

## **Vivekachaitanya and Jatadhari's Spiritual Awakening in *Confessions of a Sannyasi* and *The Man from Chinnamasta***

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**Abstract.** In Indian culture spirituality plays a vital role. Spirituality has the goal of liberation which means to acquire the moksha. It is an integration of Sadhana, meditation, mantra, Vedas, shlokas, etc. There are two basic and the greatest enemies of spirituality – Kama (lust) and Kanchana (Gold). Predominantly, in the modern age, human being became materialistic. Spiritual principles and spiritual ideals have very different place in Indian culture and tradition. Nowadays it has been affected due to modernization. In Indian culture, no doubt sadhus, saints, gurus are spiritual guide of Indian society. At present, they take advantage of innocent peoples' gullibility. In Indira Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta* Jatadhari does not deceive the people but deceives heroine Dorothy and many other women. Jatadhari fights against animal sacrifice. But in Mukunda Rao's *Confessions of a Sannyasi* Ravi (Vivekachaitanya) is not a real saint. After two years' refuge in the ashram, he becomes a fake saint and deceives the women also. Spiritual awakening is discussed by various writers in their works. Mukunda Rao and Indira Goswami are the prominent writers among them.

**Keywords :** Spirituality; meditation; saint; Indian culture; tradition; ashram; contemplation; animal sacrifice; Bhagwadgita; Upanishads; hermit, seclusion, materialistic world; paintings.

India is known for its culture, various traditions, arts, classical music, various rituals, Vedas, etc. In Indian culture, a true saint or holyman has significant role in the lives of common man. A sannyasi's first and most important duty is to destroy any root and branch, any feeling of attachment that may still linger in his heart for the worldly pleasures and materialistic world :

A Sannyasi, a wanderer living on alms, never rooted  
to any place except when he seeks the seclusion of  
a cave or forest at some stage for prolonged  
meditation. (Dnyate 13)

This is the shastra based concept of sanyasi which depends on traditional fourth ashram. No doubt, throughout the ages, saints, sadhus, gurus are spiritual guide in Indian society. But at present they take advantage of innocent people's gullibility. They have nothing to do with their emotions and feelings.

A true sage must have some abilities. He should have the knowledge of Vedas. He must have the ability of contemplation. Through meditation, he must have various spiritual principles and spiritual ideals. He must have been fitted with yogas and siddhis. It is however, in Patanjali's *Yogasutras* that we have the first systematic presentation of yoga both as a philosophical system and as a treatise on applied psychology. Briefly, in the yoga system "chitta (mind) is a single unitary thing, but is made up of three aspects, or gunas – Sattva, rajas and tamas". (Rao, K. Ramakrishna 307)

In the Indian tradition spirituality has the goal which is liberation (moksha) :

The goal of spirituality, like that of science, is also liberation. It is the liberation of the inner spirit. Spirituality could be seen also as a complementary force that gives a positive direction to science and acts as an antidote to the latter's use for destructive purposes. In the least, it provides coping mechanisms to deal with psychologically debilitating anxiety, stress, fear and helplessness. (*Ibid.*)

Spirituality is known to free humans from all kinds of sufferings and personal frustration. 'Spirituality penetrates beyond the appearances and reaches the heart of things, which is Divinity.' ( Ananda 20) At the same time, spiritual practices as prescribed by different belief systems may also be seen as superstitious behaviour and stifle ambition and achievement. Instead of liberating, human being may use human spirit for ignorance, disease and deprivation, miracles, hypnotism, planchette, fortune telling. These are, in fact, obstacles to spiritual life. Thus spiritual practices are double edged. They could be used to emaciate or to enslave us.

As spirituality is a significant quality of a real saint, it is reflected in the various novels in Indian fiction in English. Among them Mukunda Rao's *Confessions of a Sannyasi* and Indira Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta* are predominant novels for their extravagant writings.

As above stated that spiritual practices are double-edged, Mukunda Rao's *Confessions of a Sannyasi* is negative aspect of spirituality. It tells the story of a middle class boy who belongs to a good and respectable traditional family having every usual material comfort, and who quite unexpectedly leaves his home and joins Nityananda's ashram. In ashram, everyday brahamacharis and brahamacharinis gather for meditation. When Yogachaitanya was fully immersed in the bhajan:

I tried to join in the resounding voices around me.  
It was like swimming on the surface. The body came

alive at every point and the consciousness of the body in contact with water was exciting. But it was an incomplete experience. I had to dive under and probe the depth of the ocean; capture and contain the mysterious stillness. (Rao 10)

Ravi or Vivekachaitanya is also deeply involved in bhajan with him. He feels floating on the water which was very exciting. He wants to remain with these eternal moments of mysterious peace. He lives in the atmosphere where one can think, 'Here almost everyone thinks that through study and meditation they can attain anything'. (19) In spirituality, meditation plays a significant role :

Meditation is active contemplation, as distinguished from the feeling of calm which constitutes the essence of contemplation. Thus viewed, meditation is whole- hearted concentration, on the part of its practitioner, on what he considers to be the most sublime object. Such concentration is a prolonged process of internal quietude, together with abstraction from the solicitations of the senses, which enable the human soul to acquire a unique dimension of spiritual experience. In consequence, the meditator's personality is raised to a higher level and there happens the release of his previously unknown powers, including the power of 'seeing into eternity.' (Banerjee 70)

Meditation is a continuous and long process of *Dhyana- dharna*. It is a base of spirituality. In this process, practitioner has to concentrate on his mantras. To feel the eternal bliss of spirituality, he must cross the barriers of worldly pleasures. He has to integrate his body with soul. Then only he can see eternal world with his spiritual eyes.

When he visits frequently Bangalore center with brahmachari Ramakrishna he understands the meaning of eternal world. There he reads a book by Swami Nityananda. After reading his book, he eagerly wants to meet him. Fortunately, this meeting changes his life. Furthermore, he listens Nityananda Swamiji's discourses regularly and carefully :

I went on a leave of absence for ten days to attend Swamiji's discourse, both in the mornings and evenings. I had never heard a man talk on *the Gita* and *the Upanishadas* with such simplicity, and make such tremendous influence on his listeners. The more

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I heard him the more I yearned to be in his presence, and burned with anxiety to meet him; beg him to accept me as his disciple. He had to merely tell me, 'Come away' and I was ready to abandon everything, and totally surrender myself to him. Was he not a realized soul? His demeanour, his mystical eyes, the clarity in his voice, his mudras, bore the stamp of an enlightened Master! (Rao 43)

Here, Ravi acquires a spiritual awareness in the real sense. He is able to understand the importance of discourses in spirituality. He is influenced by Nityananda's discourses on Gita and Upanishadas. The knowledge of Bhagwadgita and Upanishadas is essential to get spiritual pleasure. He feels indebted to listen to the preaching about Gita with such simplicity. He wants to become his disciple. For this, he is ready to leave everything. He wants to surrender himself with body and soul. He is tremendously impressed with his behaviour, expressions and mudras.

After spending three years in the ashram, he goes to Bangalore to the missionary work. He feels more comfortable in the world of Gita, Upanishadas and satsangas :

I stopped going to the school, meeting friends, talked less and less, and turned more and more inward. Almost everyday, shutting myself in my room, read Swamiji's books, chanted and meditated for long hours. Some nights, I slipped out of my bed, went into the fields, sitting cross-legged in some grassless spot, raised my eyes at the star-studded sky and meditated so long that tears trickled down my eyes and I told myself, 'There is peace within. I am one with the world. What is this Universe, the moon and the billions of stars but an extension of me. I am deathless. I am That!'

All sense of time was lost upon me, life attained an ethereal quality. People at home were bewildered over my new change; psychologically I had moved out of their world. (46)

Furthermore, his interest in spiritual activities increases. Now he has nothing to do with outside world. He feels better in chanting, meditation, and book reading rather than meeting friends and other sources of time pass and fun-making. Family members and other people are not ready to accept this change. Everyone is against joining the ashram. Only his grandmother is in favour of him. She strokes his hair

and says chokingly, 'You are a gem in our community. God wants you to serve Him, go, go to Him, we won't come in your way'.(48) After his grandmother's support he is relaxed now. At least someone was with him. He thinks more intensely about spiritual world :

I must have sat there like a stone pillar in some ancient temple, completely lost to the external world. I cannot recall even a single face, a single event, absolutely nothing. The world, after all was *maya*, like blossoms seen in the air. People, events, places were only instants in time against the backdrop of the eternal Reality. Nothing was permanent. In illusion we clung to people, our experiences, ideas: Ideas of nation, society, family, happiness, love, attributing intrinsic values to them and falling into a world of opposites, falsities. *Na dhanena na prajaya tyagenaikam amritatwam anashuh*—Not by wealth, not by progeny, but by renunciation alone immortality is reached. (48-49)

He cannot tolerate the existence of anyone. He doesn't want to remember any incident or place which is related with his personal or familial life. He wants to live fully immortal life. For which, he must sacrifice all the worldly pleasures. :

Life in the ashram, compared to what we saw here, was a luxury. My exposure to this life had begun to turn me inside out. Abandoning the security, order, discipline and knowledge,— a bloodless, fleshless knowledge, which had begun to wither from inside, I had plunged into a world that appeared suddenly chaotic and meaningless. (103)

He feels more comfortable in the ashram life than the outside world. He feels grateful to acquire such a knowledge which has no blood, no flesh, no colour, no language. Suddenly, he feels irritated with materialistic world. There is only one thing which is not suited to his personality of Vivekachaitanya that he feels so deeply touched by Vanitha's personality that he starts fancying himself marrying her. Again towards the end of the novel Ravi is introduced to a non-professional prostitute by Machado to experience sexual pleasures. But there is nothing wrong in it. Because most of our rishis and the gods depicted in our holy books also dwelt upon the sex and women. Mukunda Rao quotes the famous example of Shiva from Indian myth in support of his argument:

Once because Shiva caused the sages' wives to shed their clothes at the sight of his naked erect phallus, the sages cursed his linga to fall to the earth and burnt everything before it like fire. (72)

There is no illegal thing that Ravi is eager to fulfil his sexual desires. Like *Confessions of a Sannyasi*, Indira Goswami's *The Man From Chinnamasta* also mainly focuses on the subject of animal sacrifice at the famous Kamakhya temple. Chinnamasta Jatadhari is an ascetic who plays important role to ban this convention:

The man was once a student of history at the Benaras Hindu University. He had roamed around North Kashi for a while after his initiation as an ascetic. Later on he had meditated for a long time in a cave in the Vindhya. It was said that during this period he had lived at one with nature. Venomous serpents had nested in his matted locks. Wild birds had perched on his arms.

Respectful of all creatures, the Jatadhari could not bear the sight of blood at the goddess' sacred abode. He would say, "Man is god's creation. Man has many a thing to learn from animals. Only when men and animals live in harmony with the world become a paradise." (Goswami 179-180)

Chinnamasta Jatadhari was a brilliant scholar from Benaras. He has extensive knowledge about History. He knew many languages. He has tremendous affection with various birds and animals. Various venomous serpents are swirled around his dreadlocks. He is deeply hurt by this inhuman treatment to sacrifice mute animals to worship the Goddess. With these things he has interest in paintings. He encourages the young artists to paint something quite extraordinary. Ratnadhar is his important disciple. Jatadhari inspires Ratnadhar to paint various paintings. Along with these things, people think that he has powers as well about last rites of corpse. :

Chinnamasta Jatadhari prayed continuously for two nights squatting over the corpse. I saw it with my own eyes. If the family abandoned the corpse so, it was only because they wanted the Jatadhari to perform the last rites. ( 8 )

People incline to get the last rites performed by Jatadhari. He prays to God at the time of performing the last rites. They feel indebted when Jatadhari will perform last rites on the relative's corpse. Except these he has many other extraordinary qualities :

The ascetic from Chinnamasta cut through the surging mass of devotees –the asthma victims, the deranged, the gastric patients, the fathers of marriageable daughters. Gently, he took Ratnadhar and eased him to the ground. The bystanders closed in to get a better look. The Jatadhari was squatting over the young man, in meditation, chanting Om Hreeng...Om Hreeng. His voice was soft, mesmerizing. One by one he picked up the flowers and offered them in concentrated worship as he repeated the incantations. (10)

He is popular among the people from far and wide as someone blessed with power to cure sickness. He can cure various incurable diseases confidently. He meditates continuously with soft voice. He preached his devotees with examples that give moral :

The words purled from Chinnamasta Jatadhari's mouth. "No peace of mind, no peace of mind!" He raised his hands sharply, asking the crowd. "Do any of you have peace of mind?"

No one replied. Not even the man who, till a while ago, had been dominating the gathering. The ascetic allowed himself a smile. He said in a consoling voice, "No one is happy. No one. People somehow manage to string body and soul together and carry on." (13-14)

According to him, no one is happy in the world. No one has peace of mind. People just try to console themselves that they are happy. Giving discourse, he uses many aphorisms. Along with these things he has many magical powers. :

Dambaru asked Ratnadhar, "I have heard a lot about this Jatadhari. Is it true that he has magical powers? They say the restless magpie settles down before him, to sing its melodies. The shy swallows are said to grow boisterous in his presence." Ratnadhar

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nodded. Dambaru continued, “One of his disciples said that he can stand on the water. Is that true? Poisonous snakes are entwined in his matted locks.” Ratnadhar nodded again. “They say he stays under water for hours. Is that so?” (114)

Furthermore, he has attained magical powers also. He can control different heinous and brutal birds and animals. They sing melodiously in the existence of Jatadhari. He can stand on the surface of the water also.

Indira Goswami also narrates the important things for a true hermit :

A student from the tol shouted, “If we are welcoming the Jatadhari straight from the river, we must offer him a seat made of stone, kusha grass or wood. The scriptures state that in order to worship Durga, a seat of stone, bones or wood is appropriate. Listen, not any other bones but an elephant’s. Seats of iron, bronze and lead are also not appropriate.

“Ratnadhar, you must have read the shloka that says, seats made of gold embedded with pearls are useless to an ascetic. Wood, bones, cloth and cotton are more than adequate for a hermit.” (140)

Moreover, Shastra also tells which metal is appropriate to sit upon for the worship. Hereafter, it further states that a true hermit has nothing to do with gold and pearl embedded thrones as they are useless. Jatadhari knows these things very well. He has all kinds of shastra - based knowledge which is essential to become a true hermit. He knows very well that animal sacrifice is a brutal convention hence he strongly opposes it :

The Jatadhari raised his hands skywards, reassuring them. “Do not panic. Taking life is not easy. Those trying to wipe out this bloody ritual must be prepared to sacrifice their own blood.” (153)

Jatadhari pleads for worshipping Ma Chinnamasta with flowers and encourages the supporters to offer their own blood instead of that of innocent animals to the goddess. To their surprise, he makes a deep cut in his navel and offers his own blood to support his argument against animal sacrifice. Thus it is proved that Vivekachaitanya in *Confessions of a Sannyasi* and Chinnamasta Jatadhari in *The Man From Chinnamasta* have spiritual qualities. Because these are Jatadhari’s efforts

through which animal sacrifice is successfully banned completely in Kamakhya temple forever. Hence, to prevent India from decline we have to adopt the principles of spirituality. According to Swami Vivekananda, "Indians should purify their religious life and instill spiritual thoughts into every aspect of their lives." (Prabhananda 62)

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