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Tales, Tanks, and Temples

The Creation of a Sacred Center in Seventeenth-Century Bengal

Abstract

Vrindavan, the hallowed site of the Hindu deity Krishna's youth, located geographically in the green groves on the banks of the River Yamuna in north India, was of deep spiritual concern for his devotees. In its replication at Vishnupur, the capital of the local Malla dynasty in eastern India, aspects of the distinctive physical qualities of this older holy site were selectively reproduced, while others were abandoned. I analyze the town's devotional poetry, oral narratives, extant temple forms, and landscape architecture for the choices that determined this process of transforming Vishnupur and its immediate surroundings. Scrutinizing the extant material culture and forms of devotional expression at this site, for example, suggests that the consolidation of this first Gaudiya Vaishnava foothold involved careful negotiation in the heterogenous political and cultural circumstances of seventeenth-century Bengal. The form in which the new Vaishnava message is given expression is unmistakably regional, an Indic adaptation of Islamic culture.

Keywords: Bengal—Krishna—temples—landscape—architecture

VISHNUPUR, IN MODERN West Bengal, eastern India, was pivotal in sustaining the Gaudiya (Bengali) Vaishnava devotional movement at the end of the sixteenth century (Figure 2).¹ This religious community had emerged under the inspiration of the Bengali saint Chaitanya (1486–1533), who called for an intensely personal and deeply emotional engagement with Krishna, the central deity of the tradition.² The formation of a Gaudiya Vaishnava community at Vishnupur provides an opportunity to explore how Vrindavan, a preexisting sacred center, is mapped onto new territory (Figure 1). Vrindavan, the hallowed site of Krishna's youth, located geographically in the green groves on the banks of the River Yamuna in north India, was of deep spiritual concern for Vaishnava devotees. In its replication at Vishnupur, aspects of the distinctive physical qualities of this older holy site were selectively reproduced, while others were abandoned. Here I analyze the choices that determined this process of recreating Vishnupur, the capital of the local Malla dynasty, and its immediate surroundings as "Gupta Vrindavan," that is, a hidden Vrindavan. Scrutinizing the extant material culture and forms of devotional expression at this site suggests that the consolidation of this first Gaudiya Vaishnava foothold involved careful negotiation in the heterogeneous political and cultural circumstances of seventeenth-century Bengal. The form in which the new Vaishnava message is given expression is unmistakably regional, which in this situation represents an Indic adaptation of Islamic culture. Finally, in uncovering the layering of Vrindavan's distinctive cultural forms and institutions upon Vishnupur, it is important to recognize the double replication of these elements, following immediately from their initial establishment at Vrindavan.³ This strategy not only linked but also legitimated both sites, giving Vishnupur the authority desired and reinforcing the mythic status mapped historically upon Vrindavan.

A variety of grafting mechanisms were employed in overlaying a secret Vrindavan upon Vishnupur. The process was enabled partly by the mapping of the local deity Madan Mohan to Krishna, the universal and ultimate

object of Gaudiya Vaishnava devotion. The transformation of the forested terrain of Vishnupur into a cultural center was equally achieved by launching comparable expressive forms and institutions to those established over the previous century at Vrindavan. A dominant mode for linking the two sites, for example, was the creation of narratives about the town, its deities and their distinctive features, and the composition of devotional poetry by the rulers and their courtiers. A center for manuscript production and copying was established parallel to Vrindavan. The oral sources can be traced through tales retold by living members of the royal family, temple priests, and local tour guides. Textual sources include a local narrative poem that collected many of these stories, and Gaudiya Vaishnava historical and biographical accounts of this period.⁴ If Krishna and the narratives provided theological, ritual, and mythological links, landscaping of the immediate surroundings of Vishnupur revealed the sacred topography of this newly created Vrindavan. Prolific temple construction to support royally sponsored worship of newly installed deities brought a new community together through common ritual activities and devotional sentiments centered around sacred architecture. I will examine the extant architecture and site plan as sources of material culture to sketch this process.

While such shifting of the center of the Gaudiya Vaishnava sacred cartography made the eternal realm of Krishna flexible and easily accessible to the growing devotional community in Bengal, this sacred Hindu site was relocated to the Indo-Islamic cultural and political milieu of this region during the seventeenth century. As a result, the Islamic imprint on this Hindu cultural center is indelible. The architectural structure supporting this new Vrindavan, for example, was composed of temples that minimally modified the region's established mosque tradition. I argue that they signal the political aspirations of their Hindu patrons and point to their multiple allegiances and complex identity in the region. Such receptiveness to Islamic sources also complemented consonances in Sufi and bhakti theological premises and shared imagery in the literature of the two traditions. It probably made the recreation of a Vaishnava sacred center in the distinctive regional idiom developed under Islamic patronage familiar and attractive to the local community.

The dominant Gaudiya Vaishnava telling of this process of re-mapping Vrindavan in Bengal is highly illuminating about the strategizing necessary to establish predominance. I summarize this account by synthesizing from several versions of the narrative circulating in Vishnupur at present.⁵ Chaitanya had picked six disciples, who came to be called the *goswamis*, and based them at Vrindavan over the course of the sixteenth century. At his behest, these six disciples, who became the second generation of Gaudiya

Vaishnava leadership, composed the corpus of theological texts that have come to define the tradition. At the end of the sixteenth century, when the personal charisma of Chaitanya was no longer operative, the movement decentered and fragmented to the point of dissipation in the east. The six disciples selected their pupil Srinivas Acharya, who was to become the third-generation spiritual leader, to refocus the movement in Bengal. He was provided a cartload of newly written manuscripts containing the vital precepts of the tradition to help him accomplish this task. It was in Vishnupur that Srinivas lost these precious manuscripts in his charge. Tracing them to the local landholder Raja Vir Hambir of the Malla dynasty, he visited the

Malla court at Vishnupur and swept the court with his insightful recitation and interpretation of episodes from Krishna's life. The raja was so entranced by Srinivas's passion for Krishna that he fell at his feet and confessed to organizing a theft of the books he had mistaken for worldly riches. In the raja's desire to make amends, Srinivas gained his first and possibly most powerful devotee (Figure 8).⁶ The momentum of this alliance reverberated rapidly through Mallabhum (land of the Mallas) in the southwestern corner of Bengal.

Seventeenth-century Gaudiya Vaishnava texts provide details that illuminate our understanding of the replication of Vrindavan at this site. According to the *Bhaktiratnakar*, at the moment of his initiation, Raja Vir Hambir entreated his guru to stay longer at his court: "Without Prabhu, Vishnupur would be nothing more than the forest" (CHAKRAVARTI, N. 1332 BS, 7.476). The emerging sacred center, that is, would lapse back to its former state of undifferentiated jungle. As the term *prabhu* (lord), used to address Srinivas in the original, was also applied to Chaitanya by his followers, and Krishna was the ultimate lord, it is the absence of not just Srinivas, but also Chaitanya and Krishna that he feared would threaten his

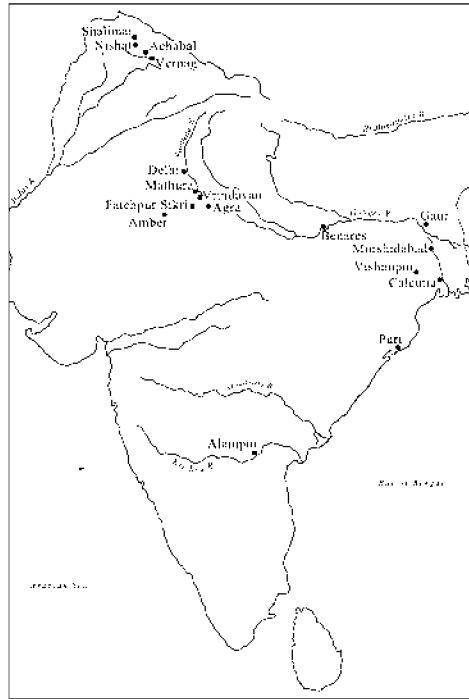


FIGURE 1. Map of South Asia showing major sites discussed.

territory.⁷ Gaudiya Vaishnava literature thus claims that its adherents urbanized and civilized Vishnupur from the wilderness and transmuted the rude ways of its raja, the book thief, into spiritual energy.

I interpret this account, percolated through text and oral narrative, as indicative of the mechanisms employed to map Vrindavan's sacred territory at Vishnupur. While unabashedly propagandistic, the narrative

underscores the reality of collaboration with the local political authority for the success of the venture. This partnership assured the support of the kings for the process of transforming Vishnupur into a sacred center. The patronage of oral poetry is foreshadowed in the critical role given to Srinivas's recitation to move the hardened ruler in this tale. The importance of landscaping and temple building is anticipated in the jungle-clearing implied by the imminent danger of relapse and reversal of the newly constituted Vrindavan into forests. The narrative highlights the significance accorded to the natural surroundings and its transformative role in this process, which I will consider at greater length below.

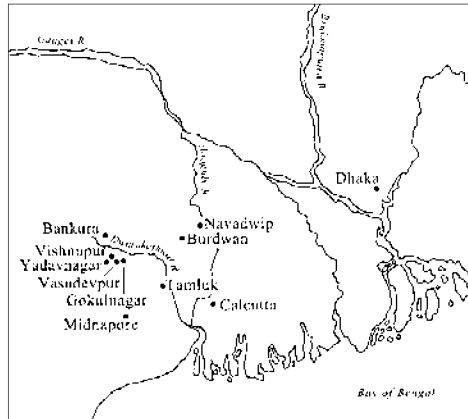


FIGURE 2. Map of Bengali Cultural Region.

PILGRIMAGE ROUTES BETWEEN VRINDAVAN AND VISHNUPUR

From the earliest documented histories of Vishnupur in Gaudiya Vaishnava sources, the town has been intertwined with Vrindavan. The selection of this site was probably due partly to its geographical location in southwestern Bengal, strategically situated on several important preexisting routes through north India, probably mapped for trade, which were also traversed by Gaudiya Vaishnavas on pilgrimage. The ancient road from Tamralipta (Tamluk) in southwest Bengal to Vrindavan passed through Vishnupur (Figures 1, 2).⁸ Similarly, the town lay on the road from Orissa to Monghyr in Bihar. The pilgrimage route between Puri and Vrindavan, called “Nilachaler Path” or “Jharikhander Path,” used by Chaitanya on his travels to the temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri, also went via Vishnupur (*Prem Vilas* of Nityananda Das, cited in SAHA 1995, 20).

The first of these routes was critical to the creation of a Gaudiya Vaishnava center at Vishnupur as Srinivas journeyed from Vrindavan with the cartload of manuscripts compiled by the *goswamis*. The conversion of

Raja Vir Hambir to Vaishnavism followed the theft of these manuscripts. The systematic transformation of Malla territory into a realm suited for Krishna's residence followed this momentous victory when the raja convinced his guru to live in the town (Figures 6, 7, 8).⁹ This initial journey from the most sacred of Gaudiya Vaishnava sites, Vrindavan, to Vishnupur, the new location selected as a focal point for their activities, was renewed by both Vir Hambir and Srinivas, who travelled back and forth. Ingredients that went toward the making of a new Vrindavan were transported along this route. The raja, for example, brought *kīrtana* (devotional songs) composed at Vrindavan to be sung in his temples' courtyards. He also brought back fruit and flowering trees on such trips and planted them himself to transform his capital into the green groves where Krishna could sport with the *gopīs* (cowherding women) once again (MALLIK 1921, 123).

Vishnupur, the town that Srinivas is credited to have transformed into a flourishing Vaishnava hub in the seventeenth century, was thus layered with Vaikuntha, the sacred site of Krishna's activities, which had itself been reclaimed at Vrindavan in the sixteenth century by the *gosvamis*. The analogy between Vishnupur's founding and Vrindavan's rediscovery becomes even more powerful when it is recalled that Srinivas was himself regarded as an incarnation of Chaitanya during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁰ Texts from this period such as the *Bhaktiratnakar*, *Prem Vilas*, and *Karnananda* present his spiritual experiences as comparable to those of Chaitanya.¹¹ The association of Vishnupur with Vrindavan was thus strengthened to the point of identification, mapped as part of a single Gaudiya Vaishnava world. Such strategies deployed across multiple media suggest a deliberate attempt to yoke the two Gaudiya Vaishnava centers together and present Srinivas's Vishnupur as a reincarnation of Chaitanya's Vrindavan.

MADAN MOHAN OF VISHNUPUR

The precise origins of the term *gupta* (hidden) Vrindavan are difficult to date, but its use is reflected in the *Madan Mohan Bandana*, a lengthy poem from the eighteenth century extolling the heroism and influence of the town's primary deity, Madan Mohan, a form of Krishna (Figure 3).¹² The description of each well-known miracle performed by Madan Mohan culminates in the couplet: "This Vishnupur became Gupta Vrindavan/ Where resides Lord Madan Mohan." These lines provide an irregular refrain that strings the numerous episodes into a narrative. The poem reflects Madan Mohan's ties to the local landscape and its distinctive topographical and architectural features, and thereby reaffirms the conflation of Vrindavan with Vishnupur.



FIGURE 3. Deity images of Madan Mohan and his consort Radha, Vishnupur. Photograph by the author.

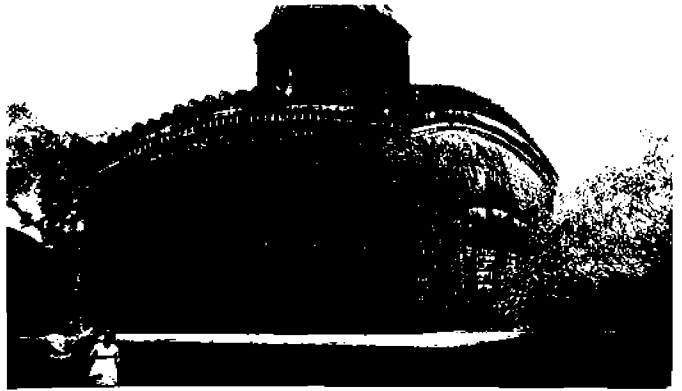


FIGURE 4. Madan Mohan temple, Vishnupur 1695. Photograph by the author.

AMERICAN T.V. TRAINEE



FIGURE 5. Ratha (Stone Chariot), Vishnupur. Photograph by the author.

FIGURE 6. Festival clay sculptures of Srinivas and Raja Vir Hambir, Vishnupur Madan Mohan Tala. Photograph by the author.



FIGURE 7. Shrine dedicated to the slippers of Srinivas, marking the site of the guru's conversion of the raja. Photograph by the author.



FIGURE 8. *Samadhi* (burial) of Srinivas Acharya. Photograph by the author.

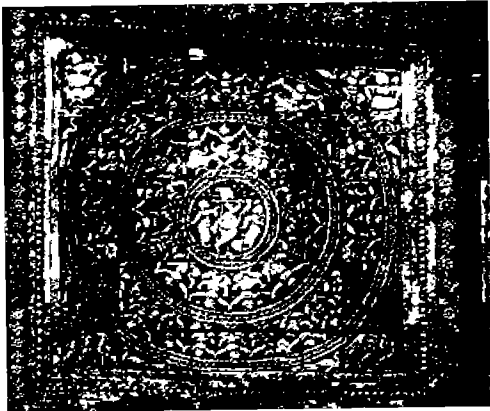


FIGURE 10. Rasalila, Shyam Ray Temple, Vishnupur, 1643. Photograph by the author.

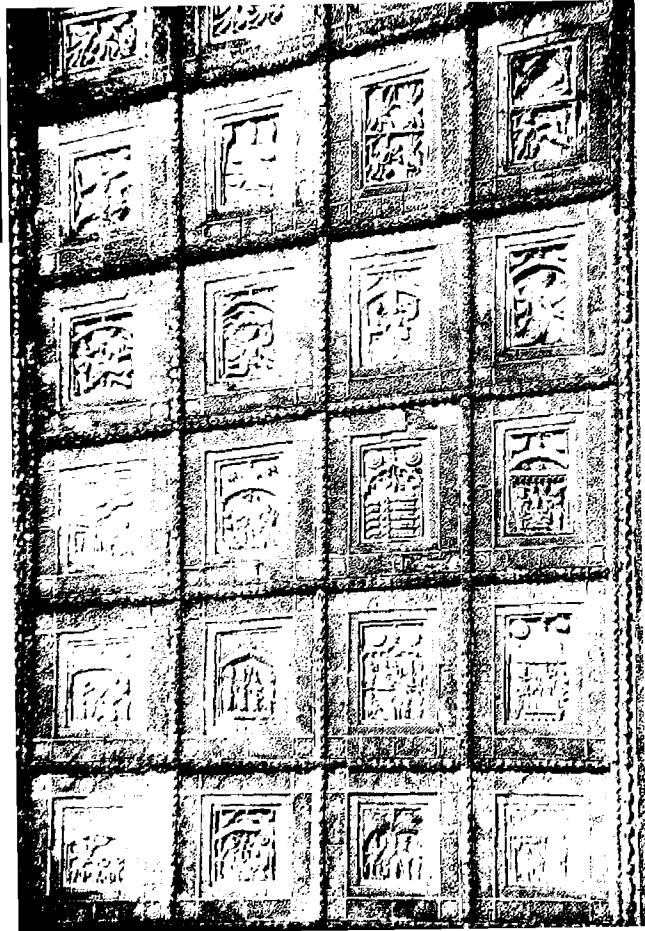


FIGURE 9. Terra cotta narrative panels, Madan Mohan Temple, south façade. Photograph by the author.

Vishnupur, as depicted in the poem, is a town imbued with the presence of Madan Mohan, just as Vrindavan had been inhabited by Krishna and retains the imprint of his miracles. This presence is demonstrated in two ways: by Madan Mohan's direct involvement with the townspeople and by his interaction with the town's natural topographic features and architectural forms. One popular episode narrated in this poem is that of the miraculous mobilization of the stone chariot, a permanent and immobile architectural feature of the town, built by Vir Hambir's successor, Raja Raghunath Sinha (1627–1656). In his compassion, Madan Mohan later stopped the wheels of his chariot from moving as he waited for his last devotee, an old woman who was travelling on foot from a faraway village, to arrive for the celebration of Ratha Yatra, the chariot festival (Figure 5). This narrative associates the stone chariot at the foot of the double stone gateways into the old fort to the primary deity of the town. Another episode, perhaps the best known of Madan Mohan's feats, was his defense of the town from the historic *bargi* (Maratha) raids of the 1740s. While the town gathered in his temple to chant the names of Krishna, Madan Mohan is believed to have galloped on a red horse to the edge of the fort and fired the royal cannons Dal and Madal that dispersed the light artillery of the Maratha troops. Again the deity is integrally tied to the extant cannon and therefore the urban fabric through narrative, as Krishna had been to Mt. Govardhana, which he is believed to have raised or Radha Kunda, the site of his nightly amorous exploits with Radha in Vrindavan. By their association with the deity, material forms and events at historically verifiable moments are invested with the authority that elevates them from their location in history to mythic status. By extension, Vishnupur is afforded the same standing.

The power of these mythic narratives is evidenced in their continued evocation today by local residents to legitimate Madan Mohan's personal relationship with them. These contemporary acts and narratives continue to maintain Madan Mohan's identity with Krishna and the status of the town as Krishna's abode. As verses of the poem continue to be sung as *kīrtana* in the courtyard of the Madan Mohan Temple during evening *ārati* (the final service of the day), the reiteration reinforces the identity of Vishnupur as Vrindavan for the local community through performance. Here the conviction remains strong that Madan Mohan is *jāgrata* (awake and alert) to attend to the needs of his followers as Krishna is in Vrindavan. The priest is convinced that the deity's far-reaching influence alone maintains this community-patronized temple, drawing the generous donations to this temple from not just devotees of neighboring districts but from Benares and Vrindavan in north India (personal communication, Sushanta Mukhopadhyay, Vishnupur, 12/1995). These contributions go toward his lavish clothes and jewelry

as well as the daily food offerings that feed the poor. His accomplishments at Vishnupur are compared by the present women of the Bishnupur Raj family to Krishna's feats in Mathura such as the killing of Kamsa, the slaying of the serpent Kaliya, or the raising of Mt. Govardhana (personal communication Mrs. Salil Singh, Vishnupur, 12/1995). Other devotees perceive them as identical and interchangeable. During the annual celebration of the coming of Srinivas and ensuing Vaishnavization of the town at the Madan Mohan Temple (Figure 6), a local resident observed: "As Krishna had lived and played in the groves of Vrindavan, Madan Mohan resides in Vishnupur" (oral communication, Gauri [Chhaya Goswami], Vishnupur, 6/2000). She explained that Krishna's realm is here because all the temples' deities rode their chariots to Madan Mohan's courtyard each night just as the gods had all flocked to Vrindavan. Hence this was the "Gupta Vrindavan." Narrative is thus employed to retain legitimacy of the town's distinctive status.

The Madan Mohan Temple's walls are sheathed with exquisite terra cotta panels that recount these adventures of Krishna, reinforcing the identity of the local lord Madan Mohan as the universal deity Krishna (Figures 3, 4, 9). The metal image of Madan Mohan in the sanctum is virtually indistinguishable from the iconography of Krishna, or any of the other specific images such as Radha Raman, Madan Gopal, Murali Mohan, and Gopinath worshiped in the region. Like them, Madan Mohan lifts his hands to play the silver flute that enchanted the *gopis* and drove them to the woods of Vrindavan to meet Krishna for secret trysts under cover of darkness. Like them, he sways with his weight on one hip, his body curving rhythmically. The right leg is poised momentarily in front of the left, as if pausing in his dance. His head is bent, mesmerized by the sound of his flute as is his beloved Radha. The identity of Madan Mohan as Krishna thus reverberates iconographically in sculpted metal and terra cotta.

By introducing the designation "Gupta Vrindavan," Madan Mohan's devotees at Vishnupur made an explicit claim for the younger town to the sacred authority of Vrindavan, with which the spiritual leaders of the Gaudiya Vaishnava community were deeply concerned. The nuances of the adjective *gupta* are difficult to recover with any certainty, but the "hidden" aspect of this identification probably made the site itself a tool for Gaudiya Vaishnava initiates who alone could comprehend its true significance. Such recreation of the ultimate sacred realm in Bengal may indeed have served the ritual prerequisite for devout Gaudiya Vaishnavas to reside within the mystical mandala of Mathura, the site of Krishna's eternal play.¹³ Conversely, the selective features of Vrindavan that were transported to Vishnupur determined the most important criteria for a sacred center for Vaishnavas, and

thereby revealed the true Vrindavan. As this new secret Vrindavan disclosed the original one, the replication also reinforced Vrindavan's mythic status, eliding the historical reality of its creation.

THE RECOVERY OF VRINDAVAN

The original sacred site of Vrindavan, on which Vishnupur was modeled, was itself recovered over the previous century from undifferentiated forests. Gaudiya Vaishnava literature from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gives Chaitanya responsibility for revitalizing Vrindavan from the state of wilderness into which it had degenerated.¹⁴ The tenth-century Bhagavata Purana, a text regarded as revelation in this tradition, depicts how Krishna had enjoyed the company of local women in Vrindavan's forests (Figure 10):

Like unto a young elephant exuding temporal fluid sauntering in the company of female elephants, the Lord, surrounded by a swarm of black-bees and a bevy of young ladies, roved in a grove on the bank of the Yamuna, where blew on all sides a gentle breeze bearing the fragrance of aquatic flowers as well as of the flowers on lands.

(Bhagavata Purana, 10.33.35. TAGARE 1978 [1462])

As this divine play is believed by Vaishnavas to be reenacted perpetually in these groves, they offer a taste of the pleasures that can ultimately be enjoyed by the devotee in the afterlife. This text describes how the sites of his divine *līlā* (play) had become celebrated through pilgrimage through the forests of Vrindavan as early as Krishna's lifetime, undertaken by his companions and famous sages while he had resided there.¹⁵ Local tradition attributes the loss or disappearance of these sacred spots to Muslim onslaughts of the eleventh century (VAJPEYI 1955, 141). The Mathura area was sacked by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1017 for twenty days, and plundered again during the reign of Sikander Lodi (1488–1516).¹⁶

Gaudiya Vaishnava texts describe how Chaitanya unveiled this now invisible site of Krishna's pleasures to the devotional community once again.¹⁷ Specifically, they ascribe agency to the saint's visit to Vrindavan in 1514, when he mobilized the reclamation of the land of Krishna's biography, a restoration process that continued to the end of that century. The *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, his final and definitive biography, datable to the end of the sixteenth century, claims that when the saint reached Vrindavan he entered an ecstatic state while wandering through its forests and bathing in its ponds (DIMOCK 1999, 17–18). Through meditation, dreams and delirious fits, he had visions of the divine couple and identified the sites of their erotic encounters in what was then dense, sparsely inhabited, forest. The

Chaitanya Charitamrita goes further to identify Chaitanya as a dual incarnation of Krishna and his beloved Radha united in the same physical body, so that through his meanderings in the forests, the divine lovers enjoyed their *līlā* once more. Chaitanya's wanderings through the woods thus re-sited these events on the topography of the region. As his journey gave material form and cohesion to what had been lost or had previously remained inaccessible, it is often called the *Braj-prakash līlā* (play that revealed Braj/Vrindavan).

The imagined locale of an original narrative documented in the *Bhagavata Purana*, which had subsequently been transformed into an idealized sacred cartography in the form of a meditative mandala to provide an aid to visualization, was now located geographically (See HABERMAN 1988). As Krishna's life was mapped on the ground, the site was built up for pilgrimages such as the annual Bana Yatra or Journey into the Forests (For discussion of the Bana Yatra, see HABERMAN 1994). The cultural construction of Vrindavan or its "externalization," to use David Haberman's term to draw attention to the process of revealing the hidden, ensued when the six *goswamis* engaged in the recovery of deity images, construction of temples, and institutionalization of ritual worship (HABERMAN 1994, 55). They were also responsible for memorializing the natural surroundings of Krishna's play such as the embankments lining the sacred ponds where Radha and Krishna had bathed by paving them and refacing the steps on the riverside. This project was initiated in 1517, with the arrival of the first of the *goswamis*, Rupa, to these jungles.¹⁸ He is credited with recovering the image of Krishna as Govindadeva from under the ground at a spot that was revealed to him in a vision. The location was believed to be the very spot where Radha met her beloved for their nightly trysts.¹⁹ Here Rupa constructed the first temple in 1533. A golden image of Radha was sent from Orissa to accompany the unearthed image of Krishna as Govindadeva.

The *goswamis'* project of reinstating a sacred center for pilgrimage in the heartland of north India, where monumental construction had been minimal during the previous centuries of Islamic rule, was made possible by imperial and sub-imperial financial sponsorship and personal interest. The present temple of Govindadeva was completed in 1590, under the patronage of the Hindu Raja Man Singh, one of Akbar's top-ranking officials (Figure 11). This Rajput dynasty, among the highest Hindu rulers of north India at this time, thus played a vital role in the construction of Vrindavan's most important temple. As Catherine Asher has argued, the alliance with Mughal style expresses the political allegiance of its Hindu patrons to the emperor.²⁰ The site also received significant imperial patronage.²¹ As early as 1565 the temple's priest obtained a land grant from Akbar to collect revenue at this

site. A second imperial *farmān* of 1568 recognized Jiva Goswami as keeper of the temples and permitted him to claim all offerings and donations. The emperor, according to local lore, himself visited the site in 1573, and moved by a vision in one of the sacred groves, issued land grants for the maintenance of the major temples built at this time (HABERMAN 1994, 35). His biographer Abul Fazl lists 35 major temples receiving such land grants. This imperial Mughal development of Vrindavan in the sixteenth century gave physical expression to the eternal realm of Krishna, the ultimate object of bhakti (devotion). Its maintenance was ensured by Akbar's successor Jahangir through grants in 1598 and the construction of two more temples. He too paid a personal visit to Govindadeva in 1620. Shah Jahan likewise issued supportive *farmāns* and decreed that temple bells could resound freely throughout Vrindavan (MUKHERJI and HABIB 1988, 289–99).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the buildings that defined the environment of this sacred Hindu center bear the imprint of the imperial Mughal architectural style that dominated north India during the second half of the sixteenth century.²² The series of five early temples (Madanmohan, Gopinath, Radha Vallabh, Jugal Kishor, and Govindadeva) from the closing years of the sixteenth century flaunt the red sandstone marked unmistakably by their immediately precedent use at Akbar's capital at Fatehpur Sikri for example. Not only are construction techniques such as vaults and domes used conspicuously in Sultanate and Mughal architecture employed here, but features of early Indic architecture made popular at Fatehpur Sikri like the lotus bud fringes of the four-pointed arches, heavy brackets for columns, and deep *chajjā* (projecting eaves) also proliferate. In fact, E. B. Havell concluded:

The craftsmanship is that of Fatehpur-Sikri, but the Hindu builders working on their own ground could deal with structural problems more freely and confidently than they were able to do under the restrictions of Musulman ritual and custom, with the result that they achieved a structural harmony and decorative unity.... (HAVELL 1913, 194)

The architectural construction of Vrindavan, contingent upon the political realities of sixteenth-century north India, therefore looks to Mughal fashion. The residence for Krishna was modeled in part on that of the emperor. And it must be recalled that Fatehpur Sikri, as other examples of Mughal architecture and courtly rituals practiced therein, drew liberally upon recognized forms and customs honoring Hindu deities such as the practice of giving daily *darśan* to establish Akbar's authority in a majority Hindu realm.²³ Drawing upon imperial Mughal resources would consequently not have

been inappropriate for marking the bowers of Krishna's eternal realm and making them visible.

The distinctive geographical elements of Vrindavan were also highlighted for pilgrimage with imperial and sub-imperial patronage. While they gave permanent form to Chaitanya's visions, as with the Vrindavan temples, the paving of embankments, facing of ponds and rivers, and defining of bowers can be understood in conjunction with other imperial Mughal gardening projects. The emperors were famous for their passion for verdant gardens with flowing water as frames for their palaces and tombs (See CROWE, et. al 1972; WESCOAT and WOLSCHKE-BULMAHN eds. 1996; MOYNIHAN 1979). Babur, the founder of the dynasty laid the first of these Timurid-Persian gardens, subdivided into quarters by walkways and canals, on the banks of the Yamuna at Agra, downstream from Vrindavan.²¹ The foundation for the development of Agra as a "riverbank" city, with a succession of such gardens on both banks of the river was thus concurrent with the project at Vrindavan. While Akbar's palace complex at Fatehpur Sikri was laid with tanks and waterways, Jahangir is perhaps known best for the magnificent gardens of Shalimar, Nishat Bagh, Achabal, and Vernag with their pools, pavilions, shade trees, flowers, and shrubs. Although the landscaping of Vrindavan does not conform explicitly to Mughal style, its ponds, pavilions, temples, and flowering trees retracing Krishna's love play were developed contemporaneously with these secular pleasure gardens for the enjoyment of earthly rulers. And both paradises, eternal and temporal, Islamic and Vaishnava, share the same imperial sources of patronage.

By the time this project was accomplished at Vrindavan, the Goswami leadership dispatched Srinivas on his mission back to Bengal to consolidate Gaudiya Vaishnava territory there. The process of reconstructing Vishnupur as a hidden Vrindavan at the margins of the empire thus follows immediately after the earlier generation of leadership made Vrindavan itself visible in the Mughal heartland and with direct Mughal patronage.

CENTER FOR THE COMPOSITION OF POETRY AND SONG

Parallel to Vrindavan's established reputation as a center for composition of the texts underpinning the vital precepts of the tradition at the end of the sixteenth century, Vishnupur gradually emerged as a locus for composition and performance of Vaishnava song and poetry in Bengal. In fact, part of the town's present claim to fame rests on the foundation of a musical school, emergence of local musical geniuses, and the production of musical instruments to accompany performances of these songs during ritual. Srinivas himself is credited with the introduction of the Manoharshahi Gharana, a school of music with a distinctive compositional style. Local singers and

musicians perpetuated this style by leading public recitals in the temple courtyards during festival celebrations.²⁵

This process was initiated by the enthusiastic personal sponsorship of Gaudiya Vaishnava song and poetry by Vir Hambir following his personal transformation upon hearing Srinivas's expression of his love for Krishna and succeeding generations of Malla rulers who continued the trend. The Karnananda describes Vir Hambir's keen interest and active participation in the dissemination and preservation of these compositions:

The raja recites the *pada* (lyric) dreaming, and on hearing it Pattadevi [his queen] was moved and burst into tears of ecstasy. At daybreak the raja looked delighted and at that moment the queen implored him to recite the *padas* to her again. She would die if the raja denied her the rare pleasure. (SAHA 1995, 185)

Several of these rulers, including Vir Hambir, Raghunath Singh, and Chaitanya Singh (1752/3–1802) are credited with actively composing *kīrtana* in honor of Kalachand (an aspect of Krishna honored at Vishnupur) and other deities. Gopal Singh (1713–1752) wrote a more ambitious work called *Krishnamangal Kavya*.

By personally copying the rich local collection of poetry as well as translating core Vaishnava texts into Bengali, the Malla rulers made them accessible to the emergent Vaishnava community they supported. Gopal Singh, for example, copied the central Gaudiya Vaishnava text, the *Chaitanya Charitamrita*. Large numbers of these manuscripts, with their finely painted wooden covers, survive in the Vishnupur Sahitya Parishad. In this way, Vishnupur's reputation evolved as a local center for composing poetry, thereby preserving and disseminating the theological premises and distinctive ritual activities of the movement that had been developed at Vrindavan.

The rich corpus of devotional poetry that emerged in Bengal at this time through such acts of royal patronage was grounded locally to make it familiar and recognizable. Such a strategy would have served the dual purposes of strengthening the emergent community and facilitating proselytization, thereby assuring the continuity of the tradition sought by its spiritual leaders. Written versions reveal shared technical devices and imagery with the poetry burgeoning in conjunction with the region's flourishing Sufi culture. To cite one instance, the following description of Yusuf, from the story of Yusuf and Zulaikha bears startling similarities with those of Radha and Krishna:

...your eyes are black as if bees are buzzing around them. Your eye-

brows are like the bow of Kama and your ears like lotuses which grow on shore. Your waist is as slim as that of a prowling tigress. Your step is as light as a bird's and when they see it even sages forget all else. Your body is as perfect as a well-made string of pearls. A maid, therefore, cannot control herself and longs for your embrace. (MANNAN 1966, 99)

If the context were unknown, such lines could be identified with vivid descriptions of the beloved in Vaishnava verses such as the following one by Sheikh Kabir:

What a wonderful beauty the maiden possesses!
 Her movement is as slow as that of an elephant.
 Her collyrium-coloured eyes on the white forehead
 Look like bees in a beautiful lotus garden.
 She is devoid of pride and her waist is thin.
 The beautiful maiden possessing a moon-like face speaks smiling
 Like the full autumnal moon, it pours nectar.

(TARAFDAR 1965, 251)

Resources shared by Gaudiya Vaishnavas and Muslims in oral and written compositions, as also in architecture discussed below, thus suggest that both communities emphasized established regional patterns to appeal to known forms and create smooth transitions in the introduction of new traditions. It also suggests a second Vaishnava strategy for endurance in Bengal's political situation. Rather than ignoring or challenging Islamic hegemony, adaptation to that reality, and subversive appropriation of relevant aspects of its message and strategies for survival ensured the success of Vaishnavism in the seventeenth century. Thus it is by affinity with contemporary developments as much as by differentiation from it that a local Vaishnava community and sacred center was secured.

NAMING, MYTHMAKING, AND LANDSCAPING TOWARD CONSECRATING A VAISHNAVA REALM

The transformation of the Land of the Mallas into Vishnupur (Vishnu/Krishna's center) was achieved in part through the systematic renaming and consecrating of the territory held by this local dynasty. Villages surrounding the capital city of Vishnupur were appropriated to this newly discovered "Brajamandala"²⁶ given the names Gokulnagar, Yadavanagar, and Vasudevpur, just like parts of Benares, for example, had symbolically incorporated other major *tirthas* (pilgrimage sites) toward the establishment of a pilgrimage center earlier (see ECK 1982). Similarly, Alampur, in the Deccan

plateau, had been reconsecrated Dakshinakashi (the southern Kashi or Benares) as it was transformed into a pilgrimage town with the construction of its numerous temples (Figures 1, 2). And Vrindavan itself had appropriated within its forested terrain the four major *dhams* (sacred abodes of Krishna/Vishnu) that mark the corners of India and thus define the great circumambulation of the Hindu world.²⁷

The superimposition of a Gaudiya Vaishnava mandala at Vishnupur was achieved partly by naming and giving new significance to the region's geographical features. The rivers Damodar and Kangsabati are perceived as male and female lovers in eternal union like the divine couple, Krishna and Radha. Damodar is in fact another name of Krishna. The female river, the smaller tributary, is said to move toward union with him in the region's current oral lore. Another myth attached to the Damodar River is that it is the source of the image of Madan Mohan (*Bishnupurer Madanmohaner Adimahatya*, 8).²⁸ The king is said to have retrieved it out of the water in his net while fishing, along with implements for his worship and gold bricks to sustain the public performance of rituals. Again the process of Gaudiya Vaishnava appropriation of territory is comparable with that consolidated at Vrindavan during the previous century. There, distinctive geographical features such as the river and mountain had made the site suitable as a natural *tīrtha*, and the place itself had been a primary locus of devotion (see ECK 1981, 323–44). Through acts of renaming and investing topographical elements with significance in the biography of the deity, a realm suited for Krishna's sports had been mapped onto it.²⁹

A physical transformation of the land and mapping of the sacred physical markers of Vrindavan onto the Malla capital accompanied this process of consecrating Vaishnava territory in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The land of Vrindavan is itself believed to be the embodiment of the divine and is far more important for Gaudiya Vaishnava pilgrims than the worship of temple images. Numerous local legends point to Mt. Govardhana's status as a living being, as Krishna himself in the form of a mountain. While the mountain would have been difficult to replicate in the low-lying deltaic plains of Bengal, the *kuṇḍas* (ponds) scattered throughout the forests of Vrindavan such as the famous paired Radha and Shyam *kuṇḍas* at the foot of Mt. Govardhana were simulated at Vishnupur. These bodies of water became stops for worship on Gaudiya Vaishnava pilgrimage, which included the forests of Vrindavan from the sixteenth century. The pair was replicated in the heart of the royal *darbār* (court) area, serving the central core of early temples built in this area. Gradually others, called *shayers*, accompanied the next two groupings of temples that were built to Vishnupur's various aspects of Krishna. A third set of vast artificial water



FIGURE 11. Govindadeva Temple, Vrindavan.
Photograph by the author.



FIGURE 12. Shyambandh, Vishnupur.
Photograph by the author.

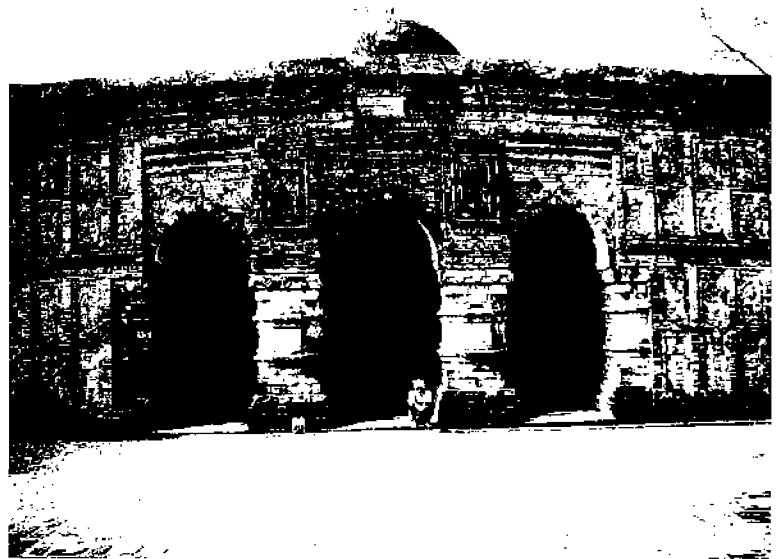


FIGURE 13. Qadam Rasul (Shrine dedicated to the Footprints of the Prophet), Gaud, 1519.
Photograph by the author.

bodies excavated by the Rajas at Vishnupur, called *bāndhs*, are situated near the perimeters of the town (Figure 12). Located near clusters of temples, they provided an arena for reenacting the water sports of Krishna during festivals.³⁰ Like the Gopal and Raghunath Shayer, their names such as Jamunabandh, Lalbandh, Kalindibandh, Shyambandh, and Krishnabandh suggest the newly discovered secret Vrindavan. Accounts of miracles accrued around them. While Hemlata Devi, the daughter of Srinivas, herself a significant spiritual leader of the movement, bathed in the Krishnabandh, the drops of her bath water were turned to rose petals by Radha herself (oral communication, Mrs. Chittaranjan Dasgupta, Vishnupur 6/2000).³¹ Another narrative recalls how Srinivas, when calling his daughter to return from her bath, witnessed her play with a boy he recognized as Radha Raman (Krishna as lover of Radha), her chosen deity (Oral communication, Sukamal Goswami of Nakaijuri, Vishnupur, 6/2000).³² Such narratives complement the events witnessed by the previous generations at Vrindavan's famous ponds, the most important of which is the Radhakunda for the Gaudiya community. Originally dug by Krishna himself to purify himself from killing the demon bull Arishta before he touched his beloved, this pond was reidentified by Chaitanya through meditation in the midst of the fields,³³ and excavated by the *goswami* Raghunath Das in 1546.³⁴ Such conflation of older sacred cartographies onto a newly developing site to invest it and its agents with the authority of the former was by no means an unfamiliar strategy. The inland pools of Benares had been named for the sacred rivers of the four ends of the land, which had thereby been invoked within the confines of the city (ECK 1996, 48–49). The medieval Pallava and Chola kings of south India claimed to have brought the River Ganga down to their domain.

Like the Radha and Shyamkunda on the edges of Vrindavan, these bodies of water in Vishnupur were used for bathing in earlier times. Dipping in the waters of the Radhakunda and Shyamkunda, where the deities had themselves sported, is believed to be direct access to them. Like other parts of the forests of Vrindavan, these waters are considered to be the divine manifested in natural forms. The *Chaitanya Charitamrita* claims:

In that *kuṇḍa* Kṛṣṇa eternally with Rādhikā plays games in the water, and dallies with her on its banks. Whoever bathes in that *kuṇḍa*, Kṛṣṇa grants to him a *prema* like that of Rādhā, and the sweetness of the *kuṇḍa* is like the sweetness of Rādhā and the greatness of the *kuṇḍa* is like the greatness of Rādhā. (DIMOCK 1999, 18.7–9)

In their replication at Vishnupur, that sweetness of Radha and Krishna is

transmitted to the emergent religious center and made physically accessible to the newly converted local populace.

The rajas also landscaped gardens, planted flowers and fruit trees from Vrindavan, and constructed pavilions around them. The trees of Vrindavan are as significant as its ponds in mapping Krishna's eternal realm. They were believed to be the members of Krishna's entourage in arboreal form. While restoring the Radhakunda, the *goswami* Raghunath Das, for example, was informed in a dream that the five Pandava brothers, the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* epic, now resided on the banks of the Radhakunda in the form of trees (HABERMAN 1994, 102). Their transplanting in the soil of Vishnupur physically connects this later site with not only the earthly Vrindavan but also the mythical abode of the deity with his entourage. The strategy of transplanting flora to replicate older sacred sites was also familiar as it has a long history in South Asia. The distribution of branches from the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha had attained enlightenment, for example, initiated and provided the center for the development of a Buddhist cosmic mandala at such sites as Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka (WICKREMERATNE 1987, 45). Such planning at Vishnupur seems part of a larger attempt to recreate, in a fairly general way, the geographical features marking the sites of Krishna's activities discovered by Chaitanya, most likely to create a similar pilgrimage path through forests, tanks, *ghāṭs*, and temples as the one established at Vrindavan.

CONSTRUCTING TEMPLES AND INSTALLING DEITY IMAGES

As at Vrindavan, the reshaping of the landscape to the contours of Krishna's divine realm supplemented the construction of temples and the establishment of ritual worship of images. This proliferation of temples probably gave Vishnupur the reputation as a religious center that is attested in British site surveys and administrative reports from the mid-eighteenth century. Over a century and a half, Vishnupur had become so abundant with temples that in 1766, the local administrator J. Z. HOLWELL observed, "There are, in this precinct, no less than three hundred and sixty considerable Pagodas or places of worship, erected by the Rajah and his ancestors" (1766–71, 197–98). Similarly, HESILRIGE, in 1789, commented, "In the whole district there are four hundred and fifty three Hindoo temples. The principal one in the town of Bissenpore formerly contained the idol of Mudun Mohun" (1789, 43). Today this profusion of monuments is offered by its residents as an explanation for its renown as Gupta Vrindavan.³⁵

The deities installed in these temples were named in accordance with those of Vrindavan. The most notable example is Madan Mohan, one of the earliest temple deities in Vrindavan, who became the primary deity of

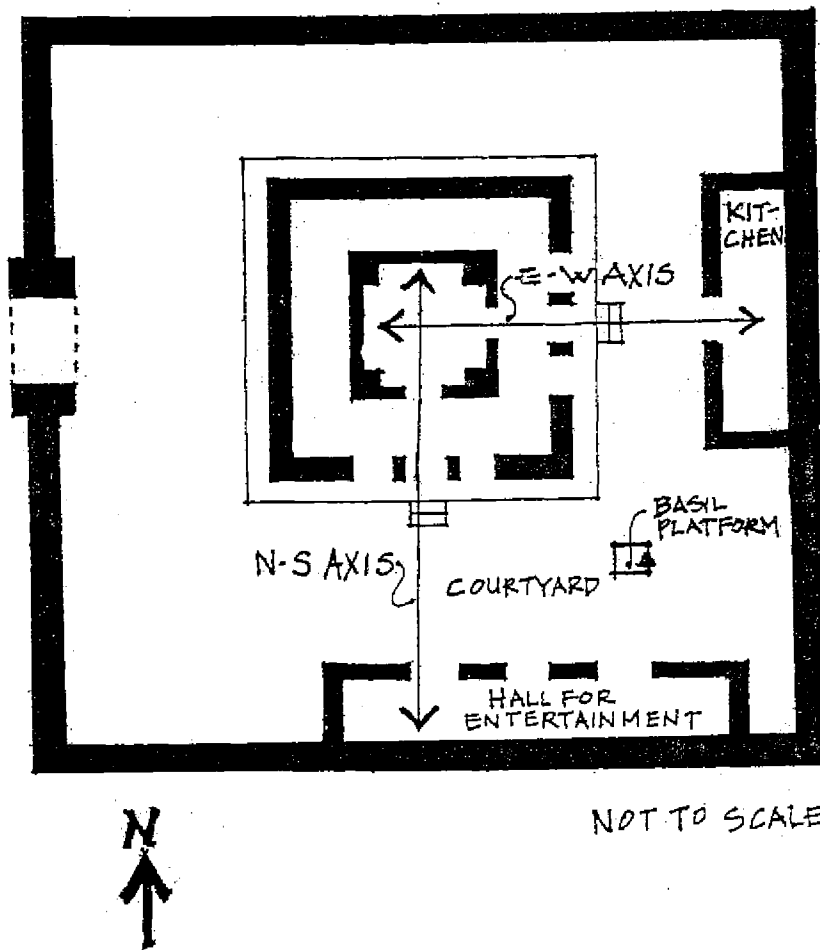


FIGURE 14. Typical Temple Compound. Drawing by the author.

Vishnupur, and the subject of dedication of the poem discussed earlier. Temples were also dedicated to Shyam Ray, Radha Raman, Madan Gopal, and other deities enshrined previously at Vrindavan. The discovery and installation of some of these images are analogous to those of Vrindavan. They share narratives of miraculous revelation comparable to Rupa Goswami's vision of the young boy who took him to the spot where the spontaneously milking cow revealed the buried image of Govindadeva. The wondrous emergence of Madan Mohan in the Raja's fishing net is perhaps the best-known tale. Others are related to Vrindavan by contiguity. Hemlata Devi went to Vrindavan and chose her personal deity Radha Raman, for

instance, from the selection offered by Jiva Goswami after she was informed in a dream that she would be mother to Krishna exclusively and no mortal son.³⁶

The temples in which these images were housed, however, are an original architectural form, distinct from the late sixteenth-century modifications of imperial Mughal style that characterized the monuments of Vrindavan.³⁷ Instead of pointing to Vrindavan, their dedicatory inscriptions proudly proclaim a new temple form. They are new in their double-storeyed form, stacking an additional shrine above the conventional sanctum on the lower level to accommodate special festival use in the upper pavilion while accommodating daily worship in the lower level sanctum (Figure 4). Second, they are new in their provision of dual altars within that lower level sanctum (Figure 14). These temples now have dual axes of worship. One maintains the traditional east-facing altar of Hindu temples, aligned now with daily priestly functions of service to the deity. A second altar, the one that has come to dominate, faces south, toward the courtyard and *nātmandir* (hall for entertainment) where the community of devotees gather to sing the name and narratives of Krishna and often rise to dance spontaneously during *ārati*. As the axis of expressive community devotion, it complements the priest's maintenance of the image. The new temple form thus accommodates the range of ritual needs of this new Vaishnava movement in Bengal.

Rather than turning to Vrindavan, these temples remain tied to local architectural traditions. They draw on the architectural forms established in the region by the independent Sultanate that had ruled Bengal for the previous four centuries.³⁸ This stylistic continuity is articulated, for example, in the shared features of the cubical base of the Madan Mohan Temple's sanctum and the Qadam Rasul, an Islamic shrine dedicated to the footprints of the Prophet at Gaur, the last capital of the Bengal Sultans (Figures 4, 13). The low structure with triple arched entrance consisting of cusped arches supported on squat faceted pillars, profusion of shallow terra cotta surface ornamentation, and the basic plan of a central space enclosed by shallow porches is adapted for the needs of a Hindu temple. The temples also turn to the region's thatch hut, used previously as a regional marker in mosque construction, to provide a home for Hindu gods.

The expression of such architectural allegiance on the part of these local landholders to the Sultanate can be understood in the political context of early seventeenth-century Bengal. Before the consolidation of Mughal authority in Bengal, Hindu landholders such as the Mallas, the patrons of these temples rebelled sporadically against the formative Mughal government, refusing to pay taxes, and even putting up armed resistance. The architectural alliance with the well-recognized forms of Bengal's independ-

ent Sultanate, together with these attempts at resisting the emerging empire suggests that these Hindu rajas sought to appropriate the earlier Sultanate's political authority as sovereigns of the region, perhaps perceiving themselves heirs to these earlier local rulers. The choice of the local mosque was therefore suitable as a base for these Vaishnava temples. While these temples turn their back to the architecture of sixteenth-century Vrindavan, their style is contingent upon the political dimensions of their patronage, not unlike the situation considered earlier in the case of Vrindavan.

By the mid-eighteenth century, when the last of these temples were built at Vishnupur, this replication of the newly reconstituted sacred center at Vrindavan may have developed other implications. Vrindavan was on the brink of being lost a second time. Rather than expressing the physical continuity sought earlier with Vrindavan, now promoting this new Vrindavan may have been an attempt to replace it and thereby preserve it and maintain continuity in a different sense. Following Aurangzeb's ordinances toward creating a better Muslim state, repressive measures seem to have been taken against temples in the Vrindavan area.³⁹ In anticipation of imperial attacks, many of Vrindavan's temples were shutting their doors and sending their deities to safer sites. The image of Govindadeva was removed from the temple, whose sanctum may have been razed at this time, transported to temporary homes and finally installed in a permanent temple at Amber.⁴⁰ This transfer of the most important image⁴¹ initiated the creation of yet another Vrindavan, this one called Kanak (golden) Vrindavan, that is, one superior to even the original one (conversation with Catherine Asher 3/2000). Vishnupur was therefore not singular in replicating the earthly site and thereby replenishing the eternal realm. At this time, shifting the center of their sacred cartography to a more protected area at the empire's periphery in Bengal, where the turbulences in the heart of the Gangetic Valley would reverberate slowly, may have been a response to the political contingencies of the period.

CONCLUSION

Invoking the past as an instrument for change in the present is a mechanism that is used widely in the construction of sacred centers. The consecutive creation of dual sacred centers in rapid succession, replicating an ideal realm by repeated mappings that legitimate each other, is less common. Replication as a strategy evokes perceptions of continuity between the sites. In this case, however, no absolute mapping of the geographical features of Vrindavan can be recovered from the materials available at Vishnupur; nor can any significant stylistic continuity in the architectural style be established. Rather, through myth-making, temple construction, ritual worship, landscaping,

and the production of texts Vishnupur was transformed into a parallel sacred center for the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. The careful mediation of the forms and institutions of the original sacred center and the presentation of the message of this religious formation for its new hub in local forms suggests a shrewd awareness of and attempt to survive within the political realities of seventeenth-century Bengal. The resultant conceptual, rather than literal, mapping revealed a Vrindavan latent at the new site of Vishnupur to the accruing religious community and satisfied some of the prerequisites for expression of their devotion.

That it was acceptable for this Hindu holy site to be recreated in an Indo-Islamic idiom is testimony to the fluidity of the cultural environment of this period. It also reminds us of the negotiated and mutable nature of markers erected for the coherence of a new religious formation, which simultaneously serve as exclusionary borders for its self-definition. In the current political climate of South Asia, when fervent religious nationalisms are rendering such responsiveness between the region's dominant religious cultures inconceivable, it is important to remember the historical moments when Hindu cultural centers could draw on mosques to give shape to earthly manifestations of the divine realm.

NOTES

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1. The movement gets its name from Gaud (Gaur), the sixteenth-century capital of the independent Sultanate of Bengal. This community dedicated to the worship of Krishna/Vishnu is thereby distinguished by its Bengali roots from other contemporary developments in north India such as the Pushti Margis, Radha Vallabhis, and Nimbarkis.

2. For overviews of the bhakti tradition that coalesced under Chaitanya, see DE 1986, KENNEDY 1981, CHAKRAVARTI 1985. For a study on the Vaishnava Shahajiyi groups, see DIMOCK 1966.

3. In keeping with Gaudiya Vaishnava popular usage, and for the sake of consistency, I use the term Vrindavan loosely to refer to the larger area of Krishna's childhood and youth, also known as Braj (Vraja), rather than identify individual sites in this area such as Gokul with geographic specificity. Mathura is also included in this designation.

4. The Gaudiya Vaishnava texts used are CHAKRAVARTI, N. 1332 BS, DAS, 1298 BS, and DAS, J. 1355 BS. I am grateful to Tony Stewart for guiding my reading of this material.

5. Interviewed residents include Sushanta Mukherjee (a priest of Madan Mohan temple),

Mathur Majhi (an attendant at the Radha Shyam Temple), Banshi Kar Mukhya, Chhaya Das, Tara Banerjee, Chandi Chakraborty, and Sukamal Goswami of Nakaijuri. My understanding of this material is also influenced by discussions with Tony Stewart at the University of Pennsylvania, 1997.

6. Recently reconstructed Malla family trees and oral tradition locate Vir Hambir at the end of a long line of rulers, but there is little historical evidence to corroborate this hoary lineage. The precise dates of Vir Hambir's reign and conversion remain uncertain and contested among historians. Most agree that he ruled from around the last decade of the sixteenth to the second decade of the seventeenth century. The only contemporary source to mention his name is Abul Fazl's *Akḥbarnama* (see CHAKRAVARTI 1985, 222–28; SAHA 1995, 24–28).

7. By this time Srinivas was regarded as an incarnation of Chaitanya, who had been deified as Radha and Krishna come down to earth in the same body (SEN 1917).

8. The road from Tamluk wound its way through Patpur, Uramya, Sapur, Birsinghapur, Jote-behar, Rajhat, Bahulara, to Telkupi in Purulia to Rajgir and Patna. See BEGLAR 1878, 202.

9. Vir Hambir is said to have devoted much of his time and money to his guru's needs. He sponsored Srinivas's second marriage to Padmavati and paid for his mother's funeral expenses.

10. D. C. SEN observes the following in his discussion of these literary works: "Crīnivāsa, at the time of Narahari Chakravartī—the author of the work [*Bhaktiratnaḥar*], was already surrounded with a halo of glory in the eyes of pious Vaiṣṇavas; and his admirers had ceased to think of him as a man; they had begun to regard him as an incarnation of Caitanya. So, whenever the author speaks of him, he uses the coloured language of a poet, and in narrating the incidents of his life cannot free himself from pre-conceived notions about the deified subject of his memoir" (1917, 121).

11. Srinivas is said to have demonstrated "ecstasies of joy and devotion for Krishna even as the great Master [Chaitanya] had done; so that already a report spread in the adjoining countries that Caitanya Deva was reborn in Crīnivāsa." Similarly, Srinivas is described to have responded with tears to the stories of Chaitanya's life as Chaitanya had been moved to tears in his response to Krishna: "When Chaitanya cried 'Kṛṣṇa' 'Kṛṣṇa' with tears in his eyes, the world cried with him... Then the topic turned to... the event of his [Chaitanya] Sannyāsa. And when young Crīnivāsa heard all this he could contain his grief no more. He burst into tears and could not cease weeping for hours together. The very name of Chaitanya uttered, would bring tears to his eyes, and for days he spoke of nothing but of Chaitanya, so that the beauty of the Master's life and its pathos completely possessed the boy" (SEN 1917, 88–89). Representations of his mystical visions were modeled on the intense and intimate experiences of Chaitanya: "One evening with his soul fixed on the lotus feet of Krishna, Crīnivāsa passed into that world which is not beheld by others but only by the chosen few. He saw that Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa were bathing in the holy Jumna. They were sporting in the dark blue waters, crested with the golden rays of the setting sun, when the *besara*, or nose ornament of Rādhā fell into the river. She asked one of her maids to look for it. The maid, Maṇimanjari by name, searched in the transparent water under which every grain of clear sand was visible, but the *besara* could not be found. For three days, Crīnivāsa lay unconscious enjoying this mystic vision, and Rājā Vīra Hamvīra called all the physicians of his kingdom to bring him back to life. None of the remedies prescribed was of any use and it was believed for a time that Crīnivāsa was dying. Rāmchandra Kavirāj, the physician and the scholarly disciple of Crīnivāsa at last arrived, and he restored the patient to his senses by the simplest means. Crīnivāsa awoke with a start, and exclaimed, "It has at last been found, it lay stuck in the roots of a water weed but it is now recovered" (SEN 1917, 158–59).

12. R. KAVIRAJ, *Madan Mohan Bandana*, MS 324.

13. The performance of sixty-four acts of worship were prescribed to inspire and stimulate devotion to Krishna and anchor Vaishnava practice. From the list of sixty four, the five principal *vaidhi* instructions consist of chanting the name of Krishna, remembering the stories of Krishna's life, as narrated in early texts such as the Bhagavata Purana, serving the divine image in the temple, living in the presence of holy men, and living within the realm of Mathura. These are considered to be the most efficacious: "These five are the best of all the *sādhana*s. And in the merest association with these five, Kṛṣṇa-prema is born." *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Madhyalila 22.74-75. All citations are from DIMOCK 1999.

14. The saint Vallabha's followers make the same claim for their leader having rediscovered parts of the area such as Gokul and reinstated images, the best known of which is Sri Nathji, now at Nathdwara in Rajasthan. See VAUDEVILLE 1980.

15. For a discussion of the term *līlā* in the Gaudiya Vaishnava context, see DIMOCK 1989.

16. F. S. GROWSE (1882, 64–65) quotes from the *Tariḳh-I-daudi* of Abdullah, an author from the reign of Jahangir: "He was so zealous a Mussalman that he utterly destroyed many places of worship of the infidels and left not a single vestige remaining of them. He entirely ruined the shrines of Mathura, that mine of heathenism, and turned their principal temples into *saraes* and colleges. Their stone-images were given to butchers to serve them as meat-weight and all the Hindus in Mathura were strictly prohibited from shaving their heads and beards and performing their ablutions. He thus put an end to all the idolatrous rites of the infidels there...."

17. Some scholars have argued that if the absence of earlier monumental construction is taken into account, this project was actually the initial establishment of a Vaishnava center at the site. Charlotte VAUDEVILLE (1976) has pointed to the prevalence of cults of *nāgas*, hills, and natural phenomena, as well as evidence for Shiva and Goddess worship, but not a significant Krishna cult, with the exception of the Keshava Temple at Mathura.

18. A. ENTWISTLE notes that "Ironically, it was during the reign of Sikandar Lodi, a staunch oppressor of Hinduism, that propagators of the emotional variety of devotion to Krishna came in search of the sacred places of Braj" (1987, 136). Similarly S. M. IKRAM points out that despite Sikander Lodi's reputation for bigotry, "it seems fair to surmise that in the cultural sphere his period was one of active mutual interest among Hindus and Muslims for each other's learning, thus conducing to a reapproachment" (1964, 78).

19. A boy is said to have appeared mysteriously before him and led him to Goma Tila, where a cow shed its milk spontaneously. Rupa, at this point fainted, and when he regained consciousness, realized that the image of Govindadeva was buried at this spot, where Radha and Krishna had met for their nightly trysts: "On the beautiful banks of the Yamuna, on a raised mound with slopes on all four sides like a turtlebank, stands the temple of Govinda. On that meeting place of Radha and Krsna, the Yōgapitha, stands the beautiful stone temple like a pericarp, surrounded by groves of trees like petals and rows of golden plantain like pistles. On the beautiful banks of the Yamuna is the thousand-petaled lotus, Vrindavana" (KAVIRAJ 1604, 21.28, cited by THAKUR 1996, 68).

20. Man Singh's patronage patterns at Vrindavan have been contextualized by ASHER (1992a, 183–201).

21. This process is documented by MUKIERJI and HABIB 1987.

22. The most recent discussion of this architecture is in CASE, ed. 1996.

23. See ASHER 1992b, 62–63 and KOCH 1987. For a discussion of *darsān* in Hindu ritual practice, see ECK 1996.

24. A plan of Agra, with this fourfold garden, survives in the Jaipur Palace Museum (see KOCH 1991, 33).

25. Residents and visitors to the town continue to pay homage to these musical leaders at their homes and shrines.

26. Sacred diagram or mandala delimiting the territorial extent of Braj.

27. A hill west of Dig called Adibadri, marks the original Badrinath; Baldeo is considered the corresponding deity to Jagannath of Puri; Setubandh Kund at Kaman is described as the site where Krishna re-enacted Rama's deeds at Rameshwaram; and points at Kosi are named after Dwaraka. See ENTWISTLE 1987, 307.

28. An alternate source for the image is often traced through the narrative of the Birbhūm brahman, from whom the raja stole the image.

29. See VAUDEVILLE's argument for a pre-existing cult of nature spirits that was displaced or coopted by that of Krishna (1976, 207–209).

30. Located along the length of escarpments on the east and west peripheries of the town, they probably also provided defensive measures and supplied drinking water.

31. The Dasgupta family is descended from Srinivas's most important disciple Ramchandra Kaviraj.

32. Sukamal Goswami is a descendant of Srinivas through his son.

33. "In this way Mahāprabhu went along dancing, and when he came to Āriṭagrāma he recovered his senses. At Āriṭa he asked people the whereabouts of the Rādhākuṇa, but no one could say; not even his *brāhmaṇa* companion knew. Prabhu was the all-knowing Bhagavan, and he knew where the lost *tīrtha* was. He went to bathe in a small pool of water between two fields of paddy. When they saw this, all the people of the village were astonished; in *prema* Prabhu praised the Rādhākuṇa, 'Among all the *gopīs* Radha is the most beloved of Kṛṣṇa; so Rādhākuṇa is beloved, the tank of his beloved'" (DIMOCK 1999, 2–6).

34. The embankments were relined with brick by Man Singh in 1591.

35. The Madan Mohan Temple Committee's members and the priest pointed to the abundance of monuments as an explanation for the use of the term "Gupta Vrindavan" to describe the town.

36. Hemlata Devi is believed to have breastfed Radha Raman (oral communication from Sukamal Goswami, Nakaijuri, 6/2000).

37. For a detailed discussion of the architectural form of these monuments, see GHOSH 1999, 39.

38. Several scholars have surveyed the development of Bengal architecture during Sultanate rule, a span of about four hundred years. Most recently, Perween HASAN has interpreted the monuments as a regional architectural expression (1984). Earlier, Ahmad Hasan DANI grouped monuments by stylistic similarity along with available chronological data from inscriptions, and used dynastic appellations for these groups, (1961). See also ASHER 1984.

39. Aurangzeb reinstated religious taxation against non-Muslims in 1679. The Keshava Temple at Mathura was razed and deity images buried under the Jahanara Masjid. See SHARMA 1972, 172.

40. The images of Gopinath, Radhadamodar, and Radhavinod accompanied Govindadeva out of Vrindavan, first to temples constructed for them by a younger son of the Amber rulers at Kaman on the outskirts of Vrindavan, and then to Rajasthan. Madan Mohan was taken to Karauli in 1728 by Raja Gopal Singh, brother-in-law of Sawai Jai Singh. For the journey of the image of Govindadeva, see NATH 1996. Among the Pushtimargi deities, the best known, Shrinathji of Govardhan, departed in 1669 for Agra first and after several stops, came to reside permanently in Mewar. Even earlier, Dwarkadhish and Balkrishna had been taken to Gujarat. For the exodus of Pushtimargi and Radhavallabhi deities, see ENTWISTLE 1987, 185.

41. The Mathura Mahatmya of the *Varaha Purana* declares: "Those who see Govinda in

Vrindaban do not go to the city of death, but go to the region of the auspicious” 151: 49, cited in HABERMAN 1994, 42.

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