

PHALINI DEVI DASI

On the Subject of Female Diksha Gurus

Phalini devi dasi

Dear Respected Vaisnavas,

Please accept my humble pranams. All glories to Srila Prabhupada and the great acaryas in our line.

Thanks to all who have posted thoughtful, articulate papers and comments on the topic of female diksha gurus. I have been in India preaching with my husband for the last six weeks and during that time was not able to keep up with the back-and-forth as the various comments emerged. But now after reaching USA I have found the time to read and re-read many articles and commentaries by devotees on both sides of the issue.

After traveling back and forth to India many times, living among the villagers and also interacting with high-class, educated, cultured, chaste ladies, observing them in their homes and temples as well as in public, I am further convinced that our Srila Prabhupada wanted us western women to learn how to behave like those women. Over the last thirty+ years of visiting India, I have seen powerful, effulgent women who use their native feminine power to uplift and promote their husbands. Such women are not only an inspiration to their husbands and families, but to men, women and children outside their families as well.

Women used to be satisfied remaining out of the spotlight. Remember back in the seventies how in every shop in Loi Bazaar you could not find one woman making sales or even assisting the merchant? They were nowhere to be seen. They were not even to be found serving Limcas to shoppers! Of course, just down the road in Delhi you could find women working in banks and cloth stores, but in small towns and villages, the ladies were in their homes, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children. They did not clamor to be seen. They were content to remain hidden.

Nowadays, though, as we walk the streets of Vrndavana, we see huge, loud, garish posters plastered on the sides of buildings advertising loose-haired, imposing, scary-looking female so-called gurus. Such women are not content to remain hidden, to quietly share the wisdom they have earned by their many years of selfless service as wives, mothers and grandmothers with their daughters, nieces, granddaughters and other lady friends and acquaintances. Those unattractive billboard gurudevīs are a far cry from such cultured ladies as those I have mentioned above.

Now I'm not implying that there are any matajis in our ISKCON who, if appointed as diksha gurus, would succumb to the temptation to wear their hair loose while sporting long, flowing orange robes and posing for photo ops. Allowing their faces to be blown up into larger-than-life-size to be forced upon every passer-by in the Holy Dhama is surely not likely to be tolerated by any proposed female diksha guru that the GBC might elect. They would surely present themselves more tastefully if chosen for the job.

Nonetheless, if FDG-ship becomes an institutional law in ISKCON, I recoil in apprehension at the thought of the can of worms that a generation of ISKCON gurudevīs could open up for far-down-the-road future generations of not-so-carefully chosen candidates for female dikṣha-guruship. What if in some future decade, some attractive young woman decides that she doesn't want to bother with the hassle of being married (after all, even though Srīla Prabhupada wanted all the ladies to be married, marriage is no doubt rife with difficulties), but would rather take on the service of dikṣha guru? One can just imagine what might happen if such a young gurudevī finds herself approached by a male disciple who is desperately trying to remain celibate but is having emotional difficulties due to overpowering sex drive. The wise men in our Movement who are practicing celibacy know what would happen. They know how difficult it is for men to remain celibate in this day and age, and how gullible and soft-hearted-to-a-fault a young woman can be.

Better that such a young woman surrender to Srīla Prabhupada's desire that all women be married. She can purify her heart by the method given by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself: to serve her husband according to stri-dharma and bear children according to the process of garbhadhana-samskāra, raising them as Vaiṣṇavas. Her husband can become the guru for that struggling brahmachārī, and she can assist her husband as his disciple's guru-mata. But if we create a precedent for future young women that dikṣha guruship is another choice for those women who are not satisfied to perform stri-dharma, there will be confusion in the minds of those women as to what their duties are.

I have personally found that if a woman is actually doing her duty, she has little time for anything outside her stri-dharma. "A man, he works from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done." The fact that women always have too much to do is the expert arrangement of the Lord, who planned it that way. We women, although expert at a lot of tasks, are sometimes lacking in discrimination and weak in our resolve. We can easily fall prey to temptations and bad association, and be led astray. We require not only protection (which means protection from danger as well as control and direction) from our fathers, husbands and sons, but also full-time engagement. Busy women, happily engaged in the service of their husbands and families in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, have little chance to get into trouble. In fact, they find their feminine power and loveliness as well as blessings from above increasing as they remain devoted to their protectors. If a woman follows her stri-dharma dutifully for the pleasure of the Lord, she is kept fully engaged, occupied in positive tasks, for her entire life up until the point of death. Again, this is the expert arrangement of the Lord for souls in women's bodies, and when women follow their dharma properly, the good effects of this perfect arrangement of the Lord are felt throughout human society.

If, by chance, a Vaiṣṇavī finds that she does have extra time beyond her normal duties, then she can engage in other services that support the strengthening of Kṛṣṇa consciousness among her family members, friends and others. If she feels inspired to do so, she can preach, distribute books, do public kīrtan and perform temple and deity services, as long as her outreach endeavors are authorized by her protector.

Conversely, women who wander outside the jurisdiction of their male protectors—even in thought and even with the best of intentions—can easily find their feminine power, effulgence, influence and chastity beginning to wane like the waning moon which gradually becomes totally dark at amavasya.

A diksha guru has to be powerful and independent. Women are empowered by Krsna when they are devoted and obedient to their male protectors. If they remain dependent on their protectors in Krsna consciousness, Krsna is so pleased with such women that He bestows great power on them (See: stories of Shubha and Shaibya in Five Divine Abodes by Jayadaya Goyandka, taken from Padma Purana).

When women act independently, they become a source of trouble to their husbands and others, and their shakti dwindles. (Ibid.)

Srila Prabhupada made it clear in the Bhagavatam how he wanted us women to behave. (For some basics, see SB 3.23.2, 7.11.25-29, and 9.3.10) We lady followers of Srila Prabhupada need to apply ourselves to learning how to behave properly until proper behavior becomes second-nature. This takes a lifetime of practice. Everything else will fall into place in the coming generations if we pioneers continue to strive toward LIVING our stri-dharma in Krsna consciousness. This is how we women can do our part in promoting daivi-varnasrama-dharma.

If, on the other hand, we introduce practices which are unprecedented in Vedic culture and in our sampradaya, we are indulging in risky business. There have been a few initiating gurudevīs in our line. I recognize that fact. Those female initiating gurus gave harinam initiation under the auspices of our guru-parampara during and around the time of Lord Caitanya. All but one of those ladies were acting under the protection and direction of their husbands or fathers, who were either Visnu-tattva or, as in Srinivasa Acarya's case, empowered representatives of Lord Caitanya.

As I have said before, more than female diksha gurus, the world desperately needs to see examples of ladies who are actually following the instructions for chaste women that Srila Prabhupada labored night after night to give us. If we refuse to perform our own duty according to the body we have earned by our very own prarabdha karma, if we think that the duties Lord Krsna has prescribed for us are somehow not sufficient preaching to bring souls to Krsna consciousness, if we feel that the different kinds of mentalities found in male and female genders and the duties ascribed to each are somehow irrelevant, outdated or inconsequential, if we feel that it is not enough to preach by example as a Krsna conscious wife, mother and grandmother, and if we choose instead to do another's duty, neglecting the intended social paradigm of the Lord, we take a risk, as Srila Prabhupada explains below.

“So you have to study first of all what is nature's law. You cannot surpass the nature's law. That is not possible. Prakrteh kriyamānāni gunāih karmāni sarvasah [Bg. 3.27]. Nature's law will go on. Best thing is, let the hand... the hand can typewrite, but if you say “No, the leg will typewrite,” that is not possible. Take hand's business, take leg's business, and combine them cooperatively. Then the body will be nice. If the leg says “Why hand will type? I shall type,” that's not possible. “Legs, all right, you walk, and hands that you type.” Then combine together. Then it will be nice. You cannot change the different capacities. There is God's law, nature's law. Let the man and woman combine together, live peacefully. The woman takes charge of the household affairs, the man may take charge of bringing money, and they meet

together, have Deity at home, together chant Hare Krsna. Where is the difficulty? That is unity. Combine together, working differently but for the same purpose, for pleasing Krsna, then you will become happy. That is equality. (emphasis mine) Unity in variety. That is wanted. Variety is enjoyment. Variety is not disturbing. Just like Krsna gave, all of them fruits, but variety. They are coming from the same source, earth, but Krsna is so intelligent—varieties of fruit, varieties of flowers, varieties of grain, varieties of brain. That is enjoyment. So, take instruction from Krsna. Why He is sending so many varieties? He could have given one fruit, the coconut. With great difficulty to chop it you can get out the water, no? There are so many nice fruits. Just see Krsna's intelligence. So Krsna has made the varieties. Why should you disturb? Let the variety be united, just like these varieties are united, and it looks nice, and if you eat that will be nice. Why you want to stop the variety? That is Mäyävädi. Equality does not mean to stop variety. All the varieties combine together for the same purpose. That is required. (emphasis mine) Is it not? One must know how to put the variety to look very (indistinct). If all the vases have only rose flowers it would not have been so beautiful. Rose is costly, but the leaves are not costly. But the leaves and the rose fit together, it becomes very good variety. That art is required, how to keep varieties together for Krsna consciousness, and look very beautiful. This art is known to the Krsna conscious person, not to the fools and rascals. Why Krsna has made varieties? Why you should try to change? That is lack of Krsna consciousness. When Krsna has made so many varieties there is some purpose. That one should understand. That is intelligence. You can organize these farms very nicely. Then this devil's workshop will stop." (Room conversation, 31/7/1975, New Orleans)

In the above quote, Srila Prabhupada says, "Equality does not mean to stop variety." We men and women are equal spiritually, but materially, we are not equal. According to the body we have earned by our karma, we are given prescribed duties. That is Krsna's expert arrangement. He has created the varieties of brains, bodies, mentalities and abilities within human society, and He has also created the relative varieties of work within human society. Let us learn what those prescribed duties are for each of the varnas and for women as a separate group, and let us perform those duties as perfectly as possible for the pleasure of Lord Sri Krsna who created varieties of brain, varieties of mentality, varieties of ability and varieties of work. In this way, we will feel equal and we will feel happy as well. "Combine together, working differently but for the same purpose, for pleasing Krsna, then you will become happy."

To fail to accept the varieties of engagement that Lord Krsna has given mankind based on the varieties of gender that Lord Krsna has created is dangerous, and can lead to offenses. It can even subtly pull us toward impersonalism. Maya can then cover our intelligence, with the unfortunate consequence that we may never understand Lord Krsna's and Srila Prabhupada's plan for human society.

Over the last few years since this topic of female diksha guruship came up, although we do have a few female gurus in our line in past history, I have leaned toward the side of avoiding institutionalizing diksha guruship for women. My attitude is based on five objections:

1. A diksha guru needs to possess a measure of independence in order to perform his service nicely. Women are never to be given independence. They are meant to be always dependent, always

protected. Consequently, they can't effectively perform the necessarily independent duties of a diksha guru.

2. The diksha guru takes on the karmic reactions of his disciples. Husbands have to suffer the results of their wives' sins, therefore how can a woman take on the karmic reactions of someone else (a disciple) without passing them on to her husband?

3. Institutionalizing diksha guruship, even for males, what to speak of for females, is not shastric.

4. Traditionally, we see only male gurus giving diksha. The women in our line who initiated others during the time of Lord Caitanya were most likely giving harinam initiation, which is not actually diksha.

5. A woman cannot receive a sacred thread, so how can she give a sacred thread?

Someone objected to my stance, saying, "Well, not all elderly women in ISKCON have husbands or sons who can protect them, so what are they then to do? Who will protect them?" My answer is that instead of desiring or clamoring to take on a recognized position of leadership within ISKCON—which diksha guruship within ISKCON has come to denote—they should instead find a way to live quietly with other women, in a secluded place, as Srila Prabhupada recommended to Yamuna and Dinatarini to do, producing their own food and keeping a cow or two.

If they prefer not to live on a farm, then they should find someone, a Godbrother, a Godnephew, or a sadhu who is sympathetic with and supportive of Srila Prabhupada's teachings, who is willing to protect them and engage them in devotional service that is appropriate for ladies. Engagements that are compatible with the psycho-physical nature of women are many. Some of the services ladies can render are: teaching girls how to cook, sew, spin, weave, clean, decorate, care for babies and small children, perform deity seva, sing, dance and play musical instruments and serve a husband. Such women can also render many other services, including match-making, astrological, medical, counseling or child-care services.

For the rest of us who have husbands to protect us, we should submit ourselves to their leadership and promote them, encouraging them to become pure devotees. If they are brahminically inclined, we should encourage them to eventually take on the heavy responsibility of accepting disciples. After all, the wife benefits through the husband's spiritual progress. To be the wife of an initiating guru is a great privilege and heavy burden of love. It bestows auspiciousness on a woman by conferring yet another type of motherhood on her (guru-patni is one of the seven mothers). In this way, we not only invite great blessings upon ourselves and our husbands, but also upon our husband's disciples, our children, grandchildren and other Vaisnavas in our sphere of influence.

I have said it many times before, but I'll say it again: the world desperately needs to see Krsna conscious couples who are solid in their commitment to each other and to following their respective roles according to shastra. Srila Prabhupada's mission will be strengthened by the example of long-standing devotee marriages, especially those couples who follow their dharma as laid out by our founder-acarya. Most of the people in the world are householders, and they need to see that we Hare Krishnas follow

our dharma, that we are still chanting Hare Krishna after many decades and that we couples are still together after all the challenges that Maya devi and the Personality of Kali have thrown at us.

“It is not that woman cannot be äcärya. Generally, they do not become. In very special case. But Jähnavä-devi was accepted as, but she did not declare.” (Room Conversation, 29/6/72 San Diego)
Srimati Jahnava devi’s service as successor to Her Lord is time and time again cited as reasonable evidence that ISKCON should adopt the practice of naming women as diksha gurus. Two important points are made by Srila Prabhupada in regard to Srimati Jahnava devi:

1. One point is that “She did not declare.” I repeat, “SHE DID NOT DECLARE.” The quiet service of Srimati Jahnava devi is a far cry from the billboard gurudevīs plastered all over Vrndavana who have no qualms about declaring that they are quite available for darshan and, by the way, looking for followers. Jahnava Mata bore the cross of carrying on Her Husband’s preaching mission because She was intended to do so by Sri Nityananda Rama, the Supreme Lord, not because She desired to enjoy the name, fame and the perks of being a declared gurudevi. She is simply Lord Nitai’s fully surrendered maidservant and that is why He chose Her to do the job. She is an expansion of Sri Laksmi-devi Herself.

2. The other point Srila Prabhupada made in regard to Srimati Jahnava devi being the acarya for our sampradaya is that lady acaryas are VERY RARE. So we should keep it that way. We should not bring criticism upon our ISKCON Movement by institutionalizing female diksha guruship, nor should we create artificial adhikara for our ladies by pronouncing them fit to offer diksha.

Srila Prabhupada observed that his female followers were happy because they were cleansing the temple and cooking very nicely. When confronted with the question, “Women today want the same rights as men. How can they be satisfied?” Srila Prabhupada replied:

“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 Prabhupäda.” They never say. This is artificial. (emphasis mine) So 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, 27/5/74, Rome)

Pranams and gratitude again to all those who have so far contributed to the discussion.

Your aspiring servant,

Phalini devi dasi (ACBSP)

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Comments • [comment feed]

1Unregistered

Thank you to respected Phalini Mataji for really important words, we need grandmothers like thirsty man is in want of water on a desert. A lot devotees a specially those who live on a villages repeatedly desire to have grandmothers around. Not due want of diksa initiation but because of rising kids, helping with relationship with wife, wise advises in this regard and so on.. Now we have some generations and we know well why most of us does not have the grandmothers around (I mean they want to feed our kids with meat or whatever). I personally would really appreciate if older female devotees would go around and provided us younger with such kind of support. Not coming like supreme female power showing like Srila Prabhupada made no distinction between man and woman etc. After such kind of visitors it takes almost three weeks to pacify disturbances created (between women and men). If just normal person would come, humble, not showing up and just helping by her long life experiences with relationships, marital crisis or community relationships.. It is just boring to read years and years discussions on how we should not address woman "mataji" but "prabhu" or that woman is the same like man. Year by year. Kids growing, time is running, family crisis coming.. Can all these writings help a man to understand his wife when she is dissatisfied? No.

Phalini Mataji have risen one important point that more a woman try to become independent more it is difficult for a man to perform his duty and finally whole family shall suffer a lost.

your humble servant Mahaksa Das

Comment posted by Mahaksa Das (KCS) on December 5th, 2012

2Unregistered

Mataji,

I would like to express how I feel. This is the question, "How will this change make the ultimate meaning of life clearer to devotees". If it will confuse it, then it is the wrong change, if it makes it clearer it is the right change. We are dependent on the wisdom of the GBC to make these decisions, and whether they are right or wrong, Krishna will protect us if we surrender to Srila Prabhupada and serve his movement. I put my bottom line at the top, but I will go on because, as a human, I need to formulate my own conclusions.

I can appreciate your attitude that women should not be powerful and independent, as you say a Guru needs to be, but does a guru really need to be independent to be powerful? Isn't the most powerful thing to engage in one's duty while cultivating Krishna Consciousness? Isn't one who is doing this, whether they are a vāsya, sudra, women, or whatever, setting the best example and therefore being the most powerful spiritually? Why would one need to change from this perfect example after becoming a diksha Guru? I think in ISKCON we consider that a Guru should be in charge materially but a sudra is not in charge or independent, yet Lord Caitanya emphatically declares they can be guru's.

You say you worry about women being appointed Gurus- no one in ISKCON has been appointed guru since around 1987. If someone is inspired to take initiation from someone who is not yet a guru the perspective guru simply needs obtain a no objection vote. Anyway, I see that this assumption- that climbing the social ladder towards power and Independence is an integral part of being a guru- is deeply embedded in our thinking. Maybe I am unrealistic to think that is going to change. And I do not know if women gurus will move things away from that change or towards it. But that is the change that is needed to save this movement. We need to be able to distinguish the ultimately holy act of helping someone become Krishna Conscious with any type of material activity. There is nothing manly about being a Vāsana Guru. If one thinks there is they have a hellish mentality. A pot washer might be much more devoted and qualified to be a guru than the Temple President. We do not have to climb the social ladder to become inwardly elevated.

Comment posted by Sita Rama dasa 1962 on December 6th, 2012

3Unregistered

It is not an issue of whether or not women should initiate disciples - as if the initiation process began with the guru and not with the disciple. The process of initiation begins with demand first, not with supply. The process begins at the grass-roots level - from the disciple. Devotee "X" feels inspired by devotee "Y" and asks devotee "Y" if devotee "Y" can give him or her initiation. Not the other way around.

In ISKCON today, there is a growing number of devotees who feel inspired by a devotee woman (or devotee women). The question therefore is not whether or not the GBC should appoint women gurus. The question, rather, is whether the GBC should allow those devotees to take initiation from a woman. It's a subtle but important distinction. Just as the GBC has no right to dictate to anyone to take initiation from someone in particular, the GBC has no right to forbid someone to take initiation from somebody solely on the basis of that person being a woman. That's up to the individual who wants to take initiation. That's not up to the GBC. The only duty the GBC has is to make sure that this person - be he a

woman or a man - is chanting 16 rounds, knows the Gaudiya philosophy (in particular the teachings of Prabhupada) accurately, and is able to present Krishna Consciousness on a firm scriptural basis. That's basically as far as the GBC can (and should) go. The rest is a question of private life. The rest is a question of personal choice. The rest is a question of the heart.

The crux of the issue is a question of accommodating or not accommodating the request of the aspiring disciple. If that disciple wants to take initiation from a woman, that's his or her personal choice. Is his or her chosen guru following the standard practice of Krishna Consciousness (16 rounds, 4 regs, etc...)? If the answer is yes, the GBC cannot deny the request of the aspiring disciple because his or her chosen guru happens to have a female body.

Varnashrama considerations is a private matter; a matter of the home. It is a matter of how individuals want to live their lives in the privacy of their household. The GBC has no business meddling with that. The GBC's duty is simply to give the green light or not - solely on grounds of spiritual qualification. The rest - whether a woman is the bread-winner in a household or whether she eats the remnants of her husband after having served him submissively, is up to that family, not the GBC.

Chandrashekhara acharya dasa

Comment posted by bcsdasa on December 6th, 2012

4Unregistered

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

These are finally some words of wisdom. Quite simply put; ISKCON needs to start fulfilling the desire of the founder acarya, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and ESTABLISH SOCIETIES BASED ON VARNASHASHRAMA . This cannot be done suddenly but we should work towards it.

So many devotees claim to be followers of of Srila Prabhupada or ISKCON and yet this instruction has been totally blacked out from our long or medium term goal as a society and even from lectures. We are not pure devotees and so we cannot ignore bodily designations. A man, brahmachari, brahmin, vaisya, woman etc everyone needs to follow their own prescribed duties.

For a balanced society a well balanced family unit is important. Women are required to perform duties which only they can do properly such as child birth, inculcating good spiritual and moral values to children at a young age, seeing that the atmosphere at home is balanced and conducive to spiritual practice for the whole family by proper and timely prasadam, clean environment etc. These are not easy tasks and require training mostly from an early age. This is missing in a very big way in ISKCON, although to a lesser degree in India where the cultural background has saved the situation.

Today western society (and increasingly other societies now also) is experiencing moral decadence with Teenage pregnancies (out of marriage), incest, higher than 50% divorce rate, suicides and disillusionment among the youth, crime etc all due to the broken family unit. There are some things you can only learn at home and only from a qualified mother which will affect the rest of your life.

If women are now also made into diksha gurus who will carry out those roles in society meant for them? We are not saying that women are not advanced or can't do these duties. We are just saying that everyone has a different role to play to make society whole and complete. This is a crucial point in ISKCON's history. We have to make decisions that will create stable and nurturing society otherwise what will we preach to the materialists?

Your servant

Comment posted by Murari Das on December 6th, 2012

5Unregistered

In #3 Chandrashekhara acharya Prabhu wrote:

“Varnashrama considerations is a private matter; a matter of the home. It is a matter of how individuals want to live their lives in the privacy of their household.”

Excuse me Prabhu but this makes no sense. Since when did Varnashrama dharma end at the doorway? Varnashrama dharma is meant to be practiced everywhere not just in the closet.

To illustrate, the Bhagavad Gita was not spoken in the privacy of Arjuna's home away from the prying eyes of the public, but in the very public area of the battlefield of Kurukshetra. This is where Lord Krsna explained in brief about Varnashrama dharma and instructed Arjuna to perform his prescribed duty as a Kshatriya, one of the varnas in Varnashrama dharma, by doing battle for the Lord's pleasure. That battle was not a game played on Xbox in Arjuna's livingroom but in a real battlefield. So Arjuna was instructed to publicly perform Daiva Varnashrama Dharma by the Lord.

We are forced to conclude that Lord Krsna's instructions are just contrary to your statement.

Comment posted by Balakrsna das on December 6th, 2012

6Basu Ghosh Das

More on Varnashram dharma, by Srila Prabhupada, wherein what he writes supports what Phalini Mataji wrote, and negates the view that varnashram is unimportant:

Bhagavad-gita As It Is 16.7

pravrittim ca nivrittim ca

jana na vidur asurah

na saucam napi cacaro

na satyam teshu vidyate

TRANSLATION

Those who are demoniac do not know what is to be done and what is not to be done. Neither cleanliness nor proper behavior nor truth is found in them.

PURPORT

In every civilized human society there is some set of scriptural rules and regulations which is followed from the beginning. Especially among the Aryans, those who adopt the Vedic civilization and who are known as the most advanced civilized peoples, those who do not follow the scriptural injunctions are supposed to be demons. Therefore it is stated here that the demons do not know the scriptural rules, nor do they have any inclination to follow them. Most of them do not know them, and even if some of them know, they have not the tendency to follow them. They have no faith, nor are they willing to act in terms of the Vedic injunctions. The demons are not clean, either externally or internally. One should always be careful to keep his body clean by bathing, brushing teeth, shaving, changing clothes, etc. As far as internal cleanliness is concerned, one should always remember the holy names of God and chant Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. The demons neither like nor follow all these rules for external and internal cleanliness.

As for behavior, there are many rules and regulations guiding human behavior, such as the Manu-samhita, which is the law of the human race. Even up to today, those who are Hindu follow the Manu-samhita. Laws of inheritance and other legalities are derived from this book. Now, in the Manu-samhita it is clearly stated that a woman should not be given freedom. That does not mean that women are to be kept as slaves, but they are like children. Children are not given freedom, but that does not mean that they are kept as slaves. The demons have now neglected such injunctions, and they think that women should be given as much freedom as men. However, this has not improved the social condition of the world.

Comment posted by Basu Ghosh Das on December 7th, 2012

7Unregistered

Balakrishna prabhu, then tell me how you would actually institutionalize what you are talking about?

How would you enforce, on a strict institutional level, that - say - all women wear a red bindi and bangles, that they serve their husbands as per the instructions of the Bhagavatam, and all other details of varnashrama dharma? More importantly, how would you enforce such institutional "rules?"

You seem to confuse theology and institutional policy-making. Big difference.

Should gurus and leaders in ISKCON popularize varnashrama principles as described in the Bhagavatam? Of course. Are they the best principles for human society for follow? Of course. But that's not the point. The point is that there exists a world (both ISKCON members and non-ISKCON members) of persons who are financially independent of ISKCON. In the face of this, what is the role of the GBC, first and foremost? What is the first and foremost goal of Lord Chaitanya's Sankirtana movement? To establish the chanting of the holy names so that people can become pure lovers of God in this life and go to the spiritual world when they leave their bodies. Am I correct or wrong?

Given this fact, what are the absolutely essential practices, without which one simply cannot attain this goal? Chanting the holy names (16 rounds ideally), following the 4 regs. It is no coincidence that these were the only two core vows that Prabhupada made his followers take at initiation. Can one go back to Godhead without them? No. However, can one go back to Godhead while chanting 16 rounds, following the 4 regs and living a modern life in which one does not necessarily follow varnashrama rules? Yes. This may not be the best way to live a happy Krishna conscious life, but the goal justifies the means: going back to Godhead at the end of this life.

Therefore I again make the point that the GBC's duty should be to sift out what is not absolutely necessary for going back to Godhead and establish institutional policies about only those things that are indeed indispensable for attaining that goal. The rest - I still affirm - is ultimately a personal choice of financially independent householders who want to practice Krishna Consciousness however they want, within the perimeters of the indispensable core elements that the GBC should indeed enforce. Choosing a woman as a guru is a personal choice.

Comment posted by bcsdasa on December 7th, 2012

8Akruranatha

Murari [who BTW makes some very good points which I appreciate very much] asks:

"If women are now also made into diksha gurus who will carry out those roles in society meant for them?"

I think this question raises the false spectre that if some women serve as diksa guru then no women will do anything else.

The same kind of objection is often raised by materialistic people about devotees in general: "What if everyone became Hare Krishnas? Who would keep the farms and factories and stores and government running? We would all starve, or become like stone age savages."

We can answer these objections in two ways:

First of all, not everyone is going to abandon their ordinary duties to become Hare Krishnas. We can preach with all our might that people should give up their materialistic lives of useless activity and just sit down and chant Hare Krishna, but most people will ignore us. Cars and trucks will keep barreling down the highways. The economy is not going to fall apart. And if more people did chant Hare Krishna, the atmosphere would become so nice, the demigods would be so satisfied, everything would go on much more nicely and auspiciously. (Maybe this is the cure for global warming they should be talking about in Doha)

But secondly, becoming a Hare Krishna does not mean one has to stop doing his mundane duties. A devotee can go work in an office or factory and still be a first-class devotee. It takes 1.5 or 2 hours to chant 16 rounds, whereas the average American spends more than twice that time watching TV, playing video games, drinking in bars, and doing many other unproductive and counterproductive things.

Someone might object, "Maybe a rank and file devotee can have a job, but not a spiritual master." It may be true that one who has many disciples would have too much demand on his or her time to take care of ordinary duties, but it is not inconceivable to me that a devotee who has some good time management skills would be able to train some disciples and also find time to earn a living, raise a family or, in the case of a woman, attend to household duties, care for the husband and kids, etc.

We have this stereotyped concept that a guru in ISKCON must be a famous, globetrotting sannyasi, but why can't a guru be a humble family man (or woman?) A dutiful father or mother should be guru to children, so why can't he or she take on a qualified disciple or two from outside the family?

Comment posted by Akruranatha on December 7th, 2012

9Unregistered

I don't see how it would obstruct a woman's occupational duties to guide a younger devotee, especially a younger woman, in her spiritual life. Guiding a person which is under her care is, after all, a natural duty for a woman. If she is healthily married and well-situated spiritually, then would it not be advantageous for the aggressive outward-spreading of Krsna consciousness in Kali yuga?

Comment posted by Vrndasundaridd on December 7th, 2012

10Unregistered

Basu Ghosh Prabhu,

It is a fact known to sociologists that an overabundance of marriageable aged women compared to marriageable aged men precipitated the sexual revolution of the 1960's. It has happened in previous centuries in Europe. It is called a female marriage squeeze. There is a marriage market. At first, when there are more women available, marriage rates go up because a man can get a good deal. Then men come to realize they can have sex without a commitment at all. Women are bluffed into thinking that they can be equal by also remaining unmarried and having numerous sexual partners. But there is more personal expense in the sex act for women than for men so women are exploited. Some current feminists acknowledge this and distinguish between fair and equal. To be fair we must acknowledge that the woman is disadvantaged in free sex relationships. Not marrying women and instead just having sex with them is exploitation and only a really twisted person is too dull to understand this.

But what has this got to do with women becoming diksha gurus?

Comment posted by Sita Rama dasa 1962 on December 8th, 2012

11Unregistered

Phalini wrote, "Traditionally, we see only male gurus giving diksha. The women in our line who initiated others during the time of Lord Caitanya were most likely giving harinam initiation, which is not actually diksha."

Traditionally, there are many examples of women giving diksa. Phalini's suggestion that women who initiated during Mahaprabhu's time only gave harinama, not mantra diksa, is nothing more than speculation, as she admits by qualifying it with "most likely." On what basis would anyone make such an assertion? Such guesswork doesn't help her argument; rather, it weakens it.

In fact, there is no evidence that women initiating disciples during or subsequent to Mahaprabhu's time gave only harinama. In fact, examining Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's diksa patra shows three women, aside from Jahnava Thakurani, in the third, fourth, and fifth positions back from Bhaktivinoda Thakura. These women certainly gave their disciples both sacred mantra and transcendental knowledge.

I don't want readers to think that I submit this to denigrate Phalini in any way. My family was friends with hers when we lived in California in the '80s, and I remember her and her husband fondly as dedicated servants of our beloved spiritual master. However, I haven't seen anyone address this point in her argument yet, and I think it's a mistake to let it go unquestioned.

There is considerably more to say on this issue, and I may do so soon, when I have some time.

Comment posted by Swami B. A. Ashram on December 8th, 2012

12Unregistered

@ Chandrashekara Acarya dasa re 7

Your response has no bearing and is irrelevant to the comment I made. In your original comment you said that VAD should only be practiced in the confines of the home. I showed why this is wrong, that it should be practiced everywhere.

Now to save face you divert to a different topic, which has nothing to do with the original topic. By this method no conclusion can be arrived at.

Comment posted by Balakrsna das on December 9th, 2012

13Unregistered

In # 11 HH Swami B.A Ashram wrote:

"Traditionally, there are many examples of women giving diksa."

This should be changed to: "Traditionally, there are many examples of women giving diksa in apasampradayas."

Comment posted by Balakrsna das on December 9th, 2012

14Unregistered

Balakrsna prabhu, I humbly ask you to refrain from making personal attacks (or at least insults, if the word 'attack' is too strong) on others who post in this thread (like myself). You do not know me

personally, nor do I know you. Hence for you to publicly state your opinion that I am trying to “save face” by writing xyz is, I think, not befitting a person who is well behaved. So please, for the sake of a dispassionate and intelligent conversation, please modulate your words and tone of voice a little bit.

Thank you.

Your servant,

Chandrashekhara acharya dasa

Comment posted by bcsdasa on December 9th, 2012

15Unregistered

Basu Ghosh Prabhu,

Prabhu, I think I need to clarify my question in comment #10. Regarding Srila Prabhupada’s statement:

That does not mean that women are to be kept as slaves, but they are like children. Children are not given freedom, but that does not mean that they are kept as slaves. The demons have now neglected such injunctions, and they think that women should be given as much freedom as men. However, this has not improved the social condition of the world.

I understand Srila Prabhupada’s comment as follows. During the 1960-70’s there was a cliché, “The marriage trap”. Marriage was depicted as a means by which men took advantage of women. Women should be free from this and everyone should just have sex without any commitment. Marriage, which actually minimizes exploitation of women, was considered wrong, and free sex which maximizes exploitation was considered more ethical. Srila Prabhupada compares women to children. If parents do not fulfill their obligations, under the pretext of allowing children to be free, this is demonic because when children are set free, to compete for their livelihood with adults, they are physically disadvantaged. Similarly, due to physical qualities, the woman gets pregnant and the man doesn’t, so freeing women from marriage leaves them at a disadvantage. Instead of a man supporting his wife and children, the woman must support herself and her children and compete in a world where she is paid less than men. The demons present this as more fair to women and low class men consider it a great idea.

I am open to other ways to understand Srila Prabhupada’s comment. But I find it hard to see this as meaning that women should not have the freedom to become Guru’s. If allowing women to be Gurus is demonic and twisted, Srila Prabhupada would have explicitly stated it should never be done. In contrast to this he says he wants all his, “sons and daughters” to be Gurus. And while he was present he encouraged women to take shelter of married life, but also gave them the freedom/duty to go out and sell books on the street all day long, the freedom to live in Temples, and worship the Deities in the Temple. Women were not given these freedoms previously and Srila Prabhupada was criticized by those who said, “This has never been done”. Those that criticized SrilaPrabhupada did not know what should

or should not be done. If someone has a reason why women should not be Guru I am interested, but I find most to be erroneous.

Comment posted by Sita Rama dasa 1962 on December 10th, 2012

16Kesava Krsna dasa

We need to differentiate between what truly represents our parampara, as Srila Bhaktisiddhanta and his disciple, Srila Prabhupada revealed to us, as opposed to emulating what happened in parallel paramparas.

For instance, we do not accept the diksa guru of Srila Visvanatha Cakravarthi Thakur (Srila Krishnacaraṇa) as part of our definitive parampara, though he belonged to a line going back to Srila Narattoma Dasa Thakur:

Lokanatha

|

Narottama

|

Ganganarayana

|

krishnacaraṇa

|

Radharamana (alias Sri Rama)

(son & disciple)

|

Visvanatha

This precedent also applies to the lineage of Vipina Behari. If we try to emulate what these parallel lineages do, isn't there a possibility of missing out on the essence presented by our original parampara?

In an objective way, I am asking, are there any females in our definitive parampara? Are we willing to emulate the deeds of parallel lineages in order to placate the desire for lady guruship, and on the plea of 'preaching?'

If, as some say, that 'preaching dharma' takes precedent and that we can adapt to modern times – which is a meagre occidental blip in the expanse of human civilisation – then doesn't preaching mean to represent our definitive parampara? After all, we all claim to represent it...

If we become the first, since the dawn of creation to add female names to our definitive parampara list, who will be responsible for this? This is where we have to decipher the pros and cons of Srila Prabhupada's teachings and apply them in faithfulness to our parampara that we represent, with consistency.

Again, considering the Exceptional rarity of lady gurus in recent history, and whose names are not on our definitive parampara list, can anyone convince me how, by adding names of present "to-be" female gurus will ensure definitive parampara consistency, unless we wish to go the way of a parallel lineage?

Is this being too sparse in allowing parampara mercy to flow, or is being cautious in ensuring that the same mercy does flow the definitive way?

Ys Kesava Krsna Dasa.

Comment posted by Kesava Krsna dasa on December 10th, 2012

17Unregistered

In comment #15 Candrashekharacarya Prabhu takes offense to the following sentence:

Now to save face you divert to a different topic, which has nothing to do with the original topic. By this method no conclusion can be arrived at.

He believes that my faculties of perception are all wrong, that I have to intimately know him for years to be able to make such a judgement. That would be like saying that if someone took something of mine without my permission I would have to intimately know them for years before I could call them a thief. I do not have to know the person to call them a thief because their pattern of behavior matches that of thieves since the recorded annals of history.

In a similar vein, I have been in discussions on different fora either as a participant or viewer long enough to know why people change topics when they are losing. I do not need to intimately know them to understand their motivations for what they do because it is a common tactic of certain types of people who are losing the debate and for the same motive I mentioned.

Having said that I will rephrase my last sentence:

"Now you divert to a different topic, which has nothing to do with the original topic. By this method no conclusion can be arrived at."

This is not FB, here you will meet people who will strongly challenge your opinions. Therefore I ask you to refrain from insulting the intelligence of the readers and myself by resorting to red herrings.

Comment posted by Balakrsna das on December 11th, 2012

18Unregistered

My dear Mother Phalini Mataji,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada. All glories to you.

I just wanted to thank you for writing this wonderful text full of deep realizations and coming straight from the heart, you must be directly inspired by paramatma.

While the men who are commenting on this text argue about points of sastra and logic, the women in my ladies sangha all agreed with what you wrote because of our direct experience of what it means to have a female form. Many of us have experience of what happens when we go against our nature (dharma) and try to be like men. We lose our femininity that is so pleasing to Lord Krsna, and we don't do a good a job of being a man either. So it is a lose-lose situation.

May Srimati Radharani and Her beloved Lord Krsna bless you with many more years so that you will inspire us with more of your writings and hopefully personal association.

Your humble servant

Mohana Mohini devi dasi

Comment posted by Mohana Mohini dd on December 11th, 2012

19sita-pati

“Women used to be satisfied remaining out of the spotlight.”

Yes! And black people used to know their place too. What is the world coming to? Kali Yuga!

Comment posted by sita-pati on December 12th, 2012

20Basu Ghosh Das

Atmavidya Prabhu requested me to explain why we reject Bipin Bihari Goswami (BBG), the so-called diksha guru of Bhaktivinoda Thakur (BT) and the line gurus who came before him, wherein several names of women are mentioned.

There is an argument, it was the line of thought of one of the Thakur's son, Lalita Prasad, that BT never rejected BBG. However, it is well known amongst the followers of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur (SBSST), that BT had in fact given up the association of BBG and (informally) took shelter/shiksha from Srila Jagannath Das Babaji.

The logic here is that SBSST clearly rejected brahmanism by birthright only. BBG and his line believe that only the son of a brahmin or goswami can be a brahmin or goswami.

Also, Srila Prabhupada (SP) and SBSST do not mention BBG and his predecessor gurus ANYWHERE in their writings.

Certain ISKCON devotees who associated with Lalita Prasad became influenced by the concept of guru/brahmin/goswami by birthright and at least one of them is a very scholarly and communicative person. They read his writings and they have borrowed this lineage of gurus to support the concept of female diksha guru.

Generally, the concept of caste birthright has been abused to protect one and one's family status in "strict Hindu society". The "upper castes", the brahmins, kshatriyas, and vaishyas, over a period of time, became degraded abused this upper caste birthright status to exploit others. Therefore the British condemned the "caste system", that we know from Bhagavad-gita is the varnashram system that Lord Krishna Himself established (vide Bg 4.13).

In his purport to SB 1.16.31, SP wrote:

"When God-made varnasrama-dharma, which is strictly meant for developing animal consciousness into human consciousness and human consciousness into godly consciousness, is broken by advancement of foolishness, the whole system of peaceful and progressive life is at once disturbed. In the age of Kali, the first attack of the venomous snake strikes against the God-made varnasrama-dharma, and thus a person properly qualified as a brahmana is called a sudra, and a sudra by qualification is passing as a brahmana, all on a false birthright claim. To become a brahmana by a birthright claim is not at all bona fide, although it may be a fulfillment of one of the conditions."

Comment posted by Basu Ghosh Das on December 12th, 2012

21Basu Ghosh Das

@ Sita Ram Das - 1. The aim of posting the quotation, Bg 16.7, above, was to support the concept that we have duties according to varna and ashram, and gender as well. The duty of women is to be grihini, housewife. Srila Prabhupada (SP) was "lenient" with Western women, in view of his oft repeated observation that men and women "freely mix" in the West. As you should be aware by studying SP's stated views on women, he often mentions that women should cook, clean, etc., i.e. household chores/engagements.

Becoming a diksha guru is incongruent to these duties. Further, an intrinsic part of diksha is conferring the sacred thread. As per numerous statements of SP in his purports, i.e. CC Madhya 24.330, etc., etc.

SP specifically commented in SB 4.12.32 — as I'm sure you are well aware, that "being a woman... Suniti could not be Dhruva's diksha guru.

Phalini Mataji very nicely explained this in her essay. She quoted numerous statements of SP from his purports to support her contention(s).

The reason that there is any support whatsoever for female diksha guru is that egalitarian thought is so popular in the Western world.

If there was a clear basis in the vedic literatures for female diksha guru, then I for one would accept it!

However, the opposite is the case.

For example, at the Sandipani ashram at Avanti, Sandipani Muni is the guru, both shiksha and diksha, of boys, i.e. Krishna, Balaram and Sudama. His wife is mentioned, but no mention of her being the guru. Guru patni — one of the seven mothers (the real mother, the wife of a teacher or spiritual master, the wife of a king, the wife of a brahmana, the cow, the nurse and the mother earth), but not the guru herself.

There are so many such examples in vedic literatures: Atri and Anasuya, etc., etc.

Diksha means conferring the sacred thread, and since woman cannot wear the sacred thread, they cannot be the diksha guru. Even shiksha guru, at least for the general public, as we see in the case of Jahnava Mata, is “very rare”. She instructed and lectured from behind a curtain - never revealing herself to the public.

Comment posted by Basu Ghosh Das on December 12th, 2012

22Basu Ghosh Das

@ Sitaram Prabhu, comment #18. Prabhu, your speculation — indirectly, admittedly — that Prabhupada wrote his comments to Bg 16.7 based on circumstances & prevalent social psychology in the Western World, is, just that: speculation. I contend that his comments were based on the vedic outlook — as instituted by Lord Krishna (Bg 4.13) that humans have duties in accordance with their gunas, karmas and gender.

To repeat what I wrote in my comment on your comment #10, SP had a definite outlook on stri-dharma - the duties of women, but he did not impose that during his lifetime within ISKCON, due to his observations on Western life. So he was “lenient”, but he did not, as some would like us to believe “over-ride” vedic teachings.

We should understand that Western thought is contaminated by the lower modes of nature, and atheism.

Therefore it IS demoniac, as SP wrote, numerous times. The subtle influence of Western thought has crept into ISKCON, and that is why the issue of female diksha guru is being made a “prestige issue”, by devotees who are indeed influenced by the egalitarian value system prevalent in modern society!

Prabhu, you obviously seem to be in favor of female diksha gurus. Please present the evidence from vedic literatures that there is a provision of females diksha gurus. Kindly cite the examples of these female gurus in Srimad Bhagavatam, Mahabharata, Valmiki Ramayana, the Puranas, etc., to enlighten us in this regard.

What can't a women take sannays? Why can't a woman be conferred the sacred thread? And why can't a man bear a child (why weren't men created equal to women and have wombs)?

The answer should be clear. It is that there is gender distinction in human society.

And there are distinctions made between human beings that SP and vedic thought — and law — accept.

But we don't want to accept them, because Western thought teaches "we perceive that all men [and women] were created equal". That is the egalitarian viewpoint.

The fruit of that viewpoint is the "free mixing of men and women in society" that leads to the situation you've described in your comments. Immorality is accepted as morality. Homosexual marriage is now being recognized in many states in the USA, and many countries in Europe, and yet SP clearly condemned homosexuality as "insanity". At present, society is being misled by atheistic leaders & their atheistic ideology. Should we follow that? Kindly consider.

Comment posted by Basu Ghosh Das on December 12th, 2012

23Akruranatha

It may just be that there is a valid distinction between initiating gurus and important acaryas. Maybe there were many bona-fide female spiritual masters in Gaudiya Vaisnava history who were competent to initiate devotees into the sampradaya, but very few who had the stature of great acaryas like Jahnava-devi. We have many male initiating gurus in ISKCON but how many would Sridhar Maharaja recognize as important acaryas?

It seems to have been a mistake in the 1980s for ISKCON to have tended to equate the function of serving as diksa guru in ISKCON with the exalted stature of great, important acaryas like Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur Prabhupada.

Of course individual disciples will accept their gurus as master and lord of their lives. Also, within our society, the feelings of the disciples of different gurus should be respected and accommodated: we should not insult or deride their gurus. In fact, we should not insult or deride any Vaisnava.

But we should not promote a culture in which every devotee who has a disciple is supposed to be seen and treated by everyone as being on a far, far different platform, as one of the rare, few, holiest people to ever walk the earth.

For one thing, we would be perpetuating an untruth. For another, we would thereby call into question (by comparison) the genuine, special character of the rare, great acaryas like the six goswamis and Bhaktivinode Thakur. For another, we would force people against their conscience to worship those in whom their faith has not arisen (and they would become alienated from our society, unwilling to live a lie). For another, we would perpetuate abuse and mistreatment of general devotees by enforcing an artificial hierarchy that exalts a few to the position of highly-privileged despots. For another, we could psychologically and spiritually harm those who became accustomed to receiving such deference on false pretenses.

These seem to be among the lessons we learned under the zonal acarya system. Being a guru in ISKCON is a responsible service that one carries out on the order of Srila Prabhupada and Lord Caitanya, to initiate devotees into the sampradaya and help train them in bhakti yoga. It is not a kind of high office

giving one special honor and privilege in society generally. There are also dangers lurking in the psychology of dominance and authority that we have to remain aware of and cautions about.

Comment posted by Akruranatha on December 12th, 2012

24Unregistered

Akruranatha said:

It may just be that there is a valid distinction between initiating gurus and important acaryas. Maybe there were many bona-fide female spiritual masters in Gaudiya Vaisnava history who were competent to initiate devotees into the sampradaya, but very few who had the stature of great acaryas like Jahnava-devi. We have many male initiating gurus in ISKCON but how many would Sridhar Maharaja recognize as important acaryas?

The key word here is “maybe.” This is not a solid basis for building a whole theory.

Comment posted by Balakrsna das on December 13th, 2012

25Akruranatha

“We should understand that Western thought is contaminated by the lower modes of nature, and atheism.”

But so is Indian thought, in which the God-made varnasrama-dharma was broken by advancement of the foolishness of caste-by-birth, without necessary qualifications.

“The answer should be clear. It is that there is gender distinction in human society.

And there are distinctions made between human beings that SP and vedic thought — and law — accept.”

Everyone nowadays accepts that men and women have “essentially” different material natures. The Women’s Studies programs in western universities have mostly embraced such essentialism since the late 1980s. However, they recognize (correctly) that women throughout the world are often victims of injustice at the hands of ignorant, selfish, lazy and wicked men.

“But we don’t want to accept them, because Western thought teaches ‘we perceive that all men [and women] were created equal.’ That is the egalitarian viewpoint.”

There are two ways in which the egalitarian viewpoint is supported in Srila Prabhupada’s books.

First, we are not these bodies. All living beings are spirit souls, fragmental parts and parcels of Krishna, equal with Him in quality, but minute in quantity. Thus by nature we are meant to serve Him, and doing so we return to our Godly nature. The humble sage by virtue of true knowledge sees with equal vision the dog, elephant, brahmana, cow and dog-eater (and woman). Knowledge in the mode of goodness is that by which one undivided spiritual nature is seen in all living entities, though they are divided into

innumerable forms (whereas that knowledge by which one sees a different type of being in each type of body is in the mode of passion).

Second, in Kali yuga everyone is born with low qualities. We have people playing roles of brahmanas (scientists, philosophers), ksatriyas (statesmen, military officers), vaisyas (capitalists, captains of agriculture, industry, commerce and finance), and sudras (laborers, salaried workers), but really they are all unregulated and not conversant in the spiritual science. Hardly anyone has the special qualities by which brahmanas and ksatriyas work. To impose artificial rules of deference and submission or false hierarchies is adharmā, and everyone knows it.

To moralize about keeping people within their proper social roles is a non-starter for preachers in the west. To show how sankirtan defeats unjust hierarchies is successful.

Comment posted by Akruanatha on December 13th, 2012

26Akruanatha

“The key word here is ‘maybe.’ This is not a solid basis for building a whole theory.”

I hope at least it is a solid basis for finding common ground between devotees who seem to be entrenched in various incompatible ideologies.

We need to stay positive and stay united. The idea that “my camp is following Krishna’s instructions “as they are”, so to speak, and the opposing party is infected by maya and corruption, is a dangerous mentality. This is Kali yuga’s old trick: divide the sankirtan party, and conquer.

Actually we are all devotees. We all read Srila Prabhupada’s books. We all chant Hare Krishna. None of us has a monopoly on enlightenment, and none of us has a monopoly on ignorance. But if we serve Srila Prabhupada together nothing can stop us. Where there is Godhead there is no nescience. For those who remember Lord Caitanya, even difficult things become very easy.

What could be more difficult than establishing the Teachings of Lord Caitanya as a successful and dominant ideology in the modern world? Yet, if we keep chanting Hare Krishna together with humility and tolerance and readiness to offer all respect to others, what can stop us?

It is said that Krishna is not in the hearts of the yogis, or on the altars of the temples, or even in Vaikuntha, but is where devotees are conversing about Him with love and devotion. And yet it is also said that when devotees start quarreling, He goes away.

So it was put forward here that Sridhar Maharaja said that there were many women in Gaudiya Vaisnavism who were initiating gurus, but they were not important acaryas, “what was their realization?”, etc. Could not the same be said for many of the men who have served as initiating gurus in ISKCON since Srila Prabhupada’s departure? Was it not a mistake for us to pretend they were important acaryas, only to be embarrassed when many of the initial 11 successor acaryas fell down in scandal, leaving many devotees hurt and confused?

I am not building a whole theory, but I hope all of us can look at some of the contradictions in our own supposedly infallible theories.

Some argue that although Srila Prabhupada made statements to the effect that he wanted all his disciples, boys and girls, to become gurus, and that his sons and daughters might initiate disciples, he never gave clear, direct instructions appointing women to initiate. In fact, he never gave a clear directive for how men would initiate after his departure, either.

Comment posted by Akruranatha on December 13th, 2012

27Akruranatha

How is it going to happen? How is Srimad Bhagavatam going to become widely regarded throughout the world (not only among Hindus, but among Christians and Muslims and Buddhists and Taoists and Scientists and Philosophers of all nations) as the greatest authoritative literature? How is Lord Caitanya going to become universally recognized as the most merciful avatar of the Supreme Personality of Godhead?

Many scholars have pointed out that 1960s western youth counterculture was idealistic but somewhat arrogant, cut off from history and from the rest of society. Radicals tend to be less in touch with practical reality, and young radicals in particular tend to lack the wisdom of their elders.

This was true for hippie experiments in building a society without the prejudices of the past, an egalitarian, communal world without money, based on love and trust and good will. It may have been even more true of the followers of Srila Prabhupada, who were mostly in their 20s (or teens) when they embraced the ideal of forging a pure Vaisnava society almost entirely cut off from the corrupt world of "karmi" materialism and atheism.

One way achieve worldwide development of daivi varnasrama social arrangements may be that members of ISKCON will form ideal, self-sufficient eco-villages that are so successful, that radiate such happiness, peace, prosperity, purity and harmony, that the rest of the world will beat a path to our door and join us.

Another way may be that those who are actually playing the roles of brahmanas and ksatriyas and vaisyas in the different nations of the world (or in the increasingly global modern world culture) will begin chanting Hare Krishna, appreciating Srila Prabhupada's books, and becoming pure devotees endowed with the necessary qualities to play their roles properly within a properly functioning society.

Both approaches may seem far-fetched, but with Krishna anything is possible; and both can go on simultaneously.

Especially the intellectual and political leaders should become devotees. It does not mean they have to subordinate themselves to ISKCON, necessarily. I would hope they would at least appreciate the role ISKCON plays in promoting and maintaining a society based on Srila Prabhupada's books and teachings.

We may hope to find that some devotee-intellectuals see how the natural human social arrangements of varna and asrama are relevant to the modern world in ways we have not yet clearly understood.

Comment posted by Akruanatha on December 13th, 2012

28sita-pati

I think there are valid points, and limitations, on both sides of this issue. Either way there will be problems, because this is the material world and all endeavours here are coloured by *some* fault. Rather than promoting one way or the other way as “the one true way”, I think it’s important and valuable to be clear about what the drawbacks are, to acknowledge them, and take them into account while moving forward.

Comment posted by sita-pati on December 14th, 2012

29Akruanatha

Varnasrama is not about imposing some onerous rules on an unwilling population by force. An ideal king like Pariksit Maharaja would arrest and punish criminals, but I do not picture him imposing oppressive fascist or totalitarian state mechanisms to keep “uppity” women and sudras in their place.

Varnasrama dharma is nothing other than the natural, practical and efficient organization of human society as ordained by God, in which people are engaged in work according to their own propensities and dispositions while regulating their senses and offering the results for the pleasure of Krishna. In a dharmic society, none of the law-abiding citizens feel oppressed, despised or insulted.

No kind of work is abominable, if performed in the service of the Lord. The conclusion is that everyone should be engaged according to the particular modes of nature they have acquired, and dovetail all their actions in service of the Supreme Lord.

The modern, liberal ideologies of democracy, egalitarianism, secularism and meritocracy have their own historical provenance in struggles against injustice and oppression by unqualified aristocrats, plutocrats and churchmen. To merely reject them as maya without appreciating this history is an oversimplification. To reflexively side with conservative or reactionary opponents of these historical developments could make us unwitting allies of the agents of Kali: low-class, unqualified people clothing themselves in the perquisites and privileges of status they do not deserve by qualification. Those who do not understand history may be doomed to repeat it.

The real brahmanas of the Golden Age of Lord Caitanya will know how to apply and adjust Vedic wisdom to produce good results. Spiritual life is practical. We judge by the results. If a woman, or a man born in an obscure family from whatever race or nation, can become an effective professor of the spiritual science, why should we not accept her?

And if a person is truly an accomplished chanter of the Maha Mantra, he or she is actually better than a learned brahmana who is not a devotee. This is a scientific fact. "We have seen it practically. Even a child can do it, and even a dog can do it." (!) So why not a woman?

One's svabhava is not determined by birth, but by qualification. This is a meritocratic and pragmatic idea. Empty rituals must give way to practical, scientific, spiritual realism.

Comment posted by Akruranatha on December 14th, 2012

30Unregistered

(Part 1) Basu Ghosh Prabhu, thank you for your participation in this discussion. Please don't mind, but I would like to take issue with something that seems to be central to your arguments here, as you have repeated it (and iterations of it) more than once in your comments above and in your comments to a related post.

You say, "Diksha means conferring the sacred thread, and since woman cannot wear the sacred thread, they cannot be the diksha guru." It is a clear enough argument, and would be persuasive if it weren't based on a faulty premise, which you have also given: "...an intrinsic part of diksha is conferring the sacred thread."

I assume that by "intrinsic" you mean essential, perhaps indispensable. To support this statement you offer Srila Prabhupada's purport to CC Madhya 24.330, in which we find: "He is then recommended for a second initiation, during which a sacred thread is offered and the disciple is accepted as a bona fide brahmana. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura introduced the system of giving the sacred thread to a bona fide Vaisnava, and we are following in his footsteps." (You yourself quote this excerpt in commenting on another post on this site.)

Here Srila Prabhupada says nothing about the diksa-mantras we receive during second initiation (not to mention the qualities of a genuine brahmana). Are these not an intrinsic part of diksha? I don't think an intelligent person would consider this an actual point of contention.

Moreover, what Srila Prabhupada goes on to say about his spiritual master's role in "introducing the system of giving the sacred thread to a bona fide Vaishnava" suggests that the sacred thread is not as intrinsic as you make it out to be. Did Srila Bhaktisiddhanta introduce the system of giving diksha-mantras? No, he introduced the system of giving the sacred thread. This was, arguably, a social statement particular to the time and place. Inarguably, the diksa-mantras are clearly intrinsic to brahminical initiation, while the thread itself is less so.

(continued...)

Comment posted by acyutadasa.nrs on December 14th, 2012

31Unregistered

(Part 2) The same is evident in Srila Prabhupada's own actions (and statements, as I will show presently). In adjusting to the social climate in which he endeavored to establish his new movement, Srila Prabhupada gave mantra-diksa to women as well as men, though he declined to give the sacred thread to his female brahmana disciples. Whether or not he did so in consideration of the same caste-conscious Indians the sacred thread may well have been used to impress in the time of his spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada obviously understood that the true intrinsic element of diksa is the diksa-mantras. (He certainly considered his female brahmana disciples to be genuine brahmanas, did he not? If he did not, then why did he allow them to perform the work of pujaris in his temples, work traditionally reserved for brahmanas?)

Srila Prabhupada spoke clearly about the relative importance of diksa-mantras and the sacred thread on many occasions, virtually all of which were in service of explaining one of the symptoms of Kali-yuga, as presented in Simad-Bhagavatam (12.2.3), vipratve sutram eva hi: "...A man will be known as a brahmana just by his wearing a thread."

Here are two of Srila Prabhupada's statements regarding the same (there are several more, including a reference in Srila Prabhupada's own Vyasa-puja offering to his spiritual master from 1961):

"In the Kali-yuga brahmana means one two-paisa thread, that's all. But that is not brahmana. Brahmana means samo damo titikṣva. [BG 18.42] These are the symptoms." (Lecture, SB 5.5.3, Vrindavana, 25 October 1976)

"Vipratve sūtram eva hi: 'And one will be considered a brāhmaëa simply by this thread.' These are all written there. A two-cent-worth thread, you get it..., 'Oh, you have got thread. Oh, you are a brāhmaëa.' That's all. This is going on in India. Two-paisa-worth brāhmaëa. He has all the qualification of less than a caëöäla, but, because he has got this nonsense thread, he's considered a brāhmaëa." (Lecture, CC Madhya 337-353, New York, 25 December 1966)

Please note in the second quote above that Srila Prabhupada identifies this as a problem (then) particular to India. While you, and others, so appropriately remind us that we should not allow Western cultural conditioning to taint our deliberation on this issue, we should be equally vigilant we are not adopting another form of cultural conditioning, thinking it to be transcendental.

Thank you, Prabhu.

Your servant,

Acyuta Dasa

Comment posted by acyutadasa.nrs on December 14th, 2012

32Basu Ghosh Das

@ Achyuta Das: comments #35 & 36

Prabhu, the gayatri mantra goes along with the sacred thread. When Prabhupada wrote that it was introduced by Srila Saraswati Thakur (SBSST) (in CC M24.330), he did mean it was his invention.

Conferring the thread is as ancient as the mantras. Mahaprabhu & the goswamis demonstrated “vairagya” - total renunciation . SBSST & Prabhupada stressed revival of varnashram dharma, as sahajiyaism had become rampant.

Paancharaatrika diksha, as introduced by SBSST, was given after the “harinaam”, that Prabhupada called “first initiation”, & not diksha. We both know that Prabhupada gave women the gayatri mantra, but did not confer the thread. So if women do not have the thread, how can they confer it?

If you examine the first vilas of Haribhakti Vilas, you will see that Gopal Bhatta Goswami recommended taking diksha from a qualified brahmana. Qualified brahmana was always a male. While in vedic culture, women who were born in brahmana families are referred to as brahmani, they did not take up the occupational activities of the men, neither did they wear the thread. This is ancient tradition.

What Prabhupada wrote about, as per the quotes you referenced above, SB 12.2.3, etc., is a condemnation of the “false birthright claim” to be a brahmana. That does not change either the fact that a qualified brahmana is one who underwent the samskaras, including the thread ceremony, & would later become a “vipra”, one who studied the vedas by memorization (as per tradition), and also one who becomes a brahmana by paancharaatrika diksha as Prabhupada wrote in his Purport to CC Antya 16.29

yatha kancanatham yati kamsyam rasa-vidhanatah

tatha diksha-vidhanena dvijatvam jayate nrinam

“As bell metal is turned to gold when mixed with mercury in an alchemical process, so one who is properly trained and initiated by a bona fide spiritual master becomes a brahmana immediately.”

As for women engaging in brahminical occupations in ISKCON temples in the West, it can be accepted in two ways. One is that it was the order of the guru, Prabhupada, and it was a “time & circumstance” instruction by Prabhupada.

Studying “the body of Prabhupada’s instructions”, it’s clear that he gave abundant instructions that women would best be engaged in griha karma — household work. Sadly, in your eagerness to post a retort to what I wrote, you’ve neglected to take cognizance of those instructions.

Comment posted by Basu Ghosh Das on December 16th, 2012

33Basu Ghosh Das

Corrigendum/errata — and a bit of additional explanation.

This appeared in my comment, #37 above:

“When Prabhupada wrote that it was introduced by Srila Saraswati Thakur (SBSST) (in CC M24.330), he did mean it was his invention.”

It should read: “When Prabhupada wrote that it was introduced by Srila Saraswati Thakur (SBSST) (in CC M24.330), it does not mean that it was his invention.”

[The sense is that Srila Saraswati Thakur did not invent something new, when he introduced conferring the sacred thread. Based on panchatratrika viddhi, he did confer the sacred thread on men from lower castes, whom he considered qualified — those who performed the purashcharana. As per the verse quoted by Prabhupada in his purport to CC Antya 16.29, those persons become brahmanas. He did not confer the thread to women].

Comment posted by Basu Ghosh Das on December 17th, 2012

34Unregistered

My dear Mother Phalini Mataji,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada. All glories to you.

I just wanted to thank you for writing this wonderful text full of deep realizations and coming straight from the heart, you must be directly inspired by paramatma.

While the men who are commenting on this text argue about points of sastra and logic, the women in my ladies sangha all agreed with what you wrote because of our direct experience of what it means to have a female form. Many of us have experience of what happens when we go against our nature (dharma) and try to be like men. We lose our femininity that is so pleasing to Lord Krsna, and we don't do a good a job of being a man either. So it is a lose-lose situation.

May Srimati Radharani and Her beloved Lord Krsna bless you with many more years so that you will inspire us with more of your writings and hopefully personal association.

Your humble servant

MMdd

Comment posted by Mohana Mohini dd on December 17th, 2012

35Unregistered

Basu Ghosh Prabhu:

To clarify, I did not mean to suggest that the sacred thread was an invention of Srila Bhatissiddhanta Saraswati Thakura. My understanding is that brahmana Vaishnavas at the time of the Thakura did not wear the thread, as a statement of Vaishnavism's superiority to caste consciousness, but that Srila Bhaktissiddhanta re-introduced the thread in our line for both spiritual and socioreligious reasons. My intention was to suggest that this may be evidence of the sacred thread's being a detail rather than an

essential principle of brahmana initiation (and that if it were a detail, Srila Prabhupada's not giving the thread to his female brahmana disciples should not necessarily close the book on the possibility of qualified women acting as initiating spiritual masters in ISKCON).

Please accept my apologies if you sensed some arrogance in what I wrote (something in your reply makes me feel that you may have done so, and after re-reading my posts I can see how I may have given that impression). It was not my intention to compose a "retort" or to philosophically "defeat" you, just to present a perspective that I thought was not being presented. And I assure you that I did so only after much thought and consideration.

Ultimately, any decision on this issue is out of my feeble and insignificant hands. While I feel it is extremely important (and while I have my own opinion about it, an opinion I feel is based on studying the body and soul of Srila Prabhupada's instructions, at least to the best of my severely limited ability), I'm sure my time would be better spent by neglecting whatever future discussion may develop here.

My respectful obeisance to you, Prabhu.

Your servant,

Acyuta Dasa

Comment posted by acyutadasa.nrs on December 18th, 2012

36Akruranatha

"My intention was to suggest that this may be evidence of the sacred thread's being a detail rather than an essential principle of brahmana initiation (and that if it were a detail, Srila Prabhupada's not giving the thread to his female brahmana disciples should not necessarily close the book on the possibility of qualified women acting as initiating spiritual masters in ISKCON)."

This explanation by Acyuta Prabhu makes sense to me. Advanced Vaisnavas can chant gayatri mantra perfectly whether they wear a thread or not. If a thread has socioreligious importance, to show that aspiring Vaisnavas do not consider themselves as paramahansas above the varnasrama system, I see no reason why a female gayatri chanter, who does not wear a thread, cannot confer a thread to a male disciple who receives the mantras from her.

Shyamasundar wrote, in another thread, that Srila Prabhupada was initially lenient (when he said his women disciples would initiate their own disciples), but then revised his strategy after seeing how fallen his western disciples were, and decided to push varnasrama dharma heavily. That is a hypothesis worth considering, but I do not think it is accurate.

I do think it is an important avenue of inquiry: Did Srila Prabhupada change his views about introduction of four varnas in ISKCON over time, and if so, why?

It does not seem to me that in the February 14, 1977 conversation Satsvarupa Maharaja and Hari Sauri Prabhu were “opposing” Srila Prabhupada, as Shyamasundara indicated, but it does seem they were confused and surprised. Srila Prabhupada was introducing something new.

Previously he had given the impression that he would make all his disciples into brahmanas, or into pure Vaisnavas (better than brahmanas). Now he was explaining that becoming that kind of Vaisnava who is better than a brahmana is no cheap thing. Those who do not have the svabhava to do the work of brahmanas need not be initiated as brahmanas but can go on serving in accordance with their nature while chanting Hare Krishna.

Srila Prabhupada did teach about varnasrama dharma all along, but we really have to understand it via his books. The 18th Chapter of Bhagavad-gita is full of relevant instructions. One should not renounce the duties born of one’s own nature, but should become a pure devotee working under Krsna’s protection. Thus one achieves perfection by worship of the Lord through performing his own work.

Comment posted by Akruranatha on December 18th, 2012

37Akruranatha

“While the men who are commenting on this text argue about points of sastra and logic, the women in my ladies sangha all agreed with what you wrote because of our direct experience of what it means to have a female form.”

Yes. This is the real point of varnasrama dharma, as Mother Mohana Mohini recognizes. Not only do women have a particular nature being born with female bodies, but even male brahmanas and ksatriyas, vaisyas and sudras are supposed to be born with different natures. It does not depend on the family one is born in, but everyone has a role to play in human society based on one’s own modes of thinking, feeling, willing and acting. (It is said, however, that in kali yuga people are all born with the qualities of sudras or less).

The idea is that working in accordance with one’s own nature is safe. Engels posited that the whole caste system was devised by privileged castes as a means to exploit others — and in the vitiated system of kali yuga we admit that a certain amount of false consciousness and corruption has been at work — but the actual divine system of four varnas and four asramas is a benevolent recognition that people should be engaged in doing what they are naturally inclined to do by nature’s arrangement.

We are not these bodies. We are not the doers. The actions of these bodies are not our actions. They belong to nature. They are being carried out according to the modes.

We are considered “karta” (doer) as one of the five factors of action, but we cannot forget the other factors. If we act in forgetfulness of Krishna as the ultimate factor, we will be falsely directed: we will still work according to our nature (we cannot avoid it), but we will do so as conditioned souls taking shelter of false ego, and will not achieve perfection.

But if we depend on Krishna and remain fully conscious of Him, working under His protection, we do not have to repress our natures and try to sit in a secluded place and fast and do pranayama and meditate.

We can have occupations in offices, factories, farms or governments, without false ego. We can be children, mothers, fathers, teachers, students, managers, foremen, apprentices, while regulating our senses (niyamya) and practicing Krishna consciousness.

Varnasrama is a leniency, making allowance for our natures. We do not say “women have to act like men.” But if a qualified woman can serve as a guru, we don’t artificially prohibit, either.

Comment posted by Akruranatha on December 18th, 2012

38Basu Ghosh Das

Dear Achyuta Prabhu @ comment #40

Namonamaha. Jaya Srila Prabhupada!

Prabhu, I did not feel that you were being arrogant in your writing. You made your points humbly, as I recall, without ad hominem(s) and innuendo and that is appreciated. Hopefully I am doing this as well.

However, the conclusion that females can be diksha guru is mistaken, in my humble opinion.

You say you based your conclusion in this regard on the body of Prabhupada’s teachings. Here is where we differ. You and most of the devotees commenting on this thread know that Prabhupada wrote “being a woman... Suniti could not be Dhruva’s diksha guru”. This was written by Prabhupada in plain, simple English.

Prabhupada was teaching his disciples — and the world — through his purports. In the very same purport, he explains that Suniti was Dhruva’s patha pradarshaka & shiksha guru, and that the shiksha guru is non-different from the diksha guru.

So why not that qualified ladies be satisfied with being shiksha guru and not clamor for being diksha guru?

Prabhupada told Prof. O’Connel [room conversation @ Toronto, June ‘76] that female gurus were extremely rare & Jahnava Devi “did not declare” [herself as guru].

Consider that we Westerners were raised in an atmosphere where we were indoctrinated with the concept of egalitarianism: “the principle that all people are equal and deserve equal rights”.

Our ideology teaches that “on the platform of the soul” this is true [that we are all “equal” — as jivatmas], but while embodied we are to follow varnashram dharma — the principles of religion & social occupational duties. This means distinctions and differentiations, not equality. That’s very hard for we Westerners to accept, due to our being “brainwashed” — or rather “indoctrinated” — with this concept since childhood!

Therefore, Prabhupada's clear prohibition of a woman being a diksha guru is so very difficult for many Western devotees to accept. If Prabhupada had desired, he could have written that Suniti was indeed Dhruva's diksha guru — after he clearly wrote that she was his padapradarshaka and shiksha guru — and we would all accept his instruction. But he wrote the opposite! It would therefore be wise for his followers to accept his instruction in this regard.

das,

Basu Ghosh Das

Comment posted by Basu Ghosh Das on December 20th, 2012

39Unregistered

Basu Gosh Prabhu,

You wrote, "What can't a woman take sannays? Why can't a woman be conferred the sacred thread? And why can't a man bear a child (why weren't men created equal to women and have wombs)? The answer should be clear. It is that there is gender distinction in human society."

Yes there are gender distinctions. A woman cannot take sanyasa because she should be dependent on her own son rather than on the, "charity" of numerous men who will expect sense gratification in return. But Srila Prabhupada also stated that the first lesson is, we are all absolutely equal on the spiritual plane, and any human being can transcend illusory designations (inequalities) by performing devotional service along with the duty in connection with the body. You do not have to change the external duty to transcend the external designation. So the different viewpoints result from how we define Vaisnava Guru. Those against women gurus say a particular material designation is required. My contention is, if one cannot see the difference between the function of a Vaisnava Guru, and the external designation of that Guru, they are not qualified to be a Guru or a disciple.

We can certainly make the case that VAD is better than capitalists, communists, and other secular social structures. But ISKCON can offer freedom from the real problems, birth ,death ,disease, and old age. One must become free from illusory material designations to be free from these miseries. So if we do not emphasize spiritual equality, the real problems of life remain, whether the society is VAD, capitalism, communism, or whatever

Comment posted by Sita Rama dasanudasa on December 20th, 2012

40Phalini devi dasi

@#34: Dear Mohana Mohini Mataji, Thank you for your encouraging comment, and for your good point about practicing femininity vs trying to step into men's roles, which, as you described so aptly, is a "lose-lose" situation. All glories to Srila Prabhupada who mercifully taught us women the principles of how to cultivate and maintain femininity, and who bravely and boldly preached that although all souls are equal, men's duties and women's duties are different.

Comment posted by Phalini devi dasi on December 21st, 2012

41Unregistered

What should be clear is that there no varna or ashram that denotes Vaisnava Guru. Sometimes brahmana's are considered the spiritual masters of society, but they can be demigod worshipers and not Vaisnava's. Sanayasa's can be impersonalists or mayavada. Obviously Vaisnava Guru is not an external designation. Lord Catianya says regardless of VAD designation, anyone can be can be Guru and Srila Prabhupada clearly states that this includes women:

“Yei krsna-tattva-vetta sei guru haya [Cc. Madhya 8.128]. The qualification of guru is that he must be fully cognizant of the science of Krsna. Then he or she can become guru. Yei krsna-tattva-vetta, sei guru haya. [break] In our material world, is it any prohibition that woman cannot become professor? If she is qualified, she can become professor. What is the wrong there? She must be qualified. That is the position. So similarly, if the woman understands Krsna consciousness perfectly, she can become guru.”

This is an unambiguous statement and Ajamila Prahbu has cited many more in his article “Women Gurus; Yes but not so Many. SP.”

Comment posted by Sita Rama dasanudasa on December 21st, 2012

42Unregistered

Basu Gosh Prabhu,

You wrote:

“Our ideology teaches that “on the platform of the soul” this is true [that we are all “equal” — as jivatmas], but while embodied we are to follow varnashram dharma — the principles of religion & social occupational duties. This means distinctions and differentiations, not equality. That's very hard for we Westerners to accept, due to our being “brainwashed” — or rather “indoctrinated” — with this concept since childhood!”

There has never existed ,nor will there ever exist a society where differentiations and inequality regarding occupational duties is not understood. In the modern Western World-am I equal to my boss or does he have control over me? I am equal to a police officer; can I arrest him if I see him speeding? Can I get accepted into Harvard with an IQ of 85? If I am a woman can I be in the NFL? No.

What permeates Western culture is an open court frenzy to be supreme. Men spend hours in gyms and women spend hours in beauty salons to become supremely attractive. The capitalists want to be as rich as god. The academics want to develop the supreme theory. Our brainwashing is such that we cannot understand that the equality of the soul is real and the external inequalities are illusory. That is why panditah sama darshinah is basically unknown in the Western World. But there is no society on earth ,or in heaven ,where inequality and competition for supremacy is unknown!

Comment posted by Sita Rama dasanudasa on December 22nd, 2012

43Unregistered

Basu Gosh Prabhu,

I find your assertion (that people in the Western World have been brainwashed into believing in equality) to be contrary to observable facts. People in the Western World are striving for individual supremacy, this is undeniable: It is not possible for a person to struggle for supremacy and also think everyone is equal. We do not think we are equal. Studies show that the vast majority of the people consider themselves above average.

Children are socialized with this from the beginning of their life. We are told, by our own work, we can become wealthy capitalists, a Doctor, Lawyer, or even the President. We ignore the fact that a certain body, upbringing, and social environment (what to speak of Karma) have an effect. People have fought hard for success and loath to think that the less successful are equal. The unsuccessful would rather be poor and be able to dream of the possibility of great wealth than to live in a socialistic country where everyone is Ok financially but capitalism is too regulated for unlimited wealth.

So I fail to see how you can say that the culture of the Western World promotes equality. Gross materialists may say they think all are equal, but their actions show they all want to be supreme. Thus, as devotees, we have to emphasize that any type of superiority in the material world is totally distinct from the real identity of the living being. In other words, it is more useful to tell people something they do not know (we are all equal as spirit souls) than to reinforce what they already know about the illusory world.

Comment posted by Sita Rama dasanudasa on December 22nd, 2012

44Unregistered

assertion (that people in the Western World have been brainwashed into believing in equality) to be contrary to observable facts. People in the Western World are striving for individual supremacy

Is it a pro or anti argument? If desire for equality is seen as unfavorable in FDG issue, how's desire for supremacy any better?

Another aspect of modern culture that hasn't been mentioned so far is that it's all about rights, not duties. People have the right to do anything they want unless it's explicitly prohibited by law. This attitude might affect FGD discussion if people naturally give more weight to "prohibited" or "allowed" statements while almost completely ignoring "prescribed".

The fact is that if our women do what is prescribed for them the question of handing out diksa and brahmana threads shouldn't even arise.

Yes, in exceptional cases, yes, there are precedents in our sampradaya, but, judging by the reaction in our society, none of the current aspirants is perceived as being truly exceptional. The issue is divisive at

best and perhaps it's not the right time to pursue it. Getting a GBC stamp of approval might not be enough to convince the rest of our society.

Personally, I don't understand why our women can't be satisfied with being a siksa guru, position perfectly aligned with both their current and prescribed social status that doesn't require any changes to the rule books and doesn't contradict any shastric statements. If there's any exceptional reason and not just a push for equality or supremacy, I don't see it. Maybe someone could enlighten the audience why giving out gayatri and brahmana threads is so important to them.

A little case study:

Bhakti Pradipa Maharaj, the first sannyasi in Gaudiya Matha, was first told he doesn't need any special diksa, by Srila Gaurakishora Dasa Babaji, then he got kama gayatri and kama bija from Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, then, a few months later, on instruction of Bhaktivinoda Thakura, he received Brahma-gayatri, guru-mantra, guru-gayatri, Gaura-mantra, Gauranga-gayatri, and brahmana thread from Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati. A few years later he also received sannyasa and probably a few more mantras to go with it.

Apparently our acharyas were not obsessed with rules and regulations and who should give what mantra or who should perform upanayana. None of them were "properly" initiated as brahmanas either.

Comment posted by Sitalatma Das on December 24th, 2012

45Unregistered

Basu Ghosh das wrote: "Prabhupada told Prof. O'Connell [room conversation @ Toronto, June '76] that female gurus were extremely rare & Jahnava Devi "did not declare" [herself as guru]."

For the record, here is what Srila Prabhupada actually said, after making it clear that there's no essential distinction between men and women in our movement, to the extent that women could be panditas:

Prof. O'Connell: Is it possible, Swamiji, for a woman to be a guru in the line of disciplic succession?

Prabhupada: Yes. Jahnava devi was-Nityananda's wife. She became. If she is able to go to the highest perfection of life, why it is not possible to become guru? But, not so many. Actually one who has attained the perfection, she can become guru. But man or woman, unless one has attained the perfection.... Yei krsna-tattva-vetta sei guru haya [Cc. Madhya 8.128]. The qualification of guru is that he must be fully cognizant of the science of Krsna. Then he or she can become guru. Yei krsna-tattva-vetta, sei guru haya. [break] In our material world, is it any prohibition that woman cannot become professor? If she is qualified, she can become professor. What is the wrong there? She must be qualified. That is the position. So similarly, if the woman understands Krsna consciousness perfectly, she can become guru.

Comment posted by Swami B. A. Ashram on December 28th, 2012

46Unregistered

I thought this might be of interest to those who say women can't give a brahman thread because they don't wear one. From a letter by Srila Prabhupada to one of his disciples:

"Even though you have had no gayatri mantra, still you are more than brahmana. I am enclosing herewith your sacred thread, duly chanted on by me. [...] Ask your wife to chant this mantra and you hear it and if possible hold a fire ceremony as you have seen during your marriage and get this sacred thread on your body. Saradia (name of Vaikunthanatha's wife), or any twice-initiated devotee, may perform the ceremony." (Letter to: Vaikunthanatha, Saradia, 4 April, 1971)

Comment posted by cintamani_dasi on December 29th, 2012

47Unregistered

In this case the woman simply passed the thread chanted on by Srila Prabhupada, she wasn't the one infusing it with spiritual powers as happens during initiation. This was probably an early ritvik procedure as Vaikunthanatha surely considered himself as initiated by Srila Prabhupada.

But it's a brilliant addition to the discussion, to our understanding of norms and exceptions. Thank you very much, Mataji Cintamani.

Comment posted by Sitalatma Das on December 29th, 2012

48Unregistered

Sitalatma Prabhu,

You responded to my comment, "...assertion (that people in the Western World have been brainwashed into believing in equality) to be contrary to observable facts. People in the Western World are striving for individual supremacy", with a question:

"Is it a pro or anti argument? If desire for equality is seen as unfavorable in FDG issue, how's desire for supremacy any better?"

My comment was a response to the argument that in the western world we are brainwashed into accepting material equality and thus cannot except the material inequality described in varnasrama. In contrast to this, material inequality is unavoidable and thus known in every society; in the western world we are brainwashed with the belief that we should all strive for personal supremacy. It is not difficult for materialists in the western world to understand material inequality; rather, it is hard for them to understand spiritual equality.

We can argue that varnasrama is the best social system but we then must compete with other systems who claim to offer the best social arrangements. But through understanding the equality of the soul we have a claim the materialist cannot even presume to offer, freedom from birth, death, disease and old age. Thus, although those too addicted to their material distinction cannot understand equality of the soul, it is understandable by those who are seeking spiritual benefits obtained by transcending the illusion of material distinctions. Thus we will attract the most people by emphasizing equality of the soul

because the material systems that are competing with us cannot even claim to offer freedom from all material misery.

Comment posted by Sita Rama dasanudasa on December 29th, 2012

49Unregistered

Dear Sita Rama Prabhu, thanks for your clarification but if I didn't understand whether your argument was pro or anti FDG, I understand even less now.

Varnashrama is a different topic, but let me try to tie it together. If we develop varnashrama, then, as a rule, there will be no question of FDG. If we abandon pursuit of varnashrama then everything goes, FDG and whatever comes next.

Personally, I think the subject of FDG is fine as it stands now - not as a rule but exceptions are allowed, and SAC has outlined some guidelines for GBC consideration. Personally I think that those guidelines might be reconsidered as they describe what should actually be the norm, not an exception, but that is up to GBC to decide.

If any female devotee does attain the status of diksha guru I will try my best to show appropriate respect, hoping that divine knowledge of their exceptional qualities will come down on me later.

What could be possible repercussions of GBC making a mistake here? Under zonal acharya system ISKCON has lived through worse and survived. We have an innate strength in our system, thanks to firm faith of our leaders in Krishna and Srila Prabhupada. Whatever setbacks we have, Krishna will always help in the end.

Comment posted by Sitalatma Das on December 31st, 2012

50Unregistered

Sitalatma Prabhu,

OK, let me try to state myself more clearly. First, I was responding to the assertions of Basu Gosh Prabhu. If I understand his position correctly he argued that devotees are in favor of FDG because they feel men and women should be equal, as taught in the mundane modern world. He says it is hard for those devotees conditioned by mundane liberal values to understand material inequality which VAD describes as an integral part of human society.

I see the principal aspect of the modern western world as people striving for individual supremacy. It follows that they must understand material inequality or else they would not all be striving for superiority. In direct contrast to this, the principal function of ISKCON is to establish the eternal reality of the soul, above material designation of superior and inferior. It is this teaching that distinguishes us from other organizations. Many social/political organizations can claim to have the best answer on the material realm but we can offer something far beyond anything offered by material organizations, namely freedom from birth, death, disease and old age. So the main function of ISKCON is to explain

spiritual equality: material inequality is something people are already aware of. People should agree to allow material inequality to be regulated by VAD for the sole purpose of coming to the level of spiritual equality.

I agree with you that FDG is a different thing. There are some aspects of Krishna Consciousness that seem to correlate with mundane liberalism and others seem to be conservative values; however, we should not accept or reject something because it seems to be for ,or against, either mundane liberalism or conservatism. Basu Gosh is saying those in favor of FDG are brainwashed by modern liberal values. My argument is direct in addressing Basu Gosh's argument. I am saying his particular argument against FDG is not convincing. Spiritual equality is not material liberalism. Emphasizing equality of the soul is the primary function of ISKCON, if this equality means there should be FDG then we cannot reject it because it seems to be something a mundane liberal would be in favor of.

Comment posted by Sita Rama dasanudasa on January 4th, 2013