

Praghosha Dasa

Some thoughts on FDG

The GBC resolved in 2005:

The GBC accepts the basic philosophical conclusion presented in the SAC's Female Diksa Guru Paper, i.e. that a mature, qualified, female devotee may accept the role of an initiating spiritual master. The implementation thereof is pending further GBC consideration.

So in effect the GBC has agreed to female diksa gurus, thus our current discussions, by definition, should be focused on how to practically implement the above resolution.

In 2009 the GBC further strengthened their commitment to having females serve as diksa gurus in ISKCON with the following resolution;

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

The GBC Body authorizes local area committees to put forward for approval as initiating guru any devotee in their area, male or female, who is qualified according to existing GBC Law.

The above resolutions were passed in a very positive mood and with a large majority of GBC members in favour. Again that further underscores that the GBC need to find a way to implement these resolutions and the GBC members must be mindful of their duty in this regard.

There are many references which we are all familiar with as they relate to this issue and I wish to focus on a two of those, one generally used to support and one generally used to argue against FDGs. The first one being;

“I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta, so that the family transcendental diploma will continue through the generations. Those possessing the title of Bhaktivedanta will be allowed to initiate disciples. Maybe by 1975, all of my disciples will be allowed to initiate and increase the numbers of the generations. That is my program.” (Letter to Hamsaduta on Jan 3, 1969)

In this letter to Hamsaduta it specifically states **“allowed to initiate disciples”**,

‘initiate’ is the function performed by diksa gurus, hence the word we use in ISKCON for 'diksa' is 'initiation'. Prabhupada uses the word initiate twice in the above few lines.

Those who argue against women giving diksa, but accept that they can serve as siksa gurus, fail to explain how their position is valid given the conclusion of our gaudiya vaisnava siddhanta that there is no difference between diksa and siksa and to consider that there is, constitutes an offense:

There is no difference between the shelter-giving Supreme Lord and the initiating and instructing spiritual masters. If one foolishly discriminates between them, he commits an offense in the discharge of devotional service.
CC Adi 1.47

We are of course rightly uncompromising in our rejection of the presentation made by ritviks that Srila Prabhupada’s disciples can be siksa but not diksa gurus. In the ultimate issue for us not to accept that any siksa guru can also give diksa would be inconsistent to put it mildly. We also accept that siksa gurus whose diksa gurus are still physically present can also give diksa if their own diksa guru directs them to do so.

The distinction we seem compelled to make between diksa and siksa gurus, would at least equally seem to be as a result of us, to a large degree, merging ‘diksa guru’ with the position of ‘acarya’ in ISKCON and more concerning is that an argument could be made that such merging is ever increasing. The role of diksa should be firmly established in ISKCON in accordance with sastra, as someone who gives a mantra and ideally instruction. Of the two, instruction could be presented as the more crucial element, thus underscoring the philosophical conclusion that a siksa guru is a direct representative of Krishna. Any tinge otherwise leads to the offense of thinking a siksa guru is less qualified or a sub-standard guru.

In terms of implementing GBC policy, why should devotees who would not want to be initiated by women, take umbrage with those who do? Why is it even any of their business? They are not being forced to take initiation from a woman so why can’t they just conclude something along the lines of; “I believe the GBC are mistaken as far as this issue is concerned but it does not directly effect me and therefore I will not cause dissension”

The other reference that we are now all very familiar with is;

According to sastric injunctions, there is no difference between siksa-guru and diksa-guru, and generally the siksa-guru later on becomes the diksa-guru. Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's diksa-guru. *SB 4.12.32 purport*

The above reference is cited by those who argue that women cannot serve as diksa guru. However the above reference does not tell us anything more than we already know. Specifically it does not say that women cannot serve as diksa gurus, it simply says that the prime reason in the case of Suniti, as to why she couldn't be Dhruva's diksa guru, was because of their family connection - mother and son. Any objective reading of the above passage would not conclude that women cannot serve as diksa guru, at best the argument can be made that it is not the norm but we already know that. We also know that it is not ideal for a either parent to give diksa to their children, the most recent example of that was Bhaktivinode Thakura and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. The main issue presented above is the familial connection, it simply cannot be the fact that Suniti was a woman, as everyone is in agreement that women have given diksa and can give diksa (as per our GBC resolutions of 2005 and 2009)

As a preaching movement and particularly one that is operating in vast swathes of the world which are not rooted in Vedic culture, we have a duty to consider how best to expand Srila Prabhupada's ISKCON in those areas.

The issue of women serving as diksa gurus has raised perhaps a larger concern of the need for all ISKCON devotees to accept that all decisions taken by the GBC will not be to their liking. However what hope will there be for ISKCON unless there is a willingness to accept decisions that we do not necessarily agree with? As Rupa Goswami states;

**virodho vakyayor yatra napramanyam yad isyate yathariruddhata ca syat
tatharthah kalpate tayoh iti**

"When contradictions are found in the Vedic scripture, it is not that one statement is wrong. Rather both statements should be seen in such a way that there is no contradiction." *Laghu Bhagavatamrtam 1.232*

We are all part of the same team, that of devotees who are doing their best to follow Srila Prabhupada's instructions according to their understanding as to what is best for his ISKCON.

There are also GBC resolutions which I am sure we all struggle with but we follow them none the less. The GBC has already agreed to having women serve as diksa gurus, hence it is vitality important that the GBC's authority is not now undermined by capitulating to unreasonable demands to ignore their own convictions as expressed in their resolutions of 2005 and 2009.

Your servant,

Praghosa dasa

