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Item Type	Article
Authors	Swami, Bhakti Caru
Publisher	Frankfurt University
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Download date	2026-07-16 06:24:19
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/191167

Journal of Religious Culture

Journal für Religionskultur

Ed. by / Hrsg. von Edmund Weber
Institute for Irenics / Institut für Wissenschaftliche Irenik
Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

ISSN 1434-5935 - © E.Weber – Email: irenik@em.uni-frankfurt.de

No. 21 (1998)

The Pada-Yatra of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

By

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The word pada-yatra literally means to walk on foot. In early India people used to travel by chariot, horseback, elephant, bullock-cart, or palanquin. But saintly persons, having renounced such worldly comforts, would travel by foot. Their main concern was to teach the glories of God to the conditioned living entities and thereby deliver them from their miserable materialistic lives. Walking was the best means of contacting the common people and accomplishing that goal.

When Lord Chaitanya took sannyas - the renounced order of life - He travelled throughout India on foot. First He went from Bengal to Jagannatha Puri in Orissa and then He toured South India on foot of course.

At that South India was seriously influenced by impersonalism, and the people in general had deviated from the path of devotion to the Lord. Love of God is the source of real happiness, and when one abandons that loving relationship with God, he suffers. Lord Chaitanya wanted to deliver the conditioned souls plunged in the absolute misery of that impersonalism. In order to reinstate them as devotees of the Lord, Sri Chaitanya went personally to South India.

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is none other than the Supreme Personality of Godhead who appeared as a devotee to teach the science of devotion - the only means of deliverance from material bondage. When the Lord performs any action, its effects are wonderful; similarly, when He directs His devotees to do

anything, their result will also be wonderful. Lord Chaitanya's deliverance of South India stands as a proof that He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the guise of a devotee.

In order to understand the magnitude of Sri Chaitanya's South Indian influence, we have to visualise the religious condition of South India at that time. The philosophies of impersonalism and voidism were so prominent that the vast majority of people had become atheists (impersonalism being nothing more than covered atheism). When one thinks, as the impersonalists do, that God has no form, no qualities, no potencies and no desires, then he effectually denies the existence of God. The voidist theory that God is 'nothing' is an even more direct negation of His factual existence. This kind of indirect atheism is considered to be more dangerous than atheism, because, in these system God's existence is accepted, but then arguments are given for considering Him to be nothing. On the other hand, in direct atheism God is considered to be non-existent. By logic and argument an atheist can be convinced about God's existence, and converted into a theist. When an atheist becomes a theist, then automatically he becomes a devotee of the Lord by accepting as the Supreme Person. But the voidists and impersonalists become God's competitors instead of becoming His devotees. The concept that 'I can become God' is the most serious disease that a living entity can suffer from. God is God under all circumstances, and the living entities are His eternal parts and parcels, just as a king is the king and his subjects are always his subjects. If a subject wants to take over the throne and become king himself, then he is considered to be a rebel and that is considered to be the most dangerous offence. One gets the most severe punishment for such an offence. One may say that the revolt is successful, then the rebel becomes the king. But a living entity can never become God, because God is always the omnipotent, omniscient Supreme God, so no one can dethrone Him. He is everyone's father, and he is extremely merciful toward all living beings. So when we make plans to take over His position, he gives us the chance to become tiny gods. This material nature is the place where we get the chance. Here we all think that we are the lords and masters of everything, but since we are not the real lords or gods, we make a mess out of it and suffer. The more we try to lord it over the material nature, the more we suffer. But the Lord is our Father. He does not want us to suffer. So He comes down to tell us to give up that futile endeavour to become the lord and to go back to the spiritual sky by becoming His servants. - So, South India at that time was full with people who wanted to become God, and our Supreme Father went there as Lord Chaitanya to deliver them from that misconception.

In South India, wherever He went, by His embrace He was empowering whoever He met. He asked them to chant the Holy names of the Lord, and they in turn went to their villages and empowered others to chant the Holy names. Thus village after village became converted to Krishna consciousness. Then He went to a place called Kurma Ksetra and stayed in the house of a brahmana (priest). This learned brahmana was so moved by Lord Chaitanya that he wanted to leave home and go with Him. But the Lord instructed him, "Don't speak like that. Bet-

ter to remain at home and chant the Holy name of Krishna always. Instruct everyone to follow the orders of Sri Krishna as they are given in the Bhagavad-gita and Srimad Bhagavatam. In this way become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land.

"If you follow this instruction, your material life will not obstruct your spiritual advancement. Indeed, if you follow these regulative principles, we will again meet here, or rather, you will never lose My company."

While on His tour, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu would spend the night at a temple or on the roadside. Whenever He accepted food from a person, He would give him the same advice that He had given this brahmana. Thus He would remain in one place at night and next morning, after bathing, start again.

There was a brahmana named Vasudev who was a great saintly person but who was suffering from leprosy. He came to know about Lord Chaitanya's arrival, and in the morning he came to see the Lord at the house of Kurma. However Lord Chaitanya had already left. The leper then fell to the ground unconscious. Then the Lord immediately returned to that spot and embraced Vasudev. As soon as the Lord touched him, his leprosy disappeared and his body became very beautiful.

When king Prataparudra of Orissa heard about this wonderful pastime of the Lord, he told his chief advisor, Sri Sarvabhauma Bhattacarya, "There is no doubt that He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Otherwise, how can he have so much compassion of the living entities? He cured of leper, that is not really so surprising, because yogis can also do that. But he embraced that leper: that no one else could do."

Thus delivering all the living entities, the Lord came to Simhachalam, where the self-manifest deity of the half-man half-lion form of the Lord called Nrisimhadeva is worshipped in the temple of Jiyada Nrisimha Ksetra. Lord Chaitanya sang and danced before the deity of Lord Nrisimhadeva in great joy. That night Lord Chaitanya told those present with Him how that deity of Lord Nrisimhadeva became manifest. Sitting around the Lord, all the devotees of Lord Nrisimhadeva heard about Lord Nrisimhadeva's pastimes with rapt attention.

On the bank of the Godavari river the Lord met Ramananda Raya, the governor of that place and a great devotee of Lord Krishna. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had heard about Ramananda Raya before, so He was very happy to meet him. Ramananda Raya also became extremely joyful. He openly admitted, "You must be the Supreme Personality of Godhead, because such beauty and such qualities are not possible in an ordinary living entity." He also became surprised upon witnessing another incident. There were about one thousand brahmanas with Him. They were very proud of their scholarship and at first quite cynical about Lord Chaitanya's behaviour. But soon they began to chant the Holy names of the Lord, displaying all the ecstatic symptoms such as shedding tears, trembling, standing of hair on the body, etc. In a fraction of a moment they all became pure devotees of the Lord.

That evening the Lord had a discussion with Ramananda Raya concerning the ultimate goal of human life. In this most exalted philosophical discussion the Lord explained through Ramananda Raya that unconditional love for the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the mood of His eternal consort Srimati Radharani is the highest goal of life.

In a place called "Siddhabat" the Lord met a devotee of Lord Ramachandra. He stayed at his house for one night, discussing about spiritual topics. At the end of the discussion, this man began to chant the holy name of Krishna. This was quite surprising because the man was such a dedicated devotee of Lord Ramachandra that he never used to chant another name of the Lord but that of Lord Ramachandra. Quoting from the scriptures, he explained the reason: "One name of Rama is equal to a thousand names of Narayana, but the name of Krishna is equal to three names of Rama. Although I knew this fact, since I was a devotee of Lord Rama, I used to chant His name very earnestly. But now, just by seeing You, I started to chant the name of 'Krishna'. That indicates that You are none other than Krishna Himself." Through this pastime the Lord explained that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself, whereas the other forms of Godhead are His incarnations.

From Siddhabat Lord Chaitanya went to a place called Vriddha-kasi to see one temple of Lord Shiva. Then He visited a nearby village where many learned brahmanas used to reside. They were believers of different branches of philosophy, and they were adverse to the path of devotion. These brahmanas had a big debate with the Lord. At the end they were defeated and voluntarily accepted devotional service to Krishna.

Then the Lord came to a city named Trimanda. The king of that place was Buddhist, and he used to patronise many vastly learned Buddhist scholars. They decided to challenge Lord Chaitanya and defeat Him. The Buddhists are very fond of arguments, and their philosophy is solely based on arguments. But they were defeated by Lord Chaitanya. They felt very insulted and wanted to take revenge, so they sent a plate full of contaminated food to Lord Chaitanya. But as they were about to offer it to Him, a huge bird picked up the plate, scattered all the contaminated food on the heads of those envious Buddhists and dropped the plate on the head of their leader, Ramagiri, from great height. The rim of the plate struck Ramagiri on the head, causing a deep cut, and he fell unconscious. The Buddhist followers of Ramagiri began to cry, and begged Lord Chaitanya to forgive them and to revive their spiritual master. Lord Chaitanya asked them to chant the holy name of Krishna. Then Ramagiri also begged forgiveness and became a devotee of the Lord. All Ramagiri's followers also became devotees of Krishna.

Then the Lord came to a place of pilgrimage called Vatesvar, and seeing the deity of Lord Shiva there, began to sing and dance in ecstasy. That day he fasted and spent the night in the temple. At that time a very rich man called Tirtharama came there with two extremely beautiful prostitutes. When he saw the beauty and renunciation of the Lord he wanted to test Him. He instructed those two

prostitutes to seduce the Lord. But the Lord was totally unconcerned, and addressed them as mothers. Then they realised their mistake. Their hearts became purified by the fire of lamentation, and they took shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord. Tirtharama's heart became purified and he fell down at the lotus feet of the Lord begging forgiveness. He said, "I am the most sinful demon, called Tirtharama. Please deliver me by giving me the holy name."

The Lord then consoled him and taught him the science of renunciation. Lord Chaitanya said, "Consider material wealth as a bunch of straw, then only you will receive the wealth of devotional service. By the mercy of the Lord only one can receive devotional service to the Lord. One has to have faith in the Lord's mercy. It is unconditional, therefore it cannot be proved by any logic or reasoning. So what is the need of discussing so many scriptures? Simply render devotional service with implicit faith."

Hearing this advice, Tirtharama developed an intense feeling of detachment from his material possessions, and discarding his costly dress and ornaments, he put on a loin-cloth and accepted the holy name from Lord Chaitanya.

Lord Chaitanya stayed in Vateswar for seven days and delivered everyone there. Then He left that place and walked twenty miles through a forest which was infested with ferocious wild animals. He was constantly singing the holy names of Lord Krishna. Hearing the sweet names of the Lord, the dormant love of God in the hearts of the wild animals awakened and they were delivered from their miserable material existence.

Crossing the forest, the Lord came to a city called Munna, where He sat down under a tree. Millions of people came to see Him there. No one had seen such a beautiful mendicant before. The hearts of all those who saw Him became purified. Then Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu began to sing the glories of Lord Krishna and dance in ecstasy. All the people gathered there also started to sing and dance. Thus they got the taste of love of Godhead and became devotees of the Lord. When He decided to leave, they brought various foodstuffs, garments and ornaments. But the Lord asked them to offer these things to a beggar who was sitting under a tree. The inhabitants of Munna became extremely surprised to see this compassion shown by the Lord.

Then the Lord went to Sri Rangam and stayed there for a while. Sri Rangam is situated on the bank of the river Kaveri. There is a beautiful temple of Lord Ranganath (Vishnu), and that is why this place is considered to be one of the most important places in South India. In this holy place there was a brahmana named Venkata Bhatta who recognised Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Venkata Bhatta asked Lord Chaitanya to stay at his house during the Caturmasya (the four months of the monsoon when the saintly persons are expected to stop Travelling and stay in one place). The Lord accepted this invitation and stayed at Sri Rangam for four months. Every day he used to go to the Kaveri to take bath. Then He would go to see Lord Ranganath and sing and dance before Him. All the residents of that holy place became extremely fond of the Lord and they became devotees of Lord Krishna. Gopal

Bhatta, the son of Venkata Bhatta, was ten years old at that time. Gopal Bhatta was so fond of the Lord that he used to stay with Him all the time. Later Gopal Bhatta became one of the most intimate associates of the Lord.

In Ranganatha the Lord performed many pastimes. One day He saw a brahmana who was reading the Bhagavad-gita while sitting in the temple. The people there were laughing at him because his pronunciation of the Sanskrit words was not correct. But that brahmana did not pay any attention to them. He was so absorbed in reading that divine literature that out of acute joy tears were streaming from his eyes and all the divine ecstatic symptoms were manifest in his body. When he had finished reading, the Lord asked him what realisation of that scripture made him experience this ecstasy. The brahmana replied, "I am illiterate and therefore I do not know the meaning of the words. Sometimes I read Bhagavad-gita correctly and sometimes incorrectly, but in any case I am doing this in compliance with the orders of my spiritual master."

"Actually I only see a picture of Lord Krishna sitting on a chariot as Arjuna's charioteer. Taking the reins in His hands, he appears very beautiful and blackish. When I read Bhagavad-gita I see the Lord's beautiful features, and my mind becomes totally absorbed."

Then Lord Chaitanya replied, "Indeed, you are an authority in the reading of the Bhagavad-gita. Whatever you know constitutes the real purport of Bhagavad-gita." Saying that, the Lord embraced him.

Falling down at His feet, the brahmana said, "Seeing You my happiness increased unlimitedly. Therefore I can understand that You are the same Lord Krishna."

Then travelling for many miles and delivering innumerable fallen souls, the Lord came to Kanyakumari - the southernmost tip of the Indian Subcontinent and took bath there. Then Travelling north-west He reached the Malabar Hills. In a place Betapani, a group of pseudo-spiritualists called Bhattatharis used to live. They used to dress like renunciates, but cultivate black magic, enjoy beautiful women and cheat people of their wealth.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was accompanied by His servant called Krishnadas, who met the Bhattatharis there. They allured him with beautiful women. Early in the morning Krishnadas went to their place. To find him, the Lord went here and there and asked them, "Why are you keeping my brahmana assistant?"

Hearing that, the Bhattatharis attacked the Lord with weapons in their hands. However they fell from their hands and struck their own bodies. When some Bhattatharis were thus cut to pieces, the others ran away to save their lives. Thus the Lord saved His fallen servant.

When the Lord reached Trivancore, the king of that state, Rudrapati, wanted to see Him. The king sent his men to bring the Lord to the palace. Lord Chaitanya, however, refused to go there. The king's men tried to persuade Him in various ways. They told Him that if He went there He would get enormous wealth and all His desires would be fulfilled. But they did not know who they were talking to. They returned to the king and reported him about the young mendicant who

dared to defy him. But the king did not take any offence. Instead he went to see the Lord himself. Very humbly, leaving his chariot and elephants behind, he came to see the Lord under a tree and surrendered at His lotus feet.

Travelling north Lord Chaitanya came to Surat. There was a Durga temple, and the Lord saw that one brahmana was about to sacrifice a goat to Durga. The heart of the Lord became filled with compassion for that poor animal. He told the brahmana, "You are sacrificing this animal just for the sake of eating its flesh, but you are not considering what would be the reaction. This form of Durga is all-auspicious, therefore how can she eat this inedible stuff? King Suratha sacrificed a hundred thousand animals, and after his death the departed souls of all those animals attacked him to take revenge. Did you not read this in the Scripture? There is no mention of violence like this in the Scripture. Actually the demons, in order to eat meat, introduced this system.

"You can force the spirit soul out of the body, but you cannot make a spirit soul enter into a dead body. If someone, in the name of worshipping Durga, chops your head off, then how will you feel?"

"Durga is a devotee of Lord Krishna and she never eats meat or drinks wine. If slaughtering animals is religion, then why don't you consider a murderer a saint? Killing an animal or a human is a great sin. If you commit this sin your suffering will increase."

Hearing this advice from Lord Chaitanya, the brahmana refrained from making the animal sacrifice, and worshipped the lotus feet of the Lord in pure devotion. Many people were present there at that time, and understanding the deep purport of the Lord's advice, they stopped animal sacrifice from that day onwards.

Lord Chaitanya reached Dwaraka and saw the Somnath temple. From there He went to Girna-hills, where He saw the foot-prints of Lord Krishna. Then He went to Prabhas Tirtha where Krishna performed His disappearance pastimes.

Lord Chaitanya is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and He came to deliver the conditioned living entities. So wherever He went He delivered innumerable living entities. How He did this will always remain a mystery, because this wonderful act was performed by His inconceivable spiritual energy. Therefore no material reasoning can fathom it out.

To a layman, these activities of the Lord may seem fictitious. To them, my earnest request is to at least consider what 'omnipotent' actually means. If God is all-powerful, then He can do anything according to His desire. As a matter of fact, the appearance of the Lord as Lord Chaitanya is His most down-to-earth appearance. In His other appearances like Lord Krishna, Lord Rama, Lord Nrisimhadeva and others, He performed much more supernatural and astounding pastimes.

Lord Chaitanya travelled and preached all over India and flooded the whole country with love of Godhead. However, due to demonic influence, in course of time people became atheistic and rejected the spiritual heritage of India. As a result of this their suffering increased and their way to hell has been paved. But Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu predicted that His teachings will spread all over the

world. At a time when much of the world looked down on India, this prediction sounded like a poetic exaggeration. But then again, the Lord's inconceivable potency can perform any wonder.

In 1965 one of the most intimate associates of the Lord, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada went to the United States at the age of seventy, without any support or shelter, to spread Lord Chaitanya's teachings. His success is undoubtedly one of the greatest legends of today. The spiritual movement which he started single-handedly in New York in 1966 spread all over the world in just ten years time. Thousands of people from all over the world surrendered themselves to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and millions have become influenced by the philosophy of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Krishna which he purely presented to the world through his books and his perfect personal example. They also will surrender in due course of time. This world-wide mission of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, popularly known as ISKCON, is actively propagating God consciousness all over the world. At a time when the demoniac influence is so prevalent everywhere, to preach love of God is not so easy. But the devotees of ISKCON are pushing on with their missionary work with absolute determination and dedication. There is no doubt that they will become successful because God is all powerful and this world is His kingdom. Acting through His devotees, He will destroy the demonic mentality of those who oppose His will.

This year (1986) is the year of Lord Chaitanya's 500th anniversary. To commemorate Lord Chaitanya's appearance on this earth, ISKCON has taken up many programmes mainly intended to propagate Lord Chaitanya's mission. One such programme is ISKCON's Padayatra.

ISKCON devotees began their Padayatra in 1984, retracing the route travelled by Lord Chaitanya. They started from Dvaraka and have travelled all the way to Kanyakumari. Travelling north-east, they will arrive at Sri Mayapur Dhama, Lord Chaitanya's birthplace, during the 500th anniversary of Lord Chaitanya's appearance which falls in March 1986. Devotees of different countries of the world are walking 10 to 15 miles each day, accompanied by bullock carts, practically demonstrating in this troubled age that peace and unity of people of all nations is achieved by working co-operatively in God consciousness with the common aim of pleasing the Supreme Lord. The procession consists of hundreds of devotees, and is lead by Lord Chaitanya and His principal associate Lord Nityananda in Their deity manifestations. Thousands of local people join the procession, and thus they are reminded of Lord Chaitanya, who travelled the same path delivering their ancestors almost 500 years ago.

Lord Chaitanya revolutionised the lives of people all over India with the most dynamic spiritual movement. This ISKCON Padayatra is reviving that spiritual revolution, and the people of India are responding warmly to this. Now that many of them are utterly disillusioned by the allurements of so-called material

progress, the spiritual bliss offered by Lord Chaitanya through his sankirtana movement is becoming their real shelter.

Everyone is hankering for joy, but nothing in the material nature can offer that. It is for this reason that all material endeavours ultimately end in acute frustration. There is no real joy or happiness in the material nature. Actual joy is a product of the spiritual nature. It is spontaneously manifest when the living entity begins to love God. Therefore, when the living entities are reminded of this simple process, response becomes natural.

Lord Chaitanya went all over India and offered this blissful life of Krishna consciousness to all He met. Following in His footsteps, the ISKCON devotees are distributing this message all over the world, and this Padayatra will go on until everyone on this planet is totally submerged in an ocean of bliss of love of God.

*Revised edition of Bhakti Caru Swami: The Pada-Yatra of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, STUDIA IRENICA 33,
Ed. by Edmund Weber/Tilak Raj Chopra, Frankfurt/Main 1988*