

The Vaishnavism and its Globalization through ISKON

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Abstract:

We all know that the full form of ISKON is International society for Krishna Consciousness. Sri Chaitanyadeva was the founder of Vaishnavism. Before Chaitanyadeva the Vaishnava society was divided into many branches, like – Madhavacharya, Ballavacharya, Nimbarka, Advita Society etc. Chaitanyadeva tried to bring them together. Although Vaishnavism originated in Bengal but during the time of Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanyadeva it was as far as Orissa and Vrindavan (Uttar Pradesh). Chaitanyadeva is considered to be the semi incarnation of lord Krishna. After Mahaprabhu Chaitanyadeva's death Vaishnavism was broke into two part. One is Gauriya Vaishnavism and the other one is Sahajiya or tantric Vaishnavism. Vaishnavism is not the separate religion it is the part of Hinduism and Sri Chaitanyadeva tried to spread the message of love world wide. Now Vaishnavism has it grate in all over world through ISKON. As lord Sri Krishna and his beloved Radha was the icon of Vaishnavism, in the same way the Vaishnava School of ISKON is spreading the message of love as the cosmopolitan way. In this paper it will be shown that how Vaishnavism has taken place in a world wide way and what is the main moto of Vaishnavism and ISKON.

Keywords: Vaishnavism, Chaitanyadeva, ISKON, Globalization, Movement, Assimilation

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Main theme

In ancient India there were five communities in our Hindu religion, like Surya (those who are believers in the worship of the Sun), Saktya (in this community they try to bank on the veneration of the nature of a female goddess and they rely on the union of male and female deities), Saivya (believers of lord Siva), Ganapatya (devotee of lord Ganesh) and Vaishnava (admirer of God Vishnu and lord Sri Krishna). Sri Chaitanyadeva was the founder of Vaishnavism. The Vaishnava community believes that Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya was the reincarnation of Lord Sri Krishna. He was born in the 15th century (1486) in Bengal at Navadwip, which is now in Nadia district. Before Chaitanyadeva, Vaishnava society was divided into many branches, like—Madhavacharya, Ballavacharya, Nimbarka, Advaita Society, etc. Chaitanyadeva tried to bring them together. In the History of Bengal, the famous historian R.C. Majumdar tried to discuss that – "Scholars have tried to measure the extent and the depth of Vaishnava worship in ancient and early mediaeval Bengal." Their task was indeed a difficult one. Epigraphic evidence is subject to different readings and interpretations. The rituals of Vaishnava worship are not stated in them. The exact identification of some of the Vaishnava deities' sand images is also a difficult problem. However, various aspects of Vaishnava worship can still be discerned from epigraphic and iconographic evidence" (Majumdar, R.C., 1913:400). Also according to Dr. Ramakanta Chakravarty, "From the 4th century A.D. to the end of the 13th century, Vaishnavism as a Brahmanical faith co-existed in Bengal with Buddhism, Jainism, and Saiva-Sakta worship." Vaishnavism was an amorphous creed with a tendency towards heterogeneity" (Ramakanta Chakravarti, 1985:1)

In the fifteenth century, the tide of Vaishnavism came to Bengal through the hands of Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya Deva. He attempted to unite the various Vaishnava communities scattered by making Lord Krishna an icon in order to bring the degraded society under one roof. But it is a mistake to say that Mahaprabhavhu Sri Chaitanya Deva is the promoter of Vaishnavism. The word 'Vaishnava' is first mentioned in the '*Bajasaneyi Sanghita*', where Vaishnava means Vishnu who possesses It may be surmised that the word 'Vaishnavism' appeared in the Mahabharata as the first religious group (Asit Kumar Bondhyopadhyaya, 1970:263)

Worship of Lord Vishnu in the heart of unbroken India has been present in modern times from the Vedic age to the mythological age. That sadhana has also been mentioned in the Yajurveda Satpatha Brahman from the "Vishnu Sukta" of the Rigveda. From the time of the Upanishads onwards or later, various devotional communities and sect groups centred around Lord Vishnu and Basudev Sri Krishna. such as: "Basudev", "Bhagavat", "Pancharatra", "Sattvat" etc. With the advent of different fanatic communities, different philosophical opinions were formed. Although Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanyadeva, in his lifetime, brought these scattered communities together and brought them back into the mainstream of Vaishnava society, after Sri Chaitanyadeva, the Vaishnava community faced disintegration. The group conflict started and because of this, the path of solicitation also changed. Sri Chaitanyadeva sought to propagate love and devotion in Bengali society as well as in the whole of India. He is the proponent of the love-devotion theory. According to Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanyadeva, devotion to God is the theory of love reverence, and in this concept it has a great mystic philosophy. Many love songs with carols have been written in different languages all over India and Bengal based on this mysticism. At the same time, various literary works, philosophical thoughts, architectural sculptures, paintings, etc. were created around the culture introduced by Chaitanyadeva. The main motto of Vaishnavism, introduced by Sri Chaitanyadeva, was harmony. During the time of Chaitanyadeva, many religious philosophies, dogmas, and doctrines like Vedanta, Tantra, and various occult practises were prevalent in Bengal. In terms of this religious community, society was also divided into many parts. Chaitanyadeva wanted to eradicate casteism through the message of the love of Krishna by floating society in the tide of kirtan (a type of devotional song introduced by Chaitanyadeva). Rupgoswami's writings describe the qualities that a person needs in order to sing kirtan.

"Trinadapi Sunichena tarariba sahisnuna.

Amanina manadena kirtaniya soda Hari" (Rupe Goshwami,)

That is, a person who is humble like grass, tolerant like a tree and who respects others without expecting respect is entitled to sing kirtan.

The main mantra of Chaitanya culture was love. This love is not only the love of God but also the love of all living beings. Even today, all Vaishnava communities think that Lord Krishna resides in the whole being. There is no caste division in the Vaishnava community.

On the one hand, when the culture of Bengal was plagued by Brahmanism and Muslim aggression, Sri Chaitanyadev uttered a message of new hope, which is harmony. While in Nilachal or Puri, he saw that only the Brahmin community had the right to touch the rope of Lord Jagannath's chariot during the chariot ride. Other nations had no right to touch the rope of that chariot. Sri Chaitanyadev introduced a new message to give back that right to the common people. That is –

"Chondalopi dwija Shrestha Hari Bhakti parayan"

This means that even Chandals (the lowest caste of society) who are in devotional love with Lord Krishna can be better than Brahmins. That is to say, it is possible to gain God's favour only by devoting oneself to God and not by being proud of one's caste. People like Javan Haridas also found a place in the Vaishnava religion introduced by Chaitanyadeva, who belonged to a Muslim community. Floating in the tide of Krishna's love, he also united Javan Haridas, a member of the Muslim community, to the tune of unity.

It is interesting to note that the *Smartas* do not even indirectly propose to set any organization or make any arrangement directed against Muhammadan proselytization. They merely emphasize '*suddhi*' or purification. They do not propagate the necessity of preaching Hinduism among those who belonged to the fringe of the Hindu society. The only effective answer to Muhammadan proselytisation of the Hindu masses (if such pro selytisation was really taking place) was to adopt an effective pro gramme of Hindu proselytisation. But the intelligent Brahmanas who wrote the Smrti either lacked the courage to adopt that pro gramme, or lacked the intelligence to think of it. Their whole pur pose was to categorize, describe and multiply useless rituals. Raghunandana, however, stated certain easy rules for the "purification" of abducted Hindu women in Prayaścittatattva. Similar rules were earlier stated in Devala Smrti (*Prayascittatattva*, 1960).

Sri Chaitanyadeva devoted himself to the formation of an undivided society by removing casteism and eliminating those complex purifications of society. Sri Chaitanyadeva brought some fresh air to the suffocating society that had lost its current in the Bengali culture society that was ruined by the Muslim invasion. We know this from Jayananda Das's '*ChaitanyaMangala*' Kavya, "There are, however, some records of the oppression of the

Hindus by Muhammadans. In '*Chaitanyamangala*' Jayananda gives some detail about the tyranny and delinquency of some Muhammadans of Bengal" (Jayananda, Nadiya, (2021:13-140).

Sri Chaitanyadeva travelled to different parts of India for the purpose of propagating Vaishnavism, and after leaving Bengal, he spent a long time in Vrindavan and Nilachal with his followers. After his death, the undivided Vaishnava society became divided. A branch of Vrindavan was started by six Gosvamis and started preaching under the name of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. The other branch was formed by Chaitanyadeva's other parishad, Nityananda Abadhut and his second wife, Janhaba Devi, and Narattom Das Thakur, with marginal Buddhists and Hindus. Those whose names are easily found in the Vaishnava community are those who later became believers in the Radha theory.

The philosophy of Vaishnava religion introduced by Chaitanyadeva was not limited to India only. The Vaishnava community is still the strongest among the five major worship communities of Hinduism. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), known colloquially as the Hare Krishna movement or Hare Krishnas, is a Gaudiya Vaishnava religious organization. ISKCON was founded in 1966 in New York City by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Alfred Ford is one of the prominent patrons. Its core beliefs are based on Hindu scriptures, particularly the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. ISKCON is "the largest and, arguably, most important branch" of Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, which has had adherents in India since the early 16th century and American and European devotees since the early 1900s. ISKCON was formed to spread the practice of Bhakti yoga, the practice of love of God in which those involved (*bhaktas*) dedicate their thoughts and actions towards pleasing Krishna, whom they consider the Supreme lord. Its most rapid expansion in membership have been within India and (after the collapse of the Soviet Union) in Russia and other formerly Soviet-aligned states of Eastern Europe. ISKCON claims to have around one million congregational members worldwide

The most famous and publicly recognizable ISKCON practice is kirtan, a congregational chanting or singing of the Hare Krishna mantra. Kirtan is both a way to

express devotion to God and a way to attract newcomers to the movement. Devotees gather in public, in streets and parks, to sing the mantra accompanied by instruments like the mridanga, hand cymbals, and the harmonium. During the 1970s ISKCON entered the public eye because of this practice. Devotees would sing, distribute books, and proselytize in airports and other public areas, often obtrusively. Sankirtan continues throughout the world today, but in a less confrontational manner.

Other important religious practice within ISKCON and Gaudiya Vaishnavism is japa, or the meditative practice of repeatedly chanting the names of Krishna on a set of prayer beads (similar to a rosary). It is considered the only way for salvation for people in the current age. Prabhupada established a standard for initiated devotees to chant sixteen rounds of the Hare Krishna a day. Each round requires chanting the *mahamantra* 108 times on prayer beads, with sixteen rounds being 1728 repetitions and taking around two hours.

Another important practice in ISKCON is arati (also called puja). In arati, devotees offer water, incense, a fire lamp, and flowers to a murti, a sacred statue or image of Krishna. This is accompanied by prayers and devotional songs called bhajans. Practitioners may perform *arati* at their own home or congregate at a temple to join in the ceremony. Along with this worship, devotees will bathe the murti, dress it, offer it food, and even put it to sleep. By doing arati and serving the murti, devotees aim to deepen their relationship with Krishna.

ISKCON devotees meet regularly (typically on Sunday at a program known as the Sunday Feast) to worship deities, listen to discourses by senior devotees, participate in kirtan and eat sanctified offered food. Besides weekly gatherings, devotees within the ISKCON movement celebrate a diverse array of Hindu festivals, including Janmashtami, Radhastami, Diwali, Gaura Purnima, Ekadasi, Holi, Rama Navami, and Gita Jayanti. The Ratha Yatra Festival of Chariots is an annual parade whereby devotees chant and dance on the street, pulling a chariot with the deities of Lord Jagannatha, Baladeva, and Subhadra behind them. This public procession is typically followed by performances and free vegetarian food.

ISKCON advocates preaching. Members try to spread Krishna consciousness primarily by singing the Hare Krishna mantra in public places and by selling books written by the founder. A study conducted by E. Burke Rochford Jr. at the University of California found that there are four types of contact between those in ISKCON and prospective members: individually motivated contact, contact made with members in public areas, contact made through personal connections, and contact with sympathizers of the movement who strongly encourage people to join. According to the doctrine of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, one does not need to be born in a Hindu family to take up the practice. There are ISKCON communities around the world with schools, restaurants, and farms.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Vaishnava religion, introduced by Sri Chaitanyadeva, is still trying to distribute love to all living beings. ISKCON's main objective is to spread the loving Vaishnava religion introduced by Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanyadeva worldwide. That is why Vaishnavism has spread not only in India but all over the world through the hands of ISKCON.

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