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## In Memoriam

**Hitkinkar Baba Sri Sevak Sharan Ji (1934–2020):  
A Vaishnava Naturalist from Vrindavan**

By Joshua Nash

On October 8, 2020, naturalist, environmental activist, spiritual teacher, visionary, and beloved friend of many, Sri Sevak Sharan Ji, passed away in Vrindavan, India.

Sevakji's major achievement to the Vaishnava world was his offering of eco-spiritual work and environmental perspectives. Since the late 1970s, he and his now late wife, Malti Devi (Mataji), established a nursery and a beautiful natural ashram on the Parikrama Marg, found on the then remote outskirts of Vrindavan town. This property, known as Lata Bhavan, a name which Sevakji translated as "Abode of Flora and Fauna," would become one of the last groves of magnificent nature in this rapidly expanding pilgrimage location.

While the rest of the town was nearly breaking under the pressures of burgeoning temples, modern-day techno gurus, and consumerist religion, Sevakji worked humbly and tirelessly on his vision from Lata Bhavan, an idea that Vrindavan is a *human sanctuary*, a place where humans can live in consonance with themselves, other humans, society, and nature, in a balanced and sane way.

If we further this "*Vrindavan: The Human Sanctuary*" idea—that Vrindavan = Nature + Divinity—seeing all of the natural and human world with divine vision, then the entire perceivable world can become Vrindavan—the ultimate human sanctuary.

Sevakji is most remembered in domestic and international circles for his connection with "Friends of Vrindavan," in which he interacted during its founding (in the 1990s) with British ISKCON devotee, Ranchor Prime. This institution in parallel with World Wide Fund for Nature-India's Vrindavan Conservation Proj-

ect formed the backbone of modern conservation efforts in Vrindavan throughout the that found decade and beyond. This work was based on Sevakji's own childhood experiences and his long-term philosophical adherence to the Radha-Vallabha temple tradition in Braj, coupled with his deep love of nature, Krishna culture, and Vrindavan.

Sevakji's vision, which he dubbed the "*Vrindavan Ecological Concept*," was developed through several decades of experiments and experiences in Lata Bhavan, and this was carried worldwide as well.

Bearded from his mid 30s until the end of his life, Sevakji never shaved, saying he said he would only do so after Vrindavan was protected and conserved according to his own high standards. This was a personal austerity meant to show his determined resolve.

Overall, Sevakji was a profound Vaishnava with many attractive features. His humor, warmth, knowledge, and generosity were well known to anyone who had the good fortune to associate with him. Sevakji lived a life of truth, honesty, and sacrifice. He was a stalwart who stood by his principles. His approach to religion and ecology was well ahead of its time.

A lover of life, Sevakji radiated a rare, deep love for humans, nature, and the world at large. He was a great soul who will be sadly missed. This "unique and lesser known Vaishnavas" issue of the *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* is dedicated to the memory of Sri Sevak Sharan Ji. Let Sevakji's little-known thinking about Vrindavan spread beyond the Parikrama Marg of the town of Krishna.

Jaya Shri Van ("All glories to the beautiful forest sanctuary of Vrindavan")