

The Life of Krishna Chaitanya

first volume of the series:

The Life and Teachings of Krishna Chaitanya

by Parama Karuna Devi

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Preface

*vande 'ham sri guroh sri yuta pada kamalam
sri gurun vaishnavams ca
sri rupam sa agra jatam saha gana
raghunatha anvitam tam sa jivam
sa advaitam sa avadhutam parijana sahitam
krishna chaitanya devam
sri radha krishna padan saha gana
lalita sri visakha anvitams ca*

"I offer my homage to the lotus feet of my *sat guru*,
and to all my teachers and to all those who are devotees of Vishnu,
to Rupa Gosvami, his elder brother Sanatana and their companions,
the two Raghunathas (Dasa Gosvami and Bhatta Gosvami) and Jiva Gosvami,
to Advaita Acharya, the *avadhuta* Nityananda and their companions,
to the divine Sri Krishna Chaitanya,
to the feet of Sri Radha and Krishna and their companions,
the two (*sakhis*) Lalita and Visakha."

Much of the material in this volume was originally published in my book *Puri, the Home of Lord Jagannatha*, that I printed independently in India in April 2009. It was over 500 pages of tightly packed, small font size text, with a number of hand-drawn maps of the Jagannatha temple and other prominent places of interest in the area of Puri.

I printed it rather hurriedly, because I had come to know that some people to which the original manuscript had been submitted for review (prior to publication) were planning to publish the book themselves under another author's name, omitting all mention of my

work. My concern was not about getting a profit from the book, either financially or in the form of name and fame, and in fact I had agreed to share the authorship credit for the text with Rahul Acharya, because I was told that "in this way, the book will be accepted more widely".

This appeared to be a good idea, because in Orissa and especially in Puri there is a strong prejudice against the "outsiders", so much that devotees of Jagannatha coming from other countries and born in non-Indian races are not even allowed to enter the public premises of the Jagannatha temple in Puri, the Sri Mandir, as they are automatically considered "non-Hindus", irrespective of their actual beliefs and practices.

Almost all other temples and traditional *mathas* unfortunately follow the same policies, either because they are controlled by the government (like the Sri Mandir) or because they are influenced by the official position of the "religious authorities" of orthodox Hinduism in Puri: the Shankaracharya residing in the Govardhana Matha and the assembly of *sasana brahmanas* at the Mukti Mandapa within the Sri Mandir. The reasons for such prohibition have been expressed from time to time by the spokesmen of the Temple Administration: it is said that "western people" (which includes all races except the high caste ethnic Indians) eat objectionable foods, have unclean habits, and cannot possibly have any devotion for Jagannatha because they do not know anything about Jagannatha.

Among the people visiting Puri there have been hundreds if not thousands of cases demonstrating exactly the opposite, especially among the members of Iskcon and the various Gaudiya mathas that after 1978 had started to accept a number of western disciples, too. Apart from some bad apples (of which most have really been stinking up the entire bag) the general mass of western devotees, generally identified as Iskcon members (whether they are or not) has given ample evidence of extremely good and devotional behavior and motivations. Usually more than the visitors of Indian race, or even than the temple servants.

Apart from the requirement of a strict *sadhana* including the chanting of a prescribed number of 1728 *mantra* repetitions daily (as a minimum), the regular study of the basic scriptures (mainly *Bhagavad gita* and *Bhagavata purana*), and the active service in the worship of the Deities in the temple, it has always been compulsory for all members to strictly abstain from any objectionable foods - not only meat, fish and eggs, but even onion and garlic, and any food that had not been offered to Krishna. In fact, Iskcon (the

most iconic organization of Krishna devotees from western regions in modern times) had become the greatest name in vegetarianism at global level, opening many restaurants and distributing innumerable servings of pure vegetarian food each Sunday and on their many festival occasions.

Personally, I had founded and directed a Vegetarian Society myself for several years after moving out of the *ashrama*, utilizing the theoretical and practical knowledge that I had collected during my Iskcon membership period. I had been a strict ethical vegetarian activist already for over 8 years before joining Iskcon, but in the *ashrama* and temple I had a real opportunity to develop sufficiently in that field.

Besides the very rigid vegetarianism, the basic rules of the Sarasvata Gaudiya mathas (including Iskcon) prohibit all forms of intoxication - not only alcohol, but also coffee and even tea - as well as all illicit sexual relationships and behaviors, a rule which was generally interpreted as allowing members to have sex only once in a lifetime with one's spouse in order to get a child, and living separately for the rest of the time with practically no contact with each other, or any other sexual or romantic connection with anybody else. After closely observing the behavior of the ordinary Hindus, including the *sevakas* of the Jagannatha Puri temple, and researching about the other traditions connected to Krishna Chaitanya and the Vaishnava cults, I realized that there was a lot of work for me to do there.

In 1995, about one year after I settled in Puri, I had founded a Vegetarian Society based on spiritual and religious foundations. The organization was duly registered as an explicit tribute to Prabhupada's vision, and it regularly distributed pure vegetarian food to the pilgrims especially during Ratha yatra, and to the children of the rural villages around Puri. In 2005 I used my personal savings and the contributions of a few like-minded friends and supporters of my Association to acquire some land outside town, and I started to develop an independent *ashrama* to support and accommodate pilgrims and visitors, also offering guided tours, courses and seminars on Hinduism and Indian culture.

I built a temple and installed large Jagannatha Deities and their traditional companion Deities, under the direct guidance of prominent religious personalities in the orthodox Hindu community in Puri. The interaction with these people had been facilitated by Rahul Acharya, a descendant of the *raja guru* family in Puri, that I had met on the internet while participating to various discussion groups on Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Hinduism and Vedic tradition.

Rahul expressed great enthusiasm for my vision and work, and even wanted to become my student and cooperate directly with my research. He was instrumental in obtaining copies of some official documents about the Temple Management of Sri Mandir, as well as many quotes and invaluable "insider information", and he reviewed most of the manuscript while I was compiling it. At that time there were several people working in our *ashrama*, including Purnachandra Mishra, a full time *pujari* from a family of *sevakas* (in charge of the Deities of Benu Madhava inside the Sri Mandir), Shiva Narayana Ratha and Ranjan Bisvash who went around taking photographs, drawing maps and interviewing the *mahantas* and *pujaris* of the various temples and *mathas*, and my adopted son Raghunath Mohapatra, hailing from one of the prominent *sasana brahmana* families of the Mukti Mandapa.

I prepared the lists of places to be explored and questions to ask from the various people, integrated the collected data with further material from published books and other sources, including the Internet, verified the information with careful cross examination, added the knowledge and realizations that I had developed in my previous experiences of scriptural study, *sadhana* and *seva*, and compiled the text on the structure I had envisioned. On the request of Maharaja Divyasingh Deva, the king of Puri, Rahul personally handed him a copy of the completed text, with the understanding that he would write a preface. Here is a summary of the contents of that book, divided into sections:

* Introduction: the purpose of the book, code of behavior while staying in a holy place, Jagannatha Vallabha Research Center (our *ashrama*)

* Hinduism: Vishnu, Krishna, Shiva, the Mother Goddess, Surya, other Devatas, Dharma, Karma, Samskaras, Guru, Atma and reincarnation, Yoga, Bhakti, Vedic scriptures, Sruti, *Upanishads*, Smriti, the fifth *Veda*, Tantra, the various philosophical schools, the six Darshanas, Advaita and Dvaita, Sampradayas, the spiritual importance of Puri, the meaning of pilgrimage, Purushottama kshetra, Sankha kshetra, Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra, Sudarshana, Narasimha, Madhava, the Daru Brahman, the Tantric Jagannatha, the Mahabhava vigraha, the appearance of Jagannatha, Lalita the daughter of Visvasvasu, the Buddhist connection, a brief history of Buddhism.

* Great personalities in Puri: Adi Shankara Acharya, Jayadeva, Padmavati, Krishna Chaitanya, Bhaktivinoda and Bhaktisiddhanta, the Vaishnava Sampradayas, Ramanuja Acharya, Svami Ramananda, Madhva, Narahari Tirtha, Madhavendra, Nimbarka, Vishnu

Svami, Vallabha Acharya, Ramananda Raya, Sridhara Svami, Rasikananda, Tulasi Das, Gangamata Gosvamini, the five saints of Orissa, the seven tantric maidens, other famous devotees of Jagannatha.

* History of Orissa: the Vedic period, the Buddhist-Jainist period, the Gupta period, the Bhauma karas, the Soma vamsis, the Ganga dynasty, the Surya vamsis, the Chalukyas, the Rajas of Khurda, the Maratha period, the British period, the struggle for independence in Orissa, after Independence.

* Sri Mandira: the temple structure, *external parikrama*, entering the temple, Mukti mandapa, the main shrine, *Mukti chintamani*, Jagannatha *bhajans*.

* Daily worship: preliminary duties, the method of worship, preliminary purification, *bhuta suddhi*, *asana suddhi*, *atma pitha puja*, *devata pitha puja*, *manasa puja*, *bahir yaga*, *mantras*, *upacharas*, *avarana puja*, *naivedya*, daily worship schedule, periodical rituals, regular Veshas, special Veshas, *mahaprasadam*, daily offerings, special offerings, festivals in Sri Mandira, Chandana yatra, Snana yatra, Anavasara, Ratha yatra, Jhulana yatra, Janmastami, Vimala puja, Shiva ratri, Nava kalevara.

* Sevakas: the Niyogas, Record of rights, the temple administration, the Devadasis.

* Popular festivals and Temples: traditional festivals, recently established festivals, temples and Deities, Bata Mangala, Alama Chandi, Gundicha, Nrisimha and Vishnu temples, Tirthas, Pancha Mahadeva and Shiva temples, Shakti temples, Hanuman temples.

* Mathas in Puri: list of the Mathas, participation to the rituals in Sri Mandira, Shankara or Advaita mathas, Smarta Sampradaya mathas, Ramanuja Sampradaya mathas, Ramanandi Sampradaya mathas, Nimbarka Sampradaya mathas, Vishnu Svami Sampradaya mathas, Gaudiya Sampradaya mathas, Sarasvata Gaudiya mathas, Oriya or Utkaliya Vaishnava mathas, other Sampradayas, Akhadas, Yoga and Jaga gharas, modern *mathas* and *ashramas*.

* The Kingdom of Lord Jagannatha: Orissa, the district of Puri, Brahmagiri, Konark, Bhubaneswar, Bindu Sarovara, Lingaraja, other temples, Viraja kshetra, Cuttack, other districts in Orissa.

* The culture of Orissa: Vanavasis, handicrafts, dance traditions, Notes on specific terminology, Glossary, the Hindu Calendar, ready reference list, and maps.

The original edition is still available in the paperback format (a limited number of copies), as well as in digital format, also circulating freely on the Internet. I am now preparing a new edition, that will appear as a series of more easily readable volumes, and the digital e-book format will also contain many full-color images to illustrate the text.

During the more recent years our Jagannatha Vallabha Vedic Research Center and Ashrama has gone virtual, and this is giving me more time and energy to take care of my students and my writing. Besides the development and expansion of the old Puri book, I am planning to complete many more publications, including some of my long-cherished literary projects, and I hope to make them available for the general public very soon.

I pray for the divine blessings and for the encouragement of all good people so that I will be able to complete this great work in spite of my many shortcomings. I humbly dedicate this effort to the service of my eternal *sat-guru* and to all my spiritual teachers.

I apologize for any imperfection, mistake or omission in this book, and request our readers to please help correct them by supplying the appropriate information for the next printing, so that this work can be more useful.

Parama Karuna Devi

Puri, 27 March 2013, Gaura Purnima

Introduction

Krishna Chaitanya is the original founder of one of the most widely known spiritual movements at global level - the Hare Krishna movement, also known as ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness).

After being transplanted in the United States by Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in 1965, this movement changed the lives of many thousands of people and reached millions more, powerfully stimulating a deep transformation of cultural values and interests.

There had also been other *gurus* and teachers carrying the messages of the ancient Indian wisdom into the world, but Bhaktivedanta Swami's mission was truly revolutionary, because it offered to anyone and everyone - without the need of special qualifications - a complete dedication to a life of spiritual and practical devotion to Krishna, supported by an organizational, social and financial structure composed by members living and working full time for the "evangelization" and engagement of the masses.

It was the perfect time, too: Bhaktivedanta Swami had the intelligence and inspiration to understand the opportunity offered by the cultural situation in the 60s and 70s, that was very favorable to his preaching, because many people were looking for a genuine and new spiritual experience.

I participated full time in that experience from 1978 - right after the demise of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada - to 1986, when I left the active membership of the organization to explore a wider territory that ISKCON had introduced only partially.

I had joined the movement in Italy when it was the only opportunity for me to explore, live and practice full time the eternal and universal tradition of Sanatana Dharma and Vedic knowledge, that constitutes the roots of Indian civilization and is generally known as Hinduism, although this definition is currently loaded with misconceptions and misunderstandings.

In 1984 I had the opportunity to finally perform a pilgrimage to India, something that I had intensely desired since my early childhood. My attraction for this wonderful country

was obviously the result of experiences from previous lifetimes, because nobody in my family of origin or environment had any knowledge about, or interest for the subject.

From the very first minute of my arrival, when I breathed the hot air on the landing field at Bombay airport, I felt I had found my long lost home.

Earlier that year I had unexpectedly recovered memories from past lives, including a spontaneous knowledge of Sanskrit and the *devanagari* script, that had been stimulated by the assiduous contact with the contents of Bhaktivedanta Swami's books.

As soon as I joined the movement, I had started working for the Italian BBT (Bhaktivedanta Book Trust), the publishing department of the organization. In 1978 they had published a small booklet (*Sri Isopanishad*), an abridged edition of *Bhagavad gita*, and the first of the three volumes of the first canto of *Srimad Bhagavatam*. The second volume of the *Bhagavatam* (first canto) and the first two volumes of the "Krishna book" had also been translated and were in the process of publication.

When the BBT directors found that I had a very good knowledge of English and I worked well, hard and fast, they engaged me in the service of translating all the remaining books written by the founder of the organization, Bhaktivedanta Swami. The books were written in English, but quoted many original Sanskrit verses with and without English translation.

I soon found that I was naturally good in chanting the verses and in understanding and remembering the terminology and knowledge presented in those books (unlike most other members), as if I was simply remembering things I had learned previously.

One day, while staring at the *devanagari* letters composing a verse, I was struck by the sudden understanding of how the *devanagari* alphabet worked, and I started to compile notes for a self-taught course on Sanskrit. I was so enthusiastic about my discovery, and the other members were so impressed by this fact, that I was engaged in teaching "Sanskrit and Shastra" in the local Gurukula, in addition to my other duties.

Not much later, I was given the opportunity to travel to India for the annual celebrations of Gaura Purnima, the appearance day of Krishna Chaitanya, at Iskcon's global headquarters in Mayapur, district of Nadia, West Bengal. The small group of lucky pilgrims was scheduled to arrive at Bombay with the international commercial flight, economy class, then proceed to Mayapur through Calcutta, and finally visit Vrindavana before returning to Italy.

Much of that first journey was a blurred turmoil of emotional feelings and impressions, and until we reached Vrindavana the group was tightly packed and herded together around, only remaining in Iskcon temples without visiting any other places. In Mayapur we had a small amount of freedom, with some opportunities for quiet meditation especially on the banks of the Ganga and Jalangi (Sarasvati) that flowed just next to the Iskcon's place, but still no interactions with local people, or contact with other groups or traditions. The program was strictly inside the premises of the *ashrama*, and consisted in *kirtanas*, *aratis* and lectures within the temple.

When we reached Vrindavana the situation was quite different, as we were encouraged to visit various temples and holy places outside the Iskcon campus, and each small group was going around independently. The impact with Vrindavana was as overwhelming as my first contact with the Indian sky and land at Bombay, and there was plenty of time for individual chanting and meditation. Almost immediately, I found a way to split from the group and I started to walk around by my own, soaking in the atmosphere and connecting with the places and the people.

Then the next realization came: a glimpse of the submerged and invisible iceberg that was under the visible tip above the waters, the existence of a vast and unknown continent of which Iskcon had only touched the shores. I was not contented with camping on the beach. I wanted to walk into its forests and climb its mountains, and fill my eyes and heart with the immense horizon of its fertile plains.

When I returned to Italy after my three weeks of spiritual vacation, my aspirations had expanded considerably, and I felt eager to re-read Prabhupada's books with my newly discovered (or re-discovered) vision of the original context from which they had been written.

In that light, I re-examined all the other information and understanding I had about Prabhupada's teachings, life and activities, and especially the last period of his work and his vision for the future propagation of Krishna Consciousness.

I made a comparison with the teachings, life and activities of Prabhupada's successors and disciples, many of whom had also written books, and with the policies and guidelines of the organization, decided by its General Body Committee, the famous GBC.

It was a substantial paradigm shift.

I had already come to term with my disappointment towards the leadership of the organization, and I realized that the movement was not going to evolve in the direction planned by the founder. In fact, it seemed to me that it was going in the exactly opposite way.

From my experience and perspective as a translator, I could understand what had been lost in the transplant of Krishna Consciousness and how it could be restored, and even rejuvenated in a new effective package for the new times. I tried to bring up the issue with whatever leaders I was able to approach, asking polite questions about the application of the scriptural injunctions and Prabhupada's instructions, but the results were depressing and alarming.

From 1984 to 1986 I continued my research, and at the same time I completed the translation of Prabhupada's books, including his commentaries to the first chapters of the 10th canto of *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Then I moved out of the *ashrama* and I returned to India, where I traveled independently for six months all over the subcontinent, visiting temples and holy places, and learning from a variety of traditions. After several more journeys, including a memorable one in 1989 for the Kumbha Mela at Prayaga and a visit to Ayodhya, in 1994 I transferred my residence to India, where I have been living and working independently.

My research has continued during all these years, especially in Puri, where Chaitanya resided until the end of his life, and where his memory and environment are still alive. Since Jagannatha Puri is a sacred place for all Hindu traditions, and notably for the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, it is still possible to find the direct living representatives from all the possible perspectives on Krishna Chaitanya and his mission, and verify the facts.

*namo maha vadanyaya krishna prema pradaya te
krishnaya krishna chaitanya namne gaura tvise namah*

I pay my reverence to the most charitable manifestation of Krishna,
who gives pure love for Krishna (*krishna prema*).
I offer my respect to Krishna Chaitanya, whose bodily complexion is golden.

(Chaitanya charitamrita, Madhya lila, 19.53)

Chaitanya's forefathers

According to Jayananda's *Chaitanya mangala*, the forefathers of Chaitanya had migrated from Jajpur in Orissa to Sri Hatta (Sylhet) in Bangladesh during the period of king Kapilendra Deva (1431-1470). Kapilendra had been a senior minister (previously known as Kapilesvara Rauta) in the court of king Bhanudeva IV of the Ganga dynasty, who died without children in 1435, and who later came to be known as "the madman". However, it is possible that the allegations about the mental sanity of Bhanudeva had been created by Kapilendra's supporters, and that he had forcibly taken the power while Bhanudeva was away on a military expedition. It seems that Chaitanya's forefather had expressed disapproval for the manner in which he had ascended the throne, and he preferred to move away to avoid Kapilendra Deva's displeasure. However, the family retained their spiritual attachment to the Deity of Jagannatha, so much that Chaitanya's father was called Jagannatha Mishra.

Jagannatha Mishra (also known as Purandara), son of Upendra Mishra and father of Chaitanya, had moved from Sri Hatta (present Sylhet in Bangladesh) to Navadvipa as a student because at that time Navadvipa was still a famous center of education and culture, philosophy and religion. It had been for about five centuries, so much that British historians called it the "Oxford of Bengal", even though in later times it was so

completely devastated that at the times of the British rajya there were only a few very small villages among rice fields and jungles.

After the Gaudiya Vaishnava reform with the foundation of the Gaudiya Matha at the end of the 19th century, a few temples and *ashramas* were built and pilgrims started to pour in, especially from Calcutta. The flow increased after Iskcon started to build its world headquarters there, in the locality known as Mayapur, near the birth place of Chaitanya (called the Yoga Pitha), in the vicinity of the present town of Navadvipa (on the opposite side of the Ganges).

Navadvipa, in the district of Nadia, is 130 km north of Calcutta, on the bank of the Ganges River. The name means "nine islands" and refers to the localities known as Antardvip, Simantadvip, Rudradvip, Madhyadvip, Godrumdvip, Ritudvip, Jahnudvip, Modadrumdvip, and Koladvip. More elaboration on Navadvipa and Mayapur will be given later in our book.

Navadvipa had been the capital of the Sena empire, that from 1159 to 1206 expanded to include the entire Bengal (east and west) as well as Assam, Bihar and Orissa. Although the region had lost much of its wealth, power and safety, there were still many scholars living there.

In his *Chaitanya bhagavata*, Vrindavana Das clearly states that the people of those times were mostly materialistic, even those who belonged to aristocratic brahmin families and bore the prestigious titles of Bhattacharya, Chakravarti and Mishra (which later became mere surnames).

He says that people did not care for *dharma* or *bhakti* any more, but only engaged in dry debate, ritualistic pride, casteism, marriage show off, and arranging festivals for their relatives. They performed elaborate worship arrangements for the Deity worship but treated them merely as dolls, believing they owned and controlled the Deities and were entitled to use them for their personal pleasure and materialistic benefit. The prevalent religious tradition was the Shakta Tantric cult, but it had already fallen to a degraded level, as the worship to the Mother Goddess had become mostly a pretext for drinking alcoholic beverages, eating fish and meat, and trying to cause troubles to people perceived as "enemies".

The entire region had already fallen into the hands of the Muslims, who allowed the Hindus to continue with their religious practices only on condition that such practices

were private and very quiet, and that all Hindus accepted an inferior socio-political status (*dhimmi*) compared to the Muslims.

There was a small community of *vaishnavas* in the region, but its members kept mostly to themselves. The most famous leader of that community was Advaita Acharya, of brahmin ancestry, who had settled in Shantipura. Distressed and anxious about the condition of society and the difficulty of spiritual progress in such a degraded environment, Advaita engaged in austerities and worshiped Vishnu with fervid prayers, offering pure water from the Ganga river and leaves of *tulasi*, the plant sacred to Vishnu. In *Bhagavad gita* (4.7) Krishna declares that God manifests personally whenever *dharma* (the ethical principles of the universal religion) declines and *adharma* (the degradation of such ethical principles) increases. So Advaita prayed Vishnu to appear quickly and save the genuine Vedic knowledge, as he had done so many times in the past.

Several other future companions of Chaitanya took birth before him - Nityananda, Srivasa, Haridasa, Isvara Chandra Puri, Paramananda Puri and so on. Chaitanya's hagiographers present the picture of his advent in a manner quite similar to the advent of Krishna and his companions over 4000 years earlier, described in the *Bhagavata purana* and other fundamental texts of Vedic knowledge.

In this first volume we will discuss only briefly about Chaitanya's companions, supplying the information that is essential to understand their influence and role in Chaitanya's life and mission; in another volume we will elaborate more about them and their own followers. Here we will just say that according to *Chaitanya charitamrita*, these elder companions specifically appeared to prepare the appearance of Chaitanya. Especially Advaita Acharya: while observing the sorry state of the Hindu society of his times, he was crying out for Krishna to appear for his mission of protecting the good people, annihilating the evil doers, and establishing the genuine principles of ethics and religion.

Advaita saw the degradation of Hinduism and the persecution of the good people, and was so angry he wanted to cut the evil doers' heads off. But in Kali yuga the solution to the problem is not about killing the evil doers, because they are simply too many and the bad influences in society will continue anyway. The problem must be solved at the root, with a solution that will turn evil doers into good people, by helping them to understand and apply the genuine principles of *dharma*. This is the reason why a divine Personality manifests in this world, and so Advaita worshiped and offered *tulasi* leaves and flowers and Ganges water, crying and praying God to descend and purify the world. According to

Chaitanya's hagiographers and followers, Chaitanya's birth was the answer to those prayers.

Chaitanya's father Jagannatha Mishra settled on the bank of the Ganges at Mayapur after marrying Saci Devi, the daughter of a great scholar in Navadvipa, Nilambara Chakravarti, and he had very close friendship with other *dakshinatya* (southern) Vaidic *brahmanas* such as Advaita Acharya, Srivasa Pandita, Chandrashekhara Acharya etc.

It is said that Saci Devi gave birth to eight (some say seven) daughters who died at an early age and then had two sons, Visvarupa and Visvambhara. Visvarupa was a very serious boy, always very interested in studies and spiritual discourses. After the birth of his little brother, he remained in the family for 10 more years before taking *sannyasa*.

Visvambhara was born just after sunset, on the evening of Phalguna Purnima, 18 February 1486, 1407 Sakabda. He was a beautiful child, with a broad chest and very long arms, and a radiant golden complexion, that earned him the name of Gauranga ("golden body"). The time of his birth was considered particularly auspicious as it was marked by a lunar eclipse, and as a traditional custom everyone was engaged in religious activities and chanting of *mantras*.

During an eclipse the moon is aligned with the earth on a direct line with the sun, and this creates a special gravitation field that interacts with the normal magnetic fields of the earth and those of the living entities, especially human beings. This means that at those times the level of consciousness can change drastically, even more than during the high peaks of lunar activity at the full moon. Therefore all spiritual and religious activities performed during eclipses bring much greater results.

His maternal grandfather Nilambara Chakravarti made his horoscope and saw an extraordinary personality, who would deliver the entire universe. Thus the child was given the name Visvambhara ("supporter of the universe"). Visvambhara was also given the affectionate family nickname Nimai because he was born under a *nim* tree, and would later become known as Krishna Chaitanya (the *diksha* name he received from Kesava Bharati), or Gauranga ("golden complexioned"). Mother Saci performed all the required rituals for Nimai's birth, including the distribution of 8 types of legumes to the children on the 8th day from birth, and after the first month she took her ceremonial bath in the Ganga, worshiped Sasthi Devi and distributed gifts to all the ladies of the neighborhood.

Early period in Navadvipa

It is said that when he was still a small baby, Nimai was so attracted by the Names of Krishna that he stopped crying immediately when they were chanted. All the people around the house could feel supernatural presences, and this feeling prompted them to chant the *Vishnu raksha mantra* and *Devi mantra Aparajita stotra* for the protection of the baby. But the presences were benevolent: in fact, Vrindavana Dasa writes in his *Chaitanya bhagavata* that the Devas themselves often visited the house, sometimes spilling milk and butter in a playful mood to amuse little Nimai. Mother Saci would rush in hearing the crashing noise of broken pots and would find the 4 month old baby happily playing around.

Lochana Dasa's *Chaitanya mangala* goes even further, narrating an episode in which the Devas once entered Sacimata's room (to her amazement and fear) and, taking the child from her lap, seated him on a jeweled throne and worshiped him. At 6 months of age, during the ceremony of *anna prasana* (the first cereals meal starting the weaning process) Nimai immediately chose the *Bhagavata purana* over the mundane objects that were presented to him.

Several extraordinary stories are related in his biographies: once a big snake appeared in his home's courtyard and little Nimai started playing with it, getting everybody scared about his safety, until the snake went away. Another day some thieves kidnapped him to steal the jewels he was wearing, but they got confused and after a long walk they found themselves back in the courtyard of Jagannatha Mishra, so they put the child down and fled. Once, when the child was a little older, his father Jagannatha Mishra lovingly asked him to bring him a book, and Nimai obliged. While the toddler was walking towards him, Jagannatha Mishra heard the sound of ankle bells although the child did not wear any.

Another day he and Saci noticed that on the floor of the house there were footprints bearing sacred symbols. *Chaitanya mangala* describes that such symbols were flag, goad, *chamara*, chariot, lightning bolt, umbrella, *svastika*, *jambu* fruit, and a triangle surrounded by water pots.

A *brahmana* pilgrim who stayed for one night in the house of Jagannatha Mishra also had an amazing experience: for 3 times he cooked food to offer to his Krishna Deity, and every time little Nimai sneaked upon him and tasted the food before the ritual, ruining his offering. The *sadhu* started cooking a second time while Nimai was kept in the neighbors' house, but again the same thing happened. At 2 am the *brahmana* was exhausted, but Visvarupa encouraged to cook yet a third new offering, as Nimai was sleeping in a room locked from the outside. However, Nimai managed to come and taste the food anyway; to the aggrieved *sadhu*, Nimai showed himself as Krishna and the *sadhu* was overcome by ecstasy. However, the *sadhu* was explicitly asked not to disclose the events to anyone.

After the *chuda karana* (the first hair cut) and the *karna bheda* (piercing of the ear lobes for ear rings), Nimai was solemnly initiated to the art of writing. His father put a piece of chalk in his hand and showed him the alphabets. The child learned all the simple and composite letters in 2 days only, to the great amazement of all.

Nimai was certainly an extremely brilliant child, but very mischievous and restless as well. He regularly insisted in having his own way, often against his mother's orders - he played too close to the river bank, he stomped the ground forcefully, smeared his body with the ash from the bottom of discarded cooking pots, and so on. He used to throw terrible tantrums, and did not stop until he got what he wanted. He saw the full moon and got angry because mother would not give it to him: he kicked, pulled her hair, clutched her sari and hit her in the face, then rolled on the ground and cried. He was only pacified when some clouds drifted over the moon, and Saci told him that all his crying in anger had scared the moon away.

Chaitanya mangala says that one day he got angry with his mother and threw a small piece of brick at her; Saci decided to teach him a lesson and pretended to faint, dropping to the ground. Nimai was shocked and started to cry. The neighbor ladies rushed in, sprinkling Ganges water on Saci's face; but after being revived for a very short time, she fainted again: now understanding the game, the ladies said, "Nimai, go and find two coconuts for your mother, this is the only medicine that can save her life. Otherwise, you will lose her." Instantly, Nimai happily produced the two coconuts, to the great surprise of the ladies - including Saci herself - who could not understand where the two coconuts were coming from.

It is to be said, however, that from the stories of his early childhood it appears that Nimai got angry only when his mother (who had a very strong head, too) tried to enforce a very

conventional behavior on him, especially in regard to what was expected from him as a member of the orthodox brahmin community. For example, once he found a puppy dog and became very attached to it, but his mother put it out of the house and sent it away, because she was very concerned about his hygiene. Once on Ekadasi Nimai decided he wanted the food that was being offered to Vishnu by two close friends of Jagannatha Mishra - Hiranya and Jagadisha. He only calmed down after tasting the *prasada*. This was also rather unconventional.

Nimai loved to play in the water of the Ganga river, for hours at a time. He liked to splash people and pull them under water even while they were engaging in meditation and chanting their *mantras*. He stole their clothes, the ingredients prepared for their *puja* and even the Shiva linga they were carrying to the Ganga for worship. He regularly ate their offerings before the ritual was completed. He silently approached people from behind and then jumped on them shouting all of a sudden, throwing sand or spitting water on them after they had finished their bathing - having fun both with men and women, although he never disrespected any woman's or girl's dignity. It is said that once he disrupted the worship performed by a group of young girls, who were praying Shiva and Parvati to get a good husband: Nimai ate their offerings, saying that he would personally instruct Shiva and Parvati to grant their requests, but the girls did not take him seriously and went to complain to his parents.

In the meantime his elder brother Visvarupa was being serious enough for both of them. He studied eagerly, and he spent most of his time in the *deva griha* (temple room) of the family house, with their Raghunatha Salagrama shila. Every day he visited Advaita Acharya to discuss about *bhakti*, and sometimes mother Saci sent Nimai to call him for lunch - after which he returned to Advaita's house. Contrarily to the general habits of the majority of the people in Navadvipa, Visvarupa was totally uninterested in family and society, and had no intention to marry.

The sacred thread ceremony of Nimai - the *upavita samskara* - was performed when he was eight years old, by maternal grandfather Nilambara Chakravarti, who gave him the Gayatri and Savitri *mantras* according to the Oriya tradition. This is the version presented by Krishnadasa Kaviraja (*Chaitanya charitamrita*). According to Lochana Dasa (*Chaitanya mangala*), Nimai received the sacred Gayatri *mantra* from his father Jagannatha Mishra; however this seems unlikely as it is not the usual system. After the ceremony, Nimai was admitted to the school of Gangadasa Pandita in Ganganagara, and

within two years he mastered Sanskrit grammar, rhetoric, *smriti* (traditional commentaries to the scriptures) and *nyaya* (the science of logic). Among his dearest school friends were Murari Gupta, Kamala kanta and Krishnananda. Also in the same class was Gadadhara Pandita, who would later become one of his closest companions.

When Nimai was 10 years old, his parents started to discuss about arranging the marriage for his elder brother Visvarupa, who was then 18, and this move precipitated the situation. Visvarupa had never manifested any inclination for ordinary family life, and when he heard that he was expected to marry soon, he decided to leave home without informing anyone. He took *sannyasa* with the name of Shankara Aranya and started to travel to various places of pilgrimage: he never returned again to Navadvipa.

When Visvarupa left home, Nimai became more controlled and serious, concerned about comforting and supporting his parents, who were totally bereaved because of the loss of their eldest son. He engaged carefully in his studies, but his father started to become worried, thinking that Nimai would also leave the house if he became too attached to spiritual and religious life. So he made him stop his studies. The child reacted by becoming even more mischievous than ever, and started to play dirty. Together with his band of friends, he developed the habit of locking people inside their houses by tying the doors from the outside. Sometimes they would scare the people by pretending to be bulls (covered with a blanket for a more realistic effect) and charging into their gardens.

One day his mother found him sitting on the pile of discarded dirty cooking pots, and scolded him. Nimai replied that he was simply behaving like an ignorant person - nothing to be surprised about, considering that he was not meant to engage in studying... However, he immediately engaged his mother in a deep discussion about the nature of illusion that makes us see differences between the manifestations of the same material elements, and the unified field of consciousness that is the actual reality of everything that exists.

Mother Saci smiled and explained that the difference between the various manifestations does not depend on a different nature, because indeed all reality is one. It rather depends on the function afforded by each specific manifestation: earth or clay can be used as a cooking pot only in a particular state of being, that is functionally appropriate to containing water and other ingredients for cooking. Nimai recognized his mistake, and moved away from the garbage dump.

Saci informed her husband about the discussion, and Jagannatha Mishra finally decided to allow Nimai to continue his studies.

Nimai Pandita becomes a famous scholar

After completing the ordinary studies, Nimai approached Raghunatha Siromani Pandita and continued to explore Vedic knowledge. It is said he also studied with Vishnu Pandita and Sudarshana Pandita. Every day he went to school early, then after the lessons were over he went to the Ganga to take his midday bath, returned home to worship Vishnu in his form of the Raghunatha Salagrama shila, offered water to the sacred *tulasi* plant and then sat to take lunch. After eating he settled in a quiet place and continued to study, making notes on the subjects of the day. Everyone was amazed at his extraordinary intelligence and memory, and soon Gangadasa put him in charge of teaching his own students. Nimai loved to show off his learning, and used to taunt his school friends and engage them in debate.

One day he discussed with Mukunda, challenging him on the commentary of some verses; Nimai said that Mukunda was going to be an ayurvedic doctor, so the study of other texts was not suitable for him. Mukunda engaged in the debate and in the end Nimai conceded defeat; however, Mukunda was so impressed by the skills and intelligence exhibited by Nimai that later on he sent his son Purushottama to study under him. This Purushottama Dasa later became known as Svarupa Damodara, and remained with Chaitanya as one of his most intimate companions.

One night his father Jagannatha Mishra had a dream in which he saw Nimai taking *sannyasa* and going to live in Puri with many disciples. He realized that he could not stop the mission of his extraordinary son and he accepted the inevitable; shortly afterwards Jagannatha Mishra fell to a sudden fever and passed away. Lochana Dasa describes the last hours of Nimai's father with great details. When it became clear that Jagannatha Mishra was about to die, Nimai started preaching to his mother and their relatives about the inevitability of death and the need to face it on the highest level of consciousness possible. The dying man was carried to the bank of the Ganga, where

Nimai addressed him with great love and compassion. Then, after entrusting his family to the Salagrama Deity he worshiped - Sri Raghunatha - Jagannatha Mishra was bathed in Ganga water and left his body chanting the holy Names.

Nimai was now responsible for taking care of his mother. He was a very good and affectionate son but a very temperamental young man, especially when he saw that spiritual or religious activities were not taken seriously enough. In his *Chaitanya bhagavata*, Vrindavana Dasa writes that one day Nimai was going to the Ganga to take bath and offer worship to the sacred river, and asked for the required ingredients for the *puja*. His mother was engaged in some other work and told him he would have to wait because there was no garland ready. Nimai got into a fit of rage, smashed everything in the house and then fell unconscious, to the great consternation of his mother, who hurried to get the garland and the other articles, and affectionately pacified her son.

When Nimai returned home later in the evening, he apologized for his rash behavior and he gave his mother some gold coins to pay for the replacement of the damaged items; Saci was afraid because she did not know where the coins were coming from, so she asked the merchant to check everywhere to see if they had been stolen. But nobody was missing any coins in town, and Saci could procure whatever supplies she needed for the house.

On a few occasions, Nimai also had deep philosophical discussions with his mother and once he specifically asked her to observe the Ekadasi *vrata* by abstaining from eating all types of grains on the 11th day of the waxing and waning moon.

Every day Nimai went to the Ganga to take bath and he often sat there to discuss logic and rhetoric with the local scholars. He was always very careful and stylish in dressing - he tucked in his *dhoti* 3 times at the waist - and he was also naturally very handsome.

One day he saw the beautiful Lakshmipriya, the only daughter of one Vallabha Acharya from Navadvipa, who was also taking bath in the sacred river. Both Nimai and Lakshmipriya were attracted to each other and their meeting was like the reunion of Narayana and Lakshmi. Nimai was then 15 years old. Vanamali Acharya, who had been present at the first meeting between Nimai and Lakshmidivi, wished to arrange the marriage by talking to the girl's parents, but he had to overcome mother Saci's hesitation first. She thought her son was too young to marry, but Nimai convinced her. Finally there were no objections from either family, so the ceremony was organized in a nice but

simple manner according to the limited financial means of the bride's family, and at sunset Nimai went to get his bride from her father's house, greeted with many lamps by the women of the town.

After entering married life, Nimai became more responsible towards his family duties and was also expected to develop a certain level of social interactions with the adults of the town. He was spontaneously attracted to the small *vaishnava* community of Navadvipa, but he soon realized that the *vaishnavas* were not interested in scholarly debates and did not want to talk about material things in general.

The most prominent *vaishnavas* of the region were Advaita Acharya, who lived in Shantipur, and Srivasa Pandita, who was originally from Sri Hatta, but had moved to Navadvipa with his 3 brothers, of which Rama Pandita or Ramai was the closest to his heart. Another *vaishnava* from Sri Hatta who had moved to Navadvipa was Murari Gupta, who was a great devotee of Ramachandra (the *avatara* of Vishnu who appeared in Ayodhya as the perfect *kshatriya* prince). Also from the same village was his neighbor Chandrasekhara Acharya. They usually associated with another small group of *vaishnavas* who moved to Navadvipa from Chattograma: Pundarika Vidyānidhi, Chaitanya vallabha, Vasudeva Datta and his brother Mukunda Datta.

One day Isvara Chandra Puri arrived in Navadvipa. Vrindavana Dasa in his *Chaitanya bhagavata* states that he was an *ekadandi sannyasi* - a *dasanama sannyasi* from the Shankara line - and he visited the house of Advaita Acharya.

The *vaishnavas* that used to hang out there were not particularly impressed by his presence, at least until Mukunda started to sing a *bhajana* in glorification of Krishna, and Isvara Puri collapsed in a devotional ecstasy, manifesting all the symptoms of a true *vaishnava*. At that point his popularity increased tremendously, and all the *vaishnavas* of the district became very eager to meet him and interact with him. Nimai immediately invited him for lunch and became his close associate. Isvara Chandra Puri had written a book entitled *Krishna lilamrita* and wanted Nimai to help him edit it. Under his insistence, Nimai suggested to change a verb from the reflective form (*atmanapada*) to the transitive form (*parasmaipada*), but Isvara Chandra Puri objected and successfully defeated Nimai's criticism. Isvara Chandra Puri remained for 7 months in Navadvipa in the house of Gopinatha Acharya and often associated with the local *vaishnavas* and especially with Nimai Pandita, who also became more deeply acquainted with the other *vaishnavas* in the meantime.

However, Nimai's attitude was very extroverted, while the *vaishnavas* preferred the quiet meditation of the songs and narrations about Krishna. His attempts to engage them in debates about the technical points of the *shastra* regularly failed. One day he insisted to discuss with Gadadhara about *moksha* (liberation), and about the idea that it can be achieved only through extreme austerity or suffering. Nimai defeated him, but he realized that the philosophical debate approach was not appropriate to interact with his friends.

His exuberant energy sometimes manifested in episodes of uncontrolled behavior - shouting, roaring, and even smashing and destroying stuff such as food containers, pots, household items and even the plants in the garden. After venting his sudden fury, Nimai became stiff and then lost consciousness, so the general opinion of the people was that he was subject to attacks of *vata* disruption. According to Ayurvedic medicine, *vata* ("air" or "wind") is one of the 3 main components of the body (together with *kapha* or mucus and *pitta* or bile) and its disturbance accounts for nervousness, mental imbalance, erratic behaviors and even epilepsy.

During one particularly serious episode, Buddhimanta Khan and Mukunda came to see him, and applied Narayana taila and Vishnu taila (two types of Ayurvedic medicated oils) to relieve his condition. Nimai was revived from his fainting, but he sat up and stated emphatically, "I am *jagat isvara* (the Lord of the Universe)". Most of the people present there started thinking that he had gone totally crazy, or he was having some ghost attack. A big barrel full of more medicated oil was brought in, and Nimai remained sitting inside it, laughing.

Because of Nimai's very handsome looks and fascinating personality, and perhaps partly because they were a little afraid of him, the local people often allowed him to help himself to their wares without paying. Like Krishna entering Mathura had majestically asked tributes from various shopkeepers, Nimai visited the milkman, the cloth merchant and the shops selling perfumes, garlands and *tambula* (traditional mouth fresheners). He also took various fresh vegetables from Kholavecha Sridhara, a modest greengrocer whose income was based on the manufacture of *khola*, leaf plates and cups. Sridhara was a very pious man, and he was using 50% of his income to worship mother Ganga, so when Nimai demanded at least a 50% discount on his purchase, he put up some resistance before capitulating.

The meeting with Keshava Kashmiri

The people of Navadvipa were fascinated by Nimai's behavior and personality. His detractors rumored about his mental imbalance, but there was nothing imbalanced or unstable in Nimai Pandita's mind, because nobody was able to defeat him in debate, and his fame as a great scholar was growing day by day.

Mukunda offered him the Chandi mandapa (the traditional house pavilion where the Goddess Chandi is worshiped during festivals) in his house to give lectures, so Nimai started to teach there for 4 hours every morning. Then, as he used to do in his regular school days, he would bathe in the Ganga, return home to worship Vishnu and *tulasi* and take lunch.

Nimai was very strict in his religious discipline, and he regularly scolded the students who forgot to wear *tilaka*. However, his extrovert personality continued to manifest in many saucy interactions; for example he sometimes teased the people coming from Sri Hatta, in east Bengal, imitating their pronunciation and manners. Inevitably, they replied reminding him that his own family, too, was from Sri Hatta. Obviously these playful fights were meant to increase the fun for all the people involved, even if externally they seemed to be annoying; this type of behavior is compared by Chaitanya's followers to the pranks, teasing and frolicking exhibited by Krishna in his activities in Vrindavana, Mathura and Dvaraka.

Also, we need to note that Nimai never molested girls or women, but always respected them. True, all biographers (especially Lochana Dasa) speak highly of his good looks, elegant dressing and stylish demeanor, that were extremely attractive for the ladies of the town. It is even hinted that many girls had a crush on him. This idea - together with the idea that he entered the mood of Krishna in the *rasa lila* with the *gopis* of Vrindavana - gave rise to the practices of various sects that imagined Nimai having secret romantic or even sexual affairs with the ladies of Navadvipa.

It is very unlikely that the speculations of these Gauranga nagaris (as they called themselves) had any foundation in reality, not only because of the particular historical context of Bengal under the Islamic domination, but also because all evidence about

Nimai's character, activities and teachings easily disproves that. Several times in his life he manifested unequivocal condemnation for illicit sexual relationships, especially those of the so-called tantriks that used the pretext of religion to exploit and enjoy women, more or less openly. The anti-conventional spirit exhibited by Nimai was aimed against caste prejudice and lack of sincere devotion to God, and this earned him a good number of enemies who were more than eager to spread nasty rumors about him.

Although he did not hate or mistreat women, he was definitely not in the romantic mood either. His only sentimental relationship developed with Lakshmipriya, who became his wedded wife, and when she died, he was not interested in marrying again. There is not one single piece of evidence supporting the idea that he was interested romantically or sexually in other girls. His relationship with Vishnupriya was good as he behaved kindly to her, but he remained detached and increasingly uninvolved, especially after his initiation in Gaya, when all his emotions and sentiments became directed towards Krishna. At that time Nimai entered the mood of Radha longing for Krishna - not the mood of Krishna seeking to find some more *gopis* as the Gauranga nagaris would like to think.

We must also remember the early insistence on closed doors *kirtanas* with his intimate companions, to which no ladies directly participated, and the totally transcendental nature of Nimai's activities under trance, exhibiting only moods and acting on them only symbolically. Even when he entered the Syamasundara mood, the manifestation of those sentiments should be assimilated to the trance exhibited by Radha and the other *gopis* in the absence of Krishna, when they imitated his activities and attitudes, but only in a symbolic way. Keeping the *tribhanga* pose in a stunned immobility for hours can hardly be compared to the activities of the Gauranga nagaris.

Again, we must remember that Nimai entered *sannyasa* in the fullness of his youth (at the age of 24) precisely to demonstrate that he had no interest for romantic or sexual relationships on the material level, and after taking *sannyasa* he did not tolerate any infringement on the dignity of the *sannyasa* order, as demonstrated by his attitude in the case of Chota Haridasa. Chaitanya had some female followers, but his interactions with them was always on a purely spiritual level, and the only gratification he accepted from them was the offering of food prepared with devotion and offered to Krishna - a type of relationship he would easily afford to any sincere follower, without prejudice of birth (gender is also a major type of birth prejudice).

One day a Digvijayi Pandita named Keshava Mishra came from Kashmir to challenge the scholars from Navadvipa. He had toured Gauda (Bengal) after traveling through the region then known as Anga, Vanga, Kalinga and Utkala, as well as Tirupati, Delhi, Kasi, Gujarat, Vijayanagar and Kanchi, and he claimed he had regularly defeated all his opponents in debate. The meaning of *dig-vijaya* is precisely, "victorious in all directions".

The *tol gurus* ("village teachers") of Nadia, worried at the possibility of being defeated in public by a foreign Pandita, quickly found some other previous engagements and left town. Nimai happily rose to the occasion and went to meet Keshava Kashmiri on the bank of the Ganges at Varokona ghat in Mayapur. Informally, Nimai asked Keshava Kashmiri to compose some verse on Ganga and Keshava quickly recited 100 long *slokas*. Nimai precisely repeated the 64th verse, pointing out that the expression *bhavani bhartuh* ("the husband's wife") he had applied to Parvati, Shiva's consort, was somewhat redundant, and also mentioned 4 more discrepancies in other verses. The Kashmiri Pandita was amazed by the extraordinary intelligence, memory and erudition of Nimai, and quietly withdrew his challenge. Nimai immediately stopped his students who were starting to mock the defeated scholar, and this act of kindness inspired even more respect from the proud Kashmiri.

Nimai Pandita's fame spread wider and wider, and more students came to listen to his discourses and to visit his house. One day 20 *sannyasis* unexpectedly came to his house for lunch, and with the assistance of mother Saci and Lakshmipriya, Nimai was able to feed them all in a perfectly satisfying way.

One day he suddenly decided to go east, to the river Padmavati, to search for disciples and collect donations. In his tour he gave many discourses and attracted many students, so when he was ready to return home, he was carrying quite a lot of wealth. Also, during this journey he met Tapana Mishra, preached to him about Hari Nama and suggested him to move to Varanasi. Later this Tapana Mishra will be one of his main associates and the father of Raghunatha Bhatta, one of the six Gosvamis of Vrindavana.

While Nimai was away, Lakshmipriya died suddenly. It is generally said that she was bitten by a snake, but *Chaitanya bhagavata* says that the venom that killed her was the pain of the separation from her beloved husband during his eastern tour. *Chaitanya mangala* seems to merge the two versions, saying that the pain of separation took the form of a poisonous snake. The details, however, are relatively unimportant to the story. What matters most is that Nimai's mother was distraught, especially because of the

implications for her own life. She sensed that Nimai would eventually renounce family life, and the demise of Lakshmipriya was yet another step towards that fateful day. Immediately she started to search for a new daughter in law, and found a very quiet and serious girl who offered her respects to her every day when they met at the bathing *ghat*. The girl was Vishnupriya, the daughter of one Sanatana Mishra from Navadvipa.

Mother Saci sent Kasinatha Pandita as messenger to Vishnupriya's parents and obtained their consent to the marriage. However, everything was arranged without Nimai's knowledge and consent, and this initially created some confusion because he was not planning to marry again at all. Only when Vishnupriya's father expressed his distress for the failure of the marriage plans, Nimai consented to accept her as his wife. This second marriage was more for the benefit of mother Saci than anything else.

The wealthy Buddhimanta Khan offered to pay for all the marriage expenditures, and a very opulent ceremony was arranged. On the day before the marriage - called *adhivasa* or "eve" - all the people started to come and were given gifts; some people came 2 or 3 times to get more presents, but there was plenty for everyone and Nimai gave instructions to distribute everything liberally. In the afternoon of the next day, Nimai's relatives dressed him in full marriage regalia and accompanied him in procession for about one hour around the city to go and get his bride by palanquin. Thousands of lamps brightened the way for the many participants - friends, neighbors, relatives, and a great number of servants. Finally the rituals were completed and Vishnupriya started her new life in mother Saci's house: in fact the two women were mostly keeping company to each other, as Nimai continued to engage more and more in spiritual discussions in the company of the *vaishnavas*.

Haridasa arrives in Navadvipa

Another great personality arrived in Navadvipa during that period: Haridasa the friend of Advaita Acharya. He had moved from Bhudhan to Phulia near Shantipura to distance himself from the Muslim community to which his family had belonged, but also in Phulia he had faced many problems.

Whether Haridasa had actually taken birth in a brahmin Hindu family and subsequently had been adopted as an orphan by a Muslim family (as it is also said), or he had actually taken birth in a Muslim family, the fact remained that he had been indicted into Islam and he was considered a Muslim to all effects.

The envious caste brahmins, not contented with criticizing him for his devotion to Vishnu and Krishna, had actually complained with the local Kazi, who had him arrested and sent to jail for apostasy. In jail Haridasa found a great number of religious people who had similarly been convicted by the fundamentalist islamic regime, and he blessed them to maintain their elevated spiritual consciousness. When the King (the Nawab Hussain Shah) sent for him, Haridasa remained calm and fearless. The Nawab tried to convince him to give up his faith in Hinduism and practice Islam instead, warning him that apostasy was a serious crime, punishable by death.

Haridasa replied by explaining God is one only, although he is called with different names by different people. Also, he said that punishment will not change a man's nature or beliefs, so he did not see any need for further controversy. The Nawab was not happy with the answers, and goaded by the envious Kazi, he sentenced Haridasa to be lashed in 22 market places: this was without a doubt a death sentence, because the number of lashes inflicted at each station was so great that an ordinary man would die after 2 or 3 of these punishments, let alone 22 one after the other.

The soldiers viciously carried out the sentence, but in the end Haridasa was still alive and had not shown any sign of repentance or fear, while many people from the public had protested against that inhumane treatment. So the soldier became afraid, thinking that the Nawab would punish them for neglecting their duty. Haridasa understood their predicament and told them he was going to stop his vital functions, so that the Nawab would not blame them, and so he did. The body was brought back to the Nawab as dead, but the envious Kazi was still not satisfied, and he said that an apostate should not be buried, because a proper islamic burial would purify his sins: he demanded that Haridasa's body should be thrown into the river to rot there.

Haridasa returned to consciousness while floating in the Ganga, and feeling refreshed and happy he started again to walk around the town. Everyone was amazed, and the Muslims recognized him as a great saint and begged for his forgiveness; when Haridas was brought again to the presence of the Nawab, nobody dared to accuse him any more, and he was allowed to go free wherever he wanted.

For some time Haridasa went to live in a cave along the Ganga bank, but the people who visited him noticed the presence of poisonous fumes, caused by a big snake that lived in the same place. So his admirers requested him to leave the cave, and Haridasa said that he had not been feeling any inconvenience, but for the sake of his friends he would move out in case the snake did not vacate the place. Immediately the huge snake emerged from his hole and slithered away, to the great amazement of all the people present.

In another episode, Haridasa was honored by a snake charmer, who was entertaining some people in the courtyard of a house. Immersed in the consciousness of the spirit of Ananta Sesha, the snake charmer was dancing and singing about the Kaliya damana lila - the story in which Krishna met the great black snake Kaliya in Vrindavana and ordered him to leave and not disturb his companions any more. That devotional song immediately awakened Haridasa's ecstatic feelings, and he started to dance and chant the Lord's Names as well. The snake charmer respectfully stepped aside, leaving more space to Haridasa, and continued to sing to the end of the story, among the general appreciation of the bystanders. After regaining external consciousness, Haridasa humbly thanked the man and walked away, cheered by the spectators.

One local caste brahmin had watched the show and concluded that he could also gain easy respect and praise by those simple-minded people, and started to sing and dance himself, imitating Haridasa's behavior. However, the snake charmer immediately detected the deception and attacked the cunning brahmin, beating him with a stick until the foolish man stopped his pretense and ran away.

Not unexpectedly, these facts further stimulated the envy and hatred in the local caste brahmins, who hired a prostitute to seduce the saint and "expose and disgrace" him. When he was approached by the girl, Haridasa simply asked her to wait until he had completed his religious vows of chanting a specific number of holy Names, so the prostitute remained respectfully seated near his residence, listening to the Lord's Names and looking at the sacred *tulasi* plant, until her heart was completely purified from all material desires and attachments, and realized that her attempt at damaging Haridasa was unethical. She confessed the evil scheme to Haridasa, and he merrily revealed that he had been perfectly aware of the situation, and he had remained in that place only to help her progress in her spiritual life, otherwise he would have already left. So it was that the prostitute became a great devotee of Vishnu, and accepting Haridasa as her spiritual guide, she renounced all material activities. Then Haridasa offered her his residence and

promised that she would be getting her food and necessities by the grace of God through his supporters, then he left for Navadvipa.

These events are described in *Chaitanya bhagavata* by Vrindavana Dasa. *Chaitanya charitamrita* (while speaking of Haridasa's glories in chapter 3 of *Antya lila*) adds that the woman shaved her head and lived very simply, wearing only one cloth, and sustained herself with whatever little food she received - thus earning the respect and admiration of many religious persons in that region.

Also, *Chaitanya charitamrita* gives a report on the consequences of Ramachandra Khan's bad actions. Some time later, Nityananda was sent to Bengal to preach pure love for God, and came to the house of Ramachandra Khan. He sat in the Durga mandapa and the courtyard filled up with many people. Ramachandra Khan was outraged and sent a servant to ask Nityananda to vacate the premises. "Sir, my master sent me to accommodate you in the house of a milkman, where you will have plenty of space. This *mandapa* is too small for the crowd of your followers."

Nityananda could understand the actual situation, and getting very angry, he replied, "Ramachandra Khan's advice is good. This place is not fit for me: it is more suitable for *mlecchas* who kill cows."

Ramachandra Khan ordered the servant to remove the soil where Nityananda had been sitting, and purify the entire *mandapa* with cow dung. Some days later, the Muslim tax collector came to the village and found out that Ramachandra Khan had failed to pay all his dues; he arrested him along with his wife and sons, and plundered the house and the village for 3 days, causing all the villagers to flee to other regions. During that time the tax collector settled himself in the Durga mandapa, slaughtered a cow and cooked the meat in that same place.

According to *Chaitanya bhagavata*, while Haridasa was traveling, he had another unpleasant encounter with an envious caste brahmin. While walking through the village of Hari Nadi, Haridasa continued to chant the holy Names loudly as it was his habit, and one caste brahmin became angry at him and challenged his practice, saying that one should chant the *japa mantra* softly or mentally, and not so loudly, because that is the instruction of the scriptures. Haridasa explained that certainly one who silently recites the *japa mantra* can obtain a spiritual benefit, but such benefit is limited only to his person; on the other hand when someone chants loudly, all those who hear the Names are

benefited, including the animals and the plants who are unable to practice the *japa yajna* by themselves. Not surprisingly, the brahmin became even angrier and threatened to cut off Haridasa's nose and ears to punish him of his "arrogance". Here Vrindavana Dasa, in his *Chaitanya bhagavata*, comments that according to the *Varaha purana*, in Kali yuga many *asuras* will take birth in brahmin families to destroy the principles of religion and to persecute good people.

Chaitanya charitamrita has a different version of the episode, setting it in the village of Chandapura, near the house of Balarama Acharya, the family priest of the Majumdera brothers (Hiranya and Govardhana, the father of Raghunatha Dasa, who would become one of the six Gosvamis of Vrindavana). It says that Haridasa took residence in a small cottage and regularly accepted food at the house of Balarama Acharya, where he participated to religious discourses. One day Balarama Acharya invited him to the house of the Majumdaras to give a speech, in the presence of many scholars and *brahmanas*.

The people assembled started to discuss the glories of the holy Names, and some stated that the chanting of the Names of God would liberate a person from all bad *karma*, and even from material bondage. Haridasa intervened and said, "The true result of the chanting of the holy Names is much greater: it is pure ecstatic love for Krishna. All the other blessings are just a by-product, like the rising of the sun in the morning dissipates all darkness and fear even before the sun becomes actually visible, and enables everyone to engage in their proper activities."

A local brahmin named Gopala Chakrvarti apparently did not agree with that statement. He worked under the Majumdera brothers as a tax collector, and his target was 1,200,000 coins to be deposited in the treasurer of the Muslim king. He was young and very handsome. To show off his scholarship, he challenged Haridasa's conclusion, "Liberation is hard to attain even after cultivating knowledge for millions of births, yest this emotional simpleton says that it is merely the by-product of a reflection of the Name. I don't believe this is the conclusion of the *shastra*. I will check with the scriptures, and if I don't find any support to his claims, I will cut his nose off."

Haridasa was undaunted. "A pure devotee who enjoys the transcendental happiness of loving service to God is not even interested in liberation. I accept the challenge. If it is not confirmed that mere *namabhasa* bestows liberation, I will cut off my own nose myself."

There was an uproar among all the good people attending the meeting. Balarama Acharya chastised Gopala Chakravarti, and the Majumdaras fired him from his job and told him not to come to their house any more. After 3 days, Gopala Chakravarti developed visible symptoms of leprosy, and his handsome nose melted and fell off. His toes and fingers went the same way, and he became an outcaste. Everyone was extremely impressed, but Haridasa was not gladdened by the brahmin's misfortune. He moved to Shantipura to the house of Advaita, and taking food in his house every day, he became his close friend, discussing every day about Krishna and devotional service.

We will elaborate more on Haridasa's life and character in the section about Chaitanya's companions; here we will simply say that Advaita Acharya highly respected Haridasa's spiritual position. When asked why he was honoring him with food offerings on the occasion of the *sraddha* celebration, when it is customary for the *karta* (the person who undertakes the ritual) to feed a number of *brahmanas* to ensure the success of the ceremony, he replied, "You are a true *vaishnava*, so you are more qualified than hundreds of ordinary brahmins... by feeding you only, I get much more religious merit than I could obtain by inviting ordinary caste brahmins."

When Chaitanya inaugurated his Sankirtana movement, Advaita suggested Haridasa that he moved to Navadvipa to participate in it.

The journey to Gaya

After Haridasa's arrival in Navadvipa, Nimai decided to go to Gaya (in Bihar) to offer *sraddha* (funeral oblations) for his deceased father, and he left accompanied by a small group of students.

Arriving at Mandarachala in Gaya, he visited the temple of Madhusudana. Suddenly he became ill with a fever, and his students were very worried. *Chaitanya mangala* says that Nimai ascribed such illness to an offense that one of his students had unwittingly committed against a genuine *brahmana*, and said he knew which medicine would be required: the foot wash water of a true *brahmana*. Immediately the fever disappeared and he was up and about.

After taking bath in the Brahma kunda and performing *sraddha* for his father, Nimai visited the other famous holy places there - Bodh Gaya and Srinagara, Dakshina manasa, Rama Gaya, Yudhisthira Gaya, Bhima Gaya, Shiva Gaya, Brahma Gaya, Saurasa Gaya, and Gaya sira. Then he went to offer homage to the Pada padma or Vishnupada, the foot prints of Vishnu that constitute the main center of worship in that pilgrimage place. When he saw and touched the imprint of the feet of Vishnu on the stone, Nimai was overwhelmed by ecstasy and tears streamed from his eyes.

Isvara Chandra Puri was there, as he was originally from the village of Kumara Hatta near Gaya and was based in Gaya itself, where his fame as a great religious personality and *guru* was well established. Isvara Chandra Puri recognized the young Pandita he had met in Navadvipa, and later he went to see him in his quarters while Nimai was cooking rice. Nimai welcomed him with great affection and respect, he gave him his own food and later cooked again for himself. On the next day, he approached Isvara Chandra Puri and asked to be initiated into a *mantra*. Isvara Puri happily obliged giving him the 10 syllable Gopala *mantra* (*gopijanavallabhaya svaha*), and Nimai entered in a totally new phase of his life and mission.

This is the second initiation received officially by Nimai/ Chaitanya.

The first was from his maternal grandfather Nilambara Chakravarti, by which Nimai became officially a member of the traditional Vedic orthodox *brahmana* system. There is no controversy or contradiction in this first religious passage, but somehow Chaitanya's followers seem to overlook it as non-important, because by and large they try to distance themselves from the "traditional Hindu orthodoxy" that is perceived as based on casteist birth prejudice (at least apparently).

However, Chaitanya himself never minimized the importance of genuinely qualified *brahmanas* - and this point is highlighted considerably in the episode of his "fever" that he cured by drinking the foot wash water of a genuine *brahmana* - just before embarking into a totally different and revolutionary path: the mass distribution of the holy Names.

The information on this second initiation into the "*krishna mantra*" from Isvara Chandra Puri seems to be more confused. Isvara Chandra is often presented as a disciple of Madhavendra Puri from the line of Madhva Acharya, but Vrindavana Dasa in his *Chaitanya bhagavata* clearly says that he entered Navadvipa as an *ekadandi sannyasi* - a renunciate in the line of Adi Shankara.

Yet again, if we make some research in Gaya (one of the major holy pilgrimage places in ancient times) we find out that Isvara Chandra Puri was the most prominent religious personality there in those times, and had many disciples. The third initiation will be the *sannyasa* order, received from Keshava Bharati, a Shankarite *sannyasi* from the Shankara matha at Katwa, not far from Navadvipa, and a great admirer of Madhavendra Puri like Isvara Chandra Puri, Advaita Acharya and Nityananda as well.

We will elaborate more about these initiations in the section about the context of Chaitanya's mission, discussing about the disciplic lineage of Chaitanya, to better understand his spiritual heritage and teachings. Some Gaudiya Vaishnavas seem to give the greatest (if not paramount) importance to the idea of disciplic lineage, and we all know about the claim of the Sarasvata Gaudiya matha about the disciplic succession - from Krishna to Brahma to Narada to Vyasa to Madhva, then through a number of official links down to Madhavendra Puri and Isvara Puri and Chaitanya, and then from Chaitanya down to Bhaktivinoda and his successors.

It is not our intention to challenge the spiritual authenticity or value of the Sarasvata Gaudiya lineage. As we will explain later in the sections about the "spiritual lineage of Chaitanya" and the "context of Chaitanya's mission" and "the *mayavadi* war", we believe that Bhaktivedanta's statements about the "disciplic succession" of the Sarasvata Gaudiya mission must be understood in its proper way.

The problems of historical validation, institutional allegiances and official ritualistic ceremonies are irrelevant to the meaning that the founders of Sarasvata Gaudiya vaishnavism (Bhaktivinoda, Bhaktisiddhanta and Bhaktivedanta) gave to their statements and to the concept of *diksha* or initiation. Contrarily to what many immature person may believe based on the mainstream/ conventional notions or faith, they clearly explained that *diksha* or initiation is simply the transmission of *divya jnana*, divine knowledge, into the heart of the student by the grace of the teacher. Such transmission - like all aspects of the transcendental activities - is not limited by material considerations of time, space, and physical contact. Anyone who claims otherwise is either misinformed/ uninformed, or is furthering the materialistic interests of institutionalized religion, where competition for the allegiance of customers is considered a main issue.

Chaitanya's perspective was certainly very different: his idea was a "free market" of the holy Names, with transcendental knowledge and divine love distributed to everyone and anyone - a mass movement of spiritual revolution required to oppose the disastrous

casteist degradation, but not by attacking it directly.... rather by making it obsolete and irrelevant to the masses. In this perspective, we can see how Chaitanya and his mission are on the same "*avatara*" level of Adi Shankara and Buddha, who in their own times and in their own ways had created valid alternatives to the same major Kali yuga problem: the delusional idea of automatic birth qualification.

Here we must be extremely careful not to ascribe ignorant and wrong conclusions to the persons of these *avataras* themselves: it is crucial to understand that the problems were caused by the later interpretations of the unqualified "followers" of Buddha and Shankara. Both Buddha and Shankara expounded flawless shastric conclusions and pure transcendental knowledge for the benefit of the masses, filling the gaps where Kali yuga had damaged the orthodox brahminical system.

Similarly, we must remain alert against similar problems created by the unqualified and ignorant followers of Chaitanya and other great teachers and *acharyas*, and avoid the foolish mistake of blaming them for what they never actually taught or established. Again, the only protection against this danger is proper research at the source of this knowledge and direct realization of the import of such knowledge, demonstrated by practical behavior according to very precise parameters.

Let us now continue to review the events described in the biographical records, collected from the most famous among the universally recognized works of his hagiographers - most notably, *Chaitanya charitamrita* and *Chaitanya bhagavata*.

Nimai's transformation in divine love

Nimai had visited Gaya and requested initiation from Isvara Chandra Puri into the "*krishna mantra*" (the 10 syllable *Gopala mantra: gopi jana vallabhaya svaha*). This was a major turning point, demonstrated by a considerable transformation of his attitude and behavior that everyone could observe in the subsequent period.

To the great amazement of his students, he started to exhibit strong ecstatic symptoms of devotion to Krishna while chanting the holy Names, and forgot everything and everybody

else. He left his traveling companions and started alone towards Mathura, but then he had second thoughts and returned to Navadvipa, followed by his students. When they asked him what happened, Nimai simply said, "a voice told me that I had to remember my divine mission in Navadvipa".

When Nimai arrived home, everybody was amazed to see the huge change in his personality. He was so humble and loving and respectful to everyone, and much more quiet and emotional at the same time. Speaking highly about pure devotion to the beautiful Radha and Krishna, he stated that the pride caused by wealth, high birth and education are serious obstacles on the path of spiritual realization and religious success, while people who are sincere and humble can easily attain and please Krishna. The hunter Guha did not follow any rules of civilized life, Dhruva was just a small child, Vidura's birth was considered lowly, Ugrasena had no deeds of valor to his credit, Kubja was certainly not beautiful, and Sudama was totally broke financially.

Nimai said that while returning to Navadvipa he had traveled through the village known as Kanai natasala (where dance and drama about Krishna's activities were traditionally performed), and there he had seen Krishna as a young boy, who had come to embrace him and then had run away. From that moment on, his mind had been totally immersed in the overwhelming desire to find Krishna.

He asked everyone to meet him on the next day in the house of Suklambara Brahmachari; he specifically asked for Murari Gupta and Sadashiva to attend. *Chaitanya mangala* adds an intimate emotional touch to these early ecstatic days, showing us Nimai lost in his devotional ecstasy and crying profusely, with Suklambara comforting him and wiping his nose repeatedly. In his trance, Nimai could not tell day from night, and could not restrain himself from rolling on the ground and trembling violently.

In the morning all the *vaishnavas* used to go to Srivasa's house to pick flowers as there was one very large jasmine tree there. Srivasa, Gopinatha, Gadadhara and Rama were collecting flowers when Sriman arrived, carrying the news of Nimai's return and transformation. They were all amazed and elated, and discussed about meeting him. Nimai first went to the house of Gangadasa Pandita and then to Mukunda's - the places where he used to give lectures.

His demeanor was not scholarly any more, and did not show any arrogance at all. Naturally he was asked to resume teaching but he only spoke about Krishna even in

regard to grammar, leaving everyone very perplexed, as the students were not expecting to make any academic connection between grammar rules and the Personality of Krishna.

At home, too, Nimai manifested a great change in behavior and consciousness. He was totally disinterested in all material things and attachments, and mother Saci was alarmed by the new situation. Then Nimai explained to her the importance of transcendental realization and divine love - bringing the same examples that Kapila had presented to his mother Devahuti on birth, death, the search of spiritual knowledge and dedication to devotional service.

If mother Saci was perplexed, that was nothing compared to the effect that the new situation had on Nimai's students. They openly started to complain that Nimai Pandita had gone crazy due to some imbalance of *vata*, and that nobody could relate his discussions about Krishna and emotional displays of devotion with the subjects he was supposed to teach - grammar, logic, rhetoric, etc. Some of them even approached Gangadasa Pandita and asked him to correct Nimai, that was still his student.

To demonstrate that he was not crazy and he had not lost his mind to some illness, Nimai sat to give commentaries to the *shastra* (scriptures) for 4 hours on the bank of Ganga, challenging everyone and anyone to find any fault in his explanations and quotes regarding grammar and dictionary meanings. However, he had apparently lost all interest in this type of scholarly exercises. After his lecture was over, Nimai walked away and went to the house of Ratnagarbha Acharya, who was famous among the *vaishnavas* of Nadia for reading *Bhagavata purana*. On the next day, he returned to meet his students and officially announced that he would not teach any more. He gave them all his text books and blessed them to obtain divine love for Krishna, asking them to chant the Hari Nama, the holy Name of Hari. Deeply impressed, his former students asked for instructions on that spiritual practice to which their respected teacher had devoted himself so passionately, and Nimai gave them the famous song "*hari haraye namah krishna*" (detailed later in the book in the section about "*bhajanas* and *kirtanas*").

In his home in Shantipura, Advaita Acharya had a dream: Nimai appeared to him in a divinely radiant form, and told him, "Stop your fasting and austerities and worship me. What you have been praying for is happening."

All the *vaishnavas* in Nadia were amazed by the deep transformation in Nimai's attitude. He had become very humble and amiable, and demonstrated great affection and respect

towards them; he insisted in serving them - carrying their stuff, running errands for them, and so on. They were embarrassed but also happy to see such sincerity and spirit of self sacrifice in the great scholar. Also, Nimai became increasingly annoyed by the offensive behavior that casteist brahmins demonstrated against the humble *vaishnavas*, especially those who did not have a high social position, such as Haridasa, Suklambara Brahmachari, and Kholavecha Sridhara. Sometimes, when he was at home and thought about that offensive behavior, he became angry and started yelling and breaking stuff, scaring his mother and wife, who did not know what to do. During one of these episodes, mother Saci was desperate enough to call the *vaishnavas* for help, because "Nimai was sick".

Srivasa arrived and after observing the situation he simply commented, "that's a good disease, I would like to get it, too." The other devotees also comforted Saci, explaining that her son's emotional outbursts were caused by his intense devotional feelings, and not by some disease or mental imbalance.

To reassure his devotees that he would protect them without fail, Nimai manifested supreme powers and the highest level of divine consciousness.

To get scriptural and brahminical endorsement, he went to Advaita Acharya's house, and to the great surprise of everyone, the Acharya welcomed the young Pandit by offering him the *arati*, the formal worship ceremony that is usually performed in honor of the Deities, the *guru* and other divine personalities. One of the assembled devotees, Gadadhara, had been Nimai's school friend so out of his feelings of familiarity he believed he was entitled to express his surprise. Advaita immediately rebuked him, declaring that Nimai was not an ordinary person, rather he was a direct manifestation of the divine consciousness. From that day on, the innocent-minded Gadadhara became one of the most intimate companions of Nimai - together with Advaita, Srivasa and Nityananda, who would join them soon afterwards. In fact, Gadadhara became so close to Nimai that he was the only one capable of soothing his tempers and anxieties, and mother Saci always called him for help. Every day he lovingly offered Nimai sandalwood paste and a flower garland, and in the night he would make his bed and then lie at his feet. The *Chaitanya bhagavata* says that one day Nimai was desperately crying for Krishna, and Gadadhara replied to Nimai that Krishna was in his heart; Nimai started to claw and tear his own chest apart to find Krishna, so Gadadhara lovingly embraced him and held his hands, until he calmed down.

A few days later, Nimai suddenly rushed to Srivasa's house. Srivasa was in the *puja* room engaged in worshipping the Deity, but Nimai was impatient and he started to kick the door, calling him loudly. He manifested as Vishnu, and asked Srivasa to call his family and perform *arati* to him. He said, "I know you and the other *vaishnavas* are afraid that the Muslims will persecute you, but you must not be afraid of them. I will take care of the matter. I will tame all wild animals and bring them to the Nawab to show him how they are crying out of spiritual ecstasy." Then he called Narayani, the 4 year old daughter of Srivasa's brother, and asked her to chant the Hari Nama: she immediately became ecstatic and thrilled in loving emotion, started to recite the Names of Vishnu. After some time, Nimai returned to the external consciousness and expressed embarrassment, because in Kali yuga nobody is supposed to present himself as a Vishnu *avatara* - not even a genuine Vishnu *avatara*. His mission was to remain hidden (*gupta*, or *channa*) and to play the role of a devotee of Vishnu, so he asked all the people present to keep the secret as long as possible. "Do not speak about these things to anyone", he said.

This episode is particularly important to Vrindavana Dasa, the author of the *Chaitanya bhagavata* who relates it, as here he reveals that he is the son of that same Narayani.

In a very similar episode, Nimai rushed to the house of Murari Gupta - the original author of the diaries and biographical notes on Chaitanya, from which all the other major texts were compiled - shouting "boar, boar!". To the amazed Murari, who looked left and right to see where the wild animal was, Nimai manifested the consciousness of the Varaha *avatara*, the boar-like form of Vishnu. Roaring loudly, he spoke about protecting his devotees as his first priority; as Varaha he had lifted the Earth back to her normal orbit and at that time the Earth had become pregnant with Narakasura, but when it was time to protect the Devas, who had begged for his protection, he did not hesitate to kill his own son and save the Devas.

Chaitanya mangala adds more about the conversation between Nimai and Murari; it included verses of *Bhagavad gita* (10.15) about the fact that only Bhagavan is able to know himself, and (3.19) as Bhagavan having no material hands or feet, but rushing to accept offerings. On this occasion, Murari asked for the blessing of pure divine love, and Nimai instructed him to meditate on Krishna and engage in the service of the *gopis*. However, Murari was already devoted to Ramachandra, and Nimai kindly manifested the form of Rama for him. Moved by his sincere devotion, Nimai said, "Murari, you are Hanuman himself."

The arrival of Nityananda

Nimai had now manifested the path of divine love through the chanting of the holy Names, and had reassured his core devotees about embarking in the imminent revolution of the Sankirtana movement. The stage was set, and only one other major actor was missing.

Just then Nityananda arrived in Navadvipa, becoming the main companion of Nimai. All Chaitanya's hagiographies glorify Nityananda as the direct manifestation of Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna, who had appeared in the form of Chaitanya. More information about Nityananda will be given later in the book, specifically in the section about "the companions of Chaitanya". Here we will simply say that he had left his paternal home as a boy to accompany a visiting *sannyasi* in his pilgrimages, and after 20 years of traveling up and down around all the holy places in India, he had remained in Vrindavana waiting for Nimai to start his Sankirtana movement.

The personality of Nityananda is extremely difficult to understand, and in fact many of his contemporaries didn't get it at all. He was called the Avadhuta because he did not care for social conventions or rules, and in spite of the proverbial tolerance and inclusiveness of the Hindu tradition, his manners often confused and annoyed people around him. He used to have lots of mock fights with Advaita Acharya, with whom he had many amusing (and sometimes even alarming) exchanges that normally could be considered offensive.

Therefore both Krishnadasa Kaviraja and Vrindavana Dasa insist again and again that those who only accept Chaitanya but not Nityananda are sinners like those sinners who worship Krishna without properly honoring Shiva. Krishnadasa even starts his *Chaitanya charitamrita* by saying that he left his own family and house because his brother had criticized Nityananda for his extravagant behavior.

One day, Nimai announced to his devotees that he had had a dream: he had seen a chariot arriving, with a flag bearing a palm tree branch, and an extraordinary personality had descended from it, searching for him. He sent all his companions to look for this great personality, but nobody could find him. Nityananda was hiding in the house of Nandana Acharya. Nimai smiled and took them all to the house of Nandana Acharya. Then

Nityananda came out, roaring with delight and embracing Nimai as a long lost brother. He had a large and tall body, broad shoulder and long arms, and appeared very similar to Nimai.

The next day was the celebration of the traditional festival of Vyasa puja, when Veda Vyasa is honored by all the followers of Vedic culture. It falls on Asadha purnima, the full moon day of the month of June-July (and not, as many people believe, on the birthday of one's personal *guru*). The devotees prepared a garland for Vyasa, but when the celebration was about to start, Nityananda gave the garland to Nimai instead. Everyone was surprised, but the main devotees had already accepted the exalted position of Nimai, and the *arati* was performed in his honor.

Then Nimai manifested his *sad bhujā* ("six-armed") form of Chaitanya, Rama and Krishna in the same body and then his *chatur bhujā* ("four armed") form as Vishnu and Krishna in the same body and finally his form of Krishna. Nityananda in turn entered the mood of Balarama carrying the *mushala* ("plough"), celebrating the relationship between Krishna and his elder brother Balarama, to which the relationship between Nimai and Nitai was to be compared by their followers and associates.

Nityananda's antics certainly brought a very anti-conventional spirit to the developing Sankirtana movement. Almost every day he shocked and amazed not only the general people, but even the members of Nimai's entourage, who had to make extra efforts to try to understand him.

One day Nityananda, immersed in Balarama's mood, started shouting and asking for wine. Those who have studied the activities of the Krishna lila in Vrindavana, Mathura and Dvaraka certainly know that Balarama was/ is very fond of the intoxicating beverage called Varuni, made with honey. The exact recipe of the Varuni is not given, but it is normally equated with honey: this could mean that it was a kind of mead, the alcoholic beverage produced by the fermentation of honey and water in the ancient civilizations of Europe, but it is also possible that Varuni was simply raw pure honey, as high concentrations of sugar can also have a mild intoxicating effect. Perplexed, the devotees decided to bring him Ganga water in drinking pots, and Nityananda was pleased.

We need to understand here that the orthodox brahminical culture considered all alcoholic beverages as impure, and although it did not ban their use, trade or production, it restricted their use to the lower *varnas* or classes in society. The mere contact with

alcoholic substances would even contaminate containers, that had to be discarded, and certainly *brahmanas* and spiritual/ religious persons were considered fallen if they ever consumed alcoholic drinks. A particular exception was represented by "*shakta tantrika sadhus*" who offered alcohol and meat to the terrifying forms of the Deities they worshiped such as Bhairavi (or more often to ghosts and evil spirits), but were considered very degraded by the pure *vaishnavas*.

On a side note, we must clarify that no genuine Deity ever demands such offerings, and that the genuine *shakta* tantrics know very well that each devotee can choose whether to present tamasic, rajasic or sattvic (or transcendental) worship to the Deities. The offering of alcoholic beverages and animal meat is classified in the tamasic category, and should be considered not a ritualistic requirement, but rather as a magnanimous opportunity that the Goddess allows her most fallen worshipers that want to somehow purify their bad habits without giving them up abruptly. If someone really wants to drink alcohol and eat meat, it is much better to consume such substances after a purificatory offering to the Deity than simply indulge in tamasic gratification without any restriction.

Nityananda's ecstatic trance in the mood of Balarama - often described in puranic stories as intoxicated and with red-shot eyes - could easily be mistaken as drunkenness, but we should not be misled. This is the warning that is repeated again and again in all the hagiographic literature, and the prominent position that Nimai gave him in his Sankirtana movement should be sufficient to make us understand that there is something much deeper under the surface.

Exploring this glorious abyss is not easy, and it should not be done through mere mental speculation, because it can be extremely dangerous. It is the "dark side" of God that monotheistic cultures have tried to separate from the "bright side", thus creating a maimed image of a schizophrenic deity in constant struggle against an "Enemy" that is apparently as powerful as him, if not more. This dichotomy has profoundly affected the human psyche, too, creating and developing the disastrous situation of inner conflicts and external wars, destruction, cruelty etc that we are experiencing in our present societies.

A glimpse over this vast territory through an attentive and unbiased study of genuine Vedic tradition will show us that Vishnu - like all the other Deities or Personalities of Godhead - has both *saumya* and *asaumya* ("benevolent" and "terrible") aspects, and true devotees worship both. Specifically, the distinction between Vishnu and Shiva expands these hues in character, since Shiva is openly described (especially in *Brahma samhita*,

one of Chaitanya's favorite books) as the manifestation of Vishnu in the material universe, because Vishnu is always transcendental and non-manifest on the material platform (*narayanah parah avyakta*, as Adi Shankara wrote as an opening to his commentaries to *Bhagavad gita*). For Chaitanya's hagiographers, Nityananda and Advaita share this Shiva identity, where Nityananda manifests the *asaumya* and Advaita manifests the *saumya*. It is therefore very interesting to watch them engaged in mock fighting against each other, and in various exchanges with Chaitanya - the manifestation of Krishna/ Vishnu, that manifests his *asaumya* form only marginally (in his tantrums) but definitely shows his "non-manifested" level of consciousness with his increasingly frequent states of ecstatic "loss of external consciousness".

A superficial materialist - the most common variety of *homo sapiens* in Kali yuga - will certainly dismiss such behaviors as psychic imbalance, and indeed there is a vast body of evidence of such simplistic diagnosis expressed by many people, including some of the contemporaries of Chaitanya. However, the extraordinary character of Chaitanya mission, that was meant to include the vast masses into a paradigm shift of consciousness, is the contagious electrifying nature of his mystic emotions, that overstepped the intellectual and mental reservations of the "comfortable middle class". A famous saying describes the work of the cultural revolutionaries in all times and places: "to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable". This is a very important point to understand, because its clean simplicity underlines the missions of the *avatars* and *acharyas* in the Vedic tradition. A crisis is required in order to facilitate the spiritual evolution of people.

This is why Bhagavan appears in times of crisis, and sometimes he even precipitates them, either directly or through the agency of his devotees, such as Narada Muni and others. In this process, the institutionalization of religious movements remains the greatest threat to the authenticity of its spiritual power, because it creates inertial resistance - nothing more than *tamas*. Thus Bhagavan appears personally or sends his representatives, again and again, every time that *tamas* fossilizes a living movement - a situation easily verified through the appearance of the symptoms of increasing *adharma*, the persecution of good people and the thriving of the evil doers.

Nityananda's character, however, is not preeminently dark. Even in his most intriguing fits, the *asaumya* element is happy and transcendental, just like in Balarama during the Krishna lila. In his ecstasy-drunken state, Nityananda started calling Nada, meaning Advaita ("Nara" as in Nara Narayana).

After some time he returned to normal consciousness and asked people to forgive him for any offensive behavior he might have exhibited during his trance. The devotees reassured him affectionately, saying that "nothing strange" had happened. So Nityananda continued with his extraordinary mission to shake the conventional minds of the people around him. In the night he broke his own *danda* and *kamandalu* - he had been traveling in the garb of a *sannyasi* until then - and raised such a ruckus that the devotees were scared. In the early hours of the morning, Nimai took him to the Ganga to refresh himself and clear his ideas, but Nityananda saw a crocodile and wanted to catch it. He had to be restrained by Nimai and the other devotees, and finally accepted to calm down and return to their place.

Advaita Acharya endorses Nimai's mission

The devotees were rather perplexed. They knew something big was going on, but they could not precisely understand what. Advaita, Srivasa and Murari had been convinced about the transcendental manifestation of divine moods in Nimai, and all the participants to the Vyasa puja ceremony had seen the expression of the *sad-bhuja* manifestation of Nimai. To convince his core group of followers to embark in the new huge adventure he had in store for them, Nimai wanted to impress on them that his plans were a divine mission, the *yuga dharma* or religious prescription for the age, and this required a good shaking of their conventional beliefs.

Nimai spotted Ramai, the younger brother of Srivasa, and told him to go to Advaita and tell him about his manifestation of Nimai and about Nityananda. Advaita was universally recognized as the senior leader of the *vaishnavas* and *brahmanas* of the region, and from his position he could provide the orthodox endorsement to the Sankirtana movement, building solid foundations for valid and solid people to join it more easily.

In his *Chaitanya bhagavata*, Vrindavana Dasa writes that Advaita wanted to test Nimai so he went to hide in the house of Nandana Acharya (which seemed to be extraordinarily suitable for the purpose, having been used as a hiding place first by Nityananda and then again in the future by Chaitanya himself). Nimai said, "Nada wants to trick me, but I

know what he is doing", and to the great amazement of everyone he walked out and straight to the house of Nandana Acharya to call Advaita. The meeting was emotional. Nimai invited the old man to dance, and Advaita happily danced, singing Jayadeva's *Dasa avatara stotra*. Manifesting his divine consciousness to Advaita Acharya, Nimai impressed on him the urgency of his mission, and asked him to recognize him in public. At this time, Nimai came out in the open in front of everyone as the great leader of the Sankirtana movement, officially recognized and endorsed by the elders of the *vaishnava* community in Navadvipa.

In his *Chaitanya mangala*, Lochana Dasa describes how Nimai glorified Advaita in front of all the devotees, stating that he was greater than Uddhava and Akrura. "Advaita is the greatest *vaishnava*, my devotee and my soul. He is the master of creation Maha Vishnu, Sadashiva, that descended to save the people of Kali yuga."

In turn, Advaita Acharya performed the official and public worship to Nimai, by offering him *arati* on the bank of the Ganga - an event glorified in the famous song written by Bhaktivinoda. All the *vaishnava* community participated in awe and respect, and Nimai became the unquestioned leader of their group. After offering his allegiance to Nimai, Advaita Acharya told him, "Your mission is to distribute love for God. Please give this blessing also to simple-minded people such as women and *sudras*, and even to those who have become arrogant because of their birth, learning or wealth, or are unqualified in any other way."

Chaitanya mangala offers more details about these events. On that occasion, Nimai said, "I have come to re-establish the proper meaning of religion and to spread the *sankirtana* of the holy Names all over the land. I shall give Vraja bhava in the form of *dasya*, *sakhya*, *vatsalya* and *sringara rasas*. I will relish the nectar of Radha Krishna *prema*. I will distribute that *prema* to everyone including children, *sudras*, women, uncivilized people, *yavanas* and *devas*. I will give the blissful taste of Vrindavana to everyone."

The Sankirtana core group was getting ready for the imminent revolution. Nityananda remained in the house of Srivasa and behaved just like a small child, developing an affectionate relationship with Srivasa's family and especially his wife Malini, that he accepted as his own mother. When sitting for meals Nityananda would not eat by himself, so Srivasa's wife Malini had to feed him by her own hand. Sometimes he embraced her with the emotional abandon of a child, and called her "mother".

One day, Nimai jokingly asked Srivasa why he was keeping Nityananda in his house, since he was such an aggravation to him and to his entire family. To that, Srivasa smiled and expressed his realizations about the transcendental nature and character of Nityananda, who was non-different from Nimai himself.

Immersed in the contemplation of the transcendental pastimes of Krishna and Balarama in Vrindavana, Nityananda continued to manifest his ecstatic emotions. One day he went to Saci's house and wanted to hold her feet in love and respect, calling her Yasoda. Saci was embarrassed and scared and ran away, complaining about that strange behavior. Then Nityananda apologized as a small child would do, with the customary Indian display of humility - he held his ears and said, "Vishnu, Vishnu".

On Nimai's request, mother Saci cooked a meal for him and Nityananda, and when she entered the dining room to bring the food she suddenly saw them as 5 year old boys, naked and decorated with beautiful ornaments - Nimai had a black complexion and Nitai was white. Gradually, mother Saci was being exposed to the strongest and most immediate emotions of the transcendental contemplation of Krishna lila and her understanding developed, preparing her (and indirectly, Vishnupriya, too) for the future development of Nimai's life.

Some time later, Nimai was asked why mother Saci had not been transformed by the ecstatic consciousness of meditation on Krishna, and Nimai replied that she had unwittingly committed an offense against Advaita Acharya. Since her eldest son Visvarupa used to spend so much time in Advaita's house in his youth and ended up taking *sannyasa* at an early age and leaving home, Saci had been afraid that Nimai's association with him would also end up in him going away and abandoning her.

Saci realized that Nimai was not going to change his life purpose and abandon his mission to stay back home and play the married man, and she accepted and embraced what was inevitable. She would be taken care of properly by the devotees in Navadvipa, remain in the company of Vishnupriya, and gradually become lost in the ecstasy of Yasoda, the mother of Krishna in Vrindavana, described in the *Bhagavata purana*.

When Krishna and Balarama left Vrindavana to pursue their mission in Mathura and Dvaraka, all their devotees there became distraught and blissful at the same time in the ecstasy of separation from them, and mother Yasoda was completely lost in the consciousness of Krishna. In the same way, Nimai was preparing mother Saci for her

long separation from him, that would transform her consciousness and immerse her in a constant devotional ecstasy.

Chaitanya mangala also narrates another episode about Nimai's lack of interest for materially attached family life. One day a *brahmana* came to the house of Srivasa and was not allowed to enter. He felt offended, and the next time he saw Nimai on the *ghat* to the Ganga river he cursed him to also get shut out of the house, and never find happiness in family life. Nimai serenely replied, "You think it is a curse, but I consider it a blessing."

The *brahmana* was shocked and realized his mistake. Suddenly he was reminded of the true purpose of human life, that is to achieve *moksha* or liberation from material conditionings, identifications and attachments, and throwing himself to Nimai's feet, he begged forgiveness for his stupidity. Nimai lifted and embraced him, granting him the blessing of divine love for Krishna.

Another memorable event was the arrival in Navadvipa of Pundarika Vidyanidhi, who would also become a member of the core group of closest associates of Nimai. Pundarika Vidyanidhi was a very wealthy gentleman from Chattagrama in east Bengal. His love and respect for Mother Ganga was proverbial. Contrarily to what the general people used to do, he did not use her water to bathe or wash clothes or other articles, but he drank some Ganga water to purify himself before performing *puja*. He could not tolerate to see her disrespected by others, so he just went to offer *pranama* in the evening when nobody was there. When he arrived in Navadvipa, he went to visit Mukunda, the ayurvedic doctor, who had also been born in Chattagrama. He was accompanied by a large group of servants carrying lots of luggage, including a top class bed that he used as a sitting couch. Comfortably seated there and fanned by his servants, Pundarika Vidyanidhi was behaving exactly like a prince, immersed in extravagant luxury and sense gratification.

The *vaishnavas* who had gathered at Mukunda's house were amazed by this new arrival. Especially Gadadhara, the son of Madhava Mishra, who had been very renounced since his childhood, was surprised to see such display of sensual indulgence and ostentation. Mukunda correctly understood his perplexity and decided to give him a demonstration of the real spirit of Pundarika: he started to sing a devotional song about Krishna and Pundarika instantly fell into an ecstatic trance, falling from his beautiful couch and rolling on the ground, oblivious to everything and everyone except the glorification of the Lord. In his *Chaitanya bhagavata*, Vrindavana Dasa writes that Pundarika remained

immersed in that trance for no less than 6 hours, so that nobody could doubt its genuine feelings. Gadadhara was fully convinced and even decided to become his disciple. Pundarika then went to see Nimai, who welcomed him with great affection and happiness, and called him "father Pundarika".

The meaning of Krishna Consciousness

Nimai also manifested as Shiva for a shaivite devotee who was traveling through Navadvipa. Hearing him singing the glories of the Lord, Nimai appeared as Shiva with matted locks, and affectionately jumped on his back, embracing him and joining his singing. This gave Srivasa Pandita, Mukunda Datta and the other associates of Nimai the opportunity to offer prayers to Shiva. Then Nimai ecstatically chanted the Names of Krishna and Rama, and the shaivite devotee was also swept away by ecstatic love.

Soon afterwards, Nimai manifested as Balarama and went to ask for honey from Advaita and Murari, until he was pacified by Gadadhara Pandita. Again, in this connection we may remember that in the Gaudiya vaishnava tradition, Balarama is considered the source of Sankarshana, considered the source of Shiva. How to understand these extraordinary states of consciousness? It is certainly not easy.

The first thing we need to understand is the very definition of "Krishna consciousness", or *krishna chaitanya*. To grasp the meaning of this level of consciousness, we must be free from any material identification, because the false ego of bodily consciousness obstructs the perception of the real nature of the spirit soul. As long as we are in the bodily consciousness - "I am man", "I am woman", "I am white", "I am black", "I am Indian", "I am American", "I am Italian", "I am fat", "I am thin" and so on - we remain unable to perceive any other level of consciousness.

Liberation from this gross level of delusional bodily identification constitutes the Brahman realization - the realization of the transcendental Self that is pure consciousness free from all limitations. Of course, since this level of perception is "non-dualistic" as described by Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*, it is sometimes defined as "non-qualified" or

"impersonal", but in reality the absence of qualities or personality refers to the material categories, not to the spiritual categories.

In other words, the spirit (both Brahman and Atman) is free from material qualities and limiting identifications, but possesses unlimited qualities and in virtue of its fundamental nature of CONSCIOUSNESS, it can certainly be called "personality".

Personality is a synonym of consciousness.

The difference between material personality and spiritual personality is that spiritual personality is not limited by the boundaries of space and time that characterize the material personalities.

Therefore the aspect known as Param Atman comprises all the expressions of consciousness that are manifested in this universe, in all bodies and even in all atoms of the creation. A direct realization of the Param Atman consciousness expands our consciousness to access all such expressions of consciousness and personality. We can better understand this level by considering that *param atman* means, "the soul of the soul", sometimes translated as "supersoul", in the sense that it is the supreme Soul of all souls - not a sort of "Superman" soul that has more material powers and a higher position than other souls - as the *asuras* think. Once we arrive on the proper level of realization, envy or antagonism towards the Supreme Personality of Godhead becomes impossible.

The consciousness of Bhagavan is still more expanded as it includes not only the material world but the spiritual world as well - a level of existence that is extremely difficult to understand for the embodied individuals. Usually people who have a material mentality imagine the spiritual world as a sort of paradise with a beautiful environment and a happy life - but that's still within the realm of the material universe, and is described in the *shastra* as Svarga or heavenly planets.

The spiritual world is not a place - being beyond space and time - but is simply a level of consciousness, that is actually existing everywhere and all the time. The materially conditioned soul is unable to perceive it because such consciousness is clouded by his own material identification or false identity - the *ahankara*. As soon as the material identification dissolves, the eternal existence of the spiritual world becomes automatically manifest, just like one can realize that the sky has always been present beyond the covering of clouds that prevented us from seeing it. This spiritual realization enables us to understand the philosophical perspective or vision (*darshana*) taught by

Krishna Chaitanya, called *acintya bheda abheda tattva*, "inconceivable simultaneous separation and non-separation". The Gaudiya tradition speaks of the *siddhantas* ("conclusions") presented by previous *acharyas* as:

1. *advaita* ("non dualism"), presented by Adi Shankara, who appeared after Buddha (date uncertain)
2. *visista advaita* ("oneness with varieties"), presented by Ramanuja, who appeared in 1016
3. *visista dvaita* ("duality with varieties"), presented by Madhva, who appeared in 1238
4. *suddha dvaita* ("pure transcendental duality"), presented by Vishnu Svami, who appeared after Madhva (date uncertain)
5. *dvaita advaita* ("simultaneous oneness and duality"), presented by Nimbarka (date uncertain)

This oneness and duality refers to the Personality of Godhead and his energies - namely the individual soul, the spiritual world and the material world. As consciousness is the fundamental nature of existence (*sat, cit, ananda*), this oneness and duality must be applied to the consciousness inherent in the Personality of Godhead and in his energies.

The individual soul can "plug in" to the Brahman, Param Atma and Bhagavan consciousness by tuning his thoughts and feelings on the contents of the scriptures and the realizations of genuine devotees. It's not just a matter of intellect, as the emotional component of the consciousness is much more powerful than the rational component. This emotional component is transmitted by empathy, or contact with the energy or vibrational frequency created by consciousness - the living force.

As God is present everywhere eternally, God consciousness does not depend on space or time. To become God conscious, we just need to tune in to God consciousness: to make a practical example, it is the same awakening that a living cell in our body would experience if it could participate directly to our central consciousness. The individual cell consciousness is "lost" in the wider consciousness of the entire body, but it is not destroyed - it is just forgotten. Of course the cell is not "becoming" the entire body, but because it directly participates to that consciousness, it can function as a non-interrupted or non-separate unity with the entire body.

Another example we can give is the light of a lamp or candle that becomes "lost" when the sun rises: the light of the lamp does not cease to exist, but it is not perceived any more because it "merges" with the light of the sun.

In practice, this means that any individual soul can become "Krishna conscious", or attain the level of consciousness where there is no separation between the individual consciousness and the universal consciousness. Chaitanya is clearly demonstrating this process through his own example and by inspiring others through his personal contact.

The most amazing thing is that Chaitanya is connecting to this Krishna consciousness through the most intense feeling of all - separation, the emotion that manifests when the object of our love is not visibly present before us, and we miss it deeply. In grossly material terms, separation is the opposite of contact, but on the subtle level it constitutes the highest awareness of the love object, that "shines for its absence". On the spiritual level such intensity is even greater, because the Consciousness is non-different from the Personality; the Name, the Qualities, the Activities, etc, are actually the same Personality.

The *jiva tattva* can never become *vishnu tattva* or *shiva tattva*, but it can manifest the consciousness and hence the form of that Personality - this is the meaning of the concept of *sarupya mukti*, the liberation that confers the same "form" of Vishnu (as Vishnuduta), and the concept expressed by the verse *acharyan mam vijaniyan (Bhagavata purana, 11.17.27)*, "one should consider the *guru* as non different from me (Krishna)".

We will elaborate more about these points in the section about Chaitanya's spiritual path.

The beginning of the Sankirtana movement

The stage was now set for the great inauguration of the Sankirtana revolution..Nimai started to hold *sankirtana* ("congregational chanting and singing") every evening either in Srivasa Pandit's house or Chandrasekhara's house. The early members of this core group were Nityananda, Gadadhara, Srivasa, Advaita Acharya, Pundarika Vidyanidhi, Murari Gupta, Hiranya and Jagadisha, Haridasa, Gangadasa, Vanamali, Vijay, Nandana Acharya, Jagadananda Pandita, Buddhimanta Khan, Narayana, Kasisvara, Vasudeva, Rama,

Garuda, Govinda, Govindananda, Gopinatha, Sriman, Sridhara, Sadashiva, Vakresvara, Srigarbha, Suklambara, Brahmananda, Purushottama and Mukunda Sanjaya.

The singing usually continued all night, and all the neighbors noticed it. Some of the envious caste brahmins complained, commenting that the noise was keeping them awake, and rumoring that the *sankirtana* parties were actually based on sense gratification - wine, women, and who knows what else. Some of the detractors observed that all that singing and dancing was indecent, disgraceful and unworthy of dignified brahmins, and therefore it was corrupting the "proper caste system" and "Hinduism" as a whole.

However, the doors remained closed and only the members of the group were admitted, so the allegations and slandering were left outside.

Many devotional songs and verses were chanted and sung, not only the Hare Krishna mantra as we know it today, but also other very famous lines - such as "*jay krishna, murari, mukunda vanamali*" or "*hari haraya namah krishna yadavaya namah*". More about those early *kirtanas* will be elaborated in a later section of this work.

Within the core group, Nimai freely exhibited his ecstatic symptoms. In the expression of his devotional emotions, his eyes poured tears and became red, and his body became at times very light and other times very heavy, very stiff or very soft. Sometimes he crashed to the floor and rolled around, sometimes he dropped on all fours and went crawling like a baby, sometimes he took the *tribhanga* pose ("curved in three places", i.e. head, shoulders and legs, characteristic of Krishna while playing his flute) and kept it for hours without moving, and sometimes he bent his body into a wheel with head touching his own feet. Sometimes he expressed the divine mood, declaring himself as God, then after a short while he cried in humility, apologizing for his pride and declaring himself the servant of the devotees.

Chaitanya bhagavata says that one day at Srivasa's the devotees asked for mangoes and Nimai planted a mango seed that immediately sprouted and grew into a large tree laden with so many fruits that everybody ate their fill every month for one entire year. This is certainly an exceptional feat, because mangoes are seasonal fruits and normally they are only available for 2 or 3 months during summer. According to the version of *Chaitanya mangala*, however, the mango tree only appeared for a few moments, blossomed into flowers, produced a great abundance of fruits, and then vanished. Another day - according to the *Chaitanya mangala* - Nimai re-enacted Krishna's *rasa lila* in the

courtyard of Srivasa's house. Catching the hands of Narahari and Gadadhara, he started to dance with his devotees, manifesting the mood of Syamasundara.

One of the members of the core group, Suklambara Brahmachari, was very humble, and as a *brahmachari* he used to go begging for his modest meals. During the *kirtana* he used to dance while wearing his cloth bag on his shoulder; one day Nimai put his hand into the bag, took out a handful of raw broken rice, and ate it with great happiness, to the amazement of everybody.

Here Vrindavana Dasa quotes the verse 4.31.21 from *Bhagavata purana*: "Hari, the Lord, never accepts the worship of the people who have a dirty heart and a bad mentality, but he is very affectionate to those who simply depend on him and have no other possession or shelter. Those who are maddened by their own scholarship, wealth, family lineage, or great deeds, often commit great offenses towards those devotees who are free from material possessions and identifications."

In his *Chaitanya bhagavata*, Vrindavana Dasa describes the *maha prakasha lila* ("the episode of the great revelation"). One day at Srivasa's house, during *sankirtana*, Chaitanya deliberately sat on Vishnu's altar for 21 hours in full consciousness, and the devotees performed the *abhisheka* ("ritual bathing") with Ganga water, chanting Vedic mantras such as the *Purusha sukta*.

One servant lady in Srivasa's house, called Duhkhi, was carrying one pot after the other, and lining them carefully and neatly for his bath, and Nimai was very pleased by her devotional attitude. So he changed her name into Sukhi ("happy") because he felt that Duhkhi ("unhappy") was not a good name for her any more.

After the bathing, the devotees performed the *arati* with the 16 *upacharas* ("articles of worship") as per traditional custom. The worship was accompanied by the recitation of the 10 syllable Gopala *mantra*. (*gopi jana vallabhaya svaha*), the fundamental *mantra* of Chaitanya's followers till date, through which initiation is given. Then Chaitanya held out his hand and said, "give me food". All the devotees rushed to get food - sweets, savories, milk, yogurt, and Nimai ate everything. Whatever the devotees gave him, he consumed without hesitation, although the quantities were huge and no ordinary human being could possibly eat that much. To further reassure the devotees about his extraordinary power, Nimai then revealed details of their past. He said that once Srivasa had gone to listen to the *Bhagavata purana* reading at the house of Devananda Pandita. While hearing the

activities of the Lord, Srivasa was filled with the emotion of love and he started to cry, but Devananda's students decided that he was disturbing the reading and dragged him out of the hall. Devananda had not stopped them, so Srivasa had returned home very disappointed and depressed - not so much about that bad treatment he had received personally, but more about the disgraceful behavior of foolish, ignorant and arrogant so-called "traditional religious people".

To Gangadasa, he reminded that time when he had found himself in a very difficult situation, running away to save his family from a Muslim raid; they had come to the bank of the Ganga but there was no boat to get across the river - then finally a boatman had come to their rescue: Nimai said he was that same boatman. He then called forward Advaita, Gadadhara and Murari Gupta, and showed him the Ramachandra manifestation. To Haridasa he said, "you are of higher birth than me".

To Kholavecha Sridhara, he said that he was very pleased with him for spending 50% of his meager income to worship Mother Ganga: due to that reason only he had engaged in mock squabbles with him and tried to cheat him by paying only half the price of the banana trunk core and the other vegetables that he sold on the market. He said that devotees do not care for wealth, beauty and dress or dignity, because these things strengthen one's false ego. Then Nimai called the little niece of Srivasa, Narayani, and handed her some *prasada* personally.

This was not the only time when Nimai manifested many forms of Vishnu for his close followers. To Murari Gupta, he manifested both the form of Varaha and the form of Ramachandra; then knowing his deep love for Rama, he gave him the name Ramadasa. One day Nimai asked Srivasa to recite the *Vishnu sahasra nama* ("the 1000 names of Vishnu") from the *Mahabharata*, and when the Name of Nrisimha came up, Nimai manifested the mood of Nrisimha. Some days later, another devotee of Shiva arrived to Srivasa's house, and Nimai took the mood of Shiva and danced with that devotee for a long time. Another day, Nimai sat in a temple exhibiting the mood of Balarama and started calling for honey. In the same period Nimai also showed the *visvarupa* (the universal form) to Advaita Acharya on his request.

Whether Nimai actually showed the devotees the various forms of Vishnu, or simply manifested the mood or consciousness of such forms, is irrelevant for the sincere spiritualist, because only a foolish materialist demands to see the gross demonstration of the form of consciousness. It's like asking someone to show their mind on a petri dish in

order to demonstrate its existence: it's just something that is perceived in a different - and very real - dimension of existence. To "see" such forms, one must develop "divine eyes" - a transcendental and spiritual vision - as Krishna clearly states in *Bhagavad gita* (*na tu mam sakyase drashtum anenaiva sva-cakshusha, divyam dadami te cakshuh pasya me yogam aisvaram*, 11.8)

On special days - such as Ekadasis, Dvadasis, and on other festivities - the *kirtana* started from dawn (rather than from evening) and continued for 24 hours. This enthusiasm in religious activities certainly raised a lot of mundane curiosity in many outsiders.

One day Srivasa's mother in law told him that she really wanted to watch the *sankirtana*. Srivasa knew very well that Nimai did not want any outsider, but the old lady insisted and insisted, and in the end Srivasa caved in; he told her to hide in a corner of the hall and try not to be seen any anyone. The ruse did not go unnoticed by Nimai. He stopped the *kirtana* and said he was feeling some disruption in the atmosphere due to the presence of a person who did not have any faith or *bhakti*. After the old lady had left, the *kirtana* could proceed without any obstruction.

Another episode demonstrates Srivasa's dedication to Nimai's *sankirtana* mission, over and above his own family attachments. Another day while the *kirtana* was going on, Srivasa's son - who was already ill with cholera - suddenly got worse and died. The ladies of the house started to wail and cry, and Srivasa rushed in to ask them to be quiet, because he did not want Nimai's *kirtana* to be disturbed. The ladies complied and restrained themselves, albeit with great difficulty.

The boy had expired at 4 pm. About 2 and 1/2 hours later, Nimai returned to the external consciousness and came to know about the death of the boy. He embraced Srivasa and was moved by his spirit of self-sacrifice; he went to see the boy and asked why he had left the body. Everybody was stunned, as they could not understand why Nimai was talking to a dead body, but upon being questioned by Nimai, Srivasa's son temporarily re-entered the body and replied, pacifying his family members and explaining the science of the soul and reincarnation.

"Due to my previous activities, I had been allotted this limited time in this body and in this family. Now my time has expired, so I must continue my journey. There is no loss, because all bodies and all relationships are temporary anyway. I am happy I was given the blessing to stay for some time in this place, but now I am free to go."

Sometimes Nimai was irritated by his followers, so he went alone to other places, such as the house of Nandana Acharya. This solitary feature of Nimai's character will be evident from many similar episodes also later in his life. He was sometimes irritated also by the behavior of outsiders.

One day he passed by the house of Devananda Pandita - the famous reciter of the *Bhagavata purana* who had mistreated Srivasa - and got angry with him. He said that he had no *bhakti* or realization, so he had no qualification for teaching.

Some people approached him under pretense of giving him good advice and they told him, "Nimai Pandita, we are your friends so we advise you to be careful: the king might summon you at any time now. You know that people cannot sleep because of your noisy *kirtanas* in the night, and they may send reports against you. The king will believe them, and you will be in serious trouble."

Nimai replied, "Very good! I am always eager to meet anyone and discuss. Why shouldn't I be happy to see the king?"

The caste brahmins maliciously retorted, "But the king is Muslim..."

The threat was not so subtle: the caste brahmins were happily contemplating the idea of getting Nimai flogged, jailed, executed or forcibly converted to Islam, as that was the standard procedure for those Hindus who became too noisy with their religious activities - something that was considered a challenge to the islamic domination of the region.

Nimai was deeply annoyed by the viciousness of those so-called "pure guardians of *dharma* and religion", and his mind became disturbed. Thinking that these people did not deserve anything, he considered his mission was impossible and he decided to jump in the Ganga to commit suicide.

Nityananda and Haridasa came to know about it and jumped in the river to the rescue. Dragging him back to shore, they comforted him and begged him to stay with them, for the love of his devotees. Then Nimai said that he wanted to remain alone for some time, and he went to hide in Nandana Acharya's house.

Nityananda goes begging from door to door

We have already seen how Nityananda had arrived in Navadvipa, manifesting the mood of Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna in Vrindavana.

The son of of Hadai Pandita and Padmavati, both devotees of Maudesvara Shiva, Nityananda was an only child and was originally named Kuvera. As a small boy, he played with his friends by enacting the *lila* of Krishna and the various *avataras*. Once he actually went unconscious enacting the episode of Lakshmana who was hit in battle and needed the *sanjivani* herb to regain consciousness, and was only revived when his friends told him, "Hanuman has come with the medicine for you".

At Nimai's birth, he became immersed in the *lila* of Krishna's birth, although he lived many kilometers away and nobody had told him about the events in Navadvipa.

When Kuvera/ Nityananda was 12, one *sannyasi* came to his parents' house and asked his father to send him along on a pilgrimage journey. In this way Nityananda traveled for 20 years to many holy places - beginning with Vakresvara and the Vaidyanatha forests near Gaya, then he went to Kasi and took bath in Prayaga in Magha for the Kumbha mela. He visited Mathura, taking bath at Visrama ghat, then he went to Gokula and Govardhana, where he saw the Madana Gopala temple installed by Madhavendra Puri. Then he visited Hastinapura and Dvaraka, Siddhapura and the Kapila ashrama and Matsya tirtha, then he went to Shiva Kanchi and Vishnu Kanchi. Returning north, he paid homage at Kurukshetra and Prithudaka ("the lake of Prithu"), then he went to Orissa and took bath in the Bindu sarovara at Ekamra (Bhuvaneshvara). Then he went to Prabhasa (Somanatha) tirtha, Sudarshana tirtha, Tirthakupa, Visala, then again to Orissa in Brahma tirtha, Chakra tirtha and Pratisrota at the source of the Prachi river.

He also visited Naimisaranya, went to Ayodhya and took bath in the Sarayu, then traced the steps of Ramachandra in his exile visiting Sringa Virapura, Dandakaranya, the Kausiki river and Pulastya ashrama. He bathed in the rivers Gomati and Gandaki in Nepal and Sona in Bihar. He climbed the Mahendra hills and visited Haridvara on the Himalaya. Then again traveled south to Tirupati and Kanchi, to the river Kaveri, Srirangam, Harikshetra and Rishabha hills, Madurai. He visited Kritamala, Tamraparni,

the Malaya hills and Agastya ashrama, then Badarikashrama. Once he met a group of Buddhists and after being engaged in an annoying and foolish discussion by them, he kicked one in the face; Vrindavana Dasa in his *Chaitanya bhagavata* does not specify whether metaphorically or literally, but even the mildest interpretation of the episode gives the impression that Nityananda was not always meek and quiet and undisturbed by human foolishness and arrogance.

Nityananda also traveled to the extreme south of the peninsula, to Kanya kumari where he visited the Durga temple, then again he returned north and arrived at the Pancha apsara lake, and to the Gokarna Shiva temple. While traveling through Kerala and Trigarta he went from house to house to meet people, then he went to Vindhya-chala and took bath in the Tapti river. He went to Mahismati puri, Malatirtha and Surparaka. There he met Madhavendra Puri and instantly bonded with him in the great ecstasy of divine love. When they separated, Madhavendra went to Sarayu and Nityananda went to Ramesvaram, again to the extreme south of the Indian peninsula. Then he visited Vijayanagara, the temple of Jihada Nrisimha, Mayapuri, the river Godavari, Tirumala (Tirupati), Kurmakshetra and then Puri, where he stayed for several days. Finally he traveled north to the Gangasagara - the delta of the Ganga - and then settled in Mathura and Vrindavana, where he waited for Chaitanya to appear.

After arriving in Navadvipa, Nityananda had been staying in the house of Srivasa, usually behaving like a small child and enjoying a close filial relationship with Srivasa and his wife Malati.

One day Nimai scolded Nityananda and told him not to make mischief in Srivasa's house, because he was told that he had been throwing rice around in all rooms. Nityananda's reaction was typical of a mischievous child: he tied his *dhoti* around his head, thus uncovering his lower body, and started to leap around, laughing merrily. Nimai had to catch him and dress him personally.

But he was not always naughty. His affection for Mother Malini was genuine and deep. One day a crow stole a metal container filled with *ghi* (clarified butter) destined for Krishna's worship, and Malati was desperate, not knowing what to tell her husband. Nityananda arrived on the spot and asked mother Malati why she was crying, and when he heard what happened, he called the crow and ordered him to bring back immediately the container - and the bird complied.

One day Nityananda arrived undressed at Nimai's house. Nimai scolded him and told him to dress properly, but Nityananda was piqued, and said that if he was treated so badly he would just as well leave and go away. Then he suddenly said, "I want to eat". Saci gave him 5 pieces of a milk sweet. Nityananda put one of them in his mouth and threw the others out. Saci cried out in reproach, and Nityananda replied, "ask for it and you will find it". When Saci went back into the kitchen, she found that the 4 pieces of sweets had ended up there. Amazed, she returned to the room and found Nityananda was now eating *laddus* - nobody could say where the new sweets were coming from. Nityananda commented, "you seemed so disappointed that I had thrown away the food, so I brought more".

Nityananda always spoke sweetly to all devotees, merry with childlike enthusiasm, and often remained immersed in devotional ecstatic trance for 3 or 4 days at a time, chuckling and weeping in joy.

To impress on the devotees the exalted transcendental position of Nityananda, one day Nimai tore up Nityananda's *kaupina* (underwear) into stripes and gave them to the *vaishnavas* to wear on their heads as a mark of respect for him. Several devotees then drank a little of Nityananda's foot wash water - another customary act of deep respect towards a saintly personality.

These episodes are not necessarily listed in a precise chronological order, therefore we cannot say whether the same mood of a divine Personality was manifested more than once. Also, the description of the events could be interpreted at different levels according to the desire and mentality of the devotee who reads these hagiographic texts - for those who do not need to hear about extraordinary miracles and apparitions, these "manifestations" could simply be the expression of a mood through words, body language, and emotion.

It seems, however, that Chaitanya's biographers were particularly anxious to present their hero as an extraordinary divine Personality in himself, a powerful *avatara* who could work great miracles and exhibit many forms. One way or the other, the fact remains that Chaitanya and Nityananda were no ordinary individual, and that their mission and preaching were particularly meaningful for the period in which they appeared.

The salvation of Jagai and Madhai

The next step in the development of the Sankirtana movement was that Nityananda and Haridasa started to go preaching door to door to spread the message of the holy Name. Usually Nityananda dressed magnificently, with silken *saris*, turban and golden ornaments, but for this job he chose to take a humbler attitude. Both Nityananda and Haridasa dressed as *sannyasis* (renounced *sadhus*) and went around begging from house to house - but the only *bhiksha* ("alms") they were asking from people was, "please chant the holy Names".

This preaching method was totally unheard of, and many were shocked or even annoyed. Usually *sannyasis* or *sadhus* went to beg alms from people's houses only to get a little food - broken rice, leftovers, and so on. Unless invited to do so, *sannyasis* do not speak to people and do not preach - what to speak of asking people to engage in some new religious movement. Already there were some bad rumors about the Sankirtana devotees, so some people insulted them and threatened to call the guards (the Muslim police). Nityananda and Haridasa just walked away to another house.

One day they came to a place in a neighborhood where the two brothers Jagai and Madhai (nicknames from the original names Jagannatha and Madhava) were roaming. These two were from brahmin families, but they had become addicted to all sorts of degraded behaviors, such as drinking alcohol, eating the meat of cows, molesting women, stealing and looting houses and shops, and even torching houses. They often fought with each other, too, and they could not tolerate to hear the *kirtana* of the holy Names.

According to the *Chaitanya mangala*, one of the first public *sankirtana* parties was the spark that ignited the fury of the two evil doers, and pushed Madhai to attack Nityananda with the shard of broken wine pot. In this version, Nimai was present and directly witnessed the aggression.

The *Chaitanya bhagavata* gives another version, breaking the episode in two parts. In the first instance, while he was walking around from door to door in the company of Haridasa, Nityananda proposed they should preach to Jagai and Madhai, but they were attacked by the two bad characters and had to run away. The evil people who were hostile

to the *vaishnavas* and the Sankirtana movement felt viciously happy, thinking, "these charlatans Nityananda and Haridasa have been properly punished by Narayana", but actually Nityananda was having a lot of fun. He laughed while running and said merrily, "we got ourselves into a good mess". Walking back to their base in Srivasa's house, they kept joking with each other, and when they met the other devotees, Haridasa complained about Nityananda being unreliable and reckless, engaging in childish behavior. Advaita jokingly commented, it is normal for a drunkard to go around finding other drunks.

But the story was not over. One evening Nityananda was walking around and he met Jagai and Madhai again. He started to talk to them, trying to establish a friendly relationship, and introduced himself as Avadhuta. Madhai became angry, picked up a piece of broken wine pot and hit Nityananda on the head. Blood dripped from Nitai's forehead, but he was not agitated because of that attack. When Madhai again raised his arm to strike again, Jagai stopped him, because his heart had started to soften.

Suddenly Nimai arrived on the spot with many devotees, became very angry at that unwarranted offense, and called his *chakra* to punish Madhai, but Nityananda intervened and said, "no, do not punish them, Jagai was protecting me and my injury was an accident."

Both brothers - Jagai and Madhai - were amazed at Nityananda's kindness and saintly behavior, and they fell on their knees asking forgiveness for their offenses. Then Nimai took them to his house in front of the assembly of all devotees, and Jagai and Madhai glorified Nimai and Nitai, comparing their kindness to the compassion of the Lord towards Ajamila. After all the assembled devotees had verified the change of heart of the two criminals, everybody went to take bath in the Ganga, and Nimai and Nitai happily joked and engaged in mock fight with the devotees.

The people who used to be afraid of the two criminals rejoiced about their change of heart, and also the Devas and Rishis celebrated, starting from Yamaraja and Chitragupta, who burned the records of the past actions by which Jagai and Madhai were to be judged after their death.

The transformation of the two brother was sincere. A few days later, Madhai approached Nityananda and offering him respect and gratitude for his kindness, asked how a person can become purified from the violence that he has committed against innocent living beings. Nityananda replied recommending him to build a *ghat* (bathing access) on the

Ganga bank, so that everyone would be facilitated in the access to the purification of mother Ganga; so Madhai humbly took to the spade and singlehandedly built a proper ramp with steps on the bank of the river. A local tradition says that Madhai kept working at the *ghat* to keep it clean and functional. The entire community recognized the miracle of the change of heart of Jagai and Madhai, and started fighting off the bad rumors about the *vaishnavas*.

Another episode encouraged Nimai to open the *sankirtana* to the public. One pious *brahmachari* approached Srivasa begging to be admitted into the association of devotees and allowed to participate to the *kirtana*. He was a very respected person; his behavior was spotless and he was always engaged in great austerities and religious practices. Srivasa allowed him inside and hid him in his house for the *kirtana*.

This time, Nimai did not become angry and he did not give orders to remove him from the house. He accepted him in the movement and instructed him, "do not try to do unnecessary *tapas*". The meaning of that instruction was that the chanting of the holy Names alone was sufficient to achieve perfection in spiritual life, especially in this Kali yuga - the age of degradation - when austerity is so difficult and tends to simply harden the heart and increase one's pride.

In *Chaitanya mangala*, this episode is related to Suklambara Brahmachari. In the conversation between him and Nimai on the subject of austerity, Nimai said, "Fish constantly take bath, snakes go for a long time without eating, sheep only eat grass and leaves, the ox always walks around, the crane is always meditating, the mouse contents itself of living in a hole and lions live in the forest. A person who just follows these behaviors without having the proper consciousness is not a real *sannyasi* or *brahmachari*: he is no better than an animal. One who is conscious of God does not need to perform austerities, and for one who is not conscious of God, mere austerities will not give benefits." (*Narada pancharatra* 2.6)

In another episode narrated in *Chaitanya mangala*, one day a *brahmana* named Vanamali came from east Bengal to surrender to Nimai. "I lost my purity and I have become a pauper. Please give me peace of mind." After receiving the holy Name from Nimai, both Vanamali and his son were overwhelmed by ecstatic love for Krishna and started to dance and sing in great happiness. Many more people started to approach Nimai and in the same way they were instructed to chant the holy Names.

Defying the casteist paradigm

A new phase started. Nimai was ready to distribute freely this pure love for God, spreading the congregational chanting of the holy Names of God, as the most effective method for self realization in the age of Kali prescribed by the scriptures.

Nimai was busy demolishing the birth prejudice and the divide that had been created in society through unqualified caste brahmins. One day he gathered his followers - including Advaita, Srivasa, Haridasa, Gadadhara, Mukunda, Murari, Suklambara, and so on - and equipped with brooms and shovels, took them to clean a temple dedicated to Krishna. The work was serious and not just symbolic: *Chaitanya mangala* clearly says that Nimai hitched up his *dhoti* and tied his hair back for a greater freedom of movement in the process.

Obviously the shrine badly needed a good cleanup, as we can observe still today in many orthodox/ traditional temples and holy places in India. Actually the Vedic tradition gives immense value to cleanliness, so much that it does not allow dirty people to come in contact with pure or sacred objects: this is the origin of restrictions in the matter of entrance to temples, contact with sacred objects (as well as water, food and other items to be consumed by others) and performance of religious rituals. However, the degradation of the caste system distorted the original valid point, because the idea of "cleanliness and purity" came to be ascribed to birth only, and not evaluated in terms of habits, practices, beliefs and mental attitude.

In this delusional view, those who had not taken birth in a "high caste" (i.e. brahmin) family can never be considered pure, even if they regularly take bath and keep very clean habits and mental attitudes - so they are discouraged from practicing cleanliness, as the idea of purification is presented as irrelevant for them. On the other hand, the "purification" required for *brahmanas* is reduced to a perfunctory symbolic ritual without any real effects; brahmins are "genetically clean" so they do not need to wash themselves or clean their houses and other premises. The same logic is applied to the study of Vedic knowledge: they claim that one who was not born in a family of brahmins must not be allowed to study the scriptures because he does not possess the "intellectual and religious

DNA" that is needed to learn their knowledge and become purified by it, while one who was born in a family of brahmins has no need to study the scriptures because his "intellectual and religious DNA" automatically makes him learned, pure and qualified by nature. Thus ignorance triumphs, because for one reason or another, nobody studies or practices genuine knowledge.

The result is that every body and every place just became dirtier and dirtier "by religious tradition", and the only way out is also blocked by the foolish birth prejudice, because the "unclean" castes are actually the cleaners (those who do cleaning jobs) as while cleaning they come in touch with impure and dirty substances. So their professional occupation - considered by casteist theorists as strictly and compulsorily hereditary - is appropriate to them because they are dirty genetically and they are not disturbed by the idea of touching dirt and other impure stuff. And always according to the casteist approach, they do not need to worry about giving up uncleanliness and dirty habits, because they are "genetically engineered" just to be dirty. They took birth in a genetically dirty body, so their "duty" or *dharma* is to remain unclean.

Now the cleverest of our readers have probably seen the obviously weak point of the reasoning here: if the cleaners by profession are unclean genetically, they are not allowed to enter the temple because this would bring contamination, therefore they cannot clean the temple. The brahmins are clean genetically but if they started to do cleaning work they would degrade themselves and eventually fall into the lower caste, therefore they cannot clean the temple. In short: nobody ever cleans the temple, and the temple becomes filthy and full of garbage and pests (such as cockroaches and rats) and pervaded by bad smells. People who enter the temple to cleanse their consciousness end up more contaminated than ever, and they lose their faith in the value of Vedic tradition.

We need to clarify that such mentality is not universally endorsed and followed by all Hindus, or even by all "caste brahmins". There must be many good and learned people from traditional families of honored ancestry, who actually understand the original system and apply it in their own homes and in the temples they manage. The primary duty of a *brahmana* is to study and teach - to ascertain the meaning of the scriptural precepts and to educate society towards spiritual and material progress in accordance to the principles of *dharma* and the purposes of human life (*purusha arthas*). Therefore genuine *brahmanas* should be standing up to correct and reform any wrong conclusion and behavior that may appear in society.

Unfortunately, even one single temple where such proper understanding and practice is lacking constitutes a very bad example both to Hindus and non-Hindus, and can be used as evidence of the degradation of the entire community, especially as long as caste brahmins keep demanding for themselves the unconditional and exclusive privilege of brahmanhood as described in the traditional scriptures.

It is said that the purest the image that you want to present to the world, the most evident your defects become, no matter how small they are. Just like a fly is easily spotted on the whiteness of the milk, any sub-standard behavior by a *sannyasi*, *sadhu* or *brahmana* is inevitably noticed by the general people. And rightly so: those who want to put themselves forward as examples for society should properly understand the responsibility that comes with the position.

In the original *varna* and *ashrama* system, if one individual does not feel up to such high and important responsibility, he can step down and settle on a more modest social position without being dishonored. Better than being a bad *brahmana*, one can become a good *kshatriya* or *vaisya* and be honored for his honesty, truthfulness and actual good qualities. A *brahmana* that engages in the humble menial task of cleaning a temple does not become degraded - rather, he is demonstrating the fundamental function of a *brahmana*: the purification of human society. Nimai/ Chaitanya will again make this statement in Jagannatha Puri, on the occasion of the famous festival of Gundicha marjana, the cleansing of the temple of Gundicha just before the Ratha yatra festival, to make the place clean, fresh and pure for the arrival of Jagannatha. *Chaitanya charitamrita* clearly explains in this regard that external cleansing and purification is not only symbolical but also functional for the cleansing and purification of the mind and consciousness. Chaitanya himself directly engaged in the sweeping and washing, and actually his work was more effective than anybody else's: the pile of dirt he had collected was larger than any other's.

For casteist brahmins, a *brahmana* who engages in the menial work of a sweeper is considered to be fallen and degraded. Chaitanya demonstrated that the opposite is true: the degradation caused by lack of cleanliness is actually removed by engaging in the cleansing process, both externally and internally. The temporary contact with dirty substances during the cleansing process is neutralized by regular bathing and washing of one's clothes at the end of the cleaning work - something that must be done in any case at least once daily or more often. Nimai/ Chaitanya clearly demonstrated his ideological

position by accepting sincere devotees among his followers irrespective of their birth situation, as in the case of Haridasa, Rupa and Sanatana and so on.

Some ignorant and foolish people may think that such behavior demonstrated by Chaitanya is against the orthodox Vedic (Hindu) teachings, so much that when they refer to casteist segregationists or supremacists, they call them "orthodox Hindus". The definition of the word *orthodox* (from the Greek *orthos*, "straight, right, true, correct" as in the words *orthography* or *orthodontist*) is "conforming to established doctrine, especially in religion", and "conservative" as in "sticking to the original teachings of the scriptures".

Now, there is absolutely nothing *orthodox* about the casteist birth prejudice. There is not even one single verse in all the original Vedic scriptures that states that birth in a particular family is the defining qualification for being recognized as a *brahmana*, especially in the present degraded period known as Kali yuga.

The *Padma purana* states, *brahmanah ksatriya vaisah sudrah papa-parayanah nijacaravihinah ca bhavisyanti kalau yuge, vipra veda-vihinah ca pratigraha-parayana hatyantakaminah krur bhavisyanti kalau yuge, veda-nindakaras caiva dyutacaurya karas tatha, vidhva-sanga- lubdhas ca bhavisyanti kalau dvijah, vrttyartham brahmanah kecit mahakapata-dharminah, raktambara bhavisyanti jatilah smasrudharinah, kalau yuge bhavisyanti brahmanah sudra-dharmina*. This is the translation: "In Kali yuga, all the four social categories become degraded, abandoning the proper behavior, and fall into activities that are contrary to ethics. The *brahmanas* do not study Vedic knowledge and do not perform sacrifices, and abandoning the five ritual duties prescribed in the *Vedas* and the cultivation of spiritual consciousness, they engage in other activities, even while still claiming the social position (of *brahmanas*) in order to collect money that they will utilize to satisfy their unlimited desires for sense gratification. The false *brahmanas* of Kali yuga are afflicted by lust and cruelty, malice and envy, and become professional thieves, blaspheming the Vedic scriptures, getting drunk and exploiting women for sexual pleasure. They even come to the point of wearing the red or saffron robes of the *sadhus* or *sannyasis*, growing long beard and hair, in order to better cheat the people."

The *Varaha purana* even states, *raksasah kalim asritya jayante brahma-yonisu utpanna brahmana-kule badhante srotriyan krisan*, "Some who were demoniac beings in their previous lifetimes will be born in Kali yuga in *brahmana* families with the purpose of weakening and destroying the tradition of *sruti* (of Vedic scriptures)."

Many people commit the mistake of condemning the original pure system of the *varna ashrama*, blaming it for the degradation caused by the false *brahmanas* (that we call "brahmins" to distinguish them from the real *brahmanas*). With this warped perspective, they demand the complete abolition of the system, which they consider "obsolete" and "unjust". Although their intention may be good, they are misguided and they risk misguiding others out of lack of proper knowledge.

The real solution to the problem is already there. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, or any other eternal and universal principle - because we can find the proper instructions in the original scriptures and in the teachings *and* the example of the genuine *acharyas* (that are perfectly in accordance with the scriptures). However, we need to put them in practice, not in theory only.

Chaitanya and his close companions openly accepted "low caste" people as very qualified *brahmanas* on the basis of their *guna* and *karma* (i.e. level of consciousness), but they always showed the greatest respect to those individuals who were born in *brahmana* families AND demonstrated the required qualifications.

So the real solution to the problems of birth prejudice - that have disastrously damaged Indian society and continue to do so still now - is vanquishing ignorance by the spreading of the proper shastric knowledge. Neglecting to study and to understand the Vedic scriptures (*svadhyaya tyaga*) still remains the most serious cause for degradation for a son of *brahmana* parents. The *Vishnu dharma shastra* (93.7) states, *yaitral-laksyate sarpa vrttam sa brahmanah smrtah yatraitan na bhavet sarpa tam sudram iti nirdiset, na vary api prayacchet tu vaidalavratike dvije na baka-vratike vipre naveda vidi dharma-vit*, "Persons who observe the religious teachings should not offer even a drop of water to a hypocrite that, in spite of being the son of a *brahmana*, behaves in a way that is contrary to the laws of ethics."

Manu samhita (2.157, 2.172) states, *yatha kastha-mayo hasti yatha carma-mayo mrgah yas ca vipro'nadhiyanas trayas te nama bibhrati*, "A *brahmana* who does not study the *Vedas* is comparable to an elephant or deer made of leather, that are called elephant or deer but cannot function as such. We must know that as long as a *brahmana* is not qualified in the Vedic knowledge, he remains on the same level of a *sudra*."

Traditionally, a *brahmana* is considered fallen from his social position if he commits violations to purity, for example because of the consumption of non-vegetarian foods,

alcoholic drinks, or even of vegetarian foods that have been cooked by *sudras* (*sudranna pustam*), as confirmed by the *Kurma purana*: *nadyac chudrasya vipro'nnam mohad va yadi kamatah sa sudra-yonim vrajati yas tu bhunkte hy-anapadi*. This is the reason why a *brahmana* never goes to a restaurant for eating, and is extremely careful about what he purchases on the market.

The *Mahabharata* (*Santi parva*, 189.7) declares, *himsanrta-priya lubdhah sarva karmopijivinah krsna saucaparibhrasthast e dvijah sudratam gatah sarva-bhaksyataritn ityam sarva-karmakaro 'sucih tyakta-vedastvanaca rah sa vai sudra iti smrtah*, "A *brahmana* who commits violent acts (as for example in the consumption of non-vegetarian foods), who lies and cheats, who is greedy, impure, or engages in any activity for a monetary profit, is degraded to the position of *sudra*. Precisely because he eats and drinks anything without discrimination and is attached to the material things and to the idea of making money, he has abandoned Vedic dharma and ethical behavior, and is called a *sudra*."

The *Kurma purana* explains: *go-raksakan vanijakan tatha karuka-silinah, presyan vardhusikams caiva vipran sudra-vad acaret, yo'nyatra kurute yatnam, anadhitya srutim dvijah sa sammudho na sambhasyo veda-bahyo dvijatibhih*, "Those *brahmanas* who normally earn a livelihood by raising cattle, by trade, by artistic shows, by the service to others, or by lending money on interest, are nothing but *sudras*. One who does not study the *Vedas*, but eagerly engages in other activities is certainly a foolish person and must be ostracized from the Vedic society - the (true) *brahmanas* should not even talk to him."

Particularly serious and degrading is the case of a *brahmana* who chooses to perform the activities that are characteristic of the *sudra*, such as service under salary, even to the government (*raja sevakan*), employed teaching against a salary or selling knowledge to unqualified people (*bhrtakadhyapakan*), becoming an employee in banking or trade (*vanijakan*), or a technician of any kind (*yantra-vidyakan*), a medical doctor or pharmacist (*cikitisikan*). Even worse still are those activities that are based simply on the use of one's body, such as the show business - the performances of dancers, singers, actors, professional reciters, painters, sculptors, craftsmen and so on - as well as personal service to others, especially to persons who are on the level of *sudras* or even worse, of *anaryas*, i.e. people who do not follow the Vedic conclusions and rules of living. Such professional occupations are not negative in themselves, but because they are aimed at the satisfaction of the customer and depend on it, they create a situation of dependence

and reinforce the identification with the material body: therefore they are completely incompatible with the duties of the *brahmana*.

Although the vast majority of Chaitanya's associates and followers were from brahmin families, Chaitanya clearly demonstrated that birth prejudice is an obstacle to genuine spiritual realization and *bhakti*. Unfortunately, his legacy was quickly forgotten, and even the descendants of his closest companions, such as Advaita Acharya and Gopala Bhatta Gosvami, re-established the foolish and ignorant birth prejudice in their own religious lineages, which they are continuing to this day.

The Muslim Kazi tries to stop the Sankirtana

The Sankirtana movement became very successful. Maybe too successful, one might say. In fact some envious people from the local Brahmin community went to complain to the Muslim Kazi of Navadvipa (Bengal was under the rule of Hussain Shah) and demanded that the Sankirtana movement of Nimai be stopped. They told the Kazi that according to the orthodox Hindu system, the Names of God should be chanted silently within one's mind, an idea that also suited the Islamic government rules; so by introducing the loud and public chanting of the Names of Vishnu, Nimai and his followers were not only defying the Islamic religious domination, but they were doing so without the support of the Hindu priestly class, and therefore they could not expect any protection from the general people. In this way, they were suggesting that the Kazi could punish Nimai and his followers without worrying about a revolt of the Hindus, who were still the majority of the population.

This turn of events clearly shows that in those times, Hindu society and specifically the brahmin class had already become very degraded, and there was no compunction from their members towards the idea of taking action against their own people and their own religion, and siding with the anti-Hindu invaders. This is why, when Haridasa started to chant the Names of Vishnu, not only the Muslims but the Hindu brahmins too became annoyed, and he was arrested by the Kazi and flogged on several public places, and left for dead. Also in the case of Nimai's successful Sankirtana movement, the Muslims of the

area approached the Kazi complaining about the resurgence of Hinduism in their city, as the Names of Hari and Krishna were being chanted more and more often, and by greater numbers of people.

So the Muslim Kazi went to Srivasa's house with his soldiers, notified the prohibition against congregational chanting, broke the *mridangas* used for the *sankirtana* and put guards to patrol the streets so that no Hindus could assemble in public. When he was informed about the incident, Nimai organized a protest march with all his supporters, each carrying a torch, accompanied by 14 *sankirtana* groups. In *Chaitanya charitamrita*, Krishnadasa Kaviraja minimizes the seriousness of the episode, but Vrindavana Dasa clearly says in his *Chaitanya bhagavata* that the protest march immediately turned violent.

Nimai ordered his followers to get one torch each, and to carry barrels of oil. He openly declared he wanted to burn the house of the Kazi down and kill his entire family, to show him the Hindu fighting spirit. On the way to the Kazi's residence in Simulia the procession grew larger and larger, because many more people joined, each with their own torches. On their way, those who marched were greeted with a rain of flowers, coins and puffed rice as auspicious offerings for victory, and with shouts of "kill the Kazi". All the Muslims of the area became so scared that they covered their beards to avoid being recognized and mixed themselves with the crowd, pretending to be part of the procession of Nimai's followers. Finally Nimai arrived at the Kazi's house. He shouted, "where is the Kazi, let him come out and I will cut his head off and wipe away all the Muslims from the earth".

The Kazi himself had already fled, together with his men, so Nimai gave the order to break into his residence and destroy it, and burn burn everything, including the people that were still inside the building. The people ransacked the house and property, broke everything and ravaged the garden, then returned to town.

Here the two versions of the events separate. According to Krishnadasa Kaviraja, Nimai's protest march was much more peaceful, and only contained the threat of violence and not its open expression. Thus in this version the Kazi did not run away out of fear, but was merely worried about the possibility of disorders. So he came out to pacify Nimai calling him "nephew" (as he had lived in the same village where Chaitanya's mother was born) and sat with him discussing. The Kazi confessed that after prohibiting the *sankirtana* and breaking the *mridangas*, he had been visited by Nrisimha in his dreams and had become

very fearful. Nrisimha had threatened to kill the Kazi, his family and all the Muslims in the region if the Sankirtana movement was obstructed again, and to make sure the Kazi would not forget, he had left blazing nail marks on his chest. Also the Kazi's servants had had a similar experience, as when they had gone to stop the *sankirtana*, they all had felt great flames of fire blowing into their faces, and they had quickly retreated, beards burned and blisters all over their skin.

After the conversation with Nimai, the Kazi became very favorable to the Sankirtana movement and gave official orders to the effect that nobody should disturb the public singing of the divine Names. Still today, the Kazi's tomb in Navadvipa is visited by Gaudiya pilgrims - a custom probably created with the purpose of convincing the Muslims that it was possible to coexist with Hindus.

Of course this sweetened version is much more likely to be favored by a "multicultural" society, where the opportunities for clash between religious communities must be kept to the minimum, and the Hindus need to be presented as fundamentally peaceful and tolerant even in the face of serious persecutions against them. We can easily understand why this version was favored by the preachers of the Chaitanya movement in the subsequent period, when Hindus remained under the domination of the Muslims first and of the British later.

How to read this particular episode - even in the "milder" version presented by Krishnadasa Kaviraja - especially in the light of the recent resurgence of fundamentalist and imperialistic Islamic jihad at global level? It is a very interesting point.

First of all, it must be noted that Nimai's strong objections were not merely based on philosophical discussion. The Muslims' conciliatory attitude seems to have been inspired by two major factors: the supernatural experiences of Nrisimha's wrath (for which the Muslims were touched in their superstitious fears) and the sheer number of determined able-bodied men, equipped with torches and vigorously beating on drums in the procession to the Kazi's house.

It also seems that in those times, the specific city of Navadvipa did not have a numerous Muslim community, and that although the government was under the Muslim rule, the majority of the population was still Hindu. In that case, the Kazi probably decided that reinforcements from stronger Muslim settlements would take too long to come to his rescue, and he chose the safest course of action.

The growing success of Nimai's movement continued to cause envy among the degraded Hindus of the region. Two of Nimai's opponents from the so-called orthodox Brahmin community, called Chapala and Gopala, later became infected by leprosy and were healed after begging forgiveness: this miracle certainly impressed the general population of Nadia.

Nimai's popularity kept increasing and his Sankirtana movement expanded.

The festival at Chandrashekhara's house

On Nimai's request, Buddhimanta Khan organized a dancing drama performance at the house of Chandrashekhara. Nimai himself assigned the roles, played by his foremost associates: Srivasa played Narada, Haridasa and Murari Gupta played "Vaikuntha guards" with big mustache and turbans. Everybody came to attend the performance, including Mother Saci and Vishnupriya. The event started with a *kirtana*, in which the devotees chanted, "sing Rama Krishna, Hari Gopala Govinda".

Nimai had planned to play Lakshmi Devi, but he entered the scene in the mood of Rukmini, who anyway is the incarnation of Lakshmi who manifested during the Krishna lila and became the first of Krishna's queens at Dvaraka. Gadadhara then danced as Lakshmi Devi. From Vaikuntha, the mood of the players turned to Vrindavana and Gadadhara entered the scene dressed as a *gopi* and accompanied by Brahmananda dressed as her old companion Suprabha. Then Nimai entered the mood of Radha and Nityananda played grandmother Purnamasi, and finally Nimai entered into the royal mood of the Mother Goddess while Gopinatha played Vishnu and the devotees started offering many prayers to Lakshmi and Chandi Durga.

Lochana's *Chaitanya mangala* also mentions the episode, calling Durga the Adya Shakti. Sitting on the *asana*, Nimai manifested as Chandi and Katyayani, blessing all the devotees. He also took Haridasa on his lap like a mother does with her child, and started rocking him like a baby. On that occasion, Nimai instructed his followers never to disrespect or belittle the Devas, and especially the Mother Goddess.

Vrindavana Dasa quotes these prayers in the *Chaitanya Bhagavata*:

“All glories to the universal Mother, Mahamaya Devi.

Kindly give the shelter of your lotus feet to the wretched conditioned souls who suffer in this material world. You are the controlling power of the entire material universe and you appear in every *yuga* to uphold the principles of religion.

Even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are unable to fully describe your unlimited powers, what to speak of ordinary people.

You are faith, compassion, modesty, and the personification of pure devotion to Lord Vishnu, Krishna, so all branches of knowledge are your manifestations. The *Vedas* describe you as the original energy, and you appear to be within this material nature consisting of the three *gunas* but you are actually their cause, and you are always situated in a transcendental position.

You are the eternal, unchanging, supreme energy, the shelter and resting place of all living entities, the universal Mother who sustains everyone, matchless and unrivalled. You are the life sustaining water, and by remembering you one can easily cut the bonds of material illusion.

You appear also as Mother Lakshmi, the eternal consort of Lord Narayana, in the homes of the dharmic people, but to the sinful offender you manifest as the all-devouring death.

You are the creator of the universe and those who ignore you, not offering you worship, are punished by the threefold miseries. To the devotees you inspire pure faith, and therefore we pray you to please give us shelter in the shade of your lotus feet. Your illusory potency keeps the entire creation enthralled, so if you do not protect me, who will?

Your appearance in the material world is to deliver the conditioned souls, and by remembering you one attains all perfection. O Mother, we are all surrendered to you, kindly look upon us with benevolence, so that we may remain with a fixed mind at your lotus feet.”

The curse of the *brahmana*

After the dancing drama event, Nimai remained for 7 days in the house of Chandrasekhara. Advaita returned home, but in an unexpected turn of events, he started to teach weird lessons while commenting the *Yoga Vasistha*, putting *jnana* (scholarship and learning) above *bhakti* (devotional love). Of course this was just an opportunity to call Nimai to Shantipura to give yet another demonstration of the supreme importance of divine love.

Inevitably, Nimai and Nitai left for Shantipura to correct Advaita and set the record straight. In their journey, at first they arrived in Lalitapura and were invited in the house of a *sadhu*. The man offered them material blessings, and Nimai objected that they were not interested in material life but only in spiritual devotional service. The foolish *sadhu* was annoyed, and complained about the ingratitude of people.

At this point Nimai had what we would call a "facepalm" - he put his hand to his forehead in distress and hopelessness, in front of such ignorance and illusion. Then he explained about the natural law of *karma*, and the fact that each individual will have to accept whatever pleasure or suffering is accrued as a result of his/her previous activities. The blessings of a *sadhu* cannot change this situation; a real *sadhu* will only offer the true blessing that consists in inspiring people to engage in genuine religious or good activities, so that the bad *karma* will be alleviated or destroyed by spiritual consciousness.

Defending his own misconceptions about religious life, the so-called *sadhu* retorted, "You must have become crazy because of the effect of some *mantra*, and this is why you are talking this nonsense. I have traveled everywhere and now I am told that I do not know anything, and that I need to learn from a boy."

Nimai and Nitai decided the discussion was going nowhere, so they went to take bath in the Ganga, and after that they offered some mango, jackfruit and milk to Krishna, and took dinner. After dinner, the so-called *sadhu* offered them some liquor, which he called "happiness". The man's wife was sitting inside the house and watching them curiously. At that point, Nimai and Nitai simply ran away, jumped into the Ganga and swam all the way to Shantipura. When Nimai arrived at Advaita's house, Acyutananda - Advaita's son

- rushed to offer *pranam*. Nimai looked very angry and he challenged Advaita, asking him what is better, *jnana* or *bhakti*. To show his displeasure, Nimai dragged Advaita out into the courtyard and gave him a good beating. Advaita laughed and promised he would only teach *bhakti*.

Nimai's emotional feelings of divine love intensified every day. He was practically never at home, and spent all his time only with devotees. He did not care for family life, and did some work for his family only when mother Saci insisted. He was not even able to do the *puja* at home because of the emotions that made him cry all the time, so he asked Gadadhara to do it for him.

His moods continued to swing from the highest level of divine consciousness - when again he showed the Visvarupa to Advaita - to extreme humility, as when he drank water from the old and broken metal pot that Kholavecha Sridhara kept outside his door, or went to Suklambara Brahmachari and asked to eat his food. And again to manifestations of extreme spiritual power. Vijaya Dasa had copied many books for Nimai; one day Nimai touched him and he had a divine vision: for 7 days Vijaya was shell-shocked and remained unable to eat or sleep.

The inner contemplation of Nimai was moving more and more from the consciousness of Krishna towards the ecstatic love of Radha. One day instead of chanting the name of Krishna he was chanting "*gopi, gopi*". A scholarly-minded brahmin heard him and rebuked him, saying that he should chant the Name of Krishna instead, and Nimai, immersed in the mood of Radha during her separation from Krishna, replied that Krishna is a bad boy, and brought the various examples mentioned by Radha in the *Bhagavata purana* in the episode of Uddhava's visit to Vrindavana (10.47.15-19).

The foolish man - who obviously had no knowledge of the *Bhagavata purana* - became angry and said that Nimai was abusing Krishna, so he took up a stick to beat him. Disturbed in his ecstasy, Nimai got angry, too, and chased the brahmin away; not surprisingly, the brahmin complained about that strange behavior to the community of the *kulya* (caste) brahmins, who expressed outrage and planned to attack Nimai and beat him.

Nimai takes *sannyasa* from Keshava Bharati

On the next day Nimai, considering the episode, commented "the medicine is not working, it is actually aggravating the disease instead of curing it". He then started to think about taking *sannyasa*, as the Shankaracharya matha was very well established and respected by the people in general, including the so-called orthodox brahmins of his area.

He reflected about the fact that foolish people respect and obey even unqualified people if they are dressed as *sannyasis*, so in order to stop the criticism of materially attached people who were considering him just an ordinary householder, he decided to take the formal vows of renunciation. He reasoned that his mission would be much facilitated by that position, as people would be more inclined to hear from him, or in the very least they would not attack him physically.

Chaitanya Bhagavata, in commenting Nimai's reflections, quotes from the *Bhumi gita* in the *Bhagavata purana* (12.3.38): "In Kali yuga even unqualified people will make a living by wearing *sannyasi* clothes and thus collect charity, and similarly ignorant and adharmic people will sit on *vyasanas* and speak about *dharma*". Vrindavana Dasa also quotes the *Padma purana* saying that a sinner posing as a saint is worse than an ordinary sinner because he drags his followers down with him. Those hypocrites use sweet words, manipulate the sentiments of people, confuse them and take away their money, and thus create a horrible future for themselves and for their victims as well.

It was the winter solstice. Nimai told Mukunda about his intention to take *sannyasa*, then he told Gadadhara and gradually all the other devotees, including Mother Saci.

Chaitanya mangala describes how Sacimata tried to dissuade Nimai from taking *sannyasa*, and how Nimai responded by offering her the same teachings that Kapila had presented to his mother Devahuti. He explained the purpose of birth as a human being, and the necessity of dedicating one's life to the service of God. Then he told her the story of Dhruva, who had left home at a very early age to go and seek Vishnu. Saci said, "Then I will take *sannyasa* too and come with you, we will talk all the time about Krishna and spiritual things only."

Nimai replied affectionately, explaining that relationships in this world based on the body are relative. It is better to love Krishna, because the relationship with Krishna is absolute and does not depend on the body, or on time and space. "If I take *sannyasa*, you will also get the same benefit without having to leave the house and facing any difficulty."

Vishnupriya also expressed her grief to Nimai, and said she was horrified thinking about all the difficulties and austerities that he would have to face, and how the devotees would die because of the pain of separation from him. She said, "If you are leaving your home because of me, feeling that I am keeping you tied to material existence, I can kill myself by consuming poison and thus eliminate the problem."

Nimai pacified her affectionately, and explained that all identifications based on the body are false - son, husband, mother, father, man and woman. Only the transcendental relationship with Krishna is real and eternal, and that is what we should all focus on. On this transcendental level there is never any real separation or *sannyasa*.

When Keshava Bharati, a Shankarite *sannyasi* from Katwa in Bengal, visited Navadvipa, Nimai asked Srivasa to invite him to his house, and then went there to ask him to be initiated into the *sannyasa* order. He said that he had already received the *sannyasa mantra* in a dream, and repeated it to Keshava Bharati, saying that he wanted to have confirmation of its correct form. In this way - says Lochana Dasa in *Chaitanya mangala* - Nimai actually initiated Keshava Bharati into the *sannyasa mantra* himself, thus becoming his *guru*.

On the evening of that day, Kholavecha Sridhara came to Nimai's house to bring a pumpkin to be cooked on the next day, but Nimai said, "I will eat it today", and he had it cooked with milk brought by another devotee. Early next morning, Nimai got up quietly, swam across the Ganga and arrived at Kantaka nagara (Katwa). He was accompanied - or more specifically, followed - by Nityananda, Chandrasekhara Acharya, Damodara Pandita, Vakresvara and Mukunda Datta. The records say that Nimai took *sannyasa* at the Shankaracharya Matha of Katwa in the month of Magha of 1510. He asked Chandrasekhara to take care of all the rituals required, and simply went through the motions of the procedures, always immersed in his devotional ecstasy and oblivious to anything else. Keshava Bharati was not very enthusiastic of initiating Nimai into *sannyasa*, because of his young age and attractive looks, and especially because he would leave behind a young wife without a son, and an elderly widowed mother who had no other children to take care of her.

As a *sannyasi*, Nimai (now called Krishna Chaitanya) completely shaved his hair, carried a *danda* and a *kamandalu* as his only possessions, and was dressed with a simple *kaupina* and *bahirvasa* (loincloth and external cloth). At that time, Chaitanya did not even have a *japa mala* but counted the *mantras* on his fingers. That night he remained in Katwa together with his associates, and early the next morning he entered the forest with Keshava Bharati, accompanied by Nityananda, Gadadhara, Mukunda, Govinda, Jagadananda and Brahmananda. Many more people followed him, but he sent them back home. He said he wanted to go to the forest where the Vakresvara Deity is, but after walking for a few days, when he was only about 8 miles from Vakresvara, he changed his mind and quietly leaving in the early morning, started to walk alone towards Vrindavana. However, the devotees heard him crying for Krishna from a distance and found him.

Here we find another example where two versions of the story appear to be slightly different. *Chaitanya charitamrita* says that Nityananda did not like the idea of Chaitanya leaving without seeing his companions in Navadvipa for a last time, so he cleverly led him around and towards south through Radha desha, and then again back to Shantipura, to the house of Advaita Acharya. On the other hand, *Chaitanya bhagavata* says that it was Chaitanya who decided to see the devotees one last time and sent Nityananda to call them to the house of Advaita Acharya in Shantipura. The two versions can easily be reconciled and integrated if we consider that Nityananda knew Chaitanya's love for his devotees and cleverly led him back to the Ganga, telling him it was the river Yamuna - which meant that they had already reached Vrindavana. Then Chaitanya realized they had been walking in a circle, and sent Nityananda to call the devotees to Shantipura. In any case, Nityananda enthusiastically jumped in the Ganga and swam all the way to Shantipura.

The devotees in Navadvipa were distraught because of Nimai's absence and at the news of his taking the *sannyasi* vows, not only for him, but also for his mother and his young wife. Although the two ladies would remain under the care and protection of Chaitanya's companions in Navadvipa, they would have very little opportunities to see him again in the future.

Chaitanya mangala describes the pitiful condition of the residents of Navadvipa, and especially of Mother Saci and Vishnupriya, who had practically lost their minds out of the pain of separation from Nimai. Both had stopped caring for themselves, and had unkempt hair and very casual dressing. They kept crying and wailing, sitting and standing

and walking here and there without purpose. When Saci saw Chandrashekhara returning from Katwa crying out of despair, she overwhelmed him with a barrage of questions - where is Nimai? where did you leave him? who is the wretch that made him into a *sannyasi*? who is the heartless barber that shaved his head? where did he take his food?

Both women felt miserable, immersed in the darkness of separation from their beloved Nimai, and expected never to see him again. The devotees did their best to comfort and reassure them, and sat with them to chant the holy Names and remember the Lord.

When Nityananda arrived in Navadvipa, Mother Saci, affectionately called "Ai" ("mother") by Chaitanya's devotees, had not eaten for 12 days, and she was immersed deeply in the mood of Yasoda. Nityananda arranged for her to be carried on palanquin to Shantipura, and she was tremendously excited. The devotees wanted her to take some food, but she refused to do so, until they asked her to cook for everybody; then she was enlivened by the idea of feeding the devotees and finally ate something herself.

The news of that special opportunity to see Gauranga - the golden boy of Navadvipa, now called Krishna Chaitanya - spread as wild fire and hundreds of people got traveling, mostly on the river's current. All the available boats were hired; some people made rafts with banana trunks tied together, and others used upturned earthen pots tied to their chest.

Chaitanya arrived in Advaita Acharya's house and held his son Acyutananda on his lap out of affection. This Acyutananda later became disciple of Gadadhara Pandita.

When he met Mother Saci, Chaitanya offered her *pranama* as the universal Mother. He apologized for all the suffering he had caused her and expressed his gratitude for all her love and care. He said he was sorry for his rash decision to take *sannyasa*, but somehow the damage was done and he could not renege on his vows. Chaitanya pacified his mother by reminding her the story of Dhruva, who left his home as a mere child to search for Vishnu, and begged her to let him go. On that occasion, he stated that one's mother is the most worshipable person because she is the reason why one obtains the rare and valuable opportunities of a human birth. Saci was embarrassed but her ecstasy of love was greater than any embarrassment.

Saci asked him to take his residence in Puri instead of Vrindavana, so that she could get news about him from the devotees who traveled each year from Navadvipa to Jagannatha Puri for the Ratha yatra festival. Then Chaitanya suggested her to cook a good meal, and she enthusiastically launched into the preparation of a huge feast. Saci took charge of the

kitchen and cooked 20 varieties of *sak*, plus a great number of other preparations. Each vegetable was cooked in 10 to 20 different ways. Chaitanya explained the spiritual virtues of the various types of *sak* such as *acyuta*, *patal*, *bastuka*, *kal sak*, *salincha*, *helancha*, and ate everything Saci had prepared.

The devotees raced each other to get the leftovers from Chaitanya's meal. The reason for the tradition of eating the leftovers from a saintly personality is based on the idea that transcendental consciousness and love for God are contagious like a disease - so by eating the leftovers of a transcendental person, one would be "infected" with that emotion and realization. This is also the explanation given in the last part of *Chaitanya charitamrita* by Krishnadasa Kaviraja about Chaitanya tasting the transcendental nectar of Krishna's lips just like the *gopis* of Vrindavana did.

The journey to Jagannatha Puri

Finally Chaitanya took leave from his companions in Shantipura. He promised he would stay in Jagannatha Puri so that they could visit him regularly, and he recommended that they all take care of each other and continue in their spiritual consciousness. "I will never leave you," he said. "Just remember me, and you will have my personal presence just there with you."

Thus he started his journey towards Jagannatha Puri, followed by a small group of devotees - Nityananda, Mukunda Datta, Jagadananda Pandita and Damodara Pandita - chosen by Advaita. Chaitanya did not sleep at night, but constantly chanted the holy Names, "*rama raghava, rama raghava, rama raghava raksa mam, krishna kesava, krishna kesava, krishna kesava pahi mam*". The expressions *raksha mam* and *pahi mam* literally mean "protect me".

Walking on, they first arrived at the temple of Shiva Vaijurkanatha, at Chatrabhoga on the Ganges at Mathurapura (now Diamond Harbor - no temples or holy places have survived to present times). Chatrabhoga is a famous *tirtha* dedicated to Shiva, where Shiva manifested as the water *linga* at Ambulinga ghat, in the form of a great number of

streams formed by Ganga (also known as Adi Ganga). Everyone took bath there, and Chaitanya immediately manifested a strong ecstasy with uncontrollable spiritual emotions and lost external consciousness.

The news of the arrival of the young and spiritually powerful *sannyasi* spread around and the Governor of the region, Ramachandra Khan, invited him and his party to stay at his house. When he heard that Chaitanya had decided to go to Puri, he was very concerned because the roads were extremely dangerous due to the presence of Muslim soldiers and a number of dacoits. So Ramachandra Khan arranged a boat for them to travel down the river as safely as possible. In this way they reached Prayaga ghata in Midnapura district of Orissa. The boatman was scared and asked his passengers to stay quiet, because the Muslims could hear their *kirtana* and come to attack them, but Chaitanya and the devotees could not be stopped, and they continued their chanting.

They finally arrived in Orissa and disembarked at Ganga ghat. As soon as Chaitanya and his party arrived in town, they immediately went to pay respects to the temple of Shiva Mahesha, a *lingam* installed at a temple near a bathing *ghat* established by Yudhisthira during the journey of the Pandavas. Chaitanya ecstatically participated to the *kirtana* of the local devotees of Shiva, and in the end he was so happy that he went around to beg food for everyone and Jagadananda cooked it. This Prayaga ghata is presently known as Ballabhpur, a part of Srirampur town between Serampore and Mahesh, now also famous for its Jagannatha temple, that was installed after Chaitanya's visit. The Deities of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra were excavated by one Dhruvananda Brahmachari, who had visited Jagannatha Puri, and was directed in a dream to retrieve the ancient Deities from the sands of the Ganga river.

Both *Chaitanya bhagavata* and *Chaitanya mangala* speak about an episode or two with the the tax collectors that exploited the pilgrims traveling from Bengal to Jagannatha Puri. When they arrived at the road block, the tax collector demanded money from them, but they did not have any. According to *Chaitanya bhagavata*, after some time the tax collector let Chaitanya go because he was a *sannyasi* but he imprisoned his companions, saying that he would not let them go unless they paid the fees or convinced someone else to pay for them. The pilgrims detained in such road blocks were routinely chained and kept in inhumane conditions. Seeing his companions treated in such a terrible way, Chaitanya could not leave, and sat on the road watching the officer, until the officer decided to release his prisoners.

A slightly different version is given in *Chaitanya mangala*: the prisoners chained by the tax collector were other pilgrims that had been traveling before Chaitanya and his group. When Chaitanya saw their pitiful condition, he charged into the road block and challenged the officer about his adharmic actions. The officer was shocked and scared by the powerful personality of that impressive *sannyasi*, and released all the prisoners.

Another episode in *Chaitanya mangala* describes how Chaitanya and his companions met a *shakta sadhu* who invited them to their *matha* for a drink. Chaitanya simply laughed and proceeded on his way.

Although not particularly important for the mission of Krishna Chaitanya, this small episode shows that in Chaitanya's times there was a large presence of *shakta* tantrics not only in Bengal but in Orissa as well, and that their tradition had become so degraded that consumption of alcohol was considered a normal occurrence even outside the engagement in ritual worship. This demonstrates the point that the offering of alcohol in the tantric rituals is not required by the Deity but actually constitutes an opportunity of purification for all those people who do not want to give up the bad habit of drinking alcohol. The amused reaction offered by Chaitanya to the proposal of the drunkard *sadhu* is also a good example for his followers, who should avoid the trap of self-righteousness and indignation for the lifestyle chosen by others for their personal lives. Too often, those who feel outraged about the private life of other people are just demonstrating their own insecurity at personal level.

A more balanced person, who is solidly standing on the spiritual path, is able of taking things with some more sense of humor and tolerance for the weakness of others. Of course, here we are talking about private weaknesses, not about crimes.

Walking on, Chaitanya arrived in Jalesvara and went directly to the local Shiva temple, where he started to dance happily. Vrindavana Das writes in his *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, commenting the fact: “If anyone disrespects Lord Shiva, not following the example of Lord Chaitanya, then he cannot be considered a *vaishnava*, and all his spiritual advancement will be annulled.”

After some time the other members of the group arrived and they also joined Chaitanya in his ecstatic dancing. It seems that the name of this temple has caused some confusion and apparent contradiction between the two versions presented respectively by Vrindavana Dasa and Krishnadasa Kaviraja, due to the fact that there are indeed two

different localities called Jalesvara: one just before Remuna, and the other just before Puri. The first Jalesvara on the road from Navadvipa to Puri is at the border between the present states of West Bengal and Orissa; in the city there is one Chandanesvara Shiva temple, and a river called Suvarnarekha ("golden line") flows by. The second Jalesvara is near the Kapotesvara Shiva temple, just after the village of Chandanpur, and the river flowing by is called Bhargavi, also called Kancha nadi ("golden river"), where the pieces of Chaitanya's *sannyasa danda* were thrown.

However, between these two localities Chaitanya and his traveling companions visited Kshira chora Gopinatha, Viraja, Sakshi Gopala and Lingaraja.

There is also a third famous and ancient Jalesvara Shiva temple, on the road traveled by Chaitanya and his companions, exactly in the middle between the other two localities, near Bhubaneswar (Ekamra kanana). This temple was built in the middle of a lotus pond; now the water has moved and the building is on the west bank of the Jalesvara sarovara. There is some controversy around the name of the king who built the temple - some say it was Chodaganga Deva, others say it was Padma Keshari.

The visit to Kshira chora Gopinatha

Continuing his journey, Chaitanya and his party reached Remuna near Balasore, where they visited the famous temple of Kshira chora Gopinatha. While Chaitanya was offering *pranama* to the Deity, a garland fell from on his body from Gopinatha. It is said that this beautiful Deity of Krishna was originally carved by Ramachandra with his arrow, and Sita performed the worship in Chitrakuta while they were in exile in the forest. Later king Narasimha Deva brought this Deity from Chitrakuta to Remuna, and built the two bathing tanks called Braja pokhari and Kuta pokhari.

Chaitanya charitamrita relates the wonderful story of the Deity of Gopinatha stealing a pot of sweet rice for his devotee Madhavendra Puri, narrated by Nityananda (who was a disciple of Madhavendra Puri) and the ecstatic *kirtana* of Chaitanya and his followers in the temple.

Several years earlier, Madhavendra had traveled to Vrindavana, and after arriving at Govardhana he took bath in the Govinda kunda and settled for the night under a tree. A young cowherd boy had approached to give him some milk, as the *sannyasi* had not taken any food that day. "In my village, nobody fasts," the cowherd boy said. "Please drink this milk."

After a brief and very friendly conversation, the cowherd boy had disappeared and Madhavendra realized that he had been blessed with the direct personal presence of Krishna himself. Later that night, the cowherd boy appeared to him in a dream, showed him a bush in the forest and told him, "Presently I am staying here in this bush in the jungle, and I suffer from the bad weather, especially when it's hot. Please take me out of here with the help of the village people and install me in a temple of top of the hill, washing my body with sufficient water to cool it down. I have been watching you for many days, and I wanted you to come and take care of me. My name is Gopala Govardhana dhari, and I was originally installed by Vajra, but when the Muslims came, my *pujari* hid me in the forest to save me from the attack."

The next morning the village people helped Madhavendra Puri to recover the tall Deity of Gopala and the installation was performed with the water of the Govinda kunda. A huge feast was arranged with rice and *rotis* (flat wheat bread, also called *chapati*) as well as fruits, vegetables and roots from the forest, and plenty of milk products such as yogurt, milk, *srikhand* (condensed yogurt), rice pudding, condensed milk and cream. Thus the Annakuta ceremony was performed again in Vrindavana after a very long time. Also many wealthy people came from Mathura, bringing valuable presents for the temple and cooperating for the construction of the temple. Madhavendra Puri instructed some local *brahmanas* in the service of the Deity, and on the order of Gopala he journeyed to Puri to get some sandalwood to further cool down his body.

On the way from Vrindavana to Puri, Madhavendra had traveled through Bengal and arrived at the house of Advaita in Shantipura. After initiating Advaita Acharya, he resumed his journey. When he arrived at the Gopinatha temple in Remuna, he visited the Deity with great happiness, and impressed by the service of the *pujaris*, asked them about the offerings of food they were presenting to the Deity, so that he could also prepare similar foods for his Gopala.

The *pujaris* told him about a wonderful rice pudding, called *amrita keli* or *gopinatha kshira*, that was offered to Gopinatha every evening in 12 earthen pots. Madhavendra

desired to taste the pudding, so that he could duplicate the preparation, but then immediately he felt ashamed, thinking he had committed an offense by desiring to eat Gopinatha's food before it had been offered. After the *bhoga* offering and the *arati* were completed, Madhavendra left the temple without saying anything to anyone, and although he had not eaten anything for the whole day, he went to find a place to sleep in the market square. In the meantime Gopinatha appeared in a dream to his *pujari*, ordering him to get the bowl of rice pudding that he had hidden under his clothes on the altar, and take it to his dear devotee Madhavendra Puri, who was sitting alone in the empty market square. Startled, the *pujari* got up from his bed and went to check into the Deity's room, and actually found the rice pudding. All excited, the *pujari* ran out in the night calling loudly for Madhavendra Puri, and as Gopinatha had mentioned, he found him on the market square. Madhavendra Puri became overwhelmed by devotion for Gopinatha and was greatly honored by the people of the village, but because he was not enthusiastic at the idea of becoming famous there, he decided to continue his travel and go back to take care of his Gopala.

In Puri, Madhavendra collected about 40 kg of sandalwood and 200 gr of camphor. Since those ingredients were routinely used in the temple worship for Jagannatha but were controlled by the Government, he also had to get all the required papers and authorizations for carrying them outside the city. Then he started his journey back.

When he reached Remuna, he visited again the temple of Gopinatha. That night Gopala came to him in a dream and said, "I am the same person as Gopinatha, so by carrying the sandalwood and the camphor to Gopinatha's temple, you have already delivered the items that I had requested you. Please grind the sandalwood and camphor and apply the paste to Gopinatha's body daily, until it is all finished."

The temple *pujaris* were extremely happy to hear that those valuable ingredients were to be used for Gopinatha's service, and the two assistants from Puri who had traveled with Madhavendra to Remuna were also glad to learn that their journey would not require them to go further. At the end of the Chandana yatra, Madhavendra returned to Puri with the two devotees of Jagannatha, and remained there until the end of the rainy season.

After hearing the entire story, Chaitanya praised the great humility and renunciation of Madhavendra Puri, and especially his pure selfless love and service to Krishna. He then recited a *sloka* uttered by Radharani about Krishna - a verse that was Madhavendra Puri's favorite (and which he chanted especially at the time of his demise): *ayi dina dayardra*

natha he, mathura natha kada avalokyase, hridayam tvad aloka kataram, dayita bhramyati kim karomy aham, "Oh Lord! Oh protector of Mathura, you are compassionate to the suffering people. When shall I be able to see you again? My love, your absence is so painful that my mind has become restless. What will I do?"

The visit to Viraja kshetra

Still further on, Chaitanya and his party arrived at Yajapur or Jajpur on the bank of river Viraja (Vaitarani) and stayed in Brahma nagara (Jajpur). They visited the self-manifested Deity of Adi Varaha in the famous temple, and Chaitanya explained that just by seeing the river Viraja one is purified of all sins: it is such a sacred pilgrimage place that it is filled with innumerable temples. They all took bath at the Dasasvamedha ghat, and after worshipping Varaha they danced ecstatically for a long time. Suddenly Chaitanya left his companions to go and visit other temples by himself.

Let us review the holy places that Chaitanya visited with such great pleasure.

The town, that was the capital of Orissa during the Keshari dynasty, is on the bank of the Vaitarani river about 92 km from Cuttack and is now known as Jajpur or Jajpore. It should not be confused with Jajpur Road, that is a smaller town in the Jajpur district, or Jeypore, that is in Koraput district (both in Orissa). Some say the name of the town is derived from Yajnapura ("the city of the Yajna"), some say it comes from the name of Yayati or Jayati Keshari. Part of the city is surrounded by the river, and the other part is surrounded by a canal.

The *Brahma purana* describes it as Annakoti tirtha, meaning that in this holy place there were one less than one crore (10 million minus 1) Shiva lingams. As mentioned in the *Mahabharata* (*Vana parva*, chapter 114), this holy place was visited by the five Pandavas accompanied by Lomasa Rishi. This pilgrimage place is also mentioned in *Kapila Samhita*, *Brahmanda purana*, *Vayu purana*, *Tantra Chintamani*, and *Astha pitha Mahatmya*. The *Brahma purana* says that Brahma himself installed the Deity of Viraja in this place.

According to the *Linga purana*, Viraja appeared from the sacrificial *kunda* where Brahma celebrated the *yajna*. Within the main Viraja kshetra there are 68 subsidiary *tirthas*.

Chaitanya mangala calls Jajpur with the name of Tamaluka, and says that Chaitanya took bath in the Brahma kunda and went to visit the Deity of Madhusudana, then paid visit to Viraja and prayed her, "please give me *prema bhakti* for the lotus feet of Krishna". Then he offered *pinda* (the traditional offering of food) to his forefathers before leaving town.

The most famous bathing place in Jajpur is the Brahma kunda, more commonly known as Dasasvamedha ghat. This name refers to the story according to which Brahma himself performed 10 *asvamedha yajnas* here, attended also by Mother Ganga, who sent a flow of her waters that surfaced at Gonasika in the Keonjhar district, where the Vaitarani river starts its course. It is said that the gift of a cow in this place grants liberation. Here the Varuni Mela is celebrated every year.

King Yayati Keshari of the Soma vamsa ("lunari dynasty") also performed here the Dasasvamedha Yajna at this Ghat on the Vaitarani river. For this celebration, he brought 10,000 *brahmanas* from north India and settled them in various *sasana* villages in the region.

At the Dasasvamedha ghat we find the Deities of the Sapta Matrikas: Chamunda, Varahi, Indrani, Vaishnavi, Shivaduti, Kaumari and Mahesvari. Each one of them, about 8 feet tall, is seated on a lotus pedestal and holds a baby on her left arm. Together with them, there are a large *vigraha* of Ganesha and a beautiful Garuda. A monolithic pillar called Subha stambha and the Chandesvara pillar are believed to be Vijaya stambhas installed by the Somavamsis. Among the other *vigrahas* one of the most imposing is Padmapani Avalokitesvara Buddha, called Shanta Madhava, 16 feet tall.

This identification of Buddha with Madhava is particularly important in the culture of Orissa, as we will see later on in the section about Jagannatha and Madhava: here we will simply remind our readers that the original Deity of Jagannatha was called Nila Madhava. In the same place, other Buddha figures are depicted in *bhumi sparsa mudra*, the gesture of "touching the earth" as a mark of respect for the Mother Goddess Bhumi, who is known as Viraja.

The Hanumanesvara temple at Mahavir square contains the characteristic "hero stone slabs" commemorating the valor of great Kings, that later became object of worship superimposing to the ancient cult to the Gramadevis as Rautranis (for example, at

Kuarnadei). In this regard, it is interesting to consider the parallel with the Ghoda Nacha, the “dummy horse dance” where the two dancers are called Rauta and Rautrani. All these characteristics show the immense antiquity and deep spiritual significance of this holy place.

In Viraja Kshetra there is a popular story about a man called Gaya, a benevolent and pious Daitya who sacrificed himself to help people attain salvation. The story strongly reminds us of the creation of the Shakti pithas from the pieces of the body of Sati, and is probably a remainder from a very ancient religious ritual (the *naramedha yajna*, similar to the *asvamedha yajna*) practiced before the Kali yuga times, and that seemed to be known and practiced at global level. Now these rituals can only be performed symbolically because there is practically nobody who has the level of consciousness and spiritual power required to conduct it properly.

When the Suras came forth to kill him, Gaya accepted to die on condition that the parts of his body could become pilgrimage places to bless religious people: his head fell in Gaya (Bihar, also called Srigaya) near the Phalgu river, his feet in the Godavari river (at the place called Padagaya), and the navel (*nabhi*) in the Vaitarani river in the place called Nabhigaya, where people would perform the Sraddha ceremony for their ancestors. The Kshetra has its own *Panjika* with some different dates for religious celebrations and used to have its own Mukti Mandapa and Pandita Sabha. It is said that a pilgrimage to this Pitha gives liberation to seven generations of ancestors. It is said that there are 5 main Devi temples in Orissa: Viraja in Jajpur, Mangala in Kakatpur, Bhagavati in Banpur, Sambalai in Sambalpur, and Sarala in Jankara. Viraja kshetra, also called Nabhi Gaya or Parvati kshetra, is one the famous Shakti pithas in Orissa, dedicated to Goddess Viraja. According to the *shakta* tantric tradition, this is the place where the navel (*nabhi*) of Sati fell, when Vishnu cut her body to pieces to bless the land with holy places.

The *Kubja Tantra* describes Viraja as the Mahesvari of Uddiyana (Orissa). The Kshetra has a triangular shape, with a Shiva temple at each of the corners: Varunesvara, Bilvesvara and Khitatesvara. According to the *Madala panji* these last two temples received gifts of lands from king Anangabhima Deva, who also established a Jagannatha temple here (that was later destroyed by the Muslim invaders).

In the Viraja temple, the Deity of Viraja Devi sits on a lion. One of her hands holds a spear and the other holds the tail of Mahishasura in his buffalo form. Viraja wears a moon sliver on her crown.

The temple has a small tank called Nabhi kunda, in front of which we find the Visvanatha and the Gangesvara shrines. Also inside the temple there is a number of Shiva shrines, starting from the Isanesvara Lingam, that according to the *Viraja kshetra Mahatmya*, was the first Shiva shrine to be established in this Kshetra.

Other Lingams gathered inside the Viraja temple (apart from the cluster in the north side of the boundary wall, known as Rudra Mela) and miniature shrines, are Trilochanesvara and Siddhesvara. The *Brahma purana* says that Lord Brahma prayed Mahesvara to come and live in Abimukta Kshetra (another name of Viraja Kshetra) with Goddess Viraja, leaving his previous divine abodes.

The temple of Sveta Varaha, dedicated to the Varaha form of Vishnu, is on the island in the middle of the river. In the *garbha griha* there are three Varaha Deities carved in black chlorite slabs, while the original Deity of Lakshmi Varaha is said to have been stolen by the King of Aula. The Mukti Mandapa is partially buried by sand, and the upper part of the temple that had been damaged by the Muslim invaders was repaired by king Prataparudra in the times of Chaitanya.

Another important temple visited by Chaitanya during his journey to Puri is the Jajpur Jagannatha temple. After the temple built by king Anangabhima was destroyed by the islamist marauders, a new temple was built for Jagannatha in the same place.

As Jajpur was such a famous pilgrimage place, there were more road blocks for the collection of taxes from the unfortunate travelers. *Chaitanya mangala* describes a second misadventure with a cruel tax officer, who arrested and chained Chaitanya's companions and stole their blankets - the only possessions they had. Later that night, Chaitanya appeared in a dream to the chief tax officer, manifesting the form of Vishnu - lying on Ananta Sesha and served by Lakshmi and Sarasvati - but dressed as a *sannyasi*. He said, "One of your subordinates has mistreated my devotees".

The chief officer went to investigate, released the devotees and compensated them with new blankets. Before leaving Jajpur, Chaitanya went again to visit Goddess Viraja - who grants liberation to all those who offer their respects to her.

The visit to Sakshi Gopala

The next leg of Chaitanya's journey led him to Cuttack, where he and his companions took bath in the Mahanadi river and visited the Deity of Sakshi Gopala. The wonderful story of Sakshi Gopala as narrated by Nityananda (who had already visited the Deity during his previous journeys) is contained in several biographies about Chaitanya, and it is particularly important for his followers. This famous Deity, of black complexion and about 6 feet tall, is said to have been originally installed in Vrindavana by the grandson of Krishna, Vajra, together with the other principal Deities of Sri Krishna (Govinda, Gopinatha, etc). Lochana Dasa's *Chaitanya mangala*, however, says the Deity was installed by Uddhava in Varanasi.

This type of discrepancies in the stories around Chaitanya (and indeed in the Hindu tradition in general) shows that circumstantial details are not really important, contrarily to what many people think. Unfortunately, unevolved people often shift the focus away from the important teachings and orders of a great *acharya* and lose themselves on circumstantial and external details, even presenting them as "the all-important *lilas* of the Lord".

Although it is true that all the activities of the great spiritual Personalities are symbolically significant, we need to overcome the material mentality that separates one manifestation from another. Just like Chaitanya manifested himself as Durga, Ramachandra, Varaha and Shiva, similarly the Deity of Sakshi Gopala could easily have been installed by Vajra in Vrindavana *and* simultaneously by Uddhava in Varanasi. The Deity is not a stone statue with a linear history, but a manifestation of a special level of consciousness evoked into a particular space and time by the desire and love of a devotee. Now, Vajra and Uddhava were situated in the same *dasya rasa*, or sentiment of loving subordinate servitorship, towards the same form of Krishna, so it does not really matter which one of the two of them historically inaugurated his worship in that particular *vigraha*.

Whether he had been in Vrindavana or Varanasi, Sakshi Gopala had walked all the way to Vidyanagara (according to the *Chaitanya charitamrita*) or Vijayanagara near Kanchi

in Andhra Pradesh (according to the *Chaitanya Bhagavata*) to go and bear witness (“*sakshi*”) in a controversy where the word of his devotee had been questioned.

Two *brahmanas* from the same city (Vidyanagara or Vijayanagara) had traveled to Vrindavana (or Kashi, Varanasi) in pilgrimage. While there, the younger *brahmana* had taken very good care of his elderly companion, serving him faithfully.

Moved by his sincere service, one day in the temple of Gopala the old *brahmana* had wished that the young man accepted his daughter in marriage and thus become his son, and the young *brahmana* accepted that proposal. However, after returning to their village, the sons of the elderly *brahmana* forced their father to break his promise because the young *brahmana* was not very wealthy and they had decided to give their sister in marriage to someone else. To the objection that the promise had been made in front of the Deity of Gopala, the sons of the elderly *brahmana* derisively responded that then Gopala himself should come and bear witness. The young *brahmana* then went back to Gopala and pleaded to him to save the truthfulness of his devotee and to please come to bear witness in front of the villagers. Pleased by his intense devotion, the Lord agreed to walk all the way to Kanchi to bear witness of the promise in favor of his devotee, to the condition that the *brahmana* would walk without looking back each day, then at night he should stop and prepare some rice to offer to him. Every morning Gopala resumed walking behind the *brahmana*, his anklets tinkling merrily to reassure his devotee. Finally reaching the outskirts of his village, the *brahmana* turned around and Gopala stopped there; all the villagers came to see the miracle and the marriage was performed without any further delay. The Deity of Sakshi Gopala remained there for a long time, until the King of Kanchi installed him in the capital.

Several years later, Purushottama Deva, King of Puri (1466-1497), sought an alliance with the southern kingdom of Kanchi and requested a marriage with the daughter of the King of Kanchi but he was rejected and launched into a military campaign to subdue the Kanchi kingdom. The Kanchi abhijana or Kanchi Kaveri lila (the conquest of Kanchi) is a very popular story in Puri and is often depicted in statues and paintings as Purushottama claimed that Jagannatha and Balabhadra had personally joined his army in the military campaign.

The King of Kanchi, Salva (Saluva) Narasimha Deva, had opposed Purushottama Deva’s ascent to the throne by supporting his rival Hamvira who had rallied an army in the south. After defeating Hamvira, Purushottama sought an alliance with Salva Narasimha through

a marriage proposal to his daughter Rupambika, but the proposal was scornfully rejected as Salva Narasimha called Purushottama a “sweeper” because of his ritual act of subservience to Lord Jagannatha. As we will mention in the section about the history of Orissa, the popular version of the story in Puri is that Purushottama Deva started the tradition called *chera panhara*, by which the King of Puri sweeps the chariots of the Deities during the Ratha Yatra festival.

It is also to be noted that Purushottama's request to marry the princess was meant to humiliate the king of Kanchi (formerly his enemy) rather than to earn his friendship, as a royal princess is supposed to choose her husband in the *svayamvara* ritual, and not to be given away like cattle against her wishes. Furthermore, according to the popular tradition, a man implicitly accepts a subordinate/ inferior position towards the husband of his sister, irrespective of the actual age or qualifications or social positions of the individuals involved.

Purushottama Deva brought back not only princess Rupambika (who was renamed Padmavati and delivered to a minister with the instruction of getting her married to a street sweeper), but also the throne of the King of Kanchi, the *manikya simhasana*, that was later offered to Jagannatha in Puri, that Purushottama Deva, like his father, considered his elder brother. Still today the tradition in Puri calls the King of Puri "the younger brother of Jagannatha", ruling the kingdom in Jagannatha's name.

King Purushottama also carried away the Deities formerly worshiped by the King of Kanchi - not only Gopala and Radha Kantha, but especially one tantric Deity of Ganesha, that is still sitting today in the main temple of Jagannatha in Puri with the name of Kanchi Ganesha (also called Kamada Ganesha, Chaura Ganesha, and Uchchista Ganapati). This Ganesha Deity was the *ista deva* of Salva Narasimha, and his blessings were considered fundamental in the protection and power of his kingdom; it was said that the day when Ganesha became displeased with the King, all the kingdom's power would be vanquished..

It is also said in Puri that during this second military campaign, Jagannatha's conch took the form of a sword, causing Ganesha's mouse to run away in fear; thereupon Ganesha had to touch the ground and taking the opportunity Jagannatha manifested the form of Narasimha, finally convincing Ganesha to leave Kanchi. Of course, this is merely a popular tale, not confirmed in any scripture.

The conquered Deities were taken as a trophy (to signify the shift of the divine source of power to the conquering King) and installed in Purushottama's royal palace in the capital - then Cuttak or Kataka. Only later they were carried to Puri, when Cuttack fell into the hands of the Muslim invaders and became their capital, because of its strategic importance of military fort.

The present temple of Sakshi Gopala is in the small town of Sakhi Gopal (previously known as Satyabadi), about 20 km from Puri on the road to Bhubaneswar. According to the local tradition, this was the place where Jagannatha and Balabhadra manifested personally as two handsome youths, one of black complexion on a white horse and the other of white complexion on a black horse, and purchased some yogurt on credit from a *gopali* (cowherd lady) promising that the King himself would soon arrive to complete the payment. As evidence, the black complexioned young man gave the lady a ring that the King later recognized as belonging to Jagannatha's personal treasury. The episode is often celebrated in many paintings and even in the statues positioned at the *asva dvara*, the southern gate of the Jagannatha temple in Puri (a relatively recent addition).

The Deity was moved to the village of Satyabadi because of the danger posed by the Muslim iconoclastic raids in Puri. Some time later, a descendant of Maharaja Purushottama Deva was inspired by Krishna to install the Deity of Radharani together with Gopalji, on the auspicious Ola Navami day. There is a very nice story about this, too, about the daughter of a *pujaka* who worshiped Gopala; this girl was a great devotee and totally in love with Gopala. She died just before the Deity of Radha was installed, so the local people believe she merged into the *rasa* of Radha and remained to serve the Lord in that form.

The visit to Ekamra kanana

After reaching Bhubaneswar (anciently called Ekamra kanana and Koti lingesvara), Chaitanya saw the tower of the Lingaraja temple and offered his respect from a distance. *Chaitanya mangala* calls Lingaraja with the name Visvesvara, that is a synonym for Bhuvaneshvara ("the Lord of the universe") as well as for Jagannatha. It says that in this sacred city there are 10 million Shiva lingas, and that one should be very careful not to commit offenses while walking into the town.

Chaitanya took bath in the Bindu sarovara, a holy *tirtha* filled with all the waters collected by Shiva from the various places of pilgrimage and surrounded by historical temples, including Lingaraja, Ananta Vasudeva, a temple to Durga Ma called Dvaravasini (“protector of the door”), Yamesvara, Vaitala, the Muktesvara group of temples, Kedar gauri, Rajarani and Nagesvara. In the middle of the Bindu Sarovara there is a small pavilion used during the celebration of the Chandana yatra.

The sacred story about this lake says that Mahadeva suggested that Parvati would precede him to Ekamra. When she arrived here, she found an effulgent black and white Lingam and she started to worship it. While returning from the forest where she had picked flowers, she saw one thousand pure white cows come out of the lake and bathe the Lingam with their milk, walked around it and then return to the lake. So she followed them and became their *gopalini* (“cowherd lady”) for 15 years.

One day two *asura* brothers, Kritti and Vasa (sons of king Drumila, who had received the blessing of having two invincible sons) walked through the forest and saw the beautiful Gopalini, and falling prey to lust, they approached her for sex. Gopalini called Mahadeva, who appeared as a young *gopala* (“cowherd boy”) and told her that she was the only one who could eliminate these two arrogant people, because they could not be killed by any weapon.

Gopalini then replied to the two brothers that she would fulfill the desire of the one who was able to carry her on his shoulders, and they eagerly allowed her to mount their shoulders. Gopalini manifested her universal form as Visvambhari and crushed them both to death. After this feat, Bhuvanesvari felt very thirsty and Mahadeva created the Shankar Vapi for her, but it was still not sufficient.

So Mahadeva sent Vrishabha (his bull carrier) to collect water from the Mandakini Ganga on the heavenly planets and from all the holy places of the universe, and to invite Brahma and all the Devas for a great celebration. Thus all the holy waters from the Svetadvipa (the Milk Ocean), Svarga and Patala were collected, and also the waters from Ganga, Prayag, Ganga sagara, Gangadvara, Naimisharanya, Prabhasa, Pitri tirtha, Pushkara (the lake sacred to Brahma), Yamuna, Sarasvati, Narmada, Mahanadi, Krishna, Kaveri, Gomati, Godavari, Gandaki, Sindhu, Rishikulya, Satadru, Vipasa, Payosni, and all the other holy rivers and lakes. Mahadeva asked all the holy waters to offer a *bindu* (“drop”) each to the new lake, and thus the Bindu Sarovara was created.

The *Kapila samhita* says that Lord Visvanatha then expressed the desire to leave Kashi (Varanasi) when it would become crowded of irreligious, materialistic and arrogant people, who do not care for the genuine principles of religion, and thus performing austerities and meditation there without disturbance would be very difficult. So at the time of the destruction of Kashi, both Mahadeva and Shakti shift their residence to Gupta Kashi Ekamra and the Bindu Sarovara becomes the new Manikarnika ghat and Ganga.

The temple of Tribhuvanesvara Lingaraja (anciently known also as Kirtivasas) is the most important center of spirituality in Bhubaneswar. The Deity is a *svayambhu* ("self manifested") Lingam, a form of Hari-Hara - a combined manifestation of Vishnu and Shiva simultaneously. Therefore both Garuda and Nandi are sitting outside the main shrine. The special characteristic of this *lingam* is that it has a crack in the middle dividing it into two parts, much like the Siddhesvara Lingam in the nearby Muktesvara temple complex - also considered a Hari-Hara form. Lingaraja sits in a *kunda* within the *garbha griha* and is bathed with water, milk and *bhang*, while a flow of devotees present offerings of flowers, bel (*bilva*) leaves, *tulasi* leaves and flowers, fruits and foods, that are handed to the priests and taken beyond the low barrier that protects the inner sanctum.

The *Ekamra chandrika* says that originally the Lingam was worshiped under a mango tree by the local tribal villagers; the name of Ekamra is said to have derived from this "one mango tree".

Just like in Jagannatha's temple in Puri the most intimate personal service of the Deities is traditionally a privilege of the non-brahmin Dayitas, the descendents of the Sabara tribal chief Visvavasus who originally worshiped Jagannatha in the forest, the tradition on the Lingaraja temple gives the tribal Badu priests the privilege of bathing and decorating the Lingam. It is said they are the descendants of a shaiva saint, Siddha Bhuti, who married a Sabara lady. As in the other traditional mixed worship systems characteristic of Orissa, the Badus leave the *garbha griha* when the brahmins come to offer *bhoga* (the food presentation at the main meals times).

A special characteristic of the Lingaraja temple is that at the Nata Mandira the two *dvarapalas* are Jaya and Vijaya (Vishnu's doormen) rather than Chanda and Prachanda (Shiva's doormen). Also, the *prasada* of Lingaraja is partaken by people from all social levels like the *mahaprasada* of Jagannatha at Puri, while usually Shiva's *prasada* is not distributed to the public but is consumed by the temple servants only.

It is said that the present temple was built by the three Keshari Kings of the Somavamsa dynasty. The four structures (Deula, Jagamohana, Nata Mandira and Bhoga Mandapa) are all aligned in a row and surrounded by a large inner courtyard, with around 150 smaller shrines, starting with the Gopalini (Bhuvaneshvari) on the north of the Jagamohana, and the Savitri (south of the Deula), both of which have various forms of Devi as subsidiary Deities.

Other shrines around the courtyard are dedicated to Parvati, Narasimha, Jagannatha Baladeva Subhadra (on the west side), Lakshmi Narayana (on the north side of the Bhoga Mandapa), Ganesha, Kartikeya, Surya Narayana, Ananta Vasudeva, Ekanamsa (Subhadra), Narasimha, Trivikrama, Sani and so on. On the right side of the main entrance, inside the temple, there is a wooden Deity of Brahma. By the grace of Mahadeva, we have been able to visit this temple.

The temple of Parvati has its own Jagamohana, Nata Mandira and Bhoga Mandapa, all lined up in a row. An inscription near the south door of the Jagamohana declares that king Bhanudeva gifted a daily offering to Goddess Uma of two earthen pots (called *atikas*) filled with pancakes. The Deity of Parvati that is presently in the temple is not the original Umadevi *vighraha*, that was desecrated and damaged during invasions, but is a more recent *vighraha*, called Annapurna. On the south face of the Vimana of the temple there are images of child Krishna with a sitting bearded Nanda, and Yashoda churning the milk.

After bathing in the Bindu Sarovara, Chaitanya eagerly went to take *darshana* of Tribhuvaneshvara *svayambhu lingam*, and by seeing that it was beautifully surrounded by innumerable *ghi* lamps offered by the devotees, Chaitanya felt very pleased and started to dance ecstatically, singing the Names “Shiva, Rama, Govinda”.

Then he instructed his followers by quoting Krishna’s words: “One who claims to be My devotee but disregards Shiva is only trying to pretend devotion to Me” and he offered worship to Shiva with all the devotees. Vrindavana Das comments: “The Supreme Lord is the supreme Guru, one who does not follow his instructions suffers because of such grievous mistake.”

Chaitanya also visited many other Shiva temples in Bhubaneswar before resuming his journey to Puri. He resided in the house of a local devotee of Shiva, where he took his meal. In this regard, Lochana Dasa in *Chaitanya mangala* elaborates on the fact that

Chaitanya accepted the *prasada* of Shiva given by this devotee. In those times there was a rumor among the *vaishnavas* according to which the *prasada* of Shiva cannot be consumed because of a curse by Bhrigu Muni. In the discussion reported by Lochana Dasa, Murari Gupta explains to Damodara Pandita that the effects of Bhrigu Muni curse can only strike those persons who have a contaminated consciousness and commit the offense of differentiating between Hari and Hara. The fact is, those who accept the food offered to Shiva without committing offenses to Hari become free from material conditionings and obtain love for Krishna. This is the reason why Chaitanya gave us the example of accepting the food offered to Shiva.

Later in the book we will discuss more about Shiva's actual position in early Gaudiya vaishnavism, especially in regard to the process of initiation and to the relationship between *guru* and disciple.

Here we will simply offer a few quotes: one from the *Shivastakam* (text 7) quoted by Murari Gupta in his *Sri Chaitanya charita mahakavya (sivaya sarva-gurave namo namah*, "I repeatedly offer my obeisances to Shiva, who is the *guru* of everyone", and two from the *Narada purana* (63.121, 65.58): *diksaya guru-murti-sthah sarvanugrahakah sivah*, "Through the process of initiation (*diksha*), Shiva, the giver of all benedictions, manifests in the form of the *guru*," *om namas te natha bhagavan sivaya guru-rupine*, "I offer my respectful obeisances unto Shiva, who has assumed the form of *guru*."

For the instruction of those who may be tempted to disregard the transcendental and inconceivable position of Shiva, we will also quote the *Brihad Bhagavatamrita* (1.2.86): *krsnac chivasya bhedeksa maha-dosa-kari mata ago bhagavata svasmin ksamyate na sive krtam* , "One who sees some difference between Krishna and Shiva is committing a great offense. Krishna may excuse someone who commits *aparadha* to his own lotus feet, but will never excuse one who commits *aparadha* at the lotus feet of Shiva". Also, we should remember that Krishna himself in *Bhagavata purana* (10.88.38-39) addresses Shiva as the *guru* of the entire universe, and says, "If someone commits *aparadha* to such a *mahajana* and *jagat guru* as you are, they will never get any auspiciousness" .

Those who worship and drink the footwash of criminals and cheaters, and yet dare to call Shiva "a puny material demigod on a lower platform of devotional service" (as a *jnana mishra bhakta*) should seriously take stock of their real position and quickly change their course, for their own good.

Although it seems that there is no specific mention in the presently available biographies, Chaitanya must have visited also the Ananta Vasudeva temple, that is very near to the Lingaraja temple. This ancient temple dedicated to Narayana is on the east bank of Bindu Sarovara and is the only Vaishnava shrine remaining in Bhubaneswar after the widespread destruction carried on by marauding Muslims.

The identification of Jagannatha and Balabhadra with Krishna/ Vishnu and Balarama/ Sankarshana respectively is universally known. The main Deities are Krishna (Vasudeva), Balarama (Ananta) and Subhadra, and the *parsva devata* are Nrisimha, Varaha and Trivikrama (Vamana). These last two have been mutilated by the Muslims, so they are not worshiped any more. The banisters of the north window have the figures of Rama, Lakshmana, Sita, Hanuman and a monkey-attendant. This is particularly interesting in connection to the nearby Lingaraja temple, as there is a strong theological connection between Shiva and Rama.

An inscription originally from the Ananta Vasudeva temple, presently in the London Museum of the Royal Asiatic Society, declares that the Ananta Vasudeva temple was built for Sri Krishna and Balavasa (Balarama) on the bank of the Bindu Sarovara in the year Saka 1200. According to an inscription in the temple, the present structure was built by Chandra Devi, the daughter of Anangabhima III, during the reign of his grandson Bhanudeva.

Both the temples of Lingaraja and Ananta Vasudeva presently forbid entrance to Hindu converts of foreign origin, although many of the *sevakas* would be very favorable to the abrogation of the ban.

Chaitanya and his followers stayed in the temple of Lingaraja for the night and on the next day they proceeded to Puri, Purushottama kshetra. At this point in the narration, the *Chaitanya mangala* explains that Purushottama kshetra is glorified by all Devas as the most auspicious place in the world. There, mere sleeping is equal to *samadhi*, laying down is equal to offering *sastanga pranam*, walking is equal to performing *pradakshina*, talking is equal to *kirtana* and ordinary eating is equal to consuming the *havisya*, the austere simply cooked grains that are offered for the fire sacrifice.

Breaking the *sannyasa danda*

Chaitanya also stopped on the way outside Bhubaneswar at the Shiva temples called Jalesvara and Kapotesvara near the Bhargavi river. The river Bhargavi (also known as Kancha Nadi or “golden river”) is considered a manifestation of the sacred river Yamuna, who is the daughter of Surya (who is sometimes called Bharga or Kalinda). *Chaitanya charitamrita* calls this river Bharginadi. At Brahmagiri the Bhargavi flows near the temple of Alarnatha, and on the day of Krishna Janmashtami people there celebrate the festival called Maha Yamuna Snana (at the Mangala ghat). It is said that Chaitanya also participated to this festival.

Gaudiya Vaishnavas call the Bhargavi river with the name of Dandabhanga Nadi, as according to their tradition in this river (near Chandanpur, a few kilometers before Puri) Chaitanya threw the pieces of his *sannyasi* staff after Nityananda had broken it (according to some versions, Nityananda himself threw the pieces in the river after breaking the staff).

The biographies say that while Chaitanya was walking on, Nityananda and Jagadananda had fallen behind the group, carrying Chaitanya’s *sannyasi danda*. Jagadananda had gone to beg for food and left the *danda* to Nityananda, but in his absence Nityananda broke the staff into three pieces. Perplexed, Jagadananda carried the pieces on and when he met Chaitanya he showed them to him. Chaitanya became very disturbed and decided to travel alone from there onwards. According to the diary of Murari Gupta, Chaitanya took bath in the river, that is glorified as extremely powerful (*maha viryavatim*).

According to Krishnadasa’ *Chaitanya charitamrita*, Sarvabhauma’s *Chaitanya chandrodaya* and Vrindavana Das’ *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, this particular episode is very significant for the relationship of Chaitanya with Krishna and for the evolution of his *bhava* (devotional emotions). It is said that the bamboo is very dear to the Lord, so Krishna always carried it as his flute, while Rama used it as his bow, and Chaitanya carried it as a *sannyasi* staff.

It is also said that by breaking the *sannyasa* staff, Nityananda was implicitly stating that Chaitanya did not need to strictly follow the rules and regulations of the order of

sannyasa, because he was totally transcendental to such restrictions. This is also confirmed by a *sloka* quoted by Chaitanya on another occasion (during the Ratha yatra *kirtana* celebration in Puri):

naham vipro na cha nara patir napi vaisyo na sudro, naham varni na cha griha patir no vana stho yatir va, kintu prodyan nikhila paramananda purnamritabdher, gopi bhartuh pada kamalayor dasa dasa anudasa, "I am not a brahmana, I am not a kshatriya, I am not a vaisya or a sudra. I am not a brahmachari, or a grihastha, a vanaprastha or even a sannyasi. Rather, I am the servant of the servant of the servant of the lotus feet of the Lord of the gopis, who is the ocean of nectar, the supreme transcendental happiness, the universal radiance."

It is interesting that Chaitanya's most important companion, Nityananda (indicated by the Gaudiya theologians as a direct manifestation of Sankarshana Balarama) chose to broke his staff near the place of the Shiva Kapotesvara temple. The *Skanda purana* mentions that when king Indradyumna first reached Purushottama kshetra, he visited this temple first. More about that incident is narrated in the section about the appearance of Jagannatha and the story of king Indradyumna. The local tradition says that Mahadeva engaged here in austerities to obtain blessings from Hari and fasted so much (surviving only through wind) that his body was reduced to the size of a dove (*kapota*). Hari was pleased with Shiva's penance and established this place as his to be worshiped. It is said that the area of the Kapotesvara dhama was filled with sharp grass and nobody could live there.

On the other hand, the *Ramayana* narrates that when Ramachandra with Sita Devi and Lakshmana were traveling through the forest, they came upon a pond here, where Shiva Mahadeva was playing with Parvati; out of shyness, Shiva and Parvati transformed into two doves and flew into the forest. It is said that Chaitanya visited the temple to offer respects to Mahadeva here.

This is the place where we established our Jagannatha Vallabha Vedic Research Center.

More elaboration about this particular *lila* of the *danda bhanga* ("breaking of the staff") is offered by Gaudiya Vaishnavas in reference to the *Bhagavata purana* verse 3.14.35, mentioning Shiva as *nyasta danda* ("breaker of *danda*") and *dhrta danda* ("holder of *danda*"), and implying that with this act, Nityananda broke the separation between Madhava and Uma Madhava, or Hari and Hara. It is interesting to note that also

Sarvabhauma in his prayers addressed Chaitanya as both the holder and breaker of *danda*. Besides the ordinary meaning of “staff”, the word *danda* contains a meaning of control and punishment, much like the scepter of Yamaraja and the ancient Kings.

Chaitanya mangala offers a different elaboration on this important event. According to its version, Nityananda was not happy about the fact that Chaitanya had taken *sannyasa*; he had seen the pain that such choice had caused to mother Saci and to all the companions of Nimai in Navadvipa, and he did not like the idea that as a *sannyasi*, Chaitanya was expected to abstain from all forms of physical care, comfort and pleasure, and to engage in all kinds of austerities and difficulties. For this reason, Nityananda vented his anger on the *danda*, and broke it by bending it over his thigh. Realizing that Chaitanya was likely to disapprove his action, Nityananda lagged behind, until he was faced by Chaitanya, who demanded some explanation.

In fact Chaitanya became annoyed, and said that a *sannyasi's danda* is the seat for all the Devas, and destroying it had been a childish and useless action, that would not be appreciated by the general people. Nityananda replied, "I don't care for rules. And I don't like the fact that you are carrying the *danda* with all the Devas on your shoulder: this puts the Devas in the uncomfortable position of committing an offense against you. But most of all, I could not tolerate the pain that your *danda* was giving to your devotees - it was like a spike into their hearts."

Besides the Kapotesvara temple, this area is filled with ancient sacred places. It is said that Brighu Muni established here his *ashrama* and *yajna kunda* because of the sanctity of the Bhargavi river. Deities of Sita Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrugna and Hanuman are still worshiped in the small temple here. It is said that Chaitanya visited the *ashrama* during his journey to Jagannatha Puri; the episode and the story are narrated by Govinda Dasa in his *Chaitanya Chakada*.

At Ganga Narayanapur on the Bhargavi river we also find an old temple dedicated to Narayana and Ganga, two ancient Deities that according to some people were excavated from the river itself. It is said that this is the place where Ganga personally appeared, and it is called also Mukta Triveni Tirtha (to equate it with the famous Triveni at Prayag, today called Allahabad) because the river branches out in three streams here in a way similar to the Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati confluence. Every year during the month of Chaitra there is a festival called Maha Varuni Snana, to which Chaitanya is said to have participated.

At Tulasi chaura (also known as Kamalapura) near Malatipatpur, a few kilometers from Puri, Chaitanya saw the flag on top of Jagannatha's temple from a distance and fell to the ground in ecstasy. From this place the pilgrims coming from Bengal can first see the tower of the Jagannatha temple. It is said that Tulasi Das (the compiler of the *Rama charita manasa*) had visited the Sri Mandira and was disappointed to see that there was no Rama Deity there. Tempted to leave Puri, he spent the night here and had a dream where his *ista deva*, Sri Rama, manifested from the Deity of Jagannatha.

This area was once famous for its high quality sandalwood trees, and in fact this is the origin of the name of the village of Chandanpur. The specific locality called Tulasi chaura (on the Nimapada-Kakatpur road, 14 km from Kakatpur and near Chandanpur) is famous for the temple dedicated to the Mother Goddess in the form of Yajnasini Varahi, built during the Somavamsi rule and presently under the Archaeological Survey of India. It is said that after Parasurama had decimated the rebellious adharmic *kshatriyas* in 21 military campaigns, his axle (*parasu*) had become so heavy with the accumulated reactions of such killings that he could not find any place that could bear its weight. Finally he came to Purushottama kshetra and found that Varahi Devi (Mother Earth) here could hold it. Even today this Deity holds the axle.

The Deity is a form of the Mother Goddess with the face of a boar, three eyes and a pot belly, holding a fish in one hand and a bowl in the other. She sits in *lalitasana* on a cushion, with her right foot on her buffalo *vahana*. The worship is conducted according to *shakta* tantric practices and fish is offered every day. The temple is decorated with many sculptures especially of *maithuna* (sexual union) in 8 stages. Other well known temples in the area are Jodhalinga Mahadeva, Barala Balunkesvara, Lakshmi Narayana, Amaresa Mahadeva and especially Budha Linga Mahadeva, also called Dadhi Bhandesvara. This extraordinary Lingam keeps growing larger and taller with time, as witnessed by many people and even recorded by examinations conducted at a distance of 10 years. According to *Sri Chaitanya chakada*, this small Shiva temple was visited by Chaitanya during his travel to Puri; he spent the night here and had a wonderful *kirtana*.

After reaching Tulasi chaurasia, Chaitanya started proceeding towards Puri by constantly offering *sastanga pranama* and thus measuring the distance to Puri with his entire body, taking nine hours to reach the Atharnala bridge (six times longer than normally required). Chaitanya felt disturbed in his ecstasy by the presence of his companions, so he expressed the wish to travel alone and his companions stayed back.

Two other important temples on the road are Bali Kapilesvara and Bata Mangala (Marga Devi), that guard the entrance to the holy city. It is said that the place of the temple of Bali Kapilesvara was once covered by sand (*bali*). Here Mahadeva gave his *darshana* to a devotee who was traveling on the road; besides the Lingam more Deities were excavated from this site, such as Parvati, Ganesha etc. According to the local tradition, pilgrims would stop here and rub the sacred sand to their sore bodies to get relief from fatigue and pain.

By crossing the Atharnala toll pass, Chaitanya entered the town of Puri. The word Atharnala or *athara nala* means “eighteen pillars”, and it is the name of the bridge where pilgrims coming from north (Calcutta, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack) cross into the town of Puri after getting permission from Marga Devi, the Batamangala Durga Deity that guards the *kshetra* from that side. It is said that the Atharnala bridge was built by king Bhanu Deva I (1264-1278). It is 290 feet (about 88 meters) long and it crosses over a swampy river (called Madhupuri) that is a branch of the Mahanadi. It is still largely used for vehicles except for heavy trucks and buses, that enter Puri from a backside road. Today next to the bridge there is a small temple with the footprints of Chaitanya, commemorating his ecstasy when he reached Puri: it is said that here Chaitanya started to run wildly toward Jagannatha temple.

The arrival in Jagannatha Puri

Thus arriving in Puri on 10 April 1510, Chaitanya rushed into the temple and on seeing Jagannatha he started to roar loudly and jump in ecstasy, then he fainted crumbling to the ground. The popular tradition says that the temple guards thought he was a madman and were going to throw him out of the temple, but the Sanskrit teacher of the *pandita sabha* of king Prataparudra, Vasudeva Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, was in the temple room and intervened. Observing the extraordinary symptoms of *suddipta sattvika* ecstasy exhibited by Chaitanya, he had him respectfully carried to his house while he was still unconscious.

The *bhakti* literature explains that there are various stages of ecstatic manifestations in the body of a pure devotee. When only two or three symptoms manifest and the devotee

is able to conceal them, the emotion is called *jvalita* ("lighted"), while when four or five symptoms are manifested, it is called *dipta* ("blazing") stage, and when all the eight main symptoms are present, it is called *uddipta* ("inflamed"). The *suddipta* stage is even more intense.

Krishnadasa's *Chaitanya charitamrita* says that while Chaitanya was lying in the house of Sarvabhauma, his companions arrived at Puri and visited the temple, performed *pradakshina* of Jagannatha chanting Vedic prayers and were blessed with garlands from the Deities. When they inquired about Chaitanya, the priests told them he had been carried to Sarvabhauma's house. According to Vrindavana Dasa's *Chaitanya bhagavata*, Chaitanya's companions arrived just while the guards were carrying Chaitanya from the Jagannatha temple to the house of Sarvabhauma.

Lochana Dasa's *Chaitanya mangala* gives yet another different version. From a distance, Chaitanya saw the red silk flag flapping in the wind atop the tower of the Jagannatha temple, and then he saw a beautiful boy standing near the flag: overwhelmed by emotion at the sight of Krishna, Chaitanya crashed to the ground losing his external consciousness. His companions, still traveling with him, were frightened, because although it was not uncommon for Chaitanya to faint in the sway of devotional emotions, this time he was not even breathing or responding at all. When he finally returned to external consciousness, he was still seeing the boy and he described him as very handsome and very young, smiling, with a complexion like a blue sapphire, holding a flute in his left hand, and motioning to him with his right hand to invite him to come forward. At that point Chaitanya started to run towards the temple, distancing his companions. Arriving at the Markandeya Sarovara he took bath, offered his respect to Shiva Yamesvara who resides in the temple there, and proceeded to the temple of Jagannatha, all the time crying in ecstasy. Again he saw Jagannatha extending his arms to welcome him in a fond embrace, and calling him near.

According to this version, Chaitanya first met Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, then entered the Simha dvāra (the east gate of the temple), assisted by his companions because his knees had become weak from the intense emotion. In the Natasala in front of Jagannatha's *garbhagriha*, just behind the Garuda stambha, Chaitanya finally feasted his eyes on the beautiful form of Jagannatha, and was overwhelmed by ecstatic feelings. His hair standing on end, he was weeping profusely and then suddenly crashed to the ground, fists clenched and completely unconscious. When he recovered the external

consciousness, he walked around the temple as a mark of respect together with his companions, and finally they all went to the house of Sarvabhauma, chanting and dancing along the way.

We will now offer some information about the house of Sarvabhauma where Chaitanya stayed when he arrived in Puri for the first time. The place is in Bali Sahi, near the Svetaganga Sarovara. Today in the small temple there are the two seats of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, where it is said that they sat down to discuss *Vedanta*. However, this is not very likely, because it is not in accordance to what Chaitanya's biographies say or even to the old tradition, as the religious teachers used to go to give their lessons in the Jagannatha temple, and not in their own homes.

Later this residence of Sarvabhauma was occupied by the famous Gaudiya Vaishnava *guru* Gangamata Gosvamini, and now it is called Gangamata Gosvamini Matha. Here we find the Gupta suranga, one of the old secret passages of the city leading to the temple of Jagannatha, that was rediscovered not long ago. It is probably through this tunnel that Gangamata Gosvamini used to go to visit Jagannatha's temple alone at night, without being disturbed by anybody.

The Svetaganga sarovara near Sarvabhauma's house is a famous ancient *tirtha*, mentioned in *Skanda purana*. It is south of Sri Mandira, in Svetaganga lane, Bali Sahi. Here king Sveta Madhava installed Sveta Madhava (a Vishnu/ Shiva form). Sveta Madhava was a King of Treta yuga, and with his spiritual power he obtained the boon that any devotee who would take *mahaprasada* in his kingdom would not die prematurely. The other Deities installed in this *tirtha* are Mother Ganga, Mahavira Hanuman, Ganesha, and the Navagraha (the nine planets of the solar system according to the Vedic astrology). Next to the Sveta Madhava shrine we find the Mukti sila, the stone bearing the footprints of Vishnu. Near the Svetaganga Sarovara, that is considered non-different from the original Ganga river, there is the temple of Kapalamochana Shiva. This very old temple is behind the temple of Jagannatha, on the west side, in Manikarnika Sahi, and is presently about 60 feet under the level of the surrounding grounds. Inside the temple compound there is a well called Manikarnika Tirtha, described in the *puranas*, where the water is considered very auspicious and is only used for blessing people by sprinkling their heads.

According to the local people, the story of the temple is connected to a pastime between Shiva and Brahma. It is said that once Brahma questioned the importance of Shiva and minimized his position, refusing to consider the evidence clearly stated in the *Vedas*. So

Shiva slapped Brahma, smacking off his fifth face (that is now missing, as Brahma only has four heads). However, Brahma's head remained stuck on Shiva's hand. Embarrassed by the situation created by his anger, Shiva sat down here to worship Jagannatha in meditation, and finally the head was released. It seems that this story is relatively recent, and there must have been a more ancient version, probably connected to a tantric tradition that later came to be known as Kapalikas.

The Deity of Trikala Shiva is worshiped here. Today, inside the Kapalamochana temple we also find Deities of Patita Pavana (Jagannatha standing alone), Rameshvara Mahadeva, Hara-Parvati, Shyama Kali, Dasa mahavidya, Santoshi Ma, Mahavira Hanuman, Kartikeya or Kartikesvara, and Ganga.

Gopinatha arranged for Chaitanya and his associates to settle in his house, in a separate apartment that belonged to Sarvabhauma's maternal aunt, and organized everything for their comfort. Later, Chaitanya shifted to Kashi Mishra's house (also known as the Gambhira), where his *vighraha*, as well as personal sandals and *japa mala* are still worshiped.

The meeting with Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya

Let's now return to the version presented by Krishnadasa Kaviraja in his *Chaitanya charitamrita*. One of Chaitanya's traveling companions, Gadadhara, was a friend of Gopinatha, the brother in law of Sarvabhauma. Therefore they decided to go to his house and Gadadhara introduced the entire group. A former resident of Nadia, Gopinatha Acharya was the son in law of Mahesvara Visarada, a school friend of Nilambara Chakravarti who lived in Vidyanagara, Nadia. Visarada had two sons - Madhusudana (Vidya) Vachaspati and Vasudeva Sarvabhauma (known as Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya) and one daughter who married Gopinatha Acharya. Chaitanya's companions arrived at the house of Sarvabhauma, and were happy and distressed at the same time, seeing that Chaitanya was still unconscious. After reviving him by chanting the holy Names, the devotees went with him to take bath in the ocean and then sat to eat Jagannatha's *mahaprasada* together; Chaitanya took only some rice and a simple vegetable preparation

called *laphra vyanjana*, and he asked his companions to eat all the pancakes, the cheese and the sweets.

When introduced to him, Sarvabhauma saluted Chaitanya by saying "*namo narayanaya*" ("I offer my respect to Narayana") and Chaitanya replied, "*krishne matir astu*" ("may you remember Krishna"). This stimulated Sarvabhauma's curiosity, because Chaitanya's salutation was rather unusual among the *sannyasis* of the Shankaracharya line.

In his ensuing conversation with Chaitanya, Sarvabhauma suggested that the young *sannyasi* should be accompanied by him or by someone sent by him when visiting the temple, to avoid any further problem in case he fainted again in Jagannatha's presence. Chaitanya replied that it was too dangerous for him to come too close to Jagannatha, so from that day on he would simply take *darshana* from some distance, by standing near the Garuda stambha at the end of Jagamohana. Then Sarvabhauma asked Gopinatha to take care of Chaitanya during his visits to the temple.

Sarvabhauma was also from Navadvipa and he had been a school friend of Nilambara Chakravarti (the maternal grandfather of Chaitanya) so he naturally felt some affection for Chaitanya. But to Gopinatha's statement that Chaitanya was an *avatara* of Vishnu, he replied that such a thing would be impossible, because according to the statements of the *shastra*, in Kali yuga God does not appear personally, but only in the form of his Name. However, Sarvabhauma believed that Chaitanya, who had retained his *brahmachari* name of Krishna Chaitanya and had received initiation from Kesava Bharati, a *sannyasi* from the Bharati line (considered not very elevated), was too humble for his own good. He was the teacher of several *sannyasis* in the Shankaracharya matha, so he felt that Chaitanya deserved better.

The names Tirtha, Ashrama and Sarasvati are considered the highest level of *sannyasis*. The title Tirtha indicates a *sannyasi* who has realized the *mahavakhya* "*tat tvam asi*" and has taken bath at Prayaga, at the confluence of the three sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati. An Ashrama *sannyasi* is qualified by a keen sense of renunciation and detachment from the material world, while a Vana *sannyasi* lives in a solitary place in the forest and has no material desires. An Aranya *sannyasi* also lives in the forest without any connection with society, while a Giri *sannyasi* prefers to live in the mountains like the Parvata *sannyasi*. A Sagara *sannyasi* is a learned man who has demonstrated seriousness in following the rules of the renounced order, while a Sarasvati *sannyasi* is expert in classical music and learning. A Bharati *sannyasi* is always happy under all

conditions of life, and a Puri *sannyasi* is one who is always engaged in spiritual discussions.

Sarvabhauma suggested that Chaitanya could take a new initiation from a higher class of *sannyasi*, and offered to instruct him on the philosophy of *Vedanta*, which is supposed to be the only interest of a *sannyasi*. It is said, *vedanta vakyesu sada ramantah*, "one should always rejoice in the study of the *Vedanta*".

Chaitanya humbly replied that his intelligence was not sufficient to tackle such studies, but on the insistence of Sarvabhauma he accepted gracefully, so one month after he had arrived in Puri, he sat with Sarvabhauma in Jagannatha temple regularly for one week, and for the entire period he listened silently to Sarvabhauma's explanations. In the end Sarvabhauma, perplexed, asked Chaitanya if he had understood the topic without any doubt, since he was not asking any questions. The discussion that ensued is detailed in *Chaitanya charitamrita, Madhya lila* 6.130-199, and constitutes one of the most important examples of reports of the direct teachings of Chaitanya on his philosophical *siddhanta*.

The version given by Vrindavana Dasa in *Chaitanya bhagavata* is slightly different: Sarvabhauma was not happy to see that Chaitanya had taken *sannyasa* at such a young age; he said that by taking *sannyasa* an immature man becomes proud and expects to be honored and served by the general people. Sarvabhauma added, "By shaving his *sikha*, the proud fool deludes himself into thinking he has become Narayana, and he calls himself Svami and Prabhu. Actually Shankara did not want his followers to develop this mentality. He preached service to God and taught that the *jiva's* duty is to worship God as the foundation of his very existence. The waves exist because of the ocean, and not the other way around."

Chaitanya was very pleased by Sarvabhauma's words, and replied, "Please do not consider me to be a real *sannyasi*. I have simply shaved my head and taken the dress of renunciation because I was not interested in material life, so that people would not bother me with unnecessary engagements in family and society."

Then Chaitanya asked to hear the *Bhagavata purana* from him, and the discussion turned to the famous *atmarama* verse.

Lochana Dasa's *Chaitanya mangala* offers yet another version of this meeting: after taking bath in the ocean, and while the *mahaprasada* from Jagannatha was being

arranged on Sarvabhauma's order, Chaitanya sat down in conversation with him. Sarvabhauma had observed the young *sannyasi* happily engaged in chanting the holy Names, and he was amazed and curious about him. As a start, he inquired about Chaitanya's birthplace. Chaitanya replied, "Whatever".

Sarvabhauma was puzzled. He could not understand the meaning of such answer, and he protested about that. Actually, according to the rules of *sannyasa*, a person who has entered the renounced order is forbidden to speak about his birth and activities prior to the moment of initiation - because he is supposed to have abandoned all material identification. Chaitanya remained silent in spite of his host's requests for clarification. Then Sarvabhauma changed the subject. "Will you please tell me why you became a *sannyasi*?"

Again, Chaitanya gave a cryptic reply: "Certainly what you say is true".

Sarvabhauma was totally bewildered and upset. Fortunately, just at that time the *mahaprasada* arrived, and everybody's attention was diverted. Chaitanya roared in delight and bowed his head in respect. When his companions asked him what made him so happy, Chaitanya told them how due to the promise made by Jagannatha to Durga (Vimala), the *mahaprasada* in Puri is available to everyone, including the animals, while in other places it is extremely difficult to obtain even by the Devas.

Chaitanya mangala then narrates the episode of the philosophical discussion between Chaitanya and Sarvabhauma, specifying that it was held in front of an assembly of *brahmanas* and *sadhus* - apparently in the temple. The event started when Sarvabhauma, talking about the new guest who had arrived in his house, said that Chaitanya was too young for *sannyasa*, and although he had come from a good family, his education was still incomplete. "It is not good for a *sannyasi* to sing and dance in the street, and show such wild emotions. He should study *Vedanta* and go back to family life."

Suddenly Chaitanya arrived and Sarvabhauma stood up to receive him respectfully, offering him praise and a proper seat. Chaitanya said, "I do not know all the rules of *sannyasa*, or the meaning of the *Vedanta*. You are a great scholar: please instruct me. What do the scriptures say about taking *diksha*?"

Sarvabhauma was astonished by the fact that Chaitanya had come up with exactly those questions, as if he had heard the discussion. On the next day, they sat together and engaged in the debate on *Vedanta*.

Let's now return to the version presented by *Chaitanya charitamrta*. Sarvabhauma had been elaborating on the *Vedanta sutras* for several days, but Chaitanya did not break the silence. When he was asked whether he had properly understood the commentaries, Chaitanya candidly replied that he could understand *Vedanta* very well, but he found that Sarvabhauma's explanations had the effect of clouding the meaning instead of clarifying it (*sutrera artha bujhiye nirmala, tomara vyakhya suni mana haya ta vikala, Chaitanya charitamrta Madhya lila, 131*).

Teachings to Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya

"You are not explaining the direct meaning of the *sutras*, but instead you are covering them with your invented explanations (*sutrera mukhya artha na karaha vyakhyana, kalpana arthe tumi taha kara acchadana*). The *Vedanta sutra* composed by Vyasa directly describes the direct meaning of the verses of the *Upanishads* (*upanishad sabde yei mukhya artha haya, sei artha mukhya, vyasa sutre saba kaya*). You are neglecting the direct meaning and inventing a material meaning. You neglect the original meaning of the words and instead give some fancy elaboration (*mukhyartha chadiya kara gauna artha kalpana, abhidha vritti chadi kara sabdera lakshana*). The first and foremost evidence is based on the *sruti* itself; that conclusion explained in the *sruti* is the most important meaning (*pramanera madhye sruti pramana - pradhana, sruti ye mukhya artha kahe sei se pramana*)."
(132-136)

Chaitanya continued, "Conchshells and cow dung are nothing but bone and stool of a *jiva*, yet according to the *sruti* statements they are both considered very pure (*jivera asthi vistha dui - sankha gomaya, sruti vakye sei dui maha pavitra haya*). It is said that whatever is expressed in Vedic scriptures is self-evident truth; by creating fancy interpretations the authority of the text becomes lost (*svatah pramana veda satya yei kaya, lakshana karile svatah pramanya hani haya*).

The meaning of the *Vedanta sutra* composed by Vyasa is self-effulgent like the sunlight; any artificial commentary based on imagination covers such light like a cloud (*vyasa sutrera artha - yaiche suryera kirana, sva kalpita bhasya meghe kare acchadhana*). The *Vedas* and the *Puranas* say that the formless Brahman constitutes the characteristic of the

Lord that is expanded everywhere (*veda purane kahe brahma nirupana, sei brahman - brihad vastu isvara lakshana*). The Lord, Bhagavan, is perfect in all opulences, but your explanation present him as merely impersonal (*sarva aisvarya paripurna svayam bhagavan, tanre nirakara kari karaha vyakhyana*). When God is described as impersonal by the *sruti shastra*, this means that he is not material, but spiritual (*nirvisesa tanre kahe yei sruti gana, prakrita nishedhi kare aprakrita sthapanana*). (137-141)

"Whatever is described in the *sruti shastra* as the non-differentiated (Brahman), is originally possessing qualities and variety; the personal aspect of God is certainly more powerful, as the scriptures clearly infer (*ya ya srutih jalpati nirvisesam, sa sa abhidhatte sa viseham eva, vichara yoge sati hanta tasam, prayo baliyah sa visesham eva*). The entire universe emanates from Brahman, lives in the Brahman, and again returns into the Brahman at the time of annihilation (*brahma haite janme visva, brahmete jivaya, sei brahmne punar api haye yaya laya*).

The references to Bhagavan as the personal aspect of God are expressed in 3 cases - ablative, instrumental/ causative and locative (*apadana, karana, adhikarana, karaka tina, bhagavanera saviseshe ei tina cihna*). When Bhagavan wants to become many, he looks at the material energy; at that time there has been no creation yet, therefore there cannot be any material eyes or mind, thus such eyes and mind of the Supreme Brahman must be spiritual (*bhagavan bahu haite yabe kaila mana, prakrita shaktite tabe kaila vilokana, se kale nahi janme prakrita mano nayana, ataeva aprakrita brahmera netra mana*). The word Brahman indicates the perfect and complete Bhagavan, and Krishna is Bhagavan: this is the evidence of the *shastra* (*brahma sabde kahe purna svayam bhagavan, svayam bhagavan krishna, shastrera pramana*). (142-148)

"The deeper meaning of the Vedic literature is not easy to understand, therefore the *Puranas* have been compiled to explain such meaning beyond any doubt (*vedera nigudha artha bujhana na haya, purana vakhye sei artha karaya nischaya*). The *Bhagavata purana* (10.14.32) says, 'What great fortune! How fortunate are the cowherd Nanda and the inhabitants of Vraja. The perfect and eternal Brahman, the supreme happiness, has become their personal friend (*aho bhagyam, aho bhagyam, nanda gopa vraja okasam, yan mitram parama anandam purnam brahma sanatana*).'

The *mantra* '*apani padah*' says that Bhagavan does not have material hands and feet, but it says that he moves very fast and catches everything (*apani pada sruti varje prakrita pani charana, punah kahe sighra chale kare sarva grahana*). Therefore the foremost

meaning of the *sruti* is that Brahman is not devoid of variety, but your conclusion rejects this direct meaning and gives an impersonal interpretation (*ataeva sruti kahe brahma sa visesha, mukhya chadi lakshana te mane nirvisesha*). How can you say that Bhagavan, that is the form of the perfect happiness, full of six opulences, is impersonal? (*sad aisvarya purna ananda vigraha yanhara, hena bhagavane tumi kaha nirakara*). By his own nature the Supreme Brahman has three potencies; how are you trying to demonstrate that he is devoid of potencies? (*sva bhavika tina shakti yei brahme haya, nihshaktika kari tanre karaha nischaya?*).

The *Vishnu purana* (6.7.61-63) says that Vishnu has a spiritual *shakti*, another that is constituted by the *kshetra jna* (the *jiva atman*, the "knower of the field") and a third that is known as ignorance and activity. The *shakti* constituted by the *jiva atman* is omnipresent but covered, therefore it is put under all kinds of pressure in this material world due to material life. This *kshetra jna shakti* remains in various circumstances of life according to the degree of liberation from ignorance (*vishnu shaktih para prokta kshetra jnakhya tatha para, avidya karma samjnaya, tritiya shaktir ishyate; yaya kshetra jna shaktih sa veshtita nripa sarva ga, samsara tapan akhila avapnoti atra santatan; taya tirohitatvac cha shaktih kshetra jna samjnita, sarva bhuteshu bhu pala taratamyena vartate*). 'O shelter of everything, the one (*shakti*) (manifests as) *hladini*, *sandhini* and *samvit*, but she does not create a mixture of pleasure and suffering in you, because you are free from the *gunas*.' (*hladini sandhini sambit tvayy eka sarva samsraye hlada tapa kari misra tvayi no guna varjite*)."

After quoting these verses, Chaitanya continued, "Isvara (the Lord) consists of *sat* (existence), *cit* (awareness) and *ananda* (happiness); his *svarupa* (true form) manifests in these three forms of the Cit Shakti (the power of consciousness) (*sat cit ananda maya haya isvara svarupa, tina amse cit chakti haya tina rupa*).

We accept the notion that the *amsa* (part) of *ananda* is called *hladini*, that of *sat* is *sandhini*, and that of *cit* is *samvit* (*ananda amse hladini, sad amse sandhini, cid amse samvit, yare jnana kari mani*). The internal *shakti* is *cit*, the marginal *shakti* is the *jiva*, and the external *shakti* is *maya*: all these three are connected to *prema bhakti* (*antaranga cit shakti, tatastha jiva shakti, bahiranga maya, tine kare prema bhakti*). The Lord plays with the spiritual energy in six types of opulences, but in your great impudence you refuse to respect these energies (*sad vidha aisvarya, prabhura cit shakti vilasa, hena shakti nahi mana, parama sahasa*).

There is a big difference between Isvara, who is the Lord of Maya, and the *jiva*, who is subject to Maya's control, but you are saying that there is no difference between the *jiva* and Isvara (*mayadhisa maya vasa, isvare jive bheda, hena jive isvara saha kaha ta abheda*). In the sacred scripture called *Bhagavad gita*, the *jiva* is described as *shakti*, yet you consider this distinct *jiva* as equal to Isvara (*gita shastre jiva rupa shakti kari mane, hena jive bheda kara isvarera sane*). (149-164)"

Chaitanya then quoted *Bhagavad gita* (7.4-5): "Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and material identification: all these are the eight different forms of my nature. O Arjuna, know that besides this inferior nature there is also another, a higher one - the living beings by which the universe is upheld (*bhumir apo 'nalo vayuh, kham mano buddhir eva cha, ahankara itiyam me, bhinna prakritir ashtada, apareyam itas tv anyam, prakritim viddhi me param, jiva bhutam mahabaho yayedam dharyate jagat*)."

The divine form of Isvara is perfect existence, consciousness and happiness; you are saying that such form is a transformation of the material mode of goodness (*isvarera sri vigraha sat cit ananda akara, se vigrahe kaha, sattva gunera vikara*). One who does not show proper respect to the divine form is an offender - someone who should not be touched or looked upon, and is subject to the punishment of Yamaraja (*sri vigraha ye na mane sei ta pashandi, adrishya asprishya sei haya yama dandi*).

The Buddhists do not respect the *Vedas* and therefore they are called agnostic, but one who affirms he is taking shelter in the *Vedas* but has no faith in them is even more (offensive) than the Buddhists (*veda na maniya bauddha haya ta nastika, vedasraya nastikya vada bauddhake adhika*). Vyasa compiled the *Vedanta sutra* with the purpose of uplifting the individual souls, but if one hears its commentary from a *mayavadi*, everything becomes lost (*jivera nistara lagi sutra kaila vyasa, mayavadi bhasya sunile haya sarva nasa*). The intention of the *Vedanta sutra* is to explain the theory of transformation, by which the inconceivable *shakti* of Isvara transforms into the form of the universe (*parinama vada, vyasa sutrera sammata, acintya shakti isvara jagad rupe parinata*). Just like the touchstone produces heaps of gold without being affected or diminished, the Lord becomes the universal form without being transformed (*mani yaiche avikrite prasabe hema bhara, jagad rupa haya isvara, tabu avikara*).

The Mayavada theory is an invented interpretation according to which Vyasa was mistaken and the *Vedanta sutra* is incorrect (*vyasa bhranta bali sei sutre dosha diya, vivarta-vada sthapiyache kalpana kariya*). The theory of falsity can be applied only to the

identification of the *jiva* with the body, but the cosmic manifestation is not false or not existent - it is only temporary (*jivera dehe atma buddhi, sei mithya haya, jagat ye mithya nahe, nasvara matra haya*). The syllable Om is the great *mantra* of the Lord, and from this form of the Om all the *Veda* and the universe are emanated (*pranava ye maha vakya isvarera murti, pranava haite sarva veda jagat utpatti*). The *mantra* 'tat tvam asi' is meant for the instruction of the individual soul, but (the *mayavada* theory) considers it as the greatest *mantra*, not respecting the syllable Om (*tat tvam asi jiva hetu pradesika vakya, pranava na mani tare kahe maha vakya*).\" (165-175)

In this way, Chaitanya showed one hundred defects in Sarvabhauma's fancy commentary, and the Bhattacharya replied with many objections (*ei mate kalpita bhashye sata dosha dila, bhattacharya purva paksha apara karila*). Chaitanya, however, refuted all the objections, demonstrating how they were all fallacious (*vitanda* means clutching to details and avoiding the main point, *chala* means changing subject without replying properly, *nigraha* means merely refusing to accept the statement of the opponent) and finally establishing his own conclusion (*vitanda chala nigraha adi aneka uthaila, saba khandi prabhu nija mate se sthapila*). Chaitanya continued, "Bhagavan is the connection, devotion is the engagement, and love is the attainment of the result: the *Vedas* deal with these three subjects (*bhagavan sambandha, bhakti abhidheya haya, prema prayojana, vede tina vastu haya*). If one says something different, that should be considered as a new invention that creates imaginary meanings for the self-evident teachings of the *Vedas* (*ara ye ye kichu kahe, sakala i kalpana, svatah pramana veda vakye kalpena lakshana*).

This is not the fault of the *acharya* (Adi Shankara), because it was on the order of Isvara that he compiled a commentary that could be interpreted in an imaginative atheistic way (*acharyera dosha nahi, isvara ajna haila, ataeva kalpana kari nastika shastra kaila*).\" (176-180)

The *atmarama* verse

To his flabbergasted opponent, who could not find any more words to counteract his arguments, Chaitanya kindly said, "My dear Bhattacharya, you should not be confused or surprised, because devotional service to Bhagavan is the highest purpose of human life

(*prabhu kahe, bhattacharya, na kara vismaya, bhagavane bhakti, parama purushartha haya*). (185)

Then he quoted the famous *atmarama* verse from *Bhagavata purana* (1.7.10): *atma ramas ca munayo nirgrantha apy urukrame, kurvanty ahaitukim bhaktim, ittham bhuta guno harih*, "Those who find pleasure in the *atman*, the great philosophers and those who are completely freed from material attachments all worship the Lord through selfless devotion, because the qualities of Hari as truly wonderful."

Sarvabhauma asked Chaitanya to elaborate on that verse, and Chaitanya courteously invited him to do so first (*sunī bhattacharya kahe, suna mahasaya, ei slokerā artha sunite vancha haya; prabhu kahe, tumi ki artha kara, taha age suni, pache ami kariba artha, yeba kichu jani*). (186-188)

The great scholar elaborated on the verse in 9 different ways by using the principles of the texts on logic, and after hearing them, Chaitanya smiled and replied (*sunī bhattacharya sloka karila vyakhyana, tarka shastra mata uthaya vividha vidhana; nava vidha artha kaila shastra mata lana, suni prabhu kahe, kichu ishat hasiya*). (189-190)

"Dear Bhattacharya, I know that you are the *guru* of the Devas, because nobody else would have the power to present such explanations on the scriptures (*bhattacharya, jani tumi sakshat brihaspati, shastra vyakhya karite aiche karo nahi shakti*). But besides what you have shown through your great scholarship, there is some other meaning to this verse (*kintu tumi artha kaile panditya pratibhaya, iha vai slokerā ache aro abhipraya*)." (191-193)

On the request of the Bhattacharya, Chaitanya presented his own commentaries without touching any of the 9 already given by him (*bhattacharyera prarthanate, prabhu vyakhya kaila, tanra nava artha madhye eka na chunila*). He elaborated on all the 11 words composing the verse, giving distinct meanings one after the other, in a very confident way (*atmaramas cha sloke ekadasa pada haya, prithak prithak kaila padera artha nischaya*). Then, relating each word with the word *atmarama*, he explained 18 different meanings of the word *atmarama* (*tat tat pada pradhanye atmarama milana, astadasa artha kaila abhipraya lana*).

He said, "It is not possible to speak (fully) about God, his potencies and his qualities, because they are inconceivably powerful (*bhagavan, tanra shakti, tanra guna gana, acintya prabhava tinera na yaya kathana*). These 3 subjects (God, his potencies and his

qualities) captivate the mind of a perfect spiritualist, inducing him to forget about any other type of meditation (*anya yata sadhya sadhana kari acchadana, ei tine hare siddha sadhakera mana*). (194-197) The various explanations were based on the meanings given by the four Kumaras (Sanaka and his brothers) and Sukadeva (*sanakadi sukadeva tahate pramana, ei mata nana artha karena vyakhyana*).

Shocked, the Bhattacharya started to believe that Chaitanya was Krishna himself, and became ashamed (*sunī bhattacharyera mane haila chamatkara, prabhuke krishna jani kare, apana dhik kara*). He said, "In my great pride, I have committed a great offense to you, not knowing that you are Krishna himself" (*inho ta sakshat krishna muni na janiya, maha aparadha kainu garvita haiya*).

When (Bhattacharya) condemned himself and took shelter in the Lord, Chaitanya decided to be kind to him (*atma ninda kari, laila prabhura sarana, kripa karibare tabe prabhura haila mana*). In his compassion, the Lord manifested his own transcendental four-armed form (*nija rupa prabhu tanre karaila darshana, chatur bhujā rupa prabhu haila takhana*). Then after manifesting the four-armed form, he manifested his original form of Krishna Syamasundara, of a black color, with a flute to his mouth (*dekhaila tanre age chatur bhujā rupa, pache syama vamsi mukha svakiya svarupa*).

Seeing this (miracle), Sarvabhauma threw himself to the ground and then stood up again, with folded hands, offering prayers (*dekhi sarvabhauma dandavat kari padi, punah uti stuti kare dui kara yudi*). By the kindness of the Lord, everything became clear to him - the *tattva*, the holy Name, the distribution of pure love for God, and their importance (*prabhura kripaya tanra sphurila saba tattva, nama prema dana adi varnena mahattva*). In a very short time, he composed 100 verses - such as not even the *guru* of the Devas would be able to do (*sata sloka kaila eka danda na yaite, brihaspati taiche sloka na pare karite*). (198-206)

The 100 *slokas* composed by Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya are simply entitled *Susloka sataka* ("the 100 nice verses").

That night Bhattacharya remained brooding over the events, until in very early morning, before sunrise, Chaitanya went to visit him bringing *mahaprasadam* (sweet rice, sweet *laddu* and *pitha* pancakes) and melted his heart with affection. Surrendering to the transcendental love for Godhead, Sarvabhauma recited two verses from the *Padma purana* to glorify the *mahaprasada* of Lord Jagannatha:

*sushkam paryushitam va a pi nitam va dura desatah,
prapti matrena bhoktavyam na atra kala vicharana*

"(The *mahaprasada* of the Lord) should be consumed immediately when it is received, without any consideration of time or circumstance, even if it has dried up, it has become stale, or it has been carried for a very long distance."

*na desa niyamah tatra na kala niyamas tatha,
praptam annam drutam sistair bhoktavyam harir abravat*

"The Lord said that his *prasada* should be eaten without hesitation, and without consideration of rules in regard to place or time."

The *atmarama* verse was one of Chaitanya's favorite *slokas*; he explained it on many occasions to various persons, including Rupa and Sanatana Gosvamis. We will elaborate on those in another section of the book, when we discuss about Chaitanya's teachings.

Chaitanya becomes popular in Jagannatha Puri

Pleased by his devotion, Chaitanya remained in Sarvabhauma's house for 5 days and healed Sarvabhauma's son in law, who had contracted cholera. Sarvabhauma organized a grand feast including rice with *ghi*, 10 types of *sak*, soup with *nim* leaves, *panir kofta*, buttermilk with small *dal bara*, fried eggplants with *nim*, fried white pumpkin, *bara* made from *mung dal*, *urad dal* and bananas, 6 types of *chatni*, sweet rice pancakes and other pancakes of various types, sweet rice with *ghi*, condensed milk with mango, *lassi*, *sandesh*, and finally scented and cooled water.

On that occasion, Sarvabhauma composed two more verses for Chaitanya:

*vairagya vidya nija bhakti yoga, sikshartham ekah purushah puranah
sri krishna chaitanya sarira dhari kripambudhir yas tam aham prapadye*

"I surrender to the Ocean of Kindness, who is embodied in Sri Krishna Chaitanya. He is the One original Personality of Godhead, who appeared to instruct us on devotional service, knowledge and detachment from material identification."

*kalan nashtam bhakti yogam nijam yah,
pradushkartum krishna chaitanya nama
avirbhutas tasya padaravinde,
gadham gadham liyatam citta bhringah*

"I wish that the honeybee of my mind will become deeply engrossed into the lotus feet of the *avatara* called Krishna Chaitanya, who has come to personally revive the *yoga* of devotion, that had been lost in time."

The amazing change of opinion of Sarvabhauma and the temple priests about the young Bengali *sannyasi* was great news in Puri, and soon everyone rushed to see Chaitanya. The perception that the temple priests had of this young *paradesi* ("foreign") *sannyasi* dramatically changed into a deep respect, and several *pandas*, including the temple manager, became his followers. So respected was Chaitanya by the people of Puri that he was called "*sachala mahaprabhu*" ("the walking Deity"), where *mahaprabhu* is a title normally used to refer to Jagannatha as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Still today the presence of Chaitanya can be perceived in Puri. A large image of Chaitanya stands at the crossroads on Svargadvara, and a shrine is dedicated to him inside the Kanchi Shankaracharya Matha in the same area. Besides the Gambhira (Radhakantha Matha) that was Chaitanya's residence during his life in Puri, there is a great number of Gaudiya Mathas and Sarasvata Gaudiya Mathas where Chaitanya is worshiped in a prominent position. A Sadbhujā Gauranga form is also worshiped inside the Alarnatha temple (in Brahmagiri), together with the stone slab that is said to have melted in the places where Chaitanya's ecstatic body touched it while offering prostrated obeisances to the Alaranatha Deity.

Still today, the Sad bhuja Gauranga form is one of the *veshas* for Madana Mohana (the representative Deity of Jagannatha that goes regularly in procession) during Chandana yatra. Even inside the Jagannatha temple (Sri Mandira) we still find his presence. On the eastern side of the southern gate of the temple complex, there is a Sadbhujā ("six arms") Gauranga shrine, celebrating the identity of Chaitanya with Krishna and Ramachandra - two golden complexioned arms holding the *sannyasa* staff and the *kamandalu*, two bluish-black complexioned arms holding the flute, and two green complexioned arms holding bow and arrow. Near the *vigraha*, a Bengali inscription says: *bhaja gauranga, kaha gauranga, laha gauranga nama re, ye jana gauranga bhaja, se he amar prana he; radha krsna ekatma dui deha dhari, anyaneha dila sei, rasantadana kari*, "worship

Gauranga, speak about Gauranga, accept the name of Gauranga: those who worship and serve Gauranga are my very life and soul; Radha and Krishna are one person only in two bodies, but they reunited together to increase the taste of spiritual bliss.”

There is also the stone slab with the *chaitanya pada* or *pada padma* (footprints), marking the spot where Chaitanya stood behind the Garuda stambha inside the Nata mandira of the main Jagannatha shrine, to get Jagannatha's *darshana* every day. The slab was removed from the original place to avoid been trodden by the general crowd of temple visitors and is now in a separate shrine, not far from Jagannatha's *garbha griha* (private room) Near this shrine there is the sitting Deity of Gupta Gauranga, in his *sannyasi* form with shaved head, installed by king Prataparudra.

Ramananda Raya, Svarupa Damodara, Govinda, Paramananda Puri, Haridasa, Gadadhara, Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, Gopinatha Acharya, Kashi Mishra, Sikhi Mohanty/ Mahiti and sister Madhavi Devi were the closest companions of Chaitanya in Puri. Later Raghunatha Dasa also joined this core group and remained in Puri until the disappearance of Chaitanya. Among other close associates were Kasisvara Gosvami, Jagadananda Pandita, Ramai and Nandai (Srivasa's brothers), Vakresvara, Shankara Pandita, Kama Bhatta, Krishnadas, Balabhadra Bhattacharya, Bhagavan Acharya and Ramabhadra Acharya, Kanai Kunthia, Jagannatha Mohanty, Kashi Mishra, Krishna Das, Tulasi Pariccha (the supervisor of Jagannatha temple), Janardana Mohanty (a *sevaka* from Jagannatha temple), Harichandan Mahapatra (a military officer and minister), Murari Mohanty/ Mahiti (a temple accountant), Pradyumna Mishra (the head cook in the temple kitchen), Shivananda, Krishnananda, Kumara, Paramananda Mahapatra, Singhesvar, Svapnesvar, Chandanesvar, Raghunatha Vaidya, Shivananda, Paramananda Mahapatra, Brahmananda Bharati, Murari Mahiti, Bhavananda Raya (the father of Ramananda) and Ramananda's brothers (Gopinatha Pattanayaka, Vaninatha, Kala and Subhanidhi) and king Prataparudra, Kala Krishnadasa, Balabhadra Bhatthacharya, Ramabhadra Acharya, Bada Haridasa, Chota Haridasa, Ramabhadra Acharya, Simhesvara, Tapan Acharya, Raghunatha, Nilambara, Singabhatta, Kamabhatta, Kamalananda, Acyutananda, Nirloma Gangadasa and Vishnu Dasa. According to the historical records, Chaitanya was also in very good contact with Jagannatha Dasa (whom he honored with the title of Atibadi) and his friends, who are presently known as the Oriya Vaishnavas or the *pancha sakhas*. We will briefly discuss about them later in this volume, in the section about the last period of Chaitanya's life in Puri.

Although he was born in a brahmin family and over 70% of his companions were from brahmin families, Chaitanya regarded brahmins and non-brahmins as equals, and supported the spiritual qualifications of non-brahmins such as Ramananda. So great was Chaitanya's influence in the area of Puri, that in the end even brahmins who settled near Puri took up the name Dasa - a humble name, meaning "servant", usually attributed to *sudras*. Unfortunately, after the disappearance of Chaitanya the bad tendencies of casteism prevailed again both in Bengal and in Puri, and today in Orissa the caste brahmins who inherited the family name of Dasa from their ancestors pointedly insist that the name must be written as "Dash" and not as "Das", because "Dash is a brahmin name, and Das is a low caste name". If by any chance you overlook this apparently stupid distinction, they become very offended and you may even get an enemy who will hate you for the rest of your life.

And of course the definition of Hindu in Puri still means "high caste Hindu", i.e. brahmin. Not only the foreign born devotees are barred from the ordinary public access to the Jagannatha temple for the normal *darshana*, but the same injustice is meted out to the Indian devotees who happen to have been born in a "low caste" Hindu family. This open violation of Chaitanya's teachings in regard to the fight against casteist prejudice has become prevalent not only in the conservative society in Puri, but even among Chaitanya's official followers and representatives, especially the descendants of Advaita Acharya and the descendants of Gopala Bhatta Gosvami (one of the six Gosvamis of Vrindavana, who installed the Radha Ramana Deities there), who still at present maintain that birth qualification is the fundamental principle in the process of initiation and devotional service.

Chaitanya resided in Jagannatha Puri, also called Purushottama kshetra, for exactly half of his life, 24 out of 48 years, and inspired Jagannatha bhakti in millions of followers. In the first 6 years he kept base in Jagannatha Puri, where he returned after traveling around, to South India (Setubandha), Bengal and Vrindavana. Every year for about 18 years, his associates from Bengal traveled to Puri to visit him, and remained in Puri every year usually for four months after the Ratha yatra, then returned to their homes. In the middle 6 years Chaitanya remained in Puri only, associating with his followers, daily visiting the Jagannatha temple, and preaching.

In the last 12 years he retired to private life, in the company of very few close associates, immersed in the contemplation of the transcendental *lila* of the Lord day and night. Often

he lost external consciousness in the intensity of ecstasy in separation, totally oblivious of everything else, as we will see later in this volume.

The journey to south India

Chaitanya took *sannyasa* in the month of Magha (January/ February) and within one month he reached Puri. In the month of March he attended the Dola yatra festival (Holi) in Puri, then he turned Sarvabhauma into an ardent devotee of Krishna. In the month of Vaisakha (April/ June) Chaitanya became tired of the number of people who had started to crowd around him, and he decided to shake them off.

Thus he left Puri to travel to south India, accompanied by Krishnadasa; his declared purpose was to search for his brother Visvarupa, who had taken *sannyasa* before him. He asked all his companions to wait for his return to Puri, and he left, after a last visit to the Jagannatha temple. Sarvabhauma offered him four sets of clothes and requested him to meet Ramananda Raya, who was the Governor of a province of the kingdom in Vidyanagara (presently known as Porbandar), further south on the bank of the Godavari river. The devotees followed him up to Alarnatha, where they all stayed for the night, and then were ordered to go back to Puri.

On the way, Chaitanya happily chanted the lines

*krishna krishna krishna krishna krishna krishna krishna he
krishna krishna krishna krishna krishna krishna krishna he
krishna krishna krishna krishna krishna krishna raksha mam
krishna krishna krishna krishna krishna krishna pahi mam
rama raghava rama raghava rama raghava raksha mam
krishna keshava krishna keshava krishna keshava pahi mam*

Both expressions - *raksha mam* and *pahi mam* - mean "protect me".

On the first leg of his journey south he visited Jiyada Narasimha at Simhachala, and heard the story of his appearance. Lochana Dasa, in his *Chaitanya mangala*, narrates it in this way:

A local farmer, reportedly named Punuraya Goyala, used to stay overnight in his field to guard his crop of cucumbers from intruders. Once, in spite of his efforts, a wild boar entered the field and ate many fruits and plants, so the next night the farmer brought a bow and arrows to kill it. When it was hit, the boar cried out the name of Rama and escaped into a cave. Shocked by that extraordinary occurrence, the farmer feared he had committed an offense against a divine being; he followed the boar to the cave and called out, asking "who are you?".

As there was no reply, the farmer became very anxious and remained for two days there without eating, until a divine voice told him, "Don't worry, you did not do anything wrong. Go home and take some food. I forgive you."

The farmer replied, "I am still afraid of the offense I committed. Please show yourself to me, and I will feel I have truly been blessed."

When the voice granted his request, the farmer happily ran to the King's palace, with the intention of convincing him to come and be the witness of that extraordinary experience. The King accepted the farmer's word and went with him to the cave; the same divine voice also spoke to him, "Offer milk to the cave for my pleasure".

The King entered the cave and poured the milk on the ground, and suddenly he saw something was there just below the surface. They kept pouring milk until a Deity emerged - head and face, chest, arms, belly and legs. When only the feet were still hidden, the voice told them to stop the procedure - the Deity was installed in that position, and that is the explanation why the feet cannot be seen.

Another story is about the two *shakti* images next to Nrisimha: a merchant named Jiyada visited the temple in the company of two ladies, and suddenly, while they were leaving the temple, the door slammed shut, with the two ladies still inside. When the door was opened again, the two ladies had turned into stone images standing besides the Deity as his *shaktis*; the merchant was now without his companions and he requested the Lord to be named after himself.

Chaitanya charitamrita and *Chaitanya bhagavata* continue to narrate Chaitanya's journey to south India, saying that he also went to Sri Kurmanatha at Kurmakshetra, where he met a leper called Vasudeva, who was a great devotee and a very compassionate soul. Chaitanya embraced him in great ecstasy: immediately Vasudeva Datta was cured from his leprosy. In the same city Chaitanya met a *brahmana* called Kurma, who was very

attracted to him and begged him to be relieved of his household duties and be allowed to travel along with him. Chaitanya replied, "Don't speak like this again. It is better for you to remain at home and chant the holy Names; if you follow my instructions, your family life will be no hindrance to your spiritual life, and you will be always in my company. Whoever you meet, tell him about the instructions of Krishna and thus on my order you will become a Guru and liberate this country." This verse is found in *Chaitanya charitamrita* (*Madhya* 7.128) and has become famous: *yare dekha tare kaha krishna upadesha, amara ajnaya guru hana tara ei desha.*

The meeting with Ramananda Raya

Further south on the bank of the Godavari, Chaitanya met Ramananda Raya, the governor of Vidyanagara. *Chaitanya mangala* says that Ramananda Raya was the governor/ king in Kanchi. When Chaitanya arrived to see him, Ramananda was sitting in the temple room worshipping his Deity; suddenly in his meditation he saw the Deity turning into the form of a wonderful *sannyasi* with a golden complexion. Surprised, he opened his eyes and saw Chaitanya standing just before him.

Ramananda's first impression of Chaitanya was recorded as "a very effulgent person, very large in body and very strongly built, with eyes like lotus petals". From other passages of Chaitanya's biographies, we also learn that he was very tall, and with very long arms. Pleased by Ramananda's devotion, Chaitanya manifested for him the form of Syamasundara Krishna. During Chaitanya's stay in that locality, he had the famous confidential philosophical discussion with Ramananda related in *Chaitanya charitamrita*. The two sat together in a secluded place and freely revealed each other's mind about devotional service. Chaitanya started by asking Ramananda what was the purpose of life, according to the scriptures.

Ramananda first suggested the proper execution of *varna* and *ashrama* duties to please Vishnu (quoting *Vishnu purana* 3.8.9), then he quoted *Bhagavad gita* (9.27) saying that one should offer all activities to Krishna, then again *Bhagavad gita* (18.66) saying that one should leave all other concerns and simply surrender to Krishna.

Then he spoke of Brahman realization (as per *Gita* 18.54), then of pure devotion without concerns for scholarship, then he presented pure ecstatic love for Krishna in all its glory through various quotes. Finally entering into the discussion of the highest level of love manifested by the *gopis* of Vrindavana, Ramananda started to speak about the intense feelings of separation of Radharani for the absence of Krishna, and stated that Radharani's love for Krishna is totally selfless and motivated purely by the desire or lust to give pleasure to Krishna. Chaitanya and Ramananda spent the night deeply immersed in the intense sentiments of divine love for Krishna, then in the morning they parted, but Chaitanya asked Ramananda to move to Puri and stay with him permanently.

Taking leave from Ramananda, Chaitanya paid his respects to the local Hanuman temple and resumed his journey to the south. He reached Panchavati, the place where Rama, Sita and Lakshmana had lived during their exile in the forest, and where Sita had been abducted by Ravana. Immediately, Chaitanya manifested the sentiments of Rama - anger against Ravana and longing for Sita.

Chanting the names of Rama and Krishna, Chaitanya continued to travel. He arrived at the temple of Mallikarjuna (also known as Sri Saila) and offered his reverence to Shiva in the form of this famous *jyotir linga*, and the temple of Shiva at Vriddhakasi (now known as Vriddhachalam). He visited the temple of Ahovala Nrisimha, then the temple of Rama at Siddhavata, the temple of Kartikeya (Shiva's son, also known as Skanda), and the temple of Vishnu Trivikrama at Trimatha, meeting many great scholars and religious people.

The Buddhists were also very active in the area. When the leader of a local Buddhist monastery heard about Chaitanya's arrival, he was very interested to meet him and convert him to Buddhism and make him accept the tenets of his faith, namely that: there is no creator and in fact there is not even a creation because the entire universe is just an illusion and does not really exist, Buddha and Buddhism are the only path to understand truth, and Vedic knowledge has been created by faulty human beings.

When Chaitanya disproved his arguments by strict logic and the Buddhist monk was laughed at by the assembled people, the Buddhists felt offended and angry, and plotted to disgrace Chaitanya by offering him a plate of contaminated non vegetarian food, calling it *mahaprasada*. Immediately an eagle appeared to pick up the plate and flew off, dropping the heavy metal plate on the head of the Buddhist offender, who was seriously injured and remained senseless. Scared, the Buddhist monks begged forgiveness for their

offenses, and Chaitanya recommended them to chant the Names of Krishna, Rama and Hari to revive their master. The Buddhist teacher was revived and immediately started to chant the *maha mantra* Hare Krishna.

Arrival at Tirupati

Resuming his journey, Chaitanya arrived at Tirupati (also called Tirumala), where he visited the Vishnu temple and the Deity of Balaji Venkatesvara and his consorts Sri and Bhu, the temple of Pana Nrisimha, and also the temple of Shiva at Shiva Kanchi (Kanchipuram) and the temple of Vishnu at Varadaraja at Vishnu Kanchi, the temple of Shiva at Trikala hasti (or Sri Kala hasti, where the Vayu linga is worshiped), and the temple of Shiva at Vedachalam (or Vedagiri), famous because of the two birds (locally considered a manifestation of Shiva and Vishnu) who have been coming every day for hundreds of years to accept food from the *pujari* .

At Vriddhakola, Chaitanya visited the temple of Shiva Cidambaram, where the Lord is dressed in yellow garments and worshiped as the Akasha lingam, and the temple of Sveta Varaha. He also offered his respects to the temple of Siyali Bhairavi (in Thanjavur), famous because one very young boy, who was a great devotee of Shiva, was personally breast-fed by the Deity of Durga there. After bathing in the Kaveri river, Chaitanya went to offer his respects to the two Shiva temples at Gosamaja and Vedavana, and to another temple of Shiva worshiped as Amrita lingam. At Devasthanana, Chaitanya had a discussion with the Sri Vaishnavas followers of Ramanuja, and was not favorably impressed by their conclusions.

Proceeding further, Chaitanya also visited the Shiva temple of Kumbhakarna kapala, at the holy place called Shiva kshetra or Kumbhakonam, and the other Shiva temples in that locality, including the Brihatisvara Shiva temple. After visiting the Vishnu temple at Papanasana he finally reached Rangakshetra, on the bank of the river Kaveri. This famous pilgrimage place, near Tiruchirapalli, is also known as Sri Rangam, and its temple is considered the largest in India; many famous devotees lived there, such as Yamunacharya, king Kulashekhara, Ramanuja, Sudarshana acharya and Kuresha. The

temple, however, was abandoned for a long period after the Muslims attacked it and killed thousands of Sri Vaishnavas; the Deity of Ranganatha was only reinstalled in 1371.

In Rangakshetra, Chaitanya met a local *brahmana* who had problems with his Sanskrit reading; every day he was reciting *Bhagavad gita* but because sometimes he was mispronouncing some words, people mocked him. The *brahmana* did not care, because his heart was filled with divine love and happiness thinking about Krishna's affection towards Arjuna. Chaitanya was very impressed and pleased by such devotion.

Venkata Bhatta (also known as Tirumala or Trimalla Bhatta), a local *brahmana* who was a follower of Ramanuja, saw Chaitanya's ecstatic *sankirtana* for Sri Rama, and invited him to his home. Chaitanya stayed in Rangakshetra for the four months of the rainy season (*chaturmasya*) in the house of Venkata Bhatta; they became great friends, and Chaitanya stimulated a deeper and more intimate sentiment of divine love in Venkata Bhatta, trying to move him from the *aisvarya* (majestic) feelings of Lakshmi towards the *madhurya* (sweet) feelings of Radha.

Also Chaitanya met Venkata's young son Gopala Bhatta, who had learned Sanskrit from his uncle Prabhodananda Sarasvati. At that time Gopala Bhatta was a 10 year old child, but he was intensely influenced by Chaitanya and later on he became one of the six Gosvamis of Vrindavana. It is important to understand that the title of Gosvami is not exclusively used to refer to *sannyasis*, as some people believe. Not even one of the six Gosvamis of Vrindavana ever took *sannyasa*, and specifically Gopala Bhatta Gosvami married and settled in Vrindavana raising a family, whose descendants are still in charge of his Radha Ramana temple. For a long time (up to the time of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati) nobody among the followers of Chaitanya took *sannyasa*, but rather remained in the *grihastha* order of life or, if they chose a life of renunciation, they took up the attire (*vesha*) of a simple and humble Baba. Still today, among the Gaudiyas only the Sarasvata Gaudiya Vaishnavas take the dress of *sannyasi*, while all other lineages only take the *baba diksha* or *baba vesha*.

We will discuss more about Gopala Bhatta Gosvami in a later section of this work, about Chaitanya's followers. Here we may just say that Gopala Bhatta had a dream in which Chaitanya revealed himself to him as an *avatara* of Krishna and told him he would go to settle in Vrindavana and be instructed in *bhakti*. He wanted to go to Vrindavana immediately, but Chaitanya ordered him to stay at home and take care of his parents. Gopala Bhatta remained under the guidance of his uncle Prabhodananda Sarasvati, and

when his parents died of old age, he finally traveled to Vrindavana where he found Rupa and Sanatana. When Chaitanya heard that Gopala Bhatta had reached Vrindavana, he sent him some of his personal belongings as a gift, and a letter instructing him to help Rupa and Sanatana to compile their books. Chaitanya also requested Srinivasa to carry those writings to Bengal. In Vrindavana, Gopala Bhatta established the Radha Ramana temple, installing a beautiful Krishna Deity that became self-manifested from a Salagrama sila. The story says that Gopala Bhatta had received a Salagrama sila from a visiting devotee, and worshiped it with great devotion; his only disappointment was that he could not make nice outfits for it like it is usually done with Deities. To his amazement, on the next morning he found that the *sila* had sprouted a head, a torso, arms and legs, all exquisitely formed.

At present the Deity of Radha Ramana is one of the most popular among the Sarasvata Gaudiya Vaishnavas, with a great number of images circulating on the Internet, thanks to the considerable public relations work done by Padmanabha Gosvami, seminal descendant and only initiating *guru* of the lineage of Gopala Bhatta Gosvami. His son Chandana Gosvami has inherited the position and is presented as the official next initiating *guru* and *vaishnava acharya* in his seminal line. According to the conclusions they follow in their disciplic lineage, only the seminal descendants in their family can be qualified to become *gurus* and give initiation, and only persons born in traditional brahmin families can be qualified to be initiated; all others can only be followers and pay money to them to perform *yajnas* and ritual ceremonies for their religious and spiritual advancement. These heavily casteist conclusions are unfortunately shared by all the other "caste gosvamis" that were heavily criticized by the founders of the Sarasvata Gaudiya Vaishnava reform - Bhaktivinoda, Bhaktisiddhanta and Bhaktisiddhanta.

The journey to Setubandha

After the end of the rainy season, Chaitanya left Rangakshetra and proceeded further south. Arrived near Madurai, he visited the temple of Narayana at Rishabha hill (also known as Angada malaya parvata). According to tradition, this is the place where Rishabhadeva left this world. At Rishabha hill, Chaitanya met Paramananda Puri, a

disciple of Madhavendra Puri, who had stayed there during the rainy season; Paramananda said he was going to Jagannatha Puri and then to Bengal to bathe in the Ganges, and Chaitanya requested him to stay in Puri until his return.

In Madurai, Chaitanya visited the Shiva temples called Ramesvara and Sundaesvara, then the Devi temple called Minakshi. There he met Shiva and Parvati in person, who manifested themselves as a *brahmana* couple and invited him to their home; he stayed with them for 3 days, then he proceeded to Kamakosthi.

At Durvasana he visited the temple of Ramachandra, and the temple of Parasurama on Mahendra saila. There he met one *brahmana*, Ramadasa Vipra, who was an ardent devotee of Rama, and who expressed unhappiness at the thought that Mother Sita had been abducted by Ravana; Chaitanya convinced him that Sita herself could never be really touched by an *asura*, and that the person kidnapped by Ravana was just a "shadow" of the real Sita.

Later, at Ramesvaram Setubandha (the bridge built by Rama), Chaitanya blissfully visited the temple of Shiva, dancing in ecstasy and calling out for Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuman, Angada, Sugriva and Vibhishana. At Ramesvaram, Chaitanya sat in an assembly of *brahmanas* where the *Kurma purana* was recited. Finding that the *Kurma purana* clearly described how Sita herself had never come in contact with the materialistic Ravana, Chaitanya was so happy that he had a copy made of the book and obtained the original text, which was very ancient. The story says that as soon as Ravana tried to touch Sita, she took shelter into the fire and produced an illusory form that cheated Ravana. Thus the purpose of the "test of fire" after Sita was rescued was to return the real Sita and dissipate the illusory one.

Returning to the house of Ramadasa Vipra, Chaitanya presented him with the original copy of the *Kurma purana*, to his great happiness. After spending the night in the house of Ramadasa Vipra, Chaitanya visited the nine temples of Vishnu at Naya tripati, on the bank of the Tamraparni river in Pandya desha. Then he visited Ciyadataala (or Chamtapura) and saw the Deities of Ramachandra and Lakshmana, and further proceeding in his journey he went to Tila kanchi where he visited the temple of Shiva.

At the place called Gajendra mokshana he visited the temple of Vishnu, and at Panagadi he visited the Deities of Rama and Sita and the Rama linga Shiva temple. At Sri Vaikuntha he visited the temple of Vishnu, and at Malaya parvata he offered his respects

to Agastya Muni. There are several opinions, on whether Agastya Muni had his *ashrama* there, or he had established a temple to Skanda (Muruga, or Kartikeya) on the Siva giri (hill) there, or that someone had established a temple dedicated to Agastya (which is still there in the village called Agastyampalli, district of Tanjore). After visiting Kanyakumari (also known as Cape Comorin), the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, Chaitanya turned north-west and visited the temple of Ramachandra at Amlitala, then another Raghunatha temple at Vetapani.

On the way, his servant Kaa Krishnadasa wandered off and ended in the camp of the Bhattatharis, a sect of degraded nomadic so-called tantrics from the Nambudari brahmins community, so Chaitanya had to personally go and rescue him. Krishnadasa, who was a simple and gentle person, had been attracted by the women that the Bhattatharis kept in their community to lure travelers and rob them. The false tantrics attacked Chaitanya trying to kill him, but the weapons fell from their hands and cut their own bodies.

Proceeding in their journey, Chaitanya and Krishnadasa arrived at the temple of Adi keshava, on the bank of the Payasvini river, where to his great happiness Chaitanya found the 5th chapter of the *Brahma samhita*, a text that was unknown in other places. This text became of one Chaitanya's favorites. Next he visited the temple of Ananta Padmanabha in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), where he stayed for 3 days, and the temple of Janardana in Varkala, where he stayed for 2 days, and finally the temple of Shankara Narayana. He then visited the Sringeri Shankaracharya matha, at the confluence of the rivers Tunga and Bhadra, not far from Hariharapura; this is the original Matha established by Adi Shankara, who had taken birth not far from here.

The meeting with the Madhvacharya matha *sannyasis*

After bathing in the Matsya tirtha, Chaitanya reached Udipi, the famous seat of the Madhvacharya matha, where Madhvacharya was born and where he personally installed the Deity of Gopala. There he met with the *sannyasis* of the Madhva sampradaya, led by Raghuvarya Tirtha.

The Sarasvata Gaudiya vaishnavas trace their lineage to Madhvacharya, but they make an important distinction between their own line and the line of the orthodox Madhacharya matha, which they call "Tattavada" as opposed to "Mayavada" (as they call the Shankaracharya matha).

In our discussion about the initiations that Chaitanya received from Isvara Puri and Keshava Bharati respectively, we have already remarked how Chaitanya seems to be more closely associated to a very independent Madhavendra Puri and the Shankara line respectively, without any real connection to the Madhvacharya lineage.

This is confirmed in the text of *Chaitanya charitamrita* itself describing this part of Chaitanya's journey in south India, where he meets these "tattvavadis" and he says, *karmi, jnani dui bhakti hina tomara sampradaya dekhi sei dui cihna*, "I see that in your *sampradaya* there is an excessive attachment to *karma* and *jnana* that is obstructing the development of devotion." (*Chaitanya charitamrita, Madhya 9.276*). He also says, *sabe eka guna dekhi tomara sampradaye, satya vigraha kari' isvare karaha niscaye*, "The only good thing I see in your *sampradaya* is that you are accepting without any doubt the truth of the (spiritual) form of the Lord." (*Chaitanya charitamrita, Madhya 9.277*).

One can only wonder why Chaitanya - who is presented by his followers as their main link with the Brahma Madhva sampradaya - says "your *sampradaya*" and not "our *sampradaya*", and on top of that, he heavily criticizes it at the conclusion of his meeting with the Madhvacharya matha leading *sannyasis* and foremost *acharya*. After throwing in that shattering criticism, Chaitanya just walks out and leaves the city.

Let's go to the beginning of the meeting. *Chaitanya charitamrita* describes it from verse 9.245, when Chaitanya arrives in Udupi, *madhvacharya stane* ("the main headquarters of Madhvacharya").

He visited the famous temple of Krishna, called *nartaka gopala* or "dancing Gopala", and danced in ecstasy. The Deity had appeared to Madhva in a dream, and on the next day the *acharya* was meditating on the sea shore when a sudden storm threatened to sink a ship sailing along the coast. Madhva prayed the Deva of the wind, Vayu (of whom he is considered an *avatara*), and the storm vanished: the ship captain was amazed by that miracle and offered him a donation from the merchandise carried on board. Madhva picked a very big lump of *gopichandana* - pure and sacred clay - and carried it to shore and to town with his prodigiously strong arms, then he plunged it into a large water tank.

The clay dissolved and inside there was the beautiful Gopala Deity, that is still the center of worship of the temple and the entire lineage of Madhvacharya.

Seeing the beautiful Gopala, Chaitanya chanted and danced ecstatically, and this impressed the *tattvavadi sannyasis*, because they had previously considered him a *mayavadi* due to his belonging to the line of Shankaracharya: *tattvavadi gana prabhu ke mayavadi jnane prathama darshane prabhu ke na kaila sambhasane* (*Chaitanya charitamrita, Madhya 9.250*). We may remember at this point that the definition of *mayavadi* ("follower of illusion") is an uncomplimentary epithet used by some *vaishnavas* to refer to the followers of the Shankaracharya line. Actually the genuine followers of Adi Shankara call themselves *advaitins* ("non-dualists", sometimes translated as "monist").

Now the Madhva *sannyasis* were surprised because they realized Chaitanya was a *vaishnava*, too: *pache premavesa dekhi haila chamatkara vaishnava jnane bahuta karila satkara* (*Chaitanya charitamrita, Madhya 9.251*).

Seeing that the *tattvavadi sannyasis* were proudly considering themselves as superior because of their being *vaishnavas* (a line repeated twice by Krishnadasa Kaviraja as *vaishnavata sabara antare garva jani* - in verse 252 - and *tan sabara antare garva jani* - in verse 253), Chaitanya smiled and started to speak, directly addressing the *tattvavadi acharya* (the highest authority in the lineage), who was very learned in all the *shastras*.

He said, "I do not know much about the *sadhya sadhana* - the proper spiritual path (literally "established spiritual method" or "the purpose of religious life"). Please explain it to me."

The *acharya* replied, "The conclusion of the scriptures is that the best path is the performance of one's duties according to the system of *varnas* and *ashramas*, for the service of God. This leads to the five forms of liberation and attainment of Vaikuntha (the spiritual world)." (256, 257)

Chaitanya objected, "Actually the *shastras* say that the supreme spiritual path consists in *sravana* and *kirtana*, hearing and chanting (about Krishna), that fructify into the loving service to Krishna. This is confirmed in *Bhagavata purana*, 7.5.23-24. Such *prema* or love, attained through the nine aspects of devotional service, is considered the *panchama purushartha* ("the fifth purpose of life"), the most elevated of all." (258-261)

Again Chaitanya quoted the *Bhagavata purana* (11.2.40), describing the transcendental ecstasy of a pure devotee who is deeply in love with Krishna: *evam vratah sva priya nama kirtya jatanurago druta citta ucchaih, hasaty atho roditi rauti gayaty unmada van nrityati loka bahyah*, "One who is engaged in this vow of chanting his beloved Name develops a strong attachment and desire, and becomes agitated like a madman, singing, laughing and crying and dancing without caring about being criticized by other people."

"*Prema bhakti* can never be achieved through the performance of duty only; actually all the *shastras* say that excessive attachment to a specific social *karma* is an obstacle on the spiritual path. Krishna recommends that one should abandon all the various social identifications and simply surrender to him (*Gita*, 18.66). The duties prescribed by the *Vedas* are only compulsory until one has realized a higher level of consciousness (*Bhagavata purana* 11.20.9). Devotees do not give importance to the five types of liberation, actually (compared to the love for Krishna) they consider them equal to hellish existence if they are not providing opportunity to serve the Lord (*Bhagavata purana* 3.29.13).

King Bharata had renounced all material opulences, because when the mind is engaged in the service of Krishna ("the enemy of the *asura* Madhu") even liberation is less important - what to speak of the rest (*Bhagavata purana*, 5.14.44). A devotee of Narayana is never afraid in any circumstance - in the heavenly planets, on the level of liberation or in a hellish condition of life (*Bhagavata purana*, 6.17.28).

Liberation and duty are eventually left behind by the devotees, but you are trying to present them as the purpose of spiritual life. You are speaking like this because you consider me a *sannyasi*." (262-273)

The *tattvavadi acharya* recognized the superiority of Chaitanya's argument but added, "Still, we are bound to follow the conclusions expressed by Madhva, because we must remain loyal to him." (9.275)

Chaitanya was not pleased by such sectarianism and blind allegiance. He said, "In your *sampradaya* I see an excessive attachment to *karma* and *jnana* that are devoid of *bhakti*. The only good thing I see in your *sampradaya* is that you accept the eternal nature of the Supreme Lord's form". (9.276-277).

The last verse of the episode narrated in *Chaitanya charitamrita* (*Madhya* 9.278) says, *ei mata tanra ghare garva churna kari, phalgu tirthe tabe chali aila gaurahari*, "In that

place, Gaura Hari pulverized the pride (of the Madhvacharya Matha *sannyasis*) in this way. Then he walked out and went to Phalgu tirtha."

The return journey towards Puri

After visiting Tirthakupa and the Deity of Vishala, Chaitanya went to a place formerly visited by Rama and Arjuna - known as Pancha apsara tirtha, where according to tradition the five Apsaras named Lata, Budbuda, Samici, Saurabheyi and Varna, who had been sent by Indra to break the meditation of Acyuta Rishi, were transformed into crocodiles and lived in that lake. The story was narrated to Arjuna by Narada during their visit there, and on that occasion Arjuna had delivered the Apsaras from that condition by killing the crocodiles. Chaitanya continued his journey and arrived at Gokarna, where he went to offer his respect to Shiva Mahabalesvara and the Mother Goddess Dvaipayani, then went to Surparaka tirtha (now known as Sopara at Thane near Mumbai).

He also went to Kolapura and paid his respects to Kshira Bhagavati Lakshmi (also known as Ambabai), Chora Parvati and Langa Ganesha. Proceeding to Pandarapura, he visited the temple of Viththala - a particular form of Narayana with two arms. Some say that during his stay in town, Chaitanya met the famous Tukarama and gave him the holy Name.

In this regard, we need to comment that the idea that Chaitanya "formally initiated Tukarama", and therefore "Tukarama officially became a disciple of Chaitanya" is probably a little exaggerated. To tell the truth, Chaitanya never really initiated anybody. He just distributed the holy Name and love for God freely, without any need for rituals or affiliations. There is no record whatsoever about Tukarama presenting himself as a disciple or follower of Chaitanya, even if it is a fact that Tukarama was a great *bhakta* and engaged exactly in the same way of congregational public chanting that had been inaugurated by Chaitanya. However, he was doing so even before meeting Chaitanya - just like Ramananda Raya was already on a very elevated level of Radha Krishna *bhakti* even before meeting Chaitanya for the first time.

We do not mean to say that Chaitanya had no influence on Tukarama: our point is just to help the readers to better understand the actual meaning of "initiation" - also according the explanations of Bhaktivedanta Swami, for example, who wrote and stated many times that the actual initiation is simply the contact with the holy Name and with transcendental knowledge.

Everything else is the "container" that we can use for social purposes. Understanding this point will help us make a distinction between the jam and the jar, and to properly eat the jam instead of just remaining attached to an empty jar that has no taste and no nutritive value.

Chaitanya charitamrita also reports that on that occasion Chaitanya met Sri Ranga Puri, one of the disciples of Madhavendra, and offered his reverence to him. After discussing about Krishna for about one week, Ranga Puri asked Chaitanya about his birth place, and remembered he had visited Navadvipa with Madhavendra Puri and had lunch with him at the house of Jagannatha Mishra (Chaitanya's father). From their conversation, Chaitanya came to know that his brother Visvarupa who had taken *sannyasa* with the name of Shankara Aranya had attained liberation in Pandarapura, where he passed away.

When Sri Ranga Puri left for Dvaraka, Chaitanya stayed for some more days in Pandarapura, took bath in the Bhima river and visited the temple of Viththala (a form of Nayarana with 2 arms), then to the bank of the Krishnavenva river and to temples of various other Deities. From the community of the local *brahmanas*, Chaitanya came to know about the *Krishna karnamrita* composed by Bilvamangala Thakura, and obtained a copy to carry back to Puri.

After leaving that city, Chaitanya took bath in the Tapi river and arrived in Mahismati pura, then visited many holy places on the banks of the Narmada river. He traveled to the Rishyamuka mountain and to the Dandaka forest, heading east towards the Godavari river and Jagannatha Puri. Traveling through the places visited by Ramachandra while he was searching for Sita, Chaitanya arrived at Saptatala ("the 7 palm trees"), the spot where Rama had met Sugriva, the exiled king of the Vanaras, and demonstrated his archery skills by shooting one arrow that went through seven trees. There Chaitanya embraced seven huge and ancient *tala* palm trees that immediately disappeared. To the amazed Krishnadasa who traveled with him, Chaitanya said that those special trees had been blessed by Ramachandra, and they had been waiting to see him before returning to the spiritual world. The local residents were very impressed.

Chaitanya took bath in the Pampa lake and then rested at Panchavati. He visited Nasik and the Deity of Trayambaka Shiva, then went to Brahmagiri and then to Kusavartha to the source of the Godavari river, to Sapta Godavari, and finally to Vidyanagara, where Ramananda Raya lived. It seems that this Vidyanagara is none other than Kanchipuram, and should not be confused with Vijayanagara.

This second meeting with Ramananda was a very happy one. Chaitanya told him about his journey and gave him the two books - *Krishna karnamrita* and *Brahma samhita* - for making copies. Still today the *Brahma samhita*, containing a description of creation and the famous prayers of Brahma to Govinda, is extremely popular among the Gaudiya Vaishnavas. However, the present text constitutes only one of the chapters that the scripture was supposed to have. Also the antiquity of such text is considered rather controversial because it is not mentioned in any other recognized scripture, and except for the famous prayers of Brahma to Govinda there seems to be no complete study over the entire text by the contemporary members of Sarasvata Gaudiya Vaishnavism. This could easily be explained considering that Jiva Gosvami's commentary on *Sri Brahma Samhita* states that the same Deity that is Krishna is also Durga, and that Durga is the presiding Deity of the 10 and 18 syllable Gopala *mantras* (*gopi jana vallabhaya svaha* and *krishnaya govindaya gopi jana vallabhaya svaha*), as the Shakti of Gopala Krishna.

After about one week of intense conversations about *bhakti*, Ramananda announced that he had obtained the King's permission to move to Puri, and that he was arranging for his transfer of residence. He would leave a couple of days after Chaitanya because his retinue was very large and noisy.

At Alarnatha, Chaitanya sent Krishnadasa ahead to inform Nityananda and his other companions of his return. Immediately Nityananda, Jagadananda, Damodara Pandita, Mukunda and Gopinatha Acharya rushed to meet him on the road, followed by Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya who joined the group when they had arrived at the sea beach. He had brought a variety of delicious foods from the *mahaprasada* of Jagannatha - especially *pitha* and *rabri* (pancakes and thick condensed milk) - and after they arrived at his house he offered the meal to Chaitanya and massaged his legs. Kashi Mishra also came to offer his respects. That night, Chaitanya stayed in the house of Sarvabhauma and told him about the meeting with Ramananda and the journey to the south.

A few days later Sarvabhauma introduced several people to him, including Bhavananda Raya (the father of Ramananda) who offered his other son Vaninatha Pattanayaka to his

service. Chaitanya was not happy about the Kala Krishnadasa's escapade with the Bhattatharis and wanted to dismiss him, but Nityananda proposed to send him to Bengal to carry the news of Chaitanya's return to Puri to the devotees there, and a considerable amount of Jagannatha's *mahaprasada* to distribute there.

Another eager candidate who wanted to join the crowd of Chaitanya's associates was king Prataparudra, who already for some time had been requesting an audience through the mediation of Sarvabhauma, but without getting the permission to approach Chaitanya directly like all the most notable people in Puri.

Sarvabhauma sat on Chaitanya's right and introduced the visitors one by one - the first was Krishnadasa Mudrahasta, the temple *sevaka* who was in charge of representing the King in his absence; the insignia of his service is constituted by a golden cane. Next Sikhi Mohanty (Mahiti) was introduced, as the Deula Karana or head accountant of the Jagannatha temple, who was in charge of the *Madala panji* calendar and temple chronicles. Next Pradyumna Mishra, and then Murari Mohanty (brother of Sikhi), Chandanesvara, Simhesvara, and Vishnudasa. Another prominent personality was Paramananda Mahapatra, also known as Prahararaja. While all these people were introduced, also Bhavananda Raya arrived with four of his sons (the younger brothers of Ramananda) and he was welcomed by Chaitanya, who compared him to the king Pandu, the father of Arjuna. Of the four sons, Vaninatha remained with Chaitanya as his personal assistant.

The arrival of the devotees from Bengal

Arrived in Navadvipa, Kala Krishnadasa spread the news of Chaitanya's return to Puri. He went to Mother Saci, then to Srivasa, Advaita, and all the other devotees - Vasudeva Datta, Murari Gupta, Sivananda Sena, Chandrashekara Acharya, Vakresvara, Acharyanidhi and Gadadhara Pandita. Each group of devotees met to discuss the news and prepare for the journey to Puri - Srirama Pandita, Damodara Pandita, Sriman Pandita, Vijaya and Sridhara, Raghava Pandita, Nandana Acharya, and all the others. Advaita Acharya organized a big meeting of two days in his house, with devotees coming from all the region.

At that time Paramananda Puri arrived in Navadvipa and stayed in the house of Mother Saci. When he heard that everyone was planning to go to Puri, he also decided to go and he was the first to reach Puri, accompanied by a *brahmana* named Kamalakanta. Chaitanya welcomed Paramananda and gave him an independent room in the same place at Gambhira.

The next day, from Varanasi, arrived Purushottama Acharya, who was later known as Svarupa Damodara and became one of the most intimate associates of Chaitanya in Puri. He offered beautiful prayers to Chaitanya and honored all his companions, then was given a permanent place to stay in the Gambhira, too.

One day later Govinda arrived. He was a disciple of Isvara Puri, who had instructed him to go to Puri and become Chaitanya's servant. He also announced the imminent arrival of Kasisvara, another disciple of Isvara Puri. Sarvabhauma was surprised to see that Isvara Puri had initiated Govinda, who was born in a *sudra* family, but Chaitanya explained to him that there was nothing wrong, as Krishna did not make such distinctions among his devotees. Vidura was considered a *sudra* by birth, yet Krishna preferred to take lunch at his house rather than accepting Duryodhana's banquet. And over and above all, the order of the *guru* cannot be disobeyed.

Govinda was given four companions - two Haridasas (junior and senior) who were both musicians, and Ramai and Nandai (Srivasa's younger brothers).

Brahmananda Bharati, another *sannyasi* from the Shankaracharya matha of Keshava Bharati, also journeyed to Puri and arrived soon afterwards; he used to proudly wear a deerskin clothing (as per the orthodox rules for *sannyasis*) but when he arrived in Puri he was scolded by Chaitanya and he gave it up. He then praised Chaitanya, calling him "the moving Brahman", of golden complexion, while the "non-moving Brahman" in Puri was Jagannatha, of black complexion. Chaitanya replied jokingly, saying that actually Brahmananda was the "moving Brahman", and both Brahmananda and himself were moving, while the black Jagannatha was sitting without moving around.

Chaitanya was pulling Brahmananda out of the misconception according to which the *jiva* is on the same level as the Supreme Brahman, and after exchanging some affectionate and joyful lines with him, Brahmananda called Sarvabhauma in for help. He then quoted the verse from the *Vishnu sahasra nama* (verse 79, *Dharma dhana parva, Mahabharata*): "His beautiful body, decorated with sandalwood paste, is radiant like

molten gold and has the same color of gold. He plays the part of a *sannyasi*, always peaceful and balanced, dedicated to peace and faith." (*suvarna varno hemango varangas chandanangadi, sannyasa kric chamah santo nistha santi parayanah*).

Like Bilvamangala Thakura before him, Brahmananda Bharati had attained the realization of Krishna after meditation on the impersonal Brahman, so he offered a verse about the immense superiority of *bhakti* compared to the impersonal level of liberation: *kaivalyam narakayate tridasa pur akasa pushpayate, durdantendriya kala sarpa patali protkhata damstrayate, visvam purna sukhayate vidhi mahendradis cha kitayate, yat karunya kataksha vaibhava vatam tam gauram eva stumah*. Here is the translation of this verse, quoted in Prabhodananda's *Chaitanya chandramrita* (verse 5): "Now the non-differentiated oneness called *kaivalya* appears as hell, and the three worlds appear as a mere fantasy. The sharp teeth of the black snake of the material senses have been torn out, and the entire universe is full of happiness. Even the positions of Brahma, Indra and the other Devas appear to be insignificant, when a devotee obtains the compassionate glance of Gauranga - who should certainly be glorified."

Brahmananda concluded merrily, "I was honored by those who practice *yoga* and non-duality, but I was turned into a maidservant by one cunning boy who always jokes with the cowherd girls". Chaitanya welcomed Brahmananda Bharati to stay with him; later he was joined by Ramabhadra and Bhagavan Acharya.

The last traveler to reach Puri was Kasisvara, who remained permanently with Chaitanya and obtained the service of bodyguard; he would walk in front of Chaitanya and part the crowd for him. Sarvabhauma caught the opportunity of all these arrivals to propose a meeting with king Prataparudra, but Chaitanya strongly refused to accept the idea, covering his ears and declaring that for a *sannyasi* it was impossible to meet someone who was so immersed in sense gratification. Even if kings and prostitutes are actually great devotees, their position and image in society is sufficient to make them extremely dangerous for all *sannyasis*.

A few days later, Prataparudra left his capital Cuttack (Kataka) and arrived in Puri accompanied by Ramananda Raya. Chaitanya was extremely pleased to see Ramananda, and Ramananda took the opportunity to praise the king for his good will in granting him leave from service, and to describe the king's devotion for Chaitanya and his great humility. Mollified by Ramananda's assurances about the character of the king, expressed in front of all the devotees, Chaitanya sent him to get the *darshana* of Jagannatha and the

matter was not discussed any more between them. However, the king was extremely anxious to meet Chaitanya, and to favor him Sarvabhauma prepared a plan - the king could attempt to approach Chaitanya during the Ratha yatra, when Chaitanya would rest in the gardens of the Gundicha after dancing in the procession.

Chaitanya had returned to Puri after 2 years of traveling, and in time for the Chandana yatra festival. A few days before the Snana yatra festival, Chaitanya left all his companions and went alone to Alarnatha, moved by the intense feeling of separation experienced by the *gopis* for Krishna.

The news came that a large party of devotees from Bengal was arriving in Orissa led by Advaita Acharya. They were about 200 people - almost all the residents of Navadvipa (also known as Kulina grama) and many residents of Khanda. The King arranged with Sarvabhauma for their food and lodging, giving instructions to the temple servants, and then went to the roof of his palace with Gopinatha Acharya to identify the various devotees who were arriving. Svarupa Damodara and Govinda were sent forward with flower garlands and Jagannatha *mahaprasadam* to meet the devotees at the Narendra sarovara, where they had been resting. Advaita was the first to be honored, and he was introduced to Govinda for the first time. Then, in order of seniority, the various companions of Chaitanya from Bengal were honored - Srivasa Pandita, Vakresvara, Pundarika Vidyanidhi and Gadadhara Pandita, Acharyaratna Chandrasekhara, Purandara, Gangadasa and Shankara Pandita, then Murari Gupta, Narayana Pandita and Haridasa Thakura. Hari Bhatta, Nrisimhananda, Vasudeva Datta and Shivananda Sena. Then the three brothers Govinda, Madhava and Vasudeva Ghosha, all very passionate about *sankirtana*. Raghava Pandita, Nandana Acharya, Sriman Pandita, Srikanta and Narayana, Suklambara, Sridhara, Vijaya and Vallabha Sena, Purushottama, Sanjaya, Satyaraja Khan, Ramananda, Mukunda Dasa, Narahari, Sri Raghunanandana, Chiranjiva and Sulochana. The King was surprised to see that the devotees were not following the traditional rules for visiting a holy place, such as fasting and shaving, but were instead eating *mahaprasada* immediately on their arrival. Sarvabhauma explained to him that the *mahaprasada* is not subject to the ordinary rules of fasting, because it is transcendental and non-different from Jagannatha himself.

The *Chaitanya bhagavata* gives a rather different version of the arrival of the devotees from Bengal, in which Chaitanya sent them a devotee carrying *mahaprasada* to greet them when they were still in Cuttack, then started to walk towards them. While Advaita

and his party reached the Atharnala bridge, Chaitanya arrived at Narendra sarovara and they saw each other (as at that time there were no buildings in between). Chaitanya offered them garlands from Jagannatha and together they went to participate to the Chandana yatra in Narendra sarovara. While the representative Deities of Jagannatha and Lokanatha sailed around the lake on the boats, Chaitanya and his devotees jumped into the lake and started playing happily in the water. Finally everyone went to take bath in the sea and then to get the *darshana* of Lord Jagannatha.

Afterwards, lunch was served. Chaitanya personally distributed the *mahaprasada*, heaping two or three servings of everything on each banana leaf plate, but nobody wanted to take food before him. So Chaitanya gave Govinda a good amount of *mahaprasada* to deliver to Haridasa, and then went to accept lunch with Nityayanda and the other *sannyasis*. Svarupa Damodara, Damodara Pandita and Jagadananda continued the food distribution. Chaitanya returned to give flower garlands and sandalwood paste to everyone, then he sent them to take rest at their residence.

In the evening they all assembled again and Ramananda Raya was introduced to the devotees from Bengal; all together, they went to the Jagannatha temple and had a wonderful *sankirtana*: four groups were formed with 2 *mridangas* and 8 *karatalas* each, and Chaitanya himself danced in the middle, walking around the temple as a mark of respect. The superintendent of the temple, called the Pariccha ("examiner"), came out to offer flower garlands and sandalwood paste to everyone. During the *sankirtana*, Chaitanya entered a deep ecstasy, jumped and rolled on the ground, and finally asked his companions to dance - Nityananda, Advaita, Vakresvara and Srivasa. King Prataparudra keenly observed all these wonderful activities from the roof top of his palace (now called Puruna Nahara, in Chakratirtha Road, just next to the temples called Sonar Gauranga and Nadiar Gauranga), not to be confused with the present royal palace in Puri, that is in Grand Road.

Chaitanya visits Alaranatha

The *sankirtana* continued in the same way every evening, and Prataparudra's anxiety to meet Chaitanya personally kept growing. However, Chaitanya still refused to meet the

King officially because he did not want to give a bad example for future *sannyasis* of Kali yuga, who could be tempted to meet with kings, politicians, entertainers and other materialists that have a prominent place in society - either to get favors from them or to to advertise themselves or their institutions, or worse, to play political power games and thus contaminate spirituality and religion with the seeds of the dangerous theocratic model.

So the devotees arranged to send Prataparudra one of the old clothes that Chaitanya had been wearing, and the King literally worshiped that cloth with great reverence. Then they suggested that one of the King's youngest sons would be sent to meet Chaitanya instead, and when Chaitanya saw the boy, with his black complexion, his yellow silk clothes, and his ornaments so similar to a Krishna Deity's, he embraced him affectionately, because he was immediately and strongly reminded of Krishna.

In the meantime both Ramananda and Sarvabhauma continued to soften Chaitanya's heart towards the King, and to plan the meeting in the best possible circumstances, so that nobody could ever insinuate that Chaitanya had authorized or endorsed the degradation of the politicized model of religiosity in the name of *sannyasa*.

Also, as Lochana Dasa informs us in the *Chaitanya mangala*, Prataparudra continued to watch Chaitanya from a distance. He visited the Tota Gopinatha temple, where Chaitanya regularly sat with Gadadhara and other devotees, immersed in the reading of the *Bhagavata purana* and in the *kirtana* of the holy Names. He also visited the Jagannatha temple at the time of *darshana*, when Chaitanya attended daily. This intense feeling of separation experienced by Prataparudra was a mirror reflection of Chaitanya's own feelings for Krishna, heightened in the period immediately preceding the Ratha yatra.

During the period of Anavasara (the two weeks when the Deities of Jagannatha are not accessible to the public, because they are being repainted), Chaitanya felt a strong feeling of separation from Jagannatha so he went to the temple of Narayana Alarnatha (at Brahmagiri), about 20 km from Puri, in the direction opposite to Konarak.

It is said that Brahma descended here in Satya yuga to worship Narayana and personally fashioned the Deity - a tall black chlorite image of Vishnu with four arms with the characteristic symbols of conch, disc, mace and lotus flower, and also the Kaustubha jewel, a crown, a pearl necklace, sacred thread, clothes and anklets. Garuda is kneeling at his right foot, and two Devis stand at his sides.

Narayana Alarnatha was worshiped originally by *brahmanas* of the Sri (Ramanuja) Sampradaya from south India, followers of the famous Tamil saints, poets and devotees called Alvars (“orphans”, as they considered Vishnu their only family and support). The temple was therefore called Alvar-nath, and subsequently became Alarnath. The King had donated sufficient lands for the maintenance of the original *brahmana* families, but with time the families expanded and finally faced financial difficulties, so they started to travel to collect donations in the nearby areas. In this regard, there is a very interesting story.

Sri Ketana, the *brahmana* in charge of the food offerings to Alarnath Deva, while going out on this collecting tour, asked his child Madhu to perform the *bhoga* (food) offering in the temple in his absence. Madhu was a small child and he did not know the procedures or the *mantras* for the worship, and his father simply told him that he had to place the plate in front of the Deity and pray him to accept the offering. The child prayed with great sincerity, but was disappointed when he saw that, after his offering and prayers, the plate was still full. He did not know that the Lord can also eat with his eyes and other senses, and he does not need to leave the plate empty (like the child was supposed to do when mother gave him food) in order to accept our offering, so he felt that his offering had been unsuccessful, and insisted with the Deity that he should eat his food. After repeating the offering a few times, without any apparent success, the child became very disturbed and feared that his father would become angry at him for failing in his duty.

So he started crying and begged the Deity to please eat everything up. Finally, the child triumphantly brought the empty plate back to his mother, who actually expected to consume the *prasada* for their meal. Thus, mother and child fasted for three days because the Deity was eating all the food to grant the prayers of the child. When Sri Ketana came back, he was also expecting to get some food, and when he was told that the Deity had been eating everything up, he could not believe such a story. So he told the child that he would have to repeat the offering again in his presence. The child began the offering and when the Deity actually picked up a container of hot sweet rice with his own hand, the *brahmana* pounced on him and grabbed his arm, causing some hot rice cream to spill on the Deity’s hand, where the mark can be seen still today. Narayana spoke to Sri Ketana and said: “Since you have no faith, and believe me to be just a statue or idol, you will all be destroyed. Only your son Madhu, who is a sincere soul, will be saved.” A few days later a great tidal wave swept off the entire village, and only Madhu survived.

The temple is traditionally visited by the devotees of Jagannatha during the period of Anavasara, when Jagannatha retires from Snana yatra to Ratha yatra and is not visible to the public. The tradition was also observed by Chaitanya who came here immersed in intense feelings of separation: such was the power of his ecstatic feelings that his body melted the rock of the pavement, creating very visible depressions in the spots where it pressed on the ground. Still today the stone remains visible to the pilgrims ("birth" Hindus only are allowed inside the temple). This Deity was very dear to Chaitanya: sometimes Chaitanya threatened his followers that if they kept trying to involve him in politics he would leave Puri and move to Alarnatha.

The festival of Gundicha marjana

In the meantime, the day for the Ratha yatra was fast approaching. In Puri - the original place where the Ratha yatra was first developed - Jagannatha's chariots go in a procession down the Grand Road from the main temple (called Sri Mandira) to the Gundicha.

One day before the Ratha yatra, Chaitanya performed the cleaning of Gundicha temple (*gundicha marjana*) together with his devotees, with the help of the temple manager, Tulasi Pariccha. Hundreds of water pots were fetched from the Indradyumna lake and all the devotees participated to the big cleaning. After the cleaning work both in the Gundicha and in the nearby temple of Yajna Nrisimha, everybody went to take bath in Indradyumna Sarovara and played happily in the water.

The Gundicha ghara ("the house of Gundicha") as it is called locally, is also known as the *yajna vedi* or *maha vedi*, because it is the place ("platform") where king Indradyumna originally performed the preliminary *yajna* rituals for the first installation of the Jagannatha Deities. It is not actually called a temple by the local people because it has no Deities. In the section about the Personality of Jagannatha, we will discuss more specifically about king Indradyumna and the original installation of Jagannatha at Puri, as well as the relationship between Jagannatha and Narasimha, who was the presiding Deity of Puri before Jagannatha. Here we will simply comment that Gundicha ghara remains open all year round, but it is used by Jagannatha only for the brief period of the 9 days of

the Ratha yatra, starting from the Ratha yatra day (*sukla dvitiya*) to Bahuda yatra or the return of Jagannatha into the main temple (*sukla dasami*).

Gundicha is exactly at the opposite side of the Sri Mandir on the Grand Road, and next to it is the famous city bus stand, where all the pilgrims arrive by road. Nearby there is also the famous Indradyumna sarovara, arguably the most ancient bathing tank of the city, where for centuries (or millennia?) pilgrims have come to purify themselves from their journey before entering the sacred city.

Another very important landmark just next to Gundicha (on the eastern side) is the Nrisimha temple called Adi Nrisimha or Yajna Nrisimha - the original and most ancient temple of Puri, built and rebuilt many times, as Nrishimhadeva is the original Adideva of Purushottama Kshetra. Here Indradyumna Maharaja started the *yajna*; before performing the *yajna* for the original installation of Jagannatha, king Indradyumna worshiped this Deity as the protector of the sacred place and the Lord of the ceremony. The Deity has four arms and holds Lakshmidēvi on his lap. It is said that the present temple was built by Nangula Nrsimhadeva Maharaja. When Nila Madhava disappeared and Vidyapati could not find him any more, Narasimha appeared in his place under the *krishna aguru vriksha* (as related in *Skanda purana*, 15.91).

On the origin of the name of Gundicha there are several versions; the most popular relates it to Indradyumna's wife Gundicha, but *gudisha* or *gudi* is still the tribal name for a temple in Orissa. Also, in Sanskrit *goḥa*, *gudha* and *gund* indicate a hidden place, so it is definitely possible that in ancient times the Deity of Jagannatha (whose origins are clearly stated as a Deity worshiped by Sabaras or "tribal" *vanavasis*) as installed in a cave - which was the "tribal model of temple". There is no real contradiction between this derivation and the "name of the queen" version, because there is no reason why Indradyumna's queen wouldn't be renamed after the "hidden sanctuary that gave birth to Jagannatha", as in the Indian tradition it is rather common for someone to get a new name after some special events, such as initiation etc. Also, the queen of Chodaganga Deva, another famous royal devotee of Jagannatha, who became famous as "the second Indradyumna" because he re-established the worship of Jagannatha at Puri, had a very similar name (Gundichora).

Different *sampradayas* honor Gundicha by giving it a special importance in connection to their particular *ista devata*. The *Puranas* call this holy place of Gundicha as Mahavedi or Yajnavedi (while the place of Sri Mandira is called Antarvedi or Ratnavedi), as it is the

place where Jagannatha was installed originally. Therefore the orthodox *smarta brahmanas* and the traditional devotees of Jagannatha see it as the birthplace of the sacred fire in the form of Jagannatha, while the devotees of Ramachandra believe that Gundicha is (or represents, which for the spiritual perspective is not very different) the place where Sitadevi appeared, and therefore call it Janaka Puri (“the city of Janaka, Sita’s father”).

The Gaudiya Vaishnavas honor it as Vrindavana, the holy place of beauty and simplicity where Krishna spent the early years of his childhood playing with his foster father and mother and especially with his intimate friends the cowherd boys and girls (*gopas* and *gopis*). In this perspective, the Gaudiya Vaishnavas consider the Ratha yatra as the re-enactment of the journey of Krishna, Baladeva and Subhadra who during the Krishna lila traveled from their capital Dvaraka Puri to Kurukshetra on the occasion of a solar eclipse and met the inhabitants of Vrindavana who had also traveled there for the auspicious occasion. Seeing their beloved Krishna, the *gopis* were overwhelmed by the loving desire to take him back to Vrindavana, and grabbing the reins of the chariots, they tried to pull Krishna there.

Situated on the opposite end of the Grand Road, the temple of Gundicha is smaller than Sri Mandira (the main Jagannatha temple) but has a very nice garden full of trees, including the Yajna Bata or the banyan tree next to which king Indradyumna originally installed the Deity of Jagannatha. The Grand Road between the Gundicha and the Jagannatha temple is 2,688.0696 meters long. About halfway between Sri Mandira and Gundicha, there was a river with a sandy beach, called Sarada Bali. In that spot there used to be a river crossing, and the Deities were moved from one chariot on one bank to another chariot on the other bank. Taking advantage of the opportunity, the local people presented several offerings to the Deities; the tradition is still observed at present, and the place is characterized by two important landmarks - the Mausima temple and the Jagannatha Vallabha gardens. To facilitate the Ratha yatra ceremony, the famous king Narasimha Deva I (1239-1265) built a bridge, and gradually the river was filled with sand (in Oriya language, *bali* means "sand"). Still today, during the rainy season this area is still the most prone to high water. The temple of Gundicha has two gates, separated by a temple office, and they are both on the same side facing the Sri Mandira. The second gate of the Gundicha ghara is called Nakachana dvara, as it is said that the queen of Chodaganga Deva (Gundichora) sold her nose ring (called *nakachana*) to raise the funds to build it.

On the corner of the outer wall of Gundicha, towards the temple of Yajna Nrisimha, we find a very small pavilion with a small Jagannatha (with two hands) standing on a lotus pedestal, and Tulasi Devi (also called Vrinda, identified by the people of Puri with Radha) kneeling in front of him with folded hands (and a Tulasi plant on her head). Inside, the walls of the temple room are decorated with images from the *lila* of Krishna and Rama. There are also some clay statues or dioramas (images that are not worshiped) of Sadbhuja Gauranga with two devotees engaged in *sankirtana*, and separately clay statues of Krishna and Balarama on horseback as in the Kanchi abhijana lila, in front of which several *brahmanas* in two rows facing each other. Also, there are several relief panels with various scenes of Krishna lila in Vrindavana.

As we mentioned, this temple is special because it does not have permanent Deities, and therefore it is called Ghara or “house” rather than Mandira, but it is the center of the celebrations during the famous Ratha Yatra festival, when Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra, Sudarshana, together with the *vijaya murtis* of Madana Mohana, Sridevi, Bhudevi and Rama Krishna leave the Sri Mandira and travel to Gundicha, to remain there for seven days of celebrations.

Just before the Ratha yatra day, Chaitanya decided to engage his followers in cleaning the Gundicha ghara and make it clean and pure for the arrival of Jagannatha. He informed Kasi Mishra, the superintendent of the Jagannatha temple, and Sarvabhauma, who organized the function. The temple provided hundreds of new brooms and water pots, and Chaitanya himself started to work and merrily encourage all his followers - the entire place was swept clean and washed from floor to ceiling, from the main *simhasana* of Jagannatha to the smallest buildings within the compound, the open area between the *darshana* hall and the *kirtana* hall, and the courtyard as well. The Nrisimha temple and the roads outside were washed as well. Hundreds of people were engaged in filling the water pots at the Indradyumna sarovara and carrying them back, and in the hustle several pots were broken and replaced.

Chaitanya himself collected more straw, dust and sand than anybody else, then gathering it in his own cloth, he took it outside. After sweeping the entire place twice, Chaitanya and his followers splashed water everywhere, in the traditional way to wash a place - not by mopping but by flushing with the help of a broom. The mopping was done at the end, to dry the surfaces. The purpose of the cleaning festival was not only to create a clean and pure environment for the service of Jagannatha, but also to purify the minds of the

devotees through the attitude of cleaning. Many caste brahmins believe that cleaning is a "dirty" activity, much below their position, so they end up living in very filthy places filled with garbage, and the same dirty mentality is applied to the temples where they proudly conduct the ceremonial worship rituals, where garbage is rarely removed and many kinds of pests - especially rats, cockroaches and bats - leave their urine and excrements. This problematic mentality is inevitable in people who believe they are "genetically clean", no matter what they do, and that they can protect their cleanliness only by avoiding contact with other people and certainly they do not even suspect that their minds and hearts actually need a good clean-up. We have already discussed about the superficial bathing habits of some caste brahmins and similar unclean habits.

Also, we need to know that most brahmin *sevakas* of the Jagannatha temple normally eat fish, eggs and other stuff they actually call "garbage"; they believe that taking a perfunctory rinsing bath and changing their *upavita* (sacred thread) before actually touching the Deity is sufficient to make them perfectly pure.

Often, since according to the tradition it is better to take bath in running water as it is supposed to be cleaner and more energized (it usually was even until 20 or 30 years ago), they continue to perform their ablutions in small rivers and ponds even though that water is grossly polluted by garbage, sewage and other contaminants. And since they pass stool on the river of the bank or pond before taking bath, after their "purificatory ablutions" they walk through and over a soil that is dotted with human excrements in various states of decomposition.

On the other side, they get terribly angry and believe they have to take another full bath if they are touched by the *shadow* of a person of low birth (even if such a person is perfectly clean and a strict vegetarian) on the way from their "purificatory bath" to the temple.

Chaitanya demonstrated that by actually cleaning the temple of the Lord - the house where he is called to reside - our body, mind and heart are cleansed, too. Nobody is genetically impure: purity and impurity must be ascertained from *guna* and *karma* (qualities and actions) in human beings. Vedic scriptures (*Svetasvatara Upanishad* II.5) say that all human beings, without any distinction, are *amritasya putra*, "children of the Immortal", as they are heirs to spiritual realization. Both the *Rig Veda* (5-60-5) and *Yajur Veda* (16.15) state that all human beings are members of the same family, and they are all entitled to equal respect and opportunities. This means that they should be evaluated on

the basis of their actual *guna* and *karma* (qualities and activities) as very clearly stated in *Bhagavad gita* (4.13), and not by the *guna* and *karma* of their ancestors or even present family members. A son of a *brahmana* becomes a *brahmana* only through *samskara* and *vidya* (purification rituals and acquisition of knowledge) and remains as such only through *guna* and *karma* (developing the required qualities and performing the required duties and activities)..

The idea of untouchability is applicable only to those people who choose to maintain dirty habits and refuse to cleanse themselves; the contact with these people is certainly forbidden, because it is always possible to become infected and contaminated, not only at physical level but also at a mental level. Contaminated people are those those who do not bathe regularly and do not have hygienic habits, who eat non-vegetarian items such as meat, fish and eggs, drink liquors, and have sex promiscuously with degraded random partners or with unclean prostitutes, or - even worse - entertain perverted lusty thoughts that lead to disrespect and mistreatment against innocent people.

There are other kinds of contamination, but they all start in the mind and manifest in the body and living environment only as a side effect. According to the scriptures, a *sannyasi* is not supposed to take care of his body because he is not attached to it, therefore he does not care much for the environment where he lives - a forest, a temple, an abandoned house, a cave in the mountains. But one can easily tell the difference between a dirty person and a renounced person, because a renounced person has a very clean and pure mind, while the mind of a dirty person will easily manifest through glances, attitudes, body language, and in other similar ways.

The chanting of the holy Name was certainly the focus of the entire *gundicha marjana* exercise, as the people called each other by saying "Krishna! Krishna!" and kept reciting the Name while engaged in working. Chaitanya was certainly breaking the casteist social conventions that had already built up since the beginning of Kali yuga, and had no problems in accepting the contact with people engaged in lowly occupations or born in lower social classes.

In those times, though, the situation was not as serious as today, because a worthy individual could easily be reformed through the required purification rituals (*suddhi* and *prayascitta*) and be accepted into a higher *varna* on the authority of a *guru*, a *brahmana* or a king. The system became compromised already during the Muslim invasions, because the invaders killed practically all the genuinely qualified *brahmanas* who could

oppose their government, and destroyed many texts and temples, while they allowed or even encouraged those practices and beliefs that could weaken Hindu society.

After the British introduced the official census of the population, though, the original system was practically destroyed by the government's involvement, as the British did not accept the original mobility of the *varnas* but considered the castes as racial or ethnic communities that are strictly hereditary. To convince Hindu Indians to accept this perspective, they introduced the concept of “aryan race”, by which the highest castes of Hinduism were to be considered “more pure” from the racial point of view. A corollary of this ideological distortion can be observed in the obsession for bleaching one's skin and make it whiter.

The connection between the Jagannatha temple and the followers of Chaitanya is now practically lost, although officially some of their *mathas* still surviving are engaged in some temple service. The Radhakanta matha (Gambhira) is still in charge of the annual cleansing of Gundicha and provides lamps during the Ratha yatra, and the Sonar Gauranga matha and the Gangamata matha present a food offering at Gundicha during the Ratha yatra. All the other *mathas* connected to Chaitanya have been gradually cut off from the contact with the main temple, or had disappeared already during the British colonial time.

At present, we have seen that the *mathas* that were most strictly connected with Chaitanya have embraced the casteist paradigm and do not allow "non-Hindus" even to enter as public visitors - especially the Sonar Gauranga matha (the old royal palace of king Prataparudra) and the Jagannatha Vallabha matha (originally established by Vishnusvami, then residence of Ramananda Raya who was officially from that *sampradaya*).

Of the hundreds that exist in Puri, only a handful of *mathas* presently allow access to devotees from all social classes without birth discrimination: the Radhakanta matha or Gambhira, the Tota Gopinatha matha (Gadadhara), the Haridasa samadhi matha, the Siddha Bakula matha (residence of Haridasa), the Jhanjhapitha matha (Narottama Das), the Gangamata (Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya's house), the Puri Gosvami matha (Paramananda Puri), the Naga matha or Damodara matha (Jiva Gosvami's disciple Krishnadasa), the Nandini matha (Sita Advaita parivara's disciple), and the Kotabhoga matha (Advaita Acharya).

The celebration of Gundicha marjana (the cleansing of the Gundicha Ghara) is still performed by a party of temple *sevakas* and *mahantas* of the Mathas of Puri. The Mahanta of the Oriya Matha goes to Gundicha with *panchamrita* ("five nectarean substances") to clean the Simhasana (the Deities' seat) there. Then the Simhasana is washed with sandalwood water.

After completing the cleaning work, Chaitanya led all his followers to the nearby Indradyumna sarovara, where everybody had a lot of fun bathing, swimming and playing in the water. During the ecstatic *kirtana* that followed, Chaitanya ordered Sri Gopala, Advaita's son, to dance, and the boy suddenly fainted and fell to the ground. As the boy was not regaining consciousness, Advaita and the devotees became very agitated and started to cry, but Chaitanya intervened and revived the boy.

Finally, Chaitanya and the devotees entered the Aitota gardens (where now the Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mission stands) that are just next to the Gundicha compound and had lunch with many varieties of *mahaprasada* brought by Vaninatha Raya, Kasi Mishra and Tulasi Pariccha. There was food enough for 500 people - rice, *pitha* (pancakes), *payasa* (sweet rice pudding), and a variety of vegetable preparations.

Contemplating the memory of Krishna taking lunch in the forest with his friends, Chaitanya was trying to control his feelings of ecstasy, but his companions were able to notice them.

On the next day, Netrotsava ("the festival of the eyes") celebrated the moment when the temple servants complete the re-painting of the Jagannatha's Deities by "opening their eyes". Another name for this festival is Nava yauvana ("new youth", or "rejuvenation"). Chaitanya eagerly participated to this festival by visiting the Deities in the main temple. Kasisvara walked in front of Chaitanya and Govinda behind him, carrying his *kamandalu* (the water pitcher that is part of the *sannyasi*'s scanty equipment).

Paramananda Puri and Brahmananda Bharati also went in front of him, and Svarupa Damodara and Advaita guarded the sides. In their great eagerness to see Jagannatha, the devotees invaded the temple hall and also the inner space where the food is offered and usually nobody is allowed to stand.

The tradition of the chariots

The tradition of Ratha yatras or Car Festivals is very ancient and widespread, and is still followed today on a variety of dates in many places, according to the personality traveling on the chariot. Lingaraja's Ratha yatra is traditionally held in Bhubaneswar on Ashoka ashtami (Chaitra sukla ashtami) and lasts for one day. In Nepal the Ratha yatra festival is held every year in the month of Vaisakha; Bhairava is traveling on the *ratha* instead of Jagannatha. Similarly, in Bengal there are Ratha yatras for Radha and Krishna during the month of Kartika and on Janmastami. Buddhists in Sri Lanka hold Ratha yatras on Buddha Purnima, taking the Buddha's relics in procession on a chariot. Even politicians on electoral campaigns have their own Ratha yatras, using special chariots for their parades, and nobody thinks this is offensive.

However, Jagannatha's Ratha yatra can only be performed on the specific day prescribed by the traditional calculation - on Asadha sukla dvitiya - because it has always been connected to the beginning of the monsoon season. The arrival of Jagannatha at Gundicha thus symbolizes the auspicious divine blessing that is strictly connected in Vedic tradition to the performance of the *yajna* or ritual sacrifice for Vishnu and the Devas.

Jagannatha's Ratha yatra is mentioned in *Skanda purana (Utkala khanda, 27.13-63)* when Brahma comes to Puri to install the Deities, and it commemorates the 9 days of the Asvamedha yajna performed by Indradyumna. It is also mentioned as the Mahavedi Yatra, going from the Jagannatha temple to the Yajna Vedi in Gundicha Ghara once a year (*Skanda purana, 29. 25-44*). While the Ratna Simhasana is known as Antar Vedi, the Gundicha Ghara is known as Maha Vedi or Adapa Mandapa.

It is said that while king Indradyumna had gone to Brahmaloaka to ask Brahma to come and perform the installation rituals, on Earth many long years had passed and the temple built by Indradyumna had disappeared into the sands. One king of Orissa, called Gala Madhava, excavated the old temple and installed his own Deities there, so when king Indradyumna came back from Brahmaloaka there was a dispute over the utilization of the temple. Finally Indradyumna was recognized as the genuine builder of the temple and the installation proceeded. So for the people of Puri the annual Ratha Yatra represents the

celebration of the original appearance of Jagannatha at the Yajna Vedi (in Gundicha). In the *Skanda purana*, *Utkala khanda*, Jagannatha tells Indradyumna, “On Ashadha sukla Dvitiya, place Subhadra Devi, Balarama and me on chariots and celebrate the Navadinatmaka ("consisting in 9 days") Yatra. Take me to Gundicha, the house where I was born, and where you performed a thousand Asvamedha yajnas.”

We find this immensely ancient connection between *yajna* and rain very clearly explained in *Bhagavad gita* (3.10-16), at the beginning of Krishna's instructions to Arjuna about *karma yoga*, or the performance of dutiful action in this world.

*saha-yajñah prajah srishtva purovaca prajapatih
anena prasavishyadhvam esha vo 'stv ishta-kama-dhuk
devan bhavayatanena te deva bhavayantu vah
parasparam bhavayantah sreyaḥ param avapsyatha
ishtan bhogan hi vo deva dasyante yajña-bhavitah
tair dattan apradayaibhyo yo bhunkte stena eva sah
yajña-sishtasinah santo mucyante sarva-kilbishaih
bhuñjate te tv agham papa ye pacanty atma-karanat
annad bhavanti bhutani parjanyaḥ anna-sambhavah
yajñad bhavati parjanyo yajñad karma-samudbhavah
karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahmakshara-samudbhavam
tasmāt sarva-gatam brahma nityam yajñe pratisṭhitam
evam pravartitam cakram nanuvartayatiḥa yah
aghayur indriyaramo mogham partha sa jivati*

“The Prajapati originally manifested the *prajas* (creatures) together with the *yajna* (the sacred action), and said, ‘By these (sacred actions) you will become more and more prosperous; these (sacred actions) will supply you with whatever you desire.

The Devas will be pleased/ fed by you through these (sacred actions), and they (the Devas) will bless/ feed you (in return); in this way both sides will reciprocate in a positive way and you all will attain the highest benefit. Satisfied by *yajna* (sacred action), the Devas will give you whatever pleasures you desire. One who eats what is given by them without offering anything in return is just a thief. The good people who subsist on the leftovers from the sacrifice/ sacred action are liberated from all consequences, while those who cook for selfish purposes are eating/ enjoying sinful (substances). (All)

creatures come to being thanks to (food) grains, and (food) grains come into being thanks to rain. Rain comes thanks to the performance of sacrifice, and sacrifice comes to being through work. Know that work/ action comes from Brahma, and Brahma comes from the Imperishable (*akshara*, the Om), therefore the all-pervading Brahman eternally resides in sacred action. O son of Pritha, one who does not accept to follow this established cycle (of action) is enjoying his senses through a sinful longevity, and his life is useless."

It is not by mere chance that Jagannatha Puri is famous for its *mahaprasada* and its tradition of orthodox brahmanism based on fire worship, just as it is not by mere chance that the mission of Chaitanya was based almost equally on the chanting of the holy Names and on the distribution of Krishna *prasada*. Also, it is not by mere chance that Bhaktivedanta Swami gave such great importance to his pure vegetarian *prasada* restaurants and his *prasada* feasts every Sunday at each and every temple and center, as well as to the establishment of rural communities where devotees should have been engaged in cultivating the land, producing food grains and protecting the cows.

There is also another deep connection that has been vastly forgotten or - more precisely - disowned in later periods because of the negative impact of the abrahamic concept of "sexual morality". The ancient worship of Indra to propitiate the rains was connected to sexual fertility as well, as we can see for example in the story of the Rishi Rishyasringa, who performed the auspicious rituals for Dasaratha the father of Rama. King Romapada of Anga sent his best courtesanes to seduce the Rishi and entice him to the capital, because his presence was needed to neutralize a long drought in his kingdom; subsequently the Rishi had married the daughter of the king. In Sanskrit, the word *sringa* means "horn" or "mountain peak". Indra is associated with the Apsaras, the beautiful "water nymphs" (*apsu* means "water") that are considered the courtesanes of the heavenly planets and are regularly sent to Earth to distract those who are engaged in very intense austerity (*tapas* literally means "heat").

Until a few centuries ago (before the abrahamic invasions) the temples were decorated with beautiful and very explicit figures of sexual activities (*maithuna*) or just beautiful semi-naked or naked girls (*kanyas*), to balance the "heat" generated by the austerities of those who are engaged in *vratas*. Most of such temples have been destroyed or plastered over, and the people have been taught that the human body and natural healthy sexual activities are immoral and irreligious. This is the same reason why the service of the Devadasis (or Maharis) was discontinued. But this is only an artificial superimposition,

and has nothing to do with Vedic values, society and culture. In *Bhagavata purana* (10.24.8-9) Nanda talks with Krishna about this tradition:

*parjanya bhagavan indro meghas tasyatma murtayah
te 'abhivarshanti bhutanam prinanam jivanam payah
tam tata vayam anye cha, vah mucham patim isvaram
dravyaih tat retasa siddhaih yajante kratubhih narah*

"The clouds are the form of the great God of rain, Indra. They bring the rain, that like milk gives nourishment and pleasure to all living beings. So like many other peoples, we also worship the Lord of the clouds, because human beings perform *yajnas* with various items produced by his semen."

By asking the cowherd people of Vrindavana to offer to him directly the ancient sacrifice performed for Indra on the occasion of Govardhana puja, Krishna vanquishes and claims directly for himself the attributes and functions of the King of the Devas, who was at the center of the traditional system of *yajnas* in Treta and Dvapara yuga. This was required because in the upcoming Kali yuga, people would become unable to understand the deep symbolic language and get simply stuck in the gross material sense gratification of the external level.

At the end of the Govardhana lila, recognizing this shift in focus, Indra consecrates the new icon of divine auspiciousness with the ancient *abhisheka* ritual, ceremonially bathing Krishna with the water from his elephant carrier and the milk from the Surabhi cow. It is not by mere chance that the color of Krishna's complexion is compared to the monsoon cloud, and that Krishna's *rasa lila* is performed at the end of the rainy season.

And there is also a strong connection with the romantic character of his most important and popular *lila*, that is unabashedly described in explicit sexual tones in one of Chaitanya's favorite books - Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. The *Gita Govinda*, immensely popular not only in Orissa but all over India, is also famous for being Jagannatha's favorite text, so much that Jagannatha still wears special shawls woven with the words of the songs of the book.

Chaitanya himself is compared to rain in *Chaitanya charitamrita* (*Madhya* 10.1):

*tam vande gaura jaladam, svasya yo darshanamritah
vicchedavagraha mlana bhakta sasyany ajivayat*

"I offer my reverence to Gaura, who is like a rain cloud. The nectar of his personal presence revives the devotees, who wilted like the grain plants when rain is scarce."

Many aspects of the Ratha yatra festival in Puri are openly connected to the celebration of fertility as prosperity, happiness and pleasure. Above all, the popular songs and comments of the Dahuka (the Sevaka charioteer) during the journey of the *rathas* are openly sexual. It is also said that Dahuka is also the name of a bird that starts chirping at the beginning of the monsoon.

The Sabaras of the Gunupur-Ganjam belt in Orissa still observe a Car festival on the eve of the monsoon. Wooden chariots with four wheels (but without Deities) travel from a Godali ("starting point") and when the chariots reach the next village, old earthen pots containing cooked rice are broken before them to propitiate a good harvest for the next year.

The traditional chariot festival in Puri lasts for 9 days, and starts on Sukla Dvitiya (the second day of the waxing moon) of the month of Asadha, traditionally the beginning of the monsoon season. Before the day of the Ratha yatra, there are some preliminary rituals to be performed. The entire cycle begins with the Chandana yatra ("the festival of the sandalwood") in which the Deities receive a daily offering of cool sandalwood pulp applied on their bodies, and the representative Deities of Jagannatha and Lokanatha (Shiva) are carried in procession to the Narendra Sarovara for a boat ride - both in the morning and in the evening.

The Chandana yatra period is ended by the Snana yatra ("the festival of the bathing"), a ceremonial ablution performed in the public view as a statement of the royal position of Jagannatha. Traditionally, the King is elaborately bathed in a public formal ceremony on the occasion of his coronation or birthday anniversary; the bathing is performed by priests and members of the royal family, and the substances used are sacred waters, milk, and other sacred liquids. As Snana purnima is considered the "birthday" of Jagannatha, this royal *abhisheka* is performed for him every year on this day.

In the specific case of Daru Brahman Jagannatha, his visible form manifests in wood - representing the bones of the body - covered with layers of *dhatu*s ("bodily components" such as skin, flesh, etc) consisting of sandalwood paste, resins, vegetal colors etc. During the rest of the year, the ordinary and extraordinary bathing of the Deities of Jagannatha is done by reflection: the water is poured on a polished brass mirror in which Jagannatha's

image is reflected. This is because applying water directly to the body of Jagannatha would cause the body to swell and crack. However, once a year - for the royal *abhisheka* - the bathing is done directly on the Deities' bodies, and the layers of Jagannatha's body are purposefully slackened in order to repair any small damage occurred in the course of the year and repaint the surface.

Follows the ritual period called Anavasara, in which it is said that "Jagannatha becomes sick" and does not give audience to the public; the Deities are plastered with a fresh coat and the paint is left to dry completely. The doors to the *darshana* room of the Deities are opened again on the day before Ratha yatra. As we have already mentioned, this is called Netrotsava ("the festival of the eyes") or Navayauvana ("renewed youth"). Traditionally prepared black colour is brought in a silver vessel and the eyeballs of the three Deities are painted by the *puja pandas*: thus the eyes of the Deities are "opened" and they can look upon the devotees. The festival is also called Ubha yatra. In the meanwhile the *patti dias* (the paintings of Vishnu, Shiva and Durga that had been worshiped during the Anavasara in substitution for Jagannatha, Baladeva and Subhadra) are "un-installed" (a ritual called *visarjana*).

After breakfast, the *ajna malas* (*prasadam* flower garlands symbolizing the permission or authorization obtained from the Deities) are carried from the temple to the chariots in procession with accompaniment of conchshells, bells and musical instruments. After being garlanded, the chariots are pulled from the Sri Nahara (the King's palace) to the Simha Dvara ("lions gate", the main entrance facing east) of the Jagannatha temple - first Balabhadra's Taladhvaja, Subhadra's Darpadalana, and then Jagannatha's Nandighosha. On the same day after *sandhya dhupa* (the evening *arati*), the 3 *kalasas* (sacred water pots symbolizing the Mother Goddess) are carried to the chariots and mounted on top of them. These *kalasas* used to be made of gold but now they are made of *asta dhatu* (an alloy of 8 metals). The flags are fastened, too.

The consecration of the chariots is completed with the *ratha pratistha*, celebrated in the Chahani Mandapa. A *mandala* in the shape of a 36-petal lotus flower is drawn in the Chahani mandapa, Varuna is worshiped, then the officiating priest declares the *sankalpa*, the intention to perform the Ratha yatra. Narasimha is worshiped and a fire sacrifice with 1008 *ahutis* (oblations of clarified butter) is performed. Finally after the *bada sringara* dressing and the bed time *arati*, the Deities are changed again into the *sena patta* ("military dress") and *sukla sajja* ("simple white dress"), for the next day travel.

Three chariots are prepared, one each for Balabhadra, Subhadra and Jagannath. The wood required for the chariots is traditionally provided by the King of Daspalla (a feudatory to the Raja of Puri) who supervises the collection of wood from his forests in Daspalla and Ranpur starting from Vasanta Panchami. Each chariot must have the 34 traditional components from wheels to flag: *chakra, dandia, ara, banki, hansapata, kani, sankhadhvaja, jali, gajapata, simhasana, kanakamunda, bhumin sola nahaka, makaradanda, vasanta, kubir ghoda, sarathipida, kumbhapati, rahupati, athanahaka, banki, pida, rusipata, danda, parabhadi, khapuri pada, olatosua, dodhinauti, kalasa, kashi, danda, chakra, kapiketana.*

After the fire ceremony, a group of master carpenters, appointed by hereditary right, start to work on the logs in groups composed of 3 masters, assisted by 125 skilled and semi-skilled carpenters equipped with brand new chisels, wooden hammers etc. The chief carpenter is honored with a sari-turban (red, yellow and blue) by the Padia Karanas. All the parts of the chariots except *kalasha*, the *parsva devatas* (companion Deities), *sarathis* (charioteers) and horses, are remade every year; these other will be renewed only on the occasion of Navakalevara.

The logs for the chariots are cut into 2188 pieces, 832 pieces for Nandighosa, 763 for Taladhvaja and 593 for Darpadalana. A total of 1,135 logs of proper size (about 400 cubic meters) are sent to Puri. This involves cutting about 1000 trees of 13 specific types, most of which require 25 to 30 years to mature, except the *phasi* tree used for the wheels, that takes 60 to 70 years. The reforestation programs organized by the government and by non-governmental agencies are not sufficient to replenish the stock, due to several factors, including rampant corruption and poaching, lack of irrigation facilities and very low survival rate of the planted trees, and especially the time gap in supply expectation between the cutting of the present trees and the maturity stage of the trees that are being planted now. Forest officials now spend months searching for *phasi* trees that are large enough for the chariot construction, while previously such trees could be found easily within any small area. The chariots are built new every year, as at the end of the Ratha yatra the old chariots are dismantled and disposed of. Some pieces are sold to devotees or collectors, and the rest of the wood is used as fuel in the temple kitchen, where the use of cooking gas is still banned as a "violation of the old tradition".

Currently there is an awareness campaign that presents the dangers of deforestation in Orissa as related to the construction of new chariots every year as well as the utilization

of firewood in the temple kitchens, described as "the greatest kitchens of the world", so big that it is possible to cook food for 100,000 people at the same time. The wood consumed by this kitchen is about 8.5 tonnes a day, with a peak of 25 tonnes during the 9 days of the chariot festival.

The 3000 cooks, called Suars, work on shifts of about 700 persons at a time on 752 firewood stoves, normally producing 5,000 kg of food every day (catering for 35,000 to 40,000 people every day) and on special festivals even up to 10,000 kg in a single day. Each firewood stove (*chula*) had 9 fire mouths, lit every morning after the performance of the Vaishnava Agni-homa in the name of Lakshmi and Narayana, and burning for the entire day.

Now, if the chariots were renewed only at the Navakalevara festival (every 12 years or so) together with the horses, charioteers, and the bodies of the Deities themselves, and if the firewood stoves (*chulas*) in the kitchen were replaced by biogas-operated stoves burning methane produced from cow dung in dairy farms, a huge number of trees could be saved, improving not only the situation at State level but also at global level. Forests slow or stop cyclones, soil erosion and desertification, improve the air quality, and in many cases supply a wealth of other products such as nuts and seeds, edible leaves and fruits, honey, medicinal herbs, and so on. The chariots could be disassembled and stored within the buildings already existing in the vast temple compound, or if disassembling them would weaken their structure, a suitable shelter could be constructed within the city. In other temples in India, the chariots are usually sheltered during the year in special premises.

Furthermore, much firewood could be saved by use of biogas created by the promotion, development or sponsoring of dairy cow farms either directly or indirectly connected to the temple, as it was in the past, when Jagannatha had large herds of cows and a *sevaka* officially in charge of caring for them (the position is still listed). This would bring the added benefit of supplying sufficient quantities of milk to improve the quality of the food and clarified butter offered daily to the Deities, not only for the cooking but also for *ahutis* (oblations in the sacred fire) and lamps.

The chariots are huge, and extraordinarily strong in spite of the absence of any metal part (nails, screws etc). Besides the considerable weight of the massive Deities, the moving chariots carry several dozens of *sevakas*, and when they are stationary, the many more devotees that climb up to offer their respects to the Deities.

Balabhadra travels on the Taladhvaja ratha, Sudarshana and Subhadra ride on the Devidalana ratha and Jagannatha is on the Nandighosa ratha. Taladhvaja is 44 feet high, has 14 wheels (6 feet in circumference) and is covered with red and green cloth. Its charioteer Matali is dressed in blue. Devadalana is 43 feet high, has 12 wheels (5 feet in circumference) and is covered with red and black cloth. Its charioteer Arjuna is dressed in green. Nandighosa is 45 feet high, has 16 wheels (7 feet in circumference) and is covered with red and yellow cloth. Its charioteer Daruka is dressed in yellow.

The flags on top of the chariots have also names: they are called Unmani (for Balabhadra), Nadambika (for Subhadra) and Trailokya Mohini (for Jagannatha). The *dhvaja puja* or worship of the chariot flag takes place everyday starting from Ratha Yatra until Niladri Vijaya. Everyday after Madhyana Dhupa, the Patri arranges the *ratha bhoga* that is offered by the Puja Panda to the flags.

The guardian Deities (*parsva devatas*) of the chariots, portrayed on icons all along its sides, are as follows.

For the chariot of Balabhadra: on the right Ganesha, Kartikeya, Sarvamangala, on the back Pralambari (Baladeva killing Pralambasura), Halayudha (Baladeva holding the plow), Mrityunjaya Shiva, on the left Nataraja, Muktesvara, and Ananta Sesa. In the front at the two gates, the keepers are Rudra-Shakti and the Asta Vasus. The chariot as a whole is guarded by Vasudeva. For the chariot of Subhadra: on the right Chandi, Chamunda, Ugratara, on the back Vanadurga, Sulidurga (holding the trident), Varahi, on the left Syama Kali, Mangala, Vimala. In the front the two gate keepers are on one side Sridevi and Bhudevi and on the other side the Rishi pata and Bhairavi. The chariot as a whole is guarded by Jayadurga. For the chariot of Jagannatha: on the right Govardhana dhari, Gopi Krishna, Nrsimha, on the back Varaha, Rama, Narayana, on the left Trivikrama, Hanuman, Rudra. In front, on one side Indra and Brahma and on the other side Marici with the seven Rishis. The chariot as a whole is guarded by Garuda.

Four ropes, each 8 inches diameter and 250 feet long, are attached to each chariot. In ancient times, the *brahmanas* of the *sasana* villages around Puri supplied the ropes. The access ramp is made of palm tree trunks, tied together temporarily and dismantled for the journey. The construction of the chariots, arranged in front of the King's palace in Grand Road under palm leaf roofs, is completed by Ashadha amavasya, and on pratipada the chariots are pulled to the Simhadvara.

The Ratha yatra

On the Ratha Yatra day the rituals start very early in the morning, beginning with *mangala arati* ("auspicious ceremony", performed at dawn), *abakasha* (bathing) and *vesha* (dressing) of the Deities, and after *roscha homa* (kitchen fire *yajna*), *surya puja* (Sun worship) and *dvarapala puja* (honoring the door guards Jaya and Vijaya), *sakala dhupa* is offered. The *sakala dhupa* (breakfast ceremony) on this day consists of special *khechedi* (rice cooked together with lentils and vegetables) along with a few other dishes. *Khechedi* is considered to be a very light meal, so we could say that Jagannatha eats less than usual before going on a journey. After the *sodasha upachara puja* (offering of the 16 worship items) and auspicious invocations, the Mudirasta (or Mudra hasta) prepares the ropes to carry the Deities, the Dayitas remove the *vesa* and untie the rope by which the Deities are fastened (*rundha*) to the Ratna simhasana.

The most intimate personal servants of the main Deities, called Dayitas (considered direct descendents of the Sabara Visvavasu and hence non-brahmins) fit the Deities with new ropes and lift them, carrying them up to their *asanas* on the chariots. A large number of these special *sevakas* are engaged in carrying the Deities, especially Balabhadra and Jagannatha who are very big and rock forward and backward, arms and body supported by strong servants both directly (by grasping or by pushing and pulling) and indirectly (by pulling at the silken ropes fastened to the Deities' bodies).

The much awaited Pahandi procession starts to the accompaniment of various musical instruments. The specific name of this ceremony is Pandu vijaya (as distinct from the Adapa vijaya when the Deities enter the Gundicha ghara, and the Niladri vijaya when the Deities again enter the main temple or Sri Mandir at the end of the 9 days of the festival). The type of *pahandi* (procession) for this Pandu vijaya is called Dhadi Pahandi, when the Deities are carried one after another in a row, led by Sudarshana. Each Deity leaves the *garbha griha* when the previous Deity has reached the exterior of the temple; this procedure is more complicated and requires more time compared to the Goti pahandi of the return *yatra*, when the Deities are carried all together from their throne inside Gundicha to the chariots outside the gate.

At the 7 steps (that lead into the Jagamohana), the Deities wear the *tahiyas* (special head dresses) provided by the Raghava Das Matha. These huge head gears are very characteristic: they are structures composed by bamboo sticks tied together to imitate the rays of the sun, and decorated with flowers and other ornaments. They can be seen from a long distance, so they constitute the first sign of the arrival of the Deities. Since these head dresses are too large to be accommodated inside the chariot pavilion, the *sevakas* tear them apart before setting the Deities on their seats.

The Deities are carried through the Ananda Bazar (the *mahaprasada* market inside the temple compound) to the Grand Road, and on to their respective chariots. Sudarshana sits with Subhadra on her chariot. The *sevaka* called Changada Mekapa brings three pillows, one for each of the three Deities and after the pillows are placed behind each Deity, the Deities are fastened to their sitting places. Now the *mahajanas* (main *sevakas*) carry the *chalanti pratima* (representative Deities) Madana Mohana (with Sri Devi and Bhudevi) and Rama Krishna to the palanquin waiting for them under the Kalpa Bata (the banyan tree inside the temple compound). Then the *sevakas* called Bimana Badus carry the palanquin first to Balabhadra's Ratha, where Rama and Krishna are placed. Then Madana Mohana, Sri Devi and Bhudevi are carried to Jagannatha's chariot.

From the description of the *Chaitanya charitamrita*, we see that in ancient times the contact of the Deities' bodies with the ground was softened by cotton pillows called *tulis*, described in the *Chaitanya charitamrita*, but that tradition is now lost, like many other good customs. Also, at the festival of the Ratha yatra and in all the other festivals the traditional ritual required the presence of the *devadasis* or *maharis*, the female temple servants that sang and danced for the pleasure of Jagannatha, but that tradition, too, is lost apparently forever, in spite of the generous donations of the pilgrims and devotees. As the temple is managed and controlled by the Indian Government, most of the income goes for non-devotional purposes under the civil city administration.

The important ancient tradition of the Devadasis' service is considered by the government as "indecent" and "unnecessary", and the Devadasis themselves have been treated like ordinary prostitutes since the times when they were forced to satisfy the lust of the Muslim rulers and subsequently of the degraded Kings of Puri. However, some playing of musical instruments is still practiced, especially the small gongs rhythmically hit by a considerable number of temple servants, and that characteristically announces the arrival of the Deities.

When all the Deities are seated, the luggage comes: two trunks, one with the outfits and the other with the ornaments and *puja* paraphernalia, are placed on Jagannatha's chariot by the Kotha Suasias. The Lanka and Paika *sevakas* bring the three *chittas* (*tilaka*-shaped ornaments with gold and precious stones at the center) from the jeweler's house and tie them to the Deities' heads. It is to be noted that the three original *chittas* (made of sapphire, ruby and diamond respectively) had been removed before Snana Purnima. After all the luggage is loaded, the King of Puri comes to perform the ritual called Chera Panhara - the sweeping of the chariots. It is possible that in the past the King used to sweep the road instead of the chariots (as *Chaitanya charitamrita* says) or maybe he did both, but at present the ritual is only focused on the three chariots, and only at the time when the Deities have been settled and before the chariots start. However, the chariots are still lavishly decorated with colored cloth, mirrors, carvings and paintings, and a flag and sacred water pot (*kalasa*) on top.

In our days, the Gajapati King of Puri (the present king's name is Divyasingh Dev) arrives from his palace in Grand Road (called Sri Nahara) in a *mehena* or *tanjan* (silver palanquin) in a procession accompanied by relatives and tributary Rajas, by the two Raja Gurus, by the palace attendants and by State policemen. He is announced by the sound of various musical instruments especially *vira kahali* (war bugle), as a symbol of his authority. He climbs on each chariot - first for Baladeva, then for Jagannatha and finally for Subhadra - and performs the traditional ceremony assisted by a number of priests. He offers *pranama*, *puspanjali* and *arati* to the Deities, fans them with a *chamara* with a golden handle, then proceeds with the sweeping. The King symbolically touches the floor with a traditional type of broom that has been fitted with a golden handle, then sprinkles perfumed water all over the chariot floor, then finally descends from the chariot and returns to the palace carrying a *prasada* garland from the Deities.

The huge wooden charioteers are seated: Matali (Balabhadra's driver), then Arjuna (Subhadra's charioteer) and Daruka (Jagannatha's driver). Then the access ramps made of palm tree trunks are removed and the wooden horses are yoked.

Balabhadra's horses are the black Tivra, Ghora, Dirgha and Svarnanabha. Subhadra's red horses are Mochika, Rochika, Jita and Aparajita. Jagannatha's white horses are Shankha, Balahaka, Shveta and Haridashva. The pulling ropes are attached, too: Vasuki is the rope of Balabhadra's chariot, Svarnachura is the rope of Subhadra's chariot and Sankhachuda is the rope of Jagannatha's chariot.

The chariots can begin to roll. The time when the chariot start moving is generally not fixed, although in recent years delays have been greatly reduced. Balabhadra's chariot starts first, followed by Subhadra's and finally by Jagannatha's.

There is generally a Dahuka (a *sevaka* who monitors the progress of the chariot by waving a stick) on each *ratha*. In ancient times the strength of the devotees and pilgrims, often tired from the long travel and fasting, was not sufficient to pull the chariots all the way to Gundicha, especially because the road was very sandy and the chariots used to get stuck very easily. Therefore some dedicated devotees from nearby villages, called the Kalaberiyas, were assigned to the task of getting the chariots going all the way: 1400 for Jagannatha, 1200 for Balabhadra and 1200 for Subhadra. In return for their service, they were given free accommodation in Puri during the festival. The Kalaberiyas considered this service as a family privilege inheritance. Now the system has been discontinued, and the ropes are pulled mostly by police officers.

Jagannatha's chariot stops at Mausima to take *podapitha* (a special sweet pancake made of cottage cheese cooked in deep and large pans). The popular local version says that Mausima ("aunt") is Sriya (the daughter of hunter Jara) who used to offer the same dish to Sabari Narayana (Nila Madhava). This Mausima temple stands at Balagandi or Sraddha Bali, the place where the river existed in ancient times before it was filled up with sand by king Kapilendradeva on the advice of Madhva Acharya who was visiting Puri at that time. Previously the chariots were made in two sets (for a total of 6) because the road from Jagannatha temple to Gundicha was cut in half by the Banki Malini and Saradha rivers. Here many Mathas of Puri still come forth to offer Panthi Bhoga.

Also, in this place we find Salabega's samadhi mandir. It is not certain exactly at what point in history the tradition of the *poda pitha* offerings at Mausima temple started. However, we can also consider the possibility that it was established as an alternative explanation about why Jagannatha's chariot always made a stop at Balagandhi. The two other explanations can be: a) the difficulty created by the different nature of the road soil at that point, and b) Jagannatha's love for Salabega.

Luckily, as it often happens with spiritual events, one explanation does not necessarily disproves the others. There can be several genuine layers of meanings to each event or teaching, and they can be understood and explained according to the realizations and level of knowledge and consciousness of each individual.

Salabega was a great saint and devotee of Jagannatha, but as he was born from a Muslim (who abducted his mother Lalita, a beautiful woman from the local brahmin community) the casteist brahmins of Puri gave him a very hard time, although his devotional songs are the most popular among all classes of people. Salabega was born on Radhastami day in 1592 (about 60 years after Chaitanya's disappearance) and lived in Cuttack during his early years. At the age of 15 he was called by his father (who was then the Subadar of Bengal) to fight with him against the Afghans who had rebelled against the Delhi sultanate, but in the battle he was seriously wounded and his father was killed. Lalita and a friendly *sadhu* named Bala Mukunda prayed Jagannatha for the boy's recovery, and although the infection had already been spreading from the wound, Salabega recovered.

However, he now had a deep faith in Jagannatha, and as an apostate to Islam he was deprived of all paternal rights and had to escape for his life. Arrived in Puri, he found that he was not allowed to get the *darshana* of Jagannatha, and no Matha would give him shelter; so he built a small hut made of palm leaves for himself and his mother at Balagandi. At the next Ratha yatra, the people were shocked to see that the 3 chariots stopped just in front of Salabega's hut while he was singing his famous prayers. The chariots did not budge for more than one hour, until the priests humbly prayed Salabega to help; he pulled the ropes and the chariots started to roll again.

The simple palm leaf hut was replaced by a permanent housing by permission of king Narasimha Deva, after Salabega saved the Jagannatha temple from the attack of Mirja Ahmed Bed, Subadar of Cuttack - he went to meet him and pleaded until he convinced him. Still many envious brahmins continued to hate Salabega and make his life as hard as possible, so when his mother died, he was refused admittance to Svargadvara, the cremation grounds on the ocean beach where the Hindu carry their dead for the funeral rites. Also, the brahmins physically attacked Salabega's house and tried to destroy it, to show their spite and hatred for what they considered an act of presumption and arrogance from Salabega's part.

Distressed, Salabega left Puri and moved to Vrindavana, but the situation there was not much better. In that period Vrindavana came under the attack of Aurangzeb who had set out to destroy all the temples there, so after some time Salabega decided to return to Orissa; he planned to arrive in Puri in time for the Ratha Yatra. During his journey he fell ill and became worried about not making it in time for the festival, so he ardently prayed Jagannatha to wait for him. It was the year 1489.

Meanwhile the Ratha Yatra festival started but after reaching Balagandi, in front of today's Salabega's Matha, Jagannatha's chariot stopped and it was impossible to move it, in spite of many auspicious ceremonies such as fire sacrifices, *kirtanas*, and all physical efforts including the strength of the largest elephants that were harnessed to pull it. Instead, a great flood came up and the chariots were totally blocked for three months. The chariot finally moved only when Salabega arrived in Puri and came to offer his homage to Jagannatha on his chariot. King Narasimha was now strongly convinced of the special favor of Jagannatha for Salabega and he ordered that he should be allowed to enter the temple, but the priests refused to comply. For Salabega, however, Jagannatha's affection was sufficient and he remained in Puri for the rest of his life. He passed away in 1646, and his body turned miraculously into a heap of fragrant flowers. Some of Salabega's songs are transliterated and translated in our book "*Puri, the Home of Lord Jagannatha*".

The journey of the chariots along Grand Road is the peak moment of the festival, with the religious sentiments surging in the crowds that welcome the approaching Deities from the road as well as from all the buildings along it. During the Ratha Yatra day devotees climb practically on every roof and balcony, and crowd all windows and shops. House owners and shopkeepers also make some extra money by renting space and chairs from which pilgrims can watch the procession.

Groups of *sadhus* and devotees sing and dance in the road, sometimes carrying the picture of their *gurus* or other sacred symbols such as banners with *mantras*, potted *tulasi* plants, and sometimes even small Deities. Sometimes devotees, especially with children, bring miniature chariots to the festival and perform miniature Yatras in areas that are relatively free from crowds.

From time to time, devotees and pilgrims take turns in joining the police force in pulling the ropes of the chariots. Finally the chariots reach the temple of Gundicha; if they cannot reach the destination by the evening of the same day, the chariots stop at whatever place they have reached and spend the night there. *Darshana* goes on continuously until late at night and many people climb on the chariots to go and embrace the Deities. Then the next morning the chariots start again and travel until they reach Gundicha.

In front of Gundicha a *mahasnana* (a special bathing ceremony) is performed by *puja pandas*, then the Deities are dressed in *vairani* cloth and offered, with a worship ceremony with 16 *upacharas*, a lunch of dry food that has been cooked in the kitchen of Gundicha. *Madhyana dhupa* (midday lunch) is followed by all the usual rituals such as

sandhya arati, *sandhya dhupa*, *chandana lagi* and *bada shringara*, all of which take place on the chariots.

Then after *badashringara* (the dressing of the Deities with the best outfit of the day) the *palia pushpalakas* cover the Deities with the *srimumkha khandua* and leave the chariots. The *paharabalas* (security guards) tie a curtain around the *simhasana* of each chariot. In ancient times all the *sevakas* and devotees used to spend the night around the chariots, but this tradition has been discontinued and only policemen stand guard to the chariots during the night.

The next day all the rituals starting from *mangala arati* till *sandhya dhupa* take place on the chariots. Finally the Deities enter the Gundicha Ghara in the quicker *pahandi* procession called *goti pahandi* - Sudarshana, Baladeva, Subhadra and Jagannatha, accompanied by the sound of the *vijayakahali*, the “trumpet of victory”. The *mahajanas* carry Madana Mohana and Rama Krishna and place them on a throne in the store house in Gundicha, called Bhandara Ghara. This ceremony is called Adapa Vijaya, just like the return into Jagannatha temple is called Niladri Vijaya.

After the change of dress the Dayitas unfasten the large Deities from the seats on the chariots and carry them down. The Chamu Khuntia calls the Lord, “*Manima! Manima!*” and the *pujaris* present garlands, *chandana* and refreshments. The worship continues with offering of incense, camphor lamp, 7 wicks lamps, *durba* grass with raw rice, sweet betel and other articles, then the Deities enter Gundicha and are offered *panthi bhoga* on their way into the Adapa Mandapa.

On Hera Panchami, the 5th day from the beginning of the Ratha yatra (the 6th day of the moon), the festival of Lakshmi Vijaya ("the victory of Lakshmi") is celebrated. On this day, Lakshmi - who is the wife of Jagannatha and stayed back home for Ratha yatra - gets angry because of Jagannatha's delay in returning, and goes to search for him, carried on palanquin and accompanied by her servants. In old times, the Maharis played a central role in this festival as personal servants of Lakshmi, and engaged in a mock fight with the male *sevakas* of the temple, representing the personal servants of Jagannatha.

Lakshmi's party wins the fight: the servants of Jagannatha are beaten and tied up (playfully), and some symbolic damage is done to Balabhadra's chariot (usually one plank is cracked), as Lakshmi considers Balabhadra responsible for delaying the return of Jagannatha to his home. Then the Deity of Lakshmi returns to the Sri Mandira through

the road named Hera Gohiri Sahi, and the chariots at Gundicha are moved to the position to be ready for the return journey (called Bahuda, on Dasami or the 10th day of the moon).

The next three days are particularly sweet as the Deities take leave from their devotees. The *chalanti pratima* Madana Mohana goes out into the pavilion every day to meet the devotees, and on the last evening a great crowd participates to the Navami *sandhya darshana* (the evening audience of the 9th day of the moon). The next morning the Deities leave Gundicha and board the chariots again, with the simpler procession called Dhadi Pahandi. As on the Ratha yatra day, the Deities are decorated with elaborate head gears and the King arrives to ceremonially sweep the chariots before the journey starts.

When Balabhadra's chariot arrives at Badasankha, Subhadra's chariot starts, and both reach the lions' gate of the Sri Mandira, while Jagannatha's chariot again stops at Mausima/ Salabega's place and then at the Sri Nahara (the King's palace in Grand Road) where Lakshmi Devi arrives to greet Jagannatha.

By evening all the 3 chariots are parked outside the main gate of the Jagannatha temple, but the Deities remain outside for 3 more days. The Deities are offered a special drink called *adhara pana bhoga* - made with milk, fresh cottage cheese, bananas, coconut, sugar, and sweet spices. Then the 3 huge clay cups are broken, and the *prasadam* drips over the chariots to bless all the spirits that traveled with the Deities.

The next day, Ekadasi, the Deities are elaborately dressed with the Sona Vesa ("golden dress", where *suna* is the Oriya contraction of the Sanskrit *suvarna*, "gold") flaunting huge ornaments of solid gold, including *sri hasta* (hands), *sri payar* (feet), *sri sankha*, *sri chakra*, *sri gada*, *sri padma* (conchshell, disc, club and lotus - the symbols or weapons of Jagannatha), *sri hala* and *sri mushala* (plow and club, the weapons of Balabhadra). There are also several others gold ornaments, such as *srimukuta* (crown), *sri mayura chandrika* (golden peacock feather), *sri chula pati* (a golden ornament for the forehead), *sri kundala* (earrings), *sri rahu rekha* (the half square aura around the face), *sri malas* (necklaces of different designs, like the flowers *padma*, *sevati*, *agasti*, *parijata*, *kadamba*, *kanti*, *champa* and peacock feathers), and *sri chitta* (head ornament made with gold and diamonds that represents the third eye). This *darshana* lasts all day and a good part of the night, and it is very popular among the people of Orissa, who travel from all the corners of the State in huge numbers to see the Deities (and their gold as well).

Finally on the next evening - Dvadasi - the Deities are carried back into the temple with the Goti Pahandi procession, accompanied by musical instruments and a display of fireworks (likely, a modern addition). One last dramatic enactment is done when Lakshmi Devi orders her Mahari servants to close the temple doors while Jagannatha climbs down the chariot to enter the temple, where Balabhadra and Subhadra have already settled back. In this way, Lakshmi is expressing her dissatisfaction for having been left behind for so many days. Another mock fight ensues between the Maharis and the temple *sevakas*, and finally Jagannatha pacifies Lakshmi with some gifts - a gold necklace and a package of *rasagullas* (cottage cheese sweets).

Of course since there are no more Maharis in Puri, the re-enactment of this *lila* (as for the many other performances on the occasion of other festivals during the year) is not the same as it used to be in the past.

The prayers of Chaitanya to Jagannatha

Chaitanya had organized his followers in four main groups, and in each group there were 6 singers and 2 *mridanga* players. Svarupa Damodara was the leader of the first group and was accompanied by Damodara Pandita, Narayana, Govinda Datta, Raghava Pandita and Govindananda.

Chaitanya himself danced in this group. The second group leader was Srivasa, accompanied by Gangadasa, Haridasa, Sriman, Subhananda and Sri Rama Pandita: Nityananda danced in this group. The third group leader was Mukunda, joined by Vasudeva, Gopinatha, Murari, Srikanta and Vallabha Sena, with Haridasa Thakura dancing. The fourth group leader was Govinda Ghosha, accompanied by Chota Haridasa, Vishnudasa, Raghava, as well as Madhava and Vasudeva Ghosha, with Vakresvara Pandita as the dancer. Another group composed by the devotees from Navadvipa had Ramananda and Satyaraja dancing; the group from Shantipura was directed by Advaita and Acyutananda was the dancer. Two additional groups were formed, one of which was composed by the residents of Khanda. In all, there were 7 *sankirtana* groups all surrounding Chaitanya.

Chaitanya himself started to recite verses in praise of Krishna:

*namo brahmanya devaya, go brahmana hitaya cha
jagad hitaya krishnaya, govindaya namo namah*

"I offer my respect to Krishna, Govinda. He is the Lord of the *brahmanas*, who is benevolent towards the cows and the *brahmanas*, and always acts for the benefit of all."
(*Vishnu purana* 1.19.65)

*jayati jayati devo devaki-nandano 'sau
jayati jayati krishno vrishni vamsa pradipah
jayati jayati megha shyamalah komalango
jayati jayati prithvi bhara naso mukundah*

"Glory and victory to the Lord, the son of Devaki, the light of the Vrishni dynasty, who destroys the burden of the Earth and gives liberation." (verse 2 of the *Mukunda mala stotra* by King Kulashekhara)

*jayati jana nivaso devaki janma vado
yadu vara parishat svair dorbhir asyann adharmam
sthira chara vrijina ghnah susmita sri mukhena
vraja pura vanitanam vardhayan kama devam*

"Glory and victory to the Lord, who lives among the people as the son of Devaki (the son of Devaki and the shelter for all people), who kills *adharmam* through the agency of his companions in the Yadu dynasty and by his own arms. He destroys the misfortune of all beings, and his beautiful face, always smiling, increases the desires of the girls of Vrindavana." (*Bhagavata purana* 10.90.48)

*naham vipro na cha nara patir napi vaisyo na sudro
naham varni na cha griha patir no vanastho yatir va
kintu prodyan nikhila paramananda purnamritabdher
gopi bhartuh pada kamalayor dasa dasa anudasa*

"I am not a *brahmana*, I am not a *kshatriya*, or a *vaisya* or even a *sudra*. I am not a *brahmachari*, a *grihastha*, a *vanaprastha* or a *sannyasi*. Rather, I am the servant of the servant of the servant of the lotus feet of the Lord of the *gopis*, the full ocean of nectar, the supreme happiness, the radiance of the universe."

The devotees also offered their prayers, and then the *sankirtan* started again. Chaitanya danced and jumped high, roaring "like a thunder" and moving in a circle like a firebrand, exhibiting dramatic symptoms of ecstasy. Around him, the devotees formed three concentric circles to protect him from the thick crowd, and Advaita moved around shouting, *hari bol* ("chant the Name of Hari"). Chaitanya ordered Svarupa Damodara to sing, and he obliged with a Bengali verse: "I have obtained the Lord of my life, for whom I have been burning in the fire of love, that made my heart dry."

Dancing in ecstasy, Chaitanya replied with another verse in Sanskrit:

*yah kaumara harah sa eva hi varas ta eva chaitra ksapas
te chonmilita malati subhayah praudhah kadambanilah
sa chaivasmi tathapi tatra surata vyapara lila vidhau
reva rodhasi vetasi taru tale cheta samutkanthate*

"He who stole my heart in my youth is once again in front of my eyes as my lord and master. These are the same moonlight nights of the month of Chaitra, the same fragrance of the *malati* flowers, and the same sweet breeze from the *kadamba* forests. I am also the same person who played with him in joyful and ecstatic love. Yet my mind longs to be back there, to that place on the bank of the Reva, under the *vetasi* tree." (*Chaitanya charitamrita*, *Madhya* 1.59, and *Padyavali* of Rupa Gosvami, 386).

Radha sees Krishna in his kingly dress, on his majestic chariot, accompanied by his brother Balarama, sister Subhadra and large crowds of people. However, her undiminished love and attachment for Krishna cannot be fulfilled completely because of the lack of privacy and intimacy. Chaitanya kept repeating this prayer again and again. Later, Rupa Gosvami explained this verse by writing a similar, but more explicit one (*CC Madhya* 1.76): "O my friend! This is my beloved Krishna I see here at Kurukshetra, and I am that same Radha, and we are meeting again with great joy. Yet, my mind longs for the forest on the bank of the Yamuna, where the flute of Krishna resounded so sweetly." Chaitanya was swimming in the ecstatic mood of Radha when she sees Krishna at Kurukshetra on the occasion of the eclipse, reciting the prayers that the *gopis* offered to Krishna in Vrindavana, that he so often chanted in his meditation. Chaitanya was coaxing Jagannatha to Vrindavana, calling "*Manima! Manima!*" ("O Lord!") and singing the famous couplet from Adi Shankara's *Jagannathashtakam*: *jagannatha svami nayana patha gami bhavatu me* ("O Lord of the universe, kindly become manifested to my eyes").

After walking around Jagannatha's chariot as a mark of respect, Chaitanya touched his head to the back of the chariot and started to push it, then when the chariot rolled on, he moved to the front with his companions and started to dance. At Balagandi, Jagannatha's chariot stopped to receive the food offered by his devotees, from the King to the last subject. While Jagannatha accepted the offerings, Chaitanya entered the Jagannatha vallabha garden nearby and lied down to rest. At that time, Chaitanya's companions encouraged king Prataparudra to approach him.

The meeting with King Prataparudra

For a long time Chaitanya had refused to meet king Prataparudra directly as he insisted that *sannyasis* should never have any contact with kings, politicians or materially powerful persons, because such association is extremely dangerous: Chaitanya compared it to “pure poison”. This is another very important point to remember, as it easily disproves the theory by which Chaitanya's *bhakti* movement would be responsible for the weakening of the Hindu society by influencing the rulers to absenteeism and neglect of the government, to engage instead in inner meditation about the pastimes of Radha and Krishna in Vrindavana. The truth is quite different. Chaitanya and his followers were always very careful not to have contacts with people who held high positions in the government, and certainly never gave kings or generals any instructions about their jobs.

Not only Chaitanya did not want to have any contact with Prataparudra in his position of king, but even later on, Chaitanya strongly refused to get involved in any kind of politics, to the point of abstaining to intercede when Prataparudra sentenced to death Chaitanya's follower Gopinatha Raya, the brother of Ramananda Raya, for misappropriation of government funds - something that certainly had not been done on the instructions of Chaitanya. On that occasion, Chaitanya became irritated and said that if he had to be dragged into politics, he was ready to leave Puri.

The sons of Bhavananda Pattanayaka were engaged in government service, as Gopinatha Raya was the governor of Midnapore and Ramananda Raya had been governor of Rajahmundry. Ramananda left his government position after meeting Chaitanya and

retired to a solely spiritual life, while his brother continued to work in the government. Of course Ramananda's place as governor was taken up by someone else, duly appointed by the king.

The narration from the *Chaitanya charitamrita* shows that Chaitanya was appreciated for his spiritual greatness, but he never became entangled in state business in any way. On his part, Prataparudra never gave up his kingly duties or military campaigns to engage in spiritual meditation. As we will see from the section about the historical context of Chaitanya's life, he continued to behave, in the matter of state, exactly as he had done before. His admiration for Chaitanya had no effects on his government principles and policies.

If anything, we could say that the opposite was true: if he had applied some more of Chaitanya's spirit in his policies, beginning with his own family and ministers, and not forgetting to keep better relationships with the other Hindu kingdoms, probably the history of Orissa would have been happier. For example, while Prataparudra was south fighting *against* the Hindu king of Vijayanagara, Orissa was invaded by Hussein Shah (Alauddin Abul Muzaffar) and his general Gaji Ismail, who destroyed many temples and arrived even in Puri, so much that the temple priests had to flee from a secret passage from the Lokanath temple, carrying the Deities with them to be hidden in a cave on an island within the lake Chilika.

But the trouble was not over: while the king rushed back to try to save Puri, his minister Govinda Vidyadhara usurped the throne for himself. Prataparudra had to compromise, giving Govinda Vidyadhara so much extra power that practically he made him the owner of the kingdom, while he himself returned to fight against another Hindu, general Krishna Deva Ray, who was at the service of the sultan of Bengal and had raised a huge army, consisting of 800 elephants and 34,000 foot soldiers. The series of defeats suffered by Prataparudra were not due to his (or other people's) devotional meditation on Radha Krishna, but to the fact that his army had less than 1/3 of foot soldiers, only 400 horsemen and no elephants, because he had weakened his forces by fighting against the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagara - again, certainly not on Chaitanya's order or based on religious motivations.

For a long time Prataparudra contented himself of observing Chaitanya from a distance. Sarvabhauma has assured him that he would be able to approach him at a favorable time if he was wearing plain clothes like any ordinary person. In his eagerness to win

Chaitanya's favor, Prataparudra showed great respect and humility also towards Chaitanya's associates. During the Ratha yatra celebrations, Prataparudra was watching Chaitanya dancing ecstatically at the Ratha yatra. Srivasa Pandita was standing in front of them, and Prataparudra's minister Harichandan repeatedly tried to push Srivasa aside, telling him that the King wanted to see Chaitanya. Finally Srivasa lost his patience and slapped him. When Harichandan became offended and angry, Prataparudra told him that he should instead be grateful for having been blessed by a personal associate of Chaitanya. When finally the King was able to come nearer, Chaitanya was dancing for Jagannatha and exhibited his wonderful ecstatic symptoms; completely lost in his ecstasy, he was covered in tears, mucus, drool and dust as he cried in his emotions and rolled uncontrollably on the ground. It was not a pretty sight, materially speaking.

It is said that the same night Prataparudra had a dream where Jagannatha appeared to him similarly covered in drool and dust, and scolded Prataparudra for having given a material judgment about Chaitanya. Then suddenly Prataparudra saw in his dream Jagannatha disappear from his throne, and in his place he saw Chaitanya dressed in the Deities' clothes and ornaments.

About the venue of the meeting proper, the *Chaitanya charitamrita* mentions the garden in Gundicha (which would be Aitota, where the Sri Krishna Chaitanya mission now stands), while the *Chaitanya bhagavata* speaks of the Jagannatha Vallabha garden (where Ramananda Raya had his Matha), that is half way between the Jagannatha temple and Gundicha. As with the other instances of differing versions, the meaning of the events is not affected in a serious way.

Paramananda Puri, Sarvabhauma and Ramananda suggested that the King should wear plain clothes as any ordinary person, and quietly approach Chaitanya while he rested. Then he should recite some verses from the *Gopi gita* in the 10th canto of *Bhagavata purana* (chapter 31), starting from *tava kathamritam tapta jivanam* ("the nectar of the discussions about you are giving life to those who burn in the fire of sufferings in this world").

Chaitanya mangala says that Prataparudra had been fasting for 10 days in his anxiety to meet Chaitanya. It also says that Chaitanya clearly instructed the King, "Your duty is to look after your subjects, like a father takes care of his children. This is the most important thing. Krishna can be attained by everyone, so you should treat all living entities as servants of Krishna."

Prataparudra was blessed by Chaitanya, who acknowledged his humility and devotional sincerity. Filled with ecstasy, Chaitanya embraced Prataparudra, on a totally transcendental platform. A large quantity of *mahaprasada* was brought and all the devotees enjoyed a feast - fruit juice, coconuts, mangoes, jackfruits, bananas, palm fruit seeds, oranges, grapefruits, tangerines, papayas, pomegranates, almonds, raisins, dates, yogurt, milk, milk cream, condensed yogurt, and many varieties of sweets, such as *manohara laddus*, *sara puris*, *sara bhajas*, *hari vallabhas*, *senotis*, *maricha laddus*, *amriti jallebis*, *chandra kantis*, *khajas*, *tila khajas*, *kadmas*, sweet rice fritters, sugar candy and artistically shaped sugar creations looking like fruit trees. There were also savory preparations, such as *mung dal* sprouts with shredded ginger, and various types of pickles made with lemons and berries.

After the meal everyone returned to the chariots, but the chariots would not move on. The King arranged for very strong elephants to be harnessed to pull it, but Chaitanya gave the ropes to the devotees instead, and started to push the chariot from the back by using his head. The chariot moved and rolled on, and that also without effort from the devotees, who according to *Chaitanya charitamrita* simply carried the ropes.

Quickly the chariots reached Gundicha and the Deities were carried in; after all the rituals were completed, Chaitanya and his companions went to rest for the night in the Aitota garden just next to Gundicha. Chaitanya and his companions continued to visit the temple daily, perform *sankirtana* morning, noon and evening in the yard of Gundicha, bathe and play like children in the Indradyumna and Narendra sarovaras, and sit in the shade of the trees inside the compound, then go to take rest in Aitota and/ or Jagannatha vallabha. They also celebrated the Lakshmi vijaya festival with great opulence and happiness.

According to *Chaitanya charitamrita*, at that time the procession included hundreds of Devadasis carrying water pots, *chamaras* and boxes for betel nuts and other refreshments. The Devadasis captured Jagannatha's *sevakas*, tied them and threw them to the ground in front of Lakshmi Devi, insulting and teasing them.

Observing the ritual, Svarupa Damodara spoke about the different mentality of the *gopis* of Vrindavana, who manifest their pride and resentment in a different way, because they are totally surrendered to Krishna, although there is also a variety of behaviors and attitudes among the *gopis* - especially the restless and independent "left wing" as opposed to the submissive and sweet "right wing" *gopis*. The small love quarrels with the *gopis* actually give Krishna great pleasure, because they show their attachment for him.

Srivasa spoke up in the mood of Narada Muni, taking the side of Lakshmi Devi, and glorifying her opulence and power, that cannot be compared to the situation in Vrindavana, where the ornaments are simple, such as peacock feathers, flowers and seeds of the *gunja* plant. "Your *gopis* are busy boiling milk and churning butter," he said to Svarupa Damodara, "but my Lakshmi Devi sits on a throne made of gems."

Svarupa Damodara replied, "You have forgotten the opulence of Vrindavana: compared to it, Dvaraka and Vaikuntha are just a drop compared to an ocean. The soil there is more valuable than any jewel, and the people are perfectly happy. Their speech is music, their movements are dance, the water is nectar, the trees are *kalpa vrikshas*, and Krishna plays the flute." He started to sing and Chaitanya danced, while Srivasa entered the mood of Krishna's cowherd friends.

On the return *yatra*, one of the ropes holding Jagannatha snapped and Chaitanya instructed two of his companions - Satyaraja Khan and Ramananda Vasu - to supply stronger silken ropes for the next festival. He also stated that one should meditate on those ropes as a manifestation of Ananta Sesha, that expands in 10 different forms to serve Jagannatha.

Chaitanya's companions remained in Puri for the entire monsoon season, so they celebrated Janmastami (Krishna's birthday) together. At that time they all dressed like cowherd boys, carrying pots of milk and yogurt and chanting the holy Names, and re-enacted the Vrindavana lila. One devotee dressed as Nanda, another as Yasoda, and Chaitanya himself played Krishna and whirled a staff, throwing it up and catching it again, like the cowherd boys use to do. The temple superintendent, Tulasi Pariccha, brought some of the used clothes from Jagannatha and tied them as turbans around the heads of Chaitanya and his main associates, and the devotees playing Krishna's parents in Vrindavana actually distributed much of their personal wealth in charity on that day to bring auspiciousness to the celebration.

After Janmastami came Vijaya dasami, the day celebrating Rama's victory against Ravana. Chaitanya manifested the mood of Hanuman and went around looking for his Ramachandra and for the battle against the Rakshasas. Chaitanya and his companions also participated to the festivals of Rasa yatra (on Kartika Purnima), Dipavali (or Divali, the lamp festival) and Utthana Dvadasi (the day when Vishnu gets up in the abode of the Devas - where 1 complete day equals 1 complete year of people on the Earth).

Finally Chaitanya asked the devotees to return to Bengal, saying that they could come to Puri every year for the Gundicha marjana festival and the Ratha yatra. Also, he would be traveling to Bengal himself after some time.

Nityananda was appointed as the leader of the Sankirtana movement in Bengal, with several personal assistants such as Rama Dasa, Gadadhara Dasa, Raghunatha Vaidya, Krishnadasa Pandita, Paramesvara Dasa and Purandara Pandita. More about Nityananda's preaching mission will be discussed later in the book.

The devotees return to Bengal

Chaitanya gave the devotees one of his clothes and some Jagannatha *mahaprasada* for Mother Saci, as well as an affectionate message for her. "Please forgive my offenses. I should not have accepted the life of a *sannyasi*, because it was my duty to take care of my mother out of gratitude for everything she had done for me. It was a mistake to take *sannyasa*, but I was crazy. I am staying at Puri to follow your orders, but at times I am coming to see you, and you have felt my presence although your intellect does not easily accept this fact."

He added that on Vijaya dasami Mother Saci had cooked a special offering for the Salagrama form of Vishnu that was the family Deity. "She had prepared the *sali* variety of rice, spinach, banana flowers, fried *patola* with *nim* leaves, yogurt, milk, and many other dishes. Taking the plate on her lap, she was crying, remembering that such foods were all my favorite, and wishing that I was there to eat the *prasada*. I went there immediately and ate everything, leaving the plate empty. She was confused and went into the kitchen, finding the pots still full, and so she repeated the offering to the Deity. Tell her that her love called me there in person and I really ate the food," said Chaitanya, "and I will do so again".

Then he embraced Raghava Pandita and glorified him for his pure service to the Deity, especially in procuring the best coconuts and offering them in perfect cleanliness, and revealing that sometimes Krishna was drinking that coconut water. "He collects first class

fruits even from distant villages, then prepares pickles, rice, spinach and other vegetables, pancakes, condensed milk and sweets, all excellent and delicious. Also he worships Krishna with beautiful clothes and ornaments."

He called Shivananda Sena and asked him to take care of his neighbor Vasudeva Datta, who was not very good at managing finances: he immediately spent all his income, and that was not acceptable for a family man. He also asked Sivananda to personally take care of all the devotees from Bengal when they traveled to Puri for the Ratha yatra. The residents of Kulina grama - the home village of Gunaraja Khan, the first vernacular devotional poet of Bengal, author of *Sri Krishna vijaya* - were reminded about their task of bringing silken rope for Jagannatha.

Ramananda Vasu and Satyaraja Khan decided to take advantage of that rare opportunity of personal audience with Chaitanya and asked for instructions on their devotional service. "Remain dutifully engaged in your family life and social occupation," Chaitanya replied. "Always chant the holy Names, worship Krishna and serve the *vaishnavas*."

Satyaraja asked, "How can I tell who is a *vaishnava*?"

"One who faithfully chants the name of Krishna, even if only once, is worthy of veneration. Chanting the name of Krishna even once destroys all previous mistakes and material attachments. It constitutes the perfection of all the nine activities of *bhakti* because the attraction for Krishna is awakened. The name of Krishna is easily available to everyone, so everyone can be a *vaishnava* by chanting Krishna's name, and you should offer your respect to everyone."

On subsequent occasions, Chaitanya added further elaborations on the concept, stating that a *vaishnava* is one who always chants the holy Name, and then that a *vaishnava* is one whose presence inspires others to chant the holy Name as well. *Chaitanya bhagavata* reports a similar episode (or maybe it is the same episode) but in a different point in time, specifically when Chaitanya spends 10 days in the house of Advaita Acharya in Shantipura during his journey. In that version, the question is presented by a *brahmana* (unnamed) as follows: "Who is a *vaishnava* in Kali yuga?". Chaitanya replied, "One who chants the holy Names and performs his duties properly".

Let us return now to the version of *Chaitanya charitamrita*. The devotees were preparing for their return journey to Bengal, and cherished their last moments with Chaitanya before their separation from him. Chaitanya highlighted the glories of the devotees -

Mukunda Dasa and his son Raghunandana, and Narahari, who lived in Khanda. Mukunda caught the opportunity and offered his respect to his own son for his greater devotion, that had inspired the rest of his family. Chaitanya then spoke about Mukunda Dasa, who worked as a physician for the Muslim king. One day, while he was sitting with the king, Mukunda saw a fan made with peacock feathers, and remembering Krishna, he was overcome by ecstatic emotions: he excused himself by saying he was suffering from epilepsy. His son Raghunananda was engaged full time in worshipping Krishna in the temple.

To Narahari (who later became the *guru* of Lochana Dasa, the author of *Chaitanya mangala*) he gave the order of staying in Puri with him. Speaking about Murari Gupta, Chaitanya praised his devotion for Rama, that he had tested one day by instructing him about the superiority of Krishna. Vasudeva Datta's deep generosity was also praised. He was ready to take upon himself all the reactions of all the conditioned souls, so that they could achieve liberation. Moved by Vasudeva Datta's prayer, Chaitanya replied, "Krishna is perfectly capable of delivering everybody without taking any karmic payment from you. There are millions of universes floating on the Karanodaka ocean - also called Viraja river. Krishna can easily liberate one of such universes and make it vacant: it is not a big thing for him."

Gadadhara Pandira remained in Puri and was given a residence at Yamesvara tota, a small garden near the temple of Shiva Yamesvara, and later the temple of Tota Gopinatha was built. Haridasa also stayed in the garden that is now known as Siddha Bakula. The other devotees that stayed in Puri with Chaitanya were Paramananda Puri, Svarupa Damodara, Govinda, Damodara Pandita, Jagadananda and Kasisvara.

After the departure of the devotees to Bengal, Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya asked Chaitanya for lunch to his house for one entire month. However, since a *sannyasi* cannot cook for himself or take meals in the same place for many days, Chaitanya refused. Sarvabhauma bargained and finally obtained 5 days with Chaitanya and some more days with his 10 *sannyasi* companions - Paramananda Puri for 5 days, Svarupa Damodara for 4 days, and the 8 other *sannyasis* for 2 days each. Sarvabhauma had a new special room built for Chaitanya's meals, and personally prepared the food together with his wife, who was a very good cook. The meal consisted of almost 3 kg of rice stacked on a large banana leaf and seasoned with fragrant clarified butter, accompanied by a great number of containers made with banana tree bark containing a variety of vegetables - 10 varieties

of *sak* (spinach), *sukta* (soup flavored with *nim* leaves), cottage cheese pancakes, *dal* fritters in buttermilk sauce, pumpkin cooked in milk, boiled banana flowers, fried eggplants and *patola*, and many other vegetables, soups made with different legumes, *chatni*, 6 types of pickles, fried legume pancakes, sweet pancakes made with rice and coconut, rice pudding, mango pudding with condensed milk, and many other preparations. Sarvabhauma also provided several types of Jagannatha *mahaprasada*, such as pancakes and sweet rice.

Chaitanya was amazed by the quantity and quality of the food, and Sarvabhauma replied happily that in the form of Jagannatha, Chaitanya was normally eating every day 52 different types of preparations. In Dvaraka he was served meals regularly in 16,000 palaces simultaneously, and offered food often by many friends and relatives. In Vrindavana besides Yasoda and Nanda and all their many relatives, there were many other families where Krishna would take food regularly twice a day. While Sarvabhauma was talking with Chaitanya about the food, Sarvabhauma's son in law Amogha (husband of Sathi) came up with some negative comments about that quantity of the food, that would have been sufficient for 12 men, but was being devoured by a renunciate.

Sarvabhauma immediately became very angry and chased the young man around with a stick, cursing him and calling him bad names; Amogha escaped, but the very next day he became sick with cholera. Chaitanya was informed by Gopinatha Acharya that both Sarvabhauma and his wife were fasting due to the anxiety for the offense committed by their son in law, and that Amogha himself was dying of cholera. Immediately Chaitanya ran to see Amogha to offer his forgiveness and to heal him, and under this touch Amogha was purified materially and spiritually, and started to chant the holy Names in a devotional sentiment. Then Chaitanya went to Sarvabhauma's house and comforted him and his wife.

Chaitanya travels to Bengal

Chaitanya had arrived in Puri in April 1510, at the age of 24, and about 2 months later had left for his south Indian tour. Returning to Puri 2 years later, around May-June 1512, he had been joined by his devotees from Bengal, and with then he had participated to

various festivals until the end of the rainy season. Then he had sent back Nityananda and his other companions to Bengal, with a few exceptions.

The next year, Chaitanya expressed his desire to travel to Vrindavana, but king Prataparudra became very sad about the idea of this journey. So he asked the help of Sarvabhauma and Ramananda to convince Chaitanya to postpone the program, first after Ratha yatra, then after Kartika, then after the winter, and so on.

On the 3rd year (1514) all the devotees from Bengal returned, accompanied by their wives and children. They were greeted as usual and spent the four months of the rainy season in Puri, but at the time of their departure, Chaitanya requested Nityananda not to leave Bengal any more. On the other hand, Pundarika Vidyanidhi remained in Puri to stay with Svarupa Damodara, and performed the *diksha* (initiation) ceremony for Gadadhara Pandita. During this period the *sevakas* of Jagannatha observed the festival of Odana sasthi, offering warm clothes to the Deities at the beginning of winter. Usually these clothes are washed to eliminate the starch before being offered to the Deities, but that year the *sevakas* skipped the step and the clothes looked very stiff. Pundarika Vidyanidhi noticed the defect in the worship system, and became angry and offensive in his mind against the temple *sevakas*, expressing his criticism to Svarupa Damodara, that was his close friend. That night, Jagannatha and Balabhadra appeared in a dream and laughingly started to slap him left and right; however Pundarika was happy because he had received the direct vision of Jagannatha.

On the 5th year (1516) the devotees from Bengal only came for Ratha yatra and left after the festival. Then Chaitanya called Sarvabhauma and Ramananda and told them, "I want to see my mother and the Ganga river in Bengal, and then proceed towards Vrindavana. Please give me permission to go."

The journey was arranged for Vijaya Dasami celebrating the victory of Ramachandra (the 10th day of the moon, at the end of the rainy season) while king Prataparudra was south waging war against the kingdom of Vijayanagara. At that time Chaitanya was 28 years old.

Chaitanya collected *mahaprasada* from Jagannatha and asked the Oriya devotees not to follow him. Gadadhara Pandita wanted to go with Chaitanya, but he was reminded of his vow of *kshetra sannyasa*, that consists in staying only in a particular holy place, without ever leaving it. This particular vow is considered equal to the order of *sannyasa*, but it

dispenses with all the rules of complete renunciation and austerity that are so difficult to follow in Kali yuga - one can also take *kshetra sannyasa* while living with his family. Gadadhara Pandita became very sad and replied, "Wherever you are is Puri. Your presence is everything to me, even more than my vows." Then Chaitanya reminded him of the Deity of Gopinatha, that he had been worshiping regularly, but Gadadhara was undaunted. "Simply seeing you is for me more important than serving Gopinatha. Also, I will not be a disturbance: I will simply follow after you."

Chaitanya first traveled to Bhavanipura, then to Bhuvanesvara and to Cuttack, where he was invited for lunch by a *brahmana* named Svapnesvara and then met king Prataparudra (as Cuttack was then the capital of the kingdom). Touched by Chaitanya's kindness to him, the king made extraordinary arrangements for Chaitanya's journey, ordering the immediate construction of accommodation and food storage along the route, and appointed two officers, Harichandana and Mardaraja, to oversee the work and direct the servants, prepare the boats for crossing the rivers and so on. In the end, all the ladies of the palace lined up in palanquins carried by elephants and gave a really royal farewell to Chaitanya and his traveling companions when they left that evening. After crossing the river, they kept walking in the moonlight to the city of Chaturdvvara, where the *prasadam* reached just before them.

Ramananda, Harichandana and Mardaraja traveled with Chaitanya and made sure that all the arrangements worked properly. Also traveling in the group were Svarupa Damodara, Govinda, Paramananda Puri, Jagadananda, Mukunda, Haridasa, Vakresvara Pandita, Gopinatha Acharya, Damodara Pandita, Ramai, Nandai, and others. Gadadhara Pandita followed the group up to Cuttack, when Chaitanya called him to join the group, but only to scold him for having broken his vows. "You want to come with me simply because you want to please yourself, and this makes me very unhappy," Chaitanya told him. "If you want to make me happy, return to Puri without further discussions."

At those words, Gadadhara fainted, and Chaitanya entrusted him to Sarvabhauma, who had also come to accompany him to the border of Orissa. The two government officers - Harichandra and Mardaraja - were also sent back when the group arrived in Jajpur. At Remuna, Chaitanya ordered Ramananda to go back, too, and wept when Ramananda lost consciousness because of grief.

When Chaitanya reached the border of Orissa, he was warned by the government officers there about the dangers on the road ahead, as the territory was under strict Muslim

domination. A government spy actually sneaked into the camp and reported about the *sannyasi* from Jagannatha Puri traveling in the company of many great saints; he said they all chanted the Name of Krishna, dancing and crying. The spy himself demonstrated the chanting, and while doing so he was overwhelmed by devotional feelings, and started singing, laughing and crying like a madman.

The Muslim governor was intrigued and asked his higher officers - Visvasa and Mahapatra - to arrange a meeting with Chaitanya. The officers, too, came back immersed in the ecstasy of divine love. The Muslim governor dressed himself as a Hindu and accompanied by a small group of unarmed servants, went to see Chaitanya; immediately he also started to chant the Names of Krishna. The Mahapatra (who was a Hindu) was amazed and overjoyed by the turn of events, and offered many gifts to the governor and made friends with him. On his request, the governor sent several nice boats to ferry Chaitanya and his companions across the river that constituted the border of Orissa, and personally accompanied them with 10 more boats full of soldiers for protection against the marauders. They finally arrived in Panihati, where they left the boats.

A great crowd had assembled along the way, and it was not easy to reach the home of Raghava Pandita. After staying there for one day, Chaitanya went to Kumarahatta to see Srivasa, as Srivasa had moved there from Navadvipa because of his feelings of separations. Then Chaitanya went to Sivananda Sena's house, where he stayed for two days, then he went to see his neighbor Vasudeva Datta and then to Vidyanagara, on the west side of Navadvipa. On one of Navadvipa's islands, Koladvipa (Kuliya grama, "the village of the caste brahmins") he went to the house of Madhava Dasa Chattopadhyaya, where he stayed for one week. Here it is said that Haridasa came to offer his respects to him - but it was certainly not the Haridasa that was traveling with Chaitanya's group: it was Madhava Dasa's younger brother, son of Yudhisthira Chattopadhyaya.

There is some disagreement about Chaitanya's movements here among his biographies - *Chaitanya bhagavata*, *Chaitanya mangala*, *Chaitanya chandrodaya nataka* and *Chaitanya charita kavya*. So it is not very clear whether Chaitanya went to the house of Advaita Acharya before entering Navadvipa, or when exactly he went to the house of Sri Vidya Vachaspati, Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya's brother. Some sources say that from the house of Advaita Acharya in Shantipura, Chaitanya went to Ramakeli where he met Rupa and Sanatana, then known as Dabir Khas and Sakara Mallik. Then he went to Kanai Natasala, and returned to Shantipura for 10 days.

It was on this occasion, probably, that we can pin the "grand cooking" demonstrated by Advaita Acharya at least in two instances. *Chaitanya bhagavata* says that Advaita wanted to invite Chaitanya for lunch, but he wanted to have him alone so he could give him more and better food to eat; therefore while Chaitanya was in his house, Advaita called for a big storm that kept everybody away until the meal was over. Advaita and his wife Sita cooked a wonderful feast, with many varieties of *sak* and other vegetables, yogurt, milk, *rabri* and sweets. Vrindavana Dasa writes here, "the love between Chaitanya and Advaita is like the love between Hari and Shankara" - a blissful opportunity for the devotees to sample the power of devotional service demonstrated by the greatest Personalities.

The second instance was the festival organized by Advaita in his house for all the devotees on the occasion of the appearance day of Madhavendra Puri (on Vaisakha purnima, that falls on the day after Nrisimha Chaturdasi). Mother Sachi cooked daily and all the devotees busied themselves making garlands and working at the roomfuls of *chida* (flat rice), *muri* (puffed rice), bananas and banana flowers, coconuts, sugarcane and *gur* (brown cane sugar), yams, potatoes, spinach, *patola*, and all kinds of milk products. Chaitanya thus commented: "Such manifestation of opulence cannot be the work of an ordinary *jiva*. Advaita must be Mahesha, Shiva, I am strongly convinced of that. This miracle is possible only for Mahadeva, so Advaita Acharya must be the incarnation of Shiva."

Chaitanya bhagavata adds: "The Lord smiled and kept repeating these words, thus revealing the actual spiritual identity of Advaita Acharya. One who is blessed by virtue will accept these statements of Chaitanya with great spiritual joy, but those nonbelievers who have no faith in the Lord's words will be confronted with Advaita himself as the terrible consuming fire of destruction. Although Advaita is very compassionate in nature and his shelter is cooling as the refreshing rays of millions of moons, he becomes the terrifying all-devouring death to those who have no faith."

Here a quote from *Bhagavata purana* (4.4.14) declares that if anyone utters Shiva's name, even without the proper understanding of the esoteric truth about Shiva, he will immediately be purified by all sins anyway. If a person disregards Shiva's Name and fails to feel happiness in hearing it, that wretch will certainly be thrown into an ocean of despair. Shiva's orders cannot be disobeyed. Shiva is a completely pure and transcendental Personality, and those who disrespect Shiva are the personification of misfortune. Krishna himself says that one cannot worship him without worshiping Shiva.

It is not possible to develop love for Krishna by disregarding Shiva, who is so dear to Krishna. Again *Skanda purana* teaches, “One should worship Krishna, the cause of all causes, and then worship the best of the *devas*, Shiva. Then one should worship all the other *devas* with great faith and devotion.”

According to the version of *Chaitanya bhagavata*, it seems that Chaitanya went directly from Puri to the house of Sri Vidya Vachaspati in Vidyanagara where he stayed for 5 days, then to Gauda and the city of Ramakeli that was on the way to Mathura; in this version the government spies were sent directly by the Nawab Hussein Shah to find out about the *sannyasi* that had arrived in town. The spies said that the *sannyasi* was a very strange person: he kept singing prayers to God in his language and falling to the ground, but he was never hurt. In this version, the Mahapatra described by *Chaitanya charitamrita* is named Keshava Chatri Khan and is one of the main advisors of the Nawab; he told the Nawab that Chaitanya seemed to be nothing more than an ordinary *fakir* saint, a *khuda*. He minimized Chaitanya's personal power because he was afraid that the Nawab would take too much interest in Chaitanya and his companions. He recommended that instead of proceeding towards Mathura, Chaitanya should return to Bengal as quickly as possible.

This was also the opinion of two other ministers of the Nawab, named Dabira Khas and Sakara Mallik, who were sent by the Nawab himself and first met Nityananda and Haridasa; in the presence of Srivasa, Gadadhara Pandita, Mukunda, Jagadananda, Murari and Vakresvara. When introduced to Chaitanya, they suggested him that a pilgrimage to Vrindavana should be done in a quiet way, without big crowds of followers, because that would distract the meditation on Krishna. This point is also confirmed by *Chaitanya charitamrita*. This is where we find the episode of Nrisimhananda Brahmachari mentally decorating the road for Chaitanya. Vrindavana Dasa in his *Chaitanya bhagavata* describes how Nrisimhananda heard that Chaitanya wanted to travel to Vrindavana and so started to decorate the road all the way from Navadvipa to Vrindavana. In his meditation, he created *bakula* trees for shade and sweetly scented breezes, refreshing small lakes, many flowers, and even beautiful gems and jewels. However, he found himself unable to continue all the way after Kanai Natasala - because Chaitanya had stopped there and proceeded no further. Lochana Dasa's *Chaitanya mangala* also describes Nrisimhananda's meditation as a beautiful raised road, and how Chaitanya revealed all this to Paramananda Puri.

Also, some biographers say that on this occasion, Raghunatha Dasa came to Shantipura to meet Chaitanya for the first time; others say it was the second time, as he had already met him briefly in Shantipura when Chaitanya had met his well wishers and devotees just after taking *sannyasa*.

Raghunatha Dasa was the son of Govardhana Majumbara, an extremely rich land owner from a *kayastha* (non-*brahmin*) family - together with his elder brother Hiranya, they had an annual income of over 1 million rupees (in times when one rupee was a serious amount of money). The Majumbaras lived in Saptagrama, a very wealthy settlement of gold merchants (*suvarna vanik*) and their family priest, Balarama Acharya, was a friend of Haridasa. However, they had very good relationships with the *brahmanas* of the region - most of whom depended on their financial support - including Advaita Acharya, Nilambara Chakravarti (maternal grandfather of Chaitanya) and Jagannatha Mishra (father of Chaitanya). Raghunatha Dasa was interested only in spiritual life, and he used to run away from home to go to Jagannatha Puri, but his father would have him tracked and taken back home under the surveillance of 5 guards, day and night.

Now that Chaitanya himself had come so near to his house, Raghunatha Dasa begged permission to see him, and stayed in Shantipura with him for 7 days, accompanied by several people from his household. Chaitanya instructed him to stop behaving like a madman as a show of renunciation. "Be patient," he said. "Stop running away from home, and live in a balanced way, accepting the pleasures of the material world without becoming attached to them. There is no absolute value in renunciation in itself. You can maintain your devotional consciousness and detachment also if you behave externally as an ordinary person, performing the duties of your family and social position. If you make this effort, Krishna will arrange to fulfill your spiritual desires. You may come to see me after I return from Vrindavana."

In the end Raghunatha Dasa's family allowed him to leave, and he went to Puri where he remained in the company of Chaitanya for 16 years. After Chaitanya's disappearance, Raghunatha Dasa went to Vrindavana, where he settled in a small *bhajana kutir* at Radhakunda, living in great austerity and simplicity.

He is quoted to have stated, "When one's heart has been purified by perfect knowledge, and realized Krishna, the Supreme Brahman, there is no need for any other benefit. Why such a person should make an effort to keep his material body happy, fit and healthy? That would be a stupid pursuit."

According to *Chaitanya charitamrita*, Chaitanya went straight to the house of Sri Vidya Vachaspati and asked him to help arrange his journey for Vrindavana, and suggested that for some time he could stay secretly in his house on the other bank of the river, to avoid the huge crowds that had been gathering at the news of his arrival.

The house of Sri Vidya Vachaspati was at Vidyanagara, not far from Devananda Pandita's house in Koladvipa (Kuliya). *Chaitanya bhagavata* says that the number of people following him was so great that large holes in the road were made by those who collected a little of the dust that had been touched by Chaitanya's feet while walking. In any case, the point is that there was a big crowd trying to be with Chaitanya, and Chaitanya was busy trying to get away from them: this could explain the confusion among his biographers. Where he went first or later while visiting Navadvipa really does not have any impact on Chaitanya's mission and teachings, so for the sake of simplicity from now onwards for this journey we will simply follow the account given by Krishnadasa Kaviraja in *Chaitanya charitamrita*.

Chaitanya visits Advaita Acharya in Shantipura

When the rumor spread that Chaitanya was in the house of Vidya Vachaspati; so many were trying to cross the river that the boats sank under the weight of the people. So to reach Vachaspati's house, people quickly constructed makeshift rafts with banana tree trunks, or swam across the river with the help of upturned clay pots. After much pleading by Vachaspati, finally Chaitanya agreed to bless the crowds and there was a huge *kirtana*. After that Chaitanya sneaked away, but it was impossible to keep the secret of his movements. Everybody followed him and in the meantime the crowds had multiplied, so much that merchants started setting up street markets selling all kinds of goods and made very good business. Boatmen also worked a lot, and pathways were created in the forests by the passage of people.

At some point the people started to get angry with Sri Vidya Vachaspati because the rumor circulated that he wanted to keep Chaitanya hidden from the people, and the

situation was looking rather dangerous. So Chaitanya came out to bless the crowds with a roaring *kirtana*. On that occasion Chaitanya met a friend of Vakresvara Pandita named Devananda, and instructed him to freely distribute to people the *Bhagavata dharma*, contained in the *Bhagavata purana*.

Chaitanya had reached Bengal traveling through Radha desha, followed by Nityananda, Chandrasekhara and Mukunda. Here the various versions merge, and if we want to maintain the sense of sequence, there will inevitably be some repetitions.

Nityananda told Chandrasekhara to go to the house of Advaita and tell him to prepare a boat and receive Chaitanya, then go to Navadvipa and inform Saci and all the devotees. Then Nityananda took Chaitanya to the bank of the Ganges, telling him it was the Yamuna in Vrindavana. When Advaita arrived, he told Chaitanya that actually in that spot the eastern side of the river was Ganges, while the western side was Yamuna as that is their position when the two river meet at Prayaga. On that occasion Advaita invited Chaitanya to his house at Shantipura for lunch, saying that the meal would be very simple - just a little rice, some *vyanjana* and some *sak* - but instead he arranged a large festival. The large stack of top quality rice was generously seasoned with clarified butter, and it was accompanied by 100 containers filled with various preparations - *mung dal*, various types of *sak* (spinach), *patola*, green pumpkin, *manakachu*, 5 types of *sukta*, *karela*, aubergines, small nuggets made of dried *dal* paste, banana flower *khari*, pumpkin cooked in milk, sweet coconut pulp mixed with yogurt, *rabri*, sweet rice pudding, *sandesha*, and condensed milk. There were also various types of pancakes made with ripe bananas and *urad dal*, and several earthen pots filled with cooled scented rose water. Chaitanya and Nityananda attended the *arati* ceremony and appreciated the *prasadam* very much. Chaitanya said, "I will always be obliged to someone who can offer Krishna such nice food."

It was on this occasion that Chaitanya said that he would always accept food from *laskhesvaras*. It seems there was some perplexity among the devotees and brahmins about the meaning of the reference, as *lakshesvara* ("owner of hundreds of thousands") is usually applied to the calculation of a person's monetary wealth. Chaitanya explained that he was referring to those people who chanted *lakhs* of God's Names, that are the true treasure of human life.

When Chaitanya commented that a *sannyasi* should not eat such sumptuous foods, because that excessive sense gratification will damage his renunciation, Advaita jokingly

replied, "In Puri (in the form of Jagannatha) you eat hundreds of pots with 52 different preparations."

Nityananda also started to joke, commenting that the quantity of food they had been given was insufficient, and Advaita responded in a similar humoristic mood, saying that having such a greedy *sannyasi* for lunch was a real disgrace. Finally Advaita offered mouth fresheners made with cloves, cardamom and *tulasi* flowers, and provided flower garlands and sandalwood paste to smear on their bodies.

According to this version (in *Chaitanya bhagavata*), on the next morning Advaita brought Mother Saci in a palanquin, accompanied by many devotees - Srivasa, Ramai, Vidyanidhi, Gadadhara, Gangadasa, Vakresvara, Murari, Suklambara, Buddhimanta Khan, Nandana, Sridhara, Vijaya, Vasudeva, Damodara, Mukunda, Sanjaya and the other residents of Navadvipa. Chaitanya offered *pradakshina* and *dandavat pranama* to his mother, while Advaita recited prayers to Devaki. Filled with ecstasy, Saci insisted to cook for her son and prepared 20 types of *sak* (Nimai's favorite vegetable), plus a variety of other vegetables cooked in many different ways, and other innumerable dishes. Chaitanya happily ate the food, describing the spiritual qualities of the various types of *sag* such as *achyuta*, *patala*, *bastuka*, *kala* etc. Relaxing after the feast, Chaitanya asked Murari Gupta to glorify Ramachandra (by reading the 8 verses in glorification of Ramachandra that he had written) and he blessed him. From that time, Murari Gupta has been considered by the Gaudiya Vaishnavas as a manifestation of Hanuman. Chaitanya remained in the house of Advaita for ten days, and every day there was a great *sankirtana* festival. Advaita's young son Acyutananda had a great attachment to Chaitanya and once he even scolded his father because he had apparently disrespected him.

Chaitanya visits Srivasa Pandita

During this journey Chaitanya met many people. One of such meetings is reported by Vrindavana Dasa and also with greater detail by Lochana Dasa. Possibly, this episode could be linked with a passing comment made by Vrindavana Dasa in another passage, regarding one brahmin named Gopala Chapala, who lived in the district of Radha desha

(near Navadvipa) and had claimed he was Gopala. It seems that such extravagant claim from his part was due to his envy against Srivasa, who was worshiping Nimai/ Chaitanya and telling people that Nimai/ Chaitanya was a direct manifestation of Krishna himself. Here is the story of the meeting.

One day a leper approached him. In all humility, the man offered his respect. "Everyone says you are a divine *avatara*. I accept you as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the deliverer of the fallen. You are Govinda, you are Gopala, you are the ocean of compassion. Please save me. I take shelter in you. I have committed great offenses, I now realize it. Please deliver me from this intolerable disease."

Chaitanya got terribly angry. "I am not concerned about the offenses that someone may make against me, but I cannot tolerate the offenses against my devotees. I am a friend for all the living entities in the universe, but I am very displeased when someone becomes envious of good persons and sincere devotees, who are always in my heart. You have brought this disgrace on yourself by attacking and slandering Srivasa, and you will have to pay the full price for it."

The leper was crying desperately. "You are certainly independent and can do whatever you want," he said, "but in Kali yuga every house is full of offenders, and if your name is *patita pavana* ("the savior of the fallen") this should mean that you have come to save people, not to kill them. You are the *dharma setu* ("the bridge of religion") by which people can cross over degradation and ignorance, and reach the shore of light, knowledge and immortality."

After sending away the leper, Chaitanya went to the house of Srivasa and in front of all the devotees presented his case. "That leper will have to suffer for many lifetimes because of his offenses, but although his body is melting away, I do not feel any compassion for him. I told him that he cannot be saved, but if you want to be compassionate to him, I think he can be delivered by you."

Laughing, Srivasa replied, "I have no power or position. You are the savior of all, but you are glorifying me. I forgive that man's offenses: may he become free from his disease."

The leper was lying on the bank of the Ganga. At that very moment he saw his body becoming free from disease and healthy again. He ran to Srivasa's house, crying out in gratitude, and glorifying Chaitanya, who had delivered him from the blindness of ignorance. Chaitanya went out to meet him, and when the brahmin prostrated himself in

front of him, he picked him up and embraced him. The man was overwhelmed by love for Krishna and started to sing, dance and roll on the ground, shouting, "Gauranga is the friend of everyone".

While Chaitanya was in Srivasa's house, he elaborated on the results of the Sankirtana yajna. Srivasa asked, "It is said that in Kali yuga one can obtain the best results by engaging in Harinama Sankirtana. Why is it?"

"In Satya yuga, the *dharma* or religious practice for that age was *dhyana* - meditation and *yoga*. In Treta yuga it was the ritual celebration of *yajnas* such as fire sacrifice, etc. In Dvapara yuga, it was *archana* - the worship of the Deity. In Kali yuga people have a lot of difficulties engaging in these practices - in fact, it is said that nobody is really able to perform them properly. For this reason, God appears in the form of his Name, and is properly worshiped through the Harinama Sankirtana. This is a very easy method that can be applied even by totally unqualified persons, and easily offers all perfections. Whatever results were achieved in previous *yugas* with great efforts, can be obtained comfortably in Kali yuga."

Many devotees came to meet Chaitanya on that occasion, including Purandara Pandita and Paramesvara Dasa. Finally, Chaitanya reassured Srivasa on the future and the future of his family, then he left for Panihati to visit the house of Raghava Pandita. Before returning to Puri, Chaitanya again met his mother.

During this visit to Bengal, it is very likely that Rupa and Sanatana quietly attended some of the events, although they did not have direct interaction with Chaitanya as their presence is not recorded in Chaitanya's biographies. However, something happened between the first meeting with Chaitanya in Ramakeli and their second meetings - in Prayaga for Rupa and in Varanasi for Sanatana - because in that period they decided to give up their families and social positions and join Chaitanya full time as renunciates.

We have mentioned that in Ramakeli, Chaitanya first met Rupa and Sanatana, who lived there and had been engaged in the Muslim government. The two brothers were from an ostracized brahmin family, descending from a Sarasvata brahmin from Karnataka, named Sarvajna, who belonged to the Bharadvaja gotra and was learned in *Yajur Veda*. This scholarly brahmin, honored with the title of *jagat guru*, had taken the position of King in Karnataka. His son, Aniruddha, occupied the throne after him and was also very learned; he had two sons - Harihara and Rupesvara. While Rupesvara was scholarly inclined, his

brother Harihara became proficient in politics and the use of weapons; at their father's death the kingdom was supposed to be shared between them, but Harihara took his brother's land and sent him to exile. From Paurastya desa, where Rupesvara had settled, his descendant Padmanabha (Sanatana's great grandfather) migrated to Nava Hatta on the Ganges and had 18 daughters and 5 sons, of whom the youngest was Mukunda, the grandfather of Sanatana, Rupa and Anupama.

Mukunda became the private secretary to the Sultan of Bengal, Jalaluddin Fateh Shah. Mukunda's son Kumaradeva moved to Jessore, and on his death his family moved to Sakurma, near the capital of Gauda (Bengal), where his sons continued their studies, and finally they moved to the capital, Ramakeli.

Sanatana (Santosha) was the eldest brother, born in 1488, next was Rupa (Amara) and then Anupama (Srivallabha), who became the father of Jiva. Sanatana and his brothers studied *nyaya* and *Vedanta* from Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya and his brother Madhusudana Vidya Vachaspati, from whom Sanatana took the traditional *upavita diksha*. On the death of his father, Santosha (Sanatana) was forced to take up the position of treasurer (*sakara mallik*) for the new Sultan, Alauddin Hussein Shah, while his brother Amara (Rupa) became the private secretary (*dabir i khas*) to the Sultan. The two brothers had also studied Persian and Arabic besides Sanskrit, and thanks to their intelligence and talent, they had made a career in the government as chief secretary to the Sultan and State revenue minister. However, they had a sincere desire to pursue vaishnavism and they had expressed their longing in letters they had sent to Chaitanya in Puri. Chaitanya had replied, instructing them to read *Bhagavatam* and to meet him during his journey to Vrindavana.

After discussing with them at Ramakeli, Chaitanya told them to return home to study *Bhagavatam* and started to devise some means by which they could give up their government posts and join Chaitanya in total dedication in the devotional service to Krishna. It is not difficult to understand that such instruction would not result in weakening the Hindu government in favor of the Muslim invaders - if anything, it was just the opposite.

Rupa was able to extricate himself from his job in a relatively easy way, and after collecting all his wealth in gold coins, he loaded them in two boats. Part of that money - 10,000 coins - was used to bail Sanatana out of jail, because the Sultan had felt insulted by his disobedience. The rest of the money was divided: half of it was given for the

service of Krishna, and the rest was again divided in two - half for his family members, and the rest was kept for future emergencies.

More about Rupa's and Sanatana's personal qualities and activities will be found later in the book, in the section about Chaitanya's companions. In this first volume we will only discuss about those events that are directly connected to Chaitanya's activities.

The journey through Jharikhanda

After his journey to Bengal and the meeting with Rupa and Sanatana, Chaitanya returned to Puri accompanied by Balabhadra Bhattacharya and Damodara Pandita.

However, after spending only a few days in Puri he attempted again to travel to Vrindavana, obsessed by his longing for Krishna. It was the Jyestha Purnima (Snana yatra). After consulting with Ramananda and Svarupa Damodara, he quietly left at night. One *brahmana* named Balabhadra Bhattacharya, originally from Bengal, was designated to accompany him; Chaitanya did not want to take any of his usual companions with him to avoid bad feelings of favoritism. This Balabhadra was a very honest and well behaved person, kind and quiet, and would not create any problem for the travel.

Chaitanya charitamrita says that Chaitanya and his companion took the road to Nimaparha, Dhavalesvara, Dhenkanal, Angul, Talcher, Boudh, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Rourkela and Sundargarh in the hills, passing north of Cuttack in Orissa, and entering the Jharikhanda jungle, inhabited by many deer, boars, tigers and elephants. In those times, the forest covered several districts - not only of the present States of Jharikhanda and Chattisgarh, but also Orissa, Bihar and Bengal. Now the jungle has been considerably reduced, with urbanization spreading from Ranchi to Bokaro, Dhanbad, Deogarh, Dumka, Chatra, Garhwa and Gumla, although there are still the Simlipala tiger reserve and the Ushakothi wildlife sanctuary.

Both *Chaitanya charitamrita* and *Chaitanya mangala* state that it was at this time that Chaitanya delivered all the jungle animals by making them dance and sing the holy Names. *Chaitanya charitamrita* says that the wild animals simply stood aside and let

them pass without bothering them, and that one day Chaitanya touched a tiger who was lying on the path: immediately the wild animal got up and roared the Name of Krishna. Another day, while Chaitanya was chanting the Gayatri mantra standing in a river, a herd of wild elephants came to drink water; Chaitanya splashed them playfully and asked them to chant the holy Names - they started to dance and sing as well. Some of them rolled to the ground, others cried in ecstasy, leaving Balabhadra totally amazed.

Deer too came to welcome Chaitanya, attracted by his singing, and Chaitanya recited a verse spoken by the *gopis* of Vrindavana, who had blessed the wild animals of the forest who also loved Krishna. A few tigers arrived as well, and started to dance playfully with the deer, kissing and showing affection to each other. Several birds, including peacocks, also followed Chaitanya singing and dancing, all overwhelmed by the feeling of devotional ecstatic love for Krishna. Even the trees and other plants seemed happy and excited. Balabhadra Bhattacharya served Chaitanya at the best of his abilities, collecting alms of rice and vegetables from village houses whenever they found them, and picking fruits, wild spinach and root vegetables in the jungle where there were no houses in sight. Many villagers spontaneously offered them milk, yogurt, sugar and other foods. All the people of that region, including the tribal communities, were blessed by Chaitanya's presence and pure love for God, and everyone chanted the holy Names, dancing, crying and laughing. However, Chaitanya controlled his ecstasy and kept a low profile as much as possible. They bathed 3 times a day in rivers and waterfalls, and kept a fire morning and evening with the abundant wood from the forest. Chaitanya was extremely happy of that quiet and contemplative life afforded by the solitary journey.

Walking through the Jharikhanda forest, Chaitanya finally arrived in Varanasi (also called Kasi or Benares) and took bath at the famous Manikarnika ghat, where Adi Shankara had lived while he was starting his preaching mission. The name Manikarnika ("ear ornament") refers to Vishnu's ear pendant that fell in this place when Vishnu shook his head in admiration for the compassion manifested by Shiva. Sitting here in meditation, Shiva contemplated the unlimited miseries of the human beings in the material world, and cried out of compassion; then he resolved to engage in austerity to obtain from Vishnu the blessing of liberation for all mankind, including those who would reach that place after their death. Later, when Ganga descended to earth to purify the sons of emperor Sagara (the dead uncles of Bhagiratha), she purposefully came through this way to honor Shiva's austerities, transforming the *ghat* on the small lake into a *tirtha* on her bank.

Tapana Mishra happened to be at the Manikarnika ghat when Chaitanya arrived, and was extremely happy to greet him. In his company, Chaitanya went to visit the famous Shiva Visvanatha (one of the 12 *jyotir lingas* installed by Adi Shankara) and Bindu Madhava (a famous Lakshmi Narayana temple that was later destroyed by Aurangzeb, who built a large mosque on its ruins) that was said to be at the confluence of 5 sacred rivers (*pancha nada tirtha* - Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Kirana and Dhutapapa). The Deity of Bindu Madhava was originally installed by Indra as an atonement for the killing of Vritrasura. At present the Deity is housed in a small 19th century temple in the vicinity of the mosque.

Chaitanya remained in town for several days (10 according to *Chaitanya charitamrita*, 4 according to *Chaitanya mangala*) and was a very welcome guest in the house of Tapana Mishra, that was near the Bindu Madhava temple at Panchanadi ghat. Mishra was so excited at the idea of having Chaitanya in his home that he started dancing around and waving his shawl in happiness. Balabhadra cooked the meal, and Raghu, the son of Tapana Mishra, massaged his legs while he was resting after lunch. According to *Chaitanya charitamrita*, at this time a friend of Tapana Mishra's, named Chandrashekhara Vaidya, came to see Chaitanya. He expressed his disappointment with the lack of *bhakti* demonstrated by the residents of Varanasi, who seemed to be interested solely in the philosophical debates on the various *Veda darshanas*.

Also a *brahmana* from Maharashtra, who lived in Varanasi and knew Tapana Mishra, came to meet Chaitanya. He complained that Prakasananda had given some negative comments about Chaitanya. Chaitanya merely smiled and explained that some people are unable to really appreciate the spiritual glories of the Personality of Godhead, and therefore they remain stuck at the elementary level of Brahman realization. To illustrate their lack of realization, he quoted the famous *atmarama verse* - one of his very favorite, that he had already discussed with Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya in Puri.

The next morning very early Chaitanya left Varanasi and walked on to Prayaga, presently known as Allahabad. It is 135 km west of Varanasi, and had been the capital of the Gupta empire.

At the time when Chaitanya visited it, the city had not yet been appropriated by emperor Akbar, who established there his residence in 1584 and built his famous fort that enclosed the ancient pillar of Ashoka and the *akshaya vata*, "the immortal banyan tree" that was already described in 643 by the Chinese traveler Huiyen Tsang.

Prayaga is one of the most famous sacred *tirthas* of Vedic tradition, also called Prayaga raja, Yajnaraja or Prayajna tirtha because of the many *yajnas* that were celebrated there in ancient times, beginning with the famous sacrifice performed by Brahma himself. Here we find the Triveni ("3 rivers"), the confluence of the 3 sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati. In this place the Kumbha mela is still held regularly (the other places are Nasik, Ujjain and Hardvara). Chaitanya offered his respect to this sacred tree and took bath in the Triveni, then went to take *darshana* of the Deity of Yajnaraja, Veni Madhava (Narayana), the presiding Deity of the *dhama* (also installed by Indra in very ancient times).

The name Madhava literally means "the husband of Mother" and refers to the relationship of Vishnu/ Shiva (as Hari Hara) with the Mother Goddess in her form of Lakshmi. In fact the defining characteristic of this Deity is that he is holding Mother Lakshmi (also called Kamala) in his front right hand, within the lotus flower. The particular form of Madhava is very significant especially in the tradition of Jagannatha. We will discuss more about this subject in the section of this work about Chaitanya's spiritual path. Here we may just remember that Jagannatha's original Deity was called Nila Madhava, and that two of the most ancient Deities in Puri are Matsya Madhava at the Indradyumna Sarovara and Sveta Madhava at the Sveta Ganga tirtha, installed in Puranic times.

Chaitanya arrives in Mathura

Soon after his arrival, Chaitanya was joined by Rupa and Sanatana, who had successfully become free from their professional responsibilities, and he instructed them to go to Vrindavana and re-establish the worship of Krishna there. He remained in town for 3 days only.

From Prayaga, Chaitanya walked to Agravana (present day Agra), where according to the *Chaitanya mangala* he visited the *ashrama* of Jamadagni Muni, the birthplace of Parasurama. Passing through Renuka grama (named after Parasurama's mother), he proceeded towards Vrindavana. All along the way, at every stop he spoke to the people about the love for the holy Name of Krishna, and induced them to dance happily.

The road from Prayaga crossed the Yamuna river several times, and each time Chaitanya blissfully jumped into the water. Finally arriving at Mathura, he threw himself to the ground to offer his homage, and then he went to bathe at Vishrama ghata, the place where Krishna and Balarama had gone to wash themselves after the wrestling match in the arena of Kamsa, where Krishna had killed the evil king. Then Chaitanya visited the birthplace of Krishna and the Deity of Adi Keshava there. At the time when Chaitanya arrived in Mathura, the ancient temple had not been destroyed yet by Aurangzeb, who later built a large mosque on top of the ruins. The present temple was started in a later period, and improved and expanded by many rich Marwari devotees.

As usual, Chaitanya sang and danced in ecstasy in the temple in front of the Deity, and the people were fascinated by the blissful *kirtana* of Chaitanya, especially the *pujaka* and an elderly *sanodiya brahmana* who was present at the temple at that time. After the *kirtana*, Chaitanya talked with the *brahmana*, who was a disciple of Madhavendra Puri and had been present at the installation of the Gopala Deity at Govardhana, and reassured him that he did not have any social prejudice, so he did not care about his lower status in the community compared to the other sub-castes of brahmins. In those times the *sanodiya* brahmins worked as priests for the *vaisya* (*suvarna vanik*, or gold merchants and bankers) community of *kalavaras* and *sanvadas*, who do not follow the Vedic rules strictly and often consume wine and similar stuff. However, Madhavendra Puri had been in his house and accepted his food while visiting Mathura, so Chaitanya was very happy to take lunch from him as well.

In his *Chaitanya mangala*, Lochana Dasa reveals that this *brahmana*'s name was Krishnadasa, and says that he had already noticed Chaitanya while he was approaching the city. In his intense feelings for Krishna, Chaitanya had cried out the name of Akrura (Krishna's uncle, who had taken him from Vrindavana to Mathura on the order of Kamsa) and then collapsed to the ground, lost to external consciousness for 3 days. So in this version of the story, the *sanodiya brahmana* Krishnadasa accompanied Chaitanya in his visit to Mathura and Vrindavana from the very start.

Accompanied by his host, Chaitanya took bath in the 24 *ghats* along the Yamuna. These 24 *ghats* are listed as Avimukta, Adhirudha, Guhya tirtha, Prayaga tirtha, Kanakhala tirtha, Tinduka, Surya tirtha, Vata svami, Dhruva ghat, Rishi tirtha, Moksha tirtha, Bodha tirtha, Gokarna, Krishna ganga, Vaikuntha, Asi kunda, Chatu samudrika kupa, Akrura tirtha, Yajnika vipra sthana, Kubja kupa, Ranga sthala, Mancha sthala, Mallayuddha

sthana and Dasasvamedha. Lochana Dasa gives a few different names such as Sapta tirtha, Mahesa tirtha, Koti tirtha, and Ganesha tirtha.

Chaitanya also visited all the temples, not only those dedicated to Vishnu but those dedicated to Shiva and the Mother Goddess as well - such as Svayambhu Shiva, Dirgha Vishnu, Bhutesvara and Mahavidya.

Starting early in the morning, they visited first the palace of Kamsa on the bank of the Yamuna river, in the south-west corner of the city. The palace had two gates (east and north) and the throne hall in the north, while the prison was in the north-west corner of the compound. In *Chaitanya mangala*, the *brahmana* explains how baby Krishna suddenly peed while Vasudeva was carrying him out of the prison and towards Gokula. So Vasudeva quickly put the baby down on a stone that was therefore called *mutra-sthana* ("the place of urine").

Then Devaki washed Krishna's clothes in the nearby *kunda*, and Vasudeva resumed his journey. After leaving Kamsa's palace, the *brahmana* showed Chaitanya the house of Uddhava (north of Kamsa's palace), and Chaitanya was overwhelmed by love for this great devotee of Krishna. Next, proceeding east, they came to the houses of the washer man, the florist, and the prostitute Kubja, and then to the wrestling arena. Then he showed him the house of Vasudeva, standing in the south-east, and next to it the house of Ugrasena. Just south of these two houses there was Visrama ghat, where Krishna and Balarama had taken bath after killing the evil tyrant, and the Ghatashrama temple with the canal called Kamsakhali. South of Kamsa's palace there was the place known as Rangabhumi, and further on the Kamsa kupa, and a well on its south-west called Agastya kunda.

After passing the south gate, Krishnadasa showed Chaitanya the Setubandha Sarovara, a small lake where Krishna told Radha that in ancient times he had appeared as Ramachandra (Ranganatha) and had built a floating bridge of trees and stones to Lanka. Challenged by Radha's skepticism, Krishna demonstrated his power by floating stones over the lake. North of this lake is the Saptasamudra kunda, where the 6 sons of Devaki were killed by Kamsa at their birth, and the Sarasvati kunda, north of Kamsa's palace. Next to the Dasasvamedha ghat, there was Somatirtha where Krishna's necklace fell and was carried away by the Nagas riding the underground stream called Naga tirtha. The entire day was spent touring the city of Mathura; in the evening Chaitanya consumed some food and went to rest, anxiously waiting for the morning to go and see Vrindavana.

On the next day Krishnadasa took him to the place where Krishna was born within Kamsa's prison, and along the route by which Vasudeva had carried baby Krishna out of town, guided by a she jackal and shielded from the rain by Vasuki.

The forests of Vrindavana

Krishnadasa showed Chaitanya the 12 forests (*vanas*) of Mathura-Vrindavana that surrounded the city on 3 sides, 5 on the eastern side of the Yamuna (Bhadravana, Bilvavana, Lohavana, Bhandiravana and Mahavana) and 7 on the western bank (Madhavana, Talavana, Kumudavana, Bahulavana, Kamyavana, Khadiravana and Vrindavana proper). He explained that in Mahavana there was Nanda Maharaja's house, where Yasoda had given birth to Yogamaya Durga; here Vasudeva exchanged Krishna with the baby girl and carried her back to Kamsa. When the evil tyrant had tried to kill the child, she slipped out of his hands and rose to the sky, manifesting her divine form and warning Kamsa about his defeat.

The cows and the other animals of the forest welcomed Chaitanya with great affection and even followed him. Even the plants seemed to be expressing their happiness by presenting him with sweet honey, fruits and flowers. The *brahmana* narrated the early childhood activities of Krishna - the killing of Putana, Sakatasura and Trinavarta, and the name giving ceremony performed after 6 months from his birth. He showed the place where Krishna had danced leaning on the churning rod for making butter, and the grinding mortar on which Krishna had climbed as a toddler to steal the butter; then Yasoda had rushed in - leaving the milk pot on the fire - to tie him to the mortar to punish him, leading to the deliverance of the two *yamala arjuna* trees. *Chaitanya mangala* mentions the various other sites - the village of Gokula, the place where Krishna purchased the fruits, the temple of Shiva Gopisvara, the Sapta samudra kunda, and the houses of Sundara Gopa and Upananda (Nanda's brothers). At west and north there were the *ashramas* of Ravana and Durvasa Muni, and the forest of Lohavana. In Bhandiravana one day Nanda Maharaja asked Radha - who was older than Krishna - to take the small boy home; following Nanda's order, Radha embraced and kissed Krishna, but Krishna unexpectedly scratched her breast.

From time to time, Chaitanya loudly sang verses and called out for Krishna, enchanting not only the people but the animals as well - especially the cows, the deer and the birds. Even the plants seemed to respond to the ecstatic chanting, and Chaitanya reciprocated with everyone, embracing all moving and non-moving beings. To Chaitanya, everything spoke about Krishna and Radha, and this increased his devotional feelings even more.

Chaitanya charitamrita speaks of a couple of parrots - male and female - who flied down to Chaitanya's hand and began to talk about Krishna's and Radha's glories (their words are reported in *Govinda Lilamrita*, also written by Krishnadasa Kaviraja, the author of *Chaitanya charitamrita*). Krishnadasa and Balabhadra took care of Chaitanya as in his ecstasy he swooned and rolled on the thorn-covered ground, and then suddenly jumped up and ordered them to chant the Name of Krishna. *Chaitanya charitamrita* says that in Puri, Chaitanya's ecstatic love was already intense, but on the way to Vrindavana, such ecstasy increased 100 times; in Mathura it increased 1000 times, but in Vrindavana it increased 100,000 times. When Chaitanya's external perception was awakened, Krishnadasa continued to narrate the activities of Krishna connected to the various places they were visiting.

After the attacks of the *asuras* sent by Kamsa to kill Krishna, Nanda Maharaja moved from Gokula and crossed the Yamuna to settle in Chattikara (Vrindavana), and camped for the night arranging the carts in a semi-circle and tying the calves to a *kapitha* tree. Here Krishna defeated Vatsasura, and not far from here he killed Bakasura and then Aghasura. The Yamuna river used to flow there, but at the times of Chaitanya it had already changed her course. Playing with the young boys, Krishna used to run trying to catch the shadows of the birds flying. He carried a flute, stick and buffalo horn.

Visiting the sites, Krishnadasa narrated the story of Brahma hiding all the cowherd boys and calves, of Balarama killing Dhenukasura, the feast of *tala* fruits, the defeat of the snake Kaliya, and Krishna's resting at the Dvadasa aditya ghat - where 12 suns came down to warm him up. The swallowing of the forest fire, and the time when Krishna entered the mood of Narayana and stood on the shoulders of his friend Sridama who played Garuda. Balarama killing Pralambasura who had kidnapped him, the affectionate dealings of Krishna with all the animals and the plants and the fascinating songs of his flute.

They visited the Cita ghat on the Yamuna, where the unmarried *gopis* worshiped Katyayani (Durga) Devi, each one of them secretly praying for the blessing to become

Krishna's wife. And the *kadamba* tree where Krishna climbed after stealing the clothes of the *gopis* while they were bathing in the river - thus fulfilling their wish of an erotic relationship with him. And the place where Krishna sent the cowherd boyd to beg food from the wives of the *brahmanas* engaged in the *yajna*. Nandisvara, the hill where the *gopas* built their homes after leaving Gokula. All these places were described one by one with the activities of Krishna there.

In his *Chaitanya mangala*, Lochana Dasa says that Chaitanya remained in Bhadravana and Bhandiravana for 2 months, because of the happiness he was feeling in those places.

Finally reaching the Govardhana area and Aristagrama - the place where Krishna had killed Aristasura - Chaitanya was eager to find the Radhakunda and Syamakunda, but these two lakes excavated by Krishna and Radha had been lost among the rice fields and nobody knew about their location any more. Walking around the place, Chaitanya found two small muddy ponds and recognized them as the remains of the ancient lakes; he took bath happily in them offering his prayers, to the great amazement of the local farmers. He also marked his body with *tilaka* with the mud from the pond and collected some more to take away with him. Then he went to the Sumanas or Manasa sarovara lake, and from there he first saw the Govardhana hill and walked on to the small temple of Harideva Narayana, where he danced and sang ecstatically, happily welcomed by the *pujaris* and by the local people. At Brahma kunda, Chaitanya rested and Balabhadra cooked some food, then they spent the night at the temple of Harideva.

On the next day they performed the *parikrama* (walking around as a mark of respect) of the hill, dancing and reciting a verse from *Bhagavata purana* (10.21.18) in praise of the place.

Lochana Dasa briefly describes here the activities of Krishna at Govardhana, the Manasi Ganga flowing on the north-east side of the hill, and the narrow path used by the local people leading to the Dan ghati, where Krishna played with the *gopis* demanding a tax for their passage. The stones of the hill were wet from the milk of the grazing cows, and Chaitanya threw himself to the ground and started rubbing them and embracing them, then took one of them on his lap affectionately.

Here *Chaitanya charitamrita* reports that Chaitanya hesitated to climb the hill to get to the Gopala temple (installed by Madhavendra Puri) on top of it at the Annakuta grama, inhabited by a Rajasthani colony; he was anxious at the idea of touching the sacred stones

with his feet - traditionally, an act that is considered disrespectful. But Gopala himself wanted to see him, so he arranged for a rumor about a raid of Muslims going to attack the region. The *pujaris* of Gopala's temple and the people from Annakuta grama quickly packed and fled from the hill, carrying the Deity with them into the bushy jungle, and to the house of a *brahmana* in the village known as Ganthuli.

After taking bath in Govinda kunda (where Indra had bathed Krishna with water from his elephant's trunk and milk from the Surabhi celestial cow) Chaitanya came to know that Gopala had gone to Ganthuli grama, and he rushed there and remained with Gopala for 3 days. Then on the 4th day Gopala returned to his temple on top of Govardhana. Here *Chaitanya charitamrita* comments that Gopala did the same thing later for Rupa and Sanatana; he went to see Rupa in Mathura in the house of Viththalesvara (son of Vallabha Bhatta Acharya) for one month, thus favoring Rupa and his companions Gopala Bhatta, Raghunatha Dasa, Raghunatha Bhatta and Lokanatha Dasa. Also, in the group there were several other devotees - Bhugarbha, Jiva, Yadava Acharya, Govinda, Uddhava Dasa, Madhava, Gopala Dasa, Narayana Dasa, Vani Krishnadasa, Pundarikaksha, Isana and Dvija Haridasa.

Although Chaitanya's biographers give him little or prominence in their writings, Lokanatha was an intimate associate of Chaitanya - the first to be sent to Vrindavana to rediscover the lost holy places. Before Rupa and Sanatana arrived there, Lokanatha had been living in Vrindavana for some time already, and he met Chaitanya during his visit, accompanying him to see many places. Lokanatha Dasa was from Talakhadi in the Jessore district of Bengal, established the Radha Gokulananda temple, and accepted only one disciple: Narottama Dasa.

After leaving Govardhana, Chaitanya and his two companions went east towards Kamyavana (also called Kusuma forest) where Krishna performed the *rasa lila* and to Nandisvara and the various lakes in that area. On the way, he saw the place where Nanda Maharaja had been kidnapped by Varuna while taking bath in one of the *kundas* there - Sarva papaharana, Brahma, Rudra, Indra, Surya and Moksha.

Chaitanya took bath in all of them, then climbed on a small hill and inquired about any Deities that could be there inside some cave. Nobody knew about any Deities, so Chaitanya himself went in search of them, and he found the images of Yasoda and Nanda - two well built persons - and between them, a beautiful child in the *tribhanga* pose (curving the body in 3 places).

Krishnadasa then took him to the forest of *ashoka* trees, that had bloomed with sweetly scented flowers out of season to honor the dancing of Krishna with the *gopis*. While Chaitanya was looking at the forest, suddenly the trees blossomed with flowers and fruits, to the amazement of his companions. Overwhelmed and made impatient by ecstasy at the memory of the *rasa lila*, Chaitanya expressed the mood of Radha at the time when Krishna had left the company of the *gopis* to relieve them of their pride. There Radha embraced the *kadamba* tree, believing it to be Krishna's body, and there Krishna stood under the tree to play his flute and call his *gopis* to him. Hearing Krishnadasa's description of the *rasa lila*, Chaitanya roared loudly and sent waves of powerful feelings into the atmosphere, maddening even the animals and the plants.

Finally they moved to Khela tirtha and Bhandiravana, and after crossing the Yamuna, they went to Bhadravana, Srivana and Lohavana, where Krishna had killed Lohajanghasura. In Mahavana, they visited the house of Nanda and Yasoda, where Chaitanya became very emotional. Krishnadasa then started to describe the departure of Krishna and Balarama from Vrindavana - when Akrura had come to pick them up under the order of Kamsa.

Krishna and Balarama had welcomed Akrura, and after hearing about the atrocities committed by the evil tyrant Kamsa, they had decided to go to Mathura and kill him. When the *gopis* saw that their beloved Krishna was sitting in Akrura's chariot, ready to leave, they threw themselves to the ground in despair, crying, in the attempt to stop him. Krishna had comforted them, saying that he would soon return. Many cowherd men had followed Krishna to Mathura, and they had witnessed the wonderful activities of Krishna and Balarama there, roaming in the city and meeting its residents culminating with the wrestling match against Chanura and Mustika, and the killing of Kamsa. In the arena, Kamsa had a raised platform built for Krishna's parents Vasudeva and Devaki, so that they could clearly see the death of their sons, and prepared a deep well with the intention of dumping Krishna's and Balarama's bodies after killing them.

However, Krishna had defeated all the wrestlers and then jumped to the raised seat of Kamsa, and dragging him down and across the entire arena, he had beaten him to death. Then he had released his parents from captivity, and restored Ugrasena to the throne. Krishnadasa also narrated how Balarama had pacified Kamsa's wives, and how the cowherd men had kept their carts just outside town, waiting for Krishna and Balarama to return to Vrindavana with them.

Chaitanya returned to Mathura, too, with his companions, but as the town was very crowded, he left again and settled in Akrura ghata on the way to Mathura, and every day he returned to Vrindavana to roam around the holy places of the Krishna lila - Kaliya hrada, Praskandana, Kesi tirtha, Cira ghat, Tentuli tala and its ancient tamarind tree, that became his favorite place to sit and chant the Names of Krishna. He meditated alone in isolated places during the mornings, and then in the afternoons he preached to people about the chanting of the holy Names.

At this point *Chaitanya charitamrita* introduces a new companion - one Krishnadasa described as a *rajputa kshatriya* from Rajasthan, who lived on the other side of the Yamuna, and met Chaitanya sitting under the tamarind tree in Tentuli tala; from that day the *kshatriya* left his home and family and started traveling with Chaitanya. It is certainly possible that this Krishnadasa is one and the same with the *sanodiya brahmana* described by *Chaitanya mangala*, who accompanied Chaitanya in his tour of Mathura and Vrindavana from the very beginning.

The contradictory versions between the two biographies become more puzzling in the episode of the Muslim soldiers, that comes next. There *Chaitanya charitamrita* speaks of "four companions" traveling with Chaitanya, and the Sarasvata Gaudiya vaishnavas' commentaries list them as Balabhadra Bhattacharya, an assistant *brahmana*, Rajaputa Krishnadasa and the *sanodiya brahmana*. The fact that two of these persons are left unnamed is confusing; also *Chaitanya charitamrta* seems to be ambiguous on purpose, saying that the Rajputa Krishnadasa was fearless and "that *brahmana*" was very fearless (*krishnadasa rajaputa nirbhaya se bada, sei vipra nirbhaya se mukhe bada bada*). It is also likely that one of these four companions was Lokanatha Dasa, who, according to some, had specifically requested not to be mentioned in Chaitanya's biography. This would certainly complicate and confuse the narration in regard to the identity and number of Chaitanya's traveling companions.

One day Chaitanya chastised his servant, Balabhadra Bhattacharya, who had believed the popular rumor according to which Krishna had appeared in the Kaliya lake. Chaitanya slapped him and said, "In spite of all your learning, you have become a fool. Krishna will not appear personally in the Kali yuga. Anyone who claims that is just deluded." The mystery was revealed on the next morning, when it was ascertained that the light that had appeared in the lake was actually the lamp of a fisherman. Then some people tried to please Chaitanya, saying that after all, Krishna had really manifested to their eyes, in the

person of Chaitanya, as they accepted him as "*avatara* of Krishna". Chaitanya immediately protested, calling the name of Vishnu, and asking people not to call him God. (*Madhya* 18.111)

He then proceeded to explain that there is a great difference between Bhagavan and an ordinary soul, and that denying such difference is offensive. After the episode of the gullible villagers mistaking a common fisherman's lamp or torchlight for the effulgence of Krishna appearing along the Yamuna, this lesson by Chaitanya appears to be particularly important. However, *Chaitanya charitamrita* continues by saying that the people insisted on the divine nature of Chaitanya, whose spiritual power was so great that he inspired transcendental love in everybody. It is interesting to note that the argument of consciousness - Krishna Consciousness - was then accepted by Chaitanya without any complaint.

Many traditional orthodox *brahmanas*, who had originally come from Kanyakubja and the south, eagerly offered food to Chaitanya, cooking at Akrura ghat and consecrating the food to the Salagrama sila. However, Chaitanya's deep emotional ecstasies in the vicinity of all those people were a cause of constant concern for his companions. One day Chaitanya was meditating on Krishna's journey from Vrindavana to Mathura, when Akrura immersed himself in the river and saw the Vaikuntha planets. Suddenly Chaitanya jumped under water and did not come out again; Krishnadasa started to shout and with the help of his companions could drag Chaitanya out, but they were all very scared that he could have drowned. They consulted each other, and concluded that the intensity of Chaitanya's emotional feelings was becoming excessive for his own safety, and that he needed to leave Vrindavana. As the month of Magha (January/ February) was starting, they decided they would propose a journey to Prayaga for the Kumbha mela, where they could reach in time for Makara sankranti, a very auspicious occasion

The encounter with the Muslim *pathanas*

On the way to Prayaga, Chaitanya and his companions walked the path along the Ganges. While they were resting under a tree, a herd of cows arrived to the place, and started to

graze around them. Suddenly a cowherd boy blew on his flute, and Chaitanya was struck with a very intense feeling of ecstasy, remembering Krishna. He fell to the ground, unconscious, foaming at the mouth, and his breathing stopped.

Soon afterwards, a large group of Muslim soldiers arrived there, and seeing Chaitanya in that condition, concluded that he had been poisoned by the others to rob him of some gold. They wanted to capture and execute Chaitanya's companions as thieves, but the brave Rajaputa (whether he was a *kshatriya* or the *sanodiya brahmana*) challenged the Muslims, presenting one argument after another. He demanded that the soldiers first presented the case to their leader, who was not present, and when this request was not accepted, he bluffed, saying that his house was very near, and he had about 200 Turkish soldiers and 100 cannons at his command - he could call them in at any time. Fortunately, when things were taking a very bad turn, Chaitanya returned to external consciousness and charmed the Muslims with his devotional singing and dancing.

Among the Muslim marauders there was one *pira* (Sufi mystic), all dressed in black, who was amazed by Chaitanya's love for God, and wanted to discuss with him about religion and divinity. According to *Chaitanya charitamrita*, this Sufi must have had some previous contact with *advaitin sannyasis*, because he had concluded that the Vedic perspective on God is impersonal. Quoting the Koran and Muslim beliefs, Chaitanya refuted all the arguments proposed by the Sufi, who became very impressed. Chaitanya concluded that since prayer (*namaz*) is one of the main requirements for a Muslim, God must be a person, and not an impersonal power. Love and worship of God is presented as the highest purpose of life, more important and elevated than *karma*, *jnana* and *yoga*. The Sufi accepted the Name of Krishna as one of the Names of God, and became eager to chant it, also inspiring the other Muslims in the group.

According to *Chaitanya charitamrita*, at that time Chaitanya accepted those Muslims as his followers and gave them new names - such as Ramadasa and Vijuly Khan.

It may be interesting to note that according to the Muslim tradition, the Arabic name Rahman ("all beneficent") is the most important name of Allah, being chanted regularly by devout Muslims. So Rama Dasa could easily be mistaken by Indian Muslims as "the servant of Rahman". The name Vijuli is a little more difficult to interpret, as in Indian languages it refers to the "silk-cotton tree" also called *simli*, while in Arabic language *vijdan* means "ecstasy, sentiment", so with a little imagination, relatively uneducated people could assimilate it to the idea of "one who is ecstatic/ has deep feelings".

Chaitanya charitamrita mentions that those Muslims all became fully dedicated to spiritual life, and their descendants became known as *pathana vaishnavas*. The popular Gaudiya vaishnava tradition says that Vijuly Khan was the young son of a local Muslim chief and became known as a great spiritual personality, but until today we could not find any independent evidence.

This example of attuned preaching to the Muslim soldiers is particularly interesting, because it utilizes the belief structure of the listeners to introduce them to the Vedic concepts, and not the other way around. Too often we see immature preachers twisting and distorting the Vedic concepts to adapt them to the beliefs and prejudice of the people they are talking to. This should be strictly avoided.

The key here is the motivation of the preacher. A devotee who is sincerely and selflessly interested in helping people to get nearer to the transcendental realization will not be afraid of displeasing his public, but will only be concerned that they will correctly understand and appreciate the new vision of truth. On the other side, a materially motivated religionist will flatter his public and accommodate their prejudice and misconceptions, because he wants to get more customers for himself and his own camp. Understanding the fine line between the two positions is extremely important.

Chaitanya continued to travel, and after arriving at Soro kshetra he requested his companions from Mathura (the *sanodiya brahmana* and Rajaputa Krishnadasa) to return to their homes. They respectfully declined, saying that Chaitanya still needed someone who could speak the local language, that was different from Bengali and Oriya. So they all continued to travel together. In Prayaga, they attended the Magha mela for 10 days, bathing at the confluence of the sacred rivers.

The meeting with Rupa in Prayaga

The second meeting with Rupa was in Prayaga (also known as Allahabad), at the Dasa asvamedha ghata, while Chaitanya was in town for the Kumbha mela. The most important instruction Chaitanya gave him on that occasion was to rediscover the lost holy

places of Krishna lila in Vrindavana, and to produce literature about *bhakti*, saying that Krishna would inspire him in his writings. *Chaitanya charitamrita* is the only biography that contains some record of the teachings offered by Chaitanya at that time and in other occasions, but we need to remember that Krishnadasa Kaviraja presents himself as a humble disciple of the Gosvamis of Vrindavana, as he repeats at the end of each and every chapter of his voluminous book: *sri rupa raghunatha pade yara asa, chaitanya charitamrita kahe krishnadasa*, "Aspiring to the feet of Sri Rupa and Raghunatha Dasa, I, Krishnadasa, speak the nectar of the activities of Chaitanya". Also, the Sarasvata Gaudiyas list Krishnadasa Kaviraja as a prominent link in their disciplic succession, presenting him as a disciple of Raghunatha and Jiva (by the way, this says volumes about the idea of spiritual initiation and discipleship among the companions and early followers of Chaitanya).

According to Krishnadasa Kaviraja, Chaitanya told Rupa:

"The ocean of the *bhakti rasa* is so deep that it is impossible to measure its dimensions. But I am giving you one single drop of it, so that you can understand. This universe is filled with an immense number of *jivas*, that go from one form to another in 84 *lakh* (8,400,000) of matrixes. A *jiva* is very small, about 10,000 times finer than the tip of a hair, as the Vedic literature explains. All these innumerable atomic *jivas* are particles of consciousness, and they are so subtle that Krishna in *Bhagavata purana* (11.16.11) says that among all subtle things he is the *jiva*, indicating that the *jiva* is the supreme among all subtle things.

The *jivas* are eternal but they take a material body, that restrains them by giving them limitations and subjecting them to the laws of nature. If the material forms did not have such limits, they might become deluded into thinking they can be completely independent, which is not good for them.

The embodied beings are divided into two main categories: *chara* and *achara*, those who are able to move, and those who are not. Those who can move around are those that fly in the air, those that live in the water, and those that roam the earth. Among the embodied beings that live on land, very few take birth as humans, and most of them are not *aryas* - they are uncivilized *mlecchas*, *pulindas*, *sabaras* or Buddhists. Among those few that have faith in the *Vedas*, about half are simply on the theoretical level, while in practice they commit innumerable forbidden acts, without giving any consideration to *dharma*.

Within the group of those who actually practice *dharma*, many put their faith in the mere performance of one's duty (*karma*), and among millions of such dutiful religious people, we will find one person who has the proper knowledge. If we could gather all these knowledgeable people, among millions of such *jnanis* there will be one person that is actually liberated from material identifications and conditionings, and among millions of liberated persons, it is rare to find even one single genuine devotee of Krishna. A devotee of Krishna has no selfish purpose or aspiration, therefore he is peaceful. Those who pursue material benefits, liberation or the perfection in religious life are all restless. This is confirmed in *Bhagavata purana* (6.14.5)."

Chaitanya continued: "It is a great fortune, for a *jiva* that is wondering around the universe, to meet a genuine *guru*, and by the blessing of *guru* and Krishna, one receives the seed of the devotional plant. This seed must be carefully planted in one's heart and tended like a gardener would do. The practice of *sravana* and *kirtana* - listening and chanting - will be the watering of the seedling of devotion. When properly cultivated, the plant will grow beyond the material universe, cross the Viraja ocean and penetrate into the spiritual dimension. There it will reach Goloka Vrindavana and climb on the Kalpa vriksha ("wish fulfilling tree") of Krishna's feet. There the *bhakti lata* creeper will produce the fruit of *prema* - pure love - while here the gardener continues to water it with the spiritual practices, beginning with *sravana*. If the mad elephant of the *vaishnava aparadha* - the offense against a genuine *vaishnava* - will rise, the plant will be broken or uprooted, and the leaves will become dry. Therefore the gardener must be very careful and keep a good fence around the plant, to avoid the arrival of elephants.

Sometimes weeds - such as the desire for material benefits or liberation - grow together with the *bhakti lata*. There are innumerable manifestations of such weeds, in the form of bad behavior, hypocrisy, hatred or violence, selfishness, desire for personal benefits, desire to be worshiped, desire to obtain a prominent position, and so on. These noxious weeds drink the water that was meant to nourish the *bhakti lata*, and they grow stronger and more luxuriant, while the *bhakti* suffocates and dies. Thus it is very important to cut off all the weeds as soon as they appear, so that the actual plant of devotion can grow nicely and attain Vrindavana.

When the fruit of *prema* becomes mature, the gardener tastes it, and by climbing on the creeper, he attains the Kalpa vriksha (of Krishna's feet), and happily engages in the divine service, always tasting the juice of the *prema* fruit. That is the supreme fruit, the supreme

purpose of the living being, compared to which the four purposes of life (*purusha artha - dharma, artha, kama, moksha*) become ordinary things like common grass or straw.

The great attainments such as *riddhi* and *siddhi*, the observance of *satya dharma* (truthfulness), the *samadhi* of *yoga* and the spiritual happiness known as *brahmananda* are all considered extremely desirable, but only as long as one has not achieved *prema* - pure love. This *prema* is like the miraculous herbal potion that simply by its scent can tie Krishna, the enemy of Madhu, within one's heart, and make him one's constant companion in all journeys. This *prema* is produced by pure *bhakti*, devotional service that is not contaminated by any material identification or attachment. I will now explain the characteristics of this pure *bhakti*." (*Madhya* 19.137-167)"

Here Chaitanya gave Rupa a verse that he will later quote in his *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu* (1.1.11): *anyabhilasita sunyam, jnana karmady anavritam, anukulyena krishnanusilanam bhaktir uttama*, "The higher level of devotion is totally selfless, and not obstructed or covered by the attachment to scholarship or ordinary duties, or similar pursuits. It must be favorable to Krishna, and in accordance to the instructions of Krishna."

Then he continued, "Therefore one should give up all other interests, desires and even modes of worship, including scholarship and rituals, and engage completely all senses in following Krishna's instructions. This is *suddha bhakti*, pure devotion, from which *prema* can rise: its characteristics are confirmed in the *Pancharatra* and in the *Bhagavata purana*." (*Madhya* 19.168-169)

Here is another fundamental Sanskrit verse that Rupa will insert in his *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu* (1.1.12): *sarvopadhi vinirmuktam tat paratvena nirmalam, hrishikena hrishikeshya sevanam, bhaktir ucyate*, "*Bhakti*, or devotion, is the service offered to the master of the senses through the activities of the senses. It must be spotless, focused only on the Supreme, and free from all designations and labels."

"In the *Bhagavata purana* (3.29.11-14) the Lord confirms that simply by hearing about the qualities of God, who is situated in the hearts of everyone, all the movements of the mind become free, like the water of the Ganges flows towards the ocean. It is said that the characteristics of the union with God through *bhakti* are: being transcendental to the material qualities, being unconditioned, and being constant without interruption.

These people (the devotees) will not give up the service to God even in exchange of the highest perfections of *yoga* - called *salokya, sarsti, samipyta, sarupya* or *ekatvam*

(respectively: living in Goloka Vrindavana or other planets of the spiritual world, developing divine perfection, remaining in the personal company of Krishna, having a divine form, and merging into God's consciousness), even if Krishna himself offers them. This *bhakti* that has been described is the ultimate goal of life, the supreme level much beyond the three material qualities, where one attains the divine nature." (Madhya 19.170-174)

Chaitanya further elaborated on the subject, but a more complete report of his instructions will be best located in the next volume, that will deal more specifically about the teachings of Chaitanya, as Rupa and Sanatana wrote the most important and significant compilations of *bhakti* literature in pursuance of Chaitanya's mission.

Another important meeting during this journey was with Vallabha Bhatta - also called Vallabha Acharya, the founder of the Vallabha sampradaya. While going to Vallabha's house in Adaila, Chaitanya was overwhelmed by ecstasy and he jumped into the Yamuna.

The meeting with Prakashananda Sarasvati

After leaving Prayaga, Chaitanya returned to Varanasi, where he stayed in the house of Chandrasekhara Vaidya, and usually taking lunch in the house of Tapan Mishra. While he resided in Varanasi, Chaitanya again met Sanatana who had come searching for him. On that occasion he instructed Sanatana for two months on many subtle and technical points of philosophy, and ordered him to compile philosophical and theological texts for the education of the people in general, as he had already told to his brother Rupa. Then he told him to go to Mathura.

In Varanasi, very often Chaitanya visited the Shiva Visvanatha temple and he became very popular with the inhabitants of Varanasi. In those times the city had many more temples than today, as most of them were destroyed in the 17th century by Aurangzeb.

The most famous scholar in the city was Prakashananda Sarasvati, a *sannyasi* in the line of Adi Shankara.

We may remember that on his way to Vrindavana, Chaitanya had stayed for some days in Varanasi and met with the friends and neighbors of Tapana Mishra and Chandrasekhara Vaidya - especially with one *brahmana* from Maharashtra, who had expressed his disappointment with the negative comments about Chaitanya he had heard from the local *sannyasis* (*Chaitanya charitamrita, Madhya* 17.105 and following verses).

Prakasananda had laughed about the high consideration and praise of Chaitanya's personality and activities presented by the *brahmana* and told him, "Yes, I know about the young *sannyasi* from Bengal, the disciple of Kesava Bharati. He is a fake, a very sentimental person. Together with other emotional people, he travels from one place to another, dancing and making people dance like him. He must have some mystic powers or be skilled in hypnotizing people, so the ignorant public is led to believe that he is God. I heard that even Sarvabhauma Bhatthacharya has become mad in his association. However, in Kasi he will not find many customers for his strange cult."

At that time, Chaitanya was anxious to travel to Vrindavana and his admirers were unable to correct the misunderstanding. Now, however, a meeting could be arranged under suitable circumstances. The *brahmana* invited Prakasananda and his disciples to his house, and invited Chaitanya as well. The meeting is mentioned in chapter 25, *Madhya lila, Chaitanya charitamrita*, and was already described in chapter 7, *Adi lila*.

After completing his midday duties, Chaitanya presented himself very humbly in front of the Shankarite *sannyasis*, who were conquered by his unpretentiousness, effulgence and enormous spiritual power.

It is interesting to note that, in spite of their rather low opinion about him, the Shankarite *sannyasis* welcomed Chaitanya affectionately, as one would greet a god-brother, and that Chaitanya presented himself very humbly as one would behave with senior god-brothers. Contrarily to what happened with the Madhvacharya *sannyasis*, there was no philosophical debate pointing out philosophical or theological differences, but simply a discussion about the application of philosophy.

Prakasananda expressed his surprise at the fact that Chaitanya, a respectable *sannyasi* (from his own Matha, he clearly said), was known to engage in sentimentally singing and dancing in public together with simple-minded and illiterate people, instead of spending his time in the contemplation of the *Vedanta*. Also, he did not approve of the fact that Chaitanya had not assumed his due title of Bharati, but retained his *brahmachari* name.

The line of Adi Shankara is called *dasanama* ("ten names") referring to the 10 titles awarded to its *sannyasis*, such as Sarasvati, Tirtha, Ashrama, Vana, Aranya, Bharati, Puri, Giri, Parvata and Sagara.

The name Chaitanya is given to the *brahmacharis* who study under the tutelage of the Bharati, Sarasvati and Puri *sannyasis*, that are generally in the lineage of the Sringeri Matha. The name Prakasa is given to the *brahmacharis* studying under the Vana and Aranya *sannyasis* (Jagannatha Puri Govardhana Matha), while Svarupa is the name of the *brahmacharis* studying under the Tirtha and Ashrama *sannyasis* (Dvaraka Matha), and Ananda is the name of the *brahmacharis* studying under the Giri, Parvata and Sagara *sannyasis* (Badrinath). Chaitanya's *sannyasi guru*, Keshava Bharati, belonged to the Bharati lineage, and therefore Chaitanya should have taken the same title and accepted the respect attached to the lineage. Therefore Prakasananda perceived Chaitanya as excessively humble, and even suspected he was suffering from some personal problems, especially when he saw he had seated himself on the naked floor, in the area where people washed their feet.

Prakasananda rose from his own seat and went to take Chaitanya by the hand, called him "Sripada", and had him sit in a very respectable raised place, in the middle of the other *sannyasis*. Again, this gesture can be interpreted only as a sign of encouragement towards someone who is considered a member of a same group. And in fact Prakasananda clearly says so: *sampradayika sannyasi tumi*, "you are a *sannyasi* from our same lineage" (*Chaitanya charitamrita*, Adi, 7.66), and asks him why he is not staying more often in their company and reading *Vedanta*, choosing instead to spend his time with emotional and illiterate people who are always engaged in singing and dancing. (7.67-69)

Prakasananda reassured the young and humble *sannyasi* that his spiritual splendor was easily perceived, so there was no reason to be excessively humble. Chaitanya, however, did not fall in the trap of self-righteousness, and replied, "My *guru* told me I am stupid, and gave me the direct instruction to always recite the Krishna *mantra* instead of engaging in the study of the *Vedanta*, because the Name of the Lord is the essence of the *Vedas* and liberates people from the material existence, taking them directly to the feet of Krishna. All the scriptures teach that the holy Name is the only *dharma* in the age of Kali. So my *guru* taught me one *sloka* in this regard, to remember constantly. " (7.70-75)

In the verses from 7.75 to 7.98, Chaitanya beautifully explains the glories of the Names of the Lord, also quoting the *shastra*, and claiming that his mission and *sadhana* have

been explicitly approved by his *guru*. His discourse is deeply appreciated by Prakashananda and the other *sannyasis*, who feel reassured about Chaitanya's genuine knowledge, realization and level of consciousness.

Contrarily to the beliefs of some over-zealous members of Gaudiya Vaishnava institutions, the genuinely qualified *sannyasis* in the line of Shankara are not *mayavadis*, and they do not believe that the name, form and qualities of the Lord are material, false or temporary. On the contrary, as we can see from the famous *Bhaja Govindam* song and many other writings by Adi Shankara, he presented *bhakti* to the personal form of God as the most important and highest religious *sadhana*. Not only that: all the Shankaracharya Mathas respectfully and faithfully worship Deities - a practice that would have no meaning for people who do not understand the concept of spiritual form, and believe that any form is a material form.

We will discuss more about this issue in the section of this work entitled "The Mayavadi war".

Return to Puri

Leaving Varanasi, Chaitanya was overwhelmed by the ecstatic feelings of devotion for Jagannatha, and expressed the desire to return to Puri as quickly as possible.

Chaitanya mangala describes some more miracles during this journey back - for example, the episode of the young milkman, who was walking to the market with his products when he met Chaitanya down the road. Chaitanya said he was thirsty and asked him for some buttermilk, and the boy obliged, without charging him any money. Later, the boy found that his buttermilk pot had been miraculously filled with gold and valuable jewels.

On their way to Puri, Chaitanya and his companions arrived in Bengal, then walked through Radha desa and arrived in Navadvipa. Mother Saci rushed to meet him, unable to tolerate her separation from him any more. Bewildered and crying, Saci gazed at her son, and begged him to go home with her, and bring back life to Navadvipa and its people. "You can take *sannyasa* after I am dead," she said, and everybody cried seeing her

despair and pain. Moved, Chaitanya tried to pacify her with spiritual instructions, but that was not enough. So he went to stay at Varakona ghat, near his former home, and took his food at the house of Suklambara Brahmachari. He remained in Navadvipa for one day only, then he resumed his journey to Puri. Everybody followed him on the road, up to Shantipura, where Chaitanya stayed for one more day.

Chaitanya came back to remain permanently in Puri in 1455 at the age of 30. He never traveled again from there. For several years the devotees from Bengal came to visit him regularly. Residing with him at Puri were Gadadhara Pandita, Vakresvara, Damodara, Sankara and Haridasa, as well as Jagadananda, Bhagavan, Govinda, Kasisvara, Paramananda Puri and Svarupa Damodara. Ramananda Raya was also in Puri and together with Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya remained always near Chaitanya.

As he was feeling disturbed by the large numbers of people who came to see him, Chaitanya moved to a small *bhajana kutir* on the ocean beach, near the house of Kasi Mishra, who was the Jagannatha Temple Manager and *raja guru* of king Prataparudra Deva, and went to live there. On the request of Kasi Mishra, Chaitanya remained to live there for the next 18 years, therefore the Gambhira is a very famous pilgrimage place for Bengali and Oriya Vaishnavas. Chaitanya regularly had *sankirtana* here with his most intimate associates. The Matha is still preserving Chaitanya's *kamandalu* (water pot) and sandals.

That place is now known as the Gaura Gambhira, and it is in Bali Sahi. The Gaura Gambhira is also known as Kashi Mishralaya or Radhakantha Matha. The name Radhakanta comes from the Deities of Radha Kanta, that were originally from Kanchi. They had been installed in Sri Mandira, but the King had decided to move them out; the explanation given by the local people is that Radha Kanta were eating the offerings of food before they were placed before Jagannatha, so a separate worship schedule was arranged in the house of Kasi Mishra. The Deities presently worshiped there, besides Radha Kanta, are Radharani and Lalita sakhi, Chaitanya, Nityananda, Advaita, Radha Krishna, Revati Balarama, Jagannatha, Laddu Gopala, Antua Gopala, Salagrama and Giriraja (Govardhana sila). The main celebration is *sankirtana*, performed regularly every day. Presently the Matha has other branches in Andhra Pradesh, Vrindavana (especially in Sri Radhakunda), Navadvipa, etc.

When Chaitanya moved there from Sarvabhauma's house, Gadadhara Pandita stayed with him and they had night-long *kirtanas* on the beach. Later on, in that same area Chaitanya

excavated an ancient Deity of Gopinatha and established the temple that is today known as Tota Gopinatha. Gadadhara Pandita was appointed to take care of the Deity, and he continued in this service until the last days of his life. When Gadadhara Pandita became old, he had difficulties in his service as Gopinatha is very tall, and dressing and garlanding him was not easy. So one day Gopinatha sat down on the floor in *padma asana* (with crossed legs) so that his *pujaka* could reach him more easily, and he is still in that position.

Later more *vigrahas* were installed, and now besides Gopinatha we find Radha and Lalita, all black complexioned, which is quite unusual. In a separate room, Balarama of white complexion is holding horn and plough, and is accompanied by his two consorts Revati and Varuni. In the third room in the temple there are Radha Madana Mohana and Gaura Gadadhara. Outside the original temple structure, in what is now the large Kirtana hall, there are the self-manifested Radha-pada, the marks of the lotus feet of Srimati Radharani. Chaitanya used to come here every day to listen to Gadadhara Pandita speaking on *Bhagavata purana*. This is also the place where according to the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, Chaitanya disappeared from this world. More about these events will be said at the end of the section on the life of Chaitanya in Puri.

The Tota Gopinatha Matha is near the temple of Yamesvara Shiva, in Gaudabadi Sahi. Gaudabadi or Gaurabadi Sahi takes its name from the fact that Chaitanya (Gaura) used to come this way every day with a *kirtana* party to walk to the Jagannatha temple, and he liked this area very much because it reminded him of Vrindavana. In fact he often stopped here and he was very attracted by the sandy hill he called Govardhana and by the gardens at its foot.

One day Chaitanya went to see Paramananda Puri in his Matha and asked for some water. Paramananda Puri Gosvami, disciple of Madhavendra Puri and godbrother of Isvara Puri (Chaitanya's initiating Guru), regretfully informed him that the water of his well was actually very bitter and muddy and unfit to be drunk. Chaitanya smiled and said that Jagannatha had made that water muddy to put a limit to the number of people who would attain liberation by drinking it. Chaitanya prayed Mother Ganga to appear in the well and the next morning, to the great amazement of everyone, the water from the well had become crystal clear and extremely sweet. Many Mathas still use the water of this well for the ritual bathing (*abhisheka*) of their Deities, collecting it in silver containers and carrying it in procession to their place, accompanied by a *sankirtana* party.

The Paramananda Matha is also known as Sri Puri Gosvami Matha, and is near Lokanatha road, inside a gate in Baseli sahi. At present the Matha, that has been for a long time under the control of the local Government, is being used as a police station. In 1904 Bhaktivinoda repaired the well with the assistance of Mrinalini Das, whose name was engraved on a commemorative plaque. Paramananda Puri's tiny *bhajan kutir* (about 5 feet wide) and the *kua* or well (on the right side of the compound) have been separated from the rest of the area with a metal rail.

Rupa and Sanatana visit Chaitanya in Puri

When Chaitanya returned to Puri from Vrindavana, Svarupa Damodara sent news to the devotees in Bengal, and everyone was so excited that they immediately left for Puri. Shivananda Sena made all the arrangements, paying for all the expenditures, food and accommodation of the entire party, including one street dog that had followed the devotees. He actually even paid a large extra sum of money to a boatman who did not want to ferry the dog across the river, and one night he was so unhappy because his servant had forgotten to feed the dog, that he sent 10 men out to find the poor animal and give him food. When they finally arrived in Puri, they went to pay their respects to Jagannatha and took lunch with Chaitanya, then on the next day they all went to meet him. When they arrived at the Gambhira, they were astonished to see that the same street dog that had traveled with them was sitting next to Chaitanya, eating coconut pulp from Chaitanya's hand, and happily responding to his invitations to chant the Names of Rama and Krishna.

In the meantime Rupa and his brother Anupama had been in Vrindavana on the order of Chaitanya; after some time they went to Bengal to get feedback on the texts Rupa was writing, but Anupama died as soon as they arrived. All the devotees had left to go and see Chaitanya, so Rupa decided to go to Puri as well.

Rupa had a close friendship relationship with Haridasa, and stayed at his place. When Chaitanya arrived for his daily visit to Haridasa, they exchanged news, especially about Rupa's brothers Sanatana and Anupama.

On the next day Chaitanya introduced Rupa to all the devotees and requested their blessings so that he could write literature on *bhakti*. During the entire festival period Chaitanya regularly met with Rupa at Haridasa's place, and discussed about Krishna prema, especially about the difference of *rasa* between Krishna in Vrindavana and Krishna in Dvaraka. This confirmed Rupa's idea that he should write a different text on Satyabhama, the queen of Krishna in Dvaraka, without mixing her story with the relationship between Radha and Krishna in Vrindavana.

After the end of the rainy season the visiting devotees returned to Bengal, but Rupa stayed in Puri and had more opportunities to discuss his work with Chaitanya and his most intimate associates, such as Ramananda, Svarupa Damodara and Sarvabhauma. He then left at the end of the Dola yatra (Holi festival, at the end of spring), to return to Vrindavana and remain there.

As Chaitanya had requested, Rupa had passed the message to his elder brother Sanatana that he should go to see him in Puri. Sanatana traveled from Mathura to Puri, and while passing through the forest of Jharikhanda he became ill due to drinking bad water. His body became covered with itching sores oozing liquid pus, and this condition threw him into a deep anxiety because according to the Vedic system one falls to the level of untouchability when contracting a medical condition by which the body is constantly contaminated by oozing substances.

He was horrified at the idea that his disease could contaminate the *sevakas* of Jagannatha and spoil their service in the temple, and considered that he would be unable to see Chaitanya either, because he had heard he lived near Jagannatha's temple. So he decided to commit suicide in a proper place and attain a better body; he deliberated that the best opportunity would be to throw himself under the chariot during Ratha yatra. When he arrived in Puri he went to see Haridasa, who embraced him in affection, but when Chaitanya came on his daily visit and tried to embrace him, Sanatana backed away in anguish. "Please do not touch me. I am so contaminated, not only because of my social position, but also due to my disease."

Smiling, Chaitanya caught him and embraced him anyway, without showing any repulsion for the sticky liquid oozing from his sores. Then they sat together and exchanged news about the devotees, especially about Sanatana's brothers Rupa and Anupama. Sanatana humbly said, "I come from a low social position, because my family members engaged in all sorts of negative activities."

In this regard, we may remember that Sanatana's family descended from a high ancestry of brahmins, but already his great grandfather had fallen from that position and his descendants had become associated with the Muslim government. However, the youngest brother Anupama (previously called Vallabha) had been a great devotee of Ramachandra from his very childhood (much like Murari Gupta), and Rupa and Sanatana were always absorbed in reading and discussing the *Bhagavata purana*, even before they had given up everything to follow Chaitanya.

Like his brother Rupa, Sanatana remained in Puri for the Ratha yatra festival, the rainy season, and the winter - for a total of a little less than one year. In the month of Jyestha (May/ June), Chaitanya went to the temple of Shiva Yamesvara for lunch, and he sent for Sanatana. It was noon, and the hottest time of the year: the sand of the beach was burning like fire, but Sanatana walked through the ocean shore path and scarcely noticed the heat because he was so happy about being called by Chaitanya. When he reached the place where Chaitanya was sitting with the devotees, he received a plate of food from Govinda and then went to see Chaitanya.

Chaitanya questioned him affectionately. "By which road did you come? Why did you walk through the beach, where the sand is so hot? The path in front of the temple is very cool. Now your feet must be covered with blisters and you will not be able to walk normally."

"I did not feel much pain," Sanatana replied, "and I did not notice the blisters. I cannot walk in front of the temple of Jagannatha, because the *sevakas* are always coming and going there: if I touch one of them, I will commit an offense."

Chaitanya was very pleased. "Your touch can purify even the Devas and the great Rishis, and grant liberation to the entire universe. However, a devotee becomes even more glorious when he shows dignity and respect to others."

With these words, Chaitanya embraced Sanatana in spite of all his protests. "I consider you as my child," he said. "When a small child passes urine or stool while sitting on his mother's lap, she does not become angry or repulsed; in fact she is amused and happy to clean him up. When a devotee chooses to dedicate his body, mind and soul to the service of God, he immediately becomes purified and his body is spiritualized."

Then Chaitanya embraced Sanatana again, and instantly his sores were healed.

Sanatana stayed at Haridasa's place and Chaitanya visited them every day, bringing the best *mahaprasada* from Jagannatha. One day Chaitanya told Sanatana, "If I could attain Krishna by committing suicide, I would certainly kill myself immediately. But the only means to attain Krishna is devotional service. Without developing pure love for God and obtaining Krishna's audience in this very lifetime, one will not go to the spiritual world simply by dying. It is normal for a devotee to aspire to his own death, because the limitations of the material body are painful and frustrating, but the body should be used in devotional service, and not given up whimsically out of ignorance or passion. In devotional service there is no preoccupation of higher or lower birth, as anyone can attain perfection even if born in a very low family or community. In fact, the pride coming from a high parentage, community, wealth or education constitutes the greatest obstacle to the purpose of life. Anyone can serve Krishna by engaging in the 9 methods of devotional service - hearing, chanting, remembering, executing the orders, offering worship, offering respect and surrender, developing a service relationship, becoming friends with God and fully dedicating oneself to God. The most important among these 9 practices is *nama sankirtana* - chanting, singing, talking or discussing about God in the company of devotees: when it is free from offenses, this practice easily gives pure love for God."

Sanatana realized that Chaitanya knew his heart and had discouraged him from committing suicide. "Because you have dedicated yourself to me," added Chaitanya, "I will use your body to carry out many important things. You will study and write about the principles of *bhakti* - who is a devotee, what is devotional service, what is love for God, and what are the qualities and the characteristics of a *vaishnava*. You will excavate the lost places of pilgrimage, establish centers to develop love for God, and teach people about renunciation. Because my mother asked me to stay in Puri, I cannot go to Vrindavana and teach there personally, but I can do it through you. Therefore you should not try to destroy your body. I need it for my mission."

Raghunatha Dasa joins Chaitanya in Puri

After some time also Raghunatha Dasa joined Chaitanya in Puri. On Chaitanya's instructions, Raghunatha had remained at home engaging in his family duties to please and reassure his parents and relatives. As we had seen in a previous section, Raghunatha

Dasa was the son of Govardhana Majumdara, a wealthy tax collector living in Ramakeli under the government of the Sultan of Bengal.

At some point Govardhana's brother, Hiranya, got in a sticky spot with a local Muslim who had previously occupied his professional position. The Muslim found out that Hiranya was withholding a larger percentage of taxes than allowed, and he denounced him to the magistrate. Hiranya escaped and the magistrate arrested Raghunatha Dasa instead and kept him hostage to capture his uncle. Raghunatha appealed to the Muslim tax collector's best sentiments, saying that he considered him as on the same level of his father and therefore deserved his kindness and compassion. The Muslim tax collector was moved and had Raghunatha Dasa released, requesting him to speak with his uncle and convince him to give a share of the profits. Luckily, the matter was settled and the danger averted.

After some time, Raghunatha Dasa decided to ask Nityananda's advice and help to become free from his family ties, and he went to Panihati to talk to him. In a playful mood, Nityananda grabbed Raghunatha and threw him to the ground, taking him as a "prisoner" and ordering him to organize a great festival for all his followers, and serve them yogurt and *chida* (flat rice, a sort of rice flakes). Flat rice is a very popular food for pilgrims and *sannyasis*, because it does not require any cooking and after washing it can be mixed with a variety of ingredients, sweet or savory, to prepare many different recipes. It is produced by parboiling the rice and flattening each grain with stone rolling pins; then the grains are dried and packed, and sold on the market traditionally at a very cheap price. It also keeps well for a very long time and is not heavy to carry around.

Raghunatha was extremely pleased and immediately sent his servants to the market to purchase all kinds of ingredients for the feast - flat rice, yogurt, milk, condensed milk, *sandesha* (one type of sweet made with fresh cottage cheese), clarified butter, sugar and bananas. Many people heard about the event and flocked to the place, and Raghunatha simply purchased more food to distribute to everyone. Half of the rice was mixed with yogurt, and the other half was mixed with condensed milk.

Nityananda sat on a raised platform and the seven huge basins of flat rice were carried to him, then his associates came to sit all around - Ramadasa, Sundarananda, Gadadhara Dasa, Murari, Kamalakara, Sadashiva, Purandara, Dhananjaya, Jagadisa, Paramesvara Dasa, Mahesa, Gauridasa, Hoda Krishnadasa and Uddharana Datta. The crowd of people who had come to participate to the feast was so great that some did not find a place to sit

inside the compound, and went to sit on the bank of the river and even down into the water to eat their flat rice. The food was distributed by 20 men. The rumor of the festival spread so wide that people came from other villages to sell their flat rice, yogurt and milk supplies. Raghunatha Dasa purchased their goods, too, and then had them sit down and eat like all the other people. Anyone who came to see the fun also received a pot with flat rice, yogurt and bananas.

After everyone had settled down with their food, Nityananda brought Chaitanya and fed him personally. Not everybody was able to see Chaitanya, but everyone could understand that Nityananda was talking and feeding someone.

Suddenly, in the middle of the celebrations, Raghava Pandita arrived, with even more food - he was famous for his wonderful cooking and for the feasts he prepared for Chaitanya. In fact, it was common belief that Radharani herself had taken charge of the kitchen in his house - and Radharani had received a special blessing from Durvasa Muni, and whatever food she cooked would be exquisite like nectar.

So it was decided that Nityananda and his companions would go to Raghava Pandita's house for dinner, and Raghunatha Dasa was given some of the *prasadam* touched by Nityananda and Chaitanya.

"Chaitanya has come personally to eat your food," said Nityananda to Raghunatha Dasa. "Now there is no doubt that he will deliver you from your family ties and place you under the care of his secretary, Svarupa Damodara." Before leaving, Raghunatha Dasa presented Raghava Pandita with a considerable amount of money for the service of the Lord and the devotees, out of gratitude for the kindness he had received.

After returning home, Raghunatha Dasa started to sleep in the Durga mandapa of the house instead of using his inner bedroom, but still the security personnel were guarding him and it was not possible for him to get away.

One day Yadunandana Acharya, the spiritual mentor of Raghunatha Dasa, arrived at his house very early in the morning and asked his help to convince a *brahmana* in the neighborhood to resume the worship of the Deity. Raghunatha seized the opportunity and left the house with him while the guards were still deeply asleep.

When the people in the Majumdaras' house woke up, they discovered that Raghunatha was gone and they demanded an explanation, but Yadunandana Acharya was surprised as

well, because he did not expect him not to come back. Finally they concluded that the boy had joined the Bengali devotees traveling to Puri for the festival, and Govardhana wrote a letter to Shivananda Sena, kindly requesting him to return his son. However, when the letter was delivered to Shivananda on the way at Jhankara, he was unable to oblige because Raghunatha was not traveling with him. In fact Raghunatha was walking on his own, and so fast that he reached Puri in 12 days only, and on the way he only consumed whatever little food he could find easily.

When he reached Puri, Chaitanya welcomed him and praised his detachment from the dangerous trap of family identification and enjoyment. He said, "Your father and uncle are both very close to my own family, as Nilambara Chakravarti considered them as his own brothers. So I can afford to be a little familiar with them, and go for a little joke. They are like worms in stool living in the latrine of material attachment, because they mistake poison for nectar. Although they are good people and generous in supporting the *brahmanas*, they are trapped in the web of *samsara*."

Thus Raghunatha Dasa was accepted in the core group of Chaitanya's associates, and entrusted to Svarupa Damodara. Now he was finally free to be as crazily renounced as he liked. For 5 days he accepted the *prasada* given by Svarupa Damodara, then on the 6th day he went to beg his food like the *sadhus* used to do - standing at the *simha dvara* of Jagannatha temple, after the main rituals of the day were over and the *sevakas* were going home late at night, or walking from stall to stall along the Ananda Bazar, where the *mahaprasada* shops are.

When Chaitanya was informed about it, he was very pleased. He said, "A person who has accepted the renounced life should not depend on others, because if he does so, he will be neglected by Krishna. The desire to eat nice food is dangerous because it distracts the consciousness from spiritual life, therefore one should simply satisfy one's genuine hunger with whatever food is easily available - vegetables, leaves, fruits and roots and so on."

Raghunatha requested direct instructions from Chaitanya, and this is what he received: "Do not listen to ordinary talks of the people, do not engage in gossip and useless conversations. Do not pursue good food or good clothing. Do not demand any honor but respect everyone. Always chant Krishna's Name and meditate on the service of Radha and Krishna in Vrindavana."

He was always completely immersed in the chanting and meditating on Krishna - he kept only one hour and a half a day for eating and sleeping, and he only used a small torn cloth and a patched wrapper to cover his body.

When the devotees from Bengal arrived in Puri for the Ratha yatra, Shivananda Sena informed Raghunatha Dasa that his father had sent 10 men with a letter asking to send him back home. Again, when the devotees returned from Puri at the end of the rainy season, Govardhana Majumdara sent another letter to Sivananda, asking for news about his son.

Shivananda replied truthfully, describing the supreme level of renunciation and spiritual realization attained by Raghunatha Dasa, but his parents were deeply aggrieved by the news. Understanding that their son would not return home, they decided to send him some provisions at least - 400 coins, two servants and one *brahmana* assistant, and Shivananda Sena replied that he would take them to Puri on his next journey. This information is reported by Kavi karnapura in *Chaitanya chandrodaya nataka*.

The following year, the men sent by Govardhana Majumdara traveled with the Bengali devotees to Puri, but Raghunatha Dasa refused to accept the money and the assistants for himself, rather he employed them to offer lunch to Chaitanya for 2 days every month, for 2 years. Then he stopped, because he came to think that it was not proper to do service by using money received from materialists, because there could be a danger of generating some material reputation for the opulence of one's service. When one depends on materialistic people, the food one eats is contaminated and meditation on Krishna becomes difficult. Chaitanya approved this choice and said that during those 2 years he had accepted Raghunatha's food only because of his affection and eagerness.

After a few days Raghunatha took another step forward on the path of renunciation, and instead of standing at the temple gate at the end of the day, he started getting his lunch from a charitable center for public food distribution. Chaitanya commented, "Very good. Standing at the temple gate waiting for the *sevakas* to give some food is not much different from the behavior of a prostitute, who watches all the men coming and going, and hopes to get some profit from one of them. To receive some food at the *chatra* (traditional booth for free food distribution to pilgrims and beggars) one does not need to convince or attract anyone or even talk at all, therefore one can happily continue to concentrate on the *sankirtana* of Krishna."

Still striving for higher renunciation, Raghunatha found that he could sustain himself by recycling the old rice *mahaprasada* that the Ananda Bazar shopkeepers were unable to sell because it had started to smell bad from fermentation. Near one of the temple gates (where the kitchen drains flow outside the compound) there is a dump used specifically for this purpose, and where the cows came to eat; at night Raghunatha would collect the discarded rice that the cows had not consumed, and then after washing it very carefully in lots of water, he would add some salt and eat it.

Both Svarupa Damodara and Chaitanya were so pleased with Raghunatha's humility, that they begged some of that rice from him and ate it happily in spite of his protests, and praised its taste and transcendental qualities.

To show his approval and affection, Chaitanya gifted Raghunatha Dasa with a *govardhana sila* (a stone from the Govardhana hill) and a *gunja mala* (a necklace of small seeds from a particular plant that is dear to Radha) that had been carried from Vrindavana by Shankarananda Sarasvati and had been treasured by Chaitanya for 3 years. The *sila* had been bathed many times by Chaitanya's tears and fondly embraced by him, because such a *sila* is non-different from Krishna's own body. The seed necklace symbolized Radharani's association, and had been gracing Chaitanya's chest for a long time. Chaitanya recommended him to faithfully worship the *govardhana sila* with pure water and 8 soft *tulasi* flowers, on a perfect sattvik level of consciousness. Svarupa Damodara gave him two pieces of cloth used to dress the *sila*, a wooden *asana* that served as a throne, and a small jug for offering water. Also on Svarupa Damodara's advice he started to offer the *sila* some *khaja* and *sandesha* (two types of sweets) which would be supplied by Govinda.

The story of Raghunatha Dasa is very significant and it is important to understand it within the context of the other episodes in the activities of Chaitanya and his close associates - Haridasa, Rupa and Sanatana, Saravabhauma, Srivasa, Advaita, Sivananda Sena, and so on. In order to get a clear view of Chaitanya's teachings about renunciation we need to move past the mentality of rules and bodily identification, and understand the meaning of *chaitanya*, literally "consciousness".

Contrarily to a general belief, spiritual realization does not depend on the rules we follow, the position we hold in society, or to the distance or association towards other people. To each and every person in his core entourage, Chaitanya assigned a particular mission that would uniquely support the *sankirtana* movement. To Raghunatha Dasa, who was born

and raised in the lap of unlimited luxury and wealth from a very materialistic family, Chaitanya entrusted the task of exemplifying the greatest renunciation, humility and austerity in devotional service, so that the bondage of social conventions and limitations could be broken, for the sake of the spiritual progress of all.

This message needs to be brought to the forefront of Hindu society once again, and just as powerfully and purely.

Life in Puri

There are also some miraculous episodes about Chaitanya's activities while he was living in Puri, described in various biographies. *Chaitanya charitamrita* says that at some point Chaitanya entered the body of a sincere devotee, Nakula Brahmachari, who lived in the village of Ambuya muluka (Bengal), and induced him to manifest all the symptoms of pure transcendental love for God. People came from all over Bengal to see him and everyone he met was told to chant the Names of Krishna, and infused with the powerful emotion of devotional love.

Shivananda Sena heard about these facts and went to see for himself, because he was rather skeptical. To test the genuineness of the phenomenon, Shivananda remained outside the house and waited to see if Nakula would come personally to call him and reveal his personal *sadhana mantra*, which would confirm the direct presence of Chaitanya in Nakula's body. There was a very large crowd, and people were coming and going all the time, yet Nakula - in his *avesa* or possession/ channeling state, asked that 3 or 4 persons should go to call Shivananda, who was waiting some distance away. Many people started to run around, calling in all directions, "Whoever is Shivananda, please come. Nakula Brahmachari wants to see you." When Shivananda entered the room and paid his respects, Nakula said, "I know about your doubts. I will now give you evidence. Your *sadhana mantra* is the Gaura Gopala mantra, composed of 4 syllables."

Chaitanya also often appeared in the household temple of Mother Saci, in the places where Nityananda danced, in the house of Srivasa during *sankirtana*, and in the house of Raghava Pandita.

Srikanta Sena, nephew of Shivananda Sena, came to Puri to see Chaitanya, and stayed for 2 months there. When he was leaving to return to Bengal, Chaitanya told him to ask the devotees not to travel to Puri next year, because he would go personally to Bengal and meet them; he would go to Shivananda Sena's house in the month of Pausha (December/January) to accept the food cooked by Jagadananda.

When the month of Pausha arrived, the devotees prepared everything, but Chaitanya did not come. Nrisimhananda Brahmachari (his original name was Pradyumna - he was called Nrisimhananda by Chaitanya) arrived in the house of Shivananda and saw that he and Jagadananda were very unhappy because of their disappointment. "Do not worry," he said. "I will bring him here within 3 days". After 2 days of meditation, Nrisimhananda said, "I have already brought Chaitanya to Panihati, and tomorrow he will arrive at your house. Please arrange for ingredients, and I shall personally cook and offer him food."

Shivananda arranged for the items listed by Nrisimhananda and the cooking started early in the morning. Then 3 plates were prepared - one for Jagannatha and one for Chaitanya, and a smaller one for Nrisimha, his own Deity. In his meditation, he saw Chaitanya coming quickly, sitting and eating all the food from the 3 plates. Then Nrisimhananda asked Sivananda to bring more food for Jagannatha and Nrisimha, because Chaitanya had eaten also their offerings. The following year, when the devotees went to Puri to see Chaitanya, he addressed Nrisimhananda and said, "Last year in the month of Pausha, Nrisimhananda cooked a wonderful feast for me. I had never before tasted such good sweets and vegetables as those he prepared at that time." This confirmed the faith of Shivananda.

Chaitanya mangala says that one day a *brahmana* from south India, named Rama, arrived in Puri to get the *darshana* of Jagannatha. He was suffering from extreme poverty and he was even unable to get sufficient food to eat or perform his religious duties; he had been abandoned by his family and had no shelter or support. Although he could understand that his situation was the result of his own previous bad *karma*, he found his life intolerable and hoped that Jagannatha would help him. Praying before Jagannatha, he asked for the blessing of sufficient wealth, and declared that unless his misery was relieved, he would kill himself. So he started to fast, and continued for 7 days, lying on the ocean beach and feeling very weak. Suddenly, just when he had decided to drown himself, he saw a tall man coming out of the water, and thinking that extraordinary man was Jagannatha himself, he somehow ran after him and begged for his mercy. The man

stopped and talked to him. Moved by his plight, he revealed that he was Vibhishana, great devotee of Rama and brother to Ravana, and he was going to pay his respects to Jagannatha. "Your present situation is due to the result of your past activities," he told the miserable *brahmana*. "Devote yourself to the service of God and in your next life your situation will be much better."

Vibhishana then proceeded to the temple and the *brahmana* walked behind him. Arrived at the temple of Tota Gopinatha (that stands between the beach and the Jagannatha temple) they stopped at its gate. Chaitanya was sitting inside the temple with his companions and asked Govinda to go out and see who had come, and lead them to his presence. One of the two guests sat besides Chaitanya, and was greeted very affectionately. "I see you again after a very long time," Chaitanya told him, patting him gently with his hand, and they both started crying out of affection for each other. The other people present could not understand what was going on, because the newcomer was not known to anyone. Then Chaitanya said, "This *brahmana* who came with you and is standing in the back is suffering very much. Due to poverty, he has lost all knowledge and thus he has come to blame Jagannatha for his problems. It is easy to blame others for one's difficulties, but in happiness and success, people say that it is due to their own qualities and good work. What can we do? Please take care of this problem personally."

After paying his respects to Chaitanya and accepting his order, Vibhishana left and returned to the ocean beach. Rama Vipra followed him, asking why he was leaving without visiting Jagannatha, and Vibhishana replied that they had just seen Jagannatha - as Chaitanya is non-different from Jagannatha himself. "I will take you home and give you the wealth you desire," Vibhishana said. "Please take me back to Chaitanya," begged Rama Vipra. "I was a fool, and I did not see things clearly."

Vibhishana obliged. Rama Vipra offered his respect to Chaitanya and asked him what was the proper medicine that would cure his problems. Chaitanya blessed him, and on the request of Paramananda Puri, he explained the devotees what had happened. "Because of his great sufferings, this *brahmana* had lost his mind and knowledge, and came to Puri to blackmail Jagannatha, saying that if he did not give him sufficient wealth, Jagannatha would become responsible for the death of a *brahmana*, as he would fast to death or drown himself. Jagannatha felt sorry for him, so he arranged for Vibhishana to help him."

One of the main associates of Chaitanya in Puri was Ramananda. He was so immersed in the sentiments of service to the divine couple of Radha Krishna, that Chaitanya sent him

Pradyumna Mishra to be instructed about *bhakti*. So Pradyumna Mishra went to Ramananda's house, and he was welcomed by a servant, as Ramananda was busy training two young Devadasis in performing his theatrical piece *Jagannatha vallabha nataka*. He was taking this task very seriously, even personally dressing the girls himself, but his mind was never disturbed by any material desire, because his consciousness was firmly situated in the sentiment of a maidservant of the *gopis*. Externally he appeared to be a man, but internally his meditation was the mind of a *sakhi*, every single moment of his life.

When Pradyumna Mishra told him about his visit, Chaitanya explained that such a level of concentration on the spiritual level is extraordinary and should never be imitated. Ramananda's sublime spiritual realization and qualities are even more appreciated when we remember that he was born in a family considered as belonging to the *sudra* class, and he was living in an ordinary social position, as he was not a *sannyasi* or a *brahmachari*.

In this regard, Krishnadasa Kaviraja comments in *Chaitanya charitamrita* about the deep intentions of Chaitanya in entrusting some of the most important roles of his mission to people that were normally considered as low-born, such as Ramananda and Raghunatha Dasa (who were considered *sudras*), Haridasa (considered a Muslim), or coming from fallen positions such as Rupa, Sanatana, Anupama and his son Jiva (who had been formally converted to Islam).

Ramachandra Puri's criticism

Once a *sannyasi* named Ramachandra Puri, disciple of Madhavendra, arrived to visit Puri. Chaitanya offered him respect as an elder and Ramachandra Puri embraced him. After they had been sitting for some time, Jagadananda came to invite Ramachandra Puri for lunch. A large quantity of Jagannatha *mahaprasada* was brought for distribution and Ramachandra enjoyed it very much, then he requested Jagadananda to sit and take lunch, personally serving him the *mahaprasada* and encouraging him to eat more and more.

Ramachandra Puri waited until Jagadananda had finished eating and washed his hands and mouth, and then he started shooting his criticism. "I had heard that Chaitanya's followers were eating too much," he commented, "and now I can see it's true. A *sannyasi* that indulges in gluttony will certainly lose his sense of renunciation."

Eager to watch Chaitanya's companions and continue to criticize them, Ramachandra Puri remained in Puri for some time and kept showing up even when he was not invited. Besides, he busied himself in collecting information about the amount of money required to arrange a meal for Chaitanya and two companions, as well as about his daily schedule, his sleep time, his movements, and the rules he was observing - always in the hope of finding something he could criticize. In the end, the only thing he could clutch to was the fact that Chaitanya was eating sweets, that are usually forbidden to *sannyasis* because sugar tends to agitate the senses; so he started advertising this violation, and still he went every day to see Chaitanya and received his respect.

One morning Ramachandra spotted some ants walking around Chaitanya's room and immediately jumped at the opportunity to make a loud statement about Chaitanya eating sugar in spite of the strict *sannyasa* rules. The fact is that ants walk everywhere, and their presence is not necessarily evidence of the presence of sugar or excessive food, yet Chaitanya instructed his personal servant Govinda to reschedule his meals, reducing their quantity and variety to simply 1/4 of a pot of rice and a small amount of vegetables.

When the news spread, all the devotees were shocked and worried, and started talking about Ramachandra Puri. It was known that when he was on his death bed, Madhavendra was remembering Krishna and crying, "I was unable to reach Mathura". At that time, Ramachandra was sitting in the room and told him "If you really know Brahman, you should be situated in perfect transcendental happiness, so why are you crying?"

Madhavendra had become angry and kicked him out, saying, "I don't want to see you any more; if I die seeing your face, the purpose of my life will be wasted." The other disciple of Madhavendra, Isvara Puri was instead humbly serving his *guru*, even cleaning up his urine and stool, and repeating the holy Names and the activities of Krishna to assist Madhavendra Puri's devotional sentiments, and therefore he was blessed.

Chaitanya's companions and followers were not happy at all with the fact that he had minimized his eating so drastically. The quantity he had established as the new rule was minimal, and the *brahmanas* who invited him were shocked and aggrieved to see that he

would not accept a normal quantity of food. But Chaitanya only consumed half of that reduced quantity, and gave the rest to Govinda as his share. Deeply pained by the situation, the other devotees stopped eating altogether. Chaitanya ordered Govinda and Kasisvara to go out and get some food for themselves, but they were appalled at the idea.

Finally, Ramachandra Puri noticed that Chaitanya had lost a lot of weight and then he started criticizing him for his *sushka vairagya*, "dry/ artificial renunciation". He quoted *Gita* (6.16-17) and gloated over Chaitanya's humble submission that he was grateful for his good instructions. The next day, Paramananda Puri and the other devotees came to see Chaitanya and expressed their displeasure. "The scriptures recommend that one should avoid two things: criticizing and excessively praising the activities and qualities of others," they said. "We do not want to criticize anyone, but it is a fact that Ramachandra Puri mostly engages in this bad practice, and he is turning our lives into hell in this way, therefore we must say something. Please disregard his criticism and accept food in a normal way."

Unmoved, Chaitanya replied that Ramachandra Puri's observations were correct. However, Ramachandra Puri did not stay much longer in town. After a few days he left to go to visit other places of pilgrimage. All the devotees felt wonderfully relieved and extremely happy, and Chaitanya started again accepting food normally.

The troubles of Gopinatha Pattanayaka

Ramananda Raya was one of the five sons of Bhavananda Raya. His brother Gopinatha Pattanayaka (a special professional title meaning "the keeper of records") also worked in the government under king Prataparudra, and was in charge of managing the collection of taxes.

One day some people rushed to Chaitanya and informed him that Gopinatha Pattanayaka had been sentenced to death by the eldest son of the King. When Chaitanya inquired about the reason for such situation, they explained that he had failed to deposit a certain amount of money from the tax collection - precisely 200,000 *kahanas*. When questioned

about it, he had requested a period of grace because he had spent the money for himself as he had a very lavish lifestyle, and liked to patronize arts and especially dancing girls. But he was willing to sell some of his properties and use the income to refund the required amount of money to the State treasury; as an alternative, he offered 12 of his valuable horses in payment for his dues. One of the King's sons went to see the horses to estimate their market value, but he purposefully named an extremely low price, and Gopinatha became angry. Unwittingly, he expressed his irritation by uttering some offensive and sneering remarks against the prince himself, who had an involuntary nervous habit of twitching his neck, which turned his head upwards. "My horses don't keep looking up at the sky all the time," he said. "They are very good animals, and their value is much higher than this."

The prince, infuriated, stormed away and went to the King making false allegations against Gopinatha, saying that he was unwilling to pay his dues and volunteering to take care of his case. The King consented and said, "You may do whatever you like to get that money". So the prince arrested Gopinatha and all his family, including his brother Vaninatha (who was Chaitanya's personal assistant and a great devotee) and prepared for the public torture and execution of Gopinatha. Chaitanya's devotees were shocked and terrified, but he protested that being merely a *sannyasi*, a beggar without any social status, he was unable to help as in his position he was forbidden to get into politics or contact politicians for any reason. He could not ask for that kind of money in charity, and he could not interfere in government matters in any way. "We can only pray Jagannatha," he said.

At that very moment, a government officer named Harichandana Patra approached the King and asked him if he had ordered the execution of Gopinatha Pattanayaka. The King was very surprised, because he had told the prince that the purpose was to get the money, and killing the Pattanayaka would certainly not going to enable him to pay his dues, so he ordered the Patra to stop the execution and settle the matter in a reasonable way. In the end, the treasury took the horses for a proper price and the balance payment was referred to a later date, and Gopinatha Pattanayaka and his family were released. Chaitanya was informed of the developments and he asked, "What was Vaninath doing when he was arrested?" "He was fearlessly chanting the Names of *hare krishna*," they told him. "He counted the *mantras* on his hands and after completing a 1000 count, he would make a mark on his body."

While this discussion was going on, Kasi Mishra arrived at the Gambhira and Chaitanya complained with him about the disturbances and anxiety that was created in that place.

"I cannot stay here any longer," he said. "I will go to Alarnatha, that is much more peaceful. All the sons of Bhavananda are engaged in the service of the government, but they cannot manage themselves properly. All this drama was not the King's fault: he simply wanted his money to maintain the kingdom, but when Gopinatha got in trouble, people came to me four times to ask me to do something. A *sannyasi* lives alone in a solitary place to find peace and quiet for meditation, but these problems of material life are disturbing my mind."

Kasi Mishra offered his respect to Chaitanya and said, "Your devotees do not want any material favor from you. Ramananda gave up his government post to be with you, and so did Rupa and Sanatana. Raghunatha Dasa left his family and properties, and lives in total renunciation. Gopinatha Pattanayaka did not send anyone to ask for your help - his friends informed you because they know that he is your faithful servant. Please do not leave Puri."

After pacifying Chaitanya, Kasi Mishra returned to his house and at noon he received the visit of king Prataparudra, who used to come every day to pay him his respect and offer some affectionate service. While he was sitting with him, Kasi Mishra carefully introduced the subject to him. "My dear King, there is some important news. Chaitanya wants to leave Puri and settle in Alarnatha."

The King became unhappy and asked why, so Kasi Mishra took the opportunity to explain the entire situation and tell how Chaitanya had blamed Gopinatha Pattanayaka for his troubles. Prataparudra realized the danger and said he would be happy to give up any amount of money and forgive any offense, in exchange for one moment of Chaitanya's presence. Upon returning to the palace, Prataparudra called for the prince and the Pattanayaka, and said, "You are excused for all the money you owe to the treasury and reinstated in your office. If you think your salary is not sufficient, I will double it, but do not mismanage the government revenue again."

Gopinatha Pattanayaka went to see Chaitanya and gave him the good news, but Chaitanya did not show any pleasure, because he did not want to encourage people to think that they should or could approach him to get some material benefit or blessing. Kasi Mishra clarified with Chaitanya that the trouble had not been caused by wrong

government dealings, but by a misunderstanding in the familiar dealings between the King, the prince and Ramananda's family. Then Bhavananda Raya arrived with his five sons, and they all offered their respect to Chaitanya. "In my family we are all your eternal servants. Today you saved us from a great danger, just like you saved the Pandavas, so we are totally surrendered to you. People are amazed to see the results of your blessings, but we know very well that material facilities are nothing but a secondary reflection of your kindness. The real treasure you have given us has been properly demonstrated by Ramananda and Vaninatha - pure love for God and detachment from material things. Please bless me so that I can also utilize such treasure in the same way."

Chaitanya smiled and said, "If you all become totally renounced and detached from material dealings, who will work to maintain your large family? It does not matter whether you take *sannyasa* or remain in family life, all of you are my eternal servants. I only ask from you that you do not spend anything from government funds for your own selves. Do not live above your means, and do not use money for unethical and extravagant sense gratification."

The punishment of Chota Haridasa

This episode is narrated in *Chaitanya charitamrita* and is meant to illustrate the importance of a perfectly respectable and responsible behavior among the followers of Chaitanya. Questionable attitudes and actions were a danger to Chaitanya's mission already in his times, although his companions and followers were extremely good people, who never created problems to others. On the practical level, Chota Haridasa's mistake was really negligible. He did not rape or attack anyone: his only fault was to have looked down to a devotee using a familiar attitude, treating her as a woman - applying the materialistic bodily identification on a great devotee. The woman in question, Madhavi Devi, was one of the closest spiritual associates of Chaitanya in Puri, and one of the only four persons who were allowed in Chaitanya's room.

Considering the much more serious stuff that has gone down in history, committed by so-called "followers of Chaitanya" over innocent people with a variety of pretexts, Chota

Haridasa's violation could seem a totally normal way of dealing with people. But the greatest danger for a spiritualist is the temptation to misuse the trust and affection offered to him by the people and exploit them for one's own sense gratification, especially for sex - gross or subtle - that is based on bodily identification.

We need to remember that Chaitanya's mission was to distribute pure love for God expressed through the *gopi bhava*, the feelings of the girls of Vrindavana towards their beloved handsome black Krishna. The *sringara rasa*, the erotic sentiment, is therefore characteristically expressed in the *parakiya* modality - the intense attachment and longing of a young woman for her secret lover. It is important that these devotional emotions towards Krishna must remain totally distinct from their material reflection on the ordinary level, that is not motivated by pure service to God, but by mere lust. This is certainly not easy, especially for those who still have some tinge of material bodily identification towards themselves or others. A conditioned soul, that has not realized its transcendental nature, still thinks in terms of bodies - men, women, fat, slim, young, old, ugly, attractive, and so on. When he looks at persons, s/he sees bodies and therefore evaluates them on the basis of how much sense gratification s/he can obtain from them. Such a mentality is totally incompatible with genuine *bhakti yoga*, but the ignorant masses are unable to see the difference. Often the lust inevitably produced by bodily identification is hidden or repressed behind a moralistic facade, as in the case of persons who artificially wear the habit of renunciation, but unless the sense of identification is purified from material attachments, such lust will not disappear.

Rather, it will become dangerously distorted into a deep hunger for power, fame, name, adoration, and control over people and resources: a subtler and more damaging form of sexual lust, just like the various forms of personality cults. In extreme cases such distortion can even create psychic imbalances and manifest as envy, insensitiveness, bitterness, and cruelty to the point of sadism or masochism (the pleasure caused by inflicting pain to others or to oneself respectively).

This distortion is not always deliberate or conscious, especially when the individual has been forced by circumstances into a life of artificial abstinence or when there is a fundamental ignorance about the purpose of spiritual life - both conditions that are observed in abrahamic cultures, where artificial sexual abstinence or/and sexual abuse (enforced on oneself and/or on others) is considered as a meritorious act of penance or a rightful punishment, or even as a symptom of morality.

The consequences at both the individual and social levels are devastating. The repressed sexual urges become distorted and perverted, and "religious people" can become obsessed by them, entering a vicious circle of denial and frustration and torture, that eventually spills over and causes them to try to interfere in the legitimately private (sexual) lives of others - including lay people. This is typical of abrahamic systems, and it is also found in systems that have been unconsciously influenced by abrahamic ideologies. The more these "religious people" try to be "strict" in this direction, the more they become obsessed by their misdirected sexual energy, and the more misery befalls them and everybody else.

In original Hinduism this distortion was totally unheard of, because *kama* (sense gratification) was traditionally considered one of the main *purusha arthas* (purposes of human life), after *dharma* and *artha*, and before *moksha*. The Vedic system for the gradual progress and evolution of the individual does not repress or demonize the natural tendencies of the embodied being, but regulates them according to an ethical vision (*dharma*) based on honesty/ truthfulness, compassion/ non-violence, cleanliness/ purity, and self control/ austerity.

As we can easily understand from the artistic expressions of the sacred images of the Deities and the decoration of the ancient temples, the original Vedic/ Hindu religious attitude did not condemn sex, eroticism, or the display of the human body. In fact, the happiness derived from these natural wonders of life was deeply appreciated on many levels.

Krishna himself, in *Bhagavad gita* (7.11) declares to Arjuna that *kama* is a manifestation of the divine consciousness - provided it is not against the ethical principles of *dharma*. This means that a natural healthy sexual life in itself is not an obstacle to spiritual and divine realization. One does not need to take *sannyasa* or physically abstain from sex in order to attain the highest level of self realization and love for God; this point is demonstrated by the fact that many of Chaitanya's followers were happily married and had children, and such children were often privileged in their access to Chaitanya himself, who behaved very affectionately with them.

From his biographies, we can see episodes in which Chaitanya takes children on his lap, allows them to play with his feet (in one instance, even to suckle on one of his toes) and even pours ecstatic love into them, as in the case of little Narayani, or Advaita's young son. Such affectionate dealings with children are based on the fact that before puberty,

usually a person has a very innocent attitude towards the sense of bodily identification and does not suffer from sexual lust. The problems come when the adult that is interacting with children is not free from sexual lust, and even worse, if the adult's sexual energy has been seriously distorted and perverted: in that case, the fresh innocence of the child stirs a mass of painful feelings in the mind of the repressed adult, and creates an almost irresistible urge to defile such purity. This is the mechanism of pedophilia, the mental disease expressed through the sexual abuse of children.- compared by some abrahamic ideologists to a mere "innocent scratching to relieve an itch".

We will elaborate more on this subject in another upcoming publication.

Of course repressed (if not distorted) sexual urges can surface also when the artificial or immature renouncer comes in contact with adult bodies that he can consider attractive. This lust is different from the pure aesthetic appreciation of beauty and harmony; to understand this difference we can verify whether we experience the same feelings by looking at a beautiful human body and at a beautiful sunset, flower, or other similar forms. The characteristic of lust is that the mind becomes agitated, while pure aesthetic appreciation of beauty pacifies the mind: just the opposite effect.

The Vedic system offers some practical rules that should be followed honestly by those who practice *brahmacharya*, the discipline that trains a person to "behave like *brahman*", i.e. in a spiritual way. Such rules are meant mostly for males, because the root of the material lust is the sense of *purushatva*, "maleness", which is the tendency to enjoy, possess and dominate. In ordinary sexual relationships, the male is characteristically more active, while the female is usually more passive.

On the spiritual level, exactly the opposite is true. Krishna is passive, self-satisfied, and inactive, while the *prakriti* or *shakti* - Radha, the *gopis*, the devotees - is active, generating movement, sentiments, and pleasure. This fundamental principle is also illustrated by the traditional image of Mother Kali standing on the inert body of Shiva: without *shakti*, Shiva is *shava* ("corpse"). Brahman is unchanging and Shakti is always changing. Therefore, in *bhakti yoga*, the devotee who wants to offer loving service to God takes shelter in Shakti - Radha, Yogamaya. It is only through Bhakti Devi herself that a devotee can approach Krishna.

We should not underestimate or misunderstand the transcendental erotic principle in the spiritual relationship between the devotee and the Personality of Godhead. Chaitanya also

loved the famous devotional erotic text *Gita Govinda*, that is extremely dear to Jagannatha, too - so much that king Prataparudra decreed that it was to be the only source for songs performed by the Maharis (Devadasis) in the temple.

In a later section of this work we will also see extracts from Chaitanya's favorite texts including the romantic poems written by Chandidasa and Vidyapati. Considering the general ignorance and foolishness of the people of Kali yuga, we can see the great danger of sentimental imitation of such sublime devotional feelings exhibited by unqualified persons who are still heavily identified with the gross material body and afflicted by ordinary material lust. This is the rationale of the severe punishment meted out by Chaitanya to Chota Haridasa. The fault was not in the action, but in the material consciousness to which the devotee fell due to inattention. Here is the story.

Bhagavan Acharya was one of Chaitanya's companions in Puri. His devotional mood was in the sentiment of friendship like a cowherd boy in Vrindavana, and he was uninterested in family affairs and in his father's (Satananda Khan) involvement in the government. Sometimes he invited Chaitanya to take lunch at his home, preparing a variety of rice and vegetables for him alone. One day Bhagavan Acharya called Chota Haridasa and asked him to go to see Madhavi Devi, the sister of Sikhi Mahiti, and get some uncooked white rice from her. As we already mentioned, this Madhavi was a great devotee and according to Chaitanya, a direct associate of Radharani. Chota Haridasa obtained the rice and took it to Bhagavan Acharya, who was pleased with its quality. He cooked it and presented it to Chaitanya together with several other preparations. After eating the rice, Chaitanya asked Bhagavan Acharya who had touched it, and when he had heard that Chota Haridasa had fetched it personally from Madhavi Devi, he became serious, and gave orders not to allow Chota Haridasa to his presence any more.

Everyone was flabbergasted, and even more so the poor Chota Haridasa, who fell into a great anxiety. He fasted for 3 days, hoping to be forgiven of whatever offense he had committed, but Chaitanya was relentless. He said, *vairagi kare prakriti sambhasana dekhite na paron ami tahara vadana*, "I will not look at the face of a person in the renounced order of life who sits to talk intimately with a woman".

This of course does not mean that women are contaminated, or inferior, or lusty, or evil in themselves. In fact Chaitanya unequivocally clarifies that the problem is in the mind of the man, who may even become agitated by the presence of a wooden statue of a female body (or a porn photo in a magazine, for that matters). Therefore a *sannyasi* should

always be very careful not to put himself in a sticky situation or allow his mind to fall to the level of bodily identification. Many so-called *sadhus* simply make an external show of renunciation, without elevating their consciousness to the spiritual or divine level. So they merely abandon the difficulties and the responsibilities of family and society, drop all rules and duties, and live as free as the monkeys do: no clothing, no home, no possessions. This is called *markata vairagya*, the "renunciation of monkeys". However, monkeys are not on a level of detachment and transcendence. They indulge in whatever sense gratification they can get, even by stealing or looting, and they have a strong sense of social pride and hierarchy, that easily erupts in fighting and random destruction. They are not only identified with their body, but they behave in an aggressive and arrogant way, often proudly displaying the power of their genitals and the influence they have on their followers.

For a sensitive person who has purified his senses and mind, it is possible to perceive a difference in the frequencies of energy emitted by other people. We can call it instinct or sixth sense, vibrations, charisma, radiance, or aura: the fact is that different emotions considerably modify the magnetic field around a person and even remain attached to objects. Because of this principle, clairvoyants and psychic mediums are able to "read" the energy vibration frequency of an object, and people working with wild animals are able to communicate feelings and establish a connection with them. Food grains and water are particularly sensitive to strong magnetic fields created by living consciousness, as it has been demonstrated by studies in cymetics and other laboratory experimentation. For this reason, in Vedic society there are restrictions and rules to avoid contamination due to contact with cooked grains and water touched by materialistic persons, or persons who have dirty habits - physically and mentally. By eating the rice carried by Chota Haridasa while he was entertaining materialistic thoughts, Chaitanya was immediately able to perceive the contamination.

When they saw that Chaitanya was not going to change his mind, the devotees went to Paramananda Puri - knowing that Chaitanya had a great respect for him - and convinced him to pacify Chaitanya. However Chaitanya was respectfully sharp with him, "Please stay here with the devotees, I will move to Alarnatha and stay alone, only Govinda will come with me." Chaitanya's threat to leave them all was more than they could bear, and Paramananda Puri bowed to the inevitable. The devotees then talked to Chota Haridasa, advising him to stop fasting. "Take bath and eat something, because if you make a show of persistence, Chaitanya will also become more rigid."

Eventually Chota Haridasa left Puri and traveled to Prayaga, where he drowned himself at the Triveni. Finally purified from his offense, he returned to Chaitanya remaining invisible and would sing for him at night, as he had used to do in life. To bring the episode to a closure, Chaitanya then told the devotees that he was now ready to see Chota Haridasa, and he was told what had happened. Chaitanya smiled, apparently very pleased, and said, "He did well".

Chaitanya's explicit approval of suicide by drowning in a sacred place could be shocking for some people, but we need to remember that in some particular circumstances suicide is not considered a sinful action. According to the Vedic system, perfection of life is attained by overcoming the identification with the material body, and the value of the body itself is calculated in the measure of its usefulness in divine service. When the body is not functional any more, or is contaminated in a painful way, leaving it can be a valid choice, provided that the level of consciousness at the time of death is high enough to access a next incarnation in a human form or higher.

As a fallout of this incident there were discussions among the devotees. Some of them - Jagadananda, Svarupa, Govinda, Kasisvara, Shankara, Damodara and Mukunda - heard Chota Haridasa's voice singing from a distance, and they wondered whether he had become a ghost. Svarupa denied that possibility. A ghost is a person trapped between dimensions because he is still attached to material existence and feels lost and confused. Chota Haridasa had only fallen for a brief moment, but his consciousness was normally on a much higher level, so the purification brought about by his pilgrimage and his intense meditation had returned him to the pure love for God. His attachment for Chaitanya was not a material bondage, but rather a spiritual asset that he valued beyond the boundaries of time and space, so he would return to the spiritual world with Chaitanya.

However, the lesson for all the other devotees had been very clear, and they all became extremely careful in their dealings with women. In particular, Svarupa Damodara had become very rigid and he was fiercely watching out for any irregularity. One day he lost his patience and scolded Chaitanya himself because of the time and attention he was giving to the small son of a young and attractive widow from Puri. The boy was very gentle and beautiful, and loved Chaitanya very much, so that he came daily to see him. Chaitanya was amused by Svarupa Damodara's over-reaction, but he could understand that he was worried about his good name and the bad rumors that envious people could

be circulating. So he appreciated his intimate friendship and sent him to Navadvipa to take care of Mother Saci and carry news about him. This turn of events appears to highlight a lesson that is exactly the opposite of the chastisement of Chota Haridasa: the path of devotional service taught by Chaitanya is certainly not impersonalistic, and does not impose the same rules and requirements on everyone in the same way.

While Chota Haridasa had been too weak and had fallen victim of the attraction of material relationships, Svarupa Damodara was at the opposite end - he needed to relax a little and share the feelings that make the fundamental background of human relationships. In that regard, Chaitanya said, "You may come to see me again and then return there. Offer my respect to my mother, tell her that I am happy here, pacify her mind and make her feel happy. Tell her that I am always going there to eat the food that she prepares for me." To substantiate that statement, Chaitanya described what Saci had cooked for him on the day of Makara sankranti. Then he gave Svarupa Damodara several packages of Jagannatha's *mahaprasada* for Saci and the other devotees, and sent him away.

From these two incidents - purposefully placed one after the other by Krishnadasa Kaviraja in his *Chaitanya charitamrita*, not far from the episodes about Haridasa Thakura and his gentle and compassionate but irreproachable behavior with the prostitute - we can understand what is the actual position of a delusional so-called "religionist" who treats innocent and spiritually minded women like garbage and gloats in hurting their feelings, and at the same time teaches that material bodily identification is the deepest foundation, the highest attainment and the sum total of *dharma* and religious/ spiritual life.

Vallabha Acharya arrives in Puri

Among the noteworthy events in the later period of Chaitanya's life, there was the visit of Vallabha Bhatta Acharya, a famous *vaishnava guru* who branched off from the Vishnusvami sampradaya. He was born in 1479 in south India, as the son of a learned *brahmana* named Lakshmana Bhatta Dishita. He died in 1531, spending much of his life in Varanasi, the greatest remaining center of Hindu culture, where his family emigrated

after his birth. The exact name of his birthplace is controversial - some say Trailanga, others Champakaranya or Kakunrapadhu. Some even place his paternal home in Chanpajhara grama in Madhya Pradesh. In any case, it seems that his family emigrated to Varanasi when he was still very young. Vallabha's father died or took *sannyasa* while his son was still engaged in his studies, and Vallabha became the head of the family at a very early age.

After completing his studies and taking initiation in the Vishnusvami Sampradaya (that was very influential in Vrindavana and in Bombay in those times), he left his mother in the care of his younger brother and started traveling to engage in philosophical debates, to make a name for himself and earn the respect and the financial support of the ruling *kshatriyas*. In Vijayanagara he was welcomed by king Krishnadeva, grandson of king Bukkaraja, who became his fond supporter.

Vallabha continued to travel around India for 18 years, collecting donations, engaging in philosophical debates and establishing his own *sampradaya*. He recited the *Bhagavata purana* in each of the 84 places he visited - usually a grove outside a major city, on the bank of a river or lake, at Varanasi, Puri, Prayag, Dvaraka, Bhadrinatha, Ramesvaram, etc. In each of these places his followers established a memorial called Bethak (“a place to sit”) still worshiped with offerings of fresh drinking water, *arati* (ceremonial presentation of various articles such as lamps, incense, etc), *sringara* (decoration with clothes and other ornaments) and *naivedya* (offerings of food) 7 times a day.

At the age of 30 he married one girl named Mahalakshmi, and finally he settled at Prayaga in Adaila grama, about one mile from the Yamuna, on the side opposite the Triveni, where Chaitanya had gone to see him. He had two sons, Gopinatha and Viththalesvara, who later adopted *Gita Govinda* as his text for teaching Sanskrit in his school.

He wrote the *Tattvartha dipa nibandha* (divided in three parts, one about *Gita*, one about *Bhagavata purana* and the third a comparison between philosophies), *Anubhasya* (a non-completed commentary on *Vedanta sutra*), *Purva mimamsa bhasya* (commentary on Jaimini's *karma kanda* philosophy), *Subodhini* (a non-completed commentary on *Bhagavata purana*), and especially the *Sodasa grantha* (16 books containing the essence of his teachings). Before dying at Varanasi in 1531, Vallabha Acharya accepted the renounced order of *sannyasa*.

Branching off from the Vishnusvami sampradaya, Vallabha started his own tradition, which is prominent today especially in Mathura-Vrindavana. The preaching of Vallabha Bhatta made the worship of Bala Gopala popular in all Hindu homes. In his school there are no *sannyasis* but only householders, as the emphasis of his teachings is on the point that devotion is perfectly compatible with the ordinary duties of the world. As the *pratistha* ("founder") *acharya* of his own *sampradaya* ("religious tradition"), he established his main center (Bhakti marga Matha) in Varanasi and also installed a Deity in Vrindavana, near Govardhana, where his *sampradaya* is still very influential.

His philosophy distinguished the two different roads in Vishnu worship as *maryada bhakti* (or devotion in respect), where God is worshiped as the Supreme Brahman, and through *pusthi bhakti* (or devotion in intimacy). *Pusthi* means "nourishment" and it describes the sentiment in which the devotee meditates on God in total surrender as his or her intimate companion: family member, friend or relative. The most intense relationship in this tradition is the motherly or fatherly affection towards Bala Krishna or Bala Gopala, Krishna as a small child. For Vallabha, the realization of the Para Brahman, the complete (*purna*) aspect of the Brahman, can be achieved only through *pushti* ("nourishment") or total surrender to God who blesses the soul with His grace. In his philosophy there are different categories of *jivas* (living entities), described as *suddha* ("pure"), *samsarin* ("materially conditioned", further divided into *daivi* or "divine", *madhyama* or "intermediate" and *danava* or "evil minded") and *mukta* ("liberated").

It seems that Vallabha Acharya had come to Puri the first time in 1489, but returned in 1519 and at that time he met Chaitanya, who had already visited him in Prayaga (Allahabad), as we described in a previous section. Vallabha Acharya approached Chaitanya with great respect and praising his supreme spiritual position, acknowledging that he had come to distribute pure love for Krishna through the chanting of his Names.

Chaitanya understood that Vallabha was trying to stimulate his pride and engage him in a scholarly debate to show off his own erudition and greatness, so he humbly and jokingly replied, "I am merely a *sannyasi* in the *mayavada* line of Adi Shankara, and I do not know anything about *bhakti*. However, I had the good fortune to come in contact with Advaita Acharya, who is a great divine personality, so powerful that he can even transform *mlecchas* into *vaishnavas*. Also, the *avadhuta* Nityananda is Isvara himself, always drunk with the love for God. Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya is a great devotee, too, and he is a great teacher in all the six Darshanas. Ramananda Raya is the greatest

authority on *krishna rasa*, the ecstatic sentiments of love for Krishna such as *dasya*, *sakhya*, *vatsalya* and *sringara*, and he instructed me on this subject; he told me that *bhava* (spontaneous sentiment of love) can be *aisvarya jnana yukta* (conscious of God's unlimited power and supreme position) or *kevala* (pure love), as we see in the *gopis* who simply embraced Krishna as their beloved boyfriend, or the young cowherd boys who climbed Krishna's back in a playful mood, or Mother Yasoda who nursed Krishna as a small child and tied him up to punish him for his mischief. Also, Svarupa Damodara here is a very good expert, always immersed in the pure sentiments of a *gopi*, totally free from all traces of material lust - to the point of chastising Krishna in the passion of their love; he has taught me all about Krishna. Haridasa here is the greatest devotee - every day he chants 300,000 Names, and he has instructed me about the glories of Krishna's Names."

Then he mentioned Acharyaratna, Acharyanidhi, Gadadhara Pandita, Jagadananda, Damodara, Shankara, Vakresvara, Kasisvara, Mukunda, Vasudeva, Murari and many others, as more qualified than him to speak about the glories of Krishna bhakti. "Some of them live in Bengal and others in different places, but they are all present here in Puri for the Ratha yatra, so you will be able to meet them all easily."

Vallabha humbly invited Chaitanya for lunch and on the next day when he visited Chaitanya again, he was introduced to the devotees. He had brought a large quantity of Jagannatha *mahaprasada* and he offered it to everyone; he had also brought garlands, sandalwood paste, and mouth fresheners such as sweet spices and betel. Then everyone went to attend the Ratha yatra, and Vallabha was amazed to see the big *kirtana* and the ecstatic dance of Chaitanya.

On the next day, Vallabha went to see Chaitanya again, and asked him to hear his commentary on the *Bhagavata purana*. Chaitanya humbly declined, claiming that his knowledge was not sufficient. "I simply sit and try to chant the holy Name of Krishna," he said. "And in spite of my efforts, I am not even able to complete the prescribed number. Also, I do not know much about the differences between the Names of Krishna - I only know 'Syamasundara' and 'Yasoda nandana', nothing more."

Frustrated, Vallabha went to see Gadadhara Pandita and made all efforts to develop a good relationship with him, so that he would agree to hear his elaborations on the meanings of Krishna's Name. Gadadhara patiently sat through the lecture, hoping to get out of that sticky spot with the least damage. But that was not sufficient to satisfy Vallabha - every day he was trying to get into debates with other devotees, and was

regularly defeated, especially by Advaita. At some point he started to criticize the Sankirtana movement by objecting that, if the devotees were worshiping Lord Krishna in the *madhurya rasa* (conjugal sentiment) they should not chant his name, because a faithful wife is not supposed to call her husband confidentially by his name, but always addresses him with a respectful title. Chaitanya responded, "The real duty of an obedient wife is to do what is asked by her husband. Krishna has ordered that we should chant his Name always, so we are doing that."

Vallabha was unable to say anything to that, so he returned home in a very depressed state of mind.

He showed up again on the next day. Obviously hoping to regain some mileage and impress Chaitanya, he started boasting that his own commentaries on the *Bhagavata purana* were better than the *Bhavartha dipika*, the *Bhagavata* commentary written by Sridhara Svami. He pushed his criticism to the point of saying that Sridhara Svami's explanations were inconsistent, and therefore not authoritative. Chaitanya smiled and said, *svami na mane, yei jana vesyara bhitare tare kariye ganana*, "If one does not show respect to the husband, I consider that as a prostitute."

Here Chaitanya played on the double meaning of the word "*svami*", as "lord, protector" and also "husband". Traditionally, this word is used as a title of respect to address God (Jagannatha Svami) but also great religious and spiritual personalities, such as those who have accepted the renounced order of *sannyasa*, thereby renouncing all material identifications and attachments and solely dedicating to spiritual and devotional life.

Vallabha was shocked by Chaitanya's powerful reply, but all the devotees were very pleased. Returning home that night, Vallabha meditated on what had happened. "When I met him in Prayaga, Chaitanya was very kind to me, so there must be a reason why he has been trashing me so badly here in Puri. I think that he is trying to relieve me from my false pride, because this is a serious obstacle on the path of devotional service. His insulting words are actually meant to correct me for my own good."

At this point, Vallabha Bhatta realized that he had been acting like a fool, trying to impress Chaitanya and the others with his great learning, and surrendered to Chaitanya in full humility. Then Chaitanya comforted him, "You are a great *pandita* ("great scholar") and a *maha bhagavata* ("great devotee of Bhagavan") therefore you cannot really be arrogant, but your fault consists in building your commentary of the *Bhagavata purana*

on the rebuttal of Sridhara Svami's work. I consider Sridhara Svami as my spiritual teacher, because he is indeed a great *guru*, and by his grace we can understand the *Bhagavata purana*. If you correct your mistake and remove your offense, you will be able to achieve perfection."

To reassure Vallabha that he had nothing against him, Chaitanya accepted his invitation to lunch. From his part, Vallabha requested to be initiated into *madhurya rasa* by Gadadhara Pandita.

The fact that Chaitanya attributed such an immense value to Sridhara Svami's commentaries seems to confirm that Chaitanya was closer to the Adi Shankaracharya Sampradaya than to the Madhvacharya Sampradaya. Sridhara Svami, disciple of Ramakrishnananda Svami, was born in the village of Marei or Maraigaon in the present Nilagiri subdivision of the Balasore district in Orissa, about 3 km from the temple of Kshira chora Gopinatha (Remuna, Balasore, between Orissa and Bengal) around the second half of the 14th century. In the first part of his life he was a householder and had some children, then he took *sannyasa* in the Shankara line. For some time he was in charge of the Chandrashekara temple in Kapilasa, then due to his vast learning and saintly character he was selected as the Mahanta (head) of the Govardhana pitha (the Adi Shankaracharya Matha in Puri). Besides the commentary to the *Bhagavata purana*, he wrote a famous commentary to *Bhagavad Gita*, and a commentary to the *Vishnu purana*. His commentary to the *Bhagavatam* (entitled *Bhavartha Dipika*) is universally considered one of the best in history, and very dear to Lord Jagannatha. Once the temple *sevakas* wanted to verify the value of the book, so they presented it to the Deity before closing the doors. On the next morning, the book was found on Lord Jagannatha's lap.

Chaitanya reciprocates with the devotees

For many years the devotees from Bengal traveled to Puri to attend the Ratha yatra and remained in town for at least 4 months, until the end of the rainy season. We have seen on many occasions that Chaitanya gave a tremendous importance to the devotional practice of accepting *prasada*, the consecrated food that had been offered to Krishna, not only out

of his love for Krishna but also because of his affectionate relationships with the devotees.

Raghava Pandita and his sister Damayanti were particularly famous for their devotion, care, and skillful cooking, and always traveled to Puri carrying several bags (that became famous as the *raghavera jhali*) filled with food and packed with the utmost care. One devotee named Makaradhvaja Kara was entrusted with carrying these bags as if his life depended on them. Chaitanya kept the bags in a corner of his dining room and nibbled through these foods along the entire year.

Among the many preparations, there were hundreds of various types of *kasandi* (pickle, also called *achar* in Hindi), mango preserved in mustard oil, dried *karela* and other dried vegetables, and snacks made with natural medicinal ingredients. For example, she cooked powdered ginger or powdered anise and coriander seeds with sugar and made small confectioneries. She also made berry preserves (*koli sunthi*, *koli khanda* etc), dried coconut *laddus* that stayed fresh a very long time, preserved cheese, and various sweets made from condensed milk and cream. Also she packed a very large bag of *chida* (flat rice) made from first quality paddy, as well as puffed rice, and *laddus* made with puffed rice fried in clarified butter and then cooked in sugar. Top quality rice was also fried and ground to powder to make wonderful *laddus* with clarified butter, sugar, camphor, black pepper, cardamom, cloves and other sweet spices. There were also *laddus* made with various types of legumes and pulses, and medicinal confectioneries made with pure Ganges clay mixed with aromatic ingredients.

All the other devotees also brought some food from home, or arranged for special food to offer to Chaitanya during their stay in Puri - coconut *burfi*, *laddu*, pancakes, sweet rice pudding, and other costly preparations. Usually Chaitanya instructed Govinda to store the items, and did not actually eat all that stuff, so after some time the accumulated food filled up a considerable space in the room. Govinda, however, was unhappy because the devotees were asking whether Chaitanya had tasted their food, and he did not like lying to them. So one day Chaitanya told him to bring all the food to him and started to eat, while Govinda spoke the names of the person who had given each item - Advaita, Srivasa, Acharyaratna, Acharyanidhi, Vasudeva Datta, Murari Gupta, Buddhimanta Khan, Shivananda Sena, Sriman Pandita, Nandana Acharya, and so on. Although the food had been sitting there for one month and there was enough stuff to feed at least 100 people, Chaitanya consumed everything, including the sweet drinks, as if it was perfectly

fresh and tasty. In the end, only Raghava's bags had remained, and Chaitanya said, "We will see them later on".

On the next day, Chaitanya opened Raghava Pandita's bags and tasted a little from each preparation, praising them all very much. Then he consumed everything gradually, a little every day, sometimes at night, enjoying the faith and love of the devotees.

From time to time, Advaita and others would invite Chaitanya for lunch or bring lunch to him, mostly home-cooked rice and various vegetables. Some preparations were sweet and sour, others were seasoned with black pepper or ginger. There were at least 2 types of spinach preparations, a *karela* soup, *dal* soups, *dal vada*, eggplant with *nim* leaves, fried *patolas* and many types of *sabjis* made with milk, yogurt and cheese. Also, many devotees purchased the *mahaprasada* of Jagannatha from the Ananda Bazar and offered it to Chaitanya. Once, Chaitanya complained that Shivananda Sena had given him too much food, and Shivananda's son, named Chaitanya, arranged special light food for the next day - soft *vada*, rice with yogurt and ginger - so Chaitanya very happily accepted his invitation and gave him some leftovers, too. We need to remember here that leftovers from Chaitanya and great saints were highly prized for their spiritual "infection" quality.

Once Chaitanya sent Jagadananda Pandita to Bengal with some *mahaprasadam* for Mother Saci and the devotees. Jagadananda was very happy to carry news from Chaitanya to Navadvipa, and all the devotees were very happy of his company. While he was there, the devotees arranged for a large jug of pure medicinal quality sandalwood oil to be sent as a gift to Chaitanya, and Jagadananda was glad to carry it back to Puri. However, when he reached there and presented Chaitanya with the medicinal sandalwood oil, Chaitanya refused to accept it. Although the oil was to be used as a medicine, Chaitanya did not want people to think that he was indulging in sense gratification, and told Jagadananda to take the oil to the temple of Jagannatha and donate it for the lamps there. Jagadananda became very upset. He threw the oil jug to the ground in front of Chaitanya, then went inside his room and bolted the door.

Three days later, Jagadananda had not showed up yet, so Chaitanya went to see him. "Please, Pandita, get up," he called. "I am going to the temple, but I want you to cook personally for me today. I will be back at noon."

After Chaitanya left, Jagadananda got up from his bed, bathed and helped by Ramai (Srivasa's brother) and Raghunatha Bhatta, began to cook a feast - a large heap of very

good quality rice seasoned with clarified butter placed on a banana leaf, and surrounded by many leaf containers filled with various vegetable dishes. He also served sweet rice pudding, pancakes and other *mahaprasada* preparations from Jagannatha temple. "Even when you cook in an angry mood," commented Chaitanya jokingly, "your food is delicious. This is because Krishna is very pleased with you."

Then he consumed all the food that Jagadananda was giving him - eating 10 times more than usual - because he wanted to make him happy. Every time Chaitanya tried to get up, Jagadananda put more vegetables on his plate, and Chaitanya continued eating, without having the courage to refuse.

So deep and affectionate was Jagadananda's love for Chaitanya, that he was always worried about his comfort. When Chaitanya became older, his body became thinner and frailer, and his bones were giving him pain when he was resting on the dry bark of the banana trees - as it is customary for *sannyasis*. *Sannyasis* are forbidden to sleep on beds or mattresses, but they can only use bark and other parts of plants to make a bedding for themselves. The devotees were extremely unhappy about this situation, and Jagadananda purchased some *simli* cotton (a very soft type of fiber from a pod growing on the *simli* tree) and made a mattress covered with red cloth. He also made a blanket and a pillow. When Chaitanya saw the arrangement, he became very angry. But he was told that it was Jagadananda's idea, and he became silent because he did not want to hurt him. He asked his servant to put the mattress and pillow aside, and he lay down on the usual banana bark. Govinda explained the situation to Jagadananda and Svarupa Damodara. Then they took a large quantity of dry banana leaves and tore them into very fine fibers, stuffing them into two of Chaitanya's clothes. After a lot of discussion, Chaitanya agreed to use the mattress and the pillow made in this way.

Chaitanya's relationship with the Oriya Vaishnavas

Another huge chapter of Chaitanya's activities in Puri is about the Oriya Vaishnavas, who are not the Gaudiya Vaishnavas of Oriya birth or origin (that are mentioned in the official Gaudiya biographies of Chaitanya) as someone may think, but rather the "Five Saints of

Orissa" (also known as *pancha sakhas*, "the five friends"), the original founders of the Oriya Vaishnava movement, as well as their disciples and followers. These five saints were Balarama Dasa, Jagannatha Dasa, Acyutananda Dasa, Yasobanta Dasa and Sisu Ananta Dasa.

As a reaction against the excessive ritualism of the caste brahmins and their monopoly and control over the temples and Deity worship, the Pancha Sakhas preached that Krishna/ Jagannatha could be worshiped as Sunya, "void", a particular "non-shape" that transcended the Deity in the temple and therefore could be accessible by everyone at all times. It is important to understand that such "void" is not some impersonal emptiness devoid of sentiments, qualities and relationships as surmised by the "sworn enemies of the *sunyavadis* and *mayavadis*". The origin and the reason of the misunderstanding among the Sarasvata Gaudiyas about their *sampradaya* will be elaborated in a later section of this book.

Here we will simply mention that the rift happened some time after Chaitanya's disappearance, probably because the Oriya Vaishnavas did not want to merge into the Gaudiya line and therefore did not participate to the councils organized by Nityananda's wife, Jahnava Devi. By itself, this fact should not be a very serious problem, because Chaitanya certainly did not want to create an institutionalized religious movement. He just preached pure love for God, and accepted without discrimination all those who chanted the holy Names, irrespective of their religious group or lineage.

It is therefore cause of great sorrow to see that some people among the Gaudiya Vaishnava denomination are not ashamed of openly and unnecessarily badmouthing those Oriya Vaishnavas by spreading the rumor that the Oriya Vaishnavas were "fallen" and "offensive" (no evidence is ever given about such allegations, though). In fact the vision of the Pancha Sakhas was very much personal and devotional. Jagannatha Dasa taught about the *rasa krida* ("playing the games of the *rasas*"), Acyutananda about the *nitya rasa* ("eternal sweetness of devotional sentiments"), Yasobanta preached the *Prema bhakti brahma gita* ("the spiritual song of the pure love for God"). They accepted Radha Krishna as Paramatma and Jagannatha as *bhava murti* ("the form of devotional emotions"), that is an equivalent of *rasa rupa*.

The Pancha Sakhas had started their own *sampradaya* already before the arrival of Chaitanya, preaching *bhakti* for Radha and Krishna in the tradition that had been established by Jayadeva Gosvami's *Gita Govinda* and the songs written by Vidyapati of

Mithila - both these poets were extremely dear to Chaitanya as well. We may also remember that Ramananda Raya had written the *Mahabhava prakasa* ("the revelation of the great ecstasy") before meeting Chaitanya, and that work described Radha as the embodiment of *mahabhava*. So as Chaitanya closely associated with Ramananda (who was also from Orissa), we can assume that there must have been considerable contacts also with the Pancha Sakhas, who were Chaitanya's contemporaries and lived in Puri just next door to him. *Chaitanya Bhagavata* actually mentions Nityananda and Ramananda Raya doing *sankirtana* together with Balarama and Achyutananda.

Balarama Dasa was a minister of king Prataparudra, so he must have been at least acquainted with Ramananda Raya; like Ramananda, he gave up government service to engage exclusively in spiritual life and meditation on Radha Krishna, so much that many people called him Matta Balarama ("crazy Balarama") because of his disregard for social conventions in favor of ecstatic *bhakti*. Also, he became famous because of his miracles - for example, one day he touched the head of a dumb beggar and the beggar instantly started to speak, and to speak about *Vedanta* no less. Balarama Dasa wrote the famous *Dandi Ramayana*, the *Lakshmi purana* and many other famous religious texts.

Appointed by king Prataparudra as the *Purana panda* in the Jagannatha temple like his father before him, at the age of 18, Jagannatha Dasa was honored by Chaitanya with the title *atibadi* ("very great") because of his wonderful devotional explanations on the *Bhagavata purana*; he also compiled a very popular translation of the *Bhagavata purana* in Oriya language, which gave him the reputation of being the best spiritual teacher in Orissa. Still today his translation is worshiped and recited in all traditional households, and considered on the same level of the *Rama charita manasa* written by Tulasi Dasa. He also wrote many other devotional and religious books.

Among the Sarasvata Gaudiya groups there is a nasty rumor that "Chaitanya was being sarcastic", and "actually meaning that Jagannatha Dasa was offensive", but it is rather hard to believe, considering that it was Chaitanya who approached Jagannatha Dasa, and there is no record of Chaitanya ever being that "sarcastic" with anyone on a subject like this, even when he was approached by actually arrogant half-baked scholars who wanted to impress him or defeat him in a philosophical debate. Besides, on that occasion Chaitanya not only praised him, but also presented him with a cloth as a token of respect and affection. Jagannatha Dasa, too, was famous for his *siddhis* and for becoming the initiating *guru* of king Prataparudra's wife on the request of Prataparudra himself.

It is not unlikely to consider that among the Gaudiya followers of Chaitanya there could have been some un-vaishnava feelings of hostility and jealousy against the *pancha sakhas* and their disciples, and this reflected on that the scarcity of information about them in the biographies of Chaitanya written by the Gaudiyas. The problem is clearly mentioned in the *Jagannatha charitamrita* by Divakara Das, one of the disciples in the succession of the Pancha Sakhas.

Acyutananda, the famous author of the *Acyutananda Malika* book of prophecies, had a dream in which Krishna gave him the knowledge of *Gita*, *Upanishad* and *Tantra*. Immediately he left home to go on pilgrimage and at the age of 18 he met Chaitanya, who suggested him to associate with Sanatana Gosvami. He also wrote a book about the *Rahasa Sankirtana* (“explanation of the importance of chanting the holy Names”) and several *bhajan* songs. Yasobanta Dasa was from a *kshatriya* family and married the sister of king Raghunatha Champatti of Aranga; later he took *sannyasa* and traveled around many places of pilgrimage, and wrote many books, including the *Govinda chandra* (on the teaching of traditional dance in connection with the *vaishnava* devotional tradition) that became very popular in Assam, Bengal and north India. It is said that the very famous saint Salabega was his disciple.

Sisu Ananta Dasa also demonstrated *yoga siddhis* (miraculous powers); in a dream he went to Konarak and received from Surya Narayana the order to go and meet Chaitanya, so he approached him and took initiation from Nityananda. He excavated a Jagannatha *murti* from the beach in Balia patana (now called Balia panda) in Puri, and established an *ashrama* in that place; he also wrote many books, including the *Bhakti mukti daya gita*, one of the oldest and most important popular scriptures in Orissa, and the *Udaya Bhagavata*, in which he describes Jagannatha as the combined form of Radha and Krishna.

These Five Saints of Orissa found Chaitanya’s preaching very near to their own ideas, because Chaitanya introduced the *nagara sankirtana* that made no discriminations based on caste or social class, and the songs of the *kirtanas* were not only in classical Sanskrit but also in the popular languages such as Bengali and Oriya, encouraging ordinary and low-caste people to participate more directly. Chaitanya also accepted low-caste people as his followers, embraced fishermen and honored “ex-Muslim” devotees such as Haridasa, Rupa and Sanatana etc, although not with the same enthusiasm and liberality as the Pancha Sakhas did. We may remember that as a rule Chaitanya only formally

accepted home-cooked food from people born in brahmin families, because he did not want to antagonize the caste brahmins too much, and that over 75% of Chaitanya's followers were from brahmin families.

The Five Friends preached the *vaishnava dharma* or ninefold process of *bhakti* and chanting the holy Names (Harinama), giving more importance to spiritual realization than to the worship of the Deities. The most important aspect of their preaching was the abolition of all discriminations among *vaishnavas*, no matter from which caste or background they came.

Of course the greater liberality of the Pancha Sakhas created many enemies among the brahmins of his times, who even insulted the Oriya translations of the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagavata* and *Harivamsa* compiled by Sarala, Balarama, Jagannatha and Achyutananda. Some of such casteist people even called the Oriya *Bhagavata purana* of Jagannatha Das “*teli bhagavata*” (the “*Bhagavata* of the low-caste oil-maker”). However, this Oriya *Bhagavatam* created a real mass revolution in Krishna consciousness and it became so popular that every village had a *tunga*, a hall where the people regularly gathered to listen to its reading, and constituted the center of the social life of rural Orissa especially in the Puri district. The literary and religious work of the Pancha Sakhas was vital to the development of the Oriya language and cultural identity, uniting the people and creating a feeling of solidarity that protected the region for a long time.

More information about the Pancha Sakhas and their books and teachings will be given in another section of this work.

Haridasa funeral festival

Haridasa had settled in Puri in the *ashrama* presently known as Siddha Bakula, and was constantly engaged in chanting the divine Names. Chaitanya called Haridasa the *nama acharya*, and personally went to see him every day and brought him *mahaprasada* from Jagannatha, because Haridasa considered himself as fallen due to his association with the Muslim family that had raised him, and out of his humility did not want to enter the

temple with the danger of contaminating it. This great display of humility is often found in the writings and life of the followers of Chaitanya, as we see when Krishnadasa Kaviraja states in his *Chaitanya charitamrita*: "I am lower than a worm living in stool, and simply by hearing my name people will become contaminated". Similarly, Sanatana preferred to walk on the blistering hot sand of the beach rather than mixing with the temple *sevakas* of Jagannatha, fearing that his contact may pollute their ritual purity. It is very important to understand this behavior in its context, because its misinterpretation can lead to very dangerous distortions and expose sincere people to emotional manipulation and ideological deviation, because there is a fine line between beneficial humility and degrading humiliation.

The first and most important factor in the historical context is the political situation in medieval India: largely occupied and dominated by Muslims, but with a very low percentage of Muslim population. The islamic government enforced discrimination policies and laws to push people to conversion, but with scarce results, so as long as the Hindus were humble and meek, and did not show off too much with their temples and religious festivals, they were allowed to survive and follow their own customs.

According to the islamic law codes, non-Muslims are required to pay the "subjugation tax" called *jizyah*, to avoid being converted by force or killed. So under the islamic domination, those who chose not to convert to islam had no civil rights and could only hope to be tolerated. They could not occupy any public office post and had no right to testify in court against Muslims, to defend themselves, to repair their places of worship that had been destroyed or damaged by Muslims, or resist the expropriation of their lands and wealth or the abuse of their women.

This oppressive situation created an imbalance in Hindu society, by which the higher classes more or less consciously tried to imitate the oppressive behavior they suffered, venting their frustration on the Hindus of lower birth, thus compounding and aggravating the birth prejudice and divisions that were later on exploited by the British colonial regime. In this way the "high caste brahmins" forgot and perverted their original duty, and instead of teaching, training and performing the purificatory rituals for the less evolved members of society, they started to humiliate, mistreat and exploit those who were of lower birth, without caring for their actual level of spiritual development, and rather actually trying to prevent them from making any progress. Women, too, became subject to very strict limitations - although partly to protect them from the invaders' lust.

However, the most vicious treatment was reserved to the "isolated and helpless" who had no strong status, especially the former converts to islam or their descendants, that for some reason had left the ruling group - as for example Haridasa, Rupa and Sanatana, or to make an example outside the circle of the followers of Chaitanya, the famous Salabega, a great devotee of Jagannatha. Their position was particularly difficult because according to the islamic code of laws they were under a sentence of death for rejecting islam. Thus they were equally exposed to the revenge of the islamic rulers and to the petty and cowardly expression of frustration of the dominated Hindus (who did not dare to attack the "real" Muslims), and nobody was willing to defend or protect them.

They were on a very uncomfortable middle ground, in "no man's land", and they had no status in either camp. Under the circumstances, the best thing to do for them was remaining as humble as possible, to avoid creating further divisions and sufferings for the Hindu community. Some tried to fight back against the inhumane treatment meted out by the so-called *brahmanas*, like Kalapahada did - but then such a choice would entail revolting against the entire Hindu system, of which the *brahmanas* were considered the authorities, judges and teachers.

All the leaders of the medieval *bhakti* movements - as we will see in a later section of this work - preached against birth prejudice and welcomed people born in Muslim families, in whatever measure they wanted to participate. Chaitanya had a special relationship with Haridasa, and as we have seen, he went everyday to see him and to give him the *mahaprasada* from Jagannatha. Also, the other confidential devotees of Chaitanya often visited Haridasa and cared for him, as he was becoming older. One day Chaitanya's personal servant, Govinda, noticed that Haridasa was lying on his back and chanting the Names very slowly.

"Please get up and take your food," said Govinda. "Today I am not going to eat," Haridasa replied. "I am feeling very weak, and I have not been able to finish my regular chanting, so I cannot take food."

Then he had a second thought. "But I cannot disrespect *mahaprasada*," he said, and sat up, offered prayers to the *mahaprasada* and ate a bit of it. Chaitanya himself came over to see what was happening and if he was sick. "My body is all right," said Haridasa. "But my mind and intelligence have become weaker, and I cannot complete my regular chanting."

"Now you have become old," replied Chaitanya. "You may reduce your chanting. Also, you are already liberated and you do not need to follow a *sadhana* very strictly. You have fulfilled your duty already."

Haridasa then pleaded with Chaitanya, "The real problem is something else. You have been so kind to me and accepted me as your servant and companion, although I was in a very low social condition. Because of your kindness, I have been highly honored as when I was offered the *sraddha patra* (the special food charity given to first class *brahmanas* for the benefit of the departed ancestors of the giver). I think that you are going to depart from this world soon, and I do not want to be left behind here without your presence. Please let me die before you, so by seeing you I will die happy."

Chaitanya protested and said that he was very much attached to Haridasa, too, so he would not be happy to see him die so soon, but Haridasa insisted.

The next day, after visiting Jagannatha's temple, Chaitanya quickly went to see Haridasa, accompanied by all the devotees. When Haridasa repeated his request, Chaitanya started a great *kirtana* in the courtyard of the *ashrama*, all around him. Then in front of all the devotees Chaitanya praised Haridasa, describing his great qualities and activities, and everyone came to offer him respects. Haridasa asked Chaitanya to sit in front of him and fixed his eyes on his face. He offered his respect to all the devotees, and started to chant "*sri krishna chaitanya*" again and again, weeping tears of joy, and finally left his body.

Seeing the wonderful death of Haridasa, who had chosen deliberately the moment of his own death, everyone remembered Bhishma, the grandfather of the Pandavas in the *Mahabharata*. They all shouted the Names of Hari and Krishna, and Chaitanya lifted Haridasa's body and hugged it, then he started to dance in the courtyard, holding the dead body to his chest. After some time, Svarupa Damodara reminded Chaitanya about the requirements of the funeral. So Haridasa's body was raised to a palanquin and carried to the sea, accompanied by the *sankirtana*, while Chaitanya danced in front of the procession. When they arrived at the sea, Chaitanya personally bathed Haridasa's body in the water, and then declared that on that day that place had become a great *tirtha*, an important holy pilgrimage

Haridasa's body was then smeared with sandalwood paste that had been offered to Jagannatha, and a pit was dug for his *samadhi mandira*. Haridasa's body was composed there, together with various types of *prasadam* - food, cloth, sandalwood paste, and so

on. Then the *samadhi* pit was covered with sand, a platform was constructed, then a fence was placed around it for protection. We may remember here that according to the tradition, the body of a *sannyasi* or *sadhu* is not cremated, but buried in a protected place.

After the completion of the funeral rites and after the *kirtana*, Chaitanya and the devotees bathed in the ocean, swimming and playing in great happiness. Then they walked around the *samadhi* of Haridasa as a mark of respect and went to the temple of Jagannatha, arousing a great *kirtana* all over the city. At the inner *simha dvara* (the "lions gate") Chaitanya entered the Ananda Bazar, spread his cloth and collected *mahaprasada* from all the shopkeepers there. "I am begging for *mahaprasadam* for a festival honoring the passing of Haridasa. Please give me alms."

All the shopkeepers came forward with big baskets of *mahaprasada*, but Svarupa Damodara arranged four *vaishnavas* and four servant carriers to collect the food, and sent Chaitanya back to his residence. Large quantities of *mahaprasada* were also arranged by Vaninatha Pattanakaya (Bhavananda Raya's son) and Kasi Mishra. When everything was ready, Chaitanya made the devotees sit in rows and personally began to distribute the *mahaprasada*, but he was putting such enormous quantities of food on each plate, that Svarupa Damodara begged him to sit and watch, and served the food himself, helped by Jagadananda, Kasisvara and Shankara. Kasi Mishra also came carrying Chaitanya's lunch and served him personally. When everybody had eaten their fill, they washed their hands and mouths, and Chaitanya personally honored them with sandalwood paste and flower garlands, blessing them all to achieve the favor of Krishna very soon. They all chanted *jaya jaya jaya haridasa, namera mahima yenha karila prakasa*, "all glories to Haridasa, who manifested the power of the chanting of the holy Names".

The last years of Chaitanya

Of the 18 years that Chaitanya spent without moving from Puri, the first 12 years were rather active. The devotees from Bengal came every year to see him and stayed at least four months - the entire duration of the rainy season - plus the 15 days of the Ratha yatra festival. Often they arrived even one or two months earlier, so that they could participate

to the Chandana yatra, the boat festival where the *vijaya murtis* or *chalanti pratimas* (representative Deities) of Jagannatha and Lokanatha go on procession every day to the Narendra Sarovara and are worshiped with several beautiful rituals. These include anointing all the Deities with a thick layer of refreshing and sweet smelling sandalwood paste, performing an *abhisheka* (ritual bathing) in front of all the devotees inside a nice pavilion in the middle of the lake, and a joy boat ride in beautifully decorated swan-like rafts. These *chalanti pratimas* are Madana Mohana, Sridevi and Bhudevi to represent Jagannatha, Rama Krishna to represent Balabhadra, and the "five Pandavas" - Lokanatha, Yamesvara, Nilakantha, Kapalamochana and Markandesvara (the representative Deities of these main Shiva temples in Puri) .

In those times, during the entire period of the Chandana yatra the Maharis/ Devadasis used to offer the *gupta seva* ("secret worship") to the main Deities inside the temple, involving private erotic dancing and fanning, but since the *mahari seva* has been discontinued, Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra simply get fanned by the *puja pandas*.

In Jagannatha Puri, Chandana yatra lasts 42 days (21 for the "external" festival at Narendra Sarovara, plus another 21 days for the "internal" festival inside the Jagannatha temple) and starts on Akshaya tritiya (Vaisakha sukla tritiya, usually in May, when the construction of the Ratha yatra chariots is started) and is followed by a series of festivals such as Niladri mahodaya (Vaisakha sukla astami), the festival for Nrisimha (Vaisakha sukla chaturdasi), Jala krida (Krishna playing with turmeric water with Lakshmi, on Jyestha krishna ekadasi), Sitala sasthi (the marriage of Shiva and Parvati, on Jyestha sukla sasthi), Rajendra abhisheka (the coronation of Ramachandra, on Jyestha sukla dasami), Rukmini harana and Rukmini vivaha (the abduction and marriage of Rukmini by Krishna, Jyestha sukla ekadasi), Snana yatra (the annual royal *abhisheka* for Jagannatha, considered his "birthday" celebration, on Jyestha purnima), plus the 15 days of Anavasara (in which the main Deities of Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana are hidden from the public view as they are being repainted), and then there is the very famous Ratha yatra (starting from Asadha sukla dvitiya and ending on Asadha sukla dvadasi with the Niladri vijaya pahandi).

So adding the 4 months of the rainy season after the completion of the Ratha yatra, we find that the Bengali devotees usually stayed in Puri with Chaitanya for no less than 6 months every year. During this period Chaitanya led all the devotees in *nagara*

sankirtana parties around town, but especially from his residence at the Gambhira to the temple of Jagannatha along the road that came to be called Gaudabadi Sahi after his name. Chaitanya would take lunch, rest and then meet the devotees in the afternoon and again go with them to the Jagannatha temple for *kirtana*. In the evening and in the night, the *sankirtana* party often moved to the ocean beach, near to Haridasa's *ashrama*, or to the Tota Gopinatha temple where Gadadhara Pandita was worshipping the Deity excavated by Chaitanya himself and reading from *Bhagavata purana*.

Attendance to these programs was not compulsory for all the devotees. The formally invested *sannyasis* - Paramananda Puri and Brahmananda Bharati - always participated, and so did the most intimate companions of Chaitanya, who had also non-officially embraced a renounced life, such as Svarupa Damodara, Govinda and Ramananda Raya. Others, who had a family and a job to care for, attended only when they had the opportunity. The general public was also welcome to participate.

There is much that Chaitanya's official biographers do not tell us, and that we can find out only by living in Puri for many years and interacting with the local people - not only from the *brahmacharis* and *sannyasis* living in the innumerable Mathas, but also from the orthodox brahmin community and the temple *sevakas*, as well from the local records, libraries, and history. Apart from what we have briefly discussed about Chaitanya's relationship with the Pancha Sakhas, we can discover that Chaitanya was highly respected by the Puri Shankaracharya Matha *sannyasis*, and although at present the Shankaracharya Math leaders in Puri are not very friendly or communicative about the subject, we can safely think that there must have been some interaction with the Matha in those times. This hypothesis is supported by quite some evidence; one is the image of Chaitanya installed and worshiped at the Kanchi Shankaracharya Matha in Svargadvara road, and the other is the Nigamananda Ashram, also in Svargadvara, founded by Nigamananda, a Bengali saint, at the beginning of the 20th century, where Chaitanya and Adi Shankara are worshiped together.

Chaitanya's relationship with the Jagannatha temple *sevakas* was very strong, as we can easily see from the many episodes narrated in the widely known Gaudiya biographies - a huge difference between those times and the present times. As a norm, Chaitanya went every day to see Jagannatha in the temple, standing near the Garuda pillar, and stayed there often crying in ecstasy until the end of *vallabha bhoga arati*. It is said that his tears filled the drain besides the Garuda stambha, where the water from the Deities' bath flows

outside the temple. Raghunatha Dasa, in his *Chaitanyastaka (Stavavali)* describes Chaitanya contemplating Jagannatha in the temple. One day during the *arati* an old lady climbed the Garuda stambha to see Jagannatha behind the thick crowd, propping her foot on Chaitanya's shoulder. Chaitanya's servant Govinda chastised her for this offense, but Chaitanya stopped him, saying he was very pleased to witness such eagerness to see Jagannatha. As soon as the old lady realized she had climbed on Chaitanya's back, she immediately begged for forgiveness.

Another day Chaitanya was going to visit the temple of Shiva Yamesvara, when he heard a Devadasi singing in the temple of Jagannatha. The song was from *Gita Govinda*, and the voice of the girl was as sweet as the lyrics. Hearing the glories of Krishna and Radha, Chaitanya immediately went into a trance and without noticing whether it was a man or a woman singing, he started to run towards the singer, so fast that the thorny hedges scratched and cut his body. Govinda quickly pursued and finally caught him, crying out, "that is a woman singing". Suddenly Chaitanya came back to external consciousness and realized that it would have been very inappropriate for him as a *sannyasi* to rush to embrace the girl in his ecstasy for love to Krishna.

In this period, Raghunatha Bhatta (the son of Tapana Mishra from Varanasi) left home and came to Puri to meet Chaitanya; on the way through Bengal he made friends with Ramadasa Visvasa, from a *sudra* family, who was a great *vaishnava* devotee of Ramachandra. Together they traveled to Puri, and Ramadasa helped Raghunatha by carrying his luggage. Raghunatha was feeling embarrassed in receiving such menial service from a great scholar, well versed in the knowledge of all the scriptures, but Ramadasa insisted, "I am a *sudra* and it is my duty to serve a *brahmana*". When they arrived in Puri, Ramadasa did not show much attraction for Chaitanya's company, as he was interested mostly in scholarship and theoretical philosophy - he had no desire to acquire *bhakti*. Anyway, he settled in Puri and became a teacher for the sons of Bhavananda Raya (Ramananda's father). Raghunatha Bhatta remained in Puri with Chaitanya for 8 months and took care of his meals, as he was a very expert cook. Chaitanya explicitly ordered him not to marry, but to return home to take care of his elderly parents and study the *Bhagavata purana* from a realized devotee. Raghunatha followed his orders. About 4 years later his parents passed away in Varanasi, then he left his home and returned to Puri. Again after 8 months Chaitanya sent him to Vrindavana in the care of Rupa and Sanatana, to chant the holy Names and read the *Bhagavata purana*.

The last period of Chaitanya's life was increasingly solitary and reclusive. He had ordered Nityananda to remain always in Bengal to conduct the Sankirtana movement, and asked the devotees there not to come and see him in Puri any more. Thus his last 6 years were increasingly absorbed in the internal ecstasy of meditation on Krishna in the company of very few devotees (Ramananda Raya, Svarupa Damodara, Govinda, Paramananda Puri, Raghunatha Dasa, Shankara Pandita) mostly listening to the recitation of *Bhagavata purana*, *Gita Govinda*, *Krishna karnamrita*, the poems of Chandidasa and Vidyapati, and the *Jagannatha Vallabha Nataka* written by Ramananda Raya.

Chaitanya continued to go to the temple for the *darshana* of Jagannatha, but as he was alone or accompanied by one or two associates only, the visits would often go unnoticed and remained a closely intimate exchange between Chaitanya and Jagannatha. After lunch at noon, Chaitanya would take rest while Govinda or Shankara Pandita massaged his body.

Often, Chaitanya wandered around a tall sandy dune near the ocean (now called Chataka Parvata) surrounded by gardens, calling it "Govardhana". Once he started running, falling into a trance, and the devotees tried to catch him before he hurt himself. On that occasion, several devotees were present - Svarupa Damodara, Jagadananda, Gadadhara Pandita, Ramai, Nandai, Shankara Pandita, Paramananda Puri, Brahmananda Bharati and even Bhagavan Acharya, who had some physical handicap and could only walk slowly, so he followed at a distance.

In one of the gardens near the Chataka Parvata, Chaitanya had unearthed the Deity of Tota Gopinatha. Every day Chaitanya went to see Gadadhara Pandita and sat with him listening to the readings of the *Bhagavata purana* again and again; he particularly liked the story of Prahlada, and he listened to it hundreds of times. In fact, the temple of Tota Gopinatha is the place where Chaitanya asked to be carried at the time of his demise.

Often he would enter the Jagannatha Vallabha gardens and stay there for long time. In these gardens, where the representative Deities of Jagannatha come on the occasion of several festivals, Ramananda Raya had established his residence. One memorable night on Vaisakha purnima, Chaitanya went to the Jagannatha Vallabha garden and happily lost himself in the forests of Vrindavana. His companions sang the verses from the *Gita Govinda*, and when suddenly Chaitanya crashed to the ground, everyone could perceive the intoxicatingly sweet scent of Krishna's body.

The disappearance of Chaitanya

During the day, Chaitanya was in the company of the devotees and gave them some attention, but in the night his meditation on Krishna became extremely intense, and his feelings of separation were intolerable. Ramananda and Svarupa Damodara recited verses and sang devotional songs about Krishna to soothe Chaitanya's mood and pacify him, but when they went to sleep he became very restless, so much that people started to think he had lost his mind completely. In the night Chaitanya stayed in the Gambhira but did not sleep. He kept chanting the Names of Krishna loudly, distraught by the feelings of separation that Radha and the *gopis* experienced when Krishna left Vrindavana - and that are elaborately described in the *Bhagavata purana*.

But his madness was not ordinary, because he demonstrated very extraordinary and mystic symptoms. He could get through the doors even if they were carefully bolted from the outside, and Svarupa Damodara and Govinda lay down right in front of his room door. Often he passed through the 3 bolted doors and wandered around Puri in the night. His companions suddenly woke up, alarmed by the fact that they could not hear his chanting any more, and they saw that the room was empty, although all the 3 doors were still bolted as before. Govinda and Svarupa Damodara would take a torchlight and run around in deep anxiety and usually they found him lying unconscious in his ecstasies near the *simha dvara* (main gate) of the Jagannatha temple, or sometimes even on the sea beach or in the gardens outside the city. Sometimes he would fall into a well, or in the cow sheds outside the temple. Always the devotees would bring him back and take care of him, and Chaitanya would talk very intensely about Krishna and his activities, qualities and form, often reciting those same verses spoken by Radha.

The shocking bodily transformations exhibited by Chaitanya in his ecstatic trance were elaborately described by Raghunatha Dasa in his book *Gauranga stava kalpa vriksha*. They are so extreme that most people would find them difficult to believe the description; however, acceptance or non-acceptance of the truthfulness of such details is totally irrelevant to the fundamental point - that Chaitanya was deeply affected by his emotional feelings in separation from Krishna.

He stopped breathing, his body temperature dropped, his skin became as white as a conchshell, he perspired blood and foamed at the mouth, his teeth became temporarily loosened, he trembled violently, and tears flowed from his eyes. He even lost and gained weight suddenly in a visible way. His joints separated by 10 cm or more and appeared to be kept together only by skin, or withdrew inside the body, so that at times his body became much longer and at other times he looked like a turtle. All these symptoms instantly disappeared as soon as Chaitanya regained external consciousness, after the devotees chanted the holy Names in his ears for some time. Then he would get up, very surprised, and wondering where he was and how had he reached there. He usually said that he had suddenly seen Krishna for a moment, and had gone looking for him. In his trance, sometimes he wandered around in Vrindavana, walking with the *gopis*, talking to the trees and the animals, always searching for Krishna and intensely remembering the taste of his lips, the scent of his skin, the touch of his arms, the coolness of his palms, his fascinating looks and beautiful clothes and ornaments, and the sweet, sweet sound of his flute.

Once, immersed in his love ecstasy for Krishna, Chaitanya threw himself into the ocean, seeing it as the Yamuna river in Vrindavana. The strong underwater currents carried him from Aitota (next to the Gundicha ghara) towards Konarak, so his devotees were unable to find him - they looked in all the places he used to go, but in vain. They had already accepted the idea that Chaitanya had probably disappeared forever, but still they could not give up the search. Finally, while they were walking along the beach, they saw a fisherman with his net over his shoulder, who was dancing and singing the Name of Hari, crying and laughing like a madman. Svarupa Damodara asked him if he had seen anyone, and what was the cause of his extraordinary behavior.

The fisherman replied, "I did not meet anyone, but while I was casting my net in the water, I picked up a dead body. At first I thought it was a large fish, but then I realized it was a human corpse, so I became very afraid and I tried to release the net. But as soon as I touched the dead body, a ghost entered inside me and caused my madness, and many very strange symptoms. I started to cry and shiver, my hair stood up, and I became unable to speak properly. Also, that dead body is very strange: all the joints are separated so this man cannot be alive, but his eyes are open and a strange sound comes from his throat. Now I am very scared, because usually I chant a prayer to Nrisimha to protect me from ghosts while I stay out alone at sea to catch the fish, but this ghost only becomes more powerful when I pray to Nrisimha."

Immediately Svarupa Damodara could understand the situation, and pacified the man, saying, "I am a famous tantrik, and I know how to free you from this ghost."

The fisherman took him to the place where Chaitanya was lying, still unconscious, and Svarupa Damodara explained to him what had really happened. The devotees cleaned Chaitanya's body from the sand and changed his wet clothes, then started to chant the Name of Krishna to revive his external consciousness.

Gradually Chaitanya became more and more introverted, and oblivious to any external events or to the presence of other people. Most of the time he remained in half-external consciousness and he talked to himself, always remembering Krishna and his activities.

During one of his journeys to Navadvipa to carry news and Jagannatha *mahaprasada* to the devotees there, Jagadananda received a strange message from Advaita Acharya. "We have sold enough rice on the market," the message said. "Everyone has purchased whatever goods we had to offer. Tell the crazy man that everyone has become crazy, too."

When Chaitanya received the message, he explained that Advaita Acharya had invited Krishna to appear so that he could be worshiped, and now after the completion of the worship, the Deity would be withdrawn in his original abode.

From that time, Chaitanya became even more immersed in his inner contemplation, both day and night, and he would only speak to the *gopis* about Krishna, reciting verses from the *Bhagavata purana* about the *rasa lila* and the feelings of separation of Radha. He stayed awake all night, and in his anguish of separation from Krishna, he rubbed his mouth and face on the wall looking for the door to get out, scratching himself and bleeding profusely in the process. In the end the devotees decided to ask Shankara Pandita to sleep in Chaitanya's room with him, holding his legs for a relaxing and comforting massage. When Shankara fell asleep, Chaitanya covered him with his own blanket, but then Shankara would wake up quickly and start again massaging Chaitanya's legs. In this way he would stay more or less awake for the entire night, so out of consideration for him, Chaitanya would not try to get out of the room or hurt himself.

Chaitanya left this world during the Ratha Yatra of 1555, and it seems that his disappearance was perceived and discussed by different people in different ways. Among the 13 plus biographies and hagiographies, there are 5 different accounts of his demise.

The most respected in the Gaudiya Vaishnava community - especially among the Sarasvata Gaudiyas are Krishnadasa Kaviraja's *Chaitanya charitamrita* and Vrindavana Dasa's *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, and they do not say much about the passing of Chaitanya. Kavi Karnapura (also known as Paramananda Sena) in his *Krishna Chaitanya Charitamrita Mahakavya* simply says that "Chaitanya returned to his divine abode", and Vasudeva Ghosha (a resident of Navadvipa and personal associate of Chaitanya) wrote a song about Chaitanya's disappearance, saying "I have lost my Gaurachandra in Gopinatha's house". In later times, Narahari Chakravarti in his *Bhakti Ratnakara* describes his *guru* Narottama Dasa visiting Puri and receiving information about the disappearance of Chaitanya at Tota Gopinatha; he writes simply "Chaitanya entered the temple alone, then fell unconscious".

Some say that Chaitanya's immediate followers did not want to discuss Chaitanya's death because his activities are eternal and never end, because the *avatara* or any divine Personality never dies, or because it is too painful, or for similar reasons. Although we can certainly allow respect for personal feelings, we must notice that Krishna's disappearance is amply discussed in the *Bhagavata purana*, universally considered the most authoritative and important sacred text for Chaitanya's followers, regularly read and recited by them.

Actually, the circumstances of Krishna's disappearance described in the *Bhagavata purana* are echoed in the popular tradition and in the accounts offered by the Oriya Vaishnavas: Krishna was shot in the left foot by huntsman Jara's arrow and died as a consequence. Krishna's disappearance is also a very popular topic in Puri, with various versions stating that the *brahma padartha* (also called *nilamani*) that is inserted inside the new Jagannatha Deities by transferring it from the old Deities during the Nava Kalevara ritual is actually a relic from Krishna's body that remained after his cremation, and was either carried to Puri by the Pandavas or washed ashore by the ocean that carried it all the way from Dvaraka to Puri. The *Mahabharata* also tells the story of Krishna's disappearance, adding more details, as for example the fact that Krishna serenely accepted to suffer the curse pronounced by Gandhari, by which he would lose all his family, too, and used it to withdraw his companions - the members of the Yadu dynasty - to conclude his presence on the planet.

The popular unwritten tradition among the Sarasvata Gaudiya Vaishnavas says that Chaitanya seemed to get a foot injury and then developed a fever (which could be

ideologically assimilated to the circumstances in which Krishna himself had disappeared, having been shot in the foot by Jara's arrow) and he told his associates that he would be gone soon. On the next day he went to the temple of Tota Gopinatha and during the *kirtana* he entered the inner room of the Deity he disappeared into Gopinatha: still today the *pujari* of that temple will show a golden line in the leg of the Deity, where Chaitanya is said to have entered.

Lochana Dasa in his *Chaitanya mangala* elaborately describes another version of Chaitanya's disappearance, saying that on Asadha saptami, a Sunday afternoon, Chaitanya went for *darshana* as usual to Gundicha (during the Ratha yatra festival period) but he ran quickly and arrived before the devotees, closed the entry door and merged into the body of Jagannatha. According to this version, Chaitanya embraced the Deity of Jagannatha and merged into his body; the fact was witnessed by Kashi Mishra, Govinda, Srivasa, Mukunda Datta, and others, who saw him entering the temple but not coming out again. When they asked the *sevaka* to open the doors, the *sevaka* replied that he had seen him enter into the Deity of Jagannatha. (This would give some substance to the persistent rumor according to which Chaitanya was buried inside the Gundicha ghara). When the other devotees caught up and were informed about what had happened, everyone wept bitterly and loudly; Prataparudra fainted and Sarvabhauma cried out in agony. The same story is given by Isana Nagara in his *Advaita Prakasa* (a hagiographic text about Advaita Acharya). Kavi Karnapura (also known as Paramananda Sena) in his *Krishna Chaitanya Charitamrita Mahakavya* simply says that "Chaitanya returned to his divine abode", and Vasudeva Ghosha (resident of Navadvipa and personal associate of Chaitanya) wrote a song about Chaitanya's disappearance, saying "I have lost my Gaurachandra in Gopinatha's house".

In later times, Narahari Chakravarti in his *Bhakti Ratnakara* describes his *guru* Narottama Dasa visiting Puri and receiving information about the disappearance of Chaitanya at Tota Gopinatha; he writes simply "Chaitanya entered the temple alone, then fell unconscious". A Gaudiya scholar and disciple of Bhaktisiddhanta, Adikeshava Das, better known as Dr. OBL Kapoor, confirms the disappearance of Chaitanya at the Tota Gopinatha temple, but he does not believe that Chaitanya entered the body of the Deity; he says that in his opinion Gadadhara might have buried Chaitanya in the garden of the Tota Gopinatha temple, but did not build a *samadhi* because he did not want huge crowds assembling there.

Vaishnava Dasa in his *Sri Chaitanya Gauranga Chakata* says Chaitanya fell unconscious at the Garuda pillar inside the Jagannatha temple and was carried to the Tota Gopinatha temple, where he disappeared.

A more substantial testimony is given by Jayananda Mishra in his *Chaitanya mangala* (written in 1568). He writes that Chaitanya decided to return to the spiritual world on Asadha sukla saptami; according to his version, Brahma, Yama and Indra went to Chaitanya to ask him to return to Vaikuntha because all the people were becoming liberated and hell was empty - a story similar to the popular legend about the appearance of Ekadasi Devi, whose observance was then limited to the 11th day of the moon.

So while Chaitanya was dancing in front of the chariots at the Ratha yatra on the day of Hera panchami (Lakshmi vijaya utsava, on Ashada sukla sasthi), his left toe was pierced by a brick, then on the 6th day of the festival (meaning on saptami, the day after the accident) the pain became severe and Chaitanya was carried to Tota Gopinatha, where he told Gadadhara Pandita that he would leave the world during the night. Jayananda writes specifically "the brick hit his foot", and that he returned to Vaikuntha on a chariot pulled by Garuda. He also says that at that time both Nityananda and Advaita were in Puri. In the presence of all the devotees, Chaitanya's physical body fell on the earth where it remained, and his death was accompanied by bad omens - meteors fell, the earth trembled, and so on. Some interpret this mention of the 6th day (*sasthi*) to mean that Chaitanya died from the infected wound after being in great pain for six days, but this is not confirmed by the calendar calculation.

In his *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, Isvara Dasa (an Oriya Vaishnava follower of the Pancha Sakha sampradaya) says that Chaitanya "merged into Niladripati" in the presence of king Prataparudra, but his body was moved by Kshetrapala Shiva to the Ganga (some say this reference indicates Gomati tirtha). The day mentioned by Isvara Dasa is Sunday, sukla saptami of the month of Ashadha 1555. Also Acyutananda in his *Sunya samhita* (Chaitanya's biography) and Divakara Dasa in his *Jagannatha charitamrita* (also Chaitanya's biography) say that Chaitanya merged into the body of Jagannatha in the presence of the king. Govinda Dasa babaji in his *Chaitanya Chataka* (composed in Oriya language) says that Chaitanya was carried unconscious to Tota Gopinatha, then regained consciousness as usual and went to see Jagannatha for the evening *arati*; at that time a garland fell from the body of Jagannatha and in a flash of light Chaitanya disappeared. Literally disappeared - his body became invisible.

Another Oriya text, the *Chaitanya vilasa* by Madhava Pattanayaka, who was in Puri at the time of Chaitanya, describes his activities during the last part of his life as *divya unmada* ("divine madness"), and says that he was injured during the evening procession of Rukmini that is performed on Vaisakha amavasya. The Ratha yatra is in the month of Asadha, and the Gaudiya Vaishnavas observe the Rukmini vivaha procession on Jyestha sukla ekadasi, while on Vaisakha amavasya they only celebrate the appearance day of Gadadhara Pandita. If we give credence to this version, we must acknowledge that it is totally separate from the Ratha yatra festival, and probably there were very few bengali devotees with him. This version is also confirmed by Sadananda Kavisurya Brahma in his Oriya work *Prema tarangini*.

Apart from the discrepancy about the date compared to the Gaudiya Vaishnava version, the Pattanayaka writes that during the procession Chaitanya's left toe was pierced by a piece of brick lying on the road and there was some bleeding, the joint suffered a sprain and he fell on the ground in the presence of Kasi Mishra and (hear, hear) a few of the Pancha Sakhas themselves - Jagannatha Dasa, Jasobanta Dasa, and Ananta Dasa.

They carried him on their shoulders to the northern *mandapa* of the temple; he developed a fever, his entire body became swollen and on the day of Akshaya tritiya he died of septicemia or blood infection. Here we must remember that Akshaya tritiya is the third day after Vaisakha amavasya, so this calculation of time actually makes sense, although it completely goes against the version mentioning the *sasthi* (6th day).

But what do the local people in Puri have to say about this? There is a rumor in Puri that says Chaitanya was eliminated by the priests of the Jagannatha temple and/ or by some high-caste brahmins, who attacked and murdered him while he was alone taking *darshana* of Jagannatha inside the temple, and then buried his body somewhere inside the compound walls or grounds (some say in Gundicha). One letter allegedly written by Ramananda Raya presents this version, and says that the conspiracy was hatched by a small group of envious, hateful and degraded caste brahmins, together with Prataparudra's evil minister Govinda Vidyadhara.

In this regard, we should remember that this same minister, Govinda Vidyadhara, later staged a coup to usurp the throne while king Prataparudra was away waging war, and then after the demise of Prataparudra, Govinda Vidyadhara assassinated all the 18 princes sons of Prataparudra who occupied the throne one after the other, and finally in 1542 Govinda Vidyadhara personally sat on the throne claiming the title of first King of the

Bhoi dynasty. He reigned only for 7 years and was followed by a disastrous series of degraded and incompetent descendants; the dynasty was finally overthrown in 1560 by Mukunda Deva Harichandana, who also re-established a new batch of *sasana brahmanas* from south India.

During the Bhoi dynasty, Orissa fell under the domination of Muslims, inaugurating one of the most painful periods of its history, especially because of the raids by Kalapahada, a Muslim convert (previously from a brahmin family) who served under the Bengali sultan Sulaiman Kararani.

Kalapahada became the terror of the entire region: he destroyed almost all the temples and Deities, looting and desecrating also the Jagannatha temple and abducting and destroying the Deities, even if they had been hidden by the scared *sevakas*. The new Deities were again desecrated and destroyed several times and returned to Puri only in 1713 with the permission of the sultan, but the king of Puri was converted forcibly to islam before being allowed to continue to work as temple superintendent.

Things slightly improved when Orissa was annexed by the Maratha empire, but the situation must not have been so bright if we consider that the temple *sevakas* and brahmins of Puri wrote an official letter to the British army on 16 September 1803, requesting them to occupy Puri and take over the control of the temple and the sacred city. The letter, written with golden ink, read, "the sacred will of the idol having been first ascertained through the medium of the officiating priest... that the Brahmans at the holy temple consulted and applied to Jaggernaut to inform them what power now was to have this temple under its protection; and that he has given a decided answer that the English Government was in future to be his guardian."

The Temple priests were so happy that they expressed "most unequivocal proof of their confidence" in the British Government. The British troops reached Puri to settle there, while the Marathas hurried out of the city. The British relieved the local government and the temple from the heavy Maratha taxes and in fact the British administration itself paid the difference in the budget: in 1803 the temple income was 31,884 rupees, while the expenditures were 65,950 rupees. The British also improved the roads and funded the temple with annual grants. However, Christians both in England and in India gradually took offense at the British government supporting the Jagannatha temple and pressurized the British government to dissociate itself from "idol worship".

We will discuss more about the history of Bengal and Orissa in a later part of this work. For now, we will simply conclude that irrespective of the precise way in which Chaitanya disappeared from this world, he considered his mission was clearly completed and he had already exited the scene by ultimately withdrawing from external consciousness and contacts.

It would be myopic to judge the success or effectiveness of Chaitanya's life and work on the durable transformation (or lack thereof) in the religious and spiritual consciousness of the people of his times, in Orissa and in Bengal. His mission was to present the *yuga dharma* - the chanting and discussion of the holy Names, qualities, activities, and teachings of Krishna, and he certainly did that, both personally and through his many followers, and although there is a vast variety of interpretations and paths created by such followers (sometimes oddly in contrast to each other), his influence remains to this day as one of the most powerful in the world's history.

In the next volume, discussing the *Teachings of Krishna Chaitanya*, we will examine the various traditions that sprouted from his legacy, and we will compare their evolution with the development of the various branches of the followers of Buddha Sakyamuni. We will also elaborate how Chaitanya's mission was revived during the brief British colonial period in India, and transplanted in the rest of the world by the "Indian spiritual ambassadors" of the Gaudiya Matha.

Biographies of Chaitanya

All biographies were composed from the diaries (*kadacha*) of Svarupa Damodara (who was the closest associate of Chaitanya during the last part of his life) and Murari Gupta (a medical doctor who had been a close associate of Chaitanya since his childhood). Also, a good amount of material, especially about the last period of his life, is found in the diaries of Raghunatha Dasa. Murari Gupta arranged his diaries in a Sanskrit work with the title *Gauranga charita*, also called *Krishna Chaitanya Charitamrita*.

About ten years after the disappearance of Chaitanya, Nityananda requested Vrindavana Dasa to write a biography in Bengali (*Chaitanya Bhagavata*). About sixty years later, Krishnadasa Kaviraja wrote the deeply philosophical and theological *Chaitanya charitamrita*, elaborating in the popular Bengali language on the divinity of Chaitanya and his associates.

Other Gaudiya biographies of the period are Lochana Dasa's *Chaitanya Mangala*, Kavikarnapura's Sanskrit *Krishna Chaitanyacharitamritam Mahakavya* and *Chaitanya chandrodaya Natakam* and Jayananda's *Chaitanya Mangala*. Vishvanatha Chakravarti also collected poems about Chaitanya written by several devotees, especially Chaitanya's associates in Navadvipa. Several other biographies were composed in the subsequent period. Some of these pushed Chaitanya's identity with Krishna to the level of the idea of describing *rasa lila* with the women of Nadia, thus giving some kind of ideological basis for the perspective of the Gauranga nagaris, the Sahajiyas, and other similar groups.

The Oriya followers/ associates of Chaitanya also wrote some biographies, such as *Shunya Sangita* by Acyutananda Dasa, *Jagannatha Charitamrita* by Divakara Dasa, and *Chaitanya Bhagavata* by Ishvara Dasa. Madhava Pattanayaka also wrote another work on Chaitanya, entitled *Vaishnava lilamrita* and composed only 2 years after Chaitanya's disappearance.

Most of the information presented in this book is sourced from Chaitanya *Charitamrita* and *Chaitanya Bhagavata*.

Chaitanya Charitamrta is divided into Adi, Madhya and Antya lila, but Adi lila deals more with the philosophical aspects of the incarnation of Chaitanya than with his childhood and early life. The detailed explanation of the *pancha-tattva*, or the "five forms of the incarnation" as Chaitanya, Nityananda, Advaita, Gadadhara and Srivasa is extremely detailed and learned, quoting many verses from a variety of scriptures.

In the first 14 Sanskrit verses, Krishnadas Kaviraja offers his homage to the Pancha tattva, then to the three principal Krishna Deities of Vrindavana (Madana Mohana, Govinda and Gopinatha), representing the three stages of the development of devotional service: *sambandha*, *abhidheya* and *prayojana*. Then in the subsequent Bengali verses he gives an extensive explanation and commentary on the meaning. A long conversation between Krishna in Vrindavana and Brahma (when Brahma stole Krishna's cows and friends) establishes that Krishna is Narayana, the origin of all *avataras*, and explains that

different devotees address him as the different incarnations: each statement is as correct as the others, because there are no contradictions in God.

A description is then given about the topics of the *Bhagavata purana*, and the reasons for the descent of Chaitanya in this world (quoting *Bhagavata* 11.5.32) and his auspicious bodily features. In the 4th chapter of *Adi lila*, the author reveals the confidential reason for the appearance of Chaitanya, as Krishna wanted to taste the nectar of the love of Krishna, that gives so much pleasure to his devotees. Then the internal potency of Krishna is described in detail, as well as the sentiments of Radha and the *gopis* – but warning that such information should not be disclosed indiscriminately in public.

After 12 chapters of substantial and complex philosophical and theological presentations, the author starts describing the advent and the early years of Chaitanya's life.

Madhya lila also contains the teachings to Rupa and Sanatana, and the philosophical discussion with the Sankarite *sannyasis* in Varanasi. *Antya lila* describes the character and life of Haridasa, the meeting with Raghunatha Dasa, and the *Sikshastaka* prayers.

Chaitanya Bhagavata is also divided into *Adi*, *Madhya* and *Antya lila*, but leaves philosophy and theology to a minimum, simply describing the events of Chaitanya's life, especially his childhood and early years, up to the travel to Puri and his arrival there. Unlike *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, there are not so many philosophical discussions, so the text is relatively shorter.

The *Chaitanya mangala* also focuses on anecdotal episode of Chaitanya's life, and has a special introductory part in which Murari Gupta discusses with Damodara Pandita, narrating three conversations about the appearance and mission of Chaitanya - one between Rukmini and Krishna, one between Narada and Krishna, and one between Narada and Shiva and Parvati.

In turn, in the meeting of Narada with Shiva and Parvati, Narada narrates a very interesting conversation between Uddhava and Krishna about Krishna Consciousness. Uddhava asked Krishna what would happen to the people after his disappearance, and how it would be possible to attain liberation in the Kali yuga. Krishna replied by teaching Uddhava the spiritual science, by which a devotee can perceive the presence of God everywhere and in everything. He said, "Always remember me as the life of all beings, the cause of creation and destruction, inside every thing and independent from every thing. I am water, earth, and trees. I am the Devas, the Gandharvas and the Yakshas."

Another important section of the text speaks about the glories of *mahaprasada*, starting from a conversation between Narada and Lakshmi. Narada requested some Narayana *mahaprasada* from Lakshmi, and she finally gave him some as an exception, telling him that it is very rare to obtain. Narada happened to meet Shiva and shared with him one single grain of the *mahaprasada* that was still stuck on his little finger, and Shiva became so ecstatic and started to dance so forcefully that Bhumi requested Parvati to stop him. When Parvati came to know that Shiva's ecstasy had been caused by the contact with the *mahaprasada*, she became very eager to get some for herself, and indeed she decided that she would make *mahaprasada* available for everyone through the universe, even for animals. This story is also very popular in Puri, and has earned Parvati (worshiped in Puri as Vimala) the name of Kaivalya lolupini, as well as one of the strongest traditions in Puri: the offering of Jagannatha's *prasada* to the Deity of Vimala Devi in the temple, after which the *prasada* actually becomes *mahaprasada*. Lochana Dasa then launches in vast glorification of Vimala (Durga or Katyayani), expressed by Narayana himself, who says that Hara and Gauri are "his very self" and speaks of the appearance of the Kalpataru (the "desire tree") at the time of the churning of the ocean. The effulgence of this desire tree subsequently appeared as the compassion manifested by Chaitanya in his mission. The conversation between Narayana and Durga is reported to be quoted from the *Padma purana*, and broadcast all over his kingdom by Prataparudra.

It is interesting to note that *Chaitanya mangala* begins with an auspicious invocation song to Ganesha, who destroys all obstacles, to Gauri and Shiva the creators of the three worlds and the givers of devotion to Vishnu and to Sarasvati the bestower of artistic speech. The author then bows to the spiritual masters, the *devas* and the Vaishnavas to ask for their blessings so that the book can be completed successfully. Then he offers obeisances to Chaitanya and all his associates, listing them one by one.

The text narrates that Rukmini in Dvaraka originally suggested to Krishna to try to taste the bliss of love for Krishna, and it was at that time that Krishna first manifested the form of Gauranga to the astonished Narada who had come to visit, and said he would descend as Gauranga in Kali yuga. Narada went to give the wonderful news to Uddhava, to Shiva and Parvati, and to Brahma respectively. In Satya yuga Vishnu appears as white Hamsa, in Treta as red Yajna, in Dvapara as black Krishna, and in Kali as yellow Gauranga (*Bhagavata purana*, 10.8.13). The text also explains the reference to the important verse in *Bhagavata purana* 11.5.32: *krishna varnam tvishakrishnam sangopangastram parshadam, yajnaih sankirtana prayair yajanti hi sumedhasah*, "Resplendent and not

black, consisting of/ dedicated to the the syllables *kri-shna*, accompanied by his associates, emanations and weapons, (God) will be worshiped by the intelligent persons through the process of *sankirtana*." This is a very delicate point, as the *shastra* also explain: *kali yuge nama rupe krishna avatara*, "In Kali yuga, Krishna descends only in the form of his Name". The fact of the matter is that in Kali yuga people are generally unable to tell a genuine *avatara* from a cheater, so the ignorant and gullible public can easily be misled into worshiping an ordinary conditioned soul, or even a clever criminal that exploits them for money, adoration, power and sense gratification.

One of the *bhagas*, or perfections, of Bhagavan, is renunciation or detachment, therefore God does not have any problem in stepping down to the position of his own devotee and teaching people to worship God from a humbler position. After all, the entire corpus of Vedic knowledge has an objective value, not because of who affirmed it, but because of what it contains, because of the knowledge and consciousness that it expresses. This is the meaning of the concept of God in the Vedic vision - something quite different from the "historical" perspective of the abrahamic ideologies.

After the elaboration on the purpose of the appearance of Chaitanya, Lochana Das proceeds to describe the spiritual world as manifested in Narada's vision, and the appearance of the companions of Chaitanya. First Shiva appeared as Kamalaksha (Advaita), then Balarama appeared as Kuvera Pandita (Nityananda), son of Padmavati and Hadai Ojha. Then Katyayani appeared as Sita, the wife of Advaita. Lochana Dasa also mentions again all the associates of Chaitanya and especially Narahari Thakura, his own spiritual master, who in Goloka is the *gopi* Madhumati. The Adi, Madhya and Sesha Khanda describe the events of the life of Chaitanya, much like the *Chaitanya Bhagavata*.

Conclusion

This is only the first volume in a series that proposes to discuss the various aspects of Krishna Chaitanya's life, mission and teachings, as well as his legacy in the centuries after his disappearance. Our intelligent readers will have noticed already that this work is focusing on history rather than hagiography, although we give full respect and support for the spiritual and religious significance of the subject.

However, it is a fact that the present times demand some measure of clarification in the field of Chaitanya's legacy and teachings, to dispel the misconceptions and confusion that have accumulated in many decades. This "cleaning work" needs to be done from time to time, because the nature of this material world inevitably causes distortions even in the best traditions; this is the reason why Bhagavan keeps manifesting repeatedly in so many *avatars* and sending his devoted servants and partial manifestations.

In all humility and in a spirit of respectful and loving service, we are offering this effort to Krishna Chaitanya - Krishna Consciousness - and to our spiritual teachers, as well as to all the good people and to the sincere students of the real purpose of life.

In the subsequent volumes, we are planning to elaborate on the following topics:

* The teachings of Krishna Chaitanya: The *Siksha astakam*, The *maha mantra* Hare Krishna, What is *mantra japa*, How to chant the *mantra*, The ten offenses to be avoided, The difference between *mantra* and *maha mantra*, Evidence from traditional scriptures, Quotes from other sources, Other versions of the *maha mantra*, *Kirtanas* and *bhajan*as, Traditional songs from Bengal, Other important teachings, The observance of Ekadasi.

* Krishna Chaitanya's favorite readings: The story of Prahlada (from *Bhagavata purana*), The prayers of Prahlada, The story of Dhruva, *Gita Govinda* by Jayadeva, *Jagannatha astakam* by Adi Shankara, *Krishna karnamrita* by Bilvamangala, The poems of Chandidasa, The poems of Vidyapati, *Brahma samhita*, *Jagannatha vallabha nataka* by Ramananda Raya, The commentaries by Sridhara Svami.

* The spiritual path of Krishna Chaitanya: Chaitanya and Krishna, The story of Krishna from *Bhagavata purana*, The mood of Radha, Chaitanya and Jagannatha, Jagannatha as the *mahabhava vighraha*, Jagannatha as the unifying principle of various traditions, Antiquity of the Jagannatha worship, Spiritual importance of Puri, Jagannatha in Puri, Hari Hara, The Daru Brahman and the tribal tradition, Balabhadra in Puri, Shiva as the *jagad guru*, Subhadra in Puri, Yogamaya and Lakshmi, Jagannatha and Nrisimha, The tantric Jagannatha.

* The context of Krishna Chaitanya's mission: A brief history of India, A brief history of Navadvipa and Bengal, A brief history of Orissa, The culture of Orissa, Jayadeva and the Devadasis, Festivals and worship in Jagannatha Puri, The Bhakti movement in medieval India, The disciplic lineage of Chaitanya, Madhavendra Puri, Madhva Acharya, The four *vaishnava sampradayas*, Adi Shankara, The *mayavadi* war, Buddhism.

* The companions of Krishna Chaitanya: The *pancha tattva*, Nityananda and the Jahnava parivara, Advaita and the caste Gosvamis, Srivasa, Gadadhara, Haridasa, The six Gosvamis, Rupa, Sanatana, Jiva, Raghunatha Dasa, Raghunatha Bhatta, Gopala Bhatta, The descendents of Gopala Bhatta, The Chaitanya tree, The five saints of Orissa, The women around Chaitanya.

* The Sarasvata Gaudiya movement: After Chaitanya's disappearance, The seminal *sampradayas*, The independent *babajis*, Prakrita sahajism, Bhaktivinoda, Bhaktisiddhanta, The Gaudiya matha and its branches, Bhaktivedanta, After Bhaktivedanta's disappearance, Gaudiya vaishnavism versus Hinduism, Gaudiya vaishnavism versus abrahamic ideologies, The unification of Chaitanya's followers, The unification of dharmic ideologies.

All interested readers are welcome to present their questions, comments and even suggest corrections where applicable.