

Chapter Seventeen

In Praise of Śrīla Narottam Dās Ṭhākur

Today is the Disappearance Day of Śrīla Narottam Ṭhākur, so I would like to say a few words to glorify him. Before Śrīla Bhaktivinod Ṭhākur most of the Vaiṣṇava songs came from Śrīla Narottam Ṭhākur. ‘Śrī Guru charaṇapadma, kevala-bhakati-sadma,’ you all know. This is from Narottam’s *Prema-bhakti-chandrikā*, and *Prārthanā*. But although he wrote many beautiful songs of devotion, Narottam Dās Ṭhākur was not just a song writer, he was a great *pāṇḍit* and more than that, he was a devotee of Śrī Chaitanya-dev.

When Mahāprabhu travelled to Rāmakeli, on the way He had to cross the River Padmā. While on the banks of the river He began to call, “Narottam, Narottam, Narottam.” The devotees could not understand the meaning at that time, but later it was revealed that from that part of Bengal, a great devotee would appear, and his name would be ‘Narottam.’ Śrīman Mahāprabhu had left a great treasure stored in the waters of Padmā Devī for Narottam—Kṛṣṇa-prema.

After many years, Narottam Dās Ṭhākur appeared in the village of that area, known as Kheturi. He was a prince, the only son of Rāj Kṛṣṇānanda Datta and Rāṇī Nārāyaṇī Devī. Narottam was enlightened even from his early childhood, and one day he had a dream in which

Nityānanda Prabhu instructed him, “Go to the River Padmā and take your bath there because Mahāprabhu has left His gift of Kṛṣṇa-*Prema* for you within her waters.” Narottam immediately awoke and went to the river and entered the water. While bathing he experienced the Divine Form of Mahāprabhu embracing him and Kṛṣṇa-*Prema* entered into his being. He became transformed and just like Mahāprabhu Himself, he began crying, dancing, laughing and constantly chanting the Names of Kṛṣṇa and suddenly *aṣṭa-sāttvika-bhāva* (the eight symptoms of ecstasy in love of Kṛṣṇa) appeared in his body.

Upon returning home Narottam’s mother began to question, “Oh my son, what has happened to you? Why are you crying and behaving in this peculiar way? Please, if I can help in any way, I am ready to do anything. I am even ready to give up my life if that will help you. Tell me what I can do.”

Narottam replied, “Mother, last night I went to the River Padmā, inspired by a dream, and there someone who I believe was Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, embraced me and entered into my heart. Now I am feeling great sadness and separation from that Mahāprabhu and from Śrī Kṛṣṇachandra and that is what causes me to cry. If you wish to show your kindness to me then please give me permission to go to Vṛndāvan where I shall search for Mahāprabhu.”

After hearing Narottam’s petition, his father became worried, fearing that his son would leave home, and so, just like the father of Raghunāth Dās Goswāmī, he arranged some guards to watch Narottam. Narottam remained in the house, chanting, dancing, and writing devotional songs and always manifesting the eight symptoms of divine ecstasy.

Narottam was restless, always crying for Mahāprabhu and Kṛṣṇa. Since the day he took his bath in the river, his body had changed from his dark complexion and he had become the same golden colour of Mahāprabhu. Rādhārāṇī's colour had come into his body and everyone was greatly surprised saying, "Yes, it is true, Narottam has received Kṛṣṇa-*Prema* from Mahāprabhu and Mahāprabhu is really living in his heart." Everyone was offering him respect, but his father was becoming more and more worried.

One day when his father had gone to pay taxes on behalf of the state and had traveled far away, Narottam went to his mother crying in great anguish and again petitioned her, "Mother, please give your permission, I must go to Chaitanya Mahāprabhu's associates who are living in Vṛndāvan. It is the order of Nityānanda Prabhu, so please arrange for me to go." Narottam's mother made the arrangements, and in secret Narottam left his home and went to Vṛndāvan.

Narottam had been having many dreams in which Mahāprabhu instructed him to go to Vṛndāvan and take shelter of the lotus feet of His confidential devotee Śrila Lokanāth Dās Goswāmī who would give *dīkṣā* to him. He also told Narottam to find Śrila Rūpa Goswāmī, Śrila Sanātan Goswāmī and Śrila Jīva Goswāmī and to keep their holy association. After arriving in Vṛndāvan, Narottam found that Rūpa and Sanātan had already left the world but he found there Śrila Jīva Goswāmī, Śrila Lokanāth Dās Goswāmī, Śrila Kṛṣṇa Dās Kaviraj Goswāmī and many other great Vaiṣṇavas who gave him their company. Narottam became the student of Jīva Goswāmī and petitioned Lokanāth Goswāmī to give him *dīkṣā*. Lokanāth refused him.

Lokanāth Goswāmī had decided that he would never accept any disciples and lived in an extremely austere way in Vṛndāvan, living under a different tree every night.

Narottam felt great sadness upon being refused by Śrila Lokanāth, and he told him, "I can only take my initiation from you. Śrīman Mahāprabhu has told me that you will give me *dīkṣā*, so until then I will wait." Narottam tried to serve his Guru but the Goswāmī would allow no one to serve him. Narottam thought, "If he will not even stay under the same tree for more than one night then what kind of service can I do for him?" After a while Narottam noticed that Śrila Lokanāth Prabhu would always go to the same place to pass stool and he began to think that although Lokanāth had refused to give him any service for over two years, if he could clean that place every day then at last he would have some service. Narottam was fixed in his resolve that he must take *dīkṣā* from Śrila Lokanāth Goswāmī, as this was the order of Mahāprabhu.

Very soon Lokanāth Goswāmī began to notice, "I come here every day to pass stool and it seems that someone is cleaning this place after me. Who can be doing this?" So one night from a hidden place Lokanāth saw that at midnight Narottam is coming and very happily cleaning that place. Lokanāth knew that Narottam was the son of the famous King Kṛṣṇānanda Datta. He was greatly astonished and confronted Narottam, "Why are you, a prince of high noble birth, coming each night and cleaning this dirty place?" And Narottam replied, "Prabhu, I need your mercy. Without your mercy I cannot live. Your vow is that you will not accept any disciples, but by the order of Śrīman Mahāprabhu, it is my vow that I must have your connection. I don't know when you will give me your mercy but you must accept me as your disciple." So after

refusing Narottam eighteen times, finally Śrīla Lokanāth Dās Goswāmī took Narottam Dās and gave him *dīkṣā*.

Narottam received instruction from Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī, Śrīla Kavirāj Goswāmī and many other *gospāmīś* who were there in Vṛndāvan. He was a great *pāṇḍit* and all the devotees headed by Śrī Jīva, recognising his qualification, bestowed upon him the title of 'Thākur.'

Narottam Thākur's close associates and peers were Śyāmānanda and Śrīnivās. From the inspiration of Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī and the other Vaiṣṇavas, these three great devotees were sent back to Bengal to continue the preaching of Mahāprabhu. The Bengali Vaiṣṇavas were very eager to read the writings of Śrī Rūpa, Sanātan, Raghunāth, Kṛṣṇa Dās Kavirāj, Lokanāth Goswāmī, Gopāl Bhaṭṭa Goswāmī, Prabhodānanda Sarasvatī and the other Goswāmīś; so Narottam, Śyāmānanda and Śrīnivās travelled from Vṛndāvan towards Bengal with many copies of those great books.

Finally they arrived in Viṣṇupur in the district of Virbhumi, Bengal. The King of this region was Rāja Bir Hambir, but he was a dacoit (bandit) and was engaged in many robberies in the area. The King had a *brāhmaṇa* astrologer and according to the astrologers' calculations he would know where and when to carry out his next robbery. The astrologer informed the King that on a particular route bullock carts would be passing, carrying many precious jewels, so the jubilant King sent his dacoits to rob the caravan. While Narottam and the Vaiṣṇavas slept, the King's dacoits stole away the chests containing the books of the Goswāmīś.

After much searching, Narottam, Śrīnivās and Śyāmānanda in great sorrow could not trace the books. Śrīnivās ordered Narottam to return to Kheturi Grām, and

Śyāmānanda went to Midnapur where they began preaching. Śrīnivās Āchāryya resolved to stay and try to find the stolen books.

Śrīnivās heard that in the assembly of Rāja Bir Hambir, that night a great *pāṇḍit* would give explanation of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. The *brāhmaṇa* in whose house Śrīnivās was staying, invited Śrīnivās to accompany him to the meeting. Śrīnivās agreed.

After hearing the *pāṇḍit*'s explanation of the *Bhāgavatam*, Śrīnivās addressed Rāja Bir Hambir saying, "*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is not child's play. It is the transcendental knowledge descended to this earth for our super benefit and the explanation given by this man is intolerable, he obviously knows nothing of the meaning of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*."

Rāja Bir Hambir was greatly surprised at Śrīnivās' exclamation and asked him, "Then can you explain the *Bhāgavatam*?"

"Yes I can," replied Śrīnivās and taking his seat on the *vyāsāsan*, he spoke for several hours. All those that heard him became greatly moved and they all, including the King, took shelter of his lotus feet.

The King humbly approached Śrīnivās, "Prabhu, you are indeed a great Vaiṣṇava, please tell me what service I can do for you? Where have you come from? How far have you travelled?"

Śrīnivās Āchāryya told him, "I have come from Vṛndāvan carrying chests of books written by the Goswāmīś, but now they are lost, stolen by I know not who, so I remain here searching for them."

With his head bowed Rāja Bir Hambir announced, "I am the culprit, I have those books in my home, and every day I have been worshipping them. My astrologer told me

that his calculations were true and that the books were actually jewels although they were in the form of books, and so that is why every day I am offering *pūjā*." And the King took Śrīnivās to the books.

The news was sent to Narottam and Śyāmānanda and in great jubilation Narottam Ṭhākur arranged a grand festival. As well as Narottam, Śyāmānanda, Śrīnivās and other noted Vaiṣṇavas, Mother Jāhnavī Devī—Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu's *sakti*—also came there to Kheturi Grām to attend the festival. After properly worshipping Jāhnavī Devī, Narottam Ṭhākur installed six deities in different temples—Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Vallavī-Kānta, Vraj-Mohan, Rādhā-Kānta, Rādhā-Rāmaṇ, and Gaurāṅga. Elaborate *pūjā* arrangements were made, including a month-long festival of *Hari-kīrttan*. And every day in Narottam's *kīrttan*, those who were fortunate saw Nityānanda Prabhu and Mahāprabhu dancing there, such was Narottam's devotion. Those who knew him considered he was the incarnation of Nityānanda Prabhu and Mahāprabhu combined.

Although Lokanāth Goswāmī only had one disciple, Narottam gave Kṛṣṇa-*Prema* to everyone, and just like Nityānanda Prabhu, he did not consider who was fit and who was not. Whoever wanted Kṛṣṇa-*Prema*, then Narottam would give it them. He was given this special power by the grace of Mahāprabhu, Nityānanda and Lokanāth Goswāmī, Narottam's Gurudev.

Narottam Dās Ṭhākur was born in the *kāyastha* community, and caused a great deal of controversy by accepting disciples who were from the *brāhmaṇa* caste. The *brāhmaṇa* section were very angry with him and tried repeatedly to defeat him in debate, but the only result was that more *brāhmaṇas* were becoming his disciples. The

brāhmaṇas were very unhappy, and when in his last years Narottam manifested much sickness, the *brāhmaṇas* declared that this was the result of Narottam violating the scriptural injunctions by accepting disciples from a higher caste than his own. Gradually Narottam's condition became worse and finally he died. The *brāhmaṇas* were jubilant and began celebrating Narottam's passing as proof of his offences to their community.

Narottam's disciples were heart-broken and prayed before their Gurudev's body, "Oh Prabhu, you have shown this *līlā* of your passing in this way and the *brāhmaṇas* are committing offence to your lotus feet because they cannot understand. Lord, what shall we do now? Surely all the preaching will be ruined if you show this kind of passing *līlā*. Please show your mercy to these misguided *brāhmaṇas*." Suddenly Narottam returned to his body and sat up and upon seeing this miracle, the opposition surrendered to his lotus feet.

Some months later, Narottam was exhibiting intense symptoms of separation from Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and so again he left this world. His body turned into milk and merged with the waters of the holy River Ganges.

In this way Narottam Dās Ṭhākur preached Kṛṣṇa consciousness and from him the preceptorial line is coming to Viśvanāth Chakravarti. Narottam wrote many songs of devotion and *Prema-bhakti-chandrikā* is very famous in this world amongst the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavas. Today is his holy Disappearance Day and we pray for his grace upon us all.