

Badrinarayan Swami

Note: Mormons are the fastest growing religion and they are male dominated.

Hare Krishna. I have written to Bhanu Maharaja about the caste goswami concern. I will get back to you with his comments.

As for the other part, no doubt we accept and respect the principle that Vaisnavis can become diksa gurus. My questions about the quotes offered in the papers so far was not the real thrust of my concern. Again, I accept the principle of Vaisnavi diksha gurus and that it has been put into practice in the past.

My understanding is also that it is a rare and not general practice. The reason for that has nothing to do with the alleged lack of qualified women. I am willing to accept that there are a number of Vaisnavis who could execute this service: in the past, in the present, and in the future. My understanding of the rarity of the event is because of the need to balance this with the need to maintain the proper cultural balance in society. This brings us back to the already stated argument that Srila Prabhupada did not put Vaisnavis in prominent leadership positions--and the conviction that he did not do so for good and thoughtful reasons.

I have seen the seeds of this social ethos shift already manifesting in the arguments presented by some in favor of Vaisnavi diksha gurus. These arguments rest on "equal rights", "discrimination" "the need to keep up with changing times" etc. These are the same themes that run through the feminist arguments of the 1960s and 1970s. Again, I know that this is not a politically correct statement and that I will be calling down the wrath of these very proponents on my head but I do so because I want to see an honest, thoughtful, and dispassionate discussion of the issues.

I believe that in a healthy society, Vaisnavis do not seek out the role of diksha guru. It is something that happens organically, naturally, when there is a deep need for a particular Vaisnavi to do so--and very rarely. There is the law of unintended consequences and I believe that we are playing with that now. By accepting the above arguments, several generations out, we have the potential (I believe certainty) of having thrown the whole Vedic ethos out of whack. Thus, we will have done a great disservice to those future generations who will have lost sight of the true and best nature of Vedic society and its role models.

I have heard the counter--"But society has changed and by sticking to this standard you are putting off 50% of the world's population (the women)."

Firstly, I don't see that this argument swayed Srila Prabhupada. When asked about the role of Vaisnavis in ISKCON and women in general in the world, he did not back off one inch. Review the conversations with the media as Srila Prabhupada traveled across the USA in the summer of 1975.

Secondly, there are many intelligent and strong willed women who joined ISKCON knowing full well Srila Prabhupada's and the Vedic view. It is not that all women feel the need for assertion or equal rights / roles. There still are many out there who can understand the nuance and necessity of the Vedic societal structure. Even Barbara Bush, the 1st president Bush's wife, told the commencement class at Smith College (one of the most prominent women's colleges in the USA) "It is not what happens in the White House that really matters. It is what happens in your house that matters". She was speaking to an educated elite about the preeminent value of motherhood in shaping a healthy, happy society.

Let me close by quoting Lillian Hellman before the McCarthy congressional commission (investigating alleged Communists in the USA) "I cannot cut my conscience to fit the fashion of the day". I believe that we do so here at great risk and loss for future generations.

These are the concerns and convictions I believe that Srila Prabhupada held. For me to untether ISKCON from them, for me to put them aside, I am going to need to see a sober and thoughtful counter argument.

Your servant,
Badrinarayan dasa