

A WORD TO OUR MADHVA
BRETHREN

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There is a fundamental justification in seeking to approach the past history of a sect, especially in this country, on the basis of the prima-facie authenticity of the *guru-paramparā* as preserved in the sect. We would be more scientifically employed if we turn our attention to obtaining greater information by comparative study of the different records instead of resorting to gratuitous assumptions against the validity of the preceptorial lists.

For this very cogent reason we must accept as historically valid the existing preceptorial list of the Madhva-Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sect till its authenticity in any particular is conclusively impugned by specific historical evidence. We have had no cause up till now to suspect the truth of any portion of this list.

This list discloses the fact that the Supreme Lord Śrī Caitanya accepted Śrī Īśvara Purī as His preceptor. Śrī Īśvara Purī was a disciple of Śrī Mādhavendra Purī.

Śrī Mādhavendra Purī is a most renowned Vaiṣṇava. He is, in fact, the great founder of the society of transcendental lovers who adhere strictly to their all-absorbing passion for the amorous transcendental hero, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, This constitutes a great development of the original doctrine of Śrī Madhvācārya. In spite of this peculiarity of the teaching of Śrī Mādhavendra Purī, the list of the former gurus shows that Śrī Mādhavendra is descended from the line of Ānanda Tīrtha in the ascetic order of the Madhva Vaiṣṇavas. There is really nothing against the genuineness of the list of the gurus of the line of the Madhva Vaiṣṇavas.

Some misguided critic may try to rashly propose to disconnect Śrī Mādhavendra from the line of the gurus of the Madhva Vaiṣṇavas, by asserting that the Madhva *sannyāsīns* are known as Tīrthas and that no Purī *sannyāsīn* can have admittance into their ecclesiastical order. But the solution of this apparent difficulty is offered by an incident in the authentic career of the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. He is stated to have embraced the order

of the Bhāratī *sannyāsīns*. But He was also stated to be a disciple of Śrī Īśvara Purī. This irregularity is to be ascribed to the practice of attaching their surnames by the older associations. The different *guru-paramparās* show the same line. So we cannot discredit those records by basing our arguments on assumptions and ordinary argument from current practices.

Moreover, whenever there is any congregational gathering of the different schools of Vaiṣṇavas, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, as a class, introduce themselves as belonging to the line of Śrī Madhvācārya. These are hard and indisputable facts and cannot be lightly explained away by inferences based solely on certain practices of either sect.

If, however, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas actually preferred to brand themselves as Madhva Gauḍīyas as a matter of history, enquirers would naturally be anxious to know whether the servants of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas subscribe in-toto to the professions and practices of the Madhvas or whether they differ from the older school in some other points. In case they have a distinctive reference, enquiry should naturally start to make a list of the differences between the two schools. This comparison should necessarily be made in regard to their practical activity, social procedure, philosophy, theology and different performances due to all these, - or, in other words, the examination should embrace both their exoteric and esoteric differences.

If we take up the practical activities of the Madhva and the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas for the purpose of such comparison, we find that the former put themselves under a severe reserve in their propagatory methods, whereas the latter are vigorously proselytizing. The Madhvas keep up the old habits and ideas, whereas the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas have advanced towards and utilized everything facilitating the true cause of devotion. The former are very fond of *arcana* according to the *pañcarātrika* system; whereas the latter,

though not different to adopt *arcana*, yet in addition to that, they perform *bhajana* like the Dāsakuṭa section of the Madhva community. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas give more stress to *bhajana* than to *arcana* of the Vyāsakuṭa section of the latter community. The habits and customs of the Southern Indian Vaiṣṇavas are different from those of Northern Indian Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, though both of them have a common base and origin as their guiding principle.

Turning to their respective social procedures we find that there is one great point of resemblance. *Brāhmaṇas* are alone considered to be eligible for the service of God by the Madhva community. *Brāhmaṇas* are accordingly in sole charge of the religious institutions of the sect. They alone conduct all public and private worship. This is also the practice of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. But in this matter also there is an important distinction between the two. The point has already been referred to in connection with propaganda and proselytization. The Madhvas are not prepared to go outside the pale of the caste *brāhmaṇas* for imparting initiation for worship. In this they are in one sense too narrow in comparison with the method of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. Śrī Caitanya accepted all who possessed the real inclination for leading the exclusive spiritual life and bestowed on them even the position and function of the *ācārya*. Ṭhākura Haridāsa, the great *ācārya* of the Gauḍīya sect, was a Mohammedan by parentage. Most of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Gosvāmīs were not caste *brāhmaṇas*.

In another respect, however, the Madhva practice is more lax than the practice of the Gauḍīya society. No person is entitled in the Gauḍīya community to *mantra-dīkṣā* unless he or she is prepared to submit unconditionally to follow the instructions of the *ācārya* in every particular of actual conduct. By this test caste *brāhmaṇas* are also liable to be ineligible for the service of God in the Gauḍīya community, if they are not prepared to give up their

unscriptural mode of life by submitting to the autocratic rule of the *ācārya*.

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas claim to follow the real principle of the scriptural *varṇāśrama* institution in the organisation of their spiritual society. Whereas the Madhvas follow the hereditary principle which is seldom applicable in the present age when few persons possess either the habit or the inclination to follow the spirit of the *śāstrika* regulation.

Judged by the test of loyalty to the spirit of the scriptural regulation, the Gauḍīya community may justly claim to be far more conservative in their social practices than the Madhvas.