



Chaitanya Dev's Kirtan and Contemporary Society

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Abstract:

The political supremacy in Bengal was centered on Muslim rule, which significantly influenced the region's administrative structures, cultural development, and social hierarchy. At the dawn of the thirteenth century, the Muslim configuration of governance had its origins centered around Nadia or Nabadwip. During the beginning of the 16th century, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's kirtan—a style of singing the holy chants of Lord Krishna and devotional singing—became widely recognized in Bengal. It was predominantly a spiritual and social reform movement rather than a reaction to religious or social turmoil. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu emerged as a spiritual saint and promoted the Bhakti movement, introducing a unique Vaishnava philosophy centered on devotion and unconditional love for Krishna. The practice of Kirtan was not limited to Bengal; rather it extended to other parts of India, significantly influencing the cultural and spiritual perspective of the country. The love religion and devotion propagated by Chaitanya Deva through Kirtan resonated with ordinary people from diverse backgrounds contributing for spiritual fulfilment, social assimilation and universal brotherhood. Consequently, Kirtan remains a vibrant and integral part of Bengali as well as Indian religious and cultural heritage, encapsulating the timeless ideals of humanity, love, and devotion. In this paper, I am trying to examine the evolution and dissemination of Kirtan among the common people.

Key Words:- Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Kirtan, Consciousness, Bhakti movement, Undivided Bengal, Vaishnava society

Introduction:

In the social, cultural and religious history of undivided and India, the appearance of Sri Chaitanya in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was a major event. It was a time when the process of transformation in every aspect of Bengali-society was taking place in Sambar. While



the development of Muslim society was gaining momentum under the Muslim monarchy, on the other hand the internal anarchy of Hinduism was disrupting this religious social structure. It became almost impossible to maintain socio-cultural unity and religious structure in Bengali society. Alauddin Hussain Shah, the accomplished man of Hussain Shahi era, however, appeared with new optimism. His liberal attitude sought a reconciliation in the religious sphere. The Sultan's dynamism was largely successful in creating an atmosphere of temporary peace. At that time, the Bengali nation had a coup d'état due to the motivation of the new creation. He and other Muslim rulers patronized art and literature in an effort to promote communal unity and harmony. Hindu translators and poets of mythology were given universal favour. Hindu poets were honoured with various titles in recognition of their talent at this time. Despite all this, there was a vacuum in the Bengal environment at that time. That void is inexhaustible—a question of generous humanity. Rebellion against prevailing social and religious ideologies is rampant. For these reasons, the need for an ideological revolution to sustain the worldly and spiritual position became clear. It was along this path that Sri Chaitanyadev appeared with his new Vaishnava philosophy. Contemporary Bengali society and cultural arena floated in the tide of this religious philosophy. The bond of devotion created an environment for the Bengali nation to take shape. In this important movement, the medium Chaitanya Dev introduced to preach his devotional message was kirtan in the broadest sense. The hymns of the kirtan hit the wall of the apartheid society. Gathered the larger Bengali population in a uniform procession of devotion. As a result, an institutionalized form of kirtan naturally emerged. Therefore, Kirtan can appear in an important position from the social and religious aspect of this country at that time.

Objectives:-

This study aims to explore the significance of Chaitanya Dev's Kirtan in contemporary society, particularly in Bengal, India. It delves into the historical context of Chaitanya Dev's emergence during a time period of social and religious transformation in Bengal, highlighting the influence of his Vaishnava philosophy centered around devotion and unconditional love for Krishna. Kirtan, as a form of devotional singing, became the medium through which Chaitanya Dev preached his message, attracting a large following and institutionalizing the practice of Kirtan.



The study examines the religious and social impact of Kirtan, focusing on its role in bridging societal divides and promoting communal unity.

Methodology:

Method:- Qualitative research Methods

An attempt has been made to write the research paper on the basis of information obtained from various books, magazines and internet.

The literal meaning of kirtan is 'exaltation' (magnificence kirtan). of a dead tree It is known to us as a propagandist feat: which we are in the case of a living person Let's say 'fame'. But the presence of kirtan through Sri Chaitanya in the tide of mediaeval thought-revolution It has been established with a meaning of its own transcending this lexical meaning; That is one Special genre of music. (Majumdar, A. K. 1969) The essence of Bhagavata Bhakti lies in chanting the praises of Shri Krishna, accompanied by melody and rhythm (Sur and Taal), forming a style of music generally known as kirtan. This tradition, which can be seen as part of a broader social and historical movement, also plays a role in fostering devotion and may carry specific cultural and societal influences. Given this context, it becomes relevant to ask why the kirtan form introduced by Sri Chaitanya is considered unique and worthy of distinction. To understand its special role in contemporary society, it is essential to trace the historical development of kirtan.

There is a veiled allusion to the devotion of the devotee for chanting God's merits in the Gita. And along this path, various groups of Hindu religious groups throughout India have chosen different ways of worshipping God. From that point of view, it can be said that the description of God i.e. 'Kirtan' is not a unique 'Bengal' genre. (Kumar, R. 2009)The music performed by the Maharashtrian saint-poet Tukaram is also known as Kirtan. He says in one of his abhangas (Bhakti Gita) that just as the stream of kirtan rises from the lotus feet of the Lord and descends to Mardham, so the stream of kirtan springs from the heart of man and descends to the lotus feet of Bhagavat. Upstairs is the fall of Pabni. Kirtan is as effective as the Ganga in purifying the human heart and washing away sins. Attracted to Bhaktimarga, Tukaram composes the devotional verse that is called Kirtan. However, his mode of expression, devotion and worship is not similar to that of Bengali Kirtan. There is no room for doubt that kirtan as a



novel musical method made its debut and established itself only in Bengal. Barring Tukaram's devotional songs in Maharashtra, the presence of Bhagavad music in other parts of India is generally better known as 'Bhajan'. The artistic method of bhajans is also different. Which cannot be matched with Kirtan In order to further clarify the distinctiveness of Sri Chaitanya's Sadhana Kirtan from the Sadhanas of various regions outside India, it is necessary to present the Sadhanas of different regions of India.

To highlight the distinctiveness of the devotional practice of Shree Chaitanya's kirtan in comparison to the spiritual practices of various regions outside Bangladesh, it is essential to present the devotional trends from different regions of India. In northern India, the devotion of Ramanuja and his disciples, including Kabir and Tulsidas, focused on the worship of Ramchandra and Vishnu, blending love and devotion with intense renunciation. However, it is noteworthy that during the 15th and 16th centuries, the bhakti paths in Eastern, Northern, and Southern India, centered around the worship of Vishnu, Krishna, and Shri Ramchandra, merged with the religious thought of Eastern India. There was also an interconnection between the religious thought and literary ideas of North and West Bengal, as well as Mithila and Nepal, with Assamese Vaishnavite literature and culture. The influence of Shaiva, Shakta, Tantra, and Vaishnavism can be traced back to the 10th and 11th centuries in the religious thought of different regions of India. In the medieval period, various forms of worship like Nirguna (formless) and Saguna (with form), Jnana (knowledge), Yoga, and Bhakti paths were seen in various parts of India. The three major figures in the Bhakti movement of the medieval period were Vallabhacharya in the North, Shree Chaitanya in Bengal, and Sankardev in Assam. While all three followed the Bhakti path, their practices and paths to devotion were distinct. Shree Chaitanya's bhakti path is uniquely intertwined with love, with Radha and Krishna as the central deities. The concept of establishing a personal relationship with God is a characteristic of the Raganugamarga, introduced by Shree Chaitanya. It is this uniqueness that gives kirtan its distinctiveness. During the time of Shree Chaitanya's kirtan, "Nagar Sankirtan" was considered an essential religious practice. The streets of Nabadwip were filled with the sounds of drums, cymbals, mridangas, and dance, as the procession of Krishna devotees made their way through, and the entire society, regardless of class, became part of the kirtan movement. (Sharma, R. 2000)



Caitanya introduced a personal form of kirtan. Therefore the music composed on the basis of Krishnalila got the name Kirtan. The practical stream of kirtan can be divided into two main categories – Naam kirtan and Leela kirtan or rasa kirtan. Naam Kirtan is essentially the presentation of Krishna's name through the words of the Gita. Sankirtan and Kirtan are synonymous. Chanting Harinaam in a loud voice is Sankirtan. According to Vaishnavas, the merit of Naam Sankirtan is the gain of consciousness. An expert on Sri Chaitanya's Sankirtana Being here collectively enriched with the elements of music, considering Krishna's name as the main theme, the sura murchna will be absorbed in the ocean of vakti. Members of all classes of society gathered in this flow of devotion. All other Vakti musics of India did not have this innovative medium of collective music. Here the name sankirtan is with the name of Krishna. Like - 'Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare.' Eight hours, twenty-four hours can be spent in the repeated and uninterrupted chanting of this name. Or the name of Sri Chaivalya can also be added to it, ie 'Sri Krishna Chaivanya Prabhu Nityananda Hare Krishna Hare Rama Sri Radhe Govinda.' 'Nitai Gaur Radhe Shyam Hare Krishna Hare Ram.' Sri Chaitanya is worshiped as Bhagavan or incarnation of God. Name Sankirtan is basically the chanting of any form out loud. It is only through this Nam-jop that one can attain Bhav-Samadhi or Moksha by surrendering oneself. And this is the main aim of Chaitanya Vaishnavism spirituality.

The second part of Kirtan is Leela kirtan or Rasakirtan. Bhai leela Kirtan is a song composed on the basis of Sri Krishna. Leela kirtan is called Rasakirtan. Rasa means that which is savoured. Jai - means that which makes the heart happy by thinking or hearing. Its name is Ross. The pastimes of the blissful Lord also create joy. That is why the other name of Leela Kirtan is Rasa Kirtan. But all in all Sri Chaitanya's invented kirtan is an outward expression of his philosophy. And the whole philosophy is love. Love of God is called Ishwarprem. Humanity is the name of human love. Deep intimacy between the two. Humanity cannot stand without the foundation of God's love. Love of humanity and love of the world are completely impossible if there is no love relationship with Shri Bhagavan Srikrishna. In the light of this innovation of Kirtan in the New Vaishnava movement from a religious point of view, some questions may be raised with good reason to determine the place of contemporary society and religion. First of all, how original is this novelty of kirtan? Is this a single invention of consciousness? That is to say, is it Bangaj? Or is it derived from a previous or contemporary



religious cultural behavior? Second, how much is the influence of kirtan in contemporary Bengali society and religion? The position of Kirtan in the society and religion of this country can only be determined through the settlement of this question.

To settle the first question it is necessary to trace the origins of Neo-Vaishnavism. Apart from love devotion, the prominent feature of Vaishnavism introduced by Caitanya was its liberalism. However, Neo-Vaishnavism is only a sectarian branch of Hinduism. (Majumdar, R. C. 1977) However, there is no sectarian narrowness in this religion. In medieval Bengal, when there was great conflict in Hinduism, the socialists were aware of the question of caste justice, the common man had no direct right in religion, Sri Chaitanya wanted to establish the concept of equality through such generosity. Bhagavata or Vaishnavism originated in Western India. Its proponents declare their presiding deity Krishna to be identical with the ancient Vedic deity Vishnu. They chose Vishnu from the Vedic pantheon. As an all-powerful monotheist and hence the later phase of Bhagavad-gavata, popularly known as Vaishnavism, the religion began to gain popularity from the 4th-3rd century BC.

Monotheism is naturally favored; which Vaishnavism and Shaivism have always had. Ekeshwar Bhakti is the name of devotion to one king. Vaishnavism was particularly helpful in establishing monarchy and feudalism in this country. Thus, it is understood that Chaitanya's New Vaishnavism has been distinct from the ancient Vaishnava philosophy. Most of the helpless and backward people of the society responded to Chaitanyadev's call. Chaitanya Dev is not known to have any support behind the so-called religious organizations, such as the direct or indirect patronage of the wealthy. Because he was the social leader of that era and the eyesore of the sufferers. So they created obstacles every step of the way in Sri Chaitanya's path. The Hindu socialists had for so long left the lower classes, especially the Shudras, untouchable through social provisions. Any right to practice religion they didn't have Now Sri Chaitanya's Naamsankirtan sees this neglected population chanting Krishnanama .they are angry.Enraged, these Samajpatis complained to the Kazi to disarm Sri Chaitanya. Based on his sources, the story of Kirtanyads' conflict with Kazi and later Apsarfa has been presented in various ways in contemporary Bengali history and literature. So it appears, two noteworthy aspects are present here. The first is the external method of dharmacarana 'Kirtan' introduced by Sri Chaitanya Deva distinct from ancient Vaishnavism or the Indian contemporary mainstream. And the second is that Sri Chaitanya is hindered in his preaching by the upper caste Samajpatis who



lead his own religion. So naturally the question arises what is the source of Chaitanya Dev's novel form of worshipping Krishna? And why did he preach this message of love even in the face of the anger of his own religion and socialists?

There is no doubt that Sri Chaitanya Dev was a social reformer of high order. The social and religious conditions of medieval Bengal were highly conflicted. The caste-divided social structure of the Sena dynasty left the lower caste Hindus cornered from all sides. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the arrival of the Muslims as a royal power began, but only in the middle of the fourteenth century, the entire Bengal was included under the Muslim royal power. But in this country, though slowly, Islam began to spread through the Sufis from the eleventh century. The lower caste Hindus of the country, who have long suffered from religious and social rights and insecurity in their religion, were naturally attracted to the Sufis who carried the message of equality. They gradually became Muslims, at least for relatively better shelter. In the fourteenth century, Sufi propaganda increased in favor of Muslim monarchies. Islam is propagated in India in two ways, one is the Turkana Tariqa and the other is the Sufiana Tariqa. (Ahmed, S. 2001) Turkana Tarikai is the method of proselytizing by force by Turks, Arabs, Pathans etc. soldiers and Sufiana Tarika is the method of preaching love by mystic Sufi saints. Weapons could not resist the power of love as Indians were able to resist the power of religion and culture. Wherever Islam is preached in the Sufiana Tariqa, it becomes very difficult for the staunch Hindus to resist Islam. And Bengal or East Bengal can be mentioned as the best example in this explanation.

The rise of Sri Chaitanya was during the reign of Alauddin Hussain Shah, the creator of the independent Sultanate. Meanwhile, Bengal has become a Muslim-dominated country. There was no possibility of religious riots during his time. He was able to gain the credibility of a secular monarchy by giving due respect and dignity to Hindus. Hindus to worship and preach religion without hindrance. Hussain Shah took appropriate measures for that. He instructed the Qazis and Kotwals not to interfere with Chaitanyadeva's religious activities. Even then the Hindu socialists could not come down from their delusions of aristocratic arrogance and conservatism to stem the tide of Hindu apostasy. Perhaps this fact stirred the mind of the reformer Sri Chaitanya. He realized that a defense movement was needed to protect Hinduism and therefore needed to break the wall of casteism and present a humanitarian appeal. Hence a historical perspective emerges in searching for the originality of kirtan in Chaitanya's



worship and the source of the distinctiveness of his dharma-philosophies. He did not find it difficult to understand that if the same current could be made to flow in liberal Hindu society in imitation of Islam's liberality and equality, the tide of conversion might be stemmed. So Chaitanya's novel worship 'Kirtan' or 'Naam Sankirtane' has its origins in Sufi worship. Islamic mysticism attracted Sri Chaitanya. It is clearly no different from Naam Sankirtan, the 'halka' (zikir) of the Sufis, the chanting of God's name, and 'sama', the expression of God's love through music. If caste, creed arbitrary coming to the Khanka of Sufis, taking a little in one pot and worshipping God encouraged the conversion of oppressed Hindus, building the same sphere of attraction in one's own religion might be the last attempt to save Hinduism. So it seems that Sri Chaitanya's new Vaishnava philosophy appeared with a new revolution. Kirtan takes a favorable institutional form in society and religion. To put it more clearly, Chaitanya Dev appeared as the savior of the Brahminical society when Islam was rapidly expanding in Bangladesh. The dualistic Bhaktiism of South and North India developed into Premism in its consciousness under Sufi influence. Under the influence of his love, all other thoughts and feelings of Bengali were washed away for some time. The spread of Islam was largely blocked by the Chaitanya movement. Because the features of Islam which attracted the oppressed and ignorant masses were adopted in all its conscious doctrines. For example, the promise of equality, friendship and fraternity among people, the right of people to develop and expand themselves independently, rejection of differences in the status of people based on caste-caste or wealth, recognition of love as the main source of relationship between individuals, unconditional marriage and divorce, addiction to naming, devotion to Krishna. life etc.

Thus Sri Chaitanya made a last ditch effort to sustain the Hindu society and religious structure by revealing the essence of humanity in the flow of his kirtans. Therefore, the position of Kirtan in contemporary society and religion can be observed with importance. Sri Chaitanya made the lower caste people stand in a row starting from the Brahmins. It is called social revolution. He declared that a Shudra too could rise to the heights of spirituality by merit. Most of the sages of different regions of pre-Chaitanya and post-Chaitanya period were of low birth. From these it can be assumed that the need for peace, unity and cultural harmony was felt most in the lower part of the society. Because In the midst of social and state anarchy, the lower classes of society suffer and suffer the most. The toxic garbage of the state bureaucracy wants to consume their very lives. So with the strong motivation of life, with the instinctive urge to



survive, they stood to resist this all-consuming evil. Their weapons in this resistance were humanity and love of heart. This revolt in the name of life can be termed as a revolt against the ideology of the social upper castes, against their austere philosophy of life, the ideology of the social lower castes. And like all true rebellions, this rebellion was idealized by a humanity filled with the joy of creating a true sense of well-being. Because this rebellion wanted to establish human dignity as human being beyond all caste, class, communal and religious differences. Naam Sankirtan played a key role in inciting this rebellion, uniting the rebels in a novel way. There can be no greater and more effective medium to bring the devotees on the same page. He did not stop at chanting the name verbally to strengthen the ground of this mega reunion, but rather Chaitanyadev was able to create an example to break down the walls of caste hatred in a simple way. In this context some light has been shed before. He expounded the scriptures to the Shudra Ramaraya to demonstrate the futility of casteism; And his Brahmin devotees have shed their Brahmin pride and identified themselves only as 'Das'. A Brahmin named Ishan gained their service by tearing the Upavit. The philosophy of kirtan made a deep impression on the society and religion of this country. Hence the vitality of new creation came to Bengali Hindu society. That Chaitanya truly influenced and inspired Bengali Hinduism is evident in the abundance of biographical material. Pradhan Parikar of Chaitanya's Navadwipa Lila wrote a karcha about his life in Murarigupta Sanskriti—probably between 1533 and 1542, shortly after Mahaprabhu's death (Rath, B. 2004). Chaitanya dev's close associate, Sivananda Sen, who was also known as 'Karnpur' and the son of poet Paramananda Sen, wrote three important books on Chaitanya culture: Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita (a poem), Sri Chaitanya Chandradaya (a play), and Gaura Ganodesa Deepika. These books were likely written between 1542 and 1576. The first major account of Chaitanya's life in Bengal was the poetic work Chaitanya Bhagavat by Brindavan Das, written in 1548. Around the same time, Jayananda wrote Chaitanya Mangal, but it wasn't highly regarded in Vaishnava circles. Later, between 1560 and 1566, Lochan Das wrote another version of Chaitanya Mangal. Scholars are still unsure about when Krishnadasa Kaviraj wrote Chaitanya Charitamrita. Besides Bengali and Sanskrit, Chaitanya's biography can also be found in works from Odisha, Assam, and Hindi. His influence spread across India, inspiring Krishna Leela stories and many compositions based on them. Chaitanya's Vaishnavism, although originating in Bengal, became part of the cultural heritage of the entire



country. To truly understand India, one must be familiar with this ideology. Among these cultural contributions, Bengali kirtan, known for its melody and rhythm, holds a special place.

Conclusion:

What is clear in the proper discussion is the possibility of attainment in the generosity of abstinence without ignoring the contemporary trends in the need for social reform and preservation of religion, Sri Chaitanya's neo-Vaishnavism established through the invention and propagation of kirtan as a medium of worship. Kirtan's dance songs not only ended the task of bringing a revolutionary tide to the book, Baraksh wanted to rehabilitate the caste-divided Hindu society with the idea of equality. While determining the social and religious position of Kirtan, a natural question may arise that how much Sri Chaitanya was able to benefit the oppressed people despite being such a great communist? Maybe a future Vaishnava researcher can give the correct answer to that question. But it may be relevant to say from a theoretical point of view that the early enthusiasm for the awakening of the proletariat in the bosom of India came from this direction. The movement that the kirtan revolution initiated was the epitome of human consciousness. And his priest Sri Chaitanya. Therefore, determining the social and religious position of Kirtan and placing Sri Chaitanya in the seat of the devotee's Lord may not do it justice or give it historical authenticity and identity. Rather, it is a proper duty to seat him in the leadership of humanity as a social reformer

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