

The Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana:
Biographies of the Fourteen Principle
Ācāryas of Vṛndāvana,
who propagated the teachings of Śrī Caitanya

O.B.L. Kapoor
(Ādikeśava Dāsa)

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Preface

Vṛndāvana is the highest paradise on earth. It is here that Kṛṣṇa revelled in pastimes of love with the cowherds and the milk-maids of Vraja. It is here that His flute maddened the animate and inanimate with the bliss of divine love. It is here that Brahmā, the creator of the universe, wished to roll in dust. It is here that Uddhava, the foremost amongst the jñānīs, wished to be born, if only as a creeper or a blade of grass. It is here, in its caves and groves and under its trees, that many a saint meditated and realized the supreme end of life — the lotus feet of the Lord.

When Kṛṣṇa revelled in Vṛndāvana, its beauty and grandeur were the envy of gods. The nature bestowed its bounties with a lavish hand. The crops were full, the trees were laden with fruits, the pasture lands were green and the cows gave plenty of milk. Privation and want were unknown and the people were a merry band of seraphs and cherubs with a glow of happiness on their cheeks. Every grove and nook and corner of Vṛndāvana pulsated with life and transcendental bliss.

Hundred years after the disappearance of Kṛṣṇa Vṛndāvana was turned into a forest, infested with wild beasts. The inhabitants having all fled on account of the inroads of Jarāsandha, no trace of human life was left.

It was Bajranābha, the great-grandson of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who reclaimed Vṛndāvana and tried to restore its glory by building temples, installing the images of Govinda Deva, Madana-Mohana, Gopīnātha and other deities, and by rediscovering the holy places connected with the *līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, with the help of Śāṅḍilya Ṛṣi.

History repeated itself. At the time of the advent of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Vṛndāvana was again a forest. The attacks of Huns, the hostile attitude of the Buddhists against the Vaiṣṇavas, the incursions of Mohamad Gazanavī, and the oppression of Sikander Lodi had robbed it of its sanctity and beauty and reduced it to a hunting ground for the rulers and their chiefs.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's heart bled to see the miserable condition of the holy land. He sent a band of His able and devoted followers to reclaim it. They

were not ordinary men of this world. They were the angels, the denizens of Celestial Vṛndāvana itself, who had come down on earth to assist Mahāprabhu in the task of reclaiming Vṛndāvana as the chief center of *bhakti* and delivering the fallen souls from bondage and suffering by showing to them the sweetest and the smoothest path of *bhakti*.

They built the modern Vṛndāvana with temples, ponds, groves and the bathing-ghāt on the Yamunā; they identified the holy sites connected with the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa; they wrote extensively to systematize the doctrine of *bhakti*; and what is more, they tried by their own examples to set the people on the path of *bhakti*.

Their lives will continue to inspire and guide people traversing the path of *bhakti*. They are like lamp-posts on the path of *bhakti*, leading like “kindly light,” erring souls to celestial Vṛndāvana, the land of eternal peace, love and happiness.

In this book I have described their lives in detail, as far as possible, and given the substance of some of their more important works, specially useful for the devotees desirous of attaining the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa.

I need hardly express my deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to my esteemed friend Śrī Badri Narayana Bhagavata Bhusana, Founder-acarya of the Śrī Caitanya Bhakti Rakṣaka Maṇḍapa for kindly undertaking the publication of this work and publishing it expeditiously. My thanks are also due to my good friend Śrī Radharamana Sadhu for all the pains he took in reading the proof, designing the cover and supervising the printing.

O. B. L. Kapoor

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Radharaman Marg

Vrindaban, U. P., India

Chapter 1

Śrī Lokanātha Gosvāmī

1.1 Vraja-Vṛndāvana

According to the Vaiṣṇava tradition, Vraja or Vṛndāvana¹ is the highest paradise. It is the transcendental dwelling place of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Being a manifestation of His own *svarūpa śakti* or intrinsic energy, it consists like Him of the attributes of *sat* (existence), *cit* (intelligence) and *ānanda* (bliss) and is conditioned like Him by love. Everything here — the sun, the moon and the stars, the trees, the creepers and the grass, the birds and animals and even the smallest particles of dust are made of *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* and are engaged in their own manner in the loving service of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is so charmed by the sweetness and beauty of Vṛndāvana and its spontaneous outflow of love towards Him that He never goes even a step out of it,² so that we can neither think of Kṛṣṇa without Vṛndāvana, nor of Vṛndāvana without Kṛṣṇa. The ever growing beauty, sweetness and love of Vṛndāvana make Kṛṣṇa ceaselessly dance and revel in love with the milkmaids and the cowherds of Vṛndāvana.³ No wonder, therefore, that even Uddhava the wisest of the associates of Kṛṣṇa, wishes to be a blade of grass or a creeper in Vṛndāvana so that he may be consecrated by the dust of the holy feet of the gopīs.⁴ It is this celestial Vṛndāvana that exists here on earth as the geographical Vṛndāvana.⁵ It only appears as phenomenal on account of our coloured vision

¹Vraja is also called Vṛndāvana because Vṛndāvana is the central and most important part of Vraja.

²*vṛndāvanaṃ parityajya sa kvacin naiva gacchati.* (Cited in the *Laghubhāgavatāmṛta* from the *Yāmala*)

³Kṛṣṇopaniṣad, 7.

⁴Bhāg., 10.47.6 1.

⁵*Padma Purāṇa, Pātāla-khaṇḍa*, 69.2.2 and *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta*, 4.82.

1.2 Demolition of Vraja by Mohammedans

The geographical Vṛndāvana, however, has had a history. It has from time to time been ravaged by the invasion of foreigners. In 1017 A. D. Mahmud Gazanavi conducted his seventeenth invasion. He demolished many temples and carried away with him so many statues made of gold and silver and so much jewelery that 100 camels were required to carry them.⁶ Among the temples, he demolished, was the famous temple at the birth place of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Mathurā. This temple was so gigantic and beautiful that according to Mahamud himself it could not have been built in less than 200 Years and must have cost at least 100 million *dinars* (gold *mohurs*).⁷ In the time of Sikandar Lodi (1488-1516) all the temples of Mathurā were demolished and the idols were given away to butchers to be used as weights for weighing meat.⁸ The Hindu mode of worship was prohibited. Hindus could not even shave their heads. They were compelled to grow beards.⁹

From the beginning of the eleventh century till the close of the sixteenth century the demolition of Vraja by the Muslims continued unabated. "Till the close of the sixteenth century, except in the neighbourhood of the one great thoroughfare, there was (in Vraja-mandala) only here and there a scattered hamlet in the midst of unclaimed woodland."¹⁰ No one lived here except some forest tribes and animals. There was no sign of the holy places connected with the pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which were discovered by His great-grandson Mahārāja Vajranābha 100 years after the disappearance of Kṛṣṇa.

The Śrī Mūrtis (temple images) he installed were lost. All other Śrī Mūrtis were hidden in the forests, wells or ponds by their *pūjārīs* (ritual priests) for fear of their being demolished by the Mohammadans. Vraja-mandala, the highest place of pilgrimage of the Hindus and the center of their religion and culture, which was described by Greek writers as the land of gods, was reduced to a forest, full of wild animals, and was used as hunting grounds by the Mohammadan rulers.

1.3 Lokanātha and Mahāprabhu's Vow to Revive Vraja

At this time Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had appeared like a sun on the eastern horizon of India. His fame as the biggest pandit of Nadiyā, at that time the highest center of learning in India, was already established and he had now emerged as the Messiah of the Vaiṣṇavas and the greatest religious and social reformer of the

⁶Growse, *District Memoir of Mathurā*, 3rd ed., p. 33.

⁷ibid., p.34.

⁸ibid.

⁹ibid.

¹⁰ibid., p 75.

time. He had begun to be regarded as an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, who had mercifully appeared on earth as a devotee to show the fallen *jīvas* (living beings) of Kali (the Age of Ones) the path of *kṛṣṇa-bhakti*. His attention was drawn by the devastated condition of Vraja, the homeland of *bhakti*. It made his heart weep. He vowed to revive its original grandeur and beauty, to rediscover its holy places connected with the divine *līlā* (sports) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, to rebuild its temples and to make it a suitable place to live for the Vaiṣṇavas who wanted to go and live there and practice *sādhana* (religious practice or cultivation).

But he could not devote Himself to this task right now, when He was busy organizing a band of followers who could go from door to door to preach His doctrine of love and prepare the background for His great mission. At this time He could only turn the minds of the people to *vraja-bhakti* (*bhakti* as manifested in the land of Vraja) and *vraja-rasa* (sacred rapture as experienced in the land of Vraja) as the highest and sweetest end that can be achieved. Even then he was on the lookout for some powerful souls who could renounce the world and start the work with exclusive devotion.

Lokanātha was an old friend of Caitanya Mahāprabhu. He used to study the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* with Śrī Advaitācārya when Mahāprabhu was a student in the *ṭola* (Sanskrit academy) of Gaṅgādāsa Paṇḍita. In his very first meeting with Him Lokanātha felt so attracted to Him that he completely surrendered himself to Him for the rest of his life. He was now living in his native village, Tālakhaṇḍī in North Bengal. When he came to know that Mahāprabhu had turned out to be a veritable dynamo of *kṛṣṇa-bhakti* and had resolved to charge the whole world with the current of *bhakti*, his heart began to dance with joy.

He renounced the world and set out towards the far off Navadvīpa with a view to pass the rest of his life in Mahāprabhu's sweet company.

When Lokanātha reached the house of Mahāprabhu, he found Him sitting outside surrounded by Murāri, Gadādhara, Śrīvāsa and other devotees. Mahāprabhu had already determined to renounce the world and take *sannyāsa* (the fourth or renounced order of life) for the deliverance of the fallen souls for whom His heart always wept. He was sitting grave and silent and drawn completely in Himself when Lokanātha laid himself prostrate before him. As soon as He saw him His serious mood disappeared. His heart was filled with great delight. He lifted Lokanātha and drawing him close to His heart, said in a voice choked with emotion: "Lokanātha, you have come. Oh, how merciful Kṛṣṇa is. I have found my lost friend." He began to dance and sing the name of the Lord in a rapturous mood. The dance and *kīrtana* (loud singing of the names, qualities, forms, and sports of Kṛṣṇa) lasted until late at night. At the close of *kīrtana* He said to Lokanātha: "Lokanātha, you have come walking a long distance and are tired. Go to where you are staying and rest. Come tomorrow morning, when I shall open my heart to you. Kṛṣṇa has kindly sent you to me for the fulfillment of a great task which is

so dear to Him.”

Lokanātha went, but though tired he could not sleep. Throughout the night kept ringing in his ears the sweet words of Mahāprabhu: “Kṛṣṇa has kindly sent you to me for the fulfillment of a great task which is so dear to Him.” He wondered what that great task could be. He was overjoyed to think that he would get an opportunity to serve both Kṛṣṇa and Mahāprabhu.

The next morning when he went to Mahāprabhu, Mahāprabhu embraced him lovingly and said: “Lokanātha! You are very fortunate. Kṛṣṇa has chosen you for a task which is so dear to Him. You go to holy Vṛndāvana. That land of Kṛṣṇa’s love-pastimes is now a deserted forest. You reclaim all the holy places associated with His *līlā*. You have now to devote yourself exclusively to this great task. You need not stay any more in Navadvīpa.”

Lokanātha was stunned! He was about to faint. Somehow he controlled himself and said with folded hands and tears flowing profusely from his eyes. “Prabhu! I renounced the world and came here to pass the rest of my life in Your sweet company and to drink to my heart’s content of the cup of ambrosia that flows from Your lotus feet. You are the soul of my soul, the life of my life. How can I live without You? Why are You so cruel to me Prabhu? What offense have I committed on account of which You are giving me this punishment?”

“No punishment, Lojanātha. I am giving you the rare privilege and opportunity of service to Kṛṣṇa. Don’t you know how dear Vṛndāvana is to Kṛṣṇa? He is not pleased so much by His own service as He is by service to His *dhāma* (the dwelling place of the Lord). Vṛndāvana is also my heart and soul. By sending you to Vṛndāvana I am only keeping you close to my heart.”

“Prabhu! Don’t not trick me like this. Do You not have the slightest place in Your heart for me? If so, why are You pushing me away as soon as I have come?”

“Lokanātha, I am not sending you to any other place. I am sending you to Vṛndāvana which you always meditate upon along with Kṛṣṇa and His *līlā*. I am sending you to Vṛndāvana where even a day’s stay enables a man to attain the highest end — *kṛṣṇa-prema* (love of Kṛṣṇa).¹¹

“Prabhu! I do not want to attain anything except nearness to Your lotus feet.” Lokanātha said this and fell at Mahāprabhu’s feet and began to weep.

Mahāprabhu tried to pacify him by saying tenderly: “Listen Lokanātha. Try to understand the importance of the work I want you to do. Everyone practices *sādhana* to achieve his desired end, but blessed are they who not only try to attain the end themselves but also try to help others attain it. You know that Nitya Vṛndāvana (the eternal, transcendental Vṛndāvana) is only for the *siddha*¹²

¹¹Rūpa Gosvāmin, *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.237.

¹²Those who are accomplished in religious practice or cultivation (*sādhana*) and have realized the end.

Vaiṣṇavas, but the *bhauma* (earthly) Vṛndāvana is for all. I want that you rediscover and revive Vṛndāvana and make it accessible to all, the devotees and non-devotees alike. If you want my happiness, you should go and start the work forthwith.”

Nothing that Mahāprabhu said regarding the importance of Vṛndāvana and the necessity of its revival could persuade Lokanātha to leave Mahāprabhu’s company and go to Vṛndāvana. He was fully conscious of its importance. He knew that every tree or creeper of Vṛndāvana could easily give the practitioner (*sādhaka*) what he could not attain by *sādhanā* performed life after life. Even then he could not leave Mahāprabhu whom he had begun to regard as his *iṣṭa* (the deity one worships exclusively) for the sake of Vṛndāvana. There was nothing in this world or the transcendental world that he could not forego for Mahāprabhu. But there was only one thing for which he could leave Mahāprabhu and that was the happiness of Mahāprabhu Himself. Therefore when Mahāprabhu said that if Lokanātha wanted His happiness he should go to Vṛndāvana and start the work of its revival, Lokanātha had to acquiesce. This is called *bhakti* — renouncing everything, even the *iṣṭa* for the happiness of the *iṣṭa*.

When this discussion was going on Gadādhara Gosvāmin’s disciple Bhūgarbha was also present. He said to Mahāprabhu: “Prabhu, if you permit me, I may also go to Vṛndāvana with Lokanātha. I shall consider it a great fortune, if I can be of any help to him in the great task entrusted to him.”

Mahāprabhu said: “Oh! That would be fine.”

Lokanātha stayed in Navadvīpa only for five more days to enjoy the company of Mahāprabhu. On the sixth day he left for Vṛndāvana with Bhūgarbha. Mahāprabhu and His companions bade him farewell with a loving embrace and tearful eyes. As Lokanātha was going he shed tears and turning again and again to have a look at Mahāprabhu. He did not know whether he would have the good fortune of seeing that sweet face again. The doubt lurked in his mind that that was perhaps his last meeting with him. As he thought of this the stream of tears flowing from his eyes increased more and more until it turned into a ceaseless tide.

This was actually his last meeting with Mahāprabhu.

1.4 The Early Life of Lokanātha

Lokanātha was born in the year 1483 or 1484 in the village Tālakhaṇḍī in the district of Yashohar. He was two or three years older than Mahāprabhu. His father was Padmanābha Cakravartī and his mother was Sītā Devī. Padmanābha had studied in Navadvīpa and taken initiation from Advaitācārya. He was famous

as a scholar and devotee in North Bengal. He had established a *catuṣpāthī*¹³ in Tālakhaṇḍī. Lokanātha was in the beginning a student in that *catuṣpāthī*. When he was fourteen years old his father sent him to Shāntipura to study the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* from Advaitācārya. At that time Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu was a student in the *tola* (Sanskrit academy) of Gaṅgādāsa Paṇḍita.¹⁴ Lokanātha became his intimate friend. The study of the *Bhāgavata* maddened Lokanātha with love for Kṛṣṇa. According to the *Advaita-prakāśa*, Advaitācārya then asked Gaurāṅga to take complete charge of him and look after his spiritual progress.¹⁵

After completing his study of the *Bhāgavata*, Lokanātha returned home. He started his own *tola* and began to teach. He was respected as much for his scholarship as for his devotion. But on account of his *kṛṣṇa-prema*, his eyes always swam with tears and he remained indifferent to the world. The image of Gaurāṅga also was constantly present before his mind. He thought several times of going to Navadvīpa and living in His company. Fortunately, Gaurāṅga Himself came to him.

We know from the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* that Mahāprabhu traveled to East Bengal some time after He had defeated the *digvijayī* (world-conquering) *paṇḍita* in *śāstrārtha* (a debate on the meaning of the scriptures) and His reputation as the most learned *paṇḍita* of Navadvīpa had spread far and wide. There he conducted studies and performed *kīrtana*.¹⁶ During his travels in East Bengal he went to Tālakhaṇḍī and stayed with Lokanātha for a number of days. He took Lokanātha with him and went to Vikramapura where he met Tapana Mīśra, the father of Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin. From there, walking along the bank of the river Brahmaputra he went to the village of Bhetiyā where lived Lakṣmīnātha Lāhari with his brother Puruṣottama who was known as Svarūpa Dāmodara after his *sannyāsa*. After staying for a few days with Lakṣmīnātha and Puruṣottama He went to Śrī Haṭṭa to meet his grandfather Upendra Mīśra.¹⁷ Upendra Mīśra had at that time gone to Baruṅga. Therefore, He went to Baruṅga. Throughout this period Lokanātha was with Him. While returning from Baruṅga to Navadvīpa He left Lokanātha at Tālakhaṇḍī.

The next five years Lokanātha passed with great difficulty in separation from Mahāprabhu. During this period both his father and mother died. Then the fire of separation blazed up to such an extent that he was compelled to renounce the world and go to Navadvīpa. The fire of separation had hardly extinguished when he was asked to leave Navadvīpa and go to Vṛndāvana.

¹³A school where Sanskrit is taught, specifically the four Vedas..

¹⁴According to the *Advaita-prakāśa* Mahāprabhu at that time used to study the Veda from Advaitācārya. He was then 17 years old, while Lokanātha was 19. (*Advaita-prakāśa*, 19)

¹⁵The *Prema-vilāsa* also mentions Lokanātha as a disciple of Gaurāṅga. (*Prema-vilāsa*, 20)

¹⁶Cc., 1.16.8-9. The *Caitanya-bhāgavata* says that He also distributed degrees to hundreds of students (Cbh., 1.10.96). A degree conferred by a *paṇḍita* of Navadvīpa had great importance.

¹⁷*Prema-vilāsa*, 24.

1.5 The Journey to Vṛndāvana

Lokanātha and Bhūgarbha took three months to reach Vṛndāvana, because during those days the direct route to Vṛndāvana was not safe and they had to go through a circuitous route. Also, they had to depend on alms (*bhikṣā*), which was not always available. They often had to go without food or eat such fruits and vegetables as were available in the forests. But the suffering and privation of the journey did not affect them at all, because they talked incessantly of Kṛṣṇa and Gaurāṅga. The nectar emanating from those discussions was so enjoyable and intoxicating that they felt neither thirst nor hunger nor fatigue. They were pilgrims of the same path. They were inspired by the same purpose and dedicated to the same cause. Their minds, bodies, and souls always swam in an ocean of love for the same, sweet, beautiful, and loving personality that had made them renounce the world and everything. Therefore, by their discussions they could churn the ocean and bring about nectar. Every sip of the nectar so enthralled, entranced, and enraptured them that they forgot all the trials and tribulations of the journey. The *Narottama-vilāsa* says that the nectar had melted their two hearts into one:

*tanu mana eka ithe kichu bhinna naya
parama adbhuta ei duhāra pranaya*

Their bodies and minds were one;
no difference at all between them.
A most amazing thing it was,
the love between those two.

Nityānanda Dāsa unravels the mystery of their union by pointing out that Lokanātha was the incarnation of Mañjulālī or Līlāmañjarī and Bhūgarbha of Nāndīmukhī or Premamañjarī in divine play of Vraja.¹⁸ In the divine play of Vraja the bond of love between them was such that they appeared like one soul in two bodies. Therefore, in this life also Mahāprabhu joined them together:

*mañjulālī nāndīmukhī haya mahāprīta
gaurāṅga dilena saṅga jāni suniścita*

Mañjulālī and Nāndīmukhī
are very fond of each other.
Therefore, Gaurāṅga put them together.
This I know for sure.

¹⁸Kavikarṇapūra also describes them as such in his *Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā*.

1.6 In Search the Sites of Kṛṣṇa-līlā

As soon as Lokanātha and Bhūgarbha reached Vraja they set to work on their mission. For some time they conducted their search for holy places in Mathurā and then in the forests of Vraja. The task was so difficult and so full of risk at every step that one cannot even imagine it today. The forests were so thick and full of bushes that one had to make his way before he placed his foot down almost at every step. Wild animals roamed about here and there. There was no habitation except that of some tribals who had neither any knowledge of the holy places nor any interest in them. The accounts of the holy places given in the scriptures was the only basis on which research could be carried out. But the scriptures gave only some hints about their geographical positions, on the basis of which it was difficult to find their exact locations. But they carried on their search undaunted, sometimes even at risk of losing their lives. If by chance they came across the ruins or remains of some ancient temple or signs of a pond somewhere, their hearts sprang with joy. If they did not find anything they prayed to Vṛndādevī, the presiding goddess of Vṛndāvana in piteous voices and said: “Vṛndā, beloved of Kṛṣṇa and organizer and supporter of his divine play! How long will you keep those play sites hidden from our view? When will you manifest Nandagrāma, Barsānā, Rādhākuṇḍa, and Śyāmakuṇḍa? Oh! When shall we see Śṛṅgāraṇḍa, Vaṁśīvaṇḍa, Keśīghāta, Kālidaha, and the other holy places bearing in their bosoms the sweet memory of the divine sports of Kṛṣṇa? How is it possible without your mercy to get even an inkling of them?”

No one had before them tried so assiduously and persistently with all his heart and soul to discover the play sites. No doubt Śrī Advaitācārya and Śrī Nityānanda had gone to Vraja before them and wandered about in search of those places, but they had returned to Bengal after staying there only for a few days. The efforts of Lokanātha and Bhūgarbha did not go in vain. Gradually some discoveries were made and they started keeping record of them.

1.7 Journey to the South in Search of Mahāprabhu

After three or four months they heard that Mahāprabhu had taken renunciation (*sannyāsa*) and gone on pilgrimage to the South. Their hearts began to yearn for a look at Mahāprabhu as a renunciant (*sannyāsī*).

They postponed their search for sites in Vṛndāvana for some time and started on their journey to the South. Was it possible to find Mahāprabhu in the vastness of southern India, specially when he was always on the move, going from one pilgrimage place (*tīrtha*) to another? It was only their maddening love for Mahāprabhu that made them launch upon the journey without thinking of the

prospects for the fulfillment of their purpose. They went from holy place to another, but Mahāprabhu could not be found anywhere.

Mahāprabhu returned to Purī after traveling for two years in the South. He lived in Purī for two years and then started for Vṛndāvana. But he could not go beyond Gauḍa. He met Rūpa and Sanātana at Rāmakeli and returned to Purī. He went to Vṛndāvana the next year (1514 C.E.) through the jungles of Jhārikhaṇḍa. When Lokanātha and Bhūgarbha returned to Vṛndāvana they learned that Mahāprabhu had come to Vṛndāvana and returned only a few days before their arrival. Who can describe their grief on coming to know this?

However, like two mad persons they again started from Vṛndāvana with a view to find him somewhere on the way. But how could they find him if he did not want to be found? He wanted them to give their undivided and exclusive attention to the task that was so dear to him, the revival of Vṛndāvana. They had not gone far when Mahāprabhu appeared before Lokanātha as a renunciant in a dream and said: “I am always with you in Vṛndāvana. You must not leave Vṛndāvana and go anywhere else.”¹⁹

Lokanātha and Bhūgarbha then returned to Vṛndāvana and again applied themselves to the task entrusted to them.

1.8 Lokanātha and his Deity Rādhāvinoda

While Lokanātha was engaged in his quest for the places where Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s play occurred, his mind was also set on Kṛṣṇa and his divine acts. He always shed tears when remembering them. He wished that he had an image of Śrī Kṛṣṇa so that he could serve him. When this thought came to his mind he was living under a *tamāla* tree in a forest called Chattravana. Near Chattravana is a pond called Kiśorīkuṇḍa.²⁰ On the bottom of that pond lay hidden, one does not know since when, an image of Śrī Kṛṣṇa called Rādhāvinoda. The desire for his loving service that arose in the mind of his devotee could not remain hidden from Kṛṣṇa. It made him equally anxious to receive and enjoy his devotee’s service. Frolicsome as he is, he thought of a clever device to bring that about. He assumed the form of a tribal man and carried himself in the form of the image of Rādhāvinoda to Lokanātha. He said to him: “Mahārāja, this is my *ṭhākura* (sacred image), Rādhāvinoda. I have been serving him since long. But now I have become old. It is not possible for me

¹⁹Narahari Cakravartin, *Narottama-vilāsa*, p. 16:

*tomāri nikate nīrantara āchi āmi
vṛndāvāna haite kathāo na jābe tumi*

²⁰Around this pond a village called Umarāo is now situated.

to serve him any more. I am leaving him with you. I shall be happy if you kindly serve him.”

Lokanātha was taken by surprise. It was to him a bolt from the blue. The benign Lord had responded to his desire and come to him of his own. Tears of love and gratitude streamed out of his eyes. He took the image, hugged it to his heart, and was for some time lost within himself. On regaining outer consciousness he looked all around for the man who had brought the image, but he was nowhere to be found. Who was he and where had he gone after doing him that great favor? The thought was plaguing his mind when Rādhāvinoda smiled and said: “Who else will bring me? I have brought myself. I was lying in Kiśorīkuṇḍa nearby. Since you desired eagerly to serve me, I have come. I am very hungry. Give me something to eat.”²¹

Was Rādhāvinoda really hungry? If so, how did he suddenly become hungry after lying in that pond for God knows how many years? The answer is that the hunger of the deity depends on the desire of the devotee to serve him.

Has not Kṛṣṇa said in the *Gītā* that whatever the manner in which a devotee worships or wants to serve him, he always reciprocates in a manner most appropriate to that mode of worship.²² If, for example, the devotee has the parental attitude and wants to serve him as a father serves his child, Kṛṣṇa begins to behave towards him like his child. It is not that he so pretends. The devotee’s love makes him forget his divinity and behave towards him like his child. He actually feels hungry and thirsty like a child and when he does not get food to eat or water to drink, he cries like a child. As far as the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and his devotee is concerned the regulative principle is not Bhāgavān or Paramātmā, but love. Both Kṛṣṇa and his devotee are subservient to love. As the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* says: “Love makes them both dance and dances itself.”²³

Lokanātha’s love for Rādhāvinoda and his intense yearning for his service made Kṛṣṇa actually feel the want and necessity of his loving service. His hunger, therefore, was not feigned but genuine. Lokanātha happily and speedily cooked whatever he could and gave it to him to eat. Rādhāvinoda ate with great enjoyment and to his fill.

²¹Narahara Cakravartin, *Bhakti-ratnākara*, 1.331-333.

²²*Bhāgavad-gītā*, 4.11:

*ye yathā māṃ prapadyante
tāṃstathaiva bhajāmyaham*

²³Cc., 3.18.17:

*kṛṣṇere nācāya prema, bhaktere nācāya
āpane nācāye — tine nāce eka thāñya*

1.9 Rādhāvinoda's Assistance in the Search of Vṛndāvana