The main sources for the study of social, political and religious life of Bengal during the period of Caitanya (1486-1533 A.D.) are primarily the biographies, written on his life by some of his companions and followers. Murarigupta, Kavikarnapura, Vrndavanadasa and Krsnadasa Kaviraja are prominent among them. Vrndavanadasa composed *Caitanya-bhaqavata*, the first Bengali biography on Caitanya. His work is full of panegyrical verses and its main object is to establish Caitanya as the highest and ultimate object of worship. Still we find that Vrndavana's work furnishes a lot of valuable information on the social, religious and cultural life of contemporary Bengal and it serves as a valuable store-house for those who want to have a clear idea of the cultural scenery of medieval Bengal. It is a well-established fact that such biographers were more prone to deal with the superhuman qualities and divine virtues of Sri Caitanya than to represent the socio-cultural aspects during his time.

*Caitanyabhaqavata* of Vrndavanadasa is one of the most valuable works depicting the life of Caitanya as well as the social status and condition of the Vaisnavas and their religious cult and traditions in medieval Bengal. It has been reported by Vrndavana himself that he was not an eye-witness of Caitanya-movement, but the reports and accounts given by his master Nityananda were the main sources of his work. He collected some materials from Advaita Acarya, Gadadhara Pandita, a disciple of Pundarika Vidyanidhi, and some other devotees.
who personally witnessed the activities of Caitanya. Thus the author says:

vedaguhya caitanyacarita ke va jane
tai likhi yaha suniachi bhaktasthane (1)

ch. I. 1.64.

Vrndavanadasa is also indebted to Murarigupta. Murarigupta, an older contemporary, fellow-student and associate of Caitanya, wrote Srikrishnacaitanyacaritamrta, usually known as Kadca, a brief biographical account of Caitanya. Out of the four introductory verses of the Caitanyabhagavata the last two are taken from Murarigupta's Kadca. Many incidents of Caitanya's life given in the Adi and Madhya (i.e. the first and the middle) parts of the autobiography by Murari are described briefly or only referred to by Vrndavanadasa. It is a fact that Vrndavana was well-acquainted with Murari's Kadca and gives details of those episodes of Caitanya's life which have been merely referred to by Vrndavana. Perhaps Vrndavana got the details of those episodes from the devotees of Caitanya. Therefore all the informations which Vrndavanadasa heard or collected from different sources might not be always true, because there may be some exaggerations, misinformations or misrepresentations from various sources which have the natural tendency of believing in all myths or legends in whatever form they might appear.

Vrndavanadasa's Caitanyabhagavata should be considered an ideal work from all respects. The facts described in brief by Murari are elaborately given by Vrndavana; on the

1. Caitanyabhagavata, I/1/64
other hand, the informations and episodes not available in *Caitanyacaritamrta* can be easily found in Vrndavana's work. So his work should be treated as the most important one from all others. Kavirāja Gosvāmin has informed us that all Vaiṣṇavas used to read Caitanyabhagavata sincerely and respectfully and even some used to worship it in the same way as they worshipped Caitanya. The trend of Bhakticult which was started by Caitanya and was flourished by his devout Vaiṣṇava followers has been simply and sincerely represented in Vrndavana's work. He is the foremost pioneer of the Bhakti-school who for the first time came to establish that Śrīkrṣna and Gaurāṅga are identical, and the sole object of all living beings is to worship him and to receive his blessings. So Kṛṣnadasa writes, thus:

```
are mudhaloka suna caitanyamangala kamyaamahim
caitnyamahimayate janibe sakala
krsnalila bhagavate kahe vedavyasa
caitanyalilarr vyasa vrndavanadasa
vrndavanadasa kaila caitanyamangala
vahar sravane nase sarva amangala
caitanya nitaira yate janiye mahima
yate suni krsnbhakti-siddhanter sima
bhagavate vata bhakti-siddhanter sara
likhyachen iha jani kariva uddhara
caitanya-mangala yadi sone pasandá yavana
sei mahavaisnava hai tataksana
manusye racite nare aiche grantha
dhanya vrndavanadasa-mukhe vakta sri caitanya
vrndavanadasa-pade koti namaskara
aiche grantha kari tenho tārila sansāra
```
O' you fools, listen to Caitanyamanqala. All the glories of Caitanya would be clear from it. Vrndavanadasa is, as it were, the Vyasa of Caitanyalila. It is Vrndavanadasa who wrote the Caitanyamanqala. By listening to it one can avoid all the dangers. Greatness of Caitanya and Nityananda can be known from it. The opinion on the limit of Bhakti on Krsna is also explained in it. Bhagavata is the treasure-house of all schools of Bhakti, and Vrndavana has written his biography relying on the Bhagavata. If a pasandi or a yavana listens to it, he would become a great Vaisnava at once. It is beyond the capacity of a human being to compose such a book. Here Caitanya is the speaker through Vrndavanadasa. I, therefore, bow down on his feet again and again.

By writing such a work he has rescued the whole earth.

Kaviraja Gosvamin has reported that devout Vaisnavas of Navadvipa requested him to take up the task of writing down the incidents of the last part of Caitanya's life, because Vrndavana had left it after being engaged in delineating the episodes of Nityananda's life. Therefore Kaviraja writes:

\begin{quote}
'Nityananda-lila-varnane haila avesa
Caitanya-sesa lila rahila avasesa
sa[s]a[s]a lilar sunite vivarana
vrdavanavasi bhakter utkanthita mana
sesalila sunite sabhar haila mana
more aina karila sav karuna kariya
ta savhar bole likhi nirlaja haiva
\end{quote}

As I was engaged in depicting the lila of Nityananda, so the last part of Caitanya-lila remained incomplete. The devotees of Vrndaavana being anxious to hear all those about the last part of his lila advised me sympathetically and it is due to their request by which I write down the biography of Caitanya.
Krsnadasa respectfully supplied the names of a number of devout Vaisnavas who eagerly prompted him for this great cause. Firstly it was Pandita Haridasa, a righteous, benevolent, modest and respectable man who combined in himself all the qualities which are said to be chief elements of Krsna's character. He had a disciple named Ananta Acarya sincerely devoted to Krsna-worship. Ananta's disciple Haridasa Pandita firmly acknowledged Caitanya and Nityananda as his preceptors.

He showed keen interest in the activities of Caitanya. There were others like Kasisvara Gosvamin, Govinda Gosvamin, Yadavacarya, Mukundananda Chakravartin, and Sivananda Cakravartin. Therefore it becomes clear from the statement of Krsnadasa Kaviraja that the elite of Navadhipa was seriously interested in Caitanyabhagavata and requested Krsnadasa to describe elaborately the antvaiila of Caitanya in the same manner as Vrndavana wrote down the adi lila.

Vrndavana was not at all interested in exposing systematically any theory or doctrine about caitanya. His first and foremost intention was to narrate the activities of Caitanya and Nityananda. Therefore we must have to rely on what he had said through the deliberations of his masters, his songs in their praise or glorifications. According to his interpretation Caitanya is completely identical with Krsna, i.e. he is Krsna incarnate.³ Therefore, it is clear that during Vrndavana's time there were at least some people who whole-heartedly believed that Caitanya was the incarnation of Lord Krsna. So Vrndavana tried to propagate this popular belief as he himself was one of the pioneers of this doctrine. Like all other contemporary biographers of Navadhipa Vrndavana tried to avoid the exaggeration of the scholastic personality of his master and dwelt more upon his ecstatic devotion and miraculous power of doing wonderful things. S.K.De, therefore, remarks:

3. Vrndavanadasa, Caitanyabhagavata,
   I/I/106,125; I/8/262; II/22/14; II/23/285;
   III/10/170; 370
'It should be recognised that the extremely emotional mode of Caitanya's religious devotion never made any demand upon the intellect, nor wanted the nourishment of any other interest. There was no study, and no production. He lived in and for mystic ecstasies and trances, they consumed all his energies. Questions of social or ethical import, the welfare of the society, seldom impinge upon his ecstatic consciousness; nor does intellectual consideration guide his practice. Although Krsnadasa Kaviraja would make an attempt to figure Caitanya as a subtle logician, he would also admit to Caitanya's life of 'divine madness' in later years.

The other biographical records, however, clearly indicate that as days went on Caitanya's life became marked by progressive nervous instability; and in proportion to the excess of frenzied emotionalism there was steady deterioration of his intellectual gifts. It is not surprising therefore, that in Caitanyaism itself, which was inspired by and modelled on Caitanya's life, there is a great deal of intellectual subtlety, but intellectual virility is never a marked feature. (4). On the other hand, through different songs in praise of Caitanya Vrndavana has expressed his firm belief on the 'Doctrine of Incarnation' of his beloved master Sri Caitanya. It can be easily proved through the following expressions:

\begin{verbatim}
ve tumi anantakoti brahmander vasa
se tumi srisacigrabhe karila prakas
sakala samsara var icchaya samhare
se ki kamaa ravana vakye badhite nare
thathapi dasaratha vasudeva-ohare
avatirna haiya badhila ta-sabhare
kaliyuge viprarupe dhari pitavarna
bujhabare vedagopya samkirtan-dharma.
\end{verbatim}

4. S.K.De, Early History of the Vaisaava Faith and Movement in Bengal, pp 112-113
5. Caitanyabhagavata, I/2/149-50, 152-153, 163
It is you who held the universe in countless forms and then took birth on the womb of Śacī. The whole world can be destroyed at his will, so is it impossible for him to destroy Kāṃsa or Rāvana by mere words only? In spite of the fact being such God appeared in human form in the abode of Dāsaratha and Vāsudeva, and killed all of them. In the kali-era Lord appeared in the form of a brahmin wearing yellow garments in order to convince the people about samkīrtana-dharma which was preserved in the vedas.

Vṛndāvana fervently nourished the idea that Caitanya's attendents like Advaita Acārya, Srīvāsa Pandita, Haridāsa Thākura and others had so many occasions to realise that Caitanya was no other than Śrīkṛṣṇa (6).

On the basis of the same identification Gaura's parents Śacī and Jagannātha have been identified as Yasoda and Vāsudeva. (7)

Following the footsteps of Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas where Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva and Supreme Lord or Brahman have been established as identical, Vaiṣṇava authors and devotees like Vṛndāvanadāsa have tried through all possible ways the identity of Caitanya and the Supreme Godhead, and therefore, it has been logically explained that all the incarnations of God in various forms and for various purposes are simply the manifestations of Kṛṣṇa, the Almighty (8). So Vṛndāvana proposed to establish that Caitanya assuming the human form is an incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa who previously took ten different forms and saved the world from total destruction.

6. Ibid, II/2/269-74; II/9/53-60; 201-14, II/10/72-75
7. Ibid, I/2/134; II/26/44-45
8. Ibid, I/9/138-143
In Fish-incarnation you roved over water during pralaya or universal annihilation; in Tortoise-incarnation you become the holder of the universe; in Hayagriva-incarnation you recovered the Vedas and destroyed the two great giants named Madhu and Kaitabha; in Boar-incarnation you rescued the earth; in Man-lion-incarnation you tore away Hiranya Kasipu; in Dwarf-incarnation you deceived Vali, in Parasurama-incarnation you made the world free from the evil burden of the Ksatriyas; in Rama-incarnation you vanquished Ravana; in Haladhara-incarnation you roamed throughout the world; in Buddha-incarnation you explained the virtues of mercy; in Kalki-incarnation you destroyed the mlecchas.

Advaita, the devout Vaisnava and Caitanya’s attendant, has easily been put in such positions as to glorify the master thus:

‘O my lord, you are one who lay on Ananta; you are the sole resort of all beings. You are Visnu, Krsna and Narayana. You are Matsya (the Fish incarnation), Kurma (the Tortoise incarnation), you are the eternal entity. You the same Varaha

9. Ibid, 1/2/64-69
(the Boar incarnation), you are the Vamana (the Dwarf incarnation). You preserve the Vedas age after age. You are Jñānaki's lord who destroyed the Rākṣasa family. You bestowed a boon to Guha, and rescued Ahalyā. For Prahālāda's sake you assumed another incarnation. By destroying Hiranya you got the title of 'Man-lion'.

Vṛndāvana was a firm believer of the legends and myths which were current during his time. On the other hand he has sincerely presented all the facts and figures as supplied by his contemporaries. For example the description of Visvambhara's scholastic triumphs are surely exaggerated both in Vṛndāvana's and Kaviṛāja's work.

Caitanya is said, for instance, in the two orthodox biographies of Vṛndāvana and Kṛṣṇadāsa to have vanquished in disputation Kesava Bhatta Kāśmirī, the well-known scholar and commentator of the Nimbārka school. What really happened in Visvambhara's so-called disputation with this formidable scholar, who was the author of commentaries on the Bhagavadgītā, the Vendantasūtra and other works, is somewhat strange. Visvambhara requests Kesava to compose a hymn to the Ganges, on the banks of which they meet, and on Kesava's reciting extemporaneous and astonishing series of verses on the subject, all that Visvambhara does to silence him is to pick rhetorical flaws of a somewhat fastidious kind in one of the verses recited: This is the whole extent of the learned disputation; and the account in its trivality is extremely disappointing. In the same way Visvambhara is represented elsewhere as picking trivial grammatical flaws in Isvarapuri's poem. No concealment is made here of the fact that Visvambhara was chiefly a teacher of grammar with some stray knowledge of rhetoric.
The disputation is omitted in other biographies. It is mentioned for the first time by Vṛndavaṇādāsa, from whom Kṛṣṇadāsa obviously elaborates the legend. One might even suspect sectarian loyalty in making a veteran champion of the Nimbārka school suffering defeat at the hands of youthful Caitanya.

But apart from such traditional identity Vṛndavana also sets him as the pioneer of namasamkirtana. After his return from Gaya Caitanya, as represented by Vṛndāvana, refuses to go on with his studies, and sets the stage for a new tradition of worship by Kirtana along with his followers. The surrounding of Gaya stirred the hidden springs of his religious emotion. He was then completely a changed man; the pride of scholarship has vanished and he is a god intoxicated mystic person, he laughs and weeps and incessantly shouts Kṛṣṇa's name and falls into deep trance. In this new form of worship he was joined by Nityānanda and others. Visvambhara passes his days and night in ecstatic mood deeply absorbed in Kṛṣṇa. Wherever he goes he expresses the same spirit and psychology. He enters the residence of Suklāmbara Brahmacārin, or comes to the bank of the Ganga or passes his time in his own residence. But always he is in an ecstatic state, sometimes he faints or he cheers everybody loudly but uttering the name of Kṛṣṇa. In this way Visvambhara became the centre of devout Vaiṣṇava group in Navadvipa and everyone hails him as the very incarnation of the spirit of devotion. His charming personality, his emotional spirit and his spiritual advancement evoked same kind of mental uplift for others who gathered round him. Thus the whole atmosphere was changed and was set to the tune of this great master and very soon kirtana-processions were arranged throughout the city, ultimately Visvambhara and his followers become the main
thing of attraction for the people who became whole-heartedly awakened to this new and popular spirit of Bhakti-cult of the Vaisnava school.

Social conditions:

Caitanya was the pioneer of Bengal Vaisnavism which started a new phase of Krsna worship in the form of name-samkirtana, i.e. recitation or singing in devotion the name and glory of the respective deity. But as a matter of fact everybody was not pleased with this new tradition, and moreover there were some religious sects like the Saktas or some social groups who vehemently opposed this novel trend either for personal jealousy or religious sectarianism. This influential section consisting mainly of arrogant scholars and the self-styled elite considered this uproarious movement a public nuisance. But such Hindu groups or sects posed not so much hindrance as the then Muslim governors. The Kaji (i.e. the Muslim judge) of Navadvipa came forward and was supported by anti-vaisnava groups who wanted to stop all these trends of ever-increasing influence of Neo-vaisnavism advanced and led by Caitanya. By the order of the Kaji Kirtana was prohibited and in some places the kirtana-singers were physically assaulted. In spite of all these oppositions naara-kirtana could not be stopped and such kirtana-processions organised and led by Caitanya ultimately convinced the Muhammadan magistrate about its spiritual value. But the orthodox brahmans then tried to invoke the sentiment of casteism against this movement and to dissociate the high castes from it. In order to remove all such opposition Caitanya resolved thus:
'As I have to save all these people I should have to embrace the life of an ascetic. When they see me as an ascetic, they will be convinced and bow down to me. Thus I can save all these godless men and there is no other way left for me.'

With this intention in mind Visvambhara requested Kesava Bharati to initiate him as an ascetic (samnyasin). Being initiated by Kesava Bharati he was named Sri Krsna Caitanya. He was then popularly known in its abbreviated form as Caitanya. Kesava Bharati was a famous ascetic of Katwa not far from Navadipa. It was at the beginning of the year of 1510 when Caitanya was initiated at the age of twenty-four. Nagara-kirtana was introduced not only in West Bengal but in east Bengal also and it was introduced by Caitanya himself when he went there on tour. Caitanya through his irresistible charm of gifted personality could easily win the hearts of the high and the low. Even some Muslims embraced his religion, and there were some other Muslim-poets who composed devotional poems in praise of Krsna and Caitanya.

This new method of mass-worship or congegrated devotional practice (i.e. nama-lila-gudainam uccair bhasa tu kirtanam - as defined by Rupa Gosvamin in Bhakti-rasamrta) in the form of enthusiastic chorus song with drums and cymbals along with rhythmical bodily movements was truly very fruitful for the common people.

Although Caitanya left home and made a permanent residence at Puri a close connection was maintained between him and his followers. All responsibilities for his organisation were thereafter borne by Nityananda and Advaita. From Vrndavana's information it is known that even during his time there arose some sort of sectarian groupism among the followers of Caitanya.
Shortly after his initiation Caitanya went to Puri and passed the rest of his samnyasa-life of twenty-four years there excepting a span of four years spent for the propagation of Vaisnivism in the western and southern parts of India. He had been able to establish profound influence on the religious and cultural life of Puri, a famous religious site of medieval India. During religious festivals at Puri hundreds of people used to assemble there from different parts of India. They were influenced by Caitanya and thus his religious faith and movement received tremendous support and became very popular among the masses.

Caitanya's first stay at Puri is marked by two important events i.e. firstly his meeting with Vasudeva Sarvabhauma, the famous Vedantist. Conversation between these two scholars – former a Bhaktivadin and the latter a Mayavadin shows that on the theological and philosophical side the bhakti-cult as well as the jnana-cult were prominent. It is traditionally reported that this Vasudeva went to Mithila to study Nyaya; but his teacher Pakṣadhara Misra would not allow an outsider to copy any manuscript of his school; therefore, Vasudeva committed the whole Tattvacintamani and the metrical portions of the Nyayakusumanjali to memory and returned to Bengal. He then introduced the study of Navyanyāya in Bengal for the first time. Raghunātha Siromani, the outstanding scholar of Bengal school of Nyaya, was also a pupil of Vasudeva. But the Vaiṣṇava authors like Vṛndāvanadāsa and others have represented Vasudeva more as a Vedantist than as Naiyāyika. But even such a great logician, as reported by Vṛndāvanadāsa and others was completely moved and turned to a staunch supporter of Caitanya. So it is undoubtedly true that the logical and rationalistic mind of Sarvabhauma
found something irresistibly interesting in Caitanya's personality and something very much attractive in religious attitude, and therefore, submitted himself under the mystic spell of the great master.

Secondly Caitanya's meeting with Prataparudra and his influence on him is of great historical value. Kind Prataparudra who seems to have ruled in Cuttack from 1497 to 1540 A.D. was deeply impressed by Caitanya's personality and rendered his best compliments for this devout Vaiṣṇava. And if we are to believe all such accounts as given by these biographers like Vrndāvana, we are to accept that Caitanya made an extensive tour in northern and western India, met all classes of people here and there and conquered them by his mere sight and conversation. It appears from their reports that Caitanya was always able to draw large crowds by his pleasing personality and everybody became moved and pleased by his divine grace and attractive feature of Bhakti-dharma. Probably Caitanya's emotional fervour and living faith rooted in deep and sensational feeling of bhakti marked a tremendous impress on Western and Southern Vaiṣṇavism. In all provinces of India either in the East or West or South he was received with honour and devotion and some how there arose in this way a sort of personality-cult which became so prominent in his home province that all great scholars while writing his biography simply believed in all sorts of miracles, legends and myths about Caitanya. This type of devotional attitude though sincere was not always logical.
The first and foremost aim of Vrndavanadasa is to teach and propagate the gospel of Caitanya. Devotion to Visnu as explained in the Vedas has been indentified with devotion to Krsna in the Kali age. The Brhadaranyaka upanisad preached that service to Visnu or Narayana was the be-all and end-all of human life. Our aim of life should be Krsna-bhakti or devotion to the Supreme Reality. It is manifest in different ways:

sravanam kirtanam visnoh smaranam padasevanam
arcanam vandanam dasyam sakhyam atmanivedanam

i.e. to hear about the glories of Visnu, to remember him, to serve him, to worship him, to praise him, to follow him as a servant, a relation of friendliness and to surrender oneself completely. Prema or sincere devotion to Krsna is eternal and unfailing and ultimately leads to salvation. It is through the grace of the Lord by which a devotee can attain eternal anandam and jiva from the bondage Sat (Truth), cit (knowledge) and ananda (delight) combine the true essence of man and it leads him towards his ultimate realisation of the Godhead which is infinite eternal and supreme. Vrndavana warns us that the sentiment of ill-feeling towards others is a great hindrance in the path of spiritual realisation. From such attitude of the author it becomes clear that there were different groups and sects of people who used to spread ill-name against Caitanya. He also shows us the way through which a Vaisnava devotee can get rid of such sinister motives:

suna vipra visa kari ye mukhe bhaksana
sei mukhe kari yadi amrita grhana
visor hay jirna, deha hay ta amara
na janiya yata tumi karile mindana
se kevala visa tumi karile bhojana
parama amrta eve krsna guña nama
niravadhi sei mukhe kara tumi pana
ve mukhe karile tumi vaisnava nindana
sei mukhe kara tuma vaisnava bandana
sabha haite bhaktir mahima badhyaiva
qita kavitva vipra kara tumi qiva
krsna-vasa-paramananda amrte tomara
nindā-dosa yata sava kariba samhāra
ei kahi savare, tomare na kevala.
nā janiya ninda karileka ve sakala
āra vadi ninda karma kabhu nā acara
niravadhi visnu vaisnavera stuti kare
e sakala papa guce ei se upave
koti prāyascitte anyatha nahi vaye
cala vipra kari qiva bhaktir varnana
tave se tomar sarva-papa-vimocana
'O brahmin listen to me -- if you drink nectar on the same
mouth through which you take poison, this body becomes deathless,
and at the same time, the poison becomes digested through
the nectar. All the slanders which you uttered through
ignorance have turned into poison to be swallowed by you.
Kirtanas of the glories of Krsna are the sweetest nectar,
and you should drink that always. You must praise the
Vaisnavas by your mouth through which you uttered words of
vilification against vaisnavas. Greatness of Bhakti has to be placed above all. O you Brahmin, go and sing for such Bhakti. I shall make you free from all such demerits arising out of censure against others by the touch of ambrosia in the form unique delight available through uttering the glories of Kṛṣṇa. This is my advice not only to you but to all for all such vilifications of yours committed through ignorance. If you do not commit any such misdeed like slander against others and always praise Viṣṇu and the Vaiṣṇavas you will be relieved from such vices. Even hundreds of purificatory rites cannot remove it. O brahmin, go and discuss Bhakti, and only by that, you would be revived."

As we find to-day some religious leaders and their followers breed ill feeling and propagate slanders against others belonging to another sect or religion so there were such people in those days too. Vṛndāvana has firmly opposed such practices and condemned such habits. He opines that a Vaiṣṇava must remain free from all such things. He also boasts that Caitanya for the first time broke the barriers of caste and creed, class and sect and embraced the brahmin and candal both. He who loves god loves all being. Without devotion and love a devotee cannot approach God; so a Vaiṣṇava must be devoted not only to God but also to all living beings. Thus it is said in the Caitanyabhāgavat:

\[
\text{phalavanta Vṛksa ār gunavante jana}
\]
\[
\text{nāmrata se svabhāva anukṣaṇa}
\]

'A' good man is like a tree bearing fruits. Modesty is there prime virtue.
Caitanya censures a class of people and calls them 'khara-jatiya', i.e. who are basically bad but pretend to be righteous.

Vaisnavas never allowed discrimination through caste or creed. Each and every human being must be considered a part of the divine being, therefore, any difference between two persons is only apparent. So Vrndavana writes:

\[
\text{ye papiṣṭha vaishnavera jati buddhi kare}
\]
\[
\text{janma janma adhama yonite duve mare}
\]

He who makes any difference among the Vaisnavas by the standard of caste has to take rebirth, again and again on base womb. (10)

Non-violence is one of the fundamental teachings of Sri Caitanya. The doctrine of non-violence bears a tremendous affect on the social and religious conditions of medieval Bhakti cult. Though there is nothing new in this doctrine, yet its social impact was very serious specially in the face of Sakta-worship.

In the sakta-cult violence is open in the form of many ritual performances before the different forms of Sakti. But Caitanya vehemently opposed it. The Caitanyabhagavata says:

\[
\text{ananta brahmaṅca yata sava mava ṃasa}
\]
\[
\text{eteke ye pariḥmṣe sei ṣaya ṃasa} . \ (11)
\]

10. Caitanyabhagavata, II/10/151
11. Ibid, II/19/210
"Each and every one in all the Brahmāndas serve me alone. He who does any harm or act of violence against those is destroyed."

Therefore, any type of violence in the name of religion must be abandoned. 'Service to man is service God' is the motto of Vaisnava faith; non-violence is neither timidity nor cowardliness, but love towards others and this love ultimately directs our mind towards God. Bhakti is another form of such love and God is love.

Condition of Navadvipa as depicted in the Caitanyabhāgavata. Vṛndāvanadāsa has presented a fine picture of Navadvipa during his time. Navadvipa was one of the famous centres of learning and teachers and students from various parts of India used to come here for studying various disciplines or traditional Hindu sastras. As we now find hundreds of people gathering rounds the bathing ghāts of the Ganga during sacred days for various religious rites, such were the conditions in these days also.

Hundreds of Hindu pilgrims used to assemble on different ghāts of the river for taking a holy bath there. There lived renowned teachers on different branches of learning. They had their own academies named tols or Catuspathis where brahmin students had to learn their lessons also. Cult of Bhakti was in doldrums. People used to worship Mangalacandī or Manasā. They lavishly spent their wealth for religious festivals or for other social ceremonies.

Vṛndāvana expresses his surprise for such a sorry state of religious festivity and it was for him a cause of dismay.
that nobody cared for devotion. Sincere inclination shall be assumed that the state of Vaiṣṇava faith and movement was political conditions not up to his satisfaction. Vṛndāvanadāsa's Caitanyabhāgavata supplies some important data regarding the socio-political conditions of medieval Bengal. At that time most of the parts of India were being governed by Muslim rulers and only a few states like Orissa were under Hindu monarchy. During Caitanya's time Hussein Shah was the governor of Bengal and Gauda was his capital. He appointed some Hindu ministers in his council as well as in some other key posts. His prime minister was Sanātana-a veteran brahmin. Sanātana's younger brother was Rūpa. Still such appointments were exceptions only.

Vṛndāvana informs us that Hussein Shah invaded Orissa, demolished many temples and destroyed Hindu images and statues of gods and goddesses. When Caitanya reached the village Ramkeli near Gauda in course of religions mission the katoyal or police commissioner became alert about him. The Nawab called on Kesava, the investigation officer and collected information about this Hindu mork. But Kesava in order to save Caitanya from any type of harassment, gave a false report attaching minimum importance about this sannyāsin. Hussein Shah was moved by Caitanya's supernatural power and charming personality. He accepted him as a great religions personality and became convinced by his teachings of synthesis of all religions. Hussein Shah said to Kṣāvā:

hindu yare bale Kṛṣṇa khodaya yavana
sei tinho niscaya janiha sarvajana
āpanār rājya se amāra ājñā rahe
tar ājñā sarvadesa sīre kari vahā
ataeva tinho satya janiha vāra
 gabiba kariya tāre na kara uttara. (12)

Hindus call him Isvara, and the Muslims call him Khoda, everybody must know that these two are identical. My order is carried out in my own kingdom, but everywhere his order is placed above all. There, you should know that he is undoubtedly an incarnation of God; you must not utter anything against him because of the fact that he appears to be a poor man.

At last Hussein Shah ordered that Caitanya was free to move anywhere according to his will, Kazi or Kotala would not do any harm to him; he was allowed to teach his faith and preach his mission without any obstruction. (13) This proves that this Muslim ruler had a soft corner in his heart for Caitanya, still the local Kazis were antagonistic towards this public practice of Kirtana. Common people who were pro-Caitanya had to face hazards sometimes.

Caitanyabhagavata again informs us that the forcible practice of religious conversion was in vogue. Both Hindus and Muslims were very orthodox and conservative, but religious fanaticism or bigotry was not very much acute and therefore posed no such serious problems as would have been disastrous for both the groups (14).

Economic conditions as portrayed in Vrndavanadasa's work seem to be satisfactory. Navadvipa was a cosmopolitan city. Gauda was a welfare state. Even the common man of the village could easily make both ends meet. Those who were well-to-do had the habit of spending money extravagantly.

Religious rites like adoration of Sasthi, Visahari and such other mother goddesses were observed for the fulfilment of worldly attainments such as the prosperity of the family, begetting of male issues etc. The rich always tried to exhibit their wealth by making a show of social or religious functions. Meat and wine were offered to gods by a certain section of people. Sometimes worship of Krsna in the form of theatrical performances or daylong kirtanas was in vogue but performers had least idea about their philosophical value. The householders were busy on earning money and spending it for their own purposes. Some people were very eager to exhibit themselves as brahmacarins but never cared for observing the austerities connected with this particular way of life. Vanaprastha or resort to forest offer leaving the worldly life was in no way observed by anyone. Sannyasa or the renouncement of the world by accepting asceticism was adopted by a limited number only and they also accepted it falsely for earning livelihood by begging. The scholars were always busy with sastric discourses as laid down in different schools of six philosophical systems and they had not the least of Bhakti in their attitude towards esoteric philosophies, but remained engaged in debates etc. Scriptures like the Bhagavadgita were studied but those who used to teach and discuss these works had not the mental endeavour to explain these on the line of Bhakti. There were monks or ascetics who took to various forms of asceticism and cheated others by different tricks. The non-Vedic sādhus belonging to Tantric and such other sects exhibited their magical tricks and tried to prove that such capacities of their own had been acquired through philosophical powers or directly through the grace of God.
Vrndavana again informs us that the worship of Vasuli was one of the important rituals in medieval Bengal. Perhaps Vasuli was originally a Buddhist deity, or she might be Vasalakshi a form of Kali, the prominent Indian mother-Goddess. Her worship was connected with Tantric ritual which was very popular among the common people. When Caitanya was engaged in kirtana along with his followers in the residence of Srivasa, the pasaancis belonging to various Tantric sects posed us a stumbling block to such Vaisnava rituals and worship. (15)

On the other hand, common people had strong superstition about the mischievous nature of different evil spirits. They very name Nimai (i.e. as bitter as the Margosa) as given by his mother indicates such psychological fears. Both the Puranic and Tantric rituals went on side by side. Like the Tantrikas the Saivaites had also some sort of influence among the masses, Vrndavanadasa says that musical performances by the followers of Yogipala and Bhogipala were very popular. These Yogis most probably belonged to saiva sects as prevalent during that period. The followers of these so-called Tantric and Saiva sects always tried to make a laughing stock of the Vaisnavas:

\[
\text{ihara di karya daka chade uccaisvare}
\]

(i.e. why do they shout so loudly?) The nama-sankirtana as conducted by Caitanyua and his followers was, to speak the truth, a new form of worship to operate publicity.

15. Ibid, II/8/19-20; 242-245
16. Ibid, III/4/412
It might have caused some disturbance for the common men who were not quite familiar with such devotional songs. The followers of the anti-Vaisnava sects might have tried to capitalise this sort of public apathy against the followers of Caitanya. These people were very jealous towards the Vaisnavas and lodged complaints against them in the court. Even Caitanya and Nityananda were their targets for scandal and aspersion. They tried not only to boycott them socially but also to victimise them politically. But the Vaisnavas kept themselves totally aloof from such abuses and misconducts of others, that is why there was no social or political turmoil regarding this religious movement. The Vaisnavas were so sensitive about all sorts of religious fanaticism and so they were never directly affected by these antisocial feelings of others. In spite of all such odds as narrated before it has been admitted by Vrndavana and others that Caitanya's pleasing personality and mysterious powers not only captivated the minds of thousands of people everywhere he went during his monastic itinerary but also succeeded in winning those who were not friendly towards the Vaisnavas.