

BASU GHOSH DASA

Female Diksha Guru — some considerations

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undefinedBy Basu Ghosh Das

There is a definite “push” for a female diksha guru in ISKCON that is the proverbial “elephant in the room”, as the title of the recent article on Dandavats.com by Devaki Mataji alluded to.

The eagerness of a section of devotees to see a female blessed as diksha guru in ISKCON posthaste is akin “affirmative action” in the USA, as well as the reservation system for the backward classes here in India. Call it “social engineering”, if you want. The mood is “let’s have a token woman diksha guru” to affirm that women are equal to men in ISKCON.

This arises from the egalitarian outlook of modern Western society and the various equal rights movements so popular in the Western world, and is an ideology that runs contrary to Srila Prabhupadas’s teachings and the ancient culture he was eager to transplant from India, worldwide.

To begin with, when a woman can’t wear the sacred thread – the yajnopavita – then how can she give one as a part of initiation? Srila Prabhupada followed the system of initiation introduced by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur. Srila Saraswati Thakur introduced the brahmin thread – yajnopavita – for persons not born in brahmana families.

Traditionally, brahmanas, kshatriyas, and vaishyas were initiated with the yajnopavita in order to study the vedas and then perform vedic sacrifices. They are the “dvijas” – the twice born, as upanayanam (“bringing closer”) samskara was performed in their communities.

Srila Prabhupada introduced such initiations – for men. For women, he never conferred the yajnopavita! Therefore, how can a woman give a sacred thread as a part (“anga” in Samskritam) of “diksha” if she herself does not/cannot wear it? This historical fact should be sufficient in itself as evidence that women were not to be diksha gurus.

Prabhupada’s now well know comment in his purport to Srimad Bhagavatam 4.12.32 is a direct comment on this:

“According to sastric injunctions, there is no difference between siksha-guru and diksha-guru, and generally the siksha-guru later on becomes the diksha-guru. Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja’s diksha-guru”.

Srila Saraswati Thakur and Srila Prabhupada envisioned the revival of vedic culture and “daivi varnashram”. Lord Krishna states in Bhagavad-gita that He Himself created varnashram dharma:

catur-varnyam maya srishtam

guna-karma-vibhagasah

tasya kartaram api mam

viddhy akartaram avyayam

“According to the three modes of material nature and the work associated with them, the four divisions of human society are created by Me. And although I am the creator of this system, you should know that I am yet the non-doer, being unchangeable.” (Bhagavad-gita 4.13)

In the varnashram system, women are envisioned as belonging to the varna of their husband. The following verses in Manu Samhita clearly indicate that:

“Whatever be the qualities of the man with whom a woman is united according to the law, such qualities even she assumes, like a river (united) with the ocean. Akshamala, a woman of the lowest birth, being united to Vasishtha and Sarangi, (being united) to Mandapala, became worthy of honour. These and other females of low birth have attained eminence in this world by the respective good qualities of their husbands.” (Manu 9. 22-24)

After the battle of Kurukshetra, when Bhishmadev was lying on the bed of arrows (baan shayaa), Lord Krishna took Maharaj Yudhishtir to him so that Bhishma would instruct him on the various aspects of dharma.

In this regard there is the following verse in the Bhagavatam:

dana-dharman raja-dharman

moksha-dharman vibhagasah

stri-dharman bhagavad-dharman

samasa-vyasa-yogatah

“He (Bhishmadev)” then explained, by divisions, acts of charity, the pragmatic activities of a king and activities for salvation. Then he described the duties of

women and devotees, both briefly and extensively.” [Srimad Bhagavatam 1.9.27].

From this it is crystal clear that the Bhagavatam states that women have their own specific and separate set of duties, distinguished from those of men.

Srila Prabhupada voiced this in simple language on several occasions. Here are two examples of those expressions:

A woman's real business is to look after household affairs, keep everything neat and clean, and if there is sufficient milk supply available, she should always be engaged in churning butter, making yogurt, curd, so many nice varieties, simply from milk. The woman should be cleaning, sewing, like that.

(Srla Prabhupada in a letter to female disciple, February 16, 1972)

Prabhupada: We shall teach the girls two things. One thing is how to become chaste and faithful to their husband and how to cook nicely... These two qualifications required. She must learn how to prepare first-class foodstuff, and she must learn how to become chaste and faithful to the husband. Only these two qualification required. Then her life is successful. Educate the girls how to become faithful, chaste wife and how to cook nicely. Let them learn varieties of cooking. Is very difficult? And by fifteenth, sixteenth year they should be married. And if they are qualified, it will be not difficult to find out a nice husband. Here the boys, they do not want to marry because they are not very much inclined to marry unchaste wife. They know it, that "I shall marry a girl, she is unchaste." What do you think?

(Srla Prabhupada on his morning walk, July 10, 1975, at Chicago, USA)

And Srla Prabhupada's letter to Arundhati Devi Dasi dated July 30, 1972:

"Child-worship [for female, grihini] is more important than deity-worship. If you cannot spend time with him [alluding to her son], then stop the duties of pujari. At least you must take good care of your son until he is four years old, and if after that time you are unable any more to take care of him then I shall take care...".

The point is that women were encouraged by Srla Prabhupada and vedic/vaishnava /Indian tradition to be grihini – housewife, which is the most important duty for women. Grihini's act as mother, grandmother, cook, cleaner, and guide to the children in the home.

We don't find in any of the shastras that women studied or taught the vedas, nor wore the yajnopavita (sacred thread). Srla Prabhupada and Srla Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur did not indicate that we should change this ancient vedic tradition by having women take up these activities.

The pro-female diksha guru devotees cite Jahhava Mata, Gangamata Goswamini, and others who Srla Prabhupada recognized as "gurus".

However, from Gaudiya vaishnava history it can be understood that these exalted ladies were "shiksha gurus" and that such exalted personalities were exceptional cases Srla Prabhupada only mentioned these two or three ladies as gurus.

According to the Taitiriya Upanishad, mother is the first guru as per the famous mantra: "matri devo bhava, pitri devo bhava, acharya devo bhava, atithi devo bhava".

Some proponents of female diksha guru state that there were "hundreds" of women gurus in the Gaudiya Sampradaya. However, upon close investigation of their names, we see that these women were

from the “caste goswami lines” (the “parivaars” – “families”/family lines), that were rejected by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur and Srila Prabhupada.

“In India there are still superstitions that one should be initiated by someone from such a sukaracharya family. They are called generally the jatigosain. Jatigosain means the caste spiritual masters. All over India, especially in Bengal, this jatigosain spiritual mastership is very prevalent. But really goswami means one who is master of the influence of different senses, namely the influence of anger, the influence of the belly, the influence of the genitals, and the influence of talking. So one who is master of these influential webs of sense gratification, he is called goswami. Goswami is not by hereditary chart. So Sukaracharya posed himself as such a goswami spiritual master. He had many mystic powers; therefore, he was considered to be a very influential spiritual master of the demons”.

[Srila Prabhupada as quoted in Srila Prabhupada lila by Satsvarupa das Goswami, in Chapter 3]

Then we have the example from the Srimad Bhagavatam of Lord Krishna and Balaram residing at the home of the guru, Sandipani at Avanti (today Ujjain):

prabhavau sarva-vidyanam sarva-jnau jagad-isvarau

nanya-siddhamalam jnanam guhamanau narehitaih

atho guru-kule vasam icchantav upajagmatuh

kasyam sandipanin nama hy avanti-pura-vasinam

“Concealing Their innately perfect knowledge by Their humanlike activities, those two omniscient Lords of the universe, Themselves the origin of all branches of knowledge, next desired to reside at the school of a spiritual master. Thus They approached Sandipani Muni, a native of Kasi living in the city of Avanti.” [Srimad Bhagavatam 10.45.30/31]

Sandipani Muni was Lord Krishna’s guru and his wife was “guru patni”, the

wife of the guru. He is addressed as the guru, not his wife. We do not find her addressed as “gurvi”, the feminine form of the word guru in Samskritam. [Like “prabhvi” is the feminine form of the word “prabhu”].

In fact, in all the vedic/Samskrita literatures and histories we don’t find reference to even one woman guru! That is because women were trained in the vedic culture to be grihini – housewives, and engage in their natural dharma – household work.

The five “panchakanyas”, famous women in vedic literatures, were famous for their devotion to their husbands, not for guruship:

ahalyaa draupadi sita taaraa mandodari tatha

panchakanyah smarennityam mahapatakanshiniḥ

“Ahalya, Draupadi, Sita, Tara and Mandodari. One should forever remember these panchakanyas who are the destroyers of great sins”.

If a woman were to give up her home life and become a traveling preacher, which is the duty of sannyasis, then it would be a cause for her falldown, according to the Manu Samhita:

Panam durjana sangasya patya cha viraho'tanam svapno'nyagehvaschcha naari sandushanaani shat

“Drinking (spirituous liquor), associating with wicked people, separation from the husband, rambling abroad, sleeping (at unseasonable hours), and dwelling in other men’s houses, are the six causes of the ruin of women”. (Manu 9.13)

It is said that the sannyasis are the guru of the brahmanas and the brahmanas are the gurus of society.

In his lecture during sannyas initiation at Mayapur on March 16,1976, Prabhupada stated this:

“So guru is the post given to the sannyasis, to the brahmaṇas. Without becoming a brahmaṇa, nobody can become a sannyasi, and sannyasi is supposed to be the guru of both all the ashramas and all the varnas. So the preaching work... We require so many sannyasis”.

This fact further supports the contention that women were to be grihini, housewife. Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur did not initiate a single female into the sannyas ashram.

Prabhupada: In the history of India there is no woman leader. Throughout

Mahabharata you'll find... Mahabharata is the greater history, history of greater India. Maha means “greater,” and bharata. So “Greater Bharata.” That means this whole planet. So you won't find woman leader”.

[Srila Prabhupada in a room conversation March 24, 1977, Bombay, regarding Indira Gandhi].

Woman reporter: And if women were subordinate to men, it would solve all of our problems?

Prabhupada: Yes. Man wants that woman should be subordinate, faithful to him. Then he is ready to take charge. The man's mentality, woman's mentality different. So if the woman agrees to remain faithful and subordinate to man, then the family life will be peaceful.

(Newspaper interview with Srila Prabhupada, July 9, 1975, Chicago)

Devaki Mataji, in her article “The Hot Issue, Female Diksha Guru”, attempted to echo Srila Prabhupada's and vedic/vaishnava tradition's views on women and their duties, and the fact that becoming a diksha guru for a women is incongruent with those duties – known as “stridharma”.

The quotes above and so many other quotes, and the history and tradition of vedic culture preserved by the parampara, system of disciplic succession, teach us just what is stated herein above, that diksha guru is the occupation of a brahmana, and not the occupation for women, who have their own dharma.

Prabhupada's conversation with Tamal Krishna Maharaj gives us gives us further indication of this:

Prabhupada: So far gurukula is concerned, that also, I have given program. They have given the name of "girls." We are not going to do that.

Tamala Krsna: What is that?

Prabhupada: Girls. Boys and girls. That is dangerous. Girls should be completely separated from the very beginning. They are very dangerous.

Tamala Krsna: So we're... I thought there were girls in Vrndavana now. They said that they're going to have the girls' gurukula behind the boys' gurukula. Gopala was talking about that.

Prabhupada: No, no, no. No girls.

Tamala Krsna: It should be in another city or somewhere else.

Prabhupada: Yes. They should be taught how to sweep, how to stitch, clean, cook, to be faithful to the husband.

Tamala Krsna: They don't require a big school.

Prabhupada: No, no. That is mistake. They should be taught how to become obedient to the husband.

Tamala Krsna: Yeah, you won't learn that in school.

Prabhupada: Little education, they can...

Tamala Krsna: Yeah. That they can get at home also.

Prabhupada: They should be stopped, this practice of prostitution. This is a very bad system in Europe and America. The boys and girls, they are educated, coeducation. From the very beginning of their life they become prostitutes. And they encourage. They distribute pills. I have seen the boys and girls dancing together, embracing, in the school film. That ruins the career. Both of them are ruined. That is very regrettable. Then you shall require this sterilization, pills, another big program. They are creating animal civilization, and when the animals are disturbing, they are trying to find out some other means. This is their program. First of all create animals. Then, when the animals behave like animals, then another program. Why do you create animal? Woman brahmacarini, this is artificial.

Tamala Krsna: In our centers, though, there are so many brahmacarinis, and even sometimes they're encouraged to remain brahmacarini.

Prabhupada: That they cannot. As soon as they will find opportunity, they will become vyabharini [sexually deviated]. For woman, protection.

Tamala Krsna: So you don't advocate this remaining sing..., these women remaining brahmacarinis.

Prabhupada: Therefore polygamy was allowed. Let them be taken care of, one husband, three wives.

(Prabhupada's conversation at Bombay on April 29, 1977)

If the example of a female guru is allowed to be established within ISKCON, it would certainly inspire other women to do likewise, and that would set the wrong example, as it is in contradiction with Prabhupada's teachings.

The rationalization and justification for establishing female diksha guru in ISKCON is born out of Western liberal, egalitarian thought, and not based on the teachings of Srila Prabhupada, Srila Saraswati Thakur and our previous acharyas.

Thus it would be a shame for us to change ancient vedic culture and the traditions of vaishnavism so as to make our movement acceptable to "popular modern thought" prevalent in the mleccha and yavana West! Srila Prabhupada set the example by not doing so, and we would be wise follow his example. Srila Prabhupada never appointed one woman as GBC or Temple President, what to speak of dikha guru.

The late Dr. Stillson Judah, a Western religious scholar who dialogued with and befriended Srila Prabhupada wrote: in his 1974 book "Hare Krishna and the Counterculture":

"The position of women in the [ISKCON] Society may not appeal to Americans interested in women's liberation. Swami Bhaktivedanta says that all women other than one's wife are to be considered as one's mother, and yet he regards them as prone to degradation, of little intelligence, and untrustworthy. They should not be given as much freedom as men, but should be treated like children; they should be protected all during their lives, by their fathers when young, later by their husbands, and in their old age, by their sons ... This view is largely consonant with the traditional one found in the ancient Indian law books. Females may not become presidents of any temple, nor occupy positions of authority. They may do the cooking, help with the devotional services and maintenance of the temple and prepare the flower offerings for Krishna." (Judah, 1974:86)

The conclusion is that establishing women as diksha gurus contradicts the concepts that Srila Prabhupada taught above the duties of women, as well as the example Srila Prabhupada himself set when managing his ISKCON society.

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Comments • [comment feed]

1Unregistered

Dandavata pranamas, Basu Ghosh prabhu ! You have established the points very nicely and conclusively, but I feel it is like preaching to the converted. Those devotees who have understood Srila Prabhupada's points differently will continue to argue and try and establish that somehow Srila Prabhupada wanted devotees in female bodies to become diksha gurus in his institution. As you so rightly point out, 'western liberal egalitarian thought' seems to play a prominent role in all pro-FDG arguments.

Dasanudasa,

GGD

Comment posted by Govardhanagiridasa on November 29th, 2013

2krishna-kirti

I would like to congratulate Sriman Basu Ghosh Prabhu on this excellent essay. A point which is the proverbial "elephant in the room" is why were female diksha-gurus so exceptional, to the point of almost being non-existent in our sampradaya and in other Vaishnava sampradayas we respect as bona-fide. For example, to this day, neither the followers of Madhvacharya or Ramanujacharya have female diksha-gurus.

One clarification needs to be made about Basu Ghosh Prabhu's discussion of the yajno-pavita and women not getting it in our tradition: who gets the yajopavita is actually governed both by pancharatrika shastras and by dharma-shastras such as Manu-smriti. Neither permit women to have them.

Women can receive (and hence give) mantras which are not Vedic (that is, mantras that are not to be given to stri-shudra-dvijabandhu (women, shudras, and unqualified offspring of brahmanas). But mantras like the brahma-gayatri are not to be given to women. That is why up through Srila

Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura no acharya gave it to women. Doing so is against sruti-smriti-purana-pancharatra. (I'll explore this more in depth in a coming essay.) Basu Ghosh Prabhu's focus was specifically on Vedic mantras, not necessarily non-Vedic mantras.

Srila Prabhupada gave the brahma-gayatri to his female disciples, but the only official record we have for his reasons are in the Srila Prabhupada Lilamrita, where it is described that Srila Prabhupada felt there could be "no harm" in giving to them. The context of this is that his two lady disciples, Jadurani and Govinda dasis felt slighted by not being included in the second initiation. That's the context.

Now, as to the difference between getting a mantra because it "causes no harm" and getting the mantra because it will be beneficial is a great difference. There is absolutely no support in the shastras—sruti or smriti—that that supports any notion that chanting the brahma-gayatri will benefit women. To allege it does, one will have to concoct an elaborate theology that will necessarily contradict the corpus of Vedic literature—especially srutis and smritis.

To justify women giving upanayanam and upavita, along with the brahma-gayatri, to others would require us to contradict the Vedas and hence establish us as nashtikas, persons who do not accept Vedic authority. This would immensely disgrace Srila Prabhupada.

Comment posted by krishna-kirti on November 29th, 2013

3Sankarsana das

Thank you for the well presented and authoritatively based article Basu Ghosh prabhu, and the informative follow up by Krishna-kirti prabhu. How do either of you (or anyone well acquainted with this subject) respond to a popular Prabhupada quote the pro FDG devotees use that Srila Prabhupada wanted all his disciples (both men and women) to take the Bhakti satri exam, and whoever passed could initiate disciples? By the way this instruction does not corroborate with Srila Prabhupada's instructions to Tamal Krishna Maharaja about not having gurukula for girls, and what girls need to learn. This casts doubt on the idea that the female role in Prabhupada's view would change much when girls became women. From my perspective not everything Prabhupada said has to be taken literally. Especially when something he said he did not implement himself, not to mention he made comments to the contrary on and provided references for (as Basu Ghosh prabhu provided quotes for in this regard). It's possible he could have said something like that just to encourage all his disciples to preach.

Also how do you respond to a logical argument Urmila mataji makes as follows: "In a situation where a guru has been giving siksa and personal guidance for many years—even a decade—to a particular disciple, where there is a firm relationship of guru/disciple, where the disciple has been worshiping and studying from and serving his or her siksa guru for many years—why is it better for that disciple to take diksa from someone else, only because the siksa guru is female? (And often the "someone else" has little or no relationship or personal knowledge of the disciple)."

Comment posted by Sankarsana das on November 30th, 2013

4Unregistered

“The point is that women were encouraged by Srila Prabhupada and vedic/vaishnava /Indian tradition to be grihini – housewife, which is the most important duty for women. Grihini’s act as mother, grandmother, cook, cleaner, and guide to the children in the home.”

I would like to add that in spiritual culture mothers are indeed the most important personalities within human society: they create the spiritual atmosphere in the homes and thus within the entire society, where also the husband can recharge after a hard day’s work. Mothers are the first Guru for the living entities and sow the seed of bhakti within the children’s hearts, and with their devotional cooking they affect everybody’s consciousness within the family, and thus within society. They are the harmonizing and balancing energy, and they create the selfless mood of care and service. In spiritual culture mothers are giving the highest respect and care. She is actually the boss of the family - through her selfless service she ties up everyone’s hearts, including the husband’s.

This understanding is all completely lost these days. In materialistic culture this most important function of the mother creating the spiritual atmosphere in the homes is taken away, and thus mothers are reduced to cleaners and cooks - not very appealing of course! So therefore the women are looking for another avenue to find satisfaction and recognition - by competing with the men for career, position etc. So the whole issue is a pretty deep and involved one.

Your servant, Devaki dd

Comment posted by Devaki on November 30th, 2013

5krishna-kirti

Sankarsana Prabhu, quoting Urmila Mata, wrote:

Also how do you respond to a logical argument Urmila mataji makes as follows: “In a situation where a guru has been giving siksa and personal guidance for many years—even a decade—to a particular disciple, where there is a firm relationship of guru/disciple, where the disciple has been worshiping and studying from and serving his or her siksa guru for many years—why is it better for that disciple to take diksa from someone else, only because the siksa guru is female? (And often the “someone else” has little or no relationship or personal knowledge of the disciple).”

The response to this, as per my prior comments, is in Lord Caitanya’s reply to Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya’s observation that Maharaja Prataparudra was a great devotee. “Only because the siksa guru is female” is not an inconsequential fact, as Mother Urmila believes it to be. Sex attraction is there, and the means for avoiding it are strict separation at the societal level.

Comment posted by krishna-kirti on November 30th, 2013

6Puskaraksa das

Dear Sankarsana Prabhu

I think in this one quote here below, you can find the answer to your two questions:

May 28, 1977 ISKCON Governing Board Commission (GBC) meeting.

Srila Prabhupada: "In my presence, one should not become guru!

So on my behalf, on my order... Amara ajnaya guru hana, be actually guru, but by my order."

1) "In my presence, one should not become guru!

Then, how can one seriously think that Srila Prabhupada - being a tri-kala-jna nitya-siddha - had made a plan to leave the planet by 1975, so that all his disciples could take up his position, as per this letter dated 3rd Dec, 1968, addressed to his ambitious disciple Hamsadutta das...?

"I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta" (and not Bhakti-satri, by the way), "so that the family transcendental diploma will continue through the generations. Those possessing the title of Bhaktivedanta will be allowed to initiate disciples. Maybe by 1975 all of my disciples will be allowed to initiate and increase the number of generations. That is my program."

Just the fact that Srila Prabhupada used the word "maybe" should give us a hint that Srila Prabhupada was aiming at having at least 6 years of peace, in regards to this desire to become guru in some (if not many) of his disciples...!

Beyond, he encouraged everyone to study, so that at least they may come closer to knowing (jnana) and then understanding and even further, realizing (vijñana) our Vaishnava siddhantha.

2) So, on my behalf, on my order... Amara ajnaya guru hana, be actually guru, but by my order."

What would make one think that he or she is guru...just because one acting as a senior, passes on some knowledge to a junior...?

As it is, neither is a self-appointed guru, bona fide, nor is the naive faith or worship of a neophyte what will intronize one into the position of guru...!

Srila Prabhupada - 1976: "I am practically seeing that as soon as they, our students, begin to learn a little Sanskrit, they immediately feel they have become more than their guru."

Morning Walk — November 11, 1975, Bombay:

Prabhupada: "Parampara. Guru is also not authority by himself. He is authority by his guru, parampara. If he is coming in the parampara system, then he is guru. Otherwise he's not guru."

SP Vyasa puja Lecture, Hamburg 1969:

"A person who is authorized to deliver people from that material pangs, he is called spiritual master."

Comment posted by Puskaraksa das on December 1st, 2013

7Sankarsana das

Thanks for the acceptable reply Krishna-Kirti prabhu, but it seems from Urmila mataji's comments that she is referring to the situation where she has been giving siksa to female devotees for years and wonders why it is those women under her shelter have to be initiated by a male guru when they have primarily taken shelter of her. In a scenario of women only giving initiation to women the sex attraction consideration tends not to be a problem. So the question follows what would be the problem under these conditions of there being women gurus for exclusively women disciples? Is it just begging the question since it's not women's dharma to be diksa gurus for some of the reasons cited earlier?

Comment posted by Sankarsana das on December 1st, 2013

8Sankarsana das

Thanks also for your response Puskaraksa Prabhu, and thanks also for correcting my mistake about bhakti sastri. What you say and the Prabhupada quotes you provided warn against the ambition to become a guru, which certainly is an anartha. At the same time disciples of Prabhupada gravitating towards becoming gurus (by qualification or not) can use the quote you provided (as well as others) to indicate it is Prabhupada's order for all of his disciples to become guru, since he said he wanted it. The "maybe" indicates that Prabhupada had some doubt how qualified his disciples could become. In Prabhupada's own case (correct me if I'm wrong) I am not aware of a specific instruction Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur gave him to become guru. The well known general instruction Prabhupada got to go to the western countries and preach was an indirect order to become guru though. So if the order is indirect or direct it still can be arguably accepted as an order, as long as one is linked to the parampara line.

You also brought up a good consideration that someone should not flatter themselves into thinking they should become a guru because a neophyte approaches them with interest of becoming their disciple. That brings up more serious considerations not only of the qualification of a disciple, but also what the qualifications of guru are such as controlling the pushing agents, and being able to deliver dependents from death.

Comment posted by Sankarsana das on December 1st, 2013

9Unregistered

Re #3:

I offer a humble perspective regarding the excerpt quoted from the January 1969 letter:

Given that Srila Prabhupada taught, both in theory and practice, that all women should be married, it is not illogical to propose that the statement "Maybe by 1975 all of my disciples will be allowed to initiate" means that grhastha men would be allowed to initiate, but not that their wives also would initiate. I proffer that "all of my disciples" is a generic expression meant to include all women disciples as the better half of their respective husband. In other words, if during his prakata-lila all of Srila Prabhupada's grhastha male disciples had become Bhaktivedantas and hence were instructed to become a diska-guru, then Srila Prabhupada could have rightly stated: "All of my householder disciples are initiating spiritual

masters.” Again, when we duly consider the full gamut of Srila Prabhupada’s teachings, and also Vedic culture, guru-sadhu-sastra, and so on, it is indeed simply common sense to conclude that this statement is factually not at all an indication that Srila Prabhupada wanted his female disciples to initiate. (!?)

So much can be said about this. But, dear esteemed readers, kindly consider the following situation: Some number of Srila Prabhupada’s female disciples had/have passed the Bhaktivedanta exam and thus are now qualified “to initiate.” As Bhaktivedantas, these exalted ladies must have thoroughly learned and understood Gaudiya Vaisnava siddhanta, Vedic standards, stri-dharma, etc. Consequently, as chaste wives of their respective husband, such women would naturally serve their husband in his capacity as a diksa-guru. Being philosophically astute, they would be capable of providing excellent siksa to (especially) any female disciples whom he had accepted. Such pairs of husband-wife guru would be quite efficacious for ministering to the general populace, most being neophytes (whereas brahmanas and sannayasis would be available to especially guide the more advanced devotees. Brahmacharinis and widows would generally restrict their preaching to women only.)

The dire need in this dense darkness of Kali-yuga is for countless self-realized light-of-knowledge-bearing siksa-gurus, not necessarily many diksa-gurus. Moreover, anyone not yet fully self-realized should perhaps vehemently shun the prospect of becoming another’s “guru.”

Comment posted by gkd on December 2nd, 2013

10Akruranatha

“The eagerness of a section of devotees to see a female blessed as diksha guru in ISKCON posthaste is akin ‘affirmative action’ in the USA, as well as the reservation system for the backward classes here in India.”

“Posthaste”? That word means “with the greatest possible speed”. I think the GBC approved female diksa gurus in ISKCON back in 2005. Maybe even sooner. So I do not see any signs of impatience or urgency on this issue.

Rather it seems that the opponents are extremely anxious to prevent even a single woman from serving as diksa guru. Are they afraid that it may prove so successful that many more women will follow?

There are many different devotees who accept the principle that women in ISKCON can serve as diksa gurus. Some may indeed be influenced by egalitarianism in western society, as Basu Ghosh Prabhu suggests, but I do not think it is fair for Basu Gosh to speak to the mentality of all of them.

I rather expect that most of the devotees (including most of the GBC apparently) who approve women serving as diksa gurus are more likely influenced by egalitarianism in Lord Caitanya’s teachings and Srila Prabhupada’s explanations of them, as explained by Kaunteya in the “eye of the storm” book (<https://sites.google.com/site/eyeofthestormbooks/>)

Why does Basu Ghosh feel he has to tell us what other devotees’ motivations are? He should speak for himself and let others speak for themselves. Does he really believe he knows the minds of his opponents

on this issue better than they do? It comes across kind of high-handed for him to presume to characterize the motives and influences of his opponents, especially when he does so in an unflattering light, as if they are opponents of Vedic culture and champions of modernity and its accompanying ills (atheism, materialism, illicit sex, divorce).

I can't help but think that he is wrong, that he is not listening charitably to his opponents and what they have to say about their own motives, and that rather than directly address their strongest arguments (including the statements of Srila Prabhupada when directly discussing the issue of women serving as diksha gurus), he is stooping to the tactic of impugning his opponents' character, motives and influences. It strikes me as an illegitimate tactic, the sort resorted to when one has little means of refuting the opposition's direct statements.

Comment posted by Akruranatha on December 3rd, 2013

11Sankarsana das

I am somewhat surprised with Akrurantha prabhu's comments because he discredits Basu Ghosh prabhu's entire article on the basis that it is ill motivated. Even if the beginning few short paragraphs of the article were left out which had to deal with the motive in question, Basu Ghosh prabhu compiled a great deal of impressive evidence that female diksa guru is an unknown species in our tradition, so why abandon tradition for the sake of liberal considerations which are minuscule in comparison. Regarding the motive, if someone is aware of tradition and is able to back up his statements with strong authoritative evidence to support the tradition, his listening charitably to a notion which goes outside the tradition is asking a great deal. Akruranatha prabhu had nothing to say to compromise the bulk of the article with all the quotes and sastric evidence provided. To introduce legitimate opposing evidence would have been much more impressive. He even states at the end regarding the motive, "It strikes me as an illegitimate tactic, the sort resorted to when one has little means of refuting the opposition's direct statements." There was plenty of means of refuting the opposing position in the article.

Comment posted by Sankarsana das on December 4th, 2013

12Akruranatha

I am well instructed by you Sankarsana Prabhu. It was really only the first three paragraphs of Basu Ghosh's article that provoked such a strong reaction from me. I suppose I should have said something about the rest of the article, which does deserve consideration. I do think Kaunteya has considered those issues in his book and I can add little that is new.

I think we all know that women have an important role to play in society as wives and mothers and daughters and the compassionate, faithful, feminine side of human personality.

Nevertheless, they may become pure devotees and professors of the science of Krsna, and if such women (like Queen Kunti and Draupadi and Parvati and Devaki and Radharani) can teach us about Krsna, they are our gurus. Actually Srimati Radharani, the original guru of all devotees, is feminine.

I appreciate the concern that we want to try to reestablish a kind of Vedic social system where each member of society fulfills the roles for which he or she is best suited, based on the qualities they have been born with.

But there is also an urgency to actually spread Krsna consciousness, and this is Kali yuga. To be honest, we should recognize that most of us in this age days are varna-sankara, born with some bad qualities. We need all the help from enlightened devotees we can get, whether they are sudras or women or even if they come from dog-eater families (Vaisnava sva-paco guru).

Between the two goals of setting an example of a more well-ordered, dharmic society, and delivering the pure message of Krsna bhakti, of Srimad-Bhagavatam and Lord Caitanya's sankirtan, I think the latter is more urgent. Otherwise why would our acaryas have bothered giving brahmana initiation to men and women from non-Aryan, meat-eating families?

There is a kind of "egalitarianism" there, but it is not the egalitarianism based on sense gratification. It is the egalitarianism that recognizes devotional service as the common duty for all jivas.

And that is not to say that a woman who is a diksa guru will stop being a mother or a wife or a daughter or a keeper of religious traditions in the family. We expect any guru to be an exemplary moral person. But the all important issue for any guru, male or female, is whether he or she can do it. Does he or she have the qualification necessary to transmit the message of Krsna to a disciple? If so, she should do it. There is an urgent need.

Comment posted by Akruranatha on December 4th, 2013

13Unregistered

Re #41:

Nevertheless, they may become pure devotees and professors of the science of Krsna, and if such women (like Queen Kunti and Draupadi and Parvati and Devaki and Radharani) can teach us about Krsna, they are our gurus.

Indeed they are our gurus. But as has been explained over and again, they were not diksa-gurus!

Nor will this statement disappear: "According to sastric injunctions, there is no difference between siksa-guru and diksa-guru, and generally the siksa-guru later on becomes the diksa-guru. Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's diksa-guru."

There is no difference, yet there is a difference. And the difference must not be side-stepped or discounted. Pro-FDG arguments persistently stress the non-difference without ever reconciling the difference. Being a woman was no disqualification for Suniti to be a siksa-guru., but it definitely did preclude her from being a diksa-guru.

What is the difficulty to understand and accept this?

In a comment to a different article, Akruranatha P. asked, “Did Srila Prabhupada EVER say that women cannot be diksa gurus?”

I am thus compelled to ask: “Did Akruranatha P. NOT EVER read the above, well-known statement?” Of course he has read it. Yet he also stated: “And he never wrote or spoke anywhere that women were disqualified from serving as initiating gurus.”

Does something seem awry here? Will Akruranatha P. explain?

Nor have we yet read any convincing refutations of these points (in the article by Basu Ghosh P.):

To begin with, when a woman can't wear the sacred thread – the yajnopavita – then how can she give one as a part of initiation? Srila Prabhupada followed the system of initiation introduced by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur. Srila Saraswati Thakur introduced the brahmin thread – yajnopavita – for persons not born in brahmana families.

Srila Prabhupada introduced such initiations – for men. For women, he never conferred the yajnopavita! Therefore, how can a woman give a sacred thread as a part (“anga” in Samskritam) of “diksa” if she herself does not/cannot wear it? This historical fact should be sufficient in itself as evidence that women were not to be diksa gurus.

Perhaps Akruranatha P. would kindly respond to these essential points of pancaratrika-viddhi.

Comment posted by gkd on December 4th, 2013

14Akruranatha

“I am thus compelled to ask: “Did Akruranatha P. NOT EVER read the above, well-known statement?” ... Yet he also stated: “And he never wrote or spoke anywhere that women were disqualified from serving as initiating gurus.” Does something seem awry here? Will Akruranatha P. explain?”

I have explained repeatedly, I do not read the purport about Suniti to directly address the question, “may a woman ever serve as diksa guru?” For more information, read Kaunteya's book which addresses this subject.

Srila Prabhupada said various things about various subjects (including this one) such that a determined advocate could make a one-sided presentation of some of his statements and declare victory. The reality is not so simple, however. We should consider the totality of what Srila Prabhupada said and try to determine what he meant without being guided by preconceived positions. Some may have done so and concluded that the Suniti Purport clinches the case against women diksa gurus, but I have done so and believe otherwise.

Another point Basu Ghosh makes (repeatedly) is that because many women diksa gurus in Gaudiya Vaisnava history were in jati gosai lineages, we should not consider them. I think we should be more cautious about this.

We all know that taking birth in a certain family does not automatically qualify one as a bona fide guru, (nor can taking birth in such a family be considered a prerequisite for being a guru). However, can we extrapolate from the above that every guru from a caste-goswami lineage has been bogus? In fact, there is a Purport in Cc. (I have quoted it before) in which Srila Prabhupada mentions that certain jati-gosai gurus are bona fide spiritual masters (!)

Were any of these women bona fide gurus? I cannot say for sure, but I think we should be cautious about disparaging all of them (and all their disciples and supporters) as “bogus” without looking into the matter more closely. It is one thing to criticize the ideology of caste-goswami-ism, and quite another to condemn huge numbers of devotees, about whom we know little, in a blanket generalization, because of their association with that ideology.

Finally, if a woman is qualified to chant (and give) an aprakṛta mantra handed down in an unbroken chain from the spiritual world, I don't see why she can't also give a male disciple a piece of thread (if she has a male disciple). To over-emphasize form over substance can be niyama-aagraha.

Comment posted by Akruranatha on December 6th, 2013

15Akruranatha

The quote I was thinking of was Cc. Adi 7.45:

“There are many Vaisnava families in Bengal whose members, although not actually born brahmanas, act as acaryas by initiating disciples and offering the sacred thread as enjoined in the Vaisnava tantras. For example, in the families of Thakura Raghunandana Acarya, Thakura Krsnadasa, Navani Hoda and Rasikananda-deva (a disciple of Syamananda Prabhu), the sacred thread ceremony is performed, as it is for the caste Gosvamis, and this system has continued for the past three to four hundred years. Accepting disciples born in brahmana families, they are bona fide spiritual masters who have the facility to worship the salagrama-sila, which is worshiped with the Deity.”

I am not claiming to be an authority on the history but am just raising the question. Were any of the women devotees that Basu Ghosh condemns as being in caste goswami lines from any of the above families? Even if they were from other families, should we consider them bogus and disparage their names without having sufficient knowledge about the character and activities and devotion of each of the “hundreds” of women in question?

Regarding Srila Prabhupada's letter to Arundhati Dasi, which Basu Ghosh quotes as follow:

““Child-worship [for female, grihini] is more important than deity-worship. If you cannot spend time with him [alluding to her son], then stop the duties of pujari. At least you must take good care of your son until he is four years old, and if after that time you are unable any more to take care of him then I shall take care...”

Please note that the material in brackets “[for female, grhini]” is not in the letter and appears to have been added by Basu Ghosh. That fact that Srila Prabhupada offered to personally care of the boy

suggests that “child worship is more important than deity worship” may apply to males too. Of course, for Srila Prabhupada, deity worship was unnecessary because he could already see Krsna everywhere, but even for neophyte disciples who need deity worship — male or female — it should not be an excuse for neglecting to care for one’s child. One should also teach the child deity worship at an appropriate age.

I do not see how being a diksa guru and being a child care-giver, homemaker or devoted wife are mutually exclusive. If a housewife knows the science of Krsna, can she not explain it and give the sacred mantras? How would doing so entail abandoning her child?

Comment posted by Akruranatha on December 6th, 2013

16Unregistered

Re #14

“I am thus compelled to ask: “Did Akruranatha P. NOT EVER read the above, well-known statement?” ... Yet he also stated: “And he never wrote or spoke anywhere that women were disqualified from serving as initiating gurus.” Does something seem awry here? Will Akruranatha P. explain?”

I have explained repeatedly, I do not read the purport about Suniti to directly address the question, “may a woman ever serve as diksa guru?”

Granted, as conditioned souls we will not necessarily understand the true meaning of anything that we perceive via our obviously imperfect senses. Any one of us may sometimes misunderstand words whose meaning is self-evident to others. Admitting this obvious fault within our conditioned self, shouldn’t we therefore be very careful to not make absolute statements that may well be proven wrong?

You have publicly declared that Srila Prabhupada “never wrote or spoke anywhere” that women are disqualified from serving as diska-gurus. It is an absolute statement: “He never wrote...”

But your assertion is not only unverifiable but soundly refuted by Srila Prabhupada’s own words: “Being a woman, [Suniti] could not become Dhruva Mahārāja’s dékñā-guru.”

We should consider the totality of what Srila Prabhupada said and try to determine what he meant without being guided by preconceived positions.

Amen!

We all know that taking birth in a certain family does not automatically qualify one as a bona fide guru, (nor can taking birth in such a family be considered a prerequisite for being a guru). However, can we extrapolate from the above that every guru from a caste-goswami lineage has been bogus?

No such conclusion has been proposed. The simple point is this:

The argument that “There have been many women diksa-gurus in Gaudiya Vaisnava history” is rejected due to their being from jati-gosai lineages. This argument must be rejected, but not that those Vaisnavi gurus per se are being discounted.

I think we should be cautious about disparaging all of them (and all their disciples and supporters) as “bogus” without looking into the matter more closely.

Again, this was not done. And neither is it wrong to disparage specious “evidence” (by citing jati-gosai examples) that there have been female diksa-gurus within our line.

Comment posted by gkd on December 6th, 2013

17Unregistered

Were any of these women bona fide gurus? I cannot say for sure, but I think we should be cautious about disparaging all of them (and all their disciples and supporters) as “bogus” without looking into the matter more closely.

“Jāhnavā-mātā is also within the list of Lord Nityānanda’s followers. She is described in the Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā, verse 66, as Anaṅga-mañjarī of Vṛndāvana. All the devotees who are followers of Jāhnavā-mātā are counted within the list of Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu’s devotees.”

From Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta - Adi-līla : Adi 11: The Expansions of Lord Nityananda : Adi 11.21 : PURPORT

Comment posted by sitadasi on December 6th, 2013

18Unregistered

If a housewife knows the science of Kṛṣṇa, can she not explain it and give the sacred mantras?

It’s not so much a question of “can” she but rather “should” she? (in our parampara)

Comment posted by sitadasi on December 6th, 2013

19Unregistered

I have explained repeatedly, I do not read the purport about Suniti to directly address the question, “may a woman ever serve as diksa guru?” For more information, read Kaunteya’s book which addresses this subject.

Eye of the Storm :

“There is no rule preventing ladies from becoming diksa-gurus in the pancaratika ^[OB]system”

Where is the rule which directly allows women to perform diksa (with the maha mantra)? Eye of the Storm cites Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (1.194) which is about receiving initiation, not giving it.

Comment posted by sitadasi on December 6th, 2013

20Puskaraksa das

Dear Sankarasana Prabhu

I hope this answers your question on Post 8:

“ONE CAN BECOME GURU WHEN HE IS ORDERED BY HIS GURU. THAT’S ALL. OTHERWISE, NOBODY CAN BECOME GURU”

(Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 7.2 — Nairobi, October 28, 1975):

INDIAN MAN: When did you become the spiritual leader of Krishna consciousness?

PRABHUPADA: What is that?

BRAHMANANDA: He’s asking, When did you become the spiritual leader of Krishna consciousness?

PRABHUPADA: When my Guru Maharaja ordered me. This is the guru-parampara.

INDIAN MAN: Did it...

PRABHUPADA: Try to understand. Don’t go very speedily. A guru can become guru when he’s ordered by his guru. That’s all. Otherwise, nobody can become guru.

INDIAN WOMAN 2: (Hindi)

PRABHUPADA: (Hindi) Sadhi mam prapannam. “I am surrendered to you. Whatever you say, I shall carry out.” That’s all.

INDIAN MAN: When did he tell you to—

PRABHUPADA: What is the business, when did he tell me? And why shall I disclose to you? It is so very insignificant thing that I have to explain to you?

INDIAN MAN: No, I am just curious when—

PRABHUPADA: You should be curious within your limit. You should know that one can become guru when he is ordered by his guru, this much.

Hence, we are fooling ourselves (and others) if we think (or pretend) that anyone can become Guru, without getting the direct personal instruction to become Guru, from his own Guru who received, in a similar manner, the same instruction from his own Guru.

INDIAN MAN: When did you become the spiritual leader of Krishna consciousness?

PRABHUPADA: WHEN MY GURU MAHARAJA ORDERED ME. THIS IS THE GURU PARAMPARA.

Comment posted by Puskaraksa das on December 14th, 2013