

Life of Govinda Bhattatiri Jyotish Sastri

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Text 363645: 21-Mar-94 Shyamasundara.AC BSP@com-link.org
Subject: New Direction

Since the flame wars are over (for now) I thought we could do something of more interest for everyone. The name of Kerala and Kerala Astrologers has become prominent recently. Therefore I thought you might like to hear about a famous astrologer from this state in S. India. It is a brief life sketch in two parts. This is excerpted from an astrological text/course I am writing. With all your encouragement this course book may actually see the light of day.

YS
Shyamasundara Dasa

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Subject: Govinda Bhattatiri

Life Of Govinda Bhattatiri Jyotish Sastri

The following short summary of the life of Talakkulatur Govinda Bhattatiri gives more insight into the dedication and lifestyle of a Vedic astrologer. Govinda Bhattatiri was born in Kerala, South India, in 1238 AD and died 1317 AD. He was educated in the traditional Vedic gurukula style and studied all the scriptures and sciences including jyotisa. Govinda Bhattatiri was precociously intelligent and took keen interest in all his Vedic studies, so much so that his guru blessed him that one day Govinda Bhattatiri would become a great astrologer in Kerala.

Govinda Bhattatiri vigorously pursued his astrological studies and became renowned as the most respected youth-astrologer of his day. He got married in the traditional custom of the Nambudiri brahmanas, and his beloved wife soon gave birth to a son. Govinda cast the child's horoscope and was happy to find that the child would live long and also become a scholar of astrology. But within a few months the child died!

Deeply grieved at the loss of his first born but more depressed because of his astrological predictions going wrong, he began to look for an expert who could illuminate why his prediction had gone wrong. Govinda had heard of a highly learned pandit astrologer named Daivajna Alvar living in the village of Kanjanur, in the Pandya Kingdom of what is now the state of Tamil Nadu in India. Selecting an auspicious day and time for his journey Govinda Bhattatiri went to Daivajna Alvar and prostrated himself before him. Having already divined the coming of Govinda and the purpose of his visit Alvar told Govinda:

"Astrology and predictions never prove false or incorrect. It is not enough if an astrologer studies the subject and begins giving out predictions. He must develop his intuitive power for which he must propitiate his istadevata (personal deity) and seek His blessings everyday, and he should further possess Mantra Siddhi. Then alone predictions given by an astrologer will prove accurate and correct."

With this revelation Govinda understood his shortcomings. On his way home he stayed at a temple of the Lord and began concentrated practice of Mantra Siddhi for 45 days. On the last day of his practice a theft occurred in the temple. A silver ornament of the deity had been stolen. By order of the King of Cochin, Ashtamangala Prasna was performed by the royal temple astrologer who found out by the prasna that the thief's name had the letters Ka and Ka. There was a servant in the temple named Kaakku. He was arrested for the theft but refused to accept the accusation and claimed his innocence on oath. To everyone he appeared innocent.

Being compassionate Govinda could not bear to see Kaakku suffer, so he set up Ashtamangala Prasna and found out that the ornament had been stolen by a Kaakka (crow) and that the bird had kept it in a particular tree. The ornament was recovered to everyone's surprise. Govinda Bhattatiri was called upon and rewarded by all the local Kings, and then went home.

One morning Govinda decided to examine his own chart, he found from it that 75 days from that day he would become an outcaste, i.e. fall from the high standard of brahminical behavior. He kept this a secret and decided that on the fateful day in question he would go on a pilgrimage to Varanasi. When the day arrived he began his journey, he reached the bank of the river Muvatru Puzha after night fall with the full moon overhead. While making the crossing a tempest arose, he was thrown overboard, and with great difficulty, almost drowning, he made it to the other side of the river. He dragged himself out of the water and in the glow of the lightning he saw a hut nearby and some planks lying in front of the hut. Exhausted he reached the planks, lay down and fell asleep.

End of Part 1 to be continued.

Text 364629: 25-Mar-94 Shyamasundara.AC BSP@com-link.org
Subject: Govinda continued

When he awoke at midnight he saw a beautiful young girl sleeping by his side. He became a victim of this unexpected temptation and had sexual intercourse with her. When his sanity returned and realizing his animal act he asked the girl who she was. The girl was stunned. She jumped from there hearing the unfamiliar voice when she realized that the man lying there was not her husband. She apologized to Govinda and said: "I am the wife of the village astrologer. He was drunk, quarreled with me and left the house at noon in a huff. I thought he was still in a drunken mood and as usual was sleeping on this plank: and hence I slept here to appease his anger. I have committed a sin and have also made you party to it. I beg your pardon."

Govinda Bhattatiri realized that he had become an outcast on the appointed day. He convinced the girl that the occurrence had been destined by God, and had been clearly indicated astrologically. He told her that the son born of their union would be a highly intelligent and gifted child who would become a greatly learned astrologer. Bhattatiri then continued his journey to Varanasi.

The boy did indeed become trained as an astrologer and was highly skilled in both prasna and jataka and was famous as Bala Jyotish, Boy Astrologer. One day he was invited by the chief of the Nambudiri brahmana community to determine by prasna if the two month old foetus in the womb of his wife was a boy or a girl. The young astrologer declared that it was a girl, he fixed the time of its birth and cast the horoscope! The Nambudiri was bitterly disappointed as he dearly wanted a son. Therefore he approached a mantravadi to perform the pumsavana samskara for changing the foetus into a male. At the time of delivery, which did take place at the predicted time, the boy astrologer was disappointed to find out that child was a boy and that his prediction had gone wrong.

On another occasion the chief Nambudiri sent for the boy to determine if the calf of the cow about to be born would be male or female. The boy set up prasna kundali (prasna chart) and boldly declared that it would be a he-calf with a white mark on its forehead. It turned out to be a he-calf, but the white mark was not on the forehead, rather it was on the tail end. The chief Nambudiri, disgusted with the young astrologer because his predictions were false began to berate the boy. Just then a sadhu, saint, suddenly approached and affectionately told the boy that the sex of a foetus and the time of delivery should not be predicted till the foetus is 91 days old and that calf did have a white mark on the end of its tail: but while in the womb, the end

of the tail had been placed on the forehead and hence the finding of the astrologer had been correct to that extent. But the astrologer should have found out if the mark was on the forehead itself or because of any other cause.

The Nambudiri was pleased and made inquiry into the identity of the sadhu, he was none other than Govinda Bhattatiri returned from pilgrimage. Having heard about his real father from his mother the boy could realize that this was his father. He was very happy and hence forward always accompanied his father.

Before his death Bhattatiri asked his son to bury his body in a samadhi, and use the place for doing Ashtamangala Prasna so that predictions would never go wrong. The place is known as Paazhur Padipura, and is known as the temple of astrological radiance even to this day.

End of Part 2, Conclusion

Text 366015: 29-Mar-94 jagadish@aol.com

Subject: Re: story

In Text 39693 Urmila prabhu asks the following questions:

>Is illicit sex ever ordained by the Lord? How can a child begotten
>out of "animal desires" show brahminical tendencies?

For the first question I will show the relevant section from the story:
"Govinda Bhattatiri realized that he had become an outcast on the appointed day. He convinced the girl that the occurrence had been destined by God, and had been clearly indicated astrologically."

Illicit sex is not ordained by the Lord rather it is by our own free will that we choose the deviant path. Of course in the story the word 'destined' is used, not ordained, which implies something completely different. Govinda realized by his expertise in astrology that this was indeed his destiny and by his free will he chose the deviant path under the strong influence of triguna which he was unable to transcend. Only the perfect devotee of Krsna can completely transcend such strong material desires.

As far as the child is concerned, anyone can become a brahmana by proper training. Birth is not all in all. This is a basic tenant of our philosophy.

I hope this helps in your understanding.

your servant, Jagadisananda

PS. Off the subject, but I wanted to personally thank you for helping my wife with her children's book. I think she's finally satisfied after so many years.

Text 366018: 30-Mar-94 Shyamasundara.AC BSP@com-link.org
Subject: Story

Mother Urmila writes regarding the story of Govinda Bhattatiri:

"Is illicit sex ever ordained by the Lord? How can a child begotten out of "animal desires" show brahminical tendencies?"

It was Govinda's destiny to be placed in a compromising situation. This happens all the time to all of us. How we react to such situations is our free will. His reaction was a philosophical one, not one of trying to rationalize his behavior and continue in sinful activities. Sometimes apparently sinful actions have a higher purpose as when Pariksit shamefully placed the dead snake on the meditating muni. Govinda Bhattatiri was not a pure devotee of the Lord like Haridasa Thakura who in a compromising situation was able to resist. Also Govinda's mistake is understandable as he awoke to find a willing young woman at his side. In such a dreamy state on just awakening I think that most of us would agree that generally we are pretty much in the mode of ignorance. Not really capable of making the kind of decisions that we are capable of in jagrati, fully awake state.

As for the off-spring being of brahminical tendencies there are several examples.

Parasara Muni became attracted to Satyavati as she rowed him across the Ganga, they had sex and the offspring was Vyasadeva!

I think that we can be reasonably sure that Hiranyakasipu didn't perform the Garbhadhana Samskara yet his wife gave birth to Prahlad.

Then there is the famous case of Jabali Satyakama of Upanisad fame. Prabhupada tells the story often. A young boy Satyakama wanted to get initiation from Gautama Muni. The muni asks who is the father of the boy. The boy replies that he doesn't know. The muni says go ask your mother. On questioning his mother she replies, "I worked for many men and I don't know who your father is. My name is Jabala so therefore you are Jabali Satyakama." The boy told this to Gautama. Gautama pronounced that he must be a brahmana because he was honest and thus agreed to initiate him.

And most of all there are the ISKCON devotees. None of us had any pure births

yet many are quite saintly.

This of course doesn't in any way detract from the importance of regulated principles and samskaras. Govinda's fall down was an accident which he atoned for.