

Svalikhita Jivani

The Autobiography of Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda

Translated from the original Bengali by Shukavak N. Dasa Ph.D.

We are in the process of editing this book for publication. If you would like to be informed when it becomes available email us at Sukulina@vaishnava.com.

Chapter One–Village Life

Birth

- Kedarnath born Sakabda 1760, 18th day in the month of Bhadra (September 2, 1838), in the home of his maternal grandfather in the village of Ula.
- Ula, also known as Birnagar, a prosperous village situated 80 miles north of Calcutta in the district of Nadia.

Mitra Family

- Maternal grandfather, Isvara Candra Mustauphi, a famous landowner of the Mitra family.
- Family has extensive land holdings in the Murshidabad district north of Calcutta.
- Mother's name was Shrimati Jagan Mohini Mitra.
- Mahesa Babu maternal cousin.
- Kailasa Datta, son-in-law of Kedarnath's maternal grandfather.
- Girisha Babu, mother's brother who died when Kedarnath was 3 or 4 years old.

Datta Family

- Kedarnath born a descendent of Purusottama Datta, originally a Kanyakubja Kayastha invited to come to Bengal at the urging of King Adisura in the 13th century.
- The Datta family, known as the Hatakhola Dattas, connected to Govinda Saran Datta the founder of Govindapura, one of the three original settlement towns of Calcutta. Kedarnath 8th in line from Govinda Saran Datta.
- Kedarnath's family related to Madan Mohan Datta, ship owner and trader, famous for constructing the 397 stairs of Pretshila Hill in Gaya. Kedarnath forth in line from Madan Mohan Datta.
- Paternal grandfather was Rajavallabha Datta, a Kālī–siddha living in Orissa.
- Rajavallabha Datta had large landholdings in Calcutta and Chutigovindapur.
- Rajavallabha lost property in Calcutta.

- Property of Chutigovindapur taken over by the household servants after the death of Rai Jagannath Prasad Ghosh.
- Father's name was Anand Chandra Datta.

Kedarnath's Siblings

- First brother, Abhayakali, dead at time of Kedarnath's birth.
- Second brother, Kaliprasanna, living at time of Kedarnath's birth.
- Kedarnath was third son of Anandacandra Datta
- Two brothers, Haridas and Gauridas, and one sister, Hemalata, junior to Kedarnath.

Other Important Names

- Shibu name of family's nurse.
- Vacaspati Mahashaya name of a pandit who had a Sanskrit school in the Temple of Dindamayi that was part of maternal Grandfather's estate.
- Sivchandra name of the family elephant.
- Isvara and Umakaran names of two doctors employed by maternal grandfather for family care.

Early Education

- Attended a day school run by Kartika Sarakara at age three years.
- Kedarnath formally entered school at age five years.
- All education was in Bengali until end of sixth year.
- At age 7 began English school under a Frenchman named Dijor Baret.
- Mahesa Babu, Kailasa Datta, Mahendra Babu, Raja Kumara Ganguli, attended English school along with Kedarnath.
- 1845, at age seven attended school in Krishnanagara.
- Captain Richardson, principal. Ramatanu Lahiri, Bengali teacher.
- Excelled in English studies in Krishnanagara but later failed due to false pride of his studies.
- 1846 Kedarnath's older brother, Kaliprasanna, dies of cholera contracted in Krishnanagara.

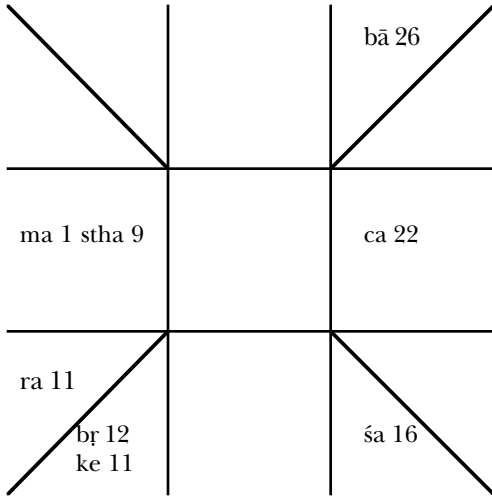
May Lalita Prasad Datta
attain the highest welfare
in the lotus hands of Shri Lakshmi Devi.

April 4, 1896.

Dear Lalita Prasad,

You have asked for the details of my life, so whatever I can remember, I will include in this letter. Please see that this information is not misused.

I was born in *śakābda* 1760 on the eighteenth day of *Bhādra* in my maternal grandfather's home at the village of Ula, now known as Birnagar. Here is my natal horoscope:



jātāhaḥ
dināmāna 31/14/48

1	22	5
13	25	8
26	11	40
43	4	18

My birth corresponds to the following times: *śakābda*, 1760; Caitanya era, 352; Saṁvat, 1895; Christian era, September 2, 1838; and Bengali era, 1245.

Mother said that she suffered severe labor pains for two or three days before I was born. During the birth an astrologer marked the time with both an hourglass and an English clock. I had a good weight at birth. Previously, my oldest brother, Abhaykali, had died. A second brother, Kaliprasanna, was still living at that time, so I was my father's third son. It was said that of all my brothers I was a little ugly so my mother prayed, "O God, let this boy be the servant of the rest, but just let him live."

My father was religious, straightforward and detached from worldly dealings. People said that there was no one was more handsome in all of Calcutta. My mother, Shrimati Jagan Mohini, was unique. She possessed equality, intellect, straightforwardness, and devotion to my father.

Since my paternal grandfather, Rajballabh Datta had lost his wealth in Calcutta and moved to Orissa, my father, Anand Chandra Datta, along with my mother, left Calcutta to live with my maternal grandfather, Ishwar Chandra Mustauphi. Later when my paternal grandfather was cheated of his property in Orissa, Father had to go and help. Father was away for almost three years until the lawsuit was settled. For this reason I was born in my maternal grandfather's home at Birnagar (Ula) while my father was in Orissa.

Here is the story of my paternal family, the Hatkhola Dattas. Amongst the *kāyasthas* who came to Bengal at the invitation of King Adishura, Purushottam Datta was the foremost. I was a descendant of this Purushottam, the best of the *Kānyakubja*¹ *kāyasthas*. Purushottam's community originally settled at Baligram, but later another individual in the lineage settled in Andulgram and became a leader of the *kāyastha* community. Govindasharan was the seventeenth descendant from Purushottam, who eventually gave all the property of Andulgram to his brother, Harisharan. With the help of the sultan of Delhi, Harisharan established the village of Gobindpore on the bank of the Ganges. In time Gobindpore fell into the hands of the British and was converted into Fort William. In exchange the Datta family received land at Hatkhola,² where they built a new settlement. In this way they became known as the Hatkhola Dattas.

The twenty-first descendant from Purushottam Datta was the famous Madan Mohan Datta,³ who was foremost among the Hatkhola Dattas on account of his extensive religious works. All of Bengal knew of his famous works at Pretshila Hill in Gaya and other religious sites. My paternal grandfather, Rajballabh Datta, was the grandson of Madan Mohan.

In Orissa, Chutigovindapur was situated on the banks of the river, Birup, within the district of Cuttack. My paternal grandfather had his residence in that village. Grandfather actually owned Chutigovindapur as well as a few other villages nearby.

1. *Kānyakubja*, also known as *Kanyākubja*, was a region of ancient India near Delhi. The main center was Kanauj. See C. Collins Davies, *An Historical Atlas of the Indian Peninsula* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, N.D.), p. 33.

2. Hatkhola is presently a locale of northern Calcutta.

3. Madan Mohan Datta (1710-1787) was a famous trader of the eighteenth century who lived at Hatkhola. He accumulated a vast wealth working with the British. Later he expanded his business activities with

When the honorable Rai Jagannath Prasad Ghosh passed away my father became the legal inheritor. Therefore, all of Jagannath Prasad's property came to my father. However, so long as my grandfather's vast wealth in Calcutta was not disturbed, there was no desire by either my father or my grandfather to secure their wealth in Chutigram. After the death of Rai Jagannath the property in Chutigovindapur was taken over by the household (*khānājāta*⁴) servants. Ramhari Das, who was the chief servant, came to control the property.

Later when my grandfather and grandmother lost their wealth in Calcutta they moved to Chutigovindapur. At that time my parents moved to Ula with Abhaykali, my oldest brother. Eventually Kaliprasanna, my immediate elder brother, was born in Ula. Soon afterwards my father went to Orissa at the request of my grandfather because Ramhari Das refused to relinquish control of the property.

When I was almost two-years-old Father returned from Orissa. My nanny said that a few days before he returned I saw a flying crow and recited the following rhyme:

kāk kala kala jhīṅgera phula
baba āseta naḍe bas/
 O crow, sitting near the flower of the Jhīnga squash,
 Ka! Ka!,
 If Father comes, sit aside (make room).⁵

As I spoke the crow moved aside. Some people nearby saw this and said, "O Babu, your father must surely be coming soon." It so happened that Father arrived a few days later.

Up to age three or four I cannot remember much, so whatever I write has been told to me. As I grew up I was into everything and nothing failed to catch my attention. At eight months I developed a boil on my thigh and became weak and skinny. I also heard that while being carried in the arms of Shibu, my nanny, she fell down a flight of stairs and I cut my tongue. To this day I still have the scar on my tongue. This happened just when my teeth were coming in.

I went to a preschool run by Karttik Sarkar at the age of three. Even now I can see his cane. The school was on the long terrace of my grandfather's *pūjā*⁶ building.

America. Madan Datta is particularly famous for building many sites at Gaya including the stairs up Pretshila Hill. Gaya is a noted Hindu pilgrimage centre, visited by about 300,000 pilgrims annually.

4. The *khānājāta* servants were household servants who were born into the household and who work in the inner part of the house as opposed to other grades of servants who were not allowed into the inner areas of the house.

Many village boys came to that school: Mahesh Babu, my maternal cousin, Kailash Datta, the son-in-law of my grandfather, Mahendranath Basu, Shyamlal Mitra, and many others. Karttik Sarkar had a forbidding nature so we all feared him. Around this time my mother's brother, Girish Babu, died.

The village of Birnagar overflowed with happiness, for it was the wealthiest village within the district of Nadiya. As the wealth of Birnagar was known throughout the land, so my maternal grandfather, the honorable Ishwar Chandra Mustaphi, was famous as a prosperous landowner. His astounding liberality was widely known; people came from all over the countryside just to see his famous palace. The home of my maternal grandfather was unequalled in its wealth and size with its hundreds of male and female servants.

My grandfather celebrated all the festivals and I can especially remember the Jagaddhātrī *pūjās*⁷ held during the night. They were celebrated with great pomp. The image of the goddess was dressed and decorated in her finest outfit. The meals were heavenly. Hundreds of lights, strung in lines, were hung in the *pūjā* building and the vacant lot next door. The guards dressed in sepoy uniforms, and many stout men wearing golden embroidered clothes came from Ranaghat and Shantipur. These guests were accompanied by a multitude of bodyguards and soldiers; the scene resembled a forest of people, and with all the lights, it looked like the battlefield of Kurukshetra.⁸ There were fireworks and lots of rowdy pomp. *Kṣemaṭā* and *bāināca*⁹ dancing were held on the first night. Everyone was so overwhelmed with the fun that they lost sight of the religious side of the occasion. Late in the evening the *kavi gāna*¹⁰ would begin. The speakers would form two teams and go on till dawn. They sometimes screamed so loudly that my ears hurt.

The worship of the goddess Durgā was also very nice. Everyday Jagattārinī (Durgā) was worshipped in her temple. Her statue was very large and made of eight kinds of metal. During the *pūjā* she was brought to the home temple; I can remember seeing twenty-five to thirty Brahmins from the west performing her *pūjā*. She was

5. This is a simple child's rhyme, one of many that could have been recited by children and their nurse maids throughout Bengal.

6. *Pūjā* is a common form of Hindu worship that involves the veneration of a sacred image. The *pūjā* building is a place where *pūjās* are performed.

7. Jagaddhātrī is a form of the goddess Durgā.

8. Kurukshetra is the famous site where the battle that is described the *Mahābhārata* occurred.

9. *Kṣemaṭā* and *bāināca* are two forms of Bengali folk dance performed by hired persons, who would dance during the Durgā *pūjā*. Generally *kṣemaṭā* is performed by men dressed up as ladies.

10. *Kavi-gāna* is a form of entertainment performed by a class of *kavi's* or poets who would be hired to attend a religious or social event and present an impromptu poetic dialogue describing the exploits of Rāma, for example. Many *kavi's* may participate on a competitive basis, each trying to demonstrate their poetic abilities by outdoing the other. *Kavi-gāna* may be analogous to modern day "rap".

worshipped with the grandest splendor. The sound of the *ṭāka* and *ṭola*¹¹ drums would shake the whole house and on the last day the goats and buffalo would be sacrificed. On that day the ladies would worship the goddess Durgā by carrying pots of incense on their heads. We would all get together with our friends and go to the temple to enjoy this occasion. The stone *mūrti* of Dīnadāyāmayī Kālī gracefully stood in the Navacūḍa Mandir.¹² On the actual night of the Kālī *pūjā* there was great fanfare. Everybody used to enjoy this occasion, except of course, the goats and buffalo. The assembled Brahmins and pundits used to come, I'm sure, just for the taste of goat meat.

We also had lots of fun during the *dola-yātra* festival.¹³ There was singing and the throwing of red powder—everything would appear to be covered in blood. Even the guards took part in the festival. They would enter the temple courtyard singing and throwing powder. I stayed a little distant because of their commotion. At this time I especially enjoyed watching the festive bonfire known as *meḍāpoḍā*.¹⁴

After my mother's brother, Girish Babu, passed away many inauspicious things began to happen to my maternal grandfather. Swindlers cheated my maternal grandfather of his wealth. As he gradually lost his land he became exceedingly disturbed. Since his sons had died, he married several times to have another son; he could not understand that at his age marriage was not a solution. With his declining wealth and mounting expenses he experienced untold suffering.

When I was five years old I again went to school. My former teacher, Kartik Sarkar, was no longer there instead Yadu Sarkar and other respected teachers had taken charge. My younger brother, Haridas, was also enrolled in this school. We attended classes both in the mornings and in the late afternoons. At school the older students acted as agents of the teacher to harass the younger students. If we came to school late these older boys would catch us. It was the rule that whoever came to school first got hit only once; whoever came second got hit twice, and whoever was third got hit three times; in this way the numbers increased. The teacher would beat one of the older boys, who would in turn beat the rest of us. If, for any reason, you had to leave class you would have to spit on the floor and return before it dried.

The routine of this school was as follows: the youngest students wrote their letters on palm leaf using black coal. After a year they could write on banana leaves and after

11. The *ṭāka* drum is a circular drum that stands about three feet off the ground and has at least a two foot diameter. It is played with sticks. The *ṭola* drum is usually played on the lap with the hands in a horizontal manner. It is similar to the *mṛdaṅga* or *ḍholak*.

12. Navacūḍa refers to a temple in which there are nine domes.

13. The *dola-yātra* is more commonly known outside of Bengal as holi. It is a festival that celebrates the advent of spring and it involves the throwing of colored powders.

14. Meḍāpoḍā is a bonfire ceremony carried out as part of the *dola-yātra*.

that they could write on paper. The older boys studied accounting just like in the office of the Zamindar, and from time to time we practiced court proceedings under the scrutiny of our teacher. The youngest boys would make a complaint against the older boys and present their witnesses and evidence in the court of law. Finally, there would be a judgement and punishment that had to have the sanction of the teacher. There were many kinds of punishment: twisting ears, slapping, caning, *nāḍu-gopāla*,¹⁵ or paying a fine. Our teacher was the personification of death. The older students always acted on behalf of the teacher, as if they were the agents of death. We had no alternative but to keep these older boys happy. Once during a school holiday the older boys spoke to me as follows, “O Kedar, our teacher has no food tomorrow morning, so bring whatever nice food you can from your home.” So I stole a little ripened jackfruit,¹⁶ hiding it under my schoolbooks. They gave it to my teacher, who was very pleased and said that this little boy will get knowledge. However, when my nursemaid found out she came and took back the jackfruit. My mother was outraged, and when our teacher heard about this he became scared. He told us not to steal things that could be noticed: “Don't bring big things!” he said. The neighboring children stole tobacco, but since our servants kept my father's tobacco under lock and key, I could only get soaked chickpeas. On one occasion my brother, Haridas, became so angry at this teacher and the boldness of the older boys that he took a machete and was going to enter the house of our teacher while he was sleeping. I just happened to catch him on his way, so I took the machete away from him. He ran away, but when our teacher woke and heard all the commotion he became afraid. He handed in his resignation and left home that very day. Soon afterwards another person became the teacher. In this way I studied under two or three teachers and eventually began writing on paper.

In the morning we would stand up and recite the multiplication tables in a loud chorus. First the older students would say: “Four *kaḍis* make one *gaṇḍā*.” Then the younger students would immediately repeat, “Four *kaḍis* make one *gaṇḍā*.”¹⁷ In this way the chorus would go on, and when it was finished we sat down and wrote it out. During the writing time our teacher would often call out – “say it, say it, write it, write it” – and in a loud voice we would all repeat the words aloud and then write them out.

15. *Nāḍu-gopāla* refers to the particular bending down posture held by the child Krishna when he is holding butter or sweets. In this case Krishna is known as *laḍu-gopāla*, *laḍu* being a kind of sweet. *Naḍu*, however, is a brick. So the term *Nāḍu-gopāla* refers to a posture assumed by a student while holding a brick instead of some sweets. It was apparently used as a form of punishment because the brick, which was heavy, quickly became tiresome.

16. Jackfruit is a popular delicacy of Bengal.

In the tumultuous chaos no one could understand anyone else. After three hours we had morning break. In a rush we went inside for boiled rice. Half an hour later we returned for more reading and writing. At noon the school closed till three o'clock when we would return and again recite the tables. The school would close for the day at six o'clock.

I went to that school till I was seven. All the instruction was in Bengali. I learned some bookkeeping and eventually I could write out the *Sevaka Śrīpāṭha*, although my handwriting was not good.

In the mean time an English school opened near my maternal grandfather's home. A Frenchman named Dijor Baret from Chandannagar¹⁸ was the teacher and so my maternal cousin, Mahesh Babu, along with Kailash Datta, Mahendra Babu, Rajkumr Ganguli, and others went there. When my school closed at noon I would also go and try to learn some English. The teacher, Mr. Dijor Baret, talked to my father and suggested that my elder brother and I also be admitted to this English school. Mr. Baret was fond of me because of desire to study English. Even though he was French, he liked Bengali customs and so he would wear a *dhuti*¹⁹ and enjoy eating *khicuḍi*²⁰ and other Bengali dishes. I would often stay with him after class. My brothers were always restless and could not stay for long, so if I did not go with them I would sit with Mr. Baret.

On the days that Mr. Baret returned to his home I would go with my brothers and play all afternoon in the gardens and at the ladies' tank.²¹ We would net *Khalisā* fish in a cloth or wander in the gardens and pick ripe mangos. My grandfather had a circular building,²² not far from these mango trees, where we could play. Nearby my father kept his butterfly collection. He had the *Karavī*, the *Ākanda*, the black *Kaśandā*, and other kinds of butterflies in a box. He raised them by feeding them their respective leaves. The best of all these butterflies was the one that lived on the leaves of the *Isu Mūla* tree. When all these insects had grown into butterflies he would let them go, and if I saw any of these butterflies while I was playing I would catch them for him.

In the garden there were many beehives that we sometimes broke into for honey. Unfortunately, eating that much honey made our bodies hot. This meant that

17. This was the old system of Bengali measure including *ganḍā* and *kaḍā*. A *kaḍi* (cowrie) is a miniature conch shell that was used as a coin of the smallest denomination. A *ganḍā* is a set of four.

18. Chandannagar is about thirty miles north of Calcutta. Previously it was known as *Pharāsaḍāṅgā*, literally meaning Frenchtown. It was an area originally controlled by the French in Bengal.

19. A *dhuti* is the Bengali equivalent of a dhoti, the traditional lower garment worn by Indian men.

20. *Khicuḍi* is a common Bengali dish made primarily of beans and rice.

21. The *puṣkaraṇi* is a pond usually on the west side of a house that is reserved for ladies bathing.

22. The *golābātī* is a circular building that is often used for the storage of grain and rice.

my mother could usually tell whether we had been eating honey. If she found out she would punished us. One day the honeybees stung us so badly that my older brother, Kālīprasanna, came down with a fever for several days.

Playing in the gardens and ponds and grain sheds was not enough for my brothers. They sometimes wanted to get into real trouble. I was generally more restrained than them, so I would leave my brothers by midday to visit the gatekeepers. These men were soldiers from the west, so they ate *roḷīs* made of wheat and *ḍāla*.²³ After lunch they would sit on their cots near the front gates and recite Tulsi Dasa's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Even though I could not understand the language it sounded very sweet to me. One day as I was listening to the stories, I asked Shital Teoyari to tell me some of the meanings. They were reading the story of the wise old crow.²⁴ I liked that story so in the evening I told it to my mother and nanny. Mother was so pleased that she showed her appreciation to Mr. Teoyari by giving me some gifts to take to him. Out of affection Teoyari gave me some of his lunch, which I ate and became very happy.

From the beginning I stayed close to my teacher and studied English as much as possible. Whenever possible I stayed after school. At home before bed I would listen to Mr. Ghosh's maid and Shibu, my nanny, and the other “wise” ladies of the house get together to tell stories of highway robbery, romance, and tigers.

Sometimes I would wake up late in the night and sit by the window. During the four watch hours²⁵ officers Naph and Sannyasi would carry lanterns in the courtyard around the estate and shout out the watch calls.²⁶ I would often call Officer Naph over to the window and question him about many things. Mr. Naph was very old, but still he carried his lantern and stick. Originally he lived at my maternal grandfather's estate in the district of Murashidabad, but after the dacoits attacked Ula, my grandfather stationed many western guards and sepoy in Ula. Even though my grandfather had all these guards, he gave Officer Naph and two or three other guards the task of protecting the inner grounds. In his younger days Officer Naph had been a big dacoit. Once by accident he even cut off the head of his guru during a raid. Since then he always repeated the names of God. I would call him over to my upper story window to tell me stories from his childhood and younger days. I was only six or seven years old at the time so I could not understand half of what he told me, but still I liked to hear his stories.

23. A *roḷī* is kind of flat bread. *ḍāla* is a soup made with beans.

24. The story of the wise old crow (*bhūṣaṇḍī kākā*) begins with a conversation between a crow and Garuḍa. See Tulasi Dasa's *Rāmāyaṇa Uttara-khaṇḍa* 93kha.

25. The twenty-four hours of the day are divided into eight three-hour time periods call *prahāras*. Four of the *prahāras* are during the day and four are during the night.

Since my mother was the daughter of a wealthy man she could not tolerate too much work. The burden of our physical care was entrusted to our nanny, Shibu, who looked after us as if we were her own children. In the morning she served us a light breakfast and then took us to school. Later, for a snack she would bring us rice. At noon she always made sure we took hot milk. In the evening she brought us home and put us to rest by laying beside us in bed. She sacrificed her own happiness for our happiness, and even if her daughter wanted some attention, she looked after us first.

I enjoyed watching the doctors make medicines in the outer area of the temple of Dīnadayāmayī.²⁷ They made preparations from sandal oil, black molasses, and ghee. In the village of Raghunath there were two doctors named Ishwar and Umacharan, who were paid by my grandfather to make medicines and look after the family. They burned gold and oxidized iron and other metals for different medicines. I often watched them make preparations out of rabbit oil and ghee. They made *loha-jvara*, a kind of tonic made by powdering precious stones and mixing them with iron. Their students studied many books and also made medicines. In an alcove, Vidya Vachaspati had a school. He would recite different hymns, cook rice and chickpeas as an offering to the goddess Kālī. Respected Vachaspati had many students who studied grammar, vocabulary, and literature. I would often hear their discussions on various verses.

In the afternoon we would often play around the house, moving from room to room. Before I was born my older maternal uncle, Kirtichandra Mustauphi, had died, but while he was living he had two wives, Ranga Mami and Baro Mami. Ranga Mami was a little crazy, and Baro Mami liked me very much. When I went to her room she gave me nice things to eat and told me many stories. Throughout my childhood I had a lot of cavities. Sometimes I would cry all day on account of a toothache. Baro Mami told me that most people thought that cavities were caused from insects, but in fact cavities were the result of a disease within the teeth from eating sweet and sour things. There was no such a thing as teeth insects. She also said that it was just an old wives' tale that some gypsies could drive out these insects.

Sometimes in the late afternoon, before evening prayers, I would sit in my father's parlor and hear stories. After the prayers he took a light snack and gave me a piece of *sandēśa*.²⁸ Most of the time I was with my older brother Kali. I always avoided

26. At night the guards would call out the watch calls at the end of each *prahāra*.

27. Dīnadayāmayī is a name of the goddess Kālī.

28. Sandēśa is a common Bengali sweet made from milk curd.

my youngest brother, the bad one, as we called him. Gauridas was a beautiful boy, but because he was so young he was into everything and could not come with us.

During the birth festival of the goddess Ulācandī, all of Ula would join in the fun. There was a place for Ulācandī in one area of the village, which had many banyan trees. Her statue was placed on a stone that was covered with red powder and on the full moon night of the month of *vaiśākha*,²⁹ she was always worshipped with great fanfare. On that occasion two neighborhoods celebrated public *pūjās*.³⁰ One was called *mahiṣa-maddinī-pūjā* and the other, in the southern neighborhood, was known as the *byhat-durgā-pūjā*. During the festival people came to Ula from far and wide and stayed with their relatives for the three days of the festival. During that time the streets were thronged with crowds, and each neighborhood was filled with many exciting things to do. I liked the buffalo and elephant fights the best. Elephants and buffalo came from many places. The Mukhopadhyays had one buffalo that was especially immense. Its horns were covered with iron and it would fight against an elephant that also had its tusks covered with iron. After the announcement that the elephant and buffalo would be set loose in the middle of the town everyone would clear the streets. Sometimes the buffalo would wound the elephant and sometimes the elephant would overcome the buffalo. We stayed on the second floor roofs to watch. Some days we rode atop our elephant, Shivchandra, who carried us all over the town for these festivities.

In those days I had not seen any other villages, but still, I knew that Ula was the best. There was no suffering in Ula and hardly a single day went by without some festival going on. There were 1400 good *brāhmaṇa* families and many more *kāyastha* and *vaidya* families. The respected Mustauphis were the wealthiest, so no one ever went without food. In those days one could get by with very little and everybody was very happy. People would sing, make music, and tell stories. You could not count how many jolly-bellied *brāhmaṇsa* there were in Ula. Everyone was skilled in the fine arts, song, and music. Groups of people could be heard all the time making music and singing, playing chess and gambling with dice. The village was a very happy place and if anybody was in need they could go to the home of the honorable Mustauphi family and get whatever they needed. Medicine, oil, and ghee were in plenty. The village was so large that it took fifty-six watchmen to look after it. The good people of Ula did not know the need to find work in order to eat. What a happy time it was!

29. Vaiśākha corresponds to the months of April and May.

30. The *barottyari pūjās* were public *pūjā* that were sponsored by a wealthy individual or a group of individuals.

I lived in this way until I was about seven years of age. My older brother, Kālīprasanna, was nine and my younger brother Haridas was four. Around this time a college opened in Krishnanagar. The king of Krishnanagar, Shrishchandra, wrote a letter to my grandfather requesting that he send his children to this college. Whatever deliberations went on I did not know, but we soon heard that my maternal cousin Mahesh Babu, my older brother Kālī, myself, Kailash Datta, Mahendra Basu, and Yadunath Chandra would go to that college. I was in great anxiety because I knew that I could not sleep at night without my nanny, so my mother decided that our nurse should accompany us to Krishnanagar.

We stayed in a two-story house near the bazaar; our sleeping quarters were upstairs and our cooking facilities were downstairs. The bazaar and the street were at the front. A statue of Gaṇeśa was just above the stairs. Below the stairs, near the kitchen, there was a storage room for cooking supplies. Even though the door was closed, seeds would fall through the cracks. We would fry them and eat them for snacks. Our main diet was rice and *ḍāla*. Our cook was a brahmin, but his cooking was terrible. From time to time our nanny would bring us a lunch that we could really enjoy. Sitting on the stairs we could see into the room of the oil pressman. He was a very old man who sat on a low seat. Because of his age he would have the *Mahābhārata* read daily. In his courtyard there was a raised seat and canopy for a reader, who would be offered a garland and make his recitation and sing some songs. I used to enjoy hearing the *Mahābhārata*, especially the stories about Bhīma. On the days that the speaker received good things to eat he would speak eloquently; on the days that he received little to eat his heart would be depressed and he would not speak so well. Every Saturday we returned to our home in Ula by hired bearers, who carried us quickly on a palanquin. That was the happiest day. Mahesh Babu, Kālī Dada, and myself traveled on one palanquin and when we reached home we touched the feet of my mother in great joy. On Sundays there were no end to the stories, but early on Mondays we would have to go to Goyara, eat breakfast, and return to school.

Our school was at the official residence of the local magistrate in Krishnanagar. In those days there was a large playing field with many trees and shrubs; today the place is a jungle. Right in front of the school was the main road, the local police station, and the heavenly residence of the barrister, the honorable Mr. Manomohan Ghosh. Part of his home was used as the chief post office. At school we sat on mats, but after a while chairs, tables, and benches arrived. Captain Richardson,³¹ an Englishman, was the

31. D. L. Richardson was also the principal of Hindu College in Calcutta.

college principal, while Ramtanu Lahiri³² was the head Bengali teacher. Mahesh Dada and Kailash Babu studied in the second year class. My brother Kali and I studied in the lower class. We even studied alongside the king's son, the honorable Satish Chandra. Later, the son of the king from Koch Behar arrived. Masters Gadadhar and Dina Dayal were our teachers. I remember that Master Gadadhar's neck was somehow swollen and that he was very cruel. He would even hit us with a broken piece of slate.

Everyone said that I liked to study English. My teachers were kind to me, so with a little effort and practice I obtained good standing in class. I passed the examination and received a class promotion along with an award. No one in our group, including Mahesh or Kali Dada, received an award or promotion. It was announced in Ula that I was the best boy and by Sunday my fame had spread everywhere. Grandfather was so proud of me that he made me sit near him for dinner. My father was also very proud. My mother, Baro Mami, and the other ladies talked about me everywhere. Dijor Baret, my former teacher, came and praised me to no end. My father tried to stop everyone from praising me too much but it was too late. All this praise inflated my pride, so much so, that immediately my reading and writing amounted to nothing. I was no longer any good in class. Now the teachers gave me trouble. Using this as an excuse Mahesh Dada and others, who had become envious, gave me nothing but trouble. While I excelled in class everyone had become envious, but now their anger came out with a vengeance. I could no longer memorize my lessons; torment came from all sides. I would leave for school on the palanquin, but I would not arrive in class. Instead I would stay in the woods until school ended and then return home on the palanquin. Whenever possible I stayed at home on the pretext of being ill. By that time our nanny no longer stayed with us in Krishnanagar; she had returned to Ula as soon as we were able to live nicely in Krishnanagar. I had no one to turn to for shelter.

One day Deoyan Govind Auca came to our house and cooked some goat meat. Late that night my brother Kali Dada became ill with cholera. Doctor Kali Lahiri said that the affliction was very serious, so it was decided that Kālī and I should return immediately for Ula. First thing in the morning we set out on the palanquin. Kali Dada was very ill so I tried to pacify him and make him feel better as we crossed the river. By eight o'clock the next morning we arrived in Ula; an hour later Kali Dada died. I knew that something was very wrong when the women of the house began to cry. That day my uncle was arranging to feed *brāhmaṇas* at the house. The feast was to be hosted by the whole *kāyastha* community, but now the affair had to be canceled.

32. Ramtanu Lahiri, originally from Krishnanagar was a prominent member of Young Bengal.

We are in the process of editing this book for publication. If you would like to be informed when it becomes available email us at Sukulina@vaishnava.com.