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Preface

by

*Bhakti-charu Swami**

In this dark age of hypocrisy and quarrel Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu distributed love of Godhead and showed everyone the most sublime way to transcend the bondage of matter and enter into the spiritual sky. Even if one does not recognize Shri Chaitanya to be the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one who has knowledge of His life and teachings can never fail to appreciate Him as the greatest personality the world has ever seen.

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada not only introduced Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and His teachings to the world outside of India, but

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convinced thousands of sincere souls to become Shri Chaitanya's dedicated followers. Shrila Prabhupada himself spread the glories of the Lord through his writings. No one has ever written so many profound literatures in such a short span of time (about eighty volumes in ten years). He knew that in this age the written word would be the best means of propagating the spiritual message of Shri Chaitanya. Therefore he instructed his followers to distribute his books and to write as well.

Satyaraj Das (Steven Rosen) took that instruction to heart and dedicated himself to writing about the Supreme Personality of Godhead and His associates. *The Lives of the Vaishnava Saints: Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda* is a natural sequel to his two earlier writings, entitled, *India's Spiritual Renaissance: The Life and Times of Lord Chaitanya* and *The Six Goswamis of Vrindavan*. These books reveal Shri Chaitanya's confidential message.

Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu came to distribute the most precious gift of the spiritual sky to everyone, from the most advanced to the most degraded people of this world. Although He established the most profound spiritual philosophy, He Himself did not write anything except eight Sanskrit verses, the "*Shikshashatakam*," which delineate the essence of His teachings. The Goswamis of Vrindavan, especially Shri Rupa, Sanatan, Raghunath Das, Raghunath Bhatta, Gopal Bhatta, and Shri Jiva, wrote volumes of books elaborating Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's teachings and justifying them according to the Vedic scriptures. Had it not been for the Goswamis, the teachings of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu would have passed into oblivion.

The activities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead are not accidental or coincidental. They are all due to His divine arrangements. The appearance of the Goswamis to assist in His pastimes was a part of His divine plan. So too were the appearances of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda. The books that the Goswamis of Vrindavan wrote on the teachings of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were originally distributed by them.

On the spiritual path one gets to know the predecessor through the successor. The Supreme Personality of Godhead Shri Krishna appeared as a devotee in the form of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and in this way revealed His own identity. It is by the mercy of the Six Goswamis of Vrindavan that one gets to know Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and His teachings, and by the mercy of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda one gets to know the Goswamis.

In writing the book you now hold in your hands, Satyaraj Prabhu has extensively researched the lives of these three luminaries of the Vaishnava world. His main source of information is the authentic Gaudiya Vaishnava literature, from which he has carefully chosen all of the relevant episodes in connection with his subject. As a result, this book will be appreciated by devotees of Shri Krishna Chaitanya and by a wide variety of readers as well.

However, the work is not without potentially controversial segments. For example, Satyaraj has indicated how Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda were following the path of *Ragamika Bhakti*, and their spiritual identities as *manjaris* were revealed to them by their spiritual masters. This may appear to contradict the teachings of Shрила Bhaktisiddhanta Sa-

raswati Thakur and His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, but actually there is no contradiction. It is certainly true that the Rupanuga Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya* follows the path of *Ragamika Bhakti*, but Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati and Shrila Prabhupada maintained that the spiritual master must be situated on the pure spiritual platform to reveal the spiritual identity of his disciples and the disciples also should be advanced enough to maintain his spiritual identity. This truth is clearly brought out in Satyaraj's book and is consistent with the conclusions of the *sampradaya*.

One's own spiritual identity and his spiritual master's identity in Vrindavan are revealed automatically in the heart due to his spiritual progress, just as the son of a millionaire who is a natural heir to his father's fortune spontaneously inherits it when he grows up.

When a disciple once asked Shrila Prabhupada about his *siddha svarup* ("spiritual identity"), Shrila Prabhupada replied, "Don't worry about your *svarup*. When you are ready I will personally come and reveal it to you."

Shyamananda Prabhu was initiated by Shrila Hridaya Chaitanya, in the line of Lord Nityananda. Hridaya Chaitanya did not reveal Shyamananda's spiritual identity at the time of initiation, but it was later revealed by Shrimati Radharani Herself that Shyamananda was Kanaka Manjari. One must remember that the spiritual world is the world of the absolute truth and that there is no room for mental speculation and unwarranted imagination. Surrender to the Lord and His devotees is the only way.

In his book, *The Lives of the Vaishnava Saints: Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda*, Satyaraj has succeeded in his attempt to reveal the glorious activities and brilliant contributions of three extremely prominent *acharyas* in the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya*. The world needs to know more about such personalities. Shрила A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada started a spiritual revolution all over the world and Satyaraj Das is making a wonderful contribution to His Divine Grace's mission by compiling the biographies of the eminent *acharyas* in the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya*.

The facts that surround the lives of eternally liberated souls are meant to be sung and heard for the enlightenment and benefit of all. Great souls have relished retelling these stories for centuries. It might be noted, as well, that factual narrations are sometimes more exciting than fiction: and the lives of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda reinforce that statement. Therefore, knowledge of these personalities as presented in this book will bring peace, prosperity, and a tide of spiritual joy to the world.

Foreword

by

*Dr. Charles S.J. White**

The *Lives of the Vaishnava Saints: Shrinivas Acharya, Narottam Das Thakur, and Shyamananda Pandit* adds well-documented material in English, sometimes from Indian-language sources, on important saints of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. Steven Rosen's special focus in this work is on Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda, some of whom had personal contact with Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (the tradition's founder).

Mr. Rosen's *guru*, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, of course, is the principal link in contemporary times between the Indian lineages and the spread of Gaudiya Vaishnavism abroad in the ISKCON move-

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ment. Mr. Rosen began in ISKCON and continues to be a practicing and believing Vaishnava.

In this latter respect Mr. Rosen's work emphasizes his own devotional attitude toward the subject-matter and is written in the "*bhakta*" style rather than in a strictly scholarly manner. The adjustment of the reader to this point-of-view enhances his appreciation of the experience of devotion in this *sampradaya's* tradition. The book, also, has value for students of Hinduism generally and *bhakti* in particular because of Mr. Rosen's reporting and documentation of the historical development of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in its formative period. The work is perhaps unique in its presentation of material on the higher states of Vaishnava mysticism in the *Sakhi-bhava* mode.

For example, there is a moving description of a meditative trance of Shrinivas's wherein he witnesses Radha's water sport with the *Gopis*. In mystic experience he observes Radha's nose-ornament (*besara*) fall into the waters of the Yamuna while Radha and the *Gopis* are splashing about. Shrinivas cannot return to normal consciousness for several days because he is fully absorbed in finding the *besara* and returning it to Radha. He finally accomplishes this with the assistance of Ramchandra Kaviraj, another highly advanced devotee, who enters into trance side by side with Shrinivas, finds Shrinivas in the company of Radha and the *Gopis* and discovers the *besara* under a lotus leaf.

In the mystical realm of *Sakhi-bhava bhakti*, Shrinivas and Ramchandra Kaviraj share the identity of the *Gopi*, Mani Manjari, a *Sahachari* of Radha, and in this way participate in the companionate *rasa*, available to the *Gopis* from the Radha-Krishna relationship. Understanding this unusual meditative scenario is impor-

tant in distinguishing the process leading to spiritual realization in a particular *bhakti* tradition as distinct from the Indian mysticisms of *Nirguna Brahman* or the qualityless *Purusha*.

Introduction

Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu revolutionized the spiritual and social sensibility of sixteenth-century India. Prior to this reformation a clear majority of the population had been gradually moving away from authentic Vedic religion. *Brahmanical* deviations proliferated; Tantric Buddhists and other Hindu heterodoxies were increasing in popularity; *Shakta* worshipers and *avadhuta* ascetics roamed the countryside; *Nava-nyaya*, the new science of logic from Mithila, was the predominant course of study; and the ever-present Muslim antagonism exacerbated the situation.

In the midst of this confusion, Mahaprabhu revived the natural spiritual inclination of the people by revealing the often-concealed, Vedic truth—that the holy name of Krishna is both the means and the goal of

spiritual enlightenment. The details of Mahaprabhu's life and teachings and the renaissance that ensued have been elaborately explored by many writers and scholars. However, it is not widely known that a *second renaissance* began shortly after Mahaprabhu completed His earthly pastimes, one which may be seen as the natural consequence of all that He had imparted. While He had broken open the storehouse of love of God, and while His Six Goswamis had poured that love into tangible vessels by writing books, the world would not have been able to drink deep had three Vaishnava saints not taken those vessels and distributed them across the Indian subcontinent.

Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda were the crown jewels of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. It is hard to believe that no one has presented the lives of these three notable personalities in the English language. While it is true that D.C. Sen wrote about them in the 1930s, he did so in cursory form, and only Ramakanta Chakravarti has written about them since, also in an all too abbreviated fashion. This reticence is surprising, for Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda were responsible for disseminating the esoteric message of Shri Chaitanya to all parts of India, which unquestionably necessitated a monumental effort.

In their day (circa, sixteenth/seventeenth century), the dissemination of transcendental knowledge was largely accomplished through verbal sermons and by conducting elaborate festivals, with singing, dancing, and the distribution of sacred vegetarian food (*prasadam*). The teachings were also conveyed by studying original palm leaf scrolls under a bona-fide spiritual master. Our three saints were particularly en-

thusiastic and outstanding in these functions, and this has been duly noted by Bengali historians.

In fact, the magnitude of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda's accomplishments would not be replicated until the time of Bhaktivinode Thakur and Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur who, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, distributed Vaishnava philosophy through modern means, such as the printing press. Taking their enthusiastic mission even further, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and his disciples lovingly took the teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to every town and village of the world—a feat that was largely accomplished through book distribution.

The phenomenon of sharing or transmitting spiritual knowledge has a long and honored history in the Vedic tradition. The Upanishads were studied at the feet of a perfect master; Vedic knowledge was given orally from *guru* to disciple; scribes soon copied Vedic scriptures onto palm leaves, only to be revealed to serious students; the truths of these texts were concealed in complicated Sanskrit and kept by *gurus* as blueprints for their disciples's entry to the spiritual world. In pursuance of this same tradition, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was anxious that His Goswamis's *Bhakti* literature, which elucidated the hidden essence of Vedic texts, be distributed to all concerned individuals. The pioneers of this spiritual outflow were Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda—the first travelling *sankirtan* party.

Those who are familiar with Vaishnavism's medieval Bengali literature know that Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, during very select portions of His career, prophesied the appearance of Shrinivas, Narottam and

Shyamananda, and He spoke in glowing terms about the unparalleled contributions that each of them would make in the annals of religious history. In this endeavor, they were naturally assisted by other important individuals, such as King Birhambir, Ramchandra Kavi-raj, Santosh Datta, Rasik Murari, Jahnava-devi, Bira-bhadra, and many others, but our focus will be squarely on Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda, for they stand out as particularly significant, as we shall see later in this book.

Still, the importance of the others should not be minimized. For example, Jahnava-devi, who was Nityananda Prabhu's wife and perhaps the most respected Vaishnava of the time, was instrumental in convincing Jiva Goswami of the need for sending the *Bhakti* literature from Vrindavan to all points east, including Bengal and Orissa. Had she not instigated this consequential event, some of the most important episodes in the lives of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda would not have occurred.

Jahnava-devi's historic visits to Vrindavan and her meetings with Jiva Goswami are documented in the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, *Narottam-vilas*, *Prema-vilas*—works to which we will refer throughout this book—and also in the *Murali-vilas* by Rajballabha Goswami. But, again, we will only address such issues when there is a direct relation to the famous trio under discussion. In such cases, we will not refer to the many volumes written about these other exalted personalities but only to the authorized books that center on the lives of our three heroes:

(1) *Bhakti-ratnakara* (“Jewel-Producing Ocean of Devotion”). This is perhaps the most prominent and

widely read work on the lives of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda. It was written in the late eighteenth century by Narahari Chakravarti, who was also known as Ghanashyam Das. He was the son of Vishvanath Chakravarti Thakur's disciple, Jagannath Chakravarti. Narahari took formal initiation from Narasingha Chakravarti (a student of Birbhadra) and was a noted cook at the Govindadev temple in Vrindavan, where he studied. Narahari gradually became one of the most prolific Gaudiya writers of the period. *Bhakti-ratnakara* remains his preeminent work, composed of fifteen long chapters (15,019 verses).¹

(2) *Narottam-vilas* ("The Pastimes of Narottam"). This was also written by Narahari Chakravarti as a supplement to his lengthy *Bhakti-ratnakara*. In twelve chapters it fills in the details of Narottam Thakur's life.²

(3) *Prema-vilas* ("The Pastimes of Divine Love"). This was written much earlier than the previously mentioned works, and its author, Nityananda Das, may well have been an eyewitness to many events in the lives of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda. In Nityananda Das's early life, he was known as Balaram and was an orphan. Adopted by the famous Jahnava-

¹ We will be referring to Narahari Chakravarti, (in Bengali) *Bhakti-ratnakara*, ed., Nandalal Vidyasagar (Calcutta, Gaudiya Mission, 1960).

² Narahari Chakravarti, (in Bengali) *Narottam-vilas*, ed., Ramnarayana Vidyaratna (Murshidabad, Radharaman Press, 1921).

devi, he later took initiation from her, and she instructed him in Vaishnava philosophy. He travelled with her to Vrindavan, and she asked him to document the events of the period. The main results of his labor were the twenty chapters of *Prema-vilas*.³

These three Bengali books are the main reference material for the lives of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda. In addition to these, we are using three other books of historical merit:

(4) *Karnananda* ("Bliss for the Ears"). Yadunandan Thakur, the author of this short work consisting of seven chapters, was a direct disciple of Shrinivas's daughter, Hemlata Thakurani, although it is sometimes said that he was a disciple of her nephew, Subalchandra. This book focuses on Shrinivas's life but also includes valuable information about Narottam and Shyamananda. Of all the books that have been written about the three Vaishnava saints, historians generally prefer this one, perhaps because Yadunandan Thakur carefully organized his facts. Moreover, it is an early work, so the author may have been an eyewitness to many of the events.⁴

³ Nityananda Das, (in Bengali) *Prema-vilas*, ed., Ramdev Mishra (Murshidabad, Radharaman Press, 1911). Another edition has also been useful: ed., Yashodalal Talukdar (Calcutta, Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1913).

⁴ Yadunandan Thakur, (in Bengali) *Karnananda*, ed., Ramnarayana Vidyaratna (Murshidabad, Radharaman Press, 1892).

(5) *Anuraga-balli* ("Collection of Spiritual Emotions"). Another short (eight chapters), early book about the life and times of Shrinivas Acharya. The author was a Vaishnava historian named Manohar Das, a disciple of Ramsharana Chattaraj (one of Shrinivas's intimate disciples). This book includes many pragmatic details not found in other works. It was composed sometime in the year 1697 A.D., shortly after the divine trio had exhibited the last of their manifest pastimes.⁵

(6) *Shyamananda Prakash* ("The Manifestation of Shyamananda"). This apocryphal work was written by Krishna Charan Das and focuses on the early life of Shyamananda Pandit. It is sometimes said that Krishna Charan was the great grandson of Rasikananda (the primary disciple of Shyamananda), but it is known for certain that he was the disciple of Radhamohan Das and the Godbrother of the famous Baladev Vidya-bhushana. *Shyamananda Prakash* comprises sixteen chapters (620 Bengali couplets) and is considered one of the few reliable works on the life of Shyamananda Pandit.⁶

⁵ Manohar Das, (in Bengali) *Anuraga-balli*, ed., Mrinalkanti Ghosh (Calcutta, Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1931).

⁶ Krishna Charan Das, (in Bengali) *Shyamananda Prakash*, ed., Gopal Govindananda Dev Goswami (Gopiballabhapur Shripata, 1957). Also useful was Rasikananda's Sanskrit work: *Shyamananda Shataka*, with commentary by Baladev Vidyabhushana, as was Gopijanaballabha Das's often-quoted *Rasik-mangal*.

The present book is based largely on these six works, and since they form the groundwork for everything that follows, we will not quote from them directly. Instead, we will allow the narrative to flow smoothly, only using footnotes to clarify academic or historical disputes and to set forth the perspectives of subsequent scholarly studies. Our style will be more devotional than academic, but we will not neglect relevant scholarly research. Consequently, devotees will benefit from this book because it elucidates an important yet rarely commented-upon period in their own tradition and will provide an opportunity for them to see what the academic community says about this particular period in Vaishnava history. On the other side, scholars may find this book useful because it shows how the tradition views itself even when taking scholarly research into consideration.

Our main reference books remain the six works listed above. There are other valuable sources, which shall be mentioned in a moment. But first, it would be prudent to admit that the original six works are not without flaws. Scholars as well as orthodox Vaishnavas have pointed out interpolations and historical inaccuracies in all six of these works. While such problems are significant, they are not overwhelming, for an overall understanding can still be achieved by making a serious comparative study of all the critical literature on the subject.

The reason that this problem exists at all is because Gaudiya writers, especially in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, are not and have never been *historians* in the western sense of the term. Rather than focusing on chronology, for example, they tend to write in a topical way. This can even be seen in

earlier Vedic texts as well, such as *Shrimad Bhagavatam*. When the *Bhagavatam* discusses marriage, for instance, it deals with three successive generations at once—Krishna, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha—only mentioning the sequential episodes that lead up to these events in other seemingly less appropriate sections.

Another example of this can be seen when the *Bhagavatam* discusses the killing of demons: the events leading to the deaths of Paundraka, Dvidida, Jarasandha, Shishupal, Shalva, and Dantavakra are taken up successively, even though the time periods that separate these deaths are quite considerable. In Vaishnava literature we thus often find that topics are grouped together. Dates and sequence of activity are considered less important. This is the general rule.

But there are more important ways in which Vaishnava historical writing has not conformed to the norms of western methods, and there are equally important reasons why they have continued to write according to their own unique standards. Most significant, perhaps, is this: Rather than conveying facts and figures—dates and time sequence—Gaudiya writers are more interested in *siddhanta*, or “philosophical conclusions,” and consider it their foremost duty to convey *bhava*, or the “emotions,” of a particular person or period. In other words, while they may be interested in sound historical method and data as a side issue, their main focus is on the spiritual content of the subject.

For this reason, stalwart authorities, such as Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur, have confessed that these books may not in all cases be historically accurate. For example, Shri Naveen Krishnadas in his in-

roduction to the Gaudiya Math edition of *Bhakti-ratnakara* quotes from the collected letters of Bhakti-siddhanta Swaraswati Thakur (*Patrabali*, Second *Khanda*, p. 146.). Therein, the Thakur says that "the historical significance of *Bhakti-ratnakara* is *ati alpa*—'very small'." Nonetheless, Saraswati Thakur commissioned the Gaudiya Math edition, which means that in general he accepted the book, and he conceded that in terms of topography (in relation to Vrindavan and Navadvip) and in terms of *siddhanta* it had much to offer. Moreover, his father and spiritual mentor, Bhaktivinode Thakur, had heavily relied on *Bhakti-ratnakara* in order to rediscover the important places of Shri Chaitanya's pastimes. Shрила Prabhupada, too, relied on *Bhakti-ratnakara*, and it is listed as a reference in many of his translations and commentaries. So, despite historical problems, the book has been accepted by the Vaishnava orthodoxy.

It is accepted, too, by the scholarly world. D.C. Sen viewed *Bhakti-ratnakara*, despite its faults, as the most important history book of the period. The late B.B. Majumdar, one of this century's foremost authorities on the Gaudiya tradition, agreed with this perspective, saying:

Narahari Chakravarti was a diligent historian, a fine biographer, an expert in prosody, a painstaking geographer of the areas surrounding Mathura and Nabadwip....Narahari Chakravarti collected the data about the life of Shrinivas Acharya and Narottam Thakur from written records and oral traditions more than a century after the demise of these persons. His account, therefore, might not be absolutely

free from historical errors. But the same sort of doubt may be raised against all historians from Herodotus to Tarachand.⁷

Thus, the six primary source books may not be without blemish, but they are valuable as the only reliable documents of the period, at least in terms of their spiritual content (if not also in terms of general history). What's more, by comparing them to each other and to other historical sources, a consensus of opinion may be achieved that can extinguish all reasonable doubt in regard to historical inconsistencies. Minor points may remain in question, but the overall series of events will become clear.

For example, *Prema-vilas*⁷ states that Shrinivas's first discourse in King Birhambir's court focused on the five chapters on the *Rasa* Dance; *Bhakti-ratnakara*, on the other hand, says that he spoke from the *Bhramara Gita* ("The Song to the Bumblebee"). However, as Shrinivas's story unfolds, it becomes clear that the subject matter of his first discourse in no way affects the essential story of his life and may at best be considered an insignificant detail.

Nonetheless, to determine the truth behind even the most inconsequential details we have consulted many secondary sources. There have been a plethora of good Bengali books about the lives of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda, both scholarly and devotional, and these augment the information

⁷ B.B. Majumdar, "Three Great Vaishnava Poets of Sixteenth Century Bengal," in Ed., R.K. Dasgupta and Sisir Kumar Das, *Sasibhusan Dasgupta Commemoration Volume* (Calcutta, New Age Publishers, 1965), p. 81.

that has been handed down in the six original works.⁸ For conclusive philosophical as well as historical insight, however, my main reference has been the voluminous work of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. In Shrila Prabhupada's books, correspondence, recorded conversations, and detailed essays, he elucidates the framework with which to pursue an exhaustive study of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda. In addition, Shrila Prabhupada directly discusses these three Vaishnava luminaries in his work, particularly in his letters and conversations. His perspective on their teachings is nicely summarized in his translation and commentary on some of Narottam Thakur's poetry, and this has been included in the Appendix to this book.

⁸ Some of the more important secondary sources include: (1) *Shri Narottam-charita*. This is a Bengali work, written by Shishir Kumar Ghosh, an intimate friend of Bhaktivinode Thakur and the founder and editor of the *Amrit Bazar Patrika*. Published in 1901, this book gives many elaborate details and in-depth analyses of the life and times of Narottam Das Thakur. (2) B.B. Majumdar, (in Bengali) *Shri Chaitanya-chariter Upadan* (Calcutta, Calcutta University, 1959). (3) Naresh Chandra Jana, (in Bengali) *Vrindavaner Chaya Goswami* (Calcutta, Calcutta University, 1970). (4) Radhagovinda Nath, (in Bengali) *Shri Shri Chaitanya-charitamriter Bhumika* (Calcutta, Prachyavani Mandir, 1958). (5) Nirod Prashad Nath, (in Bengali) *Narottam Das O Tahar Rachanavali* or "Narottam Das and his Complete Works" (Calcutta, Calcutta University, 1975). (6) J. Raya, (in Bengali) *Shrinivas Acharya O Shodasha Satabdhir Gaudiya Vaishnava Samaja* (Santiniketan, West Bengal, Vishva-bharati Grantamala, 1984). (7) Haridas Das, (in Bengali) *Gaudiya Vaishnava Abhidhana* (Navadvip, Haribol Kutir, 1956).

Most of the rare Sanskrit and Bengali texts needed to complete this life of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda were procured in India, and for this, as well as for translating services, I am largely indebted to Hena Basu and Bharati Roy of the Vaishnava History Research Project in Calcutta. Shrivatsa Goswami, Kiranash Das, Mathura Das, Haridham Das, Dayananda and Nandarani, Sitala-devi, and others too numerous to mention have also shared their knowledge of these languages and the tradition it supports. In addition, my dear friends and Godbrothers, Brahm-ananda Das, Dasarath Suta Das, Lochanananda Das, Mrigendra Das, and Vaiyasaki Das, in particular, have given their support and have enhanced the quality of the work by offering suggestions and editorial comments. I must also thank His Holiness Bhakti-charu Swami and Dr. Charles White for carefully reviewing the text, offering constructive criticism, and for writing the prefatory words of encouragement and inspiration.

1 —

Shrinivas Acharya

Shrinivas Acharya was one of the most important Vaishnava teachers in the generation immediately following Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He is chiefly remembered as the illustrious disciple of both Gopal Bhatta Goswami and Jiva Goswami, and his achievements include leading the very first book distribution party in the history of Gaudiya Vaishnavism; converting to the Vaishnava religion King Birhambir (the powerful Malla king of Vana Vishnupur); originating the Manohar Shoy style of *kirtan*; developing elaborate techniques for *Manjari-sadhana*; and co-organizing the first Gaur-purnima Festival (the birth anniversary of Shri Chaitanya), which was held at Kheturi with Narottam Thakur, Shyamananda, and thousands of other Vaishnavas.

The story of Shrinivas begins years before his birth with a pious brahmin named Gangadhar Bhattacharya and his wife, Lakshmi-priya, who lived in the small

village of Chakhandi [on the eastern bank of the Ganges]. They were to become Shrinivas's parents. However, before his birth they felt themselves unfortunate because by the will of providence they had remained without offspring for many years.

Gangadhar was a great devotee of Mahaprabhu and spent a good deal of his time hearing and retelling the stories of the great Golden Avatar. This predicted Incarnation of Shri Shri Radha and Krishna had recently appeared in Navadvip and was performing pastimes (*lila*) with His intimate associates. Gangadhar Bhattacharya desired to do more than just talk about these things, but due to social and familial pressures he inwardly resolved to meditate in separation.

In the year 1510, however, he could not tolerate it any longer, and he decided to travel to Navadvip to see the Lord of his life. En route he had to pass through Katwa, which is some seven miles from Chakhandi, and while there, he learned that Nimai of Nadia—Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Himself—was in that very village taking *sannyasa*, the renounced order of life. "What?!" exclaimed Gangadhar. "Why must my Lord take to the renounced order? This austerity is especially reserved for human beings like myself so we can overcome our attachments to this world. Certainly there is no need for Shri Nimai, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, to live the harsh life of an ascetic!" But Gangadhar Bhattacharya's reservations were mixed with excitement, for Mahaprabhu was now in proximity and Gangadhar would get to see his Lord face to face!

When Gangadhar approached the holy area where Shri Nimai was taking *sannyasa*, he saw the Lord's intimate associates, Nityananda Prabhu, Chan-

drashekhar Acharya, Shri Mukunda Datta, and many others. He saw Madhu Sheel, the barber, preparing to cut Nimai's beautiful locks of raven black hair. "No! Please stop!" said the onlookers. They, like Gangadhar, could not conceive of the Lord in the renounced order of life, nor did they relish seeing Him in that condition. Even Madhu, who had the good fortune to touch the Lord's head, could only cut His hair out of duty, while weeping profusely. Madhu and the others were well aware that the Lord had made up His mind, wanting to set an example for the entire religious world and to stress the importance of renunciation. There was nothing they could do.

"Chaitanya Das"

By the time Keshava Bharati, the *sannyasa-guru*, had uttered Nimai's new *sannyasa* name, "Shri Krishna Chaitanya," the crowds were in a state of shock: "Beautiful Nimai is really taking *sannyasa*!" They could not believe their eyes, from which tears were now incessantly flowing. But the deed was done. Madhu, the barber, fainted in disbelief. Why did he shave the Lord's head? It was as if he were controlled by the Lord's own hand, to fulfill the Lord's own inexplicable desire. Whatever had actually occurred, Nimai Pandit was now a *sannyasi* named "Shri Krishna Chaitanya."

Gangadhar was particularly moved by what he had seen, and yet all he could do was repeat to himself, "Chaitanya! Chaitanya! Chaitanya!" His eyes pleaded with everyone present, as he tried to understand what

had just transpired. But all he could do was mutter in a stupor of mixed emotions. "Chaitanya. Chaitanya." Keshava Bharati's words resounded in his head, over and over. Soon, Gangadhar found himself calling aloud, "Chaitanya! Shri Krishna Chaitanya! Shri Krishna Chaitanya!" with uncontrollable enthusiasm. Somehow the transcendental sadness and happiness mixed together to create an especially volatile spiritual emotion. Gangadhar was mesmerized—half mad with ecstasy—as he returned to Chakhandi-*gram*, constantly repeating, "Shri Krishna Chaitanya! Shri Krishna Chaitanya! Chaitanya! Chaitanya!"

He explained to his wife what had happened at Katwa, and she too was overcome with ecstasy. As the days passed, their ecstasy increased, and the whole town of Chakhandi came to marvel at Gangadhar's vital transformation. In fact, upon seeing his uncontrollable absorption in Shri Chaitanya's name, which was contagious, his wife and the villagers of Chakhandi gave him a new nickname: "Chaitanya Das."

Journey To Puri

Chaitanya Das was obsessed with Shri Chaitanya. In order to see the Lord, he and his wife planned a trip to Jagannath Puri, where the Lord had journeyed after accepting the renounced order. When the couple arrived in Puri, they immediately went to Shri Chaitanya and surrendered at His feet. At that time the Lord showed them special mercy, saying, "Lord Jagannath is very happy that you have come here. Go to the temple and see His Deity form. The lotus-eyed Lord is extremely merciful, so please go to see Him."

Following Shri Chaitanya's order, Chaitanya Das and his wife, together with Govinda, Mahaprabhu's personal servant, quickly ran to the temple where they offered many prayers at the feet of Lord Jagannath. Weeping tears of divine love, the happy brahmin couple were soon escorted from the temple and given luxuriant accommodations by the arrangement of Shri Chaitanya. They then spent several happy days with Shri Chaitanya in Jagannath Puri.

One day, Mahaprabhu told His servant, "Govinda! Although Chaitanya Das and his wife have not mentioned it to Me, they would like to have a child. They admitted this in front of Lord Jagannath, from Whom I am nondifferent. They have sincerely prayed, and I know their hearts. The desired offspring will soon appear and Shrinivas will be his name. He will be a greatly beautiful child. Through Rupa and Sanatan I will manifest the *bhakti-shastras*. Through Shrinivas, all of these scriptures will be distributed. Let that brahmin and his wife quickly return to Chakhandi."

The Appearance of Shrinivas

The couple returned to Chakhandi and conceived a child, a beautiful baby boy. They named him Shrinivas. The exact year of his birth is now unknown, for none of the authorized biographical sources mention it. Nonetheless, at least five prominent theories exist,¹

¹ See Ramakanta Chakravarti, *Vaisnavism in Bengal* (Calcutta, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1985), pp. 208-9.

placing his birth as early as 1517 A.D.² or as late as 1585.³ Since Shrinivas was acquainted with many of Lord Chaitanya's direct associates, especially Narahari Sarkar, who was Mahaprabhu's senior contemporary, there is little doubt that the later dates attributed to his birth are quite untenable (since Narahari had by that time passed away). The truth probably lay somewhere in the middle, closer to the earlier dates—perhaps two decades prior to Mahaprabhu's disappearance in 1534. It is generally accepted by the orthodox tradition that the earliest of Shrinivas Acharya's alleged birthdates are more accurate, since Shrinivas was senior to both Narottam and Shyamananda. Their exact birthdates are also unknown, but what *is* known is that they were born just around the time of Mahaprabhu's disappearance. Moreover, as Shrinivas Acharya's story unfolds, it becomes clear that he was a young man at the time of Mahaprabhu's disappearance. Thus it is likely that Shrinivas was roughly fifteen to twenty years of age in 1534. Modern scholarship seems to hold that Shrinivas Acharya was born in the second or third decade of the sixteenth century, or perhaps a little earlier.⁴

It is known that he was born on the auspicious full-moon day of the month of *Vaishakha* (April-May)

² B.B. Majumdar, ed., (in Bengali) *Govindadaser Padavali O Tabar Yuga* (Calcutta, Calcutta University Press, 1961), pp. 400-403.

³ Radhamadhav Tarkatirtha, "Srinivas Acarya," *Our Heritage* (in Bengali), Vol. 2, Part 1 (January-June, 1954), pp. 191-2.

⁴ Ramakanta Chakravarti, *op. cit.*

and that his brahmin parents were overjoyed with their special son. Lakshmi-priya's father, Balaram Vipra, was a learned astrologer, and he informed the happy couple that their son was a *mahapurush*, or a divinely-empowered individual. *Bhakti-ratnakara* records Balaram Vipra's findings: "On the full moon day of *Vaishakha* month, in the constellation of *Rohini*, when all the stars are aligned in the most beneficial way, Lakshmi-priya, the wife of Chaitanya Das, gave birth to a son who will be a great devotee of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu." In fact, the boy's bodily luster was just like molten gold and thus reminiscent of Lord Chaitanya. He had a long, elegant nose; his beautiful eyes extended like huge lotuses; he had a broad chest and arms extending down to his knees, also like Lord Chaitanya. This much is described in the first chapters of both the *Bhakti-ratnakara* and the *Prema-vilas*.

His Youth

According to custom, Chaitanya Das and Lakshmi-priya immediately gave charity to the brahmins and delighted in the blessings that these brahmins offered their child. In pursuance of these blessings, Lakshmi-priya would constantly and prayerfully sing *Gaur-kirtan* into the child's ears. The melodious sounds of his mother's prayers made Shrinivas joyful, and as he grew day-by-day he learned to chant the names of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and of Radha and Krishna.

Soon this small crescent moon known as Shrinivas grew into his full, brilliant form, and he was known as the brightest and most beautiful boy in all of Chakhandi. He studied under the famed Dhananjaya Vidyavachaspati, who taught him all branches of Vedic

learning, including religion, logic, poetry, political science, grammar, Ayurveda, and other well-known sciences of the time. However, according to the Third Chapter of *Prema-vilas*, Dhananjaya Vidyavachaspati admitted that he had nothing to teach Shrinivas: "This boy knows more than I could ever hope to learn." Moreover, *Prema-vilas* relates that the Goddess of Education appeared to Shrinivas in a dream and told him that she would personally make him proficient in all areas of learning and that he would especially master the scriptures. Still, Shrinivas became known as Dhananjaya Vidyavachaspati's prize pupil, and as such, he was the pride of Chakhandi, without any rival. He was loved by all the townspeople, who saw him as a precious gem.

Narahari Sarkar Thakur

Due to Shrinivas's popularity, he came in contact with Narahari Sarkar of nearby Shrikhanda [Shrikhanda and Chakhandi are both in the Burdwan District of Bengal], who was Lord Chaitanya's intimate associate. Because of Narahari Sarkar's intense devotion he was allowed to sing glorification of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Mahaprabhu's presence, even though out of humility the Lord dismissed anyone else who would sing His glories. This distinction, bestowed upon Narahari by Mahaprabhu Himself, impressed Shrinivas, who consequently accepted Shri Narahari as his first instructing *guru*. According to all authorized sources, after young Shrinivas met Narahari Sarkar, the boy began to exhibit ecstatic symptoms. Narahari had a profound effect upon him, giving him spiritual instructions and telling

him that he should go to Puri to see Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

As Shrinivas was thinking of going to Puri, his father became ill and after seven days of fever passed away from this mortal world. It was a great shock to the family, and Shrinivas did all that was possible to console his aggrieved mother. Meanwhile, the omniscient Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu prepared His associates for Shrinivas's arrival:

He [Mahaprabhu] had written to Rupa, Sanatan, and Gopal Bhatta, requesting them to train Shrinivas in spiritual life (*Karnananda*, Sixth Chapter). Shri Chaitanya also asked Gadadhar Pandit to teach Shrinivas the *Bhagavat* on his arrival in Jagannath Puri (*Prema-vilas*, Fourth Chapter).⁵

Narahari Sarkar advised Shrinivas to see to his mother's care and maintenance in Jajigram, where her father, Balaram Vipra, and her brothers resided, having moved from Chakhandi. Moreover, Narahari insisted that Shrinivas proceed to Puri in order to associate with Shri Chaitanya. At this time, Shrinivas asked Narahari to initiate him into the chanting of Krishna's name, but Narahari told him that Mahaprabhu desired that he eventually take initiation from Gopal Bhatta Goswami.

⁵ Sambidananda Das, *The History and Literature of Gaudiya Vaishnavas and Their Relation to Medieval Vaishnava Schools* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), Calcutta University, June, 1935, Chapter Nine, p. 781.

Meeting With Gadadhar Pandit

Still a young boy, Shrinivas travelled with a companion to Puri, but, according to *Karnananda*, during the journey he found out about Shri Chaitanya's untimely departure from this world. When he first heard this devastating news, he was prepared to commit suicide by setting his body on fire. However, both Shri Chaitanya and Nityananda Prabhu, who, according to some, had also passed away by this time, appeared to Shrinivas "on the pretext of a dream" and consoled him. The phrase, *shopna chaley* or "on the pretext of a dream," appears frequently in Bengali literature of the period and is usually taken to mean "within the context of a spiritual vision."

Despite such visions, however, Shrinivas remained grief-stricken as he made his way to the Gopinath temple in Puri to take shelter of Gadadhar Pandit. The Pandit was overcome with intense separation as well and tears kept flowing from his eyes like torrents of rain. Shrinivas himself was traumatized, but he managed to bow down reverentially at Shri Gadadhar's feet. After introducing himself, he noticed that Gadadhar Pandit's mood had changed: "I am glad that you have come and introduced yourself. Just before Chaitanya Mahaprabhu passed away, He instructed me to teach you the *Bhagavatam*. He knew that you would arrive in Puri one day and He asked me to explain *Krishna-lila* to you."

Although Gadadhar Pandit now rejoiced in the prospect of fulfilling one of Mahaprabhu's last desires, he was suddenly overcome once again with grief: "I cannot teach you *Bhagavatam* at this time, O young Shrinivas, for the manuscript in my possession

has now become illegible due to the profusion of tears that I have cried on its pages." Historian D.C. Sen writes that the manuscript was "mostly effaced by Chaitanya's own tears."⁶ Apparently, Mahaprabhu had given the manuscript to Gadadhar but before doing so had cried upon its pages when He read of Radha and Krishna's separation.

Shrinivas touched the sacred book to his head reverentially and began to experience ecstatic symptoms. Nonetheless, the problem of studying a book that had been rendered illegible remained. Both Shri Gadadhar and Shrinivas would not be swayed from their purpose. The will of Mahaprabhu—that Shrinivas study the *Bhagavatam* under Gadadhar Pandit—could not be obstructed. That is, if indeed it was the Lord's will.

In an attempt to fulfill this divine decree, Shri Gadadhar sent a message to Narahari Sarkar in Bengal, requesting him to secure another manuscript of *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, which he could then use to instruct the enthusiastic young Shrinivas. Narahari replied that another copy was available and that a messenger should immediately be dispatched to receive the book.

At Gadadhar's request Shrinivas himself was sent back to Bengal to get the *Bhagavatam*. Shri Gadadhar told him to hurry, as separation from Mahaprabhu was intolerable for him, and he did not know how long he could remain in this world. However, before leaving Puri for Bengal, Shrinivas fulfilled a long cherished desire to see Shri Chaitanya's direct assoc-

⁶ D.C. Sen, *The Vaishnava Literature of Mediaeval Bengal* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1917), p. 89.

iates by going to the homes of Ramananda Roy, Shikhi Mahiti, Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, Vakreshvara Pandit, Paramananda Puri, Gopinath Acharya, and many others. He also went to see King Prataparudra, but according to *Bhakti-ratnakara* the king had gone away to lament in solitude the Lord's passing.

Shrinivas As Gaur-Shakti

By seeing Shrinivas, all of the great personalities in Puri were reminded of Shri Chaitanya. By observing Shrinivas's intense and unprecedented love of Godhead, the devotees could understand that he was *Gaur-shakti*, or the embodiment of the energy of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Actually, *Prema-vilas* concludes that Shrinivas is an incarnation of Mahaprabhu's ecstasy. The intimate associates could naturally perceive this and could immediately understand that through Shrinivas the eternal message of Shri Chaitanya—the esoteric message of the Vedic literature—would be widely distributed. If Mahaprabhu had broken open the storehouse of love of God, and the Goswamis had taken that nectar and placed it in tangible vessels, Shrinivas would then see that these vessels were properly circulated among all sincere souls. Perceiving this, all the intimate associates of Mahaprabhu gave Shrinivas important instructions and advice for carrying on the mission.

When Shrinivas arrived in Bengal and received the copy of the *Bhagavatam* from Narahari Sarkar Thakur, he heard of Gadadhar Pandit's passing away. This was a terrible blow, and Shrinivas, now lamenting in separation, did not return to Puri. According to other authoritative versions, he didn't find out about

Gadadhar's passing *until* he returned to Puri. Whichever version is correct, Gadadhar Pandit appeared to him "on the pretext of a dream" and encouraged him to go forward. At that time Shrinivas reflected on the inconceivable will of the Lord. Why did He take away the personality who was to teach him the *Bhagavatam*? Was there a new plan? Was someone else to teach him the sacred scriptures? In fact, he would soon study under Jiva Goswami, the most respected scholar in all of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. The original plan of studying under Gadadhar Pandit was meant to entice him, to whet his appetite, and to make him mad with the mood of separation toward the Lord and His devotees.

Some say that Shrinivas fell despondent at this time, but not much is known about the ensuing months or years that followed Shri Gadadhar's passing from this world. It is generally assumed that Shrinivas spent this time at first in a heart-broken state and then in serious meditation and study:

There is no account of his life for the next several years in the available biographies. The books by Karnapur, Narottam, and Nrisinghadev Kaviraj may have recorded it, but we have not yet been able to trace them entirely, except passages quoted in contemporary and later writings. He seems to have continued his studies, as he was still in his teens. When Shri Jahnava-devi [the wife of Nityananda Prabhu] went to Vrindavan, Rupa Goswami asked her to send Shrinivas [from Bengal] to Vrindavan as soon as possible (*Prema-vilas*, Sixteenth Chapter). On her return to Bengal, she asked Narahari to do this, as Rupa was waiting to

train him. It was Shri Chaitanya's command to the Goswamins of Vraja to train Shrinivas, and Narahari advised him to hasten, so that the command should not be violated. This request seems to have heightened Shrinivas's desire to study *Bhakti* literature with Rupa and Sanatan, but he was still staying at home. Had he gone to Vrindavan then, he would have met Rupa and Sanatan. But instead he resolved to visit the homes of Shri Chaitanya's principle associates on the way, halting at Navadvip to visit Shri Chaitanya's home.⁷

Association of Navadvip Devotees

This is the second time that young Shrinivas had behaved in this way: first with Gadadhar Pandit, and now with Rupa and Sanatan. Perhaps Shrinivas's enthusiasm to associate with Shri Chaitanya's direct followers in Puri and Navadvip was so overwhelming that he was unable to heed the sagacious advice of his forebears. Some say that all of this was the will of providence, so that Shrinivas would take initiation from Gopal Bhatta Goswami. Others opine that Shrinivas, by his example, was merely teaching something about the unequivocal importance of sacred pilgrimage and the association of devotees. Whatever the case, Shrinivas was enthralled with the home of Shri Chaitanya in Navadvip (Mayapur) where he met Vishnu-priya-devi, the Lord's revered widow, and her esteemed servants, Vamsivadana Thakur and Ishan Pra-

⁷ Sambidananda Das, op. cit., p. 783.

bhu. They all blessed Shrinivas, and he stayed with them for several days, hearing the pastimes of Shri Chaitanya. During those few days he watched Vishnu-priya perform severe austerities. For example, she would chant the *maha-mantra*—Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare—over each grain of rice in her possession. When she was finished with her daily chanting, she would eat only the grains she had set aside with each *mantra*. “Truly,” Shrinivas said, “this is a wife who was worthy of Shri Chaitanya.”

Shrinivas also met Damodar Pandit, Shuklambar, Murari Gupta, and other early friends and intimates of Shri Chaitanya in Navadvip. From there Shrinivas went to nearby Shantipur, where he met Shri Adwaita's wife, Sita Thakurani, and her two sons, Achyuta and Gopal. In the Talukdara edition of *Prema-vilas* it is stated that Shrinivas went to Shantipur only three years after the departure of Adwaita Acharya, but the Vidyaratna edition states that it was thirteen years after Shri Adwaita's holy departure. The latter calculation seems more in keeping with the bulk of biographical information available about Shri Adwaita's life and times.

Shrinivas Meets Jahnava-devi

After Shrinivas was warmly greeted by Sita Thakurani and her sons, he visited the house of Nityananda Prabhu in Khardaha, where Jahnava-devi, her son, Birabhadra, and others greeted Shrinivas as if he were part of their own family. But Jahnava-devi encouraged him to start for Vrindavan without delay, because

Rupa and Sanatan would soon rejoin the Lord in the spiritual world.

On the way to Vrindavan, Shrinivas stopped at the well-known Abhiram Thakur's house in Khanakul Krishna-nagar, to deliver a letter from Jahnava-devi. Upon his arrival the Thakur greeted him with three loving lashes from an extraordinary whip! This whip, known as "Jai Mangal," had the peculiar effect of bestowing love of God on anyone it touched. Shri Abhiram's strange greeting was actually a benediction. (According to some, Jai Mangal is actually a bamboo rod, more like a magic wand than a whip.)

The distinguished historian D.C. Sen was quite mistaken when he suggested that Shrinivas "...received the strokes of the Jayamangala stick in the temple of Kardha..." while visiting Jahnava-devi.⁸ According to *Prema-vilas* (Fourth Chapter), it was clearly Abhiram Thakur, the incarnation of Shri Krishna's intimate friend, Shridama, who blessed Shrinivas with it at Krishna-nagar. Both Abhiram and his wife, Malini, showed the deepest affection for Shrinivas. Not only did they bless him with their famous whip, but they gave him valuable instructions and reiterated the importance of going to Vrindavan as soon as possible.

While continuing his journey, Shrinivas stopped in Katwa, where his father had witnessed Mahaprabhu adopt the renounced order of life. Next he passed through Agradvip, where the three famous Ghosh brothers—Vasudev, Govinda and Madhava—had established their temple, and then he proceeded to

⁸ D.C. Sen, op. cit., p. 90.

Ekachakra, the birthplace of Nityananda Prabhu. Finally, Shrinivas made one last stop in Jajigram to say farewell to his aging mother, Lakshmi-priya, and to once again visit Narahari Sarkar, whom he considered his beloved *guru*.

Narahari was concerned about Shrinivas's delay in going to Vrindavan, and he asked him to leave immediately. "Otherwise," said Narahari, "you may not get your heart's desire: to study the *Bhakti* scriptures with Rupa and Sanatan." And so, without any further distraction Shrinivas determinedly set out for Vraja. By this time, Shrinivas had achieved full adulthood.

The Journey To Vraja

Bengali religious historian, B.B. Majumdar, states that the first Vrindavan sojourn took place in the year 1564,⁹ while Radhagovinda Nath, another respected authority, says it occurred in 1592.¹⁰ Since both of these dates would make Shrinivas a middle-aged man, it is likely that an earlier date would be more accurate, especially since there is evidence that Shrinivas was a young man at the time of this trip. Dr. Sambidananda Das rightly suggests that Shrinivas had gone to Vrindavan for the first time in the mid-1550s, when he was

⁹ B.B. Majumdar, op. cit., pp. 400-403.

¹⁰ Radhagovinda Nath, (in Bengali) *Shri chaitanya charitamriter Bhumika* (Calcutta, Prachyavani Mandir, Fourth Edition, 1958), p. 22.

in his early-to-mid-thirties. Dr. Das gives elaborate evidence to support his views.¹¹

Meanwhile, Sanatan Goswami had left this mortal world, and Rupa Goswami could not bear the separation. Shri Rupa felt that he, too, might not survive to instruct Shrinivas, and so he asked his distinguished disciple (and nephew), Jiva Goswami, to care for Shrinivas when he would come to Vrindavan. Travelling in those days mostly by foot was difficult. Nonetheless, Shrinivas was making determined progress, stopping briefly on the way in Benares to visit the house of Chandrashekhar Acharya (where previously Shri Chaitanya had lived for two months). Here Shrinivas met an elderly disciple of Chandrashekhar, who invited him for a meal and showed him the places associated with Shri Chaitanya.

Next, Shrinivas reached Prayag (currently known as Allahabad) and spent the night there. Four days before arriving in Vrindavan, he heard that Sanatan had passed away some four months earlier. Moreover, when he reached Mathura, he learned that Rupa Goswami had passed away only three days before. Hearing this, Shrinivas fell to the ground crying like a madman. He felt that he was the most unfortunate person in the entire universe. Every step, from his proposed meeting with Mahaprabhu, to his studying *Bhagavatam* with Gadadhar Pandit, to his meeting with Rupa and Sanatan, had all failed. Shrinivas sat beneath a tree and wished for his own death. Just then, Rupa and Sanatan appeared to

¹¹ Sambidananda Das, op. cit., Appendix C, pp. 1,058-1,068.

Shrinivas “on the pretext of a dream,” and they told him that he was the embodiment of Mahaprabhu's love. They encouraged him to proceed to Vrindavan and take shelter of Gopal Bhatta Goswami and to study under Shri Jiva with all of his life and soul.

Jiva and Gopal Bhatta Goswami

Hearing the words of Shri Sanatan and Rupa relieved Shrinivas's heavy heart to some extent. He was now able to travel, and soon he felt the dust of Vrindavan beneath his feet. His anguish now mitigated, he approached Rupa Goswami's Govindadev temple hoping to find greater solace in Lord Govinda's lotus feet.

Some historians doubt that Shrinivas could have found a fully constructed Govindadev temple in the 1550s, for there is an inscription on the temple itself which states that it was completed in the 1590s. Nonetheless, since the standard biographers suggest that Shrinivas saw the Govindadev temple when he arrived, it is quite possible that a preliminary structure existed at that time.

Bhakti-ratnakara describes that as Shrinivas sat in trance before the Deity, Jiva Goswami and his many followers entered the temple. Shrinivas immediately recognized the famous Goswami, and after introducing himself, was greeted by Shri Jiva with great warmth and loving hospitality.

Shri Jiva brought Shrinivas to his Shri Shri Radha Damodar Mandir and gave him comfortable lodging for the night. The next day, Shrinivas expressed his homage at the tomb of Shri Rupa in the courtyard of Jiva Goswami's temple. Then Jiva introduced him to Gopal Bhatta Goswami, who greeted

him with kind words but openly expressed his regret that Shrinivas could not have arrived sooner, for Rupa and Sanatan had been anxious to meet him. Gopal Bhatta then took Shrinivas to his Radha-Raman Temple, where he asked the Deities to bless Vrindavan's newly arrived pilgrim.

According to the Sixth Chapter of the *Prema-vilas*, Gopal Bhatta Goswami revealed to Shrinivas at this time that he (Shrinivas) is Mani Manjari in the spiritual realm. Gopal Bhatta also told him that in this eternal spiritual identity, upon which he should now consistently meditate, he will always assist Guna Manjari (Gopal Bhatta himself, who is also known as Ananga Manjari) in her service to Shri Shri Radha and Krishna. This was to be his inner meditation from that day. And this would lead Shrinivas to the perfection of self realization. Gopal Bhatta Goswami explained to him that this mode of devotional service is called *Ragatmika Bhajan*. After revealing these confidential truths, Gopal Bhatta Goswami and Jiva Goswami gradually introduced Shrinivas to all of the inhabitants of Vraja.

Narottam and Dukhi Krishnadas

Gopal Bhatta and Jiva Goswami taught Shrinivas well, and Gopal Bhatta even initiated Shrinivas, as Mahaprabhu had decreed. Since Jiva Goswami was the pre-eminent Vaishnava philosopher of the period, Gopal Bhatta directed his disciple Shrinivas to Shri Jiva for higher instruction. It may be remembered that this was the expressed desire of Rupa-Sanatan. In fact, *Prema-vilas* makes it clear that it was Shri Jiva who personally

took care of Shrinivas and gave him a thorough spiritual education.

Another young scholar, the illustrious Narottam, had already been placed under Jiva's tutelage. Narottam was originally initiated by Lokanath Goswami, but was sent by Lokanath to Shri Jiva for additional spiritual instructions. Narottam had been studying under Jiva for one year when Shrinivas arrived in Vrindavan. Then young Dukhi Krishnadas came as well, being sent by his *guru*, Hridoy Chaitanya. These three young men—Shrinivas, Narottam, and Dukhi Krishnadas—studied under Jiva Goswami with the utmost enthusiasm and became the Goswami's best students. They were widely known as inseparable friends.

Raghava Pandit

Jiva Goswami ordered his three pupils to study the forests of Vrindavan with Raghava Pandit who, as an incarnation of the intimate *gopi*, Dhanishtha (in Krishna's pastimes), knew all the sacred groves as well as their significance for the *Bhakti* movement. *Bhaktiratnakara* dedicates five long chapters (the entire "Fifth Wave," which comes to 3,937 Bengali couplets) to the wanderings of Raghava Pandit with Narottam and Shrinivas throughout the sixty-four *krosas* of Mathura Mandala. These pilgrimages are enunciated as a detailed science with references to theology, morphology, and ontology. Dukhi Krishnadas accompanied them on pilgrimage according to some accounts, but according to others, he joined them afterwards.

As time went on, Shrinivas, Narottam, and Dukhi Krishnadas were given a special mission. They were to distribute the books of the Goswamis—the

Bhakti-rasa Scriptures—especially in Bengal, where Vaishnavism was widely embraced but where its underpinning in philosophical literature was wanting. Jahnava-devi had visited Rupa and Sanatan in Vrindavan some years earlier and was well aware of the prolific spiritual literature that the Vrindavan Goswamis were producing, so she contacted Jiva Goswami and suggested that the books be sent to Bengal. To comply with her wishes, Shri Jiva summoned his three best men.

The Mission Begins

In a large assembly of Vaishnavas, Shri Jiva called forth Narottam Das: "From this day forward, you will be known as Narottam Thakur Mahashoy." Then he called Shrinivas: "You will be known as Shrinivas Acharya." And, finally Dukhi Krishnadas: "Because you have brought pleasure to Shrimati Radharani, you will be known as Shyamananda." [For the full story of how Shyamananda actually received this name, please see this book's final chapter.] After giving them these titles, Shri Jiva told them of their travelling *sankirtan* mission to Bengal, Orissa, and other provinces of India.¹²

The distinguished triumvirate did not want to leave the holy land of Vrindavan, but they fully

¹² Some authorities say that this important journey took place during Shrinivas's second trip to Vrindavan. Other facts vary as well. For example, sometimes it is said that Shyamananda did not accompany them. Whatever the case may be, we will tell the most common rendition of the story according to the most orthodox sources.

understood the importance of their divine mission. They went to their initiating *gurus*, who gave their blessings, and this instilled in them the necessary enthusiasm to begin. When they returned to Shri Jiva, they found him making preparations for the lengthy and arduous journey that lay before them. These were, after all, his three best students, and he would spare no pains for their welfare.

Shri Jiva engaged a rich merchant disciple from Mathura by having him supply a huge, spacious cart, four strong bullocks, and ten armed guards. The manuscripts—original works by Rupa, Sanatan, Gopal Bhatta, Raghunath Das, and Jiva, among others—were carefully placed in a large wooden chest, which was bolted and covered with a special wax-cloth. Some say that the enclosed manuscripts were the only existing copies of these works, and so Shri Jiva was fastidious in packing them and in choosing the appropriate men to accompany them. Others say that Jiva had engaged scribes to make copies, but still the books were valuable having only one or two alternate editions. Shri Jiva also secured a special passport from the king of Jaipur, which the three Vaishnava heroes needed to show as they travelled to various regions of Eastern India. After thorough preparation, Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda left Vrindavan.

The First Travelling Sankirtan Party

As they commenced their journey toward Mathura, several devotees, including Shri Jiva, accompanied them, unable to bear being separated. As the caravan neared Agra, the well-wishers fell behind. Now their journey was underway; there could be no turning back.

Soon they reached a small town known in those times as Ita, and then they traveled a path through the Chota-Nagpur jungles, also known as the Jarikhanda forest. Leaving Maghadesh on their left, they arrived in Tamlook, where they camped for the night.

After many months of travel, they approached the land of Gaudadesh, or Bengal. Confident that their mission was nearing completion, they decided to rest in a small village named Gopalpur, just within the boundaries of the Malla kingdom of Vana Vishnupur. Here the priceless cargo of books was stolen; but before retelling the details of this heart-rending episode, some historical background would be useful.

Vana Vishnupur

Since the province ruled by Vana Vishnupur figures prominently in Shrinivas Acharya's life, it would be prudent to briefly explain the geography and history of this locality. The kingdom of Vishnupur is in the district of Birbhum, in Bengal, bounded on the north by the Santhal Pargannas and on the south by Midnapur. Leagram was the capital and in the early part of the eighth century it was ruled by King Adimalla (literally, "the first hero"), who was originally known as Raghunath Singh. Tradition asserts that Raghunath was a warrior who was raised by a Bagdi chief and subsequently installed on the throne. The kingdom was independent and powerful. D.C. Sen elaborates on the reign of the Malla kings:

A record of the kings of Vishnupur with dates is to be found in Oldham's Historical and Ethnological aspects of the Burdwan District

(sic). Adimalla's son, Jayamalla, extended his dominions by conquering Padampur, the whole family of the Raja there committing suicide by drowning themselves in the tank Kanai Sara, after the latter's defeat in order to escape a capture by Jayamalla. The forty-eighth king of Vishnupur from its founder, was Vanamalla, whose son, Ham Bir (literally, "I am a hero") ascended the throne [toward the end of the sixteenth century]. Ham Bir was generally known as Birhambir....[In addition to his huge kingdom] he was the leader of a strong body of bandits who were the terror of the adjoining countries. He had employed a large number of thugs and assassins who infested the highways and killed and robbed the wayfarers. The astrologers of the court were ever ready to submit to him confidential reports as to what fortunes the stars would grant him if he carried on robberies in particular localities.¹³

Stealing the Books

The king's dacoits were following Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda for some time, carefully surveying the well-protected cart of priceless manuscripts from afar. According to *Bhakti-ratnakara*, they had planned to rob the caravan for quite a distance, keeping it under strict surveillance, but they tactfully waited until it

¹³ D.C. Sen, op. cit., pp. 109-10.

reached the jurisdiction of their own Raja's kingdom. The court dacoits soon detected that only fifteen men accompanied the cart—ten armed soldiers, three holy men, and two cart-men.

This caravan held special interest for the thieves because the king's astrologers had prophesied that the cart contained a precious treasure. The band of dacoits, now numbering over two hundred, inflamed each other's imagination while discussing one of the astrologers's exact words: "This cart is filled with gems that are more valuable than gold."

Excited by the possibility of an enormous fortune, they were about to overtake the caravan in a village named Tamar, but circumstance did not permit it. The marauders stealthfully followed them through the town of Raghunathpur, and through Panchavati as well. Finally in Gopalpur, the Vaishnava saints spent the night near a beautiful lake, confident that their mission was nearly completed.

The dark night and luminous stars were the only witnesses to the surreptitious theft of the manuscripts, as all fifteen men slept deeply due to their arduous journey. When they awoke it was as if their worst nightmare had come to pass. The loss of this priceless treasure was the most terrible scenario. The three stalwarts could not contain their tears. But Shrinivas, the senior man in the party, advised the other two, Narottam and Shyamananda, to dry their eyes and to proceed with their mission of bringing the message of the Six Goswamis to various parts of Bengal and Orissa. Shrinivas made it his own solemn duty to retrieve the manuscripts. Before doing anything, how-

ever, he wrote to Jiva Goswami and told him all that had transpired.¹⁴

The King Experiences Love of God

As Shrinivas was writing his letter some miles away, King Birhambir was rummaging through the treasures stolen from various travellers. Just then, his servants

¹⁴ Naturally, all of Vrindavan took the news painfully. Several writers of the period, however, have exaggerated the reaction of Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami. Notably, Nityananda Das, author of *Prema-vilas*, says that Kaviraj Goswami committed suicide upon hearing that the books, including his *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, were stolen. Nityananda Das is corrected by the author of *Karnananda*, who heard the story directly from Hemlata-devi, Shrinivas's daughter. *Karnananda* states that Kaviraj Goswami survived the ordeal and did not commit suicide. Besides, suicide is against Vaishnava tradition. Despite the fact that Raghunath Das, Sanatan, and others are known to have attempted suicide, the Lord invariably plays a trick on them, not allowing such an ignoble death to befall His devotee. Why would Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami be an exception? Another factor to be considered is the date of the *Chaitanya-charitamrita*. It seems that there is enough evidence to suggest that the book had not yet been written, which would make Kaviraj Goswami's anguish over Shrinivas's losing it an anachronism. B.B. Majumdar also points to the four letters of Jiva Goswami, found in both *Prema-vilas* and in *Bhakti-ratnakara*. In a letter that is dated some years after the period under discussion, Shri Jiva writes to Shrinivas: "Krishnadas Kaviraj offers his obeisances to you." How could Krishnadas Kaviraj offer obeisances if he had committed suicide years before? For these and other reasons, the orthodox Gaudiya tradition and the world of scholarship both dismiss the alleged suicide, claiming that the entire incident is a later interpolation.

appeared with the court's most recent acquisition—Shrinivas's carefully wrapped chest of “the most precious gems.” Birhambir dropped everything else and feverishly unwrapped his latest prize. After having heard the prophesies, he could scarcely imagine what splendors awaited him.

In one suspenseful moment, he removed the cloth covering and opened the trunk to reveal mere manuscripts. What a shock! Where was the priceless treasure? Lifting out the top manuscript in disbelief, the king saw the signature “Shri Rupa Goswami” written on a palm leaf. When he examined further and saw Shri Rupa's beautiful exposition of Vaishnava philosophy, he felt something change deep within. According to the *Gaura-parshad-charitavali*, Birhambir attained love for Krishna at that moment. He then reverentially returned the book to the trunk and retired for the evening, aware of the grave sin that he had foolishly instigated.

Shrinivas Appears In A Dream

As the king rested, he had an unusual dream. He saw a beautiful and effulgent person, whose body was filled with divine energy. With a loving smile, that person spoke to him: “Do not worry. Soon I will come to Vishnupur and we shall meet. I will retrieve my manuscripts and you will be relieved of all sinful reactions. At that time, your joy will be boundless. Know for certain that you are my eternal servant life after life and I am your eternal well-wisher.” The next morning the king awoke and started his life anew, waiting for the day when his mysterious dream would come true.

Meanwhile, Shrinivas Acharya made his way to the outskirts of Vishnupur, where he met a brahmin resident named Shri Krishna Ballabha. The two pundits became friends, and Krishna Ballabha graciously invited Shrinivas to be a guest in his home. Gradually, he realized Shrinivas's exalted position and surrendered to him as a pupil. In due course, Krishna Ballabha mentioned that the king regularly convened a *Bhagavatam* study group for all who were interested. Shrinivas was extremely curious as to the nature of the *Bhagavatam* presentation and asked Krishna Ballabha to take him to the next meeting.

Bhagavatam Recitation

When they arrived, Vyasacharya, the court pundit, was reciting and commenting upon the *Bhagavatam*. Shrinivas was unimpressed, but he said nothing. The next day, they arrived again, and this time, too, Vyasacharya was pontificating in the same fashion. After two weeks of the court pundit's intolerable display, Shrinivas could not contain himself, and so after the meeting he spoke to Vyasacharya: "You, sir, do not follow the text, nor are your commentaries in line with Shridhar Swami or the other standard exponents of *Bhagavat* philosophy." Vyasacharya listened to Shrinivas's comments but ignored his advice. However, the king, who was nearby, overheard what was said and found it interesting.

The next day at the recital Vyasacharya again attempted to elucidate the esoteric section of the *Bhagavatam* that delineates Shri Krishna's *rasa-lila*. Respectful but firm, Shrinivas interrupted with a question: "Sir, how can you comment on such confidential

subjects without referring to the authoritative statements of Shridhar Swami? You are obviously unfamiliar with his work." Vyasacharya now became angry. He didn't like being challenged in front of his sycophantic assembly, who were accustomed only to his peculiar rendition of *Bhagavatam* commentary.

Before another word was said, however, the king, who was in the audience, began to defend Shrinivas's position: "How is it that this brahmin scholar finds fault with your explanations? Perhaps your interpretations *are* questionable!" To this, the arrogant Vyasacharya replied: "Who can interpret the texts better than I? This newcomer is an upstart, and he dares to question me in the presence of Your Majesty." Then he turned to Shrinivas and indignantly quipped: "If you are such an authority on the *Bhagavatam*, why don't you come sit here and explain these same verses in a more brilliant way."

Shrinivas rose to the challenge. He recited the *Bhagavatam* verses in the most melodious style, and then he spontaneously commented upon them with great verve and authority. He drew upon all existing Vaishnava explanations and yet offered his own unique presentation. No one had ever heard such a masterful enunciation of *Bhagavat* philosophy. The king encouraged him to go on, allowing him to speak for several hours. When he finished, the whole assembly applauded and were ecstatic with Shrinivas's contagious love for Krishna. Vyasacharya could not believe his ears. He was defeated, but he was happy.

King Birhambir was greatly moved and spoke to Shrinivas: "No one has ever come to this kingdom and shared so much love and scholarship in the way that you have. Please, tell me your name and from

where do you come?" Shrinivas replied: "My name is Shrinivas and I am a native of this country (Bengal). I came here to see your magnificent court and to relish the *Bhagavatam*." The king then gave him the best accommodations in the palace and asked him to stay as long as he liked.

The King Surrenders

Later that evening, the king asked Shrinivas to dine with him, but Shrinivas said that he took only one humble meal per day, and that he had already eaten. Nonetheless, Birhambir encouraged him to have some fruit, and he complied, not wanting to offend his distinguished host. As Shrinivas ate his fruit, the king sat at his side like a humble servant. He had never felt this way about anyone: Shrinivas was that effulgent person who had appeared in his dream—his *guru*—and he wanted to render some menial service.

That night, Birhambir heard Shrinivas repeating the name of Krishna through the wall, since his room was right next to the one in which he had his honored guest stay. It seemed as though Shrinivas did not sleep. "Here is a genuine saint," thought the king. "He is simply absorbed in the name of God." With this pleasant idea, the king fell asleep, listening to Shrinivas Acharya's blissful voice in the next room.

The following day in the great assembly Shrinivas again spoke from the *Bhagavatam*. Once again, the eager, expectant audience relished every word. Shrinivas astonished all who listened. Chroniclers of the event have reported that "even the stone

walls of the hall seemed to melt at the pathos.”¹⁵ Shrinivas spoke with enough erudition, sensitivity and devotion to honor his Vaishnava predecessors, and all who were present agreed that the wisdom of the orator far exceeded his years. One by one, people came and bowed to Shrinivas's feet, hoping he would accept them as his disciples.

Later, the king submitted himself to Shrinivas as a lowly beggar: “You are the real king,” he said, “for you have love for Krishna. I am not even worthy to be in your presence.” Shrinivas, with all humility at his command, merely shook his head; he was not able to accept his own exalted position. But the king persisted: “Allow me to be your servant! Please!” Anxious to know Shrinivas's internal purpose, the king implored him: “How can I serve you? My entire kingdom is at your disposal.”

Shrinivas replied: “I came from the holy city of Vrindavan with a mission from Gopal Bhatta Goswami and Jiva Goswami. I was to bring their original literature to Bengal. But this treasure was, unfortunately, robbed within your kingdom. If I cannot retrieve these books, I would prefer to lose my life. Can you help me get them back?”

The remorseful king burst into tears: “A poor worm am I, lost hopelessly in this land of birth and death. My own men have pillaged for years and years under my order, and then they came upon your caravan. We were told it was the greatest treasure in the universe and we naturally pursued it. I cannot express my sorrow.” Then, reflecting for a moment, the king

¹⁵ D.C. Sen, op. cit., p. 119.

said: "But there is a positive side to all of this. Our meeting would not have taken place if all of these events had not occurred. I would commit these sins again and again for but a moment of your association."

Shrinivas laughingly reassured him that such sinful life was unnecessary for attaining his association. In fact, Shrinivas told him that sinful life was an obstacle to spiritual progress. Shrinivas then forgave the king for all the sins he had committed but asked him to sin no more. The king, of course, was more than ready to comply.

The Books Are Safe!

Grateful for Shrinivas's mercy, the king led him to the room where his treasures were kept, and there Shrinivas saw the trunk with the Goswami literature. At that moment, Shrinivas experienced ecstatic symptoms, and as a merciful gesture he took the garland of flowers from his own neck and placed it on King Birhambir. Shrinivas then asked the king to bring him *tulasi* leaves, flower garlands, sandalwood paste, and other paraphernalia for worshiping the sacred books. The king brought him everything and with rapt attention he watched Shrinivas perform the elaborate initiation ceremony that followed.

By reciting the *maha-mantra*—Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare—in the king's ear, Shrinivas initiated him. According to the *Prema-vilas*, Shrinivas gave him the name "Haricharan Das." Later in that same work it is said that Jiva Goswami eventually showed the king special mercy by writing a letter in which he renamed him "Chaitanya

Das." The king's wife, Queen Sulakshana, and their son, Prince Dhari Hambir, also became Shrinivas Acharya's surrendered servants. The Queen's initiated name is unknown, but the boy was named "Gopal Das." Krishna Ballabha and Vyasacharya also became dedicated disciples. Whether or not Shrinivas initiated all of these great souls on this or his second visit to Vishnupur is a matter of controversy.

Vishnupur As A Vaishnava Center

Vishnupur soon became a great center of Vaishnavism. The initiation of the king and his loyal subjects was an epoch-making event in the history of the Gaudiya tradition. In all of India it was only in Vana Vishnupur that Gaudiya Vaishnava culture and art developed without any foreign or distracting influence. Even the Muslim intrusion was minimal. Consequently, the architectural and sculptural art of Bengal, from the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards, is nowhere found in such abundance and in such pristine form as in the Vaishnava monuments of Vishnupur. This is one of the many virtues of royal patronage. As noted by Dr. Sambidananda Das:

We know that it was through the active influence of Prataparudra, Emperor of Orissa, that Gaudiya Vaishnavism was firmly established in the Orissan Empire. The success at Vrindavan was mainly due to the acceptance of its faith by the Prince of Amber and other Rajput States. The movement in Bengal had for so long been confined to the common people, until the king of Vishnupur came

forward with his help. We should remember that the kings of Gauda [Bengal] were Mohammedans and naturally antagonistic to Vaishnavism, which they considered a Hindu movement. Vaishnavism in its native province suffered persecution at the hands of an alien power, whereas in other provinces it developed under the beneficent care of its rulers. The king of Vishnupur removed this sin from Bengal by employing all his resources in favor of Vaishnava propaganda in his own territory and in other parts of Bengal.¹⁶

King Birhambir reigned from 1596 to 1622, and in that time he wrote many devotional songs in praise of Krishna, Mahaprabhu, and Shrinivas Acharya. Much of his exquisite poetry can today be found in *Bhakti-ratnakara* and in *Pada-kalpataru*. The king's mellifluous voice, reflected in his literary work, assisted in his newfound task of spreading Vaishnava teaching throughout his domain. In this he was quite successful. Shrinivas had thus accomplished his mission in Vishnupur, and when he wrote to Jiva Goswami, informing him that the books had not only been retrieved but that the main bandit, a king, had taken up the banner of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, all of Vrindavan rejoiced and sang the glories of Shrinivas Acharya.

Other important events occurred during this period. For example, although King Birhambir and his entire kingdom were now converted to Vaishnavism and Shrinivas was in the process of developing an im-

¹⁶ Sambidananda Das, op. cit., p. 791.

portant center there, the Acharya needed to again see his dear friends, Narottam and Shyamananda. He had written to them of the developments in Vishnupur, but he knew little of their activities. Furthermore, he had heard that Narahari Sarkar Thakur was ill and preparing to die, and so he wanted to go to Shrikhanda to see him as well as his own aging mother in nearby Jajigram. In addition, Shrinivas's marriage occurred around this same time. Although some of the authoritative books mention that he had married before going to Vrindavan, *Bhakti-ratnakara* seems to say that he married after returning to Bengal from Vrindavan at the advice of Narahari Sarkar.¹⁷ Evidence tends to support this latter perspective.

Shrinivas Returns to Jajigram

Bidding his leave of King Birhambir, Shrinivas took the chest of books to Jajigram. Upon arrival there, he told the devotees exactly what had transpired. All of the holy town's inhabitants (especially his loving mother) rejoiced in his company. But they had some heart-breaking news for him as well: they told him that Shrimati Vishnu-priya had passed away from this world. This was Shri Chaitanya's widow, whom Shrinivas had met, and who had since become an important personality in the preaching mission of Bengal. When Shrinivas heard of her demise, he was in a state of profound remorse. Unable to control his emotions, he

¹⁷ Narahari Chakravarti, *Bhakti-ratnakara*, ed., Nandalal Vidyasagar (Calcutta, Gaudiya Mission, 1960), Chapter Eight, verses 489-505.

fainted. Such was his love for the intimate associates of Mahaprabhu. The Jajigram devotees did their best to revive and console Shrinivas, and after some time he recovered.

A few days later, a message came from Narahari Sarkar and Raghunandan Thakur requesting Shrinivas to come to nearby Shrikhanda. Shrinivas immediately left to see his two well-wishers, who had guided him so nicely in his youth. It was during this meeting that Narahari Sarkar suggested that Shrinivas take a wife. Shri Narahari said: "Your mother is a great devotee. She has for many years been rendering valuable service in Jajigram. You should fulfil whatever small desire she might have. Personally, I know for a fact that she would be very happy to see you married. Since she is a great devotee, you should comply with her wishes." On the advice of Shri Narahari, Shrinivas resolved that he would soon marry and raise a family.

After spending a few more days in Shrikhanda, he travelled to Kanthak Nagara in order to visit the great sage Gadadhar Das, who was one of the personal associates of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. When Shrinivas arrived, Gadadhar Das embraced him with intense affection. He asked Shrinivas about the devotees of Vrindavan, especially the Goswamis. He was curious about the welfare of all the great Vaishnavas: how were they able to exist in separation from the Lord and His confidential devotees? Where were they living and under what conditions? In this way, Gadadhar Das and Shrinivas discussed the subject of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and the plight of His devotees in His absence. After several days in the association of Gadadhar Das, Shrinivas was scheduled to return to Jajigram. Before leaving, however, Gadadhar Das blessed him: "One

day you will taste the nectar of congregational chanting in the company of the Lord Himself, and in the company of His intimate associates. For now, you have my blessings to go and marry. May it bring you all auspiciousness.”

Shrinivas Gets Married

The words of Gadadhar Das touched Shrinivas deeply and meditating on their import, he returned to Jajigram. There he met Gopal Chakravarti, an elderly brahmin who had a beautiful and devoted daughter named “Draupadi.” Observing that Shrinivas and Draupadi were naturally attracted to each other, Shri Raghunandan Thakur, out of concern for Shrinivas, arranged the wedding. After the marriage, Draupadi came to be called “Ishvari” (some say it was her initiated name), honoring her own steadfast devotion to God and acknowledging her marriage to a great saint. Her father, Gopal Chakravarti, soon accepted Shrinivas as his spiritual master, as did her two brothers, Shyam Das and Ramchandra. Shrinivas quickly became one of the most prominent *gurus* in all of Bengal.

After some time, his wife gave birth to a son, and when he wrote to Jiva Goswami in Vrindavan about the blessed event, he received an exuberant reply in which Jiva named the boy “Vrindavan Ballabha.” Soon after, Shrinivas married again (polygamy was not uncommon in Shrinivas's time, but it was rarely encouraged). His second wife was also a great devotee and, after initiation, she was known as “Gaurangapriya,” although her name at birth was “Padmavati.”

One may wonder why Shrinivas found it necessary to take a second wife. Most of the standard biographies do not elaborate, stating merely that the second marriage followed the first one by a few years. But the *Anuraga-balli* informs us that his most intimate disciples insisted that he remarry upon the untimely death of his two sons from Ishvari. Apparently, they were concerned that his bloodline should not die out. It seems that Shrinivas had two sons, Vrindavan Ballabha and Radhakrishna Das, who are said to have died at a young age—they are not listed as having any disciples. The others—his first wife, her daughters (Hemlata, Krishna-priya, and Kanchan, also known as Yamuna), and his second wife, Gauranga-priya, and her son, Gati Govinda—had hosts of disciples. Today, there is also a continuation of Shrinivas's bloodline from Gati Govinda in Vrindavan.

The Passing of Narahari Sarkar

Meanwhile, Narahari Sarkar Thakur took his final breath after seeing Shrinivas one last time. Shrinivas organized a massive festival in order to properly honor Narahari's memory. Everyone from Shrikhanda and from neighboring villages attended. Vaishnava festivals soon proliferated in the region. For example, Shrinivas started an important preaching center in Barakuli by installing the Deity of Radhavinode (Krishna) in the house of one of his prominent disciples, Govinda Chakravarti. Such installation ceremonies were accompanied by elaborate festivities, including singing, dancing, and distributing sacred food (*prasadam*). It was through this method that the movement was spread throughout Bengal.

In due course, Shrinivas decided to return to Vrindavan. Some say that it was just prior to this period that he was invited to Narottam's huge festival at Kheturi. Others say that this festival occurred much later, after Shrinivas's return from this second journey to Vrindavan. In either case, we shall discuss the Kheturi episode in the chapter that describes Narottam Das Thakur's activities, because it was he who sponsored and inspired this singularly historic Vaishnava celebration.

Shrinivas's Disciples

Before elaborating upon Shrinivas's second sojourn to Vrindavan, it would be appropriate to describe some of his important disciples, especially because Ramchandra Kaviraj, one of his most renowned followers, had accompanied him on this second trip to Vraja. Ramchandra was considered Shrinivas's "other eye and other arm." They were so close that they were considered as one soul.

Ramchandra and his famous brother, Shri Govinda, who was also a disciple, were the sons of Chiranjiva Sen, Mahaprabhu's intimate associate. Both were celebrated scholars, artists, and poets, but Ramchandra came to be widely accepted as Shrinivas's most noteworthy disciple. This was in some measure due to Narottam Das Thakur who, at Shrinivas's request, took charge of Ramchandra and forged an intimate friendship while schooling him in all the details of Vaishnava philosophy.

With the active help of King Birhambir, Shrinivas successfully expanded his area of preaching in Bengal to the districts of Birbhum, Bankura, Burdwan and

as far as Tripura in the East. It would not be hyperbole to declare that he evangelized all of Bengal, and converted hundreds to become his disciples. *Prema-vilas* alone specifically names 117 direct initiated disciples hailing from every corner of Gaudadesh. Even though Shrinivas had hundreds of disciples, twenty-one of them were considered prominent in four basic categories:

- (1) **Six Chakravartis**—Gokulananda, Govinda, Narayana, Shridas, Shyamadas, and Vyasacharya.
- (2) **Eight Kavirajas**—Bhagavan, Gokula, Gopiramana, Govinda, Karnapur, Nrisingha, Ramchandra, and Ballabhi.
- (3) **Six Thakurs**—Jayaram, Kumudananda Kularaj, Radhaballabha Mandala, Ramakrishna Chaturaj, Rupa Ghataka, and Thakurdas.
- (4) **One Raja**—King Birhambir.

Hemlata Thakurani

To this list, Harinarayana, king of Shikharabhumi, is often added, as is Hemlata Thakurani, Shrinivas's daughter. Although she is not often counted among his disciples—being a blood relation—she was nonetheless properly initiated by him and one of his most significant followers. A highly educated and vigorous preacher, she has been compared to Jahnava-devi in spreading the movement throughout Bengal. She was a gifted and devoted leader, initiating both men and women into the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. One of her disciples, Yadunandan Thakur, became a famous scholar and poet, composing simple Bengali versifica-

tions of classic Gaudiya literature. Moreover, he wrote *Karnananda*, among other works, at Hemlata Thakurani's specific request.

She eventually married a great devotee named Gopijanaballabha Chattaraj and had several children. Today, her descendants are living in the villages of Maliati and Budhaipad, in the Murshidabad District, where in her own time she had personally revolutionized the preaching of Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

Shrinivas Returns To Vrindavan

Shrinivas's second journey to Vrindavan (mentioned earlier), in which he was accompanied by Ramchandra Kaviraj and also by his son, Vrindavan Ballabha, is important for a number of reasons. First, Shrinivas had not been there since his recovery of the *Bhakti* literature. All of the Goswamis were thus anxious to show their appreciation and when Shrinivas arrived they did so in full glory. Further, he now came to Vrindavan with Ramchandra Kaviraj (or, according to some, Ramchandra met him there soon after he arrived)—a good example for the Vrindavan Goswamis to see, for such a worthy disciple evidenced Shrinivas's capabilities as a preacher. Consequently, Gopal Bhatta Goswami, who had initially wanted Shrinivas to take over the worship of the Radha-Raman Deity in Vrindavan, gave the duty, instead, to his other disciple, Gopinath Pujari, and he insisted that Shrinivas continue his excellent preaching mission in Bengal. The descendants of Gopinath's brothers are still in charge of the Radha-Raman temple.

Another reason that Shrinivas's return trip to Vrindavan was important was because Shyamananda

Pandit had returned there at approximately the same time, enabling them to deepen their friendship. Together, they resumed their studies under Jiva Goswami, who taught them further esoteric secrets of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Gradually, Shrinivas began to reveal his mystic potency, and it became apparent that he was fully absorbed in the mood of *Manjari-bhava*, or the highest intimacy of love of God.

Back To Vishnupur

After several months in Vrindavan, Shrinivas, along with Shyamananda and Ramchandra Kaviraj, returned to Bengal because the missionary work there was incomplete and was encouraged by Shri Jiva and the other Vrindavan Goswamis. Stopping in Vana Vishnupur, they went to see King Birhambir, who was delighted by the presence of his *guru* and the other two Vaishnava luminaries. The king's devotion was reflected throughout the kingdom. In the words of D.C. Sen:

Raja Vira Hamvira [Birhambir] would not do anything without the advice of his *guru* [Shrinivas Acharya], even in political matters. His [Shrinivas's] voice prevailed alike in the court and in the domestic circles of Vishnupur. We find that repeating the name of God a fixed number of times was made compulsory by penal law in the State. Sacrifice of animals at the altar of the gods was also discountenanced, though not actually prohibited by law. Worldly dignity attended the *guru* who had brought spiritual glory to the country. We

find that on every occasion of Vaishnava festivities of any importance, valuable presents were given to Shrinivas, while Raja Vira Hamvira was ever ready to minister to his physical comforts in every possible manner. But true to the traditions of a brahmin scholar and saint, Shrinivas contented himself with living in a straw-roofed hut though he might have built palaces with the help of the Raja and other influential disciples. The money he received was mainly spent in feeding his disciples of whom there was always a large number residing at his house.¹⁸

The Glories Of Vishnupur

The pervasiveness of Vaishnava *dharma* in Bengal, and particularly in Vishnupur, lasted well after the time of Shrinivas and into the following centuries. For example, King Birhambir's successor, Raghunath Singh I, eventually built numerous Vaishnava temples in many distant villages in order to make Vaishnava religion popular with the tribal people of those localities. In fact, the kings of Vishnupur, from the time of Birham-

¹⁸ D.C. Sen, op. cit., pp. 156-7. Two controversial subjects are addressed: (1) forcing religion on people; and (2) sacrificing of animals. It should be noted that the monarchs of Vishnupur and other Vaishnava provinces were not vehement or coercive but were rather tactful and competent. They saw to the righteous behavior of their subjects and, when the people did not comply, they merely asked them to leave. That was their only punishment.

bir onward, assumed considerable responsibility for the material and spiritual well-being of their subjects. They contributed ample endowments for the maintenance of shrines and other religious institutions. Not only did they request all citizens living within their jurisdiction to chant the holy name, as noted by D.C. Sen, but they introduced an extensive system of espionage to see whether their subjects were observing the prescribed religious obligation. To this end, King Gopal Singh in the subsequent generation used to go out in disguise in order to detect whether his subjects were actually repeating the names of God while chanting on their *japa* (rosary-like) beads. In this connection, however, the Vishnupur kings were far from merciless. Most of their subjects readily complied with their religious mandate. Others, who did not, were obviously disinclined to live in a Vaishnava community and, as much in consideration for them as for the State, the authorities asked them to leave. According to Dr. Sambidananda Das:

In short, the Vaishnava kings, from Vira Hamvira downwards, developed Vaishnava culture in all its branches. The practical religious lives of the kings, particularly Vira Hamvira, Gopal Singh, and Chaitanya Singh, made the people of Vishnupur God-fearing, virtuous, humble, and courteous in manner and pure in heart. It is not an easy matter to make the whole population happy and pious. The standard of morality of these Vaishnava people was judged by more than two distinguished foreigners. The people regarded their kings as their *gurus*. To this day it is their custom to offer edibles

to Shri Chaitanya's altar in the name of the king, on the occasion of public worship. Thus did Shrinivas, through Raja Vira Hamvira, start a new epoch in the religious life of the country.¹⁹

Manjari-Bhava

While in Vishnupur, Shrinivas showed the highest level of Krishna consciousness. He was an exemplary *Gosh-thyanandi* [a preacher], as is evidenced by his travelling *sankirtan* party and by his enthusiasm to spread the bona-fide message of the *Bhagavatam* to all who would listen. He was also an excellent *Bhajanandi* [an inner worshipper], as is seen by his absorption in *Manjari-bhava*, or his inner meditation on his ontological form as a maidservant of Shrimati Radharani.

In this connection, one interesting story, among many others, is related in all of Shrinivas's authorized biographies: Once, while in Vana Vishnupur, Shrinivas fell into trance while meditating on his form as Mani Manjari in the spiritual realm. As he fixed his mind on Radharani's water sports in Vrindavan, he relished watching her splash about in the Yamuna with Krishna and her intimate *gopi* friends. But in the middle of her playful dealings, her nose-ornament (*besara*) fell into the dark blue waters, and only Rupa Manjari noticed that it had fallen from her moon-like face. At this point, Rupa Manjari winked at Guna Manjari [Gopal Bhatta Goswami] who, knowing the mind of Shri Rupa, dove in to look for the lost nose-ring. Guna Manjari searched the transparent waters in vain, how-

¹⁹ Dr. Sambidananda Das, op. cit., p.819.

ever, because the blessed ornament could not be found. Guna Manjari had even engaged Mani Manjari [Shrinivas himself] in the search, but to no avail.

Shrinivas continued his meditation on this pastime, day and night, for three days without a break. However, in the external world, his wives were now beside themselves with grief: "Will Shrinivas ever come out of this meditative trance? Is he dead?" His body had become stiff and his breathing was slight. His wives started to cry out loud. Soon the king came running, and when he observed Shrinivas's condition, he too was deeply concerned: "The body requires food. If the Acharya does not soon return to our plane of existence, he may permanently leave us." Nonetheless, the king consoled himself and Shrinivas's wives when the court physicians examined Shrinivas's body—it was still in a healthy state. But how long can even the healthiest man exist without food?

Of course, it might be prudent to note at this point that such states of exalted consciousness are rare, and one should not attempt to imitate them. According to the Vedic tradition, those who are in the neophyte and intermediate stages of devotional service (*bhakti-yoga*) should concentrate on required *viddhi-sadhana* under the direction of a bona-fide spiritual master, and it is by this method that one can gradually attain the higher levels of *bhava* and *prema* as exhibited by Shrinivas Acharya.

Ramchandra Kaviraj To The Rescue

Ishvari, Shrinivas's first wife, thought of Ramchandra Kaviraj. If anyone could understand Shrinivas's state and bring him out of it, it was Ramchandra. She ex-

pressed these thoughts to the king, who quickly sent for Shrinivas's most intimate disciple. After some time, Ramchandra arrived, and seeing the face of his lord and master, he assured everyone: "Do not fear, Shrinivas Acharya is in a deep state of *samadhi*. He will soon return to you."

Ramchandra, who was also the embodiment of Mani Manjari (although he is more commonly known as Karuna Manjari), sat next to Shrinivas in a meditative trance. In this state, he appeared at the Yamuna where Shrinivas, as Mani Manjari, was still looking for Radharani's nose-ring. Ramchandra, in his own ontological form as Mani Manjari's other self, jumped in the river and helped Shrinivas find the ornament, which was hidden under a lotus leaf. Giving the nose-ring to Mani Manjari [Shrinivas], Ramchandra was happy to assist his *guru* in this confidential way.

At this same time, Radharani finished her water sports, and she began to dress in her beautiful dark blue *sari*. Her intimate *gopi* friends naturally assisted her, and when there was one last ornament to place on her person—the nose-ring—Guna Manjari confidently looked to Mani Manjari who, in perfect timing, came out from the Yamuna and delivered the desired apparel.

The Meditation Is Complete

As the finishing touch was placed on Radhika's body, Krishna came to scurry her off into the forests of Vrindavan. The *gopis* and *manjaris* watched on in disbelief, mesmerized by the unparalleled beauty that emanated from the Divine Couple. The scene engulfed

them with intense love, and their bodies showed symptoms of spiritual ecstasy. Just then, Ramchandra Kaviraj broke his meditation, as did Shrinivas. They turned to look at each other, once again, in the external world. Laughing like madmen, they embraced and fell to the floor, their eyes emitting tears of love.

King Birhambir was never more ecstatic. His master had come back! Ishvari and Gauranga-priya cried tears of joy. All the devotees began to chant, "Hari! Hari!" A huge feast was brought in for the two *sadhus* who had just returned from an expedition in consciousness, an esoteric journey to the spiritual world. The feast remnants were given to the inner circle of Vishnupur devotees. After eating, the devotees sat at the feet of Shrinivas and Ramchandra, who began to talk about the pastimes of Radha and Krishna throughout the night.

Manasa Seva

Shrinivas developed his inner meditation to such a degree that he began to inadvertently bring tangible paraphernalia from these meditations when returning to external consciousness. For example, *Bhakti-ratnakara* relates that once, while meditating on Mahaprabhu's *lila*, Shrinivas saw that he was actually worshiping Lord Chaitanya Himself, who was seated on a beautifully-jeweled throne. In Shrinivas's meditation, he approached the Lord and reverentially anointed His body with fragrant sandalwood paste. Then he placed a garland of aromatic flowers around the Lord's neck and began to carefully fan Him with a *chamara* whisk.

As Shrinivas served the Lord in this way, he could not keep his composure and, looking at the

Lord's magnificent form, he began to exhibit ecstatic symptoms. This pleased Lord Chaitanya, who then took the same garland of flowers that Shrinivas had given Him and placed it around Shrinivas's neck. After the Lord made this loving gesture, Shrinivas's meditation broke; but the garland was still adorning his own chest. Its fragrance was unlike anything he had ever experienced. He quickly took off the garland and hid it in order to conceal this confidential pastime.

This same kind of *manasa seva* experience often occurred for Shrinivas in relation to Radha-Krishna *lila* as well. *Bhakti-ratnakara* describes that once during Shrinivas's intense meditations, he envisioned himself (as Mani Manjari) at the side of Radharani as She and Krishna were taking part in the Holi Kela Festival. This is a joyous event wherein Radha and Krishna playfully throw colored dyes at each other. Shrinivas saw in his meditation Radha and Her intimate *gopi* friends flinging dyes and squirting all kinds of colored waters at Krishna, bombarding Him from all directions; and He in turn threw various kinds of dye at them. As this loving battle reached its highest point, the *gopis* looked over at Shrinivas (Mani Manjari), gesturing that he should come to their rescue.

Mani Manjari then started to quickly supply Radhika with ample quantities of multi-colored powders. Radhika and the *gopis* used these against Shri Krishna, but He would not be defeated so easily. He returned their attempts with even greater attacks, the conflict becoming so furious that the ground began to shake. In the midst of this irrepressible enjoyment Shrinivas's meditation broke, and when he returned to external consciousness, he realized that his body was covered with the multi-colored dyes from the spiritual

world. When his family and disciples saw him in this condition, they realized the perfected nature (*siddha*) of his inner meditation (*manasa seva*).

His Daily Activities

The activities of Shrinivas Acharya can fill volumes, and they have, but our objective is to present an overview of his life and accomplishments. Our work is hardly exhaustive. Details abound in the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, *Prema-vilas*, *Narottam-vilas*, *Anuraga-balli*, and *Karnananda*. This latter work gives a brief summary of his daily life in Vishnupur, as well as the similar routine he followed upon his return to Jajigram. According to that text, in the early morning he would read from the following books, explaining and interpreting them for his disciples: *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*, *Vidagdha Madhava*, *Lalita Madhava*, *Hari-bhakti-vilas*, *Hangsa-dutta*, *Gitavali*, *Shat-sandarbha*, *Bhagavatam* and *Brahma-sangita*.

The study of these books would occupy him until 10 o'clock in the morning. Then, until 2 o'clock in the afternoon he would chant his *japa* in solitude, occasionally worshiping Krishna according to his inner meditation. From 4 o'clock to 6 o'clock in the evening he would perform *kirtan*, song and dance, with his disciples. The particular form of Padavali *kirtan* for which he became famous is called *Manohar Shoy*, and some say that it is the only authentic classical style that has survived. For his own *kirtans*, he would generally select songs from the varied repertoire of Jayadev, Chandidas, or Vidyapati. At night he used to instruct his disciples and discuss esoterica with them.

His Literary Work

It is said that Shrinivas composed only five lyrical *padas*. These are included in Chapter Six of *Karnananda*—three of which are also found in *Pada-kalpataru*. In addition, he wrote an excellent commentary on the *chaturshloki* of *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, which is respected and studied to this day; and he wrote other works as well, including his famous *Shat Goswami-ashtakam* (“Eight Prayers to the Six Goswamis”). While his literary work is not voluminous, its quality in terms of content and writing style is nectar-ean, leaving an indelible and unique mark on the Gaudiya tradition.

Divine Ascension

Just as the authorized biographers of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu did not mention in any detail His passing from this world, so too did Shrinivas's followers neglect to tell us the story of Shrinivas's disappearance. This may be due to their intense love for the Acharya and to their deferential conception that he was Mahaprabhu Himself. Such conclusions are alluded to in *Prema-vilas*, which opines that Shrinivas Acharya was one-sixteenth part of the full spirit of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He was thus a special manifestation of the Supreme in the guise of His own devotee. Although his divine ascension remains a mystery, his life remains an inspiration.

2— *Narottam Das Thakur*

Narottam Das Thakur was the embodiment of Gaudiya teachings. He conveyed love of God through his memorable poesy and lived that love in the same poetic way. He was the perfect devotee, the archetypal messenger of the Divine, whose characteristics the Six Goswamis described every time their quill touched palm leaf. More than Shrinivas or Shyamananda, Narottam is remembered as the superlative Gaudiya, perhaps because the ultimate philosophical conceptions of Gaudiya Vaishnavism are reflected in every one of his songs. Consequently, Narottam's achievements have been fully recognized by historians and surveyors of the Gaudiya tradition.

It is not possible to accurately describe Narottam's merit, but noted Bengali historian Ramakanta Chakravarti has nicely summarized his major accomplishments in his classic work on Bengali culture:

The importance of Narottam Datta in the history of the post-Chaitanya Vaishnava movement in Bengal can hardly be overestimated. He worked in unison with Shrinivas Acharya for the establishment of the Vrindavan [doctrine] in Bengal. He was one of the principal organizers of the Kheturi festival in which the Vrindavan viewpoint finally dominated over the other [views]....Narottam Datta and his disciples boldly flouted caste. Narottam was an eminent *shudra-guru* of many brahmins. He and his disciples spread Vaishnavism in Murshidabad and Rajshoy. Narottam was also the author of several works in which his spiritual ideals were clearly stated. So great was his authority that even the deviant *sahajiyas* found it expedient to write some of their sectarian works in his name.¹

Two important events connected with Narottam Das Thakur precipitate his advent. The first is the appearance of Lokanath Goswami in this world, and the second is the prediction by Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Narottam's birth. A survey of Narottam's life would be incomplete without a thorough analysis of these two episodes.

Lokanath Goswami

Lokanath Goswami was the son of Padmanabha Chakravarti and Sita-devi and was born in a small village

¹ Ramakanta Chakravarti, op. cit., p. 229.

known as Talakhadi in East Bengal's Jessore District. According to some sources, he was Mahaprabhu's schoolmate in Navadvip. When Lokanath was very young, perhaps in his teenage years, Mahaprabhu sent him to Vrindavan along with Bhugarba Goswami to rediscover the lost pilgrimage sites of Krishna's pastimes. This was an important project. Due to the passage of time and the invasion of foreign powers, many shrines in the Vrindavan area had become obscured. Mahaprabhu's desire to reclaim these lost sites did not begin when He sent Rupa and Sanatan to that most sacred of holy places, because He had sent Lokanath much earlier.

Mahaprabhu sent him with Bhugarba because in His omniscience Mahaprabhu knew that Lokanath and Bhugarba were the best of friends both in this life and in Krishna's eternal *lila*. Moreover, their identity in Krishna-*lila* enabled them to recognize the exact location of many of the lost places of pilgrimage. According to *Gaura-ganoddasha-dipika*, Lokanath and Bhugarba were in their previous births Lila Manjari and Prema Manjari respectively, and sometimes it is said that they were Manjulali Manjari and Nandimukhi.

It is said that they arrived in Vrindavan in 1509, or thereabouts, and remained there for the rest of their lives. Lokanath Goswami's major accomplishments in Vrindavan include constructing the Gokulananda temple (today one of the seven primary temples of Vrindavan), establishing his Deity of Radhavinode, and, eventually, initiating Narottam Das Thakur. Actually, when Mahaprabhu sent Lokanath to Vrindavan, He warned him that the day would come when Narottam would arrive, and at that time Lokanath was to

initiate Narottam into the Gaudiya tradition. This was the will of Shri Chaitanya.

Searching For Mahaprabhu

Despite the legend that Lokanath never left Vrindavan, there is one well-documented instance in which he ventured out in search of Mahaprabhu. It was about a year or so after he had first arrived. Having heard that Mahaprabhu had taken *sannyasa*, Lokanath became overwhelmed by the same confusion that had engulfed Shrinivas's father, Chaitanya Das, and he immediately left to see Mahaprabhu in His newly-adopted order of renunciation.

Leaving for Puri, he travelled the long arduous trails through the Jarikhanda Forest. After many weeks, he finally arrived, only to find that Mahaprabhu had departed for South India. Lokanath then started south, and for many months he tried to retrace the Lord's steps. After some time he heard that Mahaprabhu had returned to Puri. Following his Master, Lokanath also dispatched for Puri, and this time, he thought, he would definitely meet Shri Chaitanya. On his way to Puri, however, he heard that Mahaprabhu was now in Vrindavan. In this way, Lokanath returned to Vrindavan; but when he arrived, he was told that Mahaprabhu had just left, going through Prayag and Benares on His way back to Puri.

Lokanath was relentless but Mahaprabhu appeared to him in a dream and told him that he should not waste his time. He should stay in Vrindavan, said Mahaprabhu, for it would torment him to see his Lord in the severe persona of a renunciant. Feeling compassion for His devoted Lokanath, Mahaprabhu asked

him to take solace in the memory of their inner relationship and to meditate on Him in His pre-*sannyasi* days at Navadvip.

Soon after this dream, Lokanath Goswami became even more determined to begin the work of reclaiming the holy places. This he did, but little was accomplished until the arrival of Rupa and Sanatan. In retrospect, it seems that his main role in Vrindavan was as a senior Vaishnava, giving guidance to younger devotees. Moreover, Lokanath Goswami prepared for the arrival of Narottam Das Thakur, who would eventually accept him as *guru*.

"O Narottam! O Narottam!"

When Chaitanya Mahaprabhu decided to go from Puri to Vrindavan, He stopped in the village of Ramakeli² to see Rupa and Sanatan. At that time, Mahaprabhu looked into the deep blue waters of the Padma River, facing Kheturi village in East Bengal, and began to feverishly shout, "O Narottam! O Narottam!" This was no surprise to Nityananda Prabhu, the Lord's constant associate. Mahaprabhu had on several occasions already exclaimed this name in the midst of exuberant *kirtan*. From this, the intimate devotees knew that a great personality would soon take birth, for *narottam* literally means "the topmost person."

On this occasion, however, Mahaprabhu was howling the name of Narottam with an overwhelming

² *Prema-vilas* intimates that this particular episode may have occurred in Kanair Natshala, which is in the Saotal Pargana Dumka District of Bengal (to the west of Kheturi).

sense of joy. Tears flowed from His eyes with uncontrollable force, as He ran back and forth like a madman. Nityanananda Prabhu was concerned about Mahaprabhu's well-being. He had never seen his Master reach this level of irrepressibility, nor had He ever seen Him shed tears of love with such vehemence, nearly forcing Himself to lose consciousness.

Mahaprabhu revealed the reason for His heightened ecstasy: "Nityanananda, across the Padma in Kheturi-*gram* Narottam will soon take birth. This will occur in our lifetime. *Kirtan* is my life and soul, and Narottam will sustain it. There in Kheturi (Garerhata), he will absorb my *Kirtan-rasa* with all of My love. I grow anxious for this to occur. For now I will deposit my intense love in the Padma, and when Narottam comes and bathes here, the Padma will extend My love to him."

The next morning, Mahaprabhu, Nityanananda Prabhu, and the assembled devotees engaged in an ecstatic *kirtan*. Nityanananda forewarned all of the devotees that Mahaprabhu would be placing His love in the Padma and that this love would one day be seized by an important devotee named Narottam. After the *kirtan*, the devotees went to bathe; and when Mahaprabhu entered the Padma, all the waters began to overflow, unable to contain the divine *prema* that Mahaprabhu had stored there.

At that time, the personified Padma is said to have appeared to Mahaprabhu and the devotees. She asked the Lord: "I understand that you want me to deliver this love to Narottam. But how will I know when he comes? How will I be able to identify him?"

Mahaprabhu answered: "When someone enters your waters and causes you to overflow, as I have

just done, and when a person comes whose presence makes you greatly jubilant—*that* is Narottam!” The Padmavati smiled, offered her obeisances, and returned to her watery form.

Nityananda Prabhu was taken by the beauty of this scene near the Padma River and expressed to Mahaprabhu that He would like to stay there. Mahaprabhu told Him that He would one day return, for it was His duty to bring Narottam, at the appropriate time, to the Padma. Nityananda Prabhu is the personification of *Guru-tattva*, and so he would naturally guide Narottam to the river where the divine treasure of love of God was waiting.

Birth And Childhood

In or around the year of Mahaprabhu's disappearance, 1534, on a full moon day in the month of Magh (January-February), Narottam Das appeared in this world.³ As Mahaprabhu had predicted, he was born in Kheturi (Garer Hata subdivision), which is about seventy-two miles northwest of present Rampur Vojalijar in the Rajashoy District of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). His father was a great king, named Krishnananda Datta, and his mother's name was Narayani-

³ Shishir Kumar Ghosh (*Narottam-charita*, p. 13) seems convinced that Narottam was born a few years before Shri Chaitanya's disappearance. Dr. Sambidananda Das seems to concur (op. cit., p. 821), adding that the birth may have been as early as the second decade of the sixteenth century. This is generally accepted in the orthodox tradition. Nonetheless, the authoritative biographies do not give an exact year.

devi. They were fabulously wealthy and were *kayasthas* by caste. They raised their son as an honored prince.

During the traditional *anna-prashanam* ceremony for the newly-born Narottam, when a baby is supposed to eat his first grains, Narottam's parents were taken aback. It seems that Narottam would not eat, turning his head away from the food in disgust. However, shortly thereafter, when a devout Vaishnava came with similar food that had been offered to Krishna, Narottam ate heartily. All who were present could understand that the only reason he had initially rejected the grains was because the grains were unoffered. This spoke highly of the baby's devotional demeanor. His parents rejoiced.

As Narottam advanced in years, he became an exemplary student, mastering all academic subjects and religious books as well. His favorite activity, though, was to sit at the feet of an elderly brahmin named Shri Krishnadas, who would daily recite the early, middle, and final pastimes of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Narottam relished these stories throughout his youth and resolved to devote his life to the eternal principles of Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

Prema-tali Ghat

One day, soon after Narottam became a teenager, Nityananda Prabhu appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Tomorrow, as the sun begins to rise, you should take your bath in the Padma River. At that time you shall receive the totality of Gaur-*prem*, or love of God." When Narottam awoke, he immediately complied with Nityananda Prabhu's instruction.

Entering the Padma, Narottam felt himself undergo a vital transformation. Just then, Mahaprabhu appeared before his eyes and affectionately embraced him. As their bodies merged, he felt Mahaprabhu's very essence engulf his soul. It is said that at that moment Narottam's naturally dark complexion turned to molten gold—Mahaprabhu's own distinctive hue. Today, pilgrims visit Prema-tali Ghat, in Bangladesh, where this historic event transpired.

His Parents' Lament

When Narottam did not return home after some time, his parents sent a search party after him. They found him dancing furiously on the banks of the Padma. Who was this madman? Certainly it was not the same Naru. When they brought him home, his parents did not recognize him. Not only was there a change in the color of his skin, but he now bawled like a lovesick adolescent. This was not some ordinary crying, but the tears of a lover of God. Narottam's parents sensed that it was something to this effect. His mother confronted him directly: "My dear Naru! What has happened to you? Why do you weep in this pathetic way? How can I help you?"

Narottam replied: "Dear mother, this morning, when I went to bathe in the Padma, a golden-colored Divinity—the Supreme Lord—entered into my heart. It is He who is causing these tears. I am feeling His ardent love and I am separated from Him. If you want to relieve my distress, allow me to leave home and to go in search of His lotus feet." Then, having expressed his inner heart, Narottam went to the palace *kirtan* hall and started chanting the Lord's names with

great ecstasy: "All glories to Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the Lord of my life!" After singing for many hours, he fainted.

King Krishnananda, Narottam's father, feared that his Naru would run away to adopt the life of renunciation. For a king this would be a terrible fate—his only son, the heir to the throne, leaving as though all his riches were worthless. Krishnananda also had plans for Narottam's marriage. A renounced life was not what he had in mind for his young Naru. In pursuance of his plans, Raj Krishnananda had his best guards watch Narottam from morning until evening. Ironically, out of love, he made Narottam a prisoner in his own home. Still, Narottam's singular activity, day and night, was reciting the names of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Radha and Krishna.

After some time, Krishnananda became desperate and called a "spirit-tamer" to save his "possessed" child. The spirit-tamer said that the boy was suffering from a common wind disorder, that his body should be rubbed with oil and that a fox should be brought in for the boy to eat. Narottam laughed at this silliness and explained that the killing of animals is forbidden and would in fact only worsen his condition. Narottam's father relented, but this was the sort of embarrassment that young Narottam had to tolerate.

Day and night Narottam would pray: "Please my Lord, Gauranga Mahaprabhu, liberate me from this insane life of family attachment and allow me to serve You in the association of advanced Vaishnavas!" This single-minded determination grew so intense that it kept him from sleeping; his mind and heart were completely absorbed in the Lord's pastimes and mission.

"Go To Vrindavan..."

One night, Narottam managed to fall asleep, and Mahaprabhu appeared to him in a dream. After tightly embracing Narottam, as He had done that fateful morning at the Padma River, the Lord said: "O Narottam, as you are anxious to be with Me, I too have become overwhelmed by your intense devotion; and I am anxious to be with you. For now, though, I want you to go to Vrindavan, and there you should take initiation from my dear associate Lokanath Goswami."

When Narottam awakened, he was gripped by love in separation more thoroughly than before. Night after night he would try to sleep, but the Lord would allow him to actually rest only sporadically, every few nights. When Narottam did sleep, the Lord and His associates would show him special mercy during his dreams by allowing him to enter into the spiritual world and the divine *lila* in which he plays a crucial role.

Narottam Escapes

Some months elapsed, and Narottam's reputation as a divinely inspired youth spread to all corners of Bengal. When he was sixteen, the *Jaygirdar* (an influential Muslim governor in the district) requested his presence, wanting to be blessed by the young Narottam. Krishnananda could not refuse a political leader of the *Jaygirdar's* stature. But he was skeptical—if he gave Narottam the slightest chance, he knew, the young enthusiast would run off to Vrindavan. Still, Krishnananda felt as if he had no choice.

Upon reaching the court of the *Jaygirdar*, Narottam found an opportunity to escape. It was now or never. Moving stealthily and furtively past the guards, he managed to run to the forest, determined to find his way to the holy land of Vrindavan. Although Navadvip was comparatively near, he went in the direction of Vraja, not only because Mahaprabhu had ordered him to do so but because nearby Navadvip would be the first place that the guards, if sent after him, would look.

Going to Vrindavan entailed a lengthy sojourn across much of India on foot! Being the son of a king, his delicate and pampered body could barely endure the hardship of the journey, and he began to experience fatigue and hunger. After three days, his soft feet began to blister, and at one point, due to exhaustion, he lost consciousness.

While Narottam was in that exhausted state, Mahaprabhu appeared to him in the form of a golden-skinned brahmin and supplied a pot of milk for him to drink. Not recognizing the brahmin as Shri Chaitanya Himself, Narottam merely fell asleep, submitting once again to exhaustion. As he slept, Rupa and Sanatan encouraged him in a dream: "Narottam, soon your suffering will end. Mahaprabhu has appeared to you and has brought milk for your nourishment. Drink deep and proceed to Vrindavan!" With the words of Rupa and Sanatan still resounding in his heart, he awakened and began to weep joyously.

In the eternal *lila* of Krishna, distributing milk to Shri Radha and the intimate *gopis* is one of Narottam's services as a *manjari*, but now Krishna in the form of Mahaprabhu was reciprocating by serving milk to his pure devotee. Contemplating the implications of

this loving exchange was all the nourishment that Narottam required, and with renewed vigor, he soon continued his journey to Vraja.

The Fire of Devotion

Before leaving the area in which he had been given the milk by Shri Chaitanya, he was discovered by the family guards. Apparently, Krishnananda had sent many men to scout for Narottam and bring him back. One particular party of competent employees actually found the young runaway. When they questioned him about his resolve, he simply said that he was being faithful like a good wife.

“When the husband dies, it is our custom that the faithful wife may follow him into the fire (*sati*) and burn with his body on the funeral pyre,” Narottam said. “So I too am going into the fire of dedication to God.

“To extend the analogy,” Narottam continued, “when a woman wants to show devotion to her husband in this extreme way, it is natural that well-wishers will try to stop her. They will not allow her to enter the fire.

“So I understand that you do not want me to enter the fire of God consciousness,” Narottam concluded, “but you should also understand that I would be less than a faithful servant of my Lord if I did not attempt to enter that fire.”

Narottam's simple and poetic analogy so moved the guards that they let him go on his way. One guard even gave him some money for his expenses. This was a common example of Narottam's spiritual potency and divinely bewitching personality.

Entering Vrindavan

After this incident, he approached Mathura near Lord Krishna's birthplace and bathed in the Yamuna at Vishram Ghat. That night, he met an elderly brahmin who invited him to stay at his home. This brahmin informed Narottam that Sanatan, Rupa, Raghunath Bhatta, Kashishvara Pandit and others had recently departed from this world to rejoin Mahaprabhu's *lila* in the kingdom of God. As the brahmin spoke, Narottam began to cry. He had travelled many miles and had hoped to personally meet all of these exalted personalities.

Contemplating the untimely demise of the teachers he had idolized, he fainted. The biographies concur, however, that at that time all of the exalted souls whom Narottam had wanted to see appeared to him in a spiritual vision. In fact, the fortunate brahmin at whose house Narottam was staying was able to hear much of the discussion that Narottam had with these departed souls. Rupa and Sanatan especially consoled Narottam, encouraging him to seek out Jiva Goswami to study Gaudiya philosophy.

When Narottam finally arrived in Vrindavan, he came upon the Govindadev Mandir. Seeing Rupa Goswami's magnificent temple structure drove him mad, and his body exhibited eight symptoms of ecstasy, such as intense weeping, horripilation, and change in color. Naturally, Jiva Goswami was quickly informed of this new *sadhu's* arrival and could understand that he was the long-awaited Narottam.

Shri Jiva hurriedly walked to the Govindadev temple, and when he saw Narottam he was immediately reminded of Mahaprabhu. Just then, many great

Vaishnava *mohants* arrived, asking "Where is Narottam? Where is Narottam?" and with great love all of the devotees pointed to the young saint who was sprawled across the temple courtyard in a trance-like state. "This, indeed, is young Narottam."

Narottam's Initiation

As Narottam met Vrindavan's most advanced devotees, he was particularly impressed by Lokanath Goswami, whose exceptional sense of humility and austerity was noted by all Vaishnavas. Lokanath was very kind to Narottam and arranged for a portion of the temple's sacred vegetarian food offering (*prasadam*) for him to eat. Since Mahaprabhu had revealed to Lokanath the night before in a dream that Narottam would arrive the next day, Lokanath had made preparations so they could eat together; and during that meal Narottam told Lokanath his entire story.

After relating the major incidents of his life, he concluded by saying, "Actually, I have no right to sit with you and take this pure food—I do not even have a *guru*."

Hearing this, Lokanath Goswami laughed heartily, reminding him, "You have received the direct grace of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He is the original *guru*—the *guru* of the universe. Besides Him, who else do you want for a teacher? He has given you divine love, the same love that most devotees hanker for throughout their entire lifetime. You possess that love. What is the value of having another *guru*?"

Narottam replied: "My prabhu, I am a poor man, bereft of all good qualities. Your order is my life and soul. But if you will permit me, I would like to say

a few more words on this subject." Lokanath then assured him that he could speak freely.

"It is true that Mahaprabhu is the only real *guru*," Narottam agreed, "but He simultaneously has faith in you to be my *guru* and has asked me to take initiation from you. The *guru* guides his disciple in practical spiritual life. I have no spiritual insight, and I am feeling separation from the Lord. For this reason, I beg for your mercy."

Lokanath laughed at his future disciple's insistence. He countered Narottam by saying, "The scriptures recommend that the prospective disciple chant the holy names of Krishna in a regulated way for at least a year and develop an attachment for the holy name within his heart." Lokanath, out of humility, had vowed never to accept any disciples; and particularly now that Sanatan and Rupa had passed away—he was grieving their loss. So Narottam was clearly given a rough time of it.

Nonetheless, chanting was not a foreign activity to Narottam, and so complying with Lokanath Goswami's orders he chanted *japa* for a full year in Vrindavan. During this time, Narottam listened to Lokanath's discourses on a regular basis. Out of humility he ate only the remnants of Lokanath's food, and then he cleaned the area and performed various menial services. A year passed in this way, and Lokanath was still disinclined to give initiation to his worthy disciple.

Narottam was totally devoted to Lokanath and he used to arrive secretly every day near Lokanath's dwelling late at night to clean the area where Lokanath had evacuated. Once, Lokanath hid in the bushes and discovered that it was Narottam who was

cleaning up after him. Nonetheless, Lokanath remained true to his vow and did not initiate Narottam.

After another year of Narottam's selfless service, Lokanath had a sacred dream. Mahaprabhu appeared to Lokanath and chastised him for not initiating Narottam. "Did I not *tell you* to initiate him?" Mahaprabhu insisted, "Do not continue in this false humility." Lokanath now knew that he had to initiate Narottam.

Soon after this incident, Narottam again approached Lokanath for initiation. This time, Narottam offered a very pleasing argument: "I am like a young woman who has already chosen her husband," Narottam said. "My heart is clear, without any doubt. A young woman who makes up her mind in this way prays that her father will agree with her choice." Narottam concludes: "I pray that our Father in heaven agrees with my choice." Lokanath was moved by Narottam's sincerity and said: "Your fierce determination has exceeded my own—but you are the only disciple I will ever make." For the remainder of his life, he adhered to this vow.

Lokanath initiated Narottam according to the guidelines of the Gaudiya *sampradaya*, giving him the confidential Radha-Krishna *mantra* and the Gayatri-*mantra* as well. In addition, Lokanath revealed Narottam's ontological *manjari* form as Vilas Manjari (or, as he is sometimes called, Champak Manjari), and explained his service in the spiritual world. Generally, the *guru* does not reveal such esoteric subjects so early in the disciple's devotional life. But Narottam was clearly an exception in every way. Lokanath concluded the initiation by asking Narottam to take shelter of Jiva Goswami for further instruction.

Boiling The Milk

As the days passed into weeks and then months, Narottam grew in spiritual accomplishment, as did his reputation throughout Vrindavan. One night, a divine Vaishnavi appeared to him in a dream and said, "Dedicate yourself to the feet of your *guru* and do whatever he asks. Your sincerity and austerity have pleased me, and I will see that you are engaged in a very confidential service. When I meet Krishna every afternoon in the *kunja*, I see that the *sakhis* are serving Him with the utmost care. They make a special milk-based preparation for Him, and Champakalata is the most efficient *gopi* in this service. You shall work under her direction boiling the milk and remember that I become happy if Krishna is happy."

When Narottam awoke, he quickly ran to Lokanath Goswami's hut and conveyed the entire dream. Lokanath embraced Narottam, confirming that the Vaishnavi was indeed Radhika, Krishna's consort. Lokanath was pleased to hear that Narottam was given a special service—boiling milk—by Radharani Herself. Lokanath understood that this was his disciple's eternal service to Krishna, and that Radhika was merely reinstating him in that service.

After being given this unique chore by Radharani, and having it confirmed by his *guru*, Narottam would sometimes go into elaborate meditative trances, visualizing himself boiling milk for Radhika and the *gopis* while in his *manjari* form. Often, in this visualized *siddha-deha*, or "perfected form," he found it useful to use dry wood for the fire, which kept the milk boiling. On occasion, however, the milk would overflow. Whenever this happened, Narottam would try to

stop the overflowing milk with his bare hands. During his intense meditations, he would often neglect the fact that his hands were scorched. But when his reverie subsided, he saw that the scorched hands in his mystical vision had accompanied him back to the world of three dimensions. Sometimes he tried to cover his marked hands with a piece of cloth, but all of Vrindavan knew the transcendent way in which he had received the burns.

Jiva Goswami

Complying with the order of Lokanath, Narottam submitted himself at the feet of Shri Jiva Goswami, asking the Goswami to accept him as a student. In response, Jiva Goswami took hold of his hands and immediately requested him to tell the story of how they became so badly burned. Narottam then told his master the recurring events of his inner meditation. As Shri Jiva listened, he felt great satisfaction and spiritual ecstasy. He confirmed that Narottam was indeed Vilas Manjari, and Narottam said, "Yes, Radhika Herself has addressed me in this way." Hearing this, with boundless glee, Jiva Goswami embraced Narottam, saying, "You are the manifestation of Mahaprabhu's love, and with this love you will flood the entire universe."

It was during this period that Narottam met Shrinivas, who came to Vrindavan to study under Shri Jiva, and the two of them became dear friends. They were known as Jiva Goswami's best students and along with Dukhi Krishnadas (Shyamananda), they excelled in all of their studies. Consequently, Jiva Goswami bestowed distinguished titles upon them—Narottam *Das Thakur Mahashoy*, Shrinivas *Acharya Prabhu*, and

Shyamananda—and he gave them the special mission of distributing the *Bhakti-rasa* scriptures throughout greater Bengal and Orissa. (The details of this episode are retold in the previous chapter concerning the life of Shrinivas Acharya.)

Kheturi-gram

When the *Bhakti-rasa* scriptures were stolen by King Birhambir, Shrinivas resolved to get them back, and so he stayed in Vana Vishnupur, as mentioned in the previous chapter. At that time, however, Shrinivas sent Narottam back home to Kheturi, in East Bengal, with Shyamananda, who would accompany Narottam for some time and then proceed to his native town in Orissa.

At first, Narottam and Shyamananda travelled rather aimlessly, intoxicated with divine love but heartbroken by the disappearance of the *Bhakti* literature. As they walked from town to town, Narottam, being senior, instructed Shyamananda in the devotional books of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. He had been studying under Shri Jiva for a longer period and Shyamananda relished hearing his explanations. In this way, they passed many days and nights together.

Eventually, they made their way to Kheturi, in East Bengal, where they contacted Narottam's relatives. When Narottam's long lost family members saw him with his saintly friend, these pious people immediately fell to the ground with tears of joy, realizing for the first time just how much they had felt Narottam's separation. Their "Naru" had returned! He was happy to see everyone as well. He told them all about his stay

in Vrindavan, and they were in awe as he explained the secrets of the Goswamis's *Bhakti* literature.

After ten days, according to plan, Shyam-ananda Pandit left for Orissa, and Narottam provided him with the necessary travel funds. Words cannot express the sadness that the two saints must have experienced as they left each other's side, though the Bengali biographies do their best to convey the pathos. Months passed, and during this period Narottam often kept to himself, chanting Radha-Krishna *mantra* and meditating on his eternal service according to the techniques of *Raganuga-bhajan*.

By this time, Narottam had begun to initiate disciples. Some of the most important writers, poets and devotees of India came to him for shelter. Among those first disciples are his cousin (Santosh Datta), Shri Devi Das, Shri Gauranga, Shri Gokula, Ganga-narayana Chakravarti, Raj Narasingha, Queen Rupamala, Raj Chand Roy, Santosh Roy, and many others. *Prema-vilas* lists 123 disciples. Under Narottam's direction they were able to break open the storehouse of love of Godhead and distribute every drop of nectar to the thirsty inhabitants of Kheturi-gram and its neighboring villages.

Navadvip and Puri

Longing to travel to the holy places directly associated with Mahaprabhu's pastimes as Shrinivas had done some years earlier, Narottam now explored all of Gaur-mandala with great relish. He visited all of the surviving associates and the second generation devotees as well, embracing the company of Shuklambar Brahma-chari, for example, and in the ruins of Mahaprabhu's

house he spent time with Ishan Thakur as well. Narottam visited Damodar Pandit and he met Shrivast Thakur's two brothers, Shripati and Shrinidhi; he also associated with Achyutananda (Adwaita Acharya's son), Hriday Chaitanya (Shyamananda's *guru*), Abhiram Thakur, Jahnava-devi and Birbhadra (her son), and others. Narottam was also fortunate enough to meet Narahari Sarkar and Raghunandana Thakur.

When Narottam came into the presence of these special souls, he fell into fits of ecstasy—crying, shouting, laughing, muttering as if in a stupor, and even fainting. He thus happily interacted with these saintly persons and saw such divine camaraderie as an extremely significant and thrilling part of his spiritual development.

Engulfed in the mood of association, he went to Puri and visited Gopinath Acharya, Gopal Guru Goswami, and others; and since they were direct witnesses, he asked them penetrating questions about the final *lila* of the Lord. He then travelled to Jajigram and was temporarily reunited with Shrinivas Acharya. After some time, he visited Katwa, where the Lord had entered the renounced order of life, and finally, he arrived at Ekachakra, the place where Nityananda Prabhu had first appeared in this world. Some of Narottam's biographers, such as Narahari Chakravarti (in his *Bhakti-ratnakara*), for example, stress the importance of this pilgrimage, especially his visit to Nityananda Prabhu's birthplace. As stated in the *Prema-vilas*, Narottam was an incarnation of Nityananda Prabhu's ecstasy, and so his visit to the *lila-sthali* of that divine soul was viewed as a most significant mystical occurrence.

moderate these noteworthy souls, for out of deep respect he wanted to offer them the best possible facilities. As it transpired, Narottam would indeed be able to give his guests such first-rate lodgment, since Raj Krishnananda (Narottam's father) and Raj Purushottam (Narottam's uncle) had both passed away, leaving the riches of the kingdom to Santosh Datta (Narottam's very close cousin).

Santosh had recently become Narottam's disciple and was anxious to meet Narottam's peers and other exalted devotees. Consequently, Santosh became the prime mover behind the organization of the festival, and under Narottam's order he willingly bore the entire expense. Laboring for many months a huge and ornate temple was constructed, with a large storehouse for food; an elaborately designed *kirtan* hall; an adjoining residential building for devotees; an idyllic bathing pond; a colorful and highly-wrought flower garden; and another guest house for additional visitors. Messengers were dispatched in all directions to invite not only Vaishnavas, but also kings, landowners, poets, scholars, authors, performers, and other illustrious guests.

Devotees Arrive

The devotees of Jajigram came together with Shrinivas Acharya and Govinda Kaviraj. Ramchandra came as well, providing the opportunity for his friendship with Narottam to blossom. From Narasinghapur, in Orissa, came Shyamananda Pandit and his followers, including Rasik Murari. Jahnava Ma and her entire entourage came from Khardaha. From the Shrikhanda district came Raghunandana Thakur and many other devotees.

Returning to Kheturi

After visiting many of the holy places and personalities of Chaitanya-*lila*, Narottam returned to Kheturi. When he arrived, a letter was waiting for him. It was from his *diksha-guru*, Lokanath Goswami. In the letter Lokanath asked him to establish Deity worship in Kheturi-gram, because although there were many sincere devotees at Kheturi, according to Lokanath, they would develop best with the *archa-vigraha* to worship on a daily basis.

This would be a significant step in the spiritual lives of Narottam's disciples. He chose the day of Gaur-purnima, the auspicious birth anniversary of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, to inaugurate a huge installation festival. This festival would also offer Narottam an opportunity to spread the teachings of the Goswamis throughout the Bengal area, for all important Vaishnavas would attend a celebration in honor of Mahaprabhu's appearance. The Lord had completed His manifest pastimes several decades earlier, but His birth anniversary had not been observed as a big *mahotsav* ("great celebration"). This would be the first time, and so Narottam invited many important Vaishnava *mahonts* ("great souls") from throughout the Indian subcontinent, particularly in Bengal and Orissa. Although there is tremendous scholarly debate over the exact year of this festival, it can safely be said that it occurred between the sixth and eighth decade of the sixteenth century.

Hundreds of the first and second generation associates of Mahaprabhu and their followers received invitations written in elaborate Sanskrit poetry. Still, Narottam wondered how he would properly accom-

Shrivas Thakur's brothers came from Navadvip, and Adwaita Acharya's sons came from Shantipur. Hriday Chaitanya travelled from Ambika Kalna, as did many other Gaudiya *mohants*. This is just a brief sampling of the devotees who attended.

Since all of these exalted souls travelled from their respective towns—largely by walking—they gathered new followers along the way, telling everyone they met about the fabulous festival that would soon take place at Kheturi. Hundreds snowballed into thousands, and over the course of one week they all reached the borders of West Bengal. Santosh Datta arranged for dozens of colossal boats to ferry back and forth as devotees needed to cross the river. Once the devotees were in East Bengal, luxurious palanquins and huge ox carts carried them to Kheturi-*gram*.

The hosts—Narottan, Shrinivas, and Santosh Datta—greeted everyone as they arrived, offering each guest a flower garland and welcoming them with great affection. All the devotees were given separate accommodations with personal servants to tend to their needs. The guest of honor, Jahnava Ma (Acharyani), was the senior and most respected Vaishnava at the event, and so Narottam specifically worshiped her with flowers and *chandan*, and encouraged the devotees to do the same. Actually, the role of Jahnava Ma at the Kheturi festival should be properly highlighted. Within the Gaudiya *sampradaya*, diverse philosophical conceptions were coming to the fore, such as Gaur-*na-gari-bhava*, *Rasa-raj*, Gaur-*paramyavad* [the teaching that Mahaprabhu is the Ultimate Godhead], Nitai-*paramyavad*, Adwaita-*paramyavad*, and other variations as well. Each of these conceptions embodied distinct nuances, too complex to illuminate in this short book.

Jahnava, as the leading Vaishnava of the time, mediated on behalf of all these camps and resolved their differences to the satisfaction of the Gaudiya orthodoxy. Thus, her presence was especially appreciated by Narottam Thakur.

After worshiping Jahnava-devi in the appropriate way and showing proper respect to all the assembled Vaishnavas, Raghunandana Thakur sang the invocation prayers signifying an extremely holy event. A huge *kirtan* ensued well into the night as a preparation for the actual festival, which began on the following day.

The Festival Begins

The next morning, thousands of enthusiastic devotees began the celebration of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Appearance Day Festival with a huge, enthusiastic *kirtan*. Then Narottam unveiled five sets of Radha Krishna Deities, whose names were Ballabhi Kanta, Shri Krishna, Vraja Mohan, Radha Kanta, and Radha Raman and also two gorgeous Deities of Shri Chaitanya and His consort⁴—all to be installed with the

⁴ The origin of these Deities is interesting. Originally, Narottam was searching for an appropriate image of Shri Chaitanya to be installed at the Kheturi festival. But he could not find an appropriate Deity. One day, a brahmin named Vipradas (who lived in Gopalpur) found Narottam at his front door. Welcoming the famed *sadhu* from Kheturi, Vipradas gave him a special seat and a glass of fresh water. As the two Vaishnavas discussed various topics, it became clear that Vipradas was afraid of a venomous snake residing in the shed where he stored his rice paddys. Fearless Narottam smiled and went directly into the storeroom to confront this "terrible serpent." Later, when he emerged, he appeared

blessings of the assembled Vaishnavas. The purpose of such Deity worship centers around the Vaishnava belief, grounded in the scriptures, that Krishna agrees to accept service through His properly installed *archa-vigraha* and that the devotees can thus develop a personal conception by focusing their mind and senses on God in a plainly visible form.

Shrinivas Acharya presided over the *abhishek* ceremony, or the traditional bathing of the Deities. Meanwhile, experienced orators and *kirtanias* glorified Krishna according to elaborate Vaishnava traditions; without cessation intricate classical dances and various dramatic performances were enacted as the whole of Kheturi roared with the holy name of Lord Krishna.

After the Deities were installed according to the strictures of *smriti-shastra*, the edible offerings as well as the flower garlands were given to Jahnavā, who then gave Shrinivas, Narottam, Shyamananda and Santosh Datta her direct remnants. Then, the rest of the devotees feasted and discussed Krishna for many hours. Finally, the devotees went into the large, ornate *kirtan* hall, where Narottam began to lead a moving, deliberate *kirtan* in his own distinct style. This came to be known as the *Garan-hati* form of *kirtan*, with its mellow, unmistakable melodies and its rich emotional

with the two beautiful Deities—one of Mahāprabhu and one of His consort, Vishnu-priya-devi. The snake had vanished. Afterwards, Narottam brought these Deities to Kheturi for the now famous installation ceremony. Today, these Deities are worshiped at a place called Gambilat, which is southwest of Kheturi in the Murshidabad district.

content. It was based on the classical *drupada* technique, which is serene and majestic.⁵

Narottam's Kirtan

Narottam Das Thakur employed the most sophisticated rhythms (*tala*), melodic formats (*raga*), gestures of emotional expression (*abhinaya*), and developed dance techniques (*natyam*) in his *kirtan* at Kheturi. This is elaborately described in *Bhakti-ratnakara*. Shri Gauranga Das, Shri Gokula Das, and Shri Ballabha Das were at his side with a large number of musicians led by Devi Das, an expert *mridanga* player. After the musicians had reached a crescendo, Narottam appeared on the stage and began to sing. Everyone followed along by playing instruments, singing and dancing, and all wept when they heard the recondite voice of Narottam Thakur, leading them through the chanting of the beautiful *mantras*. It is described that Narottam and the countless waves of devotees looked like the full moon and the numberless stars in the sky.

Also significant is the fact that Narottam was inaugurating what came to be known as Padavali *kir-*

⁵ Of the classical *kirtan* techniques, Garan-hati is usually attributed to Narottam Thakur; there is also a technique called Rani-hati, or Reneti, which is usually attributed to Shyamananda; and there are also two forms (sub-branches, perhaps) called Mandarini and Jharakhandi; to this list may also be added Shrinivas's Manohar-shoy. Donna Wulff, who has thoroughly researched this subject, personally told the author that of these five techniques only Manohar-shoy is still practiced. The others are quite rare, and although there are many *kirtanias* who claim to know them, the authenticity of their technique is questionable.

tan, a dramatic singing technique that begins with Gaur-*chandrika*, or glorification of Mahaprabhu, and then gradually evolves to Radha-Krishna *kirtan* in a very beautiful way, often connected through thematic references and melodic consistency. It is said that this method was originally inspired, at least in seed-like form, by the melodious voice of Swarup Damodar, the Lord's intimate associate, but was not systematized at that time. It was developed further by the three Ghosh brothers—Madhava, one of the greatest *mridanga*-players of all time, Govinda, known as a preeminent *pujari*, and Vasu, who was a fabulous singer and wrote many Gaur-*chandrikas*—but now it was brought to new heights by Narottam at the Kheturi festival.

The Lord Descends

It is said that Narottam's *kirtan*, more than anybody else's, had reached a perfected state. This is accepted by Gaudiya Vaishnavas as an objective fact for a number of reasons, not least of which may be the miraculous occurrence that has been documented by all biographers of the period: Mahaprabhu and all His associates, many of whom had left the mortal world more than fifty years earlier, personally appeared at the Kheturi festival and danced at the height of Narottam's blessed *kirtan*. Thousands of attending devotees bore witness to this sacred event.⁶ The author of *Bhakti-*

⁶ In the biblical tradition it is taught that the Jewish revelation is unique because God revealed His Divinity to an entire people, not just to a lone individual as in the case of Jesus or Mohammed. However, this episode at Kheturi seems to indicate that their theory only holds true in regard to Western religious traditions, for here the Divinity of

ratnakara incredulously asks, "Who can describe the incomparable happiness of the devotees when in the midst of the *kirtan* the munificent Shri Chaitanya and His associates descended for the pleasure of His devotees? Like a flash of lightning in the middle of a mass of beautiful clouds, Shri Chaitanya Himself appeared within the multitude of His followers."

According to the *Prema-vilas*, Mahaprabhu appeared with Nityananda Prabhu, Shri Adwaita, Gadadhar, Shrivasa Thakur, Haridas Thakur, Swarup Damodar, Rupa-Sanatan, and many others. Who, indeed, can imagine the heightened *bhava* as Jahnava saw her departed husband in the midst of the *kirtan*? Who can imagine the feeling of Adwaita Acharya's sons when they saw their father singing and dancing as if he were a young man? How did Shrivasa Thakur's brothers stop themselves from crying when they saw Shrivasa himself dancing in front of Mahaprabhu, just as they remembered him? In fact, they could not control themselves and were carried away by the ecstasy of being reunited with the Lord and His associates. By experiencing *Vipralambha-bhava* (intense separation) they were all to experience *sambhoga*, or divine union.

As the devotees danced more and more, each one felt his or her body become soaked with tears as they completely lost themselves in Narottam's *kirtan*. For a time, Shrinivas was able to control himself, but Narottam could not, and his *kirtan* reached irrepressible proportions. Some devotees shouted in Narot-

Mahaprabhu was revealed before tens of thousands of witnesses. A comparison of this Vaishnava revelation and that of Mount Sinai (the revelation to the multitudes) should be thoroughly researched by historians of religion.

tam's ear: "Thank you, my master. Your devotional power has enabled us all to see Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in His unending spiritual dance with Adwaita Acharya and the other eternal associates."

Mahaprabhu had told Narottam in a dream the prior evening that He would come with His associates and ecstatically dance in his *kirtan* performance; so Narottam was waiting for this moment and would not abandon it so easily. In fact, the *kirtan* lasted many hours, deep into the night. But it seemed endless, and for many it was, for they took the event with them and lived in its memory (*lila-smaranam*). Externally, it had to come to a halt, and when it did, the devotees knew the phenomenon of love-in-separation as a firsthand experience.

The Unending Festival

Just as Narottam's *kirtan* came to an end, Jahnava-devi began new festivities. She approached the newly installed Deities and offered a special form of red powder, the kind that Radha and Krishna throw at each other during their Holi festival. After the Deities enjoyed the dye, Jahnava Ma instructed the devotees to take the many buckets of colored dye and commemorate the Holi festival by throwing it at each other. Before the words had emanated from her lips, however, the devotees—thousands of them—were throwing the dye with great enthusiasm, enjoying remembrance of Radha and Krishna's fun-loving pastime. This took the devotees well into the night, and then they joyfully celebrated Mahaprabhu's appearance festival with specially composed songs about His divine birth and early pastimes.

The next morning Jahanava Ma and a team of experienced cooks, trained by her, prepared breakfast for all of the devotees. Then with a few assistants she personally fed the devotees with her own hands. Only when everyone else had completed their meal did Jahnava herself sit down and enjoy the remnants. This was her humility.

The festival lasted for three days, but for the attending Vaishnavas it was the experience of a lifetime. Many stayed in Kheturi for several weeks, but in due course they all returned to their original villages. Only Ram Krishna Acharya and Ganga-narayana Chakravarti did not leave, because their love for Narottam would not allow them to bear being separated from him. Eventually, however, they too left under Narottam's instruction, and later by their enthusiastic preaching they succeeded in making the country of Manipur a Vaishnava kingdom. It is said that a great devotee named Bhagyachandra also preached in Manipur on Narottam's behalf and solidified what Ram Krishna Acharya and Ganga-narayana Chakravarti had begun.

Mission Accomplished

For a number of complex reasons, the Kheturi festival is considered one of the most important milestones in Vaishnava history. First of all, since the Goswami literature was stolen, Narottam did not initially have the asset of books with which to spread the message of the Goswamis. So he had to use a different medium. This he did through the Kheturi festival, which eventually became an annual event and continued to be a source of inspiration even after the Goswami books

were recovered. These festivals served a purpose similar to that of the famous ecumenical councils of Christendom. (However, the lively singing and dancing and the complex Vedic theology underline a few obvious distinctions.). By gathering Vaishnavas from many different lands in one place, Narottam was able to convey to them the conclusions of the Vrindavan Goswamis in an organized way, and he was able to get the impressions of the Vaishnava pilgrims as well. Consequently, the results of these festivals established canonical doctrine and orthodox conclusions (*siddhanta*) for future generations of Gaudiya Vaishnavas. This phenomenon is explained by sociologist and historian Hitesranjan Sanyal:

The festival of Kheturi offered the Vaishnavas of Bengal the opportunity to know closely the Goswami system with modifications as envisaged by its adjustments to the tradition of *Bhakti* movement of Bengal with particular reference to *Gaur-paramyavad*. The modified system provided the Vaishnavas of Bengal with what they lacked, namely, a systematic formulation of their faith in the form of concrete *shastriya* discourses. The Kheturi congregation may have been conceived as a common platform on which the different groups of the *Bhakti* movement could meet each other for interaction and mutual understanding under the influence of the Goswami system.⁷

⁷ Hitesranjan Sanyal, "Transformation of the Regional Bhakti Movement (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)," In Joseph T. O'Connell, ed., *Bengal Vaishnavism, Orientalism, Society and the Arts* (East Lansing, Michigan, Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1985), p. 62.

It should be remembered that this was the very same concern that Jahnava Ma expressed to Jiva Goswami when she made her first pilgrimage to Vrindavan. Jiva Goswami reacted by sending the Goswami literature to eastern provinces with Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda. The Kheturi festival may be seen as an extension of this same plan, for at the festival the Goswami doctrines were conveyed and accepted with full enthusiasm. This was reflected in the installation of the Deities, in the *kirtan* performance, as well as in every other major part of the celebration. For example, in relation to the installation ceremony, Hit-cesranjan Sanyal elaborates:

The installation of the Gauranga-Vishnupriya image along with the images of Radha-Krishna according to the rituals prescribed by the Goswamis indicates a most interesting aspect of the attitude and efforts of Narottam. The devotees belonging to the Navadvip circle, who formed the core of the Bhakti movement in Gaur-mandala, i.e., in Bengal, came under the influence of Chaitanya at the pre-*sannyasa* stage of his life and were devoted to the charming young man that he was. The early Bengali *padas* on Chaitanya composed by the poets of Gauda-mandala refer to his beautiful young appearance and use the names Gauranga, Goura, and Gaurakishor which are associated with it. The images of Chaitanya which were conceived by the Gaur-mandala devotees represent Chaitanya dressed as a respectable young man, as a householder. The Goswamis of Vrindavan, however, who had

seen Chaitanya in his *sannyasa* life only, invariably refer to his *yativesh* (ascetic's appearance) while adoring the master in their texts. Naturally the Goswami texts do not [emphasize] the existence of Vishnupriya, Chaitanya's wife. By installing the Gauranga-Vishnupriya image in Kheturi, Narottam demonstrated the acceptance by the adherents of the Goswami system of Gaur-*paramyavad*, in other words Chaitanya's selfhood as Krishna, who is the *param-tattva* (ultimate reality) according to the view of the Goswamis. The appearance of Vishnupriya by the side of Chaitanya reinforces the identification of Chaitanya as Krishna, for Vishnupriya is conceived of as the consort of Chaitanya in the same way as Radha is the *hladini-shakti* (energy of bliss) of Krishna.⁸

If Narottam utilized the installation of Deities to harmonize the existing Vaishnava theological conceptions of the time, his style of *kirtan* shows even greater sensitivity in this endeavor. He had studied *kirtan* under the Goswamis of Vrindavan—and in Vrindavan, Krishna reigns supreme!—but in Bengal adoration of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was emphasized. Narottam devised a *kirtan* method whereby the two—Mahaprabhu and Krishna *kirtan*—can coalesce, since this is after all the ultimate message of the Gaudiya *sampradaya*. Again, this has been eloquently explained by Hitesranjan Sanyal:

⁸ Ibid., p.61.

In the Kheturi *mahotsav* Narottam introduced the lila-*kirtan* designed by him. Rupa Goswami had classified *kirtan* into three types, namely, nama-*kirtan*, guna-*kirtan*, and lila-*kirtan*, all of which are songs on Krishna or about Him. But in the Kheturi festival Narottam began the proceedings with the preface of Gaur-*chandrika*, i.e., songs in adoration of Gaurchandra (Fair Moon, i.e., Chaitanya). The Gaur-*chandrika* songs consisted of *padas* pertaining to the Gaur-*paramyavad* composed by the poets of Gauda-mandala. The practice of prefacing Krishna-*lila* with Gaur-*chandrika* represents the idea of identifying Chaitanya with Krishna but with a particular emphasis on Krishna worship....Apparently Narottam sought to reconcile the Goswami system with the tradition prevalent in Bengal.⁹

In addition to these significant developments, Narottam, Shrinivas, and their followers, like Ramchandra Kaviraj, were responsible for systematizing the techniques of *Manjari-sadhana*, which were squarely based on the Goswami literature and the esoteric traditions passed down by Shri Chaitanya Himself. Several well-known texts of the *Padma Purana*, as well as the writings of Kavi Karnapur, Raghunath Das Goswami, and especially Krishnadas Kaviraj, set the stage for *manjari* introspection and established the philosophical underpinnings for Narottam's poetry, which elaborate the complexities of the *manjari* form of

⁹ Ibid., pp. 61-2.

current age,¹⁰ even though Narottam and his intimate disciples convincingly quoted all of the pertinent scriptural sources and predecessor *gurus* to silence these caste-conscious agitators. In fact, Narottam's supporters were able to convert even those who had initially thought of committing murder.

Nonetheless, the problem became so severe that at a subsequent Kheturi festival Birabhadra (Jahnavā Ma's son) delivered a lecture on this very subject, and all who listened understood that caste should not be determined by birth but by qualification and work.¹¹ According to the scriptures and the Vaishnava tradition, these latter considerations were more important. More important still was love of God. The possessor of this, say the scriptures, transcends mundane classification, such as the caste system. The fortunate persons who actually met Narottam and who had prolonged exposure to his contagious love did not doubt the truthfulness of this statement.

¹⁰ In the year 1911, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur also argued convincingly about the importance of Vaishnavism over Brahminism. For a detailed discussion see Rupa Vilas Das, *A Ray of Vishnu* (Washington, Mississippi, New Jaipur Press, 1988), pp. 33-5.

¹¹ This teaching is confirmed in *Bhagavad-gita* (4.13). And at that later Kheturi conference, Birabhadra, respected by all, is said to have quoted chapter and verse from scripture, proving that Narottam through his devotion was far more noble than a brahmin and that he wore "an internal sacred thread around the region of his heart." Those who were fortunate enough to hear Birabhadra's lecture, or even to hear from people who had heard that lecture, came to accept Narottam with their heart and soul.

meditation. Narottam's poetry and the Goswami literature he based it upon paved the way for later masterworks on the same subject, such as Vishvanath Chakravarti Thakur's *Shri Krishna-bhavanamritam*. Nonetheless, there were many who exploited Narottam's good name, such as the adherents of the deviant *sahajiya* movement, who attributed many of their practices to themes they had imbibed from Narottam's writings. Narottam himself, however, practiced strict celibacy and had nothing to do with heterodoxies of any kind.

Brahmin/Vaishnava

Narottam quickly became the most famous Vaishnava *guru* in all of Bengal. His profound poetry, which successfully elucidates all of Gaudiya philosophy, and his magnificent singing voice, which made him a proverbial legend in his own lifetime, had brought disciples to him from all over India. Moreover, his intense purity inspired people from all walks of life—from kings to brahmins—to take full shelter at his feet.

In late-sixteenth-century India, caste distinctions were very powerful considerations, and many who subscribed to the brahminical orthodoxy did not look fondly upon Narottam, who was born in a *kayastha-shudra* family, because he was initiating those of the brahminical class. In fact, there were elaborate philosophical debates centering on this issue, and in several instances there were threats upon Narottam's life. This volatile controversy has continued into the

There was a certain class of people, though, who heard of Narottam's activities only from afar and did all that was within their power to defame him. As these men inflamed each other's fears and insecurities, they formed a large group to obliterate Narottam's inappropriate "non-brahminical" leadership. To this end, they sought the assistance of the local king, who, at that time, was a pious man named Raj Narasingha.

The Ruse

Raj Narasingha, who ruled the province of Pakapalli, was consistently harassed by the orthodox brahmin community in regard to Narottam. They said that Narottam was a low-born person and should therefore not have taken *sannyasa* nor should he have accepted as disciples those who were brahmins by birth, such as Ganga-narayana Chakravarti and Ramachandra Kaviraj. They insisted that the king inflict a severe punishment on Narottam for his impertinence.

The Raj sent a message to Narottam asking how a genuine *sadhu* such as he could possibly violate the injunctions of scripture by committing the alleged atrocities. Narottam responded by sending a letter which flatly stated that there was nothing in the scriptures, properly interpreted, to uphold the views of the caste-conscious brahmins, and that he was willing to attend a public debate to prove his point of view. Narottam assured the king that if his perspective on this subject was proven wrong, he would amend his ways.

By the time the Raj finished reading Narottam's humble letter, he was convinced of the validity of Narottam's position. Nonetheless, he gathered together a group of his greatest scholars, including the

famous Rupa-narayana,¹² and they marched toward Kheturi to debate with the Vaishnava saint. In the interim, however, Narottam's two dearest brahmin disciples, Ganga-narayana Chakravarti and Ramchandra Kaviraj, devised a clever ruse to show the real glory of their respectable teacher.

One of the brahmin disciples disguised himself as a potter; the other as a seller of betel nuts. They quickly set up small shops in an area known as Kumarapur, just outside Kheturi-gram, because this was on a roadway along which the king's men would have to pass. When the scholars came marching through, the two devotees called them over to buy their necessary supplies. This gave them the opportunity to engage in polite conversation, discussing various issues of the day.

To the surprise of the scholars, however, these shopkeepers spoke in perfect Sanskrit, which only the most learned men were able to do! How is it, they considered, that simple shopkeepers in Narottam's town are such accomplished scholars? If simple working men are as sophisticated as this, what would

12 Rupa-narayana, sometimes called Rupachandra (in a certain portion of *Prema-vilas*), is the same person who had remained undefeated in philosophical debate until he met Jiva Goswami. Shri Jiva's defeat of the proud scholar is recounted in my *Six Goswamis of Vrindavan* (New York, FOLK Books, 1990). In any case, it was at that time predicted by Sanatan Goswami that some years after he was defeated by Jiva he would be initiated by Narottam Thakur. This event would eventually come to pass, and it is mentioned in the *Prema-vilas*. It is also revealed that Narottam later initiated him into the esoteric tradition, giving him the name Narayana Manjari.

the actual scholars be like? And what would Narottam be like?!

The king's men decided to see how knowledgeable these shopkeepers actually were and began to debate the issue of Narottam's status as a *guru* of brahmins. With the greatest ease, Ganga-narayana and Ramchandra defeated the king's scholars. As the royal academics referred to scriptural quote after quote, Narottam's men showed them how they were taking the citations out of context or misinterpreting them altogether. Totally frustrated, they turned to the king and admitted their pathetic defeat.

The king himself was eager to see how Rupanarayana would deal with the two scholarly shopkeepers, but in due course he was also defeated. Finally, the two *sadhus* revealed who they actually were. The king then turned to his men: "If you cannot defeat Narottam's disciples, how can you defeat Narottam?" These painful words resounded in their ears. Eventually, they all became Narottam's disciples.¹³

His Literary Work

Unlike Shrinivas and Shyamananda, once Narottam left Vrindavan, he never returned. Rather, he spent his years in the vicinity of Kheturi-gram, cultivating devotees and writing his resplendent poetry. Govinda Kaviraj described Narottam as a great king of *prema* (divine love) and Ramchandra as Narottam's minister. These two (Narottam and Ramchandra) spent much

¹³ This story is retold in the English language by D.C. Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1954), pp. 428-9.

of their day studying and teaching the *Bhagavat Purana* and the literature of Rupa, Sanatan, and the other Goswamis. Since Narottam was the prince of a wealthy state—he was known as the *raj-kumar* in his youth!—he had the opportunity to study with many great scholars of his day. Taking advantage of this, Narottam became eloquent and prolific, and conveyed all of the tenets of Gaudiya Vaishnavism through the medium of poetic language.

His most important work is the *Prarthana*, a compendium of thirty-three Bengali songs. This is divided into 258 verses arranged in fifty-five sections. He succinctly deals with such subjects as prayer; self-criticism; mental training; spiritual happiness; the agony of the soul in separation from God; the superiority of Vaishnavism; the topmost aspirations; the *guru*/disciple relationship; residence in Vrindavan; the importance of asceticism; and the humility of a Vaishnava. In addition, twenty-seven sections of *Prarthana* focus on *manjari-sadhana*, which is the esoteric form of Gaudiya practice in which one visualizes oneself as a servant of Shrimati Radharani; since She is very dear to Krishna, this is the secret way to Krishna's heart.

Also important is Narottam's *Prema-bhakti-chandrika*, a lengthy poem (120 verses divided into nine sections) that elucidates the full gamut of Gaudiya philosophy in seed-like form. This poem has to have been written after the first Kheturi festival and the death of his dear friend Ramchandra Kaviraj, because Kaviraj's passing is mourned in one particular verse. Many of the same themes of the *Prarthana* are dealt with in this masterpiece of Bengali poetry. Vishvanath Chakravarti, a later Vaishnava commentator, has writ-

orthodoxy ridiculed him at this crucial moment. "Just see," they shouted, "he spent his life initiating brahmins—but he was never anything more than a lowborn *shudra*, and now he will die as one."

Ganga-narayana Chakravarti could not tolerate their blasphemous words and prayed to his *guru*: "Please come back. Show them that they are fools." At that very moment, Narottam's body began to glow and a golden brahmin thread mystically appeared on his body. Observing this miracle, the caste-conscious brahmins immediately confessed their mistake and surrendered at Narottam's feet, begging forgiveness.

There is a slightly different version of this in the *Narottam-vilas*: Narottam had his disciples bring him to Budhari and then to Gambhila to bathe in the Ganges. At that time, he was besieged by a raging fever and expected to die. He immediately ordered his disciples to stack wood in preparation for his cremation. This naturally made his disciples uneasy. Still, they complied with their *guru*'s wishes. Narottam then sat silently for three days and finally left his body before many witnesses, disciples and others as well. After the soul passed from his body, the disciples placed him on the decorated seat of firewood. Just then, the critical brahmins started to shout blasphemous obscenities at Ganga-narayana and at Narottam's other faithful followers. Ganga-narayana could not tolerate their harsh words and so he prayed to Narottam to please come back and to show his mercy to these misguided brahmins. At that very moment, Narottam's eyes opened and he said, "Radha-Krishna-Chaitanya!" Moreover, his body radiated with the intensity of the sun, forcing the awe-inspired brahmins to change their point of view.

ten a Sanskrit explication of this work to the great satisfaction of the Vaishnava community. In addition to his two major works, Narottam wrote many shorter poems, which were later included in important Vaishnava anthologies. In the twentieth century, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada was fond of singing Narottam's poetry and of quoting him in his lectures, which attests to the abiding value and relevance of Narottam's achievement.

His Disappearance: Part One

As revealed in Narottam's writings, he survived Jiva Goswami and his best friend Ramchandra Kaviraj. In the same way that he had felt separated from Mahaprabhu and Radha-Krishna, so he also felt intense separation from his exalted contemporaries. Narottam's biographers always describe him as being in a mixed state of bliss and divine lamentation, which according to Vaishnava doctrine evokes the highest spiritual sentiments. Writers have described Narottam's sensitive state by saying that he perpetually "bedewed the ground beneath his feet with the streams of tenderness that gushed from his pious eyes." With an unprecedented passion, he yearned for God and for God's associates.

Finally, Narottam could not tolerate the intensity of love in separation and decided to rejoin the Lord in the spiritual world. At the home of Ganganarayana Chakravarti in Murshidabad he thus went into trance, totally absorbed in Radha-Krishna-lila. This lasted for several days, convincing many that Narottam was planning to leave the world. However, several of his diehard opponents from the brahminical

Witnessing this resurrection-like incident, everyone surrendered to Narottam's lotus feet. He embraced them all, bestowing upon them the jewels of *bhakti*. He ordered them to study the *Bhakti* scriptures with Ganga-narayana Chakravarti and then he left that area, wanting to meditate in solitude. For the next several months he exhibited ecstatic symptoms and repeatedly bemoaned the separation of Shri Shri Radha and Krishna.

His Disappearance: Part Two

Some time later, Narottam actually prepared to leave the earthly realm. He requested Ganga-narayana and other intimate followers to accompany him to the Ganges (a second time?!). When they arrived, Narottam offered obeisances to that holy river and entered her waters. He gestured that his disciples should join him, asking them to fill their hands with water and pour it over his body. As they complied with his wishes, they watched as his bodily limbs turned to milk and mixed with the waters of the Ganges! Their natural impulse was to stop, lest their *guru* totally disappear into the waves of the river. But they had their order, and they dutifully carried it out, as their own tears also merged with the Ganges.

When the miraculous ritual came to an end, Ganga-narayana filled a jug with the milk that was once Narottam's body. This milk was taken to a holy place near Ganga-narayana's home, in Jiya Ganja (Murshidabad District, West Bengal), where Narottam's tomb (*samadhi*) was soon erected. This tomb came to be known as *Dugdha-samadhi*, or the tomb of

milk, and it is an important pilgrimage site for all Gaudiya Vaishnavas.¹⁴

¹⁴ Narottam has another *samadhi* in Vrindavan. According to popular Manipuri legend, Narottam could not rest and wanted to continue his preaching. Therefore he reappeared and told his followers to reserve some of the firewood they had planned to use for his body: "I'll be coming again," he said. "So save it for me." As it happened, Maharaj Jai Singh died in the exact same area in Murshidabad and the firewood was used for his body. Manipuris believe that Jai Singh was thus a reincarnation of Narottam Das Thakur.

tanya Mahaprabhu. This is in keeping with the belief that of the three saints under discussion, Shrinivas was the eldest, having been born at least ten years before Mahaprabhu's departure; chronologically, Narottam was second, being born just prior to Mahaprabhu's disappearance; and Dukhi (Shyamananda) is said to be the youngest, although close to Narottam in age.

Dr. Sambidananda Das summarizes Dukhi's youth:

He was the life of his parents. From his infancy they used to inspire him with the glory of Shri Chaitanya, Nityananda and other Vaishnava masters. Dukhi had a strong religious bent and exulted in the name of Shri Chaitanya, which, at that time, was a household word in Orissa. Dukhi was gifted with a marvelous memory which was very rare in the humble caste into which he was born. He finished his studies in Sanskrit grammar and other subjects at the local academy. He was calm and sober and hardly spent any time in play. He was a born philosopher.³

Noticing Dukhi's predilection toward religion and philosophy, his loving parents wanted him to select the *guru* of his choice. Krishna Mandal and Durika knew that they were, after all, only *shudras*. But their boy was inclined toward intellectual and priestly work. They therefore decided to let him decide for

³ Sambidananda Das, op. cit., p. 857.

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Shyamananda Pandit

Krishna Mandal and his wife, Durika Dasi, were Bengalis who had settled in Dandeshwar (Darendra Bahadurapur) in the Midnapur District of Orissa (which extends into Bengal). They were from a *Sadgopa* background¹ and wanted children, but each time they conceived, the baby died in infancy. When one of their offspring survived, they named him *Dukhi* ("the sorrowful"), hoping that the god of death would be reminded of the untimely demise of his brothers and sisters and spare him.

According to *Shyamananda Charit*,² *Dukhi* was born approximately one year after the passing of Shri Chai-

¹ A *shudra* sub-caste whose service was to distribute milk.

² A work usually attributed to Rasik Murari, Shyamananda's foremost disciple. My edition comes with the commentary of Baladev Vidyabhushana, Haridas Das, ed., (Navadvip, Hari-bol Kutir, 1944).

himself, only cautioning him about hasty decisions and youthful zealotry.

Although only a teenager, Dukhi was already certain about the identity of his *guru*: "Hridoy Chaitanya is my *guru*!"⁴ He lives at Ambika Kalna, in Bengal, and his *guru* is Gauridas Pandit, Mahaprabhu's intimate associate.⁵ He is faithfully serving Shri Gauridas by caring for the images of Gaur-Nitai in his temple." Dukhi begged his father: "Please give me permission to go to him."

"But it is a far distance, and you are only a boy," said Krishna Mandal.

Recognizing his father's concern, Dukhi replied, "Many people go to Bengal on pilgrimage. When they leave, I can go with them. They will take care of me. Do not worry."

After considering many possible alternatives, Krishna Mandal agreed, and Dukhi left for Ambika Kalna. The trek was difficult, but after a journey of several days, he reached the home of Abhiram Thakur in Khanakul. Associating with this veritable embodiment of Mahaprabhu's *lila*, Dukhi fell into a state of spiritual ecstasy. Soon after, he arrived in Ambika Kalna, where he frantically asked everyone for the temple of Gauridas Pandit, which was adjacent to

⁴ According to historian Prabhat Mukherjee, *History of the Chaitanya Faith in Orissa* (New Delhi, Manohar Publications, 1979), p. 17, Hridoy Chaitanya was the nephew of Gadadhar Pandit.

⁵ Actually, Gauridas Pandit was in *sakha-bhava*, so he was more in Nityananda Prabhu's line. In fact, Nityananda's father-in-law was Suryadas Pandit, Gauridas's elder brother. This makes Gauridas the uncle of Jahnava Ma.

the house of Hridoy Chaitanya. The people of Kalna happily directed Dukhi to Gauridas's temple.

Hridoy Chaitanya

Before describing Dukhi's relationship with Hridoy Chaitanya, it would perhaps be best to mention something about Gauridas and his disciple. Gauridas Pandit was Subal in Krishna-*lila*, and in the form of Gauridas he was one of Mahaprabhu's closest associates. From Puri, Gauridas had settled in Ambika Kalna, where Hridoy Chaitanya eventually followed him and surrendered to his lotus-like feet.

Tradition reveals that Gaur-Nitai—Chaitanya and Nityananda—Themselves came to Ambika Kalna to pose for the *murtis* that are to this day housed in that little temple. Pilgrims may also see *Bhagavad-gita* on palm-leaf there—verses that are said to have been written by Mahaprabhu's own hand; the oar with which Mahaprabhu rowed to Kalna is still enshrined in that temple; and the tamarind tree still stands, under which Gauridas and Mahaprabhu are said to have discussed Vaishnava philosophy.⁶ These sacred relics would have been seen by Dukhi as well.

The Deities of Gaur-Nitai, however, remain the most prominent part of the Kalna experience, being made from pure *neem* wood, and, as it is said, bear

⁶ This information is preserved at the temple of Kalna and was conveyed to me in personal correspondence with Bijoy Krishna Goswami, current head priest of Kalna and present-day descendent of Gauridas Pandit. His letter is dated 1-8-89.

an uncanny resemblance to Mahaprabhu and Nityananda. If one makes the journey to Ambika Kalna, he can still see these Deities, although only for a brief moment because of an event in which Hriday Chaitanya received his present name (prior to this he was known as "Hridayananda").

Jonaki Darshan

Once, while worshipping the Deities at Ambika Kalna, Gauridas observed the energetic *kirtan* that was raging around him. As the *pujari* [presiding priest], he could not participate but had to instead serve the Deities by offering the *aratik* ceremony of standard items with a steady hand. Mahaprabhu and Nityananda were in the *kirtan*, and when it reached its climax, the Gaur-Nitai *murtis* on the altar, which were identical to Them, jumped off and joined the ecstatic singing and dancing.

There were now two Gaur-Nitais in the *kirtan*! Gauridas jumped in after Them, chasing Them with a stick. They became so afraid that one set of Gaur-Nitais (or according to some sources only Gauranga Mahaprabhu) leaped into Hridayananda's heart; the other set sprang back onto the altar. From this point on, Hridayananda came to be known as Hriday Chaitanya, for Mahaprabhu had frantically danced into his heart ["*hriday*"].

To this day, the priests at the Gauridas Kalna temple allow extremely short *Jonaki* ["firefly"] *darshans*, revealing the Deities for only a brief moment because they fear that the Deities might again jump off the altar.⁷ Dukhi knew this story, and he heard about

⁷ Ibid.

Hridoy Chaitanya's spotless reputation as well—he was so pure that Mahaprabhu searched for shelter by jumping into his heart! These are the sort of stories which had inspired him to come to Kalna in the first place.

Dukhi engaged in the service of the temple and developed deep affection for Hridoy Chaitanya, who taught the boy all he had learned from Gauridas Pandit. Soon Hridoy Chaitanya initiated Dukhi, giving him the name “Krishnadas.”⁸ All of the inhabitants of Kalna came to love Dukhi Krishnadas because he was Hridoy Chaitanya's best disciple.

Pilgrimage

After studying for some time, Dukhi Krishnadas asked his *guru*'s permission to travel. Permission was granted and Dukhi Krishnadas embarked on an extraordinary pilgrimage. In the same way that Narottam and Shrinivas had gone to the holy places associated with Mahaprabhu's pastimes, so did Dukhi Krishnadas. But he visited other places as well.

Rasik-mangal gives details about the sites that attracted our young Dukhi Krishnadas: Vakrishwar, Vaidyanath, Gaya, Benares, Allahabad, and many other

⁸ Gopijanaballabha's *Rasik-mangal* is unique in saying that Hridoy Chaitanya gave Dukhi Krishnadas the name “Shyamananda” (*Purva Two*, p. 10). According to *Prema-vilas* and all other authoritative sources, Dukhi merely received the affix “Krishnadas” from Hridoy Chaitanya. He was later named Shyamananda by Lalita-devi. A great controversy arose surrounding this name, as we shall see in this chapter.

places. He also went to Brahma-tirtha, Chandra-tirtha, Nimsar, Ayodhya, Hastinapur, Kurukshetra, Haridvar, Badarik and so on, as well as southwest to Dwaraka and to other important places along the western coast. He travelled all over the north, too, where many Gaudiyas generally do not go. Then, he came back to Puri and Navadvip, to see the places of Mahaprabhu's most intimate pastimes. In all, he travelled for more than a year, or perhaps a few, and then he returned to his native village in Orissa. After a short time, however, he again journeyed to the house of his *guru*, Hridoy Chaitanya, who greeted him with great affection.

After spending some time together, Hridoy Chaitanya asked Krishnadas to go to Vrindavan and to study the Vaishnava literature under Jiva Goswami at the newly-established theological school for advanced students. Krishnadas, sincerely touched, obeyed his *guru*, who had supplied a note of introduction for Shri Jiva. After visiting Mahaprabhu's home and His surviving associates in Navadvip, Dukhi Krishnadas left his *guru's* feet to travel to the holy land of Vrindavan.

Jiva Goswami

Dukhi Krishnadas reached Vrindavan in due course. Just before arriving, he met a brahmin named Shridas, who took him to Radha-kund to meet Raghunath Das Goswami and Shрила Krishnadas Kaviraj. When these two stalwart Vaishnavas heard that Dukhi Krishnadas was a respected disciple of Hridoy Chaitanya (whom they knew to be Gauridas Pandit's dearest disciple), they treated him with deep affection. According to *Bhakti-ratnakara*, they secured personal attendants for

Krishnadas, and these attendants escorted him to the lotus feet of Jiva Goswami.

When Shri Jiva saw Dukhi Krishnadas, he wept tears of ecstasy. Now Mahaprabhu's plan was complete. Shrinivas, Narottam, and Dukhi Krishnadas were together, studying and developing their inner realization for their future mission. Like Shrinivas and Narottam, Krishnadas quickly became a master in all branches of knowledge from grammar and poetry to logic and aesthetics, from the Vedas to Rupa Goswami's *Ujjvala-nilamani*. He became proficient in all of the Goswami literature, including the works of Sanatan and Gopal Bhatta, and even in Jiva's own newly written books, like *Gopal-champu* and the *Sandarbhās*. He lived an ascetic life and became the joy of Vrindavan. Shrinivas and Narottam were like brothers to him and cared for him in every way.

Raganuga-bhajan

Jiva Goswami used to send reports to Kalna about Krishnadas's well-being and his progress in study. Hridoy Chaitanya would write back, asking Jiva Goswami to reveal the confidential secrets of devotional service to his disciple. As Dukhi Krishnadas's *guru*, Hridoy Chaitanya advised Krishnadas to accept Jiva Goswami as an extension of himself.

By the mercy of Shri Jiva, Krishnadas worshiped Radha and Krishna according to the methods of *Raganuga-bhajan*. Day by day he became increasingly absorbed in devotional service. Thinking only of the pastimes of the Lord, he repeatedly fell into trances of spontaneous devotion. He was consistently preoccupied with meditating upon the Lord's activities in the

spiritual realm. Externally, he carefully performed his *sadhana* (his daily services), which included sweeping the area of *Kalpa-kunja Kutir* and fetching a pot of water for Shri Jiva, while internally he served their Lordships under the guidance of Rupa Manjari. These services were to merge on the spiritual platform as his meditation reached its perfected state.

Radhika's Ankle Bracelet

Inside the *Kalpa-kunja Kutir* in Vrindavan, Shri-Shri Radha and Krishna eternally perform Their ecstatic *rasa-lila* dance. Those who are spiritually unqualified are not able to perceive this reality, even if they happen to be present at the exact location of the divine performance. However, accomplished devotees, such as Dukhi Krishnadas, can see the polydimensional truth of spiritual reality in all of its glory.

One day, as Radha, Krishna, and the *gopis* were enjoying this *rasa-lila*, they were overcome with especially intense ecstasy. The rhythms of the music and dance mixed with the enthusiasm of the moment, creating indescribably volatile emotions. This compelled everyone to participate with an even greater urgency, dancing more forcefully with each moment. As the *gopis* moved their bodies to the beat of Krishna's heart, encircling Him and Shri Radha, they played various musical instruments in spirited fashion. While doing this, the *gopis* jumped in and out of Radha and Krishna's vigorous dance. Soon their energetic shuffle became unwieldy—uncontrollable—and Radhika lost Her *nupura* (ankle bracelet).

No one noticed the missing bracelet. In fact, Radhika had deliberately lost it just to offer special

mercy to Krishnadas, who arrived the next morning to perform his usual sweeping service and found the golden bracelet beneath a tree. Krishnadas was enthralled by the bracelet's beauty. He could understand that it was an ornament of another dimension—of Radhika's world. The whole *kunja* was glowing from the light that emanated from that ankle bracelet, and so Krishnadas touched it to his head out of respect. At that moment, his body exhibited all varieties of ecstatic symptoms, such as horripilation and profuse sweating. He began to cry and experienced a sort of overflowing happiness. Deluged with divine love, he clasped the ankle bracelet to his heart and fainted.

Lalita-devi

After a considerable period of time, Dukhi Krishnadas came to his senses and began calling the names of Radha and Krishna. Like the love-mad *gopis*, he ran here and there, filled with distress, looking for Their Lordships. In desperation, he frantically shouted again and again: "Where is Radha? Where is Krishna? Please—I must find Them!" Eventually, he calmed himself, tied the ankle bell around his neck, and continued cleaning the *kunja*. Considering that someone might steal it from him, he eventually buried the bracelet in a secret place.

Meanwhile, after entering Her room, Radha noticed the missing ankle bell. Thinking (knowing!) that She may have dropped it in the *kunja*, She ordered Lalita, Her dear friend, to go there and search for

it.⁹ Disguising herself as an elderly woman, Lalita-sundari hurried to the *kunja* in compliance with Radhika's request. When she arrived, she immediately saw Krishnadas and asked his name. "I am Dukhi Krishnadas," he said.

"Have you seen my daughter-in-law's ankle bell?" she asked. "She is careless and sometimes when I send her to the Yamuna to fetch water for me, she loses things. I cannot trust her. Tell me, please, did you find the ankle bracelet? I can give you a reward if you return it to me."

"Tell me frankly," Dukhi Krishnadas asked with great suspicion, "where do you live and what is your name?"

"I am Radha-dasi," Lalita replied, concealing her true identity. "I belong to a Kanoj brahmin family of Vraja."

Hearing this, Krishnadas confessed, "Yes, I did find an ankle bell. But it cannot be yours. It belongs to Shri Radha. I know this because the moment I touched the ankle bell I felt as if I were falling into the deep ocean of love of God. My heart swelled with unfaltering devotion, and I fell unconscious. No ordinary ankle bracelet could induce such feelings.

"Listen to me," Krishnadas continued, "I will give it to you if it is truly yours. But first you must prove it. We will go to your village and show the bracelet to your neighbors. If they identify it as belon-

⁹ According to later documents, such as the *Gaur-parshad-charitavali*, it was Vishakha-devi and not Lalita.

ging to you, then I will happily relinquish it without any further questions.”

When Lalita heard this proposal, she became nervous and revealed the actual situation: “You are right,” she admitted, “I was trying to deceive you. The ankle bell indeed belongs to Shrimati Radharani. She is pleased with you, as am I. Ask for any boon, and it is yours. Then I will return the bracelet to Radhika, who will be grateful that you have recovered it.”

“Shyamananda”

Krishnadas did not want anything for himself. “O Thakurani,” he said, “I must know your real identity. Only after you reveal your true self to me will I ask for this boon.”

Taking Krishnadas to a secluded place, she revealed her true identity as Lalita-sundari by telling him her name and her service to Radhika. She did not, however, take off her disguise as an elderly lady. Instead she cautioned him, “Listen Dukhi Krishnadas, you are anxious to see my real spiritual form, but such a revelation will be too much for you to bear.”

He countered her: “By your grace, anything is possible. If you give me the ability to bear it, then I will be able.”

Submitting to his intense desire, Lalita was ready to abandon her disguise, but she told him to first close his eyes. After several moments, she allowed him to look upon her holy form. Gazing at the incomparable beauty of Lalita-sundari, he fell unconscious and began to foam at the mouth. As he came to his senses, she soothed him with kind words as he bowed to her feet with tears of love. She put one foot on his

head and he relished the dust that fell from her toes. Fully under the control of the spiritual energy, Krishnadas was unable to speak. He could only weep.

At this point, Lalita again offered to grant him any boon he desired. "What else can I ask for?" Krishnadas queried. "My only desire is to serve Radha and Krishna under your guidance."

Lalita smiled, knowing well the single-minded determination of young Krishnadas. "You shall certainly attain the association of Radha and Krishna," she said, "but you cannot serve Them in this body. You must prepare yourself mentally (*manasa seva*) as a confidante of Shri Radha. Then you can come to the *kunja* with Rupa Manjari and personally witness the *rasa-lila* of Radha and Krishna. At that time you shall discover everyone's real identity. This is self-realization. For now, continue serving Jiva Goswami in this body and continue doing your service for the *kunja*. You will attain your perfected body (*siddha-deha*) in due course." With this advice, she gave him a secret *mantra* which she herself chants for constant vision of Radhika's form.

Krishnadas then took her to an area in the *kunja* where he had buried the ankle bracelet. The iron spade with which he had buried it turned bright gold, and he used this to unearth it. After digging it up with the spade, he put the bracelet to his head. Then he prostrated himself before Lalita's magnificent form and relinquished the bracelet, gently placing it in her hand. Upon giving the precious ornament to Lalita, he was surprised to see that she first touched it to *his* head, moving it around in a mystical fashion. She said: "Let the touch of Radhika's feet be impressed upon your head." Suddenly, two vertical lines appeared on his

forehead, and from the touch of the tip of the anklet, a dot appeared in the middle.¹⁰ "From this moment" Lalita said, "you shall be known as 'Shyamananda,' for you have brought bliss (*ananda*) to Radha (*Shyama*)¹¹ by returning Her anklet. Now go back to your *kunja* and former state, but do not tell anyone about this incident. You may disclose these events only to Jiva Goswami—but do not tell anyone else." Overwhelmed with love, Shyamananda bowed again, and when he arose, Lalita had disappeared into the *kunja*.

He began searching the *kunja*, "Where is the beautiful Lalita, Radharani's servant? Where has she gone?" But it was to no avail. Soon he came upon Jiva Goswami and fell at his feet. When Shri Jiva saw the bliss in Shyamananda's eyes and his new molten gold complexion, obtained through his intimate association with the golden-hued Lalita, he asked the natural questions: "Where have you been, and why is your skin glowing in that distinct way?"

Shyamananda replied: "My Lord, I have been to Kanaka *kunja*. While at this place, I received the zenith of Shri *guru's* mercy. Only by such grace can one experience the transcendental fortune that I have known." Jiva then saw the beautiful golden spade, wrapped tightly in a cloth beneath Shyamananda's

¹⁰ For an excellent historical study of Shyamananda's *tilok* and other forms of *tilok* as well see Alan W. Entwistle, *Vaishnava Tilaks: Sectarian Marks Worn by Worshipers of Vishnu* (London, School of Oriental and African Studies, Bulletin XI and XII, December, 1981-June, 1982), pp. 42-43.

¹¹ Shyam is a name for Krishna and Shyama is a name for Radha.

arm. He began to suspect that something extraordinary had indeed taken place.

Shri Jiva said: "And what is this strange *tilok* mark on your forehead? You cannot fool me, my dear Krishnadas, I know that you have attained Krishna's special mercy, or, perhaps, even the mercy of Shri Radha.¹² Your body is exhibiting ecstatic symptoms and your eyes are gushing tears of love....Please—tell me the details of your transcendental experience."

Since Shri Lalita-devi had given permission, Shyamananda proceeded to tell Jiva Goswami the entire story but asked him not to divulge this secret to anyone. Shyamananda requested that Jiva "simply tell them that by the grace of *guru* everything has taken place." Since this was Lalita's desire, Shri Jiva complied, and the people of Vrindavan came to know Krishnadas's new name "Shyamananda" and they called the new *tilok* "Shyamanandi," or "Kripa-bindu." But only Jiva and Shyamananda knew the secret behind the name.

Hridoy Chaitanya's Fury

All of Vrindavan observed Shyamananda's transformed demeanor, and there was much talk about his new name, his *tilok*, and his golden complexion. Everyone knew that he had received the mercy of Jiva Goswami. But had he been unfaithful to Hridoy Chaitanya, his initiating *guru*? After all, it was quite unorthodox to

¹² According to later accounts, it was Shri Radha who had given Shyamananda the name and *tilok*.

receive a new name from one's instructing *guru*.¹³ His relationship with Shri Jiva seemed to have eclipsed his relationship with Hridoy Chaitanya, and because of this, certain Vaishnavas were developing a terrible attitude toward Shri Jiva. Nonetheless, Jiva was steady in his resolve to keep Shyamananda's secret, even at the risk of his own reputation.

Rumors quickly circulated. Before long, in Bengal, Hridoy Chaitanya heard that, in Vraja, Jiva Goswami was obscuring his relationship with his dear disciple, Dukhi Krishnadas, and had even given him a new name. Hridoy Chaitanya became furious: "Jiva Goswami is accepting my disciple as his own. In good faith I sent my disciple for training. Now, because of Shri Jiva, my Dukhi Krishnadas is abandoning his *guru*."¹⁴

Hridoy Chaitanya called for five of his best disciples: "Go to Vrindavan and ascertain if these stories are true. If they are, then bring Krishnadas to me. I will give him the punishment that he deserves."

¹³ A *diksha guru* is one who initiates with the sacred *mantra*, giving a disciple his new spiritual name. Generally, he is one's guide as well. It is unorthodox to accept more than one *diksha guru*. However, one may accept many *shiksha*, or "instructing" *gurus*. The *shiksha guru* is a person who gives practical spiritual guidance throughout a devotee's life. According to convention, he does not change the name of his student, although he may give a title in honor of his student's accomplishments.

¹⁴ According to *Bhakti-ratnakara*, (ch. 1, pp. 16-19) Hridoy Chaitanya took it a bit more gracefully than the other literature would suggest, but it is nonetheless clear that this event had started a tremendous controversy.

Reflecting for a moment, Hridoy Chaitanya added: "If Jiva Goswami interferes, do not challenge him. Despite what he has done, he is a great Vaishnava. Just deliver my letter to him and get his response. Also, ask Krishnadas why he has done this. How could he forsake me and accept another *guru*? Ask him if, by doing this, he has attained Krishna. If he says that he has, then tell him that we, too, will all come to Vraja, and we will accept Shri Jiva as our own *guru*. But I must say this: I have never heard of such behavior among the hundreds of followers of Mahaprabhu. Adwaita Acharya rejected his own son, but Mahaprabhu never granted shelter to that son. These topics are clearly explained in the scriptures. Whether one is a saint or a *guru*, if he commits an offense at the feet of his own *guru*, Krishna does not grant him shelter.

"Now go to Vrindavan," Hridoy Chaitanya said to his five disciples, "and bring me Jiva Goswami's reply. If the conclusion is as I suspect, then I will gather all of the great Vaishnavas of Bengal and we will all go to Vrindavan for the judgment on Shri Jiva and his questionable activities."

Jiva Goswami's Response

After a long journey, the Vaishnavas of Bengal finally arrived in Vrindavan and went directly to Jiva Goswami, who received them hospitably. Jiva then read the letter from Hridoy Chaitanya. Anxiously waiting for his response, the five disciples of Hridoy Chaitanya felt relieved when Shri Jiva finally said: "Although Hridoy Chaitanya has written this accusing letter, I assure you that I have not taken Krishnadas as my disciple. I would never even consider such a thing.

“In fact,” Jiva continued with great humility, “I am not even worthy to be *his* disciple. I am sorry that Hriday Chaitanya is so angry with me, but I have done him no wrong. His own *guru*, Gauridas Pandit, always treated me with great affection. It is unfortunate, indeed, that such a rift has come between us. I do not know why this unpleasantness has developed. I had agreed to train his disciple, Dukhi Krishnadas, expressly because he was a disciple of the exalted Hriday Chaitanya, and now I am accused of some impropriety.”

Hriday Chaitanya's men felt terrible. One of them said to Jiva: “Two *sannyasis* came from Vraja and told our revered Hriday Chaitanya that you had renamed Krishnadas as 'Shyamananda,' and that you had given him a special *tilok* marking.”

Jiva laughed. “If this is true,” he said, “we will hear it from the assembled devotees. Come, let us gather all of the Vrindavan Vaishnavas together and hear their verdict.” But Hriday Chaitanya's devotees protested. They said that Jiva's word was sufficient. They merely wanted to hear the story from him.

Jiva said: “Listen and I shall tell you everything. One day I asked Krishnadas, 'Who has given you the name Shyamananda?' He explained that by meditating on the lotus feet of his *guru*, the new name and *tilok* were awarded to him. This is due to the intensity of Krishnadas's devotion to his *guru*, Hriday Chaitanya, which centers around the daily cleansing of Kanaka *kunja*. While doing his service, Krishnadas always recites the *Bhagavat Purana*, performing his service in the *kunja* with remarkable enthusiasm. This is Krishnadas. Whether day or night—he chants the holy name incessantly.

“One day,” Shri Jiva continued, “Krishnadas had a dream which he revealed to me. In this dream, Hridoy Chaitanya appeared to him while he was cleaning the *kunja*. Krishnadas offered his respected *guru* a seat of comfortable *kusha* grass and began to offer prayers. Seeing Krishnadas's humility and sincerity, Hridoy Chaitanya became very happy and told Krishnadas that he had achieved something for which even Lord Brahma hankers—personal service to Radhika's *kunja*. Soon, Hridoy Chaitanya assured him, he would receive the mercy of Radha and Krishna, and because he was bringing such pleasure to Shyama (Radha), he will eventually be given the name 'Shyamananda.'

“After telling Krishnadas these things,” said Shri Jiva, “Hridoy Chaitanya blessed him and put his feet on his head. This gesture created a magnificent new *tilok* marking, and this is the same mark that is seen today. It should be known, though, that everything has transpired by the mercy of Hridoy Chaitanya. This is a fact. But since many do not understand this point, the local people have invented their own renditions of what has happened.” In this way, Shri Jiva told the truth—since Krishnadas did indeed see everything as the mercy of his *guru*—but he did not reveal the sworn secret of Lalita-sundari and Shyamananda.

Hridoy Chaitanya's disciples were relieved to hear Jiva Goswami's answer, and they asked Jiva to write the entire story in the form of a letter for their *guru*. This is exactly what Jiva did, but he insisted that the devotees go to Krishnadas and hear the story directly from him. Jiva assured them that Krishnadas would corroborate the entire episode with all of its details.

When they brought the matter before Krishnadas, he said: "I hold the lotus feet of Hridoy Chaitanya on my head; he is my Lord and Master. Although I serve in Vraja under the tutelage of Shri Jiva, I see everything as the mercy of my beloved *guruji*. This is how I received the blessings of Radha and Krishna, and I fully believe that the name and *tilok* were given to me through Hridoy Chaitanya as the special mercy of the Divine Couple." The disciples of Hridoy Chaitanya were delighted that Shyamananda verified the words of Shri Jiva. After visiting all of the holy places in Vraja, the devotees returned to Bengal and delivered the letter to Hridoy Chaitanya.

Response Rejected

Hridoy Chaitanya read Shri Jiva's letter and thoughtfully considered its contents. "It appears that Jiva Goswami is twisting the truth," he said, "for I have not appeared in Krishnadas's dream, at least not to my recollection. Neither have I given him the name Shyamananda! It is absurd to claim that I have given him the name and *tilok* in a dream even though I have no remembrance of it! This dream is only a figment of the imagination—it has no reality. Shall we let a mere dream contradict what we see in the real world? No! Only if we have lost our minds can we do such a thing. It is a fool who places so much stock in the dreaming state.

"I tell you frankly," said Hridoy Chaitanya to his disciples, "Shri Jiva is trying to deceive us with this letter. I will personally go to Vrindavan with an assembly of devotees and reveal this charade for what it is! Only then will my heart know peace." Hridoy Chai-

tanya formed a large party of twelve *gopals*, sixty-four *mohants*, and an assortment of his own disciples; and they made their way to Vraja. Soon after starting their trek, they passed the house of Gauridas Pandit, and some of his leading followers came as well to mediate on behalf of both parties.

Arrival in Vraja

When Hridoy Chaitanya's large group arrived in Vrindavan, they were shown elaborate hospitality. Shri Jiva himself offered all respect to the devotees, as they did to him, and he began praising them with the choicest poetry. Soon Shyamananda arrived as well, and upon seeing his *guru*, Hridoy Chaitanya, he fell flat like a stick, offering full obeisances.

Hridoy Chaitanya immediately challenged Shyamananda: "To whom is Dukhi Krishnadas bowing?" he said in a sarcastic mood.

"Prabhu," Shyamananda said with surprise, "I am bowing to your feet, as well as to the feet of all of these saintly personalities."

Hridoy Chaitanya did not accept his response: "Your relationship with me is understood by your name and *tilok*, not by a superficial display of humility."

Shyamananda assured him that the name and *tilok* were seen as his grace and nothing more. Otherwise he would not have accepted them. But Hridoy Chaitanya was adamant: "Listen to me," he said, "dreams cannot be accepted as fact. You have acted without my approval and, in conjunction with Jiva Goswami, you have sent me a misleading letter about a bogus dream. This is inexcusable!"

“But I have not tried to deceive you,” Shyamananda protested, “and everything in that letter is true.” Hridoy Chaitanya began to lose his patience: “I shall wash off your *tilok* with my own hand. In addition, I will paint the name 'Shyamananda' on your chest. That too will rub off. This name and *tilok* are as temporary and illusory as the person who has concocted them! If it comes off, you will be known as a liar and I will be disgraced. For this, I will take my own life. If the *tilok* mystically reappears on your body, then I will accept your so-called spiritual dream as a reality. Do you accept this challenge?”

Bowing to the feet of his *guru*, Shyamananda replied that he would do whatever the assembled devotees requested of him. But he insisted that he would, in the end, prove that his name and *tilok* were authorized and authentic. Hridoy Chaitanya then gathered all of the *mohants*—hundreds of them—in the Rasasthali of Vrindavan. The assembly of great souls took their seats and called Shyamananda before them. Falling prostrate at their feet, Shyamananda offered prayers to his superiors and well-wishers.

“Who is your *guru*,” the *mohants* asked, “and who has given you this name and *tilok*?”

“Hridoy Chaitanya is my master,” Shyamananda declared, “and I am his servant.” However, before Shyamananda could elaborate, the *mohants* told him that dreams are always false, just as Hridoy Chaitanya had stated, and that he should admit the whole truth, especially if he had accepted another *guru*. The assembled devotees had the power to absolve him of this sin, they said, but if he persisted in telling this lie, then nothing could save him. The *mohants* told

Shyamananda to carefully consider all of this before offering his final response.

Shyamananda respected the words of the *mohants*, and so he asked for a little time to compose himself before he answered their questions. They granted him a few moments and just then while looking at the form of Hridoy Chaitanya, Shyamananda fell into a deep meditative trance.

Deep Meditation

In his perfected body, he started to recite the *mantra* given to him by Lalita and found himself in the spiritual dimension just outside Radhika's home. In his eternal maidservant form of Kanaka Manjari, he sat at Her doorstep sobbing tears of love mixed with tears that reflected his current *guru* dilemma.

Radhika's other maidservants soon happened along and asked why Shyamananda (Kanaka) was crying so pathetically. Shyamananda explained, "I am an inhabitant of Vrindavan named Kanaka Manjari. I am one of Lalita-sundari's assistants. Some time ago, I spent an entire day and night with her, and when I returned home, my husband rushed toward me in an unseemly and aggressive way. I ran away in fear. Please tell Lalita to save my life by coming before me and telling me exactly what to do."

The maidservants immediately went to Lalita and conveyed the story as revealed by Shyamananda. "Bring her here," Lalita ordered, "I am preparing betel leaves for Shri Radha, and I cannot depart in the middle of my service." Taking Lalita's order as their life and soul, the *gopis* ran to the place where they had

seen Kanaka Manjari in a fit of tears, and they brought her to Radharani's inner chambers.

Kanaka Manjari was spellbound as she saw Radharani seated on a beautiful yet simple cot, chewing betel leaves one by one as Lalita prepared them. Shri Rupa Manjari was massaging Radhika's legs, while Champakalata Thakurani waved a *chamara* whisk to cool Her from the midday sun.

Awestruck by this sublime apparition, Kanaka Manjari began to float in the ocean of ecstatic love, forgetting all previous problems. With a profound sense of boundless joy, she fell straight to the ground, whereupon Radhika ordered the *gopis* to pick her up. Lalita then hurried in Kanaka's direction to affectionately embrace her, feeling for all she had been through. Radha also approached Kanaka and blessed her by placing Her divine feet on her head. Kanaka fell unconscious for a few moments and then at the feet of Rupa Manjari she came to. Looking up at Radharani, she proceeded to tell her story.

Shri Radha's Mercy

“O Supreme Goddess,” Kanaka said, “listen to my story and you will hear the most unfortunate plight in the world. In the external realm, I am the servant of Hriday Chaitanya, and I am his dedicated servant. I came to Vraja on his order and I serve Jiva Goswami in the same way. Shri Jiva has helped me immensely, particularly in regard to my meditation on Your Grace and my understanding of Your Divine Pastimes. He has put me under the care of Rupa Manjari, who is Lalita's very own servant. And, it is well known that Lalita Thakurani is Your intimate associate. In this way,

I have come to relish the indirect service of Your lotus feet by cleansing the *kunja*.”

After relating the entire story, including the loss of the ankle bracelet; its return; the naming of Shyamananda; the *tilok*; Lalita swearing her to secrecy; Jiva Goswami's version of “the dream”; and Hridoy Chaitanya's strong reaction to the entire episode, Kanaka Manjari fell at Radhika's feet, asking for a merciful resolution to this unfortunate mishap. In response, Radhika called for Subal, Krishna's best friend, and She told him about Kanaka Manjari's predicament. By Her causeless mercy, She ordered Subal to pacify all parties to Kanaka's satisfaction.

Subal proceeded to tell his own story, explaining that he had descended in Mahaprabhu's *lila* as Gauridas Pandit, and that in this form he was the *guru* of Kanaka's *guru*, Hridoy Chaitanya. He assured Kanaka that as her grand-spiritual master he would verify the name and *tilok* on Shyamananda's behalf. He told Kanaka that she should thus grieve no more and, saying this, he duplicated the *tilok* mark on Kanaka's head and wrote the name “Shyamananda” across her chest.

After doing this, he insisted that when she would reappear in the form of Shyamananda (in the assembly of *mohants*), and when Hridoy Chaitanya would attempt to rub the name and the *tilok* from her body, it is she who will emerge victorious. “Just remember me at that time,” said Subal, “and the name and *tilok* will not rub off. Tell them that this has all happened by the grace of Gauridas Pandit.” Kanaka tried to express her deep gratefulness but was at a loss for words.

Offering full respects to Radha, Subal, and all the assembled *gopis*, Kanaka drank deep the beauty of Radhika's face. Unable to stop the tears that flowed from her eyes, she made one last request of Shri Radha: "Please help me to dedicate my life—body and soul—to the service of Your pinkish lotus feet." Shri Radha, the image of love, assured her that she would always have Her blessings. She told Kanaka that after resolving her current dilemma, she should go with Rasik Murari to all corners of Orissa to spread Gaudiya Vaishnava doctrine and practice. She did not understand what Shri Radha had meant by this, nor did she yet know a Rasik Murari. But she was confident that a day would come when all of this would be clear. With this order on her head, she began her inward journey to the external world, to the *mohants* who were waiting in Vrindavan.

Divine Justice

While in her form as Kanaka Manjari she relished Radhika's presence, as Shyamananda she sat lifelessly still. The *mohants* gazed upon Shyamananda's outward appearance, deep in meditation, and they wondered about the identity of the great soul in their midst. Only Shri Jiva could understand what had happened on the spiritual platform, and to celebrate he encouraged the devotees to engage in a massive *kirtan*. As they all began to sing the names of the Lord, Shyamananda's meditation broke, and he returned to the world of the *mohants*. Looking at all of the great souls he began shouting: "Hriday Chaitanya! Hriday Chaitanya!" The entire assembly of Vaishnavas now turned

to him, eager to hear his final statement about his new name and *tilok*.

“Listen to what I say,” Shyamananda began. “By my *guru*'s grace, Gauridas Pandit has appeared to me in a dream and has assured me of the sanctity of my name and *tilok*. Please, mark my body with that distinct Shyamanandi *tilok* and write the name 'Shyamananda' across my chest. After that, use as much soap and water as you like—it will not come off.”

The *mohants* did just that, and Hridoy Chaitanya himself came and scrubbed his disciple's face and chest. At first, the *tilok* and name began to wash off, but then, as Shyamananda called out to Gauridas Pandit and Lalita-sundari, the *tilok* and name reappeared with even greater intensity. All the residents of Vrindavan who witnessed this event were astonished. Hridoy Chaitanya happily admitted defeat, proud of his uncommon disciple's mystical victory.

The devotees began shouting the glories of Shyamananda Pandit, but Shyamananda could only clasp his *guru*'s feet with all humility. After the devotees enjoyed a huge feast, Jiva Goswami advised Shyamananda to always stay in Hridoy Chaitanya's association, because through this entire misunderstanding Shyamananda had come closer and closer to Radhika's service. This, he said, was the divine arrangement of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Radha-bhava

With the controversial aspects of Shyamananda's life now settled, he and his *guru*, Hridoy Chaitanya, as well as the many Vaishnava *mohants* who happened to be in Vrindavan for the debate, were now able to tour

the forests and *kunjās* of Vraja. In Sanketa, they came upon a troupe of actors that were performing the *rasa-līla*. With spiritual vision, the *mohants* saw the actual *līla* take place, and Shyamananda, especially, started to cry like a madman, fully experiencing the ecstasy of love in separation.

Observing the spiritual emotions of his disciple, Hridoy Chaitanya thought: "My Shyamananda is certainly a maidservant of Radha. This mood is slightly different than my own. As a disciple of Gauridas Pandit, my relationship centers around *sakhya-bhava*, or transcendental friendship with the Lord. Shyamananda has given up the mood of a friend and has adopted this *gopi-bhava*."

With these thoughts, Hridoy Chaitanya left the performance of *rasa-līla* with a sad heart. Shyamananda, however, remained there, infuriating Hridoy Chaitanya to an even greater extent. After the performance at the *rasasthali*, the devotees bedded down for the night, and the next morning when Shyamananda came to offer his respectful obeisances to his *guru*, the following words pierced his heart like a poisonous dart: "You have discarded your emotions for Krishna," said Hridoy Chaitanya, "and, instead, you are immersed in *gopi-bhava*. This is not my mood, so there is no reason for you to associate with me any longer."

Shyamananda was shocked. He had hoped that all disagreement between him and his *guru* had come to an end. He said: "Gauridas Pandit ultimately worships in *Radha-bhava*, and Your Grace does as well. It is true that his emphasis is *sakhya-bhava*, the relationship of friendship to Krishna, and that you exemplify this mood to perfection; but you and he are

always ultimately thinking about how to assist the *gopis* in their service to Shri Shri Radha and Krishna. All moods are virtuous only because they lead to this end. Isn't it true?

"In the form of Subal," Shyamananda continued, "our revered Gauridas Pandit is always absorbed in Radha-*bhava* in the *kunja*. I have seen it. Being influenced by this, a similar mood has arisen in me, his disciple's disciple. So what is the harm?"

Hridoy Chaitanya could not accept this idea. "Gauridas Pandit never explained things in this way," he said. "If you claim to be in my line, you must behave in the mood of Krishna's friend. Do not entertain any other idea or you must go elsewhere to pursue your spiritual life."

"I cannot comply with your wishes," Shyamananda sadly replied. "One cannot change his passion for God—it is an affair of the heart. It is a question of one's eternal relationship. Surely there is a way to reconcile this difference of opinion. You are my lord and master, and if you abandon me, I will give up this worthless life. But please do not ask me to do something that I am unable to do."

At this point Hridoy Chaitanya was so enraged that he picked up a branch and started to beat Shyamananda, striking him repeatedly on his hands, legs, and back. Severely bruised, Shyamananda fell to the ground. Seeing his pitiable condition, the *mohants* angrily chastised Hridoy Chaitanya: "Oh, Goswami! What are you doing? Do not beat him like this. Your emotions are carrying you away. You will kill him. Is this what you really want? Besides, he is correct—*gopi-bhava* is the culmination of all *rasik* experience. The

madhurya aspect of relationship contains all of the others—so *sakhya-bhava* is not being neglected.”

Shyamananda did not approve of their intrusion: “Do not worry for me,” he said. “Actually, this beating means that my spiritual master is finally taking notice of me. He is concerned about me and cannot tolerate anyone obscuring his distinct relationship with Krishna. He is so absorbed in his particular *bhava* that he thinks that I am doing myself an injustice by immersing myself in Radha-*bhava*. His intentions are entirely spiritual, and Jiva Goswami has even told me that I should take my interactions with Hriday Chaitanya as the special mercy of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.”

Turning to his *guru* in all humility, Shyamananda concluded: “If I have offended you in any way, I am deeply sorry. Please forgive me. I will do my best to adhere to your way of thinking.” The *mohants* were impressed with Shyamananda's humble presentation and defended him before Hriday Chaitanya. Sorely displeased, however, the *guru* did not consider Shyamananda's heartfelt plea. He saw it as nothing more than insincere rhetoric and consequently resolved to end his relationship with him. But because it was late in the evening, he decided to think more deeply about it and come to a definite conclusion by morning, possibly giving Shyamananda another chance. As he lay in bed, however, he could not find it in his heart to forgive his disciple and planned to dismiss him the very next day.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

That night, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu appeared to Hriday Chaitanya in a dream. After the Goswami offered

his respectful obeisances, he noticed that Mahaprabhu's white chaddar was covered with blood. Severe wounds permeated His hands, legs, and back. Hridoy Chaitanya specifically observed that the chaddar was so drenched in blood that it stuck tightly to the Lord's back. "What has happened?" the Goswami asked his Lord. "What are these horrible marks on Your Divine body?"

Mahaprabhu's reply went right to Hridoy Chaitanya's heart: "It is only by your mercy," said Mahaprabhu, "that My body and clothes are soaked with blood. You have beaten Shyamananda, who is like My other self. He is very dear to me and so I have taken this punishment on his behalf."¹⁵

Hridoy Chaitanya threw himself at Mahaprabhu's feet, begging forgiveness: "I had no idea that Shyamananda was such a special soul. Please forgive me! I can see everything clearly now. If I do not receive Your mercy and forgiveness, I will take my own useless life. This would be no great loss. But I want to remain in this world, O Lord, just so I can atone in the presence of our dear Shyamananda, from whom I have learned so much."

¹⁵ The only other soul to be protected in this way was Haridas Thakur, Mahaprabhu's intimate associate. Actually, it should be mentioned that Hridoy Chaitanya is not a mundane personality but is instead an eternal associate of the Lord. The seemingly ordinary if also harsh way in which he interacts with Shyamananda is part of the Lord's divine pastime. By closely studying these complex devotional relationships, the truths of Vaishnava philosophy can unfold for the sensitive reader.

Mahaprabhu forgave Hridoy Chaitanya and ordered him to expiate his sins by holding twelve Vaishnava festivals. Hridoy Chaitanya enthusiastically agreed and thanked Him profusely, falling at His feet with abundant humility. At that time, the Lord placed His lotus feet on Hridoy Chaitanya's head, the much-sought-after dust bringing him to spiritual perfection. At last Hridoy Chaitanya had come to his senses, even to the point of realizing that dreams which include the Lord or the pure devotee, when they do not contradict scripture, can be seen as tangible reality. He spent the rest of the night absorbed in these thoughts, reflecting on his own adamant tendency when he had heard about Shyamananda's dream. He was embarrassed but was a changed man.

The next day, he told all of the *mohants* what had happened, and he turned to Shyamananda, saying, "From this day forward, you are not my servant, but you are my life and soul." Because of Shyamananda's humility and proper attitude toward his *guru*, he could not tolerate these words. He fell at Hridoy Chaitanya's feet, declaring, "I am *eternally* your servant, and nothing can change that."

In good faith, Hridoy Chaitanya instructed Shyamananda to continue his studies with Jiva Goswami in Vrindavan, while he himself would eventually return to Bengal. Shyamananda accepted the instruction but clearly expressed his disinclination to once again be separated from his *guru*. Nonetheless, he complied, and Hridoy Chaitanya made preparations to leave Krishna's holy land. Before he was actually able to begin his journey, however, all of the devotees helped him make arrangements for his twelve festivals, which were carried out in a gorgeous way. Shyam-

ananda himself begged alms for the expenses of the festivals, encouraging the people of Vraja to give whatever little they could. Everyone contributed, and it was a huge success. After some time the Gaudiya *mohants* returned to Bengal.

Oriyan Commandos

After Shyamananda spent many months with Shrinivas and Narottam (studying under Jiva Goswami), the three young saints were sent to Bengal and Orissa to distribute the Goswami's *Bhakti-rasa-shastras*. They were first given special titles, as mentioned previously, and Shyamananda was officially given his name by Jiva Goswami. In fact, the controversy of Shyamananda's name was well known to the common people of Vraja, as was the story behind the original giving of this name by Lalita-sundari. But it wasn't until after the official title-giving ceremony that the name "Shyamananda" came to be accepted by all devotees of the Gaudiya *sampradaya* and it was also after this ceremony that Shyamananda was recognized by this name when he came to the eastern provinces of India.

Although enthusiastic about the prospect of being a missionary to Bengal and Orissa, Shyamananda was still reluctant to leave Vraja with the Goswami literature. After all, he had been asked by his *guru* to stay with Jiva Goswami, and this is exactly what he intended to do. But Shri Jiva reminded him that Radhika Herself had asked him to go to Orissa and to spread the transcendental message with Rasik Murari. Remembrance of this fact prompted Shyamananda to depart with Shrinivas, Narottam, and the entire caravan of books.

When the books were eventually stolen in Vana Vishnupur and Shyamananda was sent, first with Narottam to Kheturi and then alone to Orissa, he became one of the most important preachers in the history of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. He evangelized much of Orissa and its bordering cities and villages. This was no easy task. According to *Anuraga-balli*, when Shyamananda arrived, the Oriyan empire was at a low ebb, especially in terms of spiritual morale.

Although it was Mahaprabhu Himself who had initially turned Orissa and particularly Puri into a Vaishnava metropolis, after His passing much of the Vaishnava community centered around the development of Vrindavan, obscuring what little preaching zeal was left among the devotees of the east. To be sure, there were a few important "upholders of the faith" among the second generation Gaudiya Vaishnavas, such as Gopal Guru Goswami, Dhyanachandra and, according to some, the *pancha sakha* devotees, Ananta, Achyuta, Yashovanta, Balaram, and Jagannath.¹⁶ And, in Bengal, Jahnava Ma and Birabhadra were quite prominent. But not until the arrival of Shyamananda did Orissa become reestablished as the important holy place it had been in the time of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Dr. Sambidananda Das explains the period of Oriyan history that precipitated the arrival of Shyam-

¹⁶ While several of these devotees may in fact be first generation disciples, they are generally counted amongst the leaders of the second generation, perhaps because they were young during Mahaprabhu's manifest pastimes and also because they influenced second and third generation Oriyan devotees with their preaching zeal.

ananda, a period that resulted in a decline in Vaishnava practice:

The overthrow of Emperor Prataparudra's dynasty was no doubt a great hindrance to the further development of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement in the province, with the frequent change of dynasties, anarchy, and the subsequent succession of Pathan rule accompanied by its inevitable series of wars with the Moghuls. The people were severely subjected to plunder and torture both by its alien rulers and their enemies. The country as a whole was demoralized as a consequence of various adverse circumstances. There is no doubt that Gopal Guru Goswami and his disciples continued the Vaishnava movement for some time but it soon came to an end. Gopal Guru's disciples do not seem to have been as vigorous as an *acharya* ought to have been. Moreover, their activities were confined to Puri and its immediate surroundings, northern Orissa being free from their influence.¹⁷

The great decline in the Vaishnava practice of Orissa can perhaps be attributed to the desecration of Jagannath's temple in Puri. Sambidananda elaborates:

The temple of Jagannath was first desecrated by Kala Pahara and next by Pathan iconoclasts. The stronghold of Hinduism at Puri suffered

¹⁷ Sambidananda Das, op. cit., p. 851.

brutal persecution at the hands of the fanatical Pathans who spared no pains to humiliate Vaishnavism in all possible ways. Orissa was then very badly in need both of great acharyas of extraordinary genius and also of a warrior class to deliver the Vaishnava religion. The former was wanted to inspire the people with religious vitality and bring back the moral life and courage of its population and the latter to secure and inviolate the Jagannath temple, the glory of Vaishnavism in eastern India....At this critical moment, Gaudiya Vaishnavism of western India sent its two worthy defenders in the persons of Shyamananda and Raj Man Singh, to restore the lost glory of Puri, the first Gaudiya headquarters established by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Himself.¹⁸

Sambidananda rightly asserts the need, at that time, for both spiritual and material commandos, if you will, who could reestablish the Gaudiya tradition in Orissa after it was decimated by the Muslim invasion. Raj Man Singh was the reputed disciple of Rupa-Sanatan, or, according to others, he was the disciple of Raghunath Bhatta Goswami. Moreover, since he was one of Akbar's chief generals and, simultaneously, had an attachment to the Vaishnava *mohants* under whom he studied, he would be the perfect political commando to accomplish the task of restoring Vaishnavism in Orissa.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Raj Man Singh

Just as Man Singh was made governor of Bengal and worked hard with great success to reestablish the sanctity of Puri and all of Orissa as Vaishnava holy land, Jiva Goswami sent Shyamananda to revitalize the spiritual consciousness of the people. In effect, the two Vaishnava commandos, working separately, achieved significant harmony for the Gaudiya tradition in eastern India, accomplishing monumental tasks.

After the death of the great Pathan king of Orissa, Kutlu Khan (c. 1589-90), his sons and chief minister were compelled to sign a treaty with Raj Man Singh by which the Pathans agreed to relinquish the Jagannath temple to local Vaishnava leaders. This occurred, but only for a few years. With the death of the chief minister, the sons of the Pathan king again seized the temple. This demonstrative and unfair act infuriated Man Singh to such a degree that, although he was normally a peaceful man, he now considered physical expulsion. As time passed, he found no other alternative and obtained permission from Akbar to forcefully banish the Pathans of Orissa.

A vigorous war ensued on the banks of the Suvarharekha. Man Singh led the armies himself and would not rest until all Muslim soldiers were driven far away from the home of Jagannath. The Raj forced the Pathans to flee and take refuge in nearby Cuttack, which he surrounded with his army on all sides. Placing all affairs in the hands of his assistants and deputies, he hastened to Puri to visit the temple and other holy places associated with the memory of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He was greeted by Puri's afflicted citizens as a great saviour and eventually suc-

ceeded in returning the temple and much of Orissa to Hindu rule.¹⁹

Shyamananda In Orissa

If Man Singh liberated Orissa politically, allowing the citizens the necessary religious freedom to practice Vaishnavism, Shyamananda brought spiritual substance and inspiration to the people. When Jiva Goswami's prize student first returned to Orissa from Vrindavan, he found that his parents had died. This was a tremendous blow. Still, he remained undaunted and started a preaching center at his own house in Dharendra, where his parents had lived.

Tolerating abuse, skepticism, and religious intolerance, Shyamananda humbly persisted to establish Vaishnavism as the preeminent path to Ultimate Truth. Everyone gradually recognized his excellent scholarship, courteous manner, and exemplary Vaishnava behavior. They came to see him as a great mystic, too, because his prolonged trances had become famous throughout the eastern provinces. He was Hriday Chaitanya's famous disciple, who also studied under Jiva Goswami. His reputation spread like fire, and he accepted many disciples from the cities and opulent kingdoms and no less from the villages and tribes. Through reliable messengers, Shyamananda

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 852. For further details regarding the political situation in Orissa just prior to Shyamananda's presence, see Prabhat Mukherjee, *History of the Chaitanya Faith in Orissa* (New Delhi, Manohar Pub., 1979). Also see *The History of Medieval Vaishnavism in Orissa* (New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1981), by the same author.

kept close contact with Hridoy Chaitanya, Shrinivas, Narottam, and others; and with Hridoy Chaitanya's blessings, Shyamananda soon opened a second temple at Narasinghapur. Many hard working devotees helped him with this project by engaging in missionary activity, temple construction, worship, and fund-raising. This secured for him an even larger following in northern Orissa. After developing that area for several years he was able to return to Vrindavan, for the many devotees who thronged to his side were capable men and women who were able to maintain the mission by themselves.

A Visit to Vraja

When Shyamananda arrived in Vrindavan this second time, he was well-known as the distinguished Vaishnava who had evangelized Orissa. Even Jiva Goswami expressed surprise at how much Shyamananda had accomplished during his short stay in the eastern provinces. Accordingly, Jiva gave him a tremendous reception, and all of Vrindavan's *mohants* enthusiastically celebrated Shyamananda's success.

But being in Vrindavan was not a mere pilgrimage or vacation for him. While there, he established yet another monastery, today known as "Shyamasundar-*kunj*." In the early nineteenth century it was cared for by the famous Gaudiya *mohant*, Baladev Vidyabhushana and was made so famous that pilgrims still flock to see his Shyamasundar Deity.²⁰

²⁰ Alan W. Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* (The Netherlands, Egbert Forsten, 1987), p. 407.

Sher Khan

Shyamananda next left Vraja to go to Kalna to see Hriday Chaitanya. From there he traveled further east to attend Narottam's festival at Kheturi. Then, after months of pilgrimage, he arrived in Orissa. Once there, it is said, he married three times, but little information exists about his wives or the circumstances of his marriages.²¹ However, his preaching mission blossomed at this time, and all of Orissa was saturated with divine love.

Prema-vilas relates an interesting episode that occurred just after Shyamananda's return to Orissa. During this period, he began the *nagara-sankirtan* festival, leading his followers through the streets in ecstatic chanting and dancing. One day, Sher Khan, a militant Pathan and an important representative of the Muslim court, came upon Shyamananda's *kirtan* party. The very sight of "blissful Hindus" infuriated him beyond words. He broke into the middle of the party and stopped it, threatening the devotees and insisting that they never do it again.

Not heeding the words of the notorious Pathan, Shyamananda returned to the streets the very next day with an even larger *kirtan* party. Naturally, this vexed the Muslim soldier, who gathered his colleagues and again disrupted the *kirtan*. This time, however, the Muslim soldiers were violent, breaking

²¹ *Rasik-mangal* (*Dakshin* 11, pp. 87-9) mentions the three marriages, merely stating that they took place in Midnapur after his return from Vrindavan.

instruments such as the *mridangas*, and throwing the *kartals* into the river. At that point, Shyamananda began to shout in a high-pitched mystical way, calling upon the names of Radha and Krishna. When Sher Khan and his cohorts heard this sound, they began to cough blood and found that their beards and mustaches had caught fire. Shocked at Shyamananda's potency, everyone left that place in a stupor.

The next day, Shyamananda again led his *sankirtan* party, and when Sher Khan saw the devotees approaching, he fell at Shyamananda's feet, begging for mercy. He said to Shyamananda: "My Lord, in addition to coughing blood and the scorching of my facial hairs, I have been having a terrible nightmare. The Supreme Lord, Allah, appears to me and, slapping my face, repeatedly says that He is the same as your Ahlada Swarup, or the form of God that is revealed to the Vaishnavas. He shows me His golden complexion and says that, in His most confidential feature, He is none other than Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He further says that you are His favorite devotee and that I should be initiated into the chanting of the holy name by you alone." Shyamananda was moved by the Pathan's conversion and duly initiated him into the Gaudiya tradition. Like King Birhambir of Shrinivas fame, Sher Khan received the name "Chaitanya Das" after his initiation.

Rasik Murari

Shyamananda next travelled to Rayani, or Rohini, a small village situated on the bank of the Suvarharekha, where, it may be remembered, Raj Man Singh had paved the way for Shyamananda's preaching. This is

where Shyamananda would meet Rasik Murari, his most important disciple. Shri Radhika had prophesied that Shyamananda would spread Vaishnava *dharma* throughout Orissa with Rasik and in this way make an important contribution to the *sankirtan* mission.²²

Raj Achyuta was the king of Rayani, and the queen was Bhavani. They were great devotees of the Lord, having come under the sway of Vaishnavism by Dayal Dasi, a pious custodian of the local Radha-Krishna temple. She had for many years given the king and queen spiritual guidance and had even initiated their little son, Rasik Murari, into the chanting of the holy name.

Shyamananda came to Rayani just as the four-month-period of austerity (*chaturmasya*) was about to begin. Since he was a famous Vaishnava, Raj Achyuta asked him to stay for the entire four months. He obeyed the king and in that relatively short period succeeded in converting the entire province. Achyuta's son, Rasik, was particularly attracted to Shyamananda's purity and mastery of the scriptures. Both Rasik and

²² There is some confusion about the identity of Rasik Murari. In *Prema-vilas*, Rasik and Murari are clearly mentioned as Raj Achyuta's two sons. *Prema-vilas* even refers to Rasik's wife as Malati, while Murari's wife is referred to as Shachirani. *Rasik-mangal*, however, always refers to Rasik Murari as one particular individual. *Bhakti-ratnakara*, too, seems to indicate that Rasik and Murari are two names for the same person—Shyamananda's primary disciple (see *Bhakti-ratnakara*, ch. 15, text 27 & 28, p. 643). Traditionally, it is this latter version that is accepted by the scholastic community as well as by the orthodoxy of the Gaudiya *sampradaya*.

his wife Ichcha-devi²³ were initiated as Shyamananda's disciples, and they were given the names "Rasikananda" and "Shyama Dasi" respectively. In addition, they were asked to always chant the *maha-mantra*: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.²⁴

Rasik took his *guru* to the house of Damodar, a close friend who was a famous scholar in the village of Chakulia. Damodar's knowledge extended into the realms of Sankhya philosophy, yogic perfections, and Advaita Vedanta. Rasik had hoped that exposure to Shyamananda would convince Damodar of the superiority of Vaishnavism. After several days of debate, Rasik's desire was abundantly fulfilled when Damodar surrendered to Shyamananda, accepting him as his only shelter and saviour.

With Sher Khan ("Chaitanya Das"), Rasikananda, and Damodar to manage the movement, Shyamananda decided to spend some time in Puri, visiting all the places associated with Mahaprabhu's pastimes. He then embarked on a third (and, according to some sources, a fourth) trip to Vrindavan. There he was greeted by Jiva Goswami, his well-wishers and disciples, and he sent word for Rasik to join him. Several months later Rasik arrived in Vraja and became

²³ She was an important Vaishnavi of the period, and there is evidence of this in *Bhakti-ratnakara*. She may well have been the first known Bengali woman to write religious verse in the vernacular. For further information see Swami Madhavananda and R.C. Majumdar, eds., *Great Women of India* (Calcutta, Shri Sarada Math, 1982), p. 375.

²⁴ *Rasik-mangal, Dakshin Vibhag, Lahari 4*, p. 71.

immersed in love of God. After some time he and Shyamananda decided to return to Orissa through the Jharikhanda Forest. They carefully retraced Mahaprabhu's steps and with each precious mile became more deeply entrenched in love of God.

Gopiballabhpur

After returning to Orissa, Shyamananda gave the province of Kashipur to Rasik to personally cultivate in terms of Krishna consciousness. When Shyamananda saw how well Rasik was doing there, he installed a beautiful Deity called "Gopijanaballabha" for his disciple to worship, and he renamed the place "Gopiballabhpur." Eventually, Shyamananda gave the worship of Gopijanaballabha over to Rasik's wife, Shyama Dasi, making her the chief priest of the temple. This became an important center for the Shyamananda branch of Vaishnavism.

For forty years, Rasik preached on behalf of Shyamananda, and often they went on preaching tours together. The standard biographies, such as *Rasik Mangal* and *Shyamananda Prakash*, tell how they put an end to animal sacrifices in non-Vaishnava areas and convinced people throughout Orissa and its bordering villages of the validity of Mahaprabhu's message. The high class brahmin disciple and his *Sadgopa guru* were an unstoppable pair, converting both Hindu and Islamic Zamindars [wealthy landowners] to the Vaishnava faith.

Shyamananda converted the famous landlord of Ghatshila, Bhimadhana Bhuiyan, the landlord of Govindapur, Uddanda Roy, Rajyadhar Roy, and many others; Rasik was responsible for the Vaishnavism of

Baidyanath Bhanja, ruler of Mayurbhanj, the king of Patashpur, Harinarayana of Panchet, Chandrabhanu, king of Mayna. Thousands of others followed them as they followed Rasik and Shyamananda. Gopiballabhpur became the religious center for all of these people.

Hridoy Chaitanya heard of Shyamananda's prodigious achievements and came to Orissa to see it with his own eyes. When he arrived in Dharendra, he went straight to Shyamananda's house. Shyamananda, of course, was overwhelmed with joy, falling at his *guru's* feet with humility and ecstasy. He immediately sent for his two best disciples, Rasik and Damodar, and introduced them to Hridoy Chaitanya. The four pure Vaishnavas spent many days discussing the pastimes of Krishna and various strategies for making this knowledge more widely known. Hridoy Chaitanya then returned to Kalna, happy and confident that the movement was in capable hands.

Reneti Kirtan

A significant feature of Shyamananda's movement at this time was the development of what came to be called the Reneti style of *kirtan*. This unique blend of classical *kirtan* music and Shyamananda's own brand of devotion originated in the Ranihatī Pargana (the Midnapur District of present-day Orissa), and it is therefore sometimes referred to as Ranihatī *kirtan*.

In its melodies and structure it is comparable to the traditional Hindustani Thumri pieces, well-known throughout India. But Reneti *kirtan* remained provincial and gradually became obscured by the famous Manohar-shoy style, popularized by the followers of Shrinivas Acharya. It is claimed, however,

that Shyamananda's Reneti *kirtan* was, for a time, revitalized in the nineteenth century by an enthusiastic *kirtaniya* named Beni Das.²⁵

Shyamanandi Literature

Shyamananda wrote few books, as he spent most of his time in active preaching and pilgrimage. In addition to these activities and the *kirtan* style that was popularized by his followers, however, he did compose several works. Among these, scholars usually include both *Govinda Mangal*, a short book about the Lord of his life and *Adwaita Tattva*, which explains Madhavendra Puri's teachings to Adwaita Acharya. But it is questionable whether Shyamananda is actually the author of either one.²⁶

Generally, it is accepted that Shyamananda composed a work called *Vrindavan Parikrama*, which is an account of the most important holy places in Vraja. He is also said to have written the *Upasana Sara Samgraha*, which is now a rare manuscript about the science of devotional service according to outlines given by Jiva Goswami. There are poems attributed to Shyamananda, too, the most famous of which are found in an anthology called *Aprakashita Pada-*

²⁵ Kedarnath Dutt, *Sajjana-tosani* (1894), Vol. 6, p. 25.

²⁶ There is evidence that these books are written by a Vaishnava named Shyamdas, a poet of Hariharapur in the Medinipur district of Bengal. He flourished soon after Shyamananda.

ratnavali. In this work he describes one of Radhika's many secret meetings with Krishna.

Rasik's Sanskrit epic on the life of his teacher, *Shyamananda Shatakam*, is also an important work for Shyamanandi Vaishnavas. Radhananda, who was Rasik's eldest son and inheritor of the Gopiballabha Math, wrote a book called the *Radha-Govinda-Kavya*, which is a magnificent devotional poem modelled after Jayadev's *Gita Govinda*. Nayananda was Radhananda's eldest son and was directly initiated by Rasik. He was an active preacher, but there is no literary activity to his credit.

Shyamananda Departs

One day, Shyamananda received a solemn report that Hriday Chaitanya had passed away in Kalna. At that moment, all of his achievements felt hollow, like empty shells, for he had pursued them merely to please his *guru*. He could not tolerate the sad news, and he called for his disciples to comfort him and to discuss the glories of Hriday Chaitanya. They held a festival in his honor and, gradually, Shyamananda was able to go on with his preaching activities.

Soon after, however, word arrived that Shyamananda's dear disciple, Damodar, had also departed this world. It is said that Shyamananda never recovered from this shock, and from that day he was given to severe illness. In his illness he stayed at the royal home of Uddanda Roy in Narasinghapur. All medical aid was administered, but to no avail. Still, he received many visitors and until his last breath he vigorously preached the conclusions of Vaishnava philosophy.

He openly appointed Rasik his spiritual successor and asked all of his followers to submit to Rasik's demands. "Those who disobey Rasik," he said, "shall be regarded as hostile to me." He asked Rasik to watch after his wives as well, and to increase the preaching mission. Thus, in the middle of the seventeenth century, he passed away. Rasik saw to the construction of a beautiful tomb (*samadhi*) in Narsinghapur (now called Kanpur), which is located in the Mayurbhanj State of Orissa. Rasik conducted an elaborate ceremony in honor of his departed *guru*. Thousands of Vaishnava and Muslim chiefs, zamindars, kings, queens, and others, attended to pay their last tribute to the exalted devotee who was responsible for the conversion of all of Orissa.

Rasik continued to spread the movement after his *guru*'s demise. He also managed to resolve a severe difference of opinion among Shyamananda's widows, a difference that threatened to splinter the movement. Among all of his later achievements, however, he is especially remembered for one: In memory of Mahaprabhu's mandate that Hriday Chaitanya hold twelve festivals, Rasik established twelve important days of celebration for all followers of Shyamananda Vaishnavism, and these festivals are still observed to this day: (1) the anniversary of the passing of Shyamananda; (2) Hera Panchami; (3) Ratha-yatra; (4) The nativity of Mahaprabhu; (5) the anniversary of the passing of Gauridas Pandit; (6) the nativity of Shri Krishna; (7) the nativity of Shri Radha; (8) The Utthana Ekadashi ceremony; (9) Rasotsava; (10) Dol Yatra; (11) Kojagari Lakshmi-utsav; and (12) the anniversary of the passing of Hriday Chaitanya.

Conclusion

As Shrinivas Acharya was the embodiment of Mahaprabhu's ecstasy and Narottam Thakur was that of Nityananda Prabhu, Shyamananda Pandit is said to have been the embodiment of Adwaita Acharya's ecstasy. Their pastimes are inconceivable and the benefit that one derives from merely hearing them is unimaginable.

Eternally liberated souls such as these come into our world for a specific purpose, and their pastimes serve to purify and enlighten all who will listen. As souls who transcend imperfection, they are naturally beyond any need for "practice" or "*sadhana*" in any devotional discipline. Still, they manifest the *lila* of gradually attaining perfection to set an example for the many generations of Vaishnavas who follow them.

I have attempted to summarize the limitless activities of entities who are clearly beyond my reckoning. Indeed, even the pastimes that are known to us, as recorded in this book, are retold in various ways and have layers of meaning that are impossible for the conditioned soul to decipher. We hope, therefore, that this little drop in the ocean of nectar has enabled our readers to perceive just how vast the ocean is. If this work has encouraged even one person to swim in the nectarian waves of Vaishnava nectar, it will have been worth the time and effort that went into producing it. Jai Radhe!

Appendix — The Songs of Narottam Das Thakur

W

hat follows are excerpts from the poetry and songs of Narottam Das Thakur as translated and/or commented upon by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the late founder-*acharya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. These extracts should give the reader an overview of Shrinivas, Narottam, and Shyamananda's unique spiritual perspective.

Although we have avoided scholarly diacritical marks throughout the bulk of this book, we now supply a Bengali pronunciation chart so the reader can see Narottam's work in its original language and, for those who know Bengali, taste its sweetness.

Guide to Bengali Pronunciation

The vowels should be pronounced as follows:

- | | |
|---|--|
| a — like the au in law; the u in pun; sometimes like the o in go; final a is usually silent | ai — like the oi in boil |
| ā — like the a in far | o — like the o in go |
| i — like the ee in meet | au — like the British pronunciation of ou in house |
| ī — like the ee in meet | ñ (<i>anusvāra</i>) — like the n in song |
| u — like the u in rule | ḥ (<i>visarga</i>) — a final h sound: aḥ is pronounced like aha ; iḥ like ihi |
| ū — like the u in rule | ṅ (<i>candra-bindu</i>) — a nasal n sound like the n in the French word <i>bon</i> |
| ṛ — like the ri in rim | |
| ṛī — like the ree in reed | |
| e — like the ai in pain; occasionally like the e in bet | |

The consonants are pronounced as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| k — like the k in kite | ch — like the chh in much-haste |
| kh — like the kh in Eckhart | j — like the j in joy |
| g — like the g in got | jh — like the geh in college-hall |
| gh — like the gh in big-house | ñ — like the n in bunch |
| ṅ — like the n in bank | |
| c — like the ch in chalk | |

Cerebrals are pronounced with tongue to roof of mouth; dentals are pronounced with tongue against teeth:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ṭ — like the tin in talk | ḍh — like the dh in good-house |
| ṭh — like the th in hot-house | ṛh — like the r in run (softened form of ḍh) |
| ḍ — like the d in dawn | ṇ — like the n in gnaw |
| ṛ — like the r in run (softened form of ḍ) | |

t — as in talk but with the tongue against the teeth
 th — as in hot-house but with the tongue against the teeth

d — as in dawn but with the tongue against the teeth
 dh — as in good-house but with the tongue against the teeth

n — as in nor but with the tongue against the teeth

Other letters:

p — like the **p** in pine
 ph — like the **ph** in philosopher
 b — like the **b** in bird
 bh — like the **bh** in rub-hard
 m — like the **m** in mother
 y (य) — like the **j** in jaw
 y (य) — like the **y** in year
 r — like the **r** in run
 l — like the **l** in law

v — like the **b** in bird or like the **w** in dwarf
 ś — like the **sh** in shop
 ṣ — like the **sh** in shop
 s — usually like the **sh** in shop; sometimes like the **s** in sun
 h — like the **h** in home
 ~ — indicates nasal pronunciation when placed over a vowel

Iṣṭa-deve Vijñapti
Prayer to One's Beloved Lord
 (from Prārthanā)

(1)

hari hari! bifale janama goñāinu
manuṣya-janama pāiyā, rādhā-kṛṣṇa nā bhajiyā,
jāniyā śuniyā biṣa khāinu

(2)

golokera prema-dhana, hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana,
rati nā janmilo kene tāy
samsāra-biṣānale, dibā-niṣi hiyā jwale,
juṛāite nā koinu upāy

(3)

brajendra-nandana jei, śaci-suta hoilo sei,
balarāma hoilo nitāi
dīna-hīna jata chilo, hari-nāme uddhārilo,
tāra śākṣī jagāi mādhai

(4)

hā hā prabhu nanda-suta, vṛṣabhānu-sutā-juta,
koruṇā karoho ei-bāro
narottama-dāsa koy, nā theliho rāṅgā pāy,
tomā bine ke āche āmāra

(1) O Lord Hari, I have spent my life uselessly. Having obtained a human birth and having not worshiped Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, I have knowingly drunk poison.

(2) The treasure of divine love in Goloka Vṛndāvana has descended as the congregational chanting of Lord Hari's holy names. Why did my attraction for that chanting never come about? Day and night my heart burns from the fire of the poison of worldliness, and I have not taken the means to relieve it.

(3) Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is the son of the King of Vraja, became the son of Śaci (Lord Caitanya), and Balarāma became Nitāi. The holy name delivered all those souls who were lowly and wretched. The two sinners Jagāi and Mādhai are evidence of this.

(4) O Lord Kṛṣṇa, son of Nanda, accompanied by the daughter of Vṛṣabhānu, please be merciful to me now. Narottama dāsa says, "O Lord, please do not push me away from Your reddish lotus feet, for who is my beloved except for You?"

Lālasāmayi Prārthanā

(from Prārthanā)

(1)

'gaurāᅅga' bolite habe pulaka-śarīra
'hari hari' bolite nayane ba'be nīra

(2)

āra kabe nitāi-cānder korunā hoibe
saᅅsāra-bāsanā mora kabe tuccha ha'be

(3)

viśaya chāriyā kabe śuddha ha'be mana
kabe hāma herabo śrī-brᅅndābana

(4)

rūpa-raghunātha-pade hoibe ākuti
kabe hāma bujhabo se jugala-pīriti

(5)

rūpa-raghunātha-pade rahu mora āśa
prārthanā koroye sadā narottama-dāsa

PURPORT

by His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

This song was sung by Narottama dāsa ᅅhākura, a great devotee and *ācārya* in the Gauᅅᅅiya Vaiᅅᅅᅅava-sampradāya, the disciplic succession coming down from Lord Caitanya. Narottama dāsa ᅅhākura has written many songs, which are recognized as authoritative by all Vaiᅅᅅᅅavas. He has sung these songs in simple Bengali language, but the purport—the deep meaning of his songs—is very significant.

In this song he says, 'gaurāᅅga' bolite habe pulaka śarīra. One has attained the perfection of chanting when as soon as he chants the name of Lord Gaurāᅅga, who initiated this *sankīrtana* movement, at once there is shivering in his body. This is not to be imitated, but Narottama dāsa ᅅhākura is asking, "When will that opportune moment come to us when there will be shivering of the body as soon as we chant Lord Gaurāᅅga's name?" And after the shivering—'hari hari' bolite nayane ba'be nīra: "While chanting Hare Kᅅᅅᅅᅅa, there will be tears in the eyes."

Then he says, *āra kabe nitāi-cānder korunā hoibe*. We are all asking about the mercy of Lord Nityānanda. Nityānanda is sup-

posed to be the original spiritual master, so we have to approach Gaurāṅga, Lord Caitanya, through the mercy of Lord Nityānanda. What is the symptom of a person who has achieved the causeless mercy of Lord Nityānanda? Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says that the symptom of one who has actually received the causeless mercy of Lord Nityānanda is that he has no more material desire. *Āra kabe nitāi-cānder koruṅā hoibe saṁsāra-bāsanā mora kabe tuccha ha'be.* *Saṁsāra-bāsanā* means "desire for material enjoyment," and Narottama dāsa wonders when it will become very insignificant. Of course, as long as we have bodies we have to accept so many material things, but not in the spirit of enjoyment, but only to keep body and soul together.

Narottama dāsa says further, *rūpa-raghunātha-pade hoibe ākūti*: "When shall I be very much eager to study the books left by the six Gosvāmīs?" *Ākūti* means "eagerness." Because Rūpa Gosvāmī is the father of devotional service, he has written a book called *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, in which there are nice directions on devotional service. These topics are also dealt with in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and other books, and we have given the summary of those directions in our book *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*. One has to learn of the conjugal loving affairs of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa through the teachings of these six Gosvāmīs. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura directs us not to try to understand the conjugal love of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa by our own endeavor. We should try to understand this *yugala-pīriti*, conjugal love, under the direction of the Gosvāmīs.

As long as the mind is too much absorbed in materialistic thought, one cannot enter into the kingdom of Vṛndāvana. But Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, *viṣaya chāriyā kabe śuddha ha'be mana kabe hāma herabo śrī-brṅdāvana*: "When the mind is completely purified, being freed from material anxieties and desires, then I shall be able to understand Vṛndāvana and the conjugal love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and then my spiritual life will be successful."

Nāma-saṅkīrtana

- (1) *hari haraye namaḥ kṛṣṇa yādavāya namaḥ
yādavāya mādhavāya keśavāya namaḥ*
- (2) *gopāla govinda rāma śrī-madhusūdana
gīridhārī gopinātha madana-mohana*

- (3) *śrī-caitanya-nityānanda śrī-adwaita-sītā
hari guru vaiṣṇava bhāgavata gūā*
- (4) *śrī-rūpa sanātana bhāṭṭa-raghunāth
śrī-jīva gopāla-bhāṭṭa dāsa-raghunāth*
- (5) *ei chay gosāir kori caraṇa vandan
jāhā hoite bighna-nāś abhiṣṭa-pūraṇ*
- (6) *ei chay gosāi jār—mui tār dās
tā-sabāra pada-reṇu mora pañca-grās*
- (7) *tādera caraṇa-sebi-bhakta-sane bās
janame janame hoy ei abhilāṣ*
- (8) *ei chay gosāi jabe braje koilā bās
rādhā-kṛṣṇa-nitya-līlā korilā prakāś*
- (9) *ānande bolo hari bhaja bṛndāban
śrī-guru-vaiṣṇava-pade majāiyā man*
- (10) *śrī-guru-vaiṣṇava-pāda-padma kori āś
nāma-saṅkīrtana kohe narottama dās*

PURPORT

by His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

This song of Srila Narottama dasa Thakura is very famous among devotees in Bengal and Orissa. When Lord Caitanya returned from Gaya, where He was initiated by Sri Isvara Puri, He was completely transformed into a God-intoxicated personality whom His students of grammar had never known before. Instead of teaching ordinary grammar studies, Lord Caitanya explained every sentence in such a way that every Sanskrit word and every letter was understood to indicate Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This form of grammar was later on developed by Srila Jiva Gosvami in a book called *Hari-namamṛta-vyakarana, The Grammar of the Nectar and Name of Sri Hari*. But Lord Caitanya's students thought that their teacher had become mad, and they rubbed His head with Visnu oil, an oil that cools the

brain. Finally they asked Him, "You say that everything means Krsna and we should ultimately always be chanting the names of Krsna. Just how should we do this?" Then Lord Caitanya began to sing the names of Krsna and clap His hands, and He began His *nama-sankirtana movement*. The names He sang are the first two lines of this song, and Narottama dasa Thakura and others have placed these names in the beginning of their writings to immortalize these events in the memory of everyone.

Narottama dasa Thakura chants the names of Lord Caitanya, Nityananda, Sri Advaita and Sita (Lord Advaita's consort). Since Lord Hari, the spiritual master and the *Srimad Bhagavad-gita* are all on the transcendental platform, they are given the same respect. Then Srila Narottama dasa chants the names of the six Gosvamis. "I offer my obeisances at their feet," he sings, "which destroy sufferings accumulated over many long years. I am the servant of these six Gosvamis, and the dust of their lotus feet is my five kinds of foodstuffs. To serve their lotus feet and keep the association of devotees is my only business, birth after birth." When the six Gosvamis were staying at Vrndavana, they revealed the eternal transcendental pastimes of Sri Sri Radha-Krsna. Before Lord Caitanya the exact location of the places of Lord Krsna's pastimes were not known, and therefore Lord Caitanya instructed the Gosvamis to uncover the holy places and construct temples. The temple of Sri Radha-Damodara is situated near the location of the *rasa* dance, and Srila Rupa Gosvami and the other Gosvamis used to gather there and discuss the topics of their literatures, which scientifically explained the super-excellent pastimes of Sri-Sri Radha-Krsna. Narottama dasa Thakura says, "In great ecstasy shout the name of Hari and serve the real transcendental master and devotees." He concludes by saying, "With all hopes in the lotus feet of my *guru* and the holy Vaisnavas, Narottama dasa sings the *sankirtana* of Lord Hari:— Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna-Krsna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare."

Sakhi-vṛnde Vijñapti

Prayer to the Sakhīs
(from Prārthanā)

(1)

*rādhā-kṛṣṇa prāṇa mora jugala-kīśora
jīvane maraṇe gati āro nāhi mora*

(2)

*kāliṅḍira kūle keli-kadambēra vana
ratana-bedira upara bosābo du'jana*

(3)

*śyāma-gaurī-aṅge dibo (cūwā) candanera gandha
cāmara dhulābo kabe heri mukha-candra*

(4)

*gāthiyā mālatīr mālā dibo dōhāra gale
adhare tuliyā dibo karpūra-tāmbūle*

(5)

*lalitā viśākhā-ādi jata sakhi-vṛnda
ājñāya koribo sebā caraṇāravinda*

(6)

*śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya-prabhur dāser anudāsa
sevā abhilāṣa kore narottama-dāsa*

(1) The divine couple, Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, are my life and soul. In life or death I have no other refuge but Them.

(2) In a forest of small *kadamba* trees on the bank of the Yamunā, I will seat the divine couple on a throne made of brilliant jewels.

(3) I will anoint Their dark and fair forms with sandalwood paste scented with *cūyā*, and I will fan Them with a *cāmara* whisk. Oh, when will I behold Their moonlike faces?

(4) After stringing together garlands of *mālatī* flowers I will place them around Their necks, and I will offer *tāmbūla* scented with camphor to Their lotus mouths.

(5) With the permission of all the *sakhīs*, headed by Lalitā and Viśākhā, I will serve the lotus feet of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

(6) Narottama dāsa, the servant of the servant of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Prabhu, longs for this service to the divine couple.

Sapārṣada-bhagavad-viraha- janita-vilāpa

Lamentation Due to Separation from the Lord
and His Associates
(from Prārthanā)

(1)

*je ānilo prema-dhana korunā pracur
heno prabhu kothā gelā ācārya-thākur*

(2)

*kāhā mora svarūpa rūpa kāhā sanātan
kāhā dāsa raghunātha patita-pāvan*

(3)

*kāhā mora bhāṭṭa-juga kāhā kavirāj
eka-kāle kothā gelā gorā naṭa-rāj*

(4)

*pāṣāṇe kuṭibo māthā anale paśibo
gaurāṅga guṇera nidhi kothā gele pābo*

(5)

*se-saba saṅgira saṅge je koilo bilās
se-saṅga nā pāiyā kānde narottama dās*

(1) He who brought the treasure of divine love and who was filled with compassion and mercy—where has such a personality as Śrīnivāsa Ācārya gone?

(2) Where are my Svarūpa Dāmodara and Rūpa Gosvāmī? Where is Sanātana? Where is Raghunātha dāsa, the savior of the fallen?

(3) Where are my Raghunātha Bhāṭṭa and Gopāla Bhāṭṭa, and where is Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja? Where did Lord Gaurāṅga, the great dancer, suddenly go?

(4) I will smash my head against the rock and enter into the fire. Where will I find Lord Gaurāṅga, the reservoir of all wonderful qualities?

(5) Being unable to obtain the association of Lord Gaurāṅga accompanied by all of these devotees in whose association He performed His pastimes, Narottama dāsa simply weeps.

Sāvarāṇa-śrī-gaura-mahimā

The Glories of Śrī Gaurāṅga

(from Prārthanā)

(1)

gaurāṅgera duṭi pada, jār dhana sampada,
se jāne bhakati-rasa-sār
gaurāṅgera madhura-līlā, jār karṇe praveśilā,
hṛdoya nirmala bhelo tār

(2)

je gaurāṅgera nāma loy, tāra hoy premodoy,
tāre mui jāi bolihāri
gaurāṅga-guṇete jhure, nitya-līlā tāre sphure,
se jana bhakati-adhikārī

(3)

gaurāṅgera saṅgi-gaṇe, nitya-siddha kori' māne,
se jāy brajendra-suta-pās
śrī-gauḍa-maṅḍala-bhūmi, jebā jāne cintāmaṇi,
tāra hoy braja-bhūme bās

(4)

gaura-prema-rasārṇave, se taraṅge jebā dube,
se rādhā-mādhava-antaraṅga
grhe bā vanete thāke, 'hā gaurāṅga' bo'le dāke,
narottama māge tāra saṅga

PURPORT

by His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

This is a song by Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura in praise of the glories of Lord Caitanya. *Gaurāṅga* refers to Lord Caitanya, who has a fair complexion. One who has a fair complexion is called *gaura*, and since Lord Caitanya was very fair, just like molten gold, He was also named Gaurasundara. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, *gaurāṅgera duṭi pada, jār dhana-sampada, se jāne bhakati-rasa-sār*. Anyone who has accepted the two lotus feet of Lord Caitanya can understand the true essence of devotional service. Devotional service is very difficult. It cannot be understood by any ordinary man. As it is stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, out of many thousands of persons who are trying to achieve the perfection of human life, only some actually become perfect and realize the self. And out of many thousands of such self-realized persons, only one can

understand Kṛṣṇa. Without understanding Kṛṣṇa, how can one engage himself in the service of Kṛṣṇa? Therefore, the devotional service of Kṛṣṇa is not an ordinary thing. But fortunately, if one follows in the footsteps of Lord Caitanya (*gaurāṅgera duti pada*) by following the path shown by Lord Caitanya—the process of simply chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa—he can very easily understand what devotional service is. Therefore, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura prays that one take shelter of Lord Caitanya and follow in His footsteps, for then one can understand the essence of devotional service.

Lord Caitanya's pastimes are very pleasing, because the basic principles of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu's movement are chanting, dancing, and eating *kṛṣṇa-prasāda*. He made His headquarters in Jagannātha Purī and would dance, chant, and then immediately call for *prasāda* to be distributed to the devotees. They were so pleased that every day hundreds of men would come to chant and dance with Lord Caitanya. The temple proprietor, the King of Orissa, Manārāja Pratāparudra, had an open order to the workers in the temple to supply as much *prasāda* to Lord Caitanya's devotees as they wanted. Therefore, His pastimes are very pleasing: chant, dance, and take *prasāda*. If one is captivated by the pastimes of Lord Caitanya, simply by chanting and dancing and eating *prasāda* the dirty things in his heart will all become cleansed. The heart of anyone who takes to this movement of chanting, dancing, and eating *kṛṣṇa-prasāda* will surely be cleansed of all dirty material contamination. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, very rightly, *gaurāṅgera madhura-līlā, jār karne praveśilā, hṛdoya nirmala bhelo tār*: if one wants to cleanse his heart, he must take to the movement of Lord Caitanya—Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Lord Caitanya is so nice that one who simply takes the holy name of Gaurasundara, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, will immediately develop love of God. Generally, devotees first chant *śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda*, for the preliminary process of cleansing the heart is to invoke the mercy of Lord Caitanya, Lord Nityānanda, and Their associates. *Līlā* means "pastimes." Without associates there cannot be pastimes, so Caitanya Mahāprabhu is always accompanied by associates—Nityānanda, Advaita, Gaḍādhara, Śrīvāsa, and many other devotees. *Tār* means "his," *hoy* means "it is effected," and *premodoy* refers to development of love of God. Simply by chanting *śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda* one immediately develops love of God. To such a person Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, "Bravo!" to encourage him in chanting Lord Caitanya's name and dancing. Just as we clap and say, "Bravo!"

similarly he says, *jāi bolihāri*: "Very nice. Excellent!"

Then he says, *gaurāṅga-guṇete jhure, nitya-līlā tāre sphure*: if one appreciates the merciful pastimes of Lord Caitanya and feels ecstasy and sometimes cries, this process will immediately help him to understand the pastimes of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, which are called *nitya-līlā*. The loving affairs between Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are not a temporary thing. Here in this material world we can see loving affairs between boys and girls, but that is temporary. That is simply for a few months, a few years, or maybe a little more. But then all that so-called love will go to hell. They are not permanent affairs. But if one really wants permanent love affairs, he must enter into the pastimes of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Simply by appreciating Lord Caitanya's movement one can immediately enter into or understand Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's eternal pastimes. One who can understand the transcendental, eternal pastimes of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa reaches the highest perfectional stage of devotional service.

The next line is, *gaurāṅgera saṅgi-gaṇe*. *Saṅgi-gaṇe* means "associates." Lord Caitanya is always associated: He is not alone. We never see a picture of Lord Caitanya alone. At least there must be Lord Nityānanda or Gadādhara Paṇḍita. Actually, wherever Lord Caitanya was present, many thousands of devotees would assemble. Such devotees, especially those who were His nearest intimate associates, were *nitya-siddha*. In the devotional line there are three kinds of perfect devotees. One is called *sādhana-siddha*. This refers to a person who has very rigidly performed the regulative prescriptions and thereby reached the perfectional stage. Reaching the perfectional stage by executing the regulative principles is called *sādhana-siddha*. There is another kind of devotee, who is called *kṛpā-siddha*. He may not have executed the regulative principles very rigidly, but by his service mood he is specifically blessed by the spiritual master or Kṛṣṇa. He is immediately promoted to the perfectional stage. This is called *kṛpā-siddha*. *Nitya-siddha* is one who was never contaminated by the material nature. The *sādhana-siddhas* and the *kṛpā-siddhas* were supposed to have once been in the contamination of material nature, but *nitya-siddhas* never came into contact with the material nature. All the associates of Caitanya Mahāprabhu are *nitya-siddhas*, or eternally perfect. Nityānanda Prabhu is Balarāma, the immediate expansion of Kṛṣṇa; Advaita Prabhu is Mahā-Viṣṇu (He is also *viṣṇu-tattva*); Gadādhara Prabhu is an expansion of Rādhārāṇī; and Śrīvāsa is an incarnation of Nārada. They are *nitya-siddha*, or eternally perfect. They were never imperfect. They were never in contact with material contamination. We should under-

stand that as Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Kṛṣṇa Himself, is transcendental, similarly His personal associates are also *nitya-siddha*, or eternally transcendental. *Se jāy brajendra-suta-pās. Brajendra-suta* means Kṛṣṇa. Simply by accepting that the associates of Lord Caitanya are eternally free, one can immediately be promoted to the transcendental abode of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī-gauḍa-maṇḍala-bhūmi. *Gauḍa* means West Bengal. Lord Caitanya appeared in West Bengal, Navadvīpa, and He especially flooded that part of the country with the *saṅkīrtana* movement. That part of the country has special significance, for it is non-different from Vṛndāvana. It is as good as Vṛndāvana. Living in Vṛndāvana and living in Navadvīpa are the same. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, *śrī-gauḍa-maṇḍala-bhūmi, jebā jāne cintāmaṇi. Cintāmaṇi* means the transcendental abode. *Tāra hoy braja-bhūme bās*. If one simply understands that this land of Navadvīpa is not different from Vṛndāvana, then he actually lives in Vṛndāvana. One should not think that he is living in Bengal or any material country; the places where Lord Caitanya had His pastimes are as good as Vṛndāvana.

Lord Caitanya's distribution of this love of God is compared with an ocean (*rasa-arnava*). What kind of ocean? Not the salty ocean that one cannot taste. The water of this ocean is so nice that if one drinks even one drop, he will like it more and more. It is not ordinary ocean water, of which one cannot taste even a drop. Therefore it is called *rasārṇava*. In this ocean there are different waves; an ocean does not stand still, for it is not impersonal or void. And as the ocean is always dancing with waves, similarly the ocean of transcendental love of Kṛṣṇa as introduced by Lord Caitanya has constant waves, constant sound. One has to dive deep into that ocean. If one knows the secret and says, "Let me dive deep into the ocean of the transcendental loving movement introduced by Lord Caitanya," he immediately becomes one of the confidential devotees of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Therefore Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura concludes this song by saying, *gr̥he bā vanete thāke, 'hā gaurāṅga' bo'le dāke*. It is not necessary that one become a mendicant or give up his family life and society. One can remain wherever he finds it suitable, whether as a householder, as a *brahmacārī*, as a *vānaprastha*, or as a *sannyāsī*. *Vānaprasthas* and *sannyāsīs* are supposed to live outside of the city. *Vanete* means "forest." Formerly, those who were in spiritual consciousness used to live in the forest to become free of the turmoil of city life. But that is not possible now. In this age no one can go into the forest. That requires practice, and no one is practiced to that line. Therefore, generally one is recommended to live

with his friends, wife, and children. That doesn't matter, but he must take to the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness as introduced by Lord Caitanya. It is not difficult. The real thing is that one has to accept the movement of Lord Caitanya—chanting, dancing, and eating *kṛṣṇa-prasāda*. Even if one is in family life, there is no difficulty. He can just sit down, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, dance nicely, and then take *kṛṣṇa-prasāda*. Everyone can do this. Those who have renounced this world, *sannyāsīs*, also can do it; there is no difficulty. Therefore, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says that it doesn't matter whether one is a *brahmacārī*, *gṛhastha*, or *sannyāsī*. He says, "If you have taken to these principles of life, I desire your company, because you are a devotee of Lord Caitanya." In this way, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura finishes the song.

Śrī Guru-vandanā
The Worship of Śrī Guru
(from Prema-bhakti-candrikā)

- (1) *śrī-guru-carāṇa-padma, kevala-bhakati-sadma,*
bandō mui sāvadhāna mate
jāhāra prasāde bhāi, e bhava toriyā jāi,
kṛṣṇa-prāpti hoy jāhā ha'te
- (2) *guru-mukha-padma-vākya, cittete koriyā aikya,*
ār nā koriho mane āśā
śrī-guru-carāṇe rati, ei se uttama-gati,
je prasāde pūre sarva āśā
- (3) *cakhu-dān dilo jei, janme janme prabhu sei,*
divya-jñān hṛde prokāsito
prema-bhakti jāhā hoite, avidyā vināśa jāte,
vede gāy jāhāra carito
- (4) *śrī-guru karuṇā-sindhu, adhama janāra bandhu,*
lokanāth lokera jivana
hā hā prabhu koro doyā, deho more pada-chāyā,
ebe jaśa ghuṣuk tribhuvana

The lotus feet of our spiritual master are the only way by which we can attain pure devotional service. I bow to his lotus feet with great awe and reverence. By his grace one can cross the ocean of material suffering and obtain the mercy of Kṛṣṇa.

My only wish is to have my consciousness purified by the words emanating from his lotus mouth. Attachment to his lotus feet is the perfection that fulfills all desires.

He opens my darkened eyes and fills my heart with transcendental knowledge. He is my Lord birth after birth. From him ecstatic *prema* emanates; by him ignorance is destroyed. The Vedic scriptures sing of his character.

Our spiritual master is the ocean of mercy, the friend of the poor, and the lord and master of the devotees. O master! Be merciful unto me. Give me the shade of your lotus feet. Your fame is spread all over the three worlds.

Sāvaraṇa-śrī-gaura-pāda-padme Prārthanā

A Prayer to the Lotus Feet of Śrī Gaurāṅga
(from Prārthanā)

(1)

*śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu doyā koro more
tomā binā ke doyālu jagat-samsāre*

(2)

*patita-pāvana-hetu tava avatāra
mo sama patita prabhu nā pāibe āra*

(3)

*hā hā prabhu nityānanda, premānanda sukhi
kṛpābalokana koro āmi boṛo duḥkhi*

(4)

*doyā koro sītā-pati adwaita gosāi
tava kṛpā-bale pāi caitanya-nitāi*

(5)

*hā hā swarūp, sanātana, rūpa, raghunātha
bhaṭṭa-juga, śrī-jīva hā prabhu lokanātha*

(6)

*doyā koro śrī-ācārya prabhu śrinivāsa
rāmacandra-saṅga māge narottama-dāsa*

PURPORT

by His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

This is a song composed by Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura. He prays to Lord Caitanya, "My dear Lord, please be merciful to me, because who can be more merciful than Your Lordship within these three worlds?" Actually, this is a fact. Not only Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, but Rūpa Gosvāmī also prayed to Lord Caitanya in this way. At the time of the first meeting of Lord Caitanya and Rūpa Gosvāmī at Prayāga (Allahabad), Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī said, "My dear Lord, You are the most munificent of all incarnations, because You are distributing love of Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa consciousness." When Kṛṣṇa was personally present He simply asked us to surrender, but He did not distribute Himself so easily. He made conditions—"First of all you surrender." But this incarnation, Lord Caitanya, although Kṛṣṇa Himself, makes no such condition. He simply distributes: "Take love of Kṛṣṇa." Therefore Lord Caitanya is approved as the most munificent incarnation. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, "Please be merciful to me. You are so magnanimous, because You have seen the fallen souls of this age, and You are very much compassionate to them, but You should know also that I am the most fallen. No one is more greatly fallen than me." *Patita-pāvana-hetu tava avatāra*: "Your incarnation is just to reclaim the conditioned, fallen souls, but I assure You that You will not find a greater fallen soul than me. Therefore, my claim is first."

Then he prays to Lord Nityānanda. He says, *hā hā prabhu nityānanda premānanda-sukhī*: "My dear Lord Nityānanda, You are always joyful in spiritual bliss. Since You always appear very happy, I have come to You because I am most unhappy. If You kindly put Your glance over me, I may also become happy." Then he prays to Advaita Prabhu. *Doyā koro sitā-pati advaita gosāi*. Advaita Prabhu's wife's name was Sitā. Therefore He is sometimes addressed as *sitā-pati*. Thus Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura prays, "My dear Advaita Prabhu, husband of Sitā, You are so kind. Please be kind to me. If You are kind to me, naturally Lord Caitanya and Nityānanda will also be kind to me." Actually, Advaita Prabhu invited Lord Caitanya to come down. When Advaita Prabhu saw that the fallen souls were all engaged simply in sense gratificatory processes, not understanding Kṛṣṇa consciousness, He felt very much compassionate toward the fallen souls, and He also felt Himself incapable of claiming them all. He therefore prayed to

Lord Kṛṣṇa, "Please come Yourself. Without Your personal presence it is not possible to deliver these fallen souls." Thus by His invitation Lord Caitanya appeared. Naturally, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura prays to Advaita Prabhu, "If You will be kind to me, naturally Lord Caitanya and Nityānanda also will be kind to me."

Then he prays to the Gosvāmīs. *Hā hā swarūp, sanātana, rūpa, raghunātha*. *Swarūp* refers to Svarūpa Dāmodara, the personal secretary of Lord Caitanya. He was always with Caitanya Mahāprabhu and immediately arranged for whatever Caitanya Mahāprabhu wanted. Two personal attendants, Svarūpa Dāmodara and Govinda, were always constantly with Lord Caitanya. Therefore, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura also prays to Svarūpa Dāmodara and then to the six Gosvāmīs, the next disciples of Lord Caitanya—Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī, Śrī Bhaṭṭa Raghunātha Gosvāmī, Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī, and Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. These six Gosvāmīs were directly instructed by Lord Caitanya to spread this movement of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura also prays for their mercy.

After the six Gosvāmīs, the next *ācārya* was Śrīnivāsa Ācārya. Actually, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura was in the disciplic succession after Śrīnivāsa Ācārya and was almost his contemporary,* and Narottama dāsa's personal friend was Rāmacandra Cakravartī. Therefore he prays, "I always desire the company of Rāmacandra." He desires a devotee's company. The whole process is that we should always pray for the mercy of the superior *ācāryas* and keep company with pure devotees. Then it will be easier for us to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and receive the mercy of Lord Caitanya and Lord Kṛṣṇa. This is the sum and substance of this song sung by Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura.

Manah-śikṣā Teachings to the Mind (from Prārthanā)

- (1) *nitāi-pada-kamala, koṭi-candra-susūala,*
je chāyāy jagata jurāy
heno nitāi bine bhāi, rādhā-kṛṣṇa pāite nāi,
dr̥ḍha kori' dharo nitāir pāy
- (2) *se sambandha nāhi jā'r, bṛthā janma gelo tā'r,*
sei paśu boro durācār
nitāi nā bolilo mukhe, majilo samsāra-sukhe,
vidyā-kule ki koribe tār

* "Contemporary," in this case, means approximately the same age.

- (3) *ahankāre matta hoiyā, nitāi-pada pāsariyā,*
asatyere satya kori māni
nitāiyer korunā habe, braje rādhā-kṛṣṇa pābe,
dharo nitāi-caraṇa du'khāni
- (4) *nitāiyer caraṇa satya, tāhāra sevaka nitya,*
nitāi-pada sadā koro āsa
narottama boṛo dukhī, nitāi more koro sukhi,
rākho rāṅgā-caraṇera pāsa

PURPORT

by His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

This is a very nice song sung by Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura. He advises that *nitāi-pada*, the lotus feet of Lord Nityānanda (*kamala* means "lotus," and *pada* means "feet"), are a shelter where one will get the soothing moonlight not only of one, but of millions of moons. We can just imagine the aggregate total value of the soothing shine of millions of moons. In this material world (*jagat*), which is progressing toward hell, there is always a blazing fire, and everyone is struggling hard without finding peace; therefore, if the world wants to have real peace, it should take shelter under the lotus feet of Lord Nityānanda, which are cooling like the shining of a million moons. *Jurāya* means "relief." If one actually wants relief from the struggle of existence and actually wants to extinguish the blazing fire of material pangs, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura advises, "Please take shelter of Lord Nityānanda."

What will be the result of accepting the shelter of the lotus feet of Lord Nityānanda? He says, *heno nitāi bine bhāi*: unless one takes shelter under the shade of the lotus feet of Lord Nityānanda, *rādhā-kṛṣṇa pāite nāi*—it will be very difficult for him to approach Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. The aim of this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is to enable us to approach Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and associate with the Supreme Lord in His sublime pleasure dance. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura advises that if one actually wants to enter into the dancing party of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, he must accept the shelter of the lotus feet of Lord Nityānanda.

Then he says, *se sambandha nāhi*. *Sambandha* means "connection" or "contact." Anyone who has not contacted a relationship with Nityānanda is understood to have spoiled his human birth. In another song also, Narottama dāsa says, *hari hari bifale janama go-*

nāinu: anyone who does not approach Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa through a relationship with Nityānanda has uselessly spoiled his life. *Brthā* means "useless," *janma* means "life," *tā'r* means "his," and *sambandha* means "relationship." Anyone who does not make a relationship with Nityānanda is simply spoiling the boon of his human form of life. Why is he spoiling it? *Sei paśu boṛo durācār*. *Sei* means "that," *paśu* means "animal," and *durācār* means "misbehaved" or "the most misbehaved." Without elevation to Kṛṣṇa consciousness through the mercy of Lord Caitanya and Nityānanda, life is simply spoiled in the animal propensities of sense gratification. Narottama dāsa says that ordinary animals can be tamed, but when a human being is animalistic, having only animal propensities, he is most horrible, for he cannot be tamed. Ordinary cats and dogs or even a tiger can be tamed, but when a human being goes out of his way and neglects to take to the human activity of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, his higher intelligence will simply be misused for animal propensities, and it is very difficult to tame him. The enactment of state laws cannot make a thief an honest man—because his heart is polluted, he cannot be tamed. Every man sees that a person who commits criminal offenses is punished by the government, and also in scriptural injunctions punishment in hell is mentioned. But despite hearing from scripture and seeing the action of the state laws, the demoniac cannot be tamed.

What are they doing? *Nitāi nā bolilo mukhe*. Since they do not know who Nityānanda is, they never say the names of Lord Nityānanda and Lord Caitanya. *Majilo samsāra-sukhe*. *Majilo* means "becomes absorbed." They become absorbed in so-called material enjoyment. They don't care who Lord Caitanya and Nityānanda are, and therefore they go deep down into material existence. *Vidyā-kule ki koribe tār*: if one has no connection with Nityānanda, and if he does not come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, his *vidyā*, or his so-called academic education, and *kula*, birth in a high family or great nation, will not protect him. Regardless of whether one is born in a very big family or nation or has a very advanced academic education, at the time of death nature's law will act, his work will be finished, and he will get another body according to that work.

Why are these human animals acting in this way? *Ahaṅkāre matta hoiyā, nitāi-pada pāsariyā*. They have become maddened by a false concept of bodily life, and thus they have forgotten their eternal relationship with Nityānanda. *Asatyere satya kori māni*: such forgetful persons accept the illusory energy as factual.

Asatyere refers to that which is not a fact, or, in other words, *māyā*. *Māyā* means that which has no existence but is a temporary illusion only. Persons who have no contact with Nityānanda accept this illusory body as factual.

Narottama dāsa Thākura then says, *nitāiyer korunā habe, braje rādhā-kṛṣṇa pābe*: "If you actually want to approach the association of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, you must achieve the mercy of Lord Nityānanda first. When He is merciful toward you, then you will be able to approach Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa." *Dhara nitāi-carāṇa du'khāni*. Narottama dāsa advises that one firmly catch the lotus feet of Lord Nityānanda.

Then again he says, *nitāi-carāṇa satya*. One should not misunderstand and think that as he has caught hold of *māyā*, similarly the lotus feet of Nityānanda may also be something like that *māyā*, or illusion. Therefore Narottama dāsa confirms, *nitāi-carāṇa satya*: the lotus feet of Nityānanda are not illusion; they are a fact. *Tāhāra sevaka nitya*: and one who engages in the transcendental loving service of Nityānanda is also transcendental. If one engages in the transcendental loving service of Nityānanda in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he immediately achieves his transcendental position on the spiritual platform, which is eternal and blissful. Therefore he advises, *nitāi-pada sadā koro āśa*: always try to catch the lotus feet of Lord Nityānanda.

Narottama boṛo dukhī. Narottama dāsa Thākura, the *ācārya*, is taking the position that he is very unhappy. Actually, he is representing ourselves. He says, "My dear Lord, I am very unhappy." *Nitāi more koro sukhī*: "Therefore I am praying to Lord Nityānanda to make me happy." *Rākho rāṅgā-carāṇera pāśa*: "Please keep me in a corner of Your lotus feet."

Śrī Rūpa Mañjarī Pada

The Feet of Śrī Rūpa Mañjarī

(from Prārthanā)

- (1) *śrī-rūpa-mañjarī-pada, sei mora sampada,*
sei mor bhajana-pūjana
- (2) *sei mora prāna-dhana, sei mora ābharana,*
sei mor jīvanera jīvana
- (3) *sei mora rasa-nidhi, sei mora vāñchā-siddhi,*
sei mor vedera dharama
- (4) *sei brata, sei tapa, sei mora mantra-japa,*
sei mor dharama-karama
- (5) *anukūla habe vidhi, se-pade hoibe siddhi,*
nirakhibo e dui nayane
- (6) *se rūpa-mādhurī-rāśi, prāna-kuvalaya-śaśi,*
praphullita habe niśi-dine
- (7) *tuwā adarśana-ahi, garale jāralo dehi,*
ciro-dina tāpita jīvana
- (8) *hā hā rūpa koro doyā, deho more pada-chāyā,*
narottama loilo śaraṇa

1) The lotus feet of Sri Rupa Manjari are my treasure, my devotional service, and my object of worship. 2) They give my life meaning, and they are the life of my life. 3) They are the perfection of *rasa*, and they are perfection worthy of attainment. They are the very law of the Vedic scriptures for me. 4) They are the meaning of all my fasts and penances and my silent utterings of my *mantras*. They are the basis of religion and activities. 5) By the purifying process of favorable devotional service one will attain perfection and with these two eyes be able to see. 6) His transcendental form is shining like moonlight in my heart, and my heart therefore shines and reciprocates. In other words, the ordinary moon lights up the night, and its shine illuminates other objects; but the moon of the effulgence of the form of Sri Rupa Manjari shines into the heart and makes the heart also shine back to the spiritual sky. This moon shines not only in the nighttime, but day and night. 7) Your absence from my vision is like a dose of strong poison, and I will suffer till the end of my life. 8) Narottama dasa Thakura says: "Please give me your mercy and the shade of your lotus feet."

Vaiṣṇave Vijñapti
Prayer to the Vaiṣṇava
 (from Prārthanā)

(1)

ei-bāro karuṇā koro vaiṣṇava gosāi
patita-pāvana tomā bine keho nāi

(2)

jāhāra nikaṭe gele pāpa dūre jāy
emona doyāla prabhu kebā kothā pāy

(3)

gaṅgāra paraśa hoile paścāte pāvan
darśane pavitra koro—ei tomāra guṇ

(4)

hari-sthāne aparādhe tāre hari-nām
tomā sthāne aparādhe nāhi paritrāṇ

(5)

tomāra hṛdoye sadā govinda-viśrām
govinda kohena—mora vaiṣṇava parāṇ

(6)

prati-janme kori āśā caraṇera dhūli
narottame koro doyā āpanāra boli'

(1) O Vaiṣṇava Gosvāmī, please be merciful to me now. There is no one except you who can purify the fallen souls.

(2) Where does anyone find such a merciful personality by whose mere audience all sins go far away?

(3) After bathing in the waters of the sacred Ganges many times, one becomes purified, but just by the sight of you, the fallen souls are purified. This is your great power.

(4) The holy name delivers one who has committed an offense to Lord Hari, but if one commits an offense to you, there is no means of deliverance.

(5) Your heart is always the resting place of Lord Govinda, and Lord Govinda says, "The Vaiṣṇavas are in My heart."

(6) I desire the dust of your holy feet in every birth I may take. Please consider Narottama yours, and be kind upon him.

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