

# Golden Avatara Sri Caitanya Maha Prabhu

About 500 years ago, at the bank of Sacred river Ganges in India, a great personality appeared. Of all the saintly personalities appeared so far in India, He is the greatest! He inaugurated the massive bhakti movement based upon nama sankirtan that changed India's social and philosophical development influencing millions of people throughout the world down to the present day. His name is Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. He appeared in West Bengal in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. His bhakti movement has five principal personalities: Sri Advaita Acharya, Sri Nityananda Prabhu, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Sri Gadadara and Sri SriVasa. They together are called Pancha Tattva and worshipped together in North India. "Sri Krishna Caitanya, Prabhu Nityananda, Sri Advaita Gadadara Sri Vasadi Gaura Bhakta Vrinda" is the invoking sloka.

Let us now see the great and marvelous history, theologies and philosophies of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Our information comes from an authentic scripture written in Bengali about 450 years ago by Sri Krishna Dasa Kaviraja Goswami and translated by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Sri Krishna Caitanya was born in West Bengal in a village named Mayapur, part of Navadvip. Of several internal and external reasons for his appearance, one of the reasons was due to a great vaishnava, Advaita Acharya who lived at that time. He saw that people did not have interest in spiritual life at all. Instead, they were growingly more and more interested only in accumulating money, fame and addicted to sense enjoyment. Seeing these pathetic conditions, Advaita Acharya begged Lord Krishna to appear personally and deliver the people at the present age of materialism. Thus, Lord Sri Krishna Himself appeared as Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu to deliver the people of this Kali Yuga.

Sri Caitanya appeared in 1486 in the village named Mayapur. At his birth place under a neem tree, we can see a small temple. As he was born under this neem tree, his mother Saci Devi named the child as 'Nimai' honoring the sacred neem tree. Inside this temple, we also find deities of Sri Caitanya, his mother Saci Devi and his father Jagannath Misra.

During his young age, Nimai used to cry continuously. But when anyone around chanted 'Haribol', he would immediately stop crying. As long as people around him chanted 'Haribol', he would be happy and wouldn't cry. But as soon as they stopped saying 'Haribol', then he would cry again. Thus, in their house, there was always nama sankirtan going on continuously which was the very sadhana of the child's future mission!

As per the custom in India at that time, Sri Caitanya married Sri Lakshmi Devi at the age of 15. But as she died soon due to a snake bite, he married Sri Vishnu Priya. Sri Caitanya studied all the vedic and logic scriptures from an authentic guru and became a great scholar. He debated with great personalities at his very young age itself. Once he debated with the greatest scholar of India from Kashmir and defeated him and won the title 'Pandit'. Pandit means great scholar.

After the death of his father in 1502, Sri Caitanya went to 'Gaya' a famous city in North India. There he met a very well known saint of that time Sri Ishwara Puri and took initiation from him. After this incident, his life changed dramatically. His interest completely turned to chanting, dancing and singing the names of Lord Krishna. He was always immersed in the bliss of nama sankirtan. When he returned back to his birth place Navadwip, he reconstructed the house of Sri SriVasa and opened up a school for congregational chanting and nama sankirtan. There he displayed all the ecstatic symptoms of a very highly advanced devotional yogi.

From all over Bengal, vaishnava preachers joined Sri Caitanya Mahaprabu. Among them was Sri Nityananda Prabhu who joined after returning from a missionary tour. Sri Caitanya commanded each of the fellow devotees: "O friends! Go through the streets of every town and village. Meet every man at the door! Ask them to chant and sing the names of Lord Sri Krishna and lead a holy life..."

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's preaching and sankirtan movement spread all over the places. He accepted everyone irrespective of caste, religion, age or color! One day while preaching in this way, Nityananda Prabhu was attacked by two drunkards named Jagai and Mathai. They hit Nityananda Prabhu's head with a broken pot. Hearing this, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu immediately appeared on the scene and called his chakra weapon to kill the offenders.

Seeing this, Nityananda Prabhu immediately stopped Caitanya Mahaprabhu and pleaded: “O Lord! You cannot kill them! You have appeared to save the fallen! So, please begin showing your mercy starting with these two!” By the mercy of both Sri Caitanya and Nityananda Prabhu, Jagai and Mathai started dancing and singing Lord’s names on the spot. They became vaishnavas. Sri Caitanya’s influence grew more and more after these kinds of incidents.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s increasing influence made Chand Kasi, the local Muslim magistrate to become envious. He became so envious that he passed a strict order prohibiting chanting and performing sankirtan on the streets. When Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu came to know, he became furious and asked all the devotees to join him to march towards Chand Kasi’s house. Thousands of devotees joined and to every one’s surprise, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu miraculously converted Chand Kasi to be a vaishnava. Chand Kasi became one of the great devotees of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Following this incident, hundreds of Muslims became vaishnavas and followed the hari nama sankirtan movement.

Later at the age of 24, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu became a renounced Sanyasi leaving his dear mother and wife. As a simple sanyasi with shaven head, wearing simple saffron robe, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu took the sankirtan movement to every social and religious sect in India. At the request by his mother Saci Devi to Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu not to go too far, he made Jagganath Puri as his permanent head quarter. It was few days of journey from Mayapur to Puri. When Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu saw the deities of Lord Krishna, Lord Balaram and Subadra Devi, he went into spiritual ecstasy, fainted and fell unconscious.

As a vaishnava, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu worshipped and taught that God has a personal spiritual form and He is Sri Krishna. However, in Puri there were many mayavadis who believed that God’s personal form is secondary and God does not have any form. The foremost mayavadi Sri Sarvabauma Bhattacharya even called Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and lectured continuously for seven days. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu remained silent for all the seven days without asking even a single question. Sarva Bhauma could not understand the behavior of Sri Caitanya mahaprabhu.

Later Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu started to speak and pounded with so many details from sastras showing that the mayavada philosophy is wrong and explained that God is a person and He is Sri Krishna. At the end, Sri Sarva Bhauma admitted his defeat and sadly said, “By reading all kinds of books, I only became dull headed and made my life useless.” To console Sarva Bhauma, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu showed one of his astonishing spiritual forms. Sri Sarva Bhauma threw his mayavadism and became a great vaishnava. Followed by him, hundreds and hundreds of mayavadis converted to Vaishnavism and followed Hari Nama Sankirtan.

Sri Sarva Bhauma Bhattacharya’s room in Puri where Lord Caitanya gave darshan became one of the shrines for Hindus. On one of the walls of his room, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s form as ‘Sad Bhuj’, has been painted. ‘Sad Bhuj’ means one with six arms. This form was manifested to Sri Sarva Bhauma Bhattacharya in this very room! Followers believe that Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is the same Supreme God who previously appeared as Sri Krishna and Lord Ramachandra. The upper two arms in green color represent the arms of Lord Ramachandra holding the bow and arrow. The middle two arms in blue color represent the arms of Lord Krishna holding a flute. The lower two arms in golden color belong to Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu holding a water pot and a sanyasi staff.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu then left for a tour to South India by walk. Sri Caitanya Caritamrta describes all the miracles and details of his tour. It also describes how Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu embraced a leper named Vasudeva who instantly got cured from leprosy and received a beautiful body. Even though no one even wanted to go near the leper due to the offensive smell of his leprosy body, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu embraced Vasudeva with so much of intense affection showing how Lord loves His dear devotees.

Social customs do not allow sanyasis to have association with rich and famous people such as kings and ministers. However, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s meeting with Ramananda Raya was very special. Their discussions about Lord Krishna were of very high nature in the line of pure bhakti and described in Sri Caitanya Caritamrta. At the end, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu asked Ramananda Raya to renounce everything and join the vaishnavas in Jagannath Puri.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu also spent four months in Sri Rangam called Ranga Ksetra. It is the largest temple in India. There he stayed at the house of Sri

Venkata Bhatta, a high class devotee in Sri Ramanuja line. There he met the small boy who later became Gopala Bhatta Goswami, one of the six topmost Goswamies in the line of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. In fact one of the main purposes of his South India trip was to prepare and take this boy for his service. We can see the footsteps of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu there in Sri Rangam. There are about 108 such places in South India where Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's foot prints have been preserved and honored even today.

Lord Caitanya then visited the south most point of India Kanyakumari also known as Cape Comorin and saw the famous temple of Kumari Bhagavathi Amman. Then he continued his trip via Kerala and visited Adi Keshava and other famous temples. In Adi Keshava temple he found the Brahma Samhita which is one of the very important scriptures for vaishnavas. Then he returned back to Jagannath Puri. By now, he was 27 years old and had converted thousands of Buddhists, Jains and Mayavadis to his nama sankirtan movement.

By that time, his fame spread all over India. Even the king of Puri became a Vaishnava. The yearly ratha yatra in Puri where thousands and thousands of devotees pull the huge chariots with the deities of Lord Krishna, Lord Balaram and Subadra Devi became flooded with more and more devotees. There Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu displayed many miracles. Once the huge chariots stopped from moving and became heavy like mountains. Even when thousands of devotees pulled, they could not be moved even a bit. When this news went to the king of Puri, he arranged so many wrestlers and strong men to join pulling the chariots. But the chariots wouldn't move. Seeing this situation, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu used his head to push the chariots. That is all! The chariots by themselves without any other effort started to move !

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu then wanted to go to Vrindavan and excavate the past-time places of Sri Krishna and re-establish their spiritual glories. While walking towards Vrindavan, he passed through several dense forests while singing and chanting the names Sri Krishna. When hearing his singing and chanting, the wild animals there also used to make sounds and dance. One of such incidents is described in Sri Caitanya Caritamrta where it happened in the Jarighanda forest.

In the Jarighanda forest, the elephants, tigers, lions, monkeys and all animals joined and danced in ecstasy with Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu! Performing such miracles, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu reached Vrindavan.

In Vrindavan, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu was always floating in spiritual ecstasy. He walked through all the wonderful past-time places of Sri Krishna. He danced, sang and shed tears, wept and cried! He initiated the excavation works to re-establish all the past-time places of Sri Krishna, and to build temples, making Vrindavan as the greatest place of pilgrimage. He assigned the detailed responsibilities to his six goswamies. The famous temple called 'Madan Mohan Temple' in Vrindavan was constructed about 450 years ago by Sri Sanatana Goswami one of the six goswamies. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu not only engaged the six goswamies to excavate the sacred places and build temples, but also to write volumes of authentic scriptures on bhakti yoga.

These six goswamies were also notable to accept anyone as disciple irrespective of their caste, greed, color, religion or age. Caitanya Caritamrta describes that Rupa Goswami and Sanatan Goswami were ministers in a Muslim government in Bengal. Sri Raghunatha Dasa Goswami and Jiva Goswami joined Caitanya when they were very young. Raghunatha Dasa was a son of a very rich merchant. But he was so austere from his boyhood and he would drink only very little butter milk and sleep only for two hours daily just to maintain his body. Sri Jiva Goswami was the youngest in their group and nephew of Sri Sanatan Goswami. Sri Jiva Goswami wrote many famous scriptures on vaishnavism and is considered as one of the greatest scholars that India has ever produced.

After Vrindavana trip, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu went to Benaras, the holy city at the bank of the sacred Ganges. Benaras was considered as the head quarter for Mayavadi sanyasis. When the Mayavadis saw Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu chanting and dancing, they complained that Sri Caitanya's chanting and dancing deviated from the vows of a sanyasi. They asked, "Why don't you quietly sit and study as a proper sanyasi should? ". But Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu replied, "I am too foolish to read all these books, but I have received all the benefits of studying all those books just by chanting the names of Lord Krishna."

Lord Caitanya with his intelligent arguments convinced the mayavadis to abandon their mayavadism and adopt to the process of bhakti yoga. Thousands and thousands of mayavadi sanyasis became vaishnavas.

At the age of 31, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu returned to Jagannath Puri and spent the next eighteen years in the association of Sri Ramananda Raya, Sri Sarva Bhauma Bhattacharya and other intimate devotees. During those years he lived in

a small hut that we can see even today. It is known as 'Gambhira'. It is one of the important places of pilgrimage. Inside we can see his shoes and the water pot he used as a sanyasi.

During his time, there was another famous Vaishnava by the name Haridas Thakura who was born in a Muslim family. He chanted the names of Krishna 20 hours a day without fail and is called as 'Nama Acharya' even today. He was so powerful that even when a very beautiful prostitute tried to seduce him, the prostitute fell on his feet and became a devotee and chanted the names of Krishna! Later the jealous muslims wanted to kill Haridas Thakura saying that a born muslim should be killed if he adopts to another religion. By the muslim authorities, he was very severely beaten in 21 market places so that he would be killed in public. But Haridas Thakura was still chanting 'Krishna, Krishna' and the painful beatings did not hurt him!

When Haridas Thakura passed away from this world at his old age, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu personally carried his body and performed the burial rites. A tomb was constructed at that place which is now a famous place of pilgrimage for Vaishnavas.

In Puri, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu experienced many vivid mystical visions which are considered as highest expressions for the love of God. On some occasions, he not only witnessed transcendental visions but also personally entered into and participated in them. Once when immersed in spiritual trance, he imagined a sand dune to be Govardhan Hill, where Sri Krishna raised cows. Thinking the distant green forest and trees near the blue ocean to be Vrindavan and Yamuna, and ran towards it. He saw Sri Krishna surrounded by Vrindavan forest and Krishna was about to enter into a cave with Srimathi Radha Rani. It also seems that the milk maids asked Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu to collect flowers for the divine couple.

Just at that very moment, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu woke up from trance. He greatly lamented for the sudden loss of this sublime transcendental vision. Later in 1534 when he was performing a great nama sankirtan in the Tota Gopinath temple, he miraculously entered into the deity and disappeared.

In Mayapur, the birth place of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Sri Bhakti Vinod Thakura constructed a memorial temple at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sri Bhakti

Vinod Thakura, who is considered as the seventh Goswami due to his enormous contributions, comes in the same line of discipline from Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. This temple is considered to be the Vraja Mandala of Mayapur. One of the most important personalities behind bringing Sri Caitanya's sankirtan movement out to the world is Sri Bhakti Siddhanda Saraswati Thakura who is also the son of Sri Bhakti Vinod Thakur. By his inspiration and command, His Divine Grace Srila A.C. Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada later brought this to the foreign countries and established ISKCON – International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Continuing from where Srila Prabhupada left, Srila Bhakti Vedanta Narayana Maharaja is now distributing the mercy of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu throughout the world. Coming in the same disciplic succession from Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, he is guiding every aspirant irrespective of religion, country, caste or age. Srila Narayana Maharaja has been very closely related to Srila Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Every year, on the appearance day of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, devotees from all over the world assemble in Mayapur to celebrate. Wearing the traditional tilaka and wearing Vaishnava dresses, they sing and dance in the same way Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu performed hari nama sankirtan 500 years ago. Lord Caitanya's bhakti yoga movement has spread throughout the world. There are so many new temples and books on bhakti yoga appearing constantly. As per the sastra, in this age of Kali, only the Nama Sankirtan can deliver the soul. No other means can do it.

Hare Nama Hare Nama, Hare Namaiva Kevalam

Kalau Nasti Eva Nasti Eva Nasti Eva Kathir Anyata

Lord Krishna Himself came as Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu to show by example as how one should do devotion to the Supreme Lord for this age and attain Him.

Let us all chant the glorious names of Lord Sri Krishna, sing and dance and go back to His abode!

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare

Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare