

## CHAPTER XXI

### SOME ASPECTS OF VAISNAVISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

#### I

It is believed that in Bengal rational judgment gained ascendancy during the nineteenth century. Even religion was deeply influenced by rational thinking. Rammohun Ray initiated the Brāhma Samāj movement with a view to levelling the angularities of Hinduism. The 'Young Bengal', educated in the Hindu College of Calcutta, initially preached iconoclasm. Social and religious reformation became the creed of a good number of Bengalis educated in the institutions set up by the British. Both urban culture and mass media developed throughout Bengal. The century also witnessed the development of new forms of administration and economic production. The purpose of the present survey is to inquire into the response of Vaiṣṇavism to the challenge of modern times.

It should be noted that the position of Vaiṣṇavism was almost unassailable. It had a vast social base. W. Ward wrote in 1811 : "... two persons in ten, of the whole Hindoo population of Bengal are supposed to be followers of Choitunyu."<sup>1</sup> In 1820 Walter Hamilton described Vaiṣṇavism as one of the principle religions of Bengal.<sup>2</sup> Bholanauth Chunder wrote in 1869 : "One fifth of the population of Bengal are now followers of Chaitanya. Nearly all of the opulent families of Calcutta belong to this sect."<sup>3</sup> The census figures corroborate these statements. According to the census of 1881, 5,68,052 people of Bengal belonged to the Vaiṣṇava caste.<sup>4</sup> In the Census of 1901, however, the number computed was 3,91,392.<sup>5</sup> Ward noted the remarkable opulence and social importance of the Vaiṣṇava gosvāmins. They were patronised by many rich landlords. Kṛṣṇarām Basu, a Kāyastha landlord, bore

1. Ward, *Account*, Vol. 3, p. 262
2. Hamilton, *Description of Hindustan*, Vol. 1, p. 208
3. B.N.Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. 1, pp. 35-36
4. J. A. Bourdillon, *Report of the Census of Bengal, 1881*, Vol. I, p. 134, Table 33
5. E.A.Gait, *Census of India, 1901*, Vol. VI B, Provincial Table III. pp. 62-122.



the huge expense of the construction of the chariot of Māhesh. It amounted to "four or five thousand rupees."<sup>1</sup> Nearly all prostitutes of the growing Calcutta metropolis professed "the religion of Choitunyu before their death, that they may be intitled to some sort of funeral rites."<sup>2</sup> A large number of people became *Bairagis* (Vaiṣṇava mendicants) to avoid worldly trouble, unpleasant connections and debts. Some became mendicants "for the sake of gratifying some unlawful passion." Some people became Vaiṣṇava beggars to evade stringent caste rules. "The poor farmer's little all, when he is unfortunate in his harvest, is sold up by the corn merchants, and he is turned upon the unfeeling world, to beg his bread as a religious mendicant, or perish."<sup>3</sup> Rev. Lal Bihari De describes how intolerable poverty compelled a peasant woman of Burdwan to become a *bostumi* (Female Mendicant.)<sup>4</sup>

Simplicity was the strength of Vaiṣṇavism. Its rituals had been considerably simplified by Siddha Kṛṣṇadāsa and his disciples. The theory and practice of *bhakti* had been accepted even by the caste-conscious Brāhmaṇas. Caitanya was respected as a great saint by all castes mainly because he had renounced the world. Vaiṣṇavism had also strengthened the eclectic ideals by which it was itself very deeply influenced. Vaiṣṇavism was quite compatible with polytheistic worship. But the chief reason behind its growing popularity was its liberal attitude towards caste.

The eclectic tendency resulted in the construction of hundreds of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva-Śākta temples by people belonging to both high and low castes. The Śāktas had been affected by the soft, mellow spirit of Vaiṣṇavism and its poetry. It has already been pointed out that leading Śākta poets like Rāmprasād Sen and Kamalākānta Bhattācārya preached Kālī-Kṛṣṇa non-duality in their simple, passion-laden songs. This idea of non-duality was, however, disliked by the orthodox Vaiṣṇavas.<sup>5</sup> But the songs of Rāmprasād showed which way the wind was blowing. Rāmprasād's contempo-

1. Ward, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 535. Kṛṣṇarām also gave the Māhesh priests an allowance of six rupees per day.
2. Ward, op. cit. Vol-3, p. 262
3. Ibid, pp. 433-37 ; Vol. 4, p. 80.
4. De, *Bengal Peasant Life* ch. XXXIV, pp. 175-76.
5. Ward records a Śākta-Vaiṣṇava duel of banter. *Account*, Vol. 4, pp. 198-200. Very often the language of the sectarian quarrel was unprintable. Vide, Nārāyaṇa Cattarāja Guṇanidhi, *Kalikutuhala* (published in B.S. 1260, A.D.1853), pp. 72-78, "Atha Śākta-Vaiṣṇava Kalaha"

rary, Bhāratācandra Rāyaguṇākara, the celebrated court-poet of Kṛṣṇanagar, also wrote some sophisticated songs on the loves of Kṛṣṇa, though *Annadāmangala*, his masterpiece, deals with the Durgā legend.<sup>2</sup>

## II

During the eighteenth century Tantra was popular among a powerful section of the Bengali *zamindars*. Sizable segments of the upper castes also observed Tāntrika *Kulācāra*.<sup>3</sup> The steady growth of the Calcutta metropolis as the city of the Bengali new rich, and the tragic waning of the late mediaeval estates after the introduction of the Permanent Settlement in 1793, resulted in the pauperisation of the Kālī-worshipping Rājās, who once retained bands of club-wielding body-guards recruited from the scheduled castes. These people associated plunder and murder with Kālī worship. Professional robbers worshipped Kālī. But the new rich of Calcutta very soon developed a different way of life. They were staunch supporters of British 'Law and Order' from which they derived immense benefit. Most of them professed or patronised Vaiṣṇavism. One may say that the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth was an indirect effect of the consolidation of British power in Bengal, which gradually put an end to plunder and murder in the name of religion. All old *zamindars*, however, did not give up their Śākta faith. The Rājās of Kṛṣṇanagar, for instance, were unflinching Śāktas, though they did not disrespect the Vaiṣṇavas. The Navadvīpa gosvāmīns had very little influence over them. Siddha Caitanyadāsa of Navadvīpa once publicly described a Kṛṣṇanagar Rājā as an incarnation of Rāma<sup>4</sup>. But almost all among the new rich of the latter half of the eighteenth century were Vaiṣṇavas. Their pre-eminent representatives were Gangānārāyaṇa Simha, the Rājās of Cossimbazar, Mahārājā Nandakumār, the Rājās of Postā, and the Sobhābazar Rājās. Rājā Sukhamaya Rāyabāhadur of Postā spent huge sums during one of his pilgrimages to Puri.<sup>5</sup> Lālā Bābu, a very rich

2. These songs are included in *Vidyāsundara Kāvya*
3. Dinseh Chandra Bhattācārya, *Kaviranjan Rāmprasāda Sena*, in *Sāhitya-sādhaka Caritamālā* Vol IX. P. 17.
4. *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Jivana*, Vol. 2, pp. 87-88.
5. Benimadhav Chatterji, *A Short Sketch of Maharaja Sukhmoy Roy Bahadur*, Calcutta, 1910, pp. 5-6; also, appendix-c. Sukhmoy "left a sum of Rs,



*zamindār*, ultimately became a mendicant (*bhekadhārī*) disciple of Duhkhī Kṛṣṇadāsa II of Vṛndāvana. The *Bābu* died in far Vṛndāvana on May 14, 1820, at the age of forty-four.<sup>1</sup> Among the new rich of Calcutta and its neighbourhood, the following either professed Vaiṣṇavism, or patronised the Vaiṣṇavas :

Govindrum Mitra, the notorious 'Black Zamindar' of Calcutta.<sup>2</sup>

The millionaire Rājās of Shobhābazar.<sup>3</sup>

Muttillol Mullick of Pāthuriāghātā.<sup>4</sup>

Jayanārayaṇa Ghosāla of Bhukailāsh.<sup>5</sup>

The Tagore families of Pāthuriāghātā and Jorāsānko.<sup>6</sup>

The majority of the Suvarṇavaṇik landlords of Calcutta.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the temples of Calcutta, built by the new rich, were Vaiṣṇava temples. The Suvarṇavaṇik millionaire Matilāl Śil and the trustees of his vast estate, for instance, built eight Vaiṣṇava temples in Calcutta.<sup>8</sup>

1,555/- to meet the expenses for the entertainment of strangers at this Koonjah (meaning, Bower) at Brindaban Dham and another sum of Rs. 15,000 for expenses relating to the worship of Gopaljeeoo at Sutobadi", p. 7

1. The news of Lālā Bābu's death in Vṛndāvana was published in the *Samācāradarpaṇa* of June 17, 1820.
2. Vide, *An Account of the Late Govindrum Mitter*, Vol. CCXIX of India Office Library Tracts, Calcutta National Press, 1869; B. V. Roy, 'The Black Zamindar of Calcutta' *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, Independence Commemoration Number, 1947, pp. 12-18. Govindaram built a huge, nine-pinnacled temple with a lofty cupolla which was totally destroyed by the great cyclone of 1737. T. N. Daniell drew a coloured sketch of the temple.
3. N. N. Ghose, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur*, Chs. 1, 2 and 3.
4. Matilal Mallik was a disciple of some gosvāmin of the Nityānanda branch. He showered gifts on the followers of Nityānanda. Brajendranāth Bandyopādhyāya, *Samvādpātre Sekāler Kathā*, (1937 ed.), Vol. 1, p. 264
5. Author of *Karuṇānidhānavilāsa*, and, in all probability, a disciple of the Kartābhajā pope, Dulālcānd. Jayanārayaṇa wrote in Sanskrit prose *Vaiṣṇavārcaṇacandrikā*, a work on rituals, which is fully quoted in *Karuṇānidhānavilāsa*, pp. 232-235. Some parts of *Karuṇānidhānavilāsa* were written with the assistance of Mangala Dāsa, a Vaiṣṇava, and Mādhava Paṇḍita, a Sanskrit scholar, who also knew Vrajabhākhā. *Karuṇānidhānavilāsa* p. 59, verses 7-12
6. The Tagore families worshipped the Sāligrāma stone. Nagendranāth Basu, Byomakeśa Mustafī. *Vanger Jātiya Itihās, Brāhmaṇa Kāṇḍa*, Vol. 3, part 6, pp. 319-320; the religion of Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, pp. 349-352.
7. 45 biographies in *Suvarṇavaṇik Kathā O Kirti*, 3 Vols. 23 were enthusiastic Vaiṣṇavas.
8. Benoy Ghosh. *Kalikātā Saharer Itivṛtta*, p. 673

The nine-towered temple of Rādhākānta, located in Tollyganj, was built by the local Maṇḍal *zamindārs* in 1809. Here it should be noted that a big, brilliantly decorated temple of Syāmasundara was built in Bāhāru village in 1821-1825. The temple was decorated with excellent mural paintings of the 'sports' of Caitanya by one Durgārām Bhāskar. Bāhāru village is in south 24-Parganas.

### III

The Vaiṣṇavas were aware of the challenges thrown by the evolving modern society in the urban centres. The pace of life had grown faster than before. The Vaiṣṇavas did not mix with the reformers. They "kept to the right" with meticulous care. Jadunath Sarkar is of opinion that Vaiṣṇavism liberalised the outlook of the Bengali Hindu.<sup>1</sup> Tāntrika 'leftism' was disciplined. Women grew socially conscious and literate. But despite Vaiṣṇavism, hundreds of widows were burnt in Bengal. Infants were thrown into the surging waves of Gangāsāgar, despite the Vaiṣṇava adoration of Kṛṣṇa, the divine infant. Drunkenness and immoralities grew rampant. The Vaiṣṇavas miserably failed to promote the ethical view. When they saw that the new rich had been able to establish their social prominence on a solid basis, they began to nestle close to them. The low caste *zamindārs* were trying to elevate their caste status by vigorously courting the favour of the Brāhmaṇa *Paṇḍitas* and priests. As rival of the *Paṇḍitas* and the priests, the Vaiṣṇavas were not in a position to champion the causes of social and religious reform. They grew conservative because the new rich, as a class, were conservative. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism became a distinct facet of Hindu orthodoxy.

Many low-caste rich *zamindārs* were attracted by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava-Brāhmaṇa equation. Since the gosvāmins considered themselves equal to the Brāhmaṇas, and since they preached the theory that a practising Vaiṣṇava was even superior to a Brāhmaṇa, the low caste *zamindārs* found it possible to elevate their social position by professing Vaiṣṇavism.

The millionaire Matilāl Śil (1792-1854) requested the leading members of the *Dharmasabhā*, the principal Brāhmaṇical organisation of Calcutta, to consider the Vaiṣṇava's claim to social superiority, irrespective of his caste. The Brāhmaṇa *Paṇḍitas* of the *Dharma-*

1. *History of Bengal*, Vol. 2, p. 221.



*sabhā* composed a work entitled *Viprabhakticandrikā*, five hundred copies of which were published by Śil in 1832.<sup>1</sup> The authors of this work concluded that a Brāhmaṇa was decidedly nobler than a Śūdra-Vaiṣṇava. Though Matilāl Śil was a Vaiṣṇava, he accepted the conclusion, because he was a patron of the Brāhmaṇas, too. But Brāhmanical superiority was boldly challenged by another Suvarṇavaṇik landlord named Bhairava Candra Datta. He published a work entitled *Śrī Śrī Vaiṣṇavabhaktikaumudī*,<sup>2</sup> which was printed in a press named "Pāṣaṇḍadalana" (Suppression of the Unbelievers), and published in 1832. The work flatly rejected the Brāhmanical claim to the highest social status, and stated the various theories of the social and sacerdotal pre-eminence of the Vaiṣṇavas irrespective of caste.

#### IV

The Vaiṣṇava fairs and festivals were extremely popular in the nineteenth century. In 1802 the Gaurāṅga fair in Navadvīpa was a famous event. Rām Rām Basu, one of the earliest writers of Bengali prose, described the fair in *Lipimālā*.<sup>3</sup> The people did not have to observe caste rules as long as they were present in the fair. Vaiṣṇava festivals were regularly held in Calcutta and the districts.<sup>4</sup> The pilgrimage to Puri was so popular that the Jagannātha temple of Puri earned Rs. 12,87,790/- between 1810 and 1831. The annual income of the temple was Rs. 51,101/-.<sup>5</sup> The *Janmāstamī* procession of Dacca, financed mainly by the local Śāṅkhavaṇik merchants, and the *Rāsa* fair of Śāntipur were magnificent affairs, in which the local Vaiṣṇavas exhibited their immense wealth in the form of gold and silver reserves. In 1834 the government unexpectedly imposed a ban on Vaiṣṇava processions in Calcutta. It was lifted in 1835, thanks to the intervention of Rādhā-

1. Narendranāth Lāhā, *Suvarṇavaṇik Kathā O Kīrti*, Vol. 1, pp. 43-50. The *Dharma Sabhā* was founded in January 1830. Bhavānīcaraṇ Bandyopādhyāya (1787-1848) was its secretary. Its journal was *Samācāracandrikā*.
2. *Suvarṇavaṇik Kathā a Kīrti*, Vol. I, pp. 50-64.
3. *Lipimālā* (Serampore, 1802), pp. 110-132.
4. Vide, *Samvādpātra Sekāler Kathā*, Vol. 1, pp. 256, 225, 257. Vol. 2: pp. 371, 372, 373 for descriptions of the Vaiṣṇava festivals of Māhesh, Serampore Pānihāti, Ulā and Calcutta. See also Benoy Ghosh, *Sāmayika Patre Bāṅglār Samājacitra*, Vol. 4, pp. 702-704, for a description of the *Rāsa* fair at Harinābhi (24-Parganas) a centre of Brāhmanical culture.
5. *Samvādpātra Sekāler Kathā*, Vol. 2, pp. 407-408

kānta Deb (1784-1867) of Sobhābazar, who was a distinguished leader of the conservative Bengalis.<sup>1</sup> Some Vaiṣṇava gosvāmins, however, did not mend their old ways. At least some of them practised *jus primae noctis* in Midnapur and Balasore. Gradually the barbarity disappeared. Ultimately the Midnapur bridegrooms had to seek merely the permission of the Vaiṣṇava *Kulagurus* before they could consummate their marriage. The permission was given on payment of a fee.<sup>2</sup> In Calcutta the Vaiṣṇava gosvāmins tried very hard to initiate substantial landlords. They often faced trouble when they paid visits to aristocratic seraglios.<sup>3</sup> Utterly materialistic and given to dissipation, some of the new rich simply tortured the prowling gosvāmins.<sup>4</sup> The majority of the Vaiṣṇava mendicants preferred seclusion. They lived in *Ākhḍās* or monasteries. These were set up throughout Bengal. The well-known of them were located in Simuliyā, Navadvīpa (Nadiā), Kālnā (Burdwan), Jāganj (Murshidābād), Kenduli and Maṅḍol (Birbhum), Rāmkeli and Gayeshpur (Malda), and Kambuliyātolā (Calcutta).<sup>5</sup> Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism had still no central organisation. For a long time some sort of control over the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas was exercised by the leading *Ākhḍās* of Navadvīpa and Kālnā. Heresy often raised its head. The *Spāṣṭadāyikas*, for instance, respected the tenets of the Caitanya cult, but repudiated the authority of the *gurus*. In the *Spāṣṭadāyika* monasteries monks and nuns lived in separate quarters. It was believed that heresy in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava order was a result of "the introduction of knowledge, liberal sentiments, and Christian truth into the community".<sup>6</sup>

The Vaiṣṇava tradition was kept alive by secular organisations of householding Vaiṣṇavas and Hindus who worshipped the five divinities. Behālā in South Calcutta had a *Haribhaktīpradāyini Sabhā* in 1852; this was perhaps the earliest association of the lay Vaiṣṇavas of Calcutta.<sup>7</sup> *Śrī Caitanya Sabhā* was organised in Kolutolā, Central Calcutta in 1861.<sup>8</sup>

1. Ibid, Vol. 2, News Item of September 1835, pp. 383-384.
2. *Hutom Payāncār Naksā* (ed. Bandyopādhyaya and Das), pp. 41-45
3. *Samvād Patre Sekāler Kathā*, Vol. 1, pp. 124-126
4. *Hutom Payāncār Naksā*, pp. 32-34, 41, 45-46.
5. *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Jivana*, Vol. 2, pp. 133, 205-206
6. Lal Bihari De's opinion in *Calcutta Review* Vol. XV, 1851, p. 194.
7. Brajendranāth Bandyopādhyāya, *Bāṅglā Sāmayika Patra*, Vol. 1, p. 141. The *Sabhā* published a journal named *Sāmvātsarika Samvādpātra* in 1856.
8. Ibid, p. 172. The journal of the *Sabhā* was named *Śrī Caitanyakīrti-kaumudī Patrikā*.



In 1898 or thereabouts Calcutta and the suburban areas had as many as twenty-nine *Harisabhās* or associations with a pronounced Vaiṣṇava sympathy. These associations constituted a powerful Vaiṣṇava milieu in urban-industrial surroundings. The main reason behind the multiplication of these associations in 1898 was the outbreak of bubonic plague in Calcutta in an epidemic form. It was believed that the devastating plague would disappear if the citizens chanted the names of Hari and Caitanya *Mahāprabhu*. Even Muhammadans and Christians sang *Kīrtana*.<sup>1</sup> The *Harisabhās* strengthened Vaiṣṇavism as a Brāhmanical cult. The plague revealed the fact that the urban culture of Calcutta had an imperishable link with what a sociologist describes as "the traditional matrix of sacred culture." In Calcutta, (and, to a considerable extent, in the city of Madras), the traditional cultural media "not only continue to survive but have also been incorporated in novel ways into an emerging popular and classical culture. Much of the urban popular culture is seen as an extension of the path of devotion (*bhaktimārga*), more easily accessible to modern man than the paths of ritual observance (*Karmamārgā*), or the path of sacred knowledge (*Jñānamārga*)."<sup>2</sup>

## V

The Vaiṣṇavas felt the need of disseminating their views on a wide scale. The Vaiṣṇava biographies *Narottamavilāsa* and *Jagadīśacaritravijaya* were published by Bengali publishers in 1815. The publication of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava classics, such as CCM, *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, and *Haribhaktivilāsa* was advertised in the *Samācāradarpaṇa* between 1818 and 1829.<sup>3</sup> Upendranath Mitra's Bengali translation of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* was published in 1816. At about the same time Jayanārāyaṇa Ghosāla's *Karuṇānidhānavilāsa*, too, was published.

Later the responsibility for publishing Vaiṣṇava and Sahajiyā manuscripts was shouldered by a group of printers and publishers of north Calcutta who were known as 'Batatalā' publishers. Their

1. The devotional songs sung by the members of these clubs are collected in *Sangitakoṣa*, pp. 751-800. See also Rāmadāsa Bābāji, *Caritasudhā*, Vol. 2, pp. 171-174
2. Milton Singer, "The Great Tradition of Hinduism in the City of Madras", *Anthropology of Folk Religion*, ed. Charles Leslie, p. 158.
3. *Samvādpātre Sekāler Kathā*, Vol. 1, pp. 75-76, 90-91.

printing presses were set up in Upper Chitpore Road, Nimu Gosvāmi Lane (Āhirītōlā), and Sobhābazar, Jaya Mitra Street and Grey Street. The Batatalā publishers were keenly aware of the great demand for Vaiṣṇava books in the rural areas. They printed a good number of original works and translations of the Vaiṣṇava classics on cheap paper, using very bad types and apocryphal manuscripts. The Batatalā products were notoriously brittle and unauthentic. But it was the only place where all sorts of Vaiṣṇava books were printed and published mainly for the use of the villagers. The Batatalā publishers also brought out numerous cheap editions of Sahajiyā works. This fact was an indication of the popularity of Sahajiyā Vaiṣṇavism. The principal publisher of Sahajiyā works was Benīmadhav De of Upper Chitpore Road. He published numerous Sahajiyā works in the form of printed manuscripts. Between 1815 and 1899, nearly fifty important Vaiṣṇava works were published in Calcutta. Most of these works were written in Bengali verse and prose. This shows that the Vaiṣṇavas grew conscious of the value of publicity through the press.

The products of Batatala failed to satisfy the demands of the sophisticated Vaiṣṇavas. In 1845 Muktārāma Vidyāvāgīśa edited, printed and published at his own cost an authentic edition of Gopāla Bhatta Gosvāmin's *Haribhaktivilāsa*. In 1854 Rājendralala Mitra edited Karṇapūra's *Caitanyacandrodaya* with a very interesting introduction. Later on the task of bringing out reliable editions of the Vṛndāvana texts and the Vaiṣṇava biographies and *Padāvalis* was most brilliantly fulfilled by Rāmanārāyaṇa Vidyāratna of Murshidabad. He was associated with a project of Vaiṣṇava publications which was financed by Rādhāramaṇa Ghoṣa, Bhāgavatabhūṣaṇa, who was the private secretary to the King of Tripura State. Rādhāramaṇa set up a press in Baharampur which was named Rādhāramaṇa Press, and from which an authentic edition of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* with four Sanskrit commentaries and Bengali translation was brought out at the cost of nearly Rs. 1,000,000/-. The edition was prepared for private circulation.

## VI

The earliest Vaiṣṇava weekly was *Bhāgavatasamācāra* which was edited by Brajamohan Cakravarti in 1831.<sup>1</sup> Another contemporary

1. *Samvādpātre Sekāler Kathā*, Vol. 2, p. 124



Vaiṣṇava weekly was *Bhaktisūcaka* (1835). Between 1846 and 1861 at least four other Vaiṣṇava or semi-Vaiṣṇava journals were published. These were *Nityadharmānuranjikā* (1846), *Sāmvatsarikasamvādapatra* (1856) *Advaitatattvapradarsaka Patrikā* (1856) and *Śrī Caitanyakirtikaumudī Patrikā* (1861).<sup>1</sup>

Vaiṣṇava journalism as well as Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava organisation in Bengal really became meaningful under the guidance of a dynamic Vaiṣṇava Deputy Magistrate named Kedārnāth Datta, Bhaktivinoda (1838-1914). He was originally a member of the Kartābhajā sect. Later he severed his link with the Kartābhajā, and became a disciple of Bipinbihārī Gosvāmin of Bāghnāpārā.<sup>2</sup> In his youth he came into close contact with Dvijendranāth Tagore (1840-1926), eldest son of Devendranāth Tagore. With Dvijendranāth, Kedārnāth assiduously studied Western Philosophy and History.<sup>3</sup> Later he initiated the study of comparative philosophy in the light of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology. When he was a Deputy Magistrate in Puri, Kedārnāth caused the incarceration of a man named Visakisan, who was the leader of the heretical *Ativādī* sect, on the plea that the man was inciting the peasants to revolt against British rule.<sup>4</sup> Kedārnāth first published the famous Vaiṣṇava journal, *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*, in 1884.<sup>5</sup> In 1885 he founded a Vaiṣṇava society named Vaiṣṇava Sabha, and also set up the Depository Press in 181, Māniktalā Street, Calcutta. The Vaiṣṇava Sabhā appointed three Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava preachers named Bipinbihārī Gosvāmī, Mahendranāth Gosvāmī and Harigopāl Gosvāmī. They were to work in the districts of West Bengal.<sup>6</sup>

The Vaiṣṇavas of Dacca and Balasore published in 1885 two journals, titled, respectively, *Ratnākara*, and *Śrī Haribhaktipradāyini*.<sup>7</sup> Three other short-lived Vaiṣṇava journals appeared in Calcutta in the same year; these were *Vaiṣṇava*, *Navamanjarī*, and *Tattvamanjarī*.<sup>8</sup> In 1894 one Manmathanath Mitra organised in Burdwan town a

1. Brajendranath Bandyopadhyaya, *Bangla Samayika Patra*, Vol. 1, pp. 54, 86, 141, 148, 172
2. *Gauḍīya Vaisṇava Jivana*, Vol. 2, pp. 288-89
3. *Śrī Bhaktivinoda Thakurer Svalikhita Jivani* pp. 112-14
4. *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*, 1896, Vol. 8, pp. 161-167, 207, 229
5. Kedārnāth also published a Vaiṣṇava work in Urdu. Its title was *Bālid-i-Registry*.
6. *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*, 1885, Vo. 2, p. 3
7. *Ibid*, p. 217
8. *Ibid*, p. 217

Vaiṣṇava association called *Vardhamāna Vaiṣṇavadharma Uddīpanī Sabhā*.<sup>1</sup> Tripura, too, had a Vaiṣṇava club known as *Āgartalā Haribhaktipradāyini Sabhā* (1895).<sup>2</sup> This association was organised by King Viracandra Mānikya.

A similar association of Dakṣiṇakhaṇḍa, Murshidabad, organised a popular *Mahotsava* or grand festival in 1884.<sup>3</sup> A Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava named Premānanda Bhāratī (originally named Surendranāth Mukhopādhyāya, 1857-1914) preached Vaiṣṇavism in Europe and the U.S.A.<sup>4</sup> A *Cāitanyasamāja* was established in the U.S.A. in about 1897 by an American convert named Professor Osman.<sup>5</sup>

In about 1899 the orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas of Calcutta established a new Vaiṣṇava society in Calcutta which was named *Gaurāngasamāja*.<sup>6</sup> A Vaiṣṇava journal named *Vaiṣṇavapratibhā* appeared in Calcutta in 1899-1900.<sup>7</sup>

*Gaurāngasamāja*, mentioned above, was founded by Śīśirkumār Ghoṣe (1840-1911), an eminent journalist of Calcutta, and a devout Vaiṣṇava. He created a stir in the intellectual circles by publishing the first volume of *Amiyanimāicarita* in 1892. With the help of Kedārnāth Datta and Rādhikānāth Gosvāmī, Śīśirkumār published the fortnightly journal, *Śrī Śrī Viṣṇupriyā Patrikā* on 1 Caitra, of Caitanya era 405 (1890). It was edited by Kedārnāth Datta and Rādhikānāth Gosvāmī. Later the journal became a monthly. It was afterwards amalgamated with the weekly *Ānandabāzār Patrikā*. In 1901 *Śrī Śrī Gauraviṣṇupriyā Patrikā* was published as the journal of the *Gaurāngasamāja*. Kedārnāth Datta severed his link with *Śrī Śrī Viṣṇupriyā Ānandabazar Patrikā* in 1899 on the ground that the journal was indulging in un-Vaiṣṇava 'confabulation' (*Prajalpa*) by mixing Vaiṣṇavism with the news of secular developments.<sup>8</sup>

1. *Ibid*, Vol. 6, 1894, pp. 74-75
2. *Ibid*, Vol. 7, 1895, pp. 289-291
3. *Ibid*, Vol. 8, 1896, pp. 111-113
4. Rāmadāsa Babaji, *Caritasudhā*, Vol. 1, pp. 270-298: Premānanda Bhāratī was a friend of Rādhāramaṇa Caraṇa Dāsa Deva, and author of *Śrikṛṣṇa* (New York, 1904).
5. *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*, 1897, Vol. 9, p. 3
6. Brajendranāth Bandyopādhyāya, *Śīśir Kumār Ghose, Sāhitya Sādha* Caritamālā-86, p. 49.
7. *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*, Vol. 12, 1900-1901, p. 1.
8. *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*, August, 1899, pp. 28-29



A society named *Gauḍeśvara Vaiṣṇava* was established in Vṛndāvana in 1900-1901. Its journal was also named *Gauḍeśvara*.<sup>1</sup> Kedārnāth Datta was one of those Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas who thought that Māyāpur was the Navadvīpa of the sixteenth century. In 1894 he organised a society with a view to establishing the primacy of Māyāpur over the present town of Navadvīpa.<sup>2</sup> His hypothesis was bitterly criticised by the leading citizens of Navadvīpa town who were led by Kānticandra Rāḍī.<sup>3</sup>

The Bengali Vaiṣṇavas of Vṛndāvana established an association in 1892 or thereabouts, which was called *Śrīcāitanyamatavodhinī Sabhā*. Its journal was called *Śrīcāitanyamatavodhinī*. In the fourth issue of this journal, an article entitled "Vivādarahasya" contained a scurrilous attack on Viṣṇupriyā Devī. It also described Karṇapūra's hagiography as an apocryphal work. These views were condemned in *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*.<sup>4</sup> Another Vṛndāvana society named *Vaiṣṇavadharma-pracārīnī Sabhā* awarded titles to thirty-four outstanding Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, including Śiśīrkumar Ghose.<sup>5</sup>

## VII

The leading Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas had quite different political opinions. Śiśīrkumār Ghose was renowned for his long and bitter struggles against the indigo-planters and tyrannical bureaucrats. Śiśīrkumār used the *Amṛitabazar Patrika* in defence of the rights of his countrymen. He believed that the basic interests of the Indians and the Englishmen were never identical. "We are we and they are they" he said.<sup>6</sup> Kedārnāth Datta, on the other hand, openly preached loyalty to the Rāj in *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*.<sup>7</sup> He criticised secularism and Comte's positivism as worthless doctrines.<sup>8</sup> He believed that the British and the Bengalis were brothers because they belonged to the Aryan race.<sup>9</sup> This shows that Datta was deeply

1. Ibid., Vol. 12, 1900-1901, p. 1

2. Ibid., Vol. 5, 1893-94, No. 1: notice of the association was published in it.

3. The dissentient opinions are published in Kānti Candra Rāḍī's *Śrī Śrī Navadvīpatattva* (1895)

4. *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*, Vol. 4, 1892, pp. 24, 79

5. Ibid., Vol. 4, 1892, pp. 68-69

6. Anāth Nāth Basu, *Mahātmā Śiśīr Kumār Ghose* (ed. 1976) Matilāl Ghose's introduction, p. 2.

7. *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*, Vol. 4, 1892, p. 1

8. Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 37.

9. Ibid., Vol. 2, 1885, p. 78

influenced by the 'Aryanism' of a section of the Bengali nationalists of the time.

Dutta was also a Darwinian. According to him, for each of the ten stages of evolution, Viṣṇu appeared as an *Avatāra* who was particularly relevant to that stage of evolution. This interpretation of the *Avatāra* was widely accepted.<sup>1</sup> Later on in *Caitanyaśikṣāmṛta*, Kedārnāth described four broad stages of civilisation, namely, the primitive stage, the scientific and technological stage, the ethical stage, and the devotional stage. Each of these stages had appropriate forms of worship.<sup>2</sup>

*Sajjanatoṣaṇī* offered some suggestions with regard to the restructuring of the caste system. These suggestions possibly represented the social philosophy of the enlightened Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. These were as follows :<sup>3</sup>

1. Birth should never be a factor in the determination of caste. Caste should be determined according to the *Svabhāva* or nature of a man and his parents. Thus a son's caste may be quite different from that of his parents.
2. A man's caste should not be considered at all before he attains the age of fifteen.
3. Once fixed, the caste of a man should be preserved and protected from the assaults of the so-called *Samājapatis* by the *zamindārs* and the government. The journal did not regard the Vaiṣṇava caste as an untouchable caste.

In 1886, Kedārnāth Datta founded the *Viśvavaiṣṇava Sabhā*. It was the combination of two societies called *Harisādhana Samāja* and *Vaiṣṇava Sabhā*. It was claimed that the *Viśva Vaiṣṇava Sabhā* had been founded by Rūpa Gosvāmin and Jīva Gosvāmin. Later the *Sabhā* was transformed into the Gauḍīya Mission. The Mission established branches in different parts of India. Both celibate monks and householders were its members. The monks lived in the monasteries established by the Mission. The Gauḍīya Mission preached the following concepts :<sup>4</sup>

1. Absolute Truth was self-evident as Kṛṣṇa.

1. *Akṣaya Sāhitya Sambhāra*, Vol. 1, pp. 130-132

2. *Caitanyaśikṣāmṛta*, pp. 10, 21

3. *Sajjanatoṣaṇī*, Vol. 2, 1885, pp. 123-124.

4. Summarised from *Outlines of Gauḍīya Mission*, published by Calcutta Gauḍīya Mission.