

27th July 2019

Report on Guest Lecture by Dr Abhishek Ghosh on Chaitanya Mahaprabhu – History and Theology.

Department of Sanskrit, University of Mumbai was honoured to have the presence of eminent scholar Dr Abhishek Ghosh. The topic was Chaitanya Mahaprabhu – History and Theology. He was accompanied by another scholar Harshad Marathe.

The guest speakers were aptly introduced by Dr Shakuntala Gawde and the occasion was graced by the presence of the HOD Dr Shuchitra Tajane. Despite the unpredictable Mumbai rains there was a good turnout of students from various courses such as Certificate and Diploma courses of Bhakti Literature and Masters in Sanskrit.

Dr Abhishek Ghosh is a professor in Michigan University and his doctoral thesis has been on Bhaktivinod Thakur who is philosopher, guru and spiritual reformer who wrote books reintroducing the teachings of Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Dr.Ghosh's areas of interest are Hinduism, 19th Century Bengal, Bhakti Movements of India, and Vaishnavism. His vast research and command over Vedic texts and Sanskrit language made him a perfect speaker to enlighten the students on philosophies of Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Harshad Marathe is a scholar of Shrimad Bhagvata Purana and has translated the Krshna Kathamrit Bindu from Gita press edition. He provided beautiful insights on the commentaries by various writers.

Dr Ghosh started the lecture with a very interesting question on what do these numbers mean to you?

∞ 0 1 2



He then went on to explain the amazing analogy of the symbol of infinity. This symbol is the movement of the Sun, which is a continuous process, and since it denotes a natural phenomenon, it is linked to the Vedic times.

Next comes the **0** which was India's contribution to the world that was unaware about its existence until it was discovered by Aryabhata. It was later also propagated in religions like Buddhism. Zero is the first reaction to Infinity and theories like *Shunyavada* were lucidly explained. Metaphysically every being is *Shunya* as matter is made of atom that is 99% empty and 1% energy. Krishna also rejects those parts of Vedas that have *triguna vishaya*.

The next logical step was **1** which, as propounded by none other than Shankaracharya in the Advaita philosophy, suggests that everything is Brahman. In an example, Dr Ghosh narrated the story of a disciple who wanted to attain the Ultimate truth in the quickest possible way and kept asking his Guru to let him know if he was enlightened. Once the disciple who was considering himself as *Brahmjnani* was sent to the market, where he was confronted by a rampaging elephant and returned with injuries. The guru explained that just as the elephant is Brahman, so are the people fleeing for safety. Hence, depending on the situations the manifestations change.

Finally, just as it takes “**two to tango**” the next step is **2** which is dualism for *Dvaita* and here you can find seeds of Bhakti. There are 2 entities which are different from each other yet deeply connected i.e. The *Bheda* between the Bhagvan and his Bhakta. Bhakti is an intuitive natural phenomenon of every living being.

So now, it is easy to understand the logical sequence and evolution of philosophies

∞	0	1	2	
Vedic Times	Buddhism	Shankaracharya's Advaita	Dualism Dvaita	Ramanuja Madhva Nimabaraka Vallabha Chaitanya Azhwars

Thus, we can explain the Bhakti concept, which starts at 2 and goes back to ∞ which denotes the infinite *jivas* effected by Bhakti. Here the infinity symbol denotes the right and the left brain too (rationality and emotions). In *Harinamamrita*, Rupa Gosvami says that all *rasas* emerge from *bhakti rasa*, which is an emotion.

Dr. Ghosh then introduced Caitanya as a scholar of Nyaya and Vyakarana who was able to point out grammatical errors in works of scholars far experienced and aged than himself. His friendship with Gadhadhar Pandit for whom he threw away his doctoral thesis shows his emotional maturity. This story is mentioned in his biography *Caitanya-CharitaAmrita* (nectar or which is immortal – not merit). The highest emotional maturity can be seen in the appreciation of love between Krishna and gopis. Jiva Gosvami has classified *Vyanjana* or Consonants in his book *Harinamamriata* Vyakarana as follows and calls it a **PA varga**

Consonant	Meanings
<i>Pa</i>	<i>Parishrama</i>
<i>Pha</i>	<i>Phena</i>
<i>Ba</i>	<i>Bandhana</i>
<i>Bha</i>	<i>Bhaya</i>
<i>Ma</i>	<i>Mrityu</i>

As *Bhakti Marga* does not have these aspects, it is called *Apavarga i.e. moksha.*

Jiva also says that *Svara varnas* are the *Sarveshvara* as every consonant has a vowel in it just like every Bhakta has God in him. Vowels or the *svara* can be prolonged unlimitedly hence are called *svadhina* (Independent), while Consonants end up in the *svara* hence are called *Paradhina* (Dependent).

Interesting quote by Dr Ghosh “When you change the way you look at things, things you look at will change”

He further explained the Concept of *Anubandha Chatushya*

1. *Adhikarin*- Capability
2. *Sambandha*- Relationship / Bond
3. *Abhidheya*- Practice
4. *Prayojana*- Ultimate Love

Chaitanya also refined the *Achintya Bhedabeda* concept meaning qualitative oneness and ontological differences simultaneously exist. Vaishnavas believe that while Advaita *tattva* is one it may reciprocate differently with different people. Gaudiya Vaishnavism believes in Radha as the *Lhadini* Shakti or the Ultimate Bliss.

Harshad Marathe gave insights on the commentaries on *Bhagavata Purana*. e.g Hari Suri describes the movement of river using metaphors such as *Saritapati* and humorous take on Krishna being the son in law of earth in his previous *avatara* of Rama. He also chanted several verses from *Shrimad Bhagvata Purana* and elaborated on Caitanya’s definition of Bhakti

The session was interspersed with Q&A where Dr Ghosh and Harshad gave deeper insights through stories and peppered the answers with anecdotes which made it an interesting conversation.

The session ended with a vote of thanks from Dr Tajane and left the students feeling enriched and enlightened.



Dr. Abhishek Ghosh with students of Bhakti Literature

(Report by Aparna Sambhare – Diploma in Bhakti Literature 2019-20)

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