PREFACE

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan has published several monographs on the lives of saints including an abridged version of Śrī Gaurāṅga by Mahātmā Śiśir Kumār Ghos; still it was felt desirable to publish a complete biography of Śrī-Caitanya including the basic tenets of his school. As it involves a fair knowledge of Bengali, I was entrusted with the task of writing the present volume.

* * * * *

The life of a religious teacher cannot be explained without discussing the ideals he stood for, and this leads to a discussion of the doctrine preached by him, and his immediate followers. Similarly, it sometimes becomes necessary, as in the present instance, to describe the historical background of the movement.

In the first few chapters, therefore, certain problems are discussed with which apparently Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇavism or its founder are not directly concerned. For example Chapter II analyses the Nārāyaṇiya section of the Mahābhārata, partly because this has not been done since the publication of Sir R. G. Bhandarkar’s famous work, and also due to the fact that Pañcarātra has played a decisive role in the development of Vaiṣṇavism and it is necessary to trace its historical origin, which unfortunately cannot be ascertained with any degree of precision; hence an attempt has been made to show that reliance on the Nārāyaṇiya section will not be helpful in solving the problem. The tentative conclusion possible at present is that Pañcarātra is a non-Vedic religion but we do not know under what circumstances nor at what period it originated. For, even if the present available Pañcarātra texts could be dated, that would by no means fix the date of its origin, which must be much earlier than the earliest text, on the hypothesis that a text follows the establishment of a religion, and not a religion that of a text. Secondly, though we have recorded Dr. Schrader’s opinion as to the date of the Pañcarātra texts (p. 26) the mention of Pañcarātra in the Kambuja inscriptions noted below (p. 28) indicates the possibility of Pañcarātra tenets having been systematized in texts at an even earlier period.

The relation between early Pañcarātra and Bhāgavatism is also unclear. From Yāmuṇa onwards there is historical evidence of their inter-relationship, but as Dr. S. N. Das Gupta has shown Pañcarātra was at one time beyond the pale of Hindu society which
has been noted below (p. 26). Here again we do not know the date of the texts which vilify Pañcarātra, hence it is not possible to establish the date when it became respectable nor under what circumstances. The evidence of the Nārāyaṇīya Section is highly suspicious, and it would be risky to rely upon it to determine the age at which Pañcarātra was admitted to the orthodox fold. It seems most probable that Pañcarātra became an integral part of Hinduism, when image worship came to replace the Vedic sacrifices.

Bhāgavatism, however, from the beginning was based on the Vedas, though some of the doctrines which were preached in its principal texts, namely the Bhagavad-Gitā and the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, are not to be found in the Vedas. Enough has been said on these two texts, and many attempts have been made to determine their age, hence I need not add to the confusion by another dissertation here. Nor is such a discussion strictly relevant in the present context, for, in order to understand Vaiṣṇavism it is necessary to take into account the firm belief of the vaishnavas that the Gitā is an integral part of the epic, and Vyāsa wrote the Purāṇas.

In the absence of adequate evidence it is almost certain that Indian history can never be retold in the same manner as European history, and in this connection Rabindranath Tagore’s observation seemed to be so appropriate that I have translated a passage from one of his essays on this subject (pp. 103-04). The subject matter of Indian history is Indian people, and their faiths and aspirations have some claim to be recorded as history. Hence, because the vaishnavas worship Kṛṣṇa of the Mahābhārata and not of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, it was necessary to discuss Dr. H. C. Ray Chowdhury’s theory that Kṛṣṇa of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad was identical with Kṛṣṇa of the Mahābhārata, in order to show that this identification is not tenable.

* * *

Attempt has been made in the following pages to describe what the Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇavas believe and not to discover what they should believe. The biography of Caitanya as presented here is, therefore, based upon the two works which the Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇavas accept as authoritative, namely the Caitanya-bhāgavata of Vṛndāvan-dās and Caitanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kavirāj. After working with these two texts for sometime, I am convinced that their value as works of history is very high, which was implied in the translation of the latter by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the greatest of our historians. This will also be apparent from the discussion in the appendices
where it will be seen that most of the criticisms levelled against Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kaviṅāj are without foundation.

The other charge against him and other biographers of Caitanya is that they have recorded miracles, but the fact is that no religious text is free of such incidents. The modern attitude is epitomized in the words of Bernard Shaw who once said: "There is nothing that people will not believe nowadays if only it be presented to them as science, and nothing they will not disbelieve if it be presented to them as religion. I myself began like that; and I am ending by receiving every scientific statement with our suspicion whilst giving very respectful consideration to the inspirations and revelations of the prophets and poets." For such people the miraculous happenings in Śrī-Caitanya's life may be meaningful, and have been recorded in the following pages.

This method, it may be objected, does not lead to the production of a 'scientific history'. I have given below (pp. 101-02) a sample from a scientific history, where the author has brushed aside all evidence on 'scientific principle', and advanced conclusions based entirely on his imagination. One wonders what would have happened to a real scientist had he observed this particular method; that is, if he had rejected all the data yielded by laboratory tests, and arrived at a conclusion to satisfy his fancy. Hence it seems preferable to follow the evidence, even if it cannot be corroborated, rather than lose the thread of narrative in purposeless arguments as to its possibility or rather impossibility. In matters pertaining to religious history, it is better to be grouped amongst the credulous than be ranked with the virtuosi of philistinism. There are undoubtedly differences amongst Śrī-Caitanya's biographers as has been shown below (pp. 98-9) regarding minor incidents in his life. It is now too late to find out the true version; hence it is better to accept any one of them. Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kaviṅāj's version has been accepted in the present work because it is the best and the Gauḍiya-vaiṣṇavas believe that his work is the authoritative one.

* * *

As stated above, the life of a religious leader can become meaningful only if it is presented along with his doctrine, which, in the present case, also includes metaphysics. An historian of philosophy must know philosophy in the substantive sense before he can address correct questions to their sources and extract philosophical problems from the texts in order to study the mutual relation and consequences of those problems in the context of epochs and culture.
CAITANYA: HIS LIFE AND DOCTRINE

The task of a biographer, however, is more limited, and is discharged when he has been able to point out the main contribution of his subject to the developing process of thought. But evaluation is more difficult, for in an historical evaluation attempt is made to facilitate the understanding, and attention is diverted to the explanation and the interpretation of the metaphysical views; while in a philosophical assessment, attention is focussed on what brings us nearer to truth. The former may be called the modern historical method, the latter being our traditional method, but since it implies some practical cognition, I had of necessity to adopt the historical method.

* * *

While writing this preface, I came across T. S. Eliot's Notes Towards the Definition of Culture where he states in the introduction:

'The first important assertion is that no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religion: according to the point of view of the observer, the culture will appear to be the product of the religion, or the religion the product of the culture.'

Mr. Eliot's assertion seems to be particularly valid for understanding the development—as well as the decay—of Indian culture, which have been proportional to its loyalty to philosophy, conceived on the basis of a religion which led to the contemplation of a truly existing reality.

The complexity of Indian culture is due, not only to variations depending on her vast area and long history, but also to the stratification, or what may be called, the staggering of culture at the same place and time. This has been possible because of the universal approach of the religious creeds, and it is most striking in the doctrine preached by Caitanya. Though his followers are mainly confined in Assam, Bengal and Orissa, his influence pervaded the entire sub-continent, and the emotional upsurge which this country witnessed in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries may be traced to him. Even today he is a living force.

To appreciate Caitanya's greatness, it is necessary to remember that the age in which he lived and the society in which he moved were neither glorious nor progressive, but he triumphed over apparently insuperable difficulties. The state of pre-Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism has been briefly described below in Chapters IV and V. There was, however, a type of Vaiṣṇavism which was frowned upon by the intellectuals before the advent of Caitanya. Gāṅgāśa Upā-
PREFACE

dhyāya (c. 1200) wrote in his Tattvacintāmaṇi: ‘tasmād avivekinaḥ sukha-mātra-lipsavo bahutara-duḥkh-ānuviddham api sukham ud- dīśya “siro madhyāṁ yadi yātu yātv”=iti kṛtvā para-dārādiṣu pra- vartamānā “varaṁ Vṛndāvane ramye” ity=ādi vadanto n=ātr= ādikārīnaḥ.’¹

The two verses referred to by the father of Navyanyāya are the following:

\[yusmat kṛte khaṇjana-manjulākṣi siro madiyaṁ yadi yātu yātu\]
\[lūnāṁ nūnāṁ Janak-ātmaj-ārthe Daśānanen=āpi daśā- nanāṁ²\]

and

\[varaṁ Vṛndāvane ramye śṛgālatvam vrajāmy=aham\]
\[na tu vaiśeṣikāṁ muktiṁ prārthayāmi kadacana.³\]

Of these the second verse with slight modification was quoted by the monk Prakāśānanda in the 16th century as an example of rāgī-gītā as has been noted below (p. 221). Here the condemnation of people who loved Vṛndāvana is significant, and it is apparent that Gaṅgeśa was not referring to ordinary adulterers, but to a religious sect, in which adultery, actual or symbolical, had been accepted as a part of the creed. It is difficult to arrive at a definite conclusion on this evidence, but if this is linked with Rāmānandarāya’s teachings as given below (pp. 179-84), and his practices as described in the CC (III, v, 11-18), it would point to a Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult.

By a strange quirk of fate, the greatest exponent of Navyanyāya of his time, Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma, completely submitted to Caitanya and requested him to meet Rāmānandarāya, and soon no trace of obloquy was to remain in connection with the worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and their amour. This was entirely due to Caitanya. He separated the precious metal from the dross, and firmly united the purified doctrine with Vedānta. There possibly still remained unredeemed persons or sects of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa worshippers whose practices might be condemned, but that was in spite of Caitanya, not

1. ‘Therefore, those senseless persons are not eligible (for the study of Navyanyāya), who hanker for pleasure and in spite of many hardships and sufferings run after others’ wives saying “let my head roll on the ground” and “it is preferable to be in lovely Vṛndāvana” et cetera.’ Quoted by MM Phaṇībhūṣan Tar- kavāgīśa, Nyāya-parāścyā, p. 10.

2. ‘For your lovely eyes, let my head roll on the ground; did not Rāvaṇa lose his ten heads for the sake of Sītā.’ ibid.

3. ‘I would prefer to roam as a jackal in lovely Vṛndāvana, rather than pray for the Vaiśeṣika type of liberation.’ ibid.
due to him. The result of any movement depends to a great extent upon the age in which the work is cast.

* * * * *

All great historical figures in Bengal before Caitanya—and for centuries after him—are somewhat shadowy, being known only from inscriptions or stray references in chronicles by no means always friendly to them, such as, men like Śaśānka, Divya or Rājā Gaṇeśa. Caitanya appears in flesh and blood, and for this we should feel grateful to his biographers. They make him appear and dance before our eyes.

Caitanya ushered a new era in Bengal and laid the basis for modern Bengali culture. He was an apostle of love but also of basic human dignity, to whom humility was as natural as an iron will which never compromised on essentials. He was not an idealist—for the same reason that he was not a materialist—because the distinction between the ideal and the material did not arise for him.

But the movement which saw its culmination in Caitanya has had a very long history. For the sake of convenience it may be studied from two aspects, namely, emotional and metaphysical. The first is usually termed bhakti movement, and I have traced its development in a separate monograph called the Bhakti Renaissance; therefore, it has not been discussed in the present work which deals to a certain extent with the doctrines of the various schools of Vaiṣṇavism, particularly of Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇavism.

It is now almost a political creed to assert dogmatically that the medieval saints were influenced by Islām. There can be no objection to such contacts, but there is no evidence to justify the assumption. The religious doctrines which are usually included in the 'bhakti movement' were all indigenous, and their development can be traced from an early stage to the latest phase on good documentary evidence; and Islāmic influence is nowhere traceable with the exception of a few songs by Kabīr. Indeed a unique feature of medieval religious texts is their complete oblivion to foreign domination, political or cultural.

Though Caitanya had met Muslims, there is no evidence that he knew anything about Islām. One may assume, however, that had he studied Islām, he would have appreciated it, for Islām is also dualistic, and demands complete submission to God. But Caitanya would have violently reacted to iconoclastic teachings of Islām. Worship of images is an essential part of all schools of Vaiṣṇavism.

* * * * *

The least that may be demanded of people who judge any doctrine is that they should judge of it in the sense in which the
PREFACE

teacher himself understood it. And a teacher understands his doctrine not as a distant ideal for humanity, obedience to which is impossible, nor as a mystical poetic fantasy with which to captivate (or dupe) the simple-minded men who gather around him. He understands his teachings as a real thing, and a thing which would save mankind.

It is true that no religious leader has been entirely successful. But as Rabindranath Tagore has said: 'To go through the history of the development of science is to go through the maze of mistakes it made current at different times. Yet no one really believes that science is the one perfect mode of disseminating mistakes.' The important thing to remember regarding the history of science as well as of religion is not their mistakes and failures, but their progressive ascertainment of truth.

Caitanya's life is an example of the triumph of faith, devotion, and love. If in the following pages, I have been able to bring this out, even in some very small measure, my labour shall have been amply recompensed.

A word is possibly needed to account for the vagaries of orthography which may be noticed in the following pages. The peculiarities of Bengali pronunciation have been explained below in note 2 page 106. To ears accustomed for nearly half-a-century to Vṛndāvan-dās, Kṛṣṇa-dās Kavirāj, Rūp, Sanātan etc., Vṛndāvana-dāsa, Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kavirāja, Rūpa and Sanātana jarred and appeared too pedantic. Hence wherever Bengali source-materials have been used, the inherent 'a' of the final consonant has been dropped from personal names, and restored even when the same names are found in Sanskrit sources.

I am greatly indebted to MM. Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj for patiently answering all my queries and leading me on to useful study.

I like to recall in this connection late Dr. S. K. De and Prof. H. D. Bhattacharya. Dr. De initiated me into the study of Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇavism and Prof. Bhattacharya encouraged me to work on history of religions. It is also my melancholy duty to recall the memory of my friend Mr. S. N. Sen Gupta, M.A., B.L., Kānya-Vyākarana-tīrtha, retired Law Secretary to the Government of West Bengal, who was one of the finest scholars that I have ever come across. He read the typescript of the first four chapters and encouraged me to proceed, but passed away soon afterwards. At the time of his death
he was representing West Bengal on the Language Commission. He was a real jñāna-bandhu to all his friends.

I have pleasure in thanking my colleague Śrī S. A. Upadhyaya for helping me to correct some proofs, and Śrī Rajagopalan who not only helped me in correcting the proofs but actively co-operated with the press, Messrs Associated Advertisers and Printers, to whom also my gratitude is due, towards the speedy publication of this volume.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,
Bombay,
June 2, 1969.

A. K. Majumdar