

Is the Gaudiya Vaishnava sampradaya connected to the Madhva line?

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– Jagadananda Das –

The relationship of the Madhva-sampradaya to the Gaudiya Vaishnavas is one that has been sensitive for more than 200 years. Not only did it rear its head in the time of Baladeva Vidyabhushan, when the legitimacy of the Gaudiyas was challenged in Jaipur, but repeatedly since then. Bhaktivinoda Thakur wrote in his 1892 work *Mahaprabhura siksha* that those who reject this connection are “the greatest enemies of Sri Krishna Chaitanya’s family of followers.”

In subsequent years, nearly every scholar of Bengal Vaishnavism has cast his doubts on this connection including S. K. De, Surendranath Dasgupta, Sundarananda Vidyavinoda, Friedhelm Hardy and others. The degree to which these various authors reject this connection is different.

According to Gaudiya tradition, Madhavendra Puri appeared in the 14th century. He was a guru of the Brahma or Madhva-sampradaya, one of the four (Brahma, Sri, Rudra and Sanaka) legitimate Vaishnava lineages of the Kali Yuga. Madhavendra’s disciple Isvara Puri took Sri Krishna Chaitanya as his disciple. The followers of Sri Chaitanya are thus members of the Madhva line.

The authoritative sources for this identification with the Madhva lineage are principally four: Kavi Karnapura’s *Gaura-ganoddesa-dipika* (1576), the writings of Gopala Guru Goswami from around the same time, Baladeva’s *Prameya-ratnavali* from the late 18th century, and another late 18th century work, Narahari’s *Bhakti-ratnakara* (5.2149-2162), which quotes Kavi Karnapura’s version.

The following is the version as taken from the *Gaura-ganoddesa-dipika* (21):

paravyomesvarasyasic chishyo brahma jagat-patiu /
tasya sishyo narado’bhut vyasas tasyapa sishyatam //
suko vyasasya sishyatvaà prapto jianavabodhanat /
vyasal labdha-krishna-diksho madhvacaryo mahayasau //
tasya sishyo’bhavat padmanabhacaryo mahasayaù /
tasya sishyo naraharis tacchishyo madhava-dvijau //
akshobhyas tasya sishyo’bhut tac-chishyo jayatirthakaù /
tasya sishyo jiana-sindhus tasya sishyo mahanidhiù //
vidyanidhis tasya sishyo rajendras tasya sevakaù /
jayadharmamunis tasya sishyo yad-gana-madhyataù //
srimad-vishnu-puri yas tu bhaktiratnavali-kritiù /
jayadharmasya sishyo’bhud brahmanyaù purushottamaù //
vyasatirthas tasya sishyo yas cakre vishnu-saàhitam /
sriman lakshmipatis tasya sishyo bhaktirasarayau //

*tasya sishyo madhavendro yad-dharmo'yaà pravartitaù /
tasya sishyo'bhavat sriman isvarakhya-puri-yatiù //
kalayamasa sringaraà yaù sringara-phalatmakaù /
advaitaà kalayamasa dasya-sakhye phale ubhe /
isvarakhya-purià gaura urarikritya gaurave /
jagad aplavayamasa prakritaprakritatmakam //*

Brahma, the master of this universe, was the disciple of the lord of the spiritual world. His disciple was Narada and Vyasa became the disciple of Narada. Suka became Vyasa's disciple through the awakening of spiritual knowledge. Madhvacharya **took initiation in the Krishna mantra** from Vyasa. Madhva's disciple was Padmanabhacharya, whose disciple was Narahari, who was followed by Madhava Dvija. Madhava's disciple was Akshobhya, who was followed by Jayatirtha, Jïanasindhu, Mahanidhi, Vidyanidhi and Rajendra. Jayadharm Muni was one of Rajendra's many disciples and Vishnu Puri, the author of Bhakti-ratnavali and Purushottama the lover of Brahmin culture became his disciples. Vyasa Tirtha, the author of Vishnu-saàhita, was Purushottama's disciple. Lakshmpati Tirtha, a reservoir of devotion, was Vyasa Tirtha's disciple.

Madhavendra Puri was the disciple of Lakshmpati, and it is **by him that this religion was founded**. His disciple, the sannyasi Isvara Puri, took up the mood of conjugal devotion, while Advaita Acharya [also the disciple of Madhavendra] took up the moods of servitude and friendship. Gaura accepted Isvara Puri as his guru, and then flooded the material and spiritual worlds [with divine love].

Baladeva gives a more abbreviated version of the same succession:

*sri-krishna-brahma-devarshi-badarayana-saàjïakan |
sri-madhva-sri-padmanabha-sriman-narahari-madhavan //
akshobhya-jayatirtha-jïanasindhu-dayanidhin |
sri-vidyanidhi-rajendra-jayadharman kramad vayam //
purushottama-brahmanya-vyasatirthaàs ca saàstumaù |
tato lakshmpatià madhavendraà ca bhaktitaù //
tac-chishyan srisvaradvaita-nityanandan jagad-gurun |
devam isvara-sishyaà sri-caitanyaà ca bhajamahe |
sri-krishna-prema-danena yena nistaritaà jagat //*

The disciplic succession goes from Krishna to Brahma, to Narada, to Vyasa; then to Madhva, Padmanabha, Narahari, and Madhava. Then to Akshobhya, Jayatirtha, Jïana-sindhu, Dayanidhi, Vidyanidhi, Rajendra and Jayadharm. From them, it passes to Purushottama, Brahmanya and Vyasa Tirtha. With devotion, I praise all these spiritual masters, then Lakshmpati and his disciple Madhavendra, whose disciples were the spiritual masters of the universe Advaita and Nityananda. I worship Lord Sri Chaitanya, the disciple of Isvara Puri, who delivered the entire universe with the gift of love for Krishna. (1.7)

The two texts match well, the only difference being that it has been made clear that Brahmanya is not an adjective describing Purushottama, but a separate individual.

To these three, we must add another important source text, that of Harirama Vyasa,

the author of *Nava-ratnam*. Harirama's version of the Madhva sampradaya is significant, because it is the only other extant disciplic line that traces its origins to Madhavendra Puri without going through Mahaprabhu or any of his companions. Harirama's text reads as follows:

*sri-krishno bhagavan brahma narado badarayanaù |
sri-madhvaù padmanabhas ca nriharir madhavas ca saù ||
akshobhyo jayatirthas ca jïanasindhur dayanidhiù |
vidyanidhis ca rajendro jayadharma-munis tataù ||
purushottamo brahmany vyasatirthas ca tasya hi |
tato lakshmipatis tataù sriman madhavendra-yatisvaraù ||
isvaras tasya madhavo radha-krishna-priyo'bhavat |
tasyahaà karuna-patraà hari-ramabhidho'bhavam ||*

This text substantially replicates the text of Baladeva, with no differences in the names or their order. After telling us that Madhavendra is Lakshmipati's disciple, Harirama tells us in an awkward verse that he is the disciple of Madhavendra's disciple Madhava.

Harirama goes on to argue that he accepts the basic ideas of Madhva, summarized in a verse quoted from the Madhva tradition. Such a wholehearted acceptance of Madhva's ideas is nowhere found in the Gaudiya line prior to Baladeva's *Prameya-ratnavali*. In fact, most Gaudiya Vaishnavas acknowledge that there are differences in the teachings of the two lines. This is stated first in the verses of Karnapura -- *tasya sishyo madhavendro yad-dharmo'yaà pravartitaù* -- "Lakshmipati's disciple Madhavendra founded this religion."

Bhaktivinoda Thakur writes: "Madhavendra Puri was a well-known sannyasi of the Madhva-sampradaya. His grand-disciple was Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Prior to his appearance, there was no evidence of prema-bhakti in the Madhva line. In his verse, *ayi dina-dayardra-natha* (CC Madhya 4.197), the seed of the religious doctrines of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu can be found." Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati similarly states, "Madhavendra Puri was the first shoot of the desire tree of divine love that came out of the Madhva lineage. Prior to his appearance, there was no sign of the conjugal mood of devotion in the Madhva line."

This has been elaborated by other thinkers, who summarize ten points of difference between these two lines -- even though they accept that the Gaudiya line is a branch of the Madhva-sampradaya.⁽¹⁾

Of interest in this discussion is the distinction between *siksha* and *diksha*. In the verses by Karnapur, it is clearly stated that Madhva was given *krishna-diksha*, or a specific initiation.

Since it was written by a Gaudiya, we must assume that he is referring to a pancharatrika transmission of the mantra. Indeed, this is the specific context in which all these descriptions of disciplic succession begin -- with the profession that there are four disciplic successions and that without such an authorized line of succession, no *mantra* will be efficacious. With one voice, all these authors --

Karnapur, Gopala Guru, Baladeva and Harirama Vyasa – attribute the following lines to the Padma-purana:

*sampradaya-vihina ye mantras te nishphala matau
atau kalau bhavishyanti catvaraù sampradayinau
sri-brahma-rudra-sanakaù vaishnavaù kshiti-pavanaù
catvaras te kalau bhavya hy utkale purushottamat ||
ramanujaà sriù svicakre madhvacharyaà caturmukhaù
sri-vishnu-svaminaà rudro nimbadyaà catuùsanaù ||*

Mantras that are without a disciplic succession do not bear fruit. Therefore the founders of four disciplic successions appeared in the age of Kali. Thus the four world purifying Vaishnavas like Lakshmi, Brahma, Rudra and Sanaka will appear in the age of Kali, out of Purushottama (Jagannatha Puri) in the land of Utkala (Orissa). Lakshmi accepted Ramanuja, Brahma (the four-faced) accepted Madhvacharya, Rudra accepted Vishnusvami and the four Kumaras accepted Nimbadya.

Though all or part of this quotation is attributed to the Padma-purana, in fact, no reference that I know of has ever been given, though I have heard that the very first line (*sampradaya-vihina ye...*) can indeed be found somewhere in that immense text (the electronic version of which is now available). What is interesting, however, is that none of these verses have any currency in the Madhva-sampradaya itself. (2) Nor is any one of them found in any of the discussions of mantra and diksha that form the first two chapters of *Hari-bhakti-vilasa*. The idea that there are four sampradayas is not found in any of the Goswami literature, which must be considered the most authoritative.

Moreover, the disciplic succession as given with amazing consistency in Gaudiya sources is problematic. In the Madhvaite tradition, Padmanabha, Nrihari, Madhava and Akshobhya are all considered to be direct disciples of Madhva, rather than being links of a historic chain. Furthermore, no Lakshmipati is known in the Madhva line as a historical personality. There is, however, a Lakshminarayana, also known as Sripadaraja, who was in fact Vyasa Tirtha's teacher – not his disciple.

The Madhva tradition, as given in Udipi, lists the following disciplic succession following Madhva -- (13) Sri Madhvacharya, born 1119 (or 1239); (14) Padmanabha, 1200; Narahari, 1206; Madhava, 1215; and Akshobhya 1235; (15) Jaya Tirtha, 1246; (16) Vidyadhiraja, 1269; (17) Kavindra, 1335; (18) Vagisa, 1340; (19) Ramacandra, 1348; (20) Vidyavidhi, 1377; (21) Sri Raghunatha, 1445; (22) Rayuvarya 1503. (3)

Vyasa Tirtha, more commonly known to Madhvas as Vyasa Raya or Vyasaraaja, is a very well known acharya of the line, according to some the Tattvavada scholar held in highest esteem next to Jayatirtha. According to the Madhva tradition, his disciplic line branches off after Vidyadhiraja Tirtha, going through Rajendra Tirtha, Vijayadhvaja, Purushottama, and Subrahmanya.

Thus, if we compare the two disciplic successions, we find that the differences are significant:

1. Madhva	1. Madhva
2. Padmanabha	2. Padmanabha
3. Narahari	(2. Narahari)
4. Madhava Dvija	(2. Madhava)
5. Akshobhya	(2. Akshobhya)
6. Jayatirtha	3. Jayatirtha
7. Jnanasindhu	--none--
8. Mahanidhi	--none--
9. Vidyanidhi	4. Vidyadhiraja
10. Rajendra	5. Rajendra
11. Jayadharma	6. Vijayadhvaja
12. Purushottama	7. Purushottama
13. Brahmanya	8. Subrahmanya
14. Vyasa Tirtha	9. Vyasa Raya
15. Lakshmiapati Tirtha	--

Deadwyler (4) argues that these errors are not significant, especially if we take some of these (9, 11, 13) to be name variants for the same person. By so doing, we are left with only two missing links (7, 8) and a confusion about the first generation of disciples. But this misses the point about what these mistakes mean. The very consistency of errors in all versions of the parampara indicate that they come from a single source, indicating that knowledge of the disciplic succession was not widespread, as there was no corrective mechanism.

Vyasa Tirtha's dates are given as 1469-1539, which means that he postdated Chaitanya's death by five years. Interestingly, from 1498 to the end of his life, Vyasa Tirtha lived in Vijayanagara, the capital city of Krishnadeva Raya, directly to the south of the Orissan kingdom of Prataparudra. These two kingdoms were frequently at war during this time. According to B. N. K. Sharma, Krishnadeva Raya had a lot of regard for Vyasa Tirtha, making several honorific references to him in his writings, even calling him his *kuladevata*.

The problem that Vyasa Raya's dates presents for the Gaudiya tradition is self-evident. Vyasa Raya's disciple was Lakshmiapati, whose disciple was Madhavendra, whose disciple was Isvara Puri, Chaitanya's guru, and yet he outlived them all! Though at a stretch of the imagination, it is possible that such a connection existed, the general custom in non-Udupi institutions such as that of Vyasa Raya typically have only one "reigning" pontiff who designates someone to take his place only when it comes to prepare for his departure. Thus, had Lakshmiapati Tirtha been Vyasa's successor, he would not have acceded to this position before 1539, after

Chaitanya's disappearance. The question we are left with, even if the connection were possible, is how could such mistakes and omissions creep into the Gaudiya knowledge of the disciplic succession, especially in the matter of who was Vyasa Tirtha's spiritual master, when they were not only contemporaneous, but neighbors? .(5)

Furthermore, if Chaitanya's great-great-grand spiritual master lived in the neighboring kingdom, we would expect some kind of acknowledgement of this fact somewhere in his biographies. Even if the problem was one of disagreement – the Madhva line does not accept the worship of Radha, the central point of the Chaitanya line – one would expect such a break with the previous acharyas of the disciplic succession to be considered something of great significance – a central point of the legend, as it were. Krishna Das Kaviraja does briefly mention in passing that Mahaprabhu visited Udipi, the main seat of the Madhva line, and describes a debate that ostensibly took place on that occasion. .(6) He refers to the Madhva guru, without naming him, as a Tattvavadi. This is the term by which the Madhvas know themselves, but the use of the term itself confirms the distance between the two lines of thought. Indeed, in Kaviraja's description of the meeting, Mahaprabhu uses the expression “*your sampradaya*” twice (Madhya 9.276, 277).

Furthermore, during his travels, Mahaprabhu visited Kurma Kshetra and Simhachalam, two places that have a significant connection to Narahari Tirtha, also named as a previous acharya in Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's disciplic succession. Narahari Tirtha came to the Ganga kingdom on his guru Madhva's order in order to obtain images of Sita-Rama, as Orissa was famous for its sculptors. After transmitting these deities to his guru, Narahari kept on living in the southern part of the Ganga kingdom from 1264-1293, and his participation in endowing the Simhachalam and Kurma Kshetra temples is well recorded. He not only preached the Vaishnavism of the Madhva sect, but became the governor of a province in the Ganga kingdom and regent of Narasimha Deva II during his minority. According to K. C. Panigrahi, “His long stay in Orissa was mostly responsible for the ascendancy of Vaishnavism in this country.” (History of Orissa, p. 173) Mahaprabhu seems to have had no knowledge whatsoever of these two temples' historical connection to his own line, or at least Krishna Das was not aware of it.

As far as the rest of the first generation of Mahaprabhu's line is concerned, despite this ostensible connection to the Madhva line, there is no *pranama-mantra* to Madhva anywhere in any of the Goswami literature prior to Baladeva Vidyabhushan. The connection of Madhavendra Puri to the Tattvavadi gurus is not mentioned in the most current biographies, *Chaitanya-bhagavata* or *Chaitanya-caritamrita*, nor even in the *Chaitanya-candrodaya-nataka*, where Madhavendra's name is mentioned, but not connected to Madhvacharya (CCN 1.21). Nor does Karnapur mention any connection to the Madhva line in his earlier work, *Chaitanya-carita-mahakavya*. The author of *Bhakti-ratnavali*, Vishnu Puri, who is said to be a disciple of Jayadharm (whose name does not figure in any of the Madhva lines), makes no mention of him or of Madhva in the *mangalacarana* of that work.

Those who defend the connection of the Gaudiya to the Madhva lines often refer to two passages in the *Tattva-sandarbha* where Jiva Goswami mentions Madhva, or Ananda Tirtha, by name, and several of the acharyas of his line, specifically Jaya

Tirtha, Vijayadhvaja and Vyasa Tirtha. It is also significant that Vijayadhvaja is **not** mentioned in the Gaudiya disciplic succession, where the corresponding name is given as Jayadharmā.

Where does Jiva say that Madhva is anything more than an acharya who has quoted many obscure scriptures he thinks are useful?

This preliminary section of the *Tattva-sandarbhā* is called the Pramāna-khanda because Jiva is establishing the sources he is using in writing the *Bhagavata-sandarbhā*. He first lists various commentaries on the Bhagavata beginning with the *Tantra-bhagavata*, which has been named in the *Hayasirsha-pancharatra*. He then lists all the commentaries to the *Bhagavata-purāna* he has consulted. In this list, he gives no priority to Madhva (Para. 22 in my edition). In section 23, he makes reference to Madhva's having originally been a disciple in the Shankara line. This is done to give credibility to Shankara's having Vaishnava tendencies and to defend the possibility that followers in Shankara's line, like Sridhara, may well be Vaishnavas.

By extension, it may well be a defence of other Vaishnavas like Mahāprabhu himself and other members of the Bharati and Puri lines who were Vaishnavas in Puri with him and had taken sannyas in the Shankara tradition. And by further extension, this likely includes Madhavendra Puri, whose tradition they were directly following.

In section 27, Jiva goes on to discuss the most authoritative sources among the acharyas. He first defends Sridhara Svami against the accusation of Mayavada, then praises South Indian Vaishnavas, specifically Ramanuja and the Sri-sampradaya. Finally in section 28, he cites Madhva as source for some of his conclusions. But on looking carefully at the context, one will see that he is not specifically glorifying Madhvacharya as much as defending him against the possible accusation that he has simply made up many of the mysterious never-before-seen verses that he quotes so profusely in his books. Jiva wants to make use of these citations from time to time and has to justify his usage of these pramanas. The verse he quotes at the end of that section makes it very clear that this interpretation of the text is the right one.

Baladeva comments that since Jiva uses the honorific plural when speaking of Madhva (*tattva-vada-gurunam*) is stating that Madhva is his guru, but in the context this argument looks quite artificial. Showing respect for a purva-acharya or Vaishnava does not mean that you are his disciple. If one can argue that Jiva is in this section claiming spiritual descent from Madhva, then one could just as easily argue that he is claiming to come in disciplic succession from Sridhara or Ramanuja.

Indeed, Jiva says of Sridhara that though he is a *parama-vaishnava*, his writing is chock-full of Advaita ideas because "he wished to plunge the Mayavadis of the Madhya-desa into the glories of the Supreme Person." Therefore Jiva will only cite those ideas of his that are in concordance with the principles of pure devotion (*suddha-vaishnava-siddhantanugata*). I would call that mixed praise. Yet we see that Jiva consistently quotes Sridhara far more than any other source, including Madhva, whose commentaries or ideas he never refers to.

How many direct quotations of Madhva's Bhashya can be found in the *Bhagavata-sandarbhā*? One often finds a statement like *madhva-bhashya-dhrita-catur-veda-*

sikhayam, but rarely do you see a direct reference to any of Madhva's ideas expressed in his own words. Indeed, the sole purpose of Jiva's naming of Madhva and his disciples is the need to buttress these dubious quotations. The idea being that if Madhva and his disciplic line are so renowned, then surely he could not have fabricated these texts!

To conclude this argument, let it be noted that a significant institution of the Madhva line, Poornaprajna Vidyapeetha, Bangalore, an institution founded by Shri Vishvesa Tirtha Swamiji of Pejavar Math, categorically denied any connection between the Madhva line and that of the Gaudiyas in an official statement made at the beginning of May, 2001. Their arguments are based principally on a multiplicity of doctrinal differences, rather than the historical ones presented here.

Siddhanta Saraswati has also discussed many of these points in *Brahmana o Vaishnava* (some of which were mentioned in footnote (1)), but specifically makes the comment that the Madhva sampradaya was originally a "bhagavata" line, but later became predominantly Pancharatrika. But this is questionable, as individuals like Baladeva were not arguing a doctrinal connection to the Madhva line, but a legitimizing one, i.e. a *diksha-sampradaya*, not a *siksha-sampradaya*.

NOTES:

(1) This is in Tripurari Maharaja's *Tattva-sandarbha*, 89. I don't have further details on what these ten points are as yet. Baladeva specifically mentions the following: 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--
bhaktAnAM viprANAM eva mokSaM, devaH bhakteshu mukhyaH virinchasyaiva sAyujyaM, lakshmyA jIva-koTitvam ity evaM mata-vizeSaH dakSiNAdi-dezeti tena gauDe'pi mAdhavendrAdayas tad-upaziSyAH katicid babhUvur ity arthaH.

(2) In a statement released on the Internet in May, 2000, the Haridas Bhat and N.A.P.S. Rao of the Poornaprajna Vidyapeeth in Bangalore made the following statement about the *mantrās te niSphalA matāh* verse: "Tattvavada does not accept the validity of this shloka, which seems to hold that different Vedanta schools that have been arguing over the correct interpretation of Vedanta Shrutis since their inception are all valid in spite of essential differences. The same confused approach of ISKCON is also seen in their acceptance of the *Bhagavata-bhashya* by Sridhara Svamin, which tends to interpret many texts as per Advaita tenets, while they claim to follow Dvaita school when convenient. According to Tattvavada, the only correct school is that of Acharya Madhva: *ante siddhas tu siddhanti madhvasyagama eva hi*, in the words of the revered saint Sri Vadiraja."

(3) The information given here is found in Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati's *Anubhashya* to Chaitanya-caritamrita, Madhya 9.245. He attributes it to the Bombay Gazetteer and the South Canara Manual.

(4) William Deadwyler “Sampradaya of Sri Chaitanya” in *Vaishnavism: Contemporary Scholars Discuss the Vaishnava Tradition* (ed.) Steven J. Rosen. New York: Folk Books, 1992. 127 ff.

(5) Furthermore, the disciplic succession prior to Madhva given in Udupi is as follows: (1) Hamsa Paramatma; (2) Caturmukha Brahma; (3) Sanakadi; (4) Durvasa; (5) Jnananidhi; (6) Garuda-vahana; (7) Kaivalya Tirtha; (8) Jnanesa Tirtha; (9) Para Tirtha; (10) Satyaprajna Tirtha; (11) Prajia Tirtha; (12) Acyuta Prekshacharya Tirtha. This differs substantially from the Gaudiyas’ Krishna – Brahma -- Narada – Vyasa – Madhva.

(6) Chaitanya-caritamrita, Madhya 9.245-278. The account consists of a typical encounter with a rival group: the Madhva Vaishnavas fail to recognize Mahaprabhu as a Vaishnava, but think of him as a Mayavadi. Mahaprabhu goes on to criticize the Madhva doctrines for being mixed and having the goal of liberation rather than prema. The Madhva acharya acknowledges the inferiority of his doctrine, but out of loyalty to Madhvacharya, does not convert. In verse 277, Mahaprabhu says, “The only good thing I see in your sampradaya is that you accept the eternal nature of the Supreme Lord’s form.”