MAHA TIRTHA CHAKLA: ORIGIN AND FEATURES

Lokenath devotees consider the village of Chakla as a Tirtha. Every year lakhs of devotees flock here, in different occasions from different districts of West Bengal. Non-Bengali devotees also visit this place. But they are microscopic. Both Hindus and Muslims, upper caste and lower caste, rich and poor people turn up in this place and take part in different ritual activities. They pour the water of Ganges or coconut water on the image of Lokenath Brahmachari. They observe puja, take part in arati receive prasada from the pujaris drink santi bari and eat khichuri bhogh in a common dining hall which is situated in the north of the Nut Mondir (big temple). According to the Sangha, Chakla is not only a tirtha but also a maha tirtha, because, it possesses all merits of all tirthas. If anybody visits this place, he/she does not have to go any other tirthas.

The village of Chakla is situated in Deganga (block) of Barasat (sub division) of District North 24 Parganas. North 24 Parganas is one of the populous districts of West Bengal, an estern province of India. Geographical location of this area is stated below -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latitude</th>
<th>Longitude</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N 23°15/22//</td>
<td>S 22°11/6/</td>
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<td>E 89°5/</td>
<td>W 88°22/</td>
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Before the decade of 80s of 20th century, a very few people of West Bengal heard the name of Lokenath Brahmachari and they knew almost nothing about his birth place. After 1947 some of Lokenath devotees migrated from Dacca (East Pakistan) to West Bengal. They settled in Howrah, Calcutta and other places. They brought the story of Lokenath with them. At that time Lokenath Brahmachari was called 'Brahmachari of Baradi (of Dacca)', 'Goswami of Baradi'. In the last decade of 20th century the name of the village of Chakla became very popular as the birth place of Lokenath Brahmachari. And the Sangha had started to claim that Chakla is the birth place of Lokenath and for that reason it is a tirtha (place of pilgrimage). A number of questions are related to the appearance of Chakla as a tirtha. Why does the
Sangha call this place a *tirtha*? How far is it correct to say that the village of Chakla is a tirtha? How does the Sangha justify its claim? Which factors are responsible for the transformation of the place into a tirtha?

(ii)

Several scholarly works have been done by the sociologists and social anthropologists on the place of pilgrimage or *tirtha*. Vidyarthi’s work (1961) is a pioneer work in the study of Hindu *tirtha*. He describes in his book how the pattern of interaction between patrons and sacred specialists in an important centre of Hindu pilgrimage, has changed through history. Other studies, viz. on Bhubaneswar by Mahapatra (1971); Deoghar by Narayan (1972), Dwarka by Upadhyaya (1974), Janakpur by Jha (1971), Pasupatinath by Roy (1969), Puri by Jha (1978), Rameswaram and Tirupat by Sahay (1974), Kashi by L. Eck (1982), Ayodhya by Veer (1989), Hardwar by Gold (1988) have mostly followed the model given by Vidyarthi. These studies have given emphasis on *puranic tirthas*. Origin and history of these *tirthas* can be traced in the Hindu sacred scriptures and *puranas*. Apart from these *tirthas*, there are many other “regional or relatively minor places” (Chakraborty, 1984:5) of pilgrimage in different parts of India. Jha (1975), Bhowmick (1977), Chakraborty (1984), Moninies (1984) have paid their attention to the study of minor or regional *tirthas*.

The *Mahatirtha* Chakla, of course, is not a puranic *tirtha*, because no (*puranic*) scriptural support does help to legitimize the claim of the Sangha, i.e. Chakla is a *tirtha*. The village of Chakla can be described as a regional or minor *tirtha*, which is very recently emerged and developed and has attracted lakhs of people.

Some authorities differentiate between purely sectarian *tirtha* and the non-sectarian sites, dividing the latter into regional and pan-India levels. (Bhardwaj, 1987; vol II : 353). Bhardwaj has given another classification of *tirtha*. He writes, “There is a fundamental difference between *Jalatirthas* (temple sites) and *mandiratirthas* (temple sites). At the former self purification by ritual bathing and the performance of rites for ancestors are the most prevalents pilgrim’s activities. At the latter, devotees generally seek to establish a relational and reciprocal spatial proximity to the deity of their focus. Thus, at *mandiratirthas* supplications, vows, *darsan* (holy sight), and various relational expectancies of the pilgrims tend to dominate.” (ibid : 353)

Following this classification, it can be said that, the village of Chakla, is a *mandir tirtha*. No river flows in this site. So it is not water associated tirtha or *jalatirtha*. 
Naturally, pilgrims have no scope to perform any purificatory ritual bathing and other river related rites. But they perform other rituals, e.g. vows, darsan, supplications etc. as Bharadwaj mentioned earlier.

According to Bharati (1970: 85-126), there are three types of pilgrimage sites

1. All India trans -sectarian sites (e.g. Ajodhya, Kanchi, Dwarka, Mathura, Varanasi, Ujjain and Hardwar)

2. Regionally important sites, usually with some sectarian emphasis but not exclusively sectarian. (e.g. Arunachala and Dakshineswar), and

3. Purely sectarian sites which are related to a type of ritual or particular deity (e.g. Saktapithas).

Some features of Chakla show that the second category of the classification presented by Bharati, can match with the site. Chakla is a regionally important site with non-sectarian traits trans-sectarian traits. Devotees of Lokenath do not form any sect. According to Dumont, “The Indian sect is a religious grouping constitutes primarily by renouncers, initiates of the same discipline of salvation, and secondarily by their lay sympathizers any of whom may have one of the renouncers as a spiritual master or guru.” (1998:187). The process of initiation is totally absent in the world of the Sangha. So the Sangha is not a sect. Both organizers and pilgrims do not think that Chakla is a sectarian tirtha. People from different sects flock here. According to the organizers of the Sangha, this place is open to all. Everybody is welcomed here. No sect, caste, religion do not limit the Mahatirtha Chakla. In this way the Sangha wants to depict the village of Chakla as a non-sectarian and trans-sectarian tirtha.

Bharadwaj’s scheme of classification can be helpful to denote the village of Chakla. According to Bharadwaj, there are five types of tirthas — pan-Hindu, supra-regional, regional, sub-regional and local. (1973, cited by Moninis, 1984:234). His classification can be shown briefly in the following manner —

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of tirtha</th>
<th>Nature of pilgrims</th>
<th>Purpose of visit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper level</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Pan-Hindu</td>
<td>Upper castes</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Supra-regional</td>
<td>Upper castes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle level</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Regional</td>
<td>Personalized deities,</td>
<td>Material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sub-regional</td>
<td>mixed group of pilgrims</td>
<td>gain</td>
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</table>
Chakla can be placed in the middle level group of *tirthas*. Because pilgrims come from different social strata, i.e. upper, middle and lower level castes and classes and they visit this site mainly for material gains. Moreover, most of the pilgrims are Bengali, which denotes its regional character. According Bharadwaj’s classification, regional and sub-regional *tirthas* are related to the personalized deities. Here the cult of Lokenath Brahmachari is the central theme of the pilgrimage or object of worship.

Turner and Turner (1978) have given classification of pilgrimages. They are —

1. Prototypical pilgrimages as being those pilgrimages which, on the authority of documentary or widespread traditional evidences, were established by the founder of a historical religion, by his first disciples, or by important national evangelists of his faith (e.g. Mecca, Rome, Jerusalem, Benaras, Mount Kailas and Kandy).

2. Archaic pilgrimages as those pilgrimages which bear quite evident traces of syncretism with older religions beliefs and symbols (e.g. Glastonbury in Mexico, Pandharpur in India).

3. Medieval pilgrimages, which originated in the European Middle Ages and take their tone from the theological and philosophical emphasis of that epoch (e.g. Canterbury, Loreto, Assisi etc.)

4. Modern pilgrimages: Pilgrimages from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries characterized by a highly devotional tone and the fervent personal piety of their adherents and deeply involved with mass technological and scientific culture. (1978:17-19)

The pilgrimage to the village of Chakla is neither comparable with the first or second type, nor with third type. It can be placed in the fourth type, as prescribed by Turner and Turner. Because this *tirtha* has been emerged in the last decade of twentieth century and the pilgrimage can be characterized by a highly devotional tone and the fervent personal deity of their adherents. Devotion to Lokenath Brahmachari is the core idea of this pilgrimage.

The literature regarding the scholarly works on tirthas, helps to understand the
nature of the village of Chakla as a *tirtha*. On the basis of the previous studies the village of Chakla could be characterized in the following manner —

1. It is a non-*puranic* *tirtha*. Because no *puranic* support can be found behind the emergence of the village as a *tirtha*.

2. It is a regional *tirtha*. Because most of the pilgrim-devotees come from the different districts of Bengal.

3. It is a *mandir* *tirtha*. The village of Chakla has been emerged as a *tirtha*, centering around the temple of Lokenath Brahmachari.

4. It is a non-sectarian *tirtha*. Besides, it allows pilgrims and visitors of all castes & religions.

5. It is a modern *tirtha*. Firstly by, it has been emerged in modern-times, and secondly, modern technologies are associated with this *tirtha*.

(iii)

It is necessary for the proper understanding of the present study, to define the three inter-related terms, thus, *tirtha*, *tirthayatra* and *tirthayatri*. The term *tirtha* refers to “a place for pilgrimage”, *tirthayatra* refers to pilgrimage, and *tirthayatri* means, “pilgrim” (*Dictionary*, Samsad. 1994:402-3). Walker writes, “Visiting holy places is one of the main religious duties of the Hindu. This ‘*yatra*’, going, is enjoined as a sacred commission upon all devotees of pleasing the deity, accumulating religious merit, and securing bless hereafter. The place of pilgrimage is called *tirtha*, which means a bathing place or a ford across a stream, and by extension, a cross point, an *axis mundi* or sacred spot, which in itself is worthy of reverence.” (1983:212). More or less, same definition can be found in *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (2003): “A shrine or sacred place of pilgrimage, often situated on the banks of a river or stream.” (2003:303).

The term *tirtha* literally means ‘ford’ and ‘is used to label geographical locations to which people flock because of the sacred reputations of these spots.” (Morinis. 1984:6). According to Michaels,”*tirtha* is the holy substance ‘transition, junction between worlds that touch and do not touch each other (2005:288). Veer says more clearly that ‘*tirtha*’ is a place where heaven touches the earth, where sacred and profane meet. (1989:2). Monier-Williams defined the term *tirtha* as “a passage, way, road, ford, stairs for landing or for descent into a river, bathing-place, place of pilgrimage
on the banks of sacred streams, piece of water." (1964:449). It also refers to "a worthy person, one of the ten orders of ascetics founded by Samkaracarya (its members add the word tirtha to their names); a brahman." (ibid)

The devotees of Lokenath consider the village of Chakla as a sacred spot, where pilgrim-devotees find solace (holy peace). According to them it is such place where devotion of pilgrims and the holy grace of Lokenath meet. So it is a junction between this worldly mundane life and the divine authority of Lokenath. People visit this place to receive the *ashirbad* of Baba (divine grace). One of the devotees said, ‘I just come here for mental peace. Whenever I find myself in trouble, I step forward to this place and receive a cool breeze, which is nothing but the expression of the divine power of Baba Lokenath.’" Another one expressed about his oceanic feelings. Manik Hazra, an important organizer of the Sangha, said, “Baba Lokenath is the expression of all kinds of gods and goddesses. So, the divine power of them exists in the village of Chakla. People flock here to have the touch of the *ashirbad* of gods power, i.e. power of Lokenath.”

It is commonly suggested that Hindu pilgrims visit *tirtha* for higher morals, in other words to gain *punya* or merit. This merit is related to the *moksha*. Among the four *purusharthas* *moksa* is the highest *purusartha*. The term *moksha* has been variously taken to mean self-realization, transcendence, salvation, a release from worldly involvement, from coming and going, i.e. *janmantar*. According to Hindu idea, it is a state of perfect union between self and Brahman. (Kakar. 2002:16). But *moksa* has no relevance in the *tirtha* of Chakla. The Sangha express that Chakla is that type of *tirtha* where devotees achieve a great peace and relief from worldly pain and sorrow. In every occasion lakhs of pilgrims visit this place to make themselves free from distress, pain of their routine life. In other words, most of the pilgrims look for the redemption, not for the salvation. Perhaps it is the dominant trend of the modern *tirthas*, where people visit not for the highest spiritual gain, but for the worldly purpose.

The term pilgrimage refers to a journey to a holy site. According to Webster's *Encyclopedia Unabridged Dictionary* (1989), the word pilgrimage means “a journey, especially, a long one, made to some sacred place as an act of devotion.” and the term pilgrim refers to “a person who journeys, especially, a long distance, to some sacred place as an act of devotion” (ibid). More clear definition can be found in Pike’s
writing. He writes, “Visit paid to sacred places for religious purposes, e.g. to acquire merit or wipe out the demerit of some sin. (1951:300).

Morinis has used the term pilgrimage in his scholarly work (1984) in two senses. He writes, “It is used to label the journey any individual undertakes to a sacred place with the idea that he is a pilgrim. But ‘pilgrimage’ as I use the term also refers to the structured institution, that is, the full composite of all relevant features which constitute the socio-cultural ecology of individual pilgrim behaviour. One can thus refer to the pilgrimage to Mecca, or Lourdes, or Benaras, meaning the total set of symbols, history, rituals, legends, behaviour, deities, locations, specialists or whatever, that centre on these sites. It is also possible to speak of Bengali pilgrimage, or Hindu pilgrimage, referring to the institutional complex of journeys to sacred places as practical and conceived by that cultural or religious group. Pilgrimage is therefore both an individual’s behaviour and socio-cultural institution. (1984:2). This meaning of pilgrimage can be helpful to study the mahatirtha Chakla.

The present discussion resolved that the term pilgrimage bears three elements—sacred site, a special journey and individual pilgrim. Sacred site can be a shrine, or temple, or river bank (ford), or cave. Pilgrim is a person who makes a journey to the tirtha to gain merit or seeks relief from worldly pain and misery. In between two extreme poles, i.e. tirtha and pilgrims, the journey to the sacred centre or pilgrimages takes place.

Pilgrim → Pilgrimage → Tirtha

The preliminary goal of a Lokenath devotee (pilgrim) is to visit tirtha, but the ultimate goal is to satisfy his or her spiritual or material interests. A pilgrim thinks that tirtha as a sacred place, can solve his or her problems or satisfy his or her needs. So tirtha is a passage through which pilgrims achieve their ultimate goal.

Pilgrim → Goal

The point should be noted here that if one stays in tirtha, he/she needs not to go anywhere else on pilgrimage. It shows that in this case pilgrimage would be irrelevant. But the dwellers of the village of Chakla, though they think that this place is a tirtha, visit other sacred centres of India. They do not think that journey to the other sacred places is irrelevant to them.
There is a difference between ordinary temple-goer and pilgrim. But it is a problem to locate the difference. Every trip to a temple, if only to the shrine next door, is a ‘journey’ to a sacred place. Is this trip a pilgrimage or *tirtha yatra*? Is that person a pilgrim? This sacred place can be a local temple of the neighbourhood or too far from the devotees house. Ordinary temple-goer of local people of Chakla travel very short distance to visit the Lokenath temple and they do not think that they are *tirtha-yatri* or pilgrim. But when devotees think or conceive consciously that this journey, whether it is short or long, is *tirtha yatra*, see themselves to be pilgrims and follow some special rules, dress, behaviour, they should be called pilgrims and their journey should be described as pilgrimage. Many devotees pay visit to Chakla once or twice in a year. They come by train, private car, private bus, bicycle, motor cycle, or on foot. They wear simple and clean dress, do not talk loudly, sometime they put red mark on their forehead. The day of their journey is conceived as a special day, which is different from other ordinary days. Precisely they have a special role and attitude on that very day. They consider that their journey is a pilgrimage and they are pilgrims.

**Emergence of Chakla as a *tirtha***

There are thousands of holy places in India. But all of these places are not *tirthas*. Some places only are considered as *tirthas*, to which a pilgrimage may be undertaken. Because only *tirthas* have some special qualities. These qualities can be stated below.

Firstly, sacred reputation of the place. Tradition and age-old shrine, temple or a well known place can be transformed into a *tirtha* from a common or ordinary place.

Secondly, scriptural support. Support of the religious texts legitimize the holiness of a sacred place.

Thirdly, legends, myths, stories also play the important role in the emergence of a place as a *tirtha*.

Fourthly, this place is conceived as a ford, where sacred and profane meet.

Fifthly, participation of the devotees-pilgrims. A *tirtha* becomes a *tirtha* when this place is visited by the pilgrims. There is no *tirtha* on earth where pilgrim never visit.

Sixthly devotees belief in supernatural especially in the miraculous healing power.
of the site. Edith Turner writes, "Miracles of healing ...endow the pilgrimage centres with a powerful spiritual magnetism. Such miracles seem to occur when there are both a heightened sense of the supernatural and profound sense of human fellowship, sacred experience." (1987 Vol. 11 : 329). Pilgrims visit tirthas for some specific goals. These goals can be classified in two groups — spiritual and material (in most of the cases for therapeutic purpose). When it is believed by the pilgrims that a place has supernaturality and miraculous healing power they flock there. And through this process a common place can be transformed into a *tirtha*.

Seventhly, emergence of various organizations centring around the *tirtha* and their propaganda in various forms.

Morinis (1984) has observed that every *tirtha* of West Bengal is associated with noteworthy geographical features particularly water. (1984:42). He writes, "For every place of pilgrimage associated with a river bank in West Bengal, there are miles of equally suitable river bank but no tirthas." (1984:42). Precisely river’s bank cannot alone gives birth to a *tirtha*. There are several other factors which play important role for the existence or emergence of a *tirtha*. Not only that other factors can play prime role, where river’s bank is not indispensible factor. On account of this several mandir *tirthas* are seen.

Morinis mentioned some contributing factors to the transformation of a common place into a *tirtha* —

1. "The religious activities of men" (1984:42). "The tradition of seeking out sadhus and enlightened souls, if only to sit in their company, remains alive in India today. The tendency of disciples almost or actually to deify their preceptor leads to the encouragement of visits to the site of his life as his memory and teaching become institutionalized. The crystallization of the charismatic spirit of an individual gives rise to the developed, highly structured and ritualistic practices which generally characterizes the temple life of *tirthas*. The memory of the guru is preserved, but is somewhat transformed, so that it is not his accomplishments which inspired them on that spot.” (1984:42-43).

2. "Local rulers or powerful residents of the area promulgate false histories to glorify their centre, and thus reap the benefits of its increased popularity. Nevertheless, the focal spiritual individual has been known to be of importance where histori-
cal records are available ...and so it is safe to say that the ideological formulation of belief surrounding a pilgrimage gives considerable emphasis to the reputed inceptor, whether he is portrayed in an historically accurate or mythological form.” (Ibid)

3. “The factor which has proven important in West Bengal in the development of places of pilgrimage is the endowment of the religious centre with land and/or funds by a wealthy benefactor. The creation of temple or the collaboration of an existing one, plays an important role in glorification of the site of devotion. While again not a sufficient cause in itself for elevation of a site to a tirtha, endowment taken together with a suitable site and the reputed presence of the deity in the place as revealed to an accomplished ‘sadhaka’, is significant for transforming the religious centre into a pilgrimage place. Endowment provides the funds needed to build and maintain the temple, provide temple, develop establishments of religious culture, build facilities for pilgrims, etc. These institutional features which are provided by wealth, are important for the ritual operation of the tirtha, and lend it glory and esteem. These factors, in turn increase the attraction of the pilgrimage to pilgrims. It is often stated by pilgrims that their reason for coming to place of pilgrimage, is the ‘sthana-mahatmya’ ascribed to the tirtha.” (1984:43-44).

The Lokenath Sevashram Sangha of Chakla argues that the village of Chakla is a great tirtha, due to its spiritual magnetism and sacred reputation. According to the claim of the Sangha Baba Lokenath was born in Chakla in 1730. In order to prove their claim, they produce court paper. This court paper is the deposition of Lokenath Brahmachari before T. Naylor, asst. magistrate of Narainganj on 8th April, 1885. His deposition was, “My name is Lokenath Brahmachari. My father’s name is Ramnarin Ghosal. I am by caste Brahman. My home is at Mouza Chakla, thana, Zillah Barasat. I reside at present in Mouza Baradi, Thana Narainganj, Zilla Dacca, where I am a priest.” They also refer several books in which Chakla is described as the birth place of Lokenath. These books are —


There is a conflict among the Lokenath devotees. Two other groups have emerged on the question of Lokenath's birth place. Some of the devotees believe that Lokenath was born in Santipur of North 24 Parganas. Other group thinks that he was born in Kachua. And in order to prove their claim they also refer so many documents and books. It can be said that, though the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha claims that the village of Chakla is the birth place of Lokenath, still this claim is disputed.
These written documents have little significance in Lokenath world. Organizers of the Sangha do not give emphasis on historical data or books. Intellectual discussion or studies regarding Lokenath and his birth place is little valued in the Lokenath movement. The Sangha boldly expresses that their claim is supported or not by any historical document, is not important to them. Because this question is not related to any historical data or document. Lakhs of Lokenath devotees believe that Lokenath was born in Chakla and that is enough for the Sangha to consider the village of Chakla as the tirtha.

The Sangha emphasizes on the 'sthana-mahatmya'. Many legends are connected with Chakla tirtha. It is believed Lokenath's miracles still work in the locality. Miraculous power of Lokenath manifests in the healing power of the soil of baba’s bhita, in the flowers and prasada of Lokenath puja etc. Precisely, the Sangha propagates that everything in Chakla is pure and sacred. So, when a person visits this place, automatically he gains some merits. Stories of Lokenath sanctify this place. It is propagated by the Sangha, that Baba Lokanath appears in the dreams of the local people to solve their social, economic of physical problems. Sometimes he appears in the disguise of a Muslim fakir, child, woman or common people. These legends and false stories work out as the substitute of puranic stories which are connected with almost all tirthas. Devotees, however are attracted by these stories and accept its 'sthana mahatmya' and flock here to have the benefit of Lokenath’s miraculous power.

The Sangha considers Baba Lokenath is not only a holy person, but also a deity. Baba Lokenath is the expression of all sorts of deities, viz, Siva, Vishnu, and goddesses too. The Sangha has incorporated the cult of Siva, as if Lokenath himself is Siva. In the time of puja, in devotional songs and in panchali Lokenath is described as Siva. It has been seen that the cult of Lokenath is around the traditional image of Siva. Iconographically he is frequently portrayed in association with Siva or image of linga which is Siva’s principal material representation for purposes of worship. It can also be found in locket, in stand picture, statue or images. The Sangha also considers Lokenath as the manifestation of Vishnu. For that reason the bhaktibad, the central idea of Vaishnavism, has been emphasized by the Sangha. Moreover, Lokenath is considered as the Ma Kali, Chandi etc. So many stories of Lokenath has been popularized by the Sangha, which constructed for his deification. This deification is an important factor which is involved in the spiritual magnetism of the village of Chakla.

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According to the Sangha’s version, the village of Chakla is a ford, where sacred and profane meet. But literally there is no ford at all. The Sangha uses the symbolical meaning of ford. For the Sangha, the village of Chakla is a place where this worldly desires of devotees and divine grace of Baba Lokenath meet. Every year lakhs of devotee-pilgrims visit this place, to receive the *ashirbada* of Baba. Pilgrim devotees consider this place as the holiest of holy places. They feel that only this can provide a spiritual proximity with the Baba Lokenath. In other words, they think that this place is a point of junction between Baba’s grace and their griefs and demands.

The Sangha has developed a vast organizational network in and around this place, which has been taken as the birth place of Lokenath. In the decade of 1970’s, a very few people knew about Lokenath and the village of Chakla as his birth place. During that period Chakla was not considered as a *tirtha*. Nitya Gopal Saha, the first propagator of the name of Lokenath Brahmachari in West Bengal, left East Pakistan (after the partition of Bengal) around 1950 and settled in Salkia of Howrah of West Bengal. He brought stories and pictures of Lokenath Brahmachari with him. In the 1950’s he started campaigning the name of Lokenath and his miraculous powers and established an organization, called Lokenath Math. From that time he began to organize Lokenath festival and Lokenath-puja in the district of Howrah. Common devotees knew almost nothing of the birth place of Lokenath. Neither they heard of Chakla, nor of Kachua.

Nitya Gopal Saha was trying to find out the birth place of Lokenath Brahmachari. In 1976, March, Saha visited the village of Chakla. He found that the *bhita* of Lokenath was covered with bushes and trees and no temple was built up in his birth place. The situation made him angry and expressed his grief in front of the villagers. Hence, he criticised the villagers of Chakla for not doing anything and for their indifference about Baba Lokenath. Saha made a promise to the villagers, that, if they transferred the ownership of the land in his name, he would build up a temple on the Baba’s *bhita*. The present owners of the land of Baba’s *bhita* and some important villagers agreed with Saha and gave their word to do so. Then they took preparation to register that land. In that time that piece of land belonged to Biswas family. Sachidananda Biswas, Nirmal Kumar Biswas, Amiya Kumar Biswas, Sanjib Biswas, Kumari Santana Biswas, Kumari Sarbani Biswas, Srimati Deepali Biswas were the owners of that piece of land. They made up their mind to donate the land for the
construction of Lokenath temple. Nitya Gopal Saha declared that he would convert the village of Chakla into second Baradi Ashrama. Leading villagers of Chakla, then, started to maintain a close contact with Nitya Gopal Saha. They used to visit Lokenath Math and Salkia, residence of Nitya Saha, for taking advice and discussion. During this period Nitya Saha wrote a book on Lokenath. Name of the book was *Jibanta Gita Sri Sri Lokenath*, published in 1976. In this book he clearly wrote that Lokenath was born in the village of Chakla. Another book on the biography of Lokenath (published in 1960, Ramesh Chandra Sarkar), was published by the Presidency Library, in which the village of Kachua was described as the birth place of Lokenath. Nitya Saha requested Anil Chandra Ghosh, publisher of the book and owner of Presidency Library to change the name of Lokenath’s birth place. Consequently, in the second edition of the book (1972) Kachua was replaced by Chakla. Later on, in 1977 Saha again requested Anil Chandra Ghosh to use the name of Kachua as the birth place, instead of Chakla. Around 1975, Nitya Saha came with the contact of Kali Sadhan Das, an industrialist, who used to provide financial support to Nitya Saha and Lokenath Math. Later on, Kali Sadhan Das donated two pieces of land in Kachua to the Lokenath Mission of Nitya Saha. From that this period, Nitya Gopal Saha had been losing his interest about Chakla, because he was convinced by Haripada Bhowmik, brother-in-law of Kali Sadhan Das, that Lokenath was born in Kachua. Watching Saha’s silence and indifference, leading villagers of Chakla and some people of Ashoknagar started to think in a different way, because they got fed up with the behaviour and action of Nitya Gopal Saha. Sailen Roy, Sib Chandra Roy, Nimay Roy, Joy Biswas, Md. Ali Ahmed of Chakla and Nikhil Chandra Chaudhury, Devaprasad Sarkar, Krishna Nag Chaudhury, Amalendu Chakraborty of Ashoknagar, Babul Kr. Roy of Maniktala (24 Pgs). Badal Chandra Das of Kachair (Assam), Gurupada Das of Habra took initiative to build up temple on Baba’s *bhita* and form an organization, called Lokenath Sevashram Sangha, which was registered on 3 November, 1981. Erection of temple and formation of the Sangha were the milestone to make the cult of Lokenath popular and their successful propaganda made the common people aware of the *Maha Tirtha Chakla*. The Sangha emphasized in two points, firstly, Lokenath was born in the village of Chakla. Secondly, the sacred soil, water of this village and *charanamrita* (flower-nectar) of Baba Lokenath have healing power. Everybody should visit this place and try it. Because, these can cure any disease. It is nothing but the
expression of holiness of Baba’s birth place. The Sangha started to spread this message among the people. Constant use of conventional and high-tech propaganda has given birth to new godman and a new tirtha.

High-tech propaganda is one of the important features of modern tirthas. This high-tech and conventional way of propaganda, which have been employed by the Sangha to make Chakla tirtha popular, can be described in the following manner —

Use of audio and video cassettes and CDs. Cassette tape players

In modern times audio video cassettes, CDs, and tape players are the very important and effective means of propaganda. Cassettes, CDs, and tape players are cheap, portable, durable, and easily mass-produced. “As such, their spread has revolutionized the formerly monopolistic Indian music industry, making possible the emergence of several hundred production companies of various sizes, which have revitalized regional folk traditions formerly threatened by homogenizing film music, and spawned the growth of dynamic, syncretic folk-pop genres.” (Manuel. 1996:134). Undoubtedly, these means of propaganda have tremendous impact over the people's mind. These can very easily replace the old ideas and values with the new values and ideas. The propaganda potential of audio cassettes with their accessibility and relative immunity to censorship — was first used by the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha on a mass scale to spread the message and name of Lokenath in the last two years of 1980’s. Members of the Sangha play audio cassettes at rallies, from speakers mounted on trucks, from the temples or enthusiasts tea-stalls. Most of the cassettes, and CDs, contain various mixtures of songs, drama, speeches, the latter often consisting of new lyrics set to familiar film-music tunes.

Songs of these cassettes and CDs are composed and sung by the famous professional Bengalee singers and famous composers. Famous singer are Hemanta Mukhopadhyya, Subir Sen, Dhananjoy Bhattacharya, Arati Mukhopadhyya, Srabonti Mukhopadhyya, Amar Pal, Usha Uttup, Anup Jalotha, Amrik Sing Arora, Indranil Sen, Kumar Sanu, some songs are sung by non famous and ordinary singers. Besides, most songs are composed by famous composers, like Kalyan Sen Barat, Pulak Bandhyapadhyay, Anup-Pranoy etc. Lyrics and note of these songs are different from the so called popular religious songs like Kirtana, Shyama Sangit or any other type of devotional songs. These songs easily attract a huge audience. Not only religious
persons but also secular minded people are attracted by these songs. Some of the interviewees opined that though they have little interest in the cult of Lokenath but "songs are really terrific". Those who do not even go to the village of Chakla, they also buy the cassettes and CDs of songs and dramas, and play on different occasions.

The central theme of the cassettes and CDs is the devotion to Baba Lokenath. Songs invite devotees to worship and to visit the place of Lokenath. These also describe his 'Mahatmya', including the following—

Baba Lokenath is eternal and omnipresent,
Please come our god to us.
You are absolute brahmin,
You are Brahma, Visnu and Siva.
You were born in the village of Chakla,
And for that reason Chakla is a maha tirtha to us.
We pray, please come to us. etc.

The Hindu says the temple is his abode
The Muslim says Allah in his faith
Both fight, and in fighting die.
Baba Lokenath will save us from this.
Both Hindus and Muslims are equal
In the eyes of Baba Lokenath.

In such songs, the Sangha reclaims and revitalizes the syncretic and devotional tradition of India and transcends sectarian difference. This innovative method of propaganda strengthens the Lokenath movement and makes mahatirtha popular among the Bengali speaking people.

Use of Feature film and television serial

Everyday in Bengal, various newspapers, hours of television programming, a thriving cinema industry, video and magazine production, and a host of other media forms generate entertainment, advertising, education, religion and political persuasion. In the vast majority of these productions, religious values, ethics, and conceptions and ideas have an important place. Devotees of Lokenath have used these successfully to propagate the message of Lokenath. In 1980's Santoshi Ma, a non-puranic deity become very popular as a result of release of a film on her. Her name is found in dif-
ferent books in 'Bratokatha', which are written very recently. The name of the film on her is 'Joy Santoshi Ma'. It was shown in rural, semi-urban and urban areas. Ap­
peal of this film was very significant. (Bhattacharyya, Ramkrishna. 2003:276).

Devotees of Lokenath learnt a lot from this phenomenon. They made a film on Lokenath in 1990's. This film includes life and works of Lokenath. It describes that Lokenath was above the casteism and ritualism and saviour of all sections of society. It emphasises on his miraculous performance. It is not difficult to understand that main intention of the film was to produce a new deity, a new cult, a new instrument for the people suffering from various crises and troubles at the present state. In other words it provides an all-rounder-deity who is able to help the devotees in a state of grief and pain. This film not only focuses on the birth place of Lokenath but tries to make myth of the place. According to the narration of the film, Lokenath is the combination of all gods and goddesses. And in this way the cult of Lokenath transcends the sectarian boundaries.

This film played a most crucial role to spread the popularity of Lokenath in 1990's. This was shown in rural and semi-urban areas, and in urban areas too. A large section of the people of West Bengal had watched this film. Owners of the cinema houses were very happy to see that all shows are housefull. Producer and director made a huge amount of money by making the film. In the process of propagation of name of Lokenath this film was an important step to popularize the cult of Lokenath and the village of Chakla as a tirtha.

Another media genre-television – played the most crucial role to strengthen the foundation of Lokenath movement and to make popular Lokenath’s birth place as a tirtha. Akash Bangla, a popular Bengali television channel made telecast a T.V. se­
rial on Lokenath Brahmachari for six months. This serial contains various stories of Lokenath’s boyhood and sadhana, which includes his power of miracle. It also in­cludes his syncretic, humanitarian, liberal and democratic ideals. The film and T.V. serial generate a sense of security feeling among the devotees. Watching this specta­tors of these film and serial posit that Lokenath as a saviour. And he is easy acces­sible deity, because devotees do not have go through a complicated and rigid rituals to reach him. Devotees of Lokenath in this way, manipulated people’s idea by ex­ploiting the highly modern technology.
Use of print media

The print media has an important place in India. It is accepted as a civil and fundamentally legitimate media. Newspapers have two kinds of readers, - 1. literate readers, who are able to read directly and 2. indirect readers illiterate people, but they are influenced by the direct readers. Naturally newspapers can influence both group of people. The Lokenath Sevashram Sangah has influenced both groups through the use of print media.

Throughout the year the Sangha organizes many festival-type programmes in different occasions, namely, 1. Tirodhan Divas (death anniversary) 2. Janmasthami festival 3. Mongaldeep festival. In order to propagate these festivals of Chakla village, the Sangha announces the programmes through publishing advertisement in Bengali newspapers, namely *Ananda Bazar Patrika, Bartaman* etc. Besides the Sangha gives advertisement frequently in the various news papers to invite the people to visit the village of Chakla, the birth place of Lokenath Brahmachari. The advertisements have three parts — (a) a heading includes the name of the Sangha. (b) an invitation, which announces that Chakla is the birth place of Lokenath; class caste, creed, religious differences are insignificant in the worship of Lokenath; and pilgrims can receive mental peace from this place.

Last part includes bus route and cost of journey. The Sangha gives a full page advertisement with photograph of the yearly festivals. Cost of this advertisement near about 3 lakhs. This type of advertisement has tremendous effect on people's mind. It very easily attracts the reader's eye. Unawre readers can have a brief sketch about the life and message of Lokenath, his birth place and activities of the Lokenath Sevashram Sangha. It has been found that 35%. of the devotees have come to know about the cult of Lokenath by reading the news like advertisement published in various news papers. Just after the electronic media, news papers are the most important agent in the process of making of public opinion. The Sangha without any hesitation, exploits the opportunity of news paper propaganda to make their guru and his birth place popular.

Use of hoarding, poster, leaflet and calender

Apart from T.V. film, and newspapers the Sangha took help of other forms of advertisement to popularize the village of Chakla as a *tirtha*. They set up big hoard-
ings in important places of different cities and towns. These are displayed particularly in the road side and street corner. The contents of these hoardings are — (1) A very big photograph of Lokenath Brahmachari associated with his famous words — "At the battlefield, in the sea or in the jungles, if you are in trouble, think of me and I shall save you.” (2) “The village of Chakla is the birth place of Lokenath. Everybody should visit this place.” (3) Date of his birth and disappearance are mentioned at the bottom of every hoarding.

Quality and standard of these hoardings can be compared with the hoardings of the multinational companies and big business houses. Point should be noted here that these hoardings were sponsored by ‘Nut-khat’, ‘Pearl Mineral Water’ companies, which are mentioned at the bottom of the hoardings. It is an expression of the connection between religion and business. These hoardings serve the interest of both religion and business.

Leaflet is another effective tool of propaganda. This instrument is common to all political parties and commodity producing companies. This means of communications is included in the propaganda programme of the Sangha. Two kinds of leaflet are circulated by the Sangha — circulates occasional leaflet on different occasion viz., Janmastami festival, death anniversary of Lokenath and Mongaldeep festival. The Sangha sends invitation to the people through the leaflet to visit the village of Chakla. It also includes some story to prove the majesty of the place. In between two occasions, the Sangha also circulated without mentioning the name of their organization. This type of leaflets is circulated in railway stations, bus depot, street corner, market place, fair and in other places. This very leaflet contains stories regarding the cult of Lokenath and make people scared, if they do not perform some activities which are mentioned in the leaflet, that would fatal for him or her.

The Sangha uses posters to popularize the cult of Lokenath and Chakla as a tirtha. Posters are stuck on the walls or hang them with the thread in different places of urban, semi urban or rural areas. It includes date, place and time of the festivals, and the name of the celebrities taking part in the festivals.

Directly or indirectly, the Sangha requests the members to use the name of Baba Lokenath to influence the common people. Usually members and other non-member devotees name their house, shope, car, child in Lokenath’s name, viz. Lokenath Dham, Lokenath Apartment, Lokenath Abashan, Lokenath Kutir, Lokenath Bhaban, Lokenath...
Villa; Lokenath Bastralaya, Lokenath stores, Lokenath Clinic, Lokenath Chicken Shope, Lokenath Roll Centre, Lokenath Restaurant etc. Members put stickers on the back screen of their cars. This stickers include - “Joy Baba Lokenath”, “Cholo Cholo Chakla Dham” or a photograph of Lokenath. Moreover, they publish date calender with a big photograph of Lokenath. It also includes an invitation for people to visit Mahatirtha Chakla. Devotees believe that these type activities are holy activities. And if one does it, he will be happy and wealthy. This type of propaganda plays a crucial role in making of Chakla as a tirtha, popular.

Selling of goods

The Sangha has a sales counter in the temple complex of Chakla. The Sangha produces different things which carry the picture of Lokenath, viz. pen, locket, picture, statue etc. These are very cheap. People buy these things and use them regularly. They keep the photograph and picture of Lokenath in their pocket, purse or books. They hang the picture on the wall of the office room or room of their house. The image of Lokenath is put in the sacred place of the house, where they worship the other deities. This very process also makes the unaware people aware about the cult of Lokenath and his birth place. And when people accept Lokenath as a deity, they accept the village of Chakla as a tirtha too.

Use of books

Books are the strong and effective means of propaganda, which can influence the educated people easily. The Sangha has published lots of book on the biography of Lokenath. These books narrate the life and teachings of Lokenath in a very lucid and simple language. Most of the books are written in Bengali language, considering it as the language of the majority people of Bengal. Price of these books is very cheap and easily available on different books stalls. Mainly these books are sold from the temple counter of Chakla. These books also deal with the debate on the birth place of Lokenath. A large section of the educated devotees have made an understanding by going through the books, regarding the birth place of Lokenath. According to them these books helped them to take their decision on this point. And some of them are convinced that Chakla is a tirtha and it is the birth place of Lokenath.

Other means

The Sangha and its co-associations from time to time, organize some other kinds of activities-viz.
2. Flood relief camps.
3. Water distributing camps. (mainly in the Summer)
4. Medical camps.

Apart from these the Sangha sends members to collect donation from the common people. Through these activities the Sangha tries to legitimize its claim and tries to make popular the temple of Chakla as a tirtha.