

2 Position Paper

Bhanu Swami

In Favor of Female Diksa guru:

Vaisnavis are spiritual equal to Vaisnavas since the atma is beyond male and female distinctions. Therefore Vaisnavis can equally take up all services that Vaisnavas do in ISKCON.

This is supported by some quotations showing spiritual equality.

There is a statement of 1968 indicating male and female diksa gurus through a bhakti sastri exam. There is a conversation in which Prabhupada cites Jahnava devi as a female guru in the Gaudiya sampradaya.

Since Vaisnavis can do any service in ISKCON, they can also be diksa gurus in ISKCON.

Not in Favor of Female Diksa guru:

Though Vaisnavis are spiritual equal, some distinction of services must be considered due to different physical bodies and minds of male and female devotees, which still influence most devotees performing sadhana bhakti.

These distinctions are codified in varnasrama rules which delineate different roles for men and women. Prabhupada supported these varnasarma rules to some extent. This is evident in the many statements in Bhagavatam in which the role of women is distinctly different from men. These statements do not only apply to nondevotees, but are applicable to devotees to some extent. This is evident from the decisions Prabhupada made in appointing managers and diksa gurus who were all male.

This position is supported by many statements in Bhagavatam and other sources and most importantly by Prabhupada's actions.

The 1968 statement cannot be used definitively, since it was made very early in the movement, and could be subject to change later. IN fact Prabhupada finally appointed diksa gurus, all male, with no exam.

The mention of Jahnava devi is accompanied by the remark that such cases are very few.

The conclusions of those opposing female diksa gurus is that if at all there are female diksa gurus in ISKCON it would be very rare, an exception rather than a norm.