
Time, Trajectory and Philosophical Propagation of Chaitanya

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Chaitanya was one of the pillars of Vaishnava Movement in India, a popular propagator and champion of Krishna cult in Eastern India. The bugle that sounded deeply in the regions of Maharashtra in the years of 12th-13th century under the stewardship of number of Vaishnava Maratha saints about prominence of Krishna with Rukimini tradition was re-popularized by Chaitanya in 16th century in the form of Krishna with Radha tradition in Eastern and Northern parts of India. Whole of Bengal, parts of Orissa in the East and Mathura (Vrindavana), connecting to Northern parts were impacted by the influence of Chaitanya's Krishna-Radha tradition.

To know about Chaitanya and his movement we have number of treaties and textual sources. *Padas* and biographies are the sources which bring us to know stages his life, ideas and philosophical narratives. But consultation of sources needs to be duly cross examined to demolish and debunk interpolations and sectarian prejudices. Biographies supply sufficient materials to sketch philosophical ideals of Chaitanya and they are as follows: *The Caitanya Caritamrta* by Murari Gupta, *The Caitanya Caritamrta Mahakavya* and *The Caitanya Cardrodaya Natak* by Parmananda Sen (Karikarnapur), *The Kadacya* by Govinda Das, *The Caitanya Candramrta* by Prabodhananda, *The Caitanya Bhagvat* by Vrindavana Das, *The Caitanya Caritamrta* by Krsnadas Kaviraj, *The Caitanya Mangal* by Jayananda, *The Caitanya Vilas* by Madhav, *The Caitanya Bhagat* by Isvara Das.¹

Chaitanya and His Time:

It is important to study social environment that how it influenced the mental frame of Chaitanya. The followers of Chaitanya, though, projected him incarnation of God or a man of some super human qualities, but it is desirable to assess him in the historical framework. Along with prevalent social situation all through India with which Chaitanya had come across in course of travelling, it is indeed important to examine impact of Bengal and Orissa where he crossed through various socio-religious channels during his childhood and lived in divergent social milieu.

The social formation in the succeeding years and centuries in India was ridden with religious rigidity, intractable Brahmanical behaviours and the oppressions of down-trodden in the name of religion. It had necessitated the course of action to put more pressure to liberalize it or if possible to eliminate it. The chief baton under which all these oppressions perpetrated was religion. The interpretation of religion and its application in the society was a dominant affair of one Brahman community or intelligentsia which interpreted religion always in the light to maintain its own superior hierarchical social situation. With the changing time and situation

¹Out of all, biography by Parmanada Sen gives a detailed account about teaching, activities and life of Chaitanya.

or whenever they realized their position might be challenged by the emergence of some other parallel religions, they maintained a sui-generic flexibility of religious interpretation to thwart the acceleration of counter forces. The long list of success and superiority of Brahmanical religion is marked with the subtle manipulation as it sometime engulfed and assimilated the other religions declaring them as the off-shoot of its own religion or some time causing the leaders of other religions as incarnation of their own God in different from and with different idea.

The basic structure of society in the pre-Chaitanya period was formulated on the '*Varnasrama Dharma*'. The society was distinctly divided in four *Varnas*: *Brahmana*, *Kshtriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra*, as prescribed in the Hindu *Smritis*. With passage of time, status of following *Varnas* turned strictly vertical and *Brahmans* were denominated sociologically at the top and *Sudra* at the lowest. Other than these primary *Varnas*, there were other low castes, grouped as '*Antyaja*'.² The *Antyajas* (hypergamous) had number of such groups. Al Beruni talks about the group of people those that were involved in certain occupation or dealing in some classified professions, they are put in the category of *Antyaja*, other than the *Sudra*. There are eight classes of them.... the fuller, shoemaker, juggler, the basket and shield maker, or sailor, the fisherman, the hunter of wild animals and of birds and the weaver. These professionals are not given any caste name but are identified as *Antyaja* and they come after *Sudra*. But lower than them, rather those who were held at the lowest position of the society were the *Hadi*, the *Dom*, the *Chandala*.

Brhaddharma Purana talks about the sufferings of *Sudras* as they were deprived of the right to study and explain the *Vedas* or the *Puranas*. They had been provided the right to listen the recitation of the *Puranas*, but they were not permitted to listen to the hymns which used to begin with the word '*OM*'. *Smrititattava-Sara* lays down the same kind of disabilities prevalent in the lower caste of the society. It deals with the superior rights of *brahmanas* in administration and judgment. In the absence of kings, *brahmanas* had the right to look after administration and dispense with the justice. Any contact of *Sudras* with people of higher castes was strictly prohibited, at any point of time or situation like sleeping, sitting, or eating. People of lower caste had to suffer a lot of disabilities and disadvantages.

Hierarchical dichotomy of society into *Varna* and caste was the general feature all over India. To some extent social classification and divisions of Bengal was different. In Bengal, the *Kshatriyas* and the *Vaisyas* did not have any importance. The society was divided into two major sets – *brahmin* and *non-brahmins*. The *non-brahmin* group is classified into *Sudra* a '*Sankara*'. They were further sub-divided into '*Uttam*' or superior, '*Madhyam*' or middle, '*Adham*' or inferior. It was exceptionally a different situation of Hindu society in Bengal where *Kayasthas*, *Vaisyas* and *Sudras* were tied together.

In the society a higher provision was *Karan* or *gopa* (writer caste) and *Vaidya* or *Ambastha* (physician). The *Napit* (barbers), *Malakar* (florish), *Humbhkar* (potters), *Sankhakar* (conch-shell dealers), *Tantubaya* (weavers), *Modak* (confectioners), *Tambuli* (betel-dealers) were placed in the next social order. Besides the group of *Karan*, comprised clerks, accountants, court-employees and the *Vaida* had relatively higher position in the society. By

²This was considered that emerged out of inter-caste marriages like '*Anuloma*' and '*Pratiloma*'. In *Anuloma* marriages, wives belonged to low caste and in *Pratiloma* husbands belonged to low caste.

and large, entire caste structure of Bengal was occupation-oriented and caste-structure was split into smaller groups and creating further sub-castes.

Much before Chaitanya emerged as potential Vaishnava Movement protagonist to lay its foundation in East of India, many of the Vaishnava leaders were busy laying its foundation and popularizing it in different parts of India. It is though controversial to locate exact date regarding emergence of Vaisnava movement. It is believed that traces of it in the form of Krishna Cult came into being in the areas of Andhra Pradesh in 2nd century A.D. During Gupta period the worship of Vishnu Narayan was pervasive all over India.³ From the 5th to the 9th century Tamil Nadu experienced the heat of Movement.⁴ Some of the historians have the opinion that the ideas and institutions which flourished in more advanced civilization of the Gangatic valley, as represented in the Gupta empire, were gradually spreading to the South. The Puranic ideology of Bhakti, carrying string of Vaishnava ideas, appears to have percolated to the South through the temple-centred Brahman settlements. Study of sacred and quasi-sacred literature was taken up as a religious duty by large number of priests⁵.

Historically we can divide the Movement in two parts; the inception of it which deals with the first phase attached to the South of India till 10th century and second phase continues from 13th to 17th century covering Turkish and Mughal⁶ period in North India. Movement was initiated as a cult of love and devotion based on the *Bhagvad Gita* and other sacred Hindu Texts by *Alvars* and *Nayanar* Brahmanas of South India. *Alvars* and *Nayanars* had a cluster of saints who propagated the ideas of movement in the light of Bhakti⁷. There were 63 Saivite Saints and 12 Vaisnavite. Group of *Nayanars* saints had a fusion of castes which consisted of people other than Brahman community such as traders and peasants. Barrier of caste prejudices and entitlement of religious service from a particular community, usually from Brahman community, was visibly challenged. Traders and peasant belonged to lower caste were assigned the right to provide religious service. Even gender disparity was denied in practice. Women were brought in to the fold and their participation was welcomed. Society where public appearance of women was a stigma was once again challenged.

Some protagonists of Vaisnava sect accelerated the movement in collaboration with various rulers. At the time of Gupta period and after this in 10th-11th century, Vaisnavism strode in the various parts of the country. Bengal turned out to be a centre of this faith at the time of Pala dynasty, other than Buddhism. It enjoyed a royal patronage which can be substantiated on the basis of idols of Visnu discovered in this region. There are various Vaisnava temples constructed sometimes directly under the stewardship of rulers, sometimes by contemporary controllers. A Vaisnava temple in Triveni Saptagram belt (West Bengal) was constructed at the time of Sena rulers. Construction of the Jagannath temple was done by Anantavarman Codaganga (A.D. 1078-1150) was an important landmark in this period.

³ The Classical Age, Bhartiya Vidyabhawan p-422

⁴ Ram Vilas Sharma – Parampara Ka Mulayankan, p. 90

⁵ D.N. Jha, (Ed.) – Feudal Social Formation in Early India, M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan – Movement in South India, p. 354

⁶ Satish Chandra, History of Medieval India, Orient Longman, 2008, Following saints like Kabir, Chaitanya and Nanak emphasized upon unity of Islam and Hinduism. For them love and devotion is more important to achieve religious objectives, not the rituals. re p.252

⁷ Satish Chandra, ibid. 2008, pp. 190-91

Chaitanya and Trajectories To Krishna Cult:

There are different ways Chaitanya adopted to attain objectivesto popularize Krishna cult, for which he selected areas and techniques to propagate. Also, he developed company with learned masters with whom he shared best of meaning of spiritualism. He followed various means to circulate his idea amongst all sections of people.

Life of Chaitanya⁸ began from Mayapur in Nabadwip (West Bengal), where he was on 27 February A.D. 1486 (23rd Phagun, 1407, Saka era)⁹ in a Brahman family. He was known by different names till he got the name Chaitanya. His parents called him by Vishvambhar (Vishvambhar Mishra) and Nimai in childhood and he was named again Gauranga at the time of his sacred thread ceremony. He got the first teaching of *Nyaya* (logic) and he self-composed Sanskrit Grammar and different disciplines of logic in school of Navadvip under the tutelage of his scholarly Guru Pandit Gangadas. He got married to Lakshmipriya, the daughter of Vallabh Acarya, but destiny willed otherwise and their union could not continue longer enough. He got married further with Visnupriya, the daughter of Saratan Mishra.

In 1509 A.D. Chaitanya experienced a major change in life and got inclined to a new web of ideas. It was time when he came to visit Gaya to perform rituals of *Sradaha*¹⁰ of his father and there he met with Isvara Puri, a disciple of Madhavendra Puri who was an illustrious Vaisnava saint and a leading protagonist of Krishna Bhakti. His meeting with Isvara Puri imbued in him a changed perception of life and he returned Nabadwip with deep devotion for Krishna. He made a declaration reaching to Nabadwip: "Lord Krishna is the master, creator and protector. He is the supreme father of the world. One who does not worship him is sinner."¹¹ It was now a complete conversion of 'Vishvambhar' to Chaitanya and it is believed that Chaitanya gained spiritual insight where once in Bodh Gaya Lord Buddha had attained enlightenment.

On 3rd February 1510 A.D. at the age of twenty four, Chaitanya renounced his family life and decided to take shelter at Katwa to spend life of a hermit. He followed and popularized the path of Krishna-Bhakti and adopted seclusion from the worldly life primarily with the intention to emancipate people of Nabadwip from trials and tribunals of worldly evils. He wanted to set an example of devoted and disciplined life so to generate a sense of enlightenment in peoples' mind to help to overcome pangs of vicissitudes in life. His own statement substantiates his intention as he says that "In order to save these people I have to

⁸Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement, A New Perspective, A Study in the History of Ideas*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2014, pp. 255-279

⁹We find a difference of opinion regarding the date of birth of Chaitanya, as Dr. B.B. Majumdar says that he was born on February 18 according to the Julian Calendar and on February 27 according to the Gregorian Calendar (*Chaitanya Chariter Upadar, P.4*). Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar gives his date of birth as February 4, 1486 (*Chitnya's life and teachings*, Calcutta, 3rd edition, 1932, pp. 7-11). The corresponding *Saka era* was 1407, the *Bengali era* and the *Sambat era* 1542.

¹⁰ It was the last ritual on the death for *Mukti* of the soul. This Brahmanic tradition was in fact followed by Chaitanya for his departed father coming all way to Gaya in Bihar from Bengal in his own time.

¹¹Vrindavana Das, *Chaitanya Bhagvat*, Ch. 1, Bhawani Press, Calcutta, 5th edition

become a hermit. When they see me as a monk, they will bow down to one. I shall then teach them Bhakti".¹² Kesava Bharti, preceptor of Chaitanya, adored him with a new name Krsna-Chaitnya (one who awakens Krshna-consciousness in others), keeping in view to his maturing stage of devotion towards Bhakti. Later he became famous by the name of Chaitanya.

Spiritual prominence and popularity of Chaitanya spread with rollicking momentum once he decided to settle down in Navadwip and started interacting with people. Chaitanya became the central figure in his own locality and his followers inducted him as the incarnation of Krishna. Among his many followers, Nityananda proved to be his most worthy and sincere follower who extensively popularized the ideas of Chaitanya.

Chaitanya took some bold steps against the caste ridden society in which Brahmin and some other higher castes were the main gainers of privileges. Though, he himself belonged to the Brahmin community, therefore, his initiative to tie together with the lower caste of people,¹³ frequent visits to the houses of low caste of people, quenching of his thirst from the broken vessel of Sridhar, meeting with a low caste vegetable sellers were certain steps which severely impinged upon the strong caste hierarchy of the society and to the dominance of Brahmins as well. Chaitanya chose all these practices to revolutionize the situation which were being carried over since a long time in favour of the higher castes. Therefore, Chaitanya used to carry sometimes the baskets from the market and helped the people of lower castes to carry their clothes to the bathing *ghats* (banks of the river). Chaitanya discarded his *Sikha*¹⁴ and *Sutra*¹⁵.

The trend of *Kirtan*¹⁶ (music-worship) was the most alluring part of Chaitanya which helped him attaching and communicating with people. He organized a good gathering of people in the every evening with accompaniment of *khol* and *kartal*¹⁷. During *Kirtan* people from all castes used to sit together on the same carpet and the distribution of *Prasad*¹⁸ was done irrespective of any caste or creed.¹⁹ At the time of *Kirtan* people of one caste used to embrace to the people of other caste. Above all, the discipline and decency was maintained at all costs.

¹² Krsnadas Kaviraj, Ch. 17

¹³ Vipul Singh, *Interpreting Medieval India, Early Medieval, Delhi Sultanate and Regions (circa 750-1550)*, Chaitanya discouraged outrightly caste, creed and gender distinctions. p. 357

¹⁴ Tuft of hair

¹⁵ Sacred Thread

¹⁶ Jiva Goswami an eminent Vrindavana Goswami talks in *Bhakti Sandarbha*, the light of what Chaitanya said that *Hari Kirtan* is only source of salvation in *Kali-Yuga*. He has discussed ways of salvation in the light of given idea of various epochs in Brahmanic philosophy. As in *Kriti-yuga*, by meditating upon Vishnu, devotees can achieve salvation, so is in *Treta-yuga* by performing sacrifices, in *Dvapara-yuga* by serving and in *Kali-Yuga* by *Hari Kirtan*.

¹⁷ 'Khol' is a long cylindrical shaped drum with a peculiar detonation; 'Kartal' means small brass cymbals.

¹⁸ Food offered to the deity and then it was distributed among devotees

¹⁹ Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement, A New Perspective, A Study in the History of Ideas*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2014, Chaitanya was different and exception to all *Shaguna Bhaktas* as he was the only saint who vigorously led to an anti-caste movement, despite his conventional religious mode linked to Vaishnavism.

Chaitanya once declared that "I have been born to introduce *Sankiratan* in every home."²⁰ This statement of Chaitanya carries some social implication so as to begin with a mass movement to propagate Krishna Bhakti in the town of Nabadwip. Chaitanya further initiated *Nagar-Sankirtan* in the form of procession which helped him to interact, accommodate and adjust with the multiplying number of followers. *Sankirtan* & *Nagar-sankirtan* were the ways through which the quality in the people of all caste, class and creed was projected. Community dinner was organized frequently.

Various ceremonies were organized: '*Ratha-Yatra*' (Chariot-festival) for Lord Jagannath, funeral rite of Haridas²¹ was celebrated as a '*dandmahotsava*'; '*mahotsava*' was celebrated at Panihati and another at Khetturi. People mixed up quite closely in following *mahotsavas* with any biasness or predilection. These brave attempts of Chaitanya were well intended and deliberately planned. These were not isolated incidents neither perpetrated absent mindedness. It was radical in approach.

Rising popularity of Chaitanya and his attempt to allow people cutting across all caste and creed to join musical and religious congregation, had, however, spurred grounds of resentment and rivalry with people of other sects and religious groups. It was taken by some as social offence. Since society was ridden with caste and class rigidities, it was gendered and hierarchical, so the liberal step of Chaitanya was causing reaction in the society as it was going against the morality of time. Some groups of Brahmans passed strict strictures against such strides and tried to convince Qazis²² also that singing and dancing all through town is anti-islamic. But Chaitanya stuck to his stride and organized further a mammoth *Nagar-Sarv-Kirtan* which consisted of a large gathering of women and the people of various other groups. It was, in fact a severe and tactful counteract in which Chaitanya reached to the houses of all Qazis and requested them to lift up the ban.

Under the patronage of Chaitanya by 16th century, Vaisnava movement reached a new dimension of popularity and impacted medieval society. He propagated the devotional fervor all round the country through means of discussion, addressing people and interacting with Hindu cardinals at different places. Far and wide travel of Chaitanya was, indeed, a giant historical stride which laid ways for direct social relation and cultural integration. His visits to the various places with new religious ideas essentially interlinked one cultural string with other.

Chaitanya reached Puri in Orissa at the beginning of March A.D. 1510 interacted there with Vasudeva Samabhavna in the Jagannath temple. Vasudeva was impressed with his logical skill. Chaitanya toured parts of South India and visited Kadacato meet Govindadas Karmakar, Chaitanya Caritanrtato see Krsnadas Kaviraj. But these visits of Chaitanya are bit controversial. His visits in South of India deep down at Rameswara and Kanyakumari are to be counted with as these were parts where Vaisnavism and Saivism originated under the tutelage of Alvars and Nayanara. In the northern parts, he travelled all

²⁰ Vrindavana Das, *Chaitanya Bhagvat*, Chapter-3, *Sankirtan Cramble mohorator*. Bilacimubhaktiras Prati Ghare Ghare, Bhawani Press, Calcutta, 5th edition, p.115

²¹ He was a disciple of Chaitnya and once he was caught up conversing with a female co-disciple. To maintain the discipline, he was expelled from the community. In shame, he committed suicide.

²² Vipul Singh, op.cit. Chaitanya never dissociated people from other religions. Haridas was his favourite disciple and he was a Muslim. p. 357

through the banks of river Narmada and visited parts of Kasi,²³ Prayag, Mathura, Vrindavana²⁴. Chaitanya returned again to Puri at the end of A.D. 1511. At his return to Puri, Chaitanya received a standing ovation by the people as because of his erudite discussion with two famous preceptors of their time: Sarvabhauma and Ray Rama Nanda.

Visits of Chaitanya at different places and his conversational success had impacted and stirred socio-religious situation of Bengal and galvanized aspirations of his followers. Overwhelmed followers of Chaitanya organized a big '*mahotsava*'²⁵ on returning of Chaitanya in AD 1513 to Bengal for his intellectual prowess. The congregation in the form of '*mahotsava*' was for *Darshan* (glimpse) of their *Guru*. It was now a challenging time for Chaitanya to fulfill wishes of his followers and to expand further the importance of Krishna Bhakti. For that, he chalked out a plan with Nityananda and shouldered larger responsibility was on Advaitacarya. Instruction given by Chaitanya was done in a social perspective that Vaishnava devotion needs to be brought down to all levels of the society, even to the lowest Candalas. The two of the preachers of Chaitanya, Nityananda and Advaitcarya carried Vaishnava ideas religion to long distance.

Chaitanya had of course a deep rooted devotional attachment with Nabadwip of Bengal, but his attraction towards Vrindavana and Mathura was no less. He travelled to Vrindavana and Mathura via Gand and wished to make Vrindavan as the main centre of Krishna Bhakti of Vaishnavism and was successfully executed. In view of success of Nityananda affiliating and incorporating merchants of Saptagram (Hugli); also the original inclination of Chaitanya towards merchants and artisans, the choice of Vrindavan as the principal centre of Vaishnavism does not appear to have resulted entirely from religious considerations. As Vrindavan is located near Agra which was increasingly an important centre for trade and commerce during Medieval period. The pilgrim from Bengal to Vrindavan was required to go along the trade route from Eastern India to the North through which the products of Bengal were taken to North India. The road connected several important commercial centres such as Banares, Allahabad, Koil and Bayana with the trade centres in the north such as Delhi, Agra and Lahore. Merchant-followers always cherished to visit Vrindavan as it put them in touch with the commercial centres and emporiums in North India where the products of Bengal were taken for sale and from where these could be sent to west and central Asia which were connected by trade-routes.

²³ When Chaitanya reached Kasi to propagate his idea about Vaisnavism or Krishna Bhakti, he had discourse with Prakashnanda Saraswati. Since this area was dominated by the Advaita ideas of Shankaracharya, Chaitanya's propagation could not convince Prakashnanda Saraswati, who was an Advaita supporter, nor could he ever influence this area which was deeply devoted to Shaiva tradition. Chaitanya says that I have come here to sell emotionalism i.e. Bhava-Kali, but there is no buyer.

²⁴ A.K Majumdar, *Chaitanya: His Life and Doctrine*, Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1969, After spending ten days in Kasi and due failure to establish Krishna-Bhakti at scholastic level in Kasi against Advait philosophy, Chaitanya decided to come to Mathura (Vrindavana). He got an overwhelming response in Mathura-Vrindavana. He expressed his deep desire and love to his devoted disciple Sanatana to lay strong foundation of Krishna-Radha Bhakti in Mathura. Chaitanya shared his views and told him to compose a Vaisnava Smriti pp.213-14, 227

²⁵ A festive congregation

Chaitanyawas an architect and originator of *Gaudiya* School of Vaishnavism which made a significant contribution to Indian philosophy through its system of *Achintya-bhed-abhed*. This school served religio-philosophical idea of Chaitanya and it came into shape in the life-time of Chaitanya. Foundation of philosophical ground of this school was eclectic in ways to accommodate some strings of Vedantic Vaisanava thoughts. The idea of renunciation from this transitory mundane life originated simultaneously with the idea to reinterpret the Vedanta on dualistic Vaisnava line. Books that inspired Chaitanya are *Srimad Bhagvata Gita* and *Gita Govinda*. Chaitanya proceeded with formulation of new ideas every after the discourse with some religion preachers like Vasudeva Darvabhuma, Ray Ramananda, Svami Probodhananda and Svami Prakasananda. Chaitanya never came down to put up his idea in black and white, he, rather, transmitted it verbally. The extensive collection of Chaitanya's thought was finally performed with some scholastic exposition by six Gosvamis of Varndavana whose works were followed by the writing of men like Krsnadas Kaviraj, Baldev Vidya bhusan etc. The compilation of his ideas started at Vrindavana and most of the reputed texts were completed towards the end of the 17th century.

Chaitanya And Philosophical Propagation:

Origin of Vaisnavism is a bitequivocal, but supposedly the rise of Vaisnavism took place before the birth of Christ. Though, in the Rig Veda, we get the earliest reference of Visnu. Vishnu is projected here with super human quality, as he covered whole universe in just in three strides. The impression depicted hereof Him being a Supreme Reality.²⁶ Vishnu or Narayan is considered as chief deity of this sect, and Krishna as one of His *avatars* (incarnation).

As a cult, the early reference of Vaisnavism is discernable in *Padma Purana*, a follower of Visnu. There are other textual references of Vishnu available in *Vrhadaranyaka*, *Taittiriya* and *Katha Upnishads*, *Aiteraya Brahmana*, *Taittiriya Arrayaka* and *Bhagvata Purana*. During the Epic-age the concept of sun-god Visnu and Narayan got fused into one personality named Vasudeva-Krasna. The worshippers of Vasudeva-Krasna came to be known as '*Bhagvatas*'. Bhagvatism and Vaisnavism, therefore, may be considered as identical cults.

Post-*Bhagvata Purana* experienced a rapid rise of Vaisanava sect, grown in Tamil States. Post-*Alvar* period added a new dimension to the Vaisnavasect and new school of philosophers or *Acaryas* came in to force. The earliest among them was Nathmuni who by the end of 10th or beginning of A.D. 11th century who recognized the sect of the Sri Vaisnava. Nathmuni was followed by many but one who provided it strong base was Ramanujacarya, the grand-son of Yamunacarya.

Ramanuja preached *Visista-advaita* qualified Monism and established the school of Sri Sampradaya. He propounded the idea of *Bhedabheda* doctrine (difference – non-difference theory) in which an inter-relationship between *Jiva*, *Jagat* and *Brahma* is depicted. *Bhedabheda* Vedanta is a sub-school of Vedanta which teaches that the individual self (*jivatman*) is both different and not different from the ultimate reality known as Brahman. He

²⁶ Svami Sarvanand (Trans.) *Rig Veda, The Vedas and their Religious Teachings, The cultural Heritage of India*, 2nd edition, 1959, vol. 1, p.p. 190.

presented *Brahma* as *Sugunath* that is god with a definite form or shape. Ramanuja believed in *Varnashrama Dharma* and allowed the right to act as preceptors of Brahmans alone.²⁷ Ramanuja was followed by Nimbarka, who preached *Dvaita-avaitavad* or Dualistic Non-Dualism' and founded the school of Hamsa or SarkaSampradaya at Telingana is about 1150 A.D. He says Brahma is one and at the same time *Saguna-Savisena*(with attributes) and *Nirguna-Nirvisena*(without attributes). He says that 'the Brahma is Sri Krasna, who is omniscient, omnipotent and ultimate cause and the all pervading being'²⁸ Nimbarka was followed by Madhvacarya and he propounded the philosophical system known as *Dvaitavad* or unqualified dualism. *Dvaitavada* which tells about god (Vishnu, supreme soul) and the individual souls (*Jivatma*) exist as independent reality and they are distinct.²⁹ Along with this we can mention the name of Vallabhacharya who was the contemporary of Chaitanya who preached *Suddh-advaitavad* and founded the school of *RudraSampradaya*. He was immensely indebted to BhagvataPurana and strongly emphasized on the concept of Bhakti as abode of God. Vallabhacharya ascertained various stages to tackle to reach to sublime state of Bhakti. These are as follows: *Bhave, Prema, Pranya, Sneha, Raga, Anuraga* and *Vyasan*. Finally he derived a new concept of *PustiMarga* which dealt with absolute dependence on god's grace, faith, truth and love in Him.³⁰ All these distinct Vaisnava schools were thus already in existence before the advent of Chaitanya.³¹

Chaitanya was an architect and originator of *Gaudiya*³² School of Vaishnavism which made a significant contribution to Indian philosophy through its system of *Achintya-bhed-abhed*³³. The very philosophical foundation of GaudiyaVaisnava School was the concept of '*AcintyaSakti*'. This concept of Gaudiya school was quite exclusive and it always professed the school a distinct character. Its ontology of Radha, its doctrinal exposition of Bhakti accompanied by the *Rasa*³⁴ theory and its ideas on the value of human life or *purusartha*,³⁵ are some of its other special features.

²⁷Ramanujacharya, *Vedanta Samgraha*, pp 152-3.

²⁸ Dr. S.N. Dasgupta – *A History of Indian Philosophy*, (1st Indian edition, Delhi, 1975, vol. III. P.405

²⁹Chandradhar Sharma, (1994), *A Critical survey of Indian Philosophy*, MotilalaBanarsidass, ISBN 978-81-208-0365-7

³⁰S.N.Sas Gupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. IV, p. 356

³¹Chaitanya differed in many ways to his contemporaries and to most of the protagonists of Vaishnava Sect. Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhava, Vallabhacharya were inclined to Vedanta, while Gaudiya School was not much concerned with Vedanta. Chaitanya had chosen *ItihasPurana*(Epic Period: Mahabharata, Ramayana) more important for the rise of image of Krishna, not Vedanta. But philosophically and ritually Gaudiya school was more sectarian. Vedantic saints were truly a sub-set of Vedantic ideas, but in course of implementation of ideas they got more acclimatized to prevalent condition

³² H.H. Wilson in *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, Bishop College Press, Calcutta, 1846 has discussed about various facets of Gaudiya School of Chaitanya. He in fact made it a general observation that the idea of Bhakti was never incorporated by Chaitanya in his philosophical narratives. It was well popularized amongst Western researchers. It was in fact a serious mistake on part of analytical observation.

³³ The theologians of the Gaudiya school, other than the Krishnah Bhakti, formulated this philosophy: Incomprehensible (achintya) difference/non-difference(bhed-abheda) between Jiva and Brahma

³⁴*Rasa* is considered by Gaudiya Schools as integral part of Bhakti. Concept of *Rasa* makes Chaitanya different of all previous and contemporary protagonists. *Rasa* is defined as "internationalization of feelings and emotions bordering on mysticism." What Bhakti is raised to the level of mysticism.

Prior to Chaitanya, three Vaisnava *Acaryas*, in their philosophical narration had stressed upon the relationship of Brahma with *Jiva* and *Jagat* and it was discussed in terms of '*bhedabhed*' doctrine (unity in difference) in sharp contrast to the *bheda-vada* of Sankaracharya.³⁶ But Chaitanya followed a different foot step by extolling more to the sublimity of Brahma as the Brahma is beyond the reach of human thought, calling it '*achintya*' (incomprehensible). Chaitanya further differed with his earlier *acaryas* as they interpreted Bhakti, a religious attitude. They accepted Bhakti as a path to reach to the abode of God. Chaitanya went a step forward to them; he said that the Bhakti is not only the path but it is also a *Rasa*. Besides that the Gaudiya school subdued the existence of traditional concept of '*Dharma*', '*Artha*', '*Kam*' and '*Moksha*' and it gave all importance to love to God. Chaitanya school rejected the importance of '*Varnasramadharm*'³⁷ when the love of man for god is compared. In contrast, Ramanuja and Nimbarka had considered adherence to the '*Varnasramadharm*' as fundamental. *Shagun Bhakta* Chaitanya took antagonistic position to ideas of *Nirguna Bhaktas*.³⁸

The Gaudiya school propounded some idea of Bhakti. The concept of Radha with Krishna came to light was an introduction of new pattern worship. In Western India, rise of Krishna Bhakti led by Ramanuja, Nimbarka and Maratha saints had hardly spoken about Radha, it was rather presentation of Rukimini with Krishna. Radha with Krishna was a new form of ideology. It was a new approach to god-hood-ship which may be suitably termed as *Bhakti-Rasa*. These certain features of Gaudiya Vaisnavism helped it to emerge as a new school of Vaisnava thought.

Conclusion :

Chaitanya provided platform for social catharsis for all those individuals who were economically and ritualistically deprived of opportunity to join spiritual congregation and to attain state of salvation. Other than the class situation and economic background, pattern of rituals imported from religion in the name of god, dominating and deciding sociological background of different castes and communities was a challenging task for all protagonists of their time. Chaitanya unlike most of his protagonists of *Saguna* tradition pursued strongly to dismember caste, creed and gender disparities through providing social and religious

³⁵ Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement, A New Perspective, A Study in the History of Ideas*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2014, Gaudiya School adds its own in given concept of *purusharthas*. There are four *purusharthas*: *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, *Moksha*. Chaitanya adds the fifth one i.e. Bhakti which he says stands above all or higher than *Moksha*. Bhakti is one and only source of *Mukti*. At Kasi Chaitanya declared that highest *purushartha* is love for the Krishna

³⁶ Chaitanya disagreed with *Avaidavada* of Sankaracharya and he challenged his concept of *Mayavada* (everything on earth is just *Maya* or Illusion), or *Mithya*. For Chaitanya, there is nothing bigger than Krishna Bhakti and Krishna Bhakti is superior than *Jnana*. This is in contravention to ideas of Sankaracharya that real knowledge is stored in Scholastic treaties (*Shastras*).

³⁷ Varna is a sociological classification of communities. Society was classified into four: Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra.

³⁸ Krishna Sharma, op. cit. *Shagun Tradition* believed deities with attributes and idol worship is essentially followed. *Nirguna Bhaktas* was just opposite to that. Kabir, Nanak and many other Nirguna protagonists believed that Gods are without any attribute. p.6

opportunity to one and all. Introduction of *Kirtan* tradition, allowing all to participate, was an attempt to discourage rigmarole of brahmanic divisive and rigid rituals, and also, diminishing hold of priests as the only medium to acquire the state of spiritualism. Religious narratives, confabulations stored in scriptures and religious prescriptions confined to treaties consisted of answers to address material, spiritual and moral questions of every individual. But such narratives and guidelines set by one and only community brahmanas were abysmally propinquitous to patriarchy and serving interest to those who were controlling corridors of high echelon. Though number of protagonists who themselves belonged of brahmana caste and held economically high social status like Tulshidas, Surdas, Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Namadeva and Vallabhacharya, together with Chaitanya laid down philosophical narratives to revoke such supremacist scriptural dispensation. Though, Chaitanya was more daring and sharp social reformer in the pantheon of *ShagunBhaktas*.