

# Jaiṁa Dharma

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# Chapter Seven

Nitya-dharma and  
Samsāra, Material  
Existence

The ancient township of Saptagrāma with its predominant mercantile class is situated upon the banks of the holy River Sarasvatī.

For hundreds of years, many thousands of gold traders and jewellers had lived there.

However, since the time of Śrī Uddhāraṇa Datta, this trading society had by the mercy of Śrī Nityānanda practiced with deep sincerity the congregational chanting of harināma.

Yet, presently, a certain wealthy but miserly trader, Caṇḍidāsa Vanik, had refused to join the congregational chanting, being afraid of a possible increase in his expenses.

Similarly, his wife, Damayantī devī, who had also become infected with the parsimonious tendencies of her husband, never invited guests nor served the Vaiṣṇavas.

The couple had four sons and two daughters from early in their marriage.

Gradually, they had settled the daughters by marriage and were now keeping aside immense savings for the sons.

In a household that is not visited by Vaiṣṇavas the family members, especially the children, easily lose their charitable disposition.

And so, as Caṇḍīdāsa's children had grown older, they had become most selfish. In fact, they had become so greedy for the wealth of their parents that they now began to wish them dead.

The worries and pain of Caṇḍīdāsa and Damayantī knew no end.

Gradually, Caṇḍīdāsa and Damayantī found suitable brides for their sons and launched them into household life.

However, the daughters-in-law, as a result of close association with their husbands, also adopted self-centered ways and soon also desired the quick demise of their parents-in-law.

Having become capable of handling the business independently of their aging parents and soon managing all the shop transactions themselves, the sons gradually divided most of their father's wealth amongst themselves.

One day, Caṇḍīdāsa called his family together.

He said, "Listen! I was able to save a great deal of money for you all by being thrifty.

Your mother and I were never extravagant in regard to our own lifestyle, eating, or dress.

As we are now approaching old age, it is actually your duty to serve and care for us, but I notice that you are not looking after us properly, which is causing us great pain and suffering.

Therefore, I have hidden a fair amount of wealth, which I will give to the one who is obedient to me.”

The sons and daughters listened mutely to their father's monotonous monologue, finally dispersing and meeting clandestinely somewhere else later.

There they conspired to send their parents far away, confiscate the hidden wealth, and share it amongst themselves.

They were concerned that out of sentimentality their father might eventually donate his money to some undeserving person outside the family.

They were convinced that their parents had buried the treasure in a secret place in their bedroom and that to take the treasure away from them was the most sensible decision.

One morning, Haricarana, the eldest of the sons, approached his father and feigning concern and humility suggested, "Why don't you and our beloved mother visit at least once the holy place of pilgrimage, Navadvīpa-dhāma, and thus fulfil the purpose of your human birth?"



I have heard that in Kali-yuga no other place of pilgrimage is as auspicious as Navadvīpa-dhāma.

The journey to Navadvīpa-dhāma is quite inexpensive; if you cannot travel on foot, a passenger boat can be easily hired to take you upstream for a few pence.

There's even a vaiṣṇavī, Vaiṣṇava lady, who wants to accompany you."

Caṇḍīdāsa informed his wife about the proposal, waiting for her advice.

Damayantī devī was overcome with joy, so they made plans together, "Our earlier talk has had a positive effect upon our sons.

Actually, we are not too old to walk to Navadvīpa. Let us take the route that will take us through Kālnā and Śāntipura.”

Consulting the religious almanac, they picked an auspicious date and started their pilgrimage, taking the vaiṣṇavī with them.

They arrived in Kālnā the next day, where they found a guesthouse, cooked, and were just beginning their meal when a traveller from their hometown walked in.

Recognizing them, he broke the harsh news, “Your sons have broken open your room and grabbed all of your possessions, plus they have looted and shared out your secret savings.

Now both of you are no longer welcome in your own house!”

News of the loss delivered a terrible blow to Damayantī and Caṇḍīdāsa.

They fell into dismal, grey melancholy.

Their food lay half eaten and forgotten as tears of self-pity soaked their frail frames.

Meanwhile, their companion, the vaiṣṇavī, tried to console them with sensible spiritual advice, she said, “Do not be so attached to home and hearth.

Come, let us continue on to Navadvīpa and become mendicants.

We can build a small āśrama for Vaiṣṇavas and beg food for sustenance.

Such a life is better than to go back to those who have become so evil and inimical to you—even though you have done so much for them.”

Caṇḍīdāsa and his wife, still under the shock of the atrocious behaviour of their sons and daughters-in-law, began repeating, “We will not return to them, better to die!”

Thinking in this way, they stayed in Ambikā-grāma in the house of a Vaisnava for a few days.

From there, they went to see Śāntipura and then toured all the places of Navadvīpa, eventually staying in Māyāpura in the home of a merchant relative.

Then they visited the seven localities of Kuliya-grāma, which is situated on the opposite bank of the Gaṅgā to Navadvīpa.

However, after this lengthy time of travelling, they began to feel homesick and affection for their sons and family began to well up in their hearts.

Caṇḍīdāsa said, “Come, let us return to our Saptagrāma. Is it possible that our own sons will not show us any affection?”

Their vaiṣṇavī companion quickly retorted, “Have you no pride? This time they will definitely murder you.”

Her words had a sobering effect upon the couple, and they realized that most likely she was speaking the truth.

Candīdāsa turned to her, saying, “My dear respected lady, you have made us wise to the stark reality, please return to your home—we will remain here and find a proper spiritual guide. Taking instruction from him, we will live our lives humbly by begging.”

The vaiṣṇavī left them and returned home.

Damayantī devī and Caṇḍīdāsa, plunged themselves into the task of building a small dwelling in the village of Kuliya on a property owned by one Chakaurī Caṭṭopādhyāya.

They went around soliciting help from the village gentry, constructed a hut, and began to live there.

Kuliya-grāma is a holy place. It was common knowledge that if one resided there all one's previous sins and offences would be exonerated.

Therefore, it was known as aparādha-bhañjana-pāt, the place that absolves offences.

One day, Caṇḍīdāsa told his wife, “O mother of Hari! Is it not high time that we stopped talking or even thinking about our children?”

We must have committed many sinful activities to have taken birth in the families of merchants.

Influenced by our association and surroundings, we were always stingy and never hospitable either to guests or to Vaiṣṇava sādhus.

Now, if we can earn some money here, we should try to be generous and hospitable and serve the sadhus.



This will ensure for us a better birth in the next life.

I have decided to open a grocery store and will borrow some money from the landlord to start the business.”

A few days later, Caṇḍīdāsa opened a small shop and soon he began profiting from the sales.

So, after satisfying their own hunger and needs, the couple could feed at least one guest every day.

Caṇḍīdāsa now happily foresaw an end to his days of struggle.