

ISKCON Master of Peril

November 13, 2008

by Krsna Kant

One of the most influential and controversial guru hoaxers in ISKCON was Tamala Krishna Goswami (henceforward TKG), who died in a car crash on a road north of Calcutta on 15th March 2002. It was TKG who, in his capacity as Srila Prabhupada's secretary, co-signed the famous July 9th letter, and who later went on to give many conflicting accounts as to what Srila Prabhupada intended with regards guru-ship in ISKCON.

Following his death he has been canonized by ISKCON, with his body laid to rest in a samadhi (sacred shrine reserved only for the most exalted saints in the Gaudiya Vaisnava line) at its spiritual headquarters in Mayapur, West Bengal. Hence it is appropriate to present an account of the numerous contradictory justifications for ISKCON's guru hoax given by this GBC declared 'saint', some of which TKG confessed to in an academic paper called 'The Perils of Succession', and all of which led to turmoil within the Movement and heavily influenced the current false Guru philosophy in ISKCON:

1978:

TKG agreed with the rest of the eleven ritviks named in the July 9th letter that they had all been appointed as the 'material and spiritual successors' to Srila Prabhupada. He enthusiastically participated in and supported a system where the world was carved up into eleven zones, and where all the gurus were daily worshipped on huge, ornate *vyasanas* (special decorative seats for the guru) by their devoted disciples. A Governing Body Commission (GBC) paper approved by TKG stated:

"The GBC members met together in Vrndavana and prepared a few last questions to put before Srila Prabhupada. [...] Then he said that he would name the initiating gurus later. [...] Then one day in June he gave his secretary the names of eleven disciples who would be initiating the disciples. [...] Now these godbrother's are worshipped by their disciples as genuine spiritual masters. This means for example, that they are to be considered, as stated in the *Guruvastakam*, *as nikunjo-yuno rati keli siddhyai* - intimate assistants in the pastimes of Krsna."

(The Process For Carrying Out Srila Prabhupada's Desires For Future Initiations; A paper prepared by the GBC in consultation with higher authorities, Mayapur, 1978)

TKG vigorously enforced the above understanding, often intimidating and browbeating questioning devotees into accepting it, as in the following letter to one such 'doubting Thomas':

"The argument that after the departure of the spiritual master anyone of his disciples can give initiation, cannot be applied in the case of Srila Prabhupada who specifically named 11 persons only at first to fulfil this function. These 11 persons were named by Srila Prabhupada in the beginning of July, 1977, in Vrindavana in the back garden of his house. These names were dictated to me as I was serving as his secretary, and now he had me write a letter to all the GBC's and Temple Presidents which he also signed as approved on the 9th of July listing their names and defining their function. [...] Thus, we can understand, that in regard to the third definition of *acarya*, that Srila Prabhupada clearly appointed 11 successors for

initiation. Whatever process may have been followed by past acaryas, Prabhupada chose to appoint. [...] Even after having these facts clearly explained, if some one continues to blaspheme the 11 gurus, their legitimacy, blasphemes ISKCON, the spiritual vehicle created by Prabhupada to fulfil his will, blasphemes the GBC - the approved driver of the vehicle - [...] he is not a disciple at all. Rather he is the killer of *gurudev* and his spiritual whereabouts is unknown.

(Letter to Upananda Das, 13/12/78)

It has now been admitted by the GBC that TKG's initial understanding of what the July 9th letter meant, along with the zonal-*acarya* system this understanding inspired, were both incorrect. Thus from the very beginning TKG had apparently misunderstood the proper meaning and context of the July 9th letter, as he himself would later admit.

1980:

TKG was suspended from acting as a guru by the GBC. He had become convinced that not just his own disciples but also all members of ISKCON, including his godbrothers and godsisters, could only serve Srila Prabhupada through him and him alone! As TKG himself explains:

"Tamala Krishna Goswami, the leader of a large number of sannyasa and *brahmacari* preachers, insisted that he was now their via media in relating to Prabhupada and expected that his godbrothers follow him absolutely."

(The Perils of Succession', 1996, TKG)

3/12/80:

Having been suspended by the GBC for the above insanity, TKG next decided to pull the rug from under the other guru hoaxer's feet with the following shocking revelation:

'Myself and the other GBC have done the greatest disservice to this movement the last three years because we interpreted the appointment of ritviks as the appointment of gurus.'

(TKG, Topanga Canyon Confessions, 3/12/80)

Here TKG not only claimed that his understanding of the July 9th letter was wrong in 1978, but also that he had now finally understood what Srila Prabhupada really wanted.

1982:

Having called the GBC's bluff above, TKG was swiftly re-instated as a guru, and in return he once again changed his mind and went back to the version of events he had originally supported and ruthlessly enforced in 1978, only to later reject in 1980:

"I do not think that there is any problem in accepting the spiritual masters who Srila Prabhupada appointed. (...) Our movement is progressing and growing more and more, at least as much as it was during Srila Prabhupada's time. [...] You have enclosed a clipping from Back To Godhead in which Srila Bhaktipada is advertised as 'Bona fide Spiritual Master'. You say 'this is something that seems a little strange to me'.

Would you please explain to me what seems strange?

(Letter to Gadai Prabhu, 14/6/82)

TKG was back in business as a guru, and so was happy to again propagate the myth that he and the other hoaxers were 'appointed' to act as such by Srila Prabhupada. Incidentally, the 'Srila Bhaktipada' referred to

by TKG above has only last year released from a lengthy prison term. Perhaps poor Gadai Prabhu had a point.

1984:

TKG publishes a book called 'Servant of the Servant' in which he categorically states:

'Since the disappearance of our beloved spiritual master, we have seen such disenchanted persons come forward trying to cast doubt on the legacy left by Srila Prabhupada. When SP appointed from among his senior disciples eleven persons to continue the process of initiation, and when after their spiritual master's departure those whom he selected assumed their duties by his command, the critics began to bark their discontent. [...] To such irresponsible criticism we answer a decisive "No!" SP chose them because they merited his confidence. [...] Thus he considered them to be *uttama-adhikari**, all highly advanced devotees worthy to be accepted as spiritual masters. [...] Critics may doubt whether our ISKCON acaryas are actually liberated. Do they know their *rasa* (liberated relationship) with Krsna, and will they be able to instruct their disciples similarly? But such questions bring one dangerously near the precipice of spiritual calamity.'

(*"Servant of the Servant"*, Tamala Krishna Goswami, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1984, Pages 361-365)

*(Persons on the highest platform of God-realisation)

1987:

TKG yet again changes his mind and whole-heartedly endorses the guru hoax part 2, confessing yet again that what he and the other 11 appointees had been doing and teaching for the last 10 years was utterly wrong with regards the system of initiation. In other words he flips back to his late 1980 position (3 above). To demonstrate his commitment to this latest shift in position, TKG agreed to edit out of his book 'Servant of the Servant' the above quoted passage. The zonal-*acarya* system had been an almost unmitigated disaster, during which most of Srila Prabhupada's original disciples had been driven out by intimidating gurus like TKG; as he delicately put it:

"The stormy decade following Prabhupada's demise left many casualties in its wake: perhaps as many as 90% of Prabhupada's initiated disciples were now marginalised; disciples of fallen gurus felt they had no shelter; the preaching mission as a whole lost momentum and cohesion."

(*The Perils of Succession*, 1996, TKG)

TKG made sure he was not one of the 'casualties' of this 'stormy period' by cannily jumping onto the second guru hoax bandwagon when he saw there was absolutely no other choice.

1992-95:

TKG's understanding of guru-ship takes a further radical twist as he begins preaching that Srila Prabhupada had not given the 'highest understanding' and that everyone should take guidance from the '*rasika** guru' Narayana Maharaja, who one former GBC chairman described as:

'...a crooked and talented pretender or impostor, who has seduced, beguiled and misled many people.'

(*Ravindra Svarupa das, 'Taking Srila Prabhupada Straight'*, 1998)

As a result of his sustained deviancy the GBC suspended TKG for the second time.

1995:

TKG now denounces his previous four years of proselytising on behalf of Narayana Maharaja as a 'mistake', admitting that he was in fact wrong to say that everyone needed a *rasika*-guru. Of course by now

the damage had been done, reverberations of which continue to this day with Narayana Maharaja grabbing huge chunks of ISKCON all over the world. Still, TKG's capitulation allowed him to be once again reinstated as an ISKCON guru. He was back in the guru business yet again.

1996:

TKG seems to slip back to the 'appointment' theory that he had supposedly rejected in the post 1987 'reforms', as he writes:

"6 months before his own demise, Prabhupada had announced that he would appoint some of his disciples to perform all of the functions of initiating new disciples as he had become too ill to do so. Those so initiated would still be Prabhupada's disciple while those who would be initiated after his demise would become his grand-disciples."

('The Perils of Succession', 1996, H.H. Tamala Krishna Maharaja)

Please note above that TKG claims that Srila Prabhupada's intention to appoint disciples to assist with initiation, as recorded in the May 28th conversation (see BTP 3 page 11) '6 Months before his own demise', was even at that stage allegedly motivated by illness, and that the 'naming of the gurus' in the July 9th letter flowed directly from this May 28th conversation.

1998:

A more subtle shift perhaps, but we see below how TKG next claimed that the issue of appointing the '11', as had occurred via the July 9th letter, was done entirely independently and with no relation to the May 28th conversation, even though above he had claimed the exact opposite:

'In writing this letter (July 9th) (...) It was very clear in my mind at that time that what we were discussing was the process of initiation in Prabhupada's presence. How things would go on after his presence, he had already instructed us when the 5 or 6 of us had met him on May 28th, one had nothing to do with the other.'
(Class given by TKG on 6 August 1998, in Hong Kong)

He never could stick to one version of precisely how, when and where he and the other ritviks were authorised by Srila Prabhupada to initiate their own disciples. On the above evidence it would be hard to see anything that was 'very clear' in the 'mind' of TKG, other than a steadfast determination to remain an initiating guru. Even though TKG is no longer with us, rest assured his legacy lives on with every decision the GBC takes with regards its deviant and unauthorised guru programme.

* (A rasika-guru is supposedly adept at helping a disciple to realise his original form in the spiritual world, and thus his specific rasa or relationship with Krishna.)