

## Krishna Kirti Dasa

### Women in ISKCON as Diksa-Gurus: The Controversy - part I of III

Last year, Mother Campaka (daughter of lady diksa-guru candidate Mother Urmila Dasi) interviewed Srila Bhakti Caitanya Giri Swami, who is a diksha-disciple of Srimati Krishnamayi Devi Dasi, herself a disciple of Srila Prabhupada's godbrother Srila B.R. Sridhara Swami. After Bhakti Caitanya Giri Swami speaks at length about the glories of Srimati Krishnamayi Devi, the subject turns to initiation (diksa) and the eligibility of women to chant the Brahma-gayatri.

At mark 8:03 ([hyperlink at end of this text](#)), Campaka asks about initiation:

[8:03] Campaka: So she gave only Harinam initiation?

BCGM: Yes.

C: Not gayatri mantra

B: [shakes head no]

C: And this was at the request . . . I mean devotees were requesting for initiation from her, and then you and also Jahnavi Didi and other godbrothers, godsisters encouraged her.

B: [shakes head yes]

C: Even though she was very humble, did not want to

B: [shakes head no] Did not want to . . .

C: At all.

B: She always thinking, "What Guru Maharaj likes, I must do."

C: Yeah.

B: "It is my 'insidely', it is my position." Only wants to do seva. It is her side. Always strictly follow what Guru Maharaja says. . .

C: How many disciples did she have?

B: [pauses] Seven or eight.

C: So did they take gayatri diksha from another guru?

B: Another guru.

C: OK. So only harinam from her.

B: Only harinam.

C: And was there a reason?

B: Because Krishnamayi not follow. When boy can take diksha, she not follow the Brahma-gayatri. Understand?

C: Hmmm.

B: Guru-mantra, Guru-gayatri, Gaura-mantra, Gaura-gayatri, Bija-mantra. . . there, but Brahma-gayatri not there. This way, this man is not . . . .

She also, only for take Harinam. After, you can choice, guru . . . .

C: And that's because ladies are not supposed to chant the Brahma-gayatri?

B: [shakes head no]

C: Only the Guru-gayatri, Gaura-gayatri. . .

B: [shakes head yes]: Guru-mantra, Guru-gayatri, Gaura-mantra, Gaura-gayatri, Bija-mantra, Kama-gayatri are allowed. And also when archan time you chant Krishna-mantra, Krishna-gayatri, and Rama-mantra--that also allowed. Brahma-gayatri not allowed for ladies.

C: I see. [10:23]

The rest of the interview is about the Brahma-gayatri and the eligibility of women to chant all the other gayatri mantras except the Brahma-gayatri. Later in the interview Bhakti Caitanya Giri Maharaja describes how no one in the Gaudiya Sampradaya gave Brahma-gayatri to anyone, whether man or woman--not Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, not Gaurakishore das Babaji, not Jahnvi Devi or Gangamata Goswamini. The Brahma-gayatri was first given by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, who never gave it to women. Maharaja notes that Vedic regulations prohibit women from chanting it, and he also notes that the Bhagavatam (11.17.22) also supports that prohibition. \*‘‘From a strong acharya,’’\* says Maharaja in the interview, \*‘‘he can allow to shudra, mleccha, but not at all to ladies.’’\*

But what about Srila Prabhupada? Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura did not allow women to chant the Brahma-gayatri, and Srimati Krishnamayi devi honored that principle. How was Srila Prabhupada justified in having given Brahma-gayatri to women? More about this will be written in subsequent parts to this, but just because Srila Prabhupada gave his female disciples the Brahma-gayatri does not mean he wanted them to initiate others with it. While Srila Prabhupada did say that qualified women could be mantra-gurus, which mantras they are eligible to pass on was not a topic that Srila Prabhupada himself addressed. As Srimati Krishna-mayi devi

herself showed, being a mantra-guru does not require that one pass on the Brahma-gayatri.

So, here is the controversy: In trying to answer the question of whether female diksa-gurus are eligible to chant and pass on the Brahma-gayatri to disciples, there is a more fundamental question about the role of the disciplic succession in helping us answer such a question: does it play a weak role, or does it play a strong role? This question must be answered first because the two answers one can give (weak or strong role) will produce different answers to the question of the eligibility of female diksha-gurus to pass on the Brahma-gayatri to disciples.

It is not an easy question to answer, either. For example, devotees who ascribe a weak role to the disciplic succession say that since whatever Srila Prabhupada does or says is necessarily in line with the disciplic succession, whatever he does that appears to depart from it should be considered a time, place, and circumstance adjustment meant to serve higher religious principles sanctioned by the disciplic succession. Because Srila Prabhupada's level of devotion is far above ours, we should just follow our acharya without question. This attitude is commonly encountered within our own society, ISKCON.

Unfortunately, this facile line of thought has produced some remarkably deviant ideas. "The important point is that although the ritvik system may be totally unique, it does not violate higher order sastric principles," says Krishnakant Desai, author of the *\*Final Order,\** "It is testament to Srila Prabhupada's genius that he was able to mercifully apply such sastric principles in new and novel ways according to time, place, and circumstance." The problem is not with what Srila Prabhupada did or said but with *\*what we think Srila Prabhupada meant by what he did our said.\** Like Krishna's own words in the Gita, Srila Prabhupada's words and acts have been the subject of innumerable attempts to hijack them to further other, mundane ambitions—*\*Mayavada-bhashya.\**

In this regard, Mother Campaka's interview with Bhakti Caitanya Giri Maharaja shows us that it is improper to disregard the disciplic succession when considering these questions. That is why Maharaja spoke at length about this topic. Indeed, he discusses the topic of women and eligibility to chant the Brahma-gayatri for the rest of the interview. Our specific

problem is that there is a strong tendency to favor a weak role for the disciplic succession in our understanding of Srila Prabhupada's words and actions. This gives us much more room to be creative with our application of Krishna consciousness in the name of "time, place, circumstance" but also makes us more susceptible to deviation.

\*References\*

Interview: Srila Bhakti Caitanya Giri Maharaja speaks about Krsnamayi

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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jO\\_BGYooKU&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jO_BGYooKU&feature=youtu.be)