

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Nabadwip: The Spiritual teacher and a Great Saint of India

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Abstract: *The Chaitanya movement was not only a religious movement, but also a socio-cultural movement as it deeply influenced the socio-cultural life of India. He is a manifestation of the solar energy, and is described as striding through the seven regions of the universe in three steps and evolving all things with dust (of his beams). These three steps are explained by commentators as denoting the three manifestations of light, fire, lightning and the sun, or the three places of the sun - it's rising, culminating and setting.¹In the Veda, he is occasionally associated with Indra. He has very little in common with the Vishnu of later times, but he is called the unconquerable preserver and this distinctly indicates the great preserving power which he afterwards became". Hence, later, lord Vishnu came to be regarded as the lord sustained of the world. Thus, for having the highest significance among the deities, his virtuous deeds and roles have been explained through his various incarnations.*

Key-word: Religious, Cultural, Commentators, Indra, Deities

Chaitanyaism is a devotional religion which is based on humanism, socialism and religious liberalism. These aspects are nothing but social contributions.²Usually, in most of the Bengali families, Sri Chaitanya Deva is revered as a great saint and religious preacher. In the pre-colonial India, Chaitanya Deva's various activities were influenced in Indian culture, society, and religious life. The change in the social life of Bengal and over all India that was brought about by the clash with the British culture was rooted in the economy of the country. That is why; the British colonial unity was formed all over India for financial output. On the other hand, the expression of the Bengali literature became renovated and, in terms of literary practice, integration of new perspective took place. As a result of it, the sense of nationalism and patriotism developed within the Indians through the arts like painting and singing. The life philosophy of Sri Chaitanya Deva brought great and unprecedented changes in the Bengali society, culture, singing, religious thoughts, philosophical thoughts and painting. Like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Sri Chaitanya has entered into the Vaishnava literature like a hero. Thus, the representation of the *Bhagavat Purana* got slightly altered. On the other hand, the influence of Sri Chaitanya changed the perspective of the practice of Vaishnava literature. The influenced by the life philosophy of Sri Chaitanya, Brindiban Goswami, Nityananda, Narahari Thakur, Jahnabi Devi, later, Kedarnath Dutta, Bimal Prasad Dutta, Abhay Charan Dey, and at present, Jaipataka Maharaj have patronized Gaudiya Vaishnavism to give it a new form on the basis of philosophy. Thus, he has been revered as a great man among the devotees. His inspiration aroused the sense of right to religious practice among the lower caste people, and women too. This sense of right to religious practice aroused by Chaitanya and his path succeeded in weakening centuries of scriptural restrictions. That is why, after the introduction of his Bhakti movement among all the class of the society, a huge blow fell on the hierarchy of casteism. But, after the death of Sri Chaitanya, there has

been conflicts regarding his ideals, sectarianism, variety in Vaishnava thoughts and formation of Vaishnava circles the tradition of which is present even today.

Vaishnavism existed even in the pre-Chaitanya era. It is seen that lord Vishnu used to be the main deity in the later Vedic Sanskrit literature and mythology. But, in the *Rigveda*, Vishnu did not acquire the position of the main deity. He has been referred to 105 times in the *Rigveda*, 24 times in the *Samaveda*, 59 times in the *Yajurveda* and 66 times in the *Atharvaveda*. In the *Suktas* no 35, 36, 39, 40 and 93 of *Saptam Mandalam*, lord Vishnu has been associated with ten more deities. But, those *Suktas* do not resound with lord Vishnu's deeds.³ Regarding the real form of lord Vishnu, a western scholar has remarked, "*Root Vish to Pervade* the second gods of Hindu. He is a manifestation of the solar energy, and is described as striding through the seven regions of the universe in three steps and evolving all things with dust (of his beams). These three steps are explained by commentators as denoting the three manifestations of light, fire, lightning and the sun, or the three places of the sun - its rising, culminating and setting.⁴In the Veda, he is occasionally associated with *Indra*. He has very little in common with the Vishnu of later times, but he is called the unconquerable preserver and this distinctly indicates the great preserving power which he afterwards became". Hence, later, lord Vishnu came to be regarded as the lord sustained of the world. Thus, for having the highest significance among the deities, his virtuous deeds and roles have been explained through his various incarnations. At the beginning of his poetry, *Gitagovindam*, the Bengali poet Jayadeva has referred to the ten incarnations of lord Vishnu. But, in different times, in scriptural analyses, alteration of this theory has been found. For example, in some texts the number of incarnations of lord Vishnu has been said to be 10, again somewhere it is 7, somewhere it is 12, somewhere it is 20 and more.⁵ But, after the coming of Sri Chaitanya on earth, the focus shifted to the unprecedented revolution in the fields of philosophy, literature, *Kirtan* singing, dancing, art and craft etc. During his life time, he was regarded as lord Krishna, the incarnation of lord Vishnu. As a result of it, the number of his devotees increased by leaps and bounds after his demise. Even, his idols have been installed on the altars of various temples for daily worship following rituals like- *Chandan Yatra*, *Madhabi Purnima* or *Fuldol*, *Snan Yatra*, *Pabitra Ropan*, *Guru Purnima*, *Chaturmasya*, *Kamika Ekadashi*, *Jhulan Yatra*, *Balodeb Jayanti*, *Janmastami*, *Radhastami*, *Nandotsab*, *Unmilani Mahadvadasi*, *Indira Ekadasi*, *Bijotsav*, *Sarad Rasa Yatra*, *Gaubandhan Yatra*, *Gopastami*, *Akshay Nabami*, *Bhisma Panchamak*, *Utthanaykadasi*, *Pusyavisek Yatra*, *Basanta Panchami*, *Advaita Saptami*, *Bhaimi Ekadasi*, *Nityananda Trayodasi*, *Maghi Purnima*, *Basantotsav*, *Gaur Purnima*, *Dol Yatra*, *Pancham Dol*, *Boldeber Rasha Yatra* etc.⁶all of which created a revolution among the Vaishnava devotees and the Vaishnava religious practices.

The path shown by Sri Chaitanya Deva did not only provide deliverance to the low born, low caste sinners, and banished the centuries of social discrimination, but also it has empowered women socially by providing them a position of respect. Chaitanya Deva tactically established women in respect beside the men under the religious wrapper. Now, the housewives had the right to participate in the *Namsamkirtan* openly. Even, Jahnabi Devi, the wife of Nityananda, took the lead of the Vaishnava community at the Kheturi festival. After accepting monkhood, Sri Chaitanya Deva travelled to Puri, so the responsibility of directing Vaishnavism in Bengal fell on the shoulders of Advaita Mahaprabhu of Shantipur and Nityananda Mahaprabhu. But, Nityananda was an octogenarian old man and he did not have as much firm faith as Sri Chaitanya. As an aged person, he married both of the daughters of Surya Das, Basudha Devi and Jahnabi Devi. Besides this, as Chandramukhi, another daughter of Surya Das, became the object of his love, a great part of the Vaishnava society became disrespectful to him. Nityananda's son Birbhadra was a jewel in the Vaishnava movement. He converted the Buddhist *Tantrics* into *Sahajiya* Vaishnavas which made the base of Vaishnavism firm.

Thus, the *Tantra* Vaishnava started to be an inseparable part of *Sahajiya* religion. There were two distinct aspects to practice *Sahajiya* Vaishnavism: one is external practice and the other is the practice of mind.⁷ After Chaitanya, the *Sahajiya* practice was promoted by Ray Ramananda and Swarup Damodar. But, the *Sahajiya* Vaishnava *Gurus* of Bengal did not accept Sri Chaitanya as their only idol. They also established Jayadeva, Bidyapati and Chandi Das as their revered lord. After the establishment of *Sahajiya* Vaishnavism, four *Sahajiya* texts were composed as *Dig Darsan*: (1) *Agamsar* (2) *Ananda Bhairab* and (3) *Amritrasabali*.⁸

আগমসারআগেহয়, আনন্দভৈরবতারপর
ইহারপরঅমৃতরত্নাবলীজানিবেনিদ্ধার॥
ইহারপরঅমৃতরসাবলিরসেরসমুদ্র
এরসতরঙ্গেমগ্নপ্রজাপতিরুদ্র॥⁹

Translated into English:

Earlier is *Agamsar*, later is *Anand Bhairab*,

Next comes *Amritrasabalee* to by heart.

Amtrtrasabali is the vast ocean of aesthetic flavour,

Rudra and *Brahma* themselves engrossed in its waves.

In *Sahajiya* Vaishnavism, three types of *Bhakti* have been referred to as *Prem Bhakti* (devotion through love), *Sadhana Bhakti* (devotion through practice) and *Bhab Bhakti* (devotion through faith). Therefore, the Vaishnava *Sahajiya* devotees, at first, acquire knowledge, then faith to attain God. According to them, faith comes after knowledge.

Even today, apart from Advaita Mahaprabhu, Nityananda, master Acharya, the offspring of the *Six Brindiban Goswamis* are revered as *Gurus*. They initiate the domestic folk. Sometimes the initiate people with the mantra of lord Krishna and sometimes they initiate people with the mantra of Chaitanya for livelihood. Those devotees, who used to give up their caste, clan, honour etc. to become monks, had to put on their special garb. But, at present, breaking the tradition, even the Vaishnavas putting on garbs lead family life, beget children, and use modern technology and luxury that is available. Though widow remarriage was not practised by the domestic Vaishnavas, it was not hated by the ascetic Vaishnavas. But, the entry of immorality and infidelity amidst these garbed Vaishnavas, made them a hated community. Apart from this, a group of socially outcast lower caste people, instead of accepting Islam, accepted *Sahajiya* Vaishnavism under the guidance of Birbhadra, who later, became known as *Nera-Neri*.¹⁰ It is said that Birbhadra had arranged 1300 *Neris* for 1200 *Neras*.

বারোশতন্যাড়াআরতেরশতনেড়ি |
কেহবহেগঙ্গাজলকেশোধেবাড়ি॥
বীরংকরিন্যাড়াকরেসিংহনাদে |
কারোনাহিভয়বিরচন্দ্রেরপ্রসাদে॥
হেনলীলাবীরচন্দ্রেরইচ্ছাতেহইল |
নারীসৃষ্টিকরিন্যাড়ারতেজক্ষয়কৈল॥¹¹

Twelve hundred *Neras* and Thirteen hundred *Neries*.

Some carries the water of *Ganges* and some sweeps houses.

Muttering his words *Nera* roars into stating,

There is no fear at the blessing of Birchandra.

Birchandra feels to do miracles and created *Nari*,

That subdued the anger of *Nera*.

Thus, through the extension of love among the higher and the lower societies people, women, the *Sudras*, the illiterate, the poor and the outcast people, Chaitanya Deva had sowed the seed of a democratic mode of religious ideals which is valid even in the present-day social system.

The history of the Bengali society is so much complicated with a number of communities that in order to form the greater Bengali society, strong leading figures had to arise. Within the powerful religious circles, many wise men composed their poetry, philosophy and rhetorical scriptures of their devotionism in Sanskrit. As a result of it, later, many Vaishnava texts were composed in Sanskrit which violated Sri Chaitanya's religious ideals free from knowledge and practice. It, thus, created a breach amidst the Gaudiya Vaishnava community. Chaitanya Deva did not create any community, but after his death, Gaudiya Vaishnavism was divided into many branches and sub-branches. Religion and philosophy are closely associated with each other. Gaudiya Vaishnavism may be divided into two sects as the theist and the atheist. Those who maintain faith on the scriptural practices of *Haribhakti Bilas* are theists and Srikrishna Chaitanya is only worthy of worship for them. And, those who despise the scriptural rituals to adopt the easiest way of religious practice are looked upon as the atheists. They emphasize that there is no validity of casteism in the religion of love and they have accepted the simple path shown by Sri Chaitanya Deva. Thus, the more the Gaudiya Vaishnavas started being detached from the path of ordinary life accepting the scriptures, the faster various sub-sects of Vaishnavism started popping out counting to more than fifty.¹² As a result of it, physiology started becoming associated with the *Bhakti* (devotion) based meditative religion of Sri Chaitanya Deva in the various villages of Bengal.

In India, it is believed that there are two ways to acquire God: one of it is the path of knowledge which leads to the detachment of the five sense organs from the outer world to dedicate oneself to the path of *Yoga* which, according to the wise men, being practised with faith God is attained. In the *Upanishad*, *Tantric* practices and in the *PatanjaliYoga* philosophy, this path has been widely discussed. The other path is the path of *Bhakti Yoga*.¹³ This path emphasizes not on knowledge or meditation but on total surrender to God and the purity of mind. The pundits of the path of *Bhakti* usually say that among the five sentiments of *Shanta* (peacefulness), *Dasya* (servitude), *Sakhya* (companionship), *Batsalya* (compassion) and *Madhur* (sweetness), any one is to be adhered to for establishing the relationship between God and the devotee like the relationship between man and man. Thus, a trend of self-sacrifice, self-abnegation and total surrendering developed. The myth regarding the love affair between Radha and Krishna that developed among the Vaishnava devotees was *Madhur*. Among the five sentiments mentioned on the path of devotion, the *Madhur* sentiment or the sentiment of Radha-Krishna is the most important sentiment. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is regarded as the idol of this sentiment. This ideal of Sri Chaitanya attracted hosts of people to follow his feet. Sri Chaitanya had been making his teachers and classmates spellbound from his childhood. After his return from Gaya, seeing his personality, wisdom and new form enamoured in the love of Krishna, the Vaishnava society accepted him with adoration. He raised his head alone against cruelty and injustice. Under his leadership, innumerable men and women used to assemble in the *HariNamsamkirtan*. The barbarians like Jagai and Madhai and the cruel *Qazi* were also morally compelled to bow down their heads before him. In order to relieve the pains of the humble and the outcast of the society, he left his affectionate mother and exceptionally beautiful wife in the ocean of sorrow and accepted itinerant monkhood. Thus, his sacrifice became the best example of the deliverance and the welfare of man. That is why; Sri Chaitanya has been being regarded as the human incarnation of lord Vishnu throughout the ages. Hence, there was no narrowness or orthodoxy in the love and devotion-based religion preached by him. He accepted lord Krishna as his God and the emotions and sentiments of Radha found expression through his devotion.¹⁴ Though enamoured in the love of lord Krishna, Sri

Chaitanya Deva never had any grudge about any other deities or religious communities. Travelling from Nabadwip to *Nilachal*, then from *Nilachal* to the Rameswaram Bridge, Brindiban, Puri, Mathura etc. regions, he paid homage to all the deities of the communities like *Shakta*, *Saiva*, *Ganpatya* without making any discrimination. It is said that in many cases, after seeing the idols, he would become emotional and hysteric. Therefore, his message was that all the gods and the goddesses are equally worthy of worship like lord Krishna. Following his path, *Namsamkirtan* has been acknowledged as the principal mode of devotion to Krishna by the devotees. In reality, so long as pride dwells in the heart of an individual, so long hatred, fear, shame, wrath, jealousy, envy or aversion etc. tendencies stay active within him and so long the sense of difference among men, women, rich, poor etc. stay wide awake. One can attain the path of devotion and salvation only after winning over the six adversaries. If one can reach the height on the path of salvation, then he finds the fruit of his devotion. The Vaishnava saints call this knowledge of salvation *Mahabhab* or *Gopibhab*.¹⁵

Sri Chaitanya Deva gave more importance on Radha than Sri Krishna. Therefore, it can be said that there lies some contribution of *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, *Gitagobindam*, composed by Jayadeva and *Srikrishna Kirtan* in the Bhakti movement of Chaitanya Deva. On the other hand, some scholars think that Sri Chaitanya Deva came in contact with and was influenced by some Vaishnava devotees and sages belonging to the *Nayanar* community during his tour to Tamil Nadu. But whatever the truth may be, it is a fact that the basis of the religious practice of the *Nayanars* was meditative. They considered the right to religious practice irrespective of race or caste and love and devotion to be the vehicle for attaining God. Some scholars even claim that the ideals and philosophy preached by Chaitanya Deva is highly influenced by the Sufism of Islam. There is considerable similarity between Sufism and *Vedanta philosophy*. In *Vedantic Sufism*, there is a kind of singing and dancing practice called '*Sama*' which is similar to the practice of '*Rumi Kirtan*'. Like the '*Astangik Marg*' (the eight-fold paths) of Buddhism, the Sufi saints have introduced the concept of ten principles for attaining God (*Tauha*, *Zuhad*, *Wara*, *Faqr*, *Sabr*, *Shukra*, *Raza*, *Riza*, *Khauf* and *Tauvakkul*).¹⁶ The substance of these paths is purity or good thinking, devotion and gaining deity is the path to attain God. Confession, wilful acceptance of poverty, life without luxury, honesty, control over the sense organs, meditation, the favour of God, love, hope, desire, closeness with God, peace, thinking and surrendering are the way to be an ideal devotee. Strong faith, excitement and the feeling of Gods the way to attain deity.¹⁷ About the Vedanta idealism in Sufism, Hiralal Chopra has stated that, the Vedanta Philosophy captured their minds; the Bhakti movement influenced their ideas and in Punjab, the strong hold of Islam. Muslim mystics held the view that nothing was real except God and everything else was illusion or Maya.¹⁸ From this, we can come to this conclusion that the Sufi philosophy and ideals of Bengal were greatly influenced by the ideals of Bhakti preached by Sri Chaitanya. According to Brindiban Goswami, Sri Chaitanya was the pioneer of the '*Achintya*' discrimination theory. Thus, many critics have called the ideals as the ideals of common humanity. The ideals of the *Sahajiya* sect is the meditation of God while keeping all the sense organs active. In his book, *The Place of the Hidden Moon*, Edward C. Dimock Jr., has referred to Chaitanya Deva as the preacher of the *Sahajiya* ideals. He has further remarked that there were many possible ways for Chaitanya Deva to get associated with the *Sahajiya* group of devotees, though most probably he reached them through two of his closest companions.¹⁹ Thus, there remains no doubt in thinking that Chaitanya Deva's stealing into the hearts of his devotees is unprecedented. That is why, he is the one for the Bengalis whom the heart of all long for. The incarnation of such an individual with divine powers is a supernatural, eternal and unalterable phenomenon. It is the pursuit of him which has been fascinating many powerful and influential men to quit everything to accept monkhood to devote themselves to the service of God and to live a humble life by begging or receiving donation from the devotees in the maths and temples. That is why, it is said that Sri Chaitanya Deva is the supreme deity

and the eternal Sri Krishna who has appeared on earth as *Sri Krishna Chaitanya* for putting an end to the sins on earth. Sri Chaitanya Deva is the ultimate object and the only worthy of worship in the Vaishnava community. This concept is known as '*Gaudiya Paramya*' (Gaudiya Absolutism). The believers of this concept rejected the practice of Gopal and Krishna worship and accepted Gaur mantra as the hereditary practice. They have their own Gaur Calendar according to which they observe their festivals and rituals throughout the year. According to Dr. Bimanbihari Majumdar, "Narahari Sarkar, Shibananda Sen, Prabodhananda Saraswati etc. people were the practitioners of this practice."²⁰

The ideals of Sri Chaitanya or Gaudiya Vaishnavism and philosophy were not different from the conventional law of change. He had his own ideals and philosophy. For this reason, the sovereignty of Gaudiya Vaishnavism is very significant. From historical point of view, it is seen that the stream of the path shown by Chaitanya is flowing ceaselessly. After the 18th century, the influence of Gaudiya Vaishnavism decreased, to some extent. Nabadwip in Nadia used to be as important an educational centre as Nalanda and Taxila. It is said that during the reign of King Krishnachandra, Nabadwip was the residence of nearly 1700 Brahmins: One thousand and seven hundred Brahmins dwell in the heart of Nadia.²¹ The instructions of the learned men of Nabadwip used to get validity in Bengal and also in other provinces. As a result of it, the learned men of Nabadwip used to respect the kings of Nadia especially. Even, the scriptural and far reached pundits of Nabadwip gave King Krishnachandra the title of '*Nabadwipadhipati*' meaning the ruler of Nabadwip. The pundits of Nabadwip were the receivers of the donation of the King of Nadia. There was also arrangement of scholarship from the treasury for the pundits who taught in *Tolls* or *Chatuspathis*. King Krishnachandra also donated lands for making the *Tolls* updated according to the need of the time. But, these profoundly taught men who devoted themselves to the practice of knowledge and deeds had utter conflict with Gaudiya Vaishnavism. As a result of it, even after 250 years of Sri Chaitanya's death, the Vaishnavas of Nabadwip could not build temples, ashrams or prayer halls. The worship of the idol of Sri Chaitanya also did not become usual in a greater sense.

It was probably under the influence of the learned Brahmins of Nabadwip that King Krishnachandra became averse to Chaitanya. There is not much instance of Vaishnava temples and *Akhras* apart from those built by Ganga Gobonda Singha, the Diwan of East India Company, and Totaram Babaji who came from south India. In his work, *Kshitish Bangsabali*, Diwan Kartikeya Chandra Ray has remarked, "The kings of Nadia were a *Shakta*, but they had equal respect for Vaishnavism. They had established metal and rock idols of various gods and goddesses mentioned in the myths. They had respect for both goddess Kali and Lord Krishna. But, they used to disapprove of the community of Chaitanya's devotees."²² The king of Manipur, Bhagyachandra visited Nabadwip towards the end of the 18th century. He observed that the idol of Chaitanya used to be worshipped stealthily in an underground apartment at the homestead of Bishnupriya at the house of Pritambar Goswami at Malanchapara.²³ To establish and spread *Shaktism* in Nadia was the impassioned aim of king Krishnachandra Ray, so during his reign the practice of Gaudiya Vaishnavism could not flourish. About king Krishnachandra, Dr. Sashibhushan Dasgupta has remarked that he was the proponent of the worship of goddess Kali. During his reign, almost 10,000 Kali Pujas used to be held in his kingdom. The oldest Kali idol of Nabadwip is the Alan Kali of *Dearapara*.²⁴ It is said that in 1762, during the reign of Krishnachandra, a catastrophe came down on Nabadwip. A devastating earthquake hit the town prohibiting the establishment of any temples or idols by the king.

It was after the 19th century that the influence of Sri Chaitanya Deva gradually began to grow at Nabadwip. During this period, the authority of the British in Bengal solidified greatly. As a result of it, the adversity on the path of the administration of the state hindered the sustainable cultural uplift

and spread. The *Sahajiya* practitioners continued to represent the greatness of this religion among the villagers through portraying Radha-Krishna *Lila* and *Gaur Lila* through the vehicles of theatre, *Panchali* (a variation of ballad), *Kabigan* (a variation of ballad), *Astaprahara* (one day long) *Kirtan*, etc. But the popularity and spread of Western education among the people of the Middle class, gave rise to a new group of intellectuals. As a result of it, in the 19th century, when the rationalists and advanced reformists like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Keshavchandra Sen, Akshay Kumar Dutta and Rammohan Roy established the standard for the practice of knowledge and life, the tales of Radha-Krishna and Gaur continued to be preached through the endeavour of people like Haru Thakur, Nityananda Bairagi, Ram Basu, Krishnakamal Goswami etc.

The famous '*Shuk Sharir Dwando*' of Nityananda Bairagi, the '*Rai Unmadini*' narrative opera of Krishnakamal Goswami and the songs of separation by Haru Thakur and Ram Basu saved the Bengali Gaudiya sentiment from being extinct.²⁵ Durgadas Lahiri wrote the book named '*Bengali Gaan* (song), which included many songs which brought him the title of '*Kobiwal*'. It is not that the *Gaur Lila* and *Krishna Lila* only influenced the sentiments of the rural people, but also influenced the aristocratic people, society and literature. This inspired the composition of various books rich in the Gaudiya sentiment and the ideals of Sri Chaitanya. As a result of it, an advanced and Vedanta based monotheistic Brahminic religion arose following new ideals. The impact of this Brahminic religion reached the distant Krishnagar in Nadia. On the other hand, under the reformatory influence of Ramkrishna Paramhansa Deva, Bijay Krishna Goswami, Swami Vivekananda, Keshab Chandra Sen, and Krishnaprasanna Sen, the Bhakti based traditional religion was greatly rejuvenated. This triggered the practice of Vaishnava literature. This happened at the time when there was a great conflict among the Vaishnava Gurus, Goswamis and the devotees. When, in 1894, the verdict of honourable Calcutta High Court stated that both Mayapur and Nabadwip were the birth places of Chaitanya, but in 1896, instead of Nabadwip, only Mayapur was stated to be the birth place of Chaitanya, the conflict was more infuriated. For this, probably, Vaishnavism and Vaishnava literature began to be practised in a new way. Writers like Madhusudan Dutta, Nabinchandra Sen, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, even Rabindranath Tagore created literature following Vaishnavite ideals. The Vaishnava literature also tempted writers like Bipin Chandra Pal, Brajendranath Shil, Sishir Kumar Ghosh and Chittaranjan Das and made them opinionated about Vaishnavism. The love religion of Sri Chaitanya Deva provided these prolific writers the nectar of communal harmony, the philosophy of monkhood and sacred life. That is why, in the *Brahma Samaj*, a new base of culture was formed with the combination of rationalism and devotionalism.²⁶

After the 20th century, the massive advancement of science and technology along with the expansion of communism became an obstacle on the path of the concepts of God, soul, fate and deliverance and also Gaudiya Vaishnavism. But a deep analysis of Gaudiya Vaishnavism reveals that even under the circumstance of social change, the importance of Gaudiya Vaishnavism did not change. That is why; Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is regarded as the holy man whose ideals have appeared throughout the ages for the welfare of man on earth. In this context, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar writes, "The Hindus of Bengal were infused with a new life by the example and ideal of Chaitanya and the moral uplift that he had brought about all round."²⁷ About Sri Chaitanya Deva and Vaishnavism in Bengal, Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay has remarked, "There is no aristocratic aid, no legal compulsion, no clamour of weapons, no fear of being forced, yet a transformation has occurred in Bengal, as if by the touch of a magician's wand. This revolution of the whole race of the Bengalis has occurred only at the beck and call of a single abnegator."²⁸

According to Gaudiya Vaishnava laws, even a low caste person is regarded well than an atheist Brahmin. Therefore, the duty of the pious devotees is let me see you, touch you, and sing of

your grace.²⁹ But, through the passage of time, there have been elementary changes within the framework of Gaudiya Vaishnavism based on the ideals of Sri Chaitanya Deva, like: you should not always establish companionship with the non-Vaishnavas because it violates the Vaishnava piety and purity; you should not listen to derogatory comments about lord Vishnu because He Himself is creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world; do *Kirtan* yourself and when some other is doing *Kirtan*, listen to it with attention; do not make many disciples. But, disobeying this commandment, the Vaishnava *Gurus* and *Goswamis* have been growing the number of their disciples, not only within the country but also abroad, and living by the donation of the disciples has become the easiest and luxurious profession for them. As a result of it, to some extent, the modern day Gaudiya Vaishnavism has become a little distracted from the ideals of Sri Chaitanya Deva. The lower caste and socially outcast people accepted secular Vaishnavism considering Sri Chaitanya Deva as their idol. Among the secular religions in Bengal, *Matua* was one of the most prominent sects. Many people of this community used to live in the undivided Nadia even after the independence. That is why; the *Matua* sect has taken an important role in the religious revolution. Making domestic life a prop, once Sri Chaitanya Deva gave the taste of deliverance to the oppressed and outcast people in his religious and activity gatherings. It inspired the greater part of the *Namasudras* to accept Vaishnavism for the sake of greater and larger religious practice. But, their vision was soon shattered by the higher-class Vaishnava *Gurus* and *Goswamis*. The circumstance being such, in the first half of the 19th century, under the supervision of Hari Chand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur, the *Matua* religion developed and spread in the Odakandi village. Equality, friendship and philanthropy were established as ideals following the path of Sri Chaitanya in order to free the society fragmented and contaminated by the distinctions of castes. The main religious advice of Guruchand and Harichand Thakur was to establish the autonomy of the lower-class people. That is why, the ordinary *Matua* people spread all over India.³⁰

The conflicts of pain, justice and injustice and sin and virtue, Sri Chaitanya had surrendered his life to God, the merciful for the salvation of man. Hence, his life was a life of continuous pursuit. The easiest path which he found out by his pursuit and also showed to people did not only move the people of Bengal in the tide of emotion but also the people of the greater part of the country were overwhelmed by sentiment. As a result of it, all over India, the symphony of democracy and equality resounded. Hearing the call of Sri Chaitanya, the whole country from the seas up to Himachal was roused with new life force and fresh energetic self. It rejuvenated the literature including dramas and stories and also culture of the country. Like Sri Chaitanya, Gautam Buddha appeared on earth to spread the message of equality and unity some 2,500 years ago from now. Through hard meditation he discovered exclusiveness or oneness as the path to salvation. Besides, he strongly denounced the ritualistic and scriptural practices of religions common in that time. He became an abnegator to show the human beings the way to be free from the cycle of decrepitude and death. Even without a *Guru* or teacher, it is possible for a human being to acquire knowledge through self-questioning. Winning the hearts of the oppressed and afflicted people, Gautam Buddha established equality throughout the world on the basis of individualism and faith. He succeeded in bringing together people of different classes and castes under the shed of the flag of love. Through the new religious policy, he brought about a bloodless revolution in the religious world. That is why; Sri Chaitanya followed the paths shown by Gautam Buddha, Mahavir, Goshala, Guru Nanak and also the great Mughal emperor Akbar the great, in his religious pursuit.

The path of salvation through the practice of *Harinam Samkirtan* shown by Sri Chaitanya is much easier than through acquiring knowledge by killing ignorance through deep meditation out of self-query. But it must be acknowledged that the saints appear on earth by the demand of the time.

That is why, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan remarked, “Religion is a practice, and not a faith.” God is the soul of all souls, the greatest consciousness. That is why, God dwells within us, feels our feelings, our pains and often he manifests quality, knowledge, aestheticism and love within us. During his life time, Sri Chaitanya gave the instruction for generous and simplest way in the context of society, religion, philosophy and human life to protect Hinduism and human society. Like the Buddha, Sri Chaitanya too gave much emphasis on justice, character policy, universal love, compassion and self-mortification. But, his greatness as a saviour spread from his contemporary time to the future especially through *Nam Samkirtan*. That is why, once, the companions and followers of Sri Chaitanya attracted people to Gaudiya Vaishnavism by preaching the religion. In the present time, *ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness)* and the *Gaudiya Mission* have succeeded in establishing Sri Chaitanya at the throne of international renown as a saint through conveying the Gaudiya Vaishnava ideals. The Buddha’s words were received with respect and faith within the country and abroad under the patronage of the Maurya, the Kushan and the Pala kings. Though, Sri Chaitanya’s Gaudiya Vaishnavism did not receive similar famous royal patronage, it has got international reception as a universal religion on the dint of its own glory and universal acceptability.³¹

Though Sri Chaitanya did not manifest himself exactly as a social reformer yet his path brought about unprecedented social reformation in Bengal. It is needless to say that in the 19th century, social reformers like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Keshabchandra and Raja Rammohan Ray followed his path greatly. That is why, Sri Krishnadas has written, “Though the social reformers of the 19th century could not do anything satisfactory in terms of casteism, inter-caste marriage, creating the sense of fraternity and widow remarriage thumping the table and shouting, yet Chaitanya, though not much concerned about these matters, became greatly successful through his religious preaching.”³² Sri Chaitanya’s ideals gave rise to the concept of rights for women and their awakening. During the 19th century, when the tide of social and cultural reformation was sweeping through Bengal, Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Raja Rammohan Ray appeared in the scene with the ray of hope. With the spread of British trends, the educated and urban middle-class people started their feminist reformist movement against orthodox Brahmins. While meditating over the way to relieve the women oppressed throughout the ages, the social reformists realizes that the external layer of education was insufficient. Without uprooting the firmly rooted superstitions, the progress of women and the establishment of their rights were impossible. That is why; they wanted to do something remarkable in this matter by taking rigid and bold steps. Once, the cultural awakening of Bengal became simplified through a strong cultural and spiritual revolution under the leadership of Sri Chaitanya. For all this, Sri Chaitanya is regarded as an incarnation, social reformer and the messenger of salvation.

The rearrangement of a nation’s religious and social history is not an easy task. The periphery of religious history is much greater and more expansive than that of the political and the economic history. The religious history of a region is the day to day account of the thoughts, beliefs, emotions, activities and ideals of the people of that region from the past to the present. On the other hand, the thoughts and activities of the people of a society are determined by familial tradition, ethnic group, and class. Hence, it can be said that the people of all the strata of that very region, being influenced by those very thoughts and activities, provide the society a positive impetus for progress. People try to find out the path of salvation from the oppression of conservatism through the mediums of class, caste, religion, faith, rituals, virtue, vice, moral policy, education, the values and philosophy preached by saints. The stream of a society’s movement is comprehended through the analysis of these facts. In

this connection, Chaitanya Deva's philosophy of religion may be the right way to search the God and it is the easiest path.

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