

## Apasampradayas

Deviation of the disciplic succession  
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### 1. Introduction

In a standard Sanskrit dictionary, the word sampradaya is defined as "genuine instruction that has been received through guru-parampara or disciplic succession" (guru paramparagatu sad upadesasya). The prefix sam indicates connection, while the stem is a cognate of pradhana, "source". In the fourth chapter of Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krishna declares Himself to be the original source of the transcendental science of bhakti-yoga, and He confirms that one is connected to this knowledge only through guru-parampara.

In the vocabulary of Western religious traditions, sampradaya really has no exact equivalent. One might be tempted to employ "orthodoxy", but as a noted German Sanskritist has pointed out, this word really applies to matters of doctrine, not practice. Admission into a sampradaya does not only depend upon a theoretically correct grasp of Krishna's teachings. The candidate must practically demonstrate his learning through strict adherence to the purified lifestyle (acara) set down by great saintly teachers (acaryas).

"One is understood to be in full knowledge whose every endeavor is devoid of desire for sense gratification. He is said by the sages to be a worker for whom the reactions of karma have been burned up by the fire of perfect knowledge." (Bhagavad-gita 4.19)

Pure acara automatically expands into pure pracara (preaching), upacara (Deity worship) and all other devotional activities. By such purity, the devotee becomes eligible to enjoy the higher taste of transcendence (param drstva) that is spoken of by Krishna in Bhagavad-gita 2.59, which satisfies all desires at their very root, within the soul itself. Thus the lower taste for meat-eating, illicit sex, gambling and intoxication is lost; consciousness firmly settles into sinlessness, and the devotee gradually becomes qualified to enter the rasa of Sri Krishna's personal association. Raso vai sah rasam hy evayam labdhvanandi bhavati, declares the Tattiriya Upanisad: "When one understands the Personality of Godhead, the reservoir of pleasure, Krishna, he actually becomes transcendently blissful."

The genuineness of a sampradaya or a person representing a sampradaya is primarily determined by spiritual quality (sarva maha-guna-gana vaisnava-sarire - "A vaishnava is one who has developed all good qualities", Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 22.75). The good qualities of the vaishnava are actually krishnera-guna, Krishna's own, and they appear in the devotee through his exchange of rasa with the Lord. The Lord's transcendental qualities are unlimited (ananta krsnera-guna), and His devotees are likewise unlimited. This combination precipitates different moods of love of Godhead, which are visible in

the persons of great acaryas who have descended into this world to teach genuine vaishnava qualities via the sampradaya system.

Even when he seems to be at variance with other acaryas on certain matters of detail, it is clear that a real acarya is situated in perfect knowledge because he 1) is free from vice, 2) exhibits the good qualities of a vaishnava, and 3) accepts vishnu-tattva as Supreme. Differences between the teachings of acaryas are due to their individual moods of love for the Lord.

"What Madhvacharya understands, we also understand... What Ramanuja understands, we also understand. What Caitanya Mahaprabhu understands, we also understand. So there is no difference... That is vaishnava. All the vaishnavas understand that Vishnu is the Supreme. There may be, sometimes, such as Krishna is understood as incarnation of Vishnu, and sometimes they understand Vishnu as the incarnation of Krishna. That is sampradaya. That is sampradaya. But either Krishna or Vishnu, He is Supreme, that is accepted by all... If I love somebody, I'll say he is first. And if you love somebody, you'll say he is first. But both of them same... Hanumanji, he'll never accept Krishna. And the gopis will never accept Rama or Vishnu." (His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, conversation, May 6, 1975)

Admission into a sampradaya ultimately depends upon the aspirant's submission to the mood of the acarya through strict adherence to the acara he teaches. When asked what constitutes the personal relationship of a disciple to his spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada answered, "To obey your spiritual master. Whatever he has said, you follow strictly. Follow the regulative principles. Chant sixteen rounds. That's all." (SP conversation, April 8, 1975)

In another conversation (March 11, 1976), Srila Prabhupada compared the disciple to wood, the spiritual master to matches, Krishna consciousness to fire and maya to water. When damp wood is placed in fire, it first dries and then ignites. The drying is compared to the practice of acara by which the disciple associates with the acarya. When he becomes firmly situated in acara, he naturally ignites with Krishna consciousness. In this way the flame of pure krishna-bhakti passes down the sampradaya. "There are four lines of disciplic succession: one from Lord Brahma, one from Lord Shiva, one from Laksmi, the goddess of fortune, and one from the Kumaras. The disciplic succession from Lord Brahma is called the Brahma Sampradaya, the succession from Lord Shiva (Sambhu) is called the Rudra Sampradaya, the one from the goddess of fortune, Laksmiji, is called the Sri Sampradaya, and the one from the Kumaras is called the Kumara Sampradaya. One must take shelter of one these four sampradayas in order to understand the most confidential religious system. In the Padma Purana it is said, sampradaya-vihina ye mantras te nisphala matah: "If one does not follow the four recognized disciplic successions, his mantra or initiation is useless." In the present day there are many apasampradayas, or sampradayas which are not bona fide, which have no link to authorities like Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva, the Kumaras or Laksmi. People are misguided by such sampradayas. The sastras say that being initiated in such a sampradaya is a useless waste of time, for it will never enable one to understand the real religious principles." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 6.3.21, purport)

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur identifies thirteen apasampradayas that split away from the Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya Sampradaya after Lord Caitanya's disappearance: Aula, Baula, Kartabhaja, Neda, Daravesa, Sani, Sahajiya, Sakhibheki, Smarta, Jata-gosani, Ativadi, Cudadhari and Gauranga-nagari. These apasampradayas (apa means "deviated") are like parasitical growths upon the great tree of the sankirtan movement. Because they exhibit all the defects of material conditioning, they are spiritually useless. The "rasa" relished by such groups is termed prakta-rasa by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. Their missionary activities are condemned as cheating.

"A conditioned soul in the material world has the disqualification of cheating. He has four disqualifications: he is sure to commit mistakes, he is sure to be illusioned, he is prone to cheat others and his senses are imperfect. But if anyone carries out the order of the spiritual master by disciplic succession or the parampara system, he overcomes the four defects. Therefore knowledge received from the bona fide spiritual master is not cheating. Any other knowledge which is manufactured by the conditioned soul is cheating only. Brahma knew well that Kardama Muni exactly carried out the instructions received from him

and that he actually honored his spiritual master. To honor the spiritual master means to carry out his instructions word for word." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 3.24.12, purport)

The ultimate test of whether one is or is not a member of Lord Caitanya's sampradaya is the quality of his chanting of the holy name of Krishna, which is the essential acara in the the age of Kali: "...you should always remember that either grhastha or brahmacari or sannyasi, nobody can strictly follow all the rules and regulations... In the Kali-yuga it is not possible... Therefore Caitanya Mahaprabhu has recommended that hari-nama, chanting Hare Krishna mantra, should be very rigidly performed, which is common for everyone." (SP conversation, March 10, 1976)

If a person advertises himself as a Gaudiya Vaishnava by chanting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra and yet deliberately blasphemes great devotees, denies that Lord Vishnu is the Absolute Truth, considers the spiritual master to be an ordinary man, blasphemes Vedic literatures and other authorized scriptures, considers the glories of the holy name to be exaggeration, concocts perverted theories about the holy name, thinks the holy name to be equivalent to mundane religious rituals, preaches the glories of the holy name to the faithless or maintains material attachments while chanting the holy name, he cannot represent the sampradaya even if he is initiated into it.

"Whether a Vaishnava is properly initiated or not is not a subject for consideration. One may be initiated and yet contaminated by the mayavada philosophy, but a person who chants the holy name of the Lord offenselessly will not be so contaminated. A properly initiated vaishnava may be imperfect, but one who chants the holy name of the Lord is all-perfect. Although he may apparently be a neophyte, he still has to be considered a pure unalloyed vaishnava." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 15.111, purport)

"If one chants the Hare Krishna mantra while committing offenses, these unwanted creepers will grow. One should not take advantage of chanting the Hare Krishna mantra for some material profit. As mentioned in verse 159: 'nisiddhacara', 'kutinati', 'jiva-himsana', 'labha', 'puja', 'pratisthadi yata upasakha-gana

The unwanted creepers have been described by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur. He states that if one hears and chants without trying to give up offenses, one becomes materially attached to sense gratification. One may also desire freedom from material bondage like the mayavadis, or one may become attached to the yoga-siddhis and desire wonderful yogic powers. If one is attached to wonderful material activities, one is called siddhi-lobhi, greedy for material perfection. One may also be victimized by diplomatic or crooked behavior, or one may associate with women for illicit sex. Others may make a show of devotional service like the prakrta-sahajiyas, or one may try to support his philosophy by joining some caste or identifying himself with the support of family tradition, one may become a pseudo guru or so-called spiritual master. One may become attached to the four sinful activities -- illicit sex, intoxication, gambling and meat eating -- or one may consider a vaishnava to belong to a mundane caste or creed. One may think, "This is a Hindu vaishnava, and this is a European vaishnava. A European vaishnava is not allowed to enter the temples." In other words, one may consider vaishnavas in terms of birth, thinking one a brahmana vaishnava, a sudra vaishnava, a mleccha vaishnava and so on. One may also try to carry out a professional business while chanting the Hare Krishna mantra or reading Srimad-Bhagavatam, or one may try to increase his monetary strength by illegal means. One may also try to be a cheap vaishnava by chanting in a secluded place for material adoration, or one may desire mundane reputation by making compromises with non-devotees, compromising one's philosophy or spiritual life, or one may become a supporter of a hereditary caste system. All these are pitfalls of personal sense gratification. Just to cheat some innocent people, one makes a show of advanced spiritual life and becomes known as a sadhu, mahatma or religious person. All this means that the so-called devotee has become victimized by all these unwanted creepers and that the real creeper of bhakti-lata-bija has been stunted." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 19.160, purport)

The link between namaparadha and full-blown deviation from the sampradaya is indicated by Srila Jiva Gosvami, who warns in the Bhakti-sandharba that there are offenders to the holy name who are acikitsya or incorrigible (jnana-lava-durvidagdhastra-acikitsya-atva-dupeksha). Devotees, always compassionate, try to help fallen souls with good instruction. But if someone becomes insolent and arrogant due to acquiring

a little knowledge from their association, he is disqualified from the sampradaya because of three kinds of namaparadha: sadhu-nindha (blasphemy of the devotees of the Lord), guru-avajna (disregard of the spiritual master) and sruti-sastra-nindha (blasphemy of the revealed scriptures).

Yet the incorrigible offender never concedes the fact of his offenses. He cannot understand that the mercy of the spiritual master and the association of pure devotees are indispensable to the chanting of the holy name. Because he highly values worldly knowledge and accomplishments, he looks down upon the simple devotees who have surrendered themselves to devotional service. This is sadhu-ninda. He cannot accept that the spiritual master is a transcendental teacher, not a worldly one; thus he tries to measure the person and instructions of the guru by his own mental standards. This is guru-avajna. He studies the revealed scriptures as he would ordinary literature, gleaning from it whatever seems to support his preconceived notions, heedless of the rest. This is sruti-sastra-nindha.

If, on the strength of a false show of advancement in Krishna consciousness, he pretends to have fully realized the glories of the holy name, he is fit for eternal punishment by Yamaraja. As explained in the purport to Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 19.156, one who "thinks that he has become very mature and can live separate from the association of vaishnavas and thus give up all the regulative principles" commits the hati-mata or mad elephant offense. Whatever genuine devotional inspiration that might have been implanted in his heart by good association is uprooted and destroyed. Because of his incurable calumny, such a hard-hearted acikitsya-namaparadhi is fit to be shunned by the bona fide community of devotees.

Nonetheless, it is seen that some acikitsya-namaparadhis become very influential in the Kali-yuga. Somehow or other they make use of the bona fide spiritual master for their own ends. Advertising themselves as his dearest disciples, they seem to serve, glorify and worship the spiritual master with considerable sincerity. But all pains taken by them are for the sake of self-promulgation alone. Their progress is in the accumulation of material wealth and fame, not in devotional service to Krishna. The acikitsya-namaparadhi, propelled to prominence by cunning, diplomacy and material qualifications like noble birth, opulence, erudition and beauty, may attract followers from the ranks of two lesser grades of namaparadhis who have not firmly taken shelter of the sampradaya due to misfortune. These two kinds of offenders are the ignorant and the weak.

The ignorant offenders are compared to damp wood: lacking bhakti-sukrti and the association and mercy of the saintly, they are sunk in material conceptions; even if they are exposed to the purifying fire of Krishna consciousness, it does not ignite their good fortune immediately. Thus they are liable to be misled. But if they take refuge in the holy name, Krishna's mercy will someday be available to them, even if after a long time.

The weak are hesitant to take advantage of genuine sadhu-sanga due to a paucity of faith. Innocent and without duplicity, the more they can simply surrender to the chanting of the holy name in good association, the more they are blessed by Krishna's mercy. But until their lingering sins are destroyed by the effect of sadhu-sanga, they cannot muster the strength to transcend namaparadha.

The acikitsya-namaparadhi expertly spins a net of illusion sticky-sweet with a perverted enjoying mood (prakṛta-rasa) by which he entraps his unfortunate followers. Awakening and nourishing seeds of worldly desire (anarthas) within their hearts, he misleads them into thinking that these growing anarthas are the bhakti-lata-bija.

"Bhakti-lata-bija means 'the seed of devotional service.' Everything has an original cause or seed. For any idea, program, plan or device, there is first of all the contemplation of the plan, and that is called bija, or the seed. The methods, rules and regulations by which one is perfectly trained in devotional service constitute the bhakti-lata-bija, or seed of devotional service. This bhakti-lata-bija is received from the spiritual master by the grace of Krishna. Other seeds are called anyabhilasa-bija, karma-bija, jnana-bija or political and social or philanthropic bija. However, bhakti-lata-bija is different from these other bijas. Bhakti-lata-bija can be received only through the mercy of the spiritual master. Therefore one has to satisfy the spiritual master to get bhakti-lata-bija (yasya prasada bhagavat-prasada). Bhakti-lata-bija is the origin of devotional service. Unless one satisfies the spiritual master, he gets the bija, or root cause, of

karma, jnana and yoga without the benefit of devotional service. However, one who is faithful to his spiritual master gets the bhakti-lata-bija. This bhakti-lata-bija is received when one is initiated by the bona fide spiritual master. After receiving the spiritual master's mercy, one must repeat his instructions, and this is called sravana-kirtan -- hearing and chanting. One who has not properly heard from the spiritual master or who does not follow the regulative principles is not fit for chanting (kirtan). This is explained in Bhagavad-gita (2.41): vyavasayatmika buddhir ekeha kuru-nandana. One who has not listened carefully to the instructions of the spiritual master is unfit to chant or preach the cult of devotional service. One has to water the bhakti-lata-bija after receiving instructions from the spiritual master." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 19.152, purport)

In the apasampradayas, chanting and preaching are never undertaken with regard for vaishnava traditions of regulative principles and spiritual instruction. The "ecstasy" of prakṛta-rasa generated by such unauthorized chanting and preaching is but poison in devotional guise.

"Instead of awakening real love for Krishna, such hearers of the Bhagavatam become more and more attached to household affairs and sex life (yan maithunadi-grhamedhi-sukham hi tuccham). One should hear Srimad-Bhagavatam from a person who has no connection with material activities, or, in other words, from a paramahansa vaishnava, one who has achieved the highest stage of sannyasa. This, of course, is not possible unless one takes shelter of the lotus feet of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. The Srimad-Bhagavatam is understandable only for one who can follow in the footsteps of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya 5.131, purport)

In their "ecstasy", the apasampradayas enjoy the holy dhama (or a place they claim is a dhama) as a facility for hucksterism, self-promotion and money-making. They enjoy disciples by diverting them from the Lord's service and engaging them in the service of the senses of cheating gurus. They enjoy great vaishnavas through lip-service and cheap imitation; eager to bewilder the innocent and advance their own schemes, they strive for some kind of recognition from a great vaishnava so that they can freely exploit this "endorsement." And they enjoy propagating esoteric doctrines of their own invention that they claim are the real teachings of guru, sastra and sadhu.

All this results in three kinds of inauspicious qualities that are ever prominent in the apasampradayas. These are mentioned in Vaishnava Ke by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati: anitya-vaibhava (hankering for material success), kaminira-kama (illicit sexual affairs that are usually passed off as "transcendental"), and mayavada (philosophical speculation that undercuts the personal nature of God as taught by the vaishnava sampradayas).

In the chapters that follow, the backgrounds of the thirteen apasampradayas will be investigated and their deviations analyzed. I have undertaken this work out of a firm belief that these thirteen cases are archetypical of all sorts of misrepresentations of the sankirtan movement of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu that have been seen down to this very day.

As he declared in a lecture on July 4, 1970, Srila Prabhupada considered his only success to be the extension of Lord Caitanya's sampradaya into the Western World. It will be our success as his followers to protect the growth of ISKCON so that it may extend to every town and village of this planet as Lord Caitanya predicted. Let us heed the warning from another prediction made by Lord Caitanya regarding the rise of the apasampradayas, visva andhakara koribe: "In My name they will make the whole world dark."

In preparing this volume, I have drawn from a number of sources, vaishnava and academic. The most important of these are the books, letters and lectures of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. From Sri Bhakti-vilasa Bharati Maharaja, a godbrother of Srila Prabhupada, I used resumes and refutations of apasampradaya philosophy given in Apasampradaya Svarupa, kindly translated from the Bengali by Bhakta Krishanu Lahiri, a student of languages at Calcutta University and member of Bhaktivedanta Youth Services. I also took help of the wealth of data on the Gaudiya Sampradaya's long-standing differences with the jata-gosani and smarta castes in The History and Literature of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, an unpublished manuscript by another godbrother of Srila Prabhupada named Sambidananda das (who in the 1930's accompanied two Gaudiya Matha sannyasis on a preaching tour of

Europe). The following scholarly books were consulted: Vaishnavism in Bengal by Dr. Ramkantha Cakravarti (Sanskrit Pushtak Bandhar, Calcutta 1985), Obscure Religious Cults by Dr. Sashi Bhushan Das Gupta (1976 reprint by Firma KLM Ltd.), The Bauls of Bengal by Rebati Mohan Sarkar (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi 1990) and Braj -- Center of Krishna Pilgrimage by Alan W. Entwistle (Egbert Forsten, Holland 1987).

Sri Bhakti Vikasa Svami Maharaja and Kiranasa Prabhu brought me up to date with a detailed account of the modern-day apasampradaya phenomena encountered in their years of preaching in Bangladesh. Sarvabhavana Prabhu helped with the translating of the material on the Aul apasampradaya, and Kishore Ghosh of the B.Y.S. similarly helped with material on the Bauls. Atma Tattva Prabhu of the ISKCON Mayapura Gurukula was kind in ways too numerous to mention. The following devotees assisted me in processing the raw data out of which this book was churned: Anadi das, Rama Gopala das, Sucirani devi-dasi, Priti devi-dasi, and Daya Dharma devi-dasi.

## 2. Jata-gosani: caste goswamis

"So there are thirteen pseudo pretenders belonging to the Caitanya sampradaya ... So if I describe these thirteen, it will take thirteen hours. So I don't describe them all. But one or two must be described. The most important is the jati-gosai. They created a caste of gosvamis, just like they created a caste of brahmanas. So this gosvami will come by hereditary birth, just like brahmana. So my Guru Maharaja's contribution is that he defeated these caste gosvamis, the same way as Caitanya Mahaprabhu did that, as Caitanya Mahaprabhu said, kiba vipra sudra nyasa kebe naya yei krnsa tattva vetta sei guru haya: 'There is no consideration whether a man is a sannyasi, a brahmana, or a sudra, or a grhasta, householder, or - No. Anyone who knows the science of Krishna, he is alright. He is gosvami. He is brahmana.'"

"That is the contribution, say, within a hundred years. That is the contribution. And for this reason, he had to face so many vehement protests from this brahmana class gosvamis. They conspired to kill him. Guru Maharaja told me personally, because by his grace, when I used to meet alone, he used to talk so many things. He was so kind that he used to talk with me. So he personally told me, 'These people, they wanted to kill me. They collected 25,000 rupees and went to the police officer in charge of that area, that, "You take this 25,000 rupees. We shall do something against Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. You don't take any step.'" And the police officer refused and came to my Guru Maharaja that 'You take care. This is the position.'" (Srila Prabhupada, lecture, 7 February 1969)

The following quotations from Srila Rupa Gosvami define the qualifications of a bona fide spiritual master, who is sometimes addressed as gosvami, gosani or gosai in the Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya Sampradaya.

iha yasya harer dasye  
karmana manasa gira  
nirhila api avasthasu  
jivanmurtah sa ucyate

"One who engages in the transcendental service of the Lord in body, mind and word is to be considered liberated in all conditions of material existence." (Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu 1.2.187)

vaco vegam manasah krodha-vegam  
jihva-vegam udaropastha-vegam  
etan vegan yo visaheta dhira  
sarvam apimam prthivim sa sisyat

"One who can control the urge to speak, the mind, anger and the tongue, belly and genitals is able to accept disciples from all over the world." (Sri Upadesamrta 1)

The scriptures give clear warnings to those who would accept the post of guru without qualification:

na ca mantra upajivi syanna  
capya arco upajirikah  
na aniredita bhogas ca  
na ca nirdyah niredika

"Never accept the post of an initiating spiritual master or temple priest as a profession. Never eat what is not offered, and never offer what is not recommended in the scriptures." (Narada Pancaratra)

svalpa api handi bhuyam  
sam svadharma nirdita kriya  
drstim kudrstir bhaktis tu  
devatantapo samsraya

"Even the slightest disreputable activity destroys a great quantity of virtue. Vast learning is destroyed by just the slightest wrong understanding. Bhakti is destroyed by the slightest dependence upon the demigods." (Narada Pancaratra)

guru nasa syat sva jana nasa syat  
pita nasa syat janani na sa syat  
daivam na tat syan na patis ca sa syan  
na mocayea yah samupaiti matyum

"One who cannot deliver his dependents from the path of repeated birth and death should never become a spiritual master, a father, a husband, a mother or a worshipable demigod." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 5.5.18)

The jata-gosani are a hereditary caste of so-called spiritual masters. Their qualification to give initiation is too often limited to the boast of family connections to associates of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu or to disciples of these associates. A famous example of such a family is the so-called Nityanandavamsa. They claim seminal descent from Lord Nityananda through persons who were actually disciples, not sons, of Lord Nityananda's only and childless son Sri Virabhadra Gosvami.

The jata-gosani use of "gosvami" as a family name is a deviation peculiar to this apasampradaya. Though sunken in mundane family affairs, they think themselves as important as the renounced gosvamis of the Gaudiya Sampradaya.

"One who is still in family life should not misuse the title gosvami. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur did not recognize the caste gosvamis because they were not in the line of the six Gosvamis in the renounced order who were direct disciples of Lord Caitanya -- namely, Srila Rupa Gosvami, Srila Sanatana Gosvami, Srila Bhatta Raghunatha Gosvami, Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami, Sri Jiva Gosvami and Srila Raghunatha das Gosvami. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur said that the grhastha-ashrama, or the status of family life, is a sort of concession for sense gratification. Therefore a grhastha should not falsely adopt the title gosvami. The ISKCON movement has never conferred the title gosvami upon a householder. Although all the sannyasis we have initiated in ISKCON are young, we have awarded them the titles of the renounced order of life, svami and gosvami, because they have completely dedicated their lives to preach the cult of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 12.27, purport)

A popular superstition in Bengal, alluded to in the purport of Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 10.23, is that persons born in caste gosvami families are automatically uttama-adhikaris. Thus the title Prabhupada is theirs by birthright. The Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya rejects this.

"It is said, phalena pariciyate: one is recognized by the result of his actions. In vaishnava society, there are many types of vaishnavas. Some of them are called gosvamis, some are called svamis, some are prabhus, and some are prabhupada. One is not recognized, however, simply by such a name. A spiritual master is recognized as an actual guru when it is seen he has changed the character of his disciples."

(Caitanya-caritamṛta, Antya 3.143, purport)

In Vrindavan, many of the important temples are managed by caste gosvamis. The history of two such prominent families illustrates how the jata-gosani contamination can divert even highly-qualified persons from the path of the great acaryas. To avoid the unpleasantries of controversy, some names are omitted.

One clan has temples in Mathura, Jatipur, Gokul and Kaman. They descend from a brahmana who is a famous contemporary of Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu who, as described in Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta, became formally linked with Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya when he received initiation from Sri Gadadhara Pandita. Srila Prabhupada remarked that Lord Caitanya accepted him as a great scholar, but not necessarily as a great devotee. At Govardhana, he took over the management of a temple that had been established by a great Gaudiya Vaishnava acarya. During this time, the learned brahmana associated with the six Gosvamis, especially Rupa and Sanatana. Because his own men lacked training, Gaudiya Vaishnavas were appointed to do the puja under his supervision.

The brahmana had two sons; after he left the world in the year 1530, Srila Raghunatha das Gosvami requested one son to take over the temple management. The temple duties continued to be shared between Gaudiya Vaishnavas and the learned brahmana's disciples until around the year 1550, when an intrigue was begun against the Gaudiya devotees. Once, while they were worshiping the Deity, an envious disciple of the brahmana set fire to the homes of the Gaudiya pujaris and drove them out. Thereafter, the Deity was claimed as the sole property of the brahmana's clan. (In 1699, due to threat of Muslim attack, the Deity vacated Vrindavan and eventually came to Rajasthan.)

Though the brahmana's son was not part of the intrigue, he took no steps to heal the rupture with the Gaudiya Sampradaya. To block a challenge to his authority from among his father's disciples, he appointed his seven sons as acaryas and willed that only they and their descendants could use the title "Gosvami Maharaja" and give initiation. Later on, the family propagated a myth that the great brahmana's son was an incarnation of Krishna; the same pseudo-divinity was appropriated by succeeding generations and used as means of explaining away the "amorous pastimes" of some of the clan.

The second line of Vrindavan caste gosvamis under discussion was started by someone who took sannyasa from Gopala Bhatta Gosvami. As if in imitation of Lord Nityananda, he later married two sisters and claimed that he had been ordered to do so by Sri Krishna personally. The Gaudiya Vaishnava community disapproved both his deed and defense. In the year 1585, he established a mandira near Kaliya Ghat. The caste gosvamis who manage this mandira today are descendants of his first son. Descendants of his second son manage another famous Vrindavan temple.

This clan takes a dim view of what they think are the unnecessary austerities of the gosvamis of the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya. Krishna loves his devotees, they argue, and He becomes pleased when He sees them living a life of material comfort and sense gratification. They uphold their founder's example as superior to that of the Six Gosvamis. One Priyadas of this clan composed a work called *Suslokamanimala* in which he asserts that the founder was the spiritual master of Sanatana Gosvami and Jiva Gosvami. With this and other fabrications, they defend their apasampradaya as the genuine sampradaya.

Several historical accounts, including the biography of Srinivasa Acarya entitled *Prema-vilasa*, relate that the founder met his death by having his head chopped off, either by robbers or by a disgruntled pujari.

In 1932, the caste gosvamis of Vrindavan opposed the Vraja Mandala Parikrama of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur and his Gaudiya Matha disciples on the grounds that he had deviated from the Vedic system by offering the sacred thread to persons not of brahminical parentage. Srila Prabhupada explained the fallacy of the jata-gosani in this regard in a letter to Acyutananda Swami: "Regarding the validity of the brahminical status as we accept it, because in the present age there is no observance of the garbhadhana ceremony, even a person born in a brahmana family is not considered a brahmana, he is called *dvijabandhu* or unqualified son of a brahmana. Under the circumstances, the conclusion is that the whole population is now sudra, as it is stated *kalau sudra sambhava*. So for sudras there is no initiation



according to the Vedic system, but according to the pancaratrika system initiation is offered to a person who is inclined to take Krishna consciousness."

In Bengal, besides caste gosvamis who at least have a valid genealogical link to some vaishnava of the past, there are even pretenders whose claim to the name "gosvami" lacks any foundation whatsoever. Many of the important temples and holy places connected with Lord Caitanya's pastimes remain under jata-gosani control. Up until the early part of this century, they held the lower-caste vaishnavas in an iron grip of ignorance and exploitation.

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur challenged the jata-gosani in such works as *Jaiva Dharma* and *Hari Nama Cintamani* by proclaiming that it is not enough to accept a spiritual master merely on the basis of his caste. Before initiation, the candidate must be completely satisfied that the initiator is fully conversant with the scriptures and can lift his disciples out of ignorance. The guru must be of spotless character: if he is addicted to sinful acts, even those he may have already initiated must reject him. Bhaktivinoda's books unleashed a wave of reform in Bengal that pushed the jata-gosani into a defensive stance. But the confrontation came to open war when his son, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, took over the Gaudiya mission.

In 1912, he was invited to attend a samminlani (assembly) of vaishnavas sponsored by the Maharaja of Kossimbazar. But some jata-gosani and their sahajiya supporters prevented him from giving a public lecture; in protest, he fasted for four days straight. According to the account of his disciple Sambidananda das, Acarya Siddhanta Sarasvati refuted all the arguments placed before him by the caste's proponents in a discussion separate from the main program. The jata-gosani thus learned to fear Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati as the singlemost threat to their privileged existence.

After taking sannyasa in 1918, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati mounted a concerted effort to smash the influence of the jata-gosani even in their strongholds. He fearlessly toured Jessore and Khulna (now in Bangladesh), the home turf of Priyanath Nandi, who was the leading spokesman of the caste gosvamis. Priyanatha met defeat in a public debate held at the village of Toothpada.

Things came to a head in February-March 1925, just as the Gaudiya Matha began nine days of a Navadvipa parikrama leading up to that year's Gaura Purnima festivities. The party of devotees, numbering several thousand and personally lead by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, was viciously attacked by goonda hirelings of the jata-gosani when it entered the city of Navadvip without paying a tax for maintenance of caste gosvami temples. Armed with brickbats and other weapons, the goondas charged the elephant procession, injuring many pilgrims. The shocked public sided with the Gaudiya Matha devotees and the pilgrimage continued under police protection. This incident permanently tarnished the reputation and influence of the jata-gosani. Overnight, their stubborn opposition to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's preaching lost all force.

#### The Caste Gosvami Mentality and ISKCON

By Srila Prabhupada's mercy, the grossest jata-gosani deviation - hereditary guruship - seems unlikely to take root in the ISKCON he constituted. Yet the author recalls a period in the 1970's when the devotees of the New York temple were addressing their GBC man as "Gosvami Maharaja" even though he'd abandoned his sannyasa ashrama and taken a wife (ed. note: Bali Mardan). After various indelicacies about his marriage came to light, this person was forced to relinquish his position. So here is at least one example of how an aberration of the jata-gosani type found its way, albeit briefly, into ISKCON.

In this connection, there are other characteristics of the caste gosvami apasampradaya that are worth noting. The jata-gosani are the priestly class of a mundane religion that superficially resembles vaishnavadharma. As Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati used to say, they use the saligram-sila and arca-vigraha as "stones for cracking nuts" (i.e. as a means of income for sense enjoyment). They give siddha-pranali initiation (in which they "reveal" the disciple's rasa with Krishna) as a ritual means of garnering a follower's lifetime financial support. They neglect their disciples' factual spiritual advancement by not teaching them

the regulative principles of sadhana-bhakti; indeed, such "gosvamis" are worshiped by bidi-seva (ceremonial presentations of cigarettes) and offerings of fish.

How do such deviations begin? Here are a few indications:

"Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur explains that even though one may become free from the desire for fruitive activity, sometimes the subtle desire for fruitive activity comes into being within the heart. One often thinks of conducting business to improve devotional activity. However, the contamination is so strong that it may later develop into misunderstanding, described as kuti-nati (faultfinding) and pratisthasa (the desire for name and fame and for high position), jiva-himsa (envy of other living entities), nisiddhacara (accepting things forbidden in the sastra), kama (desire for material gain) and puja (hankering for popularity)." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 12.135, purport)

"If a person overly addicted to family life takes to Srimad-Bhagavatam or Krishna consciousness to earn a livelihood, his activity is certainly offensive. One should not become a caste guru and sell mantras for the benefit of mundane customers, nor should one make disciples for a livelihood. All these activities are offensive. One should not make a livelihood by forming a professional band to carry out congregational chanting, nor should one perform devotional service when one is attached to mundane society, friendship and love. Nor should one be dependent on so-called social etiquette. All this is mental speculation. None of these things can be compared to unalloyed devotional service." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 8.83, purport)

"Everyone gets a mother and father at the time of birth, but the real father and mother are they who can release their offspring from the clutches of imminent death. This is possible only for parents advanced in Krishna consciousness. Therefore any parents who cannot enlighten their offspring in Krishna consciousness cannot be accepted as a real father and mother." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya 13.113, purport)

"One should not proudly think that one can understand the transcendental loving service of the Lord simply by reading books. One must become a servant of a vaishnava. As Narottama das Thakur has confirmed, chadiya vaishnava-seva nistara payeche keba: "One cannot be in a transcendental position unless one very faithfully serves a pure vaishnava. One must accept a vaishnava guru (adau gurv-asrayam), and then by questions and answers one should gradually learn what pure devotional service to Krishna is. That is called the parampara system." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya 7.53, purport)

"In purified consciousness, or Krishna consciousness, one sees the presence of Krishna everywhere. If, therefore, one only engages in Deity worship in the temple and does not consider other living entities, then he is in the lowest grade of devotional service. One who worships the Deity in the temple and does not show respect to others is a devotee on the material platform, in the lowest stage of devotional service." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 3.29.21, purport)

"A real brahmana is never envious of a vaishnava. If he is, he is considered an imperfect neophyte." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 15.277, purport)

"My dear King, if one derides an exalted devotee, he loses the results of his pious activities, his opulence, his reputation and his sons. Vaishnavas are all great souls. Whoever blasphemes them falls down to the hell known as Maharaurava. He is also accompanied by his forefathers. Whoever kills or blasphemes a vaishnava and whoever is envious of a vaishnava or angry with him, or whoever does not offer him obeisances or feel joy upon seeing a vaishnava, certainly falls into a hellish condition." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 15.261, purport)

"Although posing as great scholars, ascetics, householders and svamis, the so-called followers of the Hindu religion are all useless, dried up branches of the Vedic religion. They are impotent. They cannot do anything to spread the Vedic culture for the benefit of human society. The essence of the Vedic culture is the message of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Lord Caitanya instructed:

yare dekha, tare kaha 'krsna'-upadesa  
amar ajnaya guru hana tara ei desa  
(Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 7.128)

One should simply instruct everyone he meets regarding the principles of krishna katha, as expressed in Bhagavad Gita As It Is and Srimad-Bhagavatam. One who has no interest in krishna katha or the cult of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is like dry, useless wood with no living force. The ISKCON branch, being directly watered by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, is becoming undoubtedly successful, whereas the disconnected branches of the so-called Hindu religion that are envious of ISKCON are drying up and dying." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 12.73, purport)

And, as Srila Prabhupada explains in his purport to Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 12.8, when the inheritors of the spiritual master's assets fight bitterly over property rights to land and temples and thus lay waste to the whole mission by their endless litigation, they simply emulate the feuding spirit long seen among the jata-gosani. The congregations of such quarrelsome Kali-yuga vaishnavas lose faith and look elsewhere for spiritual guidance -- perhaps, unfortunately, to something far worse.

History shows that the questionable activities of the caste gosvamis drove untold numbers of simple Bengali folk into the arms of charlatan avatars espousing reform. In other words, the secret behind the charisma of many of the other apampradayas lay in their independence from the jata-gosani's ossified and uninspiring "establishment Vaishnavism." These bogus alternative movements became prominent within two centuries of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's departure and grew unchecked until Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur reestablished the sankirtan mission with his Visva Vaishnava Raja Sabha.

We should note in closing this chapter that the jata-gosani tradition was originally bona fide: "According to the pancaratra injunction, only a householder brahmana can initiate. Others cannot." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 4.111, purport) But the caste pride, greed, jealousy and moral decadence of some unworthy descendants of great vaishnava-brahmana householders spoiled this system. "Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu gave us His opinion in the verse kiba vipra kiba nyasi, etc. This indicates that the Lord understood the weakness of society in its maintaining that only a grhastha brahmana should be a spiritual master." (ibid.)

### 3. Smartas: caste brahmanas

smartavyah satatam vishnu  
vismartavyo na jatucit  
sarve vidhi-nisedhah syur  
etayor eve kinkarah

"The Padma Purana recommends: somehow or other always think of Vishnu, without forgetting Him under any circumstances. Actually this is the most basic of all regulative principles. For, when there is an order from a superior about doing something, there is simultaneously a prohibition. When the order is that one should always remember Krishna, the prohibition is that one should never forget Him. Within this simple order and prohibition, all regulative principles are found complete." (Nectar of Devotion, Chapter Two)

The word smrti means "that which is remembered." It is a classification of Vedic scriptures including dharma-sastras like Manu-smrti that give rules and regulations for the orders and ashramas of civilized human life, and histories like the Puranas that give practical illustrations of how great personalities did or did not follow these rules and what their fate was as a result. Thus the smrti-sastras can be grouped into two divisions: "law books" and "law journals."

But why are they given the name smrti? Like laws, they are to be considered before doing something that

might have legal repercussions. Can I ride my elephant on the expressway? Either I learn the traffic code, section and paragraph that applies to elephant driving, or I review the verdict of a trial that dealt with the same. The point is, I should remember the law before I act, or risk being punished.

The above quote from the Padma Purana concerns, as do all smṛti-sastras, the law of karma. Here the verdict is, if we simply remember Vishnu or Krishna before doing anything, we'll not transgress the law. If we forget Him, we unavoidably transgress it even if we remember to observe lesser rules and regulations, because keeping Krishna always in mind is the purpose of all those rules and regulations.

But not everyone understands that purpose. There are three classes of brahmanas: the dvija, the vipra and the vaishnava. The third-class dvija has accepted the sacred thread, the second-class vipra has studied the Vedas and the first-class vaishnava knows the goal of the Vedas: always remember Krishna and never forget Him. A vipra who is not a devotee can never know the real sense of the rules and regulations of scripture; like a crooked lawyer, he'll use the law to enrich himself materially. The non-devotee vipra is what is meant by the term smarta-brahmana. "A smarta-brahmana is always interested in material profit, whereas a vaishnava is interested only in satisfying the Supreme Personality of Godhead." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 8.19.33, purport)

Smarta-brahmanas completely reverse the instruction of the Padma Purana: rather than always remember Krishna and thus fulfill the rules and regulations, they remember the rules and regulations and always forget Krishna.

There are many traits the smartas share with the jata-gosani. This is because the jata-gosani lost their vaishnava qualifications by slipping back into upper-caste pride or upadhi-bhuta (acceptance of false designation), which is shunned by those on the factual brahma-bhuta platform. The upadhi-bhuta of the jata-gosani is their blood lineage to medieval vaishnava-brahmana families that were somehow connected to Lord Caitanya's movement. Coming under smarta influence, the descendents of these families gradually revived caste rules and taboos from the smṛti-sastras in order to assert their supposed congenital superiority over other communities.

"Sometimes a caste guru says that yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-veṭṭha, sei guru haya means that one who is not a brahmana may become a sikṣa-guru or a vartma-pradarsaka-guru but not an initiator guru. According to such caste gurus, birth and family ties are considered foremost. However, the hereditary consideration is not acceptable to vaishnavas." (Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya 8.128, purport)

That the jata-gosani are compromised by smarta conceptions becomes very clear when we consider the following:

"There is a difference between the smarta process and the gosvami process. According to the smarta process, one cannot be accepted as a brahmana unless he is born in a brahmana family. According to the gosvami process, the Hari-bhakti-vilasa and the Narada-pancaratra, anyone can be a brahmana if he is properly initiated by a bona fide spiritual master." (Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya 23.105, purport) Still, if the caste gosvami at least maintains his family tradition of exclusive vishnu-murti worship, he remains distinct from the smarta-brahmana community. The smartas, following the mayavadi pancopasana conception, regard Lord Vishnu as one of five forms of Brahman. Of the five (Durga, Ganesa, Surya, Shiva and Vishnu), Bengali smartas have always preferred goddess Durga because she supplies her devotees with material opulence.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D., the importance of the Bengali smarta community was practically nullified by Lord Caitanya's sankirtan movement. Among the great vaishnava-acaryas of that period, Srila Narottama dasa Thakur stands out as the preacher who most cut down their pride. The smartas, considering him just a low-born kayastha, became so infuriated at his making disciples from among their ranks that they enlisted the king, Raja Narasimha, and a conquering pandit named Sri Rupanarayana, to lead a crusade to somehow expose Acarya Thakur as a fraud. The king, the pandit and a large party of caste brahmanas made their way to Kheturi, where Srila Narottama das had his headquarters.

When Sri Ramacandra Kaviraja and Sri Ganga Narayana Cakravarti, two vaishnava-brahmanas, came to know of the smarta conspiracy, they disguised themselves as sudras and set up two small shops in the Kumarapura market: one a pan and betel nut shop and the other a store selling clay pots.

As the party arrived at Kumarapura, the smartas sent their disciples to the market to purchase wares for cooking. When the students came to the shops of Ramacandra and Ganga Narayana, they were dumfounded to find that these "wallas" spoke perfect Sanskrit and were eager not to do business but to engage in philosophical disputation. Finding themselves outmatched, the distressed students called for their gurus, who arrived on the scene with Raja Narasimha and Rupanarayana. When the smartas fared no better than their disciples, Rupanarayana himself was drawn into the debate and soundly defeated.

When, the king demanded they introduce themselves, the two shopkeepers humbly submitted that they were low-born and insignificant disciples of Srila Narottama das Thakur Mahasaya. Smarting in shame, Rupanarayana and the smarta-brahmanas lost interest in proceeding to Kheturi. They all decided to return immediately to their respective homes.

That night at home, Raja Narasimha had a dream in which an angry Durga-devi threatened him with a chopper used for killing goats. Glaring at him with blazing eyes, the goddess said, "Narasimha! Because you greatly offended Narottama das Thakur, I shall have to cut you to pieces! If you want to save yourself, then you had better immediately go and take shelter at his lotus feet."

Frightened out of his wits, his sleep broken, the king quickly took bath and set out for Kheturi. When at last he arrived, he was surprised to meet the pandita Rupanarayana, who sheepishly explained that he'd had a similar dream. They both entered the temple of Sri Gauranga in order to meet Srila Narottama das Thakur. Acarya Thakur was absorbed in his bhajana, but when a disciple informed him of the arrival of the two guests, he came out to meet them. Simply by seeing his transcendental form, the two offenders became purified and fell down to offer their obeisances at the Thakur's lotus feet. Finally he initiated them with Radha-Krishna mantra.

Because their leaders became vaishnavas, many lesser smartas thought it prudent to externally adopt vaishnava customs. This is how the smarta-apasampradaya, or Vaishnavism compromised by caste brahmanism, began. The smartas think they have monopoly rights on initiating persons born in brahmana families, and that only such persons as initiated by them can wear the sacred thread. On this issue they bitterly oppose the spiritual masters of the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya, who award the sacred thread to devotees from any background on the basis of spiritual qualification.

Until the time of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, the wearing of the sacred thread was not considered very important by many Gaudiya Vaishnavas because their spiritual lives were centered on bhajana. In his purport to Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 8.128, Srila Prabhupada writes, "Sometimes a vaishnava who is a bhajanandi does not take the savitra-samskara (sacred thread initiation), but this does not mean that this system should be used for preaching. There are two kinds of vaishnavas -- bhajanandi and gosthyanandi. A bhajanandi is not interested in preaching work, but a gosthyanandi is interested in spreading Krishna consciousness to benefit the people and increase the number of vaishnavas. A vaishnava is understood to be above the position of a brahmana. As a preacher, he should be recognized as a brahmana; otherwise there may be misunderstanding of his position as a vaishnava." In his revival of the preaching mission of Lord Caitanya, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur performed the savitra-samskara for his disciples; he met opposition even from disciples from Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur who thought he was transgressing the sampradaya. But this does not necessarily mean he introduced something before unseen in the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. Historian Dr. Ramkantha Cakravarti has furnished evidence that the savitra-samskara was previously observed in some vaishnava communities of Bengal, but not all; these communities even awarded the sacred thread to devotees from non-brahmana families. This tradition had long been decried by the smarta-apasampradaya but Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati made it the standard.

The smartas also claim exclusive right to worship the saligram-sila. And of course they never marry

outside of the brahmana caste: this taboo is followed so rigidly that a smarta father would rather give his daughter to the son of a tantrik-brahmana than a non-brahmana vaishnava.

Smashing all these arrogant notions, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur soundly defeated the smarta-apasampradaya at Valighai Uddharanapura in September of 1911. He presented a work entitled *Brahmana o Vaisnavera Taratmya Vishayaka Siddhanta* in which he conclusively argued the superiority of vaishnavas to brahmanas. Sambidananda das relates that he read this paper before a gathering of more than ten thousand pandits, and though he was the youngest speaker present, he was acclaimed by the judges as the winner of the dispute. Still, attempts were made to harm him, and he was placed under police protection.

### Caste Brahmana Values

According to ISKCON observers, the Bengali caste brahmanas have become so materialistic that they no longer show interest in religious affairs (many have become leaders in the Communist Party of West Bengal). But the smarta contamination has a subtle side that ISKCON devotees would do well to familiarize themselves with. It is a shift of values more than of behavior or even philosophy.

Smarta values are purusarthika. Vaishnava values are paramapurusarthika. The difference between the two are explained by Srila Prabhupada thusly:

"Purusartha ('the goal of life') generally refers to religion, economic development, satisfaction of the senses and, finally, liberation. However, above these four kinds of purusarthas, love of Godhead stands supreme. It is called paramapurusartha (the supreme goal of life) or purusartha-siromani (the most exalted of all purusarthas)." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya 7.24, purport)

The vaishnavas value regulated activities prescribed in the scriptures that cultivate pure love of Godhead. Indeed, they are forbidden by Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.2.9 to value these activities for anything less. The vaishnavas therefore perform their duties according to paramapurusarthika-smrti-sastras like Narada Pancaratra, Hari-Bhakti-Vilasa, Sri Sat-Kriya-Sara-Dipika, and Samskara-Candrika-Paddhati, which reveal the Krishna conscious purport to the duties of the varnas and ashramas. The smartas, on the other hand, follow purusarthika-smrti-sastras like Karma Vipaka Maharnava, Karma-Kanda-Paddhati, Prayascitta Kadamva, Prayascitta-Parijata, Prayascitta-Pradipika, Smarta-Vyavastharnava, and so on. The acara of a strict smarta-brahmana and a strict vaishnava may externally be hardly distinguishable, but the consciousness is completely different. For instance:

a) The smartas observe varnashrama-dharma as a means to engage and satisfy their own worldly desires. The vaishnavas observe it for the satisfaction of Vishnu.

b) Though the smartas officially worship Lord Vishnu, they think Him subject to reincarnation and the regulations of sastra. Side-by-side Vishnu, the smartas worship demigods as equals to Him. Their attitude is offensive, and thus their worship is never accepted by Lord Vishnu.

c) Smartas observe ekadasi to enhance their sense of self-accomplishment. Vaishnavas observe ekadasi to enhance their devotion to the Lord.

d) Smartas bathe in the Ganga to be washed clean of sins. Vaishnavas think of the Ganga as nectar emanating from the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu.

e) Smartas establish temples and install Deities for economic considerations. They think they, by their rituals, bring life to the form of the Lord. They utilize temples for self-advertisement and for social and moral welfare, e.g. as hospitals and mundane day schools. Smartas think the only qualification for worshipping the Deity is birth in a brahmana family. The smartas fail to understand that nama-sankirtan is the life and soul of all religion in this age, including Deity worship. They therefore see the Deity as a statue and have no loving reciprocation with Him.

f) Smartas commit the offense of arthavada harinama kalpanam whenever they chant the Hare Krishna maha-mantra. (This is the offense of considering the chanting of Hare Krishna to be one of the auspicious ritualistic activities offered in the Vedas as fruitive activities).

g) Smartas enjoy prasadam and caranamrta, whereas the Vaishnavas respect these sacred items.

h) Though the smartas accept initiation from a guru, they do it out of social custom with no regard for his qualification or the seriousness of the vows of initiation. The smarta disciple keeps the guru as a pet, and the guru keeps the disciple as a means of maintenance.

i) For the smarta, dharma is a matter of bodily identification and activity. Vaishnavas understand it as devotional service to Krishna, the sad-dharma of the soul.

j) Smartas value Tulasi-devi as a plant of medicinal value. They usually hide their Tulasi neckbeads, wearing them openly only on ceremonial occasions. Sometimes they treat Tulasi with great ceremonial pomp, but only to advertise their own apparent piety. As a part of this exaggerated piety, they offer Tulasi leaves at the feet of the guru, though Tulasi should only be offered to Krishna's lotus feet. They think that by dropping Tulasi leaves on any preparation -- even fish -- it becomes automatically acceptable to the Lord.

k) Smartas cherish all sorts of mundane ideas about the vaishnava scriptures. They agree with the vaishnavas that it is a good thing to memorize Srimad-Bhagavatam, because then one can make money by bhagavat-saptaha recitations. They understand the Bhagavad-gita to be a blend of different religious concepts like karma, jnana, mystic yoga, and bhakti, or a book on war, politics, impersonalism and social liberation.

l) Smartas partake in rites of birth, marriage and death in the ignorant bodily conception, and thus derive great pleasure or pain from them.

m) They observe caturmasya for fruitive gain and liberation, not as a means of dedicating themselves to the service of the Lord.

n) The smartas idea of gotra (family) is totally mundane. For them, gotras facilitate reproduction of the brahmana community. They intermarry only between select family lines, which are listed as 8, 29, and up to 3 crore (30 million). The vaishnavas know only one gotra - the Acyuta Gotra, which is Krishna's own transcendental family of devotees.

o) When smartas visit the holy dhama, they follow external rules such as those prescribed in Astavimsati-Tattva (The Twenty-eight Propositions) by Raghunandana Bhattacharya. Here it is advised that great piety will be gained by visiting Jagannath Puri on the Snana-yatra Day. One's forefathers will be greatly satisfied and sinful reactions eradicated. But there is no instruction on how to satisfy Lord Jagannatha on this day and thus advance in devotional service. Smartas fast and shave their heads in the holy dhama because they believe these activities will relieve them from sins and bring auspiciousness. They fear that they incur sins by accepting maha-prasadam in the holy dhama without first cleaning their mouths. If maha-prasadam is served by a non-brahmana, they think it becomes impure. Likewise, if maha-prasadam or Ganges water is transported away from the dhama by train, bus or car, it loses its potency. Smartas also engage in materialistic calculations about the relative benefits of visiting one holy place instead of another. For obtaining a particular boon, they may visit Puri instead of Vrindavan, thinking that Vrindavan is not so effective in satisfying this specific desire. But another kind of benediction is better sought in Dvaraka than at Puri, and so on. They also believe that there are certain months when it becomes inauspicious to visit a particular holy place. By their hifalutin ways, smartas simply commit offenses at the feet of the holy name, holy dhama, the vaishnavas, the Deity and maha-prasadam.

Vaishnavas have no selfish desires they expect the dhama to fulfill, nor do they have sins to unload there. They know that the places of the Lord's pastimes, the temples and Deities, devotional service, devotees

and devotional paraphernalia, and all the times and circumstances thereof, are transcendental.

Maha-prasadam is honorable even if it drops on the ground from the mouth of a hog. Lord Caitanya was very pleased with Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya when he accepted prasadam upon just rising from bed. Sarvabhauma took the role of a smarta-brahmana in Lord Caitanya's pastimes to show this community that their only salvation is the association of a pure devotee.

#### 4. Prakrita-sahajija: cheap pseudo-devotees

"Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur suggests that people who are materialistically inclined and sahajiyas, or so-called vaishnavas who take everything very cheaply, are both visayi, materialists. Eating food offered by them causes contamination, and as a result of such contamination, even a serious devotee becomes like a materialistic man. There are six kinds of association -- giving charity, accepting charity, accepting food, offering food, talking confidentially and inquiring confidentially. One should very carefully avoid associating with both the sahajiyas, who are sometimes known as vaishnavas, and the non-vaishnavas, or avaisnavas. Their association changes the transcendental devotional service of Lord Krishna into sense gratification, and when sense gratification enters the mind of a devotee, he is contaminated. The materialistic person who aspires after sense gratification cannot properly think of Krishna." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya 6.278, purport)

The word sahaja ("natural", "simple", "normal") has two connotations in vaishnava literatures. Tracing these can help us see more clearly the crux of the sahajija deviation. In the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krishna uses the word sahaja in reference to material nature:

saha-jam karma kaunteya  
sa-dosam api na tyajet  
sarvarambha hi dosena  
dhumenagnir ivavrtah

"Every endeavor is covered by some fault, just as fire is covered by smoke. Therefore one should not give up the work born of his nature, O son of Kunti, even if such work is full of fault." (Bhagavad-gita 18.48)

Here the word saha-jam means "born of material nature." This refers to human sense activities, which are said to be sa-dosa, faulty. Despite this, Lord Krishna says we should not renounce activities.

But this does not mean that we should engage in material sense activities. Two verses earlier, Sri Krishna declares, "By worship of the Lord, who is the source of all beings and who is all-pervading, a man can attain perfection through performing his own work." In the purport, Sri Prabhupada stresses the following points: "the Supreme Lord is the beginning of all living entities"; "as part and parcel of the Supreme Lord one has his duty to render service unto the Supreme"; and "Everyone should think that he is engaged in a particular type of occupation by Hrsikesa, the master of the senses."

So sahaja, or "natural", used in this connection, indicates the imperfect human nature. A man's sense activities are faulty due to his birth in matter. But he should learn that his real origin is Krishna, and he should engage his senses in the Lord's service. Then he can transcend the faults of his material conditioning and attain perfection. "Liberation is never inaction, but service without human mistakes." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 2.2.1, purport)

The other sense of the word is found in Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 8.215:

sahaja gopira prema - nahe prakṛta  
kama kama-kṛida-samyā tara kama-nama

"It is to be noted that the natural characteristic of the gopis is to love the Supreme Lord. Their lusty desire



is not to be compared to material lust. Nonetheless, because their desire sometimes appears to resemble material lust, their transcendental love for Krishna is sometimes described as lust."

The context is clear: sahaja refers to the spiritual nature. Another point of interest in this verse is the word prakṛta ("material"), which is used to distinguish kama or lust from the gopis' love for Krishna. We can conclude that when prakṛta is combined with sahaja, transcendental sensual affairs are not indicated. We can also conclude that a person subject to material lust has no chance to comprehend the gopi's spiritual emotions. He must first follow Lord Krishna's prescription and rise above his imperfect condition.

This is what hits at the heart of the prakṛta-sahajīya contamination: they refuse to follow the reformatory process. Thus their perceptions of Krishna, Krishna's devotees, Krishna's service and love of Krishna are faulty creations of their lower nature.

"Without serving Krishna according to vidhi-marga regulative principles of the pañcarātrika-vidhi, unscrupulous persons want to jump immediately to the raga-marga principles. Such persons are called sahajīyas." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 4.24.45-46, purport) They sometimes say that one enters raga-marga only by the causeless grace of Bhaktidevi and not by a vain attempt to conquer sensual disturbances, but Srīla Prabhupada says, "When a devotee strictly follows the rules and regulations, Bhaktidevi becomes very much satisfied with him, and at that time he is never disturbed by anything external." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 4.24.59, purport) "Such an advanced devotee has nothing to do with the sahajīyas, who manufacture their own whimsical way and commit sins by indulging in illicit sex, intoxication and gambling if not meat-eating." (Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya 22.153, purport)

According to Dr. S.B. Das Gupta, the history of the Bengali sahajīya movement can be traced back long before Srī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's appearance, to the reign of the Buddhist Pala royal dynasty (ca. 700-1100 A.D.), when a secret cult of the name Sahajayana arose within the so-called Diamond Vehicle (Vajrayana) school of Buddhism. Vajrayana, still prominent today in Nepal and Tibet, is a blend of ritualistic tantric yoga and sunyavada. Some scholars think that Vajrayana was created in Bengal, a stronghold of the tantric Kapalika religion when the first Buddhist missionaries arrived. From Bengal, so this theory goes, Vajrayana spread to the Himalayan regions. Anyway, wherever the birthplace of Vajrayana was, it is certain that the fermentation of Vajrayana into Sahajayana (the Easy Vehicle) was according to an original Bengali recipe.

Sahajayana Buddhists abandoned ritualism and study of scriptures as useless. They practised a "yoga of sex" in which they visualized consciousness as being composed of the unity of the male and female principles, sometimes called upaya and prajna or karuna and sunyata. The Sahajayana Buddhists wrote many songs known as the Caryapadas that express their philosophy in mysterious language.

Later on, under the Sena kings, Vaishnavism became ascendent in Bengal, royal patronage having been won for it by the great acarya Srīla Jayadeva Gosvami. Now the Buddhist sahajīyas absorbed and perverted aspects of vaishnava philosophy. They renamed their upaya and prajna principles "Krishna" and "Radha", imagining Radha-Krishna to represent the highest state of bliss attained by men and women on the sahajīya path.

After the Muslim invasion, the sahajīyas were influenced by the Sufis. The word Sufi comes from the Arabian word saf, which means sacred. The Sufis were a mystical Islamic order of mendicants whose goal was a state of inspiration they called fana, or oneness in love with Allah, which they sought to attain through song and dance. In the Arabic countries, the Sufis faced condemnation as heretics because some preached that through fana they had become Allah. But in India the Sufis flourished, not in the least because their ideas had much in common with Mayavadi philosophy.

In the 16th century, the sankīrtan movement of Srī Caitanya Mahāprabhu flooded the world with the sublime, perfect and transcendental religion of pure love of Godhead. The sahajīyas, who celebrated their mundane sex-mysticism with song and dance, were nothing more than a perverted reflection of the sankīrtan movement. They were not accepted as genuine vaishnavas by Mahāprabhu and His followers, as is evident in Srī Caitanya-caritamṛta. For instance, in Caitanya-caritamṛta, Antya 12.114, Lord Caitanya

refuses a gift of scented oil, explaining that those who might smell it on His head would think Him a dari sannyasi, a tantric sannyasi who keeps women for sense gratification. In Antya 2.120, the Lord calls such men markata-vairagis ("monkey sannyasis"). And as Srila Prabhupada relates in his purport to Antya 2.143, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu banished Chota Haridas for the slight mistake of begging rice from Srimati Madhavi-devi "as an example to future sahajiyas who might adopt the dress of the renounced order to imitate Rupa Gosvami and other bona fide sannyasis but secretly have illicit connections with women."

In the 18th century, the great movement begun by Lord Caitanya appeared to have become corrupted by the influence of the jata-gosani and the smartas. This sad state of affairs presented an opportunity for the sahajiyas to expand their influence among the common people. Deviant sects like the gauranga-nagari and kartabhaja are mutations of the prakrta-sahajiya movement that became popular at this time. In the 19th century, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur took great pains to distinguish the pure teachings of Lord Caitanya from prakrta-sahajiya perversions; on this basis, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati openly denounced all who deviated even an inch from the Caitanya Sampradaya: "No compromise -- Rama Krishna, avatars, yogis, everyone was enemy to Guru Maharaja -- he never compromised." (Srila Prabhupada in a letter of 20.7.73)

#### The Prakrta-Sahajiya Doctrine: The Call of Maya

Srila Prabhupada said, "Sahajiya means taking things very easily." It is a generic term that applies not so much to any specific sect or apasampradaya but indeed to all forms of deviation. From the characteristics of the sahajiya mentality shown below, it may be readily concluded that there is only one apasampradaya -- the prakrta-sahajiya -- with twelve sub-branches going under different names: "Such sahajiyas are called sakhi-bheki, and sometimes they are called gaura-nagari." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 8.204-205, purport)

Sahajiyas betray their historical affinity to Buddhism by not distinguishing matter from spirit, which is the first step in bona fide spiritual life. As Srila Prabhupada mentioned in a letter, they take "spiritual advancement as something materially manifest" by intensifying their mundane emotions until a maddened state of sentimental ecstasy is reached.

The sahajiya misconception of spirit is nourished by doubts about the transcendental nature of God's personal form. That Lord Krishna's foot was pierced by an arrow, and that Lord Nityananda bled when struck on the head by Madhai, is evidence enough for the sahajiya that his own physical body has exactly the same quality as the forms of the Supreme that appear in the material world. If the bodies of avatars are material, their divine essence flows in the blood of their descendents. It follows, therefore, that anyone connected to the families of Nityananda Prabhu or Advaita Acarya are as godly as their great forefathers.

"When the Lord descends, he displays affection for his family members (Nanda, Yasoda, Jagannatha Misra, Sacidevi). Moreover, Lord Krishna showed great fondness for young girls. This is all divine behaviour, worthy of being emulated. It is maya for someone claiming to be a vaishnava to renounce family life and lusty affairs, because that goes against the Lord's own way of life."

Preaching is not very important to the prakrta-sahajiya. One can best make new devotees by impregnating a female "vaishnava." In this way that woman is also blessed by the good association of an advanced soul. This was the real mission of Lord Caitanya, as carried out in Bengal by Nityananda Prabhu.

As an answer to all the above notions, Srila Prabhupada writes: "Whoever thinks in this way is a candidate for the darkest regions of hell. Those who hanker after women and money, who are self-interested and have the mentality of merchants, can certainly discover many things with their fertile brains and speak against the authorized revealed scriptures. They also engage in some moneymaking businesses to cheat innocent people, and they try to support their business programs by making such offensive statements. Actually Nityananda Prabhu, being the expansion of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, is the most munificent incarnation. No one should consider Him an ordinary human being or an entity like the prajapatis, who

were ordered by Brahma to increase generation. Nityananda Prabhu should not be considered instrumental for sense gratification. Although professional so-called preachers support this, such statements are not found in any authorized revealed scriptures. Actually there is no support for these statements made by sahajiyas or other professional distributors of krsna-bhakti." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 15.143)

Sahajiyas say that it is great offense to find fault with one's guru and abandon him, even if he drinks liquor and consorts with prostitutes. Garuda, Lord Vishnu's carrier and eternal associate, eats fish and meat, so this may be done by anyone in the mood of service to the Lord. No matter what nonsense a person wearing neck beads and tilak may have done, if he shows symptoms of ecstasy in kirtan (trembling, crying and falling on the ground) he is a faultless and pure devotee. Srila Prabhupada replies: "Sometimes [the] eight symptoms of ecstasy [the asta-sattvika-vikara: inertness, perspiration, standing of hairs on end, failing in the voice, trembling, paleness of the body, tears in the eyes, and trance] are imitated by the mundane devotees (prakṛta-sahajiyas), but the pseudo symptoms are at once detected when one sees the pseudodevottee addicted to so many forbidden things. Even though decorated with the signs of a devotee, a person addicted to smoking, drinking or illegitimate sex with women cannot have all the above-mentioned ecstatic symptoms. But it is seen that sometimes these symptoms are willfully imitated, and for this reason Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti accuses the imitators of being stone-hearted men. They are sometimes even affected by the reflection of such transcendental symptoms, yet if they still do not give up the forbidden habits, then they are hopeless cases for transcendental realization." [Note: A fuller understanding of what Srila Prabhupada means by "they are sometimes even affected by the reflection of such transcendental symptoms" can be had by reading Nectar of Devotion, Chapter 18, pages 139-141.]

A very significant feature of the sahajiya attitude is its perverse "humility", which is really just enviousness: "Sometimes a sahajiya presents himself as being void of desires for reputation (pratistha) in order to become famous as a humble man. Such people cannot attain the platform of a celebrated vaishnava." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 4.147) For example, sahajiyas think that a devotee who becomes recognised for his preaching accomplishments is fallen into the grip of name and fame. If a preacher refutes atheists and materialists, he is simply too proud. Harer-nama-sankirtan is too showy: it's best to remember the Lord in the core of one's heart. Only caste brahmanas should worship saligram-sila: if others do it, they'll fall down by becoming too puffed up. Vaishnavas who are fussy about sadhana, insisting that illicit sex, smoking and other harmless enjoyments be given up, are actually attached to these pleasures themselves.

In this connection, sahajiyas abhor preachers who accept disciples: "...Narottama das Thakur and other great acaryas like Madhvacarya, Ramanujacarya and others accepted many thousands of disciples to induce them to render devotional service. However, there is a class of sahajiyas who think that these activities are opposed to the principles of devotional service. Indeed, they consider such activities simply another phase of materialism." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 7.130)

The holy name is all-powerful, so the sahajiyas say; therefore there is no difference between namaparadha, nama-abhasa, and suddha-nama. The spiritual state of a guru and disciple at the time of initiation doesn't matter, because the holy name works by its own power. If Bilvamangala Thakur became Krishna conscious by hearing a prostitute, then what can be wrong in receiving the holy name from a prostitute or immoral man? There is no need to instruct anyone to follow rules and regulations -- let them chant Hare Krishna while smoking, drinking, gambling and having sex. The holy name will cleanse them of sinful reaction.

Though it is too lengthy to reproduce here, the purport to Srimad-Bhagavatam 2.2.30 very exactly explains why it is that one can realize the full glories of the holy name only by offenseless chanting. One may refer to the purport to Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 4.113 for the warning from Padma Purana that hearing from avaisnavas is like drinking milk touched by the lips of a serpent. As for those who would argue otherwise, the following quote exposes their real motivation:

"Srila Bhaktisiddhanta comments that saralata, or simplicity, is the first qualification of a vaishnava, whereas duplicity or cunning behavior is a great offense against the principles of devotional service. As

once advances in Krishna consciousness, one must gradually become disgusted with material attachment and thus become more and more attached to the service of the Lord. If one is not factually detached from material activities but still proclaims himself advanced in devotional service, he is cheating. No one will be happy to see such behavior." (Caitanya-caritamṛta, Antya 2.117, purport)

The sahajiyas believe there is no harm at all in hearing devotional songs sung by professional singers and musicians, and there is no harm in propagating these songs through modern media like records, tapes and radio. The consciousness of the singer and hearer plays no part in the transmission of devotion. In the same way, there is no harm in employing professional actors and prostitutes to enact Krishna's pastimes in dramas. If these actors can bring tears to our eyes by their performance, that proves they are spiritually empowered.

But Srila Prabhupada writes: "Professional players and dramatic actors have no sense of devotional service, and therefore although they can perform very artistically, there is no life in such performances. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur used to refer to such an actor as yatra-dale narada, which means "farial Narada." Sometimes an actor in a drama plays the part of Narada, although in his private life he is not at all like Narada because he is not a devotee. Such actors are not needed in dramatic performances about the lives of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Lord Krishna." (Caitanya-caritamṛta, Adi 10.13, purport)

Sahajiyas argue that although someone is degraded in his personal life, if he has material writing power, he may freely compose books on Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Krishna, the lives of great devotees, and devotional service. Similarly, the most confidential pastimes of Krishna (for instance, his stealing of the clothes of the gopis) may be recited to the general public on the condition that the speaker is sufficiently paid. Furthermore, a disciple can be instructed on the confidential mellows of madhurya rasa even though he is not free of material lust, because this will help him engage his lust in Krishna consciousness. The main point is to engage the emotion somehow or other in Krishna. Even demons like Kamsa and Sisupala were liberated by hating Krishna, so what is the harm of becoming lusty while hearing about the Lord's pastimes of love with the gopis?

In his purport to Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya 8.193, Srila Prabhupada compares the attempt of mundane persons to understand the confidential affairs of Sri Sri Radha and Krishna to the attempt of keeping an elephant in a dish. And: "Material lust cannot be engaged in the service of the Lord, for it is applicable to materialists, not to Krishna. Only prema, or love of Godhead, is applicable for the satisfaction of Krishna. Prema is full service rendered unto the Lord." (Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya 8.215, purport)

"But the main thing is to be natural," the stubborn sahajiya retorts. "Lord Caitanya and His associates used to overeat, so we need not endeavour to control our tongues. Some of the Lord's greatest associates had more than one wife, so we can enjoy in this way too. Even when a so-called advanced vaishnava chastises a sahajiya, calling him a dog, fool, demon, sinner and saying, 'I kick on your face', this shows he is no different from the rest of humanity, for he gives free vent to feelings of pride, anger and enviousness. Why does he then pretend to be free of lust? He should just relax and be natural."

This attitude qualifies the sahajiya for receiving the kind of vaishnava-kṛpa described in the purport to Srimad-Bhagavatam 11.2.46: "Srila Bhaktisiddhanta has stated, 'When childish people think themselves maha-bhagavatas and act in defiance of the vaishnava spiritual master, such behavior simply holds them back from receiving the mercy of the vaishnava guru. Bewildered by false ego, these self-proclaimed devotees gradually become fit to be ignored by pure devotees on the intermediate platform and are cheated of the mercy that comes from the devotees' satisfaction. Thus they become asadhu by constantly committing offenses against the devotees who preach the holy name of Krishna. Pure devotees, therefore, in all circumstances display indifference to those who falsely imagine themselves to be visuddha-bhaktas, or pure devotees of the Lord. This indifference is an excellent manifestation of their mercy.'"

The sahajiyas entertain all sorts of mundane ideas about Lord Caitanya and His associates which they try to support with offensive interpretations and outright lies about the pastimes described in Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta and Sri Caitanya Bhagavata. Sometimes they present their own bogus scriptures to prove their false assertions. The sahajiyas want us to understand that we poor fanatics should be realistic about the

great acaryas, who, being only human, also had their faults. We should take these faults into account before accepting their teachings blindly or idealistically.

Srila Prabhupada deals with this feature of sahajija rascaldom at length in his purport to Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 10.85, where he describes three bogus stories about Srila Jiva Gosvami circulated by the sahajiyas. And in his purport to Madhya 1.220 he writes: "A jealous person in the dress of a vaishnava is not at all happy to see the success of another vaishnava in receiving the Lord's mercy. Unfortunately in this age of Kali there are many mundane persons in the dress of vaishnavas, and Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur has described them as disciples of Kali. He says, kali-cela. He indicates that there is another vaishnava, a pseudo-vaishnava with tilak on his nose and kanthi beads around his neck. Such a pseudo-vaishnava associates with money and women and is jealous of successful vaishnavas."

In summary, a sahajija is a dog-stubborn sense enjoyer who may have some talent for singing, dancing, acting, speaking, joking and seducing women. He dresses himself as a vaishnava but is unable to distinguish between worldly fame and spiritual fame, incomplete renunciation and perfect renunciation, false devotion and pure devotion, offensive chanting, unclear chanting and pure chanting of the holy name, worldly service and devotional service, lust and love, maha-maya and yoga-maya, jiva and Vishnu, the cheater and the bona fide spiritual master, the godasa and the gosvami, the neophyte and advanced devotee, what is authorized and what is not authorized, the spiritual master and the disciple, proper conclusion and wrong conclusion, rasa and rasabhasa, idol worship and Deity worship, devotees and demons, and so on.

In their persistent materialism, the sahajiyas can only be compared to Hiranyakasipu, who thought Prahlada, a pure devotee, was just his son; or to Ravana, who thought Laksmi-devi was a woman he could enjoy; or Sisupala, who thought Krishna was subject to His criticism.

How can such offensive fools be delivered? It is very, very difficult, because they hold the bona fide conclusions of sastra in great disdain. "In Vrindavan, there are prakṛta-sahajiyas who say that writing books or even touching books is taboo. For them, devotional service means being relieved from these activities. Whenever they are asked to hear a recitation of Vedic literatures, they refuse, saying, 'What business do we have reading or hearing transcendental literatures? They are meant for neophytes.' They pose themselves to be too elevated to exert energy for reading, writing, and hearing." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 19.132, purport)

Therefore, in dealing with the sahajija class, one should simply stick to the proper behavior of a devotee (vaishnava-acara), asat-sanga-tyaga, - ei vaishnava acara: "The rejection of the association of nondevotees -- this is the acara of the vaishnavas." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 22.87)

## 5. Gauranga-nagaris: rasabhasa bhaktas

"From the life of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, an intelligent person engaged in pure devotional service can understand that He always felt separation from Krishna within Himself. In that separation He sometimes felt that He had found Krishna and was enjoying the meeting. The significance of this separation and meeting is very specific. If someone tries to understand the exalted position of Lord Caitanya without knowing this, he is sure to misunderstand it. One must first become fully self-realized. Otherwise he may misidentify the Lord as nagara, or the enjoyer of the damsels of Vraja, thus committing the mistake of rasabhasa, or overlapping understanding." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 4.106, Purport)

The gauranga-nagaris are quite prominent in Bengal and Bangladesh. Outwardly, they appear as regular Bengali vaishnavas, but there is a subtle sahajija contamination in their conception of Lord Caitanya's mood of devotion. Thus their position is strongly refuted by the acaryas of the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya, even though other aspects of this sect may seem praiseworthy: like staunch vaishnavas, they wear tilak and neck beads, are good kirtan performers and strictly abstain from flesh and fish.

In his purport to Srimad-Bhagavatam 4.23.31, Srila Prabhupada focuses on the sahajiya contamination that the gauranga-nagaris represent:

"Sometimes the sahajiya class of devotees are interested only in Krishna's personal pastimes to the exclusion of the activities of the devotees."

But such an attitude can only baffle the attempt to comprehend the person and activities of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, for Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 1.14 states:

panca-tattvatmakam krsnam  
bhakta-rupa-svarupakam  
bhaktavatarm bhaktakhyam  
namami bhakta-saktikam

"I offer my obeisances unto the Supreme Lord, Krishna, who is non-different from His features as a devotee, devotional incarnation, devotional manifestation, pure devotee and devotional energy."

The gauranga-nagaris are not interested in Lord Caitanya as a devotee, or in His five features as the Sri Panca-Tattva. They desire to relate to Lord Caitanya as Krishna Himself, particularly as lampat (yatha-tathava vidhadhatu-lampato: "He is a debauchee, so it is His nature to do as He likes"). They style Him as nagara, and themselves as nagari.

The gauranga-nagari doctrine is very briefly and yet very completely explained by Srila Prabhupada in several purports of Sri Caitanya-caritamrta. A few relevant quotes are as follows.

"...the gaura-nagaris, who place Lord Caitanya in the position of enjoyer and themselves as His enjoyed, are not approved by Lord Caitanya or by Lord Caitanya's followers. Instead of being blessed, the foolish imitators are left completely apart. Their concoctions are against the principles of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. The doctrine of transcendental enjoyment by Krishna cannot be mixed up with the doctrine of transcendental feeling of separation from Krishna in the role of Radharani." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 4.41, purport)

"Doctrines like those of the nadiya-nagaris, a class of so-called devotees, are never presented by authorized persons like Svarupa Damodara or the six Gosvamis. The ideas of the nadiya-nagaris are simply mental concoction, and they are completely on the mental platform." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 4.107, purport)

"...a so-called party of devotees named nadiya-nagari has sprung up and introduced the worship of Vishnupriya. This certainly indicates ignorance of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's pastimes. In the opinion of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur, such worship is a product of the imagination." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya 14.7, purport)

### Refuting the Gauranga-nagari Doctrine

In Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 1.5, Lord Caitanya is described as radha-bhava-dyuti-suvalita, "adorned with the mood and luster of Srimati Radharani." Nowhere in any revealed scripture is He said to be krsna-bhava-dyuti-suvalita, "adorned with the mood and luster of Sri Krishna," which would support the gauranga-nagari conception. Spokesmen of this apasampradaya not only say that Lord Caitanya exhibited Krishna's enjoying mood, they claim further that Vishnupriya-devi, the Lord's second wife, is Srimati Radharani, and that her close female friends are gopis. But as Srila Vrindavan das Thakur makes clear in Sri Caitanya-bhagavata, Vishnupriya-devi is actually Bhu-sakti, a form of Laksmi. The wives, mothers and daughters of Lord Gauranga's associates in Nadia attend Vishnupriya in her bathing and dressing exactly as the maidservants of Lakmiji serve Her in Vaikuntha-dhama. Their mood is different from the mood of the damsels of Vrindavan.

Sri Caitanya Bhagavata is also very clear about Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's extreme gravity in His dealings with women -- even with His own wives, what to speak of other women. He never so much as looked at the village girls of Nadia, let alone smile or talk to them. But in the tradition of the sahajiyas, the gauranga-nagaris have invented offensive myths about Lord Caitanya's supposed love affairs with a mistress named Kancana and other fictional consorts. These stories should never be heard.

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur appreciated the manifestation of Krishna's mood in Lord Caitanya in His dealings with Sri Gadadhara Prabhu. Sri Gadadhara was so meek and submissive that the Lord sometimes remarked to His confidential associates, "Gadadhara is My consort in the spiritual world." Indeed, Gadadhara Prabhu's spiritual emotions for Lord Caitanya are described as suddha gadha bhava rukmini-devira ("pure, deep ecstatic love in the mood of Rukmini-devi") in Antya 7.144 of Sri Caitanya-caritamrta. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur thus worshiped Sri Sri Gaura-Gadadhara Deities in his bhajana. Here is an example of an internal flavor of attraction in an advanced devotee for a confidential feature of Lord Caitanya's pastimes. But this is not a subject matter for preaching. Lord Caitanya's preaching pastimes are relished in Sri Sri Gaura-Nitai worship, as seen in ISKCON temples around the world. This mode of Deity worship is performed to inspire the public at large to engage in harer-nama-sankirtan. But in any case, the worship of Sri Gaura-Gadadhara by the pure devotee has nothing to do with the rasabhasa of the gauranga-nagaris.

As Srila Prabhupada states above, the gauranga-nagaris are on the mental platform. Their so-called mood of devotion is really just eroticism, a creation of their impure minds. Their wrong meditation upon Lord Caitanya simply arouses their lust, and they foolishly take that lust to be spiritual ecstasy.

#### 6. Sakhi-bheki & Cudadhari: rasa-lila imitators

"Only when one regains his original spiritual body can one enter into the spiritual kingdom. As for as the rasa-lila pastimes of the Lord are concerned, it is futile to attempt to imitate the Lord's dances within the material world. One has to attain a spiritual body like the gopis to enter into the pastimes of rasa-lila. Simply by artificially imitating Krishna's rasa-lila dance or artificially thinking oneself as Krishna, and dressing oneself up as a sakhi, one cannot enter into His rasa-lila dance." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 9.137, purport)

The confidential gopis are called sakhis. The word bekhi is a corruption of the Sanskrit word vesa, which means dress. A sakhi-bekhi is a person -- often a male, but sometimes females take part -- who dresses up like a gopi and imagines himself/herself as being enjoyed by Krishna.

Sakhi-bekhis imitate rasa-lila, sometime by dancing with a person dressed like Krishna who wears a cuda, a crown of peacock feathers. This person is called cudadhari. The philosophy of these two types of sahajiya apasampradayas is the same; practically the only difference is that one group is dressed like gopis and others dressed like Krishna.

Lord Caitanya taught, ekale isvara krsna, ara saba bhrtiya -- "The only controller is Krishna, everyone else is His servant." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 5.142) Each jiva or individual spirit soul is a tiny sample of para-prakrti, the Lord's sub-ordinate or female spiritual energy. But this sense of our "being female" does not have anything to do with sexual gender. We have temporarily assumed a male or female body as a result of past karma; the material covering does not reflect the constitutional nature of the soul. Srimad-Bhagavatam (Canto 4, chapter 28) informs us that a soul is placed within a male body because of a strong attraction to the masculine form that developed in a female body in the previous life. Those who now have female bodies were males who were very attached to females in their previous lives. This is all the result of material lust.

The soul as a spiritual spark caught in the cycle of birth and death is actually sexless. But according to the ecstasy of devotion most enjoyed by the soul in relation to Krishna, the devotee's transcendental gender is revealed, as seen in the spiritual bodies of Krishna's eternal associates. For instance, matr-vatsalya

(parental affection in the motherly mood) is feminine, and pitr-vatsalya (parental affection in the fatherly mood) is masculine. Madhurya-rasa is purely feminine. To become established in the latter mood of love, one must develop the eleven sentiments of a gopi (name, form, age, dress, the mood of a kept maidservant, and so on) under the direction of an highly realized vaishnava.

Even if one transcends the bodily conception and has understood Krishna and his own svarupa in truth, he cannot fully participate (vastu or prapti-siddhi) in the madhurya-rasa if even the slightest material attachment lingers in his consciousness. This is explained at length in the purport to Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 8.139.

The prakrta-sahajija contamination of the sakhi-bekhis and cudadharis is grossly apparent. The sakhi-bekhis think that Krishna is pleased by seeing their fleshy sack-bodies, full of bones, blood and stool, dressed up in saris, decorated with nose-rings and ornaments, with hair done like women, with feet painted red, with faces shaved twice daily, singing in high falsetto voices and gesturing with women's mannerisms. The cudadharis similarly think that Srimati Radharani will become attracted to their rotting material bodies simply because they dress up like Krishna.

Lord Caitanya gave clear instructions to Sanatana Gosvami about how the physical body of an advanced devotee is to be engaged in Krishna's service: "There are two processes by which one may execute raganuga bhakti -- external and internal. When self-realized, the advanced devotee externally remains like a neophyte and executes all the sastric injunctions, especially hearing and chanting. However, within his mind, in his original purified self-realized position, he serves Krishna in Vrindavan in his particular way. He serves Krishna twenty-four hours, all day and night. The advanced devotee who is inclined to spontaneous loving service should follow the activities of a particular associate of Krishna in Vrindavan. He should execute service externally as a regulative devotee as well as internally from his self-realized position. Thus he should perform devotional service both externally and internally." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 22.156-158) The sakhi-bekhis and cudadharis simply ignore these directions.

Some of these sahajiyas argue that they are only following the example of Sri Gadadhara das Thakur (who is different from Gadadhara Pandita of the Sri Panca-Tattva), who once walked through town with a clay pot of Ganges water on his head, calling out that he had yoghurt for sale and laughing loudly. The imitators claim that they can visualize their internal spiritual form by such external play-acting. But they overlook the fact that there is no instruction from Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu or any acarya in the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya that directs the conditioned souls to awaken their love for Krishna through speculative histrionics. As Srila Prabhupada said, "If you want to cook, then you have to cook according to the method. You may have a pot and you may have a flame, but if you don't cook according to the method, then you'll never get the food." He was referring to a story of a cook who had placed the flame on the floor and the pot near the ceiling. "If you want the result, you have to follow the method" -- bhakti-yoga as it is.

The sakhi-bekhi and cudadhari take Krishna and the gopis very cheaply; this is due to the influence of impersonalism, by which they think they can become one with the Lord and the gopis through some imaginative meditation. But if even the goddess of fortune cannot enter into the rasa-lila in Her eternal spiritual form, even after ages of austerity, how will it be accomplished by a fool who merely dresses up his gross material body?

## 7. Atavadi: "Too great"

In the early 1870's, when he was a deputy magistrate stationed in Jagannath Puri, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur arrested, judged and jailed a pseudo-incarnation of Maha Vishnu named Bisa Kisen. This man had mystic powers: he used to sit near a fire and lean into the flames, then lift his head and make flames come out of his hair. He had two companions who went by the names Brahma and Shiva. Many wealthy and influential Hindus of Orissa were under Bisa Kisen's sway. They sent him funds for constructing a temple and also provided him with women for "rasa-lila." He boasted he would drive the British out of Orissa and



rule it as a divine king. Bisa Kisen belonged to the ativadi-apasampradaya.

In a letter dated August 18, 1871 that was addressed to the editor of a Cuttack newspaper called Progress, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur described the origin, philosophy and practices of the ativadi sect. What follows is a synopsis of the most pertinent points of that letter, along with additional details gleaned from Apasampradaya-svarupa by H.H. Bhakti-vilasa Bharati Maharaja.

- a) The ativadis claim to be vaishnavas, but in fact they are quite opposed to the principles of Vaishnavism.
- b) This apasampradaya was started by one Jagannatha dasa at the time Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu was staying at Puri as a sannyasi. He claimed to be a disciple of Srila Haridas Thakur, but later on he broke his connection with Thakur and began preaching his own ideas. For instance, he had his followers cover their mouths while chanting the maha-mantra, and told them to chant the second half (Hare Rama) first, before Hare Krishna.
- c) The word ativadi means "too great." Once Jagannatha dasa arrogantly approached Lord Caitanya, ignoring the Lord's associates like Svarupa Damodara, who would screen visitors so that they would not disturb the Lord with some strange presentation of wrong ideas. This Jagannatha dasa wanted to recite his own translation of Srimad-Bhagavatam, which contained five chapters of his own invention. He also wanted to explain his independent manner of chanting Hare Krishna. To avoid him, Lord Caitanya said, "A fallen soul like Me is not worthy enough to hear the Bhagavatam composed by an author like you." Then Jagannatha das declared Lord Caitanya to be Krishna, and himself Radharani. The Lord replied, "Sir, you have become too great (ativadi). An insignificant and fallen soul like Me can have nothing to do with you."
- d) Very foolishly, Jagannatha dasa and his followers took the Lord's statement as praise instead of what it really was -- a condemnation. Thus this apasampradaya considers itself more well-read in the scriptures than Mahaprabhu and His associates, and likewise better in judgement and logic. Jagannatha das was also "too great" when he seemingly or supposedly exhibited an eight-armed form to prove himself even greater in mystic opulence than Lord Caitanya.
- e) Jagannatha das had a sweet singing voice, which attracted women to him. He engaged these ladies in massaging his body. When brought to the court of Prataparudra Maharaja for indecent behaviour on this account, he said to the King, "I don't see any difference between men and women." He was imprisoned for conduct unbecoming a vaishnava sadhu.
- f) Jagannatha dasa had been living in an ashrama donated to him and his followers by the King, but when he rejected Haridas Thakur and started his own nonsense, the King took the property back. Then Jagannatha founded his own ashrama on the sea shore; it is called the Satlahari Mandira, and can still be seen today.
- g) Ativadi priests sometimes dress up as women on certain religious occasions; they are known for loosely mixing with women.
- h) The ativadis are very influential in Orissa because Jagannatha das's Oriyan translations of Srimad-Bhagavatam and Bhagavad-gita are widely liked, especially by simple people who are not so discriminating about what is authorized and what is not. The ativadis have often exploited their influence for political ends, and can be quite fanatical. In this sense, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur said they resemble certain Islamic sects like the wahabis.
- i) They appear to be very devoted to Lord Jagannatha. It is a source of pride among this group to claim that Lord Jagannatha has personally revealed some truth or prophecy to them. Thus every respected ativadi can recite what they call their malika, or series of revelations from the Lord. A common prediction one will hear from them is the year the world will end.
- j) Yet at the same time, despite their fervor for Jagannatha, the scriptures they have received from their founder contain many impersonal ideas. Though they worship the Lord's form in life, they believe after

death they will realize that He has no form, and that they will merge into Him. This shows the influence of Sankaracarya's Advaita philosophy.

k) Ativadis are mystics. They practice yoga and sometimes work magic, to cure diseases, for instance. They form a secret brotherhood, like the Freemasons in the West, and are also involved with drugs like marihuana and opium. Bhaktivinoda Thakur reckoned there were 15,000 of them in Orissa during his stay there. At that time, they were often engaged in conspiracies against the government.

l) Bisa Kisen was only one of many self-proclaimed avatars hailing from this apasampradaya. Lord Caitanya instructed, avatar nahi kahe -- ami avatar: "The real incarnation of the Lord never claims Himself to be so."

#### 8. Sufi-tantric-vaishnava syncretists Aula, Baula, Sani and Daravesa

These four apasampradayas are closely related. They are actually different divisions of one group, commonly called "the Bauls of Bengal." Heavily tantric sahajiyas with Sufi leanings, they do not necessarily present themselves as vaishnavas, though they claim to embody the real spirit of Lord Caitanya's movement.

The word aula has different meanings, either of Arabic or Bengali origin. The Persian word aul (which comes from the Arabic wallia) means "very important person," signifying the supposed exalted status of a member of the cult of auls. There is also from the Islamic world the word auttal, which means "the first phase". This indicates that of the four sects, the auls are on the first stage of advancement, because they are married householders. They practice tantric sex-yoga with their own wives as well as the wives of other auls. Another meaning of aul is au (woman) and ula (come down); this points to their close connection to woman, through whom they think descends deeper wisdom of the universe. In Bengali, the word aul is related to kulata ("afflicted"), in the sense of being afflicted with love. They think they have attained the state described in Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya 17.46:

yeba venu-kala-dhvani, eka-bara taha suni,  
jagan-nari-citta aulaya  
nivi-bandha pade khasi, vina-mule haya dasi,  
bauli hana krsna-pase dhaya

"The transcendental vibration of Krishna's flute disturbs the hearts of women all over the world, even if they hear it only once. Thus their fastened belts become loose, and these women become the unpaid maidservants of Krishna. Indeed, they run toward Krishna exactly like madwomen."

The word baula comes from the Sanskrit word vatula, or mad. In the previous verse, the word bauli was used in this sense. It may also be related to the word vyakula, which means "impatiently eager". The bauls are wandering minstrels who play instruments like the ektar, dugi (a drum like the larger drum in a tabla set) and bamboo flute. They do hari-nama-kirtan and sing enchanting songs to express their philosophy, the words of which are very enigmatic (like Bob Dylan songs, but in Bengali). Some bauls are world famous, like Purna Das Baul, who has done concerts in Albert Hall in London.

The word sani comes from svami. This group is more commonly known as the sain. They are mendicants who wander about without following any rigid path, having supposedly renounced all external designations. Shirdi Sai Baba is a rather well-known example of this type; followers of the famous Satya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh claim that he is the same Shirdi Sai reincarnated.

The daravesa (Darbesh) are the gurus of the auls, bauls and sains. They are supposed to have reached the highest realization through the tantric sadhana that is practiced by these cults. In Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 20.70, Srila Prabhupada translates the word daravesa as "hippie," which gives some idea of how

the vaishnavas view these exalted personalities. Darbesh is a Sufi term; it comes from the Persian dar (door) and bhitan (to beg), meaning "one who begs from door to door."

The auls, bauls, sains and darbesh share the same philosophy, which directly descends from the Sahajayana tradition. They view all existence as being formed from the combination of the mundane male and female principles (purusa and prakrti). They believe they can harmonize these two principles within themselves through so-called love, which is generated by a kind of bodily union between man and woman according to tantric yoga. When purusa and prakrti are perfectly harmonized, then one realizes the inner ecstasy they call jiyante mara or "death while living", which is signified by complete stoppage of all physical and mental activity. They identify this state with the mahabhava ecstasy of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. When this state of "death while living" is attained, one can know the maner manush -- the "man in the heart", who is also known as sahaja manush -- "natural man"; bhaber manush -- "man of devotion"; raser manush -- "man of rasa"; and sonar manush -- "man of gold." Though this maner manush is never specifically identified with Gauranga Mahaprabhu, obviously the concept is stolen from the Gaudiya Vaishnavas.

#### Typical symptoms of the four cults

There are certain practices of these apasampradayas (like the caricandrabhed or "ritual of the four moons") that are too disgusting to be described here. It is enough to say that they are absorbed in the darkest regions of ignorance. They believe that all exalted states of transcendence, like the realization of Vaikuntha and Krishnaloka, rest in the gross physical body. Their motto is "what cannot be found in the body cannot be found anywhere." Their philosophy encourages a person to engage in all sorts of degraded acts of lust and depravity in order that the inner bliss (svarup) stored in the material form (rupa) may be released.

These apasampradayas share the same syncretism (the artificial combination of aspects of different religions, i.e. tantric, mayavada and Islamic mysticism with some vaishnava overtones) and iconoclasm (they all reject Deity worship).

The auls, who are said to be on the beginning stage of sadhana, practice what is termed "bodily meditation." This means that the men of this sect take themselves to be purusa and the women are called prakrti. Their sadhana is illicit sex. Husbands and wives of this community freely switch partners. Their idea is to excite lust to a fever pitch so that they can attain divine love. They claim that Lord Caitanya, Lord Nityananda and the six Goswamis were all "auliya", and use citations from Sri Caitanya-caritamrta in which the word aula appears to try to substantiate their claim sastrically.

The influence of mayavada philosophy on the aul sect is very marked. They claim to be purusa, though Krishna is actually the only purusa. They base their claim solely on the body -- if one happens to have a male form, he is purusa, and may imitate Krishna's activities with impunity.

Lord Caitanya's teachings clearly distinguish between love and lust -- atmendriya-priti-vanca tare bali kama (Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi 4.165). The practices of the auls are simply lust, and have no connection with authorized scriptures.

The bauls, being folk musicians, exert an extraordinary influence upon Bengali culture. They were patronized by no less than Rabindranath Tagore, Bengal's nobel-prize-winning poet. Bengali intellectuals are fascinated with them and have written many books to their glory. In recent years, interest in the bauls has spread to the West.

They often keep long hair in a bun on top of their heads and wear the gown of a Muslim fakir with Shaivite rudraksa beads, the glass worry-beads of a Muslim, and the tilak and japa-mala of a vaishnava, all simultaneously. They are usually bearded, and carry a shoulder bag, a bamboo walking cane and a fisti (pot made from a big coconut). They use hashish liberally for "self-control."

The bauls typically flock to festivals they call mahotsavas, many of which coincide with important Gaudiya Vaishnava functions. The Jayadeva-Kenduli Mela during winter is the largest such mahotsava; the bauls have an akhra (their word for ashrama) there, and thousands of them converge at that spot for the three-day festival. At other places across Bengal and Bangladesh they hold are mahotsavas throughout the year. The bauls move from one to the next, perform music, smoke hemp and look for women. Often a baul picks up a woman (or sadhika) at one mahotsava and drops her at the next to take on a new one. His former sadhika will be picked up by another baul.

Some bauls are literate, and use their talents to write books presenting perverted accounts of the lives of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His associates. These need not be mentioned here, as they are too offensive. Because of their talents, the bauls cast an extremely inauspicious spell over the minds of the innocent but foolish populace.

The sains are the freebooters of this tradition. They are supposedly liberated from all material conceptions, and thus may appear in any kind of dress (Hindu sannyasi or Muslim fakir) or no dress at all. They are so much beyond the grip of illusion that they may drink wine or eat human flesh as expressions of their high awareness. The common people superstitiously think sains to be powerful healers, for many Sains maintain themselves by distributing mysterious medicines and cures. Some sain "saints" of the past were Nanak Sain, Alek Sain, Ksirodha Sain and Garbha Sain. One Tapan Das Sain supervises the yearly baul three-day mahotsava at the Darbesh Ashrama at Dubrajpur. Now over 80 years old, he and his young female consort are highly honored in baul society.

The Darbesh Ashrama was founded by Atal Behari Darbesh, known as Darbeshji. By mystic influence he brought a king under his control; that king gave him the land on which the ashrama is situated. Darbeshji is thus venerated by the auls, bauls and sains as a spiritual giant. The followers of Darbeshji dress as Sanatana Gosvami was dressed when he escaped the jail of Nawab Hussain Shah to join Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu in Prayaga. Sanatana told the jailer whom he'd bribed, daravesa hana ami makkake yaiba: "I shall go to Mecca as a Darbesh." The darbesh cult take this as Srila Sanatana Gosvami's most profound instruction. The daravesa-apasampradaya is degraded in every way, for its adherents fully embrace Muslim habits (meat-eating, smoking, etc). They are feared by the common folk for their mysterious powers. Once some workers tried to cut down a tree on the Darbesh Ashrama land, a tree that Darbeshji himself used to rest under. But when they struck that tree, so the legend goes, they all fell down to the ground, vomiting blood.

#### 9. Kartabhaja: worshipers of guru as God

"One should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words of saintly people, the spiritual master and sastra. The actual center is sastra, the revealed scripture. If a spiritual master does not speak according to revealed scripture, he is not to be accepted. Similarly, if a saintly person does not speak according to the sastra, he is not a saintly person. Sastra is the center for all." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 20.352, purport)

In India, the kartabhaja-apasampradaya is nowadays lumped in with the Bauls of Bengal (aula, baula, sani, daravesa). Though indeed it is in many ways similar to the bauls, there is yet a singular feature of this cult that distinguishes it from all others: its doctrine of guruvada. To be sure, all the tantric apasampradayas venerate the guru, and they all justify this veneration with a philosophy they call guruvada. But none go to the extreme that the kartabhajas do by proclaiming the guru to be God incarnate.

Kartabhaja-guruvada is drawn from the mayavada idea of Absolute Oneness; the conclusion is that the guru alone is God in His worshipable form. No form other than his is worshipable, including the arca-murti. No name is chanted other than the name of the guru -- if the name "Krishna" is chanted, it is because the guru is Krishna.

In Lord Caitanya's acintya-bhedabheda philosophy, the guru is known to be non-different from God, but that does not mean he is identical to God in all respects. He is asraya-vigraha -- the receptacle of Krishna's mercy. He is vishnupadaya (situated at Lord Vishnu's lotus feet) and krishna-presthaya (very dear to Krishna). As Srila Raghunatha das Gosvami states in his Manah Siksa, yuruvaram mukunda presthatve smara parama ajashram nanu manah: "O mind, please remember again and again your spiritual master, who is most dear to Krishna."

The founder of the kartabhaja-apasampradaya was one Aul Chand, who lived approximately from 1686 to 1779. He was a fakir or daravesa said by his followers to be none other than Lord Caitanya Himself, whom they say reappeared at Ghosepara in Nadia 200 years after He appeared in Sridhama Mayapura. In Ghosepara, the residence of Karta Ram Sharan Pal and his wife Sati is still preserved as the kartabhaja place of pilgrimage. This husband and wife were Aul Chand's principal disciples, said to be adi-purusa and adyasakti. Nowadays, the Ghosepara Kartabhaja center is overrun with bauls during the three-day Dola Yatra festival. This is probably why many people think the kartabhajas are a kind of baul. But they are a distinct group with a distinct philosophy, and they used to be extremely influential in the last century. In 1893, an invitation was extended to Karta Dulalchand, a famous songwriter and guru of this sect, to attend the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago (at which Vivekananda lectured). But the invitation was a little late -- by that time, Dulalchand had been dead for 60 years!

The kartabhaja sect has its own holy book called the Bhaiver-gita, most of which was written in the form of songs by Dulalchand. Much of the text is puzzling and purposefully contradictory; it is to be understood only by initiates. But there are clear hints of mayavada and tantric ideas (though it seems the kartabhaja sect does not have a reputation for sexual promiscuity like the bauls). The followers are supposed to marry and be true to their partners. And they should be vegetarian, at least on Fridays (the Muslim sabbath). Husbands and wives should not have sex on this day also. The kartabhajas share with the bauls the concept of jiyante mara -- living death -- as the highest goal. They chant the name of Krishna, but say the names of Kali and Khoda (Allah) are equal to it, because all are names of the guru.

An interesting note of history is that the kartabhajas were a powerful movement of revolt against the jati-gosai and smartas, who as mentioned earlier, had become the sedentary establishment of 18th century orthodox Gaudiya Vaishnavism. The kartabhajas and other sahajiya groups converted thousands of common folk on the plea that "the company" (their special term for the Gaudiya Vaishnavas) was once rich, but is now bankrupt. Out of the ruins of the old company, a new company has arisen (meaning the kartabhajas). This company does not carry out business in the name of religion.

The word karta means "master" or "boss"; with this term the kartabhajas address their gurus, beginning with Karta Ram Sharan Pal. All the kartas lived at the residence of the first karta and organized the kartabhaja mission from there.

The faithful followers of the kartas are called baratis, which means "members of the bridegroom's party" in the curious terminology of this sect. The business of the baratis is to fully accept and serve the karta as God on earth. Because of their fanatical devotion to this principle, the kartabhaja sect was very well organized and enthusiastic, and thus very influential among people who could see the faults of the jati-gosai and smartas.

The kartabhajas worship no deity other than the karta. Whatever words he speaks are themselves sastra and should be blindly obeyed. His activities are always divine. Such divine activities were revealed by Aul Chand, the founder-avatar. While living with his disciple, Ram Sharan Pal, he used to squat in a room alone without moving for many days together. But when Ram Sharan had a wedding ceremony for his eldest daughter, Aul Chand suddenly came out of his room completely naked and danced all around the wedding party. Ram Sal became angry, but when Aul Chand threatened to leave his house forever, Ram Sharan surrendered and begged him to stay, suddenly realizing that Aul Chand was God.

In Bangladesh, a new version of the kartabhaja sect was founded some years back by one Anukul Chandra. He is now dead, but latter-day devotees can be directly initiated by him through preachers known as ritviks. New initiates must agree to follow the principles -- be vegetarian once a week and

worship no deity other than Anukul Chandra's picture.

#### 10. Neda-nedi: vaishnava-buddhist syncretists

The word neda indicates a man with a shaven head. Nedi means a shaven-head woman. The neda-nedi cult is said to be still visible around the Navadvipa area, where they are indistinguishable from other shaven vaishnavas wearing tilak and white cloth. The neda-nedi apasampradaya began at the time of Sri Virabhadra Gosvami, the son of Lord Nityananda and Jahnava Mata. It is said that Sri Viracandra converted over a thousand nedas and an equal number of nedis to vaishnavism from tantric Buddhism. Under his direction, these neda-nedis took to the chanting of the Hare Krishna maha-mantra. Most of them got properly married, thus ending the illicit connections that had been going on between them in the name of tantric meditation. But after some time, a number of them again revived their old practices while passing themselves off as vaishnavas. Nowadays, the neda-nedi is taken to be a type of baul.

From Dr. Ramkantha Cakravarti, we get a historical account of a Buddhist monk of Orissa who became a vaishnava in Puri during the time of Srila Sanatana Gosvami's stay there. He was initiated and received the name Acutyanda das. But after mixing with the vaishnavas for some time, he became dissatisfied by their adherence to varnashrama-dharma. Buddhists are naturally antagonistic to varnashrama, so when Acutyanda consulted a Buddhist guru named Mahananda, he was advised to leave the company of the devotees. Acutyanda established his own group, preaching, bolanti prabhu bhagavan buddharupa mo sri caitanya tanka carana seva kara: "I serve the lotus feet of Lord Buddha in the form of Sri Caitanya."

Though Acyutananda's cult has long faded into irrelevance, this vignette shows the type of syncretism that, on the fringe of Lord Caitanya's sankirtan movement, produced new, unauthorized movements like the neda-nedi. The same tendency was noted by Srila Prabhupada in a 1968 letter to a disciple who had chosen to follow a wayward ISKCON sannyasi:

"Now it is understood [that he] does not believe in parampara or in the necessity of scriptural authority. He seems to feel that this is a sort of tyranny. That means, after taking sannyasa and understanding the philosophy for more than a year, he has changed the whole view, and I do not understand how you would like this recent doctrine."

On syncretism as a tactic for preaching to different religious communities, Srila Prabhupada wrote in 1969:

"Actually we have nothing to do with compromising with Christians or Buddhists. Our principles should be to preach Krishna Consciousness as it is spoken in the Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam. As we are now collecting some fortunate students in our movement, it will be possible to collect more students in the future. But it is a fact that the unfortunate persons who stick to the four material misbehaviors, just like illicit sex life, etc. cannot accept these principles of Krishna Consciousness. But still there is chance for them simply by giving aural reception to this transcendental sound of Hare Krishna mantra. If we turn our attention to fit with the Christian people, or any other religious sect, I think it will not be very much fruitful because nobody will change his faith even though he is given scientific or archeological evidences. And that will not help anybody. We have already discussed this point in many articles and change in religious faith does not make one advanced in spiritual understanding. The spiritual understanding as taught by Lord Caitanya is that all living entities are eternally servants of God. We have to propagate this philosophy, and for this we have to make propaganda. Every religion believes in God, and we want that everyone should actively come to this understanding of accepting one's eternal servitorship to God."

#### 11. Conclusion

"Please do not deviate."

In the first part of this article, it was established that a genuine vaishnava is known by his good qualities. Because the Vedic scriptures prescribe the chanting of the holy name of Krishna to be the essential

dharma in the present age of darkness, a vaishnava is to be especially recognized by the quality of his chanting. As Srila Prabhupada explained, "You should always remember that either grhastha or brahmacari or sannyasi, nobody can strictly follow all the rules and regulations. In the Kali-yuga it is not possible. Therefore Caitanya Mahaprabhu has recommended that hari-nama, chanting Hare Krishna mantra, should be very rigidly performed, which is common for everyone."

If a person advertises himself as a Gaudiya Vaishnava by chanting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra and yet deliberately commits namaparadha (offenses to the holy name), he disqualifies himself. The link between namaparadha and deviation from the sampradaya is indicated by Srila Jiva Gosvami, who warns in Bhakti-sandarbhā that there are offenders to the holy name who are acikitsya or incorrigible (jnana-lava-durvidagdhastra-acikitsya-atva-dupekṣa), who immediately become insolent and arrogant due to acquiring a little knowledge from the sampradaya. Such acikitsya-namapradhis are automatically disbarred from the sampradaya because of three kinds of namaparadha: sadhu-nindha, guru-avajna and sruti-sastra-nindha.

Yet the incorrigible offender never concedes the fact of his offenses. He cannot understand that the mercy of the spiritual master and the association of pure devotees are indispensable to the chanting of the holy name. Because he highly values worldly knowledge and accomplishments, he looks down upon the simple devotees who have surrendered themselves to devotional service. This is sadhu-ninda (blasphemy of the devotees of the Lord). He cannot accept that the spiritual master is a transcendental teacher, not a worldly one; thus he tries to measure the person and instructions of the guru by his own mental standards. This is guru-avajna (disregard of the spiritual master). He studies the revealed scriptures as he would ordinary literature, gleaning from it whatever seems to support his preconceived notions, heedless of the rest. This is sruti-sastra-nindha (blasphemy of the revealed scriptures).

The acikitsya-namaparadhi confuses the growth of these and other offenses within his heart with the growth of the bhakti-lata (creeper of devotion). Thus he mistakes his fallen condition for a condition of great advancement; such is the illusion from which the apasampradayas have sprung.

By taking proper shelter of the sampradaya, we learn to avoid offenses and protect the creeper of devotion implanted in the heart by the spiritual master. By offenseless chanting of the holy name, the creeper grows to full maturity and bears the fruit of krishna-prema, pure love of God.