

Achyutananda Das was one among the prominent rebellious saint-poets of the 16th century Orissa. His other associates were Balaram Das, Jagannath Das, Yashobanta Das and Ananta Das. They had the same ideals and they worked together for uplifting the cause of the downtrodden people of their age. Achyutananda lived the longest among them and he was the most prolific writer. Among the Panchasakhas he was most concerned with the society and for various reasons he could establish the essential healthy relationship with the populace. As a poet he was active to the very end of his life.

Sri Ratnakar Chaini, who belongs to the Orissa Education service, is a well-known Oriya critic and author. His publications include *Fullar Fagua* (novel), *Kaha Lalita* (short stories), *Udbhat Natya Parampara* (criticism) etc.



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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Siddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

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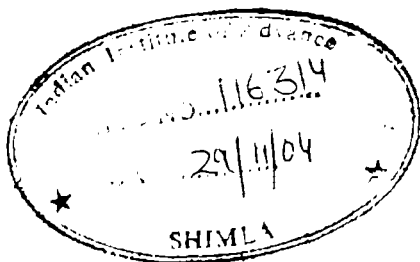
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Ratnakar Chaini

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Before the Sunrise

Achyutananda Das was one among the prominent rebellious saint-poets of the 16th century Orissa. His other associates were Balaram Das, Jagannath Das, Yashobanta Das and Ananta Das. They had the same ideals and they worked together for uplifting the cause of the downtrodden people of his age. The scholars of Oriya literature have outlined this age as the 'Panchasakha Yuga'—the age of the Panchasakhas. Achyutananda lived the longest among them and he was the most prolific writer. Among the Panchasakhas he was most concerned with his society and for various reasons he could establish healthy relationship with the populace. As a poet, craftsman he was active to the very end of his life. His creative world is a picture gallery that reflects upon his society and age.

The 16th century in the history of Orissa is an era of many conflicts. The glory of Orissa's national life had reached the zenith. The vast Kalinga empire had spread from the Ganga to the Godavari. The holy temple of Lord Jagannath and the eternal monument of Konarak had been built. The literary gem of this land *Geeta Govinda* was enjoying popularity all over India. Challenging the pride of the great Sanskrit pundits the native poet Sudramuni Sarala Das had already built up his poetic tower, in his Mahabharata. The religious preachers of various sects from different parts of India were crowding this soil with the eulogy of Lord Jagannath.

Religious and Political Background

In the eleventh century AD, during the reign of Chōraganga Deva, the Vishistadvaitavadi Saint Ramanuja arrived at Puri to preach the divine sermons. The works of the saint-poet Jayadeva of the order of Nimbarka had created a new sensation depicting love-obedience to Krishna. The saint-poet Vidyapati of Mithila spent a few years in Puri. Towards the last part of the 14th century Ramananda Swami established his ideology at Puri. At the earlier part of the 15th century the liberal saint Kabir had arrived here and set up his monastery. Goswami Tulasi Das visited Puri

in the early part of the 16th century. After some years Nanak landed here for preaching his religious doctrines. Further before the advent of Shree Chaitanya, the Suddhadvaita Ballabhacharya set his feet on this soil. In the early part of the 16th century the undercurrent of religion and philosophy gathered much momentum in Orissa and formed a devastating flood putting Jagannathdham on the high tide.

Besides these, Vaishnava saints and santhas, the various sects of Hinduism had their influence in Orissa. But they were busy in religious controversies from time to time. The saints and spiritual preachers from different corners of India visited Puri, and added fuel to the fire of prevailing religious conflicts. To put an end to these conflicts some preached to worship Sunyapurasha or the attributeless Brahman as an easy and convenient path to attain God. The Sikh guru Nanak and the Saint poet Kabir were the preachers of this ideology. Before long the Nathapanthis like Gorakhanath and Matsendranath were advocating the same cause. But this reappraisal was made to meet the needs of the time and to avoid all controversies on God.

During the last quarter of the 15th century five great devotional poets were born in the coastal regions of Orissa. They conceived Lord Jagannath as the formless Brahman. The indefinite form of the Lord and the concept of a casteless society in Shreeekshetra encouraged them. The ancient poets believed Lord Jagannath and Purushottama as one and identical. The great poet Sudramuni Sarala Das had depicted Paramatma (the Supreme soul), Jagannath and Lord Buddha as one. Like Sarala Das, the five saint poets (the Panchasakhas) had conceived Lord Jagannath as Lord Buddha, Nirakara, Sunyapurush and Purushottama. They were also guided by the ideals of Shreeekshetra, i.e. to have a casteless society and projected them in their works.

According to Buddhism the thought of the Void helps one to disappear into it and gain the salvation and according to the advaitavadi Shankaracharya, a mortal would achieve his salvation easily by worshipping the attributeless Brahman. The Jagannathpanthis (the devotees of Jagannath) differed from these philosophers on the fact that Vedic Nirguna Brahman and the Sunyapurush of Buddhism are inactive. The 'Panchasakhas' addressed God as Nirguna Brahman and conceived him as an active force. They tried

to assimilate the cult of Lord Jagannath and that of Lord Buddha. The Panchasakha Age began with such a background of religion and philosophy. Like the religious ideals, the political arena of Orissa was clouded before the advent of the Panchasakhas. There were causeless tensions on the social life. The vastness of Kalinga empire was narrowing and its cultural life was deteriorating as the foreign invaders carried on incessant attacks to capture the empire.

The reign of the Ganga dynasty ushered in an era of prosperity in the empire of Kalinga (Utkala). She was at the apex of her glory. To uphold her glory the Surya dynasty had made all efforts. Like the valient hero Arjuna of the Sarala Mahabharat, Kapilendra Dev, the founder of the Surya dynasty occupied a vast empire by exploiting neighbouring states in his conquests. His able son Gajapati Purushottam Dev, keeping the boundary of the empire intact, won the victory over the empire of Kanchi. During his tenure there were great improvements in art, sculpture and literature of Utkal. Many Sanskrit poets resided at Puri for their literary achievements assuming Utkala a safe place. It is also surmised that many might have had assigned to the authority of Gajapati Purushottam Dev on their own works to please the king or to achieve reputation in their life-time. Of course, Gajapati Purushottam Dev himself was a well-versed aesthetician, a great lover of music, art, and literature.

After Purushottam Dev his son Prataprudra Dev ascended the throne, at the age of seventeen (born approximately in 1478 AD) and assumed the heavy responsibility of this empire. At that time there were foreign invasions from the southern and northern parts of Utkal. So from the day of his ascension he was busy in battles all over the frontiers. Travelling into different regions of the vast empire from the Ganga to the Krishna he spent a very hazardous and unhappy life. He was not strong in his will power like his grandfather Kapilendra Dev. Therefore during these hard days his preceptor Shree Jibadevacharya composed the *Bhakti Bhagabat* in 32 chapters and read to him everyday to bring back tranquility and stability to his mind. The king's love for poetry attracted Dibakar Kabichandra Ray (the son of Jibadevacharya), Kabindra Markandeya and many other poets to his court. At this time the royal representative of Rajamundry Ray Ramananda was present at Puri. The king was upset with him due to administrative reasons. To

please the king Ramananda staged a drama, written by him, named *Shree Jagannath Ballav Natak* with the help of the Devadasis of southern India, as the Maharis (temple dancers) of Puri did not agree to participate in the drama with male dancers. Raja Prataprudra Dev was very much pleased with Ray Ramananda for his dedicated work.

Ray Ramananda hailed from the region of Brahmagiri in the district of Puri. His father Bhabananda Ray was a genuine Vaishnava pundit. The king loved him for his straightforward novel ideas. For his efficiency and adeptness his eldest son Sri Ramananda Ray became the governor of Rajmundry. But later on he became a weak administrator as he devoted himself for learning the divine Radha-Krishna Premaleela. The king was dissatisfied with him. *Shree Jagannath Ballava Nataka* of Ramananda was chiefly enshrined with the theme of love between Radha and Krishna. Lord Jagannath did not play much in the drama. In this play of five acts there is depiction of *Purbaraga*, *Bhaba Pariksha*, *Bhava Prakash*, *Radhavisar* and *Radhasangam*. According to a legend Ray Ramananda was so inclined to this philosophy of love in Krishna that everyday after finishing his bath in the river with naked women he spent the day playing the game of heavenly love according to the Gopi-Krishna-Tattwa-Sadhana. In such a circumstance Shree Chaitanya, the advaitachari of Nadia Nawadweepa, being charmed by the feelings of spiritual love for Lord Jagannath landed on the soil of Utkal.

The administrator of the North-Eastern region of Utkal, Shree Mukunda Pattanayak, for the first time, protested against this extra devotional ally. He was guessing that there might be some conspiracy of enemies behind this ally. But he could not find any evidence against these religious preachers and he had to remain silent. In Puri Shree Chaitanya had to face a strong protest. The Pandas (worshippers of Lord Jagannath) of Puri drove him out of the temple and rudely abused him (1510 AD). At that time he was also not favoured by the King Prataprudra Dev. Above all, the whole environment was not suitable for Chaitanya. Not being able to realize his hopes he came over to Rajamundry. Ray Ramananda received him with much care and love and they spent quite a long time in discussing the Premaleela of Radha and Krishna.

In the mean time Gajapati Prataprudra Dev lost his son in a fierce battle. The neighbouring states were attacking Utkal again and again. The king could not make the frontiers of his empire secured. Ray Ramananda met the king with Lord Chaitanya. The divine devotional fervour of Shree Chaitanya pacified the troubled soul of the king.

The bold and formidable militant race of Utkal did not like the religious instincts of the king that made him a coward. They protested against it. All spoke ill of the king's choice and his strong inclination to religious philosophy. But they were compelled to remain silent under the rude disciplinary laws of the king. At that time the powerful king of south, Krishna Dev Ray invaded Utkal suddenly and annexed many regions to build up his empire. At the advice of Shree Chaitanya, King Prataprudra Dev left many regions of his empire to Krishna Dev under the conditions of armistice and gave his daughter in marriage to him. Later the king offered his son-in-law at the southern Utkal as dowry-gifts. Gradually the political ruin came to the empire and the interregnum spread all over the kingdom. The vast empire of king Kapilendra Dev at last fragmented into pieces and the king absorbed himself deeply in *Kirtan* (the devotional lyrics sung in a chorus with instruments) forgetting his empire. During this ominous tenure of the kingdom, the poets and intellectuals and even the laymen were in the hope of a golden future and they were hopeful of a millennium. So, the prophetic poets among the Panchasakhas propagated their prevision of this new age and thus the 'Malika' literature was born to foretell the future and prepare everyone to welcome the new world.

The Literary Background : The Panchasakhas

To rescue his mother tongue from the fierce influencing flood of Sanskrit language, Sarala Das laid the foundation of Oriya language upon his vast world of poetry. Still then contemporary Sanskrit pundits were looking down upon Oriya language. The Mukti Mandap (Mukta Mandap ?) of Jagannath Temple was the focal point of the pride of such pundits. To entice the pilgrims of distant lands discussions on Sanskrit scriptures was the routine task here. The occupationist Brahmins were earning their bread by explicating scriptures everyday before an august audience. Though

it was fulfilling the needs of a few, the vast populace of Orissa was not benefitted from it. The Sanskrit pundits were honoured in the court. The saint-poets, the Panchasakhas were not easily accepted in the court and they had to face many ordeal and tests.

Jagannath Das, Balaram Das and Achyutananda Das played a significant role. They were rebellious. They revolted against the Sanskrit supremacy in order to standardize Oriya as an independent modern language and literature. Balaram Das, Jagannath Das and Achyutananda Das had to face a hard trial before the Brahmins on the Mukti Mandapa. They had simplified the unattainable and inaccessible knowledge of Sanskrit in their mother-tongue and educated the people. Against such autocratic intentions of the Brahmins they set up an open free market of knowledge. It was the reason for which the Brahmins and pundits tortured the Panchasakhas to suppress them.

Secondly, they broke away the monopoly enjoyed by the Brahmins over the scriptures. They translated the great epics like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Harivamsa and the Geeta into standard Oriya, they dedicated these scriptures to the service of all the people of Orissa irrespective of caste and creed. As most of the poets were non-Brahmins the revengeful arrogant pundits prefixed these translated books by offending word like Sudra, Teli etc. (Teli Bhagabat and the like). They propagated the colloquial sayings like "Vedas are glorified in the words of a Brahmin, alone."

In accordance to the tradition of Jagannath temple, the Panchasakhas viewed society beyond the narrow looks of casteism. For this they had to face the open protest of the powerful Brahmin's society.

In course of time the five rebellious saint-poets of Orissa came in contact with Sri Chaitanya, who also needed their cooperation for the propagation of his thoughts and ideology.

The Panchasakhas considered Lord Jagannath as the focal point of their devotion. From the very beginning, they set the rebellious fire of Jagannath consciousness to the empire of their hearts. Although in their ideals and principles they looked identical from the very beginning, there was no close similarity among them. Shree Chaitanya assembled them under the great umbrella of his cult. The idea of friendship among them grew up. The followers of Sri

Chaitanya hailed from Nadia were considering themselves great or superior to the Utkaliya Vaisnavas and were disregarding them. So there was a cold war among them. Knowing this Shree Chaitanya conferred the title of 'Atibadi' (the great) on Jagannath Das to keep up the dignity of Utkaliya Vaisnavas. But it brought no solution and on the other hand created more conflicts among them. The conflicts of these two groups are evident in the *Basana Charita Geeta* of Achyutananda. While Sri Chaitanya was preaching his spiritual ideas at Puri, except Balaram Das, the other four Panchasakha poets assembled at the holy shrines of Goddess Sarala at Jhankada. They could explore their own creative genius through debates and discussions. They were determined to specialize in their respective branches of learning.

Before resorting to the company of Sri Chaitanya, Jagannath Das had completed composing his *Bhagabat* and Balaram Das his uncompered monument, *Jagamohan Ramayana*. But their access into the company of Sri Chaitanya assuaged their poetic verve and inculcated deep devotional sensibilities into them. It would not be irrelevant to say that consuming these two great poets Sri Chaitanya gave birth to two great bhaktas or devotees. Among the Panchasakhas Jagannath Das and Balaram Das were first 'bhaktas' and they became bhaktas and the other three were at first poets and then they became poets later. It is the reason why the historical flashes about the Pachasakhas are not found in the writings of Jagannath Das and Balaram Das. Achyutananda was the most prolific and influential poet among the Panchasakhas. Feeling the pulses of his time he reflected the minute details of the contemporary world in his works. The intense devotional activities of Balaram Das were socially unsuitable. So he was called a 'lunatic' (Matta Balaram Das). But Jagannath Das was a stable saint. He was much respected by the other Sakhas. Achyutananda learnt the teachings for 'Samkirtana' from him and was always honouring him as 'Sakhaguru'. The spiritual teachings of Sanatan Gossain could not fulfil his spiritual urges and refine his Vaisnavite consciousness. So he was initiated by Jagannath Das at the behest of Sri Chaitanya. The mystery behind the Panchasakha-friendship can be conceived by explicating the minute details of their literary resources without which their institution looks illusive and deceitful.

Though the Panchasakhas were busy in their individual literary worlds, being stationed at different parts of Orissa, their love for the Lord united them in one unit. The Jagannath consciousness like an unseen thread bound them into a single compact bond. This new consciousness also brought encouragement into them for writing poetry jointly. Their whole efforts surprise the scholars in our times. They composed philosophical lyrics. There are models of such poetry composed jointly by poets even today. The Panchasakhas became intimate friends to make the national life virulent and ever green. It was the need of the time and Achyutananda Das was the product of such burning spirit of nationalism.

The Sweet Fragrance of Panchasakha Consciousness

In his magnum opus *The Oriya Mahabharat* Sudramuni Sarala Das has depicted Lord Jagannath as Krishna. According to him, after the end of His Dwarika Leela, the Lord has reincarnated himself in the Purushottam Kshetra Puri on the eastern seashore. But in this incarnation, Krishna is without his consort Radha. It is an example of extreme power of imagination to establish Jagannath as an incarnation that is rare in other Indian languages. Further, eulogising Shree Jagannath as Lord Buddha he has described him as Nirakara and Niranjana. The Panchaskhas, being in strong accord with Sarala Das, had accepted Lord Jagannath as Krishna. Their Jagannath is Nityakrishna or Goloka Krishna.

According to the Panchasakhas Lord Jagannath is the 'Purnabrahma' (Absolute soul). All the 'avataras' of Vishnu emanate from Him and also enter into Him at the end. The Purnabrahma Jagannath is Sunyapurusa, Nirakara and Niranjan and He is enshrined at Nilachaldham as such. Nilachal is Nitya Golak. The Manaba Krishna (Lord Krishna in human form) needs permission and austere Sadhana (spiritual discipline) to enter into the holy shrines of the Leela of Nitya Golaka. This heritage of wisdom was not encoded into any Sanskrit Kavya or Purana. It was a devotional path followed by the Oriya saint-poets, a trend of novel thought which they introduced.

The Panchasakhas did not renounce the path of their predecessors. On the other hand, they tried to show off their originality by appending their ideas to those of their predecessors. Achyutananda's vision of the Purnabrahma Krishna is due to the influence of the *Brahmabairbarta Purana*. In this Purana there are various descriptions of Krishna as Saguna, Nirguna, Sakara, Nirakara, Jyotirupa, Tejorupa, and Sanatana. Achyutananda had accepted it. So Sunyapurusha of the *Brahmabairbarta Purana* finds corresponding expression in his famous book *Gurubhakti Geeta*, where he writes :

Dui se denare paksh udikari yai
 Dui se chakshure sehu samsara khelai.
 Yeka ye na thile kana dui gale andha
 Yenu kari nirguna saguna pashe bandha.

(GBG 2)

(The bird flies with its two wings to see the world with its two eyes without which one is blind—thus like two eyes 'Nirguna' and 'Saguna' are chained together.)

The saint-poets like Achyutananda have showed both the paths of devotion and wisdom for the attainment of the formless Jagannath of Nityagoloka. They have established the path of discipline on Hatyajoga Rajajoga. The success of physical and spiritual discipline of a Sadhak depends on the availability of various experiences of his guru. Though there were many books in Sanskrit and Prakrit language on it, they had laid stress upon yogic sadhana of the guru.

The Panchasakhas were yogis as well as devotees. Though they were practising yoga for the attainment of the divine, they had also experienced the necessity of Nabadhabhakti (nine kinds of devotion). They had resolved the path of Jnanamishra bhakti yoga by the admixture of Jnanayoga and Bhaktiyoga. Lord Jagannath was the chief god of the devotional worship of the Vaisnavas of the Panchasakha sect. In their opinion Jagannath and Purushottam are one and identical. They had assumed Jagannath as Purushottam and Shreekshetra Puri as Purushottam Kshetra. The Prurushottam of the Vedanta, the Upanishadas and the Bhagabat Geeta is their Jagannath.

The Panchasakha poets were successful sadhakas. So they were the masters of several occult and esoteric powers. Their wonderful activities amazed the mass of society. People were allured to be their followers. They had presented Lord Jagannath as the symbol of all religions and composed powerful lyrics on this theme. These poems created the sincere interest in everyone. On the otherhand these lyrics and songs became the chief texts of contemporary literature. It was an easy way to preach the divine ideas to common people. The popularity of the poems reached the ears of the king. Gajapati Prataprudra Deva during his short stay at Puri heard about these poets and wanted to know the truth of it. He put these poets into many ordeals. These arduous tests faced

by the Panchasakhas have become legends.

In the sixteenth century the wide popularity of Buddhism lost its ground. The Buddhist preachers had divided Buddhism into several sects. The strong influence of Hinduism broke the backbone of Buddhism and the difference between Hindu and Buddhist rituals and philosophy vanished. In the mean time Lord Buddha had been counted among the Vedic and Puranic gods. During this period Buddhism only survived as a philosophy.

Chaitanyadeva's most favourite place of worship was Puri. The patronage of Gajapati Prataprudra Deva and Ray Ramananda provided him many opportunities to propagate his philosophy of love between Radha and Krishna. The religious circle of Sri Chaitanya was further accentuated due to the cooperation of the Panchasakhas. The Panchasakhas were living in Puri at that time. So they had the opportunity of having the divine presence of Sri Chaitanya in their company and were much benefited. Chaitanya could not forget the sweet fragrance of the religious life of Orissa till the end of his life. Living at Puri for about twenty years, at last he left his mortal body here.

About the Panchasakhas, this much can be said for certainty that Lord Jagannath was the God of their soul, their god of worship. But Sri Chaitanya was only an accidental preceptor. Even they could have flourished to spread their fragrance on the soil of Orissa even had Chaitanya not come to Puri. They dreamt their own dreams. Except the guru's initiation and their experiences of being in the company of learned sadhus, they had their own ideologies. In certain places Achyutananda has described his four sakhas (colleagues) as sakhas (branches). Though they had differences in their cultish paraphernalia, in the art of 'chita' or smearing their forehead, hands, chests with the sandal paste; in methods of worship and chanting the holy names; they were different. Nevertheless, their religious mental set up and trends of thought were identical for which they were sakhas (colleagues) sakhas (branches). They were the branches of the huge tree called the cult of Lord Jagannath.

Their rebellion against Brahminism resulted in the creation of a new religious class of man known as Vaishnavas, who believed in a religious socialistic structure of the society. Anybody could be

a Vaisnava. There was no Brahmin or Kshatriya or Vaishya or Sudra, among them. They considered all human beings as one. Even the Muslims converted themselves to Vaisnavas. A Muslim of Yosohar district of Bangladesh became Hari Dasa, a Vaisnava and lived at Puri. He was also an intimate friend of the Panchasakhas. Bhakta Haridas was buried in a grave of sand at the Swargadwara of Puri after his death. Though some scholars believe that the philosophy of the Panchasakhas was the fruit of Buddhistic wisdom, in fact, this was the philosophy centering Jagannath. There are also examples of many Muslim Vaisnava poets writing divine lyrics of very high standard on Lord Jagannath.

To sum up, it can be said that the foundation of the Panchasakha philosophy is based upon the worship of Nirakara (Sunya) Brahma (The formless absolute soul). In this way of worship importance is given to the control of all senses. A disciple learns it from a Sadguru, an honest pious teacher by offering himself under his feet as a total surrender. Achyutananda in one of his books has said, "With a mind that has not been calmed and made ready for further attainments, all yogic practices and austere repetitions are sure to go in vain. Mind thus is the guru, it is the root, the real player. Mind is the Bhagavata and the Geeta; and when that is not ready and confident, even nectar is sure to taste bitter."

If a man's inner soul does not submit to the path of 'Bhakti' and 'Sadhana', he cannot become a real 'bhakta'. He must have powerful and refined sensibility to receive the genuine knowledge from his guru. So Achyutananda has ridiculed the pseudo disciples in many of his poems. He has hated the false Vaisnava occupationist Mahantas (Abbots) and the egoistic Sadhus. To rescue and discipline the neglected society he had advanced a few steps more than his other sakhas. For recognising real bhaktas he had resolved rules and had enshrined them in many of his lyrics and chants.

Explaining his disciples about the attributes of a devotee he had once said : "There are bhaktas who go on chattering the name of the Lord without rest. There are bhaktas who will take food from any home. There are bhaktas who perform occult acts and bhaktas who make false offerings. There are wandering bhaktas who carry flags to parade their devotion, and there are bhaktas who are smeared all over the body (with dust or ashes). He, who has

attained a right understanding of the Divine, is the real bhakta, and a bhakta who has the inward eye sees God within him and in everyman and he is the best.”

Thus, the chief ideal of the Panchasakhas was that as a bhakta they would be faithful, humble, learned, selfless, active, benevolent and affectionate. All these abstract ideas and principles moulded the spirit of their poetic life and its sweet fragrance cleansed the superstitions and dogmas in their society. Of course, to recognise the true Panchasakha one has to breathe in the fragrant world of their poetry.

Birth and Life-story of Achyutananda

It is an irony in the social history of Orissa that a person who had written much about his time and himself is so much controversial a figure among the literary scholars and historians. Achyutananda was the first epoch-making personality who had recorded many details about his life, time and socio-cultural milieu. He has described many historical facts of the previous age and as a prophet his writings emanate many signs of the social change in future. He had the sensibility to excavate the past and explore the new possibilities in future while conscious of his present existence. It becomes difficult, therefore, to justify as to which time he belonged to and such a notion has made Achyutananda a controversial historical and literary figure. There are many conflicting opinions on his time of birth as that of Kabir.

Date of Birth of Achyutananda

Achyutananda had written a book *Udaya Kahani* about his birth, occupation, and the religious background and his contemporary poets. It is a very authentic record on dates of birth of Panchasakhas. From this record we come to know that he was born during the twenty first anka (year of region) of the Gajapati King Purusottam Dev. According to an authentic record *Khurudha Itihas* of Kedarnath Mohapatra Purusottam Dev ruled during 1466 AD to 1496.

On his date of birth in *Udaya Kahani* Achyutananda writes:

Dahana ankaku gunibu yebe
Bama anka goti mishaa Tebe.
Yemantena sala hoye nikara
Shuna Ramachandra Yethi bhitara.
Sata bhuja ari mani mitrare
Tari Sana hela oda rastrare.
Yehi anke muhi Janama heli
Pamara Achyuta nama paili.

Udaya Kahani — 69-72 padas.

[O Ramachandra (his chief disciple) : Listen; if you multiply the right digit with the left digit and add the left digit with it, you will find the year of my birth. The number concerned is the symbolic addition of Sata (7), bhuja, ari, mani and mitra. In this year of his reign I was born in Oda rastra and got the name of Achyuta].

There is a simple arithmetic formula about the date of reference. The sum is : [Sata (7) + bhuja or hands (2) + Ari or ripu (enemies) 6 + mani or ratna (jewels) 9 + mitra of Surya (Sun) 12 = 36]

Multiplying the right digit of 36 with left we get 18 (3×6). Adding the left digit of 36 with 18 we get 21. This 21 gives the date that he was born in the 21st year of reign of Gajapati king Purushottam Dev. There is also a rule for counting years of reign of the Gajapati Kings of Orissa. According to this rule the first year of new King's reign is counted as second year as it is included in the reign of the previous king. Then the 6th year and in all the years of two-digit number where 6 (six) is the right digit (digit of unit's place) are not counted. Further, all two-digit numbers except 10 where 0 (zero) is at the unit's place are not counted. Thus the 21st year of Purushottam Dev's reign is the year $(1466 + 21 - 4) = 1483$ AD. To count it with an accuracy some scholars have accepted the date as 1482 AD.

The later part of 15th century during which Achyutananda was born had a strong religious background and political stability. This period was a glorious tenure in the history of Orissa. The Panchasakha poets were born in this period within short year gaps. These poets were the truest representatives of Orissa's cultural tradition. They had built a new socio-cultural milieu and created a new to end of thought.

Birth place

Achyutananda was born in a very small village named Tilakana (near Nemala) in the district of Cuttack. Both the places Nemala and Tilakana are on the bank of the river Chitrotpala, a tributary of the Mahanadi. Tilakana is at the north of Nemala and a kilometre away. Though Tilakana was his birth-place (his father's homestead) he spent his life time mostly at Nemala. Recording about his birth place and family status in his famous book *Sunya Samhita* he writes :

Tilakanare Mun Janama Labhili
 Kehi na janile more,
 Aganite boli mata dukuthanti
 Anna na milai ghare

Chapter 19/Verse 38

(I was born in Tilakana without anybody's knowledge. My mother was calling me Aganita and there was no food in my house i.e. the family was poor).

On the bank of the river Chitrotpala, Nemala is a sylvan spot with a large number of banyan and peepul trees. At that time it was a place of extreme solitude surrounded by a dense forest where tigers lived. The place allured the poet and he spent the most difficult moments of his life sitting in meditations under the banyan trees. The murmuring sound of the flowering Chitrotpala, the flutter of leaves of the banyan and peepul trees, of cooing and cuckoos brought him the divine poetic verve and enlightenment to realise God. Here also he achieved the supreme divine ray of knowledge which pierced his inner creative soul. He attained the bliss of the divine, the occult experiences, and penetrated the esoteric doctrines of theology transcending the Mundane realities. That is why the place was so favourite for him and he had mentioned the name and descriptions of the place many times in several of his books.

In some other places he has mentioned the name of his birth place as "Tripura". In his quintessential book *Sunya Samhita* he has recorded "Tripura" as his birth place. Explicating the importance of 'Tripura' he writes in his book *Varna Tik* :

Shuna babu tuhi braja kumar.
 Samsara Janama sthana Tripura.
 Nitya Nilachala purba dwarare
 Thamba gotika aruna namare.
 Sethabun bimsha pabachha thabena
 Tripura grama seema nirupana.
 Yaunthare Bali Patali thiti
 Suramane Yaunthare gamanti.
 Manchare Nityasthala ate sehi
 Sethare gopyana Tripura bhuin.

35-40 padas

[O Brajakumar : (Ramachandra – his chief discipline) listen : In this the name of my birth place is Tripura. From the Aruna Stambha the east doorway of the Nilachal (the holy shrine of Lord Jagannath i.e. the temple) on the 20th stair (pabachha) is my birth place. Tripuragrama where the gods live and where also the proud king Bali was pressed down to the hell by the Lord. This is the eternal place of the world 'marttyapura' and here 'Tripura' is hidden.]

It is clear from the above lines that Tripura is a place within the precincts of the Jagannath Temple or a nearby place. Some scholars describe the third stair (from the doorway of the temple) of the *Baishi pabachha* as Tripura. The narration of 'Varna Tika' is in favour of this view. There is an episode about it. Achyutananda's father had no son. So, day and night, he was praying to Lord Jagannath for a son. He was a pure devotee of the Lord. One day the Lord appeared before him in his dream and advised, "Tomorrow morning go to the Garuda stambha; there a child will be playing on the twentieth stair; that child will be yours. That's why Achyutananda mentions Tripura as his birth place. On the other hand 'Tripura' is a metaphysical symbol representing Swarga (heaven), Martya (this world), Patal (the underworld). Thus it is present everywhere. Perhaps Achyutananda was getting divine pleasure to accept the universal place 'Tripura' as his birth place. Tripura is a spiritual abode."

Really, a great saint-poet should not be confined to a certain region. He belongs to all times, land and races. It is not necessary to raise controversies about his birth place, parentage etc. For the difference in statements there are conflicts. The arguments presented here are to resolve such conflicts.

Childhood

In his several works Achyutananda Das has narrated many details about his birth and ancestry. His ancestors had close affinity with the Gajapati Kings and the tradition of the temple (mandir) administration. His grandfather Gopinath Mohanty took to the vocation of a karan (a scribe) and his father was engaged as Khuntia by the order of the king in the temple of Lord Jagannath. So his father was known as Dinabandhu Khuntia. For several years

he had no child. His wife Padmavati was spending days in grief. Day and night the couple were praying Lord Jagannath. Once in dream the Lord ordered Dinabandhu that he would be granted his boon and that his son would be a partner of the Lord. Days passed. In time Dinabandhu was blessed with the divine child Achyutananda. On the day of Magha Shukla Ekadashi (eleventh day of the bright fortnight in the month of Magha) he had taken birth and had cleansed his father's sin of sonlessness. His father performed the rituals to celebrate his birth in due time. About it the poet writes in his *Sunya Samhita* :

Jatakarmamana Pitamata kale
 Shathi uthiaree tule
 Agana a pochha Karina mo nama
 aneka prakara dele
 Kebole anama aganita name
 ke bole ananta hari
 Pitamata shesha dakileka mote
 Achyuta namati dhari.

Ist chapter/39-40 padas

(Performing all kinds of rituals to celebrate my birth parents assigned many names to me. Some called me Anama, some Aganita, some Ananta [Hari]. But at last my parents called me 'Achyuta').

After the birth of Achyutananda his father was blessed with two other sons and a daughter. Dinabandhu was very serious on his son's education and training. He wanted to inculcate good manners into him. But Achyutananda was fond of games and was very unmindful in his studies. Due to the stern dealings of his father, even though he was always reading, he was never mindful in his lessons. The elders and well wishers dealt him with much strictures due to his disinterestedness in study. In spite of this there was no change in him.

Dinabandhu was serving as a Khuntia being settled at Puri. So Achyutananda spent his childhood days at Puri. The wheel of fate does not turn smoothly for ever. Somehow the king being dissatisfied with Dinabandhu suspended him from his service. It was a great thrust upon the family. As a result Dinabandhu had to return to Tilakhana. They had no other sources of earning their livelihood. In

his worries for earning his livelihood he could not pay heed for the studies of Achyutananda and even neglected him. But he was not deprived of the love and care of his mother who had a great hope of her son's future.

Achyutananda grew up. He became more and more indifferent to this material world. He left his games, studies and company of friends. Many a time his parents found him sitting in solitude and pondering over something deeply. In the youth when a person is full of dreams of marry making and several worldly ways of spending time, should one be so different ? This puzzled his parents. But they could not find any solution.

Education and Initiation

Dinabandhu wanted that his son would be a pundit with a command over Sanskrit. Learning Sanskrit was the standard of education at that time. Dinabandhu made all out efforts to train up his son as a scholar. But at the end, felt that there would be no change in the attitude of his son. Finding no other solution, once he set out for Puri with his wife and son. They made a 'darsan' of the Lord and stayed there for some days in the hope of getting an engagement. He was trying to engage his son in a job. All his efforts were in vain. He could not find any job.

Right at this time Shree Chaitanya had arrived at Puri. At Badadanda, Shree Chaitanya was leading a procession of 'Kirtan' and Dinabandhu met him with his son. They bowed to him. At the advice of his father, Achyutananda touched the lotus-feet of Lord Chaitanya. To their surprise a great change came over him at once and immediately the dull Achyutananda began to pronounce scriptures. One who was so unmindful to his studies, and stupid, who could not utter a mantra, started pronouncing the mantras fluently. A new enlightenment pierced into his mind and cleansed it. He could even remember his lessons and lecture fluently. Dinabandhu requested Shree Chaitanya to initiate his son into his order. At the behest of Shree Chaitanya Sanatan Gossain called his young disciple Achyutananda into the precincts of the temple. Beneath a banyan tree of Dakshindwar Sanatan whispered the gurumantra (the words of the master) into the ear of his disciple. He instructed Achyutananda to smear his body with 'tilak marks'. He assigned Harimandir Tilak on his forehead and Panchatilak on

arms and chest. Thus guru Sanatan initiated him into the Shyama Panchakshara Mahamantra Diksha. Now Achyutananda came out of the temple as a Vaishnava. That was not much for him. His enlightened soul was not to be satisfied with this. He tried to know more and more about the Vaishnava cult.

Finding no source of engagement he returned home with his parents. After his initiation the parents found considerable change in him. He was active. Being completely indifferent to the materialistic life of give and take he spent his hours in solitude uttering the names of God. For this reason he chose Nemala (one kilometre away from his native place) as the place for his Sadhana and set up his monastery there. Here was born the poet Achyutananda. In such solitude he learnt to sing the divine glory of the Lord. He composed songs, lyrics, kavyas and padavalis and spent time in singing them. This did not help his father and he suffered more and more in poverty.

To gain more knowledge he decided to start for Puri again. The love of Tilakana and Nemala could not bind him. The enlightened company and divine wisdom enticed him and he became impatient to set off for Puri. There he was introduced to other sakhas and spent time with them discussing poetics, aesthetics, Vedanta philosophy, esoteric doctrines of Vaisnavism and the occult philosophy. Here also he had the opportunity of being well-versed to the knowledge of the Vedic and Puranic stories, episodes and the heritage of classical literature. He took part in discussions and spiritual discourses. Slowly he joined his social recognition. He was recognised as a guru and a number of people followed him. They wanted to get wisdom from him. Being a self controlled practican, a yogi, he wandered from village to village preaching the greatness of God. A convinced saint, attaining the placidity of mind he had no inclination for worldly objects, but to rescue the millions of downtrodden. He emerged as a Saviour. In course of his wanderings he came to Ranapur (in the district of Puri) and stayed there for some years at the request of the local king and his own disciples. There he got the royal patronage. He was no more a poor man and he refined his sensibility. Here at Ranapur he wrote his magnum opus *The Harivamsha*.

In Orissa, next to the Mahabharat of Sarala Das, the books which have own wide popularity are the *Ramayana* of Balaram

Das, the *Bhagabat* of Jagannath Das and the *Harivamsha* of Achyutananda Das. Though he wrote the *Harivamsha* under the King's patronage, he had never submitted the manuscript to him. Once in his dream he saw his guru. That day was Vaishakha Shukla Ekadashee (the eleventh day of bright fortnight in the month of Vaisakha). It was a very auspicious day for him. He attained divine inspiration and a new spiritual path gleamed in his mind. So immediately he started for Puri.

Pilgrimage and Marriage

At first Achyutananda got the 'mantra diksha' (teachings for muttering the names of god). Of course, he was not initiated into the order of a saint. A saint has to wear a koupeena (a piece of cloth used as underwear). From a domesticated Vaisnava, he changed into a saint as he was inspired by the divine force. He visited Shree Kshetra with his twelve disciples. (The Vaisnavas of Orissa considered twelve as an auspicious number, as a metaphysical symbol representing the twelve months of the revolution of the sun or the twelve suns.)

Youth dips man in luxury, compels him for enjoying life and disturbs his spiritual discipline. But then youth of Achyutananda made him a Sadhaka and yogi. The company of Shree Chaitanya and his other sakhas Balaram Das, Jagannath Das, Yashobanta Das and Ananta Das enriched his knowledge on the Divine and he was much benefitted. Now, being determined to be a saint he met Shree Chaitanya with his twelve disciples and prayed him for giving him necessary teachings to wear a koupeena. Being initiated into Sannyasa he set out for his pilgrimage with his disciples. The Vaisnavas used the term Prithvi Pradakshina (going round the world) a pilgrimage, that allowed saints to visit the four most important holy shrines. Starting his journey from Puri he went to Rameshwaram, Chitrakuta, Dwarka, Ayodhya, Mathura, Kashi, Benaras and came back to Puri.

His travel was not a mere pilgrimage. He travelled all over India as a cultural ambassador and propagated Vaisnavism. The medium of his propagation was the *Rahasa Kirtana*. It was the chief medium of the cultish revival. The *Rahasa Kirtana* was a panacea for the spiritual upliftment of the ~~waifs and strays~~ of the society

that belonged to the Chaitanyaite school of Vaisnavism. Lord Chaitanya protested against the multiplicity of social barriers and differences to raise the social status of the outcastes. Achyutananda learnt it from his Chaitanyaite guru. But he learnt composing Rahasas (Rasa in Sanskrit) from his sakha Jagannath Das. Jagannath Das was his Rahasa guru whom Achyutananda was addressing as sakha guru. However, during his travel kirtan was his chief means of propagation and with its magic charm he could influence the millions.

Completing his pilgrimage Achyutananda returned to Puri. It was the time of Rathayatra. Crowds of Vaisnavas had congregated at Puri. They were holding assemblies for religious discourses. Achyutananda spent many days with them, served his guru at Puri and learnt a lot from this enlightened company here he was inspired by his guru Jagannath Das for resorting to a domesticated saint Gruhee Sanyasa. But Achyutananda was not in favour of it. He passed his time at Puri. Once he got an invitation from his friend Yashobanta Das to visit his village Nandigram near Adhanga. He visited Nandigram matha with his family. The kirtan attracted him so much that he requested Achyutananda to conduct the performance again at his palace for seven days.

Achyutananda came to Adhanga for the performance. It was a grand performance. Thousand of spectators gathered. Raghuram's only daughter Champavati was very much charmed. She could realise the enchanting power of the kirtan to show her the way to God. Her mind dazzled with sparks of the divine wisdom and indifference to the material affluent life. She expressed her strong desire before her parents to be a Sannyasinee (lady saint) and to marry Achyutananda. But the king protested against this proposal and rejected it. Narrating this story Achyutananda writes :

Champavati kimpa bauli heu
 Rajaneeti Sukha Kahaku deun.
 Kahinki Yatira dasee hoibu
 Kaun Sukhagota tahun paibu.
 Yahara nahin basa desha grama
 Hari bhakatita atain dhama.
 Bhakati rasun tu kisa paibu
 Bhrama pane sina kasta labhibu.

(O my darling Champavati : You need not confuse yourself with such trifle matters. Away from the luxury of palace what is the charm of becoming a maid-servant by marrying this monk, who has no house, village or any shelter. The devotion for Hari (God) is only an illusion. You will get nothing running after it except miseries.)

How could a princess marry a monk? But Champavati was firm and her tenacity defeated the protest of her parents.

At last she married to Achyutananda, about the year 1523 AD. At the time of his marriage Achyutananda was forty years old. It was a late marriage and he performed it at the order of his guru.

Feats and Fame

Achyutananda has not left any record about his tantric sadhana. However, after his pilgrimage he had turned into a great prophet having achieved austere spiritual discipline. The significance of his words increased many times and he was adorned by the devout mass of the society. Nemala was the abode of his spiritual exercises. After marriage he lived at Nemala. Gradually crowds of people flocked around him. His disciples grew in number. While explaining the Vaisnava wisdom and the Pinda-Brahmanda Tattwa he composed kavyas, lyrics, samhitas, geetas, tikas and kalpas.

He was converting the people irrespective of caste and creed into the Vaisnavas. His Vaisnavas were not the pseudo-Vaisnavas wearing only the robes of a Vaishnava. They were the bonafide Vaisnavas. They did not believe in wearing chains of beads, painting their forehead and body with sandal paste, begging from door to door and all the religious centres of the country. Achyutananda hated that kind of a Vaisnava. According to him a Vaishnava is a fine learned gentleman, a devout, a householder and a greedless person. He hated the man who is hungry of power and protested against the deep rooted brahmanism. To build a new society of divine atmosphere was his dream. So he was always raising his voice against the hatred for the community of the low castes. That's why though he was born in the prestigious Karan family he called himself a Sudra. According to him a Sudra can only be a servant of God. So he writes.

Nahin mohara bipravaranne asha kshatriya Vaishyare

nahin bharasa. Sana hele mana Sarua hoi Tahun Achyuta
ye Sudra bolai.

(*Varnnatika* 93-94 padas)

(I don't desire to be a Brahmin or a Kshatriya or a Vaisya. A Sudra's mind is refined, pure and noble. So I like to be a Sudra.)

Perhaps having this ideology in mind he wrote the 'Harivamsha'. The neglected milkman community feel proud of the majestic book, call it as the glory of their ancestors and find pleasure in hearing it. He also wrote 'Gopal Ogals'. This is a special kind of form of poetry innovated by the poet. This form is nothing but a skillful jotting of philosophical poetic exchanges between two groups of people. This people holding bamboo sticks in their hands dance and sing these songs. One group questions in the song and the other answers. The dance is made to the accompaniment of some musical instruments like Shinga (made of buffalo's horn), mridanga and cymbals. Further for the downtrodden class of fishermen he wrote the 'Kaibartta Geeta'. As a result he had become the guru of the communities of milkmen (gopalas) and fishermen.

For poor illiterate farmers and householders he had written a number of treatises on medicine, cow treatment and day-to-day rites, rituals and other holy performances. As a result he had made the priceless mantras and scriptural knowledge available to the illiterate mass of his society and this knowledge did not remain the only possession of the brahmins. Making the outcastes accessible to the world of scriptures and all kinds of ritualistic fervour he played the role of the greatest brahmin. But he had to suffer much for it. For several times he had to give explanation for his deeds before the kings and was questioned in the court and thus faced many ordeals. At the order of the king he had to remain in confinement for several times. But he did not care for these threatening.

The Hero of Many Legends

It is natural that legends are created in favour of eminent personalities. People generally don't examine their exactitude due to their extra devotional inclination for their heroes. We hear many legends about the panchasakha poets like Balaram Das and Jagannath Das. For his erudition the brahmins and pundits of the kings' court

were envious of Achyutananda and presented many false complaints against him before the king. The following legend records one of such cases.

Once the king Gajapati Prataprudra Deva heard an accusation against Achyutananda that he was a deceitful tantric; and that he was misleading the people against Hinduism. Creating illusions and reclaiming himself a Shunya Sadhaka, he was disregarding the brahmins of the king's court and spoke much ill of the king. So the king sent for Achyutananda and ordered him to prove his Shunya Sadhana, failing which he would be expelled from the Kingdom. Achyutananda agreed to prove it and went away.

The next day morning the king with his faithful courtiers was enjoying his morning walk. All of a sudden he came to see a wonderful sight. A few yards away from his palace, he saw a man sitting on a piece of tiger skin that was hanging in space of about a man's height over the water level of a huge well. He was sitting in a posture of deep meditation without any movement of his body. He came close and found that the man was none but Achyutananda. The king, drawing out his sword, combed the wall of the well to examine whether the skin was hanging from any source. At last he believed that Achyutananda was a real Shunya Sadhaka. The king was overpleased with Achyutananda and he offered precious treasures of wealth to him, which he did not accept and claimed that the king had nothing to give him as Lord Jagannath could only fulfil his needs and the king is a mere servant of the Lord.

Achyutananda never submitted to the royal powers. He was more a Karmavadin than a religious occupationist. Though he knew the Hathayoga he did not apply it for the fulfillment of material needs and protested against it. He presented that the Hathayoga can be used at the time of extreme need to prove the existence of God and the significance of Sadhana (spiritual discipline). He protested vehemently against its use in ordinary cases. The following is an example of it.

Achyutananda's only son Brajagadadhar (or Bhabia Das) was a great Sadhaka. He was his father's equal in the spiritual quests. His sadhana in such an early age startled the experts of yoga. Once Achyutananda grew up a cucumber plant in his garden. He had in his mind that he would take its first fruit to Puri and offer it to Lord

Jagannath. Puri is nearly 50 kilometres from Nemala. He decided to walk the distance in one day in order to present the fruit afresh to the lord.

In due time the creeper bore a fruit. On an auspicious day he went to his garden to pick the fruit. But alas, his son had already eaten up the fruit. He wondered about the missing fruit. Everyone had seen the fruit the last evening. How could it vanish within the night. Then he asked his son Gadadhar. He remained silent. After a while Achyutananda found his son in the garden in meditation and the fruit was hanging from the creeper as before. Achyutananda became ashamed of his son's behaviour. Hathayoga should not be used for any selfish means. So he advised his son to be away from him and build a separate monastery. He also advised him not to use Hathayoga to fulfil selfish desires. There are several legends about such yogic exploits and sheer emulation in occult and esoteric activities.

How Far is the Path of Life ?

No doubt Achyutananda became a saint-poet at his matured age. He created his monumental works after he was forty. As a historian of his contemporary world he depicted many important facts of his times that had influenced him. There were bitter controversies among the Chaitanyaites, when his creative imagination was mellowing. So the Panchasakhas felt ashamed of resorting to the company of Sri Chaitanya. They chose Jhankada (the holy shrine of Goddess Sarala) as the suitable place for their religious assemblage. Achyutananda played the role of an organiser and he convened the meeting of the Panchasakhas and their disciples. In his monumental work *Barancharita Geeta* he writes about the invitees to the function :

Kalpana Vatara mule dasa Jagannath
Haridasa gossain ye tahanka Samgata 1240/xxx

Chaitana thakuranka bhajana kutire
Vishrama Karina thanti schise thabare (248)

Bairagya atantitanka sutashuta nahin
Kalpabata modena dibaseaja rahi (249)

Tahankara tahir tumbha tale Kasiyiba
Shree Achuuta guru ambha bolina boliba (250)

Rahasa Kirtana guru at anti ambhara
Hasya ye karibe ajaguru tumbhathara (215)

Bahuta gopala mela gurubara dina
Saroladasa nati asanti sethana (563)

Bahu gopala nata naudi karina
Sarada bhupati ye Karai marajana (564)

(Under the kalpavata Jagannath Das with Haridas Gossain lives in the bhajan cottage of Shree Chaitanya. He has no children and he lives under the tree in day time and he is completely indifferent to the material world. He is my Rahasa Kirtan guru. He will mock at you as he is your grandfather like. Tell him Achyuta is our guru. Many gopals assemble there on Thursday and perform the Naudi dance. Sarada Bhupati the grandson of late saint-poet Sarala Das comes to this place.)

This conference was held under the patronage of Bhupati Parida, the grandson of Sarala Das. Due to the benevolence of Bhupati Parida the function was a grand success. Except Balaram Das, all the four sakhas were present in the ceremony. At that time Balaram Das was called 'matta Balaram Das' (the mad Balaram Das) because of extra-devotional externalities.

During this time the Panchasakha poets had two groups of enemies : the internal group and the external group. The Chaitanyaites were disrespecting the Vaisnavas of Orissa and were describing them as a low class of Vaisnavas. When Shree Chaitanya conferred the title of 'Atibadi' on Jagannath Das being pleased with his erudition, his followers the Gaudiya Vaisnavas protested against it and went away to Vrindavana in anger leaving Chaitanya in Orissa. However after much request they returned back. The Brahmins and the Pundits supporting Brahminism, were the deadly enemies of Panchasakhas and were protesting against their activities. They could not succeed in abating the importance of the Panchasakhas.

However, Achyutananda could not find pleasure in Shree Kshetra,

due to the increasing number of the Chaitanyaitees. So he chose the Shaktipeetha Jhankada as his spot and therefrom he waved his cultish renaissance to absolve the millions of downtroddens of their sins and worldly sufferings. The Sharada rasa was the chief medium of Chaitanya's propagation of the Premaleela of the Lord. But the chief medium of Achyutananda's ideology was the Basanta Rahasa. When the Chaitanyaitees were explicating the allegory of Gopikrishna, Achyutananda was explicating the theme of Gopalkrishna, the saviour, the lord of his Rahasas. He was exploring a new theme in the light of the conventional myth. He brought the essence of the premaleela of the Lord into limelight. Chaitanya used the kirtan as the medium for propagation of the Lord's Leela whereas Achyutananda's medium was the Rahasa Kirtan.

A remarkable thing was that when Achyutananda was organising his conference of devotees at the Sharala Pitha Chaitanya was there at Puri. Achyutananda sent invitations to all the exponents of Vaisnava cult except Chaitanya. Thus it is evident that the Vaisnavas had a community feeling and he did it to challenge, Sri Chaitanya's sense of superiority. The Panchasakhas had deep reverence of Chaitanya. But they needed liberty and they never wanted to be abused by them. In 'Baranacharita Geeta' he had referred to the rules observed by the Vaisnavas and also of the conferences of the Vaisnavas known as Vaisnava Mela. These Vaisnava melas are also now in vogue in the coastal districts of Orissa. On auspicious occasions the householders hold these Vaisnava melas with proper care. This tradition is set by the saint poet Achyutananda.

Achyutananda faced many ups and downs in his life. Shree Chaitanya breathed his last at Puri in his presence. To pay homage to him the king Prataparudra Dev observed a state-wide condolence. But the priests of Puri did not obey it. It was in 1530 and Achyutananda was 47 years old. A few years later Gajapati Prataprudra Dev died. During his reign he had seen the kingdom being fragmented. After his death political turmoil and instability accentuated and the kings of Bhoi dynasty ruled over Orissa.

The last independent king of Orissa Mukunda Dev ruled during 1559 AD to 1568 AD. There was some peace and stability during his reign. Achyutananda witnessed these political instabilities and at his ripe old age he was much depressed and disgusted.

Achyutananda lived for more than hundred years. The political interregnum and turmoil and Muslim invasions gave him great mental strain. These shattered the social peace and the serene, sweet and easy life of rural Orissa. To bring back the hope of a golden future he engaged himself in writing the *Malika* or the future forecasts that warned the vast populace to be aware of the hard times and stick to the religious ways of living, otherwise they would be slaughtered in the sword of the Kalki, the avatara of God in the Kaliyuga. He made the people aspirant of the coming of Kalki. The invasion of muslims devastated the calm social image of Orissa. There was no way to rescue the lives and property of Oriyas. Even the Sadhanapitha of Achyutananda was attacked by the muslims. So he was dreaming of a new era, an age of his dreams when there would be no muslims in the state. He wished for the extinction of wicked people after which peace and tranquility would prevail in the world. The coming of Kalki would destroy all evil forces in this world. He was not the only poet to make such statements but other contemporary poets had also made such forecast when the chief abode of Hinduism, Jagannathdham Puri was plundered and devastated by the muslims. People developed extreme hatred for Muslims and read Achyutananda's forecasts with much curiosity and hoped for the restoration of Hindu religion.

In his *Malika* verses Achyutananda has narrated the future deterioration of India's social religious and ritualistic life in his own style. In some places they are cryptic. He had advised his disciples to keep these things away from the knowledge of the mass. The crypticism of the poet has been explicated in many ways. But the real possibilities are beyond all the explications. The devotees are generally inclined devotionally towards his warnings. Even today some people argue that his forecasts are becoming facts in our times; but how would our future generation accept it, nobody knows.

During the politico-religious up-heavel of Orissa Achyutananda again went on a pilgrimage for some years. It is evident in his book *Baran Charita Geeta*. Except his chief disciple Ramachandra Das he sent all his disciples on pilgrimage for twelve years and he with Ramachandra wandered in the unknown villages of Orissa for propagating his religious ideologies.

The political crisis remained poignant for many years. In the fag end of his life he could not travel more and spent his time in his monastery at Nemala. The poet had lost the power of writing on the palm leaves in his own hand. So he dictated lines of his songs to the disciples to be taken down on the palm leaves. His most favourite disciple Ramachandra was the chief scribe of his literary works.

It is assumed that Achyutananda was alive upto 1585 AD. There are mentions of Telenga Mukunda Dev and a king of Bhoi dynasty Ramachandra dev in his works. In 'Garuda Geeta' he writes :

Telengā Mukunda bolī yeka rājā
Gaudadeshaku yiba
Bārabāī kīlā Schu tolāiba
Keeratī ye rakhī yiba.

The occasion of Ganga Katakai is a historical event of 1566 AD. In addition to it there are mentions of a dreadful famine and the extreme price rise of paddy (it is mentioned that the price of one bharana paddy was 120 Kahanas, i.e. $120 \times 16 \times 80 = 153600$ cowries which was a very very large sum of money and nobody could afford it). It happened during the 4th anka (year of reign) of Ramachandra Dev of Bhoi dynasty i.e. in 1570 AD. There is no mention of the historical events which were occasioned after 1585 AD. That's why his life period is accounted between these dates. But as a revolutionary literary artist he is beyond all time limits. He belongs to eternity.

As a social reformer he achieved vast support from all classes of people of the society. In fact he was the Jesus of the backward community. He cleansed the paths of salvation for the downtrodden mass of the society ostracising the ill-feelings of men for their fellowbeings. He tried to banish the caste system by converting people into the divine sect of Vaisnavas. Till the end of his life he was surrounded by large number of people everyday. There is a legend that in his ripe old age he could not visited Lord Jagannath at puri. So before his death once he prayed the lord, "O Lord : My time is very near. The fullmoon day of the month of Jyestha is your Snana Yatra (a ceremony of bath). I will leave this mortal

body on that day. So I pray you to visit me on that day at Nemala."

Though it was a prayer of the devotee, it is a fact that he breathed his last on the fullmoon day of Jyestha. This day is observed as an auspicious day at Nemala and lakhs of devotees gather here on that day. It is believed that the darshan of his graveyard on that day equals the darshan of Lord Jagannath.

The Creative World of Achyutananda

A secluded surrounding made Achyutananda nihilistic and this nihilistic consciousness being unified with the ideology of Jagannath cult exerted a vast influence on him to be a poet. As his mind was disinterested in this material world, the poetic genius was bestowed upon him. The Jagannath consciousness had improved and expanded his poetic vision. From time immemorial Jagannathdham is considered to be a superstructure in the religious world; the Jagannath cult voiced a literal humanism unifying the religious consciousness of the Jaina, Bauddha, Saiva, Shakta, Ganapatya and Soura. Before the emergence of the Panchasakhas the ideologies of the great Acharyas of India have been unified under the great umbrella of the Vaisnavism and Jagannath cult. After the unexpected advent of Shri Chaitanya exuberant efforts were made to immerse Lord Jagannath in the flood of Vaisnavism. The 'Achintya Vedaveda Tattwa' of Lord Chaitanya gaining royal patronage flourished in the fertile religious soil of Utkal. At this time the Panchasakhas tirelessly were engaged in their writings to prove the mighty power of Lord Jagannath as Sarva Karana Karanam (the cause of all causes). First of all this fragrance is discernible in Achyutananda's world of literary creation.

Achyutananda's medium of propagation was very powerful. He could communicate his religious findings throughout the coastal regions of Orissa by the help of his disciples. As a result he was renowned as a prophet as well as the author of the *Malikas* (a literary form of prophetic writings). Though he had written a very large number of literary works, most people know him merely as the author of the *Harivamsa*. Almost all of his literary works were meant for the propagation of his own religious philosophy. He used his pen to put forth his ideas for a growing casteless and creedless society, the upliftment of the down-troddens, the identity of Lord Jagannath and Goloka Krishna and also the protest against devotionless sagacity and tantric rites. In many of his works he has etched many details about his ancestry, progeny as well as the mystic vision of his past lives in different puranic ages. From his

vast literary creation *Shurya Samhita* can be interpreted in this light wherein he has elucidated his tattvic philosophy, patriotism and religious ideology in a very rich style. Even today his disciples are seen reciting this book like the Bhagavadgita with most humble reverence regardless of its content.

Most of his works are still unpublished and undiscovered. His works in old palm-leaf manuscripts are still worshipped by the devoted followers and disciples who believe that it is a sin to touch and read these manuscripts. As a result the hundreds of year old palm-leaf manuscripts being worm-eaten are immersed in river and many are still waiting for such tragic end. Only after the publication of his works his creative craft becomes vivid. It is conspicuous that he had kept a promise to liberate his mother tongue from the impervious clutch of Sanskrit. Achyutananda and the Panchasakhas were learned in Sanskrit and they had the power of rendering the Puranas and religious philosophy in colloquial native dialect.

The Epic-poet

Achyutananda's tattvic philosophy is the essence of all his epic works. The Harivamsa is perhaps most revered and appreciated as an epic work. It is a work in seven volumes and is popularly called in Oriya 'Satakhanda Harivamsha'. The book has no fidelity to the original text of 'Harivamsha' in Sanskrit. It is not a translation. Various leelas of Lord Krishna have very lucidly been described in it. Relating to many mythological events and episodes the poet has enhanced the greatness of the book. The diversified dilations of Lord Krishna's leela has helped the poets of succeeding ages to follow episodes anecdotes and myths from the 'Harivamsa'. The simple and lucid language and style of this book attracts the devotees to read and listen to it and this also tells us that it is one of the earliest writings of Achyutananda. It was a successful weapon of the author to win hearts of the people in future. At the time of writing this book the poet was very poor. He writes in 'Harivamsa':

“(I) live in Madhyagrama of Ranapur. Padmana Narendra gives me food and clothing. Being counted among the Sudras, (I am) initiated for the sake of the cowherdmen. (I) initiate all the cowherd men to the holy name of the Lord and keep my mind on Krishna's

feet. Thus I am called the Mahant (abbot) of the clan of the cowherdmen due to the blessings of Kamala's husband. So I always wish the feet of Gopinath; O crimson robed Lord; rescue Achyuta Das, the poet."

This statement of the poet from the fag-end of the last volume of 'Harivamsa' informs us that upto that time Achyutananda had not become a self-conscious, arrogant and confident man; the path of Sadhana, the divine exercises, was not complete to make him valiant. He was spending his days under the shade of royal patronage of king Padmana Narendra of Ranapur and had no ability or experience of raising his voice against the royal power. His intimate thought of 'Shunyapurusa' and the Nirakara consciousness also had not taken a concrete shape. So it is a proof of the poet's genius that improved steadily. While living in Ranapur he had also written some other simple and lucid popular books. They were not epics.

'Banabhoji' is a miniature epic (or epyllion) of Achyutananda. He has named this type of work as 'boli' in many places. Each of these works has been developed on some long episodes. In 'Banabhoji' the sports of Krishna and Balarama while goarding cattle with the cowherd boys and other mischievous games are narrated. Their games are chiefly human. Krishna does not look like an incarnation but a human being. In course of their games, they became hungry in the afternoon. They had forgotten to bring food. There was no cottage or village nearby. Suddenly Lord Krishna remembered that there was a village of brahmins in the southern part of the forest and everyday the brahmins performed yajna (sacrificial rites of pouring ghee into fire) to offer guests with delicious meals. Krishna sent the cowherd boys to bring cooked rice. But the cruel brahmins drove them away without giving anything and scolded them in the following words :

Who are your Rama and Krishna?

Why are you so mischievous at this shrine of yajna?

Be away from here you stupid gaudas (cowherdmen)

We will offer ghee into fire

Get out from here you stupid gopalas

Don't disturb us, o idiots, sinners :

Banabhoji, Verses 99-101

Coming back the cowherdboys narrated everything before Lord

Krishna. Then Krishna sent them to the housewives of the brahmins to beg food telling them that Lord Krishna and Balarama were hungry in the forest. When they communicated the tidings of the Lord to the brahmin housewives their joy knew no bounds and they renouncing the daily rites of home, ran to the forest with garlands and bunches of flowers, scents, kumkum, scented sandlepaste and rich and delicious dishes of food. On the way their husbands obstructed them but could not stop them. In the alcoves of the deep forest they had the darshan of the Lord and made offerings. One weak brahmin wife could not escape from the grip of her husband and was taken back home and was beaten very hard to death. She breathed her last muttering the names of Krishna and thus ascended the paradise of the Lord. In the last part of this epyllion the poet has described himself as the incarnate of Sudama, the most intimate friend of Lord Krishna, to show that the episode is from his direct experience of enjoying the company of the Lord. In his mystic vision, he has related the episodes of Krishna's other friends in many of his works. Above all, in this work he has encoded the anti-humanism of the Brahmanism and the greatness of gopalas and their ladies. Spiritual sanctity is not attainable from yajnas where the human soul is disregarded and disrespected.

'Ghātasadā' is another epyllion wherein Krishna's romance with the gopis is narrated. Krishna has created romance with the gopis who went to Mathura carrying their pots of milk and curd in charging them for toll. Here Lord Krishna of the poet, is no other than Lord Jagannath. In his words :

Hearing this smiled Lord Jagannath;
Shedding tears gopis (cowherdwomen) became dazed.
Sudam being present seeing this leela
Rolled at the Lord's feet with joy.

Ghātasadā, 6/11-12.

In this work though there is no novelty in the story element, the style of narration and presentation is unique. The poet tells that he has seen the leelas of Radha and Krishna directly being an incarnate of Sudama.

'Rama Rasa Boli' is a novel depiction of the mythological episode. It has not followed the traditional Ramayan story. Chiefly the *Pinda-Brahmanda tattwa* and rules of physical discipline are

described in this book. When Rama, Laxman and Seeta were in exile in Panchavati Surpanakha (Ravan's sister) saw them. A new spark of thought came into her mind. Her thoughts have been described by the poet as follows :

(She) Asked the mind if this be Vishnu let me test;
 being successful in serving Lord's feet
 (I shall) wash the grief of many births
 let the past luck rise
 the sinful eyes become sacred;
 many handsome youth like these
 were killed by my evil tests.

Verses 7-10

To test Lord Ramachandra Surpanakha turned herself into the most beautiful lady by her demoniac magic power. Asking Him several questions she could recognise the Lord. So she became eager to serve the Lord. Knowing everything Lord Rama said, "Surpanakha : you perform yoga, deep meditation and holy spiritual sadhanas. You can attain the divine Baikunthapura through yoga'. Immediately Surpanakha prayed, "O Lord : I don't know anything about yoga or meditation. Please be my yogaguru and teach me the paths of yoga." Then Rama replied, "I am not resorting to the path of yoga now. My brother Laxman is adept in yoga. Please go to him with this letter and he will teach you the paths of yoga."

Purusottam Rama wrote to Laxman to teach Surpanakha the *Pranayam Yoga*. Accordingly Laxman first initiated Surpanakha to mantras, introduced her to the five winds in body and their places, and taught her how to control the five Varnnas. He also taught her to control the wind of the body and concentrate the 'Pancha Pavan' (five wind) in the spinal cord and told that she could ascend Vishnupura by doing this. After completing yoga Surpanakha fled to Srilanka. She had got the divine enlightenment. She informed Ravana, "Brother : The saviour thou hadst been waiting for, is living in this mortal world in Panchavati. Thou art cursed by Laxmi. Now is the golden chance of serving Laxmi. I informed you, my duty is over and now I am going to Puskar teertha for meditating Lord Vishnu."

Getting the news from Surpanakha, Ravana became extremely pleased and meditated Mayadevi (the goddess of Maya). He expressed

his desire of serving Laxmi before Mayadevi and prayed the goddess to create an illusive golden deer to set the matter in order to keep away Rama and Laxman from Seeta so that he would be able to meet Goddess Seeta and bring Her to Sri Lanka. The things happened accordingly. In the guise of a mendicant Ravana appeared and sat in meditation before the hut of Seeta and muttering the *Sleembeeja mantra* meditated on the Yogadashakshara. Visualising Ravana's yoga Mother Seeta became pleased with him and slowly coming out of the hut she ordered Ravana to ask her for any boon. Ravana worshipped Mother Seeta and praying her with deepest humility and reverence, expressed his desire of serving her feet and thereby getting Lord Vishnu. This put Mother Seeta in dilemma. Immediately Ravana prayed her to go to Srilanka in his chariot without making any delay otherwise he would commit suicide before her and thereby she would be blamed for slaying a son. Seeta was then at her wits' end. So throwing her words of prayer to Lord Rama into the air for blessing the great devotee Ravana, she got into Ravana's Puspak chariot. In Ravana's golden city of Srilanka the Ashoka garden was the sanctuary of yoga. The place was deprived of grief, melancholy, violence and all kinds of ills and odds. It was full of fruits, flowers and various kinds of heavenly wealth. Every day Ravana worshipped Goddess Seeta there.

Following the illusive golden deer for a long distance Rama and Laxmana came to know about its fakery and returned to hut. They were surprised to find the hut empty and the bird Jatayu gave them the news of Seeta's abduction by Ravana. From there they started for Kiskindhya. Hanuman met Rama and Laxman and at the darshan of the Lord he got back his energy. The great devotee Bali attained nirvana being killed by the Lord. From Kiskindhya Lord Rama started his expedition to Srilanka with the soldiery of monkeys and bears. They built a strong bridge of stone across the sea to Srilanka and set up a shrine of Lord Shiva there. Lord Brahma advised Ramachandra to invite Ravana (the son of sage Bishraba) for the sacred inaugural rites of the bridge. Lord Rama sent Angada for inviting Ravana. Ravana was a learned and ritualist brahmin. He became very pleased for being invited by the Lord. In the evening Ravana met Mother Seeta and informed her about Lord Rama's invitation and also prayed for her permission. Ravana became too

much happy to have the darshan of the Lord with His consort after a long time. He prayed mother Seeta to go to the spot with him in the puspak chariot.

Next day morning, completing his oblations, Ravana arrived at the seashore with Goddess Seeta. With utmost reverence and care he completed the inaugural rites of the bridge and worshiped Lord Rama and His consort Seeta. The Lord became overwhelmed with the humility and reverence of Ravana and offering remuneration for his rites asked :

What wage shall I give?

O son of Bishraba : without greed tell,

What shall I beg, O Hari : Tells Ravana,

Be your name Ravanari (the enemy of Ravana).''

Verses 317-18

Ravana returned to Srilanka. After some days began the fierce war. Ramachandra destroyed the darkness of ignorance in Srilanka with the arrows of knowledge. A glorious tradition of religion was established in Srilanka. Fakery, injustice, illusions and sins were cleaned from Srilanka and the whole atmosphere reverberated with the holy names of Lord Rama. Relating to his mystic vision of life Achyutananda says that he was incarnated as the Lord's animal friend 'Nala' in this age. In Dwapara he became Sudama. His new interpretation of the Ramayanic story here accounts to his emphasis on the *Jnanmishra bhakti*.

Apart from Ramayana, Achyutananda has also exploited the episode of the *Mahabharata* into rich poetry. Basing on an episode from Mahabharat he has written an epyllion named *Sarbartha Chintamani Boli*. Here he has interpreted that Jagannath is Krishna and Krishna is Rama and through ages he has been the friend and servant of the Lord. In the age of Tretaya he was Nala, the friend and servant of Rama, in Dwapara, Sudama, Krishna's friend and servant and in the present age (Kaliyuga) he is Achyutananda among the five devotees of Lord Jagannath. Thus he was raised to the devotion-coated-memory of his past lives as a sincere devotee of the Lord of his disciples. Without making any change in the Mahabharat episode in this epyllion he has immersed the theme in the flood of devotion. In this *boli* Lord Krishna is the *Sarbartha Chintamani* the greatest essence of the universe. While Kointa

(Kunti) was wandering helplessly in the forest with her five sons she came across Lord Krishna and knew that Krishna is her nephew. Then she disclosed all her griefs before the Lord and dedicated her five sons to Him.

After some days, came the day of holy plunge in the river Godavari. The Kings and emperors of India assembled there for gaining the sacred bliss. The Kauravas, Salwa, Shishupala, Banasura, the Yaduvamshis and many other kings congregated in the Puskar teertha. Kunti also arrived there with her five sons. The presence of Nanda, Yashoda, Basudeva, Devaki, Krishna and Balaram made the place more glorious. Thus the teertha turned into the battlefield where began the war between justice and injustice, 'dharma' and 'adharma'. On one side Duryodhana with his allies and on the other Jarasandha, were engaged in the fierce war. Many wicked kings were killed. At last Jarasandha defeated Duryodhana and made him captive. This ominous news grieved Kunti and Yudhistira. But Bhima became very happy. Kunti ordered Arjuna to rescue Duryodhana. Arjuna fought with Jarasandha and his skilful fight made Jarasandha to retreat and thus Duryodhana was saved. This poem glorifies the greatness, sacrifice and ideal of Kunti. Here also Achyutananda records that during her pilgrimage and travel Kunti with her five sons came to Nemala and slept under the banyan tree where the poet himself performed his yoga and meditation. In the last part of the poem he has described the greatness of the place and the banyan tree.

In addition to these, in hundreds of his poems one can find ample evidence of his love of epics and mythologies. In many of his short poems he has taken the mythologies as the elements of his narratives. It is an essential technique in him for employing the essences of the Puranas in his works to give expression to his devotional ideas. It was also his objective of bringing Brahmanism to the right path by making therein some revolutionary changes. So the allusions to the Puranas and their significance in his works are voluntary.

Achyutananda— the poet of Rahasas

In his *Varana Charita Geeta* Achyutananda has dilated on the greatness of Rasa in Gopa and Kirtan in Nadia. But the Panchasakhas

had established a new trend of Rahasa Kirtan which is neither the Chaitanyaite Rasa nor their Kirtan. It is a blend of both and is a novel way of combining the two into an organic whole. In these Rahasas the relevance of Radha, Krishna and Gopis is symbolic. This is unlike the dilation of the Gaudiya and Chaitanyaite Rasas. Achyutananda and the Panchasakha authors of Rahasas were not unanimous with Chaitanya's *Vishista dwaitadwaita-vada* or *Achintya Vedaveda Tattwa*. They only complied with Chaitanya's views in the world of religion. For Achyutananda, Jagannathdham is the 'Nityasthala' or 'Nityadhama' (eternal abode of the Lord). He has seen many in one and thus unified all the diversities of the world. According to him the '*Pinda-brahmanda Tattwa*' is the only way of understanding worldly essences. This tattwa is enshrined in his Rahasas. For him the gopals are the main participants of the Rasaleela, but not the gopis. So to become qualified to participate in the Rahasa one has to become a gopala (i.e. a pure gopala in body, mind and soul). For the gopala (milkmen) community Achyutananda was a messenger of new culture. Being inspired by his ideology the gopala community in many regions of Orissa have become prosperous and cultured like Brahmins. The Gopalavaisnavas do not take food from anybody's home-even not from brahmins. On special occasions like feasts or Vaisnavamelas they take their meals after offering to Lord Krishna or Jagannath. They observed both the Sarada Rasa and the Basanta Rasa and laid much emphasis on the day of Dola Purnima the gopals perform Achyutananda's *Goloka Rasa* or *Gopala Ogal* to make the occasion more mellifluous. With the ogal songs they dance the folkdance with coloured bamboo sticks in their hands. Even today this is in vogue and it is a new style of performance of Rahasa introduced by Achyutananda.

Many of Achyutananda's Rahasas are more dramatic than melodious. With dance and music, it also requires the emotional dramatic movements of a participant. Variety is the chief characteristic of a rahasa. In 'Radha Rasa' he has introduced the original structure of a rahasa. The first section of the Rahasa is prayer to Lord Jagannath. The second section presents the theme in the light of theological exchanges between guru and his disciples. The third section presents Radha's sorrowstricken heart because of Krishna's absence and there Radha gives expression to her grief

before Duti. In the fourth section Duti and Krishna's conversation, beginning of Rasaleela, Krishna's delay to come to the alcove, Radha's fainting and Duti's service to Radha to bring back the consciousness are described. Duti advises Radha to meditate Krishna with *Sahaja Sadhana*. Radha plunges herself in deep meditation, sitting in Padmasana, keeping her spinal column straight, her eyes in evenness and five mental states together in poise. She drew back the forty-nine winds from her body and being in deep meditation became completely lost in the ultimate reality and then she could not see the visible world and could not hear its noise. Eventually she visualised *Sweta-peeta-neela-lohita* (The Chaturddha Muratee or holy tetrad of Lord Jagannath in a spectrum of white-yellow-blue and red colour). Thus Radha became successful in her yoga named *Shunyaguru Sadhana* and taught it to the gopis. Then Lord Krishna appeared. The gopis worshipped Him with different mantras and asked Him questions about Panchamatra, Sapta Panchatmika, Saptānga, Astānga, Panchabeeja, Chhadachakra Rahasya (or the concept of Chakra Sadhana) etc. After Krishna's answer to the questions the great Rahasya was completed. This rahasya has a magnificent lyricism and verbal composition and it is much read and applauded among the devotees.

In *Brundarsa* similar tattwas of physical sadhana are described. One day Lalita called on Radha and requested her to go with her to Brundaban for spending their time in revelry. Radha, Lalita and the gopis built an alcove of flowers with eight entrances and in the centre there was the golden altar. Radha and Lalita ascending the altar asked Brinda about the mystery of twelve gardens. Brinda explained them the mystery of Brindaban of eighty four *Kroschas*, the secret of Nitya Brindaban of sixteen *Kroscha* ground and the sixteen names which are the natives of Nitya Brindabana and also added that one who eternally utters the sixteen names attains the blessings of *Shunyapurusha* and sees the Shunyapurusha in his naked eyes. When Radha and Lalita wanted to go deeper into the tattwa, Brinda explained them everything one by one. According to her :

Keeping the Dandaka in Taraka,
Pressing the Kundali hard
meditate upon the *Ardhamatradwara*

Steadily there from is heard sound twelve,
 O Sakhis : the Rasa is going on in the void,
 And there from is flowing ambrosia

Canto 3, Verse 6

After listening to all the ways of Sadhana, Radha was still dubious. She was anxious of knowing everything more minutely. So the enlightened soul Brinda gave a complete data of recognising the mortal human body. According to her : "The sixteen teeth of lower jaw and that of upper jaw are the thirty-two petals of the lotus (the whole body is symbolised as a lotus). The whole body is of sixty-four petals and sixty-four gopis are assembled in the body. In the thirty-two teeth the thirty-two gopis live. Two eyes and eyebrows constitute a three petalled lotus and it is the throne of Shunyapurusha. Again Brinda compared the body to the a 'Badadeula' (the majestic temple of Lord Jagannath); the sixteen petals are the Jagomohana ghara, eight petals are Chandana Argali, three petals are Ratna Simhasana, the gods dwell in thirty-two petals. The compound wall of the temple symbolises sixty-four petals. Pharynx is Atharanala, face is Simhadwāra, the two nostrils are Jaya Vijaya entrances, the cheek is Badadānda, the nose is Kalpavata, the countenance is Vamchhavata, the eyes are Nikumbhila vata and the heart is shunyavata or Vamsheevata and there the Darubrahma abides and the twelve sounds are heard there for the salvation of the soul (Jiva) from the mortal bondage. One can recognise the priceless possession of one's body if he can distinguish those sounds. Then Chandrabali asked Brinda questions about Nanda matha, Swarupa matha, Chaitanya matha, Prakash matha and Nilotpala gumpha, Bhramara gumpha, Parama shunya gumpha, and Anahata gumpha and got satisfactory answers. At last they performed the great Rasa.

Apparently Achyutananda has expressed this ideology in his Nitya rahasa, Mahanitya rahasa, Parama rahasa, Ananta rahasa, Shunya rahasa, Thula Shunya rahasa, Duti rahasa and Padmavana rahasa. Yet in each of his rahasas his variety of taste and uniqueness of religious mental set up are remarkable. In some rahasas he has ridiculed the contemporaneous fake Vaishnavas. In his other rahasas he has addressed the 'sakhas' or 'sakhis' whereas in *Shunya rahasa* he has addressed the jnanins (the wise). The reason is that

by addressing the jnanins he has rejected the non-jnanins. Remarking on the features of vulgar jnanins he sings :

O Jnanins : utter the name of Hari
 May be, you are the eldest and youngest.
 Piercing six *Chakras* blooms the lotus
 Near the ethereal void and air
 Between the *Sutala* and *Rasatala*
 The bee abides at the zenith of the void.
 Nobody with a rosary is called servant of the Lord
 Unless he utters Krishna in his inner heart;
 The *Name* is seed, rosary its robe
 Rosary is of no use if only the name of Hari is vainly
 uttered;
 The three cords are the triadic streams
 And make oblations there
 Ayudhya, Dwarika and city of Gopa.
 This knowledge is memorised by every soul.

Canto 3, Verses 1-3.

Purity in body and mind, humility, non-adultery, equanimity and non-violence are the attributes of an honest sadhu. A Vaisnava is always a reserved man and he is never excessively talkative. Thus it is evident that Achyutananda has coated his *Rahasas* with his deep experiences drawn from his long life.

It is clear that *rahasa* was a powerful medium for socio-cultural renovation and it has influenced the contemporary Orissan public life exuberantly. Though the *Panchasakha* consciousness expanded the literary horizons of the five great poets, they were not satisfied with their individual achievements and had attempted joint works. It is an unique and novel ideal to attempt literary works jointly. 'The *Padmavana Rasa*' is an example of such a joint work. It contains seven chapters, of which Achyutananda has written three chapters and the other three sakhas have written one chapter each. The most deep mystic vision of physical discipline theory (*Sharira Tattwa*) has been enshrined in this work in an excellent style.

Achyutananda has not only enhanced his reputation in writing a number of *rahasas* but also he has recorded rules and paraphernalia of *rahasa* in his book *Rāhasa Bandan*. Here he has discussed theories on the sound of *Mridanga*, *Talavichara*, significance of

Aksharadhwani, Bhogasiddhi, robes of Vaisnavas, way of inviting sadhus and the behaviour of the householder who observes the Rāhāsa celebration. He has also dilated on the religious gains that one achieves by hearing, visiting and reflecting the rahasas. Moreover, in the sixteenth century Orissa when the social life was disturbed and chaotic, Achyutananda worked hard to discipline it and refined it. Being religious he felt it as the heaviest social burden on him. So he was the saviour of the vast populace of Orissa, a helmsman of a great tradition and the forerunner of a cultish renaissance. Being a great hero he established a new trend of social life, religious consciousness and a disciplined tradition of spiritual life. Perhaps it was the need of time.

Achyutananda— the poet of Samhitas

In his *Anakara Samhita* Achyutananda has given a brief account of his works as follows :

“Chhatisa Samhita athastari geeta bamshanu sapta vimshare/
Upavamshanu dvadasha Khanda gheni bhavishya Shata Khandare//
Padapadabali laksheka ye grantha sabu shrikrushna Mahima/To age
Kahilum barajakumara brahma saraswata sima//(168-169 padas.)

Thirty-six Samhitas, seventy-eight geetas, twenty-seven Vamshanucharitas twelve upavamshanucharitas, one hundred bhavishyas and a large number of songs and ditties give rise to one lakh books which are about the glories of Lord Krishna. All that I have narrated before you, are the literary achievement of Brahma.

Achyutananda has recorded that he had written thirty-six Samhitas, seventy-eight geetas, twenty-seven Vamshanucharitas, twelve upavamshanucharitas, one hundred bhavishyas and many songs, bhajana, kavyas etc. But so many works are not discovered yet. Until now only fourteen samhitas are identified most of which deal with sharira-sadhana, identification of Brahmanda in Pinda, ways to serve the guru etc. Except *Sunyasamhita* his other samhitas are pregnant with uninteresting occult theories and spiritual symbolic archetypes.

In *Akalita Samhita* the Brahmatattwasara, Namatattwabodhana, Brahmaekakshara Kāthana, and Abadabindu Panchakala prakasha are enshrined in the form of conversation between ‘guru and ‘Shishya’ (the master and his disciple). This book consists of ten

chapters. Achyutananda has mentioned that he had written this book for the cause of the clan of Gopals at the behest of Lord Jagannath. In his words :

Agyam hoichhi Padmalaya Kanta
 Agyam pramane dharaibi Chhatra.
 Sarvajatire rajapada thiba
 Gopalakule agyam pheraiba
 Santaka nilachakra thiba rahi
 dekhina Gopala udhara hoi
 Mudha gopalanku agyam ye deba
 Gopala mantra upadesha heba..... 7/92-95

[Padmalaya's husband has ordered me/(I will) hold the umbrella according to His orders/the clan of Gopal will be/the king of all clans/The great Nilachakra would be the wealth/seeing which the Gopals would be absolved/you would command the ignorant gopals/and initiate them to the Gopalamantra]

Initiating his twelve disciples, he advised them to obey the principles reverently. To get rid of the hardtimes of the epoch he directed his disciples to lead the life of a true Vaisnava adjusting himself in the changing patterns of time.

'Anakara Samhita's style of presentation is different. This Samhita of one hundred and sixty-three verses is more refined and is free from repetitions. It teaches that the shapeless soul is present everywhere. His invisible existence is felt in worms, insects, birds, snakes and all sorts of creatures, trees and creepers. The true Sadhu and Vaisnava can recognise that name. The world acts at the behest of Anakara Brahma and without His divine will a seed cannot germinate, the wind cannot blow and fire cannot burn. In the words of the poet :

Sajiachhi name loha pashanare pabane achhai raji
 Bina Chalibare pabana na chale name thaba kara khoji.
 Ehirupe name jagate purichhi rupaku jananti sarbe
 Brahmanku him kehi bheti na paranti bahi thanti mane garba
 Eka brahma dekha jagate purichhi name rupare ashesha
 Nameku chihnnile dhanda phitiyiba shuna tuho Ramadasa

[Name (chanting the glory of god) exists in iron, stone, and wind/without its force the wind does not blow/so find out the Name which pervades in this world/All know the outward

manifestation and the inward is penetrated by none/without understanding the Brahma the creatures still have pride in them/O Rama Das : see, One Brahma pervades this universe in infinite number of forms/And its recognition absolves a creature of worldly troubles.]

All the creatures of the world are equal. The concept of caste, creed and religion is just an extrinsic robe. This truth can be discovered by recognising the Brahma. This Samhita has cut off the traditional faith of the Vedas in human life and has also saved the way for making a garland of new faith.

In *Anahata Samhita* the poet addressing his chief disciple Rama Das, has given him some hints of introducing him to the Anahataadhwani. A disciple becomes immortal by hearing the Anahataadhwani. His long cherished hopes, (of the poet) to save thousands of life, would be fulfilled. That is the abode of all happiness. The way of hearing that 'dhwani' (sound) is as follows:

Chhada Chakrare anga goti sodhi
Astakonare dwaraku nirodhi
Prana pabanaku urdhaku tola
mrudhuni mandale kara ho thula
Anahata dhuni Prakasha heba
Chitta madhyare karithaa thaba

Verses 24-26

[By purifying the limbs with Chhadachakra and closing the doors of body in eight angles, raise up the prana-wind and concentrate it in the Mrudhuni Mandala. Now the Anahatdhuni would be heard and concentrate it in the mind.]

This samhita of seventy five padas (verses) is a brief one and is very exciting and emotive. It is specially considered to be helpful to the devotees and 'Sadhaka'. It is meant for controlling and disciplining the mind of the mass. Here the poet has encouraged his disciples to dissociate their minds from material pleasures and to concentrate on Anadi Brahma who is present in every soul.

In *Karma Samhita* the 'Karma' of every creature is analysed. A philosophical discussion is made about Karma and Akarma. The rules for observing daily duties of man and the methods of uttering mantras are also recorded in it. Though it is a long work, it is

devoid of repetitions.

Jnana Samhita is a book of sixty verses. It is replete with 'tattwas'. In many places prose is used to analyse the 'tattwas'. Prose literature had not made considerable progress during the sixteenth century and Achyuta's prose was poetic. In his prose the theoretical excellence is also not marked. For example :

"Suna Dasa ho/Triveni ghatare Nirakara kheda Karuthai/Tathipare abada manjari theeity. Nirbata bhuin se/Dakilata Shabada bhedai amana mandire/Se pura golahat kahi/Tahin yauli kapata ulati lagithai/Jiva parama abashya bheta hoai sethabe/Tahin pare manipura ulata kamala/Musha nekula tohin samare karu achhai/Sethibe nabina kishore swarupe se thain/sehi rupaku hridaye ghenakara/Niranajana nirekhina achhidra ausa lavare kumara".

These are occult and cryptic symbols. Their mystery can be understood by the help of a genuine guru.

'Chhaya' (shadow) is an important part of the Sadhak's karma. In his *Chhaya Samhita* Achyutananda has told us that a Sadhaka could reach at the apex of the success by the Chhaya sadhana and also by knowing the mystery of Chhaya. Lord Siva achieved success in his Chhaya sadhana. So He lived with the utmost bliss with his serene, unperturbed mind. 'Chhaya' is also identified with the soul. To recognise it one needs to observe austere sadhana. Explaining the greatness of Chhaya to his favourite disciple Rama Das he has said :

Chhya Sadhihela kaya rahibe.
Chhai paraye samsara drushiba
Dwadesha barasha Sadhile babu
Chhai Sangatena Chhai hoibum
Chhaira guna kahile nasare
Sakala Sukha achhai chhaire

Verses 49-51

[One's body can be sustained by the Chhaya Sadhana/thereby the world would look like Chhai (Shadow)/By continuing the sadhana for twelve years/one can mingle himself into Chhaya/The attributes of Chhaya are innumerable/And all bliss is there in 'Chhaya']

Along with the Sharira Sadhana (disciplining one's body by yoga) one must know the mystery of Chhaya. The cynic and agnostic persons do not believe in it. So the poet has advised to

keep these facts a secret to the wicked persons. With 'Chhayasadhana' one must have the recognition of 'Jyoti Brahma'. For that matter the poet has written the Jyoti Samhita to warn his disciples for their yogic austerities. Genuine knowledge (Sadjnana) comes from Jyoti Sadhana and thereby all sorts of ignorance vanishes from human mind. The darkness of man's mind in his last thousands of births would be wiped out. Thus the poet has recorded his experience of Jyoti darshana; once upon a time he sat under the great banyan tree at the west of his residence at Nemala. He was then the greatest ignorant and evil person. The lord appeared before him; the Lord was dazzling like the bright moon, a very fascinated form of cloud-like bluish colour, with garlands of runjagunja beads on his neck, with serene smile and precious words from his mouth. He appeared before the poet. Achyutananda could not believe his eyes and being overwhelmed with joy he prostrated himself at His feet praying Him to kindly explain him the mystery of Jyoti Brahma. Thereafter the poet completely merged in Jyoti Brahma. Explaining the methods of Jyoti Sadhana to his disciples he has said :

Asana bhidi nirbhayena basa
 Amana mandire pelai pasha
 Jyotibrahma goti manare dhyaya
 Prana Pabanaku dhire chala
 Jyotibrahma goti Udaye hoye
 Sweta peeta neela lohita shohe
 Akhanda mandala prakasha heba
 Brahma Jyotiku ho kara tu thaba
 Parache hebu hele sujana
 Kahilum Kumara tote phedina

[Sitting fearlessly with perfect asana/pierce your mind into the Amana mandira/Meditate on the Jyoti Brahma/by breathing the prana—wind slowly/Then the Jyoti Brahma would be seen/in a beautiful spectrum of white, yellow, blue and red/An extremely bright spherical manifestation would arise/Mark therein the Brahmajyoti/Being introduced to it, you would be bright/O my son, I have told you everything in detail.]

Like Chhaya and Jyoti the Dhvani Sadhana is an important feat for the success of the sadhaka. The whole world is full of Nada

of Dhvani (sound). The Gopis could understand the mystery of Dhvani. So hearing the sound of Krishna's flute (murali) they were mad. This world is saturated with different kinds of sound. But with the differences of Karma and Akarma (Action and Non-Action) other nature of Dhvani differs. Being addicted to the material possessions of the world, one destroys the achievements of his sadhana. The sages like Shuka, Sanaka and Ananta could permeate the mystery of 'dhvani'. Dhvani is the priceless possession of a genuine sadhak. The concept of Dhvani is very difficult to understand. By concentrating and fixing the eyeballs on the eyebrows one can arouse the Anahatadhvani. This dhvani can be realised in the panchama svara. The five svaras with Akara are the root of it. Its nada (sound) is like the melody of a cricket or a bee. The Dhvani is continuously heard with different svaras. It is intertwined in the four Chhandas. The four chhandas are Stambhana, Mohana, Vashya, and Uchchatana. By achieving success in his sadhana the sadhaka could recognise the eternal Dhvani from this world of sounds and the drops of illusion (Maya) to remove all kinds of different conceptions in him.

In *Bata Samhita* the poet has described the greatness of twelve *Batas* (the holy Banyan tree) and also he has suggested us to recognise these *Batas* to get rid of the evil effects of this Kali Yuga. Herein, he has made a tattvic explication of the mystery of this world from which he would redeem himself. The book is composed in the form of a conversation between Lord Jagannath (Krishna) and Arjuna. Though it is a tattvic treatise, its Bhagabatlike nine-letter-verse pattern has made it more popular.

The *Raja Samhita* of the poet is written on the contemporaneous events and his account of his own ancestry and progeny. Herein also are dilated some probable chaotic events of Kaliyuga. The revolutionary poet, in this phase, has become a prophet. Here the poet gives an account of the post-Prataprudra era i.e. after 1533 AD which is a tumultuous era in the history of Orissa. In the words of the poet :

Pratap rajana rajuti yiba
 Hanahani golamona lagiba
 Rajaghata goti heba mukuta
 Khanda Khandaite hoibe mela

Shasya na upuje Kalabelare
 Indra na pali mancha mandalare
 Nichalokamane uchcha yeheve
 Nichala hoi kehi na rahibe

Verses 57-60

[After the reign of king Prataprudra/there would be a chaotic world of slaughter and murder/There would be utter anarchy/The kingdom would be ruled by the Khandaitas/The crops would fail and there would be many droughts and famines/The low class people would become high/And none would remain secured.]

In the history of Orissa, this period was a tenure of great anarchy. In the world of religion, there were innumerable huddles. To provide eternal faith in the religion and spiritual consciousness, this samhita has given us many encouragements and just aspirations. According to him the Guru is the bridge between Krishna and Vaisnava. So he has advised us to serve the Sadguru (Genuine Guru).

Sabda Brahma Samhita or *Charikhani* is the primary tattvic treatise of Achyutananda. It has established the greatness of Jnana Yoga with its four smaller chapters. So, it is guessed that at the time of writing this book the poet was in his youth. Describing the movables, immovables, worms and insects (Sthavara, Jangama, Keeta and Patanga) as *Charikhani* he has described the infinite creation of the Lord as a part of the Shunyabrahma. The language of this book is very simple. In the first chapter of this book he has written :

Sabadabrahma Samhita bachana
 Manara age Kahe Chaitana
 Surya Vamshena Mahipati Sara
 Kapilarudra nrupati Kumara
 Shripurushottama nrupa tanuja
 Prataprudra Deva Maharaja
 Rabitale ana nahim upama
 Sapata dweepa pruthi yara Seema
 Kevana guna kahiba tahara
 Japatapa jnana yahum bahara
 Bale akalika kule pabitra
 Airi krutanta kare ashrita

Se Maharajanka Pachisha anke
Sabadabrahma mum kali nishanke

Verses 1/118-124

[The message of Sabha Brahma Samhita is a philosophical and symbolic conversation between Mana and Chaitanya (Mind and Consciousness). Here the consciousness talks to the mind. In the Surya dynasty the first emperor was Kapilendra Dev. His son was the emperor Sri Prurshottam Dev and Purushottam Dev's son was Prataprudra Dev. Prataprudra Dev had a vast empire and he had no equal in the world under the sun. He was a very pious king and had spiritual saturation by performing Yajna, japa and tapa. He was also a great fighter and all foes surrendered to him. In the twenty-fifth year of the latter's reign I (poet) wrote the *Sabda Brahma Samhita* fearlessly.]

In this work the poet has given us a very short account of the lineage of the Surya dynasty and the great monuments raised by the Kings. He has not made this applause in the hope of getting some privileges from them. From the very beginning he has disliked to live under the imperial powers or royal patronage. Only to enrich the history with data he has enshrined the genealogical record of the Gajapati Kings in his works. The cultural, social and spiritual life of Orissa has nourished the Jagannath Temple and the Gajapati Kings. So the poet has not left them unrecorded in his works.

Among the *Samhitas* the *Sunya Samhita* is considered as the greatest. It needs a special discussion due to its rich tattwas and philosophical contents.

Achyutananda, the poet of Geetas

The poet Achyutananda had written seventy-eight geetas. Among his geetas *Gurubhakti Geeta* is the greatest. It has three volumes and one hundred and thirty-four chapters. As a handbook for every Vaishnava, it is very useful to them in every walk of life. The bhakta who reads this book can easily accomplish his religious tasks without any obstacle and also can spend his time happily gaining the eternal bliss from the rasa of Hariprema. (zest of love for God). The Panchasakha poets of Utkal are equally inclined to the Jnanamishra Bhakti and the Shuddhabhakti. They were madly inclined to both the streams of bhakti. Among the innumerable

religious feats of Vaisnavism in this book are enshrined the greatness of the Guru, Guru pranalis, the systems of initiating disciples, the four kinds of Vairagya, the features of Sadhu and Sant, the attributes of a Dasa (servant), the attributes of Mahanta, Rasa Nirnaya Varnnena, Mantraguna, Mantrasnana, and some other Vaisnabite paraphernalia. Some parts of the book are controversial because of the interpolations of a later period.

The *Garuda Geeta* resembles a malika. Like a prophet the poet has recorded many events of his life and his age. Chiefly he has enshrined herein the socio-economic and political status of the country at advent of Kali Yuga. The prophecy has been elucidated by the conversation between Lord Jagannath (Krishna) and Garuda. The increase of evils and injustice in the world, the cruelty of the kings to their subjects, the famine and drought and many other predictions are made for the future years. Besides, the poet records

Telanga Mukunda boli eka raja gaudadeshaku yiba,
Barabati Kila sehu tolaiba Kiratiye rakhi yiba.
Gangakule tiribeni ghata bandhi nrupati tahir rahiba.
Ehi Samayare Yavana gotie utara digum asiba
Sehi yavana ye pramada kariba bhrasta hoiba samsara
Se rautaranimane Jhasadebe thaina kila bhitare.

4/45-47

[A king named Telanga Mukunda would go to the Goudadesha/
He would keep up his fame by building the Barabati Fort/The king
would live at the Triveni ghat on the bank of river Ganga/During
his reign a wicked muslim would come from the north/That miscreant
would devastate many monuments/And overthrow the king/The
rout-queens would fling into fire inside the fort.]

Thus at the moment of predicting the future he has not left the contemporary historical events unrecorded. In the *Madalapanni* the events of *Ganga Katakai* is recorded to have taken place in the tenth year of Telanga Mukunda's reign, i.e. 1566 AD. Further Kalapahada's invasion of Orissa and the chastity of the queens of Telanga Mukunda Dev are also evident.

Thus it seems that Achyutananda lived for about one hundred years and the events he experienced in his life have been recorded in his books in the form of conversation between Lord Krishna and Garuda.

Kaivartta Geeta is a popular book of Achyutananda. The Kavivarttas (fishermen) of Utkal worship this book like the Bhagwada Geeta. In this book the piety and greatness of the fishermen are described very lucidly. The story is that the emperor Yudhisthira invited one lakh kings to his Rajasuya Yajna. In this Yajna Lord Krishna was the storekeeper and he entertained all the guests. After the end of the Yajna he bade farewell to all the kings. At last he sat beside the kaivartta Dasaraja and had conversation with him. Giving him enormous gifts of jewels, ornaments, and rich robes he expressed his indebtedness to him. Arjuna became very curious about the Lord's relationship with the Kaivartta king and he asked Lord Krishna about it. Lord Krishna told that during the Pralaya (great cataclysm) to forget the chaos of the world, He slept soundly in a banyan leaf in the form of a baby and float on the water of the ocean. The roar of sea and swaying wild waves troubled him in his yoganidra. So when He got up from his slumber and rubbed his ears (as the babies do when they get up from slumber) a particle of dirt fell down in water and therefrom was born a person and he held the banyan leaf in poise. Now the Lord in the form of a baby enjoyed his sound sleep. After a long time when He got up from his slumber, he became excessively pleased with the person and named him as Dasaraja. Thus Dasaraja is the first Kaivartta king. When the God was in deep sleep in his yoganidra a raghava (whale) fish swallowed the Dasaraja and to kill the fish God gave Dasaraja the weapons.

In this book of twenty-five chapters, are placed the sacrifices, social services and greatness of Kaivarttas. Their religious rites in the Chaitra Purnima day, are described. To prove their greatness and high pedigree Achyutananda has written this geeta. Some other geetas written by him are Yugabhi Geeta, Bijasara Geeta, Yekakshara Geeta, Paramjnana Geeta, Gupata Geeta, Manibandha Geeta etc. These contain the esoteric doctrines of religion. For a Vaisnava's gain of the divine bliss and grace of Vishnu he has written these geetas and has enshrined there in the mystery of Pinda and Brahmanda.

Among his geetas *Varana Charita Geeta* is very important for its literary excellence and historicity. It is written in the form of a conversation between Achyutananda and his disciple Rama Das.

Description of many religious events of Utkal are found in this book. During his tenure in Srikshetra the followers of Sri Chaitanya were found in large numbers. It was not suitable for Achyutananda's religious teachings. So he left Puri and went to Jhankada (the holy shrine of Goddess Sarala). There he organised a congregation of Bhaktas. [The Rahasara thana ati yekanta banchhai/Yekanta basini yaun thabare achhai/542/ (The Shrine of Rahasa should be seclusive like that of Goddess Sarala)]. This congregation was presided by Bhupati Parida, the grandson of Shudramuni Sarala Das. To show the distinctness of the Vaisnavas methods of worship, he has propagated :

Gopare rahasa Nadiare Kiritana
 Ethi ude Kalum ebe rahasa kirtana
 Tinithanu Charithana nahin ti rahasa
 E mancha mandale yete baistamba Dasa
 Kalire rahasa thana atai Jamkhera
 Samkirtana arambha ye nadiya nabara

Verses 536-538

[Rahasa was in vogue in Gopa/And Kirtan in Nadia/We started the Rahasa kirtan from Utkal/There is no other place for Rahasa in this world/of the Vaisnavas/in the Kali Yuga the place of Rahasa is Jamkhera (Jhankada)/and the place of Samkirtan is Nadia Nabar]

In this book Achyutananda has recorded some characteristics of his Rahasa Kirtana :

- (a) Previously Rasa was in vogue in Gopa and the Kirtan (holy chants) started from Nadiya. But he started the Rahasa Kirtan from the Shaktipeetha Jhankada, while Chaitanya choose his place in Puri (Srikhetra).
- (b) The main source of Chaitanyaite premabhakti was Sharada Rasa whereas Achyutananda had chosen 'Basanta Rasa' as the source of the Premaleela.
- (c) When Chaitanya was explicating the episode of Gopi-Krishna, Achyutananda wrote his rahasas dilating and elucidating the episodes of Gopalkrishna [Basanta Rahasa Nila Uchhaba Kariba/Gopala Poanka yehne barana Kariba-567-]The way we shall perform the Basanta Rahasa and invite the Gopals to the performance.
- (d) Chaitanya wearing the robes of a Vaisnava was propagating

the icelas of Premabhakti whereas Achyutananda preferred to be a Sudra and propagated that wearing the robes of a sudra one can flow the undercurrent of the Vaisnavite consciousness in him. In spite of these Achyutananda had utmost devotion and respect for Chaitanya. To be counted as one among the disciples of Chaitanya was a matter of great joy and pride for him.

Many deep devotional feats of a bhakta are enshrined in this book. Mysticism has very often transformed the ordinary human activities into divine acts of God. Though many esoteric events are described in this book the literary and historical lineaments are still excellent. There are many padas (verses) which have been drenched in the mellifluous literary art, For example :

Kalikaku Kalmasha na tage yehne ange
Kaimcha yesane bhumibhagaru bilaga
Kantakaru ketaki bilagena rahi
Hari ashra kalajana tematati kahi

Verses 911-12

or

Anyaemana hoai biparita jata
Raja chhinineba sabu parajara bitta
Bikala hoina bane pashiba se yaim
Podu e moharapeta ki karibi rahi

1033-34

Thus Achyutananda is the creator of many great works. He has been popular in each and every Oriya house and village for his 'malikas'. People considered him as a great prophet and mahapurusha for his malikas. Due to the incessant invasion of Muslims, the political instability, social turmoil disorder and the unstable religious life, the Panchasakhas have been compelled to write the malikas. They could guess the fate of the future era. Achyutananda was especially more concerned with the contemporary society. Further, he was closely related to the vast populace of Orissa and the social responsibility he carried on his shoulders made him to propagate his prophecy to discipline the prevailing chaotic situation. So as a social reformer he sounded his warnings through his prophecy to the mankind. He also advised his disciples not to disclose his prophecy anywhere. As a saint, he was hopeful enough of the

coming of a new world of religion. Future had many possibilities for which he wanted his prophecy to be a secret. The contemporary historical events that he recorded in his malikas provide elements to future historians to develop the history of his age.

Besides, he has written many treatises on the herbal treatment of diseases, guidelines for growing domestic animals. The works of this great poet are large and varied. It is very difficult to do justice to his entire creative world. He flourished in the sixteenth century Orissa by blending literature, history and philosophy together in his works.

Achyutananda and *Sunya Samhita*

Sunya Samhita is believed to be the work of Achyutananda's last phase. At the time of composing this book he was a responsible social public man and much conscious of his divine exercises and spiritual ideas. In this book he has made all out efforts to unify his ideologies and philosophies.

Achyutananda is the first successful Oriya poet to write didactic books on religious philosophy. Before him, in Orissa, King Indrabhuti had written his book *Jnanasiddhi*. It was written in Sanskrit. There were other such books to preach a definite doctrine but these books do not base upon any religious philosophy. Excepting *Harivamsha* many critics consider *Sunya Samhita* as the greatest work of Achyutananda. With the proper stress on the composition of Kavya (epic) the elucidation of religious philosophy is the chief objective of the poet.

In different manuscripts *Sunya Samhita* is found in different forms. In some manuscripts we find forty-one chapters except the first chapter. This manuscript is named as *Brihat Sunya Samhita*. In some other manuscripts there are thirty-two chapters including the first chapter. In these manuscripts the twenty-fifth chapter is made into two separate chapters. In some other manuscripts the fourth and fifth chapters are mixed together whereas in some the first chapter is not included. As Achyutananda was a mystic philosopher poet, the manuscript writers of the original text incorporated their own ideas into it. They edited the text according to their own convenience and attitude. Therefore many critics are of opinion that Achyutananda was not one poet; there were many 'Achyutanandas'. From time to time interpolations are added to this book in different ways by different persons. The Vaisnavas worship this popular book as the Bhagavad geeta and so they might have incorporated their ideas into the text at different times to suit their purposes.

A Brief Summary of Sunya Samhita

The day dawned. After the Nishi Abakash, Lord Jagannath was prayed with the holy lamps. The Parichha came to guard with his cane. The temple was not crowded and Gajapati Prataprudra Dev entered into the temple for the darsana (meeting with devotion) of Lord Jagannath. After darsana he made the parikrama (moving round) of the temple and then returned to his palace. At that time Sri Chaitanya was dancing in the procession chanting divine lyrics and in his company were present the Panchasakhas Jagannath Das, Balaram Das, Achyutananda, Ananta and Yashobanta. As Achyutananda was narrating this episode his chief disciple Rama Das asked him about the episode at the time of his birth. While narrating his previous birth and the present state of life Achyutananda recollected his guru. Sanatan Gosain was his dikshaguru. Jagannath Das was his rasaguru. After the initiation Achyutananda went on the pilgrimage and at the end of his pilgrimage he came back to Shrikshetra. He spent a long time in the company of Sri Chaitanya. After some years came an inauspicious moment. Once when the Kirtana was performed in the temple Gajapati Prataprudra Dev entered. Sri Chaitanya uttering the names of Radha was dancing madly in the procession. Suddenly he fainted, fell down and breathed his last. Morally the king gave way. With a heavy grief stricken heart he held the condolence all over the kingdom. But the sevakas and pandas did not cooperate with the king in the condolence. On the same day they performed the holy rites to purify the atmosphere of the temple and completed their daily rites. After the death of Lord Chaitanya the Brahmins complained against the Panchasakhas before the king and the latter were put into many hard tests. For their sincerity in sadhana the Panchasakhas came out successful.

For the success in 'Sadhana' one has to know the 'Nama tattwa'. The conscious learned saints knew the tattwa of 'Nama'. Without nama this body is useless. The chanting of Nama gives us redemption. It makes us free from worldly sins and allow the Jiva (soul) to merge into the parama (the over soul). The body lives until the existence of Nama. The nameless body is not regarded to be real. The mystery of this universe can be explored by knowing the 'Mahamantra' (the ultimate key to know god) this will open the way to know the difference between Panchatattwa and Panchatma.

After studying the Panchabeeja Panchatmika. Without the service to the genuine guru one cannot penetrate into this 'tattwa'. The genuine guru lightens our burdens of the worldly life. It is like controlling heavy undercurrent of water by construction embankments. We cannot achieve success from 'bhajana' without knowing Nama as a seed does not germinate in a barren land. The ignorance of Nama makes our existence a barren land. The Anakara and Nirakara mantras are the best among the mantras. There is no necessity of the study of Veda and Vedanta for one who knows the Anakar bhajana. This mantra is very helpful for forgetting and avoiding the illusions of this world. Yogasadhana for this purpose is a difficult task; but the sadhana of Anakara is an easy path. One has to progress in the path of sadhana after realising the Brahmanda in the Pinda (the world in one's own body).

After listening to Achyutananda's explication of the tattwa the disciples questioned him, "Pinda ye Brahmanda Kehne sama sari hoye-5/2" (How are the Pinda and Brahmanda equal?). Thereafter, Achyutananda explained to his disciples the theory and introduced them to the Ekavimshapura (the twenty-one Abodes) in the body and also to the Parama Rahasa Mandala. In this context he also narrated the relevance of Sapta Panchatmika and Nirakara-gudha-mantra and the principles of meditation. Then he explained them the methods of sunyabhajana. It is not easy to know the leelas (the mysterious ways) of Nirakara. To know about the 'leelas' of Nirakara the Astapatavamshis of Lord Krishna were anxious. So Lord Krishna accompanied them to the Nitya Vaikunthadhama on the back of Garuda. The Nityadhama is the abode of the leela of Nirakara. He is busy in His leelas in the forms of Nitya Radha (Eternal and Radha) and Nitya Krishna (Eternal Krishna). The Astapatavamshis are the queens born of prestigious royal families. They have the coagulated hatred in their hearts for the gopis. The gopis are the lowly born inferior milkmaidens. But here Krishna has proved that the lowly downtrodden populace have the genuine and pure premabhakti and their bhakti is far more superior to the pseudo-love of the rich aristocrats. In the Golokadhama the glorious divine maidens were serving the Nitya Radha Krishna. The Astapatavamshis saw many Krishnas, many Radhas, many Tulasis and Patamahishis (great queens) in the Golokadhama. Thus Lord

Krishna trod down the pride of the Astapatavamshis. Being in their company as Krishna's friend Sudama (Achyutananda) could see these scenes.

Answering to the questions of his disciples and Rama Das, Achyutananda added that Nilachala is the Nitya Goloka and Lord Jagannath is the combination of Nitya Radha and Nitya Krishna. So the monks, mendicants, sages and hermits crowd here to get the darshana of the Lord. By serving the sadguru (genuine guru) one can recognise the Lord in the form of "sweta-peeta-lohita-Kumkum and Kala" (white-yellow-red-kumkum and black—a spectrum in which the Lord is believed to be seen as realised through Yoga). But to meet and get the company of the Sadguru is too difficult. It is also not so easy to choose a genuine disciple. So the mystery of mantras should not be exposed to delusive, proud and silly pundits in the Kali Yuga. By disclosing the mystery the Madhuri-Mathuri episode is to be repeated. The genuine disciples should not practise tantric Sadhana. It imposes bad influence on them and compels them to resort to evil deeds. The sages have also prohibited this practice after the Madhuri-Mathuri episode. Further the secret mantras should not be exposed to any body. Thereafter he expressed the secret theory of Ekakshara Brahma. The attributes of a bhakta, the principal characteristic of a true devotee, his attributes and name the duties of five Pandavas are also explained in this book. A genuine devotee and servant is the most favourite of Lord Krishna. They are the natives of Gopa and Dvarika.

At the advent of Kali Yuga Lord Krishna got the order of putting an end to his worldly 'leelas'. He was puzzled to know this and did not find any pleasure in his deeds. Observing the depressed mind of the Lord His intimate friend Sudama (Achyutananda) asked him the reason. Lord Krishna expressed everything and also he expressed his anguish for Bakramuni whose curse became the cause of present suffering at the end of life and that destroyed his family. Then the Lord went to the Nityadhama with Sudama sitting on the back of Garuda. There He met Lord Siva. Hara (Lord Siva) laughed at the worries of Lord Krishna. He remarked that Krishna sent to the world for creating illusive patterns had been trapped in the same patterns. Lord Siva advised Krishna to destroy the Yaduvamsha and enter into the Daru Brahma. Further Lord Siva also suggested Lord

Krishna to take steps to expose the secret leelas of the Lord. He added that for the Yoga sadhana of the Lord a place has been built in Jananidhipura. The gods would perform their tasks there. Then Lord Krishna returned to Dvaraka and destroyed the Yaduvamsha. He advised His intimate friends to take birth as Panchasakhas in Kali Yuga in the persons of Jagannath Das, Balaram Das, Achyutananda Das, Ananta Das and Yashobanta Das.

The Chaturdha Murti (holy tetrad) of Nilachala has to be understood in terms of 'Hare Rama Krishna' mahamantra. Lord Jagannath is the Nirakara Parambrahma Himself. Knowing this one has to practise the Astanga Yoga Sadhana muttering the Abana Ajapa Mantra (Para-Raja-Shasha-Bada; i.e. Para = Eye, Raja = Nose, Shasha = Face, Bada = Ear) and the success is easier through this kind of yoga. So Achyutananda advised his chief disciple Rama Das to be adept in Yoga.

This tattvic Kavya begins with Lord Jagannath and ends with Lord Jagannath.

Sunya Samhita and History

The Panchasakhas are disregarded by some critics as deceptive protagonists. Such a view is referred as the real truth emanates from their works like the brightness of the day. As has been discussed before the Utkaliya Panchasakha consciousness became a forceful trend of thought at the later phase of the age. After being described as an inferior class of Vaisnavas by the associates of Chaitanya, they gathered at the Sarala peetha to prove their distinctness and importance. Their greatness was determined by the people. The dumbwitness of this event is Achyutananda's *Varana Charita Geeta*. A biographical reference to the Panchasakhas is found mostly in the writings of Achyutananda when other four members were not so keen to justify their existence. The reason is that before the evolution of the Panchasakha thought Jagannath Das and Balaram Das had developed the devotional neutrality and almost lost their creative spirit. In spite of that they recorded some relevant facts on their age. They composed some devotional lyrics jointly which are the samples of their superior literary quests. Achyutananda became a poet at a ripe age and so his knowledge of his age was more pragmatic, vivid and real.

In his *Sunya Samhita* some historical facts (the Gohiratikiri battle-22nd chapter) and historical personalities are described. These personalities and events are the dumb representatives of history. They are :

- a) Gajapati Prataprudra Dev
- b) Sri Chaitanya
- c) Bira Singh
- d) Loi Das (Lohi Das)
- e) Bauli
- f) Chaitanya's associates of Gauda desha.
- g) Panchasakhas.

Except these some interpolated names are also seen is Jiva Goswami. It is surmised by scholars that the fame of Jiva Goswami had not reached Orissa at this time.

Achyutananda's works that belong to the first half of the sixteenth century influenced future poets like Salabega and Dinakrushna. For example :

(a) Achyutananda

Dhenu sange bachha yemante thai
Prabhu Kahanti ho brajatanai *Sunya Samhita*, 10/112
(As the calf is accompanied by the mother cow,
So does god follow his devotee)

Salabega

Dhenu pachhe pachhe bachha yae yeun bhabe
Bhakata pachhare tuhi thau sehi bhabe
Eka to bhakata Jibana.
(As the mother cow guards her calf behind,
So does god stand behind his devotee)

(b) Achyutananda

Yesanare babu boita kaka
No Chale na tale tila Matraka
Sunya Samhita, 9/79

Dinakrushna

Ketebele bohite gata karata he,
ketebelare murkha nayakachata he
Rasa Kallola 16/26

(c) Achyutananda

Bani jara bepara ye muladhana yiba
Potilara dhana au lodi na paiba

Sunya Samhita 23/24

Dinakrushna

Krushikara praye klesha kari kaye
Sharma labhaku pailu se
Kalantara lobhe gala mula

Rasa Kallola 33/20

Besides these in the eleventh chapter of *Sunya Sambita* the Manaba Krushna, Tulasi, Sudama and the Lord Krishna's journey to Nityasthala with the Astapathmahishis and the episode of Nitya Radha Krishna leela darshana are described. These are not available in the Sanskrit Bhagabat. The flashes of these are seen in the Brahmaivaivartta Purana. Achyutananda has described these episodes in an excellent style in *Sunya Samhita*. Being influenced by him Devadurllabha Das has dilated this episode in his book *Rahasyamanjari* in a similar style. The episode of Nitya Rasa is also been in Dinakrushna Das's *Rasavinoda*. Thus *Sunya Samhita* has provided us a note on Achyutananda's life time and also has helped us to trace his contemporary world.

The Lucid and Moral Verses of Sunya Samhita

Jagannath Das's Bhagabata is worshipped in every Oriya house. People regard the verses of Bhagabata as the word of God. For that reason toward the end of the 16th century a new trend of Oriya culture evolved on the foundation of the Bhagabata. Achyutananda, who has frequently proclaimed himself as a disciple of Jagannath Das, has recorded many lucid moral verses in his *Sunya Samhita*. Possibly the popularity of Jagannath Das has compelled him to put his sincere attention to it. Excepting the tattwic ideological relevance many verses are worth remembering. The Nirakara panthis recite these verses like the lines from Bhagabata and apply them in life at the time of need. For example :

- (a) Arabrusti Kale yelne Krushi nasha yaye
Atma na chihnite gyanna dhyana ksaya hoye

—2/205

[As crops are destroyed by drought, so knowledge and meditation are destroyed by ignorance of the soul]

- (b) Samodrara bali kehu gani ba pariba
Shri Krushnara nama kehu kalana kariba

—6/16

[Who can count the sand of the sea/who can conceive the nama of Shri Krishna?]

- (c) Ganthi Suna phitai gumanra hathe dela
Kashotee na dei puna na kahila mula

—7/131

[Why did you handover the pure gold to the foolishman?
Without examining its purity don't tell him its price]

- (d) Kare Matodhari Jibhya boluthiba hare
Mana buluthiba yebe yain bishaya re
Ye bhajana pramana ye yethiki nohai
Mana budaina thiba padmapada dui

—8/94-95

[Holding rosary in hand and uttering the names of Hari in tongue/if mind is diverted to the material possessions/this is not proper bhajana/proper bhajana is made by devoting full attention to the two lotus feet of the Lord]

- (e) Sarpakati Chhadiyae yemante
Janme janme ajramara temante

—1/108

[As snake remains alive even after leaving its scale/So does the bhakta remain immortal through his several birth]

- (f) Kie kahara mithya e samsara
Ape tarile bhavasindhu para
Apaku ape chihnile re babu
Kale kale ajrambara hoibu

—10/142-143

[In this illusory world everybody is selfish no one is a substitute to the other /so self absolution from this ocean of illusion is important/O son : by recognising yourself//you can be immortal for ever]

- (g) Mahata bachana ye pashana gara jani
Langhana kariba kehu yede sakya puri

—12/236

[Moral words are eternal like the carvings on stone/No one is so powerful to violate them]

- (h) Hele Jati heena tahir nahin bhinna Shrikrushna basana thae
Kalikatara pankare budile ki karddama ta dehe rahe

—19/20

[Lord Krishna is so kind to the people in the lower caste. The mole cricket always loves to plunge into the mud, but as a blessed soul its body is not covered with mud. So is the blessing of Lord Krishna conferred upon a person in the quagmire of poverty]

- (i) Giri Shikharare kumuda prakashu pachhime Udayabhanu
Nishapati ude uansa nishire achalahin ebe chalu.

—25/18

[Let the lotus bloom on the mountain and the sun rise in the west/let the moon rise in a no moon night and let the mountain move]

- (j) Samodra jalaku khurigheni bohi shukhai ki baranidhi

—27/115

[If the water is removed from the sea with the help of small pot to dry it up it will remain a nightmare for ever.]

These are some lucid and didactic verses and they play the role of making Achyuta's world of creation mellifluous.

Lord Jagannath in Sunya Samhita :

In *Sunya Samhita*, Sunya (void) is Lord Jagannath, i. e. this Samhita is about Lord Jagannath. Jagannathdham is the Nityadham or Martyavaikuntha. Jagannath is Nirakara. The poet Achyutananda is the sadhaka of the Nirakara Mantra. So he has described the daily 'dhoopa' (worship) of the Lord at the beginning of this epic. At the dawn, the king of gods, Lord Jagannath's daily rites begin. And right from that episode begins the epic. At the time of explicating the Panchabeeja Panchatmika tattwa, Achyutananda has analysed Lord Jagannath as Kleembeeja or Kamabeeja. In his words "Jagannath Kamabeeja Jyotibrahmaghara"

[Lord Jagannath is the Kamabeeja and Jyoti is the house of Brahma]

Most of the avatars are created from them and even Krishna is also born of Him. According to him :

Machhchha Kachha barahaye Narasingha gheni
 Bamana ye parshurama rama Krishna Puri
 Yamantena avatara leelamana ramchi
 Satya ye tritaya dvapara kali chhamehi

—3/222-23

[The Avatars were in the forms of fish, tortoise, bear, Narasingha, Bamana, Parashuram, Rama, Krishna etc. With their leelas the age of Satya, Tretaya, Dvapara and Kali are created by you]

Arddhamatra Sudarshana became the Bindubrahma and thus became enshrined in the form of Pranava Himself. In the colours of Sweta-Peeta-Lohita-Kumkum. He is existent in the form of the holy tetrad. This is the house of Jyotibrahma. The paramabrahma is the Yekakshara. The Mahamantra and Mantraraja are merged in Yekakshara. Lord Jagannath is the Ekakshara Himself. In the words of Achyutananda :

Jagannath Balabhadra Bhadra Sudrrasena
 Mahamantram Mantraraja ape darubrahma

—4/109

[Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana are the Darubrahma who are the Mahamantra and Mantraraja]

Lord Jagannath's form is mysterious like a spirit that cannot be seen. He is conceived in the form of Jyoti. He is also seen blowing the flute and nobody could hear the Anahatanada of that flute. The Gopis surrounding Him, serve Him day and night. He is again

Brahman yekakshara seye ape Niranjana
 Reha rupee Jagannath ape darubrahma
 Bhagat bhabare bije darubrahma rashi
 Alekha bhubanum Khasi Jyoti rupe drushi

—4/148-149

[He is Himself the Brahma Yekakshara and Niranjana – the darubrahma Jagannath — the void/as the Lord of devotees. He is established as Darubrahma and also has come down from the Alekha Bhubana in the form of Jyoti]

He is the Sunyapurusha. But to our surprise he is a captive in the Sunya mandira and spends His time in dejection. He exists in everybody as many foes, but nobody wants to kill him. The prison of Sunyapurusha is guarded by the sentries of Lust, Anger, Greed

and Fascination. Within the prison there is a moat of seventy-two canals. Twelve Dalais are the porters of the fort. Among so many sentries very often He performs mysterious leelas. The Sunyapurusha makes His flight in the void. The worthy things become useless. So by muttering the Nirakara bhajana one has to bind up the Lord in the strings of his mind like making a garland of beads with string or churning the curd by drawing the strings of churning stick. So he sings :

Achale nischale sujanedhara
 Shunyapurusha ku Talae kara
 Dishiba shunya divya Nalakaya
 Nirakara rupa arupadehe
 Chaturdha rupe bije Nirakara
 Padma phutiba Keshara bhitare

—9/82-84

[O Gentlemen, meditate with utmost concentration/And concentrate on the Shunyapurusha/In the void would be seen the bright blue body/of Nirakara, the formless manifestation/Established as Nirakara in the form of holy tetrad/in the blossoming centre of the lotus]

Keeping Lord Jagannath at the centre of the story, the poet has composed the epic. The nucleus of the subject-matter is the metamorphosis of Lord Krishna into the Darubrahma due to the advent of Kali Yuga. Lord Krishna was enjoying the Rajasikaleela with the Astapatavamshis. At the coming of Kaliyuga messages came to Him from the Nityadhama, to end his leelas. The Lord who incarnated in this world for creating illusions and was himself devoured by those illusions and at last He became worried for the evil deeds of His children and grandchildren. He was upset with Bakramuni's curse which was the cause of the destruction of his family. Eventually he made his flight to the Nityadhama with his sakha (friend) Sudama on the back of Garuda. With the advice of Hara (Lord Siva) he ordered his sakhas to incarnate themselves in the Kali Yuga and added that He would be worshipped at Nilachala for ever.

In this book Achyutananda has depicted Lord Jagannath as 'Baudharupa' (the incarnation of Lord Buddha) [Baudha rupena maudadhi kule bhoga bilasibu bele-27/71—In the incarnation of

Buddha you would enjoy the worldly royal status on the seashore]

Achyutananda could mark the vogue of Buddhist dogmas in the universal fraternity of Jagannathpeetha. He could realise Buddha's message here where people irrespective of caste and creed assemble, exchange their cordial feelings with each other freely and forget all kinds of worldly greed and selfishness. After describing Lord Jagannath as the Nirakara Brahma, his description of the latter as 'Baudharupa' has created controversy. Possibly he has remarked such due to the ideological similarities. Here no attention is paid to the factual error. Above all his Shunyapurusha, Nirakara, Jyotibrahma, Parambrahma and Jagannath are one and identical. His *Shunya Samhita* is chiefly built upon Lord Jagannath. So he eventually has sung :

Avatara yete yehi jagannath angaru kshari mishanti
Nila nimante se neeladrinayeka nirbikare basichhanti

—29/78

[All the avataras (incarnations) are born of this Jagannath/And the Niladrinayaka Lord Jagannath has sat unperturbedly to show His mysterious ways]

The Essence of "Tattwa"

At the outset it has been said that *Sunya Samhita* is a religious book based on tattwas. It is not based upon any story. The poet has explained the tattwas lucidly in his poems. So no further explanation is required, still the following few moral lines are quoted :

- (a) Phula basanare ye bhramara mahamata
Panchuvarnadharina se pushya goti jata
E pushya chihnile sina basana phutiba
Name brahma Jyotibrahma rupa prakashiba

—2/153-54

[The bee is mad with the fragrance of flowers which bloom with five colours/By recognising this flower one can be blessed with divine bliss/And be introduced to the Nama Brahma and Jyoti Brahma]

- (b) Sonita Shukhile angu shobha palaiba
Bhangiyiba khedaghara gela ye garaba

—3/56

[The beauty and glaze of body vanishes when blood dries up from body/Then pride of worldly existence and its show off vanish]

- (c) Punchhabate gai jhampi ahara ye khai
Mukhabate ahara neina balakai
Ye gabaku chetana ye rakhina achhai
Yehi mana sina gaba rupa boli kahi

4/16-17

[The cow uses the tail while grazing to draw her food close, but ruminates the food in her mouth for a long time. Our volatile mind looks at her as an image of animal (body) but in our consciousness she remains a spirit.]

- (d) Bara yuna baligale palaiba gai
Bhangiba gohala goti khojile na pai

4/22

[The cow would pass away after completing twelve yunas and thereafter her shed would be broken and she would not be searched again]

- (e) Dekha babu Rama toha dehena/Nosika duare hamsa gamana//
Bara angula pramane chalai/Anachasha khanda tanu dharai/
Chachhu duare chhai tara dishe/Alekha rupa Jagate prakashe//

9/63-65

[See, O son Rama: in your body/the movement of the swan (wind) at the doors of your nose/Of a length of twelve fingers/in forty-nine forms/is seen with its shade at the doors of your eyes/in the manifestation of Alekha Rupa as glorified in this world]

- (f) Dakhinum asibe pachhime sajibe uttaru
padibe madi/Tikaragohiri thabe mela hoi
Chhadibeti ghora radi//

22/8 etc.

[Tresspassing from South, West and North they would assemble at Tikaragohiri and therefrom would sound their roar]

These lines are very often considered symbolic. During the sixteenth century this kind of literature was highly praised. The signals of Yoga sadhakas were respected highly by the devotees. Achyutananda has not protested against it. He also has paid his favourable attention to this ideal. Though he had a revolutionary outlook and had cherished in his heart the dream of new world. He could not make any remarkable renovation in the world of literature. He wrote his epics paying equal prestige to Sanskrit and Prakrit

language as he considered the Brāhmins and Chandals as equal. His utmost importance was on the Karma. A person of high social status, committing evil Karma is a beast in his eyes.

Achyutananda knew that without sadhana it is very difficult for a sadhaka to progress on the path of yoga that he had introduced. Besides in this book his use of symbolic language (Sandhyabhasha) makes many things obscure and it is very difficult to understand those. According to him *Sunya Samhita* is his greatest work. The philosophical thought enshrined in this work is very difficult for a layman to understand. Among his sixteen thousand disciples the one who penetrates the essence of this book is the most sincere follower of him. It is difficult for a layman to understand his work due to the incorporation of many difficult philosophical religious and theological ideas. Only a self-confident and genuine sagacious (jnanin) sadhaka could understand the essence of this work.

Achyutananda's Creative-Craft

Before the advent of Chaitanya the spiritual sadhana based on mantras, yantras, and yoga was acclimatised to the religious creed of Utkal. This spiritual nourishment was encouraged by the Buddhist tantras and Mantrayana and later on it was named after the Nathayogis' systems of yoga or the Naganta Vidya. But the spiritual thirst and aspirations of the community were not assuaged by the graces of the Naganta Vidya. The spiritual followers of Utkal were hopeful enough for an overflow of the honeyed Chaitanyaite premabhakti. As the Panchasakha consciousness was a mellifluous combination of this trend of thought many critics name this system of sadhana as 'Jagakhechudi'. Regarding this integrated trend of Panchasakha thought Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh writes : "as Jagannath and his Oriya literary friends and disciples, who are now described as five associates had already been moulded in their own process of spiritual and literary strivings, they were unaffected by Chaitanya's religion. Until then Orissa had a religious culture of her own. It was an indefinable combination of the Vedic, the Buddhistic and the aboriginal or tantric streams of thought and all were symbolised in Lord Jagannath. From widely current legends, it had been asserted that Jagannath was originally a tribal God of the Savaras. Later on this God has had Buddhistic and Brahmanic metamorphosis in these forms. He continues till date. As a Brahmanic God Lord Jagannath at Puri represents the reappearance of Krishna in Kaliyuga. So the Krishna-cult had practically turned out to be the Jagannath-cult in Orissa, and the Beatific Realisation, till Chaitanya came on the scene, was through a sort of Vedantic self-examination and Buddhistic self-purification as also through esoteric tantric processes. This is what we find being held out in the writings of Jagannath and his associates" (Landmarks in Oriya literature—Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh, Triveni, Oct. 1951, p.174).

The above mentioned messengers of Indian culture and literature were these Panchasakhas. They achieved success in their individual lives through their own sadhanas. They shaped the invaluable

literary jewels of ancient Indian literature tasty, lucid and alluring through the medium of colloquial folk language. They had the promise of creating joy, awe and devotion in the hearts of the people. On the other hand they voiced the slogans of a revolt against the conservative and orthodox social systems of their epoch. During this epoch, superstitions shrouded the religious systems of the society and menaced the community life. The spiritual life became hazy in the bustle of the many systems of beliefs and dogmas. Due to the innocence of the common life system Brahmanism expanded its empire and there was a chaotic system of religious business. The selfishness and sacrilege of the Brahmins were the obstacles for social upliftment. Achyutananda and his associates struggled hard against these malpractices through their individual way of spiritual quests and literature.

The Panchasakhas were iconoclasts. They paved the way for the search of the divine in one's own self. So Achyutananda suggested in his writings, "Atmare atmak dekha" (see the over-soul in your own soul). The Sunyabrahma exists in every human being. One who recognises Man and his soul, never fears birth and death. At present, Achyutananda requires to be examined more closely. His way of universalization of the mystic experiences and the successful esoteric dogmas of sadhana are remarkable. His poetic crafts critical creeds and weird individualism demand special reference.

Achyutananda was very adept in Sanskrit. Though, in his childhood he had not developed any inclination towards learning inspite of the provocations from his father, it is surmised that he was inclined to the learning of scriptures of his own accord afterwards. Nirakara Brahma and His hymns, the mystery of Pinda and Brahmanda, the explication of Gayatrimantra, the ideas of Sahaja Sadhana, explication of Mantraraja and many other spiritual and philosophical theories introduce his learned self to us. He expanded and enriched the repertory of his knowledge through his own efforts and the counsels of his guru. Besides he had shown his individuality and excellence in the empire of his epics as examples of his own self-confidence and sadhana.

(a) Nirakara Mantra Sadhana and its anagraph

Achyutananda has told in his Sunya Samhita "Purba heturu ye

muhiṇ Paiti/Nirakara bhaji bhabun tarili (9/71)" [benefitted from my consciousness of previous birth I was absolved of this worldliness chanting the glory of Nirakara]. By chanting a mantra of thirty-two letters the shapeless "Sunyapurusha" can be conceived. Facing upwards a yogi has to concentrate deeply and by meditating the Alekhabrahma in Trikutasandhi one can realise the Nirakara mantra in the Kantha Chakra. Achyutananda has presented his ideas excellently for the explication of the methods of this mantra sadhana and mantra analysis.

(b) Protest against devotionless sagacity .

He has preached his dictums for his disciples to addict to the path of Bhakti (devotion). According to him without devotion, spiritual cultural growth is impossible and the knowledge of scriptures is useless. The minds of the pundits are crowded with discourses and arguments. They always run after reason and falsehoods. So the principles of mantra sadhana should not be initiated to them and they should not be made disciples. The scriptures are studied for destroying ignorances. But it is most harmful to be ignorant after studying the scriptures.

(c) Protest against Tantric Mantras

A true bhakta disapproves tantricism. He does not appreciate the doctrines of Nagantaka, Yogantaka, Uluka etc. Achyutananda did not love those people who created illusion and hallucinations through mantras and tantras. So he considered Gorekhanath's doctrines, Mallikanath's yoga, Loi Dasa's mantras, advices of Bira Singha and Bauli's postulates and corollaries as the misuse of the divine power. Their consequences may also be like that of the episode of Madhuri. So he led importance on the achievement of the glorious divine power through the chanting of Namabrahma bhajans or Shunya bhajans.

(d) Worship of Void and its success

Glorifying Lord Jagannath as Shunyabrahma, Anakara purusha and Nitya Krushna he has led importance on the worship of the void. In several places of his (epic) kavyas he has related to his success by the Shunyabhajana. He has also narrated his adventure to face Raja Prataprudra Dev's test in the latter's palace in his

magnum opus *Sunya Samhita*.

(e) Love for Utkal

Achyutananda had a very deep love for his motherland Utkal. In many of his Kavyas and poems he has dilated on the geographical features of Utkal and her majestic qualities. In his books *Baranacharita Geeta*, *Kalikahani* and in many of his malikas he has given much importance to Utkal. Besides the theme of his greatest work, *Sunya Samhita* is built upon the Puridhama. He has described Jagannathdham of Puri as the Martyavaikuntha. From his writings we also come to know that a large number of Sadhakas were living on the bank of the river Prachi.

(f) The Casteless and Creedless society

Achyutananda hated the mean casteism of a Hindu society. The Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were very influential in the society and they were very corrupt, mean and proud. So he preferred to be a Sudra. He believed that a Sudra has no ego and meanness. He addressed the community of his disciples as 'Vaisnavajana'. According to him a bhakta has no caste. He is a member of the family of Lord Vishnu. Many critics consider this view to be an ideology of clandestine Buddhists.

(g) Upliftment of the downtrodden community

He always worked for the upliftment of the downtrodden, community of the society. So he wrote *Gopal Ogals* and *Kaivartta Geeta*. To provide same social status to all classes of society he introduced the Vaisnavamelas. In these melas people of all communities could participate. This tradition is still prevalent in many regions of Orissa.

(h) Patriotism in his Concept of Incarnation

Like Sarala Das, Achyutananda also believed in the concept of incarnation of God, accepted by the followers, in different ages. We find flashes of his love of motherland expressed through different incarnations the Panchasakhas in the four puranic ages and that equates him with the other sakhas of his time. He has compared the modern incarnations of the Panchasakhas in the past four puranic ages as follows :

Satya Yuga : Sanak, Sanatan, Kripajal, Kapila, Godhru

Tretaya Yuga : Hanuman, Nila, Nala, Sushena, Jambaba

Dvapara Yuga : Subala, Dama, Sudama, Bahu, Subahu

Kali Yuga : Jagannath, Balaram, Achyuta, Ananta, Yashobanta.

Thus it is believed that in different ages, the Panchasakhas took birth with their lords and enjoyed their divine company and spent their time in glory. The Panchasakhas may be different in bodies but in soul they were one.

(i) Liberal Outlook in the Path of Sadhana

According to Achyutananda the Alekhabrahma is the creator of Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswar, Surya, Ambika, Ganapati and other gods and goddesses. Further Alekha is Ananta (endless), Anadi (eternal), Nirakar (shapeless) and Niranjana and so there is no meanness of community feeling in his bhajans. Again, this Alekhabrahma or Shunya Niranjana is Lord Jagannath Himself. The way of His worship is one; though He is prayed and worshipped in many ways. That Shunyapurusha is both in Lord Krishna and Lord Jagannath. He is both Saguna and Nirguna. In this way, Achyutananda has expounded the Vaisnava tattwas and the paths of Sadhana, bhajana and bhakti Upasana.

(j) Creator of New Mantras

For the redemption of the poor, downtrodden and ignorant people Lord Chaitanya preached a Mahamantra. In Bengal this mantra was "Hare Krushna Hare Rama" and Achyutananda slightly changed it into "Hare Rama Hare Krishna". He also argued in support of it and won the approval of Sri Chaitanya and king Prataprudra Dev. This mantra was preached all over Utkal and this spiritual activity of Achyutananda was very much praised all over the kingdom. He has written a large number of new mantras in Prakrit for the downtrodden classes of his society for their holy performances and daily rites. In his book *Nitya Karma Samhita* we find such mantras.

Achyutananda has introduced us to the concept of a clear and glorious liberal humanism. He cleared the path of absolution of the downtroddens, abolished the mean concept of casteism and established the downtroddens on a high pedestal. We find ample evidence of his liberal outlook in his deep love for the poor and

ignorant people of his society. After Sarala Das, Achyutananda and his Panchasakha friends accomplished the great task of upholding the prestige of their mother tongue, in writing religious literature with colloquial native dialects. Achyutananda robed the Gopals in the garb of Brahmins, to bring in a social revolution and he has added to Oriya literature and culture the dynamic upsurge of a novel and dynamic life.

A Bouquet from Achyuta's Garden

It is marked that the saint-poet Achyutananda's religious preachings and divinehood were more famous than his literary creation. The laymen of our society should know that Achyutananda has become a legend because of his literature and literature is the medium of his religious preachings. Many critics have given importance on him as an enlightened sadhaka. Apparently his sadhana and religious mental set up had excelled the greatness of his poetic creation. His poetic craftsmanship is considered to be second rate in comparison to his religious ideas. However it does not mean that his creative poetic craft was not superior. In order to show his refined perfect poetic sensibility, a handful of flowers from his garden of poetry are presented below. The learned readers could evaluate his genius from the fragrance of these flowers.

(1) E' mana sinā chaturdhā murati he mudhamati (0)

Mana kahe Chaitana heture dekhatu brahma

Ye tattwa chāribedena dandiba nāhin shamana

Sanakādi muni dhyāuchhanti, he mudhamati (1)

Na Khola tadāge kupa deula tolā na topa

Thāpanā dian na thāpa na yā Brindābana Gopa

Na yā tuhi Prayāga Gomati, he mudhamati (2)

Ye gyāna hrude nadhara tilaka mālā na kara

Jata koupuni nadhara bhasma angun parihara

Gangā Kule nāhin sadagati, he mudhamati (3)

Atmāre atmāku dekha dekhile Pāibu sukha

Toradeha tuhi dekha dishuachhi jakajaka

Bhābi kahe Pāmara Achyuti, he mudhamati (4)

(2) Phula bujha ho Nāgara

Bela Jani phulaphute amana mandira (0)

Phulagoti phutiachhi nāma tāra Kali

Yemanta bishama phula na gunthai mali (1)

Jai nuhen jui nuhen nuhai sevatee

- yemanta bishama phula na ghene yubatee (2)
 Dale nāhin mule nāhin tinipure nāhin
 Yemanta bishama phula shunye achhi rahin (3)
 Phulagachha mule hara sādhu chhanti yoga
 Se phulaku jagichhanti astakutā nāga (4)
 Kahai Achyuta Dāsa Phula rasa bance
 Pandita chha mase bhaje murukha ki jāni (5)
- (3) Mālā bhajuchhure bhajana rahiba nāhin
 Lokajānibāku bhagatiā hoi
 Thaka thaka karu tuhi (0)
 Tu kisa bhajibu bhajana lāgichhi
 Trikuta Sandhire yāi
 Tribhangimā rupa laye tuhi kale
 Rādhākrishna bheta pāi (1)
 Mantra yantra nāhin mālā na gadāi
 Mana sutrare bhajana
 Āsuchhi yāuchhi bārana nohuchhi
 bhaji tu pāri le chihna (2)
 Se yeun bhajana sādhujana mana
 purba bāsanā ru pāi
 Bhanile Achyuta na bhajina nāma
 Akārane dina yāi (5)
- (4) Rangamāti lo : tote kari panjuri
 Tahinre rakhili subarnna shāree (0)
 Beni chadhāiku ādhāra mundeli e' nei samāna pāin
 Jane ta khāila jane na khāila kaun abiguna nei (1)
 Pachisha kumāra pātha padhāili chātashāli ghara shunyare
 kari
 Gurushishya duhen antara hoile bheta na pāile kehi
 kāhāri (2)
 Bela asta helā maruta bahilā anachāsha rupadhari murati
 Sindhu uchhulilā kula budigalā jeeba nuhen kāra kahe
 Achyuti (3)
- (5) Shunyapurusha padichhi bedire
 Shohuthānti dayā kshamā pāshare//
 Ekādasha indri bedhi achhanti

Kāma krodha moha dwāri jānanti//
 Dwādasha dalāi gada Pāika
 Panchu ye prakruti pancha 'nāyeka//
 Shadachakra pare panchāshakshara
 baāstari nādi gada pāshara//
 Gadachāri pāshe māne dwāri
 Shunyapurushaku thānti ābori//
 Shunyapurusha alsge rahichhi
 Shunyapure rahi leelā karuchhi//
 Na chhuannti tāku panchāshe jana
 Alage rahi kare bhinna bhinna//
 —Shunya Samhita/Chapter -nine

- (6) Gyāmnī ho : Satya Shāntire raha
 Guru bachane ki bolanti kaha (0)
 Kriyā Shudhakari Shāhāstra padha
 Jantu badha kale bolanti rādha
 Teerthabrata kale yete suphala
 Para ramanire sabu biphala (1)
 Tapee lokankara gyāmnā karama
 Bātula bolibā bahile dhama
 Keetun brahma yāe Sam tule dekha
 Tānku ye jānanti atmā bibeka (2)
 Rāmanāryana gāibā geeta
 Iha paraloka shunimukaṭa
 Gyāmnara tachhu se karibe dayā
 Kahe Achyuti durayiba Māyā (3)
 —Shunyarahasa/4th

- (7) Shuna ho brahmara nandana/
 Tu yāhā puchhilu prashana//
 Uttamashisye iha kahi/
 Sumārga gati e' bolāi
 Tu ye saptānga heu beenā/
 bāra tithire heu janā
 Sādhile bahudine sidhi/
 e' mahākasta gyāmnabidhi//
 Shabdaku chitare sambhāi
 layānge hetu rakha nei//

lāgichhi dibānishi eka
 Amana sutre hetu rakha//
 Abarnna achihnā se pada
 Sumana chetadwāre chhanda//
 Ujāni pabanku nei
 Trikuta madhye bhara tuhi//
 Tuhāi uthile sebāta
 dishiba rājadānda patha//

—Brahmashankuli/2nd kalpa

- (8) Badanti Achyuti Shunare bābu
 Tumbhe moho prāna jāhere sabu//
 Kahitā tumbhanku gopya rahasya
 yenu tumbhe ata mohoradāsa//
 Panchasakhānkara mahimā bala
 dekhi hāsyā kale brāhmana kuḷa//
 Vedapathane ahamkāra niti
 tattwa na jāni ye shudra hoanti//
 Sāna helāku ye āchāre mana
 tahun shudra chitta nohai khina//
 Saruāre gyāmna garuāhoye
 krushna payare sebā khatithāe//
 Tahun panchasakhā shudrahoilun
 Jyestha kanistha bārina pārilun//
 —Udayakahani/84-89

- (9) Nāhin mohora bipra varne āshā
 Kshatriya bashyare nāhin bharasā//
 Sāna hele mana saruā hoi
 Tahun Achyuta ye Shudra bolāi//
 Shudra Varnnare sebā prāpta hoe
 Ahamkāra nāhin Shudrara dehe//
 Sebā bhaktire goloke milai
 Yaupade chaturbarga ye thāi//
 Tinibarnne mukti nāhin ye ukte
 Moksha patha kahe decna Achyuti//
 —Varnnatceka/92-96

(10) (Sample from Prose Writing)

Shupa daśa ho/Tribenēe ghātare nirākāra kheda
 karuachhi/Tathipare abāda manjāree thāaiti/Nirbāta bhuin
 se/Dākilāra shabada bhedai amana mandire/se pura
 golāhāta kahi/Tahin yāuuli kapāta ulati achhai rahi/Jiba
 parama bhetābheti hoanti sethābe/tahipare manipura ulata
 kamala/Mushānekula tahin samara karu achhain/sethābe
 nabina kishore sworupe se thāi/Sehi rupaku hrudare
 ghenākara/Niranjana
 nirekhiṇa achhidra āusa labharekumara

—Gyāmna Samhitā