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Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

- poems -

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Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu(18 February 1486 - 1534)

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu) was a Vaishnava saint and social reformer in eastern India (specifically present-day Bangladesh and states of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Manipur, Assam, and Orissa of India) in the 16th century, believed by followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism to be the full incarnation of Lord Krishna. Sri Krishna Chaitanya was a notable proponent for the Vaishnava school of Bhakti yoga (meaning loving devotion to Krishna/God) based on the philosophy of the Bhagavata Purana and Bhagavad Gita. Specifically, he worshipped the forms of Krishna, popularised the chanting of the Hare Krishna maha mantra and composed the Siksastakam in Sanskrit. His line of followers, known as Gaudiya Vaishnavas, revere him as an Avatar of Krishna in the mood of Radharani who was prophesised to appear in the later verses of the Bhagavata Purana

Sri Krishna was born in Mayarpur in the town of Nadia, just after sunset on the evening of the 23rd Falgun, 1407 Advent of Sakabda answering to the 18th February, 1486 of the Christian era. The moon was eclipsed at the time of His birth and people of Nadia were then engaged, as usual on such occasions, in bathing in the Bhagirathi with loud cheers of Haribol. His father Jagannath Misra was a poor Brahmin of the Vedic order, and His mother Sachi Devi was a model good woman, both descended from Brahmin stocks originally residing in Sylhet. Mahaprabhu was a beautiful Child and the ladies of the town came to see Him with presents. His mother's father, Pandit Nilambar Chakravarti, a renowned astrologer, foretold that the Child -would be a great Personage in time ; and he therefore, gave Him the name Visvambhar. The ladies of the neighborhood styled Him Gaur Hari on account of His golden complexion, and His mother called Him Nimai on account of the Nim tree near which He was born. Beautiful as the lad was every one heartily loved to see Him everyday. As He grew up. He became a whimsical and frolicsome Lad. After His fifth year, He was admitted into a Pathsala where He picked up Bengali in a very short time.

 Early Anecdotes

Most of His contemporary biographers have mentioned certain anecdotes regarding Sri Chaitanya which are simple records of His early miracles. It is said that, when He was an infant in His mother's arms, He wept continually, and when the neighbouring ladies and His mother cried Haribol, be used to stop. Thus there was a continuation of the utterance of Haribol in the house, foreshowing the future mission of the Hero. It has also been stated, that, when His mother once gave Him sweetmeats to eat, He ate clay instead of the food. His mother asking

for the reason, He stated that, as every sweetmeat was nothing but clay transformed, He could eat clay as well.

His mother who was also the consort of a Pandit explained, that every article in a special state was adapted to a special use. Earth, while in the state of a jug, could be used as a water-pot, but in the state of a brick such a use was not possible. Clay, therefore, in the form of sweetmeats was usable as food and not clay in its other states. The Lad was convinced and admitted His stupidity in eating clay and agreed to avoid the mistake in future.

Another miraculous act has been related. It is said that a Brahmin on pilgrimage became a guest in His house, cooked his food and read his grace with meditation on Krishna. In the meantime, the Lad came and ate up the cooked rice. The Brahmin astonished at the Lad's act cooked again at the request of Jagannath Misra. The Lad again ate up the cooked rice while the Brahmin was offering the rice to Krishna with meditation. The Brahmin was persuaded to cook for the third time. This time all the inmates of the house had fallen asleep and the Lad showed Himself as Krishna to the traveler and blessed him. The Brahmin was then lost in ecstasy at the appearance of the Object of his worship. It has also been stated that two thieves stole away the Lad from His father's door with a view to purloin His jewels and gave Him sweetmeats on the way. The Lad exercised His illusory energy and deceived the thieves back towards His Own house. The thieves for fear of detection, left the Boy there and fled.

Another miraculous act has been described of the Lad's demanding and getting from Hiranya and Jagadisha all the offerings they had collected for worshipping Krishna on the day of Ekadasi. When only four years of age. He sat on rejected cooking pots which were considered unholy by His mother. He explained to His mother that there was no question of holiness and un-holiness as regards earthen pots thrown away after the cooking was over. These anecdotes relate to the tender age up to the fifth year.

** Scholastic Career **

In His eighth year. He was admitted into the Tol of Gangadas Pandit in Ganganagar close by the village of Mayapur. In two years, He became well read in Sanskrit Grammar and Rhetoric. His readings after that were of the nature of self-study in His Own house, where He had found all important books belonging to His father who was a Pandit himself. It appears that He read the Smriti on His own, and the Nyaya also, in competition with His friends who were then studying under the celebrated Pandit Raghunath Siromani.

Now, after the tenth year of His age, Chaitanya became a passable scholar in Grammar, Rehotiric, the Smrti and Nyaya. It was after this that His elder brother Vishwarup left home and accepted the asram (status) of a sannyasi (ascetic). Chaitanya, though a very young boy, consoled His parents saying that He would serve them with a view to please God. Just after that, His father left this world. His mother was exceedingly sorry, and Mahaprabhu, with His usually contented appearance, consoled His widowed mother.

It was at the age of fourteen or fifteen that Mahaprabhu was married to Laksmhi Devi, the daughter of Ballabha Acharya, also of Nadia. He was at this age considered as one of the best scholars of Nadia, the renowned seat of Nyaya philosophy and Sakskrit learning. Not to speak of the smarta pandits, the naiyaiks were all afraid of confronting Him in literary discussions. Being a married man, He went to Eastern Bengal on the banks of the Padma for acquirement of wealth. There He displayed His learning and obtained a good sum of money. It was at this time that He preached Vaishnavism at intervals. After teaching him the principles of Vaishnavism, He ordered Tapan Misra to go and live in Benares. During His residence in East Bengal, His wife Lakshmi Devi left this world from the effects of snakebite. On returning home, He found His mother in a mourning state. He consoled her with a lecture on the uncertainty of human affairs. It was at His mother's request that He married Vishnupriya, the daughter of Rakj pandit Sanatan Misra. His comrades joined Him on His reutrn from pravasa, or sojourn. He was now so renowned that He was considered to be the best pandit in Nadia. Keshab Misra of Kashmere, who has called himself the Great Digvijayi, came to Nadia with a view to discuss with the pandits, of that place. Afraid of the so-called conquering pandit, the tol professors of Nadia left their town on pretence of invitation. Keshab met Mahaprabhu at the Barokonaghat in Mayapura, and after a very short discussion with Him he got defeated by the boy and mortification obliged him to decampt. Nimai pandit was now the most important Pandit of His times.

It was at the age of sixteen or seventeen that He travelled to Gaya with a host of His students, and there took His spiritual initiation from Iswar Puri, a Vaishnava sannyasi, and a disciple of the renowned Madhavendra Puri. Upon His return to Nadia, Nimai Pandit turned out a religious preacher and His religious nature became so strongly represented that Avdaita Prabhu, Sribas and the others who had before the birth of Chaitanya already accepted the Vaishnava faith, were astonished at the change of the young man. He was then no more a contending naiyaika, a wrangling smarta and a criticising rhetorician. He swooned at the name of Krishna and behaved as an inspired man under the influence of His religious sentiment. It has been described by Murari Gupta, an eye witness that, He showed His heavenly powers in the house of Srivas Pandit in the presence of

hundreds of His followers who were mostly well-read scholars. It was at this time that He opened a nocturnal school of Kirtan in the compound of Srivas Pandit with His sincere followers. There He preached, there He sang, there He danced and there He expressed all sorts of religious feelings. Nityananda Prabhu who was then a preacher of Vaishnavism and who had then completed his travels all over India, joined Him by that time. In fact, a host of Pandit preachers of Vaishnavism all sincere at heart, came and joined Him from different parts of Bengal. Nadia now became the regular seat of a host of Vaishnava Acharyas whose mission it was to spiritualize mankind with the highest influence of the Vaishnava creed.

 Preaching and Sankirtan

The first mandate that He issued to Prabhu Nityananda and Haridas was this: "Go friends, go preaching and through the streets of the town, meet every man at his door and ask him to sing the Name of Hari with a holy life and you then come and report to Me every evening the result of your preaching." Thus ordered, the two preachers went on and met Jagai and Madhai the two most abominable characters. They insulted the preachers on hearing Mahaprabhu's mandate but were soon converted by the influence of Bhakti inculcated by their Lord. The people of Nadia were now surprised. They said, Nimai Pandit is not only a gigantic genius but He is certainly a Missionary from God Almighty." From this time to His 23rd year, Mahaprabhu preached His principles not only in Nadia but in all important towns and villages around His city. In the houses of His followers. He showed miracles, taught the esoteric principles of Bhakti and sang His Sankirtan with other Bhaktas. His followers of the town of Nadia commenced to sing the Holy Name of Hari in the streets and bazars. This created a sensation and roused different feelings in different quarters. The Bhaktas were highly pleased.

The Smarta Brahmins became jealous of Nimai Pandit's success and complained to Chand Kazi against the character of Chaitanya as un-Hindu. The Kazi came to Srivas Pandit's house and broke a Mridanga (khol) there and declared, that unless Nimai Pandit would cease to make noise about His queer religion, he should be obliged to enforce Mohammedanism on Him and His followers. This was brought to Mahaprabhu's notice. He ordered the town people to appear in the evening, each with a torch in his hand. This they did, and Nimai marched out With His Sankirtan divided in fourteen groups, and on His arrival in Kazi's house, He held a long conversation with the Kazi, and in the end communicated into his heart His Vaishnava influence by touching his body. The Kazi then wept and admitted, that he had felt a keen spiritual influence which had cleared up his doubts, and produced in him a religious sentiment which gave him the highest

ecstasy. The Kazi then joined the Sankirtan party. The world was astonished at the spiritual power of the Great Lord and hundreds and hundreds of heretics converted joined the banner of Visvambhar after this affair.

 Sannyasa

It was after this that some of the jealous and low minded Brahmins of Kulia picked up a quarrel with Mahaprabhu and collected a party to oppose Him. Nimai Pandit was naturally a soft hearted Person though strong in His principles. He declared that party feeling and sectarianism were the two great enemies of progress, and as long as He should continue to be an inhabitant of Nadia belonging to a certain family, His mission would not meet with complete success. He then resolved to be a citizen of the world by cutting off His connection with a particular family, caste and creed and with this resolution He embraced the position of a Sannyasi at Katoa under the guidance of Keshav Bharati of that town, on that 24th year of His age. His mother and wife wept bitterly for His separation, but our Hero though soft in heart, was a strong Person in principle He left His little world in His house for the unlimited spiritual world of Krishna with mankind in general.

After His Sannyas He was induced to visit the house of Sri Advaita Prabhu in Santipur. Sri Advaita managed to invite all his friends and admirers from Nadia and brought Sachi Devi to see her Son. Both pleasure and pain invaded her heart when she saw her Son in the attire of a Sannyasi. As a Sannyasi, Sri Krishna Chaitanya put on nothing but a kaupin and a bahirvas (outer covering). His head was without hair and His hands bore a danda (stick) and a kamandalu (hermit's water pot). The Holy son fell at the feet of His beloved mother and said, "Mother! This body is yours and I must obey your orders. Permit Me to go to Vrindavan for My spiritual attainments". The Mother in consultation with Sri Advaita and others asked her Son to reside in Puri (town of Lord Jagannatha) so that she might obtain some information about Him now and then.

Mahaprabhu agreed to that proposition and in a few days left Santipur for Orissa. His biographers have described the journey of Sri Krishna Chaitanya (that was the name He got after His Sannyas) from Santipur to Puri in great detail.

He traveled along the side of the Bhagirathi as far as Chhatrabhog situated now in Thana Mathurapur Diamond Harbour, 24 Parganas. There He took a boat and went as far as Prayag Ghat in the Midnapore District. Thence He walked through Balasore and Cuttack to Puri, seeing the temple of Bhubaneswar on His way. Upon His arrival at Puri He saw Lord Jagannath in the temple and put up with Sarvabhauma at the request of the latter.

 Sarvabhauma and Vedanta

Sarvabhauma was a gigantic Pandit of the day. His readings knew no bounds. He was the best Naiyaik of the times, and was known as the most erudite scholar in the Vedanta Philosophy of the school of Sankaracharya. He was born in Nadia (Vidyanagar) and taught innumerable pupils in the Nyaya Philosophy in his Tol there. He had left for Puri sometimes before the birth of Nimai Pandit. His brother-in-law, Gopinath Misra, introduced our new Sannyasi to Sarvabhauma who was astonished at His personal beauty, and feared that it would be difficult for the young Man to maintain Sannyas-dharma during the long run of His life. Gopinath who had known Mahaprabhu from Nadia had a great reverence for Him and told everyone that the Sannyasi was not a common human being. On this point, Gopinath and Sarvabhauma had a hot discussion. Sarvabhauma then requested Mahaprabhu to hear his recitation of the Vedanta Sutras to which the latter tacitly submitted. Sri Chaitanya heard with silence what the great Sarvabhauma uttered with gravity, for seven days, at the end of which the latter said, "Krishna Chaitanya! I think you do not understand the Vedanta, as you do not say anything after hearing my recitations and explanations." The reply of Sri Chaitanya was that He understood the Sutras very well, but He could not make out what Sankaracharya meant by his commentaries. Astonished at this, Sarvabhauma said, "How is it that you understand the meanings of the Sutras and do not understand the commentaries which explain the Sutras? Ah well! If you understand the Sutras, please let me have your interpretations."

Mahaprabhu thereon explained all the Sutras in His Own way without touching the Pantheistic commentary of Sankara. The keen understanding of Sarvabhauma saw the truth, beauty and harmony of arguments in the explanations given by Sri Chaitanya and obliged him to utter that it was the first time that he found One, Who could explain the Brahma-Sutras in such a simple manner. He admitted also, that the commentaries of Sankara never gave such natural explanations of the Vedanta-Sutras as he had obtained from Mahaprabhu. He then submitted himself as an advocate and follower. In a few days Sarvabhauma turned out as one of the best Vaishnavas of the time. Report ran out and the whole of Orissa sang the praise of Krishna Chaitanya, and hundreds and hundreds came to Him and became His followers. In the meantime, Mahaprabhu thought of visiting Southern India, and He started with one Krishnadas Brahmin for the Journey.

 Tour in Southern India

His biographers have given us a detail of the journey. He first went to

Kurmakshetra where He performed a miracle by curing a leper named Vasudeva. He met Ramananda Rai the Governor of Vidyanagar, on the banks of the Godavari and had a philosophical conversation with him on the subject of Prem-bhakti. He worked another miracle by touching (making them immediately, disappear) the seven Tal trees, through which Ram Chandra, the Son of Dasarath, had shot His arrow and killed the great Bali Raj.

He preached Vaishnavism and Nam Sankiratan throughout the journey. At Rangakshetra, He stayed for four months in the house of one Venkata Bhatta in order to spend the rainy season. There He converted the whole family of Venkata from Ramanuja Vaishnavism into Krishna-bhakti, along with the son of Venkata, a boy of ten years named Gopal, who afterwards came to Vrindavan and became one of six Gosvamins or Prophets serving under their Leader Sri Krishna Chaitanya. Trained up in Sanskrit by his uncle Prabodhananda Sarasvati, Gopal wrote several books on Vaishnavism.

Sri Chaitanya visited numerous places in Southern India as far as Cape Comorin, and returned to Puri in two years by Pandarpur on the Bhima. In this latter place He spiritualized one Tukaram who became from that time a religious preacher himself. This fact has been admitted in his Abhangas which have been collected in a volume by Mr. Satyendranath Tagore of the Bombay Civil Service.

During His journey He had discussions with the Buddhists, the Jains and the Mayavadis in several places, and converted His opponents to Vaishnavism.

 Dabir Khas and Sakar Mallik reclaimed

Upon His return to Puri, Raja Prataparudra Dev and several Pandit Brahmins joined the banner of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He was now twenty-seven years of age. In his 28th year he went to Bengal as far as Gaud in Maldah.

There He picked up two greater personages named Rupa and Sanatan. Though descended from the lines of the Karnatik Brahmins, these two brothers turned out demi Musalmans by their continual contact with Hussain Shah, the then Emperor of Gaud. Their names had been changed by the Emperor into Dabir Khas and Sakar Mallik and their master loved them heartily, as they were both learned in Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit and were loyal servants of the state. The two gentlemen had found no way to come back as regular Hindus, and had written to Mahaprabhu. while He was at Puri for spiritual help. Mahaprabhu had written in reply that He would come to them and extricate them out of their spiritual difficulties. Now that He had come to Gaud, both the brothers appeared before Him with their long standing prayer. Mahaprabhu ordered them to go to

Vrindavan and meet Him there.

 Instructions to Rupa and Sanatan

Chaitanya returned to Puri through Santipur where He again met His dear mother. After a short stay at Puri, He left for Vrindavan. This time He was accompanied by one Balabhadra Bhattacharya. He visited Vrindavan and came down to Prayag (Allahabad,) converting a large number of Mohammedans not by the scriptures of Vaishnavism but by argument from the Quran. The descendants of those converts are still known as Pathan Vaishnavas. Rupa Gosvami met Him at Allahabad. Sri Chaitanya trained him up in spirituality in ten days and directed him to go to Vrindavan on missions. His first mission was to write theological works explaining scientifically pure Bhakti and Prem. The second mission was to revive the places where Krishna Chandra had, in the end of Dvapara yuga, exhibited His spiritual Lila for the benefit of the religious world. Rupa Gosvami left Allahabad for Vrindavan and Mahaprabhu came down to Benares. There He put up in the house of Chandrasekhar and accepted His daily bhiksha (meal) in the house of Tapan Misra. Here it was, that Sanatan Gosvami joined Him and took instruction for two months in spiritual matters.

The biographers, specially Krishnadas Kaviraj have given us details of Sri Chaitanya's teachings to Rupa and Sanatan. Krishnadas was not a contemporary writer, but he gathered his information from the Gosvamins themselves, the direct disciples of Mahaprabhu. Jiva Gosvami, who was nephew of Sanatan and Rupa and who has left us his invaluable work, the Sat-sandarbha, has philosophized on the precepts of his great Leader. We have gathered and summarized the precepts of Sri Chaitanya from the books of those great writers.

 Prakashananda Saraswati

While at Benares Sri Chaitanya had an interview with the learned. Sannyasis of that town in the house of a Maharatta Brahmin who had invited all the sannyasis as an entertainment. At this interview Chaitanya showed a miracle which attracted all the samnyasis to Him. Then ensued reciprocal conversation. The Sannyasis were headed by their most learned leader Prakashananda Saraswati. After a short controversy, they submitted to Mahaprabhu and admitted that they had been misled by the commentaries of Sankaracharya. It was impossible even for learned scholars to oppose Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu for a long time, as there was some spell in Him which touched their hearts, and made them weep for their spiritual improvement. Sannyasis of Benares soon fell at the Feet of Sri Chaitanya and asked for His grace (kripa).

Sri Chaitanya then preached pure Bhakti and instilled into their hearts spiritual love for Krishna which obliged them to give up sectarian feelings. The whole of Benares, on this wonderful conversion of the Sannyasis, turned out Vaishnavas, and they made a master 'Sankirtan with their new Lord. After sending Sanatan to Vrindavan, Mahaprabhu went to Puri again by the jungles with His comrade Balabhadra. Balabhadra reported that Mahaprabhu had shown a good many miracles on His way to Puri, such as, making tigers and elephants dance on hearing the Name of Krishna.

 Assembly at Puri

From this time, i.e, from His 31st year, Mahaprabhu continually lived in Puri in the house of Kasi Misra, until His disappearance in His forty-eighth year at the time of Sankirtan in the temple of Tota Gopinath. During these 18 years, His life was one of settled love and piety. He was surrounded by numerous followers, all of whom were of the highest order of the Vaishnavas and distinguished from the common people by their purest character and learning, firm religious principles and spiritual love in Radha-Krishna.

Svarup Damodar, who had been known by the name of Purushottam Acharya while Mahaprabhu was in Nadia, joined Him from Benares, and accepted His service as His secretary. No production of any poet or philosopher could be laid before Mahaprabhu, unless Svarup has passed it as pure and useful. Rai Ramananda was his second mate.

Both he and Svarup sang, while Mahaprabhu expressed His sentiment on a certain point of worship. Parmanada Puri was His minister in matters of religion. There are hundreds of anecdotes described by His biographers, which we do not think it mete here to reproduce. Mahaprabhu slept short. His sentiments carried Him far and far in the firmament of spirituality, every day and night, and all His admirers and followers watched Him throughout. He worshipped, communicated with His missionaries at Vrindavan, and conversed with those religious men who newly came to visit Him. He sang and danced, took no care of Himself and often times lost Himself in religious beatitude. All who came to Him, believed Him as the All Beautiful God, appearing in the nether world for the benefit of mankind. He loved His mother all along, and sent her mahaprasad now and then with those who went to Nadia. He was most amiable in nature. Humility was personified in Him. His sweet appearance gave cheers to all who came in contact with Him. He appointed Prabhu Nityananda as the missionary in charge of Bengal. He dispatched six disciples (Gosvamins) to Vrindavan to preach love in the up-country. He punished all of His disciples who deviated from a holy life. This He markedly did in the case of junior Haridas. He never lacked in giving proper

instructions in life to those who solicited them. This will be seen in His teachings to Raghunath Das Gosvami. His treatment to Haridas (senior) will show how He loved spiritual men and how He defied caste distinction in case of spiritual brotherhood.

Chanting His Name

Chant the Name of the Lord and his glory unceasingly,
That the mirror of the heart may be wiped clean
And quenched that mighty forest fire,
Worldly lust, raging furiously within.

O Name, stream down in moonlight on the lotus heart,
Opening its cup to knowledge of thyself.
O self, drown deep in the waves of his bliss,
Chanting his Name continually,
Tasting his nectar at every step,
Bathing in his Name, that bath for weary souls.
In each and every Name thy power resides.
No times are set, no rites are needful,
For chanting of thy Name,
So vast is thy mercy.

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

In The Kadamba Grove

'In the kadamba grove what man is (that) standing?
What sort of word coming is this:
the plough of whose meaning has penetrated startlingly the path of hearing?
With a hint of union, with its manner of penetrating
making one well-nigh mad:
My mind is agitated,
it cannot be still,
streams flow from my eyes:

I know not what manner of man
it is who utters such words:
I see him not, my heart is perturbed,
I cannot stay in the house:
My soul rests not,
it flutters to and fro in hope of seeing him:
When she sees him,
she will find her soul, quoth Urdbab Dâs.'

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

O Name, Stream Down In Moonlight

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That the mirror of the heart may be wiped clean
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The Padkalpataru

'One day coming and smiling, sitting in Adwaita's house,
spoke the son of Sachî, having Nityânand with him and Adwaita,
sitting in enjoyment, he planned a great festivity.

Hearing this, smiling with joy,

Sîtâ Thâkurânî coming spoke a sweet word:

hearing that with joyful mind the son of Sachî spoke
somewhat in regard to arranging the festival.

'Listen, Thâkurânî Sîtâ, bring the Baishnabs here;
making pressing invitation to them: whoso can sing,
whoso can play, invite them separately, man by man.'

Thus Gora Rai speaking gave orders for an assembly:

'Invite the Baishnabs! Bring out the cymbal and drum,
set out full pots painted with aloes and sandal-paste:
plant plantains, hang on them garlands of flowers,
for the Kîrtan place joyfully.

With garlands, sandal, and betelnut, ghee, honey, and curds
consecrate the drum at evening-tide.'

Hearing the lord's word, in loving manner

she made accordingly various offerings with fragrant perfumes:
all cried Hari, Hari! thus they consecrate the drum;

Parameshwar Dâs floats in enjoymen

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu