



A Reply to the GBC Action Order 305 (2009)

BY: KRISHNA DEVI DASI

Oct 20, 2012 — INDIA (SUN) — This is the first part in a series of articles regarding Female Diksa Gurus in ISKCON. These papers comprise various texts that were commissioned by the Indian Regional Governing Body (IRGB) who strongly protested the whole idea, and felt that this was being imposed on them by the feminist controlled North American GBC. It should be noted that the GBC allegedly ordered the IRGB disbanded.

Before reading the response it would be wise to read the paper by the Sastra Advisory Council that it is responding to, which can be [downloaded here](#).

A Reply to the GBC Action Order 305 (2009) and the Sastra Advisory Committee's paper "Female Diksa-gurus in ISKCON"

"Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's diksa-guru." SB 4.12.32 purport

Dear members of the GBC,

Please accept our humble obiesances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

This is a response to the GBC Action Order 305 (2009), which authorized female diksa-gurus. We very strongly believe that for females to function as diksa-gurus is completely against sastra and the traditions and standards of Lord Krsna's Vedic civilization. We agree with Srila Rupa Gosvami, who stated that the kind of so-called bhakti which is not based on sastra simply creates a disturbance in society:

*sruti-smrti-puranadi-pancaratra-vidhià vina
aikantiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate*

"Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the Upanisads, Puranas, and Narada-pancaratra is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society." Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu 1.2.101

The very fact that we, the IRGB, feel impelled to respond to GBC Action Order 305 indicates the potential polarizing effect likely to ensue if this Action Order is not rescinded. The following statements from that resolution raise some troubling thoughts:

"Whereas there is a factual need for more diksa-gurus in ISCKON to accommodate the worldwide preaching;

"Whereas there are mature female preachers qualified to take on diksa-guru responsibilities"

Certainly it is true that in a few geographical locations in the world (particularly India) ISKCON's preaching is booming. But in many other parts of the world (particularly North America and other Western zones), preaching has declined to the extent that it is commonly said, "Most temples have more Deities than devotees at mangal artika." While we do not wish to discourage the many sincere, hard-working preachers in the West, unfortunately that is the current scenario.

We also note that the desire to have female diksa-gurus is being pushed by leaders of zones wherein the state of ISCKON is in decline, where prospective initiates are not exactly waiting patiently in queue for female diksa-gurus to be created so that they can become initiated. In India, where persons are actually waiting for initiation, we do not see any need to contravene the sastra and create female diksa-gurus. We also note that in those zones where ISCKON is in decline, academics have observed the rise of feminism, and also have noted that, for obvious reasons, the feminists are loath to be called feminists. [1] So the question arises: What is the actual motive for pushing this agenda? Is it for "pushing on the preaching," or perhaps for pushing something else?

Canakya Pandita stated:

"A brahmana sees through the sastra, a king through his spies, a cow through her nose, and ordinary people with their eyes."

And, Lord Krsna gave His opinion:

"He who discards scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination. One should therefore understand what is duty and what is not duty by the regulations of the scriptures. Knowing such rules and regulations, one should act so that he may gradually be elevated." Gita 16.23–24

Since the GBC is the ultimate executive body of ISCKON, an organization whose aim is to reestablish Krsna's Vedic civilization, it is therefore incumbent upon the GBC to base all of its policy decisions firmly on the bedrock of sastra, rather than to conform with modern social trends. For indeed, to be "modern" is not actually modern at all, since even in ancient times Manu deprecated modernism as just another form of maya:

"All those (doctrines), differing from the (Veda), which spring up and (soon) perish, are worthless and false, because they are of modern date." Manu-smṛti 12.95–96

To be "modern" is to exist in the ephemeral present, which has no duration. This is the definition of *asat*—nonexistent, unreal.

"Those who are seers of the truth have concluded that of the nonexistent [*asat*] there is no endurance and of the eternal there is no change. This they have concluded by studying the nature of both." Gita 2.16

Moreover, we should be careful not to allow our (Western influenced) materially conditioned nature to—by introducing secular, egalitarian values—undermine the sacred mission that we are pledged to fulfill.

"The great danger of conversion in all ages has been that when the religion of the high mind is offered to the lower mind, the lower mind, feeling its fascination without understanding it, and being incapable of rising to it, drags it down to its level by degrading it." George Bernard Shaw

We in ISCKON have two choices: either to affect society or be affected by society. The former will fulfill our mission; the latter will destroy it. In the following quote from former U.S. Attorney General and Federal Judge Robert H. Bork, please simply substitute "ISCKON" for "Roman Catholic Church" and contemplate the situation:

"Radical egalitarianism and individualism have altered much in American life. The question of just how irresistible they are, the test case of whether any institution can maintain its integrity in the face of the deforming pressures of a modern liberal culture is, of course, the Roman Catholic Church. What is to be seen is whether the church can maintain its doctrines and its institutional structure in the face of pressure both from without and from within.

"The Roman Catholic Church is the test case because, as Hitchcock put it, 'few religions in the history of the world have placed more emphasis on doctrinal purity, liturgical correctness, and moral authenticity than has the Catholic Church. . . . If at almost all times in the history of the church, a concern for orthodoxy has been paramount, the contemporary Church has an eerie feel about it precisely because of the absence of that concern.' If, despite powerful and orthodox American bishops, orthodoxy is no longer a major concern in the American church, that is surely a sign that the church is giving way to the culture. The church's opposition to abortion, homosexual conduct, and the ordination of women is under attack and appears to be a minority position among the Catholic laity, perhaps even among the American bishops. If the church gives way on any of those issues, the culture will have effectively destroyed it. The other reason the church arouses hostility is that its structure is hierarchical and authoritative, in addition to the fact that its priesthood is male. It has clear lines of authority of the pope. These are matters that create no small outrage in the egalitarians of our time, and one sees even within the church demands that it be democratized, that it accept beliefs and behavior it has always condemned, and that it accept radical alterations of its ancient structure. Columnists pronounce the church out of touch with the people in the pews and find that reason for the church to change."

"That is not reason for the church to change. The protestant mainline denominations are out of touch with the people in the pews because the churches' leadership changed, moving well to the left of their membership. That is a different situation than a church that is trying to remain unchanged while the culture changes its members. If the church changes doctrine and structure to follow its members' views, it is difficult to see the value of that church and its religion. Religions must claim to be true and, in their essentials, to uphold principles that are universal and eternal. No church that panders to the zeitgeist deserves respect, except from those who find it politically useful, and that is less respect than disguised contempt." [2]

As a basis for making its decision, the GBC has used the conclusions of the SAC paper, as evidenced by the statement:

"The GBC accepts the philosophical conclusion presented in the SAC's Female Diksa Guru paper that a mature, qualified, female devotee may accept the role of an initiating spiritual master."

Therefore we shall respond to that paper and demonstrate how it is wrong and does not prove its thesis, and that consequently the GBC should rescind Action Order 305 (2009) and thereby avoid creating a disturbance to society.

(To be continued...)

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Rochford, E. Burke, *Hare Krishna Transformed*. New York: New York University Press, 2007 (ch. 5).

[2] Bork, Robert, H., *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, New York: Regan Books, 1997.





A Reply to the GBC Action Order 305 (2009), Part Two

BY: KRISHNA DEVI DASI

Oct 22, 2012 — INDIA (SUN) —

"Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's diksa-guru." SB 4.12.32 purport

In this response to SAC's (Sastric Advisory Committee) paper titled *Female Diksa-gurus in ISKCON*, on which the GBC based its Action Order 305 (2009), we will explain why we think the SAC's paper is unsound in its reasoning and presents conclusions that will further undermine the institution of *diksa-guru* within ISKCON not only for men, but also for women.

The problem with the paper is not with one of its premises, that a qualified woman can become a *diksa-guru*—a premise we agree with (whether a qualified woman should become a *diksa-guru* is another matter; see Bg 3.35 and 18.47). Instead, the problem is that the paper does not adequately distinguish between certain statements in the *sastras* or from Srila Prabhupada that fully apply to a soul at a higher stage of spiritual advancement but not necessarily to a soul at a lower stage. The SAC's paper on female *diksa-gurus* is therefore a special case of a more general problem in ISKCON. **It is based on a way of thinking that predisposes ISKCON's members to treat some devotees as liberated souls when typically they are not liberated.**

This way of thinking in part has its origin in how devotees interpret Srila Prabhupada's description of the guru. In almost all of his statements about the guru, Srila Prabhupada describes him as a topmost, liberated devotee—"A person who is liberated acharya and guru cannot commit any mistake." Rarely does Srila Prabhupada describe a guru as someone "less qualified or not liberated, but can still act as guru and acharya by strictly following the disciplic succession." [1] The abundance of the former kind of statement on the one hand and the rarity of the latter kind on the other predisposes many devotees to consider only liberated gurus as being bona fide. Through the lens of this predisposition, many devotees try to see their gurus, or god brothers acting as guru, as examples of the topmost, liberated guru and acharya Srila Prabhupada so often describes. This tendency has, of course, been a general problem in other areas that are well known and beyond the scope of this paper. In the case of the SAC's paper, this tendency has special relevance.

The SAC's paper is special case of the same general problem **because Srila Prabhupada, following sastra, generally describes the nature of women in negative terms.** Although he sometimes describes the nature of women in positive, sometimes glowing, terms, overall his statements tend to be negative. These statements and statements about

the guru as a topmost, liberated devotee are therefore difficult to put together. This is especially so when it is presumed that in ISKCON the general case of a female candidate for guru will be that of a conditioned soul. The SAC's attempt to reconcile these disjoint statements sheds needed light on the fact that whether we are considering a man or a woman as candidate for guru, the candidate will probably not be liberated. Overall, this is a positive discovery.

This discovery also raises an important question: if a candidate for *diksa-guru* is still a conditioned soul, will his material *sva-bhava* affect his ability to act as a *diksa-guru*? The straightforward answer to this is "yes," and in the case of women it is most obvious in authoritative statements about matters of judgment. Here are some examples:

Hari-bhakti-vilasa:

*yosito navamanyetana casaà visvased budhau
na caiversur bhavet tasu nadhikuryat kadacana*

"A wise man should never insult women, nor should he trust them. He should never become jealous of women, nor should he ever appoint them." [2]

Mahabharata: "Consolest thou women and are they protected in thy realm? I hope thou placest not any confidence in them, nor divulgest any secret before any of them?" [3]

Ramayana: "Do you keep your womenfolk pacified? Are they duly protected by you? I hope you do not repose excessive faith in them and do not confide your secrets to them." [4]

Srila Prabhupada:

As children are very prone to be misled, women are similarly very prone to degradation. Therefore, both children and women require protection by the elder members of the family. By being engaged in various religious practices, women will not be misled into adultery. According to Canakya Pandita, women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy. [5]

Women as a class are no better than boys, and therefore they have no discriminatory power like that of a man. [6]

Since Lord Siva is himself associated with women, he knows very well their defective nature, and he might not take very seriously Diti's unavoidable offense, which occurred due to her faulty nature. [7]

A woman's nature has been particularly well studied by Kasyapa Muni. Women are self-interested by nature, and therefore they should be protected by all means so that their natural inclination to be too self-interested will not be manifested. Women need to be protected by men. A woman should be cared for by her father in her childhood, by her husband in her youth and by her grown sons in her old age. This is the injunction of Manu, who says that a woman should not be given independence at any stage. Women must be cared for so that they will not be free to manifest their natural tendency for gross selfishness. There have been many cases, even in the present day, in which women have killed their husbands to take advantage of their insurance policies. This is not a criticism of women but a practical study of their nature. Such natural instincts of a woman or a man are manifested only in the bodily conception of life. When either a man or a woman is advanced in spiritual consciousness, the bodily conception of life practically vanishes. [8]

And, we should note that the SAC's paper has provided many more such examples. These statements about women are typical of Srila Prabhupada, not exceptional. They matter because they are related to *adhikara*-- qualification, and qualification is related to the status of one's being liberated or not liberated. If a woman is liberated from the bodily concept of life, there is no problem with her accepting disciples (whether she should is another matter, there have been many liberated women in the past yet extremely few accepted disciples.

Why? Because they would be setting wrong example of how a woman should behave see BG 3.35 and BG 18.47). However, if she is not liberated, approving her as a *diksa-guru* is to also approve of a guru who by nature has the above-mentioned liabilities. Such characteristics are a part of one's material *sva-bhava* if one happens to be a woman.

More generally in the case of a conditioned soul, his particular *sva-bhava* influences all of his activities. This includes the activities of a *diksa-guru*. Of the five factors that contribute to the success or failure of any action, four of these factors are material. [9] As per the Gita, they must also be considered. For example, a *brahmana* by nature has characteristics that are also desirable in a *diksa-guru*. These characteristics are well known: peacefulness, austerity, self-control, honesty, religiousness, learning, wisdom, etc. But a *ksatriya* has a different nature with different characteristics, which are not always desirable in a guru. For example, *isvara-bhava* (a tendency to rule) can be troublesome for someone who is acting as a guru. A guru who "lords it over" his disciples almost always creates unnecessary trouble for himself and his disciples. Also, *arjavam* (honesty) is not one of a *ksatriya's* characteristics. *Ksatriyas* sometimes have to engage in diplomacy; they sometimes tell half-truths or even lie. Although sometimes this is necessary, a lack of the brahminical commitment to honesty is generally a liability for a *diksa-guru*, which his disciples and the rest of society would have to put up with.

Even as compared with the *sva-bhava* of a *ksatriya*, the *sva-bhava* of a woman presents many more liabilities that one would not want in a *diksa-guru*. Some of these liabilities, such as deficiency in judgment, have already been described. However, there are many others as well. Although some say that women are classified according to *varna* as are men, the *sastras* also categorize women as a special category distinct from the other *varnas* (we shall discuss this at length later). The series of verses in the Bhagavatam 7.11.25 – 29 make such a categorization. Like a similar series of verses in the Gita (18.42 – 44), this series also describes the occupational principles of the four *varnas*. However, the fifth verse describes the principles chaste women should follow. The inclusion of verse SB 7.11.29 in this series justifies a comparison between men and women in terms of *varna* with women as a special category of *varna*.

A further significance of this categorization is that women as a class are subordinate even to *sudras*. As per verse SB 7.11.29, a chaste woman is enjoined to "render service to the husband, to be always favorably disposed toward the husband, to be equally well disposed toward the husband's relatives and friends, and to follow the vows of the husband." Since a woman requires the supervision of a husband (or father or son)—even if he is a *sudra*—women, as a special class and in terms of *sva-bhava*, present the greatest liability when considering who, among non-liberated devotees, is fit to be a *diksa-guru*. This would be true even in the case of a *brahmani*, the wife of a *brahmana*. Nevertheless, when considering someone for the post of *diksa-guru*, the material *sva-bhava* can be disregarded in the case of a man or a woman who is liberated. **However, it cannot be disregarded in the case of someone who is not liberated. Just as no one would reasonably want a guru who, as a *ksatriya*, has a tendency to "lord it over" his disciples and be untruthful, no one would reasonably want a guru who, as a woman, has a tendency for lapses in judgment and, as per Srila Prabhupada, is "very prone to degradation."**

This brings us to reconsidering the SAC paper's reference to *Hari-bhakti-vilas* (quoted in *Cc Madhya* 8.128), along with Srila Prabhupada's comment, in which Srila Sanatana Gosvami recommends accepting as a guru a *vaisnava brahmana* instead of someone from a lower *varna* if the *brahmana* is available:

"It is stated in the *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* that one should not accept initiation from a person who is not in the brahminical order if there is a fit person in the brahminical order present. This instruction is meant for those who are overly dependent on the mundane social order and is suitable for those who want to remain in mundane life. If one understands the truth of Kāśna consciousness and seriously desires to attain transcendental knowledge for the perfection of life, he can accept a spiritual master from any social status, **provided the spiritual master is fully conversant with the science of Kṛṣṇa**. . . Factually the qualifications of a spiritual master depend on his knowledge of the science of Kṛṣṇa. It does not matter whether he is a *brahmana*,

ksatriya, sanniyasi or sudra." [10]

This is an instance of Srila Prabhupada's speaking of the guru at a highly advanced stage of spiritual realization. And we do not think that Srila Prabhupada is correcting Srila Sanatana Gosvami. There must be some time, place, and circumstance where Sanatana Gosvami's recommendation is indeed for the spiritual benefit of others. If a person who is liberated is available, then they would always be preferable to a guru who is not liberated. But in the absence of such a liberated guru, a non-liberated *vaisnava brahmana* acting as guru will generally be preferable to a non-liberated *ksatriya*, who will be preferable to a *vaisya*, and so forth. Srila Prabhupada's caveat, that one may accept a spiritual master from any social status, "provided the spiritual master is fully conversant with the science of Krsna," seems to support this understanding. A spiritual master not yet liberated from the influence of the material energy cannot be fully conversant with the science of Krishna. His realization is not yet mature. **Therefore in the absence of a liberated guru, the *sva-bhava* of a non-liberated guru must be considered.**

But the SAC does not interpret Srila Prabhupada's statement in this way. Instead, it seems they interpret this statement and others similar to it as banishing any material consideration—even in the case of a non-liberated devotee. Two points in the SAC's essay cause us to believe this: **the first is that the SAC places extraordinary emphasis on the post of guru instead of on the person aspiring to the post.** "The proper vision of our philosophy on the topic of eligibility to become a Vaisnava guru," says the SAC, "[is that] there cannot be placed any material prohibition on the post of guru—it is transcendental being based on one's devotion." The emphasis on "the post of guru" seems to be undue, because in the lower stages of devotion one's material *sva-bhava* does seem to have some bearing. However, the SAC still concludes that "gender is also a consideration to be discarded in judging a guru's eligibility."

The second point is that the SAC seems to be well aware that they are in fact dealing with non-liberated, female candidates for *diksa-guru*. Thus, the SAC recommends that a female *diksa-guru* "should normally have some family support. . . and a residential base to ensure her psycho-social stability." **Whether male or female, a liberated guru does not require "family support" and a "residential base" to ensure "psycho-social stability."** Gangamata Goswamini dressed in rags and slept on the banks of the Yamuna even before her guru Haridas Pandit initiated her. **She did not require residence and family support for her mental well-being. Liberated devotees get along quite well without them. That is why they are called "liberated."** Thus we believe that the SAC has interpreted Srila Prabhupada's comment in *Cc Madhya* 8.128, with regard to Srila Sanatana Gosvami's prescription, as removing any material consideration for the post of guru even in the case of a non-liberated devotee.

But there are many reasons that cause us to believe this to be a misinterpretation. Firstly, if material consideration is not required in the circumstance of a non-liberated soul, then it is unlikely Srila Sanatana Gosvami would have made his prescription about seeking a *vaisnava brahmana* as a guru first before seeking a guru from the lower social orders. And even then, Srila Prabhupada would not have needed to add his own caveat about the spiritual master needing to be fully conversant with the science of Krishna. Secondly, as demonstrated in this paper, one's material *sva-bhava* does affect one's ability to act as a *diksa-guru*. And it is furthermore our experience over the last 30 years in ISKCON that this is indeed the case.

And thirdly, the SAC's claim that their recommended material adjustments correspond "to the many recommendations and warnings of women becoming independent given in *dharma-sastras*" is implausible. For example, what is likely to happen if some conflict of interest arises between a non-liberated female *diksa-guru's* family and her disciples? On account of her dependence on family, it is likely that she will act against the interests of her disciples. In order to always act in their best interests, she must necessarily be independent. She must be able to act outside of "the many recommendations and warnings of women becoming independent given in *dharma-sastras*." A person who is allowed to act outside of her material *sva-dharma* must necessarily be free from the influence of her material *sva-bhava*. And one who is free from the influence of her material *sva-bhava* must

necessarily be a liberated soul.

This alone explains why female gurus have been so rare. Although this rarity is explored further in the next part of this paper, it is enough to note that when a non-liberated *vaisnava brahmana* accepts disciples, he does not act outside of his material *sva-dharma*. He is independent by nature. His occupation usually involves his accepting students, giving them *upanayanam*, teaching them, and so forth. He does not have the liabilities that a non-liberated female *diksa-guru* would have. Unlike the non-liberated female *diksa-guru*, he does not have to act outside of his prescribed *varnasrama* duties to properly care for his disciples. And, Krsna Himself states in Gita 3.35 and 18.47 that one should not perform others duties but only those of your own *sva-dharma*. The SAC's claim that their recommendations for (non-liberated) female *diksa-gurus* are in line with the prescriptions of the *dharma-sastras* is therefore implausible.

These reasons cause us to believe that the SAC has arrived at an incorrect understanding of "the proper vision of our philosophy on the topic of eligibility to become a Vaisnava guru." And this misunderstanding in part seems to arise from a general tendency to misapply to non-liberated devotees statements that apply fully to the liberated but not necessarily to the non-liberated.

Democratic Socialism

However, another source contributing to the SAC's particular understanding of female *diksa-gurus* seems to be related to the fact that ISKCON exists in a world in which western ideas of freedom, democracy, and individual rights are influential. What causes us to believe that these ideas have exerted some influence on the SAC's paper is in how the paper itself deals with the *dharma-sastra's* prescriptions for women. How they deal with these prescriptions resembles less their descriptions in Srila Prabhupada's commentaries, or in their historical expression, than they do laws inspired by a popular current of political thought known as "democratic socialism."

Democratic socialism is the political idea that society has an obligation to compensate for differences that arise from birth or social circumstance. This compensation allows all citizens as equal an opportunity as possible to get ahead in life and to fully participate in society's civic and political affairs. For example, in order to give women a more equal chance to compete with men in the job market, most democratic countries have made laws that require businesses to give women paid maternity leave. With paid maternity leave, women retain their jobs and suffer no loss of income on account of bearing children. Women have a "right" to maternity leave because the desired outcome of equality requires it. And society in turn has an obligation to "level the playing field" in order to help them compete with men in the workplace. From this principle of "leveling the playing field" comes the idea of "equal rights."

The SAC's paper seems to treat the *dharma-sastra's* recommendations and warnings of women becoming independent in a way similar to the social democratic notion of leveling the playing field. "These kinds of statements," say the SAC, "may be followed, and thus reconciled, by supportive facilities in the form of relative prerequisites in deciding female *diksa-guru* eligibility." As per the SAC, since gender is to be "discarded in judging a guru's eligibility," these statements point to the means for overcoming any disadvantage related to gender. They cannot be taken as disqualification. Since this line of thinking resembles the notion of "leveling the playing field," it is necessary to explore the possible influence of "equal rights." Even though the SAC paper itself offers assurances that women will not be made gurus for the sake of "equal rights," this idea is influential within ISKCON and therefore cannot be discounted.

The mundane idea of "equal rights" in ISKCON has three main sources: (1) lingering conditioning from our previous existence as *karmis*, (2) association with *karmis*, and (3) association with non-devotee academics. To begin with, devotees don't leave all their *anarthas* or bad ideas at the temple entrance when they join ISKCON. In particular, this manifests as indifference to *varnasrama-dharma*. Here is one such example:

Vedic life, as extolled in our scriptures, is highly interpretive. **Understanding what is**

truly Vedic is elusive. Srila Prabhupada, taught us about Vedic society and the role of *varnasrama* in elevating society, but he did not practically speaking, engage his spiritual daughters within such a system. They were active preachers, pujaris, cooks, etc. **Srila Prabhupada in fact, introduced a new model** with new standards; one based on preaching. He had Yamuna dasi perform *Abhisehka* in Jaipura when the Radha Govinda Deities were installed in 1972 before thousands of Indian pilgrims. He had Malati dasi speak before a large crowd including Gaudiya Matha in Mayapura after the laying of the corner stone in 1972. He was proud to showcase his competent daughters to his god-brothers.

This was stated in 2004 at a meeting of senior Vaishnavis who met to discuss the "non-compliance of the ICC [Indian Continental Committee] regarding GBC Resolutions 501 and 618, passed in 2000." Here we have senior devotee women declaring that *varnasrama* is not only incomprehensible but that Srila Prabhupada gave us some other social system to follow. Especially from 1975 on up to his departure in 1977, Srila Prabhupada spoke frequently on the topic of *varnasrama-dharma* and, above all, exhorted his followers to implement it *within ISKCON*. These facts and statements are so well known that it is not necessary to reproduce them here. Yet here we have senior women, who actually have a say in how ISKCON is run, saying that *varnasrama* is not only irrelevant but that Srila Prabhupada wanted us to follow some other newly created social system.

Whatever else may be said about their views, their statements here cause us to believe that **they are opposed to having *varnasrama* in ISKCON**. And, hence, it is to be expected that they would be **similarly opposed to having *varnasrama* criteria used in vetting female candidates for *diksa-guru***. The fact that opposition to *varnasrama* exists among some of ISKCON's most senior devotees means we are obliged to consider how feminist thought and sentiment shapes ISKCON insiders' views of spiritual life.

A second source of opposition to *varnasrama* is bad association. Most devotees now live outside of ISKCON *asramas*, and because they live outside of *asramas* they have to associate regularly with non-devotees. Because of this association—*asat-sanga*—their ideas about spiritual life are inevitably shaped by their outside friendships. Naturally, this creates a demand for mundane social justice in the form of equal rights. **Hence the greatest agitation in ISKCON for "equal rights" and therefore having some representation of females in the role of *diksa-guru* comes from devotees living in western countries, where this type of social and sexual justice has the strongest influence.**

Negative influence of mundane academics

A third source of opposition to *varnasrama* is the association of professional academics. It sounds harsh to say that their association is "*asat*," but it is impossible to deny that they have had a profound influence on ISKCON's internal debate about the public role of women in ISKCON. And certainly, their reasons for wanting to see a more gender-inclusive ISKCON are based on mundane ideas of social justice.

For example, in his Srila Prabhupada Centennial survey, E. Burke Rochford Jr. implored ISKCON leaders to be more inclusive of women:

I recommend that ISKCON leaders immediately move to restore the rights and responsibilities afforded women by Srila Prabhupada. Men should be educated accordingly. Guru and non-guru leaders should teach respect for women; women should again be viewed as capable devotees in the service of Prabhupada's movement rather than as temptresses or other such derogatory characterizations. To do so would immediately increase the self-esteem of women and make them more productive members of ISKCON. This will also make the movement more attractive to potential members who view ISKCON's position on women as antiquated and morally objectionable.

What is also notable about this statement, and many others from professional academics we do not mention here, is that ISKCON devotees use these statements in arguing for more gender-inclusive ISKCON. **This particular statement by Rochford was quoted by Kusha Dasi in her presentation, which she delivered with other members of the Women's**

Ministry, to the GBC in 2000. Kusha Dasi is by no means unique in appealing to outside experts to make her case. Since these professional academics' concepts of social justice are based on mundane concepts of equal rights, and since devotees cite them as authorities, mundane ideas of "equal rights" have a significant influence on ISKCON's internal social discourse.

There have also been bold, recent appeals from professional academics to women in ISKCON to challenge ISKCON's own tradition in order to establish a gender-egalitarian society. For example, in a recent book titled *The Hare Krishna Movement: Forty Years of Chant and Change (2007)*, which is a joint project between ISKCON devotees and professional academic observers of ISKCON, **anthropologist Anna S. King recommends that ISKCON adopt a "feminist re-reading of Radha" (a "theology" of Radha) for the sake of establishing social and sexual justice within ISKCON.** More specifically, she recommends that women who are also ISKCON insiders take up the task of revisioning and challenging the Chaitanya tradition. "The critical task then for feminists would be to confront the Chaitanya tradition wherever the historical perpetuation of unjust, exclusionary practices that have legitimated male superiority are found." [11] And it appears that King is aware that such a radical revisioning of ISKCON's theology and tradition **will likely undermine ISKCON's ethics of sexual abstinence.**

Self-restraint is the dominant virtue in sexual ethics, together with a body-rejecting model of sexuality. ISKCON spirituality therefore presupposes a cultural system that denies, displaces and sublimates sexualities. Behind the veil of *rasa puritan* (and misogynist) values are hidden. While these may appear to offer points of reference in a postmodern world, they also imply that gender inequality is divinely revealed. [12]

These examples demonstrate that both insiders and outsiders are putting much pressure on the rest of ISKCON to implement a mundane concept of gender equality as a matter of social justice. "Equal rights" by whatever name is a popular social cause within ISKCON. Therefore, we believe that the SAC paper's assurance that "such a decision will surely not be based upon the equal-rights doctrine found in modern Western civilization" is an empty assurance.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, we are not against the concept of women *diksa-gurus*. However, the difference we have with the SAC is on the matter of qualification. We agree with the SAC that if someone is liberated, gender is not a difference to be considered. However, we differ with the SAC on the matter of qualification in the case of non-liberated devotees. Our difference with the SAC can be summed up as follows: we believe that in the case of non-liberated devotees, gender, as is the *sva-bhava* of non-liberated men, is a factor that must be considered in determining qualification. The SAC, however, seems to reject gender as a qualifying or disqualifying criteria for the non-liberated devotee.

We have detailed in this paper why we believe this conclusion is in error. It seems to us that there are two factors that underlie this error and most of the other errors in SAC's papers: **one is a tendency to apply Srila Prabhupada's statements about the liberated guru to non-liberated devotees, and the other is feminist thought and sentiment internal and external to ISKCON.** The SAC's paper, however, has other problems, which are detailed in the next section. We believe these other errors should not be overlooked.

To be continued...

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Letter to Janardana, 26 April 1968

[2] Hari-bhakti-vilasa 11.708, quoted from *Visnu Purana* 3.12.30

[3] Narada says to Yudhisthira. Sabha Parva, Lokapala Sabhakhya Parva, section 5; *Mahabharata*, Ganguli edition, PDF version, p. 654

[4] Lord Rama inquires from Bharata. Ayodhya-kanda 100.49, *Valmiki Ramayana*, Gita Press (Gorakhpur 1992) 585

- [5] BG 1.49 purport
- [6] SB 1.7.42 purport
- [7] SB 3.14.36 purport
- [8] SB 6.18.42 purport
- [9] BG 18.16 purport
- [10] CC Madhya 8.128 purport, quoted in SAC 10
- [11] Anna S. King, *The Hare Krishna Movement: Forty Years of Chant and Change*. 225
- [12] King 224

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A Reply to the GBC Action Order 305 (2009), Part 3

BY: KRISHNA DEVI DASI

Oct 24, 2012 — INDIA (SUN) — [Revised]

Since this section specifically references the SAC paper, it would behoove the reader to download and [read it first](#).

A Reply to the GBC Action Order 305 (2009) and the Sastra Advisory Committee's paper "Female Diksa-gurus in ISKCON"

"Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's diksa-guru." (SB 4.12.32 purport)

This report was commissioned [in 2010] by the Secretary of the Indian RGB in response to the GBC's Sastric Advisory Committee paper entitled "Female *Diksa-gurus* in ISKCON."

Anomalies

Before dealing with the philosophical aspects of the SAC paper, we wish to bring to the attention of the GBC two anomalies. The first concerns **Urmila devi dasi**, who [in 2010 [when this paper was written](#)] was the woman to be nominated as a *diksa-guru*, and hence was the very reason that the SAC was asked to research the matter. However, since Mother Urmila was also a member of SAC, a very clear conflict of interest resulted, which is why the SAC stated:

"SAC members felt that the circumstances of the task were valid, and the topic interesting, and so accepted the task. Urmila-devi, however, being a SAC member involved in this case before the GBC, excused herself from the **discussion** and writing of this paper."

Yet this turned out to be a **false** statement. On our inquiring about the veracity of this statement, two SAC members (HH Bhakti Rasamrta Swami and Sriman Mukunda Datta Prabhu) stated that while Mother Urmila did not participate in the actual writing of the paper, she was definitely involved in the discussions that constituted the substance of the document. To exactly what extent her involvement might have swayed the outcome of the SAC paper is conjectural, but the fact that the SAC chose to cover up her involvement is in itself troubling.

[It is interesting to note that the new candidate for female diksa guru, Narayani Mataji, is a newly appointed SAC member. It seems that being appointed as a member of SAC is part of the *Cursus honorum* for becoming a female diksa guru.]

Secondly, the SAC wrote:

"Furthermore, in order to ensure that all sides of the topic were properly represented, SAC accepted a temporary member representing Vaisnavas raised in Bharata where one might question the propriety of female devotees as gurus due to cultural background."

This statement is actually misleading. That sole member from Bharata, Devamrta Prabhu [now H.H. Bhakti Rasamrta Swami], explained that his involvement was very limited, and only in the initial stages:

"I was involved in the initial stages. I helped in the research with the Madhva *sampradaya*. But then since I was not able to cope with my heavy load of other services I withdrew myself from the SAC after speaking to the convener, Purnacandra Prabhu (now Goswami)."

While Devamrta Prabhu's leaving was not the SAC's fault, the SAC should have replaced him with someone else, or better still, with several others born in India. Not only did the SAC not do this, but it falsely stated that native-born Indians were actively involved and "properly represented." Again, that simply was not true.

These two anomalies of obfuscating the truth are completely incongruent with brahminical behavior, which of course the SAC is supposed to embody. Besides damaging the credibility of the SAC, such a discrepancy sows doubt in the minds of the reader: Was the SAC paper fair and unbiased, or was it written from a strictly "Western-centric, modernist, feminist" position, **with a predetermined conclusion already in place?** This lack of transparency on the part of the SAC seriously undermines its credibility.

Women cannot be *diksa-gurus*

We now consider the philosophical aspect of the matter at hand. In his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.12.32, Srila Prabhupada stated in very clear, explicit, unambiguous, and conclusive terms that a woman cannot be a *diksa-guru*:

"Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's *diksa-guru*."

The SAC wrote sixteen pages in attempt to undermine Srila Prabhupada's categorical statement. Therefore, now we shall concisely adumbrate the line of thought and the salient points in our argument against the *purvapakshin* (respected opponent). The dilated version (100+ pages), with a detailed exegesis explaining all points, citations, references, dialectics, and responses to objections, etc., is available from the IRGB's secretary, Basu Ghosh dasa Adhikari.

Women must not be given authority

The position of *diksa-guru* is obviously one of authority. *Thesastra* clearly states that one should not give authority (secular or spiritual) to women. The SAC trivialized and dismissed these sastric directives by stating: "After all, being a mother is also a role of authority." We find this statement to be lacking in intelligent discrimination— similar to the argument given by meat-eaters that eating vegetables also requires killing. Whereas to be a mother is an aspect of women's *sva-dharma*, to be a *diksa-guru* is not. In *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* 11.708, the *Visnu Purana* 3.12.30 is quoted, regarding how a *grhastha* should work in this world:

*yosito navamanyetana casam visvased budhau
na caiversur bhavet tasu nadhikuryat kadacana*

"A wise man should never insult women, nor should he trust them. He should never become jealous of women, **nor should he ever appoint them.** "

Srila Sanatana Gosvami comments, *nadhikuryat adhikaram na kuryat; yad va sribhyo 'dhikaram na dadhyat ity arthaù. Nadhikuryat* means one should not appoint women; in other words, **one should not give authority to women.**

There is a similar statement in the Mahabharata (*Sabha Parva, Lokapala Sabhakhya Parva*, section 5; Ganguli edition, PDF version, p. 654), wherein Narada says to Yudhisthira:

"Consolest thou women and are they protected in thy realm? I hope thou placest not any confidence in them, nor divulgest any secret before any of them?"

And in the *Ramayana* 2.100.49, Lord Rama asks Bharata:

"Do you keep your womenfolk pacified? Are they duly protected by you? I hope you do not repose excessive faith in them and do not confide your secrets to them."

In Krsna's Vedic culture Women must be socially restricted.

Manu said that a woman must never be independent, not even in her own home:

"By a girl, a young woman, or even an aged one, nothing must be done independently, not even in her own house. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons. A woman must never be independent. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons. By leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families **contemptible.**" *Manu-samhita* 5.147-9

This certainly places many **restrictions** on her and excludes her from many social functions, what to speak of her being a *diksa-guru*. A *diksa-guru* must be able to make independent decisions, be fearless in traveling, in going into the public, etc.— all of which are restricted for women. Who would be protecting a female *diksa-guru* when, in the course of executing her guru-ship, she had to travel away from home? Would her male guardian (father, husband, son) always accompany her? If not, then she would be separating herself from her family, thereby making her family "contemptible."

"The ruler who moves about is venerated, as also the *brahmana* and the yogi who travels, but a woman who wanders gets destroyed." Canakya Pandita

We now consider the arguments presented by the SAC regarding why women should be *diksa-gurus*. Please note that in none of the "positive" evidence it presented was the SAC able to controvert Srila Prabhupada's categorical statement (in reference to Suniti) that women cannot become a *diksa-guru*. In their attempt to contradict Srila Prabhupada, the SAC depend heavily on inference, secondary and tertiary levels of evidence, and extrapolation. **The question arises: Is the SAC forcing the evidence to meet a predetermined goal?**

The SAC relies on the Sakta text Kularnava-tantra for support.

*svapna-labdhe striya dattemala-mantre ca try-aksare
ekaksare tatha mantre siddhadin naiva sodhayet*

"One should not test a mantra attained in a dream, a mantra given by a woman, a *mala-mantra* [mantra over twenty syllables] or mantras of one or three syllables for *siddha*, and so on." *Kularnava-tantra* 15.97

The SAC claim: "This verse points to the fact that, in the past, women sometimes gave mantras. One could then assume that women, on occasion, had acted as *diksa-gurus*."

On researching this statement, we found that the translation of the text has proven to be controversial, with very opposing views about its precise meaning. But leaving that aside, we see that this statement in no way negates Srila Prabhupada's very direct and explicit remark:

"Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become

Dhruva Maharaja's *diksa-guru*." *Bhagavatam* 4.12.32 purport.

Furthermore, even if the above statement actually says exactly what the SAC claim it says, the fact that the SAC supported its position by quoting *Kularnava-tantra* is itself very dubious. The SAC's position is: "If *Kularnava-tantra* supports that women can be *diksa-gurus*, then we should also." But, *Kularnava-tantra* is a **Sakta** text, not a Vaisnava text, and thus supports many things that are incompatible with Vaisnavism. For instance, one of the central tenets of the *Kularnava-tantra* is the method of worshiping Durgadevi with the *panca-makaras*:

"The ingredients to be used in the worship of Devi are of many kinds. These comprise, in the Kaulachara, *madya* (**wine**), *mamsa* (**meat**), *matsya* (**fish**), *mudra* [1] (grain), *maithuna* ([**sex** with] woman)—well known as "the five m's" (*panca-makaras*, each item beginning with *ma*)." (Avalon, Pandit, & Vidyaratna, 1965, p 47)

Since the *Kularnava-tantra* supports the ritual use of wine, meat, fish, and sex in worship, should we also adopt such practices? Should we also worship Devi instead of Krsna? Not only is it dubious to use the *Kularnava-tantra* as evidence, but it is even dubious to assume that *Kularnava-tantra* supports the notion that women may be *diksa-gurus*, for the *Kularnava-tantra* consistently describes gurus as male—for example, in such statements as:

"The initiated shall always please his guru, **guru's wife**, guru's son, [and] adherents of the Kaula path of *sakti*, in the measure of his means." (Avalon, Pandit, & Vidyaratna 1965, p 110)

What to speak of women becoming a *diksa-guru*, on the very same page as the above it is stated that a woman cannot (even) be initiated without the permission of her male guardian:

"The competence of the widow for *diksa* is subject to the consent of her son; of the daughter to that of her father, of the wife to that of her husband. **A woman has no right of her own for getting *diksa*.** "

In conclusion, when we consider that the *Kularnava-tantra* is not a Vaisnava text but a *Sakta* text (which promotes practices that Vaisnavas consider abominable and tamasic), that in the *Kularnava-tantra* the guru is always referred to as a male, and that a woman cannot even receive *diksa* without the permission of a male guardian, we conclude that to quote the *Kularnava-tantra* in support of females being a *diksa-guru* is **no evidence at all**. Moreover, the *Kularnava-tantra* certainly cannot be used to negate Srila Prabhupada's statement:

"Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's *diksa-guru*." SB 4.12.32, purport

"I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta."

The SAC quote:

"I want that all of my spiritual sons and **daughters** will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta, 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 numbers of the generations. That is my program." Letter to Hamsaduta—Los Angeles, 3 December 1968.

According to the levels of evidence described by Jayadvaita Swami in the VedaBase, this is third-class evidence, as per the hierarchy:

Books; Legal documents and similar papers

Lectures

Letters

Conversations

The above statement is not on par with Srila Prabhupada's statement—in his books—about Suniti. Moreover, that letter was written in 1968, whereas in 1974 Srila Prabhupada made his statement about Suniti—which strongly suggests that the statement of 1974 supersedes that of 1968 (according to the rule that a later statement supersedes an earlier one).

There is also another reason why the above and similar statements cannot be considered good evidence: In the early days of ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada had high hopes for his disciples—that by the power of the holy name and the process of *bhakti-yoga* they would quickly rise above the modes of material nature and be allowed to initiate even as early as 1975. But as time passed, Srila Prabhupada experienced that his disciples were struggling to overcome their material conditioning, and this gave him a new perspective. Hence, even after 1975, none of his disciples were initiating. We discuss this in detail in the full version of our paper (available from Basu Ghosh dasa Adhikari).

Boys and Girls become spiritual master

The SAC quoted a very long speech by Srila Prabhupada that ended with the following paragraph:

"So I hope that all of you, **men, women, boys and girls, become spiritual master**, and follow this principle. Spiritual master, simply, sincerely, follow the principles and speak to the general public. Then Krsna immediately becomes your favorite. Krsna does not become your favorite; you become Krsna's favorite. Krsna says in the *Bhagavad-gita*, *na ca tasmad manusyesu kascin me priya-krttamaù*: 'One who is doing this humble service of preaching work, Krsna consciousness, nobody is dearer than him to Me.' So if you want to become recognized by Krsna very quickly, you take up this process of becoming spiritual master, present the *Bhagavad-gita* as it is. Your life is perfect. Thank you very much." (Vyasa-puja Lecture—22 August 1973, London)

While a *diksa-guru* should do as Srila Prabhupada describes above, what Srila Prabhupada is actually describing is the *vartma-pradarsaka-guru*, the guru who shows the way and also gives instruction. **In the above quotation Srila Prabhupada indicates that one becomes a spiritual master by "speak to the general public" not by giving diksa.** Srila Prabhupada wrote that such gurus need only very little qualification; even a small child can be such a guru:

"From the very beginning of life. Just like Prahlada Maharaja advised, *kaumara acaret prajno dharman bhagavatan iha* [SB 7.6.1]. The boys... He was five-years-old boy. He said, 'My dear...' He was preaching amongst his class friend. This is Vaisnavism. Even a five... **Just like our Sarasvati, Syamasundara's daughter.** She also preaches. She goes sometimes, 'Do you know what is Krsna?' If somebody says, 'No, I do not know'-'The Supreme Personality of Godhead.' You see? This is natural. Simply one has to be given the chance. Because this, I mean to say, **small girl** has got the chance to live amongst Krsna conscious people from the very birth, she's developing that 'Oh, I shall also preach. I shall also preach.' Developing. Similarly, advancement of Krsna consciousness means you will be, I mean to say, pushed how to preach, how to preach." (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.1.2—August 15 1971, London)

The SAC has highlighted: "So I hope that all of you, men, women, boys and girls, become spiritual master."

According to the OED: "**boy**. A male child below the age of puberty."

Hence by the juxtaposition of "men and boys" and "women and girls," we can conclude—**according to the logic used by the SAC—that Srila Prabhupada wanted prepubescent children to become diksa-gurus.** Of course, such a conclusion would be absurd. However, Srila Prabhupada did want all of his followers to be gurus in the sense of

being preachers. Hence, this *pramana* presented by SAC is of no use in supporting that a female can be a *diksa-guru*—that is, unless they contend that small children also should be allowed to be *diksa-gurus*.

Srila B. R. Sridhara Maharaja quoted by the SAC

As did Srila Prabhupada, Srila B. R. Sridhara Swami also conceded that women of the caliber of Jahnava-mata, the wife of Nityananda Prabhu, could become a *diksa-guru*. But he qualified his statement by adding that they were rare: **"Yes, very rare. The number can be counted on fingers, lady acaryas."**

Since both Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Swami said that for a woman to become a *diksa-guru* was "very rare," why did the SAC ignore that point? While paying mere lip service to statements by Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Swami—that such instances were very rare—the SAC has recommended a drastically lower prerequisite for women to become a *diksa-guru*. Acceptance of this lower standard would contravene the historical rarity of women ever functioning in the role of *diksa-guru*. The SAC then averts the issue of qualification by stating, "It is difficult to ascertain someone's level of *bhakti*." If this is indeed a fact, then logically the SAC should be **more cautious** and conservative, not less so, about recommending for ISKCON a new practice not in accord with the prescribed duties for women. "Exceptions to the rule" must be indeed truly exceptional, and not whimsical. In such matters, commonsense wisdom dictates: "If not fully certain, don't do it."

Srila Sridhara Svami actually derogated female gurus

Srila Sridhara Swami tells us that after Jahnava-mata several female gurus appeared in her line, but because they were not exceptions to the rule, as was Jahnava-mata, they delivered "dead mantras":

"But their mantra is dead. We are after a living mantra ... We have to follow the spirit. Otherwise, after Jahnava-devi, the wife of Lord Nityananda, up to Bipin Goswami, from whom Bhaktivinoda Thakura took initiation, there are so many unknown lady gurus. Through them, the mantra came to Bipin Goswami, and from him Bhaktivinoda Thakura received the mantra. We accept Bhaktivinoda Thakura, **but should we count all those ladies in our disciplic succession? What was their realization?"**

It seems clear that Sridhara Maharaja's disparaging those lady gurus was to add weight to the proposition that Bhaktivinoda Thakura's *diksa* by Bipin Bihari Goswami was at best insignificant. But why? Because those ladies were not of the stature of Jahnava-devi (and therefore should not have been *diksa-gurus* in the first place), and hence delivered "dead mantras." (The full text may be [found here](#)).

The implication by Sridhara Maharaja is clear: we should not repeat that same mistake and create another *apasampradaya* of lady gurus.

Qualified female *diksa-gurus* are very rare

As noted by Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Swami, bona fide female *diksa-gurus* are extremely rare—so rare that Sridhara Swami said that during the past five hundred years the number of females who were *diksa-gurus* can be counted on the fingers of one hand; so rare that, when pressed on this point, Srila Prabhupada gave only one example: Jahnava-mata, the wife of Lord Nityananda and expansion of Srimati Radharani. One would think that such statements by Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Swami would be sufficient to dissuade anyone from taking such an unnecessary risk that could very likely degrade the parampara and create an *apasampradaya* (as had already been noted by Srila Sridhara Swami). But after much hand wringing, and what could be described only as word jugglery, the SAC concluded "Yes, we should follow such extremely rare examples," and that a woman in ISKCON may become a *diksa-guru*.

However, the SAC's conclusion is just the **opposite of the opinion** of our *purvacaryas*, who did not think it wise to follow such rare examples. In the following statement regarding

female *sannyasa* , Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saravati states that it is not advisable to follow the exceptional cases. And while the issue of female *sannyasa* and female *diksa-gurus* is very similar, still, they are not identical. But what is identical about these two issues is that each is a rare exception. Consequently, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati's statement "**Imitation of exceptional cases is not advisable**" is as applicable to female *diksa-gurus* as to any other exceptional case. As did Sri Rupa Gosvami, Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati averred that such imitation creates a disturbance in society:

"The *sannyasa-asrama* is not suitable for women. Performing Hari-bhajana **while remaining at home** will bestow auspiciousness upon them. **In the name of giving women *sannyasa*, *bhek*, and so on, much disturbance exists in the world. Imitation of exceptional cases is not advisable.** Persons wishing to have detailed knowledge of *bhek* and related topics may see *Samskara-dipika* , by Srila Gopala Bhatta Gosvami Prabhupada." Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saravati Thakura, from the *Gaudiya* 16.11.256

We also note that for women Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati stressed that staying in the home, the grhasta asrama, will be auspicious for women, not being travelling preachers.

And regarding the imitating of the non-vegetarian diet of some *maha-bhagavatas* :

"In Dacca, one Prana Gopala Brahmachari challenged Srila Sarasvati Thakura by declaring it acceptable for Vaisnavas to take non-vegetarian food, citing Garuda and Jatayu (famous devotees in an eagle and vulture form respectively) as non-vegetarians. But Srila Sarasvati Thakura rebutted, 'There are innumerable Vaisnavas who abjure meat and fish. **A few exceptions do not neutralize the rule.** Flesh is the ordained food for those particular bodily forms. It is not approved for all.'" *Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Vaibhava*, vol. 2, p. 92

The SAC drastically lowers the standard

The SAC wrote: "It is difficult to ascertain someone's level of *bhakti*."

This statement logically suggests that one should be more—not less—prudent regarding the permitting of women of unascertainable *bhakti* to hold positions of spiritual authority previously held only by expansions of Srimati Radharani. But apparently the SAC considers that the difficulty of being able to ascertain a women's level of *bhakti* is a license to lower the requirements for women to become a *diksa-guru*.

In our full treatment of this issue (of 100+ pages), we several times registered our agreement with Lord Caitanya's statement (in Cc 2.8.128) that anyone, regardless of material bodily designation, "can" be a *diksa-guru* if they know the science of Krsna consciousness . But this point **must be reconciled** with Lord Krsna's statements (in *Gita* 2.47, 3.20–23, 35, and 18.47) that even if someone is liberated, they should not be attached to renouncing their prescribed duties, but should perform those duties as an example for others to follow, and that it is better to execute one's own duties (even poorly) than to perform (even perfectly) another's duties. **In other words, not that because one can do something that they should do it.** One should do only that which is within the compass of their *sva-dharma* as defined in *sastra* otherwise as Rupa Gosvami predicts there will be disturbance in society.

The prescribed duties of a woman (*stri-dharma*), as defined by Narada Muni in *Bhagavatam* 7.11.25–29 and other authentic *sastras*, do not include her being a *diksa-guru*. Therefore even if liberated, a woman should not take up such a duty. For this reason, Srila Prabhupada said that Suniti could not be a *diksa-guru*. Only in a very rare and extraordinary circumstance would even a fully liberated soul in a woman's body act in a capacity that was outside the realm of *stri-dharma*.

Therefore, we find it distressing that the SAC has recommended lowering the standard making it very cheap to the point that for a Vaisnavi to be considered a candidate for *diksa-guru* in ISKCON **she need only be a Srila Prabhupada disciple in good standing with a living family member and a *siksa-guru* to pass the SAC criteria.**

"Rare" according to *Mimamsa*

Mimamsa is the Vedic philosophy and science of scriptural interpretation (hermeneutics). It can be applied to any subject, particularly the Vedic texts. Jaimini used *mimamsa* to explain how Vedic sacrifices were to be performed; Vyasadeva used it to interpret texts for realizing Sri Krsna. Jaimini's text is simply called *Purva* (earlier) *mimamsa* or *Karma mimamsa*, while Vyasadeva's is called *Uttara* (later) *mimamsa* (and also called *Brahma-sutras*, *Vedanta-sutras*, etc.)

In – *A Note on the Application of the Mimamsa Principles to Hindu Law* – it is stated:

"The commentators on the *smṛti* texts have very freely resorted to the application of the *mimamsa* rules in the interpretation of the texts.... Hindu jurists quite as much as English jurists recognize **the well-known canon of interpretation that a special text or statute forming an exception to a general text or statute should be construed strictly and applied only in the cases falling clearly within it**; the *Mitaksara* [*dharma-sastra* text on Hindu law, popular in Bengal] itself recognizes **the principle that where an exception exists to a general rule, the exception should be confined within the strictest limits so as not to encroach unduly upon the general rule.**" [2]

If I have killed someone and want to be judged innocent of murder, I must prove that the killing was done in self-defense (the exception to the rule); otherwise, I will receive capital punishment. If the criteria for determining what is an exceptional case is not sufficiently strict, social chaos would ensue—the streets would be soaked in blood.

Regarding whether women should function as *diksa-gurus*, we must first consider that even if a woman is fully liberated, she should nonetheless perform her *stri-dharma* (not some other dharma), for the edification of other women, as dictated by Lord Krsna (Gita 2.47, 3.20–23, 35, and 18.47). Within *stri-dharma*, there is no scope for women to be a *diksa-guru*. Hence, a rare soul like Jahnava-devi, who is an incarnation of Ananga-manjari (the pleasure potency of Lord Nityananda and younger sister of and expansion of Srimati Radharani), is a true exception. A woman who is struggling in *sadhana-bhakti* would not be a bona fide exception.

Why was Jahnava-devi an exception?

When Jahnava-devi took up the role of *diksa-guru* five hundred years ago, the social conditions in India were much more stable than in today's globalized Western *varna-sankara* society. Five hundred years ago, women accepted that they needed protection and dependence upon guardians. In today's *varna-sankara* societies, it is unsafe for everyone, especially women, due to the unlimited freedom given to individuals and to the resultant false feeling of independence that is engendered. Five hundred years ago, people had more respect for women and would treat all women as mothers. But nowadays, the situation has degraded to a totally opposite state: instead of all women being treated as mothers, practically all women are regarded as free objects/agents for sex pleasure, be it gross or subtle.

We must also remember that only **after** Nityananda Prabhu had already completed His *lila* did Jahnava-devi assume the role of a *diksa-guru*—**to continue her husband's mission**—for, as an exalted chaste wife and disciple of her husband, she felt duty-bound to do so. After all, She is the Goddess of fortune (hence, most exceptional) and was expected to continue her husband's mission. Thus She became a prominent figure in a natural sequence of events. But again, it was most exceptional. Nor was this the first time that the Goddess of fortune had become an acarya. The *adi-guru* in the Sri sampradaya is Sridevi Herself. But after Her, we know of no other bona fide female *diksa-gurus* in that line.

Today's social conditions are most degraded, but even in the best of times these roles of *diksa-guru* or *sannyasa* for women are not supported by *sastra* or previous Vaisnava *acaryas*. Jahnava-devi's situation was totally unique even for the more socially stable past; Her assuming the role of *diksa-guru* after the departure of Prabhu Nityananda must not be artificially imitated.

The SAC ignored why Jahnava-devi and others were exceptional.

Unfortunately, the SAC did not even superficially discuss the remarkable unique singularity of Jahnava-devi or the other few bona fide female *diksa-gurus*. Why were they exceptions to the norm? If we analyze why Jahnava-mata and a few others were so exceptional and then strictly apply that standard (as required by *mimamsa*) for judging whether a certain Vaisnavi is exceptional, **that process will completely nullify the conclusions drawn by the SAC**. Rather than strictly defining the criteria for being an exception such as Jahnava-devi, the SAC simply ignored the reasons why such Vaisnavis were so extraordinary. Instead, by fiat, the SAC created its own standard for determining "rareness," a standard which turns rare into something relatively common place. This raises disturbing questions. Why did they do this? Was it just innocent incompetence? Or, were they eliminating an obstacle to a predetermined goal? In any case the creator of dharma is Krsna, not the SAC:

*dharmam tu saksad bhagavat-pranitamna vai vidur rsayo napi devau
na siddha-mukhya asura manusyaù kuto nu vidyadhara-caranadayau*

"Real religious principles are enacted by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Although fully situated in the mode of goodness, even the great *rsis* who occupy the topmost planets cannot ascertain the real religious principles, nor can the demigods or the leaders of Siddhaloka, to say nothing of the *asuras*, ordinary human beings, Vidyadharas and Caranas." *Bhagavatam* 6.3.19

And:

"No person, even if he be very learned, should express a decisive opinion all by himself, in regard to the disputed points of dharma. The way of dharma is very subtle. It has many loopholes and is inscrutable. Excepting Svayambhuva Manu, none of the *devas* and sages can pronounce a judgment on dharma." *Vayu Purana* 2.57.112

For Manu's opinion on the position of women, see *Manu-samhita* 5.147–9 (quoted earlier in this text).

Taking into account Lord Krsna's statements (Gita 2.47, 3.20–23, 35, and 18.47), we conclude that even a liberated soul performs their prescribed duties for the edification of others; that to be an exception to this standard one must at the very least be at the liberated state; and (in the case of women) that even among liberated Vaisnavis only a rare few would qualify as an exception. When we examine Jahnava-mata, we understand that not only is she a *nitya-siddha*, but is also in the category of *laksmi-tattva* (being the eternal consort of Sri Nityananda Prabhu, who is Himself *visnu-tattva*). This is indeed very extraordinary, within the strictest limits. Yet, when we contrast the SAC's guidelines to the GBC against the *mimamsa* definition of what constitutes a bona fide exception we are disappointed and find cause for questioning as to how such absurd conclusions were arrived at especially as it seems to be a **pattern of behavior**.

Daiva-varnasrama-dharma is poorly understood by ISKCON's leaders

We have done little within ISKCON to promote this most important social aspect of Srila Prabhupada's mission, largely because our leaders have yet to understand many aspects of the *daiva-varnasrama-dharma* system, or how to apply it in a practical way. It therefore seems contradictory and even contemptuous to push forward the very controversial topic of female *diksa-guru*, the very concept of which militates against *daiva-varnasrama-dharma*.

Since understanding and implementing *daiva-varnasrama-dharma* remains unclear for many leaders, how then can they be so clear and justified to establish something which is in fact antithetical to *daiva-varnasrama-dharma*? Will it not, in fact, create problems for future generations by legislating unwarranted precedents? We dilate on this topic in our larger essay on the subject.

What does it mean to cooperate and please Srila Prabhupada?

Srila Prabhupada said that if we, his followers, want to demonstrate that we love him, we will cooperate to spread this Krsna consciousness movement. And how do we cooperate? By performing our prescribed duties in *daiva-varnasrama-dharma*, according to our constitutional position (psychophysical nature), as men and women, for the pleasure of Lord Krsna. By rejecting our prescribed duties, we create conflicts and instability. To legislate that Vaisnavis may become *diksa-gurus* would create disharmony (it already has and it will increase). Therefore in the past such instances have been extremely rare and exceptional. Women should cooperate by performing their own God given prescribed duties, and thereby come to resemble the ideal ladies of the Bhagavatam. Then they would be the kind of "person *Bhagavatam*" that Srila Prabhupada said we should learn from. [3] A woman should make her life perfect by performing her natural, Divinely ordained prescribed duties (*stri-dharma*), according to her psychophysical womanly nature, for the purpose of pleasing Lord Krsna. By setting such an example, she would thus be a genuine guru.

"Everything will be satisfied. Just like our women, Krsna conscious, they are working. They don't want equal rights with men. It is due to Krsna consciousness. They are cleansing the temple, they are cooking very nicely. They are satisfied. They never say that 'I have to go to Japan for preaching like Prabhupada.' They never say. This is artificial. Krsna consciousness means work in his constitutional position. **The women, men, when they remain in their constitutional position**, there will be no artificial (indistinct) (loud traffic noises)." Morning Walk—27 May 1974, Rome

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have shown that the SAC was not able to refute Srila Prabhupada's categorical statement:

"Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's *diksa-guru*." *Bhagavatam* 4.12.32, purport

Additionally, on analysis there is strong evidence of a pattern of behavior suggesting that the SAC attempted to force a predetermined conclusion in line with modern, secular values of feminism. Therefore, the GBC should rescind Action Order 305 (2009) authorizing female *diksa-gurus* and abrogate their support for the SAC paper which the said Action Order is based on.

As previously stated, the above presentation is merely a shortened version of our larger essay and gives only the salient points of our argument, without delving into detail. Should our respected readers have any questions or objections to this essay, we humbly request that they first read the entire unabridged paper, for very likely such questions or objections are answered therein. If after a careful reading of the full paper one is still not satisfied, one may correspond with Basu Ghosh Dasa Adhikari for further discussion. Again, a complete copy of the paper may be obtained from him.

Your humble servants,

IRGB

Footnotes:

[1] In some texts it is written "*mala-mutra*"—stool and urine

[2] *Mimamsa Sutras of Jaimini*, vol 1, pp. ccxxxiii–ccxl (pp. 233–240 of the introduction)

[3] Lecture by Srila Prabhupada on *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.7.8— 7 September 1976, Vrndavana

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