

Jaiṡa Dharma

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Chapter Nine

Nitya-dharma and Material Science and Civilization

Almost four years have now gone by since Lāhirī Mahāśaya came to Godruma and associating with the Vaiṣṇavas of that sacred place has had a greatly purifying effect upon him.

Now he is continuously chanting even whilst performing his daily chores. His lean frame is covered by sparse clothes and he has given up using any footwear, even wooden clogs.

He has overcome the false pride of his high caste to such an extent that whenever he sees a Vaiṣṇava he immediately offers dandavats and with the utmost humility places the dust from the feet of the Vaiṣṇava upon his head.

If anyone refuses to comply, he remains undeterred, using gentle force to achieve his goal.

He is always looking for and eating eagerly the prasādam remnants of the pure Vaiṣṇavas.

From time to time, his sons visit him with the idea of bringing him back home, but in view of his absorbed devotional attitude they quickly realize the futility of their plans and return home empty-handed.

Lāhirī Mahāśaya looks like a Bābājī who has already received bheka.

However, after due analysis of the Vaiṣṇava philosophy through his diligent absorption in the daily Vaiṣṇava discussions here in Godruma, he has concluded that internal detachment is more essential than externally donning the garb of an ascetic in an official ceremony of bheka.

The mood of Sanātana Gosvāmī was to live most frugally and Mahāśaya is trying to emulate that lofty level.

For instance, to minimize his material needs, instead of possessing four dhotis, he cuts one dhoti into four pieces and wears one piece at a time.

The sacred thread of a brāhmaṇa, generally rejected by the bābājīs, still hangs around his neck, but when his sons attempt to offer him money he refuses, explaining, “I will not take money from materialistic persons.”

Once the elder son, Candranātha, brought a large sum of money, offering it as a contribution for the Vaiṣṇava festivals.

Following in the footsteps of Śrīla Raghunāthadāsa Gosvāmī, Lāhirī Mahāśaya declined.

One day, Paramahansa Premadāsa Bābājī spoke to him, “Lāhirī Mahāśaya, we see that you have freed yourself from all the habits of the non-Vaiṣṇavas.

Actually, we have received bheka initiation, but from you we could still learn a great deal about vairāgya, renunciation.

Now, the only thing needed to complete your transformation is a Vaiṣṇava name.”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya replied, “Sir, you are my parama-guru, you are free to
decide as you wish.”

Paramahansa Premadāsa Bābājī said, “You are from Śāntipura, so I think the
name ‘Advaita dāsa’ is appropriate.”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya fell to the ground in humility to receive his new name.

From that day on, everyone addressed him as Advaita dāsa, and even his
little cottage got a new name, Advaita-kuṭīra.

Advaita dāsa had a friend from childhood named Digambara Caṭṭopādhyāya,
who had accumulated great wealth by holding important posts in the Muslim
government.

After retiring, he had returned to his village, Ambikā, and enquired about his
old friend, Kālidāsa Lāhirī.

Finally, he found out that his friend had renounced home and family and
was presently residing in Godruma under the name of Advaita dāsa,
spending his days in chanting kṛṣṇa-nāma.

Digambara Caṭṭopādhyāya was a śakta fanatic, a worshipper of śakti, the
female energy.

He abhorred the word “Vaiṣṇavism,” covering his ears whenever it was uttered in his hearing.

Upon hearing about the present circumstances of his dear friend, he called his servant, “Hey, Vāmana dāsa, immediately arrange a boat.

I want to dash off to Navadvīpa without delay and save my friend Kālidāsa from disaster!”

The servant soon returned to his master with a boat fully prepared for the journey.

Digambara Caṭṭopādhyāya was a shrewd man.

A pundit in the tantra-śāstras and well versed in Muslim culture, he often forced the Muslim religious scholars to accept defeat in their Persian and Arabic debates with him, and he often left the brāhmaṇa paṇḍitas speechless whenever they tried to debate with him upon Tantra.

He was famous in important cities like Delhi and Lucknow, and in his leisure time he had also managed to write a book entitled Tantra-saṅgraha, A Compendium of Tantra.

His impressive erudition was further demonstrated by the commentaries he had written on the various verses of this book.

Digambara hurriedly stepped into the boat, clutching a copy of Tantra-saṅgraha in his hands.

Landing at the pier of Godruma-dhāma after a two-hour boat ride, he picked out and instructed a capable man to act as his messenger.

Digambara then dispatched the messenger to Advaita dāsa and waited patiently in the boat for his return.

Advaita dāsa was sitting in his cottage and quietly chanting when Digambara's messenger arrived and paid his respects.

Advaita dāsa asked, “Who are you and why have you come here?”

The messenger replied, “I have been sent by Śrī Digambara Cattopādhyāya, who wants to know whether you, Kālidāsa Lāhirī, remember him or not?”

His curiosity aroused, Advaita dāsa asked, “Where is Digambara?”

He is my childhood friend, how could I ever forget him? Has he embraced Vaiṣṇavism?”

The messenger replied, “He is waiting nearby in a boat, but I do not know whether he is a Vaiṣṇava or not.”

Advaita dāsa quickly asked, “Why has he not come to me directly?”

Upon hearing this and without answering, the messenger took his leave to inform Digambara.

Two hours later Digambara, accompanied by four other gentlemen, arrived at Advaita-kuṭīra.

Digambara had always been very generous and open by nature and upon seeing his old friend, he was clearly extremely pleased.

He rushed to meet Advaita dāsa and taking him in his arms broke into a song he had composed:

kālī! tomāra līlā-khelā ke jāne mā, tribhuvane?
kabhu puruṣa, kabhu nārī, kabhu matta hao go raṇe

“O dear Kali, Who can fathom you, dear Mother? You enjoy pastimes on the earth sometimes in the male form, sometimes in the female form, and sometimes you are ferociously absorbed on the battlefield.”

brahmā ha'ye sṛṣṭi kare, sṛṣṭi nāśa ha'ye hara,
viṣṇu ha'ye viśva-vyāpī pāla go mā, sarva-jane

“As Brahmā you create, as Śiva you destroy, and as Viṣṇu, dear Mother, you maintain the whole universe.”

kṛṣṇa-rūpe vrndāvane, vāṁśī bājāo vane vane,
(ābāra) gaura ha'ye navadvīpe, mātāo sabe saṅkīrtana

“As Kṛṣṇa you play the flute throughout the forests of Vrndāvana. Again you appear as Gaurāṅga, immersing Navadvīpa with the sound of saṅkīrtana.”

Advaita dāsa received him warmly, “Welcome dear brother! Come and sit down.”

Taking a seat, Digambara reciprocated with tear-filled eyes these sentiments of friendship and affection.

He burst out saying, “Dear brother Kālidāsa, what shall I do? You have embraced the path of renunciation and rejected the devas as well as dharma.

I have come from my life in the Punjab with great expectations.

However, back home in Śāntipura, I have found that all our childhood friends have passed away.

Remember Girish Khendā, Peśā Pāglā, Iśe Pāglā, Dhanuva, Kele the carpenter, and Kānti Bhaṭṭacārya? Well, all of them are gone.

Just you and I are left.

I had hoped to find you in Śāntipura, thinking we could pass the rest of our lives in the enjoyment of each other's company.

One day you would come to my house, the next day I would cross the Gaṅgā to your place; we would immerse ourselves in music, study Tantra, and so on.

However, alas! Fortune has forsaken me, and just look at you! You are like the ox-dung, which, unlike cow-dung, can be used neither for cleaning the house, nor in any religious ceremonies.

Could you please explain to me what you have done to yourself?”

Within himself Advaita dāsa calmly considered the situation, knowing that this was a difficult test and that he had better get away from this unwanted association.

He said, “Digambara! Do you still remember the little game we used to play with a wooden stick and a small piece of oval-shaped wood called gullī-dāṇḍa?”

Remember one time we suddenly found ourselves under that ancient tamarind tree?”

Digambara, “Of course I remember! It was near Gaurī dāsa Paṇḍita’s house. Gaura and Nitāi had sat under the same tree.”

Advaita dāsa, “At that time my friend you told me not to touch the tree, because Śacīmātā’s son Nimāi had sat under it, and by touching it one would become an ascetic.”

Digambara, “I recall everything vividly. In fact, I remember your weakness for the Vaisnavas even at that time. I warned you then that you might fall into Gaurāṅga’s trap.”

Advaita dāsa, “Yes! You always knew I was inclined in that direction. Well, I have actually fallen into the trap and now I am caught.”

Digambara, “Take hold of my hand and lift yourself out. It is never good to remain trapped.”

Advaita dāsa, “My friend, this trap is wonderful. I pray to remain in it forever! Why don’t you just try it for yourself?”

Digambara, “I’ve had enough experience to know that in the beginning it may seem pleasurable, but ultimately it will give you nothing.”

Advaita dāsa, “What of the net which has trapped you? Will it actually give you happiness in the end? Don’t make that mistake.”

Digambara, “Try to understand! We tantrics are seekers of absolute knowledge, worshipers of the Goddess Mahāvidyā, Durgā-devī.”

This knowledge is useful now and also later—by it we are happy now and will be so in the hereafter.

You Vaisnavas consider yourselves happy now, but we tantrics do not consider your renounced way of life as happiness.

And in the final judgement, there will be no end to your misery.

I am confounded as to why people become Vaiṣṇavas.

Just note how we tantrics relish our meals of meat and fish, etc.

We wear fancy clothes and such. This is enjoyment!

We are more civilized and expert in material science, while you are denied the pleasures that these things provide, and in the end there will be no mokṣa, liberation, for you.

Advaita dāsa, “Why do you say that there will be no mokṣa for us?”

Digambara, “If one rejects Mā Nistārini, ^{→ Durgā} the Mother of Liberation, then one cannot be liberated—that applies to you, or even Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.

Mā Nistārini is the ādya-śakti, original potency—she has created Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva and is now maintaining them.

When Mā Nistāriṇī so desires everyone will re-enter her egg-shaped womb
whence all creation has emanated.

Have you ever worshiped this Mā Nistāriṇī to invoke the shower of her
mercy upon yourself?”

Advaita dāsa, “Is Mā Nistāriṇī a spiritual being or a material object?”

Digambara, “She is the personification of the conscious, spiritual energy and
independently wilful.

Puruṣa, the spiritual Supreme Male, is created by her wish.”

Advaita dāsa, “Then, what is puruṣa and what is prakṛti?”

Digambara, “Vaiṣṇavas only spend their time in bhajana; therefore, they are bereft of philosophical knowledge.

Actually, puruṣa and prakṛti are like the two halves of a chickpea, although they have separate identities, in fact they are one.

When the outside skin is removed, they are two, but when the skin covers the pea, they are one.

The puruṣa is a spiritually conscious entity, while prakṛti is inert matter.

The undivided and undifferentiated condition of puruṣa and prakṛti is Brahman.”

Advaita dāsa, “The Mā Nistāriṇī you are talking about is she the female prakṛti or the male puruṣa?”

Digambara, “Sometimes she is puruṣa, and sometimes she is prakṛti.”

Advaita dāsa, “You said that both puruṣa and prakṛti are like the two halves under the skin of a chickpea. Now who of the two is the mother and who is the father?”

Digambara, “You are challenging me with philosophical problems. Well, we know how to tackle them. Factually, Mā Nistāriṇi is prakṛti and the father is puruṣa.”

Advaita dāsa, “Who are you, the jīva?”

Digambara, “..[Pāśa-baddho bhavej jīvaḥ pāśu-muktaḥ sadāśivah].. ‘When the soul is covered by the illusion of māyā, he is jīva.’

When he is liberated from māyā's influence, he is Sadāśiva."

Advaita dāsa, "So are you puruṣa or prakṛti?"

Digambara, "I am puruṣa, and Mā Nistāriṇī is prakṛti. So long as I am in the
illusory, conditioned state, she is my mother. However, when I am liberated,
she becomes my wife."

Advaita dāsa, "Without doubt I have now grasped your philosophy well: You
will change from being the son of your mother to being her husband! Tell
me, where did you learn such ideas?"

Digambara, “My friend, I am not wearing blinders like you, who are only interested in the Vaiṣṇavas alone.”

I have associated with many sannyāsīs, brahmacārīs, mystic tantric yogis, and so on.

In addition, I have intensively studied the tantra-śāstras before I could acquire this knowledge. If you wish, I can school you and prepare you, too.”

Advaita dāsa thought to himself, “What a terrifying idea!”

However, he replied, “Could you kindly explain your concept of civilization, and what is prākṛtika-vijñāna, material science?”

Digambara, “Civilisation means to converse well in sophisticated society, to dress in a manner that pleases others, to eat food and conduct oneself in a way which is not repellent to others. Actually, you Vaiṣṇavas follow none of these manners.”

Advaita dāsa, “How is that?”

Digambara, “You do not mingle in societies outside your own, and in general, your behaviour is unsocial.”

The Vaiṣṇavas have not yet learnt what it means to entertain people with sweet words.

Whenever they meet someone, they directly exhort the person to chant hari-nāma.

Why is this so? Are there no other civilized topics to discuss?

Your dress turns people away and so they refuse to offer you a seat at any kind of social event.

A tuff of hair tied at the crown of the head, strings of tulasī beads hanging around the neck, dressed scantily in a loincloth—this is the appearance.

In addition, you only eat spinach and other vegetables. The Vaiṣṇavas are not at all civilized.”

Advaita dāsa thought to himself, “If I provoke a quarrel, he will get angry and leave. Which would be for the better.”

Continuing, Advaita dāsa said, “Does social sophistication help one’s position in the next life?”

Digambara, “I must admit that there is no gain in the next life. However, how can society advance without culture?”

If society is progressing, then one can pay attention to the next life.”

Advaita dāsa, “My friend, if you promise not to become angry, I would like to say something.”

Digambara, “You are my childhood companion, I would offer my life for you and yet you think I cannot tolerate a few harsh words from you?”

We are practiced in courtesy so even if we are irked, our words will remain sweet. After all, the more one learns to mask one’s feelings, the more one advances in culture.”

Advaita dāsa, “Human life is short and inevitably has numerous disturbances; thus, with our limited time, it is imperative to serve the Supreme Lord, Śrī Hari, with unmotivated simplicity.

The culture and sophistication, which you present as synonyms, are merely exercises in self-deception.

If a human being remains on the path of truthfulness, his life is honest and simple.

Leaving this straight path for that of deception, he becomes sly, engages in unscrupulous dealings, and tries to hide his crookedness behind a facade of sweet words and postured civility.

Truthfulness and simplicity are laudable human characteristics, whereas the culture and sophistication you speak of generally lack these qualities.

True culture, in its pristine state, shorn of all immorality, is found amongst the Vaiṣṇavas, and the culture of the non-Vaiṣṇavas is tainted by sinful ways.

Real culture means sabhyatā, worthiness to participate in a sabhā, serious truthful assembly—in other words, simple decency—but the contemporary definition of culture is simply a method of masking mischievous internal motives, which are gradually further perverted into deceit.

“The so called ‘culture’ you have described has nothing in common with the nitya-dharma of the jīva.

If dressing attractively is the standard of cultured activity, then an expensive prostitute is certainly more civilized than you.

Indeed, the real purpose of wearing clothes is simply to cover the body.

The clothes must of course be clean and fresh. Similarly, foodstuffs should be pure and healthy.

However, you insist that primarily foodstuffs should be palatable, regardless of impurities.

Alcohol and meat, for instance, are naturally impure; therefore, to consume them is not at all cultured, but is surely a sinful act.

Today's definition of culture is actually based on the mores of Kali-yuga."

Digambara, "Have you completely forgotten the Badsahi culture of the Muslim emperors?"

Just remember how the people would sit so gracefully in the court of the Muslim king, dressed stylishly, and engaged in conversation according to the court etiquette?"

Advaita dāsa, "This is all mundane business. What would we lack without it?"

My friend, I think that because of your long years of service amongst the Muslims you have become biased in favour of their culture. Actually, sinless life is truly cultured life.

As I have said just now, the so-called cultural progress of Kali-yuga only brings about an acceleration of sinful activities. It is simply the noisome disease of hypocrisy.”

Digambara, “Just realize that today’s modern civilised man considers the contemporary culture to be the actual height in the progress of humanity, and that a person without such culture should hardly be considered a human being!