

Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

by H.H Śivarāma Swami

Preface

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- At the time my book *Veṅu-gītā* came out, many ISKCON leaders held a conservative view on the subject of hearing Kṛṣṇa's pastimes with the gopīs.
- I was therefore apprehensive about the reception they were likely to give my book. But readers and critics alike—with few exceptions—supported its content and style.
- Encouraged, I went on to write *Na Pāraye 'Ham* and *Kṛṣṇa-saṅgati*.
- As the next book, *Tava Kathāmṛtam*, neared completion, however, I could not help but think of those who had voiced concern.
- Furthermore, some readers, after seeing my cautionary statements in previous introductions, expressed doubt about their own qualification to read these books.

Preface

- So I decided to put Tava Kathāmṛtam on hold and write a separate book as an introduction to the entire Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana series.
- This introduction would establish the level of Kṛṣṇa consciousness required to read the books in this series, or any book that depicts the mellows of conjugal love.
- As I began my research and continued to inquire from devotees, I found something beyond sporadic concern about my books.
- From the Vaiṣṇava community I heard of a greater concern about the indiscriminate proliferation of devotional literature.
- This concern spoke not of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, the lawbooks and lifeblood of ISKCON, books he wanted devotees to study “scrutinizingly” and to distribute profusely.

Preface

- It spoke of the works of Vaiṣṇavas, living or deceased, well-known or obscure, Gauḍīya or non-Gauḍīya, qualified or not.
- It spoke of the travesty that, properly translated or not, virtually any devotional book—up to Śrī Gīta-govinda,¹ the most confidential of Vaiṣṇava literary gems—is now readily available in the cloth markets of Vṛndāvana.
- The scope of my ideas about this introductory book then expanded and I felt obliged to address broader issues:
- Which books are to be read and at what stages of a devotee's spiritual development?
- Are there books that devotees should shun altogether, and if so, why?

Preface

- Differences of opinion about which scriptures are suitable for various approaches to devotional service stem not just from dichotomies between conservatives and liberals of the same institution.
- There are different schools of thought in the Vedic tradition, with the potential for diverse philosophical and theological conclusions (siddhāntas).
- Within the Vaiṣṇava community, various schools form separate disciplic successions called sampradāyas, each of which justifies its conclusions with scriptural evidence guided mainly by its own previous ācāryas.
- There are also schools that advocate theologies and methods opposed to Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy.

Preface

- Vaiṣṇava ācāryas call such schools deviant (apasampradāya) and reject their philosophies and ways because they are impotent to yield love for Kṛṣṇa. [Śrīla Prabhupāda lists thirteen of these deviant groups in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 7.48]
- Our ācāryas have been vigilant to correct misunderstandings and immature literary expressions troublesome to pure Vaiṣṇavism.
- Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu descended with His eternal associates to bless the world with the treasure of pure devotional service, the kind that follows Kṛṣṇa's eternal associates in Goloka Vṛndāvana.
- He also brought the sublime means to attain this treasure, the chanting of the Lord's holy names (nāma-saṅkīrtana).
- Unfortunately, pseudo Vaiṣṇavas would distort the teachings of Lord Gaurāṅga even in His presence, and completely cover them after His departure.

Preface

- To revive those teachings, empowered ācāryas have preached extensively throughout India and have written many books on the science of pure devotion.
- Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa were two such ācāryas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura followed them at the close of the nineteenth and dawn of the twentieth centuries.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda inherited Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda's legacy from his guru mahārāja, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, and blessed ISKCON with Lord Caitanya's pristine teachings.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda then instructed the world in his books, lectures, and correspondence about the spiritual practices that lead to the perfectional stage of vraja-bhakti.

Preface

- He writes: “So our desire is Krishna and we want to go back home, back to Godhead, where Krishna lives eternally.
- So you simply follow my instructions as I have given to you and surely your life will be a success.” [Letter to Nṛhari, Bombay, 22 November, 1974]
- But the indiscriminate proliferation of devotional literature, and the indiscriminate and usually innocent reading of such literature, blurs the distinctions between bona fide and pseudo schools of thought.
- Consequently, many ISKCON members feel alarmed, fearing that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings as well as his position as the Society’s founder-ācārya are at risk.
- To give these serious concerns the attention they deserve, I felt compelled to expand the scope of this work even further.

Preface

- The book thus speaks of levels of faith and how they qualify devotees for various types of devotional service, mixed and pure.
- It analyses pure devotional service in practice as taught by Śrīla Prabhupāda, a process that centres on the chanting and broadcasting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.
- It describes the development of hearing about Kṛṣṇa through successive stages of devotional practice (sādhana), and at last elaborates on the role played by hearing and chanting—especially about Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes in Vṛndāvana—at the stage of perfection (sādhya), the goal Śrīla Prabhupāda relentlessly inspired us to attain.
- The book you are holding, Śuddha-bhakti-cintāmaṇi, is thus much more than it was at its inception:

Preface

- It is a systematic overview of sādhana and sādhya—applied to ISKCON—that automatically clarifies the purpose of the Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana series. May it fulfil its goals, glorify our pure heritage, and bring pleasure to the Vaiṣṇavas.

Śivarāma Swami

Gaura-pūrṇimā, 14 March 2006

The opening of Gaura-Nitāi's temple, Budapest