

CHAPTER VIII

PRABHU JAGADBANDHU (Dāhāpādā, Murshidābād)

Jagadbandhu Prabhu was born in the village of Dāhāpādā on the bank of Gaṅgā in the district of Murshidābād. His father was Śrī Dinānātha Nyāratna and mother Śrīmatī Bāmāsundarī. It appeared from his golden colour, supernatural beauty and extraordinarily sweet mode and gestures that he was not an ordinary child but some heavenly being or manifestation of the divine that had come down on earth to fulfil some purpose of the Divine. Therefore, although his name was Jagadbandhu, people called him ‘Jagat Sundara (Beautiful Jagata)’, Bandhu Sundara (Beautiful Bandhu)’ or ‘Bandhu Sonā (Golden Bandhu)’. The astrologer found in his horoscope the constellation of five planets, which indicated that he would be superhuman and his religious influence as a messiah of the fallen souls would extend far and wide.

Jagata was only one year old when his mother died. He was seven when his father died. Soon after the death of his mother he was taken by his uncle Bhairavacandra Cakravartī from Dāhāpādā to his home in Govindapur. His widowed daughter Digambarī Devī began to look after him with great care and affection.

The superhuman character of Jagata came more and more to light as he grew. When he played hide and seek with boys, he could be easily caught on account of the supernatural smell of his body. His courage was extraordinary. He would go to the bank of the river Padmā, board one of the boats lying at anchor and release it from the anchor. The boat would go floating along the stream. One of his playmates would go and tell Digambarī Devī. She would come running and crying. Then someone would jump into the river, swim up to the boat and bring it back to the bank.

He would go to the forest with his friends. Someone would say, “Jagata! Be careful. There is a hole over there. There may be a snake in it.” Jagata would place his foot over the whole and stand fearlessly.

He would go to the cremation ground with his friends and lie down on one of the *arthī*¹ there. His friends would say, “Jagata! What are you doing?” The *arthī* is impure.” But Jagata would not listen. On going back home the friends would tell Digambarī Devī about it. She would say angrily, “Jagata! You are impure. You must bathe before entering the house.” He would reply, “Didi!² Purity and impurity are mental concepts. Whatever I touch becomes pure.” Digambarī Devī would forcibly pour a pitcher of water over him.

After some time Bhairavacandra built a new house in Brāhmanakāndā, where he shifted with his entire family. But only seven months after that he died and the burden of the family fell upon his two sons Gopālacandra and Tārinīcarana. They made adequate arrangement for Jagata’s education.

At the age of thirteen the sacred thread ceremony of Jagata was performed. This marked the beginning of a new change in his life. Jagata, who had so far been restive and sportive suddenly became serious and grave. In thought, word and deed, and in observance of the rules and regulations of the *sāstras* he began to look like a young Ṛṣi.

¹ A bed of bamboos, on which a dead body is carried to the cremation ground.

² Sister.

He bathed three times during the day, performed *sandhyā-pūjā*³ both morning and evening, cooked his own food, observed *Brahmacarya*⁴ with strictness, always kept his body covered with white cloth, kept his eyes towards the ground while walking, talked very little, sat on the last bench in the school, and was often lost in deep thought. Sometimes he went out of home and sat in deep meditation in a lonely place for hours. At night Digambarī Devī made Jagata sleep by her side. From time to time she touched him to make sure that he was there. If she did not find him, she cried, “Jagata! Jagata!” His brothers and servants got up and went out in search of him. Someone shouted, “Oh! I feel the smell of Jagat’s body coming from the other side of the pond.” When they went there they saw him sitting in deep meditation. No one had the courage at that time to disturb him.

Jagat was always seen in a thoughtful and pensive mood. It appeared that a spark was smouldering in his heart and he was restless to do something great.

After Jagat had finished his education in Brāhmanakāndā, he was sent to Rāncī, where his brother Tārinīcarana was an income tax inspector. He admitted him into a school there.

Tārinīcarana’s neighbor and his friend Raibahādura Rākhāla Bābū had a valuable horse, who had gone mad. He used to throw away anyone who tried to ride him and run. Once Jagata heard Raibahādura talking with Tārinīcarana about the horse. He said, “I shall tame the horse.” Tārinī was alarmed. He said, “Jagata! You must not dare to do that. The horse is ferocious. He has curbed the pride of many horsemen. You must not even go near him.” Jagata laughed and said, “Dādā! Even a lion turns into a mouse, when he comes under my control.” Tārinī laughed it away as a joke.

One evening when Raibahādura returned from his office, he was surprised not to see the horse in the stable. When Tārinīcarana returned from his office, he was surprised not to see Jagata at home. Someone said he had seen Jagata riding the horse. As soon as they heard this, there was no end to their anxiety. Raibahādura said, “Tārinī Bābū! I am not worried about the horse. He may or may not come back. He may live or die. But I am deeply concerned about your brother.”

Both were lost in anxiety and looking expectantly towards the road, when they had a distant vision of the horse running towards them in great speed and raising dust all around. Tārinī Bābū’s heart sank. He thought the horse was returning after throwing away Jagata and crushing him into pieces. But the very next moment the horse came running in lightning speed with the rider on his back and stood at the door.

Jagata held the bridle of the horse in one hand and whip in the other. His face was red and wet with perspiration. He got down from the horse and stood before Raibahādura with pride and said, “Raibahādura! Your horse is tamed!”

This provided an instance of Jagata’s wonderful power of attraction and enchantment, which worked on men and animals alike and which in later years turned atheists into theists and sinners into saints.

One day, when Tārinī Bābū returned from the office he saw Jagata writhing with acute stomach-ache. He called the doctor. The doctor diagnosed that the patient was given poison. He treated accordingly and he was cured.

³ Religious service performed daily in the morning and evening.

⁴ Abstinence.

There was no one in the house except the cook and a servant. The cook had already fled. When the servant was threatened, he confessed that he and the cook had conspired to give poison to Jagata, because they used to steal and found Jagata's presence in the house a hindrance to stealing.

Tārinī Bābū wanted to hand over the servant to the police. But Jagata said. "Dādā! The remedy for wickedness is not punishment, but penitence. Excuse him. He will feel penitent." Tārinī Bābū excused the servant but he did not think it proper to keep Jagata with him. He sent him to Pābanā to live with Golokmani, the younger sister of Digambarī Devī, whose husband Prasannakumāra Lāhidī was a big lawyer. He thought that there he would be better looked after. Lāhidī Bābū admitted him into a school in Pābanā.

Jagata's career as a great saint and savior and redeemer of mankind started from Pābanā. The spark that had been smouldering in his heart now turned into flame. He was never very much interested in education, although he always passed the examination satisfactorily. But now education was but nominal, because he had already attained the highest stage of Bhakti, which was the end of education. He now used to be always lost in the world of *bhāva* and *lilā*. He was fond of kīrtana since birth. But kīrtana had now become the heart and soul of his life. As soon as the sound-wave of kīrtana struck his ear even from a distance, he started dancing and became unconscious. His body trembled, tears streamed out of his eyes, drops of blood covered every pore of his body and sometimes breathing also stopped.

Once he was witnessing a dramatic performance relating to Dhruva. As soon as Dhruva started singing – '*kothāya padma palāśalocana hari* –O! Where is the lotus-eyed Hari?,' he started trembling and became unconscious. At that time Candraśekhara Kālī, the famous doctor of Calcutta was there. He said that it was an epileptic fit. But when he examined him closely he found that his pulse-beat had stopped. His touch produced *sāttvika-bhāvas* in him and he began to feel like dancing and singing '*Hari bol!*'

Once while Jagadbandhu was bathing in river Icchāmati, he heard a cowherd singing '*āra kabe dekhā habo jugala rūpa ekāsane* – Oh! When shall I see the divine couple (Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa) sitting together?' Immediately he became unconscious and fell into the river. The people present there brought him out and laid him on the bank. For a long time consciousness did not return. A Vaiṣṇava Bābajī said, "He is in *bhāva-mūrchā*⁵. Come let us sing *Harināma* around him." All began to sing '*Hari-bol, Hari-bol!*' with the clapping of hands. Jagadbandhu opened his eyes, but the *bhāva* persisted for a long time.

Jagadbandhu was mad on account of his extraordinary devotion to *Harināma*. He found another mad friend in Hārāna. Hārāna. was his name, but he was called 'Ksyepā⁶ Hārāna.'. People were surprised by their friendship, because outwardly they were opposed to each other in character, form, mode of living and manners and in almost every other thing that was external. Jagata was extraordinarily beautiful, Hārāna was ugly. Jagata was the very figure of cleanliness, Hārāna of dirtiness. Jagata bathed thrice during the day, wore clothes that were washed by his own hands and were spotlessly clean. He never even touched the bed or clothes used by others. Hārāna wore clothes full of patches of old and dirty pieces of cloth collected from various places. It appeared from his dirty body he had never in his life even touched water. He lived in the verandah of a

⁵ Senselessness due to *bhāva*.

⁶ Mad.

dilapidated building in a lonely place in Pābanā. From the crevices in the walls of the verandah hissed many a snake even during the day.. All around him one could see lying old and broken earthen pots full of stale and rotten eatables, thrown away by people and collected by him from various places. Jagata was still in budding youth, while it was difficult to say anything about the age of Hārāna. He had seen the marriages of the grandfathers and grandmothers of many old people of Pābanā. People called him *trikārajnya*⁷ and *vāksiddha*.⁸ Whatever he said about any person even casually always came true. But he was very rough in behaviour and his language was abusive. Therefore people generally did not go to him. But, as they say, only a jeweler knows the worth of a jewel, Jagadbandhu had the highest regard and love for him and called him reverentially Śivā. He called Jagadbandhu affectionately Jagā'. Spotlessly clean and fresh like a flower that had just bloomed, Jagata would go and clasp him inspite of his dirty and awfully bad smelling body, as if he was eternally his own and he loved him more than his own self. Locking him firmly in his arms he would say lovingly, 'O! Śivā.' Śivā said, 'O! Jagā.' They would both go on repeating this till they were lost in *Prema-samādhī*. Even in the absence of Jagadbandhu Śivā often cried, 'Jagā, Jagā!' like one who was intoxicated. Obviously he derived from it the same pleasure as he derived in clasping Jagā. Hārāna often went to the house of Śrī Prasannakumarā. Lāhidī and Golokmani Devī fed him affectionately. Once he looked at her in a mysterious manner and said, "Look Dīdī! Jagā is not human. Jagā is *Rājā* (king); we are all his *Prajā!* (subjects)." It is said that Jagadbandhu once told one of his confidants, "Śivā is truly Śivā and the Advaitācārya of *Gaura-līlā*, who has been living here in disguise since the disappearance of *Gaura-līlā*.

Ever since Jagadbandhu went to Pābanā, the youth of Pābanā began to be drawn to him. They were attracted by his beauty, the supernatural radiance and smell of his body, his piety, his love, his spirituality, his high spirits and strictly disciplined life. They were anxious to surrender themselves at his feet so that he might guide and mould them and make them like himself.

Jagadbandhu was only waiting for this opportunity. He became their preceptor. His precepts to them were:

1. Practise *Brahmacarya* and make others do the same.
2. Whatever you do, do for Govinda, knowing that the doer is He, not you.
3. While practising *Dharma*⁹ if any calamity or disaster comes, face it bravely and patiently, because Dharma is Kṛṣṇa.
4. Do not talk ill of others.
5. Do not waste your time in useless activities and talks.
6. You may or may not do anything else, but you must do *Harinamā*. *Harinamā* is my life. Keep me alive through *Harinamā*.
7. Others may or may not do *Harinamā*. But you should go about chanting *Harinamā* loudly so that they may hear. Only by hearing *Harinamā* people can attain deliverance from Māyā.

Precepts are fruitful only when the preceptor himself is a living embodiment of the precepts. The powerful precepts of Jagadbandhu, who was himself a living example of all that he preached, soon brought about unprecedented change in the young men of

⁷ One who knows the past, present and future.

⁸ One whose words always come true.

⁹ Religion and morality.

Pābanā. Their guardians apprehended that the boys might renounce the world and they might be deprived of their only hope and support in old age. They conferred together and decided to cut at the very root of the problem by killing Jagadbandhu. The boys came to know about this. They informed Jagadbandhu. He remained grave, undisturbed and unmoved like the Himalayas; but said, “Many atrocities will be committed upon this body, but no one will be to kill it. Suffer violence, but do not be violent. You may also have to face violence. Move about fearlessly.”

Jagadbandhu used to go out for a walk before sunrise every morning. At that time of day some villains came from behind and started hitting him mercilessly. They went on hitting till he fell unconscious on the ground. They thought he was dead and ran away, leaving him alone in the forest. He was seen by a watchman returning home after night duty. He went and informed Lāhidī Bābū. He and his men ran towards the forest. They lifted Jagadbandhu and brought him home. The news soon spread in Pābanā like wild fire. Crowds of young men started coming to Lāhidī Bābū’s house. They were all wild with anger. As soon as Jagadbandhu regained consciousness they asked him about the names of the villains. He remained silent. When asked repeatedly he asked for paper and pencil. While he was writing everyone was anxiously looking at the paper for the names. But instead of the names, what he wrote on it in bold letters was –“I have not come to chastise, but to deliver.”

After this episode Tārinī Bābū came and took Jagadbandhu with him to Rāncī. He admitted him into an English school at Rāncī in class tenth. But at this time, when the thought of redeeming the *jīvas* by preaching *Harināma* to them was persistently gnawing him, how could he apply his mind to studies and to what end? Impelled by the thought, he one day sneaked out of Rāncī. No one knows where he went and what he did for two years. After two years he reached Brāhmanakāndā and started his life’s mission – the preaching of *Harināma* in right earnest. He built two *āśramas*, one in Brāhmanakāndā and the other in Vākara, near Brāhmanakāndā.

He organized seven *kīrtana* parties. In each party there were two *mṛdaṅgas*¹⁰ and four pairs of *karatālas*¹¹. All the seven parties went about doing *kīrtana* in different parts of the city everyday. Jagadbandhu also accompanied the *kīrtana* parties. Sometimes all the parties together performed *kīrtana* continuously for twenty-four hours. The songs sung in *kīrtana* were composed by Jagadbandhu himself. An important part of *kīrtana* used to be *Harilūta*.¹² This also Jagadbandhu did himself. At first he scattered *prasāda* in *Hari-lūta*. Then in a fit of joyful emotion he squandered pen, pencil, stick, clothes, coins, notes and whatever he could lay his hand on. Once he threw away a *sitāra* in *Hari-lūta*, saying ‘*Haribol!*’ The *sitāra* broke. He gave the owner of the *sitāra* a pair of *karatālas* and made him understand that the proper instruments for *kīrtana* were *mṛdaṅga* and *karatāla*. He said that *mṛdaṅga* was Advaitācārya himself and *karatāla* Nityānanda.

Once Jagadbandhu was out for *Nagara-kīrtana*.¹³ From the opposite side was coming Banamāli Rāya, the highly devoted Rājā of Tādasa on the back of an elephant, surrounded by pikemen and gunmen. He saw in the midst of the *kīrtana* party an extraordinarily beautiful golden youth of about 20, dancing and singing and shedding

¹⁰ A drum-like musical instrument.

¹¹ Cymbal.

¹² Scattering of sweets, etc., in honour of Hari in order that people may pick them up and eat.

¹³ Circumambulation of the town while performing *kīrtana*.

tears profusely as he sang. He wondered who could be that golden youth, so divine in looks, so mad with love. He got down from the elephant. On inquiry he found that he was the Jagadbandhu about whom he had heard so much already from different persons. Then he went penetrating through the crowd near him and bending on his knees said to him. “Prabhu! I request you to grace my home once with the holy dust of your feet.”

The next day came Raghunandana Gosvāmi, the son of the Rājaguru of Banamāli Rāya and took him on an elephant to the house of Banamāli Rāya. As soon as he reached there Banamāli Rāya fell prostrate at his feet. He took him to a room adjacent to the temple of his Ṭhākura Rādhāvinoda and closed the door. He tried to say something. But he said, ‘Prabhu!’ and his throat was choked and tears streamed out of his eyes. He could not say more. But he had said by his *bhāva* more than he could say by words. He had said that Jagadbandhu was his Prabhu and he was his servant. Jagadbandhu replied by saying, ‘Rājarsi!’, implying thereby that though a *Rajā*, he was like a *Ṛṣi*. Since then Jagadbandhu began to be called Prabhu Jagadbandhu and Banamāli began to be called Rājarsi Banamāli Rāya.

Since then Banamāli Rāya began to take Jagadbandhu’s advice as his command. As advised by him, he took upon himself the responsibility of printing and distributing the works of Rupā, Sanātana, Jīva and the other Gosvāmis. Even today we find in the libraries the numerous works of the Gosvāmis published by him.

Before coming into contact with Jagadbandhu Prabhu Banamāli Rāya was very much under the influence of Brāhma Samāja. He regarded Brāhma as formless and had no faith in the Śrī Vighraha of Bhagavān. The service of Ṭhākura Rādhāvinoda in his house was done by the *pujārī* as a matter of routine in the same manner in which it was done by his father, when he was alive. Part of the service was the service of *hukkā*.¹⁴ Rādhāvinoda had acquired the habit of smoking *hukkā* since the time. He was worshipped by a devotee, who used to smoke *hukkā*. The devotee offered *hukkā* to Rādhāvinoda before smoking.

One day after *bhoga* was offered to Rādhāvinoda Jagadbandhu said to Banamāli Rāya, “Come, let us enjoy the *hukkā-smoking līlā* of Rādhāvinoda.” He went with Banamāli Rāya and sat down in the verandah of the temple. After sometime he said, “Now hear, Rādhāvinoda is smoking. The ‘*guda-guda*’ sound of *hukkā* can be heard clearly.” By his mercy the spiritual ears of Banamāli Rāya opened and he was surprised to hear the sound. Tears of love and penitence for not believing in the Śrī Vighraha began to flow from his eyes. He was drowned in *bhāva-samādhī*.

Since then Banamāli Rāya's faith in Śrī Vighraha became so strong that even if someone said something, which even remotely implied that the Śrī Vighraha was only a statue, he felt extremely pained at heart.

Banamāli Rāya regarded Rādhāvinoda and Jagadbandhu Prabhu as non-different and served them accordingly.

Jagadbandhu started his mission of preaching *kīrtana* with the Buno community of Faridapur, which was the lowliest and the most down-trodden community of the Hindu society. Since long these people had been neglected and ill-treated by the Hindus. The English missionaries wanted to convert them into Christianity. They fixed a day for their conversion. The same day Jagadbandhu organized a grand and pompous *samkīrtana*

¹⁴ Smoking pipe with long flexible tube.

procession. The procession marched on rending the sky with high pitched sound of numerous *mṛdaṅgas* and *karatālas* and reached the colony where the Bunoos lived. The Bunoos joined the *samkīrtana*. Jagadbandhu embraced their leader Rajanī Pāśā and sang and danced with him. Other members of the party embraced the other Bunoos and danced with them. *Samkīrtana* changed the heart of the Bunoos, They gave up the idea of proselytization into Christianity. The missionaries had to return disappointed. Jagadbandhu gave them *mṛdaṅga* and *karatāla*. They organized a big *samkīrtana* party. Jagadbandhu included it in his own party and treated them both equally.

Rāmabāgāna in Calcutta was densely populated by Domas.¹⁵ Jagadbandhu often went there and stayed with his devotee Tinkadī. He taught them how to perform *kīrtana*. Within a short time Rāmabāgāna became the centre of *kīrtana* in Calcutta. All the Domas became devotees. They worshipped Jagadbandhu as their Bhagavān. Jagadbandhu also gave every respect to them. He did not even hesitate to eat from their hand.

Gradually Jagadbandhu attracted several other persons, who became his chief assistants in the work of preaching *Harināma*. Rāmadāsa Bābājī was his closest companion since his boyhood. He used to be the principal singer in his *kīrtanas*. He had a sweet voice and his *bhāva* was deep. As soon as he started *kīrtana* all the *sāttvika bhāvas* appeared on his body. His name was 'Rādhikā'. But Jagadbandhu lost outward consciousness as soon as he said 'Rādhikā.' Therefore he called him 'Sārikā.' Later it was he who gave him the name 'Rāmadāsa.'

Atula Campatī was the husband of Digamabarī Devī's daughter Kṣīrodā Sundarī. He was the headmaster of a high school in Ārā, in district Patanā. He met Jagadbandhu first at the time of his marriage and came under his influence. He began in his own mind to regard him as his guru. Later he renounced the world and became a recluse. He used to go about chanting '*Haribol! Haribol!*' with a bag hanging from his shoulder and ringing cymbals with his hands in the streets and bye-lanes of Calcutta. Therefore he began to be called 'Haribol Campatī.' He visited the place where the Domas lived in Rāmabāgāna more frequently.

Śrī Devendranātha Cakravartī was also the Headmaster of a High school. He also came under the influence of Jagadbandhu and became his ardent devotee. Like Campatī, he also renounced the world and started going around different places chanting '*Jai Nitāi! Jai Nitāi!*' Therefore he began to be called '*Jai Nitāi*'

Similarly, a number of other devotees came under the influence of Jagadbandhu and were charged by him with *śakti* to go round and preach *Harināma*. Prominent among them were Mahendrajī, the founder of Mahānāma Sampradāya, Rameśacandra Cakravartī, Bakulāla Visvāsa, Mahimadāsa and Navīnacandra Vrajavāsī.

Jagadbandhu passed his last days in Goyāla Cāmatāpallī, near Faridapur. An *āśrama* was built there, which was called 'Śrī Śrīdhāma-Faridapur-Śrī Aṅgana.'

While living in Śrī Aṅgana signs of *bhāvonmāda* (madness in love or divine madness) began to appear in him. In the state of *bhāvonmāda* he used to be so lost in *bhāva* that he had no consciousness of body. He did not know whether he had clothes on his body or not. Usually he used to be naked. In his *bhāva* he used to be like an infant, who depended entirely upon others. From 1902 to 1918, for about sixteen years and eight months, he remained silent. During this period he lived in a dark room of Śrīaṅgana with the door closed from inside. He did not allow a lamp to be lit in the room. He had

¹⁵ The lowest caste in India.

no connection whatsoever with the outside world. He ate and slept very little. He left his body in 1921, two and a half years after he broke silence.