

# Thakur Bhaktivinode

## The Harmonist<sup>1</sup> (Sree Sajjanatoshani)

December 1931

Within square brackets and footnotes: Kishordas

Last changed 1 August, 2022

We avail of the opportunity offered by the Anniversary Celebrations of the advent of Thakur Bhaktivinode to reflect on the right method of obtaining those benefits that have been made accessible to humanity by the grace of this great devotee of Krishna. Thakur Bhaktivinode has been specifically kind to those unfortunate persons who are engrossed in mental speculation of all kinds. This is the prevalent malady of the present Age. The other Acharyas who appeared before Thakur Bhaktivinode did not address their discourses so directly to the empiric thinkers. They had been more merciful to those who are naturally disposed to listen to discourses on the Absolute without being dissuaded by the specious arguments of avowed opponents of Godhead.

Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode has taken the trouble of meeting the perverse arguments of mental speculationists by the superior transcendental logic of the Absolute Truth. It is thus possible for the average modern readers to profit by the perusal of his writings. That day is not far distant when the priceless volumes penned by Thakur Bhaktivinode will be reverently translated, by the recipients of his grace, into all the languages of the world.

The writings of Thakur Bhaktivinode provide the golden bridge by which the mental speculationist can safely cross the raging waters of fruitless empiric controversies

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<sup>1</sup> Here and at some other places, "The Harmonist" does not give the name of the author of the article. Many articles were the result of collaboration between Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati and some of his closest disciples, like Ananta Vasudeva, Sundarananda Vidyavinod and Nishi Kanta Sanyal. Most of the time, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati spoke and lectured in Bengali but also in English. Some of his disciples then took notes (some of them knew shorthand), which were worked through and presented to him in the way he was expressing himself, before they were examined by him. Some of his disciples also wrote texts of their own, like Nishi Kanta Sanyal, who wrote his monumental work, *Sri Krsna Caitanya*, which was crucial to Svami Sadananda Dasa after his encounter with Svami Bon in Berlin, 1933. For several years, under the editorship of his Spiritual Master, Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, Prof. Sanyal also conducted "The Harmonist", Gaudiya Math's fortnightly English journal. See also other related articles in this journal, for instance, "Sree Radhika" (Nov. 1932), "Transcendental Amour" (Dec. 1935), and Sanyal's "Spiritual Progress" (Sept. 1934) "Love in Separation" (May 1935) and his booklet, *The Erotic Principle and Unalloyed Devotion*, Gaudiya Math, 1932 (and in "The Harmonist", Nov. 1928).

that trouble the peace of those who choose to trust in their guidance for finding the Truth. As soon as the sympathetic reader is in a position to appreciate the sterling quality of Thakur Bhaktivinode's philosophy the entire vista of the revealed literatures of the world will automatically open out to his reclaimed vision.

There have, however, already arisen serious misunderstandings regarding the proper interpretation of the life and teachings of Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode. Those who suppose they understand the meaning of his message without securing the guiding grace of the Acarya are disposed to unduly favour the methods of empiric study of his writings. There are persons who have got by heart almost everything that he wrote without being able to catch the least particle of his meaning. Such study cannot benefit those who are not prepared to act up to the instructions lucidly conveyed by his words. There is no honest chance of missing the warnings of Thakur Bhaktivinode. Those, therefore, who are misled by the perusal of his writings are led astray by their own obstinate perversity in sticking to the empiric course which they prefer to cherish against his explicit warnings. Let these unfortunate persons look more carefully into their own hearts for the cause of their misfortunes.

The personal service of the pure devotee is essential for understanding the spiritual meaning of the words of Thakur Bhaktivinode. The Editor of this Journal [Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati], originally started by Thakur Bhaktivinode, has been trying to draw the attention of all followers of Thakur Bhaktivinode to this all-important point of his teachings. It is not necessary to try to place ourselves on a footing of equality with Thakur Bhaktivinode. We are not likely to benefit by any mechanical imitation of any practices of Thakur Bhaktivinode on the opportunist principle that they may be convenient for us to adopt. The Guru is not an erring mortal whose activities can be understood by the fallible reason of unreclaimed<sup>2</sup> humanity. There is an eternally impassable line of demarcation between the Saviour and the saved. Those who are really saved can alone know this. Thakur Bhaktivinode belongs to the category of the spiritual world-teachers who eternally occupy the superior position.

The present Editor has all along felt it his paramount duty to try to clear up the meaning of the life and teachings of Thakur Bhaktivinode by the method of submissive listening<sup>3</sup> to the Transcendental Sound from the lips of the pure devotee. The Guru who realises the transcendental meaning of all sounds, is in a position to serve the Absolute by the direction of the Absolute conveyed through every sound. The Transcendental Sound is Godhead, the mundane sound is non-Godhead. All sound has got these opposite

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<sup>2</sup> "Not converted". Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur used to say that we must make a 180° turn, i.e., from being turned away from the Centre of all Being to being turned towards this very Centre, that we must turn our faces, not our backs, towards the Spiritual Sun, which is Shri Krishna.

<sup>3</sup> To listen with rapt attention, in a spirit of serving, because one wants to *serve*, not to *know* in order to satisfy one's thirst for knowledge or to *experience* in order to quench one's thirst for experiences.

aptitudes. All sound reveals its Divine face to the devotee and only presents its deluding aspect to the empiric pedant. The devotee talks apparently the same language as the deluded empiric pedant who had got by heart the vocabulary of the Scriptures. But notwithstanding apparent identity of performance, the one has no access to the reality while the other is absolutely free from all delusion.

Those who repeat the teachings of Thakur Bhaktivinode from memory do not necessarily understand the meaning of the words they mechanically repeat. Those who can pass an empiric examination regarding the contents of his writings are not necessarily also self-realised souls. They may not at all know the real meaning of the words they have learnt by the method of empiric study. Take for example the Name “Krishna”. Every reader of Thakur Bhaktivinode’s works must be aware that the Name manifests Himself on the lips of His serving devotees although He is inaccessible to our mundane senses. It is one thing to pass the examination by reproducing this true conclusion from the writings of Thakur Bhaktivinode and quite another matter to realise the Nature of the Holy Name of Krishna by the process conveyed by the words.

Thakur Bhaktivinode did not want us to go to the clever mechanical reciter of the mundane sound for obtaining access to the Transcendental Name of Krishna. Such a person may be fully equipped with all the written arguments in explanation of the nature of the Divine Name. But if we listen to all these arguments from the dead source the words will only increase our delusion. The very same words coming from the lips of the devotee will have the diametrically opposite effect. Our empiric judgment can never grasp the difference between the two performances. The devotee is always right. The non-devotee in the shape of the empiric pedant is always and necessarily wrong. In the one case there is always present the Substantive Truth and nothing but the Substantive Truth. In the other case there is present the apparent or misleading hypothesis and nothing but un-truth. The wording may have the same external appearance in both cases. The identical verses of the Scriptures may be recited by the devotee and the non-devotee, may be apparently misquoted by the devotee but the corresponding values of the two processes remain always categorically different. The devotee is right even when he apparently misquotes, the non-devotee is wrong even when he quotes correctly the very words, chapter and verse of the Scriptures.

It is not empiric wisdom that is the object of quest of the devotee. Those who read the scriptures for gathering empiric wisdom will be pursuing the wild goose chase. There are not a few dupes of their empiric Scriptural erudition. These dupes have their admiring under-dupes. But the mutual admiration society of dupes does not escape, by the mere weight of their number, the misfortunes due to the deliberate pursuit of the wrong course in accordance with the suggestions of our lower selves.

What are the Scriptures? They are nothing but the record by the pure devotees of the Divine Message appearing on the lips of the pure devotees. The Message conveyed by the devotees is the same in all ages. The words of the devotees are ever identical with

the Scriptures. Any meaning of the Scriptures that belittles the function of the devotee who is the original communicant of the Divine Message contradicts its own claim to be heard. Those who think that the Sanskrit language in its lexicographical sense is the language of the Divinity are as deluded as those who hold that the Divine Message is communicable through any other spoken dialects. All languages simultaneously express and hide the Absolute. The mundane face of all languages hides the Truth. The Transcendental face of all sound expresses nothing but the Absolute. The pure devotee is the speaker of the Transcendental language. The Transcendental Sound makes His appearance on the lips of His pure devotee. This is the direct, unambiguous appearance of Divinity. On the lips of non-devotees the Absolute always appears in His deluding aspect. To the pure devotee the Absolute reveals Himself under all circumstances. To the conditioned soul, if he is disposed to listen in a truly submissive spirit, the language of the pure devotee can alone impart the knowledge of the Absolute. The conditioned soul mistakes the deluding for the real aspect when he chooses to lend his ear to the non-devotee. This is the reason why the conditioned soul is warned to avoid all association with non-devotees.

Thakur Bhaktivinode is acknowledged by all his sincere followers as possessing the above powers of the pure devotee of Godhead. His words have to be received from the lips of a pure devotee. If his words are listened from the lips of a non-devotee they will certainly deceive. If his works are studied in the light of one's own worldly experience their meaning will refuse to disclose itself to such readers. His works belong to the class of the eternal revealed literature of the world and must be approached for their right understanding through their exposition by the pure devotee. If no help from the pure devotee is sought the works of Thakur Bhaktivinode will be grossly misunderstood by their readers. The attentive reader of those works will find that he is always directed to throw himself upon the mercy of the pure devotee if he is not to remain unwarrantably self-satisfied by the deluding results of his wrong method of study.

The writings of Thakur Bhaktivinode are valuable because they demolish all empiric objections against accepting the only method of approaching the Absolute in the right way. They cannot and were never intended to give access to the Absolute without help from the pure devotee of Krishna. They direct the sincere enquirer of the Truth, as all the revealed scriptures do, to the pure devotee of Krishna to learn about Him by submitting to listen with an open mind to the Transcendental Sound appearing on His lips. Before we open any of the books penned by Thakur Bhaktivinode we should do well to reflect a little on the attitude, with which, as the indispensable pre-requisite, to approach its study. It is by neglecting to remember this fundamental principle that the empiric pedants find themselves so hopelessly puzzled in their vain endeavour to reconcile the statements of the different texts of the Scriptures. The same difficulty is already in process of overtaking many of the so-called followers of Thakur Bhaktivinode and for the same reason.

The person to whom the Acarya is pleased to transmit his power is alone in a position to convey the Divine Message. This constitutes the underlying principle of the line of succession of the spiritual teachers. The Acarya thus authorised has no other duty than that of delivering intact the message received from all his predecessors. There is no difference between the pronouncements of one Acarya and another. All of them are perfect mediums for the appearance of the Divinity in the Form of the Transcendental Name Who is identical with His Form, Quality, Activity and Paraphernalia.

The Divinity is Absolute Knowledge. Absolute Knowledge has the character of indivisible Unity. One particle of the Absolute Knowledge is capable of revealing all the potency of the Divinity. Those who want to understand the contents of the volumes penned by the piece-meal acquisitive method applicable to deluding knowledge available to the mind on the mundane plane, are bound to be self-deceived. Those who are sincere seekers of the Truth are alone eligible to find Him, in and through the proper method of His quest.

In order to be put on the track of the Absolute, listening to the words of the pure devotee is absolutely necessary. The spoken word of the Absolute is the Absolute. It is only the Absolute Who can give Himself away to the constituents of His power. The Absolute appears to the listening ear of the conditioned soul in the form of the Name on the lips of the sadhu. This is the key to the whole position.

The words of Thakur Bhaktivinode direct the empiric pedant to discard his wrong method and inclination on the threshold of the real quest of the Absolute. If the pedant still chooses to carry his errors into the Realm of the Absolute Truth he only marches by a deceptive bye-path into the regions of darker ignorance by his arrogant study of the scriptures. The method offered by Thakur Bhaktivinode is identical with the object of the quest. The method is not really grasped except by the grace of the pure devotee. The arguments, indeed, are these. But they can only corroborate, but can never be a substitute for, the word from the living source of the Truth who is no other than the pure devotee of Krishna, the concrete Personal Absolute.

Thakur Bhaktivinode's greatest gift to the world consists in this; that he has brought about the appearance of those pure devotees who are, at present, carrying on the movement of unalloyed devotion to the Feet of Shree Krishna by their own wholtime spiritual service of the Divinity. The purity of the soul is only analogously describable by the resources of the mundane language. The highest ideal of empiric morality is no better than the grossest wickedness to the Transcendental perfect purity of the bonafide devotee of the Absolute. The word 'morality' itself is a mischievous misnomer when it is applied to any quality of the conditioned soul. The hypocritical contentment with a negative attitude is part and parcel of the principle of undiluted immorality.

Those who pretend to recognise the Divine Mission of Thakur Bhaktivinode without aspiring to the unconditional service of those pure souls who really follow the teachings of the Thakur by the method enjoined by the scriptures and explained by Thakur

Bhaktivinode in a way that is so eminently suited to the requirements of the sophisticated mentality of the present Age, only deceive themselves and their willing victims by their hypocritical professions and performances. These persons must not be confounded with the bonafide members of the flock.

Thakur Bhaktivinode has predicted the consummation of religious unity of the world by the appearance of the only universal church which bears the eternal designation of the Brahma Sampradaya. He has given mankind the blessed assurance that all Theistic churches will shortly merge in the one eternal spiritual community by the grace of the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna Chaitanya. The spiritual community is not circumscribed by the conditions of time and space, race and nationality. Mankind had been looking forward to this far-off Divine Event through the Long Ages. Thakur Bhaktivinode has made the conception available in its practicable spiritual form to the open-minded empiricist who is prepared to undergo the process of enlightenment. The key stone of the Arch has been laid which will afford the needed shelter to all awakened animation under its ample encircling arms. Those who would thoughtlessly allow their hollow pride of race, pseudo-knowledge or pseudo-virtue to stand in the way of this long hoped for consummation, would have to thank only themselves for not being incorporated in the spiritual society of all pure souls.

These plain words need not be misrepresented, by arrogant persons who are full of the vanity of empiric ignorance, as the pronouncements of aggressive sectarianism. The aggressive pronouncement of the concrete Truth is the crying necessity of the moment for silencing the aggressive propaganda of specific untruths that is being carried on all over the world by the preachers of empiric contrivances for the amelioration of the hard lot of conditioned souls. The empiric propaganda clothes itself in the language of negative abstraction for deluding those who are engrossed in the selfish pursuit of worldly enjoyment.

But there is a positive and concrete function of the pure soul which should not be perversely confounded with any utilitarian form of worldly activity. Mankind stands in need of that positive spiritual function of which the hypocritical impersonalists are in absolute ignorance. The positive function of the soul harmonises the claims of extreme selfishness with those of extreme self-abnegation in the society of pure souls even in this mundane world. In its concrete realisable form the function is perfectly inaccessible to the empiric understanding. Its imperfect and misleading conception alone is available by the study of the Scriptures to the conditioned soul that is not helped by the causeless grace of the pure devotees of Godhead.