

Jaiṅva Dharma

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Chapter Five

Vaidhī-bhakti Is Nitya-
dharma not Naimittika-
dharma

Lāhirī Mahāśaya had left behind a large household in Śāntipura.

His two sons had completed their education and were well placed in their careers.

Candranātha, who was thirty-five, was in charge of the household and the maintenance of the landed properties.

He was a well-qualified doctor, disinterested in spirituality, yet an esteemed member of the brāhmaṇa society.

His success allowed him a fair crew of servants, maidservants, and guards.

The second son, Devīdāsa, had been academically inclined from childhood and now studied the scriptures, specializing in two branches: nyāya, logic; and smṛti, Vedic rituals.

A proud recipient of the academic degree vidyā-ratna, he had established a small school with about a dozen students.

Normally humdrum, Śāntipura was this day suddenly astir with the rumour that Kālidāsa Lāhirī had donned the renounced attire of a Vaiṣṇava.

Such an event became the main topic of discussion at the bathing ghāṭas, market places, and indeed everywhere.

As is usual, people were not shy to air their views.

Some cutting remarks were spoken, “He seemed to be doing all right this far in his life, but now, suddenly, he has become senile and disruptive.”

“Well! Well! What has possessed him? A happy household, a respected brāhmaṇa, obedient sons and wife—what problems could have prompted him to go to such an extreme?”

“Such a comedown is natural for one who is always talking of religion and spirituality.”

However, in contrast, the righteous population supported Lāhirī Mahāśaya, saying he was truly pious because, despite his good material situation, he had developed the desire to take shelter of harināma.

Finally, someone carried these rumours to Devīdāsa Vidyāratna.

Taking his misgivings to his elder brother, Vidyāratna said, “Great misfortune has descended upon our father. He lived in Godruma to take advantage of the wholesome surroundings, but has now fallen into bad company. I don’t dare to hear what is being said in the town!”

Candranātha responded, “My brother, some of these rumours have reached my own ears.

Our family is very respected, but now all this talk about father! I cannot show my face anymore.

Throughout the years, we have vehemently opposed the family of Advaita Gosvāmī and his philosophy and now look what has happened to our own family.

I think we should consult mother and act as required.”

That afternoon, the two brothers sat down for lunch on the long, sun-washed veranda on the first floor of their mansion.

The young daughter of a widowed brāhmaṇa was serving them while their mother looked on.

Candranātha said, “Mother, have you heard anything about father?”

The mother replied, “Why do you ask? He is quite well as far as I know and has absorbed himself in chanting. Why don’t you bring him here from Nadia?”

Devīdāsa retorted mildly, “His health may be all right, but what is now being batted around in public regarding his behaviour is most disturbing. And I think bringing him back here will definitely cause us to lose face.”

A little taken aback, the mother enquired, “What is the matter with your father? The other day I met the ladies from the house of Advaita Gosvāmī on the banks of the Gaṅgā and they said that my husband was very fortunate because now the Vaiṣṇava community truly respected him.”

An exasperated Devīdāsa replied, “Has he been honoured, or has he brought calamity on us—that is the question. At his age, he should be here being served by us instead of eating the remnants of some half-naked persons in kaupīnas, loincloths, and thus smearing the good name of our reputed family. Alas! This is the doing of Kali-yuga; after so much intelligent research, he has ended up like this!”

The mother conceded, “Then the best thing to do will be to bring him here and keep him in hiding. Here you can patiently and gradually try to convince him of his mistakes.”

Candranātha made the decision, “Yes, there is nothing else we can do.
Devīdāsa, take a few men secretly to Godruma and convince father to come
back.”

Devīdāsa spoke hesitatingly, “I’m sure you know that father dislikes me,
because he thinks that I’m an atheist. It occurs to me that He may not listen
to me.”

Devīdāsa’s maternal cousin, Śambhunātha, was known to be their father’s
favourite because he had served Lāhirī Mahāśaya satisfactorily for quite some
time.

Therefore, it was decided that both Śambhunātha and Devīdāsa would
proceed to Godruma.

A servant was immediately sent in advance to Godruma to rent lodgings in a brāhmaṇa's house.

The next day, Devīdāsa and Śambhunātha started for Godruma.

Upon reaching their temporary residence in Godruma, they alighted from their palanquin and sent off the bearers, but retained a brāhmaṇa cook and two servants.

Early that evening, Devīdāsa and Śambhunātha walked to Pradyumna-kuñja.

Upon their arrival, they saw Lāhirī Mahāśaya seated upon a small square woven-leaf sitting mat upon the raised platform known affectionately as the Śrī Surabhī-cabutarā in the middle of the wide, open courtyard.

Twelve bright tilaka markings decorated his body and he was chanting on beads with his eyes shut.

After quietly approaching and climbing onto the platform, Śambhunātha and Devīdāsa prostrated themselves before him in respect.

Startled, Lāhirī Mahāśaya opened his eyes and recognizing them, said, “Ah! It’s you, Śambhu. What brings you here? And, how are you, Devī?”

They replied respectfully that thanks to his blessings they were both well.

Lāhirī Mahāśaya inquired about their lunch, but they had already eaten.

Just then, they heard loud utterances of harināma coming from the direction of Paramahansa Premadāsa Bābājī's cottage in the area of the Śrī Mādhavī-mālatī Maṇḍapa.

Vaisnava dāsa Bābājī came out of his cottage and asked Lāhirī Mahāśaya the reason for the loud chanting coming from the quarters of Paramahansa Premadāsa Bābājī.

Both of them went to investigate and found that many visiting Vaiṣṇavas were circumambulating Paramahaṁsa Premadāsa Bābājī, whilst loudly chanting.

Vaiṣṇava dāsa and Lāhirī also joined the group and, after offering prostrated obeisances to Paramahaṁsa Premadāsa Bābājī, all the Vaiṣṇavas sat down upon the Śrī Mādhavī-mālatī Maṇḍapa.

Devīdāsa and Śambhunātha sidled to the back of the assembly and sat down, like cranes amongst swans.

One of the visiting Vaiṣṇavas spoke up, “We come from the township of Kaṅṭaka-nagara. Our main purpose for coming here is to see the holy sites of Navadvīpa and Māyāpura and take the dust of the lotus feet of Śrī Paramahaṁsa Premadāsa Bābājī.”

Paramahaṁsa Premadāsa Bābājī felt extremely embarrassed and said softly, “I am but a fallen wretch and you have come to sanctify me.”

Soon it became known that these Vaiṣṇavas were very talented in singing and glorifying the Lord.

Mrdaṅgas and karatālas were brought and handed out to them.

- The clear, melodious voice of an elderly Vaiṣṇava began the following song:

śrī kṛṣṇa caitanya prabhu nityānanda
gadāī advaita-candra gaura-bhakta-vṛnda

“O Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Prabhu Nityānanda, Gadādhara, Advaita Ācārya and the devotees of Śrī Gaurāṅga.

aparā karuṇa-sindhu vaiṣṇava ṭhākura
mo hena pāmara dayā karaha pracura

“O great Vaiṣṇava master, you are an ocean of compassion, kindly shower this degraded soul profusely with your benediction.

jāti-vidyā-dhana-jana-made matta jane
uddhāra kara he nātha, kṛpā-vitarane

“Distribute your kindness, O preceptor, and save those who are
inebriated with delusions of high parentage, learning, wealth and
followers.”

kanaka-kāmini-lobha, pratiṣṭhā-vāsanā
chāḍāiyā śodha more, e mora prārthanā

“To You I earnestly pray that you reform my greed for wealth and
women and my yearning for name and position.”

name ruci, jīve dayā, vaiṣṇave ullāsa
dayā kari' (deha more, oḥe kṛṣṇa-dāsa)

“Grant me, O sublime servitor of Kṛṣṇa, taste in chanting harināma,
compassion for the living entities, and the feeling of jubilation in the
association of the Vaiṣṇavas.”

tomāra caraṇa-chāyā eka-mātra āśā
jīvane maraṇe mātra āmāra bharasā

“The shade of your lotus feet is my only hope. In life and in death you are
my only solace.””

As the last strains of the song subsided, another song started up, composed
by Lāhirī Mahāśaya himself, and full of poetic charm:

miche māya-vaśe, saṁsāra-sāgare, paḍiyā chiāma āmi
karuṇa kariyā, diyā pāda-chāyā, āmāre tārila tumi

“Shackled by the chains of māyā, I was drowning in the ocean of
material existence, and you mercifully appeared and saved me by
taking me under the sanctuary of your lotus feet.”

śuna śuna vaiṣṇava ṭhākura
tomāra caraṇe, sampiyāchi māthā, mora duḥkha kara dūra

“Kindly hear me, O Vaisnava master! I have surrendered at your
feet, so mercifully drive away my distress.”

jātira gaurava, kevala raurava, vidyā se avidyā-kāla;
śodhiyā āmāya, nitāi-carāṇe, sampāhe,—jāuka jvāla

“The pride of high birth is but a messenger from hell, and material education
is the art of nescience. Pray, redeem my heart and offer it at the lotus feet of
Śrī Nityānanda, letting its smouldering pains be forever cooled.”

tomāra kṛpāya, āmāra jihvāya, sphuruka yugala-nāma
kahe kālidāsa, āmāra hṛdaye, jaguka śrī-rādhā-śyāma

“I beg for your mercy, which has the power to make my tongue vibrate with
the sublime names of the Divine Couple. I, Kālidāsa, humbly implore that
the transcendental names of Śrī Rādhā and Śrī Śyāma incessantly resonate
and be forever invoked in my heart.””

The song started off as a solo, but ended in a resounding chorus—
the song had intoxicating qualities that had inebriated all persons
present.

The last passage, jaguka śrī rādhā-śyāma, went through endless
encores and the devotees flung out their arms in ecstatic dance.

A few most elevated Vaiṣṇavas fell limp to the ground, entranced by
kṛṣṇa-prema.

It was a truly wonderful sight.

Devīdāsa witnessed this silently, deliberating in his mind that his father had fully devoted himself to the highest spiritual quest and that it might be an impossible task to persuade him to return home to Śāntipura.

The spiritual assembly dispersed at midnight, the Vaiṣṇavas returning to their individual dwellings.

Devīdāsa and Śambhunātha took leave of their father, Lāhirī Mahāśaya, and returned to their room.

The next day after lunch, Devīdāsa and Śambhunātha went back to the cottage of Lāhirī Mahāśaya, offered him respectful obeisances and sat down.

Devīdāsa spoke to his father, “Father, I have a request. Please return to our Śāntipura house. Here you are facing many hardships, whereas at home we can all serve you with pleasure. If you permit, we can even add a quiet and separate wing to our house.”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya replied, “It sounds good, but here I have nice saintly association, which is difficult to find in Śāntipura.”

In addition, as you also know, the people of Śāntipura are atheistic and love to criticize others.

Therefore, it is not exactly a peaceful place to live.

Indeed, many brāhmaṇa families reside there, but by mixing closely with the weaver community, their intelligence has become infected with guile and cunning.

Three symptoms characterize the Śāntipura population—the wearing of thin, fine clothing, boastfulness, and Vaiṣṇava-baiting.

There, the descendants of Advaita Ācārya Prabhu are constantly harassed. Moreover, sadly enough, as a result of the bad association, even some of their own family members are becoming critical of Śrī Caitanya.

Everything considered, I think you should try to make my stay here in Godruma proper and peaceful. That is what I want.”

Devīdāsa spoke warily, “Father! Everything you have said is true.

However, why do you have to communicate at all with the Śāntipura residents?

In the tranquillity of your separate quarters, you can pass your days in prayer and meditation, whilst pursuing your spiritual search.

The daily rituals and rites of a brāhmaṇa, such as sandhyā and vandana, are nitya-dharma and to become immersed in such performances is expected of a great soul like yourself.”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya said patiently, “My son! Those times are of the past.”

Having stayed in the company of saintly devotees for a few months and after
having received spiritual instructions from my guru, my attitudes and
opinions have irreversibly changed.

What you call nitya-dharma I call naimittika-dharma.

Devotional service to the Supreme Lord, Śrī Hari, is the only nitya-dharma of
the soul—sandhyā and vandana, etc., are factually naimittika-dharma.”

Devīdāsa retorted, “Father! I have not come across any scriptures supporting your views.

Are sandhyā, vandana, etc., not a part of hari-bhajana?

If they are, they are definitely nitya-dharma.

Is there a distinction between sandhyā, vandana, and the vaidhī-
bhakti process of śravaṇam, kīrtanam, and so on?”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “Listen to me, my son.

Sandhyā, vandana, etc., are part of karma-kāṇḍa portion of the Vedas, which deals with rituals meant for fruitive results, and so are very different from vaidhī-bhakti.

The karma-kāṇḍa recommends the practice of sandhyā, vandana, etc., for the attainment of mukti.

In contrast, devotion to the Lord through śravaṇam, kīrtanam, and so on, is performed without any ulterior motive.

The descriptions in the scriptures you have read regarding the results of śravaṇam, kīrtanam, etc., are merely written to arouse spiritual interest in materialistic men.

The principle aim of vaidhī-bhakti is to develop rati, attachment, in the heart of the neophyte for hari-bhakti.”

Devīdāsa, “Father, then you must admit that the process of bhajana gives rise to gaṇa, secondary, results.”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya: “The achievement of secondary results depends entirely upon the motivation of the sādḥaka, practitioner.”

A Vaiṣṇava practices sādḥana-bhakti in order to pave the way for and reach the highest stage of perfection in bhakti.

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Someone who is not a Vaiṣṇava utilizes this process of sādḥana-bhakti to achieve two goals, bhukti, sense gratification, and mukti, liberation.

saiva-kāmi

mokṣa kēmi

In these two instances, one may not detect any apparent difference in the external practice of sādḥana-bhakti, but the main distinction is in the motivation.

Worshiping the Deity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the karma-kāṇḍa process will result in cleansing the heart, the attainment of mukti, the mitigation of material distress and disease, and other mundane advantages.

“However, in śuddha-bhakti, the same worship of Deity of Kṛṣṇa offers an increased taste for the chanting of harināma.

The observance of Ekādaśī vows for a karmi, fruitive worker, absolves sins, but for a vaisnava-bhakta, Ekādaśī vows are followed to augment his devotion to the Supreme Lord.

Do you not see the great difference?

Of course, to discern accurately these subtle differences one needs the Lord's blessings.

The karmis cannot look beyond their myopic ^{2^o} gaṇa goals, but the true devotees succeed in obtaining the mukhya, primary and absolute, objectives.

All the gaṇa results can be brought under two headings: bhukti and mukti.

Devīdāsa, "Then why have the scriptures gone to such lengths to praise these gaṇa results?"

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “There are two types of men in the world: uditā-viveka and anudita-viveka.”
↳ Rest of the human beings

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The latter refuse any good constructive work unless they see immediate and concrete, mundane results.

Therefore, the praise heaped upon gaṇa results is for the benefit of these people.

However, the true import of the scriptures does not indicate that people should remain complacently satisfied with their gaṇa results.

Rather the scriptures intend that those of slumbering conscience
may be attracted by the gauna results initially, but then within a
short time, by the grace of a pure Vaisnava, they may hear about the
mukhya results and gradually develop an attraction for this higher
goal.”

Devīdāsa, “Would you consider the smārta, Raghunandana,
a paṇḍita of the smṛti-śāstras, and others like him to be in the lower
category of anudita-viveka?”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “No, they personally were striving for the mukhya
results, but they made arrangements through their writings to guide
the anudita-viveka.”

Devīdāsa, “In some scriptures one reads only about the gaṇa results without any mention of the mukhya results.”

How may this be explained?”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “The scriptures can be grouped into three categories, which correspond to the three levels of human consciousness: sattvika scriptures in sattva-guṇa, the mode of goodness, for people in the sattva-guṇa; rājasika scriptures in raja-guṇa, the mode of passion, for people in raja-guṇa; and tāmasika scriptures in tama-guṇa, the mode of ignorance, for people in tama-guṇa.”

Devīdāsa, “Then, given the variety of scriptural instructions, how does one discern which scriptural directives one should trust and believe, and which should be rejected?”

And how may a man elevate himself from the lower ranks of consciousness?”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “Human beings can be classified according to the level of their nature, habits, and faith.”

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And corresponding to their faith people seek the appropriate scriptures.

A sattvika person has a natural faith and inclination towards sattvika scriptures, a rājasika person towards rājasika scriptures, and a tāmasika person towards tāmasika scriptures.

Trust and belief grow easily upon the foundation of faith.

When one performs one's duties prompted by faith and an increasing level of understanding in the potent association of saintly persons, one can advance to higher levels of consciousness.

How to go up?
in the ladder of
consciousness?

- a) Engage in your own duties according to your faith.
- b) Associate with Sādhus.

“The sages who wrote the scriptures were perfect personalities.

The methods employed by them in formulating the scriptures ensure that if anyone diligently and faithfully executes his specific duties as recommended in the scriptures, he progresses higher.

Thus, we find diversities in the many scriptures.

Nevertheless, unwavering faith in the scriptures ushers in all good fortune.

The conclusion of all the scriptures is the Bhagavad-gītā, which delineates this esoteric precept.”

Devīdāsa, “I have been studying many different scriptures from my early years, but today by your grace I have understood a unique philosophical point.”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “The Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.8.10, writes:

aṇubhyaś ca mahadbhyaś ca
śāstrebyaḥ kuśalo narah
sarvataḥ sāram ādadyāt
puṣpebhya iva ṣaṭpadaḥ

“Just as the honeybee takes nectar from all flowers, big and small, an intelligent human being should take the essence from all religious scriptures.”

“I remember, my son, I used to call you an atheist, but now I have stopped criticizing people.”

No one should be faulted for adhering to their individual level of adhikāra, qualification.

At the appropriate time, they will be promoted to higher levels.

You are a pandita in tarka-śāstra, the scriptures of logic, and karma-śāstra, the scriptures of fruitive work, therefore there is no offence in your level of realization, which is based upon these scriptures.”

Devīdāsa, “Earlier, I held the false opinion that there are no paṇditas in the vaiṣṇava-sampradāyas.

I thought they were fanatics respecting only revelation and believing only in particular segments of the revealed scriptures.

I am convinced now there are also broadminded seekers of truth amongst the Vaiṣṇavas.

Are you presently studying the scriptures under a teacher?”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “My son, you may call me a fanatic Vaiṣṇava or anything else, as you please.

My Gurudeva lives in that cottage and does his bhajana there.

He has taught me the essence of all the scriptures, which I have repeated to you.

If you also wish to learn, then approach him humbly and enquire from him with devotion. Come, I will introduce you to him.”