

Western Thoughts on Odishan Vaishnavism : A Bird's Eye View

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This Article is an attempt to highlight the historiography of Vaishnavism from the writings of the Western scholars and to show how it was different from the Nationalists' approach and the writings of the recent times in terms of its evolutions, genesis, characteristics and growth, and as a symbol of intellectual development in the sphere of religious synthesis. The next aspect is how neo- Vaishnavism and the tribal concept have transmitted themselves through the intellectual trend followed by the scholars before the advent of Sri Krsna Chaitanya. The Cultural History of Orissa is mostly available from the selective writings of the famous Orientalists like J.Beams, L.S.S.O' Malley, R. Kenedy and A. Sterling. These Historiographers in spite of their limitations and prejudices have given a very transparent picture of the intellectual development in the cultural History of Orissa based on the materials then available. Their writings have made Vaishnavism and the cultural history of Odisha known worldwide. The historiographical analysis of Vaishnavism has given rise to a conglomeration of social and religious philosophies and doctrines.

Before the emergence of Vaisnivism in Orissa it was developed in South India by the popular saint poets called *Alvars*, who represented the rise of Vaishnavism through collective songs called



Prabandhas. It led to a momentum better shaped after the 10th century, when as a philosophical and ideological movement it was led by *Acharyas* like, Ramanuja and others. For the first time, they put emphasis on purity of heart and mind, humanism and complete devotion through Bhajanas and personal efforts. The Bhajanas were later on propounded by Sri Krsna Chaitanya in the form of *Nama-sankirtan* by uttering

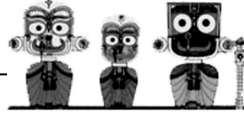


*Hare Krsna Hare Krsna
Krsna Krsna Hare Hare
Hare Rama Hare Rama
Rama Rama Hare Hare.*

W.W. Hunter points out in his Orissa (Vol.1) that Vaishnavism was a mass movement while supporting the view of J.Beams, L.S.S.O' Malley, A. Sterling. The nationalist approaches and the history of recent trends represent Vaishnavism as a popular movement because of no barrier of caste, prejudices, creed, colour, sex or strict rituals. The evolution of Vaishnavism is the earliest manifestation of the word Visnu which relates to the worship of Nilamadhab in Nilachala, the present Kambukshetra before the emergence of the Jagannatha trinity in the form of *Darubrahma* during the period of the king Indradyumna. But the evolution of Vaishnavism in Orissa is found in the form of a legend which is mentioned the *Purusottama Kshetra Mahatmya* in *Skandapurana*, Musaliprava of Sarala Mahabharat, Deulatola of Sisu Krsna Das and Nilambar Das. K.C. Das in his work, **Legend History and culture of India**, quotes both the accounts *Purusottama Kshetra Mahatmya* of *Skandapurana* and *Musaliparva* of *Sarala Mahabharat* and identifies Nilagiri, the place of evolution of Vaishnavism. In the initial stage, it happened to be part of the Savara land under the tutelage of visvasu. A tribal religion centre was converted in to a centre of Visnu worship and Vaishnavism became an institutionalized religion as a living faith among most of the communities of Orissa. From the writings of western scholar, it is ascertained that Vaishnavism was in a different shape earlier like the rigid monotheism of Ramanuja, the monastic system of Ramananda and the luxurious love worship of Vallabhacharya before the advent of Sri Krsna Chaitanya. Though Vaishnavism is derived from the cult hero

Visnu, its religious system is evidently derived from the sacred *Vedas*. It forms one of the eight religious treatises under the title of the *Puranas* are devoted to the mythology of the Hindus. Lord Krsna and Radha and the village deities worshipped by the Hindu Villagers bear testimony to it. The *Vaishnavism* or *Vaisnava Dharma* is combination of the fetishism of the aboriginal races and flower worship of the *Vedas*. In the medieval period a movement began that was Vaishnavism which was soon to appeal to the internal instincts of human liberty, equality and fraternity whose first stirrings commenced in southern India by Ramanuja. The Orientalists opine that at the end of the thirteenth century the great reformation made Visnu worship and the cult of Vaishnavism a national religion in India. In the 16th century Gaudiya Vaishnavism which primarily meant the worship of Radha and Krsna as a symbol of love and compassion was popularized by Sri Krsna Chaitanya was an equally respectable protagonist of *Vaisnava Bhaktas* like Ramanuja and Madhavacharya.

With the development of the intellectual perspectives each and every philosophy went through a process of assimilation with Vaishnavism. The moral code of Vaishnavism touched one and all in the context of humanity, truthfulness, retirement and submissiveness. In humanity for life are the gift of God and the shedding of blood, whether of man or animal a crime. In truthfulness, for the ills of the world and ignorance of God are attributed to real falsehood. In retirement, the passions and perturbations of the earth ruffle the tranquility of man's soul and interfere with his contemplations of God. In submissiveness to the spiritual guide, the disciple is enjoined first of all to examine well the life and doctrine of Him who proclaims to take care of the souls. The Orientalists describe the emerging concept of new Vaishnavism in terms of



Panchadevatas, namely, Visnu, Siva, Surya, Ganapati and Sakti, worshipped in five pithas in Orissa like Puri, Bhubaneswar, Konarka, Mahabinayak and Jajpur respectively. It also throws ample light on the popularity of Panchadevata Upasana or worship. The followers of Vaishnavism known as Vaisnavas are instructed on the performance of Nama-sankirtana during the time of Badasinghara. Gradually the Vaisnava faith and doctrine became more eclectic and heterogeneous because of the concept like Sunya (void) personified in Sri Krsna. The same thing also happened to the Mahimapanthis, who adopted the principle of Sunya Brahma or Alekha. Here, it can be said that the term Vaishnavism is assimilated with Mahima Dharma on the basis of Sunya or void concept. The Orientalists like J.Beams and others have supported the notion of intellectual tradition relating to Vaishnavism given by W.W. Hunter. At present, Vaishnavism is highly adored in Eastern India in the form of Radha-Krsna cult and the Odias are no exception.

However, we should not categorically reject the intellectual development suggested by the Orientalists while comparing their writings with the writings of the recent period. Here, we can conclude that the development of Vaishnavism had a deep impact on the social life of the people of Orissa and their philosophical thoughts reached a new high setting, a new trend in the cultural history of Orissa.

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