

IN SEARCH OF THE BIRTHPLACE OF SRI CHAITANYA: PART II.

An Archaeological-Geomorphological Study on Nabadwip Vs. Mayapur

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ABSTRACT. – In Search of the Birthplace of Sri Chaitanya: Part II. An Archaeological-Geomorphological Study on Nabadwip vs. Mayapur. Bhagirathi, the most sacred river in Bengal is a distributary of the Ganges and runs North to South in a tortuous course. Nabadwip is situated on the right bank, while Mayapur is on the left bank, directly opposite to each other along the present course of the river. Sri Chaitanya was a 15th-century Indian saint, philosopher, social reformer, and propounder of equality and humanity. He was born in Nabadwip in 1486 AD. But the debate on his birthplace and the mystery of his disappearance is unsolved. During the last decade of the 19th century, a discussion arose about whether his birthplace was Nabadwip or Mayapur. The present paper is directed towards finding the solution to this issue. For this purpose, Bhaktiratnākara, the literature in which the hint of the debate was seeded, is analysed under the spectacles of history, geography, fluvial geomorphology and modern techniques of GIS software. Bhaktiratnākara mentioned that 'Mayapur' in Nabadwip is the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya. In addition to examining Bhaktiratnākara, contemporary literature has also been reviewed to trace the evolution of this debate. It is apparent from the study that Nabadwip town has its century-old glorious heritage. Sri Chaitanya was born in Nabadwip. What 'Mayapur' in Nabadwip is meant for opens an avenue for further research. Searching for the exact site of the birth of Sri Chaitanya demands an advanced interdisciplinary study of sedimentology, botany, archaeology, and paleo-fluvial study equipped with the latest dating tools and other technologies.

Keywords: *Bhaktiratnākara, Vaishnavism, ISKCON, Bhagirathi River, Jalangi River, Gaurāṅga*

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1. *Sri Chaitanya: an introduction*

Sri Chaitanya, historically identified as Sri Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahaprabhu, was a significant 15th-century religious figure and social reformer in India. Commonly addressed by appellations such as Nimai, Gora, and Gouranga, he is credited with establishing the Gaudiya Vaishnavism tradition (Rosen, 2004). His contributions to Vedantic thought are most notably marked by the development of the philosophical doctrine of *Achintya Bheda Abheda Tattva*, which articulates an intricate synthesis of the simultaneous oneness and difference between the divine and its manifestations (Brahmacari, 2024). Chaitanya's influence extended beyond theological discourse to shaping the larger Bhakti movement, wherein he emerged as a pivotal figure advocating for inclusive spirituality and the transcendence of rigid socio-political hierarchies (Mukherjee, 1984). Through both direct discipleship and later institutional efforts by groups such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), his teachings gained global prominence (Wong & Sardella, 2020; Das, 2023). The significance of Chaitanya's philosophical contributions lies not only in their historical impact but also in their continued resonance with contemporary spiritual and intellectual frameworks (Bryant & Ekstrand, 2004). His emphasis on devotional practices and the ideal of universal spiritual egalitarianism situates him as an enduring figure in the study of comparative religion and modern spiritual movements.

1.2. *Nabadwip and Mayapur: historical and geographical context*

Nabadwip, also known as Nadia or Nudiya, is a historic city on the right bank of the Bhagirathi River in the Nadia district of West Bengal, India (fig. 1). Revered as a sacred site by Hindus, Nabadwip is widely acknowledged as the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. During the medieval period, Nabadwip was a renowned centre of learning, particularly in Sanskrit and logic. The Navya Nyaya school of Indian logic flourished in this region during the 15th century, attracting scholars and logicians from across India (Ramasubramanian, 2011). In contrast, Mayapur, situated on the left bank of the Bhagirathi, gained prominence as a pilgrimage centre in the late 20th century (Fuller, 2005; Bhatia, 2017). Until the late 18th century, it was widely accepted that Sri Chaitanya was born in Nabadwip (Gupta, 1513; Karnapura, 1527a, b; Saraswati, 1935; Goswami, 1537; Kaviraja, 1557; Dasa, C., 1550; Dasa, N., 1560, 1566; Dasa, B., 1507–1589 CE; Chakraborty, 1650). However, in the 18th century, Narahari Chakraborty introduced the notion that Chaitanya's birthplace was in Mayapur,

a place within Nabadwip (Chakraborty, 1760a, b). The debate over the exact location of Chaitanya's birthplace emerged in the late 19th century when Kedarnath Dutta, later known as Bhaktivinoda Thakur, popularized the term Mayapur based on the Bhaktiratnākara and identified a village named Meyapur or Miyapur as Mayapur, which he claimed was the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya (Chaudhuri, 2004a; Dev, 2004; Bhatia, 2017; Mondal, 2012). This identification brought further complexity to the discussion of Chaitanya's early life.

1.3. The Birthplace Debate: Nabadwip vs Mayapur

The question regarding the precise birthplace of Sri Chaitanya has emerged as a pivotal topic in the academic study of Bengali Vaishnavism. Scholarly perspectives on this issue are diverse, with some maintaining that Mayapur is essentially a part of Nabadwip (Majumder, 1995), while others argue that Mayapur functions more as a symbolic or allegorical construct, embodying a spiritual rather than a geographical reality (Chaudhuri, 2004a). A number of researchers propose that the terms Nabadwip and Mayapur are interchangeable (Rosen, 2004), though this interpretation lacks textual support in foundational works such as Narahari Chakraborty's *Bhaktiratnākara*. Another significant viewpoint holds that Nabadwip, as recognized in its modern form, developed largely during the colonial period and may not directly correspond to the historical center of religious and intellectual activity associated with Sri Chaitanya (Mukherjee, 1984; Nakatani, 2003). This view suggests that historical Nabadwip consisted of several distinct 'dwipas' or islands, among which Mayapur occupied a central position within Antardwip (Mukherjee, 1984; Ray, R.C.B., 1934). Conversely, there is an argument that Mayapur specifically denotes the location of Sri Chaitanya's ancestral home within the proper Nabadwip surrounded by nine 'dwipas' (Majumder, 1995). This interpretation underscores the complex interplay between physical geography and religious memory in shaping the narratives surrounding Sri Chaitanya's life.

The scholarly discourse surrounding the Nabadwip-Mayapur debate carries significant implications for understanding the historical and religious dimensions of these locales. Nabadwip, historically recognised as a prominent hub of intellectual and religious endeavors, and Mayapur, which rose to prominence as a major pilgrimage site in the 20th century, collectively contribute to the cultural and spiritual heritage central to Chaitanya's followers (Sarbadhikary, 2013). The intricate relationship between geography, historiography, and religious identity underscores the importance of further critical inquiry to clarify and contextualize the competing claims regarding Sri Chaitanya's birthplace.

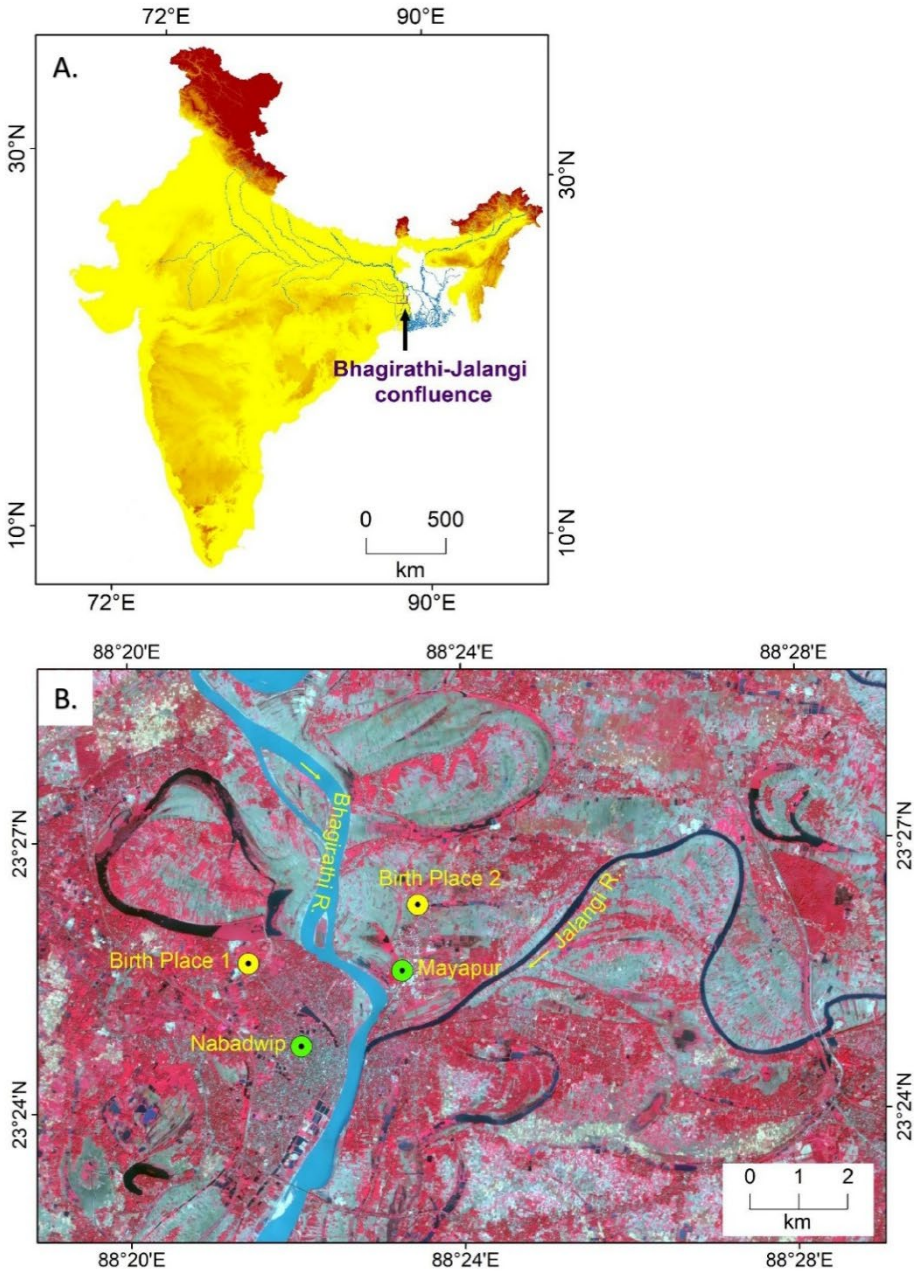


Fig. 1. *A.* Location of Jalangi-Bhagirathi confluence and surrounding localities in India. *B.* Location of Nabadwip and Mayapur on the opposite bank of the river Bhagirathi. *Source: Das (2026).*

1.4. Relevance of discourse on the birthplace debate

Despite facing significant socio-political adversities, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu emerged as a central figure leading a non-violent form of resistance against the oppressive measures of the ruling authorities, particularly through his opposition to restrictions on public *sankīrtan* (Coolidge, 2023). His leadership not only galvanized religious expression but also served as a unifying force for marginalized and socially disadvantaged groups, fostering a collective sense of spiritual renewal amidst societal challenges.

The ongoing scholarly debate concerning the precise birthplace of Sri Chaitanya—whether in Nabadwip or Mayapur—transcends a simple geographical dispute. It touches upon fundamental issues of cultural heritage, religious identity, and historical memory within Bengali Vaishnavism. The discourse surrounding this birthplace question reveals the entanglement of political, spiritual, and cultural factors that defined medieval Bengal's religious landscape. Investigating the socio-political milieu that shaped Sri Chaitanya's teachings provides critical insights into the evolution of the Bhakti movement and its enduring influence on Bengal's intellectual and devotional traditions. Employing an interdisciplinary methodology, further study of this contested historical site and the dynamics associated with it may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural and religious history of Bengal and its broader implications for medieval Indian spiritual life.

2. METHODS

As the debate originated from Bhaktiratnākara (Chakraborty, 1760), key verses from the text have been critically analysed through the lenses of history, geography, fluvial geomorphology, and modern GIS techniques. In addition to Bhaktiratnākara, post-18th-century scholarly works were similarly examined. To identify the likely location of Sri Chaitanya's birthplace, we integrated insights from historical texts and records with data obtained from maps and satellite imagery, using ArcGIS and QGIS software.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Bhaktiratnākara and Nabadwip Parikramā

Narahari Chakraborty, an 18th-century scholar and disciple of Srinivas Acharya (Chaudhuri, 2004a), made notable contributions to the academic study

of Vaishnavism through his extensive writings. Among his works, *Bhaktiratnākara* stands out for its exploration of the lives of prominent Vaishnava devotees, including Srinivasa Acharya, Sri Narottama Dasa Thakura, and Sri Ramchandra. Additionally, Chakraborty authored *Nabadwip Parikramā*, which refers to the circumambulation of Nabadwip. In the twelfth section of *Bhaktiratnākara* and in *Nabadwip Parikramā*, the term 'Mayapur' is mentioned, introducing a significant element to the ongoing scholarly discussion surrounding the location of Sri Chaitanya's birthplace. This mention holds particular relevance in the context of the Nabadwip-Mayapur debate.

The dispute Nabadwip vs. Mayapur as the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya was initiated in 1894 by Kedarnath Dutta. Dutta's claim that Mayapur is the actual birthplace was substantiated by excerpts from Narahari Chakraborty's 'Bhaktiratnākara' and 'Nabadwip parikramā.' However, a close examination of these texts reveals nuances in Narahari's stance. A series of couplets within the 12th section of 'Bhaktiratnākara' emphasize Nabadwip as Sri Chaitanya's birthplace, with only the 45th couplet suggesting Mayapur as the site within Nabadwip where Lord Goura Chandra (Sri Chaitanya) was born.

নবদ্বীপ মধ্যে মায়াপুর নামে স্থান।

যথা জন্মিলেন গৌরচন্দ্র ভগবান।।

Nabadwīp madhye māyāpur name sthan

Jathā janmilen gaurchandra bhagaban. [Taranga 12, Couplet 45, p-713]

[Meaning: Mayapur, the birthplace of Lord Gourachandra, is located in Nabadwip]

Two distinct interpretations emerge from Narahari's couplets regarding the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya. The first interpretation asserts that Sri Chaitanya was born in the present-day town of Nabadwip. The second, more nuanced interpretation suggests that his birth took place in 'Mayapur,' a locality situated within the broader region of Nabadwip. The former interpretation is consistent with other established Vaishnava texts and aligns with several additional couplets from the *Bhaktiratnākara* (Tarangas 1, 6, 8, and 12). The latter interpretation, however, introduces a layer of complexity, prompting a closer examination of Narahari's use of the term 'Mayapur' within the context of Nabadwip and raising questions regarding the precise geographical location of Mayapur itself.

In analysing Narahari's works within the historical and geographical context of his era, several noteworthy considerations emerge. The *Bhaktiratnākara*, composed circa the 1760s, was written approximately 130 years after the death of Sri Chaitanya. Chaudhuri (2004a) posited that this work was created 260 years following the birth of Sri Chaitanya and 170 years after the Nabadwip

Parikramā conducted by Srinivasa Acharya and his associates. Radi (2018) suggested that the *Bhaktiratnākara* was written 227 years subsequent to Sri Chaitanya's departure. Given the significant temporal gap between the events of Srinivasa Acharya's circumambulation of Nabadwip and the writing of both the *Bhaktiratnākara* and the *Nabadwip Parikramā*, it is plausible that the landscape of the region underwent substantial transformations. Consequently, the topographical representations found in these texts may reflect alterations or inaccuracies in the geographical features of 15th-century Nabadwip. As a result, the contemporary landscape of greater Nabadwip exhibits considerable divergence from the descriptions found in either the *Nabadwip Parikramā* or the *Bhaktiratnākara*.

The twelfth section of *Bhaktiratnākara* presents a detailed narrative of the parikrama (circumambulation) undertaken by Srinivasa Acharya, Narottama Dasa Thakur, and Ramchandra Kaviraja around Nabadwip. However, Chaudhuri (2004) raises critical concerns regarding the authenticity of this account, particularly the role of Ishān, the supposed guide of the journey. Ishān, described as the custodian of Sri Chaitanya's residence, would have been approximately 100 to 110 years old at the time of the parikrama. Such an advanced age raises doubts about his ability to complete the extensive route, thus prompting scrutiny of the plausibility of his participation. Ishān's survival, and his potential physical capacity to undertake an extended pilgrimage, highlights a significant area of scholarly concern regarding these religious texts (Chaudhuri, 2004). These accounts, frequently characterized by the inclusion of miraculous occurrences, tend to emphasize divine power and sanctity, often at the expense of historical or geographical accuracy. This tendency is a prevalent trait within many hagiographical traditions.

Chakraborty (1760b) describes that on the first day of parikrama, the team embarked on their Nabadwip parikramā. Subsequent couplets (Nabadwip Parikramā, Couplets- 26, 27, 28, 45, P-6) glorify Nabadwip as Sri Chaitanya's birthplace, depicting it surrounded by or as a composite of nine islands.

দ্বীপ নাম শ্রবণে সকল দুঃখ ক্ষয়।

গঙ্গা পূর্ব পশ্চিম তীরেতে দ্বীপ নয়।। 26, পৃষ্ঠা 6

পূর্বের অন্তর্দ্বীপ সীমান্ত দ্বীপ হয়।

গোক্রমদ্বীপ শ্রীমধ্য দ্বীপ চতুষ্টয়।। 27, পৃষ্ঠা 6

কোলদ্বীপ ঋতু জন্ম মদ্রম আর।

রুদ্রদ্বীপ এই পঞ্চ পশ্চিমে প্রচার।। 28, পৃষ্ঠা 6

*Dbīpa nāma śrabaṇē sakala 50ukkha kṣaya.
 Gaṅgā pūrbaba paścima tīrētē dbīpa naya.
 purbbē antardbīpa śīmanta dbīpa haya.
 Gōdrumadbīpa śrīmadhya dbīpa catuṣṭaya
 kōladbīpa ṛtu janhu madruma āra.
 Rudradbīpa ē'ī pañca paścimē pracāra.*

[Meaning: Hearing the name 'Dwipa' absolves one of all sins. There are nine islands to the east and west of the Ganga River. It is said that on the eastern bank of the river are Antardwip, Simantadwip, Godrumdwip, and Madhyadwip, while on the western side are Koldwip, Ritudwip, Janhudwip, Madrumdwip, and Rudradwip.]

It is pertinent to mention here that the names Bhagirathi and Ganga are synonymous in this region. Notably, a place named Mayapur within Nabadwip is also mentioned—a locale where Lord Goura Chandra (Sri Chaitanya) is believed to have been born. However, the geographical positioning of Mayapur remains ambiguous, with two distinct possibilities arising from the account of the visitors' journey on their first day of Parikrama. The first possibility questions whether the references in couplets 26, 27, and 28 of *Nabadwip Parikramā* imply that only nine islands were part of Nabadwip—Antardwip, Simantadwip, Godrumdwip, Madhyadwip, Koldwip, Ritudwip, Jāhnnadwip, Modrumdwip, and Rudradwip. If this were the case, one might question whether Mayapur was situated on one of these islands.

The second possibility, as depicted in *Couplet 45*, suggests the existence of a distinct entity referred to as Nabadwip, within which Mayapur might be located. This interpretation posits that Nabadwip proper, surrounded by the Ganga River, encompassed the nine islands—four to the east and five to the west—within its jurisdiction. In this context, a key issue arises: if Nabadwip proper is not the site of Mayapur, then which of the nine islands would house Mayapur? This question remains unanswered in both *Nabadwip Parikramā* and *Bhaktiratnākara*. One may argue that, according to the journey described, visitors, after departing from Sri Chaitanya's house, first visited Antardwip. This suggests that Mayapur may indeed lie within Antardwip. However, this assertion raises the question of why, and by what route, the visitors would travel from Mayapur to Antardwip if the former were within the latter.

The second hypothesis may offer clarification, particularly regarding the geographical positioning of Mayapur and the movement of visitors from Mayapur to Antardwip. The hagiographical accounts possibly indicate that Nabadwip proper was a separate entity, distinct from the nine surrounding islands. Within this proper Nabadwip, Mayapur could have been located, and it would thus have been feasible for visitors to travel from Mayapur to Antardwip.

On the second day, at dawn, the team pioneered by Ishān, set out for Parikrama. The route they traversed from the house of Sri Chaitanya in Mayapur is as follows (fig. 2 and 3; table 1): 1. Mayapur → 2. Ātopur (Antardwip) → 3. Simliyā (*Simantadwip*) → 4. Gādigāchā (*Godrumdwip*) → 5. Mājita (*Madhyadwip*) → 6. Bāmanpoukhorā → 7. Hātdāngā Grām → 8. *Koldwip* → 9. Samudragari → 10. Champak Hatta → 11. Rātupur (*Ritudwip*) → 12. Bidyānagarer → 13. Jāhnnagar (*Jāhnnadwip*) → 14. Māugāchi (*Modrumdwip*) → 15. Nārāyanpith (*Baikunthapur*) → 16. Mātāpure (*Mahatpur*) → 17. Rādupur (*Rudradwip*) → 18. Belpaukherā → 19. Bhāraidāngā → 20. Subarnabihār → 1. Māyāpur.

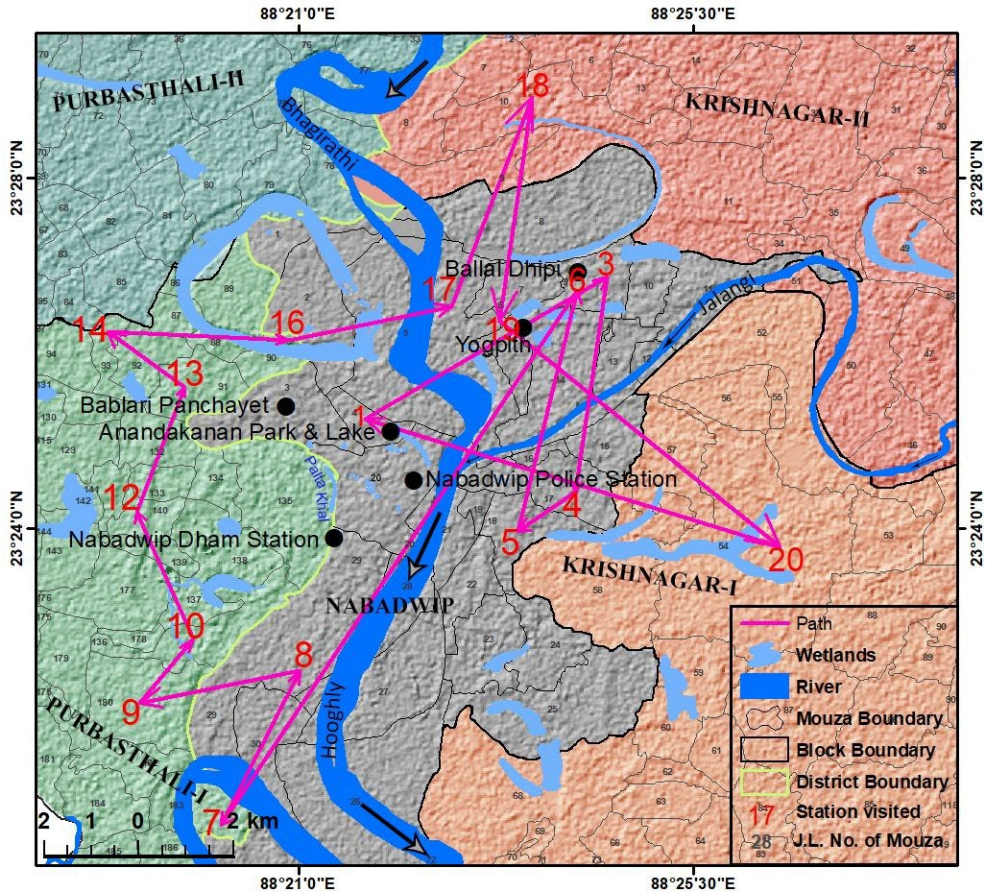


Fig. 2. If Ramchandrapur (Station 1) is considered the birthplace, the likely paths and sites of the Nagar Parikrama conducted by Shrinivas Acharya and his group, as detailed in the Bhaktiratnākara and Nabadwipa Parikrama by Narahari Chakraborty, are marked by arrows and numbers, respectively. Palta Khal is the old (17th century) channel of the river Bhagirathi, while the term ‘Dhipi’ refers to a mound. *Source: Das (2026).*

Table 1. Places of Nabadwip parikramā, their moder location distances

Sl. No.	Places visited	Mouza Name	J. L. No.	C. D. Block	Shortest Distance from the previous station	Reference
1	Mayapur	Ballal Dighi	14	Nabadwip	0.00	Census 1961, Nadia
2	Ātopur (<i>Antardwip</i>)	Ballal Dighi	14	Nabadwip	-	Mukherjee 1984
3	Simliyā (<i>Simantadwip</i>)	Bamanpukur	9	Nabadwip	1.63	Mukherjee 1984
4	Gādigāchā (<i>Godrumdwip</i>)	Gadigacha	17	Nabadwip	4.58	Census 1961, Nadia
5	Mājita (<i>Madhyadwip</i>)	Majida	18	Nabadwip	1.76	Census 1961, Nadia
6	Bāmanpoukhorā	Bamanpukur	9	Nabadwip	5.20	Census 1961, Nadia
7	Hātdāngā Grām	Jaluidanga	183	Purbasthali-I	13.25	Chaudhury 2004
8	<i>Koldwip</i>	Teghari	29	Nabadwip	3.60	Census 1961, Nadia
9	Samudragari	Samudragar	180	Purbasthali-I	3.19	Census 1961, Burdwan
10	Champak Hatta	Champahati	136	Purbasthali-I	6.00	Census Bardhaman 1981
11	Rātupur (<i>Ritudwip</i>)	-	-	-	-	-
12	Bidyānagarer	Bidyanagar	140	Purbasthali - I	2.48	Census Bardhaman 1981
13	Jāhnnagar (<i>Jāhnnadwip</i>)	Jahan Nagar	91	Purbasthali - I	4.20	Census Bardhaman 1981
14	Māugāchi (<i>Modrumdwip</i>)	Maudanga	93	Purbasthali - I	2.30	
15	Nārāyanpith (<i>Baikunthapur</i>)	-	-	-	-	-
16	Mātāpure (<i>Mahatpur</i>)	Mahatapur	90	Purbasthali - I	4.94	Census Bardhaman 1981
17	Rādupur (<i>Rudradwip</i>)	-	5	-	-	-
18	Belpaukherā	Belpukur	10	Krishnagar -II	7.44	Census 1981, Nadia
19	Bhāraidāngā	-	-	-	-	-
20	Subarnabihār	Subarnabehar	54	Krishnagar -I	11.44	Census 1981, Nadia
	Total				72.02	

Source: Das (2026)

If Yogpith in Mayapur (Station 1 in fig. 3) is identified as the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya, the parikrama routes would largely correspond to those presented in fig. 3. Narahari Chakraborty's account of the region's geographical features, however, invites certain analytical considerations: i). The aerial distance of 72.02 km poses significant challenges for completing the parikrama within a single day, particularly for an elderly individual such as Ishān. ii). The erratic and circuitous pathways illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 appear logistically implausible. These observations suggest three plausible interpretations: a) The parikrama may have been conducted over multiple days, traversing more efficient routes in successive stages. b) Narahari Chakraborty may have lacked precise geographical knowledge or opted not to prioritize route optimization and geographical accuracy in his account. c) The text might have been compiled from pre-existing narratives, potentially leading to disruptions in the spatial continuity of the pilgrimage description. These interpretations suggest a deliberate narrative strategy aimed at spiritually elevating key locations, potentially prioritizing devotional significance over precise geographical accuracy.

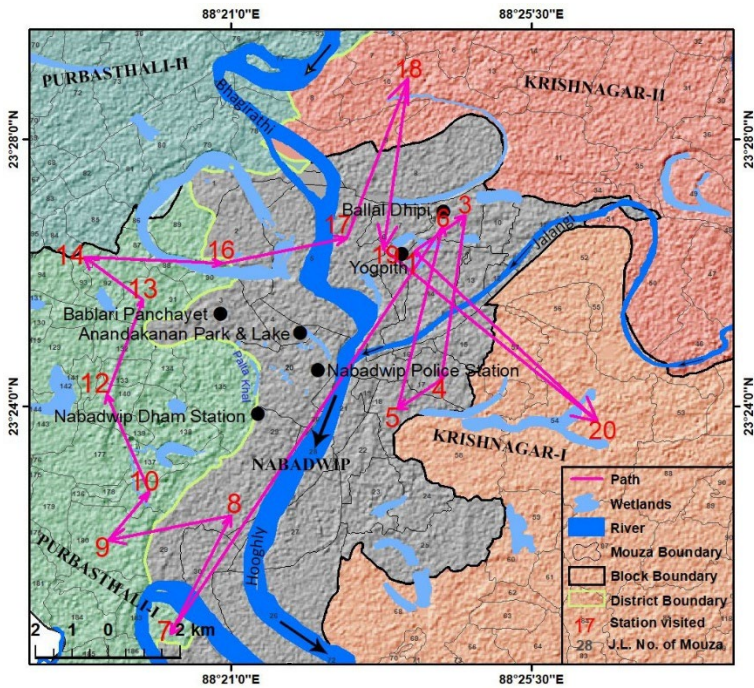


Fig. 3. If Yogpith (1) is regarded as the birthplace, the probable paths and sites of the Nagar Parikrama conducted by Shrinivas Acharya and his group, as described in the Bhaktiratnākara and Nabadwipa Parikrama by Narahari Chakraborty, are indicated by arrows and numbers, respectively. Palta Khal refers to the old (17th century) channel of the river Bhagirathi, while the term 'Dhipi' means mound. *Source: Das (2026).*

The following two couplets are very important for identifying the possible location of the place Mayapur.

প্রনমিয়া বার বার প্রভুর মন্দিরে

মায়াপুর হৈতে যাত্রা কৈলা আঁতপুৰে।।

pranamiyā bār bār prabhur mandire

māyāpur haite jatrā kailā ātopure. p-716

[Meaning: *Bowing again and again to Sri Chaitanya's house, (they) moved from Mayapur to Atopur*].

এত কহি সুবর্ণ বিহার গ্রাম হৈতে

মায়াপুরে চলয়ে মিশ্রের আলয়েতে।।

eta kahi subarna bihār gram haite

māyāpure chalaye mishrer ālayete. p- 759

[Meaning: *Saying this, from the village Subarnabihar they moved Mishra's house in Mayapur*].

The couplets from *Bhaktiratnākara* (Taranga 12, p. 716 and p. 759) detailing the journey onward and return underscore a significant distinction between Antardwip (identified with Ātopur) and Mayapur. This distinction is particularly relevant in contextualizing the movement of the pilgrimage team described in the text. If Mayapur were within Antardwip (Ātopur), the team's overnight stay at Sri Chaitanya's house at Mayapur would logically place them within Antardwip itself, making their subsequent journey to Ātopur the next morning contradictory. Such textual evidence lends weight to the conclusion that location of Mayapur was not within Antardwip (Ātopur).

Furthermore, this interpretation aligns with the narrative structure of the pilgrimage route: after departing from Mayapur, the group proceeded to Antardwip (Taranga 12, p. 716), and on the return leg of their journey, they came back to Mayapur from Subarnabihar (Taranga 12, p. 759). Additional references within the same text (Taranga 12, p. 710) emphasize the autonomy of Nabadwip proper, depicted as a region encircled by the Ganga River and comprising nine distinct islands. This characterization finds corroboration in Basu (1898, p. 633) and Chakraborty's account (1760a, Taranga 12), further illustrating the geographic and conceptual separation of these locations.

Ishān's account of Bhagirathi and Jalangi sweeping away Ātopur long ago and its abandonment further complicates the possibility that Mayapur was in Ātopur.

ওহে শ্রীনিবাস এই আঁতোপুৰ স্থান

বহুকালাবধি লুপ্ত হৈল এই গ্রাম।।

ohe srinibās ei ātopur sthan

bahukālābadhi lupta haila ei grām. P-717

[Meaning: *O Srinivas, this is the site of the village Ātopur which was abolished a long day before*].

The couplets indicate that while the geographical entity of Ātopur remains identifiable, its previous human settlement has been eroded and displaced by riverine forces. This erosion likely renders Ātopur unsuitable as a site for Sri Chaitanya's birthplace, which is traditionally associated with Mayapur. The *Bhaktiratnākara* further asserts that Mayapur does not belong to any of the nine recognized dwīpas, suggesting its plausible identification within a broader conceptual framework of Nabadwip that transcends the historically enumerated islands. Chakraborty (1760a) seemingly employed the term 'Nabadwīp' to denote either 'Nabadwīp proper' or exclusively that specific geographical region. Similarly, Basu (1898) emphasized that Narahari Chakraborty acknowledged 'proper Nabadwīp' as existing within the configuration of nine dwīpas.

নদীয়া পৃথক গ্রাম নয়।

নবদ্বীপে নবদ্বীপ বেষ্টিত এ হয়।। (বসু, নগেন্দ্রনাথ. ১৮৯৮, বিশ্বকোষ, পৃষ্ঠা-৬৩৩)

Nadiyā prithak grām nay

Nabadwīpe Nabadwīp bestita hay. (Chakraborty, 1760a/ b, cited from Basu Nagendranath, 1898, p. 633)

[Meaning: *Nadia is not different from Nabadwīp. Nabadwīp i.e., the new island is surrounded by nabadwip i.e., nine islands. New island encircled by nine islands*].

জয় জয় নদীয়া নগর।

নবদ্বীপ বেষ্টিত পরম মনোহর।।

jay jay nadiya nagar

Nabadwīp bestita param manohar. (Chakraborty, 1760a/ b)

[Meaning: The victory of Nadia, a beautiful and pleasant place, is encircled by nine islands].

ওই কথো দুরে নবদ্বীপ নামে গ্রাম।

সুরধুনী বেষ্টিত পরম রম্যস্থান।।

oi katho dure Nabadwip nāme grām

Suradhani bestita param ramya sthān.

[Meaning: The distance delightful village Nabadwip is surrounded by the river Suradhuni or Bhagirathi].

The textual evidence provided by these three couplets collectively indicates that 'Nabadwip proper' was characterized as a region encompassed by rivers and nine distinct islands. This geographical configuration aligns with observations made in Rennell's map from the 1770s, which depicts several segmented islands forming the broader Nabadwip landscape. By the late 18th century, during the period when James Rennell conducted his cartographic surveys and Narahari Chakraborty composed *Bhaktiratnākara* and *Nabadwip Parikrama*,

the central part of Nabadwip was distinctly bordered by river channels. Given this topographical context, it is plausible that Mayapur occupied one such river-enclosed island. Consequently, it appears that areas not encircled by the Bhagirathi River were likely excluded from the conceptualization of ‘Nabadwip proper.’

3.2. Other literature

During the mid-17th century, the French traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1666) documented Nabadwip as a prominent settlement situated on the eastern bank of the Bhagirathi River. His journal entry from February 19, 1666, records this location under the name ‘Nadiya,’ characterized as the ‘ultimate point reached by the tide’ (Tavernier, 1666). This observation underscores the strategic significance of the town within the region’s hydrological framework. Further corroborating this geographical depiction, the Bengali literary work *Annadamangal*, composed by Ray, B.C. in 1753, identifies the Bhagirathi River as marking the western boundary of Nadia Raj, which lay westward of present-day Nabadwip (Ray, 1753). These historical accounts together provide critical perspectives on the spatial dynamics and territorial extent of Nabadwip in early modern Bengal.

রাজ্যের উত্তর সীমা মুরসিদাবাদ ।

পশ্চিমের সীমা গঙ্গা ভাগিরথী খাদ ।।

Rājyēra uttara śimā murśidābāda
paścimēra śimā gaṅgā bhāgirathī khāda.
(Ray, B.C., 1753; *Annadāmaṅgala*, p. 19)

[Meaning: Territory of the state of Maharaja Krishnachandra was up to Murshidabad to the North and its western boundary was the natural channel of the river Bhagirathi].

Between 1666 and 1753, Nabadwip was situated on the eastern bank of the Bhagirathi River, with no significant geographical transformations during that period. However, the depiction of Nabadwip underwent a notable shift following Rennell’s surveys in the 1760s, which documented the town as being both encompassed and intersected by the courses of the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers (Das & Bhattacharya, 2020).

A later account by Chunder (1869), based on his visit on February 20, 1845, offers further insights into the spatial and socio-cultural dynamics of Nabadwip during the mid-19th century. Describing the town as a ‘rural town of small size,’ Chunder observed that it comprised a modest nucleus of habitations inhabited by Brahmins whose concerns appeared more oriented towards economic survival than scholarly pursuits. His description underscores a shift in the town’s prominence, as it struggled to retain its historic identity amidst environmental changes and socio-economic transformations.

Chunder's observations indicate the transformative impact of the river's changing course, noting that 'the caprices and changes of the river have not left a trace of old Nuddea'. He emphasized that what remained of the historical site was largely 'chur land'—newly formed riverine deposits—or part of the riverbed. Chunder further remarked that the Ganges had previously followed a more westerly trajectory, situating the historic town of Nuddea on the same bank as Krishnagur. Despite the environmental and geographical changes, however, Chunder acknowledged Nabadwip's persistence as a center of learning. He noted that the intellectual tradition of the town endured, producing numerous legal and theological scholars whose accomplishments continued to enhance its reputation.

Chunder's attempts to locate the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya provide an important cultural and religious perspective. Upon inquiry, he was directed to the 'middle of the stream' that then flowed through the area of old Nuddea, underscoring the transformative effects of fluvial processes on historical memory and sacred geography. Despite the town's apparent decline, Chunder recorded the presence of a temple where devotees continued to venerate Sri Chaitanya alongside Nityananda. He noted that 'His followers regard him as Avatar, and pay to him divine honours,' observing that an image of Sri Chaitanya, along with that of Nityananda, had been installed in this temple.

Chunder's account, therefore, attests to the continued cultural and religious significance of Nabadwip during the 1840s. While the town's geographical and socio-economic landscape had undergone significant transformations, its enduring role as a site of pilgrimage and scholarly distinction reflects a complex interplay between environmental, cultural, and religious factors shaping the historical memory of the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya.

Ray, R.C.B.'s (1934) article on the geography and historical context of Nabadwip demonstrates significant inaccuracies, both in its interpretation of cartographic evidence and in its geographical assertions. Relying heavily on Rennell's map, Ray, R.C.B. (1934) proposed several claims that do not align with historical and empirical observations. These assertions include: (i) the placement of Nabadwip on the bank of the Jalangi River rather than the Bhagirathi; (ii) the identification of Nabadwip as being located on a northwestern island; (iii) the claim that the Bhagirathi was situated three miles west of Nabadwip; (iv) the suggestion that the Jalangi bifurcated twice before converging; and (v) the argument that the Bhagirathi flowed directly south towards Nabadwip instead of encircling it. These interpretations appear to have been advanced with an intention to support modern Mayapur as the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya.

Upon close examination, Rennell's map contradicts Ray, R.C.B.'s (1934) conclusions. The map clearly depicts Nabadwip as situated on the banks of the Bhagirathi River, enclosed by both the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers (Das & Bhattacharya, 2020). Additionally, Ray, R.C.B.'s (1934) identification of Bamanpukur's paleochannel as a northerly branch of the Jalangi is factually flawed (fig. 4). Satellite imagery provides incontrovertible evidence that this channel is, in fact, a paleochannel of the Bhagirathi—specifically, the channel depicted north of stations 3 and 6 in figures 2 and 4 of this study. Ray, R.C.B.'s (1934) failure to recognize the existence of the Bhagirathi's old channel west of Nabadwip further undermines his conclusions. Rennell's map clearly illustrates this feature, suggesting that during Sri Chaitanya's time, the Bhagirathi would not have flowed directly south from Ganganagar to Majida, as Ray, R.C.B. (1934) claimed. Instead, it maintained a course encircling Nabadwip. The evidence presented by both cartographic sources and satellite imagery therefore refutes Ray, R.C.B.'s reconstruction of the regional hydrology.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in Rennell's small-scale map, which lacks the large-scale resolution necessary to capture finer geographical details. Ray, R.C.B.'s reliance on this map to substantiate claims regarding intricate riverine dynamics was thus methodologically flawed. Nevertheless, the map's broad representations are sufficient to challenge Ray, R.C.B.'s assertions and to affirm that Nabadwip's geographical context, as depicted in Rennell's work, does not support his conclusions.

In subsequent sections, this study will elucidate paleo-fluvial dynamics to provide a more accurate portrayal of the region's geography during Sri Chaitanya's time. By integrating cartographic analysis with satellite imagery and other empirical data, this paper seeks to reconstruct a historically grounded understanding of Nabadwip and its surroundings, offering critical insights into the region's hydrological and geographical transformations.

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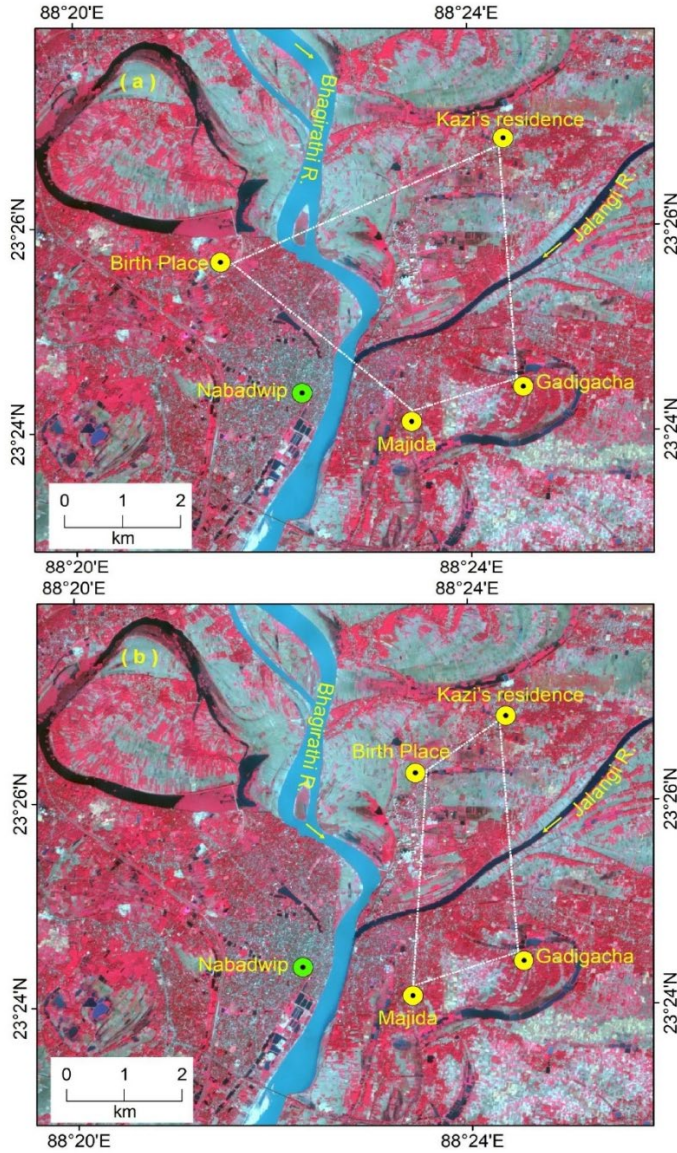


Fig. 4. The paleo-channel north of Kazi's residence originated from Bhagirathi, not the old course of Jalangi as claimed by Ray, R.C.B. (1934). 'S' is the probable Birthplace in the northern part of Nabadwip Town, claimed by Nabadwip School of Advocates. 8 is Gadigacha, and 9 is Majida, as stated in Chaitanya Bhagavata. 1 is the birthplace pointing to Yogpith as claimed by Mayapur School of Advocates.

Source: Das (2026).

3.3. Rivers and landscape dynamics during the Post-Chaitanya Period

In this section, we have examined Van den Broucke's map (1666-67) and Rennell's map based on survey from 1764-77 to analyse the historical evolution of Nabadwip and its surrounding areas.

3.3.1. Van den Broucke 1666-67

The river course at the Bhagirathi-Jalangi confluence, around Nabadwip, is very dynamic and unstable. This local instability is because of the contribution of the river Jalangi. The local population has long been aware of this instability in the river's course, which was reported in a poetic style as follows (Chakraborty, 1760a).

ওহে শ্রীনিবাস গঙ্গা সিন্ধু এই খানে।

সদাই অধৈর্য গৌরচন্দ্রের ধিয়ানে।। 12 taranga. P. 734. ভক্তিরত্নাকর

Ōhē śrīnibāsa gaṅgā sindhu ē'i khānē.

Sadā'i adhairya gauracandrēra dhiyānē.

[Meaning: Oh, Srinivas, the Ganga and Sindhu (rivers) are here. Always restless, lost in the meditation of Gaurachandra (Sri Chaitanya)].

This instability finds expression in traditional literary sources; the couplet above (Chakraborty, 1760a, b) captures it in verse. The verse metaphorically captures the turbulent nature of the rivers, suggesting their spiritual association with Sri Chaitanya, often revered for his intense devotion and transcendental teachings. In this poetic context, Ishān addresses Srinivas, pointing to the sacred presence of the rivers Ganga and Sindhu and emphasizing their perpetual restlessness (adhairya). The oscillating nature of the river system metaphorically resonates with the meditative engagement with Gaurachandra (Sri Chaitanya), reflecting both spiritual and physical dynamism.

Historical cartographic evidence further enriches this discussion. The Dutch cartographer Van den Broucke's map (fig. 5) *Nieuwe Kaart Van 't Koninckryk Bengale* (1666-67), created 133 years after Sri Chaitanya's death, identifies Nabadwip (then Neddia) on the left bank of the Bhagirathi River, near the confluence of the Jalangi (referred to as *De Galgaetse Spruys*) and Bhagirathi at Ambooa. This historical confluence point is located approximately ~15km south of the current junction at Swarupganj. Consistent with this depiction, accounts by Barlow and Yule (1682) and Chunder (1869) confirm that Nabadwip during Sri Chaitanya's lifetime (1486-1533) was situated on the left bank of the Bhagirathi. However, the present-day geographical layout presents a paradox: Nabadwip now lies on the right bank of the Bhagirathi, while Mayapur occupies the left bank. This shift raises critical questions regarding the historical identity and location of the true Nabadwip:

3.3.2. Rennel (1764-77)

Between 1764 and 1777, James Rennell conducted extensive surveys of the river systems in Bengal. His findings revealed notable changes in the courses of the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers over more than a century, particularly when compared to earlier cartographic evidence such as Van den Broucke's 1666 map (fig. 6). Historical accounts confirm that during Van den Broucke's time, Nabadwip was situated to the east of the Bhagirathi River (Ray, B.C., 1753; Barlow and Yule, 1682; Chunder, 1869). However, by the 18th century, under the Nadia Raj kingdom, the town was flanked by the Bhagirathi River along its western boundary (Kitchin, 1760, 1781).

By 1777, approximately a century after Van den Broucke's observations, Nabadwip's landscape had undergone significant transformations. The town became fragmented into at least three parts, encircled and dissected by shifting river channels (Rennell, 1781). Some cartographic sources even indicated that Nabadwip had shifted to the west bank of the Bhagirathi River (Kitchin, 1781). This change was accompanied by an upstream shift of about ~15km in the confluence of the Jalangi River.

The evolution from Van den Broucke's 'De Galgatese Spruys' to Rennell's depiction of the 'Jellinghy' illustrates a dynamic alteration of the riverine geography near Nabadwip (fig. 6). In Van den Broucke's cartography, the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers met at Ambooa, near Samudragar (fig. 5). During this period, Bhagirathi flowed west of Nabadwip, while Jalangi ran along its eastern side. The comparative instability and tortuous courses of the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers—in contrast to the relatively stable Churni—may have contributed to significant morphological changes (Das and Bhattacharya, 2020; Sarkar et al., 2020). These rivers, with their high meander amplitudes, likely experienced convergence due to the proximity of their meander bends during the period between 1660 and 1760 (fig. 7).

Neotectonic activities have further compounded these transformations, prompting an eastward shift of river systems (Goodbred & Kuehl, 2000; Akter et al., 2016). One plausible consequence of these tectonic movements was channel avulsion, where the Bhagirathi River abandoned its previous westerly course and assumed the easterly course of the Jalangi River. This geomorphological shift, along with other factors, led to the confluence relocating approximately ~15km upstream (Goodbred & Kuehl, 2000; Akter et al., 2016). Ultimately, the Bhagirathi's capture of the Jalangi's course profoundly reshaped the hydrological and geographical setup of Nabadwip.

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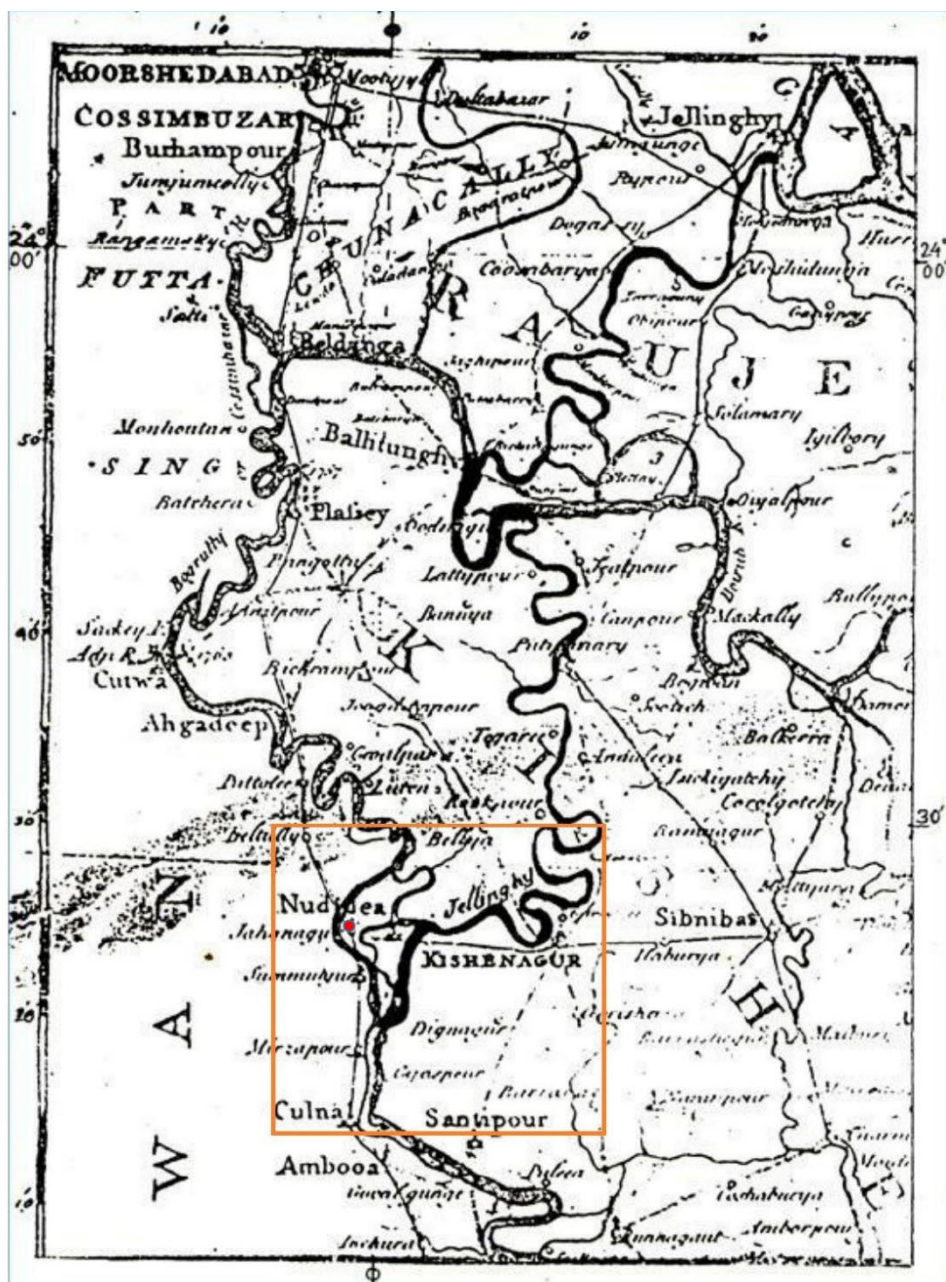


Fig. 6. Nabadwip (Nuddea) is shown in the red-filled circle. Greater Nabadwip is encircled and dissected into three parts by rivers Bhagirathi & Jalangi.
Source: Rennell (1781)

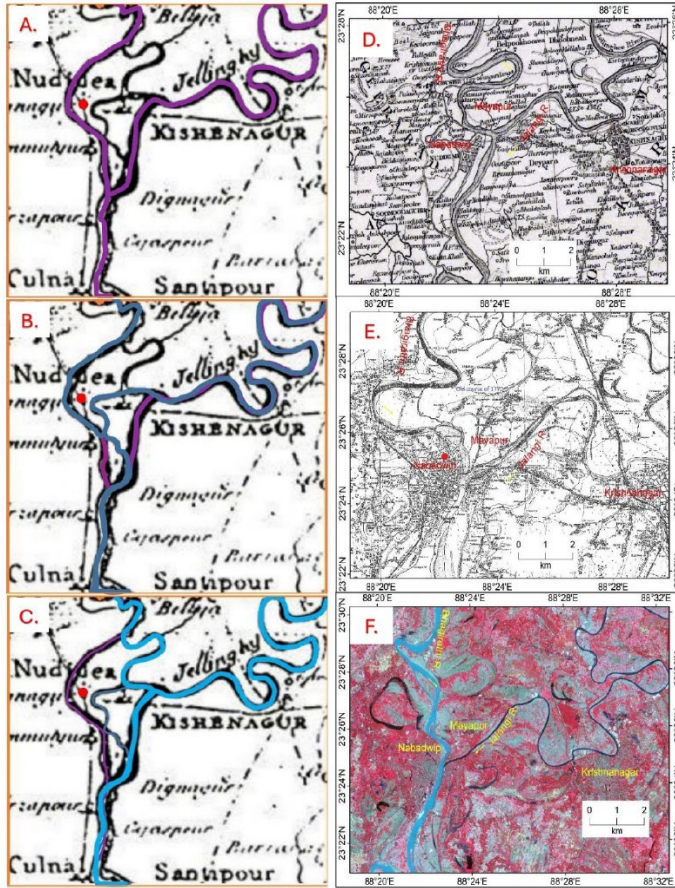


Fig. 7. Stages of channel dynamics with a probable explanation of how Nabadwip came from the East (Van den Broucke's map of 1660) to the West of the river Bhagirathi (Rennell 1781). A small red circle points to the location of Nabadwip. A. The river Bhagirathi is flowing to the West of Nabadwip. B. The highly oscillating channel of the river Jalangi migrates far West to merge with the river Bhagirathi. C. A laterally migrating meander bend of the river Bhagirathi with high amplitude touched a bend of the river Jalangi and occupied its course southward up to Mirzapore. The main flow of the river Bhagirathi is to the East of Nabadwip and its old, abandoned course is to the West. D. In 1863, the Bhagirathi-Jalangi confluence shifted ~15km upstream permanently. Although the western channel of Bhagirathi still exists (JWG, 1863). E. Topographical map of 1970 showing Nabadwip to the West of Bhagirathi River and the old course of 1770 as a meander cut-off to the North of Bamanpukur. F. The latest courses of rivers Bhagirathi and Jalangi and the location of localities as of 2020 are shown in satellite imagery. *Source: Modified after Das et al. (2025).*

3.4. Paleo-Fluvial Geomorphology and Landscape Dynamics: 1854, 1918 and after

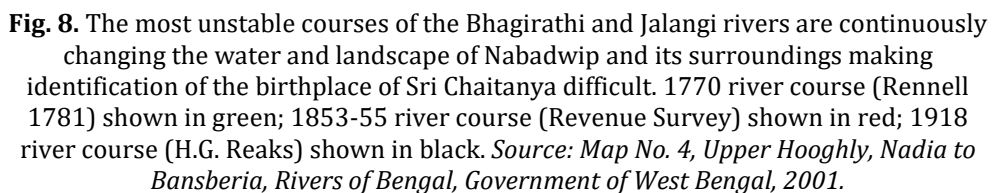
The hydrodynamics of the Jalangi River, characterized by a maximum discharge of 661.89 cumecs and a peak velocity of 1.097 meters per minute (DIWW, Investigation & Planning Division, Nadia, 2003), reveal critical insights into its geomorphological behaviour. The river's dynamics are shaped by its minimal gradient—a slope of merely 15 centimetres per kilometre—and a substantial sediment load (Das, 2013). Flowing through an easily erodible floodplain, this negligible slope contributes to the elongation of the river's course, fostering the development of pronounced meanders as a mechanism to accommodate its discharge volume.

The low gradient encourages increased meander amplitudes until neck cut-offs occur, effectively resetting the river's energy levels by steepening the gradient temporarily (Islam et al., 2020). This cyclical process causes the river to oscillate within its meander belt, a phenomenon particularly evident in deltaic plains. Near river confluences, such as those at Danki Nadi-Bhagirathi and Ajay-Bhagirathi, meander amplitudes further increase due to hydrodynamic instabilities arising from the interactions between converging flows (Guchhait et al., 2016; Islam et al., 2020).

The Bhagirathi–Jalangi confluence near Nabadwip exemplifies these geomorphological dynamics, where the river exhibits heightened instability. The interplay between the converging channels induces rapid geographical transformations, as depicted in fig. 8. This unstable fluvial landscape underscores the volatile nature of the region's riverine environment and highlights the ongoing morphodynamic changes that influence its spatial configuration.

Rennell's map provides a crucial reference point, demonstrating that in the late 18th century, Nabadwip was encompassed by the channels of the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers, and further divided into at least three distinct segments by additional river channels (fig. 6). The dynamic and fluid nature of these river systems, as evidenced by temporal hydrological changes, has significantly altered the geographical configuration of the region.

Satellite imagery analyses reveal multiple cutoffs between Katwa and Nabadwip, underscoring persistent morphological transformations within the Bhagirathi River basin. Notably, the Mayapur–Sankhapur cutoff in 1989 was a critical geomorphic event, leading to the formation of the Purbasthali beel (Islam and Guchhait, 2017). The neck-distance in this section, as initially measured from Rennell's map of 1781, fluctuated markedly over time—from 5.62km in 1781 to just 2.20km by 1975, just prior to the implementation of the Farakka Barrage Project.



Subsequent geomorphological alterations include the creation of the Chakundi beel oxbow lake following the Char-Chakundi cutoff near Agradwip in 1994. A second cutoff at the same location in 2008 further highlights the dynamic and unstable channel processes. These significant hydrological changes, which occurred within just two decades, underscore the inherent instability of the lower Bhagirathi stretch from Katwa to Nabadwip (Islam and Guchhait, 2017).

Such transformations have redefined the geospatial coordinates of numerous settlements. For example, Mohonpur and Kahspara, previously situated on the western bank of the Bhagirathi, found themselves encircled by the Chakundi oxbow lake and now lie on the eastern side. Similarly, Idrakpur, formerly on the East bank before the 1989 Mayapur–Sankhapur cutoff, now occupies a position on the West bank. Anticipated future shifts, such as the projected cutoff at Jhawdanga, are likely to reposition Char Kurmipara and Natun Dampal from the East bank to the West.

These shifting river courses have not only reshaped the landscape but also significantly transformed the waterscape and settlement patterns of the region. The persistent geomorphic changes have likely played a role in obscuring the precise geographical location of culturally significant sites. The meandering channels may have engulfed or displaced key historical landmarks, including the potential birthplace of Sri Chaitanya. Consequently, attempts to definitively locate this site must contend with the compounded challenges posed by centuries of fluvial instability and landscape reconfiguration.

4. CONCLUSION

Nabadwip, historically known by various names such as Nadia, Nadiya, Nuddeah, and Noodeah, has long stood as a place of profound cultural, educational, and religious significance. Despite enduring substantial transformations in its geospatial and socio-economic landscapes—partly due to the avulsion and migration of the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers—the town has persistently retained elements of its historical legacy. Although the northern portion of the town has been compromised by riverine changes, portions of old Nabadwip endure, continuing its role as a vital center of learning and tradition.

A critical examination of historical records and scholarly literature indicates that the name ‘Mayapur’, which holds considerable importance in contemporary religious narratives, was a relatively late construct. Evidence suggests that the rural Muslim village previously known as ‘Miyapur’ or ‘Meyapur’ was rebranded as ‘Mayapur’ during the late 19th century under the influence of Kedarnath Dutta. Prior to the 1920s, there is little to no evidence of any association between Mayapur and a distinguished heritage linked to the life

of Sri Chaitanya. Historical connections, however, are discernible in nearby Bamanpukur, which had significant ties to the Sultanate of Gour through its local Chief Magistrate, the Qazi.

The precise connotation of 'Mayapur' as referenced in the *Bhaktiratnākara* remains a subject of ongoing debate. It remains unclear whether the term designates a specific geographic locale within Nabadwip or serves as a metaphorical reference to a sacred earthly manifestation for divine activities. These ambiguities underscore the complexity of unraveling historical truths from religious narratives.

Archaeological and sedimentological methods may offer valuable insights into this unresolved question. The potential identification of Ganga Govinda Singh's temple, reportedly located near Sri Chaitanya's birthplace, through targeted excavation or Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), could be instrumental in advancing the discourse. Additionally, reconstructing the hydrological landscape of late 15th and early 16th-century Nabadwip through paleochannel mapping—including Bamanpukur Khal, Paltar Khal, Alokānanda Beel, and Bhaluka Beel—would provide essential context for historical investigations. Techniques such as sedimentological dating could help establish the active phases of these channels. The significance of local flora, such as the Pora-mae tree in Nabadwip and the Champa tree in Bamanpukur, should not be overlooked. Determining their ages could provide chronological markers supporting other lines of inquiry. These interdisciplinary approaches would undoubtedly enhance the collective understanding of Nabadwip's historical geography.

While uncertainties about the exact birthplace of Sri Chaitanya persist, it remains unequivocal that his birth occurred in Nabadwip. Until conclusive evidence identifies the precise location, skepticism surrounding the devotion of millions who venerate a possibly misidentified site is unwarranted. Rather than undermining existing beliefs, scholarly efforts should aim to foster collaborative research within the broader Nabadwip community to uncover historical truths. By embracing both devotion and rigorous inquiry, the pursuit of knowledge can coexist with spiritual reverence.

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