Representation of Charisma and Formation of Religious Community: A Study of Thakur Anukulchandra and his Followers in Bhubaneswar

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SOUMYA MOHAPATRA

**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI – 110067
INDIA
2017**

20th July, 2017

Declaration

This thesis entitled "**Representation of Charisma and Formation of Religious Community: A Study of Thakur Anukulchandra and his Followers in Bhubaneswar**" submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my original work and has not been previously submitted to this or any other institution for any degree, diploma or other qualification.

Soumya Mohapatra

Soumya Mohapatra

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of Ph.D. Degree of this University

S. Visvanathan

Professor Susan Visvanathan

Supervisor

Nilika

Professor Nilika Mehrotra

Chairperson

Acknowledgements

The writing of this dissertation has been a difficult but enlightening journey for me. I wish to express my foremost thanks to Professor Susan Visvanathan, who readily agreed to supervise my work even though she had many other academic and professional commitments. She understood my limitations and constantly guided me towards relevant materials and references which helped me write and refine my work. She has been extremely supportive and encouraging, providing all necessary assistance I sought. She was patient enough to listen to my ideas, raised questions, and provided comments, references and prompted me to explore various aspects that I had glossed over. Her suggestions and constructive feedback helped me balance my work.

Furthermore, the contribution of all the professors at the Centre for the Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, has helped me evolve as a researcher as well as a person. Their teachings on the basic ideas of sociology during my post graduation studies have been immensely productive. I would always remain thankful to my teachers Dipankar Gupta, Vivek Kumar, G. Srinivas, Anand Kumar, Nilika Mehrotra, Maitrayee Chaudhuri, Bimol Akoijam, Avijit Pathak, Surinder Singh Jodhka, Nandu Ram, Renuka Singh, Tiplut Nongbri, Amit Kumar Sharma and V. Sujatha.

I also express gratitude to my informants; the devotees of Thakur Anukulchandra interactions with whom made this research possible. My initial feelings of uncertainty and anxiety stemmed from the fact that I am a not a part of this organization and was not sure about how my intentions of objectively studying their *guru* and the organization would be viewed. But these apprehensions were greatly allayed when I interacted with my informants who were eager to share their various experiences, stories and knowledge with me.

I am grateful to my family Papa, Mama, Bapa, Bou, Natu Dada, Shilpi, Ananya and Raj for their unflinching love, support and belief. I want to specially thank Lily apa for

helping me out during my fieldwork and Papa for providing me with ideas and academic materials, whenever I required them. I thank my friends Alia Mustafa, Abdul Qaiyum, Ananta Prasad, Dhiren Kumar, Ishwari Bhattarai, Tanushree Mahalik, Tashi Lundup and Swayamsiddha Panda for their support, help and advice. My heartfelt thanks to Ekta for helping me out with the editing at the last moment. I am also indebted to the staff of Jawaharlal University Library, Nehru Memorial Library, Ratan Tata library and Bhubaneswar State Library for assisting me in locating books and materials as and when needed.

During the course of writing the dissertation, I have referred to various books, newspaper and articles, as well as material available on the internet, which has enriched my knowledge on the complex and sensitive subject. So, without constant help from teachers, family and friends it would have been impossible for me to complete this paper. I am grateful to everyone who became a source of inspiration. It is to them that I owe my deepest gratitude.

Finally, errors or misinterpretation that figure in this work entirely belong to me.

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Introduction

The guru has remained at the helm of Indian society for around three millenia as a person valued and venerated for his inherent wisdom, for his status as a living vessel for divinity and his immense knowledge of various spiritual texts and practices. The word guru has been derived from the Sanskrit word which means both 'dispeller of ignorance' and 'heavy' or 'weighty'.[1] The use of the term guru appeared in the Indian traditions in the first millennium BC. This was the period when the early Hindu Vedas and Upanishads were taking shape as a distinctive written corpus.[2] During this period the guru was an ascetic teacher belonging to the priestly, or Brahman caste who largely derived his authority from his knowledge of the holy texts. People belonging to the privileged sections of the society would spend a part of their childhood staying with a guru in his house known as a gurukul.

In course of time, the guru's role changed to provide room for the changing character of the Hindu theology and practices. During the first millennium CE, newer varieties of devotionalism and the rise of esoteric and Tantric practices came into being which altered the role of the guru from that of a teacher to a person who was held in high regard as a divine manifestation and a medium through which it was possible to attain liberation.

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[1] Joel D. Mlecko (1982) in 'The Guru in Hindu Tradition' says that the Sanskrit expression *guru* has a number of meanings beyond the English translation which means teacher. *Guru* means someone who dispels ignorance and thus *gurus* can be found in a number of fields such as art, music, wrestling, etc and are not limited to the religious and spiritual realm only.

[2] Mlecko, "The Guru," 34-40. Relevant verses from the Upanishads can be found in Patrick Olivelle, trans., Upanishads (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). This was one of the major English translation of the ancient Upanisads for over half a century and incorporates the most recent historical and philological scholarship.

One of the most spectacular developments in present day Hinduism is the increase in the number of high-profile and popular devotion-based organizations led by charismatic Indian gurus. As observed by Warrier (2003), the more thriving the guru-based organization, the more is its reach in terms of heading large 'institutional empires', which are financed by very liberal amounts of donations, from amongst thousands of prosperous devotees, both in India and overseas. Today, a number of guru organizations have their reach worldwide, with numerous branches not only within Indian cities and towns but also in other countries. Warrier (2003) also notes that in India most of these organizations draw people mainly from urban, middle class and educated backgrounds. When seen from the point of view of this middle-class, urban people, the world of these spiritually divine gurus in the present day India is marked by a lot of diversity which offers a number of possibilities so far as spiritual quest is considered.

The leaders of these new religious movements or *gurus* are generally believed to be divine or enlightened by their followers or, at least, to a great extent closer to such a state than they are themselves. Gurus are often thought to have the capability to bring about miracles and heal those who are sick. Many of them are skilled orators, and they are seen to have a capacity to eloquenyly express the 'will of the divine', and thus have an influencing and charismatic appeal for their devotees. There religious leaders generally have a lot of control over various aspects of the lives of their followers. They have the authority to regulate matters relating to dressing patterns, food, hygiene, finance, friendships and family relationships, sexual relations and marriage, procreation (Fox 2005).

Thus in the Indian context, religious *gurus* and their organizations have, since hundreds of years, played a vital role in constructing, interpreting and transmitting religious meanings and values. They are frequently looked upon as the defenders of 'tradition'. They stand for and mediate this tradition in different ways that suit their particular socio-cultural context. In the contemporary time they are faced with issues such as religious nationalism and Hindu majoritarianism which has repercussions for their manner of self-representation and identity formation. They also have to deal with 'modernity' and the

values, outlooks and conceptual categories related with modern states such as a formal system of legal incorporation, management, advertising their particular form of religion, copyrighted publications, etc. (Warrier 2012). A *guru* also has the capacity to move between and participate in multiple symbolic and practical spheres which extends beyond the ashram. It is in this context this research situates the question of charisma, taking into account the empirical context of the Thakur Anukulchandra and his devotees in Bhubaneswar. In the bilingual monthly magazine, Tarpan, published for devotees, Dr. Swapan Kumar Biswas writes, 'A living ideal is the way to 'becoming' and the embodiment of life and growth. The only way to lead an adjusted, happy and prosperous life is to be attached to the living ideal follow his dictates and teachings and fulfill his wishes without faltering, being adhered to him actively. This alone can ensure all-round success for an individual and makes him or her worthy of receiving blessings of god through the guru. When *dharma* awakens; wealth, enjoyment, liberation follow suit. And dharma should not be confused with religious affiliation. It means doing one's duty honestly. Prophets come into this world according to the needs and necessities of the age. There is no difference between the past and the present prophets. To deny one is to ignore all. We consider Thakur as the embodiment and convergence of all the past prophets and by adhering to his ideals we are fulfilling all prophets. In trying to establish him, we ourselves will be established, by fulfilling him, we will be fulfilled' (2014: 4).

Research Settings

Bhubaneswar, also known as the 'City of Temples', lying on longitude of 85 degrees and 50 minutes, east, and latitude 20 degreesand 15 minutes north, is situated to the south of the three great rivers: the Baitarini, the Brahmani and the Mahanadi, which together with their several branches, intersect the coastal plain of Odisha in the Khurda district. Rocky with an undulating surface, Bhubaneswar and its surrounding areas are mostly unfit for cultivation, providing an ideal location for the growth of habitation and religious monuments. Bhubaneswar and its immediate neighbourhood are full of laterite formations, intermittently broken up by hillocks of sandstone with the former providing excellent material for secular buildings and the latter for religious monuments.

Bhubaneswar derives its name from the temple city's chief deity, the Lingaraja, the Lord of the Three Worlds, Tribhuvaneshvara. As Kanwar Lal (1970) explains, remembered in ancient Sanskrit literature as *Ekamrakshetra* (mango forest), named after the mango grove in the area, old Bhubaneswar developed around the Lingaraja temple, erected to commemorate the '*Svayambhu lingam*' (literally, phallus made out of natural stone) that stood 'under a mango tree' (p. 4). Tradition has it that the Lingaraja temple was built over a period of forty three years encompassing the reigns of three of the later Somavamsi kings-Yayati Kesari, Ananta Kesari and Lalatendu Kesari and was probably completed towards the end of the eleventh century.[3] The grand temple is a dominating feature in the landscape surrounding the old city and is representative of the accumulated experience in temple building of several centuries. The temple stands within a spacious compound of laterite measuring 520 feet in length and 465 feet in breadth and is considered as one of the greatest creations of Indian architecture.

Bhubaneswar first witnessed a prolific activity of temple building in the seventh century A.D., and subsequently experienced a number of changes in its physical form, ethnic composition, its religious character, and its role as a socio-religious center from century to century. The city's makeup varied with Buddhism, Jainism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism during different times, with the changing dynasties of Kalinga (the ancient name for Odisha). According to a local legend, as many as six thousand temples were erected in old Bhubaneswar and about ten million *lingams* existed in the city and its surroundings (Kalia 1994). Varying in their style and size, not all of these have survived into the present and most of these temples are dedicated to Lord Shiva. Many of these temples are built around the sacred Bindu Sagar, a lake, which according to legend was formed 'by collecting a drop from all the sacred waters of India' (1994:4).

Bhubaneswar is one of the few places in India which have archaeological remains starting from the earliest period till the end of the Hindu rule. Even though old

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[3] Panigrahi, Krishna Chandra, *Archaeological Remains,* pp. 164-166. The date of completion of the temple remains controversial and has been differently described from c. A.D. 600 TO 1000. Also see Kanwar Lal, *Temples and Sculptures*, p. 68; W.W Hunter, A History of Orissa, vol.I, edited by N.K Sahu (Calcutta: Sushil Gupta Ltd., 1956), p. 90.

Bhubaneswar was never the political capital of the region, along with Puri (where the temple of Jagannath is located), it served as one of the twin religious centers for the Hindus.The city's makeup varied with Buddhism, Jainism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism, religions which found an abode in Bhubaneswar during different times, with the changing dynasties of Kalinga (the ancient name for Odisha). The presence of all these religions gave Bhubaneswar its present sacred character (Kalia 1994).

Along with these expressions of dominant Hinduism, many innovations and inventions regarding religion were seen in Odisha, the primary ones being the Mahima Dharma which emerged as a reaction to brahmanical Hinduism and the cult of Jagannath which had tribal origins but was later encompassed within the larger, dominant Hindu framework.With regard to Hindu religious thought, the notion of the four *Yugas* elucidates the idea that there is a progressive degeneration of in morality in each succeeding epoch. This bestows on each era, such distinctive qualities that make a change of *Yuga* as much as a new beginning as a return of the old.

In the 1990s, with the rise in political success of the Hindu right wing parties, vociferous demands were made for a history that was based on what Dube (2007) calls 'a specific, singular construction of the past' (p. 4). Thus a spirited discussion developed between the right wing and 'secular' historians about the authenticity the claims made about the past. Through her work on the cult of Mahima Dharma she brings to fore the innovative reformulations in Hinduism. Mahima Dharma was formed by Mahima Swami, an ascetic, in the 1860s, a time when Odisha was in the grip of a deadly famine. The Mahima Dharma advocated devotion to an all-pervasive, formless Absolute who was equally available to all, as the only path to salvation. True devotion or bhakti made the maker of the universe accessible to everyone. Dube (2007) argues that this simple yet novel message rendered redundant the worship of idols, including that of Jagannath, the chief deity of Hinduism in Odisha.

Mahima Swami preached his message in far-flung tributary territories under the Odia rulers, inhabited mainly by 'low caste, untouchable and indigenous peoples' (2007: 9).

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The mobility and intense detachment of the Swami were further statements against authority and establishment. He initiated both householders and renouncers into his cult. Together with the discarding of idolatry, his message questioned the role of the Brahman as the mediator between Gods and individuals and interrogated the hierarchies that were embedded within caste. The teachings of Mahima Swami threw a lot of challenges to the ritual power of the Hindu order. For example, he flouted the rules of commensality by asking for cooked food from all households.

The force of the message of Mahima Swami was so great that on 1st of March 1881, a small group of men and women from Western Odisha, entered the main temple of Jagannath in Puri and with the purpose of dragging out and burning the images of Jagannth, his brother Balabhadra and his sister Subhadra. The person leading the group had got a message by Mahima Swami (who had died in 1875) in his dream to embark on this mission. This event of attack on the Jagannath temple marked the entry of this new faith into the colonial records as 'a sect of Hindu dissenters' (2007: 9). Thus, the magical aura that comprised a major of the Swami's charisma in the eyes of the disciples was carefully taken out of the records and the belief in his divinity was, instead, attributed to the gullibility on the part of poor and illiterate people.

This highlights, according to Dube, the important role played by power in the creation and legitimization of historical narratives. Dube writes:

> The drive for uniformity and the demand of the legal apparatus for written evidence induced scholarly ascetics to produce authoritative explications and authentic histories of Mahima Dharma. These written texts brought order and homogeneity to divergent tenets open to myriad perceptions by forging tendentious relationships with the Vedantic tradition of Hinduism by marginalizing its complicated relationship with the cult of Jagannath and finally by reformulating Mahima Dharma as a sect that represented that represented the very essence of eternal (*sanatan*), pristine Hinduism. (2007: 12).

In her book 'Divine Affairs: Religion, Pilgrimage and the State in Colonial and Post-colonial India' (2001), Dube explores how the affairs of the Jagannath temple have been affected by the larger political and economic changes taking place in India. In her work she tries an 'ethnographic history of the temple of Jagannath and the town of Puri as a site of pilgrimage' (2001: 6). She elucidates extensively about the legends, myths as well as documents narratives with regard to the beginning of the worship of Jagannath that originally had roots in the tribal religions of India. This was later appropriated by the regional government and also the Indian State as a focus of the already emerging Hindu national self-consciousness. Jagannath was termed as 'juggernaut' by the missionaries owing to the fact that many devotees fell at the wheels of the huge chariots and crushed to death with the objective of finding instant salvation.

Dube also explains how there were conflicts between the colonial administration and the traditional rulers who have always had a saying in the running of the temple affairs. As a result of the colonial intervention the power of the king of Puri weakened. Owing to this, a tussle began between the various ritual specialists to gain power over the running of the temple affairs. As the government began to get involved in the temple administration, it had to come to terms with a secular, bureaucratic institution becoming the protector of the temple. Like many other temples in India, the Jagannath temple also has had its share of discontentment, internal strife and corruption. The British government took notice of these issues and thus, the government involvement became a regular feature in sorting out the internal troubles of the temples, a function that was earlier taken care of by the local king of Puri. This shows how Hinduism, pilgrimage and devotion is also intricately intermeshed with politics of power.

Bhubaneswar: The New Capital

Susan Seymour, in her edited book 'The Transformation of a Sacred Town: Bhubaneswar, India' writes, 'the construction of the new capital in Bhubaneswar has had certain immediate and and irreversible effects upon the city and its environs. Most obviously, is the physical presence of a new planned city that is an administrative,

educational and cultural centre and that has been the impetus for rapid population growth' (1980: 257). Thus, the establishment of a new capital at Bhubaneswar, the temple town in the present district of Khurda after Independence is an important landmark in the history of modern Odisha for two reasons : firstly, the opening of a new urban centre with administrative, educational and cultural institutions and industrial complexes has added a new dimension to the socio-economic and cultural life of Odisha; secondly, the establishment of the new capital in the site of an old capital with extant remains of the past has resulted in the establishment of emotional link between the past and the present. Bhubaneswar, which was the provincial headquarters of emperor Ashoka and the capital of the emperor Kharavela contains the inscriptions of Ashoka, the inscriptions, caves and sculptures of Kharavela, the temples of Sailodbhaba, Bhauma, Somavamsi and Ganga periods along with massive buildings and institutions of a modern period. So, before the construction of the new capital, Bhubaneswar was mainly known for its temples and religious activities. Religion is an area where Western theories about the impact of urbanization and cultural change abound. Despite a decline in temple services and temple rituals, there does not appear to be a decline in religious beliefs and activities in Bhubaneswar area. Miller (1980) in his examination of the monastic orders in Bhubaneswar notes that the traditional relationship between the guru and disciple persists even now and while some monastic orders of the past have declined in terms of their wealth and functions, since the establishment of the new capital, new ones have arisen.

Bhubaneswar was established to shape the city in serving as an administrative centre for the state and has been built as a modern city, designed by German architect Otto Konigsberger in 1948 with wide roads, gardens and parks. The new Bhubaneswar with its modern buildings and extensive infrastructure perfectly complements its historic surroundings. Further, Bhubaneswar also plays an important role as a regional gateway to the Golden Tourist Triangle of Puri, Konark, and Chilika Lake. Its strategic geographic location along the east coast of India, has positioned Bhubaneswar to serve as the gateway to South-east Asia with easy access to existing and emerging ports, petrochemical and steel hubs at Paradeep, Kalinganagar and Gopalpur.

Bhubaneswar is divided into two parts, the Old Town and New Capital. There are several striking contrasts between the New Capital and these other settlements, especially the Old Town. In the Old Town, houses are densely clustered around a set of medieval temples; the most prominent of these, the Lingaraj Temple, is at the town centre along with the communal water tank. A measure of Odisha's conservatism is the attitude of the people toward those who would visit their temples. Although the Odisha temples are important tourist attractions, they remain among the very few Indian temples that do not permit foreigners, including those certified by the Indian authorities to be orthodox Hindus, inside even the outer walls. This rule has persisted, despite national legislation to the contrary and, on occasion, these traditional feelings and the power of those who hold them.

By contrast, the New Capital is laid out in broad intersecting avenues which form neighbourhood blocks on which rows of government quarters were built after the British cantonment model. Large government buildings and a marketplace are at the town centre. In the Old Town, houses are built in a variety of styles, where some houses still have mud floors, thatched roofs, and few houses modern amenities such as running water and electricity. In the New Capital houses follow only a few designs, which vary mostly by number of rooms, and are provided with these amenities. In addition, unlike Old Town houses, most New Capital quarters are surrounded by western-style fenced yards.

The old and new towns differ in population and social structure as well. Old Bhubaneswar is dominated by several sub-castes of Brahman priests who have little formal education but who operate the temples and own much of the surrounding agricultural land. Below them in the rank are a variety of traditional service castes and outcastes with whom the Brahmans are linked by traditional occupational and economic ties. Most Old Town neighbourhoods, or wards, are organized according to caste and kinship patterns. The New Capital, on the other hand, consists mostly of government servants and their families, some of whom form a highly educated bureaucratic elite. New Capital residents in government service are assigned houses on the basis of their rank in the civil service hierarchy. Because official housing was built in response to the

needs of government departments locating there, people live in neighbourhoods that are not organized on caste or kinship principles but that contain a mixture of civil servant levels.

The five neighbouring villages vary in size, wealth, caste, and economic composition. The construction of the New Capital in the late 1940s offered new economic opportunities which left the villagers at the mercy of an environment that gave them alternatively abundance and disaster. Through 1965 Bhubaneswar experienced rapid growth, some of which benefited certain of the villagers. After that year, however, the pace of development slackened and employment opportunities increased. A number of villagers either sold their land or had it taken from them by the government for the construction of the New Capital in exchange for compensation. These people, later faced with considerable economic hardship, had nothing to fall back on.

Finally, squatter colonies and other slum habitations cropped up between the New Capital and the Old Town, on the capital's outskirts, and in adjacent villages. These settlements house much of the New Capital's service population; washermen, rickshaw-pullers, cowherds, sweepers, small tradesmen, manual labourers, and others who cannot find housing in the New Capital, the Old Town, or the villages. The squatter colonies closest to the New Capital are periodically obliterated by the government by means of slum clearance operations, but they usually reappear soon afterwards because the services of their residents are still needed by the New Capital's populace.

With the completion of four-laning of the highway between Bhubaneswar and Puri, the latter town will become part of the same urban complex. Every year on an average 5000 housing units are being added. As a result of expansion of housing, Bhubaneswar has expanded towards Khurda, Pipili and Cuttack and high rise apartments have come up. The slum population of Bhubaneswar now nearly three lakhs, has increased because of migration of people from rural areas in search of job and livelihood. Slums have developed in open spaces as well as on the sides of roads. In the words of Biju Patnaik, the former Chief Minister, "Bhubaneswar is a poor man's town. Keeping the poverty of

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Odisha in mind, it was not to be a grandiose town like Chandigarh. Its potential was limited by the poverty of the people and the imagination of planners" (as cited in Kalia 1994: 196).

Bhubaneswar, the administrative headquarters of the State is fast becoming its culture capital with dance, and music festivals, seminars, workshops and exhibitions being organised throughout the year. As a result of all this, the capital's ancient heritage, along with its present cultural activities has made it the major tourist destination of the State.

The city of Bhubaneswar is subdivided into units, each with a high school, shopping centers, dispensaries and play areas. While most of the units house government employees, Unit V houses the administrative buildings, including the State Secretariat, State Assembly, and the Raj Bhavan. Private residential areas were later built in other areas of the planned city, including Saheed Nagar and Satya Nagar. Unit I, popularly known as the Market Building, was formed to cater to the shopping needs of the new capital's residents. Later, markets and commercial establishments developed along the Janpath and Cuttack-Puri Road at Saheed Nagar, Satya Nagar, Bapuji Nagar and Ashok Nagar. A dedicated institutional area houses educational and research institutes, including Utkal University, the Institute of Physics, the Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology and Sainik School are located in the unit.

The added areas are mostly areas lying north of National Highway 5, including Nayapalli, Jayadev Vihar, Chandrasekharpur and Sailashree Vihar, which were developed by Bhubaneswar Development Authority to house the growing population.

But even today, Bhubaneswar remains popular for its temples. Along with old shrines like Lingaraj, Mukteshwar, Rajarani, Brahmeshwar, Kedaragouri and others many modern temples and religious institutions have come up. The most important of modern temples are the Ram Mandir, the Radhakrushna temple (established by Kalpataru Seba Sangha of Kendrapada), known as Baya Math, ISKCON, Shiridi Sai temple of Tankapani Road. There are also many unauthorized temples on the sides of roads. Besides the Hindu

temples, churches, a mosque and a gurudwara have been established. Bhubaneswar has a modern Buddha Vihar and a Jain temple. Ramakrishna Math, situated in old Bhubaneswar is an important religious institution, associated with the famous Ramakrishna Mission. One of the relatively newer *mandirs* is the massive religious institution, called Satsang Vihar, built by the followers of Thakur Anukulchandra.
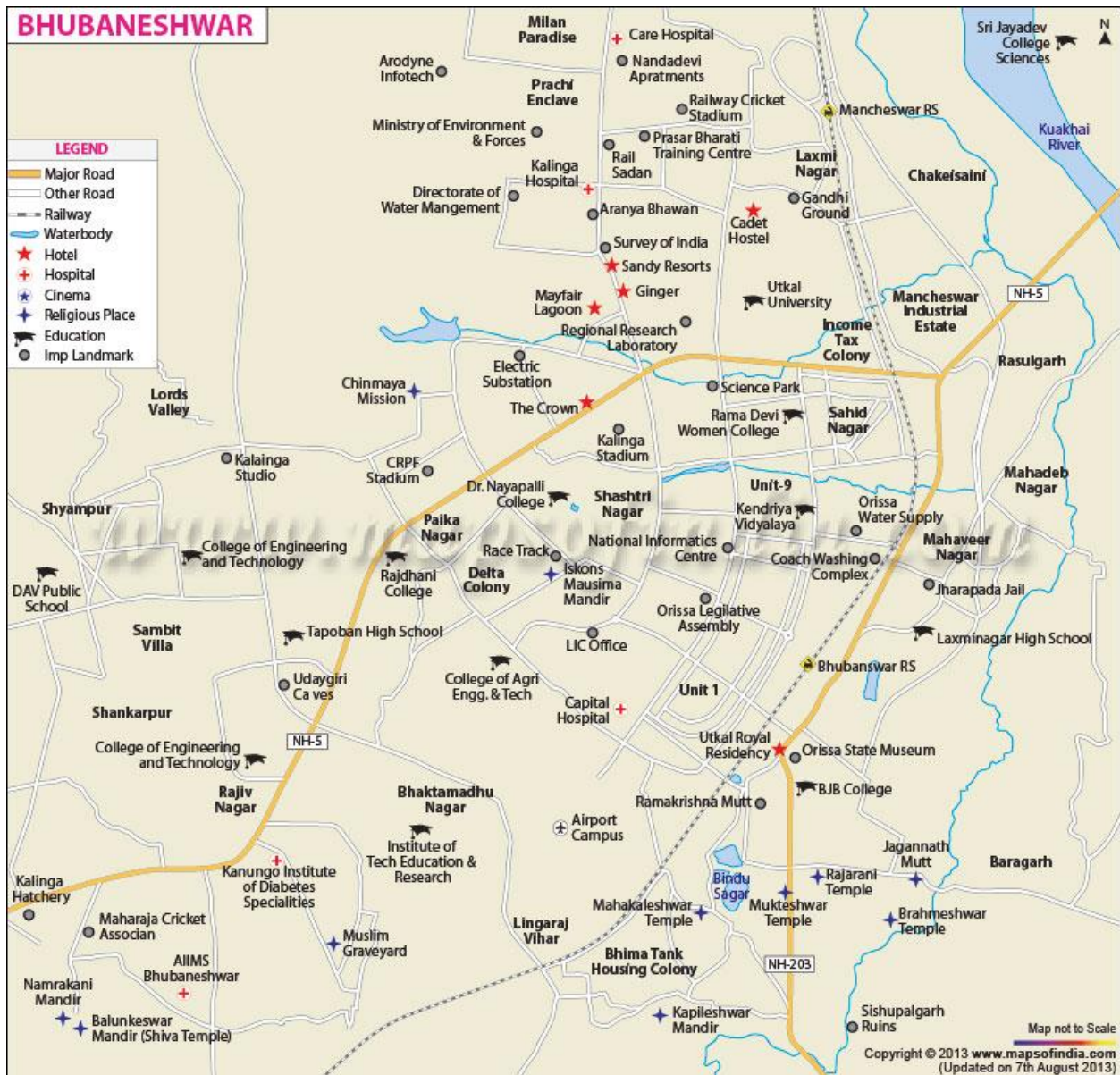
The Satsang Vihar in Bhubaneswar is located along the National Highway 5 (Kolkata-Chennai). It lies adjacent to the Income tax colony. The Satsang Mandir is 4 kilometers away from the Railway Station and 10 kilometers away from airport. Its 0.2 km away from the Kolkata- Chennai Highway. The all white huge temple attracts attention of all who pass by that stretch. After its inauguration in 1996, the fact that the devotees had named it Sri Mandir triggered a huge controversy with a large section of Hindus and priests at the Jagannath temple taking offence saying the epithet Sri Mandir is applicable to only Sri Jagannath temple in Puri and cannot be arrogated by any other temple, old or modern.

Satsang Vihar, Bhubaneswar

The temple architecture appears to be very interesting. It is surrounded by high walls and fronted with towering gates. Both the front and back gates remain open and are guarded by security personnel. The Satsang Vihar consists a huge marble building, with a series of steps which lead to the biggest room that has been installed with a huge marble statue of Thakur Anukulchandra in the sitting position, where the morning and evening prayers and *bhajan* are held. The walls of this room are also adorned with various pictures of the Thakur.

Smaller rooms of the building are dedicated to his wife, where mostly discourses, sermons on the teachings of Thakur and also talks on *Matru-sammelani* (congregation of mothers) are held. The ashram also consists of residences where the permanent residents are put up. There is also a guest house for visitors who come from other parts of the state. The ashram also consists of a library and several small offices which provide supervision over work and administer the paperwork. What makes the ashram effective as a social and economic organization is not any special technique of administration but a spirit of collective ownership and a sense of common destiny. The members of the community are the joint owners of the community through a legal trust. But their guru ultimately 'owns' it. Individuals live and work there at his behest and partake in its ownership only through their relationship with the Thakur.

In Bhubaneswar, the big political patrons of the Satsang establishment has been former Union and state minister Kanhu Charan Lenka of the Congress Party and former state minister (late) Batakrushna Jena, also belonging to the Congress Party. The Congress was in power when the Satsang Vihar in Bhubaneswar was taking shape. The foundation of the Satsang Vihar in Bhubaneswar was laid in 1978 by Thakur Anukulchandra's eldest son Amarendra Nath Chakravarty also known as *Borda*. The Satsang Vihar was constructed under the supervision of Thakur Anukulchandra's grandson Ashok Chakravarty popularly known as Sri Dada and was inaugurated by him in the year 1996.

In the recent years many temples have been built by the devotees of the Thakur across Odisha but the biggest is in Bhubaneswar, the state capital where the majority of the population is drawn from rural areas of the state. This is a very significant point as these people are deeply rooted in religion and rural culture and continue to observe traditional rites, rituals and festivities despite being part of the urban milieu and maintain close ties with their respective villages. These people form the mainstay of the sect.

Profile of the *guru*: Thakur Anukulchandra

Founders and reformers of religions like Thakur Anukulchandra are very often described as possessing a mysterious aura of personality called 'charisma' (Weber 1964 [1922], 1965 [1922]). This term, in fact, is considered standard in the language of social sciences and it stands for a certain type of social authority, which is based on personal qualities and capabilities instead of those rights and privileges that are endowed institutionally (cf. Eisenstadt 1968). It specially denotes such an authority that is founded upon some kind of mystical or religious beliefs with regards to the person in question.

Thakur's devotee and biographer Ray A. Hauserman (1962) in his book 'Ocean in a Teacup' writes about him:

> I concentrated only on the remembered experiences of those older people who
> had actually known Thakur since his early days. But here again, confusion held

full sway. According to the individual relating the story, Thakur could emerge as a gifted child, or the victim of an Oedipus complex ... as understood or misunderstood ... as a strong-willed child or an excessively humble one ... as a scientist, or doctor, or inventor ... as a common-sense prophet or a mystic. (1962: 5-6)

To comprehend an event or a phenomenon in a holistic manner, it is essential to find the various means which are required to depict the patterns in which the historical events in question are arranged, and through this one can begin to grasp the nature of the structure. White (1978) in his essay explains that in structuralism one can find the possibility to understand holistically a phenomenon and also describe succession and interrelation in an accurate manner so as to know the event in the simplest manner as well as in a more general way. There are two characteristic features that are common to structuralism. Firstly, is the principle of intrinsic intelligibility. This feature is based on the supposition that a structure is sufficient in itself and does not have the need for unfamiliar conceptual elements for its understanding. Secondly, it is presumed that when the means for efficiently understanding a structure has been found then it is possible to compare it to other structures and find out certain universal characteristics which all the structures have inspite of their diversity. An elementary understanding is that a structure is a system of transformations. These transformations seem to function in accordance with the laws that are present within every system that preserve and enhance themselves without reaching an end outside their own boundaries.

White (1978) goes on to elucidate that transformations mentioned above can again be divided into three kinds: first is totality wherein every discrete element contained inside a structure determines, and is in turn determined by, the whole in relation to which it is observed. Therefore, in all the structures, a relationship is implied. These relationships are dynamic in nature rather than being static. Thus, it can be inferred that structure also involves change or transformation. Changes emphasize on the transformations that are formed inside the structure. These changes occur according to certain rules, so, if a law is identified that functions in a structural process, it will be easier to comprehend the functioning of the structure. Lastly, self-regulation refers to the modes by which

structures are able to retain stability as well as their special features even though there always is a capacity for innovation. Thus, structures are also self-regulating.

From the aforementioned, it follows that it is necessary to put across a theory of historical religious interpretation along the lines of ascertaining structuralist transformations. Since it is difficult to delimit the boundary of what represents datum in the historical sense or the most rudimentary structural item, the point of departure would be a set of expressions employed by Gerardus van der Leeuw (1986), who endeavors to establish that one cannot detach the process of discerning historical religious phenomena from the phenomena themselves and that the primary structural element, so far as the history of religions is concerned, is an object related to a subject and a subject related to an object[4]. The object is the thing that one captures, the subject is oneself. In considering the character of a modern Indian religious expression that could be called the Anukulchandra movement, it can be inferred that it came out of a complex and intricate set of relations that includes structures passed on from the early history of India, as well as from the immediate circumstances and events in the recent past.

Thakur Anukulchandra (1888-1969), a physician, a guru and the founder of Satsang Ashram, was born as Anukulchandra Chakravarty in Himaitpur to Sivachandra Chakravarty and Monmohini Devi in Himaitpur village of Pabna district of British India which is now in Bangladesh.

Pabna district first formed in 1832, was placed under a Joint-Magistrate and Deputy-Collector; and it was not until the year 1859 that it became a separate administrative unit. In the published statistics of the Board of Revenue for 1868-69, the estimated population of Pabna District, which then included the subdivision of Kumirkhili, was estimated at 337,679. But the Census of the population, taken by order of Government in 1872, showed that Pabna district, with an area of 1966 square miles, then had a population of

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[4] Mircea Eliade, whose extensive writings especially in the subject area of history of religions have demonstrated the embedded structuralism of religious expressions seen as systems of symbols, should also be noted in this connection, particularly in *Patterns in Comparative Religion* and in *From Primitives to Zen* (London: Collins, 1967)

12,11,594 people inhabiting 198,220 houses, and 2,792 villages. Pabna was one of the few districts which had a preponderance of the Muslim population. B.B Hunter in 'Statistical Accounts of Bengal (1876) writes,

> With the exception of the four Districts of Bogra, Rajshahi, Noakhali, and Chittagong, Pabna contains a larger proportion of Muhammadans than any other District within the jurisdiction of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. The Muhammadans number 847,227, or 69.9 per cent, of the total population. Excluding semi-Hinduized aboriginals, the Hindus and persons of Hindu origin number 283,386, or 23.4 per cent, of the inhabitants (1876: 281).

Life of Anukulchandra:

Anukulchandra as a young boy was a student of the high school in Pabna. In 1906, he joined the National Medical School in Calcutta. Anukuchandra as a young medical student in Calcutta first encountered the desperate human needs of destitute and lawless slum dwellers (Hauserman 1962: 182). In 1907, he was married to Saroshi Devi, who was five years younger to him (ibid. 103). It was in 1911 that the medical needs in various parts of India were many and facilities and doctors, especially in the outlying districts, were as good as non-existent. At this point in time, a young Anukul returned home to Himaitpur after completing six years of medical studies and started practicing medicine. Around the time of starting his practice, he encouraged a group of young men to form a religious band and with cymbals, drums and other musical instruments they started singing Bengali devotional songs known as *kirtan* in different neighbourhoods of the village (1962: 181).

Seeing the rise in religious fervour in her son, Monomohini Devi wrote to Sarkar Sahib of Radhasoami Satsang of Dayalbagh in Agra, the successor of Huzur Maharaj, who was his mother's guru and he in turn instructed her to initiate him. Anukulchandra was given initiation by his mother on 7th December 1913. After his initiation, his activities in *kirtan* deepened and went on all through the night. During *kirtan*, he repeatedly fell on the ground and it seemed as if he were dead. But, he used to utter messages in this condition

of trance. His utterances of the first three days have not been recorded. But after the third day, utterances of seventy-two days have been documented (Hauserman 1962:128-129). His going into trance during *kirtan*, delivering holy message during this state of trance and the devotion of those who sang *kirtan* around him attracted the attention of many more people towards him and steadily as a number of people came to settle permanently in his village, his village home was converted into a popular ashram. Gradually, the village of Himaitpur became a thriving community as laboratories, workshops, industries, homes, and schools replaced the jungle (Hauserman 1962).

After this, he assembled a group of dancers and musicians and organized a three-week tour during which they went through numerous towns and villages in and around Himaitpur. This short expedition was so successful that inquiries and demands for such trips started coming into the village of Himaitpur. In order to address this, Thakur along with his most important disciples, Ananta, Kishori, and Goshai, undertook an extensive journey. They crossed the northern branch of the river Padma to Kushtia, relieving people of their sickness by giving out medicine during the day and a dose of religion by night. After spending some time in a place, they moved on to a different town. Wherever they went, they were received with enthusiasm. They covered the districts of Jessore and Mymensingh, Puri in Orissa (Odisha) to Benares in Uttar Pradesh. It can be assumed that in this case music had a similar effect to that of rituals, namely building a bridge between a religious tradition and the members (ibid 141).

The beginning of the twentieth century which saw the growth of the Anukulchandra faith was also a time of major social and political upheavals in the country. The period between 1905 and 1947, there were major communal outbreaks involving the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal. According to Das (1990) while riots and disturbances in Bengal till the 1930s expressed class and communal elements in a complex coexistence, the combination of communal with nationalist and modes of consciousness relating to class in the 1940s culminated into comparatively more prearranged and explicitly communal riots.

Das notes that the Pabna riots in the year 1926 began in Pabna town on the 1st of July as a result of the discovery of 'mutilated images' (1990: 26). Once the hostility and violence extended to the nearby villages, it absolutely took a rural character. The complaints of the Muslim peasant community which came together through religion, found expression during this violence. Every Hindu who was considered affluent and had influence in villages, including, zamindars, jotedars, merchants, became easy targets of the mob's anger. These well-off Hindu businessmen were 'taken to Muslim houses and made to wear *tahaba* and *taj* read *Kalma* and utter *toba*' (1990: 26). As a result of this, the Viceroy and Governor of Bengal were telegraphed for instant intervention and Gurkha and Sikh bodyguards were employed for personal protection. Even though Pabna witnessed the sacrilege of Hindu idols, these were by and large worshipped in houses of the landlords which endowed these acts with a socio-economic element.

In this period, there was an alternation between the emergence and expression of Pan-Islamism and Hindu revivalism, between the expression of dissatifaction among the lower-class, communal antagonism and anti-imperialism. In the process of development of communalism there emerged a scenario where an individual primarily perceived himself or herself from the point of view of religion, as Hindu or Muslim, frequently either before or for the duration of a riot, even as at other points in time, allegiance to class or locality emerged to obscure this explicit communal perception of the self.

Das (1990) further observes that the intensification of Muslim identity corresponded with a rapid growth of Hindu revivalism. In the districts of Pabna and Dacca, *yajnas* (public worship) and *kirtans* (devotional music) were organized to engender unity among the Hindus by the local Hari Sabhas and Arya Dharma Pracharani Sabhas. Organizations such as the Hindu Sabha based in Pabna, which from the time of its inception in 1921-22 were not, for the most part, anti-Muslim from that time onwards became active in teaching its follower on significant communal rights of playing music during religious processions without any hindrances.

The Expansion of the Satsang:

The Satsang of Thakur Anukulchandra was at first registered in 1925 in Pabna as a public charitable institution. After partition of the country in 1947, it was again registered in the Indian Union in the year 1951. Thakur, along with his disciples left Pabna and settled at Deoghar (in present day Jharkhand) on 2nd September 1946. Twenty years after the Satsang came into existence it had a population of eight thousand inhabitants. Thakur's message of 'being and becoming' was being preached throughout Bengal by five hundred *Ritwiks*.The records of the Philanthropy Office showed around a quarter million names of people who had taken initiation and become Thakur's disciples (Hauserman 1962: 290-291).

Thakur Anukulchandra is regarded as an incarnate of God by his followers, in the lineage of all the past prophets, including Ramchandra, Krishna, Lord Buddha, Lord Jesus, Prophet Muhammad, Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramkrishna. He advocated the philosophy of monism. His first wife, Saroshi Devi (also known as Boro Ma) had two sons (Amarendranath Chakravarty, i.e. Boro Da & Vivek Ranjan Chakravarty, i.e. Mejo Da). Thakur married for the second time in 1930 while being still married to his first wife. His second wife Sarbamangala Devi (Chhoto Ma) was the younger sister of his first wife. She had one son, Dr. Pracheta Ranjan Chakravarty (Kajal Da).

After the death of its founder, the Satsang organization of Deoghar witnessed a number of animosities. His eldest son, well-known as *Borda* (Amarendra Nath Chakravarty) was selected to head the organization and also be Thakur's spiritual successor, the Pradhan Acharya of the Satsang, who was thought to derive his spiritual powers from the Thakur. In cases such as these the guru's grace becomes fundamental wherein there can be a wide assortment of experiences but are acknowledged as coming from the same source (Gold, 2012). But his brothers, Vivek Ranjan Chakravarty and Dr. Pracheta Ranjan Chakravarty were not pleased with the ways of their elder brother Amarendranath Chakravarty, and in reaction to this, they set up another Satsang organization with Vivek Ranjan Chakravarty being its President. Later, these two broke up their official alliance.

The original Satsang organization is headed at present by Ashok Chakrabarty, the eldest son of Amarendranath Chakrabarty. Ashok Chakrabarty is known as the *Pradhan acharya*. The organization has almost assumed a hereditary system wherein the eldest son will be the *Pradhan acharya*. This is the way through which the charisma of the leader has been transformed into a more permanent, stable and routinized structure (Weber, 1964).

According to the ideals of the organization, adherence to the guru and the uncompromised practice of following the guidelines that have been laid down are of paramount importance. The special workers of Thakur Anukulchandra are divided into five categories called *Jajak, Adhwarjyu, Saha-Prati-Ritwik, Prati-Ritwik* and *Ritwik*. The latter three are empowered to initiate people in the faith of Thakur Anukulchandra. With the large scale attempts at preaching the ideology of Thakur, this tradition acquired a large number of followers.

The Satsang was registered after independence and partition of India under Societies Registration Act of 1860, the administration of which is vested in an executive committee comprising of not more than 30 members including the President, elected for a period of 3 years by the members of the institution. The advice and wishes of the *Pradhan Acharya* is considered to be most important in all matters related to the management and preservation of the properties of the Satsang.

Presently, there are more than two thousand branches of the Satsang located not only in India but also in Bangladesh, Burma, Europe and America. Satsang vihars (centres) have been set up in different places of India including West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Delhi, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, etc. Besides these Satsang vihars, various schools, charitable hospitals, engineering workshops, a publishing house, and a printing press have also been established in the name of Thakur.

The only book which Anukulchandra wrote was 'Satyanusaran' (The Pursuit of Truth). This was a letter to one of his disciples Atulchandra. However, the conversations of various people with Thakur have been recorded, and his direct sayings have also been compiled. This has given rise to a vast literature of his direct teachings; renowned among these are Satyanusaran, Punyapunthi, Anushruti, Chalar Sathi, Shashvati, Pritibinayak, Adarsh Binayak, Alochana Prasange series, Deeprakkhi series, The Message series, Vigayn Vibhuti, Who Thou The Revolutionary, Vivah Prasange volumes, Vivah Vidhayana volumes etc.[5]

One of the pertinent questions that come to the mind is why has this community of believers increased and thrived over the years? It is a complex question to answer as this tradition is an unusual mix of opposites. On the one hand its leadership is efficient, progressive and international, on the other hand its belief, principles and spiritual practices are esoteric and traditional, stimulating a certain form of spirituality that goes back to medieval Hinduism. This work will explore how this noticeable contradiction is overcome and how a juxtaposition of progressive and traditional modes of thought has facilitated this tradition to flourish in modern times.

In exploring the issue of this tradition's appeal to modern people and their lives, it is necessary to understand how it relates to circumstances and situations of modern life, even though some scholars have rejected the notion of a 'modern personality'.[6] This 'urban, modern personality' forms a pattern of identity that is individualistic, organizational and empirical, and is linked to a cognitive process that Max Weber called rationalization. People in the modern age see themselves as atomistic individuals whose identities are not fundamentally tied to groups and communities; their social relationships, especially in their work, are what Ferdinand Tonnies has described as

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[5] http://satsang.org.in/index.php?p=satsang Accessed on 24th February, 2017

[6] Mary Douglas has disagreed with most of the characterizations of a modern persons because they stereotype pre-moderns, some of whom are 'as mobile, footloose and uncommitted as any modern academic' (The Effects of Modernization on Religious Change,' *Daedalus* 111, no. 1 [Winter, 1982]: 18

conducive to organization (*Gesellschaft*) rather than to community (*Gemeinschaft*)[7] and they seek objective, observable verification of things that they regard as true. This is the kind of outlook that most people would describe as 'scientific' extending a mode of analysis from the natural order into the domain of social and personal truths.

As modernity is a view of reality, it has often come into conflict with other worldviews, especially those provided by religion. This conflict is clearly visible in the European history, where modernity replaced a medieval view of reality in which the Church was the organizing principle of the society and the mysteries of the natural and social order were described in terms of workings of God. Even though religion did not disappear from Europe with the rise of modernity, it did change. Over the course of the last few centuries, new forms of Christianity have developed in response which mostly fall somewhere between the extremes of traditionalism and reform.

There are a number of theoretical schemes to examine new religious movements. Definitions of key concepts have been improvized, reinterpreted, and disputed at length. But ambiguities in examining these movements continue to persist. For example, many new religious bodies are created by schisms, i.e., they split from other religious organizations. These new religions are generally known as sects. But there are several other new religious organizations that do not come into being as a result of ruptures. Rather, they become symbols of religious innovation. In such a case a person has a new kind of religious insight and engages others to the novel faith. These new religions frequently are also known as sects. But a theory which tries to give explanation about why splits in religious groups take place might have nothing to state about religious novelty. So the question arises, can these be called religious movements? How can these be identified?

According to Bainbridge and Stark (1979), sects and cults are both 'deviant religious bodies, i.e. they are in a state of relatively high tension with their surrounding socio-

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[7] Ferdinand Toennies, *Community and Society*, trans. and intro. Charles P. Loomis (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1957). These categories have been subsequently refined by social theorists.

cultural environment'. But generally, sects have a previous connection with another religious organization. In order to be considered as a sect, it is necessary that a religious movement should have been founded by such a person who left another religious organization in order to start a sect. Sects maintain that they are the genuine, purged, renewed version of the faith from which they broke off. Cults, with some exception noted below, are not related to another recognized religious body in the society in question. The cult might signify an external religion, or it might have started in the host society, through innovation (1979: 124-25).

Explained further by Bainbridge and Stark (1979) whether examined in terms of being domestic or imported, a cult is generally considered new in relation to other religious associations of the society. If domestic, it does not matter how much of the 'common religious culture' it holds on to. But the cult brings additions to that culture in form of novel revelation and insight, thus validating its claim of being new, different and more evolved. On the other hand, imported cultures generally have little or nothing in common with the various existing faiths of that society. Even though they are considered old in another society, but for the importing society they become novelties. Therefore, cults signify 'an independent religious tradition of a society' (ibid 125). The expression 'cult' sometimes becomes tricky to be used from an academic point of view as it popularly bears such value connotations which seem to make a 'new' or so called 'deviant' religion bad and malevolent. The expression 'new religious movement' is generally preferred in academic circles, as the term 'cult' is seen as pejorative and the former as more neutral (Harper, 1982; Gallagher, 2007; Melton, 2004).

In the West, the tenets of Roman Catholicism were organized with the church being its centre. The Protestant Reformation countered this hegemony and within the Protestantism, many sects came into being which were opposed to the dominant and overbearing church. As a result of this confrontation, the church and sects, in the West, might be seen as antipodal. But so far as Indian religions are considered, the church was never central to it (Venugopal, 1990). When religious persecutions disillusioned and embittered European societies, such incidents were more or less absent in India. So, the

reformist sects here do not flourish on martyrdom as they did not involve a radical break or confrontation with a central doctrine nor withdrew from it. On the contrary, reformist sects generally stayed attached to a mainstream religion and didn't wholly break ties (ibid. 78)

Thus it becomes apparent that the religious responses to a new and modern perspective on reality took quite a few centuries to evolve in America and Europe. In case of India, the clash involving a traditional and a modern worldview is more recent. It has primarily arose during the nineteenth century but the kind and range of reactions to it is more or less similar as seen in the West. Right wing Hindus such as the Shankaracharya of Puri are strongly in opposition to the social outcomes of the foreign Western influence, whereas some other Hindu intellectuals like Swami Vivekananda have come up with more progressive styles of religion, which they regarded as more suitable for modern tastes.

Statement of the Problem:

Most of the studies of *gurus* in India generally deal, with the internal workings and dynamics of a particular guru organization chosen for study, almost completely (see, for instance, Babb 1986; Carter 1987, 1990; Coney 1999; Juergensmeyer 1991; Kakar 1984; Knott 1986; Swallow 1982; Williams 1984). Such studies focus on those characteristics of guru faith as the context in which it emerged, the historical narrative, socio-political background of the concerned organization, hagiographies of the founding guru, institutional structure, the practices and philosophy it advocates, the ways in which the followers of the faith are socialized into the group. Followers are generally thought of as members of the group thus clearly marking out who are to be considered as 'insiders' and who as 'outsiders'.

But this kind of approach does not tackle with the larger social perspective within which the guru organizations function. It does not address the questions of how and why individuals seek out gurus, what motivates them and how do they adapt or change their

former ways into the new ways of the organization, how they engage with the guru's philosophy and teachings, how are issues of religion, secularism, modernity dealt with. With regard to an individual's religiosity, self-identity, ideas and actions are greatly influenced by the social context. According to Meredith McGuire (1997), one must regard 'meaning and belonging' as similar issues while attempting to comprehend why people turn religious. People not only search for meaningfulness in their lives, but also seek out a sense of community and belonging. It is quite possible that while one person might want to seek God alone, another might be attracted towards the religious community, with or without giving thought to the philosophical message. Still, both of these aspects generally are closely inter-connected and in turn reinforce one another. When people share a faith that is familiar, they frequently are attracted to be with people who are like-minded. This sense of belonging has a propensity to strengthen the authority and integrity of their religious universe.

Another important aspect while studying guru faiths is that of gender. In the last couple of decades, numerous studies have been conducted with regard to gender and religion. The different ways in which men and women and their roles are perceived is diverse within the sacred texts of various world religions. But the subject matter of women and religion is not only confined within the sacred texts and symbols, but to real, actual lives. How are the religious experiences of women different than that of men? What do these sacred texts say about women? What and how are symbols of femininity and masculinity perceived? These become important questions as people participate in religious organizations as women and men. Organisations produce and maintain such structures that reproduce gendered relations (Furseth and Repstad, 2006).

In studies relating to women and religion, many scholars have examined religious organizations and how the roles of women differ within diverse religious communities. Some of the relevant questions that arise are to what degree women participate in religious practices and rituals? Are positions of authority open to them? If yes then which positions do they hold? In cases where women face constraints, what are the negotiating spaces available to them and how do they carve them out? Another important matter is,

what are various processes through which devotees pick and choose the means by which they retain or give up certain features of their adherences as they move through contemporary India's expanding landscape of spirituality?

In trying to comprehend a worldview different from one's own, it is necessary to take into serious consideration the perspective of people who hold such a view as examining a perspective which is different requires a sort of translation from another's frame of reference to our personal frame of reference. So it is not desirable to limit ourselves only to historical factors which led to the growth and expansion of a certain tradition or to the social conditions that influenced people to connect with it. It becomes imperative to study that culture which has been constructed and also the social and spiritual vision which makes it catches the attention of those who join it. Here my attempt is to comprehend the view of reality as expounded by Thakur Anukulchandra in context of the contemporary time not just as an expression of socio-cultural factors but also as a point of view that makes sense in its own terms. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1959) argues that the most appropriate subject of religious studies is 'the religious life' of a community that knits together the various literary, social and psychological ways in which that religious life is manifest[8].

In this approach to thinking, religion is not as much as a thing, a set of principles or an organizational structure but mostly a way of seeing the world. It is as Clifford Geertz (1973) says in regard to all forms of culture, a 'context' for understanding 'social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes' (1973: 14). So the context and language become important in understanding a tradition in a phenomenological way. All this also point towards the question intrinsic to the study of religion: does religion point to a special, ultimate aspect of reality or is it just a particular way of thinking and talking about the everyday world? The leaders of the Anukulchandra tradition often seem to be describing and perhaps even creating significant areas of reality, yet at other times they seem to be

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[8] See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither- and Why? In Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagwa, eds., *History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 37. He further says 'The student is making effective progress when he recognizes that he has not to do with religious systems basically but with religious persons...'

providing a context for perceiving what is real in the ordinary world. My attempt here is to explore the aspects of charisma in the present-day, spiritual quest among men and women and guru choice in contemporary India.

Data Sources and Methodology

In the light of theories, methods help to construct, collect and produce data for scholarly work. Data are not simply 'out there', independent of the observer and the observation. There are no data without methods and theories. Methods help us to analyze reality but, at the same time, they, in part, produce the data that are to be analyzed. Methodology refers both to general technical issues regarding methods (sample selection, data collection and analysis), and to the theory and conceptualization of methods (Strausberg 2011).

The proposed study has used the qualitative approach. It has been conducted with the help of both primary and secondary data. For the collection of primary data, methods of participant observation, informal interview and snowball sampling were used. The respondents included mostly the lay devotees along with some satsang vihar administrators. The units of analysis were the individuals, the group (organization) and social artifacts (books, newsletters, magazines). Regular field visits were done during the period of 2014 to 2016 in order to participate in religious and cultural events and lectures of the satsang in order to understand and examine the world of Thakur Anukulchandra's faith.

Analysis of religious and other publicity material has been used in order to explore the issues of representation of charisma and guru devotion. Such material includes:

1. Thakur Anukulchandra's own works
    - Translations and commentaries of his sayings
    - Other books
    - Recorded and transcribed messages, conversations and interviews

2. Historical works

    - Official biography of Thakur Anukulchandra

    - Other historical works

3. Published and unpublished works of disciples

4. Miscellaneous works

My approach in this work has been ethnographic. 'Ethnography' can be understood in many different ways. Most of the time, it is equated with a method of research wherein the researcher becomes a participant in the daily lives of the people for an extended period of time. In this case, ethnography becomes a method of collecting data through 'participant observation' (Agar 1980: 114; Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 2). In studying a culture, it is important to take into account, examine and understand what people say, what they do, what are the expressions and things they use (Spradley 1980: 5). So, ethnography describes a particular culture through focusing on people, their manners, activities and artefacts.

Through the method of observation, I sought to understand religious phenomena by observing and reflecting on what people do. The focus was mostly on observable activities, actual events and practice, along with what texts, preachers or even 'ordinary' participants assert people ought to do. A survey questionnaire was prepared and basic information of about 120 devotees was gathered regarding their socio-economic details and their association with the *Satsang*. On the basis of the information 48 in depth interviews were conducted. The interviews were semi-structured. They started with specific themes and issues but remained open for new questions to come up. This opened a window to understand and interpret people's thoughts, beliefs, ideas and conceptions.

To supplement my understanding of Thakur and his teachings, hagiographies and biographies written by devotees have been extensively used. The choice of using these as the source material is because these works offer access into the social situations which are no directly observable anymore, i.e., the intimate conversations and interactions of the charismatic guru with his followers during different periods of his life and career. All the

writers are devotees; they are not disenchanted ex-devotees or just casual associates. One of the most cited biographies of Thakur Anukulchandra is Ray Hauserman's 'Ocean in a Teacup' (1962) in which Hauserman traces the life of Thakur from his childhood in Pabna to the establishment of the *satsang* in Deoghar. 'An Integral Philosophy of Life' (1980) written by Prafulla Kumar Das is the English version of the book '*Akhanda Jiban Darshan'* and this book presents the different aspects of the ideology of Anukulchandra. Rebati Mohon Biswas's book 'The New Light from the East' (1980 [1982]) is based on his Ph.D. thesis 'Dharma, The Upholder of existence as conceived by Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra' and deals with the concept of *dharma* as explicated by Thakur and says that the aim of the book is to '…propagate Thakur's doctrine of *Dharma* all through the world…' (Preface). Another work by Biswas, 'The Guide: An humble approach to the life of Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra' (1981) shows the life of Thakur as a guru and guide, his life and teachings.

Some other biographies include 'Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra' (1966 [1939] by Brajagopal Datta Ray, 'Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra' (1976 [1925]) by Satishchandra Joardar, 'Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra: Pabna to Deoghar' (n.d) by Rajendranath Majumder, 'The Living Ideal' (1977) by Kerry Brace and 'The Latest Revelation in the East' (1987) by Rabindranath Sarkar. 'Providential Prose' (2010) by Buddhadev Chakraborty is a collection of articles by the author that deal with the subject of Thakur's personality, his ideology, the history of Satsang, etc. 'Sri Sri Thakur Anukulchandra: the man who knew my mind and loved me the most' (2010) by Sushil Ranjan Das is a collection of articles that deal with the authors experiences with Thakur Anukulchandra. Recent works dealing with the teachings of Thakur as well as biographies include Manilal Chakraborty's 'Thakur Anukulchandra: A brief on a marvellous personality' (2014), Krishnalal Chatterji's 'The Guiding Light: A Treatise on Thakur Sree Sree Anukul Chandra' (2010), 'Benign Lord' (2012) by Arun Ganguli and Kerry Brace. All these works show Anukulchandra as a gifted and charismatic figure.

Exploring 'Charisma'

Traditionally, those persons who were believed to be bestowed with religious "power", have been discussed under the term 'charisma'. This term 'charisma' was originally drawn from the New Testament wherein the expression was employed to refer to the "gift of grace." It was the proof of having obtained the Holy Spirit, as manifest in the capability for prophesies, to cure sickness or to speak in tongues. This can also be observed in the case of Thakur Anukulchandra who, after his initiation in the year 1913 went into trance and used to speak in tongues. This phenomenon acted as a catalyst and attracted a lot of followers. It was during this time that the Thakur's fame grew as a spiritual leader.

Thakur Anukulchandra can be understood in terms of what Weber called a 'prophet', i.e, an individual bearer of charisma. The prophet uses his influence and powers by virtue of his personality and declares distinct revelations. He also has certain specific doctrines at the heart of his mission. According to Weber, prophets frequently practice divination in addition to miraculous healing and counseling. Thakur Anukulchandra's profession as a doctor, his speaking in tongues in a state of trance as well as his advice and guidance to his followers helped him secure a position as a religious leader. As Weber says, 'the prophet may be an exemplary man who, by his personal example, demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation' (1965 [1922]: 55).

So, by means of personal examples, the prophet persuades his followers, who crave for salvation, advising them the same path through which he had negotiated. The prophet presents 'a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude towards life' (ibid. 59). The followers or disciples are expected to organize their practical behavior into such a direction of life that gives it a coherent significance. In other words, exemplary prophets try to provide to their disciples a model way to live life which can be followed by them in order to achieve a greater height of personal merit. In cases where the prediction of the prophet turns out to be successful, he

gains a set of lifelong followers or disciples. In this way a religious community comes into being as a consequence of routinization.

In the 'Theory of Social and Economic Organization' (1964), Weber tries to elucidate how power comes to be viewed as legitimate by the people who become subject to it. As soon as power is seen as legitimate, the persons who have this power are believed to have authority. According to Weber, there are three kinds of authority: rational, traditional, and charismatic. In contrast to traditional, rational, or legal heads who are appointed or elected through existing rules and traditions, a leader who is considered charismatic is chosen by his followers in the belief that he has been gifted extraordinarily, and his authority, founded upon charismatic grounds, rests on loyalty and devotion to the outstanding sacredness, heroism, or exemplary personality of the person. His authority also rests upon the normative examples that are divulged or ordained by him.

Weber defines charisma as;

> The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but areregarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader …What is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his 'followers' or 'disciples' (ibid.358-359).

While explaining his concept of charisma, Weber also recognized the significance of the leader's validation by his followers. So in this way, if a charismatic relationship is to exist, it is necessary for the charismatic person to establish a relationship which has to be submitted to by his followers as a result of their belief the leader's extraordinary qualities.

In the view of the fact that the leader has to be re-approved continuously, he requires his followers and this dependent relationship between the leader and his followers is

complicated, as he doesn't wait for them to recognize his qualities but views it as their job to recognize this as these followers have been 'called to a charismatic mission' (ibid. 359). Since the leader is competent to evoke a sense of belief among his followers, he can thus demand obedience. So charismatic leaders do not wait passively for recognition by their followers, but instead demand it.

Both psychological and sociological elements have been used by Weber in his characterization of charisma. He defined charisma (1922: 48, 1968 reprint) as a 'certain quality of an individual's personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities'. This orientation towards charisma that is individual and psychological supports the popular notion which considers chsrisma originating from a dynamic, internal strength of the leader's personality.

Sociologically, charisma according to Weber is a kind of authority that relies upon the acknowledgment of it by a group of people. In this regard, Weber explained, "It is the recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a 'sign' or proof, originally always a miracle, and consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader" (1922a: 49). Thus, leaders are dependent on the perception of people for validation of their charismatic authority, nevertheless they should also be exceptional to be identified as charismatic (Willner & Willner, 1975: 79).

It is also very important to understand the difference between charisma and charismatic leadership. Even though there can be various kinds of charismatic leaders displaying a wide array of behavior, charisma is restricted to a certain kind of authority relationship that can be observed between the leaders and their followers. Willner and Willner's (1965) definition of charisma captures well this distinction. According to them, the concept of charisma can be redefind "without departing from Weber's intrinsic intention- as a leader's capacity to elicit from a following deference, devotion and awe toward himself as the source of authority. A leader who can have this effect upon a group is

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charismatic for that group" (1965: 79). Therefore, for Willner and Willner, charisma can be described as that kind of authority relationship which comes up when a leader through a set of dynamic teachings, an exceptional personality, or both brings out responses of awe, devotion and reverence from a group of people.

While categorizing the unique personalities who are charismatic is quite difficult as the styles of these leaders vary from frenzy-creating teachers to calm, meditative sages. A range of individual styles that reveals competence for charismatic leadership can comprise approaches and tactics such as oratory skills, making use of of simile and metaphor, reference to myth and history, certain gestures, employing rituals, handling crises properly, and dealing with anxieties of people (Willner & Willner, 1965: 83). But in spite of the numerous personal styles, the instructions of a religious, charismatic leader should deal with the critical apprehensions of a group of people. Clifford Geertz (1966) articulates that meaning, morality, and suffering are the three points as a result of which chaos pressures to break upon a person, and whichever religion wishes to survive must provide solutions in order to cope with these issues. Similarly, any religious or charismatic leaders who want their authority to persist over a community of followers should also promote such an ideology to manage these three points where disarray threatens to intrude on the consciousness of an individual.

When a period of drastic and radical social change arises which leads to suffering and dissatisfaction among a section of the populace or a group of people who are at the margins, cut off from the mainstream society, such a phase is normally acknowledged as the typical situation which will give rise to a charismatic (Friedland, 1964; Tucker, 1968; Willner & Willner, 1965; Jones & Anservitz, 1975). Religions which are institutionalized generally have a well developed system and tradition in order to deal with the problems of people regarding the meaning of life. But sometimes, they can be opposed to changes. Even though the consciousness of individuals is more flexible, they might not be able to provide solutions for the ultimate problems that concern them.

On the other hand, charismatic leaders face the problem or the risk of disorder which could be disturbing for a certain section of the community, and are able to resolve this disturbance by devising their own creative answers to the problems concerning the meaning of life. As these problems are widespread among the population, the solutions provided for each of their individual concerns might meet the standards of a lot of people within the same society. As a result, people in the community begin to become aware of the fact that the charismatic leader offers answers to similar problems that had been troubling them. In the case of Thakur Anukulchandra, this can be explored in the light of his life as a medical student spent with coolies and other manual labourers in a slum and the subsequent improvement in their lives through his work and later his work in his village as doctor with 'an intuition' who was personally involved with his patients' mental and physical well-being that cemented his place as a leader.

In its pure form, charismatic authority has a quality which is unfamiliar to the everydayness of the routine structures. The social relationships are deeply personal and based on validation as well as the personal qualities that the charismatic leader has. According to Weber, charismatic authority in its pure form can only be said to exist during the period of its origin. In the later stages, it either becomes traditionalized or rationalized or both (1922: 364). As individuals, charismatic leaders have two important approaches with the help of which they can appeal to their followers: one is their distinctive personal style and second is the content of their philosophy and teaching (Jones & Anservitz, 1975: 1097). After the passing away of the charismatic leaders, the vibrancy of their personality is no longer an important aspect. The extraordinary quality that had resulted from the leaders' confrontation with anarchy dies with them. And what remain are their legacy and their followers. With the leaders now being absent, the quality of their teachings is exposed to various kinds of interpretation and re-interpretation which must pass the test of time in order to survive. While illustrating this critical stage in the life of a new religion's existence, O'Dea (1966: 37) uses the term 'crisis of continuity' which is very similar to what Weber describes as the problem of succession (1922a: 55, 1968 reprint).

According to Weber charisma can be routinized through a pre-selection principle for the successor, choosing of successor through revelation, heredity, etc but this happens at the cost of depersonalization. In case where charisma becomes hereditary, recognition is not given any longer to the charismatic characteristics of the successor, but instead to the authority of the position which the person obtains as a result of hereditary succession. Therefore, this characteristic of charisma does not apply any longer to an extraordinary individual but instead it becomes a quality which can be reassigned or acquired, or becomes attached to a position in case of an organizational setting, which adds to its bureaucratic qualities.

So far as the two works of Weber are concerned, there is a minor departure with regard to the meaning of the term 'charisma'. In 'The Sociology of Religion' (1965 [1922]) he considers that the idea of 'charisma' can be perceived as a religious or magical power which is associated with certain kinds of objects, animals or persons. In his 'The Theory of Social and Economic Organization' (1964 [1922]) stress is given to persons who are considered as leaders.

Talcott Parsons and Peter Berger have different views so far as Weber's notion of the prophet as a person who radically challenges and breaks the prevalent societal norms and institutions is concerned. They find this idea misleading and instead offer their own explanations. Parsons (1964: xiv) is critical of Weber's methodology of ideal type for its predisposition of atomizing various characteristics instead of seeing interconnections among them. This kind of atomization gives rise to typological rigidity that exemplifies the prophet as someone who breaks with the tradition. Berger (1963:950) explains that a few of the historical data on which Weber relied for deriving his conceptions were found to be erroneous. He concludes by giving the example of prophets of Israel who were more attachment with the institutional systems of the society than it was formerly presumed by the religious and historical scholarship. Thus, it is possible for the prophet to emerge from institutions of the society and not be located principally outside of the conventional institutional order.

In his essay 'Charisma, Order and Status', Edward Shils (1965) expands the scope of the term 'charisma'. He argues that charisma be seen in modern societies too and also non-personal social bodies like permanent and stable social structures such as postions, institutions and organizations. His treatment of charisma is like a metaphysical quality that is connected to what is considered as the society's centre. In its everyday life, it can be regarded as a universal and regular social feature of every society. While in the view of Weber charisma was perceived fundamentally as a revolutionary force, Shils views that it can be seen as more of a common, regular and everyday functioning of the society and it might not necessarily always be unsettling for the society.

In Shils contention, Weber 'did not consider the more widely dispersed . . . operation of the charismatic element in [a] . . . rational-legal [system] of authority' (Shils, 1965:202), and he is of the view that 'that an attenuated, mediated, institutionalized charismatic propensity is present in the routine functioning of society' (Shils, 1965:200). Such a propensity is apparent in attributing 'charismatic properties to ordinary secular roles, institutions ... and strata ... of persons' (Shils, 1965:200). According to Shils, this inclination is an expression of man who requires stability and order that propels him to see charisma in such roles, positions or institutions which for him are fundamental in the formation or alteration of order. Apparently, these positions inspire and motivate in man a feeling of 'awe-arousing centrality', as they are able to give rise to an order that provides 'continuity, coherence and justice.' The more powerful the positions, the more influence they are able to exert on the order and as a result they get to have more charisma attributed. From this, it follows that when the power is greater, all the people or organizations who are in possession of it, will have charisma attributed to them: 'Corporate bodies-secular, economic, governmental, military, and political-come to possess charismatic qualities simply by virtue of the tremendous power concentrated in them' (Shils, 1965:207). And thus 'in the rational-legal system… charisma… is dispersed… throughout the hierarchy of roles and rules…It is inherent in the massive organization of society' (Shils, 1965:205-206). The only qualifying attribute is, efficient power 'must also appear to be integrated with a transcendent moral order' (Shils, 1965:207).

Shils contends that, the conception of charismatic attribution contains within it an element of generating feelings of awe and reverence. These two aspects of awe and reverence are called upon by social objects such as people, institutions or symbols which are helpful to comprehend man's condition and state of being in the universe and help to cope up with the pressures of social life. Shils treatment of charisma is in terms of the important human requirement for meaning and order that gives rise to a human tendency to acknowledge and legitimize charismatic leadership. This approach concentrates on charisma as an essential part of each 'normal' society and not as an occurrence that is linked only to agitated points in time such as crises or revolutions.

Thus, for Shils, the intimate inter-connection between charisma and center of powers is embedded in the fact that the two are concerned with continuation of stability and order, alongwith the condition of significantly meaningful symbolic as well as institutional order. Contact with this center can be achieved through diverse means and not only by those holding positions at the power center.

So, according to Shils, in advanced and complex societies charisma can no longer be seen in its pure personalized form. Instead of it, he explains, the sheer size, complexity and authority exercised by modern, bureaucratic organizations leads to the development of a sense of 'awe' and wonder for the individual towards such persons who are incumbent of powerful positions and responsibilities within the system. Thus, for Shils, it is not that charisma has died out or ended but changed its form and had has evolved with the rise of the bureaucratic organization.

Oommen (1967) in a similar vein argues that as the conception of 'charisma' is the creation of the social structure, it will go through changes in accordance with the changes in the society. He is of the view that the personalities that can be potentially charismatic are continuously being churned out by the society. However, all the potential charismatics might not get recognition. On the other hand, sometimes, they might not only be not paid attention to but also be branded as deviants or insane. At this juncture, the validation of charisma, socially, becomes important. To be considered as a

charismatic, it is not necessary that the person in question has charisma but the community should attribute this quality to him. Consequently, for comprehending genuine charisma, it is mportant to look into the social conditions in which the charismatic person emerges, within which he functions and the nature of the philosophy or message that he preaches. Thus, if the content of the perspective that the charismatic person provides is suitable for the social environment of that time then it is highly likely that he would be acknowledged as a leader.

So from the aforementioned arguments, it has been established that for the emergence of charisma a social relationship is required and it is not only limited to the psychology and deeds of the leader. This research also explores how after the demise of the leader, the movement has maintained itself, what are the novel and innovative approaches through which charisma has been reinterpreted and routinized. Through an examination of the beliefs that the followers follow, so far as their their leader is concerned, can yield useful results. In other words, charisma cannot be found exclusively by analyzing the actions and teachings of the individuals that are considered as charismatic. It can be established by examining them in association with and through the perception of their followers, which I will try to highlight in my study.

Hinduism, Hindutva and *Gurus*

About Hinduism it is frequently said that it is different from other religions as there is no single founder, book or central church. By citing these reasons, it is taken for granted that Hinduism is not to be seen as a missionary religion and that it has grown steadily over time, instead of beind developed intentionally like a religious identity. But it would be erroneous and naïve to assume that as a religion, Hinduism has been unaware of the anxieties relating to identity and disinclined towards mobilization. Contrary to this, Hindu mobilizations have occurred through diverse means and forms. Given the fact that the Hindu beliefs and practices are diverse in nature, it is almost not feasible to describe something or point to one thing as 'the Hindu belief system'. There isn't a worldview that can be considered common or shared by all Hindus. Instead there are numerous Hindu

ways of viewing the world. Therefore, classifying such elements that can se seen as common to all is problematic. Hindus generally have a tendency towards treating these elements selectively. Various elements are combined according to individual preference and inclination and such combinations also depend upon the social conditions, caste to which one belongs, age, sex, etc.

In Hinduism, the people ordinarily follow an assortment of animistic and polytheistic beliefs whereas those people who belong to the reformed faiths and sects by and large have a monotheistic foundation. Another characteristic feature of Hinduism is immanentism or the conviction that gods are all-pervasive and within easy access to the people. The Hindu idea of *avataras* or reincarnations entails that animal or human form is taken by gods in order to redeem mankind. The Hindu soteriology also rests upon renunciation of social and worldly attachments and the realization of a virtuous stage where the cycle of births and deaths become non-functional. This phase is known as *moksha*. It is generally pursued more forcefully by the virtuosi than ordinary people.

Another notable feature of Hinduism is that it rests upon a stable and established social organization known as the caste system which hierarchizes and differentiates the numerous communities. This system of stratification is ascriptive in nature where some castes are placed higher and others lower, in a system of ranking. Castes are considered higher or lower in terms of ritual purity. Generally, the traditional practices and rites laid down by the caste are followed by men and women on a regular basis. For most of the average Hindus, the ultimate objective is not finding salvation but merely observing rites and practices meticulously as recommended by the sacred books. Two terms used widely in this context are that of 'varna' (meaning colour) and this refers to basically to four divisions, i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra and these are arranged in a hierarchy and are more theorectical than empical. But in terms of ground reality, there are several castes, high or low, which are the tangible components of Varna and are known as *jatis*.

The later Vedic books are inclined towards what the meaning and point of life is, hold fundamental ideas about the consequences of one's deeds in this world and the notion of life after death. All these ideas can be seen today in an assortment of forms and appearances in the belief structure of a majority of Hindus and also in the philosophies and ideas of different Hindu gurus. It is generally believed that all forms of life are reincarnated in the world again and again. This belief entails that life is not limited or finite and it does not end with the demise of the living form. Rather the soul continues to live and gets rebirth as a new body in this world. This cycle consisting of birth, death and rebirth is without beginning or an end and is known as *samsara*.

Secondly, a person's deeds and actions, also known as *karma*, which he/she performs in the present life goes on to determine what will be the kind and quality of events in his/her future lives. If one performs good deeds in the present life then it leads to such conditions that are favorable for happinessin a following life, and on the other hand, bad deeds leads to misery and suffering. However, *samsaras* as such refer to a world that is largely marred by sufferings. So the primary spiritual objective is not only to perform good deeds so that a better and happy life is secured in one's subsequent incarnations but also to liberate oneself from the cycles of births and rebirths altogether. This liberation called *moksha* can be realized by aiming for internal discipline, being detached from the daily matters of the world and seeking out spiritual enlightenment.

The ideas that are supposed to bring about spiritual enlightenment and which regulate the mind are intimately connected with conceptions of *Atman* and *Brahman* which were developed during the period of later Vedic texts. *Brahman* refers to the fundamental nature or essence of the universe and the unity that is believed to be the cause of all apparent diversity. On the contrary, *atman* is the soul of an individual's self that leads an incomplete existence as it is trapped within the unending *samsaric* cycle. Some of the more popular systems of Hindu philosophical beliefs view that the *Atman* and *Brahman* are essentially the same. The perceptible duality that is perceived between them is illusory. As long as the *Atman* does not become capable of comprehending this this oneness, it continues to be trapped in the cycles of *samsara*. But once it realizes this unity

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of the *Atman* and *Brahman* the duality fades away and one sees no difference between one's own self and another, between happiness and misery or human and divine. In order to understand this one does not only have to have awareness of the truth but also has to perceive it directly in an instantaneous and insightful way. Such kind of self-realization is supposed to bring about a sense of bliss and also liberate an individual from *samsara*.

The various notions regarding the diverse paths leading to spiritual enlightenment and also ultimate liberation from the cycles of birth and rebirth have been developed into numerous renunciatory traditions in India. Many of these traditions emphasize on the principles of asceticism and meditation as significant methods in order to discipline the mind as well as the body. Ascetic spiritual seekers, also called sadhus, are a regular sight in the Hindu society. These people are believed to have abandond their everyday social, choosing instead a path of severity, celibacy and self-denial in order to achieve *moksha*. Some of these sadhus are seen as as meagerly clad figures, ash smeared bodies and matted hair, carrying begging bowls and traveling door to door in search of alms. Some are dressed in clothes of white or saffron (the colours that mark renunciation) and might be tonsured. Such persons are treated with a lot of respect and are venerated in the Hindu world, because they are thought to be on a path leading to spiritual enlightenment.

Even though considered as the ultimate goal of life, the path leading towards enlightenment is thought of as complex and filled with possible danger. Owing to this reason, it is generally deemed best to tread the path of enlightenment with the help of a guru, a spiritual being who has already attained enlightenment and therefore is capable enough to guide others towards the same road. As mentioned earlier, India has various renunciatory traditions that are founded upon the guru-follower relationship that goes back many centuries. Each of these renunciatory traditions is different in its own way and places emphasis on certain aspects and methods of seeking spirituality based on the unique personal characteristics and frequently, the charismatic appeal of the gurus. In the present context, many of these charismatic gurus draw a large following of disciples, both ascetic seekers as well as householders. In addition to this, they also attract large sums of donations from these followers.

In conjunction with self-discipline and austerity as a way of achieving liberation, *bhakti* or devotion is considered as another essential means towards the realization of *moksha*. Bhakti or the powerful feelings of devotional love for one's personal god or goddess is also a vital characteristic of Hinduism. This is apparent mostly through such religious practices as worship in temples, daily rituals of worshipping a deity in numerous Hindu homes, celebration of various festivals honouring different gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. A lot of the renouncer traditions put emphasis on devotion to a particular chosen deity, and those who have taken initiation of the order share among themselves the secret knowledge of an essential Sanskrit *mantra* or chant which is dedicated to that particular deity.

Bhakti as it is understood today is largely inspired from the Bhagavad Gita. While giving account of the divine revelation, Krishna says to humanity that in order to achieve liberation the best path is that of loving actively and participating properly in the performance of devotion and commitment to God. These practices should not be marked-off or special ones, but should be performed everyday: '[Bhakti] is represented in the Gita as a religious perspective that can inform all actions, at any time and in any place' (Prentiss 1999: 5). The emphasis placed on the practice of active devotion as an important religious experience is because it signifies where an individual might observe types of agency that are particular to these forms of religious engagement.

However, literature largely on the anthropology of *bhakti* enforces the notions of agency that are removed from aforementioned practical experience. Early examinations of *bhakti* sects were characterized by their opposition to the hierarchical Brahmanical society, and the general denunciation of caste, at least inside the panth's membership (Pocock 1973; Singer 1972). More other approaches towards these sects have become a lot more nuanced as they understand that not all *bhakti panths* are similar. For example, Lorenzen (1995), tries to differentiate between the prevailing *sagun* ('[God] with attributes') and the marginal *nirgun* ('[God] without attributes') beliefs in the bhakti tradition. On the one hand when the devotion relating to *sagun* confirms the standard codes of caste and the different stages of life given in the Brahmanical Laws of Manu, and also the notions of

trans-migration of the soul and rebirth, the *nirgun* tradition, on the other hand, vehemently rejects the *sagun* tradition and has little time for the latter ideas (1995: 18-20). *Nirgun* tradition, through its poets, gurus, and founders, is mostly lower class and lower caste; it can be observed that the Brahmans are almost always absent in it and their ritual superiority is also rejected (1995: 21). Thus, according to Lorenzen, these two traditions are stongly in opposition with each other so far as power is concerned, 'The *nirguni* movement in large measure represents an ideological andreligious contestation to *sagun* bhakti' (1995: 21); and that '[nirguni devotion] has served as one of the more significant forms of ideological resistance of the [lower] classes' (1995: 13).

Beginning from the eighth century, a number of Bhakti (devotional) sects emerged in the Indian subcontinent. This rise in Bhaktism also almost happened together with the arrival of Islamic groups in India. This bhakti tradition was a liberal creed which presented a sort of spiritual forum to people who came from various different castes. The essential elements of Bhaktism are nurturing of personal devotion to one god, discarding of rituals, adherence to monotheism, and involvement in a collective community that is built upon brotherhood and equality. So far as the Bhakti sects were heterodox, they had to face uncertainty and they often invited opposition from both Hindu and Muslim rulers in their initial period.

As mentioned earlier, the reformist sects in India, such as the Kabirpanthis of north India, Chaitanyites of Bengal, and Dadupanthis of western India, were inclusive in character rather than being exclusive. Undeniably, they did include certain cult-like features. The cults, as noted in the modern-day jargon, are prominent for their charismatic point of view, giving prominence to the individual, and more flexibility in terms of observance of rules. So far as the Bhakti sects were concerned, their membership was never very selective. Among the members, discipline as a feature was not enforced stringently, and its flexibility permitted individuals and groups living in the margins to become a part of the sect. In addition to this, frequently the cults had room for those individuals who were fugitive, marginal and deviants.

So both the renouncers and the lay disciples provided new meanings of their *dharma* to construe distinctive identities that highlight both anxieties and specific appropriation of caste, sect and Hinduism. Dube and Dube (2003) in their essay write that, the Satnampanth emerged in the 1820s by Ghasidas, a farm servant, primarily among the Chamars (leather workers) of Chhatisgarh. This group formed about a little less than one fifth of the total population of Chhatisgarh and most of its members either owned land or were share-croppers or farm servants. The ritual association of the Chamars with hides and carrion meant that the group and its members embodied the stigma of the pollution associated with the death of the sacred cow, locating their caste on the margins of the Hindu order.

The Chamars who joined the Satnampanth became the Satnamis and they had to abstain from meat, liquor and tobacco even certain vegetables and pulses. There was a rejection of Hindu deities, idols and temples within the Satnampanth. The members were supposed to believe only in a formless God, *satnam* (true name). From its conception the Satnampath served to redefine the untouchable caste status of its members and as a result it forged certain particular associations between the beliefs of sects and codes of caste. Dube and Dube (2003) write:

> At work here were two simultaneous movements. On the one hand, a rejection of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and of the *purohit* and *puja* within temples questioning the close connections between divine, ritual and social hierarchies. On the other hand, the creation of Satnampanth as a pure body through its accent of the appropriations of signs of ritual purity, which removed the impurities of the bodies of its members. These seemingly contradictory moves worked together to question the ritual subordination of Satnamis, since the twin articulations were governed by a single logic that was made up of a fusion of the codes of caste and sect (2003: 233).

So in general it can be deduced that the bhakti sects of India were populist and presented a platform for those who were considered disadvantaged economically and socially. Nonetheless, this kind of populism was never very intensely confrontationist. The fact

that devotion or bhakti can be examined as being the part of a movement that wanted to be away from the Brahmanical authority and wanted to move towards self-realization, and to do away with a present God (*sagun*) to that of a transcendent form-less God (*nirgun*), points possibly towards Protestant Christian varieties of certain particular assumptions about social change rather than about the kinds of agency that tied together diverse varieties of Hindu devotionalism. Categorizing *bhakti panths* as a 'movement' is informative as it points toward an advanced, world-changing, and universal outlook. Within the Bhakti tradition there was a tolerant and liberal acceptance of the liminal condition of being. For a large number of individuals, an emotionally enriching life of bhakti was in itself an incentive. Its philosophy of neither desiring a better life here nor an anticipation for a distant 'after life' ecstasy came as a fresh change from the dominant Brahminical ideology. Fascinatingly, the guru and *shishya* (disciple) existed in a 'dyadic relationship,' as each one of the disciple considered that s/he was closely linked with the guru. Therefore, gurus no matter living or dead epitomized personal ties.

While some traditions in their quest for self realization, liberation and spiritual enlightenment, lay stress on asceticism and austerity and thus might seem world-denying, the bhakti path requires a devoted admiration of the everyday world. This is one of the very important premises of the Anukulchandra ideology. It is founded on the principle that divine power encompasses each and everthing and this can be experienced with the help of one's senses and emotions. Here, verbal, visual, and auditory elements become essential as the expression of bhakti. The works of art, song and music, dance, recitation of *mantras*, sculptures and architecture are perceived as means of articulating devotion to a deity by sensual and emotional ways.

Another essential rite of devotional worship is *puja* which is a key expression of the aforementioned sensual and emotional approach of connecting with the deity. This ritual entails venerating the deity through a number of steps wherein the *murti* (representational image) of the deity, which is considered to be infused with a sacred power, is first purified and then clothed, decorated, given nourishment and in the end worshiped symbolically the waving of a lamp in front of the deity. This ritual of *puja* is frequently

conducted in a very detailed fashion and in certain periods at the Hindu temples. More shortened versions of the *puja* are generally carried out by individuals and families in front of the family shrine.

These elaborate rituals on the one hand symbolize the worshipper's greeting and honouring of a distinguished and admired guest and it also involves a kind of exchange between the devotee and deity in which, it is believed, that would benefit. On the other hand, it is also a time of communion between the devotee (the worshipper) and the deity (the worshipped). Through the performance of this act, the worshipper, for a brief moment of time, rises above his/her ordinary life and accomplishes an identity in the company of the worshipped. Some of the devotional traditions consider the deity as well as its image as a representative symbol of an inseparable and undifferentiated sacred core or Brahman. Here, the representative symbol acts to make such notions tangible which can otherwise be very vague to comprehend.

In the Hindu system of belief, the 'sacred' is considered omnipresent. It is not only present in temples and in divine images but also in nature. As a consequence, some trees, stones, hills, rivers, etc are also believed to be sacred. Animals such as cows, monkeys, rats, snakes too are considered sacred and sources of happiness and prosperity in the Hindu perception. Sometimes men and women are also deemed to be enlightened, self-realized and spiritually liberated and are thus venerated as sacred beings.

For the members of a local religious community, temples frequently become a focal point of congregation. For example, the Anukulchandra satsang vihar in Bhubaneswar provides an opportunity for the devotees to collectively come together and connect with each other through common spiritual and social actions. By means of classes, the young and new entrants are socialized into the morals, principles and beliefs of that community. These temples regularly seen as the preferred place for occasions such as celebration of holy days and festivals, rituals concerning birth of children, initiation of new devotees and marriage ceremonies. Through some of these religious communities, charitable acts are carried out for the poor and the needy. Temples are also the location where religious and

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spiritual dialogues, recital of music and dance, and singing of *bhajans* (devotional songs) by the community of devotees takes place.

In the present context, when a lot of people are reeling under what they believe to be an alienating environment, gurus have become significant mediators of tradition and stability. They have become authoritative religious as well as spiritual figures for such people who are on the look out for knowledge or assistance. The sources from which the gurus may derive their authority can vary greatly. Some base it on their understanding of ancient religious texts, some on their capability of performing miracles, while some others do it on their charisma and appeal.

While some recommend procedures in order to obtain spiritual discipline that might entail substantial efforts and commitment on part of the devotee, others give more simple recommendations for living and viewing life in such ways that would contribute towards happiness and contentment. Presently, a lot of gurus have found enormous international institutional domains, have a very large number of followers, and are endorsing themselves and their teachings by means of trans-nationalmedia networks.

The phenomenon of guruship has been a classic and enduring theme within South Asian scholarship (Copeman and Ikegame, 2012). In the nineteenth century, Hindu religious reformists such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), the founder of Brahmo Samaj and Protap Chunder Mozoomdar (1840-1905) journeyed overseas and interpreted Hinduism in the light of Christian moral values or vice versa in the case of the latter. But it is the notable accomplishment of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) in the year 1893 at the Chicago Parliament of Religions which is generally considered to mark the beginning of a 'globalizing Hinduism'. Vivekananda, at that time gave a number lectures and classes in the United States and also gave instructions to workers those who would later go on to preach his philosophy. Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952) is considered as another notable who travelled extensively in order to spread his teachings. He moved to the United States in 1920 and began to teach people about the practices and values of yoga and meditation. All of this in together led to the construction of a Neo-Vedanta as well as

a Neo-Hinduism. Particularly, Vivekananda propagated with clarity about the monistic vision in Hinduism wherein 'each individual was able to achieve the direct experience of God-realization and the diversity of various religions and sects merely meant that they were different paths to the same goal' (Wessinger 1995:176).

From Adi Sankara to the medieval Bhakti saints, and from modern Hindu preachers like Dayananda and Vivekananda to the new age *gurus*, there have been multiple quests for community and identity. These religious figures and reformers, through their ideas and actions, have mobilized their followers within a diverse and plural universe of Hinduism, both in terms of philosophy and praxis. Recent literature has begun to move beyond the study of gurus and their sects in narrow denominational terms and instead place them in context of their multiple roles in the society (Peabody 1991; Prentiss 1999; Copley 2003; Warrier 2005; Shah 2006; S. Srinivas 2008; T. Srinivas 2010). This broader approach gives due recognition to the extraordinary extent of the social roles of the guru. The various ways in which a guru in this regard is connected to the extraordinary propensity for becoming pertinent in given situations whether it is one of quasi-legal adjudication (Ikegame 2012), anti-stigma campaigns concerning leprosy or HIV (Barrett 2008; or even high profile anti-corruption campaign of 2011, with Ramdav baba as one of its leaders. Recent key scholarly works have focused on 'middle-class' gurus such as Mata Amritanandamayi and Satya Sai Baba, each claiming millions of devotees. These studies are focused on the nuanced links between these gurus and the processes of economic liberalization, globalization and technological modernity.

If mobilization invariably makes a distinction between the self and the other, for centuries these dynamics were focused on competing sects, *sampradayas*, and traditions from within this Hinduism. The Hindu reform movements, it is argued, were a response to missionary criticisms of their religion, Indians tried to give a positive portrayal by presenting it as a religion that had the same properties as Christianity (Laine 1983: 165; King 1999: 173; Oddie 2003: 158–59, 181; Pennington 2005; Thapar 1985: 18 and 1989: 218; Viswanathan 2003: 27, 35–36). The reformers are said to have tried to 'rid religion of the features most attacked by Christian missionaries, [and] driven by a similar will to

monotheism in their attempts to make the Hindu religion correspond more rigorously to the Judeo-Christian conceptions of a single, all-powerful deity' (Viswanathan 2003: 27). Other authors describe the 'native complicity' more as an attempt to form a unitary group or organized religion, so that the Hindus could form a religious majority in India and stand strong against Muslim and Christian proselytism and missionary and colonial attacks on their traditions (King 1999; Oddie 2003: 166–73; Pennington 2001, 2005; Zavos 2000, 2001). These reform movements, consisting mostly of the elites, intellectuals and brahmans, are thought to have played an important role in transforming the Indian traditions into a unified and textualized religion mainly based on the Vedantic religion of the brahmans. They are also held to be the precursors of the Hindutva movement of today (Frykenberg 1993: 548; Thapar 1989: 218; White 2000: 105).

Subsequently, with the emergence of a more demarcated Hinduism, religions like Islam and Christianity, which originated outside the territorial boundary of Hindustan, became Hinduism's distinct other, particularly since the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, the Cow Protection Movement, anchored on a powerful Hindu symbol, mobilized Hindus against Muslims. The pro-Hindi language movement, which was simultaneously anti-Urdu and anti-Muslim, unleashed the rhetoric of 'Hindu-Hindu-Hindustan'. Vasudha Dalmia (1997) in her work concentrates on the 'traditionalism' of the nineteenth-century instead of the 'reformist movements' (1997: 7-8), and through exploration of the case of Banaras and specifically 'the father of Hindi', Bharatendu Harischandra. This book historicizes the timelessness of 'Sanatanism' and the ways in which in nineteenth-century Banaras a diversity of Hindu traditions were restructured and nationalized. Dalmia explains how 'Hindi as a language and literature...restricted the meaning of Hindu, even as it claimed to inscribe the autobiography of Hindustan as a nation' (1997: 337). She shows what were Hariscandra's perspectives on a number of theological as well as socio-political issues, specifically was his growing persistence on the adherence of devotion to only one God which he considered as the as fundamental feature of Hinduism. The Kumbh Mela, primarily a site for the mobilization of different Hindu sects became a site for Hindu nationalist mobilizations as well (Maclean 2008). While the pre-colonial states patronized religious sects and communities, encouraging them to mobilize and expand, the colonial

state adopted a strategy which encouraged the process through which community mobilizations became communal.

V.D Savarkar's in his canonical text for the Hindutva movement, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*, he explained that the word Hinduism was a western derivation and it referred to much diversity among the Hindus. In any case their beliefs about divine matters were of little importance for defining Hindus. He carefully separated Hinduism as a religion from Hindutva, which he defined as the unique cultural essence of a whole people inhabiting the land of India. Hindus were to be understood territorially and culturally, and not in terms of their understanding of the sacred. (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]).

During the anti-colonial struggle, the nationalist leader B.G Tilak reoriented the relatively private Ganapati festival into a public celebration to mobilize the Hindus, sharpening communal divides. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leaders K.B Hedgewar and M.S Golwalkar carried forward their Hindutva politics by conceiving of India as a Hindu nation, thus projecting Muslims and Christians as enemies. In post-colonial India, the Sangh Parivar forcefully played out the politics of Hindu identity during the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation; Hindu religious icons and symbols were used to mobilize the Hindus. Sadhus and gurus became part of the Hindu nationalist movement (McKean, 1996). The contours of Indian nationalism were defined when Lord Ram was projected as the national hero.

An old point in the discourse of Hindutva is the unity and diversity of Hindus. The Hindutva people are proud of the internal religious plurality within Hinduism and the tolerance that ensures a harmonious coexistence and without privileging any particular order, it promises equality among Hindu sects. The plurality has a strategic function within the discourse. The Sangh has taken this equality and diversity to a point where they do exist but they do not matter since all are Hindus and all are patriotic Indians. Therefore, difference exists, but, like divine illusion or *maya*, it is a second order reality and does not exist on a real plane.

Savarkar had moved restlessly from faith and ritual of Hindus to an essential cultural core that would, hopefully, be common to all true Indians, something independent of the lived beliefs and practices of faith. He wanted to marginalize philosophical-mystical-devotional resources of Hinduism, its quiet and intellectual aspects, as no more than individual quirks, of little importance to people as a whole. According to him, Hindutva was Indianness, it is the idea of Indian nationalism. Then he went on to locate Indianness in the geographical features of the land. In this move, the sacred myths about the geography, the mountains, rivers and the landscape of India, became imbued with Hindu sacred significance. So, in a two-way process, India becomes the land of Hindus, a sacred geography while the Hindu faith is overwritten by Indian nationalism. In a final move, he defined both Hindutva and Indianness as an inherited affiliation to the land, land of our action. This, however, would render Hindutva wide open to all who have lived and worked here. So he made India the land of our gods, of those alone whose places of worship are restricted within its boundaries. The spatial imperative accomplishes several things at once- makes the land of India the property of Hindus alone excluding Indian Muslims and Christians as 'the other' on the basis that their 'holy land' is elsewhere.

Another notable turn in this regard is the way in which the Hindu right seeks to operationalize gurus in support of its agenda. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad famously seeks and is often granted the support of gurus in initiatives to fight against 'minority appeasement', building of the Ram Mandir, etc. (Nanda 2009). Nanda cites evidence that the organization actively seeks to make use of the evangelical potential of such gurus. Dipankar Gupta (2009) draws a comparison between Indi's 'living saints' and US evangelical Christians. According to Gupta, though Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell may look and sound different from Sri Sri Ravi Shankar of Asaram Bapu, but what is not categorically different is the fact that both the evangelists and the godmen are showmen. Today, in India charismatic guru based organizations offer spiritual wares ranging from discourses on scriptural Hinduism, meditation techniques, stress relief and relaxation methods to gentle spaces of retreat (Warrier, 2003; Visvanathan, 2010). Visvanathan (2010) analyses daily and annual contexts of ritual in the circumstances of intense belief, and uses autobiography and travel writing to come to terms with both the concepts of

rapid urban change in the context of globalization as well as the aspect of well being and mysticism. As the book shows, how the life of Ramana Maharshi revolved around self-inquiry, non-dualism and silence which is in sharp contrast with the present-day gurus such as Sri Sri Ravi Shankar or Satya Sai Baba who are 'skilled in whipping up collective effervescence, skilled also in verbal pyrotechnics or crude shows of legerdemain' (Gupta 2009:261).

Historically and in the present, the guru has been represented either as a guide who leads devotees to the Supreme being or is himself a primary object of faith (Gold 1988). Even among contemporary gurus, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1914-2008), founder of the Trancendental Meditation movement and Bhaktivedanta Swami Praphupada (1896-1977), the founder of ISCKON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), both presented themselves as extremely knowledgeable yet human teachers, while other high profile gurus such as Satya Sai Baba and Mata Amritanandamayi, emerge as *avatars* or embodiments of the divine (Gold 2005). As Gold points out, in most guru-inspired religious movements, gurus are represented both as respected teachers and *avatars*, and gurus switch as a matter of convenience between the two images, according to the demands of the devotees and the socio-cultural situations.

There has been a proliferation of a large number of Hindu religious gurus: from Ravi Shankar to Ramdev, from Asaram Bapu to Mata Amritanandamayi in the recent times. Though they represent different kinds of gurudoms, disseminate diverse discourses and demonstrate myriad performative practices, all of them have the capacity to mobilize Hindus, cutting across class, caste, region and power structure. Their pervasive presence in the public spheres, particularly on television channels, has contributed to the production of a virtual community of Hindus (James 2010). Many of these leaders may not act in tandem with Hindutva forces, but in some cases the relationship has been complementary- while Hindutva extends state patronage to the gurus, the gurus facilitate Hindutva's entry among new social groups and into new geographical regions. In such a climate, it becomes pertinent to ask how does one make sense of this apparent contradiction between inclusive Sanatana Dharma and exclusive idea of Hindutva which

does not have any space or rather any different identity for cultic practices and ever expanding terrain of the gurus and their sects? What are the individuals' motivations for seeking out gurus in general, how the devotees adapt and engage with philosophy and values of a religious guru and the organization, how they deal with the issues of religion, modernity, secularism, etc.? In an attempt to understand and address these issues, this thesis is divided into the following chapters.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter 1: The introductory deals with the research background and an account of the research setting, i.e. the historical background of Bhubaneswar, an introduction of Thakur Anukulchandra and how dominant Hinduism influences cultic practices which grow as an extension or reaction to the dominant ideas of Brahmanical Hinduism

Chapter 2: This chapter examines the life history of Thakur Anukulchandra, trace the evolution of his life from being a doctor to a spiritual *guru*, accounts told and remembered by his disciples about his life and charisma. It will deal with the organizational history and context. It will also explore the link of Thakur Anukulchandra with the Radhasoami tradition, into which he was formally initiated and the location of this tradition within the context of Sanatan Dharma. It provides an understanding of this movement within the larger socio-historical processes of the freedom movement, religious reformation and revivalism in Bengal. What was the social context that led to the growth of this tradition? This chapter will outline the shaping of the Anukulchandra tradition, its early organization, trace the lineage and succession and the routinization of charisma.

Chapter 3: This chapter provides an exposition of the history and culture of Odisha with special emphasis on the different religions that found a place in Odisha owing to royal support of religious expansion. It will outline the growth of Bhubaneswar as a temple town and subsequently as the capital city, and also delineate the political and social settings that led to the growth of new religious movements such as that of Thakur

Anukulchandra. It will also examine the *satsang* temple as a space of devotion and explore the sacred landscape of the temple and the linkages between space and meaning.

Chapter 4: The reasons for joining the sect vary from searching for a permanent solution to the problems of illness that ail them, to family and financial problems to finding a more personal, 'rational' faith. Joining the sect brings changes in modes of practices regarding worship, diet, social relations with kin and neighbours, and the moral evaluation of oneself and others. What is central to this adherence is building a relationship with God through Thakur without abandoning one's traditional faith. This process of transformation that involves in some cases ruptures in relationships and in most cases, a re-evaluation of the notion of self and the social world. In this context, this chapter introduces the consciously held and the explicit teachings of Thakur Anukulchandra. Here, an overview of the whole theological structure will be presented and analyzed along with the dilemmas and experiences of the devotees as they navigate and articulate new ways of being and living in the society.

Chapter 5: This chapter provides an outline of the socio-economic profile of the devotees. It tries to provide an understanding of the choice of guru and spiritual seeking in the contemporary time. Bhubaneswar being the city of Gods and temples, what 'extra' do people seek in a guru? It looks at questions of why the followers of this tradition are attracted to this particular ideology, philosophy and how does it fare in terms of the modern, urbane world. It explores the complex emotional bond between the guru and the followers, the narratives of devotion, accounts of miracles performed, indices of anxiety and the nature of well being. What are people looking for? What were their experiences before joining this tradition? What led them to believe and to what extent do they observe the values of the Satsang?

CHAPTER - I

The Emergence of a New Faith: Thakur Anukulchandra and the Satsang

In the recent years, there has emerged a lot of interest on *guru bhakti* and those responding to its appeal are considerable. The emergence of a new religious tradition is always a significant event in the history of religions. India has had its fair share of these, beginning with Brahmanical Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in the sixth century B.C, and including Sikhism which began to develop as a separate religious tradition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and Hindu revival movements, which emerged at the at end of the nineteenth century. The Satsang Movement started by Thakur Anukulchandra in Pabna is related to many of these earlier currents, but has taken a character of its own.

Nineteenth Century Bengal

During the nineteenth century, Bengal was being increasingly shaped through its encounter with colonialism. Organized nationalism as well as religious revivalism in Hinduism were being witnessed in Bengal during the 1870s and 1880s. Even though both of these were separate movements, they were connected intimately. In the nineteenth century, a lot of the Hindu initiatives were in some way or the other influenced or were a reaction to Western culture as well as Christian values. For example, the traditionally lower caste Hindus who had been converted to Christianity were reconverted by the Arya Samaj. A lot of the new groups were influenced by the ways in which the British societies were structured and these groups imitated the British in terms of their

organization and administration. The most notable person in this regard was Ram Mohan Roy who made use of the new technology of printing as an important tool of disseminating his ideas.

So overwhelmed were these early middle and upper class intellectuals by the supposed superiority of Western thought and English education that one of the best known among them, Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), protested to the Governor-General, Lord Amerherst, on learning about the government's decision in 1823 to establish in Calcutta a new college for Sanskrit studies as he feared that it would 'load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions' of doubtful value (cited in T.N Madan 1990: 149). He maintained that in opposing such education and instead of it, advocating the promotion of 'a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction' including mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and 'other useful sciences', he was 'discharging a solemn duty to his countrymen' (ibid 149).

A learned man well versed in his native language Bengali and Sanskrit, Persian Arabic and English cultural and literary traditions, Rammohan had resigned from the East India Company to support the cause of social and moral regeneration of his people. Historians have called him 'the father of Indian recovery' and 'in fact the first modern man in India' (Panikkar 1956: 216-17). He operated on two fronts. Convinced about the need for purification of the religious life of Hindus in the direction of a syncretic theism, he founded the Brahmo Sabha in 1828 with a view of synthesizing what he considered to be the most valuable elements in Vedic Hinduism and Protestant Christianity. He also launched and supported campaigns for the eradication of social evils of various kinds in the Hindu society such as child marriage, restrictions on the remarriage of widows, caste taboos and above all, the practice of sati. He proclaimed that he found the 'doctrines of Christ, more conducive to the moral principles and better adapted for the use of rational beings (de Riencourt 1961: 213).

Rammohan's philosophy was perhaps considered too austere and intellectual and demanded, what must have appeared then, as a radical and sudden break from Hinduism.

The remarkable thing, however, is how much of Hinduism he retained alongside Christian and Islamic elements, the new Unitarian Sabha, later renamed as the Brahmo Samaj in 1843 by Debendranath Tagore. The successors of Rammohan were not quite broad-minded and eclectic like him, leaning by turns, one way or the other, towards Hinduism or Christianity. However, they concerned themselves with his objectives of social reform with determination. This inevitably drew them back to the Hindu society. Their opposition to the intrusion of Christian elements into their faith also became stronger with the passage of time. Rammmohan and his immediate followers sought a religious response to the challenge of Christianity and the West. There were other intellectuals who opted for a secular world-view, drawing inspiration both from British utilitarians and French positivists. Instead of the worship of god, they advocated the deification of man in the name of secular humanism, and cultivated rationalism and a scientific outlook. In this struggle between theism and humanism, between faith and reason, it was always religion which retained the upper hand (Kopf 1979).

It was during this time that the Hindu culture and traditions were reinterpreted, comprehended and followed in numerous innovative ways. New changes were taking place as a result of specific political and cultural conditions that had been brought about in south Asia due to the presence of the British. The new means and modes of communicating led to new challenges as well as opportunities because now it was possible to come into contact with those cultures which had earlier been difficult to approach. Among all these new things, the most important was the culture of the British which had been embodied through government officials, missionaries, soldiers, journalists, teachers, etc in south Asia. The increasing number of Hindus who went to Britain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were very much influenced by its culture and traditions.

Also during this time, new modes of communication were being increasingly developed and accessed which led to a resurgence of interest in the cultural and religious past in South Asia. Rapid strides were being made in the means of communications which was made possible by the establishment of the three sea ports of Bombay (presently,

Mumbai), Calcutta (presently, Kolkata) and Madras (presently, Chennai). The construction of the Grand Trunk Road began from the year 1836 that linked Calcutta with the upper Ganges basin. The year 1852 witnessed the laying of the first telegraph line starting from Calcutta till the Diamond Harbour. Along with this, the first 200 miles of railway lines were laid between the years 1853 and 1856, it started from Bombay; by the year 1880, 4,300 miles of railways had been laid (Schwartzberg 1978: 61; Bayly 1988: 198). This enabled the movement of goods as well as people at rapid speeds which was not possible earlier. The establishment of the railways also gave an opportunity to people who belonged to the presidency towns to find opportunities for employment in other places. This also helped in the spreading of different ideas from one place to another. For example, numerous branches of the Brahmo Samaj that were established in the during the second half of the nineteenth century were in fact opened by the railway personnel hailing fron Calcutta (Damen 1983). The rapid speed with which ideas gained momentum became possible due to printing in various vernacular languages as well as in English and Sanskrit. Even though printing in vernacular languages was started by the missionaries, who first printed in Tamil in the year 1577, Calcutta did not get a chance to witness this printing until the year 1777 (Nair 1987: 26). Soon after, newspapers in Enlish began to get printed starting in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Bengali newspapers began getting printed in 1818 and this was followed by Gujarati newspapers in the year 1822 and Marathi ones in 1832 (Schwartzberg 1978: 105).

The effects of these new influences were first witnessed in Calcutta which was the capital at that time. The presence of the British had led to the development of a class of people who were known as *bhadralok* (literally translated to 'good people'). These people gained a lot of wealth as a consequence of the various new opportunities that opened up with regard to employment and business and they became dominant in terms of educational attatinment and the new professions. The population of Calcutta was ethnically varied which included people from different parts of India whisch resulted in the outnumbering and marginalization of the indigenous population (Sinha 1978; Killingley 1997); the *bhadralok*, were Bengali Hindus who belonged to the higher castes. Along with Brahmans, the population consisted of *Vaidyas*, who traditionally were

physicians, and ranked themselves after the Brahmans in the caste hierarchy, and *Kayasthas*, who were traditionally clerks, came forward to claim their foundation as *Kshatriya* (Killingley 1991: 16). Many of these *bhadralok* being consciousness of their higher caste status and susceptible to the charges of 'giving up' their caste by travelling abroad, getting into new occupations and being friendly with foreigners, were very proper with regard to ritual purity and many a times over-generous over rites and rituals and providing patronage to the *Brahmans.* A lot of these *bhadralok* also took up the prospect that opened up with the spread of communication that was mainly represented by printing, use of English language, the development and growth in the education system, and a trend of forming societies began to gain ground.

During this period, in the works of Bengali writer Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-94) the trends of Hindu revivalism as well as that of cultural nationalism could be observed. Also during this time, access to different sacred texts was easier as printing had gained momentum and therefore circulation of these texts was better, English had gained popularity as a medium of instruction, 'time' had become important and begun to enforce a kind of discipline that had not been witnessed earlier. The culture of the British was seen as superior as it hinged on the language of rationality and scientificity and this led to the educated Indians trying to find 'rational'arguments for either transforming or defending their traditions and importance was given to social activism like education, societal and religious reform and revival, patriotic ventures and charity. This period also witnessed the development of Hindu revivalism.

Even prior to Hindu revivalism that saw expansion in the nineteenth century, other different currents also helped in the making of a Bengali identity. Kunal Chakrabarti (2001) in his book 'Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition' has looked at the *Upapuranas* (the minor Puranas) that were composed in Bengal and eastern India between about the eighth and the thirteenth centuries. Chakrabarti tries explores what the Bengali Puranas disclose about the Bengali identity, as this identity, like other regional identities has arose as a result of the interaction between the pan-Indian and local identities. He argues that the Bengali Puranas helped to

produce and spread a Bengali regional identity that accommodated and absorbed local beliefs and practices while giving importance and maintaining the Brahman privileges. The process by which it occurred has been termed by Chakrabarti as 'the Puranic' process that involved a strong affirmation of the local customs and practices along with an assertion of Vedic authority, which has been the chief domain of Brahmanical privilege, with the Bengal Puranas attempting 'to make the two appear consistent' (2001: 32).

He argues that, "The *Puranas* were…an instrument for the propagation of Brahmanical ideals of social reconstruction and sectarian interests, a medium for the absorption of local cults and associated practices, and a vehicle for popular instruction on norms governing everyday existence. They combined scripture and the social codes of the *Smritis* in a manner acceptable to most people. In short the *Puranas* performed the delicate task of operating simultaneously at several levels, widening their scope to accommodate local elements as much as possible and involve as many people as permissible without compromising their principal objective of establishing the Brahmanical social order…The technique of accomplishing this task may be described as the *Puranic* process" (2001: 52).

According to the *Puranas*, the advantages that follows from honoring Brahmans, granting land to Brahmans, and making donations to them are simple to understand in this regard. Chakrabarti explains that the 'Vedic religion' which was being propagated by the Brahmans was very subtle. He says, 'The great paradox of Hinduism is…that, although the religion is inextricably tied to the legitimizing authority of the *Vedas,* in post-Vedic times the subject matter of the *Vedas* was and is largely unknown to those who define themselves in relation to it' (2001: 54). He also examines how Mahayana Buddhism and Tantric practices, which were thriving practices when the *Upapuranas* were getting composed and were gradually displaced through the religious practices of the Brahmans.

He concludes, 'The *brahmanization* of Bengal, if it may be so described, has been a continuous creative process, which in its ever-increasing sweep, seems to have engulfed

most of the indigenous local cultures by the time the last redactions to the *Puranas* were made, and succeeded in forging a common religious cultural tradition, flexible enough to accommodate sub-regional variations and indifference to the emerging consensus on the dominant cultural mode among some social groups, and strong enough to take dissent in its stride' (2001: 319-20).

Among the various processes that had a role in the emergence of Hindu revivalism, the main was the Ramakrishna Vivekananda movement which began in India in the late nineteenth century. During this time, traditional Hinduism had become defensive as a result of its confrontation with the western authority and power. Ramakrishna (1836-86) was born in a poor Brahmin household who went on to become a priest at the Kali temple in Dakshineshwara close to Calcutta. Ramakrishna had developed a deep and intimate relationship with the great Mother Kali and this was later reflected in his relationship with his wife Sarada, within whom he saw the presence of Kali. During the course of his lifetime, he also gained knowledge of Tantric disciplines,

He embarked on an inner journey in which he learnt Tantric disciplines, experienced the oneness of the *advaita* vision, enjoyed love of Krishna, and explored Christian and Muslim spirituality. He was not an intellectual but possessed an intense love and longing for the goddess whose worship was his duty as well as inclination. In course of time, he became a mystic and saint of incomparable quality. Ramakrishna was little concerned with the society and its problems. Like Rammohan Roy, he too was interested in the synthesis of religions, but not on an intellectual but emotional level. His profound insights and mystical behaviour impressed many people, particularly a young British-educated sceptic, Narendranath Datta (1863-1902). Later taking the name Vivekananda, it was this devotee who was to give ideological and institutional shape to his guru's vision.

Against a background of increasing industrialization and secularization of everyday life, especially in the large urban centers, the appearance of Ramakrishna was viewed by many westernized Indians as a distinct anachronism. Ramakrishna early earned a

reputation as a visionary and a mystic, but his influence grew slowly because he often was identified with regressive tendencies deeply rooted in the folk culture. Vivekananda led the forces of Hindu reaction against the unsettling contact with European science and philosophy. But Vivekananda was far from being the Christian Evangelist's notion of a counter-reformer. From his preceptor Ramakrishna Paramahansa he learned the ways of a liberal faith and has every claim to be recognised as a humanist theologian. Ramakrishna gave indirect support to religious reform as 'he demonstrated in his life,' to quote R.C. Majumdar (1976), 'that spiritual salvation was equally open to those who accepted either Vedantic monotheism or Puranic gods, those who believed in a formless God as well as those who worshipped God through His images' (1976: 190).

Swami Vivekananda also carried the message of Ramakrishna abroad. Vivekananda was quite critical of the Hindu society. He condemned the excessive ritualism of the Hindus, their indifference to human misery and poverty and the divisive influences of the caste system. In order to set things right, he advocated the cultivation of self-confidence and self-criticism. He said 'No religion on the earth preaches the dignity of humanism in such lofty strains as Hinduism, and no religion of the earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism' (de Riencourt 1961: 245). Vivekananda was also distressed by the uncritical admiration of everything Western among the educated classes in India. He advocated the supremacy of Upanishadic philosophy and dismissed the rest. He, thus, argued:

> All our present day religions, however crude some of them may appear to be, however inexplicable the purposes may seem, one who understands them and studies them can trace them back to the ideas in the Upansishads… Great spiritual and philosophical ideas in the Upanishads are today with us, converted into household worship in the form of symbols (Panikkar 1963: 31).

It is not the fiery rhetoric of Vivekanda that survives today so much as his worldwide Ramakrishna Mission centres devoted to public service in the fields of education, medical relief and religious instruction (Nikhilananda 1953). In India there are hundreds of such centres, symbolizing the reformulation of abstract Vedantic ideas into concrete moral

practice. So, Vivekananda's principal contribution was the transformation of a religion of personal salvation through world renunciation into a medium of altruistic service.

Though the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement is much talked of, a lesser known faith emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century with the birth of Anukulchandra Chakravarty, who later came to be known as Thakur Anukulchandra by his devotees.

The Life of Thakur Anukulchandra

Thakur Anukulchandra was born as Anukulchandra Chakravarty on 14th September in the year 1888, in Himaitpur village of Pabna district of British India which is now in Bangladesh. Pabna is surrounded on the north by the districts of Rajshahi, Bogra, and Maimansinh (presently, Mymensingh); by the river Padma or Ganges on the south, this separates it from the districts of Nadiya and Faridpur; on the east by the river Yamuna, which separates it from the districts of Maimansinh (Mymensingh) and Dacca; and on the west by the districts of Rajshahi and Nadiya, the Padma or Ganges forming a natural line of demarcation between the latter district and Pabna. Almost a decade before the birth of Anukulchandra, Pabna had seen its share of socio-economic turmoils. Most of the jute production in Bengal was done in the eastern and the the northern districts of the area. Both of these districts were located on the alluvial lands formed out of the delta's shifting river-systems: in the northern districts of Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Pabna, Bogra and western Mymensingh on lands surrounded by the Brahmaputra, in the central districts of Faridpur and western Dacca on the deposits of the Ganges.

During May 1873, the peasant smallholders belonging to area of Yusufshahi pargana of the Pabna district organized themselves in order to challenge and oppose an increase in the rents by their respective landlords. In the Yusufshahi pargana, the jute cultivation was high, it was among the highest jute producing areas in Bengal. Yusufshahi was located in the Sirajganj sub-division, which was close to Sirajganj, a port city and at the time being the the greatest jute mart in eastern Bengal. It was estimated that of the 192 square miles

sown with jute in Pabna during 1872-73, 123 square miles was in Sirajganj subdivision[9]. Within a span of about two months, a number of agrarian leagues had been established throughout Pabna and in the course of the subsequent years the tensions between the landlords and the cultivators became very apparent almost all through the jute producing areas of eastern Bengal and as a result a trend emerged wherein the cultivators began to organize themselves in order to collectively challenge the demands for an increase in the rates of rent.
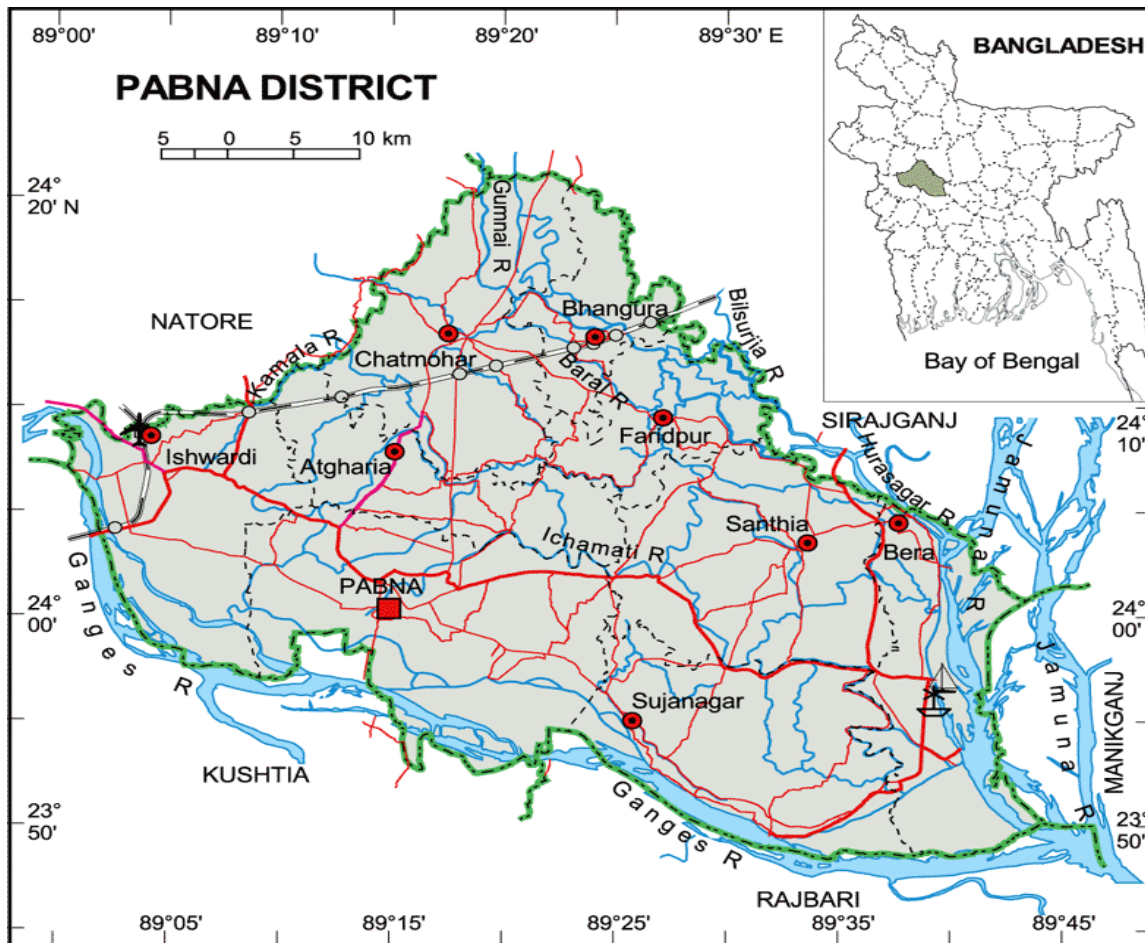
Source: http://mapofbangladesh.blogspot.in/2011/09/pabna-district.html. Accessed on 6th April 2015.

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[9] In the district of Pabna, the area of which was relatively smaller but had the most land sown with jute in 1872-73 according to government estimates. Kerr, *Report on the cultivation of, and trade in Jute (Accessed on 6th May, 2016)* in Bengal 1874.

Barring the area of Rangpur, almost all of the jute producing areas of eastern Bengal became places where organized peasant resistance was taking place[10]. The apprehensions and strains became apparent between the landlords and their cultivators and this sometimes resulted in violence between the two parties almost all through the second half of the 1870s and spilled over to the first half of the 1880s as well. The disputes regarding the rates of rent abated during the year 1885, after a new Tenancy Act was introduced by the colonial state, which gave the cultivators better security regarding tenure and protected them against arbitray increase in rents.

Ganguly and Brace (2012 [1987]) write that Anukulchandra's parents belonged to land-owning families. His father was Sivachandra Chakravarty and mother was Monomohini Devi. His father belonged to the Guakhara village of the Pabna district. When he was still in this youth, Sivachandra came to Pabna town and started working as a contractor for the district board and consequently earned a sizeable income from it. At the age of twenty-four he was married to Monomohini Devi who the daughter of Ramendra Narayan Choudhary, a zamindar of Himaitpur village. Like the parents of Ramakrishna Paramanhansa who were said to have experienced visions and other signs indicating that their as-yet-unborn child was no less than an *avatar*, likewise, a wandering mendicant had predicted to Monomohini Devi, before Anukul's birth that 'He who is coming to you mother, will reign over multitudes, by virtue of his character' (Biswas 1981, p.18).

When he was a young boy, Anukul was a student of the high school in Pabna. After his schooling, he joined the National Medical School in Calcutta in 1906. Anukuchandra as a young medical student in Calcutta first came across the distressed human needs of the impoverished and lawless slum dwellers (Hauserman 1962). It was during this period, that the Swadeshi movement was gaining momentum. During the first half of 1906, the government of eastern Bengal and Assam began to get reports that the Swadeshi activists had begun to picket against the selling of foreign-made goods from across the eastern Bengal, especially in the the districts of Pabna, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Dacca, Barisal,

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[10] As Tariq Omar Ali (2012) notes, with the exception of Bakarganj and, to a lesser degree, Faridpur, all of the affected districts had significant jute acreage. Another important factor was that agrarian leagues did not emerge in western Bengal, not even in the jute-tracts of Hooghly and 24-Parganas (2012: 48).

Khulna, Faridpur and Tippera. Rumours were rife that colonial administrators had put in force a ban on imported merchandise and also the rumours that imported salt and sugar, containing pig and cow bones were circulating in those areas (Ali 2012).

The coercion that was brought about by the Swadeshi movement led to resentment as well as resistance among the cultivators. Ali (2012) notes that, in the eastern parts of Bengal, this bitterness underwent a communal form because during this time, the Muslim cultivators were the chief consumers of foreign-made merchandise whereas the Swadeshi activists were mostly Hindus. It was almost in the beginning of 1906, in February that the deep anger of the Muslim cultivators and the possible threat of of Hindu-Muslim violence stemming from the Swadeshi boycott were taken note of by F.C. Lyons, the senior bureaucrat in the Home Department of the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Religious symbols, as demonsrated by the studies of Sumit Sarkar (2010), played an important role in Swadeshi related conflicts in eastern parts of Bengal. Sarkar (2010) also observes that the Swadeshi movement led to the alienation of Muslims from the movement as the use of Hindu symbols, caste based distinctions, sloganeering, for example, the slogan of 'Bande Mataram' were very explicit. Moreover, as a counter to the Swadeshi movement that was organized by the Nawab of Dacca along with the newly established party, the Muslim League, had an important role to play in mobilizing the religious sentiments of the Muslims against the 'Hindu' Swadeshi movement.

The Swadeshi movement failed in its attempt mainly because it tried to introduce a nationalist ideology that was mostly elite and urban which was inconsistent against a rural, agrarian background. Heehs (1997) notes that this failure was a result of the differences that stemmed from culture and religion between the overwhelmingly Hindu nationalists and the cultivators who were by and large Muslim. The differences in cultural ideologies were also matched by two very distinctive ideas regarding economic matters. The happenings, especially in the market places, showed that the Muslim cultivators felt alienated not only from the very-Hindu, elite and nationalist slogan of 'Bande Mataram' but from the very economic idea of Swadeshi that was antithetical to their market-based business as a source of livelihood. The Muslims made up a sizeable part of pre-partition

Bengal constituting around half of the population and most of them belonged to the eastern districts and mostly came from poor, rural families. Comparatively, very few of them went to the cities for education or government employment.

But the two groups were not so openly antagonistic before 1905, even though they always considered themselves culturally different from each other and there were occasions when the hostility became apparent. This was due to the fact that the Muslim cultivators had to constantly deal with the exploitation and mistreatment in the hands of the Hindu zamindars, police personnel asw well as money-lenders (Heehs 1997). When the British administration announced the proposal to partition Bengal, it was easier to convince the Muslims because they had a lot to gain within the new scheme of arrangement that would lead to the creation of a Muslim- majority area in the eastern part. After the initial days of fervor and eager enthusiasm, few Muslims became a part of the anti-partition movement. Thus the Hindu nationalists became bitter in their reaction and acted out aggressively towards the Muslims whom they felt were being uncooperative. This was the most important and immediate reason that led to the infamous East Bengal riots in the year 1907.

Before the year 1906, the Muslims were not very active in the politics of Bengal. Heehs (1997) writes that in the same year, a delegation of Muslim leaders had a meeting with the viceroy and persuaded him that the Muslim community required a distinctive representation in the then recommended reformed legislative councils. In the month of December, the Muslim League had its first meeting at Dacca. Bipinchandra Pal and Aurobindo welcomed this development, of the entry of Muslims into the political life of Bengal even though it was felt that they were not on the same page as those who were involved in the national movement. Conflicts were a significant part of the public life, wrote Bipinchandra, as they 'contribute to the strength of the units in the earlier stages of social growth and consolidation' (Pal 1909: 9; cf. Aurobindo 1970-72, 2: 23).

From a Marxist point of view, it is an obscuration by false consciousness of the correct awareness of social relations and the inevitability of the class struggle (Chandra 1987

[1984]: 18; Mukhia 1972: 56). Amales Tripathi is of the view that Aurobindo's 'messianic nationalism' was an 'unnatural blend of religion and politics' that consequently led to a backing away and communalism (1979: 75). Barbara Southard is of the view that the Sakta-Vedanta descriptions that were used by Bipinchandra and Aurobindo was primarily intended for an upper-caste Hindu-majority constituency, and their 'lack of concern with secular issues…created a situation conducive to counter-mobilization among Muslims and some lower caste Hindus,' which resulted in communal riots and long-term religious divisions between the two communities (1980: 376).

Hauserman writes, during this time, in 1907, Anukulchandra was married to Saroshi Devi, who was five years younger to him (1962:103). 1911 was a time when the people of India were having a lot of medical needs whereas the appropriate medical facilities and the number of doctors, especially in the hinterlands, were very low. In this time, a young Anukul returned to Himaitpur after six years of study in medical school and began to practice medicine, mainly among the poorer and deprived sections.

Link with the Sant tradition and Radhasoami Faith

The saints are regarded by Hindus as innovators, religious radicals, rebels against prevailing religious orthodoxies of beliefs and social institutions (cited from Juergenmeyer 1991: 23). Thakur Anukulchandra is considered by his devotees to be an incarnate of God, in the lineage of all the past prophets, namely, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Prophet Muhammad, Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramkrishna. In addition, he is also regarded as the culmination of the Sant tradition in India (Sarkar 1987).
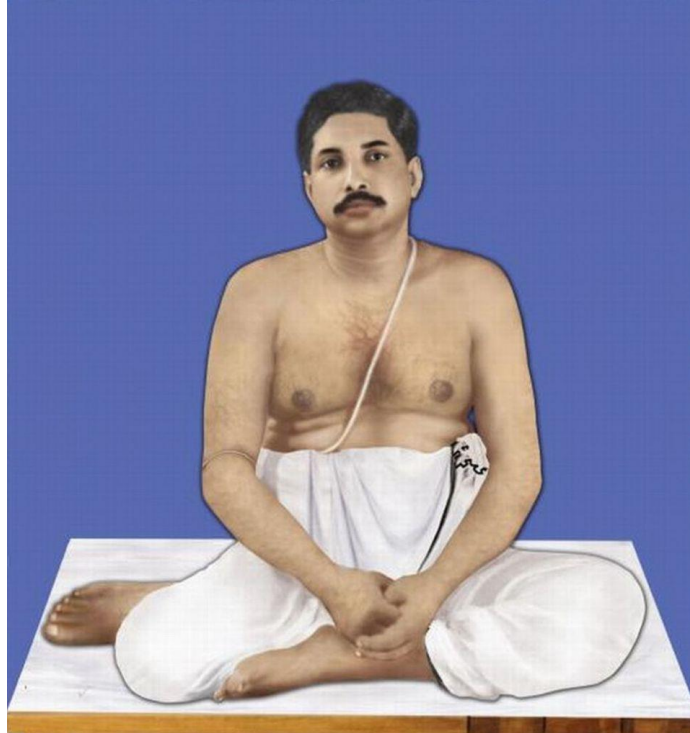
Thakur Anukulchandra

Anukulchandra's link with the Radhasoami Satsang is very interesting. His mother, Monomohini Devi was a devout and religious minded person since her childhood and was possessed by a yearning for God (Hauserman 1962, Brace and Ganguly 1987). Later she became a devoted disciple of Huzur Maharaj of the Agra branch of the Radhasoami faith. About the story of her initiation, Brace and Ganguli (1987) write:

> On a night so still that the whole seemed to have fallen asleep, Monomohini Devi went into the shrine with her brother Lola. He fell asleep after a short time, but Monomohini's heart was trembling with eagerness to attain God. All at once an effulgence illuminated the shrine and Monomohini gazed in amazement at the place of Radha Krishna; a person radiant with divine light was sitting there. He was smiling sweetly and his eyes shone with the brightness of fulfilled love. Before this divine man seated on the throne of Radha Krishna shimmered the four golden letters of the Holy Name. Monomohini's soul resonated with the universal vibration and her heart overflowed with joy in having received the Holy Name (1987: 10).

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Hauserman writes that years later when Monomohini Devi was around nine years of age, her mother's brother came for a visit and in his suitcase the photograph of man caught her attention. Monomohini was gripped by a strange sensation in her body and fainted. When she came to her senses, she said that the picture was of the same man whom she had seen in her dreams and visions. It was then she found out that the photograph was that of Huzur Maharaj, who was the saint and spiritual guide of Agra Satsang. Later, after constant insistence and a long journey with her mother, she was able to get a chance to have a meeting with Huzur Maharaj who 'knew her right off, initiated her in his wisdom and ways, and taught her how to meditate and what she must do' (1962: 10).

When Anukulchandra was a child, he had a tendency towards episodes of fits and hysteria. In order to find a solution to this problem, Monomohini wrote to Sarkar Saheb of Ghazipur (Agra Satsang) who in turn wrote to her, advising to give Anukulchandra initiation herself. Sarkar (1987) writes this ceremonial imparting of the holy Name had such a great impact on his mind and body that he immediately went into trance and repeatedly said 'I see an angel of light with long beard everywhere and all around me' and in course of his initiation, Thakur felt 'the spirit of Sarkar Saheb in the form of light entered into his body' (1987: 23) Later he describes his association with 'the Name' as,

> "I used to repeat the 'Name' from my very childhood before I had been formally initiated by my mother…I used to be absorbed in the 'Name'. [The] 'Name' would continue day and night. I never practiced the 'Name' through formalities like 'asanas' (poses), etc. A burning desire for the 'Name' would always remain in me. I would cherish it much. So, I would continue the 'Name' always… Sometimes while repeating the 'Name', [my] hands and feet, etc. would tend to be contracted inside. A terrible suffocation would, as if, throttle my throat. Yet I won't give up repeating the 'Name'. Gradually, it happened so that even if I intended to stop, the repetition of the 'Name', the 'Name' would not leave me" (Biswas 1981: 23)

A section of the satsangis believe that the date and time of Thakur's initiation and the death of Sarkar Saheb around the same time makes him the next rallying point of the

Sant-tradition (ibid. 17). Anukulchandra in his post-initiation period, has been described by Sarkar as 'a clearly defines phase of a poise in his personality, a self possession, a bewildering ecstasy rare in history' (1987: 30).

Early Organization

One night Anukulchandra was coming back to his home after attending to a patient. He had to pass through a jungle when suddenly he saw a fire and became curious about the place (Hauserman 1962). Reaching that place, he was faced with a crowd and later got to know that they were actually robbers. But instead of getting panicked, Anukulchandra offered to share space with them and listened to their stories. In some time, he began to sing on impulse and this continued for hours together. Soon he was joined by the others in the group and everybody began singing. All of a sudden Anukul jumped to his feet, with his arms spread out and it seemed that he was shaking from head to foot. There was a distressed silence among the robbers but soon they came to realize that this stranger amongst them was not shivering but dancing.

Hauserman (1962), describing this event, writes:

> Suddenly Anukul jumped to his feet, and arms outspread, seemed to be shaking from head to foot. There was a startled silence until the men realized that he was not shivering ... he was dancing. His entire body was alive and aquiver with a dance that rippled from his finger tips, swelled at his shoulder, left the head tossing in its wake; undulated the chest ... a hip ... a knee ... a calf ... a foot. He was leaves in a breeze . . . grass in a wind. (1962:119)

After a few nights, Anukulchandra returned to the jungle and presented the old robber who had joined him first in singing with a set of drums and cymbals. The man received these gifts and with this began a new life for Anukul. He was engaged in his medical duties during the daytime and at night he made it a routine to sing and dance along with this group. After some time, the villagers from his place began to go after Anukul into the jungle at night to find out what he was doing there each night and to their great surprise,

they found out the singing and dancing and they themselves began to join this group of robbers in company and camaraderie. Soon it became necessary to find a bigger place as the number of people who began gather every night in order to dance the *kirtan* with Anukulchandra grew quickly to almost over a hundred. This became a regular event for several months and took place even when Anukul was absent. When Anukul found out that the *kirtan* went on without him, he was happy to have brought about a change and now armed with new drums and cymbals he began a new journey, went another wayin order to form a new *kirtan* party.

By the summer of the year 1915, people began to openly debate and discuss Anukul's sanity and sense of judgement. Hauserman (1962) writes while some of his patients and other people in the village declared him as a saint, many others, including some of his relatives were of the view that he should be confined to his own home for safety (1962: 122). In the mean time, the *kirtan* initiated in the village by Anukulchandra began to grow and this resulted in numerous stories as well as rumors about him even farther than the jungle celebrations.

During this time, curious about Anukul's growing fame, he was invited by an aristocrat named Shyam, to his house. He went to Shyam's house with a huge number of his followers, doing *kirtan* all the way. Everybody had been dancing for several hours when suddenly Anukul's voice began to sound strange and he became unconscious. Another doctor, Kishori, who was skeptical about him and had been keeping a close watch on his activities (and later went on to become one of his chief disciples), testified that Anukul did not have a pulse when he was unconscious. This was the first timewhent Anukul went into a trance and began speaking in different tongues but curiously, did not remember anything after he came out of the trance. Hauserman (1962), in his biography writes:

> He recited several scattered words in English and then something that had the
> rhythm of verse, but it was spoken in a language which was not known to any of
> them. A long silence ensued. Then Anukul's eyelids fluttered open, and with the
> help of Kishori, he raised himself to a sitting position. He asked for water

immediately and many ran to fetch it. He revived rapidly but seemed to have no memory of, or explanation for, the words he had uttered (1962: 129).

Anukul going into trances soon became a routine and the dancers grew accustomed to it. After the first transcendent experience, he was refreshed with a new bout of energy; the *kirtan* and dances around him went on almost without pause and the drums and the cymbals continued playing. The dancers soon became used to his fainting spells and subsequently circled around his limp body with great expectations, waiting for the words that came out his mouth during this time, the strangeness of languages he spoke, which although not always understood, impressed them with a sense of meaningfulness. Thus a growing number of devoted followers, from his own village as well as the surrounding ones, refused to leave his side and were constantly at his side. They sat outside his dispensary patiently waiting for him while he worked, made the rounds with him to his patients' homes, and slept in his courtyard after the evening's *kirtan* was finished. It was Kishori, the skeptical doctor, who first began to address Anukuchandral as 'Thakur', and this title stuck and was enthusiastically adopted by his large following.

By the end of the year 1915, Anukul's trances had become a matter of widespread attention. A large number of people, both devoted seekers as well as those curious to understand ans witness this phenomenon, traveled to Himaitpur from far and wide, even from the cities throughout Bengal. Experiments of all kinds were conducted on him while he was in trance to discover the 'trick' that he was using; and crude and primitive methods such as probing the flesh with pins and applying burning coals or heated metal were used. Reluctantly, the investigators were forced to an astounding conclusion that though Anukul seemed to have no heartbeat, no pulse, and no nerve reaction to applied stimuli during these trances; yet the voice did issue from this seemingly dead body and the many languages in which he spoke were authentic (Hauserman 1962). Decribing this event, in a similar vein, Biswas (1981) writes:

> These utterances are on various subjects: the theory of incarnation, creation, knowledge, devotional activity, his own identity, purpose of his descent and answers to the questions in the minds of the people present around him and the descriptions of the past, present

and the future conditions of the world, etc. These utterances are in Bengali, in English and in many other languages which are impossible for his friends and followers to grasp and write down. At this stage a brilliant light of various hues covers his body and face, and the atmosphere becomes saturated with a divine glow. All present there feel the sensation of a highly charged electric field of a high voltage transmission agent. The doubting and the mischievous press burning wood or charcoal against his flesh, pinch and prick his fingers with sharp thorns. No sign of life do they find in Anukulchandra…The trance transforms people's attitude towards Anukulchandra. He no longer remains their familiar Anukulchandra only but changes into a man of divine attributes. People look at him with eyes of awe-filled reverence and religious submission that a deity normally commands of his devotees. (1981: 28-29)

About the visions that Thakur experienced during his trance as well as during his early childhood, Thakur describes this experience as:

'The trees and other things outside would seem to me to be heaps of brilliant light. The trees would seem to me to be crystallized forms of light. I would feel these collected atoms of light as part and parcel of myself, and I would rush to embrace them. But they in their turn would create a solid sensation to my touch. Once, I was returning from school; all of a sudden it was revealed to me that the whole world was pervaded by red and blue light, like electric light. The waves of a vast ocean of dazzling light were flowing in the universe. The strange creation was like crores of bubbles in that vast ocean of light. The place I saw it was a low ground full of clay and water. I became unconscious and fell down in the mud.' (Biswas 1981: 18-19)

A lawyer practicing in the district court of Pabna named Ashutosh Adhikari, arrived out of curiosity to see Thakur, but instead he was immediately overwhelmed with the belief that he was witnessing the making of a new spiritual movement (Hauserman 1962). Thus being besieged under this belief, he left his practice of law and came to Himaitpur and was constantlyin the presence of Thakur Anukulchandra. Always seen with a notebook and pencils, he tried to faithfully record each and every word spoken in either English or Bengali during Thakus's trances. Thus, Adhikari's notebooks became quite famous and

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were studied by numerous scholars of both religious and scientific bent and after sometime thses recordings were published and disseminated widely in the form of a book that was entitled *Punya Puthi* (the Holy Book).

These trances took place in the life of Thakur Anukulchandra on more than seventy-two days during the period extending from the year 1914-1919. But the utterances of the first few days were not recorded. As Biswas explains (1981), these trances led to a change in the way people viewed Anukulchandra. Now, he was no longer their familiar Anukulchandra but instead had transformed to a man of divine attributes. People then began to look at him with 'awe filled reverence and religious submission that a deity commands of his devotees' (1981: 30). In this context it is pertinent to quote Shils (1965) according to whom, within the whole notion of charismatic attribution is a component of evoking awe and reverence. These two elements, awe and reverence, are invoked by "social objects" (institutions, symbols, or people) that help to understand the condition of man in the universe and the pressures of social life. Here, charisma can be understood in terms of the human requirement for meaning and order, which forms a human predisposition to accept and legitimize charismatic leadership.

Satish Chandra Goswami was a Vaishnava *kula-guru* as a result of being the direct descendant of Advaita, who in turn was one of the chief disciple of the fourteenth-century Bengali prophet, Chaitanya. Thus, Satish Chandra Goswami was a *guru* who had several thousand disciples. Since the *kirtan* had originally been introduced by Chaitanya, the news of its revival through Thakur was a matter of interest for Goswami. So, along with a few of his own followers, he began a journey to Himaitpur to examine this matter. The *kirtan* was going on in full swing when Goswami reached the courtyard, and he stood silently witnessing the happenings that were going on along with many other people who had come to watch this event. About Goswami's reaction Hauserman (1962) writes:

> The Kula-guru was immediately caught up with excitement as the dancers
> bounced lightly past him. This was truly the Kirtan!... It was not necessary to
> have Anukul pointed out, for this dancer rose and fell with a buoyant grace that

left the watchers breathless . . . and there was indeed an aura of light, a vibrating radiance, surrounding him (1962:136).

It was during this trance that Anukul first spoke of moving to Deoghar, located in present day Jharkhand. After witnessing this event, Goswami went into seclusion for several days and was constantly in prayer and meditation. Then he returned to Anukulchandra and requested from him to get initiation. Goswami was given initiation by Monmohini Devi and the *kula-guru* became Thakur's third disciple, after Ananta and Kishorimohan. With Goswami taking initiation of the Anukulchandra sect, many of his disciples followed his example and thus the first mass initiations took place that made Anukulchandra, in a short span of time, 'Thakur' or the spiritual leader of hundreds and hundreds of devotees.

Devotees as well as visitors came to Himaitpur from the towns and villages, in the hope of being witness a modern-day miracle and being impressed by Thakur's persona, they constantly implored him to visit their homes along with them. A belief became embedded in the minds of people that coming into contact with Thakur Anukulchandra would reduce the rate of crime and bring about the spirit of well-being and brotherhood that was being seen in Himaitpur. This belief became very pervasive and Anukuchandra agreed to the various invitations to visit different towns and villages. A group of dancers, singers and musicians were organized for a three-week tour that would take them to many of the towns and villages in and around Himaitpur.

This three-week proved to be very successful and further inquiries and requests for more such trips came pouring into Himaitpur village. Now that his followers were able to manage *kirtan* activities without him, and feeling that some kind of autonomy would be beneficial for the disciples, Anukulchandra along with his three chief disciples, Ananta, Kishori, and Goswami, began an extensive journey to the various parts of the country. They journeyed across the northern branch of the river Padma in to Kushtia, they attended to the medical needs of the people by day and dispensed religion at night, after spending few days in a village or town, they moved on to the next one. Everywhere they went, Thakur and his group were greeted with a lot of warmth and enthusiasm, inducted

new devotees who then joined them in their journey across the country. They travelled from the areas of Jessore and Maimensingh, to Puri in Orissa to Benares in Uttar Pradesh.

On his return from his long jouney to Himaitpur, certain changes had taken place in his family. Saroshi Devi, who had been expecting, had borne him his second son who was named Vivek Ranjan, and he eagerly anticipated the reunion with his family. Also during this time, his mother had been widowed. As soon as Thakur Anukulchandra returned to his own village, his devotees made arrangements for *kirtan* that evening but to their huge disappointment Anukulchandra did not participate in it that night or ever again. The sounds of *kirtan* that had elevated Anukulchandra to zenith of fame and fortune in various places, starting with Bengal was abandoned silently and decisively.

Labour for Love Movement

Hauserman writes, on a morning, after Anukulchandra's return to Himaitpur from his long tour, he found his courtyard full of his followers who were patiently waiting for him to have his *darshan* and greet him. On being enquired about what the devotees wanted, they replied that they were around him to attend to his various needs and also many of them said that had given up their attachment with worldly ties of their families and jobs. On hearing this Thakur was surprised and reprimanded them saying:

> The Supreme Father is not pleased with idleness. If you would serve him, devote
> your working hours to meaningful activities… The most fertile soil for love is
> labor. Prayer without action is a rootless vanity and will never be effective (1962:
> 147-48).

After this incident, Thakur, along with his devotees, started to actively seek any kind of labour from all those people who were in need of it without taking any sort of payment from them and he stressed on the notion of the privilege of working. After the phase of intensive *kirtan*, this new phase of seeking and providing service became entrenched within the followers of Thakur. They went door to door asking and providing free labour. Even the wealthier households were included in this endeavour and availed of the

services of Thakur's devotees. The village had requirements of running water and plumbing systems at the homes but there were no skilled labourers in the village and taking the services of artisans from other places was thought to be quite expensive (ibid. 151).

A group of followers were thoroughly guided by Thakur who had a knack fot these things and these men very quickly learned the necessary skills for this kind of work and were soon they were seen engaged in drilling tube wells and installing septic tanks for those landowners who were willing to supply the necessary materials. In exchange for this labor, the landowners contributed whatever they freely wished to give to the movement of Thakur. With the passage of time, a lot of contributions began to come in to the movement. As there was no compulsion to pay particular wages or fees, the people's gratitude became very apparent and they expressed this thankfulness by giving away whatever they could afford or felt was appropriate.

As a result of the numerous tasks that were being taken up by Thakur's devotees and the subsequent flow of funds, a proper system of accounts was established and people assigned to it so that the many gifts in cash and kind, along with the daily offerings made to Thakur by his followers, could be used efficiently and distributed in a resourceful manner. Around the village of Himaitpur, there were large tracts of forested lands that were cheap and these lands were bargained for and bought whenever there were sufficient funds for its purchase. Thus, Thakur's ashram was now actively engaged in expansion and whenever the devotees had some free time to spare, they worked vigorously in clearing the jungle land.

During this period there was a sharp drop in the number of people who had become Thakur's devotees. There were a large number of people who had followed Anukulchandra, leaving behind their families and occupations, in the view that they would go through life by luck, charity from others or divine grace. They were unconcerned about their daily requirements and after working a few days for Anukulchandra's 'love for labour' movement their faith began to wane as it had no fixed

working hours and all of a sudden their former lives with its stable work and work hours gained appeal and thus, disenchanted these men went back to their homes.

Hauserman (1962) notes that in the first days of Thakur's return from his country-wide tour, there were more than three thousand of his devotees in the village. The largest chunk of this following had tagged along with him when he came back home while many others, who got the news that Thakur had returned, came in large numbers from the surrounding villages and towns. But just within a span of two short months the number of devotees fell to around five hundred. Those who stayed back in Himaitpur, vigorously embraced the philosophy of 'labour for love' and worked relentlessly to further the cause of Thakur and bring about a change in the society. After a few months of dragging on with fewer disciples, their numbers began to increase again. The villagers, who had been skeptical of the *kirtan* phase, now were increasingly getting attracted to the notions of progress and development. The diligence and the work-ethic of Thakur's followers who had started from scratch, clearing jungle lands and in time had changed the face of the village with their accomplishments were highly appreciated by all. Seeing these transformations, other villagers also came forward to request initiation and help out with the movement (1962: 154).

The missionary work in regard to Thakur's 'Love for Labour' movement had started early. During the phase of ecstatic *kirtan* when a number of people came forward to request initiation, Thakur, with his great foresight and organizational skills, had selected a few men who according to him had the required ability and understanding, and had gven them training about the proper ways of initiation, how to administer vows to those who requested for it. This group of men was known as *Ritwiks* and they were instructed to carry out the varied functions such as that of a teacher, a preacher and a guide to those who wanted to follow the ways of Thakur Anukulchandra in their respective lives.

They were called *Ritwiks* and they combined the functions of teacher, preacher, apostle, and adviser for those who sought to follow Thakur's conception of life. A man named Trailakya was the first missionary of Thakur's 'Labor for Love' and with the blessings of

Thakur he undertook a long journey that took him to places like Mymensingh, Dacca, Noakhali, and Chittagong. He preached the philosophy of Thakur and was able to initiate a number of people who now considered Thakur as their guru and they were devoted to a new way of life. Trailakya also travelled to Burma, and several families took initiation in Mandalay, Pagan, Merktila, and Pegu and they formed communities according to the teachings ofThakur's (1962: 159).

Meanwhile at Himaitpur, a large community kitchen had to be established with space for numerous utensils, stoves, tables and other equipment to prepare food in very large quantities in order to feed the people who had flocked the place after Thakur's return. Monomohini Devi, Saroshi Devi and other village women worked in this kitchen daily from early in the morning to late night, organizing and supervising the meals for all those who visited. It was Monomohini Devi who suggested to Thakur to name their growing community as the 'Satsang' as this name reminded her of her *guru*, Huzur Maharaj. And thus, Thakur's devotees came to be known as the *satsangis*.

This was also a time of great socio-political and economic upheaval in Pabna. Agrarian impoverishment in the rural areas was accompanied with a phase of great intellectual creativity as well as growing political activity in and around the hinterland. During the 1920s, the issues regarding the impoverishment of the peasants were the most discussed theme among the intellectuals. Historians have stressed on how communal riots, especially among the Hindus and the Muslims were on the rise and occurred at regular intervals especially after the 1920s. The few of such incidents include the riots in Pabna in the year 1926, one in Dacca and Kishoreganj in the year 1930 and in Tippera and Noakhali in 1946. Almost all of the cases of riots that took place in Bengal during this time, including the cases in Calcutta, Dacca and Pabna happened when the matter of music that was being played in front of mosques, went out of hand. The Hindu fundamentalists claimed that they had a right to play music and giving the example of Vaishnava traditions, they argued that music was a necessary as well as a continuous characteristic of religious processions. The case of the riots that occurred in Pabna was also very significant. In Pabna, the elite leaders led a mob of Hindu townfolk and started

the riots by playing music intentionally in front of the Khalifapatti mosque. It is very interesting to note that all these activities that involved violation and vandalism were done very imperceptibly, in an invisible manner which suggests that the people were embarrassed of engaging in violence openly which would cast aspersions on their character and also link them to criminal activity. The riots, however, gained visibility in Pabna where sacred imags were openly wrecked. These acts and preoccupations appealed to the dominant, aggressive and masculinist sentiments. These feelings were reinforced by the apprehension about a decrease in the population of the Bengali Hindus and the stereotypical trepidation regarding the overpotent Muslim male.

Das (1990) observes that the Kishoreganj riot that took place in the Mymensingh district in 1930 was a representation of the last and the major violence relating to religion in the twentieth century colonial Bengal and this instance reeked mostly of strong class attributes. It has been noted that the rioters in 1930 were mainly concerned about assaulting and annihilating the material manifestations of power among the Hindu zamindars and moneylenders. There were also reports of occasions where a Muslim crowd forced the powerful Hindu individuals to consume beef along with them. These actions could be seen in the light of protests in opposition to the ritual and commensal taboos of Hindus which restricted social intercourse with those who were non-Hindus or belonged to the lower castes. Moreover, the substantiation of the economic angle in the riots of 1930 was provided by the fact that the Muslim crowd attacked and did not spare those who belonged to the richer sections of its own community.

A comprehensive analysis by Sugata Bose (1982) regarding the Kishoreganj riots that occurred in the year 1930, have shown that these instances were a result of the strains that had been simmering within the social relations of agrarian production throughout this period of hardship and impoverishment which consequently resulted in the violent confrontation between cultivators who were mostly Muslim and the moneylenders, businessmen and rentiers who were mostly Hindu.[11]Death due to various diseases

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[11] Bose, Sugata, "The Roots of 'Communal' Violence in Rural Bengal: A Study of the Kishoreganj Riots, 1930," *MAS*, 16(3), 1982. Also, Partha Chatterjee's "Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bengal,

constituted another set of problems for the peasant households. The frequency of disease and death especially increased during 1910-1920. Almost immediately after the construction of the railways, an outbreak of malaria was noted in eastern Bengal, in the areas of Pabna, Mymensingh and Tippera. The high railway embankments led to stagnant puddles of water and this gave rise to a fertile ground for the breeding of malarial mosquitoes.[12] Along with the epidemics of malaria and *kala-azar*, diseases such as small pox as well as cholera were reported from the delta region.

Hauserman (1962) writes that in the spring of the year 1920, a cholera epidemic swept the area. During this time, Thakur combined several different herbs which he had been using earlier during his practice and came out with a medicine that he called Aza Munjtt, writes Hauserman (1962: 65). This medicine proved to be very effective against cholera and had instantaneous curative effects. Steadily the power of Thakur's medicine became very popular in and around the village and extended to the Pabna and Cossipore areas. Soon after, the Satsang of Thakur received numerous orders from various parts of Bengal for the extraordinary medicine that had been invented by him. By the time the epidemic proportions of the different diseases subsided, the Satsang's first pharmaceutical laboratory had been established and was gaining popularity. Hauserman (1962) that in the Satsang ashram, not a single death was reported due to cholera.

The year 1926 is poised roughly midway between the two great waves of mass anti-colonial movements. The significance of this chronological placement gains more resonance as this was the first year of great riots in Bengal. Dutta (1990) notes that there were by official reckoning eleven riots in the Bengal of 1926, that spanned not only its eastern and western regions and the two capital cities, but also its urban and rural sectors, including the peasantry, landlords, merchants, *bhadralok* and working classes. In what was then arguably the largest communal riot in our subcontinent, the April Riots in Calcutta were spread over a month (2nd of April to 9th of May) with a ten-day break in

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1926-1935," *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. I, 1982 examine the class character of the riots that occurred in Pabna in the year 1926.

[12] See Kazi, Ihtesham (2004), *A Historical Study of Malaria in Bengal, 1860-1920*, pp. 154-157 for more information.

between (13 April to 21 April). It also marked a new height in the limits of horror for those times: 110 killed and 975 injured. Nor was this a regional phenomenon. Since 1923, there were 76 riots officially recorded clustered mainly around Bombay, Punjab, Delhi, the United Provinces, Bihar and Bengal, out of which 31 had been counted from the beginning of 1926 till 22 August of that year. Like the idea of the Indian 'nation', communal discourse in the mid- twenties was still in the adolescent stage of its making.

Further, riots themselves created the specificities of a national issue. Noting the new and distinctive character of the mid-twenties riots, Haig, Secretary, Government of India, wrote: 'Disputes which in the old days would arise largely from special local and temporary causes and could often be solved by a little goodwill on the part of the local people now tend to crystallise all over India into irreconcilable claims of principle which do not admit of any compromise.' (Dutta 1990)

In the Bengal of this period the main political event that seemed to finally rip apart the two communities was the death of C.R. Das in 1925. Das was an experimenter of a politician, who through astute improvisations initiated and maintained the Bengal Pact, and postponed potentially riot-generating issues such as the Pir Burial Case. With his Swarajya Party he emerged as a commonly accepted national leader, who could on the one hand, appropriate Hindu Reformist discourse through the Tarakeswar Satyagraha, while at the same time penetrating into the Khilafat organisations. Interestingly, Chittaranjan Das had become a devotee of Thakur Anukulchandra a couple of years before his death. It was in the year 1923, while Thakur was staying in Calcutta for a while, that C. R. Das, then the President of the Indian National Congress, came to see him for the first time. With the prominent leaders of that time, Chittaranjan Das was engaged in the struggle for liquidation of the British rule in India. He was a close friend of Gandhi and placed great hopes in the non-co-operation movement which was gaining a foothold.

Thakur's name, and his genius for organization, had come to the attention of Das on several occasions. He decided to investigate. He visited a group of Thakur's devotees in

Delhi, attended one or two of their meetings, and made discreet inquiries in the neighborhoods where they lived. He was very well impressed. He was of the opinion that if Thakur as well as people of this caliber could be persuaded to lend his remarkable talents to the non-co-operation movement, the independence of India would be assured. But their meeting was extremely frustrating for Das. About the conversation between C.R Das and Thakur Anukulchandra, Hauserman (1962) writes:

> Political freedom does not mean to me any hatred of the British," Thakur stated firmly. "My work, and the work of those who chose to make me their Guru, is to establish the integration of each individual so that he may realize his own unique potential, strive for his own full development, and thus bless all with the fruit of his labors."
>
> What good will such men do if we are denied the God-given right to have our own government?" Das cried.
>
> Thakur shook his head. "What good would your government be if there were not a dedicated group of such men to guard its integrity? Would you drive away the Hon to bring in the jackals? We must recoup our social health. For this it is necessary to establish schools, industry, and the social reforms that elevate our activity and push our evolution."
>
> We are fully aware of these shortcomings," Das retorted impatiently. "But only after we get rid of the British will programs for self-betterment be possible . . .
>
> Thakur spread his hands. "Only look about you . . . everywhere. There is no end to the work that is possible now. All that is needed is men with the vision and clear purpose to accomplish it (1962: 209-10)

Hauserman (1962) writes that after the first day of discussions with Thakur, the followers were surprised to see that a transformation in the behavior of C.R Das had come about. In the following days, Das and Thakur were mostly seen engaged in intense discussions. Das seemed to be eager to know the opinion of Thakur on a variety of matters and subjects. He seemed to become more thoughtful and now was calmer and open to ideas rather than imposing his own will on every matter. Upon his arrival, Chittaranjan Das did not seem to take notice of the things that were going on in his surroundings but now he

did. But the influence of Thakur's philosophy was such that it shifted Das's attention from the freedom struggle, and as a result his new ideas came into conflict with those of his colleagues. For around two years, Das tried to persuade his colleagues and followers and as a result they began working on more social projects such as establishing schools, health clinics, and small-scale industries. But most of his contemporaries had the freedom of India from the British rule as their goal and they were not willing to invest their time or money for the strange, new experiments that Das so suddenly seemed on undertaking. This was the time when the non-co-operation movement was gradually gaining popularity in the country.

In the year 1925, Chittaranjan Das gave his resignation from the Congress and along with a few of his friends he founded a new party called the Swarajya Party. Through this endeavour, he wanted to work within the law, without confronting it. He wanted to use to the fullest the advantages of the limited legislative means that the British Government provided. But the bitter confrontation and finally breaking away from old friends and colleagues took a toll on the health of an already ill Das. After the organization of his new party was sorted out, Das left for a retreat to the hills of Darjeeling. On the way to his vacation, he stopped in Himaitpur to say his greetings to Thakur. Hauserman (1962) observes that when Chittaranjan Das arrived in the ashram, he seemed to be very happy, having high hopes and myriad plans for his new party. Even though he stayed in the ashram for a few days, he soon went away, promising that he would return later for a longer stay. But unfortunately he died a few days later. With his death, many of the followers who were of the view that Thakur was on the verge of gaining wider acceptance and acclaim, were sorely disappointed.

Thakur's Second Marriage

During the spring of the year 1930, Saroshi Devi's younger sister Sarba Mangala, who was a student of the King Edward College, arrived in Himaitpur to spend her holiday at the *satsang*. Hauserman (1962) describes her as 'a pretty girl, with a lively inquiring mind, who quickly captured the hearts of the devotees' (1962: 231). For Sarba Mangala,

the course of the vacation passed quickly in the busy atmosphere of the *satsang*, by learning and doing new things but as the time for her to leave came near 'she suddenly grew listless, her laughter ceased, and she spent long hours in the courtyard staring into space' (1962: 233). She had fallen in love with Thakur, her brother-in-law and asked him if he would marry her. Thakur replied that, 'You know this decision is not mine to make…but if you can win the true consent of Ma and Boro Ma, then I will be honored to be your husband' (1962: 235). On hearing these developments at the ashram, the villagers suddenly turned against Sarba Mangala and began to openly taunt and insult her but she remained level-headed and busied herself by helping out her elder sister and Monomohini Devi from dawn till dusk. Thakur remained detached from these issues regarding women.

Seeing that Sarba Mangala was relentless in her wish to marry Thakur, the devotees, in desperation sought the intervention of Monomohini Devi. They wanted her to prevent the second marriage of Thakur while his first wife was still alive as they believed that this development would negatively affect the image of Thakur as well as that of the *satsang*. But even though there was a lot of opposition to this marriage, both Monomohini Devi and Saroshi Devi gave their consent to it. On November 17, 1930, the wedding of Thakur and Sarba Mangala was solemnized.

As predicted by most of the devotees, the second marriage of Thakur Anukulchandra gave rise to a lot of controversies within the *satsang* ashram as well as outside and this event again witnessed a drastic drop in the number of followers. After getting married, Sarba Mangala went back to her college and completed her education. Coming back to the ashram, she carved her own niche through her dedicated work in the life of the ashram. There was a quiet dignity about her and with her devotion she very quickly earned the title of 'Chhotto Ma' (Little Mother) among the same villagers who were earlier against her. Nine years after her marriage she gave birth to her only child, a son who was named Pracheta Ranjan Chakrabarty.

In the year 1937, Monomohini Devi fell ill with fever and nothing seemed to work, neither the prayers of Thakur nor his medicines medicines or the doctors who came from

Calcutta were able to provide any remedies. Day by day, Monomohini Devi's body grew weaker and her subsequent death seemed to have shaken Anukulchandra to his core. Hauserman (1962) writes:

> On the evening of May 23, 1937, Thakur came from his mother's room and stood disconsolately on the veranda. For hours the grieving devotees watched him from a distance. He sat as still as a statue, face lifted to the sky, tears running down his cheeks…For a time it appeared that this tragedy might be greater than the Saint could bear. He walked about the village aimlessly, seeming neither to see nor hear (1962: 272).

Life went on as usual, a few weeks after the death of Thakur's mother. By preaching the ideals of Thakur Anukulchandra, his disciples were able to bring many more people into their fold. Twenty years after Satsang first established, it housed a population of around eight thousand inhabitants. Almost five hundred *Ritwiks* were on a mission to spread the message of Thakur's of love, service, being and becoming throughout Bengal. The records of the Philanthropy Office had a list of more than a quarter million names of people who had been initiated into Thakur's faith. The *Satsang*, during this time, was maintaining its own post office as hundreds of letters from various parts of the country, seeking Thakur's help and blessings came to the ashram. A secretarial staff consisting of five people was constantly engaged in reading the letters from the devotees and sent appropriare relies after consulting Thakur.

Shift to Deoghar

The Hindu-Muslim riots that took place in 1946 in pre-partion India compelled Thakur Anukulchandra and his thousands of his disciples to evacuate Himaitpur village and shift to Deoghar. The original *Satsang* in Himaitpur village of Pabna district became a part of Pakistan after the partition in the year 1947. Hauserman (1962) writes that on the 10th of September 1946, Sushil Chandra Bose, who was the vice-president of *Satsang*, was suddenly summoned by Thakur and he gave him a brief message 'We are no longer safe. Go to Deoghar immediately and rent the largest building that is available. Say nothing of

this to anyone' (1962: 306). There were about twelve incidents when some reference to Deoghar was made by Thakur and this almost always happened during his tranced state. On two separate occasions Thakur had been questioned by his devotees regarding this matter when his trance had ended. But he seemed surprised and had replied that he had never been to Deoghar and neither did he know what the messages spoken in a state of trance implied (1962: 307).

After reaching Deoghar, Sushil Bose found a large sprawling two-storied house in the outer fringes of the city. The agent who helped with the sale of the house told him that the structure was around a hundred years old, and the original owner was said to have been a queen from Nepal who maintained this estate in order to provide accommodation to her staff when she came to worship at the temple of Shiva in Deoghar. The house had been then sold to a wealthy Bengali and was known as the Boral Bungalow. But fortunately for Bose, the owner had little interest in maintaining the house which was already showing signs of wear and tear and neglect. The five acres of land surrounding the house were overgrown with grass and wild plants. But this house was the largest vacant building that Sushil Bose could find in that area and he rented it at once.

On the 15th of September, 1946, Thakur Anukulchandra received the information from Sushil that the Boral Bungalow had been leased to them. Two days after receiving word from Bose, on September 17th, Thakur led his followers through the rusted and creaky gates of the Boral Bungalow. Twenty-four hours after the arrival of the entourage, the community kitchen had been organized and was in operation to feed the thousands of weary devotees. Soon after, the children as well as the adults became engaged in clearing the property and sorting out arrangements for shelter. In the two years after the Independence of India, the population of the *satsang* community had fallen to about five thousand residents, as many of the people who were forced to evacuate their homes had found employmentas well as homes throughout the territory India.

Rohini Road contained around fifty homes that were built along a mile stretch from the crossing of the rail-road till the Boral Bungalow. All of these homes belonged to the rich

Bengalis who used them mostly during the winter breaks while rest of the year these houses remained vacant. When Thakur's staff approached these owners, they seemed delighted to rent out theoir houses all year-round for substantial amounts of money which they were to receive from the ashram's permanent occupancy.

In May, 1956, Thakur suffered a stroke and the right side of his body was partially paralyzed. Hauserman notes that this event brought about the emotions of terror and horror to the followers of Thakur as they were now realizing the fact that 'their Saint was encased in a mortal body, and that this body was nearly sixty- eight years old and subject to all the laws which governed such things . . . including death itself' (1962: 359). Boro Ma and Bor'da (Thakur's eldest son) along with the senior disciples and followers kept the organization running, both in the *satsang ashram* and in the city of Deoghar.

After passing away of its founder in 1969, the Satsang organization of Deoghar saw a lot of bitterness. For example, in 1972, a case was filed by the satsang against two of Thakur's disciples named Kiron Chandra Mukhopadhya and Kumud Bandhu Bal, who had published Thakur's work 'Satyanusran' on their own[13]. The petitioners were of the view that the defendants, Mukhopadhya and Bal, had infringed the copyright of the Satsang which was supposed to be the sole publisher of the holy books of Thakur. The exclusive licence for publication was given by Thakur to his eldest son Amarendra Nath Chakrabarty including those books containing his teachings which were collected and compiled by his followers and other members of Satsang.

Mukhopadhya and Bal defended themselves by saying that they had been initiated by Thakur himself and had dedicated their lives to the cause of the Satsang and were shocked by the attitude of the Satsang members. They said that they wanted to disseminate the teachings of Thakur far and wide and so they got the book published at a minimum price in order to distribute to to other devotees free of cost. Whereas Amarendra Nath Chakrabarty alleged that the defendants had published 'distorted edition' of the authentic book 'Satyanusaran' and through the introduction of metaphors

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[13] https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1572652/ Accessed on 25th June 2017.

by their own they had profaned the sacred work of a great prophet which had caused anguish and agony to a number of his disciples. The court, while giving a verdict in the favour of the Satsang said that:

> In the instant case, admittedly. 'Satyanusaran' is the work of Sri Sri Anukul Thakur. It was published by Satsang Publishing House. The other works are compilations made by Satsang or by a member of Satsang and, admittedly, the works were published by Satsang for a long time. Satsang claims to be the owner and/or exclusive licensee. If Satsang is the owner or exclusive licensee the matter ends. If Satsang is not the owner or exclusive licensee, then the copyright of the author devolves on his death upon his heirs. These are matters which would be decided in the suit. In any event, the defendants who are two of the disciples of Sri Sri Anukul Thakur did not prove that they have any right in respect of the aforesaid works. Their grievance is that there were distortions in the works and they were mentally shocked. Prima facie, I do not think that there is any right of the defendants to make separate publications and I cannot allow continuation of publications of the said works by the defendants.[14]

In the year 1969, a case was filed against Amarendra Nath Chakrabarty by the Income Tax department alleging evasion of taxes[15]. The income tax department asserted that through a deed of gift dated 6th December, 1957, a devotee named Charubala Dasi had made gifted a piece of land to Amarendra Nath in the (then) town of Calcutta. The Income-tax officer said that Amarendra Nath had acquired the piece of land through exercising his vocation of preaching the 'religious cult' to the donor. According to the Income-tax officer, the value of the land should, therefore, be taken as the assessee's (Amarendra Nath) professional receipt and was taxable as the assessee's income in the year 1957-58. Nath in turn defended himself saying that the donor was not his disciple but that of his father. The gift, therefore, according to him, was made by the donor to him, her *guru bhai*, out of natural love and affection and was not a receipt in the carrying

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[14] For more information, see https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1572652/ Accessed on 25th June, 2017).

[15] https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1191099/ Accessed on 25th June 2017.

on of the assessee's vocation as a religious teacher. In this case the court decided against Amarendra Nath Chakrabarty saying that:

> we find, (a) that the assessee was a preacher of the Satsang cult; (b) the gift of land may have been made to the assessee voluntarily but it was made in consideration of certain spiritual benefits that the donor had received from the assessee in his capacity as a preacher of the Satsang cult. From these points of view, it cannot be urged, in our opinion, that the value of the land was not the assessee's income.

> In the instant case no such question is arising. Here there is a document, namely, the deed of gift executed on the 6th December, 1957, and both parties relied on this deed for their respective contentions. Upon construction of the relevant terms of the deed in the context of facts found by the authorities below, we have come to the conclusion that the value of the land being the subject-matter of the gift is a taxable income in the hands of the assessee.

Thus, a religious movement may develop in different directions after the death of the charismatic leader, with difficulties depending upon what preparations have been made ahead of time. Leadership has to be passed on somehow. Perhaps the easiest solution is to install spiritual successors prior to the charismatic leader's death, although this solution has its own problems. However, the death of the charismatic leader and transition to another power structure always has potential to be problematic for a religious movement. Max Weber related the death of the charismatic leader to the transition from the *charismatic* structure to the *rational* or *bureaucratic* structure. Typical of the charismatic structure is its instability and transitory nature; it has to change towards a rational form and a bureaucratic structure. Normally, this change happens when the charismatic leader dies. Thakur's eldest son, popularly known as *Borda* (Amarendra Nath Chakravarty) was chosen as the head of the organization and his spiritual successor, the Pradhan Acharya of the Satsang, who derived his spiritual powers from the Thakur. But Vivek Ranjan Chakravarty & Dr. Pracheta Ranjan Chakravarty did not appreciate the ways of their elder brother Amarendranath Chakravarty, and set up another Satsang organization with

Vivek Ranjan Chakravarty being its President. Later, these two separated their official collaboration without sacrificing the main mission of spreading Thakur's word all around the world.

The original Satsang organization, thus, has assumed two separate forms. The first, which is the biggest in size & number, is headed at present by Ashok Chakrabarty, the eldest son of Amarendranath Chakrabarty. Ashok Chakrabarty is called *Pradhan acharya*. They have almost made it into a hereditary system that the eldest son will be the *Pradhan acharya*. This is the way through which the charisma of the leader has been transformed into a more permanent, stable and routinized structure (Weber, 1964).

As Daniel Gold (2012) explains that the personalities of the guru and his successors can be quite different, as differences of culture-historical generation come into play, as do personal temperament and style. This can lead to some changes in practice such as modes of initiation, prayers, etc. In this light, it has been observed that *Borda* altered some texts, started a new way of prayer and new Mantra (the daily utterances) of Ishtavriti. The shorter version of prayer as the new mode of prayer and it was introduced as a regular practice for everyone to follow. After Borda's death in the early 90s his eldest son Ashok Chakravarty became the *acharya*. So, one of the important features of the Satsang is the *'Acharya Parampara'* where the *Acharya* is considered as the living representative of the Ideal. According to the Anukulchandra tradition, devotion and attachment to the prophet and uncompromised practice of following the laid down guidelines are supremely important. The special workers of Thakur are divided into five categories called *Jajak, Adhwarjyu, Saha-Prati-Ritwik, Prati-Ritwik and Ritwik.* The latter three are empowered to initiate people in the faith of Thakur Anukulchandra.

Analyses of Anukul's Life

The Anukulchandra movement which emerged in the nineteenth century India, and is represented today by a multitude of schools, hospitals, publishing houses, etc. can be analyzed as an example of a modern religious movement. Among the various factors that

led to the growth and expansion of the movement include the influence and power of Anukulchandra's personality in contributing to the enthusiasm and charismatic foundation of the movement, the role played by his supporters including the Western ones, the kind of relationship Anukulchandra cultivated with his followers, and the gradual process through which hero-worship was substituted with an orientation towards service. The general theory is that the Anukulchandra movement gained a great deal of its strength initially as a result of its remarkable combination of an archaic, traditionalist rhetoric of detached work with a set of 'modern' worldly aspirations and goals.

This movement started near the beginning of the twentieth century in India and it was during this period in time that the traditional Hinduism had been relegated and pushed towards being defensive due to western authority and power. But as Pinch (2006) shows, the many gurus and ascetics of Hinduism were not always so non-violent and detached from the worldly affairs. Pinch (2006) in his book 'Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires' traces the history of ascetic warriors from the sixteenth century, who called themselves *sanyasis, gosains, fakirs*, etc. It was during the Mughal rule in the seventeenth century, that the expansion and institutionalization of these ascetic gurus and their *akharas* took place. The military service of the Mughals employed boys from the lower castes and this strengthened the identity of the *akharas* as non-biological corporate groups. These fighting ascetics also operated independently in wandering bands. There was a peak in their influence during the 18th century when these armed ascetics were employed as inexpensive soldiers. A partial domestication of these ascetics took place as the British administrators became suspicious of them they were not considered as 'proper' Hindu ascetics in the devotional Hindu parlance.

Pinch, by tracing the career of Anupgiri Gosain (1734-1804) and the *akhara* over many generations of disciples contradicts the images of armed ascetics as the first Hindu nationalists and patriots. Though his study of Anupgiri, he shows that he was a practical man who through his adept military organization accumulated lot of wealth and power and was willing to serve anyone who would pay him more, without any regard about the religious identity of that person. Anupgiri along with his brothers purchased boys and

made him his disciples, had numerous women with them to keep company. Later the British, says Pinch, used religion in conjunction with respectability in order to supervise such corporations and re-align them as family lineages. Through this work Pinch questions, the ascetic identity, its rise and gradual demise.

By examining the Anukulchandra movement, it can be observed that its members function in an intricate complex of modern, bureaucratically organized institutions that reflect western as well as Indian influences. In the twentieth century, industrialization and secularization were gaining ground in the everyday life particularly in the urban areas. Against this background, Anukulchandra began to gain reputation as a prophet and a mystic with his own unique repertoire of experiences (Visvanathan 2007, 2010). Elucidating the notion of the mystic, Visvanathan (2010) writes:

> Every mystic understood the uniqueness and singularity of his/her own experience, understood that the body mediates. For the mystic, the freedom is not from the rules of the gravity of the earth, but in understanding these, living with them, interpreting them, and very occasionally being allowed to transcend them…it is a shift away from objectivity which is comprehensible and shared, to a subjectivity that is total, but can indeed be described and shared, and is feared (2010: 41).

Thakur Anukulchandra eventually went on to become the main figure in a growing religious movement that markedly had 'modernist' connotations. He combined his philosophy and teachings with a social-welfare ethic. Two developments regarding the organization require sociological attention. First is the fact that the organization is a stable network of agencies that is professionally managed, along with traces of charismatic leadership that brought it to existence. Second is the focus on a service-orientation that has developed from his teachings.

In the initial stages, a large number of people were drawn to Anukulchandra as a consequence of their own crises of self-identity, sickness, personal/financial issues, etc and they found in him a sympathetic mentor, guide who was also a culturally accepted

model. Thakur Anukulchandra was an energetic, highly intelligent person and the devotees became emotionally involved with him through ties of respect and affection which with, through time, withstood the strain of an initial skepticism. In a short span of time, he became the leader and organizer of a numerous followers and instilled in them a sense of mission and also expressed onto them a collective commitment towards his teachings. Anukulchandra who was educated partially along western lines, was able to merge a practical, questioning and critical mind with that of an enthusiastic disposition. In addition to this, Anukulchandra derived a sense of assurance from the mystic experiences that he had gone through. Given a complex, multi-faceted personality, Anukulchandra was gradually able to produce a transposition of spiritual and religious principles to the plane of ordinary, profane idealism. He achieved this by acting upon the conviction that his teachings had universal implications and the philanthrophic content of these teachings had more significance than the stress given to supra-sensuous experiences.

The perspectives about life and the world which Anukulchandra developed, which came to be shared with his followers involved, atleast partially, no new religious doctrines. Rather than that, a vital aspect seems to be the strengthening of religious experiences and an endeavour to go back to the foundation of religious insight through personal experiences. It was as though the Indian followers within Anukulchandra's circle, alongwith their western believers, needed to re-interpret and re-define and possibly experience again the significance held by their old religious attitudes in the light of their new and more immediate experiences.

From this study, it can be further inferred that so far as the devotees' depictions of the guru is concerned, it always contains some aspects of mysteriousness, consisting of imageries that involve essentialism and the perceptions of an extraordinary and unique agency of the guru. Secondly, those representations which are characterized by a sense of mysteriousness, get their 'infectious' feature by means of the alterations in the mood produced during intensive ritual activities. Consequently, the transmission of religious symbolism concerned with the charisma of the leader was in the beginning based on a

complex process of the combination of mood-altering rituals along with such circumstances that the followers found memorable.

So the narratives and accounts of the life of Anukulchandra have the standard ingredients of legend that is commonly associated with lives of eminent religious founders. According to numerous hagiographies, his birth was surrounded with miraculous happenings. Accounts of popular biographies which devotees have written about his life contain descriptions of his various spectacular experiences and his supernatural abilities of healing the sick and miracle-making. The many typical charismatic attractions of trances, visions, curative powers and miracles are present in these narratives.

Thakur Anukulchandra can be understood in terms of what Weber called 'prophet', i.e. an individual bearer of charisma. The prophet exercises his powers by virtue of his personal gifts and claims distinct revelations and has specific doctrines at the core of his mission. According to Weber, prophets very often practice divination as well a magical healing and counseling. Thakur Anukulchandra's profession as a doctor, his speaking in tongues in a state of trance as well as his advice and guidance to his followers helped him secure a position as a religious leader. As Weber says, 'the prophet may be an exemplary man who, by his personal example, demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation' (1965 [1922]: 55).

Thus, through his personal examples, the prophet guides his followers, who seek his help to get out of crises or desire salvation. He recommends to these followers the same path or a similar one by means of which he negotiated. The prophet presents to the disciples 'a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude towards life (Weber 1965 [1922]: 59). The disciples of the prophet are commonly required to organize their behavior into a course of life that provides life with a coherent meaning. In other words, an ideal way of life is presented by the exemplary prophets that can be emulated by others inorder to achieve greater heights of personal virtue. If the insights of the prophet gain an audience and he becomes successful, he can acquire a permanent set of helpers or disciples. This kind of a religious community arises due to

routinization which can be seen in the culmination of the Satsang in case of Anukulchandra.

But Anukulchandra's persona did not symbolize a pure charismatic leadership. His authority rested on him being suitably initiated by his mother into the tradition of Radhasoami. He thought of himself as another messenger of a respected tradition with a long line of gurus and not as the founder of an exclusive, new religion. He did not stress his authority only on personal revelations. He, in fact, was dismissive of them. He also considered that the sacred scriptures were far more authoritative than revelation by any individual which might disagree with the holy scriptures.

Anukulchandra's appeal also rested on his flexible interpretation of religion. Vivekananda laid emphasis on the fact that Hinduism was universal, as it is founded upon eternal principles. Speaking to an Indian audience, he referred to those similar principles to explain that 'ours is the only true religion' (1989 [1907]: 180). Aurobindo was in favor of a diverse, essentially Vedantic Hinduism, that he considered universal and 'the basis of the future world-religion' (1970-72, 2: 19). But, according to him, this 'wider Hinduism' was something that embraced 'Science and faith, Theism, Christianity, Mahomedanism and Buddhism and yet is none of these' (Aurobindo 1970-72, 2: 19). The the book written by Bipinchandra, 'The Soul of India', based on Krishna, concludes with the affirmation: '[I]n Hindu Vaishnavism, we have a more thorough, more concrete, at once a more real and a more ideal presentation of the Universal than perhaps we have in any other culture' (Pal 1958 [1911]: 224). As it happens, he was born into a family that followed the Vaisnava sect. But, he also wrote that the true universal religion was 'beyond all sectional and sectarian designations' (Pal 1907: 58).

One of the main problems with the universal notion of Hinduism as explained by Vivekananda, Aurobindo, and Bipinchandra was that it lacked resemblance to the kind of Hinduism that was practiced in people's homes and the temples of Bengal. All of them dealt with this issue by differentiating between a higher philosophical and idealistic Hinduism and a lower, many a time corrupt, popular Hinduism (Aurobindo 1970-72, 3:

461; Chatterji 1977: 174; Vivekananda 1989 [1907], 1: 15). This was the point where Anukulchandra's teachings can be seen as being more influential as he was able to connect with people in terms of a language that they understood, be it 'scientific' or 'religious'.

Yet as far as his dedicated followers were concerned, Anukulchandra did not gain legitimacy and authority as much on the basis of tradition, as he did owing to his personal qualities. The cultural context of that time turned him into a charismatic leader, and his authority rested almost absolutely on his individual self-realisation and character. Whatever Anukulchandra said was considered as the truth for his followers and that was all there was to it. Behind the question of his charismatic appeal lies a greater issue of the attainment and transmission of spiritual and religious ideas. A number of questions emerge regarding the ways in which religious ideas get transmitted from one cultural and territorial boundary to another. What were the diverse mechanisms of spreading of a religion from one society to another?

Thakur's devotee and biographer Ray A. Hauserman (1962) in his book 'Ocean in a Teacup' writes about him 'I concentrated only on the remembered experiences of those older people who had actually known Thakur since his early days. But here again, confusion held full sway. According to the individual relating the story, Thakur could emerge as a gifted child, or the victim of an Oedipus complex ... as understood or misunderstood ... as a strong-willed child or an excessively humble one ... as a scientist, or doctor, or inventor ... as a common-sense prophet or a mystic.' (1962: 5-6).

There is an interesting incident that some of the the devotees recall when speaking of Thakur's divinity. In 1942, when the Satsang's rice crop, which was cultivated by the community, was all set for harvest that season, Thakur suggested that no contracts for the sale of the crop were to be negotiated. In its place, he asked that all of the rice must be stock up for use within the ashram. A number of followers were astounded by this order and a lot of controversy followed. During this time, the European war had resulted in sky-rocketing of the cost of rice. Some speculators were offering the farmers as much as

two to three times of its normal value. Many of the followers who were owners of private land could not refuse to let go of this deal and have a shot at prosperity. Even quite a few devoted Satsangis were of the view that a great opportunity was getting away from them and so they pressurized Thakur to let them mull over at least selling some part of their plentiful crop. But Thakur was resolute in this matter. Consequently, large granaries kept on springing up in the Satsang.

As a result of Thakur's decision some devotees were unhappy with the idea but they, nonetheless, did not question his judgement. In the subsequent months a faulty system of distribution and the increased requirements of the war brought about a famine in Bengal. Thousands of villagers migrated towards Calcutta with the hope of finding food. But the Satsang community in Himaitpur was abundantly stocked and inhabitants from far and near came in order to join the daily rice line and get a share of food. The storerooms of the Satsang which were seemingly very large a couple of months ago, became empty one after another. Rationing was austere but fair so the supplies were just enough until the next crop was ready for harvest. And as the devotees claim, there was no death due to starvation in that area.

Anukul's extreme devotion to his mother has been analyzed different by different devotees. His American devotee, Ray Hauserman, raises the possibility that Anukul can be considered as 'a victim of Oedipus complex' but according to Rabindranath Sarkar, this devotion was not a 'complex' rather a 'concord that conquered all other complexes in his life' (1987: 10). A complex or not, Monomohini's position in Anukul's life was unparalleled. For example, once when he was quite young he cut the sole of his foot on a piece of glass. He was bleeding profusely and was in great pain, so he told his mother that he couldn't go to school. But his mother replied that he should rush to school. So he went, thinking that if his mother said it was nothing, then there could be nothing to worry about. That night she found that his foot was badly swollen and wondered how he could have gone to school without worrying about it. But his devotion to her was such that her words were everyone to him and she was no less that his existence.

Another such instance took place in his school on the day of his final examination in mathematics. When his mother observed that he was late in leaving for the school she said that as Anukul was late he would not be able to solve a single problem in the exam. Anukulchandra rushed to school and got there before the examination began. When he was given the question paper, he found them very simple and knew he could solve then all. But if he did, his mother's word would be proved false so he left his answer sheet blank (Brace and Ganguly 1987).

Even when people started to recognize Anukul a mystic and a saint and formally started calling him 'Thakur', he was inclined to view how his mother reacted to all these changes. Hauserman (1962) writes:

> Anukul watched Monmohini closely for some sign of pleasure or displeasure toward the new, and somewhat exalted, mode of address. There was no hint of either. She accepted and used the name "Thakur" with an ease that made her seem completely unaware that a change had taken place (1962: 134).

The representation of Anukulchandra as 'child-like' demonstrates well how complex it is to explain a thing in terms of cultural models only. A number of his devotees, especially the older ones, perceive of Anukulchandra's personality as that of a child or comment on his 'boyish' qualities. This is one of the most prominent ways in which he is remembered by some disciples.

One of the things that largely contributed to the idea of child-likeness in Anukulchandra was his energetic; always full-of-life demeanour. So, it becomes pertinent here to question, understand and determine how these perceptions originated. The fact that Anukulchandra is considered ritually pure with boyish qualities like Krishna does not appear surprising in this background of a Hindu movement. It can be argued that such portrayals of Anukulchandra can be explained in terms of the cultural upbringing of his disciples. In other words, these representations might have become significant for his disciples after they had internalized the guru's teachings and been socialized in terms of thecultural model of the movement, principles and approaches to life. This also means

that disciples would have had to first gain knowledge about these ideas so as to appreciate these features and thus, find them appealing in their guru.

Allowing for certain qualification, Anukul's spiritual life can be largely divided into two parts. The period of *kirtan* and trance that began from the year 1914 and lasted till 1919. In the case of Anukul, this phase of getting immersed in *kirtan* and the subsequent going into trance and speaking in different languages about the past, present, future and a variety of other subjects (of which he later had no recollection) became the basis for his mysticism. Even though his followers were not able to understand everything he said in that state, it still was expressed in the language of the devotees due to their shared ethos and symbols (Visvanathan, 1998). She explains:

> The mystic is a social fact. His vision expresses itself in the language of the believers: if it did not he would merely be mad or pathological, speaking an incomprehensible private language. Language becomes the symbol of the mystic's separateness (set apartness) and the degree of comprehensibility is an index of how close the listener is to the life experience of the mystic. Shared symbols, shared ethos, shared language becomes the bases of a community (1998: 14).

From the writings of the devotees, it becomes evident that a lot of attention was paid to both Anukulchandra's personality and the moods and emotions that were produced in the audience by this congregational singing. So it is imperative to question as to how Anukulchandra displayed his personality and also his various moods and ecstasies, phases of trance-induced frenzy with phases of calmness and what was the significance placed on religious experiences that were created by these rituals. More important, however, is the depiction of this event as very unusual as this kind of thing was not a regular occurrence, but a very special event that devotees talked and speculated about for days. Stories of events such as this almost immediately spread to neighbouring areas, attaracted other people and provided a boost to the movement. Sudhir Kakar in his book 'The Analyst and the Mystic (1991) explains this as:

> The shift from the teacher to the master image is inevitable given the fact that perhaps a major…role of the guru is that of a healer of emotional suffering and its somatic manifestations. This psychotherapeutic function, insufficiently acknowledge, is clearly visible in well known modern gurus whose fame depends on their reported healing capabilities, rather than deriving any mastery of traditional scriptures, philosophical knowledge, of even great spiritual attainments…in India there will be more miracles and magical healing (1991: 45).

As a matter of fact, Anukulchandra did not make a big deal out of his devotional ecstasies and very evidently put them in a secondary position with regard to the acceptance, understanding, preaching of his ideology. Ecstasy and mysticism certainly was not the most important thing to Anukulchandra. For him, diligent preaching and dutiful following of orders given by him were more highly appreciated as signs of devotion.

After this phase, emerged the period of organization building. What was the inner implication of Anukulchandra's religious philosophy? What methods of God-realization and self-realization did he prescribe for his disciples and devotees?

According to Thakur Anukulchandra,

> 'To uphold one's own life and growth with that of others is Dharma. Dharma means the web of activities for life and growth… Dharma never becomes many. It is always one. To speak of the Hindu religion, the Christian religion, the Mohammedan religion, Buddhist religion is erroneous. Rather they are all views. In fact, there are no differences among the views. They are only different expressions of the same thing. It is to feel the One in many forms'. (Biswas 1981: 72).

When Krishna Prasanna Bhattacharya, a professor of physics and assistant to Dr. C. V. Raman and who later became a disciple of Thakur expressed his disbelief and remarked on his first visit to the Ashram, at finding so much 'worldly activity' at the ashram as one

generally expects a more *'dharmic'* atmosphere in such places. To this, Thakur is said to have replied,

> Dharma, as I understand, is the science that elevates our being and becoming. Without activity a man cannot have dharma…. The essence of every religion, as I understand it, is that man shall not live by bread alone . . . not that he must deny bread. No . . . the material world is an integral part of the experience we are engaged in. To expand consciousness, a man need break only those chains that bind him to one part of the whole. (Hauserman 1962: 192).

The attributes that the Vedic view ascribed to God are 'Sat', 'Chid' and 'Ananda'. Thakur accepts the root meanings of the term 'Sat', 'Chid' and 'Ananda' and defines them as 'existence', 'responsiveness' and 'becoming' respectively (Biswas 1980). Here, Dharma is meant not only as a way of life but a way of life lived in the light of norms (Madan 1987).

Thakur's concept of God as One without second does not contradict the doctrine of dualism in his indoctrination. For him, the meaning of duality or non-duality has nothing to do with the existence of God. In his view, both monism and dualism are right as the sense of non-duality is the ultimate result of duality. The sense of duality, non-duality or the sense that transcends both of these are the stages of acquisition in man. And the feeling that the man (devotee) realizes in the pursuit of God are his acquisitive experiences. This realization is not an abstract achievement having no relation with the reality of life. It is a practical achievement. From this comes his emphasis on the *karma marga* or the path of action which found expression in his 'Love for labour' movement. When a devotee came to him and said that he wanted to resign from his job and attend to the Thakur full time, he said to him,

> Your greatest contribution can best be achieved among the people you know. In your position, there are many opportunities for you to enlighten the working men. Teach them to love their labor. To experience it as an integral part of their own

being. To contribute it with free heart to the Supreme Father and to the blessing of all. (Hauserman, 1962: 207)

As is common for most of the Hindu culture, the satsang tradition of Anukulchandra places a prominent importance on the principle of guru in one's spiritual life. Within Hinduism generally, the word 'guru' refers to a teacher, and specifically it refers to a teacher who has religious knowledge or is a repository of religious insight. However, among the diverse traditions, a large number of differences exist as to how much is the significance of a guru in an individual's spiritual life. At one end of the spectrum, the guru is perceived as a person who can guide and show the path to liberation for the disciples as a result of his or her own spiritual experiences and realization. In this case, the guru is viewed as a helper and an educator, and is generally not worshipped. At the other end, the guru might be viewed as being identical to God, with capabilities of conferring liberation to his or her disciples. In the latter case, as the guru is given sole the responsibility of liberating the disciple, he therefore becomes an object of worship.

Anukulchandra laid a lot of emphasis on the institution of the *Guru*, the spiritual preceptor. This gave emphasis on a relativity in spiritual power or capacity, and also implicitly distinguished the office of the guru under whose guidance such differences could be critically determined (Sen 1993). According to him, the guru initiates a disciple through 'holy water' and a 'Mantra' or 'Name' and teaches the person the 'secret spiritual technique'. Only when the disciple follows this technique through 'untottering love and service for the Guru', he achieves spiritual realization which leads to a 'harmonious efficiency and all round development of his total being' (Biswas 1981).

The Satsang tradition of Thakur Anukulchandra sees itself as a monotheistic tradition within the larger Hindu culture. It defines itself as a branch of Radhasoami sampradaya (denomination). It is not a new religion. Anukulchandra did not envisage himself as starting a new *sampradaya*, he saw his satsang mostly as a contemporary extension of the Radhasoami tradition.

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Chanting of the *mantra* or the holy name is one of the signature practices of the Anukulchandra tradition. The ideas of *atman* (soul)*, maya* (illusion)*, samasara* (cycle of births and re-births)*, moksha* (liberation) and yoga, are standard elements throughout the Hindu culture. The various sects and sub-sects are not so much set apart in terms of their philosophical doctrines as through the forms of *sadhana*, or spiritual practice which they propagate. Anukulchandra emphasized on devotion or *bhakti* in the form of congregational and individual chanting of God's names. This practice, though given a new lease of life through Anukulchandra, was not new and was popularized by Chaitanya, a mystic and reformer who lived at the turn of the sixteenth century.

The holy names of God that are to be chanted by the devotees are encapsulated within a specific formula or *mantra*. This chanting is therefore considered as a form of calling the Lord and his force, in order to shield the soul. The theory that follows the employment of the *mantra* is that it revitalizes a person's 'original consciousness'. Deriving from the idea that as eternal spiritual souls, people are originally mindful and conscious beings, but owing to their connection with illusory and external energies since time immemorial, their original consciousness has become loaded with accumulated 'impurities'. According to the theory of mantra, all of these misgiving that one has can be 'cleansed' through the chanting of the holy names. The sound of this chanting will automatically lead the hearer to a "transcendental platform". In order for the mantra to have the desired result one has to receive it from authentic spiritual sources. As Anukulchandra explains, the mantra must be chanted after having been received from an authorized guru, or "spiritual master". Anukulchandra states that unless one is initiated by a legitimate spiritual master, the mantra is without effect. So, the effect of the mantra is channelized through *parampara* of the guru.

Anukulchandra maintains that if an individual aspires to gain liberation, it is of utmost importance that he/she accepts a spiritual master. Through the guidance of the spiritual master only is it possible to obtain access to the grace of God. It is generally considered as a given that an individual will not be able to understand spiritual truth unless he/she listens to a legitimate spiritual guide. Initiation for a devotee is thought of like a new birth

on a spititual plane. After this initiation, a link is set up between God and the initiated disciple. But this link is instituted only by the means of a spiritual guru, who, through the process of initiation is, thought to have accepted the load of the disciple's sins. Therefore, on one hand, the guru is viewed as a driving force for *moksha* so far as the devotee is concerned and the devotee in turn is supposed to consider his/her guru and worship him as God. As a devotee explains '*Anything that the guru says is like getting a message from God'*. For the devotees of Anukulchandra, his teachings are symbolic of an absolute truth and they consider it as their mission to spread his words around the globe.

From this it entails that, the scale and extent to which a devotee engages himself/herself in spreading the philosophy of the guru and also engages in his service becomes a signifier of spiritual progression. But, committing oneself full-time in the services of the Satsang does not only mean private meditaton. It also requires working whole-heartedly for the organization in conjunction with being a part of the temple worship. All in all, these prerequisites of an absolute obedience to the guru and employment in his service lead to a very distinctive authoritative relationship where one leader has with him a set of deployble representatives.

The kind of Hinduism that is practiced by the satsang is intensely devotional and is a derivative of the bhakti movement that was well-known especially in Bengal. In this tradition of devotional bhakti, the guru is often considered as very prominent in terms of religious as well as ritual expression. Philosophically, a number of movements lay emphasis on the fact that liberation cannot be attained without a guru being the mediator between God and the devotee and ritually, this has led to the guru being venerated on a same plane as God. Thakur Anukulchandra was treated with extreme respect by his followers, who offered him obeisance whenever they were in his presence. A relationship involving camaraderie as well as respect for the guru was possible as Anukulchandra did not maintain a distance between him and his disciples. This resulted in the devotees having a number of opportunities for interactions and conversations with him.

The way a puja is structured sheds light on the the fundamental way in which the communication between the guru and the devotees can be understood. Each time deities are to be worshipped, a person has to worship the representative image of the guru first. The symbolism contained within the elaborate worship of deities in temples is also the foundation from which guru worship finds its legitimacy. The everyday routine of worshipping the guru and spreading his words according to one's means is an essential feature for the devotees. The daily ritual ceremonies performed in the Satsang Vihar can be seen in conjunction to the larger Hindu bhakti tradition, and the ways in which puja as well as *arati* is conducted maintains the central notions of the Hindu culture. The daily veneration of the guru also constitutes an important background within which interaction among the devotees takes place. During the initial phases of the Satsang, it was through preachings, *kirtans* and other ritual settings in which people first came across Anukulchandra. Moreover, these rituals are also a symbolic expression for communicating a relationship between the guru and devotees.

Even today, the lectures given to the devotees after the ritual worship comprises one of the basic means through which potential disciples get accustomed with the spiritual masters of the Satsang. However, temple worship is not the sole environment where interaction with the leaders and the devotees takes place. Thakur Anukulchandra never made it very difficult for ordinary people to approach or consult him and was available to them more or less around the clock.

In the present time, the context for interaction available to the devotees can be categorized into the following ways. First is the worshipping of the image of the guru. Second is the lecture that is given daily as an intimate part of worship. Personal as well as casual conversations constitute the third part of interaction and lastly are the dealings of the management with the followers.

In order to understand how Thakur Anukulchandra became so successful amongst diverse classes of people, one has to have a deep understanding of his multi-faceted personality and the range of opportunities that the devotees saw in this philosophy and outlook

towards life. He had a great skill of communicating his ideas across to people in simple but effective terms; he was an imaginative storyteller, he could tread well between the path of tradition and modernity, he was known for his simplicity, child-like personality and was also considered a father-figure as and when the situation arose and last but not the least he was a great organizer and was able to motivate a lot of people. A number of people who were cynical about his philosophy however appreciated his compassion. Thus, various explanations can be given regarding the charismatic personality of Thakur Anukulchandra. He is mostly viewed as an incredible person who was an embodiment of divine grace.

It is worth mentioning that Anukulchandra's charisma did not rely upon particular situations. As he was almost all the time accessible to his devotees and he was always surrounded by them. They listened to his sermons, asked questiones when in doubt and he in turn listened and offered helpful suggestions for their myriad problems. His devotees went along with him for his walks, conversed informally among themselves in the evening meetings and also had chances for personal interactions with him. From this it becomes evident that Thakur's charisma was not 'managed'. On contrary, it was the opposite. It was mostly during his public as well as private meetings with diverse followers that his charismatic persona grew which reinforced the notion that he was special. Dr. R.M Biswas, a devotee, in his book (1982) writes about his meeting with Thakur as:

> I noticed that Thakur was the most normal man but with an astounding influence of love and wisdom over thousands of people. Like others, I had free access to him and I could easily relate myself to him in a most intimate and personal level. In him found the technique, not of renunciation, but of propitious use, not of suppression but of adjustment and sublimation (1982:4)

Thakur Anukulchandra was not only very deliberate and in control of himself, but was also keenly aware and insightful of other people's personalities and was skilled on how to deal with them. After finishing his lectures, he gave his devotees ample prospects of asking questions. He was also very efficient when it came to dealing with rabble-rousers.

Anukulchandra is frequently represented as someone who could resolve issues to the satisfaction of everyone. From the point of view of his devotees, he had a great knack for maintaining control during interpersonal interactions. In other words, Anukulchandra can be said to have been performing what can be termed as 'stunts' according to Goffman.

Another significant aspect of Thakur Anukulchandra's personality, according to his devotees, was an element of surprise. About this aspect, all the sources are unanimous, that very often the way Thakur acted and conducted himself came a matter of surprise and admiration for his devotees. It can thus be inferred that Anukulchandra's appearance, manner and way of interacting with people commanded great attention, even from those who did not follow him. He was like an enigma who had diverse and surprising aspects in him. In addition, he had commendable expertise in dealing and organizing people according to their abilities.

It can be concluded that initially, Anukulchandra's charisma was founded upon the ways of his behavior that came as a surprise to his audience. Even after he became old and temporarily incapacitated by a stroke, his mind was always sharp. He was seemingly tireless while pursuing his goals. He evoked in his followers a spirit of unceasing service towards others. He was not only perceived as 'childlike' but also in control of diverse situations. His extraordinary 'stunts' of expressing very complex notions with simplicity and his remarkable ways of dealing with tension in a calm manner gave rise to a sense of appreciation to those around him. In these numerous ways, Anukulchandra came to be seen as a charismatic personality by a large number of people and many got initiation from him formally and spread his words and philosophy to various places. Bhubaneswar is one such place which has a large number of followers of Thakur. It is also host to one of the biggest temples built in the name of Thakur. The following chapter will deal with how the devotees of Thakur in Bhubaneswar engage with his divinity and carve out various spaces of devotion with the ashram.

CHAPTER – II

Bhubaneswar: History, Spirituality and Spaces of Devotion

This chapter will provide an exposition of the history and culture of Odisha[16] with special emphasis on the different religions that found a place in Odisha owing to royal support of religious expansion. It will explore Odisha in terms of understanding the location of right wing forces, its ideas of cultural homogeneity, sameness. It will outline the growth of Bhubaneswar as a temple town and subsequently as the capital city, and also delineate the political and social settings that led to the growth of new religious movements such as that of Thakur Anukulchandra. It will also examine the *satsang* temple as a space of devotion and explore the sacred landscape of the temple and the linkages between space and meaning.

Geographical Features:

The State with a geographical area of 155,707 square kilometers, comprising 4.74% of country's landmass, is broadly within the coastal plains of India with forest clad low mountain ranges and wide expanse of fairly open plains in the South and West. The scheduled areas cover nearly 45% of the total geographical area. It lies in the East coast of the country between 81degrees 27' and 87 degrees 29' East longitudes and 170 49' and 220 34' North latitudes, with a coastline of 480 kilometers and a continental shelf of 24000 sq. kms. It has vast forest coverage of 48,838 sq. kms. i.e. 31.4 percent of the State's geographical area, which includes a large chunk of 27,972 sq. kms. of dense

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[16] The name of the state Orissa was changed to Odisha, and the language from Oriya to Odia in the year 2011 by the passage of Orissa (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2010 in the parliament. And these terms have been used interchangeably in the Thesis.

forest. The State is also endowed with vast mineral deposits like coal, iron-ore, manganese-ore, bauxite, chromite, dolomite, nickel, precious and semi precious stones, etc. Of the major rivers of the country, the Mahanadi, which is a deltaic river, passes through the State with a large number of tributaries and distributaries.

Source: http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/orissa/
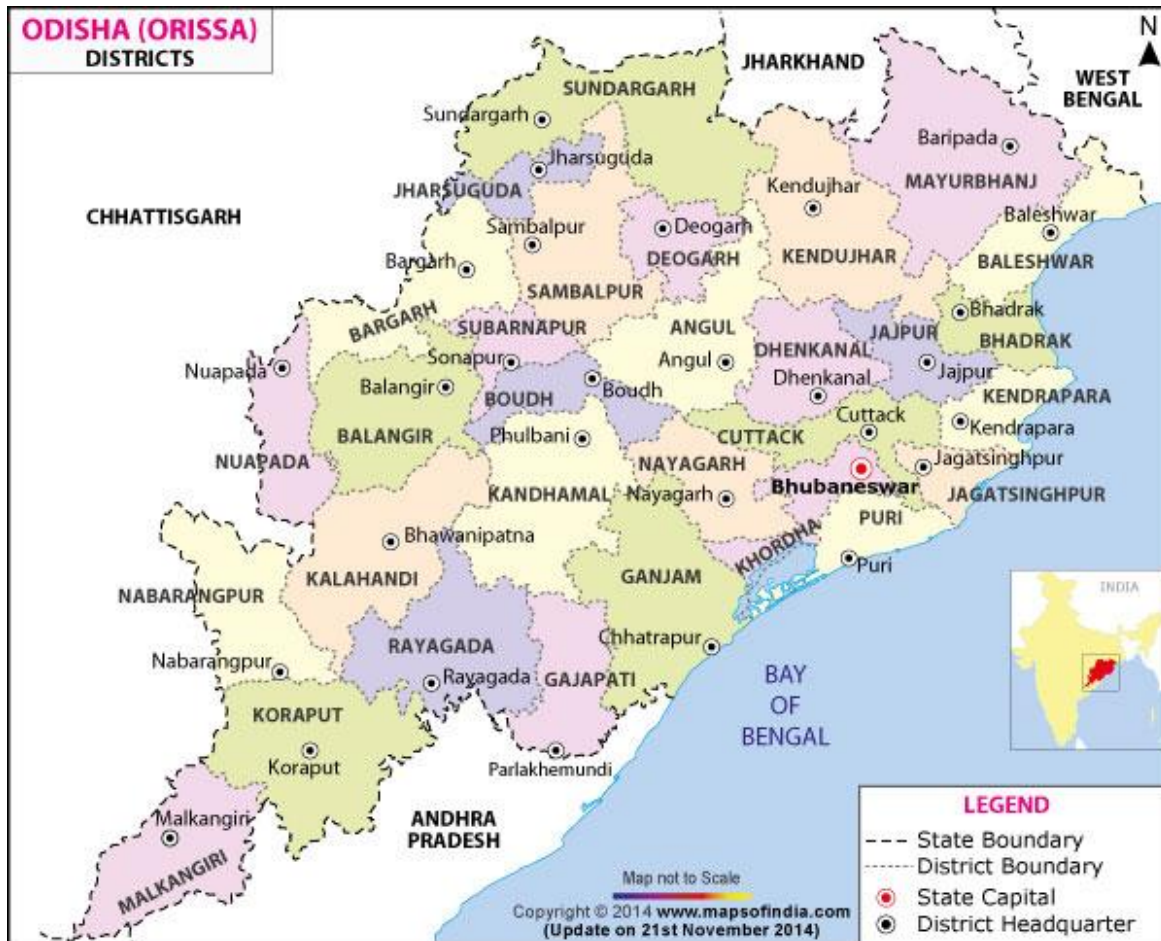
Besides, there are many other big and small rivers and streams with a network of branches, which not only cause severe floods but keep many areas cut off from communication during rains. The State has not been able to harness its water resources to get the benefits of such a bounty of nature. The state is divided into ten agro-climatic zones on the basis of soil, rainfall, climate and other relevant characteristics. Broadly, the land area of the State is divided into three classes, namely (i) Low lands accounting for

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25.6%, (ii) Medium lands accounting for 33.6% and (iii) Up-lands accounting for 40.8%. The state experiences hot and humid climate round the year with short winters.

Demographic Profile

Odisha is one of the major states of India both in terms of land area and population wise. The state is ranked at eleventh position in terms of population in India. The official census of Odisha 2011 was conducted in the state by the Census of India have provided the following numbers. As per details from Census 2011, Odisha has population of 4.2 crores, an increase from figure of 3.68 crore in 2001 census. Total population of Odisha as per 2011 census is 41,974,218 of which male and female are 21,212,136 and 20,762,082 respectively. In 2001, total population was 36,804,660 in which males were 18,660,570 while females were 18,144,090. The total population growth in this decade was 14.05 percent while in previous decade it was 15.94 percent. The population of Orissa forms 3.47 percent of India in 2011. In 2001, the figure was 3.58 percent.

Table 1: Religious Profile

Description	Population	Percentage
Hindu	39,300,341	93.63 %
Christian	1,161,708	2.77 %
Muslim	911,670	2.17 %
Other Religion	478,317	1.14 %
Not Available	76,919	0.18 %
Sikh	21,991	0.05 %
Buddhist	13,852	0.03 %
Jain	9,420	0.02 %

Source: http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/orissa.html. 26th December 2016.

According to latest census of 2011, sex ratio in the state has increased to 979 females per 1000 males. This has increased marginally as compared to previous figures of 972 females per 1000 males in 2001 census. The literacy rate in Odisha has improved by nearly 10% in this decade. Odisha with 270 per sq. km. density of population is below the

national average of 382 per sq. km. This was previously recorded at 236 per sq. km. in the last census of 2001.

Hinduism is majority religion in state of Orissa with 93.63 % followers. Christianity is second most popular religion in Orissa state with 2.77 % following it. In Orissa state, Islam is followed by 2.17 %, Jainism by 0.02 %, Sikhism by 0.05 % and Buddhism by 0.05 %. Around 1.14 % stated 'Other religion', approximately 0.18 % stated 'No Particular Religion'.

Odisha: A Historical and Political Overview

Because of its geographic isolation and relatively good climate and soil, coastal Odisha passed through successive periods of Hindu, Muslim, and British rule with little economic or social disruption. During this long time-span the inland hill region remained under the suzerainty of a series of ruling princes, some of whom had long been powerful leaders and other of whom were little more than tribal adventurers. So far as the development of the the caste system was concerned, Biswamoy Pati (2003) is of the opinion that it developed late in Orissa and when it did, around 10-11th A.D, it was markedly different in comparison to the Indo-Gangetic plain model and it had its own particularities and variations and most importantly, the varna system became a 'legitimizing force' during state formation. Pati attributes these differences of caste formation to the presence of a large tribal population and the specific geographical variations that marked the region such as the presence of a coastal tract along with the forested interior. Therefore, when the caste system emerged, the following scenario could be observed, according to Pati (2003):

> The land grants to Brahmins and the extension of agriculture implied the conversion of most of the tribes into Sudras, which converged with their process of peasantisation. Alongside, their chiefs were absorbed as Kshatriyas into the varna system. This implied the absence of any rigid polarization. The classic four-fold varna system continued to remain mostly notional, as in practice the two-tier structure with the numerous intermediary occupational castes constituted

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the functional reality. Consequently, one witnesses the evolution of two clearly identifiable varnas- the Brahmins and the Sudras. The Vaisyas were not really visible in society, though men of substance appropriated this status for themselves…the varna system was a major legitimizing force in this process of state formation (2003: 7).

After its native Hindu dynasties declined and were finally overthrown in the fifteenth century (Panigrahi 1961), coastal Odisha itself had no unique identity in contrast to, say, the Rajput kingdoms in the West.

While under British rule, what is now the state of Odisha, was a part of Bengal. In 1912, Odisha was then governed from Patna in Bihar. Around the turn of the century an active Odia nationalist movement developed. This movement was rooted in feelings of cultural and linguistic identity and traced its history back to the days of the great Kalinga kings and temples builders of a thousand years earlier (Bailey 1963). It had several objectives; chief among them were the recognition of Odia as one of the official languages of India and the creation of a separate Odia-speaking province. Both the goals were reached in 1936 with the establishment of Orissa Province by the government of India[17]. It was composed of the four coastal districts of Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, and Ganjam, the interior districts of Sambalpur and Koraput, and the two small enclaves of Angul and the Khondamal Hills. The remaining territory consisted of twenty-six princely states. Even with the recognition of Odia as an official Indian language and the creation of Odisha as the state, feelings of antagonism toward their ex-rulers in Bihar and Bengal still linger in many Odia today.

Once the new province was established, the Odisha Government began to consider the question of whether or not to build a new administrative capital, as the city of Cuttack was already crowded and had little room for expansion. In 1937 the first elected Legislative Assembly of the new province voted after heated debate to retain the provincial headquarters at Cuttack, then the only city of any size in Odisha. Before any

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[17] All provinces including Odisha, became states after independence.

final action could be taken, freedom movement politics and World War II intervened. In 1945 under a caretaker government, an alternate capital site near Bhubaneswar was investigated. In addition to being near the famous religious centre, the site was uninhabited, government-owned, well-drained, suitable for construction, and relatively accessible to the rest of the province. Publicity given, the site selection studies, however, rekindled the old regional animosities which had laid dormant since 1937, particularly those of Cuttack inhabitants who felt that they would incur a substantial loss if the capital were moved. Eventually, in 1946 the interim Orissa Government, led by the famous freedom fighter, Harekrushna Mahtab, unanimously decided to locate the new administrative capital at Bhubaneswar (Orissa Legislative Assembly Proceedings 1964: 964).

Since World War II, Orissa politics have gone through two main stages. From 1947 to 1958 power was divided between two groups-the Congress Party, composed of coastal people, and the Ganatantra Parishad, dominated the ex-rulers of Orissa's former princely states. The latter rarely lost an election in their own areas. From that time on, however, the Orissa political scene has been characterized by shifting coalitions of political leaders of different persuasions and highlighted by periodic government collapses; when no local leader has been able to govern, there have been temporary takeovers by the Government of India. Since 2000, the Biju Janata Dal has been at the helm of politics in Odisha. Odisha, like other cultural regions, were constituted by the conjunction of a multiplicity of historical forces over time. The gradual coming together of localities and sub-regions at different stages of cultural attainment, the consequent overlaps and intersections, and the wider network of trans-regional cultural transactions with the contemporary societies went into the shaping of the region, Odisha.

History of Bhubaneswar

In the year 1947, the jungle that covered the public territory two miles north of the Old Town was selected for the site of a new capital city for the state of Orissa (presently, Odisha). The new capital was conceived as a planned city to be devoted to administrative,

educational and other government institutions. Until then, Bhubaneswar was a small ancient temple town noted for its sacred Hindu complex largely controlled by the major temple of Lingaraj, the most sacred Shaivite temple in eastern India, and its temple servants. At one time the temple priests controlled vast paddy lands from which the temple derived much of its income and sustenance. Besides its religious importance, Bhubaneswar has a rich historical tradition. It was the seat of the great kings of Orissa and temple builders of the eighth to the thirteenth centuries, many of the temples are still spread out the landscape, especially in and around the Old Town.

As a temple town, it was in the seventh century that Bhubaneswar first witnessed a lot of temple building activity and as a result in the seventh century A.D., and subsequently experienced a number of changes in its physical form, ethnic composition, its religious character, and its role as a socio-religious center from century to century. The city's makeup varied with Buddhism, Jainism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism, religions which found an abode in Bhubaneswar during different times.

Panigrahi (1961) writes that the history of Bhubaneswar becomes clearer in the days of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, who reigned from 269 to 232 B.C. He chose a hill outside of Bhubaneswar for the propagation of his rock edicts. The excavations at Sisupalagarh, five kilometers to the southeast of Bhubaneswar, take the origin of the old city back to the fourth or third century B.C., lending authority to the idea thatthe city of Tosali, the regional administrative capital of Ashoka, might have been situated in the neighbourhood of Dhauligiri, eight kilometers south of Bhubaneswar (1961: 177-79) Ashoka's monuments near Bhubaneswar remain the major source for the early history of the city.

The Kalinga war, which filled Ashoka with remorse, was the main reason due to which he was drawn towards the Buddhist school of thought. The new Mauryan policy of *Dhamma,* besides introducing Buddhism to Odisha led to the implementation of welfare programs such as building of new roads, construction of wells, construction of rest-

houses every nine miles on the highways for travelers, etc[18]. Even though Hinduism coexisted with Buddhism during the Mauryan period, due to royal patronage, the entire artistic expressions of this age, centered on Buddhism. Since the full force of Ashoka's rule and proselytization was felt in coastal Odisha, leaving out the people in the hilly tracts, it could explain the Mauryan emperor's decision to place his special rock edicts near Bhubaneswar which must have been the center of his missionary activities. Bhubaneswar, according to the orthodox Sanskrit texts that provide hyperbolic legendary accounts of the city and the *Jagannatha* temple chronicle, the *Mandal Panji*, included Dhauligiri and Sisulpalgarh, possibly making the city into a metropolis (Kalia 1994: 9).

According to Panigrahi (1961), after Ashoka's death, Shaivism reasserted itself in Odisha with rapid speed that led to subsequent conversions, destruction and vandalism of Buddhist monuments by the Shaivites. Political events in India, as well as Odisha, after the end of the Mauryan period (c. 180 B.C.) became diffuse, involving different dynasties and eras. He further notes that, by the second century B.C., India was divided into numerous political regions. Kalinga remained a source of anxiety to imperial Magadha, rose to power under the Chedi kings of the Mahameghavahana family, probably in the first century B.C. King Kharavela, the most prominent of the Chedis, left a long inscription, which includes a biographical sketch at Hatigumpha, the Elephant's cave, in the Udayagiri hills but since it has been badly damaged, making it difficult to read, scholars remain divided on Kharavela's dates, some placing him in the second century B.C., and others placing him in the first century B.C and some others in the second quarter of the first century A.D (1961: 192).

The most credible date during which Kharavela's reign began can be placed in c. 159 B.C. A devout Jain, Kharavela exhibited equal passion for military conquest and conducted a number of successful campaigns in different directions. The Hatigumpha inscription describes his conquest over the king of the western Deccan, his occupation of Rajgriha to the north, his encounter with the Greeks in the northeast, his victory over the

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[18] There is some speculation that Buddhism might have existed in Odisha before Ashoka's conquest of Kalinga in c. 261 B.C. For more information, see Kanwar Lal, *Temples and Sculptures* (1970:12)

Pandyan kingdom in the south of the peninsula and lastly his two invasions of Magadha (Kalia, 1994). Kharavela's reign witnessed the rise of Jainism and under his patronage the Udayagiri and the Khandagiri hills, 6.5 kilometers from the capital city of Bhubaneswar, became strong Jain centers. There exist numerous caves in the hills of Udayagiri and Khandagiri which had socio-religious significance. There is a reference in the Hatigumpha inscription to the recovery of a Jain statue by Kharavela which establishes the presence of Jainism in Bhubaneswar area before Ashoka's conquest of Kalinga. Jain sacred literature also points towards the existence of the faith in and around Bhubaneswar before Ashoka's conquest of the region (ibid. 14-15). The immense wealth amassed by Kharavela from his conquests provided the necessary financing required for cave art and the first temples of Bhubaneswar. In course of time Buddhism was to disappear from the region though Jainism continued to have a small following even during the days of Shaivite ascendancy.

Kalia (1994) writes that it was not until the seventh century A.D. that Kalinga yet again entered a period of historical activity. But Bhubaneswar continued to be an important cultural and religious center for the Buddhists, the Jains and the Hindus. The majority of the population followed Hinduism even when Buddhism and Jainism received royal patronage. Being aware of this predominantly Hindu character, both Ashoka and Kharavela were practical enough to propagate religious tolerance in their inscriptions near Bhubaneswar. It was under the Kesari rule that Hinduism received royal patronage and the dynasty brought in thousands of *Brahmans* from the north and offered them land grants to settle in villages known as *sasanas* (1994: 15).

Even before the Aryan colonization of Kalinga by the huge influx of *brahmans* the disintegration of the Mauryan empire in the second century B.C. had exposed India to a series of central Asian and Persian invasions removing the northwest from indigenous control and causing political fragmentation of the continent, from which Kalinga did not escape.

Buddhism reasserted itself under the Murunda dynasty in the third century A.D. when parts of Bihar and Odisha came under the Murunda kings. Originating in the northwest, the non-Hindu Murundas were drawn towards Buddhism which was more accommodating. The Murundas, like the Indo-European speaking Kushanas, had arrived from in India after having driven from their homeland in central Asia by the Han dynasty in China. The Murundas ruled from Pataliputra (modern day Patna) and they styled themselves after the Kushanas. The Kushanas too had beenthe patrons of Buddhism. The impetus given to Buddhism under the Kushana king, Kanishka may have also influenced the inclination of the Murunda kings who came to be known as the 'Puri Kushanas' by the nineteenth century British indologist A.F.R Hoernle after Puri, the other temple town in Odisha (Kalia 1994).

The period between the fall of the Kushanas and the rise of the Guptas in the fourth century A.D. is a fragmented period in Indian history, but north India took a distinct turn towards brahmanical Hinduism under the rule of the Guptas. The *Nagara* style of temple architecture which developed in the north during the Gupta rule exerted its influence in Odisha as well where it became assimilated within the local tradition. After that Bhubaneswar became the center of the distinctive Odia style of Indian art and architecture and barring a few instances, the new art form was completely pressed into the service of Lord Shiva and his female counterpart *Shakti*. These two cults dominated the scene until the rise of Vaisnavism in the thirteenth century (Kalia 1994: 17).

The Hindu cultural renaissance of the Gupta period survived into seventh century India, which witnessed the political rivalries between the Buddhist king Harshavardhana (reigned from 606-47) of Kanauj in the north, the Hindi Chalukya king Pulakesin II (reigned from 610-42) in the south western Deccan and the Shaivite Gauda king Sasanka in the east for the control of Kalinga. Even though tradition tells about Sasanka's rule in Odisha, it gives no clear dates for his reign. He is believed to have ruled Odisha until the end of his life in 619 A.D. Sasanka, a devout Shaivite, is believed to have built several Shaivite temples on the ruins of Buddhist monuments in Bhubaneswar region. Even though the worship of Shiva existed in Bhubaneswar before Sasanka's reign, tradition

credits him with making Tribhuvanesvara, the Lord of the Three Worlds, the chief deity of the city and commemorating the occasion by erecting the famous Tribhuvanesvara temple from which the city derives its name. Though none of the monuments built by Sasanka have survived, it is possible that the eleventh century Lingaraja in Bhubaneswar was built on the ruins of Tribhuvanesvara (Kalia 1994: 19).

The trend towards monotheism in brahmanical thinking which came into existence with the eighth century B.C. philosophy of the *Upanishads* and the following successful attacks of the Buddhism and Jainism of the sixth century B.C. on Vedic sacrifices and gods had led to the idea of the trinity of gods: Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver and Shiva, the destroyer (ibid 19). The idea also represented the cyclical notion of nature where creation, preservation and destruction were seen as the natural order of things. Of the three gods, Vishnu and Shiva emerged as the popular gods, developing a large following among Hindus as Vaishnavas and Shaivas, respectively.

A gradual shift in Hinduism from ritualism to a more personal relationship between the gods and the devotees further helped in making salvation (*moksha*) accessible to the masses as well as to the Brahman elite. Under the new monotheistic doctrine, both Vaishnavism and Shaivism offered a devotee the opportunity to receive God's grace (*prasada*) through devotion (*bhakti*). The idea of personal devotion served as the dynamic force of later Hinduism, resulting in the frenzied activity of temple building in India of which Bhubaneswar is a good example. Hence forth Shaivism was to remain as the dominant religion in Bhubaneswar and in the absence of royal patronage, both Buddhism and Jainism retreated to the background.

The form of Shaivism that established itself in Bhubaneswar represented the *Pasupata* sect (founded by the Shaiva teacher Lakulisa) which had flourishing centers in the north as well as the south[19]. The Shiva temples of seventh century Bhubaneswar drew their inspiration from the Indo- Aryan style of temple building, though later they began to incorporate indigenous characteristics. Both the *Pasupata* sect and the Indo- Aryan

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[19] For a detailed description, see Panigrahi (1961), *Archaeological Remains*

temple style (*nagra*) may represent the free mixing of south and north India in Odisha and in Bhubaneswar, which has been described by Wolpert (2004[1989]) as the 'borderline spirit' of the region. The Buddhist architects who preceded the Hindu architects provide historical continuity to Odisha's temple architecture, which combined the best of the traditions from the north and the south India. It is generally maintained that Odisha, being a border state, is ethnically nearer to the Dravidian south than to the Aryan north, notwithstanding the Sanskrit antecedents of the Odia language.

The origin and the dates of rule of the Bhauma-karas remain obscure, but they are believed to have been of the non-Aryan origin which explains their absence from the *Ekamra Purana* and the *Mandala Panji*, the Jagannath temple chronicle at Puri. Occupying Bhubaneswar sometime before A.D 736, the Bhauma-karas must have been forced by their non- Aryan origins and unorthodox practices, to embrace Mahayana Buddhism. Conversion to Buddhism was technically difficult because of the caste system's dependence on birth. Although a large non-Hindu group could be gradually assimilated by becoming a sub-caste, the conversion of a single individual was virtually impossible as no caste could be assigned to him. It was therefore easier for the foreigners invading India- the Greeks, Kushanas and the Shakas to become Buddhists. Brahman orthodoxy could not treat people of non-Indo-Aryan origin, who held economic and political power, as outcastes; this contradiction was reconciled by the practice of conferring the 'fallen *kshatriya*' status on them.

The Bhaumakara rule of Odisha must have created considerable socio-religious problems and also must have challenged the theoretical structure of caste and orthodox practices of Shaivites in Bhubaneswar. It was during this period that tantric (occult) practices entered Shaivism, and Mahayana Buddhism, which fosters tantrism became the dominant religion of the region. The Sisiresvara and other Shaiva temples in Bhubaneswar were renovated by the Bhauma-kara artists, who introduced Buddhist images and motifs into them. Fabri (1974) writes that the Mahayanic images of gods of this period come so close to the contemporary sculpture of Hindu gods that they help in providing continuity to Odishan architecture (1974: 105). This period also witnessed the growth of the *Shakti* cult for the

first time in the region. The syncretism of Shaktism, Shaivism and Mahayana Buddhism is best reflected in the sculptures of the Vaital temple. According to Panigrahi (1961), this syncretism also led to some esoteric practices like the wearing of skulls, drinking, howling, human sacrifice, erotic sculpture, all becoming a part of the extreme Shaivite cult of *Kapalika*, which worshipped Shiva and Shakti in their tantric manifestations of Bhairava and Chamunda, respectively (1961: 233).

For nearly a hundred years after the end of the Bhauma-kara rule, believed to be about A.D 830, Bhubaneswar underwent yet another period of political uncertainty. Not until the rise of the Somavamsi kings, popularly known as the Kesari kings for their wide use of the dormant local regal title *Kesari* (lion), in the first half of the tenth century does stability return to Bhubaneswar. Possibly having origins in Kosala in central India, the Kesaris established their rule in western Odisha. The Kesari line was Brahmanical rather than Buddhist from the beginning, and under its patronage, Shiva worship was to prosper for over two centuries. No evidence exists of the immediate disappearance of Buddhism, and Buddhist hermits continued to dwell in the sister sandstone hills of Udayagiri and Khandagiri. But temples dedicated to Shiva formed the new focus of the public works under the Kesari kings, three of whom, Yayati, Ananta and Lalatendu, are credited for committing royal resources for the completion of the monumental Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar. The Kesaris are also credited with building the famous Jagannatha temple at Puri, the city destined soon to become the center of the rival worship of Vaishnavism, but nothing of the original temple has survived, the present temple having been built in the twelfth century by Anantavarman Chodaganga.

The religion of royalty slowly became the accepted faith of the people and Shaivism's ceremonial practices eventually came to supplement the ascetic rites of Buddhism. But Shaivism did not solely depend upon its new converts; rather the Kesaris encouraged the great migrations of Brahmans to Odisha from North India, the most dramatic migration apparently occurring in the reign of Yayati Kesari who is credited by tradition for importing these ten thousand brahmans from Oudh to perform a great Vedic sacrifice. That tradition signifies the Aryan colonization of Odisha, and later brahmans were to

claim descent from these ten thousand brahmans. Whether or not tradition exaggerates these numbers, the migration of Brahmans must have resulted in introducing an urban culture in Odisha. Aryanization thus refers not to an ethnic but a cultural transformation of people in different parts of India, including Odisha. The majority of people who came under Aryan influence consider themselves Aryans, though they are not Aryan ethnically.

The Kesaris are credited with performing the *Asvamedha Yajna* (horse sacrifice) at Chaudwar, near modern Cuttack, which became their capital; however, the latter Kesaris are believed to have shifted the capital to Bhubaneswar, though the claim remains unsubstantiated. There is yet another suggestion that the Kesaris held their court alternately at Bhubaneswar and Jajpur (Hunter as cited in Sahu [1956]: 90-118)

Kesari rule brought Odisha under one administration and the royal support for arts and architecture and tolerance of different cultures culminated in what came to be known as the distinctive Odishan culture. Both Buddhism and the *Kapalika* cult receded into the background without the royal patronage. Buddhism in Odisha had failed to assimilate with Shiva worship, and when at length it disappeared, it melted not into Shaivism but the Vaishnavite rites of the Jagannatha. Krishna came to be included for the first time in the sculptural representations in the temples of Bhubaneswar, thus heralding the arrival of the new religion. Tradition claims that Kesari rule finally passed away in the early twelfth century with the death of Ananta Kesari.

The vacuum created by the lapse of the Kesaris was finally filled by the Gangas, who introduced into Odisha the new religious creed of Vaishnavism, the other major sect of Hindu belief system. The origin of the Gangas remains a matter of dispute, which has led to their also being called as the Eastern Gangas to distinguish them from an earlier dynasty of the same name that ruled south India. Tradition credits the Gangas for carrying with them on their successful expedition the Vaisnavite doctrine from the south to the east. It is certain that, taking advantage of the waning Kesari rule, Anantavarma Chodaganga established and extended the hold of the Gangas on Odisha, starting from the last quarter of the eleventh century from a small principality between the present

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Ganjam district and the Godavari river in southern Odisha that had been annexed by his father, Devendravarma Raja Raja I. The indefatigable Chodaganga, a descendant of the vigorous Cholas on his mother's side and the Gangas on his father's, ruled for nearly seventy-four years, during which he was married to at least six women, raised a large family, extended the frontiers of his empire from the Godavari in the south to the Hoogly in the north and built several monuments including the famous Jagannath temple at Puri, which he completed in the first fifty years of his reign. His career, which remains unparalled even by the mighty Kesaris, unfortunately has left no evidence that will allow his association with any temple in Bhubaneswar. However, an inscription at the Lingaraja temple and the legendary association of his name with certain monuments in the Bhubaneswar area attest to his influence on the city.

The first act of the new dynasty, which was to rule Odisha for the next three centuries, was to revolutionize the religion of Odisha. Just as the Kesari kings had been the patrons of Shaivism, and the rulers before them had been the patrons of Buddhism and Jainism, the Gangas became the new patron kings of Vaishnavism, which has remained the reigning religion of the region. It must be noted, however, that in all instances the royal patronage of religion resulted not so much in the mass conversion of people but with a royal obsession with building temples to the new gods. The Ganga kings' patronage of Vaishnavism notwithstanding, their rule ushered in a period of great syncretism during which Shaivism and Vaishnavism, the two great traditions of Hinduism, coexisted in harmony.

The thirteenth century Odisha experienced the last of the best expressions of Hindu art before Islam, under the mighty Mughals swept the subcontinent. "From 900 to 1300 A.D." Hunter in his book writing about the history of Odisha notes, "architecture was the ruling passion of Indian princes, not less than of European kings…in both continents, the national passion lavished itself not on the palaces of the monarchs, but on the temples of the gods" (Hunter as cited in Sahu [1956]: 121-122). In Odisha this great activity in the public works centered around Bhubaneswar. In all instances, the temples of Bhubaneswar were built with the help of royal patronage. The result of this prolific activity has been

that the monuments of Bhubaneswar provide continuity to the history of the region. These temples represent the best of the north, the *nagara* style, and of the south, the Dravidian style and attest to the craftsmanship of the local artisans in blending the two styles to produce the distinctive art of Orissa.

Not indigenous to Odisha, the Gangas, by permanently transferring their capital to Cuttack, by adopting the local culture, and by supporting the Odia language, succeeded in resurrecting the prehistoric Kalinga into a unified kingdom. The religious syncretism of their age came to bear its imprint on art, architecture and literature. The great Sun temple at Konark bears the stamp of this syncretism, its many sculptures celebrating the Shiva *Shakti* and Jagannatha cults. Vedic sun worship, after a long period of oblivion, reappeared. Hunter (1956) again provides a charming story of the construction of the Sun temple "A son of Vishnu, having accidentally looked on one of his father's nymphs in her bath, was stricken with leprosy. The Indian Actaeon went forth into banishment; but, more fortunate than the grandson of Cadmus, while wandering on the lonely shores of Orissa (Odisha), was cured by the divine rays of the sun. He raised a temple on the scene of the miracle, and to this day the Hindu believes that a leper who with a single mind worships the bright deity will be cured of his infirmity" (as cited in Sahu [1956]: 223).

Even the Lingaraja at Bhubaneswar came under the influence of the new religious creed of *Harihara*, representing both Shiva and Vishnu. An inscription in the *Jagamohana* (audience hall) of the Lingaraja records a grant by a Ganga for the maintenance of a perpetual lamp in the temple; and the Gangas are believed to have added two new chambers to the temple, the *natamandira* (dancing hall) and the *bhogamandapa* (dining hall), and are believed to have introduced some other Vaishnavite features during renovation.[20] The Ekamra Purana recorded this syncretic sentiment: "There is no distinction between Vishnu and Siva. This is the eternal *Dharmma* (Hindu religious law) and the man who observes this *Dharmma* attains *mukti* (salvation)."[21] A reduced Odisha

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[20] For a detailed discussion on the influence of the Jagannatha cult on the Lingaraja temple, see Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains*, pp. 257.

[21] Ekamra Purana, chap. 5, p.29, cited by Panigrahi in his *Archaeological Remains*, 1961: 259

remained underthe Hindu rule until the middle of the sixteenth century, after which it yielded first to the Mughals, then to the Marathas and finally to the British in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The end of Hindu rule in Odisha also brought an end to the period of temple building in Bhubaneswar.

Bhubaneswar was not to experience another great effort in public works until after independent India decided to build the new capital of Odisha next to the sacred town of Bhubaneswar. The decision to place the new capital city at Bhubaneswar represented the culmination of the Odia regional movement, which went back to the golden days of Kalinga.

The establishment of a new capital at Bhubaneswar, the temple town in the present district of Khurda after independence is an important landmark in the history of modern Odisha for two reasons : first the opening of a new urban centre with administrative, educational and cultural institutions and industrial complexes has added a new dimension to the socio-economic and cultural life of Odisha; secondly the establishment of the new capital in the site of an old capital with extant remains of the past has resulted in the establishment of emotional link between the past and the present. Bhubaneswar, which was the provincial headquarters of emperor Ashoka and the capital of the emperor Kharavela contains the inscriptions of Ashoka, the inscriptions, caves and sculptures of Kharavela, the temples of Sailodbhaba, Bhauma, Somavamsi and Ganga periods along with massive buildings and institutions of modern period.

Later, the question of a new capital for Odisha was linked with the Odias' movement for a separate province. Bishnu Mohapatra (2006) writing about the emergence of an Oriya identity explains:

> We do not have sufficient historical materials…to reconstruct a detailed account
> of the self-consciousness of the Oriyas, but the historians have found that,
> beginning in the twelfth century, kings of the Ganga Vamsa and then the Surya
> Vamsa, made the God Jagannath the supreme deity of Orissa. By proclaiming
> themselves the divine agents of Jagannath, the kings gained legitimacy not only

from the subjects but also the smaller Hindu feudatory kings. For the Oriyas, during this period, Jagannath represented not merely an important religious deity but also a part of their cultural identity. As the Orissan empire fell into the hands of the Afghans in 1568, it disintegrated into various small political units. As the new rulers were Muslims, Jagannath became even more important for the Hindu kings as a powerful symbol motivating them and their subjects… (2006: 121)

Further Mohapatra (2006) explains that pilgrimage to Puri, the place of Jagannath, appears to have played a significant role in making the Oriyas from different regions aware of their common linguistic and cultural identity, in the pre colonial days. At a time when the mobility of common people was limited and travelling was arduous, pilgrimage to Puri provided the Oriyas with opportunities to reflect on their broader identity.

Bishnu Mohapatra (1995) in his essay on Oriya linguistic nationalism attributes the emergence of an Oriya identity to the 'fixing' of previously fluid and linguistic categories. While explaining the emergence of an Oriya consciousness and identity, he speaks of two principles, the principle of exclusion and the principle of inclusion. Through these two principles, the Oriya middle class attempted to create a political community by emphasizing on the cultural markers. By the principle of exclusion, the Oriya elites, while trying to define their identity, isolated the neighbouring groups such as the people from Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. By the principle of inclusion, attempts were made to bring together into the political fold the Oriyas who were living scattered in the various outlying areas in the Bengal and Madras Presidencies.

After the creation of the separate province, for various reasons, the question of an alternative capital site was raised. Cuttack-Puri rivalry reappeared. Though Cuttack, the headquarters of Odisha Division was the centre of all cultural and political activities, it was found to be insufficient and congested for a provincial capital because of its location between the Mahanadi and Kathjodi rivers. In 1933, the Odisha Administrative Committee recommended the retention of the provincial capital of Cuttack. While some

wanted the capital to be located at Puri, others opposed it on the ground that it was a religious town and therefore misfit to be the seat of a secular government.

The people and politicians from Southern Odisha demanded the shifting of capital towards South. In 1936, a team of experts, appointed by the Central Public Works Department, which was headed by an engineer, named F T Jones suggested Rangailunda, a place near Berhampur town to be the site for the capital. In May 1937 the Government of Odisha appointed a Committee with I.R. Dain as the chairman to prepare a feasibility report on the construction of capital. The Committee limited its feasibility report to four sites - Cuttack, Barang, Chaudwar and Puri. On 24th of September 1937, after much acrimonious discussion, the Legislative Assembly adopted the motion of Girija Bhusan Das for building the capital at Cuttack - Chaudwar, a suburb of the Cuttack Town, situated on the northern bank of the Mahanadi river. This decision could not be implemented for want of funds and lack of political will. In fact, the Government of Odisha could not mobilize resources for building a bridge on the Mahanadi.

The post-war reconstruction committee proposed Bhubaneswar as the ideal site for capital because of its history, availability of space and geographical nearness to Cuttack. Kalia (1994) citing the Public Works Department report in favour of Bhubaneswar on 14th of April, 1945, writes: "... expansion of Cuttack … does not (appear) very promising... and it appears that going to Bhubaneswar for further expansion may be the best solution" (1994: 106). Ultimately the choice had to be made between the greater Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, and Harekrushna Mahatabwas able to win the Legislative Assembly's approval in favour of Bhubaneswar.

Initially H.K. Mahatab thought of retaining capital at Cuttack by modernizing the town. For that purpose, he consulted the town planners of the Tata Company. The planners held that the topography of Cuttack town practically made its modernization difficult and expensive. Expansion towards Chaudwar was impossible without construction of bridge on the Mahanadi. Mahatab chose Bhubaneswar as the capital site on the grounds that all highway bridges from Cuttack to Bhubaneswar were likely to be completed before the

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construction of the bridge on the Mahanadi linking Cuttack and Chaudwar; in Bhubaneswar there were a number of buildings which had been constructed by the American troops during the Second World War as they were using its aerodrome, acquisition of land at Bhubaneswar was easy as there were barren lands as well as forests; Bhubaneswar had a good climate, construction of houses at Bhubaneswar was easy because of hard rocky ground and availability of stone slabs and above all Bhubaneswar was a place of historical importance.

On 30th September 1946 the Odisha Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous resolution for the construction of Capital at Bhubaneswar. In 1948 the Government of Odisha hired Otto Koenigsberger, a German Jew who had fled from Nazi Germany and who had served as architect and planner to the government of Mysore and who had also prepared a development plan for the Tata family-owned steel town of Jamshedpur in Bihar, to work as the town planner for the capital construction.

Bhubaneswar as the capital city of Odisha was to be a secular city. But the modern mission of creating a capital was shaped by a rural vision, whose origins go back to the days of antiquity when city building was considered as a religious act. As the home of gods, the city represented eternal values and revealed divine possibilities, which were purportedly present in the old temple town of Bhubaneswar, and which the Odia leaders wanted to recreate in the new capital. The desire to create the city of the old in Bhubaneswar was further reinforced by the discovery of the ruins of an ancient city near the capital site (Kalia 1994). Driven by the desire to duplicate the buried ancient city as a *tirtha* (a religious place), the Odias hoped to preserve the old memory in the new city, a desire sanctioned by the Hindu polytheistic view, which calls for important events and places to be seen from many perspectives and to be widely shared and duplicated. For planner Otto Koenigsberger, this view stood in marked contrast to his western monotheistic insistence that important events represent a singular, more linear view of history. Even though the objectives in New Bhubaneswar had changed, the realities behind them remained the same. The mixture of divinity power and personality still made for a powerful potion in fueling the passions of the Odias, a potion which had fuelled the

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passions for the creation of the old temple town but which had to be weighed anew in terms of the ideology and culture to create the new capital city with fresh civic, national and environmental concerns. Religion, with its many symbols, continues to play an important role in shaping new Bhubaneswar.

Another important factor that influenced the shape of Bhubaneswar was the absence of Jawaharlal Nehru. In post- Independent India, Nehru through his sheer stature and standing became the architect of modern India; and he played a far greater role in the development of Chandigarh than he did in Bhuabaneswar. Kalia (1994) notes that his special attention to Chandigarh might have been influenced as much by le Corbusier as by Punjab's border status. Odisha on the other hand was located at a politically safe distance, and had no refugee problem. In Chandigarh, Nehru declared 'Let this be a new town symbolic of freedom of India, unfettered by the traditions of the past …an expression of the nation's faith in the future' (Hindustan Times, New Delhi edition, July 8, 1950). But in Bhubaneswar, he said to his audience that the new capital would not 'be a city of big buildings…and it would accord with our idea of reducing the gap between the rich and the poor'. Bhubaneswar would represent the art of Odisha, Nehru emphasized so that it would'be a place of beauty where life might become an adjunct to beauty' (Hindustan Standard, Calcutta edition, April 14, 1948)

On 13th April 1949, the foundation stone of the new capital was laid by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India. On 10 October, 1949 the Odisha Legislative Assembly met at Bhubaneswar for the first time. In 1946 the population of what was to become the Bhubaneswar Notified Area, a region of some thirteen square miles, did not exceed 10,000. By 1951, after three years of construction, it reached 17,000; by 1961 it had swelled to cover 38,000; and it had exceeded 100,000 by 1971 (Census of India 1971: 46) and presently the population stands at approximately 8 lakhs (Census of India 2011).

There were some hindrances to the construction of Capital at Bhubaneswar, such as want of funds, the reluctance of Cuttack-based employees to move to offices at Bhubaneswar,

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and opposition from some prominent Congressmen to the shifting of Capital from Cuttack to Bhubaneswar. While the Government of Odisha requested the Government of India to provide Rs.2 crores for the capital construction, Liaquat Ali Khan, the Finance Minister in interim Government gave a grant of Rs.1.32 crores. Harekrushna Mahtab's departure from Odisha for joining the central cabinet and Chief Minister Nabakrushna Chaudhury's stay at Cuttack for sometime in 1951 delayed the construction work at Bhubaneswar. By the end of 1951 nine offices, i.e. the PWD, the Secretariat, the Directorate of Health, the Inspector General of Prisons, the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, the Public Relations, the Agriculture, the Forestry and the Tribal and Rural Welfare had moved from Cuttack into temporary buildings at Bhubaneswar. During Mahtab's absence from Odisha, the opposition of political leaders like Radhanath Rath and Bishwanath Das posed hindrances to capital construction at Bhubaneswar.

While designing the capital complex, initially the following institutional structures were proposed to be raised: Gandhi Memorial, the Legislative Assembly, Governor's House the Secretariat, the State Public Library, the Museum and Accountant General's Office. Completion of construction of bridges on Kathjodi (January 1951) and Kuakhai (August 1951) solved the problem of transport between Cuttack and Bhubaneswar. During Harekrushna Mahatab's second stint as the Chief Minister from 1956 to 1960, the construction of the above mentioned institutional buildings was expedited. In 1960 the Secretariat building was completed. Gandhi Memorial could not be constructed. The difference of opinion between Koenigsberger and Julius Vaz, the Government architect and dearth of qualified architects in Odisha created obstruction for the construction of buildings. Koenigsberger left for Britain in 1951. A decade after construction had begun, the government recognized that the town would expand beyond the limits of the old Koenigsberger Plan, and new planning activity was undertaken. Preliminary assistance was sought from the Ford Foundation Urban Planning team then being consulted by the Government of India on the Delhi Regional Plan. Eventually, the planning was completed by the Orissa State Town Planning Organization with the help of the Government of India's Town and Country Planning Organization.

In 1965, roughly the midpoint of the Harvard-Bhubaneswar Project, Bhubaneswar's population was about 50,000 people, two-thirds of whom lived in the New Capital. The rest lived in the Old Town and the five surrounding villages of Kapileswar, Laxmisagar, Bargad, Nuapalli, and Siripur.

According to the Puri District Gazetteer, published in 1977, the following were the notable buildings in the New Capital. Raj Bhavan, Secretariat, the Legislative Assembly, State Museum, multi-storied Heads of Department, Rabindra Mandap, Suchana Bhavan, Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalay, Orissa State Archives, Central Market Building, Utkal University, University of Agriculture and Technology, Office of the Accountant General, Office of the Post Master General, and the State Library and the following were the important centres of learning and research in the New Capital, Utkal University (Vani Vihar), University of Agriculture and Technology, Regional College of Education (now Regional Institute of Education), Sainik School, Regional Research Laboratory (now Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology), Institute of Physics, Institute of Industrial Management, State Institute of Education, Eastern Regional Language Institute, Regional Research Institute (Ayurveda), Tribal Research Bureau, State Forensic Laboratory, Administrative Training School, Tribal and Oriental Training Centre, Accounts Training School, Cooperative Training College, Homoeopathy College and various kinds of schools and colleges like BJB College and Ramadevi College.

Since the publication of the above Gazetteer quite a number of new institutes with buildings have sprung up. These include East Coast Railways, Reserve Bank of India (Regional Office), State Bank of India (Regional Office), Central Excise, Customs and Service Tax (Regional Office), Ayakar Bhavan (Regional Office), Office of the Police Commissioner and DGP (Camp), IDCOL and IPICOL. There has been a mushroom growth of Engineering, Management and Computer Application Training Centres. Two Private Engineering Colleges (KIIT and SOA) have gained the status of deemed universities. Xavier Institute of Management was established in Bhubaneswar in 1987.

The other important institutions, based on Science and Engineering are: National Institute of Science Education and Research (NISER), Indian Institute of Technology (at Argul), Institute of Life Sciences, Institute of Mathematics and Application, and International Information Technology Centre. Bhubaneswar has a chain of elite schools of international standard like Sai International School, KIIT International School, Xaviers International School, Delhi Public School and DAV Schools which are attracting students from the whole State and outside. With six universities about a dozen, of general colleges and about eighty technical institutions out of a total of 110 in the State, Bhubaneswar has become an education hub.

With Infocity-I and Infocity-II, Bhubaneswar has become a preferred destination of ITengineers. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences has started functioning at Sijua near the Capital. Three private medical colleges, namely, KIIMS, SUM and High Tech have been established. There are big private hospitals like Kalinga, Apollo, Nilachal, Aditya Care, SUM, Ayush and Vivekananda along with the Government Hospitals and dispensaries and small nursing homes.

Initially the population of Bhubaneswar was growing at a slow rate. In order to encourage private housing, the Government of Odisha started leasing the plots for ninety-nine years. Koenigsberger did not feel the necessity of vertical planning and recommended a horizontal plan. During the last three decades the population of Bhubaneswar has increased at a faster rate. According to the Census of 2011 its population is 8.38 lakhs. To enlarge its areas and enhance its population up to 10 lakhs so as to make it a metropolitan city according to the norms of Government of India, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation has planned to bring twenty-one gram panchayats and two villages within its jurisdiction. The Bhubaneswar Development Authority has decided to develop a modern integrated township on 1200 acres of land near Jatni. Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Khurda and Jatni are merging into a single urban conglomerate.

The original masterplan for Bhubaneswar has been revised on the basis of the Ford Foundation Report in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Lack of political will and popular

collaboration has posed hindrances to the implementation of masterplan and the building of a modern city. The digging of a lake which was proposed in the master plan has not yet been implemented. Originally the New Capital was planned to be an administrative town, supposed to have a population of forty-thousands. But in course of time it has grown into the political and cultural nerve centre of Odisha. About 70 to 80 daily newspapers (Odia and English) such as Sambad, Samaj, Dharitri, Times of India, Telegraph and Indian Express are being published from Bhubaneswar. The establishment of industrial estates, at Rasulgarh and Mancheswar and service industries has increased the commercial importance of the city.

With the completion of four-laning of the highway between Bhubaneswar and Puri, the latter town will become part of the same urban complex. Every year on an average 5000 housing units are being added. As a result of expansion of housing, Bhubaneswar has expanded towards Khurda, Pipili and Cuttack and high rise apartments have come up. The slum population of Bhubaneswar now nearly three lakhs, has increased because of migration of people from rural areas in search of job and livelihood. Slums have developed in open spaces as well as on the sides of roads.

Bhubaneswar, the administrative headquarters of the state is fast becoming its cultural capital with dance, and music festivals, seminars, workshops and exhibitions being organised throughout the year. As a result of all this, the capital's ancient heritage, along with its present cultural activities has made it the major tourist destination of the State. The sand sculptures of Puri, a part of the golden triangle of Bhubaneswar-Puri-Konark raised by artisans like Sudarshan Patnaik, have also been an attraction for the tourists. Well-connected with the outside world by rail, road and air Bhubaneswar is every year visited by a number of tourists.

But even today, Bhubaneswar remains popular for its temples. Along with old shrines like Lingaraj, Mukteshwar, Rajarani, Brahmeshwar, Kedaragouri and others many modern temples and religious institutions have come up. The most important of modern temples are the Ram Mandir, the Radhakrushna temple, established by Kalpataru Seba

Sangha of Kendrapada, known as Baya Math, ISKCON, Shiridi Sai temple of Tankapani Road. There are also many unauthorized temples on the sides of roads. Besides the Hindu temples, Churches, Mosques and Gurudwara have been established. Bhubaneswar has a modern Buddha Vihar and a Jain temple. Ramakrishna Math, situated in old Bhubaneswar is an important religious institution, associated with the famous Ramakrishna Mission. One of the relatively newer *mandirs* is the massive religious institution, called Satsang Vihar, built by the followers of Thakur Anukulchandra.

PIC OF BHUBANESWAR SATSANG VIHAR

Source: http://wikimapia.org/10257174/Satsang-Vihar#/photo/2615244. Accessed on 15th November 2015.

Religious Institutions in Bhubaneswar

One of the oldest roles in India is that of the "ascetic" or the "holy man," and one of the oldest existing Hindu religious institutions is the monastery. The heads of monasteries or ashrams have been, for many Hindus, the bearers of a cultural tradition that goes back to Vedic times. The holy man and the monastery provide a centre of sacredness and learning available to anyone who wishes to approach it. Despite the influence of modernization and change occurring in all parts of India, the lives of holy men still represent ideals relevant to contemporary people regardless of rural or urban residence. Bhubaneswar is no exception.

During the early 60s, there were twenty-two monastic establishments in Bhubaneswar, all located in the Old Town, with around forty-one ascetics residing in them. They varied greatly in terms of physical dimensions, income, and number of resident ascetics and servants. The largest compound belonged to the Ramakrishna Matha and covered an area larger than the Lingaraj Temple complex. In 1964 it consisted of a three storey main residence, an equally large guest house for special dignitaries, a library, a charitable dispensary that treated 23,000 cases a year, a primary school for 250 students, and a high school under construction. By contrast, the smallest establishment was an abandoned temple in which a solitary ascetic lived and worshipped a popular print of the goddess Durga.

The Gopala Tirtha Matha, one of the five oldest monasteries located in the centre of the Old Town, was the wealthiest institution. Six monasteries owned substantial amounts of land, four having been endowed by medieval kings and two others founded in the twentieth century. Although the Ramakrishna Matha finished the most money for welfare activities, it ranked below four older institutions in income. The poorest monasteries were the residences of solitary ascetics who depended on daily donations of food for their hand-to-mouth existence.

Despite the number of monastic establishments in the Old Town, there has been some question regarding the visibility of religious traditions in Bhubaneswar since the establishment of the New Capital. For example, Taub's (1969: 176) study of the new capital bureaucratic elite indicated that a majority of high level government officials held unfavourable attitudes toward religion. The work of Mahapatra (1971) in the Old Town and Freeman (1977) in Kapileswar village supported Taub's inference that interest in ritualistic Hinduism (*Karma Kanda*) was declining because "those who are traditionally priests will give up that traditional job in order to enter secular occupations if the secular occupations pay well" (1969: 180). In Bhubaneswar this problem has created a minor crisis; more and more temple priests, especially of the younger generations, are leaving their traditional occupations and are seeking employment in the New Capital. The result is a major decline in temple rituals, especially in the daily round of temple services. Because Taub's (1969: 178) informants thought of themselves as "men who are committed to modernization," they sought to dissociate themselves from ritualistic Hinduism and from temple worship. The temple, although the most prominent religious institution has never been the core of Hindu faith. Rather the Hindu faith remains centered around the family and its relationship to a guru and to other religious specialists who serve the family.

One of the key organizing principles upon which philosophic Hinduism (*Jnana Kanda*) is based, as distinct from ritualistic, caste-associated Hinduism, is the *guru-shisya* (teacher-disciple) relationship. The *guru-shisya* relationship is as old as Hindu tradition itself, finding its first concrete expression in the earliest Upanishads. In the Upanishads the *guru-shisya* relationship was not limited to the formal tie between an ascetic-guru, living in a forest hermitage, and the student who came to study under him. The Chandogya Upanishad, for example, tells the famous story of Uddalaka Aruni, the father, who leads his son, Shvetaketu, to a realization of Brahman the Absolute through a series of practical exercises that take place in the informal setting of his home. In medieval India the guru often remained a householder who functioned solely as a teacher, but more commonly he was an ascetic (*sadhu*) who lived in total detachment in a forest hermitage (*ashrama*) or who resided in a large monastery (*matha*) located near a temple in an urban area. During

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this period the *guru-shisya* relationship became concretely expressed in the Sanskrit concept, *sampradaya* (teaching order).

A teaching order or *sampradaya* can be traced back to one of five historical teachers or Acharyas who expounded a philosophical system and who established a monastic order to carry out the teaching of the philosophical tradition. The five Acharyas were Shankara (788-820 AD); Ramanuja (ca. 1017); Nimbarka (ca. 1162); Madhva (1199-1278); and Vallabha (ca. 1500). With time, due to the almost limitless flexibility of Hinduism, other gurus created an endless number of sub-teaching traditions, often synthesizing the philosophical systems of two or more founder Acharyas. The *guru-shisya* relationship remained the basic unit of organization of philosophic Hinduism.

There has been a tendency, when examining Hinduism as a total system that includes both ritualistic and philosophical aspects, to understand it in "sectarian" terms analogous to the "belief" structures of Christian sectarianism. The focus, then, has been upon the chosen deity (*ishtadevta*) selected by one group or another rather than upon the *sampradaya* and the *guru-shishya* relationship. The latter are dynamic systems that must be examined separately. For example, it may be possible to document a decline in temple rituals associated with specific deities, and it may be the case that Hindu sectarianism is declining under the impact of 'modernization'. However, the *guru-shisya* relationship, as the basis for ever-evolving *sampradayas,* may provide a conceptual structure for understanding the adaptive core of living Hinduism, a core that will remain longer after many temples in India have become national museums, state monuments, or tourist attractions.

The *sampradaya* with the *guru-shisya* relationship at the centre is an extremely adaptive religious institution, capable of almost infinite change and capable of meeting the religious needs of Hindus at all social and economic levels. As pointed out earlier, this has been true since Vedic times. The basic Neo-Vedantic philosophical position that underlies groups such as those begun by Ramakrishna and by Sivananda is an open-ended and eclectic as the institution it supports. This is attested to in our own society by

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the impact of such "modern" gurus as Thakur Anukulchandra, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Swami Satchidananda, and Bhawan Shree Rajneesh, to name only a few whose western disciples number in the thousands.

Religious scholars have invariably understood Hinduism in terms of sacred texts, whereas social scientists have generally focused upon Hindu ritualistic structures and functions, relating them to the caste system. But, today religious and spiritual sectshave emerged as one of the central means of devotion in the Hindu tradition. The gurus of Hindu tradition have continually established religious and monastic institutions in an attempt to bring about practical applications of their teachings, adopting and changing both their institutions and teachings to better fit the times in which they were living. The guru and the *sampradaya* established by the guru therefore represent and function as the dynamic center of Hinduism, contributing significantly to the process of shaping and creating contemporary India.

The Satsang Vihar of Thakur Anukulchandra in Bhubaneswar

Examining the satsang temple as a space of devotion allows us to capture "emergent social relations which are situated in particular places yet operate across geographical distances" (M. Smith 2005: 6). An attempt has been made to understand the sacred landscape of the *satsang vihar* and the complex linkages between space and meaning (Knott 2005) that lead to new forms of religious community. What is the relationship between what happens inside the gates to what happens in the world outside? Or, how does the space of the ashram define and bound its culture of sacredness, and how are these sacred spaces linked to the spaces of the outside world? In discussing sacred space, Gerard van der Leeuw (1986) identified four kinds of politics in the construction of any sacred space: a politics of position, every establishment of a sacred place is a positioning; a politics of property, a sacred place is 'appropriated, possessed and, owned'; a politics of exclusion, the sanctity of sacred place is preserved by boundaries; and a politics of exile, a form of a modern loss of, or nostalgia for, the sacred.

But Robert Orsi takes a different view when exploring the world of urban religious processions in New York City. He states that urban religious cartographies are 'maps of being' (Orsi 1999: 51) home to 'diverse religious ontologies' which link the divine and mundane worlds to 'disclose to practitioners, particular ways of being in the world, of approaching the invisible beings who along with family members and neighbors make up the practitioner's relevant social worlds and of coordinating an individual's own story with an embracing cultural narrative' (ibid. 53). Mappings of the city can provide various narratives that aid in the construction of a devotional identity; redemptive, transgressive, or transformatory, depending upon how the spaces are envisaged, used, and imagined. Orsi argues that, 'people have acted on and with the spaces of the city to make religious meanings in many different ways' leading to a city space of 'diverse religious ontologies' (1999: 47, 53) in a 'multi-vocal serenade'.

In this chapter I build upon these theories to explore the world of the ashram which the city of Bhubaneswar enfolds. There are two different strands to this built world, the material (the bricks and mortar buildings), with its architecture, functional spaces, and aesthetics, and the symbolic, with its interpretative and affective components. It is the complex relationship between the double strands, the material world and the symbolic devotional world and it is the tension and complementarity in this equation that needs to be understood.

As the material world grows and changes, the concrete place helps to shape the ontological objectives of the Anukulchandra devotees, and as the symbolic interpretation shifts, it helps to situate the place and give it significance, recasting the relationship between agency and structure. Finally, as sociologist Daniele Hervieu-Léger notes, the globalization of religio-cultural groups is linked to the problem of identity construction as it leads to "novel forms of religious sociability and new configurations of this (modern) tension" (cited in S. Srinivas 2008: 13, 21). The connection of the spatial imagination towards increased devotion rests on the Taylor's concept of the social imaginary where large groups of people imagine 'how they fit together with others, how things go on

between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations' (Taylor 2004: 23).

The foundation of the Satsang Vihar in Bhubaneswar was laid in 1978 by Thakur Anukulchandra's eldrest son Amarendra Nath Chakravarty also known as *Borda*. The Satsang Vihar was constructed under the supervision of Thakur Anukulchandra's grandson Ashok Chakravarty popularly known as Sri Sri Dada and was inaugurated by him in the year 1996. The Satsang Vihar in Bhubaneswar is located along the National Highway 5 (Kolkata-Chennai). The all white huge temple attracts attention of all who pass by that stretch. After its inauguration in 1996, the fact that the devotees had named it Sri Mandir triggered a huge controversy with a large section of Hindus and priests at the Jagannath temple taking offence saying the epithet Sri Mandir is applicable to only Sri Jagannath temple in Puri and cannot be arrogated by any other temple, old or modern.

There are many temples built by devotees of the Thakur across Odisha but the biggest is in Bhubaneswar which is the state capital where the majority of the population is drawn from rural areas of the state. In his study of colonial Lahore, William Glover suggests that many South Asian cities, have a 'distinctive materialist approach that fosters moral and social development (2007: xx); and this approach is anchored in the belief that the built world has the power to shape human conduct. Conversely, if one can link the built form to a 'way of being', then by influencing the former, one can presumably govern the latter (Glover 2007: xxi). The material world, architecture and urban planning, can, in such circumstances, be used to persuade one towards the ontological objective of social and individual transformation. This differs significantly from Foucault's (1979) practices of discipline, because the subject is transformed willingly through constant persuasion by the aspects of the built world around him; a persuasive project rather than a disciplinary one. Thus it appears that the Anukulchandra devotees are imbued with a sense of agency as they move through the spaces of the *satsang vihar* because the transformation in identity towards a devotional self- hood is believed to be one of choice.

The middle class, urban, professional, technocratic, global *satsangis* are characterized by their mobility, their affluence, and their focus on creating a healthy union between body, spirit, and mind for themselves through forms of healing, psychotherapy, and self awareness (Bharati 1962; Heelas and Woodhead 2005: 75-79). Socially, this translates into an institutionalized program where devotees do define, charitable work (seva) in hospitals, schools, colleges and shelters all over the world, catering to those less fortunate, as they strive for a 'better society'. Thakur Anukulchandra, even after 48 years of his demise, is considered at the apex of the charismatic organization. He is thought by some to be a charismatic guru (teacher) and by others to be a seer, a saint, or, as many believe, 'an avatar' (incarnation) of god. According to his devotees the powers are evidence of his sacredness. Many devotees record that the miracles are an important factor 'in recruitment to the cult.

Spaces of Entry:

Becoming and being a Anukulchandra devotee on a material level, the first persuasive piece of distinctive architecture is a formal delineation of the sacred Thakur's territory, the *satsang vihar*, that devotees and prospective devotees encounter. The huge gateway with its ornate engravings signals one's entry into this sacred space. The building that unfolds from this elaborate entrance is one that has to accommodate a wide range of activities from the mundane necessities of eating and sleeping to the performance of ritual worship and the guru's lessons. The spaces within the *vihar* suggest that certain areas were intended to facilitate ritual activity, while others may have had a more purely residential function. The most accessible and heavily frequented part of the *vihar* is the open courtyard at the centre of the building. The visual impact of the space was reinforced through the use of elaborately sculpted dazzling white main temple of Thakur. The courtyard might be seen as the *satsang vihar's* ritual and functional axis mundi, or the reference point around which the rest of the monastery's social and religious worlds revolved. Banerji (1931) who saw a monastery as containing "two classes of chambers," conjectured that the rooms with unadorned doors may have functioned as dormitories,

school rooms, or libraries. The others, he proposed, were 'chambers for gods', designated as such 'by the presence of figures of gods on the lintels of their doorways'.

When I traveled with devotees into the temple during his 127th birth anniversary during February 2015, I could observe several of them were in a state of urgency, a frenzied emotional state to have a *darshan* of the Thakur as they approached the gateway. Other devotees echoed her sentiments saying repeatedly that the gates 'reminded them how close they were to Thakur'. A devotee for twenty years told me that as he stood in front of the ashram gates he felt 'as if he had been recharged and a sense of pure energy was coursing through his system'. Many devotees claim that being in the temple, near Thakur is their true 'spiritual home' where they are 'at peace'.

Darshana refers more directly to the 'glance' or 'seeing', eye contact that constitutes the ultimate exchange between devotee and god. Similarly, *guru-darshana*, or 'exchanging glances with the guru, and guru-puja, or 'worship' of the guru, are well-established practices in India today. *Puja*, which literally denotes the act of worship, consists of dressing the *murti*, making offerings of flowers, food, and incense, pouring oblations of sacred substances, and ringing a bell or singing devotional songs to the deity; in short, it involves treating the god as an honored guest.

In some Bhubaneswar monasteries, photographs of past gurus, imbued with all the traits of their inherent divinity, are placed on an altar in a shrine, so that the lineage itself becomes the pivotal object during puja. The enshrinement of living and past gurus is a widespread practice, and shrines containing images of gurus can be found in many places in India today. In all of these examples, the guru serves as an embodiment of divinity, enshrined within a sanctum and worshiped by devotees as if he were a living deity. Because a guru may be worshiped as a god during his lifetime, after death he is understood as a deity who continues to exist and whose presence can be invoked into a *murti* or an icon that becomes the recipient of puja. In such cases the guru becomes, as Miller and Wertz (1976) note, 'a living incarnation for this generation, a representative of the deity whom the laity can see and personally revere'.

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Adrian Forty (1999) in his book 'The Art of Forgetting' notes that 'it has generally been taken for granted that memories, formed in the mind, can be transferred to solid material objects, which can come to stand for memories' (1999: 2). From this notion, it can be derived that memory is not thought to reside solely in the minds of the individuals but emerges through inter-subjective experiences with the material world. People typically share the memories of events and objects. This statement points to the fact that people inhabit worlds that extend beyond themselves. Memories are not simply shared but are actively created or constructed through collective remembering. As Middleton and Edwards (2004) point out, in the 'contest between varying accounts of shared experiences, people re-interpret and discover features of the past that become the context and content for what they will jointly recall and commemorate on future occasions' (2004: 7). Just as individual memories undergo a process of updating and reworking, so does the social memory. Middleton and Edwards (2004) outline a series of aspects of the process of social remembrance that they describe as 'remembering together'. Firstly, they note that social memory provides a foundation and context for individual memory. Secondly, they note that processes of remembering and forgetting occur in rhetorically organized forms, wherein certain aspects of the past are sanctioned while others are excluded and it is the process of telling the right kind of the story at the right time that forms the framework for remembrance.

Ultimately, they note that the continuity of social life, as a component of certain forms of social practices, and in terms of our identities as individuals, it is dependent on the continuation and the preservation of practices of remembering and forgetting. These practices are objectified in the social environment; they are externalized to the extent that the world we inhabit both embodies and is shaped by the past. These have implications in understanding the relationship between the individual and the society. As Halbwachs (1993 [1953]) noted, there is a reflexive and a mutual relationship between the individual and the social modes of remembering. The context and practices of remembering provide a framework for the production of individual memories but, equally, individual memories are woven into the fabric of the context and practices of remembering.

'Commemorative practices' constitute a form of remembrance which shifts the perspective of remembering as a state of mind to an activity that encompasses not only the minds and bodies of individuals but also the minds and bodies of others. For Casey (1987) commemorative practices are characterized by a series of features including 'memorialisation' and 'recurrence' (1987: 44). Memorialisation is an act of remembering in an appropriate way and through an appropriate medium. Recurrence is the most important component of commemoration and indicate the process of 'changing while staying the same' (1987: 44) and the rituals enacted as a part of the commemorations are meant to produce the continuation or endurance of tradition. As these commemorations are enacted periodically, their content might subtly alter through performance.

The features of commemoration underline the fact that commemorations are performative in nature (Connerton 1989: 58-59). This performance relates partly to the evocation and utterances of key components of ritual texts or narratives but also relates to bodily movements. According to Casey (1987) one of the primary ways through which commemorations are enacted is through a series of postures, gestures and movements. Actions are prescribed according to the formulation and formality of the commemorative performance. These performances primarily concern participation whether bodily participation or engagement with specific places, objects or a coherent narrative or texts (1987: 45).

Commemorative practices offer a key means for thinking about the relationship between material culture and memory. For Jones (2007), the most important point that can be drawn from the discussion of commemoration is the modes through which material culture provides a participatory outline for action. He explains:

> As an index of past action, material culture is ultimately connective, it connects people to the physical world, to temporal processes, and through its physicality directs them to future action. In this sense, like commemoration, there is a sense of recurrence. Material culture, likewise, provides the ground for connecting individual and collective remembrance. In short, material culture is critical to the maintenance and performance of tradition. (2007: 46)

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The gates of the Satsang Vihar in Bhubaneswar act as what Tulasi Srinivas (2009) calls 'markers of anticipation' (2009: 122) of coming back and spending time in this home and to be near their spiritual guru and his divine grace. Thus there is a separation regarding the two domains that the devotees inhabit, one is the ordinary, everyday world in which they are away from Thakur Anukulchandra and second is the sacred and miraculous space of the *satsang vihar* where they find themselves at home and at ease, spiritually and emotionally. Physical closeness with the satsand ashram is considered like being close to Thakur and this is valued a lot, even though a lot of the devotees maintain that, 'He is present everywhere'. Sentiments such as 'closeness to Thakur is the main aim of our life', 'Closeness to the ideas and teachings of Thakur are what keep us close to him' are frequently echoed by the devotees. Being within the domain of the satsang ashram involves a blessing, salvation, through which a person can change for the better.

A devotee often said how he 'felt at home' when he was in the premises of the temple and more 'relaxed' and 'alive'. Thus, devotees feel when they are at the satsang, they are 'at home', that is, in their true spiritual home. A devotee told during an interview, 'When I come here I feel as if I have come home. Here, everyone is welcome with an open heart... no one is denied entry… When I am here, I can feel the presence of Thakur all the time'. Her son, added, 'The first time I came here, I immediatelf could feel the change in me, it was just like my home, very welcoming'. Another devotee added, 'You can see that everything is open here? It is similar to Thakur's heart. Anyone can enter it and feel like home.

This has been described by James Clifford as a world in which syncretism and parodic developments have turned out to be the norm instead of being an exception and where everyone's has their 'roots' cut to some extent, and as a result of which it has become "increasingly difficult to attach human identity and meaning to a coherent 'culture' " (1988: 95). Therefore, finding one's real or authentic self has become a very important venture regarding one's identity. So the space of the *satsang vihar* becomes a space of the imagination (Appadurai 1996) where safety and sacredness is vested in the space.

Since the works of Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Tönnies, social scientists have been concerning themselves with how the urban milieu shapes the human community and their relations. Early studies in this subject maintained that an urban way of life, to a large extent, wears down the strength of community interaction (Wirth 1938). However, more recent studies, instead of seeing a deterministic development from rural gemeinschaft to urban gesellschaft, maintain that the former can be viewed as a sort of experience or a certain 'mode of relating' that can be present in diverse settings, rural as well as urban (Calhoun 1998: 381). In a similar manner, Fischer's (1975, 1995) argument is that urbanism can lead to the development of a sub-cultural community by generating critical mass and group boundaries. By extending this idea, Smith et al. (1998: 90), explain that there is a possibility that an urban environment might deepen the aspirations of people for interacting socially in religious groups that are considered 'morally orienting'. The aforementioned developments within the studies of cultural communities in urban areas are similar to works on social capital which has created a large volume of literature regarding community relations (Field, 2008). And within this field, religion (Putnam 2000, 65-79) and 'moral culture' (Etzioni 2001: 223) have an important part to play. In the larger debate regarding the examination of modernity along with religion, arguments include that with the development of societies, with modernization and urbanization, involvement in religious activities inevitably declines (Norris and Inglehart 2004) and also arguments that diverse societies could have different responses so far as modernization and urbanization are concerned.

According to Srinivas (1966) as Hinduism is not as organized as other systems of religion, it is, as a result, more vulnerable to the changes associated with modernity, and those who are economically privileged are affected a lot more by such transformations than others. In line with Giddens's (1990: 18-21) ideas on disembedding and distanciation, and viewing the examples in various kinds of expressions of religion in India, Srinivas proposes that in large cities, the participation of Hindus in huge numbers in voluntary associations is a consequence of making up for the apparent decline in the traditional socio-cultural environment. As modernization leads to the disconnection Hinduism from the cluthes of kinship relations and the village community, it then

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becomes increasingly dependent on temples, sects, small devotional and worship groupings and pilgrimages. Thus, voluntary associations that are founded on caste, language, and religious group turn out to be of great importance in big cities as an alternative to the decline in the 'traditional social and cultural environments' (Srinivas 1966: 139-145). Therefore, shifts toward bonding on religious lines might be a partial consequence to the new kinds of cultural freedoms that the well off urban classes feells due to the 'breaking free from the restraints of local habits and practices' (Giddens 1990: 20). Warrier (2005) illustrates how the new cultural freedom that is being viewed in the prosperous urbanites might be, to a certain extent, a consequence of their distance in terms of culture and practices based on religion of their parents and their extended families. The rapid pace of life that the urban professional way of life requires does not leave time for large and detailed religious rituals, that typically highlight the traditional religious cultures, and this detachment leads to an opening and the possible need for some kind of religious engagement in order to fill that vacuum. This opportunity has the possibility for making the urban populace adopt such religious practices which are more suitable to address the fast-paced, diverse lifestyles, like that of increased religious bonding (Singer 1972).

In his examination of religious groups in urban areas, Babb (1987) argues that the kind of life experiences that India's affluent population have may lead to the development of feeling of rootlessness along with alienation. Even though urban affluence offers people more individual freedom, it also comes with the sense of disorientation. In order to overcome these circumstances, the urban Hindus lay less emphasis on private rituals and instead of it favor participation in religious groups as the rapid ways of changes in life highlights the importance and requirement of experiencing meaning as well as personal security (Babb 1987).

According to Giddens (1991: 185) modernity leads to the development of a sense of crisis that people are able to alleviate through relationships, and the narratives of the involvement of the urban 'devotional community' in India is in line with this argument (Babb 1987: 222). Groups that are centred around religious culture also become very

effective in adjusting actions of individuals, in this case increasing the bonding activity among people, when unsettled situations occur (Swidler 1986), not least because of the culturally rooted assortment of polysemous resources that religious groups often have at their disposal, such as "symbols, language, texts" (Sewell 2005: 14).

In Beteille's (1991) perspective, the alterations in the social norms of the cities in India confront the upper castes with an increased amount of meritocracy. In a similar vein, Swallow (1982) the traditional authority of the upper caste Hindus, as well as their social status and style of living life is prone to risks in the urban environment of India. Reeling under various kinds of social changes, Swallow (1982) claims that the upper castes of the urban areas get involved with devotional participation as they find in it a foundation for moral order in the present social life in urban areas. For these groups, the contexts for social transformation, like cities, can intensify various requirements for 'stability' and 'assurance' that can be found only through religious participation along with interaction (Smith et. al 1998: 144)

This idea is equivalent to the notion of the influence that groups have in community formation that does not only brings together individuals structurally, but also, according to Etzioni (2001) has the power to bring together such people based on the ideals of moral cultures and values that are collectively shared, like religious groups (Vaisey 2007). Putting together these ideas, Smith et. al (1998: 90) explain that 'drives for meaning and belonging are satisfied primarily by locating human selves within social groups that sustain distinctive, morally orienting collective identities'.

Fischer (1995) is of the opinion that urban settings promote bonding that is more intense in 'class cultures' and that the connections between urbanism and religious bonding would be stronger amongst the more prosperous individuals. Class can become an important aspect for bonding as the individuals would share similar prospects and anxieties with regards to lifestyle, patterns of consumption and education which may connect people in terms of class. In the recent time, the populace of the affluent classes in India has increased thrice in size ever since the period of economic liberalization

(Sridharan 2004) and this has also given a base for the rise of Hindu nationalism (Chibber and Mishra 1993). Even though Norris and Inglehart (2004) are of the view that material prosperity can lead to a decrease in religious involvement, many others have argued that such effects might not always hold true and work out in a different way for diverse groups (Smith et. al 1998). In the context of India, many studies advocate that when social class transformations strengthen, the approach to religious behavior tends to become more collective so far as the numerous affluent urbanites' are concerned (Babb 1987, Kakar 1991).

The way spaces are utilized by religious groups in a variety of stable and permanent structures as well as less- permanent constructions can be understood both in terms of functions and designing them in such a way that that can facilitate for the devotees, feelings of community and also transcendental experiences. In the recent years, stress has been put on matters regarding how discourse, power and difference, resistance, transgression, performance and representation are located in particular spaces (Duncan, Johnson, and Schein 2004). David Chidester and Edward Linenthal (1995) put across their argument that in order to understand the importance of the construction of sacred spaces it is necessary to interrogate 'profane' forces also.

According to Lily Kong (2004, 2001) it is important to understand the politics of space that includes the claims of ownership and the operation and functioning of a group of people who have certain particular interests and also to examine the poetics of space that distinguishes the fundamental nature of of sacred spaces which are experienced in a religious manner. From the perspective of David Cunningham (2008), such metropolitan regions that are placed in the crossroads of an international capitalist modernity and also have networks of relationships among inhabitants and this diverse amalgamation in cities all around the world specifically in Asia, come with a combination of religious collectivities along with their various orientations and performances with regards to worship.

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Mark Wynn's (2011) contention is that religious ideas and thoughts can inhabit the sensory manifestation of things, so that the ordinary, everday things can be provided with a certain intended unity, like the feelings of being 'at home' as expressed by Thakur's devotees. Martin Stringer (2008) in a similar vein suggests that there are four important ways through which the ways in which religion works can be understood in relation to or within the city: first is as religious institutions, then as religious populations, thirdly as religious discourse, and lastly as discourses with regard to religion by means of third parties. For example, Zelinsky (2001) observes that in the religious landscape of America, cities exhibit scattered patterns of church buildings or its associated structures like shops selling religious objects, art and music. In most of the American cases, however, the religious groups which make use of spaces for worshipping and other related actions have, to a certain extent, an internal variation (Kevin Dougherty 2003). As a result of this, there would be a lot of opportunities to socially interact across the boundaries of status, but lesser communications across racial lines. In India, a general decoupling of the elements of class and social status among the Hindus has led to enhanced chances of mobility for members previously associated with lower castes, and may be similar upheaval within the higher castes also (Stroope 2012). As a consequence, more visible scattering of urban religious temples can be seen in urban spaces.

In the contemporary period Christi Kessler and Jurgen Rüland (2007) note the rise of Evangelical and Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity worldwide. In response to these new religious movements, the Vatican issued in 1986 a statement acknowledging how sects and cults appear to be satisfying genuine religious desires especially among young people. Catholic parishes could counteract this phenomenon by stepping up a more responsive and holistic community building and religious education without coming into conflict with the new religions (Saliba 1992). Various groups eventually commenced building churches, community centers, and other facilities also found in Roman Catholic communities. Kessler and Ruland (2007) describe how successful modernization erodes cognitive and emotional security, so that populist religion gains a foothold on individuals by offering them protection from possible drawbacks of modernization. Even mainstream Catholics who turn to charismatic Eucharistie celebration and other rites performed in

non- traditional 'church' spaces do so because practical or affective needs are, being met in such spaces (Gomez and Gilles 2013).

Conceptually, places of worship such as churches and other structures are viewed as physical and yet considered 'transcendent' in nature; they are the part of a multi-faceted urban landscape which is inhabited by many different groups. More specifically, the religious structures in a city can be "read" and understood in the terms that has been explained by Denis Cosgrove (1988: 179):

> for these reasons landscape is a uniquely valuable concept for a humane geography. Unlike place it reminds us of our position in the scheme of nature. Unlike environment or space it reminds us that only through human consciousness and reason is that scheme known to us, and only through technique can we participate as humans in it. Looking at religion through the layout of a city that is constantly transforming from fine-grained old neighborhoods to state-of-the-art glass-and-steel megaliths leads to the question of how different groups utilize once-profane spaces for effecting new religious meanings. This looks into how sacralization of spaces are accomplished in cities, imbuing the latter with religious meanings.

According to McKinnon (2010), the early concepts that theorized about religion still remain relevant today. For example, religion could be a protest in opposition to real misery of life, which is a Marxist view or it could be the need to provide meaning to life when faced with various difficulties, which is a Weberian view. In the same way, Physical structures can be comprehended in terms of the manifestation of the desire to get liberation and can also turn into temporal spaces for worship and celebrations. In this sense, Gomez and Giles (2013) view the urban landscape as a 'legible political and poetic text' that should be examined on terms of its physical features, and after that understood in such religious terms so that 'meanings and values' can be attributed to its structures. There are other consequences too, of the existence of religious structures contained within the larger urban landscape. As Chris Park (2004: 2) puts it:

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Religion leaves an imprint on landscape, through culture and lifestyle. Religious structures- such as places of worship, and other sacred sites - dominate many landscapes. Religious traditions - Hindu ritual bathing in the Ganges, for example - leave their mark on the physical appearance of an area. Religious observance - church attendance, and so on - affect the time management, spatial movements and behavior of believers. Given the many ways in which religion affects people and places, there are many possible themes, which could be considered here.

From the perspective of urban planning and design, such edifices do not stand just as physical constructions anymore but become a part of the intangible quality in an immense multi-dimensional urban fabric. They are at the same time assertions of belief, economic dynamism, urban design, and group strength that motivate the observers to view the structures beyond their obvious dimensions. The urban domain, in Peter Berger's (1967) idea of objectivation, as a result, does no longer stand for a fixed and neutral space, but develops into a ground for myriad religious edifices, the presence of which lends themselves to diverse messages from hundreds of religious groups that span the whole urban landscape.

Ashram for Householders

The term *ashram* has two major meanings, one associated with space and the other with time. It denotes a space of spiritual relaxation or refuge. It can also be used to refer to any one of the four stages of life in the Hindu tradition. Both senses of the word were relevant in traditional forms of religious instruction in which a student, in the first stage of life, was expected to seek out a spiritual teacher at his place of retreat and live with him for a period of education and enlightenment. More recently, ashrams have become associated with spiritual retreats where a renunciant or a group of renunciants reside for an extended period of time.

The ashrams of Anukulchandra differ somewhat from these traditional models. Firstly, there is only one holy man at the core of the community; no circle of renunciants intervenes between him and an outer circle of lay devotees. Secondly, he is not celibate

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(though some claim that masters practice celibacy after they assume an official position). The other permanent residents of the Satsang community in Bhubaneswar and most of the visitors, apart from a few, are householders. The fact that the Satsang ashrams are householder communities has implications for the way the quarters are arranged: large communal sleeping quarters that one can usually find in traditional ashrams are replaced by separate rooms for couples. Those who live at the centers receive not only the social benefit of being with their own kind, but the spiritual benefit of being near the master. "My family and I always want to be in Thakur's company," a resident of the Bhubaneswar Satsang explained[22]. This feeling persists even in the new Satsang ashrams that are built far away from the guru's primary residence, as a guest house is prominently placed in each for the present *acharya* or his family's visits. So symbolically, he is always present.

Another resident of the Satsang ashram, Sonia Das explained:

> *The art of happy living was practiced and propagated by Sri Sri Thakur. He led a life of an ideal house-holder for which thousands of worldly people flocked around him, and now millions are following his footprints. By natural practice and observance of moral discipline, this worldly life can be changed to a divine one. For this, we need a leader, whom we call 'guru', and we are to ardently follow his instructions in every moment of our life. Worldly life should not be relinquished, but to be elevated, we are in need of a savior. This savior should be an apostle of truth, peace and love. Such a man was Sri Sri Thakur. His principles and ideologies are not meant for a few but for the whole universe. The world has recognized his contributions to mankind in general. After his departure from the mortal world, he is still attracting more and more people. (Interview on 20th May, 2014)*

The concept of a householder ashram is an innovation in Indian spiritual practices. From a traditional Hindu point of view, it seems quite impossible that one could renounce the world and continue to live in it. The Satsang ashrams, however, provide locations where

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[22] Interview with Reena Das, a devotee and a resident at the Ashram on 13th May, 2014

the old ways of living can be renounced, yet 'the world' is by no means altogether left behind.

Apart from the daily prayers and bhajan/kirtan sessions, annual events are held with much fanfare. One of the most important events includes the celebration of the birth anniversary of Thakur Anukulchandra. The 127th birth anniversary of the Thakur celebrated on the 8th of February with elegance. Throughout the day, there were various programmes held which included a free medical camp. Hundreds of women joined the 'matru sammelani' (congregation of mothers) where the role of mothers (women) was discussed based on the philosophy of Sri Sri Thakur.There was also the distribution of 'prasad' at *Ananda Bazar* (community kitchen). The day ended with the evening prayer session wherein thousands of devotees prayed together and read the divine messages of Thakur.

In fact, the worship of the guru as a living icon can be seen in a special annual festival, known as guru-purnima, that occurs on the full moon day of the Hindu month of Ashadha (July). A pan-Indic festival, guru-purnima is celebrated at no fewer than fifteen monasteries in Bhubaneswar, where it serves the function of ritually connecting the guru as an object of worship within the monastery with the linga embodying the presence of the god Shiva in a temple nearby. According to Miller and Wertz's (1976) observations, at the Shankarananda matha, the ceremony begins with the consecration of a small-scale model of the guru's throne, which is worshiped by means of chanting and oblations. After the worship of the throne, the guru himself becomes the object of a ritual conducted by priests, who wash his feet and shower him with flowers before allowing others to approach. The worship of the guru is succeeded by a procession to the Lingaraja Mahaprabhu temple, where rice is offered to the linga in the sanctum before being distributed among devotees as *prasada*, or blessed food.

First, the guru in all instances operates as an object of worship a focus for puja and darshana and is treated as an embodiment of divinity. A special altar housing images of past and present gurus is sometimes established within the monastery. Elsewhere, a

separate shrine or temple is built exclusively for the purpose of housing the guru both as a living being sitting at the head of a matha and in the form of sculptural representations that function as embodiments of a divinized lineage. Finally, on occasions such as the guru-purnima festival at the Shankarananda matha at Bhubaneswar, the worship of the guru, as a living incarnation of Shiva within the monastery, is ritually linked with the worship of a stone image of the god Shiva housed within a nearby temple. Once the guru is worshiped as the divinized head of the religious community, a procession continues onward to the linga in the temple. The two guru and linga can be understood not only as manifesting the same divine presence but also as performing critically interrelated functions, for it is exclusively through the conference of initiation and the grace of the guru that devotees can follow the path that will bring them closer to god.

The Centrality of the Guru

The construction of a carefully designed architectural program can be understood in a larger sense as an attempt to reorder the world in accordance with a rapidly developing soteriological system that was becoming institutionalized across India during this period. The interior spaces constituted a sanctified world that, from the moment of entry, was separated from the exterior. The movement from that point on was then designed to direct the monastic disciple and lay devotee toward spaces meant to facilitate interaction with the guru, whose mere presence and powerful teachings could lead to liberation.

Nonetheless, the ordering of spaces and the establishment of separate zones for sleeping, hearing daily discourses, meeting with the guru, and worshiping god evoke conceptual parallels with monasteries in the European context. Ultimately, the comparison can go only so far: the individualized nature of worship in Hindu traditions and the possibility for each disciple to attain divine status calls up a very different ritual environment, one that perhaps bears more similarity to Buddhist practices in other parts of Asia than to Christian monastic traditions. Although both guru and abbot served as leaders of monastic communities, the abbot functioned primarily as a mediator and mouthpiece of

god. The authority of the guru, however, moved far beyond to reside in his status as God's avatar.

The Sense of a Center

To people on the move, a category that includes most modern persons, the search for a home base and the reorienting of oneself that is often called 'centering' can be a significant part of spiritual experience (Juergensmeyer, 1991). The Satsang, first set up in Pabna and then shifted to Deoghar, was created to anchor a floating community and establish a home.

Geography has always been important in India's religious imagination. In traditional Hinduism the whole of the landscape is a sacred place and those who travel to the four ends of the subcontinent are thereby able to achieve merit the way one would in circumambulating a temple. Pilgrimage places such as Banaras or Vrindavan provide spaces of spiritual activity and are often located in places that are in some way unusual and offer extremes of either excitement or calm[23]. In the noisy, crowded conditions in which most Indians live, however, a quiet place is more valued than a lively one.

These centers, like Thakur's Satsang Vihar at Bhubaneswar, provide places of rest and renewal to people in the urban cities. The centers also alter the role that temporal locations play in India's religious imagination. In the traditional view one moves through four stages of life until one comes to the final stage, when classically one becomes a *sanyasi* or a *vanaprasthi* and wanders about in the search of truth. But if one is a follower of Thakur Anukulchandra there is no need to wait till old age before one searches for the truth, nor one needs to wander in order to find it. Truth can be found in a definite place where a living master resides. The entire community of Anukulchandra devotees forms a sort of spiritual family, and the Satsang ashrams are homes to which the *satsangis* long to visit.

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[23] For the spiritual significance of geographical location of Banaras, see Diana Eck's *Benaras: City of Lights* (New York: Knopf, 1982), pp. 34-42) regarding Vrindavan, see John Stratton Hawley's At Play with Krishna: Five Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 3-51).

The charisma of any society, Clifford Geertz argues, is conveyed not only through its leaders but through a sense of center. Geertz describes such centers as "concentrated loci of serious acts." [24] There are the "arenas" in a society, "where its leading ideas come together with its leading institutions" and where "momentous events" are thought to occur. These centers, Geertz suggests, are a vital part of charisma of leadership, for they convey a sense of "being near the heart of things". So, at the heart of the Satsang is the guru and the place where he lives becomes the intersection where sacred and mundane orders of reality meet, which, according to Eliade (2009) is called *axis mundi* (2009: 115-116).

In Bhubaneswar, the urbane Satsang community is larger than the traditional ashram and is meant for married couples rather than celibates, and provides most of the comforts of a middle class home.

Conclusion

Studies of new religious movements provide a window into intense religious group social interaction in India's cities (Babb 1987), and highlight the unsettling urban environment's role in promoting bonding with fellow devotees (Kakar 1991, Swallow 1982, Varma 1998). Consistent with the aforementioned urban temple literature there are also indications that this urban pattern of religious bonding movement extends beyond new religious movement's involvement to more mainstream Hindu religious behavior in cities (Narayanan 1999).

Ever-present across India, but especially prevalent in cities, temples become sites of personal interaction and social negotiation (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976). As a devotee of Thakur Anukulchandra explains:

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[24] Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power." In Joseph Ben-David and Terry Nichols Clark, eds., *Culture and its Creators: Essays in Honor of Edward Shils* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977 pp. 151)

At the satsang bhajan (religious songs) and bhojan (partaking of consecrated food) together unites the devotees. Here we believe in Thakur's ideology practical karma and seva for a significant growth in life, as religion today has become distorted. Here, it is a different world, more meaningful. (Interview with Sadasiba Padhi in Bhubaneswar on 24th November, 2014).

The 'world' of the *satsangis*, their engagement with the philosophy and theological structure of Thakur Anukulchandra, is dealt in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER – III

Theology: The World of Anukulchandra's Satsangis

In recent years the number of followers of Thakur Anukulchandra has been steadily growing. The reasons for joining the sect vary from searching for a permanent solution to the problems of illness that ail them, to family and financial problems to finding a more personal, 'rational' faith. Joining the sect brings changes in modes of practices regarding worship, diet, social relations with kin and neighbours, and the moral evaluation of oneself and others. Moreover, devotion to Thakur and conformity to the ways of the faith is supposed to protect one from further harm. What is central to this adherence is building a relationship with God through Thakur without abandoning one's traditional faith. This process of transformation involves in some cases, ruptures in relationships and in most cases, a re-evaluation of the notion of self and the social world. In this context, this chapter introduces the consciously held and the explicit teachings of Thakur Anukulchandra. Here, an overview of the whole theological structure will be presented and analyzed along with the dilemmas and experiences of the devotees as they navigate and articulate new ways of being and living in the society.

Dr. Biswas (1980), a devotee of Thakur, in his book writes, 'I had been stumbling when I was a college student. I knew not which way to follow. I could not express what I really wanted. A feeling of negation haunted me day and night… I became restless for a spiritual guide… my parents persuaded me to go to Sri Sri Thakur and tell him about my problems…I noticed in Thakur a most normal man but with an astounding influence of love and wisdom over thousands of people. Like others, I had free access to him in a

most intimate and personal level. In him I found the technique not of renunciation but of propitious use, not of suppression but of adjustment and sublimation' (1980: 1, 4)

Hauserman (1962) in his biography of Thakur Anukulchandra writes 'World War II was over… and a group of us who had been serving with the ambulance division of the American Field Service found ourselves waiting in Calcutta for passage home. Shortly before I was due to sail I met an AFS colleague, a brilliant young philosopher from Harvard, Ed Spencer, who had just returned from a visit to Himaitpur, in East Bengal. There he had met Anukulchandra Chakraborty, a saint called by his devotees "Sree Sree Thakur', which meant, Spencer said, 'very reverend spiritual teacher'. It soon developed that enthusiasm for his discovery had brought about a great change in my scholarly and conservative friend. He was glowing. He told us about his visit to Himaitpur and the community called Satsang Ashram. It consisted of a group of people who were singularly loving, dedicated, and happy. 'Ray, you must meet this man' he insisted over and over again. 'If you miss this opportunity, it can cost you years of fumbling in the dark…' Ed warned (1962: 4-5).

During my interaction with Thakur's devotees, one of them observed:

> *A guru is absolutely necessary in today's time. For me Thakur is not only a guru but god. I consider him the chalanti vigraha (living representation) of god. In our tradition, belief in a guru has been present since ancient times, to show the right path. Thakur, being a family man, shows us that we can have a fulfilling social and spiritual life. (Interview with a devotee Geetanjali Parida on 26th May, 2015)*

Stories such as these show the importance of finding a spiritual master who will provide an anchor to what is a deeper reality than revealed through philosophy or science. To understand why a spiritual master is so central in the Ankulchandra circle, one has to begin with where many who have joined the community began, with the feeling of uncertainty that they once had about what is ultimately true and real in the world. The hope of overcoming a state of confusion is the reason that many have turned to this faith

as 'seekers'. When the mind is sufficient for ordinary problems but cannot fathom the deeper truths of life, it is at this juncture that 'turning towards' Thakur offers a devotee what Erik Erikson (1980) describes as 'basic trust', a sense of self assurance that comes from a solid relationship with another person. When early bonds of trust are lost or outgrown, they must be supplanted by something else that is trustworthy. According to Erikson, 'Religion through the centuries' has provided precisely this; it has served to restore a sense of trust' (1980: 65). Faith in Thakur restores this trust not only in the way that religion usually does, through scriptural authority and conceptual clarity, but a same way that a child learns to trust, through a human form, a spiritual master, who is supposed to be the '*latest avatar in a long line of gurus who can change a seeker's life through an altering his/her sense of self and giving new direction to life.*' (Interview with P.N Rath on 2nd June, 2015).

It is important to note here that among his followers, Thakur Anukulchandra is considered as an incarnation in a long line of gurus starting from lord Krishna, with Thakur being the latest *avatar guru*. According to a devotee,

> *Those people who are not members of the Anukulchandra paribar (family) rely on others to give explanation the reasons for their suffering and for the identification of their predicaments. They also try to point at other people or external circumstances as causes of their sufferings. As a devotee Anukulchandra, one is no longer dependent on others in times of suffering in the same way. By submitting oneself to Thakurji, one draws the power to manage the crises, now and in the future. All one has to do is demonstrate one's commitment as a steadfast devotee by following his philosophy. (Interview with Amrita Ray at the Bhubaneswar satsang vihar on 2nd June 2015)*

It is this ability to negotiate social relations successfully that can put an end to suffering. One does not appease others, nor does one pester them into submission. And, in a very real way, suffering is seen as caused by one's own failure to keep the promises made to Thakur. Being an adherent of the faith therefore transforms the nature of responsibility, by emphasizing one's relationship to the guru over one's relationship to other persons, and

by submitting to the practices laid down by him. Practices of devotion are important not only for the protection they provide but also because they bring devotees closer to the guru and also God.

It is not uncommon for the devotees of Thakur Anukulchandra to emphasize on the 'importance of a teacher in *sanatana dharma'*, 'seek spiritual wisdom, knowledge' and 'feel a divine presence' in their life so that they can 'follow their dharma properly' and find their 'true selves'.

For a lot of devotees this *dharma* generally means 'Sanatana Dharma' which is preferred by them over the term Hinduism. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, declared Hinduism to be 'a way of life'. By doing so, he made the point that it was not something separate from society and politics or any other aspect of it. He also suggested that the closest term to be found within Indian thought and practice was Hindu *dharma*, the law, order, truth, and duties of the Hindu people. This raises other questions such as what does the term 'Hindu' mean to the devotees? How do they make sense of their 'selves' in the contemporary time? In order to make sense of the world of the *satsangis*, it is necessary to delve into a brief history of the different intellectual traditions in Hinduism and its schools of thought which has inspired a long line of gurus like Thakur Anukulchandra.

Unlike the term 'Hinduism', which was used first in the early nineteenth century by orientalist scholars to signify the religion of the 'Hindoos', the term 'Hindu' was of earlier derivation. It had been used by incomers to India, particularly Persians and Turks, to denote those people living around the river Indus in the north and, later on, all the people beyond the Indus, the entire population of India (von Stietencron 1989 [1991]: 11–12). By that token, Buddhists and Jains, Dravidians and Aryans were all included. The term when used by those who came to India had no obvious religious significance, referring only to a geographically defined group containing immense internal diversity of language and custom. Later, indigenous Indians began to use the term, too, though only in order to distinguish themselves from the Mughals and Europeans. Still it had no religious intention, rather an ethnic or national meaning.

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But the meaning of 'Hindu' began to change. With the discovery by the British of Vedic scriptures and the Brahmin class and culture, it began to be invested with religious significance, on the principle of it being similar to the term 'Christian'. 'Hindoo' and, later, 'Hinduism' began to be identified with the religious traditions of the Aryan people, and this identification began also to be made by Indian reformers, though the idea of peoplehood and nation continued to be important in the light of calls for Indian self-rule.

Among scholars of religion the meaning and validity of 'Hinduism' has been much discussed as knowledge of its origins has grown. But more than anything, it is awareness of the internal complexity of 'Hinduism' which has called the term into question. Not only does it comprise the major divisions of Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism, but it also offers a variety of different philosophical approaches, thousands of deities and their associated mythology and iconography, and innumerable ritual practices. It contains within it Brahminism, which is often referred to as the orthodox or mainstream movement within Hinduism, as well as 'Hindu' challenges to Brahminism. And then there are the village traditions which extend beyond Brahminism to pragmatic, magical, and animist practices. Nowadays, when scholars refer to 'Hinduism', they include all of these movements, traditions, beliefs, and practices.

A sixty-four-year-old devotee revealing how his encounter with Thakur's philosophy changed his view of life said

> *'I still have problems and issues in my life. But now these problems do not confound me. I do not consider these problems as mine. It is He who has created it and He will take it away. So, I take it as a way of life'* (Interview with Sukant Behera on 25th May 2014)

Hindu idea of the self:

"That's how you are" is a translation of a famous Sanskrit phrase, *'Tat tvam asi''*. It expresses the idea that the truth which underlies everything and is its essence is also

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identical with the story of Shvetaketu's own self (*atman*)[25]. This truth or self is the life force (*brahman*) within both the world and humanity. These three important words, 'Tat tvam asi', are considered to contain a vital truth about the nature of reality, and to have the power to bring about self-realization. As well as appearing in the *Upanishads*, this and other important phrases are found in a later compendium of aphorisms known as the *Brahma-sutra* or *Vedanta-sutra*. The text summarized as the teachings of the *Upanishads* on ultimate reality (*brahman*), and became crucial within a philosophical system known as *vedanta*. *Vedanta* was one of six orthodox systems (*darshana*) within Hinduism.

To understand more about *vedanta*, and particularly what it teaches about the self, it is important to look briefly at how three philosopher-theologians understood the self, and at how their ideas have continued to be significant for modern Hindu movements. Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva were south Indian brahmins who were acknowledged for their skill in philosophical exposition. When Westerners were first introduced to Hindu spirituality at the end of the nineteenth century by Vivekananda, what they encountered was a modern interpretation of Shankara's ideas about *vedanta*. From him they learnt that the impersonal, ultimate reality was also the personal God that people worshipped, and that this God was also the higher self within each human being: 'He is you yourself,' said Vivekananda (echoing 'Tat tvam asi').

This modern version of Shankara's non-dualist *vedanta* became so widespread in the West that many commentators assumed it to be synonymous with Hinduism as a whole. They weren't aware that there were other equally persuasive and quite different perspectives on the divine and its relationship to the human self. When seekers and scholars began to visit India in large numbers in the 1960s and 1970s, they met with gurus and movements representing other approaches to *vedanta*. The widespread popularity of devotional, theistic Hinduism, underpinned by the theological ideas of

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[25] In the Upanishads there is a story of a young man called Shvetaketu, and his teacher as well as father, Uddalaka Aruni. Shvetaketu after studying the *Vedas* and, thinking himself learned, returns to his father's home. There, his father discovers that, despite years of study, his son has not fully comprehended the true nature of reality. Using the analogy of the fig, Uddalaka demonstrates how the same essence is in everything: the quality of the fig is in the fruit, the seeds within it, and the tree.

Ramanuja and Madhva and their later disciples, was apparent throughout India. From the traditional Shri-Vaishnava *sampradaya* in south India to the modern movements of the Swaminarayans in Gujarat and the Hare Krishnas (ISKCON) in Bengal and beyond, the devotional theology which had challenged early non-dualist ideas about ultimate reality and the self were flourishing.

Vedanta is a philosophical system in which scholars have focused upon the study of Vedic texts concerning ultimate reality (*brahman*). Of particular importance for study were the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-gita*, and the *Brahma-sutra*. There have been many *vedantin* scholars, three of whom have been especially influential in the history of Hindu thought and practice. Their views have ranged from an understanding of the relationship between ultimate reality and the self as identical (Shankara) to an understanding of their separation and difference (Madhava).

Advaita means 'non-duality' and it has been used to describe Shankara's perspective on *Vedanta*. To Shankara, ultimate reality and the self were identical, and his task was to explain why people failed to realize this. One of the ways in which he did this was by referring to the example of the traveler who mistook a rope for a snake, superimposing a false impression (a snake) upon the truth (the rope). He listed the many ways in which different people understood or rather misunderstood the self, for example, by equating it with the body, the sense organs, or the mind. All these imposed a false idea upon the self (*atman*). To Shankara, *atman* was really none other than *brahman*. There was no plurality of consciousness or being. It was all one. Liberation was achieved by removing ignorance, learning to discriminate between what was eternal and what only masqueraded as such, and then acquiring knowledge of the self's identity with *brahman*.

To the Brahminical community, Buddhism remained a significant threat in India, so Shankara borrowed scholarly methods used earlier in Buddhist philosophy in order to reassert Brahminical ideas. By acknowledging a lower, conditioned level of knowledge in which distinctions, like those between the rope and the snake, were recognized, he was able to explain the importance given in the *Veda* to ritual activity and sacrifice to the

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gods. He distinguished this from the higher or absolute level in which all is one and reality is experienced as non-dual.

Teaching more than two centuries later in another religious context, Ramanuja's task was different. Unlike Shankara, he did not have to combat the popularity of Buddhism, but was committed instead to promoting the religion of the *Vaishnavas*, the followers of the god Vishnu, by giving philosophical support to their devotional claims. Ramanuja worshipped Vishnu and was well versed in the Epics, *Puranas*, and the poetry of his region. His ideas built on the work of Shankara, which, by Ramanuja's time, was accepted by the brahmin community and considered orthodox. He agreed that ultimate reality was non-dual, but disagreed profoundly with Shankara on the nature of *brahman*, the individual selves, and the world. He was pointed in his criticisms, accusing Shankara's followers of error and a lack of insight, and building his own case with examples from a wide range of scriptures.

His main claim was that the strong conviction we have that we are different from one another and from God is not false, as Shankara claimed it to be. The conclusions of our senses and feelings are not illusory. They indicate a profound truth, that ultimate reality is internally qualified (*vishishta*). Moreover, ultimate reality is not impersonal and without qualities, as Shankara asserted. Ramanuja saw it as *ishvara*, the Lord, the one who is desired by all those who seek to escape from suffering. As such, *brahman* is none other than the supreme person or God of the Epics and *Puranas*.

But what, then, is the relationship between the self and this supreme person? God is the inner controller of both the individual selves and the world. Ramanuja said that, just as the human body is the instrument of the self within, so the world and the selves are related to God. Knowledge of God helps to lead us to liberation, but God's grace and the self's surrendering response are vital, too.

Madhva had a good deal of sympathy with this view, but his reaction to Shankara's ideas was different again. Renouncing the world and joining a *Vaishnava* order at the age of

sixteen, he learnt about *vedanta* and gradually developed his own critique (*dvaita*). Like Ramanuja, he utilized a full range of Vedic, Puranic, and later devotional texts, but went further, concluding that the teachings of scripture can only be understood as dualistic, as maintaining a complete distinction between the Lord and the self. *Brahman* and *atman* were not identical. What is more, he saw the selves as different from one another, and from the world. Even within the world, he understood phenomena to be distinct. Everything existed within the will of the supreme Lord while maintaining its own particularity. To be liberated from suffering and rebirth required divine grace, dependence on God, and active devotion, worshipping the Lord in the form of an icon (*murti*). Madhva placed such an icon of Krishna in his monastery in Udipi where it remains to be seen by pilgrims to this day.

Although each of these three philosopher-theologians composed commentaries on the key *vedanta* texts, they drew widely varying conclusions, for example, on the meaning of the phrase in the story of Shvetaketu: *'Tat tvam asi'*, 'That you are'. For Shankara, this signified non-duality; there was no difference between that ultimate reality and the self. For Ramanuja, unity was not implied. Instead, the sentence suggested that *brahman* (*tat*) and *atman* (*tvam*) were distinguished from one another though clearly related. For Madhva, the two were wholly separate, though he saw the self as being in God's image and inhabited by a divine inner witness. Although these three were the most renowned of *vedantin* scholars, there were others, most of whom, like Ramanuja and Madhva, were *Vaishnavas*, extolling the glories of Vishnu or Krishna. Others, particularly those who revered the god Shiva, have worked outside the tradition of *vedanta*, drawing on Tantric texts in order to develop their theological ideas.

According to Anukulchandra, God is one without second. He is unique. God has everything in Him but does not have anything or anyone like Him. He is the master of all. He sustains nurtures and fulfils every individual existence with all his specific characteristics in his own particular way. He is the centre of everyone and everything. But if God is one without second then how does one make sense of both monism (advaita) and dualism (dvaita)? Thakur's concept of God as one without second does not

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contradict the doctrine of dualism in his indoctrination. He tries to break the line of separation between monism and dualism. For Thakur the concept of duality or non-duality has nothing to do with the existence of God. It does not imply if God is one without second or not. The sense of duality lies in a person's relationship with God, in man's attitude towards his creator. So both monism and dualism are right. The sense of non-duality is the ultimate result of that duality. The sense of duality helps man enjoy the bliss of the Supreme (Alochanna Prasange, 1955: 199). The sense of duality, non-duality or the sense that transcends both these are the stages of acquisition in man. And the feeling that the devotee realizes in his pursuit of God are his acquisitive experiences. Achievement of these feelings in a person does not dislocate the man from his material background. This realization is not an abstract achievement having no relations with the reality of life. It is a practical achievement for man. It is not even a momentary flash but a permanent acquisition. Once his realization comes in a man's life, the man is changed in his habit, behavior and conduct (Niti Vidhayana 1950: 86).

In order to grasp the soteriology of Thakur Anukulchandra's world, the theological reasoning behind what he saw, it is pertinent to return briefly to the ideas of the *Vaisnava* theologians, the school of thought from which Thakur derived his major philosophy that the Lord manifests in five forms: in the supreme transcendental form; in its emanations (*avatara*); in the heart or self of each individual; as the inner controller of the universe; and as the divine presence within the consecrated icon (*murti*). The Lord is transcendent and supreme, but also immanent and accessible as in the case with Rama in the *Ramayana* and Krishna in the *Bhagavad-gita*, the Lord may emanate as an *avatara* to help humanity in times of need.

A History of Vaisnava Traditions

Here, the term 'Vaisnava' will be used to denote those who worship Visnu and his different aspects as well as the traditions which the devotees follow. While 'Vaisnava' meant only 'related with the god Visnu' in the early period, it also assumed another denotation, namely an affiliation with the religion of which Visnu is the god from around

the fifth century ad, for instance, in the title *paramavaisnava* found on the coins of Traikutaka kings Dahrasena and Vyaghrasena. Kings of the eighth century continued to use the title *paramavaisnava*. The *Pauskarasamhita*, one of the ancient Pancaratrasamhitas, also refers to *paramavaisnavas* (Jaiswal 1967: 204; von Stietencron 1978: 11). The term Vaisnava evokes a conception of an overarching and syncretic religion for it includes the worshippers of all aspects considered as those of Vishnu like Krishna, Narasimha, etc.

The 12 Alvars, Tamil poet-saints, composed devotional poems, collected under the title *Nalayira-divyaprabandham* in the tenth century, from about the sixth or the early seventh to about the ninth century. Although they did not form a homogenous tradition, their influence on other Vaisnava currents gives them an important place in the history of South Indian Vaisnavism. The tenth to thirteenth centuries saw the rise and development of three Vaisnava schools of Vedanta which gave theistic interpretations of Upanisadic doctrines: Visistadvaita, Dvaita, and Dvaitadvaita. Though these early Vaisnava Vedantic schools are often grouped together, their destinies varied much in terms of geographical expansion and influence. The three schools produced articulated philosophical systems. They emphasized the role of devotion as a means of attaining release (by contrast with Sankara's Advaita which considered knowledge as the sole means) and greatly influenced directly or indirectly the later Vaisnava traditions. Each was accompanied and more or less supported by a specific network of religious institutions, particular ritual systems and modes of transmission. Visistadvaita and Dvaita developed and received a religious basis first and mostly in South India.

Traditions associated with New Indo-Aryan literature

According to Colas (2003), the devotional fervor which nourished the traditions of New Indo Aryan expression was in fact not so much Vaisnavite properly speaking as Ramaite and Krsnaite, that is, directed to Rama and Krishna which are however aspects of Visnu. The practices and concepts which they valued and which since have long existed in Hinduism and Buddhism converged to some extent with several similar mystic

techniques and notions of Islam and Sufism: ecstatic forms of worship, collectivesinging (*bhajan* and *kirtan*), repetition of holy names (and devotion to them), notion of divine love, etc. Other means of release were devotion to the 'Good preceptor' (*satguru*) who is God in human form, and the 'company of the good' (*satsang*), that is, of the poet-saints, but more generally of pious devotees. The social ideology of these traditions is difficult to circumscribe. They initially rejected caste barriers and were indifferent or even hostile to Brahmanic learning and to ritualism. They have sometimes been presented as revolutionary currents but they did not specifically denounce social structures (except perhaps Mahanubhavas, who isolated themselves from mainstream Hinduism), nor did they seem to have raised strong opposition from the Brahmanical side. The figures around whom these traditions developed were often of a humble social origin, yet their following belonged to all strata of society including Brahmins. Though not professing formal renunciation, they often insisted on nonviolence (*ahimsa*), strict vegetarianism, and sexual restraint.

By contrast with the above Marathi poet-saints who were Vaisnava devotees, the 'Northern Sants', from the northwestern states of Punjab and Rajasthan and the Hindi-speaking area, are generally associated with devotion to a formless God conceived as being beyond the three *gunas* of *sattva*, *tamas*, and *rajas* (*nirgunabhakti*) and with the notion of non-duality of the individual soul with God.

Sanskritizing traditions from the late fifteenth century

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which saw the growth of the traditions of New Indo Aryan expression also witnessed the rise of two Sanskritizing Vaisnava traditions, those of Vallabha and Caitanya, both closely associated with a devotion to images perceived as the very form (*svarupa*) of Krishna and with the mythology of Krishna's life as described in the Bhagavatapurana. These two teachers (who lived around the same time) or their immediate disciples, identified several places in the Braj region as Gokula and as sacred sites of Vrindavan which mythology associates with Krishna's life. The Vallabha tradition, from the time of Vitthalanatha, glorified the role of Radha, Krishna's favorite

cowherd girl (*gopi*), and Caitanya tradition (and connected traditions) stressed the worship of the divine couple (*yugala*) which they formed (Barz 1992: 90–1). This mode of worship was not new but received a great impetus during the sixteenth century in traditions of New Indo Aryan expression (like the Haridasa tradition) as well. This was also associated with the revival of the Nimbarka tradition (as cited in Colas 2003: 254). Both Vallabha's and Caitanya's traditions, like that of Madhva, gave great importance to the *Bhagavatapurana*. They held devotion superior to knowledge and built religious doctrines rather than scholastic philosophies on the lines of the Vaishnava schools of Vedanta of the tenth to thirteenth centuries. The importance which the Vaishnava schools of Vedanta gave to devotion which could be practiced by all, irrespective of their social status, did not affect their social conservatism. By contrast, Vallabha's and Caitanya's traditions which held the same position with regard to access to devotion had to envisage integrating backward classes, women, and other converts in a congregation of devotees.

Visvambharamisra, the future Caitanya, was probably a younger contemporary of Vallabha, but his exact dates (usually said to be 1486–1533) remain uncertain. Sanskrit and Bengali hagiographies written soon after Caitanya's death provide a detailed though often unreliable picture of his life. It is said that Visvambharamisra, born in a Vaishnava Brahmin family of Navadvipa (Nadia) in Bengal, grew up in a milieu in which Kamalaksa Bhattacharya (also named Advaitacharya) was influential. Kamalaksa Bhattacarya was the disciple of Madhavendra Purı who seems to have taught a Sankarite non-dualism combined with devotion. Visvambharamisra had a traditional *sastric* education and was a householder who remarried on the death of his first wife. At the age of 22 he is said to have received in Gaya an initiation with Krishnamantra from Isvara Puri, which debuted his mystical life. On his return to Navadvipa, he organized the collective singing of *kirtanas* withmusic and ecstatic dancing. Singing processions in the city (*nagarakırtana*) were also organized with the agreement of the local Mohammedan authority. Possibly in 1510, Visvambharamisra was initiated into renunciation by Kesava Bharati (perhaps an Advaitin renouncer, De 1961: 20) and received his name Srikrisnacaitanya, abbreviated to Caitanya. After many years of pilgrimage, he settled in Puri, but continued to visit holy places, especially Vrindavan where he is said to have

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identified certain sites as places connected with Krishna's life. Caitanya is said to have spent the rest of his life in ecstasy and in the worship of Jagannatha, the image of the main temple of Puri (De 1961: 17, 20, 30–2, 67–110; Hardy 1974: 37–40).

Caitanya's affiliation with the Madhva tradition is a late construction. His followers came to be known as Gaudiyavaisnavas, that is, Vaisnavas from the Gauda region (situated in present South Bengal). After his death an important group gathered around Nityananda, an early companion of Caitanya (and perhaps previously an Avadhuta ascetic), who remained in Navadvipa. Nityananda seems to have accepted members of all social classes more easily than Caitanya, who allowed equal access to worship and to the role of preceptor but held a rather conservative view with regard to social rules. He became a householder and had two wives. Another group formed in Vrindavan around six of Caitanya's disciples, called Goswamis.

Apart from these two main branches other smaller groups arose around several personalities and sometimes against certain teachers (De 1961: 13–15, 77–8, 107–9, 111, 84 n. 2; Majumdar 1969: 260–9). Caitanya did not write any work except perhaps the Siksastaka, a collection of eight verses describing his intense joy of devotion to Krishna (De 1961: 113). The six Gosvamins composed the basic scriptures of the tradition. Besides doctrinal and ritual texts, the Caitanya tradition produced a large quantity of Sanskrit poems, dramas, and biographical works. Its early literature also comprised devotional songs in Bengali.

Satish Chandra Goswami was a *kula*-guru by reason of being a direct descendant of Advaita, who in turn was one of the disciples of Caitanya. Consequently, Goswami was guru to several thousand disciples. Since the *kirtan* had originally been introduced by Caitanya, its revival by Anukulchandra in the early twentieth century was a matter of great interest to Goswami. Together with a small group of his own disciples, he set out for Himaitpur, around the year 1919, to investigate and after meeting Thakur, he along with his disciples became his devotee. This was among the first mass initiations into the faith of Anukulchandra.

Late Modern and Contemporary Vaisnava Traditions and Groups

New Vaisnava movements developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Swaminarayan, a tradition (nineteenth century) from Gujarat, the Anukulchandra tradition in Bengal, the Assamese reformist movements that arose in the 1930s, like the Haridhaniyas (or Nama Kirtaniyas), the Mahakıyas, etc., may also be mentioned in this context (Cantlie 1985). At the end of the nineteenth century, Bengal saw a revival of Vaisnavism inspired by the Caitanya devotional current. While reformist movements like Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj scorned this tradition, several historical personalities illustrate the opposite tendency. For instance, Bijoy Krishna Goswami (born in 1841), previously an ardent and influential missionary of the Brahmo Samaj, left it in 1889 and became a follower of Caitanya. He had several disciples like Bipinchandra Pal whom he initiated, but did not found any organized movement (Jones 1989: 39–41; Lipski 1971). By constrast, Kedarnath Datt (1838–1914) founded a branch of the Caitanya tradition, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, which spread outside India and is popularly known as Hare Krishna movement.

According to a devotee of Anukulchandra, "*The philosophy of Thakur is derived from Sanatana Dharma. He presented the ancient teachings in a new and unique way which can be applied in the contemporary period, in our lives to make it better, more meaningful and helps us to 'grow upward' and "evolve*."[26] An attempt has been made to understand the relationship between Sanatana Dharma and ideas of Radhasoami and Thakur Anukulchandra, who was initiated into the Radhasoami branch headed by Huzur Maharaj.

Sanatana Dharma, Radhasoami Faith and Thakur Anukulchandra:

The history of the term 'Sanatana Dharma' runs through the entire Indian scriptural tradition. It is mentioned in the Dhammapada, the Manusmriti, and in the Epics[27]. It has

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[26] Interview with Umesh Chandra on 20th December, 2015.

[27] On Sanatana Dharma in the Epics, see Goldman (1997); Lutgendorf (1991: 360-71)

been important in homogenizing Vaisnavism in the eighteenth century (Horstmann 2005) and has been revisited in the nineteenth century by Brahmo Samajis, Arya Samajis, Sanatana Dharma Sabhas (see Jones 1976: 27-29; Lutgendorf 1991: 360-71), Gandhi, and many reform movements. Whereas the term 'Sanatana Dharma' ('eternal religion') refers nowadays to a self-designation of 'Hinduism' by Hindus implying that the dharma is eternal, the term 'sanatanist' pertains to those who rigidly adhere to traditional law and what is defined as 'traditional and correct law' varies depending on the tradition or group one belongs to. Thus, most reform Hindu movements see their interpretation of 'Hinduism' as an expression of Sanatana Dharma, but do not consider themselves as sanatanists. In this sense, it would be suitable to differentiate between Sanatana Dharma in the narrow sense, that is, sanatanist dharma, and Sanatana Dharma in the broad sense, that is, the eternal true religion, claimed equally by sanatani Hindus, the Theosophical Society, Arya Samajists, Gandhi, and adherents of many other reform traditions and movements of modern Hinduism, in other words, by most Hindus as a designation for their systems of belief.

Dayananda Saraswati's Teachings and Sanatana Dharma as the Ideology of the Arya Samaj

Dayananda Saraswati was born into a Saiva Brahmana family. However, he soon became disillusioned with image worship and popular superstitions. He set about to reform Hinduism to adjust it to modern times and to enable it to meet the 'challenge' posed by Christianity and Islam. He argued that the Veda is revelation and that Hindu superstitions should be abandoned along with reverence for other scriptures such as the Epics and the Puranas. He did accept the doctrine of the Dharmasastras, for instance the Manusmriti. In 1875 he founded the Arya Samaj in Bombay to promote his reformatory ideas. The Samaj was meant to be a Hindu organization, yet it was open to everyone who subscribed to its principles and wanted to be enrolled as a member, regardless of caste, color, or nationality. The society was very successful in Agra and especially in the Punjab, where its members reconverted to Hinduism many 'low-caste' converts to Christianity and Islam in a ceremony known as suddhi ('purification') (see Jones 1976: 129-35, 202-15).

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In this way, the Arya Samaj challenged orthodox Hinduism by transforming many former untouchables into "twice-born" Hindus. It also provided a viable alternative to the egalitarianism of Christianity and Islam.

Dayananda's metaphysical and social teachings are contained in his work Satyartha Prakasa (1972, 1995). In harmony with *Visistadvaita Vedanta*, he sees liberation as riddance from suffering in which the soul retains its separate identity and not in the merging of the soul into God. He believed in a formless and omnipresent God, who is the Supreme Being, and the 'primal Cause of the Universe' and condemned the polytheism of Hinduism as represented in the Puranas. He criticized the dominant position of the Brahmanas and questioned their authority by birth. He was of the opinion that the Vedas should be accessible to all. Dayananda called upon all people to study the Vedas, and he conceded all human beings the right to interpret the texts for themselves.

His social teachings about caste, education, and language were influenced by contact with Christianity and Western thought and attracted the urban merchant classes who were striving for social and material progress. While he did not reject the caste system, he reinterpreted it for the new times. To him caste was not based on birth but on merit. Varna referred to individual differences in character, qualifications, and accomplishments. He denounced the institution of arranged and child marriage and advocated marriage by choice, setting sixteen as the minimum age of marriage for girls and twenty-five for boys. Additionally, he was not opposed to the institution of *niyoga*, the temporary union of widowers and widows for the purpose of having children. Dayananda Saraswati considered education for both boys and girls very important and advocated the founding of schools, gurukulas, where one promoted the study of Indian languages and Vedic culture. He considered the teaching of Sanskrit and especially of Hindi, which he envisioned as the national language of India, essential to national unity and pride.

He argued that his teachings were in perfect harmony with ancient Vedic ideals and with the reality of life in Vedic times. He believed that throughout the centuries in which the

Puranas and the Epics originated, Hindu religion was contaminated with superstitions, polytheism, and backward social practices, and it was the task of the Aryas to 'cleanse Hinduism' of these vices and to restore the primordial eternal Vedic religion.On the other hand, Hindus who defended Sanatana Dharma from the criticisms of nineteenth and early twentieth century reform movements claimed that they were the true heirs to the Vedas and theirs was the 'eternal faith', a literal translation of Sanatana Dharma. Although not representing an organized movement, the orthodox *pandits* who defended Hinduism as it was practiced generally represented Sanatana Dharma as the way Hinduism had always been practiced[28]. As Philip Lutgendorf (1994: 363), writes, 'it was a self-conscious affirmation of religious conservatism in a perceived pluralistic context… [and] was necessarily a vague label, as it had to be applied to vast numbers of people whose beliefs and practices displayed great variation; what was important about it was that it excluded others', such as the reform movements of the Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, and the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. John Zavos (2001: 121) articulates the ways that the Sanatana Dharma movement, like the Arya Samaj, represented a response to modernity; it, too, attempted to speak for a heterogeneous collection of related traditions as a 'symbolic orthodoxy', which represented a 'pan-Hindu tradition'. Both the Arya Samaj and Sanatana Dharma movements emerged in reaction to colonial critiques of Hinduism but, as Zavos explains, they defended their positions in different ways.

Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge (1995) argue that the growing and aspiring middle classes are 'the social basis of public culture formations (1995: 7)'. Along with the media and nation-state, these classes are engaged in shaping public culture and its values. Therefore, 'the political economy of public life in India…involves a complex interaction between the triangulated forces of the middle classes of Indian cities, towns, and villages, the entrepreneurs involved in the culture industries, and various organs of the state; all of these forces seek to maneuver around, through, and with the agencies and forms of transnational cultural flows' (1995: 10). For many aspiring to the middle class, accepting the values of these forces is one means to achieve higher status. As this

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[28] John Kelly, "Fiji's Fifth Veda: Exile, Sanatan Dharm, and Countercolonial Initiatives in Diaspora," in Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 329–51.

gigantic and diverse middle class strives for government positions, education and mobility, it certainly is shaped by factors enumerated by Appadurai and Breckenridge. As Brian Hatcher has demonstrated, the developing bourgeois sensibilities of the colonial period's Tattvabodhini Sabha (a nineteenth-century, Bengal-based reform movement) represented 'a kind of cultural convergence through which indigenous norms and European values interpenetrate to foster new, vernacular idioms of religious aspiration and commitment' (2007: 318).

In addition to social reform, many of the theological arguments of Dayananda and other reformers have become popular perspectives among India's Hindu middle class. Except among certain sectarian groups, some type of non-dualistic, Vedanta-inspired view seems to be asserted by the transnational Hindu middle class, if they do talk about the nature of God and the relationship between this supreme being and specific Hindu deities. Again, Brian Hatcher (2007) demonstrates the roots of this perspective in the early nineteenth century, emerging in the writings of the Brahmo Samaj and Swami Dayananda. According to Coward (1987), reformers such as Dayananda insisted on the rationality and scientific basis of their religious views and practices, a perspective that clearly has been adopted by many middle-class Hindus (1987: 45).

The Radhasoami Movement

The founder of the Radhasoami movement, Shiv Dayal Singh (1818-78), was influenced by Kabir, Nanak, Dadu and Ravi Das, by Tulsl Sahib's teachings in his eighteenth-century *nirguna* rendering of the Ramayana story, the Ghat Ramayana, and by the then esoteric teachings. Two of his disciples, Rai Saligram and Jaimal Singh, became the masters of the two main branches in Agra and in Beas, Punjab, respectively. The difference is that at Agra, Shiv Dayal is considered sant of sants, *paramatm*a guru, and only one name that of the highest realm, is revealed at initiation. By contrast, the Punjabi branch regards Shiv Dayal in the context of an unbroken chain of satguru manifestations and reveals five sacred names at initiation. Thakur Anukulchandra's sect belongs to this branch of the Radhasoami faith. The Radhasoamis see their movement as the perfect

manifestation of sant mat and consider themselves a part of the *sant parampara*, the *nirguna bhakti* tradition of sant poets such as Kabir and Nanak. They believe in one non-manifest, formless God, in the supremacy of the guru, and in the spiritual community of the sants, the satsang. The theology of the movement is codified under the concept of suratshabd yoga 'the discipline of concentrating on the divine word through one's inner current' (Juergensmeyer 1987: 332). The Radhasoamis believe that the eternal essence of God resides in the form of pure energy, in the highest realm 'Radhasoami'. Radha is seen theologically as the energy center, the soul within. Thus, Radhasoami (the swami or master of Radha) implies the control of the soul and one's spiritual energy. Similar to the other sants, the Radhasoamis hold that external forms of ritual and murti worship are irrelevant. Theirs is an interior religion of the heart, and only the interior transformation of the soul matters. Juergensmeyer (1987: 340-42) sees the theology of Radhasoamis drawing upon the intellectual tradition of Kabir and Nanak, especially with regard to the realms of consciousness and the concept of guru-ship. The religious teachings of Radhasoami, as reflected in Shiv Dayal's work, are to be seen in the wake of the sant tradition and the esoteric teachings of medieval Nath Yoga (Juergensmeyer 1987, 1991, 1995 and Daniel Gold 1987). In their social ideals and ritual practices, however, the Radhasoami movement reflects similarities to the ideology of the Arya Samaj. So, is the Radhasoami interpretation of Sanatana Dharma identical with Dayananda's Sanatana Dharma?

Sanatana Dharma Revisited:

The understanding of the nature of the divine and the notions of caste, karma, and liberation can be traced to the ideas of both the sants and the Arya Samajis. However, the importance ascribed to the *samskaras* and other ancient (Vedic) ritual activities, as well as the explicit social implications of the egalitarian ideas related to the interpretation of caste, karma, and moksha, of Radhasoami faith are akin to the ideology of the Arya Samaj.

The belief in one formless God and the rejection of *murti* (idol) worship is common to both the Arya Samaj and the Radhasoami (Lajpat Rai 1915: 81-82, 101-2). Moreover, both movements accept the authority of the Manusmriti and ascribe to Manu an important role in the creation of the world (Dimitrova 2007). They do not reject the caste system but give it a new interpretation. Thus, they hold that one's caste and the ensuing status in society should be based on merit, education, hard work, and success in life, not on one's birth. The notion of karma and transmigration is of crucial importance and is also related to the question of individual responsibility. Both the Arya Samaj and Radhasoami are open to members of all castes. Similarly, they hold that liberation is accessible to all and the soteriology of both movements does not rely on dharmic purity or birth. Both the Arya Samaj and Radhasoami place an emphasis on education for girls and boys. They encourage hard work, scientific knowledge, social and spiritual progress, a sense of individual and public responsibility, and achievements in this world. The life of the house holder is the main concern, not the life of the sanyasi or ascetic.

One major difference in the understanding and interpretation of Sanatana Dharma is that while Dayananda Saraswati reveres the Vedas, Radhasoami gurus base their doctrine on the philosophy of Kabir and the other sants. In the case of Thakur Anukulchandra, even though he does not reject the Vedas, he does lay emphasizes on the importance of the guru, of the satsang 'community of sants and collective service of worship', *naam* ('word') and of *naam-dhyan* or *japa*, 'remembrance of the name' as essential to following the path of Sanatana Dharma.

Many times throughout the history of Hinduism new religious movements have referred to the authority of the Vedas in order to legitimate their new ideas. This enabled them to establish the novelty of their teachings and to remain within the Hindu fold. The case of the Radhasoami-Sant movement is most interesting: it legitimates its ideas by referring to the authority of a tradition, which rejects the Vedas. Not only does Radhasoami remain within the Hindu fold; it claims for itself Sanatana Dharma, the eternal true Hindu religion.

On the basis of the teachings of the medieval Hindu Sant tradition, Radhasoami and other modern Sant movements (collectively known as Sant Mat) are organized around several central concepts:

- *guru*, the notion that ultimate reality and absolute authority are located in a person with whom one can have a redemptive relationship;
- *bhajan* (music; *kirtan* and *bhajan*), the idea that the self can be transformed into itsethereal essence, a divine harmony, through love and meditation practices;
- *satsang* (the true fellowship), the concept of communal organization that provides an alternative to Hindu and Western forms of social structure;
- *seva*, or service, an understanding of social responsibility and ethics based on obedience to the *guru*;

From the beginning, the movement attracted Western followers, including British administrators and American spiritualists. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Radhasoami Satsang along with its different branches (including that of Thakur Anukulchandra) became a part of the explosion of interest in Hindu-based *guru* movements in the West, and movements such as the Divine Light (see Sivananda) and Eckankar (established by the American spiritual teacher Paul Twitchell in 1965).

Idea of a Guru or Spiritual Master

The term Guru is often translated as 'teacher'. In the Indian tradition a good teacher is not only one who knows 'true things' but one who knows how to discriminate one truth from another. Rather than first choosing a subject and then looking for a teacher who can teach it, as one might do in the West, someone searching for knowledge in the time-honoured Indian method must first establish a relationship with a teacher worthy of trust and then find out what the teacher has to teach.

The word *guru* literally means heavy and suggests someone burgeoning with knowledge, a spiritual heavyweight. It is less a title than a term of respect that is thrust upon a person

by others. The term arises out of a relationship, and the designation for the other half of the bond is *chela* or *shishya* (disciple), is often used together with it to describe a linkage between learning and devotion. The solution to the problem of translation in the Jay Guru circles (this is the term by which the devotees of Anukulchandra greet each other) is to call the guru a 'master'. This suggests mastery over a body of knowledge, while at the same time connoting a position of authority with a distinctly personal component. The use of the term by the devotees of Anukulchandra implies even more, a supreme mastery over the world where they consider him as *Vishwa Guru*. The guru is also a 'Godman' or 'Godlike' (Patra 2013). As an intermediary between the highest planes of divine consciousness and our own worldly level, he can be viewed both as the manifestation of God and as a human being endowed with divine powers.

The Indian notion of avatar, the physical manifestation of God, comes close to the Jay guru idea, but the term is seldom used for in the Hindu frame of reference it applies only to mythical incarnations of gods such as Vishnu, Krishna and Ram. Even so devotees of Anukulchandra worship him just as Hindus worship the images of gods in temples.

The central paradox of the Anukulchandra theology is that the divine can be present in the human form. The master's physical features are for that reason important, as it is sometimes put, his "astral form is exactly like [his] physical form" only "much more beautiful, luminous and magnetic". Brundaban Hota, a devotee describes Anukulchandra as,

> '…*tall and fair with a disarming boyish smile and an attractive look. Those who have seen him say that he had astoundingly bright eyes and a piercing, searching gaze that seemed to light up the room. He was soft spoken, and had an extremely endearing and loving manner of addressing and speaking to people. He was always dressed in spotless and immaculate white clothes and his movements were easy, natural and graceful (Interview with Brundaban Hota on 7th January, 2014).*

Ordinarily then before one beholds the cosmic image of the guru, one must first be aware of and concentrate upon the human. The physical figure of the master stands at the juncture between two realities, the cosmic and the mundane and is able to provide access from one to the other. No wonder then, that the master's physical presence is regarded as the source of immense benefit for the spiritual progress of the devoted.

The terms for Indian holy men are applied to those who have achieved specific levels of spiritual consciousness. A *yogi*, for example, is one who has reached the first level, a *yogeshwar* has reached the next, a *sadh* has risen up to the level after that and a*sant* has access to the highest regions (Misra 1978: 101). A guru is therefore considered as a *sant* but of a special kind. Among sants, a further distinction is made. Someone who has attained the absolute highest stage is *paramsantsatguru*or a *purushottam* and has been born the highest states of consciousness rather than acquiring them in his lifetime.

Yoga as explained by Anukulchandra derived from the root word 'Yuj' which means to attach or bind with something, to adhere. The practice of Yoga is to be accustomed to the works and activities, habit and behavior that help an individual to be attached to a universal soul. So, according to Thakur, yoga in its intrinsic significance becomes fruitful when it makes a man attached to an Ideal through love and unrepelling adherence. When a man acquires this unrepelling adherence to the Ideal, he moves on to fulfill his ideal with his love service and admiration, he remains in 'Yoga'. This yoga brings spiritual realization, enlightenment, revelation and a balanced state of mind. For Thakur, in order to proceed further and further into different stages of spiritual realization, a person needs to keep his self-consciousness intact. This can be achieved through a deep devotion to his Ideal. The deeper the devotion, the higher stages of realization can be reached, maintaining his self-conscious (Alochana Prasange 1955: 120-121).

About coming from his source, Thakur explains:

> I recall how a prime point let itself explode into millions of hyper atoms. Each
> hyper atom then burst into millions of supra-hyper atoms resulting in an uncut

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indivisible physically inconceivable point. I witnessed that ultimate point, the Cosmic Soul, create an infinity of beings out of itself like thousands of sparks coming from a fire. The souls were destined to live through a series of lives so long as they remained subject to the illusion of personal individuality. From the beginning of Creation until my present life, my ego passed through various phases prior to being encaged in a living body, last of all human. My chain of human births includes a cobbler, prince, and spiritual seeker. In the gap between each death and rebirth, I felt empathy for family members whom I watched grieving for me. I dwelled in an undefined higher region prior to my present life. My journey to Earth involved traveling through a yet undiscovered system of celestial constellations. I traversed a vast distance in space, passing through 44,000 planets. While our planets rotate around the Sun, I observed that lakhs of suns rotate around a bigger sun. I also proceeded through a former planet that had split into pieces, and observed a planetary system yet to be discovered by science. Still fresh in my memory is the strange behavior of a unique constellation – a central star surrounded by four other stars. The four stars appeared red when they approached the central star and turned blue when they moved away through a principle known to science as the Doppler Effect. En route to Earth, I stopped at various planets where celestial beings welcomed me with a grand ovation. Each planet had unique life forms suited to their atmospheres, unlike any found on Earth. I felt a pang of separation as the planetary beings chanted hymns in my praise as I departed from their planet.[29]

In 'Satyanusaran' (1950), Anukulchandra writes, "Whose literature, philosophy and science, penetrating the scattered good and evil prejudices of the mind, have been meaningfully adjusted in the Ideal, is the True Master" (p. 34). According to him, The True Masters are world teachers in the form of human incarnation, representative of all pervading, all fulfilling, all-inclusive, omnipotent God, as mentioned in holy scriptures of the whole world. To him "The 'True Masters' possess the mind of Supreme consciousness (*nirmalchaitanya mana*). They are pure and above all complexes and ever meditative in nature and does everything being guided by the Supreme Being. The True

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[29] http://cosmiccradle.com/big-bang-2/. Accessed on 16th August, 2016.

Masters descend in this world from time to time, to lead man from darkness to light, from mortality to immortality, worldly pleasures to spiritual bliss. The 'True Master' is the living ideal who practically leads and shows us the path to '*Being and Becoming*' of life" (pp. 38-39).

On 'Being' and 'Becoming'

The words, *being* and *becoming*, are of special interest because these two words have been used by different philosophers in the past to denote different ideas. Among the earliest to use these concepts were the Greek philosophers Parmenides and Heraclitus around the 6th century BC. Parmenides believed that the world was essentially unchanging and eternal and hence in a state ofconstant being. He said:

> There remains, then, but one word by which to express the [true] road: 'Is'. And on this road there are many signs that What Is has no beginning and never will be destroyed: it is whole, still, and without end. It neither was nor will be, it simply is-now, altogether, one, continuous…[30]

Contrary to this idea, Heraclitus's perspective was that the world is ever-changing, transformations occur all the time and in each and every part of the world. And from this, he derived the notion that a condition of becoming always pervades the world. He wrote:

> Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed. You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others, go flowing on.[31]

A number of Greek philosophers who followed after Parmenides and Heraclitus, such as Aristotle and Plato also endeavoured to resolve this contradiction between the two

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[30] For more information, see Savitt, Steven. 2001. "Being and Becoming in Modern Physics", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Also see Edward N. Zalta (ed.) <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2002/entries/spacetime-bebecome/>. Accessed on 5th June, 2014

[31] Ibid

philosophies and it was done through the notion of duality between the matter and the spirit. So according to this theory, spirit was considered as the fixed or unchanging living principle or what Parmenides considered as 'being' and matter comprised such elements that might be merged and transformed or what Heraclitus explained as 'becoming'. This separation of the spirit and the matter captured the attention and thinking of the Western civilization.

In nineteenth century, Ernest Renan, the French historian explained that the shift in the paradigm that took place in the Western thought through the eighteenth century can be described as a change from 'being' to that of 'becoming'. During the beginning of the eighteenth century, both religion as well as science seemed to agree on the idea that the universe was a creation of an all-pervading God and this universe was structure and in essence unchangeable or fixed. In the book 'Spectacle of Nature' written by Noel Antoine in 1732 depicted the idea that the world was created by God in through a 'great chain of being' and each and every being and object in this world can be arranged in a hierarchy and thus have their own, fixed place. John Wesley (1703-1791), an English Anglican cleric and theologian, attempted to refine the notion of 'becoming' thus leading the change in thought from a fixed Newtonian universe to a world that was in a state of change, constantly. The theory of evolution as explained by Darwin and the uncertain principles of quantum physics are the new concepts that are related to the concept of becoming.

Concepts similar to these have also be seen in Indian philosophy. The Sankhya philosophy elucidates about the notions of '*Purusha'* (which denotes consciousness) and '*Prakriti'* (which denotes nature). According to this school of thought, *Purusha* or the fixed eternal being is intricately interlinked with *Prakriti* which is the manifestation of becoming. *Yoga Sutras* by Patanjali attempts to achieve the understanding of the 'self' by comprehending the *Purusha* and *Prakriti.*

Explaining the relationship between God and the individual soul, Swami Vivekananda says:

The essence of Vedanta is that there is but one Being and that every soul is that Being in full, not a part of that Being.[32]

Talking about being and becoming in the context of spiritual realisation, Swami Vivekananda explains:

Religion is not in books, nor in theories, nor in dogmas, nor in talking, not even in reasoning. It is being and becoming. Ay, my friends, until each one of you has become a Rishi and come face to face with spiritual facts, religious life has not begun for you. Until the super-consciousness opens for you, religion is mere talk, it is nothing but preparation. You are talking second-hand ….[33]

He explains this further by saying:

The Hindu religion does not believe in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realising – not in believing, but in being and becoming.[34]

From the aforementioned statements of Vivekananda, it can be inferred that his use of the term *being* refers to the God, the Ultimate Reality or the Supreme Being and expressions being and becoming are used together to refer to a state that transcends the consciousness and leads to expeience of a greater, super-conscious reality. For the French monk, Abhishiktananda, being and becoming essentially meant the same thing (Visvanathan 1998: 96). At different periods in time, the words being and becoming have been used in different situations and contexts to refer to spirit and matter, stability and transformation, existence and realisation, life and death, un-manifest and manifest, order and chaos, religion and science, particle and wave, matter and energy, space and time, etc.

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[32] www.vivekananda.org/quotes.aspx. Accessed on 25th June, 2015

[33] www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/ vivekananda/volume_2/bhakti_or_devotion.htm. Accessed on 17th February, 2015

[34] www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_1/addresses_at_the_parliament/v1_c1_paper_on_hinduism.htm. Accessed on 25th June, 2015.

However, Thakur Anukulchandra's use of the expressions of 'being' and becoming pertains to the 'fusional adherence that evolves into being with responsive becoming is life'[35]. For Thakur Anukulchandra, the fundamental essence of words being and becoming are reflected in his idea of '*exist and evolve*'. From the concept of being and becoming, Thakur Anukulchandra derived the philosophy that the first and foremost priority in life should be existence. Without existence there cannot be any philosophy, or deeds and actions, no conception of reality and illusion

Highlighting the importance of existence, Thakur says:

> Do... never die...nor cause death…but resist death to death. [36]

According to his point of view, everything is relevant only if, and to the extent to which, it supports humanity's existence. Dharma, according to Thakur, comes from the Sanskrit root 'dhri' which means to uphold; to uphold being. He says in the *Satyanusaran*, 'The stay of all existence is Dharma'. Even truth, according to Thakur, derives its meaning from being. He says:

> That which keeps our being firm and compact is true to us! [37]
> Due to the need to support our being, service to the environment becomes important and he further explains, 'environment is the only source of life and nourishment; so service is inevitable to sustain oneself … [38]

Like the Greek philosophers, 'being' for Thakur Anukulchandra refers to the fundamental aspect of existence that permeatesall through nature. However, for him '*being*' is not only a mysterious, static or supernatural reality, rather, it is more direct, intimate and personal. It is something which is relevant, practical and attainable in the day-to-day lives of individuals.

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[35]*Magna Dicta*, 4th edition, p. 8, verse 3

[36] *Magna Dicta*, 4th edition, p. 89, verse 186. Accessed on 23rd July, 2015

[37] *The Message*, Vol 1, p. 101. Accessed on 2nd August, 2015

[38] Ibid, p. 151, 101. Accessed on 2nd August, 2015

Becoming, according to Thakur, is a fundamental, primal yearning of the being and emerges from it. Describing how the universe was created, he says:

> The booming commotion of existence
> that rolls
> in the bosom of the Beyond,
> evolves into a
> thrilling rhyme
> and upheaves
> into a shooting Becoming
> of the Being
> with echoes
> that float
> with an embodiment of Energy-
> that is Logos,
> the Word-
> the Beginning![39]

Jyoti Naik, a devotee, explains "The message of Thakur about how the universe was created can be compared with that of the Bible which says that 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' This message interconnects the recent scientific theory of the creation of the universe through the 'big bang' theory. This is also of significance because it connects the Bible to the big bang, the ancient to the modern, religion to science, *being to becoming*" (Interview on 16th May, 2016).

At another instance Thakur Anukulchandra says:

> Thy Becoming descends illuminating beings into life…
> as manifestations-the universe, the phenomena, with sun, moon and stars…
> I am also one of them though unlike in embodiment-…[40]

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[39] *The Message*, Vol 1, p. 33. Accessed on 2nd August, 2015.

[40] Ibid, p. 325. Accessed on 2nd August, 2015.

He reiterates this point further by saying:

> He is the becoming of each that becomes,
> thus He, the Ananda as known,
> He made Him Himself, -
> materialised with the matter
> of Sat-chit-ananda …[41]

In the above quotations, Thakur has used the word *becoming* to describe the process by which the un-manifest, supreme Being manifests and materialises into all creation. This becoming is a primary urge of the Supreme Being by which all nature, with all its manifested objects, has been created. Hence, every manifested being, both animate and inanimate, carries this urge for becoming within it.

What the becoming of the being implies is indicated in the extract, 'The principal hankerings of being are animation, extension and augmentation…[42]'. As in the case of the Greek philosophers, Thakur Anukulchandra's concept of becoming implies change. Unlike them, however, it is not an uncontrolled change that matter is constantly subject to. Nor is it the random mutations of organic life forms leading to a Darwinian type of evolution through the chance selection of one species over another. Rather, it is a conscious, coordinated, concentric, progressive go of life that enables one to enhance one's abilities and achieve ever loftier heights. Thakur's idea of becoming is made clear in the following quotation:

> Worship appearswith a streamy becoming ability that floods
> with a sincere excelling of lifethrough service
> and adorns one with its meaning, *worth-ship.* [43]

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[41] *Magna Dicta*, 4th edition, p. 43, verse 75. Accessed on 23rd July, 2015

[42] *The Message*, Vol 1, p. 252. Accessed on 2nd August, 2015

[43] Ibid, p. 287. Accessed on 2nd August, 2015

Like Patanjali, Thakur propounds the idea that the being (*Purusha*) within a person, hankers after becoming culminating in realisation of the highest order (*Nirvikalp Samadhi*). Similar to Swami Vivekananda, he refers to a Supreme Being and denotes an ultimate state of super-conscious realisation through being and becoming. As a fifty-one year old, male devotee of Thakur Anukulchandra explains '*Thakur's use of the words being and becoming is much more extensive and comprehensive and his ideas associated with these words encompass not only the ultimate goal of self-realisation, but also the journey leading to that goal*'[44]

In Thakur's point of view philosophy, science, and other disciplines of human thought and endeavour hold meaning in so far as they support the journey of being and becoming in life. He says:

> When science and philosophy shrinkto fulfil life and needs…that holds the
> Being with an emphasisto Becoming…they are sham and needless![45]

Explaining the role of religion in one's being and becoming, Thakur says:

> The act of binding oneself with the Ideal, in love, worship and admiration
> and to live on accordingly in an acceleration of one's being and becoming
> is Religion to me.[46]

Not only religion, but art and literature, as well, are for the purpose of being and becoming. According to Thakur:

> That which makes one luminouswith an enthusiastic unfoldment of
> ideasthat elate the mindwith a pleasure push…in the way of becoming…is
> Art and Literature. [47]

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[44] Interview with Kailash Chandra Subudhi on 15th June, 2015.

[45] *The Message*, Vol 1, p. 299. Accessed on 2nd August, 2015.

[46] *The Message*, p. 158. Accessed on 2nd August, 2015.

He emphasises that a state or nation has the fundamental function of protecting being and becoming:

> Where individuals runan endeavourto achieve higher life, to protect and maintaintheir being and becoming…may be called State in its real essence.[48]

Unlike the old Greek and Western philosophers, Anukulchandra did not subscribe to a sharp division between matter and spirit. In fact, he states in his characteristically unique manner that spiritualism emerges from our urge for being and becoming through the harnessing of matter:

> Spiritualism is investigation and invention of the hows and whys by which matter extends and grows- to the acceleration of our Being and Becoming! [49]

So, Thakur's concept of being and becoming interrelates, augments key philosophical concepts from the east and west. It encompasses and assimilates the entire gamut of human thought and experience, ancient and modern, including God, man, creation, environment, philosophy, science, arts, politics, ethics, morality and religion.

Notions of Guru-Bhakti

Many of the ideas of Thakur Anukulchandra about the guru are elaborations of the themes found in the writings of medieval sants, where the concept of the divine guru, helps to resolve a paradox that lies at the heart of *Sant* religiosity. The *sants* held two central but contradictory truths: that the absolute had no true form, it is without quality (*nirguna*) and the appropriate response to the Absolute is loving devotion (*bhakti*). These two truths are at odds for if the Absolute has no personal qualities, there is no object

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[47] *The Message*, p. 189

[48] *The Message*, p. 184

[49] *The Message*, p. 253

toward which one's love might be directed. One resolution of this dilemma is to say that *nirguna* bhakti is the love for the sake of love, another resolution is to hold that love ought to be directed towards the teacher or the guru. The guru gives form to the formless and devotion towards him becomes guru-bhakti. He is the visible symbol of what is ultimate and unseen.

According to Thakur, the factor that makes dharma meaningful to life is the Ideal. To him, the etymological significance of the term religion implies that man must bind himself to someone else beyond his own dimension through love and attachment. Love and attachment to something abstract is beyond human comprehension. Therefore, the object of love and attachment should be someone who transcends all limitations of individual ego and who by his virtue of universal love and all-fulfilling faculty can feed back every man and woman with richer impulses of love and fulfil all individual characteristics and distinctiveness. To him, without an ideal the functional significance of religion remains far away from being meaningful to life and living. Hence all religious views of the world stress on loving and following a prophet, *avatara, sadh-guru*, messiah, etc as the most essential and indispensible rite of religious performance. The term 'Ideal' in the philosophy of Thakur conveys a person in whom all the virtues that human beings can exhibit have been embodied and demonstrated in their perfect order. He is the complete and most evolved man in this plane of matter.

Even though Thakur believes in the abstract supreme God, nevertheless, he recognizes the concrete personal God who involves himself in personal relation with individual beings in the context of human history. He is the immanent aspect of the Transcendent Ultimate in flesh and blood. Man can relate himself to him on a personal level in his day to day life and living. He is the God of men. He within Whom all the resources of the word 'knowledge', 'love' and 'activity' are spontaneous and by inclination towards him the scattered lives of men and all the diversities of the world find a final solution…He is the God of men (Satyanusaran 1950: 82).

Ideal is the consummation of both the human and divine aspects of life. He 'descends through the mercy of Providence from father to mother with holy attributes and compassion for the people' (The Message 1952: 94). He acts as a man but with complete consciousness of his divine nature. An ideal is the highest manifestation of the Transcendent Being in human form. Every human being is also a discrete manifestation of the Transcendent Being. The distinction that separates an Ideal from and places him above all human beings is the conscious memory of the Transcendent Being. The Ideal is a perennial source of love. He is love embodied. People who come into contact with an Ideal get the touch of an all-consuming love, a love that knows no limit, no discrimination and no prejudice. This love reacts in the very core of their existence in such a manner that they find a way to sublimation in thoughts and emotion, they feel that they belong not to their selves but to their beloved Ideal (Ista), the sole shelter of all selves. It is the instinctive feeling in an Ideal that guides him to relate himself to other selves and react immediately to do away with the problems that others suffer.

As a devotee explains,

> *The universal love in an ideal is displayed not through his utterances but his great concern to serve others in their sufferings and distress. He cannot but serve others as his own self. The universal love in an ideal makes him feel each and every entity in the creation as part and parcel of his own self. Millions of people came to Thakur with problems in their individual, conjugal, social, political, economic, educational, philosophical or spiritual domains of life. They have all got their respective solutions to the problems in their lives and as a result are adhered to Thakur who provides us with a secured and sheltered life.[50]*

Another devotee, a 38-year-old man was of the view that as he is a teacher himself, he could also understand the usefulness of a teacher or guide in a person's life, a life without whom is like 'a car without a driver'. He explained,

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[50] Interview with a devotee in Bhubaneswar, on 9th Feb 2015

The function of an Ideal lies in making dharma meaningful in the life of people. He is the embodiment of dharma. The laws and principles that uphold our being and accelerate our becoming are demonstrated in his character and conduct. He nurtures man through his life and message. When a man follows an ideal through love and attachment, he tends to observe the principles of life and growth in his own life out of sheer urge to please his beloved, his habit, behavior and conduct become adjusted and he proceeds to achieve a balanced life. (Interview with Siddharth Nanda on 17th November, 2015)

In the teachings of Thakur Anukulchandra the traditional gods of Hinduism are not rejected but the guru is affirmed as the main object of one's love. In reviving the idea common in medieval India that the truth is not embodied in logical propositions but in extraordinary persons, the teachings of Anukulchandra is able to strike at the heart of a modern problem, i.e., the limits of knowledge. The great advances of modern science stretch the imagination not only with regard to what is known but also to what cannot be easily known. In the deep uncertainty that comes with this awareness, the teachers of the Anukulchandra faith offer the security of a relationship: a bond with those who have mastered knowledge that is beyond the reach of the conventional mind.

The Idea of Satsang

The word Satsang is formed by linking the Sanskrit words *sangha*, meaning group, community, or fellowship; and *sat*, meaning true. Thus, these two words can be conjoined to form the meaning 'true fellowship'. In the medieval sant tradition, where the term satsang came into common usage, it was usually taken in its simplest sense, that is, 'good company', and any devoted person was regarded as a sant.[51] Later there was a tendency for only the major figures of the tradition to be regarded as 'true' or 'good', and the concept of satsang came to denote the fellowships that were created when two or more persons came together as the followers of the same master.

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[51] According to Vaudeville, the term came into sant usage from the Naths, where it referred to a circle of devotees, or 'saints' who performed religious music (kirtan); satsang is thus 'the presence and proximity of the saints' (Vaudeville, *Kabir,* pp.141)

The two main forms of spiritual activity i.e. lonely individual endeavors for mystical union and collective acts of worship divide almost every religious tradition. These two approaches to spiritual life answer to differences of religious temperament that are profound, and in some cases they cause schisms within religious communities, especially in the modern age when individualism and community are often at odds with one another. In the teachings of Thakur Anukulchandra both are essential. According to a devotee, the satsang community helps discipline the mind and it fostered love for the guru. One can understand satsang as a sort of 'spiritual man-making factory'; which produces with greater efficiency the love energy that is created in spiritual exercises. Even though the guru is not physically present at the satsang gatherings, his spiritual energy is thought to be manifest, it combines with the energy of the earlier saints and creates an atmosphere that is strong enough to stave off negative forces.

According to Thakur, there are two kinds of satsang, interior and exterior each of which strengthen the other. The interior one is the devotees, soul, meeting with the master during meditation. Even remembering the master for a moment or seeing his picture is satsang, in a sense and it encourages the ascent of the soul. The external satsang is also a meeting with the master; ideally it occurs in his physical presence, but if that is not possible, then he is considered to be spiritually present among those gathered in his name. Satsang in the external sense usually refers to a group event, and by extension it refers to the group itself. Satsang has multivalent meaning of a word like *church.* It refers simultaneously to a pattern of relationships, an entity and an event. Followers of the faith are linked to the master and to one another in the bonds of satsang; satsang fellowships hold satsang services and the entire community of followers of a particular master, or even a particular lineage of masters, is known as a satsang. Anyone who has been initiated by a master has also entered into the membership of the satsang for which that master is the spiritual head. From that time the devotee is known as a *satsangi*. This form of gathering that Thakur Anukulchandra advocates is drastically different from that of normative Hinduism because a Hindu temple is not a congregational reality. But Anukulchandra'ssatsang is in a way similar to the way Christians constitute churches and

Muslims participate in communal worship. But the precedents of Anukulchandra's notion of satsang are not Christian or Muslim, however, they are definitely Hindu.

The satsang temple of Bhubaneswar often serves as a focal point for members of the Anukulchandra community to come together and engage in common spiritual and social activities. Through classes in religion and spirituality, the temple socializes young entrants into the values and beliefs of the community. Temples are often the preferred venue for such social events as the celebration of religious festivals, and birth, initiation and marriage ceremonies. In this case the *satsang vihar* brings the devotees together to engage in acts of social service directed at the poor and needy. They also provide the venue for participation in religious and spiritual discourses and the collective singing of bhajans (devotional songs) by the congregation.
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Prentiss (1999) argues that placing 'participation' at the centre of analysis allows us to re-analyse practices of devotion in South Asian religions. She draws for support on Hallisey (1996), who in his study of the pragmatics of adherence in Buddhism and Hinduism argues that the formulation 'I am involved' captures the sense of power in Hindu bhakti panths. And she points out that 'participation' might be a complementary gloss for bhakti, along with 'devotion', considering the root of bhakti, 'bhaj' which means 'to partake' or 'to participate' (Prentiss 1999: 24; see also Van der Veer 1987: 682). Ultimately, the question of participation and power cannot be understood without taking account of the process of transformation that results in Anukulchandra devotees developing a relationship with the guru as well as God. They become responsible for their own level of protection and well-being and they achieve this by submitting to the faith (and to God) in participation of its power.

Food, Sex and Moral Purity

In the view of Thakur Anukulchandra, discipline begins with the control of physical cravings. At the time of initiation, candidates are questioned about their capacity for detachment and control. Special attention is paid to their habits regarding use of drugs,

alcohol and eating of non-vegetarian food. Even though Thakur Anukulchandra did not strictly insist on vegetarianism for his devotees, it was nonetheless considered ideal. The supreme value given to vegetarianism was due to Thakur's conviction that all forms of life are to be respected. There is also the concern about the act of killing animals that produces bad karma, for not just who perform it but to those who encourage it by the consumption of these products. Moreover, meat, eggs and certain kinds of other foods is thought of as inducing 'animal instincts' and 'arousing passions' and for that reason vegetarianism is one of the marks of Brahmins and others who occupy high spiritual places or aspire to it.

One might infer that when the teachers of the Anukulchandra sect advocate vegetarianism they are showing that they and their followers are 'sanskritizing' as sociologists call the practice of adopting the manners of higher castes in order to elevate their own social status.[52] But none of the teachings of Thakur Anukulchandra suggest that one should adopt vegetarianism because it is Brahmanic but because of the major premise that underlies it, that is, moral attitudes are affected by food. The traditional Indian designation as hot, cold or neutral, for instance, does not refer to the actual temperature of foods but their alleged effects on the body, mind [53]. Yogurt and milk are said to cool the bodily organs whereas meat and eggs excite and heat them. By arousing the passions, hot foods stimulate the base instincts and impair one's spiritual purity. Echoing the common view, the teachings and the teachers of the Anukulchandra tradition describe food as *sattvik* which produce 'pure feelings'; *rajsik* which have a heating effect on the body; and *tamsik* which are virtually flammable.

Sexual feelings cause one to focus attention on the lower energy centers within the body and discourage the soul from rising higher, and the genitals provide an aperture through which the soul's attention may escape its bodily channel. Moreover, sexual activity causes a male to lose vital source of spiritual energy: his semen, which traditionally in

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[52] M.N Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962) and *Social Change in ModernIndia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966)

[53] For a discussion on the spiritual significance of food in India see R.S Khare, *Food, Society and Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1986)

India has been thought to have spiritual as well as physical potential. The retention of semen is considered an important spiritual discipline for those attempting to build up spiritual discipline for those attempting to build up spiritual strength, such as students and sadhus[54]

The concern about sex in Thakur's teachings is not simply a matter of prudishness, but a concern over the indiscipline of the body and mind that is implied in allowing sexual energy to be squandered foolishly. It is understood that householders have a responsibility to indulge in at least as much sexual activity as it takes to bear children. So, sex in its place, if it serves the soul, then it is permissible. It is only when it gets out of control that sex poses a problem. Thakur holds that for a normal growth in man his libido is to be properly nurtured, otherwise if libido gets damaged or distorted, a man becomes abnormal and his natural and spontaneous growth in harmonious order becomes impeded. Proper nurture to libido implies the nurture and nourishment of the inherent tendency of attachment in man in such a way that the man gets attached to a superior and sublime object (Biswas 1980: 99). This attachment to a superior object elevates the complexes and instincts in man. But if a man does not have a superior beloved to which he can attach himself through love, service and admiration, his instincts and complexes fail to be enlightened and elevated, on the contrary if he is impelled to live in an environment with inferior instincts and complexes, he constantly receives 'thrashes of inferiority' and 'gradually his libido becomes inclined to something inferior in his environment, he tends to lead an unadjusted life, his libido gets damaged' (Nana Prasange, Vol II, pp. 68). The only sin, thus, is humanity's in ability to control and discipline itself.

Matter, Spirit and the Transformative Self

Like the Radhasoami teachings, Thakur Anukulchandra is of the view that the self, like all other creations is a mixture of different forms of matter, extending from the grossest to

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[54] Regarding the spiritual significance of semen, see Lillian Silburn, Kundalini: Energy of the Depths, trans. JaquesGontier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988) pp. 160-161; and Wendy Doniger O' Flaherty, Siva: The Erotic Ascetic (originally, Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 4-11)

the most subtle. Before the world began, there was only a concentrated form of pure energy. Then an outburst occurred, an unleashing of spiritual force akin to the 'big bang' (Misra 1978: 77). According to Thakur's account, this cosmic explosion pulsed out, the currents are still pulsing outward and downward, and the finer elements fell back towards the center. The heaviest and the least refined elements precipitated themselves as matter and are controlled and delimited by time. These heavy aspects of energy cannot return to the generating source. Finer forms of energy, dazzling lights and sounds and forms more radiant than humans can imagine, returned or are returning to the ultimate realm. They are not bound by time and unencumbered by matter; these higher forms have no shred of materiality in them at all.

The idea of spiritualism originates from the conception that distinguishes between 'matter' and 'spirit' as two distinct entities lying behind this creation. This attitude of differentiating has no make no sense according to Thakur. Rather than distinguishing them as separate he prefers calling everything as either matter or spirit. To him matter is the evolved form of spirit and the spirit is the cause behind every material embodiment. Fundamentally, it is the one that exists in finer and grosser form. Matter viewed from the spiritual view point is spirit in gross form, and spirit viewed from material standpoint is fine matter.

If the whole creation is viewed from the angle of existence, everything is the same in its ultimate reality. Whatever exists in one form or another, it does so by the virtue of its existence; and as existence is consciousness, everything is conscious. 'No existence exists without this consciousness. Unconsciousness has no existence' (Alochana Prasange 1955: 18). Whatever exists, be it matter, energy or life, everything comes from one source, and the Supreme Being called by different names, in different views. The common denominator that underlies the creation of energy, matter and life out of that One is the Sat-Chid-Ananda, i.e. existence-consciousness-becoming. This common denominator relates energy, matter and life together in the meaningful demonstration of a self.

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At the dreg end of the scale is our material, temporal world. The fact that it has any structure at all is due the negative force in the cosmos *Kaala*, who desired to create its own kingdom in imitation of the pure realm. This realm includes the world as we know it and the regions that are called spiritual in religion, such as heaven and hell.

Ordinarily, humans are humans are firmly entrapped in *Kaala's* material world. Yet they have one redeeming feature, they possess elements of spirituality that really belong, and long to return to the higher realms. The subtle essence that humans have within them is the pure sound that still resonates from the time of creation. But it is trapped and can only be liberated through the practices spelt out by Thakur Anukulchandra, which aims at transforming gross matter into subtle. Similar to the Radhasoami faith, this involves a sort of nuclear fusion that releases pure energy from matter.[55]

The divine energy that has been inside ourselves emanates from what we commonly call a 'soul' or *jiva* according to Thakur. This *jiva* is a non-material entity that radiates its own form of energy. Undifferentiated by space and time, it has no individuality and is made out of the same substance that lies at the core of the universe. It is sometimes described as a drop of water from the divine ocean that yearns to be reunited with its source.[56]

The first move in that direction is to gather up what fragments of divine energy already exists within. At birth, the spiritual essence of the *jiva* locates itself at a point beneath the centre of the forehead and then is diffused downward through the body.[57] It tends to concentrate in six internal regions, each of which has its own focal point. These are the six *chakras*, 'wheels' of spiritual energy that are commonly found in hatha yoga and other traditional Indian portrayals of the spiritual anatomy. The lowest of these is located in the bowels, the next in the genitals, and then come the centers of the stomach, the

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[55] For more information, see Babb, The Physiology of Redemption

[56] Sawan Singh, 1939. *Discourses on Sant Mat*, p. 30

[57] Phelps, Myron H. 1947. Notes OF Discourses on Radhasoami Faith Delivered by Babuji Maharaj in 1913-1914. Agra:Radhasoami Satsang, p 68.

heart, the throat and the special one above and between the eyes. This eye center is sometimes identified with the pineal gland. It is the point at which a devotee attempts, through meditation, to concentrate the soul consciousness that has become diffused elsewhere throughout the body. It is from there that the soul can flee the body into higher realms. Even if it does, however, the soul is not yet fully free. Once it has left the body, through death or through the techniques of soul projection during its earthly life, the soul can lodge itself in other forms of selfhood. But these ethereal bodies are also spiritually insufficient. They are traps in the path of true spirituality, and the soul must extricate itself from them as well.

In the traditional Hindu thought, the moral weight that keeps the soul from fleeting its mortal limitations, comes from the law of karma, literally 'action', that makes each soul accountable for its deeds in this or in previous lives. The way one lives one life determines whether one gets the opportunity to escape this mortal world or not. Anukulchandra's teachings accept the notions of karma and karmic cycles of birth and rebirth, but with a significant difference. According to this view, there is an 'original karma' that taints the soul so much that it cannot find release (*moksha*) if it follows the traditional Hindu prescription of righteous living and ritual observances. Only the power of the guru and the practices prescribed by him will allow the soul to break the hold of the original karma. Once it has rejected the physical, mental and spiritual artifices of *Kaala*, the soul becomes ready to slough of this world and begin its ascent. But how should it proceed? For this purpose, Thakur explains, one must have a guide, a guru to beckon and befriend the soul both in the physical plane and in the higher planes.

Notion of Dharma

The Indian language term most frequently used to translate "religion," *dharma*, implies correct action, practice, and ethics rather than a requisite set of beliefs (although it does not preclude beliefs). The term comes from the Sanskrit root *dhr*, which means to hold together, to support, or to order. *Dharma* can be interpreted, then, as that which holds the world together: ethics, ways of living, a "moral coherence" (Marriot 2004: 358).

The often used term 'Hinduism is a way of life'. Given the centrality of everyday practices in Hindu traditions, over both time and space, including the foods one cooks at particular ritual occasions, I would prefer to expand the boundaries of what counts as "religion" to include "ways of life" rather than to exclude Hinduism. This inclusion may cause us to see practices in other religious traditions, such as cooking, in a new light, as *religious* practices.

While there is a class of *brahminic* Sanskrit texts called the Dharmashastras (ca. 500 bce–400 ce)*,* which provide intricate context- specific codes of social and ritual conduct, most Hindus do not learn their appropriate *dharma* from reading or hearing these texts, and many may not even know about or ever make reference to them. The primary way a Hindu learns his/her *dharma* is through observing and participating in family traditions and customs (Hindi *niyam*; Sanskrit *paddhati*), traditions passed from guru to disciples (who themselves become gurus or teachers), listening to performances of Hindu narratives, and simply by living in a Hindu-majority culture in which Hindu gods, temples, narratives, and rituals are 'all around', and a child imbibes them almost through osmosis.

Leela Prasad, in her ethnography *Poetics of Conduct* (2007), analyzes the ways in which ethical (*dharmic*) practices are learned and known in the small South Indian town of Sringeri, which is the site of an important *matha* (monastery and site of *brahminic* learning and exposition, including of the Dharmashastras). Prasad is particularly interested in the ways in which the term *shastra* (authoritative tradition of ethical action, or *dharma*; teaching) is invoked in everydayconversations and narratives. Through analyses of conversational narration, she finds that there is wide scope for interpretation of *shastra* and its authority, going much beyond reference to the textual tradition of the Dharmashastras. She argues that '… narration itself is an ethical act…' and that stories are an important means through which Hindus learn *dharma*, that is, how to live in the world (Prasad 2007: 6).

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In the same way, in Bhubaneswar *satsang vihar*, families come together on occasions like births, weddings, reinforcing a sense of solidarity as a group. A devotee, calling himself 'a regular visitor' to the temple, said,

> *Families who come here often tend to be closely knit, and family members play a vital role in transmitting these customs and traditions (those pertaining to Thakur) across generations. Children almost invariably have their first exposure to the beliefs and practice of Thakurji at home, where they are encouraged to pray at the family shrine regularly, told stories, and instructed to pray at particular times. Children learn through participation about how to perform puja and meditation at their home shrines. Through participation here, in the larger satsang family, they develop an understanding of customs and ceremonies surrounding such important rites of passage as birth, initiation, marriage and death.* (Interview with Janak Mallick on 21st April 2014)

According to Anukulchandra, every major organized religion consists of 4 structural entities: a) the Ideal and the ideology in codes (principles); b) the conducts (practices) which are ritualistically adopted by majority of followers of religion; c) institutional structures which govern, influence, regulates and mobilizes the affairs of a religion in public domain, and d) the practitioners of religion who avowedly remain affiliated to the religion.

Religion as understood from the view of Thakur Anukulchandra

- The world of religion needs fresh air, new light and a renewed originality.
- It needs a vigorous popular movement too.

Conceptually, he has challenged the very term religion, saying what prophets have actually propounded is not religion, but 'dharma'; religion is not the English equivalent of what 'dharma' conveys. According to him, 'Dharma' is not to be equated with any dogma, creed, and ism or with any kind of restrictive and exclusive preserve of institutionalized social tradition. 'Dharma' is not barrier based on one's place of birth and

inherited customs. 'Dharma' is certainly not an organized strength to be used for or against any other similar groups to settle certain existential issues.

'Dharma' is a way of scientific living. It is living and growing, in association with the surrounding fellow beings and in consonance with the environment. Thakur Anukulchandra defines it as 'being and becoming'. 'Dharma' in its conceptual domain has got certain essential ingredients like: law of nature, progressive and collective living, scientific temper, loving attitude, inquisitive serviceable approach to others, and life of balance between matter and spirit.

From the point of view of Thakur, the principles of 'dharma' have two parts: divine and discrete. The divine part is eternal; things which are linked to law of nature, principles of human biology and deep rooted psychology. Such principles which are foundations of our stay, cornerstone of cosmic law and very core to ecology, have got all time value, are divine. Those divine laws are to be maintained through basic codes of conducts, which every religion upholds. On those counts, no religion takes a contrary stand. There are however discrete parts of 'dharma', which are associated to the core and are relevant to the context of time, locality, climate and habitation. These parts of dharma are related to ritual, habits and customs, which are adaptable. On these grounds, there can be differences amongst religions. These differences are immaterial to the core purpose and substance of 'dharma'. Therefore, there can be differences in the practice and observations amongst religions, which are mostly of these kinds of discrete affairs. These differences can however be no basis for any conflict amongst religions.

According to Gautam Tripathy, an ardent devotee of Thakur and a lecturer at a local college explains:

> *The apparent differences in different religious views are ascribed to the discrete aspects of religion according to Sri Sri Thakur. In his view, religion consists of two aspects: the divine aspect which is universal and remains same in all religious views and the discrete aspect that varies according to the time, place,*

person and geographical region. The divine aspect of religion consists of worship of god; adherence to an ideal who might also be known as the sat-guru, avatar, prophet, etc; love and service to other people as well as the environment through active attachment to the ideal and the observance of hygiene. The discrete aspects of religion imply different customs, costumes, food, tradition, culture, manner of worship, etc. that arises out of the demands of the time and place. There are numerous gurus but the beauty of Thakur's teachings lies in the fact that it helps a person evolve, for example, when a Christian person accepts Thakur, he does not become a Hindu but a better Christian. This holds true for every person, no matter to which religion he or she belongs. (Interview in November, 2016)

Thakur made 'dharma' an integral part of one's daily living, thinking and action. There is nothing that one has to do separately for the sake of acquiring virtue as required by 'dharma'. 'Dharma' does not exist outside one's life. No worship, no penance, no ritual, no pilgrimage, no recitation of scripture, no donation – nothing of this sort to be done exclusively for the sake of satisfying 'dharma', and which is not linked to one's life. Everything has a place in the scheme of life and everything has to support existence and growth. One can draw line between what is core and what is periphery; what must be done under any circumstance. All of it depends on the context in which the circumstance arises. A. K. Ramanujan has identified this principle of context-specificity as an "Indian way of thinking" (1989).

According to Niranjan Sahu, a 47-year-old teacher:

Under Thakur's guidance, everything what one does has a rationale, scientific and psychological understanding; no blind faith, no superstition, no tradition without personal satisfaction'. (Interview on 7th June, 2015)

The Hindu acceptance of diverse, context-specific traditions, narratives, and rituals reflects what Diana Eck has called a "polytheistic imagination," one that includes but is not limited to the coexistence of multiple deities (1998: 22). That is, most broadly

conceived, "truths" are multiple. While multiple truths may be theoretically or conceptually accepted, and a Hindu may not judge another person for the ways in which she/he practices particular Hindu traditions, however, this does not mean that every "truth" is accepted for any given family or individual; his/her "truth" is determined by the various, often changing contexts of his/her life, including region, caste, and family.

The philosophy of Jajan, Jaajan and Ishtabriti

Jajan, Jajaan and Ishtabriti constitute the 'everydayness' of the Anukulchandra devotees. In simple terms they represent the daily activities that a devotee must unfailingly go through and it includes meditation, preaching (according to one's own leanings) and *daana* (offerings) for the nourishment of the ideal. According to a 71-year old, male devotee:

> *The main purpose of jajan is to establish the Ideal, the guru and to fulfill his interest and this means to do good to all. It is possible to accomplish it only if we make the guru who is the embodiment of good the object of our meditation. Meditation on him and moving in accordance with him will lead us in the direction of becoming. So, jajan involves repetition of the holy name, meditation, devout worship, self-analysis, self-adjustment and prayer. To thus make oneself completely to Thakur's liking is sadhana or the process of actualising the principles of life and growth. In jajan the main factors are repetition of the Holy Name and meditation and obeying the commands of the guru in proper time'.*
> (Interview with Madan Sethi on 3rd November, 2015)

In Thakur's words:

> To meditate at dead of night and dawn,
> To repeat the Name always while moving on,
> To work out in time the commands of the Lord:
> This is called *tapasya* in a word.[58]

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[58] English translation of Anushruti, Vol.1 Chapter Sadhana-27. Accessed on 29th September, 2015.

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According to a 25-year old female devotee, who is engaged in agricultural research, *'Through meditation and repetition of the Holy Name, the brain cells are stimulated and gradually become more responsive; thus the sharpness of the senses is increased'* (Interview with Pratyusha Parija on 10th November 2015)

Jaajan:

Jaajan is described by Das (1977) as 'To infuse one's Ideal-heartedness into others is called *jaajan'* (1977: 56). It is a form of preaching wherein the devotees of Thakur are supposed to spread the word of Thakur and bring more people into their fold. A devotee explains this concept as:

> *'To try for one's own upliftment while neglecting that of others brings failure in life, according to Thakur. In Jaajan the Ideal or the guru is central, for it is only through him that dharma can be offered to others. To offer dharma means to teach the principles of life and helping others evolve, and the embodiment of life and growth is Thakur Anukulchandra the greatest fulfiller. The main function of jaajan is to form in every person a link of unfailing love for our guru through service, sympathy and discussion'.* (Interview with Smita Mishra on 17th May, 2014)

According to Anukulchandra, *jaajan* activates all parts of the brain and dissolves the knots of obsessions (Answer to the Quest 1987: 39). He further says that through 'ideal-centric words'which refers to the holy mantra given by the guru during initiation, and activity, a man's regard and devotion grow and evolve and all his scattered feelings, ideas and reasoning become adjusted towards the one Ideal; as a result, his common sense develops (1987: 40).

Istabhriti

Istabhriti refers to the offering of some amount of money daily for the upkeep of the guru. According to a Siddhananda Das, a 33-year old lecturer and a devotee explained,

'It is the offering of something for the nourishment of the Ideal; it is this that makes one's initiation alive. It is a fact that if one follows this practice with adherence and regard, failure can never come into his life. Early, each morning after meditation and repetition of the Holy Name, and before eating or drinking anything, one should offer as much as he can. Carefully saving up his oblations, he should send them on the thirtieth day to the place of the Lord'.

Das (1987) writes 'Thakur says, the first oblation to Him in daily life, offered with the united eagerness of body and mind being concentric in the Ideal, with desire for earning only in order to feed Him, is called *istabhriti*' (1987: 66). According to Thakur Anukulchandra, if *jajan, jaajan* and *ishtabriti* are done, great fear will be overcome[59]and *istabhriti*, he says is the most powerful means of resisting the forces of *kaala* or cataclysm.

These three practices are considered the most important elements of Thakur Anukulchandra's teachings. Shanti Mohanty, a 55-year old female devotee, who said that she had been in Thakur's *sharana* (refuge), since the last twenty-eight years, summarizes these practices as being critical for the upliftment of every individual. She explained that 'Thakur attached great significance to the individual. An individual to him was a greater asset than an empire. Every follower is deeply, intimately and personally connected to Thakur even today. Thakur considered all his devotees as his universe and for us, the devotees, Thakur is our whole being. Thakur said that in we ignore one individual then we ignore a universe. Not only the devotees, but he wanted each and every individual of the society to grow and prosper in life by becoming attached to the *ista* (the Ideal), by being mutually interested in the well-being of all and achieving a harmony among the ideal (the guru), the self and the environment. This can only be possible when an individual is well-adjusted and integrated by controlling and meaningfully adjusting his/her emotions and achieving a co-ordination between thought, words and actions. This easiest way to achieve this adjustment is by *practicing jajan, jaajan* and *istabhriti*. Jajan is the consistent effort of an individual to cultivate the qualities of the *ista* both mentally

[59]English translation of Anushruti, Vol.1, Chapter Ishtabhriti-Swastyayani. Accessed on 29th September, 2015.

and physically by repetition of the holy name with concentration. This brings about a transformation of the character. *Jajaan* is service to the environment. Each follower of Thakur is supposed to serve the environment in such a way that every person becomes inspired towards Thakur and God. *Istabhriti* is our love-offering to Thakur, our living ideal. This is a practical activity in order to fulfill the *ista* (the ideal) and should be done with reverence. It is an act of sacrifice in our daily life. All of these activities together make a person coordinated and integrated and as a whole lead to the progress of the society. (Interview on 10th Deccember, 2015)

Conclusion:

From the above analyses, it can be said that like other forms of modern religion, the tradition of Thakur Anukulchandra, mediates between skepticism and trust, personal affirmation and self-transformation, individualism and social commitment, and it does so in a form of religion that itself mediates between an orientation to the future and reliance upon a particular past. According to Ainslee Embree (1989), "the great moment of cultural confrontation" in the late nineteenth century India involved not the East and the West, as often supposed, but "modern scientific culture and traditional religious culture" (1989: 157). The Anukulchandra faith is a product of this confrontation, and also an attempt to resolve it by raising the encounter to a higher plane, one where a new kind of science and a new kind of religion are compatible.

The modern notion of therapeutic personal power is also an ancient one and the Anukulchandra faith has, in appropriating the *sant* tradition, revived the notion that one should have an authoritative personal guide. Like the saints and holy men of antiquity, India's medieval saints and the modern teachers of the Anukulchandra faith are seen as mortal manifestations of the transformation of material energy.

Here Thakur is viewed as an important mediator of both 'tradition' and 'modernity'. He serves as sources of religious and spiritual authority for those seeking knowledge or guidance. For some of the devotees, Thakur's authority lies in his knowledge of ancient

texts, for others, it is his ability to perform miracles, or on sheer personal charisma and appeal. A devotee explains '*While some gurus prescribe techniques of spiritual discipline that require considerable effort and dedication. In case of Thakur, everything is simple. His recommendations for living life are conducive to happiness and fulfilment*'.[60]

The Devotees of the Anukulchandra Faith: Analyses of Guru Choice, Motivations, Emotions and Devotion

This chapter will provide an outline of the socio-economic profile of the devotees. It will try to provide an understanding of the choice of guru and spiritual seeking in the contemporary time. Bhubaneswar being the city of Gods and temples, what 'extra' do people seek in a guru? It will look at questions of why the followers of this tradition are attracted to this particular ideology, philosophy and how does it fare in terms of the modern, urbane world. It will explore the complex emotional bond between the guru and the followers, the narratives of devotion, accounts of miracles performed, indices of anxiety and the nature of well-being.

Chief Elements of Guru Devotion

Warrier (2003) in her book contends that even though individual gurus have their own characteristic or distinctive personal styles of preaching and recommend different modes of approaching the divine, there are particular elements which all of them share and as a consequence, these commom threads can be distinguished. Firstly, the gurus are thought as religiously or spiritually enlightened people. From the perspective of the common people, the gurus have access to such special powers which they can tap and as a result can make his/her devotees lead happy and contented lives. Another important factor that has huge potential of attracting devotees into a spiritual order is that they perceive that the guru has abilities to perform miracles. For example, Sathya Sai Baba, the immensely

popular guru and 'godman' markedly manifests his powers of divinity by openly displaying his capabilities of working out miracles, chiefly through the materialization of holy ash (*vibhuti*) and also many other objects such as watches, gold chains, diamond rings, and cameras. All this is done at some point during his public appearances in front of his devotees. Mata Amritanandamayi is another comparatively recent but very popular female guru and she has a very unique and personal way of interacting and inter-connecting with her devotees. She is also believed to have extraordinary powers through which she is able to ease the distress and suffering of her devotees. Her personal style of embracing each of her devotees individually and the power of this hold are thought to lead to subtle changes in their lives by progressively changing their individual qualities and directing them towards a change in their conditions, both physical as well as material. Therefore, in certain cases, how efficient a guru is, is determined by their capacity to give solutions to the problems of the devotees, which could be through miracles, through spiritual recommendations, etc and when a guru's remedy is perceived to work best for the devotees, it adds to their popularity. For others it is more important that the guru offers the devotees, a transcendental or out-of-the-ordinary experience, that can be taken as a signal that the guru is gifted and can be a spiritual guide and mentor and this becomes a critical feature which secures their assurance about the guru

Estimating the number of followers which the popular gurus have is very often difficult. There is usually a numerically small core or inner circle, often comprising ascetic disciples as in the case of the spiritual organization of Thakur Anukulchandra which plays a key role in the organization's promotional and institution building efforts. The bulk of the following, consisting of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of lay devotees across the world from diverse national, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, make up what may be described as a 'floating population' of adherents whose guru loyalties are likely to shift and change over time. They form the network of individual persons, instead of a closely formed 'community' of disciples who are bound together through shared rituals, practices and values.

Being attached with the guru in a personal way rather than being attached to the community of fellow followers is generally observed in most of the guru-based organizations. Such kind of personal ties are mostly maintained not through the bases of daily conversations and interactions amongst the devotees but by the means of legends and narratives that idealize the qualities of the guru like being 'omniscient' and 'omnipresent'. These myths create a sense that the guru is present in the everyday lives of his/her followers, guiding them towards well-being. As mentioned above, experiences of miracles frequently act as the key element in cementing the relationship between the guru and the devotee. An important role is also played by how the guru-organizations use mass media to reach out to the devotees, no matter on which corner of the world they reside for example, audio and video recordings of the activities of the guru, newsletters about the daily, monthly, yearly activities of the organization, online availability of holy books, etc.

Participation in such devotional organizations commonly requires a devotee to follow the daily prayer and worship of the guru, meditation or other practices as advocated by the guru, being present during collective rituals such as bhajan, kirtan, sermons, etc that are organized by the neighbouring circle of devotees and generally going for occasional trips where the headquarter of the guru is based.

A **Profile of the Devotees of Thakur**

In India, not all the people are uniformly well-endowed in order to experiment with the various kinds of guru-based devotional organizations that are available through the length and breadth of the country nor can all freely journey across the sites in which the gurus reside. From this perspective, it is mainly the well-off and educated people, mostly living in urban areas that are at advantage. Many studies of guru organizations that are high-profile and trans-national have noted this urban as well as middle-class profile of their Indian followers (see Babb 1986; Fuller 1992; Juergensmeyer 1991; Kakar 1984; Swallow 1982).

In Bhubaneswar, the devotees of Thakur Anukulchandra are urbanites in white-collar employment and a number of them are in the latest and more prestigious professions that involve high-tech proficiency and thus they have relatively higher pay cheques. These devotees include among others, government officials, doctors, teachers, lawyers, college lecturers, journalists, managers in multinational corporations or in smaller private sector companies, computer software personnel, engineers, and scientists. A common concern of these individuals is the kind of importance they place on a good, mostly English education, in the prominent schools, colleges and universities. Investment in education is considered as an important means that can evidently guarantee better economic mobility and a freedom to access both national and international opportunities. Some of these individuals also have transnational connections. They dwell in a world consisting of an increase in capital flow, new technology, and information across countries. Many of these people frequently travel abroad for the purpose of education, professional engagements, or even recreation and leisure and quite a few have family members and friends living abroad.

Today, the size of the category that is known as the Indian 'middle classes' has increased quite a lot since the colonial rule. In the period between the early to middle of the twentieth century, those people who were cosmopolitan, educated in the medium of English were considered to be the 'middle class'. These people mainly belonged to the intelligentsia, were in professions that were liberal

The category which today is familiar as India's 'middle classes' has swelled in size considerably since the days of colonial rule. In the early-to-mid twentieth century, the main constituents of the 'middle classes' were primarily cosmopolitan anglophone intelligentsia in the liberal professions, as well as business and commercial groups. After Independence, and particularly in the closing decades of the twentieth century, there have been many new recruits to the 'middle classes' owing mainly to the growth of Indian industry, and the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1980s. Industrialization and liberalization opened up new opportunities in India's business and service sectors, led to

rising incomes, and increased the purchasing power of upwardly mobile persons in urban India who benefited from these new developments.

India's 'middle classes' have been an important focus of recent commentaries on the resurgence of Hindu nationalism in India since the 1980s. Many such commentaries posit a direct correlation between the expansion of the middle classes since the 1980s, and the rise of Hindu nationalist forces in the same period, arguing that present-day Hindus suffer from a sense of alienation and defeat as a result of the legacy of India's colonial experience and their own exposure to post-colonial modernity.

The transnational links of these middle classes are reflected in the religious and spiritual organizations to which many attach themselves. Most such organizations, like that of Thakur Anukulchandra, command an international presence, and connect devotees worldwide not only through institutional networks but also through modern means of communication such as electronic mail and the Internet. Through their participation in a range of high-profile spiritual as well as social activities, these individuals derive the benefit of perceived spiritual growth and healing and keep up with their peers in matters not just of material but also spiritual wealth. Long, involved discussions on the latest spiritual options available or vivacious comparisons between different gurus and between diverse meditation and healing techniques are all commonplace in the everyday interactions of these individuals.

Scholars attempting to explain the particular appeal of modern gurus to India's urban educated middle classes often perceive a supposed gap in their lives that these persons purportedly seek to fill by attaching themselves to a guru. This 'gap' is described in terms of their inability to cope with modern India's fast paced and rapidly changing urban environment, their lack of anchoring in a closely knit community, and their sense of losing touch with their Hindu religious traditions. While the resulting sense of 'rootlessness','alienation', and 'anomie', as Varma (1998) describes it, may be true for some middle-class urbanites in contemporary India, it is certainly not a characteristic feature of them all. Instead, many of these people have in fact benefited vastly from the

changing conditions in India's political economy and have done well for themselves by seizing the education and job-related opportunities that have come their way.

Secondly, succeeding generations of urbanites see themselves as having increasingly 'lost touch' with the values, traditions, and belief systems of previous generations and feel a sense of being adrift in a world which appears inhospitable and hostile owing to the high degree of competition, lack of fellow feeling, cynicism and corruption in India's urban sprawls. Thirdly, the argument goes, they also encounter, in urban India's modern environment, changes of an unprecedented nature, with which they find themselves incapable of keeping pace, and whose very rapidity and scale they find traumatic and stressful. The uncertainties and anxieties that accompany this fast pace of change leaves them hankering after the imagined certitudes and securities of a more 'stable' past. In such a climate, religious ideologies, religious organizations, and religious leaders come to thrive as an effective compensation for the middle class urbanite's perceived sense of lack of meaningfulness in life. Membership in religious organizations provides a refuge against the impersonal organizations of this modern urban environment. For example, a devotee explains:

> *This is a platform where one can learn the art of maintaining balance in one's life- personal, familial, social. Without a guru life is meaningless. Shivaji had Ramdas, Chandragupta Maurya had Chanakya, Arjuna had Sri Krishna… likewise mine is Thakur. (*Interview with Bhabani Sankar Mohapatra, 7th February, 2015).

By invoking the certitudes and simplicities of an idealized past, religion bolsters the individual's capacity to face up to the uncertainties of fast-paced city life. As a repository of ultimate 'truths', religion puts the individual back in the centre of a social and moral order grounded in absolute values. Given religion's ability to effectively address the very problems encountered by India's middle class urbanites, it is only logical that modern India should witness an intensified religiosity among these sections of its population.

For the majority of these individuals, their experience of the unprecedented pace and scale of change in modern India's urban environment has resulted not so much in a sense of despair and failure as in the hope of increasing possibilities and multiplying opportunities. Most importantly, it has meant a growing awareness of multiple choices in every sphere of life, including that of religion. Their relatively privileged position in India's political economy gives them a position of advantage in the matter of spiritual travel and guru seeking. In the first place, they have the money and leisure necessary to (physically) travel to different spiritual centers and to pay for their entry into spiritual group activities or ticketed public programs and religious sermons. Second, they have access to the media (print and/or electronic) where these wares are commonly advertised. They are also often part of social networks that facilitate the relevant information flows between individuals and groups. Third, they can in their turn contribute towards the growth and publicity of these gurus and their organizations through donations in cash or kind or through the influence they command in the highest echelons of local business and political circles.

Motivations and Emotions for Guru Seeking

The reasons for which the devotees or the potential ones seek out gurus can be multifarious and range from a desire that their wishes be fulfilled or an expectation of finding spiritual development. Most of the studies of guru-based, devotional organizations have observed that the initial attraction for that particular guru stems out of the need for finding instantaneous answers for personal crises. In the case of Thakur Anukulchandra, many of the devotees reported that they first sought him out, mostly through familial networks or peer groups, in order to find solutions to the issues that they were face such as marital problems, health problems or even financial crises.

Even though they had the help of various professionals in the said fields, they were unable to get the kind of answers that they were looking for. Mostly, what they missed was a kind of personal support which was lacking in the professional and legal institutions. This was when they felt that a guru would provide them some respite, hope

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and faith. Many devotees who were in distress also came to know about Thakur Anukulchandra through the extended family members, neighbours, friends who insisted that they go to the satsang ashram get a feel of the place and seek the blessings of the guru, practice his spiritual recommendations, attend sermons and see if oit made any kind of difference in their lives. News of Thakur that appears in popular media was also a means through which the devotees came to know of him. So, the reasons for becoming a devotee are myriad and are dependent upon the social circumstances of the devotee.

For example, according to a female devotee, aged 49 who has been working for Thakur's ashram since 20 years explained:

> *Thakurji is not only a guru for me; he is an incarnation of god. During the birth of my third daughter, I developed some medical complications and was very critical…almost on my death bed. I recovered only through the grace of Thakurji. After this incident, I have made the SatsangVihar my home. Even my husband left his job to be with me here. Now I serve the Thakur every moment. (Interview with Reena Das on 25th February 2015)*

Another devotee, who has been initiated since the last 15 years, reported:

> *I was very depressed as my daughter was estranged from me. My neighbor, who is a devotee of Thakur ji, asked me to join his family in prayer. While I was doing kirtan, I saw the guru blessing my daughter. When I came back home I felt strangely relaxed. In a few days, miraculously, my daughter returned. I have been a disciple ever since. (Interview with Dilip Kumar Parida on 3rd March 2015)*

It is generally required of the devotees to get a *darshana* of the guru after they have been initiated and this entails undertaking a journey where the guru's spiritual headquarters is based with the objective of meeting him or her in order to seek counsel or visiting him or her when he or she comes to their city or locality. In these cases, the assurance and security that the devotees find through the love of the guru can be seen as complementary

to the services that are provided by the professionals. Many of the devotees explain this experience as a kind of 'unburdening' after which they feel 'light and free' by deriving a massive relief from the time of the said experience. But what are these emotional states and how does one make sense of these intense religious emotional states?

What are these religious emotions? How can these religious emotions be defined in a sociological manner? For Rudoph Otto (1924 [1931]) authentic religion can be recognized in terms of a particular type of feeling (a sense *of mysterium tremedum et fascinans*). According to Riis and Woodhead (2010), any emotion may possibly be religious and not just only awe and serenity. In their perspective 'grief, ecstasy, anxiety, hatred, self-righteousness, and so on' (2010: 54) can be equally considered as religious emotions. They further explain that 'the attempt to isolate essentially religious sentiments is mistaken because structures of feeling relate to an endless variety of social and symbolic structures' (ibid). An emotion can be understood as being religious if it takes place within a religious framework and is critical for its relations, both social as well as symbolic.

In the European context, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) had focused on the significance religion's emotional aspect. For him, 'true religion' could be identified with 'a feeling of clear and simple dependence', and he found in the state of religious emotion an entry point for understanding the new project concerning religious studies (Capetz 1998). In 'The Idea of the Holy' (1931), Otto builds up on Schleiermacher's ideas and he tries to spell out, more definitely, about the characteristic features of genuine religious emotions. He explains that religion is more about a distinctive mental state that cannot just be expressed clearly in words, and he refers to this state as 'numimous'. This may come over an individual's mind 'like a gentle tide', turn into 'a more lasting attitude of the soul', or 'burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and eruptions' (Otto 1917 [1923]: 12–13). Although difficult to be defined in the strictest sense, the expression of 'numinous' blends the feelings of awe, fascination, wonder, and fear, and this feeling crops up when an individual is in the presence of numen.

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Riis and Woodhead (2010) argue that religious emotion should not only be described only in terms of a certain variety of emotion or a set of emotions, but it should be understood within the social context from which ir emerges as it is the social milieu that confirms, strengthens and sanctions it. Another vital element through which these emotions can be comprehended is by the symbols that encourage it. As Jonathan Edwards in his 'Treatise Concerning Religious Affections'(1746 [1971]), writing within the background of the reinforcement of evangelicalism in Massachusetts, explains that the community aling with its symbols not only lead to the emergence of personal and communal feelings; such feelings cements the relationship of the believer to them and this, as a consequence, gives rise to such actions that substantiate the importance of these sentiments and renders them important. Edwards is of the view that an religious emotion is not only an issue regarding personal or individual affect, but it occurs within the relationship between an individual, a religious community and symbols that are seen as sacred.

But according to James (1902) the fundamental nature of religion can be located only in private and emotional circumstances. For him, the focus of religion should be upon 'the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine' (1902 [1981]: 50). He considers that such kinds of emotional experiences comprise the essence of each and every religion. One of the conclusions that he draws from 'The Varieties of Religious Experiences' is that there 'must be something solemn, serious, and tender about any attitude which we denominate religious', 'solemnity and gravity' are defining marks of religious sentiment, and attitudes which imply a 'grin or snicker', 'scream or curse', are profane (1902 [1981]: 56). For James, a religious emotion in the truest sense of the word is the reverse of 'morbid-mindedness'. It refers to a 'mystical' state where the emotions expand and the reality is embraced through feeling of affectionate acceptance as well as felt significance. As he contends that true religious emotions can only be felt privately, he deduces that would be more likely that such states occur in a hermit's cave or when the nature-mystic is roaming through wilderness or within the privacy of one's heart. Thus, James regards religious emotions as a private inter-realtion between n

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individual and God instead of being a part of the larger intricacies of agent, symbols and the community.

Durkheim's approach to religious emotion is considerably different. According to him, sentiment is a by product of religion as well as the society at large. It is through participation in the social rituals and and beliefs, an individual becomes capable of experiencing powerful emotions. Thus, for Durkheim, intense emotions are a result of structured gatherings of people instead of being experienced by individuals living in solitude. Further delving into the notion of collectivities, he provides the idea of 'collective effervescence' which is an ecstatic feeling that is produced when a number of people gather during periodic rituals. During such rituals, the expression of each sentiment from every individual finds a place in the minds of others and the original sentiment that was produced becomes stronger as it advances and gains momentum and as a result the people participating in the ritual feel that they feeling a sacred power together. Through the experience of this emotion, individuals get attached to the group. Therefore, for Durkheim sentiments become real and trustworthy only if they are collectively felt and confirmed. Even so, For Durkheim, the individual as well as those material objects of symbolic value and emotion become secondary so far as collective sentiment is concerned and religious emotions function to strengthen the social integration in a society.

From Weber's (1964[1922]) perspective, religion has the ability to perform the function of motivating action, particularly value rational actions that entails following a moral endeavour in a determined and systematic manner. This analysis by Weber opens up the possibility of examining how religious emotions function within modern societies, i.e, through charismatic authority which is capable of creating ruptures in the traditional as well as legal bureaucratic authority types. Such kind of charismatic authority can be found in the extraordinary powers of a shaman, a war hero or a prophet or any other individual who can encourage and motivate his followers and his miraculous powers in turn get validated by the followers. When individuals or even objects are considered as having charisma, others view them with the emotions of awe, trepidation as well as

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enthusiasm. The relationship between a charismatic person and his disciples is mostly based on emotions. At one level, Weber sees charisma as a special gift of the individual that sets him (or her) apart from the ordinary world, and, at another level he maintains that charisma has a social angle too. Consequently, charisma is conferred on the leader through his (or her) followers, who identify in him a kind of special power and they seek out this power and try to participate in it.

Thus, in trying to seek out and participate in the powers of the guru, devotees get connected with a guru. Attachment with the guru and surrendering oneself involves considering the guru as someone who is capable of controlling one's destiny. Frequently, the devotees try to let go of a sense of control from their daily lives and instead get acquainted with an alternative outlook through which the guru is seen as a divine manager who knows what is best for the devotees and thus, controls their lives. As a 55-year old devotee of Thakur Anukulchandra explains:

> *Earlier I used to get worked up for trivial things. Domestic issues, problems at the office bothered me a lot. After getting initiation and reading Thakur's philosophy, I have become calmer. Things do not bother me the way they used to earlier. Now I understand that these problems are not my own. They have been created by Thakur for some reason and will be solved by him. (Interview with Aseem Sahu on 17th June, 2015).*

In some cases, the search for a guru is linked with expectations of material rewards whereas in other cases, the devotees might be on the look out of a less tangible reward that is more spiritual in nature. Devotees pursuing spiritual benefits hope that by looking for Thakur Anukulchandra's guidance in their lives and by following his spiritual prescriptions, they would 'mature' spiritually. For example, Basanti Swain, a 47-year-old devotee and a businesswoman by profession explains *'Belief in gurus has been present in India since ancient times. It is the only way through one can know the right path and this will help in all round development, personal, physical, mental and spiritual'*[61]. This

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[61] Interview on 26th December, 2014

statement brings to attention how important culture and symbols are for understanding religious emotion. In order to comprehend religious emotion, it is necessary that emotion is not reduced by examining the cultural and symbolic aspect of it only but seeing it in a more holistic way by connecting the cultural perspective to the personal experiences of individuals as well as their social life.

Through this kind of an integrative approach it can be understood that symbols do not carry meanings in a 'natural' way rather these meanings are interpreted and shaped by the social relations in which they are embedded, and by their relation with other symbols. As Talal Asad (1993: 28) puts it:

> a symbol is not an object or event that serves to carry a meaning but a set of relationships between objects or events uniquely brought together as complexes or as concepts, having at once an intellectual, instrumental, and emotional significance. If we define a symbol along these lines, a number of questions can be raised about the conditions that explain how such complexes and concepts came to be formed, and in particular how their formation is related to varieties of practice.

Geertz (1971) in his essay 'Religion as a cultural system' puts the idea of emotion as central in his narrative of religion. Through this essay he also highlights a few of the characteristic and most significant elements of religious emotion. According to him, religion is:

> (1) a system of symbols (2) which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men (3) by formulating conception of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz 1971: 4)

This definition by Geertz encompasses nature and scope of religious emotions. Religious emotions are, as defined above, have a lasting influence in the minds of individuals and

they also play the function of giving value direction and providing motivation. This definition also hightlights how the religious-symbolic systems generate emotions and how these emotions, in turn, create the religious-symbolic systems. Therefore, a dialectical process arises where the feelings of the individuals shape their reality and whatever an individual considers real, shapes his/ her feelings.

Obeyesekere in his work 'Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience' (1981) examines the religious emotions that are intensely felt and are also highly personal are bound up by means of unique autobiographies, and the broader social and symbolic circumstances to which they relate. While not ignoring the importance of these contexts, he balances this with attention to the ways in which cultural symbols are articulated with individual experience. He is interested in 'personal symbols', which is his term for 'cultural symbols operating on the level of personality and of culture at the same time' (Obeyesekere 1981: 2). Obeyesekere's studies reveal how such symbols are appropriated and creatively reinterpreted by individuals, who use them not only to make sense of their own situations, but to negotiate complex social relations and, very often, to attain some leverage within them, thereby effecting changes in personal standing and circumstance that would otherwise be impossible. Citing G. H. Mead's work (1934) on symbolic communication with the self, Obeyesekere (1981: 46) points out the deep motivational and intra-communicative significance that personal symbols can have for individuals. Religious idioms are used to objectify personal emotions. Individuals can objectify emotions in new ways, or can appropriate collective symbols and run away with their meaning, turning it in new directions, and to new ends. In the process they can change that meaning, adding new layers of emotional significance in the process.

In case of the devotees of Thakur Anukulchandra, more than viewing the guru as someone who will fulfil their wishes, he is seen as an extraoerdinary man whose life is an immaculate example of the direction in which the disciples can steer their lives. Very frequently, they perceive their own existence as, lacking meaningfulness or significance and they hope that by pursuing a life that has been explicated by Thakur, they can live more fulfilled and meaningful lives, both in a material sense along with spiritual benefits.

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So, in most of the cases the motivations that the devotees find in attaching themselves to Thakur and the Satsang are a blend of the two things.

Thus, striving for spiritual development and also looking for more instant physical, tangible material rewards might not automatically seen, as being mutually exclusive. A 30-year-old female devotee, a doctor by profession described an incident about her grandfather's experience with Thakur. She said:

> *'I have heard this story from my father. My grandfather had lost his job. Even after trying very hard to get another job, he could not find one. He was constantly anxious and irritable. Our financial condition took a turn for the worse. One day, our neighbor, who was a devotee of Thakurji asked our family to accompany them to Deoghar and meet him. On meeting Thakurji, my grandfather offered him a gold ring as a token of his affection. Thakurji said that he has accepted by father's affections and returned the ring saying that he is gifting it back and everything would get well soon. Within two weeks of our return, my grandfather found employment and since that time our family has been disciples of Thakurji. We were able to find financial security as well as peace in our lives due to his blessings.'* (Interview with Shilpa Mohapatra on 21st June, 2014)

As the aforementioned narrative shows, meaningfulness in spiritual terms as well as material benefits might not always be mutually exclusive. Rather, most of the times, these objectives are perceived as being intricately connected with one another where spiritual enlightenment might bring in material benefits and tangible material benefits might bring to the fore a calm, spiritual well being. The difference that lies within the two kinds of approaches is a difference between how the devotees prioritize their interests, where one set of seekers might lay more emphasis on tangible transformations in their lives, in their external circumstances others might find greater reward in emotional and spiritual growth.

Within the circle of devotees, it is not unusual to find that a hierarchial relationship between the spiritual approach and the material approach to guru questing. The devotees who claim that they sought out the guru for purely spiritual reasons are inclined to view others, who are more concerned with wish fulfillment or seeking material benefits as not fully mature in a spiritual sense. As a devotee explained:

> *'I agree that all of the people here, who claim to be the devotees of Thakur might not be so in the real sense. For example, you will find here a lot of businessmen who have joined the satsang solely for the purposes of strengthening their business networks. There are a few politicians who treat us like votebanks. But we can know who is a real devotee and who is not. But someday they will realize what Thakur's ideology actually stands for. When your intentions are pure and you work hard, money will be a by-product. So there is no need to chase it'.*
> (Interview with Swetachandan Mohanty on 28th May, 2015)

Thus, the devotees who perceive other devotees as not being fully mature, also treat them with some kind of lenience and they claim that through prolonged contact with Thakur's practices and ideology, they will be 'reformed' and will understand that the true meaning of life does not lie in material rewards but in spiritual enlightenment.

Choosing a Guru(s)

Today, in India one comes across not only a few but a number of guru based organizations. Given this, how do people choose among the various gurus that might be available to them? What are the means through which they decide that a particular guru is the one that they want to follow? This quest for a guru assumes more importance given the fact that there is also a lot of skepticism and suspicion regarding gurus and the way they operate. While guru seekers agree that they admire and respect these 'holy' persons, they are also treated with some amount of distrust. There is often the apprehension about the 'authenticity' of a guru that might plague a believer. This apprehension is the result of the many accounts that are publicized through media channels and newspapers about

gurus being exposed as frauds, conmen, sexual predators and criminals who use spirituality as a front for making a quick buck or prey on helpless victims.

The language of recognizing and choosing a guru, as I learnt during the course of interviews and interaction with the devotees of Thakur Anukulchandra in Bhubaneswar, is highly nuanced. For the devotees, gurus are the part of a deeply pround design where it is already decreed in a divine manner about when, where and by what means will the 'guru appear before the concerned person. Thus many a times it can be observed that there is almost no or low personal agency that is involved in 'picking' a guru. On the contrary, the 'right' guru makes an appearance before the concerned individual at the 'right' time and consequently the individual is able to 'identify' the anticipated guru. 'When a person is spiritually ready to accept a guru, the guru will make an appearance in your life through an extraordinary way and show you the right way to live life', explained a devotee.

For some devotees, the knowledge of the 'right' guru is akin to an instinctive awareness which cannot be fully explained through words. A devotee of Thakur described how he had been feeling low and was not getting any motivation from his family or the society at large. In order to understand himself he wanted the guidance of a guru and during the course of his search he had got acquainted with a number of gurus and their organizations but he found none of them up to the mark. It was when he attended an event that was taking place in his neighbourhood that he became attached to Anukulchandra at the time that he finally felt he could 'surrender' himself to him and this too did not happen at the first meeting but after several such meetings and trips to the satsang. He opined that in his case there was no rationale to how he felt about Thakur, it was the 'positive vibes' that he could 'feel within himself' that sealed the deal. He furher explained that in order to find the right guru, it is critical that one's 'chemistry' should match with the 'chemistry' of the guru and when it happens, one just knows instinctively. This 'instinctive knowledge', according to him will lead a person to the right guru and help avoid fake ones.

Even though some of the devotees might deny that they had consciously opted for a guru, the accounts that they provide about their guru-experiences makes it very clear that there are several factors that are embedded in the choice of a guru. From the accounts of the devotees it can be derived that most of them have their own perceptions about what should a guru be like, what kind of a guru they would like to have in their lives, and the extent to which the ideas, practices and teachings of the guru matches their personal preferences then they eagerly enter the organization as a devotee. These factors are diverse and are given importance according to various extents by different people. It is fascinating to note that the aspects of guru choice which might, on the one hand, motivate someone to join the organization might also deter others from joining and this is the result of how a potential devotee interprets a guru's style and philosophy.

The first important aspect is how much a guru is perceived as being effective so far as proving solutions to the the immediate problems of a devotee is concerned. When people, who are searching for a guru in their lives, come across such a person, meeting and associating with whose ideas can provide instantaneous solutions to their issues of professional or personal crises, it is very likely that they would become a part of the fold. Another important aspect is the personality traits of the guru. For example, some devotees might find intimacy and ease of access, simplicity as an attractive part of the guru's personality while others might not find this appealing and instead opt for gurus who seem more distant or even impulsive while dealing with their followers.

People seeking a guru also have a tendency to be cynical about those gurus explicitly insist on monetary contributions, donations and services. People also perceived those gurus in a poor way who, according to them, are too tied up in glorifying their own selves. Rather, the gurus who are perceived as living simple lives and who connect with their followers in an altruistic manner are seen to be the most credible. Invovement in social welfare and charitable activities is considered another important indicator of a guru's authenticity. Today, in India, a number of gurus contribute towards charitable causes from the donations that they receive from their disciples such as hospitals,

orphanages, schools, etc. And for a devotee this constitutes a vital aspect of the guru's authenticity

Another decisive factor that the devotees often use for choosing between gurus is the style of their religious discourse. Some potential devotees prefer an extremely simple and spontaneous discourse with regards to gurus like the teachers of the Thakur Anukulchandra faith today, who capture devotees' imaginations with their simple stories, anecdotes, and parables. Teachers and leaders of the Anukulchandra faith, for instance, convey his teachings, philosophy of life and practices in a very direct and often emotionally charged manner, mostly avoiding difficult Sanskrit terms and abstract conceptions that are generally found in the spiritual discourses by other gurus. A devotee of Thakur who was charmed by the simplicity of his messages explained

> *'The Satsang, here, provides a positive environment for spiritual growth. Thakur's messages have clarity to them which I have not found elsewhere. His main objective is reformation of the society through one's own self, to grow up-ward and help others achieve the same. When we are reformed, then people associated with us will see this transformation and will want to change, for the better. This thought of Thakur attracted me to him'. (Interview with Jeetu Behera on 23rd December, 2014).*

So, the guru-seekers in their search for an authenthic guru, traverse through India's vast spiritual setting and carry with them a set of well-defined standards about what they are seeking in a guru. They are fully aware of the myriad options that are available to them and these persons test the several options regarding gurus, that are available to them and make a choice only when they perceive that their needs, spiritual or otherwise, will be fulfilled by attaching themselves with that particular guru. They normally opt for a guru or even gurus who match their personal inclinations. They use several criteria, according to their own set of priorities and order of significance while choosing a guru from the number of options available.

The Orientation of Devotees:

So far as guru loyalties are concerned, Warrier (2005) in her work on Mata Amritanadamayi and her devotees, distinguishes the orientation of the disciples into two types. One is exclusive orientation wherein a devotee prefers being attached to one guru and the second one is inclusive orientation where a devotee finds solace through attachment with more than one guru. Warrier (2005) explains:

> Exclusivists see their attachment to the Mata as precluding the possibility of simultaneous attachments to other gurus. They find it contemptible to owe allegiance to more than one guru at the same time, or to drift from guru to guru in the hope of tangible rewards. To be a 'tourist of gurus', in their view, is to take an altogether frivolous approach to spirituality. It is like 'digging for water' in not one but several places at the same time. According to this logic, if you dig shallow holes in the ground at several places, you will not find water, whereas if you dig deep in one place, you must, sooner or later, find it. Exclusivists therefore try and remain loyal to their chosen guru…Unlike exclusivists, inclusivists attach themselves simultaneously to several gurus. Each individual selects his or her cluster of chosen gurus on the basis of personal preferences or practical expediency, and the cluster's composition keeps changing over time, with older attachments yielding place to newer and more attractive ones (2005: 77-78)

These devotees therefore try and remain loyal to their chosen guru. They might still sample other guru figures and even attend the discourses, prayer sessions, and rituals conducted by other guru organizations, seeing such attendance and participation as spiritually meritorious activity. In terms of being 'attached' to a guru, however, they remain exclusively loyal to their chosen one. Only in extreme circumstances, such as the passing away of the chosen guru or disillusionment with him or her, will exclusivists consider the option of attachment to a new spiritual mentor.

Unlike the above who exclusively are attached with one guru, those with a more inclusive approach attach themselves simultaneously to several gurus. Each individual selects his

or her cluster of chosen gurus on the basis of personal preferences or practical convenience, and the cluster's composition keeps changing over time, with older attachments yielding place to newer and more attractive ones. These devotees constantly test the spiritual options of new gurus, form new attachments, and add to, or discard from, their chosen guru clusters.

Devotees' orientations whether exclusive or inclusive, are usually reflected in the guru iconography with which they tend to surround themselves. For example, the homes the devotees of Thakur Anukulchandra, usually bear visible signs of their guru allegiances. The walls of living rooms are adorned with framed photographs and calendar pictures of the Thakur, his wife and son. Often invocations to the gurus, are printed across doorways. Stickers and magnets bearing the visages of the gurus or some related symbol are prominently displayed on refrigerator doors, dashboards, and windscreens of cars and on the surfaces of satchels and brief cases. Most persons wear some kind of reminder of their gurus on their person. These include rings and lockets bearing miniature photographs of their gurus, bracelets with the guru's name carved on the surface, or rosary beads that have been blessed by one or the other guru. Many carry photographs of the gurus in their wallets and purses. They surround themselves with books containing hagiographies of the gurus and compilations of the gurus' teachings. Whereas exclusivists usually tend to display the icons of only the one guru to whom they are currently attached, inclusivists often combine iconography from different guru traditions. It is not uncommon to see, for instance, photographs of Sathya Sai Baba, alongside those of Thakur Anukulchandra, adorning the homes of the devotees and the devotees talking about both the gurus with equal passion and feelings. A devotee while describing this attachment with both Thakur Anukulchandra and Sathya Sai Baba said

> *'I am a follower of both Thakur and Sai Baba. I have been a follower of Thakur since my childhood and I found Sai Baba a couple of years ago through a friend. I find solace in both the gurus. Our religion teaches us that all paths lead to the same God. In their own characteristic way, both my gurus teach me to evolve as better person, maintain good relationships with my family and friends, be of service to others and help them in whichever way I can. And moreover, I now*

have a new family of like-minded brother and sisters (other devotees) with whom
I can discuss all the things that bother me. I have learnt from both of my gurus
and will continue to remain faithful to both'. (Interview with Sulochana Panda
on 7th November, 2015).

In order to understand the private and public aspects of the religious feelings in this context, the concept of 'emotional regime' (Riis and Woodhead, 2010) will be helpful. According to them the concept of an emotional regime has the following function:

> Emotional regime…serves to bring together the personal, symbolic, and social aspects of emotion, and captures the way in which emotions relate embodied agents to their wider social and material-symbolic interactions, anchor and communicate the emotional agenda, and serve as normative points of reference… they are socially constructed as religious, whether by insiders, or outsiders, or both. Such construction involves political claim-making, and is always historically and culturally contingent… By offering to order emotional lives not just differently, but in accordance with a truer, more foundational, more satisfying pattern, a faith system proposes a new structuring of relationships and with it an emotional restructuring. (2010: 69-70).

Riis and Woodhead (2010) explain that in order to become a devout Roman Catholic one has to embrace a set of fresh relationships that are concerned not only with other persons (fellow Catholics and non- Catholics) but also also with another set of beings who are represented and whose company is experienced in a symbolic manner inside such a religious regime. Such beings are perceived to be real within the religious imagination of people and offer supplementary relations in addition to the relations that are already present in the everyday life of an individual. They provide the function of managing, regulating and transforming feelings in such a way that that it has an impact on the individual's life and the society at large.

For Riis and Woodhead (2010) certain emotions are considered authorized and find expressed through imitation, enforcement and are internalized during both formal and

casual public congregations and interactions. The way an individual feels towards these 'beings' are 'learnt, stabilized, reinforced, or undermined by observing the emotional actions and reactions of other participants, and by practicing and performing prescribed kinds of bodily action (for example, kneeling in prayer, receiving communion, wearing special dress) (2010: 71)'.

According to Whitehouse and Laidlaw (2004) this synchronized interrelationship among the symbolic, material and social elements within a regime of religious emotions can have profound effects on the moods and feelings of individuals. Within a religious or spiritual setting, the combination of the sacred building or a religious location blended with musical instruments, songs, other sounds, lights, fragrance of incense and other scents; harmonized bodily actions like clapping, dancing; performances; reading of sacred books and texts, etc can all transport the participants into a special domain of sentiments and transform their relation with other participants. As a result of participating in such a ritual, the participants might experience that they have moved away from their mundane lives to a place that is remarkable or it might also make them feel protected and sheltered or do both. The impact of these emotions might be experienced once such as during the period of initiation or during a rite of passage and sometimes it can also be a regular repetition. Whatever may be the case, by and large the function of these events is to bring into existence an alternate order of life, and creating conditions that this reality is felt very profoundly that in Geertz's words, that 'order of existence' and the 'moods and motivations' associated with it become 'uniquely realistic' (1971: 4).

Taking their argument further, Riis and Woodhead (2010) contend that a religious regime is similar to an emotional one in the sense that it helps in structuring a 'a system of power relations' (2010: 72). For them, emotional authorities can be of many varieties, while some could be interconnected and reinforce one another, others might be divergent and put checks on each other. Among emotional authorities, a charismatic leader is able to set standards regarding emotion through his teachings, actions and examples. As a consequence, emotions take on a particular meaning and tone within the larger programme that includes symbolic and textual prescriptions. They provide the example of

the 'Western Christendom' which gave to the people an emotional regime that offered an outline for the course of their whole lives and also endowed emotional patterning to the concept of time by characterizing different periods of the weeks, months and year in accordance to a patten of feasting, fasting and resting.

In this way religious emotion regimes facilitate an ordering of the emotional lives of people. This kind of patterning is also done by other domains in life such as family or even politics, however religious emotional regimes give rise to an 'alternate ordering' which offera a point of reference that helps in the orientation of one's disposition and inspirations. For an individual, religion helps in fostering a sense of optimism and belief which leads to the adjustment with one's life instate of such experiences which might give rise to anxiety and fear and thus threaten one's existence. Having faith in a compassionate God (or in this case, a guru), could inspire reassurance when faced with existential crises.

When a religious emotional ordering is embodied at societal as well as group level, its notes and rhythms structure life in a more comprehensive fashion. In medieval Western Christendom, for example, the life of Christ and the saints became the template by which time, space, and social hierarchy were ordered, thus providing an encompassing template for collective and personal emotion (Woodhead 2004). Ruth Benedict's Patterns of Culture (1935) is an early and influential example. A major part of her purpose was to show that, however bizarre different cultural orderings may seem from the standpoint of a different order (particularly Western individualism), they have a logic that makes perfect sense on its own terms.

Religious emotional regimes enable transcendence over everyday emotional states, both collective and personal. It is worth emphasizing again that such transcendence need not imply other-worldiness, though it sometimes does, since it is also focused upon alteration of relations with and within this world. To embark on a course of meditation practice, to gather together a community, is likely to result in some emotional change. By multifarious means, religions offer some distance from everyday emotions, some critical

purchase over them, some ability to review, alter, or selectively confirm them. Generally, religions promise emotional easement and amelioration. This does not necessarily mean that they offer to make people feel better. On the contrary, they may make them feel worse, for example, by highlighting the evil, but bringing emotions into relation with alternate orderings in a way that enhances order, control, and change. For example, many forms of contemporary spirituality promise emotional 'well-being'. They assist individuals with understanding and expressing how they feel, and help them to monitor and 'manage' emotions more effectively (Sointu and Woodhead 2008).

Finally, it is necessary to mention those forms of emotional transcendence transition that involve the suspension of everyday feeling as individuals enter into states of 'altered consciousness'. In the proposed scheme, these can be classified as religious if they are part of a religious emotional regime. They include trances, spirit journeys, drug-induced states, ecstasies, possessions, and channelling. There is considerable and continuing debate about how to define and draw the line between such states[62]. An enormous range of means are used in different religious contexts to loosen existing emotional patterns, including bodily modifications (for example, postures, fasting, dancing, experiencing extremes of temperature) and sensory stimulation (for example, rhythmic drumming, strong smells, and foods), plus the use of symbols and objects (for example, symbols of the gods), together with wider social reinforcements.

Geertz talks of another important attribute of religious emotion when he describes them as having 'powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations'. He is of the opinion that even though religions are capable of producing short-lived instances of great emotional intensity, a more critical function performed by them is their capacity to shape the emotional character of individual in a more permanent and relational manner. By mentioning the idea of 'motivation', the definition given by Geertz also includes within itself the active and arousing feature of religious emotion that is various ways in which religious emotion facilitates an action by guiding it and also restraining certain actions when and where required. Geertz also explains that this motivation is wide in its scope

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[62] For useful discussions, see Lambek (1981), Winkelman (1997), and Morris (2006).

and reference, in addition to being 'powerful'. This shows the manner through which it might transcend other motivations. A similar kind of emotion is described by a devotee of Thakur Anukulchandra who explains:

> *I have been a devotee of Thakur for the last five years…earlier I was very hot tempered. It was affecting my personal as well as professional life. One day, one of my distant relatives, took me along with him to a neighbourhood programme on Thakur. I liked the ambience of the place, the bhajan, kirtan, everything was seemingly ordinary but still had an extraordinary feel about it. I started learning more about Thakur by reading the satsang's literature. It was then I realized that my attitude was preventing me to evolve as a person. I got diksha (initiation) and almost immediately felt like a better person. It has made me calmer and stress-free and most importantly, my relationships with others has improved. (Interview with Deepak Moharana on 23rd November, 2015).*

Perceived Relations between various Gurus:

While talking to the devotees of Thakur Anukulchandra, it became clear that they very often draw comparisons among the various gurus that they might have followed or known at one point in their lives. Thakur Anukulchandra was not the only guru that they followed and when describing about the various encounters with other gurus, they explained it in terms of either harmony or similarity of principles among various gurus or a complementary relationship among them or lastly, in terms of competition. So, it can be observed that different people perceive the relationship between the diverse gurus, differently. This can be best expressed by examining the various ways in which some of the followers conceptualize the relationship between Thakur Anukulchandra and Sathya Sai Baba, one of the more popular gurus whom a lot of the devotees followed along with Thakur. Some of the devotees perceive that a relationship of harmony and unity exists between both the gurus and see both of them as the divine manifestation of the same sacred force. A devotee used the expression '*prema-bhabana'* (an attitude of love towards all) to denote the similarity between both the gurus. Devotees of this kind of affiliation have an inclination towards passionately appealing to both the gurus in a

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similar manner for safety, security and guidance and they take part equally in the services and activities of both the guru organizations. Alternatively, some might choose to focus their energies and devotion on either of the gurus, at one time, believing that surrendering to one guru specially would be a better way for one's spiritual development.

Some of the devotees distinguish between two gurus and see their relationship in complementary terms rather than seeing their styles and teachings as similar. The devotees time and again elucidated that every guru is different and has his/her own area of knowledge and expertise that might not be observed in others. Even though the devotees are not very clear about what this 'specializations' are, they are convinced that in case they turn to the 'wrong' guru for guidance in terms of a certain request or desire, they will be somehow redirected the the 'right' guru. Debates and discussions within the circle of devotees often center on the the advantages and inadequacies of various gurus and which guru can be approached for which kind of wish-fulfilment. According to these devotees, certain gurus are more efficient in terms of healing illnesses, others might be helpful in predicting the future while some may be effective in blessing couples with progeny and others in solving domestic or even financial issues.

Lastly, many of the devotees, place Thakur Anukulchandra and Sathya Sai Baba in a relationship of competition, instead of seeing them within modes of harmony or complementarity. In the opinion of these devotees, the personalities of both the gurus as well as their teachings and principles do not match and as a result it becomes essential for them to choose only one. Some devotees of Thakur for instance, consider Sathya Sai Baba undesirable as a guru claiming that his 'very conspicuous and so- called miracle' seem too obvious and desperate for attention. They see his miracles, generally the materialization of different kinds of objects out of thin air, as the cheap tricks akin to that of a magician and they express their displeasure about the Baba just because of such kind of open and brash display of power.

In the view of a devotee[63], in the Thakur faith, unlike that of Sai Baba, a disciple does not need to see such an open display of the extraordinary powers in order to be convinced of the Thakur's divinity. An essential part of this perception is the assumption that some gurus might project themselves to the public as very exciting or alluring but they actually are 'false' gurus who thrive on attention and pretention. There fore it is pertinent to look at these gurus with skepticism. Gurus who are 'authentic' do not have any reasons to seek the undue attention or to impress as there is no need for them to do it. Instead of this pretention, their qualities and traits, their dealings with their devotees, and their humility speak for themselves. Another devotee said:

> *'Today, the number of gurus may have increased manifold fold but genuine gurus like Thakur are only a few. For example, have you ever seen leaders of this satsang showing off their powers and knowledge on television like others? No! Because what we believe in is personal and intimate. Even though we might not be very active in the mass media, Thakur's influence, even after his death, is still growing day by day due to his divine grace. It is only because he is a real guru'.*
> (Interview with Padmini Patnaik, on 4th December, 2016)

So, within this scheme of things, Thakur Anukulchandra is considered 'genuine' whereas Sai Baba is not and thus choosing Thakur as one's preferred guru simultaneously necessitates the rejection Sai Baba as a potential guru-choice. While making their own evaluations about the relationship that exists among the different gurus, the devotees employ various criteria, and how they perceive various gurus is dependent upon the kind of criteria or standards that they use to comprehend the compatibility and continuity as well as depatures between the various guru organizations. As a consequence of this perception, different persons draw lines among the various guru organizations in their own different way. Therefore, from the perspective of one follower, two or more guru faiths might seem to be very distinctive and discrete whereas for another follower the same guru faiths may seem to be parts of the same spiritual whole.

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[63] Interview with Sarat Chandra Mishra on 8th March, 2015

Performing Devotion

An important aspect of the devotees' allegiance to their guru is the experience of the miraculous in their lives. This experience of an extraordinary event or events is mostly felt at the time of entering into the guru's organization and might even continue long after the devotee has taken initiation into the faith. A 75-year-old devotee, who has been initiated since twenty years, shared his experience of Thakur's power. He said

> *'In the year 1995, I went on a trip to Deoghar to see the ashram during Durga puja (Thakur's spiritual headquarter) on a whim. I was not a devotee then. I stayed there for a day. While coming back, there was a lot of rush in the trains and was stranded in the station for several hours. There was a stampede-like situation. Suddenly, a fight broke out among some people and all began to run helter –skelter. I was very scared for my life at that time. I started praying to Thakur and somehow it calmed me down and I was able to return home safely. I have been suffering from diabetes for the last thirty years, have been operated five times but somehow I have survived till now. I feel that this is due to Thakur's grace.'* (Interview with Sudhansu Patnaik on 25th June, 2015)

Another devotee named Bichitrananda Jena, a 65-year-old retired government employee added, in a similar vein:

> *I have been a member of the Satsang since thirty years. I first heard about Thakur through an office colleague. In those days, I was not keeping well. I had chronic health problems. When one health issue came under control, another would crop up. Medicines were not working in my case. But after joining the Satsang, my health improved. Medicines couldn't do what Thakur's blessings did. Even to this day, I meditate for two hours every day, I even advice my friends and relatives to join the Satsang. Earlier I felt that there was a void in my life but now I can certainly feel a divine presence. (21st May, 2015, Satsang Vihar).*

But what happens in case a devotee is not able to experience the guru's love for him or her in a direct way? In such instances, the devotees generally are inclined to keep up with

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their devotion and even try dedicating themselves more intensely into the services of the guru in order to get a glimpse of the 'miraculous'. They frequently attribute their lack of perception of a divine intervention as result of some kind of 'shortage' in their devotion and see this as a sort of ordeal through which Thakur is putting them in order to test their devotion. They believe that they would surely experience Thakur's grace if they are patient and have steady faith in him.

So the devotees are continuously on the look out for an incident or occurrence that can be considered as a miracle, a sign of the guru's grace and love. Therefore, very often the devotees might engage actively in the process of constructing a miracle for themselves so as to establish Thakur's love for them. Such kind of miraculous happenings that were attributed to Thakur's involvement in their lives include getting train tickets during rush periods, doing well in studies after initiation into the fold, etc. These narratives of 'miraculous' occurrences show that devotees do not attribute these seemingly ordinary experiences to 'luck' or even 'chance'. Every such incident that happens by chance is taken to mean as a miracle performed by Thakur and signifies his grace. So, finally it depends on the beliefs and convictions of the devotee wherein he or she is able to perceive a 'divine hand' even in the ordinary, regular events in their everyday lives and occurrences that might have happened by chance are seen as a miracle.

Thus, the sentiments and experiences of the devotees not only signify Thakur's love and affection for them; it is also an expression of the devotees' total faith in their guru and his 'mysterious ways of working'. From the aforementioned discussion it can be inferred that the burden of performance of miracles is not the sole responsibility of the guru but it also actively depends on each and every devotee. Through engagement in a process where miracles are constructed in an active manner, the disciples meticulously emphasize on the belief that thay have in their guru and his powers and they steadfastly hold on to these perceptions and emotions. For Riis and Woodhead (2010)

> When the concept of emotion is broadened to take account of emotion as feeling,
> sensation, evaluation, motivation, and relational stance, its 'potency' becomes

clearer. As that which moves people and inhibits them, as that which helps to bind and coordinate social groups, to attach them to some symbolic objects and repulse them from others, emotions are relevant (2010: 147).

This power of the guru has an interesting dimension. Power has a quality that it can be preserved as a potential resource without it being employed actively, and thus it can also have its own effect even though it is only latent (Scott 2001, Sayer 2004). When the power or agency of an individual is taken into account, it is defined as the ability to perform an action but if symbolic power is taken into account it would be defined as the ability to 'effect' something. There are a number of approaches to understand power. An important sociological tradition of analyzing power which has been majorly influence by Weber, provides significance to the actor's rational agency by means of which they are able to follow their personal interests, even at the cost of others through imposition of their authority (Lasswell and Caplan 1950). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the objective of the actor or an organization that performs an action because individuals and organizations are considered to be powerful not only because they cause an effect, but also when they influence in bringing out an intentional effect.

The power and potential of emotions can also be examined in a serious manner in those approaches that center not only on the controlling and aggressive forms of powers regarding agency that work by means of force and manipulation, which has been termed by Poggi (2001) as the 'bloody-minded' approach to power, but rather focuses on power as persuasion. This has been termed by Scott (2001) as the 'second stream' in the understanding power studies that put stress on 'signification' which refers to the power derived from knowledge as well as expertise; and 'legitimation'. This approach to power 'embeds persuasive influence into larger and more complex structures of commitment, loyalty, and trust, using means of information and communication' (Scott 2001:17). This approach takes into account what Weber described as the structures of domination 'by order of authority' and which had been termed by Giddens as 'authoritative domination', and it is also reflected in Talcott Parsons's highlighting of the significance of norms and value commitments that are shared in a society.

Such attention is starting to be evident, above all, in the literature on social movements.[64] The fact that 'movements' are defined by shared identity and programmes of action, by 'motion' rather than rationally structured organization, indicates why they lend themselves to such analysis. And, because they challenge established structures of power, they work through persuasion, pressure, and protest (della Porta and Diani 1990). Nevertheless, it is only recently that emotion has begun to be taken seriously. Early theories of 'collective behaviour' (Smelser 1963) saw social movements as fired by irruptions of irrational emotion in response to strains in the social system, neuroses, crazes, manias, panics. In reaction, later studies tended to focus on the rational dimensions of such collective action, stressing interests, mobilization of resources, and the structure of political opportunities (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Shared memories and experiences, rituals, shared narratives, and symbols have all begun to enter into the discussion (e.g. Fernandez 2000). Moreover, there is a new awareness of the need to consider not only the dynamics of social movements themselves, but relations between movement culture and wider cultures (Williams 2007).

Randall Collins (2005) makes use of the notion of 'emotional energy' in order to describe the means by which social relations might, in some cases, either exhaust the participants of their power, or, in other cases, 'charge up' this power. According to Collins, social life consists of a 'chain' of connections and interactions in which an individual gets pulled towards those social settings which inspire in him/her encouraging and empowering emotions while keeping away from those emotions that arouse pessimistic or disempowering emotions. Thus, in pleasant and mutually life-affirming meetings, each and every participant finds an enhancement in their level of happiness, gratification and energy.

Coming back again to the devotees of Thakur, no matter how much some of them try to keep a positive outlook and work hard at trying to make miracles to come about, perpetually long phases of spiritual deficiency threatens to bog down their faith and this becomes more apparent in cases where a devotee urgently requires some kind of

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[64] For overviews, see Godwin et al. (2009).

miraculous explanation or solution to his/her critical issues. When attachment towards a guru becomes devoid of any sort of miraculous occurrences or any comprehensible sign of the guru's affection, the devotee gets inclined to see the organization as uninteresting and uninspiring. Thus, belief in the guru needs constant affirmation and verification by means of such experiences that could be considered as delightful and miraculous. When there is a dearth of such experiences, the devotees tend to lose their belief in thn concerned guru and might as well move towards other gurus who according to them give better guarantee of bringing about the desired consequences.

The reasons for the disenchantment of devotees of Thakur in Bhubaneswar, with their previous guru faiths (such as Sathya Sai Baba or the Brahmakumaris) were numerous and varied. Some had simply drifted towards gurus like Thakur Anukulchandra, whose principles and practices offered them better solutions to their immediate problems, others had become tired because even after being intensely attached to their former guru they could see no signs of miracles nor were their problems alleviated, according to their desires and some others had become disenchanted by some part of the guru's organization and did not want to be associated with it anymore. Among those devotees who found comfort in other gurus, spoke harshly about their former guru or gurus. At one point in time, they were 'insiders' to that particular guru's organization and had found solace and happiness through accounts which glorified the guru and these individual were now 'outsiders' and seemed to perceive the insiders with disapproval. One such individual, previously a devotee of Sathya Sai Baba, on condition of anonymity, insisted that her reasons for leaving the organization were a result of prolonged debate with herself and now described faith in her former guru-ship as 'blind belief and faith' which lacked a 'scientific approach towards religion'. About her adherence to Thakur Anukulchandra, she elucidated that:

> *Life is a multi-dimensional complex whole and thus an integrated approach has to be made to solve the problems of life effectively. Thakur Anukulchandra did not deny the existence of day-to-day problems that confront individuals, but he enunciated the principles of life which are to be worked out in the midst of joys and sorrows, trial and tribulations. The goal, however, is to realize the ultimate*

truth. Every person should have a clear conception of the way and goal of life. If this is not explicit, life can become chaotic and confused. As a result of this, a person might head towards disaster, without any remedy in sight. Therefore, every individual should be clear about the objective of life which according to Sri Sri Thakur is god-realization. (Interview 18th June, 2015).

It was also interesting to meet a couple of devotees of Thakur Anukulchandra who were on the verge of getting disenchanted from his faith. Tulasi Behera, a 53-year-old woman said that she joined the satsang out of *baadhyata* (compulsion or force). She said:

My neighbor and her whole family are devoted satsangis. They sometimes hold bhajan, kirtan and satsang at their home. They had invited me a couple of times…so one day I went to attend the satsang. A gurubhai from the satsang had come to their home. When my neibour told him that I was not a devotee, he started forcing me to join. He said that all the problems in my life would be solved. Even though I rejected his offer initially, he was persistent. Finally, I gave in and took initiation. I thought it would good me good to be a little more dharmic (spiritual). But all my problems still persist…in fact they have increased. Recently, I have been diagnosed with arthritis. Both my sons are graduates but unemployed. I am not sure how much longer will I continue to come here. (Interview on 14th March, 2015)

On Questions of Hindutva

Just as my informants were not unduly anxious that they were 'losing touch' with their Hindu traditions, they were not, also, particularly concerned with issues of Hindutva. The RSS- Hindutva phenomenon which has entrenched the whole country presents a special case in Odisha. The RSS considers the Jagannath-Odia-Hindu-Indian interconnection an ideal framework for the spread of Hindutva. It understands very well the positive implications of the pre-colonial/colonial/Oriya Hindu upper caste-middle class construction of the Jagannath cult and its symbolic importance in the religious, social, cultural and political life of the Odias. Hence, it depicts the culture of Orissa as Jagannath Sanskruti because this overarching culture surpasses and dominates all other sects and

little traditions. True, many counter traditions and critiques like the Mahima Dharma did emerge, but ultimately these were absorbed into the broad fold of the Jagannath cult[65]. Hence, the RSS realises the futility of projecting Hindutva as an alternative; it claims, rather wisely, its ideological affinity with the Jagannath culture[66].

The RSS further argues that bhakti (devotion) constitutes the core of the Jagannath culture and that the Oriyas are devout Hindus. As devotion to the nation is the theme of Hindutva, the RSS regards this ideology to be in consonance with Oriya traditions. However, the RSS differentiates between these two forms of bhakti. According to RSS observations, though the Oriyas are a deeply spiritual people, they emphasise the personal aspect of religion, and hence they concentrate on puja (worship), bhajan (devotional song), upavas (fasting), etc, for the self-realisation of god and for personal salvation. But they do not display a similar devotion to the nation. The major challenge for the RSS is to channelise the devotional and spiritual energy of the Odias towards the Hindu Rashtra. Though the RSS demands bhakti or a complete surrender to the Hindu nation, there exists a fundamental difference; while the Jagannath tradition is broad and flexible and allows the maximum philosophical and ontological autonomy to the devotee to attain selfless spiritual bliss, the political Hinduism of the RSS variety is precariously narrow and rigid, training its followers to tread the mundane path into the murky world of desire, conflict, hatred and 'otherness'.

Just as my informants were not unduly anxious that they were 'losing touch' with Hindu traditions, they were not, also, particularly concerned with issues of 'Hindu' identity. During my fieldwork, I discovered that devotees of Thakur were not centrally concerned with questions of nationhood and Hindu nationalism. Hindutva was certainly not a favourite topic of conversation among my informants, and even when pressed to comment on aspects of politicized religion in the country, their answers were mostly

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[65] A Eschmann, 'Mahima Dharma: An Autochthonous Hindu Reform Movement' in A Eschmann et al (eds), The Cult of Jagannath, op cit. Also see Subhakanta Behera (1997): 'Jagannath and Alekh: A Study in Juxtaposition', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XXXII, Nos 33 and 34, August 16-23, pp 2096-97.

[66] In its formative years, the RSS could not penetrate into Orissa due to its failure to gauge the hold of the Jagannath cult among the Oriyas

vague and disinterested. Some claimed they did not know enough about the Hindutva phenomenon to comment on it, others denounced Hindutva campaigners as 'fanatics' and self-seeking political manipulators. Most devotees were keen to draw a distinction between 'spirituality' (which is how they preferred to describe their faith in Thakur) and the 'politicised religion' of Hindutva campaigners. The latter, in their view, is divisive and seeks to define a 'community' of adherents by constructing boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', whereas the former is a private quest concerned with individual self-enhancement which will indirectly foster community or nation building.

Questions of Gender

The concept of the female in Hindu ideology presents an essential duality. On the one hand, she is fertile, benevolent-the bestower; on the other, she is aggressive, malevolent-the destroyer. Two facets of femaleness reflect this duality and perhaps provide the cultural logic for it. The female is first of all sakti, (Energy/Power) the energizing principle of the Universe; she is also prakriti, Nature, the undifferentiated matter of the universe.

Woman is considered as the field or earth into which man puts his seed, "By the sacred tradition the woman is declared to be the soil, the man is declared to be the seeds; the production of all corporeal beings (takes place) through the union of the soil with the seed."[67] And the Laws of Manu declare the seed to be the more important, 'for the offspring of all created beings is marked by the characteristics of the seed'.[68] The seed is the hard substance or structure as opposed to the soil, the soft substance or non-structure.

In classical texts or folk traditions, the dual character of the Hindu female reappears in the roles of wife (good, benevolent, dutiful, controlled) and mother (fertile, but

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[67] G. Buhler, trans. The Laws of Manu, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 25 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964), 9. 33; p. 333. (i.e., chap. 9, verse 33, p. 333 of Buhler). The Laws of Manu were supposedly written by the first man, Manu.

[68] G. Buhler, trans. The Laws of Manu, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 25 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964), See chapter 9, verse 33, p. 333.

dangerous, uncontrolled). Classical Hindu laws focus almost exclusively on women as wives. Role models and norms for mothers, daughters, sisters, are more apt to appear in folklore and vernacular traditions. Furthermore, most written traditions emphasize women's behavior in relationship to men: wife/husband; mother/son; daughter/father; sister/brother. Most importantly, according to these classical texts, the happiness or salvation of woman is a function of her faithful devotion to her husband.

In a vein similar to that of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the classical texts, Thakur's opinion about women which he elucidates in Satyanusaran (1950 [2006]) is:

> Almost all the miseries men have in the world come from the addiction to 'Kamini-kanchan' (women and gold). It is better to remain as far away as possible from these two. Lord Ramakrishna enjoined on everyone to remain far, far, far away from 'Kamini-kanchan'. If 'Kam' (lust) be dropped from 'Kamini','ini' (she) becomes Ma. Poison becomes elixir. And Ma is always Mother…never 'kamini'. To add 'gi'to Ma is catastrophe. Beware! Don't lose thyself taking Ma as 'Magi' (fallen woman). Everyone's Mother is the Mother of the world. Every woman is another form of one's own Mother. Think in this fashion. If filial thoughts be not heartfelt, one should not touch women. The farther away from them one remains the better. Not to look upon their faces is better yet. He who only wails, 'My passion and pride do not go, do not go', will find they never go. One should become habituated to those activities and thoughts which have no scent of pride and passion; then the mind forgets them. If thoughts of passion and pride do not arise in the mind, how can they show up? The way out is to remain always absorbed in higher thoughts and activities. Investigation into the science of creation, mathematics and chemistry controls lust. Any kind of enticing conversation on 'Kamini-kanchan' can bring attraction for them. So, the farther one stays away from such talks, the better (pp. 5-7).

Talking about the roles of men and women in the society, a 62-year male devotee explained that:

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Our purposes of life are well established in tradition, for both men and women. Thakur's sayings as well as our traditions emphasize on dharmic (spiritual) striving of worldly goals. Stri (woman) and dhana (wealth) are the means through which a householder is able to accomplish his virtuous deeds; but one has to be careful of kamini and kanchan because these two can also lead to a man's down fall. One has to be very careful and strike a balance between the two. (Interview on 15ᵗʰ December, 2015)

During my fieldwork, I observed men tended to echo this sentiment. Interestingly, most men and older women were more vocal about what an 'ideal woman' should be and behave like. A 27-year old male volunteer, at one of the Satsang's event said that,

You can see how today haw fast the society is degrading. You don't need an advanced degree to know that. Do you know the reason? Men and women are getting diverted from their intended roles and duties. Everyone is thinking about their own selves, as a result of this the society is suffering. Women, who are supposed to be the holds the strings of the society together, have changed their priorities. They want to go out and work. Even though there is nothing wrong in it, the society invariably suffers. Today, women do not understand how much power they wield, what is their importance in shaping the future of the society through correct socialization of children. As long as people do not subscribe to their prescribed roles, this is bound to happen. (Interview on 15 March, 2015).

Even though most people do not hold such rigid ideas, they invariably feel that women's roles are primarily that of a mother and nurturer. Younger women generally do not subscribe to these ideas or do not think too much about it and brushed it aside, but said that their priorities lay with their families. The attitude of the devotees as well as the leadership regarding gender is quite complex. From the level of leadership, women are invisible. When asked if positions of leadership are open to women, Mihir Tripathy, an administrator of the satsang, replied tersely, '*How can women be leaders? In, principle they cannot. They have a heavier karmic debt and are tied down to the world as nurturers*' (Interview with Mihir Tripathy in June, 2015).

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At one level the organization is rational, authoritative and efficient which are generally considered as male attributes. At another level, the traits that are valued for spiritual purposes are surrender, love, innocence that is mainly attributed to women. So, men subscribing to the Anukulchandra faith tend to praise women for doing what men think women do well, and in some sense want to emulate these attributes. This compliment paid to women, according to Juergensmeyer (1991) has its roots in Vaisnava bhakti, where devotees seek to be like Krishna's lady friends and mimic their love for their Lord. Within the teachings of Thakur Anukulchandra, a woman is defined in relation to a man, be it her father, husband or son. This ideology places different values on men and women and thus generates a language that includes reference to women when men are spoken of. The relative position of men and women is given in their relationship. But the reality of everyday life does not wholly follow this ideology.

Engaging with the Teachings and Religious Prescriptions of Thakur

Thakur's satsang does not define itself as a 'Hindu' organization. Though most of the symbols, rituals and meanings in popular use within the Satsang derive from a recognizably 'Hindu' repertoire, yet it claims to transcend narrow religious divisions and strives to reach out instead to a multi-religious audience. The devotees and disciples of Thakur Anukulchandra appear to share reservations about the narrow particularisms that the term 'Hinduism' evokes. They prefer to locate the faith within the tradition of sanatana dharma which they see as a 'universal and eternal truth' relevant to all people at all times.

Thakur recommends simple rituals for his devotees to observe as part of their daily religious practice. Important among these are puja (a ritual of worship) and naam-dhyan (the chanting of a mantra). In performing pujas and chanting mantras, devotees have the freedom to conceptualize god in whatever form they like. They may, for instance, conceptualize 'god' in purely abstract and impersonal terms, or as any of the deities of the Hindu pantheon, or even as the guru himself.

The Satsang publishes vast quantities of literature in different languages explaining in great detail the meaning of each of these prescribed rituals and other practices, the correct way of observing each, and the benefits to be derived from their regular observance. In each case the benefits listed span both immediate this-worldly gains as well as long-term salvation rewards. Again, the prescribed rituals belong by and large to a recognizably 'Hindu' repertoire.

The most appealing element of this faith is that devotees do not have to abandon their prior religious practices or reject the religious faith to which they were previously committed. It does not require that they adopt a radically new religious faith and lifestyle, unless of course they wish to do so. After entering the Thakur's fold, devotees have the option of participating in certain collective rituals and other activities organized by the ashram branch set up at the initiative of the local following in their town or city. These branches are headed by a secretary or ascetic disciple of Thakur officially appointed by the authorities. The secretary organizes periodic collective rituals and bhajan (prayer singing) sessions at the branch premises. He also arranges regular religious sermons and discourses (delivered either by himself or by other visiting disciples of Thakur) which the local following is welcome to attend.[69]

Whereas some devotees, especially those with considerable free time, participate enthusiastically in these collective activities, others, either disinterested in this aspect of the Satsang or too busy to contribute their time and effort to these ventures, prefer to keep their involvement to a minimum. For example, younger people, for instance, engaged in full-time employment and with young children to tend at home, mostly spend no more than a few hours every weekend participating in these activities. Older people, in good

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[69] Often, with the active cooperation of the local following, the resident brahmachari mobilizes social welfare efforts such as blood donation camps and free medical care for the poor. These activities belong to a common repertoire of social service engagements undertaken by a wide range of organizations in India including old religious movements like the Arya Samaj (D. Gold 1991), newer right wing groups like the RashtriyaSwayamsevakSangh (ibid.) as well as devotionalist orders like the Radhasoamis (Juergensmeyer 1991) and the Ramakrishna Mission (Gupta 1974, Beckerlegge 1998). Most religious organizations in India now engage in some charitable and social service activity, mainly because the Indian government requires non-profit religious institutions to divest themselves of their income periodically if they are to retain their tax-exempt status. Spending on medical, educational and other charitable projects is a convenient means of achieving this, and has the added benefit of garnering favourable publicity for the religious organization.

health, with fewer family commitments, retired from active service, and leading otherwise unhurried lives, often spend longer hours interacting with fellow devotees and participating in the events organized at the local branch.

Power and Religion

A significant trajectory of examination, which stems from Weber, centers on the ideological character of religious power and, particularly on its ability to bring about legitimation (Mann 1986, Poggi 2001). The legitimizing ability is connected with the capacity of religion in shaping values and giving individual a 'value-direction'. This notion is different from the practical, self-gratifying interests that are dependent upon rational calculation. Influenced by Weber's work on religion and social power, Mann (1986) and Poggi (2001) examine how various types of social power is obtained from various sources that are then sought to be monopolized. Their contention is that political power is supported by a brute physical strength and intimidation with regard to that force and economic power is supported by material sources and their allocation. Both Mann and Poggi contend that religious power is obtained from the fact that religion has the capacity to give meaning, including providing answers to the ultimate metaphysical questions and also provide value-direction and lastly, sacred symbols that get reinforced through collective feelings that get solidified and thus communicate certain meaning and value (Poggi 2001: 60–1). After providing a distinction among the different types of social power, the study further analyses the interconnections among them and deriving from Weber, it focuses on the various methods through which each tries to either invite or dominate the others by drawing from their resources into its own domain. Within this system, religion's capacity in giving meaning as well as value-direction endows it with a power that becomes important to other social realms, including the economic and political ones. As suggested by Weber, religion has the ability to encourage such actions that powerful and influential within the economic life. In addition to this, religion has a critical role in legitimizing forms of social and political organization.

Another trajectory of examining religion and power is inspired by Durkheim's work that complements the aforementioned analysis. Durkheim focuses on the ways in which religion provides a space through which the society holds up a symbolic representation of itself and confirms itself as well along with its boundaries by experiencing collective effervescence. This approach draws attention to the emotional power of religion, and to its ability to generate a sense of loyalty and commitment that transcends personal interests.

Even when validated with charismatic powers, it becomes complicated for human beings including religious leaders to motivate awe, deference and unquestioning surrender that can only be induced by the contemplation of an eternal, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent being. This is where symbols come to the rescue as they do not have to endure the kind of restrictions that human have to suffer. Symbols rise above the human predicaments, they have no limitations and finally they have an authenticity, a reality that transcends their material forms. Once they are sanctified, religious symbols bind a group together and these symbols cannot easily be distinguished from the group and vice versa.

The power that a religious community has along with its symbols is directly connected to the empowerment of its members. The faith that one has access to the ultimate power which is on one's own side gives rise to an assurance and motivation along with the emotions of fear and dread. The believer thinks that he/she is not only acting for himself/herslf but on the behalf of a lager cause for a being that transcends the world of humans. As Durkheim (1912/2001: 157) explains, 'A god is not only an authority to which we submit . . . it is also a force that supports our own. The man who has obeyed his god, and therefore believes he is on his side, approaches the world with confidence and the feeling of accumulated energy'. Such kind of an experience within collective religious surroundings can bring about a transformation of mundane feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, uncertainty, inferiority, and a lack of self-assurance into emotions that encourage actions through the enhancement of feelings of being supported, motivated, and sheltered by a higher power.

Charismatic power

On the one hand where Durkheim focuses on the process through which the group motivates and empowers a person, Weber, on the other, discusses the way in which a person by means of his/her charismatic powers can motivate and empower a group. This gift of charisma in some individuals is so powerful that they are set apart from others. In most of the cases, the individuals possessing such kind of power are able to make others do their bidding without any confrontations and the others who come into contact with these charismatic persons come under their influence like a spell and are fascinated to an extent that would do anything that the charismatic person tells them to do. The charismatic individual is found by others as being fraught with emotions as a result of which such a person is immediately able to get attention from his followers and induce in them strong feelings. Being with the charismatic individual is experienced like becoming empowering for those who come in contact with him.

But as Weber highlights, this charismatic power is not only a gift that is found in the individual but is more of an exchange between the concerned individual and the social group or collectivity. Charisma has to be validated by the group. In addition to this, charisma has the need for support, instructions and training and is also dependent on the right kind of social setting. How people react in the presence of a charismatic person depends on their cultural conditioning and the 'normal' emotive standards of the group. But the reactions can also vary within the same group, where some might react positively to the charismatic individual while other might view him/her in a negative manner. The charismatic individual strengthens the optimism in others and those who do not see this 'charisma' tend to withdraw, leaving just the followers. When an individual is assigned with charisma, his followers require an affirmation for their feelings at regular intervals and are satisfied when they find it. In some extreme conditions, the affirmation that envelops a charismatic leader could accelerate and turn into a frenzy or ecstasy.

Weber sees charisma as the beginning of prophetic religious movements and also as the starting point of political movements. He differentiates the power relating to charismatic

leadership, from that of bureaucratic and traditional authority. Traditional authority attaches people to a leader through remembrance and precedence and a bureaucratic power connects the leader by means of rules and laws.

Weber's notion of charisma highlights that religion has the potential to cultivate in people feelings of empowerment and can induce extreme action. Through the formation of affective connections that has been encouraged by a charismatic leader, the members belonging to a religious group are able to break with mundane everydayness and tradition. Being committed to the leader and acting in a collective, the group has the capacity to deal with the dominant forces of a society. Sometimes, charismatic authority might also co-exist with other kinds of authority, and there might also be complementary relationships between them, including within the religious communities (Miller 2002).

Individuals are subject to several social domains and their internal and external power struggles. They experience different constraints and opportunities in relation to socialization, education, employment, citizenship, parenthood, healthcare, social welfare, and so on. Individuals are differentiated by their varied opportunities for empowerment within different spheres, and by their struggles for status and recognition within them. Because individuals experience several often incompatible spheres of social life, with their accompanying sets of values and 'habits of the heart', they are forced to become aware of the range of possible values, commitments, moral projects, choices, and identities open to them, and to make choices between them.

It may be necessary to hold inner conversations, considering whether and how one 'should' feel in a certain situation, and whether and how one's emotional expression may be received by others. This leads to the 'reflexivity' emphasized by Giddens (1991) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). It is accentuated by the increasing realm of personal choice and growing responsibility placed on individuals. It does not diminish the reality of individual encounter with diverse spheres of meaning and value, different lifestyles and cultures, and the imperative to make choices, however constrained. This leads to

heightened reflexivity: we are aware there are different options, whether or not they are open to us.

Thus a third important feature is a disenchantment with many spheres of late modern life that is related to the way in which polycentric spheres, and institutions within them, often pursue their own goals irrespective of moral considerations and social and ecological costs and risks. The theme of individuals faced by impersonal systems is common in social theory, as in Riesman's picture (1965) of atomized, alienating society, Foucault's account of internalized forms of social alienation (e.g. Foucault 1979), or Habermas's account (1981) of the colonization of the 'life world' of human relations by the logic of dominant systems. However, this is not simply a matter of rationalization and captivity in an 'iron cage' of impersonal, bureaucratic norms. Rather, there is a double pressure, from impersonal norms pursued by autopoietic spheres, on the one hand, and from growing demands for authentic self-expression, on the other.

One effect of these combined forces and tensions is to undermine powerful, socially extensive, and long-lasting emotional regimes, along with their ability to regulate personal emotions throughout society and bring them into a common patterning and harmony. This leads to a quest for quest for, people, institutions, and symbols to which it is possible to give wholehearted and trusting commitment (despite growing cynicism and distrust).

This 'postmodern condition' can be understood in two different ways. On the one hand, culture can be viewed as becoming fragmented, business-like and superficial. According to Baudrillard (1998), in the contemporary period, culture is being encompassed by a wave of enthralling stimulations and fascinating images. This results in a kind of communicative saturation which overpowers the consciousness and sense of choice of the subjects. For Featherstone (2007: 27), 'consumer culture uses images, signs and symbolic goods which summon up dreams, desires and fantasies which suggest romantic authenticity and emotional fulfilment in narcissistically pleasing oneself, instead of others'. Similar understandings can be seen in Ritzer's notions (2000) regarding the

McDonalization of the society and Baumann's depiction of postmodern consumerism (cited in Woodhead and Heelas 2000: 340–1). On the other hand, the same circumstances can be seen as heralding new opportunities, choices, potentialities etc. It can be understood in terms of prospects for breaking of boundaries of the 'high' and 'low' culture and a opportunity for culture to become more open, personal as well as reflexive. This will in turn lead to the self-construction of numerous characteristics and identities.

In the contemporary period, people are not only victims or passive receivers of cultural manipulation but they are themselves active consumers who produce the postmodern culture. These individual choose and interpret cultural signs and symbols according to their inclination. From this point of view, many charismatic personalities, real or mythical, of the modern society represent authenticity that have the power to stand firm in the face of different sorts of social pressure and most importantly, have the capacity to 'be themselves'. So, instead of surrendering to an established regime, men and women try to seek meaning from the numerous cultural goods that are on offer.

According to Simmel (1976 [1917]) an inclination that has been gaining visibility in the late modern period is the rejection of certain fixed sets and kinds of religious life. Today, the new forms of religiosity comprise, 'wholly formless mysticism', that 'marks the historical moment when inner life can no longer be accommodated in the forms it has occupied hitherto' (in Woodhead and Heelas 2000: 349). More recently, within the sociology of religion this understamding was extended by Thomas Luckmann, who was of the view that:

> The sacred cosmos of modern industrial societies no longer has one obligatory hierarchy, and it is no longer articulated as a consistent thematic whole… The assortment of religious representations…is not internalized by potential customers as a whole. The 'autonomous' customer selects, instead, certain religious themes from the available assortment and builds them into a somewhat precarious system of 'ultimate significance'. (Woodhead and Heelas 2000: 468)

In the proliferation of more individualized and expressive forms of spirituality, symbols from high and low culture and from different cultures are mixed up, and traditional religious symbols are reconfigured accordingly. Sacred and secular symbols are presented in new constellations. But there are also spheres and pockets of 'enchantment' and meaningful emotions, sometimes in unlikely places (Bennett 2001, Watson 2006). And there is a lively and widespread desire for greater emotional openness, honesty, and richness, associated with a longing for meaningful systems of value and dependable moral communities.

New Age spirituality, whose symbols, products, and practices are put on sale, and whose teachings often promise to equip the consumer with skills that will enhance their performance in the workplace and enable them to achieve prosperity of body, mind, and spirit (Carrette and King 2004). A clearer and more important example is prosperity-focused evangelical Christianity (Bellah and Tipton 2006). The pervasiveness of religious themes and symbols in late modern culture does not, however, indicate a revival of religion. People may use religion as a source of entertainment and therapy, of emotional stimulation.

To establish a powerful collective symbol involves both an economic and an emotional investment by an organization or institution, shared value commitments, and hence a shared belonging.Thus it although society still consecrates sacred symbols, and although many sacred symbols are still able to evoke powerful collective emotions, these processes are increasingly disconnected, as a result of which traditions like those of Thakur Anukalchandra are gaining popularity as new bases of trust and social interaction.

Concluding Remarks:

In Thakur Anukulchandra faith, people see a guru who is powerful, accessible and has an ability to heal. In this faith, people find a utilitarian aspect of individualism along with bhakti and a feeling of community. For them, a personal authority becomes important, an

authority with whom one has an intimate relationship- a parent, a spiritual master, a guide and much more who is capable of awakening conscience, engendering loyalty and love.

In Thakur Anukulchandra's faith, devotees have found a pattern of religious expression and experience that allows them to identify with their cultural past without accepting what they see as 'superstitious' and showy excesses, and to embrace modern ways of living without becoming captive to what they perceive as alienating forms of society. As Berger and Luckmann's cognitive theory (1966) examine the dialectic between 'externalization' and 'internalization', showing how society (in this case, the social world of Anukulchandra faith) makes an impression on the minds of individuals (internalization), and individuals give their ideas social expression (externalization). This analysis can be broadened and extended to apply not only to cognition narrowly defined, but to emotions as well. The emotional experiences and social sentiments that the devotees experience are closely related. Through processes of socialization, members of the community are predisposed to have certain emotional experiences and not others, to identify appropriate emotions, and to internalize norms for expression in certain situations. The community prepares its members for certain experiences by forming social contexts that inspire these feelings, and orchestrating the participants' acts.

Feelings are social acts as well as personal ones. They are performed in a direct or indirect interaction with other people, and they lead to immediate or delayed emotional reactions. Both the actor and the audience can read expressions of sorrow, joy, tension, awe, disgust, hatred, and anxiety. Such emotions form a basic element in social interaction. A religious setting may allow people to feel and express emotions that are suppressed in everyday life, may help people redefine or redirect their social emotions, or may support and sustain the acceptable emotional norms of the wider community.

CHAPTER - V

Conclusion

An intimate study of the Anukulchandra faith reveals a new religious movement remarkable for its commitment to the experimental mode, functioning in diverse locales, with its own authority patterns and social organization. The ongoing innovations in forms of therapy throughout the movement's history can be interpreted as both reflecting and facilitating a tension between collectivism and individualism, between surrender to the guru on one hand and the quest for autonomy on the other. As became evident over the course of analysing the doctrines and rituals of the movement, the Anukulchandra cult represents an ancient tradition within the Hindu culture.

Most of the books written about him by his devotees are hagiography-dramatic, exaggerated, simplistic, unsophisticated, and intellectually undemanding. But for purposes of research they must be regarded as ethnographic raw material, and indeed they share many of the characteristics of such material. The official biographies open with a description of the idyllic rural setting into which the young boy was born, and give an account of his respectable heritage. The birth of the child, the result of a boon from the god, Anukulchandra, was heralded by a number of auspicious events, and occurred on a day and month devoted to the worship of the god Krishna. As a child, Anukulchandra is described as a 'natural leader, a lover of animals and the friend of the humble and lowly'. Two quotations from the biography illustrate the style of the literature and also show how the biographers, from the start, highlights the abilities, which are later recognized as miraculous powers.

From the analyses of Thakur Anukulchandra's life certain points can be derived.

a. Anukulchandra's personality, shaped by powerful traditional village influences, and given its highly distinctive style through a series of profound emotional crises, became the unique medium for expressing and satisfying the social and psychological needs of his disciples.

b. The interplay of Anukulchandraa's personality and teachings with the special aspirations of influential westernizing supporters provided the means for furthering 'modernist' reforms, bearing the imprint of traditional Hinduism.

c. Anukulchandra's abilities for organization, and his specialized role as a divinely possessed teacher and nurturing father-figure, permitted his disciples to develop complementary and differentiated roles.

d. The Anukulchandra movement benefited from its use of a traditional religious frame of reference, but in a more universal manner.

Rituals and ceremonies of the Anukulchandra faith can be conceptualised in terms of Goffmanian secondary framing, a process, which, can be met in all human populations world over. There is no human culture without forms of play-acting, whether this is understood as being serious (ritual), or non-serious (play) (see Handelman 1977). By secondary frames, people can radically transform the meaning of the activities they are performing or observing. Multifarious forms of entertainment and social ceremony depend on secondary framing, which in turn depends on pan-human capacities for meta-communication and meta-representation.

Also, the performances of rituals may activate basic emotional responses, resulting in some forms of religious experience. The moods and states of mind created by melodious songs, rhythmic bodily movements, various fragrances and visual stimuli are inseparable parts of the religious representations which may involve different objects and agents. It is

not impossible that the moods initially produced in the context of rituals are evoked by the presence of the guru or symbols denoting him.

Miracles attributed to Thakur Anukulchandra can be seen as a medium for establishing and maintaining relationships between him and his followers utilizing a transactional framework of general importance in the Hindu world. The fact that these miracles are uncertain and indeterminate in nature, instead of being viewed as skepticism of their guru's power, is understood to exemplify an unaccountability that is a necessary feature of divinity. Thakur's ultimate credibility and influential energy derives from a link, established within the symbolic world of the cult, between a devotee's belief in the divinity of the guru and his or her commitment to a transformed sense of identity. To the degree that the new sense of self is valued, the miracles must be accepted as genuine.

There is certainly nothing new about the miraculous in the Hindu world. Indeed, in this world the credibility of breaking of expectations of how the world normally works is never really the main issue. What matters most is what such occurrences, in specific instances, actually mean. However, as many observers have noted, the cult of Thakur Anukulchandra has a notably broad-based constituency consisting of many people who at least outwardly are as strongly attuned as anyone to the more international cult of scientific rationality. And yet the miraculous is absolutely central to this religious movement.

The way some of the devotees give accounts of their relationships with Thakur shows that they have very powerful feelings. What must be stressed is the strong emphasis on love-in-intimacy that is so characteristic of devotees' accounts of their feelings about him, even when such relations are to all outside appearances might not seem so. Indeed, in the ideological framework of the cult such relations can and do exist even when there has been no physical encounter with the Thakur at all. According to a devotee 'Thakur does not so much have relationships with devotees 'in general' as he has specific relationships with particular devotees for whom these relationships are charged with deep personal

meaning'. But what is this meaning? It might, in part, have to do with questions of identity.

In the South Asian religious milieu, the questions of personal identity are fundamental, and this, in turn, has to do with the meaning of experience. Everyday experience, the experience of oneself as an organic being, and as an actor in social roles, supplies the basis for a certain conception of self. But this self, defined and sustained through sensory engagement with the world, is in some sense a false self, and the aim of soteriological strategies is to 'know' the real self that lies hidden under the accumulation of normal worldly endeavor and attachment. Such knowledge, however, is not pure intellection, remote from experience. Rather, it too is grounded in experience, though of an utterly different kind, an experience that is, in many systems at least, intensely inward and achieved through arduous cultivation of contemplative insight. Here the real truth about the self is disclosed in a direct, unmediated apprehension. Such an experience ideally leaves as its residue the conviction that this more intensely, strikingly and intuitively experienced identity supersedes the person one previously thought oneself to be.

As I began to attend the satsang-related activities and interacted with the devotees, I soon realized that I was in contact with a religious style that is clearly very meaningful to at least some members of this highly sophisticated and cosmopolitan bureaucratic, political, and academic elite. But my interaction was to a large extent limited by the fact that I was an outsider to the community and many a time the devotees as well as the administrators were skeptical of my examination of the *satsang*. A common view was that no matter how much a person studies the guru and the organization, it is not possible to know him unless one becomes a devotee. So it was not possible to get information about the internal working of the organization, matters relating to property, funds, accounting systems, salary structure of the administrators etc.

Interaction with the leaders of the Anukulchandra faith is an experience and highly vivid one, or at least so the accounts of informants suggest. And given its context, such interaction has the potential to be an experiential basis for a devotee's confidence that he

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is somehow more than he seems to be, that the identity with which he is familiar is not, after all, the one that matters most. But here the revelation is apparently not, as in other instances, something arising from a cultivated experience of the self, borrowed from what the devotees believed to be the reaction to the self of a very special other.

Such a person is also in some sense a more valuable person; but the worth in question is not necessarily visible on the surfaces of things, for it is fully realized only in the knowledge of an all-knowing other. This is a knowledge the devotee cannot ever share; his only possible communication with it comes from a sense of that divine other's intimate, personal presence in his life. Such a person is also a more loved person, for this love, being all-knowing, is all-forgiving. Certainly too, such a person may have a basis for heightened salvationary expectations, but I must add that there was very little talk of soteriological matters in the discourse of my informants. In fact, I believe that many of his devotees are more serene persons as a result of their relationship with the 'Thakur'.

It would be very satisfying to see the popularity of these cults and sects developing around contemporary gurus as evidence of the relevance of the egalitarianism and universalism of the sectarian tradition to contemporary urban Indians. But this is perhaps not the whole truth. It fails to recognize the extent to which the sectarian tradition in the past came to terms with caste values and the extent to which the cults come to terms with it today. The equality preached by the modern godmen is still the equality of spirit which the traditional renouncer stressed, rather than an attack on the hierarchical realities of the world in which the renouncer and his followers have to live. The contemporary guru, just as his traditional counterpart, both transcends and ratifies some of the values traditionally associated with caste and caste dharma.

Eisenstadt (1973) asserts that modernity is not the same in all the parts of the world. Because of its distinctive cultural heritage, each society may respond in its own way to new technology, individualism, skepticism and social organization that go with it. This shows why the there are such diverse followers of the Anukulchandra faith, who perceive it from their own points of view.

The human task from the point of view of Thakur, is to transform the gross forms of energy manifested in our mortal realities into increasingly subtle forms. The devotees of Thakur view those who cling to other secular or religious views as outdated and consider this ignorance unfortunate. Because time is an illusory concept, it is destructive and deadly. In the higher states of consciousness, time, space and matter are superseded as the temporal and material orders converge in a more basic form, especially energy that manifests itself in sound. Reality is perceived in only this form. To shift one's perception so that one is able to take in such forms is an act of salvation, according to the teachings of Thakur, as it begins the process of refining gross forms of existence into something more essential. To outsiders it may seem that these teachings fail to offer a novel reality, instead alters one's sense of the familiar. But in the understanding of Thakur's teachings of how the world works, perception is reality, so to perceive the world differently is to enter a different world. This view of reality changes a devotee's notion of the physical world. If perception is everything, the physical world is not as permanent and stable as it appears to be, nor are the boundaries between things and persons as discrete as our senses lead us to believe. Thakur's challenge to ordinary perception involves a reconsideration of what we know as science and what we know as ourselves.

Sarkar (1987) writes about his relationship with Thakur, the embodiment and search for truth as:

> My experience with Thakur was like my boyhood days' game of reaching the ever shifting and the ever receding horizon which always seems so near yet which every time eluded my attempt to reach it in a speedy walk across field after field …until it was too late…Thakur once told his close adherents what it was, the realization of the supreme truth for mankind even if the truth were embodied and encased in human form. It is like the shifting horizon, always you see it very near, only beyond the next field, but when you cross the field to get near, you see it is another field beyond, and any number of fields you cross to reach it, you note that it is yet at the same original distance. That is perhaps every satsangi's experience with Thakur, very near yet at the same original distance, in

between all his rapturous *Lila,* the divine sport of his human existence. (1987: 265)

The characteristics of Anukulchandra's thought, an appropriation of a truth that, even though based on science, transcends it, a therapeutic approach to the self, the reestablishment of a personal authority, appeal to those who for various reasons have become disillusioned with the modern world and are dissatisfied with the alternatives that traditional faith offers them. There are aspects of the Anukulchandra tradition that are similar to modern forms of religion. Among these are the use of modern technology, sophisticated organization and effective publications. Even the religious message claims universality and transcendence of the particularities of any one cultural tradition. Another feature of Thakur Anukulchandra's message is its orientation towards the future. Like other charismatic preachers, the authoritative voices of this tradition come from leaders who live in the present but speak on behalf of an even greater authority whose nature is not yet revealed. An additional feature of the faith is what Juergensmeyer (1991) terms as 'integrative logic'. This integrative way of thinking contrasts sharply with the fragmentation of knowledge that has characterized the modern age. Habermas (1987) calls the 'Enlightenment project' of the modern thinkers that was intent on separating the traditional religious thought into three distinctive modes of reasoning: cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive. The Anukulchandra movement reunites these ways of thinking, as part of a single coherent framework.

Deriving from Radhasoami's Soamiji Maharaj's teachings, Thakur also emphasizes on accepting a *sant sat guru* to guide a person on his/her journey to one's own spiritual source, and this guru should be the sole object of one's undivided, single-minded bhakti, this bhakti with active service and complete self surrender, will make a person's journey smooth. Soamiji Maharaj's devotion-cult requires a living guru who has raised his *Surat*, also called the spirit current to the highest level. Devotion and service to such an embodiment of truth in human form dispels all ignorance and frees a person from the shackles of *Kal* (space and time). The central notions of the Anukulchandra faith, that truth and authority can be embodied in a person, that transformation of the self occurs

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through the purification of the self and energy, that love and community can be experienced even when the fellowship is dispersed, that social service is based on personal commitment and that place and time have centers, each contains features of a modern religion.

During the research, numerous devotees were quick to point how a person can turn to Thakur Anukulchandra, seek emotional connection with him and still retain their own religious identity. For them, this message of inclusiveness along with the promotion of forbearance and loving service found resonance, and was a mode to find inner spiritual unity and bring about transformation in the society, in one's own little but important way. This kind of thinking is directly in opposition to Hindutva's nationalist venture of projecting a culturally homogeneous idea of Hinduism. Tanika Sarkar (2012) writes that the entire R.K Puram area of Delhi which has 56 temples, all of which are affiliated to the VHP, and follow 'an identical ritual calendar as well as a shared ritual schedule for their festivals- that priests behave in largely similar ways and get their training from the VHP' (2012: 267). For Victor Turner (1969), pilgrimages, festivals and collective public rituals are *communitas* which is a liminal stage of oneness that transcends the social separations of everyday life and creates a temporary bond of equality, a felt community of equals.

The unease of identifying itself as a Hindu religious organization stems from the fact that Thakur Anukulchandra's rejection of narrow particular identities in favour of a universal goal of God realization, which, according to him, is present in all religions. A devotee of Thakur Anukulchandra, explains how the guru is the 'latest incarnation of this age, in a long of Masters', whose ideas will put an end to divisions that are being witnessed in the society and lead to 'peace, love, equality and brotherhood among all'. He explains:

> *A guru's importance lies in the fact that he brings about evolution, progression and consequently perfection to anybody who comes into contact with him. This evolution might happen immediately or it also may take some time, but it will happen for sure, such is the divine grace of the guru. Every person strives towards experiencing God and God-realization both within himself or herself*

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and also outside, in the world. Human beings have better capacity to understand and realize God. The principles elucidated by Thakur for God realization is simple. It helps to integrate both scientific values as well as moral ones for evolution of the nature of human beings and the society as a whole. The value of meditation and seva (service) help to develop human nature and brings a person closer to God. Today, we are witnessing how religion is dividing people and the solution to this is spirituality…the message of religious tolerance is ingrained in the teachings of Thakur. People of any religion can come to Thakur and find solace and become better people. Thakur's message is that of love…that is why he is known as parama premamaya (supreme embodiment of love). His teachings provide apt solutions to the various problems of the people and society (Interview with Chandan Sahoo on 25th November, 2015).

In addition to the religious and philosophical reasons for thinking of the guru in ultimate terms, psychological motivations are also involved. Kakar (1982) says that the magnification of the qualities of the master goes hand in hand with the expansion of one's own pride in knowing such a person. He says that these are 'psychological mechanisms of idealization and identification which give a newfound centrality to the self' (1982: 145).

The growing influence of Thakur's faith can be attributed to its leaders who have great organizational skills, are highly articulate, efficient and have a remarkable ability to get things done. *Seva* or service provided at regular intervals such as blood donation camps, free health check-ups, *anand bazaar* (free food provided at the community kitchen), etc serves as means for greater public recognition, social acceptance as well as communicating the name of Thakur Anukulchandra worldwide. As a devotee explains, '*Bringing about change in the society is a huge task and it requires positive interaction among the members inside the group and also outside' (Interview with Reena Das on 25th February, 2015)*. The devotees offer *seva* as worship and praise and perhaps hope for blessings in return. From the point of view of the administration, these services also generate general awareness about the organization, enhance its reputation, increase its recruitment

potential by expanding its domains of influence and enable it to fulfill its social responsibility by providing practical means of effecting social change.

From the perspective of Thakur Anululchandra, the way one thinks about oneself brings the new self into being. For this reason, the techniques taught by Thakur are considered as a sort of therapy. According to this view, individuals often have split personalities, there is a tension between their worldly selves and their potential true selves. This gap can be bridged by perceiving consciousness that lies at the intersection of the two. The devotees have to become aware of who they are, an awareness that is often experienced as liberating. This view of liberation places great importance on the master or guru as a therapist who represents what the seekers aspire to achieve: a higher state of consciousness that calms one's mind. In Thakur Anukulchandra, the devotees see a master who is powerful and able to heal. The modern notion of therapeutic personal power is also an ancient one and Thakur has, in appropriating the *sant* tradition, revived the notion that one should have an authoritative personal guide. The intimate connection of the disciples to the guru and to one another leads to the creation of fellowships that from one point of view may be seen as spiritual advantage, where seekers find salvation and are healed through their individual efforts and their own personal relationship with the guru. In the satsang of Thakur people find utilitarian aspects of individualism as well as bhakti merged together with a feeling of community. The personal relationships that the devotees form with their fellow disciples as well as the masters allow them to restore their faith in social organization.

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Appendix I

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE AND GUIDE:

Socio-economic Profile of the Devotees

1. Name
2. Age
3. Sex
4. Education
5. Language (Odia/Hindi/ English/ Any other)
6. Occupation
7. Annual income
8. Religion/Caste
9. Class (Upper/ Middle/ Lower)
10. Whom do you consider as your immediate 'social circle'? (relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours, any other)
11. Were you affiliated with any other religious organization before joining this Satsang?
12. Are you, presently, a part of any other religious organization? If yes, which is it?
13. Are you a part of any other club/ association/ neighbourhood committee?
14. Since how many years/months have you been a member of the Satsang?
15. From whom did you first learn about the Satsang? (Family, Friends, Neighbours, Any other)
16. What were your motivations/reasons for joining the Satsang? Why did you feel the need for a *guru?*
17. Did you have any kind of predicament/issue which you think was abated or solved through the *Thakur?* If yes, what were these problems?
18. Which religious activities of the Satsang do you subscribe to? Is it daily, monthly or yearly?
19. How much financial contribution do you give to the Satsang annually?
20. How much time do you devote for the Satsang's activities daily?

21. Do you have any responsibilities pertaining to the activities of the Satsang? If yes, what are they?

22. (Daily/ Monthly/ Annual)

23. Which ideas/values of the Satsang do you find particularly attractive/ important? Why?

24. Do you find any evident difference between your traditional religious faith and the Satsang? If yes what is it?

25. In what ways has joining the Satsang benefitted you? (more meaningful, fulfilling/ suits your inclination/meeting similar minded people/ gives a sense of community/ any other?

26. Have you recruited any new members into the Satsang? If yes, how many?

27. How did you convince them to join this religious community?

28. What was the most memorable event in your Satsang life?

29. In your everyday life, how do you engage with Thakur Anukulchandra's teachings?

30. In what ways has your life changed after joining this faith?

31. Has your relationship with your family and peer group changed after joining the *satsang*? If yes, then in what ways?

32. What were your motivations for joining this spiritual organization?

33. Since bringing other people into this fold is an integral part of your faith, how do you influence other people to join?

34. Why is it important, according to you, to teach others about Thakur Anukulchandra?

35. What according to you are the fundamental aspects of this organization, the *satsang*?

36. Before joining this organization what was your attitude towards religion?

37. How do you see the relationship between Thakur Anukulchandra and other *gurus*? Do you follow other *gurus* along with Thakur?

38. What makes you a believer of Thakur Anukulchandra?

39. Which rituals and practices of the *satsang* do you follow?

40. How has being a devotee affected your daily life? In what ways?

41. Do you carry any symbols of the *guru* with you? If yes, the why do you carry these symbols?

42. How has joining the *satsang* affected your outlook/perspective about life?

43. Has this community of *satsangis* helped you during your times of need? In what ways?

44. Has your approach of handling domestic, social, economic matters changed after becoming a devotee?

45. What are your beliefs about religion?

46. Have you dietary habits and practices changed after joining the *satsang*? Does it affect your daily life?

47. How do you see the relationship between science and the teachings of Thakur Anukulchandra?

48. Do you prefer seeking the guru, enlightenment in your own individual way or along with the community of seekers? Why?

49. What kind of research did you do before joining this spiritual organization?

50. Do you perform any kind of *seva* within this organization? What are those?

Appendix II

127th birth anniversary celebration of Thakur Anukulchandra

Devotees on their way to Thakur Anukulchandra's *darshan*

Devotees lining up for *prasad* at the community kitchen.

The adorned gateway of the *satsang ashram*.

Books, medicines, photographs, etc being sold at the event.

Devotees at an event being held in the honour of Thakur in February 2015.

Bh

Bhajan and Kritan in progress at the event.

A talk on the philosophy of Thakur Anukulchandra.