

# VAISNAVA SARVABHAUMA SRILA JAGANNATHA DASA BABAJI

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It was the second year after the opening of the Sri Caitanya Matha in Vrndavana. The resident devotees had left for Delhi to preach the glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krsna. I had remained behind the others because I often become ill at the festivals. Three or four days had passed since the devotees had departed. My mind was feeling somewhat restless and uncomfortable. I was sitting alone upstairs on the veranda in front of the door to my room. I was gazing here and there empty minded. It was now about 10:00 AM when the old Vaisnava Vrndavana resident arrived. He entered into the temple grounds from the front entrance and gradually made his way up the flight of stairs. As the old figure climbed the stairs he stopped for a few moments to gain his balance. He had stumped his foot. I paid my obeisances unto the old Vaisnava and offered him a sitting place on a nearby large rug. As he gasped in short drawn breaths it was apparent that he was exhausted from his travels abroad. The mood in which he humbly introduced himself would be recognized by many Vaisnavas. I had met this venerable Vaisnava on a previous occasion. Following a short exchange of reception he said, "I personally served Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji for nearly forty years. At the present age of 86 I feel very weary. I find it somewhat difficult to come and go these days. Previously my body was very strong. Often I would carry Srila Babaji Maharaja eight to ten miles on my back. I witnessed a host of transcendental pastimes. During that time I was discouraged by Babaji Maharaja from living in Vrndavana. He would frequently say, "Look Bihari, don't ever go and live with those false monkey-like renunciates." For this

reason I never associated with persons outside other than when it was absolutely necessary. Srila Jagannatha Babaji was especially close to Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura. I have firm faith in your spiritual master. I often saw him in Calcutta at Manikatala as a boy when I would visit there with Srila Babaji Maharaja. Your spiritual master (Srila Bhaktsiddhanta) would only be clothed with a pullover shirt. He struck me as always having a serious nature. I was attracted by his effluence and his learning. He was always attached to the Holy Name. In his earlier years his frame was very lean and Srila Babaji Maharaja loved him very much."

The old Vaisnava in this manner described many topics about Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji Maharaja and also his own life. I was deeply moved by the realization that this old respectable Vaisnava had undergone innumerable difficulties in his service to Srila Jagannatha das Babaji Maharaja. As a neophyte devotee my curiosity was stimulated to no bounds. There he sat before me, the actual servant of Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji. Numerous questions came to my mind. Indicating that he had anticipated my questions he delivered their answers by recounting his past. He himself was born in the family of milkmen in West Bengal. As a youth he had very little academic training. He had spent much of his time in Bangladesh. His speech was marked by Bengali spoken in an indistinct, broken fashion. Even so he was characterized by a very simple, easy going nature. In this disposition Bihari das Babaji would depict his relationship with Jagannatha dasa Babaji. In view of our Vaisnava cultural heritage today these topics are certainly priceless.

Srila Bihari dasa Babaji began to speak, "A long time has passed. It's difficult to exactly recollect. Once when Srila Jagannatha das Babaji was living in Navadvipa a householder from Calcutta suddenly appeared before him. The householder had already spent several days in Navadvip. Touching Srila Jagannatha das Babaji's feet, the gentleman seated himself before him. The unexpected visitor in his first breath requested Srila Jagannatha das Babaji to come with him to Calcutta. The man was desiring to take first initiation from him. Srila Jagannatha das Babaji was always opposed to the idea of going to

Calcutta. On first consideration he decided that the best decision was not to go. But the gentleman was very insistent. He came every day for fifteen days and prayed to Babaji Maharaja to go to Calcutta. Finally Srila Jagannatha das Babaji relented and agreed to go with the man to his residence in Kasipura. Srila Jagannatha das Babaji made the compromise that he would not accept any foodstuffs from the gentleman's house. So by boat they went together. We arrived at the residence of the householder whereupon he immediately tried to coax us into accepting some cooked foodstuffs. Srila Jagannatha das Babaji became so annoyed that he said to himself, "Take me to the residence of Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura." He then told me the address. It was midday there so we took a horse carriage to Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura's house. When we arrived Thakura Bhaktivinode was upstairs. A message was sent up. This was the first time I had seen Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura. He was somewhat tall with an effulgent golden hue like complexion. His nose was very elegant and his mouth well formed. Oh, and how expertly Srila Bhaktivinode knew how to serve the Vaisnavas! Thakura Bhaktivinode would personally serve Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji with his own hands. They would often visit one another in Navadwip and Calcutta.

Once Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura arrived at the residence of Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji with a kirtan party. The party, accompanied by Srila Babaji Maharaja quickly advanced towards Sri Mayapura. During this time another kirtan group was approaching from the Namanapukua side. The two parties chanting the glories of Lord Caitanya assembled together at the place of the present day Yoga Pith. Over the age of 130 years, Srila Jagannatha das Babaji, being humpbacked, normally could not sit in an erect position. But when he would perform the congregational chanting of the Lord he would extend his body by the distance of five hand lengths and spring upward a distance of over one yard! How wonderful it was when he pointed out the location of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's appearance site. It is also still fresh within my mind the way he struck his stick on the ground with a resounding "crack" (Srila Bihari das Babaji, who is holding a stick enacts the pastime again as true as life itself). He pointed out, some distance away, a well which contained the

broken hull of a mrdanga. Sometimes Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji would chastize persons who were opposed to the authenticity of Sri Mayapura. Again Bihari dasa Babaji began to explain with full vigor other transcendental pastimes he had seen. He continued, "I came to Navadvipa and prepared the foundation of Babaji Maharaja's bhajana kuthir. I dug it out by hand and constructed a fence around its sides. Many persons would come and visit Babaji Maharaja, leaving donations. I would place that money in a water pot for safe keeping. Every fifteen days to one month I would remove the money and count it. Normally the funds would be expended each month. Being fearful I would sometimes hide the money outside the premises. I considered that I would place 15 rupees aside for any emergency which might arise in the future. After doing so Babaji Maharaja called me and in a deep voice shouted, "Where did you place that 15 rupees?" He had never paid any attention to me as his eyelids extended well beyond his lower eyebrow as if they were hanging loosely. Whenever he wanted to see he would lift his long eyelids above his eyes. Srila Babaji Maharaja also never accounted for what was spent or given. In whatever way he wanted the money was spent. Once he said, "Go and buy rasgullas! I'm going to feed all the cows in the holy dhama." Two hundred rupees were taken and rasgullas were distributed by him to all the cows. But Babaji Maharaja never wanted to spend anything on the imposter Vaisnavas. He would say, "Don't let them come here."

"Srila Babaji Maharaja would often sit and accept prasadam from a large plate. Once five puppies took birth outside his bhajan kuthir. At prasadam time the puppies would appear from four sides and surround his place. As they began to eat he would feel to make sure they were all present. Once, seeing this, I became disturbed and began placing them outside. Srila Babaji Maharaja interrupted me in his deep voice. "Bring them back in or I will not eat." What could I do? I again brought the puppies inside and placed them around his plate. Satisfied, he said, 'The dogs of the dhama.'

"Many persons would come desiring his brahmin underwear. There was one personality by the name of Gaura Hari dasa who was determined to secure his

underwear. But Srila Babaji Maharaja would never give any personal items away. For a period of three days Gaura Hari remained outside the bhajan kuthir of Babaji Maharaja. Finally, Jagannatha das Babaji gave me permission to give him his kopin.

"Srila Jagannatha das Babaji would always become angry when he would see someone acting independently. Once one kirtan party approached Babaji Maharaja from a distance chanting unbonafide mantras. Srila Babaji Maharaja hearing them became very angry and said, 'Drive them all away from here. Don't let them come!'

"I've never seen such an effulgent personality as Babaji Maharaja. A few days before his disappearance he told me, "Oh Bihari, it's not necessary to inconvenience yourself to maintain your stomach. You don't have to separately endeavor for this. Don't ever mix with those false monkey-like renunciates."

"He didn't desire to remain any longer. If I could give up my body thinking of him then I could obtain real happiness."