

Gaudiya Bhakti, Maharashtrian Bhakti and Universal Bhakti

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The Monk's Podcast with Chaitanya Charan Prabhu

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Hare Krishna Maharaja, Dandavat Pranam. Thank you very much for joining in the monk's podcast today. It's been a great aspiration for me to have your august presence here and I am very grateful that you could spare that time today.

HH Lokanath Swami: You are welcome.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: So Maharaja on this podcast we usually try to discuss topics which go into our issues relevant to devotees and aspiring devotees so since my first encounter with you- I was brought up in Maharashtra and almost all the devotees I met.

HH Lokanath Swami: We had many encounters in the past but this is one of the first.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Yes Maharaja, so I have met many devotees but you are the first devotee leader who was not only from Maharashtrian background but you also brought your Maharashtrian Bhakti into your Krishna consciousness.

So I grew up in a more religious than devotional family but we used to have slokas and other regional bhakti songs and verses we would recite. Till that time I was fascinated as to how Gaudiya bhakti and Maharashtrian bhakti come together so broadly. What aspects of Bhakti are universal, what are regional? So I thought we could talk about that topic today.

Maharaja, I think you were amongst the first few Indian disciples who really became one of the dedicated followers of Srila Prabhupada because it was then that people became life members but not really disciples. But now you see that in fact India is the power house of the Krishna consciousness movement. Now there are more Indian devotees, there are more temples and more books distributed. So what do you feel is the reason for this revolution? Why were Indians so reluctant at that time and now they may be more open, more receptive?

Lokanath Swami: During Prabhupada days, as you just pointed out, we did have lot's of maybe hundreds or several thousand life patron members but talking of being a follower, being a disciple, there were maybe only a dozen or so who came and stepped forward to being devotees and followers in the Krishna consciousness movement.

I am talking about Mumbai where I was and where I had joined and that is where I was practicing my Krishna consciousness. And I was only a college student when I joined Iskcon.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Oh so wonderful! We are all college preachers so we have all inherited your legacy Maharaja.

Lokanath Swami: And now you have Prerna festival in Mumbai and other places. In those days they were saying 'when I become old I will take to Krishna consciousness' but that is no more. The congregation is now such that there are thousands of disciples, followers of Gopal Krishna Maharaja and Radhanath Swami Maharaja and then there are my disciples. Then there's Jayapataka Maharaja of course we are talking about Maharashtra and Mumbai but there's a whole Iskcon world in India also.

So I think Indians were still busy imitating the west and they had so much faith in science and technology but gradually they were seeing that science and technology were not keeping the promises, not delivering the goods. And you know it takes some time right? Action and then for the reaction it takes time so

people were in the enjoying spirit then soon the troubles were there. The global warming and the ecological disasters and the pandemic is here and this and that. There is more violence and more divorces and what-not.

This is my observation that Indians took note of this and they were trying some alternative to Krishna consciousness or religion or devotion but that wasn't working out or so prevention is better than cure so some kicked that out and they discarded that and are back on the track practicing culture and their religion. I think this is one observation why they are turning up in big numbers. From the congregation they are joining and youths are coming also to become full time devotees and propagators of Krishna consciousness.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Thank you for that answer Maharaja. From what I've seen the life members that came had more like a cultural national pride that 'all these Americans and Europeans are following our culture' so it was more out of curiosity and pride rather than a personal involvement and commitment. As you rightly said afterwards, a certain level of prosperity also came and then people started looking more for spirituality. Then we had a viable option.

Lokanath Swami: Yes I also would say that Prabhupada preached to the Americans, westerners and in fact while I was in college in the early seventies Prabhupada came with a bunch of his followers from America and Europe and other parts of the world. They were advertising the Hare Krishna festival in Bombay.

'The American Sadhus are here, the European Sadhus are here!' So Prabhupada, he had envisioned this and he thought 'okay, you want to follow Americans, westerners? Then follow those Americans, those who have become the Hare Krishna devotees or devotees of Krishna. You are trying to follow their culture, the western culture and they are westerners who are great in technology and science but see? Look at the westerners. They

are kicking that out, discarding that and they are becoming devotees! You foolish Indians, wake up!

Go back to your culture or Krishna consciousness.' Prabhupada was kind of dangling those Americans, 'look look at these Americans.' They did not become happy, they became hippies. Their progress, so called progress and materialism and being modern, they were not happy and you also would not be happy if you followed in their footsteps. This was a eye opener for Indians and people started thinking twice.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Compared to our movement in the 1970s and now we are in two thousand and twenty almost, so do you feel Iskcon in India has become somewhat Indian-ized in some ways and that's why Indians maybe feel more at home?

Lokanath Swami: There were days when it was known as the westerner's Mandir, our temple in Vrindavan and the followers were thought to be CIA's. 'These are CIA's. Stay away from them!' So that was propaganda and 'they did this business in the past and gradually they conquered India and they made us slaves. Now they are coming in guise of Sadhus but they have the same intentions that they previously had.'

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: I have heard this accusation of devotees being CIA, so was there somebody particularly doing this or was this just because of the tension between India and Pakistan and America supporting Pakistan? Also was it just geopolitics?

Lokanath Swami: We could say that they just did not want to practice their own culture and religion and so this was their excuse that they did not follow the American Sadhus or European Sadhus. They were not following Indian Sadhus or Indian saints and sastras and now Americans were coming and so they were not into practicing. So I think this was some propaganda so they don't then have to follow.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: So Maharaja when you were introduced

to Krishna consciousness, now you came from a Maharashtrian bhakti background, what was your experience? Did you find some significant differences or similarities? What was it that attracted you, did anything cause you hesitation when you were introduced to Krishna consciousness?

Lokanath Swami: No, I mean I was looking for Krishna consciousness or my soul was very much longing and I came in contact with these Hare Krishna Sadhus, American and European Sadhus as they were being advertised during that Hare Krishna festival. And of course Srila Prabhupada also was there. I found what I was looking for and I did not think twice whether or not to go for it.

I was right in the middle and of course I had been doing bhajans and kirtans or listening to bhajans and kirtans during my childhood days and I was into some bhajan, kirtan so when I heard and saw the Hare Krishna devotees in the Cross Maidan near Churchgate on the stage chanting and dancing and drumming and playing hand cymbals..

Prabhupada especially talks about the Warkaries in Maharashtra, their kirtan mandalies [group] and Gaudiya kirtan mandala, he says they are very much similar. They also use mrdangas and kartals and they also dance while chanting and we do the same thing so I did not – I felt at home and I took that away with me from that festival, this chanting and dancing and soon where I was residing in Dadar in my room with my villagers who were my roommates, when they were out I would lock the doors, close the windows and curtains and imitate those Hare Krishna American western sadhus and chant and dance myself. So I found what I was looking for.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: That's amazing. So your spiritual search enabled you to transcend whatever cultural differences might have been there and you focused on the cultural similarities. I had some friends when I was studying engineering so I got introduced to Bhakti in my third year of

engineering. That was about twenty five years ago. Then there were some friends also who were also studying engineering. I used to invite them for a program and they would say 'this is already part of culture so we will follow our culture. We don't want to follow this.'

Then what I noticed is that they would actually not really follow their culture at all. So sometimes the regional culture conceptions can come in the way of people taking up bhakti. So do you feel that in Maharashtra we are seen as a Bengali bhakti tradition because of our temples and kirtans? Are we accepted as a viable bhakti tradition to be practiced here also?

Lokanath Swami: I think that bhakti is bhakti. Bhakti is an activity or symptom of the soul. It is an expression of the soul's devotion and that is Bhakti. In Maharashtra there is a saying. Sugarcane may be straight one or bent one or like this or that one but the juice inside of the sugarcane, regardless of the shape and size is the same. So we act accordingly to where we are born and brought up, in different geographical locations and then there are different cultural backgrounds, and we do pick up those as well.

And that also becomes a designation or imposition on the soul's pure devotion and bhakti and the conditioning is like that. So in Maharashtra they would say 'oh you should be bhakta like a Pandalika! He was taking care of his family and his parents and he even made god wait.' So in Maharashtra that kind of culture or language is commonly spoken by all the parents but that's just not the original culture that is practiced in the spiritual world or which Gauranga Mahaprabhu appeared to propagate which, is the right culture, the eternal culture and devotion and devotional activities.

He brought that down to the Earth right here on this planet and fortunately Mahaprabhu came to Kolhapur and Pandharpur and Nashik and he passed through Satara and he chanted and he

danced with full devotion and dedication. By his example Mahaprabhu himself has taught, he became Mahatma or Sant or Acharya, Bhagavan (Supreme Lord). Sri Krishna Chaitanya becomes Sant, Mahatma or Acharya, Gaura Bhakta and he practiced Krishna consciousness.

So I think that's a flaring example and then our Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, our acarya – that is what they are practicing and propagating and that was delivered by Srila Prabhupada and eventually it is the expectation and prediction of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu that this would become a global cultural, a global phenomenon.

This practice of Krishna consciousness transcends the regional cultures so this is Maharastrian culture, this is Bengali culture, this is North Indian culture, this is maybe South American culture, this is African culture or even religious culture, this is going to be transcending all these. Krishna consciousness is not just . There are more and more religions. There is Hindu religion and that religion and so the Krishna consciousness movement cannot just be added to that list.

'This is another religion, another and not ours.' So you know it's beyond and transcendental to this kind of thinking. We are not part of that duality. We are above and beyond and matchless and we cannot be compared to anything that is around here.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: What you just said Maharaja, Bhaktivinoda Thakur also says this in Siksamrita, that bhakti is a universal emotion and then he says that there are regional expressions according to culture, language, place, time- the things that are taught in different ways. So what you are saying is that the universal aspect of bhakti will appeal to everyone irrespective of cultural background. And if somebody holds on to their background too much then that is like a designation which is basically covering the soul and which may obstruct them in their spiritual journey.

Lokanath Swami: Yes, like-I don't know if that's another question just to talk a little more about what we are talking but in 1971, I remember some Indian, Hindu Indian talking to the American Sadhus, Hare Krishna devotees, 'You are Christian then why did you change your religion and you have now become Hindu?

And that devotee gave a pretty smart answer. He said 'No no no! I haven't become a Hindu.' In fact he said, 'I have become a better Christian.' And he explained this saying 'You know the Bible says love thy Lord with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy strength. But I did not do that before, I did not put my heart into what I was doing for Jesus or for Jehovah. But now I'm doing that, in Krishna consciousness that is what I'm doing.

That is what I'm explaining to you with all my heart and all my soul and all my strength I'm loving and I'm serving my Lord and unfortunately I did not even know who that Lord was before and now I know who that Lord is. Krishna or Rama, okay he has many names, Allah. So not that I have now been converted or I belong to another religion.'

This is true of one who becomes Krishna conscious, he becomes a better Hindu, better Christian, better Muslim, better this or that. This is the best above all other ordinary stuff.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: So you mentioned how Krishna consciousness cannot be added to the list of various world religions. So people will see us as belonging to a particular group or religious organisation. So is it primarily by our philosophical explanations that we help them see that we are not just another cultural group or another religious group? Because practically speaking we dress in a particular way and we chant particular Mantras so the aspect of ethnic or regional expressions of Bhakti is there with us also.

Lokanath Swami: This could also be listed- this kind of dress

or this kind of colour of the dress or this kind of tilak or whatever else. But bhakti is beyond that all also. These are gaun lakshan, these are secondary symptoms of a religious person or a God conscious person. The architect and design of the place of your worship, the Mosque is this way and the church is that way and temple is that way.

These are external things and the world pays more attention to differences or externalities but we should be going deeper within, beyond these external forms and looks and cast and nationality and gender. And so Krishna consciousness is transcendental to all that. By seeing these things you could recognize this as superior or transcendental beyond all that exists- the different names of different religions.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: So Maharaja you have – apart from preaching all over the world you have also focused a lot on Maharashtra. So over the five decades or so long as our movement has been here, what do you see as the major achievements or landmarks in our outreach in Maharashtra?

Lokanath Swami: Well Maharashtra in our early days, in our Srila Prabhupada days we were limited to Mumbai only, Hare Krishna land only, and then we just started, I remember in 1975 Srila Prabhupada sent me and Bhagavad Das and few others to Pune to preach and of course we are thinking of Maharashtra but there were a few places. There was Vrndavan land bhumi puja and Juhu bhumi puja and Mayapur bhumi puja took place within a span of just few months in 1972.

So there were a half dozen temples in India during Prabhupada days. In Maharashtra it was basically Mumbai so from then till now all that you see, all the manifestations – now we have fifty or so big and small occasions where Krishna consciousness is practiced. We have temples everywhere and I was one Maharashtrian who joined in the beginning and I remember Prabhupada saying to me one day when myself and Prabhupada were in a room.

Prabhupada said 'We want more men like you!' And now I can see that there are so many hundreds and hundreds of devotees, men and women also and in Maharashtra, practicing and propagating Krishna consciousness. So these are all landmarks and there's book distribution and the number of books we have distributed in Maharashtra is a big number.

I think Bhagavad Gita as it is in Indian language, I think in marathi is ranking high if not the highest. And Pune distributed four hundred thousand Bhagavad gitas just last month! Previous year they did the same thing at Juhu Bombay, distributing books like crazy all over. So all these dimensions have been added and there are so many festivals, rathayatras held and we are part of the Maharashtra dinda Warkaries.

We joined them and we are there so when there's a Nasik Kumbha mela and a Hare Krishna camp is there and we have big names in Mumbai. We have many temples and there's Juhu and then Chowpatty and Mira road and now Kharghar is huge. And we have our Govardhan eco village and that's a big thing. And we have Pandharpur here.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Yes Maharaja I was going to ask about Pandharpur. I think this is amongst the few temples where there is already a holy dham. In Maharashtra and now we also have quite a significant presence there. So did we have some-like in Jagannatha Puri there are some anxieties among the local devotees about Iskcon's presence there, so was there some anxiety over there or were we naturally accepted and now seen at the Pandharpur holy land scape?

Lokanath Swami: Our neighbours threw some land dispute and encroachment so still some harassment is there. Otherwise we are accepted and embraced and we are an integral part. when padayatra from Mayapur to Dwarka was passing through Maharashtra and coming to Pandharpur – this is of course all the time. So our party was greeted by the officials of Vitthal

Rukmini temple, by the authorities and pandas.

Not only that but we have the walk which is from some twenty different nations walking with us and we all had an opportunity to do maha abhishek of Vitthal Panduranaga. Yes we had some Africans and Americans and Germans and they were all bathing and massaging the body of Vitthal. In Jagannatha Puri you cannot even look at them with side long glance. You will be immediately caught and sent away but here that's not the case.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: So this happens every year or did it happen in a particular year?

Lokanath Swami: No I'm just saying that it happened one time in 84 but otherwise also whenever our devotees come from distant countries we do bring them to the mangal arati of Panduranga Vitthala and there is something very special about the Abhishek and arati. Especially the abhishek I would say, there's no curtain so you get the Lord being woken up.

uthishtothishta Govinda trilokyam mangalam kuru

And they offer arati and undress him and bathe him. So we always have devotees.. Jayapataka Maharaja or Giriraj Maharaja, so many Maharaja's they always come here or devotees from all over the world may also come. So they get just to sit a few feet away from the deity and watch and have Darshan to their heart's content. So there's no discrimination of that sort in Pandharpur.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: That's amazing. So Maharaja when you said Eighty four, that means we got acceptance very early. So our movement was not even that big then, now we are much bigger so I presume your presence must've played a significant role. You were a Maharashtrian and you acted like a like a bridge between the movement and the local bhakti leaders and bhakti culture over there. That means you literally are our pioneer of Krishna consciousness in Pandharpur. So Maharaja

were you the first Maharashtrian to be introduced to Krishna consciousness?

Lokanath Swami: 71 in March, April was the first festival Hare Krishna festival and of course talking about being introduced, there were thousands and thousands for this one speck of dust. Of course Radhanath Maharaja was the audience there. I started practicing Krishna consciousness after the pandal program.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: So both from the historical perspective you are the first Maharashtrian to become a committed follower of Prabhupada and then you pioneered Bhakti also in Maharashtra. This is amazing.

Lokanath Swami: Prabhupada asked me also to do that. I received a letter from Prabhupada in seventy seven and I already had been preaching in Maharashtra. I had been going to my home village once a year also with Hare Krishna devotees and with a whole festival. So after one such festival in seventy seven, I was also doing travelling and preaching book distribution all over India, all over Maharashtra.

Then Prabhupada wrote to me in 77 saying 'the whole of India and specifically your Maharashtra are enthused with Krishna. Now you have to revive their Krishna consciousness. This is Tukaram's country but now they are becoming bad politicians. So revive them by the process of the Sankirtan movement.' And in the same letter towards the end Prabhupada wrote 'Organise very solidly and just increase the number of books distributed, the numbers of devotees made and develop centres of Krishna consciousness everywhere.' So this is a direct instruction of Srila Prabhupada

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: So in a sense Maharashtra is like a Guru datta desh in what Prabhupada gave you.

Lokanath Swami: That is one of the Guru datta deshas.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: I also remember that in the Kumbha

mela now you were recognised as one of the sadhus by the traditional authorities on Vedas.

HH Lokanath Swami: They are called Mahantas.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Can you elaborate on that a little bit? That is I think a special honour for our movement and it's also a recognition of how people are recognising Srila Prabhupada's followers as authentic.

Lokanath Swami: Yes so it took a long time. Srila Prabhupada attended in 71 Kumbha Mela with his followers and so he did also in seventy seven. The seventy seven Kumbha Mela in Prayag, Triveni Sangam and actually I was also there with Srila Prabhupada and we had been participating in Kumbha Melas- Iskcon was participating in practically every Kumbha Mela.

But there was some misunderstanding still prevailing 'these western movement and American Sadhus and Mlecchas are a part. Their members are Mlecchas or Sudras or Yavanas so they cannot be integrated into the Kumbha Mela team or given honour of joining the procession that takes bath at Triveni Sangam and other places like Shibayan, Ujjain, Godavari, Nasik and Ganga in Haridwar.'

So it took quite some time convincing them or clearing their misunderstanding that this is not a western organisation or a western Sadhus predominance, and so like that. Gradually after many years in Ujjain Kumbha Mela some dozen years ago our Dina Bandhu, our American Sadhu Dina Bandhu and Sarvabhauma Prabhu, the two of them were working on these Kumbha Mela authorities – the big, big Mahantas.

They are the ones that recognise different parties and get them into the fold and acknowledge them as official institutions. So then it finally happened and we were asked to take leadership in India and so this is how we became part of the Kumbh Mela.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: So when Prabhupada was there, even he was not recognised as a Mahanta at that time? He was a prominent presence at the Kumbha Mela wasn't he? From what I read lot's of people came and saw Prabhupada and were impressed.

Lokanath Swami: That anybody could do but when there's a arrangement your snana days- Makar Sakranti snana and this snana and that snana and there is a Grand trunk road or a path leading to the bathing Ghat and there, only those who are authorised or recognised as Mahantas, they are allowed to- there are thousands or millions watching and taking Darshan. There are Naga Babas and many, many parties so Prabhupada was there but I think he was not even trying to become a Mahanta. These developments took place after Prabhupada's demise.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Yes Maharaja. So the Mahanta specifically appointed you as the representative of Iskcon or you as an individual? How does this work?

Lokanath Swami: It means I am representing Iskcon, the international society for Krishna consciousness.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: That's amazing. You made the earlier point about how the non-Indian devotees are allowed intimate Darshan and massaging of Lord Vitthal. So is this like the inclusive characteristic of all temples in Maharashtra? So is Jagannatha temple more an exception or is the norm openness, or does it vary very much from temple to temple?

HH Lokanath Swami: I think in general and as we walk from Dwarka through Gujarat, through Maharashtra, through Karnataka and then to Kerela, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Mayapur. I think Jagannatha Puri was the worst experience and that's where the opposition had some tradition from Chaitanya Mahaprabhu days and that's why even Namacharya Haridas did not enter in and so he stayed away and maybe others also stayed away.

So in general we were welcomed and I mean even in South India some of the temples have a sign 'only Hindus are allowed but even there the Hare Krishna Padayatri's, the western Hare Krishna Padayatri's were allowed to enter. I think in Dakor dhama, Gujarat, they also at least in those days, they were not allowing westerners. I remember one time we had one of my god brothers Dinanatha, he was from America but black bodied.

So there were several of us and we asked him to be in the middle and we had told him that 'if anyone tries to talk to you, tell them you are observing Mauna, you are observing silence.' So you know that worked and he was able to take darsana but if he was a white body you know Dakor temple probably would not have allowed darsana.

So in general we were welcome in most of the temples but I would say in Pandharpur we had a very special and very intimate darsana and association and service of the deities and I'm sure the Sri Sampradaya temples would not have allowed us to come. Yes, their deities darshan you could take, but there was no question of us, what to say if westerners doing archanam but here in Pandharpur we had that privilege.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Okay so is it also proper to say that the Maharashtrian Bhakti tradition itself was rejuvenated by many saints, most of them from what is conventionally called the lower caste? Maybe could you say that because of that the discrimination is much less in Maharashtra?

Lokanath Swami: Yes, whatever historical reasons are there-these could also be the reasons. The famous devotees of Panduranga, some were farmers or some were cobblers or beggars or potters and from all castes and creeds.

vaishnave jati buddhi arcye visnau sila dhir gurusu nara matir
(Padma Purana).

All this is opening the gate of hell. To think that a person belongs to such and such caste or that Guru is just ordinary-

just another human being and that the deity is just a stone. Here the Lord and the Lord's devotees are kind and there everyone is welcome. We see a picture of Panduranga Vitthal and he is carrying all sorts of devotees coming from all different backgrounds and so-called castes and Varnas and asrams.

Some of them are on his shoulder and some he's holding in his hand and bringing them along and they are sitting all over him and he is carrying them so that is the Lord, wherever he is, in Jagannatha Puri or South India or Pandharpur, that's the Lord.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: This is a very intimate image of the Lord, almost like Krishna in Vrindavan where he carries the Gopas. We don't have such an intimate image of say for example Lord Rama carrying his associates and Lord Vishnu would definitely not. So can you say something about the similarities between Vitthala and Lord Krishna? The way he is worshipped or the way he is being conceived by the saints?

HH Lokanath Swami: Well officially you could say that Lord Vitthal is Dwarkadish but here the deities lilas are like the Lord of Vrindavan. In the beginning of his Abhishek the Lord is like 'oh where is my butter, where is my butter?' And then they stop bathing him and they bring the big bowl of butter and then they feed him. Makhan Chor, the Lord who eats butter, this is Krishna and what other Lord can..?

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Krishna in Vrindavan specifically.

Lokanath Swami: I'm sure Rama also eats some butter, Nrsimha eats, everyone eats but no-one eats and likes butter like Krishna does. Or Vitthal in Pandharpur, he has that very special affection for butter there and then there's Radharani, so this is what we have. We are bringing it to the notice of Warkeries and Maharashtrians that okay, it means there's a Pandharpur and there's also a Gopalpura.

And Gopalpura is Vrindavan and if you visit Gopalpura you will see that they visited Gokul in Vrindavan. All darsanas are like that and pastimes are like that. The Vishnupadas near Gopalpura, at the bank of Chandrabhaga, you see Sri Krishna and footprints of the calves and the cows and flute, so that is Krishna.

That is the very image of Krishna – I have done some research with the help and consultation of scholars and going through libraries and scriptures that what they call Gopalpura which is in top of a hill, that hill is Govardhan. And there's a river flowing and there's a Chandrabhaga and Jamuna confluence. I'm sure along with Rukmini – this is a Vitthal Rukmini temple so there's a Rukmini, there's a Satyabhama and there's a Radharani also.

Next to Rukmini, if you take darsana of Rukmini and come outside, next to Rukmini there is Radharani darsana. Vitthal is the Lord of Radha who is Lord of Vrindavan, Vrajendra Nandan Sri Krishna. He is Dwarkadish and he is also Vrajavasi, Vrindavanvasi Krishna and so we want to bring this to the notice of the warkeries and everyone.

So Prabhupada wanted me to preach in Maharashtra also and revive their Krishna consciousness and the process of Sankirtan. So I wrote a book. Prabhupada was asked to preach in the west so Prabhupada thought 'I better have some books translated in English language so I could preach.' So I also thought to do something similar and so upon arrival here in Pandharpura we have come up with this book called Bhuvaikuntha and we are trying to pair these mysteries of Pandharpur and unfold these different dimensions. So that's our goal.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Yes Maharaja it's a beautiful book and we will put in the information about this in the podcast also when you're talking about it. So Maharaja going back to the point also of you doing research to show how Krishna is very much there is Pandharpura also, so it's almost like where

Lord Chaitanya is a Channa (covered) Avatar of Krishna and the devotees actually highlight how he's the Lord.

So it's almost like it is Krishna's Vrindavan or that the mood of Krishna in Vrindavan is there in Pandharpura but now in the Gaudiya tradition you are bringing it to light.

Lokanath Swami: I'm not the first one. The previous saints – especially Tukaram and others also, and so many, many of the of their compositions talk of Vitthal as Sri Krishna.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: In general the poetic compositions are quite syncretic like even when Balaji is being worshipped he will be referred to as Rama and Krishna so I think the poetic compositions have always been syncretic and the different manifestations are worshiped together. But specifically the local places as being associated with a particular form of the Lord, I think that is something which is maybe not so highlighted.

Lokanath Swami: Tukaram Maharaj says that Krishna has appeared in Gokul and everyone is Sukhi, very happy in Vrindavan.

Govinda Govinda mana lagalia chanda

So you name it, there are thousands of Angas. We talk of Vitthal less as Dwarakadish and more as Krishna of Vrindavan. And there's the Gopis and Gopas and that.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: In general with respect to the Bhakti songs, Krishna in Vrindavan is much more glorified and sung about more than Krishna in Dwarka. It's not just in Pandharpur but overall even if you see the Gaudiya Vaisnava songs or in general the bhakti songs, they are much more about Krishna in Vrindavan than Krishna in Dwarka.

Lokanath Swami: So our Gaudiya vaisnavas, our emphasis is in Vrajendra Nandan and as you said that is also observed in many, many Krishna temples or Dwarkadish temples or Vishnu

temples also. They are always singing the glories of Krishna. There is even Rama or Vishnu or Guruvayur.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Yes Maharaja, so you mentioned about Padayatra being welcomed across the country in many places so in general in the heart land of Maharashtra, how much of the Bhakti culture which was there at the time of Tukaram Maharaj and before, how much of it is still there now and how is the Krishna consciousness movement helping to revive that more in the rural parts? We have centres prominently in the cities but in the more internal parts of the country or in the state how is it Maharaja?

HH Lokanath Swami: The age of Kali is here and getting more active and everyone is being engulfed, including Maharashtrians in it. As a result the irreligion, Yatrardhamas catur vidhah (SB 1.17.38)

Bhagavatam said 'you could reside in four places and that is where there is gambling so that is for you, oh Kali. That is your residence. Also where there is drinking, intoxication, where there is illicit sex and where there is meat eating.'

So these things are in the practice of the western culture and part of that culture is the mall culture and shopping and eating and five star hotel culture and this and that so people are indulging and Maharashtrians are indulging in these things. There used to be Akarsh (chess playing) at time of Tukaram and now there is mutton Bhakri. That's how they advertise. Not only Bhakri, Bhakri is the Maharashtrian bread of Chappati but in those days they would eat that with bhaji (spinach) bhakri or vegetables and bhakri but now mutton bhakri [jawar roti].

I was not far from Kolhapur, I was on the way to Belgaum and there was a festival called 'Mutton Utsav.' And like that you know all these things go on and even Warkeries have this mala around their necks and when they want to eat meat or eggs they

take it off and put the mala away. Then they eat and put the Mala on back again. So this is very common, chewing tobacco or drinking. This also happens during dindis and this and that.

Of course worse things happen in other parts of the world. Maybe Maharashtrians are not that bad but in the middle of Kirtan in Maharashtra they will just drink tea but I have seen in Bengal during our Padayatra that they will stop in the middle of Kirtan and they will drink liquor and also Ganja or Marijuana they will smoke and then Kirtan again. So I would say there are ten offences against the holy name and the whole world is chanting the holy names.

Hindus, Maharashtrians chanting Bhajans and Kirtans but they are not aware of ten offences against the holy name. They are eternally in Padma Puran but our Gaudiya Vaishnavas have made the popular for talk. These are the ten offences against the holy name and when we are given initiation in the Hare Krishna movement we are reminded of what those ten offences are. But the Maharashtrian Kirtan chanters and singers either they know those and they of course follow those offences or that he is not there because of his offences.

So the four regulative principles are not followed- no meat eating or intoxication, no illicit sex and no gambling.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: I think this is unfortunate everywhere. In Bhaktisiddhanta Thakur's biography it is mentioned that in previous times there were Bengalis who would have a bead bag in one hand and they would go to the fish market and bring fish with the other hand. So that is unfortunate yes Maharaja. And you were quoting many sweet lines from Maharashtrian Bhajans and songs so now these for every culture have a special appeal. For Maharashtrians there will be an appeal for Maharashtrian songs.

If we go to North India then over there people are very much into Ramcharitmanas and Tulsidas and there is a very special

intimacy when Bhakti is frozen in the Vernacular language, the language that people have grown up in. So in our outreach when we are presenters of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition you were also preaching in Maharashtra so how much do you utilise or integrate Marathi Bhakti songs or Bhakti expressions in your outreach?

HH Lokanath Swami: I wish I could do more. I had realised the significance of this and our Gaudiya Vaishnava Acharya Narottama Das Thakur and Lochan das Thakur and many other Thakurs have compiled songs. Lot's of Krishna consciousness or Gaudiya Vaishnava Bhajans or Lila Kirtan, Rupa Kirtan, Nama Kirtan, Nimai sannyas lila Kirtan.

So when it is your local language or mother tongue then you could follow and digest and assimilate that more easily so and Prabhupada has said that the songs of Bhaktivinoda Thakur and Narottama Das Thakur are non different from the Vedas, they are Vedas. So to grasp the Vedas and the Sanskrit language in Sutra form and all these acarya, they compose in vernacular or local languages so we should take full advantage of these arrangements.

Then there's some difficulties as these compilations are three hundred, seven hundred years old and then the language of the words used in those day are not the same as these days and then again philosophy understanding becomes difficult. So besides myself there are other devotees in Maharashtra who are quite well versed in the Tukaram Abhangas and they have memorised or they seek and explain. I do some, some of them are part of my vocabulary.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Yes Maharaja so if I understand rightly you said three things that our tradition has done. That 1 in the form of the songs of the Acarya like Narottama Das Thakur, Bhaktivinoda Thakur, Lochan Das Thakur, so in that sense it's part of our tradition to present a Sanskrit message in the vernacular languages. And then you are saying that

there are some devotees who are doing it with respect to Tukaram Maharaja's Abhangas and other things.

And that can be done with the challenges which include that it's a little old English. And you said that you would like to do more, is it just a matter of logistics or is it because we are a part of a particular tradition which means there are limits to how much we can take resources from other traditions, or is it just more logistical?

HH Lokanath Swami: There are other traditions and even amongst those other traditions some are closer to our Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition. Some things may be not so close and matching our philosophy or tradition or culture but we are very aware of those.

Karma kanda, jnana kanda, kevala visera bhanda.

Or Tukaram Maharaja says that your talk or songs or whatever, 'if it is tinged with Advaita, this non-dual, Nirakara, Nirguna, Advaitavad, then I have nothing to do with this!' So I am sure that this Advaita Vani or Nirvishesha shunyavadi pashchatya desha tarine. That Advaitavad or Shunyavad or Bhautikvad or Samyavad is just mixed and it becomes a song and those Abhangas could be a Mishra.

Karma Mishra or Jyana Mishra or Yoga Mishra Bhakti but our principle is

**Harer Na harer nama harer nama
harer namaiva kevalam
kalau nasty eva nasty eva
nasty eva gati anyatha (C.C 6.242)**

Why is it said three times? So the explanation is why? Nasty eva, not by Karma so there's one Nasty eva and not by Jyana there is another Nasty eva. And not by Yoga so there's another Nasty eva. So these things will be there so you have to also be cautious, be careful. So that could be a reason and so it's

better to be safe than sorry, as they say. So just stay awake.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Okay. So sometimes I find it a little paradoxical or ironical that sometimes in our out reach we can quote western authors and we may quote something from Shakespeare or Byron or something like that. But sometimes we have to be you could say almost hyper cautious about quoting something from the Indian tradition itself.

So although they may be much more spiritual, so the ideological principles may be there but if we consider the lifestyles of the western authors whom we may quote, just to introduce some philosophical point to new people, to show how something is not strange or alien but is relevant, in one sense if there is wisdom that can help us connect with Krishna's wisdom, then does the source matter that much?

Because it is not that we are recommending that source to some people, so you are familiar with this and so this is a similar point..

HH Lokanath Swami: Okay so Sankaracarya propagated this impersonalism so we stay away. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has warned

**Mayavadi bhasya sunile haya sarva nasa
(c.c Madhya 6.169)**

But when the same Sankaracarya talks

**bhaja govindam bhaja govindam
govindam bhaja mudhamate ?
samprapte sannihite kale
nahi nahi raksati dukrinkarane**

So he's saying 'go for it.' He is Advaitavadi and all that. Well he was speaking the truth, Bhaja Govindam otherwise you are being a fool! So otherwise you look into this study of grammar but then what about worshipping Govinda? The whole Bhaja Govindam series of verses is a book called Bhaja

Govindam. And there are talks of Vairagya, renunciation and there we are together and so we have no issues with Sankaracarya's Bhaja Govindam and those songs.

Or when he says bala vasta krida sakta. When are you going to worship the Lord? When you are a child you will be playing and when you will become a young man you will be running after young women and when you are old you will be absorbed in your anxieties. A ridden person you are going to become, so where is your time for the Lord? So we welcome this statement of Sankaracarya and so it depends.

Each year Sankaracarya comes to Pandharpur and he has darsana of Vitthal and he spontaneously composes Pandurangastakam.

Parabrahma lingam bhaje Pandurangam

Parabrahma lingam bhaje Pandurangam

Sankaracarya ki.. (laughter). He says Bhaja Pandurangam, worship Panduranga and what kind of Panduranga? Parabrahma lingam. Lingam means form so Parabrahma and Param Dhama like that the same thing he is talking. Just like Arjuna said to Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita and then Sankaracarya is glorifying Panduranga to his heart's content.

So we could do some picking and choosing from even what these other Sampradayas, saints or Mahatmas have written or spoken.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: That's a very important point about selecting carefully and you also mentioned that something written in very old Marathi language, it's meaning may not be clear and accessible. So do we also have a living Bhakti tradition right now? In Maharashtra within our movement or outside, there are people even today composing Bhakti songs and Bhakti poetry. Is it happening now also in the local languages?

HH Lokanath Swami: Yes maybe somewhere but there's nothing dominating the Maharashtrian scene.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: In the last hundred to hundred and fifty years in general poetry itself has been going down all over the world. Not any great poetry has been composed and I guess that's a part of..

HH Lokanath Swami: Yes, we are to revive our Gadiya Vaishnava consciousness, Krishna consciousness here and now we have Chaitanya Caritamrita in Marathi and Bhagavatam in Marathi and Bhagavad Gita and so let Maharashtrians now go for it and drink it, digest it and assimilate it. They should take full advantage of what is being made available by Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Maharashtra is waiting, India is waiting and whole world is waiting for Gauranga Maharprabhu's special benediction and the international society for Krishna consciousness is here to deliver that benediction in the form of chanting

**Hare Krishna Hare Krishna
Krishna Krishna Hare Hare
Hare Rama Hare Rama
Rama Rama Hare Hare**

And in the form of Srila Prabhupada's books and we have temples and Darshans and festivals and Prashadam. So this is complete and I think let the world be just happy with this. Or let Maharashtra, India, the world be happy like that.

Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu ki jai!

**Param vijayate Sri Krishna Sankirtana
Srila Prabhupada ki jai
Hare Krishna movement ki jai**

He has established this international society for Krishna consciousness and it is from here that Krishna consciousness spreads to the world to the best of our ability.

I think I have given my concluding message just now and am

just winding up so it's your turn and you can do this.

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: Is there anything you would like to add Maharaja?

Lokanath Swami: Thank you for this opportunity Chaitanya Charan Prabhu. It was nice talking to you and I look forward to ..

Chaitanya Charan Prabhu: It has been an immense honour Maharaja. Thank you very much for your time and sharing not just your experience and your wisdom. Through all that you were saying I could feel your sense of devotion coming out and I feel not just illumined but also encouraged. I'm sure the audience will also have that experience. Immensely grateful to you Maharaja for sparing your time and being here for the podcast.

Lokanath Maharaja ki jai!

Srila Prabhupada ki jai!!

Thank you very much Maharaja.

End.