

**An Exceptional Visionary of Contemporary Times:
Remembering H.H. Bhaktisvarupa Damodara Swami on his 86th appearance anniversary**

by
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On the auspicious day of Sri Odana Sasthi, Dec. 18th, 2023, the disciples, servants and well-wishers of H.H. Bhaktisvarupa Damodara Swami will be celebrating his 86th Vyasa puja around the world. On this special day, we are remembering maharaj as an exceptional visionary whose contribution to science and humanity continues to stand as a beacon, illuminating the path of holistic knowledge and guiding the quest for meaning and purpose in life.

Sir Richard Ernst, a Nobel Laureate in Chemistry was one of the renowned scientists who had interacted closely with H.H. Bhaktisvarupa Damodara Swami. In the year 2007, while glancing through maharaj's books at our book stall inside Mumbai University Campus, he **smilingly remarked about his relationship with maharaj,**

<<“*It seems like both our souls are itched together.*” >>



Later in the same year, in **his Tribute to Maharaj**, he said,

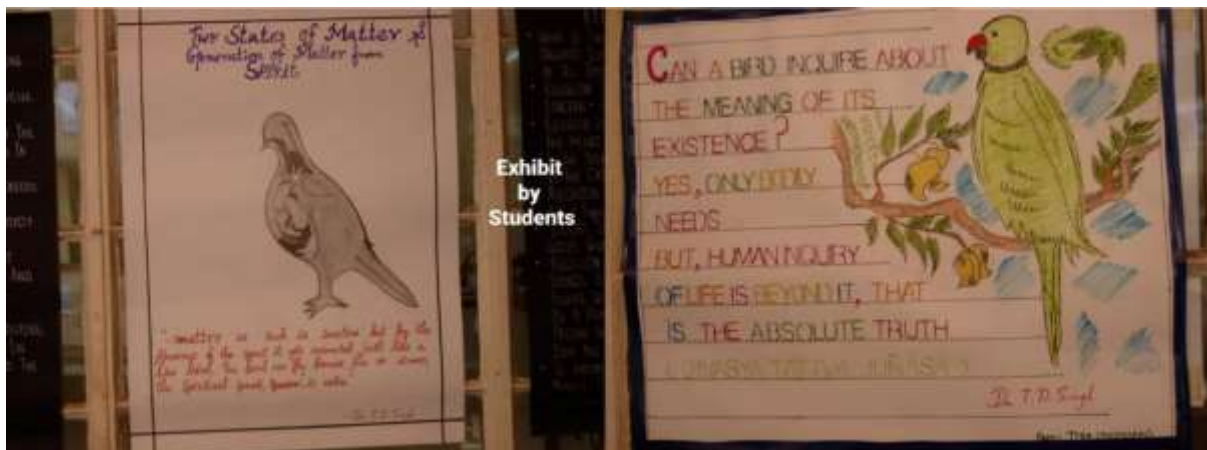


<<“Dr. T.D. Singh represents for me a perfect role model how citizens and in particular academics should think, feel and behave. He has been building bridges between groups of society and between different schools of thought. He has bridged the

gaps between science and philosophy. He showed to us what true humanness is; he showed to us what wisdom and compassion really mean. Let us keep his spirit alive, let's not forget him as a role model and improve our own being.”>>

Maharaj's three decades of pioneering efforts to bridge the two major domains of Science and Spirituality not only remain relevant today but are also widely appreciated by academicians, scholars and scientists in the present times.

Few years back, at a leading campus in Mumbai, we were requested to organize seminars and provide a set of maharaj's books for their library. Later at a large education fest organized by the campus for 3 days, **students had put different exhibits from Maharaj's books.**



Sir Richard Ernst tribute to Srila Sripada Maharaj carries significant and unique relevance in the contemporary landscape. Examining the intricate facets of mankind's identity today reveals deepening schisms at both macro and micro levels, rooted in fundamental epistemological issues. The roller coaster of experiences has intensified, especially after the pandemic crisis, widening societal gaps. Ideological divisions among religious, intellectual, and cultural realms are expanding, fostering prominence. Within this dynamic landscape, only a small fraction represents a genuinely authentic group. Hence bridging and binding human society together is nonetheless a daunting task. It is a mission by itself and for this the Lord empowers His dear servants. H.H Bhaktisvarupa Damodara swami was indeed one of the empowered servants of Lord, chosen for such a cause. Here, it is also worthwhile to recall Srila Prabhupada confirming this as he glorified his beloved scientist disciple.

He had said, <<“Svarupa Damodara is such a nice devotee. He has no enemies.”>>

So, this year, it is not a coincidence that **at the G20 summit held during Feb 2023 at Imphal City Convention Centre, Manipur**, the **representative of Argentina Mr. Eduardo Llaser**, President, Maha Solutions, South America presented to the dignified audience, the glorious contribution of maharaj. It was a rare honor bestowed over Srila Sripada maharaj at such a respected and important global event focused on bringing the nations together through common cause. An article covering G-20 Summit at Imphal had appeared in the leading newspaper 'The Sangai Express', Imphal on March 1st, 2023.

An excerpt from Mr. Eduardo Llaser's address, as it appeared in the article is reproduced below:
<<“ Honorable Guests, His Excellencies, organizer of B20 - G20, Summit. Thank you very much. I am delighted to address this gathering of distinguished leaders and representatives from the B20-G20 communities. Today we have come together to discuss one of the most important issues facing the global economy.....stressing the Business corporation between India and Latin America..... actually, Manipur is very well known in Latin America. Yes, I remember Bhaktisvarupa Damodarji. He brought Manipur to Peru, Brazil..... He actually was the organizer of one of the biggest conferences on Science and Spirituality worldwide in places like Rome.....hosting the conference Nobel Prize winners came together to discuss Science and Spirituality. He was the founder of the Bhaktivedanta Institute.... We are working on one of the biggest projects in India developing the TOVP(Temple of Vedic planetarium) based on science, Quantum physics and many other interesting topics. This came from Manipur. We really love Manipur so much and there are some very interesting points ”>>

Even recently, Prof. P.B. Sharma, VC of Amity University, India recalled the glorious contribution of Maharaj at his samadhi mandir, Radhakunda on his Tirubhav day, Oct. 24th, 2023. I share excerpts from his talk below:



<<“ ... I never realized where we have gone wrong in terms of Science and Technology during my days as IIT professor at Delhi.I was invited to the first conference AISSQ at Vrindavan in 2005. I was so happy the mission is to connect to younger generation because integration of Science and Spirituality is for the goodness of vast humanity and youth are the future leaders. I recall Nobel Laureate(NL) Madam Curie said in 1938

'I for one belong to those who firmly believe Science has a great duty and Science has a great power but it is the Spiritual strength that will eradicate poverty, eradicate hunger, even eradicate the diseases of the kind we are getting used to..,it will create the world of bliss'.

These are the golden words coming from a NL in 1938.

.....Swamiji(Dr. T.D.Singh) was keen here and that is why he interacted with several Nobel Laureates of the World. I remember when Swamiji met me he said, 'Sharma sir the work has

to be done both from the top level and at the ground level....let the NLS of the world get sensitized..'

I am so happy that a good number of them(NLS) became so much attached to Swamiji.....Swamiji's mission in my opinion continues to live and inspire many. This message has to be taken from school to the university level....

Let me also say that spirituality to a person like me is not merely a religious pursuit. It is a valid means to connect yourself to God Almighty through a hot line and bhakti perhaps is the shortest route ...and that is why Prabhupadji, the founder of Iskcon, whom I had the privilege of meeting in London in 1976, when he was returning to India, I was finishing my doctorate at that time from University of Birmingham; and I asked Prabhupada what you want to achieve? what is the mission of Iskcon? You know what he said?

He said, 'I want the knowers of Brahman to be created not just people who are religious, but one who understands we are here for a cause and to serve the vast humanity. That power of Brahman that they realize and then make this world in true sense the abode of God Almighty, the kingdom of God... '.

This mission pursued by Swami Dr. T.D. Singh through this great organization Bhaktivedanta Institute in my opinion holds a great promise.">>

At this juncture, Sir Richard Ernst's tribute to Srila Sripada Maharaj gains relevance. As we tread the intricate paths humanity faces in the pursuit of their cherished dreams and noble existential goals, it's meaningful to reflect on Srila Sripada Maharaj's contributions and valuable guidelines for serving and uplifting humanity. The present moment offers an opportune time to appreciate Srila Sripada Maharaj's skill in presenting KC to scholars, peace makers, scientists, and youth.

While steadfastly upholding the fundamental epistemological tenets of KC, Srila Sripada maharaj masterfully blended this with his compassionate and magnanimous nature, showcasing versatility precisely as the situation demanded. **The hallmark of Srila Sripada Maharaj's contribution through the BI mission was his artful presentation of KC as an exceptional visionary, a skill honed since the physical presence of Srila Prabhupada.** This wasn't a newly adopted art tailored for specific eras but rather a reflection of Maharaj's natural, authentic self from the spiritual realm. It emanated from Srila Sripada maharaj's intrinsic sacredness and purity, seamlessly manifested in his humble external endeavors to serve Srila Prabhupada.

Naturally, Srila Prabhupada's confidence on Srila Sripada maharaj's presenting KC to scientists and scholars was absolute. In one of their interactions in 1977, Srila Sripada maharaj had convinced Srila Prabhupada of using non-sastric terminology when required.

A short excerpt reproduced below.

<<Prabhupada: We are presenting sastric version in modern scientific symbolic representative. So the chairman said that he never...?

Svarupa Damodara: Yes. The chairman gave me a nice letter saying that this is the first type of seminar that he has ever heard in his life. [Prabhupada chuckles] We made the presentation sound very scientific... That's a comparison between Bhagavad-gita and science. On the left side is the modern scientific view, and the right side is from Bhagavad-gita about the nature of the Absolute Truth....On the right column is from Bhagavad-gita, the right-hand side, the alternative...We do not call Bhagavad-gita

directly, but we say “the alternative view,” so that they do not immediately be offended. We call “alternative scientific view.” [break].....

Svarupa Dāmodara: Oh, they are fascinated with this concept, but they cannot explain. They are failing those aspects.

Prabhupada: So you are attacking them like this..Choke. (laughter) That is good.>>

Later, since Srila Prabhupada’s departure, for nearly three decades, Srila Sripada Maharaj demonstrated steadfast dedication, notably guiding those facing challenges in presenting modern science and education within the KC paradigm. His efforts served as a poignant demonstration, particularly for those predisposed to undervalue science, scientists, and alternative paths in the pursuit of truth. Moreover, Maharaj held a deep concern that, at no cost, should Srila Prabhupada's image be tarnished among important sections of society. Once Maharaj recalled the guidance, he received to preach to the material scientists even when Srila Prabhupada had become very pale and weak. On September 10, 1977, when Maharaj visited Srila Prabhupada at Manor with a big flower garland, Srila Prabhupada spoke slowly in a low voice, <<“*We do not condemn the material scientists for their work, but atleast they should not neglect the existence of the Supreme Being, God... ”>>*

Here, for the pleasure of readers, we are sharing three anecdotes from maharaj’s humble efforts to please Srila Prabhupada.

1. During late 1980s, maharaj was generous enough to provide valuable wisdom to the devotee community based on his interactions with a Chinese Scientist and scholar, who was the Director of Biophysics department, Shanghai University. Maharaj met him during his journey from New York to Detroit when they jointly disembarked at Detroit.

During their waiting period to proceed further, they introduced and interacted with each other and maharaj spoke little bit about ‘life’. To which the Chinese scientist said, <<“*well, in China we are supposed to disbelieve in God.*”>> Maharaj was having few copies of his monograph ‘Theobiology’ which he had written few years back. When maharaj gave a copy to the Chinese scientist, he said, <<“*Oh this is theology. You are also scientist; you also do in theology.*”>> Maharaj said, <<“*Yes, I do so many things.*”>> He again said, <<“*well, in China we are not supposed to believe in God.*”>> Then maharaj told him it can be discussed briefly and facilitated joint discussions. Both started talking about modern science. Maharaj focused on biology knowing he was a biophysicist. In a simplified approach, maharaj opened up the present status of scientific propaganda in the field of biology like abortion and all misunderstandings about the life principles and how people are completely devoid of any spiritual insights on life. Slowly, the Chinese scientist’s thoughts were changing and Maharaj observed it. Same time, Maharaj spoke about India, how in the past there was good relation between India and China, their shared culture and so on. Soon, Maharaj noticed the heart of Chinese scientist became little soft. He told maharaj, <<“*well, yes, we also in the earlier time we all were Buddhists. We were also very religious minded and in the recent past somehow it changed..*”>> He added further, <<“*But during last few years, the younger generations are changing little bit. They are more sober....we can again come back to the religious life*”>> Maharaj could overall perceive that the Chinese scientist was a nice man. He became friendly with maharaj and invited maharaj to speak in Shanghai university. He said, <<“*I will invite you. Since I am the director of the biophysics department, if I invite you there is no problem*”>>

about your Visa.... I will send the invitation and then you can speak and you can address the students in the university.”>>

Later Maharaj told him about the conference maharaj was organizing in 1986 in three continents Europe, United States and India on synthesis of Science and Transcendence/Religion and asked him if he would like to participate. The Chinese scientist was receptive and said he would be very happy to participate.

Narrating the above episode, Maharaj told the devotees how they developed good relationship after that and like that everyone can become Krishna Conscious depending on how we preach. He said, <<“*I think it just depends on how we present Krishna Consciousness. You know it's just a format through which the individual can become convinced about the importance of Krishna Consciousness.*” >> Maharaj told the devotees, he was meeting a Chinese Scholar for the first time and had never met earlier.

2. During 1986 world congress on synthesis of Science and Religion at Mumbai, while responding to an address of a scholar, maharaj presented Vedanta epistemology in a simplified format and simultaneously educated the scholars through the lens of Sri Upanishads about the impact of unlawful killing of animals. He said, <<“*...if a human being kills an animal or other living entity beyond the limits of his quota for food or self-defense, he is liable to be punished for his unnatural i.e. Sinful activities.....*”>>. He demonstrated that the subject matter of animal killing should be presented through a right platform without hurting or being harsh to any sections of the society.

3. Once Maharaj was guiding a devotee community on preaching tips. He shared the interactions he had with scientists on Darwinian evolution theory and they avoid criticizing Darwin using offensive words. He said,

<<“*I participated in a session called Science and Religion Session in the Parliament of Religion (Cape of Town) in 1999. Most of them were scientists there. ... I said, in the western conception it seems that even the scientists and the religious people are beginning to accept about Darwinian conception of the life. According to the Vedanta or Vedic principles, this is completely unacceptable.I started saying that in the Darwinian conception, he has neglected to add the soul. Darwin wanted to explain the life without the soul, without understanding about the existence of the soul, about the jiva. Therefore, it became just a material conception of life – material paradigm. In the Darwinian conception or paradigm, if you add the soul, the jiva, the jivatma, then Darwin's principle can be fully useful. My point was that according to the Upanishads we have to realize that there are two categories of knowledge. One is called the Para vidya or spiritual science and the other is called Aparavidya or material science.In other words, the Bhagavat purana says that the soul transmigrates, but then the bodies are there, the bodies are not transmigrating, the bodies are not changing from one to the other, This is our principle. But Darwin is saying that one body evolves to another, without knowing about the soul.So when they heard Vedanta principle, they were very surprised, many of them were surprised, that this sort of principle exists. These are the scientists in this parliament and they took it quite seriously and said they will study more, look into this, and get more and more understanding. In fact, they approached me and they thanked me a lot for bringing that conception. So, we just have to educate people and it is possible that eventually people will be able to accept.*”>>



With a vision to bridge science, culture, tradition, and diverse schools of thought, he founded the UBC University of Bhagavata Culture at Imphal, Manipur guided by Srila Prabhupada's directive to globalize Manipur Vaishnavism. Maharaj's vision shared via UBC stands as the most reliable path to prevent the regrettable events that unfolded in Manipur in recent months. This is pivotal as the lifestyle, tradition, culture, and cuisine in the Northeastern states diverge from Brahmanical norms and thus maharaj proposed the Vedavyasa International Library within UBC.

About this library he conveyed to one of his servants,

<<“So we will have one very big library at the University of Bhagavata Culture in Manipur. It will be the biggest library among the Seven Sister States of North East India. It shall be called the Vedavyasa International library It will contain all of Srila Prabhupada's books, all our Bhaktivedanta Institute's publications, all the acharyas books, all different scientific and philosophical books, including western, oriental, and even, yes, Mayavada philosophy...because, after all, the sincere soul, seeker, can be content only when he has found this achintya-bhedabheda-tattva, actually philosophy cannot evolve any further... and here he finds the Ultimate Supreme Absolute Truth.. ..”>>

We come to know from Srila Jiva Goswami's Tattva Sandarbha, that Srila Baladeva Vidyabhusana in his commentary has mentioned, within our Vaishnava heritage, acharyas like Srila Sridhara Swami adeptly integrated impersonal schools of thought into their writings, serving a higher purpose. Similar wisdom shines through Srila Sripada Maharaj's contributions to the scientific sankirtan mission. He had also said, he was inspired by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's spirit, aimed to foster unity across societal spheres with emphasis on pure religion over differences due to secondary characteristics. Maharaj encouraged for a detailed study of Jaiva Dharma before engaging in preaching, and stay away from condemnation or harsh critique of individuals or societal sections. Emphasizing inner transformation, he had said that our progress in sankirtan seva is not gauged by followers or temples erected, but by the depth of purity attained.

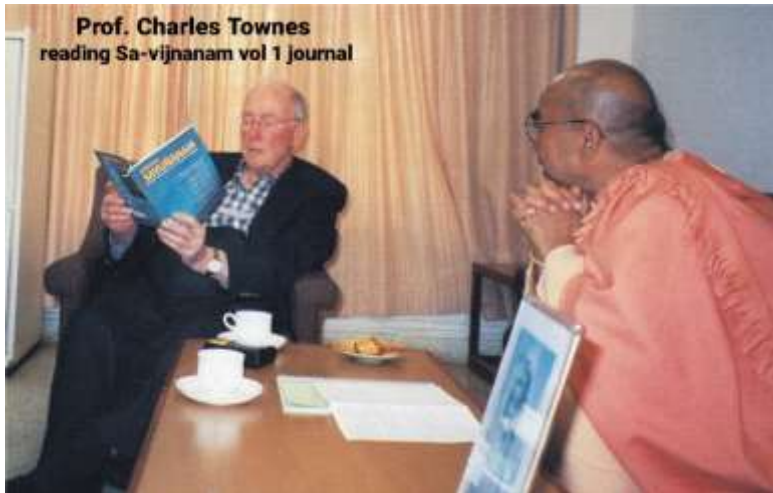
This unique personality of Maharaj is nicely encapsulated by **Father Maximilian Mizzi, OFM Conv. Delegate General for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Dialogue, Assisi, Italy**, in his tribute.

<<“...Dr. Singh is a man with great human qualities, which stem from a great heart. He is a man of deep understanding, compassion, humility, love and spirituality. It doesn't take long for Dr. Singh to understand the human qualities of a person with whom he comes in contact. Compassion and love in Dr. Singh go beyond the barriers of race and religious background. Because of his respect for every human person, Dr. Singh doesn't make any distinction between rich and poor, a VIP and the man in the street. He treats every single person with the same respect and love....”>>

Maharaj tirelessly toured campuses, organizing conferences and initiating dialogues that offered a glimpse into future decades. Emphasizing the need for a strong foundation based on

Vedanta epistemology, he endeavored to construct a harmonious bridge between para and apara domains. **A rare blend of a Saint and Scientist, Maharaj always humbly presented himself as an insignificant servant of the Lord and his spiritual master. H.H. Bhaktisvarupa Damodara Swami carried the unadulterated seed of God's love in his pure heart, attracting people from various walks of life. Thought Leaders, charmed by his purity, sought his association eagerly, hearing and accepting him without reservations.**

The renowned **Prof. Charles H. Townes, a Nobel Laureate in Physics** acknowledged, how exceptional maharaj was as a visionary,



<<“Dr. Singh’s contributions to the understanding of religion and the relation between Science and Religion have been important and will have a long-standing influence.”>>

Prof. Sharma’s recent address and Prof. Charles Townes’s tribute concur with Srila Prabhupada’s special remark to Maharaj during March-April 1977 conversations at Mumbai. Maharaj till his final days in this mortal world had often recalled this conversation which Srila Prabhupada had with his disciples at Mumbai during March 1977 last week.

Srila Prabhupada had been very pleased with all the arrangements in his quarters and as he sat down with fifteen devotees gathered around him, he started speaking very softly and lovingly: *<<“Thank you very much. You have given your life, everything to me. I am eternally indebted to all of you.” >>* The devotees gathered were silent. Soon Srila Prabhupada turned to maharaj and said: *<<“The next phase is yours. You must establish our movement as a genuine scientific movement. You must preach to all the scholars and scientists very vigorously.’....”>>*.

Certainly, the convergence of Science and Religion marks a promising frontier for humanity to address pressing concerns. Here, Maharaj’s enduring contributions to both Science and Spirituality for humanity persistently echo through time, leaving an enduring legacy that bridges the realms of knowledge and inner fulfilment, guiding us towards a harmonious existence.

Hare Krishna!

All glories to H.H. Bhaktisvarupa Damodara Swami

All glories to Srila Prabhupada

(Jaganmohini devi dasi a.k.a Dr. Jayanti Ranganathan Chavan is a disciple of H.H. Bhaktisvarupa Damodara Swami. Under the guidance of her spiritual master, she has been serving the Bhaktivedanta Institute mission for more than two decades.)