CHAPTER - II

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOKENATH SEVASHRAM SANGHA

Emergence of new religious organizations, movements and cults is a global phenomenon. "Religious organization is the complex of institutionalize roles and procedures which regulate the relations of men with the supernatural order, however, such an order maybe conceived." (Wilson. 1968 : Vol. 13 : 428. Encyclopedia). It may involve the regulation of religious practice and the promulgation of true, and suppression of false doctrine; procedures for the recruitment, education and professional socialization of religious specialists; the structure of authority among them; the basis, extent, and nature of their authority over the laity and its territorial and temporal coordination; the control of religious places, periods, premises, and equipment and such property and temporalities as accrue in the establishment of this control. (Ibid.).

The importance of the study of new religious organizations and movements and cults has been established on several grounds. First, it indicates the extent to which established religious organizations are challenged, both for the allegiance of their members and because of the influence that they wield. Second, the conditions in which people are prepared to participate in new movements are revealing in that they display the shifting lines of tension or fracture in social and cultural structures. Third, the controversies which surround many new movements reflect deep-rooted assumptions and prejudices. In short the main reasons for studying such movements have to do less with what they represent in themselves and more to do with what they indirectly reveal about the state of society, other religious bodies, or structures of meaning. Very rarely have new religious movements been seriously analyzed for the metaphysics, morality, or motivation that they offer. (James A. Beckford, 1987: Vol. 10 : 393).

Religious organizations evolve out of the specific experiences of particular founders and their disciples and devotees. D. P. described this experience as generalized anubhavas. (Mukerji. 1958 : 237): From such experiences a form of religious association emerges, which eventuates in a permanent institutionalized religious organization. The religious experience marks a breakthrough from the ordinary; it is a charismatic experience. The evolution of stable forms out of this "Charismatic movement" is an important example of what Weber called 'the routinization of Charisma' (O'Dea.
1979: 37). The charismatic authority is inherently unstable and that its transformation into institutionalized leadership is necessary for the survival of the group or organization. (Ibid: 49). The institutionalization proceeded on the three interpenetrating levels; cult, doctrine and organization. It proceeded out of the need for stability and continuity and the need to preserve the content of religions beliefs. The founding charisma is transformed into the charisma of office, and the relative spontaneity of the earlier period is replaced by institutionalized forms on all three levels. The process of further definition amid inner conflict, often bitter, continues for centuries. The need to answer questions that arise from the implications of the doctrine itself, the need to reinterpret the implications of traditional teachings so as to render them relevant to new situations, and the need to combat extrinsic influences all affect this process. (Ibid: 50-51).

Lokenath Brahmachari's mystical experience or anubhava of nature, society and religion is the fundamental basis of the emergence of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha of Chakla. Of the many ways of inner transformation known to man, the mystical path is perhaps one of the most ancient, universal and highly regarded. (Kakar. 2007: 1)

Mysticism, which is found in virtually all religions but is especially prominent in certain religions of the Far East (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism), tends especially toward the other-worldly. The mystic is seeking union with god. (Johnson. 1966: 404).

Mysticism is the mainstream of Hindu religiosity. Two major schools of Hindu mysticism are (1) Upanishadic mysticism, and (2) Yogic mysticism. Upanishadic mysticism is a quest for spiritual illumination wherein a person's deepest essence is discovered to be identical with the common source of all other animate and inanimate beings. Yogic mysticism strives to realize the immortality of the human soul outside time, space, and matter. In these two Hindu schools, mystical liberation is achieved entirely through the mystic's own efforts and without the intervention of divine grace. (Kakar. 2007: 3). It is only in bhakti or devotional mysticism which mostly was advocated by Lokenath Brahmachari. He was mystical sadhu. He was born in a brahmin family in the village of Chakla of present North 24 Parganas, West Bengal in 1730. His father Ram Narayan Ghosal, a brahmin, was a man with utmost faith in the god. His mother
Kamala Devi, a simple Bengali housewife. Previously Ram Narayan Ghosal was a permanently dweller of the village of Berugram of Burdwan of undivided Bengal. But around 1700 AD, he left his original dwelling place and settled permanently in the village of Chakla of 24 Parganas. A number of reasons might be responsible for this migration. Firstly, political turmoil; secondly, torture and repression of local administration; thirdly, natural calamity, famine. Fourthly, possible attack of Marathas (Bargi) etc. Hence, Ram Narayan Ghosal came to the village of Chakla. He was a Sanskrit scholar and an expert in daily Hindu rituals and worship. Naturally, he took the priestly profession. This profession made him solvent and an honourable person in the village.

The time, which is being discussed here, was full of confusion and turmoil. It was the time of decline of Mughal Empire and rise of British colonial power. So, it was a transitional phase of history of Bengal as well as in the history of India.

In the first half of 18th century, the village life of Bengal was stagnant, immobile and autonomous. Jadunath Sarkar called it a 'hopelessly decadent society.' (1948 : 497). The society of Bengal was caste-ridden and closed in nature. Frequent change of ruler of Bengal did not affect the autonomous society of Bengal. It remains unchanged. The traditional ideas, and ideals and culture controlled the lives of the common people. "The boundaries of the villages themselves have been sometimes injured and even desolated by war, famine or disease, the same name, the same limits, the same interests and even the same families, have continued for ages. The inhabitants gave themselves no trouble about the breaking up and divisions of kingdoms; while the village remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred, or to what sovereign it devolves; its internal economy remains unchanged." (Marx. 1944 : 595). While in Bengal there seemed to be an absence of new ideas and a harking back to the past, in Europe just the opposite process was occurring. (Percival Spear. 1961 : 173, During that period India was involved herself in incessant internal struggles. Besides, of others fears common Bengalees were scared of Maratha attack and sannyasi and fakir decoits.

Another important aspect of that society was casteism. Since ancient age varna and caste system have been working as the fundamental system of Hindu life. In medieval India the caste system governed the lives of men and the networks of relations that they could enter into. The structure of social divisions that arose, thus was a rigid,
inflexible and that created extremes of inequality, privileges and disprivileges between men and social categories. Caste penetrated (and also penetrates) every aspect of living. “It conditions how and when and what and where a person eats and washes and talks and prays; from whom specific foods and drinks and specific utensils may be taken, or to whom offered; the way the hair is worn, the kind of clothes, the shape of ornaments, the form of funerals, the frequency of sex.” (Segal, 1965 : 35). Although, this was an extremely unfair system, little could be done or said against it, as it was supported by Hindu sastras (text), particularly the notions of high and pure birth and occupation as against low and impure. In other words brahminical Hinduism was as much a social system as it was a religion, and provided an ideological framework on the basis of which Hindu society arose.

In ancient Bengal, many religious sects preached humanism against caste-based divisions and humiliation. There was a tradition of such thought propagated by the Bhagavat sahaja yanis, Buddhist Siddhacharyas and some other Hindu scholars. In the Middle Ages, Vaisnavism under the guidance of Chaitanya Deva (1486-1533) and the rich folk-culture of Bauls openly preached against caste and communal apartheid. In the Dohakosa by Sarahapad (between the tenth and the twelfth centuries AD), the brahminical authority over social and religious life was challenged. It was claimed that any person from any caste practising the brahminical rites should be looked upon just as a brahmin. Moreover, it declared that there was no separate caste like Brahmin or Sudra. Every person belonged to the same jati. (Srijnan Halder, 2005 : 68. During this period many great Sufi saints came to India and won the heart of the common people. Consequently, Devotionalism of Hinduism and Sufism of Islam came to contact with each other. With this contact between the two different social and cultural traditions, interactions and synthesis began, particularly on the level of social custom, tradition and practice of the Hindus and Muslims. A considerable amount of fusion between Hindus and Muslims, gave birth to numerous types of mystic saintism in medieval Bengal and in other parts of India. In the post-period of Ramananda, Kabir, Nanak and Dadu, a number of mystic saints appeared, e.g., Garibdas (1717-1778), Shibnarayan (1710), Bulleshah (1703), Ramcharan (1715) and Prananath (1710-1750). They propagated liberal concept of religion. They spoke of the direct contact between god and individuals. Singh writes, “...they liberalized the orthodox conception of religious beliefs and carried it 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 criticising both the Hindu and Muslim Orthodoxy” (1977 : 42). The influence of these religious movements on the life of Lokenath Brahmachari was very much crucial. Lokenath inherited the liberal ideas that flowed from the former mystic saints of the Middle Ages.

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Around 1700 AD Ramnarayan Ghoshal, father of Lokenath, permanently settled in the village of Chakla. Here he came to contact with Bhagwan Ganguly, a renowned sanskrit scholar, who lived in Kachua, a nearby village. Ramnarayan was highly attracted by Bhagwan Ganguly for his command over religious depth and knowledge. Very soon, Bhagwan Ganguly became his friend, philosopher and guide. Bhagwan Ganguly advised Ramnarayan to marry. In 1710, Ramnarayan married Srimati Kamala Devi, sister of Bhagwan Ganguly.

It was believed by most of the Hindus that if one member of a family renounces the worldly life and joins the order of sannyas, his or her, entire family is liberated. Ramanaryan a staunch Hindu by faith, believed in this popular belief and requested his wife that their first born should be allowed to become a sannyasi. Kamala Devi, as a faithful wife accepted the wish of her husband silently. But, later on she failed to keep her promise. She did not allow his first three sons to have sannyas.

Lokenath Brahmachari was the fourth son of his parents. At first Kamala Devi was disagreed with her husband regarding the question of taking sannyas of Lokenath. But at last she was convinced and gave her consent to Lokenath to take sannyas. Sannyas means renouncement of the world or mendicancy. ‘Renunciation is one of the most important means for achieving liberation as religiously conceived’. (Babb. 1987 : 146). The term renunciation refers the action or an act of renouncing, which means giving up the worldly possessions, desires and attachment. “By renunciation, a man can become dead to the social world, escape the network of strict inner dependence” (Dumont. 2009 : 184). Dumont called this renouncer, an individual-outside-the-world. (ibid : 185).

Ramnarayan approached Bhagwan Ganguly and expressed his desire that he should take the responsibility of being acharya guru of Lokenath in the the performance of
the sacred thread ceremony and lead him in the path of renunciation. Bhagwan Ganguly welcomed his proposal.

When Lokenath reached the age of eleven, Bhagwan Ganguly agreed to perform the sacred thread ceremony (a ceremony in which the boy born in a brahmin family is initiated in *Gayatri Mantra* in accordance with brahminical culture). The day was selected by Bhagwan Ganguly for the performance of the ceremony. And it was decided that Bhagwan Ganguly, after the ceremony, would set out along with Lokenath for *sadhana* as wondering mendicants. Lokenath’s bosomfriend Benimadhav Bandyopadhyya whose sacred thread ceremony was also fixed on the same day, expressed his firm determination to leave home along with Lokenath and Bhagwan Ganguly. Henceafter their sacred thread ceremony they were initiated by Bhagwan Ganguly of *Sabarna Gotra* (clan).

The sacred thread ceremony (*upanayana*) introduced the young brahmin boys into the *brahmacharyashrama*. According to Hindu concept of life of *brahmacharyashrama*, the individual has to surrender his life of sense (*indriya*, mind (*mana*), and the intellect (*buddhi*), that is to say all the intellectual and emotional apparatus, — to the handling of and moulding by the adept (*guru*). Therefore, in this ashrama, on the other hand, a sort of *yajana* of the lower self has to be practised, in the sense that the student (*brahmachari*) has to undergo all sorts of lessons in self control imposed upon him by his preceptor (*guru*); and on the other hand, as he has also to acquire knowledge from his guru, Jnana-Yajna, i.e., Yajna or ‘sacrifice’ in terms of devotion to and practice of learning has also to be increasingly practised by him (Prabhu. 1995 : 97).

It is important to note that though Lokenath took the brahmacharya (complete abstinence from sexual and secular pleasure) and sannyas (ascetic mendicancy, renunciation of the world), but the ‘order’ of guru Bhagwan and his disciples (*sishyas*) is still unknown. That is to say, the researcher could not gather from anywhere as to which particular order of ‘Dasanami’ ascetics the preceptor of Lokenath and Lokenath himself belong. Sankarcharya and his disciples started organizing the ten branches of the Advaita school from 9th century onwards. These monastic orders were known as the ‘Dasanami’ or ‘ten names’ from the ten words which formed the suffixes to the names taken by the monks of these orders after their initiation. These words were — *Giri* (hill), *Puri* (city), *Bharati* (Learning), *Ban* (wood), *Aranya* (forest), *Parbat* (Moun-
tain), **Sagar** (Ocean), **Tirtha** (temple/place of pilgrimage), **Ashram** (hermitage) and **Saraswati** (Perfect knowledge). (Jadunath Sarkar. year not stated : 53-54). It is also known that Shankaracharya placed his major disciples as the first head of the four great **maths** (monasteries) at the four strategic points of India : (i) South the Sringeri Math, under Prithvidhar Acharya, covering the Puri, Bharati and Saraswati branches; (ii) East—the Govardhan Math at Jagannath Puri, to which the Ban and Aranya orders were attached, under Padmapad Acharya; (iii) North—The Joshi (Jyotish) Math at Badri Kedar in the Himalayas which, under Trotakacharya, controlled the Giri, Parbat and Sagar branches and (iv) West—the Saroada Math and Dwarka which was assigned to the Tirtha and Ashram orders under the charge of Swarupacharya. (Ibid). Neither guru Bhagwan, nor his disciple Lokenath Brahmachari followed any of the ten orders of Sankaracharya. Swami Shuddhananda Brahmachari notes that “....Lokenath was not a brhamacharin in the lineage of Adiguru Shankaracharya’s Sannyasins and Brahmacharins. Guru Bhagwan initiated Lokenath and Benimadhav as Naisthic Brahmacharins in accordance with Vedic Principles.” (1986 : 10). Akshay Kumar Dutta, a pioneer in the field of Indian sociology, mentioned another kind of **brahmacharis** who are not included in the fold of Dasanami ascitics. (1990 : 68). The present researcher is not sure whether Lokenath was comprised in that kind of **brahmacharies** as mentioned in the works of Dutta (1990).

Lokenath and Benimadhav left home on the very day of sacred thread ceremony along with guru Bhagwan Ganguly, and walked a very long way through the village, roads and jungles and reached at Kalighat in Calcutta, the place of pilgrimage in the eastern India. In the 17th century there was no city of Calcutta. In 1690, the three villages, Sutanuti, Govindapur and Kolkata, that later grew into the city of Calcutta, lay on the fringes of the Sundarbans, along the banks of the Ganga. From the ghats of the river, through Govindapur and a jungle of heavy undergrowth and massive trees intersected by numerous creeks and watercourses, the road to Kalighat meandered along. (Nayak (ed.) 1981 : 24). At that time, two or three villages were there in Kalighat, but, the temple of Kali was amidst a wild forest. The earliest source of the name of Kalighat is **Manasa Bijoy** (Victory of Manasa, 1495) by Bipradas Piplai of 15th century (Roy. 2006 : 42). According to another source, people came to know about this place in 10th Century. (Chatterjee. 2008 : 41). Hence, Kalighat had been a place of pilgrimage for a long time. Though, the mythical association of the place go back
to the Siva on his frenzied journey through the cosmos with the dead Sati on his shoulders and Vishnu wilding his *sudarshan* wheel to cut the body into pieces and splintered limbs scattered over the country. A toe from the sati’s right foot is reputed to have fallen here. Latest of the Kalighat temple rising ninety feet on a base $26\frac{1}{4}$ by 46 feet and the present temple was built up in 1809.

When Lokenath, Benimadhav and their guru Bhagwan reached Kalighat, quite a large number of sannyasis with large locks of matted hair lived there. Bhagwan Ganguly asked them to stay with the sannyasis. Lokenath and Benimadhav used to disturb the sannyasis by pulling their long matted hair and clothes. But they kept quite. They said nothing against this misbehaviour. Seeing this, Lokenath got encouraged to do it again and again. When the disturbance reached its peak, the sannyasis approached Bhagwan Ganguly and complained about the misbehaviour of the young boys. Bhagwan Ganguly answered that these boys belong to the sannyasis’ ashrama. So, it is their duty to set them right. The sannyasis were pleased by this opt reply and they did not complain anymore. Bhagwan called the boys and asked them not to do the same thing again. Because, when they would grow old and in the same manner others would pull their long matted hair or clothes.

Hearing this Lokenath became perplexed. He asked his guru that if sannyasis and them belong to the same ashrama, then why did they live on alms and Lokenath and his associates live on the money sent from their homes? Bhagwan Ganguly replied that, the money which is sent from home should be treated as alms. He also added that, the fact is the people at home know their address, and for that reason they send money for Lokenath’s expenses. Understanding this, Lokenath argued that why don’t they immediately move to a distant place. Guru Bhagwan Ganguly agreed with his proposal. And the Bhagwan and his two disciples set out on foot to an unknown destination.

Bhagwan Ganguly preferred to live in a forest area where he could find some human habitation at a distance, so that he could beg for the food and at the same time he was egar to put the brahmacharis in the path of active spiritual discipline. To establish the disciples in the discipline of brahmacharyahood, Bhagwan Ganguly asked the boys to observe some vows or *bratas*, viz., *Naktabrata, Ekantara, Triratri, Panchha, Navaratri, Dwadashah, Pakshah, Mashah.*
(a) *Naktabrata*: *Nakta* in Sanskrit means night. The observance of this vow calls for fasting during the day and taking light food at night. This Naktabrata continued for a long period. During that period Bhagwan Ganguly used to go neighbouring village to beg alms from the householders. A typical diet used to be prepared by Bhagwan Ganguly by boiling milk and particles of grains. He would serve the brahmacharis with this diet, and take the same diet for himself. But young brahmacharis got fed up with it. As a result of that they requested their guru to allow them to go to distant village to collect alms from the villagers, Bhagwan did not allow them to do so. Because by this devotion to the life of *brahmacharya* would be disturbed. Observing the different gestures and the mode of living of the householders, they would be influenced by the householders. There was always a possibility of a fall from the *yogic* state that they had reached through their long spiritual discipline.

(b) *Ekantara*: After finishing *Naktabrata* they started ‘Ekantaraharata’. It is fasting for the whole day and taking some light food in the next day morning.

(c) *Triratri*: Next step was *Triratribrata*, that is, fasting for three days and taking food only on the fourth day.

(d) *Panchaha*: It was the next step of *Triratri*, It means, fasting for five days and having some light food on the sixth day.

(e) *Navaratri*: The next vow was *Navaratri*, i.e., fasting for nine consecutive days and taking food on the tenth day.

(f) *Dawadashaha*: After completion of *Navaratribrata*, they started *Dwadashaha*, i.e, fasting rigorously to prepare their body to reach the higher stage of *sadhana*. After finishing the course of *hathayoga* they stepped forward to the higher stage, i.e. *rajayoga*. It is opined by the yogis that *rajayoga* is a method by which one can reach the truth. Vivekananda writes, “The science of Rajayoga proposes to put before humanity a practical and scientifically worked out method of reaching the truth”. (1994 : 128). *Rajayoga* is divided into eight steps. The first is *Yama*-non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-receiving of any gifts. Second step is *Niyama*-cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study and self surrender to god.

The next is *Asana* postures designed to enhance the body-cosmos equation. The lotus posture, for example, was intended to place the seeker at the beginning of the universe where the lotus was first thought to have arisen. ‘‘This portion of the Yoga
is a little similar to the Hatha-Yoga which deals entirely with the physical body. Its aim being to make the physical body very strong.” (Vivekananda : 1994 : 138) “The result of this branch of yoga is to make men live long; health is the chief idea, the one goal of the Hatha-yogi. He is determined not to fall sick, and he never does. He lives long; a hundred years is nothing to him; he is quite young and fresh when he is 150, without one hair turned grey” (ibid).

The fourth is Pranayama, or breath control included techniques thought to purify the mythical channels which permit the flow of the five breaths of which Upanisadic sages had spoken (Clothey : 208 : 68) Vivekananda writes, “Breathing is only one of the many exercises through which we get to the real Pranayama, Pranayama means the control of Prana.” (1994:147). Fifth is Pratyahara, or withdrawal of the senses. It refers to the separation of the sense organs from the sense objects. Vivekananda writes, “The Indriyas, the organs of the senses, are acting outwards and coming in contact with external objects. Bringing them under the control of the will is what is called Pratyahara or gathering towards oneself.” (1994 : 191)

After completion of the physical preparation (which includes Asana, Pranayama and Pratyahara) Lokenath started to take the spiritual preparation, which included Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. Dharana is the sixth stage of yoga which means retention. More precisely, in this stage yogis concentrate on an object in order to bring thoughts to standstill. Next step is Dhyana or meditation (contemplation) and the last step is Samadhi or concentration which refers to the highest stage of contemplation. Vivekananda writes, “Fixing the mind on the lotus of the heart, or on the centre of the head, is what is called Dharana. Limited to one spot, making that spot the base, a particular kind of mental waves rises; these are not swallowed up by other kinds of waves, but by degrees become prominent, while all the others recede and finally disappear. Next the multiplicity of these waves gives place to unity and one wave only is left in the mind. This is Dhyana, meditation. When no basis is necessary, when the whole of the mind has become one wave, one formedness, it is called samadhi.” (1994 : 191).

After 12 long years of celibacy, fasting vows and practice of yoga Lokenath returned to his own birth place, the village of Chakla, accompanied with guru Bhagwan Ganguly and friend Benimadhava,. He stayed there for few months. During this time,
he got some unique experience of the knowledge of sex. Madhuri, one of Lokenath’s playmates of the childhood days, now a young woman, hearing the news of his return to village, came forward to offer her services to Lokenath. She prayed to guru Bhagwan Ganguly for his permission to serve Lokenath. Ganguly granted it. Days after days, the woman served Lokenath with all her might and made her own place in the heart of Lokenath. Naturally Lokenath had fallen in love with her. Suddhanandà Brahmachari writes, “Lokenath felt a deep sense of attraction for this woman. Whenever he would sit for meditation his uncontrolled mind would take its full liberty and weave colourful dreams. He would feel a deep urge to be near her physical presence, and would run and surrender himself to her loving arms.” (1986 : 27).

Lokenath was in dilemma. He found himself face to face with the most difficult situation and test of his life. Bhagwan Ganguly knew everything, but he did not try to refrain Lokenath from making love with Madhuri. He maintained a meaningful silence. Two contradictory trends struggling in the mind of Lokenath on one hand love for Madhuri and commitment to the spiritual life on the other. One day Bhagwan came to him and wanted to know his opinion whether to stay in the village for some more days or to proceed further. Lokenath expressed his wish to leave the village immediately.

There is another story of Lokenath’s love affair, written by Ganesh Chandra Mukhopadhyay. (1919 AD. & 1388 Beng.). According to the story, Lokenath’s childhood intimate play-mate (name is not mentioned) was a girl, who, later on, became widow and lost her character. When Lokenath returned to his village, he called up the sweet memory of her in his mind and fell into love with the lady. And also he felt a deep sexual urge within him. The feeling of love brought a serious trouble to his meditation. Bhagwan Ganguly came to know this and requested her to satisfy his sexual desire. She accepted Bhagwan Ganguly’s proposal and went to Lokenath to satisfy his sexual needs. After having sex with her, Lokenath got frustrated and sought to escape from this relationship (Mukhopadhyay. 1388 Beng : 196).

Whatever the story was, Lokenath got some experience about sex and this experience helped him to develop a pragmatic approach towards the sexual relationships. It should be noted here that number of Bengali gurus preached a negative approach regarding the sexual relationship. For example, Ramkrishna vigorously criticized women and married devotees. He used to express his hatred towards Kamini and
Once Lokenath told one of his devotees, “Love is beyond all human rationalisation. The natural attraction which a male feels for a female, is in the eyes of the society on immoral aspect of life, but it is really childish to give up sex or condemn it as a social evil. You have to go deep into this phenomenon and know its source, why is this bestial manifestation found in the life of human beings, why man tries to rise above this instinctive urge but fails to do it.” (Brahmachari. 1986 : 25).

He adds, “To brand sex as sin is the greatest blunder. How can that, without which the creation is impossible, be called a sin. Sin is a feeling of the mind in a state of unawareness. Sex cannot be separated from the world of desires..... You may say that the desire for material pleasures is a limited one whereas the desire for the Divine Grace is a greater value in life, but can you deny the fact that at the root there is the phenomenon of desiring.”(ibid.).

Leaving the village of Chakla, three mendicants, once again on the move. The destination was the Himalayas. Fifty long years of sadhana in Himalayas prepared Lokenath to attain enlightenment and self-realization. Recollecting the days in the Himalayas Lokenath would often say, “Gurudev had left no discipline of yoga unpractised during the half a century of most difficult penance of my life. Heaps of snow would cover my body and get melted on its own. I used to be deeply absorbed in the highest spiritual experiences, in Samadhi, that I had no feeling about the existence of my body. In this state of Samadhi years and years have passed, and then finally I reached that state of being one with the total existence. This much I can say that all that is possible in the mortal human body I have achieved more than that.” (Brahmachari, 1986 : 32).

Though, guru Bhagwan Ganguly was a jnanmargi (follower of the path of knowledge), his sishya was a karmamargi (follower of the path of work). Bhagwan transformed all of his knowledge into the mind of Lokenath.

After having Brahma-jnana, Lokenath proceeded towards Mecca and Madina, the site of pilgrimage of Mussalmans, for better understating of the religion and essential harmony between Hinduism and Islam. Lokenath, Benimadhava and their guru Bhagwan Ganguly had a desire to visit this site of pilgrimage and also study the Quran,

Lokenath, Benimadhav and Bhagwan Ganguly reached at Kabul by foot. Muslims of that place welcomed them gladly. There they lived with Mullasadi, one of the
outstanding poets and commentators of the *Quran.* Mullasadi taught Lokenath *Quran* carefully. Lokenath studied the *Quran* to facilitate a better understanding of the essential harmony that existed between two religions—Hinduism and Islam, and the superficial discords and distortions among the brothers of these two faiths. After learning *Quran* and *Hadith* (accounts of the sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad and certain early Muslims, passed down orally and in written form and collected in volumes for the guidance of the Muslim communities), Lokenath came to understand that there is no fundamental difference between Hinduism and Islam. The kernel of these two religions is identical.

After finishing his study, Lokenath left Kabul and moved towards Mecca by foot accompanied with friend and guru.

When they reached there, they received a cordial welcome from the Muslims. They stayed there for some time. Again they started walking towards Madina. On the way from Mecca to Madina through the desert, Lokenath met a Muslim saint, who was popularly known as Abdul Gaffar and his age was 400 years (!). Gaffar asked him, "Who are you?" Lokenath replied, "I have come to know from who am I?" Gaffar asked again, "How many days old are you?" Lokenath answered, "I am of two days." He meant that he can remember all about his two previous births. Gaffar said, "I am of four days." Gaffar wanted to say that he can remember of his last four births. Later on, Lokenath told his devotees that he had found only three brahmins in his life, thus Trailanga Swami, Abdul Gaffar and himself.

After a long journey they came back to their own country India. At first they went to Kashi, where they met with Hithalal Mishra alias Trailanga Swami, a famous Hindu sadhu. Bhagwan Ganguly requested him to take the responsibility of Lokenath and Benimadhav. At that time the age of these two disciples was about 100 years. Trailanga Swami agreed to take the responsibility. Then, Bhagwan Ganguly handed over the responsibility of his disciples. After that Bhagwan Ganguly passed away in Kashi in 1811 (as calculated).

After the death of Bhagwan, Lokenath, Benimadhav and Trailanga Swami aimed to tour the entire globe on foot. They travelled through the European countries. Then they toured again Arabian countries particularly Palestaine, Persia, Afghanistan and also the cities of Mecca and Madina. Finishing this tour they returned to Himalayan
region. They stayed there more than three years. Then they walked towards deep north crossing the border of Siberia in the north of Russia. They also travelled Tibet and China. When they reached China, the border security guards seeing the three naked sadhus, arrested them and put them behind the bars. According to legend, guards saw that the three prisoners moved in and out of the prison though the gates were locked in a spirit of absolute indifference. The king realizing the mystic power of the prisoners, immediately set them free. Again they started their journey towards India. At that time Trailanga Swami left them and walked alone in his own path. Lokenath and Benimadhav walked over the Himalayan region and then reached the hills of Chandranath on the Eastern part of India. At that time Benimadhav, spiritual companion of Lokenath left him. Lokenath moved towards Kamakhya of Assam. From the Chandranath hills Lokenath walked down to a village, known as Baradi which was under Naryangunj subdivision of Dacca district (now in Bangladesh) in 1861.

According to the story (as narrated by the biographers of Lokenath), Dengu Karmakar of Baradi, was in trouble due to his involvement in a criminal case. Lokenath saved him by his power of a miracle. And for that reason Dengu Karmakar gave him shelter in his own house. But the family members of Dengu Karmakar vehemently opposed his decision, because Lokenath was naked. Lokenath remained in his seat, absolutely indifferent to what all was happening all around against him. Besides, the young boys and girls started throwing dust and pieces of stones at Lokenath. They considered him as a naked madman.

One day Lokenath got opportunity to show his power of miracle publicly. In a morning, a few brahmins were sitting together and were busy preparing the sacred thread, and in the process the threads got knotted. The brahmins could not untie the knot of threads and there arose a quarrel amongst them. According to story, Lokenath suddenly appeared there and uttered Gayatri Mantra and within no time the whole thread became straightened and there was not a single knot anywhere. Then the brahmins recognized him as a great yogi.

The news of the incident spread like a wild fire to the every nook and corners of villages around and also distant places and people in large number started visiting Baradi to have darshan (seeing) of Lokenath.

At that time Dengu Karmakar passed away. Some of his family members again
started protesting against Lokenath's staying. Observing this Lokenath made up his mind to leave Dengu's house.

The Nag family, landlord of Baradi, got deeply attached to Lokenath. When Lokenath left the house of Dengu Karmakar they (Nag family) requested him so that if he wills and permits, they would construct an ashram for Lokenath where he could stay permanently. Lokenath was prepared to accept the proposal of the ashram provided they gave him a place for which no tax is to be paid.

In the east to the Baradi market, there was a land which was used as the crematory and this land was exempted from tax. Lokenath readily agreed to construct the ashram there. The ashram in the model of the ancient hermitage was constructed in no time. So far, Lokenath lived as a naked sadhu, and on the request of Nag family he took, after almost the whole life, saffron clothes to cover his body and sacred thread.

Lokenath not only found the ashrama in Baradi but also started to preach his non-sectarian religious values and idea of syncretism which attracted a large number of devotees. Some crucial point should be noted here —

1) At that time, the people of the village of Baradi were mixed group, i.e. population of that place was composed of Hindus, Muslims.

2) The dominance of the upper castes was a natural phenomenon at that time in the village of Baradi and vicinity.

3) The facility of modern medical system was absent there. Most of the diseases were considered as deadly and incurable. So, people were always scared of deaths.

4) A very few people were educated. Illiteracy ruled the society.

5) Political situation was very much frustrating, due to the aftermath effect of the failed revolt of 1857-58. People had no political hope. The old was dying but the new could not be born.

During this period Lokenath came forward with his liberalism and values of syncretism. Besides, rumour played a significant role. The rumour regarding Lokenath's power of miracle spread among the villagers and people of vicinity. Brahmins of that areas accepted him as a yogi. Again Nag family, Zamindars of Baradi recognised his spirituality and supernatural power. Both the incidents gave him a height in the rural
society of Baradi and vicinity. People with the most deadly diseases started to visit the ashrama of Baradi. With an intention to heal their critical diseases. Within a very few days Lokenath became a popular sadhu in this region. A number of people used to visit the ashram of Baradi to solve their socio-economic problems. Various kinds of rumour regarding his power of miracles and spirituality, spread all over the area. Soon he became an important character in story-tellers tales, in kirtan, in kavigan (poet-song). (*Kolikatar Kabigan* - Hemendra Dutta, cited by Bhowmik. 2002 : 222). A section of middle class and some religious persons were also attracted by him, e.g., Bijoy Krishna Goswami, Rajani Brahmachari (Rajani Kanta Chakraborty), Brahmananda Bharati (Tarakanta Gangopadhyay), Surath Brahmachari (Akhil Chandra Sen), Jamini Kumar Mukhopadhyya, Ramkumar Chakraborty, Abhaya Brahmachari (Abhayacharan Chakraborty), Mathura Mohan Chakraborty. They used to visit Baradi ashram to know the religious idea of Lokenath. Lokenath dealt these persons in a peculiar way, which made the bond stronger between them. They would take part in ritual practised by Lokenath. Sometimes they would sit silently to listen Lokenath, sometime they took part in quarrel with Lokenath. When they went back their own places they used to propagate Lokenath’s thought on religion among the neighbours. Through this oral media the name of Lokenath was spread all over the district of Dacca.

The members of Muslim community more or less were attracted by Lokenath Brahmachari and his ashram of Baradi. The first census report of Bengal (1872) shows that at that time the total population of Dacca district was 1,852,9993. The total Hindu population was 793789 and Muslim was 1050131. (Beverley, 1872). So, Muslim population formed a greater majority of the district of Dacca. So they could not be ignored. Lokenath used to preach his idea of syncretism among his devotees, saying that, “I have travelled extensively all over the world and found only three Brahmins — Abdul Gaffar, Trailanga Swami and myself.” (Brahmachari. 1987 : 40).

According to the claim of Lokenath devotees, Lokenath was Hindu and Muslim, both in one body. Lokenath observed through his years long spiritual practice, that there is no such difference between the people of Hindu and Muslim origin. There is no difference between Allah and Bhagwan. Both are same and identical, (Roy. 1997 : 305). The cognition of universal spiritual unity led him to utter that “I am a Mussalman,” or “Abdul Gaffar is a brahmin”. It is striking to note that no other modern Hindu guru have called themselves Mussalman or described any Muslim saint
as a brahmin. A biographer writes, "The ashram of Baradi was the holy pilgrimage (tirtha or site of pilgrimage) where met the two ideologically conflicting communities — the Hindu and Muslims. The Mohammedan devotees of Baba often visited the ashram and presented their personal problems which were material and spiritual in nature. On issues regarding disputes with the rival Hindu communities Baba’s decision and influence were always the supreme. To them the word of Baba was the word of God. The Mohammedan community, as a sign of their highest respect to Baba, gave up slaughtering of cows at Baradi." (Brahmachari. 1986: 153). Not only that Mussalmans considered him as a ‘Sufi’, ‘a pir’. They would bring their new born babies and children to the ashram to take his blessings. The door of the ashram of Baradi was open to all irrespective of any caste, class, creed or religions (ibid: 38).

In 1890, Lokenath had a very severe attack of dreadful tuberculosis. Consequently, he had passed away in the first week of June (19th day of Jaistha of Bengali year), 1890. According to his biographers, Lokenath cured a boy who had tuberculosis. He had taken his disease in his own body with his power of miracle. Suddhananda Brahmachari writes, "Taking over the disease, for Baba, was only a prelude for leaving his mortal body. He suffered the virulent attacks of coughs from time to time with a sense of absolute detachment. But his body gradually started manifesting the signs of deteriorating conditions." (1986: 180). For his devotees, it is not an ordinary and common death. It is more than that. Death is the phenomenon related to the body. The body takes birth, decays and dies in time. But soul or atman is birthless and deathless. It is eternal. So, the biographers would not like to call his death a death, rather they consider it as a Mahasamadhi. Mahasamadhi is composed of two words maha (great) and samadhi (attainment of oneness) which is held to be the preconditions of moksha.

After his death his body was brought outside the cottage and placed on the funeral pyre made of sandle-wood. The news of his death spread all over the area. Thousands of people of all communities flooded the small village of Baradi, their hearts’ idol is no more. The devotees covered the body of Lokenath with flowers of all kinds as their humble homage to the living god.

After the death of Lokenath Brahmachari, a crisis of continuity was created. The crisis of continuity is also a crisis of succession (O’Dea. 1979: 37). A conflict appeared within the devotees of Lokenath regarding the question of succession. Two of
his prominent followers, thus, Bramhananda Bharati and Rajani Bramhachari, claimed the true inheritance of Lokenath. Before having *sannyas*, Bramhananda Bharati was known as Tarakanta Gangopadhyya. In his household life he was a lawyer by profession. Due to some reasons he became indifferent about his family and somehow he came to contact with Lokenath Bramhachari and Baradi Ashram. Within a very short period, he successfully converted himself a close and intimate devotee of Lokenath. Just after the death of Lokenath he claimed that he (Bramhananda) was guru Bhagwan Ganguly in his previous life, because Lokenath himself recognized him as his guru. Bramhananda Bharati claimed this in his articles (1903) and in his book *Siddha Jibani* (1908). Jamini Mukhopadhyaya and Mathuramahan Chakraborty supported his claim.

Rajani Brahmachari, the other claimant of inheritance of Lokenath, previously known as Rajanikanta Chakraborty. In his early life he was a head clerk in first subjudges court of Dacca. Hearing the *mahima* (greatness) of Lokenath from Bijay Krishna Goswami, Rajanikanta visited Lokenath’s ashram of Baradi and felt a deep attraction to Lokenath. In course of time he became an ardent devotee of Lokenath. Indirectly he claimed that he was Bhagwan Ganguly in his previous life.

Consequently, two centers had been created out of this conflict. Mathura Mohan Chakraborty, an ardent follower of Lokenath and a successful businessman of Dacca, supported the Bharati line and erected a Lokenath temple in his factory premises of *Sakti Ousadhalaya* at Dacca in 1900. It became an important centre of propagation of the Bharati line. Mathura Mohan Chakraborty built up another Lokenath temple in the village of Baradi with the help of Nag Family. Probably, it was also connected with the Bharati line. Rajani Bramhachari, the other claimant of inheritance of Lokenath, founded ‘*Brahmachari Yogashram*’ in Uarhi at Dacca in 1903. This ashram was the centre of Rajani line.

The conflict between these two groups forced Brahmananda Bharati to leave Dacca and to settle permanently in Kashi. (Bhowmik. 1406 Beng. : 27). It should be noted here that the conflict between the Bharati and the Rajani Brahmachari groups was confined mainly in the district of Dacca. The conflict had been continuing from 1890 to 1930s. But it lost its significance after the death of Bharati in 1926 (1333 Bengali).

To the knowledge of the researcher, the first biography of Lokenath written in Bengali by Girish Chandra Das, was published in 1890 from Baradi. Information re-
garding his identity and his affinity with this or that group of followers of Lokenath is not available. A microfiche of the copy of this small book of 36 pages, which is kept in the British Museum Library, has recently been brought to Kolkata by Haripada Bhowmik who is going to reprint the book with an editorial note. In 1897 (1304 Beng.) a short biography of Lokenath was published in Sri Sanatani (June-July) a Bengali journal. (Mukhopadhyay, Jamini. 1391 Beng. Second Edition). In 1903 Brahmananda Bharati, wrote a series of articles on Lokenath's life in Jamuna, a Calcutta based Bengali monthly (Bhowmik.1999 : 5). The second biography of Lokenath written by Bharati, was published in 1908 (ibid : 6). In the same year Jamini Mukhopadhayay wrote Dharmasar Sangraha which highlighted the facts of life and ideas of Lokenath ( Mukhopadhyay. 1391Bengali). In the year 1909. Purnachandra Saha published Santikana, a Bengali monthly journal for religion, literature, society and morality in which a small article was published on Lokenath. But the name of the author was not mentioned. In the same magazine an advertisement was published to sell the picture of Lokenath Brahmachari (price one anna or six paisa) (Bhowmick. 1999 : 7).

All of these books followed the Bharati line.

The other line of thinking followed by Kedareswar Sengupta, a disciple of Rajani Brahmachari, wrote Sree Sree Lokenath Mahatmaya', published in 1916. This book was more descriptive and informative biography of Lokenath than the previous books. In his book, Sengupta claimed that Rajani Brahmachari was guru Bhagwan Ganguly in his previous birth.

Apart from these books the name of Lokenath can be found in a short article of Ananda Bazar Patrika (2.1.1926) and in the family history of Nag Zaminders (1930) written by Arunkanti Nag (Bhowmik, H. edited. 2000 : 8).

In the first half of the 20th century very few people of Calcutta knew about Lokenath. Before independence Lokenath and his followers never took any initiative to penetrate into the middle class of Calcutta. Dr.Nishikanta Basu (a physician and father of late Jyoti Basu, former chief minister of West Bengal) of Baradi settled in Calcutta in the decade of the 1930s. He used to organize 'nam samkirtana' in his house on every saturday during the 30s and the 40s (Basu.1991). But it was confined to a limited number of devotees of the Bengali elite.

The Noakhali riots of 1946 and the partition of Bengal swept away the difference
and conflicts of the devotees of Lokenath and also the story of Lokenath. The Noakhali riots caused the migration of East Pakistan. By March, 1948 the number of migrants has swelled to a million. By June, 1948 the number reached 1.1 million (Chakraborty, 1990:1). The second phase of the migration began with pogrom of February 1950 in East Pakistan. During the period 1961-65 there arrived in West Bengal at least a million refugees (ibid : 4). They settled in Calcutta in other districts of West Bengal. Just after the independence due to communal violence lakhs of people left East Pakistan and came to West Bengal,(Chakraborty.1990:1,4). Many of those who came from Dacca brought among other materials, ideas and ideals, the legend of Lokenath to West Bengal. Brahma Prasanna Nag of the Nag family of Baradi came to Calcutta in 1948 and erected a temple of Lokenath in 1949 in Garia. This temple is the oldest Lokenath temple in West Bengal. In 1950, due to communal riot, 1172928 persons left East Pakistan and came to West Bengal (ibid). Dasgupta family of Bikrampur (Dhaka) has been worshipping Lokenath since 1915. Lalit Mohan Dasgupta and his son used to observe Tirodhan Divas (the day of disappearance 19 Jaistha, Beng. which is around 3rd June) of Lokenath as a family puja . In 1943, Paresh Dasgupta, son of Lalit Mohan, settled in Calcutta and in 1957 he built up a temple in Bansdroni of Calcutta.


Nitya Gopal Saha of Dhaka, was one of the migrants. He settled in Salkia of Howrah in 1950. He took an effective initiative to resuscitating and popularizing the cult of Lokenath in West Bengal. He organized public meeting, mass rally, congregation and festivals. He was helped by some other migrants of Dhaka in his venture. The most notable among them were Kalisadhan Das and the members of the Nag family. At first, Saha had the idea that Lokenath was born in Chakla. This idea was buttressed probably by the assertion to that effect by the members of the Nag family. Saha visited Chakla in 1976. He declared this village as the birth place of Lokenath. And he made contact with some important villagers and requested them to build up a temple on the ‘Baba’s’ bhita (Baba’s home). Salien Ray, Sib Ray, Nimai Ray, Akshoy
Biswas of Chakla, came forward to give support the plan of Nitya Gopal Saha. A portion of land came to be recognized as the \textit{bhita} (a plot of land on which a person’s original dwelling house rests) of Lokenath. That was in possession of the Biswas family in the village. As preparations started for constructing the temple on the land the Biswas family consented to donate the piece of land. But, Saha wanted that the mutation of the ownership of the land be made in the name of Saha. The Biswas family and villagers disagreed to Saha’s proposal. At the same time (1977), Haripada Bhowmik, a close follower of Saha, convinced him that not Chakla but the village of (14 Km. away from the village of Chakla) Kachua is the birth place of Lokenath. In support of his notion Bhowmik referred to the work of Bharati and other historical reasons. Consequently, Saha made a breach with Chakla people in 1977. He announced that, not Chakla but Kachua is the birth place of Lokenath. Side by side he formed the Lokenath Mission in 1978 at Salkia with the help of Kalisadhan Das.

Observing this Lokenath devotees of Chakla and Ashoknagar, thus, Amal Chakraborty, Sailen Roy, Sib Chandra Roy, Debaprasad Sarkar, Gurupada Das, Akshay Biswas, Babul Kumar Roy, Krishna Nag Chowdhury and some other important persons decided to move independently. They found a separate organization — the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha in 1979 (registered in 1981). In the same year they erected a temple in the village of Chakla. Jyoti Prasannaya Nag Chowdhury, a member of Nag family Dacca and his son-in-law Kamal Kanta Bakshi gave their full logistic and financial support to the organizers of Chakla, i.e. to the Sangha. At first the Sangha aimed to attract the attention of the common people by developing a vast organizational network and various kinds of activities. They developed a good connection with rich businessmen, social workers, bureaucrats and political personalities. With the financial support of them the Sangha organized several exhibitions, congregations and cultural programmes, associated with Hindu festivals, to which they give wide publicity in newspaper advertisements. A common feature of these occurrences is the legitimacy-conferring display of dignitaries and celebrity members of the movement. Moreover, they stuck posters on the walls, distributed handbills in railway stations, street corners and bus stands. Apart from these, they introduced a new ritual which was similar to the water carrying ritual of Tarakeswar pilgrimage. Besides, they published books, marketed cassettes and compact discs on the life and teachings of Lokenath, in which the village of Chakla was described as the birth place of Lokenath.
So, for them, this place is as sacred as a tirtha (place of pilgrimage). Formation of the Sangha and constant use of modern techniques of propaganda played a crucial role in popularizing the cult of Lokenath. And, of course, the socio-economic milieu of West Bengal helped to organize the movement of Lokenath cult.

It should be noted here that the debate regarding the birth place of Lokenath indirectly gave impetus to the revival of the old debate on the question of succession. There is reciprocity between the Rajani line and the Sangha. The claim of the Sangha (i.e., Chakla is the birth place of Lokenath) is supported by an important writer of the Rajani line (Sengupta 1916). The Sangha gave its support to the Rajani line indirectly by denouncing the claim of Bharati. The Sangha was forced to do it because Bharati propagated that Lokenath was born in Kachua. The reverse picture can be found in case of the Mission. The Mission upheld the Bharati line for sanctification of their claim i.e., Kachua is the birth place of Lokenath.

The organizers of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha claimed two main things — (a) only the Sangha is the true follower of Lokenath Brahmachari, and (b) the village of Chakla is the original birth place of Lokenath. They also depicted Brahmananda Bharati as a cheater and fraud. Not only that they also stepped forward. In 1983, Amal Chakraborty of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha of Chakla shoot a case against Kalisadhan Das, Nitya Saha and Haripada Bhowmik of the Lokenath Mission for propagating false information about the birth place of Lokenath by publishing of book, named Trikaldarshi Mahapurusha Sree Sree Lokenath Brahmacharir Janmasthan Prasange (January, 1983). After the death of Amal Chakraborty, the case became closed. But rivalry of these organizations did not stop. It became more and more stronger. Both of the organizations started to propagate against each other. Consequently, a permanent breach developed between them.

In fine, it can be said that the location of sacred site of birth of Lokenath has got a significant role in the Lokenath movement and the division within. The Lokenath movement is split into two main branches regarding the question of sacred geography. The Sangha is associated with Chakla, which became a centre of the movement and played a crucial role in popularizing the cult of Lokenath. It is one of the important reasons for selecting the Sangha of Chakla in this study. The other group is the Mission which is connected with Kachua. To the knowledge of the researcher there are some other lesser-known Lokenath group scattered in West Bengal.
The sacredness of a space associated with a deity or godman does not inhere in the space as such. The sacredness is derived from the imagination of human beings or from the myths developed by them or even stories essayed and spread by men who may be guided by considerations which may not be spiritual but directed by mundane interests. It is demonstrated by the stories of invention and reinvention of the birth place of Lokenath.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF EMERGENCE OF THE LOKENATH MOVEMENT

(1)

Each and every thought, perception, ideology, values religious beliefs and rituals evolved and developed in a specific historical period of society. No thought, perception ideology religious beliefs and movements can be understood without the socio-historical context. Because this context helps to find out the true value of these beliefs, ideas and movements.

Numerous types of religious movement have been taken place in India under the leadership of swami, bhagat, baba, guru, from the Middle Ages down to the modern times. The root of these movements lies in the society. India has witnessed a massive upsurge of multitude of religio-mystical cults of godmen, swamis, gurus and babas, after independence, particularly during the last three decades. The cult of Lokenath/ the Lokenath movement is one of them. Lokenath passed away in 1890, but the cult of Lokenath and Lokenath movement have got popularity in the decades of '80 and '90 of 20th century. Now the question is which factors are responsible for popularization in the decade of '80 and '90 of 20th century?

(2)

Undoubtedly Lokenath Brahmachari is one of the most popular gurus in present day of Bengal. Lakhs of devotees take part in various activities of Lokenath cult. Devotees from the several districts of West Bengal take pilgrimage to the village of Chakla, which is claimed as the birth place of Lokenath. Guru Lokenath and his cult have taken the que from the long tradition of guru-cult of India.

India has a long tradition of guru-cult. According to Brent, "The skeleton of Hinduism is the guru." (1973 : 1). One may think that this statement is exaggerated. But it is needless to say that the position of guru in the realm of Hinduism is very important. The term guru has different connotations, but they are interrelated. According to
The Encyclopaedia of Religion (1987). "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 since the most ancient times. Already in the Rigveda we see him referred to as the rsi ('seer') or muni ('a sage or silent one'); as such he is the possessor of deep spiritual insights (often resulting from performing austerities) and is considered to be the 'author' of the sacred hymns. "In later times we find him referred to as 'acarya', 'Brahmana' and 'Swami', but he has most dramatically captured the attention of the west as the guru." (1887, Vol. 14 : 33-34)

The social condition of medieval India (13th century - 18th century) was the fertile field for the emergence of the new religious movements under the leadership of numerous types of gurus. Emergence of Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Rajjab, Chaitanya and other gurus and the Bhakti movements under their leadership evolved out of the socioeconomic conditions of that society. In this period Islam came to India and found the abode here. As a result of that settlement both Muslims and Hindus came closer. In order to narrate the condition of that society, Barma writes that, in this period, the main characteristics of the guardians of both the communities (Hindus and Muslims) used to believe in dogmatic faiths and preached their cultural orientation according to their scriptures (2002 : 76)

However, it is generally believed that Islam came in Indian and set up a reign of bloodshed and cruelty to the Hindu subjects. Consequently, instead of unity, conflict took place between two communities. They failed to unite themselves, rather they had been pushed away from each other (Barma. 2002 : 76). In this situation Sufi saints and Bhaktibadi gurus came forward to change the Hindu-Muslim relation. They brought a new wave of love, devotion and humanism to break the conservative caste and other unequal social institutions. To the poor aborigines of eastern and deltaic Bengal fishermen, hunters, pirates and peasants, the impure or unclean outcastes, popularly called the untouchables, spumed and neglected by the caste-proud brahmanical Hindu society, this movement came as a revelation with its message of monotheism and social equality and offered full franchise, an escape from the social disabilities and humiliations and opened avenues of progress. This movement was led by some famous gurus, e.g. Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Razzab, Prananath, Chaitanya etc. The contribution of these movements was two fold : First they liberalized the orthodox conception of religious beliefs and carried it 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 criticising both the Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy. Most of them were for the abolition of the social disabilities based on caste, sex and religious beliefs. Their second contribution was to bridge the gap between the Little and the Great traditions of Hindu culture. (Singh, 1977: 42).

The main stream Bhakti Movement in Bengal, was mainly influenced by Chaitanya and Chaitanya-centric groups. Several distinguished disciples of Chaitanya mainly came from rising mercantile classes and Bhakti movements was the expression of oppressed peasantry traders and artisans. The ideological reflection of politics and economy was expressed in religion, philosophy and culture. *Smarta* brahmins became more and more rigid and conservative due to Islamic invasion. They tried to enchain the whole society by formulating the new interdictions. *Nabha Naya* and *Nabha Smriti* were complicated, unscientific and dull. (Chakraborty, Romakanta, 2002: 36). So many urban intellectuals did not accept these *Nabha Naya* and *Nabha Smriti*. They accepted Bhakti as a new ideology (ibid). Chaitanya rejected the artificial chain of *Nabha Naya* and *Smriti* and followed the path of devotion as the true way to reach transcendence. Doctrinally, Chaitanya’s Bhakti Movement established devotion as paramount to everything else, thus rejecting the system of Karma, Jnana and Yoga, because bhakti is its own reward.

During this period, feudal suppression and brahminical *varna* system were unbearable for the whole society. One kind of dictatorship was established in Hindu society, i.e., dictatorship of brahmin caste. (Poddar, 1994: 6). Brahmin is not only at the apex of the social system, but also they instructed the customs and rituals of the other castes. Customs and rituals, which are related to the other castes became more rigid and on the other hand, unjustified activities of the brahmins were made justified and valid. (ibid: 7). Meaningless rites and practices made the people crippled. Due to the dogmatism of yagna, worship and brahminical religion, people became restless. On the other hand the activities of tantric and their transgression, like a disease, pervaded the whole society. As a reaction of Hindu conservatism, common people were attracted by the Islamic liberalism, particularly by the sufi tradition of Islam. Islam offered them social equality. (Roy M. N., 1943: 76). In this situation Chaitanya appeared with his devotional message. His movement attracted urban brahmins as well as the subaltern
section of the society. Out of his 490 disciples brahmins were 239, Kayastha were 29, Baidya 37, Subarna Banik 1, Bhumnali 1, Satradhar 1, Karmakar 1, Modak 1, Hazra 1, Muslim 2, Parsi 1, Odissi 26, Sannyasi 54 and unknown 95. (Poddar, 1994: 152). Chaitanya gave them equality and held up the flag of humanitarianism. Some kind of spiritual democracy was practised here. Point should be noted here that his movement was not opposed by the contemporary rulers. Because it was concerned with culture, not with politics. (Haldar, G. 1993: 66). It also should be pointed here that contemporary political and economic system was a suffocating cage to the common people, and this movement played an indirect protest against the existing political and economic system. Consequently Malakar, Sonarbene, Goala, Gandhabanik, Modak, Karmakar, Sutradhar and some other lower castes took part and supported the movement. (Chakraborty, Ramakanta, 2002: 39). Because they had enjoyed a relative freedom from the ritualism, orthodoxy and caste system. Hence, it was not a social transformative movement, all it made possible was that amongst the devotees there should be no distinction of birth, learning, appearance, family, wealth and the like. A devotee was exhorted to give expression to his love of god by love of beauty, adoration, recollection, attachment to his service, attachment of a beloved wife, attachment to self-consecration, attachment to self-absorption and attachment to permanent self-effacement. In Vaishnavite devotional tradition neither brahmin nor the castesm but the devotion to the guru or preceptor enjoyed importance, and guru was considered as the human form of god himself.

Bhakti had been the main ritual during the lifetime of Ramkrishna. The Bhaktas were, therefore, dedicated to guru and Kali. But his disciple Vivekanananda made breach from this tradition, he put his faith on monasticism, toleration, liberalism, humanism and scientific world view. He believed Vedanta was the only scientific religion and that it was completely compatible with science.

(3)

In Modern Ages several liberal-devotional religious movements have taken place in different times and place. A number of gurus and religious organization appeared in 19th century. Probably Ramkrishna was the most popular guru in Bengal. He preached a new liberal religious faith which was based on *Sakta* tradition of Hinduism. Sumit Sarkar points out that in colonial system, unemployment and crisis of middle class and lower middle class were responsible for the emergence of
Ramkrishna. Feeling of insecurity due to cultural hegemony of the West, made the foundation of devotion to Ramkrishna. (Sarkar, 2002: 11-22). In primary stage the popularity of Ramkrishna was limited in the realm of gentlemen of Calcutta. Later on, his name was popularized in different provinces of India and abroad, by Vivekananda and Ramkrishna Mission. (Sarkar, 2002: 10). The ideal of Ramkrishna Mission is freedom of the self and service to mankind. It's aim is to preach and practice of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion as embodied in the lives and teachings of Ramkrishna and Vivekananda. Sarkar points out that though this organization works for the subalterns, but, it is difficult for the lower middle class and poor section of the society to get the membership of the Mission. (2002: 78).

Realization of the self or upliftment of soul cannot bring any fundamental change to the society. As it was noted earlier, due to economic condition of the masses, they turned for solace to religious beliefs, fatalism, and other quasi-religious institutions. Besides some cunning commercial folk like 'Baba Taraknath'; or 'Santoshi Mata' etc. pervaded minds of the frustrated masses. The wretched people, hardly free from obscurantist values, rushed to gurus like Balak Brahamachari, Lokenath Brahamachari and others. To understand all these a broad discussion of socio-economic condition could be apprised.

(4)

Lokenath passed away in 1890 but his cult has been popularized in the last two decades of 20th century, particularly in the decade of 90. The socio-political turmoil particularly, political movements of 60's and 70's were absent in the decade of 80's. The frequency of various political and economic tensions and excitement reduced. The decade of 80' and 90' brought political stability and economic reforms also took place. But at the same time, it was equally true that the lives of the common people were not free from the insecurity, alienation and frustration. Human values changed. Existing system had failed to offer secured and joyful-life to the people.

A brief discussion on socio-economic condition of last 25 years can be apprised to understand the factors responsible for the emergence of the Lokenath movement and the Lokenath cult.

A. Condition of the Industries and Workers in Present-day-Bengal:

In the decade of 90' the number of industries have been decreased from 2.9 lakhs
to 1.70 lakhs. *(Hindustan Times 4.4.2003)*. Consequently a large number of cashiered/
dismissed workers have been appeared during this period. A study on closed and newly
established industries shows that new industries have failed to provide employment
to all of the jobless workers. A table (1) is given below to show the picture —

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>New Industry No. of workers (1000)</th>
<th>Closed Industry No. of workers (1000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>9.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>16.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>19.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>9.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Dutta. 2005 : 76)

(Source : Naba Dutta 2005, *Banglar Silpa Sramik* Nagarik Mancha)

During this period the picture of employment in West Bengal is decreasing, which
is shown in table 2 —

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>9,50,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>8,06,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>7,40,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-96</td>
<td>8,25,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>6,85,108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source : Labour in West Bengal Dept. of Labour, 2001)
There is a general tendency on the part of the employers to replace the permanent hands by contract labour. Industrialists do not honour the statutory obligation of payment of minimum wages and not providing security cover to the workers hired by them. Not only that the process of modernization of industry is responsible for rationalization. Because modern technologies do not use much labour. They are used by an investor in order to make his exportable commodities goods in the global market. Prof. Panda writes ‘In a labour-surplus country having a predominantly peasant farming society in the village, drive for modernization is sure to exclude massive numbers of people while absorbing only a handful of jobseekers. (2005 : 77). In this situation the number of unemployed graduate is 26 lakhs (Ananda Bazar Patrika, 10.9.2003). Denationalization of public sectors, huge inflow of foreign investors whose sole motive is to exploit natural resources and cheap labour market.

Apart from these, nowadays workers are in true crisis, because they have been attacked by several industrial policies, e.g. hire and fire policy, V.R.S., lay-off, rationalization etc.

In this situation trade union movement virtually became impotent. Organized trade unions failed to protect the rights of the workers. No trade unions could successfully protect the workers from insecurity, tension and poverty. Frustration and poverty drove them to fatalistic concepts of life. Ramakanta Chakraborty points out that poverty nourishes spiritualism (2002 : 39).

B. Agriculture : Condition of Peasants

At present the condition of the peasants are not satisfactory at all. According to Economic Survey (2001-02) 14.95 lakhs share croppers have been enlisted and 11.06 acre land was distributed among them as contingent. This figure is 7.9% of the total cultivated land. During last 25 years number of agricultural labour and marginal farmer has been increased (30 lakhs and 2 lakhs and 44 thousands). Marginal farmers have been evicted from 4700063 bighas. (Ananda Bazar Patrika 11.05.2003).

Prof. Panda writes “It is very often argued that industrialization in agrarian society will create demand for even some unskilled labour in urban townships. What is missing in this argument is the fact that modernization will evict the villagers from their traditional habitats, deprive them of their traditional sources of livelihood without creating any provision for residence of the displaced families. This is, in plain and sim-
ple terms, denial of right to life for the peasant families who will vacate their land under duress.” (2005 :77). Unfortunately it happened in different places of West Bengal e.g. in Marichjhanpi, Nungi, Rajarhat.

So for poor economic and social condition have driven them into poverty and miserable state. For that reason they seek the way to survive. In this condition normally they have been attracted by the new religious movements in absence of radical peasant movement.

C. Condition of the Middle Class and Lower Middle Class

Lower middle classes and middle classes are those section who swing between elites and subalterns. Culturally they are nearer to the elite and financially to the subalterns. It is their desire to gain more money, more wealth, more power, more comfort, more status etc. But their financial condition bars them to achieve this goal. “A key element in upward mobility is education, for without it good jobs will not be available, living standards cannot be improved, good marriages cannot be contracted and access to other elements of high status denied.” (Srinivas, 2001 : 181) But it is not easy for the middle class to get admission to good schools. Almost all parents think that only reputed English-medium schools are good. Tuition fees, admission fees and other fees of these schools are beyond their reach. The government has not control over private schools in such matters. Parents experience acute anxiety over the admission of their children to ‘good’ schools. They face two problems — (a) severe competition and (b) lacking in financial ability. Besides hike of tuition fees in colleges hinders common pupils to take higher education.

If one looks at the professional education (medical, engineering, management, I.T. etc.), he hardly finds students from lower middle class. Nevertheless, so many lower middle class parents want to admit their offsprings to such competitive examination and courses of study. In a number of cases hopes remain dream, and they fail to reach the target. Therefore, the condition of present social system sows seeds of frustration and a sense of insecurity into the mind of middle and lower middle class. And this condition brings them to the temple of gods and ashrams of gurus. It is significant to note that in the last decade of 20th century 78 thousand temple or place of worship have been built up in West Bengal. (*Hindustan Times*, 4.4. 2003).
D. Effect of Consumerism

The phenomenon of consumerism acts on individual values, need and behaviour. Srinivas writes, “This is a fairly recent phenomenon but it is making up for lost time by the speed with which it is spreading. Consumerism is heavily dependent on advertising and the advertising business is not only booming, but attracts many talented people. Indian news papers and journals nowadays regularly bring out lush supplements with multi-coloured illustrations on glossy paper but with hardly any worthwhile reading matter” (2001 : 184). Artificial demands are created by the advertisements through medias. Srinivas notes that, “An inevitable consequence of growing consumerism is the pressure to buy goods which are not needed” (2001 : 185). It gives birth to an artificial crisis. Lower middle class never reach this dream world of commodities. This crisis drive them to the world of spiritualism. Naturally they are very often attracted by the new religious cults and movements.

Cashierment, unemployment, alienation, crisis, tension, feeling of insecurity, uncertainty, contingency, powerlessness, scarcity (and consequently frustration and deprivation) are the features of the life of today’s common people. Man must act upon the environment, either adjusting to it, or mastering and controlling it, to insure their own survival. When they fail to control their environment, they surrender to the situation and try to adopt it and adjust with it. According to functionalist approach; Religion ...is seen as the most basic ‘mechanism’ of adjustment to the aleatory and frustrating elements.” (O’ Dea, 1969 : 5). At present new religious movements particularly Lokenath movement, “provides a supra empirical view of a larger total reality.” (Ibid : 6). This Lokenath movement provides a meaning of the human life, which helps people to adjust with the unbearable situation or accept the existing system.

Features of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha

Socio-economic condition of the last two decades of 20th century of West Bengal has been discussed to understand the context of the emergence of Lokenath cult and movement. Though, this movement started its journey in the second half of 19th century, but it gained popularity in the last two decades of 20th century. Before the establishment of the Sangha a very few people heard of the name of Lokenath. From the very beginning the Sangha started to campaign the name of Lokenath, which helped the Lokenath movement to reach a strong and influential position. They spread
Lokenath's idea among the people through mass medias. They organized religious congregations and social welfare activities, mass rallies and other activities which help to spread the name of Lokenath among the common people.

This movement has some special features which attract a large masses of the people. They are stated below:

1. Mainly this movement attracts the lower middle class and subaltern section of Bengalee society. Though, some rich lower caste businessmen have taken part in the movement but higher caste rich industrialists and businessmen are significantly absent. Lokenath himself was a high caste brahmin but most of his devotees belong to lower castes, (which is explained in the third chapter).

2. This movement has been spread and developed by the enthusiastic participation of non-brahmins with the help of some business groups. It has been seen that most of the organizers are non-brahmins and they have built up their organization in their own way. Simply they did not allow the brahminical supremacy in their organization.

3. They are non-ritualistic. There is no strict principle of Lokenath worship which should be followed by the devotees. Just to call up the name of Lokenath is considered the worship of Lokenath. The worship of Lokenath is free from the dogmatic Hindu rituals and rites. Therefore, devotees have easy access to their guru i.e., Lokenath Baba.

4. This movement does not proclaim war against the caste system, nor it supports the casteism. It is propagated by the devotees that Lokenath Brahmachari had recognized only three persons as brahmins, namely, Trailanga Swami, Abdul Gafur, and Lokenath himself. This is a complete rejection of the traditional supremacy of brahmins. Naturally lower caste people are attracted by the cult of Lokenath and Lokenath movement. At the same time, brahmins also take part in the movement without any hesitation, because it (movement) does not oppose brahmism directly or it does not foster any anti-brahminical alternative way of life. It follows a centrist line to make a balance between two extremes.

5. This movement fosters religious liberalism against the authoritative dictum of religion. Sectarian interest and notion do not play dominant role, rather people of all religions and castes are considered equal in the movement. Some sort of spiritual democracy can be found here. Sociological basis of Hinduism is caste system which
stands for stratified social system. It is a natural tendency of human being to find out the way to escape form this kind of suffocating cage of caste system. Because in this system lower castes are not allowed to enjoy equal status nor they find any helpful milieu to develop their personality. Naturally when they find this kinds of spiritual democracy they feel a special attraction to the movement.

6. There is no fixed sacred hymn (mantra) or no strict rules in the cult of Lokenath. His holy name itself a sacred hymn (mantra). This very aspect of Lokenath cult is very significant to the devotees. Because it provides a feeling of comfort to the devotees. They find that it is not necessary to call brahmin priest to worship Baba Lokenath. Anybody whether he is brahmin or not, is allowed to conduct and lead the worship of Lokenath. It follows the tradition of democratic deities, like Satya Narayan. Devotees think that it is very easy to reach at the door of Baba Lokenath, because there is no strict and complex rituals are to be followed. In modern pluralistic society human life has become very complex, where individuals are alienated and insecure. Naturally they never welcome any complex religious ritual and process. At the same time they got fed up and puzzled with the rigidity of traditional Hindu ritual. In order to follow the traditional rituals time, money and will are required but these are hardly found in the common people. So scarcity of time forces them to find out a easier path. Lokenath cult provides this path and devotees find their spiritual satisfaction through worshipping their Baba Lokenath.

7. Bhakti movement is very old in India and the word bhakti occurs in the Rgveda. (Chakraborty, A. C. : 1980 : 51). 'The earliest known use of bhakti as theistic devotion can be found in Yaska and panini (ibid : 49). This movement and cult spread all over India. Bhakti movement and cult have been playing a significant role from the Middle Ages down to modern times. Most of the prominent gurus of Bengal are Chaitanya, Nityananda etc.

'From this as well as from other evidence it appears that the Bhakti movement was the expression of the rising force of artisans and traders as well as the oppressed of peasantry (Mukherjee. 1972 : 189). In modern age Ramkrishna became a popular universal guru by emphasizing on devotion and faith. Same thing can be found in the Lokenath movement and the cult of Lokenath. His followers depict him as a gracious affectionate. And the bhakti is the central theme of Lokenath movement.
In Hinduism, there are three different paths, namely *Karmamarga, Janamarga* and *Bhaktimarga*, which help individual to realise the supreme spiritual power of 'Iswar' (God). Among these three paths *Bhaktimarga* or the path of devotion is the most popular in India. The path of devotion or Bhakti is, Singer writes, "... the most widespread and patent forms of Hinduism". (1972 : 83). Bhakti is an easier path to salvation (1972 : 156) and spiritual excellence. "The sentiments of an easier path to salvation have naturally been popular among non-brahmins and lower castes". (ibid, : 158). Most of the Lokenath devotees are non-brahmins and lower castes. They are attracted by this movement for two reasons, first, they find that this path of devotion is easier to follow than complicated ritualistic tradition of Hinduism. Secondly, they conceive it as a weapon to fight against destiny. Sukumari Bhattacharya writes, when fate either in present birth or in any later births, punishes individual, only one emotion can prevent that, which is devotion to the god (1997 : 161). In *Bhagavata Puran*, the greatest scripture of Bhakti marg, Krishna says, "If Chandal shows his devotion to me, his devotion will stop his rebirth cycle." This devotion is a force which can contend with fate. (Bhattacharya, S. 1997 : 161). It is an alternative way, which does not foster to follow the long laborious form of worship and strict rules of *Jnannamarga* (path of knowledge).

8. Scriptural religon is less significant in Lokenath movement. Intolerably long and dull arguments of difficult religious theories and philosophy are totally absent in the movement. Nor it fosters any complex way of salvation. On the contrary, always it speaks of the devotion to Guru Lokenath. Neither moksha, nor any spiritual ecstasy, is important to the devotees of Lokenath. It is important to the common people to live peacefully, healthy, and with full of security. It’s aim is to develop this mundane, life, not find out the path of moksha and spiritual excellence. Survey work suggests that 76.85% devotees visit the village of Chakla to solve their mundane problems. The cult of Lokenath mainly gives emphasis on non-spiritual problems of life. The message of Lokenath is "At the battle field or in the sea, or in the jungles, if you are in trouble, think of me and I shall save you." It shows that this cult is much more concerned with the temporal affairs of human life. Naturally this cult successfully attracts a large section of society, particularly subalterns, living in a critical situation.

9. One of the important aspects of the cult of Lokenath is the path harmonization.
There are three dominant *sampradayas* in Hinduism, viz. Saiva, Sakta and Vaisnava. Though, these three *sampradayas* have some common features, but they follow different world outlook and philosophy. Organizers of Lokenath movement try to establish that the cult of Lokenath is the harmonized form of all these three different cults. Apart from Bhakti or devotion, Lokenath is very often worshipped as linga, a phallic-shaped stone, which stands for Siva. Lokenath Temple of Chakla, like other Saiva temple, has the image of bull Nandi and Sivas’ weapon the trident (trisula) and very often his picture is seen with the association of *linga*. At the same time Guru Lokenath is called ‘Ma’ (mother) by his devotees. It represents the tradition of Sakta cult. Sakta sampradayas worship goddesses particularly ‘Ma kali as the manifestation of female cosmic energy or sakti (Michaels, 2005 : 233). In this way, it has been tried to establish that the cult of Lokenath is the expression and manifestation of all major cults of India. If one devotes himself at the feet of Baba Lokenath, he would be able to receive the grace of all deities.

Besides this, the movement also fosters that the cult of Lokenath is the cult of all kinds religion and beliefs. His devotees propagate that their guru not only is Hindu but also a Mussalman. In the way of his journey in Mecca, he met with a ‘brahmin’, whose name was Abdul Gaffur. Lokenath stayed with him, discussed with Abdul Gaffur and other Mussalman scholars and had their cooked food and announced himself a Mussalman. He said, ‘I am a Mussalman, that means “Mukallam Iman” which stands for “cent percent religious belief”. And I have this cent percent belief and faith. (Sengupta, 1982 : 32). This propaganda makes the cult and movement of Lokenath popular, among the Mussalmans.

10. By grasping the folk religious beliefs and faiths, Lokenath movement has successfully increased the degree of acceptance among the subalterns. The Sangha has built up two temples in the village of Chakla. The main temple is situated in the ground of Baba’s house (bhita), as conceived by the organizers and devotees. It is claimed that the soil of this bhita is sacred and it has healing power. There is a concrete tank in the southern *varanda* of main temple which is always full of soil. Pilgrim devotees collect soil from this tank. They either eat the soil or keep it with them in a plastic packet, or put it beside the picture or images of deities. Keeping or eating of sacred soil can be found in the popular or folk religious practice and beliefs in Bengal. Chakraborty, B. K. (1984) has found this practice in Purulia (1984 : 33), Birbhum.

There is a big temple (natmandir) which has been erected beside the main temple. Just behind the Nutmandir there is a peepul tree which is considered as a sacred tree. Because Guru Lokenath used to sit under the shadow of the tree. Devotees hang brick chips with red thread on the branches of the tree, to fulfill their desire. When they find that their desire is fulfilled they take off the chips or stones from the branches of the tree. It is also an expression of folk beliefs and practice of Bengal. Pal (2000) found the same thing in Coachbihar (2000 : 175). Naskar (2000), Haldar and Hatui (2000), have also found this practice in different place of North and South 24 Parganas of West Bengal.

11. The cult of Lokenath and Lokenath movement provides a psychological protection to the devotees. In the stress producing circumstances, devotees incorporate idealized images of the guru, through the identification with the guru, which they feel as genuine and valuable additions to their own personality. These identification and incorporations play as a supporting system, by which an individual can make balance between changing social system and himself. This supporting system of the cult attracts a great section of society.