Copy of **http://www.harekrsna.com/sun/editorials/01-07/editorials1094.htm** as it stood on 2011-06-19. Saved for the record; page furniture (menus, ads, comment forms) removed.

Report on the Bhaktivedanta Gurukula Village

BY: SUN STAFF

Jan 3, MAYAPUR, INDIA (SUN) — An extremely disturbing CPO report on the Mayapur gurukula and Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja.

On February 11, 1999, and February 19, 1999, I met with Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja (BVPM) at his gurukula, which is referred to in this report as the Bhaktivedanta Gurukula Village (BGV). During these meetings we discussed several issues pertaining to the gurukula, including its past and present in relation to child protection.

The Past

On July 11, 1991, an investigative report on child abuse incidents at Bhaktivedanta Gurukula Village (BGV) was issued by Tosan Krsna Prabhu, Adikarta Prabhu, Bhaktarupa Prabhu, and Dayarama Prabhu. Since 1991 there have been a few smaller investigations into incidents of alleged child abuse and sexual misconduct of the students at the school. During our meetings, BVPM expressed some reservations about the quality and efficiency of these smaller investigations. Regarding the July, 1991 investigation, however, he stated "That one was done nicely, because that one was done by Tosan Krsna, Dayaram, Adi Karta. So that one was very well done."

In the July 11 report there are many statements clearly indicating that there was extensive child sexual abuse perpetrated by older students on younger students, and that this sexual abuse involved force, coercion, intimidation and fear. Some of these statements include: "Repeated incidents of homosexual attack of many boys of different ages. Threatened many boys", "Abused several younger boys, threatened many boys", "Several younger boys reported that he (16 years old) abused them", "Abused several younger boys. Threatened boys about talking to investigators", "Repeatedly abused two small boys", "During investigation was seen threatening the small boys on behalf of _____", "abused smaller boys- including a 5 year old (perp was 13 years old)", "Abused smaller boys, including a 5 year old (perp was 10 years old)", "Abused a younger boy", "One small boy and a witness...convincingly reported that he fondled the small boy", "Abused repeatedly by an older boy", "Abused repeatedly by several older boys", "Cooperated with investigation even after being threatened by older boys", "Fondled by several different older boys and violated twice".

During the February 11 meeting, at which Anuttama Prabhu and Sad Bhuja Prabhu were also present, BVPM asserted that, concerning the events investigated in July, 1991, all of the sexual relations between the boys in his school were consensual and between boys of the same age, and did not involve force or violence. He maintained this several times during the February 19 meeting also.

During February, 1999, in Mayapur, I spoke with Adikarta Prabhu and Dayarama Prabhu. On Feb. 17, 1999, Dayarama confirmed the findings of the July 11 investigation and assured me that there was widespread forced sexual abuse in BVPM's school between older-younger pairs. Adikarta also confirmed that there was forced sexual molestation in the school. Adikarta and Dayarama were both disturbed and surprised, even shocked, that BVPM claimed there were no forced molestations, and that all of the sexual relations occurred between boys of the same age. Jayapataka Swami and Anantarupa Prabhu, both of whom have had some contact with the school and with child protection efforts in Mayapur during the past several years, also stated that their impression is that there were sexual relations involving older boys perpetrating on younger boys in the school, as discovered during the July 11 investigation. I also spoke with a former teacher in the school, as well as a few former students. They all expressed that there were frequent sexual molestations of older boys against younger boys.

The former teacher stated "During the year that I taught in the Mayapur gurukula, eleven out of twenty-two students in my classroom were molested by other students and in turn became perpetrators. The oldest boy, _____, 14 years old, was molesting the 8 year olds, who were molesting the 5 year olds..." When I returned to Alachua, late in February, 1999, I spoke with Tosan Krsna Prabhu, who affirmed that many, if not most, of the incidents investigated in July, 1991, involved older-younger pairs. He stated with certainty "They were not the same age...Persons in authority used their authority over the kids." Tosan Krsna emphasized that fear and intimidation were pervasive in the school.

During the Feb. 19 interview with BVPM he emphasized "Everything in that thing [the incidents investigated in 1991] was consensual." During our Feb. 19 conversation the following exchange took place: **Dhira Govinda (DG):** 16 perpetrators?
BVPM: 16 were involved, period.
DG: victims or perpetrators?
BVPM: Both. Combined. There were 11 perpetrators, perpetrators means to each other basically. And then 5, who were not perpetrators and they were younger. They were young enough that they felt they could do something with them.
DG: Uh huh.
BVPM: The older ones were like 15, 16, 17 like that..and there was a group of them that were like 11, 12 like that, so they felt they could do something with them. And they seemed to be very gentle.
DG: So I've spoken with Adi Karta, I've spoken with Tosan Krsna, Dayaram, I've spoken with Ananta Rupa,...And they say very clearly that there was a lot of force used....
BVPM: Maybe amongst each other..of equals , but it was not older to younger. They didn't tell me also...I wasn't involved. So as far I understood it was guys within fairly equal age within two years. Cause that was their groups..the clicks they hang out in.
DG: They told me that when they did the investigation there were some boys sleeping with knives under their bed, they were so fearful.

The issue of the number of boys involved in the incidents will be addressed later. For now, the above conversation excerpt is presented to illustrate that, essentially, BVPM does not perceive "victims" and "perpetrators" in the incidents that were the subject of the July 11 report. Since he perceives the interactions as consensual, there weren't really any "victims". This conversation excerpt occurred towards the end of our second meeting, and only here, after I had submitted the question a few times, does BVPM acknowledge that there were some incidents involving older and younger boys, but even these "seemed to be very gentle".

BVPM also explained that all of the incidents connected with the 1991 report occurred within a few months of the July, 1991 investigation, and that such things were not going on regularly for years. He said there were similar episodes in 1987, and also in 1984. He explained that the boys would go in cycles. Every few years they would engage in lusty dealings for a few months. Regarding the 1984 and 1987 incidents, he said that the policies at that time did not involve removing boys from the school, so he just dealt with the transgressions, which he claimed were all consensual, as best he could. I spoke with several persons involved with the school and the July 11 investigation, and all maintained that incidents of forced sexual abuse occurred regularly in the school throughout the year, over a period of many years. I mentioned to BVPM that I had received the strong impression from others that the abuse went on regularly over a period of many years. This was the exchange:

DG: You think it all happened in 91, maybe 1990?
BVPM: Ah, no ...it would have been...the earliest it would have been..I think it was one or two of something in January, which is a very dangerous time. Another thing is..there's dangerous times for this. It means just at the ...when spring starts, in January..then just after the rainy season ...you know right after Ratha Yatra.
DG: Lust is there
BVPM: The lust is there, but also they've been active and then suddenly they can't move around because they get slowed down by the rain. And then Kartika. You know Kartika, you see all the animals, that's their time, you know all the dogs are fired up...all the birds, it's like the time, you know? So at these times I'd be very vigilant to walk around and see and just check.....
DG: OK, so all the incidents described in the report happened within a few months of the report?
BVPM: A few months of the report.
DG: So it's just like that one year the boys kinda went crazy.
BVPM: Yeah. We had a similar thing come up in '87. Like that; I think less boys were involved. At that time it hadn't been said that boys that get involved in these things had to be thrown out of the school. So we were under the impression that they had to be corrected.

DG: I've gotten an impression that this had just like gone on pretty regularly for years.
BVPS: No. I mean if someone can show that.

BVPM contends that 16 boys, whether perpetrator or victim, were involved in the incidents. The July 11 report describes many more than 16 boys involved in the sexual relations.

In the following exchange I asked BVPM if he read the July 11 report:

DG: Did you read the final report?
BVPS: I'm not sure if I got to see it.

Sad Bhuja Prabhu and Gaura Narayana Prabhu were present at the Feb. 19 meeting. Gaura Narayana spent many years at the school as a student, and he is now a leading staff member of the school. When I mentioned the July 11 report, BVPM and Gaura Narayana (GN) both chuckled slightly, and made some comments related to the difficulty in obtaining the report. Gaura Narayana mentioned that he thinks someone named Govinda has the only copy. The BGV has no copy of the report, and BVPM and GN stated that it's practically impossible to obtain. They said that the Mayapur CPT doesn't have a copy of the report. Therefore they were a bit surprised when I pulled a copy of the July 11 report out of my bag. After approaching various sources in Mayapur for a few days, I had managed to obtain copies of the report from two sources, one being a member of the Mayapur CPT. Another source, from outside of Mayapur, mailed a third copy of the report to me in Alachua. The point herein is that, though the report was not especially easy to obtain, neither was it too difficult to acquire. Below is an exchange from the Feb. 19 conversation wherein I read directly from parts of the report, to illustrate that there were forced sexual molestations between boys of unequal age:
DG: I was told that someone named _____ abused several younger boys, threatened many boys. Someone named _____...this comes from Adi Karta's report.. [reading] "repeated incidents of homosexual attack ...of many boys of different ages...threatened many boys."
BVPM: What he mentions here is not clear. He is 17, they could have been 15 or 16. I remember telling...when I heard from Dayaram what were the boys and which were the relationships, they were all within a couple of years. And also cause the whole group was one group. So you also have to know the dynamics of that group. The whole group, except for one, the Western kid, they were all the same ..basically social group of Bengali kids.
DG: Yeah, cause _____, he was 13 and he abused smaller boys, including a 5 year old.
BVPM: No, the boy was 7 and he was 12.
DG: And then _____ abused smaller boys including a 5 year old when he was 10.
BVPM: Well maybe.. _____ is _____ brother? If he is he's in the same class as _____ [Earlier in the conversation BVPM described _____ as retarded]. He's in the same class as _____. I would say he was medium remedial. He was not heavily... So from what I saw... see... _____ was a monitor...

Earlier in the discussion, after I had persisted in asking about sexual relations between older-younger pairs, BVPM mentioned _____, as follows:
BVPM: _____ was 12 at the time. _____ was a retard at the time..or still is. It means he was a clinically, heavily remedial. I mean if you meet the guy you'll understand. Him, all his friends.. I mean his peers..in his mind were all 6 and 7 years olds. So he got involved with one of his friends, who happened to be a 7 year old. That's how we found out about it...because that boy... those were seen... because he's also not very intelligent. Then they were in some place where people could see them.

To summarize, BVPM at first completely denied that there were sexual relations between boys of unequal age and that the relations involved force or coercion. Upon further questioning, he acknowledged one exceptional case of sexual relations between boys of unequal age, involving a boy he described as retarded. He insisted that this was the only case involving a substantial age difference. Then when I read another case from the report involving a pair of unequal age, he acknowledged that case also. Unfortunately, the July 11 report leaves no room to infer that sexual relations between boys of unequal age was unusual in the school, as the report is replete with such descriptions. Similarly, BVPM denied that force was used, though the July 11 report describes pervasive, forced, or at least coerced, sex in the school. The report describes the atmosphere in the school as "surcharged with threats to the boys". Further, BVPM's statements are at odds with findings of the reports, as well as with corroborating statements from those involved with the school and the investigation, regarding the regularity of the sexually abusive incidents and the number of boys involved.

Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja's assertions contradict not only the July 11 report, but also his own signed statements. Attached to the July 11 report is a letter signed by BVPM and Naresvara Prabhu (The ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection has an original signed copy of this letter). This letter identifies more than 30 boys, not 16, who were involved in the

incidents. During our discussions BVPM adamantly asserted that only 16 boys were involved. The report also clearly indicates that BVPM was aware of the results of the investigation. When I mentioned this letter and pulled it out of my bag, the following exchange took place:

DG: Let's see, there's a letter written by Naresvara Prabhu and yourself.
BVPM: Yeah, that one, I think I bumped into that. That we wrote. I think I bumped into that.

BVPM was apparently barely conscious, as of Feb., 1999, of the July 11 report, or his own letter that was attached to this report. This is disturbing, because the report portrays a horrific scene of sexual abuse of children in a school that he was, and still is, managing. One would think that BVPM would be intimately familiar with every detail of the report, what to speak of his own letter. Instead, he asserts that he's not sure if he ever saw the report, that he doesn't have a copy of the report or of his own letter, and his statements contradict the content and tone of the report in practically every aspect, though he acknowledges that the investigation was conducted very nicely.

BVPM spoke very confidently throughout our meetings about what happened and what didn't happen regarding the incidents of sexual interaction surrounding the 1991 investigation. It is interesting that he feels so confident that he knows what happened, considering that he is not sure if he ever saw the report.

In the letter by BVPM he refers to two specific incidents of child sexual abuse which led to the July, 1991 investigation, and both incidents involve boys of significantly unequal age. During our meetings in Feb., 1999, BVPM stressed the point that the sexual relations involved boys of equal age.

In case readers think that excerpts from conversations or the July 11th investigative report have been chosen in a non-representative way in order to present a slanted view of events, complete original documentation from which this report is derived is available, within the bounds of confidentiality, to interested parties.

During our meetings BVPM alluded to communication and relational difficulties between the Mayapur CPT and his school. Apparently, similar difficulties date back to at least the time of the 1991 investigation. The July 11 report states: "The staff of the school cooperated with the investigation. However, the general attitude of the staff towards the investigation was disturbing. Many seemed to be down-playing its importance. Many have, as yet, failed to accept that they were neglectful in not preventing the occurrences. Many have failed to demonstrate that they have honest feelings of sympathy for the abused small children." Current discussions with BVPM reveal a similar mentality of minimization, even to the point of blatant denial of facts that were uncovered and acknowledged a few years prior.

The July 11 report further states:

"The Chairman of the Mayapur Administrative Council, Satadhanya Dasa, openly spoke, on at least two occasions during the investigation, that he thought that too much was being made of the investigation and that these activities were normal in a boy's school. This attitude may be more widespread. Discussions should be held by the Gurukula staff and the G.B.C. Committee as to how to eliminate this attitude, because it is extremely dangerous when held by any ISKCON authority"

By July, 1991, it was known to the Mayapur administration that Satadhanya dasa had had difficulties involving sexual falldown with teenage boys. Thus, it is curious that Satadhanya was serving as Chairman of the Mayapur Administrative Council at the time. Whatever the reasons behind this, it points to systemic difficulties in the Mayapur organization that allowed such pandemic child abuse to occur in the school. BVPM's currently stated perceptions of past events leave suspicions that the systemic difficulties have not been eradicated. To quote a letter from August 12, 1991, from Sri Rama dasa, who was Chairman of ISKCON's Board of Education at the time, to BVPM and Naresvara dasa: "Your cover letter identifies the following as factors contributing to the problem: boys form low class backgrounds, a lack of qualified staffing,...However, the real cause is the community's and school's attitude of tolerance [underline in original letter] towards these activities... Over the years, the school has received innumerable warnings and expressions of concern from devotees from around the world. ...Most devotees I have spoken to who have heard about the investigation make comments like 'Everyone's known these things have been going on for years.' ....It seems there was, and continues to be, an abject lack of a sense of responsibility for abuse inflicted on children under their care. Considering the ample warnings and concerns expressed over the years, the administrators involved are, at the very least, guilty of negligence.....Considering the wide-spread nature of the corruption in the school, it's hard to believe it went on for so long while the school staff remained completely oblivious."

The ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection (ICOCP) is in possession of many letters from various sources indicating that years before July, 1991, many devotees were aware of child sexual abuse in the Mayapur gurukula. It seems that such awareness was fairly widespread in ISKCON, except apparently among the gurukula administration. For example, there is a letter from October 17, 1989, to BVPM, describing delays in the establishment of a child abuse prevention program in the school and referring to some alleged incidents of abuse, and also stating "it would appear that some are beginning to think the school is more interested in keeping such incidents quiet than it is in dealing with them properly...." About eight years ago the July 11 report delineated the abuse in painful detail, yet today the principle of the gurukula, who remains the principle of a gurukula, continues predominantly unaware, according to his statements, of the extent and severity of the abuse, although his letter from that time, as well as other documents that are in the possession of ICOCP, makes it plain that at one time he was aware of the findings of the July 11 report.

The Present

BVPM explained that, since July, 1991, a major preventative measure that was implemented in the school to prevent further episodes of sexual abuse and experimentation by the students is increased screening for the students. Specifically, the school now accepts only boys who are brahminically inclined. Previously, from the time BVPM became headmaster in 1982, the BGV accepted practically all of the children who came to them. BVPM said that after the July, 1991 investigation several senior devotees advised him to reduce the number of students and to focus on that which he is most effective, namely brahminical training. BVPM stressed that many of the students that were in the school when he arrived were low-class, criminal types. While I think his emphasis on describing his former students as "low-class" and "criminal" is overstated and reinforces a mentality of unaccountability amongst the school's leadership for the mismanagement, neglect, and severe child abuse that occurred, I do believe that the tighter filter for accepting students has decreased the potential for abuse in the school.

In addition to accepting only brahminical types, BVPM explained that the diet and schedule of the boys is regulated according to Vedic guidelines to reduce lust. An additional preventative arrangement is the architecture of the buildings, which is designed so that motion inside the huts can be detected from practically anywhere on the school grounds. There are other safeguards also, including walls in the bathrooms with openings at the bottom to enable vision of the feet and ankles.

When I inquired about the child protection curriculum in the school, BVPM deferred to Gaura Narayana Prabhu to describe it. Gaura Narayana said that he and some other staff members attended parts of the child protection seminar that Yasoda gave in Mayapur in 1997. GN speaks with each boy approximately every six months about child protection issues. This is done informally, rather than in a classroom setting, as they've found that the students learn such material better when it is individualized. The July, 1991 letter from BVPM and Naresvara identifies one of the reasons for the illicit sexual relations in the school as "a lack of a comprehensive, effective program of...preventation", and assures that "General education programs on molestation will be implemented for every student." Although I did not examine the actual extent of GN's knowledge on the subject of child protection, and although his presentation to the students on this topic has not been monitored or evaluated, it seems that the staff and students are more aware of child protection issues than in 1991, though the program probably still doesn't meet the criteria of "comprehensive". The school does not have a "rule of threes" policy that would prohibit an adult and a child to be alone together. BVPM emphasized that the scheduling and architecture of the school make it very difficult to arrange for private situations. When I recommended that the school adopt a rule of threes policy, BVPM consented.

As far as teacher screening and training, the letter from July, 1991, from BVPM and Naresvara states that to develop and implement programs for the safety of the students and improvement of the school it will be necessary to obtain "assistance from outside sources, both in the form of training for the staff as well as help to improve the staffing position." When I referred to this letter and inquired about outside training, the following exchange took place:

DG: What sort of outside training does the staff receive?
BVPS: Outside? Well we regularly go out of Mayapur. We go to Vrndavana for some weeks every year. And we...like after this festival, group of boys will be going to Bangladesh for the Deity installation program there. There'll be another larger group going to Delhi for 10 days, doing yajnas for them, for Rama Navami. Then...you know generally anytime there's big Ratha yatras or Deity installations or some big program like that, then we take either a part or all the boys. And they go out, and so many of the programs are lead by the older students, you know the ones who are teachers. So they go and take the boys and with the theory

they've learned, they have to practically use it themselves. I would always lead the program for years, and even the boys who could do it themselves, they would think they don't know how to do it. So it wasn't until we had them do it themselves, then they knew they could actually go to a place and confidently do a yajna, do an initiation, install Deities, you know do samskaras, give lectures.... preach and give lectures. So that goes on. Plus here when it's festival time, we keep facilities for sannyasis, GBC to stay with us...those who know the program. And then the boys, they take care of them and do different services, and they take care of their spiritual masters during this time. So that way they get to learn how to work in that outside the school.

When I specifically asked about training from persons and agencies not affiliated with the BGV, BVPM and GN explained that some of the staff took public speaking courses from Tyaga Caitanya Prabhu when Tyaga Caitanya was in Mayapur. BVPM emphasized that the first phase of teacher training is that boys grow up in the school. Most staff members were raised in the school during a substantial part of their childhood.

It seems that the meaning of "assistance from outside sources, both in the form of training for the staff as well as help to improve the staffing position" has not been properly understood and instituted in the school. Staff selection and training remains too dependent on BVPM to ensure sufficient input from outside sources. Clearly there was a blind spot, or several of them, in the school structure that allowed the abuses of the past. Currently the excessive dependence on BVPM for staff selection and training leaves room for suspicion that the same blind spots are intact, especially considering his continued unawareness, or perhaps feigned ignorance, of the extent and severity of the abuse in the school's past.

BVPM and I spoke about CPT members being more involved with the boys in his school. He was open to this idea, though he also showed reluctance due to concern that CPT members would be insensitive to the cultural training the boys received at the school. In particular, he is worried that CPT members will be too graphic when talking with the boys about child protection issues of a sexual nature. I suggested that each boy meet with a Mayapur CPT member, or someone approved by the Mayapur CPT, for at least two hours every month, or perhaps every two or three months if monthly meetings are not practical. I emphasized that the main purpose of these meetings is for the students to develop a close relationship with someone outside of, and uninfluenced by the atmosphere within the BGV, and that the primary function of these visits is not to pressure the students with questions like "Does anyone ever look at you when you're in the bathroom?" By developing relationships with mature devotees outside of the school, students will naturally reveal things that trouble them in due course of time. When presented in this way, BVPM agreed to the idea, and he suggested that it would be more effective for ladies to do this work with the younger boys, as he thinks women will tend to be more sensitive to the boys' situation. BVPM and I also talked about gentler, more delicate approaches of teaching child protection to children, rather than graphic methods popular in the West. In attempting to educate students of the BGV about protecting themselves, we want to avoid unnecessarily introducing ideas that will degrade their consciousness.

BGV is an attempt at a traditional Vedic gurukula, and this attempt must be respected, especially considering that practically every other effort at educating the children of Srila Prabhupada's movement is clearly, though understandably, a compromise in some way. Thus it must be acknowledged that methods and techniques for teaching students in a brahminically-oriented asrama school in Mayapur will differ from those applied in many other parts of the world in schools with different educational goals. We don't want to condemn a school based on modern conceptions of political correctness. For instance at BGV the boys do not engage in sports, except for swimming. From a Western perspective this may be viewed as repressive, though it is not necessarily so. BVPM explained that the boys get exercise through mrdanga playing and in other ways that are a natural part of a Vedic education.

As a movement, however, we must consider whether we're ready for such an attempt at a traditional Vedic gurukula. By allowing such an experiment without being adequately prepared or mature, as we've often done in the past, many children, as well as Srila Prabhupada's movement, may suffer. For example, BVPM, as well as Sad Bhuja Prabhu and GN, spoke about communication difficulties between the Mayapur CPT and the BGV. CPT members confirmed that there are problems in working with this school. Considering the abject failure in the past to protect children, a healthy, communicative relationship between the CPT and the BGV is essential. It is not a luxury; it is a requirement. Wherever the responsibility for ineffective communication may lie, and whatever the details of the conflicts, if a sound and efficacious relationship between the two entities does not exist, then it should be concluded that Mayapur and ISKCON are not ready to responsibly manage the BGV.

From a modern viewpoint academics are greatly underemphasized at the BGV. However, it must be considered that the goal of the school is to train children to become brahmanas in the ISKCON society. For this goal the academic content of the school may be adequate. This is a matter for the ISKCON educational authorities to determine. BVPM explained that the goals and function of the school are explained to the parents and students when they apply, and if the school's purpose does not meet the expectations of a potential student or his parents, then the child is not accepted into the school. This increased control over student screening, compared with pre-July, 1991, combined with a reduced number of students, has apparently been effective in achieving the goals of the school. I have some concern, however, that the methods for determining which boys possess suitably brahminical dispositions for the school are not adequately standardized or explainable to others.

At our February 19 meeting BVPM said that there's no Parent-Teacher Association, though in his July, 1991 letter he wrote that a PTA would be established. Despite the lack of a promised PTA, he emphasized that the relationships between parents and the school are very good, though informally based. For instance, some of the Bengali mothers regularly visit the school and cook and perform other services there. Referring again to the point that the students need more exposure to influences outside of the school, parental involvement and input to the school is important. As a general principle, greater parental involvement in any project involving children means less risk for child abuse. I understand that BVPM is trying to conduct a school based on the philosophy of the traditional Vedic gurukula, which in many ways discourages parental involvement during the time that the student is at the school of the guru. Still, the past of the BGV shouts at us that measures for the protection of children must be implemented without compromise. A fundamental category of such measures is exposure to influences outside the direct, or even indirect, influence of the school. Such influences should of course be Krsna conscious, not maya. If allowing significantly greater exposure of the staff and students to outside Krsna conscious influences cannot be balanced with the educational philosophy of the BGV, then perhaps the time is not ripe for such a school.

During my visits to the school, as well as my meetings with BVPM, I had a few opportunities to observe and speak with the students, and to observe BVPM's interaction with them. BVPM's mode of interaction with the boys appeared firm and authoritative, though also gentle. The boys themselves seemed somewhat somber for children their age, though they looked healthy and basically satisfied. Their seriousness could be a natural result of the brahminical austerities they perform, as well as the mood in the school that is largely intolerant of frivolity.

I didn't observe anything that seemed abusive or neglectful in the school. My concern is that if child abuse is happening in the school, it might not be known outside of the school for a long time. This again refers to the school structure. Presently, it seems that Sad Bhuja Prabhu does some managerial coordination for the school, as well as for other schools in ISKCON Mayapur. Otherwise, GN and BVPM oversee the administration of the school, with BVPM dealing mostly with conceptual issues. While I was in Mayapur there was talk of making GN principal of the school. If GN is qualified for this service, then it would be good to encourage him with this position. However, this does not address the matter of outside input into the school, as GN spent many of his formative years in the school, and his educational training is almost solely from BVPM.

Shortly after the July, 1991 investigation the Sri Mayapur GBC Committee resolved "That the resignation of HH Bhaktividya Purna Swami as Mayapur Gurukula Principal be accepted...Therefore it is resolved that BVPS shall be a member of the Gurukula Board..." On September 20, 1991 there is a letter from Mayapur Gurukula Management Board Members Bhaktarupa Prabhu and Dayarama Prabhu. These letters make it clear that there was a gurukula Board of Directors. Currently there is no Board of Directors for the school. When I asked about a Board of Directors, BVPM basically tried to evade the question. To avoid an overly insulated educational institution with an unacceptably high susceptibility to child abuse, the BGV should have an active, involved Board of Directors composed of senior devotees who are in no way inordinately influenced by BVPM and who have no reason to conceal any aspect of the BGV's past or present. It is understood that such devotees may not be in complete agreement with BVPM's philosophy of Vaisnava education, and such differences will need to be accommodated and resolved. Devotees who serve on this Board of Directors must of course acknowledge BVPM's extensive knowledge and experience in the field of education, without compromising their vigilance for ensuring high standards of child protection and education. If such a Board of Directors cannot be formed and instituted, not as a figurehead but rather as a dynamic force in the life of the school, then I suggest that the Mayapur project is not prepared to run a school like the BGV.

While I was in Mayapur I noticed that the BGV hosted many visiting devotees, such as sannyasis and GBCs. This is good, as it opens up the school to examination from outsiders. Also, BVPM indicated that there are two devotees, experienced in the field of education, from outside of India who are considering to reside at the school for an extended period of about one year. This would be beneficial for the school and the students. Of course, visiting devotees must themselves be appropriately screened and monitored in their interactions with the students.

In his July, 1991 letter BVPM wrote that a "comprehensive counseling program using devotee counselors and professional techniques will be implemented for all affected boys." Almost eight years later this hasn't happened, nor does the school seem to have plans to make it happen, though BVPM did mention that a few boys met with devotee counselors. BVPM agreed that therapy can be helpful for victims of child abuse, and we discussed the potential harm that Vaisnavas can experience if they take shelter of non-devotee counselors. During this exchange about counseling for the victims, BVPM referred to "the 5 that were victims".

BVPM, unknowingly or otherwise, greatly underestimates the number of victims and the extent of the abuse and the damage. Relying solely on information from the July, 1991 report it is clear that there were more than two dozen victims of sexual abuse. From other sources, which seem to be credible, there were well over 50 victims of sexual abuse in the BGV, and perhaps more than 100 victims of physical abuse. Writers of the July, 1991 report acknowledge that, due to insufficient time and resources it is very possible that the abuse uncovered in the investigation is less than the full story, and we have reason to believe that this is true. Still, without venturing beyond the results of the July, 1991 investigation, it is clear that BVPM has grossly misconstrued the situation at the expense of the students' welfare. I realize that he had practically no control over the student screening process when he assumed leadership of the school in 1982, and this caused many of the problems. BVPM acknowledges "My foolishness for keeping such low-grade kids in the gurukula." However, too much of the responsibility is put on the so-called "low-grade kids", at the expense of the leadership of the BGV, Mayapur ISKCON, and the ISKCON GBC, taking appropriate responsibility for the child abuse and the damaged lives.

This is written with the assumption that readers are basically aware of the sequelae of child abuse. As a brief reminder, child sexual abuse often leads to severe intrapersonal and interpersonal problems in adulthood, as well as psychological and social dysfunctions, including depression, self-destructiveness and revictimization. Child abuse is a terrible experience, but institutional ignorance of that experience makes it intolerable and may lead to rage. As should be evident from this report, there is substantial institutional ignorance of the child abuse that occurred in the BGV.

This report is separate from, though related to, the case of the ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection of allegations of child abuse against BVPM. This report describes some elements of the past and present of the school, with regards to child protection, and some recommendations are provided. These recommendations, which are based on the July, 1991 report and meetings with BVPM during February, 1999, naturally involve BVPM because he was and is the principal of the school.

The case of child abuse against BVPM concerns allegations that he was physically abusive towards the students, and that he neglected to protect them although he knew of the sexual molestations. When the investigation into his personal case is complete, it will be reviewed and decided by a panel of ISKCON child protection judges, who will determine the validity of the allegations as well as the parameters of the relationship between BVPM and ISKCON. According to GBC policy, Official Decisions by these child protection adjudicatory panels become ISKCON policy. The report you are now reading contains only recommendations.

The findings of the July, 1991 report, which BVPM acknowledges was a nicely conducted investigation, are sufficient to merit the recommendations herein. For instance, the report identifies 11 serious child sex abusers and more than two dozen victims. If we find, for instance, that there were 30 serious sex abusers in the school, and 60 victims, it is still clear that the decent thing to do is for ISKCON, Mayapur ISKCON, the school, and BVPM to fully acknowledge the extent of the abuse, accept full responsibility, make appropriate and genuine apologies, and do whatever is in their power to rectify the situation for the victims. Hopefully all parties responsible for the child abuse that occurred will adopt a cooperative, non-defensive mood of genuine caring for the victims, rather than an evasive and legalistic posture designed to preserve a status quo that allowed rampant abuse of children.

Regarding the aspect of BVPM's case connected with his alleged knowledge of at least some of the sexual abuse before the July, 1991 investigation, BVPM denies that he knew or was told anything, except perhaps very vague allusions to some misconduct. The July, 1991 report

states "Some boys stated that when they reported incidents to the school authorities they were punished along with the perpetrators of those incidents....." During our Feb. 19 meeting the following exchange took place:

DG: So I've heard...that you had known about some of the sexual abuse incidents and that nothing was done. You know, prior to the investigation.
BVPS: I spoke to...Oh, you mean prior to 91?
DG: Yeah, that...
BVPS: Oh, oh, I can...that's ...I didn't know anything about that.
DG: No one ever told you?
BVPS: No. no-one...the first thing that I found out was that some parents came with whoever was...one of the younger Western kids...I forget who it was...it may have been...[He refers to the first allegation of abuse that led to the July, 1991 investigation].
DG: Now at....
BVPS: But before that I didn't know that any of ..those incident...cause all those incidents happened within about 3 months or 4 months of the...of whenever it came out. It all happened in that time.

BVPM stated that he had heard of only vague incidents before the 1991 investigation, and that he would promptly check out all allegations and speak to the boys who were involved. He acknowledged that he made the mistake of sometimes not getting back to the boy who initially made the complaint. That is, based on a complaint he would check out a rumor and find that it lacked substance, but then he wouldn't get back to the student who complained, and thus the rumor would spread. Then, according to BVPM, when parents would visit, the students would share with them all the rumors, and the parents would of course become disturbed. Regarding being informed of incidents of sexual encounters between the boys, BVPM said "If anybody said anything I'd immediately investigate it. The managerial defect was that I didn't get back to the person making the complaint...If anybody said anything I'd immediately move on it."

The ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection has many reports alleging that BVPM knew about sexual abuse among the students and that he did not act to prevent it. One senior devotee who has had close connection with the school reports that he knows several boys who told BVPM about being abused, but BVPM did nothing about it. A former teacher at the school states "When I saw him [BVPM] actively cover up the molestation, protect the perpetrators, and expel the victims from the school, I felt very betrayed. I had previously been to see him, to report my suspicions regarding certain older boys in my classroom. He dismissed my observations as being those of a 'Western neurotic female' and made every effort to isolate me from any decision-making meetings in the school." Another devotee connected with the school states "Gurukula Maharaja [BVPM] knew his Bengali instructors and hangers-on were molesting students, but he looked the other way." A former GBC stated that he met with BVPM, before the 1991 investigation, and shared reports of child abuse that later turned out to be true, and that BVPM minimized the stories and regarded them as exaggerations at best. There is a letter from the mother of a student who was abused at BGV reporting that her son told BVPM three times about the abuse, and BVPM did not respond. In a letter from September, 1991, Tamal Krishna Maharaja relates the story of a mother of a child who was abused in the BGV: "from her letter it is clear that the 'faculty at the school' seem to have had prior knowledge of sexual abuse..." On Feb. 1, 1992, Sri Ram wrote "Over the last three or four years, I have been very frustrated with the situation in Mayapur...There were many complaints and suspicions, but those in charge kept denying there was any problem." We have several reports from former students that they informed BVPM of the sexual abuse, but he failed to act. Sometimes, they claim, they would be beaten by him for making such reports, and sometimes he would make comments such as "It is only the Western mentality that you see it like that" or "The boys are simply hallucinating."

In assessing whether corporal punishment meted out by BVPM crosses the line into physical child abuse, we must consider cultural differences between Bengal and the West. A beating that in the West may be considered abusive may be regarded in Bengal, and in the ISKCON culture of the 1980s and early 1990s, as appropriate discipline. BVPM states that when he first assumed leadership in the school in 1982 he used the stick for punishment fairly frequently, for about two years, and after that he used the stick "once a year or once every two years". Presently there is no corporal punishment in the school. BVPM and GN explained that the main discipline technique is speaking to the boys, though on very rare occasions, perhaps once every two or three years, they may discipline a student by restricting him from doing certain services, or by giving extra service, such as cleaning chores. BVPM said that, when he did use the stick in the past he would always explain to the boys why they were being beaten. Further, he explained that the boys didn't consider physical punishment to be the worst form of discipline. Worse than a beating was silence from BVPM towards the boys,

and after that was expulsion from the school. Currently, part of the screening process for students is that if a student can't be disciplined by the spoken word, he cannot remain in the school. This sounds like a good method for helping to ensure a brahminical student population.

Reports from a few former students at the BGV from before 1991 contradict BVPM's descriptions in many ways. Some say that severe beatings with the stick by BVPM, after 1984, happened on a daily basis, which is quite different than a yearly basis. One former student estimates that he was beaten by BVPM about 30 times. This is a separate discussion from the issue of reported extensive physical abuse by other staff members of the BGV under the supervision of BVPM. Also, some former students specifically complained that they would not know why they were beaten, and that BVPM would not explain it to them.

These descriptions of the child abuse case against BVPM concerning his alleged knowledge of sexual abuse and his inflicting abusive physical punishments are not confirmed. They are presented to provide a broader understanding of the potential scope of the situation at the BGV. Also, although these reports are not confirmed, denials and defenses by BVPM must be regarded cautiously, considering his denials and defenses of the confirmed incidents uncovered in the July, 1991 investigation.

BVPM's attempt to create a Vedic school where young boys develop brahminical qualities and skills is commendable. However, the success of such a school is rooted in brahminical leadership, which means impeccable honesty. Srila Prabhupada writes [Srimad-Bhagavatam purport- 1.17.41] "If a brahmana is not truthful, all his claims as a brahmana at once become null and void." It is clear that an honest accounting of the past child abuse in the BGV has not been achieved by BVPM, ISKCON Mayapur, and ISKCON as a whole. Until it is achieved, ISKCON continues to send the message to children, parents, and the world, that child abuse is tolerated in the organization.

On October 7, 1991, Sri Ram wrote to Jayapataka Maharaja, concerning the child protection situation in Mayapur: "We are concerned that there is currently a somewhat lax approach that allows serious offenders to remain undisciplined and their threat to the Society largely unknown." This heedless attitude continues, as evidenced by a school principal who remains largely unaware of the abusiveness that occurred under his supervision a few years ago. Whether this ignorance is feigned, or the result of inadequate communication with the CPT, or for whatever reason, it is extremely difficult to justify BVPM remaining as headmaster at the school, especially with his current attitude of denial. As indicated above, ISKCON must carefully examine the entire infrastructure of the Mayapur management to ascertain how such situations could exist. By "such situations" I'm referring to examples such as a known child sexual abuser serving as Chairman of the management committee and belittling the importance of the child abuse investigation, and a school principal overseeing perhaps the worst child abuse in the history of the movement remaining in position and denying the facts of the rampant sexual violations of the children under his shelter.

Everyone in a leadership position in ISKCON should feel responsibility to ensure that the right and decent thing is done in regards to Mayapur and the BGV. Srimad-Bhagavatam [6.3.30] states "[Then Yamaraja, considering himself and his servants to be offenders, spoke as follows, begging pardon from the Lord.] O my Lord, my servants have surely committed a great offense by arresting a Vaisnava such as Ajamila. O Narayana, O supreme and oldest person, please forgive us. Because of our ignorance, we failed to recognize Ajamila as a servant of Your Lordship, and thus we have certainly committed a great offense. Therefore with folded hands we beg Your pardon. My Lord, since You are supremely merciful and are always full of good qualities, please pardon us. We offer our respectful obeisances unto You."

Srila Prabhupada comments "Lord Yamaraja took upon himself the responsibility for the offense committed by his servants. If the servant of an establishment makes a mistake, the establishment takes responsibility for it. Although Yamaraja is above offenses, his servants, practically with his permission, went to arrest Ajamila, which was a great offense. The nyaya-sastra confirms, bhrtyaparadhi svamino dandah: if a servant makes a mistake, the master is punishable because he is responsible for the offense. Taking this seriously, Yamaräja, along with his servants, prayed with folded hands to be excused by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Narayana."

Recommendations

Every student in the BGV should be regarded as a servant of Krsna sent to ISKCON to be trained as a Vaisnava. Many were severely abused. We should do whatever is required to atone for these offenses to Vaisnavas. If we don't, there will likely be dire consequences for the organization.

I recommend that BVPM make it his main service to help repair the lives of those who suffered abuse under his care and protection. This of course means he must acknowledge the extent of what happened, and accept responsibility for it. ISKCON Mayapur and ISKCON as a whole should fully support this mood of making amends to the young Vaisnavas who were badly mistreated under ISKCON management, and all required finances and resources should be mobilized for this effort.

Those who have sexually abused children should not be permitted to reside on the property of ISKCON Mayapur, and of course they should not be allowed to perform service that is connected with children. If a victim of a child sexual abuser resides at Mayapur ISKCON, then that abuser should not reside in the community, except perhaps in special circumstances when appropriate apologies have been made, the abuser has been psychologically assessed as not being a danger to children, and the victim, uncoerced, gives permission. I discussed with BVPM two devotees with some history, or at least accusations, of child sexual abuse- Satadhanya dasa and Murari Gupta dasa. Both of these devotees are friends with BVPM. I advised that they not visit the school and have no contact with the students. BVPM agreed to this, as did Satadhanya and Murari Gupta.

To summarize the recommendations of this report:

BVPM should make his main service the reparation of the young Vaisnavas who suffered abuse under his care.

ISKCON Mayapur and ISKCON as a whole should fully support BVPM in this endeavor, and ISKCON Mayapur and the entire ISKCON organization should see this reparation as an essential duty that is closely connected with the integrity of the institution, and thus should provide ample resources for the project. Care for the devotees who suffered at the BGV as children may include therapy, financial remuneration, and sincere apologies. Of course, in order to properly carry out this task, all responsible and concerned parties must find out the true extent of the abuse and the damage it has caused, with regards to the number of children abused and the severity of the transgressions.

The recommendations below relate to child protection issues in the school. They do not supersede the recommendations provided above. That is, if fulfilling the above recommendations means that the school must close for some period of time, then that should be done. It is important that we don't continue as if nothing happened, which is largely what has been happening for close to eight years.

If the operation of the BGV is so heavily dependent on one person, then it may not be the sort of school that the ISKCON organization needs at this time. Several times this report has referred to an overly insulated situation in the school that could lead to child abuse, which thrives on a segregated, authoritarian structure that allows secrecy with little opportunity for open discussion and critical analysis. In my talks with BVPM I was very impressed with the depth of his philosophical knowledge, especially as it concerned Vaisnava education, and I have no doubt that he has much to offer ISKCON education. I was concerned, however, that much of what he explained, as far as the curriculum and structure of the school, could apparently be fully understood only by him, and perhaps a few others that train under him for many years. Basically, the feel of the whole BGV institution is too cultish for my comfort. Though this is a subjective impression, albeit shared by many ISKCON devotees, I take the liberty of sharing it, considering the maltreatment of so many children in the past under a similar structure, at the same location, with the same school principal.

It is understood that education was neglected throughout ISKCON in the past, causing great pressures on those who agreed to accept the service of managing and teaching in schools. Though the ISKCON environment of the time is a mitigating factor that must be considered, each individual, including BVPM, must take responsibility for his actions. BVPM acknowledges that the pre-1991 school was too big for him to manage, and thus he could not effectively provide protection for all the students. Still, he should make proper restitution, and this begins by honestly admitting the mistakes that he made. Such admissions should go far beyond acknowledging that he was foolish to allow low-class children to remain in the school. Such an inadequate admission may simply revictimize the victim with a derisive label.

It may be argued that there does not seem to be abuse occurring presently at BGV, and the current students and parents are satisfied, so there's no reason to change a good thing. By neglecting to acknowledge and atone for transgressions of the past, however, ISKCON will not be able to establish itself as an organization based on the highest principles of the human spirit. Also, let's say hypothetically that there is abuse going on in the school. When it's discovered we could clean it up (to whatever extent we discover it), and then, after a few months we could again argue that all is well now, so let's not disturb the situation. This is

essentially what happened in 1991, which is all the more amazing considering that a fairly extensive investigation uncovered terrible child abuse in the school, and also uncovered an administrative structure in Mayapur ISKCON and the BGV that facilitated the abuse. The current structure of the school is not adequate to prevent child abuse, and therefore the following recommendations are offered, if the BGV continues to operate.

Further recommendations:

Each child should meet on a regular basis with a member of the Mayapur Child Protection Team, or a devotee approved by the Mayapur Child Protection Team. This adult should be sensitive to the cultural atmosphere that the school is trying to establish.

The managerial authority of the school should rest in a Board of Directors, comprised of devotees who are not unduly influenced by BVPM. This Board should respect and make all attempts to accommodate the vision of the BGV as an authentic institution for training brahmanas, without compromising the protection of the students.

Parental involvement with the school should be increased, perhaps meaning the establishment of a Parent-Teacher Association, as promised in BVPM's letter from July, 1991.

Child sexual abusers should not reside on the property of ISKCON Mayapur and should not have services connected with children, with possible exceptions as noted earlier in this report.

All school staff should receive extensive education from outside the school, meaning education that does not involve BVPM as the instructor. At the very least the staff of the BGV should complete all ISKCON educational training. For various reasons some school staff in some parts of ISKCON may not have completed the training program for educators offered by ISKCON, but for the staff of the BGV there should be no exceptions.

At least half of the staff members of the BGV should not have been students in the school. I realize this is counter to the philosophy of the BGV in some ways, but it is necessary, at least for the next several years, to prevent an over-reliance on influences and methods that have led to the abuse and neglect of children.

BVPM should not hold any official position in the BGV, though he can participate in the school as an advisor and teacher, and as a sannyasi with many years of experience in education.

Methods for screening students should be formalized and clearly written so that a literate person from outside the school can understand them without much difficulty.

BGV should be a model school in complying with reporting requirements of the ISKCON Education Ministry and the ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection. These reporting requirements include screening forms for staff members. It is understood that different forms may be applicable in Mayapur compared to the West. Still, BGV staff must fully comply in every way possible with the spirit and letter of policies presented by ISKCON education and child protection agencies.

Staff members of the BGV, individually and as a group, should have regular meetings with the Mayapur CPT to discuss child protection issues at the school.



Copyright 2005, HareKrsna.com. All rights reserved.

-->