

## **Chapter - 5**

### **Chaitanyadev, Vaishnav's Activities, and its Relevance in Present Day**

Linguistic Sukumar Sen was the pioneer of Vaishnavian research in Bengal. His biographical writings, specially his autobiography, *Diner Por Din Je Gelo* (2001) mentions of many Vaishnavite Gurus of Burdwan, their *Akhra* and activities. Impact of caste system did not affect the casteless activities of those *Akhras*. It was possible due to the influence of Chaitanyadev and his spread of '*Harinam*'.

It was said in Hindu religion that

অনাচারে দ্বিজ পূজাঃ  
ন শূদ্র বিজিতেন্দ্রিয়া

Instead of this, Chaitanyadev declared that

চণ্ডাল চণ্ডাল নহে- যদি কৃষ্ণ বোলে ।  
বিপ্র নহে বিপ্র- যদি অসৎ পথে চলে ॥<sup>1</sup>

Even though Nityananda and Gouranga were known to be the pride of the common people, Brahmin society did not leave them to criticize because they did not believe in caste system. Potter, duster, *muchi*, *methar*, *dom*, and even Harijan embraced Islam as a religion. But, Jaban Haridas (Muslim) and Bijli Khan (Pathan) were devotees of Chaitanyadev. Bijli Khan received the name 'Pathan Vaishnav'. Many religious customs and rituals are observed by the Hindus, but Chaitanyadev declared chanting *Harinam* as the only practice. He declared that if a Chandal has devotion to Hari, then he is better than a Brahmin. And by this *Harinam*, he wanted to include the lower-class people within the folds of development. Similar ideas got reflected in Karl Marx, as he wrote on the overall growth

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<sup>1</sup> Brindaban Das, *Sri Sri Chaitanya Bhagbat*, Dilip Mukhopadhyay, ed. Kolkata: Benimadhab Shils Library, Reprint 2014, p.170

of the working class; in Gandhiji's 'Sarvodaya' there is also the developmental ideas; and, in Rabindranath's writings for the improvement of society.

Rabindranath Tagore, while referring to this bonding said that

যারে তুমি নিচে ফেল  
সে তোমাকে বাঁধিবে যে নিচে ।  
পশ্চাতে রেখেছো যারে  
সে তোমারে পশ্চাতে টানিছে ।

(‘Durbhaga Desh’, R.N. Tagore.)

Gandhiji's statement was to achieve education through action, he repeatedly said that man should be taught to himself. Film based on his life (Hindi) ‘Munna Bhai M.B.B.S.’ proved this idea pleasantly. We have heard this same thing from Chaitanyadev. It has been said in *Chaitanya Charitamrita*

আপনি করিমু ভক্ত-ভাব অঙ্গীকারে ।  
আপনি আচরি ধর্ম শিখাইমু অপরে ॥  
আপনে না কৈলে ধর্ম শিখান না যায় ।  
এইত সিদ্ধান্ত গীতা ভাগবতে গায় ॥<sup>2</sup>

In the same book, it has been further stated that

এইমত ভক্ত ভাব করি অঙ্গীকার  
আপনি আচরি ভক্তি করিলা প্রচার ।<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Krishnadas Kabiraj Goswami, *Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Dilip Mukhopadhyay, edited Kolkata: Benimadhab Shils Library, Reprint 2011, p. 40

<sup>3</sup>Krishnadas Kabiraj Goswami, *Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Dilip Mukhopadhyay, edited Kolkata: Benimadhab Shils Library, Reprint 2011, p. 50

Considering the social gap between the Brahmin and the lower class during the time of Chaitanyadev, he announced that a *chandal* could be better than a Brahmin; this is an ‘Anti-Thesis’, and this was possible only through ‘*Harinam*’. According to Chaitanyadev, *Harinam*, is a universal concept. Chaitanyadev’s loyal devotee Nityananda spread the message of ‘*Harinam*’ through his songs, which Chaitanyadev proudly mentions in the following line,

হরিনাম দিয়ে জগৎ মাতালে আমার একলা নিতাই

Rabindranath Tagore was influenced by this, he composed

যদি তোর ডাক শুনে কেউ না আসে

তবে একলা চলো রে ।

We do not find any specific information about Chaitanyadev’s outlook towards Islam, because his biographers did not mention about it. However, it is accepted that Chaitanyadev was equally sympathetic to Islam. This is written in *Chaitanya bhagbat*,

যবনেও প্রভু দেখি করে বড় প্রীত ।

সর্বভূত-কৃপালতা প্রভুর চরিত ॥<sup>4</sup>

Gandhiji’s notion of ‘Harijan’ and Chaitanyadev’s ‘Sudra’ are one as both have addressed the upliftment of the lower caste. Chaitanyadev first started writing down the history of the lower caste. No one was indispensable in his cordial team. Vivekananda said in the nineteenth century that ‘do not forget your own role’ Chaitanyadev’s role in removing untouchability is surprising to the present society. However, Chaitanya's introduction of religion was not initially supported by the Brahmin religion, even they were deeply

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<sup>4</sup> Brindaban Das, *Sri Sri Chaitanya Bhagbat*, Dilip Mukhopadhyay, edited Kolkata: Reflect Publication, Reprint 1983, p. 60

opposed to the religion of Chaitanyadev. Those who responded first to the call of Chaitanyadev belonged to the lower caste people of Navadvip. When Nityananda, the great follower of Chaitanya, visited Saptagram, there was a great tide of Vaishnav religion. And for this reason, Ramakanta Chakraborty in *Vaishnavism in Hooghly District: 1486-1900* mentioned that the Vaishnav Bhakti Movement grew strong in the Hooghly district when Nityananda Avadhuta converted *banik* merchants of Saptagrama port. During that time, those trading in commerce were Buddhists. Among them Nityananda recited the twelve Gopal theories for the promotion of Vaishnav religion. One of the twelve Gopals was Uddharan Dutta, who was one of the richest merchants of the golden traders of Saptagram; most of the traders took to Vaishnavism.

The famous author, Judith Brown made the introduction of contractor and sub-contractor theory in his book *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922* while speaking about Gandhiji's movement. In the same way talking of Nityananda as a contractor about the movement of Chaitanya, twelve Gopals were the sub-contractor.

There were many people in the society who made great money but did not get the position in the society due to caste system. These people started sacrificing various temples and offering sacrifices to the Gods in order to gain prominence in society. In this context, Mallarajas of Bishnupur in Bankura district were worth noting. We have discussed in the earliest that with the kings, there were many Queens who also started sacrificing various temples and offered sacrifices to the Gods in order to gain prominence in the society. The construction of the temple and the issue of rise in power in the society is discussed in Hitesh Ranjan's 'Social Mobility in Bengal'. In the nineteenth century, the Vaishnav temple became more visible in order to have access to all religions in Vaishnav religion. One such temple is the Sridhar Jiu temple in Kotulpur of Bankura district. The temple was introduced by the gentle family of village Siromanipur. The temple is 15 feet 9 inches in

length and width, and, 30 feet in height. The temple was built in 1833 A.D.<sup>5</sup> The scene of the violin on the right side of the temple depicts the introduction of music in the society. The temple also reminds us of the great scene of Chaitanyadev. In the left side there were 12, 12 in the right and 19, in the center are engraved the Dashabatar *fac has* and myths. Besides, the scene of dance scene in Gaudiya Vaishnav religion are preached by Gauda Vaishnav. Frescos of two boats were placed in the two corners of the temple, which reminds the business progress of the descent family.

Coming from Moral village of Burdwan, Sadanand Bhadra started living at Kotulpur and bought the zamindari title of 17 Talukas situated near Kotulpur from King Udaychand Maharaj of Burdwan. Sadanand Bhadra used to do business in salt and mustard business. Ramakrishna came to his feet in his gentle family. Thakur was in Kamarpukur from March 3rd to 10th October. In the same year, before going to Dakshineswar, he came to Kotulpur on the seventh day of Durgapuja, in the time of 'Arati' he was very much enchanted. The remark of that moment is still remaining there.<sup>6</sup>

Another important dynasty in the history of the Vaishnav religion of the nineteenth century is the dynasty of Chandradhaj at Maliara in Bankura district. The Malla impact continued to disappear gradually from the end of the eighteenth century. Maliara took the permanent settlement not in the king's time but in the lion's time. Aman Singh, the son of Jay Singh, ruled for only a short time, but during his reign, the temple of Gopal Jiu was built. Thereafter took the reign the son of Aman Singh named Damodar Singh and during his reign maximum temples were built. He built a large theatre beside Gopal Jiu temple in 1854 and in this theatre room<sup>7</sup> *Harinam*, *Ramayan*, and *Krishna Yatra* were organized. In 1860, he founded the newly built Rasmancha and in 1874 he also founded Rasmandir. The

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<sup>5</sup> *Anandabazar Patrika*, 01.04.2019

<sup>6</sup> Field survey, in Siromanipur, Police Station Katulpur, District Bankura, on 22.02.2016

<sup>7</sup> Field survey, in Maliara, Police Station- Barjora, District Bankura, on 28.11.2016

mother of Damodar Chandra, Sri Shradhabati, Brahmagopal, the son of Damodar Chandra, daughter-in-law Chandrakumari also built a number of temples. Those temples, which was founded by the female members of the Maliara dynasty left a great remark. Damodar Chandra was also a poet. He composed *Ramayan Sudhaday*, *Bhagbatabrat Bindu*, *Harinamrit Sar*. Among these compositions, *Ramayan Sudhaday* was published in 1863, which probably was the first published book in Bankura.<sup>8</sup> After finishing temples, their name, the name of craftsman and the date of establishment were painted on the wall of temple and this was the custom of Bengal in the nineteenth century. Such an example was Pancha Ratna temple of Krishnarai Jiu. This temple was established in 1855. The establishment script was

শ্রী শ্রী কৃষ্ণ রায়জি

সকাল / ১৭৭৭, ৭/৮দিবস

বাঙ্গালা সন ১২৬২ সাল।

তারিখ ৮ আটএ অঘ্রায়ন

শ্রী যাদব রাম চট্টোপাধ্যায়।

সাকিম তিলাটিপঃ সয়ার ক্রিত

শ্রী সনাতন মিস্ত্রী সাঃ বিষ্ণুপুর।।"<sup>9</sup>

Again, in Bankura district, under the Police Station of Indas, the Rasmancha of Radha Damodar script was

শ্রী শ্রী রাধা দামোদর

চরণ ভরসা

<sup>8</sup> *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 30.03.2019

<sup>9</sup> Tarapada Santra, *Mandir Lipete Banglar Samaj Chitra*, Bishnupur:Terracotta2015, p. 63

শ্রী আনন্দ চন্দ্র দে  
শ্রী বিষ্ণু চরণ মিশ্রী দ্বারা নির্মিত  
সন ১২৯৭ সাল  
১৮১২ শকাব্দ ।<sup>10</sup>

Establishment of the temple on the one hand, as devotion to God, efforts were made to have a higher place in society. It was not because of the advertisement of Vaishnav religion, but to mix all religions. In this issue Kabiraj Goswami wrote,

আর দিন শিব ভক্ত শিব গুন গায় ।  
প্রভুর অঙ্গনে নাচে ডম্বরু বাজায় ॥

Chaitanyadev promoted all religions with his life and actions. In Howrah district, if we take a look at Garchandi temple, we find the same idea about *Hari*. The establishment script of this temple

শ্রী শ্রী হরিশুভমস্মৃত শকাব্দা ১৭১৭ শক  
সন ১২০২ সাল গঠনাথ শ্রী রামপ্রসাদ মিশ্রী ।

To illustrate the character and duty of an ideal Vaishnav, Chaitanyadev said the following,

তুনাদপি সুনীচেন তরোরোপি সহিষ্ণুনা ।  
অমানিনা মানদেন কীর্তনীয়ো সদা হরিঃ ॥

But the word 'Hari' did not have any narrow Hindu word. His idea about 'Hari' was universal. He did not believe in caste system; thus, he did not discuss any particular caste.

His universal Concept about '*Hari*' was spread all over the world

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<sup>10</sup> Tarapada Santra, *Mandir Lipite Banglar Samaj Chitra*, Bishnupur: Terracotta, 2015, p. 64

পৃথিবীতে আছে যত নগরাদি গ্রাম

সর্বত্র প্রচার হইবে মোর নাম ।

To spread ‘*Harinam*’ all over the world, Lord Sri Krishna descended on earth as the Chaitanya for his name and this was also noted by Krishnadas Kabiraj Goswami. In this context he wrote,

কলিকালে যুগধর্ম নামের প্রচার ।

তথি লাগি পীতবর্ণ চৈতন্যাবতার ॥<sup>11</sup>

By promoting this name ‘*Hari*’, we found a race among the Vaishnav girls in seventeenth-eighteenth century. In this time education system spread among them, the curriculum was relaxed, the ethnic distances were reduced. In this century prejudice and morality relaxed. Prabhat Kumar Saha noted that in this time we found a progressive attitude towards literature and culture among Vaishnav women.<sup>12</sup>

This trend continued in the nineteenth and even in the current century. Even today, the people of Bengal wake up in the morning and recite the name of *Hari*, they also go outside reciting the name of *Hari*. Even when a ripe house was built, Bengalis inscribed the name of *Hari* on the house. Such an instance is

শ্রী শ্রী হরিজি চরণে স্বয়ং এই পক্তাবাটি সন ১২৭১ সালে আরম্ভ

সন ১২৮১ সালে সংপূর্ণ হয়/ মলিক শ্রীযুক্ত লক্ষ্মীনারায়ণ

ঘোড়ইর কৃত সাকিন রামচন্দ্রপুর পরগনে ময়না/ কারিগর

শ্রী মাধবচন্দ্র মিস্তিরি সাকিন দাসপুর পরগনে চেতুয়া নগদ

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<sup>11</sup> Kabiraj Krishna Das Goswami, ‘Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita’, Sri Dilip Mukhopadhyay edited Kolkata: Benimadhab Shils Library, Reprint 2011, p. 42

<sup>12</sup> Goutam Chattopadhyay, edited *Itihas Anusandhan* Volume 5’, Kolkata: K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1990, p. 140

খরচ দশ হাজার পাঁচশত টাকা ।<sup>13</sup>

This means Mistri Madhav Chandra of Daspur was appointed to construct the house of Ghorui family of Ramchandrapur village under Mayna thana of Midnapur district for ten years. The cost of construction of home was ten thousand five hundred rupees. Not only the temple or the establishment of the house, but many people have taken the name of Radha Krishna in their seal to show allegiance to Vaishnavism. In the *silmohar* of King Biprocharan of Hetampur Rajbari in Birbhum, it was noted

রাধা বল্লব চরণে আশ

শ্রী বিপ্রচরণ দ্বিজ দাস ।

Radha Ballav of Gopi Mohanpur village of Panskura thana of Midnapur district demonstrates loyalty to Vaishnav religion. The text of the script is as follows,

পরি শ্রী শ্রী রাধা বল্লভ জিউ স্বরনং

ত্রানায় শকব্দা ১৮২৭ সন ১৩১২ সাল

সাধুনাংতাং ২১শা বৈশাখ বুধবার

বিনাশয় শ্রবলচন্দ্র মিত্ত্রী সাং দাসপুর

চ দুষ্কৃতাং ধর্মও সংস্থাপনার্থায় সম্ভবামি যুগে যুগে ।<sup>14</sup>

At that time, the affection of the people towards Vaishnav religion was so much that it was found to refer to Hari on the script of Chandi Mandir or Shiva temple. The Shiva temple of Dhaka Jhakaeswar of Village Sagarpur under Medinipur district was such an instance. Haricharan's name is available from this script as an architect. The script is as follows,

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<sup>13</sup> Tarapada Santra, *Mandir Lipite Banglar Samaj Chitra*, Bishnupur: Terracotta, 2015, p. 36

<sup>14</sup> Tarapada Santra, *Mandir Lipite Banglar Samaj Chitra*, Bishnupur: Terracotta, 2015, p. 44

শ্রী শ্রী হরিজিউ  
শ্রী আসুতো  
ষমিন্দ্রী  
সমিক দোলদি  
পুরপরগনা বরদা  
হরিচরণ বেরা মিন্দ্রী।

Again, in the Garchandi Nabaratna Temple in Howrah district, Hari's name is notable

শ্রী শ্রী হরিশুভমস্তুত শকাব্দা ১৭১৭ শক  
সন ১২০২ সাল গঠনাথ শ্রী রামপ্রসাদ মিন্দ্রী।

In the Muktapur *mouza* of Barjora police station in Bankura district, if we have a great look at the documents of reserved land papers in the B.L. & L.R.O. Office, there was a great priority of Vaishnav religion<sup>15</sup> Along with those papers, I also collected two rent receipt from Brindabanpur R.I.'s Office under the Beliatore Police Station in Bankura district and I was surprised to see that there was also the name of Hari on the script which proves the validity of Bengal Vaishnavism in the nineteenth century. The copies of the tax receipts are given next page.

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<sup>15</sup> B.L. & L.R.O. Office, Barjora, Bankura and R.I. Office, Brindabanpur, Beliatore, Bankura.

Shri Shri Hari Sharanam Written on the top of this tax receipts

কর্মিক নং শ্রীশ্রীহরিশরণমঃ  
 ( ১৯৮৪ সালের ৮ আইনের ৫ম ধারামুতাবারে )

প্রকৃতিগত আদায়

ধারাবাহী ১৫ মাস

১। প্রতিষ্ঠান নং ১১৮ ভৌমী নং ১ ধারাবাহীর নং  
 ২। পরমাণা বিষ্ণুপুর মৌজা বান্দা  
 ৩। প্রকার ৫২০০০০০ ৫০০০ পিকতার ধর  
 যাঃ ধরঃ  
 ৪। প্রাপ্তির তারিখ অথবা বিবরণ—

১	২	৩			৪
বোর্ডের বিবরণ	ক্রমিক	ভরমা শালিয়ারিকা			একুশ
		ধারাবাহী	ধর	আরও সেল ইত্যাদি	
		১০		১০	১০
		ধরমা ইত্যাদি	ধর ইত্যাদি		

গুণায়িত্বের বিবরণ।

গোষ্ঠিক ও ধারাবাহী	যে সন ও যে কিস্তির ব্যয়	নাজো	পাড়	আরওসেল	বন্ধ	পিঃ	একুশ
		খালিকা ইত্যাদি	সেল ইত্যাদি	ইত্যাদি	স্ব ইত্যাদি	কর সেল	
	(ক) হাল সন	✓				✓	✓
	(খ) ১৪						
	(গ) ১৫						
	(ঘ) ১৬						
	(ঙ) তিন সনের অতিরিক্ত সনঃ ১৪						

১৫

এই সেল থেকে বাছাই করা থেকে গ্রাফ ইকনে না।

Source: R.I. Office, Brindabanpur, Bankura.





Shri Shri Hari written on the top of this Sale Deed



Source: Sonamukhi Sub-Registry Office

Date of Registration 01.05.1947

Chaitanyadev had a huge knowledge about the relations between the governance and common people because he was born in a Royal family. He loved public meetings more than the Rajasabha. His insurgency cannot be called a political rebellion because he did not oppose the monarchy. However, the unification of the common people against the injustice of the ruler is unique. He announced when he read about Kaji's opposition to 'Harinam' that

নগরে নগরে আমি করিমু কীর্তন ।  
সন্ধ্যা কালে সবে কর নগরমন্ডন ॥  
সন্ধ্যাতে দেউটি সব জ্বাল ঘরে ঘরে  
দেখি কোন কাজী আসি মোরে মানা করে ॥<sup>16</sup>

It is worth mentioning here that Chaitanyadev did not direct any one or both of the people to lighting the lamp for the temple, actually he wanted to bring everyone in this path. Standing in the present society, with a natural vision, it cannot be seen that Chaitanyadev's political thought was far-reaching. He took the tool named '*Nam Gaan*', and by '*Harinam*' he wanted to break the hierarchy system in the society. Rabindranath Tagore also took '*Rakhi*' as a unity bond.

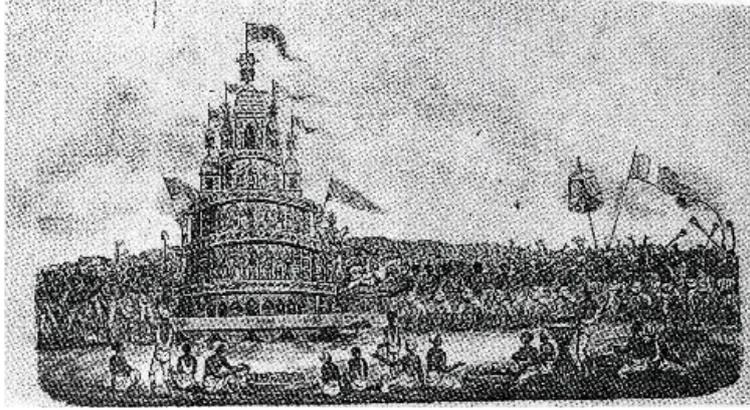
The Father of the Nation, during the Civil Disobedience Movement used salt as an instrument as he understood that salt is the daily necessity of every person. Chaitanyadev's '*NamaGana*', Rabindranath's '*Rakhi*' or Gandhiji's '*Salt*' did not have any high-low, rich-poor or ethnic destination in every case. That's why unity came in the society. In present day so many people doing *Harinam* at the time of *Rath Yatra*, this procession is totally

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<sup>16</sup> Krishnadas Kabiraj Ghoswami, 'Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita', Upendranath Mukhopadhyay edited Kolkata: Basumati Sahitya Mandir, Reprint 1989, p. 14

casteless. That is, the attempt to unite the people by Chaitanyadev are quite relevant in the current society. Here I present a picture:

### **Harinam at the time of Rath Yatra.**



**Collected from: *India's Cries to British Humanity* by James Paggs (2nd edition), 1830.**

Harinam preached by Chaitanyadev was involved in such a way that the whole life of men had become 'Hari-May'. That is why Bengal's Udas Baul sings,

হরি দিন তো গেলো সন্ধ্যা হল

পার কর আমারে

That is, there was nothing but 'Hari' at the end of life and it was the only way to get rid of Krishna Das Kabiraj explaining the death of Bhakta Haridas in this way

হরিদাস আছিল পৃথিবীর শিরোমণি

তাহা বিনা রত্ন শূন্য হইল মেদিনী ॥<sup>17</sup>

After the death of Haridas, Chaitanyadev took him in his lap. After bathing his body in the sea, he dug the sand on the beach and completed his funeral and said in his mouth,

হরিবোল হরিবোল বলে গৌররায়

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<sup>17</sup> Krishnadas Kabiraj Goswami, 'Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita', Sri Dilip Mukhopadhyay edited, Kolkata: Benimadhab Shils Library, Reprint 2011, p. 581

আপনি শ্রীহস্তে বালু দিল তার গায় ।

Since the gesture has been performed in the funeral in the people, 'Harinam' started at the event of Hindu Shraddha. And at the present society we also heard 'Harinam' in Hindu Shraddha.<sup>18</sup>

After the death of Haridas, Chaitanyadev has begun to get rid of himself and began to get begging by his lap. Due to the death of prominent Vaishnav Manohar Das, Sonamukhi festival of Bankura district is celebrated even today. This Manohar Das was a devotee of Chaitanyadev. The community of Sonamukhi *tantubai* is primarily one of the entrepreneurs of this fair.

The chief *tantubai* Kumaresh Patra said many things around the day are changing but the fury of this festival is not redeemed.<sup>19</sup> Different areas of Bankura, even Birbhum, Nadia, Bardhaman also took part in this festival. Gopinath Das Baul, who came from Birbhum, Satyananda Das Baul said, 'the peace of mind and the comfort of life are the combination of our Sonamukhi festival'.<sup>20</sup> To show his respect towards Bhagbad Gita, Rabindranath Tagore wrote in his 'Jiban Smriti' that 'in the Bhagbad Gita, the verse was masked on father's choice. They let me copy them with Bengali translation. I was a little boy in the house and felt so much glory in doing all these work deeds. In the evening when his father sat on the veranda, he sang Brahma sangeet,

তুমি বিনা কে প্রভু সংকট নিবारे,

কে সহায় ভব অন্ধকারে ।<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Interview of Sri Chittaranjan Dasgupta, (Bishnupur Expert), taken on 05.12.2017

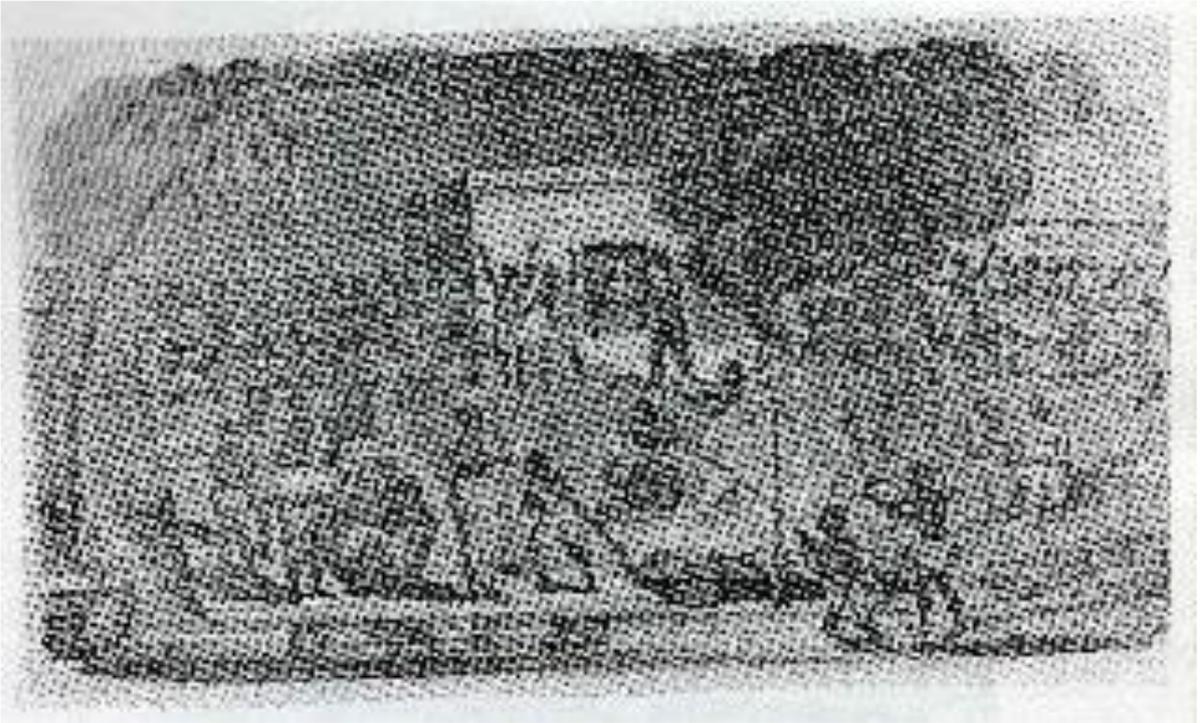
<sup>19</sup> Interview: Kumaresh Patra, age-78 years, caste: Tantubai, lives in Sonamukhi, Bankura, dated 09.04.2017.

<sup>20</sup> Anandabazar Patrika, Dated 10.04.2017.

<sup>21</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, 'Jiban Smriti', Jagat Laha & Setu Chattopadhyay ed, Kolkata: Sahitya Sange, 2005, p. 53.

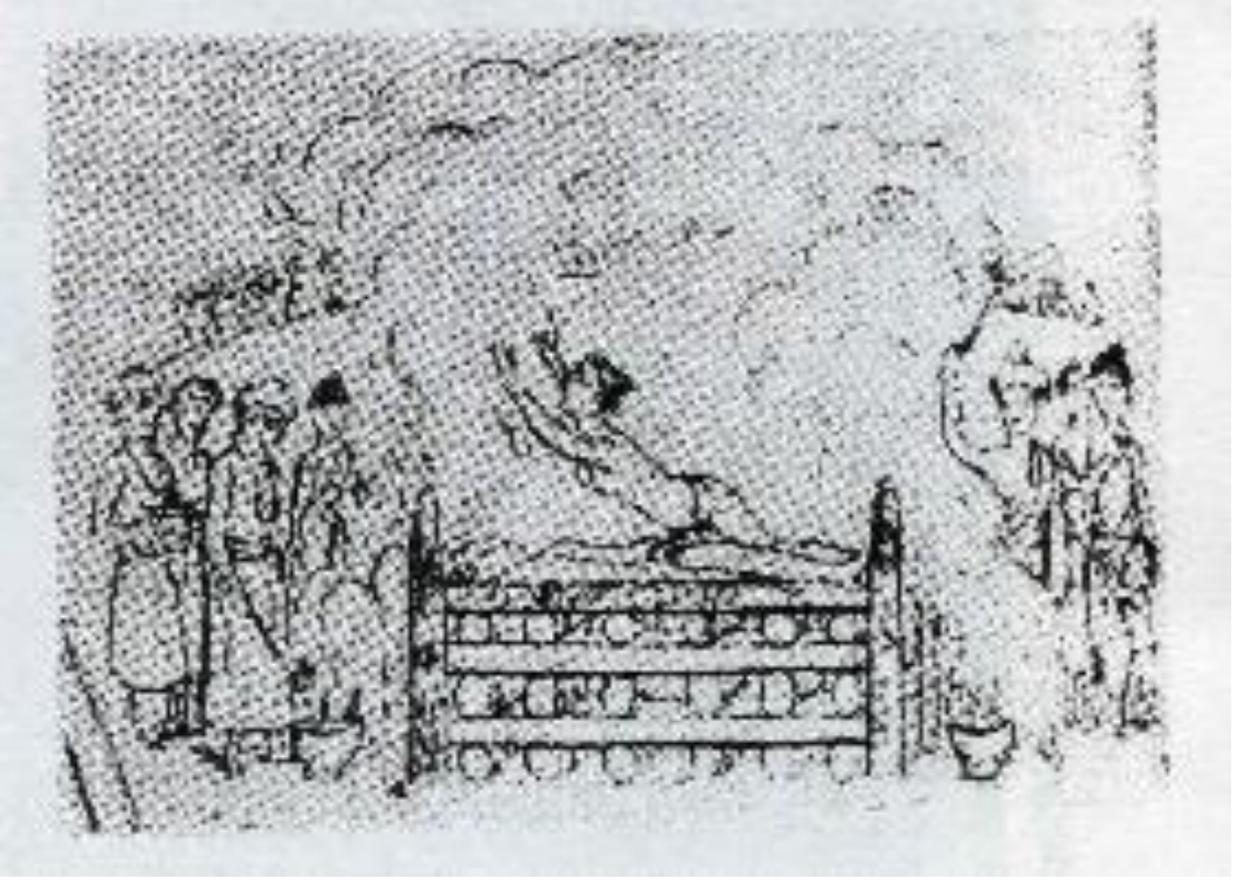
And this song echoes at the end of life ‘*Harinam*’ is the only way to get relief which we also find in Rabindranath’s *Jiban Smriti*. Rabindranath wrote ‘we read books in the dim light in the house, faraway in the Church the bell rang after every fifteen minutes. The guards are going to be auctioned one by one. From the voice of the passengers of Nimtala Ghat on Chitpur Road, the voice ‘*Haribol*’ is progressed’. In Rabindranath's time, at the moment of funeral *Harinam* was the only way, it is equally important today. ‘Harinam’ was compulsory at the time of *Satidaha* in the nineteenth century Bengal. Below are two pictures representing it.

**'Harinam' at the time of satidaha (Burning of Widow )**



**Collected from: Baptist Magazine.**

**'Harinam' at the time of Satidaha (Burning of Widow)**



**Collected from: The Mythology of the Hindus, by- Charles Coleman, 1832.**

The establishment of the Sati Temple and the mention of Radha Krishna proves the relational bonding between Hindu society and Vaishnav religion. We find an instance of such script in the village Harinarayanpur under the district of Medinipur,

শ্রী শ্রী রাধা কৃষ্ণ জয়তি

সন ১১৭২ সাল তাং ৬ ছয়াই আষাড়

শ্রী বলরাম বেরার মাতা সহমৃত্তা হইয়াছে

সন ১৩৫১ সাল মাহ আষাড় জ্ঞাতি

সহ মেরামত করা হইল ।

Another great achievement of Chaitanyadev is the dignity of women. He understood that women are the main part of society. Society never progressed except women. For this reason, there was a sign of assertive widow marriage in Vaishnav religion. Different women showed their great effort about the management of organisation. Such women mark Sitadevi, wife of Awdwaita Acharya, Nityananda's wife Jahnnabi, and Srinibas Acharya's daughter Hemlata. The appearance of mother Goosain left a great mark in the field of education.

In 1849, after the establishment of Bethun School, Bengali girls get the opportunity to study in the public school. But before this, various Vaishnavs burnt the light of education. In Debendranath Tagore's autobiography, we find an introduction to the teachings. This time such Vaishnabian women entered into the Tagore's house and taught women. Even sometimes they remained in the house of their student. Not only Bengali, they also used Sanskrit while teaching.<sup>22</sup> In the autobiography of Jyotirindranath Tagore, he marked that in his childhood he saw a Vaishnavian woman who taught women in the Tagore family. At that time, the responsibility of teaching women of the elite and middle-class families of Bengal was the responsibility of Vaishnavis. Roaming from door to door, educated Vaishnavi taught preliminary education to the women of *andarmahal* and this was noted in several newspapers and journals of that time.

Tarasundari Devi, the only daughter of Raja Shivchandra Bahadur was taught by a Vaishnavi lady in the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup> There was no end to their misery due to lack of women's education at that time. This proves in the written letter of Satyendranath Tagore, where he wrote 'When our country is blessed with such a privilege,

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<sup>22</sup> Debendranath Tagore, *Attyo Jibani*, 4th edition, Kolkata: Viswabharati Granthan Bibhag, 1962, pp. 252-253

<sup>23</sup> Sunanda Ghosh, 'Unibinsho Sataker Vabna: Banglai Nari Sikkha Bistarar Prekha Pot', *Bethun School o Nari Sikkhar Dersha Bachar* 1849-1999. Bethun School Paktani Samiti, 2000, p. 23

where women have no authority over anything. Where the next sentence teaches the rules of their life, the good fortune of the wife is far away'.<sup>24</sup>

Satyendranath was always in favor of women's independence. He wrote in *Amar Balyakatha* that I was always in favor of women's independence. Mother sometimes blamed me and said 'If you wish to go far away in the field with these women'. But this process of education is not limited to the Tagore family only, the Vaishnavian women already started this culture everywhere in the society. However, the story of roaming in the field of Satyendranath Tagore has been caught in the poem of Ishwar Gupta. He wrote about the initiative to teach girls,

যত ছুঁড়ী গুলো তুড়ি মেরে কেতাব হাতে নিচ্ছে যবে,  
এ বি শিখে, বিবী সেজে, বিলাতী বোল কবেই কবে,  
আর কিছু দিন থাকরে ভাই ! পাবেই পাবে দেখতে পাবে,  
আপন হাতে হাঁকিয়ে বগী, গড়ের মাঠে হওয়া খাবে।<sup>25</sup>

That is, this time it was true that the efforts of teaching woman in the house were in full swing, and most of the contributions to this matter are of Vaishnavs, which is like the result of Chaitanyadev's movement. The main tune of Vaishnav religion introduced by Chaitanyadev is that humanity has touched every aspect of the 19th century Bengali celebration.

At the age of eighteen or nineteen Mahanayak Uttam Kumar cultured *Harinam* and we knew this all from the meeting of Supriya Devi. She said, '...He was only eighteen or nineteen and I was eleven or twelve. There was an age difference of Seven years between

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<sup>24</sup> Letter from Satyendranath to Indiradevi, collected from Puratoni, 'Thakur Barir Kotha', Hiranmoy Bandhopadhyay, Kolkata: Sahitya Sambad, 4th edition 2002, p.10

<sup>25</sup> Sibnath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bango Somaj*, edited by Barid Baran Ghosh, Kolkata: New Age Publishers, 2007, p. 125

us. He was then a lead leader. He came to our narrow lane to play badminton and sang the famous song of that time when he was in a fourstoried house ‘*Pe la, pe la, Harinam kya peyala*’.<sup>26</sup> Later in almost every case Baul, Jhumur etc. Radha Krishna's story came even today before starting Baul or *kirtan*, we find the tradition of starting Gourchandrika. Many stories have been broadcasted with the story of Chaitanyadev or about the story of Radha Krishna, which has been placed in the heart of Bengali society. It is not a big thing to introduce *jhumur* song in Bengali film industry. Such a movie is ‘Avimaan’ where *jhumur* song was used. It was Chaitanyadev who first introduced *kirtan* songs which follows the present chorus.

Vaishnavism later influenced the poets of Shakta poets and those poets were usually worshipers of energy, but they could not ignore the sweet juice of Vaishnav Padabali. For this reason, Shyam and Shyama have coordinated in Shakta Padabali and Ramprasad tried to present this co-ordination power in one of his compositions,

প্রসাদ বলে গন্ডগোলে  
এ যে কপট উপাসনা।  
(তুমি) শ্যাম-শ্যামাকে প্রভেদ কর,  
চক্ষু থাকতে হলে কানা।<sup>27</sup>

Not even Ramprasad, in the other Shakta terms we find this tradition. Another term composed by Nobai Moira is as follows,

হৃদয়-রাস-মন্দিরে দাঁড়াও মা ত্রিভঙ্গ হয়ে।  
এক বার হয়ে বাঁকা, দেমা দেখা,

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<sup>26</sup>*Ananda Bazar Patrika*, dated 28.09.2016. Interview of Supriyadevi taken by Sarbani Mukhopadhyay

<sup>27</sup> *Shakta Padabali*, Calcutta University, ‘Manadikkha’, written by Ramprasad, *pad* number 237, *Chaitanyaloke Samaj O Sahitya*, p. 68

Chaitanyadev's life influenced the famous play writer Girish Chandra Ghosh. He wrote *Chaitanya Leela* based on Chaitanyadev's Navadeep Leela and this play was at first played on 2nd August in 1884. Sri Ramkrishnadev came to see this film at the Star Theatre on 21st September, 1884. In this drama, NatiBinodini played the role of Nimai in the name of Nati-Binodini. When he came out from the Theatre, he mentioned to a devotee that the question of 'original and duplicate are all the same'. The Vaishnavian impact which was present in the composition of Rabindranath is specially noted in *Jiban Smriti*. He wrote that 'Bankim Babu has been involved in the criticism by ending the turn of the Bengalis. The promotion is going out. I also followed a Vaishnav post or song'.<sup>29</sup> New Brahma society accepted Chaitanyadev as an *Avatar*. It was written in Tagore treatise that 'after the construction of a new Temple of new Brahmin clan was completed, Keshab Chandra was requested to lead the first day worship'.<sup>30</sup> That is, in the nineteenth century Bengal, the Vaishnavian religion had somehow touched the Bengali society.

Finally, what I am going to discuss is about the *kirtan* singers, temple creator and Baul artists who always thought themselves as the servants of God. They always wanted the 'Das' surname. They must be driven by this thought that absolute Vaishnav is the creator of life.

Only Krishna is the God and the other worshipers are the servants of God and this thought brings in them an energy to think about God and the surname of 'Das'. The main motif of Sri Chaitanyadev's religion was that worship of Lord Vishnu is not possible through any

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<sup>28</sup> *Shakta Padabali*, Calcutta University, 'Vokter Akuti', written by Nabai Moira, *pad* number 220, *Chaitanyaloke Samaj O Sahitya*, p. 69

<sup>29</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Jiban Smriti*, edited Jagat Laha and Setu Chattopadhyay, Kolkata: Sahitya Sange, 2005, p. 126

<sup>30</sup> Hiranmoy Bandhopadhyay, *Thakur Barir Katha*, Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, 4th edition, 2002, pp. 76-77

argument. Only God can be realised through simple and ardent devotion. I met various devotees at Satimaa's fair (Nodia), Jaydeb's fair (Birbhum district), Manohar Das fair (Bankura district), Panpur, twenty four hours fair (North 24 pargana), Munsefpur, twenty four hours fair (Bardhaman district), Chaliyama, twenty four hours fair (Purulia) and after field surveys I realized that as they worship God, so they thought themselves as the servant of God. Jhuma Karmakar, a devotee of God is now quite familiar among locals as Jhuma Das. Again, I asked other devotees, their reply was that, as we sing Baul, so we are 'Das'.<sup>31</sup> But it is also reasonable to see how well it is. It was noted in Vaishnavian books that any person who professionally accepted this 'Harinam', cannot be a real Vaishnav, but now many people sing and spread the message of 'Harinam' by accepting the title of 'Das', they make bargains for money, because professionalism is now more acceptable than devotion. Referring to another issue, the real idea of this will be to say that the day I went to visit Sridhar Temple at Sonamukhi under the district of Bankura, I saw that people paid money and property for Hari. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar noted this temple's name in his *Bangladesher Itihas*, (Part III), and Binay Ghosh also noted this in his *Paschimbanger Sanaskriti* (Part I). Many Vaishnavs occupied the front of this Temple; it was mainly occupied by those Vaishnavs who enjoyed the property by the name of Hari without any devotion for Hari. In present time, many people wait in front of Sridhar Temple only to take an advantage of the property.<sup>32</sup> The description of a Jain temple is found in the 2005 *Anandabajar Patrika*, it is known from this Newspaper that there is a Jain Temple in the Sat Deulia village of Memari thana of Bardhaman district, but instead of maintaining the heritage, efforts are being made to grab the adjoining land.<sup>33</sup> So naturally the question arises that do not the Vaishnavs move away from their traditions? Absolute Vaishnavs are more comfortable with their normal life, they do not need wealth as their life is filled with

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<sup>31</sup> Field survey at Jaydeb Fair, Birbhum, visited on 16.01.2017

<sup>32</sup> Field survey at Sridhar Temple, Sonamukhi, Bankura, visited on 15.02.2018.

<sup>33</sup> *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, dated 09.03.2005

‘Harinam’. In this context, such a quote of mediaeval poet Kabir is particularly prominent. He mentions that ‘I used to wear a common fabric in my neck and you used to wear the Holy *Paite* (sacred thread). You used to pronounce Hari and Gayatri but my mind is totally filled with ‘Harinam’. You always used to search the earthly King but my mind is always asking for Hari’.<sup>34</sup> But the point of discussion is that most of the Vaishnav fairs were conducted by the common lower caste people. As for example, Manohar Das fair of Sonamukhi is conducted by the Tantubai community and again Fulkishore Das Babaji’s fair of Pakhanna village under the district of Bankura was also conducted by Barujibi community.<sup>35</sup> Currently in the voice of Vaishnav, commercial songs are heard more than devotional songs. Even some of them return to America or the United States. I heard from Narugopal Chakraborty that he even sang in France. For this reason, Binoy Ghosh commented that ‘Baul community are becoming urbanized and in Kenduli fair it reached its commercialization and vulgarization’<sup>36</sup>The temple makers of the nineteenth century considered themselves as ‘Das’ and such examples are many. The foundation script of Shiv temple of Sanspur village under Bankura district and Indas Police Station in 1882 is mentioned in the following lines,

সিব চরণে আস

শ্রী হরিহর মিত্র দাস ।

Another foundation script is Pancharatna temple of Srirampur village under the district of Medinipur and Sabang Police Station, the script is as follows

শ্রী রামমোহন জানা দাস

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<sup>34</sup> *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, dated 09.03.2005

<sup>35</sup> Field survey, Fair of Fulkishore Babaji, Pakhanna, Bankura, visited on 16.02.2019

<sup>36</sup> Binoy Ghosh, *Paschimbanger Sanaskriti*, (Part I), Kolkata: Prakash Bhavan, Pancham Muduran, 2003, p. 258

শ্রী গুরূপদে অভিলাষ ।

Though the people who call themselves ‘Das’ and surrender them under Sri Krishna are found to mourn, for that reason they ask

এতো কাঁদাও কৃষ্ণ তুমি

এই কি নামের ফল,

যে ডাকে তারে কেন

দাও চোখের জল।

And we find the answer in a traditional Vaishnav script in which the traditional Vaishnav took their actual glory. The script is as follows,

যে করে আমার আশ

করি তাঁর সর্বনাশ ।

তবুও যদি না ছাড়ে আশ,

আমি হই তাঁর দাসের দাস ।

(Traditional Vaishnav *pada*)

That is only devotion and only deep devotion is the main treasure of Vaishnav religion. Therefore, as long as there are people in the world, the relevance of Vaishnavism on the earth will be maintained. Not only religious devotion in life, Vaishnavism has touched music, literature, culture are every aspect of human life and this tradition will continue as humanity is the main principle of Vaishnav religion.