

Lord Gauranga (Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu)

By

[Sri Swami Sivananda](#)

*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna
Krishna Krishna Hare Hare
Hare Rama Hare Rama
Rama Rama Hare Hare*



Nityananda and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

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Birth and Parentage

Pundit Jagannath Misra, alias Purandar Misra, a pious Brahmin of the Vaidik sub-caste, had migrated from Sylhet and settled at Nadia or Nabadwip, a city of learned men in the Nabadwip district of West Bengal, situated on the river Ganges, seventy-five miles north of Calcutta. Jagannath Misra's wife was Sachi Devi, daughter of the scholar Nilamber Chakravarti. She also was a pious lady. A son was born to Jagannath Misra and Sachi on the night of the full moon, on 4th February, 1486 A.D., at Nabadwip.

The newborn child was named Viswambar. He was the tenth child of Jagannath Misra and Sachi Devi. The first eight--all daughters--died soon after their birth. The ninth was Viswarup, a son. He abandoned the world at sixteen when he was being forced to marry and entered a monastery in South India. The women, thinking that Sachi had lost many children, gave the tenth child, Viswambar, the bitter name of Nimai (derived from the name of the Neem tree) as a protection against all evil influences. The neighbours called him *Gaur* or *Gaur-Hari* or *Gauranga* (fair-complexioned) on account of his marvellous beauty. *Gaur* means fair and *Anga* means body; and they called him *Gaur-Hari*, because he was so fond of the name 'Hari' that nothing could soothe him, when he cried during childhood, save Hari's name.

Boyhood and Studies

Gouranga studied logic at the school of Vasudev Sarvabhauma, a reputed professor of Nyaya. The extraordinary intellect of Gauranga attracted the attention of Raghunath, author of the famous book on logic called *Didheeti*. Raghunath thought within himself that he was the most intelligent youth in the world. He thought that he was more intelligent than his teacher Sarvabhauma. Raghunath's one great ambition was that he should be the foremost man of learning in the whole world. But, when he found that Gauranga, though much younger than himself, was more intelligent and learned, he began to lose hope. His heart was filled with fear. Gauranga was at that time writing a commentary on Nyaya. This made Raghunath more nervous. Raghunath wanted to see the commentary of Gauranga. But he doubted whether Gauranga would consent to show it to him. Anyhow Raghunath requested Gauranga to show him his commentary on Nyaya. Gauranga readily consented to read it to Raghunath. When they were crossing the river by boat, Gauranga read out his commentary to Raghunath. Raghunath found that Gauranga's commentary was a masterly original exposition. Raghunath's hopes of occupying the first place in the world as professor of Nyaya were blasted. He wept bitterly. Gauranga asked, "Brother Raghunath, what is the matter with you? Why do you weep? I shall console you". Raghunath spoke out the truth: "Brother Gauranga, I have a strong ambition that I should attain the first place in the whole world as a professor of Nyaya. With this hope I have written a book on Nyaya thinking that it will beat out all the existing books. But my hope is entirely gone now, because your book really excels my book. It is concise, clear and original. It is indeed a scholarly production. This is the reason why I wept".

Gauranga also burst into tears. He said to Raghunath: "Is that all? Then do not weep, my dear brother. Nyaya is after all a dry philosophy. I will not be benefited much". He threw the manuscript into the river. From that moment he gave up the study of Nyaya. Look at the magnanimous heart of Gauranga! Gauranga's *Nyaya* was lost to the world. *Didheeti* of Raghunath became the first authority on Nyaya.

Gauranga mastered all branches of Sanskrit learning such as grammar, logic, literature, rhetoric, philosophy and theology. He developed marvellous talents. He was a genius. He himself started a *Tol* or place of learning. He was then sixteen years old and he was the youngest professor to be in charge of a *Tol*.

Gauranga was kind and compassionate. He was pure and gentle. He was sweet and loving. He was humane and sympathetic. He was a friend of the poor. He lived with them, served them and cheered them. He was very simple in his life.

Death of Gauranga's Father

While Gauranga was still a student, his father died. Gauranga then married Lakshmi, the daughter of Vallabhacharya. He excelled all the Pundits and defeated even a reputed scholar of another province. He made a tour of the eastern region of Bengal and received many valuable gifts from pious and generous-hearted householders. On his return he heard that his wife had died of snake-bite during his absence. He then married Vishnupriya. He entertained pupils and taught them. He became proud of his vast erudition.

A Turning Point in Gauranga's Life

In 1509, Gauranga went on a pilgrimage to Gaya with his companions. Here he met Isvar Puri, a Sannyasin of the order of Madhvacharya, and took him as his Guru. A marvellous change of life now came over Gauranga. He became a devotee of Lord Krishna. His pride of learning entirely vanished. He shouted, "Krishna, Krishna! Hari Bol, Hari Bol!". He laughed, wept, jumped, danced in ecstasy, fell on the ground and rolled in the dust. When he was in an ecstatic mood, he never ate or drank.

Gauranga proceeded to witness the footprints of Lord Krishna in the Gadadhar temple. He stood before the footprints motionless as a statue. He became absorbed in meditation. Tears gushed out of his eyes in continuous stream. His cloth was drenched with tears. He was about to fall down. Isvar Puri rushed forward and supported him. Gradually Gauranga came back to consciousness. He spoke to Isvar Puri: "Oh venerable Guru, have mercy on me. Extricate me from the quagmire of Samsara. Initiate me into the mysteries of Radha's love for Krishna. Let me develop pure Prem for Lord Krishna. Let me drink the nectar of Krishna-prema-rasa".

Isvar Puri then gave Gauranga the ten-lettered Mantra of Lord Krishna. Purva Raga (love springing from a previous cause) dawned in the heart of Gauranga. He always remained in a meditative mood. He forgot to take his food. Tears trickled down his eyes. He swooned sometimes. He muttered again and again, "Lord Krishna, my Father! Where art Thou? I cannot live without Thee. Thou art my sole refuge, my solace. Thou art my real father, mother, friend,

relative and Guru. Reveal Thy form to me always". Sometimes Gauranga would gaze with vacant eyes. Sometimes he would sit in the position of meditation. He tried to conceal his silent tears from his companions. Sometimes he was unconscious of his surroundings. Gauranga wanted to go to Brindavan, but his companions forcibly took him back to Nabadwip.

Nitai

Nitai alias Nityananda was a Brahmin by birth. He took to the ascetic life at the age of twelve. He wandered about in quest of Krishna. He resided at Brindavan for sometime, but could not find out his Krishna. Gauranga took Nityananda to his own house and introduced him to his mother: "Mother, here is another son of yours. He is my elder brother. The lost Viswarup has come back to you now. Take him as your Viswarup". Sachi said to Nitai: "Child, come. Take care of your younger brother. Protect him. He is careless and thoughtless. Now I need not be anxious about him. Sit down, my child. Take your food and be happy".

Nityananda conducted Sankirtan in various places. Nabadwip resounded with Hari Nama. Nitai spent whole nights in singing the praises of Radha and Krishna. Religious processions were frequently arranged in which the devotees, headed by Gauranga and Nityananda, went dancing and singing through the streets or gathered in the courtyards of houses.

Gauranga was an embodiment of love. He lived, moved and had his being in love. His speech was full of love. He radiated love to all. His touch was a magnetism of love. He sang in love. He breathed in love. He walked in love. He showed by practice how God should be loved. He taught little by precept, but more by example. If he simply uttered one word, "You will be blessed with Bhakti", it was quite sufficient to throw a man into Samadhi and fill his heart with Prem (love). Such was Gauranga's power.

When Gauranga passed along the streets and roads, his powerful Prem current influenced and overpowered thousands. They uttered irresistibly "Hari Bol! Hari Bol!" and danced in ecstasy.

Gauranga Becomes a Sannyasin

The learned and the orthodox began to hate and oppose Gauranga. But Gauranga stood adamant. He converted only a few persons. He resolved to become a Sannyasin for their salvation. He thought within himself: "As I must get salvation for all these proud scholars and orthodox householders, I must become a Sannyasin. They will undoubtedly bow to me when they see me as a Sannyasin, and thus they will be purified, and their hearts will be filled with devotion. There is no other way of securing emancipation for them".

So, at the age of twenty-four, Gauranga got himself initiated by Swami Keshava Bharati under the name of 'Krishna Chaitanya', usually shortened into 'Chaitanya'. His mother, the tender-hearted Sachi, was heartbroken. But Chaitanya consoled her in every possible way and carried out her wishes. He bore deep love and reverence for his mother till the end of his life.

Chaitanya was extremely dispassionate. He abandoned all sorts of sensual pleasures as poison. He was very strict in observing the rules of Sannyasa. He declined to grant an interview to Raja

Pratap Rudra of Orissa, because it is a great sin for a Sannyasin to see a king. It is as sinful as looking at a woman. If a Sannyasin sees a Raja or a king, gradually he will be attached to the Raja. As the mind has the habit of imitating, the Sannyasin also will begin to lead a life of luxury and have a downfall eventually. That is the reason why a Sannyasin is prohibited from seeing a Raja. Gauranga never saw a woman in the face. He did not allow any woman to approach him. He slept on the ground with bare body.

Gauranga was a great Vaishnavite preacher. He disseminated the doctrines and principles of Vaishnavism far and wide. Nityananda, Sanatan, Rupa, Swarup Damodar, Advaitacharya, Sribas, Haridas, Murari, Gadadhar and others helped Chaitanya in his mission.

Conversion of Jagai and Madhai

Jagai and Madhai of Nabadwip were the most abandoned of sinners and the worst of criminals ever known to history. They were brothers. They were the Kotwals of Nabadwip. They plundered the rich, outraged the modesty of women and committed murders on the slightest provocation. There was no heinous crime on earth which those brothers had not committed. Though Brahmins by caste, they were inveterate drunkards.

Chaitanya and Nitai undertook the serious task of reclaiming the two brothers. Chaitanya proposed to his devotees that they should go to the tent of Jagai and Madhai, doing Kirtan all the way, and then give *Hari Nam* to them.

Chaitanya and his devotees appeared in the streets and started the Sankirtan. Nitai was at the head of the party. He led the party to the camp of Jagai and Madhai. He then came face to face with the two brothers. Nitai said, "Pray, dear brothers, take Krishna's name and serve Krishna, for He is the Supreme Lord". This exhortation inflamed Madhai, the stronger of the two. Madhai pelted Nitai with the broken neck of an earthen jar and inflicted a gaping wound in his forehead. Blood gushed from the wound. Nitai pressed the wound with both hands to stop the gush. Madhai picked another piece of the same jar and wanted to throw it on the head of Nitai. Jagai caught hold of Madhai's arms and remonstrated with him: "Hold Madhai. You are very cruel. What is the merit of killing a Sannyasin? It will do you no good".

News was conveyed to Gauranga, who was behind in the Kirtan party, that Jagai and Madhai were killing Nitai. Gauranga immediately ran to the spot where Nitai stood wounded. He took his own cloth and wrapped it round the forehead of Nitai to stop the bleeding. He then embraced Jagai for the good he had rendered to Nitai by checking Madhai from attacking Nitai again. Jagai fell down in a state of trance. Madhai was in a state of despair. He lost all power of speech. He prostrated at the feet of Gauranga: "O Lord, I am a great sinner. Have mercy on me". Gauranga asked Madhai to go to Nitai and seek his pardon. Madhai apologized to Nitai. Nitai pardoned Madhai and embraced him. Madhai also, like his brother, fell down in a state of trance.

Afterwards those brothers became holy saints, and as beloved of the world as they were hated and dreaded in their earlier days for their brutality. They atoned for their past misdeeds by going over on their knees in utter humility before everybody who went to the river for bathing and by

doing for them all sorts of menial services. They prepared, spade in hand, a bathing Ghat which is still known by the name of "Madhai's Ghat" at Nabadwip.

Talks to Washerman

Gauranga with his companions came to a washerman who was beating the clothes upon a piece of plank. He asked the washerman to say 'Hari Bol!'. The washerman thought that the mendicants had come to beg alms from him. He said to Gauranga, "Oh mendicant, I am very poor. I have nothing to give you. Gauranga said, "I do not want anything from you. Say 'Hari Bol!' at least once". The washerman refused. He thought he would be required to pay something to the mendicant. He said, "I am very poor. I cannot give up beating the cloth in order to utter the Name you have given to me". Gauranga said, "I shall do the beating of the cloth. Please say, 'Hari Bol!'". The washerman said, 'Hari Bol!'. Then Gauranga asked him to repeat the same twice. The washerman repeated twice. Then the fire of devotion started. The washerman repeated the name unasked. He began to dance in ecstasy raising both his hands high.

The wife of the washerman brought some food to the washerman. She saw her husband dancing with uplifted hands uttering: "Hari Bol! Hari Bol!". She also noticed that her husband had no consciousness of his surroundings. She tried to rouse him by calling him loudly but in vain. She was frightened. She ran to the village and said to the relatives and neighbours, "A ghost has taken possession of my husband. Please help me. Drive away the ghost from him". They all proceeded immediately to see the washerman. He was still dancing in ecstasy. They were afraid to go near him. At last a bold man caught hold of the washerman and tried to stop his dancing. He too caught the contagion and began to dance with the washerman uttering, "Hari Bol! Hari Bol!". He embraced the onlookers. They too caught the contagion and danced in ecstasy. The people of the whole village were affected. Gauranga enjoyed the scene for some time and left the place.

Pilgrimages

Chaitanya, along with his friend Nityananda, proceeded towards Orissa. He preached Vaishnavism wherever he went and held Sankirtan. He attracted thousands of people wherever he went. He stayed for some time at Puri and then proceeded to the South. Gauranga visited the Tirupathi hills, Kancheepuram and the famous Srirangam on the banks of the Cauvery. From Srirangam he proceeded to Madurai, Rameswaram and Kanyakumari. He visited also Udipi, Pandharpur and Nasik. He visited Brindavan. He bathed in the Yamuna and in several sacred pools and visited the various shrines for worship. He prayed and danced in ecstasy to his heart's content. He also visited Nabadwip, his birthplace. At last Gauranga returned to Puri and settled there. He spent his remaining days at Puri only. Disciples and admirers from Bengal, Brindavan and various other places came to Puri to pay their respects to Gauranga. Gauranga held Kirtan and religious discourses daily.

Miracle at Puri

At Puri a miracle happened. During the car festival, the car of Jagannath did not move. All the pilgrims tried their combined strength. It proved futile. The gigantic elephants of the Raja of Puri

also failed to move the car. All were in a stage of suspense and dilemma. Gauranga came just then. He pushed the car by his head and the car moved at once. All the pilgrims and devotees rent the air with the sound 'Hari Bol!'.

Conversion of Sarvabhauma

Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya was a great Vedantic scholar. Once Chaitanya went in an ecstatic mood to the temple of Jagannath. He rushed to embrace the image, but fell down on the ground in a deep swoon. The guard was about to beat Gauranga. The learned scholar Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, the minister of King Pratap Rudra of Orissa, removed Chaitanya to his house. His students carried Gauranga on their shoulders and put him down on a clean spot in the house. The devotees uttered loudly the name of 'Hari' in the ears of Gauranga. Gauranga came back to consciousness.

Sarvabhauma thought that Gauranga was a young man without any control of passion and knowledge of Vedanta. He did not like Kirtan and Nritya (dancing). He desired to re-initiate Gauranga. Gauranga humbly listened to Sarvabhauma for many days. Sarvabhauma expounded the following verse in nine different ways. Chaitanya showed his skill in Sanskrit and expounded the same verse in sixty-one different ways. Sarvabhauma was struck with wonder. The verse runs:

*"Atmaramascha Munayo Nigranthapi Urukrame,
Kurvanty Ahaitukim Bhaktim Ithambhuta Guno Hari"*

"Hari's qualities are so charming that the Atmarama Yogis--though they are Nigranthas (i.e., outside the influence of illusion or Shastraic injunctions)--become contemplative and are attracted by the same into adoring the Urukrama Hari with selfless love and devotion." Sarvabhauma had neither devotion nor realisation. He was only a dry learned Pundit. Gauranga was a great scholar and yet he was humble. He would never indulge in such talks as were calculated to wound the feelings of others. He would never feel a sense of elation if he got victory in his debates. Gauranga eventually converted Sarvabhauma to his faith and criticised his arguments one by one. Gauranga embraced Sarvabhauma. Sarvabhauma fainted in an ecstasy of divine joy. He then rose and danced. He prostrated at the feet of Gauranga and said, "Oh venerable Master! Logic had made my heart as hard as iron. I had no devotion. Thou hast melted me. Salutations unto thee, O powerful Lord!".

Lord Gauranga converted all the leaders of Advaita and the heads of the Vaishnavas who came under his fold. Prakasananda, the Advaitacharya of Varanasi, was also converted. The ministers of the King of Gour were subjugated. Kazi, the Governor, was conquered. The King of Orissa became Gauranga's ardent and devoted disciple. He recognised Gauranga as an Avatara of Lord Krishna.

Healing a Leper

Vasudeva was a humble, pious and good-natured Brahmin. He suffered from leprosy--a loathsome disease. He was forced to live apart from his friends and relatives on account of the abominable stench emitted by his body. He used to pick up the maggots that dropped from his

sores and put them back in their place. Vasudeva had extreme compassion and equal vision. He believed that all living creatures had an equal right to live and that he had no right to deprive them (the worms) of their natural food. What a magnanimous soul with a wonderful soft heart!

Vasudeva lived in the vicinity of the temple of Kurma at Jagannath. At night he heard of Chaitanya's arrival in the temple of Kurma. Next morning he proceeded to the temple to see him. He learnt that the Master had left the place half an hour earlier. On hearing this he fell down in a faint from disappointment and sorrow, exclaiming as he fell, "O Lord Krishna, hast Thou forsaken me?".

Chaitanya, who was then passing along the road, heard the cry of Vasudeva and ran towards the temple. He lifted the leper in his arms and embraced him, and lo! the leprosy disappeared and the body became sound and beautiful. Vasudeva said, "Oh Lord! Thou hast embraced me! All people fled from me due to the stench of my body. I came here to pay my respects to Thee and see Thy lotus feet. Certainly I did not come here with any idea of being healed. The loathsome malady taught me to be humble and compassionate and to remember the Lord at all times. But a healthy body will again generate pride and vanity and I will forget the Lord".

Chaitanya consoled him and said, "O Vasudeva! My child! You have the grace of Lord Krishna. You will never again be puffed up with vanity and pride. Lord Krishna has already accepted you on account of your extreme humility and compassion towards all living creatures and even to those worms which fed on your body. Repeat Lord Krishna's Name and save men by making them also repeat Krishna's Name".

Kirtan at the Residence of Sreebas

Pundit Sreebas was a sincere devotee of Gauranga. The first Kirtan party was formed in the courtyard of Sreebas's house. It was there that the Kirtan was usually held. *Chaitanya Bhagavata* was written by Sreebas's grandson in his house.

There was a grand Kirtan in the house of Sreebas one night. Gauranga and the Bhaktas were dancing in great joy. Now a maid-servant entered the courtyard and made a sign to Sreebas to follow her. Sreebas left the Kirtan and went inside the house. Sreebas's only son was seriously ailing from cholera. Sreebas saw now that his son was in a dying condition. His wife was weeping. Sreebas told her, "Do not weep. This will disturb the joy of our Lord. It is a great fortune that our son is dying when Hari's Kirtan is being done in the house". In a few minutes the soul of the boy left the body. Sreebas joined in the Kirtan and danced in joy. He was not a bit affected. The matter could not be kept secret for a long time. Anyhow it reached the ears of a Kirtanist. He stopped the Kirtan. Another heard the news. He also stopped the Kirtan and wanted to see the condition of Sreebas. Gradually the Kirtanists stopped one by one. Gauranga also stopped the Kirtan and said: "How is it that I do not experience much joy today? Has anything serious happened today?". He looked at Sreebas with a pained heart.

Sreebas replied, "Can I have any danger when the Lord is doing Kirtan in my house?". Another devotee said, "It is true, my Lord, a great calamity has occurred. Pundit Sreebas's son is dead". Chaitanya said, "His son dead! When?". The devotee replied, "He died some six or seven hours

ago". Chaitanya burst into tears. He said, "Sreebas, bring the child before me". The body of the child was brought before Gauranga in the courtyard. Gauranga addressed the dead child and commanded him to speak. The boy spoke: "I am leaving this body for a better existence. O Lord, may my soul cling to Thy lotus feet!". The soul again left the body of the child. Gauranga then said to Sreebas and his wife Malinee: "I and Nityananda will take the place of your departed child. Be not troubled. Be not anxious". What a large and sympathetic heart Gauranga had!

Six-Handed Divinity

The followers of Chaitanya regard Chaitanya as a six-handed Divinity. It is said that he showed his form with six hands to Sarvabhauma, Ramananda Ray and Nitai, the first two hands provided with bow and arrow, the second two with a flute in the act of playing upon it and the last two with Danda and Kamandalu (staff and pot). By this manifestation Chaitanya made Nitai understand that he was Rama as well as Krishna.

Jumping Into the Sea

When Gauranga was in a fit of devotional ecstasy, he jumped into the blue sea at Puri. He imagined that the blue sea was the Yamuna. He wanted to join in the frolics of the Gopis of Brindavan. As his body was in an emaciated condition, owing to constant fasts and vigils, it floated on the water and fell into the net of a fisherman. It was night. The fisherman was extremely glad as he felt that the net was very heavy. He thought that he had caught a big Brobdingnagian fish. He dragged the net to the shore with difficulty. He found in the net a human corpse instead of a big fish. He was disappointed. The corpse made a faint sound. The fisherman took it for a ghost or hobgoblin. He was greatly frightened. He slowly walked along the shore with trembling feet. Swaroopa and Ramananda, who were searching for their master from sunset, met the fisherman. Swaroopa asked him if he had seen Gauranga Deva anywhere. The fisherman narrated his story. Then Swaroopa and Ramananda hurried to the place where the net was lying. They removed their Master from the net and placed him on the ground. They sang the name of Hari loudly. Gauranga came back to consciousness.

His Last Words

Lord Gauranga said, "Listen Swaroopa and Ramananda Raj! The chanting of Krishna's Name is the chief means of attaining Krishna's feet in the Kali Yuga. Sankirtan of the Name is the supreme healer in the Iron Age. Sankirtan tantamounts to Vedic sacrifice. Sankirtan destroys sins and purifies the heart and creates Bhakti. Chant the name while sitting, standing, walking, eating, in bed and everywhere. The Name is omnipotent. You can repeat the Name at any place, at any time.

"Listen, Swaroopa and Ramananda! I tell you about the mental attitude with which the Name should be recited.

"Hari's Name should always be chanted by him who must be humbler than a blade of grass (which is trodden upon); who is more patient, forbearing and charitable than a tree (which does not cry out even when it is cut down, and which does not beg for water even when scorched to

death, but on the contrary, offers its treasure to whosoever seeks it, bears the sun and rain itself but protects those who take shelter under it from rain and sunshine); who, however worthy of esteem should, instead of claiming respect for himself, give respect to all (from a sense of God's immanency in all beings). He who thus takes Krishna's Name gets Krishna-prem".

Lord Gauranga became more humble in spirit and recited the following Sloka:-

"Oh Lord, I ask not for wealth or followers, or for poetic genius. May my motiveless devotion to Thee continue in me whenever I take birth."

Gauranga passed away on the 14th June, 1533.

*Chetodarpana Marjanain Bhava Mahadavagni Nirvapanam
Sreyah Kairava Chandrikaa Vitaranam Vidhyavadhoo Jivanam;
Anandambudhi Vardhanam Pratipadam Purnamrita Swadanam
Sarvatmasnapanam Param Vijayate Sri Krishna Sankirtanam.*

"Glorified above all is the chanting of the various names of Krishna which cleanses the mirror of Chitta (sub-conscious), which extinguishes the great forest fire of the succession of births and rebirths, which operates like the moonbeam upon the white lily of spiritual well-being, which is the elixir of life of the bride Vidya, which makes the ocean of bliss swell, which gives the chanter the fullest enjoyment of that divine love at the utterance of each word, and which bathes the mind and the senses in divine bliss."--*Gauranga*

Sikshashtaka