

A Chapter from

Krishna Killers

The Danger of Deranged Devotion

Henry Doktorski

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Chapter 10: The Murder

At approximately one a.m. Pacific time (four a.m. Eastern time), during the night preceding Lord Nrsimhadeva's appearance day, on Thursday, May 22, 1986, a decisive event occurred which ended the life of the protagonist in our story, and inevitably and irrevocably changed the destiny of New Vrindaban. While the 33-year-old Sulochan sat rolling a joint ¹ in his rusted 1976 Dodge van, maroon in color, parked at the intersection of Flint Avenue and Cardiff Street, a half-mile from the Los Angeles ISKCON temple, ² his brains were blown apart by two bullets from a hand gun fired through the driver's side window at close range.

The coroner reported: "Gunshot wound number one was to the left lower jaw region of the cheek, and it caused injury to the jaw bone, caused injury to a vessel of the carotid artery, and went through the cervical spine, that is, the spine in the neck region, and a bullet was recovered. There was injury to the spinal cord as a result of this gunshot wound. The second gunshot wound . . . also entered the face and the entrance was in a region just in front of the left ear. This gunshot wound went through the cheek region of the left side to a bone called the maxilla, went into the oral cavity and came out through the right maxilla, the cheek bone, and exited, that is came out, in the right cheek region. . . . The bullet was recovered from the musculature behind and lateral to the neck spine on the right side. . . . Surrounding the entrance of gunshot wound number one there were multiple abrasions or scrapes in which there was some glass pieces." ³

Through the shattered driver's-side van window, Tirtha observed tiny liquid particles of Sulochan's brain spray out from the bullet holes in his face and splatter inside the vehicle.

Tirtha described this in a conversation with Gorby three days later, “Randy, do you remember a scene in the *Deer Hunter* [movie] where they were playing Russian roulette? The brains come out identically that way in slow motion.”⁴

According to Vedic astrology, the time at Sulochan’s death was “extraordinarily inauspicious,” and “highly favorable to evil acts.” Kailasa-Candra, a professional sidereal astrologer, commented:

Sulochan was murdered during the fourteenth tithi (lunar phase) of the waxing Moon, during the night preceding Lord Nrsimhadeva’s Appearance Day, an extraordinarily inauspicious time. The fourteenth tithi of the waxing Moon, active at the time of the assassination, previous to dawn, highly favors evil acts. This particular tithi is considered the third-most inauspicious of the thirty-phase lunar tithi cycle; surpassed only by the two “Witches’ Tithies”—the fourteenth tithi waning Moon and the fifteenth tithi (*amavasya*). The propaganda that Sulochan was killed on Lord Nrsimhadeva’s Appearance Day is false. He was killed on the day before His Lordship’s appearance. According to the Vedic calendar, a holy appearance day does not begin until the Sun rises on the eastern horizon. On May 22, 1986, in Los Angeles, the sun rose many hours after the point-blank hit.⁵

Sulochan’s body was cremated in California and his ashes sent to India, as he requested in his will. Mrs. Bryant noted, “My son will be cremated in California. In his will, he stipulated that his ashes be spread over India.”⁶

News of the Murder Spreads Quickly: New Vrindaban All A-Buzz

The news of Sulochan’s murder traveled fast: lightning fast. The murderer, Bhaktipada’s disciple Tirtha, made a speedy getaway from the Los Angeles temple vicinity to the airport, where he dumped his rental car and made a quick telephone call to New Vrindaban authorities while waiting for the next flight back east. He said, “I went to the airport, dropped off the vehicle, took the first flight out of Los Angeles . . . I guess about an hour and forty-five minutes later. It just happened to be going to Dallas.”⁷

That same morning at approximately 7:30 a.m. Pacific time, the Ugly Duckling Rent-A-Car agency received a telephone call from Tirtha, who very considerably informed them that he “had left the vehicle parked at one of the parking lots at Los Angeles International Airport, and that he had to leave unexpectedly and fly out.” An employee from the agency picked up the car about nine o’clock.⁸

During the japa period preceding the *mangala-aroti* morning program at New Vrindaban, hushed whispers of the news of Sulochan’s death brought great excitement to the devotees in attendance. The news couldn’t have taken longer than twenty or thirty minutes to reach them after the murder was committed. The sankirtan leader, Dharmatma remembered:

It was the morning of Lord Nrsimhadeva’s appearance day. Nrsimha is a form of Krishna that protects the devotees. He is half-man, half-lion. When I came in [the temple room] in the morning everyone was very excited and jubilant and the whole temple was buzzing. Everyone was talking in little circles. It seemed to be a very upbeat mood in the morning. I asked someone, “What is going on?” because it was like a festive atmosphere. The devotee told me, “Haven’t you heard? Sulochan was killed in California last night!”

During the question and answer period after class [a couple days later], a devotee asked Bhaktipada, “How should we understand it when a demon is killed?” Bhaktipada responded that “A devotee isn’t disturbed when a snake is killed.”⁹

Some Brijabasis were surprised and shocked to hear the news of Sulochan’s murder. Jamuna dasi, Sulochan’s divorced wife, said, “I was extremely shocked. I hadn’t in the slightest expected that that could have happened.”¹⁰

A devotee artist recalled the shock she experienced upon hearing the news of Sulochan’s death. Saradiya devi dasi (Loetitia S. Lilot) recalled, “In May-June of 1984, my family and I had visited New Vrindaban for about a month. Sulochan asked me to do a painting of Sri Krishna for him and I did, for a minimal amount of money. . . . I was totally shocked when I heard of his death.”¹¹

Others, however, were pleased to hear the news. Ramacandra dasa (Richard Cousineau), a New Vrindaban sankirtan “picker,” asked the most-senior New Vrindaban sannyasi, Radhanatha Swami: “Do you know who killed Sulochan?” Radhanatha replied: “I don’t know, but whoever it was, he was doing devotional service to Krishna.”¹²

In an e-mail to the author, Tapahpunja Swami recalled, “When the news came that Sulochan had been killed, it came as a shock—and a relief—to everyone back in New Vrindaban.”^{13 14}

Dharmatma continued his recollection of the day of the murder: “Later on after the morning functions, I had a discussion with Kuladri. He was quite disturbed. He mentioned . . . how it shouldn’t have been done like that. And that how Radhanatha, Hayagriva and Tapahpunja were pushing like crazy for this to happen, and how he had told them not to do it.”¹⁵

Janmastami had planned to fly to California the next day, at Tirtha’s request, to again assist his partner-in-crime in their mission to “destroy the demon.” But since the mission was already accomplished, Tirtha thoughtfully telephoned Janmastami and told him to cancel his trip. Janmastami, therefore, remained in Philadelphia running his business selling flowers.¹⁶

Los Angeles police were notified of the murder about 9:45 a.m. Pacific time when a pedestrian walked past the van, noticed the broken glass, glanced inside and called police.¹⁷

From Dallas, Tirtha caught a flight to Cleveland, Ohio, where he probably arrived in the late afternoon or early evening. We do not know what he did for the next 24 hours, but we think he was picked up at the airport by his wife (Suzanne Bludeau—Suksmarupini devi dasi), son (Tapas), and stepson (Jayadeva), and taken to their trailer park home in Ravenna, Ohio, to catch up on his rest, as he had not had an opportunity to sleep (except perhaps during the two flights) since Wednesday morning.

Tirtha Told to Go to India

Tirtha had been instructed to fly to India with his family, where Bhaktipada’s wealthy industrialist disciple, Nathji dasa (Dr. Narendra Desai, the Chairman of APAR

Industries), would provide for their lodging. During a telephone conversation with Randall Gorby recorded by the West Virginia State Police, Tirtha explained:

This is extremely privileged information. They want me to go to India. That's Number One's plan. He has a disciple who's a real wealthy man and he is going to instruct him first with a Telex that I'm arriving, so on and so forth. And then, when he [Bhaktipada] goes over there, supposedly next month, he will take him aside and explain the whole situation to him. . . .

I'm going [to India] . . . with [my wife] Suzanne and [son] Tapas. . . . We're supposed to go to New York . . . and get all that shit [passport and visa] together. You know, in New York you can do it all in a few days.¹⁸

Tirtha's wife, however, was not keen about moving to India permanently. She explained, "I don't think I'm ready for it. [I could go to India] to visit, but I know I couldn't live there. . . . It's hard to live there, I've heard."¹⁹

Escape Money Denied to Tirtha

Tirtha had successfully executed the community's objective, but he still had to make his escape: he desperately needed to leave the country until things cooled down. However he didn't have enough money to purchase plane tickets for himself and his family. New Vrindaban still hadn't delivered him in full the promised amount of \$8,000—they owed him about \$5,500—but for some reason, the community was dragging its feet; the money was not forthcoming.

Tirtha had little money himself; in fact, according to Tapahpunja Swami, he was in debt. Tapahpunja described Tirtha's financial straits during an interview with a private investigator, who explained, "Drescher told Sheldon that he was financially destitute. Drescher had moved his family into a run down mobile home near Ravenna, Ohio. His credit rating was so bad that he had needed someone to use their name to have a phone installed and the electricity turned on. At this meeting he again offered to sell his Isuzu [SUV] in order to continue living. Sheldon said that he chastised him for his foolhardy spending habits and admonished that unless he made a wholesale change in his life he was a burden to deal with."²⁰

After returning home to Ravenna, Tirtha telephoned Kuladri, Dharmatma, Hayagriva, and Dulal-Candra (the comptroller of New Vrindaban) and tried to get his money, to no avail. In an e-mail to the author, Tapahpunja explained, "Tirtha tried asking every conceivable New Vrindaban manager to 'get his money,' but no one would even answer his calls. He was, to put it lightly, radioactive. He was really angry and feeling betrayed. I was in contact with him via phone."²¹

Dharmatma Refuses to Give Tirtha Any More Money

Tirtha telephoned Dharmatma on Friday, May 23rd, and demanded the remainder of his promised payment. Tirtha recalled, "I was previously promised that in the event I needed to leave [the country] there would be money available, so I . . . called Dharmatma myself to ask him for some money."²²

However, Dharmatma refused to give Tirtha any more money. Just four days earlier, on May 19th, he had personally given Tirtha \$2,500 in cash to pay for his second trip to

California, because Kuladri told him that Bhaktipada had authorized that payment. Dharmatma would not give Tirtha, or anyone else for that matter, any money without authorization from Bhaktipada. In addition, now that Sulochan was dead, Dharmatma was afraid that if he gave Tirtha any more money, he could be implicated in the murder. Dharmatma explained:

Tirtha called me on the phone and asked me if I had any more money for him. I said, “No. I didn’t know anything about any more money.” He said, “Well, there is supposed to be some more money for me. Talk to ‘Number One’ [Bhaktipada], and I will get back to you.”

When Tirtha called back [later that same day], first of all, he asked if I had talked to ‘Number One.’ And at this point I was really freaked out because the murder happened and I knew that I had given him twenty-five hundred dollars [for his California trip], so I realized somehow I was implicated and I was very frightened. So I told him, “Well, no. I looked for him but I couldn’t find him,” when in fact I had not really looked for him. I didn’t want to involve myself anymore.

Tirtha got very angry at that and said, “You both, you are bull shitting me.” I said, “No, no, you know how he is. He is hard to find. Sometimes I can’t find him.” [Incidentally, Bhaktipada was not in New Vrindaban when Tirtha telephoned Dharmatma; he was returning from Europe and wouldn’t be back until late Friday night.]

And then Tirtha got very angry and he started swearing, and saying, “This is just fucking me around, they are just screwing around with me. Bhaktipada always screws me around. I am supposed to have more money. I got to leave the country. I did the job, you know. I need my money.” He kept yelling and screaming.^{23 24}

Tirtha Speaks to Tapahpunja in Columbus

After hanging up on Dharmatma, Tirtha was upset and worried (and rightly so) that he might not receive the balance of his payment which Hayagriva had promised. What could he do? He thought, “Perhaps my comrade Tapahpunja can help me.” Tirtha got in his SUV and drove to Columbus to the Festival of India sponsored by Ohio State University, arriving during the afternoon. The Columbus ISKCON temple had an exhibit at the festival. Tirtha chatted with the temple president Karusa dasa (Kerry Roth), Tapahpunja Swami and a visiting sannyasi from New Vrindaban, Varsana Maharaja (Jack Mowen, formerly Kasyapa), who were preaching at the festival.²⁵

The most pressing thought on Tirtha’s mind was getting the remainder of the \$8,000 he was promised by Hayagriva for “destroying the demon,” and purchasing air tickets for himself and his family to leave the country. During an August 2003 telephone conversation with the author, Tapahpunja explained, “I was in Columbus when suddenly Tirtha showed up and told me, ‘The tripe is gone.’ I asked, ‘What are you gonna do?’ Tirtha replied, ‘I dunno. Kirtanananda hasn’t finished paying me. He gave me some expense money, but he still owes me a lot. [Incorrect. Hayagriva had promised the money, not Kirtanananda.] I’ve been calling New Vrindaban, Dharmatma, Kuladri and Dulal to get my money, but they just give me the run-around.”²⁶

Twelve years later, in an April 2015 e-mail to the author, Tapahpunja told the same story, “The day after Tirtha pulled the trigger, he flew back to Cleveland and then drove to Columbus the next afternoon. I was preaching at Ohio State University’s Festival of India. He told me the horrid details. . . . I shook my head in disbelief and asked him about

his plans. Tirtha wanted to take his family and leave for India but not without the remainder of the money owed to him by Kirtanananda Swami. He was stuck and no one [at New Vrindaban] would talk to him.”²⁷

It appeared that Tapahpunja was not able to offer Tirtha much solace. In his mind, Tirtha thought of his friend Gorby, who was like a father to him. Tirtha may have surmised, “Gorby is friends with Hayagriva. Hayagriva has promised me the money. Maybe Gorby can help me by speaking to Hayagriva.” Tirtha telephoned his friend, Randall Gorby, from Columbus, saying: “I am in the Big ‘C,’ and took care of everything in California, and would like to talk to you.” The two friends made an appointment to meet the next day at the Dutch Pantry restaurant outside of Youngstown, Ohio.²⁸

Bhaktipada is Notified of the Murder

When Sulochan was murdered on Thursday, May 22nd, Bhaktipada was celebrating Lord Nrsimhadeva’s appearance day festival at the Nrsimha-Ksetre (Simhachalam) ISKCON temple/farm in Jandelsbrunn, Germany. On Friday, he began the last leg of his European tour on a LTU (German Charter Airlines) flight from Frankfurt to New York City with Devamrita Swami and two teenage boys, Jayananda and Chaitanya-Mangala. Bhaktipada heard the news of Sulochan’s murder after passing through customs at Kennedy International Airport.²⁹ Madhava-Ghosh picked up Bhaktipada and his entourage at the international terminal and transported them to the domestic terminal for their flight to Pittsburgh. Madhava-Ghosh told Bhaktipada that “Bryant had been killed.”³⁰

Bhaktipada’s servant, Chaitanya-Mangal, remembered, “Our traveling party celebrated Nrsimha Chaturdasi at the ISKCON Nrsimha-Ksetre (Simhachalam) temple/farm in Jandelsbrunn, Germany. The next day we flew to New York. As soon as we got in the van at the New York terminal, while still parked curbside, the devotees picking us up eagerly shared news that Sulochan had been killed the day before. This was clearly the first time Kirtanananda was hearing about this. He responded that he saw it as an auspicious sign, having just come from celebrating Nrsimhadeva’s appearance day with great pomp and circumstance at the Simhachalam farm. He added that, like with Prahlad and Hiranyakasipu, it was clear the Lord had simultaneously protected His sincere devotees and killed a demoniac personality. As the van traveled towards the connecting terminal for our flight to Pittsburgh, devotees commented how they saw this as further proof of the Divine intervention of Lord Nrsimhadeva, Who some believed had previously appeared in one of Kirtanananda’s medical brain scans.”³¹

That evening, Kuladri greeted Bhaktipada and his entourage at Pittsburgh International Airport. Devamrita Swami recalled that Kuladri showed Bhaktipada “a newspaper article about Bryant’s death” and that Kuladri “acted pleased.”³² According to Devamrita Swami, it appeared that Kuladri was more pleased to inform Bhaktipada about the murder than Bhaktipada was after hearing about it. Bhaktipada, after all, may not have known it was his men who plotted and executed the assassination, but Kuladri knew. Kuladri had endeavored with determination for months to achieve this end. However, his satisfaction, as we shall see in the following pages, did not last very long.

Backlash

Sulochan's murder prompted law enforcement agencies to treat his accusations against Bhaktipada seriously; perhaps, they suspected, Bhaktipada was responsible for Sulochan's death. One police officer noted: "Bryant was a martyr for his faith. He was one lone voice in the wilderness and he was killed because he talked about corruption. He went up against the heavyweights and he lost."³³

Sulochan's attorney explained, "Bryant's murder was the beginning of a long downhill slide for Swami Kirtanananda, mainly because it happened in California, beyond the reach of his millions. The two investigators assigned to it, Paul 'The Stump' Tippin, and Leroy Orozco, were experienced Los Angeles detectives who had worked on several high-profile murders. There would be no cover-up."³⁴

Sergeant Thomas Westfall remembered, "Steve Bryant's murder was a catalyst because it gave us [the local Marshall County Sheriff Department] the chance to get the Federal government involved."³⁵

During a lecture at a 1999 ISKCON seminar, Ravindra-Svarupa spoke about the investigation of Sulochan's murder:

So all of a sudden Sulochan is passing around papers about the ISKCON game and stuff and everybody's dismissing him as a nut until he was murdered. His stature increased immensely and his credibility in the eyes of the police. And they [law enforcement agencies] began an investigation into his murder.

And Tirtha, for some reason, left a wide trail leading back to him and New Vrindaban. The car he was using he had rented at the airport, using his photo ID and stuff like that. And so they quickly concluded that this was a professional hit and that New Vrindaban or Kirtanananda was behind it.

Because it started in West Virginia and happened in California, it went across state lines and so the Federal Government came in. The FBI investigated, they started to find out how New Vrindaban was making its money and all of a sudden there's a prosecutor from the Federal Government Justice Department investigating New Vrindaban. . . .

The newspapers were just going to town about this whole thing. This reporter from the *San Jose Mercury News* named John Hubner wrote a two part series called "Crime and the Krishnas." Starting with Kirtanananda . . . Hamsadutta had unburdened his soul to this reporter . . . and he also talked about Kirtanananda and what happened out there.³⁶

As Ravindra-Svarupa noted, Tirtha was extremely careless about leaving no trails for law enforcement agents to track. The investigators would find many clues. Janmastami confirmed, "Tirtha left a trail as wide as a twelve-lane highway, and as the Los Angeles homicide detective Tippin said, 'this was a professional hit; it just wasn't professionally done.'"³⁷

ISKCON Leaders Denounce the Murder

ISKCON leaders who were aware of (or supported) the plot to murder Sulochan began to distance themselves from New Vrindaban once the federal government became involved in the investigation. Janmastami confirmed: "Only after the murder had been committed did any of ISKCON's leaders challenge the philosophy that prevailed at New Vrindaban at that time."³⁸

For example (as described earlier), in January 1986 Radhanatha Swami flew to Los Angeles and met with Ramesvara Maharaja, reportedly to discuss cooperation between the two temples to “destroy the demon.” Ramesvara, in turn, ordered his ksatriya security-guard disciple to “cooperate” with the New Vrindaban hit men who were hunting Sulochan in California. He made his orders clear at the Los Angeles ISKCON Govinda’s restaurant, when he emphatically declared, “Sulochan needs a new body.”

Yet after the murder, Ramesvara Swami suddenly claimed that he and Sulochan were practically buddies. Ramesvara Swami insisted, “As far as I know, Sulochan didn’t have any bad feelings toward myself and similarly, I had no bad feeling toward him. He wasn’t disturbing us. He came and went very secretly. A number of our core members attended his funeral in Los Angeles; they wanted to show their sympathy and outrage.”³⁹

Mukunda Goswami, director of public affairs for ISKCON, said it was “absolutely absurd to think that our society would have anything to do with the man’s murder.”⁴⁰

Bhaktipada denied that he had anything to do with Sulochan’s murder and said that the fact that New Vrindaban was in the news did not concern him. He said: “I don’t care what they say about me as long as they say it. All I know is that more people than ever are coming to visit the Palace. Business is wonderful.” Regarding the murdered Sulochan, Bhaktipada said: “He had a lot of enemies. Mostly, he had the Lord as his enemy.”⁴¹

Bhaktipada attempted to discredit Sulochan: “Who is Bryant? Even his parents admitted he was unstable. For years he wandered around lost; he beat his wife, abused his children—he slowly became crazed, and his only objective in life was to tear down the authorities.”⁴² Another time, Bhaktipada called Sulochan a “crazy fanatic.”⁴³

Bhaktipada insisted: “An investigation will only show that we are what we say we are—religious people who have no other business than to serve God.”⁴⁴

Brijabasis Cautioned Not to Speak to Media or Police

Many New Vrindaban devotees correctly guessed that Tirtha was the murderer. During a telephone conversation with Gorby, Tirtha explained, “He [Tapahpunja] said [to me] that half the devotees in New Vrindaban were talking that it was me that did it. So that’s why they want to move me on out [to India]. . . . I would feel a lot more assured if I could meet with Bhaktipada himself just briefly and he just said, ‘Just do like this and do like that.’ I would feel confident then that I was doing the right thing. . . . I could try to do that [meet with Bhaktipada] but I’m not sure he would even talk to me now. I think the Iron Curtain dropped out there. I think they’re covering [their eyes] with both hands again.”⁴⁵

Scarcely a week after Sulochan’s murder, one high-ranking ISKCON sannyasi who had come to live at the community a few months earlier, Devamrita Swami, wrote a feature article for the *New Vrindaban News* titled “A Word To The Wise Is Sufficient” which warned devotees to keep their mouths shut if questioned by the media or police. If anyone knew of any criminal activities, he said, they should report it not to the police nor to the media, but to the temple authorities, who would, it was implied, take whatever action they deemed appropriate. Devamrita Swami preached:

Life in the material world is constantly full of upheavals, and a fruitive worker never ceases his efforts to squeeze out some sense gratification, regardless of whether the situation is one of so-called happiness or so-called distress. Right now the media and some law enforcement officials are amusing themselves by harassing the New Vrindaban Community about the death of one great *vaisnava-aparadhi* (offender) on the west coast. The media and some police are clearly more interested in creating a sensationalistic atmosphere and profiting from it than in reporting truth or stopping violence. Therefore, if our devotees engage in wild rumors and gossip about the mundane affairs of L. A. street crime, they can actually help the karmis toward their sublime goal of an endless stream of “juicy” news to report and “suspicious” hearsay to interrogate innocent devotees about.

Naturally, if anyone ever has any factual knowledge of someone performing criminal acts, he should inform the temple authorities. Otherwise what is the use of exchanging who-dunit speculations about the illusory activities of the gross materialists? This is called *gramya-katha*, “town talk,” by Sri Jagadananda Pandit [the eternal associate of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and incarnation of Satyabhauma, who, according to *Caitanya-caritamrita*, prominently assisted in Mahaprabhu’s pastimes at Navadvipa and Puri], who warns devotees against indulging in such stale topics.

This is not the first time controversy has been stirred up against the community nor will it be the last. Whenever there is powerful preaching, maya always supplies resistance. Obviously, the best thing we can do both for ourselves and all other living entities is to absorb the consciousness in talks of devotional service, specifically how to sacrifice everything to build Srila Bhaktipada’s project.⁴⁶

More articles warning devotees to keep quiet appeared in other New Vrindaban publications:

MAINTAIN THE PURITY. . . . Srila Bhaktipada has stated that he does not know of any illegal activities in New Vrindaban and he flatly disapproves of such things. Any devotee who may know of illegal activities in New Vrindaban is requested to report them to the community administration. Srila Bhaktipada has also requested that devotees refrain from indulging in idle gossip and rumor-mongering about individuals and issues, and that they maintain the purity of New Vrindaban by speaking of the nectarian pastimes Lord Krishna and His devotees.⁴⁷

BE CAREFUL WHO YOU TALK TO, PRABHUS—. . . This is a warning to devotees not to talk about these allegations with any unknown men or women who suddenly appear in our community. Although we have nothing to hide, there are those who will distort even the simplest truths. Also, remember that there is an organized conspiracy to destroy this community, and demons can come in many disguises. Putana [the witch] came as a lovely lady and fooled the residents of Vrindaban, but she came to kill Krishna. The devotee has to be just as desirous to protect Krishna as the demons are to destroy Him. Then the devotee is always victorious. The U. S. Navy has a tagline: Loose lips sink ships.⁴⁸

Kuladri confirmed that standard New Vrindaban policy was not to cooperate with the police. Kuladri said, “This was a continuous policy that Swami recommended: no devotee talk with the police, and he was continually portraying the police as persecutors and demoniac. He said they were not interested in the religious goals of the community, and they were simply hinderances and would stop it [New Vrindaban] if they could, and any problems in the community—he always made an effort to hide them from the police.”⁴⁹

Bhaktipada ordered an internal investigation of Sulochan's murder. A portion of a trial transcript in the New Vrindaban Archive noted, "Overt Act 37. On or about June of 1986, defendant KEITH GORDON HAM, a/k/a NUMBER ONE, told an individual known to the grand jury to conduct an internal investigation of the Stephen Bryant murder." ⁵⁰

Five years later, Bhaktipada was charged with obstructing justice. The trial transcript reported, "It was a further part of the conspiracy that defendant KEITH GORDON HAM, a/k/a NUMBER ONE, would obstruct the murder investigation by having a sham internal murder investigation conducted, and by impeding the flow of information to law enforcement investigators." ⁵¹

Gorby: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Tirtha called his friend Randall Gorby on the phone and complained that New Vrindaban was not paying him the balance of the promised \$8,000 for his expenses in eliminating Sulochan. Tirtha explained, "I called him because I needed help and he has always been a close friend to me, but little did I know . . . [that my 'friend' Gorby was a snitch.]" ⁵²

At the time, Tirtha did not realize that some of Gorby's telephone calls were being recorded by the West Virginia State Police. Gorby had become a government informer. Due to his grievances against New Vrindaban (explained earlier), Gorby had gone to the State Police and offered to become an informant. Gorby did not have recording equipment on his home phone. Whenever he received an important call at his residence, such as a call from Tirtha or Hayagriva, he told the caller that he would call back in fifteen or twenty minutes. Randall then would drive to the State Police office in Wellsburg (about seven miles from his home in Bethany), and call back on their telephone, which had tape recording equipment already set up. (At this time there was no such thing as Caller ID.)

Gorby: Do you have a place to go?

Tirtha: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Gorby: Well, I'd really get on 'em. I can't understand them not coming through with it.

Tirtha: It's just ridiculous because they've got a hundred thousand [dollars] coming in every week.

Gorby: What agreement did you make with. . .

Tirtha: Well, it's just that eight figure [\$8,000].

Gorby: Yeah.

Tirtha: I mean it was just like they, a . . . liked it. They actually thought that was a bargain basement price and they were all happy with it.

Gorby: Yeah.

Tirtha: It was a bargain fuckin' basement. I mean you couldn't go any lower than that. ⁵³

Probably on Saturday, May 24th, Tirtha and Gorby met at the Dutch Pantry restaurant outside of Youngstown, Ohio. Tirtha revealed his desperate predicament: he had accomplished the community's objective, but now they were refusing to pay him the balance due for "doing the deed." Tirtha practically begged Gorby to intercede on his behalf; to help him get the money he needed to leave the country. Later that day, on behalf of Tirtha, Gorby telephoned Hayagriva from the State Police office.

Gorby: Hello, is Howard there please?

Purnamasi: Yes.

Hayagriva: Hello.

Gorby: Hello, Howard. I just talked to Tom. He's impatient.

Hayagriva: Well, I can't discuss this on the phone.

Gorby: Okay, well whatever you decide.

Hayagriva's wife, Purnamasi, recalled, "We get a phone call. Gorby asks Hayagriva for some money because Tirtha needs money. Tirtha threatens my family and tells Hayagriva if he wants to see his family again, he'd better cooperate."⁵⁴

End Notes

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- ¹ Tirtha reported Sulochan's last activities to both Randall Gorby and Tapahpunja.
 - ² "Thomas Drescher-PC 187" (May 21, 1989), 1.
 - ³ Dr. Lakshmanana Sad Yavagiswaran, *Trial transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 637-638.
 - ⁴ Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), cited by Randall Gorby, *Trial transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1149-1150.
 - ⁵ Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Candra), e-mail to the author (November 29, 2016).
 - ⁶ Helga Bryant, cited by Robert A. Fernandez, "Krishna dissident is slain on coast," *San Francisco Examiner* (undated, c. May 1986).
 - ⁷ Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial transcript V*, 67.
 - ⁸ Gabriel Alon, co-owner of Ugly Duckling Rent-A-Car, Los Angeles Airport branch, *Trial transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 1097-1099.
 - ⁹ Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.
 - ¹⁰ Jane Seward (Jamuna dasi), *Lion Television*.
 - ¹¹ Loetitia S. Lilot (Saradiya devi dasi), e-mail to the author (November 22, 2016).
 - ¹² Richard Cousineau (Ramacandra), conversation with the author at the funeral for Ronald Burstein (Muktakesa) in Moundsville, West Virginia (April 10, 2007).
 - ¹³ Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (March 29, 2015).
 - ¹⁴ Of course, the news of Sulochan's murder did not come as a shock to Tapahpunja. He was "in the loop"—he had helped "engineer" the murder, as he later admitted to the ISKCON temple president of Inis Rath Island in Ireland. In this e-mail, Tapahpunja attempts to deceive the author into believing that Tirtha acted alone.
 - ¹⁵ Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.
 - ¹⁶ John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (July 29, 2008).
 - ¹⁷ "Thomas Drescher-PC 187" (May 21, 1989), 1.
 - ¹⁸ Transcript of telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Thomas Drescher (undated).
 - ¹⁹ Transcript of telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Suzanne Bludeau (undated).
 - ²⁰ Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with Terry Sheldon by phone from Malaysia (March 22, 1990).
 - ²¹ Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (April 3, 2015).
 - ²² Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial transcript V*, 69.
 - ²³ Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.
 - ²⁴ *Trial transcript VI* (p. 9) states that Tirtha made two telephone calls to Dharmatma on Friday, May 23rd.
 - ²⁵ Sandy Fitzgerald, "Drescher Ordered Extradited," *The Intelligencer* (August 14, 1987).
 - ²⁶ Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), telephone conversation with the author (August 5, 2003).
 - ²⁷ Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (April 3, 2015).
 - ²⁸ Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), cited by Randall Gorby, *Trial transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1149-1150.
 - ²⁹ Jay Matsya (Devamrita Swami), cited in "Bryant Death Reports: Gorrick Account vs. Reality," typewritten document in the New Vrindaban Archives.
 - ³⁰ Mark Meberg (Madhava-Ghosh), cited in "Bryant Death Reports: Gorrick Account vs. Reality," typewritten document in the New Vrindaban Archives.
 - ³¹ Chris Walker (Chaitanya-Mangala), e-mail to the author (November 22, 2016).
 - ³² Jay Matsya (Devamrita Swami), cited in "Bryant Death Reports: Gorrick Account vs. Reality," typewritten document in the New Vrindaban Archives.
 - ³³ Berkeley police officer Joe Sanchez, cited by Elizabeth Fernandez in "Mysterious Murder Silences a Maverick Krishna," *San Francisco Examiner* (July 6, 1986), 1.
 - ³⁴ David Gold, *After the Absolute*, chapter 17.
 - ³⁵ Thomas Westfall, cited by *Lion Television*.
 - ³⁶ William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 4.
 - ³⁷ John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (April 5, 2015).

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- ³⁸ John Sinkowski (Janmastami), “New Vrindaban History, for the Record,” *Sampradaya Sun* (December 22, 2006).
- ³⁹ Robert Grant (Ramesvara), cited by John Dart in “Killing Sparks Federal Probe of Krishna Sect,” *Los Angeles Times* (July 20, 1986), 32.
- ⁴⁰ Mukunda Goswami, cited by Robert A. Fernandez, “Krishna dissident is slain on coast,” *San Francisco Examiner* (undated, c. May 1986).
- ⁴¹ Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Thomas Ferraro in “Krishnas Involved in Seamy Accusations, Including Murder,” *Sunday News-Register* (July 6, 1986).
- ⁴² Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in “The Fire’s Getting Hotter,” *New Vrindaban News* (October 14, 1986), 2.
- ⁴³ Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in “Sriila Bhaktipada’s Press Conference (December 4, 1985),” *New Vrindaban News* (December 7, 1985).
- ⁴⁴ Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in “Mysterious Murder Silences a Maverick Krishna,” *San Francisco Examiner* (July 6, 1986), A1, 12.
- ⁴⁵ Transcript of telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Thomas Drescher (undated).
- ⁴⁶ Devamrita Swami, “A Word To The Wise Is Sufficient,” *New Vrindaban News* (June 1, 1986).
- ⁴⁷ “MAINTAIN THE PURITY,” *New Vrindaban News* (June 14, 1986)
- ⁴⁸ “BE CAREFUL WHO YOU TALK TO, PRABHUS— ” *Brijabasi Spirit* (March 24, 1987)
- ⁴⁹ Arthur Villa (Kuladri), interview with investigators (undated, c. 1989), Villa GJ2.
- ⁵⁰ “Overt Acts Related to Steven Bryant Murder.”
- ⁵¹ Photocopied pages from Trial Transcript in New Vrindaban Archive.
- ⁵² Page from Trial Transcript in New Vrindaban Archive.
- ⁵³ Transcript of State Police wiretap of a telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Holy Cow! Swami*.
- ⁵⁴ Susan Joseph (Paurnamasi), “Mother Paurnamasi’s Statements” (September 5, 1992).