

# **A Contemporary Scholarly Survey of Radha-Krishna Devotion**

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**Sky River Press**

Pahoa, Hawai'i

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Several years ago, I read *Vaishnavism: Contemporary Scholars Discuss the Gaudiya Tradition*, Folk Books, 1992 edited by Steven J. Rosen, foreword by Edward C. Dimock, Jr.. I benefited from it, and wrote an essay in response that I published on my website. I reread the essay in 2013 to prepare it for a book of my collected writings, and it does an excellent job of showing the solid theological background of Universalist Radha-Krishnaism from a traditional Chaitanya Vaishnav perspective.

I published it on my [stevebohlert.com](http://stevebohlert.com) site, but when my devotional writings migrated from there to here, it doesn't seem to have made it, or at least I can't find it. I am republishing a reedited, updated edition as a free pdf download, since it is forty-two pages and can be read on a variety of readers at your convenience.

Rosen (Satyaraja Dasa, a disciple of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami) interviewed scholars with expertise in different areas of the field and put together a comprehensive survey of the Chaitanya Vaishnav tradition. I comment on some of the most pertinent points:

1. **Dr. Dimock** says,  
. . . the doctrine of *acintya bhedabheda*, i.e. 'simultaneous difference and non-difference, which is beyond cognition,' posits a tolerance for ambiguity to which the closest parallel in western thought seems to be quantum theory. (viii)

A number of other scholars referred to this doctrine in novel ways expanding its application. Rather than either/or, it is both/and, which gives much room for complementary perspectives and differing interpretations. The tradition is a diverse heterodoxy despite efforts of certain camps to establish an orthodoxy in their image. Ambiguity is fundamental to the spiritual quest for that which is basically unknowable in our present state.

2. **Dr. Chatterjee:** . . . Although, by "Hinduism," we do not exactly mean a set of abstract philosophical theories or a host of religious dogmas, one might venture to say a few words about some of its cardinal principles: the non-duality of Godhead, the divinity of the soul, the unity of existence, and the harmony of religions. (8)

I think this is a good summary of the context within which we find Chaitanya Vaishnavism. Hinduism tends to be broad minded and open with a wide range of sects coexisting peacefully for the most part. Individuals also tend to form their own unique interpretations and combinations.

**3. Dr. Chatterjee:** . . . Historians usually report that the theological ideas that developed in India from 200 B.C. to 400 A.D. were quite revolutionary. This is the period during which the theistic approach was emphasized. (8)

This agrees with other religious historians' time frame. Many devotees give much earlier dates--around 3,000 B.C.E.--for these developments, but the evidence does not support that.

**4. SR:** . . . Hermeneutics, or the study of philosophical interpretation, is important, too, especially since early Vedic texts can be interpreted in a number of ways. (9)

This is something I find lacking in most contemporary Chaitanya Vaishnavism, especially in the West. I try to fill this gap and encourage others to do so as well. Exegesis brings out the original meaning of a text, but hermeneutics allows us to interpret the text in new ways for today.

**5. Dr. Chatterjee:** . . . There were important leaders in Bengal in the post-Chaitanya period, like Jahnavi, the wife of Nityananda, her son Virabhadra, and then Narottama Dasa Thakura, (12)

This acknowledges the importance of Jahnavi Thakurani, the founder of Bhaktivinoda, and my, disciplic lineage.

**6. Dr. Chatterjee:** . . . But you see, the greatest allurements that they have is a fundamentally complete philosophical

system. This is what attracts people. Their sacred literature is quite vast, and it doesn't ask for dogmatic followers. Rather, all questions are answered, using a profound system of *nyaya*, or logic. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's system of inconceivable distinction and non-distinction is a very mature philosophical system, incorporating much of classical Indian philosophy, and synthesizing that which is best from all prior Vaishnava schools. (13)

I think this philosophical system is important and can be adapted quite well to Western sensibilities. I find it synthesizes well with Christianity, Taoism, Sufism, and Jung.

**7. Dr. Chatterjee:** . . . It should also be known that Caitanya was a revolutionary. His impact on medieval Indian society was profound for this reason as well. He defied the norms of both the Hindus and the Muslims. He reacted against social conservatism. Isn't this always alluring? [laughter] Especially when you have a strong philosophical basis. He rebelled against the existing caste system . . . After studying all of the relevant texts, I conclude that his feeling about the prevailing Varnasrama system was that it was counterproductive, at least for attaining the grace of Lord Krishna. (13-14)

Rather than medieval, I think of Chaitanya as a Renaissance man, a contemporary of Martin Luther. When one is a follower of a

revolutionary, ought one not be a revolutionary too? One must question why A.C.

Bhaktivedanta Swami placed so much emphasis on establishing Varnashrama in the West.

**8. Dr. Chatterjee:** . . . he preferred to associate with devout Vaisnavas only, irrespective of their caste status. You see, he was trying to teach that the real issue is spirituality--universal, nonsectarian spirituality. And all other concerns, however righteous they may be are only secondary or subservient. This was his teaching." (15)

Does this sound similar to Jesus? However, certain people who claim to be his followers formed a sectarian cult in his name and promote *varnashram*.

**9. Dr. Witzel:** . . . I think it is clear that as far as the Rig Veda goes, Indra is a much more prominent god. This, of course, has to do with the prevailing mythology and also with the needs of the people at the time. Different divinities are emphasized according to the insights of various seers and the requirements of the local people . . . From a strictly scholarly point of view, however, Vishnu goes through a transformation, from what is perceived as a minor god to the all-important divinity one sees today in the practice of Vaishnavism. (24)

This points to the developmental process and relative nature of the tradition. It is not

fixed and unchanging. What are the needs of the people we teach today?

**10. Dr. Smith:** . . . If anything, the story [The Ramayana] brings to the fore the ambiguities of understanding appropriate behavior, or *dharma*, in the abstract--for there are many verses which suggest that each individual's *dharma* is different in different situations, and the challenge is to deport oneself in any given circumstance according to one's own peculiar *dharma* (called *sva-dharma*). (31)

Thus, one's religious practices and ethics are situationally based. Naturally, a twenty-first century Westerner's religion will be different from that of an Indian, especially from a different century. We each have our own particular individual path to follow--going where no one has gone before.

**11. Dr. Hiltebeitel:** . . . the Vedas were to be brought into a new formulation for a new age. This is the Mahabharata. This is the Veda for a new population, for the masses and for people of all castes and persuasions. . . . It is for a new time and for an extended population. And of course it teaches *bhakti*--devotional love--to that population. (52)

This again shows the developmental, adaptive nature of the Vedic teachings. Certainly, they can be further developed and adapted for contemporary Westerners as I have done.

**12. Dr. Hildebeitel:** . . . Krishna is supposed to set the stage for some kind of catastrophe with the most subtle grin. That's one of the things that you can't miss if you know what the iconography looks like...the Mahabharata always plays with ambiguity and uncertainty. There are good divine forces who are in the Kaurava camp as well as in the Pandava camp. (54-55)

This points to the enigmatic, ambiguous nature of Krishna who does not see things in the dualistic way we do but brings death and destruction to all. His sport is sometimes pretty rough.

**13. Dr. Hospital:** . . . "sport" is Radhakrishnan's translation of *lila*...It's clear that in the Bhagavata version the Lord creates as a part of his *lila*...This explanation is an attempt to deal with the theological problem of why God, who is complete and fulfilled, comes to create. And the emphasis is on the fact that God doesn't need to create, that this is not something that is done because there is a lack in God. Rather it is something which just comes spontaneously out of who that Supreme Person is. It comes from His inherent nature. (66-67)

This leads to the conclusion that everything is divine sport or play, including our lives. We are all minor expansions of Radha-Krishna, the original feminine and masculine principles, and they enjoy ever new pastimes through us.



**14. Dr. Hospital:** . . . I think they make a very good case for what people have long suspected: that many of the ideas of the *Bhagavata* are coming out of the South Indian tradition. (71)

This was Bhaktivinode Thakur's conclusion in the nineteenth century. He employed this type of scholarly, analytical approach to the scriptures and the developing tradition.

**15. Dr. Hospital:** The incomprehensible holding together of difference and non-difference. In the *Bhagavata*, God is both beyond action and he is acting, beyond qualities and at the same time he is the one who bears all magnificent, auspicious qualities. (72)

The *Bhagavata* is the basis for Chaitanya's philosophy, and portrays God-dess as an incomprehensible reconciliation of opposites.

**16. SR:** . . . Jiva Gosvami met with Jahnava-devi . . . and had extensive discussions with her. It was she who established *murtis* of Radha next to the Krishna images in Vraja and it was she who influenced Jiva to send the *bhakti-sastras* to Bengal with Srinivasa, Narottama, and Shyamananda. (82)

This further establishes the major influence Jahnava had on development of the tradition. It is interesting that in sixteenth century India, a woman was able play such an important role, and today many western devotee women still fight for equality. Where is the honoring of the divine feminine?

**17. Dr. Hawley:** . . . While *sampradaya* considerations are important, a sense of sharing and learning is even more important, and the *lilas* themselves, of course, transcend all boundaries. So there is a sense of universality there. The truth of Krishna's *lila* is the bottom line, and exactly how one sees it may be dependent somewhat on one's sectarian affiliation, but it is even more dependent on that person's grasp of reality. (88)

Dr. Hawley speaks of the accessibility of Radha Krishna's pastimes, including the *rasa dance*, for the ordinary people of Braja who get to experience them through plays performed regularly by different troupes. These pastimes are also experienced through poetry and songs, which are sung by many. The point is, one need not pass through prerequisite stages before experiencing the pastimes.

**18. Dr. Davis:** . . . in *bhakti* poetry, Bryant said, the central effort of the poet is to get the audience to participate directly in the reality that he's trying to convey. . . . Jayadeva would draw us as an audience into the poem and into this world of *bhakti*. Here, specifically, it was the world of Vrindavana. (91)

Poetry is the language of devotion. Entering into the pastimes of the Divine Couple directly, as a participant is a goal of the practitioner. Reading and rereading the poetical descriptions

of the pastimes by great devotees opens a door to that transcendental realm.

**19. Dr. Davis:** . . . oftentimes the poet identifies himself with Radha, or a *gopi*, . . . it's a kind of precursor to the theological system wherein one identifies with an inhabitant of Vrindavana. (94)

This refers to the practice of most Chaitanya Vaishnavas, which Lalita Prasad Thakur taught me. How are you to relate to Radha-Krishna if you do not know who you are? If one aspires to engage in personal pastimes with Radha-Krishna, one must have a personal spiritual identity to interact in.

**20. Dr. Davis:** . . . even in those moments when Radha was in despair because Krishna had left her--at the very core of her despair, the source of her despair, Krishna was present. (95)

The theme of love in separation is dominant in Chaitanya Vaishnavism. The point is even in our separation, Krishna is present and there is union. Our longing is a pull Radha-Krishna cannot resist.

**21. Dr. Davis:** . . . this was not poetry written in libraries; . . . it was poetry that came out of life. I wanted to show that many or most of the *bhakti* poets were intense practitioners, that the poetry was often an outcome of intense devotional experience. (97)

This validates the revelatory nature of the best devotional poetry. Most of us long for such

experiences, and we can experience them vicariously through the poetry.

**22. Dr. Stewart:** Murari Gupta's Sanskrit work is the oldest. Most people seem to feel it was completed right about the time Caitanya died . . . There is also evidence in the book to suggest that he had started writing the book long before Caitanya died, and that he had actually gotten permission from Caitanya to do it. And this is, I think, pretty significant. . . . He is probably the only biographer who knew Caitanya really well. Everyone else was writing from second-hand knowledge. (102)

It's interesting that Murari's *Sri Krishna Caitanya-caritamrita* is mostly eclipsed by Krishnadas Kaviraja's *Caitanya-caritamrita*, in Bengali, which is a later, more doctrinally developed work from the Vrindaban school.

**23. Dr. Stewart:** . . . the biographers must have been working with patterns that would not be considered historically accurate in a western, more positivist sense, but are formulaic . . . And that raises all kinds of questions about the way these texts are written . . . Part of the problem is that these authors tended to write according to certain acceptable patterns. Things were always presented in a very predictable way. And to deviate from that in some respects would have at that time raised eyebrows. Now today, of course, we have a different standard for judging these things. (109-10)

This argues against taking Chaitanya's biographies literally. While having some basis in history, they are theological documents meant to spread the faith and portray Chaitanya in the same light as other luminaries of his time. They also differ in their presentation of events in Chaitanya's life.

**24. Dr. Stewart:** . . . people did not always know exactly how to interpret Caitanya's life . . . certain changes have taken place in the tradition until the community finally settles on what it finds to be an acceptable standard. . . . The *Caitanya-caritamrita*. (112)

Again we see a developing tradition similar to the four gospels. What gets included in the canon, and what is considered authoritative? Just as Chaitanya's early followers had to interpret who he was, we need to interpret who he is for us. Perhaps it's a matter of reframing.

**25. "Dr. Stewart:** . . . when Caitanya was first believed to be God, and was written about in those terms--shortly after his death--you had many people with the hope that he would lead them to an overthrow of the increasingly dominant Muslim community. This political dimension is most certainly present . . . martial images proved completely untenable in the socio-political reality of post Caitanya Bengal . . . you have a shift from the *aisvarya*, the sovereign side, to an emphasis on

*madhurya*, the sweet side, from a form that was martial and threatening to a form that was innocuous and accommodating. (114)

We see a nationalistic, messianic expectation in the early biographies change to a more spiritualized, non-threatening faith in the later biographies due to increased Muslim control over the Hindus who now had little political power but still had freedom in their bedroom and private life--not unlike living in a modern national security state. It's important to see the context within which the tradition developed to understand it. Everything is contextual or situational. Then we must ask, "How does this apply in my situation?"

**26. Dr. Stewart:** . . . *Manjari sadhana* seems to be an indirect response, . . . to . . . a need that would give you a style of worship that would enable you to locate your real and true personality into the realm of Krishna. 'Caitanya is not here anymore, so we want to go where Krishna is.' And that then is the interior landscape where the devotee works his way to heaven. . . . *Manjari sadhana* relies on an interior mode of realization. You do not have to go out onto the streets beating drums or anything like that--something that might upset the local rulers. It is done privately, behind closed doors. So you get a shift, then, from public practices to more and more private practices. (115)

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami's followers used the more martial model of Chaitanya marching on the Kazi's residence as a model for their chanting in the streets. This gave them wide exposure and a number of converts, but it also made them an object of ridicule by the media and general public. I personally find them to be an embarrassment, and do my best to distance myself. That sort of strident evangelism is not helpful. I think they had to change their tactics after the openness of the 1960s. I don't know what they are doing today, but I doubt if it is *manjari bhav*.

**27. Dr. Stewart:** . . . we can see a very complex accommodation-process, where the form of ritual, the form of practice, adapts itself to a changing environment. (116)

Again, the contextual nature of the tradition is undeniably there from the beginning. It did not form and grow in a vacuum. Now it needs to be accommodated to western sensibilities and lifestyles.

**28. Dr. Stewart:** . . . *Ansas* and *avataras*, those parts of God, are certainly legitimate, and Caitanya was those things, and the *Yugavatara* as well, but they were coincident with and subject to a much more important descent, which was *svayam bhagavan*, God Himself. (117)

Here we have a leading scholar in the field accepting the divinity of Chaitanya.

**29. Dr. Stewart:** . . . androgyny was very much perceived to be part of Caitanya's

nature; . . . and it is primarily understood through the manifestation of *bhava*." (117)

Chaitanya not only manifested as the embodiment of God-dess, but also as the ideal devotee for us to model ourselves after. We are also called to develop our masculine and feminine sides. This allows us to be balanced, whole people.

**30. Dr. Stewart:** . . . The philosophical works of Jiva . . . lay the foundation for establishing Gaudiya Vaisnavism as a *sampradaya*, an authorized lineage. This lends the group an institutional authority that is easily recognizable by any Vaishnava or any other knowledgeable practitioner in India or around the world. Having that philosophical system at its base establishes an identity which is unmistakable. (118)

Here we have balance between right and left brain, emotion and reason. This philosophical system is very complete and adaptable. It is able to hold it's own in today's world of ideas. These excerpts show that my Universalist Radha-Krishnaism is firmly grounded in the Chaitanya Vaishnav tradition and carries on those core teachings in a contemporary western way.

**31. Dr. Stewart:** . . . The Gosvamis must have discussed these things constantly. And this is the beauty of community. It is unfortunate that scholars do not do this kind of thing more often. I think that when you do get together people, who have



overlapping but different expertises, you get just his kind of creativity. In this case they are just like us--they worked on these ideas, they thought about them, and they explored them together. (119)

This kind of collaboration is a model for us, as we make the teachings of the Goswamis relevant for today's world. I use the tool of dialoging with authors like this to create a broader understanding than my own. I invite others to join in this discussion.

**32. Dr. Stewart:** . . . they start off as purely mechanical rituals, perhaps, but fairly soon they become so second-nature that you cease to think about them as an act you must perform, but rather simply what you do naturally--it is what you are. And in that process you gradually assimilate these practices to the point where you could almost say they animate themselves. Now, at this point you have a real subtle transition from a purely mechanical practice to a practice that is finally driven by what can only be described as a spontaneous, uncontrollable love. (120)

Here Dr. Stewart gives a beautiful description of the transition from regulative devotion to natural devotion.

**33. Dr. Stewart:** . . . At this point, one is ready to follow in the footsteps of one of Krishna's eternal associates--one is consumed by passion, which leads one irresistibly to discover one's true

identity . . . This is a spiritual form that enables you to participate, hopefully directly, in the *lilas* of Krishna. (121)

This is the goal of the spiritual practices. One cultivates one's identity and relationship by absorbing oneself in the pastimes of Radha-Krishna.

**34. Dr. Stewart:** And I think that the dramas of Rupa, of Krishnadasa, and of later Gaudiya dramatists as well--everyone of those are, really, revelations of a very high order . . . what the practice is supposed to produce, at some point you no longer simply relive the *lilas* that are described in the Puranas and so forth. Rather, you are really conducting yourself as yourself in those *lilas* directly. That gives you, then, the opportunity to see things never before reported. (122)

These descriptions of the pastimes are certainly spiritual revelations. However, when they are communicated through language, they are limited by language, culture, and our mental capacity. Therefore in my meditations, I see things in a much more contemporary setting, and thus the Divine Couple's pastimes expand infinitely as I and others engage ourselves in in them acting freely.

If the language of these plays were not changed, I could not understand them. If we can change the language, why not some of the cultural mores and accouterments, so that western devotees may more easily enter into

this world of Radha-Krishna? If it is going to be a universal religion, it needs to be freed from Indian culture and trappings.

**35. Dr. Stewart:** . . . there is a tremendous amount of theological consistency in the tradition as a whole, and that is one of Gaudiya Vaishnavism's most impressive points. (125)

As I adapted this tradition to the West, I maintained the theological basis while interpreting and applying it differently--as any living tradition must do.

**36. Dr. Sailley:** . . . The Vaishnava-Sahajiya believes that Radha and Krishna exist, in a sense, in every woman and man. So when there is union between the sexes, as in intercourse, they are replicating, if you will, a divine occurrence. So the Sahajiyas see it as a spiritual phenomenon. . . . a sect of Vaishnava-Sahajiyas developed that came to see the union of Radha and Krishna as somehow paradigmatic of male-female union in the world. They saw the macrocosm reflected in the microcosm . . . (144-45)

A *sahajiya* is a follower of "the natural way." A good healthy, natural attitude toward sex is helpful if one is trying to establish a personal, erotic relationship with God-ness. There is one set of practices that can be done with the outer body, and others that are done within. Certain Indian sects of sahajiyas took their extra-marital ritual sex too far. Sex engaged in by a

committed, loving couple is more like the sex engaged in by Radha-Krishna, who are one, and in the *Brahma-vaivarta Purana*, are married by Brahma. Of course, we are finite expansions of Radha-Krishna who exist in each of us. They are the supreme paradigmatic individuals. Therefore, I reworked their pastimes to dispense with certain dysfunctional, Indian cultural models. Our love making, expands Radha Krishna's play as they enjoy through us.

**37. Dr. Brooks:** Caitanya's movement reached a highpoint with Bhaktivinoda; he rekindled the flame, so to speak, and he brought out, to newer heights, whatever excellence the tradition knew in earlier days . . . he worked hard to reestablish the covered if not lost teachings of the Gaudiya Vaishnava *acaryas*. . . . He was really a visionary, in some sense, in the same way that Caitanya was. The parallels with Bhaktivinoda's rediscovery of Caitanya's birthplace and Caitanya's own visionary discovery of Vrindavana are uncanny. As Caitanya reclaimed Krishna, so Bhaktivinoda reclaimed Caitanya. (149-50)

This is quite an accolade of my grand-guru that is certainly justified. I feel honored to represent his true line in the West and reclaim it for everyone in a universalist way.

**38. Dr. Brooks:** . . . Someone who was in the world but not of it, Bhaktivinoda was a productive member of society and was in a

sense integrated into the upper strata of British India. He knew how to give Gaudiya conclusions to his contemporaries, to those who were given to, if we can use a vague term, *Westernization*. He himself was Westernized to a certain extent. He had received a Western, English education. He studied law and he was a civil servant. (151)

Bhaktivinode is a paradigmatic individual for me. His son, my guru, Lalita Prasad Thakur, also was a civil servant and became personal secretary to the governor of Bengal. After retirement, he more fully devoted himself to spiritual practice, like his father-guru. I also lived an active life in business, politics, and religion. After retiring and moving to my secluded forest home, I am better able to focus on the meditative process Lalita Prasad taught me.

**39. Dr. Brooks:** . . . I think it's interesting to note that he [Bhaktivinode] studied Christianity and the other world religions. I imagine that there were these personal questions that he was trying to resolve himself. Ultimately, of course, he concluded that Gaudiya Vaishnavism revealed the same truth that is found in all religions but to a much deeper degree. But he did this after making a study of the other religions, which is significant, and he maintained a healthy respect for all genuinely spiritual revelations. (152)

This is my experience and conclusion as well. Bhaktivinoda was a universalist like me.

**40. Dr. Brooks:** . . . Bhaktivinoda felt that Vaisnavism had been abandoned, at least by the educated people. The literature wasn't available to them. *Kirtana*, particularly *sankirtana*, was denigrated. The people in general felt that only those of loose morals followed these practices. So, he had a lot to contend with. (152)

Today, there is much more literature available than there was 30 years ago. However, *sankirtan* is still denigrated in the mass media. People feel Hare Krishna devotees are a group of kooks in a cult, and I have to agree. I also have a lot to contend with presenting this teaching to educated people.

**41. Dr. Brooks:** . . . Certainly Bhaktivinoda was similarly a charismatic prophet, in a sense. . . . Now I'm using that term rather technically. When I look at the development or the resurgence of social movements and religious movements, I think a very apt model to look at is the anthropological concept of a revitalization movement . . . this kind of movement emerges when there is a breakdown in the culture, when the culture isn't working for a large number of people. In a sense we can look at every religion in its nativity and see it as responding to the dissatisfaction of the people involved. Now, what is needed is a recognition by individuals that they are not

satisfied, psychologically and materially . . .  
And spiritually, certainly. (153)

I am starting a revitalization movement based on my own dissatisfaction with the status quo of Chaitanya Vaishnavism in the West as well as the status quo of the US. As Bhaktivinoda's follower, I similarly try to adapt his teachings to my contemporary situation. I believe others similarly yearn for such a renewal to take place today.

**42. Dr. Brooks:** . . . I think that if we look at the spread of Vaishnavism since his time, we have to say that he gave it real focus, and, certainly, he was the real generator of the idea that Vaishnavism was a universal religion, that it had the potential to proselytize, to draw other people in. This not only echoes the mood of Caitanya but functions quite positively in Indian society, where some people are denied access to salvation because of their birth status. So it's appealing on that level. I think Bhaktivinoda was consciously prophetic in the sense that Vaishnavism, Caitanya Vaishnavism, wasn't limited to one section of India. It was truly universal in scope. (153)

This universal appeal inspired Bhaktivinoda to write in English and send his books to the West. It inspired Lalita Prasad to send me back to the West to preach. It inspires my adaptation of it to contemporary western culture. I also prefer the term Chaitanya

Vaishnavism to Gaudiya Vaishnavism because I am not Bengali.

**43. Dr. Brooks:** . . . Bhaktivinoda basically said we need to get rid of all of these outward symbols of cast. He burned the sacred thread and said that, more or less, birth status, birth group or caste itself, doesn't matter; it's not important. What is important is the quality of your devotion. (155)

I agree with this whole heartedly. I wear neither sacred thread, tulsi beads, or tilak. I do not try to live up to Indian *brahminical* standards. Such distinctions put up walls rather than open doors. I am a casteless nonsectarian devotee of Radha-Krishna.

**44. "Dr. Brooks:**...Bhaktivinoda wasn't so concerned with creating *brahmana* as he was in giving everyone access to the religion and de-emphasizing cast. (156)

It's too bad A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami tried turning Westerners into *brahmins*, following the example of his guru Bhaktisiddhanta, who made any qualified person a *brahmin*. It's very unnatural for us as well as unnecessary in the West to practice such standards. Bhaktivinoda said that in the West, we should adapt Western standards for clergy, which I did.

**45. Dr. Brooks:** It is important that he [Bhaktivinoda] sent books to the West and began a sort of proselytizing mission. It's an example of his vision that the Gaudiya *sampradaya*, the religion of Caitanya, was



capable of being the universal religion that the scriptures talked about, that it had the qualities, it had the attributes, of being one of the great religions, a panacea for all mankind. . . . He was using his own English training to begin the process of disseminating cross-culturally what he felt was this universal religion. (157-8)

I share this vision, and it is what motivates my work. Bhaktivinode took it as far as he could, being a nineteenth century Bengali. True indigenization must be done by indigenous people. My graduate studies taught me how to interpret ancient religion for today's people, and that is what I did with *Universalist Radha-Krishnaism*.

**46. Dr. Brooks:** . . . The model of religion, in all branches of Hinduism, especially, is a very individual experience. The model is the devoted individual seeking out a *guru*. And the relationship between the *guru* and the devotee is an individual relationship. People have different personalities and the *guru* has to be sensitive about how they can best be taken, throughout this life, and achieve *moksha* eventually, or further, love for Krishna. What is the best process for each disciple? That's up to the qualified *guru*. So, in a sense, the institutionalization of *bhakti* religion is something that a lot of people don't hook into. (162)

I work outside of institutional religion. I see most organized religion as a blight on spiritual

progress, especially when cookie cutter, one size fits all prescriptions are given. I work with students individually and guide them from where they are in a manner consistent with holistic growth--not as a guru, but a western spiritual teacher, guide, and friend.

**47. Dr. Kinsley:** . . . when Caitanya leaves Puri to go south, one is reminded of Krishna leaving Vraja. Just as the *gopis* expressed distress at Krishna's leaving, so you have Caitanya's associates feeling similar emotions. This all serves to tie Caitanya into the *avatara* concept--to his followers, he is the embodiment of Krishna. In fact, he is Radha and Krishna combined. (180)

If we are followers of Radha-Krishna combined, shouldn't we also combine Radha-Krishna, the archetypal female-male, within ourselves? As I say in *Universalist Radha-Krishnaism*:

On one level for men, developing an identity as Radha's girlfriend involves getting in touch with the anima and developing their feminine, spiritual side. Attaining an androgynous balance between masculine and feminine natures promotes wholeness in both men and women. Radha-Krishna and Chaitanya's examples benefit the world as it suffers from feuding, patriarchal monotheisms that worship a male God without a consort. (133)

**48. Dr. Kinsley:** . . . [Chaitanya] meets a householder named Kurma. He tells this

man, who wants to leave hearth and home to travel with him, that it is totally unnecessary, that one can stay in the sanctity of one's home and still effectively practice the tenets of Vaishnavism. So, this is instructive for those who are not inclined to early *sannyasa*. (181)

I encourage my students to live a full life and not practice artificial renunciation. We act according to our nature while constantly refining that nature as we develop our relationship with Radha-Krishna. It is not necessary to totally disrupt one's life to be a devotee.

**49. Dr. Entwistle:** . . . Krishnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami was writing quite a long time after the events had actually taken place. So it is likely that he combined oral traditions with what he knew . . . So he was naturally giving a general or approximate account. I don't think you can hold him on every word. After all, he's trying to convey the "essence," or the "nectar," of the acts of Caitanya. (196)

This is a good description of the situation that guides our interpretation of these stories. They are not eyewitness accounts, but Krishna Das interviewed and studied with first hand witnesses of and participants in Chaitanya's pastimes. Of course, he also adds his own spin as he puts it all together to form the foundational document for Chaitanya Vaishnavism.

**50. Dr. Klostermaier:** . . . Vaishnavism, like Christianity, is a living religion with millions of adherents. It is numerically the largest segment of modern Hinduism, with a history going back thousands of years. So we are not talking about some small sect but, rather, mainstream Hinduism. . . .

Vaishnavism is as pervasive in India as Christianity is in the Western countries. It represents traditional Hinduism and claims to contain all that is genuinely Hindu. So Vishnu worship or, later, the worship of Krishna, is something very much akin to the worship of God or, later, Jesus, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. (219-20)

Pointing out these similarities is a good way to introduce Vaishnavism to the West.

**51. Dr. Klostermaier:** . . . Shankara, for example, takes Upanishadic texts and explains them in an impersonalistic sort of way; Ramanuja takes those same texts and gives them a personalistic gloss. The same sort of diversity exists in the Christian tradition, and there have been major theological schools that have emphasized one way of viewing things over and against another. Basically, of course, this all comes down to the failing of our language or our fundamental inability to understand the infinite. Neither the personal nor the impersonal image is fully adequate--God transcends all human conceptions. He or

she must include both and exist beyond both. (221)

It is a difference of emphasis that distinguishes my teachings from those of other Chaitanya Vaishnavs. If we limit God-dess to what we are able to describe, that idea of God-dess is too small. God-dess certainly includes personal and impersonal, male and female, but is much more as well. God-dess is both/and, plus a lot more.

**52. Dr. Klostermaier:** . . . The Canticale of Solomon and the Gita-govinda of Jayadeva agree both in form and in spirit--and in a great variety of ways. . . . There is also a *Christ-bhakti* literature, if you will, that arose in the late middle ages. . . . St. John's *Dark Night of the Soul* . . . could be seen as a Christian version of *viraha-bhakti* or love of God in the mood of separation. . . . Bonaventure . . . His perspective accentuates feeling and emotion more than the intellect. And I think . . . even a particularly rigorous thinker like Jiva Gosvami, . . . feeling and emotion are considered much more important than the intellect. (222-3)

These are just a few correspondences between Christianity and Vaishnavism. There are certainly many more.

**53. Dr. Klostermaier:** . . . The Western theological context in which the love of Radha and Krishna could perhaps be best understood is precisely that of trinitarian

theology. For the Christian, the Trinity represents the deepest mystery of faith. (225)

This shows that the Godhead is basically a loving family, and that the love exchanged between them is the real essence of their being as with Radha-Krishna.

**54. Dr. Klostermaier:** . . . Caitanya himself was eventually seen as a raving madman by all but his most intimate followers . . . divine love cannot be understood by Everyman. It is a cherished goal, and one that is rarely attained. In Vaishnavism and in Christianity you have examples of saints who have achieved this goal--but it is not so easily attained. (227)

Striving and longing to attain this goal are what count. We cannot attain it on our own; we depend on the mercy and grace of Goddess to bestow divine love, if not in this life, in the next life when we are free of this mortal body.

**55. Dr. O'Connell:** . . . Use your ears, use your eyes to see the image of the deity! Use your voice--all of these senses--to build up and sustain an all-encompassing awareness of the Divine. It is called *smarana* or 'remembrance.' It is not simply looking back at the past. You make the awareness present, right here and now. (232)

The body and senses need not be negated, they may be engaged in helping us remember Radha-Krishna constantly, which is the aim of

all spiritual practices. We should not simply look back to the great persons and revelations of the past, but see the Divine in all things here and now while developing a loving personal relationship with God-dess.

**56. Dr. O'Connell:** . . . It becomes Raganuga when the motivation shifts. Externally you might still do the same things . . . But the motivation has shifted from merely following good advice, or injunctions, to an inner longing, an intense desire. You really feel it. You want to do these things. (234)

In the beginning, it may be necessary for a devotee to follow some rules and regulations until one gets a taste for devotional practices. Once one has a taste for them and a longing to personally serve Radha Krishna, one may spontaneously follow one's inner promptings.

**57. Dr. O'Connell:** . . . the development of this raganuga system is a significant part of the Caitanyaite tradition, . . . It is an important elaboration on the principle of *sadhana*. (235)

It is unfortunate that most Vaishnava teachers in the West discourage *raganuga* devotion, rather than encouraging their students to advance to this higher platform. Perhaps they fear losing control.

**58. Dr. O'Connell:** . . . Visvanatha Cakravarti . . . emphasizes that when and if one goes from *vaidhi* to *raganuga*, one may engage in all of the same practices of *sadhana* or discipline as before, but only if

one finds them helpful. If not, one may drop them. (235)

I've practiced *raganuga bhakti*, which I call natural devotion, for over almost forty years. I follow practices that work for me at the time, and leave the rest. This is a more mature stage of devotion, and one may be expected to act responsibly under the self control of one's conscience or inner teacher.

**59. Dr. Kapoor:** . . . The rationale behind the Gaudiya view is that God has the inconceivable power of reconciling the irreconcilable. This enables the absolute to rise above our imperfect and contradictory notions of qualified and unqualified Brahman and allows them to be reconciled in a higher synthesis . . . even to say that Brahman is inexpressible or unthinkable is to say or think something about it. (240)

This is a useful and important "both/and" way of looking at things. The Absolute, is a paradox of opposites reconciled into a complete whole. It also nullifies the personalist/impersonalist split that exists in some groups.

**60. Shrivatsa Goswami:** . . . *acintya bhedabheda* applies in every case. You give me any situation: political, historical, religious, devotional, cognitive, and I will immediately demonstrate to you how *acintya bhedabheda* applies and how it gives meaning. (254)



It is interesting how Goswami expands the use of this idea as a general principle applicable to all life. I see what he means.

**61. Shrivatsa Goswami:** . . . Charles

Hartshorne . . . showed that reality is multi-valued. *Achintya bhedabheda*--he detailed a very similar truth to what was expressed by Sri Caitanya and Jiva Goswami, but in Western jargon, of course. (255)

This an interesting parallel that can be used to develop Chaitanya's philosophy in contemporary Western terms. Hartshorne is a process philosopher, and I employ process theology in my writings.

**62. Shrivatsa Goswami:** . . . Sri Caitanya

chose those who were materially powerful--who were qualified for the project of resurrecting Vrindavana. . . . Mahaprabhu did not underestimate the importance of power and politics . . . You can't say that power and politics are necessarily a bad thing. It depends on their utilization in the service of Krishna-*prema*. This is Sri Caitanya's teaching . . . Aristotle gave us the wrong idea: that reality can be compartmentalized . . . But reality doesn't work in that way. Concepts overlap . . . the human experience is holistic--everything is interdependent and included. (258)

Goswami points out how powerful the six Vrindaban Goswamis were and then goes on to say we must not compartmentalize life but live holistically--be generalists more than

specialists. While I do not have much faith in our political system and do not want to be involved in politics per se, I do think we need to address the important issues of the day. Otherwise, our silence implies support of the status quo.

**63. Dr. Beck:** . . . The entire *Bhagavata purana* (18,000 verses) has been traditionally believed to be an expansion of four 'seed' verses, which themselves were considered to be an expansion of the Vedic *Gayatri mantra* . . . the *Gayatri* is an expansion from 'OM.' So, properly chanted, the whole *Bhagavata* is evoked with this seed syllable. (279)

This is one of the reasons I chant Om constantly.

**64. Dr. McDaniel:** . . . Gaudiya Vaishnavas are quite distinct in their approach because they focus on the stages of emotion within mystical experience . . . it's really very much a sort of love-oriented mysticism . . . The texts explain a given saint's inner experience to such a degree that the reader can almost experience it for himself or herself, and, indeed, the goal of many of the descriptions is to enable the reader to attain these states. The Gaudiya literature and tradition construct a sort of ladder to the divine, and one is encouraged to go step-by-step, until one reaches *siddhi*, or perfection in mystical experience . . . The

more intense your emotion, the more likely it is to attract Krishna. (284-85)

By modeling our emotions after those of Radha and the cowherd girls, we are able to progress. We learn to feel and picture ourselves as one of them. The more we develop love and longing for Radha-Krishna, the more they respond. It's a reciprocal relationship.

**65. Dr. McDaniel:** . . . *Smarana* literally means 'remembering,' and the process involves a combined method of visualization and meditation. Through the rigors of this method, one becomes first familiar with the intricacies of Krishna's ideal world, and then enters into it. This is Rupa Gosvami's characterization of *raganuga bhakti*. . . . the meditative techniques involved are given by one's guru. In most of these lineages, initiation by a genuine guru is quite important...through the grace of the guru, there's a new birth, in a sense, which bears many shamanic undertones--the death of the old self and the birth of the new. (288-9)

This is the process Lalita Prasad taught me. I offer it in my book and to qualified students. Connection to a teacher and lineage pours grace upon us and opens the door to the spiritual world making us one of Radha-Krishna's transcendental associates in training.

**66. Dr. McDaniel:** . . . Divine madness is not considered to be an aberration, as is

ordinary madness--it expresses the highest religious goal in not only Gaudiya Vaisnava theology but also in certain mystical traditions associated with Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. (293)

This again shows the universal nature of devotion to God-dess. We get a much fuller picture of divinity through interfaith studies. Don't be compartmentalized in your own little view of things without seeing the big picture.

**67. SR:** . . . Even the *Taittiriya Upanishad* includes the famous statement *raso vai sah--'the ultimate reality is rasa, or spiritual/aesthetic experience, it is only this that gives the highest bliss.'*" (p 295)

Developing and refining one's appreciation of spiritual beauty is an important part of the devotional process as we learn to taste the nectar deeply and fully.

**68. Dr. Carney:** . . . Abhinavagupta made the important connection between aesthetic experience and religious transformation . . . Bhoja . . . emphasized the preeminence of the erotic *rasa, sringara-rasa* or *madhura-rasa*. You can see, then, how this whole tradition of aesthetic and religious theory paved the way for Rupa Gosvami, who, in the sixteenth century, developed this *rasa* theory into a theological system of devotion. (297)

Clearly, Rupa's system is based on preexisting, Indian concepts of beauty and its appreciation. Postmodern western concepts of

beauty and the ideal lover certainly differ from ancient Indian ideas. Therefore, I re-imagined Radha-Krishna's pastimes for the present day while maintaining Rupa's structure and spirit.

**69. Dr. Carney:** . . . Vaishnavas--especially the Gaudiyas--developed this notion of erotic love still further, incorporating every aspect of erotic psychology and the rhetorical embellishments of the aesthetic tradition. (301)

Again, the revelations of the Goswamis were based on preexistent cultural mores from the *Kama Sutra*, dramatics, poetics, etc. I translated not only the language, but also the setting, characters, costumes etc. into a western context to facilitate entrance into this spiritual world by western devotees in my *Universalist Radha-Krishnaism*. I began this process for others to build upon.

**70. Dr. Carney:** . . . Just as ordinary lovers spend far more time suffering in the lover's absence than in the beloved's embrace, so the devotees of Krishna possess a love which is purified through separation and yearning for a union which is not possessed. (302)

This is my experience. It is developing the longing for union with Radha-Krishna that counts. When that longing is fulfilled depends on Radha's grace.

**71. Dr. Carney:** . . . This is what *raganuga bhakti* is all about: learning . . . through spiritual discipline one's role in God's play,

how to enter into that role in Krishna *lila* which is one's own original part. Individual life is a play with that ultimate framing drama. (303)

As we develop our role or identity in Radha-Krishna's pastimes, we gradually transfer our consciousness from the outer world to this inner reality, which we cultivate. Our longing and desire to live in our spiritual body with Radha-Krishna eternally engaged in ever new pastimes is what will carry us to perfection when we give up the material body.

**72. Dr. Haberman:** . . . Instead of being something that's reached only through meditative discipline, ultimately understanding *lila* as something removed from this world, it can also be seen on this very plane itself--as non-different from Krishna. Activity in this world is another manifestation of *lila*. . . . I was most interested in *lila-smarana*, because raganuga bhakti sadhana for the most part is understood as *lila-smarana*...Now I am interested in ordinary reality as *lila*. It might be said that this is another side of the tradition, but it's really all over the place. (307)

I experienced a similar shift. My former active, western lifestyle was not very conducive to traditional meditative practices of *lila-smarana*. Now that I am retired and live a semi-secluded life, I do more and have devised my own practices that work for me in this

setting. I still live more in the ordinary world and aspire to see God-dess in everything. Therefore, I embrace panentheism as a more complete theology than theism.

**73. Dr. Haberman:** . . . Once we begin to listen to that particular side of the tradition, we see that the *lila* is not something reached only by rejecting the world; rather this very world is the *lila*. And activity in this world, if it could be perceived correctly, is *lila* . . . The ascetics seem to emphasize the *lila-smarana* tradition, while the householders, naturally, favor . . . seeing *lila* in the here and now, in this world. (308)

I reject the ascetic path as unnatural, unhealthy, and uncondusive to devotion for most Westerners. It is better to live in this world aware of God-dess' presence in everything.

**74. Dr. Haberman:** . . . an ascetic who is sitting off in a hut with his eyes closed to the world and thinking of the divine *lila* is living a very different life than the one who accepts whatever comes, does whatever is to be done, and strives to really see that as *lila*. I think that's where the real difference comes--it's in the kind of lifestyle that is produced from whichever viewpoint one seems to hold. (310)

Most Westerners are incapable of living a strict ascetic lifestyle and do better in married life. Why promote renunciation rather than

being in the world but not of it? We must reclaim the life affirming side of this tradition.

**75. Dr. Haberman:** . . . they are two different paths with a slightly different philosophical bent. Any tradition that calls itself by the philosophical name *acintya bhedabheda* is really setting one up to think about ambiguities in a particular way. It is not that they are ultimately opposing notions, but rather they are opposites that define one another and in some inconceivable way are non-different from one another. (317)

I think it is a matter of emphasis. I practice *manjari sadhana*, as well as I am able, along with seeing God-dess in the world. It's both/and.

**76. Dr. Haberman:** . . . devotion to Radha is really considered to be higher than devotion to Krishna, especially in terms of *manjari* theology . . . the two are non-different. The god or goddess of the Gaudiya tradition is not Krishna, nor is it Radha, but it is really Radha-Krishna. This dual theology is important for the tradition . . . The ideal is one of dynamic equality. (322-3)

This is why I use the term "God-dess" to describe Radha-Krishna. The two are one. For me and others in the *manjari* tradition, Radha is our foremost object of devotion, and we can tap into her infinite emotional experience of love, which is far greater than we can attain independently.



**77. Dr. Huberman . . .** Radha is the Goddess of the Gaudiyas, and they see her everywhere. They have a basis for it though, so there's nothing whatever wrong with it. (331)

This corroborates what was said above.

**78. Dr. Huberman . . .** for the Gaudiyas, even more important than the scriptural tradition, is the event and the living embodiment of Caitanya. . . . Caitanya embodies Radha worshipping Krishna in separation, and this is the highest achievement of *rasa*. (333)

The life of Chaitanya is paradigmatic for his followers. We aspire to enter into his intense mood of love, but of course that is not possible for ordinary people.

**79. SR:** . . . what you have, essentially, is a theology that shows how Radha and Krishna are ultimately everything . . . everything and everyone is, more or less, an expansion of Radha Krishna. (337)

Therefore we may speak about how our pastimes are expansions of Radha-Krishna's pastimes.

**80. Dr. Huberman:** So Radharani is the highest, because she enables Krishna to experience his highest pleasure, and he, in turn, brings Radha the highest pleasure. This is the great symbiotic mystery of the Gaudiya Sampradaya, and it's constantly growing, dynamically, emerging into deeper and deeper realities. . . . So whatever the sectarian emphasis, it has to be understood

that, ultimately, Radha rules in Vrindavana.  
(343-5)  
Jai Radhe! Radhe! Radhe!