

HARIDĀSA ṬHĀKURA

One of The World's Greatest Saints

By

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Haridāsa Ṭhākura was entirely devoted to the service of Lord Hari. This great devotee made his appearance in this world in the village of Buḍhana towards the end of the 15th Century. In order to understand the significance of his appearance, it is necessary to have some ideas about the state of the society of Bengal at that period. The caste system had lost all its propriety and its so-called purity and was simply only another name for malpractices, because of gross abuse to the principles of *sanātana-dharma*.

At that time the so-called opinion of religious communities was nothing more than a narrow-minded sectarian view. The Hindu society had become swollen with the pride of caste-consciousness and showed contempt for those who formed the lower caste society, in the name of religious endeavour. The people were selfish in different ways, in order to maintain themselves. The caste-conscious section of society became hostile to the *Vaiṣṇavas* (the worshippers of Lord Viṣṇu), and attacked the *sanātana-dharma* in many ways. The chronic disease of caste-consciousness penetrated through the bones and marrow of the Hindu society.

On the other hand the narrow-minded Muslim society was oppressing the Hindu community with different forms of malice, hatred and aggression. The followers of the Muslim religion failed to appreciate the real greatness of *sanātana-dharma*, and never slackened in their attempts to impede the progress of the religion of the Hindus.

The passionate aggressive spirit of these two parties brought untold suffering on the society in Bengal. The wealthy class of society were uninterested in religious practices and the opinion that luxury, materialistic pleasure and material power were the all-in-all was prevalent. Everyone within the Hindu community was so busy in the external display of religious practices, that it would not be exaggerating to say that there was not a single person who had any understanding or sympathy for the real method of pure devotion. Everyone was under the misconception that to attain the spiritual kingdom in the next world, one had

to undergo very rigid vows, as propagated in the *yoga* system.

The following of vows or the accepting of the *sannyāsa* order all pointed to the paths of intelligence, the sympathy of enjoyment, and the liberation of spiritual suicide.

The Hindus as time had absolutely no respect for the path of pure devotion, as they had many doubts regarding the highest attainment of life, which is simply the pure chanting of the Holy Name of the Lord. It was during these dark times of Bengal approximately 30-35 years before the appearance of Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu that Lord Brahmā, as the personality of Haridāsa Ṭhākura, displayed his transcendental activities in the village of Buḍhana. The actual site of Buḍhana is not known at the present day. It is not possible to find any information about the boyhood activities of Haridāsa Ṭhākura in any authoritative literatures. We cannot rely or place our trust on any recent books on the subject, because they offer fictitious accounts, bearing the names of old authors.

It is the opinion of some, that the appearance of Lord Brahmā in the Yavana community was the atonement for his offence of stealing the cows and cowherd boys. Then again there are some who hold the opinion that Prahlāda Mahārāja had become visible through the activities of Haridāsa Ṭhākura. It has been mentioned in the *Gaura Ganodeśa Dipikā* that Prahlāda Mahārāja and Lord Brahmā were Haridāsa Ṭhākura.

When Haridāsa Ṭhākura had grown up, he had no interest in the principles and social customs of the Yavana community, but could be seen only constantly chanting the Holy Name of the Supreme Lord Hari. There is no mention of any formal initiation or personality who inspired him to incessantly take the Name of the Supreme Lord. In the example of Haridāsa Ṭhākura we can see that he propagated that the living entity should pray to the Supreme Lord to give up any expectations for material desires.

After he reached this decision of fully surrendering unto the Supreme Lord by accepting His Name, he left the

village of Buḍhana and took his residence in a solitary place known as Benapola. Here he began to loudly chant the Holy Name of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. At that time it was the custom that those born in a Yavana family were bound to use the Yavana language for the purpose of worshipping God. But such narrowmindedness never occurred in the heart of the magnanimous Haridāsa Ṭhākura. He came with an attitude of disconcert, always accepting the universal principles. The highest charity which could be given to the living entity was to remain where he sat, always chanting the Holy Name of God in Benapola. He was endeavouring so much in his attempt to take full shelter of the Lord's Holy Name that there was a feeling of hostility towards him among the Hindu community.

Some pure-hearted persons were delighted when they saw his practices of unprecedented love for the Holy Name of the Lord, though others, who were very envious, were not really subdued by the devotional endeavours of Haridāsa. One of the degrading leaders by the name of Rāmachandra Khan was very well known in those parts. He formed a party of persons who devised a method to hamper Haridāsa Ṭhākura in his devotional services.

Khan had an immense following and great material prosperity, which made him very proud. Then Khan advised some of his evil-minded friends to prepare themselves for the bad deeds of harassing a pure devotee of the Lord.

Haridāsa Ṭhākura had originally belonged to another district, so he was an alien to this area. When he came to the village where Khan was the leader, he had intentions of constantly chanting the *Mahā-mantra* Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

He did not give any support to the bad deeds of Khan. Although Haridāsa Ṭhākura was born in a Yavana family he would always utter Hare Kṛṣṇa, the Holy Name of the Lord in the Sanskrit language and according to Khan this was improper by the injunctions of Vedic scriptures. Then Khan voluntarily decided to create trouble for Haridāsa Ṭhākura, as he thought that he was a weak-minded person, being sentimental for the present moment. Khan thought that Haridāsa had become a *sādhu* renouncing sense enjoyment and going away from the material world, taking to the path of spiritual life. The Khan decided to send a prostitute in order to degrade the spiritual character of Haridāsa Ṭhākura.

That evening at the approach of darkness, Haridāsa was chanting the Holy Name of the Lord with undivided attention. While engaged in chanting, all his senses were being used in the service of the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa.

At this time the prostitute sent by Khan appeared before him. She was very beautiful and made a display with many lusty gestures, which were born of her sensual passionate heart. She tried her utmost to divert the attention of

Haridāsa Ṭhākura away from the service to the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa. She tried in the early evening hours, the midnight hours as well as the approach of dawn to produce an effect in his heart. He was firm in his conviction in chanting the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa. He was not enchanted by her gestures.

When he was not obstructed in his service to the Lord, which would have made another conditioned soul fall away from spiritual life, she had a change of heart and realised her attempt to gain his attention had failed.

So she returned at sunrise to Khan, reporting everything as it happened. The hard-hearted Khan instructed her to try again at night to captivate the heart of Haridāsa Ṭhākura.

When she went under the instruction of Khan, she again continued to put herself in such a way as to prevent the devotional practices of a pure devotee. Three successive nights passed away with Haridāsa chanting and still she could not seem to divert him from the service to the Supreme Lord. When she would request him to engage in illicit sex with her, he would answer by persisting that he would join her later. After he had finished chanting his required number of Names of Kṛṣṇa, he could never be diverted by sinful activities, even though they might be close by.

But a person who is interested in liberation is unable to forego the temptation of such lusty desires. While the supernatural character of Haridāsa Ṭhākura changed the lusty heart of the prostitute, the following night she threw herself at his feet and in a repenting spirit said: "I am addicted to the sinful activities of lust and fully contaminated by it. You are the greatest of all devotees and are engaged in the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The evil propensities of my heart have been destroyed by your association and by the force of your transcendental nature. I am now ready to take the transcendental knowledge, following in the footsteps of the great spiritual masters who teach the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. By your casual mercy give me direction, by which I can follow the path of pure devotion."

Haridāsa Ṭhākura, who was very compassionate to all the living entities, forgot about the bad profession of the prostitute and rescued her from the deep well of sensual desires by engaging her in chanting the *Mahā-mantra* Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. Such mercy can only be met by the causeless mercy of a pure devotee.

As time passed by, Haridāsa Ṭhākura understood from this incident that most of the villagers who had supported Khan were opposed to his personal devotional practices. Therefore, after he converted her, she was engaged in practices of pure devotional service. Then he left the place. He went to another area, where he could carry on without being disturbed in his worship of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The

prostitute gave her ill-earned money to the local *brāhmaṇas* and began residing in the place where Haridāsa Ṭhākura had been living.

By his mercy she became busy in chanting the Holy Name of Lord Kṛṣṇa and came to be regarded with great reverence in society. When Haridāsa Ṭhākura had defeated Khan in his malicious attempt to divert his practices from the Supreme Lord, there was a great feeling of mailiciousness, which came into the heart of Khan.

Consequently, later when Lord Nityānanda arrived with his entourage of *Vaiṣṇavas*, the followers of Khan treated him and his followers with contempt. They would not give them a place to stay. Khan told Lord Nityānanda that he had arranged a place where they could stay in his cowshed. Lord Nityānanda, being insulted, left for another village.

After Haridāsa Ṭhākura left the place of Beṇapola, he went to the Nadia district to the village of Phulia. This is situated midway between Ramaghat and Śāntipura. By this time, Adwaita Prabhu, whose origin was not known at that time, settled down in Śāntipura. Haridāsa Ṭhākura, in the company of Adwaita Prabhu, began to ecstatically fill his mind with devotional topics and engaged himself constantly in chanting the Holy Names of Lord Kṛṣṇa. After leaving all worldly pleasures of any type, he passed his days immersed in the bliss of the Holy Name. During this period there was a powerful community of *brāhmaṇas* in the village of Phulia. These *brāhmaṇas* were unfavourable towards Haridāsa Ṭhākura. He would daily bathe in the Ganges river, which flowed near the village. When Haridāsa was bathing, he would chant the Holy Name of the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa very loudly. This brought opposition from the other side from several *brāhmaṇas* in the village of Kulia, who were opposed to the worship of the Holy Name in this way.

The Hindu *brāhmaṇas* were very envious of the pure devotee of the Lord. They agreed with local Muslims to form a conspiracy against Haridāsa Ṭhākura and have him punished by the chief Kazi of that area. They charged him with promoting a social disorder. By the order of the Kazi, Haridāsa Ṭhākura was brought before him. As an administrator of the district the Kazi had a large number of criminals under arrest. When Haridāsa Ṭhākura came before the Kazi, he was honoured and was offered a seat.

The Kazi, who was aware of his honour, said: “You have had the good fortune of taking birth in a Yavana family which is a very high lineage. But, having taken birth in such a high family within the higher rings of society, how is it that you have decided upon the religion of the Hindus?” He continued: “The Muslims look down upon the Hindus with great contempt. They feel aversion against accepting any food touched by them. Therefore, why is it that you have lowered yourself by violating the religious custom of your ancestry? By such behaviour in this world how will it

be possible for you to attain deliverance in the next life? If you are prepared to accept my good advice, then you should readopt the social customs of the high Yavana family and again be initiated into the Yavana religion, which will destroy the sins that you have committed.”

Haridāsa Ṭhākura had infringed upon the social codes, which had been given by the Yavanic society and thus for this reason he was taken before the administrator of the Nadia district at the request of the Yavanic community. This community was desirous of safe-guarding their traditional customs in the society.

Then Haridāsa Ṭhākura replied to the Kazi as follows: “This material world is merely the illusory energy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. True religion is not the monopoly of either the Yavana or Hindu community, therefore there can be no danger of worshipping the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa who is the common object of worship for both communities. The Supreme Lord is beyond all material objects. He is eternal and indivisible and the Absolute Reality. He is the perfect truth and one who worships Him in this manner according to instructions from Him, he is not unnecessarily ready to create disorder by ignoring the differences in personal qualities. It is the Supreme Lord who has caused me to take birth in the Yavanic family. It is He who has engaged me in the activities of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Rāma, which will yield the highest benefit. The Supreme Lord may also cause one to take birth in a high *brāhmaṇical* family within the Hindu community and make him turn into a Yavana because of his Yavanic propensities. Such is the will of the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is ever benevolent. I am willing to accept any punishment which you are prepared to reprimand me with, but I will not follow the Yavanic customs nor give up the highest beneficial activities of chanting the Holy Name of Lord Kṛṣṇa.” The Kazi now began to blaspheme the Supreme Lord, when he scolded Haridāsa Ṭhākura. At last Haridāsa Ṭhākura said: “Even if you cut my body to pieces and I give up my life, still the Holy Name of Lord Kṛṣṇa will never leave my lips.” Hearing this, the Kazi became enraged and sent Haridāsa Ṭhākura to be punished to death by being severely whipped in 22 market places in the district.

While Haridāsa Ṭhākura was being whipped, he employed himself in constant recollection of the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and chanting Kṛṣṇa’s name very loudly. He remained unaffected by the whipping. The pious persons of those places noticed the severity of the infliction upon him and openly disagreed with the authorities. On the other hand those who were envious and wicked, rejoined. Some people apprehended that a very bad reaction would fall upon the Kazi and those who aided him in the brutal persecution of a pure devotee. In the same way that Prahlāda Mahārāja was tortured by Hiraṇyakaśipu, now

Haridāsa Ṭhākura was being oppressed and humiliated by the Yavanas. Bearing the intolerable pain, he would say: “Have mercy upon all these living entities, O Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa! May none of them offend You by their treatment of me.”

During the whipping of Haridāsa at last the Yavanas began to say: “The whole Yavana community will suffer the terrible consequence of the inhuman practices, because you are such a great saint. Your life has not been ended by our prolonged and terrible beating. The Kazi will put all of us to death, because we are not able to kill you.” Hearing this, Haridāsa Ṭhākura felt much pity upon the Yavanas, who were beating him when he exhibited the external pastimes of quitting his mortal life. The evil-minded Yavanas, in order to prevent him from any good results in his future life joked, that his dead body should be thrown in Ganges River, so that in this way no scriptural injunctions could be performed upon it. At this time Haridāsa Ṭhākura was in meditation and occupied with the constant recollection of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes.

The Yavanas, who were ordered by the Kazi to throw the body in the Ganges, were unable to do so. They could not inform the Kazi of their inability to kill him. They were thoroughly defeated in their endeavour and at last desisted from their wicked endeavours. Hearing this the Kazi came to him, who was deeply absorbed in a meditative trance. When he came from his trance the Kazi begged from him the following: “I am convinced that you are a great saint and are of no worldly nature. Forgive me for my many faults. No one in the heavenly, earthly or hellish planetary systems are able to understand your real nature. You may go wherever you may like and we will never oppose you.” So, he then returned to the village of Phulia without being daunted in the least by the terrible persecution of the Yavanas. At that time the village of Phulia was a very populated and important centre of the *brāhminical* community. The *brāhmaṇas* at Phulia received Haridāsa Ṭhākura very cordially on his return. They had witnessed his devotional practices and recognised his transcendental love for Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. They sympathised with his misfortunes and discussed amongst themselves the cause of his suffering. He said to them: “I have been a great offender and have heard the Yavanas blaspheme Lord Viṣṇu and yet I did not oppose them or prevent them from doing so. Therefore consequently I had to suffer and that suffering was necessary for my own good. I should not have openly heard the offences which they spoke about the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” Even though he was in the full spirit of humility he was not able to save the Kazi’s family and his followers. Shortly afterwards the Kazi’s family with all its members perished. The pure devotee was unopposed to taking the Holy Name day and night by any person.

The village of Phulia on the banks of the Ganges was transformed into Vaikuṅṭha and ceased to be a place within the domain of *Māyā* because of his chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Once, a very large serpent came upon the residence of Haridāsa Ṭhākura. He was not in the least bit fearful of the grace of the serpent. He took the Holy Name of the Lord in an unconcerned manner and lived in the same room with the great serpent. Later on he was persuaded by the *brāhmaṇa* residents of the village and his friends to leave the place where the serpent was residing. At this time the serpent on his own accord departed from the residence. The *brāhmaṇas* were filled with wonder at this extraordinary event.

At a later incident at a house of a certain wealthy man a snake charmer was exhibiting a scene of the suppression of the great serpent Kāliya by Lord Kṛṣṇa with dancing and singing. Haridāsa Ṭhākura accidentally arrived at that spot and from a distance watched the performance. The dancing and singing of the snake charmer excited Haridāsa Ṭhākura to remember the pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa and then he fainted in devotional ecstasy. Upon recovering he began to sing. He displayed all the symptoms of ecstasy within his body. The snake charmer stopped his performance and stood silently on the side with his palms joined together watching his devotional ecstasies. Following this the spectators joyously sprinkled themselves with the dust which had been touched by the feet of Haridāsa Ṭhākura. At this time a hypocritical *brāhmaṇa*, hankering after the respects offered to Haridāsa Ṭhākura, pretended to have gone into a trance in imitation of him. He was beaten black and blue by the snake charmer which made him take to his heels. When asked the reason for his doing so, the snake charmer made the following remarks: “You should know that this *brāhmaṇa* is a hypocrite vainly seeking after the honour shown to Haridāsa Ṭhākura, who is a *mahā-bhāgavata*. Therefore he has committed a grave offence at his holy feet by trying to be superior to him.”

Neither birth nor wealth is the criterion of Kṛṣṇa’s devotees. To prove this, Haridāsa Ṭhākura was born in a non-Hindu family and even Lord Brahmā the creator, Lord Śiva the destroyer and the holy River Ganges the purifier, yearn for his company. Uttering once Haridāsa Ṭhākura’s name leads unto the Lotus Feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Just the sight of one who has taken shelter at the holy feet of Haridāsa Ṭhākura relieves one from the bondage of the material world’s energy. I thank my stars that I have had the proud privilege of singing his glories before a large gathering of fortunate persons like you who have been blessed with his *darsan*.

Unfortunately, some of the Hindu atheists tried their utmost to undervalue the supremacy of loudly chanting by all sorts of unfair means. But Haridāsa Ṭhākura proved in

full the capacity of loudly chanting by citing the following text from *Bhāgavatam*:

“Oh, how glorious are they whose tongues chant Your Holy Name! Even if born in the families of dog-eaters, such persons are worshipping. Persons who chant the Holy Name of Your Lordship must have executed all kinds of austerities and fire sacrifices and achieved all the good manners of the *āryans*. To be chanting the Holy Name of Your Lordship, they must have bathed at holy places of pilgrimage, studied the *Vedas* and fulfilled everything required.” (*Bhāgavatam*, 3.33.7)

“Oh king, constantly chanting of the Holy Name of the Lord after the ways of the great authorities is the doubtless and fearless way of success for all, including those who are free from all material desires, those who are desirous of all material enjoyment, and also those who are self-satisfied by dint of transcendental knowledge.” (*Bhāgavatam*, 2.1.11)

“Devotional service, beginning with the chanting of the Holy Name of the Lord, is the ultimate religious principle for the living entity in human society.” (*Bhāgavatam*, 6.3.22)

“Who but the self-annihilators or slaughterers of animals will desist from chanting aloud the glories of the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa, constantly sung by the liberated souls. It is the only cure for the world’s diseases and a thrill of delight and sweetness to the ears and hearts of the listeners.” (*Bhāgavatam*, 10.1.4)

“The Holy Name of Lord Kṛṣṇa who is the sweetest of all divine names, the Supreme Good of all good things and the self-effulgent eternal lovely fruit of the creeper of the *Vedas*, when uttered but once, attentively or inattentively, ensures deliverance of all human beings, o chief of the *Bhṛgu*.” (*Prabhāsa Khanda*)

Haridāsa Ṭhākura further added that loud chanting of the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa is twice blessed. It blesses him that chants and them that listen including even the birds, beasts, plants, trees, stones and all other things that live under the sun; while the mutterer of the Holy Name does good to himself only (*Naradiya Purāṇa*).

Sorely aggrieved at the anti-devotional nature of the world, Haridāsa Ṭhākura arrived at Śrīdhāma Māyāpura where he received a hearty welcome from the *Vaiṣṇavas* with Advaita Āchārya as their head. He then joined the banner of *Nāma-saṅkīrtana* inaugurated by the Supreme Lord Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu.

The glorification of Haridāsa Ṭhākura which was written by Vṛndāvana dāsa Ṭhākura says: “Be thou glorified, Haridāsa Ṭhākura. You have established the immaculate glories and supremacy of the Holy Name, Hare Kṛṣṇa, all over the world. Some practice but do not preach, while others preach but do not practice the chanting of the Holy Name. The twin services of the Holy Name, namely preaching and practising the chanting, go hand in hand in the teeth of all opposition. You have done both. You are therefore the *Nāmāchārya*. You are the spiritual bestower of the Holy Name, and the world teacher in this respect. You are an invaluable asset among the holy entourage of the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Chaitanya Mahāprabhu.”

**nikhila-śruti-mauli ratna malā
dyuti nīrājita-pāda-pankajānta
ayi mukta-kulair upāsyamānam
paritas tvām hari-nām saṁśrayāmi**

“O Holy Name! The tips of the toes of Your Lotus feet are eternally worshipped by the glowing effulgence radiating from the gemmed chapters of the *Upaniṣads*, the crest jewels of the *Vedas*. You are eternally adored and chanted by great liberated souls like Nārada and Śrīla Śukadeva Goswāmī. O Hari Nāma! Clearing myself of all offences, I take complete shelter of You.”

