

with the youthful Son of the Lord of Braja. This is the highest significance of Krishna *Leelā* and is exemplified in the Career and Teaching of Sree Chaitanya.

With these insufficient preliminary observations of a general character towards the elucidation of a number of current misconceptions on the subject of Religion, I shall venture to proceed to narrate the Transcendental Career of the Supreme Lord Sree Krishna-Chaitanya in course of the following chapters.

The Narrative seeks to present the Absolute as He is in His Supreme Magnanimity. The Career of Sree Krishna-Chaitanya is *identical* with the Divine Personality in the Form of His Own Loving Service. It is not possible for individual souls, who are detached infinitesimal particles of the Marginal Potency of the Divinity, to realise the Nature of the Loving Service of the Divinity by His Own Integrated Power and his own proper function within the same, except by the Eternal Support of Divine Love Himself. The Magnanimous Activity of Sree Krishna-Chaitanya is *identical* with His Co-ordinate Absolute Activity as the Amorous Lover of Sree Rādhikā in Sree Brindāvana. The individual soul has, therefore, no access to the Realm of the Amorous Pastimes of Sree Sree Rādhā-Govinda except by the realisation of this identity of relationship between the Two distinct *Leelās*.

SREE KRISHNA-CHAITANYA

CHAPTER I

COUNTRY AND SOCIETY

THE historical significance of the term Gauḍa, the name that is borne by the country of Sree Chaitanya's Nativity, is obscure. It occurs in the works of the famous Grammarian Pāṇini as the name of a well-known city 'of the East'. The geographical location of the regions bearing the name, referred to in ancient literature, presents a bewildering variety, being applied to tracts and towns scattered in all directions and attaining an extent that is sometimes equivalent to the greater part of Northern India. It supplies the designation to a wide division of the Brāhmanas, a well-known style of the Sanskrit rhetoricians and a technical term, connected with the metal 'silver', to the industrialists, of Old India. The name of the spiritual preceptor of Sree Sankarāchārya is Gauḍa-pāda, while Sreeman Madhvāchārya, an inhabitant of the extreme south of the country, bears the interesting name of "Gauḍapurnānanda". No theory regarding the historical origin or application of the word is yet forthcoming that offers any satisfactory clue to the copious use of the word by the ancients in such diverse connections.

There is evidence to prove that there were similar grades in the geographical denotation of the word 'Gauḍa' also at the period of the Advent of Sree Chaitanya. It was then applied to (1) the country under the rule of the Muhammedan King of Bengal, (2) to his Capital situated in the modern district of Māldā, (3) to

the tract adjoining the old town of Nabadwip to which the Capital of the country had been transferred from Gauḍa in Māldā by Lakshmana Sena, the last independent Hindu King of Bengal; (4) while the compound 'pancha-Gauḍa', 'the five Gauḍas', meant practically the whole of Northern India and, specifically, (5) the five countries of Kurukshetra, Kanauj, Utkal, Mithila and Gauḍa (Bengal), (6) the Brāhmana residents of which regions were also designated as 'pancha-Gauḍa'. The terms 'Gauḍa' and 'Gauḍa-mandala' (Circle of Gauḍa) used by the associates and followers of Sree Chaitanyadeva, as a designation of themselves and their country, mean the greater part of the modern province of Bengal with old Nabadwip, 'the city of the Nine Islands,' as centre; and for the purpose of this Narrative we shall accordingly accept this external regional denotation of the word, without losing sight of its true spiritual import.

But it is well at the very outset to remind our readers of the *historical fact* that neither the *Land* nor the *Activities* of Sree Chaitanya are regarded by the authors of the works that form the original sources of this account, as historical, geographical, or any other entities in the mundane sense. The *Gauḍamandala*, or Circle of Gauḍa is to them the spiritual realm of the Appearance of the Supreme Lord Sree Krishna-Chaitanya and His eternally associated devotees. The spiritual significance of their attitude may be thus indicated. Godhead is All-powerful. There is a transcendental world in which He dwells with His Own. The only business of all inhabitants of that world is to serve Godhead directly. That world is the spiritual world. It is free from all limitations and defects of this mundane world. When Godhead chooses to come down into this world, He never does so only by Himself. Just as a high and mighty Sovereign of this mundane world, when he chooses to favour a remote part of his dominions with his Royal visit, goes there with his attendants and other paraphernalia of sovereignty, in like manner Godhead also *descends* into this world with His Own, His Servitors, all His Divine Paraphernalia, and His Eternal Spiritual Realm. It is not possible for any earthly sovereign, even if he is so minded, to move out with all the circumstances and pomp of his Royal Magnificence, for sheer want of power and for other obvious reasons. But Godhead is

not troubled by such difficulties. He is here in this world with His realm and complete followings and is present at one and the same time in His fully manifest realm of the spiritual world. That is to say, Divinity and His Realm without being duplicated, is capable of revealing Himself according to the serving aptitude of mundane beholders.

It is this which happens when the Supreme Lord manifests His Auspicious Appearance in this world. The realm of Gauḍa in which Sree Krishna-Chaitanya appears with His kindred, associates and eternal devotees, is not the mundane region that is visible to the eyes of conditioned souls. The Spiritual Circle of Gauḍa, that appears to bound *jivas* in the figure of a definite tract of land of this physical world, is, in reality, in its own manifest nature, no other than the "White Island" (*svetadvēpa*) of the Scriptures, the eternal realm of the Divinity in His Own Most Beneficent Form. This principle of spiritual identity of periodic manifestation also applies to other parts of the sacred land of *Bhārata* (India). This sacredness of the land is not a figment of the human imagination; nor due to any association of any mundane country with the Appearances of the Divinity by way of fortuitous concurrences. The Holy Realm of Godhead, in all its infinite vastness and diversity, appears also in this world being *identical* with *spiritual Bhārata* (India) as its centre. But *spiritual Bhārata* is not always manifest to the view of fettered souls. When the Divinity chooses to come down into this world, the spiritual realm is also unveiled to the unobstructed gaze of mortals. 'But unbelievers do not see what is then really opened to their view, just as the owl does not see the light of the Sun when he shines in all his mid-day splendour.'

It would not also be in strict conformity with historical judgment to regard the view just sketched as an exaggeration of patriotic partiality for the land of one's mundane birth. The Vaishnava point of view is that everything of this world is to be used in the service of Godhead, and it is only by such use of the most beautiful and valued things of this world that man is enabled to earn the position of the highest distinction that is open to him on this condition. This level of view regarding human life and this world, which marks the highest achievement of human civilization, has, of all countries

of the world, been most nearly realised by the spiritual community of Vaishnavas in India. Indeed, Godhead Himself comes into this world only for the sake of the Vaishnavas who follow faithfully His highest teaching by desiring, instead of piety (*dharma*), wealth, sensuous pleasure, relief from worldly misery, etc., which are universally coveted by all mortals, only the unconditional service of the Divinity. In all parts of the world less spiritual people have always been engaged in a perpetual strife for the fulfilment of their mundane aspirations. Godhead has sometimes sent His agents to teach the peoples of other countries the transitory and miserable end of all worldly pursuits and thereby win them to a desire for *liberation* and moral living. But by such mere improvement of the procedure of earthly pursuits effected thereby, the *summum bonum*, in the shape of the unalloyed spiritual service of the Supreme Lord, is never attained. The quasi-spiritual ideals help at best to establish a certain apparently moral order amidst the unrestrained pursuit of sensuous activities.

These *facts* offer the undisputed evidence that is historically available to all of us, which establishes the spiritual superiority of the theistic civilization in India and its premier claim to the Mercy of the Divinity by the sole right of His unalloyed service. The patriotic or any other worldly sentiment, has *no place* in such views.

As India is thus the most sacred country of the world, the land of Gauḍa is the most sacred of all parts of India. This is so because it corresponds to '*Svetadvēpa*' wherein the Divinity abides eternally as Embodiment of Perfect Magnanimity. The land of Braja, full of the most exquisite bliss, is the realm of the most delicious *Rāsa*¹ pastimes of Youthful Krishna Who is identical with Sree Chaitanya. The land of Gauḍa is most liberal, as it is only here that Godhead manifests the *Leelā*² of bestowing *on all* the unalloyed love for Himself which alone confers on the emancipated *jīva*³ the right of entry into the happy realm of Braja and join there in the eternal pastimes of Sree Sree Rādhā-Govinda. Therefore, for the same reason which makes the *Svetadvēpa* in Sree Brindāvana more magnanimous, the land of Gauḍa is more

¹ Amorous dance of Krishna in the circle of the spiritual milkmaids.

² Transcendental Eternal Divine Pastime.

³ Individual soul, distinct from Godhead.

liberal than the enchanting realm of Braja overflowing with every bliss. There is also a corresponding mellowness in the subdued charms, reminiscent of the chastened mood of faithful lovers temporarily parted, of this land of Gauḍa, which can be utilised by any one who cares to enter its wide portals ever open to receive, with the unspeakable welcome of Divine love in its most unreserved and indiscriminate generosity, all those who want to receive the *summum bonum* as a free gift from the Hands of Godhead Himself.

The reader will now be in a position to understand why the Vaishnava authors expatiate on the minutest features of the holy Circle of Gauḍa with such intense devotional fervour and why we can perfectly rely on any information of a historical or geographical nature, that they may have cared to record, as being free from all sectarian bias in its ordinary narrow worldly sense; as the genuine Vaishnava authors have nothing to do that is worldly either in their life or in their faith for which alone they live. Most of these Āchāryyas lived by themselves a secluded life far from home and family on scanty alms procured by short rounds of day-to-day begging or given unsolicited by well-wishers, and in the humblest styles conceivable even in India. Many of them had discarded inherited worldly affluence for greater convenience of devoting themselves to the practice of the religion which forms the subject of this work and for recording and expounding its principles for the benefit of *all* animate beings. Such is the *spiritual Circle of Gauḍa* and all truly pure souls are the denizens of the Eternal Realm of the Divinity.

The remains of old Nabadwip, the city of the "Nine Islands", are situated at the junction of the *Bhāgirathi* and *Jalangi* rivers about sixty-five miles above Calcutta. The present town of Nadia is one of the 'Nine Islands' of old Nabadwip. The name Nabadwip at the time of Sree Chaitanya was applied to the actual conglomerate of nine separate islands cut up by the channels of the *Bhāgirathi*, which had their different individual designations also. The main part of the old city was situated on the eastern bank of the *Bhāgirathi* which split up Nabadwip into two groups of 'Islands' of which four bearing respectively the names of *Antardwip*,

Simantadwīp, *Godrumadwīp* and *Madhyadwīp* were to the east, and the remaining five, *viz.*, *Koladwīp* (modern town of Nadia), *Ṛtudwīp*, *Jahnudwīp*, *Modadrumadwīp* and *Rudradwīp* were located to the west, of the main channel of the *Bhāgirathi*. These details are given clearly in several of the old books and they are supplemented by bits of topographical notices of old Nabadwīp that have been recorded by later writers who treated the subject in pursuance of the traditional description.

Antardwīp, as its name implies, was the central 'island', or the *heart* of the old town. *Sree Māyāpur*, the quarter of Nabadwīp which contained the house of Sree Jagannātha Misra, the father of Sree Chaitanya, was located in the centre of *Antardwīp*. Accordingly, the old chroniclers, in describing Nabadwīp, always compare it to a full-blown lotus afloat on the stream of the *Bhāgirathi*. The eight islands surrounding *Antardwīp*, which is the core of the Lotus, are described as forming its eight extended petals. Holy *Māyāpur*, with the *Yogaṭeetha* or the House of God, is described as the central part of the core. The House of God thus forms the central point of an immense circle of which the circumference is stated to be thirty-two miles. This is the Circle of the Nine Islands. The Circle of Gauḍa is stated by these writers to be 168 miles in circumference.

The Vaishnava authors are tireless in reminding their readers that these places appearing to mortal eyes as the divisions of an ordinary tract of land of this earth, must never be regarded as the real Nabadwīp and should not be revered as such. Such reverence would constitute an offence against the Abode of the Divinity which is transcendental. They lend no countenance to the practice, so prevalent in all parts of the world, of putting the seal and label of mundane history and geography on spiritual sites and occurrences, a practice that has been the parent of much misery and of the worst superstitions that abound in all the ancient creeds. The Divine cannot be pinned down to any place, time or event of this world. There cannot be a greater offence against Godhead than to suppose that His Body or anything pertaining to Him can at all be of the nature of the things of this world.

So 'Nabadwīp' of Vaishnavas is not a geographical town bearing the name situated in the geographical country known to

the historians and geographers of this world under the name of Gauḍa. Such a place is not only not Nabadwīp but if it is ever considered as real Nabadwīp, the latter refuses to manifest her proper form to the view of an offender who chooses to think in this unspiritual way. Real or spiritual *Nabadwīp*, real or spiritual *Sree Māyāpur* and real *Yogaṭeetha*, are open only to the view of the Vaishnavas, or uneclipsed serving souls, and whatever they say about the Divine Realm is also, therefore, necessarily true. What other people designate as *Nabadwīp* or *Sree Māyāpur* or the Circle of *Gauḍa* or *Bhāratavarsha*, in as much as it happens to be the mundane view, is entitled to no hearing from a Vaishnava and the very notion that the realm of the Divinity can possibly be any other than spiritual should be most carefully discarded once for all by those who want to understand what the Vaishnavas have really to say.

The reader, who complains that such a procedure will block the way of impartial scientific enquiry, would not also be quite reasonable; because it is he who, under this unscientific pretext, really wants to block the way of the only true enquiry. What the Vaishnava wants the empiric scientist to admit is that he should allow the devotee to deliver the tidings of the Spiritual Realm and not to insist on identifying the geography and history of this world with the Geography and History of the Spiritual Realm. The empiricist is also not entitled to exclude spiritual Geography and History from the account of the spiritual events if his purpose really be to represent a thing, as it actually is, by available evidence and not as he thinks it *ought to be*. The two categories are quite distinct from one another; and it would be fair to the spiritual subject to admit unreservedly its transcendental nature, not merely in theory but in practice as well.

If the career of Sree Chaitanya is written in accordance with the rules laid down by empiric biographers, the narrative would be worse than a parody: it would be a blasphemy. Such a performance is not the purpose of the writer. His object is to faithfully record the events as he finds them in the original sources, offering no opinion of his own except only such as help the elucidation of the subject in its spiritual sense which is foreign to ordinary mundane experience. This method leads to frequent digressions to caution

both the writer as well as the readers at every step not to misunderstand the subject. These digressions, which are offered as the real explanation of the subject, have been gathered from the monumental works of the Āchāryyas, who quote text and verse of the Scriptures to prove by scriptural evidence the absolute truth of every word they write and take no credit for originality, and in conformity with the personal experience of the transcendental teaching and activities of the writer's most revered Gurudeva and his associates.

The geographical site of the *Yogapeetha*, the Abode of Godhead, passed out of the memory of most people due to the misfortune reflected by tradition of havoc wrought by the shiftings of the course of the *Bhāgirathi*. The religion taught by Sree Chaitanya was not properly grasped by posterity and suffered from misrepresentation in the hands of pseudo-teachers who soon abounded at Nabadwip and in other parts of the country. There have, indeed, been a small number of persons forming the inner following of the Āchāryyas, in all these generations, who have kept up the real tradition. But these have failed to win, for the purely spiritual religion up till now, any appreciable measure of general acceptance.

The pseudo-Vaishnavas themselves also divided into an increasing number of hostile groups, each of which followed a novel inspiration, some of them taking to grossly immoral practices which they were not ashamed to give out as the religion taught by Sree Chaitanya. The history of these tragic occurrences will be told in the concluding chapters of this narrative. The preponderance of the pseudo-forms of the religion has, however, secured their deserved banishment from the society of the cultured classes, and in consequence of this, the real tradition itself has tended to fall into utter neglect and is regarded with mistrust even by the orthodox Hindu society at the instigation of the *Smārta* priests.

The pseudo-cults, that usurped the name of the religion of love, were invaded by all those evils of the older atheistical creeds which Sree Chaitanya wishes to put down. The descendants of the old associates and followers of Sree Chaitanya set themselves up as hereditary teachers of the pseudo-religion which proved to them the means of eking out a miserable livelihood by exploitation

of the credulity of the lowest classes and the most immoral sections of the people. The reader may for the present accept this as a moderate statement of the evils that have made us forget the teaching of Sree Chaitanya, in order to be able to understand why His Religion in course of time ceased to prevail in the upper ranks of society and was allowed to be substituted by wretched counterfeits to suit the whims and wickednesses of designing quacks and knaves who earned their living by pandering to the worst vices of the dregs of society claiming exemption from even the ordinary salutary checks of communities obeying the rules of the old civilization of the country.

It is this which has made the identification of the old geographical sites a matter of hostile interest to the professional Goswāmis even of this day and their misguided followers. When the old town was being deserted the shrines and the holy Forms (*Vigrahas*) were taken by their migrating proprietors to the new sites. And, as the cultured society took little interest in the matter, the old sites quickly passed out of the memory of the nation. But with the revival of interest in the religion of Sree Chaitanya among the cultured classes within the last fifty years or so, there also arose a natural desire to find out the old sites connected with Sree Chaitanya.

Neither has it been really difficult to discover them with the help of the old books. The actual site of the home of Sree Jagannāth Misra which had escaped the general havoc wrought by the *Bhāgirathi*, has been settled on the testimony of Vaishnava authors supplemented by the help of the actual knowledge of the most revered Vaishnava saints. The process by which the old sites have been identified is the same as that by which at the time of Sree Chaitanya the holy sites of Sree Brindāvan were identified and made known. For the proper identification of a spiritual site the testimony of the pure Vaishnavas is, spiritually speaking, the one thing needful, as they alone are privileged to recognise the site. Geographical and historical considerations by themselves are extraneous and can only be ancillary to the spiritual method.

Sree *Māyāpurdhām*, so identified, is situated geographically to the east of the river *Bhāgirathi*, nearly opposite the present town

of Nadia which is located on the western bank of the river identifiable with old *Koladwip* one of the "Nine Islands" forming old Nabadwip.

The name *Antardwip*, changed into *Ātopur* (vide *Bhakti Ratnākar*), persists to the present day and includes Sree Māyāpur which still maintains its name unchanged. The river has constantly shifted its course, up to quite recent times. The oldest maps enable us to follow the changes only as far back as 1763 A.D. We have to rely exclusively on the testimony of the old writers for avoiding mistaken identification that is being attempted by interested parties by availing the shiftings of the location of the places during the two hundred and seventy-six years that elapsed between the Appearance of Sree Chaitanya and the publication of Major Rennel's Atlas. But tradition had always pointed to those deserted parts as the site of the old city. Of this fact we possess reliable and continuous testimony.

The method, that appears to us on the whole to be best for the purpose of describing the place, is to follow the old writers, taking help of such light as is afforded by recent investigations for the purpose of understanding their statements. It is not our purpose to enter at this place into the details of any recent evidence for which the reader is referred to the investigations of Thākur Bhaktivinode which have been summarised in different publications and which have formed the basis of subsequent enquiries regarding the real position of the old sites.

Sree Māyāpur which has escaped the widespread destruction that was apparently caused by sudden changes of the course of the *Bhāgirathi* from a *very early* period is distinguishable from the adjoining lower alluvial plain by its elevation and older soil of adhesive clay. A modern village occupying a part of the site of Māyāpur is inhabited by a number of Muhammedan families who began to settle on this old site, which appears in course of time to have been totally deserted, from the year 1785. This is traceable.

The actual site of the *Yogāpectha*, the Home of Sree Jagannāth Misra, was identified by the famous saint Chaitanyadās Bābāji about eighty years ago. It appears that the actual site was known

as such to the few Vaishnavas who cared to be informed about it and had also been visited by them for their devotional purposes. The place was noted by the inhabitants of adjoining villages for alleged peculiarities. They maintain to this day that the place used to be always overgrown with sacred *tulasi*, for which reason people had instinctively desisted from any act of defilement or occupation for the purpose of erecting any private dwelling. This reverence towards the site which is displayed by the Muhammedan residents in occupation of the adjoining plots, indeed, point to a definite conclusion. The row of high mounds, that are now crowned by a number of substantial buildings erected by the piety of Vaishnavas since the re-discovery of the old sites, had never before been occupied by the villagers on their own account who had always regarded with a sort of sacred awe those sites which were collectively known as the '*Vaishnava settlement*' (*Vairāgi dāngā*).

There are many current stories of miraculous occurrences connected with the sites. But the most startling miracle of all is the fact that the persistent local tales are now found to be confirmed in their details by the topographical descriptions of the old writers. For example, we read in the *Bhakti-Ratnākar* that the court-yard of Sribās Pundit, where Sree Chaitanya inaugurated His own distinctive form of worship, *viz.*, the congregational *Kirtan* of Hari and where, in the early days of His Preaching, Sree Chaitanya used to chant daily the *Kirtan* all through the nights in the company of His close associates, was situated one hundred *dhanus* (two hundred yards) to the north of the 'House of God'. A plot of land, adjoining the site of the House of Jagannāth Misra, finally and definitely identified by Sree Jagannāth Dās Bābāji and easily recognisable by the evidence of local tradition, still bears the name of '*khol bhāngār dāngā*', *i.e.*, the mound where the '*khol*,' *i.e.*, *mridanga*, was broken, which event, according to *Sree Chaitanya Bhāgavata*, the biography of Sree Chaitanya by a contemporary, took place in a locality *close* to the 'yard of Sribās'. The site is found to have continued to bear this name from the time when the '*khol*' of the offending townsman, who persisted in playing on the *mridanga* for accompanying the chant, was broken by Chānd Kāzi for arresting the further progress of the movement, as described in that work.

The tomb of Chānd Kāzi himself, who afterwards turned into a staunch supporter of Sree Chaitanya, still exists at a place, the situation of which perfectly tallies with the topography of the books. It has, therefore, been possible on the testimony of such excellent corroborative evidence to identify many of the old sites and even the actual location of the houses of the prominent persons connected with the Activities of Sree Chaitanya in old Nabadwip.

Antardwīp which formed the heart of the old straggling city was situated at the time of Sree Chaitanya on the eastern bank of the *Bhāgirathi* whose current then flowed under the city. The old bank of the river is identifiable with the help of the old topography. The following old sites have been traced up till now in the above manner—(1) The House of God (*Bhagavadgriham*), i.e., the *Yogāpetha* or House of Sree Jagannāth Misra, father of Sree Chaitanya; (2) the house of Sreebās Pundit in whose 'yard' the *Kirtana* was first regularly sung in company; (3) the house of Sree Advaitāchāryya, the meeting-place of the Vaishnavas in the early days of the movement; (4) the house of Sree Chandrasekhar Āchāryya in which Sree Chaitanya acted the part of Sree Rukmini in a dramatic performance staged by His associates; (5) the tomb of Chānd Kāzi which is shaded by a marvellous *champakā* tree reputed to be over four hundred years old; (6) the old bank of the *Bhāgirathi* marked by its four prominent bathing ghāts, viz., (a) the ghāt of old Siva, (b) Gaurānga's own ghāt, (c) Mādhai's ghāt, and (d) Bāraakonā ghāt, all of which possess famous associations; (7) the shrines of old Siva and of *praurā Māyā*. All these, with the exception of (5), belong to the village that still bears the name of Māyāpur.

Close to the tomb of Chānd Kāzi is the site of Sridhar's house. The house of Chandrasekhar is situated on 'Ballāl's Tank' which bears the name of the famous independent Hindu king of Bengal, whose successor Lakshmana Sena permanently removed the capital from Gauḍa near Māldā to the old town of Nabadwip. 'The *Mound of Ballāl*' situate within a short distance of Sree Chaitanya Math is regarded locally as marking the site of the palace of the Sena kings which was shunned by all persons after its desecration by the first Muhammedan conquerors of Bengal. The

residence of Sree Nilāmar Chakravarti, father of Sree Chaitanya's mother Sree Sachi Devi, was in the quarter of the town where the Kāzi lived, which is the same as present Bāmanpukur (identical with Belpukur of the chroniclers).

We shall, therefore, follow the order of the sites that was observed by pious devotees who performed the circumambulation of the holy Nābadwīpdhām as described by the old writers, in offering a brief account of the surroundings of Sree Māyāpur that are associated with the early career of Sree Chaitanya.

Antardwīp (literally, *the central island*), within which Sree Māyāpur is situated, forms the first of the 'Nine Islands' and the starting point of the circumambulators. The more famous of the recognisable old sites of *Antardwīp* (*Ātopur*) have already been noticed above.

Simantadwīp is the next 'Island' that is reached by the pilgrim. Its present name is Simuliā situated to the north of Sree Māyāpur. Sardāngā close to Simuliā contains an old shrine of Sree Jagannāthadeva. Sondāngā, Villvapushkarini, the tract known as *meghārchar*, etc., lie close together. The house of Sachi Devi's father, as already stated, was situate near Belpukur.

The third of the 'Islands' is *Godrumadwīp* (modern Gādi-gāchhā) to the south and east of Sree Māyāpur. Close to it is Suvarna-bihār with very ancient associations. Other old places of this locality are Harihara-kshetra, which contains the mounds Surya, Brahmā, Indra and other gods, and Devapalli with an old temple of Sree Nrisingha. This 'Island' contains the *bhajan kutir* (cottage of devotional practice) and *samādhi* (resting place) of Thākur Bhaktivinode.

The fourth 'Island' is *Madhyadwīp* (Mājidā) situated to the south of Sree Māyāpur. It contains the *Mounds of the Seven Rishis*, a channel bearing the name of Gomati, the adjoining wooded tract being known as Naimishāranya, Sree Brāhmanpuskaras (Bāman-paukherā), Uchchahatta (Hātdāngā) and other sites of pious association.

The fifth of the 'Islands' is *Koladwīp* (the modern town of Nadia) to the west-south-west of Sree Māyāpur. At the time of Sree Chaitanya *Koladwīp* or Kuliā was separated from Nadia, the

Home of Sree Chaitanya, only by the intervening main channel of the *Bhāgirathi*. It is called 'the place of expiation' in reference to the incidents connected with Gopāl-Chāpal and Devānanda Pandit, whose offences were forgiven by Sree Chaitanya at Kuliā. It is sometimes designated as 'the *high bank* of Kuliā' and is connected by old writers with very ancient events. Close to it is Samudragarh.

The sixth 'Island' is *Ṛtudwīp* south-west of *Koladwīp*. In it is situated the village of Champāhāti which was formerly a grove of *champaka* trees. The old shrine of Sree Gaur-Gadādhār erected by Dvija Bānināth, one of the principal associates of Sree Chaitanya, still exists at Champāhāti. It was also the residence of the famous poet Jayadeva of the time of King Lakshmana Sena.

The seventh 'Island' was anciently called *Jahnudwīp* (modern Jāhnnagar) to the north of *Ṛtudwīp*. Close to it is Vidyānagar where was situated the Academy of the famous Vāsudeva Sārba-bhauma.

Modadrumadwīp is the eighth 'Island' to the north of *Jahnudwīp*. Here is the village of Māmgāchhi, the birth-place of Thākūr Brindābandās, author of *Sree Chaitanya-Bhāgavat*, the contemporary, systematic account of the career of Sree Chaitanya written in Bengali verse. At Māmgāchhi was located the paternal residence of Sree Mālini Devi, spouse of Sribās Pandit. Close to the birth-site of Thākūr Brindābandās is the shrine of Sree Madan Gopāla installed by Sree Vāsudeva Datta Thākūr, brother of Sree Mukunda Datta Thākūr of Chattagrām, the close associate of Sree Chaitanya. This shrine contains also the holy Form (*Vigraha*) installed by Sāranga Murāri Thākūr, the associate of Sree Chaitanya.

The ninth 'Island' is *Rudradwīp* north-east of *Modadrumadwīp*.

These 'Nine Islands' constitute the *Circle of Sridhām Nabadwīp* the circumference of which is given as thirty-two miles.

Sree Māyāpur and the adjoining places are at the present day, in their outward appearance, very different from the old town of Nabadwīp at the time of Sree Chaitanya. The present town of Nadia, which is not a very beautiful place except its shrines, is now the only part of the '*City of the Nine Islands*' that bears anything approaching an urban appearance, judged even by the modest

standard of a Bengal town. The other parts are almost purely rural and are mostly overgrown with jungle. The numerous small channels of the *Bhāgirathi*, which abound about this point, impart a charming openness to the landscape and salubrious freshness to the soft rural breezes that love to haunt the silent places of practices of the only absolute pure faith. The main stream of the sacred *Bhāgirathi*, which is here swelled to noble proportion by the tribute of the great body of sweet and pure water that is poured into it just below Sree Māyāpur by the Jalangi, forms now, as it did also at the time of Sree Chaitanya, the central feature of the countryside. But the main current of the *Bhāgirathi* in old time flowed past the landing places of the old populous city. The riverside of the old city is partly traceable. The bank was washed away probably by a sudden shifting of the course of the river due to a great earthquake that fearfully damaged the place in 1515 A.D. shortly after Sree Chaitanya had renounced home and family.

But the splendours of the old city lingered long in the memory of the inhabitants. Thākūr Brindābandās who wrote his Divine Narrative, *Sree Chaitanya Bhāgavat*, not long after the disappearance of the Supreme Lord, gives the following description of the old town to his contemporaries who could also confirm his eulogies. 'There was not another town in the world,' says Thākūr Brindābandās, 'like Nabadwīp where Sree Chaitanya was born. The divine architect must have known beforehand His impending Advent and had accordingly lavished with a prodigal hand all his bounty to make of Nabadwīp the ideal place that it was. Who could describe the opulence of Nabadwīp? Every single bathing-ghat was thronged by a hundred thousand bathers. Each caste resident in Nabadwīp had lakhs of members of every age. All the people were highly skilled in their respective occupations by the grace of the goddess of learning. All of them boasted of being masters in their line and mere boys contended with the Brāhmana teachers in scholastic disputations. People from various countries flocked to Nabadwīp. One could obtain the real taste of learning only by studying at Nabadwīp. The great fame of its learning drew countless students who were taught by an incredibly large number of the most erudite teachers. This atmosphere of learning was

also one of great happiness by the kind glance of the goddess of wealth.'

But the spiritual condition of the town, in which we are specially interested, was not encouraging. This is what the same competent observer has to say on the subject. 'The people were blessed with the choicest favours of the goddesses of learning and wealth. In these respects they had attained the summit of their desire. There was only one drawback. The time of all people was wholly wasted in the enjoyments of secular pursuits. The world was destitute of devotion for Krishna and Rāma (Baladeva). At this earliest stage of the Iron Age there came to prevail prematurely those worst practices that have been predicted by the Scriptures about the far-off future of this Age of Evil. The people sat up whole nights at the songs of *Mangalchandi* (goddess of worldly blessing). This was the only practice of religion known to the people. There were a few who in their vanity worshipped the goddess *Bishahari* (healer of poison). Some lavished immense wealth on the making of grand idols. Wealth was squandered on the marriages of sons and daughters. The time of the people was passed in such vanities. The great Chakravartis and Bhattachāryas were wholly unaware of the significance of the great *Shāstras*. By their teaching of the Scriptures they earned for themselves and their hearers only entanglement in the toils spread by the pitiless hand of Death. They never expounded the Divine Dispensation of the Age in the shape of the *kirtana* of Krishna. They spoke only of faults, and never of the good qualities, of any one. There was a great number of arrogant recluses and ascetics whose mouths never uttered such a sound as the Names of Hari. Those persons, who were most reputed for their piety, used to utter the Names of Govinda and Pundarikāksha only at their baths. Even those who professed to teach the *Geetā* and the *Bhāgavatam*, never employed their tongues to the task of explaining the principles of devotion to Godhead. No one could be persuaded even by entreaty to take the Name of Krishna. Every one harped *ad nauseum* on the merits of learning and social rank.'

There was one notable exception to the above rule. 'Sree Advaita Āchāryya who lived at Nadiā was most highly respected for his unrivalled learning, his high birth and honoured position

in society. He was an eminent professor of the Scriptures and excelled in expounding the true spiritual practice and principle. He was equal to the great Sankara (Siva) himself in expounding the subject of devotion to Krishna. He was equally well versed in all branches of the Scriptures; and, in teaching them, he was always careful to explain that devotion to the Feet of Krishna was the essence of all the Scriptures. He was always engaged in worshipping Krishna with the greatest ardour, in the simplest and purest manner, by the offering of sprays of the holy *tulasi*, dearly loved of Krishna, steeped in the sacred water of the Ganges. He often gave vent to deep ejaculations of sorrow, resembling the rumbling of thunder and impregnated with the fiery energy of Krishna, which, passing beyond the limits of this universe, reverberated in the Holy Realm of Vaikunṭha.

Sree Advaita Āchāryya was the leader of a small band of sincere devotees who were at this time settled in Nabadwip. These Vaishnavas were opposed by atheists, specially on account of their practice of frequently uttering the Name of Hari with a loud voice. This practice together with their theistic views was sufficient to mark them out as the legitimate objects of their invectives and ridicule, from which they could not be effectively shielded even by the great influence of Sree Advaita Āchāryya himself who was regarded with respect and awe all over Nadiā.

The reasons for such hostility were many: the foremost being that the Vaishnavas eschewed all worldly pleasures and enjoyments, which was regarded as a deprecation of the life of epicurean ease that was fashionable in all ranks of the then society. There was no want of aggressive epicureans in that Age also who openly condemned all pretensions to a life that was in every way above animality. They wrote scurrilous ballads against the Vaishnavas and sang them in the streets. 'The ascetic, the chaste woman, no less than others,' so ran these effusions, 'will go the way of all the flesh. He alone can be said to have done good deeds in his previous birth who rides the *dolā* and the horse and is preceded and followed by scores of running footmen. Much as your Holiness cries in the mood of devotion, yet it does not cancel your Holiness's sorrows of poverty. Your Holiness never ceases to call upon the Name of Hari with a very loud voice. It may

surely anger the Lord to be addressed by shouts.' The frank realism of these fifteenth century Bengali followers of *Chārvāka* cannot be outdone by their most up-to-date successors of the present day. This was almost the general attitude of the citizens of a profligate town devoid of all taste for anything higher than bodily enjoyments of a refined character engendered by their engrossing secular studies and urban pursuits.

There was another class of objectors who also ridiculed the mode of *kirtana* with a loud voice. The ground for their objection was, however, different from that of the refined epicureans. 'I myself,' such were the ideas of these people, 'am the *Brahman* Who is devoid of all the qualities. Why then do they make any such distinction as that between servant and Master?' These men were the worst enemies of the Vaishnavas. There were also many persons who looked upon the Vaishnavas as designing worldly people who took to begging to earn their livelihood by that easy method, for sheer idleness.

We frequently hear the complaint that religion suffers degradation by scarcity of people who really lead the religious life. It is supposed that if religion is freed from the clutches of these people who have so long monopolised it for their profit and pleasure and have degraded it by their foul lives, people in general would voluntarily follow the lead of truly devout persons. If only the preachers of religion, say these open atheists, lead truly spiritual lives themselves, their example would prove irresistible in winning everybody to spiritual living. But the opposite of this is what almost invariably happens in this world. The sincere devotees are always ridiculed and persecuted by the people. This is also exactly as was likely in the circumstances. Those who are steeped in worldliness have a spontaneous dislike for persons who openly profess principles and follow a mode of life that are in essential contradiction to theirs. The conduct of the devotees is always regarded by worldly people, who have no inclination for listening to the unpalatable truth, as both foolish and mischievous. Therefore, instead of following the example of such persons the worldlings always look upon the pure souls as enemies of every useful institution and set themselves in vindictive opposition to their activities. To what ferocious persecution the *bona fide*

Vaishnavas have been subjected at the hands of their opponents from time to time, is not sufficiently well known, although it forms the most pathetic and the most shameful chapter of the history of India. Sree Chaitanya says, "It is our only duty always to chant the *kirtana* of Hari with humility greater than that of the blade of grass, with greater endurance than that of the tree, giving all due honour to others without desiring any honour for ourselves." But nothing can make amends, in the eyes of worldly people, for the crime of chanting the Name of Hari or proclaiming the unvarnished Truth in and out of season and at all time with body, mind and speech as required by the teaching of all the Scriptures embodied in the institution of the whole-time *kirtana* of the Absolute.

We have already described in a preceding chapter the state of religious opinion in the country of the time of Sree Chaitanya. There was no lack of unspiritual doctrines and practices upheld by ancient philosophical systems most of which were mere apologies, or even justifications, of the ordinary ungodly practices of the misguided *jivas* of this world. The system that was in most vogue among the Pandits of Nabadwip at this period and has been fashionable ever since, is the atheistical system of *Nabya Nyāya*. The other atheistical systems of philosophy were also assiduously taught in the schools of Nabadwip. We learn that scholars even from *Mithila* (Tirhoot) came to Nabadwip to study the New Logic. *Sannyāsins* and learned Professors from Benares and all parts of North India came to Nabadwip for the study of *Vedānta*. We also read of students coming to Nabadwip even from distant *Kānchi* and the southernmost part of the country.

These materialistic studies had acquired such preponderance at that period that scholarship and ungodliness came to be regarded as necessarily identical. The masses sang the songs of *Mangalchandi* and considered the endeavour for increasing the means of worldly enjoyment as the *ideal* of religion. The common people, and especially the wealthy trading communities, performed with great *eclat* the worship of *Mangalchandi* and, by subsidising the Brāhmana Pandits with liberal pecuniary gifts, were enabled to buy their subservient approval of those unscriptural practices. Much money was recklessly squandered on the shortlived idols and no

less on the exhibition of pantomime dolls, which was an invariable and costly item of expense on all festive occasions. There were very few permanent Holy *Vigrahas* in Bengal at that time. The worship of the permanent Holy *Vigraha* became a tradition in Bengal only subsequent to the Advent of Sree Chaitanya and as the effect of His Teachings. Temporary images were the only objects of worship. Those images were immersed in water after the festivity in their honour was concluded, on the wrong assumption that the Form of Godhead is a material and temporary entity.

This posture of affairs filled the devotees with grief and despair. No one served Godhead, no one ever talked about Him, or took His Holy Name, or could be persuaded to listen to any discourse about Him. This was the blighted waste glutted with every form of luxury aggravated by the strenuous pursuit of worldly knowledge, which evoked the tenderest solicitude, of that small band of pure souls and impelled them to adopt every method that could be devised for rousing the deluded people to a sense of their eternal duty and thereby saving them from their impending terrible doom. But all their efforts for the amelioration of the spiritual condition of the people were misunderstood and responded to by the bitterest invectives, ridicule and cruel persecution! Yet those servants of Godhead did not lose their faith nor relax their efforts, although their very food did not taste in their mouths at the sight of the miseries of their kindred. The Bhāgavatas applied themselves to their devotions in the forms of the worship of Krishna, discourse about Krishna, and bathing in the holy stream of the Ganges. And all of them incessantly blessed the world, 'May Krishna soon bestow His mercy on all!'

CHAPTER II

FAMILY AND ELDERS

THE Advent of Sree Chaitanya was preceded by the appearance of a numerous body of pure devotees in different parts of the country who joined Him at Nabadwip in due course and became incorporated in His Activities. This galaxy of the stars of the first magnitude occupies the foreground of the picture that it is our purpose to offer. Sree Chaitanya is unintelligible without intimate knowledge of the doings of His associates. He is expressed in the only intelligible form in the lives of His *bona fide* devotees. These devotees were not so many *imitators* of Sree Chaitanya. Each of them has a great, living, individual personality; each *serves* Sree Chaitanya in his own way and helps to demonstrate the quality of unbounded catholicity and endless variety of manifestation in individual personalities of our only eternal function. The conduct of these devotees is even more instructive than the Transcendental Activities of Sree Chaitanya Himself Whom it was the function of these great souls to express by serving the Absolute Truth identical with the Personality of Sree Chaitanya under every form of circumstance and every manner of disposition, by the method of incorporated, subordinate service.

The Vaishnava authors always offer the esoteric view of those events. When Godhead Himself comes down into this world, He does not come un-attended by His eternal associates and Divine paraphernalia. They accompany Him to this world. The transcendental realm of the 'White Island' is the Eternal Divine Abode of Sree Chaitanya Who is identical with Sree Krishna and presents the Divinity's Own Benevolent Nature dominating over all other Divine Qualities.

The Lord Sree Krishna-Chaitanya dwells in the White Island, as does Krishnachandra in *Braja*, with all His elders, kindred, associates and complete entourage. When Sree Chaitanya deigns