Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava

Three volumes

Bhakti Vikāsa Swami
Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava

**Volume 1**

Part 1: Biographical Overview
Part 2: His Message, Mission, and Personality

**Volume 2**

Part 3: The Preaching Challenge
Part 4: Disciples, Associates, and Acquaintances
Part 5: His Contributions Reviewed

**Volume 3 (Supplementary)**

Writings, Lectures, and Colloquies
Appendixes
I am foolish, lowborn, and insignificant, and I always desire material enjoyment; yet by the order of the Vaiṣṇavas I am bold enough to write this book. (Cc 1.8.83)

It is practically a joke that such a minuscule insect as myself would dare to write about Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Śrīla Bhakti...
Preface

From my initial days in devotional life I was fascinated by the personality of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. I often reflected on the painting of him in the ISKCON temple at Bury Place, London, his serious gaze as if descending directly from Goloka Vṛndāvana. He was known as a lionlike guru for his power in combating nondevotional theories. Who would not be impressed by his erudition, strictness, austerity, fearless dedication to truth, unflinching devotion to the lotus feet of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and unveering preaching of Their glories?

Our own spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, another empowered ācārya, through his unbreakable bond of devotion to his gurudeva Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, has linked us eternally to him and the entire paramparā.

There is no intrinsic difference between the teachings of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and those of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. Considering this, and that bhaktivedānta-vānī is perfect and complete, one may question the necessity of studying bhaktisiddhānta-vānī. In reply, we should understand the principle that the guru is one yet manifests in multiple forms, each a distinct individual with a specific and unique contribution. All ācāryas deliver the same message, but with differing style and emphasis. No guru is self-made, but is dependent on and to be understood in terms of the paramparā he represents. Without clear understanding of these subtle points of guru-tattva, no one can be a genuine ācārya; hence, for spiritual progress it is essential to learn in depth and from an authorized source about the character, activities, and teachings of previous ācāryas.

Typical of a bona fide guru, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda never took credit for his achievements, but attributed them to the blessings of his own guru-mahārāja. Devotees who worship those achievements will naturally be eager to know of the extraordinarily empowered sadhu who gave rise to another ācārya as significant as His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, who repeatedly pointed out that it is not sufficient simply to believe that God is great—one must know how He is great. Similarly, a sincere disciple should not merely accept as axiomatic that his guru is exalted, but should strive to comprehend how he is so, by reverently studying his instructions and behavior.

Whatever a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa does and says is invaluable for conditioned souls trying to follow in his footsteps. This is especially true of those special ācāryas who come to this plane specifically to uplift fallen souls. Thus in the course of preaching duties in Bengal during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, I relished several opportunities to hear stories and teachings of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura from some of his direct disciples and granddisciples. Gleaning here and there gems of information about our parama-guru, my heart filled with wonder and pride at being connected to such a towering transcendental luminary, and my eagerness to learn more about him increased. Realizing that numerous valuable pastimes and instructions of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura could be systematically
collected from his remaining disciples, I sometimes contemplated doing so. But as an insignificant member of the devotee community, I felt it would be presumptuous to attempt such an important endeavor that would entail approaching many senior Vaiṣṇavas.

Yet toward the end of 1985, having gradually built up courage and considering that no one else was likely to undertake this task, I set out to meet the few disciples of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī still present in the world. (Unfortunately, before I was able to meet Śrīmad B.R. Śrīdhara Mahārāja, who might have revealed oceans of nectarean events, he had become indisposed and was hardly speaking; and then he passed away.) Initially I visited different ashrams of the Gauḍīya Maṭha diaspora and met a few elderly sannyasis and brahmacārīs. The quest for Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's householder disciples led me to many places in Bengal, Orissa, and Vṛndāvana, including some remote spots and dead ends. Although eventually I found the whereabouts of most of the few remaining disciples, many of them either did not take me seriously, or having had minimal association with Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, had little to say. Others were happy to meet me but seemed unable to focus on the topic for which I had approached them.

Having gathered smatters of information, by good fortune I was advised by a devotee to meet Śrīpāda Jati Śekhara Prabhu, who had joined the Gauḍīya Maṭha in 1926 as a brahmacārī and who frequently saw and heard much from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. After the breakup of his guru's institution, Jati Śekhara Prabhu withdrew to live as a householder.

During several visits of a few days each, as we sat together on the floor of the tiny thatched-roof temple at his home in Cuttack, Orissa, Jati Śekhara Prabhu revealed dozens of stories about Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. He told me, “You are like a train, and I have the goods. You will take the goods to the destination. For many years I was carrying these memories of my guru-mahārāja. Sometimes I recalled them, yet being engaged in family affairs I was mostly forgetting them. But now that you have come, these things will not be lost—they will be revealed to the world.” Reflecting the love he had received from his gurudeva, Jati Śekhara Prabhu was kind to me. He appreciated his godbrother A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami's contribution in spreading their guru's mission, but as a lifelong supporter of Śrī Ananta Vāsudeva Prabhu (later known as Śrī Bhakti Prasāda Purī Gosvāmī and then as Śrī Puṇḍāsa) and Śrīmad B.K. Auḍulomi Mahārāja, both controversial figures in Gauḍīya Maṭha history, he maintained distinct differences of opinion regarding certain things that His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda had done. While Jati Śekhara Prabhu and I could not agree on everything, we met on the happy ground of jointly glorifying Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura to the world, and thus developed a relationship of mutual respect and affection.

My original intention was simply to compile unpublished anecdotes of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, but ultimately I decided to give a more composite overview of his activities, achievements, and teachings. Hence I chose to also present his biography and some of his philosophical explanations, essays, and discourses, and to include already told vignettes well worth repeating. This led me to consult available literature by and about Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta
Sarasvatī, especially the diverse biographical works in Bengali and English, as well as his extant letters and abstracts of lectures and conversations. From Sarasvatī-jayaśrī, an anthology of disciples’ recollections that was first printed in 1935, I culled dozens of anecdotal events never before published in English. Although unsystematic and documenting only from 1911 to 1925, Sarasvatī-jayaśrī is the most authoritative contemporary work about Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, from which all subsequent biographies have directly or indirectly drawn much information. And my previous failure to have interviewed Śrīmad B.R. Śrīdhara Mahārāja was largely compensated when, some fifteen years after his departure, I gained access to various narratives and insights recorded in transcriptions of conversations with him. Another valuable source for me was the body of statements by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda about his guru-mahārāja.

Several times when I thought my task nearly complete, important research material that I was previously unaware of became available to me. Thus the undertaking seemed to assume a life of its own, gradually expanding to an extent I had not imagined upon its commencement. Major input was proffered by a Russian disciple of Śrīpāda Bhakti Pramoda Puri Mahārāja who, on Mahārāja’s order, had learned Bengali and spent years collecting and preserving the printed vānī of Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, during which he became closely acquainted with it, and with many orally preserved anecdotes about Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. This devotee (who requested anonymity) graciously spent several weeks with me, combing over the text, providing suggestions, clarifications, relevant material, and photos of Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. His contribution significantly meliorated the growing tome.

Since Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī’s vaibhava (grandeur and glory) is principally manifested in his vilāsa (pastimes) and vānī (teachings), Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava attempts to give an intimate look at his vilāsa through reminiscences of those who lived with him, and to thereby reveal his attributes, character, and achievements, insofar as they may be apprehended by limited sensibility—for a great person is known not only by his achievements and instructions but also by his conduct, his commitment to live by what he professes, and his genuine regard and empathy for others, as manifested at each moment and in every detail of his life. In addition, Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava presents drops from the vast and fathomless ocean that constitutes Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī’s vānī, which being inseparable from and the very meaning of his vilāsa, reveal not only his extraordinary intellectual depth, but even more, the magnitude of his transcendental personality. And because that personality is saturated with and nondifferent from bhakti-vinoda, Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava necessarily also provides some insights and anecdotes illuminating the renown of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.

Readers eager for what they consider nectar, and thus inclined to hear only stories and not philosophy, are urged not to skim through the specifically philosophical sections of this book, for without bhakti-siddhānta it is impossible even to begin to appreciate the qualities and activities of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. As he himself taught, although vānī and vapu are inseparable, vānī is more important than vision through materially formed eyes; vapu can be understood through vānī, but not vice versa. His very name being expressive of philosophical
instruction, to neglect or pooh-pooh the vāṇī that is the essence of his being is necessarily a
disservice and offense to him. Actual benefit will accrue to those who peruse the entire contents
thoughtfully and prayerfully, with faith that imbibing his message will lead to the summit of
spiritual perfection.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's numerous unique, divinely inspired, and amazingly
perspicacious philosophical insights were typically presented in a Bengali so turgid and difficult
to satisfactorily translate, that in their pristine form they are accessible only to those few adepts
possessing sufficient linguistic, cerebral, and devotional qualifications. Therefore nearly all
seekers in subsequent generations will better approach the legacy of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta
Sarasvatī Thākura via the simplified yet no less spiritually potent expositions of His Divine
Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. Indeed, for persons with little grounding in
those teachings, many of the topics in Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava will likely be
incomprehensible. This book is not for beginners.

Inevitably, not all readers will accept Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī as he is. Even a number of
his professed discipular descendants will approach his vāṇī with “half-hen” logic, to ignore,
minimize, or redefine whatever does not appeal to their own sense gratificatory notions of
bhakti. Yet Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava was written principally for the elucidation of
purified men who are thoroughly honest, in other words, devotees sincerely aspiring to follow
in toto the sacred path shown by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. Loving devotees who hold
bhakti-siddhānta in their hearts will comprehend these topics, which are always pleasing to
Vaiṣṇavas. Genuine bhaktas become blissful by hearing them, whereas camel-like nondevotees
and pseudo-devotees cannot enter into these matters. And if such persons do not understand,
then what in all the three worlds could be more satisfying?

Presumably Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava will be of interest also to secular students of religion,
particularly those specializing in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. However, notwithstanding their
scrupulous standards of research and exegesis and their laboriously acquired accumulation of
facts and figures, such external inquirers are by their very outlook disqualified from inner
appreciation of Vaiṣṇavas and Vaiṣṇavism; for the neutrality and aloofness that purportedly
define the academic position are self-defeating in the realm of spirituality, where commitment
alone is the key. Indeed, that such a monumental ācārya as Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī has
to date been largely overlooked by academicians specializing in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism bears
testimony to their committed mundane-ness and resultant inability to recognize the essential.

\[
\text{acintyāḥ khalu ye bhāvā na tāṁs taraṇaṇa yoja yet}
\]
\[
\text{prakṛtibhyāḥ paraṁ yac ca tad acintyasya lakśaṇam}
\]

Whatever is beyond material nature is thus inconceivable to persons within it, and cannot
be grasped through mundane reasoning. (Mahābhārata, Bhīṣma-parva 5.22)

The endeavor of small-minded scholars to classify Vaiṣṇavas according to psychological or
sociological criteria, as if like ordinary mortals Vaiṣṇavas are primarily products of their
environment, volitionally denies the spiritual dimension that empowers devotees. Certainly, to subject Vaiṣṇavas to analytic methods born of partial experience and imperfect conceptions is from the outset preposterous and offensive. Those who consider transcendental personages to be objects of empiric study, ipso facto can never understand them. Only they who seek mercy from such great souls may be blessed with comprehension of their glories. In the words of Professor N.K. Sanyal, a prominent disciple of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī:

The empiric historian, with his geographical and chronological apparatus of observation, can have really no proper idea of the grotesque anomaly that he unconsciously perpetrates by his pedantic effort to gauze [sic] the absolute by the standard supplied to her victim by His deluding energy in the form of the mundane categories that can only limit and define them, whereas the function to be performed is to get rid of the necessity to do either. The empiric consciousness is not in the absolute consciousness at all. It can only bungle and commit a deliberate blunder by attempting to limit and define the immeasurable under the pleas of a necessity that need not be supposed to exist at all. By the empiric attitude one is led to launch out on the quest of the absolute truth with the resources of admittedly utter ignorance. This foolhardiness must be made to cease. The method of submissive inquiry enjoined by the scriptures should be substituted after being properly learnt by those who have themselves attained to the right knowledge of the same by the right method of submission.4

To exoteric vision, great ācāryas resemble common men, inasmuch as they walk, talk, eat, travel, undergo sickness, and in many other ways seem like anyone else. But a devotee's existence is quite distinct from that of a conditioned soul. Just as each thought, word, and deed of ordinary persons is impelled by the deluding influence of the material energy, the movements of pure devotees are conducted by the Supreme Lord's līlā-śakti (internal potency). Thus like Kṛṣṇa Himself, pure devotees who come to this world are never really part of it:

\[
\text{etad īśanam īśasya prakṛti-stho 'pi tad-gunaiḥ na yujyate sadātma-sthair yathā buddhis tad-āśrayā}
\]

This is the divinity of the Personality of Godhead: He is not affected by the qualities of material nature even though in contact with them. Similarly, devotees who have taken shelter of the Lord are never influenced by mundane qualities. (SB 1.11.38)

Unlike conditioned souls ever enmeshed in māyā, pure devotees remain perpetually immersed in intense love for Kṛṣṇa, thus infusing each moment of even their seemingly routine affairs with the ecstasy of their hearts’ craving for Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is the life of His devotees, and a devotee lives only to serve his beloved Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. A Vaiṣṇava is fully engaged in that service even before his apparent birth, and upon leaving the plane of mortal vision he returns to the realm of eternal service. Hence a Vaiṣṇava's life and activities are clearly distinct from those of ordinary people, which have a discernable beginning and end and may be considered a product of their contemporary historical and sociological ethos. A Vaiṣṇava is not limited by time nor conditioned by his terrestrial surroundings, because in all times and all places he
remains absorbed in wholly spiritual service to Kṛṣṇa, beyond the constrictive vector of mundane time and space. Hence, reference to a Vaiṣṇava’s “life” should be understood to indicate his transcendental existence manifested within the plane of temporal existence. Eternally perfect Vaiṣṇavas appear in human society solely to bring others back to the immortal abode, which they themselves keenly hanker for in separation. By their causeless mercy they infuse devotion into the hearts of those who have neglected Kṛṣṇa since time immemorial. Accordingly, even though a nitya-siddha mahā-bhāgavata like Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī may appear to transit through various phases of spiritual development or be tutored in the principles of bhakti, enlightened thinkers accept that even before being formally instructed, a liberated soul is never bereft of knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, and indeed is so enriched by such realization as to be empowered to similarly enrich others.

The character and activities of such exalted devotees can be appreciated only from the plane of divinity, which they represent and to which they beckon us, and will remain ever inexplicable to persons unwilling to embrace the spirit of their teachings. Such outsiders are warned not to equate the transcendental actions, moods, and emotions of redoubtable devotees with the counterpart expressions of common men. Mature students of Vaiṣṇava theology know well that the anger, disappointment, and other apparently less desirable traits of a mahā-bhāgavata are as much spotless manifestations of his unsullied attachment to Kṛṣṇa as are his renunciation, tranquility, modesty, and other such qualities considered exclusively adorable by persons ignorant of transcendental reality. This point is repeatedly elaborated in the biographies of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, wherein simpletons are cautioned not to ascribe imperfection to unimpeachable saints who are beyond their scope of ideation:

\[
yāṅra citte kṛṣṇa-premā karaye udaya
tāṅra vākya, kriyā, mudrā vijñēha nā bujhaya
\]

Even the most learned man cannot comprehend the words, activities, and symptoms of one situated in love of Godhead. (Cc 2.23.39)

As Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī elucidated: “Although to external vision the activities of a devotee and the mischievousness of a pseudo-devotee may appear the same, there is a gulf of difference between them, like that between milk and a mixture of limestone and water. Worldly people cannot understand devotees. If they could understand they would become renounced like the devotees—but that they do not want.”

Even the seeming sickness and other apparent adversities undergone by mahā-bhāgavatas must be accepted as līlā and not misconstrued as equivalent to the karmic sufferings of conditioned souls. As Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura often quoted:

\[
yata dekha vaisṇaverar vyavahāra duḥkha
niścaya jāniha sei parānanda-sukha
viṣaya-madāndha saba kichui nā jāne
\]
vidyā-made dhana-made vaiṣṇava nā cine

Be convinced that distress seen in a Vaiṣṇava is actually the happiness of spiritual bliss. Persons blind and intoxicated with sense pleasures know nothing of this. In the pride of knowledge and wealth they fail to recognize a Vaiṣṇava. (Cb 2.9.240–41)

And he explained:

Pure devotees are never forced to experience the fruits of their karma. All their pastimes, such as taking birth, are enacted simply by the Lord's will. But it is often seen that devotees appear in low-class families, or to ordinary eyes seem like fools or to be afflicted with disease. There is a great purpose behind this: if people were to detect that the Lord's devotees appear only in high-class families and are always strong, healthy, and well educated according to material calculation, they would become discouraged.

As evidenced from their mutual correspondence, the compilers of Sarasvatī-jayaśrī took much care to describe their gurudeva in a manner meant to prevent readers from being influenced by martya-buddhi, the misunderstanding that a transcendentally situated devotee is subject to the defects of ordinary mortals. Indeed, even to describe Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī as a lionlike guru or ṣaktyāveśa-avatāra, while not incorrect, is incomplete. As he himself revealed, the guru is to be considered either a confidante (priya-sakhī) of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī or a manifested representation of Śrīla Nityānanda Prabhu. Certain disciples of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura detected that in the eternal pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa he is Nayana-maṇi Mañjarī, a young girl assistant of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and the personification of Her gazing at Kṛṣṇa. Such intimate devotees of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī do not belong to this world, nor can they be fathomed by the feeble methodologies that it spawns. Only from the plane of the absolute, which Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī represented and directed others to, can one at least somewhat comprehend his glories.

Even though a great Vaiṣṇava preacher may live among ordinary beings, he is nonetheless always above them, and perhaps very few will truly appreciate him. Within a day of Brahmā, but one or two pure devotees of the stature of Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura might appear in this universe. To gain the association of such an extraordinarily exalted mahatma is more valuable and pleasing than completing millions of pilgrimages, studying millions of śāstras, or assiduously following śāstrīya prescriptions for millions of years. Yet even among pious souls dedicated to reciting, studying, and living according to authorized scripture, or among those extremely fortunate souls counted as disciples of Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, hardly a few persons could truly recognize the value of such association.

The almost unlimited gap between such illustrious souls and ourselves may be bridged only by their mercy, which they bestow upon those sincerely desiring to receive it. The magnitude of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's remarkable character, as chronicled herein, stands as testimony and warning to devotees in subsequent generations that the role of guru is not a matter of razzmatazz, but may be properly conducted only by faithfully following (anusaraṇa)
in the footsteps of genuinely liberated devotees, and not by attempting to imitate (anukaraṇa) their anyway inimitable behavior and achievements.

The lives of mahā-bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavas are full of magnificent transcendental activities in service to Lord Kṛṣṇa; their every moment is replete with profound meaning. How much can be recorded? How much can be preserved? And how much is our ability to appreciate? Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavitāraja Gosvāmī writes:

\[
gaura-līlāmṛta-sindhu—apāra agāda
ke karite pāre tāhāṅ avagāha-sādha

tāhāra mādhurya-gandhe lubdha haya mana
ataeva taṭe rahī’ cāki eka kaṇa
\]

The ocean of the pastimes of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu is immeasurable and unfathomable. Who is able to bathe therein? Its sweetness and fragrance attract my mind. Therefore I stand on its shore and taste but a drop of it. (Cc 1.12.94–95)

Unfortunately, many instructive pastimes of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura are now irrecoverably lost. And not only did he himself perform innumerable wonderful activities, but so also did the transcendental warriors he recruited, trained, and inducted into the preaching arena. Had all the adventures of each of his acolytes been recorded, it would have filled countless volumes. Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava comprises just a tiny nugget from the vast treasure of the pastimes of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and his associates, and a mere glimpse of his teachings, yet it is our humble attempt to conserve and present at least a fragment of that important legacy.

Notwithstanding its inevitable faults, I am confident that this book will be interesting and enlivening to most readers. And more importantly, as Jati Śekhara Prabhu noted, it will give valuable instructions to practitioners and preachers of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, by providing edifying anecdotes and realizations as well as intimate insights into guru-disciple relationships and other crucial facets of devotional life, all of which could help even mature and experienced devotees delve further into the intricacies of bhakti-siddhānta and deepen their understanding of the roots of the current worldwide bhakti movement.

Furthermore, Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava should fill a lacuna in knowledge of our heritage; for instance, prior to its publication, many senior and well-read members of ISKCON were unfamiliar with even the name of Śrī Sundarānanda Vidyāvinoda.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī stated that Sarasvatī-jayaśrī was so abundant in factual examples and anecdotes that reading it would bestow a result unattainable even by studying many śāstras for many years. Hence I pray that this volume, being similarly rich with Bhaktisiddhānta-vaibhava, by his mercy will bestow similar benediction on its readers. It particularly aims to better acquaint his discipular descendants with knowledge of what he gave
and how he gave it, with the hope that they preserve and not dilute or pollute his essential gifts, and that by being better equipped to serve his mission, they will spread his message throughout the globe and thereby obtain his blessings.

Collecting materials for and weaving the tapestry that comprises this presentation has been a prolonged learning experience affording an ever increasingly profound meditation on the divine qualities of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura and the numerous great souls who gathered round him. Notwithstanding my failings, I pray at the lotus feet of my parama-gurudeva that he be pleased to appear in these pages, his splendid attributes shining through. I pray that the readers’ regard for him be similarly enhanced, and that they become inspired to follow in his divine footsteps by adopting his unswerving mood of sacrificing everything for Kṛṣṇa. May his dynamic spirit energize us, and his purity sustain and nourish us.
Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura altered the course of religious history by reviving and forcefully propagating pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness. His boldness in combating cheating religion earned him the appellation “lion guru”—yet his heart was soft with divine love for Kṛṣṇa.

The result of over twenty years of research, Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava presents a wealth of newly translated material. Replete with anecdotes told by disciples who lived with him, this devotional, philosophical, cultural, and historical study gives intimate insights into the activities, teachings, and character of an empowered emissary of the Supreme Lord.

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Volume 3 features an overview of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvati’s contributions, with selections from his lectures, writings, and colloquies, also his astrological chart, and appendixes that include important details concerning Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvati and the Gauḍīya Maṭha.
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