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Achyutananda Das: A Spiritual Eco-Chronicler

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Abstract

The paper presents an exploration of the literary and cultural contributions of a 16th century Odia saint poet who represented the oppressed communities of his time like cowherdmen, fishermen and other castes and worked for the socio-cultural upliftment of these communities through religious and socio-economic activities. It is said that this saint wrote one lakh books, all devoted to glorify the great incarnation of God, Lord Krishna. A propagator of neo- Vaishnavism, he contributed profusely to the medieval Odia religious literature, where he has narrated his personal experience from *yoga*, *sadhana* and ponderance over religious thoughts/experiences and his practices as a *karmayogi* (crusader of action) and *jnanayogi* (crusader of knowledge). Describing himself through his own spiritual experience and vision as a companion of the Lord through the various ages, he had created several personal myths and had adopted a large number of disciples from various communities leaving behind a tradition of *guru-shishya* (preceptor-disciple) in the communities which have been following him so far and a religious sect of his own creating a community of worshippers who are called *brahma-gopala* who are adept in religio-cultural activities, etc. This poet-saint was the contemporary of Sri Chaitanya and had other four companions in Odisha who together were the five Vaishnava saints and poets, popularly called *Panchasakha*, i.e., five friends.

Keywords: Saint, Oppressed communities, Cowherdmen, Spiritual revolution, Panchasakha, Neo-Vaishnavism.

Achyutananda Das (1482-1601 AD) was a prominent poet and saint of medieval Odisha, an eastern Indian province, who crusaded the greatest social change during the 16th century AD and fought for the socio-cultural and political uplift of subalterns by liberalizing the religious and social norms in favour of the downtrodden lay communities who were struggling to survive amidst quagmire of multiple social maladies. He was born on the eleventh day of moonlit fort-night of January in 1482 AD at a small village called Tilakana in the Cuttack district of Odisha to the poor

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parents who afterwards shifted to Puri to work under the then king Prataprudra Dev. This child born to the poor parents Dinabandhu Khuntia and Padmabati was a very unmindful boy at the beginning of his career who afterwards under the grace of the Almighty had achieved miraculous power and merit with spontaneous poetic grace and spiritual knowledge and emerged as a socio-cultural and spiritual crusader and advocate of the divine grace and activities of the supreme Lord to spearhead a revolution to empower the poor populace of the province of Utkal as a whole and of the Eastern coast of Odisha to uplift the down-trodden and empower them culturally and spiritually. The spiritual revolution initiated by this poet was invigorated when he came in association with his other friends and Sri Chaitanya at Puri. Odisha has been artistically and culturally rich since time immemorial. The major saints of India like Sankaracharya, Ballabhacharya, Nimbarka, Ramanuja, Vishnu Swami and Madhvacharya came to Puri and established their faiths and monasteries and set traditions of worship and bhakti (devotion) making the field fertile for further cultivation. The five poet-saints popularly called *Panchasakha*, namely, Achyutananda Das, Balarama Das, Jagannath Das, Yashobanta Das and Shishu Ananta Das liberalized the tradition of bhakti making it reachable to the depressed and oppressed of the society, snatching it away from the sole dominant possession of the oppressive Brahmins. This bhakti movement was anti-brahministic in the sense that it aimed at suppressing the wrong and superstitious dominance of the Brahmins and democratizing religion, and cultural and spiritual sadhana which were the sole property of the Brahmins when the other castes and women were treated as dalit/subaltern who could not participate in any spiritual debate/activities. In the other way, the real role of the Brahmins was appreciated and alternately realized by these saints who created alternative Brahmins in other castes who were Vaishnava priests to provide cultural and spiritual leadership and transparency and propagated and initiated spiritual ethos among the non-brahmins and oppressed classes. This spiritual revolution was also a socio-economic, political and cultural revolution to empower the oppressed in their fundamental rights and to make them self-empowered, self-reliant and sufficient.

Most prolific among his *Panchasakha* colleagues, Achyutananda Das has not been much recognized in the Vaishnavite circle of devotees/saint biographers of Bengal. His other two colleagues Jagannath Das and Balarama Das have enjoyed enough popularity and their names are available in the biographical works on Sri Chaitanya Dev and the Chaitanyaite tradition of Bhakti. But among the *Panchasakha* poets he is the most adept sadhak, yogi and guru and has been famous for his prophetic writings about the contemporary and future forecasting with the analysis of the vedantic saga. He upheld a stern sense of ecology in the era of spiritual and phenomenal turmoil when the overall security of Utkal was at stake and being a humble preacher of divinity and source of sustainability, he came forward for rigorous propagational programme for the upliftment of deprived populace by sacrificing his own comfort. His time was a time of religious unrest because of the instability of ruling dynasties and political upheaval. Besides his activities, he was basically a poet who crusaded reforms through his writing, preaching and religious missionary activities. His writing as devotional glorification of the Almighty Lord was meant for chanting because chanting the holy

name is a kind of yoga for it brings mental integrity/tranquility and discipline along with humility which banishes the sin and sense of sin from the human mind and propels him towards being united with the work/activity that brings sustenance to uphold honourable living. Among his colleagues he was most autobiographical who wrote about himself and his colleagues in many of his works that give clue to his activities and details of life and such details also have enough spiritual significance as that was an attempt at creating personal myths. Myths and mysteries have role in everybody's life in asserting some identity or other. The history of Odisha is littered with ruins, invasion, devastations and natural calamities and here history is not even safe. As such had Achyutananda not left behind such autobiographical traces, his identity would completely have been lost. In his book entitled *Udaya Kahani,* he has mentioned the dates of birth of him and his four colleagues. According to this book, he being the senior-most, was born in 1482 AD, Balarama Das was born in 1484, Shishu Ananta Das in 1486 AD, and both Jagannath Das and Yashobanta Das in 1487 AD (Dash 1963: 640). An eighteenth century biographer Ishwar Das in his *Shri Chaitanya Bhagabata,* in chapters 46-48th and 54th narrates Sri Chaitanya's relationship with the Panchasakha and gives a brief account about each of the five saints who have been described to be the parts of Lord Vishnu incarnated to be the associates of Sri Chaitanya. In the 46th chapter it is mentioned that Sri Chaitanya met Achyutananda at the Kundabalada village (in *Guru Bhakti Geeta* Vol. III, Chapter 10, and other books, it is Tilakana Village) and he was the son of Ananda Mohanty (Ishwar Das 1953:262) who was titled by the King as Khuntia. It may be mentioned here that the data provided by Ishwar Das being a devotional account may vary and as such Achyuta's father's name and other details do not match here with other books. His early life, married life, poverty, wide pilgrimage with his disciples to the major pilgrimage centres of India, writing the theoretical and devotional texts, texts on religious praxis and works meant for upliftment of the subalterns have been narrated repeatedly at various places in his writings. In his book entitled *Anakar Samhita,* he has given a list of his works and as per this list, he composed 36 *samhitas*, 78 *geetas*, 27 genealogies (*vamsanucharit*), 12 sub-genealogies (*upavamsanucharit)*, 100 futurological writings (*bhabisya*), and many songs and *padavalis* which number altogether one lakh, all glorifying Lord Krishna. Many of these works are not extant now not being properly preserved by the families of his disciples with whom he left these works. Thus preservation has been a difficult task though devotional accounts say otherwise about cosmic preservation. Historians and critics also opine that though Achyutananda mentions the total number of his writings as one lakh in *Anakar Samhita,* it means a large number of writings, not exactly one lakh in number.

It is said that Achyutananda Das was very unmindful in studies at his childhood and was taken by his father to Puri for a *darshan* of Lord Jagannath during which Sri Chaitanya was present at Puri and in the Grand Trunk road in front of the Jagannath Temple he was leading a procession of kirtan by the Gaudiya Vaishnavites when Achyuta's father made him touch the holy feet of Sri Chaitanya and it is also said that with touching His holy feet a change came in Achyuta and he started pronouncing scriptures and a great attraction for learning came in him immediately. At the behest of

Sri Chaitanya, Achyutananda was initiated to the *gurumantra* by Sanatan Gosain. He was advised to wear the *Koupina* (holy underwear used by the saints), smear his body with *tilak* (sandalwood paste/a particular yellow soil called *tilak* available for the purpose). He was given instruction to paste *Harimandir tilak* on his forehead and *panchtilak* on arms and chest. Sanatan Goswami initiated him into the *Shyama Panchakshara Mahamantra* under the banyan tree at South side in the precincts of the Jagannath Temple at Puri. Thus it is probably in 1505 AD during the first visit of Sri Chaitanya to Puri when Achyutananda Das was about 24 years old that he was initiated into the Vaishnavite cult and was advised by Sri Chaitanya to propagate the Krishnalila among the down-trodden cowherdmen and all other *sudras* and compose and enact the Raslila at different places at different times of the year. He evolved a type of Raslila in Odisha known as *Rahasa Kirtan* which is chiefly musical recitation of the theoretical song interpretation of the Radha-Krishna *lila* and which is firmly devotional, sometimes interpretation of the occult mystic realities of bhakti with phenomenal reality, sometimes it is physiognomic interpretation of *sadhana* based on meditational performances, that is, how to master the senses to overcome the difficulties or physical sufferings to arouse spiritual awakening in us and aggravate our mental power. Experience gathered from yoga, spiritual *sadhana* mixed with the vedantic knowledge which he calls *brahmajnana/ brahmavidya* was narrated in many of his works. His writing career spans over several decades and towards the close of his career, he wrote many books which bear discrepancy with the former narrations and there have been several interpolations by the later scribes and minor writers who were his followers. That is why many critics opine that there were many writers from fifteen to nineteenth century having the name of Achyutananda and there are several confusions over the authorship of texts.

At the behest of Sri Chaitanya he decided to be a spiritual leader of the subalterns and specially a mentor of the clan of the cowherdmen for flourishing a socio-cultural revolution enacting the holy *lila* of Lord Krishna through the performances of the *Rahasa Kirtan* to bring peace, prosperity and spiritual uplift and diversity among the devotees providing them the eternal holy and mystic sense of the Lord's companionship that emboldens the depressed in the spirituality and strengthens them in soul to take up strides in *karma* and *jnana*. Karma is at the root of everything and that is why in the *Bhagavata Purana,* Lord Krishna advises Uddhava that *Karma* is his guru. Achyutananda provided the same knowledge to his followers that by chanting the holy name of the Lord one cannot get salvation unless he devotes himself all out to perform the activities that sustain our life. A *karmayogi* in the first place is only fit for becoming a *jnanayogi*. He was a sternly secular minded-fellow. The spiritual practices of the *Panchasakha* had closeness with Buddhism because of their knowledge-oriented devotion called *Jnanamishra bhakti* (Devotion mixed with Knowledge/Knowledge-based devotion). That is why the Bengali/Odia critics of Vaishnavism have called these five poet-saints as *Prachhanna Bauddha* (Clandestine Buddhists). Like Sri Chaitanya he had a large number of followers and through his spiritual intuition he came to know about his previous births in various mythological ages and he says at various places in his books that all the time he has been an associate of the Lord along with his four other friends

who together are called *Panchasakha* and they say that they were born in the Kaliyuga for bringing salvation to the suffering devotees and promoting the subalterns and destroying the demonic forces as the associates of the incarnation of the *Kalki*. He was Sudama, a friend of Lord Krishna in Dvapar Yuga, Nala in Tretaya Yuga in the monkey army of Lord Rama and saint Kripajal in the Satya Yuga, who was the father of goddess Sarala. As Achyutananda in Kali Yuga he became an associate of Lord Chaitanya who was supposed to be an incarnation of Lord Krishna and as advised by him he preached the divine mode of living among the downtrodden and became the guru of the whole clan of the cowherdmen in Odisha by teaching them, promoting them and evolving various spiritual-cultural activities to perform throughout the year and to strictly become vegetarian.

His preaching can be interpreted to be a strictly spiritual ecological principle. Matthew T. Fox (1940-), a Roman Catholic priest and Professor of Religious Education at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas, who runs now his own University of Creation Spirituality in Oakland, California, seeks to define ecological spirituality within the Christian Tradition drawing on many earlier Christian scholars, including Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Francis of Assisi and Julian of Norwich. He introduces a religious experience that builds on a sense of the sacred and this religion begins with a sense of awe and wonder and includes a sense of unconditional love and delight. Fox proposes four paths to a spiritual ecology. The first is to experience the Divine in terms of delight, awe and wonder at being present in the world which involves the intuition that the creation is a blessing and response of gratitude (Via Positiva). The second journey into spiritual ecology comes through experiencing darkness, deprivation, suffering, and pain (Via Negativa). These two paths lead to a rebirth of creativity, a third path, which involves in identifying new ecological virtues for living such as vegetarianism, recycling, relearning the sacredness of nature, defending creation through political action, and making new rituals to celebrate sacred places, times, and being in nature (Via Creativa). The fourth step is a transformation to a more compassionate society in which all beings love one another (Via Transformativa) which includes the making of justice (Fox 1998: 228). The four paths of spiritual ecology were strictly adhered to by Achyutananda and his followers. He had his disciples at various corners of Odisha and beyond and they hailed from different depressed and deprived communities. With his disciples he experienced and practised suffering, pain, deprivation and made benign prayers to the Lord, practised humility, maintained strict vegetarianism, recycling of things to safeguard loss to nature, celebrated the sacredness of nature and revolutionized the religious activities in democratic ways and evolved new rituals (like *Rahasa kirtan*, etc.) to celebrate sacred places and times. He was the creator of new pilgrimage centres like the places where he established his monastery and the places where the monasteries of his disciples were established. His first monastery was at Puri sea-beach called Banki Muhani and then he permanently established his monastery at Nemala, (which has other versions like Nembala/ Lemala/ o,/ Lembala- all originated from the root Odia word Neem/Nim/Nimba/Lima/Limba- the bitter Neem wood from which the idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra of the Puri temple are carved out) at present in the Cuttack district of Odisha which is a

famous pilgrim centre. The place was full of the neem trees and as such it was called as Nemala and was named as such by the saint. He has mythicized these places by giving them eternal dimension. His graveyard shrine at Nemala is named and described by him to be Padmaban (the lotus forest) which is the most sacred place in the world where the soul and supreme soul unite with each other. The place is such situated that at the four directions of it there are shrines of four very ancient goddesses [Jagulai (Ambika) in East (with south-faced Ganesh), Mangala (Durga) in West, Sunama (Anukampa) in South and Bhagabati (Bhabani) in North]* who are supposed to be the guardian deities of the place along with four Siva temples. It is said that Lord Siva is the greatest Vaishava. So the place is a confluence of Saiva, Shakta, Ganapatya, Soura and followers of other divine faiths.

He propagated and practised the vegetarianism and celebrated places by assigning greatness to many places in describing their glory by attaching some mythical and mystical attributes to them. He called the place of his monastery at Nemala as Padmaban (Lotus Forest) by assigning many glories to it. Similarly the river Chitropala, on the bank of which his monastery situated has been as one of the holiest rivers in the world and is narrated to be holier and greater than river Ganga. In *Mangalastakam*, the name Chitrotpala is mentioned as the great godly river: "Ganga, Sindhu, Saraswati, Yamuna, Godavari, Narmada, Kaveri, Saraju, Mahendratanaya, Charmanvati, Renuka, Sipra, Vedamati, Mahasuranadi Chitrotpala, Ganduki, punyapunya jalei samudra sahitam kurvantu te mangalam" (qtd in Mohanty 2014:48). In *Brahmapuran*, *Kapil Samhita*, *Agni Puran*, and *Niladri Mahodaya* also the greatness of the river is amply mentioned. The great saints and sages like Maitreya, Bidur, Chyavan, Markanda, Soubhari, Narayan, Kratubhvaja, Gargacharya, Shukadev, Pareswar, Vyasadev, Bamdev, Gyadhisut, Chamasa, Karbharjan, Mrukund, Manduk, Dadhichi, Sangisut, and Lomaharsan established their monasteries on the bank of this river Chitrotpala. Many ancient banyans existed on the bank of this river making it sanctuaries of many precious lives, plants and places. Hence Achyutananda in his *Chitrotpala Mahatmya* has celebrated the greatness of the river which confirms to the Via Creativa path/principle of Spiritual Ecology theory of Matthew T. Fox.

In his *Guru Bhakti Geeta*, he has talked about his various disciples and advised them to do various activities for the dissemination of knowledge among all the devotees. For the cowherdmen community he composed songs of riddles and difficult questions called *Gopal Ogal* which are sung with dance and with accompaniment of musical instruments like *singa* (a pipe made of buffalo's horn), *kahali* (a pipe made of brass metal), *mridanga*, cymbals and they also beat sticks like *garba* dance. Elderly cowherdmen hold a bamboo cudgel parallelly being in groups in both sides of the cudgel and sing *ogal* songs pushing each other parallelly and dancing. The *ogal* songs and dance are the new rituals invented by Achyutananda for the cowherdmen community amongst whom he was recognized as the saviour and prime preceptor and as such he pronounces himself "Me Achyuta Das, the King of cowherdmen" in his *ogal* songs. In these songs he has narrated in the question- answer mode several difficult riddles about the secrets of the cosmology like he has theorized the creation of cow and has

defined the various parts of its body that how the thirty three crores of gods live in the body of the cow and how the Gayatri mantra is inscaped in its body. He describes a cowherdman as the incarnation of *Gopala*, the Lord as a cowherdman and the twelve robes of the Gopal. The theory of the colours of the cow and its heavenly types are some of the interesting subjects narrated in the *ogal* songs. He created a community of gurus for this cowherdmen community who are like Brahmins, adept in all ceremonial and sacred religious performances and they initiate the cowherdmen community with the guru nama (sixteen names and thirty two letters) mahamantra and the gopal mantra and this community of gurus are called *Brahma- Gopala/ Gopala Vaishnava*.

Though Achyutananda was initiated to the holy cult of Neo-Vaishnavism at the behest of Sri Chaitanya and propagated the holy lila of the Lord through his *Rahasa-Kirtan* at the behest of Sri Chaitanya, he established his originality and independent views through his activities. It may be mentioned here that the Bengali associates of Sri Chaitanya disliked his appreciation of the Panchasakha and his award of *Atibadi* (the very great) title to Jagannath Das and that is why they left Sri Chaitanya alone at Puri and left for Brindaban. Achyutananda, through his sadhana and spiritual/ devotional exercises superseded the activities of Sri Chaitanya and chose his own centre of activities among the deprived populace leaving Puri, his place of initiation and inspiration and travelled to the different corners of Odisha. He lived for nearly seven decades after the demise of Sri Chaitanya in 1533 AD. During this long span of time he wrote a large number of books. He is basically famous for his monumental work *Harivamsa* (in seven volumes) as Jagannath Das is famous for his *Odia Bhagabata* and Balarama Das for his *Ramayana*. Besides that his other monumental works are *Sunya Samhita* and *Guru Bhakti Geeta.* For propagating the Raslila he composed more than twelve Raslila texts which he calls *Rahasa*s and a theoretical text on the rules of performing the *Rahasa Kirtan* known as *Rahasa Vandana*. The Rahasa texts written by him are *Nitya Rahasa*, *Mahanitya Rahasa*, *Sunya Rahasa*, *Thulasunya Rahasa*, *Radha Rahasa*, *Brunda Rahasa*, *Duti Rahasa*, *Parama Rahasa, Ganga Rahasa, Rahasa Prema Panchamruta, Ananta Rahasa, Padmaban Rahasa,* etc.

Sri Chaitanya was preaching the devotional love theory of Gopi-Krishna whereas Achyutananda with his disciples was propagating the theory of Gopala-Krishna which was socio-economically and spiritually sound as that was making the devotees activity-bound. Like twelve forests of the Brajamandala namely Madhuban, Talban, Kumudban, Kamyaban, Bakulban, Bhadraban, Khadirban, Mahaban, Louhajangban, Belban, Bhandirban, and Brindaban, he created/named places under these names and named the sacred places after the banyan trees as *Bata.* He primarily adopted twelve disciples whom he called *Dvadasha Gopala* (Twelve cowherdmen) of whom he was the initiator of the Gopala mantra/ Mahamantra and divided them into two groups as *Panchashakha* (five branches)and *Saptashakha* (seven branches). His chief disciple Rama Das had twelve disciples whom he initiated to the Mahamantra. These two groups of Devadasha gopalas make another group called *Chabisha Gopala* (24 cowherdmen) which were the divine sects of spiritual disciples (apostles) in his system of propagating the holy lila of the Lord. The core group *Dvadasha Gopala* (twelve disciples) of Achyutananda

who belonged the community of the cowherdmen were Rama, Utthana, Bhratha, Mukunda, Dharma, Ananda, Bakra, Batsa, Vishnu, Jadava, Paban and Nanda. Five of them who were the closest disciples of Achyutananda are Rama, Bhratha, Bakra, Dharma and Bishnu and they are called *Panchashakha* (five branches of the Achyuta tree) and their monasteries existed at five different places like Kameswariban, Khadiraban, Chandrabhaga-Sangarasa Village, Ekamra Kanan, and Hemban respectively. Achyutananda had a total of sixteen thousand disciples, out of which the *dvadasha gopala* headed by Rama Das were the chief disciples and seven disciples named Utthana, Mukunda, Ananda, Batsa, Jadava, Paban and Nanda were engaged in the organizational activities of the propagation of the lila of the Lord at the behest of Achyutananda. At the behest of Achyutananda also his chief disciple Rama Das initiated twelve gopalas to the Mahamantra and advised them to organize and propagate the Rahasa kirtan widely among the devotees to uplift them socio-economically and spiritually. These twelve disciples who are again called *Dvadasha Gopala* are Mukunda, Ananta, Batsa, Paban, Sudam, Jadava, Balak, Madhu, Mathuri, Utthana, Gobinda and Brundaban. Like Matthew T. Fox's University of Creation Spirituality, Achyutananda had planned a University of Subalterns to equip them with better knowledge and ability in those days of colonialism when the security of their land of birth was at stake. Calamities struck the land and made the lay populace suffer the worst. His twenty four apostles and sixteen thousand disciples headed by him formed a great institution of religious and cultural education to uplift the subalterns of the time and since then the same trend of learning has been continuing and the vast populace of Odisha are still inspired by the morals of this great man even after four centuries of his demise.

This great saint was open to all different religious faiths of the time. He was never prejudiced against any religious faiths. It can be well exemplified in his admonition to his disciples *in Barancharit Gita* to meet Haridasa Gosain, Jagannath Das and Sri Chaitanya under the great banyan called Kalpabata in the campus of the Jagannath Temple at Puri. Haridasa Gosain was a sufi saint of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) who was a companion of Sri Chaitanya. He also respected the followers of Kabir. He believed in the Almighty Lord who according to him is both *Saguna* (Attributed) and Nirguna (Attributeless). He theorized the Lord Jagannath as the Ultimate Reality in his symbolic language and the four deities of the Jagannath Temple, i.e. Balabhadra (Balaram), Subhadra, Jagannath and Sudarshan as the tetradic ultimate reality and compared the human mind with the tetradic holy phenomena and after experiencing all religious experiences he has given his ultimate realization as:

> This mind is the tetradic idols, O Disillusioned Mind/0/
> Mind advises Conscience to peep into the Soul carefully,
> Being encoded in the four Vedas this theory frightens the God of Death,
> Whereas the sages like Sanak meditate always, O Disillusioned Mind/1/
> Don't dig pond nor well, nor build temple nor arch
> Nor Consecrate Lord on throne nor go to Brindaban nor Gopa
> Don't go to Prayag and Gomati, O Disillusioned Mind/2/

Don't hold this knowledge in heart nor put on garland nor paste tilak on forehead
Don't hold matted hair on head nor put on holy underwear
Nor smear ashes on your body as there is no salvation on the bank of Ganges, O Disillusioned Mind/3/
Meditate on your soul to realize the truth in others and you will be happy,
If you can see into yourself the dazzling reality
Says thoughtfully idiotic Achyuti, O Disillusioned Mind/4/ (Tr. Author)

Besides the Raslila propagation/ *Rahasa Kirtan*, to uplift the spiritual and cultural learning of the deprived cowherdmen, Achyutananda wrote a number of *Ogal** songs (songs of challenge/ encounter) narrating various theoretical precepts. These songs were meant for singing and dancing performances during several festivals and they contained many instructions about cow husbandry, producing healthy food products and marketing them in healthy ways for economic and cultural uplift of the cowherdmen. Combining religion with sustainable development, this saint did contribute profusely to help the down-trodden to come up and face the challenge of time when the land of Odisha was under the threat of foreign invasion like Muslims invading Odisha to destroy the monuments and plunder the rich religious shrines and destroy them and loot the public as a whole. The following are the samples of a few *ogal* songs which testify the knowledge crusade of this *Mahapurush* (great man) who stood for economic, cultural and spiritual boost to promote healthy living in the line of epic ages:

OGAL – I

Questions:

Listen O cowherdmen brethren! What I am asking
Explain me all one by one
I have kept them in mind since days so many
Tell me how many kinds of robes has a cowherdman
How do they go out in what robe?
How do they show their visage in how many robes?
Tell O brothers! Answer these select queries
It is getting so late as Achtyuta says:

Answers:

Listen O What you asked, brothers Cowherdmen!
We shall answer all fast one by one.
In our first robe we wear wooden sandal in feet
In the second we blow the buffalo-horn-made pipe
In the third robe, we put on a red loin cloth
And garland of Tulsi leaves on our shoulders back and front
In the fourth robe we use kohl in our eyes
In the fifth we put on garland of flowers
In the sixth robe we put a vermillion mark on foreheads
In the seventh we hold a flute in our hands

In the eighth we hold a sacred thread on our shoulders
In the ninth we hold an umbrella in our hands
In the tenth we put *gochina** mark on our foreheads
In the eleventh we put on various flowers
In the twelfth we hold a stick in our hands
Says Achyutananda thus we come out dressed. (Tr. Author)

OGAL - II

Questions:

Listen O! listen O! jewels of Cowherdmen
Allow me to ask you many a question
Tell me how did the pitcher evolve?
How was the water created and put in it?
How is the filled pitcher put on the ceremonial site?
Uttering which mantra are put the pulses and molasses at offering
With which chant of mantra the milk is offered to the gods?
Uttering which mantra do you hold flute and *singa* in your hand?
With which mantra you milk your cows
Uttering which mantra you untether the calf
With which mantra you offer the first milk to the Lord
Uttering which mantra you take stick and umbrella to your hands
With what mantra you offer water to your cows to drink
With which mantra you enter your cows to their congress
While closing the gate which mantra you chant
Uttering which mantra you arrange your basket
Answer these queries after thorough rumination
Asks Achyuta you answer these soon.

Answers:

Hearing all these speaks the son of Parvati
For the greed of son offerings were done like this
Said Ganapati like this to Lord Brahma
The World Enchanter Lord Siva first made the earthen pitcher
For many days the pitcher was not consecrated
Thus I would say the rules for consecration
When fruit and flowers were put on the pitcher
We chanted in three twilights the names of Lords three
Uttering the Name of Lord Siva we pour water in the pitcher
Chanting the name of Vishnu we put coconut on it
Now listen O brothers! The secret of Gopal's birth
Now the *Dol* festival has been arranged by new brides
Dazzles like new clouds Radha-Krishna's tri-dimensioned twin shape
That adorns the platform of *Dol* festival
We bow before Him uttering the Gopal mantra

We move round the throne uttering *Om* sound
We milk the cow muttering the mantra of calf
We put milk pot in thread-hanger uttering Tarak mantra
We bring back the cows from grazing ground reminiscing Sudama
Enter them into their shed with *shishuved* mantra
We go for selling curd uttering the mantra of Radhika
And arrange our baskets uttering the name of great goddess
We close gate at cow shed reminiscing Ananta
The mantra for opening the gate is the mantra panchakshar
The mantra for setting fire is the mantra of *jivanyasa*
And the mantra for burning fire is the twin lettered mantra
The mantra for putting ghee into pot is the twin lettered mantra
And that of thread hanger and bamboo-stick carrier is the seven lettered mantra
Mantra for walking the path is the Betal's mantra
The mantra of wearing the girdle bells is the Chandika's mantra
We tether the cows with Niranjan mantra
And mantra of carrying milk with bamboo carrier is the rice eating mantra
Mantra of *Chua** and sandal wood paste is *gopiballabhaya**
O brothers! All these mantras must you know
Listen O! Listen O! jewels of cowherdmen
Told you in summary, please don't me blame
The ogal songs gist the saga of cowherdmen
Says Achyutananda for the benefit of them. (Tr. Author)

He was the legendary hero for the cowherdmen community of Odisha during his time and has been supremely honoured so far and will continue to be so as he has been called the Mahapurush (the great man) and is worshipped as the God and as an incarnation of the Almighty's closest associate and was empowered with eight heavenly powers (*Asta Aishwaryas*) like the God and beyond. It is not only the cowherdmen community but all other communities also worship him as God and an omniscient seer. He propagated the principles of action and devotion for the uplift of all concerned and accepted disciples from all communities and worked hard for preaching the principles of salvation amongst all. For the fishermen community he wrote their seminal spiritual text called *Kaibartta Geeta* which theorizes their evolution, greatness, prescribed activities of self-sustenance, rituals and festivals. He has prescribed and narrated the virtues and practices of a true Vaishnava, Gopala, Saint, Abbot, Mahatma, Dasa, Guru, Sujana, and the like in the *Guru Bhakti Geeta* (Vol. III).

This great saint and prophet was also a great practitioner and propagator of yoga and was also a medicine maker out of herbs and wrote a number of treatises on alchemy and treatment of humans and domestic animals. In *Gopakeli Gita* and *Kuanr Gita* the poet has narrated the healthy ways of rearing the domestic animals like cows and buffalos. In *Brahma Shankuli,* he has discussed various methods of yogic exercises and use of herbal medicines through which one can live disease-free life without

hunger and thirst for many days with firm meditation on the Ultimate reality. In Seventh canto of *Brahma Shankuli*, he says that drying herbs like Harikeshar, bhumineem, banyan boughs and pounding them to powder, if one takes with cold water in the morning, one can forget thirst and hunger. Similarly powder made of dried bael leaves, ganja, shoots of brinjal leaves and basanga leaves, taken in morning with cold water for six months frees all from all diseases and physical ailments. (Sahoo 2015:91). There are several other prescriptions made by this saint for physical and spiritual well-being of all the humans.

Achyutananda Das was a saviour of the subalterns during his time and has been so since then till now as he has been a great spiritual force commanding the honour of a god since his time and his works have been the panacea of instruction for the lakhs of devotees, though many of his works have been lost and destroyed in natural calamities and the persons in charge them have not been able to protect and preserve them for various reasons. He composed a large number of future forecasting texts popularly known as *Malika* (i.e. rosary of predictions) which were the warnings and instructions to the devotees about the nature of time and people's behaviour. He inspired the public through these writings to perfect themselves to get rid of the calamities and lead peaceful lives. The people believe that his words are proved all true all the time. As such all devotees consider this great saint to be an incarnation who was born to show right direction to the erring world at a juncture of spiritual crisis.

Notes

* The mythical Padmaban (Lotus Forest) and its four goddess gatekeepers are described in the *Padmaban Rahasa* as follows:

> The jewelled platform with endless glory
> Where twelve sounds are heard endlessly
> Dazzles with five dimensions this cosmic phenomena
> It is called as such Manikarnika
> O Holy Maidens! There is heard the eternal sound
> One sheds all sins by *recognizing* this sound //14//
> Mother Ambika is the gatekeeper there
> Exists at East direction of Padmaban
> Exists Mother Bhabani at the Northgate
> Goddess of Autumn guards the Western gate
> O Holy Maidens! Guards the Southgate Goddess Champa
> She is the Champak coloured goddess named Anukampa//15//
> Constantly they visit, with utter devotion
> Serve the Almighty at Padmaban
> They come with Goddess Chacheka and Bhagabati
> Also with Chitreshwari Gopi
> O Holy Maidens! Among the holy milkmaidens she is the main
> All congregate at the Padmaban //16// (Tr. Author)

* *Ogal*- In Odia language Ogal means to encounter/challenge. The ogal songs are meant for challenging some one's knowledge in a particular field.
* *Dol*- This festival is observed in the month of March (Phagun) and the famous *Holi* festival is a part of it. It is chiefly a festival of Cowherdmen and Lord Krishna played it with the gopis. Now it is a universally popular festival in India. In Dol Lord Krishna and his consort Radha visit the households in a Rath (Chariot)-like mobile decorated platform called Biman which is carried by at least four cowherdmen.
* *Gochina*- A yellow-coloured camphor like product collected from head of some rare dead cows which has divine healing power. Butchers collect this while scaling skin of dead cows and uprooting horns etc. and sell this product which is precious like gold.
* *Chua*- An oily coarse perfumed product, which is mixed with the sandalwood paste (Chandan) and is used at worshipping the Lord.
* *Gopiballabhaya*- is a part of the Gopal mantra (The Gopal mantra is- om klim krishnaya gobinday gopijana ballabhay swaha).

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