

True Stories:

Tyaagi Babba

Name withheld at writer's request

I feel extremely fortunate to have seen TYAAGI BABBA. It has been like a spiritual journey for me. TYAAGI BABBA was the maternal uncle of my father, younger brother of my grandmother. From my early boyhood to adult life, I closely watched him advance from a practicing conscientious Jain householder to an aspiring ascetic.

We lived in Mungaoli, a small town in Gwalior State. The story began a few years before 1900. India was under British occupation. My grandfather had moved from Chanderi to Mungaoli. My grandmother's three brothers too moved from Chanderi to Mungaoli. Shri Gore Lal Jain Kulaiya, who later renounced the life of a householder and became our TYAAGI BABBA, was the youngest. All three brothers were extremely nice, kind, honest and unassuming. So was my grandmother. Both families had meager means of livelihood. They helped each other survive through the tough times. They believed in 'simple living and high thinking'.

TYAAGI BABBA could barely read and write but he knew enough mathematics to maintain the accounts of his small business. He was a dedicated follower of teachings of religion – a genuine ethical individual. He performed daily prayers and worship like most other Jains in the town. He meticulously studied religious texts and participated in religious discourses. TYAAGI BABBA was extremely modest and mild mannered individual. I never saw him get angry. Although he ran a small cloth shop successfully, he did not indulge in intrigue or greed.

TYAAGI BABBA did not have any children so he lived with his wife and the family of his nephew as a joint family. Though his nephew helped him run the business to some extent, he did not try to expand his operations. His intention was to make an honest and simple living, just enough for his family. He curtailed the hours of business to accommodate his religious observances. Even if a number of customers were waiting, he would close the shop a couple of hours before sunset. Further, he would calculate the cost of each item, add minimal profit

and sell the goods at fixed price, without bargaining. These were novel features of his business in that small town. The reputation of TYAAGI BABBA's shop spread all around Mungaoli and in the surrounding villages. He could have expanded his business but he believed in non-possessiveness. He was content with what he had. He never tried to cut corners in paying customs duty or taxes. Bribery was unthinkable for him.

TYAAGI BABBA was a highly respected member of the town. He religiously fulfilled his role as a model citizen. I did not see anyone criticize him or point a finger at him. People valued his judgment. Once some individuals accused a Jain pundit (Jain school teacher) of offensive conduct. The assembly of Jains (PANCHAYAT) investigated the matter but it was not possible to reach any decision. TYAAGI BABBA suggested that the Jain community should graciously give the pundit a certificate of appreciation for his services and let him go without any mark on his character. Everybody agreed. That was the sensible way to resolve the controversy without any mental violence.

TYAAGI BABBA was instrumental in establishing a charitable dispensary of Indian medicines (AUSHADHAALAYA) in Mungaoli. The medical practitioner (VAIDYA) provided free treatment and medicine to all patients.

Then came a time in TYAAGI BABBA's life when he decided to renounce his household. His wife, my grandmother, had passed away a few years back. He had taken the loss calmly and patiently. He sought the advice and support of his family and relatives in making the resolve to leave the household and join an UDAASEEN ASHRAM (residence for aspiring ascetics). Everyone around him was at peace with his decision. He did not want to become a burden on society. So he deposited a sum of money in an account. The interest on the sum was sufficient for his expenses. When he passed away, this sum was donated to the free dispensary in Mungaoli. The rest of his estate went to his nephew.

TYAAGI BABBA was a true aspirant. He was unique in many respects. He did not cast off his clothes but he had ditched passions and desires. Although people respected him, he did not seek respect or recognition. He did not act superior to others on account of being a saintly person - a devout and humble follower of the principles of religion. He did not consider himself to be superior to any layman or ascetic on account of

his beliefs, knowledge and conduct. He was extremely modest and had a pleasant disposition. He had no aversion. His nephew squandered a good portion of his fortune but TYAAGI BABBA did not show any resentment about it. He was extremely pragmatic. Once some individuals approached him and said that my wife, his granddaughter-in-law, was attending college and did not cover her head. He quietly remarked that she was following her husband's wishes. Evidently, he did not like to impose his wishes on others, including his family members.

In spite of his spiritual accomplishment, TYAAGI BABBA always showed that he was human. He never concealed his inner weakness. He did not pretend that he was superior to others around him. He liked to spend the four months of the rainy season (CHAATURMAAS) in Mungaoli where his family lived. He admitted that attachment to family and relatives was his weakness and someday he hoped to give up such attachment as well. When he saw my son, his great grandson, for the first time, he lovingly called him Pappu, and since then it has become his nickname. He did not hide this shade of attachment. He did not put on airs to show off his spiritual accomplishments. That was the greatest virtue of TYAAGI BABBA. My father, uncle and other family members watched his pristine conduct. Our character was greatly influenced by his thoughts, words and deeds. How fortunate we have been!!

* * * * *

Mithaini Bau

Name withheld at writer's request

My grandmother was the sister of TYAAGI BABBA. She was called MITHAINI BAU. Her mindset was similar to that of TYAAGI BABBA. She could not read or write, but she had a fair knowledge of the basics of Jainism. She too practiced 'simple living and high thinking'. She was extremely kind, considerate, modest and mild mannered. People in need would come to her asking for wheat, rice, lentils, milk, buttermilk, and so on and so forth. She would always fulfill their requests. A few glimpses of her life are presented below.

Four grandchildren:

At one time, we were four brothers just like Ram, Lakshman, Bharat

and Shatrughna. My grandmother would seat us in a line and sing a song about Bhagavaan Ram. I would dream of the epic story of Bhagavaan Ram – the ideal person. Naturally, sometimes we, children, would indulge in some mischief. So my grandmother would take a stick and chase us. But she would deliberately run slowly. She would scare us but never hit us. She patiently tolerated all our obstinacy, saying that children, kings and rainclouds all are stubborn. Perhaps she spoiled us but that was because she did not want to hurt our feelings.

Encounter with dacoits:

Once MITHAINI BAU was walking from one village to another along a jungle trail, accompanied by a female friend, when she had an encounter with a gang of dacoits. The head of the dacoits asked my grandmother to give him all her ornaments and money. She did not have any fear. She was not angry. She had little possessiveness. She remained calm and quiet, took off all her ornaments and placed them in front of the dacoit. She was not concerned about her well-being and had no attachment to the ornaments. The dacoits were greatly impressed by her mannerism and conduct. Their head returned all the ornaments, touched her feet as a mark of respect and left. MITHAINI BAU exemplified the ethical code of Jainism, including nonviolence and non-possessiveness. She had no anger, pride, intrigue or greed. Later in her life, she became to be known for these qualities in Mungaoli and in the surrounding villages. When my grandfather passed away, many people came to touch my grandmother's feet considering that she was a DEVI (goddess). My grandfather believed that she had brought good fortune to the family.

Deep compassion:

Once my grandfather brought a new sari for my grandmother. A couple of weeks later, he found the sari in the trunk. It was brand new except that its border was missing. He was very unhappy to see the sari with the missing border so he asked my grandmother about it. She said that she had touched the neck of a young calf and had felt that the rope was hurting him. So she had made a softer rope for the calf. Considering her intentions, it can be said that MITHAINI BAU had shown deep compassion. However, one can also take another view of the incident. She could have used some material other than the border of

the new sari.

Weaver is a good caste:

We lived in a city where we had hired a young boy, Gaya Din, to babysit my son, Pappu. The babysitter was very sincere and honest. In summer vacation, we went to Mungaoli and took Gaya Din with us. When we had hired the young boy, we had not asked him about his caste. In our home in the city, Gaya Din was free to enter the kitchen. In Mungaoli too, he would go into the family kitchen and handle food and drinks. When some family members found out that Gaya Din was a weaver by caste (which is considered to be a lower caste), they went to my grandmother and complained about Gaya Din's conduct. The grandmother asked, "What is Gaya Din's caste?" When somebody said 'weaver', she said right away, "Weaver is a good caste." Indeed, MITHAINI BAU judged a person by his deeds and not on the basis of caste or creed.

Such was my grandmother, MITHAINI BAU.