Chapter -III.

The evolution of the monastic system at Tārakeswar up to the end of the 18th century.
The evolution of the pilgrim town owes to a great extent to the simultaneous growth and development of the monastery system. The fame, the pilgrim town has earned so far, is no doubt the result of the service rendered by some of the illustrious Mohants of the Tārakeswar Math. However, the evolution of the monastery at Tārakeswar and the consequent growth of the pilgrim town in due course had begun immediately with the initiation of the cult of Lord Tārākānāth. The embodiment of the religious complex at Tārakeswar is the Math administered by the Mohants, the principal religious functionaries of the sacred complex.

The monastic system at Tārakeswar had been put into order in course of time by the Giri subsect of the Dashnāmī Sannyāsīś with obvious adherence to the Guru-Śīya Paramparā or the preceptor-disciple lineage. The reference to Dashnāmī or ten names can be had in the Mahānirvānatantram along with those of four important Maths or monasteries. Shankarāchārya, the great Hindu revivalist, organised his Advaita School of Śaivism and set out to establish four Maths or monasteries in four corners of India. He established Shringagiri Math at Shringagiri, Saradā Math at Dwāraka, Gobardhan Math at Purī and Jōshi Math at Badarikāsram. All these monasteries at four important religious centres in India, were placed under his four famous disciples—Padmapāda, Hastāmalaka, Sureswara and Totaka. They, in turn, took ten acolytes who, during the prescribed ceremony of renouncement of the world of senses, took the names of: (i) Purī (city), (ii) Bhārati (learning), (iii) Saraswati (perfect knowledge), (iv) Tīrtha (temple), (v) Āśram (heritage), (vi) Ban (wood), (vii) Aranya (forest) (viii) Giri (hill), (ix) Parbat (mountain) and (x) Sāgar (ocean).

These ten pupils were, as their successors now are, the heads of the ten sects of Hindu monks or Sannyāsīs in India. Usually, the ascetics of the Advaita school of Śaivism are given, and have to bear one of the aforesaid ten names at the time of and ever after their dikṣā or initiation.

Of these four monasteries, the Shrīṅgagiri Math at Shrīṅgagiri holds sway over the Purī, Bhāratī and Saraswatī categories of the Dashnāmī Sannyāsīs. The Tīrtha and Āshram categories among these Dashnāmī Sannyāsīs owe their allegiance to the monastery at Dwārakā. Accordingly, the Giri, Parbat and Sāgar categories of the Dashnāmīs comply with the Joshi Math at Badarikāśram while the Ban and Aranya categories sustain themselves at the behest of the Gobardhan Math at Purī. In fact, the Aranya, Sāgar and Parbat categories among the Dashnāmī Sannyāsīs are now extinct.

Besides these four important monasteries, the subsects of the Dashnāmī Sannyāsīs organised innumerable monasteries elsewhere in India in the shadows of those established by Shankarāchārya. He who is supposed to be in charge of such a monastery is known as a Mohanta. He enjoys full control over the financial resources of the Math with the associated administrative power at regional level.

However, the original disciples of Shankarāchārya had learnt to bear arms to fight their rivals. Long after the institutionalisation of the Advaita School of Śaivism, it became gradually clear that both the Giri and the Purī sects were more militant in their outlook. It is interesting to note that at a certain stage

these two sects indulged in internecine squabbles over trifles. As early as in 1567, the Emperor Akbar witnessed a fight between the armed **Sannyāsīs** of the **Gīrī** and the **Pūrī** suborders at Thāneswar. But in course of time, their military character practically disappeared although some of them continued to bear arms.

The real ascetics never indulged in such unsocial activities. That the early Britishers confused the real ascetics and saints with the ‘vagrants’ and ‘erratic beggars’ of the more or less gipsy tribes becomes clear from a description by H. H. Wilson. Wilson writes, “Sannyāsī is a generic term and equally applicable to any of the erratic beggars of the Hindoos be they of what religious order they may. It signifies in fact nothing more than a man who has abandoned the world or has overcome its passions and, therefore, equally suitable to any of the religious vagrants we meet in Hindoostan.”

In fact, the inroads made by the Sannyāsīs on Bengal through the ages began principally with their intention to participate in the bathing ceremonies at the Karatoyā, Brahmaputra, Ganges or in the Gangā-Śāgar—where the Ganges meets the sea. The Gangā-Śāgar—an important place of ancient pilgrimage for the mendicants lies in the district of South 24 Paraganās at present. It is considered very auspicious to bathe there on the last day of the Bengali month of **Paus** which, according to the English calendar, falls sometime around the middle of January. They came from the west and “after passing through the territory of the Nawāb of Oudh, they followed a route generally through the north of Bihār and the borders of the Nepāl terāī.”


the Sannyāsīs were no more than beggars and bandits in the eyes of the officials of the English East India Company during this period. During the latter half of the 18th century, a constantly recurring theme in the correspondence of the East India Company's officials was that the Sannyāsīs or the mendicants who “have long infested these countries and under the pretence of religious pilgrimage, have been accustomed to traverse the chief parts of Bengal, begging, stealing and plundering wherever they go, and as it best suits their convenience to practice”\(^8\).

The Bargīs, indeed, showed the way for the organised loot of Bengal and Bihār to the Upper India robber bands who called themselves Sannyāsīs\(^9\). Here is no denying the fact that they had taken advantage of the tumultuous situation of rural Bengal and were naturally very enthusiastic to fish in troubled waters. Their determination was strengthened by the belief that the people of Bengal were so timid and enervated that they would not resist\(^10\).

Whatever the case might be with the Sannyāsīs elsewhere in Bengal, the Dashnāmi Giri Sannyāsīs were there at Tārakeswar to try their luck long before the Battle of Plassey. In fact, the presence of these Giri Sannyāsīs was felt a few years before the Bargīs invaded Bengal to perpetrate wanton destruction. The fact that the monastery at Tārakeswar was established in 1785 Sambat or 1729 A.D. at the behest of the Giri Mōbāntas bears the proof of their presence around this sacred complex. Despite their incidental response to the Mārāthā terror, they were more or less decided right from the initial phases that they would concentrate their influence on this region with the Math as their bastion. They


\(^{10}\) Anil Chandra Bānerjee– Madhya Yuge Bānglā O Bāngāli. P.–215.
perhaps preferred the site on which they built the monastery because of its secluded nature, with low marshy lands as well as thick forests around it. The *Math* was, therefore, the nucleus, around which the big temple-*zamindāri* evolved in due course. The *Tārakeswar Śivatattva* edited by the last Gīrī Mohānta gives vivid descriptions of the reactions of the Gīrī Sannyāsīs to the Mārāthā invasions, the first of which occurred in Bengal in April, 1742. Besides, their reactions to the Sannyāsī rebellion that raged across East as well as North Bengal from 1763 to 1800, had also been clearly put in this compilation. Nonetheless, the establishment of the monastic system certainly brought about a complete transformation in their outlook which had definite implications for the future.

II
It has already been mentioned that the Gīrī sub sect of the Dāshnāmī Sannyāsīs took keen interest in putting the monastery at Tārakeswar into order in the district of Hooghly. Numerous Sannyāsīs, generally belonging to the Gīrī community, settled also in Mymensing and other districts of East Bengal during this period under review. Innumerable *Maths* were organised in those districts which usually became the nodes of a powerful network. As soon as they transformed themselves into resident monks, they endeavoured earnestly to develop the *Math* at Tārakeswar with an eye to defending themselves against possible adversaries.

It has already been emphasised that the advent of these Giri Sannyāsīs almost coincided with the advent of the Kshatriya Rājputs who had already established themselves as zamindārs of Rāmnagar in the vicinity of this place of pilgrimage. Although this had happened towards the end of the second decade of the eighteenth century, information about the periods attributable to successive Mohāntas suffers from the lack of chronological accuracy. The information in this regard can only be had in the Tārakeswar Śivatattva compiled at the behest of the last Giri Mohānta of the Tārakeswar Math.

The genealogical order of succession in accordance with the Guru-Siṣya Paramparā or the preceptor-disciple lineage cannot be ascertained at ease without taking recourse to the Kurshināmā (genealogical table) put forward in the preface of the Tārakeswar Śivatattva. This chronological order of succession cannot be authenticated in the absence of any other document in this regard. There were altogether twenty-five Giri Mohāntas including the last Giri Mohānta, Satishchandra Giri who had administered the monastery as well as the temple over the years. However, the information about the succession of the Mohāntas can not be taken for granted.

If the information is taken for granted, it will be observed that the first Mohānta of the Tārakeswar Math assumed office sometime in 855 Sambat or 799 A.D. This is somewhat absurd since we know that the monastery at Tārakeswar was institutionalised in 1785 Sambat or 1729 A.D. Incidentally, this Kurshināmā puts forward two lists of names of the Giri Mohāntas, of which the correct one includes twenty-five names. The other which is considered as incorrect, includes nineteen names. Besides these two lists, there is also a third list with five names in it who were elevated to the office as temporary Mohāntas of the Tārakeswar Math.

The incorrect list of names of the Giri Mobántas given on the left side of the 'Kursbinámā' includes:-

1. Dhúmrapán Giri
2. Kamalnáth Giri
3. Mukteswar Giri
4. Yogeswar Giri
5. Gournáth Giri
6. Nirmalnáth Giri
7. Shíbnáth Giri
8. Samudranáth Giri
9. Bilá Giri
10. Arunáchal Giri
11. Balbhadra Giri
12. Prasád Giri
13. Jagannáth Giri
14. Parasurám Giri
15. Mohanchandra Giri
16. Raghuchandra Giri
17. Mådhabchandra Giri
18. Shyámchandra Giri
19. Satishchandra Giri
20. Prasád Giri
21. Parasurám Giri
22. Mohanchandra Giri
23. Raghuchandra Giri
24. Mådhabchandra Giri
25. Satishchandra Giri

The correct list of names of the Giri Mobántas who took over the office of the Mobánta in succession given in the middle space includes:-

1. Måyágarí Dhúmrapán
2. Kamalnáth Giri
3. Bálgi Giri Bálkhandi
4. Amarnáth Giri
5. Keshabnáth Giri
6. Golábnáth Giri
7. Jawáhirnáth Giri
8. Rájendranáth Giri
9. Suratnáth Giri
10. Kumudnáth Giri
11. Bálkrishna Giri
12. Gaurnáth Giri
13. Nirmalnáth Giri
14. Mukteswarnáth Giri
15. Balbhadránáth Giri
16. Bårhbadranáth Giri
17. Mahendranáth Giri
18. Samudranáth Giri
19. Arunáchal Giri
20. Prasád Giri
21. Parasurám Giri
22. Mohanchandra Giri
23. Raghuchandra Giri
24. Mådhabchandra Giri
25. Satishchandra Giri

Similarly, the list of names of the temporary Mobántas given on the extreme right side of the 'Kursbinámā' includes:-

1. Shíbnáth Giri
2. Mahendranáth Giri
3. Bílás Giri
4. Jagannáth Giri
5. Shyámchandra Giri

It is interesting to note that both the incorrect as well as the correct lists accept Dhúmrapán Giri or Måyágarí Dhúmrapán as the first Mobánta and Satishchandra Giri as the last one of the Giri sub sect of the Dashnámi Sannyásís at the Tárrakeswar Math. Differences, in fact, crop up only with those who are named in between the first and the last one. The Táiddád No. 1931 mentioned in the Court Register, however, names Måyágarí Dhúmrapán, Balbhadra Giri, Shibchandra Giri, Arunáchal Giri, Prasád Giri and Parasurám Giri prior to Mohanchandra Giri, the twenty-second Mobánta as the heads of the religious estate at Tárrakeswar. Another striking feature is that a few names of the Giri Mobántas in the Kursbinámā are common to all the three consecutive lists.
So far as the major activities of these *Giri Mohāntas* at the *Tārakeswar Math* were concerned, it appears that they usually spent their time in pursuit of religious activities. The successive *Giri Mohāntas* generally possessed hordes of disciples who engaged themselves in learning the holy scriptures and other religious practices. Although Prafulla Chakrabarty does not carry out a definitive study of the diverse roles of the ascetics of the *Tārakeswar Math*, there are in fact ample references to the various activities of these *Giri Sannyāsīs* which were strikingly similar to those of their counterparts in Northern India\(^\text{15}\).  

Notwithstanding their continuous struggle for survival, these *Giri Sannyāsīs* at the *Tārakeswar Math* often indulged in commercial transactions that were common among the *Giri* section of the *Gosāins* in Northern India during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries\(^\text{16}\). The *Giri Mohāntas* who were involved in commercial transactions, were generally called the *Dangli Sannyāsīs*\(^\text{17}\). The Title Suit Under Sec. 92, Civil Procedure Code also bears ample references to the temporal activities of the *Mohāntas* at the *Tārakeswar Math*.  

The last *Giri Mohānta* was very emphatic in his assertion that no legal or scriptural barriers could debar a *Mohānta* of the *Tārakeswar Math* from acquiring properties accruing from the *pranāmīs* given to him personally and “from the profits of the money lending business and trade and from the income of those properties”. Besides, he pointed out that this practice at the *Tārakeswar Math*  

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Math of the Mobântas acquiring properties and holding the same over the years was in keeping with the Mobântas of similar Maths elsewhere\(^{16}\).

III

It has already been pointed out in the previous chapter that Mâyâgiri Dhûmrâpân owed his allegiance to the Giri order of the Dashnâmî Sannyásis and had become the first Mobânta at the Târakeswar Math at the behest of Râjâ Bhârâmalla, the zamindâr of Râmnagar. Lt. Col. D.G. Crawford, however, opined that Bhârâmalla was the first Mobânta, and thereafter, the office of the head of the order continued through the Guru-Śiṣya Paramparâ or the preceptor – disciple lineage\(^{19}\). It is erroneous to consider Bhârâmalla as the first Mobânta of the Târakeswar Math as he had already been initiated into Sannyâsa by Mâyâgiri Dhûmrâpân and he practised meditation to discover the manifestation of divinity in himself\(^{20}\). Mâyâgiri had incidentally achieved the title of Dhûmrâpân simply because of his addiction to tobacco. He smoked throughout the day, and so he was almost veiled by smoke\(^{21}\). Thus the name.

Mâyâgiri Dhûmrâpân, the first Mobânta of the Târakeswar Math was the disciple of one Śrî Nispân Giri, the Mobânta of Joshi Math at Badarikâsram. This Joshi Math was the original as well as principal Math of the Giri order of the Dashnâmî Sannyâsîs of Northern India\(^{22}\). After visiting Nepal, Bundelkhand,


21. Ibid. – P.-32.

22. Ibid. – P.-7.
Vārānasi, Deoghar and other places, he appeared at Rāmnagar, the village in the vicinity of this place of pilgrimage. He was believed to have mesmerised Rājā Bhārāmalla by virtue of his power to perform miracles. This resulted ultimately in his appointment as the first Mohānta of the Śaiva Math at Tārakeswar.

Reference has already been made to the grant of 1025 bighās and 11 cottaḥs of land by Rājā Bhārāmalla for the worship of Lord Tāraknāth and the subsequent appointment of Māyāgiri, an ascetic of the Giri order of the Dashnāmī Sannyāsīs as an administrator of the temple and the religious endowment. Besides this gift from the Rājā, “the Mahārājā of Burdwan from time to time made gifts of some jungles and waste lands to the then Mohānta”. This formed the nucleus of the Śaiva Math at Tārakeswar, under the administration of Māyāgiri Bhūmrapān who “established the Math with the assistance of his numerous disciples”. They “cleared jungle and took possession of the neighbouring lands and obtained as gifts some rent-free lands from the above mentioned pious rich men.....”.

This ascetic along with his disciples established more than sixteen Maths all over Bengal in due course. These were constituted under the holding body called the Tārakeswar Maṇḍali. Of these, the Tārakeswar Math, Guptipārā Math, Purī Math, Dewān Math, Naināgarb Math and the Bhadrakālī Math are in the district of Hooghly. The Bhotbāgān Math is in the district of Howrah. The Chājpāt Math and Reyāpārā Math are in Midnapur district. However, the Maths at Barāsi or Hāttāgarh, Garh Bhaṇānīpur, Rāyān or Rāinā, Āmrā, Khāmārpārā and Pār Bāgnān no longer exist. The Math at Āmdāngā is now under the management of the Bhotbāgān Math. All these he did after the propagation of

23. Ibid. PP. -23 – 37.


the cult of Lord Tāraknāth.

Some say that one Jagannāth Giri, an ascetic of the Giri order was the first Mohānta of the Śaiva Math at Tārakeswar. On his way to Chattagram, now in Bāṅgaladesh, to worship the Śiva cult of Chandranāth, he heard of the revelation of the cult of Lord Tāraknāth at Tārakeswar and, therefore, stopped at Tārakeswar. Mukundarām Ghosh who had already been given the responsibility of arranging for the daily services to Lord Tāraknāth breathed his last just prior to the arrival of Jagannāth Giri at Tārakeswar. Consequently, he was appointed as the principal Sebāyēt of the Lord by order of Rājā Bhārāmalla. Thenceforth, he put into effect the process of worshipping the Lord which, in some manner, is still followed today. However, Pramathanāth Sānyāl argues that Jagannāth Giri and Māyāgiri Dhūmrāpān were one and the same person. But it is noteworthy that neither the Title Suit No. 28/1922 Under Sec. 92, Civil Procedure Code nor the Taqīdad No.1931 bear the name of Jagannāth Giri as the first Giri Mohānta of the Tārakeswar Math. Only the Tārakeswar Śivalattva edited by the last Giri Mohānta of the Tārakeswar Math refers to one Jagannāth Giri, both in the incorrect list as well as in the list of the Mohāntas appointed temporarily.

Despite this controversy regarding the identity of the first Mohānta of the Tārakeswar Math, the fact remains that Māyāgiri Dhūmrāpān institutionalised the Tārakeswar Math and established the temple-zamīndāri under the administration of the Giri Sannyāsīs. Besides, the establishment of the satellite Maths at his behest all over Bengal, which were incorporated into the Tārakeswar Manḍālī, speaks highly of his foresight. Above all, he set the example, following which the succeeding Giri Mohāntas endeavoured to serve faithfully the cult of Lord Śiva at Tārakeswar, being fully aware of their religious and temporal responsibilities.

The second *Giri Mohānta* of the *Tārakeswar Math* was Kamalānāth Giri, who succeeded Māyāgiri Dhūmrapān in accordance with the preceptor-disciple rule of succession. It is noteworthy that the incumbent *Mobānta* was, indeed, the principal *Chelā* (disciple) of his immediate predecessor. This rule was followed with no exception until the assumption of office by the last *Mobānta*. He preferred meditation to administration and, thereby, confined his actions to religious matters only. He installed the Goddess *Kāli* within the precinct of the sacred complex as Lord *Śiva* devoid of *Śakti* (consort) was thought to be an oddity in the religious context.

Unlike Kamalānāth Giri, Bālgiri Bālkhandi, his close associate, was very active in furthering the interest of the twin institutions as the third *Mobānta*. In order to ensure the security of the sacred complex, he made arrangements for the construction of a fort at Bāligari, a village not far from Tārakeswar. He also took the initiative to build a *Cāchāri* or the replica of a court, to be conducted at the behest of the *Mobāntas* of the *Math*\(^{28}\). The ruins of these establishments still exist. Activities like those of Bālgiri Bālkhandi make it clear that the *Giri Mobāntas* were equally busy with both spiritual and temporal matters. Knowledge of these activities, indeed, vindicates the standpoint of the last *Giri Mobānta*, that the *Mobāntas* of the *Tārakeswar Math* were not required to devote themselves “wholly to the *Sebā* (service) of the *Thākur* (deity) and to the *Sadābrata* (hospitality)” within the sacred complex\(^{29}\). Hence, there was nothing unusual in their inclination to acquire as well as consolidate considerable property over the years.

\(^{28}\) Satishchandra Giri – *Tārakeswar Śivatattva*. Preface.

\(^{29}\) Title Suit No. 28/1922. Suit Under Sec.92. C.P.C. Para.-15.
Amarnāth Giri succeeded the third Mobānta. No special reference has been made to him, and also to his five immediate successors. This seems to have been due to the lack of major contributions by them in the evolution of the monastery at Tārakeswar. In fact, the elevation of Keshabnāth Giri, Golābnāth Giri, Jawāhiriṅāth Giri, Rājendranāth Giri and Suratnāth Giri successively to the office of the Mobānta at the Tārakeswar Math seems to have had no lasting effect on the administrative policies of the twin institutions.

However, Kumudnāth Giri, the tenth Mobānta was comparatively more illustrious. He is said to have arranged an Asvamedha Yajna at Nādan Ghāt on the bank of the Ganges, near Nabadwīp Dhām, with the obvious aim of popularising the sacred complex at Tārakeswar

These successive Mobāntas of the Tārakeswar Math, from Māyāgiri Dhūmrapān to Kumudnāth Giri, were at the helm of affairs in this place of pilgrimage prior to the beginning of the Mārātḥā invasions. Despite relative differences in their administrative efficiency, the earlier Mobāntas, from Kamalnāth Giri to Kumudnāth Giri, were more or less true to their commitment to follow the example set by Māyāgiri Dhūmrapān.

In spite of their commitment to the Advaita School of Śaivism, the inclination of the Giri Mobāntas to Tāntrik rites began from the time of the establishment of the deity of the Goddess Kālī under the direct supervision of the second Giri Mobānta. Reference has been made earlier to the impact of this development on the religious ambience of this place of pilgrimage. This inclination to Tāntrik rites on the part of the Giri Sannyāśis need not be thought unnatural especially since Shankarāchārya, the organiser of the Advaita School of Śaivism, was also a renowned propagator of Tāntrik religion. He was incidentally the worshipper of

30. Śrī Śrī Tāraknāth Jiu Sebā Samiti(ed.). Śrī Śrī Tārakeswar Lilā. PP.-11-12.
Srividyā, Mātangī and Bhubanesvarī- the three variforms of the consort of Lord Śiva. Of his famous compilations, the Prapanchasāra as well as the Saundaryalalahari are held in high esteem among those inclined to the Tāntrik religion\(^\text{31}\). Hence, the characterisation of the Ḍasbāmī Giri Sannyāsīs “as Vedic and not Tāntrik Sannyāsīs” as given in the verdict of 6th Nov., 1929 betrays the ignorance of the District Judge.

However, the other salient features in the process of evolution of this sacred complex included endeavours by the Giri Mobāntas to consolidate the power-structure of the temple-zamindāri, as was found in the case of Bālgiri Balkhandi, and to propagate the popularity of the sacred complex, as was found in the case of Kumudnāth Giri.

The Giri Mobāntas during this period under review dared not to indulge in commerce since that was yet unfeasible. However, the escalation of the Mārāṭhā intrusions during the next phase of evolution of the monastery did create a commercially favourable atmosphere.

V
The tumultuous conditions that prevailed in Bengal between 1742 and 1751 because of the incessant Mārāṭhā incursions did not affect, initially, the rule of sucession of the Mobāntas at the Tārakeswar Math. In fact, five consecutive successors of Kumudnāth Giri, the tenth Mobānta, witnessed the turmoil in Bengal during this period. The Tārakeswar Śivatattva bears ample references to the disturbances created not only out of the Mārāṭhā incursions but also of internecine squabbles in the Math during this phase of its evolution\(^\text{32}\).

Incidentally, Bālkrishna Giri, Gournāth Giri, Nirmalnāth Giri, Mukteswarnāth Giri and Balbhadrānāth Giri were said to have been the five consecutive successors of the tenth Mobānta\(^\text{33}\).

32. Satishchandra Giri – Tārakeswar Śivatattva. ‘Preface’.
The Tārakeswar Śivatattva, indeed, contains vivid description regarding this period of turmoil with special reference to the role played by the Giri Sannyāsīs. It is well-known that the Sannyāsīs were hired in general by the Mārāṭhā invaders who used them usually as mercenary soldiers. They were employed also in the armies of the Rājpūt Rājās, as well as in the army of Shujāuddaulāh, the Nawāb of Oudh. However that may be, the aforesaid compilation remains repeatedly evasive with regard to chronology. Despite this, the Mārāṭhā incursions and the consequent reaction of the Giri Sannyāsīs in general as depicted in the Tārakeswar Śivatattva, agrees with the actual historical analysis. The Giri Sannyāsīs generally accompanied the Mārāṭhā intruders with twin objectives. While sticking to the primary objective of ensuring the sustenance of their base in and around Tārakeswar and the areas dependent on it, they were also instrumental in enhancing their commercial activities in collusion with the Mārāṭhās.

In spite of numerous references to the nature of collusion between the Mārāṭhā intruders under Raghūji Bhonsle and the Giri Sannyāsīs in general, the omission of the last Giri Mohānta in reporting the nature and conditions of the alliance especially with regard to the activities of the five Mohāntas of the Tārakeswar Math during this period seems incongruous. This becomes glaring when one considers the concentration of the Giri Sannyāsīs around Tārakeswar during this period. In fact, the paucity of corroborative evidence constrains the attempt to fill in this lacuna.

Despite this lacuna in the account of the Mārātha incursions and the nature as well as conditions dominating the participation of the Giri Sannyāsīs of the Tārakeswar Math in particular, it becomes clear from the Tārakeswar Śivatattva that the Giri Sannyāsīs in general did their best to enhance their material interests. They were in collusion with Raghuji Bhonsle, Rāja of Nāgpur, from the beginning of the Mārātha incursions. This certainly presupposes their presence in Nāgpur which, thereafter, became an important commercial centre for the Giri Sannyāsīs.

The Giri Mobānta who encouraged this interest in trade for the first time in this period was Bīrbhadranāth Giri. By then, the storm of the Mārātha incursions had blown over. But the consequence of this collusion between the Mārāthās and the Giri Sannyāsīs, which took the form of establishment of commercial link with Nāgpur, remained intact thereafter.

However, Bīrbhadranāth Giri, sixteenth in the line of succession, had taken over the administration of the Math accordingly. But he was unable to remain long in the office because of the animosity between him and his Gurubhratā (disciple-brother) Mahendranāth Giri. Bīrbhadranāth Giri, quiet and peace-loving in nature, was forced out of the Math by Mahendranāth Giri. This resulted naturally in Mahendranāth Giri’s taking over of the administration of the monastery as well as the temple at Tārakeswar, as the seventeenth Mobānta. More importantly, this also resulted in the interruption in the tradition of the Guru Śīsya Paramparā for the first time since the process of evolution of the monastery. Bīrbhadranāth Giri left this place of pilgrimage in disguise along with his trusted disciples and moved westward. He and his trusted disciples were thereafter known to have taken up commercial activities in Nāgpur.

Mahendranāth Giri failed, in the long run, to enjoy the fruit of his success. This facilitated the assumption of the office of the Mobānta by Samudranāth Giri, the most trusted Chela (disciple) of Bīrbhadranāth Giri. The most important cause of Mahendranāth Giri’s failure was attributed to his acrimonious relationship with the then Nawāb of Bengal.\footnote{Ibid. - Preface and P.-110.}

A critical analysis of this phase of the evolution of the monastery does not reveal a constructive role on the part of the Giri Mobāntas, from Bālkrishna Giri to Bālbhadranāth Giri. They were not as illustrious as their predecessors. What was important to them, was their commitment to hold on the gains accumulated over the years.

Moreover, the Giri Mobāntas of this period, along with their disciples, exploited their collusion with the Mārāthas in pursuit of the establishment of commercial link with Nāgpur. The tradition set by Bīrbhadranāth Giri in this context remained viable till the tenure of Raghuchandra Giri, the twenty-third Mobānta of the Math.

This phase of evolution was also important, for an unprecedented development that had taken place in the usurpation of power by Mahendranāth Giri. This untoward development certainly set an example that was once more followed when Jagannāth Giri was the temporary Mobanta of the monastery, prior to the taking over of the administration by Parasurām Giri, the twenty-first Mobanta of the Math. Therefore, this phase of evolution saw the rise of novel trends, which deeply influenced the history of the twin institutions.

VI

In spite of frequent references to the indulgence of the Giri Mobāntas of the Tārakeswar Math in commercial activities, the compilation of the last Giri Mobānta seems to have avoided making logical references substantiated with appropriate data in this respect. Besides woollen and cotton goods as well as...
rice, no other commodities are referred to as items for trade\textsuperscript{39}. They also took special interest in money lending, by virtue of which they amassed immense fortunes. However, no statistical data have been provided with reference to either trade or money lending business resorted to by the \textit{Giri Mobant\as} particularly from B\textipa{\b}rbhadran\textipa{\t}ath Giri onwards, in association with their trusted disciples. In fact, the profits from the lending of money as well as trade helped in the long run through the acquisition of property by the \textit{T\textipa{\r}arak\textipa{\e}swar Math} and its satellites\textsuperscript{40}. Besides the book written by the last \textit{Giri Mobant\a} and his statement made in the District Court, no other corroborative evidences are available in this context.

Moreover, the reasons behind the selection of far away N\textipa{\a}gpur on the part of the \textit{Giri Mobant\as} have not been adequately explained. As has been noted earlier, the commercial connection that was created since the M\textipa{\r}ar\textipa{\a}\hath incursions presumably gave rise to this attraction of the \textit{Giri Mobant\as} for N\textipa{\a}gpur. To prove that they were never at odds with the main stream \textit{Giri Sanny\textipa{\a}s\i\s} who participated in the M\textipa{\r}ar\textipa{\a}\hath incursions, the \textit{Giri Mobant\as} from B\textipa{\b}rbhadran\textipa{\t}ath onwards not only maintained a viable link with N\textipa{\a}gpur over the years but a few of them also returned to N\textipa{\a}gpur to indulge in commerce having delegated their authority to their trusted disciples. Therefore, their concern for commercial activities did in no way clash with the common interest of keeping a good hold on the twin institutions at T\textipa{\r}arak\textipa{\e}swar.

\textbf{VII}

Samudran\textipa{\a}\hath Giri, the most trusted disciple of the ousted \textit{Mobant\a} B\textipa{\b}rbhadran\textipa{\t}ath Giri, was informed of the decay in the condition of the twin institutions when he was engaged in business in far-off N\textipa{\a}gpur. It has already been pointed out that the internecine quarrels formed a primary cause of this \textit{dilapidation}, apart from the consequences of the M\textipa{\r}ar\textipa{\a}\hath incursions that had

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.- P.-126.

\textsuperscript{40} Title Suit No. 28/1922. In the Court of the Dist. Judge of Hooghly. Sec.92. C.P.C. Para.-31.

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ravaged Bengal for years. In fact, Samudranāth Giri appeared at this pilgrimage when Mahendranāth Giri, the usurper, had failed to exercise his power and ensure the allegiance of the Giri Sannyāsīs in general. Samudranāth Giri is said to have amassed meanwhile immense fortunes by virtue of business in Nāgpur prior to his initiation as the eighteenth Mobiēnta of the Tārakeswar Math 41.

However, a delegation of the Giri Sannyāsīs along with Samudranāth Giri appealed to the then Nawāb, seeking his permission for the rejuvenation of the temple and the monastery. The tenure of this incumbent Mobiēnta seems to have coincided with the concluding phase of the administration of the Nawābs in Bengal, although no Nawāb has been named. With permission from the Nawāb, this eighteenth Mobiēnta endeavoured to save the sacred complex from ruin exclusively with the use of his own financial resources. His commendable plan included the digging up of the tank of Belpukur adjacent to the temple of Lord Tāraknāth. He was shortly to return to his world of business as his interest in business was very important to him. He authorised one Bilās Giri as the interim Mobiēnta to run the administration on his behalf 42.

Bilās Giri was always vulnerable to the pressure of circumstances. In fact, the internecine dispute that erupted for the second time during this phase of the evolution of the monastery and the uncertainty about the English East India Company resulted in his decision to sell the twin institutions to one Daman Puri. Thereafter, he left for a distant destination 43. What is important to note here, is


42. Ibid.- PP.-113-115.

43. Plaintiff Suit No.4458 of 1790 in the Judge’s Court of Burdwan. Parasurām Giri Vs. Fatey Giri.
the decision of the interim Giri Mohanta to sell the monastery to none but a Sannyasi from the Puri order of the Dashnami. The East India Company armed with the grant of Diwani had, by then, become an important player in the changed historical scenario. It had already begun to use coercion to extract money from the Dashnami Sannyasis engaged in business elsewhere. That was why he thought of selling the Math and the temple at the earliest opportunity.

Samudranath Giri was never heard of again after he returned to his world of business. He died while in Nagpur. Meanwhile, he nominated Arunachal Giri as his favourite disciple, who later became the nineteenth Mohanta of the Taraakeswar Math. He was then a businessman, following footsteps of his preceptor, and had been busy in transporting goods between Nagpur in Maharastra and Maldaha in Bengal. No details are provided regarding the nature of the commodities. Corroborative data are also unavailable. Presumably, the trade items remained the same with this tradition bound Giri Sannyasi. While in Maldaha, in connection with his commercial activities, he heard of this sale and “recovered the Math and the temple and all other properties from the purchaser by paying to him the full value thereof.” This he did prior to his initiation into the office of the Mobanta at the Taraakeswar Math. The recovery of the twin institutions usually facilitated the process of his taking over the office of the Mobanta by virtue of his having been favourite disciple of Samudranath Giri. Much land along with a vast mango orchard at Sahapur, a village adjacent to Taraakeswar, was bought during his tenure to raise the income of the estate as well as to make it financially viable.

46. Plaint Suit No. 4458 of 1790 in the Judge’s Court of Burdwan. Parasuram Giri Vs. Fatey Giri.
This historically somewhat well-known Mohanta was succeeded by his less illustrious disciple, Prasădchandra Giri, who failed to leave any permanent impression in the history of the evolution of this place of pilgrimage. After his demise, one Jagannāth Giri was appointed the temporary Mohanta of the Tārakeswar Math as Parasurām Giri, the favourite disciple of Prasădchandra Giri was away in Nāgpur along with his trusted disciple, Mohanchandra Giri. Meanwhile, one Fatey Giri usurped the office of the Mohanta at the Tārakeswar Math taking advantage of the senility of Jagannāth Giri. This was, in fact, the second incident of usurpation in the history of the Tārakeswar Math. Having heard of these developments Parasurām Giri started for Tārakeswar from Nāgpur with his coffers already enriched through trade. Immediately after he reached Tārakeswar, he took the decision to file a suit against Fatey Giri at the Judge’s Court of Burdwan in 1790. Parasurām Giri won over the case in the long run and ensured his ouster from the Tārakeswar Math. The role of Parasurām Giri in this state of affairs bore proof of his efficiency as compared to his Gurupitā or preceptor, Prasădchandra Giri.

Parasurām Giri was succeeded by Mohanchandra Giri, as the twenty-second Mohanta of the Tārakeswar Math at the fag end of the eighteenth century. He followed the footsteps of his erstwhile illustrious predecessors. Prior to his initiation into the office of the Mohanta, he was also engaged in business in Nāgpur along with his Gurupitā, Parasurām Giri. Initially, he wound up his business in Nāgpur and devoted his energy to the increase in the property of the Math as well as of the temple in right earnest. He had brought with him about nine lakhs of rupees and immense amount of gold, with which he bought tracts of land as debutter to the tune of about four hundred bigahs. Endowed with a

humanitarian outlook, he ordered the digging up of two large tanks at Sāhāpur and Bhimpur—the two adjacent villages on the outskirts of Tārakeswar—in order to relieve the people of the area from the scarcity of water 51.

His scheme for rejuvenating the sacred complex included the renovation of the dome of the temple of Lord Tāraknāth and the temple of the Goddess Kālī within the periphery of the sacred complex. Moreover, the Nātyamandīra in front of the temple of the Lord along with the Gadīghar, the seat of temple administration, was also designed by order of Mohanchandra Giri 52. This Nātyamandīra had been built with the primary objective of staging mythical as well as purānic plays, particularly during the religious festivals, in front of the Natarāj—the figure of Lord Śiva. But this complex had incidentally begun to be used, almost round the year except at the time of religious festivals, as accommodation for the dhāma pilgrims. The pilgrims of this type usually perform the ritual of fasting and lying stretched out obstinately in front of the cult of Lord Śiva for days and nights together, expecting the vision of the Lord in a trance as well as his direction about how to overcome the crises. All these schemes for the renovation of the Math along with the temple naturally necessitated a steady inflow of income. Therefore, he, in association with his Chelās or disciples, began to deal in woollen and cotton goods as well as rice 53.

Meanwhile, Lāt Jainābad, Lāt Rāmchandrapur associated with Lāt Krishnapur, Lāt Nārayanpur and Lāt Guria were added to the estate during the tenure of Mohanchandra Giri. As tālukdār of the first two Lāts, he was bound by agreement to pay land revenue as well as road-cess to the Hābeli Cābhāri of the Rājbāti of Burdwan. For the remaining two Lāts, he was required to pay the land revenue and road-cess to the Dewān Daftari Cābhāri of the Rājbāti of

By then, the fame of the pilgrim town spread far and wide and this resulted directly in the steady inflow of pilgrims. Keeping pace with this inflow of pilgrims, a few families of the Sebāyet priests came to settle here from surrounding areas during the period being studied. The descendants of these families claim even at present that their ancestors received free land-grants from the estate by order of the then Mohanta of the Tārakeswar Math, so that they could settle around the sacred complex.

Mohanchandra Giri was, indeed, the link between the Mohantas of the Tārakeswar Math during the 18th century as well as those who succeeded him in the 19th century. However, this period of transition, with Mohanchandra Giri at the helm of affairs, witnessed comparative stability in so far as the Math as well as the temple were concerned.

However, an over all analysis of this phase of the evolution of Tārakeswar reveals a few interruptions in the process until the end of the 18th century. The primary inclination to trade that had begun with Bārbhadranāth Giri remained intact until Mohanchandra Giri — the Mohanta during whose administration one century gave way to another.

Despite their adherence to the enhancement of commerce, these Mohantas of the second half of the 18th century were also concerned with the increase in the temple-zamindāri and its consolidation. This was specially true in the case of Mohanchandra Giri.

The short-lived interruptions during this phase of the evolution are proofs of the fact that tradition overcame the forces of the destabilisation that often threatened
the Tārakeswar Math.

Over and above, the illustrious Mohantas during this period were at one with their commitment to the principle of making the infra structure of the twin institutions financially strong with the help of the profits, that accrued from their commercial activities especially when crises came into existence.

In addition to their desire to extend and consolidate the temple-zamindāri, the Mohantas during this period were also relatively alert to the necessity of adopting humanitarian measures for those living within the area of the sacred complex.