

## **Gaudiya Vaishnavism and The Gastronomic Milieu in Early Modern Bengal: Some Socio-Economic Perspectives**

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Appearing in the late fifteenth century Gaudiya Vaishnavism continued to be one of the most prominent religious and philosophical ideologies in Bengal. The movement which caused new resurgence in the socio-cultural life of early modern Bengal had so long been studied by the academic scholarship mostly as an ideology championing social egalitarianism against the contemporary dogmatism of the gnostic and ritualistic Hindu cults. But the conventional academia has not yet analysed a number of significant contributions of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in the material and social life of early modern Bengal. We will try to study the Gaudiya Vaishnavism's influence on one of the most important fields of daily life in early modern Bengal that is the gastronomic milieu. The influence of Gaudiya Vaishnava world on the culinary sphere of contemporary Bengal had been complicated, multifaceted and massive. Instead of studying how the Gaudiya Vaishnavism had enriched the Bengali platter by expanding the number of culinary delights we addressed two complicated issues which were closely connected with both the gastronomic space of Bengal and also the Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Firstly we had tried

to study how the Gaudiya Vaishnava world was connected with the market economy. We will show a how the market transaction of the foodstuffs had influenced the consumption pattern in the Gaudiya household and hospices. Secondly, we had navigated the more important issue of the contribution of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in introducing some sort of cosmopolitanism in the consumptive world of early modern Bengal by overcoming the caste and religious barriers in dietary intake and introducing a sense of common platter. We tried to interweave these questions of socio-economic aspects with the broader and complex issues of gastronomic arena influenced by Gaudiya Vaishnavism. These socio-economic aspects of Gaudiya Vaishnavism help us to reach a newer dimension of gastronomic cosmopolitanism which was slowly but surely developing in early modern Bengal.

## **Gaudiya Vaishnavism and the Gastronomic Milieu in Early Modern**

### **Bengal: Some Socio-Economic Perspectives**

Gaudiya Vaishnava *bhakti* in early modern Bengal entered the wider fold of *bhakti* movement to a certain extent later. Scholars have often traced the origin of the *bhakti* movement in south India arguably in the Sangama age as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. Since the origin of the form of *bhakti* in *Dravida desha* (parts of present Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh), it moved to west and from west to north India. From the north the *bhakti* tradition had reached east; first Bengal and then Odisha (then Kalinga) through Bengal and finally to Assam.<sup>1</sup> The Gaudiya *bhakti* which emerged centring the city of

Nabadwip, the then cultural and academic capital of Bengal finally developed its particular shape with the appearance of a number of energetic Vaishnava evangelists and finally of the millennial man Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Since the emergence of the *bhakti* cults in South India it took nearly a millennium to reach Bengal and find a strong base there. So a movement, which was originated in one corner of the subcontinent even before the early medieval period, had reached the eastern corner in the early modern period. The origin of *bhakti* in Bengal was closely associated with Vrindavan. Madhavendra Puri (1420-1490 CE), the famous *bhakti* saint had acted as a strong catalyst to link the *bhaktimarga* of Vrindavan with Bengal and generated new inspiration among a group of scholars who were already getting disillusioned about the monistic ideals of Shankaracharya and were moving towards the theory of the dual form of God (*dvaita*).<sup>2</sup> Sri Chaitanya (CE 1486-1534), the true spiritual successor of Madhavendra had helped the Gaudiya cult to evolve into a newer shape and historical identity. Around his personality there gathered a group of energetic and spiritually inspired personalities of *bhakti* cult. Their religious energy and evangelic zeal had helped the Gaudiya movement to reach such a spiritual, cultural and social pinnacle that it had started to be compared by the modern scholars with the European reformation or premature renaissance.<sup>3</sup> The modern scholars, often being influenced by European teleological and ideological paradigms, studied the movement from a nationalist viewpoint. Either the movement is being studied as a great movement of social liberation where humanism and devotion had overcome narrow superstitions, caste hierarchy and the dominant aristocratic cognitive paradigms or religious dogmatism which severely harmed the martial power of the

Bengalis and turned the Bengali males effeminate. During the late nineteenth century when nationalist ideologies had overrun the Bengali intelligentsia, several Bengali cultural stalwarts had been in this opinion.

However, conventional historiography is yet to analyse a number of significant contributions of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in the material and social life of early modern Bengal. We will try to study the Gaudiya Vaishnavism's influence on one of the most important fields of daily life in early modern Bengal that is the gastronomic milieu. Our quest for analysing the gastronomic space will be helpful to unravel a larger arena of socio-cultural history closely associated with the great spiritual movement which had a huge and influential material counterpart as well. One of the most important fields of daily life which had gone under the influence of this movement in early modern Bengal was the gastronomic milieu.

Gaudiya Vaishnavism had contributed significantly in enriching and expanding the early modern Gaudiya platter. This expansion was mostly achieved in two particular ways. Firstly it had contributed to the spreading and popularising of vegetarianism across the western part of Bengal and simultaneously created a sudden boom in the production and variation in the sweetmeat dishes. Secondly the movement had contributed in exposing Bengali platter to its early modern counterparts across the subcontinent. In this process of expanding and enriching the platter it got associated and simultaneously influenced with some problematic and complicated issues which cannot be directly taken as the parts of the food or culinary history. But without analyzing those

important and complicated material aspects, the formation of the Gaudiya Vaishnava platter in the early modern Bengal cannot be studied and analyzed academically. In this article we are addressing two of such problematic issues connected with the socio-economic aspects of the gastronomic milieu generated in the western part of Bengal under the direct or indirect influence of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Firstly we will study how the Gaudiya Vaishnava world was connected with the market economy. We will show how the market transaction of the foodstuffs had influenced the consumption pattern in the Gaudiya household and hospices in the daily and occasional basis. And secondly, we will navigate the more important issue of the contribution of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in developing the gastronomic proto cosmopolitanism in early modern Bengal by overcoming the caste barrier in consumption and introducing a sense of common platter. The study of these interweaved relations amidst food, market, caste and the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement will help to throw new light on the contemporary gastronomic space. On a greater impact it will be helpful to unfold a larger arena of socio-cultural history of early modern Bengal.

### **Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Food and the Market Economy**

The Gaudiya Vaishnava literary works are not usually regarded to be very useful and reliable sources to trace out the monetary transactions and commercial interchanges. Usually there is a severe disregard and despise of the Gaudiyas towards the economic activities which is more generally applicable to all worldly material affairs. Unlike the *Mangalkavya* world the patrons and disciples of the Gaudiya Vaishnavism

were not the business tycoons. Most of them were landed elites and few were well to do goldsmiths. So the references of the large commercial transactions are mostly absent in the Gaudiya literature. The market transaction of the foodstuffs also acquires an insignificant presence. Whatever studies we are doing here hence requires comparisons with the detailing of the *Mangalkavya* works and long quotations have to be made. Among the *Mangalkavyas* we have mostly used the *Kabikankan Chandi* of Mukundaram Chakrabarti to develop our arguments. The few and fragmented references about economic aspects which we can gather from the Vaishnava literary sources comes majorly from *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita*. We have also used a few hagiographies of the eminent Vaishnava personalities like Uddharan Dutta Thakura. However the authenticity of the hagiographies of Uddhan Thakura can be questioned as those were composed way after the original incidents had taken place. The economic aspects of food, especially the connection between food consumption and market transaction in Gaudiya sources are hardly been studied in the academic till now. We ventured this in this chapter.

The references of different foodstuffs, spices and cooking ingredients in the Gaudiya literature indicate contact with the gastronomic milieu outside Bengal. These descriptions in the Gaudiya Vaishnava texts indicates an obscure connection of the Gaudiya Vaishnava world with a large scale commercial and mercantile network of different While analyzing the contribution of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in exposing Bengali platter to its early modern counterparts across the subcontinent we can find the existence of different spices in the feasts and banquets in the Gaudiya hospices. In the Vaishnava

texts, they are found in the making of the sweets palatable and aromatic. In the *Antyalila* of *Charitamrita* when the Vaishnava *bhaktas* from Bengal used to visit Mohaprabhu in Nilachal in the rainy season, they carried different sweet products and snacks with them for Prabhu. Among those refreshment items, one very attractive one was the *naru* of puffed rice (*hurum*). In preparing this *naru* the spices like camphor, pepper, cardamom (*elach*), cloves (*labanga*) were used. The spices were crushed (*churna*) and then used with the rice puffed in *ghi* and sugar to prepare the *narus*.<sup>4</sup> In *Rasikmangala* (1660) we find that on the occasion of *Maharasjatrautsav* the spices and ingredients like catechu (*khadir*), asafoetida, fenugreek, nutmeg, aniseed, cumin, camphor etc. were used for preparing the vegetable dishes.<sup>5</sup> The use of the spices helps us to assume that the Gaudiya Vaishnava world was at least indirectly linked with the contemporary spice import network. The spice imports from South Asian archipelago and Coromandel Coast which was controlled by the Portuguese merchants and also their South Asian counterparts like the Bohras of Gujarat and the 'Muslim' merchants 'of Bengal' slowly percolated to the Gaudiya world as well. This connection with spice trade helps us to trace some of the elements of economic activities inside the Gaudiya literary works. However such elements are few and infrequent in the Gaudiya literature contrary to their literary counterpart, the *Mangalkavyas*.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from these obscure connections with the big scale commercial endeavours we however can find some arbitrary references about the daily transactions of foodstuffs in the small rural markets called *hats* and *bajars* and in the comparatively bigger places of

exchange (*gunjas*). In the descriptions of *Sri Chaitanyabhagavata* we find the narratives of young Sri Chaitanya going to the market of Nabadwip and making friends with the sellers of curds, milk, sweets, garlands, conch shells and other things. The reference shows that the influence of Chaitanyadeb had first spread among the shopkeepers and the downtrodden people of Nabadwip and the *Gops* (caste of milkmen) and *Tambulis* (betel leaf sellers) were the major groups among them. Prabhu was pleased by the attitude of the *Gops* who had treated him like their family members and offered fine dairy products (*dadhi dugdha sor dodhi sunder nabani/santoshe Prabhure sob gop dey ani*). Then he (Chaitanya) visited the shops of a betel leaf seller where he asked for betel leaves without paying cowries. He was extremely pleased when the shopkeeper gave him betel leaves for free. He asked why the seller was offering him catechu without taking money. The seller replied that someone had asked him to do so. Prabhu was happy to chew the fine betel leaves with catechu and camphor.<sup>7</sup> However apart from the dairy products sold by the milkmen there is no reference of the selling of other food commodities in the market. Unlike the descriptions of shopping by Bharu Dutta<sup>8</sup> and Durbala Dasi<sup>9</sup> in *Chandimangala* of Dwijamadhab and Mukundaram Chakrabarti; the search of rice and banana in the market by the bankrupted Chand Saudagar with his little left resources<sup>10</sup> in the *Manasamangalas* or Lausen's buying in *Dharmamangala* during his journey towards Gaur, there is hardly any such reference of the food market and its daily transactions in the Vaishnava texts. The descriptions in the *SriChaitanyabhagavata* informed us about the use of cowries in the markets of Nabadwip, the description evades any further detailing. Unlike the *Chandimangala* or *Manasamangala* texts, there is no reference of any business

tycoon playing a significant role in the spread of Vaishnavism. Tapan Raychaudhuri has mentioned that the self sufficient village economy had to depend on a marketing transaction mostly for two things: salt and metals.<sup>11</sup>From the Gaudiya texts the descriptions which we find most often are of *folars* prepared of milk, puffed rice, curds, sugar, ripe bananas and *sandesh*. All these ingredients could be supplied from any prosperous household in village. Any rich family who had the productions of rice and sugarcane, had cows in house and the tress of coconut could make an elaborate arrangement of *folar*. Any dependence of market was quite unneeded. *Folar* was served mostly on the earthen pots known as *holnas* or the leaves of the banana tree. No metal utensils were required as well. Common Vaishnava dietary pattern itself prevented the need and frequency of the market transactions. We lack enough sources for unfurling the daily dishes of lunch and supper in the Vaishnava households. So the question of daily marketing transaction for the household needs also remains obscure. Even when any reference of buying or selling is found the price or bargaining remains unmentioned.

The influential members of the society who came under the influence of Gaudiya Vaishnavism were either landed elites or goldsmiths. So, it is expected that there would be no descriptions of grand mercantile voyages and transactions like in the two prominent *Mangalkavyas*. However, the lacuna of the detailing of even daily and smaller-scale marketing transactions often indicate localization of economy and somewhat contradict the notion of cosmopolitanism which we have earlier argued to have been introduced by Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

However, this type of simplistic conclusion about the supposed picture of the localized economy found in the Gaudiya Vaishnavism might appear premature. We must observe that most of the celebratory feasts which had been described in the Gaudiya texts had been arranged in the Vaishnava *akharas*. Most of the ingredients in those occasions were supplied by the *bhaktas* or the disciples of the particular *akhara* or *sripat*. So market transactions were rather unimportant for the *Gopalas* or the organizing chiefs of the *akharas* to go to market or *hat* to buy the necessary ingredients for the occasion. The *rasmahotsava* of Shyamananda Prabhu in Gopiballabhpur is the perfect example of it.<sup>12</sup>In the biographies of Chaitanya there are the references of two banquets which were arranged by noted individuals. One was by Advaitacharya in Santipur, and another was in Puri by Basudeb Sarbobhouma who was the court scholar of the Gajapatis, and the everyday or special ingredients required by him were supplied by the royal household itself. The scarcity of the descriptions of market transactions is hence usual in the descriptions of Vaishnavadining. There were regular contributors of the merchants (mostly the big dealers of foodstuffs), landed elites, goldsmiths and the other well to do sections in the Vaishnava *akharas*. From Panchanan Mondal's edited *Chithipatre Samajchitra Vol.II* we find a letter where such a trader named Gangadhar Das was sending the cost of fine rice, *sandesh*, bananas and other stuffs along with a promise of the *dakkhina* or offering to the *sebaet* (abbot) separately in the *patbari* (hermitage and temple) of Sri Radhamadangopal Jiu and requesting the *sebaet* to offer one hundred basil (*Tulsi*) leaves at the feet of Madangopal for the expansion of Gangadhar's business.<sup>13</sup>Similar descriptions are available elsewhere as well. We find that a few Kaibartas in Ilambazar,

Birbhum had offered a power of attorney to a certain Vaishnava *mohanta* to use the *debottar* property of the temple, after showing it to the local land official.<sup>14</sup>

There are however, small references to market and peddling transactions in the Vaishnavaliterature. During the *chira-dodhimahotsava* of Raghunath Das in Panihati the villagers and the milkmen from the nearby villages came selling the puffed rice, curds, bananas, sugar and sweets there. The *Prabhu* had bought their products and fed it to those milkmen themselves.<sup>15</sup> Here too, the sense of charity eclipses the monetary dealings. After the *chira-mahotsava* in Panihati, Prabhu had moved to Saptagram and asked the rich *bhakta* Uddharan Dutta from *Suvarna-vanik* (goldsmith) caste to organize another *mahotsava* gathering there. Being instructed by Prabhu, Uddharan had organized the *mahotsava* much elaborately than the most popular *mahotsava* in the Vaishnava world which was organised by Raghunath Das few years ago in Panihati. A huge amount of puffed rice, fine bananas, fine yoghurts, different kinds of *naru* and other ingredients were collected. Unlike in the *mahotsava* in Panihati puffed rice and curds were served here in hard banana leaves known as *angot* instead of earthen pots (*Prabhur paia adesh Dutta mohamoti/chiradodhi vara vare loia ase tothi/loklolki kolakhondo sita naru jog/angotia kolar pate barailo vog*).<sup>16</sup> Uddharan had bought these preparations and ingredients from the peasants and milkmen of the nearing villages around Saptagram. As the Vaishnavas had increasingly practised vegetarianism and depended mostly on the dairy products to replace the animal flesh, the importance of the *Gops* or milkmen had increased considerably in the Vaishnava texts. Their presence eclipsed any other groups of vendors, peddlers and the lower sections of the society. In the descriptions of different *mahotsavas*

we find that they were compared to the *Gops* of the Vrindavan, who were the associates of SriKrishna. There are references to the *hats* (weekly markets) of Santipur, Fulia, Uddharanpur and other places. The *hat* of Uddharanpur was established by Uddharan Dutta, the celebrated Vaishnava figure and a wealthy goldsmith and landed elite. *Gaudiya Vaishnava Abhidhana* referred that by the year 1557 CE (1479 Shaka era) there had been a devastating famine near Saptagrama. Uddharan had established a huge charity house for distributing food. The huge storehouse for hoarding the foodstuffs had covered thirty *bighas* (ten acres) of land. Surely Uddharan had bought parts of such huge amount of foodstuffs from distant places which clearly indicates a significant monetary transaction.<sup>17</sup> Even in his last mysterious letter to Chaitanya in Nilachal, Advaitacharya had made an allegory of the scarcity of rice in the local *hat*.<sup>18</sup> So the reference and connection between food, crops and market economy is not altogether absent in the Gaudiya Vaishnava literature though it makes rather faint appearances.

### **Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Consumption of Food and the Caste Practice**

There has been endless debate regarding the claim of the egalitarian role played by the Gaudiya Vaishnavism in early modern Bengal. The issue is undoubtedly intriguing and complicated. Christian Lee Novetzke had clearly shown in his article that *bhakti* and *prasada* were always inclined to the practice of obeying or disobeying the caste prejudices and restrictions in dining and feasting. Novetzke had shown clearly that *bhakti* itself was closely linked (if not originated) from the word *bhakta*, which literally means food.<sup>19</sup> So it is always expected that in the dining practices of the *bhakti* cults, caste differentiation would be disregarded. The practice of *annadan* of the Dadupanthis, *bhandara* systems of

the Kabirpanths and the *langar* system (common kitchen and dining place) of the Sikhs are a few among such evidences of intercaste congregational dining initiated by the *bhakti* sects. However, in the Gaudiya context, the situation was much more complicated, which sometimes reminds us of the Ambedkarian views of these *bhakti* movements and saints.<sup>20</sup>In the most dependable biography of Chaitanya, *SriChaitanyaCharitamrita* there are many verses and comments dishonouring the static formation of caste society. One of the very basic teachings of Chaitanya was '*Muchi hoye suchi hoy jodi Hari voje/ suchi hoye muchi hoy jodi Hari tyaje*(A lower rank cobbler who is devoted to Krishna is more respectable than a Brahmin without devotion).<sup>21</sup>Again in the *Antyalila* of *Charitamrita* we find that Sanatan Goswami was anxious to get intimate with the respected Vaishnavas as he thought himself impious. Chaitanya had told Sanatana that '*Je voje sei boro, abhakta hin char/ Krishnabhajane nahi kuladi bichar/ dinere adhik doya kore Bhagawan/ Pundit kulin jatir boro oviman*' (God is more gracious to the downtrodden and lower caste because the higher caste educated people are too egoistic).<sup>22</sup>The later poets have always described him (Chaitanya) ignoring any caste division and offering his *Krishnaprema* to all.<sup>23</sup>In the colonial and post-colonial period too even the academic scholarship (not to talk of the emotional nationalistic representations) often projected Chaitanya as an egalitarian figure. However, we must remember that individual beliefs and personal activities of Chaitanya cannot be synonymous with the role played by the entire Gaudiya movement. A few revisionist studies in Bengali had blamed the six Goswamins of Vrindavan and the financially rich spiritual successors of Nityananda to be responsible for the reappearance of ritualistic orthodoxy in Gaudiya Vaishnavism. The six Goswamins were all upper caste

Brahmins. They had invoked the Brahmanical ritualism, caste hierarchy and orthodox religious practices (based on neo Vaishnavite scriptures) inside the earlier egalitarian arena of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. The Vaishnava scriptures known as the Vaishnava *Smritis* turned complicated and dominating. They ultimately appeared as the parallel of the earlier Brahmanical ritualistic codes. Those were no less orthodox in prescribing the rigid caste discriminations and injunctions.<sup>24</sup> Sri Gopala Bhatta in his voluminous text *Haribhaktivilasa* had codified every action of a Gaudiya Vaishnava in his daily schedule. In the famous Vaishnava gathering in Kheturi (took place in an unspecified time between 1610 and 1620) all the well known Vaishnava leaders in Bengal including Janhabi Devi (the wife of Nityananda), poet Jnandas, Kamalakar Piplai, Minketan Ramdas, poet Balaram Das, Vrindavan Das, Achyutananda, poet Lochandas, poet Govindadas, Vishnudas Acharya, Mangal Thakur, Shyamananda, Rasikananda, Kavikarnapur, Narottam Dutta, Srinivasacharya and others had assembled and unambiguously accepted the ideologies of the Goswamins of Vrindavan. The readings of the works of Vrindavan Das, Krishnadas Kaviraja and the Sanskrit texts of the six *Goswamins* were made mandatory for the Vaishnavas. It was prescribed that the Krishna worship is to be performed in the *manjari* and *ballabhi bhava* (way) preached by the Goswamins in Vrindavana. All the activities and rituals of *mahotsava* in Kheturi were performed by carefully following the guidelines of SriRup Goswami (*Sri Rup Goswamikrita granthadi bidhane/karila sakal karja ati sabdhane*).<sup>25</sup> Popular contact and the egalitarian spirit which was the soul of the Gaudiya Vaishnavism were lost into oblivion. The Vaishnava sects who denied accepting the ideologies of the six *Goswamins* had gradually lost their place

in the mainstream Vaishnava movement. They continued to exist as different obscure religious cults e.g. Jatvaishnavas, Kortabhajas and Aulias etc.<sup>26</sup>

However, if we look at the entire development of the Gaudiya Vaishnavism with an unbiased outlook, we will easily find out that Kheturi was not the very cause but rather a culminating point of a continuous process inside the Gaudiya movement of shifting towards caste-based Brahminical elitism. Unlike the Kabirpanths (followers of saint Kabir) the Gaudiya Vaishnavas never denied caste division altogether. There is an interesting description of a *lila* (dalliance) of Nityananda *prabhu* in the house of Advaita. In all Vaishnava hagiographic texts, we find a distance and some sort of disagreement between the followers of Nityananda and Advaitacharya. Nityananda had never respected the rules of caste division and radically ignored many of the established social rituals. This had alienated him from Advaitacharya and his associates who did not deny the Brahminical affiliations completely. In this *lila* when Nityananda in a certain mood of ecstasy had thrown some rice on the floor of Advaita's room, the latter turned furious. He accused Nityananda of being a self-proclaimed monk who had no *guru* (preceptor). He had taken food with the drunkards (*madyap*) and in the houses of the people of western India (*paschima*) in his youth. Now he had destroyed the ritual purity of a Brahmin.<sup>27</sup> This conversation proved the strong existence of the deep rooted Brahminical prejudice of caste barrier among the eminent Gaudiyas. Different references of *Charitamrita* indicate that even Chaitanya himself was sometimes sceptic in this matter. The devoted *muchi* (cobbler) was higher than the non-devoted *suchi* (higher caste). But

the difference was always there between a *muchi* and *suchi* in case they both were devoted. Most of the associates of Chaitanya were Brahmins. The most radical of the Vaishnava leaders who was known for rejecting all the caste barriers, Nityananda Prabhu was compelled to offer some partialities and special treatments towards the Brahmins. These differences are found best in the descriptions of dining whether congregational or private. During the *chira-mahotsava* in Panihati organized by Raghunath Das we find that under the instruction of Nityananda the Brahmins were offered the best places near the altar (*Suni pundit bhattacharya adi bipra aila /manya kori prabhu sobar upare bosaila*).<sup>28</sup> Some Kayasthas, Baidyas and Subarnavanikas like Gadadhar Das, Shibananda Sen, Krishnadas Kaviraj, Uddharan Dutta, Narottam Dutta, Narahari Sarkar and others were obviously taken in the close circle of Nityananda. Uddharan Dutta was from the caste of goldsmith or Subarnavanik before accepting Vaishnavism. Some scholars have stated that the *Subarnavanikas* were the followers of Buddhism and that is why they were degraded and demoted in the caste hierarchy by the orthodox king Ballal Sena in the twelfth century.<sup>29</sup> But we hardly find any higher rank Vaishnava from the lower castes and their place in the *panktibhojana* was depicted with much detailing. In every important feast, we find the cooking was done by the appointed Brahmin cooks or the women of the Brahmin households. The *Rasikamangala* describes that in the funeral feast of Shyamananda (hailed from the lower caste of Sadgops) or the *rasamahotsava* in Gopiballabhpur hundreds of Brahmin cooks were appointed.<sup>30</sup> From the same text, we find the detailed descriptions of Brahmins taking their food in the first row. There was no reference of the guests of other caste seating in the same batch.<sup>31</sup> We know from the *SriChaitanyaCharitamrita* that in

Nilachala the Vaishnavas were always hesitant to take meals with the venerable figures like Jaban Haridas, Rup and Sanatan. They thought them impious because of their earlier connections with the Muslims. Chaitanya himself had arranged to send the *mohaprasada* of Jagannath in Haridas's hamlet separately<sup>32</sup> although he gladly took the rice prepared by the great *bhakta* Uddharan Dutta.<sup>33</sup> For his spiritual achievements Uddharan got the honorific title of *Thakura* which was preserved specifically for the Brahmins. Nityananda used to delightedly take the sweets prepared by Uddharan.<sup>34</sup> He and Uddharan often shifted the cooking duties between each other.<sup>35</sup> Ajit Das had claimed that one of the sarcastic remarks about the dearth of social customs and the growth of dietary hypocrisy in the Vaishnava society had originally generated from this event of Nityananda's consumption of the food cooked by a *Subarna-Vanika*. Few orthodox Vaishnavas had even complained to Chaitanya in Nilachal about Nityananda's ill practice of taking food from the Sudras.<sup>36</sup> The reactions of the greater Gaudiya society indicate that unlike the Kabirpanths the Gaudiya Vaishnavas had never accepted the common inter caste dining from their soul. The seed of this caste orthodoxy and discrimination which was already present even during the life time of Chaitanya had extended further in the later years. The basic egalitarian difference of the Gaudiya Vaishnavism with the conventional Brahmanical domination had almost disappeared. The doctrines of the six Goswamins declared that the Vaishnava Goswamins and *mohantos* (abbots) should be considered equal of the Brahmins. The very intention of arranging the Vaishnava *panktibhojana* on egalitarian basis had thus gone in vain. The egalitarian dining continued to remain only among the obscure Vaishnava sects. Commensality could not be reached

through the common and inter caste dietary consumption in the Gaudiya arena and purview. However despite all these criticisms, it can be argued that a limited effort was made by the Gaudiya Vaishnavas in overcoming the caste barrier in consumption of the contemporary age. While in one hand it (Gaudiya Vaishnavism) had connected Bengaliplatter with the other parts of the subcontinent including up to Varanasi and Vrindavan in the North and also in the south through Odisha, on the other hand they had been partly successful in introducing congregational dining and feasts going beyond the caste reservation. Breaking the reservations in both ends thus it introduced something in the milieu of gastronomic consumption in Bengal which can be called a modest or proto form of cosmopolitanism.

### **Conclusion**

The Gaudiya Vaishnava movement had influenced a number of material and metaphysical spheres of early modern Bengal. Gaudiya Vaishnavism had always been reluctant to care about worldly histories. Apart from the magnum opus of Krishnadas Kaviraja it is extremely difficult to trace from any other premiere Gaudiya works anything about the contemporary secular events. Tracing the hard material facts about the contemporary society and economy in the literature of such a religious movement is a most difficult job which we ventured in this article. We tried to find out how the monetary transactions and dealings in the Gaudiya world had helped to acquire the food crops and ingredients. The relation among food consumption, production and market in the Gaudiya world appears quite faintly in the Gaudiya literature. I have tried

to show the difference of the market and economic world in the Gaudiya Vaishnava texts from their literary counterpart the *Mangalkavyas*. Vaishnavism certainly contributed significantly in developing the gastronomic proto cosmopolitanism in early modern Bengal by overcoming the caste barrier in consumption in one hand and the regional barrier in other. But we have to accept that the Vaishnava world seems to lack an important aspect of the cosmopolitan society. Unlike the world of *Mangalkavyas* the world of market economy and monetary flow is rather absent here. Apart from the reference to the huge amount of money earned by Rup and Sanatan Goswamin in the service of the Hussain Shahi administration,<sup>37</sup> the reference of different grades of coins are rarities in the Vaishnava literature. The more important part which occupies the lion share of this chapter is the significant social aspect of the violation of caste prejudices and restrictions on dietary sphere. Gaudiya Vaishnavism had always maintained some sort of duplicity regarding the caste barriers. Despite the presence of many celebrated quotations in the Gaudiya literature about the brotherhood and casteless status of the *Krishnabhaktas* caste barriers could not be uprooted from the Gaudiya soul. This caste differences became gradually acute along with the expansion of the ritualistic scriptural doctrines of the *Goswamins* of Vrindavan. The Vaishnava *mohantos* or abbots were equated with Brahmins and caste differences were indirectly accepted. This caste different became more visible in dining. It went so far that having *prasada* with the obscure Vaishnava cults like the *Jatvaishnavas* and others was prohibited strongly. The intercaste congregational dining with the lower and unclean castes (*antyajas* and *ajalachals*) like *Subarna-Vanikas* and other lower castes was never possible without significant

grudge and clamour. In this chapter we tried to dig this paradox of the Gaudiya Vaishnava consumption world. By analyzing these two important socio-economic aspects connected with the world of consumption we tried to find a new understanding of some developments in the material aspects of the Gaudiya Vaishnava world of gastronomy. The Vaishnava texts present us a world of consumption where metaphysical often dominates material. Rather, in the Gaudiya world the division between these two worlds is impossible. A new dimension of 'material' appears from where 'metaphysical' in present sense is inseparable. Like all other consumable products food had also undergone this reality of the Gaudiya world. We tried to analyze this extremely complicated, multifaceted and ambivalent nature of consumption here.

Initially, the Gaudiya platter appears from the descriptions from the Vaishnava texts as static and unmoving. However, a thorough reading of these texts composed between the 16th to 18th centuries certainly enlightens us about a slow but sure pace of change in the Vaishnava food choices throughout this period. It was far away from the simplistic Braudelian conceptualisation of timeless sustenance and unmoving *longue duree*.<sup>38</sup> The cosmopolitanism in the gastronomic space induced by Vaishnavism is one of the key factors of the slow but certain change in early modern Bengal's greater socio-cultural arena.

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<sup>1</sup>Bhattacharya, Bishnupada (1961), *Bharatiya Bhaktisahitya*, Kalikata: Lekhapora Prakashan, pp.48- 57.

<sup>2</sup>Chakravarti, Ramakanta (1985), *Vaisnavism in Bengal: 1486-1900*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, pp. 64-68.

- <sup>3</sup>Chatterjee, Bhaskar ‘Social Perspective of Caitanyaism’ in Bhattacharya, N.N.(1989) (ed.), *Medieval Bhakti Movements in India*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Limited, pp.315–25.
- <sup>4</sup>Kaviraja, Krishnadas,( 2009), *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita Antyalila* (ed.) Mukhopadhyay Sahityaratna, Harekrishna. Kalikata: Deb Sahitya Kutir, p. 559.
- <sup>5</sup>Das, Gopijanaballabh, *Rasikmangala Paschim Bibhag*, p.94 cited in Ray, Pranab (1987), *Banglar Khabar*, Kalikata: Sahityalok, p.24.
- <sup>6</sup>Curley, David (2008), *Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal-Kabya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal*, New Delhi: Chronicle Books, pp.119-125.
- <sup>7</sup>Das, Vrindavan. (1854). *Sri Chaitanyabhagavata Adikhanda*, Serampore: Gyanarundodoya Jantra, pp.60-61.
- <sup>8</sup>Chakrabarti, Mukundaram(1921), *Kabikjankan Chandi*(ed.) Basu, Apurbakrishna, Kalikata: Indian Publishing House, pp.91-92.
- <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*,p.161.
- <sup>10</sup>Gupta, Bijay, (1935), *Padmapuran* (ed.) Bhattacharjya, Basantakumar,Kalikata: Sudhangshu Sahitya Mandir, p.153.
- <sup>11</sup>Raychaudhuri, Tapan ‘Inland Trade’ in Raychaudhuri, Tapan and Habib, Irfan(2009) (eds),*The Cambridge Economic History of India Vol.I: c.1200–c.1750*, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, pp. 325-332.
- <sup>12</sup>Das, Gopijanaballabh Das, *Rasikmangala Paschim Bibhag* pp.94-96 cited in Ray, Pranab, *Banglar Khabar*,pp.23-24.
- <sup>13</sup>Mondal, Panchanan (1953), *Chithipatre Samajchitra* Vol.II, Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati Press, 1953, p.133.
- <sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p.139.
- <sup>15</sup>Kaviraja, Krishnadas, *Charitamrita Antyalila*,p.529.
- <sup>16</sup>Bhowmik, Baidyanath. (2014). *Uddharan Dutta Kathamrita*, Badkulla, p.26.
- <sup>17</sup>Das, Haridas (1957), *Gaudiya Vaishnava Abhidhana Dwitiya, Tritiya o Chaturtha Khanda*, Nabadwip: Haribol Kutir, p. 1156.
- <sup>18</sup>Kaviraja, Krishnadas, *Chaitanya Charitamrita Antyalila*, p. 612. *Baulke kahio hate nahika chaul* (Inform the *Baul* that there is no supply of rice in the *hat*).
- <sup>19</sup>Novetzke, Christian Lee (2007), ‘Bhakti and its Public’, *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 11(3):255-272.
- <sup>20</sup> B.R. Ambedkar had referred that in the *bhakti* movements the millenarian saints could have broken the caste prejudices, but his examples were not suggested to be taken as ideal by the common men. They should abide by the established caste rules. So the development of inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage was impossible to achieve through these ‘egalitarian’ *bhakti* movements. See Ambedkar, B.R. (2014), *Annihilation of Caste* with an introduction by Arundhati Roy, London: Verso,pp.326-27.
- <sup>21</sup>This is a very popular verse among the Gaudiya Vaishnavas. A very similar description is found in Das, Nityananda(1913), *Prem Vilasa* (ed.)Talukdar, Jashodalal,Kalikata: Bagbajar Patrika Press,p.187.*Vishnubhaktiparayan jei jon hoy/ tahar antare poita janiho nischoy/Krishnabhakti hoy sei Brahmaner boro/ Krishnabhakti hin bipra sudradopi drirho.*
- <sup>22</sup>Kaviraja, Krishnadas, *Charitamrita Anyalila*, p.512.
- <sup>23</sup>Majumdar, Bimanbihari (1961),*Govindadaser Padabali o Tahar Jug*, Kalikata: Kalikata Visvavidyalaya, p.10,(*Barana ashrama kinchana akinchana karo kono ved nahi mane/Kamola Shiv Bihi dulaha premdhan dan koroye jogojone*).
- <sup>24</sup>Das, Ajit (1960), *Jatvaishnav Katha*, Kalikata: Charubak, pp. 28-40.
- <sup>25</sup>Chakravarti, Ramakanta (1996), *Bange Vaishnav Dharma: Ekti Aitihāsik o Samajtattwik Adhyayan*, Kalikata: Ananda Publishers, pp. 83-96.
- <sup>26</sup>Chakravarti, Ramakanta ‘Mahyajuge Banglar Vaishnavdharma o tar Prabhab’ in Ray, Aniruddha and Ratnabali Chattaopdhyay(1992) (eds), *Madhyajuge Banglar Samaj o Sanskriti*, Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Company, pp.168-171.

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- <sup>27</sup>Das, Vrindavan, *Sri Chaitanyabhagavata Madhyakhanda*, p. 120.
- <sup>28</sup>Kaviraja, Krishnadas, *Charitamrita Antyalila*, p. 528.
- <sup>29</sup>Das, Ajit, *Jatvaishnava Katha*, p.35.
- <sup>30</sup>Das, Gopijanaballabh *Rasikmangala paschimbibhag 16<sup>th</sup>lahari*, pp.132-133 cited in Ray, Pranab, *Banglar Khabar* p.23.
- <sup>31</sup>Das, Gopijanaballabh. *Rasikmangala paschimbibhag 2<sup>nd</sup> lahari* p.96 cited in Pranab Ray, *Banglar Khabar*,p.24.
- <sup>32</sup>Kaviraja, Krishnadas *Charitamrita Antyalila*, pp. 564-66.
- <sup>33</sup> Bhowmik, Baidyanath *Uddharan Dutta Kathamrita*,p.23.
- <sup>34</sup>Das, Nityananda, *Prem Vilasa*, p. 249.
- <sup>35</sup>Das Thakura, Vrindavan(1992), *Nityananda Vamsabistara*, (ed.) Kishori Das Babaji, Halihsahar: Nitai Gouranga Gurudham, pp.7-8.
- <sup>36</sup>Das, Ajit, *Jatvaishnava Katha*, p.73.It is a popular myth among the Bengalis that if a Brahmin takes the rice prepared by a lower caste goldsmith, he gets reborn as a Hilsa fish.
- <sup>37</sup>Kaviraja, Krishnadas, *Charitamrita Madhyalia*, pp.338-40.
- <sup>38</sup>Fernand Braudel, 'Sustenance' in Aymard, Maurice and Mukhia, Harbans ,(1988) (eds), *French Studies in History*, Vol. I: *The Inheritance*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, pp.168–92.