



APASAMPRADAYAS

TRAPS IN OUR PATH BACK TO GODHEAD

Caitanya Chandra Dasa

Apasampradayas: Traps in our path back to Godhead

Caitanya Chandra Dasa

2023

**This is a free ebook, a humble offering to all the exalted
Vaishnavas in Srila Prabhupada's movement. It can be
downloaded for free on:**

t.me/thepathofbhakti

<https://thepathofbhakti.com/apasampradayas/>

Feel free to share it with your friends.

If you have any thoughts or questions, be welcome to contact the
author:

bhagavatamrta@gmail.com

facebook.com/caitanyachandra.das

We gratefully acknowledge the **BBT** for the use of verses and purports
from Srila Prabhupada's books, as well as some of the illustrations
found in this book. All such verses and purports are copyright of the
Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International, Inc.

Preface.....	4
Chapter 1: A historical perspective.....	6
What are apasampradayas?.....	9
Saki-Bheki, Chuda Dhari, Gauranga Nagari (Prakrta-sahajiyas).....	11
Caste goswamis.....	16
Caste brahmanas.....	21
Ativadi: too great.....	24
Kartabaja: blind followers.....	27
Bauls and others.....	29
Chapter 2: The Revival.....	32
Srila Prabhupada comes to the West.....	35
Obstacles on our path.....	37
Chapter 3: Traps in our way back to Godhead.....	41
Sahajiya and Mayavada.....	47
The example of the "Gopi-bhava club".....	50
Being sincere.....	56
"Time, place and circumstance".....	59

Preface

When someone starts a diet or starts doing exercise, the first day is relatively easy. The problem is to continue long term. As soon as we try to do something that demands sacrifices, especially for a long period, many obstacles, distractions, temptations, and difficulties appear, testing our determination. In our spiritual life, it's not different.

As Srila Prabhupada puts it, to try to follow spiritual life seriously means to declare war against Maya. When one declares war against a strong adversary, he shouldn't expect that the opponent will stay still and not react.

It's very common to see devotees who are enthusiastic in the beginning but have problems later due to a lack of deep philosophical understanding. Some succumb to material desires or mental speculation, others get burned out, and some lose their faith in the teachings and gradually stop following them. Some try to find shortcuts on the spiritual path and get attracted to different groups with concocted philosophies and practices, some get involved with Vaishnava aparadha due to bad association, others get too much involved with mental speculation or materialistic views, etc.

To be able to navigate through the difficulties we must have not only determination but also a good deal of maturity. The goal of this small book is to offer some philosophical basis about common traps in our spiritual development, so we can understand the pitfalls and thus be able to avoid them.

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains that spiritual progress should be based on three components: Sambandha, Abhidheya, and Prayojana.

Abhidheya is our spiritual practice and Prayojana is the goal we aim to achieve with this practice, but to understand what should be our practice and what is the goal we need to first cultivate Sambandha, or philosophical understanding. Without this proper understanding, it's difficult to understand where and how we should go.

When there is no Sambandha, or practice doesn't have a very solid basis and tends to crumble over time. Our spiritual practice then becomes lax and our spiritual health decays.

Keeping our focus is essential not only for our own spiritual life but also for the success of our whole movement. A group is only as strong as the sum of its parts. If our devotees are individually weak, the movement as a whole will also be weak. If we lose focus, our movement can fragment and degenerate into a bunch of un-bonafide sects. It happened in the past and can happen again if we are not careful. Krsna is in control, but He respects our free will.

This presentation deals with many issues that may be polemical. Still, I believe these are important points that present risks for one trying to advance in the spiritual path, therefore I did my best to present them. You can read, meditate about it, and use this knowledge at your own discretion.

Chapter 1: A historical perspective

In the past, Vedic knowledge used to be orally transmitted. The reason that was possible was that people had such good memories and honest dispositions that they would be able to properly understand and transmit it to the next generations without change. Nowadays this is almost impossible. People misunderstand and change things.

That's the reason all the recent acaryas emphasized the production of books. Once the knowledge is written, everyone who receives it will get the same message. Some may still misunderstand, but the ones who are sincere will get the knowledge as it is.

This is one of the reasons why Srila Prabhupada wrote so many books, and why studying these books is so important for our spiritual development. It's through his books that we have access to the pure teachings that are the basis of Vaishnava philosophy, which allows us not only to follow spiritual life seriously but also to distinguish right and wrong and not fall into the different traps that may appear on our path of devotional service.

There is no such thing as "all paths are equal". Different paths lead to different results. Because of our conditioned nature, we have the tendency to lower our spiritual standards and mix the philosophy of Krsna consciousness with other concepts and philosophies. Once one starts to get off course, the result is uncertain. We can understand the danger by studying the history of our own movement.

We all know that Lord Caitanya appeared in the Bengal region five hundred years ago to inaugurate the sankirtana movement. He traveled around India and with the assistance of His numerous

associates and devotees, inundating the sub-continent with love of Godhead.

We can see that the start of our movement at the time of Mahaprabhu is in many aspects similar to the movement started by Srila Prabhupada. Initially, there was rapid growth, propitiated by the direct example of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His personal associates. Thanks to their efforts, the sankirtan movement spread very quickly in Bengal and other parts, and many other groups adopted the Vaishnava philosophy.

However, after the departure of Mahaprabhu and His main associates, there was a lot of confusion. There were a lot of people chanting Hare Krsna, but not many of them had a very clear philosophical understanding. As a result, many different groups, with different understanding and different practices started to appear.

Lord Caitanya entrusted to His most confidential servants, the six Goswamis, the mission of writing books about the Vaishnava philosophy, excavating the holy places in Vrindavana, and giving continuity to the movement He inaugurated. They did this by writing many books, explaining the proper philosophy of Krsna Consciousness, and sending Srila Narottama Thakura, accompanied by Srila Syamananda Prabhu and Srinivasa Acarya to preach it in Bengal. From them, a succession of acaryas led by Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura appeared, preserving the original teachings.

The problem was that outside the parampara, everything started to degenerate quickly. The pure sankirtana movement inaugurated by The Lord began to degenerate into numerous apasampradayas, that started to grow uncontrollably, suffocating the original movement.

By the time Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura appeared, the reputation of Vaishnavism was almost destroyed. Many took Vaishnavism as some kind of sex religion due to the practices of many of these un-bonafide sects. There was a lot of sentiment, but not much philosophy, and these led to all kinds of degraded practices carried in the name of devotion to Krsna.

As conditioned souls, we have the tendency to cling to their material conceptions and try to project them into Krsna's Lila, up to the point of using the dealings of Krsna with the gopis and other pastimes as an excuse to exercise our material propensities. When this tendency is not checked, it can lead to the appearance of different un-bonafide sects with all kinds of strange practices, just like it happened in the past.

In other words, instead of giving up our material misconceptions and propensities, we try to create a philosophy that suits it, so we can have an illusion of cultivating pure devotion without having to change our perspectives. Instead of changing ourselves to fit into the teachings, we try to change the teachings to fit our material conditioning.

Understanding how this process works is quite important not only for our personal spiritual development but for the future of our movement since we are now living in a similar situation. The movement Srila Prabhupada started passed through a phase of rapid growth, but now, after the disappearance of Srila Prabhupada and most of his leading disciples, we are entering a dangerous phase, where the lack of a proper philosophical understanding by many is leading to the appearances of philosophies and practices that are substantially different than what was originally taught. If we are not careful, our movement can degenerate into a group of different sects, with their own concocted practices and philosophy, becoming again some kind of sex religion.

What are apasampradayas?

A sampradaya is a school, a tradition or line of devotional service, practices, and principles that are transmitted from generation to generation through disciplic succession (“sam” means “connected to” and “pradaya” means “source”).

An apasampradaya is a corrupted sampradaya, a broken link in the chain, or a non-bonafide school that lost connection with the parampara. An apasampradaya may have some degree of philosophy and spiritual practice, but at the same time mixes it with perversions and deviations. One example that can be given is that when we mix milk with poison, it will still have some nutritional value, but it will at the same time contain other components that may put one’s life in danger.

As mentioned in the Sri Isopanisad (mantra 9), there is knowledge, there is ignorance and there is corrupted knowledge, and such corrupted knowledge is actually more dangerous than the simple absence of knowledge.

“Utpata, simply disturbance. Yata mat tata patha: “I can manufacture my own way.” This rascaldom has been condemned by Srila Rupa Gosvami. He says that harer bhaktih... You will find many so-called bhaktas crying, falling down on the ground. But immediately after, he is smoking bidi. So why this is going on? Because they do not follow the injunction of Srila Rupa Gosvami. Chanting, dancing very loudly, and after the performance is finished—I have seen it—“Can you give me a bidi?” You see? “My throat is now dried up.” So this is utpata. Srila Rupa Gosvami has described this kind of so-called devotional attitude is simply

disturbance. They imitate. Imitate. Therefore Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura has condemned. There are so many apa-sampradaya going on in the name of Caitanya Mahaprabhu's devotee. Who are they? Aula, baula, kartabhaja, neda, daravesa, sani, sahajiya, sakhibheki, smarta, jata-gosani. Then ativadi, cudadhari, gauranga-nagari, tota kahe ei tara sanga nahi kori: Tota Babaji, he says, "I do not associate with these classes of men." So after disappearance of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, so many apa-sampradaya sprang up. So we should be very much careful that... Sampradaya means who are carefully following the Vedic principle." (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on CC Adi-lila 1.3, Mayapur, 27 March 1975)

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura identified thirteen different movements claiming to have inherited the mission initiated by Lord Caitanya, despite not nurturing true Vaishnava qualities. They are called aula, baula, kartabhaja, neda, daravesa, sani, sahajiya, sakhi bheki, smarta, jata-gosani, ativadi, cudadhari, and gauranga-nagari. Understanding these movements can give us some insight on the different ways one can go astray, and valuable understanding of the stumbling blocks that may appear in our own spiritual path.

These groups are described in detail in the Book "*Apasampradayas, deviation of the disciplic succession*" by HH Suhotra Swami. My idea here is not to repeat his words but to just give a summary and proceed in connecting these different groups with tendencies most of us have, tendencies that can grow into challenges in our spiritual progress.

Saki-Bheki, Chuda Dhari, Gauranga Nagari (Prakrta-sahajiyas)

One of the most well-known groups by devotees is the prakrta-sahajiyas, mentioned often by Srila Prabhupada. We hear a lot about “sahajiyas” in his books, but often we may fail to understand what exactly a sahajiya is.

We may think that sahajiyas are just some sect in India, but actually, we all have a sahajiya inside of us, ready to come out at the first opportunity. There are different groups that form the historical sahajiya communities described by Bhaktivinoda Thakura, but we should keep in mind that these are just the terminal symptoms of a disease that we all carry inside of us. We may not get down to the stage of dressing in saris and pretending to be gopis, but this doesn't mean the disease may not affect us at a certain point.

I will try to first describe the historical sahajiyas and later in the book enter into details of how this tendency can manifest in our lives.

The word “prakrta” means materialist, and “sahajiya” means someone who takes the spiritual process as something cheap. There are different types of prakrta-sahajiyas, but they all have something in common: trying to find ways to practice spiritual life without following the proper process. In other words, they take spiritual life as something cheap. They try to attain the result while at the same time kicking the stair that leads to it.

One may like to hear about rasa-lila and other very confidential and esoteric subjects, but not be equally inclined to get rid of his bad habits and follow a regulated spiritual life. Such behavior can be justified on the basis of “love” and “spontaneous devotion”, giving the idea that

rules and regulations are for neophytes. When one thinks that he is already on a transcendental platform, above rules and regulations, the doors to all kinds of questionable activities and behavior are opened. The result is often illicit sex, intoxication, and other problems.

Prabhupada mentioned in a few conversations about devotees in Vrindavana posing as sadhus or babajis while at the same time secretly having illicit relationships cultivating other questionable habits. Unfortunately even today this is more common than we would like to believe.

Sahajiyas often want to be elevated to the level of sakhis and gopis, but they don't want to follow the proper devotional process. The process for us to become purified of all anarthas and contaminations and from this platform gradually develop love for Krsna, a process that continues up to the point we can directly join Krsna pastimes. This requires one to approach the spiritual process with all respect and gravity and seriously practice under the guidance of a bonafide spiritual master. Without this, the tendency is that one will start confusing genuine spiritual emotions with material lust.

One on this path will be very eager to hear about the pastimes of Radha and Krsna because they remind them of ordinary dealings between men and women. Instead of becoming purified, however, such hearing will just increase their attraction to the opposite sex, leading to illicit connections and an enjoying mood. Instead of curing one's selfishness and arrogance, such a practice will end up increasing it.

Another common symptom is that although one may have a great interest in Krsna's confidential pastimes with the gopis, he will not have the same eagerness for hearing Krsna's other lilas, like Krsna killing demons or Krsna speaking the Bhagavad-Gita in the battlefield

of Kurukshetra, considering them something external or for neophytes. As a result, their spiritual practice becomes progressively sentimental, without the checks and balances of a proper understanding of Vaishnava philosophy.

“Vaishnava, devotees of Lord Krsna, use the term prakrta-sahajiya to refer to persons who imitate the signs of prema, pure love for God, while still addicted to the low-class pleasures of illicit sex and intoxication. The sahajiyas imagine that they feel the divine emotions of Krsna and His dearest devotee, Srimati Radharani. Yet they don't understand that before we can savor the pleasure shared by Radha and Krsna, we must rid ourselves of lustful desires for sensual pleasure.

The word sahaja means "easy." A prakrta-sahajiya wants the bliss of spiritual life without the struggle to attain it. And the word prakrta means "materialistic." Because the sahajiyas forgo the standard disciplines of bhakti-yoga, the divine love they apparently show never gets beyond material lust. The prakrta-sahajiyas mistake lust -the disease of the soul- for spiritual advancement. So instead of curing lust, they wind up cultivating it.” (Deviant Vaisnava Sects, Suhotra Swami)

The sahajiya community includes groups like the **sakhi-bheki** (where the men dress in saris and use make-up in an attempt to imitate the gopis and attract Krsna) and **cudadhari** (where they dress like Krsna and try to imitate His pastimes with the first group). The sakhi-bheki think that by dressing like gopis they can attract Krsna, and similarly, the cudadhari think that by dressing like Krsna they can attract Radharani.

Their philosophy is thus not based on love but on envy. Instead of aspiring to serve the gopis or serving Krsna, they aspire to become the gopis or become Krsna Himself. Their approach to spiritual life is thus

completely inverted: instead of aspiring to be a servant, one aspires to become the enjoyer. A sakhi-bheki can dress like Lalita Sakhi, for example, and imagine that he became one with Lalita. Their philosophy is thus also contaminated by mayavada.

Another sect, prominent in Bengal, is the **Gauranga-Nagari**. Externally they appear to be regular Vaishnavas, using tilaka, doing kirtana, following a vegetarian diet, etc. There is, however, a notable sahajiya contamination in their philosophy. They are not interested in Lord Caitanya's mood as a devotee. Instead, they try to impose the mood of Krsna, as an enjoyer on Mahaprabhu, and see themselves as enjoyed by Him. They try to depict Mahaprabhu as a debaucher who had affairs with different consorts and support their philosophy with invented stories. This offensive way of worship comes from material lust and is condemned by our acaryas.

The problem is that this philosophy is quite popular in parts of India, and many books have been published over the centuries. Many inexperienced devotees get in contact with such books, and not being able to distinguish them from bonafide books published by our acaryas, become confused by the stories and the philosophy depicted in them.

After the mayavadis, the sahajiya are probably the most criticized group in Srila Prabhupada's books, lectures, and conversations. This was his way to alert us to the potential danger, since this tendency of taking spiritual life cheaply, to mistake material sentiment for spiritual bhava, to impose our mundane lust into spiritual rasa and so on tend to be extremely common. He explains that spiritual life is a straight path, just like a road that has grass and secondary roads on both sides. To the one side, there is Mayavada, and to the other side the different variations of the sahajiya philosophy. Only one who is capable of

continuing to go straight, avoiding both sides will be able to reach the goal.

The Mayavadi wants to get free of the material world, but he doesn't want to serve Krsna. On the contrary, he is envious of Krsna and this wants to destroy his personal existence. *"I'm Krsna, you are Krsna, everyone is Krsna"* means that actually there is no Krsna.

The sahajiya wants to get access to the bliss of the spiritual platform without going through the process of curing his material disease. He takes spiritual life as something cheap and wants to get personal enjoyment instead of wanting to please Krsna. A devotee sees Krsna as the center while a sahajiya sees himself as the center. As a result, he wants to bring all his contaminations with him and project them into Krsna Lila. The sahajiya sees lust, envy, etc. in the pastimes of Krsna and because of this, he is not able to ascend to the spiritual platform.

Srila Prabhupada used to say that Krsna Consciousness is a scientific process. Nowadays the word "scientific" is often misused, but originally scientific means a process that is reproducible. Someone does a certain experience and documents the necessary steps and the results, in a way that anyone, in any part of the world, can replicate the experiment, following the same steps and achieving the same results. Krsna Consciousness is based on a process that is described in detail and is reproducible: anyone who properly follows the process will achieve the same result.

The problem is that we often want to achieve the result without executing the necessary steps that lead to such a result, and thus we end up being baffled. If one wants to become an engineer, he just needs to enroll in an engineering course. After studying for a few years under the proper teachers he will become a qualified engineer. If

instead, he spends his time associating with drunkards in a bar, the result will be different.

Similarly, we may have the desire to develop love for Krsna and participate in His pastimes, but we must understand that this is only possible after we get rid of all the contaminations that surround our true selves. The danger is precisely when we want to find a shortcut to get Krsna without first getting rid of our lust. Following such a shortcut will invariably bring us to some variation of the sahajiya philosophy.

We may also be attracted to some un-bonafide leader due to sentiment, not being able to distinguish real love for Krsna from cheap imitation. In Kali-Yuga there are many false religious orders that are initiated by people who want to attract followers. Some may be just plain dishonest, some may be deluded themselves while others may think they are speaking to Krsna or Balarama due to diseases like schizophrenia, and sometimes innocent folks may be attracted to them on a sentimental basis.

Sahajiyism is like a cancer that tends to appear in the Vaishnava society at different times and in different forms. What makes it dangerous is that it can start as something very subtle, and grow into more gross contaminations. It's a formidable trap for the aspiring transcendentalist. Our defense against this is to properly understand and study the Vaishnava philosophy as explained by our past acaryas.

Caste goswamis

Another common problem is when the idea of hereditariety, the transference of privileges to one's descendants, becomes prominent.

This leads us to the caste goswamis (or jata-gosany), groups that are still prominent in India.

We know that in other eras, the son of a great person would also normally become great because all the purificatory processes would be rigidly followed. Still, even at those times, there would be exceptions, like Drona and Ashwathama, or King Anga and Venu, for example. In Kali-yuga, there is no such rigid observation of purificatory processes, therefore frequently the son of an advanced devotee is just an ordinary fellow. Therefore, the injunction is: "*In Kali-yuga everybody is sudra*". Until the son can prove himself to be qualified, he can't be accepted as a great devotee just because he has a great father.

Actually, one of the greatest problems in Kali-yuga is that in this era demons can take advantage of the lack of proper purificatory processes during the conception to take birth in exalted families and thus create havoc. As Srila Prabhupada mentioned in his purport to SB 4.21.40:

"At present, in the Age of Kali, it is very difficult to render service to the brahmana-kula, or the brahmana class. The difficulty, according to the Varaha Purana, is that demons, taking advantage of Kali-yuga, have taken birth in brahmana families. Raksasah kalim asritya jayante brahma-yonisu (Varaha Purana). In other words, in this age there are many so-called caste brahmanas and caste gosvamis who, taking advantage of the sastra and of the innocence of people in general, claim to be brahmanas and Vaisnavas by hereditary right. One will not derive any benefit by rendering service to such false brahmana-kulas." (SB 4.21.40 purport)

There are many clans of caste goswamis, both in Bengal and in Vrindavana. Most of the traditional families had a connection with

some exalted Vaishnava in the past (usually through initiation), but over the centuries most of them degenerated into a caste of hereditary gurus who made a living by exerting a monopoly in the control of temples and initiation of members of lower castes. Even though frequently immersed in bad habits and worldly behavior, caste goswamis would claim to be renounced goswamis.

Even today, sometimes sentimental devotees may become attracted to members of the jata-gosany class just because they claim to have seminal descendance from some important acarya. It's interesting to note, in connection with this, that the high priest of the demons is Sukracharya, whose name means, literally, "seminal guru" or someone who declares the birth connection as the only way to transmit powerful positions to future generations. This makes it clear to understand where this idea comes from.

In any case, their claim of seminal descendance is usually false, as their connection with previous acaryas is usually through initiation, and not through family ties. In other words, in most cases, these families are not descendants of the claimed acaryas, but descendants of disciples.

One group in Bengal, for example, claims to be descendants of Lord Nityananda, but their connection with him is through a disciple of his son, Sri Virabhadra Prabhu, as proved by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura.

Similarly, many families of caste Goswamis in Vrindavana are descendants of disciples of the six goswamis who were entrusted with the maintenance of the temples established by them. At the time, the region was under muslin rule, and the only way to establish temples was to register them as private property. In this way, disciples entrusted with the maintenance of the temples were also made the

legal owners, and such ownership, combined with the duty of maintaining the temples was passed to their descendants.

Over time, however, many of these descendants started to treat the temples just like a business or family property, taking advantage of the great sums donated by visitors. There were thus many cases of caste goswamis who would pose as spiritual authorities and would exert control over the local population while immersed in very questionable habits.

In any case, even if seminal descendance is present, this doesn't mean much. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati explains how the families of even incarnations of Krsna may become degraded over time. The central point, according to him, is that the son of Krsna is not Krsna, but a Vaishnava, therefore from the third generation there is no difference from a regular Vaishnava family. The sons of even a pure devotee are not always pure devotees, consequently, the lines initiated by powerful Vaishnavas continue through disciplic succession to their confidential followers, and not through seminal descendance.

"We may go on bragging that we are born in the seminal dynasty of a Vaisnava and we may exhibit lifeless limbs of devotional service, but unless we have firm faith in the service of Hari we will simply cheat ourselves and become enemies of society.

Acyuta-gotra is never a saukra gotra, or -seminal family, therefore Vaisnava vamsa does not refer only to the seminal dynasty. The spiritual Vaisnavas who belong to the Acyuta-gotra, or family of Krsna, entrust their respective authority only to their most confidential servants. The unqualified descendants can never claim to be successors just because they were born in that family. Even if they achieve such a position, they are unable to protect it. These facts are similarly applicable to the dynasties of Lord Visnu as well. Specifically, the Lord and His devotees appear in different

dynasties at different times, and there are no obstacles for nondevotees and demons to take birth in such families. The son of Lord Visnu is not Lord Visnu, but a Vaisnava. So from the third generation there is no difference between the descendants of Visnu and the descendants of the Vaisnavas.” (Srla Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Sajjana tosanī, Vol. 19, Part 7/8)

The main point is that advanced devotees may take birth in caste goswami families, just like they may take birth in any other family, but such Vaishnavas should be respected by their spiritual realizations and achievements and not by their seminal descendance.

“It is said, phalena pariciyate: one is recognized by the result of his actions. In Vaisnava society there are many types of Vaisnavas. 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 that he has changed the character of his disciples. Haridasa Thakura actually changed the character of the professional prostitute. People greatly appreciated this, and therefore they all offered obeisances to Haridasa Thakura and glorified him.” (CC Antya 3.143 purport)

Although there was not yet a case of someone trying to implement hereditary guruship in our society, we may be tempted by more subtle jata-gosani deviations, like, for example, using a temple or a deity as means of livelihood, or trying to maintain privileges or titles even when though one is not maintaining the proper standards demanded by such position. In other words, to use spiritual life as a means to attain and maintain privileges.

In one sense, the jata-gosanis are the starting point for the other apasampradayas, for they were at a certain point the established tradition. Because of their degradation, people started to rebel and demand change, leading to the rise of other groups, which instead of improving the situation, just resulted in increasingly degraded practices. This is also a warning for us. If we don't keep high standards in our movement, people are going to flock to other groups, which are also not necessarily going to provide any real improvement. Human tendency is towards degradation, and this is even more prominent in Kali-yuga. Different acaryas and Krsna Himself in His different incarnations come periodically to elevate the standards, but outside of this, human concoctions never introduce anything better. Just like we had our dose of problems in our movement in previous decades, other movements that appeared in this period had theirs.

Caste brahmanas

Another apasampradaya based on the concept of hereditarity is the smarta brahmanas. The defying characteristic of the smarta philosophy is a misapplication of the principles of the sastras. They try to follow the rituals, rules, and regulations given in the scriptures but leave aside the devotional aspects.

The injunction of the scriptures is that we should always remember Krsna, and never forget Him. To this end, we have so many rules and regulations that help us to keep pure in consciousness and thus be able to maintain our minds fixed in Krsna, which is the ultimate goal of all injunctions of the scriptures.

The smarta brahmanas invert the logic, remembering all the rules and regulations, but forgetting Krsna. Smartas are generally bogged down in an inveterate fruitive mentality: their sole goal is to get material piety and fame. Generally, smartas have a greater propensity to worship demigods, especially Durga devi, but even if they adopt devotional practices, like chanting the maha-mantra, visiting the holy places, or fasting on Ekadasi, their idea is usually to just increase their material piety and sense of self-accomplishment. They just take all these as fruitive activities.

The smartas are a much older community, but according to Suhotra Maharaja, many smartas adopted Vaishnava dress and habits starting from the 16th century, after Raja Narasimha surrendered to Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura.

This is a very interesting pastime. In the course of his preaching, Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura converted and initiated a number of illustrious members of the smarta community, including Ganga Narayana Chakravarti, Jagannatha Acharya, and other well-known brahmanas. The smartas considered Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura a sudra because he took birth in a kayastha family, therefore the fact that he was giving initiation to brahmanas of the community created a great stir. At some point, a large fraction went to complain to Raja Narasingha, the local king. With his support, they enlisted Sri Rupa Narayana, a famous digvijay, and proceeded to Kheturi, with the intention of somehow exposing Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura as a fraud.

On the way, they stopped at a small town called Kumara Pura to rest. Coming to know about the plot, Sri Ramakrishna Bhattacharya and Sri Ganga Narayana Cakravarti disguised themselves, one as a seller of clay pots and the other as a seller of betel nuts. In this way, they set up shops within the local market and waited. When some of the disciples

of the panditas went to buy provisions in the market, they met the two Vaishnavas who, speaking perfect Sanskrit, engaged them in a debate. Gradually, the teachers got involved, and soon Raja Narasingha himself arrived with the digvijay. In the presence of the king, the two Vaishnavas soundly defeated Sri Rupa Narayana and all other members of the group.

Surprised that a pan-walla and a potter could defeat such great pandits, the king inquired about their identities. Showing great humility, they answered that they were humble disciples of Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura. Turning to the digvijay, the king exclaimed: *If two of Narottama's ordinary disciples can defeat you in debate, there is no need of going to see him!* Later, Durga Devi herself appeared to the king and Rupa Narayana and ordered both to go to Narottama and beg forgiveness for their offenses. Surrendering, both became initiated disciples of Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura. From this point on, an increasing number of smartas adopted Vaishnava habits, mixing Vaishnavism with smarta values.

Another famous clash between Vaishnavas and smartas happened in 1911, when a group composed of many of the most illustrious members of the smarta community was fully defeated by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, who proved that Vaishnavas are superior to ordinary brahmanas and that anybody can be elevated to a pure platform by executing devotional service, regardless of birth or social position. The arguments given by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati on this occasion can be found in detail in the book *"Brahmana and Vaisnava"*.

He starts by quoting different passages from the sastra that glorify the exalted position of the Brahmana, basically exhausting all the arguments that could be used by the smartas. He then expertly changes the subject and starts explaining why the Vaishnava is even

more exalted than ordinary brahmanas, describes the wrong concepts and practices adopted by the smarta community, and explains how even the ones born in lower families can be elevated to the topmost platform by receiving spiritual initiation and practicing under the guidance of a bonafide spiritual master, again quoting extensive scriptural evidence. By the end of his lecture, the smartas could not put forward any plausible argument.

The smartas illustrate our tendency to take devotional service as a means to nurture our materialistic tendencies, using it as a fruitive endeavor to improve our existence in this material world, achieving fame, opulence, and prestige or, on the other side, to become ritualistic, taking the rules and regulations as everything, forgetting that they are just means to achieve the real goal, which is love for Krsna. If we chant the maha-mantra, fast on Ekadasi, or do different services with any other goal than to please Krsna and develop our love for Him, we may be already deviating in this way.

The smarta tendency can be also noted when we take the rules and regulations from different scriptures too literally, without adjusting to time and circumstance according to the teachings left by our previous acaryas, especially Srila Prabhupada. The smarta philosophy is also based on the Vedas, but it is a very orthodox, rigid, one-sided interpretation that fails to examine different higher aspects also mentioned in the scriptures. It is also based on a sense of superiority and entitlement, where one's ego grows as a result of his practice, instead of the opposite. These are also traps we need to learn to avoid.

Ativadi: too great

Another apasampradaya mentioned by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura is the **ativadi**. This sect was started by a man called Jagannatha dasa at the time of Mahaprabhu. Initially, he was a follower of Haridasa Thakura, but later he broke his connection with him and started spreading his own ideas. He created his own version of the Srimad-Bhagavatam with five new chapters that he wrote himself, told his followers to chant the second part of the maha-mantra before the first, and so on.

Once, he arrogantly directly approached Lord Caitanya, wanting to recite his version of the Bhagavatam, bypassing Swarupa Damodara and other associates who would screen visitors. 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*".

Jagannatha dasa then declared that Lord Caitanya was Krsna and he was Radharani, to which The Lord replied: "*Sir, you have become too great (ativadi). An insignificant and fallen soul like Me can have nothing to do with you*". Blinded by his ego, Jagannatha dasa took the chastisement of the Lord as praise and continued spreading his ideas. Later he was imprisoned by Prataparudra Maharaja for indecent behavior in connection with his dealings with women, but his sect continued.

The ativadi became prominent in Orissa because of the popularity of the translations of the Srimad-Bhagavatam and Bhagavad-Gita in the Oriya language written by Jagannatha dasa amongst the lower classes. The ativadi claim to be Vaishnavas but they are actually opposed to Vaishnava principles. While worshiping Lord Jagannatha, they accept the mayavada conclusion that God is ultimately impersonal and that they will merge into Him when liberated. They mix loosely with women, use intoxicants like ganja and opium, exploit their influence for political means, and so on. They claim to have a better

understanding of the scriptures than Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His associates. Some are ascetics that start claiming to be incarnations after gaining a little mystical power.

We can see that these are traces common in many un-bonafide groups. A charismatic leader appears, claiming to have higher realizations, or even direct contact with Krsna, Radharani, Balarama, or other divinity, and followers are attracted to the idea of being connected with such an exalted person. This gives rise to pride: they start to consider other Vaishnavas as neophytes who are just doing sadhana and see themselves as more elevated. The charismatic leader uses this to promote himself and attract more followers, and thus the sect grows until some scandal leads to its demise.

When Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was serving as deputy magistrate in Jagannatha Puri, in the early 1870s, he had to deal with many disturbances caused by followers of the ativadi sect, which were very numerous in Orissa at that time. There was a lot of political agitation and even cases of false proclaimed incarnations, that were exploiting their followers. In his autobiography, he wrote:

“This atibari group is secretive and extends throughout Bengal as do the Bauls. This sect has many forged books wherein it is written that Chaitanya will reappear. In this group there are some wicked people who imitate Sri Chaitanya, Brahma, Baladeva, or Krishna. One person, known as Bisakishan, a scoundrel who had obtained a little yogic power, was celebrated as Mahavishnu Himself. He had started to establish a Temple at Chatira Krosa within the jungle near Saradaipur with the help of his followers.”

The ascetic Bisakisen was a dramatic example. While claiming to be an incarnation of Maha-Vishnu, he was using his mystic powers to impress his followers and seduce married ladies. He even tried to kill

Bhaktivinoda Thakura using his powers after he was imprisoned by his order. In a dramatic event, after the yogi was sentenced, a British medical officer had the idea of cutting his hair, having read that yogis often store their power in the hair. This made Bisakisen lose his powers and collapse, which finally convinced his followers that he was not an incarnation of God. Falling into disgrace, he eventually killed himself by drinking poison while in prison.

The ativadi illustrates our tendency to become proud, thus contaminating our devotional service. Everyone in this material world is proud, even a dog or hog is proud of his position. This is just another symptom of our material fever. As soon as we get a little bit of learning, or seniority, or any other small opulence, our material fever may return if we are not careful. If we start to cultivate pride instead of humility and meekness, we may end up being evicted from the association of true Vaishnavas. We may then find our sanga amongst similarly arrogant persons, start to criticize sincere devotees, and thus open our path to complete ruination.

Kartabaja: blind followers

In our Vaishnava philosophy, we see the guru as representative of Krsna, and thus worthy of the same respect and worship as Krsna Himself. Not only the guru is the bonafide representative and recipient of Krsna's mercy, but he conveys the same message given by the Lord, transmitted through disciplic succession, and teaches us by his exemplary behavior. In other words, we accept the guru as good as God, but not as God.

At the same time, we understand the guru in the context of his godbrothers and other senior vaishnavas, and thus our respect to the

guru doesn't prevent us from also respecting other vaishnavas. Lord Caitanya Himself gave the example by offering respects to Ramachandra Puri, because he was a godbrother of His spiritual master.

The kartabhaja, on the other hand, proclaims that the guru is God incarnated. For them, nobody is worshipable except the guru. If they chant the name "Krsna", it is because they believe that their guru is Krsna, an idea derived from mayavada philosophy. Even if the guru performs immoral acts, still his activities are seen as divine.

A similar idea was propagated inside ISKCON for a short period, culminating in the incident of 1970 in the Janmastami festival of New Vrindavana. A small group of sannyasis were propagating that Srila Prabhupada was actually Krsna Himself and that he had left for India because they themselves and the other disciples failed to recognize it. This new philosophy was refuted by members of the newly formed GBC with quotes from the books. Srila Prabhupada was in Japan at the time and became very disturbed by the news of the incident, explaining that this is mayavada philosophy.

"Coughing intermittently and speaking with physical discomfort, Prabhupada explained the Mayavadis' dangerous misconceptions. The impersonalists held a cheap, mundane view of the guru, the guru's worship, and the guru's instructions. If one says that the guru is God and God is not a person, then it follows logically that the guru has no eternal personal relationship with his disciples. Ultimately the disciple will become equal to the guru, or in other words he will realize that he, too, is God.

Arguing from the Vedic scripture, Prabhupada refuted the Mayavadis' claims. The individual souls, he said, are Krsna's eternal servants, and this master-servant relationship is eternal. Service to Krsna, therefore, is spiritual activity. Only by serving

the guru, however, can a disciple fully revive his eternal relationship with Krsna. The Vedic literature gives paramount importance to serving the spiritual master. He is the representative of God, the direct, manifest link to God. No one can approach God but through him. Lord Krsna says, "Those who are directly My devotees are actually not My devotees. But those who are devotees of My servant (the spiritual master) are factually My devotees."

For hours Prabhupada drilled his disciples. He would pose a Mayavada argument, then ask his disciples to defeat it. If they failed, he would defeat it himself. He stressed that the relationship between the spiritual master and disciple was eternal-not because the guru was Krsna, but because he was the confidential servant of Krsna, eternally. A bona fide spiritual master never says that he is Krsna or that Krsna is impersonal." (Srla Prabhupada lilamrta, vol. 4, ch. 31)

Sometimes, followers of a genuine spiritual master can be fanatic and pushy, but a genuine guru can gradually correct them and help them to become more mature. If however such blind followers have the misfortune of getting in contact with a bogus guru, they can be easily exploited. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Srila Prabhupada mentions that both absurd enquiries and blind following are condemned. A disciple must be respectful, but at the same time have enough critical sense to distinguish a real guru or religious leader from a farce.

Bauls and others

Another source of apasampradayas and apasidhantas is syncretism: the mixing of Vaishnava philosophy with other philosophies and practices, like Buddhism, mayavada, tantric practices, etc. Five of the

other apasampradayas enumerated by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura fall into this category.

The **neda-nidi**, for example, practice a mixture of tantric Buddhism and Vaishnavism. It started when Sri Virabadra Prabhu (the son of Lord Nityananda) converted a group of tantric Buddhists to Vaishnavism. As in other tantric lines, these Buddhists had the idea of using sex as a way to achieve transcendence, and in the name of this would engage in sex with multiple partners.

Sri Virabadra Prabhu convinced them to chant the maha-mantra and adopt general Vaishnava habits, and to stop their promiscuous sexual activities he got them married. Soon, however, many started to fall down into their old practices, concocting a mixture of impersonal philosophy, tantric sex, and Vaishnavism, leading to the appearance of the neda-nidi sect.

The most disturbing example, however, is the **bauls**, who follow a mixture of tantra, mayavada, sufism, and sahajiyism. The bauls can be divided into four sub-groups: **aula**, **baula**, **sani**, and **daravesa**. The first are householders, the second are wandering artists that chant enigmatic songs in Bengali and play popular instruments, while the third and fourth are mendicants. It is interesting to note that Srila Prabhupada translated the word daravesa as “hippie” (CC Madhya 20.70), summarizing their appearance and behavior.

They have roots in the sahajayana community, a much older line that mixes tantric yoga and Buddhist philosophy. The bauls appeared from the mixing with Islamic mysticism and other influences. Over the centuries, they assimilated and perverted different aspects of Vaishnava culture, giving birth to the final concoction. Another mutation is that they abandoned their ritualist roots and adopted tantric sex as their main practice. Their idea is that one can awaken his

inner bliss through the bodily union of male and female. This fixation on the material body and the acceptance of material lust as spiritual rasa is a trace similar to other sahajiya groups, but in the bauls, the degradation reaches an extreme.

Different from the neda-nidi, who restrict their tantric practices to the wife, the bauls use “sadikas” which are frequently exchanged, and their sadhana includes the most disgusting practices, going up to the consumption of human stool and urine.

With the excuse of practicing a spiritual process, they live an unregulated lifestyle of drugs, illicit sex, and degradation. While they don’t present themselves as Vaishnavas, they claim to represent the true spirit of Mahaprabhu’s movement and enjoy a certain degree of influence over the general public, including in the West, where a few of them became famous artists.

These last examples can be taken as a warning about another common tendency: to keep our previous concocted ideas and mix them with Vaishnavism, instead of giving them up and fully embracing the process of Krsna consciousness given to us by Srila Prabhupada. In other words, we have the tendency of changing Krsna consciousness to fit our mentality, instead of changing our mentality to fit Krsna consciousness. This can lead to the appearance of many speculations that can often be quite dangerous.

Chapter 2: The Revival

The deviations introduced by the sahajiyas, jata-gosanis, smartas, and other groups not only almost suffocated the sankirtana movement but also gave it a very bad reputation amongst the general population, especially in the educated circles. Due to the actions of these deviating sects, Vaishnavism became related to exploitation and moral deviation, a very sad situation.

This partially explains the growing popularity of Christianity in India, a religion that although facing many scandals at least preserved its general moral standards. By the time of Bhaktivinoda Thakura, most educated people saw Christianity as the religion for high-class people, and Vaishnavism as a group of sects for low-class people with questionable moral standards.

To reinvigorate the sankirtana movement, and finally fulfill the prediction that the holy names would be chanted in every town and village, Lord Caitanya sent a succession of three acaryas: Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and Srila Prabhupada. Working in succession, they performed the miracle of not only re-establishing the original teachings but spreading them all over the world.

Many have the idea that Srila Prabhupada took a well-established tradition and implemented it in the West in the form of our ISKCON society, but the truth is that most of the lines at the time were deviating in serious ways. If it was not for these three powerful acaryas, the true teachings of Mahaprabhu would be lost. This also explains why our spiritual society is special: despite all the problems we face, our society is actually the one that has the true teachings, in

the form of the books left by Srila Prabhupada. We remain bonafide to the proportion that we remain faithful to this knowledge.

Although there are many sincere Vaishnavas outside, it's not easy to find a place where the teachings of Srila Prabhupada are being rigidly followed. People have different opinions, but such opinions are not always necessarily correct.

The revival of our line started with Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura. He came first, and with a very difficult mission: to create the philosophical basis of our movement, defeating in the process the bogus ideas that were suffocating it. By his powerful teachings and spotless behavior, he denounced bogus practices and deviations and re-established the reputation of the Vaishnava culture, that had been ruined by the sahajiyas and other imitators over the previous centuries. He recovered the teachings of the Six Goswamis and successor acaryas, wrote many new books, explaining the philosophy in a modern way. He defeated many apasampradayas and other bogus philosophies and adopted new technologies, like the printing press, teaching that everything should be used for Krsna.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati took this philosophical base created by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and implemented the second part of the plan: he created the Gaudiya Matha, a preaching mission to spread these teachings all over India. He also wanted to preach abroad, therefore he sent a group of disciples to London. Unfortunately, it didn't work at that time, but that was his idea: to expand the preaching to the West, fulfilling the predictions that the sankirtana movement would spread to all towns and villages.

Unfortunately, when Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura left this planet, his disciples were not able to follow his instructions to create a governing body to direct the society in his absence. Instead of a single

ruler or a divided society, with parts being separately governed by different acaryas, he wanted a unified mission, with a collegiate of senior disciples jointly deciding on important matters. As a result, the Gaudiya Matha was split first into two factions, and then into several smaller groups. The institution was not only fragmented, but the groups started to fight amongst themselves for control of properties and followers, each group with its own acarya. The preaching almost stopped and the printing machines were sold to pay for legal expenses. The sankirtana movement suffered a major setback.

Srila Prabhupada wrote his view about this period in his purport to CC Adi 12.8:

“The words daivera karana indicate that by dint of providence, or by God’s will, the followers of Advaita Acarya divided into two parties. Such disagreement among the disciples of one acarya is also found among the members of the Gaudiya Matha. In the beginning, during the presence of Om Visnupada Paramahansa Parivrajakacarya Astottara-sata Sri Srimad Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura Prabhupada, all the disciples worked in agreement; but just after his disappearance, they disagreed. One party strictly followed the instructions of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, but another group created their own concoction about executing his desires. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, at the time of his departure, requested all his disciples to form a governing body and conduct missionary activities cooperatively. He did not instruct a particular man to become the next acarya. But just after his passing away, his leading secretaries made plans, without authority, to occupy the post of acarya, and they split into two factions over who the next acarya would be. Consequently, both factions were asara, or useless, because they had no authority, having disobeyed the order of the spiritual master. Despite the spiritual master’s order to form a

governing body and execute the missionary activities of the Gaudiya Matha, the two unauthorized factions began litigation that is still going on after forty years with no decision.

Therefore, we do not belong to any faction. But because the two parties, busy dividing the material assets of the Gaudiya Matha institution, stopped the preaching work, we took up the mission of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and Bhaktivinoda Thakura to preach the cult of Caitanya Mahaprabhu all over the world, under the protection of all the predecessor acaryas, and we find that our humble attempt has been successful."

Srila Prabhupada comes to the West

We can imagine it was not easy for Srila Prabhupada to go through these troubled times, seeing the institution created by his Guru Maharaja being fragmented and many of his godbrothers descending into fratricidal disputes over properties. What is most significant, however, is the way that Srila Prabhupada behaved during this period. Instead of joining the fray, taking the side of one of the groups, or trying to create his own faction, Srila Prabhupada was just printing his Back to Godhead magazine and supporting some of his godbrothers who were preaching. He simply kept the order that he received from Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura: to preach in English. This is also a lesson for us, to stay away from political disputes motivated by the lower modes, and instead to be concentrated in our services and assist others who are doing preaching work.

When Srila Prabhupada finally came to the West, he first tried to cooperate with his godbrothers, he tried to rally them around the common goal of spreading Krsna consciousness in the western countries. His attempts suggest that he was seeing the union of the

remnants of the Gaudiya Matha, combined with the support from pious powerful people from India as the most probable way to successfully establish Krsna consciousness in the West. His initial idea was to bring resources from India to purchase a suitable house in Manhattan and thus establish a temple in a respectable location (probably inspired by a similar attempt by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati to establish a lavish temple in London in the 1930s). However, just as the effort of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati proved fruitless, the efforts of Srila Prabhupada in rallying his godbrothers and getting resources from India were frustrated. Krsna had a different plan.

In the end, Srila Prabhupada had to create his own institution, counting only on the help of his first followers. He had to start from scratch. HG Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu did very extensive research on this topic, which resulted in a small book, called "*The Founder Acarya*". In pages 52 to 67, he explains in detail why Srila Prabhupada created ISKCON instead of cooperating with the remnants of Gaudiya Matha, answering many questions that one could have on this subject. On pages 58-59, for example, he wrote:

"So it happened that in 1966 Srila Prabhupada gained an unwelcome realization: the spiritual defects that engendered the failure of the Gaudiya Matha remained robust three decades later.

All his hopes for cooperation from donors, government, and godbrothers shattered, Srila Prabhupada would be obliged to start from scratch—just himself, alone. Undeterred, he wrote Mangalniloy, "There is no need for help from any one else."

This, then, is a major component of the context in which the International Society for Krishna Consciousness was born. The other element is the spiritual fulfillment afforded Srila Prabhupada by a steadily increasing number of young Americans

who gave their earnest and eager attention to Lord Caitanya's teachings.

What was Prabhupada to do? In his first plea for cooperation posted to Tirtha Maharaja in November of 1965, just after his arrival in New York City, Prabhupada had offered to work within his godbrother's institution:

"So here is a chance of cooperation between us and I shall be glad to know if you are ready for this cooperation. I came here to study the situation and I find it very nice and if you are also agreeable to cooperate with it will be all very nice by the will Srila Prabhupada.... If you agree then take it for granted that I am one of the worker of the Sri Mayapur Caitanya Matha."

The recipient—and many others—having proven themselves uncooperative, Srila Prabhupada then established his own Institution." (HG Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu, "The Founder Acarya")

Obstacles on our path

This is also an important lesson for us: rarely are things going to work on our first try. Many times, Krsna wants to first test our determination before He reveals His plan to us. By the example of Srila Prabhupada, we can see how even the most powerful acaryas have to go through this process before they can be fully empowered to accomplish their mission.

Even though eternally perfect, great acaryas play the role of human beings, accepting material bodies and dealing with the same difficulties that we face, like hunger, thirst, cold, etc. They go through the struggles of human life, facing much harder challenges than we do. The difference is that they always remain Krsna conscious and by their exemplary behavior they show us how to overcome difficulties on our

spiritual path. Sometimes we minimize their achievements by thinking that since they are perfect souls and Krsna is in control, things just happen automatically for them, but that is not the real purpose. Their stories are meant to show us the way, so we can be inspired to pass the severe tests on our spiritual path.

HG Hari Sauri Prabhu: *"Atreya Rishi asked him if it was true that Krishna tests us every day. "No, just like if you want responsible post," Prabhupada told him, "then there is question of test. If you want to become a vagabond, remain vagabond. Where is question of test?" "No, for devotees," Atreya Rishi clarified. "Ah, for devotees, there is test," Prabhupada said. "We see from the devotee's life, Prahlada Maharaja, how much severe test he had to pass through. Bali Maharaja, Narada Muni." "And the most advanced the devotee is, the more severe the test is..." Atreya Rishi said. Srila Prabhupada reassured him. "No, after you pass the examination, there is no more test. But before coming to the post of recognized devotee, Krishna tests very severely. That one has to pass."*

I recalled one of his Bhagavatam purports where he stated that maya is there to test the sincerity of the candidate and Prabhupada continued, "Yes, we see from the life of Bali Maharaja, how he was put into difficulty. Even his spiritual master cursed him. If a devotee is put into test and still he remains in his determination, then he's passed. That is very natural. There is a word, 'acid test,' for ascertaining real gold? the acid test one has to pass to become real gold." (A Transcendental Diary Vol 4)

In a deeper sense, Srila Prabhupada didn't create a new institution. He replicated all the original ideas that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura instituted in the Gaudiya Matha. He just started it again in a rejuvenated state.

The reforms introduced by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati were not easy to implement. They demanded a complete change of paradigm from the Indian tradition (where each acarya would have complete control over his small institution and transmit his position to his successor, with little cooperation between the different gurus) to a modern organizational approach, in which different spiritual masters and leaders would be able to cooperate and thus operate on a much larger scale.

How large? Srila Prabhupada stated that he wanted “hundreds and thousands of spiritual masters”, which implies millions of disciples and followers. If we realize the scale of his plan, we can realize how the only way of achieving such a scale is through a very organized cooperative structure. This, in turn, demands a lot of maturity, not only from the leaders but also from their followers, who need to get along and cooperate with devotees with different mentalities, different cultures (and sometimes even different philosophical approaches), who share the umbrella of a single unified mission.

As soon as we speak about a worldwide spiritual institution, it implies the presence of people from different backgrounds, different levels of spiritual advancement, and different levels of commitment. In such an environment, the principle of being strict with oneself and tolerant with others becomes essential. One who does the opposite, being lenient with oneself but strict with others can create havoc. As Srila Bhaktivinoda explains (Jaiva Dharma, 8th chapter), one who is starting on the path of bhakti may show many misconceptions and materialistic tendencies, but by associating with pure Vaishnavas he can quickly progress. It's important to be patient and not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

As with any other great structural change, the implementation of this new approach resulted in many difficulties. Not only was there the split

of the Gaudiya Matha, but even in ISKCON there were many succession problems after Srila Prabhupada. What is significant is not what went wrong, but the simple fact that somehow the institution held together despite all troubles. As a result, 40 years after the disappearance of Srila Prabhupada we are still here; this time it worked.

As Krsna says in the Bhagavad-Gita, in this material world *“every endeavor is covered by some sort of fault, just as fire is covered by smoke”*.

Even when Krsna Himself comes, the effects of His actions are not always free of negative repercussions, due to the intrinsic nature of this material world and the actions of conditioned souls. Lord Caitanya and the Six Goswamis, for example, made public a lot of details about Krsna’s pastimes with the gopis and details about rasa. This served as the basis for our sampradaya, with all our powerful acaryas, but also fuelled the sahajiyas and other apasampradayas, which at times practically covered it. Similarly, we had, have, and will have numerous problems in our spiritual society.

Just as it is not possible to have fire without smoke, it is not possible to have a spiritual organization without problems. The ones who decide to leave because of the smoke will also lose the benefit of the fire.

Chapter 3: Traps in our way back to Godhead

In his *Vaishnava Ke*, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura gives a list of three prominent qualities of apasampradayas: *anitya-vaibhava* (hankering for material success), *kaminira-kama* (illicit sexual affairs) and *mayavada* (philosophical speculation).

Many of the groups we studied may seem to be too exotic to be relevant in our current day and age, but it's important to notice how their mistakes can be repeated even in our times. These are not just isolated historical examples, but different spiritual diseases we carry inside, which may manifest in different ways at different times and circumstances.

If we look around in the modern world, we may find many different groups that manifest characteristics of different apasampradayas. Hippies, for example, had much in common with the baulas and daraveshas, while much of the new age movement is based on sahajiya ideas. Tantric sex is prominent in many philosophies, just like with the Neda-Nidi, and the tendency to use spiritual practices to attain power and dominance, like in the case of the ativadis, is certainly common. It's also not difficult to see in practice the tendency of blindly following religious leaders like the kartabhaja.

However, as our movement grows, it becomes increasingly vulnerable to the introduction of similar ideas. Since our movement is becoming bigger, there is a general tendency to make things more liberal and accommodating. At the same time, with so many devotees, the leaders can't be aware of everything that is going on. Also, the need to keep growing starts to conflict with the idea of maintaining purity. Srila

Prabhupada alerts us to this tendency of diluting things with the excuse of reaching more people in many passages.

“So far the Road Show and the Yoga Village are concerned, these things should be stopped. Simply perform our kirtan. If we divert our attention in this way, the whole thing will gradually deteriorate. He is going far away. All these things are nonsense inventions. Such inventing spirit will ruin our this movement. People may come to see, some will become devotees, but such devotees will not stay because they are attracted by some show and not by the real thing or spiritual life according to the standard of Lord Caitanya. Our standard is to have Kirtan, start temples. What is this ‘Road Show’ and ‘Yoga Village?’ It will be another hippie edition. Gradually the Krsna consciousness idea will evaporate: another change, another change, every day another change. Stop all this. Simply have kirtan, nothing else. Don’t manufacture ideas.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Sudama, 05 November 1972)

Sometimes, sahajiya tendencies may appear. Two factors that are prominent in such sangas are a pervasive mood of enjoyment and the presence of illicit relationships and sexual affairs between the members. These are two prominent characteristics of the sahajiyas. A third factor is an aversion to authority.

A sahajiya sees himself as the center and therefore he chants and does other activities with the purpose of enjoying, while a devotee sees Krsna as the center, and therefore conducts his activities with the purpose of giving pleasure to Him. A sahajiya sings a kirtana to enjoy the rhythms and melodies, while the devotee sings to give pleasure to the Lord, with a devotional attitude. In other words, the sahajiya sings to satisfy his own senses, while the devotee sings to satisfy Krsna’s senses. The result is that the sahajiya gets material satisfaction, while

the devotee gets transcendental bliss. The kirtana of the devotee awakens devotion in the heart, while the sahajiya kirtana awakens material lust.

A second problem with this enjoying mentality is that it makes one likely to execute only some aspects of the process while dismissing others. One can be thus attracted to kirtanas and to discussions about confidential activities of Krsna with the gopis for example, but not very much into following the four principles, or in maintaining a proper sadhana. Because of this, not only the quality of the spiritual activities are lower (since the mentality is inappropriate), but the practice also becomes seriously unbalanced. This in turn makes it very hard for one to control his senses, which leads to the second problem: illicit connections with members of the opposite sex (or even with members of the same sex). One thing leads to the next.

A consequence of these two problems is an aversion to authority. One who understands that he has problems and needs to improve will be naturally propense to hear superior persons, and by following their instructions he will be able to advance. One contaminated by a sahajiya mentality, on the other hand, will see himself as someone already very advanced and thus belittle others. Because his ego will remain too big, he will not be able to surrender to proper authorities, being thus unable to advance. He will follow similar fools, or try to become a leader himself.

Another characteristic is to mistake material emotions for spiritual development. Material emotions are just on the mental platform, someone can laugh or cry, but that doesn't mean much: professional actors can do both without difficulty. Real spiritual realization comes as a result of sacrificing our life to serve Krsna. Most traps in our path come exactly from trying to find shortcuts in this process.

“One thing, if we are not very careful to always stick to the point of regulative principles and purest standards of high living, then everything will spoil very quickly and the whole show will be a farce. So impress this point in your preaching for training the younger devotees, they will follow your example in all respects.”
(Srla Prabhupada, letter to Rebatinandana, 02 February 1972)

In other groups, one may find materialistic tendencies. It usually starts with the infiltration of materialistic and humanistic values in the practice of devotional service and results in a growing deviation in the direction of pious life, material development, material relationships, and sense gratification. The idea of gradually becoming free from all material contamination is thus replaced by the idea of using spiritual life as a means to be happy in this world, to have a prosperous life, and so on. The center is shifted from Krsna to material prosperity and social life and the idea of preaching changes from giving people Krsna consciousness to material welfare activities, and the meditation is shifted from our previous acaryas to pious persons like Gandhi or Mother Teresa, who dedicated their lives to help others, but ended being restricted to material philanthropy due to a lack of pure spiritual knowledge.

“Those who imitate an uttama-adhikari by flaunting a sense of oneness or fellowship but who behave on the bodily platform are actually false philanthropists. The conception of universal brotherhood must be learned from an uttama-adhikari and not from a foolish person who does not properly understand the individual soul or the Supreme Lord's Supersoul expansion, who dwells everywhere.” (Isopanisad, mantra 6, purport)

Naturally, one who is not prepared to become a pure devotee instantly may combine material development with the practice of devotional service (Krsna Himself recommends this in the Bhagavad-Gita), but

there is a difference in combining material development and spiritual practice as a means to attain a higher platform in the future and consider this level of mixed devotional service as a goal in itself.

Naturally, to help others, even if in a purely material sense, is good, and someone who dedicates his life to philanthropy is surely a pious person, but as the saying goes, *"the good is the enemy of the best."* Different from ordinary teachers and religious reformists, our acaryas did not come to just make people more pious, but to give the unalloyed path of pure devotional service, that can bring one straight back to Godhead. The main difference of Vaishnavism to other, more mundane religious paths, is that the goal of our process is not merely to make us happy in this world by adopting a pious life, but to transfer us back to Godhead, away from any kind of material contamination.

Similarly, our goal when helping people is not to simply make them comfortable in this material world but to make them gradually understand that they are not this body, giving them spiritual knowledge and engaging them in devotional service as much as possible. Sometimes, we do this directly, by distributing books, performing kirtana, organizing public programs, distributing prasadam, etc., and sometimes we may use indirect ways, using different artifices to make the public interested, and then ministering spiritual knowledge in homeopathic doses. In both cases, be it by spreading spiritual knowledge directly or indirectly, the goal must be the same. As Srila Prabhupada brilliantly defines in his purport to SB 1.4.1:

"The original purpose of the text must be maintained. No obscure meaning should be screwed out of it, yet it should be presented in an interesting manner for the understanding of the audience. This is called realization."

If however, at some point, the goal becomes to just help people be comfortable in this world, instead of getting free from it, then we fall down into a mundane philanthropic level, that actually gives little real benefit to the people we are trying to help. In this case, we may commit the same mistake as Gandhi, who wanted to help people, but due to imperfect spiritual knowledge, ended up actually doing more harm than good, disseminating incorrect concepts, like the “daridra Narayana”, and directing people's attention towards political change, instead of spiritual cultivation. These were points opposed by both Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, as can be observed in SB 6.19.9 purport, the Vyasa-puja lecture from 17 August 1968, and many other references.

In other words, we get off-track when the object starts being the body and not the soul. This tendency may grow to the point that one gets interested in simply leading a pious life, doing rituals to improve his material situation, and accumulating pious credits, instead of obtaining love of Godhead or achieving liberation. In this case, one falls down to the level of a caste brahmana.

Naturally, there is nothing wrong in making money and using it for Krsna, or in trying to help people in poor material conditions. However, if one falls into the idea of just taking religion as a means to live a pious life and thus improve his standard of material prosperity and sense gratification, or simply do material philanthropy without spiritual support, it can become a serious obstacle in his spiritual path. It becomes worse if one starts to create some new philosophy based on that and starts to try to spread it to others. In this case, it becomes some kind of new apasampradaya.

Sahajiya and Mayavada

Sahajiyism and most other philosophical discrepancies walk hand in hand with mayavada, not necessarily in the sense of impersonalism, but in the sense of mental speculation.

One of the most notable characteristics of the mayavadis is their talent for twisting the meaning of the scriptures to milk out the desired conclusion. Instead of studying the scriptures to find the real conclusion, they start with the conclusion that they want and twist the meaning of the scriptures to fit it.

Similarly, we may have the tendency to twist the philosophy and even statements from Srila Prabhupada to sustain our own speculations. In the past, this gave birth to the ritvik philosophy and other adventures, and in the present, it continues to give birth to new philosophies, groups, and movements. Frequently, the leaders of such cults target weak yatras to recruit new members, and thus such groups prosper at the cost of the lack of philosophical understanding of many of our devotees. This lack of understanding of the essential points of our philosophy is one of the greatest dangers for the future of our movement.

One of the main characteristics of any bonafide acarya is consistency. By studying and understanding a good portion of Srila Prabhupada's writings, one will notice that all the basic points of the philosophy are repeated in many different passages and adjusted to different contexts. The basic message is consistent. Once one understands this basic message, he will be able to easily spot dissonant ideas and passages taken out of context, and thus identify speculation.

As a rule, bogus philosophies are based on indirect interpretations or isolated passages taken out of context. As Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains:

“Baba! The Vedas have no shoreline and are unsurpassed. Their precise meaning can only be understood by studying each and every sloka of the Upanisads separately, and by deriving the meaning from all of them combined. If one singles out a particular sentence, he may always be diverted by some misinterpretation.” (Jaiva Dharma ch. 18)

Frequently, devotees enter into battles of quotes but, as explained, just isolated quotes don't necessarily lead to the right conclusion (frequently the opposite happens). It's common that devotees would do a search in Vedabase, collect quotes that sustain their idea (ignoring other quotes that may suggest otherwise), and in this way try to use Srila Prabhupada as a hammer to try to impose their ideas on others. The mistake here is to start with the conclusion and then try to find quotes that support it, instead of trying to understand what is the real instruction, by studying Srila Prabhupada's teachings as a whole. This comes from raja-guna, the desire for conquest. It's not the proper approach to spiritual knowledge.

Even the mayavada philosophy is supported like that by its partisans: by using twisted logic and quotes taken out of context. To reach the right conclusions, one needs to have a deeper understanding of the philosophy and put things in the proper context. This comes after years of study and realization.

As stated in the Laghu Bhagavatamrta (5.327), *“When contradictions are found in the Vedic scripture, it is not that one statement is wrong. Rather both statements should be seen in such a way that there is no contradiction.”*

There are different statements from Srila Prabhupada spoken in different contexts and even cases of statements that may appear contradictory. If one goes deeper, however, it will be revealed that they are just applications of different principles in different contexts.

One should be able to understand and harmonize different quotes from Srila Prabhupada. It's not about making a search in the Vedabase and counting the quotes that say "yes" and ones that say "no".

There was a case when Srila Prabhupada authorized a disciple to divorce, answering a letter. The servant became confused, How could Srila Prabhupada give him an instruction that contradicts his general stance? He voiced his question and Prabhupada answered that he would divorce anyway, therefore he was authorizing him, so he would, at least, not be guilty of disobeying his spiritual master.

We can see that in this example there is a conflict of two principles: a) to not divorce, b) to not disobey the orders of the spiritual master. Srila Prabhupada adjusted, and gave the instruction that was more beneficial to the disciple, according to the situation. One who would try to apply this letter in a different situation, using it to sustain that Srila Prabhupada authorized us to divorce would commit a serious mistake.

One should first try to understand the principles and then the details. If one tries to apply the details without understanding the principles or tries to apply instructions outside of their context (especially instructions from the letters, which are mostly answers to particular situations, and thus often not applicable outside of that specific context), one will certainly commit serious mistakes.

The example of the “Gopi-bhava club”

In the second volume of “A Transcendental Diary”, HG Hari-sauri Prabhu narrates in detail the reaction of Srila Prabhupada to the appearance of the “The Gopi Bhava Club” in 1976, which is considered the first sahajiya movement within ISKCON.

It was very mild compared to many things one may see today, but still, Srila Prabhupada saw it as a great danger to our movement and dealt very swiftly and strongly with all those involved. This episode serves as an example of how subtle the sahajiya influence can be, and how dangerous it is, not only to ourselves but to our movement as a whole.

“Prabhupada had just sat down in the middle room for breakfast when Pradyumna came in, obviously quite disturbed. Prabhupada allowed him to come up to his small table, already set out with his silver thali of cut fruits, puffed rice and fried cashews. Pradyumna began to complain about the study group Radhaballabha mentioned yesterday. He told Prabhupada one devotee was reported to have said that the Gita was too bodily conscious and “external” and that he became inspired only by reading about Krsna's confidential, internal dealings, especially those of the gopis in the Sri Caitanya-caritamrta.

Srila Prabhupada was so disturbed by this news that the piece of fruit he held in his hand never made it into his mouth. Abandoning breakfast, he went back into his darsana room and called for all GBC men and sannyasis, as well as for several members of the study group. He demanded to know who was involved”...

“By this time the men were in his room and for almost three quarters of an hour he strongly rebuked the group, angrily

refuting its reasoning. He compared their exclusive focus on the gopis to "jumping like monkeys."

Puranjana said their intention was to simply scrutinize the activities of the gopis and develop the same aspirations because this was recommended by Lord Caitanya.

Prabhupada got even angrier. He was in no mood for being mollified. "You want to scrutinizingly study Caitanya Mahaprabhu's instructions, but why just the parts about the gopis? Why don't you scrutinizingly study where Caitanya Mahaprabhu says guru more murkha dekhi' karila sasana, that His guru found Him to be a fool and told Him he was not fit for anything but chanting Hare Krsna? Why don't you scrutinize that part? First become a fool like Caitanya Mahaprabhu before jumping over like monkey!"

Puranjana tried to reassure him that they were not attempting to imitate the gopis' love of Krsna; they were simply studying the descriptions so that they could develop such desires.

Prabhupada flushed, his top lip quivering. "First deserve, then desire! There is no question of desire unless one is actually liberated. Until that point you simply do whatever service you are given. So long as there is any pinch of material desire there is no question of desiring on the spiritual platform!"

He said the intimate gopi-lilas were discussed by Lord Caitanya only among His three most confidential associates—Svarupa Damodara, Ramananda Raya, and Sikhi Mahiti. Siddha-deha is for liberated souls—no one else.

Sulocana said that they had thought it was all right because it was in Prabhupada's books, and they were only reading his books. Prabhupada told them that just because a drug store has every type of drug it does not mean that one can get them without prescription. The doctor prescribes according to the disease. He said that from the beginning stages of devotional service up to

the highest rasas, everything is there in his books, but they are not all to be immediately studied.

He ordered them not to hold any more meetings and to disband the "club." He directly linked this sahajiya tendency to devotees meeting with the babajis in Vrndavana, and he strongly criticized Jagannatha dasa (although he is not one of the study group) for even leaving his ears unblocked while the man spoke to him about so-called siddha-deha.

After sending them out duly chastened, Prabhupada explained to us that this sahajiya philosophy means the preaching will be finished. "So try to save them," he advised the GBC men. "In Vrndavana many sahajiya would ask, 'Oh Svamiji, why are you bothering to preach? Why not just be content to stay in Vrndavana and do your bhajana?'" (A Transcendental Diary, vol. 2. Hari Sauri Prabhu)

On the next day, Srila Prabhupada continued discussing the issue during his morning walk:

"Going out in the car for his morning walk Prabhupada gave further warnings to Tamal Krishna and Ramesvara Maharajas on the dangers of the sahajiya tendency spreading in ISKCON. Tamal Krishna is returning to New York a little early because he is concerned that it might be spreading there also. Pradyumna prabhu's ongoing investigation has discovered that the gopi-bhava group have been transmitting their ideas to other temple communities by some sort of unofficial newsletter.

Tamal Krishna told Prabhupada that one of the symptoms he has noticed about these people is that they don't go out on sankirtana.

As soon as he said that Srila Prabhupada cut in. "Then everything will be finished. Preaching will be finished. In this sahajiya party, then preaching will be finished." Declaring the siddha-pranali

process as nonsense, Prabhupada told us where the whole thing was coming from. "They have learned it from these Radha-kunda babajis."

"From Radha-kunda babajis?" Tamal Krishna asked.

"Babajis, yes," Prabhupada reasserted. "After all, they're fool, rascals, so whatever they say..."

Ramesvara said he felt that the danger lay in their use of Prabhupada's own books for authority. But Prabhupada told him it was all right that they are taking some authority, the problem is that they are not taking all the instructions in his books. "That I've already explained. Why these rascals do not take the lessons of Caitanya Mahaprabhu that we are all rascals, fools? No. That they will not take. They'll take the Radharani's bhava. What Caitanya Mahaprabhu is teaching by His practical life, that we have to take."

Ramesvara repeated one of the statements from their newsletter. "Regarding service in a reverential mood; so they have found some quote, that reverential devotional service is an impediment toward developing pure love."

Tamal Krishna added another. "They quote that regulative principles are a hindrance on the path. There's a statement somewhere in one of your books that when one attains the highest platform..."

"Then where is that highest platform?" Prabhupada interrupted.

"One must go through stages," Ramesvara said. "You gave the example of trying to get an M.A. degree."

"Yes," Prabhupada agreed. "One has to come to that highest stage. It is not forbidden. That may be ideal, but not for the neophytes. One who does not know ABCD, what he will know about M.A. degrees? That they do not know. They think that they have already passed M.A. degree. That is their fault."

Tamal Krishna Maharaja brought up another item from the newsletter. "There's another statement, I saw them, where it

says, it's a quote, that you can treat Krsna as your lover and Krsna will reciprocate."

"And they underlined the two words 'you can' treat Krsna as your lover," I added. "In this way they're taking your quotes out of context."

"This is one of the main ideas in their philosophy, that the living entity can desire to have any relationship he wants with Krsna," Ramesvara said.

"That's all right," Prabhupada told us, "he can desire. I already explained: first deserve, then desire. You are rascal, how you can desire? You have no qualification, you desire to be High Court judge. What is this nonsense?"

Ramesvara was keen to get Srila Prabhupada's response to every possible argument. "But then they have an answer."

Prabhupada obliged him. "What is that answer?"

"Let me just try it anyway, to keep my mind thinking..."

"How you can try it?" Prabhupada challenged. "First of all, be qualified, a big lawyer, then you become High Court judge. Where is that qualification? You are after illicit sex and bidi, and you want to be associated with the gopis."

"They say that 'In ISKCON, we do not...'"

"Let them say all nonsense," Prabhupada replied. "They are disqualified. Sahajiya babajis, that's all." (A Transcendental Diary, vol. 2. Hari Sauri Prabhu)

Later, it was revealed that some members of the group were not properly following the four principles. There were cases of unmarried ladies getting pregnant and even one case of abortion. To this, Srila Prabhupada answered: *"That is their fault. They want to utilize the love affairs of Krsna and gopis for their debauchery. That is a support for their debauchery. That is sahajiya."*

These views are also expressed in a letter to Visvambhara (14 December 1972):

"So far your question about the gopis, in the beginning there is no such question. In the beginning we have to follow the principles of devotional service rigidly, like chanting 16 rounds, regularly following the instructions of the Spiritual Master, which includes study, temple worship, sankirtan, like that."

"Going to girls and making them pregnant, then talking of gopis, that is going on, that is nonsense. Without coming to the perfectional stage, if anyone tries to understand the gopis he becomes a sahajiya."

Apart from breaking the principles, one more symptom of the members that was described was a lack of interest in preaching activities. This is another symptom of a sensual mentality since material consciousness leads to selfishness. At the time, Srila Prabhupada warned that if these ideas would spread inside ISKCON, our preaching would be finished. As he mentioned in another occasion: *"Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, he said that 'When our men will be sahajiya, oh, they'll be more dangerous.'" (Room Conversation, 24 January 1977)*

In his purport in SB 4.24.45-46, Srila Prabhupada further elaborates, making the point that without following the principles of pancaratrika-vidhi, it's not possible for a neophyte to make advancement. It's true that, due to intimacy, on a pure platform there is no question of offense in service, but to get there we need to first treat our disease of material lust and enviousness of Krsna, which is done by serving Him according to the rules and regulations:

"Without serving Krsna according to the vidhi-marga regulative principles of the pancaratrika-vidhi, unscrupulous persons want

to jump immediately to the raga-marga principles. Such persons are called sahajiya. There are also demons who enjoy depicting Krsna and His pastimes with the gopis, taking advantage of Krsna by their licentious character. These demons who print books and write lyrics on the raga-marga principles are surely on the way to hell. Unfortunately, they lead others down with them. Devotees in Krsna consciousness should be very careful to avoid such demons. One should strictly follow the vidhi-marga regulative principles in the worship of Laksmi-Narayana, although the Lord is present in the temple as Radha-Krsna. Radha-Krsna includes Laksmi-Narayana; therefore when one worships the Lord according to the regulative principles, the Lord accepts the service in the role of Laksmi-Narayana. In The Nectar of Devotion full instructions are given about the vidhi-marga worship of Radha-Krsna, or Laksmi-Narayana. Although there are sixty-four kinds of offenses one can commit in vidhi-marga worship, in raga-marga worship there is no consideration of such offenses because the devotees on that platform are very much elevated, and there is no question of offense. But if we do not follow the regulative principles on the vidhi-marga platform and keep our eyes trained to spot offenses, we will not make progress.” (SB 4.24.45-46 purport)

Being sincere

Only a few of us are completely pure, perfect devotees. This means that most of us have some particular problems or deficiencies. These may go from relatively minor transgressions, like eating food cooked by non-devotees, television, etc. to much more serious problems. This doesn't disqualify one as a devotee: if we keep following the spiritual process and praying, Krsna will eventually help us to leave these bad

habits behind. He even ensures in BG 9.30-31 that: *"Even if one commits the most abominable action, if he is engaged in devotional service he is to be considered saintly because he is properly situated in his determination. He quickly becomes righteous and attains lasting peace."*

In chapter nine of the Sri Gitamrta (translation of HH Purnachandra Goswami) this point is explained in detail:

Arjuna: *You deliver only Your devotees and bring them to You, not the non-devotees. Does this mean that You also have attachment and aversion?*

Krishna: *No, I'm not partial, but My devotees are in Me, and I am in them. Actually I am in everything, and everything is in Me. My devotees are attached to Me, but others, have no dealings with Me. Practically speaking, for them I do not exist. Actually there are so many living entities and I maintain everyone therefore I am equal like rain. But some trees watered by the rain give sweet fruit and others give bitter fruit. That is not a defect of the rain. It is their nature, it is not My attachment and aversion. I am rewarding equally, but My devotee gets special treatment, so much so, that even if he commits the most abominable action --- if he's still determined to serve Me --- I do not reject him. Rather, he is still to be considered saintly.*

Arjuna: *Yes, I accept that he is a sadhu when he's worshipping You, but if he's doing nonsense, then he is not a sadhu.*

Krishna: *No Arjuna, in every regard he's a sadhu because he's properly resolved to serve Me. He's thinking that, "I am unable to give up this sinful activity and I'll probably go to hell, but I'll never give up devotional service to Krishna." Therefore I consider him a sadhu.*

Arjuna: *But how do You accept the service of such an irreligious man whose heart is polluted by lust, anger and greed? Aren't his offerings contaminated by these things?*

Krishna: *He very quickly becomes righteous and I accept him because he laments, remembering Me again and again. And because of lamentation his heart burns and he thinks, "Alas, Alas! there's no other devotee lower than me. I'm a black spot for devotees". Again and again he curses himself, and becomes purified due to this repentance. Or you can take it in this way, Arjuna. Such a person even when committing sins, his righteousness existed in him in a subtle form. He's taking the medicine of devotion although the fever remains. He is not afraid, for he knows that the fever of improper activities will go away by the power of devotion. The sinful acts are like snakes with the fangs removed. Thus he obtains eternal peace, for his lust will go away and never return."*

Devotees who are serious just keep a humble position. They just think: "Ok, I have this problem, I'm not strong enough, please Krsna, help me, I want to leave this behind". When someone has this mentality, it's just a matter of time, since his sincerity is the ticket for his advancement.

Someone who is not so sincere may become a finger-pointer, putting the blame for his faults on the shoulders of others, as if they were forcing him. Persons who are even less sincere will not admit that it is a problem, and they may go far enough to create a whole new philosophy to justify and defend their position. Finally, someone who is crooked, will not be satisfied with just doing wrong, putting the blame on others, or even creating a new philosophy. He will also want to spread it to others, to create his club, so he can have company. That's how apasampradayas are started.

*"There are many so-called followers of the Vaisnava cult in the line of Caitanya Mahaprabhu who do not scrupulously follow the conclusions of the sastras, and therefore they are considered to be apa-sampradaya, which means outside of the sampradaya."
(CC Adi 7.48 Purport)*

"Time, place and circumstance"

As devotees, we should be very careful about not changing the philosophy and standards of our movement when teaching. We may explain the philosophy in our own words, create new ways of spreading Krsna Consciousness according to our particular talents and the interests of the public, and allow people to follow and evolve at their own pace, but we need to be careful to not change the philosophy in the process. In other words, the presentation may change according to the circumstances, but the message must always be preserved. Srila Prabhupada emphasizes this point in his purport to SB 1.4.1, where he summarizes the qualities of a spiritual teacher:

"Personal realization does not mean that one should, out of vanity, attempt to show one's own learning by trying to surpass the previous acarya. He must have full confidence in the previous acarya, and at the same time he must realize the subject matter so nicely that he can present the matter for the particular circumstances in a suitable manner. The original purpose of the text must be maintained. No obscure meaning should be screwed out of it, yet it should be presented in an interesting manner for the understanding of the audience. This is called realization."

A similar idea is given in his purport to CC Adi 7.31-32, where he explains that an acarya, an especially empowered preacher, must find

the ways and means by which Krsna consciousness can be expressed, without fitting in trends or stereotypes. Being empowered by Krsna, an acarya may frequently break the established tradition and find new and revolutionary ways to spread Krsna consciousness:

“Here is an important point. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu wanted to invent a way to capture the Mayavadis and others who did not take interest in the Krsna consciousness movement. This is the symptom of an acarya. An acarya who comes for the service of the Lord cannot be expected to conform to a stereotype, for he must find the ways and means by which Krsna consciousness may be spread. Sometimes jealous persons criticize the Krsna consciousness movement because it engages equally both boys and girls in distributing love of Godhead. Not knowing that boys and girls in countries like Europe and America mix very freely, these fools and rascals criticize the boys and girls in Krsna consciousness for intermingling. But these rascals should consider that one cannot suddenly change a community's social customs. However, since both the boys and the girls are being trained to become preachers, those girls are not ordinary girls but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Krsna consciousness. Therefore, to engage both boys and girls in fully transcendental activities is a policy intended to spread the Krsna consciousness movement. These jealous fools who criticize the intermingling of boys and girls will simply have to be satisfied with their own foolishness because they cannot think of how to spread Krsna consciousness by adopting ways and means that are favorable for this purpose. Their stereotyped methods will never help spread Krsna consciousness. Therefore, what we are doing is perfect by the grace of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, for it is He who proposed to invent a way to capture those who strayed from Krsna consciousness.” (CC Adi 7.31-32)

On the one hand, we should be able to adapt our presentation according to the culture and mentality of the people we are trying to teach, but on the other hand, we must be able to do it without changing the message. That is actually the main principle.

While empowered acaryas may frequently institute reforms with the purpose of steering the mission back on the right track, ordinary teachers should be much more careful in introducing changes, since it's due to the changes instituted by ordinary teachers over time that empowered acaryas have to come from time to time to straighten things out.

Inexperienced devotees can create havoc by changing or diluting things with the excuse of trying to reach more people.

One particular thing that I started to understand only after many years of spiritual practice is that our particular notions about Krsna consciousness frequently have very little to do with what Krsna consciousness really is. Only a self-realized soul can understand Krsna consciousness in its totality. As conditioned souls, we are frequently just like the blind fellows trying to understand what an elephant is. One was touching the leg and came to the conclusion that the elephant is just like a pillar, the other was touching the tail and concluded that the elephant is just like a rope, another one was touching the ears and concluded that the elephant is just like a fan.

Similarly, someone could think that Krsna consciousness is all about following rules and doing different rituals, another may think that it's all about being clean, dressing in a specific way and putting nice tilaka, another that it's all about doing austerities, another that it's all about doing festivals and having fun, another that it is all about being celibate and not having wife and children, while another could think the opposite, that it is all about family life.

That's why it's injunctioned that only an acarya can change the practices of spiritual life, adjusting standards according to time, place, and circumstances. As neophytes, we tend to corrupt the process, by adjusting the standards to suit our limited views.

Lord Caitanya is so merciful that despite our limitations He ordered us to spread Krsna Consciousness, but we should be careful, humbly understanding our limitations. Most of the time we do good to ourselves and others by following the instructions and precedents set by Srila Prabhupada and the previous acaryas, instead of trying to concoct new things based on our limited understanding of spiritual life.

Another point is that we need to be careful to really understand the reasons why we do different things in our spiritual lives. We need to understand why we dress in a particular way, why we worship the deity and the reason different standards of cleanliness and worship exist, why we grow Tulasis, what is the significance of the different items offered in pujas, why we use particular melodies for the different aratis of the day, why we use tilaka, why we adopt different cultural aspects of Vedic culture and so on. Everything that we do in our spiritual practice has a meaning and such meaning must be understood. We should not do things just because others do, but because we understand their reason and importance. When we don't understand the reason we follow different rules and rituals we will tend to change them over time.

Some say that people are driven away because of devotees using dhotis, saris, tilaka, worshiping the deity, and so on, but in reality, the problems are not in the clothes or the practices, but in the fact that frequently we fail in presenting them in the proper way, and explaining

to people what they mean. If we don't know why we are doing certain things we will fail to make people appreciate them.

Other times we may preserve something in a superficial or external way, but twist the meaning, creating some corrupted practice. For example, sometimes ladies dress in saris in ways that show most of their bodies, failing to understand that the main purpose of the sari is to make a lady look chaste and elegant. If at one point this would become the norm, new ladies would learn that to dress in sari means to dress in a sensual way, and thus the essence would be lost.

"I have seen your advertisements as shown to me by Shyamasundar, and I think you have made the thing less important. This kind of ad is not good, it is not grave. Our process is to show Krsna consciousness as it is, not as others want to see it. By showing Krsna consciousness in this way, you are making the thing less important. It is not that we should change to accommodate the public, but that we should change the public to accommodate us." ...

"These books are the best advertising, they are better than advertising. If we simply present Krsna consciousness in a serious and attractive way, without need to resort to fashionable slogans or tricks, that is sufficient. Our unique asset is our purity. No one anywhere can match it. That will be noticed eventually and appreciated, as long as we do not diminish or neglect the highest standard of purity in performing our routine work, not that we require to display or announce ourselves in very clever ways to get attention. No, our pure standard is enough. Let us stand on that basis." (Srla Prabhupada, letter to Yogesvara, 28 December 1971)

When we start to do things without understanding their meaning, two problems quickly appear. One is that we inadvertently start making

changes. Another is that we start to do things in a corrupted way, that looks strange and without purpose. We start to look increasingly strange in the eyes of the public, looking more and more like a cult. Then, when we eventually start to realize this, we tend to lose confidence in our own practices and culture and merge back into the dominating materialistic culture.

For example, in Brazil there is a group of Christians where the ladies dress in a particular type of skirt, that is very tight, made from jeans and that goes only to the knees. This type of skirt is far from being chaste and doesn't look very elegant, but still, almost all ladies of this group use it, as if it's a symbol of their faith. There is a passage in the Bible that says that ladies shouldn't wear men's clothes (which is usually taken in the sense that they should wear dresses and skirts), but nowhere is it said that they need to use tight and short skirts made from jeans. Someone created this idea at some point and then all the ladies started using it, without questioning why. Such cultural fetishes can start at some point and then become standard practices in the group for many generations, up to the point that nobody understands why it's done, or why such standards were established in the first place. It's simply human nature to follow the particular cultural traces of the group, even without understanding them.

There is a description of an experiment on monkeys about conditioning that illustrates this point. It may be or it may not be real (there is indication it may be just an urban myth) but still, this description gives us an important lesson. Certainly, we can observe this pattern of behavior in practice, if not in monkeys, at least in human beings.

There was a cage with a group of monkeys, where the researchers would put a bunch of bananas on top of a ladder. When one of the monkeys would try to go up the ladder to take it, the experimenter

would knock him down with a stream of cold water and then proceed to splash all the other monkeys. After this was repeated a few times, the monkeys started to hold and beat up the ones that would try to catch the bananas, until finally none of the monkeys would dare to try to get the bananas. Then, one of the old monkeys was removed and a new monkey was put in the cage. The new monkey quickly tried to get the bananas, but he was held and beaten by the others. When a second monkey was changed by a new one, this first new monkey helped the others to beat him when he tried to grab the bananas. Then, one by one, all the old monkeys were removed, until only new monkeys remained. None of these new monkeys had ever been splashed by the cold water, but still, when a new monkey would be put in the cage, they would all jump and beat him up when he tried to grab the bananas, even without knowing why. It had become a tradition.

As devotees, we are supposed to be the most intelligent class, higher even than brahmanas. We need to understand the reason and purpose behind all the aspects of our spiritual practices, otherwise, we risk becoming just some sect, blindly following some kind of corrupted version of the Vaishnava culture.