

Thakura Bhaktivinoda's Guru Parampara (Part Nine)

What Can We Learn from Svalikhita jivani?

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Part Nine is Dedicated to Our Yugal Sevita Vighrahas
Sri Sri Gaura and Gadadhar



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After reading Bhaktivinoda's autobiography and hearing him tell about his life, a few questions come to mind. The first comes from a rather obvious observation that we have previously discussed: Can it be rightly said that he is a *nitya siddha* Vaisnava?

To be honest, however, as he is in *Svalikhita jivani*, won't we have to admit that he presents himself quite differently?

So what is a *nitya siddha* bhakta? Let us try to understand this important matter. In his series of poems entitled *Prarthana*, Narottam das Thakura mentions this topic:

*gauranger sangi gane, nitya siddha kore māne
sei jaya vrajendra suta pasa*

"Those who acknowledge that Gauranga's eternal associates are *nitya siddha*, also become eligible to attain Vrajendra nandan Krishna."

What can we imbibe from these teachings?

Gauranga's eternal associates who are *nitya siddha* come when he descends into our world. And they return to Goloka Navadvipa when Gauranga returns there—they don't come at other times.

Another one of their distinguishing features is, they don't have material bodies composed of flesh and bones as we do—for their divine forms are *sat-cid-ananda*, just as Gauranga's divine form is *sat-cid-ananda*.

Moreover, Gauranga's *madhur-asrita* bhaktas such as Gadadhar (Radha), Narahari (Madhumati Sakhi), Vasudeva Ghosa (Sudevi Sakhi) and Sivananda Sena (Campaklata Sakhi) have the highest *mahabhava* prema eternally present within them.

Indeed, in *Bhaktirasamrita sindhu*, they are what Rupa Goswami terms *ragatmika bhaktas*, and their highly excellent standard of prema is described as follows:

*iste-svarasika rāga paramavisthata bhavet
tanmayi ya bhaved bhakti satra ragatmikodita*

“These devotees’ total absorption in Krishna (their *Istadevata*) is called *rāga*. And when such *ragamayi seva* is *tanmayi* (constant) the sastras define it as *ragatmika bhakti*.”
B.r.s. 1, 2, 270

Since such incredible absorption in Krishna is only possible in his *nitya siddha* bhaktas, Rupa next gives raganuga bhakti’s definition:

*virajantim avibyaktam vrajavasi janadi su
ragatmikam anusrta ya sa raganugocyate*

“The bhakti that follows Krishna’s *ragatmika* Vraja associates is called raganuga.”
B.r.s. 1, 2, 168

Rasa Analysis

In Bhaktivinoda’s manjari parivara we find an ideal example of how the raganuga bhaktas follow the *nitya siddha ragatmika* bhaktas. As the Sampradaya’s leader Ananga Manjari and her disciple Ratna Manjari are *nitya siddha ragatmika* bhaktas, the parivara members coming after them follow these first two by the raganuga bhakti process.

For example, after Bhaktivinoda received his *nitya svarupa*, Kamal Manjari, from his guru, he took to raganuga sadhana, and by following his previous manjari parivara members headed by Ananga Manjari, he became *sadhana siddha* by their mercy.

In ISKCON and the Gaudiya Math, however, as they state that Bhaktivinoda, Bhaktisiddhanta, and A.C. Bhaktivedanta Svami are *nitya siddha*, what this does is put the *anugata* system of worship that Rupa Goswami teaches in *Bhaktirasamrita sindhu* in reverse order. In other words, by declaring these three Acaryas as *nitya siddha ragatmika* bhaktas they overstep Rupa’s teachings that they should be *anugatas* or followers of Mahaprabhu’s eternal *ragatmika* associates. So can we say that it is true that they had divine *sat-cid-ananda* bodies when they were present in our world? And was their prema on the level of *mahabhava*? For these are the actual characteristics of a *nitya siddha* bhakta.

How Should the Guru be Worshipped?

It is only natural that the disciple will desire to place his guru in a very high position. Yet Visvanath Cakravarti presents the correct Vaisnava siddhanta for doing so in his *Sri Gurvastakam*:

*saksad hari tvena samasta sastrair
uktasya tatha bhavyate eve sadbhih
kintu prabhor ya priya eva tasya
vande guruh sri caranaravindam*

“The sastras declare that the guru is Sri Hari, and great devotees meditate on him as such. Nevertheless, he is Sri Hari’s priya bhakta, and non-different. Thus I respectfully offer by obeisances unto his *sri pada padma*.”

To cite an example of such guru bhakti, in the following *guru vandana*, Bhaktivinoda is seeing his guru as *saksat-Hari*:

*vipina vihari hari tahar sakti avatari
vipina vihari prabhu bora
sri guru goswami rupe dekhi more bhava kupe
uddharila apana kinkara*

“Krishna, known as Vipina vihari, has made his sakti descend into this world as Vipina vihari Goswami, my Prabhu. Seeing me, his humble servant, in the dark well of worldly existence, he took the form of my spiritual master to deliver me.”

Amrita pravaha bhasya, p. 1678

The Second Question

After hearing Bhaktivinoda praise his guru with such strong conviction, we wonder how the I.G.M. can claim that Bhaktivinoda rejected him, as being a smarta brahmina, and went on to take initiation from Jagannath das Babaji? Now let’s begin to investigate if this claim is true, or not?

In *Svalikhita jivani*, we can remember that in paragraph 299, concerning his diksa, Bhaktivinoda said, “I had been searching for a suitable guru for a long time, but I could not find one. Mahaprabhu then came in a dream and relieved my distress. Two days later Vipina vihari Goswami wrote to me saying, ‘I will come and give you diksa.’”

So here we can see that according to Bhaktivinoda, his diksa to Vipina vihari came as the result of Mahaprabhu’s direct mercy to him in a dream.

In *Svalikhita jivani*, although Bhaktivinoda tells how he met and associated with Jagannath das Babaji on a few occasions, never does he say that he took diksa from him. Yet in 1886, he shows us the certificate that his guru Vipina vihari and all of the Baghnapura Goswamis presented to honor him with the title “Thakura Bhaktivinoda.” Indeed, we can see that they empowered Kedarnath Datta with this title to glorify him as the genuine Vaisnava Acarya we know him today.

Then Bhaktivinoda shows us in *Svalikhita jivani* how he responded, “I worship the Goswami descendants of Sri Vamsivadan Thakura who are my *guru varga* and eternal instructors on the bhakti path.”

Jagannath das Babaji passed away in the year 1898, but in 1903, we find Bhaktivinoda offering this *guru vandana* to Vipina vihari Goswami:

*punaraya mone hailo sriguru carane
akrtajna haile bhakti sadhibo kemone
lajja teje likhi eve tadiya ajnaya
aparadha yadi hoy ksama mahasaya
vipina vihari prabhu mama prabhu bora
sri vamsivadan-ananda vamsa sasadhara
sei prabhu pader anujna sire dhor
bhagavat-slokaśvada nirantara kori*

“Let me remember once again my Sri Guru’s lotus feet, for without being grateful how can I execute bhakti sadhana? Without hesitation therefore I confess that I am writing this book under his order. O gentlemen! Please forgive me and don’t take offense when I say that Vipina vihari is my Sri Gurudeva, and the bright full

moon who appears in Vamsivadan Thakura's guru parampara. Thus holding my Prabhupada's order upon my head I relish the *Bhagavatama's* slokas."

Bhagavata-tarka-marici mala

Doesn't Bhaktivinoda's personal statements here sound convincing enough, that he wishes to inform us that Vipina vihari Goswami is truly his guru. And moreover, as he wrote this *guru vandana* in 1903, five years after Jagannath das Babaji's disappearance, this proves without a doubt that he never took initiation from him.

The Third Question

After learning that Bhaktivinoda's guru parampara is different, why can't we accept it? For ISKCON and the Gaudiya Math's roots and ancient heritage actually comes from here. So rightly speaking then, since Bhaktivinoda's guru parivara can provide us the authentic path of raganuga bhakti which descends in an unbroken disciplic succession, isn't this what we all need to attain Krishna in Vrindaban—as *Caitanya caritamrita* assures us:

*raganuga marge tare bhaje je jana
sei jana paya vraje vrajendra nandan*

"The person who worships on the raganuga marga will surely attain Vrajendra nandan Krishna in Vraja."

Madhya 8, 220

