

Introduction

“On June 23, 1757 the middle ages of India ended and her modern age began” –

J.N. Sarkar

Historian Jadunath Sarkar described the victory of British in the battle of Plassey in 1757 as the beginning of modern time in India, but the question remains if that could really be addressed as the beginning of modern era in India? If at that time society was filled with religious disbelief, narrowness and hindrance of religion and society then could it be called the ‘Modern Time’?

During that time the life of man was problematic. Social and religious boundaries covered the life of the people in those times. Society became motionless, because of the lack of spread of education, any type of motion was not found during that time. This motionless society is defined in poet’s language,

“যে নদী হারায়ে স্রোত চলিতে না পারে
সহস্র শৈবালদাম বাঁধে আসি তারে।
যে জাতি জীবন হারা অচল অসাড়
পদে পদে বাঁধে তারে জীর্ণ লোকাচার।”

At that time, in Bengal, various religious and social disbeliefs expanded its affects specially. A harmful custom of that time was ‘Koulinya’ custom. In Bengal it was said that around the twelfth century Ballal Sen introduced this custom. Historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar said in the first part of his book *Bangladesher Itihas* that the name of Ballal Sen was impartially associated with the source of ‘Koulinya’ in the book *Bangiyakulji*. The ill impact of *koulinya* custom has been described by the poet Raigunakar Bharatchandra in his poetry ‘Annapurna O Iswaripatani’. In this poem, by getting the identity of ‘Iswari’, ‘patani’ says,

“পাটনী বলিছে আমি বুঝিনু সকল
যেখানে কুলীন জাতি সেখানে কোন্দল।”

As an impact of ‘Koulinya’ custom, child marriage and polygamy has increased, in the same way extension of the evil custom of ‘Sati’ and protest against widow marriage have been found as deviation from ceremonies of social body. At that time, the pioneer of change in Bengal, the Hindu College was established. Among few days, an aware class filled with

modern thinking and education was born whose spokesmen were the person like Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar. In this time they devoted themselves for the development of various political and non-political committees and announcement of newspaper etc.

During the nineteenth century and even in the present time in Bengal the Hindu religion was full of rituals and customs for which Hindus often engage in various ceremonies. Hindus celebrated *charak* they enjoy with dancers by eating wine and meat at the time of Durgapuja (according to *Tattabodhini* in these three days an evil waves flowed), also celebrate *Ras Jatra*, at the time of Mahesh bathing enjoying extremely with ladies, playing gambling by keeping young wives became characteristics of the society. To get freedom from the hard principles of Brahminical rituals and at times in the hope of getting help people increasing developed an interest in Christianity; gradually people got adverse to Hindu religion.

But it cannot be said that Vaishnav religion expanded during that time. Thus, in Bengal, during the nineteenth century, Vaishnav religion was not much practiced. Indifference towards Vaishnavism was noticed among the mass, and among later scholars of the twentieth century. According to scholars, nineteenth century was the time of renaissance: a time to set up political committees and councils, and the spread of education. These were the important functions of the society. Men were not interested in admitting any type of existence of Vaishnav's religion. But, I chose the subject to discuss how the existence of Vaishnav religion affected the thinking process of people in the society. The conventional notion is that during the nineteenth century renaissance period there was no special effect of Vaishnavism. Thus, we do not find any discussion on Vaishnavism during this period. But I have taken this topic because the fragrance of an incense still exist after the burning of it, and in the same way though there was no existence of Vaishnavism during the nineteenth century, yet the trace of the religion existed in the society: in culture, education, *jhumur* songs, *baul* songs and specially in the work of R.N. Tagore. To analyse the effect of Vaishnavism on the same I have selected this research topic. The main purpose of my research is to analyse the effect of Vaishnavism on the society, culture, education, and literature. Thus, this research tries to find out how in nineteenth century Bengal Vaishnav thinking and ideal are present in society, education, folk literature, entertainment, baul songs and above all in the writings of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore.

I think there is another most important subject which should be mentioned here. As my research paper is related to the effect of Vaishnavism so there are some Vaishnavian rhythmic

poem of Sri Chaitanya which I have directly quoted all those poems and in Bengali language to maintain the proper thought of the same. At the same time the essence of it have been interpreted in English also. I think to represent the Vaishnavian essence properly, it is necessary to quote directly from Bengali. There is also several terms which are written in Bengali scripts but they are Sanskrit in utterance. Again I mention that for the betterment of this research I have used both the languages, Bengali and English to establish the profound thought in my thesis.

The title of my thesis is “Vaishnavism in 19th Century Bengal: A New Interpretation (1801-1899)”. This research centers around nineteenth century Bengal, and Vaishnavism. During the nineteenth century in Bengal educational system, literature, culture, social revolution, construction of religious and political academies got privilege as the period was known as the age of Renaissance. On the other hand, not only the common people but also the educated personalities thought that Vaishnavism was not accepted in the society at that time. But I am interested in researching on this subject matter after viewing that Vaishnavism indirectly influenced the literature, songs, poems, rhymes, folk literature, and folk songs in the nineteenth century Bengal.

Here, I want to mention an important factor that I referred to so many *Vaishnav Padabalis* because my research work is Vaishnav related. I did not translate those quotations of *Vaishnav Padabalis*, so that the essence of those quotations remain the same. For the interest of my research, I used *Vaishnav Padabali*, poem, and rhymes in Bengali. Although the explanation and analysis of those quotation have been done in English. I have tried to find out in this research how much Bengali culture and lifestyle was influenced by Vaishnavism in nineteenth century Bengal.

This research aims to locate: first, an interpretation of the cause of Chaitanyavatar; second, an analysis of the socio-religious condition of Bengal and the primary activities of Chaitanya at the time of Chaitanya’s arrival; third, explain the influence of Vaishnavism in the works of Tagore; four, a comparative study between Sri Ramkrishnadev and Chaitanyadev; five, an analysis of the cause of the direct influence of Chaitanyadev in *kirtan* and *baul* songs; six, to study the influence of Vaishnavism on women’s education and music education; seven, finding out on the influence of Vaishnavism on *jhumur* and rhymes; eight, reason why *kirtan* and *baul* players use the surname ‘Das’; and lastly, the present day relevance of Vaishnavism. Both primary and secondary sources as well as oral interviews have been

conducted for this research. Vaisnav scriptures, books (published by ISKCON), plays, poems, Tagore's works, rhymes, *jhumur* songs, newspaper, reports, and unpublished documents have been collected from the National Library, West Bengal State Archives and Sahitya Parisad. Oral interview and field visit are two very significant sources of this research. Certain details have also been taken from websites. All of these are mentioned in the bibliography.

I got interested in this area of research after reading the book *Bange Vaishnav Dharma* by Ramakanta Chakroborty. Other relevant work in the area includes: *Vaishnav Dharmar Utpatti O Kromo Bikash* by Subira Jaiswal. It discusses on the cause of the emergence of Vaishnav Dharma and its development; *Mahajiban Katha Sri Chaitanya Sri Ramakrishna* by Dayamayee Majumder is a comparative study between Chaitanyadev and Ramakrishnadev; *Collected Essays* of Haraprasad Shastri, *Lila Purushottam Sri Krishna* by Swami Pravupad discuss the activities of Sri Krishna; *Banglar Lok Sahitya* by Asutosh Bhattachariya refers to the various forms of *loksahitya* of Bengal; *Samayik Patre Banglar Samajchitra* by Binoy Ghosh is a detailed study on the culture and society of Bengal; *Sanbad Patre Sekaler Katha* by Brojendranath Bandyopadhyay is a collection of newspaper clippings which is compiled in this book; *Vaishnav Ke* by Thakur Bhaktisidhanto Saraswati addresses the question of who is a real Vaishnav?, What is the quality and activities of a real Vaishnav? What is devotion here?; *Bauls of Birbhum* by Manas Roy is an elaborate description on the life style and the culture of Baul; *Vaishnav Sahitya* by Sushil Kumar Chakroborty is on the Radha Krishna Theory, Sadhya Sadan Theory, and the *Padabali* of Joydava, Vidyapati, and Chandas; *Bangla Kirtaner Itihas* by Hitesh Ranjan Sannal is on the types and forms of Kirtan and the role of Kirtan in Bengali society; *Chaitanya Loke Samaj O Sahitya* by Arundhuti Mukhopadhyay is on Chaitanyadev and Vaishnav Dharma; *Life and Teaching of Sri Chaitanya* by Jadunath Sarkar discusses mainly the Bengali biography of Chaitanya *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* translated by him; *Paschim Banglar Sanaskriti* by Binoy Ghosh critically discusses the culture of West Bengal in its several districts; *Rabindra Sahitye Podabolir Sthan* by Biman Bihari Majumder is on the reflection of *Vaishnav Padabali*in Tagore's works; *Baul Fakir Kotha* by Sudhir Chakroborty is on the *Baul* and their *Sadhana* as well as their position in society; *Jhumur O Tar Nanadik* by Suvash Roy is a collection of article on *Jhumur*; *Kathamrita* by Sri M. is a collection of Ramkrishnadev's speech; *Bhagbat O Bengla Sahitya* by Gita Chattopadhyay is a reflection of Bhagbat on Bengali Sahitya; *Shri Mahanambhrata Probandhaboli*, Vol I & II by Mahanambhrata Brahmachari is a collection of essays on the devotion of Vaishnav Dharma mainly of Jagatbondhu Hari; *Sri Ramkrishna*

Chintane O Manane by Swami Ritananda includes articles on Ramkrishnadev; *Sri Krishna Kirtan*, *Ujjal Nilmani*, *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, *Chaitanya Bhagbat*, *Haribhakti Bilas*, *Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhur Siksha* by Swami Prabhupad are significant contributions in the field.

Sources for this research are collected from multiple repositories including, Rare Books Collection in National Library, Kolkata; Manuscripts in Sahitya Parisad, Bishnupur Branch; Records of BL and LRO office of Thana Barjora, district Bankura; Manuscripts of R.I. Office in Brindabanpur Gram Panchayat; Interviews of scholars, Chitranjan Dasgupta of Bishnupur and Subhash Roy of Purulia; Original documents, like tax receipts of land, Deeds of land and the record of land by name of Vishnu Devatta; Field work in temples of *Panchabinsatichur Sridhar* temple of Sonamukhi, *Radhavinod* temple of Bishnupur, *Gopal Jiu* Temple of Bikrampur, *Gopal Jiu* Temple of Maliyara, *Radhakrishna Temple* of Panihati, and *Jaydev Padmabati* Temple of Joydev Kenduli; Records on Sudhabrata of Sonamukhi under Bishnupur sub division; Interviews of folk singer Sadhan Adhikari; Vaisnava lyrics of singer Ganesh Bhattacharya and Dilip Chatterjee; and interview with folk singers of Jaydeb and Manohar Das Festival.

Some of the questions which this research has tried to address are what is the cause of Mahaprabhu's *Chaitanyavatar*?; what was the influence of Vaishnavism on Tagore's works?; how much similarities are there between Shri Ramkrishnadev and Shri Chaitanyadev?; what was the relationship between Bauls and Vaishnav in Bengal?; how did Vaishnavism influence rhymes and *jhumur*?; what was the role of Vaishnavism in the field of education in nineteenth century Bengal?; what is the contemporary relevance of Vaishnavism in the life and culture of Bengal?

In this thesis, research has been done on the cause of *Chaitanyavatar*, socio-religious condition of Bengal at the time of Chaitanya' arrival, his primary activities, influence of Vaishnavism on Tagore's works, educational system, entertainment, folk literature and relevance of Vaishnavism in the present time.

Certain limitations of this research include: only the socio religious activities of Chaitanya have been mentioned here, but other activities have remained untouched; apart from Vaishnav *padabalis*, mentioned in Tagore's works, some other influences present in his works are not investigated; while discussing the relation between Bauls and Vaishnavs, I have selected a few fair and festivals for taking interview of Bauls; the number of interviews

could have been increased; this research work only deals about women's education and music education in respect of Vaishnavism in education; only *jhumur* and rhymes have been discussed in this research to analyse the influence of Vaishnavism on folk literature; temples in every districts of Bengal have not been visited by me; while discussing the present relevance of Vaishnavism, I have only highlighted those issues which are influenced by Vaishnavism, but I did not highlight those subject matters which are not influenced by Vaishnavism.

This research will help us to know about the cause of *Chaitanyavatar*. It also explores the impact of Vaishnavism on Tagore's works. This research is also significant in finding out the relationship between Vaishnavism, *Bauls* and Kirtan. Influence of Vaishnavism on folk literature is also highlighted in this thesis. This research will help us to know about the influence of Vaishnavism on women's education, and music education in the nineteenth century Bengal. This thesis is significant in knowing the impact of Vaishnavism on Bengal's life and culture in the present day.

This thesis has five chapters. Introduction; Chapter 1 *Coming of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu: Raj Jog in Bengal*; Chapter 2 *Influence of Vaishnavism on Tagore and Ramkrishna*; Chapter 3 *Reflection of Vaishnavism on Education and Entertainment*; Chapter 4 *Reflection of Vaishnavism on the Folk Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal*; Chapter 5 *Chaitanyadev, Vaishnav's activities and its Relevance in present Day*.

Statement of the Problem, Objectives of the Research, Research Methodology, Literature Review, Research Question, Limitation of the Research and Significance of the Research and the historiography is mentioned in the **Introduction**

Why Sri Chaitanya appeared in Bengal? I have discussed this question in detail in the Chapter 1, titled **Coming of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu: Raj Jog in Bengal**. Apart from that social and religious condition of Bengal during the arrival of Chaitanya, Primary activities of Chaitanya and Gaudiya Vaishnavism are also discussed in this Chapter.

In Chapter 2, titled **Influence of Vaishnavism on Tagore and Ramkrishna**, I have discussed how during the childhood of Rabindranath Tagore, *Vaishnav Padabali* came to his hand and he was inspired so much by reading the text that he also tried to write *Padabali*. Influence of Vaishnav Padabali on the writings of Tagore are discussed here; a comparative

study between the nineteenth century's great person Sri Ramkrishnadev and Sri Chaitanyadev are also discussed in this Chapter.

In Chapter 3, titled **Reflection of Vaishnavism on Education and Entertainment**, I have discussed the significance of Vaishnav religion on the education of women as well as music education in the nineteenth century Bengal. Reflection of Vaishnavism on *baul* songs and different forms of kirtan songs are discussed in this Chapter.

In Chapter 4, titled **Reflection of Vaishnavism on the Folk Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal**, I have discussed how Vaishnavism is reflected through the creation and singing of rhyming and *jhumur* songs. In the poetry collection of Rabindranath Tagore there is a strong influence of Vaishnavism. I have discussed here how he had spread his songs to the common people. One of the important aspects of this Chapter is a comparative study of the poetry collected by Tagore and *Vaishnav Padabali*. The *jhumur* songs which is also popularized by today's regional songs has an influence of Vaishnavism. Important *jhumur* songs influenced by Vaishnavism are also discussed in this chapter.

In Chapter 5, titled **Chaitanyadev, Vaishnav's Activities and its Relevance in Present Day**, I have discussed how Vaishnav thinking has influenced Bengali people based on newspapers reports, field surveys in some of the temples, oral interviews, reports of R.I., B.L. and L.R.O. Office. I have discussed the attempt and impact of Vaishnavism in establishing a casteless society, mentioning the name of *Hari* in newspaper, and government documents, performance of *kirtan* after one's death, establishment of new temples, movies made on Chaitanyadev, and the reason for the adoption of the sur-name 'Das' by the folk singers.

Conclusion: In conclusion, I have summed up my argument by citing instances of the relevance of Vaishnavism from the nineteenth century to the present day.