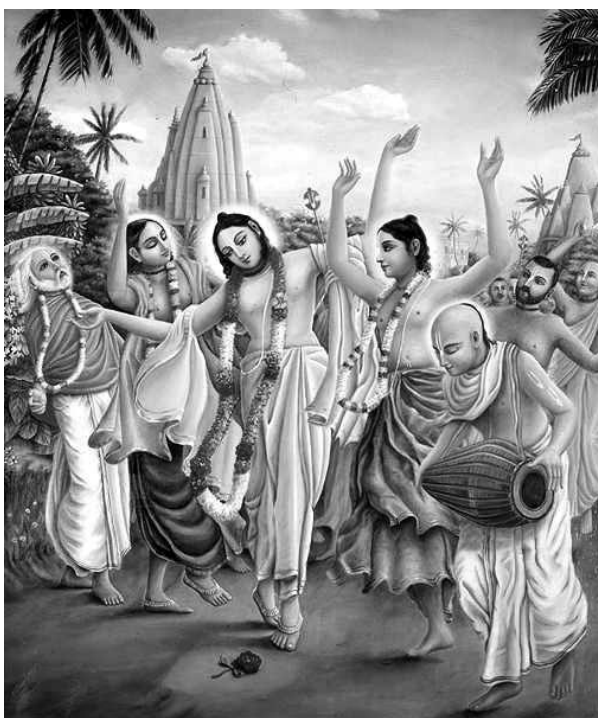




Odia Society and Sri Chaitanya

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Bhakti Movement which was originated in the medieval period brought manifold changes in the fold of religion and society in India. It had far reaching effects. The Bhakti preachers emphasized on simplicity and salvation. From ancient period Indian saints and sages suggested three ways to realize God such as: *Gyana Marg*, *Karma Marg* and *Bhakti Marg*. The sages and saints of the medieval period put stress on the *Bhakti Marg* as it reflects keen devotion, surrender before God and social equality, so it gains popularity. Casteism, conservative ideas, rigid religious formalities, social inequality dissatisfied the common people. Islam gradually spread its wings in India. The rigidity of Hinduism also accelerated the spread of Islam in the Soil of India. So some saints worked to simplify the Hindu religion and out of that Bhakti movement was born. It worked to generate peace,

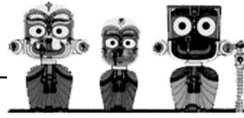


co-operation and co-ordination among the two major communities of Indian society. Moreover, the Sufi movement also helped for the growth of Bhakti movement. The main objective of this movement was to eradicate superstitions and

inequalities in the socio-religious field and realization of God by Bhakti. Among the towering figures of this Bhakti movement, Sri Chaitanya was one. The life and teachings of Sri Chaitanya had manifold social effects. His prime objective was not for social reforms, but it was a byproduct of Bhakti, the chief characteristics of which were catholicity and equality in the eyes of God. He preached for the religious freedom and accepted converts

from all sections of people irrespective of castes and creed.

Sri Chaitanya was born on 18th February 1486 at Nadia to Jagannath Mishra and Sachi



Devi. At the age of 24 he was ordained as a monk by Keshab Bharati and was given the name Sri Krishna Chaitanya. His original name was Viswambhar, Nimai. As in the case of Buddha, who in seeing four stages of human life renounced his married life. So also Viswambhar on being irritated by the Muslim Kazi who prohibited the procession chanting the name of Krishna with music, staged Satyagraha and Kazi ultimately lifted his prohibiting order. But Viswambhar decided to take sanyasa. Chaitanya made his abode at Puri for about eighteen years. Chaitanya considered Lord Jagannath to be Krishna Himself. His father was a follower of Vaisnavism. So Viswambhara was inclined towards Vaisnavism in his early age. After the death of his father he entered into worldly life. He had a happy married life with Lakshmi but due to her untimely death he again married to Vishnupriya. But she failed to fill the void of his heart so he sought solace from religious pursuit. Some time towards 1508 Viswambhara met Iswarapuri at Gaya. His interaction with Iswarapuri had a deep spiritual impact on Viswambhar. On 23 January 1510 at the age of 24 he took Sanyasa from Keshava Bharati and the Guru named him as Sri Krishna Chaitanya. Then he visited several religious places.

Odisha at that time was the only independent Hindu empire under Gajapati Prataprudra Dev. King Prataprudra Dev himself was religious minded. So Chaitanya decided to settle at Puri. In the eyes of Sri Chaitanya, Jagannath was no other than Krishna. Chaitanya was not an originator of Vaishnavism, but his impact started a Neo-Vaisnavite movement by rendering a new interpretation to the faith. As an exponent of Neo-Vaishnavism he prudently spread Bhakti through medium of Kirtana (Devotional songs accompanied by Mridanga, symbols etc. Sankirtana a regular ritual of the Vaishnavas was originated to attract the people.

Through Sankirtana he was able to make Vaishnavism a popular mass movement.

Srichaitanya's cult spread far and wide in Odisha creating virtually a social revolution. It saved Odisha from the onslaught of Islam. He introduced Kirtan as the means for developing love and devotion for Krishna which is unique in Hindu religion. The Hindus had no system of common mass prayer or worships as Muslims and Christians have. Kirtan is the mass chanting with music in which there is no distinction of caste and other social distinctions. It has minimized caste conflict in Orissa as it exists in North and South India. Kirtan kept intact the rural society. Social reformers have adopted the method of Kirtan in the tribal society to bring them to the mainpath of Hinduism. Under the impact of Kirtan, *Bhagvat Tungis* established in every village where Bhagvat is read and listened by the villagers together. The cult of Chaitanya developed especially among the agricultural tribes and castes who had an inferior position in the social hierarchy. Chaitanya Maths and temples in different parts of Orissa testifies the popularity of Chaitanyaism among the masses. Among them the Maths and temples at Rambha, Buguda, Sergada, Athagarh Patna, Bodokhemandi, Bhimapur, Polasara, Hatasahi, Kaunpur, Soro, Nuagan, Ghanteswar, Bhadrak, Damodarpur, Gurudaspur, Bengali Sahi, Purosottampur, Vishnupur, Kaipadar and Brahmagiri are very famous.

His Kirtan was to reconstruct an equalitarian society under the banner of the name Hari, where there would be no difference between the ruler and the ruled, the learned and the illiterate, the rich and the poor, the Brahmin and the Sudras, the Hindus and the Muslims. The philosophy of Chaitanya taught three things -

- Simple living with minimum possible item of things.



- Disregard caste rule
- Spirit of toleration.

He was entirely successful in his missionary activities transforming the Orissan society to his evangelical order through Sankritan. He ushered in an era of Cultural renaissance against political turmoil caused on account of Muslim rule over an orthodox society. The Sankirtan, the greatest contribution of Sri Chaitanya is still a living force. Now-a-days people resort to Sankirtan irrespective of castes and creed reminds us the significance of the flow of his tenents as a strong cultural force.

Even before his renunciation of the world, he was a beloved friend of the distressed, the poor and the downtrodden. The noblest achievement in Chaitanya's life was an extending of the right to the love of God to all including the backward section of the society. His mission was to reconstruct an egalitarian society under the banner of the name Hari where there would be no distinction between the ruler and the ruled, the learned and the illiterate, the rich and the poor, the Brahmin and the Sudra, the Hindu and the Muslim. Chaitanya proved to a great reformist as he struck at the root of untouchability. He was of the view that even a Chandala is not to be despised

as a Chandala, if he is attached with the name of Krishna and that a Brahmin is not to be respected as a Brahmin if he is dishonest. Kindness to all living beings was the fountain source of inspiration to Chaitanya.

The popularity of Chaitanyaism in Orissa was not only the result of its inner simplicity and egalitarian approach but at the same time due to the contribution of his followers and their successors. There is a controversy regarding whether he really wanted to eliminate caste-system or to maintain status-quo. But Chaitanyaism was more popular among the down-trodden and socially exploited people.

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