



Śrī Indirā Ekādaśī

Issue no: 46

27th September 2016

Vaiṣṇavas: Equal Or Superior To Brāhmanas?

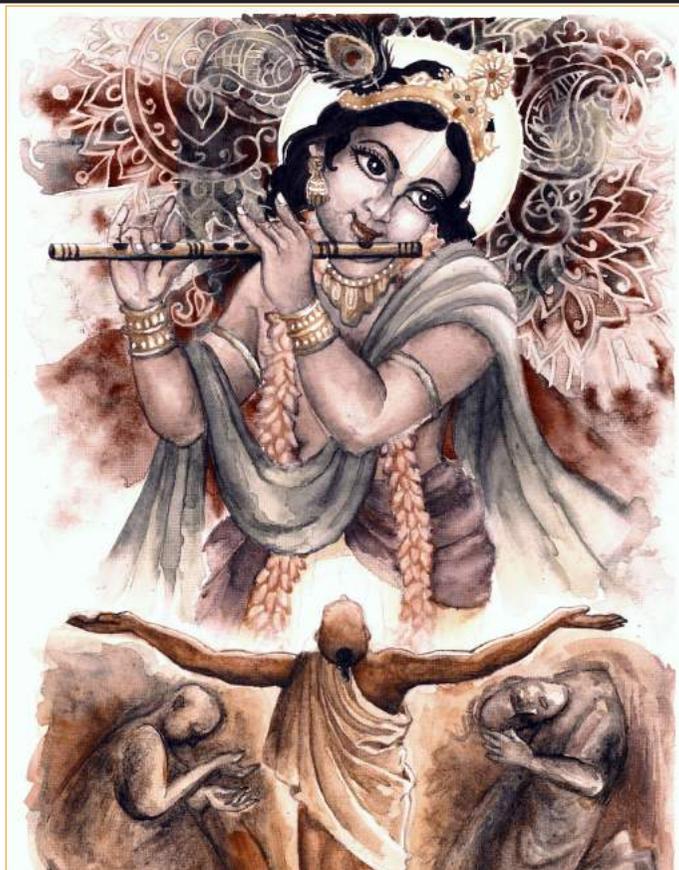
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KING PRITHU INSTRUCTS HIS CITIZENS

Sriman Purnaprajna Das

After receiving advice from Lord Brahma, King Prithu gave up his zeal for performing sacrifices. He then took his *avabhrtha* bath, marking the completion of the *yajña*. At this time, Lord Vishnu, who was very satisfied with Maharaja Prithu's performance of ninety-nine *āsvamedha- yajña*, appeared at the sacrificial arena. The Lord was accompanied by King Indra and all the demigods, great sages, as well as His personal associates, headed by Nanda and Sunanda.

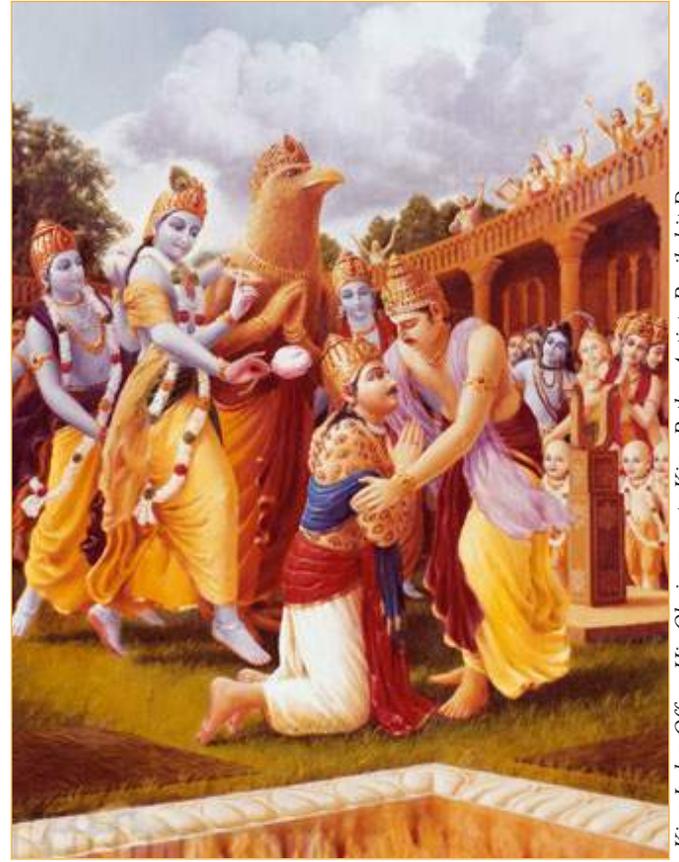
Addressing Maharaja Prithu, the Supreme Personality of Godhead said, "My dear King, Indra, who had disturbed the execution of your one hundred horse sacrifices, has come here with Me to be forgiven by you. Therefore, you should excuse him. One who is advanced in intelligence naturally feels inclined to perform welfare activities for others, and thus he is considered to be the best among human beings. By always remembering that the material body is different from the Soul, Such persons are never malicious toward others.

My dear King Prithu, the devotee who is connected with Me in a relationship of intense friendship and affection, and thus is liberated from all material contamination, is fully satisfied. Due to his perfect knowledge and equal vision, such a devotee never becomes agitated by material happiness or distress. Therefore, please keep yourself always equipoised, and treat others equally while executing your duties as a king. If you continue to protect your subjects according to the teachings of the *ācāryas* in disciplic succession, they will become very happy and love you without reservation.

My dear King, you will very soon attain the good fortune of meeting the great liberated sages, the four Kumaras. I am very pleased with your elevated qualities, so I request you to ask Me for a benediction that will fulfill your heart's desire."

Indra was standing nearby, and when he heard Lord Vishnu's speech, he became very ashamed remembering how abominably he had acted. With great repentance, he prostrated himself before Maharaja Prithu and touched his feet. Being a magnanimous *vaiṣṇava*, King Prithu had already given up all malice and so he quickly picked up Indra and embraced him with great affection.

Thereafter, Prithu Maharaja very reverently worshiped the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu, and as he did so, his devotional ecstasy increased. Although the Lord was preparing to depart, He did not immediately do so, because of being greatly attracted by the pure behavior of His unalloyed devotee. King Prithu's eyes were full of tears and his voice faltered due to ecstasy, and thus he could not see the Lord very distinctly,



King Indra Offers His Obeisances to King Prithu. Artist: Parikshit Das

nor could he properly speak. Therefore, he simply embraced the Lord within his heart while standing before Him with folded hands.

Lord Vishnu who resides upon one of the planets within the universe, at first did not allow His feet to touch the ground due to playing the part of one of the demigods. However, after becoming fully satisfied with King Prithu's behaviour and character, the Lord at last placed His feet upon the earth. It appeared that Lord Vishnu had to rest His hand upon Garuda's shoulder to keep his balance, as if unaccustomed to standing upon earthly ground. Maharaja Prithu could understand that the Lord acted in this way due to affection for him, and thus, while contemplating his great fortune, various ecstatic symptoms became manifest in his body.

Finally, after wiping away the tears from his eyes, King Prithu prayed as follows: "My dear Lord, You are capable of bestowing all kinds of benedictions upon your worshippers. Therefore, why should a truly learned person ask You for the benefits that are enjoyed by the bewildered conditioned souls; or even the liberation or merging into Your existence where there is no chance to receive the nectar of Your Lotus feet? Instead, I wish to have the benediction of possessing at least one million ears so that I may be able to properly hear about Your glories from the mouths of pure devotees.

My dear Lord, if one hears of Your glories even once

variety of living conditions we see have come about by chance - there is a supreme dictator behind these arrangements, and this is confirmed by all authoritative scriptures. By developing the inclination to serve the lotus feet of that supreme controller, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, suffering humanity can immediately cleanse the materialistic intentions that have accumulated in their minds over the span of innumerable births.

My dear citizens, you should enthusiastically render devotional service unto the Supreme Lord with your minds, your words, your bodies, as well as the results of your occupational duties. You should know that the Supreme Personality of Godhead becomes especially pleased with those devotees who follow in His footsteps by serving of the *brāhmaṇas* and *Vaiṣṇavas*, without reservation, for they are always dear to Him, just as He is dear to them. Although the Supreme Lord certainly eats those offerings that are made into the sacrificial fire, He takes more pleasure in accepting the offerings made through the mouths of the *brāhmaṇas* and pure devotees.

O respectable persons present here, I beg to receive your blessings so that I may perpetually carry upon my crown the dust from the lotus feet of such *brāhmaṇas* and *vaiṣṇavas*. Whoever does so, acquires the qualities of those pure *brāhmaṇas*, whose only wealth is their good behavior, and thus he receives all kinds of opulence without difficulty.

After hearing Maharaja Prithu's excellent speech, the members of the assembly heartily congratulated him as follows: "My dear King, the Vedic conclusion that one can conquer heaven as the result of the activities of a good son has been practically demonstrated by you. The most sinful King Vena has been delivered from the darkest regions of hell by you, his son, just as Hiranyakasipu had formerly been rescued by his son, Prahlada.

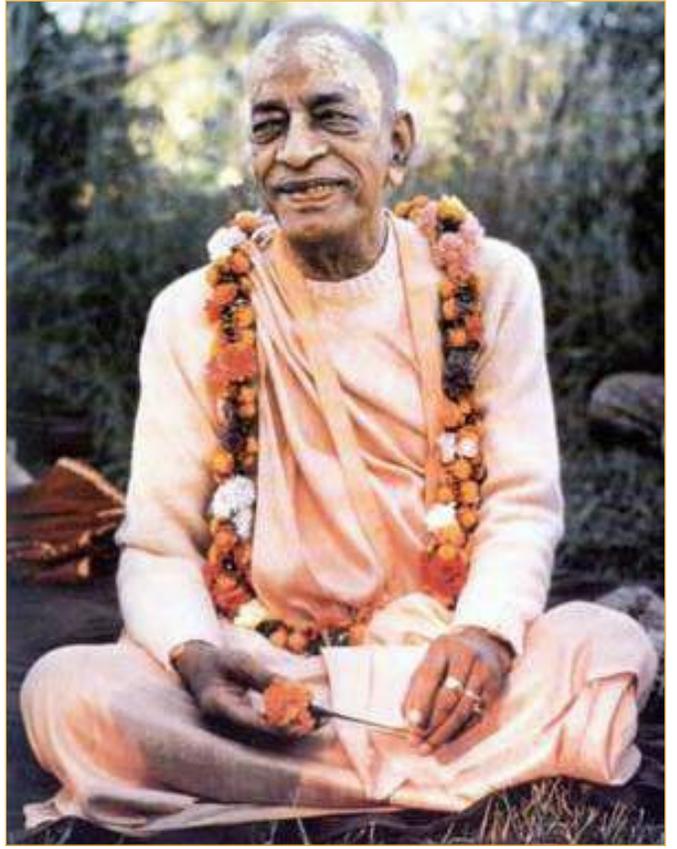
O dear King, since you are preaching the glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, we feel ourselves to be very fortunate, as if we are living directly under his merciful protection. Today you have opened our eyes and revealed the means for crossing to the other side of the ocean of darkness in which we are immersed."

— Adapted from the book "Śrīmad Bhagavatam in condensed form" by Purnaprajna das. ॐ

WHO IS A VAIṢṆAVA?

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta
Swami Prabhupada

The simple definition of *vaiṣṇava* is given by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu: "A person who immediately reminds one of the Supreme Personality of Godhead,



Krishna, is a *vaiṣṇava*." In these instruction of Maharaja Prithu, both *vaiṣṇavas* and *brāhmaṇas* are mentioned. A *vaiṣṇava* is a learned *brāhmaṇa* and is therefore designated as *brāhmaṇa-vaiṣṇava*, *brāhmaṇa-panḍita* or, alternatively *vaiṣṇava* or *brāhmaṇa*. In other words, a *vaiṣṇava* is understood as already a *brāhmaṇa*, but a *brāhmaṇa* may not be a pure *vaiṣṇava*. When a person understands his pure identity - *brahma jānāti*- he immediately becomes a *brāhmaṇa*.

In the *brāhmaṇa* stage, one's understanding of the Absolute Truth is mainly based on the impersonal view. When a *brāhmaṇa*, however, rises to the platform of personal understanding of the Supreme Godhead, he becomes a *vaiṣṇava*. Such a *vaiṣṇava* is transcendental even to a *brāhmaṇa*. In the material conception, a *brāhmaṇa* is considered to hold the highest position in human society. However a *vaiṣṇava* is transcendental even to a *brāhmaṇa* though both the *brāhmaṇa* and *vaiṣṇava* are spiritually advanced. A *brāhmaṇas* qualifications are mentioned in *Bhagavad-gītā* as truthfulness, mental equanimity, control of the senses, the power of tolerance, simplicity, knowledge of the Absolute Truth, firm faith in the scriptures, and practical application of the brahminical qualities in life. In addition to all these qualifications, when one fully engages in the transcendental loving service of the Lord, he becomes a *vaiṣṇava*. Prithu Maharaja warns his citizens who are also partially engaged in the devotional service of the Lord to take care against

offenses to the *brāhmaṇas* and *vaiṣṇavas*. Offenses at their lotus feet are so destructive that even the descendants of Yadu who were born in the family of Lord Krishna were destroyed due such offenses. The Supreme Personality of Godhead cannot tolerate any offense at the lotus feet of *brāhmaṇas* and *vaiṣṇavas*. Sometimes, due to their powerful positions, princes or government servants neglect the position of *brāhmaṇas* and *vaiṣṇavas*, not knowing that because of their offense they will be ruined.

—*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavata Purāṇa)* » Canto 4: The Creation of the Fourth Order » Chapter 21. Instructions by Maharaja Prithu » Verse:37. ❁

VAIṢṆAVAS : EQUAL OR SUPERIOR TO BRĀHMANAS?

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura

According to the scriptures, *vaiṣṇavas* are accepted as equal to *brāhmaṇas* even in ordinary consideration. In this regard, Srila Sanatana Goswami has quoted many scriptural statements in his *Dig-darśinī-ṭīkā*. Initially, he quoted the statement of Lord Kapila from His conversation with Devahuti in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*(3.33.6):

*yan-nāmadheya-sravaṇānukīrtanād
yat-prahvaṇād yat-smaraṇād api kvacit
śvādo 'pi sadyaḥ savanāya kalpate
kutaḥ punas te bhagavan nu darśanāt*

“To say nothing of the spiritual advancement of persons who see the Supreme Person face to face, even a person born in a family of dog-eaters immediately becomes eligible to perform Vedic sacrifices if he once utters the holy name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead or chants about Him, hears about His pastimes, offers Him obeisances or even remembers Him.”

Again, from the topics of Prithu Maharaja in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (4.21.12),

*sarvatrāskhalitādeśaḥ
sapta-dvīpaika- daṇḍa-dhṛk
anyatra brāhmaṇa-kulād
anyatrācyuta-gotrataḥ*

“Maharaja Prithu was an unrivaled king and possessed the scepter for ruling all the seven islands on the surface of the globe. No one could disobey his irrevocable orders but the saintly persons, the *brāhmaṇas* and the descendants of the Supreme Personality of Godhead [the *vaiṣṇavas*].”

In other words, Maharaja Prithu viewed and treated the *brāhmaṇas* and *vaiṣṇavas* equally. Srila Sanatana



Goswami has also quoted the statement of King Puranjana from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (4.26.24) :

*tasmin dadhe damam aham tava vīra-patni
yo 'nyatra bhūsura-kulāt kṛta-kilbiṣas tam
paśye na vīta-bhayam unmuditaṁ tri-lokyām
anyatra vai mura-ripor itaratra dāsāt*

“O hero’s wife, kindly tell me if someone has offended you. I am prepared to give such a person punishment as long as he does not belong to the *brāhmaṇa* caste. But for the servant of *murāripu* [Krishna], I excuse no one within or beyond these three worlds. No one can freely move after offending you, for I am prepared to punish him.”

In all these places the *brāhmaṇas* and the *vaiṣṇavas* have been equally respected even in worldly dealings. At this juncture a doubt may arise. There is a protocol to show respect equally to the *brāhmaṇas* and the *vaiṣṇavas* in worldly dealings. Moreover, the *ācāryas* have mentioned the word *viprasāmya* indicating that there is non-difference to the *brāhmaṇas* on the part of the *vaiṣṇavas*. However the word *vipra* refers to the subject of comparison, the word *vaiṣṇava* refers to the object being compared, so it is certainly indicated that the object being compared is inferior to the subject of comparison. For example, if we say that the face of Devadutta is like the moon, than we can understand that the face of Devadutta is not the moon, rather it has some similarity with the moon. Therefore, in beauty, the face is inferior to the moon. Considering in this way, some less-intelligent people may conclude that the word *viprasāmya* indicates that although the



vaiṣṇavas are equal to the *brāhmaṇas* in some ways, they are nevertheless inferior to the *brāhmaṇas*.

But before concluding in this way, one should patiently deliberate how it has been described everywhere that the beauty of the moon is more beautiful than a man's face. Furthermore it has always been the practice to exhibit the similarities of a more beautiful and famous object with a less beautiful and ordinary object, and thus the beauty of the latter has been established. In this type of comparison the fault of exaggeration may often arise. But if we carefully analyze the statements of the scriptures, then we will find that the devotees of the Lord have always been established as the topmost. If we study the commentary of Srila Sanatana Goswami with careful attention, then we will know that a *vaiṣṇava* has not been compared with a *brāhmaṇa* in the same way that a face is compared with the moon. Rather the fact that a *vaiṣṇava* is not inferior to a *brāhmaṇa* in any way as far as external prestige is concerned has been shown with gross external worldly considerations to envious people who are unqualified to see others' supremacy.

For example, when the *śāstras* explain the form of the Supreme Lord to a devotee who is attached to the opulent feature of the Lord, it conceals the most wonderfully sweet form of Sri Krishna and depicts Him with names like Narayana, Kṣīrodakashayi Vishnu, or Brahman. By this process, the complete eternal form of Sri Krishna is not indicated, yet at the same time it is not a lie to call Krishna Kṣīrodakashayi or Narayana. The knowers of the science of Krishna understand that just as a person who possesses a million rupees also possesses a hundred rupees or a thousand rupees; just as Brahman, Narayana, and Kṣīrodakashayi Vishnu are inseparably present in the form of Krishna; and that when Sri Krishna is explained as equal to Narayana, actually Sri Krishna is not inferior to Narayana, rather He is the source of Narayana. Similarly, though a *vaiṣṇava* is accepted as equal to a *brāhmaṇa* in the primary worldly consideration, yet a *vaiṣṇava* is nothing less than a *brāhmaṇa*, rather he is the crest jewel on the head of the *brāhmaṇa* communities, because a worshiper of the Supreme Lord who knows Brahman perfectly is a *vaiṣṇava*. If by the word *viprasāmya* it is concluded that a *vaiṣṇava* is inferior to a *brāhmaṇa* or only equal to a *brāhmaṇa*, then the behavior of *śāstras* and *sādhus* would not have proved opposite. When *vaiṣṇavas* have been glorified thousands of times as greater than *brāhmaṇas*, then it cannot be concluded that the word *viprasāmya* means that a *vaiṣṇava* is inferior or equal to a *brāhmaṇa*. Among the *brāhmaṇas* and *vaiṣṇavas*, the qualities of the *brāhmaṇas* are a common factor. Therefore brahmanism or brahminical qualities are eternally present in *vaiṣṇavas*, as the word *viprasāmya* indicates. Had it been a fact that *brāhmaṇas* were glorified in many places in the scriptures as greater than *vaiṣṇavas*, then we would have accepted the meaning of the word *viprasāmya* in the same way as

nityaṁ bhāgavata-sevayā

the comparison of a face with the moon.

It is mentioned in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*:

*brāhmaṇānām sahasrebhyaḥ satra-yājī viśiṣyate
satra-yājī- sahasrebhyaḥ sarva-vedānta- pāragah
sarva-vedānta- vit-koṭyā viṣṇu-bhaktō viśiṣyate*

“Out of thousands of *brāhmaṇas*, one is qualified to perform sacrifices. Out of many thousands of such qualified *brāhmaṇas* expert in sacrificial offerings, one learned *brāhmaṇa* may have passed beyond all Vedic knowledge. Among many such *brāhmaṇas*, one who is a devotee of Lord Vishnu is the best.”

In *Nārādīya Purāṇa* it is stated: *śvapaco 'pi mahīpāla viṣṇor bhaktō dvijādhiḥ* —“O king, a devotee of Lord Vishnu, though born in a dog-eater family, is higher than a *brāhmaṇa*.”

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* quotes the *Itihāsa-samuccaya*, wherein the Lord states:

*na me 'bhaktāś catur-vedī
mad-bhaktāḥ śva-pacaḥ priyaḥ
tasmai deyaṁ tato grāhyaṁ
sa ca pūjyo yathā hy aham*

“Even though a person is a very learned scholar of the Sanskrit Vedic literatures, he is not accepted as My devotee unless he is pure in devotional service. However, even though a person is born in a family of dog-eaters, he is very dear to Me if he is a pure devotee who has no motive to enjoy fruitive activity or mental speculation. Indeed, all respect should be given to him, and whatever he offers should be accepted. Such devotees are as worshipable as I am.”

If the word *viprasāmya* indicated that a *vaiṣṇava* should be considered equal to, or even inferior to a *brāhmaṇa*, then the Supreme Lord would have advised us to see a non-devotee *brāhmaṇa* who knows the four Vedas and a devotee of the Lord who is born in a dog-eater family on an equal level. That is not the case though. Rather, He says that a devotee is non-different from Himself, and is as worshipable as Himself. The Lord further states that an ordinary *brāhmaṇa* who knows the four Vedas is even lower than a dog-eater because he is devoid of devotion to Him. This is confirmed by the Lord as follows:

*caṇḍālo 'pi dvija-śreṣṭho
hari-bhakti-parāyaṇaḥ
hari-bhakti-vihīnaś ca dvijo 'pi śvapacādhamaḥ*

“Even if one is born in the family of a *caṇḍāla*, if one engages in the devotional service of the Lord, he becomes the best of *brāhmaṇas*. But a *brāhmaṇa* who



is devoid of devotional service is on the level of the lowest dog-eater.”

It is stated in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.9.10) as follows:

*viprād dvi-ṣaḍ-guṇa-yutād aravinda-nābha-
pādāravinda-vimukhāt śvapacāṁ variṣṭham
manyē tad-arpita-mano-vacanehitārtha-
prāṇam punāti sa kulam na tu bhūrimānah*

The *vaiṣṇavas* who are attached to devotional service are naturally indifferent to fruitive activities. If, according to the considerations of the materialists, the word *viprasāmya* indicated that a *vaiṣṇava* is inferior or equal to a *brāhmaṇa*, then the above-mentioned verse from *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* would not have described as follows: “If a *brāhmaṇa* has all twelve of the brahminical qualifications [as they are stated in the book called *Sanat-sujāta*] but is not a devotee and is averse to the lotus feet of the Lord, he is certainly lower than a devotee who is a dog-eater but who has dedicated everything—mind, words, activities, wealth and life—to the Supreme Lord. Such a devotee is better than such a *brāhmaṇa* because the devotee can purify his whole family, whereas the so-called *brāhmaṇa* in a position of false prestige cannot purify even himself.”

Srila Sanatana Goswami has further written: *viprād dvi-ṣaḍ- guṇa-yutād ity ādi-vacanaiva- vaiṣṇava-
brāhmaṇebhyo nīca-jāti- jātānām api vaiṣṇavānām
śreṣṭhyam*—“it has been established by various statements such as *viprād dvi-ṣaḍ* that a low-born *vaiṣṇava* is greater than a non-devotee *brāhmaṇa*.” When such clear understanding is there, then other concocted narrow opinions are understood to be in the language of Srila Sanatana Goswami as *mātsarya-
paraiḥ smārtaiḥ kaiścit kalpitam iti mantavyam*—“the wicked imagination of some envious *smārtas*.”

—*Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava, The conclusive comparison between brāhmaṇas and Vaiṣṇavas, Sri Srila Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. Translated by Bhumipati Dāsa.* ❧

WHY HAVE THE UPPER CLASS BRĀHMAṆAS NOT TAKEN UP VAIṢṆAVA-DHARMA?

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura

Chaturbhujā, “I admit that these days there are hardly any good *paṇḍitas*. Nevertheless, please tell me why the upper class *brāhmaṇas* have not taken up *vaiṣṇava-dharma*. The brahminical caste is a *sāttvikā* group established in the mode of goodness. They are generally inclined towards the path of truth and noble deeds, yet why are they mostly antagonistic to *vaiṣṇava-dharma*?”

Vaishanava Das Babaji, “Please note that Sri Ramanuja, Sri Madhvacharya, Sri Vishnusvami, and Sri

Nimbāditya were all *brāhmaṇas* by birth. Each of them had thousands of disciples who were *brāhmaṇas*. Our Sri Chaitanya of Bengal was a Vedic *brāhmaṇa*; Sri Nityananda was a high caste *rādhīya-brāhmaṇa*; and Sri Advaita Prabhu was a *vārendra-brāhmaṇa*. Even the *gosvāmīs* and *mahātmās*, the intimate associates of Sri Chaitanya, were mostly from the *brāhmaṇa* class. In addition, an impressive number of *brāhmaṇa* stalwarts have joined the ranks of the *vaiṣṇava* preachers to disseminate this pure *vaiṣṇava-dharma* worldwide. Therefore, why do you claim that higher caste *brāhmaṇas* do not admire *vaiṣṇava-dharma*?

“We know that mostly all the high-born *brāhmaṇas* hold *vaiṣṇava-dharma* in esteem. However, some, as a result of bad hereditary traits, depraved company, and wrong upbringing are hostile towards the *vaiṣṇava-dharma*. Of course, this attitude certainly does not give a good account of their *brāhmaṇa* background. It simply reflects their misfortune and degradation.

“The *sāstras* hold the view that particularly in Kali-yuga, properly qualified *brāhmaṇas* are scarce. These few select and qualified *brāhmaṇas* are *vaiṣṇavas*. From the moment of initiation into the *gāyatrī-
mantra*—the *mantra* that personifies the Vedas and who is a devotee of Sri Vishnu—a *brāhmaṇa* is factually embracing *vaiṣṇava-dharma* by having been thus initiated into a purely *vaiṣṇava-mantra*. Yet, on account of the ill influence of the deteriorating times, the deluded *brāhmaṇa* unfortunately accepts re-initiation by bogus non-Vedic methods and rejects his original *vaiṣṇava-dharma*. However, this small number of mislead *vaiṣṇava-brāhmaṇas* must not lead you to draw a wrong conclusion.”

—*Jaiva-dharma, Translated by: Sarvabhāvana dāsa, Chapter Ten: The Age and History of Nitya-dharma.* ❧



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Our heart felt thanks to Isha Prakash Das for helping as Copy Editor, Vrajsevika Devi Dasi for her Sanskrit and Bengali Translations and Rasa Manjari Devi Dasi for her assistance.

Quotations from the books, letters, and lectures of

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

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