

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Contemporary Politics in Bengal

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Asia is pre-eminently the greatest spiritual continent in the world and in Asia; India stands foremost in respect of spirituality. The world takes time to absorb great ideas and teaching; in fact, their greatness may be measured, almost; by the time it takes other to appreciate them. Perhaps this is the price of prophetic vision. A sensitive conscience foresees, others wait for events and in the time lag underestimate the vision. This also happened to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu the social and religious innovator; though as a spiritual leader he becomes a power in his lifetime. Because Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was the creator of love religious movement and through most of its active phases its unsurpassable controller and director, he lives in most Indian hearts in the role model of religious liberator. So the creative leadership is exercising the task to change the traditional role from commander to coach from manager to mentor, from director to delegator and from one who demands respect to one who facilitates self-respect.¹ About the time when Sri Chaitanya appeared, Bengal had nearly lost its independence. The rulers were a Mohamedan, and though the Hindus succeeded, from time, in occupying the throne, they were obliged to embrace Mahomedanism in order to retain their sovereignty. Hossain ascended the throne of Bengal under the title of Hossain Shah in 1498 A.D. Gour (now in ruins), near Rajmehal, was the then capital of Bengal. The Muslim sovereigns normally administered the affairs of the state through the Kajis or Governors. Nabadwip, popularly called Nadia, situated in the banks of the Bhagirathi. Nabadwip is the holy and the most sacred city of Bengal it is also one of the consisting of nine islands called Naba-dwipa, like Antardvip, Simantadvip, Godrumadvip, Madhyadvip, Rudradvip, Koladvip, Ritadvip, Jahnudvip, Modadrumadvip. In Mayapura, now the heart of Nabadwip and it was the greatest spiritual and cultural heritage in Bengal. The district of Nadia had then a world-wide reputation as the Centre of poetry, literature, Nyaya, art, and above all, philosophy of all kinds. In this light Nabadwip Dham is the most significant religious site and place in the eyes of Vaishnava followers and the Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is the transcendental love and knowledge.

Among Chaitanya's Companions, fifty-eight become more or less famous as poets, and Dr. B.B. Mujumdar, to whom we owe this information, remarks that, beginning from confusion down to Madhava Blavatsky, on founder of a religious order, is known to have attracted so many poets. Most of their works have fortunately survived, and are available; as a result, Chaitanya's modern biographer is presented with an *embarras de riches*. But we shall presently see, while the source-material is undeniable, their conflicting statements as to details are not only embarrassing, but sometimes from an impediment to the writing of a coherent account of Chaitanya's life.² We shall not take into consideration the devotional lyrics on Chaitanya by his contemporaries; their works as source material may not be considerable, but their main value is literary, and in any case, we have much better material to rely upon. These are, (i) Murari Gupta's Kadaca (ii) Three works by Kavi-Karnapura; (iii) Chaitanya Bhagavata by Vrindavan Dasa; (iv) Chaitanya Mangala by Jayananda; (v) Sri Chaitanya Mangala by Lochan Das; (vi) Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita by Krishna Das Kaviraja and (vii) Govinda Das Kadaca; Murari Gupta. The earliest available work on Chaitanya's life is the Sanskrit Sri-Krishna- Chaitanya-Charitamrita, or simply Chaitanya-Charitamrita of Murari Gupta. Murari Gupta was one of Chaitanya's closest associates in Nabadwip, and as we shall see, many incidents of Chaitanya's life of this period are linked with him. According to Dr. B.B. Mazumdar, Murari's works seem to have been completed with a decade of Chaitanya's death.³

Nabadwip was the capital City of Sena Empire that from approximately 1159 A.D. to 1203 A.D. extended to include the entire Bengal as well as Assam, Bihar, and Orissa. Although the region had lost much of its wealth, power, and safety, there were still many scholars living in this secret land. This city about seventy miles north of Calcutta, and a very large and populous city, was under the Muslim rulers. It was not the metropolitan of Bengal, nor an emporium of trade, but was famous as a seat of learning. It was in fact, in that respect the most famous city of the world. The one absorbing idea of all the respectable citizens was the acquisition and young men and women among the higher class, were constantly engaged in intellectual pursuits, if there was no other business in the world. Wealth, politics, war, pleasure and amusements had no attraction for them. So the people of Nadia

devoted most of their time to the pursuit of knowledge. The learned had no fear of suffering from want, for society maintained them in various ways. Such was the honour bestowed upon learning. The people of Nadia devoted most of their time to the pursuit of knowledge. The learned had no fear of suffering from want, for society maintained them in various ways. During every festival and the Hindus have at least one every month, gift were made to the learned. One of the principal duties of a wealthy man was to protect, against want, those who were engaged in intellectual and spiritual culture for the benefit of their fellows. Such was the honour bestowed upon learning, that when a wealthy man, proceeding in his state chair, meet a savant in the street, he was obliged to descent therefore salute him. In short, the whole energies of the city were directed towards the creation of learned men.

According to Vrindivanadasas work Chaitanya Bhagavata clearly state that, “the people of those times were mostly materialistic even those who belonged to aristocratic Brahmin families and bore the prestigious title of Bhattacharyay, Chakravarti, Mishra, Sanyal (which later became mere surnames). To know about Chaitanyas life at Nabadwip, mainly we are to depended on BrindibanDasa’s Chaitanya Bhagavata, Murarigupta’sKadcha, KaviKarnapuram’sKavya and Drama. Even Jayanandas Chaitanya Mongalwith the birth of the child, NilambarChakravarti had a presentiment that the child would be a great man in future. The child’s name was Visvambar in Murari Gupta’s and KaviKarnapuram’s books there is no mention of Visvambar,s nickname Nimai⁴.Chaitanya Deva was one of the mystic saints of medieval Bhakti cult of India and the symbol of the resurgent spirit of India. The ideologies of the neo Vaishanava Movement such as religious tolerance, Non-violence, universal fraternity social justice, love religion and last but not least can alloyed devotion to god. Chaitanya’s name before initiation into the monastic order was Visvambar. So the early part of the 16th century met with a new kind of Bhakti Dharma, which was founded by Chaitanya Deva of Bengal, and by which different parts of the Indian Sub-Continent was flooded. The necessity of Chaitanya Deva, probably arose as a repercussion of Kabir’s anti Vedic preaching which were becoming popular day by day amongst the lower cast peoples. If Chaitanya Deva would not flourish at that time, then the Vedic Vaishnavism might have its worse days.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu probably did not possess any particular idea of political advancement, and his reform in its prompt impact was only religion, spiritual and ethical development. The political ideas of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, it is conceded that he was a spiritual and social thinker, but it is also to be noted that he did not systematically probe into the affairs of the state political authority. His reaction to the contemporary politics, his sentiment to the political authority, and his impregnations of the ideal rulers must be an ideal person.

Bengal had inessential diplomatic circumstances during the 16th century A.D. It is remarkable fact that Nadia or Nabadwip was the first Centre in Bengal was devoured by the Muslim general Bakhtiyar Khalji, it become under the Muslim ruler the great Centre of Brahminical learning, not only in Bengal, but in Eastern India. The Muslim ruler's conquest of Nabadwip or Nadia one after another many dynasties and many emperors came to rule over Bengal. From 1388, with the foundation of IlyasShahi dynasty by the emperor Samsuddin Ilyas Shah, Bengal Sultanate becomes free and independent from the control of Delhi Sultanate. In 1437 A.D. Mohammad Shahi dynasty started in Bengal politics. Rukun-Uddin BarbakShahi (1459-74) was ascended the throne and one of the greatest ruler of Bengal. His son Samsuddin Yusuf Shah (1474-81), an intolerant sultan ascended the throne of Bengal province. He was succeeded by his son, sultan Sikandar Shah who was made and was replaced by his Uncle, Jalal Uddin Fateh Shah (1481-87). During his reign, the great spiritual saint and a holy man whose life is a model to be followed as well as the incarnation of God were appeared. Some scholars believed that it was the dark period of Bengal, when there dominated full of political confusion. But in course of time, these Mahammedan regents obtained themselves to the renewed atmosphere and deserve through Indianite. During this period so many religious cult movements started like Vaishnavism, Manasa Cult, Chandi Cult, Tranticism, Chaitanya Cult, Nathism etc. made strident progress with little interference from the state which was extremely liberal and in its politics.

The last decade of 15th century and early 16th century Muslim dynasty ruled over Bengal. They were Hussain Sahi Dynasty 1493-1538 A.D. Alauddin Husain Shah was unquestionably the significant ruler, he supplanted and represented Bengali sentiment, hopes and aspirations and had almost become a national leader. It was an epoch which witnessed an efflorescence of the Bengali mind symbolized by the Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, by whose message of love and forgiveness the

whole province was carried off its feet. The Bengal soul burst its bonds and found its voice in the sweet lyricism of the cult of Radha Krishna, in the emotional intensity of a resurgent Vaishnavism, and in poetry and song, social toleration and religious fervor. With this renaissance, the rulers of the house of Hussain Shah are inseparably connected. It is almost impossible to conceive of the rise and progress of Bengal Vaishnavism or the development of Bengali Literature during this period, without recalling to the mind the tolerant and enlightened ruler of the Muslim ruler of Gau.⁵

Hussain Shah was a powerful ruler and also a great soul of liberal outlook and catholicity of mind of which it is hard to find a parallel in Muslim India until the age of the great empire Akbar. He was appointed worthy persons, in this light he appointing several Hindus to high posts and continuing the traditional administrative practices. His private physician Mukunda Das, chief body guard was Kesava Chhatri, his master of mint Anup. His experienced Wazir Gopinath Basu was assumed the title Purandar Knan, soon he become a good and dynamic administrator. On the other hand, the names of the two brothers Rupa and Sanatana, one of whom held the highly important office of the private security (Dabir-i-Khas) are well known. In his patronage Persian and Arabic literature was popular and largely cultivated during this period. He was also promoted the growth and development of Vernacular literature which received at his hands a new dignity and importance. Many Bengali scholars accompanied him in his campaigns. Among the scholars was Maladhar Basu, Bipradas, Bijay Gupta, and Jasoraj Khan, mentioned his name with gratitude.⁶

Some of the Vaishnava thinkers narrate to him a belief in the Avatara of Mahaprabhu, to whom he indisputably emerged with a great regard. During the later visit to Gaur, Hussain Shah instructed to every Officer to show honor to that Sannyasis and to give special advantage for his peregrination. It is true that central Muslim rulers imposed Jiziya tax for the non-Muslims people. But Hussain Shah Jiziya tax or the poll-tax was never imposed of the non-Muslim subject.

The contemporary Vaishnava texts, that the Brahmins were untoward to the dynamic ideas, and spiritual life and teaching of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The orthodox and traditional Brahmins prosecute against him to the Sultan. The blooming Sultan drawn up accurate exploration into the performances of Chaitanya

Deva and convinced his Vaishnava ideas conveyed no injury to the Hindus, on the other hand this aimed at improving the Hindu society.⁷ Chaitanya Mahaprabhu made an important contribution towards the development of the sincere and passionate love for God and he realized that the expansion and continuation of Vaishnavism was an attempt to save Hinduism. So Chaitanya Deva were no social reformers militating against the caste structure but, within the sphere of devotional practice, they rejected all distinction of caste and thereby promoted a sense of equality that penetrated deep into the Bengali social life. Most of his devotees were come from the lower castes of the Hindu community. Some were Muslims. Haridas, one of the greatest spiritual leaders and his might disciple was a Muslim.

Empirically Islam has no connection with the Hinduism. But the Hindus and the Muslims have been lived tighter in Nadia for about 800 years. Muslim penetrated Nadia lives into some phases like confrontment, reciprocal appreciation and integration.⁸ In this way the integration is very essential in the spiritual and cultural lives of Nadia during the Medieval period. The appearance of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Vaishnava sahajiya cult both the Hindus and the Muslims broke the barriers of religious injunctions and performed common worships in many occasions. It is also to be noted that the syncretism was noticed in Sufism, Pirism, Bhaktism, Vaishnavism, Kartabhaja Sect, Bauls, etc. This was the diaphanous display of socio-cultural reconciliation among the Muslims and the Hindus in Medieval period. Vaishnavism lend numerous Islamic elements, exceptionally in the Sufi ideas and thoughts EnamulHaque have investigated to trace assimilate among the Vaishnavism and the Sufism, Viz. dacha and hall (rapture); Krishnamnama and Zikr (recital of God name); Kirtan and Sama and quality the deep pantheistic monotheism of Vaishnavism, its emphasis of Divine love and anti-caste attitude to the Sufi influence.

Syncretism of Vaishnavism and Sufism:

So the Chaitanyite Bengali Vaishnavism is the strong spiritual and religious movement introduced by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, rowed almost entire things before it for an important period in the life of Bengal. It is true that Chaitanya Deva did not live with any Sufi for a considerable period of time, nor did he come across any Sufi Mulfazat or any Islamic religious text. In the beginning he grew an orthodox Brahmin family which does not seem to have had any Contac with Islamic

ideas and practices. Most of the biographies of Chaitanya Deva show that the lives of his parents were characterized by an excessive amount of religious austerity which did not have any scope of Islamic impacts. At that period the life of common masses was saturated with Sufistic influences. It is true that Sufism could make itself felt at Navadvipa, is undoubtedly a debatable point. Chaitanya Deva's birth place of Nabadwip was still remaining its position as an important center of Sanskrit learning. It seems that Chaitanya was greatly influenced by the Bhagavatapurana which contains prediction to the practice of kirtana,⁹ which was also performed by the Alvar saints of the South. It also has been mentioned in details for his south India tour. On the other the practice of singing and dancing was common with the Maulawi Sufi order, introduced by Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi.¹⁰ The famous spiritual masters, Persian poet and an Islamic dervish and Sufi mystic, appeared during the 13th century. He was a disciple of Sayyed Burhanuddin Muhaqqiq Termazi. Rumi wrote Diwan-e-Shams-e-Tabrizi and, another famous work was Mathnawi written in a didactic style.

In Muslim thought those who have speculated connecting the Divine being were divided some aspects like, God created the Universe out of nothing and that his essence is distinct from his creation. The aim of every Sufi is to awaken these five Lateef into active remembrance of God, and through them to receive Tajalli, the divine illumination. These objects he seeks to accomplish by the constant practice of dhikr or remembrance. The nectar gulf that separates man from God is commonly described by Sufi writers in symbolical language. One of the most prominent and puissant philosopher and mystic of Sunni Islam Al-Ghazels quotes "Allah hath seventy thousand Veils of Light and Darkness: was He to withdraw their curtain, then would the splendours of His Aspect surely consume everyone who apprehended Him with his sight."¹¹

The postulation of the influence of the Sama (Sufi song) of the Mawlawi Sufis on the Kirtana of the Vaishnava seems thus unwarrantable. Equally untenable is probably the view that the sophisticated (ecstatic condition) had influenced the Kirtana of the Gaudiya Vaishnava's, for some Indian saints used to attain the state of ecstasy in the course of their religious experiences. Madhavendra Puri is said to have had occasional fainting fits due to the impact of Krishna religion on his mind.¹² The dhikr (repetition of the name of God), of the Sufis does not appear to have any influence on the Vaishnavism religious practice, called Krishnanama

also. God has been regarded as a Beloved in the Bhagavata.¹³ Pantheistic ideas are found in the Upanishad that we have hardly any reason to trace them in Sufism. Among the points of difference between Sufism and Vaishnavism, the absence of the female intermediately agent is invariably present in Vaishnavism. Monotheism does not appear to be the essential feature of Vaishnavism, although it forms the cornerstone of Sufistic belief. The Vaishnava's conceive of a hierarchy of Gods in which Krishna is placed in the first and foremost position.¹⁴ But the attitude of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu took towards the caste system was probably influenced by the Islamic social order. Chaitanya's spiritualism and emotionalism did not attach importance to caste rigidity; but he does not seem to have tried to wipe out this system, on the other way he did not introduce inter-dining and inter marriage system among the Hindus of Various castes. So the impact of Sufism on the Vaishnavism of Chaitanya deva is a very vital issues is yet to be searched. It is true and contended that Chaitanya Deva checked the progress of Islam deliberately by converting large number of Islam's to his creed.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, a study of the Vaishnava works clearly shows that the achievements of Chaitanya deva have been greatly magnified. The great master's zealous adherents could hardly resist the temptation of showing that Vaishnavism as propounded by Chaitanya Deva was swallowing even a powerful religion like Islam. But the large scale of Conversion of the Muslim could hardly be possible because during that period Muslims were the Political Masters of the Province. It is true factor that the Chaitanyascharismatic appearances and he made deep impression on the minds of the Muslims who used to utter the name of Hare Krishna on seeing the dancing and singing with the musical instrument like Kholo Kartala. And also Vaishnavism was saved the Hinduism from Islam.

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