Charismatic Renewal in Gaudiya Vaishnavism (Part I)

Charismatic renewal and institutionalization
in the history of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and the Gaudiya Math

– Jagadananda Das –

"History is the biographies of great men." Thomas Carlyle.

If traditional India could be said to subscribe to a theory of history, it would be the "great man theory," which holds that history moves by the actions of great men upon it. Perhaps the best known of the *Bhagavad-gita*'s 700 verses is the one in which Krishna promises to appear in the world whenever there is irreligious practice or rampant injustice in human society (Gita 4.7). However different this belief may be from the Shi'a's belief in the Mahdi or the Jew's expectation of a Messiah, its influence has been equally pervasive in Hindu society. Not only has it led to messianic hopes for a savior, but also to the conviction that wherever or whenever greatness appears in human society, it is a manifestation of the divine (Gita 10.42). Though such a belief can naturally be exploited for political ends or to buttress the status quo, it has also played a role in the religious sphere as a means of legitimizing change. It thus seems that almost every prominent spiritual leader who makes a mark on Hindu society sooner or later claims to be an avatar, or becomes, as the Indian media disparagingly call them, "a God-man."

This belief is present in almost every branch of Hinduism, whether Vaishnava, Shakta or Shaiva, though its expression may take different forms. Vaishnavas, who resist the temptation to identify themselves with God as the last snare of illusion, still understand the spiritual master in this way, though this identity is based on his being God's "dearmost" or "most intimate servant." Even so, there is a hierarchisation even within this category, and particularly powerful individuals may be identified with some mythological figure, a divine being or "eternal companion" of Vishnu or Krishna. Thus Ramanuja is thought to be an incarnation of Ramachandra's brother Lakshman, while Madhva is taken by his disciples to be an incarnation of the wind-god Vayu. In some cases, the powerful individual may be considered an ordinary person (or jiva) in whom God has invested his potency. The technical name Gaudiya Vaishnavas give such individuals is *shaktyavesh* avatar.

Thus though the scriptures prescribe the indifferent equation of all spiritual masters with God, a de facto distinction exists between the specially gifted individuals who influence the course of religious history by promoting new understandings and others who act to maintain these new traditions with a more limited charisma based on tradition or legislated rights. The very injunction of the scriptures to see the spiritual master as God is one that needs to be enforced in the post-charismatic phase of a religious movement; in the presence of a genuinely charismatic individual, such an attitude comes naturally.

The history of Gaudiya Vaishnavism may also be analyzed according to the "great man" model. This is facilitated by the sociological categories defined by Max Weber, to whom the "great man" is the charismatic prophet, who breaks from tradition to proclaim a radical new message. Though this volume is primarily concerned with an examination of the post-charismatic phase of the branch of Vaishnavism that spread outside of India and took shape as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness under the leadership of its founder, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, the scope of this article is to examine two previous charismatic phases of the Gaudiya Vaishnava religion, the first one brought about by Chaitanya himself, the second coming in the 20th century with the creation of the Gaudiya Math, which was founded by Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, the spiritual master of the abovementioned Bhaktivedanta Swami. I will attempt a comparison of the critique of society and religion against which these two charismatic leaders set themselves, how they legitimized their charismatic leadership, and the institutional models they left in place to routinize their own charisma and legitimize their succession. To conclude, I will briefly attempt to see whether these findings have any implications for understanding the various directions Vaishnavism is likely to take in the 21st century. I will try to do all this succinctly at the risk of making sweeping generalizations without sufficient documentation.

I. Krishna Chaitanya

Much has been written about the social conditions into which Chaitanya was born and which made an enthusiastic revival of Vaishnavism possible. A primary factor was the presence of Islam, not necessarily as a direct threat, but for the effect it had had on Brahminical society, and by extension, to the rest of Hinduism. The Brahmins had become inward looking: obsessed with purity and ritualism while holding on to social forms that had ceased to have meaning in the changed context where they had no influence on polity and a diminished hold on the rest of society. Though they continued to claim an exclusive monopoly on religious life and practice (ritual, study of scripture, etc.), a large portion of the Brahmin community found this religious life sterile. Some amongst them also recognized that all members of society had a religious need that extended beyond the orthodox principle of Varnashram Dharma, which declared that everyone "attains perfection through the performance of his prescribed duty," even though it would take future lifetimes before one could hope to become a Brahmin and attain direct spiritual experience. The alienated Brahmins, many of whom had already gravitated toward Vaishnavism, were looking for a savior.

Krishna Chaitanya was a young teacher in Nabadwip, the cultural capital of Hindu Bengal at the time. He had shown no particular talent for leadership or religion until he suddenly underwent a conversion experience following his initiation into Vaishnavism. Through his remarkable ecstasies while engaging in sankirtan, or congregational chanting, he quickly established his authority as a leader of the nascent Vaishnava movement in his home town. Within a very short period of time—only thirteen months separated the beginning of his ecstatic experiences and his leaving Nabadwip to live in Puri—the basis of a religious movement that washed over Bengali society was firmly established. This was due in part to his own leadership, but also to a great extent to two other figures—Advaita Acharya and

Nityananda Avadhuta—who shared in his charisma and recognized his value as a powerful symbol.

It is said that when Advaita Acharya, a prominent Brahmin and leader of the Vaishnava community, saw the desperate condition of society, he prayed for an incarnation of the Lord. When Chaitanya began publicly going into trance states and claiming to be an incarnation of Krishna, it was Advaita who confirmed his claims and worshiped him with the namo brahmanya-devaya mantra ("I bow to you, the god of Brahminical society"). According to Vrindavan Das, Advaita was also the source of the socially liberal religious ethic of the movement.(note 1)

Chaitanya was soon identified as the yuga avatar, the incarnation of Krishna who had come to spread the religious teaching of the age, the chanting of his own names. The success of Chaitanya's mission was confirmation of his divine status, as Krishna Das wrote in the *Chaitanya Charitamrita*:
In the Age of Kali, the religious practice of the age is the chanting of Krishna's names. It cannot be spread successfully by anyone unless empowered by Krishna himself. Since you have successfully set the sankirtan movement into motion, you must therefore possess Krishna's powers. You have spread the chanting of the holy names throughout the world and anyone who sees you immediately experiences love of God. Love for God is never manifest without the power of Krishna, for Krishna alone is capable of giving love for himself.(CC 3.17.12-14)
Though it is now an article of faith in Gaudiya Vaishnava circles to connect Chaitanya to the Madhva sampradaya, it is important to note that Chaitanya did not derive the legitimacy he enjoyed amongst his followers from Madhva, even though it may be that he derived a portion of it from his connection to his spiritual master Ishwar Puri, and through him, to Madhavendra Puri, many of whose disciples, including Advaita, became a part of his entourage.(note 2)

The consensus in scholarly circles is that a Krishna devotional movement originating in South India made its way north through a Vaishnava-oriented group of Shankarite sannyasis of the Puri and Bharati orders, including Madhavendra Puri. Their principal authority seems to have been Sridhar Swami, who lived in Jagannath Puri, which was also the home base of these particular sannyasi orders. Despite Chaitanya's connection with these lines (to the Puris by initiation and the Bharatis by sannyas), however, his followers quickly identified him as an incarnation of Krishna. By so doing, they placed him in a category outside previously established traditions that allowed him to claim an authority that was *sui generis.*

The post Chaitanya period

Though Chaitanya's personality was the source of the efflorescence of the religious enthusiasm of the Bengali Vaishnavas, he never exercised any kind of administrative direction. He lived an increasingly reclusive life, and his direct input into the society that developed around him was limited. He did not himself give initiation to anyone.(note 3) He never appointed any individual "successor"; nor was there in his lifetime or ever after a central executive body as such. It is often pointed out that Chaitanya left little in the way of written instruction, though Krishna Das Kaviraj has taken pains to establish him as the source of the teachings found in the writings of Rupa and Sanatan Goswamis, the principal authors of the

Gaudiya Vaishnava canon. He also could and did offer advice and act as a final authority on crucial matters. On the whole, however, he served primarily as an inspiration, a divine example and symbolic rallying point, but the nuts and bolts of the movement was left in the hands of others to whom he delegated certain responsibilities.

Of these delegated responsibilities, two are particularly important historically: one was the responsibility to preach, especially among the lower strata of Bengali society, which he gave to Nityananda Avadhuta in Jagannath Puri in 1513. (note 4) The other mission was given to Rupa and Sanatan Goswami to lead exemplary lives of spiritual dedication, to develop Vrindavan or Vraja as a pilgrimage center, and to write scriptures on various aspects of Vaishnava theology and practice.

This instruction to write scriptures ultimately had the greatest influence on the history of the sampradaya as it, more than anything, legitimized and unified it by taking it beyond the enthusiastic effusions of a purely popular movement to one that possessed an innovative and thorough theology and also participated more clearly in the pan-Indian Vaishnava tradition.

Three epicenters of Gaudiya Vaishnavism thus grew: the principal one in Bengal, which would always be the main source of converts; Vrindavan, which remained the ideal spiritual center or ultimate destination for retirement and monastic dedication; and Jagannath Puri which, though it lost considerable influence in Bengal after Chaitanya's death, remained the main center of Chaitanya Vaishnavism in Orissa, not without considerable influence on the religious life of that region. Three distinct institutional patterns thrived in each of these places: In Vrindavan the eremetic style of asceticism became the dominant model; in Puri, it was cenobytic monasticism, or the "math"; while in Nabadwip and Gauda, householder guru or Goswami dynasties dominated.

Perhaps predicably, the early period of the fledgling Vaishnava movement in post-Chaitanya times was not without a certain amount of turmoil, particularly in its homeland of Gauda. The principal reasons for this conflict were the conflicting visions of who Chaitanya himself was and the nature of his teaching, as well as a certain amount of jostling for supremacy among the followers of his leading associates, particularly Advaita and Nityananda.

It was only when the influence of the Vrindavan school, carried east by Narottam, Shyamananda and Srinivas Acharya, was brought to bear in the last third of the sixteenth century, that the Gaudiya Vaishnava world was consolidated and took on the characteristics that held it in good stead for several hundred years. The writing of the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* by Krishna Das in 1612, which reproduced the principal ideas of the Vrindavan school in the Bengali language, may be said to mark the completion of the consolidation process, but the festival at Kheturi in the early 1570s was its defining moment. (note 5)

Along with the theology of Radha and Krishna as the supreme form of the Godhead, the Vrindavan doctrine emphasized the idea that Chaitanya was something more than a yuga avatar—he was the combined form of Radha and Krishna. What this did was to strengthen the basis for the legitimacy of the entire movement by adding

layers of meaning to the Chaitanya symbol; the need for him to be legitimized by any external agent became even less important. Thus though certain passages in the scriptures were reinterpreted—and others invented—to support Chaitanya's claims to incarnation, these played a secondary role in creating faith in his followers and inspiring new converts to the movement.

Expanded liturgical norms were also established at Kheturi, in particular that of lila kirtan. The songs of Jnana Das and Govinda Das in particular, who were both more profoundly influenced by the poetic writings of Rupa Goswami than by the Bhagavata itself, the avowed ultimate scriptural authority of the school, had a tremendous impact on the Bengali popular culture of the time.

Besides firmly establishing the Vrindavan theology, which presented a clear hierarchical understanding of religious experience, culminating in service to Radha and Krishna in the madhura-rasa, the principal doctrine with practical effects for the established at Kheturi was that of the Pancha Tattva.(note 6) This doctrine confirmed the status of Nityananda and Advaita as incarnations of the Deity in their own right, gave specific prominence to Gadadhar as the incarnation of Krishna's shakti, i.e. Radha, and identified all of Chaitanya's other associates as descents of Krishna's eternal companions in the spiritual world.(note 7) This had the effect of confirming the descendants of these now deceased members of the movement's first generation as participants in their charisma. It is notable that the *Gaura-ganoddesha-dipika* even identifies Nityananda's wife Jahnava, as Radha's sister Ananga Manjari, and Virabhadra, his son, as a form of Vishnu, even though neither of them ever met Chaitanya.

It also seems likely that the particular esoteric practices of identifying of identifying as a participant in Krishna's pastimes became a part of the Gaudiya Vaishnava culture of raganuga bhakti at this time (siddha pranali).(note 8) This concept first appeared textually in the writings of Gopal Guru and Dhyana Chandra Goswami, the monks responsible for the prestigious Radha Kanta Math, which stood on the grounds of Chaitanya residence in Puri. Jahnava, an important organizer of the Kheturi festival, was a major force in sixteenth century who changed the orientation of the Nityananda group from the mood of friendship to that of madhura-rasa.

Brahmins and kula-gurus

Despite the stresses on Hindu society in the 16th century, the existing social system was based on timeless principles that the Vaishnavas could and did opt into, despite their philosophical recognition of its limitations. The Vaishnava religion was not a radical departure from the Sanatan Dharma, but a particular interpretation of it. As such it shared in the respect for birth in accordance with the karma theory. It was thus accepted that by birth one participated in the charisma of one's forefathers and that this could be transmitted through to others initiation. With this understanding, the already existing system of hereditary kula gurus serving client families for generation after generation fit perfectly into the operative world view of the time. The Hari-bhakti-vilasa fairly clearly approves of householder gurus;(note 9) on the other hand, there appear to be a clear injunctions against those in the renounced order doing so.(note 10)

Though orthodox renunciates avoided giving initiation, they gained respect for their exemplary spiritual practice. Renunciation, which came to be known simply as bhekh, or "taking the cloth" was open to all castes, and in some cases even became a refuge for lower castes. The dasnami sannyas tradition, which had always been confined to Brahmins only and to which Chaitanya and his spiritual masters had belonged, was categorically rejected, along with its saffron colored cloth.

The babajis, as these renunciates came to be called, could gain a certain amount of social prestige by refusing any claim to social power, i.e., by refusing marriage. If they did get married, any claim to social authority was usually lost and they became marginalized. On the whole, attempts to establish patterns of renounced authority failed in Bengal and tended to collapse into deviant lines or apasampradayas and Jati Vaishnava. (note 11)

Advantages and Disadvantages of the established institutions

Thus, even without the creation of a "hard institution" with a single centre, the Chaitanya Vaishnava movement established itself in Bengal as a single identifiable religion with a strong symbol system and a loose network of "intermediate" institutions of disciplic successions traced to the original associates of Chaitanya.(note 12) Festivals like the one at Kheturi provided informal settings for sadhu-sanga, community bonding or hashing out controversial theological or policy questions. The non-coercive nature of the school permitted a wide degree of variability of value-orientation within the broad Chaitanya Vaishnava standards and there thus existed variations in theology, practice and social ethos among the main branches of hereditary and non-hereditary guru-sishya lines in Bengal. Joseph O'Connell comments on the capacity of these traditional lines to faithfully preserve traditions:

A standard criticism of the hereditary guru-sishya system is that genuine devotion, moral probity and other qualities suitable for spiritual direction cannot be assured by heredity. On the other hand, traditional India seems to have had a rather good record of passing down from one generation to the next the particular expertise and style of performance upon which the reputation and livelihood of such families depend.... Though lacking a centralized mechanism for insuring standards of performance, the Chaitanya Vaishnavas have had subtle ways of exerting peer pressure and influencing reputation within the community as whole. The Vaishnava understanding of guru-sishya relations does allow for abandoning a guru known to be positively bad; and, in the case of an initiating or diksha guru of limited abilities, a disciple may, preferably with the initiating guru's approval, go to one or more others as instructional or siksha gurus.(note 13)

Liberal Bengali social historians have long lamented the transformation of Bengal Vaishnavism from an egalitarian movement that broke through caste barriers as epitomized by Nityananda, to one that returned to the Brahminical domination as a result of the Sanskrit writings of the Goswamis, such as the *Hari-bhakti-vilasa.* According to Hitesranjan Sanyal, "The Goswamis of Vrindavan derived their spiritual inspiration from Chaitanya, but did not seem to have the strong social commitment of the Master."(note 14) Some cynics even argue that Advaita Acharya appropriated the mystic Chaitanya to restore Brahminical influence over a disintegrating Hindu society. The Brahmin Vaishnavas made some cosmetic

adjustments to their social doctrine, as powerful elites are wont to do. Some concessions had to be made to the lower castes and these concessions were made, but real control of the movement remained in the hands of the Brahmins. The fact that over 75% of Chaitanya's associates were Brahmins may be taken as evidence.(note 15) Whatever advances the lower castes made in Chaitanya's movement, the general feeling is that it simply preserved the status quo.

But the mechanism for social and spiritual relief to the underprivileged and oppressed sections of society developed by the Gaudiya Vaishnavas was overlaid with orthodox ritualism which suppressed the remnants of the spirit of freedom in respect of actual social action. In effect, the dichotomy of Gaudiya Vaishnavism became an effective medium for diffusing social tension growing from the rise of people from the lowest strata into importance and thus for maintaining the status quo. (Sanyal 1981:64)(note 16)

It is quite true that Bengal Vaishnavism did not change the social system as found in Bengal; rather, it made use of it. There are positive ways at looking at the preservation of the so-called "status quo." Joseph O'Connell, for instance, argues that Chaitanya Vaishnava values helped defused Muslim-Hindu tensions, and also preserved social peace within Hindu society, a benefit that accrued to all, not only the Brahmins.(note 17)

Whatever successes the system may have had, there were certain failures. The critics are not altogether without merit. Thus even though Chaitanya Vaishnavas universally affirmed that Krishna bhakti is available for all—including women, Shudras and sinners, certain lineages retained an abhorrence for contact with lower castes and refused to give initiation to them. In some cases, they may have authorized non-Brahmin disciples to carry out this function amongst outcastes. The inevitable consequences of this are explained by R. K. Chakravarti:

The assertion of Brahminical dominance in a religious movement that was rooted in mysticism, and which was anti-caste and anti-intellectual, inevitably led to the growth of deviant orders. If a Brahmin guru tried to initiate persons belonging to castes lower than the Shudra caste, the motive behind such initiation was questioned and the orthodox elements gave him the bad name of a Sahajiya and expelled him from the Gaudiya Vaishnava order.(1985:324)

Thus the Hindu tendency to enforce social rigidity rather than correct dogma in the world of Vaishnava orthodoxy.

NOTES

(1) Chaitanya Bhagavata, Madhya 6.167-9: "If it is your intention to distribute devotion, then you must also give it to the women, the lower castes and the uneducated. Those who would withhold devotion or obstruct your devotees out of pride in their knowledge, wealth, social class or ability to practice austerities are most sinful. May they die and roast in hell, while the lowliest outcaste dances in joy at the sound of your holy name."

(2) There is much reason to believe that the connection to Madhva is a fabrication that became necessary in later times to legitimate the Gaudiya school outside of Bengal and has been preserved for its continued usefulness as a source of such legitimacy. S. K. De has voiced the principal arguments in his work. *The Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement,* 13-24. See also Friedhelm Hardy, "Madhavendra

Puri," JRAS, 1979. Indeed, most scholars find these arguments against a Madhva connection to be most persuasive, while only followers of Chaitanya Vaishnavism refuse to entertain the possibility. See also my article on this website. For the Gaudiya position, see B. V. Narayan Maharaj's *Five Fundamental Essays* , pp. 55-76.

(3) Sanatan Goswami's commentary to Hari-bhakti-vilasa, 2.1: "Since it is impossible for him to have directly instructed him [in the mantra], as the presiding deity of the consciousness, he is the supreme guru of all beings. Thus it is legitimate for [Gopal Bhatta] to call him his guru." Joseph O'Connell explains: "There is a standard explanation (or restatement) of the anomaly that Chaitanya, though founding an emergent tradition (or meta-sampradaya) of devotees, seems not to have bestowed diksha himself. It is to say that Chaitanya is the samashti-guru or collective spiritual master for the age, while his several associates are the vyashti-gurus, or particular spiritual masters."

(4) This incident is described in *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, Antya 5.222-229. According to the *Nityananda-vamsa-vistara*, a later book, Chaitanya's instructions to Nityananda included the order to get married and to establish a hereditary line of gurus.

(5) Chakravarti (1985), 235-38; H. Sanyal (1989), esp. Ch. 10.

(6) Both the doctrine of Chaitanya as the combined form of Radha and Krishna and that of the Pancha Tattva are credited to Svarupa Damodar, a close associate of Chaitanya in Puri. Though the Pancha Tattva idea seems to have come to Kheturi without passing through Vrindavan, the other certainly received is potent force through the theological efforts of the Vrindavan school.

(7) This doctrine was put to paper in the *Gaura-ganoddesa-dipika* by Kavi Karnapur, who was present at Kheturi, in 1572, around the same time.

(8) The principle was that the possiblity of attaining the ultimate goal of spiriutal life, a role in the eternal pastimes of Radha and Krishna, came through establishing a connection through disciplic succession with Chaitanya's original companions.

(9) 4.41. Sanatan Goswami's gloss of amnayagatam.

(10) Bhagavata-purana 7.13.8, quoted in Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu 1.2.113. This is taken as one of the ten principle prohibitions of devotional practice.

(11) The reasons for this have not been fully explored, but may well be traced to local traditions, i.e. the strength of Tantricism in Eastern India.

(12) I borrow the terms "hard, soft and medium institutions" from Joseph O'Connell, who defines a hard institution as one "with centralized executive authority with coercive sanctions, and mechanisms for marshalling extensive mundane resources for community interests or for mobilizing adherents against external threats." Soft institutions are "symbolic means of articulating their cherished mode of loving devotion to Krishna, prema bhakti. Such 'soft' symbolic institutions are bound up with the production and utilization of religious literature (sahitya, shastra) and with a complex repertoire of recommended devotional practices (sadhana)."

Intermediate organizational institutions in Gaudiya Vaishnavism are "diverse and diffuse networks of affiliation, formed through groups of religious mentors (gurus) and their disciples (sishyas). Typically, these groups are voluntary and hence non-coercive." From "Chaitanya Vaishnava Movement: Symbolic Means of Institutionalization." in Organizational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements. Ed. J.T. O'Connell, 1999, 215-239.

(13) ibid.

(14) See Hitesranjan Sanyal (1981:64).

(15) There were others that laid claim to the charisma of one or the other of Chaitanya's associates, but of these only a few were non-Brahmins, and of the non-Brahmins, only the Thakurs of Srikhanda had widespread influence.

(16) In any case, as R. K. Chakravarti argues, without a change in "means of production," genuine social change was impossible.

(17) "The Impact of Devotion upon the Societal Integration of Bengal." *Studies in Bengal Literature, History, and Society.* Ed. Edward C. Dimock Jr. New York: Learning Resources in International Studies, 1974; reprinted in *Studies on Bengal.* Ed. Warren Gunderson. East Lansing: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1976, 33-42.

Charismatic Renewal in Gaudiya Vaishnavism (Part II)

II. Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati

Our second "great man," Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, was a charismatic figure who acted as a reformer of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition and, according to some, broke with it. Though the extent of his influence on Bengali society as a whole was nowhere near that of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, he must nevertheless be included among the many Bengali reformers in the 19th and early 20th centuries who contributed to the revitalization of Hindu pride in its own traditions. His role in inspiring others to carry the Chaitanya Vaishnava message beyond Bengali society alone makes him worthy of examination.

Unlike Chaitanya, Saraswati was not an ecstatic, but an ascetic and intellectual, who was driven by a vision of the potential glory of Chaitanya Vaishnavism and by the desire to overcome the restraints placed on it by contemporary conditions. He saw himself as continuing his father Bhaktivinoda Thakur's attempts to rationalize Gaudiya Vaishnavism and bring it into the modern age. Ironically, in view of his later preaching, part of Saraswati's charisma came from being the son of this leading Vaishnava. Born in 1874 in Jagannath Puri, Saraswati (the hagiographers say, as the answer to the Thakur's prayer for a "ray of Vishnu") was both materially and spiritually advantaged as Bhaktivinoda Thakur's son. He participated with his father in the publication of books and periodicals; on several occasions, he took

extended trips with his father to important sites connected with Gaudiya Vaishnava history and accompanied him to Puri in 1901 after his retirement, where the two intended to live a life of devotional dedication together.

Nevertheless, whereas Bhaktivinoda Thakur, though possessing strong opinions about the needs for reform in Gaudiya Vaishnava society, stayed within the traditional structures of the sampradaya and dealt with it in a conciliatory manner, Saraswati took a more directly confrontational approach. As a reformer, he broke with the traditional authority structures in the Gaudiya Vaishnava world. This, coupled with the desire to make use of modern institutions to preach Gaudiya Vaishnavism, resulted in the creation of the Gaudiya Math in 1920.

Much has been made of the perceived illegitimacy of Saraswati's initiation. Nitai Das, for example, catalogues the various differences between the Gaudiya Math and contemporaneous Gaudiya Vaishnava disciplic lines, some of which are major, others minor.(note 18) We will attempt to look into some of the most fundamental of his innovations here.

Saraswati's social philosophy

In his brief mention of the Gaudiya Math (or Gaudiya Mission), Ramakanta Chakravarti states that it

...ostensibly had no social aim. It did not pretend that it was an organization with a social mission. But it set up schools, libraries, research centers, and free hospitals. These, however, had only secondary importance. Its primary object was to preach mysticism.(1985:398)

Though Saraswati's ultimate purpose may indeed have been mystical, it is a serious error to underestimate the social concerns that underlay the creation of the Gaudiya Math. Saraswati's interest in the sociology of Gaudiya Vaishnavism were no doubt inspired by his father's articles on the subject in *Sajjana-toshani*,(note 19) which presented a wide-ranging critique of the social structures in Bengal, and in particular within the Vaishnava world. In 1900, Saraswati published a book, *Bange samajikata* ("Social relationships in Bengal"), that indicate a preoccupation with the subject.(note 20) In a letter written in 1910, Bhaktivinoda Thakur told him to "establish the *daivi varnashram* dharma—something you have already started doing" (note 21) What exactly Bhaktivinoda Thakur was refering to is not clear, but evidently it was an acknowledgment that Siddhanta Saraswati was already active in some kind of social reform program based on Vaishnava principles. Saraswati's researches into the Sri Sampradaya also seem to have informed his thinking about reforming social structures, if not in Bengal as a whole, at least in Bengal Vaishnavism.(note 22)

A defining moment of Saraswati's career came on Sept. 8, 1911 when he participated in an assembly in Balighai, Midnapore, where Vaishnavas from all over Bengal were summoned to debate aspects of the recurring Brahmin and Vaishnava controversy. The probable points of discussion were whether those belonging to non-Brahmin castes were authorized to worship Shalagram Shila after receiving Vaishnava initiation, or to act as acharyas by giving initiation in the mantras.(note 24) Saraswati's arguments presented on that occasion were later published as a booklet *Brahmana o Vaishnava taratamya vishayaka siddhanta* ("Ascertaining the relative

positions of Brahmins and Vaishnavas"). This is one of the earliest available expressions of Saraswati's ideas that led to the eventual creation of his separate branch of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and is therefore an important document to which we will refer to often in this essay.(note 25)

From the point of view of European culture, the arguments presented by Bhaktivinoda and Saraswati appear self evident. Indeed, the general democratic thinking that had arisen in the European enlightenment was not without influence on the English-educated new aristocracy of Bengali, from which the Brahmo Samaj, the first wave of Hindu modernization, had sprung and to which Bhaktivinoda himself belonged. The educated classes saw India through the eyes of their British rulers and deeply felt the need to make changes. In the later 19th century, with the rise of the Ramakrishna Mission, reform and revival joined hands and there was a general recrudescence of pride in Hindu culture. Bhaktivinoda and Bhaktisiddhanta were a part of this movement. Their feeling was the Vaishnava culture was in no way inferior to any other religious system; indeed, that it was superior. Nevertheless, they admitted the need for certain societal reforms. Bhaktivinoda's principal criticisms concerned the deteriorating morality in the Vaishnava world. He saw no harm in maintaining the institutions that had served Gaudiya Vaishnavism for three centuries, as long as everyone did what they were supposed to. Vaishnava gurus should lead exemplary lives of religious leadership while renunciates were to either maintain their vows of chastity and poverty or take up a respectable householder life.

Bhaktivinoda wrote that a man's caste should never be determined by birth alone, but according to his actual qualities or nature. Thus a son's caste might be quite different from that of his parents. It should not be considered at all before one attained the age of 15 and once fixed should be preserved and protected from the assaults of so-called samaja-patis, zamindars, or government.(note 26)

Bhaktivinoda also proposed a solution for the so-called Jati Vaishnavas, considered untouchable by the higher castes. He asked them to give up begging for a living and practices deviating from the Vaishnava orthodoxy and take up making an honest living from cottage industries.

In *Brahmana o Vaishnava*, Saraswati furthers the cause by presenting arguments for the existence of caste mobility in ancient times, citing the Mahabharata, Puranas and even the Smritis and Dharma Shastras. He also points out how Bengali social customs had deviated in other ways from the pristine Vedic model.(note 27) When Saraswati began taking disciples, as an aspect of his effort to establish *daivi varnashram*, he would give the sacred thread and Gayatri mantra to his disciples, no matter what their caste, thus appointing them as Brahmins, or what he hoped would be an exemplary class of spiritual leaders. This was a controversial move, though by no means the most controversial one that he took.

In 1918, Saraswati took another major step in his plan for *daivi varnashram* by initiating himself in a new order of sannyas that had a form quite distinct from the existing Vaishnava tradition of bhekh. He took the reviled saffron cloth, seen by Vaishnavas as representative of the "Mayavada" sects of Hinduism, and the triple staff (*tridanda*), reviving a tradition that though mentioned in the Puranas never had

much currency in any of the Vaishnava lines.(note 28) Saraswati's objective here was twofold: to criticize the existing system of renunciation, which he felt brought the institution established by Rupa Goswami into disrepute, and to create a committed preaching brotherhood of impeccable character. The Gaudiya Math sannyasi, though fully committed to his spiritual practice, was to be a part of society, not divorced from it. The essence of this attitude of renunciation was to be *yukta-vairagya*, mentioned by Rupa Goswami in *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu* and which seems to give licence for a "this-worldly asceticism."(note 29)

Saraswati's initiation (bhagavati diksha)

Just as Saraswati rejected Brahminical status by birthright, he similarly rejected the idea of automatic accession to guru status by the same means. This is one of the lynchpins of the Gaudiya Math and requires some detailed analysis, especially since legitimacy in Gaudiya Vaishnavism (even in some cases, to the deviant lines) customarily required initation in a recognized line leading back to one of Chaitanya's associates. Saraswati claimed to be initiated by Gaura Kishor Das Babaji, but contrary to custom, placed no importance on the line of discip012 succession in which his guru himself had taken initiation and never communicated this line it to his own disciples.(note 30) Rather, he innovated something called the bhagavata-parampara (see attached diagram). Furthermore, Saraswati clearly marked his separation from the rest of Gaudiya Vaishnavism by giving initiation to Vaishnavas who had already received the mantra from a family guru (kula-guru).(note 31)

Though some point to the fact that Saraswati "did not have high regard for Bipin Bihari Goswami" (his father's spiritual master),(note 32) it seems that his quarrel was not with an individual, by with the entire existing system. Saraswati claimed that the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition had been infected by a kind of ritualistic approach to religion, styled as vidhi-marga, in opposition to the spontaneous devotional spirit of the bhagavata school of Vaishnavism that had existed at the origins of Chaitanya's movement.

Siddhanta Saraswati took initiation from Gaura Kishor Das Babaji in January, 1901. Legend has it that he had to ask his master three times before being accepted, as the humble hermit of lower caste background at first doubted the sincerity of the well-to-do scholar. There are differing ideas about the type of initiation Saraswati received: according to some biographers he was given mantra, others it was a bhagavati diksha.(note 33) Not surprisingly, bhagavati diksha is a concept unfamiliar to most people, even those within the Gaudiya Math, as the only kind of initiation current in Vaishnava circles has always been of the Pancharatrika type. The result is that many have wasted much time and effort unnecessarily trying to establish that Siddhanta Saraswati received Pancharatrika-type mantra initiation from Gaura Kishor Das.

We get an idea of what Siddhanta Saraswati meant by bhagavati diksha from his *Brahmana o Vaishnava* essays where he cites the example of Hari Das Thakur, a Muslim convert, who likely never received Pancharatrika initation, who says:
I have been initiated into a vow to perform a great sacrifice by chanting the holy name a certain number of times every day. As long as the vow to chant is unfulfilled, I do not desire anything else. When I finish my chanting, my vow comes to an end

(dikshara vishrama)...I have vowed to chant ten million names in a month. I have taken this vow (diksha), but it is now nearing its end. (note 34)
Saraswati continues, "Unless one becomes qualified as a sacrificial Brahmin in the sacrifice of chanting the holy names, the name of Krishna does not manifest. Although Hari Das was not a seminal or Vedic Brahmin, he had attained the position of a qualified initiated (daiksha) Brahmin."(note 35) In other words, the simple commitment to regularly chant the holy names a certain number of times constitutes bhagavati diksha.

Saraswati then goes on to distinguish between the Bhagavata and Pancharatra schools of Vaishnavism. According to his analysis, though there were originally many categories of Vaishnava, all but two of which had been lost. These were the Bhagavatas, whom he associates broadly with bhava-marga, or the path of emotion (raganuga bhakti), and the Pancharatras, who are associated with the ritualistic path of deity worship (vidhi-marga). The former followed the ecstatic path of chanting the Holy Name, the religious procedure meant for the Age of Kali, while the latter followed a path that had been prescribed in a previous age.(note 36)

Saraswati divides the four principal Vaishnava acharyas according to these two categories, assimilating Madhvacharya and Nimbaditya to Bhagavata-marga and Ramanujacharya and Vishnuswami to the latter. Nevertheless, to a greater or lesser extent, he admits there had been an intermingling of the two broad groups of Vaishnavas, with the elements of the Bhagavata culture based on hearing and chanting being accepted by the Pancharatrikas and the Bhagavatas accepting the need for deity worship on the lower stages of practice (kanishtha-adhikara).

According to Saraswati, though Madhva strictly speaking followed the bhagavata-marga and Madhavendra Puri had accepted initiation in his line, neither Madhavendra nor Chaitanya accepted his doctrines, which had in time been infiltrated by Pancharatrika ideas. In fact, Saraswati even equates Madhva's "Tattva-vada" with Pancharatra. Saraswati cites Baladeva Vidyabhushan who, though considered by many to be wholly responsible for the Gaudiyas claims of connection to the Madhvas, pointed out four teachings in the Madhva line to be particularly unacceptable to Gaudiya Vaishnavas.(note 37) Thus, Saraswati says, "This Tattva-vada, or Pancharatrika system, is not acceptable in the opinion of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Rather, He taught the path of bhagavata-marga." (ibid.)

Saraswati further goes on to associate everything that is connected to the vidhi-marga with Pancharatra, and all that is with the raga-marga to the Bhagavata path. This is particularly significant, especially in view of the claims of traditional Gaudiyas to be faithfully following the raganuga process and to whom initiation and the practice of raganuga are integrally linked. He writes,
The regulated worshipers on the Pancharatrika path serve their worshipable Lord Narayan here under the shelter of two and half rasas—shanta, dasya, and sakhya with awe and reverence. Above Vaikuntha is Goloka Vrindavan, where Sri Krishna Chandra, the perfect object for all five rasas, is eternally worshiped by His devotees who are the repositories of love... The worshipable Lord of the Pancharatrika Vaishnavas resides in Vaikuntha, and the worshipable Lord of the Bhagavata Vaishnavas resides in Goloka. (121-2)

Saraswati then directly criticizes the situation in the contemporary Gaudiya Vaishnava world:

The Pancharatrika Vaishnava principles of medieval South India have to some extent entered the current practices of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas. Descendants of the Gaudiya Vaishnava acharyas became more or less attached to the path of archan, like the followers of the Pancharatras, and spread subordination to Sriman Mahaprabhu, sometimes in its pure form but more often in a perverted form. Like the householder acharyas of the Ramanuja sampradaya who are addressed as Swamis, Gaudiya householder acharyas have similarly accepted the title of Goswami. While preaching the pure path of bhava explained in the Srimad Bhagavatam, Sriman Mahaprabhu distinguished it from mundane formalities, but in due course of time His teachings have become distorted into a branch of the Pancharatrika system. This, however, is not the purpose of Sriman Mahaprabhu's pure preaching. (98-99)

This criticism he extended to the hereditary gurus of the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya for further distortions:

...some immature Pancharatrika mantra traders are presenting imaginary material names and forms as the goal of life and the path of perfection (siddha pranali); in this way they gratify the minds of their disciples as well as disclose their own foolishness and ignorance of the Vaishnava literatures.(119)

Followers of the Gaudiya Math hold that the siddha pranali tradition is not to be found in the earliest texts of the school. They have a very different idea of the practice of raganuga bhakti. The spiritual identity is something which comes out of one's inner being as a result of purification through spiritual practice and not through formal instruction. This implication is present in the following statement by Sridhar Maharaj:

To get the mantra from a sat guru, a genuine guru, means to get the internal good will or real conception about the Lord. The seed of a banyan tree may be a small seed, but the great big banyan tree will come out of that seed. The will with which the particular sound is given by the guru to the disciple is all-important. We may not trace that at present, but in time, if a favorable environment is there, it will express itself and develop into something great.(note 38)

To summarize, it would appear that Saraswati went beyond simply criticism of the deterioration of morality in the sampradaya, but attacked its very foundations as established at the Kheturi festival.

Siddhanta Saraswati and the "hard institution"

According to one legend, Gaura Kishor gave Siddhanta Saraswati the traditional instruction for renunciates to keep away from Calcutta, which he called Calcutta kalira brahmanda, "Maya's universe," and avoid taking disciples. According to Saraswati's biographers, he had a vision in 1915 in which Gaura Kishor and many other great saints of the disciplic succession enjoined him to preach widely. This vision confirmed Saraswati's intuition and gave him the determination to take tridandi-sannyasa system and establish the Gaudiya Math.

In view of the attempts made by Siddhanta Saraswati to establish the Gaudiya Math and its evident successes, it is rather surprising to find in his writings a very pessimistic attitude to institutional religion as such. Perhaps this derived from

inevitable jostling for power amongst his disciples while he was still alive, or perhaps from a deepseated philosophical conviction. In 1932, he wrote,

The idea of an organized church in an intelligible form, indeed, marks the close of the living spiritual movement. The great ecclesiastical establishments are the dikes and the dams to retain the current that cannot be held by any such contrivances. They, indeed, indicate a desire on the part of the masses to exploit a spiritual movement for their own purpose. They also unmistakably indicate the end of the absolute and unconventional guidance of the bona-fide spiritual teacher.(note 39)

In view of the above vision of organized religion—that of an outsider and prophet—it is perhaps not surprising that there was a disruption in the organization of the movement after Saraswati's death. It is not altogether clear how he intended the charismatic center of the movement to be preserved, or how the principle of bhagavata-parampara was meant to be continued. The bhagavata-parampara idea had never stopped Saraswati from initiating disciples according to a Pancharatrika model. On the other hand, his ideas about unconventional leadership may have prevented him from designating a successor, in the expectation that a true spiritual leader would emerge from the ranks of his disciples. His principle instruction on his deathbed appears to have been for everyone to "work together to preach the message of Rupa and Raghunath."(note 40)

Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati left a council of three governors to handle the affairs of the Math, Ananta Vasudeva, Paramananda and Kunjabihari, without designating any of them as acharya. All three were brahmacharis, and with the presence of a sizable contingent of sannyasis, it does not seem that his intention was that they should form anything other than an ad hoc group to handle the management of the properties and continued publication of Vaishnava literature. Nevertheless, Kunjabihari (who upon taking sannyas in 1948 became Bhaktivilas Tirtha) and Ananta Vasudeva (who in 1941 became Bhaktiprasad Puri) both had their individual charisma and their own group of dedicated followers. There were no doubt others who saw themselves as playing the traditional guru role.

The Ramakrishna Mission had survived the untimely passing of its founder by the election of a single successor and there was little protest when the leaders amongst Saraswati's disciples chose Ananta Vasudeva to act as acharya. Unfortunately, this did not sit well with Kunjabihari and his followers, who familiarly called him guru-preshtha ("most dear to the guru"). Lawsuits and even violence followed, and the disciples of Saraswati either fell into the camp of one of these two, or left in disgust to strike out independently. Sridhar Maharaj, Keshava Maharaj, Goswami Maharaj, Bharati Maharaj and others all founded their own maths in the 1940s and 50s.

Puri Maharaj, or Puri Das as he later called himself, and his close associate Sundarananda Vidyavinoda, both of whom had been intellectual pillars of the Gaudiya Math, took up a spirited regimen of scholarly criticism of their own movement. They abandoned secondary literature and concentrated on the primary works of the six Goswamis of Vrindavan. Puri Das was particularly unhappy about the proselytizing work of the Gaudiya Math, which he considered to have been overly zealous, ill-informed, and offensive to the true spirit of Vaishnavism. To a great extent these two leaders of the organization were disillusioned by the rapaciousness of Puri Maharaj's opponents in the succession battles, which they came to attribute to the very nature of the math institution itself. Yukta-vairagya

was a difficult discipline, indeed; the vices associated with wealth, reputation and power were not the monopoly of any religious school or institutional system.

Puri Das and Sundarananda eventually came to accept the necessity for initiation in an accredited disciplic line and advised all of his disciples to also seek diksha from such gurus.(note 41) The position formulated on the basis of early writings of Chaitanya's followers was expounded in Sundarananda's treatise, "The characteristics of the guru according to Vaishnava theology" (Vaishnava-siddhante shri-guru-svarupa).(note 42) Sundarananda engaged in an exhaustive critique of Gaudiya Math deviations in accordance with the traditional Gaudiya Vaishnava position.

Despite the extremely damaging defection of Puri Das and Sundarananda, the Gaudiya Math survived, but lost much of the momentum that had existed during the life of its founder. One of the strongest critics of the situation was Bhaktivedanta Swami who, as a householder, had been a relative outsider in the Gaudiya Math's heyday. In the 1950's, Bhaktivedanta wrote several articles appealing for a return to the previous institutional unity, but to no avail. With the loss of the strong, centralized "hard" institution, the institutional model of the Gaudiya appears to have reverted to one not so radically from what existed in the Gaudiya Vaishnava world.

First of all, the Gaudiya Math has its "soft" institutions or symbol system, much of which though it shares with the greater Gaudiya Vaishnava sampradaya, is sufficiently different to be a different species: The liturgical corpus, or hymnology is almost entirely based on the writings of Bhaktivinoda Thakur; the great mahajanas of the post-Chaitanya effervesence—Govinda Das, Jnana Das and others—as well as most of the books of the Six Goswamis, other than those that are purely philosophical or theological in content, have been almost entirely purged from the religious practices of members of the Gaudiya Math. The practice of lila kirtan, the nama yajna and other staples of Gaudiya Vaishnava community, are consipicuously absent.

The siddha pranali aspect of the traditional raganuga practice has been entirely jettisoned. As a result, Bhaktivinoda and Siddhanta Saraswati's identities as associates of Radha and Krishna (Kamala Manjari and Nayanamani Manjari) are considered special signs of their eternally perfect status rather than a routine aspect of the Gaudiya Vaishnava culture, even though in at least Bhaktivinoda's case, it was received in precisedly the traditional manner.

Though the Gaudiya Math was born as a "hard" institution, the current situation is closer to the kind of loose collection of disciplic lines that existed in Bengal after Chaitanya's disappearance. A number of Siddhanta Saraswati's disciples set up their own "houses," each of which functions independently. Similar patterns of inter-math discipline based on exclusion, etc., maintains the orthodoxy, and festivals, etc., assure their continued association. There is, however, little real cooperation among these maths or missions, whose relative success depends on the individual charismatic powers of their leaders. The recent attempt to create an association of Gaudiya Maths to foster cooperation and pooling of resources, the World Vaishnava Association, has not met with much success.

The method of preserving the disciplic lines in the Gaudiya Maths is clearly Pancharatrika in nature. The idea that one has to be an uttama adhikari or "unconventional" spiritual master before one can take disciples has been abandoned and the idea that one can take disciples in a "routine" manner accepted. The process of succession in these maths has, on the whole, been comparatively trouble free, though of course, heredity is not an option; in nearly every case, the parting acharya has named a single successor.

The most successful of the Gaudiya Math's offspring, however, is a special case. Iskcon had its own set of succession problems, which left it searching for ways to resolve the succession conundrum. As a worldwide organization, different situations in different countries have resulted in different real patterns being established. Iskcon's strength as a monolithic central institution is greatest in India and weakest in America, where the "religious free market" appears to favor the individualistic "intermediate" institutional model.

Conclusions

In my 1996 paper, I concluded that Iskcon's future depended somewhat on the appearance of charismatic renewal within the movement. In the intervening years, the three directions of institutional development I pinpointed in that article seem to have remained in place: these are the Ritvik model, which subsumes any possibility of new charismatic leadership, putting "the seal on prophecy," so to speak. The other extreme is the openly charismatic model, led by Narayan Maharaj, an outsider from the Gaudiya Math who rather openly makes claims of esoteric knowledge to which Iskcon's leaders are not privy. After the disastrous leadership of the eleven successors to Bhaktivedanta Swami, Iskcon itself has developed a middle way, in which a certain amount of charismatic leadership is given scope, but one that is nevertheless subject to the approval or sanction of the governing body. On the whole, however, like any institution that seeks self-preservation, Iskcon is wary of the true charismatic leader, whose objectives are invariably destructive to existing power structures. As such, the charismatic attractions of Narayan Maharaj, and to a lesser extent, that of other Vaishnava leaders outside the Gaudiya Math or even Gaudiya Vaishnavism itself, continue to cause a certain level of discomfort within the movement.

The reason for this is rather easy to pinpoint: Siddhanta Saraswati placed so much emphasis on the need for "unconventional" leadership from a spiritual master, to the detriment of the "conventional" leadership of the caste Goswamis, continuously pointing to the ideal example of notoriously unconventional Vaishnavas such as Gaura Kishor Das and Vamshi Das, that the purely bureaucratic functionary leader ("guru by committee vote") pales by way of comparison. In an age where the urge to personal religious experience dwarfs the idea of adherence to duty as a spiritual ideal, the attraction of the charismatic leader will no doubt continue to exercise a hold on the seekers drawn to the Vaishnava path.

On the other hand, as the Ritviks have pointed out, the concepts of bhagavati diksha and bhagavata-parampara open the door to a kind of organization that does not specifically need charismatic leadership at every generational level. This permits

institutions that are more rational in character. The contradiction here is that a certain amount of charismatic leadership is necessary for the promotion of even this idea if it is to take root in Iskcon itself. Whatever little successes the Ritvik movement has had seem to be due to the banding together of disgruntled ex-Iskcon members rather than to any great shows of positive spiritual strength. It seems as though this splinter group is destined to remain marginal unless it can find that kind of leadership.

Within Iskcon itself, it does not seem as at present that there are any individuals who wish to exercise a uniquely dominant leadership over the movement as a whole, living out the traditional role of an institutional acharya. The bad experiences of the immediate post-charismatic phase have left a very deep mark in the consciousness of the movement's current leaders. It is yet possible that the spirit of collegiality and even a certain degree of democracy may take root in the movement, though the problems involved in developing truly modern institutional structures may well be insurmountable.

NOTES

(1) Chaitanya Bhagavata, Madhya 6.167-9: "If it is your intention to distribute devotion, then you must also give it to the women, the lower castes and the uneducated. Those who would withhold devotion or obstruct your devotees out of pride in their knowledge, wealth, social class or ability to practice austerities are most sinful. May they die and roast in hell, while the lowliest outcaste dances in joy at the sound of your holy name."

(2) There is much reason to believe that the connection to Madhva is a fabrication that became necessary in later times to legitimate the Gaudiya school outside of Bengal and has been preserved for its continued usefulness as a source of such legitimacy. S. K. De has voiced the principal arguments in his work. *The Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement,* 13-24. See also Friedhelm Hardy, "Madhavendra Puri," JRAS, 1979. Indeed, most scholars find these arguments against a Madhva connection to be most persuasive, while only followers of Chaitanya Vaishnavism refuse to entertain the possibility. See also my article on this website. For the Gaudiya position, see B. V. Narayan Maharaj's *Five Fundamental Essays* , pp. 55-76.

(3) Sanatan Goswami's commentary to Hari-bhakti-vilasa, 2.1: "Since it is impossible for him to have directly instructed him [in the mantra], as the presiding deity of the consciousness, he is the supreme guru of all beings. Thus it is legitimate for [Gopal Bhatta] to call him his guru." Joseph O'Connell explains: "There is a standard explanation (or restatement) of the anomaly that Chaitanya, though founding an emergent tradition (or meta-sampradaya) of devotees, seems not to have bestowed diksha himself. It is to say that Chaitanya is the samashti-guru or collective spiritual master for the age, while his several associates are the vyashti-gurus, or particular spiritual masters."

(4) This incident is described in *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, Antya 5.222-229. According to the *Nityananda-vamsa-vistara*, a later book, Chaitanya's instructions to Nityananda included the order to get married and to establish a hereditary line of gurus.

(5) Chakravarti (1985), 235-38; H. Sanyal (1989), esp. Ch. 10.

(6) Both the doctrine of Chaitanya as the combined form of Radha and Krishna and that of the Pancha Tattva are credited to Svarupa Damodar, a close associate of Chaitanya in Puri. Though the Pancha Tattva idea seems to have come to Kheturi without passing through Vrindavan, the other certainly received is potent force through the theological efforts of the Vrindavan school.

(7) This doctrine was put to paper in the *Gaura-ganoddesa-dipika* by Kavi Karnapur, who was present at Kheturi, in 1572, around the same time.

(8) The principle was that the possiblity of attaining the ultimate goal of spiriutal life, a role in the eternal pastimes of Radha and Krishna, came through establishing a connection through disciplic succession with Chaitanya's original companions.

(9) 4.41. Sanatan Goswami's gloss of amnayagatam.

(10) Bhagavata-purana 7.13.8, quoted in Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu 1.2.113. This is taken as one of the ten principle prohibitions of devotional practice.

(11) The reasons for this have not been fully explored, but may well be traced to local traditions, i.e. the strength of Tantricism in Eastern India.

(12) I borrow the terms "hard, soft and medium institutions" from Joseph O'Connell, who defines a hard institution as one "with centralized executive authority with coercive sanctions, and mechanisms for marshalling extensive mundane resources for community interests or for mobilizing adherents against external threats." Soft institutions are "symbolic means of articulating their cherished mode of loving devotion to Krishna, prema bhakti. Such 'soft' symbolic institutions are bound up with the production and utilization of religious literature (sahitya, shastra) and with a complex repertoire of recommended devotional practices (sadhana)." Intermediate organizational institutions in Gaudiya Vaishnavism are "diverse and diffuse networks of affiliation, formed through groups of religious mentors (gurus) and their disciples (sishyas). Typically, these groups are voluntary and hence non-coercive." From "Chaitanya Vaishnava Movement: Symbolic Means of Institutionalization." in Organizational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements. Ed. J.T. O'Connell, 1999, 215-239.

(13) ibid.

(14) See Hitesranjan Sanyal (1981:64).

(15) There were others that laid claim to the charisma of one or the other of Chaitanya's associates, but of these only a few were non-Brahmins, and of the non-Brahmins, only the Thakurs of Srikhanda had widespread influence.

(16) In any case, as R. K. Chakravarti argues, without a change in "means of production," genuine social change was impossible.

(17) "The Impact of Devotion upon the Societal Integration of Bengal." *Studies in*

Bengal Literature, History, and Society. Ed. Edward C. Dimock Jr. New York: Learning Resources in International Studies, 1974; reprinted in *Studies on Bengal.* Ed. Warren Gunderson. East Lansing: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1976, 33-42.

(18) "Some Reflections on Initiation." March 19, 1999. www.bhajankutir.net/first-issue.html and subsequent issues, especially "Why Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Never Received Initiation from Gaur Kishor Dasa Babaji" at www.bhajankutir.net/first-issue.html/nitai-zine-vol-7/node5.html. For instance, the *tilaka* (sectarian marking) used by Saraswati and his disciples does not correspond to that of any existing disciplic line.

(19) These articles were mostly succinct and prescriptive rather than descriptive, and dealt with most of the issues that spurred Saraswati to action. See Sukavak N. Dasa, 211-216, 244-249. Caitanya-shikshamrita, 102-111. Sajjana-toshani. vol 2, (1885), 123, 142; vol. 4 (1892), 121-4.

(20) I have not seen this book, though no doubt it would shed some light on the development of Saraswati's thinking at this time.

(21) The Authorized Sri Chaitanya Saraswata Parampara. Swami B. G. Narasingha. Bangalore: Gosai Publishers, 1998. Page 9. Prabhupada Saraswati Thakur. (page 17). No firm date is given for this letter, so it may perhaps refer to the Balighai meeting, discussed below, where Saraswati argues for a more fluid concept of the Varnashram system

(22) Though Saraswati's vision was that Chaitanya Vaishnavism was a universal religion and his social philosophy was meant to reflect this..

(25) Nabadwip: Gaudiya Vedanta Samiti, 1995. It was first published in 1920, making it one of the Gaudiya Math's first books. An English translation has been prepared by Pundarik Vidyanidhi Das. Any quotations here are from that translation, but page numbers refer to the Bengali edition.

(26) Sajjana-toshani, Vol. 2. 1885, pp.123-124.

(27) In Bengali society, there was in fact no system of four castes, but rather a two-tiered system consisting only of Brahmins and everyone else. A hierarchisation of non-Brahmin castes existed, divided into six categories based on the degree to which Brahmins permitted intermingling with them. In the 1931 census, Brahmins represented about 7.5% of the Bengali population, 7.4% belonged to the other higher castes, i.e., Vaidyas, Kayasthas, Khatris and Rajputs. See *Census of India, 1931.*

(28) Saraswati made much of the supposed currency of tridandi sannyas in the Ramanuja sampradaya, but there is not much evidence of any such practice. He also often identified Prabodhananda Saraswati, a Chaitanya contemporary, as being such a tridandi sannyasi, but there is absolutely no evidence anywhere to support this contention.

(29) *anasaktasya vishayan yathartham upayunjataù |*
nirbandhah krishna-sambandhe yuktam vairagyam ucyate ||
Yukta-vairagya is defined as the attitude of one who is detached from the objects of
the senses, but uses them only inasmuch as they have utility in the service of Lord
Krishna." (BRS 1.2.255). It is unlikely that Rupa Goswami understood the concept in
quite the same way that Saraswati did.

(30) I have given the disciplic successions of Bhaktivinoda Thakur as given to his son
Lalita Prasad Thakur and the Bhagavata-parampara delineated by Saraswati Thakur
in my article, "The Parampara Tradition in Gaudiya Vaishnavism", Journal of
Vaishnava Studies. Vol. 5, no. 1. Winter, 151-182. Bhaktivinoda's parampara is also
given by Shukavak Das. B. V. Narayan (1999) has given a rather interesting diagram
attempting to combine the two kinds of disciplic succession. According to him, the
bhagavata-parampara includes the the Pancharatrika.

(31) On the basis of Bhakti-sandarbha 210: "One should give up a mundane guru and
take a spiritual guru." The traditional Vaishnavas hold that "mundane guru" refers
to other authorities such as parents or village elders, not to a family guru, for this
custom is approved in Hari-bhakti-vilasa (4.141), which quotes the Brahma-vaivarta
Purana, "Even the vultures will not eat the dead corpse of the ungrateful one who
abandons the guru in disciplic succession (amnaya-gatam)."

(32) Swami B. V. Tripurari. Sri Guru Parampara: Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura,
Heir to the Esoteric Life of Kedarnath Bhaktivinode. Mill Valley, CA: Harmonist
Publishers, 1998. 37-38.

(33) Prabhupada Saraswati Thakur. Eugene, OR: Mandala Publishing Group, 1997. p.
15. Bhakti Promode Puri. "Of Love and Separation." San Rafael, CA: Mandala
Publishing Group, 2001, p. 48, 82. "esoteric initiation into Bhagavata Dharma." B. G.
Narasingha says mantra diksha. The Authorized Chaitanya-Saraswata Parampara.
Bangalore: Gosai Publishers, 1998. 9. According to Rupa Vilasa Das (Robert D.
MacNaughton), Gaura Kishor gave him "initiation" and the name "Varshabhanavi
Dayita Das." A Ray of Vishnu. Washington, MS: New Jaipur Press, 1988. 18.

(34) CC 3.3.240-1, 124. These translations are by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, which
Pundarika Vidyanidhi uses throughout his translation of Brahmana o Vaishnava.
Swami translates diksha as vow, which seems to fit the context. Neither Siddhanta
Saraswati nor Bhaktivinoda Thakur have explained these verses in their
commentaries to CC.

(35) Brahmana o Vaishnava, 92.

(36) BhP 12.3.52: *krite yad dhyayato vishnum tretayam yajato makhaiù, dvapare*
paricaryayam kalau tad dhari-kirtanat, where paricarya is taken to mean
Pancharatrika temple worship

(37) ibid. 103. These are: Only a Brahmin devotee is eligible for liberation, the
demigods are the foremost devotees, Lord Brahma attains sayujya-mukti (merging
in Brahman), and Lakshmi Devi is a jiva. The Baladeva text is from his commentary
to Tattva-sandarbha 28.

(38) Sri Guru and His Grace, 19.

(39) Excerpted from the essay "Putana" (http://bvml.org/SBSST/putana.html) printed in the January 1932 edition of The Harmonist.

(40) This period was traumatic for the members of most Gaudiya Math members and most accounts of it are understandably vague. Thorough scholarly research of the post-charismatic phase of the Gaudiya Math would be most welcome.

(41) All this appears to have been accompanied by personal problems. Ananta Vasudeva married one of his disciples. He liberated all his disciples to take initiation elsewhere, gave over the Gaudiya Mission to Bhaktikevala Audulomi Maharaj on the condition that he dress in white rather than the saffron of the Gaudiya Math sannyasis. He then left for Vrindavan where he lived out the rest of his life more or less as a recluse. Ex-disciples of Ananta Vasudeva formed a large contingent of the renounced residents of Radha Kund and sri krishna caitanya gaura guna-dhama, the kirtan promulgated by Puri Das can still be heard there. (Puri Das also came to accept that the congregational chanting of the maha mantra was not authorized.) His abandonment of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati made him an anathema in the rest of the maths, and left many of his admirers particularly disillusioned. Bhaktivedanta styled Tirtha as guru-bhogi, "exploiter of the guru," and Puri as guru-tyagi, "renouncer of the guru."

(42) Calcutta: Karuna Dasa, Sripata-Paraga, 1964.