

Chapter One

Early Years

The village of Gadeigiri is situated in the Jagatsinghpur District of east central Orissa. It is a quiet place much like other small villages in India, consisting mostly of mud huts with thatched roofs. The residents take their daily bath in the local pond, keep cows, and cook over cow dung fires in the same way their ancestors have done for thousands of years. The main source of livelihood is rice cultivation and the selling of brass utensils. In front of almost every house one will find a shrine for the sacred *tulasī* plant, and it is common to hear the sound of the *mahā-mantra*: “*hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare*” being sung. The residents of Gadeigiri are very devoted to Gopal. The long-standing tradition in the village is that the first fruit or flower that appears in any garden must be offered to the Gopal deity, and it is understood that by doing this those trees and shrubs will thus give their fruits and flowers abundantly.

The sacred Alaka River is of great importance to the area. The businessmen of ancient Kalinga, modern

day Orissa, would travel via the Alaka to the Mahanadi River, and then via the Bay of Bengal to the southeast Asian islands of Bali, Sumatra, Java and Borneo. By this trading they were able to earn substantial wealth and gradually establish the culture of Orissa in those foreign lands. To this day there are people living in



Villagers home in Gadeigiri

Bali who are addressed as “kling”, a contracted form of the word “Kalinga”. This ancient trade connection with Bali can still be seen in various place names of the district, such as Balikuda and Balisahi, and in the annual celebration of the “Bali-yātrā” festival, which means, “travelling to Bali”.

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With the wealth earned through this lucrative trading, the Kalinga merchants built numerous temples for different deities on both sides of the Alaka. Later, devotees and *sādhus* also established numerous temples and *maṭhas* in the Alaka basin. The temple of Sri Radha Gopal Jiu is one of them.



Rice fields in Gadeigiri

The Founding of Gadeigiri

The village Gadeigiri is named after its founder Gadai Giri who migrated from the district of Midnapur* in the seventeenth century. He was a businessman who regularly came to the area to sell utensils and bell metal items. Every year Gadai Giri would come

* District Midnapur, now part of West Bengal, was formerly part of Orissa, with which it maintains close cultural links.

during the rainy season, stay four or five months, and then return to Midnapur. Gadai Giri was a gentle and saintly person. He would rise early each morning and perform *kīrtana*. Then after taking some flat rice and water he would go out selling brass utensils door to door. When evening arrived he would spend the night in some village and join with the local people in their daily custom of singing *kīrtana* and reciting *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. He soon became well known as a good *kīrtana* singer and devotee and he received frequent invitations to take part in the different *saṅkīrtana* festivals celebrated for the pleasure of the various local deities of Baladev Jiu, Brindaban Bihari Jiu, Radha Madan Mohan Jiu, and Dadhi Baman Jiu.

The local *zamindar*, feudal landlord, lived in Harispur, six kilometers from present-day Gadeigiri. Appreciating Gadai Giri's saintly qualities, the *zamindar* offered to give him some nearby land. Shortly thereafter Gadai Giri met a *nāgā-sannyāsī*, a naked mendicant, who was very pleased with Gadai Giri's gentle behavior and high character. One day, Gadai Giri and the *sannyāsī* were walking together in the forest when suddenly they heard the sweet voices of several different kinds of birds as well as the sounds of a flute, ankle bells, and a conch shell. The *nāgā-sādhu* told him, "Where such auspicious sounds are heard, Krishna Himself is present. Wherever Krishna is present His consort Lakshmi, the Goddess of fortune, is also present. This is a sacred place, a place of

glory. You should build a house here for your residence and engage yourself fully in the service of the Lord. Here, whatever you desire will be immediately fulfilled." Presenting all these things before the *zamindar*, Gadai Giri received from him a large segment of land, including area for cultivation. He cleared a small section of the jungle indicated by the *nāgāsādhū* and built a house and a small temple wherein he established a deity of Dadhi Baman. When Lord Jagannath is worshiped without His brother Baladev and sister Subhadra He is known as Patita Pavan or Dadhi Baman. Gadai Giri left his brass business and simply engaged himself in *bhajana* and *kīrtana*. Many wandering *sādhū*s and *sannyāsīs* came to join with Gadai Giri's *kīrtana*. Gradually other people came to stay permanently, and a village developed in that place in Gadai Giri's name.

Gopal Giri

Gadai Giri had only one son, who was named Gopal Giri. Gopal Giri was influenced by the devotional qualities of his father and was very devoted to Lord Jagannath. Every year he would go to Puri to see the Ratha-yātrā festival. He was also very attached to performing *saṅkīrtana*, and was expert in many different styles of *kīrtana*.

Gopal Giri had a desire to worship a deity of Gopal. Unable to find such a deity, he decided to go to Puri, thinking that if he would render service to Lord Jagannath there, then somehow Gopal would come to

him. Arriving in Puri, he stayed in the area known as Kunderi Benta Sahi, near Grand Road. As he was very scholarly, he easily obtained service in the office of the king, where he became the *poddar*, or cashier for the temple of Lord Jagannath. Gopal Giri led a very regulated life. While staying in Puri he would daily go to see Lord Jagannath. While at the temple he would sit on the *bāiś pāhāca*, the twenty-two steps inside the compound leading up to the main *darśana* area, and there he would read *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. In the evening he would take *prasādam* and go home. Every Sunday he would go to the Satalahari Math, a temple near the ocean, where he would sit and read *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and chant *harināma*. He was very attached to *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

Gopal Comes from Vrindavan

Gopal Giri had long cherished the desire to worship a deity of Gopal. During the Ratha-yātrā festivals in Puri he would approach devotees and *sādhus* coming from Vrindavan and ask them to bring him back a deity of Gopal. They would readily agree, “Yes, yes. Next time I will bring a Gopal deity for you.” But no one ever brought a deity.

At this same time, in Vrindavan there was one renounced devotee who was worshiping a deity of Gopal. One night this Gopal deity appeared in the *sannyāsī’s* dream that his deity was speaking to him. Srila Gour Govinda Swami tells this story:

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Gopal Giri was serving in Puri as a government cashier. He was always thinking in his mind, "If I can get a Gopal deity I'll offer worship to Him." But he thought, "How can I go to Vrindavan?" He had a strong desire to get a deity.

At that time this deity of Gopal was in Vrindavan with a *sannyāsī vaiṣṇava*, a renunciate. He was doing *madhukari*, begging, and he was keeping that deity in his *jhola*, [a cloth tied as a bag]. During the day, he would go out and do *madhukari*, then in the evening he would cook whatever he had begged and offer it to Gopal. In this way he was leading his life.

One night this Gopal deity told the *vaiṣṇava*, "You take me to Gopal Giri, the son of Gadai Giri." He wants to offer Me worship. I want to go there. Take me there. But the *vaiṣṇava* thought that it was only a dream. He did not take it seriously. After a few days Gopal came again in a dream and beat him with a cane on his legs. It was such a severe beating that his legs were bleeding. The *sannyāsī vaiṣṇava* woke up and begged apology, "Please forgive me for my offense. I did not take Your order seriously. But You have beaten me so severely, how can I go there with such wounds on my legs?" Gopal said, "When Gopal Giri touches you it will be healed, otherwise you cannot be cured. You go there at once, don't make any delay."

So he started walking. At that time there was no communication system, no train or

bus. The only way was by walking. It took him two and a half months to reach Puri. At this time Gopal Giri was staying in a rented house at Kundhei Benta Sahi in Puri. The *vaiṣṇava* reached Puri in the evening and stayed near the Jagannath temple. Early the next morning he inquired, "Who is Gopal Giri? I want to meet him." Many people knew Gopal Giri; he was famous as the cashier of the Jagannath temple. So he quickly found Gopal Giri at his rented house.

Gopal Giri had just finished his bath and was putting on *tilaka*. The *vaiṣṇava* arrived and offered his obeisances to Gopal Giri. He then took the deity from his bag and presented Him to Gopal Giri. Gopal Giri was amazed, "What is this? Who are you, and where has this deity come from?"

The *vaiṣṇava* replied, "You wanted Gopal to worship. So Gopal has come from Vrindavan. I was in Vrindavan carrying this Gopal. He told me to hand Him over to you, and He beat me. He showed Gopal Giri his legs and said, "If you touch it, it will be cured, otherwise it will not be cured." So Gopal Giri immediately touched him and the injury was gone.