



PHOTO:  
SOMEN  
SENGUPTA

The Goswami Maharaj temple in Mayapur has the 10 avatars of Vishnu sculpted on its outer wall

## On A Pilgrimage Close To Home

Somen Sengupta

MAYAPUR, OR Sri-mayapur, is a small village in Nadia district that was once known as Miyapur. It was put on the country's map when Srila Prabhupada, the exponent of the Harekrishna movement, decided to build a temple here in the Seventies. The temple is now synonymous with Mayapur — so much so that many people take the sprawling complex to be all of Mayapur, hardly aware of what lies outside it. It attracts visitors from all over the world, both the spiritually inclined and the ordinary tourist.

The first temple built by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Iskcon) is the Chandrodaya temple. It houses a splendid statue of Radha-Krishna and their eight Gopinis. An exhibition section displays the life and works of Sri Chaitanya through clay models and written text. Two smaller temples are under the same roof. One of them has its walls entirely covered by painting and illus-

trations relating to the life of Lord Krishna. Near the temple is a *gurukul* (school) and *goshala* (cowshed). The first is devoted to Vaishnav study; the latter generates medicines made from cow dung.

Another attraction is the Samadhi Mandir of Srila Prabhupada, finished in 1995 at the cost of Rs 10 crore. It was inaugurated by Alfred Ford, greatgrandson of automo-

bile maker Henry Ford. Alfred, a patron of Iskcon, has been given the Hindu name of Ambarish Das.

However, Mayapur is not only about Iskcon. It has a heritage that is centuries old. Many scholars claim that this is where Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was born in the late 15th century, February 1486 to be precise. But this is disputed, as scholars from Nabadweep also claim Sri Chaitanya as their own.

Mayapur has its own Chaitanyamath. One can see a neem tree here which is believed to mark the birthplace of the great saint. Even a hut where he is supposed to have been born is preserved here.

Another place of interest in Mayapur is the Goswami Maharaj Temple of Dashavatar. The construction of this temple was funded by the people of Orissa, so features of Orissa architecture are quite evident in its front gate, which has two roaring lions, and the tower of the temple. The 10 reincarnations (*dashavatar*) of Vishnu are sculpted on its outer wall.

### TOURIST INFO

Reaching Mayapur by bus takes about three-and-a-half hours. Regular bus services are available from Esplanade and Barasat. Iskcon also has regular bus services from its Kolkata branch. Please contact Iskcon, 3C Uttam Kumar Sarani (Albert Road), Kolkata - 17, Tel: 2247-3757. Night stay is possible at the Iskcon guest house and the Birla Guest House. Smoking, loud music and non-veg food are prohibited inside the Iskcon complex.