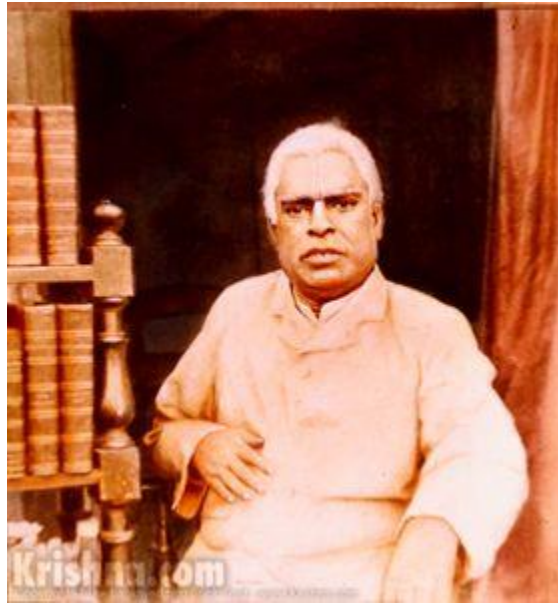


# The Life of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur



Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura (1838-1914) is a prominent preceptor *acharya* in our succession of spiritual masters and disciples coming from Lord Krishna. He was a pioneering spiritual leader, a householder, a magistrate working in colonial India under the British rule, a prolific preacher, writer, and poet. He wrote volumes of books reintroducing the pure teachings of Lord Chaitanya at a time when those teachings had practically become lost. He composed hundreds of devotional songs glorifying Krishna to uplift the consciousness of the suffering people of this world. He corresponded with philosophers, theologians, leaders, scholars, and professors of his time and sent books, including *The Life and Precepts of Lord Chaitanya*, to university libraries in foreign countries, planting the seeds for a worldwide movement of Krishna consciousness. Bhaktivinoda Thakura discovered and excavated the birthplace of Lord Chaitanya. Along with his devoted wife, Bhagavati Devi, he raised ten children, including the illustrious Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura, who would become a great spiritual leader in his own time and the spiritual master of ISKCON's founder-*acharya*, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Above all, Bhaktivinoda Thakura taught devotion to Krishna by his personal example. His life story, excerpted below, demonstrates a tremendous amount of courage, character, and perseverance in the face of many difficulties and gives hope to those of us who may be wondering just how to find the time to serve Lord Sri Krishna, His holy names, and His devotees in our ever so busy lives.

In many ways, aspiring devotees of Krishna today owe a significant debt to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura for charting the course and laying the foundation for the modern-day Krishna consciousness movement.

Once, as he looked out from his window across the river towards the birthplace of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Bhaktivinoda Thakura had a vision that people from all nations would soon come together there in harmony through the blissful chanting of the holy names of Krishna, *sankirtan*.

His great-grand-disciple, Srila Prabhupada, who humbly and fearlessly spread Krishna consciousness to the far corners of the world, thought it significant that he was born in 1896, the year the Thakura sent copies of *The Life and Precepts of Lord Chaitanya* to universities across the oceans.

### **Chronology of the Life of Bhaktivinoda Thakura**

Adapted from *The Seventh Goswami*, by Rupa Vilasa Dasa.

1500 AD. The *avatar* of Krishna, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, inaugurated the Hare Krishna Movement in Bengal, India. The movement, based on ancient Sanskrit texts of devotion to Krishna like the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, spread all over India within a short time. It popularized *sankirtan*, the congregational chanting of the *maha-mantra* - Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare - as the practical means of God realization and the panacea for the miseries of this age of materialism.

1750. Two centuries later, the influence of the Hare Krishna movement had waned. Sects of pseudo devotees, such as the *sahajiyas* and similar groups, had become prominent. Professing love of Godhead but acting in base, immoral ways, these groups brought disrepute upon the pure movement begun by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

1838. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, who was named Kedarnatha Datta by his parents, was born in opulent circumstances in Biranagara (Ulagrama) in the district of Nadia, West Bengal. He was the seventh son of Raja Krishnananda Datta, a great devotee of Lord Nityananda. He would be known as *daitya-kulera prahlada*, "Prahlada in the family of non-devotees," because Vaishnavism (the worship of Vishnu or Krishna) was not very much respected in his family.

His childhood was spent at the mansion of his maternal grandfather in Biranagara. His environment at this time was very opulent. He got his elementary education at the primary school started by his grandmother. Later he attended an English school in Krishnanagar started by the king of Nadia. He left that school when his older brother died of cholera.

1849. When he was 11 years old, his father passed away. Subsequently, the grant of land that had been conferred upon his grandmother changed owners, and the family fell into poverty.

1850. When he was just twelve, his mother arranged his future marriage to the five-year-old daughter of Madhusudana Mitra Mahasaya, a resident of Ranaghata. Around this time his uncle, Kasiprasada Ghosh Mahasaya, who had mastered English under the British education, schooled young Kedaranatha Datta at his home in Calcutta. Kasiprasada was a central figure in the literary circles of his time, being the editor of the *Hindu Intelligencer*. Kedaranatha assisted his uncle with selecting appropriate articles to publish in the newspaper, studied his books and frequented the public library. He later attended Calcutta's Hindu Charitable Institution high school.

1856. At the age of 18, Kedaranatha Datta entered college in Calcutta. He started writing extensively in English and Bengali. He studied English literature and taught speech-making to a person who later became a well-known orator in the British Parliament. Between the years 1857 and 1858 he composed a two-part English epic entitled *The Poriade*, which he planned to complete in 12 books. These two books described the life of Porus, who met Alexander the Great.

He was very taken by Christian theology, regarding it more interesting and less offensive than Hindu monism, the *advaita-vedanta* of Sankaracharya. He would spend hours comparing the writings of Channing, Theodore Parker, Emerson, and Newman. At the British-Indian Society he gave a lecture on the evolution of matter through the material mode of goodness. Dvijendranatha Thakur was Kedaranatha Datta's best friend during these scholastic years. He assisted Kedaranatha Datta in his studies of Western religious literature. Affectionately, Kedaranatha Datta used to call Devendranatha Thakura *baro dada*, or "big brother."

1858. Kedaranatha Datta returned to Biranagara and found his native village ruined and deserted. A cholera epidemic had killed the inhabitants, including most of his relatives. He returned to Calcutta with the two surviving members of the family, his mother and paternal grandmother. Acting on the last wishes of his grandfather, he undertook a pilgrimage and traveled to all the monasteries and temples in the state of Orissa.

As a young householder Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura began to consider the question of the means of his livelihood. He was not interested in business, as he'd seen how the apparent "necessary dishonesty" of the trade world had morally weakened the merchant class. He decided instead to become a school teacher, establishing a school for English education in the village of Kendrapara, Orissa. After some time, he went to Puri and passed a teachers examination. He got a teacher's post in a Cuttack school and later became headmaster of a school in Bhadraka and then in Medinipura. His dedicated work was noted by the school board authorities.

1860. In Bhadraka, his first son Annada Prasada (Acyutananda) was born. Unfortunately, Kedaranatha's wife died during childbirth. Sometime later, he married Bhagavati Devi.

He published a book in English that described all the ashramas and temples in the state of Orissa, which he had visited earlier.

During his post as headmaster of the Medinipura high school, Kedaranatha Datta looked into the various religious sects, their philosophies and practices. He could see that people in general were taking religion cheaply. He came to understand the unique importance of the *sankirtan* movement, spreading love of God through chanting of His names, that had been established in Bengal by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Unfortunately, at that time, His movement was not well-represented. Kedarnatha Datta made an onslaught against those who were polluting Lord Chaitanya's teachings and who had, mostly because of their boldness, been seen by the public as representing the Gaudiya Vaishnava lineage (followers of Vishnu or Krishna coming in line from Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who appeared in Bengal, formerly known as Gauda-desha).

1861. Kedaranatha Datta accepted the post of deputy magistrate in the government of Bengal. Later, after seeing the corruption of the government workers, he became collectorate officer. He established an organization called the Bhratri Samaj, wrote an English book called *Our Wants*, constructed a home in Ranaghata, and composed two novel poems in Bengali: *Vijinagrama* (deserted village) and *Sannyasi*, which received praise from reviewers.

1866. Kedaranatha took the position of deputy register with the power of a deputy collector and deputy magistrate in the district of Chapara. He became fluent in Persian and Urdu. He successfully settled disputes between tea farmers and helped secure public aid to build a school for teaching *nyaya-shastra*, sacred texts that ascertain knowledge and truth through logic and argument. He was transferred to Purniya, where he took charge of the government and judicial departments.

1868. He became the deputy magistrate in Dinajapur, West Bengal, the highest rank in the government that could be held by an Indian person during the British rule. At this time he was finally able to procure rare copies of the sacred texts *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, describing the pastimes of Krishna and His associates, and *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, the biography of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He read *Chaitanya-charitamrita* repeatedly. His faith increased until he was absorbed in the sacred text all day and night. He began incessantly submitting heartfelt prayers for the Lord's mercy. He came to understand the supreme majesty and power of the Absolute Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna, and His incarnation in this age, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He published a song about Lord Chaitanya entitled "Saccidananda-premalankara."

1869. While serving as deputy magistrate under the government of Bengal in Dinajapur, he delivered a speech in the form of a treatise he had written on the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* to a large congregation of prominent men of letters from many parts of India and England.

He was transferred to Camparana, during which time his second son, Radhika Prasada, was born. In Camparana, people used to worship a ghost in a banyan tree. The ghost had the power to influence the mind of the local judge to decide in the favor of the worshiper. Sri Kedaranatha Datta advised a local scholar to read *Srimad-Bhagavatam* under the tree continuously, day and night. After one month the tree

crashed to the ground, and many people found renewed faith in the message of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

From Camparana he moved to the holy city of Jagannatha Puri, Orissa, which gladdened his heart to no end.

1873. Near the capital of Orissa, in the town of Kamanala, there lived a mystic named Bisakisena, who would lean into a fire, then return to an erect sitting posture; in this way he'd rock back and forth over the flames. By his acquired mystic powers, he could also produce fire from his head. He had two companions going by the names of Brahma and Shiva; he claimed to be Maha-Vishnu. Together they were the divine trinity, the creator, maintainer, and destroyer of the universe described in the sacred scriptures. Some of the lesser kings of Orissa came under his sway and were providing funds for the construction of a temple. They also sent him women. Bisakisena declared he'd drive off the British from ruling Orissa and would himself become king. He published such statements, which were circulated all around Orissa. The British thought him a revolutionary for speaking out against the British rule, so the district governor of Bengal drew up arrest orders. However, nobody dared to act upon these orders, fearing Bisakisena's mystic powers.

Mr. Ravenshaw, district commissioner for Orissa, requested Sri Kedaranatha Datta to bring Bisakisena to justice. Sri Kedaranatha Datta went personally to see Bisakisena. The yogi showed some powers that would normally scare off an ordinary man, and informed Kedaranatha Datta that he knew well who he was, but that since he (Bisakisena) was the Lord, Kedaranatha better not interfere with him. That was enough for Sri Kedaranatha Datta, who replied by acknowledging Bisakisena's accomplishments in yoga and *tantra* and requesting him to come to Puri, where he could receive the blessings of Jagannatha, the famous deity of Krishna there. Bisakisena haughtily replied, "Why should I come to see Jagannatha? He's only a hunk of wood; I am the Supreme in person." Sri Kedaranatha Datta became furious. He arrested the rogue, brought him to Puri and threw him in jail, where he was guarded by 3 dozen constables and 72 policemen.

The fearless Kedaranatha Datta tried Bisakisena in Puri. The trial lasted 18 days, during which thousands of people whom he had control over gathered outside the courtroom, demanding Bisakisena's release. On day six of the trial Kedaranatha Datta's daughter Kadambini became seriously ill and nearly died. Sri Kedaranatha Datta knew it was the power of the tantric yogi at work. He remarked, "Yes, let us all die, but this rascal must be punished." The next day in court the yogi announced he'd shown his power and would show much more. He suggested that Kedaranatha Datta should release him at once or face worse miseries. On the last day of the trial Kedaranatha Datta himself became ill from high fever and suffered exactly as his daughter had. But the determined Kedaranatha pronounced the man guilty and sentenced him to 18 months for political conspiracy. When Bisakisena was being readied for jail, the district medical officer cut off all his hair. Apparently, the yogi drew power from his long hair. He hadn't eaten or drunk during the whole trial, so he fell to the floor like a dead man and had to be taken to jail by stretcher. After three months he was moved to the central jail at Midnapura, where he took poison and died.

In Puri, Sri Kedaranatha Datta studied *Srimad-Bhagavatam* with the commentary of Sridhara Swami. He also copied out in longhand the *Sat-Sandarbha* of Jiva Goswami and made a special study of Rupa Goswami's *Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu*.

1874-93. During these years, Bhaktivinoda Thakura spent much time in seclusion chanting the holy names, though he still executed his worldly duties perseveringly. He wrote several books in Sanskrit, including *Sri Krishna Samhita*, *Tattva-Sutram*, and *Tattva-Viveka*. He wrote many books in Bengali, such as *Kalyana-kalpataru*. In 1874 he composed *Datta-kaustubha* in Sanskrit.

While in Puri he established a Vaishnava discussion society known as the Bhagavat-Samsat in the Jaganatha-Vallabha gardens where the saint Sri Ramananda Raya (a contemporary and devotee of Lord Chaitanya) had held his worship. All the prominent Vaishnavas at the time joined this group except for one Raghunatha dasa Babaji. He thought that Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was unauthorized, as he did not wear the customary religious symbols of neck beads (*kanthi-mala*) or clay marking (*tilaka*) on his head. Moreover, the Babaji advised other Vaishnavas to avoid Srila Bhaktivinoda

Thakura's association. Soon thereafter, Raghunatha dasa Babaji contracted a deadly illness. In a dream, Lord Jagannatha appeared to him and told him to pray for the mercy of Bhaktivinoda Thakura if he at all wanted release from the illness and death. He did so. Bhaktivinoda Thakura gave him special medicines and cured him. At this time Raghunatha dasa Babaji gained awareness of Bhaktivinoda Thakura's exalted spiritual position.

Sri Swarupa Dasa Babaji, who performed his worship (*bhajana*) at Satasana near the ocean in Puri, showed much affection for Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and gave him profound instructions and insights from his realizations on the chanting of the holy name.

Charan Dasa Babaji preached and printed books advising that one should chant the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* in personal meditation (*japa*), but "Nitai Gaura Radhe Syama Hare Krishna Hare Rama" in public *kirtan*. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura preached long and hard to him, trying to convincing him to stop spreading this unauthorized mantra. Eventually Charan Dasa Babaji came to his senses and begged forgiveness from Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, admitting his fault. Six months later Charan Dasa Babaji went mad and died in great distress.

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was one of the foremost devotional scholars of his time, yet he always humbly presented himself as the insignificant messenger of the Lord, as we can note from the following passage:

*"The way how I got the inspiration to compile this book is a Divine Mystery which I felt not proper from my part to disclose as it might be bridging spiritual conceit, but subsequently I realize that it would be an undoing to my spiritual master which might stand as an obstacle on the path of my spiritual progress. Therefore without any shame I record the fact that, while under the benediction of my Guru Sri Bapin Behari Goswami, who belonged to the great heritage of Thakur Vamshibadananda, a faithful follower of my Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, I was deeply penetrating upon Srimad-Bhagavatam. One day in a vision Sri Svarup-Damodara, the right hand personal adherent of Lord Sri Chaitanya, instructed me to compile the slokas of Srimad-Bhagavatam in accordance with the principles of sambandha, abhidheya and prayojana*



*as laid down by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu - so that the book will read with an easy understanding with great interest and delight by the loving devotees of the Lord. Sri Svarupa-Damodar Prabhu further guided me by giving a wonderful explanation of the first sloka of Srimad-Bhagavatam and also showed me how I have to explain the slokas under the light of Gaudiya-Vaishnava philosophy."* –Bhaktivinoda Thakura (from *Sri Srimad Bhagavata Arka Marichimala*)

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura became manager of the Jagannatha Puri Temple complex. He used his government powers to establish regularity in the worship of the deity. In the temple courtyard he established a Bhakti Mandapa where daily discourses of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* were held. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura would spend long hours discussing Krishna and chanting the holy name, especially at Tota-Gopinatha Mandir, the tomb of the great saint Haridasa Thakura, the sacred Siddha Bakula tree, and the Gambhira temple. He made notes on the *Vedanta-sutra*, and those notes were used by Sri Syamalala Goswami when he published Baladeva Vidyabhusana's *Govinda Bhasya* commentary on the *Vedanta-sutra*.

1874. Near the Jagannatha-vallabha gardens, in a large house adjacent to the Narayana Chata Matha, the fourth son of Bhaktivinoda Thakura was born, answering his prayer for the Lord "to send a ray of Vishnu" to preach the message of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu all over the world. He was named Bimala Prasada, and would later be known as the great Vaishnava spiritual leader and scholar Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada, the spiritual master of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

When Bimala Prasada was six months old, Lord Jagannatha's cart stopped in front of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's house in Puri for three days during the procession. Bhaktivinoda asked his wife Bhagavati Devi to bring the child to view and receive the blessings of Lord Jagannatha. As she placed the child before the Lord, a garland from the Lord fell and encircled the baby boy, and the first-grains ceremony was performed at that time, with sacred food (*prasada*) from Lord Jagannatha. Bimala Prasada stayed in Puri for ten months after his birth and then moved to Bengal, where his infancy was spent at Ranaghat hearing topics of Sri Krishna from his mother.

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur and his wife Bhagavati Devi were orthodox and virtuous; they never allowed their children to eat anything other than *prasada*, sacred food prepared for and offered first to the Lord, nor to associate with bad company. One day, when Bimala Prasada was still a small child of no more than four years, his father mildly rebuked him for eating a mango not yet duly offered to Lord Krishna. Bimala Prasada, although only a child, considered himself an offender to the Lord and vowed never to eat mangoes again. This was a vow that he would follow throughout this life.

By the time Bimala Prasada was seven years old, he had memorized the entire *Bhagavad-gita* and could even explain its verses, giving wonderful purports. His father then began training him in proofreading and printing, in conjunction with the publishing of the Vaishnava magazine *Sajjana Tosani*.

At this time, Bhaktivinoda Thakura discovered that the king of Puri had misappropriated eighty thousand rupees. This money belonged to the temple, so Bhaktivinoda Thakura forced the king to offer Lord Jagannatha meals 52 times daily in retribution. This diminished the money quickly. The king was furious and began, with the help of 50 pundits, a 30-day *tantric* ritual sacrifice meant for killing Bhaktivinoda Thakura. When the last oblations were poured into the sacrificial fire, it was the king's son who died, not the pure-hearted Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura.

1878. Bhaktivinoda Thakura left Puri, returned to Bengal and saw Navadwip, Shantipura, and Kalana. He was put in charge of the Mahisarekha subdivision in Haora. After that he was transferred to Bhadraka, and later was made head of the Naraila subdivision in the Yashohan district. While in Naraila, his two famous books *Sri Krishna-samhita* and *Krishna-kalpataru* were published. These two works caught the attention of many of India's pundits and educated men. In a letter dated April 16, 1880, Dr. Reinhold Rost wrote:

*"By representing Krishna's character and his worship in a more sublime and transcendental light than has hitherto been the custom to regard him, you have rendered an essential service to your co-religionists..."*

1877-78. In Ranaghata, Varada Prasada, and Viraja Prasada were born, the fifth and sixth sons of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and Bhagavati Devi.

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura took formal *diksha* initiation from Vipin Bihari Goswami, descended from the Jahnava family of Baghnapura. Around this time, his seventh son, Lalita Prasada, was born at Ranaghata.

Many people had adopted Vaishnavism but they could not tell who was a Vaishnava and who was not. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura gave them shelter and instructed them on this matter most exactly.

Once Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and his son Bimala Prasada went to see Bhaktivinoda's guru, Vipin Bihari Goswami.

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's dealings with his *diksha* (initiating) guru were always exemplary. Bhaktivinoda always played the humble disciple. Once, in the presence of young Bimala Prasada, Bhaktivinoda Thakura bowed down and paid his respectful obeisances to his guru. Vipin Bihari Goswami replied by placing his feet on the Thakura's head. For the young, fiery Bimala Prasada, this was too much. It was one thing that his father had accepted him as his formal initiating spiritual master, but this was going too far. Bimala Prasada was only seven years old at the time, but when Bhaktivinoda Thakura left the room, leaving the two of them alone, Bimala Prasada decided to set things straight:

*"You are acting like a big, big guru and you place your feet on the heads of those who you don't know. If you knew who the Thakura is you would not do it. But you do not know. My father is a great exalted nitya siddha eternal associate of Sri Radha and Krishna who has come here to fulfill Their mission. Do you think that you are so advanced that you can place your feet on the head of such a person? I think not. You have proven yourself to be a kanistha adhikari (neophyte) by not being able to distinguish between those who are advanced and those who are less advanced, therefore I suggest that you desist from this practice any further."*

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura then re-entered the room and the conversation changed. Later that day, Vipin Bihari Goswami mentioned to Bhaktivinoda, "Your son is bold to the point of being rude." Later Thakura Bhaktivinoda found out about the conversation and used to jokingly glorify his exalted son in front of his friends, saying, "He is so fearless that he even chastised my guru Vipin Bihari Goswami."

1881. Bhaktivinoda Thakura began publishing *Sajjana Toshani*, his Vaishnava journal. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura had previously pilgrimaged to Kasi, Prayaga, Mathura, and Vrindavana (Vraja Mandal) in 1866. At the close of his stay in Naraila he desired to again see the land of Vraja. He took three months for this purpose. While there, he met Srila Jagannatha Dasa Babaji, who would move every six months between Navadvipa and Vrindavana. Meeting him, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura accepted him as his eternally worshipping *shiksha* (instructing) guru.

During his pilgrimage at this time he dealt with a gang of criminals known as the Kanjharas who robbed and killed pilgrims; he gave evidence to the government, and a commission was formed to wipe out this scourge.

From Vrindavana he went to Calcutta and bought a house at 181 Maniktala Street, now called Ramasha Datta Street, near Bidana Park. He started daily worship of Sri Giridhari, the transcendental form of Krishna who appeared in the form of Govardhan Hill, and called the house Bhakti-bhavan. He was appointed head of the subdivision of Barasa.

In the course of excavating for the construction of the Bhakti-bhavan, a deity of Kurmadeva was unearthed. After initiating his seven-year old son in the practice of deity worship, Bhaktivinoda entrusted Bimala with the service of the deity of Kurmadeva, the Lord's tortoise incarnation.

The well-known novelist Bankim Chandra met Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura at Barasa. Bankim Chandra had written a book about Krishna and showed it to Bhaktivinoda Thakura, who preached to Bankim Chandra for four days, taking little food and hardly any sleep. The result was that Bankim Chandra changed his ideas (which were mundane speculations about Krishna) and his book to conform with the teachings of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

1884. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was appointed the senior deputy magistrate of Serampore, where he admitted Bimala Prasad into the Serampore High School. When Bimala was a student in class five, he invented a new method of shorthand named

Bicanto. During this period he took lessons in mathematics and astrology from Pandita Mahesacandra Cudamoni. However, he preferred to read devotional books rather than the school texts.

1886. During the last year of his stay at Barasat, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura published an edition of the *Bhagavad-gita* with the Sanskrit commentary of Srila Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura, which he translated into Bengali. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura had undertaken this task at the request of Babu Sarada Carana Mitra, ex-judge of the Calcutta High Commission. Sriman Bankima Candra wrote the preface, acknowledging his own indebtedness to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura; he noted that all Bengali readers would be indebted to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura for his saintly work.

From Barasat, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was transferred to Sriramapur. He visited the residence of Uddharana Datta Thakur, a great associate of Lord Nityananda, at Saptagram. At Khanakula he visited the place of Abhirama Thakur, and saw the place of another great devotee of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Vasu Ramananda, at Kulinagrama.

At Sriramapura he composed and published his masterly *Sri Caitanya Siksamrta*, and also the *Vaisnava-siddhanta-mala*, *Prema-pradipa*, and *Manah-siksa*. He was also publishing his *Sajjana Toshani* journal on a regular basis. In Calcutta he set up the Sri Chaitanya Yantra, a printing press at the Bhakti-Bhavan, upon which he printed Maladhara's *Sri Krsna-vijaya* and his own *Amnaya-sutra* and the *Chaitanyopanishad* of the Atharva Veda.

Finding the *Chaitanyopanishad* was a difficult task. Hardly anyone in Bengal had heard of it. Consequently Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura traveled to many places in its search. Finally, a devoted Vaishnava pundit named Madhusudana dasa sent him an old copy. Bhaktivinoda Thakura wrote a Sanksrit commentary on the book and called it *Sri Chaitanya Charanamrita*. Madhusudana Dasa Mahasaya translated the verses into Bengali. This translation was called *Amrita-bindhu*.

In Calcutta Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura started the Sri Visva-Vaishnava Sabha, dedicated to the preaching of pure bhakti as taught by Lord Chaitanya. To publicize the

work of the society, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura published a small booklet entitled *Visva-Vaisnava-kalpatavi*.

He also published his own edition of the *Sri Chaitanya-charitamrita*, with his *Amrita-prabhava Bhasya* commentary. He introduced the Caitanyabda, or Caitanya-era, calendar and gave assistance to the propagation of the *Caitanya Panjika*, which established the annual feast day of Gaura Purnima, celebrating the appearance of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

He lectured and gave readings on books like the *Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu (Nectar of Devotion)* of Srila Rupa Goswami in various Vaishnava societies. He published in the *Hindu Herald*, an English periodical, a detailed account of Sri Chaitanya's life. It was at this time that the learned Vaishnavas recognized Kedarnatha Datta and gave him the honorary title of Bhaktivinoda Thakura.

1887. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura resolved to quit government service and go to Vrindavana with Bhaktibhringa Mahasaya for the rest of his life. One night in Tarakeswara, while still in government service, he had a dream in which Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu appeared to him and spoke. "You will certainly go to Vrindavana, but first there is some service you must perform in Navadvipa [Lord Chaitanya's birth place], so what will you do about that?" When the Lord disappeared, Thakura awoke.

Bhaktibhringa Mahasaya, hearing of this dream, advised Bhaktivinoda to apply for a transfer to Krishnanagar, near Navadvipa. He did, even turning down offers of personal assistanceship to the chief commissioner of Assam and the seat of the minister of Tripura State. He also tried to retire at this time, but his application was denied. Finally he arranged for a mutual exchange of personnel: himself for Babu Radha Madhava Vasu, deputy magistrate of Krishnanagar.

During his stay at Krishnanagar, Bhaktivinoda Thakura used to go to Navadvipa and search for the birthsite of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. One night he was sitting on the roof of the Rani *dharmashala* in Navadvipa chanting on his prayer beads when he spotted a *tal* tree next to a building that gave off a remarkable effulgence. He went to the Krishnanagar library, where he began to study old manuscripts of *Chaitanya Bhagavat* and *Navadvipa Dhama Parikrama*, and some old maps of Nadia. He went to

the village of Ballaladibhi and spoke with the elderly people, uncovering facts about modern-day Navadvipa. Eventually he discovered that the place he'd seen from the *dharmashala* rooftop was in fact the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. This was confirmed by Srila Jagannatha Dasa Babaji, the head of the Gaudiya Vaishnava community in Nadia. A great festival was held there. In glorification of this sacred place, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura published the *Navadvipa Dhama Mahatmya*.

In the same year, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura renovated the house of Srila Jagannatha Dasa Babaji at Ravasghata. He took leave from office for two years and acquired a plot of land at Sri Godrumadvipa, or Svarupaganga. He built a retirement house there for his *bhajana* (worship) and called it Surabhi Kunja.

1890. He established the Nama Hatta there, the market place of the holy name.

Sometimes Jagannatha dasa Babaji would visit and have *kirtan*, chanting devotional songs glorifying Krishna. Several hundred years earlier, Lord Nityananda, the eternal brother of Lord Chaitanya, had established His Nama Hatta in the same place.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura considered himself the street sweeper of the Nama Hatta of Lord Nityananda.

While he was stationed at Krishnanagar, every spare moment was spent in Mayapur, the holy land of the birthplace of Lord Chaitanya. When the birthplace was uncovered, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and Srila Jagannatha Dasa Babaji would worship Lord Chaitanya there.

Once, one of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's sons contracted a skin disease. Jaganntha Dasa Babaji told the boy to lie down at the birthsite of Lord Chaitanya for the night. He did so, and the next morning he was cured.

1888. He took charge of the village of Netrakona in the district of Mayamanasimha, because he could not keep good health in Krishnanagar. From Netrakona he went to Tangaila, and from there he was transferred to the district of Vardhamana. There he would have *kirtan* with devotees of Krishna at a place called Amalajora.

1890. He was put in charge of the Kalara subdivision and from there would often visit holy places. From there he was transferred to Ranighata, and then to Dinajapura again. Sailaja Prasada, his youngest son, was born there. In Dinajapura, Srila Bhaktivinoda

Thakura wrote his *Vidva-ranjan* commentary and translation of the *Bhagavad-gita*. It was published in 1891 with the commentary of Baladeva Vidyabhushana.

1891. Bhaktivinoda Thakura took leave from government service for two years. He desired to preach the holy names of Krishna. His base was at Godrumadwipa; from there he used to visit other places to lecture in clubs, societies, and organizations. This he had also done in Krishnanagar.

1892. He travelled and preached in the Basirahata District with some other Vaishnavas. All the while he was writing also. He opened many branches of Nama Hata in different districts of Bengal. The Nama Hata became a self-sustaining success which continued to spread even after his return to government service.

From Basirahata he set out on his third trip to Vrindavana. He stopped off at Amalajora to celebrate the Ekadasi day with Srila Jagannatha Dasa Babaji. In Vraja, he visited all the forests and places of Lord Krishna's pastimes. He continued to give lectures and readings on Hari Nama in various places in Bengal when he returned to Calcutta.

1894. He gave a lecture on his investigation into the whereabouts of the birthsite of Sri Chaitanya. His audience included highly learned men from all over Bengal who became very enthusiastic at the news. Out of this gathering was formed the Sri Navadwipa Dhama Pracarini Sabha, an organization for spreading the glories of Navadwipa-Mayapura. All the learned pundits, having deliberated fully on Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's evidence, agreed that the Yogapitha was the true birthsite of Mahaprabhu.

That year, on Gaura Purnima, a big festival was held to witness the installation of Gaura-Vishnupriya Deities at the Yogapitha. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura personally, in a spirit of pure humility, went door to door collecting funds to build a temple on the site. His venture was highly successful, and the temple was built.

In October of 1894, at age 56, he retired from his post as deputy magistrate, though this move was opposed by his family and the government authorities. He stayed at Surabhi Kunja, preached, and revised his old writings. Sometimes he went to Calcutta, where he begged door to door for building the Yogapitha temple.



1896. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura went to Tripura state at the request of the the king, who was a Vaishnava. He stayed in the capital for four days and preached the glories of the holy name. His lecture on the first day amazed the local pundits. For the next two days the royal family and public were thrilled to hear his talks on the pastimes of Mahaprabhu.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura's mercy reached far beyond the geographical boundaries of India or even Asia. He was intent on spreading Krishna consciousness to the West. He sent out a small booklet, written in Sanskrit, *Sri Gauranga-lila-smarana-mangala-stotram*, with a commentary by Srila Sitikantha Vacaspati of Nadia. The introduction, *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, His Life and Precepts*, was in English. This book found its way into the library of the Royal Asiatic Society in London, the library of McGill University in Canada, and other respectable institutions. It was reviewed in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society by Mr. F.W. Fraser, an erudite European scholar.

In the rainy season of the same year, requested by the Maharaja of Tripura, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura went to Darjeeling and Karsiyam. In 1897 he went to villages such as Medinipura and Sauri to preach.

Sri Sisira Kumar Ghosa was the founder of the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, a leading newspaper in Bengal at the time, and the author of the *Sri Amiya Nimai-carita*. He had great respect for Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, and took up the preaching of the holy name throughout Calcutta and in many villages in Bengal. He published the *Sri Visnu Priya O Ananda Bazar Patrika* under the editorship of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura. In one of his letters to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura he wrote, "*I have not seen the six Goswamis of Vrindavana, but I consider you to be the seventh Goswami.*"

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's son Bimala Prasad (later Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati) had been residing at Puri as a celibate monk (*brahmacari*) and was engaged in worship at the Gandharvika Giridhari Matha, one of seven temples near the tomb of the saint Haridasa Thakura, near the ocean. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, desiring to help his son, had the monastery cleaned and repaired when he came to visit Puri. After the young Siddhanta Saraswati left for Navadwipa Mayapura, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura constructed his own place of worship on the beach, calling it Bhakti Kuti. Sri

Krishnadasa Babaji, an assistant and devoted disciple of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, joined him there and became very dear to him. He remained his constant attendant up to the end of the Thakura's life.

At the Bhakti Kuti the Thakura began solitary *bhajana* (worship and devotional meditation). He had many visitors; some simply wanted to disturb him, whereas others were sincere and benefited greatly from his spiritual inspiration.

1908. One of his sons informed him that Sir William Duke, chief secretary to the government, was visiting Calcutta. Formerly, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura had served under him as a magistrate. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura made an appointment to meet him the next day in Calcutta. Sir William Duke greeted Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura on the street outside and personally escorted him into his office. With folded hands he asked forgiveness for having once planned to remove Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura from office of district magistrate, because he had thought that if such qualified Indians took up such posts, the British would not last much longer in India. In those days, while studying Bhaktivinoda Thakura's activities, the magistrate would come to his house and would be fed by the Thakura's wife. But now he was begging forgiveness as he was getting on in life. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura answered, "I consider you to be a good friend and a well-wisher all along." Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was pleased with him and gave him his blessings. Later he admitted he was astonished that Sir William Duke had wanted to harm him.

In the year 1908 Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura took the external dress of *ababaji*, signifying one who devotes the remainder of his life to solitary devotional practices, especially chanting the holy names. For the first two years he would travel between Calcutta and Puri and was still writing books.

1910. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura shut himself away from the world and entered *samadhi*, claiming paralysis. He devoted the remainder of his years to solitary *bhajana*, meditation, prayer and chanting Lord Krishna's holy names.

1914. On June 23, just before noon at Jagannatha Puri, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura Prabhupada left his body. On the Gaudiya Panjika calendar this day was also the disappearance day of Sri Gadadhara Pandita. His bodily remains were taken from

Orissa back to his beloved Godruma, in the land of Nadia, the land of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and His eternal pastimes. Amidst *sankirtana*, congregational chanting of the Lord's holy names, his remains were interred in Godruma.

### **Remembering His Divine Character**

In an obituary about Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Sarada Carana Mitra, Calcutta high court judge, wrote: "I knew Thakur Bhaktivinoda intimately as a friend and a relation. Even under the pressure of official work as a magistrate in charge of a heavy subdivision he could always find time for devotional contemplation and work, and whenever I met him, our talk would turn in a few moments to the subject of *bhakti* and *achintya bheda abheda*, *dvaitadvaita-vada* etc., and the saintly work that lay before him. Service of God is the only thing he longed for and service under the government, however honorable, was to him a clog."

His son Lalita Prasada recalled the following about his father Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, including his daily schedule:

7:30-8:00 PM - take rest.

10:00 PM - rise, light oil lamp, write.

4:00 AM - take rest.

4:30 - rise, wash hands and face, chant 'Hare Krishna *maha-mantra japa*.

7:00 - write letters.

7:30 - read.

8:30 - receive guests, or continue to read.

9:30-9:45 - take rest.

9:45 - morning bath, breakfast of half-quart milk, couple of chapatis, some fruits.

9:55 - go to court in carriage.

He would wear coat and pants to court, with double-size Tulasi neckbeads and Vaishnava *tilaka* [religious marking on his forehead]. He was very strong in his decisions; he would decide immediately. He did not allow any humbug in his court; no upstart could stand before him. He would shave his head monthly.

He never allowed harmonium in his *sankirtan*, considering it a distraction from the sound of the holy name.

He never had any debts.

10:00 - court began.

1:00 PM - court finished. He'd come home and bathe and refresh.

2:00 PM - return to office.

5:00 PM - translate works from Sanskrit to Bengali.

Then take evening bath and meal of rice, couple of chapatis, half quart (half litre) of milk.

He always consulted a pocket watch, and was always accountable keeping time very punctually.

He was always charitable to *brahmanas* and equally befriended other castes. He never showed pride, and his amiable disposition was a characteristic feature of his life. He never accepted gifts from anyone; he even declined all honors and titles offered by the government to him on the grounds that they might stand against his holy mission of life. He was very strict in moral principles, and avoided the luxurious life; he would not even chew betel. He disliked theaters because they were frequented by "public women."

He spoke Bengali, Sanskrit, English, Latin, Urdu, Persian, and Oriya. He started writing books at age 12, and continued turning out a profuse number of volumes up until his departure from this world.