CHAPTER - III
THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE LOKENATH SEVASHARM SANGHA

In societies in which religious pluralism is protected one usually can observe the continual formation of new religious organizations. "New religious groups tend to arise either out of schisms within existing organizations or as a result of the teaching of charismatic leaders who attract people to new religious movements are also stimulated by severe inequalities and widening gap between rich and poor." (Kornblum and Smith. 2002 : 552). The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha as a movement of Lokenath cult emerged out of schism within existing religious organizations, as a result of the appearance of charismatic religious leader (Lokenath Brahmachari) and in response to severe inequalities in society. The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha as a religious organization regulates the relation of devotees with the divine grace of Lokenath Brahmachari.

Hinduism is a conglomeration of various beliefs and practices. It is practised by various religious organizations. The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha is one of them. It is solely based on the divine experiences and preachings of Lokenath Brahmachari. The organization is named after Baba Lokenath to attract the people and masses outside the orbit of bhadralok (elite) society. According to his devotees, Baba Lokenath was an ascetic sadhu or sannayasi who devoted himself to find out the meaning of self or spirit or soul and contributed a lot to the development of human civilization. In fine he showed his devotees the way for salvation (moksha) of individual soul. The Sangha believes that the name of Baba Lokenath is sacred. One can attain peace, prosperity or moksha by chanting his holy name. This is called nam mahatmya (greatness of name). Sankirtana (chorous devotional song) and chanting of the names of deities are the typical traditional style of the Vaisnavite sects. It is said that chanting the name of Baba Lokenath bring a feeling of ecstasy to the heart of the devotees. His name is not only a holy name, but also it has a magical power, which can solve any kind of problem of devotees.

The middle name of the organization signifies its orientation and nature. It is 'sevashram' which has been derived from two different words— 'Seva' and 'Ashram'. The term 'Seva' refers to 'to service', 'to nurse', 'to worship', 'to eat'
or drink' or enjoy' (Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary. 1994 : 898). The aim of the Sangha is to serve the people. It should be noted here that this 'seva' is not only related to the mundane life of the people, but also concerned with the religious life. It can be depicted as 'seva dharma', which refers to the social service looked upon as a religious or the sacred task of serving others (Ibid). The word 'Ashrama' means 'a hermitage'. (Ibid : 116). Literally, an ashram is a halting or resting place. The word, therefore signifies a halt, a stoppage, or a stage in the journey of life just for the sake of rest, in a sense, in order to prepare oneself for further journey. Moksha or liberation is the final aim of Hindu life. So, the ashramas, them are to be regarded as resting places during one's journey on the way to final liberation or 'Moksha'. (Prabhu, 1995 : 83-84).

This Ashramas are four in number — (1) The brahmacharya—that of a student, (2) the grihastha—that of a married man, the house holder, (3) the vanaprastha—that of retired life in the forest, after abandoning the home, preparatory to complete renunciation of worldly relations and (4) the sannyasa—the life of complete renunciation of worldly relations and attachments. (Ibid : 84). In Kurma Purana, each of the four ashramas is further divided into three kinds, viz, the Vaishnava, the Brahma and the Hara-asrama. (Hazra, R.C. 1975 : 70). Now according to the Hindu Dharma Sastra, each individual should normally pass through these four phases of life, one after the other, and live in them in accordance with the sastras if he desires to obtain salvation (moksha).

The word ‘ashrama’ is originally derived from the Sanskrit root ‘srama’ ‘to exert oneself’; therefore it may mean, by derivation - (i) a place where exertions are performed, and (ii) the action of performing such exertions. (Prabhu : 1995 : 83)). Litman writes that due to abstract structure and ideology of Hindu religion, independent associations have been evolved in form of ‘ashrama’ by the religious personalities (1991 : 37). He also notes that ‘ashrama’ is an association (sangha) of professional monks, god-seeker, sannyasis, yogis etc. (Ibid : 37-38). Common Hindus assemble here in a large scale on different occasions. Usually gurus or swamis are the head of these ashramas. And the authority of the guru is unquestionable and undoubtable.

The position and influence of guru is not less important than the temple-priest or family-priest. “In the marked absence of a well-defined clergy, the most important
figure in Brahmanism, as well as in Hinduism in general, is the Guru, the spiritual teacher and guide. Ideally, he is a world renouncer or at least is known for his look of self-interest. Although not a priest in the sense of an officiant or dispencer 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. He can be seen as the actual recipient of the cult. Indian religiosity would be able to dispense with its gods on the condition that there is a 'Guru'. (The Encyclopedia of Religion, Eliade, 1987 : vol. 15 : 240).

Religious teachers and preachers are ...autonomous units belonging to no organization. (Takacheva, 1989 : 57). They travel along the country, living from alms like prophets and supervisors. However, as much as two millennia ago, guru who divorced themselves from the world, began to settle with their disciples in remote places and found religious sanctuaries called asramas. (Ibid : 58).

Gurus are the head of the asramas. Asramas are commonly known as matha, akhra, asthana etc. Adherants of gurus flock here to worship and pray to various deities and also to listen religious discourses. In the Middle Ages, these asramas remained the centres of religious-philosophical thought. The influence of the ashrama only increased with Sankara, the outstanding religious philosopher and the founder of the Advaita-Vedanta school. A typical ashrama of medieval time, consisted of a dwelling place of the ashrama head, called a mahanto, and huts for his disciples, a temple dedicated to the god they worshipped or a sepulchre of the founder of such ashrama; dharamasalas or dwelling quarters for pilgrims and travellers regularly visiting the ashrama. An ashrama was always fully controlled by its head, sometimes several abodes had a common head, i.e. it was a sort of religious organization. Many such abodes had land in their possession, and therefore lived on donations and incomes from their land. (H. Wilson, cited by Thacheva, A.A. 1998 : 58).

Thacheva points out that a sect or school in Hinduism should not be identified with ashrama. (1989 : 59). Thacheva writes, "It seems that unlike a sect which places special accent on real membership of its fold, ashrama never place any rigid rules for one's being in them. In addition to hermits constantly residing there an ashrama is often visited by many Indians who understand themselves as part of the ashrama because of its religious-cum-worldview identity rather than formal membership. A
sect is chiefly characterized by a certain conceptual deviation from the official and dominating religious ideology and worship shared by the society. However, the very idea of dissent appears to be often indefinite: it is not always possible to say where tradition ends and dissent begins. To apply the word “school” to a Hindu current adhered to by an ashrama or a group of ashramas is also to make a mistake. A religious school is likely to be associated with philosophical conceptual search in the field of religious ideology and usually does not involve any independent ritual practice or organisational forms. Where each ashrama, being an independent organization, practiced its distinctive forms of worship, identifiable in many respects with other practices, though not coincident in all details.” (1989 : 59).

At present ashrama refers to the organization which may be religious or secular. Gandhi’s Sabarmati Ashrama and Tagore’s Santiniketan are the example of secular ashramas. On the other hand the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha is a religious ashrama. This religious organization owns property which is substantial—almost rivalling in wealth some of the richest individuals. The Sangha maintains a permanent staff of priests, pujaries and a hierarchy of personnel, reminding of staff and line offices of any big secular organization. The division of functions are very methodically worked out, allocating different tasks with precision of a well oiled bureaucratic set up. The Sangha also has a special category in their staff consisting of priests and preachers who spread the doctrine of their respective religious cult among people. It has elaborate, distinct, detailed rituals of religious practices, for the followers of the cult, including mode of prayer, sartorial dresses, type and mode of eating and taboos against certain categories of dresses and food and other practices.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LOKENATH ASHRAM

In order to understand the nature of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha, brief outline of its characteristics can be stated here. They are—

1. A major part in the life of ashrama belongs to Lokenath Brahmachari, whose thought leads the organization. He is believed to be in immediate connection with the transcendental origin, the abode of godness which he gradually conveys—in the course of his religious perception—to his devotees. The relation of the devotee—religious teacher type, involving unconditional subordination and service to the latter are inherited by the ashrama from the antiquity and the Middle Ages. The model “teacher-students” presupposes an informal psychological contact; the attractiveness
of a religious teaching is enhanced by the fascination of an attentive and wise guru. The relation between a devotee and his guru Lokenath is ascribed a sacral character. Because to choose a guru is always a personal matter, the quest for a guru is declared to be charged with mysticism. Many devotees mention that guru Lokenath came in their nightdream, in one’s mind’s eye, in the state of meditation. Thus, Lokenath in his ashrama is a central figure, ideologically and as far as worship and organization are concerned.

2. It is a common feature of all ashramas that sanyasis or Hindu monks permanently reside in the ashrama. The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha, does not allow any sannyasi to reside here permanently. They provide only accommodation only for chief priests and co-priests.

3. No qualification is required to be admitted to the organization. Any person dedicated to the ideals of Lokenath’s teaching, can become a member of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha, whatever his sex, race, national or religious affiliation, social status and alike, which forms an artificial barrier between people. Remarkably neither caste, nor national or even religious affiliation forms a hindrance for the admittance. “This principally important feature that distinguishes all the ashramas of the modern type from similar Medieval associations, results from certain conceptual tenets rooting in the reforming ideas of Hinduism.” (Tkacheva. 1989 : 67). One may call it a reinterpretation of Hinduism.

The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha does not limit their activities to their members only. These include attendance of services, spiritual and religious talks and philanthropy. Organizers do not consider formal membership in the organization as obligatory. They think the main task is to meet a guru who could guide one in meditation and the cognition of God, such is the tradition of Hinduism.

Lokenath Ashrama willingly enters into correspondence with any person and send literature published by them. Now and then correspondence goes far beyond religious questions. Devotees turn up here for the advice of the priest to solve their mundane problems. Such process of advice are always granted for the spiritual sphere which includes all the aspects of life.

4. Though, caste system is considered as the sociological basis of Hinduism, but the Sangha denies the supremacy of caste system. The denial of caste system has
opened up the opportunities for the involvement of all sections of society and foreigners as well.

5. One of the most important features of Lokenath Ashrama is combination of religious activities proper with social and charitable functions. The latter was entirely absent in Medieval Hindu ashramas (Tkachera 1989: 69) and is a novelty introduced by Swami Vivekananda. The traditional idea of an asramite was a meditating ascetic who had gave up the world. Lokenath was an ascetic sadhu aimed to serve people, particularly, poorest of the poor. He emphasised on the path of devotion. He considered work as a divine service, and life as a religion. This is the main thesis of Lokenath Brahmachari. The concept of social service, eliminations of differences between secular and spiritual has opened up channels for the spread of organizations influence upon various sections of the society, including the poorest of them. The movement of the Sangha is undoubtedly popular with the present day Bengal.

6. Orientation to individual, personal god-perception, the mystical aspect of religious faith inherent from time immemorial in the religious practice of Ashramas (Ibid: 75), are pushed by the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha to the forefront and regarded as accessible to every person whatever his or her social status, nationality or sex, or religious affiliation. This forms the main thing which distinguishes the ideas of modern ashramas from those of the Middle Ages which did not ban sadhana, or an unsupervised religious Guest and theoretical interpretation of religion, but limited it to the priestly class alone. (Ibid). Lokenath ashrama teachings stress the need to be spiritually active, ethically perfecting and developing the feeling of oneness with other people. Concentration of attention on man, his inner states reveals the desire to solve the problem of disintegration, the crisis of personality in the present day society. To be more precise, the Sangha wants to solve these crises with the help of religious humanism.

7. Central to the concept of the Sangha is the concept of religious pluralism, substantiating the principal unity of all religions in reflection of universal, transcendental truth and paths to attain it, differentiating features of these religious systems are regarded as secondary and relatively pluralism played a major part in the teachings of Lokenath Brahmachari. (Noim. A 1990: 23). A prominent follower of Lokenath writes, “The living Gita, the living Korma, and the living Bible are mani-
fest in the Divine presence of Baba Lokenath.” (Brahmachari. A, 1986 : 188). According to the teaching of Lokenath all religions in the world are in fact variants of a universal creed understood as a mystical experience of cognition or communion with god.

Emergence of religious teachers and prophets is explained by the need not to proclaim anything new, but to actualize in accordance with circumstances the eternal and to wash off contaminations distorting religious truth. Inner spiritual experience, or psychological effect of religious exaltation, is identical for all religious systems, as declares its central argument.

8. The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha can be characterized by a combination of religious and secular activities. Their secular aspect is charitable, commercial or covertly political. They run free dispensary, free bhogh (food) centre, distribute clothes among the poor sections of the society etc. They have transport system, they sell picture, books, lockets, cassettes etc. At the same time they keep touch political leaders. And indirectly they support the existing political system. They aim to develop universal brotherhood, and by this they dialute the class conflict and hostility between rich and poor.

In fine, one must mention the elements of syncretism in the cult of Lokenath. The Sangha preaches Lokenath’s idea of syncretism among the people of Hindu and Muslim communities.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Social organization is the organization of society. Society is a web of social relationships. In this way social organization is a system of social relationships. According to Malinowski, “social organization is the standardized manner in which groups behave” and is organized activity through which, “human beings are bound together by their connection with a definite portion of environment”; and that “the concerted character of behaviour is the result of social rules.” (Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. 1935 : Vol.-IV : 639). More lucidly, it is defined by Duncan Milchell. According to him, social organization means, the interdependence of parts, which is an essential characteristic of all enduring collective entities : groups, communities and societies. (Shankar Rao. 1999 : 333). Social organization of the Lokenath Sevasharam Sangha can be explained in terms of organizers, members, devotees, ancillary groups,
or i.e., sacred specialists, employed persons, sacred rites and rituals. More precisely three interconnected parts of the Sangha have been studied to understand the social organization of the Sangha, viz., (a) beliefs and ideas, (b) organizational structure and activities of the Sangha, and (c) pilgrim-devotees.

(a) Beliefs & ideas:

Philosophic background of the cult of Lokenath

The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha draws its inspiration and owes allegiance to the teaching of Lokenath Brahmachari. But it is not very easy to locate the philosophical school of Lokenath’s teachings. There are three difficulties concerned here-

a. Lokenath never disclosed his philosophical root.

b. His biographers (except Sengupta) have not mentioned his philosophical school.

c. Lokenath used rhetorical sentences and words.

One of his biographers writes that Lokenath was born in the lineage of Bisuddha Advita (pure monism, non-dualism) of Santipur. (Mishra. 1990 : 27). But it cannot help to trace out the philosophical school of Lokenath’s teachings. For that reason present researcher has been forced to depend on his teachings and the interpretation of his followers. His followers call him Brahmavid (one who has realized Brahma). There are five great school/interpretations regarding the question of Brahma. They are Samkara, Ramanuja, Nimbark, Madhva and Vallabha. Five schools have been emerged from their interpretation, thus—Visuddhadvaitabad or Kebaladvaitabad of Samkara, Visistadvaitabad of Ramanuja, Dvaitadvaitabad of Nimbark, Dvaitabad of Madhva, and Suddhadvaitabad of Vallabha.(Chaudhury, Roma. 1944 : 2.)

The major commentator of the Vedanta-sutra was Sankara (8th-9th century), and he may rightly be referred to as the founder of Advaita (Non-dualist Vedanta) school. (Brodov, 1984 : 130). Samkara believed that the foundation of all the phenomena of nature and society is an absolute, that is, a spiritual reality which is designated by the terms of Brahman, atman, or Brahman-atman. Brahma is eternal, infinite and amorphous, the categories of time and space, cause and effect, motion and rest, quantity and quality do not apply here. According to his teaching world is Maya, which is neither real nor unreal, it is appearance. Ramanuja of 11th-12th century accepted the basic propositions of Samkara but at the same time imposed considerable restrictions on it. While for Samkara Brahma is a homogeneous impersonal absolute and the world,
an illusion, for Ramanuja Brahmman is a person including in itself the entire diversity of the material world, which, being a manifestation of Brahman, is real and not illusory, Brahman is the substance, while the world is an attribute. (Broder, 1984:132). Here are Ramanuja’s arguments in favour of this viewpoint.

a. All objects whose existence has been proved by various modes of cognition have attributes. Consequently, the existence of an object without attributes cannot be proved.

b. The concept of attribute is always present even in intuitions—both in the case of self-consciousness and in the object of intuition.

c. In the case of direct knowledge (pratyaksa), both reflective (savikalpaka) and non-reflective (nirvikalpaka) knowledge has for its direct objects things characterised by definite attributes, with the sole difference that non-reflective direct knowledge yields an object devoid of some attributes. (Bordov, 1974:133-34)

Lokeanth Brahmachari believed in the theory of separate existence of jiva and 'javata' and followed the path of sagunapasa. It shows that his philosophical idea is connected with the Visistadvaitbad of Ramanuja. According to Ramanuja both person (jiva) and yagata (world) are equally real like brahma. (Chaudhury, R. 1994:24),

Besides, Ramanuja believed the sagunaposana. Brahma, for him, is a full of qualities. Brahma is eternal and is container of all good qualities. (Chaudhury, R. 1994:27).

Lokenath took a cue from this philosophical school. Lokenath said that brahma is one but he is manifested in different forms. (Brahmachari. S. 1986:172). These forms are jiva (individual) and jagata (world). According to Samkar’s non-dualism, jiva can attain moksha through jnana (knowledge). (Chaudhury, R. 1944:21). But for Lokenath, the supreme realization can be possible by the bhakti, jnana and karma. Like Ramanuja, Lokenath emphasized the bhakti yoga. Lokenath writes. “Surrender, unconditional surrender, is the path. You have to constantly try to surrender your ego, your mind and intellect at His Lotus feet. This cannot be achieved in one day. All your miseries and unhappiness will come to an end the moment His Grace descends, but, for that moment you have to prepare yourself, with devotion, and utmost perseverance.” (Brahmachari. S. 1986:66). Again, he says, “The divine Grace has such ingrained transforming influence that devotee need not influence anything forcibly.
People seeing the external manifestations of renunciation think about the greatness of the devotee, but to the true devotee of the Lord, Love and devotion is all that is important and he is flooded with a perennial divine ecstasy—hence, the trifling materials happiness has no attraction or significance any more.” (Ibid: 68). Similar idea can be found in Ramanuja’s thought. The cause of human suffering, Ramanuja believed, does not lie in that this allegedly illusory world conceals Brahma from it and that, in cognising this ‘untrue world’, one can obtain ‘true Knowledge’; it rather lies in that Brahma is god, but, “People do not show enough love and loyalty to it (bhakti).” (Brodov. 1984 : 134). According to bhakti teaching, god is accessible to all, regardless of caste and religion and thereby learn the truth that no material happiness is free of pains and sorrows, they grow an inner awareness not to get attached with the actions, Gita spontaneously mainifests in the hearts of such devotees and you see the devotees always conscious and aware about the unhappiness that follow all material cravings. To them the path of Nishkama karmayoga opens-up on it own accord.” (Brahmachari, 1886 : 65).

Lokenath claimed that he is eternal and deathless (Ibid : 185). Because he reached at the state of brahma (Ibid : 170) through the acheiving of non-duality or oneness. He said “I have travelled in the hills and mountains for more than a century, heaps of snow piled over my body and got melted on its own, but I could not meet your God anywhere. I have seen myself.” (Ibid : 173). This is the highest state in which Lokenath sees within himself the all pervasive brahma and in the all pervasive brahma, himself. This is total unification, the total merger. Again Lokenath says, “When I reached the state of identifying myself with all the living manifestations, I could not but feel the pains and suffering of all as if happenings to myself (Ibid.)

There are two types of Karma—swakam and niskam. Karma is obtained and passed on by birth. Niskama karma does not pass on by birth. But swakam karma has some purpose and the result of the karma is carried out by birth. This karma is prarabdha karma. Lokenath defines it in the following manner, “The wish ones have compared prarabdha karma with the arrows. Just as the archer does not have any control over the arrow which has left the arrow depending upon its speed falls at a distance, so also is the prarabdha karma of the jivas (individual soul). (Brahmachari. 1986 : 172).

“Attainment of the moksa can be possible through sufferance that the prarabdha karma ends. (Ibid). At the same time he notes that some people are not able to follow the
path of *nishkama karma* yoga. According to him, "Those who lead the life of material desires and face the odds of life to myself. I could see the Brahman the one Existential Truth living in all. The question of heaven and hell was no longer anywhere to be seen, for all was He." (Ibid : 175).

The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha considers Lokenath as pure enlightened one, who achieved the highest state of realization and oneness. He is also called *jiban-mukta*. It means one who has acquired liberation in living state. The Sangha holds that Lokenath's name is the highest *mantra*. One can make himself free from all sorts of pain, unhappiness through the devotional service to Lokenath.

He did not bother much about the pursuit of *moksha* or liberation of the soul, as held that the devotional service surpasses all liberation. Lokenath did all sorts of sadhana to attain the supreme state of realization for the common people. For that reason, devotees do not have to go through any complex and strict rituals. They should do mainly two things — to call Lokenath from the core of their heart and to devote themselves completely to Lokenath. Other than these devotional service to Lokenath implies — (a) chanting his name and worshipping his image; (b) surrendering whatever talent one has to him, e.g., a painter should draw and paint his portrait; (c) listening to the sacred account of the life and times of Lokenath; (d) eating *prasada* of Lokenath; (e) dressing, feeding and caring for the idol of Lokenath.

The Lokenath was a traditional Hindu ascetic sadhu. However his vision of religion was not tied down to a particular dogma. He resecured religion from the trammels of sectarianism, rites and ceremonies. His idea of religion was not intellectual or theoretical, but one of realization. His teachings transcended the barriers of caste, class, creed and canons of different religions. He upheld the primacy of man and sought his elevation from painful state to happiness.

**GURU - DEVOTEE RELATIONSHIP AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CULT OF LOKENATH**

Lokenath lived one hundred sixty years (as claimed by the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha), teaching a faith that blended *trantric* imagery with elements of Saivait and Vaishnav devotional tradition and that also incorporated some of the liberal views to the Islam. His fame spread, as a result of the growth of the Sangha. By the time of his death in 1890, he was known to a few. He taught, preached and performed a lots
of miracles, nevertheless the guru devotee relationship is the central to the cult of Lokenath. The relationship between guru and devotee is the beginning and end of all Lokenath teaching.

There are two contradictory notions prevail within the Sangha. According to the first Lokenath had no disciple. He did not initiate anybody. For that reason guru-sishya parampara is irrelevant to them. But bhakta (devotee) is there. Those who devote themselves to Lokenath they are bhaktas (devotee). The other opinion is the very name of Lokenath is the supreme mantra. If one utters the name Lokenath from the core of his heart, he becomes the disciple of Lokenath. And this very process may be called initiation, though it has no formal gesture in the Sangha. Both notions accept that there is no difference between devotee and disciple (sishya). It is true that all disciples are devotee, but all devotees are not disciple. Because sishya or disciples are a special category of devotees. They are formally initiated by the guru. According to the second notion all devotees can be disciple, if they consider themselves as disciple. But all devotees are initiated informally. The Sangha put emphasis on guru-devotee relationship instead of guru-disciple parampara. It marks the unique nature of the cult.

By passing the terminological problem one can observe the relationship between two ends of the cult. In the tradition of guru-cult, devotees have an important place. The guru is only one half of the relationship — the other half is the devotee. The guru has to be a true spiritual master; but the devotee too must fulfil his obligations by cultivating in themselves a true spirit of dedication to the guru. The relationship is founded on the familiar ideal of reciprocity. The gracious act of giving would lose much of its significance if the acceptance of such gifts were not equally gracious and spontaneous. The devotee must be able to receive without reserve.

Lokenath Brahmachari was world-renouncing sadhu, but he had never preached to his followers to give up their mundane interests. He asked them to follow the normal way of life such as to get married, to have job etc. The Sangha on behalf of Lokenath, preach the same thing. Because they know very well the real lives of devotee of course, do not take place in heavenly kingdom. Devotees have to make their way through the social, political and economic institutions of this world, through the hard struggles. That is why the Sangha has developed a strategy for dealing with the requirements of earthly existence. Consequently the cult of Lokenath becomes a path for house-
holders and considers very little about the spiritual interest of devotees. They never ask devotees to give up their material desire. Devotees need not renounce anything forcibly. They should try to keep their family healthy and peaceful. In this way spiritual life and family life of a devotee is harmonized in the cult of Lokenath.

Following Robinson (2005 : 207) this concept can be described as a 'new face of Hinduism'. Robinson writes, ‘The new face of Hinduism teaches no austerity; it allows you to access to the spiritual, while wallowing in the material. Indeed, it promises greater material gain without too much cost.” (2005 : 207).

In the domain of Lokenath cult, the question of a devotee’s relation with his family is a dyadic one. It is fundamental to the Lokenath cult that the essential unit to which religious interests adhere is not a collectivity, but the individual. “In Hindu India, however, individuals have deep ties to collectivities, and of these the most important are likely to be families.” (Babb. 1987 : 54). Devotee’s relations with his family and Guru Lokenath is portrayed as a purely dyadic one. Individual devotee does not find any contradiction between their family and personal faith in Guru Lokenath. They do not consider their family a spiritual hazard. Moreover Lokenath movement encourages family life. It is also said that the benefits from spiritual practices of devotees can be transmitted along lines of kinship.

There is no gender discrimination in the guru-devotee relationship. It is considered that the true self is present in men and women alike. In Hindu tradition the status of women is very low. As per Hindu religion and caste values, a woman should be self-effacing, self-denying, self-sacrificing and submissive. (Desai. N. 1985: 14). Everywhere they are enchained by the masculine dominated social system of Hindus. They are given tasks of child-bearing and child-rearing. In Hindu tradition they are not considered free individual. Very rarely women are assigned the tasks that take them away from their home for a long time. In the cult of Lokenath devotees, irrespective of their sex, are considered equal and same. Both men and women are eligible to receive the grace of Lokenath. Both can take part in the worship of Baba Lokenath. Not only that, very often devotees describe Lokenath as ‘Ma’. He is both man and woman. This feature shows a radical departure of Lokenath cult from the traditional male dominated Hindu tradition.

Lokenath movement, from the very beginning has rejected caste distinctions. Caste
system is the sociological basis of Hinduism. (Mensching. 1976 : 27). Theoretically, however, individuals cannot join the Hindu religion, if they were not born into one of its castes. Hence Hinduism, not allowing proselytism, closely related to India’s caste system, could not function outside the country and become a world religion. This was only possible for Buddhism which also developed in India. At present several Hindu cults and sects have spread and developed cultic and sectarian associations in several European and American countries, due to their non-castiest and liberal approach.

Individual from any caste can be the devotee of Lokenath. The caste identity of the devotees is irrelevant in the world of Lokenath. But it should be understood that what is really mean by this is that caste distinctions are irrelevant from a spiritual point of view. Both lower and higher castes assemble in the Chakla temple congregation. This congregation does not foster anything which directly attacks the fundamental caste structure of Hinduism. A dim view is taken of social equality and social reform in general. The world itself cannot be reformed or changed; that is, the world is utterly benighted due to the ignorance of the people and efforts to change it will simply lead to further fatal consequence. So devotees can do only one thing, that is, to call Baba Lokenath from their heart. The path of devotion is the only way to reach the door of Lokenath’s grace. This path of devotion does not encourage any caste discrimination. Again non-brahmin cooks cook the bhogha in the temple’s kitchen, and those who serve the prasada and bhogha are not brahmins. Some of them are (so-called) low caste and Mussalmans.

What must be emphasised is the strong emotional relationship with Baba Lokenath. Love-in-intimacy is very important characteristic of devotee’s feeling about him. Lokenath has passed away many years ago. So physical encounter with Lokenath is not possible at all. Nevertheless, in the ideological framework of the cult intimate relations can and do exist. The Sangha fosters this close relationship between Baba Lokenath and devotees. It involves questions of identity. Certainly the theme of identity is very strong in Lokenath’s teachings. He used to speak about the delusions and miseries of the people. The root cause of all miseries and delusions is avidya or ignorance. He who performs all actions with the basic knowledge is a liberated one. Avidya or ignorance about the truth is responsible for sin and the consequent unhappiness. In a state of vidya or realization there is nothing like sin or sorrow. Vidya is
the knowledge of supreme divine power or self. If anybody wants to reach at the state of **vidya** he or she has to follow the instructions of guru. Devotees should follow the teaching of their guru unconditionally. It leads devotees to reach at the state of **Shivatva** of godhood. So, devotees should try to be the children of guru otherwise they will not be able to attain realization of self or godhood. In other words the realization of self can be possible through making identification of devotees with guru. Therefore identity plays a crucial role in the cult of Lokenath.

Kakar has dealt with the emotional relationship between guru and devotee, from a psychotherapeutic view. He writes, “In identifying with the guru, the patient incorporates idealized images of the guru which he feels a genuine and valuable additions to his own personality. Looking at himself, at others and his problems with new eyes (the eyes of the guru) the problems no longer seem as intractable as they did earlier. Better adjustments to the real-life situation can and do take place, the changes often being sustained over long periods of time. Psychoanalysis, with its characteristic notions of individuality and personal autonomy, will see the limitations of these approaches in the fact that these identifications and incorporations (and hence the personal changes) are ultimately defending fear, the fear of the loss of the guru, and the most a patient can hope to become is a poor imitation, a smudged copy of the guru’s idealized image.” (1994 : 277)

According to the Sangha, devotee should surrender his will and his future actions to the guru and all his efforts are turned inwards in the attempts to make that surrender; it is the means by which he conquers that devouring self which anchors him so tragically to the heaviness and misery of earthly life.

The issue which is very important here, is trust. Baba Lokenath very often spoke about the basic trust on guru. A devotee cannot live without guru. A critical factor in identity formation, such trust arises at first. It is a collective expression in religious images of surrender. It brings to one’s mind that he is someone with a place in an ultimately beneficent world. The school of this trust and the essential condition of its existence, is a sense of being loved. In the case of Lokenath’s devotees it is supported by their absolute confidence in his love, the physical and moral confusions of the world notwithstanding. For his true devotees he is always there. He is omnipresent, and omniscient. The Sangha frequently quotes Lokenath’s famous words. “At the battle-
field, in the sea or in the jungles, if you are in trouble think of me and I shall save you”.

SYNCRETISM IN THE CULT OF LOKENATH

Though the cult of Lokenath is a newly emerging cult, but it takes a cue from the tradition syncretism of medieval Bengal (A.D. 1500-1800). Bengal has a rich tradition of syncretism. For that reason some traits and elements of syncretism can be found in this cult. The term syncretism refers to an attempt to harmonize between two opposites. According to Dictionary of Modern sociology, it means “The union of conflicting organizations or principles, and the processes involved in bringing about such union; sometimes used synonymously with assimilation and with amalgamation.” (Hoult, 1977: 326). Whenever two or more cultures come into contact there is a mixing of some elements from each of the cultures. Syncretism is one specific type of culture blending that in its most extreme form results in the development of a new culture on ethnic group characterized by numerous cultural traits and institutions that are an amalgamation of traits drawn from different cultures. (Levinson, 1996: 236). Levinson points out that, a less extreme form of syncretism involves the development of new forms of cultural institutions through a blending of traits but not a transformation of the entire culture. (1996: 236-37). It is an important phenomenon in the history of religion. It has been found in the fusion of religious doctrines or in religious cults. “Here syncretism denotes generally an unconscious, widespread tendency, due to or fostered by some re-adjustment of political relationship or by some clash of civilizations. There is a blending of religious Ideas and practices, by means of which either one set adopts more or less thoroughly the principles of another or both are amalgamated in a more cosmopolitan and less polytheistic shape. Such movements in the religious world are often preceded and accelerated by a new philosophical synthesis...” (ERE/Hastings, 1961: XII-156).

The concept of syncretism can be used to describe either a state or a process. It is used to describe an entire religion or its particular components or traits as a syncretism or as syncretic. In this case the concept is applied to describe a state or condition in which the characteristics of the object are systematically correlated among themselves. At the same time the term syncretism is understood as a process, which extends through time and in which gradations or stages of development are to be dis-
A strong and significant current of syncretism can be found in the history medi­eval Bengal as well as in the other parts of India. A considerable amount of amalgamation between Hindu and Muslim population took place, not only in peripheral matters like the pattern of life but also in more fundamentals like new social ideas took place. Sufi and bhakti thought and practice fused together on several aspects; namely, devotionalism and idea of brotherhood. "Sufism, the interior or mystical aspect of Islam, is a way of life directed toward the realization of God’s unity and presence through love, experiential knowledge, asceticism, and ecstatic union with the beloved Creator." (Eliade 1991:156). The Sufis dissociated themselves from the established Islamic orthodox centers and used to criticise misinterpretation of the Quran and Hadith by the ulema. Thapar observed that, the Sufis believed that the latter, by combining with political policy and cooperating with the Sultanate, were deviating from the original democratic and egalitarian principles of the Quran. The ulema denounced the sufis for their liberal ideas and the sufis accused the ulema of having succumbed to temporal temptations. (1990: Vol-1, 306). The message of Islam preached by the sufis that union with god could be achieved by love, touched the hearts of lower ranks of the Hindu society. Hindu society had experience of asceticism; devotional cult also found its place among the Hindus. Sufi ideas influenced these doctrines. This intemmingling swayed the men of lower ranks and initiated the popular syncretism. Thus, against the orthodoxy of the two great systems, there arose number of sects and cults based on popular syncretism. Sufism and Bhaktibad constitute the mystical core or essence of Islam and Hinduism, have been firm and essential binders of the two cultures.

A number of guru/saint-poets appeared in this era and they contributed greatly to the process of syncretism between Hinduism and Islam. They were against the brahminical hegemony and fanaticism of the ulema. Syncretic cults and sects preached the message of god, rejecting religious texts, rites and paraphernalia and sometimes made unique synthesis of spiritualism of the two great systems or sometimes went far beyond the scriptures. Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Razzab, Chaitanya etc. preached these humanitarian, devotional, egalitarian and syncretic values of life. The bhakti saint and sufi pirs taught universal toleration and brought about a revolution in the social structure of society. Lokenath Brahmachari was highly inspired and influenced by the
teachings of the saints of the Middle Ages. Following the great saints of the Middle Ages he taught his devotees entirely in the local varnacular language, i.e. Bengali. And the kernel of his teaching was’ devotion to the god.’

Lokenath had a universal attitude towards all religions. He visited Mecca and Madina, the holy place of pilgrimage of the Mussalmans. Lokenath, Benimadav and their guru Bhagwan Ganguly had a desire to visit these places and also to study the holy Quran under the guidance of a competent teacher. (Brahmachari. 1986 : 37). First they visited Kabul. There they lived with one of the outstanding poets and commentators of Quran, Mallasadi or Seikh Sadi by name. They stayed in his residence and learned Quran under his guidance. After that he visited Mecca. Brahmachari, Suddhananda writes, “His visit to Mecca and study of Quran only proves his universal approach towards the Truth. The All Knowing Baba studied the Quran only to facilitate a better understanding of the essential harmony that existed between these two religions—the Hindu and Muslim, and the superficial discords of these two faiths on the points of rituals and external practices. To the enlightened one there never exists any discrimination, for everything is the manifestation of the one. But to prove that all rivers ultimately merge in the ocean, that all religious are but the means to reach the end-Realisation of the all Pervading Parmatman, Baba Lokenath after attaining siddhi through all spiritual disciplines as prescribed in the Vedic scriptures, wanted also to realise the same through the faith of Islam as preached by prophet Mohammed. His study and practice of the principles of Koran and his bold statement “I am Mussalman,” was only a great step to bridge the widening gap between the population of these two faiths...” (1986 : 37-38). Lokenath was asked that why he calls himself a Mussalman. Lokenath answered, “The word Mussalman is derived from ‘Musallam Iman’ which means one in whom there is total divinity.” (Sengupta, 1982 :33)

Lokenath Brahmachari travelled Arabian countries too; particularly Mecca and Madina. When he reached there local Muslims had considered him as prophet. (Roy, 1997 : 304). Lokenath stayed in their residence, spent time with them, learned Quran under their guidance and took food from them. (Sengupta, 1982 : 31). Noim, (Mohammad Abdul) one of the devotees and biographers of Lokenath, writes, “Local people accepted him whole- heartedly and placed him in their own heart.” (1992 : 25). He also writes that, on his (Lokenath) way from Mecca to Madina through the
desert, Lokenath met a yogi of very high order as Abdul Gaffar. He was four hundred years old. This yogi used to remain mostly silent but his spiritual attainment and powers was known to all. When Lokenath took his seat before him, the yogi asked Lokenath, “How many days old are you?” Lokenath understood that Gaffar is enquiring about his memory of previous incarnations. Lokenath replied “I am of two days.” It signifies that Lokenath can remember all about his previous incarnations (births). Abdul gaffar said, 'I am of four days.' (Noim, 1992 : 25-26).

In this manner two great saints exchanged and shared their individual experiences on the highest spiritual plane. In later years at Baradi Lokenath preached his idea of syncretic, sying that, “I have travelled extensively all over the world and found only three Brahmins—Abdul Gaffar, Trilanga Swami and myself.” (Brahmachari, 1986 : 40).

According to claim of Lokenath devotees, Lokenath was Hindu and Muslim, both in one body. Lokenath observed through his years long spiritual practice, that there could not be any 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 leads him to utter that “I am a Mussalman” or ‘Abdul Gaffar is a Brahman’. For that reason he is not only for Hindus but also for Mussalmans and the people of other religions. It is striking to note that none of the modern Hindu gurus /godmen has called himself as Mussalman or depicted any Muslim saint as a brahmin.

After a long spiritual practice Lokenath settled in the village of Baradi (Bangladesh) around 1861. He established an asrama in Baradi and stayed there till his death, in 1890. Suddhananda Brahmachari, writes, “The ashram of Baradi was the holy pilgrimage where met the two ideologically conflicting communities—the Hindu and Muslim. The Mohammedan devotees of Baba often visited the ashram and presented their personal problems of material and spiritual 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.” (1986 : 153). Not only that Mussalmans considered him as a ‘Sufi’, a ‘Pir’. They would bring their new born babies and children to the asram and take his bless-
ings. The door of the asram was open to all irrespective of any caste, class, creed or religion. (Barhmachari. 1986 : 38).

Following the teachings of Lokenath the Sangha keeps the door of temple open for both Hindus and Muslims. They propagate that the erection of temple in the village of Chakla is the expression of the divine wish of Lokenath. And Lokenath expressed his wish through a Mussalman fakir. The fakir was Lokenath in disguise. From the very beginning of the formation of the Sangha some Muslim villagers have been playing important role. Omar Ali of Raikhola and his friends had a crucial role in this respect . They also take an active part in the time of different occasional festivals. In order to organize these occasional festivals the Sangha appoints temporary volunteers from both communities— Hindus and Muslims. Muslim villagers are also appointed as permanent volunteers. Two of them are involved in distribution of bhogh and prasada in food distribution centre. So participation of Muslims in different activities of the Sangha signifies the syncretism in cult of Lokenath.

According to the Sangha, people of all communities are allowed to eat bhogh in Bhogh Bantan Kendra. Muslims are allowed to take part in different types puja and arati and other rituals of the temple. Manik Hazra, an important organizer of the Sangha, was asked to know the attitude of the Sangha regarding Islamic rituals. a. Do you allow any Muslim to perform namaz in the temple complex? Hazra answered that Muslim devotees think that prayer to Lokenath is identical with the namaz that is why they do not perform namaz in the temple complex. If anybody does such a thing the Sangha would not refrain him. Virtually Muslims do not perform namaz in the temple complex. Present Research Scholar has not seen anybody performing namaz here. He has found many Muslims eat Bhogh in Bhogh Bantan Kendra. Some of them take it as prasada, and some of them do not. They coincide it with a common food which carries no divinity. During the month of Ramzan, some Muslim devotees, if they keep fasting, do not take any food/bhogh from the temple, but they take part in different activities of temple. And those who do not keep fasting they take prasadā and bhogh from distributing centre.

The features of syncretism in the cult of Lokenath are as follows :

A. Participation of both the Hindus and the Muslims

The Sangha, from the very beginning, gives great importance to the issue of Hindu-Muslim unity. The organizers propagate a sort of syncretism with an eye to the winning
the allegiance of both Hindus and Muslims to the cult of Lokenath. Though, there is evidence of their working within the broad framework of the idioms and rituals of Hindu socio-religious order. In order to win over the support of both the communities, the Sangha has prepared and marketed books, cassettes and compact discs on the life and works and spiritual message of Lokenath Brahmachari to propagate the liberal, non-communal and syncretic nature of the cult. They also propagate some myths and legends to legitimize their claim. For example, they seek to make the people believe that the founding of the Lokenath temple was prompted by the divine wish of Lokenath who came in the guise of a Muslim fakir. So Lokenath temple of Chakla is not only for the Hindus but also for the Muslims.

Since the formation of the Sangha, many Muslim villagers of Chakla have been playing a crucial role in its consolidation and expansion. The Sangha encouraged the Muslim community to take part in various activities of the organization. Consequently, not only the Muslims of Chakla but also the people of the same community of the neighbouring villages supported and patronized the Sangha. For instance, Omer Ali, Dr. Isha Haque, Dr. Sakikul Islam, Abdul Gaffar, Abdul Juberber, Abdul Noim, Mayajjam Hassan, Kattachar Ali, Ali Ahmed, Bakir Hossen who belong to the villages in the environs of Chakla, have contributed a lot to the development of the Sangha and temple.

B. The organizational activities of the Sangha involve people of both the communities. For instance:

a. Membership of the Sangha is open to all adult persons irrespective of their caste, religion or faith.

b. Out of 11 permanent volunteers (svechhasevaks) who are in overall charge of the supervision of the activities of the Sangha including its safety and security, 3 are Muslims.

c. There is a common dining hall in the temple complex. Two Muslim workers are involved in the distribution of bhoga or consecrated food. They distribute bhoga in the dining hall which is called ‘bhoga distributing centre’.

d. Four temple cooks belong to the so-called exuntouchable caste. Three of the assistant cooks and helpers are Muslims.

e. The Sangha has appointed two persons from Muslim community for making tea and distributing the same.
C. The Sangha claims that members of the Muslim community also take part in arati (waving of light around the image of Lokenath), take prasada or bhoga (food leavings of the deities, i.e., Lokenath and Balagopal, objects or substances sanctified by contact with, or use by the deity), drink charanamrita (the water with which the feet of the idol of Lokenath is washed and is considered nectar) and take heat of the flame of the lamp (Panchapradeep or lamp with five burning wicks emitting light) which is waved around the image of Lokenath. Moreover, the Muslim devotees collect the soil of Baba’s bhita (the place or ground on which Lokenath’s dwelling house rested) with as much devotion and faith in its efficacy as a remedy against diseases or ill luck as are nurtured by the Hindus.

Important observations

Thus, people of different communities take part in various organizational activities of the Sangha. Both the communities (Hindus and Muslims) work together in the temple complex and take a leading role to organize daily rituals and occasional festivals and ceremonies. Devotees of both the communities buy books, cassettes, compact discs on the life and message of Lokenath from the sales counter of the temple. They donate money and collect coupon for the bhoga.

There is a big bhoga distributing centre to the north of the temple of Lokenath. It consists of a big kitchen and a very big common dining hall (20,000 sqr. ft.). Devotees of both communities stand in the que to enter the hall. Both Hindus and Muslims sit and take prasada and khichurhi (kind of mixed food of rice and pulses) bhoga together. Hindu devotees reverentially take the bhoga, knowing fully well that it has been prepared by cooks some of whom are Muslims. It is striking to note that devotees do not think that it is an abnormal phenomenon. It is quite natural in the world of Lokenath. Because, Lokenath did not make any difference between Hindus and Muslims. One of the devotees put the matter effectively with a metaphor. ‘Sand may be dirt on the floor of the kitchen or bed room of your house but not on the sea beach.’

Collection of soil from Lokenath’s bhita by the Hindus and the Muslims coming to the temple has already been referred to. They collect it from a rectangular reservoir with walls made of concrete, situated at the centre of the wide verandah on the southern part of the temple. Considering its medicinal value and divine power they collect it in a plastic or paper packet and keep it with their person or place the packet in the site where their idols or their sacred symbols are preserved. Some of them even
eat it or rub it on the forehead.

One of the Muslim devotees told this investigator at time of interview that he had a vision in his dream of the guru Lokenath (he had seen his photograph earlier) who told him to come to the temple of Chakla to give puja (worship) and collect soil from the bhita. He did it and greatly benefited by it. Earlier he had been suffering from migrane and moroseness. He was relieved of all this after offering puja to Lokenath and rubbing of the soil on his forehead.

A paradoxical situation arises here. It is believed that simply chanting of the name of Lokenath can solve all sorts of problems of the devotees; at the same time the devotees collect soil to protect themselves against untoward happenings or calamities. Another paradox is related with the co-existence of such beliefs in the curative quality of the soil from Lokenath’s bhita and the medical clinic run by the Sangha.

Just behind Lokenath temple, there is a big peepul tree with innumerable aerial roots. In traditional Hindu concept, peepul tree is regarded as the abode of Vishnu in his form as Narayana. (Chakraborty, Chintaharan, 1377. Beng. Hindu Achar Anusthan: 143). Lokenath devotees believe that the peepul tree in the courtyard of the temple has a magical power because Lokenath performed his ‘Sadhana’ (spiritual practice), for some time, under this tree. Both Hindus and Muslims hang pieces of brick with red thread on the branches of the tree for the fulfilment of their desires. And, if their desire is fulfilled they untie the brick-stones from the tree-branch or aerial root. Most of the lower branches and lower parts of the aerial roots are covered with brick-stones with red thread. It is a point to examine how many devotees come to the temple to untie the knot of the red threads binding the piece of brick which they once had tied with the branches of the tree.

It has been observed that a few Muslims take part in arati, drink charanamrita, eat prasada and offer puja. Some of them believe in the divine power of Lokenath. They also believe that there is no difference between Hindus and Muslims in the eyes of Lokenath. They consider him as ‘pir’ (Mahommedan saint). At the same time, some Muslims who take prasada have observed that they eat prasada just as food which carries no special divine quality.

During the month of Ramadan [popularly known as Ramzan; in this month, during daylight hours complete fasting or Sium (popularly known as Roza) is practised by the Mussalmans.] some Muslim devotees, if they keep fasting or Sium, do not take any food/
bhoga from the temple. But, those who do not keep Sium take prasada/bhoga from the distributing centre. Generally, Mussalman devotees of both the categories take part in different activities of the temple. Naturally, some questions arise in this connection. Does the Sangha allow any Muslim to perform Salat (Popularly known as namaz, i.e. ritual prayer) in the temple complex? Does the Sangha provide food for ‘ifter’ (sium breaking ritual through taking food)? Manik Hazra, an important organizer of the Sangha, gave an explanation. According to him, Muslim devotees have accepted that prayer to Lokenath is identical with Salat. For that reason they do not perform Salat in the temple complex. Do the Muslims themselves really think so? Very few Muslim devotees are at one with this opinion but most of the Muslims are not. Manik Hazra also notes that if anybody does such a thing, the Sangha would not prevent him from offering Salat or namaz. At the same time, the Sangha does not supply any kind of food for ‘ifter’. Those who keep fasting, they go back home in the evening and break their fast there.

Comments

The village of Chakla is situated in Deganga Block of North 24 Parganas of West Bengal. This area has a long tradition of syncretism, which can be found in the performance of the annual ritual of floating dala (a small open wickerbasket shaped like a high-rimmed tray containing offerings to the deity) honouring Manasa, the snake goddess by both the Hindus and the Muslims, the cult of Manik Pir, the cult of Badsha Fakir, the cult of Pir Gorachand, the cult of Satya Pir, etc., i.e., the cults revered by both the communities. Amity of the two communities is evident here. There is evidence galore of peaceful co-existence of the two ethnic groups in this area. For example, Muslim butchers never sell beef openly here since they do not want to hurt the sentiment and religious feelings of the Hindus. Another important point to note here is that 67.95% of the total population of Deganga Block is Muslim. (Total population 2,34,142; Hindu 74,819; Muslim 1,59,109. Census 1991). One may infer from these facts that it was almost a compulsion for the Sangha to foster and propagate a popular syncretism due to the presence of these factors. In other words, the Sangha had to propagate syncretism to win over the allegiance of the local Muslim population.

Limits of syncretism

It was mentioned earlier that the Sangha works within the broad framework of the idioms and rituals of Hindu socio-religious order which marks its limit. Consequently,
it has been seen that —

a. Muslim cooks are not allowed to cook the food which is offered to the deity of Bala-Gopal or to Lokenath, i.e., the bhoga offered at the time of worship of the deities in the main temple. Though, the Muslim cooks prepare the food for distribution among the mass of devotees, both Hindus and Muslims. What is done actually is that a little of bhoga or food prepared by Hindu cooks and offered to Gopala and Lokenath is mixed with the food for distribution among the people who take bhoga in the dining hall.

b. None other than the Brahmins perform the puja, i.e., recite mantra (sacred hymn) and perform other rituals, viz., consecrate food to the deities, wave the lighted lamp (perform arati) before the images of Bala-Gopala and Lokenath.

c. It has been seen that the image of Lokenath is always associated with Hindu symbols (trident, phallus, om, bulls) and deities, but not with any Islamic symbols, e.g., crescent and star.

Despite the above, as the researcher has elsewhere (Chaudhuri, 2009: 171) pointed out, one can hardly miss the ties that bind the local Muslims with the temple complex of Lokenath and the devotees visiting the same. The articles offered in worship in the temple of Lokenath, namely, incense, flowers, fruits and sweetmeats or the red-thread and pieces of brick (referred to earlier) are sold mostly by the Muslim shop-keepers and Muslim boys and girls. Finally, the surrounding villages have not witnessed even a single instance of communal conflict in post-independence India. The people of the area remained unruffled even after the demolition of Babri Masjid, the event which spread countrywide communal tension. Whether the cult of Lokenath has facilitated communal harmony in the villages in the vicinity or it is the ambience of Hindu-Muslim amity of the toiling masses of the surrounding villages, rather, Deganga Block as a whole, that has helped Lokenath cult achieve increasing strength is a matter for reflection by the students of sociology.

The Sangha tries to harmonize between Hindus and Mussalmans in the cult of Lokenath. Besides, it tries to harmonize among the different Hindu cults and sects. The Hindus are broadly divided into Saiva, Vaishnava and Sakta. This division is based on doctrinal differences and rituals. (Dube,2000:30). The cult of Siva has a great antiquity. Numerous Saivite sects have been evolved out of the cult of siva. Saivism became influential in south India in seventh century. A wealth of Saivite sects exist,
many of them professing yogic and tantric doctrines and practices. The Kalamukas and Kapalikas excelled in antinomian asceticism. Starting with the seventh century c.e., a whole Saiva literature appeared, consisting of twenty-eight orthodox agamas and about two hundred auxiliary tractates, or upagamas. (Eliade.1991:135). The cult of Siva has both higher scriptural support and wider culture of little tradition. (Chakraborty, R. 2002 : 271). The philosophical side of the cult of Siva represents him as the earliest and universal impression of nature upon men—the impression of endless and pitiless change. But he has also assimilated much of the demonolatry and Animism of the non-Aryan races, as in his manifestation as Bhutesvara, 'lord of goblins'...... (ERE/ed. Hastings, 1964 : VI-700). The symbol of Siva is the linga or phal-lus. It is a very popular cult among the Hindus. The development of asceticism in its coarser forms is one of the main contributions of Saivism to modern Hinduism. (E.R.E/Hastings. 1946 : VI-701).

The god Vishnu has been venerated since the ancient period of India. Vaisnivism appeared around the cult of Narayan-Vishnu and his serveral images. These two names can be found in epics and purans and both names referred to the same deity. (Jaiswal, S. 1993 : 38). "In one sense the cult of Visnu may be regarded as in direct antithesis to that of Siva. Like the latter, it has its philosophical side. Vishnu impersonate the higher evolution; the upword tendency of the human spirit. He represents several great and far-reaching religious ideas. In the increasing flux and change of all things he is their preserver; and although he is one of the highest gods, he has constantly revis­ited the earth either in animal or in human shape.” (E.R.E/Hastings. 1946 : VI-702).

Chaitannya (1486-1533), the most prominent figure in the Vaisnavite tradition who played a significant role in Bengal. He was initiated by the sage Kesava Bharati. To obtain freedom from ignorance, strict ritual was no longer necessary; love suffices. Chaitanya taught that everyone should choose to impersonate a character of Krishna’s legend and live out the character’s love for Krishna. He himself cherished Krishna as Krishna’s lover Radha. Therefore, Chaitanya’s disciples held him to be an incar­nation of both divine spouses—Krishna and Radha. The aim of his movement was to bring a close contact between upper class and lower class. Chaitanya wrote very lit­tle, but inspired others to write. And in this way he contributed a lot to the Vaishnavism of Bengal. The cult of Vishnu is less tinged with asceticism, more compasionate, more amicable, more human, than that of Siva. “Its eclecticism is clearly
marked. Its theory of incarnation or descents (avatara) at once links it to Vedic mysticism...." (ERE/ed Hastings. 1946 : VI-702)

The worship of Sakti or the female energy has prevalent in India from an ancient period among almost all the different ethnological elements comprising the vast mass of Indian population. (Chattopadhyaya, S. 1962 : 49). During 4th to 8th centuries, the Tantric cult grew through which began the worship of female deities, associated with fertility cult. The impact of the Tantric beliefs on Hinduism manifested itself in the form of sakti cult, with their basic belief that the male can be activated only by being united with the female. Siva is a combination of two gods—Rudra and Agni—his Sakti is a combination of the spouses of both the deities (Chattopadhyaya .1962 : 51). Countless goddesses are related to the cult of Sakti. The power of these countless goddesses is manifested in a single expression which is cosmic energy or Sakti. Durga, Kali, Katyayani, Karali, Bhadrakali, Tara, Uma, Chandi etc. are included in the cult of Sakti. Numerous Sakta sects have been evolved out of the cult of Sakti.

Biographers of Lokenath Brahmachari emphasised on the universality of Lokenath. According to them, Guru Lokenath never followed any sectarian path to fulfil his sadhana. On the contrary he followed all. He is not only for Hindus but also for Muslims. He is for all types of Hindu sects, viz. Saivaitas, Vaishnavait, and Saktas. He has been described as Siva, Brahma, Vishnu and Sakti Chakraborty, has described him as the manifestation and expression of all gods and goddesses. (1999 : 15).

The Sangha has incorporated the cult of Siva in the cult of Lokenath. In time of puja, in devotional songs and in panchali, Lokenath is described as Siva. Iconographically he is frequently portrayed in association with Siva or linga, which is Siva’s principal material representation for purposes of worship. It can also be found in locket, in stand picture and in statue or image.

The incorporation of Saivism can be traced in different events of Lokenath cult. It can be described in the following manner—

a. Everyday morning priests bathe the image of Lokenath. When chief priest pours the water of Ganges over the head of the image of Lokenath, he recites the mantra of Siva’s bathing.

b. In the main temple, there are two images of Lokenath—one is the big image which is situated inside the temple, and the other one is in the back side varanda.
Both images are associated with linga and Nandi (divine bull of Siva).

c. At the centre of the nut-mandir there is an image of Lokenath. A linga or phal­lus of marble is installed in front of the image. Devotees pour the water of Ganges and milk on the head of the image. This ritual is identical with the ritual of Tarakeswar temple and the night of Siva (Siva Ratri). Tarakeswar is one of the forms of Siva.

d. The Sangha publishes so many audio cassettes and compact discs on the life and teachings of Lokenath which include songs, dramas and stories. Both songs and the inlay cards show that the cult of Lokenath is closely associated with the saivaite tradition.

e. In the panchali hymn of Lokenath, he has been depicted as Nilkantha, Maheswar, Sarabhbuteswar, Sivakalpa. This nomenclature belongs to the cult of Siva.

The Sangha calls Lokenath Ma (mother) and deifies him as Ma Kali, Mahamaya, Sivapriya and Chandi. Lokenath, once called himself Kali of Kalighat. (Brahmachari, s. 1991 : 131). A story can be mentioned here, which is very much popular among
the devotees of Lokenath. A relative of Gowlaini (Milkmaid Mother, a devotee of Lokenath in Baradi Asrama), had an acute problem and serious anxiety. So she desired to visit at Kalighat temple to worship Mother Kali. But due to the financial crisis she could not visit Kalighat. In this situation she spoke everything to Lokenath. After listening all, Lokenath discaouraged her to go to Kalighat temple. And she was asked to offer her puja to Lokenath. She duly carried his order. Gowalini Ma with all attendences of Puja, entered into the room of Lokenath. It was evening. She found Lokenath nowhere in the room and instead, she visualized Mother Kali, sitting at the place of Lokenath. Seeing this Gowalini Ma lost her sense and fainted. After sometime when she returned to state of consciousness, heard the voice of Lokenath, ‘Your puja is over, now get up and take up the plate of sweets.’ (Roy, A. 1997 : 371-72).

Biographers of Lokenath have mentioned that apart from scriptural study Lokenath also practised yogic cult. The yogic cult is the indispensable part of Trantricism. When yogic cult entered into the cult of Siva and the cult of Sakti, it gave birth to Saiva and Sakta Tantricism. Dasgupta writes, “Side by side with the commonly known theological speculations and religious practices there has been flowing in India an important esoteric yogic practices from a pretty old time; these esoteric practices, when associated with the theological speculations of the Saivas and the Saktas, have given rise to Saiva and Saktas Trantricism;........” (1946 : xxxiv). Trantricism gives emphasis on yoga. Many of the aspects of yoga that are especially associated with hathayoga. A close connection of Trantricism can be found with the sadhana of Lokenath Brahmacari. Lokenath practiced hathayoga for 35 years (Mishra, 19990 : 50). Hathayoga is historically the most influential, and today the best known, of the several schools yoga derived from the classical yoga of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra.” (ER/ed. Eliade. 1987! VI-213). It tends to prefer esoteric mysticism to systematic metaphysics and emphasizes physical exercises over meditation. (Ibid). Hathayoga can be depicted as ‘a science of physical feats.’ (Dasgupta, s. 1946 : 77). Biographers of Lokenath claimed that Lokenath successfully finished the course of Hathayoga. And through this practice he acquired a supernatural power and conquered the diseases and death. The practice of Hathayoga marks the close association of his sandhana with Trantricism.

Lokenath was also influenced by Vaishnavism. In the other words he accepted the cult of bhakti as an important path of sadhana. He said, “Gauranga is one of my
lands.” (Sengupta. K. 1982 : 296) Sengupta, one of his devotees, has explained this sentence in his book (1982 : 296). In the following manner “the term Gauranga (another name of Chaitanya a great and famous leader/social reformer of Vaishnavism and bhaktibad) refers to bhakti and Lokenath has four hands, thus - Janana yoga, Dhyanya yoga, Karma yoga and Bhakti yoga. Gauranga’s bhakti is one of his four path’s. Lokenath repetedly emphasized on bhaktibad of Vaisnavism.

The basis of Vaishnavism is bhaktibad which made a breach from vedic upasana. (Jaiswal, s. 1993 : 133). Jaiswal mentioned in her book (Ibid : 133-159) three main theories of Vaishnavism, are bhaktibad, ahimsabat (theory of non-violence) and avatarbad (theory of re-incarnation). In the cult of Lokenath first two theories are significantly present, but the last one is absent. The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha gives stress on bhakti and non-violence. According to them without bhakti no one can reach at the seat of Lokenath. Guru Lokenath is at the centre of the cult and the other part is devotee. The union of Lokenath and devotee can be possible through the bhakti or devotion. Point should be noted here that though Lokenath preached four ways or paths namely Janana, Dhayana, Karma and Bhakti, but the Sangha mainly emphasis on the path of bhakti. Organizers hold that the path of bhakti or devotion is an easier path to reach at the seat of Lokenath, than karmamarga, the path of strict ritual observances, or jnanamarga, the path of meditation and scriptural study. They also mentioned that Guru Lokenath had done all kinds of sadhana in his life time. So, devotees do not have to go through the strict and complex ways of sadhana. Lokenath says, “I have travelled in the hills and mountains and have earned enough of treasures, you enjoy them sitting at home.” (Brahmachari, s. 1996 : 176). Devotees must have devotion or bhakti which can help them to reach at the state of realization and the blessedness of Lokenath. Therefore formal rituals, or yoga practice or any other kind of strict and complex sadhana have been prescribed neither by Lokenath nor by the Sangha. Precisely, it can be said that the Sangha has been fostering and preaching a non-ritualistic devotional cult.

The aim of the Sangha is to establish that Lokenath is not a sectarian or sampradaik guru. Lokenath attained the highest stage of spiritual realization. This spiritual realization helps him to understand that religious paths are different but the goal is same. So, there is no reason to make any distinction between religions and different cults or sects of Hinduism. Lokenath studied and followed the Visishtadvaita philosophy,
at the same he practised hathayoga. Again he emphasized on bhakti and ahimsa which are the essential features of Vaishnavism. It shows that Lokenath tried to develop a state of amalgamation between various contradictory ideas, values and practices. The Sangha fosters this syncretic elements of the cult of Lokenath. Their target is to influence all sections of the people i.e. people of various Hindu sects and Muslims. For that reason the Sangha amalgamates various elements of different Hindu sects and Islam, and liberalize their cult, some time introduce new rituals, to make the cult of Lokenath a universal and all accepted popular cult.

Ideals and Teachings: Paradox and Inconsistency

Ideology plays an important role in the formation of social organisation. The term ideology refers to a set of ideas, which includes values. Ideology is "the body of doctrine, myth, symbol, etc. of a social movement, institution, class, or large group." (Webster's Dictionary, 1989:707). According to Marxism, "ideology" includes not only the theory of knowledge and politics, but also metaphysics, ethics, religion, and indeed any "form of consciousness" which expresses the basic attitudes or commitments of a social class. (Henry D. Aiken, the Age of Ideology, p.17, cited by Robert E.Lane in Political Ideology. 1967. The Free Press, New York, p-13). Ideology involves not only a judgment about the way things are but also the way things ought to be. Thus ideology is a set of beliefs and values which provides a way of seeing and interpreting the world and expresses the interests of a particular social group. (Haralambos, 1998:22). Ideology may be well-organized and systematic, or may not be. But it is very important and its role can not be ignored. Like other social and religious organizations Lokenath Sevashram Sangha follow (consciously or unconsciously) on ideological guideline, which is based on the teaching of Lokenath Brahmachari. Point should be noted here that Lokenath never wrote a book or any article to express his ideas and experiences of his life. His disciples, devotees and followers expressed his world view, what they received, learnt and heard from Lokenath Brahmachari, are the only source to make of the idea of Lokenath Brahmachari. His ideas, experiences and interpretation have been recorded by his devotees, disciples and closest associates. That is why the present research work has been forced to depend largely on the writings of Lokenath's devotees and on the literatures which have been published by the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha and other Lokenath organizations.
Lokenath’s idea can be stated in the following manner:

1. According to the claim of Lokenath devotees, that Lokenath believed in egalitarianism. But, of course, this egalitarianism is not socio-economic and political egalitarianism. It is spiritual egalitarianism. Lokenath thought that god is everywhere and each and every creation is itself the very manifestation of the divinity. From the smallest ant to the highest being, he had the same attitude, for to him the very question of the ego drawing a line of demarcation had totally disappeared.

2. Lokenath was an idealist thinker. He emphasized on human consciousness. His notion of happiness and peace is related to the consciousness. According to him, each and every action should be done consciously with a sense of awareness. If one becomes conscious and aware, he would find that his conscience would prevent him from such evil action. The evils in the society are perpetrated due to the absence of awareness on the part of the people. All evil actions are the result of unconsciousness. Sin is committed in a state of ignorance and subconsciousness. Any action which helps man to have more confidence in himself and create a happy state of mind is a virtue. The consequence of a vice is always unhappiness and virtue happiness. Therefore the seeker of truth should always try to perform all activities in a state of awareness. According to him, the root of all miseries is ignorance. Vivekananda, the famous Hindu idealist thinker has echoed the same thing. He writes, knowledge, “will take away all our misery” “when by analysing his own mind, man comes face to face, as it were, with something which is never destroyed, something which is, by its own nature, eternally pure and perfect, he will no more be miserable, no more unhappy.” (1994 : 130)

Lokenath used to say, “Be angry but do not become blind with anger.” (Suddhananda., 151-1985). Man should not allow the anger to possess and make himself blind, i.e., unconscious. It is only when the anger is given a free reign that it blindly bursts out and causes damages not only to the person on whom the anger is expressed but much more damage is caused to the entire body system of the angry man. What Lokenath tried to mean, by saying that ‘be angry’ is the show of anger, or the conscious anger. (Ibid). The show of anger in a social life may become absolutely inevitable. Father abusing the child, the teacher punishing the student, all these definitely call for the show of anger as corrective measures. But both the father as
well as the teacher should not become ‘anger’ itself, but only express it consciously, without allowing the anger to possess them and cause any damage to the body or mind.

(3) Lokenath used to repeat a principle “First practice yourself and then teach. To teach the people the path of desireless action, and the importance of self-help as a virtue to be followed by every individual irrespective of his material attainment, when the local landlords of Baradi Dacca (Bangladesh) presented Lokenath the piece of land for the construction of the ashrama and also expressed their intention to donate funds to get the cottage constructed by hired labourers, Lokenath objected to this and with the help of the local villagers, he worked himself and constructed his small cottage. Point should be noted here that same idea can be found in teachings of Ramakrishna Paramhansha.

(4) An important aspect of teachings of Lokenath is the authority and absolute control of guru over disciples devotees minds and body. Authority of guru and guru-sishya parampara are considered as the important features of traditional Hinduism. According to Brent, ‘The skeleton of Hinduism is the Guru (1973 :1). According to the Hindu tradition shishya surrenders his will and his future actions to the guru and all his efforts are turned inwards in the attempt to make that surrender. Lokenath says that the supreme divine qualities of the guru is unlimited and infinite, hence, his attributes are also unlimited. (Brahmachari, 1986 : 167). According to him, guru kindles the light of wisdom in the the heart of the disciple. Who am I ? What am I supposed to do in life ? From where have I come, where am I to go ? What is the secret of this creation ? Guru makes devotees/disciples seek solutions to these fundamental questions of life and guide disciples to realize them, (Ibid : 166). Onece a devotee came to Lokenath with a very pertinent doubt in his mind. He had a doubt regarding the genuineness of the mantra which his guru had given him. He hesitated to ask the question, but when he asked him, Lokenath answered that a disciple is not supposed to judge the genuineness of the mantra given by his guru. Whatever mantra he has given the disciple should accept it and should do the japa with the devotion and trust. If disciple accepts anybody as his guru, then surrenders himself with unquestioning faith, and his attitude should be “Mantramulam guru vakyam”. But before accepting anybody as guru, devotees/disciples may test him. As it happened in the lives of Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda with his analytical and logical
mind would not accept Ramakrishna so easily. He tried different techniques to test the genuineness of the master, and when he got totally convinced he surrendered unconditionally at his feet and remained his humble servant all through his life. Point should be noted here that the notion of Ramakrishna regarding the relationship between guru and shishya is identical with the notion of Lokenath. According to Lokenath, right action, listening to the words of the holy ones, and performance of these actions in society which is dear to the guru, is the true guruseva or service to the master. Disciples always should remember the command of his guru. The instruction or command is the guru himself. (Brahmachari. 1986 : 165).

5. Religion:

It is known to everybody that the term ‘Religion’ and Bengali word ‘Dharma’ are indentical. But the connotation ‘Dharma’ is different from the term religion. But in the present work both words are considered as same and identical. When Lokenath was asked by his devotee to know the meaning of the term ‘Dharma’, he answered, ‘All the consequent actions of the triple qualities of Sattva, Rajah and Tamah is Dharma.’ The qualities are found in a true Brahmin are the qualities of Sattva guna, such as, restraint of senses, controlling of the mind, meditation, renunciation, cleanliness and purity. Gifting, wealth, heroism are the signs of Rajah guna and jealousy, sleep, idleness are the signs of Tamah guna. Lokenath’s disciple Yamini Kumar Mukhopadhyay, in his book entitled “Dharmasar Sangraha” gives a brief account of his conversation with Lokenath, which can help to understand Lokenath’s views on religion. It can be stated here.

Q. If we contemplate on sattva, rajah and tamah qualities what will be the benefit?

Baba (Lokenath) : Just as the darkness disappears with the rising of the sun, just as the thief runs away when the householder wakes up, in the same manner if you contemplate on the higher qualities, the lower instincts will run away from you and your body will be transformed into a temple of the divine. Later, when the power of the brahman awakens in you, you will become the brahman.

Q. Is there any method by which the body and the mind could be purified?

Baba : Yes there is the sattvic food purifies the body and renunciation of desires purifies the mind. When your body and mind is purified then you will realize Hari.
Then you will know what Hari is to you.

Q. The power of the brahman will manifest itself in my heart. What is the meaning of this?

Baba: Why, have you not seen the image of the mother Kali worshipped on the mahastami day?

Q. Yes, I have seen, but what am I to understand out of that?

Baba: That Kali is the brahma-shakti or the potential energy of the brahman. She is standing on the dead body.

Q. Who is the dead body?

Baba: You all know him as Siva.

Q. How do you call the dead body as Siva?

Baba: The reason being that Siva is Shav or dead.

Q. Siva is also known as Mritunjay, the conqueror of death, then why do you call Siva as Shav or dead?

Baba: The reason for which he is the immortal one is the reason to call him shav or dead.

Q. I could not understand what is that reason?

Baba: Renunciation of all desires, when one reaches a state of desirelessness; he attains immortality. The destruction or annihilation of the pot (body) is death. But he dies not. The one who does not identify himself with the body how can there be the phenomenon of death to him? Because he has no ego, he does not feel that any action is performed by him. In this state he performs all actions of the day to day life, at the same time he does nothing. In the absence of desire the 'Jiva' (individual) moves about in this world like living dead. The moment an individual reaches a state of desirelessness him 'jivatva' i.e., his worldly identification ceases and he reaches the state of 'sivatva', godhood, which means that his 'jivabhav', the tendencies of worldliness transformed, merge in the existential being of the brahman. In that state the potential divine energy, brahmasakti, takes possession of the living dead 'she' performs 'her' actions of creation, preservation, and annihilation. Thus endowed with the divine qualities, the 'jiva' or individual soul, comes to be known as the Siva, the god in human form.
Q. If I reach a state of desirelessness, am I to see the form of the four armed mother Kali within my heart?

Baba: *Sadhakanam hitarthya brahma rupakalpanam*, I hope you know the meaning of this.

Q. Yes, I know, please explain me further.

Baba: It is for your good. It is to give you the realisation is that form of Kali.

Q. How many categories of spiritual seekers are there?

Baba: Four types: (1) Jnani (2) Yogi (3) Bhakta (4) Karmi.

Q. Is there any difference in the technique and method amongst these four types of spiritual disciplines?

Baba: Yes, the spiritual discipline of a *jnani* is *satsanga* (the company of holy ones or study of scriptures) ‘dana’ (gifting) ‘vichara’ (discrimination between the eternal and the transient) and *santosh* (contentment). The discipline of yogi is to unite the *jivatman* (individual soul) with the *paramatman* (the supreme godhood) or awakening the *kulakundalini* and allow it to merge with the ‘*paramsiva*’ the supreme godhood or to unite Radha with Krishna. The discipline of bhakti is to worship the divine and serve him. The discipline of karmayoga is ‘*dana*’ (gifting) *yagna* (sacrificial fire) and the performance of all the worldly activities in a spirit of dispassion and detachment. Though, I have spoken about the four types of discipline of yoga yet all the spiritual seekers irrespective of the path followed have to perform all actions with awareness and discrimination, thereby reach the state of desirelessness and become liberated.

Q. What is the benefit of *satsanga*, the company of the holy ones?

Baba: The glory of the company of holy ones is beyond human expression.

Q. What is the benefit of ‘Dana’ or gifting?

Baba: It helps you to enrich your feeling for others and attain renunciation.

Q. What is the benefit of ‘Vichara’?

Baba: It helps you to realise the difference between the ‘*atman*’ and *anatman* and when your conscience to discrimination between the eternal and transient awakens in you, you become truly detached and then the ‘*jiva*’ becomes Siva i.e., the man becomes god.
Q. What is the way to inculcate the sense of contentment?

Baba: To constantly try to keep the mind in a state of happiness by being god conscious while attending to all the mundane day to day activities under all circumstances.

Q. If one is blessed with divine vision, why does he not attain liberation?

Baba: It is only through sufferance that the 'prarabdha karma' ends. Apart from that if liberation is so easily granted then it becomes difficult for god to maintain the creation.

Q. What is 'Prarbda karma'?

Baba: The wise ones have compared prarbdha karma with the arrows. Just as the archer does not have any control over the arrow which has left the bow, the arrow depending upon its speed falls at a distance, so also is the prarbdha karma of the jivas (individual soul).

Q. I could not understand you clearly.

Baba: Have you not read in your childhood days?

“Lalate likhitam yatlu sasthi
jagar vasare
Na Hari Sankaro Brahma cha
anyatha kartum iti.”

The meaning of 'sasthi' is the sum total of six, not loosely or separately, but by being one. ‘jagat vasare' is an awakened state. The meaning of this sloka is, before the creation when the absolute Brahman was one, and he willed “Ekameva babu shyam” I am one, but let me by many, the whole creation came into existence. At that, whatever is written on the forehead of one, i.e. whatever activity is prescribed for one by will of the lord even Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara are bound by that wish. This wish is the prarbdha (Brahmachari. 1985 : 169-72).

6. The kernel of the teaching of Lokenath is devotion and love. Bhakti (devotion) and love are the beginning and end of all Lokenath teachings. One can enter into the relationship between guru and devotees, through the path of devotion and love. Redemption is possible only by entering such a relationship, and redemption achieved can be through such a relationship which is the sole aim of the devotee. Everything
is subordinate to this fundamental goal. Most of the people work unconsciously. Due to that they invite evils, unhappiness and pain in their life. Devotion and love to the Baba Lokenath can make them able to have happy any peaceful life. Lokenath never speaks of moksa or salvation, which is the final goal of individual in Hindu world. The English meaning of Moksa is 'Salvation'. (Everymans Dictionary. 1999 : 1386). The meaning of Christian Salvation is not identical with the meaning of Hindu ‘Moksa’. Salvation refers to the power of the god. Jesus Christ has been empowered by goal to fulfil his saving purpose towards mankind. “In Him (Jesus) God gave the perfect revelation of Himself, and through him fulfilled his saving purpose towards mankind. The saving work of God, however, is not complete as a barefact of history. It operates as an abiding power in the experience of men, under the condition of trustful surrender to Jesus Christ, the personal saviour and ever-living Lord.” (ERE / ed. Hastings. 1962 : XI-694). Salvation consists in a transition from one state or condition to another, i.e. lower to higher, the state of the misery to the state of blessedness. Both states are conceived as determined by a power governing and animating human life. According to Christian theology, “It is sharply distinguished from two forms of the higher life of man : (1) moralism, in which salvation is achieved by man through diligent obedience to the moral imperative; (2) mysticism, in which salvation, conceived as immediate union with god, is achieved by man through special exercises of soul which vary from the magical to the contemplative. In deep contrast with these divergent types, the Christian salvation as grounded in and-warranted by, the divine sufficiency. Its origin is in the love of God, conceived as a ruling purpose aiming at a kingdom or realm in which the holy will of God shall be done. This love appears in human experience as grace, i.e. the action of God, in the history of the race and the individual, directed towards the salvation of man. This salvation is not the work of man, but the work of God in man, and always ut evokes in man, not self-congratulation, but the sense of constraint, as of those who find themselves in a bondage which is nevertheless, perfect freedom.” (ERE/ed.Hastings, 1962 : XI-694)

Hindu concept of moksa has a special meaning. It does not refer to deliverance or release in general, from pains and penalties of any kind. In Hindu religious and philosophical thought “moksa has become the technical and specialized expression to denote that deliverance from bondage to the world and its fetters which is the described and ideal end of the Hindu religious life.” (E.R.E/ed.Hastings, 1962 : XI-932)
According to the Oxford Dictionary of World religions, moksa is the fourth and ultimate artha (goal) of Hinduism, release from the round of death and rebirth (samsora). This is attained when one has overcome ignorance (avidya) and desires. The routes leading toward moksa are, in effect, a map of ‘Hinduism’: the Bhagavad-gita tries to reconcile the different forms of yoga, jana, karma, and bhakti, as all having their place. Although moksa is the soteriological goal of Hinduism, it is paradoxically not a goal at all, since its attainment depends upon one’s abandonment of all desire and attachment, including the desire for moksa. Moksa is the transcendence of all goals (arthas). Its attainment which alive (jivan-mukti) or discarnate (videha-mukti) marks the end of rebirth and suffering. (1997 : 650). Therefore, the term moksa refers to the emancipation of individual from the all kinds of earthly bondage and existence. It is the entry into brahman, a merging with Brahma, eating of brahman, breathing of brahman’s spirit.” (Kakar, 2002 : 16)

Biographers of Lokenath Brahmacari keep silence about the concept of moksa of Lokenath. They emphasized on his redeeming power. “Redeem” refers to, “to free people from sin offence.” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. 2005 : 1062). One can be released from worldly pain, guilt, sin etc with the help of the reconciliation or atonement. (ERE/ed. Hastings. 1964 : V : 78). According to Compact Oxford Reference Dictionary (2001) the term redeem means save from sin or evil. (pp-698). In modern times the term redemption is closely connected to the ‘this worldly’ phenomena, and redemption tends to be understood as the triumph of good over evil in human history or in the individual’s personal life. (The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions. 1997 : 805).

Including a closeness with supernatural beings or the paramatma (supreme soul), or to achieve moksa or salvation.

Lokenath was an ascetic sadhu. He announced that he had reached the state of closeness with the supreme soul. He said “when I reached the state of identifying myself with all the living manifestations, I could not but feel the pains and suffering of all as if happening to myself. I could see the Brahman the one Existential Truth living in all. Hence, the question of heaven and hell was no longer anywhere to be seen, for all was he.” (Brahmanchari. 1986 : 174-75). His devotees narrates him as the enlightened one, who is free from pride and ignorance and is never attached to his actions or its fruits and ever illumined in conscious awareness of the divine, unaffected
by the opposites of pleasures and pains, love and hatred of the mundane plane, moves about in this world like the living god in a state of absolute detachment and desirelessness. Devotees hold that Lokenath did his *sadhana* not for himself but for the good and benefit of the common people. He said to his devotees, “I have travelled in the hills and mountains and have earned enough of treasures, you enjoy them sitting at home.” (Sengupta. 1982: 297). Therefore devotees do not have to go through a complex process of *sadhana* or to follow a painful ascetic path. They have to do only one thing, that is to surrender themselves to Lokenath. But Lokenath knows that it is not so easy task. He says, ‘I allow you to reach me, hence, you can reach me, or else your might is too little for it.” (Brahmachari. 1986: 176). Because devotees have no trust. He says, “I can do whatever I like, you have no trust, hence, you do not receive the fruits as you desire.” (Ibid: 177). So, “Let sraddha (trust in the words of the guru and shastra) be your shelter, let sraddha be your friend and the path to realisation.” (Ibid).

Therefore world-rejecting asceticism as *moksa* are not welcome here. Though, it considered that ascetic ideals have high value, but neither Lokenath or the Sangha preach it among the people. On the contrary it is propagated by the Sangha among the devotees that each and every devotees should look after his/her family properly. And devotees come to the temple to solve their worldly problems, Present research scholar has never found a single devotee who looks for *moksa* or salvation or wants to have ascetic life or path. It can be said from this discussion that the cult of Lokenath is supposed to be the path of the middle class and lower middle class house holders. Lokenath or the Sangha has never suggested to quit the family and take the path of ascetic sadhu like Lokenath, but Lokenath suggested several times to be a ‘Grihi sannayasi’. He said that “In order to love Him (god), you must start from the house. He is there in the midst of your father-mother, son-daughter, all others. That person who cannot make everybody his own, whose very being does not cry for other’s with unselfish motives, how can he love the greatest one.” (Sen, B.C. 1995: 41). His other messages are — (a) ‘Any son looks after his father and mother with or without wishes, and carry out their orders, god will always do good for them. (Roy, A. 1997: 453)

(b) ‘If anyone wants to be a religious man he has to judge at the bed time, the analysis of his whole day’s activities and with the judgement, if any act is good, preserve that, and any act is evil, forget that forever, with a strong mind. (Ibid)
(c) He is the real ‘sannyasi’ who observes doing or not doing of actions, as the
same. With idleness leaving a dutiful work, is not the work of a sannyasi. (Ibid : 454)

Therefore no other worldly idea is encouraged by the cult of Lokenath. Certainly
it is a significant contribution of the Sangha to the Hindu world and its tradition.
Though the Sangha performs the rituals and rites of great tradition, but never preach
it among the devotees. More and more they emphasis on the material condition of
the devotees. Though their form is religious but content is highly materialistic. It would
not be incorrect to call it ‘religious materialism’. There is a popular idea among the
Hindus, that destiny determines the lives of the people. But in this cult destiny cannot
control people’s lives, devotees can control the destiny by calling the name of
Lokenath,

One may find a similarity between Lokenath and Ramkrishna regarding the ques­tion
of grihi sannaysi. According to Ramkrishna, one may have the bless of god
without leaving the family life. (Sarkar. S. 2002 : 62)

In the cult of Lokenath spiritual goal can be achieved in the realm of the family
life. So, two different trends are harmonized here. One is the spiritual goal and the
other is the materialistic goal of family life. Lokenath followed the path of karma
(Karma Marg). That is why he never denied the importance of karma and the mun­
dane interest of the devotees. In Europe, the puritans of 17th century apprised a spe­
cific principle of work in which mankind are suggested to do work for their mun­
dane interest for salvation or liberation. (Weber, 1969 : 167-270)

The real lives of devotees do not take place in heavenly regions. They must make
their way through the social institutions of this world, and this means that the move­
ment has had to develop a strategy for dealing with requirements of earthly existence.
(Babb, 1987 : 54). Lokenath teaching is deeply concerned with the mundane interest
of the devotees. It can be depicted as the path of the householder. In the modern age
house holders have not much time to spend for any complex and difficult spiritual
practice to enhance thus spirituality. Neither they think of moksa, nor to reach at the
state of closeness with paramatma (supreme sol). Rather they think of the require­
ments of worldly life. Lokenath never asked his devotees to leave samsara or family,
rather he tried to make them happy family man. He also asked them to earn their live­
lihoods in normal forms of employment. (Sengupta, 1982 : 61, 63). Lokenath’s idea
can be depicted as the path for householder, not for the ascetics. Devotees pay visit
to the temple of Lokenath to worship him for the removal of sins or for the gratification of specific desires: position, job, wealth, power, health, successful marriage, success in examinations, and victory in legal cases and in election.

People from different social strata go to the Lokenath temple with their social, economic and religious problems. They hold that in order to have the grace of Lokenath, devotees just have to remember him, just have to call his name. Lokenath says, “In the battlefield, in the sea, or in the jungles, if you are in trouble, think of me and I shall save you.” (Roy, 1997: 452). Manik Hazra, one of the organizers of the Sangha, expressed that, devotees do not have to do anything, only they have to think of Baba Lokenath. Baba Lokenath is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. Lokenath has collected a lot for the devotees. Lokenath said, “I have earned fabulous wealth while travelling all over mountains and since hundred years, therefore, make effort to take that from me.” (Roy, 1997: 454)

Biographers and the Sangha have mentioned that Lokenath redeemed and is redeeming many people by using his miraculous power. Once Lokenath said, “In order to test whether I have attained the state Brahman, I cured 94 dying patients, just by the word.” (Brahmachari, S., 1996: 125). His biographers have mentioned so many instances of his miraculous power. Some of them are stated here —

(a) Lokenath saved a person from the punishment of the court. (Brahmachari. 1986: 117-18)

(b) He saved the people of Baradi from the Sitaladevi, the demi-goddess of small pox. (Ibid: 118-19)

(c) He cured Radhika Mohan Roy and Sitanath Das from their paralytic condition. (Ibid:119-21)

(d) He saved a baby of Umaprasanna Nag by making his wife milch. (Ibid: 122-23)

(e) Chandrakumar Dutta of Bikrampur had some personal problems. Lokenath solved his problems by using his miraculous powers.

(f) He cured a boy who had a very severe attack of dreadful tuberculosis. When the poor boy appeared in front of him, Lokenath said, “I have taken the disease in my body, now you can go.” (Ibid: 180)

(g) Nishikanta Basu, father of the former chief minister of West Bengal, had some
Lokenath Brahmachari has passed away in 1980. Physically he does not exist. Now the question is how does he bless the devotees or solve their problems or cure this diseases? It is claimed by the organizes of the Sangha that he is eternal, he has no death. He exists everywhere. He is omnipresent and omnipotent. Whenever and wherever devotees call him, he responds. His photograph, clay of his house (vita) and flower of his feet have miraculous power too. If one keeps his photograph with him or her, or wears locket or ring he/she would be free from all sorts of dangers. Organizers give emphasis particularly on the healing power of the clay of Lokenath’s vita (house). There is a 3/2.5 ft. concrete tank in the varanda of the main temple. This tank is filled up with the clay of Lokenath’s vita. Devotees collect clay from this tank to protect themselves from danger and to be cured from the diseases. Devotees also collect charanamrita (foot nectar) from the reservoir which is situated at the back side of the temple. They think that this clay has healing power and it is considered to be the another expression of Lokenath’s miraculous power.

But one can be surprised to see that though the Sangha believes and propagates the miraculous healing power of Lokenath, but they do not give up or ignore the scientific method of treatment. They run a free dispensary and aim to establish a hospital. Now, the question is how do they harmonize both — the miraculous power of guru and modern scientific method? In response to this question, organizers of the Sangha answer that, they never propagate that the clay and foot nectar have healing power but people believe in the healing power of the clay and foot-nectar, that is why they preserve them. And, of course they firmly believe that the soil of this village is sacred, because Lokenath was born here. To support the popular belief they dig out and collect clay from a near by pond for filling up the empty concrete tank of the main temple. For the same reason they built up a concrete water reservoir for foot nectar, which would help the devotees to collect foot-nectar.

Point should be noted here that, usually local people do not collect clay or foot nectar, but they go to the dispensary run by the Sangha. Mainly outsiders collect foot nectar or clay of Lokenath’s vita.

Regarding the question of the harmonization between the two opposite trends, the answer of the organizers is not satisfactory. Because personally they believe that
foot nectar and clay have some miraculous power and they should not refrain devotees to collect these. The Sangha does not want to hurt the feeling of the devotees. Point should be noted here, that, there is only one health centre in the Chakla panchayat, which is not sufficient for the people of this area. For that reason people go to the charitable dispensary of the Sangha. Besides, they collect clay of Lokenath’s *vita* and foot nectar.

The argument is explicit. But it is not true. Because it is the stated goal of the Sangha, but the real goal is to influence the people. They patronize it to make their activities valid in the eyes of the people.

In fine it can be said that the cult of Lokenath and the Sangha specially encourage the materialistic part of life. But it would be incorrect to say that they follow the path of materialism. On the contrary they harmonize the two contradictory trends of human life consciously or unconsciously. So one may call it ‘this worldly mysticism’ or ‘materialistic spiritualism’.

(b) Organizational structure and activities

The following diagram illustrates the organizational structure of the Sangha

**Diagram—1**

Two Correlated Bodies

Sree Sree Lokenath Sevashram Sangha
Trust Body (Estd. 1982)

The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha
Diagram-2 shows the relationship between Sree Sree Lokenath Sevashram Sangha and Lokenath Sevashram Sangha.

**CHAIRMAN AND THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

The board of trustees elects the chairman of the board. Chairman has the supreme power to control all the functions of the trust. Trust may form various committees and sub-committees for the smooth functioning of the trust.

**President and governing body of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha.**

The members of the governing body of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha are se-
lected by the board of trustees of Sree Sree Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. It shows that Sree Sree Lokenath Sevashram Sangha is superior to the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. Though, Sree Sree Lokenath Sevashram Sangha was formed in 1982, one year after the formation of Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. Both are distinct entities. Sree Sree Lokenath Sevashram Sangha is constituted under a board of trustees with well-defined rules of procedure. It has been registered as a trust body to ensure the continuity of the nature of activities to be carried out by the operative side of the organizational complex under scrutiny in this study. It has got supreme status & role in relation to the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. On the other hand, the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha is a registered society. According to their constitution, both take up religious activities, i.e. worship of Lokenath, organize religious festivals, preaching the ideology of Lokenath Brahmachari as well as charitable and philanthropic activities.

Legally or constitutionally they are different but in practice they are the same, because both are controlled by the same set of persons. It should be pointed out that devotees hardly know the name of the trust, i.e Sree Sree Lokenath Sevashram Sangha.

Composition and election of the governing body of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha.

The Governing Body of Lokenath Sevashram Sangha would consist, according to the Societies Registration Act, of not less than seven and not more than eleven members. The President, Vice-president, Secretary, Assistant-Secretary, Treasurer, Game Secretary, Assistant Game-Secretary, Journal-Editor, Drama-Director, Yatra Director (Folk Drama) and Collector. The office-bearers are elected by the Governing Body amongst themselves. All the members of the Governing Body have to retire at the Annual General Meeting.

Meetings

According to the constitution organization, meetings of the Governing Body is held at least once in the three months. Time and venue are selected by the president or secretary. Any five members of the Governing Body may call the meeting of the Governing Body. According to their constitution, “Any five members of the Governing Body may requisition the meeting of the Governing Body and the secretary
shall summon the same within seven days and failing which the president or the requisitionists may do so provided no business other than that specified in the notice shall be transacted at such meeting.” (sic. P-2). Emergency meeting may be called on 24 hrs. notice. Four members, personally present, should be constituted quorum for the meeting and if a quorum is not present within 30 minutes of the time the member present may adjourn the meeting. (sic. P-2).

The principle of the formation of the Governing Body of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha ignore the caste-class or religious identity. Anybody can be the member of the Governing Body. An individual from any caste or religion can be the head of the body. This system should be described as a democratic system. (Ambiguity and elements of dilemma can be seen in the relationship of religion to democracy). In modern democratic society, human being is regarded as the individual. Each particular man in a sense incarnates the shole of mankind. He/she is the measure of all things. In liberal view of life is society is the means and life of each individual is the end. More precisely, there is no social good apart from the good of the individuals. Individual is regarded as sovereign in his/her action, body and mind. He/she has liberty to choose means and ends of his/her life. It is the task of the democratic state to protect the liberty of the individuals. Moreover, individuals are equal in the eyes of the law of the liberal-democratic state. Contrary to this values, religions, particularly Hinduism in India follows an authoritarian system in which human being is not regarded as an individual. In this authoritarian milieu, individualism is not only absent but also human being is less-free, and less-equal. It provides an authoritarian system, in which individual is not allowed to raise any question to the fundamental structure of religion, i.e. varna/caste system, which is contradictory to the modern egalitarian theories and democracy. So, one may say that the absence of democracy is one of the important features of Hinduism.

In the Modern Ages a great change has taken place in every religion of western countries. Religions of transcendence perform important positive role in the development of democracy. O’ Dea writes, “Religions of transcendence are conducive to the development and maintenance of democratic institutions” (1969 : 104). In India, though, the context and development are not identical with west, but a similar process can be found here. Religions, particularly Hinduism tries to adapt the mod-
ern conditions. Its "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." (Singer, 1972: 202). Apart from this, many Hindu sects and castes have formed political associations in order to protect their right and interests.

Being a modern religious association the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha has adapted many democratic features. Election is one of them. In a closed social system undoubtedly it is a remarkable step. By adopting this election system the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha has made a breach from the traditional Hindu system.

Another important democratic feature is equality. Caste-based Hinduism does not allow equality. Because varna and caste system are related to the stratified social system and which are unchangable and rigid and vertical mobility is totally absent. Though, the caste system has been weakened by the processes of westernization and modernization. Hence, it plays an important role among the Hindus. Still it is the sociological basis of Hinduism and an all India phenomenon of Hinduism with some exceptions. The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha does not follow this tradition. Besides, it ignores all sorts of descrimination regarding the question of caste and religions.

The Sangha follows the principle of equality, which is one of the characteristics of democracy. The formation of the Governing Body of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha is based on the principle of equality. No such discrimination can be found here. Anybody from any caste can be the member of Governing Body of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. Not only that, they ignore religious discrimination too. It is open to all. Even Muslims are allowed to take membership and to take part in different activities. It can be depicted as the mainfesatation of liberalism, which is an inherent feature of modern democary. The Sangha is a pragmatic organization. According to their constitution, an individual of humble origin and of Muslim community can be the President of the Sangha. But the Sangha never allows non-brahmins to have the post of priest in Chakla temple.

According to the constitution of the Sangha president or secretary has to call the G.B. meeting at least once in three months. Mr. Debprasad Sarkar, the founder-secretary of the Sangha described the G.B. meeting in the follow manner. "Either Sailen Babu (Salin Roy, the President) or I would call the G.B. meeting. We would sit together and take our decisions democratically." Decisions were taken by the G.B.
on the basis of the support of the majority members of the G.B. Therefore, it is
not difficult to say that in the beginning, the decision making process of the G.B.
of the Sangha was democratic in nature.

The scenario had been drastically changed in mid ‘80’s of 20th century. The
principle of democratic decision making process became fade in day to day prac­
tice of the Sangha. Sometimes democratic norms were ignored or superseded. De­
velopment of the G.B. started running in a different manner. With the growth of
the Sangha, a series of conflicts had been taken place. Crisis of continuity is inher­
ent feature of every religious group or association. In the domain of the Sangha
founder organizers failed to transfrom themselves into institutionalized decision mark­
ers of the association. For that reason Debaprasad Sarkar and his associates were
replaced by the leadership of Kamal Kanta Bakshi and his followers. After
Debaprasad Sarkar Kamal Kanta Bakshi became the secretary of the Sangha. Point
should be noted here that selection of Kamal Kanta Bakshi as the secretary of the
Lokenath Sevashram Sangha was not determined by the G.B, led by Debaprasad
Sarkar. Kamal Kanta Bakshi and his associates simply ignored the existing the G.B.
(1984). They did not even call the committee meeting, Kamal Kanta Bakshi was
the owener of the Eastern Bakery. It was 1992, when Kamal Kanta Bakshi came to
understand that it was not possible for him to run the Sangha smoothly, he gave
up all his hopes and resigned from his post and left the Sangha. In this period of
crisis Bhudeb Sen, a very rich businessman, came forward and took the responsibilty
of the Sangha. In 1992 he became the president of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha
and Naba Kumar Das was given secretaryship of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha
Bhudeb Sen passed away in 2000. After his death the Sangha had fallen into a great
gorganizational crisis, i.e. crisis of leadership. In order to overcome the crisis, some
members of the G.B. requested Sudipto Sen, (elder son of Bhudeb Sen) to take the
Presidentship of the Sangha. He took six months to think over it. At last he ac­
cepted the post of President of the Sangha and Nimay Roy became the secretary
(2000).

Sudipta Sen would ignored the democratic principles of the Sangha. He would
not care the opinions of the other members of the G.B. Without having any con­
sent of existing G.B, he formed a new Governing Body. He became the sole au­
thority of the association. Policies of the Sangha have been determined by him. Hé
himself become the decision making authority. So democracy left the realm of the Sangha. Bhudeb Sen almost did the same thing. But he used the mask of democracy. He would talk to the other members and discuss about the various problems. At present Sudipta Sen is partly detached from the Sangha. Neither he comes to Chakla Temple nor he gives any financial help to the Sangha. The rumor is police looks for him for his illegal activities.

On account of that, again democracy has turned up in the activities of the Sangha. Members of the G.B. time to time sit together. They discuss about various activities and programs of the Sangha. Decisions are made on the basis of support of majority. At present the G.B. is composed of 7 members.

President : Sudepta Sen, Business man, age 36, B. Com, M.B.A.
Vice-president : Ramkrishan Mazumdar Advocate (Kharada), age. 65, B A. L.L.B.
Secretary : Nimay Roy, Rtd. primary teacher, B A. age 62.
Treasurer : Himangsu Bikash Roy, Rtd. engineer, Irrigation Department, West Bengal Goverment, age -63.

Other members are —
Pradipta Sen (brother of Sudipta Sen) Businessman, computer engineer, age-32
Samit Roy — Businessman, age. 45 Edu. Qualification-Not told.
Rakha Hari Dutta — Businessman (rice) age.50, Edu. Not told.

Membership and the method of recruitment :

There are four categories of members—

(a) Patrons, (b) life member, (c) honorary member, and (d) ordinary member.

a. Patrons : Any person, qualified to be a member by paying or having paid a sum of Rs. 251/- only on endowing movable or immovable property worth of Rs. 251/- or above may be admitted as a patron, by the G.B.

b. Life member : Persons, qualified to be a member on making a lump sum donation of not less than Rs. 501/- (Now it is Rs. 30,000/-) or more in cash or in kind may be admitted as a life member of the Sangha by the G.B.

c. Honorary Member : Any person, qualified to be a member whose connection with the Sangha is deemed to be necessary by any member may with the consent of such person to be elected an honorary member of the society. He may not be
eligible to be member of the G.B., nor shall be entitled to vote at any meeting.

d. Ordinary Member: According to their constitution, any person qualified to be a member by paying ordinary membership fee of Rs. 1/- per month along with an admission fee of Rs. 2/- payable at the time of admission may be admitted as an ordinary member of the Sangha. At present the Sangha has introduced new method. It any one wants to be a member of the Sangha he/she has to fill up a membership form and has to pay Rs. 50/- per month.

Rights, duties and functions of members:

a. Any member has the right to elect and to be elected in any election of the Sangha.

b. To submit suggestion for discussion to the G.B. and sub-committee on any matter.

c. To inspect the accounts of the Sangha on appointment with the secretary.

d. To forego his membership after due information in writing to the G.B.

e. To pay his subscription within the prescribed time.

f. Defaulting members shall not be allowed to take part or vote at any meeting.

g. Members have one vote each.

The process of recruitment of the members is very important, in every social, political and religious association. The original written constitution of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha does not deal with any process of recruitment. In second half of the decade of 90s, it was seen, that those who donated Rs. 50/-, they were considered to be the members of the Sangha. But later on this method was changed. At present there are two types of members, thus—(1) Life member and (2) Ordinary member. Those who want to have life membership, they have to pay Rs. 35000/- at a time. Monthly subscription of general members is Rs. 50/-. Both type of members have to fill up an application form. This application form is to be sent to the G.B. If the application form is accepted and permitted by the G.B., the applicant would be considered to be a member of the Sangha.

Life members are given facilities to stay for one week in Lokenath guest house of Chakla. Usually, business people, executives, doctros, lawyers and professionals form a majority of life member. At present the total number of life members in 520 and that of the ordinary members in 1350. Ordinary members pay Rs. 50/- as
PRIESTS: SACRED SPECIALISTS

There are four priests working in the temple of Lokenath. They look after the whole liturgical activities of the temple. And of course these priests are brahmin. Jan Heesterman said, "In Hindu society the brahmin stands supreme." (cited by Michaels, A. 2005:188). Max Weber spoke of "the pervasive and all-powerful influence of the Brahmans." (Ibid.) According to Dumont, "The Brahmans, being in principal priests, occupy the supreme rank with respect to whole set of castes." (1998:47). Brahmanical supremacy is an age old phenomenon of Hinduism. But the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha does not follow the principle of brahmanical hegemony of the varna/castes hierarchy. The Sangha openly declares that this system has no utility. The Sangha propagates that guru Lokenath Brahmachari never followed this artificial castes system. He denounced the castes system and castes barriers. But he accepted the supremacy of brahmins in a different way. His notion is completely different from traditional concept of Hinduism. According to traditional Hinduism varna and caste system are created by god. (Ghosh. 1985:9 in Gita). Secondly, brahmins are the top most caste in the caste hierarchy. In religious ideology, as formulated in the Brahmanical Sanskrit texts, the brahmin is a 'god on earth.' (Veer. 1989:186). Thirdly, caste status reveals the individual’s relation to his parents and siblings. A brahmin inherits his highest status from his brahmin parents. So, in caste hierarchy status of brahmin and other varnas and castes are ascribed status which is determined by birth, karma and dharma. Contrary to this notion, Lokenath holds that brahmanatta (brahminness) can not be ascribed. If one wishes to have it he has to go through a long course of sadhana (practice). One can be called brahmin if he is able to see himself or realise himself. Brahm is one, who knows 'I' or 'atman' (soul) which is pure consciousness. In other words, when a person is able to attain the awareness of non-duality of 'I' and other, he would be called brahmin. Lokenath says, it is the realization of brahma, which makes a person brahmin. One of his followers writes, "As a result this realization the yogi totally identifies himself with the objective manifestations. The subjective and objective merge in each other in a note of divine harmony. All the walls of differences disappear and sama-darsana, equal vision rules the heart of the yogi. Compassion becomes as natural and spontaneous as breathing. (Brahmachari, S. 1986:174). Once
Lokenath said, “I have travelled many places, but I saw only three brahmins—Abdul Gaffur of Mecca, Tailanga Swami of India and myself.” (Sengupta, 1982:33). In this way the conventional concept of brahmanattva is rejected by the Lokenath Brahmachari and the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha.

The Sangha professes egalitarian anti-casteist idea. They have employed some cooks who belong to low-caste community. These cooks cook kichori bhogh everyday. In bhogh distributing centre, bhogh is distributed among the devotees by a group of volunteers, which consists of the member of both communities—Hindu and Muslim. Besides those who distribute tea, they are untouchables. The Sangha claims that in this way they practice the egalitarian ideology of Lokenath Brahmachari. Paradoxically, it has been seen that organizers appoint and allow only brahmins to worship the image of Lokenath in the Chakla temple. They think that only brahmins have right to worship god and they are able to recite sanskrit mantras properly. As because of that other castes are not able to perform this puja. Organizers also emphasized the experiences of the brahmans. They opined that a non-brahmin can not perform such a work perfectly and professionally. In this way organizers legitimized and secure the status of brahmin, though officially they do not accept the supremacy of brahmins. In other words the Sangha sustain the caste hierarchy, though apparently they go against the brahmanical supremacy.

Another paradox can be found in the ambit of sacred complex of Chakla temple, when they virtually accept the supremacy of brahmins, particularly in the worship of image of Lokenath and in the cooking of special bhogh for Lokenath Baba. Whereas they propagate among the people that brahmin priest is not required at all in the worship of Lokenath. Any person from any caste can worship him. The Sangha has published a book on the method of worship of Baba Lokenath and non-brahmin can conduct the puja. At the same time they hold that no need to worship him, just call him whole heartedly, that would be the true puja of Lokenath. Therefore, it can be said that—

1. Organizers do not want any kind of enmity with the brahmins.
2. They aim to harmonize between great tradition and little tradition.
3. They seek to make their guru a universal figure, more precisely a democratic deity, like ‘Satyanaryana.’ (Kosambi, 1956:359).
Brahmin priests are indispensable part of Lokenath temple complex. They are selected and appointed by the Governing Body of the Sangha. Though, the purity and sacredness of the brahmins are accepted by the organizers but they have not been given power to control the Sangha. Though, their liturgical supremacy is accepted by the organizers but in the organizational structure they are subordinate to the authority comprising both (so called) lower and upper castes. In the realm of the Sangha brahmin prists are controlled, instructed and directed by the lower castes member of the Governing Body. There are two types of brahmin priests appointed by the Sangha—1. Permanent priests, 2. Temporary priests.

**Permanent priests**:

There are four permanent priests worship in the temple. Considering some qualities of brahmin candidate, the Governing Body of the Sangha appoints the candidate as the priests of the temple, thus—

1. Candidate must be a brahmin.
2. He must be an erudite person.
3. He must have vast knowledge about the process of Lokenath worship.
4. He must be a devotee of Lokenath Brahmachari.
5. He must be a good reciter of sanskrit *slokas* (hymn).
6. He must be loyal to the Sangha.

Brahmin priests play the central role in the worship of Lokenath. *Murti-puaj* (image worship) of Lokenath Brahmachari is indespeasble part for establishing contact between Baba Lokenath’s grace and the devotees. In this process priests play as the mediator’s role. The image of Lokenath is fed, and washed. Lokenath is treated as human beings of high status. In the *puja* the *arati* is the central ritual act. A lamp with five wicks is swayed before the image. These ritual acts are exclusively done by brahmin priests.

All of the priests are salaried by the Sangha. The monthly salary of chief-priest and his associate is Rs. 2500/- each. And other two priests get Rs. 2000/- each. The sangha provides quarter and meal and cloth. They are not allowed to take any money from pilgrim-devotees. But it is an open secret to all that very often they accept gifts and money from the pilgrim-devotees.
Temporary priests:

Temporary priests are also appointed by the Governing Body of the Sangha. They are appointed only for some special occasion, i.e. ‘Tirodhan Divas’ (the day disappearance). The chief priest and 30-40 associate priests are appointed to carry out the *viswa santi yagna* (a sacred ritual with fire for world peace). Other permanent priests do not take part in this ritual. Temporary priests get a lamp-sum fees, clothes and other gifts.

The Sangha controls both types of priests—permanent and temporary, by means of material and normative method. Material rewards consist of goods and services. Permanent priests are afraid of expulsion. In the time of interview they expressed their fear. They are also scared to talk about their remuneration. And they are not satisfied with their salary. But they are forced to hide their dissatisfaction. They hardly talk about it. Apart from the material control, the Sangha uses its normative power of control over the priests. Firstly, the Sangha wants to establish that it is a philanthropic association. So, priests should not deserve a high remuneration. According to them, priests do not earn a good amount of money but to serve the people. Secondly, faith on Lokenath’s divine power unities the employers and employed persons.

Volunteers:

The place and functions of the volunteers are not mentioned in the original constitution of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. With the growth and development of the Sangha, organizers came to understand the need for the volunteers. Around 1983/84 a group of volunteers was formed. At present they are indispensable part of the Sangha. Volunteers are appointed mainly from locality. Volunteers can be classified in two categories—permanent and temporary.

Permanent volunteers:

The total number of permanent volunteers is 15. They are appointed from local unemployed youths. Some of them have primary education. Two of them have passed madhyamik (secondary) examination. Others are totally illiterate. Three of them are Muslims and others are (so-called) low caste Hindus. Monthly salary of the volunteers is Rs. 1150/-. Some of them are engaged in serving *khichori bhog* in the great dining hall, which is called ‘Bhogh Bantan Kendra’ (sacred food distributing cen-
Eight volunteers are engaged in this work. Two of them are Muslims. Some time they take part in cooking of *khichori Bhog.* Hindu devotees do not raise any question about it or do not hesitate to eat *bhog* from the hand of *mlechha* Muslims. Because they think that this place is sacred place, and nothing is impure, everything is sacred due to the touch of divine grace of Lokenath Brahmachari.

Out of fifteen volunteers seven are involved in looking after the devotees. Some of them guide the devotees, and tell them what to do and what not to do. They help the devotees to form a que to enter the temple. They show the place where to keep the cars and tourist busses. They also play the role of traffic police and security guards. Besides, it is obvious for them to solve innumerable and peculiar types of problems.

Volunteers have expressed that they are not satisfied with the activities of temple authority. They perform lots of work, but they neither have job security nor holiday. Their working hour is 10 hours (from 8 A.M to 6 P.M). They think that they are underpaid. But they have no choice. They understand that they are not educated and it is not possible for any uneducated person in such a village to earn more than this standard. As because of that they have accepted the situation.

**Temporary volunteers**

In the time of main festivals, like *Tirodhan Divas*, *Janmastami* or *Mangal Deep Utsav*, the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha recruits more than 100 temporary volunteers. Some of them are appointed from locality, but majority come from outside. They come from different sources, thus,

1. Factory workers engaged in different factories of Sudipta Sen.

2. Members of different Lokenath Sangha, those are connected with the Lokenath Samannaya Committee. Temporary volunteers are not very much organized like permanent volunteers. They showed their apathy to talk to the present research scholar. They were reluctant to tell anything about their remuneration and work-condition.

**Lokenath Coordination Committee**

It was the time of great leap forward for the Sangha. In 1999, a coordination committee of Lokenath organizations was formed under the leadership of the
Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. Bhudeb Sen, the President of the Sangha played an important and significant role to organize the scattered and fragmented Lokenath-centric groups. These groups are formed by local people. Some of them are vulnerable and occasional. Side by side, some groups are permanent and relatively well organized. Basis of these groups is the spontaneous effort and astrong emotion of the members regarding the cult of Lokenath. Occasionally they organize various kinds of religious and philanthropic activities.

Some of them are very much short-lived. Lack of good organizers, limited financial resouces, absence of good and committed volunteers etc. make them weak, feeble and vulnerable. Sen brought these groups under the same umbrella of the Lokenath Samannaya Committee (a coordination committee). This committee has played a crucial role in popularising the cult of Lokenath and the Chakla-tirtha as a birth-place of Lokenath.

MEMBERS OF THE LOKENATH CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

1. **Gaishpur Lokenath Mandir**
   5/1587, Gaishpur, P.O. Gaishpur, Nadia
   Ph. : 828503

2. **Lokenath Seva Sangha**
   5/1027, Kantaganj, P.O. Bedibhavan
   Kalyani, Nadia

3. **Lokenath Sevak Sangha**
   Jatindas Nagar, 4 No. Battala
   P.O. : Belghoria, North 24 Pgs.

4. **Lokenath Seva Samiti**
   Madhyamgram Chowmtha, P.O. : Madhyamgram
   North 24 Pgs.

5. **Baharampur Lokenath Life Mission**
   B-8, Magazine Building (North-West Barak Square)
   Baharampur, Murshidabad

6. **Sri Sri Lokenath Brahmachari Anath Ashram Chatrabash O Vidyapith**
   Gram : Bainchberia, P.O. : Batiswar, Thana : Mathurapur
   South 24 Pgs.
7. **Baba Lokenath Seva Niketan**  
Sasthitala, Tribeni, Hooghly  
Ph. : 845390 (Bikash), 846522 (Kalipada De)

8. **Madanpur Lokenath Bhakta Sangha**  
Madanpur Bazar, Nadia

9. **Lokenath Bhakta Sangha**  
Nandanagar, Belgharia  
Kolkata-83, Ph. : 539 4310

10. **Netajinagar Lokenath Mandir**  
Natagarh, Sodepur, North 24 Pgs.

11. **Ichapur Lokenath Bhaktabrinda**  
420B, Anandamath, P.O. : Nawabganj, Ichapur

12. **Lokenath Utsab Committee**  
24, Tagore Cannal Street, Kolkata-6

13. **Lokenath Mandir**  
1No. Gobindanagar, Madanpur, Nadia

14. **Lokenath Benimadhab Mission**  
183, B. N. Ghoshal Road  
Kol-56, Ph. : 2553-3280

15. **Lokenath Baba Ashram**  
Basunagar, 1No. Gate, Harmej Villa  
Madhyamgram, North 24 Pgs.

16. **Lokenath Bhaktabrinda**  
Kodalia, P.O. New Barrackpur, North 24 Pgs.

17. **Uttarpara Makhla Lokenath Sevak Sangha**  
P.O. Makhla, T. N. Mukherjee Road, Dist. : Hooghly

18. **Sri Sri Lokenath Babar Mandir**  
Teghoria Railgage, Madanpur, Nadia

19. **Sukhmoy Ashram**  
159/1, Rashbehari Avenue, Kol-19

20. **Sri Sri Lokenath Brahmachari Bhaktabrinda**  
Jagaddal (Golghar), North 24 Pgs.
ACTIVITIES OF THE LOKENATH SEVASHRAM SANGHA

Activities of the Sangha can be classified in three groups - (1) religious activities, (2) philanthropic activities, and (3) miscellaneous activities.

Religious activities —

1. Daily puja — The Sangha organizes daily puja of Lokenath Brahmachari. It is the duty of the brahmin priest to arrange everything of the puja. Three different kinds of puja are performed in a day, thus, ballyabhagh, rajbhogh, and sandhyarati.
2. The Sangha receives devotees sacrifices and pujas.

3. Everyday at noon the Sangha distributes *khichori bhogh* among the devotees.

4. The Sangha organizes festivals and programs on different occasions, e.g. Janmasthami, day of disappearance of Lokenath, *santi yagna*. Mangaldip festival.

5. The Sangha organizes congregation. On different occasions they organize processions. Meetings and convocations have also been organized by the Sangha. The devotees of Lokenath Brahmachari on many occasions come together as a group, to perform or watch ceremonies, talk to their god or to each other, dance, play music, sing, eat, drink, bathe, pray or in other forms engage in various acts. Frequently religious meetings are organized by the Sangha. In these meetings they discuss about the teachings of Lokenath the Sangha side by side they organize *nam sankirtana* (chanting the name of holy Baba). They hire many professional *sankirtana* group to perform their programme.

**Philanthropic activities —**

These kinds of activities can be classified in three categories —

1. Educational services
2. Health services, and
3. Other activities

**1. Educational Services —**

These services can be classified in three groups

(a) The Sangha helps poor students by giving books and money. Every year on different occasions they encourage meritorious pupils as well as poor pupils of financially backward families. They also give them money to continue their study.

(b) The Sangha has a publication unit. This unit publishes books on the life of Lokenath Brahmachari and on various religious topics. They also publish other low-priced literature, booklet, cassate, photographs, pictures and produce pen, batch, image of Lokenath and other saints, statues etc to sell. They have same sell counter in several places. By selling these they earn a huge amount of money. But they never disclose the exact amount. They keep secrecy strictly in financial matters.

(c) The Sangha has a plan to establish some educational institutions. But the plan is not yet materialized. Still it is on process.
2. Health Service —

It can be classified in four groups —

(a) Of health services, people of all types are beneficiaries. These services can be enumerated in the following manner —

The Sangha has established a free medical centre in the temple premises. This clinic has the following functions.

A. To diagnose individual cases.

B. To treat cases fit for the treatment at the clinic.

C. To get admitted in other hospitals, cases which require prolonged hospitalization or special surgical treatment.

D. To examine contacts of patients with a view to detecting early cases as a preventive measure.

E. The clinic run by the Sangha in the village of Chakla is a clinic fully equipped with facilities for diagnosis and treatment of various diseases. Various medicines like anti T.B. drugs, antibiotics, vitamins are supplied free to all patients. The clinic is well equipped with physician medical officer, paramedical staff etc.

(b) The medical diagnostic centre renders service to the community particularly the poor and needy, in pursuance of the spirit and ideal of the Sangha.

(c) The clinical wing is in the shape of a polyclinic providing facilities and health services of numerous types.

(d) The free Homoeopathic dispensary is run by the Sangha to serve the people, particularly the poorer section, in the neighbourhood.

Apart from these the Sangha has a plan to establish an old age home and a hospital. The Sangha has purchased a plot near temple for a big hospital. They have built up some quarters for old age home, but it has not been started yet.

3. (b) Other activities —

3. (a) Apart from the religious & philanthropic activities, Sangha has built up several organizational units to conduct various kinds of social welfare activities. Their literature describes it. The Sangha has always been in the business of providing programmes for the benefit of the larger society. Their food programme is one of them. Six days of a week. The Sangha feeds thousands of poor people. The sunday feast of
the Sangha explicitly concerned with the special lunch for the devotees and common people. Recently the Sangha has concentrated on a food programme specially targeted at the poor. Poor people of the different villages flock behind the main temple or in front of the temple to collect the food. Wealthy and rich devotees donate a lump sum money to the Sangha to carry out this food programme. They think that service to the people is the service to the god. In other words, in order to serve Baba Lokenath, it is their task to serve the poor people. They opined that this is the central idea of the teaching of Lokenath. The food programme, as observed, was introduced primarily with a view to promote a more positive image of the Sangha. It attracts not only devotees but also non-devotees.

I. Thrice in a year on different occasions, the Sangha distributes cloths among the poor and needy people. Just before the Durga Puja the Sangha distributes shawls and other woolen wear among the poorer section of the villagers.

II. Time to time the Sangha organizes blood donation camp, particularly in summer season. The Sangha renders emergency relief to flood victims of North 24 Parganas, whenever and a calamity occurs.

III. Various kinds of cultural programmes are organized by the Sangha. Famous artists and singers are invited for stage performances, e.g. Shivaji Chattarjee, Arundhuti Hom Chowdhury, Arati Chowdhury, Purna Das Baul, Amar Pal, Sree Kumar Chattapadhay, Arindam Ganguly, Banasree Sengupta etc.

IV. The Sangha makes and repairs village roads and time to time maintained them. The Sangha sinks up many tubewells. Beside the temple complex the Sangha has built up a big market.

Impact of the movement on the locality

Any movement can sustain itself only through the participation of the people. The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha spreads the life-giving ideas and the inspiring messages of Lokenath Brahmachari through regular discourses and occasional lectures which stimulate the spiritual aspirations of the people. They take part in the celebrations of Janmasthami, bhajanas, worship, Nam sankirtana, drama, and discourses on the teachings of Lokenath in Bengali. At the same time the Sangha organizes philanthropic activities in different areas. In all religious and philanthropic programmes, people of various strata of society viz., students, teachers, government servants, businessmen,
politicians, doctors, professionals and common people, rich and poor take part.

In the village of Chakla new kinds of profession have been appeared after the establishment of the Lokenath temple. These people are related to the temple directly or indirectly. They are —

1. Flower sellers,
2. Photo, locket, image and poster seller,
3. Tea shops,
4. Hotel and restaurant,
5. Coconut seller,
6. Fruit seller,
7. Fruit juice seller,
8. Vegetable seller,
9. Cycle/car garage,
10. Priest and sannyasis,
11. Volounteers,
12. Shoe keepers,
13. Beggars,
14. Contractor and building material suppliers,
15. Electricians,
16. Jeep, Auto-riksha driver and helpers,
17. Snatcher
18. Red thread seller
19. Hawkers
20. Tricycle (locally called van), puller

The establishment of the Sangha and Lokenath temple (in 1979), in the village of Chakla brought several changes in the social life of the villagers of Chakla. Means of communication have been changed, new types of profession have been created, social relations have been changed, new kinds social conflict and crimes have been appeared.

In the decades of seventy of twentieth century the village of Chakla was a remote
village like other remote villages of Bengal. The village of Chakla is seven K.M. away from Berachampa. In the decade of eights of 20th century the path was a mud path. Villagers used to walk or used to get bullock cart to reach Berachampa. Establishment of the Sangha brought a great change into the nature of path and and means of communication. At first, the Sangha converted the mud path into a brick road with the help of Chakla Panchayat. In nineties the Sangha made it a permanent road. It helped to enter modern means of communication, i.e. bus, motor car, cycle, van, motor bike, mini truck, big tourist busses etc. At the same time they got connection of electricity.

Modern means of communication (jeep, auto-riksha etc.) played a crucial role not only for the (outsider) devotees, but also for the local people. It made possible for the devotees to visit this place frequently. Same thing is true in case of the local people. Consequently, life became more dynamic. And this dynamism breaks the natural inertia of village life. This milieu has given birth new kinds of profession which were earlier unknown to the villagers. Increase of employment opportunity makes the people dependent directly or indirectly on the temple complex of Lokenath. Income of these people (mentioned above) is dependent on the number of the pilgrims/devotees visiting the temple. More devotees come here, more they (villagers) earn. Those local people who are involved in these profession always try to enhance the sacred reputation of this place by telling cock-and-bull stories on Lokenath. And in this way they have become the part and parcel of the propaganda machinery of the Sangha.

Propaganda, good means of communication, electricity etc. made the village and temple as a tourist attraction. Lakhs of devotees started to come to this place. Local people established flower shops, resturant, tea shops, stationary shops, cycle garage, motor cycle garage, car parking place.

The negative impact of the movement on the local people should not be disregarded. Local people, in various ways, have expressed their discontent. Some of them mentioned the increasing rate of pollution in the village and its vicinity. Huge gatherings makes their life hell. During the festival days their village becomes a suffocating cage for them. They are afraid of crowded. Lakhs of devotees visit in the temple on different occasions, viz., Janmasthami, Tirodhan Divas etc. They spend the whole day in the temple and surrounding areas. They rome aimlessly and throw the garbage (plastic bottle, polithin packet, plastic rapper, etc.) here and there. The whole area turns into
a dumping ground. The whole area also becomes a urinal.

Some people focussed on the increasing rate of criminal activities in the area. According to them, criminals from different places come here for suking shelter. Besides, number of snatchers and thieves has been increased. The case of snatching has been seen several times. So, people are very much worried regarding the question of the law and order of the place.

Some veteran persons of locality expressed their worriness regarding the school children. According to them, some of the school children frequently bunk their school and they go to the temple complex to sell different kinds of things, e.g. red-thread, pieces of brick, photograph of saints, flowers etc. By selling these things they earn some money. This money earning activity is also helpful for their families. That is why their parents never discourage them from such kind of work. Veteran persons described it as a dangerous trend of the school going children. They firmly opined that it should be stopped.

**Financial resources of the Sangha**

It is different to get a precise idea about the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha’s total wealth in terms of its landed property, huge temple, guest houses and other assets, as well as its liquid capital. Main organizers are reluctant to say anything about their income and expenditure. They like to keep all the information within themselves. In the time of interview Nimy Roy, secretary of the Sangha, uttered two or three sentences on the financial matters of the Sangha. He said that the president of the Sangha (at present Sudipta Sen, son of former president late Bhudeb Sen) looks after this matter. He mentioned that the main source of the Sangha is the donation of the devotees.

No secular or religious organization can run smoothly without strong financial background. From ancient to modern period, rulers and rich people have been giving financial support to the brahmins, religious leaders, temple and religious organization. (Note. Axel Michacle, Telegraph magazine 8.5.1994). Every modern religious organization maintains a close connection with industrialists, businessmen and wealthy persons, promoters, advocates, civil servants and invariably with the politicians. Desai (1993 : 38) points out the something in his work. Bhatia (1994), Chakraborty, R. K. (2002), Uday Mehta (1993), Michaels (2005), Chakraborty, P. (1984), Klyuyev (1989) have echoed the same observation. This contact is established and universally accepted.
So, it is not surprising for anybody when the close contact between religious organization and business group is found in the cult of Lokenath.

Main organizers of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha do not want to say anything about their funding agencies. But lower level organizers did not want to hide the information as far their knowledge is concerned. According to their information, landlords, bureaucrats, businessmen and some industrialists both directly and indirectly give financial and other material help to the temple complex of Chakla. Not only they help but also take direct initiative to build up Lokenath temple and the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. The Sangha was formed in 1979 and was registered in 1981. Main organizers were Amalendu Chakraborty and Gurupada Das. Both of them were businessmen. The first governing body of the Sangha consisted nine (9) members. Six of them are businessmen. Name of the members of the first Governing Body are mentioned below—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Nikhil Chandra Chaudhury</td>
<td>Ashoknagar P.O. Ashoknagar 24 pgs (N)</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Devaprasad Sarkar</td>
<td>300/4 Ashoknagar P.O. Ashoknagar 24 pgs. (N)</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Gurupada Das</td>
<td>Makali Mulibansh P.O. Habra, Karjalaya Jessore Road 24 Pgs. (N)</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Akshoy Kumar Biswas</td>
<td>Vill+P.O. Chakla 24 Pgs. (N)</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Amalendu Chakraborty</td>
<td>187/5 Ashokenagar P.O.Pgs. (N)</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 1982 the committee had received the total land of one acre 20 decimal including tank or low land from Biswas Family, as a gift. Members of Biswas Family, viz. Sacchidananda Biswas, Nirmal Kr. Biswas, Sanjib Biswas, Kumari Santana Biswas, Kumari Sarbani Biswas, Dipali Biswas willingly registered in court to give this land to the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha for the promotion of public welfare.

In the primary stage the Sangha had two main sources —

(1) Donation of the organizers, and (2) Mass collection. At the primary stage organizers donated a lumpsum money to build up the organization and to establish the temple of Lokenath on the *vita* (land) of Lokenath Brahmachari. After the formation of the Sangha, organizers dived for public collection. They used to go to the businessmen and traders and common people, with their leaflets and donation bill. This programme had two significance, firstly, it helped them to collect a huge amount of money and secondly, it helped to propagate the name of Lokenath Brahmachari. Secondly, it made the people aware about the cult of Lokenath and the Sangha.

Around 1986, Kamal Kanta Bakshi became the president of the Sangha. Kamal Kanta Bakshi was the proprietor of Eastern Bakery. The main patron of Baradi Ashrama of Lokenath Brahmachari was Zaminder Joyti Prasad Nag Chaudhury. Kamal Kanta Bakshi the son-in-law of Joyti Prasad Nag, Chaudhury. For that reason he got a natural acceptance. But he was accused for the defultation of Rs. 20,000/- from the fund of the Sangha. Whether it was correct or not, still it is not clear. Hence, he resigned from his post. After him Bhudeb Sen, a millionaire became the president of the Sangha in 1988. He was a good organizer, and energetic person, who augmented members of the Sangha for more advancement of the organization. Under his presidentship the Sangha gained more popularity among the people. He introduced some new rituals, viz. water carrying and pouring on the image of Lokenath in 1994. Introduction of new rituals brought some financial problems. For that reason they started to collect money from the industrialists, big businessmen, treaders and common people. Beside that Bhudeb Sen himself donated plentiful money several times, which is near about the 60%-70% of the total expenditure of the festival or programme. In every year he used to spend Rs. 16 to 17 lakhs for various religious activities of the Sangha. Within a very short period he started the construction of a big *nat mandir*.

Under the leadership of Bhudeb Sen, the Sangha opened the various sources of collection. They opened sales counter in temple complex. They started to sell photo-
graph, pictures of Lokenath, images of Lokenath, books, cassettes, CD’s, calendars, pens, sainted sticks, batches, locket etc. They put 20 box of pranami (money given at the time of making abhisance). Devotees put money inside the box through a small hole. Everyday around twenty thousand rupees is collected from the box of pranami. The figure increases in the time of festivals the Sangha provides a free meal (bhogh) to the devotees. But for the special bhogh devotees have to collect ticket by paying Rs. 50/- for each. Other than these devotees pay Rs. 40/- to take part in Mangal Pradip Utsav. Sometime devotees stay in the guest house of the Sangha, which increases the fund of the Sangha.

Present provision for the life-membership has been changed. Previously, one who wished to have the life-membership, he/she had to pay Rs. 501/- or more. But at present willing person has to donate Rs. 35000/- to have the life membership. It helped them to earn a huge amount of money but the exact figure is not disclosed.

Present president of the Sangha is Sudipta Sen, who is a big businessman and main patronizer of the Sangha. Sudipta Sen uses religious sentiment of Indian society like Mafatlal group and others (The Telegraph, 8.5.1994). He has a confectionary and insurance company called Ilam systems Limited'. He fully uses the popularity of Lokenath. At the same time he donates around 50-60 Lakhs in every year to the Sangha.

Besides, some millionaire devotees donate gold necklace or gold to their Baba. Subrata Chakraborty of Bright Advertizing Agency donates regularly, which not less than 10 lakhs. Minu Sari, and Cookme Company are the important patronizers. Sujit Bose, Sunil Dutta and Mithun Chakraborty also donate regularly. According to the information of the Hazra some foreigners very often donate money to the Sangha. One of the organizers (who wants to hide his name) expressed that the total yearly turnover of the Sangha is 10-15 crore.

Klyuyev (1989) has done an important work on the economic aspects of Hindu religious institutions. He has focused on the religious philanthropy. He writes — “First of all, money set aside by companies are tax exempt and the exclusion of this money from a company’s gross profit results in a lesser taxation of the rest of the profits. The act of piety appears to be financially advantageous in two ways.” (P. 160)
Sacred space:

No religious ritual can be performed without space and this space must be sacred. Not only sacred space but also sacred time is indispensable in the performance of rituals. “A believer’s relationship with and experience of the sacred is generally realized in a place-time framework. (Madan, 1991: 97). For this reason sacred space and sites and time are different from the other space, sites and time. Axel Michacles writes, “.....religious places and sites “in space” or on maps can never be the whole holy place.” (2005: 293). Again he writes, “Holy places then, are holy only when they are at the sametime the complete other, thus, when man, place, and deity are identical or are identified ritually.” (2005: 293). The ritual space is well defined setting characterised mainly as the domain of the sacred. While in most cases spaces are permanent and identified by members of the faith as such, there are also temporary settings defined as ritual spaces, during the occurrence of a ritual in such a space.

“In classical Hindu thought, the virtuous person or moral agent (patra, literally ‘vessel’), that is one who lives according to dharma, is comprehensible only in social (varna-ashrama) and spatio-temporal (desh-kal) settings.” (Madan. 1991:97). Hindu concept of space is related to the both internal and external space. Chitta (mind) is the internal space and outside of the chitta is external space. According to the devotees of Lokenath, the village of Chakla is a sacred space. It’s soil, water, air, trees, fields, roads — everything is sacred. And when the devotees call the divine name of Lokenath Baba, their minds become sacred space.

Durkheim (1971) dealt with sacred profane dichotomy. Sacred is something which is noble respected venetated and worshipped. Society creates the sacredness and sets the sacred apart from the profane. In other words, gods are derived from certain rites performed by human beings. Not only that, what is considered to be sacred today may not be so tomorrow. Also it is a fact that when profane approaches the sacred without due precautions, sacred itself loses its value. Durkheim did not deal with the degree of sacredness in his work. Organizers of the Sangha think that though everything in the village of Chakla is sacred, it should be noted that all are not considered as equally sacred. There is a difference between the soil of Lokenath’s bhita and other
things. It is more sacred than the other things of the village of Chakla, which are the lesser sacred. According to Mr. Nimay Roy, the secretary of the Sangha, Lokenath was born in this place, and he used to dwell here, that is why the soil of this vita is more sacred than the other things. There is a pond in the west of the vita. Lokenath used to bathe here. In the north-east corner of the vita there is a banyan tree. Lokenath used to sit under the tree and did his sadhana there. For this reason these places are more sacred there. For this reason these places are more sacred than the other places. The holy touch of Lokenath made this soil pure and sacred.

The main temple is situated in the middle of the asrama compound. The main temple faces towards south, like traditional Bengali houses. Its roof is made of dry straw which is not aatchala (eight roof). Its shape is rectangular, which is 1040 sq. feet. It has four verandas in four sides. Both flanks are 6 feet each. There is a 10 feet veranda behind the temple. There is a mavral image of Lokenath and a linga which is made of black stone, and an image of cow Nandi, sacred animal inside an iron-cage. People are allowed to touch these images and to pour water, milk and coconut water on the images. The frontal veranda is 14 feet. The whole temple is guarded by the grill. There are two grill gate in frontal veranda, one for entrance and the other for exit. In between two gates there is a concreate tank which is full of soil of Baba’s bhita. Devotees collect this soil for its divinity and magical healing power. The Muslim devotees collect the soil of Baba’s bhita with as much devotion and faith in its efficacy as a remedy against diseases or ill luck as are nurtured by the Hindus. Some of the devotees think that this soil can protect the persons from any sort of danger. Some consider it as the medicine. But some devotees are not at one with this notion. They think that it is completely out of the realm of the science. Where science fails to work, it works. It is related to the belief of the individuals. One may take it as medicine, others may not. It varies from man to man. It is totally dependent on individual’s belief.

What do the people do with the sacred soil of Baba’s bhita? Some of them keep the soil in a paper of plastic packet with them, particularly they keep it in their pocket or in the wallet. Some people like to keep it in their thakur ghar (room for gods and goddesses). Some devotees keep it at the back side of Lakhsmi’s (goddess of wealth) photograph. Besides, some devotees eat the soil, considering its medicinal value.
Manik Hazra, one of the main activists of the organization opined that it is not important that whether this soil has healing power or not, the most important question is what devotees think. Devotees think that this soil is sacred, and it has some medicinal value. The Sangha does not propagate that this soil is a medicine or it has healing power. But it is the belief of the devotees that the soil of Lokenath’s bhita can cure all sorts of diseases and it has power to keep people away from the danger. Not only that, it has also power to bring peace to the mind of the devotees. In fine, Mr. Hazra opined that something must be there. Millions of devotees collect the soil, which signifies that this soil must have some divine power or healing power, otherwise people would not collect it. They have got some good results that is why they collect the pure and divine soil and it has a great power. Late Bhudeb Sen, the former president of the Sangha, writes in his book, “In a way the soil of the place where Chakla Temple is situated, is a medicine for all diseases. This is for those who have full faith in their hearts.” (1995: 26-27).

It could be paradoxical to see that the Sangha keeps both sides of human life, i.e. traditional popular belief and scientific understanding of life. The Sangha runs a free-medical unit, which comprises both Homeopathic and Allopathic treatment. One could say that if the soil of Lokenath’s vita has healing power, why should they run this medical unit? The answer of the Sangha is not clear cut. Organizers of the Sangha say that they should take the opportunity to exploit the scientific method. Because the main aim of the Sangha is to work for the welfare of the people. If it is possible by the use of scientific way, why should they not adopt it? Moreover the Sangha does not find any conflict between belief and scientific knowledge. Because this science does not disturb the sacredness of Lokenath’s soil.

Devotees collect clay from the 2½ / 3½ sq. ft. tank of the main temple. When the tank becomes empty, organizers dig up the soil from nearby sacred pond and fill up the temple’s tank. They do it regularly. Point should be noted here, that, though they think that the soil has supernatural power and allow to spread this irrational ideas among the devotees, but they do not give any irrational explanation about the filling up of the concrete tank of the temple.

Sacred trees and plants

There is a big ‘Nat Mandir’ in the east corner of the main temple. The size of the ‘Nat Mandir’ is 8000 sq. ft. It is two storied building. Just behind the ‘Nat Mandir’,
there is a big peepul tree with innumerable aerial roots. There are two other sacred
trees, thus, jack-fruit tree and licchi tree. But the peepul tree is more sacred, because
Baba Lokenath performed a part of his ‘sadhana’ under this tree. That is why this
tree is called ‘holy peepul tree.’ In Brahminical religion peepul tree has an important
place. It is a similar form of Vishnu”. “In traditional Hindu concept, peepul tree is
regarded as the abode of Vishnu in his form as Narayana.” (Chakraborty, 1377 Bang.
: 143). According to mythology, gods by sending Agni, (the fire god) in disguise of
brahmin, created disturbance in time of the copulation of Hara and Parvati. In conse­
quence of that, Parvati cursed Vishnu, Siva and Brahma and they took birth as peepul
tree, banyan tree and palash tree (the Bengali kino) (Chakraborty, 1377 Beng. 143-4).
It is believed that those who touch and render service to the peepul tree they become
sin-free. According to another story, Hari in order to save himself from the attack of
Asura, took shelter in peepul tree. As a result of that peepul become a divine entity.
(Ibid). The story of Lokenath makes the peepul tree of Chakla temple more divine,
and it adds more religious aroma to the tree. Naturally, it attracts devotees.

The Sangha has made a concrete bench around the peepul tree. Devotees take seat
here and talk about Lokenath Brahmachari and his magical power. They also talk about
their own problems. This place is considered to be a sacred and peaceful place. Devo­
tees hang brick, stone with the red thread on the aerial roots and branches of the tree.
They believe that it would fulfill their desire and want. It is called ‘manat’. ‘Manat’
is a traditional Bengali folk vow which may be religious or spiritual. There are two
parties in manat — a claimant and other one is god or supernatural power or any
natural object, e.g. river, tree, leaf, wind, soil etc. Though, organizers and prists fol­
low sanskrit texts to worship their Baba, but at the same time they do not ignore folk
religious ideas or little traditions. When people hang break-chip/stone chip on the
branches of the holy peepul tree, The Sangha encourages them. Some old women and
children sell brick and stone chips with red thread among the devotees. It is also
encouraged by the the Sangha.

One of the great primitive religious symbols of mankind is the tree. The phenom­
non of the tree serves as sources of religious experience. Tree is the primitive sym­
bol of life and its luminous powerfullness. In the domain of Christianity, Buddhism
and also in Hinduism trees are considered as sacred object. Among the Lokenath
devotees the peepul tree is considered as the living witness of the activities of
Lokenath. Anybody can have Baba's grace by touching the tree’s roots, leaves, branches. It is also believed by the devotees that any sorts of problems can be solved by hanging the pieces of stones on the branches of the peepul tree.

Apart from the trees, some plants, seeds, leaves and flowers are considered as sacred objects. Because these are inseparable part of Lokenath puja. These are banana, potato, rice, sesame, myrobalan, milk, green coconut, white flower necklace, basil, leaves of Bel tree, grass, leaves of manto tree, chinarose, Indian marigold and different kinds of fruits.

In the time of Rajbhogh boiled rice, banana and potato are offered to Lokenath Baba. Lokenath used to have these foods when he dwelled in the Ashrama of Baradi. Sudeb Banerjee, one of the important priests of the temple of Chakla, said that Lokenath would take these foods once in a day. He also opined that no naisthik (greatly devoted) brahmin takes food not more than once in a day. Rice is the central part of his food. Rice is the most sacred member of the plant world. It is the basis of life, the central part of any meal. (Akos Ostor in Madan, 1991:191). It is eaten in many forms, and it is sacred, especially when it is cooked. Rice is considered as Laksmi, the goddess of wealth. Bengalees observe the new rice festival (Nabannya) in the month of Baishakh (around 15 April).

Green banana is another important item of Rajbhogh puja. The goddess of brahmani (Brahm’s sakti or power) is associated with it. Banana is regarded as a necessary item of ordinary diet. It’s leaves are used as plates for eating because they are pure and sacred. The plant itself is auspicious, being used for the mangalghat in pujas and life cycle rituals. (Ibid, 1991:190)

The third item of Rajbhogh is potato. Usually potato is not considered as sacred vegetable. But when it is cooked for and offered to Lokenath it becomes sacred. Rice, banana and potato alltogether cooked by the brahmin cooks. And offering rituals converts it as a sacred food.

Among other plants and leaves tulsi (basil) is very important in the world of Hindus. It is associated with the cult of Vishnu. Vaisnavites wear the necklace of tulsi wood and stick tulsi leaves on their forehead. In the Lokenath puja priests put tulsi-leaves along with other item, in the kosha (a pot which is made of copper). These are essential for sankalpa (ritual promise). Sankalpa is “a mental resolution to perform or to undertake specific actions.” (Singer, 1972:91). “Each religious act starts
with a *sankalpa*, a resolve to do a particular sacred act." (Ibid). Priests do *sankalpa* by pouring the water in the *ishan kon* (the north east corner).

Leaves of Bel tree are indispensable item of Lokenath *puja*. Bel is one of the most sacred trees in Bengal. The leaves are usually offered to all deities, especially Siva. They are offered as picked, in clusters of three, symbolizing the *trisul* (trident), Siva’s weapon. The longest series of offerings in the *puja* are done with the water of Ganges and *bel* leaves.

Durba (one kind of grass) is an important item of Lokenath *puja*. Priests put durba, tulsi and water and into the *kosha* (copper vessel). It is also a part of *sankalpa* (ritual promise). Durba is also used in many rituals of Bengalee Hindus. Old and seniors give ‘ashirbad’ (blessing) to the juniors with *dhan-durba* (paddy-grass). It is also used in rites (*bratas*) of women, being tied to the arm with a yellow or red thread (*suta*) as a sign of the goddess’s benediction and protective watch over the wearer.

**Sacred water**

A primitive symbol of mankind is water. It is believed that water is the prime cause of the visible world, all germs of created life are contained in it. It is said in Bhavisyottara purana. ‘Water you are source of everything and every existence.’ (Mensching, 1976:123). Mensching writes, “The original meaning of this symbol is also seen in the widely spread cult-practice of diving in water. (1976:123). In the cult of Lokenath water has a great muminous role as it is seen in different sects, subsects and cults of Hindu world.

Firstly, water is one of the important items of the worship of Lokenath. In every morning, at 8.30 A.M. chief priest gets bathe the image of Lokenath with the water of the Ganges. After the completion of bath, other priests collect the water and keep it in a big round shaped copper pot. After the *puja* this water is distributed among the devotees, considering as the sacred foot-nectar. Devotees take the foot-nectar not as the common water, but considering as the divine bless of the Lokenath. Therefore the foot-nectar of Baba Lokenath is, in Durkheim’s term, ‘purely sacred’ or ‘sacredly auspicious’ to the devotees.

The river of Ganges and its water are considered as highly sacred river and water. This is evident in the well-known myth of the descent of India’s most sacred river ‘Mother Ganga’, which flowed in heaven until the penance and devotion of Bhagirath
induced the god Siva to command Ganga to descent; the god held her in the coils of his matted hair in order to prevent her from destroying the world in her fall. Every Hindu knows the story and Siva is often depicted with Ganga in his matted hair. According to *Brahmabaiabarta puran*, Ganga, the river goddess, has three forms—in heaven she is Mandakini, on earth she is Ganga and in netherworld she is Bhagabati. The story of appearance of Ganga on earth has been narrated in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and in different Purans (Bhattacharya, vol-III, 1997:110). Vishnu gave birth of Ganga from his foot. In Himalaya Siva carried her in his matted hair. Bhagiratha performed a great *sadhana* for the liberation of 60 thousand sons of king Sagar. Ganga was satisfied with the *sadhana* of Bhagiratha. And she appeared on the earth. (Ibid). Hindus bathe in the river of Ganga, but usually they do not drink its water directly. They use the water for purifying the objects. When this water is used for bathing of the image of Lokenath, it turns into more auspicious, more sacred. And in this state people can drink it. The rites of bathing transforms the water of Ganga more pure and drinkable.

Secondly, in the main temple of Lokenath priests perform some purificatory rites in which water as an important place. The first *puja* begins at 8.30 A.M., which is called *ballybhogh*. After the *ballyabhogh puja* devotees take the foot-nectar, which purifies the body and mind of the devotees. After that priests sprinkle the peace water (*santi bari*) over the heads of the devotees which also purifies the body and mind of the devotees and it brings peace to the mind of the devotees. During the sprinkling of peace water, priests utter loudly, "Om Santi, Om Santi, Om Santi." After the completion of Ballyabhogh priests arrange different articles for Rajbhogh puja. Among the articles the water of Ganga occupies an important place. Rajbhogh puja starts at 12.30 P.M. Those devotees keep fasting, they prepare themselves by washing their hands with the water of Ganga. It is another purificatory rite, which helps the devotees to take part in *puja*.

Thirdly, the devotees of Lokenath believe that Lokenath was born on the day of Janmasthami (Beng. 20th Bhadra, Eng. 5/6 September). According to Hindu religious scriptures, Krishna, a popular deity, was born on the day of Janmasthami. Chapter IV (8,26) of the *Brahmavaivarta - Purana* deals with the Janmasthami *brata* (Hazra, 1975:166). The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha organizes two day festival, which starts from the day of Janmasthami. Devotees bring Ganga-water to the temple to pour the
water on the head of the image of Lokenath Brahmachari. Devotees collect water from
different ghats of Ganga. (mentioned earlier). At the sametime they also collect water
from the Ichhamoti River (Gobardanga and Hasnabad). Point should be noted here
that the Ichhamoti River generally is not considered as sacred river (like Ganga).
Organizers opine that all of the rivers are sacred. Beside, when devotees pour the water
(which may not be pure) on the image of Lokenath, the water turns into the holy and
pure water, due to touch of the image of the Lokenath. Some devotees, those who do
not bring the water of river, they pour the coconut water on the head of the image.
In fine, it can be said that the water which is originally not holy, but it has rendered,
holy through special consecrating acts.

Fourthly, according to Hindu text water is dwelling place of all gods and it is the
symbol of all types holiness. (Bhattacharya, 1992 : vol.-I, 491). That is why water is
an essential article of every puja of Hindus. In every morning around 6'Oclock, priests
of Lokenath temple open the gate of the temple and wash the temple with the water.
After arranging the offerings (upacaras) in proper order, priests first purifies their seats
by sprinkiling Ganga water. The chief priest prepares thereafter a protective wall of
fire and water around himself. It is a part of the process of purification. The idea
behind this process which is known as Bhutasuddhi, is that the human body as such
is far too impure to approach divinity. A fresh spiritual or rather divine body, is there­
fore, created dissolving the older one so that the worshipper could worship the deity
- possessing a spiritual body - from the same level. (Tripathi, G. C. in Journal of the

So, the role of water in the process of purification is very important. Sometime
they drink one/two drops of Ganga water to make themselves pure. Priests put two
mangal ghat (pure water vessel which signifies good) at the both sides of the tem­
ple-gate. These mangal ghats are symbolic expression of auspicious coming of di­
vine power and welcome for common people.

Sacred animal

"Man perceives in animal the quite different nature of the numinous, and the ani­
mal becomes, therefore, on the one hand a carrier of mysterious power like the holy
animals of various religions and on the other hand a form of numinous person.”
(Mensching. 1976:125). In the realm of Hindus some animals are called Vahan (riding
animal/faithful follower). In primitive age, perhaps the concept of vahan was con-
connected with totem. (Chakraborty. 1999:486). Some Hindu gods and goddesses have such kind of vahan, some do not have. (Gupta. 1999:357). Lokenath Brahmachari is considered as god-without vahan. But of course, some animals and insects are connected with his cult.

Lokenath devotees believe in superior power and divinity of the holy cow. Cows are called 'Go Mata' (Cow-mother). Killing of cows and eating of its meat are strictly prohibited. Devotees never hurt cows. They give this sacred animal food and show respect to them. Bull is also another sacred animal. Beside the main temple, there is a big nut mondir (a hall of the temple for devotional dancing and musical performances). It faces south. The nat mandir has two staircases. Beside the staircases, there are two big and colourful images of bull, which are made of concrete. Deb Prasad Sarkar, founder-secretary of Sangha, said that thinking anything these two images were established in front of the 'nat mandir'. At present the Sangha gives a spiritual explanation behind the establishment of the images of bull. According to Manik Hazra, an important organizer of the Sangha, these two images are of Nandi, Vehicle of Siva. It is believed that the god of Siva lives in the divine entity of Lokenath. That is why the images of bulls (Nandi) represent the presence of Siva.

It is evident that cow and bulls are venerated by the Lokenath devotees. They also believe in the popular belief of vaitarani (imaginary holy river) and cow. There is an ancient belief that after dying one has to cross the terrible river of death, vaitarani, which sinks of blood and bones. The cow will help the dead to cross by allowing them to grasp its tail so as to be taken to the far ashore.

The Sangha propagates that the blessing of Lokenath Brahmachari is for all worldly creatures — human being, animals, birds, insects etc. Anjan Roy writes, 'Many a time, Baba Lokenath used to spread sugar on the floor of his room to welcome ants to eat. At that moment, if any visitor entered, Baba used to stop them and never allowed to enter into the room, as members of his family were busy eating. When Baba gave them permission to enter, they found sugar was spread on the floor, and line of ants walking on the wall in numbers.' (Roy. 1997:321). According to the Sangha, one of the principal teachings of Lokenath, every creature, whether it is big or small, is sacred. Because they are created by the god. Lokenath was a confirmed vegetarian. For that reason his devotees never offer any kind of meat to their baba. Point should be noted here, that though, Saivaites and Saktas are not vegetarian, but when they wor-
ship Lokenath they do offer him a complete vegetarian preparation.

Sacred time and directions

Sacred space and sacred time have religiously the same structure as they are sectors of profane space and profane time. But they should not be thought as identical. There is a difference between two. Mensching points out, "Where as space is a resting power into which man must enter, time is flowing and comes itself upon man." (1976:235). In Sanskrit the word ‘time’ means ‘kal’, which is divided into sacred time profane time. In the cult of Lokenath daily and occasional ritual are performed by maintaining the principle of sacred time. “Sacred space and sacred time together and inseparably provide the setting for meaningful performances of the kind broadly called ritual”. (Madan. 1991:173).

There is a notice board in front of the main temple. It indicates three different rituals in three different times of the day. In morning at 8.30, ballybhogh puja begins. It is one hour puja. It ends at 9.30 A.M. At 12.30 P.M. priests starts rajbhogh puja. It ends at 1.10 P.M. The third important daily ritual is sandhya arati. In summer season it begins between 6 P.M. to 6.30 P.M. In winter it begins at 5.45 P.M.

Priests sit in front of the image of Lokenath. Image of Lokenath faces towards the south. Cooked-naibedya (offerings placed on the alter at the time of worship) must be kept on the left side of the image and non-cooked food on the rightside or all of the the naibedya should be placed in front of the image. Priests sprinkle rice (unboiled) with fat mantra to the 10 directions. The ten directions indicate ten gods.


Right/left opposition is also important here. Robert Hentz shows that the right hand is the hand which is used for worship and for the performance of various pure tasks. The impure tasks, according to him are usually relegated to the left hand which is also considered to be particularly adept in dealing with demons, magical practices and sorcery. (quoted by Das, in Madan (ed.). 1991:158). In the worship of Lokenath generally right hand plays more important role than the left hand. But, sometime, particularly in doing of some mudra (any one of the peculiar signs made with fingers during worship/prayer) left hand is prior to right hand. So it can be said that, in Lokenath worship, there is no dichotomy between pure hand and impure hand. Vina
Das points out that, “identification of right with pure and left with impure is not [always] correct [so far as Hindu rituals are concerned]. In Hindu ritual there are clearly specified contexts in which the left hand is used for offering worship.” (in Madan, 1991: 158)

In different stages of puja of Lokenath mudra is an indispensable part. These mudras are listed below—

1. Ankusa Mudra
2. Five mudras for Avhahana
3. Twatva Mudra
4. Samhaa Mudra
5. Dhenu Mudra
6. Matsya Mudra
7. Kurma Mudra
8. Lelihana Mudra
9. Chakra Mudra
10. Avagunthan Mudra
11. Jalini Mudra

SACRED RITUALS

Ritual is the core component of all religions. (Sarswati, B. N. 1984: 98-104). The rules of ritual are transmitted either orally or through the written text. Daniel de Coppet (1992) states that ritual is a special kind of performance which is both an act and a statement. Rituals create and maintain or transform a society’s cultural identity and social relations. Sarswati (1984: 98-104) holds that ritual is by definition “an obligatory social behaviour prescribed for occasions that have reference to belief system.” Ritual also holds the ritual participants together both as a community in belief and action. “...men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed.” (Monica Wilson 1954, cited by Turner, 1974: 6). Ritual provides a system of meaning to both the social and cosmic world. Langer writes, “Ritual is a symbolic transformation of experiences that no other medium can adequately express. Because
it springs from a primary human need, it is a spontaneous activity — that is to say, it arises without intention, without adaptation to a conscious purpose; its growth is undersigned, its pattern purely natural, however intricate it may be.” (1948 : 40). According to Durkheim (1971), ritual is that human behaviour, that takes place in the domain of the sacred. More clear and definite definition has been given by M. Eliade in his work ‘The sacred and The Profane (1959)’. He observes that rituals are those conscious and voluntary, repetitive and stylised symbolic body actions that are centered on cosmic structures and/or sacred presences. The various rituals engaged in by the different religions, viz. prayer, ceremonial worship, chanting, a range of gestures and movements, activities with sacred object etc., all done with the specific intention of spiritual communication with a supreme being.

Lokenath Brahmachari is considered as the supreme being and the manifestation of eternal divine blessing by the devotees of the Lokenath. The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha of Chakla has built up two temples in Chakla. One of this is old and the other one is new which is bigger than the old one. The old temple is situated on the grounds of Baba’s bhita the place or ground on which Lokenath’s dwelling house rested. And the newer temple is standing on the left side of the older one. The new temple is ten times bigger than the old temple. Devotees consider the old temple as the main temple. Both old and new temples and the ashrama campus are considered as the sacred place for the performance of cultic rituals. These rituals can be classified in two broad categories —

(a) Regular rituals, and

(b) Occasional rituals.

It is extremely difficult to reach at any clear picture about the worship of Lokenath in relation to the book published by the Sangha. For organizers, printed books on the worship of Lokenath have little importance, because these books are not followed by the priests of Chakla temple. But they have published a book on the rules & regulations and procedures of worship of Lokenath, which is written by Sri Mukti Kumar Chakraborty (1999). Hence, this book is less significant material to the study of Lokenath cult. For that reason, present researcher used both the method of observation — participatory and non participatory observations.
Regular rituals.

Regular rituals are of three kinds, viz.,

(a) Balyabhogha, (b) Rajabhoga, (c) Sandhya Arati

Regular rituals are performed in the old and main temple (mula mandir). It looks a charchala house (housing a roof consisting of four parts) of traditional village of Bengal. The Chief priest, Basudeb Banerjee, opens the gate of the temple at 6 AM and clean the temple with the help of the other priests. They wash the face of the image of Lokenath, as it is practised by every human being practising *. After that they arrange the Balyabhogh Puja (breakfast worship). It starts at 8.30 A.M. The puja accompanying balyabhoga, or first food offering of the day to the deity, goes through different stages. The chief priest bathes the image of Lokenath with gangajal (water of the Ganges which is every pure and sacred) bathed and changes his dress. The pieces of cloth used for clothing the image or used as dress of Lokenath changed thrice daily. The clothes once used are preserved by the temple authorities who distributed them later among the poor people.

The Sangha distributes these clothes in the Janmastami festivals (i.e. 20th Bhadra (Beng) or first week of September). When the chief priest pours the water of Ganges over the head of the image of Lokenath, he recites the mantras of Siva’s bathing and rings the bell. After that he swabs the image with a napkin and, then clothes him with a new dress. In between the other priests arrange five articles (upacara). The term ‘Panchapacara’ (five attendances) refers to the five elements or articles which are required to the worship of Lokenath. These five attendances are — incense, flowers, a lamp, perfumes and naibedya (food-offerings placed on the alter at the time of worship). Daily puja of Lokenath consists of five attendances, but yearly puja consists of 16 attendances : with the offering of which the omnipresent Lokenath is invited to direct his attention to the particular place of worship : offering of a seat, water for washing feet and hands, and for rinsing mouth, a bath, a garment, a sacred thread, perfumes, flowers, incense, a lamp, food, homage and circumambulation of his image and and ultimately bidding formal to him.

After offering the flower at the feet of the image of Lokenath, the chief priest starts the puja with the chanting of the name of ‘Vishnu’. Then he lights up a pradipa or lamp. At the time of ‘Balyabhogha’ some food/articles are offered to the image — these are sugar candi, fruits, sweets and payasa (rice boiled in sweetened milk). These
constitute ‘Naibedya’, a appropriate food offering to Lokenath. After the puja these food articles are turned into ‘prasada’ (food-leavings) which carry the blessings and favour of Lokenath. Lokenath takes the Naibedya symbolically and the food leavings carry the grace, blessings, favour of Lokenath. Devotees wash their hands with the water of Ganges and take part in Anjali (offerings). Devotees keep fast before their offering of Anjali. The associate priests give them flowers and belpata (leaves of wood-apple tree). Devotees recite the mantra thrice, with the main priest. Eliade (1973 : 212-16) interprets the use of mantras in the first place as ‘supports’ for concentration.” (cited in Veer. 1989 :122). By uttering the mantras in the correct way one can realize Lokenath. In addition, the mantra has also all kinds of therapeutical and magical powers. After finishing the Anjali priests scatters the water of Ganges, which is called Santi Bari (water of peace) over the heads of the devotees. And he distributes prasada among them. The point to note here is that this ritual ignores caste and religious discrimination.

Rajabhogha:

After completion of Balyabhogha Puja, associate priests arrange the things to start the Rajbhog puja. The cooks of the kitchen send some cooked food, called bhogh at 12.30 P.M. Rajbhog puja begins at 12.30 P.M. Three kinds of food are placed before the image of Lokenath, thus — a. Pancha banjan (five kinds of cooked vegetables) potato chips, uccha fry (a variety of kitchen vegetable having bitter taste), patal fry (a kind of vegetable), brinjal fry and pumpkin fry; b. curry; C. fried rice and payes (a sweet dish prepared by boiling rice in milk with sugar and other ingredients). Chief priest mentioned with great emphasis, that, there is no question to serve of puni sug (a kind of herb), onion, garlic, musur dal (seed), fish and meat. So, naibedya (food offerings) must be vegetarian. There are five food - pots, which are served to the seven deities, thus - (1) Ganesha (2) Narayan (3) Krishna (Gopal) (4) Bhagwan Ganguly (5) Benimadhava Brahmachari (6) Trailanga Swami, and (7) Lokenath Brahmachari. After serving the naibedya chief priest take some water of Ganges and put it on the floor. Again he takes some and sprinkles over the food-pots. This is called puja of the naibedya (worship of the food-offerings). It is the convention of the Hindu Puja, that none should be offered to the god without worshiping it. After finishing the offering ritual of foods, chief priest close the doors and the windows of the temple for the repose of Lokenath.
It is conceived by the devotees that Lokenath is god as well as dearest relative of devotees. This way of thinking is not unnatural in the world of Hindu. Besides he is depicted as the mediator between divine world and mundane world. Because he lies in between the supreme power and the devotees.

Around 1’O clock chief priest reopens the doors and windows of the temple. The time span of Baba’s (Lokenath) rest time is ten minutes. After this, it is conceived that the naibedya becomes prasada (food offering, which is to be taken by devotees after the sacrifice) which is sent to the bhogh distributing centre. In that time devotees assemble in front of the temple and give anjali (offering) to baba and drink charanamrita (food nectar). Then chief priest starts bhogaroti (food offering+act of greeting a deity) with pancha pradipa (five lamps), napkin, chamar, conch, flower, scented sticks and incense. Rajbhogh ends with sprinkling of santi bari (peace-water)

Prasada and Bhogha

Prasada is food leaving of deity but bhogh is not identical with prasada, but it is considered as prasada. In the great kitchen of Lokenath temple rice, dal and chatni are prepared in huge amount. In the time of cooking, prasada with belpata (wood apple leaves and flowers petals) are sprinkled by the priests in the food. And that food becomes bhogh.

Through this process ordinary food becomes bhogha and gains religious merits. It is not an ordinary food and it cannot be served as ordinary food. In this context Durkheim writes, sacred food “...serve as true sacraments; in general, however, they cannot be used for ordinary eating. Anyone who violates that prohibition exposes himself to extremely grave danger.” (1995 : 127).

Those who serve and take the bhog for both it is very much crucial. Because it is sacred to both of them. It is served and eaten sacredly and both are considered as religious rituals. Lokenath devotees, before eating the prasada and bhogh, touch their forehead to show their respect to the deities and their food-leavings or prasada. Because, prasada or bhogh is not an ordinary food. It is much more crucial than any kind of food. Its quantity in most of the cases, is small which cannot satisfy the biological need of the devotees. But it is full of sacred value which can satisfy the moral need of the devotees.
Sandhya Arati

In summer days sandhya arati begins at 6.30 P.M. and in winter at 5.30 P.M. Sandhya Arati begins with the sounds of Mangal Sankhya (auspicious conch). Chief priest lights up the pradipa (lamp) and dhunuchi (an incense burner) to make smoke. He utters thrice — Om Vishnu, and does 'pranama' (act of making obeisance by lying prostrate or bending and touching one's feet.) to Lokenath. Then he and his associate priests utter the name of Narayana. Now they light up panchapradipa (five lamps) and start arati. By waiving the panchapradipa they start arati. Arati is a lamp-offering in which the priest sways an oil lamp with five wicks before the image. This is a colourful event, which concludes with the lamp being taken to the devotees so that they can put their hands above the flame and bring them to their heads. Devotees think that the heat of the flame has a miraculous effect, because it protects them from the danger of unhappiness and pains and agony.

After the end of heat-taking ritual, the chief priest enters into the next stage of arati with auspicious conch in right hand and sounds the gong with his other hand. The next stage is arati with a piece of cloth, which signifies that the deity is dressed with a pure and need cloth. After that the chief priest puts the conch and the piece of cloth on the 'ghata' (a small earthen pot). Then he does arati by dhunuchi and chamar arati. At the end of the arati chief priest sprinkles 'santi bari' (water ensuring peace). After finishing the arati one of the priests reads the Bhagavata, (a sacred text of Hindu) that relates to Vishnu or Krishna.

Devotees are never allowed to enter into the interior of the mula mandira or the old temple of Lokenath. Devotees are never allowed to enter into the interior of the mula mindaira or the old temple of Lokenath. The room in the mula mandira (the main temple which contains a small marble image of Lokenath sitting on a lotus) is the garbha griha (or sanctum sanctorum) where the worship of Lokenath by the brahmin priests is held thrice daily in the morning, at noon and in the evening. Intrusion in the this sacred arena by the devotees, is strictly prohibited. The devotees are not allowed to pour sacred water on the image of Lokenath lying in the garbha griha. They pour sacred water on the marble image of Lokenath, which is much larger than the image of Lokenath in the garbha griha and which is situated in the nata mandira to the left of and adjacent to the mula mandira. Devotional dancing and singing of devotional songs are performed and sung on the floor of this nata mandira. Devotees
watch *sandhya arati* and the performance of *puja* at other times, from the temples veranda. Sometimes, the priests are requested by the devotees to allow their children to enter in the *garbha griha* and lie prostrate on the floor in front of the image of Lokenath. They believe that it will ensure benediction of Lokenath for devotees who watch *sandhya arati* and other *pujas* from the temple's veranda. During *sandhya arati* and other *pujas* devotees either sit on the floor or stand in the veranda. Sometimes priests are requested by the devotees to allow their children to lay on the floor in front of the image of Lokenath. Some time priest makes exception, they allow not only the children but also the elders, if they are considered as special guest. Devotees take part in *arati* by taking flower and drinking *charanamrita* (foot-nectar). They think that by drinking *charanamrita*, baba’s grace enters into their body. Some devotees expressed that the heat of *panchapradipa*, flower, foot-nectar and soil of baba’s bhita have healing power. If anybody takes any one of them, he or she would be cured from any diseases. Some other devotees opined that flowers have power to keep the life of the people safe from danger. They think only baba can save the devotees. So he is considered as great saviour. That is why devotees think that intimate contact is necessary for the redemption of the devotees.

Organizers claim that they do not believe in superstition. But they have noticed that some devotees got positive results by having the foot-nectar and soil. And this positive result is the product of deep *bhakti* of devotees. Anybody can have such a result by keeping a deep *bhakti* in his or her heart.

Devotees drink foot nectar of the image of Lokenath. They touch the foot of the image with their hands and forehead (only in the nat-mandir). It is believed that drinking the foot nectar and touching the foot confer great religious benefits on the drinker and on the devotees. This tradition gives great emphasis to patterned contact between a devotee and a guru’s body. In fact they are merely conspicuous examples of a ritual gesture that is fundamental to the cult of Lokenath.

The ritual process converts *naibedya* (food offerings) into *prasada* (grace). In other words *prasada* is ritually transformed food. The sharing of *prasada* is an essential part of Lokenath cult. Because it refers to the intimate contact between guru and devotees. Guru Lokenath physically does not exist, so direct contact between guru and devotees is not possible. Only indirect contact can be possible here. Therefore the sharing of *prasada* or *charanamrita* is only substitute for the actual contact, that occurred
between Lokenath and devotees, when he was alive.

It should be noted here that all these acts, e.g. drinking foot-rinsing water or taking food leavings, are in wider setting of Hindu life suggestive of dirtiness or pollution. The concept of purity and pollution are closely related to every religion. The concept of purity and pollution is central to the Hinduism. "Terms exist for pollution and purity in every Indian language, and each of these terms has certain amount of semantic stretch enabling it to move from one meaning to another as the context requires. Thus pollution may refer to uncleanliness, defilement, impurity sort of defilement and indirectly even to sinfulness, while purity refers to cleanliness, spiritual merit and indirectly to holiness." (Srinivas. 2001: 126-127). In Hinduism foot rinsing water of other person is considered as impure, dirty or polluted. There is no sacredness or holiness. But if it is foot-rinsing water of guru or deities, it would be accepted by all as sacred or pure water, which is called foot nectar or charanamrita. Because it carries religious and spiritual values. At the same time food leaving of common people is considered as the impure or polluted. But when it is considered as the 'prasada' it becomes sacred and pure. In the domain of the cult of Lokenath, by eating the food-leavings of Lokenath and by drinking foot-washings the devotee can assimilate the guru's true nature, which is a current manifested power of awareness.

It also refers to the indirect physical contact between guru and devotees. It is conceived that when the devotees take prasada and foot-nectar guru enters into the body of the devotees. For the non-devotees foot-washings is considered to be a polluted thing, but to a true devotee this thing is supremely 'pure' and value-laden.

Touching the foot of the image of Lokenath, and receiving santi-bari (peace-water) and giving anjali are the important ritual gesture of Lokenath devotees. These ritual gestures show the transactions and intimate contact between guru and devotees, which can be characterised as a 'physiological engagement' (Babb. 1987: 69), what Marriott (1976) has called a 'biomoral' gain. Therefore homage and intimacy are the important themes of interactions between guru Lokenath and devotees.

Two interrelated things are seen in Hindu world, regarding seeing (darshan). The matter of vision is one of the fundamentals to the cult of Lokenath, as it is in the wider Hindu tradition as well. This seeing or darshan is not like any ordinary gaze or stare, it carries a religio-mystical sense. Every Hindu wants to see the deities. "This is one reason why image worship is so basic to Hindu religious practice (Babb. 1987

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Hindu visit temples, asrama, sacred places, tirthas (site of pilgrimage) to see the deity, guru or pious persons. Sometimes deities, gurus come out from the asrama or temples in procession, as kings and queens might come forth from their palaces, so that they may see and be seen by their worshipper subjects. (Basham 1977, ix, cited Babb 1987:75). Virtually everywhere Hindus live or work there are pictures of the gods.

Devotees want to see the image of Lokenath and at the same time, want to be seen by their guru, as well. Devotees assemble in the time of different pujas to see their guru and to take part in various rituals to make themselves intimate with the Lokenath. This seeing makes possible the visual contact between Lokenath and his devotees. Such visual contact is believed to add virtue to the beholder. It is believed that Lokenath is everywhere. He is present in his image picture, in the Sivalinga and also in the mind of the devotees. Dreams and walking vision of Guru Lokenath are common among the devotees and are greatly valued as signs of grace. It is believed, moreover that at the time of death every true devotee has Lokenath's darshan.

A rich visual imagery can be found in the sacred literature of Lokenath cult. One of his followers claims that he saw his Guru Lokenath in the time of sadhana. (Saha, 1392 Beng.). Bijoy Krishna in his death bed, was saved by Lokenath. (Sengupta 1389 Beg. : 212), Ray (1997), Mishra (1990), Suddhananda Brahmachari (1985), Basu (1991) and several other writers claim the same thing. Most important of all, however, the devotee sees guru with what may be properly called a much deepened insight; that is, the worshipper sees the guru as the supreme being that he truly is. This is the fulfilling darshan, and the devotee has now achieved his or her goal.

Devotees want to see their guru and at the same time want to be seen by the guru Lokenath. "Lokenath's grace - looking destroys the sin of the creature in morning and evening," (Guha, in Sarkar, Beng 1378 : 224). Devotees are grateful to Lokenath because Lokenath casts his glance of compassion on the devotees. Devotees looks at guru and guru looks back. The devotee, being a true devotee, is humble, surrendered. The glance that the guru casts upon the devotee is one of compassion or kindness. The seeing of devotee and Lokenath is different. Devotees look at the guru to move upward and to achieve their goal. But the seeing of Lokenath moves from upwards to downwards. Perfect seeing can be passing through the sadhana. Devotee should purify his or her soul by the sadhana. On the other hand Lokenath can help the devo-
tees to purify their soul and enable them for perfect seeing.

"The idea that 'looking' carries power is a commonplace of Hindu culture. It is widely believed that a person who is envious, or in some other way ill-disposed, can inflict harm, usually inadvertent, on persons or objects merely by looking at them." (Babb. 1987 : 78). According to the devotees, 'the benign gaze of Baba Lokenath is opposite of this so-called evil eye. His carries a benevolent power, which saves the devotees from bad and evil eye. His Kripa-dristi (glance of grace) is so powerfull which sanctify food as prasada. And prasada is a good carrier of his miraculous power which protects devotees from any sort of danger and gives peace to the mind of the devotees.

Kakar points out two psychological mechanisms in the guru-devotee relation — idealization and identification. (1994 :145). In order to analyse this concept, Kakar focuses on the guru-follower relationship in the cult of Radha Soami. He writes, "The cult’s group activities such as the satsang, its philosophy as expounded in the cultic literature, by senior disciples, and by the guru himself, all propel idealization to its culminating point, where the guru can be experienced as God, and take the identification to its logical conclusion, where the disciple has the feeling of complete unity with the guru." (1994 : 146). In identifying with guru, the devotee incorporates idealized images of the guru which he feels as genuine and valuable additions to his own personality. In this new state he sees his problems with new eyes and the problems no longer seem as intractable as he did earlier.

"Better adjustments to the real-life situation can and do take place, the changes often being sustained over long periods of time." (Kakar. 1994 : 277). In fine Kakar comments, "It is therefore not surprising that some Indian psychiatrists consider the guru-disciple relationship as the most acceptable model of psychotherapy in the Indian setting (1994:277). There can be no doubt that guru-devotee relationship as it is encountered in the cult of Lokenath does correspond to a large degree to Kakar’s analysis.

MAIN FESTIVALS

'Hindu religion is called the religion of festivals.' (Gusseva, 1989 : 96). The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha being a Hindu religious organization, does follow the mainstream culture of Hinduism. Apart from daily rituals, the Sangha organizes three
main cerimonial festivals, thus—

1. Death ceremony (19th Jaistha (Beng), of Lokenath around 1,2,3 June)

2. Janmastami 20 Bhadra (Beng) around 5,6,7, September.

3. Mangal Deep Festival (last saturday of Kartick (Beng), around 13th November.

**Death ceremony (Tirodhan Divas)**

According to the published literature of the Sangha, Guru Lokenath Brahmachari passed away on 19 Jaistha, 1297 Beng. (1,2,3 June, 1890). This day is called 'Tirodhan Divas' (the day of disappearance). Dutta (1997) describes the incident of disappearance of Lokenath in the following manner, “The day was rising and the time was 11.40 minute in the day time. Holy baba silently occupied his seat with his usual sitting posture, and that too before all the disciples. Within a few minute, Holy Baba Lokenath transformed himself into solid rock like marvel statue. The time was quickly passing out. The life returned in his marvel statue like body. That way, of course, Holy Baba did change himself many a time before, but never took so much time like that. Thereafter, the disciples and devotees were restless. Many of them without understanding the meaning what Holy Baba Lokenath said, cried out loudly, rather everyone was crying as Holy Baba did not return to his normally from firm trance. The news ran a space. Time passed more, and hundreds of people came running to the Baradi Ashram. The assembled devotees were totally blank as they could not understand that their Holy Baba never sat for so long time like a marvel statue. Many of them desired to touch him to feel his life, but they dared not. So, Rmkmumar stepped forward and touch the Holy Baba’s body, the most purified supreme body of Holy Baba Lokenath.” (1997 : 390-391). “The real truth then was discovered. Holy Shree Baba Lokenath Brahmachary had departed form his body for eternal heaven, exactly as he told to everyone that at the hour of mid day under the clear blue sky, and sun shining, he will move through the sun light towards northern hemisphere.” (Ibid : 391)

Lokenath’s devotees believe Lokenath is immortal. After his death his devotees did not perform *Sraddha* (Hindu death ritual), because his death is not a (an ordinary) death, it is *mahasamadhi*. According to them, it is the convention of Brahmanic-Sanskritic tradition, that there is no need to perform ancestor worship (*sraddha*) for ascetic world renouncer. Because he had died ritually before his physical death. In his boyhood, Lokenath took ‘sannayas’ under the guruship of Bhagwan Ganguly.
Through this he became a renouncer to the mundane world. By renunciation, a man can become dead to the social world, escape the network of strict interdependence.......


The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha believes that though Baba Lokenath is no more in physical presence, but millions and millions of his devotees feel his presence, and feel from the core of their heart that Lokenath is always with them, at times of distress and also in happiness. For that reason the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha does not consider 19 Jaistha as a painful day. They consider the day as a festival day as well as a holyday.

The Sangha observes three-day festival to celebrate ‘Baba’s tirodhan divas (the day of disappearance). These three days are 18, 19 and 20 Jaistha (first week of June). The weather of Bengal in this time generally very hot, sometime drizzling or heavy rain are seen, which are the sign of the beggining of the rainy season. 18 Jaistha is the first day of the festival. Festival begins with the ‘mangalarati’ and the reading of Bhagavatgita at 4.15 am. Chief priest takes the leading role in reading of Gita, which takes place in the main temple. Some time, other priests also read the ‘Gita’. This ritual is also performed in 19 and 20 Jaistha in the same time and same place.

At 6 a.m. 32 brahmin priests, coming from different places and the committee members of the Sangha led by secretary or president assemble in the Yajna bedi. (place of fire). It is situated in front of the main temple. It is a round shape platform. It’s diameter is 9 meter. Yanga bedi is encircled by a small round shaped foot path. Height of the platform is 2½ feet. There is a staircase in the western side which comprises five stairs. In the middle of the platform there is a square shaped (4ft/4ft) Yajna place. President or secretary devotionally receives the priests. The chief priest is selected by the Sangha. There are three main criteria of the selection of chief priest—

1. He has to be a high caste brahmin.
2. He must be a learned person. Particularly in Sanskrit literature.
3. He should be a good reciter.
4. He should be a devotee of Lokenath.

The main programme of the festival is Viswa Santi Yanga (world-pleace yaga). The
chief priest leads the *yajna*. He performs there main functions—

1. The main priest appears early in the morning for the ritual preparation. It is his duty to arrange the attendances (*upacara*) of *yajna* (sacrifice), thus flower, rice, sesame, linseed, incense, clarified butter, barley, which are mixed up and is kept in a brass pot. Under his leadership other priests prepare the ‘*yajna kundu*’ or ‘standil’ (place of fire) for ‘*yajna*’. Woods of banyan tree, peepul-tree, the sal, the teak, the marmelos (wood-apple), the Bengal kino tree (*palas*) are kept inside the *kunda*. Chief priest puts fire with help of jute stick.

2. He divides the priests into four groups consisting eight members. He prepares a time table for the priests. Each group takes part in *yajna* ritual for four to five hours. They work by rotation.

3. At the beginning of the *yajna* chief priest recites vedic mantras. President or secretary of the Sangha and other priests recite the same mantra in chorus. And in this way he starts the *viswa santi yajna* (world-peace-fire ritual). Beside that his most important duty is to lead the *yajna* for three days.

Around 9.30 a.m. at the cultural stage which is situated in the temple complex, *Kirtan* and *bhajana* groups perform *kirtan* and *bhajana* and *tarak brahma nam*. Some pilgrim devotees take part in the *nam-yajna*, some just listen the *kirtana*. Some of them assemble in front of the main temple and take part in *puja*. Somebody watch the *viswa santi yajna* curiously and devotionally. And some of them roam around there aimlessly. It can be seen some are busy for marketting and eating food or drinking tea or smoking. At 5 p.m. devotees start to assemble in front of the stage which is situated in the southern corner of temple complex. In the religious congregation, different speakers speak on different aspects or religion. They focus on three points, viz, (1) importance and significance of the recent religious festivals, (2) idea and contribution of Lokenath Brahmachari (3) *sanatana* (traditional) Hindu religion and its liberalism.

There is a stage beside the *Kamar Pukur* (tank) in the market, which is situated just outside the temple compound. Professional singers, dancers and drama-actors start performing different types of cultural activities at 6 p.m. Popular artists and singers of radio and television sing devotional songs. Actors perform dance drama and open theatre on the life of Lokenath Brahmachari. Folk singers sing folk songs which are related to the devotion to god and Lokenath. It is a whole night programme. It has
been observed that the local people (audience) behave differently from the outsider pilgrim-devotees. Local people do not sit to watch through a four-hour ‘Katho Katha’ and dance programme, religious song and play or devotional gathering that last up to the 3 or 4 a.m. They doze, talk, walk around, go home and come back and find other resources for diverting their attention. On the other hand outsiders (devotees) watch cultural performances with full attention. But some of them particularly children and aged persons fall asleep during the programme.

The programme of 19 and 20 Jaistha is identical with the previous day. But of course 19 Jaistha is considered as the most important day than the other two days. Because 19 Jaistha is the final departure day of Lokenath. The Sangha arranges a special bhoga for the devotees on 19 Jaistha. One more food is included in the list of Raja Bhogh (which is puspannya or fried rice). Important personalities turn up on this day, e.g. S.D.O., B.D.O, advocates, big businessmen, police officers etc. Point should be noted here that both leftist and rightist political leaders turn up here and take part in different programmes. Chitta Basu of Forward Block, Somn Mitra of Indian National Congress (now TMC), Amitava Nandi and Subhas Chakraborty of C P I (M) and other local political leader keep touch with the Sangha.

There is no holiday in temple complex. The temple is kept open for 365 days in a year. But all days are not regarded as the same. Devotees go to the temple and take part in rituals throughout the year. But attendance of the devotee/pilgrims varies from time to time. From Monday to Friday attendance of the devotees is lesser than Saturday and Sunday. In the three main festivals attendance is highest. From Monday to Friday an average from 500 to 100 thousand devotees turn up here and 3000 to 5000 devotees turn up on Saturday, Sunday and on public holidays. According to the official information around two lakhs pilgrim-devotees visit this place in the time of festivals.

The commercial mass media, T.V, radio and printing media are attracted by the glamorous and gorgeous programme of the Sangha. They visit this place, particularly in the time of festivals. Electronic media make telecaste the news of the Sangha’s activities. Newspapers publish the news of the programme of the Sangha with great importance. Though these media are the representative of modern and secular culture, but in India, they have not “displaced the traditional media or the traditional culture.” (Singer. 1972 : 47). The advantages of these media are fully exploited by the Lokenath
Sevashram Sangha. Singer observed this phenomenon earlier. He noted that "...it is common to find such traditional institutions as temples adopting the tape recorder, the public address system, the radio, and the printing press for the popularization of prayers, devotional songs, and religious discourses." (Ibid). During the festivals days the Sangha exploits the modern media, e.g. microphone, close circuit T.V., walkie talkie etc. They use these to maintain discipline, order and peace, to communicate the volunteers, to give instruction to the helping agencies and to give information to the devotees.

Apart from these activities, during the festival-days, the Sangha also arranges some mundane/secular programmes, e.g. they run a big medical camp and arrange blood donation camp.

Janmastami

(20 Bhadra, Beng, around 5,6,7 September)

Janmasthami is an important auspicious day of the Hindus. According to the Brahanic-sanskritic literature Krishna, a popular deity, was born on the day of Janmastami. Poet Joydeb speaks of ten avatara (incarnation) of Vishnu. (Bhattacharya, 1995 : vol-2;218). Krishna is one of them (Ibid). According to Gita Krishna is Vishnu. (Ghosh, ed. 1365 Beng : 403/10/21). In Mahabharata Krishna is depicted as a warrior as well as god. (Basu, trans. 1394 Beng : Introduction). Krishna cult is very popular in different parts of India. The popular belief is Krishna was born on the 8th day of Krishna paksia in Bhadra, which is called Janmastami. Lokenath Mission of Kachua believes that Lokenath was born on the day of Janmastami. But the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha does not think so. According to the Sangha it is nothing but a clever propaganda to cheat the devotees. They also think that some associations very often misuse the divine name of Lokenath, by propagating that Lokenath was born on the day of Janmastami. But it is not possible for anybody to prove it, because there is no written document in support of such a claim. Regarding the date of birth of Lokenath, the Sangha suffers from a confusion. Late Bhudev Sen, former president of the Sangha, declared that there is no reliable information about the date of birth of Lokenath nobody can prove that Lokenath was born on the day of Janmastami. (Ananda Bazar Patrika. 13.8.1998). But Pranab Kumar Mishra, an important member of the Sangha, writes in his book (1990) that, neither Lokenath told anything about his date of birth,
nor any written document can be found. But there is a mystical incident can help to know the date of birth of Lokenath. This incident is called swapnadesh (the order which is given in the dream). After the death of Lokenath, he appeared in the dream of a devotee. In the dream Lokenath told him that he was born on the day of Janmastami (Mishra. 1990 : 11). It is peculiar to find that this contradictory ideas do not create any confusion neither among the organizers nor among the devotees. Besides some of his devotees believe that Lokenath was the incarnation of Krishna, but some of them are not at one with this notion.

It is believed by the Hindus, that Krishna appeared in the Kansha’s prison at Mathura of the 8th day of Krishna paksaha of the month of Bhadra. According to the popular story King Kansha of Mathura was the uncle of Krishna. Krishna was the enemy of Kansha. Krishna’s mother Debaki was scared of Kansha, that he would kill her baby. On the very night of his birth Krishna’s parents had to remove him to a distance, beyond the reach of his uncle King Kansha who sought his life. Lastly Krishna killed Kansha and brought peace in Mathura. There is another story of love which is connected with the life of Krishna. According to Vaishnab Padaboli Radha is the lover as well as the inspiration and power of Krishna. (Bhattacharya; 1995 : 299-300, vol-2). Vaisnavites believe that Vishnu, on the day of Janmastami, was born in form of Krishna. Krishna appeared where and when the religion is in crisis.’ In Gita, Krishna says, when adharma (antireligious activities) takes place on earth, I create myself and appear to protect religion and honest person (Ghosh, 1957 : 154, 7,8/4). As an avatar of Krishna, Lokenath appeared on earth to save the poor people and civilization, and to protect the earth. Not only that the Sangha also thinks that people are not in the state of peace and peace is badly required. One can find peace if he comes to Chakla. Because the village of Chakla is the birth place of Lokeanth. So, this place is as holy as other tirthas.

The Sangha organizes a three-day-festival—the day before Janmastami, the day after Janmastami. The central phenomenon of the festival is water carrying ritual of devotees. Same kind of ritual can be found among the Saivaites of Bengal. In the month of Sravana (Beng) they visit Tarakeswar to pour the water of Ganges on the head of the image of Siva.

On the first day of the festival, the day starts with the mangal arati at 5 a.m. Chief priest and his associates carry out the daily ritual, viz, ballyabhogh, rajbhogh, and
sandhya arati. *Kirtan* groups and Kathak (story teller) perform different activities on the stage. *Kirtan* groups chant the name of Krishna and Lokenath through out the day. Kathaks use the microphone to tell the story of Lokenath and try to show that like Krishna, how Lokenath used his divine power to save the mankind from pain and misery. *Kathaks* also describe Lokenath as an expression and manifestation of all gods and goddesses. It is believed by them that Lokenath’s name has full magical potency. If one utters his holy name, he/she will receive the bless of all gods and goddesses. One of the Sangha members poined that, for this reason Lokenath has been accepted universally. In other words the cult of Lokenath goes beyond the boundary of different Hindu sects, e.g., Saivaism, Vaisnavism, Saktaism etc. It can be said that this feature makes the basis of his universal acceptence. Chakraborty correctly depicts him as a ‘universal guru’. (2002 : 281).

The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha has been organizing Janmastami festival since 1982. But the water carrying ritual was introduced in 1994. Though, Lokenath Mission of Kachua (rival organization of Chakla) started it five years ago in 1989. According to an organizer of the Sangha, when it was seen that the water carrying ritual became a popular phenomenon, the Sangha came to understand that this ritual should be introduced by them. In order to introduce this new ritual they moved planefuly. It was 1994, the Sangha sent a truck with a group of people wearing badge, cap and T-shirt of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha of Chakla, to Bagbazar *Gangar Ghat* to collect the water of Ganges. This artificial group of pilgrim-devotees collected the water of Ganges from Bagbazar *Gangar Ghat* and started their journey to the village of Chakla. Besides, the Sangha stuck wall-posters to invite the devotees to visit the village of Chakla. Newspaper advertisement, street corner meeting, hand bill, big hordings and festoons etc. had been employed to invite the devotees and to make the place popular among the people. In 1994, around 6 thousand pilgrim-devotees (water carrier) turned up in the temple. At present, near about 2 lakhs devotees turn up in the temple.

On the day before Janmastami, devotees, those who want to pour water on the image of Lokenath, assemble near the different ghat of Ganges. (landing-stage of the river of Ganges). They wear a special clothe, viz, saffron T-shirts for men and red bordered sari or saffron salwar kamiz for women. They tie a red or saffron band on their forehead. This hair band carries a slogan, thus “*Jai Baba Lokenath*” or “*Cholo Cholo*”.
They also tie a napkin in their vest. Most of the devotees visit the temple in a group. A very few go alone.

Pilgrim-devotees bear some special mark on the day of their journey. They put on vermilion marks on their forehead. In fact, it is a general rule that pilgrim-devotees try to give themselves the external appearance of expression of their belief. It is not only the external expression of their belief but also the part of the ritual. They do not put on the vestige in daily life. When they are involved in purely economic occupation or in normal daily life, they do not encumber themselves with this decoration which can be quite complicated. But when the pilgrim-devotees meet to share a communal life and attend this kind of religious ceremonies, they are obliged to adorn themselves in this way. It signifies that this journey is not an ordinary journey, it is a very special journey for themselves. This mark becomes an important part of their journey.

Pilgrim-devotees start to assemble around 11 a.m. in different Ghat of Ganges. In this time different Ghats of Ganges become temporary market of different things, which are essentials for the water carrying ritual. The things which are sold in the temporary market, are—

a. bamboo sticks with bells. There are two small trisuls (trident) which are sticken at the both ends of the sticks.

b. water pots which are made of clay, brass, still or plastic.

c. rope. Ropes are tied like a tress or a queue. Pots are hanged from the both ends of the bamboo stick.

d. flower. Devotees buy Ganda flower (marigold) and Rajani Gandha (tuberose) chain to decorate their stick and water pot. Ganda is very much popular flower among the Lokenath devotees due to its saffron colour. They also decorate their stick with the leaves of Jhaw tree (tamarisk tree) and saffron flag.

After buying all these things from the temporary shops, devotees get bathe in the river of Ganges and fill up their pots with the water of Ganges. Then they put a pot lid on the pot and seal the lid on the pot and seal the lid with the clay of Ganges. Now they are prepared to start their journey to their destination, i.e. the village of Chakla.

Devotees do not wear any shoe, they walk in barefoot. Some of them put on a cap
and T-shirt, specially made for the journey of the pilgrims. Coco Cola, Pepsi, and some detergent shop companies sponsor to make such type of cap and T-shirts. Caps and T-shirts bears some slogans on the front and back side. Front side bears, ‘Lets go to Chakla’ or ‘There is only great tirtha, which is Chakla’. Back side carries the name of the sponsors. (Point should be noted here that one may find a nice meeting point of religion and business (capital). A considerable section of pilgrim devotees walk in the half-naked state. Most of the male pilgrims wear saffron colour half-pant and hang on a napkin around their neck. All of them use thick pad on their shoulder to make their journey more comfortable. Because, the carrying of water become more and more painfull with the passing of time.

During the period of journey the behaviour of the pilgrim-devotees various from person to person, group to group, time to time and place to place. It can be described in the following manner—

**Morning and noon of the day of the journey**

Considering the number of the pilgrim devotees, they can be classified into three groups-(a) single, (b) two to four persons and (c) more than four persons. Number of the last category never cross sixteen, as it was found in the period of journey. Single Tirtha-goers are more sincere than the other. They like to keep their mouth shut during the journey. They express that every one should keep silence in this time. Because Baba Lokenath did not like to talk too much. Not only that talkative person can hardly reach their destination. Too much talk is harmful for fulfilling the vow of the devotees. Besides, they do not take tea or smoke during the journey. These persons behave more or less same thing till the end of their journey.

Second category of devotees is disciplined, organized and sincere. Mostly they are kingroup. They do not smoke. But some time they take tea from roadside tea stall. During the journey they talk about their physical or family problems. Due to the presence of female members this group frequently takes rest in the roadside temporary rest place and food stalls which are made by the local clubs with the help of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. Most of the female devotees seek to avoid walking in the night.

Third category of pilgrim devotees, mostly consists of young people. They take part in this ritual as a quasi-religious activity. They assemble in different Gangar Ghat, around12 noon. They sit in a place and gossip loudly. Sometime smoke or eat food.
Some of them roam aimlessly here and there or bargain with the different stall holders or buy different things from the stalls and take preparation for the journey. Around 3 to 4 p.m. they start their journey to their destination. In the beginning of the journey they start shouting some slogans, e.g. *Jai baba Lokenath, Cholo Cholo Chakla dham* or *Lokenath Baba par karega* etc. This shouting plays very important physical and psychological role in their journey—

Firstly, it helps to break the monotony of the journey.

Secondly, it expresses their solidarity.

Thirdly, it gives impetus and energy to the pilgrim devotees for walking steadily.

Fourthly, this kind of shouting produces some sort of excitement which enhances their energy to endure the pain of the journey.

On the way to their destination pilgrim devotees take rest in different halting camps which are organized directly by the Sangha or local clubs with the help of the Sangha. Foods and water are distributed in the camps, among the devotees. Most of the camps are well decorated with flowers and saffron flags and pictures of Lokenath. Each and every camp is connected to either the Sangha of Chakla or the Mission of Kachua. Pilgrim devotees are guided by the camps. Camp organizers give them suggestion to smooth their journey.

It was seen, the third category of pilgrim-devotees do not behave in the same manner throughout the journey. In the morning when they assemble in different Gangar Ghat they look like as festival-goer. Religious gesture is totally absent in their behaviour. Most of them smoke or take tea, not in the Gangar Ghat but also during the journey. In the first phase of their journey (3-6 P.M.) they look organized and disciplined but after the sun sets they become indisciplined and violent. Most of them do not behave like the pilgrims. Some time they teased the girls and women, walking roadside or sitting in the bus or riksha. In the mid night they take alchool, narcotics and herbs to excite themselves.

During the period of journey pilgrims-devotees follow some interdictions. Most of the interdictions have been derived from their other social and religious rituals, individual-devotee's self-created idea and advertisement of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. These interdictions can be stated below—

1. Pilgrim-devotees walk in barefoot. It is one kind of self troture, by which, they
think, their goal would be achieved. Same thing can be seen in other Hindu rituals. When a Hindu enters into a temple, he/she takes off his/her shoes or in the time of worship participants remove their shoe. In the Lokenath temple, devotee has to take off his/her shoe before entering into the admit of temple.

2. It is commonly believed that saffron colour stands for sacrifice. For that reason the wearing of saffron colour clotl is widely practised by the Hindu samnyasis (monks). Lokenath devotees in the time of pilgrimage, wear saffron colour clothe. They do not use any other coloured colthe, other than saffron. The Sangha, too, discourages devotees to wear other coloured clothes.

3. During the journey smoking is strictly prohibited. It is a self-imposed interdictions. Pilgrim-devotees never smoke in open space. A very few persons smoke in open space. A very few persons smoke, when they take rest in the camps. They express that, though, it should not taken but after smoking they wash their hands and face before touching the bamboo stick.

4. During the journey pilgrim-devotees have to keep themselves clean. Dirtiness brings unholyness and impurity. And an impure person cannot acheive his/her religious goal. Foodstuffs are chosen by qualities of purity. According to Lokenath, traditional meat, eggs, onions, garlic are not pure. So these foodstuffs should not be taken neither before the journey, nor during the period of journey. Pilgrim-devotees whenever they take food during the journey they never eat these foodstuffs. It is popular among the pilgrim-devotees that not having such kind of foodstuffs as a means of improving one’s status of purity. They eat pure foods, e.g. potato stuffs or curry with bread or fried bread or fruits. Whenever they eat something, they wash their hand and mouth, before and after the eating.

5. It is the common belief of the pilgrim-devotees that during the journey nobody should use any abusive language. Pilgrim-devotees not only avoid filthy language, but also give up uncivil haughty behaviour, evil and harmful thought. Pilgrim-devotees emphasis on three things—a. purity of thought. b. purity of behaviour, and, c. purity of food.

6. Taking of drugs and alcohol is strictly prohibited during the journey. Aged pilgrims do not take alcohol or any kind of drugs. But it has been seen that a countable section of young pilgrims, takes narcotics and alcohol during the journey. They expressed in support of their behaviour, that nothing is wrong with the taking of drugs.
and alcohol. Because it is an established convention among the devotees of Siva to take such a thing during the journey or in the time of puja (worship).

Evening and night of the day of journey

When the seen sets and pilgrims start to feel fatigue, they look for some refreshment. They sit together in different resting camps and eat different kinds of food and drink tea. Some of them tease street walkers, specially girls and women. Some time they behave like spoiled college students. As a time pass some of them become unruly. They use abusive language. It is very difficult for a viewer to conceive them as pilgrims. Around 11 o' clock some of them start to take alcohol openly. Mainly youth section of the pilgrims behave in such a manner. But the middle aged male and women pilgrims are calm and quit and organized. They do not speak loudly or tease any other person, nor they take a drop of alcohol. They criticize the illmannered youth and opine that these pilgrims are not pilgrims at all, because they do not have any religious mind and they will not achieve their goal.

Some of the pilgrims reach at the village of Chakla around 3o'cloclck, some of them at the dawn (daybreak). They enter into the temple complex, and put their bamboo sticks and water pots on the stand which is made of bamboos. They never put it on the earth. Then they take off their pots from the bamboo stick and get into the que and make themselves prepare to pour the water on the head of the image of Lokenath. When the time comes they pour one by one. In the time of water pouring they shout ; Jai Baba Lokenath'. Those who do not carry the water of Ganges, they pour coconut water.

After finishing this ritual some of the pilgrims start crawl on the floor of the big temple (nat mandir). It is called 'dandikata'. When a desire is fulfilled and believed to be so through the deity's grace some devotees undergo an austerity called "Dandi". It consists of traversing a part or whole of the way to pilgrimage through succesive prostrations, each equal to measure of one's body length and is a common sight at many other centres of pilgrimage in India, like Deoghar,; Nasik, Pilani and Puri. Dandi is one of the several forms of austerity performed by the pilgrims of all ages and sex in the day of Janmastami. Apart from the expressoin of gratitude the dandi ritual is also meant for expiation of sins.

Apart from dandi kata, there are some other rituals performed by the pilgrim-devo-
a. **Darshan (seeing)**:

Pilgrimage in Hinduism is to a great extent 'sacred sight-seeking' (Eck, 1982: 20). If one follow the pilgrim who carries *bunck* (bamboo stick) on his visits to the Lokenath temple of Chakla and ask him his reasons for visit, then he will certainly answer that he is going for pouring water and *darshan*. He enters the temple, folds his hands and looks at the image of Lokenath. He may do all kinds of other things, like ringing the temple bell, prostrating, calling out loudly 'Jai Baba Lokenath,' but the central act is that of beholding the divine image.

b. **Sparsha (touching)**:

There are two temples in the complex of Chakla. One of them is called main temple which is smaller than the other one. The bigger one is called *nat mandir*. There is an image of Lokenath Brahmachari in main temple. There are some other things like clothes, photographs, napkins, utensils which are sacred items too. They are touched and handled in highly formalized ways, because devotees regard them as sources of divine power. Contact with them is the same as contact with the supreme beings, and will aid in achieving freedom from the sorrow and endlessly recurring deaths that are the lot of the beings who inhabit this world.

But pilgrim-devotees are not allowed to touch these things directly. They may see from the far. The Sangha thinks that it is the utmost desire of the devotees to touch the image of the Lokenath. That is why they have constituted another image of Lokenath in the *nat mandir*. Pilgrim-devotees are allowed to touch the image and altar and pour water on its head.

This touching is an important ritual. Sometime it is contagious and sometime it is sacred. If a younger person touches the feet of an older person, if a devotees touches the feet of his guru, if a pilgrim touches the feet of an image of a god, this is a sign of subordination, respect and holyness. Pilgrim-devotees, in the time of pouring water on the head of Lokenath, touch the different parts of the image. It makes them delighted. It also plays an important role to uplift the status of the pilgrim-devotees. Because this contact is not an ordinary contact. It is a two way traffic. By touching pilgrim-devotees feel an intimate contact and can express his desire, on the other hand Lokenath touches them and sends his divine blessing to the devotees.
c. Collection of foot nectar:

There is a concrete tank, size is 14F/4F. Poured water is stored in this tank. Before leaving the temple devotees collect water from this tank. This water is foot nectar. They collect and bring it to their home, considering a sacred item. It is believed that by drinking this water one can gain some puṇya (merit). It is also believed by the devotees that it has healing power. One can be cured by drinking this foot nectar.

d. Manat (wishing)

Each and every pilgrim-devotee wish something before their journey. This wishing is called manat. If their manat is fulfilled they give something to their Baba Lokenath.

A part from these rituals pilgrim devotees give puja (worship) and eat prasada (food leavings).

WATER COLLECTION CENTRES

In order to introduce this new ritual the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha has built up an organizational network. In the year of 1994 the Sangha sent some devotees to collect water of Ganges to pour it on the image of Lokenath. Point should be noted here that Kachua group (Lokenath Mission) introduced this ritual just one year ago. The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha started it to popularise the ritual among the common people. And of course they had another intention. By introducing this ritual, they wanted to make their temple more popular and to attract the people’s attention. In the beginning the pilgrim-devotees used to collect the water of Ganges, only from the Bagbazar ghat of Kolkata. Later on, when the cult of Lokenath gained more popularity and people of different places started to come to the temple of Chakla, the Sangha requested devotees to collect water from other convenient ghats of Ganga. A list of collection centres is given below—

1. Babu ghat (The river of Ganges)
2. Bagbazar ghat (The river of Ganges)
3. Gangar Ghat (Naihati)
4. Gangar Ghat (Tribeni)
5. Mahatsave Tala ghat (Sodepure)
6. Maniram Pore ghat (Barrack pure)
7. Hali Sahar Ramprosader ghat (Barrack pure)
8. Ganger Ghat (The river of Ganges, Panihati),

There are two other ghats which are not Gangar Ghat—

1. Ichhamati River Ghat (Gobardanga)
2. Ichhamati River Ghat (Hasnabad).

The river is an ancient and complex and cultural symbol in Hinduism. (Veer. 1989:2). Particularly the river of Ganges is considered as the most sacred river, which is called 'Mother Ganga'. According to the myth the river of Ganges flowed in heaven until the penance and devotion of Bhagirath induced the god Shiv to command Ganga to descend; the god held her in the coils of his matted hair in order to prevent her from destroying the world in her fall. Every Hindu knows the story and Shiv is often depicted with Ganga flowing in his matted hair. It is not only a holy river, but also a holyfying river. Hindus get bath in this river to gain merit and to destroy sin. They collect the water of Ganga in their home and sprinkle the water to purify the place, body, food or anything. So, it is not difficult to understand that, why the river of Ganga is very important in the ritual context of Lokenath cult.

The organization of the cult and the priests relate the story and holiness of the river of Ganga to the cult of Lokenath, in order to stress on the divinity of Lokenath. It is believed that the water of Ganga has a purifying power. It is also believed that by bathing in the river of Ganges one can get rid of all kinds of sins. The same kind of bathing ritual can be seen among the devotees of Tarakeswar (Siva). Devotees of Tarakeswar bathe in the river of Ganges and carry water with bamboo stick to the tirtha of Tarakeswar. Point should be noted here, that the practice of the pilgrims of Tarakeswar is much more older than the water carrying ritual of Chakla-devotees.

It has been seen that pilgrim devotees of Lokenath collect water, not only from the river of Ganges, but also from the other river, i.e. the river of Ichhamati. No mythical story can be found about the river in any sacred scripture of Hindus. But still it is not thought that the water of Ichhamati river is impure. A countable number of pilgrims devotees of North 24 Parganas collect water from the river of Ichhamati and carry it with the bamboo stick. Neither organizers nor priests raise any question regading this event. On the contrary, not only they allow it but also they encourage it. Because they think that it is convenient for the pilgrim-devotees. So, it will be meaningless to raise any question of interdiction against it. Though the organizers do not
think that the water of Ichhamati is as sacred as the water of Ganges. Besides, they think that any kind of water can satisfy their Baba Lokenath, if devotees carry the water with devotion to Baba Lokenath. Another unexpressed reason is, “India’s rivers are seen as originating in heaven and flowing vertically from the celestial lake of divine water down through the atmosphere, and out on to the face of the earth. (Veer. 1989 : 2). Organizers expressed that it would be easier for the devotees of this place to collect water from the Ichhamati river. That is why they declared that if devotees like, they may bring water not only from Ichhamati River, but from any river. If they have devotion source of water is not important and it makes no difference to the cult of Lokenath.

MANGALDEEP BRATA

Mangaldeep festival is observed on the second or last Tuesday or Saturday of the month of Kartik (a month of Bengali calendar, which comprises 29 days, in English calendar from 19 October-16 November). This festival cannot be found in Bengali panjika (Bengali calendar). Panjika is a book which guide the people to observes various Hindu rituals in different times and space. In other words it is a ritual calendar. Mangaldeep ritual is not enlisted there, but some other more or less similar rituals are mentioned, viz. Yama depadan on 12 Kartick (Beng), Dipanwita parban and Dipabali, on 14 Kartik, Chaturdash Dipdan on 13 Kartick. All these rituals and bratas (vows) are performed in the dark fortnight of the month of Kartick, i.e, the first 14 days of the month. These vows and rituals are symbolic expression of human desire to eradicate the darkness of life, unhappiness, pain and misery of life. The same spirit is carried out by the Mangaldeep festival of the Sangha.

Kartik is one of the most religiously important months in the Hindu calendar. It is associated primarily with the worship of Vishnu and hence is most meaningful to Vaisnavas. Some Saivas and Saktas also participate in the month-long devotional observances associated with Kartik. Kartik vrata, a month-long brata, is performed in this month. MacGee describes the term as a religiously sanctioned votive observance, that is, a rite performed at a particular time with a particular desire in mind. (1987 : 17. cited by Tracy Pintchman. 2003 :329). In West Bengal the month of Kartik starts with a very popular Bengali vow, called Bhai Fonta and ends with the worship of Kartik. The merits of Kartik are mentioned in sections of the Skanda and
Padma Purans that both go by the name “Kartik Mahatmya” (glorification of Kartik). The two Kartik Mahatmya are not exactly the same, but they do share a good deal of content. Some portions of Kartik Mahatmya of the Skanda Purana are same or nearly same with the Padma Purana. Both versions of the Kartik Mahatmya includes passages glorifying Kartik, explanation of its religious importance, descriptions of ritual practices that should be undertaken during the month of Kartik. (ibid).

In 1880s, considering the religious importance of the month of Kartik, devotees of Lokenath started observing a new kind of ritual in this month, called Mangaldeep Prajjalan Utsav, in Baradi of Decca (Bangladesh). But it was confind within members of Baradi Ashrama and some of the local village folk. The Sangha follows the tradition of Baradi. They arrange a one-day-festival to observe the ritual in the second or last Tuesday or Saturday of the month of Kartik. In Baradi Ashrama Mangaldeep festivals was observed for one week. But the Sangha has converted this one-week ritual into a single day festival. And the date is determind by the organizers on the basis of discussion. This very ritual is observed only by the Lokenath devotees, because it is exclusively associated with the cult of Lokenath. It shows that this ritual is out of the ambit of Hindu ritual calendar which fixes up every religious ritual on the fixed dates. It can be said that the introduction of this new ritual is a fundamental contribution to the Hindu world. Organizers do hope that sooner or later, this new ritual will take place in the page of Bengali panjika (calendar).

Meaning and nature

The term ‘Mangaldeep’ is composed of two words ‘mangal’ (well-being, weal, welfare, good) and ‘deep’ (lamp). Who does light the lamp and for whom? The answer is devotees of Lokenath light the lamp and they perform this ritual for the welfare of themselves or for the well-being of their relatives, or both or for the welfare of society. It is found that none of the devotees takes part in this ritual for social welfare. Most of the devotees (74%) perform this for the well-being of their relatives and 26% for the welfare of themselves. Only 2000 devotees can take part in the ritual, on the basis of advance booking. Most of the participants (85%) are female. It shows that it is a female-dominated ritual. One can say that it is a common characteristics of Bengalee women, that very often they sacrifice their whole life to make the other people happy. Mangaldeep Brata is a glimpse of the life of Bengalee women.
Bengalee males do not take part in brata (vow). Usually married women take part in various kinds of Bengali vows. (Chakraborty. 1970, Beng 1377 : 84). Most of these vows have been developed around folk or scriptural deities. In these vows, not the deities, but the rituals are important. (Ibid). Mangaldeep brata follows the traditional ritual dominated vows, as well as, it makes a breach from them. 15% of the participants of Mangaldeep Brata are male; which is unusual to the tradition of Bengali Brata. The comment of the organizers is clear. They say that whoever like to take part in this festival the Sangha will not refrain them. They do not want to give importance on tradition or scriptural sanction. The Sangha does not value theology highly, since they does not consider knowledge as an intellectual asset, but rather have the practical aim of realizing Baba Lokenath’s grace through the transformation of the body and mind.

In every Bengali vow participants have to follow some ritualistic principles, which are called ‘paloni’. This ‘paloni’ is carried out by the tradition. Through ‘paloni’, participants practice continence, which is the central theme of ‘paloni’. Lokenath-devotees start to prepare themselves on the day before the date of festival. Food restrictions figure prominently in this votive observance. This vow entails abstention from certain types of food. Non-vegetarian devotees avoid, non-vegetarian food and start to take ‘Sattvik’ or pure food to make their body and mind pure. Lokenath had never taken non-vegetarian food in his life time. Because he was a naisthik Brahmin. “Vegetarianism is usually the sign of a self-proclaimed high status, since the Brahmanic view considers consuming meat impure.” (Michaels. 2005 : 183). It is thought that human body and mind are impure, and when make himself pure by avoiding something to eat or something to do. In other words he/she has to follow some interdictions or taboos. By not eating or not doing some kind of activities (e.g. not to eat meat or drink alcohole, or not use any filthy language, or not to hurt anybody or not to cheat or harm anybody etc.) one can make himself/herself pure. They do not have sex on the day before Mangaldeep. After practising these for a very short period they feel that they are prepared for worshiping their deity or for performing a particular sacred ritual.

This period refers to the stage of uncertainty, (i.e. rite of passage.) By the term uncertainty is meant the very common type of situation where there is a strong emotional investment in the success of certain human endeavors, where energy and skill
undoubtedly count for much, but where unknown and/or uncontrolable factors may and often do intervene to upset any ‘reasonable’ balance between action and success. (Parsons. 1964 : 165), This period can be depicted as the period of transition. Those are practised universally. They consecrate the crises and marginal situations in individual and collective life. According to Hertz, these rituals move the persons in one question, over a limen, a threshold, so that they are in a condition that society can know and cope with. (The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions, ed. I. Bowker, 1997 : 818).

One of the main observances of Mangaldeep vow is ritual bathing before sunrise in a river or other publicly accessible body of water. The goal for most Mangaldeep bathers is the river of Ganges. The river of Ganges is considered a goddess and is held to be a holy river, eternally pure and purifying. On the day of Mangaldeep devotees get up early in the morning and bathe in fresh water and put on clean or new clothe. They keep fasting for the whole day. Though, there is no strict restriction about drinking water, tea and smoking, but most of the devotees do not take these. A very few make exception. But after having these they wash their mouth and hands. Through these continence devotees prepare themselves for Mangaldeep brata. A day before the festival devotees have to register their name in the counter of Chakla Mandir, by buying ticket (Rs. 51/-). As soon as possible they buy their ticket, because only 2000 people are allowed to take part in Mangaldeep brata in Chakla temple. Members of the Lokeanth organization enjoy some privileges. They can buy the same ticket by paying Rs. 40 only.

At 4 pm volunteers of the Sangha cordon the field (which is situated in front the nat mandir) Where the vow is to be performed. Volunteers request the participants to form a queue. After that devotees form a long queue and wait for the next instruction of the volunteers. Participants wear a batch on their cloth which indicates that they are registered and allowed to take part in the vow. When the watch strikes 4.30, volunteers help the participants to sit in the particular place. Asana (seat) must be brought by the devotees. When devotees take their seat, volunteers give them two inches clay lamp (matir pradip), a slender wick and same clarified butter (ghee). They are also given an incense-burner which contains of coconut-coir and resin. At 5 pm secretary/president of the Sangha gets up on the south-east corner of the main temple. In order to inaugurate the festival he lights up a big bruss lamp on the stage. After
that the chief priest gives instruction to the devotees to light up their own lamp and incense-burner. Two or three priests start to read ‘Chandi’ (chandi-path). After receiving the instruction of the chief-priest, devotees wave their lamp clock-wise. They wave it until the chandipata is finished. It is called ‘arati’. The time span of ‘arati’ is 30 minutes. After finishing the arati volunteers give them habishanya [a special food/sunned rice boiled Atap Chal (rice obtained by sunning paddy and not by boiling it)], boiled green banana and potato with some milk and sweet. Then participants break their fasting by having these food. Span of this ritual is one hour and fifteen minutes.

Mangaldeep Prajjalan is not a puja. “The daily or regular worship of one or several deities through invocations, offers of gifts, and ritual farewell is called puja.” (Michads. 2005 : 241) Puja is performed by invoking, receiving and treating ‘God’ as a royal guest, provided with 16 attendances (upacara) reverberating on the doctrine of pantheism. (Samaddar. 1998 : 59). Through a puja the pious person seeks contact with gods; he might call attention to himself with gifts and invocations to obtain their favour. In sanskritic Hinduism puja is led by a brahmin priest. Brahmin priest plays an intermediary between deity and devotees or common laity. In Mangaldeep festival, there is no room for priest. Participants can perform their ritual without any intervention of priest. They express their desire and demand the favor of nature. In puja there is no question of demand, but absolute surrender to the god is required. Abanindranath Tagore points out that priest and mantras are not relevant in Bengalee brata (vow), and participants just express their desire to the power of nature. (1976 : 6). In Mangaldeep brata participants express their desire which is related with the welfare of their relatives. They perform the ritual silently, in their own language. It is very simple, when they light up their lamp they do not have to recite any textual mantras. So this ritual act can be depicted as a vow, not puja. Abanindranath Tagore defines it this way, vow is an act which wishes something, in society (1976 : 1).

Tagore classifies Bengalee vows in two groups—1. Sastriya Brata (vows which are regulated by brahmanical sacred scripture) and Josit Brata (which are pre-paranic and mixed vow). Josit Brata or Mayali Brata can be classified in two gorups—Kumari Brata and Nari Brata (1976 : 5). Sastria Brata or scriptural vows are very close to the puja (worship). This brata has two parts—Samanya Kanda and Brato Katha. In Samanaya Kanda Vedic rituals like sacred purification (achmon), recital of benedictory
incantation (swastibachan), ritual inauguration (karmarambha), solemn vow for worship (sankalpa), installation of sacred water vessel (ghatasthapan), purification of cow's five articles (panchagabya), evil-eradicating incantation (shantimantra), and purification of the moral body (bhutashuddhi) etc., are performed by the Brahmin priest. Ritualistic offerings to the Brahmins, both in cash and kind (dakshina and dan respectively), are important and compulsory parts of sastric brata. (Tagore, 1976 : 5). In this brata brahmin priests play a major role to conduct the whole ritual process. Mangaldeep brata mostly follows the line of scriptural vows of traditional Hinduism. The brata is a new one to the world of Hinduism, but its theme is old. However, it is armed with modern technologies, viz., the Sangha uses the electronic and print media to popularise the vow and the festival.

By organizing the festival Sangha does two things—

Firstly, It helps to prove that only the Lokeanth Sevashram Sangha keeps the continuity of Lokenath tradition of Baradi. It is also related to their claim that only the members of the Sangha are the true follower of Lokenath Brahmachari. In India, tradition has an important place in people's mind. It is said that traditional things and ideas are easily accepted by all. Most of the religious and social organization aim to prove that they are older than the others and they have a long tradition. And in this way tries to sanctify themselves and establish their legitimacy and superiority over other Lokenath organizations.

Secondly, in a modern pluralistic society, no tradition can remain purely orthodox. They are constantly changing. Conflicts are seen in various ideas and values. New technologies and scientific inventions force to change the older orthodox ideas. These have resulted in innovations and experimentation in terms of projecting the basic beliefs of the religious organization to attract a larger following for itself.

PIGLRM-DEVOTEES: TREND AND FEATURES

The core component of Lokenath world is devotees and their devotion. A deity cannot be a deity if it is not recognized by the members of society. In other words, any discussion in study about a deity and its sacred place or tirtha never be complete without studying of pilgrim-devotees, because they (pilgrim-devotees) are one of the vital aspects. “For these are the people who largely maintain its religious tradition and economic stability and ultimately make such centre popular.” (Chakraborty, P.,
1984:94). In most of the studies on modern gurus, (Brent P. 1973; Babb, L.A; 1987; Mehta, U. 1993; Chakraborty, R. 2002) have given emphasis on the gurus or religious leaders, but they did not focus on the pilgrim-devotees. Dr. P. Chakraborty correctly points out, “In most of the published literature on gurus or religious leaders are portrayed as the value - transmitters, but there seems to be little discussion about the value-receptors.” (1984:94). One of the aims of the present study is to study the features of pilgrim-devotees of Lokenath of Chakla. This chapter will deal with some questions (given below) to satisfy the aim of the present study. These questions are —
(a) what types of pilgrims come to Chakla?
(b) which sections (caste and classes) of the society are attracted by its pervasive influence?
(c) For what purposes do pilgrim-devotees undertake pilgrimage?

As a tirtha (place of pilgrimage) the village of Chakla attracts masses of the people from diverse areas, castes and classes and religions. It is a very recent phenomenon. Devotees have been visiting this place for more than 20 years (from around mid eighties of 20th century). Within this very short period the cult of Lokenath and Chakla as a tirtha have gained popularity. On an average from 500 to 1000 devotees visit this place everyday. But on Saturday, Sunday and on public holidays the number increases into 3 to 5 thousands. Two/three lakhs devotees congregate here in Tirodhandivas (day of departure, 19th Jaistha (Beng) or around 3 June.); Janmastami (Birthday of Krishna, a popular Hindu deity) and 20000 to 30000 in Mangaldeep Festival.

A very few scholars have done research on the value-receptors or pilgrims, e.g. E. Alan Morinis “Pilgrimage in the Hindu tradition; A case study of West Bengal” (1984); Prafulla Chakraborti’s “Social profile of Tarakeswar: study of a pilgrim town in West Bengal”, (1984). In order to analyse the pilgrims behaviour they have collected data from sample survey of pilgrims. Inherent disadvantage of this techniques is “the ever present possibility of obtaining a nonrepresentative sample.” (Thomlinson, R. 1965:55-56). To overcome this difficulty, Thomlinson has advised a popular substitute technique. “A popular substitute for pure random sampling is selection at regular interval (say, every fourteenth name from a city directory or every ninth dwelling unit along a street) which goes by the name of systematic sampling. (Thomlinson. 1965:56). Present study follows the random sampling technique to collect data of pilgrim devotees. But the absence of well defined sampling frame the selection procedure adopted
for sampling the pilgrims was not strictly random. Dr. P. Chakraborty faced the same problem in his study (1984) and he noted that “.....the tests being carried on to get an idea about the association of characters may not be in strict conformity with theory. However the results from the tests may be taken as an indication of the nature of association.” (1984:99).

The technique which was adopted in Chakraborty’s work (1984) is followed by the present researcher. In order to get a clear understanding about pilgrim devotees, the survey has been done on three different occasions — (i) maximum attendance (Tirodhandivas, Janmastami Mangaldeep), (ii) minimum attendance (week days Monday-Friday) and (iii) the period in between (Saturday, Sunday and any public holidays). Pilgrims have been classified by their sex, age, caste, class. Samples are divided into three different age groups - (a) young (14yr. - 18year), (b) Adult (19-59 yrs.) (c) old (above 60 yrs.). There are three caste groups — upper, middle and lower and three classes — upper income group, middle income group and lower income group. Beside that urban rural locations of the pilgrims have also been observed in the present work.

In order to get an idea about the trend and types of pilgrim devotees, data collected from a sample of 147 pilgrims at different points of time and the survey was spread over a period of two years (2007-08).

The present researcher thought that caste may have some influence on the purpose of visit. To investigate this point, castes of sample pilgrim-devotees have been examined by classifying them into three broad groups—upper, middle and low. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Kayastha and Baidya are comprised in so called high castes; and S.T., S.C.and O.B.C. are considered as so called low castes. All of these castes of the samples(127) in between these two categories are treated as the so called middle. This classification follows the works of Chakraborty (1984), Sur (2008) and Kundu (2008). Considering the monthly income samples are divided into three groups—upper income groups (U.I.G) middle income group (M.I.G) and lower income group (L.I.G). Education and urban-rural locations of the pilgrim-devotees have also been observed in the work.
Table-1 shows the four different types of pilgrims and their area of origin. Table-1 shows a classification of pilgrim-devotees on the basis of their attendance in the Chakla temple. It also shows their area of origin. According to this classification pilgrim-devotees are divided into four groups - (1) some pilgrim-devotees visit this place regularly, minimum once in a month. (2) some of them attend the *Tirodhandivas* (death ceremony); (3) some turn up on the occasion of Janmastami and (4) some visit Chakla to join the Mangaldeep festival. Table-1 shows that 68.70% of the visitors are from North 24 parganas and 40.88% from Kolkata. The rest of the devotees came from Purulia, Hooghly, West Midnapore, Burdwan and Howrah. It shows a distinct sub-regional spread of Lokenath cult since its pilgrims’ field extends to only eight out of nineteen districts of West Bengal. It has been found that the festival of Tirodhan Divas is the most popular among the pilgrim-devotees.

### Purpose of Pilgrimage

Purposes of pilgrimage of Lokenath devotees are numerous. Pilgrims-devotees visit...
the village of Chakla for different purposes. These purposes can be classified into three categories (a) Spiritual (b) Material and (c) Recreational.

(a) Spiritual Purpose 10.88% — This category refers to such a desire which bears no material motive. When a pilgrim visits *tirtha* for mental peace, spiritual joy and love or ecstasy, satisfaction, or for gaining merit or removal of sin, his or her purpose would be called spiritual purposes. In this category, pilgrims are directed by emotional experience, religious ideas and not by the earthly gains, welfare of society etc.

(b) Material Purposes 76.85% — This category includes such desires which involve the therapeutic, socio-cultural, economic and related aspects of life. The therapeutic purpose is concerned with the health related problems, viz. curing illness, improving health, infertility, and so on. Devotees think that giving *puja*, taking *prasada* and *santibari* and eating or keeping the soil of Baba’s *vita* can cure them from all sorts of diseases and make them healthy and strong. The socio-cultural purpose refers to the social and psychological needs of the devotees’ life. It involves some rituals, rites and deties, viz, *upanayana, annaprasana, gari-puja* etc. A part from these purposes involving successful examination, restoration of family peace, marriage, parenthood, safe delivery, winning is legal fight, knowing where abouts of missing person etc. have all been included in these category. The economic purpose comprises — success in business, getting an employment, service promotion, settlement of disputes concerning property, and so on. Some pilgrims visit this place for some other purposes which are not included in the previous sub categories. Point should be noted here that these four sub categories of motives are completly out of spiritual and religious world. On the contrary they do have some spiritual contents. Because devotees think that the supernatural power of Baba Lokenath can protect their mundane interests.

(c) Recreational Purposes (12.24%) — A considerable section of devotees visit this place neither for spiritual nor for material interests, but for recreation. They are directed by fun, desire for change, curiosity or similar other motives. It can be called recreational purpose. To them, the deity or the sacred place represents nothing more than a tourist spot.

There are three diagrams (I, II and III) in this chapter, show that the sex and age play an important role to determine the purpose of pilgrimage. Diagram-1 shows that spiritual need of the female pilgrims is 33% which is 3.3% higherer than male pilgrims. The economic need of the male pilgrims is 22% which is 10% more than female pilgrims.
Demographic Characteristics

Age is an important factor related to differential value systems. Its impact can be found on the nature of religious expectations also. Similarly, sex also plays an important role because of the difference in the style of life, mental make-up, ideologies, and so on between the males and the females. In order to present a meaningful picture of the purpose of visit of Lokenath pilgrims, these two demographic traits have been considered relevant and crucial; and data are presented in several diagrams.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSES</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>% of Col. 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8.82</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>11.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8.82</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>7.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio Cultural</td>
<td>8.82</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>7.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>23.52</td>
<td>24.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>8.82</td>
<td>14.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Sample : 150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Non-Respondent : 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total = 147</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diagram 1: Male & Female
Diagram-1 shows that compared to male pilgrims the female pilgrims was more for the purpose of spiritual benefit. While the percentage of male pilgrim-devotees in the spiritual, material and recreational categories are 9.80, 77 and 14.70 respectively, the corresponding figures for the female pilgrim-devotees are 10.88, 76.85 and 12.24 percents, respectively.

This difference in the nature of expectation tends to indicate the differential role played by the two sexes in the households.

For further analysis the age-categories of male and female have been examined. Diagrams 2 and 3 show the results. The diagrams indicate that the younger pilgrim-devotees are particularly motivated by the socio-cultural and recreational urge, the adults, by the material needs comprising therapeutic, socio-cultural and economic,
whereas the older pilgrims are relatively more for the spiritual necessity. When the two diagrams are compared with each other it becomes clear that all the three female age-groups behaved differently from those of male. For example, while the majority (53.31%) of the female pilgrim-devotees belonging to the adult age-group stated their purpose as material needs of (37.76%) socio-cultural therapeutic and economic nature, the corresponding percentage for the male adult pilgrim-devotees have shown their maximum interest in material purpose (53.90%) and in spiritual purpose (4.90%). The younger age-group of male pilgrim-devotees are relatively highly concerned (94.44%) with recreational, socio-cultural and economic problems, whereas, the corresponding figure for female youngers is higher, i.e., 100 percent. None of them reported to have come with a spiritual motive.

As many as 26.66% old male pilgrim-devotees have come to Chakla for the fulfilment of their spiritualistic needs and 20% for therapeutic need. The corresponding proportion of the old female pilgrim-devotees are 7.69% for spiritual purpose and 92.30% for materialistic needs. Among the old male pilgrim-devotees, the relative incidence of visits for material purpose is less and spiritual purpose is more compared to the old female pilgrim-devotees. Thus the data suggest that the purpose of visit to a religious centre differs by age and sex of the participants.

Cultural Characteristics of pilgrim-devotees

Does the level of education have any relationship with the purpose of pilgrimage? The simple hypothesis that the higher the level of education, the lower the proportion of pilgrims seeking divine grace for solving material needs, can be examined through this. This is based on the assumption that education increases rationality and power of self confidence and gradually neutralizes the habit of depending on fate.
### TABLE - 3

**PURPOSE AND EDUCATION / RURAL-URBAN LOCATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>ILLITERATE</th>
<th>LITERATE (PRIMARY)</th>
<th>SECONDARY, H.S.</th>
<th>B.A. / B.SC./ B.COM</th>
<th>P.G. / Ph.D.</th>
<th>NO. OF SAMPLE</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>TOTAL % OF TOTAL COL. 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.28 (3)</td>
<td>14.28 (3)</td>
<td>9.52 (2)</td>
<td>19.04 (4)</td>
<td>14.28 (3)</td>
<td>19.04 (4)</td>
<td>9.52 (2)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Cultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.00 (20)</td>
<td>17.50 (7)</td>
<td>15.00 (6)</td>
<td>7.50 (3)</td>
<td>5.00 (2)</td>
<td>2.50 (1)</td>
<td>2.50 (1)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.58 (7)</td>
<td>2.94 (1)</td>
<td>17.64 (6)</td>
<td>8.82 (3)</td>
<td>14.70 (5)</td>
<td>11.76 (4)</td>
<td>5.82 (2)</td>
<td>17.64 (6)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.11 (2)</td>
<td>16.66 (3)</td>
<td>22.22 (4)</td>
<td>11.11 (2)</td>
<td>16.66 (3)</td>
<td>11.11 (2)</td>
<td>5.55 (1)</td>
<td>11.11 (2)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.25 (1)</td>
<td>12.5 (2)</td>
<td>6.25 (1)</td>
<td>12.5 (2)</td>
<td>18.75 (3)</td>
<td>12.5 (2)</td>
<td>25.00 (4)</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.55 (1)</td>
<td>11.11 (2)</td>
<td>16.66 (3)</td>
<td>5.55 (1)</td>
<td>38.88 (7)</td>
<td>22.22 (4)</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total No. of Sample** : 150  
**No. of Non-Respondent** : 3  
**Total** = 147
Table - 3 shows that there exists a distinct association between the two variables. The percentage of pilgrim-devotees coming for purposes related to material life decreases with the increase in the level of education. The reverse relationship appears in the case of those having low education, or none. While the illiterate pilgrim-devotees 2.63% visit for spiritual purpose, the corresponding figures for the literate (primary), secondary / H.S., B.A. / B.Sc / B.Com and P. G. / Ph.D. are 8.57%, 11.62%, 16.66%, and 50% respectively.

The mobility of individuals possibly increases with the increase of education. This is borne out by the fact that compared to pilgrims having low education, the percentage of higher educated pilgrim-devotees is higher in the purpose category, recreation. So far as the visit for deriving emotional satisfaction, spiritual upliftment, solace or similar spiritual desires are concerned, the sample pilgrims do not show any difference by the level of education. Therefore, education has got some roles in influencing the motive of pilgrims but not to the extent of changing every kind of it.

The percentage of pilgrims coming for purposes related to the aspiration for the fulfilment of some material interest decreases with the increase in the level of education of the pilgrims. The percentage increases with the decreases the level of education of the pilgrims. People with higher levels of education came for the fulfilment of some spiritual need whereas people at the lower levels of education show relatively great interest in mundane interest. Therefore, education plays a crucial roles in influencing the motive of pilgrim-devotees.
### Purpose of Visit (Class & Caste)

#### Table - 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Lower Income Group (LIG)</th>
<th>Middle Income Group (MIG)</th>
<th>Higher Income Group (HIG)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Upto Rs. 3,000/-)</td>
<td>(Rs. 3,001/- to Rs. 6,000/-)</td>
<td>(Above Rs. 6,000/-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>High Caste</td>
<td>Middle Caste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.52 (2)</td>
<td>14.28 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Cultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27.50 (11)</td>
<td>52.50 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.94 (1)</td>
<td>17.64 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.55 (1)</td>
<td>16.66 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.25 (1)</td>
<td>12.5 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.55 (1)</td>
<td>22.22 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total No. of Sample**: 150  
**No. of Non-Respondent**: 3  
**Total**: 147

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>127</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>127</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>147</strong></td>
<td><strong>147</strong></td>
<td><strong>147</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lokenath Brahmachari is a guru of all castes. Both sections of people of high and low caste, visit the pilgrim-centre of Chakla. He is very popular among the low castes, as well as among the upper castes. Major section (53.54%) of pilgrims is from low caste people and a considerable section (38.58%) is of High castes. Table - 4 shows that the claim of the Sangha is correct and legitimate i.e. people of all castes turn up their temple. At the same time they claim that both rich and poor people are attracted by divinity of Lokenath. Table - 4 does not show that. Contrary to the claim of the Sangha mainly poor people (Low income group / LIG) visit the village of Chakla. Their percentage is 61.22% and 22.44% and 16.32% belong to MIG and HIG respectively. It should be pointed out here, that both income groups are mixed group. Both comprise upper caste and lower caste. So castes cannot be identified with any income group. From the class character of the pilgrim-devotees is subaltern. From this finding on can be concluded that there is a close relationship with the poverty and the cult of Lokenath. In the state of economic crisis people are easily attracted by the religio-mystical cult of Lokenath Brahmachari. Prof. Ramakanta Chakraborty correctly points out that poverty nourishes spiritualism. (2002:39).

Participation of Muslim Community

Another important aspect is participation of the Muslims in the cult of Lokenath. It was earlier that the Sangha propagates some sort of syncretism and liberal ideas of Lokenath Brahmachari. The Sangha never closes its doors to the so called age old enemy of Hinduism, i.e. Islam. On the contrary, it allows and invites the people belonging to the other religions. This kind of liberalism helped the Sangha to gain a strong foothold in the vicinity of the Chakla village. a number of people belonging to the Muslim community, was attracted by the activities of the Sangha. Frequently they visit the village of Chakla, for various purposes. Present research reveals that the members of the Muslim community visit this place not only for business purposes, but also for material, recreational and also for spiritual purpose. They take prasada, drink santibari, observe arati. They do not hesitate to sit in the varanda of the temple, share their views with the other devotees. But what do the Hindu devotees think of the Muslim’s participation in the cult of Lokenath? Most of the Hindu devotees do not consider it as an abnormal phenomenon. Because, they think that Lokenath did not make any difference between the Hindus and the Muslims. One of the devotees put the matter effectively with a metaphor. “Sand may be dirt on the floor of the
kitchen or bedroom of your house but not on the sea beach." Hindu devotees do not feel uncomfortable to take prasada in the same room or same table. But, at the same time, they do not allow any one of the Muslim community to enter into their kitchen. In a peculiar manner they solve this paradox. They expressed that nothing is impure in the place of Baba Lokenath. Because, the temple of Chakla has divine power to convert everything into pure.
CASE STUDIES

As the present investigator attempted to enter the inner world of the devotees of Lokenath reflecting on their life histories, he took some cases of individuals for deeper understanding of the nature of their devotion. Some of them are of urban society and some are of rural society. Most of them belong to the subaltum section of the society and to the so called low caste. They expressed their deep concern and overwhelming emotion to the cult of Lokenath. These cases represent two different classes and religious communities, i.e., Hindu and Muslim.

Case-1

Barin Das, a 49 year old man and namasudra by caste who works in the eastern railway as a lower division clerk. He is a permanent inhabitent of Kalighat of Kolkata. In his word a pacca ghati. Before 1990s he knew nothing about Lokenath Brahmachari. He came to know about Lokenath from Mr. Saha, next door neighbour. Mr. Saha would observe the festival of 18 Jaistha, the day of disapperence of Lokenath, a popular festival among the Lokenath devotees. Barin Das was invited to take part in puja and other rituals. He joined them and took part in different activities. After that, gradually he became an utmost devotee of Lokenath. It was 1990-91. Since then he has been carring out his journey to the Lokenath temple of Chakla. In Mr. Saha’s house, he noticed that in the puja of Lokenath no brahmin priest is required at all. Everything is very simple and unostentatious. There is no strict rituals and definite sacred hymn. It attracted him. These non-ornamentalism and simplicity of Lomenath worship made him highly impressed. It was the first time he saw the picture of Lokenath and heard Baba’s namgan (name chanting). The participation in such a religious activity was very crucial for both Barin Das and his daughter. Within a very short period her daughter became a devotee of Baba Lokenath. She started Lokenath puja in his own residence regularly.

One year later, Barin Das started to keep a photograph of Lokenath with his person and place an image of Lokenath in the site where his idols and sacred symbols are preserved. And arranged regular puja of Lokenath. Barin Das mentioned two important events which took place in 1991 (before starting worship of Lokenath in his house). He is a vaisnav by faith in his family tradition. Gopal (child Krishna) is worshipped in his home regularly. Once, a golden ornament of Gopal was lost. Then his daughters made a manat (a promise to offer a particular sacrifice to Lokenath on fulfilment of the prayer) regarding the trace out the ornament of Gopal. They made their vow not in the temple but in their own home. According to Barin Das, the manat did a miracle. Just after 2/3 days, suddenly, they found it under the
bed. The other incident was not less interesting. Barin Das had a tenant in his house's ground floor. That person had been staying there for a long time and he did not want to leave that room. For that reason Barin Das was forced to quarrel with his tenant. It made him unhappy and disturbed his normal life. Again he called Lokenath from the core of his heart. And finally, in his word, “Baba Lokenath rescued me from the sea of danger.” After these incidents Barin Das came to understand that Lokenath is the saviour of mankind. Besides, he stated another incident of the kindness of Lokenath Brahmachari. It was 2002. Barin Das almost finished the arrangement of marriage of his daughter. But, suddenly, some problems related to the marriage appeared. The problem was related to the amount of dowry. Henceforth, Barin Das invoked the name of Lokenath Das was cent percent convinced that if anybody invokes Lokenath from the core of his heart. Lokenath responds to his call.

Barin Das and his family members invoked him, Lokenath responded through eradicating his (Das) hindarenes and problems of his daughter’s marriage. At present the problem is solved. Everything is settled. His daughter’s husband (son-in-law) is a nice person and his family is a good family.

In early 1990s Barin Das came to know about Lokenath and his birth place from newspaper advertisement of the Sangha and feature film. And then from his neighbour. After the two incidents he felt a great attraction to Lokenath. He is a handicapped by missing a leg for an street accident. He visited the village of Chakla more than 10 times. Whenever he visite that place he received an immense contentment from there. It is an unique experience to him. In every visit he donated Rs. 150/- to the fund of the Sangha. Due to his physical problem he is unable to visit the village of Chakla in every occasion. Before seeing Lokenath Baba it was very much painful for him, but now it is relaxed. Because, for him, Baba is always with him. Everyday he worships the image of Lokenath in his home.

Barin Das knows very well that the food which is distributed in the bhoga distributing centre at Chakla, is cooked by the Muslims and also distributed by the Muslims. Although he never hesitates to take prasada from the centre of the temple. And he never feels uneasy or never considers the food is impure. To him everybody is same and equal in the birth place of Lokenath. Lokenath never discriminated his devotees on the basis of their caste and religion. He noticed that the articles offered in the puja of Lokenath are sold mostly by the Muslims. Das purchased flower, sainted sticks, candles, sugar candy and other articles of puja from them without any stringency or uneasiness. At the same time he mentioned that other than this place he would not eat any kind of food cooked by the Muslims. Because, to him, the
food which is cooked by the Muslims is not pure. In the birth place of Lokenath everything is pure. But that is not true in case of other places. "Sand is the dirt in the bedroom, but not in the sea-beach."

Barin Das noticed that visitors collect soil of Baba’s bhita (the place or ground on which Lokenath’s dwelling house rests) from a rectangular reservoir with walls made of concrete, situated at the centre of the wide verandah on the southern part of the temple. Considering its medicinal value and divine power they (devotees) collect it in a plastic or paper packet and keep it with their person or place the packet in the site where their idols or their sacred symbols are preserved. Some of them even eat it or rub it on the forehead. Barin Das never collected the soil from there. Because soil can not work. It is nothing but a superstition. But at the same time he collected Charanamrita (the water which the feet of the idol of Lokenath is washed and is considered as nectar) in a big plastic container for his own-family and others. He does not find any contradiction between them. Because he thinks that belief is much more important than logic. If one has belief in the power of Lokenath, Lokenath will solve his problem. Lokenath is omnipresent. Das ever feels the presence of Lokenath. And for that reason his life has become smooth and peaceful.

Case-2

Md. Nasim was a fifty two year old man of Raikhala of Chakla Panchayat. His monthly income was around 6000. By faith he is a Muslim. He also revealed his sect identity, i.e. Kadria-chistia sect. He is a disciple of Sha Badsha Fakir. In his early life he was an agricultural labour. Now he has opened a tea-stall. From the very beginning of the construction of the Lokenath temple of Chakla, Nasim took part as an activist. He considered Lokenath a pious person who worked for mankind. To him Lokenath ignored any kind of difference between Hindus and Muslims. When he first saw the picture of Lokenath he felt that Lokenath was very much known to him. The piece of land where the temple of Lokenath is situated, earlier it was a papaya field. After the construction of the temple the nature of that land was changed, due to the divine power of Lokenath. Now it is more peaceful, more pleasant. A popular hearsay in this area is the extant of a Muslim fakir or pious person called Lokeman Gazi who lived here, a long time ago. Nasim, at first thought that Lokeman Gazi and Lokenath Brahmachari are same person. Later on, he understood that it was a great mistake. And he came to know that Lokenath is completely different from the other religious figure or personality. He is a sui generis entity. Uttering this he became imotional and his throat became choked. Then he started singing about Hari. The central idea of his song was the oneness of
the universe. There is no difference between Bhagwan and Allah. Similarly there is no difference between Lokenath and Lokeman Gazi. Only ignorant persons differentiate them wrongfully. To the wise man this differentiation is artificial.

During the month of *Ramadan* [popularly known as *Ramzan*; in this month, during daylight hours complete fasting or *sium* (popularly known as *Roza*) is practiced by the Mussalmans]. Nasim does not *keep* fasting or *Roza*. For him it depends on the individuals. Everybody has full right to determine the way to reach at the divine power. He thinks that if anybody likes, he may keeps fasting or *Roza*, but that is not the correct way to achieve the religious goal. This ritual makes people weak; and hinders to work for a long time. Most of the people are very poor. They are unable to feed their family properly. So, so many people are forced to keep fasting. Therefore no use of such a ritual like *Roza*. He would visit Lokenath temple during the month of Ramzan and take *prasada* with as much devotion and faith as the Hindus have. At present he is unable to visit the temple frequently. But that does not mean that his devotion to the Lokenath, has become weak.

To him, Lokenath is not only for Hindus but also for the Muslims. If anybody visits this place Baba never refuses him. Both the communities the Hindus and the Muslims are happy to live together for the grace of Baba.

Formation of the Sangha and construction of the temple brought a lot of changes to the rural life of Chakla. Md. Nasim expressed that before the construction of the temple of Lokenath, he was an agricultural labour. He said “There was not a single teastall in the Chakla road side near the market of Burirhat. In the second half of 1980s, the number of devotees of Lokenath was increasing rapidly. Most of the devotees used Chakla road which leads to Chakla temple. I told myself that I must do something which would be helpful for the devotees. Then I fixed up a tea stall in *Uttar Mati Kumra More*, near Burirhat. I also made three beanches which are made of bamboo sticks for the devotees. Devotees and local people take rest here and drink tea and water. Earlier my shop was made of bamboo sticks and its roof was made of *tile*. Now the sale has been increased. For that reason, I have purchased another piece of land behind my shop. Besides, I have built up a *pakka ghar* (concrete building) instead of *Kaccha ghar* (mud house or bamboo house). All these are the manifestation of divine grace of Lokenath Baba.”

**Case-3**

Kartik Debnath by faith a Hindu, and by profession a street hawker. He is born and brought up in Kolkata. His father was a clar in *Yugantar*, a famous Bengali daily newspaper. But
due to the lock-out in *Yugantar* Kartik's father lost his job. It pushed them into a miserable condition. Consequently, Kartik had to stop his study after madhyamick (Class X) examination. It was late eighties of 20th century, Kartik watched a film on Baba Lokenath. This film gave him immense impetus to visit the village of Chakla, the birthplace of Lokenath. He and his friends decided to visit there. Consecutively six years he collected water from Bagbazar Ghat and carried it with bamboo stick to Chakla temple to pour the water on the image of Lokenath Baba. In his word, "It was my first visit. When I reached there I got a great relief from the pain and misery of my daily life. First of all, my severe neck-pain had gone. I came back from the village of Chakla with full of peace and satisfaction in my mind. Within few months two major problems of my life were solved. Firstly, I got success in my business which provided a financial stability to my family. Secondly, I had my son.

"All these happened to my life due to the divine grace of Lokenath. Very often, I dream of him. I do not understand that why Baba Lokenath is so mercyful and why does he show his *Koruna* to me? Few years back I always thought that I am alone. But, at present my mind has totally changed. I never feel that I am alone. Because, Baba is always with me."

"At present, I am very busy for my business. That is why I can not go to Chakla. My friends and me put up racks where pilgrims can keep their bamboo sticks and organize water distributing camps in different points. We always look after the devotees and pilgrims. We also take care for the women and old persons."

"I do not have time to worship Lokenath. Because I know he is always with me. He always looks after my family. If anybody calls him sincerely, Baba responds him. When my father passed away, I lost everything. I had been thrown out into a state of miserable condition. We had nothing to eat. Nobody came forward to help us. We called Baba Lokenath. And only Lokenath responded our call. He blessed us. His divine play rescued us from the poverty and pain."

"I think that the service to the mankind is much more important than the worship. Baba Lokenath wanted this. I should do something which is helpfull to the poor people. No need to worship him. No need to visit *tirtha*. We should do only one thing that to serve the people."

After saying all this he started crying and calling the name of Lokenath.

**Case-4**

Kalpana Sardar (age 38) by profession a maid servant lives in a slum area situated in DumDum. She belongs to the Vaisnavite sect of Hinduism. She has no formal education.
She is completely illiterate. Around 12 to 14 years ago, she watched a television serial on the life of Lokenath Brahmachari. After watching the serial she felt a deep attraction to Baba Lokenath. Besides, she also noticed that youth of her locality used to organize the festival on the day of Janmastami and would visit the village of Chakla, carrying water with bamboo sticks. Not only that they encouraged her to join them. Wasting no time she drove herself into the activities of Lokenath devotees.

Kalpana's husband does not stay with her. He has married another lady. At present he lives with his second wife. Kalpana has a son who is a bus-conductor. He is married. He lives in the same pad, but separately. Kalpana does not get any type of help from her son. She is alone. She described her miserable life in the following manner—"I was born in Midnapore. My father was a daily labour. Within a few months, after my birth, my family left Midnapore and found a shelter in Dum Dum Cantonment, near rail-station."

"I don't remember much about my childhood, except that we were always poor. Toiling day and night my father could not make a living. He moved from here and there for work. When I was about eight, my mother passed away. It was a terrible shock for me. I was the only child of my parents. I was alone. I found nobody who could have helped me. Then I made up my mind that as soon as possible I would go to work. I started my carrier as a maid servant and still I am a maid servant. During that period I was alone, but at present I am not alone."

"At the age of 18, I got married. My marriage life was not happy at all. My husband used to torture me. In fine he left me. I did not care. I made myself busy to look after my only son. But, he also left me. I did not care too. Because, I have my own god, Baba Lokenath. I do not worship any other gods and goddesses. They have never responded to me. But Lokenath Baba is different. He is the god of all gods. He shows his mercy on me. I can talk to him. He answers my questions. He responds to me. He is very kind to me. He always gives his favour to me. Whenever I am in trouble, he comes up and rescues me from the trouble. Not only that he comes to my dreams and gives his advice. Not only that he makes me cautious about the forthcoming trouble."

"I do not know any kind of mantras (sacred hymn). But I worship him regularly. I sit before his picture and call him from the core of my heart. I sing his songs. It gives me immense pleasure and satisfaction. I surrender my all only to him. He receives all and returns everything. You may call me mad. But I am not at all an insane. I am very much conscious and healthy. When I sit in front of the picture of Lokenath, or touch his picture, I am
overwhelmed with joy. I spend my leisure time with my baba’s picture. Sometime tears running down my cheek. Sometime I talk to him loudly. I understand that I live for Baba, without him I am nothing.”

“Lokenath is omniscient and omnipresent. I tell him everything. Sometime I understand no need to tell him anything, because he knows everything. Sometime he appears to me as my father, sometime as my son. I do not understand the meaning of moksha. I do not want to understand. I want only one thing that is a peaceful shelter. Lokenath has given it to me.”

“Lokenath loved people. So, I love people. Always I do wish good for my neighbours. I donate money for the welfare of the people and for the construction of the Lokenath temple. On the day of Janmastami I invite my neighbours (not more than ten) to my room and feed them Lucchi (fried bread) and alurdum (potato curry).”

“At present I live on my own. I am not alone. My son and daughter-in-law keep a good relationship with me. I lead a happy life. All these are nothing but the divine grace of Baba Lokenath. I firmly believe that it is his divine grace through which I have recovered myself from the state of pain and misery.”

Case-5

Ashim Dasgupta of Kolkata was born in Chandpore of Dacca (Now in Bangladesh) in 1920. He was the second son of his father Lalit Mohan Dasgupta, Head master of Chandpore school. Kedareswar Sengupta, a famous biographer of Lokenath, was cousin of Lalit Mohan. Kedareswar Sengupta introduced Lalit Mohan to his guru Rajani Brahmachari. Rajani Brahmachari gave a photograph of Lokenath to Lalit Mohan and asked him to worship Lokenath regularly. It was 1915. Since then, Lalit Mohan had started worshipping Lokenath on the day of Lokenath’s death (i.e. 19 Jaistha). Paresh Dasgupta, elder son of Lalit Mohan, got a job in Eastern Railway and left Dacca with all of his family members to settle in Calcutta in 1927. They kept worshipping Lokenath in their house. In 1957, Dasgupta family built up a house, where they built up a temple also. Paresh Dasgupta passed away in 1963. After his death, Ashim Dasgupta took the respeonsibility of the temple. He expressed his emotion and devotion in the following manner —

“I was a railway clerk. All through my life, I was engaged in this profession only. I had never thought of better earnings. I was fully satisfied with my profession and amount of salary. I am a confirmed bachelor. I am happy to live with my brothers and their families. We learnt to live together. Above all I have my dearest deity i.e. Lokenath Brahmachari. I am always
with him and he is always with me. We have been worshipping him since 1915. Our temple is well decorated. There is an altar where we have kept a giant picture of Baba. We have brought soil of Baradi Ashram of Dacca. A pitcher which is full of the sacred soil of Baradi is kept under the alter.”

“Our family is a happy family. There is no quarrel in our family. My brothers, sisters-in-law and their children do love and respect me. I love them too. There is no conflict among the brothers regarding the question of property. The source of happiness and wealth is the divine grace of Baba.”

“There is a conflict among the devotees of Baba regarding the question of his birth place. I think this question is not important at all. In fact, Baba takes birth in the mind of the devotees. Whenever and wherever devotees call him, he appears there. So, it is meaningless to carryout such type of debate.”

“I regret to say that some people do not understand him and do not love him. Let me tell you an incident. Few months ago, I saw a procession of Lokenath devotees on the day of his disappearance. In front of the procession there was a van where a photograph was kept. There was no umbrella. It was very much painful for me to see ‘Baba’ (Lokenath’s picture) open under the scorching heat of sunshine. It was a scorching summer day. I requested them to use an umbrella and hand fans to protect him from sun. But none of them listened to me. I do not understand that why and how do the people behaving such a manner. I cried out loudly. They asked me to know the reason of my pain. I said nothing. Suddenly, I noticed that ‘Baba’ was smiling at me and telling me, “Why are you crying? Go home. I am the sun. So, ‘sun’s scorching heat can not make any sort of trouble to me.” I came back. And kept silence for the next three days. During that period I decided that I have to do something for Baba. Lastly, I made up my mind that I would utter one crore names of Baba.

Yet, I have uttered eight lakhs. I know I am too old to finish my vow. But I know very well that ‘Baba’ is giving/will give me power to finish such a Himalayan task. This is the most important work in my life. When my work will be completed. Baba will take me to his lap. I want nothing, except to keep my promise. When I call his name, I can not resist my emotion. Tears flows automatically from my eyes. It gives me a feeling of ecstacy, a highest state of happiness.”

When Ashim Dasgupta finished his talking, his eyes had begun dropping tears.