CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The role of religion is very important in a tradition bound society like India. A lot of social and cultural idioms prevalent in the Indian society is enshrined in the lore of various sects, sampradayas, cults as well as in the rites and rituals, values and ideologies centering around religion. Religion has been one of the most effective means for sustaining tradition or parampara. The overwhelming majority of Indian people [827578868 (83%) Census 2001] follow Hindu religion. The impact of Hindu religion has tremendous implications in shaping the Indian society across the ages. It has influenced the world-outlook, philosophies, art, architecture, sculpture, music, literature, political power, political processes, patterns of social stratification and hierarchy, family, culture, education and economic life of Indians. Hinduism shape the cultural mainstream in India. It sustains the traditions of Indian society. It implication for the Indian society and culture has been viewed differently by different thinkers. “Hinduism is the best, or at least the largest, single instance of traditional culture” (Smith, 2008:6). Max Weber’s study on Hindu religion claims that religious ritualism and caste system are inimical to the modern development or change along the line of modernity. In other words, they are responsible for social conservatism. (Aron, 1976:228; Weber, 1958). Smith observed, “Both Hinduism and modernity are contentious terms, threatened and threatening” (2008:5). A. K. Saran asserts, as Saraswati points out, that Hindu religion is “unabashedly traditional and not conducive to the orthogenetic evolution of a rational modern world”. At another place, Saran (1977) says that the core values of the Indian tradition cannot survive in a technology centred society, and Gandhi had realized this with unshakable clarity (Saraswati, 1985:13-14, ICSSR, Vol.-II). Yogendra Singh too, observed in a similar vein, “Although, unlike Dayananda, Vivekananda and Gandhi did not plead for deliberate hostility [to] or rejection of the non-Hindu cultural values and religious beliefs, yet their interpretation of Hinduism and their formulation of the cultural policies for the Hindu society itself were such that it came as a sharp contradiction to the western or modern way of life and its basic value premises.” (1977:44).

Undoubtedly, Hindu religion is one of the most effective means for sustaining tradition or parampara. But that does not mean that Hindu religion is a static and
changeless religion. A number of scholars point out the process of change in the domain of Hindu religion. Saraswati (1985) has shown that in the mainstream of Indian sociological and anthropological thought, there is the assumption that the Hindu religious tradition is fully compatible with change and modernity. This stream of thought has been fed by the studies of S. C. Dube, D. N. Majumdar, M. N. Srinivas, N. K. Bose, L. P. Vidyarthi, Milton Singer and Surajit Sinha. Viswanathan (2003) points out the changes in and the modernity of Hinduism. A few crucial points have been mentioned by her— (1) Hinduization occurred in pre-Muslim India, when a competitive religious spirit among various sects - Saivas, Vaisnavas, Jains, Buddhist [?], Smartas among others — created a tendency to make one religious view prevail over the others. (2) During the Muslim rule Hinduism faced a serious challenge from the followers of Islam but it was not wiped out. (3) The impact of British colonialism brought about a remarkable change in Hinduism. In this period the spiritual leadership of Hinduism was centered in all-India institutional bodies. (2003 : 29 ). In the process of meeting the waves of aggression by the new values of the west, it selectively adopted certain elements from them and thereby, apparently, strengthened itself.

Viswanathan concludes in the following manner, “...the newly invigorated Hinduism of the nineteenth century is constituted as an exclusive defence against the assault of ‘foreign’ religions, Christianity as much as Islam. This new Hinduism borrows features from European modernity and rational religion; most importantly, it relies on the concept of the nation-state in order to claim a national, all-India character.” (2003:30 ). Another important scholar Atul Sur thought along the same line. For him, Hinduism always changes its rules and regulations to make a balance with the changing nature of social life and the stream of historical events across the ages. If it failed to harmonize with the changes of national life, it would have been obliterated long time ago (1998 : 47). At another place Sur depicts Hinduism as a dynamic religion and its dynamism provides Hinduism a measure of solidarity (2008 : 239).

D. P. Mukejhi (1958 ) rightly points out, the various saint founders of numerous sects, etc., have through the ages brought about changes in the social system with the help of their own experience or generalized ‘anubhavas’ of the conditions of the lower castes and classes, of the women labouring under an inferior status in the existing social systems. These religious personalities have organized collective dissent against the prevailing social arrangements. D. P. considers the supremacy of generalized
‘anubhava’ (experience) as the principle of change. The process has been operating, according to him, from the Middle Ages down to modern times. (Mukerji. 1958 : 237-38).

Yogendra Singh (1977) has shown that the orthogenetic changes in the Hindu tradition continued to take place from the classical age of the Hindu period of history (A.D. 300 - 700), through post-classical (A. D. 700 - 1500), and medieval periods (A. D. 1500 - 1800) to the contemporary times. As these changes were taking place in the wake of the breakaway traditions of Buddhism and Jainism, etc., in subsequent periods signs of segmentation and disintegrative pluralism also began to appear. Sankaracharya by his exegesis of the great tradition contributed a great deal to unifying the cultural tradition of Hinduism (Singh. 1977 : 41). Examples are legion. To cite a few, Andal, a saint of South India of 9th century, followed the cult of devotionalism and opposed casteism (Sen. 2008 : 87). Another saint Ramanuja of 11th-12th century emphasized the metaphysical but devotional and ritual aspect of Hindu religion. Madhva of South India appeared in the 13th century, who also propagated the devotional cult of Hinduism. Both Ramanuja and Madhva supported the temple entry for the lower castes, and the removal of their many disabilities. (Singh. 1977 : 42 ).

A major wave of devotionalism came in during the medieval period when Islam became increasingly visible. In this age, innumerable saints and gurus appeared in different parts of India. Nambiandar, Nimbark, Basava (Lingayat) of South India, Ramananda and Kabir of North India, Nanak of West India and Chaitanya of East India are the most important gurus and saints of the Middle Ages. They propagated their own experiences or generalized ‘anubhava’ among the people in popular language and tried to understand their agony and misery. For example, Chaitanya (1485 - 1533) started a new movement within the fold of Bengali Vaisnavism. Appealing especially to a newly emergent “middle class” in Bengal, viz. , merchants, farmers, artisans, Chaitanya offered an egalitarian form of Vaisnavism which borrowed brahminical ideas while critiquing brahminic hegemony. (Bhaduri. 1988 : 141; Clothey. 2008 : 145 ). These gurus and saints of devotional-liberal tradition of Hinduism raised questions regarding the utility of casteism and vedic rituals. They contributed to the process of change in Hinduism in two ways. First, they liberalized the orthodox conception of religious beliefs and carried the liberalized view of religion...
or spirituality to the people in their own languages; they rendered the so far esoteric and ritual-ridden religious beliefs into simpler idioms of the masses; some of them, notably Kabir and Nanak, also introduced purely humanistic and mystical values in religious beliefs criticizing both the Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy. Some of them also wanted to abolish the social disabilities based on caste, sex and religious beliefs. (Singh. 1977:42). Their second contribution was to bridge the gap between the little and the great traditions of Hinduism. (Ibid). And, in this way, they paved the way to social and cultural change in the realm of Hindu tradition.

In the Modern Age, religion is viewed sceptically by many of those who have been influenced in one way or another by the process of westernization and secularization and such intellectual currents as that of Marxism. These processes and currents would or could undermine, if not totally obliterate, the importance of religion in modern, particularly, post-independence India. But, contrary to this inference or expectation, India has witnessed a massive upsurge of multitude of religio-mystical cults of saints, gurus and godmen since the British colonial times, e.g., Ramakrishna (1836 - 1886), Vivekananda (1863 - 1902), Aurobindo (1872 - 1950), Ramana Maharshi (1879 - 1950), Shivananda (1887 - 1963), Jagatguru Shri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati (1894 - 1994), Bhaktivinoda Prabhupada (1896 - 1977), Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (born 1911), Satchidananda (born 1914), Sathya Sai Baba (born 1926-2010), Rajneesh (1931 - 1990) etc. In this respect the scenario of West Bengal is not radically different from the other states, though it has been ruled by a leftist government for the last 34 years. Names of some notable Bengalee gurus are Lokenath Brahmachari (1730 sic. - 1890), Kedemath Dutta Bhaktivinod (1838 ? - 1914), Anukul Thakur (1888 - 1969), Bijay Krishna Goswami (1841 - 1899), Annada Thakur (1297 - 1335 Beng. Year), Sitaram Das Omkernath (1891 - 1982), Pranabananda Swami (1896 - 1941), Dhananjay Das Kathiababa (1308 - 1390 Beng. Year), Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar (1921 - 1990), etc. These gurus and godmen themselves and/or their followers claim that they genuinely possess special powers and such powers are for many Hindus inseparable from spirituality. The cult of the gurus works at various levels. Some of these cults operate at the local, district and regional levels, while the others have established themselves at the national as well as international level. Under the guidance or direct leadership of these gurus and saints a number of new religious movements have emerged in India. “Most of the new religious movements are guided by the motive of intro-
ducing change in traditional religions” (Mehta. 1993 : V). Many of them have brought in new ideas, new values, new norms, new attitudes. Some sort of spiritual democracy has been brought in by them. They ignore the differences of caste, class and even religion. M. N. Srinivas points out that the newly emerged gurus and new religious movements are the agents of the process of reinterpretation of Hinduism (2001:138). L. A. Babb also holds a similar view of the phenomenon. One may add to it the fact that quite a few sects and gurus and their cults attempt even a sort of syncretism of the elements of traditional Hinduism and those of its age-old contender, viz., Islam, in order to win the hearts of the devotees at the folk and the elite level. The cult of saint / guru / pir appeared not only in the realm of Hinduism but also in the domain of other minor religions, such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism etc. In West Bengal some of them are most prominent and popular too, viz. the cult of Barkhan Gazi of Ghutiari Sarif, Manik Pir, Pir Gorachand etc. They are not only popular among the Muslims but also among the members of the Hindu community of West Bengal.

A number of religious cults/groups emerged largely in several modern secular western countries, such as America. While the term ‘sect’ classically refers to a breakaway movement from a mainstream church, the term ‘cult’ became a popular way of referring to new and different religious groups. Some of these cults surfacing in the 1960s and 1970s in America are, for example, The Unification Church (known as the ‘Moonies’ after their leader Sun Myung Moon), Scientology, the Children of God, Branch Davidians, and also ISKCON (that has become widely known in West Bengal as well).

Interest in cults in America has been revived since the events in Waco, Texas, drew national and international attention in 1993. There under the leadership of David Koresh, a self-styled messiah, emerged the Branch Davidians, a breakaway sect from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. It is interesting to note that what drew the media’s interest was not so much the existence of the Branch Davidians themselves, but rather the intervention of the ATF and the FBI. Despite attempts at a peaceful end to what became a siege scenario, the authorities lost control of the situation resulting in the death of 75 people, the vast majority of whom were members of the group. The events at Waco perhaps teach as many lessons about the intolerance and suspicion amongst the influential sectors of American society with respect to religious minorities as about the potential for religious ideologies to produce harm as well as good.
Point to be noted here is that the Indian context is radically different from the American social milieu. Different religious cults in India are not identical with the American religious cults.

How the Indian cults are functioning and what impact they exercise on the Indians of today constitute a legitimate field of inquiry by the students of sociology not only in India but all over the world.

**Domain of the present study**

The phenomenon of religion attracts the attention of the sociologists because of its great importance. Religion is an important part of society. No society is absolutely free from the influence of religion. The institution of religion is found in all the societies, past and present. Edwin A. Burtt (1981 : 131) depicts religion as a major guide on the human journey. He writes, "The word 'religion' refers to a pervasive, powerful, and persistent force in human life. But it is haunted with serious difficulties, arising largely from people's varied acquaintance with that force. It may be associated in their experience with wise insight, benevolence, comforting security, and hope, or it may reverberate with echoes of unwelcome authority, primitive superstition, even aggressive exploitation. And the nuances between these extremes are many. Would that such an ambiguous word could be avoided! But one who seeks to understand man can hardly get along without it" (1981 : 131).

Religion is both an individual and a collective phenomenon. It consists of a body of beliefs and ideas about spirituality and/or speciality of supra-individual phenomenon, a set of practices and a range of moral prescription. Religion plays as an agent of social control because it regulates the activities of people in its own way. Religion prescribes a set of rules of conduct for people to follow. It is also an effective means of preserving the values of life. It constructs and reconstructs, defines and redefines the moral, spiritual and social values. O'Dea writes, "... religion sacralizes the norms and values, contributing to social control; legitimates the allocation patterns of the society, thereby aiding order and stability; and aids in the reconciliation of the disaffected" (1969 : 14). Religion covers the entire span of human life, from birth to death. It contributes to social cohesion, but in certain situations may also lead to conflict. For example, the cow as a sacred symbol of the Hindus gives cohesion to the Hindu society. At the same time the movement for the protection of cow has given birth to the conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims.
The influence of religion on the different aspects of society is a universal phenomenon. A student of sociology can hardly miss it. One should not also miss that religion also is influenced by the society or, in other words, the other aspects of society. More precisely, there is a reciprocal relationship between religion and society. Religion should not be treated as completely autonomous, independent, eternal and static. Beteille notes “Religious beliefs and practices vary and change, and this has to be examined in relation to variation and change in the structure of society. No religion operates independently of specific social arrangements” (2006: 39). Beliefs, cults, rituals, religious institutions, denominations are changed and changing. For example, in modern times, many major denominations “have increasingly emphasized this world as opposed to the other world, they have moved away from traditional doctrine and concern with the supernatural, they have compromised their religious beliefs to fit in with the wider society” (Haralambos with Heald. 1998 : 479).

In case of the Indian context, one may add to this that various kinds of processes, viz., sanskritization, westernization, secularization, etc., are introducing changes into the domain of religion. Consequently innumerable cults, sects and religious organizations have evolved.

Durkheim has written, “....religion is something eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rituals are ways of acting that are generated only within assembled groups and are meant to stimulate and sustain or recreate certain mental states in these groups” (2001 : 1).

So, no explanation of religion can be complete without considering its sociological aspects. (O'Dea. 1969 : 1). The sociology of religion has been evolved out of this demand. It is the study of religion in relation to the social structure and social process. The sociology of religion studies the relation between religion and society in general as well as the relations which are internal to specific religious organization and institutions (Nayar. ed. 2000 : 299 [Encyclopedia]. More precisely, it studies religious beliefs, practices, organizations of the primitive and advanced, the rural and the urban, the eastern and the western societies. Beteille has rightly mentioned that an important feature of the sociological approach to religion consists in “the investigation of religious beliefs, practices and institutions in relation to the other aspects of society and culture” (2005: 56). Grace Davie has put the matter more lucidly when he says that “the sociology of religion aims to discover the patterns of social living
associated with religion in all its diverse forms and to find explanations for the data that have emerged” (2008 : 6).

The sociology of religion does not show any sympathy or apathy to the religious phenomena. Sociology studies religion in three ways. Firstly, sociology is concerned with the relation of religion to social structure and social process, including the function of religions in particular societies. Secondly, in the study of given societies or of separate institutions in any society, the sociologist may be concerned with the functional relationships between religious institutions and the particular area of his concentration. In this instance, a study of social structure and motivation for achievement will have to take into account the effects of various religious identifications and backgrounds on the former. Thirdly, the study of particular religious groups or of particular religious problems must pay attention to the effects of social structure and social processes on the religious group and its ideas (Nayar. ed. 2000 : 316 [Encyclopedia]).

The sociology of religion as a sub-discipline of sociology, has been fed by many eminent scholars, viz. Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Antonio Gramsci, Gustav Mensching, etc. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels developed a new approach to the study of religion. Bottomore and Rubel called them the true founders of sociology of religion (1975 : 20). The dialectical approach of Marxism shows that the religion as a part of superstructure is determined by the mode of production or economic system. But it is not a single way traffic. Economic system is influenced by the superstructure too. In other words, all the facets of superstructure such as religion, state, political, legal, philosophical and artistic react upon one another as well as upon the economic base. So, it is not the economic system that operates as the sole active cause in human society. Human thought and consciousness are determined by the economic system and at the same time can influence the base. Marxism is commonly believed as a theory of economic determinism. Undoubtedly, it is a great mistake of the non/anti-marxist writers. Engles answered to this incorrect labeling on Marxism. He writes, "...According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure —
political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, to wit, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants: political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas, also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form." (Engels to Joseph Bloch on 21 September, 1890 in Karl Marx, *Selected Works*, Vol. -1, 1946 : 321).

One may add Gramsci's contribution to the Marxist study of religion. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), a prominent Marxist of Italy, gave more stress than his predecessors "...to the autonomous nature of the superstructure..." (Davie. 2008 : 27). More precisely, according to him, religion has capacities to exert influence independently of economic forces. Religion is "a conception of the world which has become a norm of life" (Gramsci. 1971 : 344).

Max Weber's most celebrated work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, was first published in German in 1904-05. Weber saw that religion played as a crucial factor in the rise of modern capitalism. There is an affinity between the spirit and ethic of modern capitalism and that of protestantism, i.e., its rules of conduct and practical ethics.

The intention of Weber was to understand religious action from the subjective meaning of the actor rationally and also categorically. Weber was not interested to formulate and evaluate the social function of religion. "What he wanted to show above all was the affinity—intellectual, spiritual, existential if you will — between an interpretation of Protestantism and a certain form of economic behaviour. On the basis of this affinity between the spirit of capitalism and the Protestant ethic, he shows how a way of conceiving the world orients action in the world. At the same time he explains in a positive and, as it were, scientific style, how values, ideas, and beliefs influence human behaviour and thus how the causality of religion or religious ideas operates throughout history" (Aron. 1976. Vol.-2 : 225).

From a different point of view Emile Durkheim dealt with religion. In his famous book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, first published in 1912, Durkheim presented the most influential interpretation of religion from a functionalist perspective. According to him, religion is based on sacred-profane dichotomy. In
his words, "The division of the world into two comprehensive domains, one sacred, the other profane, is the hallmark of religious thought" (2001 : 36). For Durkheim society is the real object of religious veneration. Social life cannot be possible without collective conscience. Religion reinforces the collective conscience. The worship of society strengthens the values and moral beliefs which form the basis of social life (Haralambos. 1998 : 456).

Bronislaw Malinowski (1954) collected data from small-scale non-literate societies to develop his thesis on religion. Like Durkheim, Malinowski observes religion as reinforcing social norms and values and promoting social solidarity. But, at the same time, one may find in his views a difference from Durkheim’s notion. Malinowski does not see religion as reflecting society as a whole, nor does he see religious ritual as the worship of society itself. He identifies specific areas of social life with which religion is concerned, to which it is addressed. These are situations of emotional stress which threaten social solidarity (Haralambos. 1998 : 457).

Today the sociology of religion as a sub-discipline of sociology is well established in Europe, America, and also in India. Prof. M. N. Srinivas, Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, Prof. T. N. Madan, etc., have enriched this sub-discipline.

More than fifty-nine years ago M. N. Srinivas (1952) advocated sociological approach to the study of Hinduism. Srinivas never considered Hinduism as a monolithic or single religion, rather he "spoke of local Hinduism, regional Hinduism, peninsular Hinduism and all India Hinduism" (Beteille. 2006 : 40). All India Hinduism spreads in several ways: Firstly, sanskritic deities extended their ritual and cultural forms. Secondly, the groups undergo greater sanskritization of ritual and beliefs.

Srinivas’s analysis of Hinduism is an important means to study the Hindu caste, cult and sects. He observed that Hinduism is not static, it is rather a dynamic religion and it is fully compatible with change. He writes, "An important result of mobility was a change in the culture, ritual, and lifestyle of the upwardly mobile caste or other group in the direction of the culture of the higher group that was emulated, generally one of the twice-born jatis, Brahmin, Kshatriya, or Vaisya. This is the well-known phenomenon of Sanskritization which had several dimensions to it, religious as well as secular" (2002 : 364, emphasis added). He also focused on the syncretistic character of Hinduism (Ibid : 367). In fine, his observation regarding the survival of Hinduism is crucial for the student of the sociology of religion. He observed, "....the soci-
ologist of religion finds that one of the reasons for the survival of Hinduism is its intimate linkage with the perennial concerns of the village” (Ibid : 368). And, traditionally India has lived in her villages.

Prof. A. R. Desai (1990) studied religion from the Marxist point of view. To him the Hindu religion is a conglomeration of numerous sub-religious and religious cults (1990 : 59). One may, however, find some similarity between Desai and Srinivas regarding the nature of Hinduism. According to Desai, “A number of these sub-religious and religious cults have been institutionalized. Corresponding to these institutionalized sub-religious and religious cults there exist a number of religious organizations” (Ibid). He also speaks of the common characteristics of Hinduism all over India and at the same time he mentions the regional variation of Hinduism. (Ibid. : 62).

But, Desai considers religion a means that is manipulated by the highers castes, particularly, the Brahmans, and the upper classes in order to delude the lower castes and classes. Srinivas, on the other hand, highlights the eu-function of religion.

Thus, a number of scholars have studied Hinduism from different points of view. Some of them are marxist and others are non-marxist. But both the categories have contributed a lot to the field of the study of Hinduism. It can be said that marxist scholars mainly have given emphasis to the macro-level study of Hinduism. On the other hand, most of the non-marxist sociologists have paid attention to micro-level. More precisely, the latter group mainly deals with regional or particular aspects of Hindu religion. M. N. Roy (1982), D. N. Ganguly (1994), D. D. Kosambi (1956), Romila Thapar (2007), Bhupendranath Dutta (2007), A. R. Desai (1990), U. Mehta (1993), A. D. Litman & R. B. Rybakov (1989), etc., have concentrated in their works on the general trend and features of Hinduism. Whereas, non-marxists have shown more interest in both general and particular aspects of Hinduism. One may mention the names of M. N. Srinivas (2002), M. Singer (1972), N. K. Bose (1996), B. Saraswati (1983), P. V. Veer (1989), Axel Michaels (2005), David Smith (2008), L. A. Babb (1987), A. A. Morinis (1984), P. Chakraborty (1984), F. N. Clothey (2008), T. N. Madan (1991), S. Dhar (1988), Gavin Flood (2003), Rowena Robinson (2004) etc. Their works have focused on the different aspects of Hinduism. In this way both marxist and non-marxist scholars have contributed greatly to the field of sociology of Hinduism.

The present research work falls in the domain of sociology of Hinduism. It seeks to understand the nature and functioning of a Hindu religious cult and the related
organization which, apparently, has a trend towards syncretism. And, of course, the study deals with certain other questions which also are relevant in the field of sociology of Hinduism.

**Objective of the study**

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. Fundamentally, it is different from the others. The scholars who have got used to approaching religion in a way that is most appropriate for Christianity or Islam find themselves to be overwhelmed by the specifics of Hinduism and sometimes even doubt the very possibility for Hinduism to be addressed from a general platform easily applicable to other religions. (Rybakov. 1989 : 1). Why is Hinduism different from other religions? Because, there is neither any single founder of Hinduism nor one church nor one religious leader. Nor is there one sacred text or one doctrine, one religious symbol or one sacred centre. Consequently, no single religious authority has emerged to bind the multifarious threads of Hinduism. Hinduism appears to be a conglomeration of numerous sub-religious and religious sects or sampradayas or other categories such as cult-formations, acquiring distinct forms of religious organizations (Desai, 1993 : 26). The place of cult of a guru or saint or swami is very important in the world of Hinduism. Perhaps, the cult of Guru is of central importance to Hinduism. Brent holds that, the skeleton of Hinduism is the Guru (1973 : 1). He writes, “In a confusion of ideas, philosophies and sectarian beliefs, in a morass of idolatry and superstition, faith in the Guru as intermediary resolves all problems of doctrine”. (ibid). The cult of guru is an age old institution which can be traced, at least, to the days of the *Upanishads*. Eliade notes that gurus have been playing a very significant role since the most ancient times (1987. Vol.-14 : 33). Interestingly enough, the emergence and efficacy of gurus is also a modern phenomenon.

After independence a massive upsurge of multitude of religio-mystical cults of gurus, swamis, has been seen in different parts of India, e.g., Satya Sai Baba, Bhagwan Rajnish, Swami Chinmayananda, Pandurang Shastri, Mahesh Yogi, etc. Some important Bengali gurus are Lokenath Brahmachari, Anukul Thakur, Balak Brahmac, Prabhuapada Abhayacharan.

The present research work is but a modest attempt in understanding the nature of this phenomenon. It seeks to examine the nature and functioning of an organization which despite its avowedly multipurpose character, centres around a newly emerg-
ing distinctive religious identity which shows the signs of assuming the character of a religious cult, viz., the Lokenath cult. More precisely, the research work seeks to examine the origin and functioning of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha (Chakla), against the backdrop of the legends regarding Lokenath Brahmachari and what are said to be his messages. These, legends and messages have, in recent times, been widely publicized by those who profess to be his devotees and who try to penetrate into an ever increasing number of people, particularly in West Bengal.

The phenomenon regarding Lokenath is interesting for several reasons. It shows how social factors come to resurrect the memory of a religious figure who had ceased to exist physically long before the attempt at resurrection was made. As the account below shows, Lokenath’s message was not so widely spread in his life time, as the messages of spiritual figures or saints like Ramakrishna or Ramana Maharshi spread during their life-time. His gospel was not available in writing or in print during his the span of his life. Even, it is difficult to say whether he had any sishya or disciple who was initiated into the religious life by him or, in other words received “mantra” or the “sacred formula” from him for pursuing the goal of spiritual realization or attainment of liberation from worldly bondage. It is, of course tune, that according to the legend he himself has his spiritual guru in the person known as Bhagawan Ganguly. Though, it is not known to which order he belonged to.

Lokenath, because of the above reason was not the guru of anybody about whom some concrete historical information may be available. What has puzzled the researcher is the claim made by the organizers of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha (which has been studied in detail by him) that it is a manifestation of a sect or sampradaya in the religious domain of India, and not a cult.

A sect centres around a guru but guru-sishya parampara or the succession and tradition of the preceptor and his disciples is absent from the case of the devotees of Lokenath. The researcher, however, finds that the complex that has developed keeping Lokenath at its centre partakes more of the qualities of a cult than of the features of a sect or sampradaya.

Louis Dumont, suggests, of course, guru-sishya-parampara to be a feature of a sect. But, it is also true that he has not categorically said that a cult never develops around or with a guru. And, many sociologists and anthropologists have talked of the cult of Guru to be an important feature of dynamic Hindus.
Further, the devotees of Lokenath consider him both as a manifestation of divine power, a deity embodying all the divine forces, and as a Guru. Lokenath is *parama guru* (the supreme preceptor) for them. The organizers of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha too admit this fact. And, it is interesting to note that some devotees justify their belief that Lokenath is both a deity (even the supreme deity) and a Guru by citing the well-known sloka which is as follows:

\[
\text{Gururbrhma Gurur Vishnu Gurur Deva Maheswara} \\
\text{Gurureva parambrahma Tasmai Srigurave namah.}
\]

That is, the preceptor or Gum is the embodiment simultaneously of Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Mahesvara (the destroyer) — [i.e., the Trinity adored in Hindu religious love]. Indeed, Guru is Brahma (the supreme and Universal spiritual Power) itself. Obeisance [is paid by the devotees] to that Guru.

The devotees of Lokenath including the Sangha mention that Lokenath himself said that the combines in his divine person all the qualities of the Trinity. Suddhananda Brahmachari, a well known devotee of Lokenath and the Director and Secretary to another organization connected with Lokenath and engaged in spreading his messages, has said about Lokenath that he is “the living Geeta” and at the same time “the living Quran”.

What transpires from the above is that there is no contradiction between the notion of the cult of Lokenath and Lokenath as a guru (*parama guru*) though the ritual of initiating a person (*sishya* or disciple) by a guru (preceptor) into the spiritual or religious life is absent from the complex developing around Lokenath. Moreover, the complex of beliefs and activities centering Lokenath seems to develop like a cult and falls, in to use Johnson’s words, in the ‘catch-all’ category which embraces the great heterogeneity of religious groups that do not fit the anyone of the other types such as Ecclesia, Sect, Denomination. (1966 : 437)

The researcher has analysed how those who want to sustain and further develop the cult of Lokenath propagate a sort of syncretism with an eye to the winning of allegiance of both Hindus and Muslims to the cult of Lokenath. Though, there is evidence of their working within the broad framework of idioms and rituals of the Hindu socio-religious order. Another very important aspect of the activities of the organizers lies in their constant use of modern propaganda machinery and charitable and service organizations (which address to purely mundane interests) to popularise the
cult. The study aims at understanding the complex processes involved in all these.

The social organization of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha can be described in terms of its sacred geography, its organizational structure and functions, beliefs and ideas, rituals and festivals and devotees or value-receptors. More precisely, three different and interrelated parts have been considered to understand the social organization of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha, viz. - (a) beliefs and ideas, (b) organizational structure and functions of the Sangha, and (c) pilgrim-devotees

(a) Beliefs and ideas — A number of questions are related to this part. Does the Sangha have any well defined philosophical guideline ? What is the central theme of its beliefs and ideas ? What kind of ideas does it foster ? Does it preach any kind of syncretism ?

(b) Organizational structure and functions — This part deals with some crucial questions, viz, Who are the organizers ? What is the composition of organizational structure of the Sangha ? What are the activities of the Sangha ? What is the place of the priests in the Sangha ? Nature and functions of this organizational structure would also be studied here.

(c) Pilgrim-devotees — A number of questions are dealt with in this part, viz, who is a devotee (value receptor) ? What types of pilgrims-devotees come to Chakla? What are the nature and characteristics of the pilgrims / devotees ? For what purpose do pilgrim devotees undertake pilgrimage ? What is the relationship between guru Lokenath and his devotees ? What is the significance of taking of food offered to Lokenath during his worship, viewing his image, and touching his image ?

Survey of literature and importance of the present research

The number of works similar to the present research work would not be many in the extant sociological literature, as is evident from the survey of research on the theme of religion presented by Surajit Sinha (Sinha, 1974 : 508-30) and Baidyanath Saraswati (Saraswati, 1985 : 1-35) in the ICSSR’s survey(s) of Sociology and Social Anthropology. The first survey spanned the period upto 1969 and the later covered the period between 1969 and 1979. Saraswati specifically mentions that a careful examination of the birth of new gods, new incarnations, new forms of transcendentalism with which modern India abounds is urgently needed (Ibid : 17).

The pioneering sociological (a very important and dispassionate) study of religious sects and cults in India by Akshay Kumar Dutta appeared as early as 1882
Dutta’s analysis is sociological (DuttGupta, 1972). Apart from its method Dutta’s work is specifically relevant for the present study in the sense that it highlights the ‘cult’ of Brahmacharis outside the circle of Dasanami Ascetic order of the Hindus in India. Sankaracharya and his disciples started organizing the ten branches of the Advaita school from the 9th century onwards. These monastic orders were known as the ‘Dasanami’ or ‘ten names’. These ten orders were Giri (hill), Puri (city), Bharati (learning), Vana (wood), Aranya (forest), Parvata (mountain), Sagara (ocean), Tirtha (temple), Asrama (hermitage) and Saraswati (perfect knowledge) (Sarkar, J., year not mentioned : 53-54). Lokenath Brahmachari did not, they say, belong to any of these ten orders. Rather, he can be compared with the brahmacharis as mentioned by Dutta (Ibid : 68-69).

A very important and dispassionate study of religious cults and sects of medieval India has been done by Kshitimohan Sen. He lays stress on the syncretic and liberal tradition of cults (Sen. 1965, 1990). His works deal with the syncretism of the elements of Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs and practices and its manifestation in the various cults and sects. Bhupendra Nath Dutta’s sociological study on Vaishnavism (1945) marks that the role of the cult of guru is very crucial in the realm of Bengalee Vaishnavites (Ibid : 52-64). Almost at the same time Shashibhusan Dasgupta (1946) also studied the various religious cults. His work gives a great importance to the guru-vada. He comments, “The whole field of Indian philosophy and religion is characterised by a unanimous emphasis on the Guru-vada or the doctrine of the preceptor” (1946 : 101).

G. S. Ghurye in his work, Indian Sadhus (1964), has been ingenious in pointing out the necessary changes experienced as well as initiated by the organization of Hindu asceticism and ascetics in response to the vicissitude of historical circumstances in India. If his analysis of the traits of Hindu asceticism has been masterly, the part of work which is most relevant for the present research relates to that social service of varied kinds has now come to be recognized as a legitimate and important objective of ascetic and monastic life in India (Ibid : 235). Of course, the work does not examine the phenomenon of newly emerging cults of gurus, munis and godmen in India.

M. N. Srinivas has brought forward the question of reinterpretation of Hinduism and related activities in modern India (1982 : 142). New cults, saints, either alive or deceased, contribute to the evolution of a new structure of Hinduism. The lectures
or discourses of the saints or their disciples or devotees attract large audience and focus on the religious interests of many people. They have built up vast religious organizations which are involved in various religious and secular activities and voluntary work. That is why M. N. Srinivas suggests, “The rise of new cults and the functions they fulfil are subjects that need to be studied systematically.” (Ibid. : 132)

Milton Singer too notes the structure and transformation of the great tradition of Hinduism in his study of the interface of tradition and modernity in India (1972). His examination of ‘Bhakti’ in the city particularly, the organization of “the Radha Krishna Bhajanas of Madras City” is relevant for the present study. He points out “how traditional mythological and legendary stories, rites and ceremonies can serve contemporary moral and social purposes by providing support for social equality, ‘national’ and regional identity or community development.” (1972 : 202). Not only that but he also notes that “the social and psychological functions of the Krishna stories and ceremonies seemed to express aspirations that were in some respects diametrically opposed to the existing status quo” (1972 : 204). It shows that great tradition can bring changes into the traditional social system.

Peter Van Der Veer’s work (1988) examines inter alia the unique nature of Rasiks, a group of Ramanandi Sadhus in Ayodhya, and the openness of the Ramanandis because of the existence of Rasiks among their category.

Books like Peter Brent’s Godmen of India (1973) are of a different genre from the above. Nonetheless, Brent’s book offers a detailed account of the importance of saints and/or gurus in the Hindu religious order including its modern manifestations like the set of institutions developing around personalities such as Swami Muktananda. It is found helpful by the researcher for his research work.

A few studies have been done on the emergence and development of the cult of modern gurus, saints, swamis, etc., and the religious movements centering around these religious personalities. One may find a discussion of the recent or newly emerging religious movements in Hinduism in Lawrance A. Babb’s work (1987). It examines the Radhasoami faith, the institution of Brahma Kumaris and the cult of Satya Sai Baba, each posing simultaneously an innovation in traditional Hinduism and reconciliation with it. Taken together, the three movements challenge the notion of a single Hindu belief system. For each represents a particular construction of the world human condition that contrasts strongly with the others. But below the obvious dif-
ferences there are shared concepts that suggest a deep underlying unity. Babb’s analysis of the cult of Sathya Sai Baba which has been specially considered by Madan in his anthology (1991 ed.) is relevant for the present research work.

Babb points out the fundamental features of the cult of Sai Baba. They are —

1. The main basis of Sai cult is miracles (1987: 164).
2. His personality is considered an impressive display of modernized saintliness (Ibid.: 160). Babb called him a Jet-age holyman. (Ibid)
3. Most of his devotees belong to high castes, middle and upper-middle classes.
4. It is non-sectarian.
5. The imposition of rigid rules is foreign to the teaching of Sai Baba.

In comparison with the cult of Lokenath one finds in the cult of Sai Baba some resemblance as well as some dissimilarities. Lokenath’s devotees claim that their Baba had miraculous power. He saved many lives by using his miraculous power. Not only that but it is claimed that he had the power to change himself into a dog or as an idol or image of Makali (Mother-goddess Kali). He cured many people by using his supernatural power. Sometimes he played the role as an infallible soothsayer. These stories have been propagated by the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. But, the organizers of the Sangha never think that the miraculous power is the central theme of the cult of Lokenath. They emphasize the unconditional devotion to Guru Lokenath and his divine grace.

Most of Sai Baba’s devotees are high-caste middle and upper-middle classes. (Babb, 1987: 160). But the devotees of Lokenath come mainly from the lower castes, lower-caste businessmen, rural-middle class, lower middle class, peasants and workers. At the same time some urban big businessmen are attached with this cult and help the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. Ramakanta Chakraborty correctly depicts him as a ‘universal Guru’ (2002: 281).

The cult of Sai Baba is an all India phenomenon, whereas the popularity of Lokenath is confined only in some districts of West Bengal (and one or two places of Bangladesh). But by using modern propaganda machinery the cult is gaining popularity in other parts of West Bengal and also outside West Bengal. The organizers use various means of modern technology of propaganda to popularize the name of Lokenath. The message of Lokenath is propagated in a non-sectarian manner but the central idea of his message is completely based on traditional Hinduism. Mehta cor-
rectly points out, “It is interesting to note that modern religious sects differ from their traditional counterparts through hybridization of sorts, by which cult leaders have very clearly borrowed the essential core of various schools of Hindu philosophy, but project the message to new members in a seemingly rational, secular, non-sectarian manner (1993: 41). Moreover, “the cults... and organizations variously involved in spreading the religion abroad have ensured that it is made simple, digestible, modern...” (Robinson. 2005:210).

Babb’s study reveals two important points which should be noted here, (i) the cult of Sai Baba provides a milieu of the “reenchantment of the world” to its members, (ii) he (Sai Baba) has found, rather surprisingly, a point of contact between religious traditionalism and a certain kind of modernity (1987: 200-201). Both can be found in the cult of Lokenath.

In the field of the study of modern guru cult L. Babb’s study is, no doubt, one of the pioneering works. The present researcher humbly states that Babb’s study deserves some criticism. His work should not be followed blindly. Because, it has some incompleteness. Firstly, his study does not deal with the factors responsible for the emergence of the Sai cult. Secondly, the role of his devotees is neglected. Thirdly, the study is not adequate. Fourthly, the term, cult, is not defined by Babb. Nevertheless his study is an encouragement to the present study.

Uday Mehta (1993) has studied some other emerging cults, viz., International Society for Krishna Consciousness and the cult of Rajneesh. He focussed on their origin, growth, mode of recruitment of followers or disciples or devotees, kind of following, style of functioning and organizational network. He discovers a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, the newly emerging cult-like organizations buttress the powers that be, and, on the other, they organize sections of the suffering masses. His invitation to explore this dual aspect proves to be exciting for the present researcher.

Mehta’s work (1993) is the first volume in the series of six volumes. Title of this series is ‘Role of Religion in Indian Society’. A. R. Desai has written a general introduction to this volume. Desai indicates some general social characteristics of these godmen (1993: 37-38).

“1. In post-Independent India, there is a sudden influx of Godmen, known by different designation, some claiming to be themselves Bhagwans or Gods.”
2. These Godmen claim to possess some unique and distinct divine attributes which differ from Godman to Godman. These special powers have capacity to influence their followers.

3. These Godmen have been given wide publicity in the press, through newspapers, T.V., journals or other mass media. In fact, some of these Godmen have themselves evolved a powerful media machine to highlight their activities and spiritual qualities.

4. These various Godmen generate specific forms of social currents, attract specific categories of people and inject certain values and practices, whose role require very careful examination.

5. Some specific forms of activities and values they inject are now becoming clear:

(a) They generate among their followers a mentality of dependence on Godman.

(b) Each Godman possesses special divine capacity, which differ from Godman to Godman, providing different techniques and procedures to be followed by the disciples to gain reliefs and benefits.

(c) Every Godman has evolved a vast network of Institutes, ashrams and complex organizational structures. They have amassed huge assets, attracted a retinue of followers, specializing in specific functions necessary for this vast complex. It is also interesting to note that the sources of the wealth in the form of cash, land holdings and other assets are hardly made known to the public.

(d) Godmen/women's jurisdiction does not remain limited to certain local areas or districts, but has national and international dimensions. Some of the Godmen's establishments have acquired the structure of multinational corporations, specializing in rendering "spiritual" values and practices.

(e) Godmen have built contacts with powerful political, economic and cultural organizations, bureaucrats, managers, industrialists, ministers and Prime Ministers. They are also involved in launching industries and other ventures, training courses for political leaders and business managers, and act as liaison persons in political and business matters.

Desai comments that these modern godmen play "consciously or unconsciously as a spiritual wing of the ruling class and the state." (1993 : 39). Sukumari Bhattacharya (2000) mentioned almost the same thing in her book (38-39). No ruling
class can justify and sustain their rule without intellectuals. The ruling classes can use coercive measure, but it does not help them to survive in long run. Incessant use of coercive power obstructs them to spread their root into the society. They badly need the permanent (relative) influence over the masses of the people. Because of that they have to win over the consent of the people ideologically. Intellectuals of the ruling class put the ideological hegemony over the people. Hegemony is the result of organization of consent. Gramsci has written “...in order to organise the state and to organise trade, the ruling class breed a particular type of intellectual” (1972: 43). Modern gurus and godmen fulfil the need of the ruling class by preaching the ideology of dependence among the people, by harmonizing desires and need of the common people and the domination of the ruling class.

David Smith (2008) devoted a whole chapter in his book to study the cult of gurus of Modern India. He mentions that there are tens of thousands of gurus. (2008: 169). He observes that, “The guru, no less than the gods, is the object of darshana, seeing him can be enough in itself. For the guru, modernity can be a profitable home, encouraging his entrepreneurship, spreading his ideas more easily, fostering innovation in techniques and doctrine. From the point of view of traditional Hinduism, gurus are generally maintaining traditional spirituality, but packaging it attractively for the modern world, and also spreading it beyond the shores of India” (2008: 180).


His article (1980) deals with the various aspects of cults of gurus. He classifies the gurus of Bengal into two types. To the first type belonged the sectarian guru. To type second belonged the *kulaguru* or family guru. Kulaguru represented a free spiritual organization with some hold over a number of households. Both the sectarian guru and the kulaguru lent an institutional character to *gurugiri* or guruship in Bengal. At the same time, Chakraborty points out that, “The significance of the priests did not, however, affect the fortunes of the gurus. The *kulaguru* gradually became a nonentity, but the sectarian *guru* grew, for various reasons, stronger and stronger. No
real difference was seen between the professional priest and the professional *kulaguru*. But the sectarian guru was honoured as an exceptional man by the sectarian votaries. 

"(1980 : 7). At another place Chakraborty shows that gurus of Bengal can be classified into two groups: elite gurus and subaltern gurus. (2002 : 277, 279). Again, he notes that on the basis of organization and *sampradayas* gurus of Bengal may be classified into two groups a) *Vaisnava*, *saiva* and *sakta gurus*, and b) Practitioners of *Vedantic guruvada*, e.g., Ramkrishna Mission. (2008 : 32). To him gurus were the natural leader of society in premodern age. Development of individualism was impossible in that society, due to influence of elders (*gurujan*) and tie of family tradition (2005 : 19).

He also mentions that saints almost disappeared from Europe after the Industrial and French revolutions. The Europeans began to appreciate the value of ‘free will’ and individualism. But the British rule in India did not and could not strengthen these ideals among the masses (1980 : 58). Consequently, the British rule in Bengal did not affect the position of gurus in Bengali society (1980 : 56).

**Literature on Lokenath Brahmachari**

No written works of Lokenath Brahmachari have been found, except a few letters. After a long gap from his death (1890), some of his devotees started writing on his life and teachings. The earliest available piece of literature is Brahmananda Bharati’s articles on his Guru or preceptor, Lokenath. These articles were published in *Yamuna*, a monthly Bengali journal of Calcutta, in 1903 (Beng. 1310). A total of eleven articles were published in eleven different issues of *Yamuna*. Then in 1908 these articles together were published in a single book—*Siddha Jibani*. This book by Bharati is the first published book providing the life sketch of Lokenath Brahmachari and his philosophical thoughts. This book deals with three main aspects, thus-1. biography of Lokenath ; 2. religious teachings of Lokenath and 3. Bharati’s concept of religion. Another book, *Dharmasar Samgraha*, written by Jaminikumar Mukhopadhyay was published in 1908. Mukhopadhyay wrote his book on the basis of his personal experiences with, Lokenath. He had a good contact with Bharati. Both of them claimed that they were the true followers of Lokenath. Bharati indirectly claimed in his book that he was Bhagawan Ganguly or Lokenath’s guru in his previous life or incarnation. Perhaps, this claim created a lot of confusion and debate among the devotees of Lokenath. Some important devotees, e.g. Rajani Brahmachari and his
disciple or follower, Kedareswar Sengupta did not accept this claim. Sengupta wrote a book, viz., *Shree Shree Lokenath Mahatmya*, which was published in 1916 on Lokenath to refute Bharati's claim and at the same time to establish that his guru, Rajani Brahmachari, was Guru Bhagawan Ganguly in his previous birth. In this way a crisis in continuity was created in the world relating to Lokenath.

Bharati's *Siddha Jibani* was a pioneering work which provided help and guidance to other writers and biographers. Bharati gave a detailed description of Lokenath's teaching. Lokenath initiated him in the spiritual life, by offering to him *bija mantra*. Bija means seed. Here it refers to the principal or fundamental formula for attaining success in the pursuit of spiritual goal. A *mantra* is considered or a sacred magical formula, whose rhythmical repetition can fulfill the desired purpose of *sadhana*, or consistent and continuous practice of austerity. Though Bharati accepted Lokenath's discipleship, he at the same time offered a sort of critique of Lokenath's teaching. Firstly, brahmmins should try to achieve moksha. But Lokenath spoke nothing about moksha. On the contrary, Lokenath emphasized the amelioration of material conditions of the people through the provision of relief to them from the problems suffered by them because of ailment or disease, complications in law-suits, pecuniary difficulties, etc., with the exercise of his co-called miraculous power. Secondly, the place of Tantric *shat chakra* was very important in the process of Lokenath's *sadhana*. But for Bharati *shat chakra* is useless. It also misleads people.

Bharati's *Siddha Jibani* has a great influence over a number of writers, thus— Roy (1956,1963), Sarkar (1960), Banik (1962), Majumdar(1968), Saha(1976), Kaviraj (1988), etc. At the same time, many writers have been influenced by the works of Mukhopadhyay (1908) and Sengupta(1916). B. C. Bhaumik (1961), S. Brahmachari, (1986), Misra(1990), A. K. Roy, (1997) mainly followed the line of Rajani Brahmachari. The main problem with these books relates to authenticity. Contradictory information and assertions of the books make the readers confused and perplexed. Moreover, these books are written from a religious inclination, not from the sociological point of view. For that reason, the present researcher tried to study the cult of Lokenath from the standpoint of the sociology of religion.

And, as the researcher performs the above task he faces several problems. The first one relates to the birth place which is the *sacred space* for the devotees following the cult of Lokenath. Brahmachari's book mentions Kachua as the birthplace of
Lokenath but the book by Sengupta, who claims to be a disciple of Rajani Brahmachari who (it is claimed by Sengupta) in his turn, the true follower of Lokenath, declares Chakla as the birth place of Lokenath. The devotees adhering to the cult of Lokenath are thus divided into two contending groups.

Secondly, Bharati claims that he was initiated into spiritual life in his present birth by Lokenath Brahmachari who was, therefore, his guru. But, in his previous incarnation, he (Bharati) was Bhagawan Ganguly who was the preceptor or Guru of Lokenath. On the contrary, Sengupta claims that it was Rajani Brahmachari who was, in his previous birth or incarnation, Bhagwan Ganguly. And, he claims that Rajani Brahmachari’s statements about the life and message of Lokenath was authentic. (Sengupta declares Rajani Brahmachari as his [Sengupta’s] guru). Sengupta printed a photocopy of a court document that recorded the deposition by Lokenath Brahmachari in the court of law to the effect that his ‘home’ was situated in Chakla (and, therefore, Chakla was the Badi [home] or birth place [janmasthan] of Lokenath). The organizers of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha accept the authenticity of Sengupta (and, therefore, of Rajani Brahmachari as the true follower of Lokenath.

However, the organizers of Lokenath cult both at Chakla and at Kachua declare that the cult of Lokenath does not have any tradition of succession of Guru (preceptor) and Sishya (disciple) or Guru-sishya-parampara. But, there is reference to this parampara in the works by both Bharati and Sengupta. In the first book Bharati claims that Lokenath was his guru in Bharati’s present birth but he was in his previous birth Lokenath’s guru. In the book by Sengupta the author does not clearly state that Rajani Brahmachari was or was not a sishya of Lokenath, but Brahmachari was in his previous birth Lokenath’s guru.

Rajani Brahmachari is claimed by Sengupta as his (Sengupta’s) own guru. So, both the works admit of the existence of the line of succession of guru and sishya, though in slightly different ways.

It is interesting to note that the present organizers of Lokenath cult in Chakla and in Kachua labour on the point that the system of initiation of a devotee of Lokenath into the spiritual life does not have any room in Lokenath cult. But, the books on which they depend for the authentic character of their views and activities refer to a certain kind of Guru-sishya parampara. How is it that the existence of this parampara is denied by the organizers and devotees of the cult of Lokenath?
Was this denial the result of an attempt by the organizers to meet the exigencies of present time and condition which do not favour the sustenance of the paraphernalia relating to deeksha (initiation) of a devotee into spiritual life by somebody who might be considered a Guru (preceptor) in the Lokenath cult?

The researcher comes, indeed, to notice a certain kind of manipulation of the text by Bharati in the abridged edition of his work which was edited and published by Bhowmik (2000). Bhowmik gives many other details of Lokenath's life and practices as depicted by Bharati (including Bharati's description of Kachua as the place of birth of Lokenath) but maintains studied silence on whether Bharati was the sishya of Lokenath. Sengupta's work too does not speak of any act of by Lokenath in initiating anybody into the spiritual life.

This act of expunging parts of the text by Bharati in Bhowmik's abridged edition of Siddha Jivani and the lack of reference to the making of anybody as his sishya by Lokenath have a striking similarity.

In order to obviate the problem of maintaining the paraphernalia of initiation by persons specially suitable for the task, both the groups (at Chakla and Kachua) give a sort of new interpretation of beginning of spiritual life in the circles of devotees of Likenath. Organizers of Lokenath cult at both the places try to convince the devotees of Lokenath that there is no requirement for them of the ritual of deekshah (initiation). Lokenath is Lokaguru or Jagatguru (the preceptor and spiritual guide of the entire world). And, his name is so sacred that its very utterance by any person entitles him/her to the pursuit of spiritual life.

Recalling the very name of Lokenath is the surest passage to the domain of spirituality as well as the most effective means of deliverance from the crises of mundane life or worldly life. Therefore, the organizers say that there is no sishya in the Lokenath cult but everyone following it is a devotee of Lokenath. And, Lokenath is both the deity and preceptor, rather, the supreme spiritual guide, for them.

Definition of terms

There is a convention in the study of sociology to define the terms used in research to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The main aim of the present study is to understand the nature and functioning of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. Several terms have been employed in the study and they may defined below:

Social Organization:
The present study deals with the social organization of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha of Chakla. The term, organization, refers to “an aspect of interaction system.” (Johnson, A. M., cited in C. N. S. Rao, 1999 : 333). According to Duncan Mitchell, social organization means the interdependence of parts which is an essential characteristic of all enduring collective entities: groups, communities and societies. (cited in C. N. S. Rao, 1999 : 333). Following these definitions, the term social organization is considered as the interdependence of parts in groups.

The present study aims to understand the interdepending parts of Lokenath Sevashram Sangha, i.e. how the parts are related to each other and how each is related to the whole society.

Cult:

Perusal of sociological literature on the concept of cult suggests that cult is a concept which seems, “to be a catch-all for religious groups that do not fit any one of the types” like ecclesia, denomination or sect (Johnson, 1966 : 437). According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1964), cult means a particular form of religious worship and devotion to a particular person. Howard Becker uses the term to describe a loose association of people who hold eclectic religious views (1992 : 402-403). Its most important attribute is the high degree of individualism (Becker, 1987 : 156).

According to Durkheim, “…a cult is not a mere collection of ritual precautions that man is responsible for taking in certain circumstances. It is a system of rites, feasts, and various ceremonies all having the characteristic that they recur periodically. They meet the need that the faithful feel periodically to tighten and strengthen the bond between them and the sacred beings on which they depend. This is why one speaks of nuptial rites and not of a nuptial cult, of birth rites but not a cult of the newborn. The events that occasion these rites imply no periodicity. In the same way, there is an ancestor cult only if sacrifices are made on the tombs from time to time; if libations are poured there more or less frequently, or if regular feasts are celebrated in honor of the dead person. (1995 : 59-60). Following his definition it is not difficult to call the worship of Lokenath a cult. Because, this kind of periodicity and repetition can be found in the activities of the Sangha.

Looseness and diffuseness of organization and an absence of clear ‘boundaries’ are identified as defining properties of cults. Cults are viewed as lacking centralized
leadership, clear organizational boundaries, and standardized doctrine. (Robin, T. and Anthony, D. in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Eliade M. 1987, Vol-10 : 399). According to O'Dea "... the cultic act is a social congregational act through which the group re-enacts its relationship to the sacred objects and through them, to the beyond, and in so doing reinforces its own solidarity and reaffirms its own values. In it "relationships of fellowship, and of leader and followers are acted out, reasserted and strengthened. For the individual it incorporates him into the group which provide him with the emotional support, and by its re-enactment of the religious experience relates him to the source of strength and comfort." (O'Dea, 1969 : 41).

The term 'cult' has been used by the Western scholars either in the context of U.S.A. or Europe. The western connotation of the term 'cult' is often found inappropriate for the Indian context. The western scholars identify a cult as a group that makes a radical break with a dominant religious tradition. (Robbins and Anthony, in Encyclopedia of Religion, ed. Eliade 1987: Vol, -10 : 399). But in India, this notion is incompatible with several cults of the land. Several Hindu cults of India do not make any radical break with the dominant religious tradition. Not only that but the western scholars idea that "cults are viewed as lacking centralized leadership, clear organizational boundaries and standardized doctrine (Ibid) is incompatible with some Hindu cults. Therefore, if one follows the western notion of cult blindly, he cannot be able to understand the nature of Hindu cults properly. Any grand-narrative like statement would not be helpful to understand the cults of Hindus. In Europe, there is a long tradition in which the term 'Church' stands for the institutionalized, dominant orthodoxy, while the term 'cult' is used as a heterodox group which attempts to break away from the 'church'. But in Hinduism there is no church like organization. It is difficult to speak of Hindu orthodoxy as against Hindu heterodoxy. Because, both can be found in the realm of Hindu religion.

Hinduism is a collection of rites, worships, beliefs, traditions, mythologies, sampradayas, minor religious sects. Some of these are sanctioned by the sacred texts and some are not. It is an institutional complex (Desai, 1990 : 59). Naturally, it is difficult to say that Hindu cults are religious groups which invariably break away from the centre.

There is neither one founder of the religion nor one church nor one religious leader in Hinduism. Nor is there one holy book or one doctrine, one religious symbol
or one holy centre. Consequently, so many authorities have appeared in Hindu religion. Pal writes, In Hinduism you find elements that coincide with the essentials of most other world-religions, standing in a mysterious and profound unity. The contradiction of tenets, the complexities of disciplines, the varieties of cultures that go to form what we know as Hinduism to-day are absolutely bewildering, and one cannot blame people for having failed to discover the unity that underlies these (1968:2). Though it is diversified, on one point the various manifestations are united; it is casteism. The sociological basis of Hinduism is the caste system (Mensching, G. G., 1976 : 27). Veer described Hinduism as the religion of caste system. (1989:67). But, the caste system has been opposed by various saints, gurus, swamis and babas who have appeared in different times and different parts of India. Some of them wanted to abolish it while others compromised with the caste system. Some of the new cult groups of Hinduism appeared without opposing the caste system, They preached their views among the people. Therefore western notion cannot help to understand Indian cults. It is needful for the students of Indian society to develop deeper understanding of the Indian cults. An Indian cult is generally constituted by a loosely structured religious group, which worships a deity or saint/guru and it is open to all. Membership of the cult is voluntary.

The Lokenath Sevashram Sangh of Chakla is a cultic organization. The worship of Guru Lokenath is at the centre of the organization. The cultic features of Sangha can be shown in the following manner.

Firstly, membership of Sangha is voluntary. It is not obligatory for the devotees who visit Chakla and take part in different ritual activities to subscribe to the membership of the Sangha. Field survey carried out by the present researcher shows that 98% devotees/pilgrims are not members of the Sangha.

Secondly, the Sangha is open to all people irrespective of their caste, class, religion, sex, education. Anybody can become a member of the Sangha.

Thirdly, according to Johnson, the attitude of a cult toward other religious groups is tolerant. The organizers of the Sangha declare in public that they are tolerant toward other religious groups. From this point of view the Sangha and its members and followers bear a cultic character. But the organizers did not practice this tolerance at the primary stage of their organization. In the decade of 90s of the 20th century, the organizers (e. g. Sailen Roy, Siva Chandra Roy, Nimai Roy, Bhudeb Sen) were very
hostile toward another organization, which too claimed to have been engaged in signing and spreading the glory of Lokenath, viz., Lokenath Mission of Kachua and its leader Nitya Gopal Saha. Bhudeb Sen would call Saha and his associates ‘fraud’ and ‘cheater’, the other organizers of the Sangha bore more or less the same feelings. Later on, in the first decade of 21st century these leaders were replaced by the new group. The new batch of organizers (Sudipta Sen, Manik Hazra etc.) gave up this hostile attitude towards the Lokenath Mission and similar other groups and they became more tolerant. Not only that but some of the organizers of the older generation (viz., Siva Chandra Roy, Nimai Roy) too have given up their earlier notion and become more self-critical.

Fourthly, the cult of Lokenath does not have any centralized leadership nor has got clear organizational boundaries and standardized doctrine. Looseness in organization and the consequence openness is an important trait of cult and the cult under consideration does possess this trait.

Fifthly, the priests do not play any leading role in the life and activities of the Sangha. They work under the supervision and guidance of the organizers. Further, neither the organizers nor the devotees think that the help of a brahmin priest is necessary in the cult of Lokenath to earn the favour of Lokenath or to attain salvation. This fact confirms the cultic nature of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha.

Sixthly, the attitude of the Sangha is highly ambivalent towards secular activities. Though organizers organize various secular (non-religious) activities, they at the same time express their disliking about involvement in secular activities.

The explanation, given above, helps the readers to understand the cultic nature of the Sangha. It would not, however, be incorrect to say that the term, cult, has not been very clearly defined. This term is widely used by the Western Scholars and their context of study in either U.S.A. or Europe. The term, cult, is frequently employed by them to refer to deviant or marginal religious or therapeutic groups. The term really has no precise consensual meaning (Robins, T. and Anthony, D. 1987, Vol. - 10, p. - 398 in Encyclopedia).

Sect:

The organizers of the Sangha very often call themselves a sampradaya. Three Sanskrit words: marga (literally, path), path (path) and sampradaya (tradition transmitted from a teacher to a pupil) can be characterised by ‘sect’. "These three words
are used widely as synonyms, both in literature and in popular parlance.” (Shah 2006:209). The term sect is of western origin. In western sense, it (sect) refers to a group who separate from a church or party. (Ince. 2004:253 A Dictionary of Religion and Religions). To Becker, sects are schematic movements that borrow heavily from their parent groups, doctrines and practices. (Encyclopedia of Sociology. 1992:402:03). A more clear definition can be given here—“A sect is a type of religious group formed in protest against, and usually separating from, another religious group; its formation represents support of beliefs, rituals practices, and moral standards, most commonly believed by sect members to be a return to earlier and purer forms of the particular religion; the membership is limited and earned by individual performance; the sect therefore stands apart from, and in contrast to, groups which are carriers of the dominant norms of the societal system; and the sect moves in time either to a position of limited isolation from the surrounding system or to a state of adaptation to it.” (Warner, W. J. in Dictionary of the Social Science ed. by Gould and Kolb. 1965:624). According to O’Dea, a sect is a voluntary society of strict believers who live apart from the world in some way. Its foundation upon contracted or upon freely elected membership marks a sharp contrast with the ecclesiastical body of the church, as does its smallness of size and its spirit of austerity and asceticism. (International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences. 1968:V of 14:131). He also notes that, sect refers to the ideal type of the protest group, protesting both the church’s accommodation to the world and the world itself. The sect’s refusal to compromise with secular values and institutions may find expression in either an active or a passive form (Ibid). In another definition sect is described as a fluid group of the worshippers of certain deity, or of a certain form of deity—has its religious order, sometimes two or there religious orders. (Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. 1981 : Vol-X, P716).

In the western intellectual tradition, since Troeltsch, the term, sect, represents as a contrapuntal ideal type to the church form of social organization. (A Dictionary of Sociology. (ed. Milchell) 1968:158). According to Troeltsch, ‘...the distinctive significance of the sect-type is contrasted with the church type...” (1931:462). He further writes, “In reality the sects are essentially different from the Church and the churches. The word ‘sect’, however, does not mean that these movements are undeveloped expressions of the Church-type; it stands for an independent sociological type of Chris-
The church-sect dichotomy is a common feature of western religious development. There is a long tradition in which the term ‘Church’ stands for the institutionalized dominant orthodoxy, while the term, ‘sect’ is used in a ‘pejorative’ sense. ‘The word, “sect”, gives an erroneous impression (Troeltsch. 1931:459). It indicably a heterodox group which attempts to break away form the ‘church’. The church-sect dichotomy deriving from the Christian tradition has become a part of standardized sociological vocabulary. (Veer. 1989:66). Students of sociology of Hinduism may face two problems : (a) The term sect (marg, panth, sampradaya) is not used as a pejorative lable.. (b) The use of the term, sect, in the context of Hinduism may easily obscure the important fact that there is no Hindu Church. It is even difficult to speak of Hindu orthodoxy as against Hindu heterodoxy. Because Hinduism does not have one definite founder, one religious leader, one definite holy scripture, one definite doctrine, one religious symbol, one pilgrim centre or one definite deity. “Hinduism is often described as acephalous.” (Shah. 2006:218).

In order to understand Indian sect, one can rely on Dumont’s definition. He emphasize the renunciation and guru-sishya relationship in his understanding of sect. According to him, ‘Indian religious groupings which are readily characterized in terms of renunciation are conveniently called ‘sects’, without prejudging their similarity to what are called by this name in christianity. The Indian sect is a religious grouping constituted primarily by renouncers, initiates of the same discipline of salvation, and secondarily by their lay sympathizers any of whom may have one of the renouncers as a spiritual master or guru” (1998 :187). His definition suggests that renunciation is the basis of the sect. He points out primarily, the existence of a necessary relation between sects and, renouncers, and, secondarily, lay members of a sect as sympathisers. Besides, the word, sect, also indicates the process of initiation as the fundamental principle of recruitment to a sect. (Shah 2006:225).

The above discussion may help one understand the nature of Lokenath Sevsahram Sangha. Very often the Sangha uses the term sampradaya to designate its identity. Again sampradaya and sect are used as synonyms both in the Indian and the western sociological literature. But according to Dumont’s definition, the Sangha should not be characterized as a sect. There are two clear reasons behind it : (1) The sangha does not have any mechanism for initiation. (2) It does not attach importance to the notion of disciple or sishya. The Sangha is a fluid and loose religious group which has no
strict method of recruitment of *sishyas*, disciples, devotees into its fold. The Sangha holds that it is not important whether a person is a formal member of the Sangha or not. Rather, it emphasizes *bhakti* and *bhakta*. A devotee from any caste, class or religions can get the membership of the Sangha by paying a certain amount of money and filling up a membership form. It should at the same time be noted here that 98% devotees are not formal members of the Sangha.

A. M. Shah (2006) has given a description of the behaviour of the laity of Indian sects. His narration can be presented in the following manner—

(1) Laity or sishya of sects keeps pictures of only one principal deity and a few minor ones associated with it, in his/her room/ house. In the corner for worship in a sectarian’s home, it can be found that the members of the household are worshipping only one deity and its associates, and they go exclusively to the temples belonging to their own sect. They display the icons only of sectarian deities in their shops and offices, on car dashboards, and so on. A staunch member of a sect might attend a ritual or ceremony in the house of a neighbour belonging to another sect, or in the home of a non-sectarian, but he/she is more likely to be an onlooker than a participant. He/she might accept *prasad* in his/her hand at the end of the ritual, but will not eat it, giving it away rather to another person, usually a child of a servant, or to a cow. (2006:213)

(2) The member of a sect celebrate only the festivals in honour of their chosen deity and of the their chosen deity and of the founder of the sect. (2006:213).

(3) There can be several sects centred on a single deity, each with its own conception of the deity, there can also be non-sectarian conceptions of the same deity. (2006:214).

(4) The members of every sect greet one another with a sacred phrase, e.g., Jai Ramji Ki, Jai Baba, Jai Guru etc. (2006:214).


(6) Every sect has a sacred literature of its own. (Ibid).

(7) The followers of a sect go on pilgrimage mainly to those places considered sacred by the sect. Even when members of several different sects go to a common place, there are significant differences in their behaviour. (2006:216).
It is a peculiarity of the complex surrounding the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha that it shares some of the features of a sect as mentioned by Shah though uptill now it retains mostly the character of a cult.

Firstly, Lokenath devotees keep their guru’s picture and image of Lokenath in their home. They also place the picture of Siva, Vishnu, Kali, Krishna, Lakshmi and other Hindu deities with equal importance. Rigidity is absent in the world of Lokenath. Lokenath devotees frequently attend ritual or ceremony in the home of their relatives, friends or neighbour belonging to another sect, and they take part in them. They accept *prasad* and eat it at the end of the ritual.

Secondly, the members of the Sangha and devotees of Lokenath not only celebrate the festivals in honour of their chosen deity and of the founder of the sect, but also celebrate the other festivals related to the several Hindu deities and religious personalites.

Thirdly, apart from the worship of Lokenath, other deities are also worshipped in the temple of Lokenath.

Fourthly, Lokenath devotees do not greet one another with any particular sacred phrase. A few greet one another with different sacred phrase, e.g. “Baba will bless you.” “Baba will protect you.” or “Jai Baba Lokenath.”

Fifthly, Lokenath devotees do not use any diacritical mark.

Sixthly, the Sangha expresses that Guru Lokenath did not follow any particular path of *sadhana*. He followed all paths of Hinduism or *Santana Dharma*. Therefore the Sangha considers all scriptures of Hinduism which are equally important to them.

Seventhly, Lokenath devotees visit the village of Chakla considering as a place of pilgrimage or *tirtha*. But their pilgrimage is not confined to this place only. Lokenath devotees visit other *tirthas* too. At the same time people from different sects and cults visit the village of Chakla too. To quote Johnson (1966), “... a cult shows its looseness of organization by permitting its members to come and go, and to participate in other religious groups at the same time if they wish. The coherence of the groups depends upon the emotional hold of a leader over the members, or upon the fascination of the beliefs and rituals” (1966:437).

The consequent simplicity in the cult of Lokenath has, probably, been the most attractive feature of the cult for the swelling number of devotees drawn to the cult of
Lokenath. The discussion which is presented above is that the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha is not a sect. The Sangha is neither a denomination, nor ecclesiasia. It should be depicted as a cult.

Guru:

The idea of a spiritual preceptor to guide one’s study of religion and philosophy has been a constant influence on the religion of India. This influence can be found in the most ancient period. In the *Rgveda* guru was referred to as the ‘Rsi’ (Seer) of Muni (a sage, or silent one); (Eliade. 1987: Vol.14:33-34). Guru is considered as the possessor of deep spiritual insights (often resulting from performing austerities) and is considered to be the ‘author’ of the sacred hymns. (Ibid) Later on “....we find him referred to as ‘acarya’, ‘brahmana’ and ‘swami, but he has most dramatically captured the attention of the West as the ‘Guru’. (Ibid). The educational system of ancient India, knowledge of vedas was personally transmitted through the oral teaching from the guru to his students. The term ‘guru’ is used in the sense of ‘teacher’ of ‘spiritual guide’ for the first time in *Chandogya Upanishad* but one should also point out that its original sense (heavy one or weighty) is illustrative of the widespread belief that holy persons are characterized by uncommon weight, not necessarily in the outer, physical sense. (Ibid:33).

In the Middle Ages ‘guru’ was identified with the god. The great poet and mystic saint Kabir taught that the guru should be recognized as the lord himself; (Tarachand. 1988:132). A similar view echoed by Chaitanya and his followers. This process of deification went to such extremes that the guru might be said to have usurped and displaced the gods in importance. Thus, the Saiva texts teach that if Siva becomes angry, then the guru can pacify him, but if the guru becomes angry, no one can pacify him. (Eliade,1987: Vol-14: 33). Therefore the guru as the spiritual teacher and guide, is the most important figure in Hinduism. “Ideally he is a world renouncer or at least is known for his lack of self-interest. Although not a priest in the sense of an efficient dispenser of sacraments, he holds an all but absolute authority — even in matters not necessarily of a spiritual nature — in the personal affairs of his devotees. Even in the context of ‘Bhakti’, which emphasizes the direct personal relationship of the devotee to his god, the guru is the indispensable mediator.” (Eliade,1987 : Vol-15: 240).

Ramakanta Chakraborty’s classification of gurus of Bengal are two types —- elite
gurus and subaltern gurus. (2002 : 277, 279). The popular belief of the Bengalees is that none can understand the deep sense of religion without guru. They generally act as the family guru or *kula* (lineage) guru. Most of the devotees and disciples of elite gurus are educated middle class section of Bengal (Chakraborty, 2002 : 279). Beside these elite gurus, subaltern gurus play an important role of Bengal. Chakraborty (2002) holds that these subaltern gurus are the propagator of traditional Hinduism (2002 : 279) and they play as an agent of the process of sanskritization (Ibid). Lokenath Brahmachari, though he belonged to Sanskritic Brahmanism, was/is popular among the subaltern sections of the Bengalee Society.

**Method and techniques followed in the study**

It is physically impossible for an individual researcher to keep track of the plethora of new religious organizations that centre around the cult of Lokenath and that have sprung up in different parts of West Bengal, other parts of India and Bangladesh. Keeping in view the time schedule and resources at the researcher's disposal, he has confined his inquiry to only one of these organizations, i.e., Lokenath Sevashram Sangha of Chakla, North 24 Parganas of West Bengal.

The study is mainly based on material acquired from primary sources, viz., the respondents of various categories. These categories comprise organizers, volunteers or workers, and devotees from the locality and pilgrims. In order to collect relevant information through field work, different techniques of social research have been employed, viz., (a) observation, (b) interviews, and (c) sample study.

The researcher visited the Sangha and its environs in Chakla, and the temple of Lokenath there on occasions of special festivities and pilgrimage as well as on other days when only daily worship and rituals were observed. Whenever the researcher visited Chakla, the Sangha and the temple of Lokenath, he stayed there for a length of time to collect the information, which is not available to occasional visitors or to the visitors who just "touch (the place) and go.” The researcher has gone to the field from time to time even after 2008 in order to have a greater clarity and comprehension of what he observed and learnt.

The size of samples of the respondents was originally to the order of 170. But the responses from 3 respondents were found incomplete or unsatisfactory. Hence, 3 schedules could not be taken into consideration for analysis. Thus, ultimately the
number of respondents in this study stood at 167. Of them 10 respondents belonged to the category of organizers, 10 others belonged to the category of workers or who are officially called “volunteers” in the Sangha and the rest (147) were the devotees from the locality and pilgrims.

The researcher has followed the method of both participant and non-participant observation. The participant observation helped the researcher to study the interpersonal relation and motivations of members of the Sangha. It also helped to observe and understand the different stages of pujas and the activities of both the parts of the structure of the Lokenath cult as enshrined in the activities of the Sangha— (a) priest and their associates and (b) the devotees. It was a great opportunity to find out some newer rituals which made a sort of breach with or deviation from or change in the old order or way, as was evident from the comparison with the researcher’s findings gained in the earlier spell of work. It has been found that though the Sangha works within the broad framework of the idioms and rituals of Hindu socio-religious order, organizers allow the (so called) low caste Hindus and even Muslims to take part in ‘arati’, to drink ‘santibari’ and ‘charanamrita’. Devotees from any religion and caste are also allowed to receive these directly from the hand of the brahmin priests. It marks, probably, a syncretic aspect of the cult of Lokenath.

Another important technique was interview which had been employed to understand the past history, ideas and future programme of the Sangha. It also helped to understand the attitude of the individual organizers, volunteers, local people and the devotees of Lokenath. In quite a few cases the repeated interviews have been fully utilized to understand the changes in the notions of the organizers.

A number of aids have been used in course of field observation, viz., tape recorder, camera, maps, schedules etc. Schedules used during the interview are semi-structured in nature. Several case studies also have been undertaken to have a deeper understanding of the nature of devotion of the devotees and the pilgrims as well as the intention and purpose of the organizers and volunteers of the Sangha.

Limitations:

The analysis is based on the data collected from a sample of 147 pilgrim-devotees plus 20 organizers and volunteers at different points of times. It should be mentioned here that for the quantitative aspect of the study, it has followed the work of
Chakraborty (1984) on Tarakeswar pilgrimage. He mentioned a limitation of his work. He wrote, "...because of the nature of problems under consideration and the absence of well-defined sampling frame the selection procedure adopted for sampling the pilgrims was not strictly random. And therefore, the tests being carried on to get an idea about the association of characters may not be in strict conformity with the theory." (1984: 99). The same limitation can be found also here. Sampling in the present study is incidental. Therefore, the results from the work are not representative in character. They offer certain broad indications as to the nature of association of the variables considered and the nature of devotion to the Lokenath cult.

**Difficulties of the study**

Right from the beginning of the inquiry, researcher experienced various difficulties e.g. distant location from the researchers residence. It is 87k. m. away from his residence. Means of communication is not good at all. Consequently journey to the village of Chakla is very much difficult and troublesome. Another difficulty is stereotype versions of devotees. In time of interview present research scholar had faced this. A countable section of devotees spoke almost same thing mechanically. Pathetic ignorance and indifference of an overwhelming number of devotees and even important office-bearers about basic Hindu religious scriptures, or different school of Indian religious philosophy such as Sankhya, Nyaya, Carvaka, Sankar’s monism etc. Not only that but most of them are unaware of the teachings of Lokenath. Always they speak of Lokenath’s miraculous power and kindness. Devotees know several stories of Lokenath’s life. But they are less acquainted with the basic philosophical notion of him. Because, higher philosophy is less-important to them. Only one thing is very important to them and that is absolute surrender to the feet of Guru Lokenath. The other difficulty is insufficient printed literature on the cult of Lokenath. The Sangha has published some books on their Guru. But the number of the books is not many. Again, some of these books, according to them, are not worked out properly. For example, the Sangha published a book on the worship of Lokenath which is written by Mukti Chakraborty (1999). Name of the book is *Lokenath Puja Paddhati*. But it is surprising to note that what is laid down in this book is not followed by the priests of Lokenath temple and they never ask the devotees to follow the book. It has also been found that some information of the published books is completely incorrect. For example, Roy (1997) writes that Sangha was established in 1981. But according to
Devaprasad Sarkar (founder secretary), Siv Roy (founder member), etc., the Sangha was established in 1979 and it was registered in 1981. It creates lots of trouble to the present scholar. Apart from these difficulties, sometimes non-co-operation of some organizers hindered the study properly.