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Five Good Reasons for Women to Avoid the Position of Diksha Guru

Reason #1 Generally speaking, a woman's strongest sphere of influence is with her immediate, biological family, while by comparison, a diksha guru accepts disciples from the public sector to join the greater family of ISKCON.

Srila Prabhupada said that women generally have families and are to be regarded as mothers. They are to be regarded as mothers in the young child bearing age, the years of raising their children, and when they are grandmothers or elderly. The model of mother, housewife and grandmother, which Srila Prabhupada said the western world is lacking, is perhaps the single most important component in establishing varnasrama. As we read in Bhagavad-Gita, 1.40, "Varnasrama's principles were so designed that the good population would prevail in society for the general spiritual progress of state and community. Such population depends on the chastity and faithfulness of its womanhood."

If women extend themselves into the larger, more unpredictable environment of accepting persons outside of their family as "family," then personal family life is put aside for another aspiration. Can this benefit the society at large?

Generally, women in Vedic culture never abandon the care of family, or place it as secondary, even if old enough to be grandparents, or even if they have accepted vanaprastha. Typical women vanaprasthas do not separate from family life even up to the time of death, though naturally they will have more time in old age for spiritual practices. **Because a woman has concerned herself with family life throughout her adult life, to take up an external larger family at the time of vanaprastha is not required of her.**

To the contrary, she has sacrificed for her family as her primary duty throughout her adult life so in old age she is simply protected by the younger family members who allow her to concentrate more peacefully on pure spiritual practice.

Reason #2. Srila Prabhupada recognized and appreciated women for their legitimate, natural feminine qualifications. He did not select women as managers, or to become gurus or GBC's. In this way he "liberated women from women's liberation" so that they could do what is necessary to raise and educate Krsna conscious offspring, serve their husbands faithfully and be engaged in devotional service.

The women who are currently aspiring for the position of diksha guru in ISKCON are no doubt very advanced, pure devotees and exemplary disciples of Srila Prabhupada. I will even go so far as to say that their advancement is on a par or even greater than many of the currently leading men. In my personal life my spiritual advancement has been utterly dependent on specific female disciples of Srila Prabhupada and I hope to always remain as their humble servant.

But when I think of their relationship to Srila Prabhupada I wonder just how much did he think it was proper to put them in the "line of fire"? He did not select women to be temple presidents, he did not request them to be GBC's or gurus, he did not even insist

that we go out and distribute books more than a few times a week. While he told us he regarded his women disciples as “good as their godbrothers,” and he lauded their efforts and success in helping to establish his mission, Srila Prabhupada chose his managers of ISKCON from among his male followers.

Reason #3 Women devotees should not run the risk of having to take birth again in order to retrieve errant disciples. i.e.: *One should not become a mother, father, a teacher or an initiating spiritual master if he cannot deliver his disciples from repeated birth and death.*

For the sake of his disciples a guru requires sufficient stamina and spiritual determination. Interacting with a variety of candidates who are new to spiritual practice can be both inspiring and/or debilitating. The burden of responsibility is sometimes a great disturbance due to various complex scenarios in the spiritual master’s disciple family. A modern day Vaisnava spiritual master sometimes acts on many levels, as a counselor/therapist/diplomat, etc. in order to interact with the whole of ISKCON and still benefit his disciples to best ensure their spiritual advancement. “Guru” literally translated means heavy. It is perhaps the heaviest service. Can ladies expect to be able to bear such a burden and carry it through a number of years?

At this point of the article I beg to briefly describe my mother’s liberation. In the sixties my UCLA educated mother acquired a job as a managing editor at one of the largest newspapers in the country, the Los Angeles Times. This was “due her” because our whole family was in the newspaper business for several generations. She was very glad to have this prestigious well paid job which was not generally awarded to a female at that time, but after sixteen years of her working this job, when I became 17 years old, my sister and I would open the door to our house after coming home from high school to find our mother passed out on the floor due to alcohol and Valiums. She had been prescribed a psychiatric medication for “nervous breakdown.”

She had lost her job due to the competitive nature of her profession and her own weaknesses. She did not recover for many years. It was a most powerful life lesson for me, and I respect and offer my humble obeisance to my mother who has helped me to understand so many things about my own material tendencies.

Professional research studies show that women struggle with depression issues that men do not struggle with. Statistically speaking women are about twice as likely as men to suffer from depression! *This two to one difference persists across racial, ethnic, and economic divides. In fact this gender difference in rates of depression is found in most countries around the world. Studies have shown that the physiological response to stress in women is different. Women actually produce more stress hormones than do men, and the female hormone progesterone actually prevents the stress hormone from abating as it does in men.**

In this sense it is fair to say that women are more vulnerable to suffering from karmic reactions from taking disciples. When a bone fide spiritual master somehow becomes unable to deliver his dependents he is required to take birth again to complete this duty. Is this something we want to establish as a norm of our society? Do we want to assign this role to persons who may be less likely in the long run to be able to bear the burden of it?

Reason #4 There is very little precedent for females as guides for male monks among any of the various major religious organizations throughout the world.

Look carefully at Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. You will find that female priests do not act as guides for students who are male celibate monks. Some readers may object to this reason because it compares us to other organizations. Yet Srila Prabhupada observed the Catholics and told us that he appreciated their organization and we should study it in order to understand how to better establish ISKCON government.

Assigning the role of guru to females would upset the social order. Srila Prabhupada did not institute women as temple altar pujaris in India because it would disturb the social order. He felt it best to respect the social custom according to time and circumstance. Srila Prabhupada referred to this as *loka-vicar*.

As former Moslems, Haridasa Thakura and Sanatana Goswami avoided the Jagannatha mandira in Puri. Lord Caitanya was very pleased with their mood; they would not do anything to disturb the social order, though they themselves were personal associates of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

To claim ourselves as female instructors for male monks would seem a farce from the public point of view. Moreover, to allow gurus who could not fully encourage and guide disciples who wish to become bramacari would be to inhibit one of the four asramas of spiritual life or to consider it not essential.

Reason #5 Shiksha is more important than diksha, and women are a most important class of siksa gurus.

Srila Prabhupada's classic teachings offer a woman the liberty to pursue her natural dharma according to her psycho-physical nature. From examples such as that of Queen Kunti, Drapadi, Devahuti, and Suniti we learn so much about what is real womanhood, real motherhood. Mothers are gurus in the most vital way. Their Krishna conscious guidance is crucial to good human society.

Women are intuitively very personal. God has gifted them with innate caring ability, innate ability to nurture, to respond to other's needs, to nurse, to mother, to love, to intuitively inform their offspring about what is good and valuable in life, what is to be avoided. All of this great deal of instruction in youth comes from the Lord through the mother. The home altar is the heart of this.

Yare dekhe tare kaha krsna upadesa, amara ajnaya guru hana tara ei desa.
Mahaprabhu did not say you must become a diksha guru to liberate the land. He does not exclude diksha, but His instruction is far more inclusive than that. He means all of us, in any capacity, have a role to play, a specific, personal role to play. Siksa is at least equally essential. Meanwhile, if women aspire to take on a role which has been traditionally the very sober and heavy responsibility required of men their nurturing and intuitive tendencies are put on the back burner. We desperately need those tendencies for for the sake of sound and gentle Krsna conscious culture.

I happen to be writing this offering to the respected GBC on the day of the Appearance of Jahnava mata. It would be an unfortunate, perhaps contrived, misunderstanding to point to her grace Jahnava mata, the consort of Sri Nityananda, and report that she was a diksha guru. According to *Bhakti Ratnakara* by Narahari Chakravarti, she did guide devotees but they were her husband's (Sri Nityananda's) initiates. She did not speak publicly. Her sphere of siksa was more domestic, she arranged marriages, for example, or cooked feasts for the devotees and organized festivals.

If a female guru does indeed become predominant in the chain of disciplic succession it is only because there are no other representatives. At that time you may call in the reserves. I hope our respected GBC authorities will take time to carefully decide if there is any necessity to call them in at this time.

*http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_women.htm