

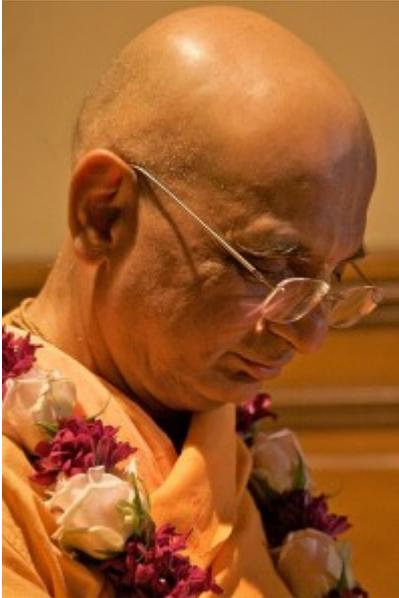
The History of our Vaishnava Heritage Part 8

THE FOLLOWING LECTURE GIVEN BY HIS HOLINESS BHAKTI CHARU SWAMI IN ISKCON RADHADESH BELGIUM, 2004, IS THE EIGHT OUT OF NINE IN A SERIES ON THE HISTORY OF VAISHNAVA HERITAGE.



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In this Krishna consciousness movement, what is our business? Our business is to recognize that the highest devotion is available in Vrindavan and Vrindavan is the topmost region of the spiritual sky. In this way we become fixed in our spiritual understanding. We are very grateful to Srila Sanatana Goswami for giving us a very scientific understanding of the process we are pursuing. Today we will discuss the history of Caitanya Mahaprabhu's movement after His disappearance. In this way, we will come chronologically to today's state of affairs in this world as far as Krishna consciousness is concerned and what Srila Prabhupada has done. Tomorrow, in the concluding class, we will discuss about the importance of ISKCON in the propagation of Krishna consciousness for many years to come

and why we need an institution like ISKCON. So Caitanya Mahaprabhu spread Krishna consciousness all over India when He was present. Caitanya Mahaprabhu very systematically established a very solid foundation of this Krishna consciousness movement through the writings of the Goswamis. He assigned the Goswamis of Vrindavan with the responsibility to write scriptures to establish the philosophical foundation of the Krishna consciousness movement. Caitanya Mahaprabhu personally preached and He also assigned Nityananda prabhu with the responsibility to preach in Bengal, which was the main field for Krishna consciousness at that time. He himself was present in Orissa, in Jagannath Puri. There He preached and traveled throughout India, first to South India and all the way to Western India then He traveled to Vrindavan. Wherever He went, He attracted thousands upon thousands of people and inspired them to accept Krishna consciousness. The way Caitanya Mahaprabhu did it was very interesting and automatically people would become attracted by Him. People became attracted to Caitanya Mahaprabhu mainly because of three reasons: 1. Wherever Caitanya Mahaprabhu went, thousands of people followed Him, so naturally people became attracted to Him. 2. Caitanya Mahaprabhu's appearance was very beautiful so people became attracted by His physical beauty. 3. Caitanya Mahaprabhu, wherever He went He chanted the Holy Name so sweetly that people became attracted and also began to follow Him. When people became attracted to Caitanya Mahaprabhu then Caitanya Mahaprabhu would instruct them about Krishna consciousness, Krishna bhakti. Then Caitanya Mahaprabhu would instruct them to go back to their respective places and start to preach whatever He taught them. In this way, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu within a very short time very effectively spread Krishna consciousness throughout the length and breadth of India. Then after twelve years of preaching (6 years of traveling and another 6 years of preaching), Caitanya Mahaprabhu went into seclusion. He hardly ever went out or met anybody. He was displaying His transcendental madness. Still, people became naturally attracted to Him. At that time, Bengal was the main field for preaching and Nityananda Prabhu was doing that preaching. Nityananda Prabhu created a tremendous sensation throughout Bengal. Thousands upon thousands of people became his followers. One time, at one go, sixty four thousand Buddhists became converted. That was the extent of his preaching. After Nityananda prabhu withdrew his pastimes from this planet, his wife Jahnava Devi, continued the preaching. She actually became the head of the Gaudiya Vaishnava society. She was a very powerful personality. It has been described that when Jahnava Devi traveled to Vrindavan, thousands of people followed them. That was the sort of popularity they had. We have to remember that in those days, traveling was not so easy. Nowadays, we can just buy a ticket in the train, or if we can afford it, fly by plane. In those days, most of the time, people had to walk. And the distance was not a short one. From here in Bengal to Vrindavan was fifteen hundred kilometers or a thousand miles. After Jahnava Devi, the main preaching was done by three very, very great acharyas. They are Srinivas Acharya, Narottama Das Thakura and Shyamananda Prabhu. All three of them came from the Eastern part. Srinivas Acharya came from Agrudwipa, which is not too far from Navadwip on the bank of the Ganges. Narottama Das Thakur came from what is East Bengal today. Their residence was on the eastern part of the Ganges. The Ganges actually goes further east and then goes to the ocean. Actually, the Ganges splits. One branch, which is considered to be the main branch of the Ganga, which is called Bhagirathi that goes through this part of Bengal, Navadwipa. The other branch, called Padma, goes to East Bengal and then goes to the ocean. That river is very wide. You cannot actually see the other bank of the river it is so wide. Narottama Das Thakur's father was a king. They were a very aristocratic royal family. All three of them went to Vrindavan and studied Gaudiya Vaishnavism under the guidance of Srila Jiva Goswami. The three of them did not meet Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Srinivas Acharya's parents did not have any children. His father met Caitanya Mahaprabhu for the first time when he was getting shaved up to take sannyas. This

sight was so painful to his heart that he became like a mad man. He used to call out the name of Caitanya Mahaprabhu and cry all the time. Everybody thought that he had become mad. From that time, his name became Caitanya Dasa. He traveled to Jagannath Puri to meet Caitanya Mahaprabhu along with his wife. Caitanya Mahaprabhu blessed him that he will have a son. That son is Srinivas Acharya. Srinivas Acharya, from his childhood, had an intense desire to meet Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu but Caitanya Mahaprabhu had already become a sannyasi. It was difficult for him, but he used to dream that someday he would go to Jagannath Puri and meet Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Then finally, when he was about sixteen years old and he was allowed to travel on his own, he set out for Jagannath Puri. When he was going to Jagannath Puri, he got the news from some brahmanas who were coming from Jagannath Puri that Caitanya Mahaprabhu left the planet. Srinivas Acharya was so heart-broken that he decided to give up his life. He felt there was no need to live if Caitanya Mahaprabhu had left the planet. That night, he got some logs together, lit a huge fire, and he decided to enter into that fire. When he was about to enter into that fire, Caitanya Mahaprabhu came and personally stopped him. Caitanya Mahaprabhu assured him that He would always reside in his heart. In this way, Srinivas Acharya, although apparently, he did not physically meet Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, he did meet Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. After that, he went to Vrindavan. In Vrindavan, he took initiation from Gopala Bhatta Goswami. He was trained by Srila Jiva Goswami. Two other personalities also came to Vrindavan around that time. One was Narottama Das Thakur. He actually ran away from home like Raghunatha Das Goswami because his father was a king and he was a prince. He became so attracted to Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu that he just left home and ran towards Vrindavan. Syamananda prabhu was another person who was brought up from his childhood with Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's teachings. His father was a great devotee. When he reached his youth, he left his home and went to Vrindavan. The three of them became great friends and all studied under Jiva Goswami. Their idea was to spend the rest of their lives in Vrindavan and study in Vrindavan, but Jiva Goswami had a different plan. He sent them back to Bengal with all of the books that the Goswamis wrote because Vrindavan did not have so many people living there at that time. Bengal was the main field for Caitanya Mahaprabhu's devotional mission. Those books were sent back to Bengal. The three of them brought the books and they started to preach in Bengal. They created a tremendous sensation. Kings were becoming their disciples. Very big Brahmin scholars were becoming their disciples. It is not that they did not have any opposition initially, but finally, their preaching was very successful. One king, in a place called Vishnupur, which is on the border of Bihar and Bengal, he and his wife became disciples of Srinivas Acharya. Another king called Nrsimhananda, a very powerful king, became a disciple of Narottama Das Thakur. Another king's son, Rasikananda, became the disciple of Syamananda prabhu. A disciple of Narottama Das Thakur went to the province called Manipur in Eastern India, which was surrounded by the mountains. He converted the king into a Vaishnava. The king made the whole state into a Vaishnava state. He took the Vaishnavas from Bengal to train them up. Still today, when we go to Manipur, we see the trace of Gaudiya Vaishnavism there. The whole culture is based on Gaudiya Vaishnavism. They sing the songs written by Narottama Das Thakur. Over hundreds of years, the pronunciation and everything has changed. Once they showed me some songs by Narottama Das Thakur and I could not decipher it because they write and the way they pronounce is completely different. Whenever they have any festivity, they just have Krishna conscious activities. They will have Krishna's pastimes enacted through dance and their performance and they stay up throughout the whole night watching these performances. These three personalities preached very effectively throughout Bengal. They had various oppositions, especially from the brahmanas. To tell you one incident, Narottama Das Thakur and Ramachandra Kaviraja, a disciple of Srinivas Acharya

were very close friends. One day, they were traveling from one place to another. They saw that two young brahmana boys were carrying the goats and sheep. They could understand that they are taking them to be slaughtered for offering to Kali. Narottama Das Thakur felt that such nice brahmana boys should not be involved in such tamasic activities. Ramachandra Kaviraj and Narottama Das Thakur made a plan to convert them. Walking just ahead of these boys, they started to discuss in such a way that these boys could hear what they were talking about. The topic of their discussion was what actually happens when one offers animals in sacrifice to Durga, to Kali. When these boys heard that, they realized that through this kind of worship they are plunging they deeper and deeper into the mode of ignorance and they are going to invite all kinds of suffering. These two boys fell at their feet and said, "We realize our mistake. Now please tell us how we can be free from these sinful reactions." Then Narottama Das Thakur gave them Krishna consciousness. These two boys were so much affected by them that they let those animals loose. They did not even go home, they followed Narottama Das Thakur. When the father of these two boys, who was a very influential Brahmin landlord, got to know that his two sons are missing and found out where they were, he came there. He found out that not only are these two boys staying with Narottama Das Thakur, but they became initiated by Narottama Das Thakur. He became very, very upset because Narottama Das Thakur was a kayastha. A kayastha is one who is in between a Kshatriya and a vaishya. He was inferior to a brahmana and it was unheard of those days that somebody from lower caste to give initiation to someone from a higher caste. And he did not consider him a kayastha, he considered him a sudra, so he became very upset. He forced his children to come home. When they went home, their father tried to convince them to give up Narottama Das Thakur, but the boys came up with such arguments that the father was defeated. The father thought, "After all, although I am a Brahmin, I am not so scholarly." So he got the biggest scholar of that area, Ganganarayan Chakravaty, and told him to take care of these boys and bring them to their senses. When Ganganarayan Chakravaty started to speak to these boys, he saw that they had developed such intense love for Krishna that he himself was very impressed. He realized that this love for Krishna was the ultimate perfection of life. So, Ganganarayan Chakravaty also became a follower of Caitanya Mahaprabhu. The father of these boys became so upset that he reported to the king, King Nrsimhananda. He said, "Look, Kali Yuga has begun and what has been described in the scriptures, everything is happening. Everything will turn upside down in the age of Kali and that is why we are seeing that the sudras are giving initiation to the brahmanas. They are the agents of Kali, so you take care of it, you are the king. So the king said, "Sure, I will do that. I am the king and it is my responsibility to establish dharma." The king got all of the big scholars. He even got a scholar from Mithila, which is in Bihar. Plus, he had his own entourage. With the whole caravan he started to move towards Narottama Das Thakur's village, Kheturi. In the mean time, the news reached Narottama Das Thakur's followers that this king is coming to punish Narottama Das Thakur. Ganganarayan Chakravati and Ramachandra Kaviraj felt that something must be done to stop these people from coming here and disturbing Narottama Das Thakur. The place where the king's caravan was to stop, they went there and opened up some shops in the market. Some were selling betel nut; some were selling cooking pots, all kinds of things. These brahmanas do not usually carry pots; they buy the pots and the fresh ingredients to cook. When they stopped at the marketplace, they found that the shopkeepers are speaking to them in Sanskrit. They were very surprised. Some of them even got into an argument and they were defeated. They reported it to their main pundit and the main pundit said, "Okay, let's go and see who these people are." They went and they got into an argument and the main pundit was also defeated by Ganganarayan Chakravati and Ramachandra Kaviraj. They were very big scholars. They asked, "Where did you learn? You are simple shopkeepers. Where did you get this knowledge?" They answered, "We got this knowledge by the mercy

of our spiritual master.” They asked, “Who is your spiritual master?” they said, “Narottama Das Thakur.” So the king said, “These simple shopkeepers are giving you such a hard time, what will happen when you go to Narottama Das Thakur? He will beat you to the pulp!” So they decided not only to retreat, but that they would surrender to Narottama Das Thakur. This is how wonderfully those preachers were preaching Krishna consciousness at that time. After Narottama Das Thakur, we see a decline in the spiritual movement of Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s Gaudiya Vaishnavism. It went on for some time, but gradually there was a decline. That is why Srila Prabhupada said that after a great acharya leaves the planet, there is bound to be a crisis. We saw the crisis after Narottama Das Thakur, Srinivas Acharya. We see a similar crisis after Bhaktivinod Thakur. We also see a similar crisis after Prabhupada left. In the eighteenth century came Baladeva Vidyabhushan. Baladeva Vidyabhushan is also an interesting personality because he was originally initiated in the Madhva Sampradaya. He was a great scholar, very learned, a brilliant personality. He was reputed for his scholarship. He came across a follower of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu in the line of Syamananda prabhu (Narottama Das Thakur’s line), three generations down, a devotee called Radha-Damodar Dev Goswami. Therefore, we can see that there is precedence that when someone comes across something higher, then he can take re-initiation. His spiritual master, Radha Damodar Dev Goswami, sent him to Vrindavan to study under Viswanatha Chakravarti Thakur. Viswanath Chakravarti Thakur is another brilliant scholar. When we say brilliant scholar, we have to remember that their scholarship is not the understanding of scholarship that we have from the material point of view. For example, when we see the writing of Viswanatha Chakravarti Thakur, it does not strike as a very erudite writing, but what actually strikes is the depth of Krishna’s pastimes he went to, as if he is seeing Krishna’s pastimes as he is writing. It is very interesting the way Viswanatha Chakravarti writes the commentary of the tenth canto of Srimad Bhagavatam, as if he is seeing what is going on between Radha and Krishna. Not only what is going on between Radha and Krishna, but also what is going on around them, some very, very in-depth understanding from his own perception of Krishna’s pastimes. Viswanatha Chakravarti was the Siksha Guru of Baladeva Vidyabhushana in that sense. That is why in our line, the disciplic succession that Srila Prabhupada gave in Bhagavad Gita, the line is from Viswanatha Chakravarti to Baladeva Vidyabhushan. Baladeva Vidyabhushan did a great service to our sampradaya by writing the Govinda Bhashya, the commentary on Vedanta Sutra. In Jaipur, the Gaudiya Vaishnavas were taking care of the deities Radha Govindaji. Some Ramanuja Vaishnavas objected to that saying that Gaudiya Vaishnavism was not bona-fide. They tried to present that it was some new thing that came up. It does not really have the disciplic succession. They completely rejected Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s gaudiya Vaishnavism saying that it is not bona-fide because it does not have any commentary on Vedanta Sutra. The king of Jaipur sent the message to Viswanth Chakravarti Thakur asking him what should be done now that the Ramanuja Vaishnavas are challenging the authenticity of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Viswanatha Chakravarti at that time was very old, so he sent Baladeva Vidyabhushan. Baladeva Vidyabhushan had a debate with those scholars. His point originally was that our sampradaya did not take the trouble to write any commentary on the Vedanta Sutra because we accept Srimad Bhagavatam as the original commentary on the Vedanta Sutra. Vyasadeva himself wrote the Vedanta Sutra and as a commentary to Vedanta Sutra, he wrote Srimad Bhagavatam. They would not accept that. They also tried to point out that Caitanya Mahaprabhu took initiation from the Madhva Sampradaya but they would not accept that because Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s teachings and Madhva’s teachings were not the same. There is a difference, naturally. They were asking, “What is the basis of these teachings that Caitanya Mahaprabhu has propagated?” Baladeva Vidyabhushan took just seven days time and wrote the commentary known as Govinda Bhashya, the commentary given by Govindadeva Himself. Actually, he said that

Govindadeva Himself wrote that commentary. This is how Baladeva Vidyabhushan gave our sampradaya the bona fide by presenting his Govinda Bhashya. Seeing that brilliant commentary, the Ramanujas accepted it. In this way, our acharyas have established Gaudiya Vaishnavism in the most wonderful way. Unfortunately, with the influence of time in this terrible age of Kali, Caitanya Mahaprabhu's teachings were practically lost due to the apasampradayas. There are thirteen apasampradayas, namely aula, baula, lara, lari, kartabhaja, daravesha, shani, shakhibheki, chudadhari, sahajiya, gaura nagari, jati gosai, etc. they all claim that they are coming from Caitanya Mahaprabhu. actually what they are presenting is detrimental to Caitanya Mahaprabhu. How this is detrimental to Caitanya Mahaprabhu's teachings? Because they are claiming that they are followers of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, but philosophically they are deviating. Many of them not only break the regulative principles, like the sahajiyas, aulas, baulas, but their whole practice is based on breaking these regulative principles. For example, the baulas, their custom is that in order to be a baula, one has to elope with someone else's wife. This is how the whole deviation crippled and stifled Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's sankirtan movement. The condition became so ominous that a man with refined taste would not have anything to do with Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's movement. They would think that this is what Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's sankirtan movement is. The bauls, they smoke marijuana. They have illicit relationships with other women. The whole thing is actually based on that. It is very, very abominable. At that time, Bhaktivinod Thakur appeared. Caitanya Mahaprabhu's movement was completely covered over and then Caitanya Mahaprabhu sent Bhaktivinod Thakur to start the revival of this movement. Bhaktivinod Thakur, through his powerful writing, reestablished Gaudiya Vaishnavism and the people with education and culture started to recognize Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His teachings. Bhaktivinod Thakur was a brilliant writer. He wrote with equal dexterity in English, Bengali and Sanskrit. To give an example, he writes sanskrit poems: yadi te hari-pada-saroja-sudha- rasa-pana-param hridayam satatam parihrtya grham kali-bhava-mayam bhaja godruma-kanana-kunja-vidhum At least from the sound, you can understand what beautiful writing it is. Now, look at his English writings: Alas, for those who spend their days In festive mirth and joy. The dazzling, deadly, liquid forms Their hearts fore'er employ. The shining bottles charm their eyes And draw their heart's embrace; The slaves of wine can never rise From what we call disgrace. Such a brilliant writer!! In this way, he presented Caitanya Mahaprabhu's teachings. This poem is very interesting. In twenty one or twenty six paragraphs, Bhaktivinod Thakur gives the entire philosophy of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. You can see it is a brilliant poem: "Alas, for those who spend their days in festive mirth and joy." Look at the material nature, Bhaktivinod Thakur is feeling pity for them. "The dazzling, deadly liquid forms their hearts forever employ." Their hearts are attracted to the dazzling deadly liquid forms, the material beauty or maya. The shining bottles charm their eyes and draw their hearts' embrace. The slaves of wine can never rise From what we call disgrace." Then he is concluding, "O Saragrahi Vaisnava soul, Thou art an angel fair." O Saragrahi means one who extracts, like a swan. The swan can extract milk from a solution of milk and water. He will leave the water and just extract the milk. A vaishnava is a saragrahi. He can extract the spiritual and leave the material. "O Saragrahi Vaisnava soul, Thou art an angel fair; Lead, lead me on to Vrindavan" He is inviting the swan like Vaishnava to lead him to Vrindavan. The one before that is, "there rests my soul in my lover's arms." He is describing that he is back in the spiritual sky in Krishna's arms. After that came Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur. Bhaktivinod Thakur wrote the books and created the foundation for the revival of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur came and gave a tremendous thrust to that mission of Bhaktivinod Thakur. He spread Krishna consciousness all over India. Then came his worthy disciple, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. He fulfilled his mission by spreading Krishna

consciousness all over the world. Srila Prabhupada not only spread Krishna consciousness all over the world, but he established the International Society for Krishna consciousness, which will continue to spread Krishna consciousness all over the world even in his absence. Srila Prabhupada established the International Society for Krishna consciousness, so there will never be a time when Srila Prabhupada is actually absent. Srila Prabhupada will continue to be here through his ISKCON. Tomorrow we will discuss that to continue to spread Krishna consciousness all over the world, we need an institution like ISKCON. And if we can successfully maintain that institution, Krishna consciousness will spread all over the world very effectively. But if we cannot save ISKCON, if we become the cause of ISKCON's disintegration, then, the propagation of Krishna consciousness all over the world will be very badly hindered, may be for hundreds of years. Therefore, those who are loyal followers of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu should take it upon themselves as the most important service today, to protect this wonderful institution that Srila Prabhupada gave us.