

An excerpt from

Krishna Killers: The Danger of Deranged Devotion

a 250-page book by Henry Doktorski.

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The Relationship Between Tirtha and Radhanatha Swami

The first devotee to visit Tirtha in jail was the “most kind and compassionate” Radhanatha Swami. This was not surprising, as Tirtha and Radhanatha Swami had (and may still have) a very close relationship from 1983 to at least 2007, when Radhanatha began distancing himself from Tirtha in prison. What were the circumstances which placed Tirtha and Radhanatha in close proximity?

It was because of Tirtha’s exile from New Vrindaban in 1983. After Tirtha and his accomplice Daruka murdered Chakradhari on the night of June 10, 1983, Tirtha was banished from living at New Vrindaban. Tirtha moved to Ohio and eventually rented a home for his wife and young son and stepson at a trailer park in Ravenna, about five miles east of Radhanatha’s preaching center in Kent. Tirtha became friendly with the newly-initiated sannyasi, who had recently established several preaching centers and college vegetarian cooking classes in that State. Tirtha assisted his friend and mentor by driving Radhanatha to preaching centers in Ohio and helping with his cooking classes.

Due to his submissive service mentality, Tirtha developed a very close friendship with Radhanatha, and years later remembered, “During that time [after my 1983 banishment from New Vrindaban] I had occasion to chauffeur Maharaja on numerous occasions, sometimes on trips lasting the entire day. Whenever I would drop him at his destination I felt that I should be staying with him [instead of with my wife], feeling that this was a very special time in my life. Truly it was. Just being in such close proximity with Radhanatha Swami gave a much needed boost to my flagging Krishna consciousness.”¹

Now that we understand the affection Tirtha had (and has) for Radhanatha Swami, we can further examine Radhanatha’s previous statement to the Grand Jury, “I was not aware of what Sulochan was doing in regards to New Vrindaban.” This statement now becomes suspect, for four reasons:

(1) Radhanatha knew a lot about Sulochan and his grievances against Bhaktipada. In October 1985, he flew to California to meet with Berkeley ISKCON residents about the possible acquisition of the Berkeley temple as a New Vrindaban satellite center. He was in Berkeley about a week, and during that time, Puranjana personally spoke with

Radhanatha about Sulochan for about four or five hours, as described earlier in Chapter Four. Subsequently, Radhanatha also spoke extensively on the phone with Atreya-Rsi, the GBC for Berkeley, and discussed the possibility that Jamuna and her children could move to Berkeley so that Sulochan could have access to his sons.

(2) Tirtha likely spoke to Radhanatha Swami about the murder plot. Tirtha, by nature, lacked self-confidence. His constant need to throw his weight around was not a symptom of self-esteem; it was a symptom of lack of self-esteem. He needed constant encouragement and reassurance from those he respected, as evidenced by his statement quoted earlier: “I would feel a lot more assured if I could meet with Bhaktipada himself just briefly and he just said, ‘Just do like this and do like that.’ I would feel confident then that I was doing the right thing.”²

Tirtha displayed his lack of self-confidence three months earlier in February, by calling Tapahpunja, Kuladri, Devananda or Radhanatha nearly every day for encouragement, when he traveled with Janmastami in California, networking with Los Angeles devotees and examining mine shafts. As we read earlier, Janmastami claimed, “Tirtha said ‘Who can I take my instructions from?’ and I told him ‘Radhanatha.’ Radhanatha seemed to be the only one with enough brains to keep his mouth shut. After that he [Tirtha] talked to Radhanatha or Devananda [daily on the phone.]”³

Radhanatha (and Devananda) became Tirtha’s spiritual mentor and confessor, as Tirtha could no longer speak to Kuladri nor Tapahpunja. It is ludicrous to assume that Radhanatha had no idea why Tirtha was calling him daily on the phone from California during February 1986, when Tirtha, in the company of Janmastami, were making important contacts to assist them in the assassination of Sulochan.

(3) It is highly likely that Radhanatha Swami was privy to the confidential discussions in late October and November, 1985, which Tirtha spoke about earlier, when the conspiracy to murder Sulochan was hatched. We know that Radhanatha was positively at New Vrindaban during those tumultuous days, because on October 29th, he presented the morning *Srimad-bhagavatam* class (two days after Triyogi’s assault). His lecture was published in *New Vrindaban News* (October 31, 1985). In addition, according to Yogadeva’s recollection, Radhanatha was at Allegheny General Hospital eight days later, on November 6, when Bhaktipada awoke from his coma. We think Radhanatha was at New Vrindaban and Pittsburgh constantly at this time.

Why would Tapahpunja not invite him to attend—indeed, *insist* he attend—these very important meetings? At the time, Radhanatha was loved by all and universally regarded as the second-most spiritually-advanced New Vrindaban resident, next to Bhaktipada. His input would be most welcome. Radhanatha would have canceled his cooking classes and preaching engagements, if he thought he could help to protect Bhaktipada by attending these discussions and offering his suggestions. Radhanatha loved Bhaktipada, as did all the faithful Brijabasis. Bhaktipada was “Number One” in our lives.

(4) Of course, items one through three are circumstantial evidence, but how can we ignore Kuladri’s conversation with Dharmatma on the morning of the murder? During it, he named the three most-vociferous leaders of the conspiracy to murder Sulochan. Dharmatma explained, “I had a discussion with Kuladri [the morning of the murder]. He

was quite disturbed. He mentioned . . . how it [the murder] shouldn't have been done like that. And that how Radhanatha, Hayagriva and Tapahpunja were pushing like crazy for this to happen, and how he [Kuladri] had told them not to do it.”⁴

Radhanatha, on the other hand, insisted he knew nothing about the plot to murder Sulochan. He claims that he never spoke to Bhaktipada about it, and he never spoke to Tapahpunja, or Kuladri, or Hayagriva, or Tirtha, or Janmastami about “destroying the demon.” He claimed he hardly ever came to New Vrindaban; he was always far away “traveling and preaching.” He was not “privy to things.”

The whole time I lived at New Vrindaban I was never involved in decision making or management. For the first seven years I was a pujari up on a mountain,⁵ and I . . . never even came down to [the Bahulaban farm] where the devotees lived. . . . I was just with the brahmacaris. All I did was milk cows and took care of the deities. I was isolated.

And then when I came down from that [Vrindaban farm] I was asked to do college preaching so I was just traveling and I'd come to New Vrindaban maybe a couple of days a month, so I was never involved in any management there. I was in many ways just like the regular devotees. I was not very privy to things, but because when I was traveling and preaching (I was a sannyasi), somehow or other, people assumed I must have been involved in it . . . the decision making [regarding the murder of Sulochan].

If you were to ask anybody who actually was involved in the decision making, they'll say I had nothing to do with it. I never went to any meetings. Kirtanananda Swami never discussed anything with me. . . . I would just tell him how my college preaching was going and that was our only dialogue (laughter). That's when all the stuff [Sulochan's murder] happened.⁶

However, one person who was involved in “the decision making” of the murder of Sulochan claimed that Radhanatha was indeed involved. Radhanatha was one of the principal actors in the drama and had preached that devotees must do “whatever it takes” to protect the spiritual master. During a 1989 interview with a private investigator (quoted earlier in Chapter 10), Kuladri was asked:

Q. Let's go back now to Richard Slavin talking and making these preachings [to do whatever is necessary to protect the Swami], is there any question in your mind that Kirtanananda, whether Kirtanananda knew that Slavin was preaching this aspect of the devotees had to do whatever it took to protect their Swami, who was a representative of God. Did Kirtanananda know that Slavin was making these preachings?

A. You know, I would say yes, because Radhanatha Swami, Richard Slavin, was always talking with Kirtanananda because he represented Kirtanananda. He would invite people to take initiation from Kirtanananda. He was opening temples for Kirtanananda, so he was always in communication with Kirtanananda, and his preaching would always reflect Kirtanananda's desire.⁷

Radhanatha Swami Visits Tirtha in Jail

In any case, Tirtha was delighted (and humbled) to no end when his idol Radhanatha Swami became the first devotee to visit him in jail. Tirtha recalled:

When I was first arrested and put in jail, it was Radhanatha Swami who first came to see me. He spoke to me in a most kind and compassionate manner, explaining that my life was now completely in Krishna's hands. Speaking with him through the thick security glass, I was ashamed and embarrassed to be in such a predicament. He told me to

concentrate on Krishna and nothing else. Only Krishna could help me now. Before leaving he gave me copies of the all-in-one *Srimad-bhagavatam*, *Caitanya-caritamrita*, and *Bhagavad-gita*. Reading these books anew would mark the beginning of my new life in prison, and a new era of consciousness, not as a convict, but as a devotee. . . .

When I next spoke with Radhanatha Swami he said that I was most fortunate, for Krishna was showing me great mercy by ripping everything away so abruptly. Perhaps if it didn't kill me it would make me much stronger. Die before you die. Surely this is what death is like for the soul too attached to home and hearth. Indeed, it surely felt like death, with everything I held so dearly, now gone in an instant.⁸

Radhanatha Swami confirmed, "I visited Tirtha while he was in jail and we only discussed religious issues and never talked about his charges."⁹

Radhanatha also preached to Tirtha by sending inspiring and poetic handwritten letters through the mail. One October 1989 letter noted, "Without a goal worth dying for we have nothing worthwhile to live for. Any shallow creature can speak these words. Very few most fortunate souls have the courage and integrity to engrave these words within the heart of hearts and remain faithful in the face of life and death."¹⁰

¹ Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *The 26 Qualities*, Part 11: "Rainbow Swami," <http://web.archive.org/web/20050223135430/http://tirthainprison.com/26qualities11.html> (accessed February 28, 2014).

² Transcript of telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Thomas Drescher (undated).

³ John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (October 31, 2008).

⁴ Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.

⁵ The Radha-Vrindaban Natha temple at the Vrindaban farm is located on the top of a ridge, not a mountain. New Vrindaban, geologically speaking, is located in the Allegheny Plateau (not the Appalachian Mountains or foothills). Much of the Allegheny Plateau is strongly dissected by stream erosion and the topography is rugged. Small, narrow valleys (hollows) twist through the resulting hills and ridges. The older plateau surface is evident in the pattern of hilltops all tending to reach the same elevation (about 1,300 to 1,400 feet above sea level).

⁶ Richard Slavin (Radhanatha Swami), telephone conversation with Saunaka-Rsi (October 2008).

⁷ New Vrindaban Archive, Interview with Arthur Villa (Kuladri), Villa GJ2, p. 15. (undated, c. September 1989).

⁸ Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *The Twenty-Six Qualities*, Part 12: "Exile," which was published on Tirtha's website (tirthainprison.com) but later removed. This article, however, can still be seen at <http://web.archive.org/web/20051027034319/http://tirthainprison.com/26qualities/26qualities12.html> (accessed March 21, 2017).

⁹ Richard Slavin (Radhanatha Swami), *Grand Jury interview*.

¹⁰ Richard Slavin (Radhanatha Swami), letter to Tirtha Swami (October 1, 1989), from Puna, India.