

# Bhaktivinoda Thakur and Bipin Bihari Goswami

## Bhaktivinoda Thakur's relationship with Bipin Bihari Goswami

– Jagadananda Das –

A name remarkable for its absence in the parampara given by Siddhanta Saraswati is that of Bipin Bihari Goswami (1850-1919), the initiating spiritual master of Kedarnath Datta, Bhaktivinoda Thakur. (1)

Born 3 Sravan 1850, Bipin Bihari was twelve years Bhaktivinoda's junior. He was born in the family of Goswamis whose seat is in Baghna Para, between Kalna and Nabadwip in the Burdwan district. This is the seat of Ramachandra Goswami, the grandson of Vamsivadananda Thakur, an associate of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and the adopted son and disciple of Jahnava Thakurani, the wife of Nityananda Prabhu.

Married at 13, Bipin Bihari moved to Hooghly district. He became closely involved with the Brahmo Samaj, causing a reaction from other members of the Baghna Para family, who insisted that he move back to Kalna. There he began associating with the famous "siddha," Bhagavan Das Babaji, one of the most notable Vaishnavas of the time. He studied the Vaishnava scriptures with Bhagavan Das for nine years. He also studied with another prominent renounced Vaishnava, Nabadwip's Chaitanya Das Babaji. He took initiation from Yajneshwar Goswami in 1872.

He began writing articles almost immediately after initiation and submitted articles on Gaudiya Vaishnavism to various magazines both in Bengali (*Prema-pracharini*, *Samvada-purna-candrodaya*) and English (*The Education Gazette*). He made his reputation in 1877-1880 by giving lectures on the Bhagavatam and attracted the attention of the king of Burdwan, Mahatap Chand. Aftab Chand, Mahatap Chand's successor, also regularly invited Bipin Bihari to the Burdwan palace.

Bipin Bihari Goswami wrote a number of books. The first, written in Sanskrit, *Harinamamrita-sindhu*, was published in 1879. His major work, *Dasa-mula-rasa* (1898), is over a thousand pages long and covers the gamut of Gaudiya Vaishnava doctrine and practice. Other works were *Arcanamrita-sagara* (1883), *Madhura-milana*, *Sara-sangraha*, *Bhava-sangraha*, *Hari-bhakti-tarangini* (1902) and a number of Sanskrit and Bengali poems and songs.

Kedarnath Datta and his wife both took initiation from Bipin Bihari Goswami in 1879, after three years of exchanging letters.(2) Bhaktivinoda Thakur himself summarized his initiation from his guru in his autobiographical letter to his son Lalita Prasad in 1896.

I had been searching for a suitable guru for a long time, but had not found one, so I was feeling disturbed. Whenever I met someone in whom I could have a little faith, when I studied his teachings and character, I would lose whatever little faith I had. I was quite worried, but Prabhu eradicated these worries in a dream. In that dream, I had a hint of what would happen and when morning came, I felt joyful. A day or two later, Gurudeva wrote me a letter saying, "I will come soon and give you initiation."

When he came and performed the initiation rituals, I became cheerful. From that day on the sin of meat eating vanished from my heart and I began to feel a little compassion toward all beings. (3)

In the period that followed, Bipin Bihari and Bhaktivinoda cooperated in the publication of the periodical *Sajjana-toshani*, which first appeared in 1882. Many articles by Bipin Bihari appeared there, as well as his translation of *Vishnu-sahasra-nama*. In January 1886, he arranged for his disciple to be given the title Bhaktivinoda in Baghna Para itself in a ceremony at the Baladeva Krishna temple. (4)

Bhaktivinoda mentions his spiritual master's name in several places in his own writings to offer him respects, as is appropriate Vaishnava etiquette for an author. These appear in works published in 1893 (*Siddhi-lalasa* of *Gita-mala*), at the end of his commentary on the Chaitanya Charitamrita (1894) (5), in his introduction to an edition of *Krishna Karnamrita* (6) in 1898 and in *Bhagavatarka-marichi-mala* in 1901, one of the Thakur's last works. (7)

The two texts from *Giti-mala* are particularly interesting, as they indicate the *siddha* name of Bipin Bihari, which is Vilasa Manjari.

When will Vilasa Manjari and Ananga Manjari [Jahnava Mata] see me and, being merciful, speak the follow essential words?

O Vilasa Manjari, Ananga Manjari and Rupa Manjari, please notice me and accept me at your feet, bestowing on me the essence of all perfection?

In both of these songs, Bhaktivinoda follows the classical tradition established by Narottam Das of praying to his spiritual master in his *siddha* form as a Manjari. It is thus clear that Bhaktivinoda had not only taken initiation, but had also received *siddha-pranali* from his guru. Shukavak Das has argued in his work on Bhaktivinoda that he followed the *Rasa-raja* concept of worship that had been developed in the early days of the Baghna Para line. (8)

In *Kalyana-kalpa-taru*, Bhaktivinoda Thakur also offers heartfelt prayers for the association of Srimati Ananga Manjari in the spiritual world, further showing a strong affinity for Jahnava Mata, the original preceptor in Bipin Bihari Goswami's line.

Cooperation between Bhaktivinoda Thakur and his spiritual master continued on other levels to the very end of the former's active career as a writer and preacher, which may be said to have come about in around 1907, the date of his last published work and after which his health began to deteriorate considerably.

Most notably, Bipin Bihari participated in the meeting of dignitaries in Krishnagar in 1893, helping Bhaktivinoda Thakur to launch the great project of establishing Chaitanya's birthplace in Mayapur. Bipin Bihari's magnum opus, *Dasa-mula-rasa*, written in 1898, not only quotes a verse written by Bhaktivinoda in 1896, but seems to have been inspired by it. (9) In his autobiographical notes to that work, Bipin Bihari proudly mentions Kedarnath Datta as his disciple. All indications are that from 1880 up until at least 1901, the two worked harmoniously. Nowhere has anyone been able to demonstrate that Bhaktivinoda Thakur ever said anything negative or dismissive about Bipin Bihari Gosvami.

Some, like Bhakti Gaurava Narasingha Maharaj(10), say that Bhaktivinoda "did not

imbibe any of the conceptions of Bipin Bihari Goswami." He argues that Bhaktivinoda placed central importance on the chanting of the Holy Names "in contrast to the stress on *siddha-pranali* given by Bipin Bihari Goswami." This of course is nonsense, for on the one hand Bipin Bihari Goswami's first book was written in glorification of the Holy Name (*Harinamamrita-sindhu*), and on the other, Bhaktivinoda himself stressed the *siddha-pranali* method of bhajan in at least three of his books: *Jaiva-dharma*, *Chaitanya-sikshamrita* and *Harinama-chintamani*. Bhaktivinoda followed the *siddha pranali* system himself and passed it on to his son Lalita Prasad, to whom he gave initiation.

### **Did Bhaktivinoda Thakur ever reject Bipin Bihari Goswami?**

This would then appear to be the very image of a perfectly harmonious guru-disciple relationship, were it not for a number of issues that were raised in the years following the deaths of both Bhaktivinoda and Bipin Bihari. The classical statement of this position is given by Rupa Vilasa Dasa in his biography of Bhaktivinoda Thakur, *The Seventh Goswami*:

Bipin Bihari Goswami initially enjoyed a very sweet relationship with the Thakur, but later he is said to have been neglected by the Thakur due to a disagreement about the position of Raghunath Das Goswami. He also assisted the Thakur in his preaching work, but his spiritual advancement was not on the same level as the "Commander-in-chief of the Vaishnavas," as Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji came to be called... (11)

This proposition is riddled with misconceptions, but arises as a result of a need to explain why the initiating spiritual master of Bhaktivinoda Thakur is not a part of Siddhanta Saraswati's disciplic succession. Siddhanta Saraswati may have felt it necessary to reject Bipin Bihari Goswami, but how can this be explained if Bhaktivinoda Thakur himself did not do so?

Saraswati's disciples have adopted his concept of prioritizing teaching (*siksha*) over formal ordination (*diksha*) as a sign of relationship and a marker of disciplic succession. They thus wish to establish that the renunciate bhajanandi Jagannath Das was more significant in Bhaktivinoda Thakur's life than Bipin Bihari Goswami, who represents the Gaudiya Math's *bête noire*—the householder Vaishnava born in the traditional guru families.

At the time Bhaktivinoda was living, however, the *siksha* and *diksha* gurus would have occupied complementary roles, not exclusive of one another. Even if Bhaktivinoda had considered Jagannath to be more advanced than his own initiating spiritual master, a not at all unusual or offensive attitude, this would not have affected his disciplic relationship with Bipin Bihari Goswami. Scripture is clear: there can only be one initiating guru, who is not to be abandoned unless there is a sign of complete destitution from the spiritual path. There appears to be no evidence of this in the case of Bipin Bihari Goswami.

Some representatives of the Gaudiya Math, such as Narasingha Maharaj try to discredit Bipin Bihari by saying that he was engaged in less than exemplary behavior such as smoking tobacco. On the one hand this is hearsay; on the other, this in itself would probably not been considered sufficient criterion for rejection. After all, would Bhaktivinoda Thakur not have been aware of this from the very

beginning of his relationship?

Other oft-heard statements linking Jagannath Das Babaji to Bhaktivinoda as his real spiritual master are that he took vesh from him (another misconception, by the way, for this was a unilateral act performed years after the Babaji's death), or because Jagannath helped him to discover the place of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's appearance, or that Bhaktivinoda called him "Vaishnava-sarvabhauma." None of these, however, indicate that Bhaktivinoda Thakur rejected his initiating spiritual master. It is evident from Bhaktivinoda's relationship with own son and disciple, Lalita Prasad, that he held the diksha relationship to be paramount, at least when it came to the understanding of initiation and disciplic succession.

### **The Raghunath Das Goswami Issue**

A more significant claim coming from the Gaudiya Math is that Bhaktivinoda Thakur rejected Bipin Bihari because he had taken an unsavory stance on the Raghunath Das Goswami issue. Little can truly be ascertained here, but we shall examine it briefly anyway. The setting of this incident is the famous Balighai meeting that took place on Bhadra 22, 1318 (i.e., September 1911). [\(12\)](#)

Here is the summary of this position as expressed by Narasingha Maharaj: In 1911 there was an famous assembly of scholars held in Medinipur (Bengal) wherein the topic of debate was to be on "Brahmin and Vaishnavas." Bipin Bihari Goswami was present at that assembly and, as was already known, he would side with the brahmana community on the platform that brahmana Vaishnavas were automatically superior to non-Brahmin Vaishnavas, due to a brahmana being born in a higher caste. Bhaktivinoda Thakura was also invited to attend that assembly. The conflict between he (sic) and Bipin Bihari was destined. Bhaktivinoda Thakur--not wanting to take a position of confronting and attempting to defeat his "diksha guru" in a public forum declined to attend the meeting on the plea of bad health. In his place he sent Saraswati Thakur (age 37) to represent the Gaudiya Vaishnava Siddhanta in the line of Sri Rupa and Raghunath Das Goswami, as per the teachings of Mahaprabhu. We all know what happened in the meeting."

In his book on the history of the Baghna Pada Vaishnavas, Kanan Bihari Goswami makes the following interesting statement: "He [Bipin Bihari Goswami] defeated the scriptural considerations of the Smarta pandits and demonstrated the superiority of Gaudiya Vaishnavism." Evidently, there seems to be some misunderstanding: both traditions hold that their man was defending the same position.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura did for sometime show formal respect to Bipin Bihari Goswami. But when the Goswami disrespected Srila Raghunath Das Goswami by thinking that he can give blessings to Raghunath Das, the prayojana-acarya, because Raghunath Das was from a "lower caste," the Thakur distanced himself more from Bipin Bihari Goswami. [\(13\)](#)

I have heard, though I have not been able to get it confirmed, that a statement of this type was made by one of Bipin Bihari Goswami's more zealous disciples, a young zamindar by the name of Choudhary Jadabendranandan. This then was attributed to Bipin Bihari, but once this attribution became tradition it has been established a a "fact" though no real evidence can be found to substantiate it. Since Bipin Bihari Goswami spoke strongly at the Midnapur debate that Vaishnavas were superior to Brahmins, this accusation becomes even more doubtful and seems likely to be the

result of some misunderstanding.

All Vaishnavas are agreed that the Vaishnava is superior to a Brahmin in the karma kanda. There are, however, some subtleties that have arisen in the course of time that were objected to by reformers like Siddhanta Saraswati. These were principally the incursion of caste conventions into Gaudiya Vaishnavism. This will require something of a detour into other matters, but we will do so since they are not without relevance to the subject at hand.

The debate around Raghunath Das arises from the fact that of the six Goswamis, he was the only one who was not born in the Brahminical caste. He was also the first person known to have worshiped the Giridhari shila, which was given to him by Lord Chaitanya himself. The question asked by the Brahmin Vaishnavas is why Mahaprabhu confided the worship of Giridhari in him rather than Shalagram, as was worshiped by Rupa and Gopal Bhatta Goswamis? Some consider this to be exemplary behavior on Mahaprabhu's part, setting the standard of behavior for non-Brahmin Vaishnavas, by putting Shalagram worship, like the Gayatri mantra and sacred thread, out of their purview. As with the wearing of saffron cloth, the standards of behavior of the associates of Mahaprabhu are considered law that stands above scripture. Thus, though scripture approves the worship of Shalagram by non-Brahmin Vaishnavas, the maryada followed by most Gaudiyas not born in the Brahmin caste is that they do not do so.

The usual reference is found in Jiva Goswami's commentary to Srimad Bhagavatam (3.33.6).<sup>(14)</sup> He there states that there is no need for a non-Brahmin Vaishnava to perform the savana-yajna, even though the verse clearly states there he is so free from sin that he is "eligible" to do so. Jiva interprets this to mean that a low-caste Vaishnava is more revered than a Brahmin, but that this verse does not specifically permit him to act as a karma-kanda Brahmin. The primary reason for this is that such sacrifices are outside the scope of a Vaishnava's duties or desires. Vishwanath Chakravarti (himself a Brahmin) has elaborated further on this point to some degree, stating that since such sacrificial activities are lower on the spiritual hierarchy than direct service to Krishna, they are not to be taken up even by Brahmin Vaishnavas.

In other words, Gaudiya Vaishnavism historically did not interfere with the social status quo. Siddhanta Saraswati's *daiva-varnashram* ideas were radically opposed to this vision, as he tried to democratize the Brahminical function and open it, so to speak, to people from all castes and races.

Narasingha Maharaj also repeats the received Gaudiya Math tradition, no doubt heard from Saraswati himself, that Bipin Bihari arrogantly claimed that he, as a Brahmin, was in a position to bless Raghunath, a Shudra. This kind of statement is obviously inflammatory. All evidence indicates that Raghunath, as a humble Vaishnava, would have observed the social protocol of the time and would have offered due respects to any Brahmin.<sup>(15)</sup> There is external protocol and inner spiritual achievement. The external protocol is based on social position, not on inner worth. Hari Das Thakur observed the protocols of Jagannath Puri: despite being universally recognized as a man who was as holy if not more so than the Brahmins who served Jagannath, he never attempted to enter the temple there.

Sanatan also respected the Puri Brahmins' ritual purity out of extreme humility and avoided coming in contact with them.

No doubt caste prestige and position are dangerous spiritually and also lead to social abuse. From a Marxist perspective, the only way that the lower caste or casteless Vaishnava could gain a modicum of social prestige was to become a renunciate, in other words, to take himself completely out of society and forfeit any worldly privileges. But such critiques are entirely separate and distinct from those found in the scriptures, where the issue is only whether a lower caste Hindu can enhance himself socially (and by extension his family) by becoming a Vaishnava. As the Vaishnava is supposed to be indifferent to Varnashram, elevation to Brahminical duties through his religious activities or spiritual achievements is clearly counterindicated.

We are, of course, dealing with a feudal mentality that functions within the static agrarian culture of the Indian middle ages. What transpired is to a great degree the result of a clash of civilizations—egalitarian Western concepts had started to be internalized in Bengali society through the reform or renaissance movements that began with Ram Mohun Roy. Though some kind of spiritual egalitarianism may have been inherent in Vaishnavism, I think it is not excessive to say that no external transformation of social hierarchies ever took place in Gaudiya Vaishnava, nor that it was ever intended. In the opinion of a Ramakanta Chakravarty, it never was, though Bengali Vaishnavism did at least stop the hemorrhaging of lower caste Hindus to the socially more egalitarian Muslims, winning them back into accepting Brahminical leadership. With very few exceptions, Mahaprabhu's close associates were Brahmins and the non-Brahmins amongst them were perhaps nothing more than representative "tokens."

Scriptures like the *Hari-bhakti-vilasa*, which suggest that where possible one should take a guru who is a Brahmin, in the absence of which one should take a guru who is in a higher caste than oneself, are marginalized by the Gaudiya Math as a mere concession to the caste-conscious times. Nevertheless, their very sanction in Gaudiya Vaishnava rulebooks would indicate that maintaining existing Hindu caste conventions was not an aberration in Vaishnava society.

To summarize: It would appear that Bipin Bihari took the conventional position held by orthodox Gaudiya Vaishnavas prior to Saraswati Thakur in holding that though a Vaishnava was spiritually superior to a Brahmin, that did not accord a Vaishnava any specific social rights. Saraswati strongly contested this social conservatism and his Daiva Varnashram doctrine was a powerful element in his preaching movement.

To establish Bipin Bihari's position, however, we are on shaky territory, for we are not in possession of any of his writings, nor do we have an objective account of the Balighai meeting that could shed further light on these controversies. With only a partisan account of these matters, we cannot make any conclusive pronouncements. But, on the whole, since Bipin Bihari's position at worst would have been conventional, it does not seem that in itself it would have been cause for Bhaktivinoda Thakur to reject him. And, of course, as stated, there is no evidence that he did so.

## Did Bipin Bihari Goswami reject Bhaktivinoda Thakur?

More significant and troubling for disciples in the line of Bhaktivinoda is evidence that Bipin Bihari Goswami rejected Bhaktivinoda because of "preaching untruths" about the birthplace of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

As mentioned above, Bipin Bihari was one of the first directors of the committee to oversee the worship of Sriman Mahaprabhu, newly established at the Yogapith in Mayapur by Bhaktivinoda Thakur in 1891. However, though many significant personalities in the Vaishnava world participated in these events, not everyone accepted this as the true birthplace of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Not long afterward, controversy arose when a certain Vraja Mohan Das Babaji, an engineer in his life before renunciation, declared that the so-called Yogapith in Mayapur was false and that the real one was in Ranichora, a suburb of Nabadwip that had recently been reclaimed from the receding Ganges. (16)

After the disappearance of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur in 1914 these controversies became quite shrill, and nasty exchanges went on between the followers of Saraswati Thakur and the Nabadwip adherents. This time, however, Bipin Bihari Goswami sided with the Nabadwip Goswamis and in 1919 rejected the claims of Bhaktivinoda and his son in a small newspaper of his own called *Gauranga-sevaka Patrika*.

Unhappy with the Miapur controversy. In order to show his commitment to the Nabadwip, [Bipin Bihari] held a festival in honor of Vamsivadananda Thakur in Kuliya in 1919. He disappeared the same year. (K. B. Goswami, 542) (17)

Since this rejection took place after Bhaktivinoda's disappearance, it may well be that Saraswati and his disciples' heavy-handed approach to the debate contributed to Bipin Bihari's making a break of this sort. However, it is not unlikely that he became convinced that Bhaktivinoda had wilfully fabricated evidence to promote the Mayapur birthsite.

## Bhaktivinoda Thakur and the three books

Did Bhaktivinoda Thakur fabricate evidence to promote the Mayapur birthsite? I cannot answer the question where the historical and geographical evidence is concerned. However, I am seriously disturbed by the evidence that Bhaktivinoda Thakur manufactured literary evidence to support the validity of Chaitanya as avatar and the nine-islands theory of Nabadwip, which in turn is meant to promote the Mayapur birthplace.

In the 1890's, the Thakur wrote a Bengali verse work, *Nabadwip-dhama-mahatmya*, which he published under his own name. This book is a pretty typical "Sthala Mahatmya" style of text. Most Sthala-puranas introduce many puranic or Vedic personalities and ascribe to them activities and words that glorify the place in question. The events described in *Nabadwip-dhama-mahatmya* are quite radical: Madhva and Ramanuja are not the only names that are dropped in this book – there are also demigods, Vedic rishis, and other historical figures like Jayadeva, all of whom spend time in Mahaprabhu's Dham and have premonitions of His future appearance there.

Had *Nabadwip-dhama-mahatmya* been written in Puranic Sanskrit two or three hundred years earlier, it may have been insinuated into the Skanda Purana or Padma Purana and achieved canonical status. But as it is, the Thakur decided to publish it in Bengali and in his own name. This could only mean that he was either sufficiently confident of his own position as a "realized Vaishnava" who could claim to have mystic visions of this sort and be believed, or that he never intended for it to be taken literally as history, but as a fanciful work in glorification of Mahaprabhu. The Gaudiya Math and others who believe in the divine status of Bhaktivinoda take this work as literal "truth," but to those who do not share in the vision of a Nabadwip which has its center in Mayapur, it is a gratuitous fabrication.

The Vaishnavas no doubt believe that in some dimension or alternate reality these events were not only possible, but historically true, even if they were not necessarily so in our universe. In this sense, we can compare it to his other works like *HarinAma-cintAmaNi*, which Bhaktivinoda Thakur wrote as a conversation between Haridas Thakur and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Jagannath Puri, or *Jaiva Dharma*, which includes characters like Gopal Guru Goswami and Dhyana Chandra – a kind of historical fiction, as it were. There is a certain literary license that has been taken here and is not problematic as long as we recognize the genre.

However, three books that the Thakur published as ancient works were almost certainly composed by him. These three -- *CaitanyopaniSad* (1887), *Prema-vivarta* (1906) and *Navadvipa-satakam* (n.d.) have certain common characteristics – they were all connected to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and the glorification of his birthplace. The motives are fairly clear: the Thakur was trying to promote Mahaprabhu's birthplace and he did it in a fashion time-honored in India. He simply wrote the material he needed and attributed it to someone who had historical credibility. Rather than attributing his works to Vyasa or Narottam Das Thakur as did the counterfeiter of the past, he used the names of Jagadananda Pandit and Prabodhananda Saraswati. (18)

Bhaktivinoda Thakur did in fact publish many rare manuscripts of genuine Vaishnava literature, such as *Sri Krishna Vijaya*, many *padyAvalis*, etc. He was not the only one in his time who yielded to the temptation of counterfeiting. Nevertheless, I personally find it problematic that someone who contributed so much to the Vaishnava religion, who worked so hard to instill a spirit of morality and honesty into Vaishnavism, whose life was in general a monument of commitment to service to Mahaprabhu and His principles, who in his worldly life was a justice and so presumably knew a thing or two about ethics and the law, saw fit to take such a chance.

Furthermore, in view of his familiarity with scholarly historical method, it is hard to understand how he thought that he could get away with it. Perhaps he thought his personal probity put him above suspicion. But did he really think that a single manuscript found by chance in mysterious circumstances only to disappear again after its publication would not cause people to examine the published text more carefully? And if that text contains elements of language and content that not only point to a modern origin, but to the very person who claims to have found the manuscript, will our suspicions not be confirmed?

I can only say that in his enthusiasm to see Mahaprabhu's birthplace be glorified and become a center of pilgrimage – as it has indeed become – the Thakur took a chance with his personal reputation and that of his religion. He succeeded in making Mayapur a magnet for pilgrims from around the world. His disciples, grand-disciples and great-grand-disciples have succeeded in creating an environment that is quite extraordinary. Nevertheless, one cannot help but wonder at the *masi-bindu* that stains his otherwise sparkling white cloth. Can we not expect people to ask the question that naturally arises: How can a religion that needs lies to spread its message make any claims to be the truth?

It does not give me pleasure to remind us, who are accustomed to thinking negatively of Bipin Bihari Goswami as someone who was rejected for his caste consciousness and bad habits like tobacco smoking, that he publicly renounced Bhaktivinoda Thakur as his disciple shortly before dying in 1919. The reason he gave for this drastic act was precisely for "preaching falsehoods" connected to the birthplace of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. It is easy to condemn Bipin Bihari Prabhu for having some self-interest in this matter, but the doubts that have been brought up in this article tend to give justification to the Goswami.

I find it rather painful to bring the matter up, and I do so in the full expectation of being heartily condemned, but I would like to see those who love the Holy Name and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu face this problem head on, much in the way that Roman Catholics have decided to accept the terrible things in their history – things which are many times worse than those we have mentioned here – and still find a way to justify their faith.

Faith has to be honest to be genuine, and such honesty has to extend to our forefathers, even those to whom we have attributed the highest spiritual perfection. It is a shock to accept that our divinities may have had human failings, but I think this is a necessary step in facing our own failings.

Human psychology is such that we often compensate for our own human frailties by placing faith in someone else. We say, "I am not perfect, but my guru is. I have no personal qualifications, but this does not matter because the parampara is perfect." This is a psychological trick and results in ego-inflation. By identifying with the guru and the parampara, we appropriate their perfection and their authority for ourselves. Unfortunately, this expands into the kind of distorted personal psychology that is not only historically present in Iskcon, but in many of the interactions between devotees who are otherwise sincere.

## NOTES

(1)The biographical information is taken from Kanana Bihari Gosvami. *Baghnapada Sampradaya o Vaishnava Sahitya*. Calcutta: Rabindra Bharati Vishwa-vidyalaya, pp. 526-32, 541-3.

(2) Bipin Bihari wrote some autobiographical notes in his *Dasamula-rasa*, where he

mentions his relationship with Bhaktivinoda Thakur. The complete text is given in note 4 below.

(3) *Jivani*, 155-6. Translation by Shukavak Das, *Hindu Encounter with Modernity*, p. 92.

(4) The following is taken from *Dasamula-rasa* by Bipin Bihari Goswami (pp.1216-1219):

The best and dearest of my disciples is Sri Bhaktivinoda Kedarnath Datta, who is pleasing to everyone. He is the ornament of the Datta lineage and a true devotee of the Lord. He has received many honors from those who are loyal to the government. He wrote me from Jagannath Puri over a period of three years telling me of his desire for devotion (bhaktyälope?). Then he and his wife took initiation from me at his home in Narail. At the time he first took shelter, he was Narail's magistrate and was living there. His actual home was in Calcutta, the capital city, at 181 Ram Bagan [Lane]. As a government servant he was making a good living and he now has seven sons. Since taking mantra from me, he has liberally supported me and defrayed all my household expenses. From that day, I have had no further worries about my personal living costs, all thanks to the devotion of this disciple. Yet although he has performed such extensive service, he has never been satisfied and always expresses regret that he is not able to do more to serve his guru. He quotes the scriptures *sacchiSyair guru-niSkRtiH*—"Good disciples protect the spiritual master from all danger" and says that he has not been able to fulfill this command. I know it well that both he and his wife often sincerely express regrets like this.

Bhagavati Devi is devoted to her husband-guru and engaged in his service with an attitude of pure devotion, just like the goddess Sati is to Shiva. Just as Kedarnath is a great devotee, his wife Bhagavati is also. When they saw the extent of Kedarnath's devotion and knowledge, the Goswamis of Sripat Baghnapara were very pleased and gave him the title "Bhaktivinoda" along with a certificate. Everyone is aware of this because it was published in the newspaper. Nevertheless, to bring satisfaction to everyone, I reproduce the text of that document here:

zrI-paTTa-baghnApADA-nivAsibhir gosvAmibhiH zrI-kedAranAtha-dattAya  
bhaktAya ziSyAya kRpayA bhaktivinodopAdhiH pradatta |

ziSyasya zrImataH sAdhor govinda-caraNaiSiNaH |  
kedAranAtha-dattasya jayo bhavatu sarvada ||1||  
prabhoz caitanya-candrasya matasya cAnuvartinaH |  
pracArakasya zAstrANAM bhakti-mArga-pravartinAm ||2||  
zrI-rAdhA-kRSNa-viSayAM tava bhaktim anuttamAm  
dRSTvA ko na vimuhyeta loke'smin vaiSNava-priya ||3||  
yAM bhaktiM labhituM zazvat vAJchanti bhagavat-priyAH |  
tAM bhaktiM hRdaye dhRtvA dhanyo'si priya-sevaka ||4||  
jIvasya jIvanopAya ekA bhaktir garIyasI |  
ato bhaktivinodAkhyā upAdhiH pratigRhyatAm ||5||

The Goswamis residing in the holy site of Baghna Para mercifully bestow the title of Bhaktivinoda on the devotee and disciple Kedarnath Datta.

1. May you, our pious disciple Kedarnath Datta, who desire nothing but the lotus

feet of Govinda, be ever glorious.

2. You faithfully follows the doctrines taught by our Master, Chaitanya Chandra, and you actively preach the scriptures that establish the path of devotional service.

3. Seeing your unequalled devotion for Radha and Krishna, O you who are dear to the Vaishnavas, what person in this world would not be enchanted?

4. The kind of devotion that the Lord's dearest associates ever desire to attain is held in your heart, so you are most fortunate, O beloved servant.

5. The supreme and only benefit for the living beings is devotion to Krishna.

Therefore, please accept this title of Bhaktivinoda.

The Goswamis of Baghnapura joyfully gave this honor to him in the month of Magh in the 400th year after the birth of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

The many books that Kedar has written on the subject of bhakti are proof of his vast learning in the subject. **After much research into the matter, he discovered the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Nabadwip Mayapur. Genuine devotees always sing his glories and only the false renouncers and cheaters criticize him.**

Because he is my disciple, I shall not go on and on, but have only told the essential so that everyone knows [of our relationship]. I bless him that he, his wife, children and grandchildren will all have long life and conduct their affairs for the pleasure of Krishna. May he and his wife always be engaged in the service of Krishan's lotus feet.

The following is Bhaktivinoda's note on the title from "Sva-likhita-jivani" (p. 176-177):

I forgot to write one thing. When the leaders of my spiritual master's family saw the work I was doing publishing Vaishnava literature, they were pleased and gave me the title Bhaktivinoda. Here is a copy of the certificate they gave me on that occasion. (See above)

Signed: Sri Bipin Bihari Goswami, Sri Tinkori Goswami, Sri Gopal Chandra Goswami, Sri Gaurachandra Goswami, Sri Ramachandra Goswami, Sri Yajneswar Goswami, Sri Binod Bihari Goswami, Sri Yadunath Goswami, Sri Binod Bihari Goswami, Sri Yogendra Chandra Goswami, Sri Gopal Chandra Goswami, Sri Hemachandra Goswami, Sri Chandra Bhushan Goswami, Sri Kanailal Goswami, Sri Haradhan Goswami.

I responded to this honor by dedicated the following verses to the Goswamis of my Guru Pat.

zrI-kRSNa-caitanya-candrAya namaH  
jayataH zrI-rAmakRSNau bAghnApalli-vibhUSaNau |  
jAhnavi-vallabhau rAmacandra-kirti-svarUpakau ||1||  
vyAghro'pi vaiSNaVaH sAkSAt yat prabhAvAd babhUva tat |  
bAghnApAllyAtmakaM vande zrIpATaM gauDa-pAvanam ||2||  
zrI-vaMzIvadanAnanda-prabhor vaMza-pradIpakAn |  
AcAryAnumatAn sarvAn mad-dezika-varAn prabhUn ||3||  
teSAM prasAda-lezena jaDopAdhau gate mama |  
bhaktivinoda-prakhyAtir dAsasya vidyate'dhunA ||4||  
yeSAM kRpA-lavenApi bhUSito'ham upAdhinA |

teSAM pAda-saroje me sASTAGga-daNDavan-natiH ||5||

zrI-rAmapurataH | kRtAJjalir nivedanam etat teSAM cira-sevakasya sarva-vaiSNava-  
dAsAnudAsasya bhaktivinodopAdhikasya zrI-kedAranAtha-dattasya

1. I offer salutations to Sri Krishna Chaitanya Chandra. May Balaram and Krishna, the jewels of Baghna Para, the beloved deities of Jahnavi Devi and the bringers of fame to Sri Ramachandra Goswami, be ever glorious.

2. I worship the village of Baghna Para, which purifies the land of Gauda. Its spiritual power is so great that it turned even a tiger into a devotee of Krishna.

3. I also worship all the descendants of Sri Vamsivadananda Thakur, my masters and instructors in the spiritual path.

4. Through just a small fragment of their blessings, the identification of this servant with his body has disappeared and henceforth he shall be known as Bhaktivinoda.

5. By their mercy, I have been graced with this title and so I prostrate myself at their lotus feet.

Signed at Sri Rampur by Kedarnath Datta, now entitled Bhaktivinoda, the eternal servant of the descendants of Ramchandra Goswami and all the Vaishnavas.

(5)

*vipina-vihArI hari tAnra zakti avatari  
vipina-vihArI prabhu-vara  
zrI-guru-gosvAmI-rUpe dekhi more bhava-kUpe  
uddharila Apana kinkara*

"Krishna, known as Bipin Bihari, made his energy descend into this world as Bipin Bihari Goswami, my lord. Seeing me, his humble servant, in the dark well of worldly existence, he took the form of my spiritual master and delivered him." (AmRta-pravAha-bhASya, p. 1687)

(6)

*sri-krsna-caitanya-kRpa-patra-sri-bilvamangalaya namah  
guror hareH padaM dhyAtvA zrI-vipina-vihArINaH  
kRSNa-karNAmRtasyeyaM bhASA-vyAkhyA viracyate*

I offer respectful obeisance to Sri Bilvamangala Thakur, the recipient of Lord Krishna Chaitanya's mercy. Meditating on the holy feet of my guru Sri Bipina Bihari and Lord Hari, I am writing this Bengali translation and explanation of the Krishna Karnamritam.

(7)

*vipina-vihArI prabhu mama prabhu-vara  
zrI-vaMzI-vadanAnanda-vaMza-zazadhara*

"My exalted spiritual master, Vipina-vihari Prabhu, is the brilliant moon in the family of Sri Vamsi Vadananda."

(8) Page 93. This still has to be demonstrated, as the exact nature of the Rasaraja concept as distinct from the doctrines of Rupa and Jiva Goswamis has yet to be analyzed

(9) *GaurAGga-smaraNa-maGgala-stotra*, 75.

(10) All references to B. G. Narasingha Maharaj are to his book *The Authorized Sri Chaitanya Saraswata Parampara*. Bangalore: Gosai Publishers, 1998.

(11) *The Seventh Goswami* (Washington, MS: New Jaipur Press, 1989), 142-4.

(12) Goswami, 528. Sources of the information are not given.

(13) We do have the Siddhanta Saraswati version that came out of this meeting, Vaman Maharaj writes in the introduction that he made a statement (Nivedana, page 1) about Raghunath Das Goswami, but no mention is made that Raghunath was a *BrAhmaNa o VaiSNava: TAratamya viSayaka siddhAnta*. NavadvIpa: zrI-GauDIya-vedAnta-samiti, 1995. This is the third edition of this work. The first two were published in 1920 (by the three trustees of the Chaitanya Math) and 1934 (by the *vizva-vaiSNava-rAja-sabhA*), both during Saraswati's lifetime.

(14) Also in the *Durgama-saGgamaNI* commentary on *Bhakti-rasAmRta-sindhu* 1.1.22 and *Bhakti-sandarbhA* 128.

(15) He was a *kAyastha*, which according to the strict conventions of Bengal society made him a *Shudra*.

(16) With modern methods, it should be possible to trace the history of the Ganges bed, on which both sides of this argument hinge. It seems to my layman's eyes that the Ganges has tended to move eastward over the past several centuries, making the more westerly birthplace more likely. See Shukavak Das, p. 107-108, particularly the note on page 108. See also Chakravarti, 396.

Here is some more information, based on *Carita-sudhA*, volume 4, pp. 65-71. The original temple on Mahaprabhu's birthplace was built by Bir Hambir of Vishnupur, who ruled from approximately 1586-1621. This small shrine was claimed by the Ganges. Gaur Govinda Singh, the diwan of the East India Company temple, was an important Vaishnava. He built a second temple on the site in 1780-5, a sixty foot high building with nine pinnacles in red sandstone. This building was submerged in floods in 1876. Clearly, then, Bhaktivinoda Thakur must have been exaggerating somewhat when he said that nobody had any idea where the birthplace had been.

As a result, a few years after Bhaktivinoda established the Mayapur site, in 1304 Bangabda (1897), Sashibhushan Bandyopadhyaya wrote in *Pallivasi Patrika* the first article claiming that the Janmasthan was somewhere in Ramchandrapur. This started the Janmasthan wars. The Mayapur faction started a court case, which ultimately refused to reject the Mayapur claim, but did conclude that Gaura Govindna Singh's temple had indeed been built on the site of Mahaprabhu's birthplace and if anyone could find the ruins of that temple, that would be the deciding factor in establishing the birthsite.

Premananda Bharati, well-known as the first preacher of Vaishnavism in the West, took up the cause in the early 20th century, enlisting the aid of the leaders of the various Vaishnava communities both in Vrindavan and Gauda Desh. Finally, these Vaishnavas decided to find a qualified person to establish the exact site. They

engaged Vraja Mohan Das Babaji, who in his householder life had been a government engineer and had recently taken responsibility for rebuilding the steps around Radha Kund and Shyam Kund.

Vraja Mohan Dasji started his research in 1916. He walked all over the Dham as well as investigating the available records, including the British survey maps that had been conducted from 1757 onwards. Apparently, he was on one occasion beaten up, his sikha cut off, his mala cut and thrown naked into the Ganges by the Mayapur faction. This probably when he entered the Mayapur compound. I have myself seen the vitriolic literature written by Paramananda Brahmachari at around this time, accusing Vraja Mohan Dasji and his backers of all manner of licentiousness in an effort to discredit his efforts. This evidently did not help Bhaktivinoda Thakur's cause with Bipin Bihari Goswami.

At any rate, through his research Vraja Mohan pinpointed the Ramachandra Chora land as the likeliest site of Gaur Govinda Singh's temple. He proceeded to dig more than 700 holes in the ground there before finding a large piece of red sandstone that had been a part of it. He exhibited the piece of stone to an assembly of Vaishnavas and work was begun building a new temple there.

Even so, the effort had exhausted him and he died not long after, turning the temple service over to Charan Das's sakhibhekhi disciple Radhavinodini Dasi. The area was officially named Prachin Mayapur in 1928. The temple was turned over to Ramdas Babaji in 1953.

Clearly, the timing of the Prachin Mayapur birthsite roughly coincides with Bipin Bihari's rejection of Bhaktivinoda, so it is not unlikely that the two are related. For more discussion of the Mayapur birthsite, see *Sridham Mayapur, the birthplace of Sriman Mahaprabhu*

(17) There is some question as to whether K. B. Goswami has given an accurate account of this rejection, since on page 542, he writes that Bhaktivinoda established the "Saraswata Gaudiya Mission," which is true of neither Bhaktivinoda or Saraswati, but nevertheless seems more true of the latter.

(18) I have attempted to demonstrate the unlikelihood that Prabodhananda was the author of Navadvipa-zatakam and the unlikelihood that anyone other than Bhaktivinoda wrote *Prema Vivarta*. See *An analysis of three suspicious texts*