

CAITANYA AND MEDIEVAL BENGAL VAISNAVISM

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AND  
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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: This study is an analysis of the actions and attitudes of Caitanya in the light of the ideals of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The basic sources for the study are: the Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the devotional poetry of the Bengal Vaisnava cult. It is the contention of this thesis that the distinctive religious contribution of Caitanya is that his life was seen as the concretization of the love romance of the Bhāgavata. Max Weber's concept of charisma is introduced in order to demonstrate the relevance of this thesis to the wider study of religion.

## PREFACE

I would like to thank Professor Yun-Hua Jan and Dr. David Kinsley for their assistance in the preparation of this work.

## INTRODUCTION

In the fifteenth century there appeared a religious leader who came to be revered as the greatest figure of Bengali Vaisnavism. This thesis proposes to explain why Caitanya's life had such an impact upon the religious tradition of Bengal. It is the contention of this work that the major factor leading to the high esteem in which he is held, is that Caitanya's life is paradigmatic of the religious ideal presented in the basic scripture of the cult; Caitanya is a living myth, the practical expression of the love romance of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

Bengal Vaisnavism has attributed to Caitanya the instigation of all ritual, the exposition of all dogma, the development of sect organization and the conversion of all India to the devotional celebration of Kṛṣṇa's love that Caitanya demonstrates so beautifully in his own life. At the level of popular literature the pre-eminence of Caitanya in all areas of religious activity is acknowledged without question. We find this unqualified acceptance problematical: we perceive inherent conflicts between the ecstatic outpourings of a mystic, replete with the non-rational emotionalism of a religious celebrant on the one hand, and the premeditated, rational establishment of a cult, complete with codified ritual and elaborate theological doctrines on

the other. As academics we are impelled to ignore the unquestioned assumptions of the devotee. We seek to determine why a particular leader should become the object of such veneration. Much of the work that follows could be interpreted negatively, for in order to isolate the specific greatness of Caitanya it is necessary to subject pious assumptions to academic scrutiny. We shall weigh each claim made on Caitanya's behalf, not for the purpose of debunking the claims of the pious and thereby reducing religious values and aspirations to psychological or sociological categories, but in the hope of determining what particular aspect of his life distinguished his religious contribution.

The perspective from which this thesis is written is an historical one. Though we have felt free to draw upon a wide variety of materials, including sociological, philosophical, and literary works, the fundamental question raised is historical: Why did Caitanya exert such a profound influence upon the Bengali religious tradition? The proposed answer to this question develops principally from an analysis of two literary sources, the Bhāgavata Purāna and the Caitanya Caritāmṛta. In order to focus sharply upon these sources it has been necessary to virtually ignore other materials, notably the work of the Goswamins of Vrndāvana. It is our contention that though Caitanya inspired their scholarly tomes his direct influence upon their work was minimal. The Goswamins acknowledged Caitanya both as a spiritual leader

and as the avatāra (incarnation) of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, but their writings gave little emphasis to the place of the Caitanya-līlā in the devotional life.<sup>1</sup> We hope to demonstrate in our work that the topics that were of greatest interest to the Goswamins, philosophical theology and ritual practices, were matters of relative indifference to Caitanya.

The scope of the present study is also limited in terms of time and place. We have made no attempt to discuss the bhakti cults of India as a whole which were contemporary to the Caitanya movement. The question of the relation of the life of Caitanya to the sweep of devotionism that spread across India during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries would necessitate a study far more bulky than the present work. In the interest of manageability the thesis has been confined to the Vaiṣṇava cult of Bengal. Similarly there has been no attempt to trace the influence of Caitanya upon the Bengali tradition beyond the seventeenth century. Despite the interest and relevance of these questions to the study of Indian religious history they would take us beyond the scope of our thesis.

In an historical analysis there are fundamental dilemmas that confront the researcher. The major dif-

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<sup>1</sup> S. K. De, Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement, (hereafter VFM), pp. 227-28; S. K. De, "Caitanya as an Author", Indian Historical Quarterly, 1934, p. 309.

ficulties of this study are threefold. The first dilemma involves the choice of materials; how can a subject of extreme complexity and subtility be approached within the confines of a brief study? In this introduction we attempt to defend our choice of certain materials at the expense of ignoring others. The second dilemma is more basic; how can a historical analysis determine whether Caitanya is really Kṛṣṇa? How can the historian evaluate the Vaiṣṇavite claim that the Kṛṣṇa-līlā is the highest religious expression? At this point we must acknowledge the limitations of our methodology; rational techniques can never supplant the relevatory experience and establish beyond doubt the absolute validity of religious claims.<sup>2</sup> This study does not claim to have any new insight into the second question and will ignore it completely. The third dilemma relates to the paucity of non-devotional data about the life of Caitanya. Throughout this thesis we shall refer to the Caitanya described in the Caitanya Caritāmṛta as the true Caitanya, unless there is compelling evidence to suggest that the biography has not reflected accurately in certain instances,

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<sup>2</sup>Of course every religious tradition attempts to establish criteria by which claims of contact with the divine may be verified. An examination of the ethical consequences of revelation is often suggested as such a criterion. Unfortunately we know of no theoretical model that will serve as a standard of judgment for every contact with the transcendent in all religious traditions.



his actions and attitudes. The absence of an objective historical narrative weakens the force of our concluding remarks.

The content of this thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter consists of an analysis of the central motifs of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, with particular emphasis on the līlās<sup>3</sup> of Kṛṣṇa, and an examination of the elaboration of these themes in the poetry of Jayadeva, Vidyāpati and Candīdās. The Bhāgavata was widely read in Bengal and Orissa in the time of Caitanya;<sup>4</sup> it is the text most frequently quoted in the Caitanya Caritāmṛta, and it is still considered by Bengal Vaisnavas to be the most definitive of all scriptures. According to the Caitanya Caritāmṛta the Bhāgavata "is a teacher like the Lord Krishna Himself. It is a repository of all wisdom and its teachings can save all".<sup>5</sup> From an analysis of the purāṇa we will attain an awareness of the fundamental tenets of the religious tradition upon which Caitanya based his devotional life. We shall also examine the

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<sup>3</sup>"līlā is one of the many Vaisnava terms which defy ready translation. The meaning is 'sportiveness', amorous or not; but the connotation is that, behind the seemingly random and often seemingly immoral manifestation of Divine Will, there is meaning which is not comprehensible in ordinary human terms." Dimock, American Oriental Society Journal, p. 153n.

<sup>4</sup>D. C. Sen, Chaitanya and His Age, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup>Madh XXIV.627; Cf. Madh VI.110f; Madh XXV.654.

influence of the poetic tradition upon the later understanding of the puranic religion, with special interest given to those poets whom Caitanya loved best: Jayadeva, Vidyāpati and Candīdās.<sup>6</sup>

The second chapter will attempt to enucleate the nature of Caitanya's devotion and to ascertain his religious contribution to the Vaisnava sect. The basic source for this study will be the Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja. This work, written after Caitanya's death, is a devotional biography drawing upon earlier treatises. (The Caitanya Caritāmṛta is especially dependent upon the Caitanya Bhāgavata for its sections on the early life of Caitanya.) Because it was the first definitive biography written in the vernacular it became the authoritative text. It "is the principal religious book of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, and gives the most faithful description of the life and teachings of Sri Chaitanya".<sup>7</sup> Through an analysis of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta we shall discuss Caitanya as a religious leader in terms of his attitude toward sect organization, scholastics, sannyāsa, proselytism and ecstatic experiences. Implicit within this analysis are the motifs

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<sup>6</sup>Caitanya's veneration of these three poets is mentioned in Madh X.23; Antya XVII.292.

<sup>7</sup>N. K. Roy, introduction to Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita, p. iii. The authority of the text is also confirmed by D. C. Sen, Chaitanya and His Age, p. 95 and S. Sen, History of Brajabuli Literature, p. 102.

that we found to be central in our discussion of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

The concluding section of this thesis will be a comparison of the basic ideals of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta and Bhāgavata Purāṇa. It is our contention that with a few exceptions the Caitanya-Caritāmṛta and Bhagavata expound the same basic principles. Brief references to the poetry of the post-Caitanya era will be introduced to substantiate the conviction of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta that Caitanya is the incarnation of both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The conclusion of our work is that Caitanya's contribution to the Bengal Vaiṣṇava cult is that he was seen as the concrete example of the love romance of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Our final statement will attempt to relate this study of Caitanya to the wider study of religion, through a brief discussion of the theory of charisma developed by Max Weber. This final statement will be proffered not as a reductionist "explanation" of Caitanya's appeal but as the locus for further study.

Before launching into an analysis of the themes of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Kṛṣṇa-līlā, it is appropriate to discuss briefly the central figures of the love romance. An extended discussion of the origin and development of the figures of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā would take us far from our main theme. But without immersing ourselves into the tremendous controversy surrounding the historical questions, we may say that the Kṛṣṇa of Vaiṣṇavism is a synthesis of Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa,

Vāsudeva and Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa. Though not a chief god in the Rg Veda, Viṣṇu became the greatest god in the late Vedic and Brahmanic period.<sup>8</sup> Vāsudeva was recognized as the highest god in Mathurā in the fourth century B.C.,<sup>9</sup> and there appears to have been a Bhāgavata religion centred around Vāsudeva as early as the second century B.C.<sup>10</sup> Nārāyaṇa appears in the Brahmaṇasand Āraṇyakas as a supreme spirit.<sup>11</sup> Gradually Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva, and Viṣṇu each came to be recognized as the chief deity, and the three became interchangeable. Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva were brought together in the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Mahābharata Epic<sup>12</sup> and Nārāyaṇa was identified with Viṣṇu as early as the Baudhāyana-Dharma-Sūtra of the fifth century B.C.<sup>13</sup> Though some sections of the Mahābharata identify Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva, the recognition of these three as the supreme god Kṛṣṇa, the avatāra of Viṣṇu, did not occur until much later. Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa, the low born cow herd youth who sports with the gopīs was identified as the god through identification

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<sup>8</sup>Sircar, "Early History of Vaisnavism", Cultural Heritage of India, (ed. H. Bhattacharyya), Vol. IV, p. 110.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>10</sup>S. C. Mukherji, A Study of Vaisnavism in Ancient and Medieval Bengal, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Sircar, p. 119.

<sup>12</sup>R. G. Bhandarkar, Vaisnavism, Savism and Minor Religious Systems, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup>Sircar, p. 119.

with Vāsedeṇa-Kṛṣṇa, in the post-Christian era.<sup>14</sup>

By the time of the composition of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, in the ninth century the synthesis was largely complete, although later in the tradition the purāṇic emphasis upon Kṛṣṇa as an avatāra of Viṣṇu was reversed so that Viṣṇu becomes an avatāra of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is described in the Bhāgavata as loving all women but is especially devoted to one consort who is not mentioned by name in the puranic text. This special gopī is identified as Rādhā in the Bengali Vaiṣṇavite poetry of Dimboka in the twelfth century.<sup>15</sup> Rādhā does not appear in the Māhābharata or Harivaṃśa, though the legend of Rādhā is present in some late puranas, (Brahmavivartta and Padma), and in the medieval tantras. The earliest literary composition in Bengal to mention Rādhā is the Gāthā-Saptasatī of the seventh century A.D.<sup>16</sup> S. C. Mukherji cites sculptural and inscrip-tional records to link Rādhā with Kṛṣṇa in the seventh or eight century, before the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.<sup>17</sup> Mukherji sug-

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<sup>14</sup>Bhandarkar's suggestion (op. cit., p. 38) that the stories of Kṛṣṇa's lowly birth and miraculous adolescence were brought into the Indian tradition through Christianity, is flatly rejected by Sircar (op. cit., p. 131).

<sup>15</sup>Dimock, In Praise of Krishna (hereafter IPK), p. 77.

<sup>16</sup>A. K. Majumdar, Caitanya: His Life and Doctrine, p. 173.

<sup>17</sup>S.C.Mukherji, p.189

gests that Rādhā is absent in the Bhāgavata because the authors of that text were opposed to the medieval Rādhā cult or because that cult had not penetrated into the area of south India<sup>18</sup> in which the work was composed. But by the thirteenth century Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa worship had become the mainstream of Vaiṣṇavite bhakti, chiefly through the influence of Nimbārka and the poetry of Jayadeva.<sup>19</sup>

Having dealt with these preliminary concerns we may now begin our analysis of the Vaiṣṇavite tradition before Caitanya, specifically, the themes of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and pre-Caitanya devotional poetry.

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<sup>18</sup>There is ample internal evidence for locating the composition of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa in the south, e.g., southern place names are found in the text: Kṛtamālā (modern Vaigai), Dakṣiṇi Mathurā, etc. Also Tamil customs, e.g., the worship of Kātyāyanī by the gopīs in order to secure Kṛṣṇa as their husband, (a custom known as Arda darśanam in south India). Further evidence is provided in R. Mukerjee, Lord of the Autumn Moons, pp. 72-74.

<sup>19</sup>S. C. Mukherji, pp. 183ff.

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## CHAPTER I

### VAISNAVITE BHAKTI BEFORE CAITANYA

#### A. The Bhāgavata Purāna

The Bhāgavata Purāna encompasses a wide variety of material taken from many sources and historical periods. It is a late work, probably written in the 9th century.<sup>1</sup> Despite the encyclopedic scope of the purāṇic text, the later tradition, including the Caitanya Caritāmṛta, concentrated on the stories of Kṛṣṇa's life, particularly the account of his sport with the gopīs, in the tenth book. There are numerous references in the Caitanya Caritāmṛta to other sections of the purāṇa, but these passages are carefully chosen to elucidate the central theme of Kṛṣṇa's erotic sport. Huge sections of the Bhāgavata are not even mentioned in the later text and other passages are taken out of context and interpreted in the light of the 10th book.

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<sup>1</sup>T. J. Hopkins, "Social Teachings of the Bhagavata Purana," Krishna: Myth, Rites and Attitudes (ed. M. Singer), pp. 4-8. Hopkins rejects the later dates of Winternitz, Vaidya and Śāstri on the grounds that there is simply no evidence to suggest that the BP was written after Sankara. Since the puranic text gives a more complete biography of Kṛṣṇa than the Harivamśa or Viṣṇu Purāṇa, a date earlier than 500 A.D. is equally inappropriate. On the basis of the devotional emphasis of the work, a date in the ninth century appears likely.



The Bhāgavata calls itself a purāṇa<sup>2</sup> since it possesses the lakṣaṇa, or marks, of the purāṇic class of literature; specifically it contains an account of the creation, destruction and re-creation of the universe and subsequent history of mankind, including the genealogies of the gods and saints.<sup>3</sup> The Bhāgavata claims to have been written by the sage Vyasa, the author of the Vedas and epics. The text is acutely aware that it is now the Kali Yuga, the last of the four great cycles of time, a period when life is degenerating and men are impious. Because men are now weak in mind and spirit, a fuller statement of the truths of earlier texts is necessary. The Bhāgavata contains the essence of śruti and smṛti, expressed in simpler language. It is said that Vyasa wrote this text because Kṛṣṇa had retired from the world, leaving men in ignorance of spiritual matters,<sup>4</sup> and because Vyasa had not yet written of the full glory of Vasudeva.<sup>5</sup>

Because it is the Kali Yuga, the old ways of religion are now inappropriate.<sup>6</sup> In earlier ages man could attain

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<sup>2</sup>I.2.5; XII.6.33.

<sup>3</sup>B. Waller, Hindu World, Vol. II, p. 254.

<sup>4</sup>I.3.12.

<sup>5</sup>I.5.16ff.

<sup>6</sup>XII.3.14; XI.5.155.

salvation through jñāna, (meditation upon the Absolute), yagna, (the performance of sacrifices to the gods), dharma, (the fulfilment of caste duties), or by karma-yoga, (the performance of one's duties in a disinterested manner).

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa deprecates the value of these earlier methods, and in some passages denies their significance entirely.<sup>7</sup> These earlier religious paths may act as intermediary steps toward spiritual bliss but they can never be efficacious in themselves. The Bhāgavata insists that the true path now is the way of bhakti, enthusiastic devotion to Viṣṇu in his incarnation as Kṛṣṇa.

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<sup>7</sup> For jñāna: I.5.17; I.2.6; X.14.65. For yagna: I.2.5; II.4.102. For dharma: XI.5.153. For karma-yoga: XI.14.180, 189.

## B. Kṛṣṇa-līlā

The nature of bhakti is revealed in the Kṛṣṇa-līlā, the erotic sport of Kṛṣṇa with the gopīs. It is said that Kṛṣṇa even as a young child attracted women and charmed them with his pleasing appearance. In his adolescence Kṛṣṇa becomes a great lover, intoxicating the young milk maids of Vṛndāvana. Kṛṣṇa plays tricks on the girls, and they rejoice at his pranks, even when he steals their clothing as they bathe in the river.<sup>8</sup> Just the sound of his flute is sufficient to send the gopīs into paroxysms of joy, as they cast off their immediate concerns and race off with Kṛṣṇa into the forest.

Some damsels who had been milking their cows, started anxiously, leaving their milking half-done. Some went away leaving the milk they had been boiling over fire... Some had been distributing eatables among (their) family members, some had been suckling their babies, some had been serving their husbands, some had been taking their meals, some had been toiling with cosmetics, some had been cleansing their persons and some had been painting their eyes with collyrium. All these gopees, leaving their respective business and duties unfinished flew to Krishna, their garments and ornaments having fallen off from their persons in consequence of their great hurry.<sup>9</sup>

Kṛṣṇa tells the gopīs to return to their homes and responsibilities, but their impassioned pleas cause him to relent

<sup>8</sup>X.22.98.

<sup>9</sup>X.29.119-20.

and satisfy their ardour. But these women become swelled with pride, glorifying in their womanliness, each supposes that she alone has been chosen for special attention because of her beauty and merit. To chastize and humiliate them for their arrogance Kṛṣṇa abruptly vanishes without a trace.<sup>10</sup>

The gopīs are shattered by Kṛṣṇa's flight; moaning distraughtly they begin to imitate Kṛṣṇa's actions and expressions in a pitiful charade. They go off in search of the dark lover, asking the trees and plants of the forest to reveal Kṛṣṇa's hiding place. Their fatigued state becomes even more distressed when the gopīs discover Kṛṣṇa's footprints mingled together with the footprints of another woman. Acute jealousy spreads throughout the group of girls as they realize that Kṛṣṇa has forsaken them to give pleasure to another. Little do they know that the special gopī, thinking that she alone is Kṛṣṇa's favorite, is demanding that Kṛṣṇa carry her upon his shoulders. Affronted by this presumption Kṛṣṇa suddenly disappears, repeating with the special gopī the scene that occurred earlier with the group of girls. This rejected woman is plunged into deep despair crying "O lord, O darling, O beloved one, O mighty armed one, where art thou

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<sup>10</sup> x.29,122-4: "Every one of those damsels considered herself the best of all earthly women, and was thus elated with pride. Beholding their arrogance produced by their good fortune and also their great pride and being desirous of humiliating them and showing favour unto them, Krishna instantly disappeared from that place."

gone? O friend, lead thy miserable slave to thy proximity."<sup>11</sup>  
 She joins the other gopīs, lamenting the absence of Kṛṣṇa.

Wandering in disorientation through the forest the gopīs accuse Kṛṣṇa of great cruelty.

Thou art piercing us with thy eyes that rob  
 the beauty contained inside the full-grown  
 and full-blown autumnal lotuses. Is not  
 this act of thine equal to slaughtering?<sup>12</sup>

But suddenly Kṛṣṇa reappears; his presence alone is sufficient  
 to heal the malady of their hearts and the gopīs arrive at  
 the end of their desires."<sup>13</sup>

The suffering of the gopīs in the absence of Kṛṣṇa  
 is a dominant theme in the erotic sport. This emphasis  
 upon viraha, the acute pain of longing for one's lover has  
 ample historical precedent in the Indian tradition,  
 particularly in the works of the devotional poets. Sambandar,  
 a Tamil Śaivite saint of the seventh century, describes the  
 devotee of Śiva as a love sick woman, yearning for Śiva's  
 embrace. The devotee is in one passage of Sambandar's  
 writing pictured as a sorrowing girl, fallen before her lover.

Prostrate with fear at Thy feet, she cries:  
 'Lord with matted hair, my Refuge, Rider of

<sup>11</sup> X.30.128.

<sup>12</sup> X.30.129.

<sup>13</sup> X.32.133.

the Bull! / Lord of Muruhal where fresh  
water-lilies bloom, is it right to leave  
her in this anguish of heart?"<sup>14</sup>

So strong is the woman's pain in the absence of her lover  
that spots appear on her body, a standard image of Tamil  
love poetry. "Love writeth clear its mark on me, for He/  
Who cured my grief, yet left unending pain..."<sup>15</sup>

Mānikka Vāśagar, a Śaivite saint of the ninth century,  
describes his longing for Śiva as analogous to the longing of  
a cow for her calf. The sorrowful yearning of the soul for  
God is a wild desire that consumes the devotee. In the  
Tiruvāśagam Mānikka speaks of his heart which unceasingly  
melts in mad longing for the divine. In the Tirukkovaḷ  
Manikka describes the grief of a bereaved wife whose husband  
has gone to a foreign land on some business venture. Unlike  
earlier romances, this tale has no happy reunion; there is  
only the sorrow of separation from the beloved. The Tirukkovaḷ  
appears to be strictly a secular work, but the existence of  
Mānikka's other writings has led his followers to interpret  
this particular folk tale allegorically; the romance is said  
to symbolize the mystical longing of the devotee for his God.  
For Mānikka the agony of separation is not an accidental,

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<sup>14</sup>C. Vaudeville, "Evolution of Love Symbolism in  
Bhagavatism", Journal of American Oriental Society, Vol.  
LXXXII, March, 1962, p. 33, quoting Kingsbury and Philips  
translation.

<sup>15</sup>Vaudeville, p. 34.

transitory component of the love relationship; inconsolable grief is the essence of love.<sup>16</sup>

The early Vaiṣṇava saints, the Ālvārs, also employed erotic imagery to express the relation of God to man, emphasizing the role of painful longing in devotional life.<sup>17</sup> Nāmmālvār<sup>18</sup> describes himself as a woman pining for her lover, always separated from him. Even in the embrace with Kṛṣṇa there is the fear of a new separation; the temporary encounters with Kṛṣṇa serve only to exacerbate the pain of unending longing. In order to experience the love of Kṛṣṇa, Nāmmālvār suggests that he identify himself with one of the characters in the Kṛṣṇa legend, for example, with the

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-34.

<sup>17</sup> There are a number of similarities between the writings of the Ālvārs and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa; endless repetition of the names of Viṣṇu is advocated in both; asceticism, yagna, and jñāna are deprecated in both; caste restrictions are de-emphasized in both. But the erotic element, though present in the Ālvārs, is not so strongly emphasized, (Hooper speaks of "perversion" in reference to the BP). In addition the purāṇic emphasis on the youth of Kṛṣṇa is a new development not found in the Ālvārs. It is very difficult to pin down exactly the relationship between the Ālvār saints and the BP. See J. S. M. Hooper, Hymns of the Alvars, pp. 18-26.

<sup>18</sup> Tremendous controversy surrounds the date of the Ālvārs. Sircar (op. cit., p. 144) sees no evidence that would suggest support for Bhandarkar's (op. cit., p. 50) 12th century date for Nāmmālvār. Dasgupta (History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. III, p. 65) cites two stone inscriptions found in Madura to place Nāmmālvār at the end of the 8th or beginning of the 9th century, before the composition of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

foster mother of Kṛṣṇa or with one of the gopīs.<sup>19</sup>

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa the gopīs suffer a longing, which, if it persists, could culminate in death itself. But the agony of separation is not only pain; ultimately acute longing leads to spiritual bliss in the presence of Kṛṣṇa. It is said of the girls who are unable to join Kṛṣṇa when the flute sounds, (because they are restrained by their husbands and relatives), that "the sins of these women melted away in consequence of their suffering from the great anguish of separation from their darling Lord".<sup>20</sup> With the gopīs who are able to join in Kṛṣṇa's sport, it is his sudden absence that leads them to identify totally with Kṛṣṇa; by imitating his actions "they were completely united with him".<sup>21</sup> Thus Kṛṣṇa instructs the gopīs:

Your body may be easily turned towards me  
by listening to my deeds, by a sight of me,  
by meditation on me, and by the recital of  
my name. But the mind again cannot be so  
easily turned to me by living near me.<sup>22</sup>

There is always pain in the separation from Kṛṣṇa for the senses are not denied without great effort. But it is through meditating upon Kṛṣṇa in his absence that the devotee is able to renounce the mental and bodily desires that chain

<sup>19</sup> Vaudeville, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> X.29.120.

<sup>21</sup> X.30.129.

<sup>22</sup> X.29.121f.



man to the world.<sup>23</sup> Once Kṛṣṇa assures the gopīs that his absence is for their benefit, that even when he hides himself he still is attached to them, the gopīs are able to overcome their grief.

Thus dwelling on the glory of Krishna, the women of Braja passed their days in joy. Having their hearts absorbed in joy, and their minds engrossed in him, they were always cheerful.<sup>24</sup>

Kṛṣṇa's departure to Mathurā precipitates an emotional crisis similar to that of his first departure, but now the gopīs, by meditating upon his anticipated return, are able, though with great difficulty, to keep themselves alive.<sup>25</sup>

The gopīs experience bliss in gazing upon the beauty of Kṛṣṇa. The Bhāgavata is silent as to what actually occurs at the height of Kṛṣṇa's embrace -- there is no graphic description of actual sexual contact. The joy of <sup>the</sup>gopīs is based upon the consummate vision of the lustrous body of Kṛṣṇa. The gopīs curse their eyelids for inhibiting their sight;<sup>26</sup> they lament even the slightest distance between themselves and the object of vision. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa contains lengthy descriptions of how the physical body of the

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<sup>23</sup>X.29.120.

<sup>24</sup>X.35.145.

<sup>25</sup>X.46.191.

<sup>26</sup>X.82.83; X.31.131.

divine intoxicates the devotee with its supreme beauty.<sup>27</sup>  
 Even animals are transfixed by the sight of Kṛṣṇa's body.<sup>28</sup>  
 Hearing his flute is often sufficient to create a mental  
 vision of the god which throws the listener into ecstasy.<sup>29</sup>

Devotion to Kṛṣṇa incidentally brings with it fulfilment of the four ends of life, (artha, kāma, dharma, and mokṣa), but the devotee must not attach himself to Kṛṣṇa for the sake of attaining these goals.<sup>30</sup> In many ways the Bhāgavata Purāṇa rejects (i) artha, (material wealth and power), as having any religious value at all. The Bhāgavata notes that it is the poor who seek out Kṛṣṇa's presence because he and his wife Rukmini are also poor (in the major part of 10th book at least<sup>31</sup>). The poor are favoured because they lack the arrogance that denotes the attitude of the wealthy, an attitude that is not conducive to the devotional life. In order to convert the wealthy to bhakti Kṛṣṇa first deprives them of their riches.<sup>32</sup>

Poverty only is the best remedy for such

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<sup>27</sup>X.21.93; X.44.82; X.52.223; X.82.84.

<sup>28</sup>X.15.68: a peacock catches sight of Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>29</sup>X.35.144. This also applies to swans and to female deer who hear the flute (X.31.94).

<sup>30</sup>III.4.16.

<sup>31</sup>X.60.257. In the later sections of the 10th book Kṛṣṇa is a wealthy ruler.

<sup>32</sup>X.88.121.

wicked men blinded with the pride of wealth... A poor man is freed from egoism and all forms of arrogance.<sup>33</sup>

The sense organs that bind man to the world are less highly developed in the poor. In addition the poor are accepted more readily than the wealthy by the community of the pious, an important consideration as we shall see.

The value of (ii) kāma, sensual pleasure, is also deprecated in the Bhāgavata Purāna. The saintly man is told to shun the company of women, for they bring out the worst in men, as the lust of Brahma for his daughter clearly demonstrates.<sup>34</sup> Once the householder state has been left behind the devotee "should give up seeing women, touching, conversing or cracking jokes with them. Nor should he behold creatures united as husbands and wives".<sup>35</sup> The purāṇic objection to kāma is that the constituent element of sensual love is the desire for personal satisfaction. The gopis, particularly Kujā the hunchback of Mathurā, are at first driven by their greed for the love of Kṛṣṇa,<sup>37</sup> but true

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<sup>33</sup>X.10.41.

<sup>34</sup>III.31.145.

<sup>35</sup>XI.17.200.

<sup>36</sup>III.14.64-7; VII.12.65.

<sup>37</sup>Rūpa Goswamin also refers to the greed (lobha) of Kṛṣṇa incarnating himself to taste of his own sweetness, (S. K. De, VFM, pp. 431-32) and to the lust of the devotee (ibid., pp. 176-78).

love is a self-less devotion that is a total surrender to the loved one without regard for one's own satisfaction (prema). The bliss the gopīs experience in Kṛṣṇa's presence is a higher joy than sensual fulfilment. There is little importance attached to kāma because of the danger of a too literal interpretation of the Kṛṣṇa-līlā, that is, emphasis upon kāma as a fruit of bhakti could lead to the practice of ritual coitus and other licentious habits.

The third end of life (iii) dharma, the performance of duties appropriate to one's caste and historical situation, is attained through devotion to Kṛṣṇa. But the Bhāgavata makes some notable revisions of the understanding of what constitutes proper behaviour. The traditional hierarchy of castes and emphasis upon respect of the lower classes for the higher is forgotten. Though there are a few passages in the purāṇa which venerate the status of the Brahman caste,<sup>38</sup> the general tone toward Brahmins is accusatory. The Brahmins of Vraja rejected Kṛṣṇa because of their pride.<sup>39</sup> They, like the wealthy, are too attached to earthly things (in this case status in the community and pride in scholarship), to be devoted to Kṛṣṇa. No special status is conferred upon the Brahmins: even a low caste devotee is higher than a Brahmin who does not utter

<sup>38</sup>VII.11.64; VII.15.78.

<sup>39</sup>X.23.100.

the name Hari.<sup>40</sup> The religion of the Bhāgavata appears to be open to all. Mixed castes are accepted; in fact, Sūta, the narrator of the purāṇa is of mixed caste.<sup>41</sup> Members of the lowest caste, the cāṇḍalas, are readily admitted to the worship of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>42</sup> It is even possible for a cāṇḍala to act as a guru. The lowest castes can more easily serve Kṛṣṇa because in their everyday life they adopt the attitude of a servant toward the upper classes -- this servant attitude is the proper way to approach Kṛṣṇa.

The ethical teachings of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa enjoin tolerance and kindness<sup>44</sup> to all men with particular compassion directed toward the poor.<sup>45</sup> The greatest virtue for the devotee is extreme humility: the Bhāgavata reserves its strongest attack for those whose pride inhibits their devotion to Kṛṣṇa. The most frequently uttered ethical command in the purāṇa is to eschew the company of the impious

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<sup>40</sup>VII.9.45.

<sup>41</sup>I.18.77; Cf. T. J. Hopkins' article, "Social Teachings of the Bhagavata Purana," in Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes, ed., by N. Singer.

<sup>42</sup>I.11.47; III.16.77; X.70.33; XI.14.189.

<sup>43</sup>"If a Chandala utters Thy name on the tip of his tongue, he becomes worthy of reverence." (III.33.150).

<sup>44</sup>III.25.116.

<sup>45</sup>VIII.16.145.

and seek the company of the saints.<sup>46</sup>

The final end of life (iv) mokṣa, liberation from the cycle of rebirths, is not the ultimate state for the bhakta (devotee). The gopīs would consider themselves in the highest state of bliss if they were reborn in Vṛndavana with Kṛṣṇa.

From the perspective of the devotee it is irrelevant whether or not the four ends of life are attained. The true devotee practices nirguṇa bhakti, a devotion that is completely without selfish motive.<sup>47</sup> It is this unselfish devotion that attracts the Godhead.

The Supreme Lord abiding in all hearts confers His own highest stage to the devotee who keeps his eye fixed on Hari and worships Him wholeheartedly without the least desire of any fruits of such worship. (48)

The dominant characteristic of religious life in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is the depth of emotional attachment demanded of the devotee. The sincerity of the supplicant is more important than the size of his offering to the god. Thus Kṛṣṇa instructs his devotees:

Even water, given reverentially by a devotee,  
is liked by me, but profuse articles offered

<sup>46</sup>I.10.42; I.18.76; II.4.102; II.7.119; III.25.117; III.31.144-5; V.5.176; X.51.218; XI.2.142; XI.26.235.

<sup>47</sup>III.29.135.

<sup>48</sup>III.13.63.

disrespectfully cannot produce my pleasure.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly discourses about Kṛṣṇa and religious rituals are useless without an outpouring of emotion.<sup>50</sup> In this text bhakti is a frenzied longing for the divine, quite unlike the almost quietistic devotion of the Bhagavad-Gītā. In the eleventh book of the Bhāgavata Kṛṣṇa asks "save by the erection of hairs, through emotion, the melted state of the mind and drops of tears begotten by joy, how can devotion be known"<sup>51</sup> To follow Kṛṣṇa is to rise above the everyday world in a highly emotionalistic state that shatters all earthly barriers, a state of divine madness. In participating in the Kṛṣṇa-līlā the devotee should

wander about independent of regulations. Although senseless (that is, though he is no longer bound by his senses) he should sport like a boy, although skilled he should behave like a stupid person, although learned he should talk like a maniac, and although regarding the Vedas he should act like a cow regardless of all rules.<sup>52</sup>

The emotional attitude the devotee should adopt is best exemplified by the gopīs. These women renounce their familial and social responsibilities in a frenzied rush to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>53</sup> The emotional intensity of their devotion is

<sup>49</sup>XI.27.240; cf. X.81.76-7.

<sup>50</sup>I.2.6.

<sup>51</sup>XI.14.189.

<sup>52</sup>XI.18.204; cf. XI.2.143.

<sup>53</sup>See footnote No. 9, and quote p. 4.

heightened by the fact that they are parakiya women, (married to others.)

Post-nuptial love is not the highest ideal of love so far as the intensity of emotion is concerned, -- for long association and acquaintance devour the strange mystery, which is the salt of love, and social convention and legal compulsion take away much from the passion in it and thus make it commonplace and attenuated.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the attempts of later theologians to Bowdlerize the erotic elements from the Kṛṣṇa-līlā and through ingenious textual interpretation to make the gopis svakiya women (legitimate wives), the Vaiṣṇavite movement retained the purāṇic view that the gopis are wives of others. In a theological debate before the Muslim court of Bengal in the 18th century, the orthodoxy of the parakiya position was affirmed.<sup>55</sup>

Central to the purāṇic emphasis upon the totality of surrender to Kṛṣṇa is the devotee's renunciation of family ties. While in the householder stage one must observe caste

<sup>54</sup>Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults, p. 175. The doctrine of parakiya women in no way renders Kṛṣṇa immoral. As the divine Kṛṣṇa is beyond conventional morality, the erotic sport of Kṛṣṇa is merely his means of assisting the devotee. "He assumed a body only out of his sportive humour. Having assumed a human form, He joined in these kinds of sports merely to show grace to His devotees." (X.33.138) There is no moral impropriety in Kṛṣṇa's actions nor is there social disruption, for the husbands of the gopis, through the power of Kṛṣṇa's māyā, have apparent wives at their sides, even as their true wives are off in the forest with Kṛṣṇa (X.33.139).

<sup>55</sup>Dimock, Hidden Moon, pp. 208ff. The chief spokesman for the parakiya position during the debate was a poet Rādhāmohana Thākura. (S. Sen, History of Brajabuli Lit. p. 275).



and family obligations, though in a disinterested manner.<sup>56</sup> Eventually the devotee must progress beyond the householder stage of life and become a wandering ascetic, for family ties bind one to the world and inhibit devotion to Kṛṣṇa. In the parable of the householder pigeon, the male bird is trapped by the hunter's net because he returns to his mate and offspring. The meaning of the parable is explicit:

whoever being attached to home and relations  
and being of uncontrolled mind, maintains his  
family out of excessive attachment for them  
like that pigeon, is consumed with his body.<sup>57</sup>

The ideal devotee renounces all family entanglements and attaches himself to Kṛṣṇa alone.

In the Bhāgavata the catalyst that casts the devotee out of the everyday world into the realm of Kṛṣṇa's habitat is the recitation of the names of God. The mere utterance of the name is sufficient to purify the devotee, who then falls heir to all the gifts of the Supreme Lord.

Do know it for certain that recitation of the glorious names of the Lord Viṣṇu is conducive to the well-being of the universe, and as such it constitutes the best and ultimate redemption even of the most heinous crimes. The soul is not so much purified by ceremonials, penances, and other means of expiation as by unflinching faith... as is generated by means of frequent rehearsal and recitation of the unsullied

<sup>56</sup>XI.18.205.

<sup>57</sup>XI.7.167; Cf. I.13.52; III.30.138; V.14.215; VII.12.66.

splendour and auspicious glories of the  
Lord Sri Hari.<sup>58</sup>

Among the devotional practices that the Bhāgavata recommends  
is the kīrtan, a gathering of a small group of devotees to  
chant and sing the glories of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>VI.3.281; Cf. I.1.4; II.1.87; II.3.100; III.1.6;  
VI.2.273,276; VII.11.61-2; XI.2.143.

<sup>59</sup>XI.5.155; XI.11.180.

### C. The Poetic Tradition

The stories of Kṛṣṇa's sport in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa were taken up by the poetic tradition. The poets virtually ignored the purāṇic material not directly relevant to the Kṛṣṇa story. In their elaboration of the Kṛṣṇa-līlā greatest prominence was given to the erotic elements of the myth, centering upon the totality of the gopīs surrender to Kṛṣṇa, and emphasizing the themes of painful separation and blissful union. The poets identified the special gopī mentioned in the Bhāgavata as Rādhā and saw in her the essence of the devotee's longing. The other gopīs in the Kṛṣṇa legend were relegated to the background as friends of Rādhā or as rivals for Kṛṣṇa's attention. Rādhā epitomizes in the works of these poets the emotional attachment to Kṛṣṇa demanded of all the gopīs, that is, demanded of all devotees.

#### (1) Jayadeva

The Gita Govinda of Jayadeva is the first literary work exalting the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. So little is known of Jayadeva's life that three neighbouring states in East India (Bengal, Orissa and Mithila), claim him as an indigenous poet. But on the basis of the Kāśmir and Nepāl manuscripts of the Gita Govinda, it can be established that Jayadeva was born in Kenduli (Bengal) at the beginning of the twelfth century.<sup>59a</sup> Jayadeva infused traditional

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<sup>59a</sup>S. C. Mukherji, pp. 91-94.

Sanskrit love conventions with religious ardour, creating a love opera extolling the pain of separation in love (virahadhukha). In composing his work he was undoubtedly influenced by the great beauty of his wife Padmāvatī, and above all by the landscape of Bengal.

Much of the Gita Govinda's power arises from the endowment of Nature with romantic ardour, the forest itself being presented as a highly sensitive and symbolic setting for the behaviour of lovers.<sup>60</sup>

Jayadeva writes as if he were Kṛṣṇa, experiencing the supreme bliss of heavenly love.

There is no explicit articulation of the religious precepts of the Gita Govinda within the work itself. But it is clear that Jayadeva was a Vaiṣṇavite devotee. All his biographers emphasize the Vaiṣṇava character of his bhakti, and there are a number of legends surrounding the work that refer to Kṛṣṇa himself descending to write certain sections of the poem.<sup>61</sup> In addition Jayadeva is credited with systematizing a list of 10 incarnations of Viṣṇu in which Kṛṣṇa is held to be the source of all avatāras.<sup>62</sup> Randhawa postulates that the musical style of the poem, the preponderance of

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<sup>60</sup>W. G. Archer, quoted by Randhawa, Kangra Paintings of the Gita Govinda, p. 54.

<sup>61</sup>Jayadeva was unable to write that Rādhā put her foot on the head of Kṛṣṇa. When he left his poem Kṛṣṇa miraculously appeared and finished the passage.

<sup>62</sup>S. C. Mukherji, p. 101.

alliterations, assonances and recurring choruses, suggest that the Gita Govinda must have been performed as a type of rāsa-līlā.<sup>63</sup> For all its eroticism the poem is a religious document extolling the power of religious love.

The poem begins with the dawn of love on the banks of the Yamuna. After this first evening of joy, Kṛṣṇa retires to other loves and Rādhā is overcome with jealousy.

When Radha saw how with an equal eye  
Her Hari gave his love on every hand,  
Her heart was torn, a strong jealous pain  
Caught fire. She turned away, she went apart  
Into a beauty-haunted bower arched  
With drooping leaves.<sup>64</sup>

This great jealousy arouses in Rādhā a deep love for Kṛṣṇa together with despair over the manner in which he treats her, dallying with other loves without thought of the pain he has given her. Little does she know the efforts of Kṛṣṇa to resume their love-making, and the pain that he feels at their separation.

In vain sought Madhava his Radhika  
Both here and there; His mind immersed in pain  
From arrow-wound of love, and stricken sore  
To find no Yam'na's Darling.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup>Bandhawa, p. 51. By writing of Kṛṣṇa in his form as a lover, (mādhurya-bhāva), the poets participated in the bliss of Kṛṣṇa in imitation of Rādhā and the gopīs. A rāsa-līlā refers to the height of the dance of Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs.

<sup>64</sup>Jayadeva, Gita Govinda: The Song of Divine Love, (trans. Greenless), p. 16.

<sup>65</sup>GG, p. 24.

Seeing me surrounded by a swarm  
 Of dancing Gopis of entrancing form,  
 She has gone away from Me.  
 Ah Radha! I am truly in the wrong;  
 Yours is my heart-whole fealty,  
 For you my youth must always long  
     Oh Hari, Hari, see!  
     She has gone away  
     Angry at My play  
     Vexed at My inconsistency.<sup>66</sup>

The fire of Kṛṣṇa's love causes him to give himself totally,  
 thus his pain at separation from his love. A gopī friend of  
 Rādhā, seeking only the happiness of the two lovers, goes to  
 Kṛṣṇa and tells him of Rādhā's plight. The poor girl is very  
 near death: Kṛṣṇa must go to her immediately if she is to  
 survive.

Her body burns with burning fever; say,  
 Can that beloved body live?  
 If you, the very image of one sent  
 With many remedies celestial,  
 Take pity on her suffering, she may  
 Be cured; but if you drop her tender hand,  
 Who then can save her from death's icy grasp?<sup>67</sup>

Kṛṣṇa is far too experienced in the ways of love, and far  
 stronger than his immediate desire, to go to Rādhā at once.  
 He knows that further longing will heighten the heat of their  
 embrace; he refuses to go to her at once. He sends the gopī  
 back to Rādhā with messages of undying devotion and tales of  
 the suffering he feels at her absence. Sadly, Rādhā reacts  
 with an outpouring of jealousy. In this poem Radha is a

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<sup>66</sup> GG, p. 25.

<sup>67</sup> GG, p. 36.

confused woman, longing for her lover; she is not yet the personification of Kṛṣṇa's bliss that she becomes later in the tradition. So Rādhā means:

In raiment suited to love's contest clad, most fair  
With rain of scattered flowers flying from her hair,  
Some other beauty, fairer far than I  
Now plays with Madhu's foe although I sigh.<sup>68</sup>

Kṛṣṇa suddenly appears in the night. In the morning their union is concretely visible, for Rādhā wears his golden silk robe and he her azure sari.<sup>69</sup> But Rādhā accuses Kṛṣṇa of infidelity, despite her gopī friend's pleas to overcome jealousy. Kṛṣṇa having retreated in the morning, returns once again, and with sweet words turns aside Rādhā's jealousy. He retires to his bower; when Rādhā enters she is overcome with the beauty of his dark body. Yet even now, alone in the presence of her lover, Rādhā is filled with modesty.

Her band of friends had quietly withdrawn,  
When Hari saw that Radha more and more  
Was dipped in modesty intense, though swayed  
By love's keen power.<sup>70</sup>

Such modesty can be only an impediment to true love. Kṛṣṇa implores Rādhā to surrender to him totally.

Ah now your eye grows tired of angry glare  
In vain; it blinks as though ashamed to stare.  
Oh let all shrinking from my ardour cease,

<sup>68</sup>GG, p. 52.

<sup>69</sup>GG, p. 58.

<sup>70</sup>GG, p. 84.

For love alone can lead you into peace  
 O Radha, for a little while, your love to show  
 Stay near Narayana who longed your love to know.<sup>71</sup>

Finally Rādhā surrenders and she and Kṛṣṇa experience supreme bliss. Rādhā has been transformed by this love, but her appearance is restored that others may not know of her affair.

Place on my breasts one tender little leaf,  
 And make a scented mark upon my cheeks;  
 Re-tie the loosened girdle round my waist,  
 And with a garland bind my heavy hair;  
 Set straight the line of bangles on my arms;  
 Arrange the chain of anklets on my feet.<sup>72</sup>

The erotic beauty of the work must not be neglected; the Gita Govinda is above all a poem celebrating the importance of sexual love.<sup>73</sup> But the frank sensuality refers also to the union of God and the individual soul, both in this work and in the countless parallels to be found in Christian and Sufi mystical writings. The central motif of Jayadeva's poem is the power of separation to heighten the sexual embrace and the mystical union with God. Kṛṣṇa stimulates Rādhā's love by arousing jealousy within her, for "the mango just out of reach always looks the sweetest, and it is when the Beloved seems indifferent to our need that

<sup>71</sup>GG, p. 85.

<sup>72</sup>GG, p. 90.

<sup>73</sup>S. C. Mukherji's statement that "the erotic elements in his poem may be explained away as purely allegorical or symbolical representation of highly spiritual ideas", emasculates the tremendous power of the Gita Govinda, and destroys its intrinsic value as a poetic creation.



our love burns brightest in the heart".<sup>74</sup> In the Gita Govinda the principle component of separation from the Beloved is pain, but this is merely a transitory state, a stimulus to the bliss of union.

(ii) Vidyapati and Candidās

The stories of Kṛṣṇa's dalliance with the gopis celebrated in the Gita Govinda were taken up again in the late fourteenth century when the Pāthāns established a stable government in Bengal and encouraged a revival of literary works.<sup>75</sup> These poets, unlike Jayadeva, wrote in Bengali or Maithilī rather than Sanskrit. Their poems are complete in themselves, much shorter than Jayadeva's great work. The most interesting development is that these poets wrote as if they were among the gopīs following Kṛṣṇa,<sup>76</sup> or as if they were friends of Rādhā observing the passion of the two lovers.<sup>77</sup> Some poets even changed the dāsa (servant) ending of their names, and substituted the feminine form dāsī.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup>Greenless, introduction to GG, p. 8.

<sup>75</sup>S. C. Mukherji, p. 122.

<sup>76</sup>Dinock, IPK, p. xviii.

<sup>77</sup>Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults, p. 125.

<sup>78</sup>S. Sen, History of Brajabuli Literature, p. 58, 432 (e.g. Rasamaya-dāsa: Rasamayi-dāsī); Cf. D. C. Sen, Chaitanya and His Age, p. 70.

The chief poets are Vidyāpati and Candīdās. Vidyāpati was born in Bihar<sup>79</sup> in 1352 and wrote his love songs between 1380 and 1406. As a court poet Vidyāpati extolled the love of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā as the highest expression of human love, a love that was paralleled by the affair of his royal patron Śiva Siṃha and his favorite wife Lakhimā Devi.<sup>80</sup> It is fairly clear that Vidyāpati, though he wrote on the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme, was not a Vaiṣṇava. After the collapse of Śiva Siṃha's court in 1406 Vidyāpati reverted to writing Sanskrit treatises until his death in 1448. His later writings exalt Śiva and Durgā as models for the ideal marriage, with no further mention of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.<sup>81</sup> Vidyāpati's poems became part of the Vaiṣṇava heritage through Caitanya who interpreted his songs as hymns extolling the divine. For Vidyāpati Viṣṇu is higher than Kṛṣṇa who is often described as a gross country bumpkin. Vidyāpati's poems are written from the perspective of Rādhā, often lashing out against what

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<sup>79</sup>Bihar was once controlled by Bengal so that Vidyāpati's poems were easily assimilated into the Bengali literary corpus (S. C. Mukherji, p. 122).

<sup>80</sup>In his signature lines (*bhanitā*) Vidyāpati often mentions his royal patron, e.g., "Says Vidyāpati, skilled in all moods: Love has no limits. Raja Śiva Siṃha is the husband of Lakhimā". (Vidyāpati, *Love Songs of Vidyāpati* (trans., D. Bhattacharya), p. 34, (hereafter *Vidy.*)

<sup>81</sup>W. G. Archer in his introduction to Vidyāpati's poems (*op. cit.*, pp. 35-37). However near the end of his life Vidyāpati copied the *Bhāgavata purāṇa* in his own hand. (S. C. Mukherji, pp. 153-55.)

is labelled the cruelty and indifference of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is said to be a mere country boy ignorant of the art of love,<sup>82</sup> unaware of the tremendous pain he inflicts on Rādhā with his sudden departures.<sup>83</sup> Rādhā is portrayed as a shy, confused girl, an innocent victim of her lover's cruel acts: "It is not she/Who is to blame / When Krishna harshly turned aside".<sup>84</sup> The touchingly human character of Rādhā's devotion to Kṛṣṇa ensured tremendous popularity for Vidyāpati's poems.

Candidās was a contemporary of Vidyāpati, though the latter was a somewhat younger man at the time of composition of his poems.<sup>85</sup> It would appear that there are at least two Candidās: an early fifteenth century Vaiṣṇavite poet and a post-Caitanya Sahajiyā lyricist.<sup>86</sup> There are a large number of legends surrounding Candidās, concerning his life long affair with a low caste woman, an affair that caused him untold sorrow.<sup>87</sup> Regardless of the validity of these

<sup>82</sup>vidy., p. 46.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>85</sup>S. C. Mukherji (p. 127) notes that the order of names in the Vaiṣṇavatosanī-tikā suggest that Candidās preceded Vidyāpati. Cf. Bhattacharya's introduction to Love Songs of Candidās (trans. D. Bhattacharya), p. 31, (hereafter Cand.)

<sup>86</sup>S. C. Mukherji, pp. 137-38; Cf. Dimock, Bengali Vaisnava Lyrics, (hereafter BVL), pp. 24-25.

<sup>87</sup>Bhattacharya, Cand., pp. 18-26.

legends it is clear that the poems of Candīdās delineating the deep yearning of Rādhā for Kṛṣṇa became paradigmatic for Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa poets and devotees.

In the poems of Vidyāpati and Candīdās, Rādhā is initially shy; it is only through the great skill and patience of Kṛṣṇa that she surrenders her maidenhood. It should be remembered that Kṛṣṇa at a very early age was able to arouse young girls simply by dancing before them.<sup>88</sup> The exquisite beauty of the dark lover alone is sufficient to arouse the most reluctant maid. But all Kṛṣṇa's resources are required to bring Rādhā out of her shell.

Fingering the border of her friend's sari, nervous  
and afraid  
sitting tensely on the edge of Krishna's couch,  
as her friend left she too looked to go  
but in desire Krishna blocked her way.  
He was infatuated, she bewildered;  
he was clever, and she naive.  
He put out his hand to touch her; she quickly  
pushed it away.  
He looked into her face, her eyes filled with tears.  
He held her forcefully, she trembled violently  
And hid her face from his kisses behind the edge  
of her sari.  
Then she lay down, frightened, beautiful as a doll;  
he hovered like a bee round a lotus in a painting.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> BVL, #6

<sup>89</sup> Govinda-dāsa, IPK, p. 11. Govinda-dasa is a much later poet (1535-1613). This poem has been included in our text because Govinda-dāsa modelled the thought and language of his songs on those of Vidyāpati, and wrote poems in the latter's honour. He even completed some poems of Vidyāpati that had been partially lost. (S. Sen, Brajabuli Literature, pp. 105-9, 125-32).

This initial meeting of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa changes him as much as it changes her. But even after her youthful encounters, Rādhā remains the shy maid, always reluctant to submit to Kṛṣṇa's advances. But Kṛṣṇa overcomes such maidenly restraint, arousing the passion that is concealed within. "How beautiful the deliberate sensuous union of the two;/the girl playing this time the active role,/riding her lover's outstretched body in delight."<sup>90</sup> The sight of Kṛṣṇa's image alone, (for example, the blue neck of the peacock), is sufficient to transport Rādhā into Kṛṣṇa's arms.<sup>91</sup>

Kṛṣṇa's overpowering love completely destroys all boundaries, and Rādhā surrenders totally to the dark lover. "My mind fixed on you alone, I have offered you everything;/in truth, I have become your slave."<sup>92</sup>

I who body and soul  
am at your beck and call,  
was a girl of noble family.  
I took no thought for what would be said of me,  
I abandoned everything;  
now I am part of you,  
your will is my will.<sup>93</sup>

At the first note of the flute Rādhā escapes the world of respectable married life and enters a strange realm of illicit sensuality.

<sup>90</sup>Vidyāpati, IPK, p. 56.

<sup>91</sup>Candidāś, BVL, #15.

<sup>92</sup>Candidāś, IPK, p. 57.

<sup>93</sup>Vidyāpati, IPK, p. 51.

Casting away  
 all ethics of castes  
 my heart dotes on Krishna  
 day and night.  
 The custom of the clan  
 is a far-away cry  
 and now I know  
 that love adheres wholly  
 to its own laws.<sup>94</sup>

The joyous embrace of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā is heightened by the great danger involved in their love. Rādhā is the treasure of another man.<sup>95</sup> Because she is a married woman, consorting with her wanton lover in the dead of night, "the elders chatter and the wicked gossip",<sup>96</sup> calling the unchaste Rādhā a whore.<sup>97</sup> When Kṛṣṇa's passion subsides she is overcome with remorse.

With the last of my garments  
 shame dropped from me, fluttered  
 to earth and lay discarded at my feet.  
 My lover's body became  
 the only covering I needed...  
 Now shame returns  
 as I remember. My heart trembles,  
 recalling his treachery.<sup>98</sup>

Upon her return to the home of her husband Rādhā contrives ingenious alibis to explain her ravished appearance.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>94</sup>Cand., p. 135.

<sup>95</sup>Vidy., p. 56.

<sup>96</sup>Cand., p. 96.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>98</sup>Vidyāpati, IPK, p. 27.

<sup>99</sup>Vidy., p. 133.

The pain of separation is a recurrent theme in these poems. Rādhā is cast into the depths of sorrow when Kṛṣṇa abruptly leaves her or fails to come to their trysting place. Rādhā believes that only pain can come of her love for Kṛṣṇa.

Whoever loves Kalia will come to grief  
I have made a rosary of Kalia's beads,  
And exhausted to death muttering his name,  
Day and night my restless heart  
And body burn in the flame of separation.<sup>100</sup>

Knowing that "shattered desire is death",<sup>101</sup> Rādhā contemplates suicide. Vengeance has become her prime motive; her only desire is to repay Kṛṣṇa for the wounds that he has inflicted upon her body.

I shall drown myself in the sea with this last wish--  
May I be the son of Srinanda in the next incarnation  
And you, my dear, may you be my Rādhā  
I would love you and then leave you behind.<sup>102</sup>

She also hopes that the other loves of Kṛṣṇa will suffer as she does.<sup>103</sup> There is no end to her resentment and pain.

But suddenly all that is forgotten for Kṛṣṇa has returned from his other affairs. All pain vanishes at the sight of her lover. The pain of separation, far from destroying her love, has prepared her for an even greater union with Kṛṣṇa than she experienced earlier. In their

<sup>100</sup>Candidās, BVL, #59.

<sup>101</sup>vidy, p. 50.

<sup>102</sup>Candidās, BVL, #64; also in IPK, p. 32.

<sup>103</sup>Candidās, BVL, #45.

embrace Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā are brought together in a brief indissolvable union in which they become one body, all distinctions being shattered.

As the wings to a bird or water to a fish  
Or life to living beings  
So, art thou unto me, my Darling!  
But tell me, Madhava, what art Thou, in sooth?  
Says Vidyapati, "Each is both".<sup>104</sup>

The poets exalt the union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa; for them the agony of separation is a temporary state, a means of increasing the blissful embrace. It is assumed that "happiness is never attained without some pain".<sup>105</sup> But even in the indescribable joy of union there is still the pain of potential separation.

Their hearts are cemented so close;  
They weep at the distance that needs must be  
Even in the closest, the most intimate embrace.<sup>106</sup>

She slept in the arms of her beloved.  
Suddenly she cried "Kanu, Kanu"  
And wept as if in the pangs of separation.<sup>107</sup>

In summation we may say that the poets revive the themes of love in separation and union inherent within the story of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Using the same events and often the same images of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the medieval poets

<sup>104</sup>Vidyapati, BVL, #38; also in IPK, p. 15 ("They are one another")

<sup>105</sup>Vidyapati, BVL, #23.

<sup>106</sup>Candidās, BVL, #44.

<sup>107</sup>Govinda-dāsa, BVL, #65; also in IPK, p. 23.



eulogize love in all its erotic and mystical power. The poets glorify the total surrender of Rādhā to the beauty of Kṛṣṇa, a surrender that implies the renunciation of all other values. Above all the poets centre upon the oscillation between pleasure and pain that keeps the devotee in emotional turmoil.

## CHAPTER II

### CAITANYA CARITĀMṚTA

The central figure of the Bengal school of Vaisnavism is Kṛṣṇadāsa Caitanya. In this chapter we shall examine his life and personality and the cultural milieu in which he lived in order to discover why Caitanya made such an impact upon the Bengali religious tradition. The sources for this study are the orthodox biographies that arose shortly after his death, chiefly the Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kavirāja, completed in 1615.<sup>1</sup> The last is "the most complete and authoritative biography", the "most esteemed text" of the Bengali Vaisnavite school.<sup>2</sup> It is the first theological treatise of Vaisnavism written in Bengali,<sup>3</sup> incorporating all the earlier biographies in a vernacular

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<sup>1</sup>Krishna-dasa Kaviraja Goswamin, Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita (trans. N. K. Roy and S. K. Chaudhuri), introduction, p. iii. Dasgupta, History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. IV p. 385, gives the date as 1616. Sukuman Sen (Hist. Brajabuli Literature, p. 104) suggests 1581 as the date but gives no evidence for rejecting the later dates of others. The biographies that are considered authoritative are: the Caitanya Bhāgavata of Vṛndāvana-dāsa, the Caitanya Mangala of Locanadāsa, and the Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kavirāja. Only the last will directly be quoted.

<sup>2</sup>D. C. Sen, Chaitanya and His Age, p. 95; S. Sen, History of Bengali Literature, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup>S. K. De, VFM, p. 57.

text available to the masses. Though completed almost 80 years after the death of Caitanya, the Caitanya Caritāmṛta claims to be an accurate account of the life of Lord Cauranga, drawing upon the personal reminiscences of the Gosvamins of Vṛndāvana,<sup>4</sup> and written under their direction.<sup>5</sup> Though the Caitanya Caritāmṛta is a devotional rather than a historical narrative it is still the basic source for studying the cultural climate in which Caitanya lived.

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<sup>4</sup>D. C. Sen, Chaitanya and His Companions, p. 274.

<sup>5</sup>Adi VIII.114ff. The Caitanya Caritāmṛta is divided into three sections contained in six volumes. Vol. 1: Ādilīlā, Vol. 2: Madhya-līlā, chapters I-XII, pp. 1-284; Vol. 3: Madhya-līlā, chapters XIII-XIX, pp. 285-478; Vol. 4: Madhya-līlā, chapters XX-XXV, pp. 479-671; Vol. 5: Antya-līlā, chapters I-IV, pp. 1-146; Vol. 6, Antya līlā, chapters VII-XX, pp. 147-352. In references cited in these notes, the Roman numerals refer to chapter numbers, the other numbers to pages.

### A. Cultural Milieu

By the time of Caitanya Bengal was controlled by an immigrant power which propagated a foreign language and an alien faith. As iconoclasts the Muslims barely tolerated image-worship and Hindu rites and festivals.<sup>6</sup> In their early conquests the Muslims converted many Hindu temples into mosques.<sup>7</sup> But in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there was little direct influence of Islam on the everyday life of the Hindu peasant, except for the popularity of Sufism among Bengali Muslims that encouraged the growth of mysticism within the Hindu community.<sup>8</sup> On the whole the Muslim rulers remained relatively indifferent to the religious life of the indigenous population. It was the reaction of the Brahmins to the presence of an alien faith that is important.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>S. C. Mukherji, p. 162.

<sup>7</sup>M. T. Kennedy, The Chaitanya Movement, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>A. C. Roy, History of Bengal (Mughal Period, 1526-1765), p. 466. There are a number of mystic saints revered by both Hindus and Muslims. Sukumar Sen, (Brajabuli Lit. pp. 461-64), notes some Vaisnava lyrics written by Muslims.

<sup>9</sup>In the Caitanya Caritāmṛta the kazi or Muslim ruler, issues a strong decree against the bhakti movement. "If in future I detect anybody in the art of chanting sankirtana, I shall forfeit all his property and make him an outcaste." But the motive for his statement is his fear of social disruption and the warnings of the "Hindu heretics", who objected to the emotionalism of bhakti. (Adi XVII.198-204; Cf. Madh XVI.382).

The great fear of the conservative members of the Brahman caste in the face of the Muslims, was the introduction of foreign ideas into the Hindu religious tradition. To prevent the introduction of alien material the Brahmins instituted a strict codification of religious rules and rituals that would admit no deviation.<sup>10</sup> This tightened the caste system and consolidated the social position of the Brahman caste. The priests were at the pinnacle of the caste structure and their presence was required at all legitimate religious events. The religion of knowledge that they propogated offered salvation only for the select few with the ability and leisure for rigorous intellectual activity. For the masses the mood of the times was stagnation and repression. To those strangled by ritual prohibition Caitanya came as a liberator. His attack upon arid intellectualism and the religion of the few struck a responsive chord.

The Brahmins generally opposed the emotional excess of the devotional cults. Though the stories of Kṛṣṇa's sport with the gopīs were still heard through the poetry of Jayadeva, Vidyāpati and others, the Vaiṣṇava movement was relatively dormant. There were small Vaiṣṇavite communities celebrating the worship of Bādhā and Kṛṣṇa throughout Bengal

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<sup>10</sup> An outstanding example is the religious code of Raghunandana, S. C. Mukherji, p. 163; Cf. S. K. De, VFM, p. 28.

and there was a reservoir built up over the centuries for the acceptance of this tradition. But in the fifteenth century the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa movement coloured with tantricism. In the opinion of A. C. Roy, the vāmācāra (left-hand) school of Tantricism, by centring religious life upon the heroic path, emphasized the role of wine and ritual sexual intercourse in religious festivals, an appealing facet of tantric religion which manifested itself among low-caste Vaiṣṇavites as sexual immorality and drunkenness.<sup>11</sup> The accounts of licentious behaviour recounted in the medieval Bengali texts are probably exaggerated (and we should remember that tantricism was an esoteric discipline), but it is clear that the Vaiṣṇava heritage was in need of revivification and purification.

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<sup>11</sup>A. C. Roy, pp. 461-62; Cf. B. Walker: "the left hand path or vāmāchāra is characterized by antinomianism, a disregard for the conventional dharma, and a belief that one is beyond good and evil." (Hindu World, p. 51).

## B. Life and Personality of Caitanya

Caitanya was born of Jagannāth Miśra and his wife Śacī in 1486, in Navadvīp (Nadia) the youngest of eight children. Six sisters had died in infancy with only one brother surviving. His parents gave him a strict Vaiṣṇavite upbringing and Brahman education. It is difficult to make any factual statements about his childhood since the account is filled with stories of Kṛṣṇa's childhood interpolated into Caitanya's youth. Numerous striking phenomena are observed at his birth;<sup>12</sup> it is said that the beautiful baby looked just like Kṛṣṇa (except for his colour); even as an infant he made all utter the name Hari.<sup>13</sup> The text wishes to demonstrate that Caitanya performed the mighty feats of Kṛṣṇa in concealment because he adopted the sentiment of boyhood. "Outwardly these Līlas appear like human character, but they are intrinsically of a divine character."<sup>14</sup>

After an exceptional career as a young student, Caitanya, well versed in Sanskrit grammar, founded his own school and began to hone his skills in academic debate. At about this time his brother Viśvarūpa renounced the world and became a sannyāsin (wandering ascetic).<sup>15</sup> His mother never

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<sup>12</sup>Adi XIII.161ff.

<sup>13</sup>Adi XIII.150.

<sup>14</sup>Adi XIV.167.

<sup>15</sup>Adi XIV.176.

saw him again. This event, occurring at approximately the same time as her husband's death, shattered his mother and reinforced the tie to her one remaining child. Caitanya's first wife Lakṣmī died shortly afterward<sup>16</sup> and Caitanya married Viṣṇupriyā. At the age of 21 he went to Gayā to perform a rite in honour of his dead father. At Gayā Caitanya appears to have experienced a profound religious transformation under the tutelage of Īśwara Purī, an ascetic.<sup>17</sup> The Caitanya Caritāmṛta is silent about what occurred there but it is probable that the atmosphere of the sacred shrines at Gayā and the long tradition of mystical saints within India as a whole precipitated a spiritual upheaval in the young pedant that radically changed the direction of his life. Upon his return to Navadvīp he began to experience the deep trances that marked the rest of his life.

Caitanya cast off his concern for knowledge and began to lead kīrtan processions through the city, attracting numerous followers. His thoughts dwelling only on Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya became a man apart from his fellow Brahmans, an object of mocking contempt. Appalled by the irreverence of these sinners he resolved to become a wandering ascetic, to

<sup>16</sup> Adi XVI.179 states that she died of the serpent of separation from (Caitanya) who was on a pilgrimage. T.V.K. Sastry, (Men of God, p. 10) concludes that she died of snakebite.

<sup>17</sup> Adi XVII.188.



elicit the respect that enables the saint to save others.

I shall take up the holy order of sannyasa.  
And they (the mocking Brahmins) will lie  
prostrate before me seeing me a sannyasin.  
And through this humility their transgressions  
will be expiated and in their purified hearts  
Bhakti will be evolved. And thus the heretics  
will be saved.<sup>18</sup>

Abandoning the life of a householder Caitanya accepted as his guru Keśava Bhāratī, and left his place of birth.

The Vaiṣṇavite community at Navadvīp was shattered by Caitanya's decision to leave them. Before Caitanya departed for Vṛndāvana his mother extracted a promise from him that he would take up residence at Puri so that she would not lose sight of her second son as well as the first.<sup>19</sup> After establishing a base at Puri, Caitanya wandered for the next two years across southern India visiting various shrines, both Vaiṣṇavite and others, converting the masses to his peculiar brand of bhakti.<sup>20</sup> Upon his return to Puri he met the first of many annual pilgrimages from Navadvīp and settled into a life of daily worship at the temple. After three years Caitanya decided to realize his fondest dreams -- a pilgrimage to Vṛndāvana. (This had been his original goal but his disciples had tricked him into visiting

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<sup>18</sup>Adi XVII.208.

<sup>19</sup>Madh III.54-57.

<sup>20</sup>Madh VII.138.

another place.<sup>21</sup>) As he neared the sight of Kṛṣṇa's sports, in Mathurā and Vṛndāvana, his emotion increased in intensity. When visiting the sacred shines he was completely beside himself, lost in a frenzy of devotion. Often he had to be saved from danger by his disciples.<sup>22</sup> Forced to leave at last Caitanya entered Benares and converted a number of Brahmans to Vaiṣṇavism<sup>23</sup> and then returned to Puri.<sup>24</sup>

The last 18 years of Caitanya's life were spent at Puri in worship with his chosen disciples. The emotional tenor of his life seems to have increased so that he was almost constantly in an ecstatic state. Near the end of his life he was not responsible for his own actions, being completely imbued with the love of Kṛṣṇa. His death at the age of 48 (1534) is shrouded in mystery -- there is no mention of it in the authoritative biographies. It is possible that he died from a foot infection sustained during a violent kīrtan dance,<sup>25</sup> or perhaps he cast himself into the sea,

<sup>21</sup>Madh III.43.

<sup>22</sup>Madh XVII.394-400.

<sup>23</sup>Madh XXV.634.

<sup>24</sup>Madh XXV.659.

<sup>25</sup>The view supported by Kennedy p. 51, D. C. Sen (Caitanya and His Age, pp. 262-63), and Dimock, Hidden Moon, p. 31, citing the Chaitanya Maṅgala of Jayānanda, the least authoritative of the biographies.

thinking it to be the Yamuna, and drowned.<sup>26</sup>

A brief outline of Caitanya's life in no way indicates the depth of his emotional fervor and the reason for his veneration by the Bengal Vaisnava movement. The actions of Caitanya and the excessiveness of his emotional ardour created great confusion even among his followers. The Caitanya Caritāmṛta constantly refers to the inscrutability of Caitanya and the incomprehensibility of his līlās.<sup>27</sup>

In order to understand his life and personality more deeply we shall examine his attitudes toward (i) sect organization, (ii) scholastics, (iii) sannyāsa, (iv) proselytism, and (v) examine the depth of his emotional commitment.

#### (i) Sect Organization

Caitanya never concerned himself with the details of the establishment of a new sect. Administrative considerations were far from his mind, being irrelevant to the central aspects of his devotional life. Caitanya appears to reject any attempt to systematize his spiritual insights.

The Lord Krishna of Vraja cannot be gained through mere conformity to established

<sup>26</sup> The traditional view supported by R. C. Dutt, Cultural Heritage of Bengal, p. 53. This incident is recounted in Antya XVIII.305-9: it is said that Caitanya is taken from the sea after a full day by a fisherman but is unharmed because he is in a trance.

<sup>27</sup> Adi XVI.182ff.

religious rules and injunctions. Such worship is too shallow for sublime realization.<sup>28</sup>

Nityānanda, Caitanya's greatest disciple, probably exerted a greater influence in the development of a sectarian organization. Nityānanda was familiar with different types of monastic cults and travelled all over India establishing the Caitanya cult. Caitanya did however inspire the establishment of a scholarly community at Vr̥ndāvana to codify and elaborate the theological implications of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa bhakti. Gopāla Bhaṭṭa a disciple of Sanātana Goswamin, is responsible for the exhaustively detailed tomes that outline in minute detail the rituals and devotional practices of the cult. Caitanya's influence in the area of sect organization was indirect; he left the details of codification for others.

#### (11) Scholastics

The Caitanya Caritāmṛta makes elaborate claims about the scholastic ability and interest of Caitanya. As a young student he is said to have delivered a devastating critique of a poem of his future guru Īśwara Purī.<sup>29</sup> In

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<sup>28</sup>Madh VIII.172. "The chief characteristic of the typical Indian mystics was that they did not submit to the control of any church (i.e., sectarian organization) or scriptures (sastras)" Kshitimohan Sen, Medieval Mystics of India, p. xvii.

<sup>29</sup>Adi XVI.182ff.

another passage Caitanya is seen providing no less than 61 interpretations of a single sloka (verse) of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, amazing Sanātana.<sup>30</sup> In a confrontation on his return from Vrndāvana with soldiers of the king Caitanya reveals as astounding knowledge of Muslim texts, causing the soldiers to accept the truth of Vaisnavite teachings.<sup>31</sup>

Caitanya reaches the greatest height of scholarship in refuting the arguments of the Vedantists. He argues that Śankara interprets only the secondary meaning of the Vedic texts and that the primary meaning is explicitly stated in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.<sup>32</sup> The objection of Vaisnava theology to Śankara centres upon his assertion that the Absolute is without attributes. In the debate with the Vedantist Sārvabhauma,<sup>33</sup> Caitanya argues that God has non-phenomenal qualities; when the Veda speaks of nirguna (attributeless) Brahman, the text is merely stating that the Absolute lacks phenomenal qualities. For how can God be said to possess the

<sup>30</sup>Madh XXIV.586ff. The Bhāgavata verse interpreted is: "Such are the attributes of Lord Hari-Krishna that those Atmarama Munis who have been absolved from all worldly bonds entertain spontaneous Bhakti to Him." (trans. by Chaudhuri).

<sup>31</sup>Madh XVIII.442-4

<sup>32</sup>Madh VI.110f; XXV.636.

<sup>33</sup>Madh VIII. Essentially the same arguments are used in the debate with Prakaśānanda, a monist at Benares (Madh XXV.634ff.)

six emblems of divinity if he is without attribute?<sup>34</sup> God possesses threefold powers: (1) Viṣṇu-śakti (his inner nature as being, consciousness and bliss); (2) kṣetrajña-śakti (his power in the souls of men), and (3) avidyā-śakti (his power as creator of the world).<sup>35</sup> Against the Vedantists the Vaiṣṇavites argue that God has attributes, that the world and the souls of men are part of the divine power and hence are real, and that God and the individual soul (jīva) are not identical. The purpose of Caitanya's demonstration is to destroy the pride of the Brahmans in their knowledge of scripture. Kṛṣṇa can only be approached in humility -- the vanity of the Vedantists is an obstacle to their participation in devotional practices. After Caitanya's withering attack the Brahmans become devotees.<sup>36</sup>

In his debate with Rāmānanda Rāya Caitanya directs the discussion to the conclusion that the devotion of Rādhā to Kṛṣṇa is the highest religion. Rāmānanda begins the

<sup>34</sup>Madh VI.111. The six emblems or aiśvāryas are: complete power, perfect strength, perfect frame, possession of all wealth, omniscience and perfect renunciation. (A. K. Majumdar, p. 170n.)

<sup>35</sup>Dasgupta, History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. IV, pp. 39-93; Sinha, History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, pp. 719-23.

<sup>36</sup>Madh VI.120, in reference to the conversion of Sārvabhauma. In the BP the Brahmans are attacked because of their pride in learning that inhibits devotion to Kṛṣṇa (XI.5.153).

discussion with the statement that devotion to God results from the performance of religious duties. Upon Caitanya's command to inquire deeper Rāmananda is led from this assertion to the statement that the highest devotion is Rādhā's love for Kṛṣṇa. Upon Rāmananda's realization of the supreme truth, Caitanya reveals himself as the supreme Lord. The Caitanya Caritāmṛta insists that though Rāmananda presents the theological system he is merely repeating the teachings of Caitanya.<sup>37</sup>

It is doubtful that Caitanya was as familiar with the sacred texts as the biographers would have us believe. Some of the texts that Caitanya quotes in the Caitanya Caritāmṛta were not even written until after his death.<sup>38</sup> The account of Caitanya's critique of Īśvara Purī's poem is probably grounded in fact, in that Caitanya was a skilled grammarian, easily capable of the linguistic cavils described

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<sup>37</sup>Madh VIII.157. The intermediary steps of the argument of Caitanya with Rāmananda are: perform one's dharma and renounce the fruits to Kṛṣṇa; renounce even dharma to Kṛṣṇa; devotion through knowledge of Kṛṣṇa; pure faith without knowledge; loving faith (santa bhāva); loving obedience (dāsyā bhāva); loving friendship (sakhya bhāva); parental attachment (vatsalya bhāva), and conjugal affection (mādhurya bhāva). The highest conjugal affection is that of a parakīya woman (a woman married to another man) as exemplified by the gopīs, particularly Rādhā (Madh VIII.142-182).

<sup>38</sup>Dimock, "Gauracandrika in Bengali Vaisnava Lyrics", American Oriental Society Journal, Vol. 78, p. 154.

in the Caitanya Caritāmṛta.<sup>39</sup> The suggestion that he gave 61 interpretations of a single verse of the Bhāgavata is less likely to be accurate. Caitanya claims in a later section of the text to be uninterested in either hearing or making comments about the Bhāgavata.<sup>40</sup> He even states that he knows less about theology than his disciple Svarūpa. He tells Raghunātha that he has

appointed Svarupa as thy advisor, oh Raghunatha.  
Learn all from him. And he will tell you all  
about the Lord Krishna and his worship. For  
he knows much more than I do.<sup>41</sup>

It is likely that after his experience at Gayā Caitanya lost interest in scholastic pursuits, confining himself to a very few texts, principally the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the poetry of Jayadeva, Vidyāpati and Candīdās. The pursuit of knowledge was for Caitanya a distraction from devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

Though Caitanya was not himself concerned with theological systems he recognized the needs of others, and inspired certain disciples to develop the theological implications of his devotional life. In the debate with

<sup>39</sup>S. K. De, VFM, p. 73.

<sup>40</sup>Antya VII.156-7. The Bhāgavata says that a sannyāsin "should not get by heart many books. He should not make the exposition of the scriptures as his profession". (VII.13.69)

<sup>41</sup>Antya VI.137.



Rāmānanda Caitanya did not expound the theology of the cult but inspired Rāmānanda to do so. Similarly Caitanya sent Rūpa and Sanātana to Vṛndāvana to work out the details of Vaiṣṇava bhakti in a systematic way.<sup>42</sup> Vṛndāvana had always been a sacred shrine but it was Caitanya who revived and elevated the site to its present significance as a centre of learning and goal of pilgrimage.<sup>43</sup> Caitanya sent the Goswamins to Vṛndavana to revive the stories of Kṛṣṇa's sport with the gopīs which had been forgotten in the sixteenth century.<sup>44</sup> To assist these scholars Caitanya had copies made of two important Vaiṣṇava texts that he discovered in his tour of South India, the Kṛṣṇakarnāmṛta and the Brahma Saṁhitā.<sup>45</sup>

The Caitanya Caritāmṛta asserts that Caitanya gave Sanātana a clear outline of the topics to be elaborated upon in the theology of the Goswamins.<sup>46</sup> Only the Caitanya

<sup>42</sup>Madh I.4.

<sup>43</sup>D. C. Sen, Chaitanya and His Companions, p. 302 notes that Rāmānuja visited the site in the 11th century and that Madhavendra Puri, Advaitācharyā, Nityānanda had visited Vṛndāvana before Caitanya.

<sup>44</sup>"The mystic truths of the jublations of the Lord Krishna of the holy Vrindavana were forgotten in course of time. Lord Chaitanya decided to revive them in all their glory, so he granted Sri Rupa and Sri Sanatana his mercy. He inspired them with power to revive these sacred places and ordered them to perform the task." Madh XXIV. 632; Cf. Madh XIX:447, 460.

<sup>45</sup>S. C. Mukherji, p. 168.

<sup>46</sup>Madh XXIV.628.

Caritāmṛta recounts this incident; Sanātana refers to the inspiration he received from Caitanya but makes no reference to any direct instruction.<sup>47</sup> In our view the content of Sanātana's teachings and the details of Caitanya's theological position are supplied by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, in accordance with that author's place as a disciple of the Goswamins. A. K. Majumdar, however defends the historicity of Kṛṣṇadāsa's biography. Majumdar's defense is based essentially upon two arguments: first he contrasts the scholarly background of Caitanya with the paucity of theological training in Rūpa and Sanātana, and second he stands on the personal integrity of Kṛṣṇadāsa.<sup>48</sup> Majumdar argues that Caitanya, after he had completed his education in grammar, studied philosophy privately<sup>49</sup> and sharpened his academic skills in classroom debates as a teacher. But after the Gayā incident Caitanya's school virtually dissolved as the teacher was concerned only with devotion to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>50</sup> Caitanya's time and interest dwelt no longer on academic things. In contrast Rūpa and Sanātana had a firm background (as Brahmans they received an education

<sup>47</sup>S. K. De, IHQ, p. 308n.

<sup>48</sup>A. K. Majumdar, pp. 216-19.

<sup>49</sup>Adi X.133 refers to Vijaya-dāsa, a copyist who provided Caitanya with several books (A. K. Majumdar, p. 122).

<sup>50</sup>Adi XVII.207.

in the scriptures); they had great intellectual ability (as their rise in the Muslim court would indicate), and they had time and inclination to work out a theology. In regard to Majumdar's second argument it should be noted that there are countless examples in the Indian tradition of one author ascribing his own thoughts to an earlier and more illustrious thinker. To label this practice as "impiety" or "fabrication" as Majumdar does suggests that the Western ideal of objective history is of paramount importance within the Indian religious tradition. In the light of the evidence cited earlier which points toward Caitanya's later indifference to academics, we conclude that much of the theological detail in the Caitanya Caritāmṛta is supplied by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja.

Caitanya himself wrote only eight verses (known collectively as the śikṣaṣṭaka).<sup>51</sup> These are devotional texts extolling the religious value of the sankīrtana<sup>52</sup> and the merit of reciting the names of God at all times.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>These verses were written in Sanskrit. There are other verses in the CC and other texts that are ambiguously presented as possibly belonging to Caitanya. The eight recounted in the CC and in Jīva's writings are the only non-controversial verses. (S. K. De, IHQ, pp. 313-17.)

<sup>52</sup>Antya XX.337-38, quoted below, footnote #109.

<sup>53</sup>Antya XX.338, "Thou hast, Oh Lord, yield (sic) up all thy powers through thy holy names, and the names are many, each having a virtue and significance of its own. They are Krishna, Govinda, Makunda and the like. And thou hast, Oh Lord, fixed no definite times or rules for muttering the holy names. So one may mutter them whenever he likes. Oh thou merciful One, thou hast been so merciful unto me. Yet <sup>as</sup> ill-luck would have it, I have not been able to imbibe an attachment for the holy name."

as in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Like the Bhāgavata they exalt the virtue of humility<sup>54</sup> and direct the devotee to unselfish devotion to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>55</sup> Above all they reveal the acute longing of Caitanya for a glimpse of the god.

Oh, how deep are my sorrows for separation from my Lord: moments seem to me as ages. Tears flow from my eyes in showers. And the whole world seems to me as something stale and unprofitable.<sup>56</sup>

In the last of these verses Caitanya speaks as Rādhā, pledging total surrender to Kṛṣṇa with a complete lack of concern for her own pleasure.

I am serving maid of my Lord Krishna. He may embrace me, do anything he likes with me; and he may make me all his own. He may give pain to my soul by his absence or reckless as he is, he may do anything he likes; yet, he is my Lord, yea, the very Lord of my life but not of others or none other is so.<sup>57</sup>

In these verses the depth of Caitanya's emotional attachment to Kṛṣṇa is revealed; there is no need to read abstruse theological meanings into them.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Antya XX.339, quoted below, footnote #102.

<sup>55</sup>Antya XX.340, quoted below, footnote #129.

<sup>56</sup>Antya XX.341; Cf. Antya XX.341, also by Caitanya: "Tell me Oh Lord, tell me when will it be so? When will my heart be filled with joy as I shall utter Thy holy name? When will my voice be choked with Thy name and when will tears flow from my eyes, yea, will flood my cheeks as they flow from the deep love for Thee?"

<sup>57</sup>Antya XX.342.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. S. K. De, IQ, p. 313.

(iii) Sannyasa

During his sannyāsin period Caitanya lives the life of an ascetic, abstaining from wine and meat,<sup>59</sup> renouncing bodily attachment to the world. He rejects the jar of rich scented oil offered to him by Jagādananda.<sup>60</sup> It is said that he "would not see a king even in his dreams",<sup>61</sup> spurning the attempts of a wealthy ruler to come to his presence, for "the very name king pollutes".<sup>62</sup>

Caitanya's open hostility toward women is central to his sannyāsa. When touched on the foot, accidentally, by a woman, he is in agony and casts himself into the Ganges.<sup>63</sup> In a later incident Caitanya is overpowered with emotion when he hears a voice singing the Gita Govinda of Jayadeva. He runs toward the singer, oblivious to all. A disciple warns him that it is a female voice he hears. Caitanya abruptly stops, saying "if I had touched that woman, I would most assuredly have died".<sup>64</sup> He rigorously avoids all contact with people of bad company, specifically worldly persons and women. A visit with a woman is "Poisonous",<sup>65</sup>

<sup>59</sup>J. C. Oman, The Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India, p. 129.

<sup>60</sup>Antya XII.226.

<sup>61</sup>Madh X.221.

<sup>62</sup>Madh XII.268-9.

<sup>63</sup>Adi XVII.206-7.

<sup>64</sup>Antya XIII.239.

<sup>65</sup>Madh XI.241.

for it binds a man to the world more strongly than anything else.<sup>66</sup> When Caitanya learns that one of his followers, Haridāsa<sup>67</sup> accepted rice cooked by an old and saintly female devotee he banishes Haridāsa from his sight.

He has talked with a woman; so I can no longer bear the sight of his face. The passions in men, Oh Svarupa, are invincible. And they always hanker after the object of their desire. Even a statue of a woman, made though it may be of wood, might move the heart of a sage. Men should not sit even with his mother, his sister or his daughter in secret, for passions in men are all-powerful. And not to speak of others, they even overpower the wisest of men.<sup>68</sup>

When Haridāsa commits suicide in remorse Caitanya accepts the act as fit penance for speaking with a woman.<sup>69</sup>

Yet Caitanya has a curious relationship with his own mother. A sannyāsin renounces his home and family because these bind him to the world; Caitanya never renounced his mother. He settled at Puri rather than Vṛndāvana so that he would be close to her.<sup>70</sup> He promises his mother that "I shall never be indifferent to you. And I shall do whatever

<sup>66</sup>Madh XXIII.553; Cf. BP III.31.145: "the company of women and of those that associate with them is more injurious than even association with the impious people".

<sup>67</sup>The second or Chota Haridāsa.

<sup>68</sup>Antya II.42-3.

<sup>69</sup>Antya II.47.

<sup>70</sup>Madh III.57.

you say and I shall always be at your command."<sup>71</sup> He sends Dāmodara to her with messages of affection.<sup>72</sup> The Caitanya Caritāmṛta states that

even in the midst of his ecstasy, the Lord did not forget his mother... So the Lord sent (Jagādanada) to his mother at Nadia to console her in her grief for separation from him.<sup>73</sup>

This filial piety is remarkable in a sannyāsin, being in contradiction to his vows and his statements on contacts with women in general.

A. K. Majumdar cites historical precedents in an attempt to demonstrate that there is nothing unusual in Caitanya's veneration of his mother. Majumdar notes that Śaṅkara performed his mother's śrāddha ceremony (funeral oblations) after taking the sannyāsa vows and that the saint Jñāneśvara had four children after becoming a monk.

"Caitanya was merely following Śaṅkara, though in a slightly different manner."<sup>74</sup> But Caitanya's life more closely parallels that of the ideal devotee of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Though there is in that text<sup>75</sup> an account<sup>of</sup> an ascetic who married the daughter of a king, the Bhāgavata, as we have

<sup>71</sup>Madh III.54.

<sup>72</sup>Antya III.51.

<sup>73</sup>Antya XIX.321.

<sup>74</sup>A. K. Majumdar, p. 103.

<sup>75</sup>BP III.22.103-111.

seen, condemns association with women.<sup>76</sup> Caitanya follows the purāṇic ideal of female renunciation, (he never saw his wife after his sannyāsa vows), but ignores the Bhāgavata's warnings about the dangers of family attachments.<sup>77</sup> We should also note that Caitanya ignores the puranic command that a sannyāsin should stay in a village only for one night, and that a sannyāsin who resides in one place is "the vilest among the people".<sup>78</sup>

The key to Caitanya's apparent ambivalence toward sannyāsa obligations is revealed in an incident involving the sage Rāmananda. This devotee washed the bodies of two women in secret, touching even their most private parts, and instructed them in the art of dance. Caitanya heartily approves of his actions for he attends the maidens without the slightest sexual arousal, having only the attitude of a female servant towards the girls. Rāmananda undergoes no danger of pollution because his deeds are in the service of the devotional life. Caitanya thus instructs his followers:

whoever puts faith in the love-games of the  
Lord at the holy Rasa with the maidens of  
Vraja, in that same person the sexual desire  
which is but a disease of the heart dies

<sup>76</sup>BP III.14.64-7; III.31.145; VII.12.65; XI.17.200.

<sup>77</sup>BP I.13.52; III.30.138; V.14.215; VII.12.66

<sup>78</sup>VII.13.68; VII.15.82.



all at once.<sup>79</sup>

Asceticism serves a purpose but is subordinate to the ultimate goal. The great ascetic Nityānanda married late in his life because the need for asceticism had passed.

Caitanya's habit of periodically eating huge meals<sup>80</sup> indicates that the devotee must not attempt to attain his goal through ascetic disciplines--only Kṛṣṇa can draw the devotee toward supreme bliss. Caitanya ~~eats~~ only what is put in front of him,<sup>81</sup> but he eats no less, rejecting the temptation to subordinate devotion to asceticism.<sup>82</sup>

Bound up with Caitanya's sannyāsa vows is world-renunciation. It has often been claimed that Caitanya was a social reformer -- actually he was relatively indifferent to social questions. The Caitanya Caritāmṛta goes to some lengths to establish the existence of a spirit of brotherly equality and denial of caste barriers within the Caitanya movement. Caitanya attempts to convert Buddhists to the sect, despite the fact that they were considered untouchables.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup>Antya V.103, quoting BP X.33.39.

<sup>80</sup>Madh III.48-9, XV.361; Antya II.38.

<sup>81</sup>Madh IV.73; Antya VIII.166-76.

<sup>82</sup>At one point Caitanya dissuades Kurma, a Brahman from taking the sannyāsa vows, for "the waves of wordly affairs will never distract thee". (Madh VII.139).

<sup>83</sup>Madh IX.188-90.

He accepts as disciples Rūpa and Sanātana, high-born Brahmans who had lost status through association with the Muslim court,<sup>84</sup> and accepts even a Muslim, Haridāsa, as a devotee. Caitanya embraces Sūdras and insists that even those of the lowest castes are fit to be gurus for the highest.<sup>85</sup> He approves of Advaita serving food cooked by Brahmans to Haridāsa<sup>86</sup> and even does the same himself.<sup>87</sup> For Caitanya "there is no distinction of caste nor of creed in the matter of serving Lord Krishna".<sup>88</sup> There are countless statements in the Caitanya Caritāmṛta attributed to Caitanya affirming the spiritual equality of all men.

The unique effect of the love for Krishna is that it causes the superior, the equal and the inferior as well, to be imbued with the spirit of service to Lord Krishna.<sup>89</sup>

(The devotees) did not consider the fitness of the persons nor did they consider the propriety of the place, but they commenced distributing love to all whomsoever and whenever they met.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>84</sup>Dimock, Hidden Moon, pp. 72-74.

<sup>85</sup>Madh VIII.145,158.

<sup>86</sup>Adi X.131.

<sup>87</sup>Antya XI.209.

<sup>88</sup>Antya IV.82.

<sup>89</sup>Adi VI.89.

<sup>90</sup>Adi VII.99.

Our Lord Chaitanya conferred such prema on all without any discrimination.<sup>91</sup>

There is no distinction great or small among the companions of Lord Chaitanya.<sup>92</sup>

There are however a few indications within the biography to indicate a greater social conservatism. Caitanya is said to have held respect for superiors as very important.<sup>93</sup> He bows down before his teachers in reverence and devotion in order "to maintain the dignity of social status through religion in his earthly sports".<sup>94</sup> Separate quarters are given to Haridāsa, the Muslim.<sup>95</sup> It has even been suggested that Caitanya's concealment of his divinity from non-devotees was an attempt to minimize social disruption by confining public expression of emotion.<sup>96</sup> In his travels Caitanya generally stayed at the home of a Brahman and only ate food cooked with Brahman hands.<sup>97</sup> It is doubtful

<sup>91</sup>Adi VII.115.

<sup>92</sup>Adi X.128.

<sup>93</sup>Antya IV.88; S.K. De's (VFM, p. 108) translations of this verse underlines more sharply Caitanya's concern for propriety.

<sup>94</sup>Adi VI.88.

<sup>95</sup>Madh XI.258f.

<sup>96</sup>D. C. Sen, Caitanya and His Companions, p. 221.

<sup>97</sup>A. K. Majumdar, p. 206, interpreting Madh VIII.143.

therefore that Caitanya was as concerned with destroying caste barriers as the Caitanya Caritāmṛta would have us believe. The bhakti movement had far-reaching social consequences but it is likely that this was the accomplishment of Caitanya's later followers, particularly Nityānanda, who admitted even the lowest castes into the movement without restrictions, accepting even male and female Buddhist mendicants.<sup>98</sup> The many statements in regard to caste attributed to Caitanya are likely the result of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's veneration of Nityānanda.<sup>99</sup>

Caitanya's attitude toward social questions was probably one of indifference<sup>100</sup> except when social rules conflicted with the requirements of the devotional life. (He

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<sup>98</sup>Kennedy, pp. 57ff.

<sup>99</sup>D. C. Sen thinks that Caitanya was the guiding light for the social reforms of Nityānanda. "Nityānanda was appointed by him to stay in Bengal with the sole charge of social reformation. Caitanya had found the caste system eating into the vials of our social fabric, and he and his followers were determined to root out this evil from the land." (Chaitanya and His Age, pp. 298-99). Sen refers to certain secret conversations that the two held in private. Yet no orthodox biographer refers to this incident. M. T. Kennedy, (pp. 59-61), in disagreeing with Sen notes that in the last six years of Caitanya's life he never met with Nityānanda and hence concludes that the friendship of the two had cooled.

<sup>100</sup>The apolitical attitude of Caitanya is clearly revealed in his refusal to intervene in the dispute of Gopinath, the brother of Caitannya's disciple Rāmānanda (Antya IX.177-190).

may have opposed caste laws at various times because these could be a source of pride for some.) Caitanya lived a very simple life, advocating few rules and regulations. He felt that it was possible to ignore Vedic injunctions and caste rules.<sup>101</sup> But he prescribed relatively few specific ethical commands for his followers: "the promulgation of Yugadharma is not His task".<sup>102</sup> Noting that śruti and smṛti and the saints often disagree he suggests merely that one follow the actions of those who are "saintly and pure".<sup>103</sup> The devotee should be aloof from worldly concerns; one should not revolt against the social structure nor conform to it. Devotion to Kṛṣṇa may involve the infringement of certain social norms but this was relatively unimportant to Caitanya.

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<sup>101</sup>Madh XI.252; as in the BP IV.31.158-9; IV.29.148.

<sup>102</sup>Adi IV.41. The BP is more concerned with ethical instructions. But both the BP and CC extoll the virtue of humility. The devotee "should be as humble as a servant is supposed to be" (BP VII.12.65). "That man alone is fit to sing the holy name, who is humbler than grass, who is forgiving like the tree, who has very little regard for his own respect and who has respect for all" (Antya XX.339. Caitanya's own verse). In another verse of his own Caitanya declares his own worthlessness before Kṛṣṇa and his utter dependence on Him. "Oh Thou Son of Nanda, I am a slave unto Thee. I am immersed into the deep ocean of worldly desires. Be merciful unto me and make me as the holy dust of Thy lotus-like feet" (Antya XX.340).

<sup>103</sup>Madh XVII.415; cf. Madh XX.547, 548, 551; Madh XXIV. 593, 610. Here we may recall the numerous passages in the Bhāgavata that recommend the religious value of pious company (see above p. 15).

(iv) Proselytism

Elaborate claims are made for Caitanya's proselytizing activity. There are numerous examples of Caitanya converting Brahmans, Śaivites and Muslims to Vaiṣṇavite bhakti. It is claimed that Caitanya converted the whole of southern India to Kṛṣṇa-worship.<sup>104</sup> On the way to Vṛndāvana Caitanya's effusive personality causes even the animals of the forest to cry out Hari.<sup>105</sup> Caitanya's evangelical technique consisted simply of uttering the name of Kṛṣṇa in the presence of a potential devotee; prema would immediately flow through him and cause him to take up the chant.<sup>106</sup> An embrace from Caitanya is sufficient to overwhelm the receiver with joy -- a joy that can be communicated to others, as the first generation of converts creates the second generation.<sup>107</sup> In addition many casual observers were

<sup>104</sup>Madh VII.138.

<sup>105</sup>Madh XVII.394.

<sup>106</sup>Adi III.32.

<sup>107</sup>Madh XII.269ff recounts an incident in which Caitanya embraces the son of a king who then embraces his father. The king thereby receives grace from Caitanya without disrupting Caitanya's sannyāsa vows. In the BP anything touched by Kṛṣṇa becomes holy, e.g., the hill Govardhana is blessed because it came in contact with Kṛṣṇa's foot (X.15.68). Similarly the flute of Kṛṣṇa is holy because it is touched by his lips.

probably caught up in the emotional binge of the kīrtan dance. Previous to this the kīrtan was a small festival held by a few devotees;<sup>108</sup> Caitanya introduced the processional dance (nagarakīrtan) that attracted huge mobs,<sup>109</sup> though the figures in the Caitanya Caritāmṛta are probably exaggerated.

But the emotional contagion produced by the presence of Caitanya quickly dissipated in the majority of cases in the south of India. "There is nothing in the after history of the sect (of Caitanya) to indicate any following whatever in the south."<sup>110</sup> Caitanya's trip to Benares had little effect on the Śavite and Advaitist saints there. Although a number of Hindus became Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa devotees the

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<sup>108</sup>The BP refers to "festivities accompanied by singing and music" (XI.11.180) and to "chanting songs" (XI.5.155).

<sup>109</sup>S. C. Mukherji, p. 166. Caitanya himself acknowledged the power of the kīrtan dance to arouse prema in the hearts of men. "May Kṛṣṇa Sankīrtana prosper; may it prosper in full. For it cleanses dust from the glass of our minds; it quenches the great wood-fire of the wordly life; it gives soft light to all good attributes to blossom forth like the water-lily; it swells to its utmost height the ocean of joy within us. It is as the very life of the lovely Goddess of wisdom. It satisfies all our senses. And it gives us a taste of the finest sweetness of love at every moment." (Antya XX.337-8, Caitanya's own verse).

<sup>110</sup>M. T. Kennedy, p. 41; Cf. S. K. De, VFM p. 92. Caitanya did have a lasting success with a Vaiṣṇavite revival in the Kanarese country. (Kennedy, p. 42.)

sectarian beliefs that divided the cults remained.<sup>111</sup> But Caitanya did make a number of extremely significant converts, notably the great Vedanta scholars Sārvabhauma and Advaitācharyā, the Brahman officials of the Muslim court, Rūpa and Sanātana, and the ascetic Nityānanda, the greatest of Caitanya's followers.

(v) Ecstasy

Whatever success Caitanya enjoyed as an proselytizer he owed to the tremendous sincerity of his life; his emotional committment to Kṛṣṇa serves as a sterling example of the ideals of the cult he and his followers propagated. The Caitanya Caritāmṛta states that Caitanya was always in one of three states: 1) his natural condition as a saintly man acting no differently than other men, 2) his semi-conscious condition, or 3) the ecstasy of fervent longing for Kṛṣṇa.<sup>112</sup> As he grew older Caitanya was more and more frequently in the third condition, completely beyond the realm of everyday life. The acceleration of his emotional fervor began with the mysterious experience at Gayā and continued until his death some twenty years later. Throughout his life he was considered a madman by both his followers and his critics, a God-intoxicated fanatic who

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<sup>111</sup>S. C. Mukherji, p. 166.

<sup>112</sup>Antya XVIII.439.



was subject to mysterious attacks that shook his whole body, causing him to fall unconscious to the ground, foaming at the mouth.<sup>113</sup> There are numerous lengthy descriptions of his trances in the Caitanya Caritāmṛta; the following are typical of the extremity of his ardour.

The Lord was lying down...unconscious...no breath was found in his nostrils. And each hand and foot of the Lord seemed as three cubits long. Only his body seemed a little warm...And the joints of his hands, of his legs, of his neck and waist were all divided; and each bone in them seemed about half a cubit off from the other...only the skin rested on them...the Lord had spittle and foam in his mouth. And his eyes were turned upwards.<sup>114</sup>

All of a sudden he became still as a statue... At every pore of his skin the flesh seemed swelled. And each pore seemed as high as a boil...And from each pore perspiration flowed down. And the streams of it were as streams of blood. And the Lord could not utter anything. For the sound was stopped at his throat. And only a gargling voice came out of it. Both his eyes were filled with tears; and tears flowed down in torrents...The limbs of the Lord became as white as a conch-shell. And they shook like waves of the sea. They shook in intense emotion. And thus shaking, the Lord fell down on the ground.<sup>115</sup>

These emotional orgies generally ended in total exhaustion and sleep, or were interrupted by Caitanya's followers out of fear for his safety.

<sup>113</sup>Madh XXVIII.439.

<sup>114</sup>Antya XIV.253.

<sup>115</sup>Antya XIV.255-6.

Caitanya's ecstatic states were precipitated by hearing or seeing something that reminded him of Kṛṣṇa. He appears to have lived in a fantasy world in which the external environment could quickly become the forest of Vṛndāvana. As his mind became more attached to Kṛṣṇa the trances became more frequent until virtually everything, even the blue neck of a peacock, reminded him of Kṛṣṇa and sent him into a swoon.<sup>116</sup>

He mistook every forest for the holy Vṛndāvana and every hill he mistook for the hill Govardhana. Every river on his way he took for the holy Yamuna and on the bank of each one of them he sang and danced and wept in deep ecstasy of love.<sup>117</sup>

Often Caitanya's feeling was so strong that he would dive into the sea, convinced he was entering the waters of the Yamuna.<sup>118</sup>

During his ecstatic experiences Caitanya was completely beside himself, unaccountable for his own actions.

<sup>116</sup> Madh XXVII.419. This experience is normal for the devotee. "The lovers of the Lord sees (sic) His image everywhere -- in all objects, inanimate and animate. And though they look at them, yet they always see the image of their dearly beloved one everywhere in objects both animate and inanimate." Madh VIII.178.

<sup>117</sup> Madh XVII.400.

<sup>118</sup> Antya XVIII.305.

He would starve if his disciples did not put food in front of him. On numerous occasions he was saved from drowning by the swift action of his followers.<sup>119</sup> Svarūpa prevented him from injuring his finger when he began to write continually Kṛṣṇa's name in the sand.<sup>120</sup> On another occasion Śamkara prevented Caitanya from self-mutilation as he rubbed his face against a wall.<sup>121</sup> The grief of separation from Kṛṣṇa often threatened to destroy Caitanya completely: by reading to him stories of the Vṛndāvana-līlā Svarūpa and Rāmānanda saved his life.<sup>122</sup>

The emotional fits of Caitanya oscillate between frenzied pain and ecstatic joy; both emotions are inherently part of the devotional life. "In the love for the Lord both poison and nectar are wonderfully commingled...Love for the Lord is indeed as full of pain as of pleasure."<sup>123</sup> The pain that Caitanya experiences is the agony of separation from the Lord. This pain strikes whenever Caitanya emerges from a trance or when he is unable to see Kṛṣṇa. The suffering is

<sup>119</sup>Madh XXVII.411-2, XIX.455; Antya XVIII.305.

<sup>120</sup>Madh XIII.303.

<sup>121</sup>Antya XIX.330.

<sup>122</sup>Antya VI.116.

<sup>123</sup>Madh II.32; Cf. Antya I.18.

very real, causing him to tear his hair and mutilate his body. But the pain of separation is forgotten in the moment of bliss; one glance at Kṛṣṇa obviates the memory of the painful yearning for him. The pain of longing heightens the joy of being in Kṛṣṇa's presence. In the Caitanya Caritāmṛta the ecstatic trances that Caitanya experiences are often precipitated by a period of intense pain at separation. The frenzy of separation and the lamentations of Kṛṣṇa's absence encourage the sudden arrival of the dark god and the violent attacks that accompany the vision of Him.<sup>124</sup> "Only the ardent desire of the devotees moves Lord Krishna to appear on earth."<sup>125</sup>

As in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa the pleasure of the devotional life is a result of seeing Kṛṣṇa. In the Vṛndāvana-līlā it is the sight of the beauty of Kṛṣṇa's body that drives the gopīs mad with desire.<sup>126</sup> Just to catch a glimpse of the holy Līlā of the Lord Krishna<sup>127</sup> sends Caitanya into an ecstatic fit. With one's heart devoted to Him one sees the beauty of Kṛṣṇa everywhere. When Caitanya

<sup>124</sup>For examples of the pain of separation leading to pleasure see Adi IV.47; Madh XIII.303; Antya VI.116, XIV.257, XIX.329. The rapid poscillation of pleasure and pain characterizes the love of the gopīs with BP.

<sup>125</sup>Adi III.37.

<sup>126</sup>Madh XXI.530-2; Antya XV.269. Cf. BP X.29.122 X.31.131.

<sup>127</sup>Antya XIV.251.

plunges into the ocean it is because he is convinced that Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs are playing there. But the text does not say that the leap into the water is an attempt to participate in the sport directly; in the water Caitanya is suspended in a trance, overwhelmed by the sight before his eyes.<sup>128</sup>

The supreme joy of bhakti is not related to the quest for release (mokṣa). It is said that devotion ends desire in man for the four ends of life, including mokṣa.<sup>129</sup> Salvation comes more or less automatically to the devotee as he utters the holy name; but mokṣa is a very petty thing, not the main concern of the devotee.<sup>130</sup> The highest pleasure is to see the beauty of Kṛṣṇa in his dalliance with the gopīs; for Vaiṣṇavism "the highest mystic experience (is) the detailed imaginative participation, in a vicarious mood, in the erotic sports of the deity".<sup>131</sup> The emotional turmoil that Caitanya experiences is derived from the rapid oscillation of moods in his personality, the sudden shifts from acute pain to ecstatic joy.

<sup>128</sup>Antya XVIII.313-9.

<sup>129</sup>Madh XXIV.590. Similar sentiments are expressed in one of Caitanya's own verses. "I pray not unto you, Oh God, for wealth, either for issue or for poetic power or for a beautiful wife. I desire none of these. I only pray, Oh Lord, so that I may, in every birth, have faith, yea, pure faith in Thee." (Antya XX.340).

<sup>130</sup>Madh XXIII.540; Antya III.69. Note our discussion of the four ends of life in the BP (above pp. 11ff). The CC refers to nirguṇa bhakti (BP III.29.135) in a number of passages, e.g., Adi IV.57; Madh VI.124; Madh IX.211.

<sup>131</sup>S. K. De, VFM, p. 542.

### CHAPTER III

#### CAITANYA WORSHIP

##### A. A Comparison of Texts

In our analysis of the life and personality of Caitanya we made reference in certain instances to the similarity of the attitudes of Caitanya to the attitudes of the ideal devotee of the Bhāgavata. In this chapter we will attempt to make explicit the relation of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and attempt to delineate the central implications of this relation to our understanding of Caitanya and Bengal Vaiṣṇavism.

Although Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja quotes a vast number of texts in his biography, the most frequently quoted source is the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The Caitanya Caritāmṛta assumes that the Bhāgavata contains the essence of the Vedas and smṛti, that it gives the complete truth about the Absolute and the way to attain Him.<sup>1</sup> The biography accepts the puranic account of the Kṛṣṇa-līlā as the centre of the devotional life.

Both texts deny the ultimate importance of the four ends of life. In regard to (1) artha, it is clear that

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<sup>1</sup>Madh XXV.627, 654-5; BP I.1.1.2; I.3.12.

poverty and diffidence are more virtuous than wealth and the arrogance of power. (2) Kāma is subordinated to the non-sensual bliss of prema. Both texts warn the devotee against entanglements with women that bind man to his senses and distract from devotion to Kṛṣṇa. For both the purāṇa and Kṛṣṇadāsa, the performance of the (3) dharma appropriate to one's caste and historical situation is not in itself salvific. The Bhāgavata in many passages attacks the traditional caste system, declaring that devotion to Kṛṣṇa is a better criterion of spiritual excellence than the family of one's birth or the performance of religious rites. The equality of all men before the divine is a motif common to both the purāṇa and the Caitanya Caritāmṛta, though Caitanya himself appears to be less concerned with reforming the social system than the Bhāgavata. The purāṇa is perhaps more concerned with outlining ethical demands than is Caitanya; however both texts strongly advocate the virtue of humility, (hence the attack of both upon certain members of the Brahman caste), and recommend the religious value of pious company in attaining the grace of Kṛṣṇa. (4) Liberation from the cycle of rebirths, is a petty matter for the ideal devotee of the two texts. Mokṣa is not the central goal of religious life.

The four ends of life come incidentally in devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Both texts insist that there must be no selfish

craving for the four ends; the ideal is nirguna bhakti. The religious ideal is the self-less surrender to Kṛṣṇa of the gopīs; the complete renunciation of all other values in veneration of Him. As in the Bhāgavata, the Caitanya Caritāmṛta exalts the beauty of Kṛṣṇa as the mesmerizing force which draws the devotee out of the everyday world into the realm of Kṛṣṇa's erotic sport. The supreme bliss is to gaze upon the inimitable beauty of the dark god.

The key to the bhakti promulgated by these two texts is the depth of emotional fervour demanded of the devotee. The ecstatic fits of Caitanya are similar to the ardent trances experienced by the gopīs in the Bhāgavata. In both there is a rapid oscillation of pleasure and pain, a continuous shift from the agony of separation to the visionary bliss of Kṛṣṇa's beauty. The emotional depth is in both texts precipitated by the recitation of the names of God and is sustained by singing and dancing in community.

Despite the close similarity of the teachings of the two texts, there are a number of notable differences. Though the Caitanya Caritāmṛta quotes the Bhāgavata with great frequency, the quotes are highly selective; the vast majority of passages refer only to the purāṇic exposition of the sport of Kṛṣṇa with the gopīs in the tenth book. Other passages are introduced only by way of elaboration upon the līlā motif, or in defense against other sects.



Huge sections of the purāṇic material receive no mention at all. It is the contention of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta that

in Vraja Lord Krishna is fullest with all his attributes, in Mathura fuller and in Dwaraka and Parabyom full.<sup>2</sup>

The Caitanya Caritāmṛta focuses its attention upon those sections of the Bhāgavata that reveal Kṛṣṇa in his true nature and virtually ignores the rest.

In the Bhāgavata Kṛṣṇa is probably an avatāra of Viṣṇu, the latter being the supreme deity. Although the Caitanya Caritāmṛta does acknowledge this at one point,<sup>3</sup> the later text attempts to demonstrate that Kṛṣṇa, not Viṣṇu is the supreme Lord. "Just as several lamps are lit from one lamp which is taken to be the root or primary lamp, so also all incarnations are grounded in Lord Krishna."<sup>4</sup> There are countless examples in which the Caitanya Caritāmṛta slightly distorts a passage of the purāṇa, adding for example, that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme god, or substituting Kṛṣṇa's name in place of a purāṇic reference to Viṣṇu, Vāsudeva or Nārāyaṇa.<sup>5</sup> The emphasis upon the Kṛṣṇa-līlā

<sup>2</sup>Madh XX.515; Cf. Adi III.27, Madh XIV.331.

<sup>3</sup>Madh XX.511; BP X.10.42

<sup>4</sup>Adi II. 23

<sup>5</sup>In quoting BP X.1.2, "it behoveth thee to relate in detail to my attentive self, the above and all other deeds of

portion of the Bhāgavata leads to the elevation of Kṛṣṇa beyond Viṣṇu.

According to the Caitanya Caritāmṛta Rādhā occupies a prominent place in the erotic sport. But the Bhāgavata makes no mention of Rādhā, though there is an account in the purāṇa of a special gopī who catches Kṛṣṇa's eye.<sup>6</sup> The Caitanya Caritāmṛta identifies her as Rādhā<sup>7</sup> and sees in her experiences the essence of the devotional life. All the other gopīs are but emanations of Rādhā<sup>8</sup> and it is she who binds the ring dance of Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs together.<sup>9</sup> In this text she is in some ways equal to Kṛṣṇa in that only she, not Kṛṣṇa, can experience the divine bliss;<sup>10</sup> hence

Sri Krishna", the CC adds to this line "Lord Krishna who is the highest abode and support of the universe. His body is the resort of all His devotees who find shelter in him." (Adi II.24) Compare BP I.9.40 (in reference to Vāsudeva) quoted in Adi II.16 (but substituting the name of Kṛṣṇa); BP I.1.1 (an invocation to Viṣṇu), quoted in Madh VIII.177 (as an invocation to Kṛṣṇa); BP IV.14.324 (in reference to Nārāyaṇa) quoted in Madh XIX.464 (substituting the name Kṛṣṇa).

<sup>6</sup>X.30.127ff.

<sup>7</sup>Madh I.8 relates a conversation of Kṛṣṇa with the gopīs (BP X.82.85; X.83.86) but introduces the Bhāgavata texts with a conversation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa not found in the purāṇa.

<sup>8</sup>Adi IV.45; Madh VIII.170.

<sup>9</sup>Madh VIII.156.

<sup>10</sup>Adi I.2; Adi VI.95. Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā are actually

she instructs Kṛṣṇa.<sup>11</sup> In the Caitanya Caritāmṛta the role of the other gopīs is minimal; it is the selfless love of Rādhā that is the paradigm of the devotional life.<sup>12</sup>

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa the erotic attachment of the gopīs to Kṛṣṇa is the height of religious fervour. Though the purāṇa is not explicit on this point it is clear that the līlā dance involves direct physical contact of the girls with their lover. In the caritāmṛta sexual love, particularly that of a parakīya woman, is the supreme religious expression,<sup>13</sup> but this eroticism is vicarious, in that there is no actual physical contact of Kṛṣṇa with the devotees. The erotic bliss in the caritāmṛta is to gaze upon the beauty of Kṛṣṇa in sport with the gopīs.

At least three major factors should be noted in accounting for the differences between the two texts. The most important factor is the role of the poetic tradition mediating between the purāṇa and the Caitanya Caritāmṛta. Kṛṣṇadāsa interpreted the Bhāgavata in the light of the

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one but separate to enjoy divine sport (Adi I.2). Rādhā is the essence of Kṛṣṇa's bliss in the theology of the cult. (S. K. De, VFM, p. 281).

<sup>11</sup>Kṛṣṇa says "The Prema of Rādhika is my Guru and I am Her dancing pupil". (Adi IV.49).

<sup>12</sup>Antya XX.34ff.

<sup>13</sup>Madh VIII.153; Madh XIX.476; Madh XXIII.576.

reflections and elaborations of his poetic precursors. The devotional poets centred upon the Kṛṣṇa legend, ignoring the other sections of the Bhāgavata and thus elevating Kṛṣṇa to a position of supreme divinity. The poets introduced Rādhā into their account and often wrote from her perspective, thereby bringing Rādhā to the foreground of the Kṛṣṇa legend. In their poetry the poets took on the role of one of the participants (rāgānugā bhakti), in the scene which they described, thus shifting the focus of emotional outlet from direct to vicarious eroticism.

More difficult to ascertain is the second factor accounting for the differences in the texts, namely the changes brought about by the personal life of Caitanya. The problem in assessing this factor is that the source for knowledge of Caitanya's personality is the very text we seek to exegete, hence a certain circularity in our argument. Nonetheless we can see that in some areas the actions and beliefs of Caitanya have led Kṛṣṇadāsa to ignore certain purāṇic injunctions. As an example we may note Caitanya's emotional attachment to his mother that led Kṛṣṇadāsa to place less emphasis upon the purāṇic command to renounce family ties.

The third factor accounting for the difference in the texts is the theological system worked out by the Goswamins at Vṛndāvana. Though a discussion of the role of

the Goswamins in the cult is beyond the scope of this thesis we should note that Kṛṣṇadāsa wrote under their direction and felt obligated to incorporate their insights into his biography, even if deviation from the purāṇa resulted. Thus for example the emphasis upon Rādhā as the śakti (consort and spiritual energy) of Kṛṣṇa.

### B. Caitanya as Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā

Despite the differences between the two texts outlined above, it is clear that the Caitanya Caritāmṛta is in fundamental agreement with the tenth book of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The central contention of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta, in explicitly stating its agreement with the purāṇa, is that Caitanya is indeed Kṛṣṇa. It should be noted that Caitanya in his own verses makes no references to himself as Kṛṣṇa and that the early biographies of his life do not ascribe divinity to him.<sup>14</sup> However the worship of Caitanya developed at Navadvīp at a relatively early date when images of Caitanya were created<sup>15</sup> and quickly spread to Puri where there was a processional kīrtan chanting the name of Caitanya in lieu of the name of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>16</sup> By the time of the composition of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta the worship of Caitanya had become rampant. In numerous instances this text draws parallels between incidents in the lives of Caitanya and Kṛṣṇa.

Caitanya's birth, like that of Kṛṣṇa, is marked

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<sup>14</sup>D. C. Sen, Chaitanya and His Age, p. 65. Sen also claims that Caitanya actually denied that he was a deity (op. cit., p. 303) but presents no evidence to substantiate his claim, nor does he specify which early biographies.

<sup>15</sup>S. K. De, VFM, p. 422.

<sup>16</sup>S. K. De, VFM, p. 439.

by auspicious astrological signs and favorable portends.<sup>17</sup> All men are filled with joy.<sup>18</sup> The new born child is strikingly beautiful, bearing the 32 marks of greatness upon his body.<sup>19</sup> In fact the young boy looks "exactly like Sri Krishna of Gokula, the colour only being different".<sup>20</sup> When the child walks the parents are startled to hear the jingling of bracelets, like the sound of those worn by the young Kṛṣṇa, even though the youthful Viśvambhara's ankles are bare.<sup>21</sup> In the account of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta childhood pranks are described. These playful gestures, such as stealing food and quarreling with other boys, at first arouse the ire of his mother, but she, no more than the mother of Kṛṣṇa, can chastize her child.<sup>22</sup> When Kṛṣṇadāsa writes that Caitanya eats earth with his rice, (since both are the same to him),<sup>23</sup> and when that author recounts the

<sup>17</sup>Adi XIII.161; BP X.3.13.

<sup>18</sup>Adi XIII.163; BP X.5.23.

<sup>19</sup>Adi XIII.168.

<sup>20</sup>Adi XIII.165

<sup>21</sup>Adi XIV.173; BP X.3.13. Viśvambhara is the name that was given to Caitanya at birth.

<sup>22</sup>Adi XIII.170f; BP X.7.35f. Note that in these texts both youths exhibit indifference to ritual cleanliness--Caitanya sits upon discarded pots; Kṛṣṇa pollutes clean houses.

<sup>23</sup>Adi XIII.169.

horoscope predicting that Caitanya will devour the earth,<sup>24</sup> the reader is reminded of the purāṇic incident in which Kṛṣṇa's mother sees all of creation in the mouth of her son, immediately after he has eaten soil.<sup>25</sup> In the Caitanya Caritāmṛta various celestial beings reveal to Caitanya's parents his true identity,<sup>26</sup> thereby explaining why he is able to cause all to utter the name Hari.<sup>27</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa tells his readers that he could recite even more miraculous incidents in the life of the young Caitanya even though Caitanya concealed his divine nature in the sentiment of boyhood.<sup>28</sup>

In the later sections of the biography the comparison of Caitanya and Kṛṣṇa continues. Caitanya's touch conveys spiritual bliss and renders the object touched holy, just as the foot of Kṛṣṇa makes the hill Govardhana sacred.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Adi XIII.166.

<sup>25</sup>BP X.7.36. D. C. Sen refers to a legend that Damodara the infant Kṛṣṇa, could put the whole universe in his stomach (Chaitanya and His Age, p. 66).

<sup>26</sup>Adi XV.175.

<sup>27</sup>Adi XIII.156..

<sup>28</sup>Adi XIII.169. Kṛṣṇa too conceals his divinity in his childhood frolics (BP X.15.69). Kṛṣṇadāsa refers the reader to the fuller account contained in the Caitanya Bhāgavata of Vṛndāvana-dāsa.

<sup>29</sup>Madh XII.269ff; BP X.21.95.



When Caitanya dances with a large group of devotees, each of the seven batches of singers in the group thinks that Caitanya is with it alone, just as each of the gopīs thinks that Kṛṣṇa sports with her alone.<sup>30</sup> When Caitanya leaves Puri and Navadvīp his followers are as grief-stricken as the consorts of Kṛṣṇa who watch him leave for Mathurā.<sup>31</sup> The līlās of both Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya are inscrutable,<sup>32</sup> beyond the understanding of men: they both assume the shape of a tortoise for no apparent reason.<sup>33</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa strengthens the comparison between Caitanya and Kṛṣṇa by referring to the greatest followers of Caitanya as relatives of Kṛṣṇa; Nityānanda for example is called Balarāma, (the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa).<sup>34</sup> The point of the comparison is to make clear the central contention of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta: Caitanya is the supreme lord.<sup>35</sup>

But Caitanya is also the incarnation of Rādhā, imitating her actions, sharing her despair and joy. Hearing

<sup>30</sup>Madh XIII.290; BP X.33.135. Also in the BP X.18.84, Kṛṣṇa is said to dance and sing with Balarāma.

<sup>31</sup>Madh XXV.659; BP X.35.142ff.

<sup>32</sup>Adi XVII.211-2; Antya XII.224; the gopīs call Kṛṣṇa the "deceiver" in BP X.31.131.

<sup>33</sup>Antya XVII.293-8; BP VIII.5.101.

<sup>34</sup>Adi IV.78.

<sup>35</sup>Adi II.14.

a story of Rādhā, Caitanya begins to dance and becomes the consort of Kṛṣṇa. "The Lord's frenzy grew. It grew to such a height that all of a sudden the Lord was seen there as Radha."<sup>36</sup> Caitanya sings the songs of Rādhā and calls himself 'she'.<sup>37</sup> "The Lord was always in the frenzy of holy love as Radha was. And out of this deep frenzy he always considered himself as Radha."<sup>38</sup> As Rādhā Caitanya laments his fate, crying out in the pain of separation from Kṛṣṇa. "I am indeed poor, for I have nothing of that wealth -- the love for Lord Krishna. So this body and all my senses are for nothing."<sup>39</sup> When visiting Vṛndāvana Caitanya imitates Rādhā by wandering through the forest in disorientation, pleading with the trees and shrubs to reveal the hiding place of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>40</sup> On the anniversary of Kṛṣṇa's birthday (the Nanda festival) Caitanya always assumes the guise of a gopī and acts out the sports of Vraja.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Madh XIV.333.

<sup>37</sup>Antya XVII.295.

<sup>38</sup>Antya XIV.246.

<sup>39</sup>Adi II.31.

<sup>40</sup>Antya XV.265.

<sup>41</sup>Madh XV.339.

Kṛṣṇa incarnates himself as Rādhā to enjoy his own bliss.<sup>42</sup> Rādhā experiences the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa's nature in a way that he cannot; to enjoy the sentiments of Rādhā he incarnates himself as Caitanya.<sup>43</sup> The cause of his incarnation is the overflowing of his blissful nature and his desire to experience in totality the joys of his sport. The effect of Kṛṣṇa's action for the devotee is the revelation of prema-bhakti (loving devotion). In the Satya Age Kṛṣṇa appeared as white and men became pure by meditating on him. In the Treta Age he appeared as red, establishing for men yagña (sacrifice) and dharma (duty). In the Dvāpara Age he appeared as blue and established worship. Now in the Kali Age Kṛṣṇa returns in yellow form, giving men prema-bhakti. The fruits which were formerly attained by meditation, yagña or worship are now accomplished by chanting Kṛṣṇa's name in group worship: kṛṣṇa-nāma-sankīrtana.<sup>44</sup> Kṛṣṇa manifests himself in different forms in different ages,

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<sup>42</sup> Kṛṣṇa is unable to enjoy the bliss he gives to the gopīs. Madh VIII.154; BP X.32.134.

<sup>43</sup> Adi I.2; Adi IV.46; Madh VIII.161.

<sup>44</sup> Madh XX.509-10; CF. Adi III.30, Madh VI.106, Madh XI.250. The BP XI.5.155 affirms that Kṛṣṇa is blue in the Dvāpara Age but in BP X.8.34 it is said that Kṛṣṇa is blue in the Kali Age. This apparent contradiction in the purāṇic text caused remarkable theological gymnastics. (S. K. De, VFM, p. 441; however De incorrectly cites chapter XI of the Bhāgavata as the second reference.)

but he is sporting eternally in the eternal Vṛndāvana of the highest heaven. The manifestation of Kṛṣṇa in Vraja is the fullest revelation of Kṛṣṇa's nature.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See footnote #2 above.

### C. Conclusion

In Caitanya the devotee sees Kṛṣṇa entering into the sentiments of Rādhā, thereby demonstrating the proper attitude the devotee should adopt to approach the divine. As the greatest exemplar of the devotional life he was the subject of a number of poems even during his lifetime. Usually these poems introduce the kīrtan dance. These songs employ the standard poetic images, relating some aspect or attitude of gauracandra (the golden-moon) to the Vṛndāvana-līlā. Some poems portray Caitanya in the bhāva (sentiment) of Kṛṣṇa, others in the bhāva of Rādhā; there are even a few poems in which Caitanya appears as both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Caitanya, as Kṛṣṇa, is revered as the supreme Lord, whose mercy overflows, spreading love across the earth without distinction. A glance at his beauteous form is the supreme desire of the devotee.

That beauty, that unique love is unforgettable.  
No difference in caste or wealth  
Does he care to notice  
He offers love, that is rare to get  
Even from Lakṣmī, Śiva and the other gods.<sup>46</sup>

In emphasizing the beauty of Caitanya some poets wrote as a young woman madly in love with the golden frame of Caitanya.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Dimock, Bengali Vaiṣṇava Lyrics, (hereafter BVL), #3, author not given.

<sup>47</sup>S. Sen, History of Brajabuli Literature, p. 399.

When Caitanya leaves Navadvīp his followers are cast into despair, just as the gopīs suffer the pangs of separation when Kṛṣṇa goes off to Mathurā. In poems of this type the people left behind are sometimes referred to in the feminine form, underlining the analogy between Caitanya and Kṛṣṇa.<sup>48</sup>

My Lord took Samnyāsa in that evil month of Magh;  
the hope of my life went then.  
Day by day by body wastes away; my eyes fill with  
tears;  
how much longer can I live without my Gaura?<sup>49</sup>

But the suffering of the devotees is immediately forgotten upon first sight of Caitanya when he returns.

After so long a time, fate has been gracious to me  
And has brought to my treasure-house, my Gaura.  
After so long a time, my sorrow has ended;  
My eyes have justified their being, for they have  
seen his moon-like face.<sup>50</sup>

The poems written in honour of Caitanya in his bhāva of Rādhā emphasize the longing of his soul for the vision of Kṛṣṇa. In these songs, as in the others, the poet writes as a friend of Caitanya, sharing his suffering in the pain of separation. The agonizing of Caitanya epitomizes the ardour that the devotee must feel to receive the supreme bliss of

<sup>48</sup>Dimock, Gauracandrika, p. 166, note to poem #24; Cf. S. Sen, Brajabuli Lit., p. 58.

<sup>49</sup>Dimock, BVL, #4, Rāmananda Rāya, a contemporary of Caitanya. (Gaura means light-coloured.)

<sup>50</sup>Dimock, BVL, #5 Vāsudeva Ghoṣ, a contemporary of Caitanya who lived at Navadvīp.

of Kṛṣṇa's presence.

The limbs of Gaura are held up by the limbs of  
his companions,  
he cannot walk--from time to time he slips to the  
ground, fainting,  
his body is so weak that he cannot hold it up.  
Fallen to the earth, he gazes up at the face of  
his companions,  
sobbing "O lord of my life, where are you?"  
In the fever of his viraha, he has no peace.<sup>51</sup>

In the poetry of the post-Caitanya era we see clear confirmation of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta contention that Caitanya is Kṛṣṇa. But there were others in the time of Caitanya who claimed to be incarnations of divinity. Mādhava of East Bengal claimed to be Gopāla Kṛṣṇa and sported with lower class women in orgiastic rituals. Vāsudeva of the Rādhā Desa claimed to be Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu Dāsa claimed to be Rāma.<sup>52</sup> Though they had a moderate following none founded a lasting sect.

What distinguishes Caitanya from these claimants to divine status is Caitanya's introduction of the kīrtan as a religious ritual on a mass scale. The kīrtan consists of a chorus reciting the poems and dramas of the Kṛṣṇa-līlā. The music of drums and cymbals exacerbates the emotional flood precipitated by the uttering of Kṛṣṇa's name. In an earlier period the kīrtan was a small gathering of a few

<sup>51</sup>Dimock, "Gauracandrika," p. 164, #12, Jñānadasa, of the early 16th century.

<sup>52</sup>D. C. Sen, Chaitanya and His Companions, pp. 305-8.

devotees in private. But Caitanya conducted the ceremony in public, often in procession. As the dancing and singing grows in intensity, non participants, both Vaisnavas and non-devotees are drawn into the excited circle, joining into the singing and dancing frenzy. The ceremony can go on for hours, until all collapse exhausted.<sup>53</sup> The simplicity of the kīrtan ritual enables even the most casual observer to participate; through the infectious emotionalism of the ritual many who would pass by are drawn into the Vaiṣṇava cult. In addition to the proselytizing value of the kīrtan, there is the element of emotional protection. Emotional excess of the type recommended by the Bhāgavata is intensely dangerous for it entails the risk of psychic disintegration. By introducing the kīrtan on mass scale Caitanya provided a mechanism which could both arouse emotional fervor and structure that emotion in the safety of religious ritual.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>M. T. Kennedy, p. 204, notes the legend of a kīrtan that has been going continuously for 400 years; he personally knows of a 10 year kīrtan.

<sup>54</sup>The recognition of the Vaiṣṇava cult of Caitanya's emphasis upon the religious value of kīrtan is suggested in this poem by Paramananda-dasa, a contemporary of Caitanya. "He, the merciful one, has introduced the Name of God, and thus has saved the sinful men. He delights in dancing in the ecstasy of sankīrtana; he always horripilates in ecstatic joy, and he ever does good to the devout people. He dances and sings, to the joy of the world, and the people are charmed with it." (S. Sen, Brajabuli Literature, p. 63).



In our introduction we stated that our purpose was to determine why Caitanya is so venerated by the Bengal Vaiṣṇava cult. The answer is epitomized in a brief phrase from the Caitanya Caritāmṛta: "And he taught all the stages of love by tasting it himself".<sup>55</sup> Caitanya acted as the concrete realization of the love romance of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa; his life is a paradigm for Kṛṣṇa devotees. In Caitanya's life the devotee sees how religious ardour should be expressed; he learns the proper devotional posture and above all he learns the proper response to Kṛṣṇa's call.

We have analyzed the relation of Caitanya to the myth of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and have suggested the reason for his veneration by the Bengal Vaiṣṇava cult; now we must indicate the relevance of this small work to the wider study of religion. There is no neat general theory of religion that can "explain" Caitanya and <sup>place</sup> him into a universal category. But Weber's sociological analysis of religion, particularly his concept of charisma, can be the starting point for further research, connecting the data of this work to the study of religion in general.

This brief discussion of Weberian theory in no way attempts to delineate in detail his theoretical structure of

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<sup>55</sup>Adi XIII.158.

religion or to defend his theses. The many criticisms<sup>56</sup> that have been levelled against his studies on religion will not intrude upon our discussion, though we mention in passing that Weber's work has received more lasting attention than that of his critics.

Weber applied the term charisma

to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional

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<sup>56</sup>A brief summary of the theoretical attacks upon Weber's sociology of religion may be useful at this point. a) Weber saw society as a balance of opposing forces; his emphasis upon irreconcilable conflict obscures a view of society as a functioning whole, implying an inherent instability in social action (Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait, p. 263). b) Weber overemphasized the monolithic character of religious traditions, failing to see that every tradition has tensions within it and that a tradition encompasses widely divergent points of view (Bendix, p. 267). c) Weber concentrated upon the influence of religious ideas upon non-religious activities but failed to confront the issue of how deeply the common man is influenced by metaphysical nuances. Involved in this criticism is the suggestion that Weber overemphasized the degree to which religious controls become internalized. (E. Fischhoff, "The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism -- The History of a Controversy", Social Research, XI, 1944, pp. 73ff.) d) Weber failed to give sufficient weight to the influence of other factors in his analysis of the interaction of religion and society (Bendix, p. 280). e) Weber too readily ascribed simple motives to religious groups; he overemphasized the need for salvation as the predominating factor in religious life, dissociating this need from other human motives (Parsons, introduction to Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. lxvi). f) Weber placed too much emphasis upon radical breaks in the history of religions, thereby ignoring to a large extent the patterns of evolutionary development (Parsons, ibid.). g) Weber's theory of types gives an exaggerated picture of religious life that has no foundation in empirical reality. This last point we will discuss further.

powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.<sup>57</sup>

The charismatic leader arouses in others a tremendous devotion to his person and the recognition that the leader's contact with another sphere of life is of great importance to the individual follower. These followers form a spiritual community which lacks both structural hierarchy and established administration; a spirit of brotherhood and equality pervades the group. The followers are bound together by their allegiance to the self-declared leader; he gives them an over-arching pattern of meaning toward which they feel they must orient their lives. This new order that the charismatic gives can be the basis for a revolutionary transformation of the traditional order. But the authority of the charismatic is transitory; charisma persists only until

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<sup>57</sup>Weber, Theory of Social and Economic Organization, pp. 358-59. This definition limits itself to persons; but Weber also concerned himself with the process by which personal charisma becomes routinized and incorporated into institutional forms (*ibid.*, pp. 363-73, 386-92). The concept of impersonal charisma pervades Weber's thought, often appearing without reference to persons or to religion (e.g. in his discussion of political charisma). For a fuller discussion see C. J. Friedrich, "Political Leadership and the Problems of Charismatic Power", Journal of Politics, XXIII, 1961, pp. 3-25, and E. Shils, "Charisma, Order and Status", American Sociological Review, XXX, Apr. 65, pp. 109-13.

it is destroyed by failure or routinized by success.<sup>58</sup>

The basis of the charismatic's power is his ability to order the lives of his followers; the emotional bond between the leader and his group is for Weber grounded in the followers' acceptance of the leader's authority in order to receive personal salvation. The quality that distinguishes this group from other social groups is the absence of economic motives on the part of all, the subordination of all other values to the demands of the group leader.<sup>59</sup>

Weber never claimed that the pure charismatic type described above could be discovered in actual experience. He developed the concept of ideal types as a tool for sociological analysis; the types in themselves have no value and do not directly correspond to the empirical world. Weber referred to his types as "utopias" because they were highly artificial. Weber took

Certain traits, meaningful in their essential features, from the empirical reality of our culture and brought them together into a unified ideal-construct...the most varied criteria can be applied to the selection of

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<sup>58</sup> Weber, Theory, pp. 359-63.

<sup>59</sup> "The holders of charisma, the masters as well as his disciples and followers, must stand outside the ties of this world, outside of routine occupations, as well as outside the routine obligations of family life." (Weber, On Charisma and Institution Building, p. 21).

the traits which are to enter into the construction of an ideal-typical view.<sup>60</sup>

The charismatic type is a one-sided concept, the exaggeration of certain characteristics for the purpose of analysis. Thus when applying the type to Caitanya we find that certain elements of his personality do not fit the category, though on the whole Caitanya is a striking example of charisma.

Caitanya's violently emotional fits<sup>61</sup> characterized him as one set apart from other men. This apartness was based upon a relationship with the sacred order, a relationship that caused others to follow him with unquestioning devotion.<sup>62</sup> The followers who gathered around him recognized

<sup>60</sup>Weber, The Methodology of the Social Sciences, p. 91. Weber warned against three common abuses of his types: 1) the belief that theoretical types contain 'true' content, 2) the belief that these types are forces that operate beneath the surface of history and hence the belief that history must ultimately produce these types in pure form, 3) the attempt to force society into particular categories, ignoring the inadequacy of any typology to account for all aspects of social life (Weber, ibid., p. 94). Criticism of Weber's theory of types has been twofold. Some have argued that by picking and choosing from the tradition the elements that suit an ideal-typical analysis, the nature of society is severely distorted. Others have argued that by emphasizing the artificial character of types Weber obscured the elements of reality contained within them, (that is, the type is an exaggeration of certain traits but these traits are taken from the empirical world), thereby destroying the value of types for sociological analysis.

<sup>61</sup>See above pp. 65-69.

<sup>62</sup>See above p. 63.

no status distinctions among themselves, (in the early community),<sup>63</sup> and both he and his followers professed to be uninterested in nondevotional matters, subordinating all secular values to the worship of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>64</sup> Caitanya, as the charismatic leader, the concrete exemplification of the myth of the Bhāgavata, established an order of meaning around which his followers could structure their lives.

The charismatic hero thus performs the function of agent for the identification of the alter-ego with a transcendent state. By giving 'presence' to the historical ideal, he transforms it from a remote abstraction into an immediate psychological reality.<sup>65</sup>

We can see then that Caitanya's life can be used as a concrete model of the charismatic leader.

At the same time there are certain elements in Caitanya's life that do not correspond to the Weberian concept of charisma. The most notable exception is the absence of revolutionary goals in his teachings. According to Weber the charismatic plays the central role in radically altering history; his example is a call to break away from traditional values and authorities in order to found a new

<sup>63</sup>See above pp. 59-60.

<sup>64</sup>See above p. 70.

<sup>65</sup>J. T. Marcus, "Transcendence and Charisma", Western Political Quarterly, Vol. XIV, p. 237.

society.<sup>66</sup> Charisma is for Weber intrinsically related to antitraditionalism. But Caitanya was concerned with re-viving, not destroying the religious tradition, and, as we have seen,<sup>67</sup> was uninterested in restructuring the social situation. We must also note that Weber thought that the followers of the charismatic leader were devoted to him because of their need for personal salvation.<sup>68</sup> Yet Caitanya exhorted his followers to renounce all desire for the four ends of life; Caitanya called men not to salvation but to joy.<sup>69</sup>

In conclusion we cite two basic reasons for intro-

<sup>66</sup> The charismatic offers a "subjective or internal reorientation... (which) may then result in a radical alteration of the central system of attitudes and directions of action with a completely new orientation of all attitudes toward the different problems and structures of the 'world'" (Weber, Theory, p. 363). Cf. T. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, p. 663.

<sup>67</sup> Above, p. 61.

<sup>68</sup> Weber, Sociology of Religion, p. 55.

<sup>69</sup> See above p. 70. In passing we may note an additional difference between Caitanya and Weber's charismatic. Weber applied the term "prophetic" to those charismatics operative within a specifically religious context. For Weber one of the distinctive features of prophetic movements is the support these movements receive from women and the attempt of the prophet to institute equality of the sexes (Weber, Sociology of Religion, p. 104). But Caitanya refused even to allow women into his presence (see above, pp. 54-55) and the Vaiṣṇava cult that followed Caitanya inevitably attracted more men than women (cf. Milton Singer's account of modern bhājana cults in Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes).

ducing Weber's concept of charisma into this study of Caitanya. 1) Caitanya provides an empirical example of the phenomenon that Weber described in theory. In the past Weber's concept of charismatic authority has tended to be ignored by sociologists because of the vagueness of his definition. By citing concrete examples of religious charismatics we hope to arouse greater interest in this area of Weber's thought. It should be noted that Weber's concept of charisma is very similar to Otto's definition of the Holy and Durkheim's concept of the Sacred.<sup>70</sup> That a particular charismatic could be recognized as the divine is a definite possibility in Weber's theory. Weber himself suggested that

If he (the charismatic) is to continue to live on in some manner among large numbers of the laity, he must himself become the object of a cult, which means he must become the incarnation of a god.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>O'Dea, Sociology of Religion, pp. 21-22; Parsons introduction to Weber, Sociology of Religion, p. xxxiv; E. Shils, "Charisma, Order and Status", American Sociological Review, p. 205.

<sup>71</sup>Weber, Sociology of Religion, pp. 78-79. Weber thought that the charismatic could be recognized more easily as the divine in a polytheistic tradition, e.g., India. This is not the place for a discussion of Weber's analysis of the Indian tradition but we suggest that many of the deficiencies of his analysis are a result of deficiencies in the monographs of India that he used. This may account for example of his belief that the Caitanya cult was of "sexual-orgiastic character" (Weber, Religion of India, p. 308).



The fact that Caitanya is recognized as Kṛṣṇa indicates a fundamental soundness in Weber's basic theory and suggests that further utilization of Weber's charismatic type could be useful in the study of religion.

2) The failure of Caitanya to fit perfectly into the Weberian charismatic type directs our attention to certain elements in Caitanya's life that may provide the basis for further research. This research can take the form of refining the Weberian model of religion; for example, the observation that Caitanya is both charismatic and concerned with the past may suggest that religious traditions are more heterogeneous than Weber imagined.<sup>72</sup> Further research may take another form and concern itself with understanding more deeply Caitanya and his movement, in the light of his deviation from the charismatic ideal. Specifically we may ask why Caitanya eschewed socially revolutionary goals. (The answer to this question may lie in an analysis of the Vaiṣṇavite view that creation as the sport of Kṛṣṇa has no inherent purposes.) We may also inquire why Caitanya expressed disinterest in the Mokṣa question; what elements in the Vaiṣṇava heritage and social conditions of Bengal would lead one to elevate bliss beyond traditional Indian religious valuations?

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<sup>72</sup>A possibility raised above, note 56, part b.

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