

FDG: Prudent Questions, Sastric Answers

*The Sastric Advisory Council's answers to
the GBC Executive Committee's questions
regarding female dīkṣā-gurus in ISKCON*

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Authors (in alphabetical order):

- 1. Adi-purusa Dasa**
- 2. Caitanya-carana Dasa**
- 3. Drutakarma Dasa**
- 4. Isvara-krsna Dasa**
- 5. Madana-mohana Dasa**
- 6. Narayani Dasi**
- 7. Sarvajna Dasa**
- 8. Urmila Dasi**
- 9. Vinoda-bihari Dasa**
- 10. Yadunandana Swami**

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1 Pramāṇa for female dīkṣā-guru's qualification

Question: Is there a pramāṇa or sastric reference which establishes that women have to be more qualified than men to become dīkṣā-gurus?

Śāstric Advisory Council (SAC) members mostly agreed that there are no direct and unequivocal statements in the śāstras that women have to be more spiritually qualified than men to become dīkṣā-gurus.

It is important to remember that Vaiṣṇava views of the guru qualification markedly depart from those of varṇāśrama, singling out devotion to Kṛṣṇa as the only prerequisite even for an outcaste to act as a spiritual master. In highlighting this qualification, standard Vaiṣṇava śāstras such as the Bhāgavad-gītā and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam do not make gender distinctions.[1][2]

In the same spirit, Caitanya-caritāmṛta cites mastery of the science of Kṛṣṇa as the only qualification required for being a guru that overrides all traditional disqualifications for guruship, such as being a śūdra or a sannyāsī.[3] This is further corroborated by the statement in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (3.33.6) by Devahūti that even dog-eaters, considered by the Vedic authorities to be the most spiritually unqualified category of human beings, can overcome their otherwise incorrigible disqualification by birth and achieve brahminical status by practicing bhakti.[4] Caitanya-caritāmṛta also mentions that women, among other classes of people traditionally deemed unqualified for becoming gurus, were able to become spiritual masters during Lord Caitanya's times just by chanting the holy name under His influence.[5] Śrīla Prabhupāda in his purport to Caitanya-caritāmṛta stresses that not only personal associates of Lord Caitanya, who were present at His time, but all of His devotees who are engaged in preaching can achieve perfection and must be considered liberated.[6] (See also **Appendix 1: Ācāryas on SB 3.33.6**)

This is corroborated by works of the ācāryas. Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmī in his book *Muktā-carita* makes repeated references to Paurnamāsī as a dīkṣā-guru of other residents of Vraja, and her initiated disciple Nāndī mukhī as a prospective dīkṣā-guru even for Lord Kṛṣṇa. (See **Appendix 2: Muktā-carita on women initiating**) Rūpa Gosvāmī in *Upadeśāmṛta* bases one's eligibility to be a guru on attainable qualities of self-control and not on gender. Jīva Gosvāmī in *Tattva-sandarbhā* uses the example of Sūta Gosvāmī to reiterate that bhakti makes up for one's lack of Vedic qualification for being a guru.[7] Jīva Gosvāmī also cautions against accepting a spiritual master "in terms of hereditary or customary social and ecclesiastical conventions." [8] While conceding that female preachers can give the holy name to men, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura also warns that they should be elderly Vaiṣṇavīs who must exercise extreme care and caution as well as consideration of place, time, and circumstances.[9]

At the same time, Śrīla Prabhupāda acknowledged that FDGs were "not so many" [10] and said that there could be even female ācāryas as "very special" cases.[11]

While the scriptures and Śrīla Prabhupāda regard dīkṣā and śīkṣā gurus as equally important, the discussion on female dīkṣā-gurus (FDG) in ISKCON is indicative of a mistaken overemphasis on dīkṣā as more important than śīkṣā. It was conveyed that such overemphasis as well as objections to FDGs might be due to a mistaken notion of dīkṣā and dīkṣā-guru as a social function associated with institutional status and power, rather than a natural development of śīkṣā, an exclusively interpersonal, voluntary and inspirational connection.

While there is no recorded social prohibition in the traditional Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava society on Vaiṣṇavīs acting as dīkṣā-gurus, or disciples taking initiation from Vaiṣṇavīs, many exalted Vaiṣṇavīs in the history of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavīsm, such as Mādhavī Devī, Mālinī Devī, Śacīmātā, Viṣṇupriyā Ṭhākuraṇī, Vasudhā, Nārāyaṇī Devī, Kṛṣṇapriyā Devī (the daughter of Śrīnivasa Ācārya), Bhagavatī Devī (the wife of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and the mother of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura), who were competent to be gurus, never acted as such. It may therefore be

inferred that spiritually qualified Vaiṣṇavīs of the past and present may have usually voluntarily refrained from initiating unless strongly persuaded into these roles by their superiors. Of course, the same could be said for many spiritually qualified Vaiṣṇavas who never started initiating.

Śrīla Prabhupāda in his teachings repeatedly acknowledged disparity between men and women in the Vedic tradition, never shied away from advocating these differences even in the most challenging of audiences, and factored male-female dichotomy in his managerial decisions. At the same time, he would consistently furnish such references to women’s social inferiority in the Vedic society with strong emphases, both sastric and his own, that women in Kṛṣṇa consciousness have equal opportunities for spiritual advancement, that they rise above material conditioning, and can preach and become gurus:

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.[12]

Regarding your questions about the examinations to be given, the girls will also be able to take these. In Kṛṣṇa consciousness, there is no distinction between girls and boys. The girls also may become preachers if they are able.[13]

Prabhupāda: “Jāhnavā Devī, Lord Nityānanda’s wife, she was ācārya... It is not that woman cannot be ācārya.”[14]

My dear sons and daughters... You’ll have to become spiritual master. You, all my disciples, everyone should become spiritual master... I hope that all of you, men, women, boys and girls, become spiritual master.[15]

Women in our movement can also preach very nicely. Actually male and female bodies, these are just outward designations. Lord Caitanya said that whether one is brāhmaṇa or whatever he may be if he knows the science of Krishna than he is to be accepted as guru.[16]

Śrīla Prabhupāda also emphasized that *varṇāśrama* considerations, like those prohibiting women in a traditional Vedic society from occupying position of spiritual authority, play utilitarian rather than dogmatic roles in the lives of devotees:

Prabhupāda: Yes. But our, our position is that we are above varṇāśrama. But for management or ideal society, we are introducing this. We, so far we are concerned, Kṛṣṇa conscious men, we are above varṇāśrama. But to show the people that we are not escaping, we can take part in any order of life. That is our position. Just like if I brush somebody’s shoes, that does not mean I am shoemaker. My position is the same. But to show how to do it... Just like a servant is doing. The master is, “Oh, you cannot do. Just see.” (...) Similarly, even if we take to varṇāśrama, we do not belong to any... Just like Kṛṣṇa says, maya srstam. “I have inaugurated.” But Kṛṣṇa has nothing to do with varṇāśrama. Similarly, if we act as varṇāśrama, still, we have nothing to do with the varṇāśrama.[17]

and, more specifically:

Because in India, according to the caste system, or varṇāśrama-dharma, the brāhmaṇa and kṣatriyas are considered to be the highest in the society, and the vaiśyas, a little less than them, and śūdras, they are not taken into account. In the similarly, woman class, they are taken as śūdra, śūdra. Just like the thread ceremony is given to the brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya, but there is no thread ceremony for the woman class. Although the woman is born in the brāhmaṇa family, she has no that reformation. Because striyaḥ, woman class, are taken less intelligent, they should be given protection, but they cannot be elevated. But here in the Bhāgavad-gītā, He surpasses all these formalities. Lord Kṛṣṇa surpasses all these formalities. He is giving facility to everyone. Never mind what he is. In the social structure, you may consider that woman is less intelligent or śūdra or less purified, but in spiritual consciousness there is no such bar. Here Kṛṣṇa accepts everyone. Either you become woman or you are śūdra or a vaiśya or whatever you may be, that doesn't matter. If you simply take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the Lord is there. He will give you all protection, all protection, and gradually He will help you. You are already... One who is in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness platform, he is already in the liberated platform.[18]

So he must get the woman, the girl, married. It is compulsory. There was no compulsory for man to marry. Because a man may remain brahmacārī. By training, he can abstain from sex. But if woman is not protected very strictly, it is very difficult... Of course, when woman comes to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, that position is different. We are speaking of ordinary woman.... So when we study things from material point of view, these things are to be taken care. But when a man or woman becomes Kṛṣṇa conscious, he or she takes care of herself or himself.[19]

It is noted that while Vedic smṛti-śāstras restrict women from position of spiritual leadership, this limitation might be merely subsequent to the smṛti restriction on women accepting dīkṣā – a restriction obviously overridden by the pañcarātrika-vidhi followed by Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavas:

If one actually wants to serve Kṛṣṇa, it doesn't matter whether one is a śūdra, vaiśya or even a woman. If one is sincerely eager to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra or dīkṣā-mantra, one is qualified to be initiated according to the pañcarātrika process. However, according to Vedic principles, only a brāhmaṇa who is fully engaged in his occupational duties can be initiated. śūdras and women are not admitted to a vaidika initiation. Unless one is fit according to the estimation of the spiritual master, one cannot accept a mantra from the pañcarātrika-vidhi or the vaidika-vidhi. When one is fit to accept the mantra, one is initiated by the pañcarātrika-vidhi or the vaidika-vidhi. In any case, the result is the same.[20]

The overall conclusion is that there are not different sets of qualifications to be a guru for various classes of people, including women.

2 FDGs vs. social sanity

Question: How to open the door for FDGs while simultaneously protecting Vedic social models (needed to create a stable, sane, and spiritually progressive society)?

Vedic social models, albeit highly customized for different strata of society, aim at the same goal – to help one revive spiritual consciousness by engaging one’s nature and abilities in the service of the Lord and creating a favorable social environment for one’s spiritual progress. However, these Vedic norms are still at a formative stage in ISKCON. In the absence of a developed social infrastructure, it is Śrīla Prabhupāda’s position as the founder-ācārya and his application of Vedic social norms to ISKCON that take precedence over other social considerations. Those norms are further applied according to an individual devotee’s qualification under the guidance of her or his spiritual authorities.[21]

As the main authority for all generations of his followers, Śrīla Prabhupāda consistently emphasized that material liabilities such as birth or gender are no bar in rising to the highest levels of bhakti:

“No one should try to check a person, no matter what his present position is, from coming to the platform of a brāhmaṇa or a Vaiṣṇava.”[22]

“When either a man or a woman is advanced in spiritual consciousness, the bodily conception of life practically vanishes”[23]

While women in Vedic times usually did not learn the Vedas, chant the Brahma-gāyatrī, or perform yajnas, there are also examples in authoritative scriptures to the contrary.[24] Śrīla Prabhupāda has already ostensibly superseded a number of traditional dharmic injunctions regarding women by giving them gāyatrī, brahmacārinī training, and responsible roles in the preaching mission. But by engaging female disciples in these activities Śrīla Prabhupāda acted not in violation of Vedic social norms, but towards achieving their actual purpose. Therefore, if we are really to protect his model, we must include women receiving and giving dīkṣā. Indeed, we can make the point that Prabhupāda wanted to restore this ancient and śāstric Vedic model to replace the birth and caste conscious model that gains support from only a limited part of the Vedic literature.

While it is hard to assess social implications of introducing FDGs, there are no recorded negative impacts of FDGs in our sampradāya in the past, in other Vaiṣṇava sampradāyas, and in the modern Indian society in general. On the other hand, there are possible adverse social implications of inhibiting FDGs, such as: limiting female devotees in their spiritual functions as preachers, curtailing their relationships with the devotees they inspire, undermining the significance of the their spiritual instructions, failing to provide female devotees of ISKCON with the role models that they lack, and instigating “FDG-suffragettes” of varied motivations in ISKCON.

Indeed, allowing senior Vaiṣṇavīs of ideal character, impeccable reputation, and exemplary devotional record to initiate may be the most effective way of instilling and upholding Vedic social norms that are always based on living examples. By exercising their vetting power, the GBC can make sure that only such exemplary Vaiṣṇavīs are allowed to serve as FDGs, which would raise the threshold for FDG qualification and promote them as role models.

The introduction of FDGs might need to be done gradually and with an ongoing reassessment. To respect Vedic social norms, it might be proper etiquette for FDG candidates to seek permission for

commencing this service from their social guardians such as husbands, devotee parents, or grown-up sons. There could also be formed an appropriate saṅga of senior Vaiṣṇavīs for the protection and facilitation of FDGs in their service.

Another important way of protecting the Vedic social model while implementing FDGs is, for both men and women, to put more emphasis on the traditional model of dīkṣā-gurus having a limited number of disciples with whom the gurus had regular contact and could truly train and instruct.

3 Balance between Śrīla Prabhupāda's statement and FDGs

Question: How to balance Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements and standards with opening the door for FDGs (not just taking a select sampling that supports one side of the equation)?

Before considering the specific examples of Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements and standards in question, it is important to note that, since all of them are in reference to roles of women in the Vedic society, the apparent contradiction between them and Śrīla Prabhupāda's other statements empowering Vaiṣṇavīs for positions of spiritual authority in ISKCON requires not a stop-gap managerial decision, but an overarching hermeneutical approach that preserves ISKCON's core values and mission and reconciles philosophical differences. The hermeneutical approach standard to our sampradāya is exemplified by Lord Caitanya in His discussion with Ramananda Raya [25], and translated by Śrīla Prabhupāda as the famous "principle and detail" maxim.[26] From this principle and the entire thrust of Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions it follows that, albeit important for the proper functioning of the human society, varṇāśrama principles are subservient the spiritualization of human society, which is, in turn, subservient to śuddha-bhakti-sādhana, pure devotional service in practice. This approach allows Vaiṣṇavīs to have any degree of involvement in the purely transcendental preaching mission, including their serving as dīkṣā-gurus, while maintaining a traditional social profile as mothers, wives, and dependent members of the society.

In practical terms, this balance might look like this: accept that most females, like most males, will enter the gṛhasṭha āśrama. But in contrast to the varṇāśrama system, where the wife accepts the husband as guru, and does not herself take initiation, we accept that women will take harināma and mantra-dīkṣā and have their own gurus. Accept that ISKCON is a preaching movement and that some percentage of women in the gṛhasṭha āśrama may be involved in preaching, either as the assistant of their husband or in some more independent manner, with the consent of her husband. In practice, the percentage involved in preaching, to the extent that they attract śīkṣā disciples, would be small. If some of the śīkṣā disciples desired initiation then some other factors would apply. The husband would have to approve. The guru of the woman would have to either be departed or give consent. And finally (especially in case of widowed or renounced Vaiṣṇavīs) there would be the oversight and permission process by the GBC. Thus the woman, even if granted permission to initiate, would still function in terms of her womanly nature in society, and would be under the protection of relevant ISKCON authorities, such as the Guru Services Committee of the GBC, or their local GBCs. Thus even senior single women and widows may, if serving under proper ISKCON authority, also be able to take up the service of dīkṣā-guru. As long as the GBC's overall authority is maintained and accepted by all ISKCON gurus and leaders, this will prevent schism and even accommodate a certain degree of theological plurality.

3.1 *Vaiṣṇavīs in prominent roles*

Statement: Śrīla Prabhupāda did not put Vaiṣṇavīs in prominent leadership roles.

There is ample evidence to the contrary – that Śrīla Prabhupāda did put Vaiṣṇavīs in prominent roles of spiritual and even administrative leadership, albeit on a smaller scale than men and in some cases mostly over other female devotees. Examples include Vaiṣṇavīs serving as preachers, teachers, pujaris, heads of departments, leaders of the World Sankirtana Party, and temple managers (such as Śilāvātī, Yadurāṇī, and Yamunā).[27] He also proposed two of his female disciples as GBC members. This, although apparently at odds with a traditional role of women in the Vedic society, and with the instructions of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s immediate predecessors, is still supportable with instances in the śāstra and tradition of some ladies holding prominent leadership roles. We should not imagine that a varṇāśrama society entails having all women being unknown, unseen, and unheard in society. There are many Bhāgavatam verses that have women speakers, and the Bhāgavatam has descriptions of women who were well-known and influential in various ways even in ancient, Vedic societies. Gangamata was a prominent spiritual leader in her role as dīkṣā-guru to the king of Puri. Paurṇamāsī is the main guru in Vṛndāvana and the most prominent spiritual leader there. (See **Appendix 2: Mukṭā-carita on women initiating**) Prabhupāda's actions of putting some women in positions of spiritual leadership is also consistent with Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own teaching that bhakti overrides varṇāśrama qualifications or disqualifications.

But there is also a misconception, which has a pronounced influence on this discussion, that being a dīkṣā-guru necessarily means holding a prominent leadership position other than for the disciples. Some gurus become prominent leadership figures in society but others, perhaps because of having few disciples, or a very low social profile, do not become prominent in society. There is no necessary connection between the prominence of one's position in the general society and his or her service as a dīkṣā-guru or vice versa. There are many male devotees who have prominent institutional roles but do not serve and will not serve as dīkṣā-gurus. Some women devotees will naturally have prominent roles in ISKCON and some will not, regardless of whether or not they give dīkṣā to any disciples.

3.2 *Traditional standards for boys and girls*

Statement: Śrīla Prabhupāda upheld traditional standards about the different roles of the sexes within his society, including his outlining different training for boys and girls at gurukulas.

While Śrīla Prabhupāda did uphold traditional standards,[28] he did so not simply for their own sake. While emphasizing the importance of establishing varṇāśrama with its concomitant standards for preserving purity,[29] Śrīla Prabhupāda also expertly modified such traditional standards in compliance with the more essential principles of pure devotion and preaching, evident from his empowerment of female disciples for untraditional roles of preachers and teachers,[30] emphasized equal spiritual education for both men and women, as well as boys and girls in gurukulas, and left clear instruction that there can be female dīkṣā-gurus.[10] (See also **Appendix 3: Śrīla Prabhupāda on traditional and spiritual roles of men and women**) Śrīla Prabhupāda obviously did not see the roles of women as good mothers and good wives to be incompatible with their missionary roles within a modern social context, and integrated both. His statements favoring the missionary involvement of female devotees are too many and too strong to ignore. At the same time, Śrīla Prabhupāda would correct female disciples neglecting their motherly duties to perform temple or missionary activities.[31] On the other hand, Prabhupāda did not want women to be exclusively engaged in the duties of a wife and mother at the cost of their spiritual lives.[32]

Moreover, Vaiṣṇavī's giving initiations are not at all a departure from traditional standards, as evident from the history of our sampradāya, nor is it impossible for Vaiṣṇavī's serving as dīkṣā-gurus to still behave in a way fully compliant with traditional standards for women. One may refer to the description of Jāhnavā Devī's behavior in Bhakti-ratnākara [33] that shows both her exalted status of a dīkṣā-guru and ācārya, respected by her great contemporaries such as Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmī and Jīvā Gosvāmī, and her behavior in perfect compliance with the traditional standards governing male-female interaction and their respective roles. (See **Appendix 4: Bhakti-ratnākara on Jāhnavā Devī**)

3.3 *FDGs and the list of eleven proxies*

Question: If Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted FDGs, then why did he not put any Vaiṣṇavī names on the list of the original eleven?

Trying to construe Śrīla Prabhupāda's appointment of male devotees as his proxies for initiations as his philosophical statement is a very speculative and tenuous argument. In fact, one can just as well extrapolate this argument to advance a wide range of absurd conclusions: that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not want any Indian gurus, that he did not want any black gurus, that only these eleven disciples and no one else could ever initiate, or that wanted a certain percent of ISKCON gurus to be Jews. This type of reasoning is at conflict with Śrīla Prabhupāda's own teachings on receiving knowledge from the spiritual master rather than by guesswork. Furthermore, Śrīla Prabhupāda did not preach or act in terms of affirmative action or quota systems. Therefore, to assume or conclude anything at all from the bodies, ethnic background, and so forth of those 11 in terms of Prabhupāda's desire for who would be guru, may be a mistake.

If we take it that the list of eleven has some meaning in terms of what sort of persons should be dīkṣā-gurus in ISKCON, there are some possible interpolations of what Prabhupāda might have, or might have not, intended:

1. Śrīla Prabhupāda did say that qualified female devotees can also be dīkṣā-gurus, “...but not so many”, [10] and the fact that there were no Vaiṣṇavīs among the eleven proxies could simply be a confirmation of this statement.
2. The sannyāsī-gṛhastha controversy was still too fresh, and Śrīla Prabhupāda might have wanted to avoid exacerbating it by appointing women among the eleven proxies.
3. Considering the young age of his disciples at that time, Śrīla Prabhupāda might have chosen men over women to protect the latter’s new family life and responsibilities.
4. The situation in ISKCON nowadays is different, and having 60-plus-year-old Vaiṣṇavīs initiate a few disciples, might have a favorable effect on the somewhat troubled record of ISKCON's male guruship.
5. There are reasons to believe that those eleven proxies were not intended by Śrīla Prabhupāda to become anything more than proxies.[34]
6. This argument seems to be based on a mistaken notion that there was indeed an appointment of not just gurus but eleven zonal ācāryas. Denying female devotees permission to serve as dīkṣā-gurus appears to be another symptom of the same inappropriate conflation of the dīkṣā-guru's position with administrative influence and power.
7. The fact of appointing eleven proxies does in no way cancel out Śrīla Prabhupāda’s repeated and consistent instructions to all of his disciples to become gurus:

“Anyone following the order of Lord Caitanya under the guidance of His bona fide representative, can become a spiritual master and I wish that in my absence all my disciples become the bona fide spiritual master to spread Kṛṣṇa Consciousness throughout the whole world.”[35]

“I hope that all of you, men, women, boys and girls, become spiritual master.”[15]

“As far as Kṛṣṇa consciousness is concerned, everyone is capable of becoming a spiritual master because knowledge in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is on the platform of the spirit soul. To spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one need only be cognizant of the science of the spirit soul. It does not matter whether one is a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya, śūdra, sannyāsī, gṛhastha or whatever. If one simply understands this science, he can become a spiritual master... The word guru is equally applicable to the vartma-pradarśaka-guru, śikṣā-guru and dīkṣā-guru. Unless we accept the principle enunciated by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement cannot spread all over the world.”[3]

8. During Śrīla Prabhupāda's time ISKCON's leadership was mainly masculine, and naturally the prominent leaders were appointed as the original eleven proxies.
9. One may even go as far as claiming that, out of respect for conservative Vedic social traditions and his similarly conservative predecessors, Śrīla Prabhupāda did not actually mean to introduce FDGs as a norm within ISKCON despite the impression to the contrary deliberately given by him to Prof. O'Connell[10] and other outsiders as well as neophytes, despite his letter to Hamsadūta[36], and despite his many statements that “all” of his disciples should become gurus. However, such an assertion would be at a stark contrast with Śrīla Prabhupāda's boldness and assertiveness in stating even in the most defiant of audiences what he accepted as truth.

4 Introducing FDGs vs. feminism or modernism

Question: How to avoid making the right decision but it being seen as support for the wrong reasons? Eg. “We are being left behind. Catch up with the times.”

SAC members concurred that, if ISKCON leaders make decisions on this or other matters based strictly on Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instructions and in accordance with guru, sadhu, and śāstra, they need not feel apprehensive about or intimidated by possible misperceptions and repercussions as a result.

In order to make the right decisions for the right reasons, it is essential, as is already mentioned in the previous section “Balance between Śrīla Prabhupāda's statement and FDG”, to formulate and stick to the principles of the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava hermeneutic, or a hierarchy of values, as presented in Caitanya-caritāmṛta (eg. *Ramanānda-samvāda* or *Rūpa-śikṣā*), Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (eg. *Uddhava-gītā*, or Chapter 5 of Canto 1, especially with *Sārārtha-darśinī* commentaries), Bhāgavad-gītā (eg. BG 12.8-12) etc. This will allow us to explicate both the higher principles (*bhakti-sādhana* and *tattva-jñāna*, according to which female dīkṣā- gurus are an undeniable fact, both historically and philosophically), lower principles (*varṇa-āśrama*, according to which a woman can be simultaneously a recognized teacher of spiritual truths[37] and “not independent”) as well as the respective order of importance between the two.[38]. Such a comprehensive hermeneutical analysis of the FDG issue will serve both as a satisfying FDGs rationale for propounders of varṇāśrama-dharma and an effective protection against accusations of feminism or modernism.

This hermeneutical approach is often referred to by Śrīla Prabhupāda as the consideration of *deśa-kāla-pātra*, or “principle and details”. [29] As an empowered *ācārya*, he used this consideration as support for the numerous innovations in his preaching – even for such innovations as engaging women in preaching (principle), which went starkly against the traditional Vedic decorum (detail).[39] Likewise, Śrīla Prabhupāda considered that his qualified female disciples being able to become gurus was a matter of principle, while Vedic traditions restricting women from such roles merely details.[15][36] (See also **Appendix 5: Reasons for FDGs in terms of principle and details**) At the same time, Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasized that these ostensible “changes” and “violations” of Vedic tradition were in fact his strict adherence to the words and spirit of his spiritual master.[40]

5 Respecting cultural considerations

Question: Do we need to respect cultural considerations (like the concerns of the India Yatra's leadership) or not? If so, how?

Śrīla Prabhupāda repeatedly stressed the value of traditional Vedic and Vaiṣṇava culture as still extant in India:

So America has got money but blind. And India has got culture but lame. So let us combine. Then things will be done very nice. Andha-pangu-nyaya.”[41]

Prabhupāda: “India could not improve on account of poverty, lame. And America? Blind for want of culture. So let the blind man carry the lame man on the head, and the lame man

give direction that 'Go this way,' and he walks. So both men's work is done. There is no hampering because one is blind and one is lame. Combined together, they get the benefit."[42]

In fact, Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes emphasized such cultural requirements as simplicity, chastity, and humility to his Vaiṣṇavī disciples while encouraging them for unconventional role of preachers:

You can attract the fair sex community. Most of them are frustrated being without any home or husband. If you can organize all these girls they will get a transcendental engagement and may not be allured to the frustration of life. Your engagement should be chanting and worship of the Deity. Jīvā Goswami advises that in the Kali-yuga sankirtana is the principle worship. Even if one chants many mantras it must be preceded by glorious sankirtana—sankirtana is the maha-mantra. Yes, you are right, women are generally after sense gratification. That is the disease. Chant twenty-four hours a day and don't dress nicely to attract men. It is better that you don't make a large program. Remain a humble program. In bhakti there is no grotesque program. A humble program is better. We are doing all these grotesque programs to allure the masses. My Guru Mahārāja used to say that no one hears from a person coming from a humble, simple life. You remain always very humble.[43]

At the same time, Śrīla Prabhupāda consistently criticized Indian people for their superficial, neglectful and indiscriminate attitude towards their own spiritual culture, and for spoiling it with casteism and superstitions, like:

[A]ctually India's position is now degraded; it is not advancing. They have lost their original culture, and now they are begging from outside. So actually they have not gained by sacrificing their original culture. Of course, this superficial loss of original culture is visible only to the so-called educated person at the present moment, and they have become befooled as it is stated in the Bhāgavad-gītā:māyayāpahṛta-jñānā, their knowledge has been taken away.[44]

"If you have time, you read this philosophy, this science, and try to understand what is this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. But it is not a new movement. It is already known in India. Unfortunately, we Indian people, we are rejecting. That is our misfortune. Our misfortune is, as it is said, (Hindi). We have kicked out our own culture; now we are trying to develop another culture from other spheres of the world. So you can do that -- there is no objection - - but don't forget your original culture, Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which was taught by Kṛṣṇa Himself five thousand years ago in the Bhāgavad-gītā...[45]

Therefore, while it is important to take into account and respect cultural considerations and concerns of the Indian yatra leadership on the matter of FDG, it is even more important to maintain the foundational principle in this discussion: that qualification to serve as a guru is not a mundane or bodily consideration, as repeatedly stated by Śrīla Prabhupāda. ISKCON should not try to be more Vedic or Indian than Śrīla Prabhupāda himself was or ever intended his followers to be.

As for the contemporary Indian society, even its most traditional and cultural strata seem to be quite receptive to and respectful of women in various leadership roles, including spiritual. In this connection it is noteworthy that most of the opposition to FDGs appears to be largely induced not by the native Indian devotees, but by a vocal minority among Western devotees living in India. Therefore it should be ascertained, ideally in a face-to-face discussion with all the important stakeholders, including FDG candidates, what the actual concerns of the Indian yatra leaders about introducing FDGs are and how to best address them.

It should also be noted that one significant factor contributing towards the resistance to FDGs in ISKCON is a mistaken perception of a dīkṣā-guru as a position of independent authority rather than a service. This tangling of spiritual guidance with managerial authority, which seems to originate from the Zonal Ācāryas era, is sufficiently addressed in the GBC paper “Harmonizing ISKCON's Lines of Authority”. By clarifying the distinction between these two lines, that paper can assuage the anxieties of those who oppose FDG either out of genuine or induced cultural, philosophical, or institutional concerns.

Some practical steps to address genuine cultural concerns about FDGs could also include:

1. developing an educational course on guru-tattva that should become mandatory for all aspiring disciples in ISKCON before they accept someone as their guru;
2. formulating a code of conduct for ISKCON śīkṣā- and dīkṣā-gurus, with specific details provided for both genders that would:
 - remove the perception of dīkṣā-gurus as independent autocrats, and
 - help FDGs in particular to behave in accordance with both transcendental principles and female cultural roles (for example, like mothers and not masters) with a view of molding FDGs into ideal role models for ISKCON Vaiṣṇavīs;
3. forming an FDG oversight subcommittee of the existing Guru Services Committee that would consist of mature and exemplary senior Vaiṣṇavīs who would help FDG and candidates to conform to the formulated code of conduct;
4. introducing FDGs in India on a gradual and limited basis, but without infringing upon the spiritual principles of faith and inspiration;
5. continuing to research the eternal culture of India with a view of getting a better idea of how FDGs should fit into the spiritual cultural conquest envisioned by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

6. Rarity of FDGs

Question: It appears that while there have been FDGs in our line, they are rare. If so, should the same standard be upheld in ISKCON? How 'rare' is 'rare' and what is the criteria?

Given the absence of an uninterrupted and exhaustive hagiography of the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava line with its many sub-branches, it is virtually impossible to provide a solid proof for the claim that FDGs were rare, as well as a mathematically accurate estimate of how rare they were. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, for instance, listed 12 persons in his dīkṣā line starting from Jāhnavā Ṭhākurānī, among whom 4 were Vaiṣṇavīs, who constitute one third of the dīkṣā-gurus in his line – a minority, but not a rarity.[46] Other Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava lineages, as learned from various sources, show a highly varying ratio of male-female dīkṣā-gurus, which indicate little, if any, numerical standard:

- 1 Lineage descending from Jāhnavā Ṭhākurānī and Nārāyaṇī Devī down to Prāṇa Gopāla Gosvāmī, a respected ācārya of the sampradāya in the early 1900's in Bengal: 2 men, 9 ladies.
- 2 Lineage descending from Lokanātha Gosvāmī and Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura down to Siddha Sakhicaran Das Babaji: 10 men.
- 3 Lineage descending from Advaita Ācārya and his son Kṛṣṇa Mīśra down to Nikuñja Gopāla Gosvāmī of Navadvīpa: 6 men, 6 ladies.

- 4 Lineage descending from Jāhnavā Ṭhākurāṇī and Dhanañjaya Paṇḍita down to Kuñjabihārī Dāsa Bābājī: 13 men, 1 lady.
- 5 Lineage descending from Lokanatha Gosvāmī and Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura down to Jñānānanda Cakravartī Ṭhākura: 10 men, 7 ladies.
- 6 Lineage descending from Jāhnavā Ṭhākurāṇī down to Hari-mohana Gosvāmī: 13 men.

Therefore, historically, the claimed rarity of FDGs in the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava sampradāya is difficult to substantiate, what to speak of seeing it as a “standard” to “uphold” in ISKCON in terms of a FDGs quota – just as there cannot be a quota for Western, African, or Indian male dīkṣā-gurus.

There is also no evidence that the relative minority of FDGs in the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava sampradāya has been due to social or institutional suppression. Neither is there in the scriptures or in historical records an incident that a competent Vaiṣṇavī was ever denied the right to initiate disciples, or that aspiring disciples were ever forbidden to seek dīkṣā from a competent Vaiṣṇavī.

It appears that the relative minority of FDGs is due to the same internal and natural reasons as the overall rarity of male dīkṣā-gurus among competent male Vaiṣṇavas – devotees' natural humility and consequent reluctance to accept others' perception of themselves as competent to give shelter and guidance. For example, very few close associates and intimate devotees of Lord Caitanya are known to have given dīkṣā, with some of them, like Lokanātha Gosvāmī, refusing to do so even upon Lord Caitanya's personal request. Other factors limiting the number of FDGs in our line could be the choice of prospective disciples (who might prefer male gurus), the reluctance of women to assume the role of dīkṣā-gurus (for instance, due to family commitments, or because the husband is a dīkṣā-guru and she functions as guru-patni, or due to other personal choices), and the absence of women dīkṣā-gurus in canonical śāstras like the Bhāgavatam, Mahābhārata, and Rāmāyaṇa. (Also see **Appendix 6: Analysis of Śrīla Prabhupāda's “not so many” statement**)

On a practical note, what ISKCON leaders need to uphold themselves, and teach to aspiring disciples, are the objective, observable, and authorized qualifications required for serving as a dīkṣā-guru. These include criteria stated by Śrīla Prabhupāda, such as being a loyal preacher in good standing,[47] preferably with a Bhaktivedanta degree,[12] and the nearly equivalent criteria stated in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (learned, devoted, self-controlled)[48] If upheld, demonstrated, and consistently taught to devotees prior to their accepting a spiritual master, these principles by themselves will guarantee the natural and healthy level of rarity of dīkṣā-gurus of both genders – both rare enough to assure the quality of spiritual guidance and not too rare as to block the growth of the Kṛṣṇa Consciousness movement as envisioned by Śrīla Prabhupāda. With these principles being introduced, even if the GBC were to allow women to serve as dīkṣā-gurus, there would be no rush of disciples to them rather than to male gurus, nor would there be a flood of women following them in assuming the role of dīkṣā-gurus.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1: Ācāryas on SB 3.33.6: Bhakti overrides inborn disqualification

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (3.33.6):

yan-nāmadheya-śravaṇānukīrtanād
yat-prahvaṇād yat-smaraṇād api kvacit
śvādo 'pi sadyaḥ savanāya kalpate
kutaḥ punas te bhagavan nu darśanāt

yat—of whom (the Supreme Personality of Godhead); nāmadheya—the name; śravaṇa—hearing; anukīrtanāt—by chanting; yat—to whom; prahvaṇāt—by offering obeisances; yat—whom; smaraṇāt—by remembering; api—even; kvacit—at any time; śva-adaḥ—a dog-eater; api—even; sadyaḥ—immediately; savanāya—for performing Vedic sacrifices; kalpate—becomes eligible; kutaḥ—what to speak of; punaḥ—again; te—You; bhagavan—O Supreme Personality of Godhead; nu—then; darśanāt—by seeing face to face.

TRANSLATION: To say nothing of the spiritual advancement of persons who see the Supreme Person face to face, even a person born in a family of dog-eaters immediately becomes eligible to perform Vedic sacrifices if he once utters the holy name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead or chants about Him, hears about His pastimes, offers Him obeisances or even remembers Him.

Śrīdhara Svāmī, the first commentator on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, in his commentary glosses the words *savanāya kalpate* as *savanāya soma-yāgāya kalpate yogyo bhavati. anena pūjyatvaṁ lakṣyate*, which translates to “a dog-eater becomes qualified for performing *soma-yajñas*, meaning that he (the dog-eater) becomes as worshipable as one who performs a *soma-yajña*.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda in his purport quotes Śrīdhara Svāmī's statement *anena pūjyatvaṁ lakṣyate*, stressing the point that through the power of devotional service (hearing, chanting, etc.) even a person born in a family of *caṇḍālas* “becomes respectable as a most learned brāhmaṇa and can be allowed to perform Vedic sacrifices.”

Śrīlā Jīva Gosvāmī in his Krama-sandarbhā commentary to this verse says at the end: *tatra yogyatāyām labdhārambho bhavatīty arthaḥ. tad-anantara-janmany eva dvijatvaṁ prāpya tad-ādy-adhikārī syād iti bhāvahaḥ*: “Here eligibility means the beginning of obtaining qualification. Only in the next life, having obtained the status of a twice-born, one actually becomes fully qualified. That's the implied meaning of this verse.”

The same verse is quoted in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.1.21), included by Śrīlā Rūpa Gosvāmī to prove the power of bhakti to destroy a devotee's prārabdha-karma, which is explained further on in the next verse (BRS 1.1.22). Commenting on that verse (BRS 1.1.22), Śrīlā Jīva Gosvāmī elaborates why there is a need for a devotee dog-eater to take another birth in order to become fully qualified. He says that when *prārabdha-karma* gets destroyed, there are no more obstacles to performing *yajñas*, but such a dog-eater still needs some additional qualification, namely to take his second birth by receiving the sacred thread and further training. Jīva Gosvāmī compares his position to that of a *brāhmaṇa* boy, who, while having no bad *prārabdha-karma* (caused by taking a low birth), still needs to get proper qualification (such as receiving the sacred thread) in order to actually perform *yajñas*. And because the Vedic tradition mandates that such training be undergone at a young age [according to *Manu-saṁhitā* 2.36-39, *brāhmaṇa-dīkṣā* must be completed by the age of sixteen], a grown-up dog-eater would necessarily have to take another birth.

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, while not disagreeing with his predecessor, slightly modifies the meaning by saying that *śva-paca*, a dog-eater, is actually fully qualified to perform *yajñas* even in this birth, but he does not perform mundane *yajñas* such as *soma-yajñas* from the karma-kāṇḍa section because he does not have faith in them, aiming only at pure bhakti.

Śrīlā Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Ṭhākura further developed this line of argument by awarding *brahma-gāyatrī* even to those who did not take birth in high brahminical families but who became Vaiṣṇavas and started chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Despite the fact that they already passed the proper age required for brāhmaṇa training, he gave them the second initiation and allowed them even in this birth to perform *yajñas* and worship *śalagrama-śīlas* – activities reserved exclusively for the brāhmaṇas. In his *Vivṛti* commentary on the verse in question he writes: “The statement ‘lacking proper behavior’ (from Śrīlā Jīva Gosvāmī’s commentary) is only in relation to the lowborn that did not receive *vaiṣṇava-dīkṣa*. If the lowborn receives *vaiṣṇava-dīkṣa*, he then surpasses the second birth.”[49]

Following his spiritual master, Śrīlā Prabhupāda also gave second initiation to his Western disciples and even in this birth engaged them in performing *yajñas* and Deity worship. In doing so he was fully aware of, and completely pursuant to his predecessor ācāryas’ opinions, which is illustrated by his purport to CC Madhya 16.186 (where Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī quotes the same SB 3.33.6 verse):

Those who find fault in the Western Vaiṣṇavas should consider this statement from Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and the commentary on this verse by Śrīlā Jīva Gosvāmī. In this regard, Śrīlā Jīva Gosvāmī has stated that to become a brāhmaṇa one has to wait for purification and undergo the sacred thread ceremony, but a chanter of the holy name does not have to wait for the sacred thread ceremony. We do not allow devotees to perform sacrifices until they are properly initiated in the sacred thread ceremony. Yet according to this verse, an offenseless chanter of the holy name is already fit to perform a fire ceremony, even though he is not doubly initiated by the sacred thread ceremony.[49]

Śrīlā Prabhupāda applied the principle that bhakti overrides disqualifications by birth one step further, giving second initiations to women and engaging them in brahminical activities without having them wait to change their female body in the next birth. Moreover, he even sanctioned their giving the *dīkṣā-mantras* to men, as is seen in the following letter to Vaikuṅṭhanātha and Śarādīyā, Bombay 4 April, 1971:

Even though you have had no Gāyatrī-mantra, still you are more than brāhmaṇa. I am enclosing herewith your sacred thread, duly chanted on by me. Gāyatrī-mantra is as follows: [taken out] 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. Śarādīyā, or any twice-initiated devotee, may perform the ceremony. I remember the days when Śarādīyā expressed to marry you and I immediately reserved you for marriage to Śarādīyā. Later on in Boston you were married and since then you are working so nicely. I am very pleased upon you. Simply use this marital life for spreading the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa and in this very lifetime you will be promoted to associate with Krishna in Goloka Vrindāvan. So please stay on the purity platform; chant 16 rounds daily and without fail, follow all the regulative principles, and read all our books and your life is sure to be successful. Unless one is sufficiently empowered, one cannot preach Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. So the fact that you are preaching so nicely is proof that you are already benedicted by Kṛṣṇa. So preach Kṛṣṇa Consciousness and be happy.[50]

Consistently, Śrīlā Prabhupāda established that qualification for performing brahminical activities (in this case cooking for the Deities) was based on one’s spiritual training, rather than on the

external bodily distinctions:

Any initiated girl can take part in preparation of prasadam, and even a boy who is not initiated cannot take part.[51]

Conclusion: the above demonstrates that for a devotee, birth in a female body (considered to be a lesser liability for spiritual life than birth as a caṇḍāla) is not regarded by our ācāryas as an obstacle for receiving dīkṣā, giving dīkṣā-mantras, and engaging in other brahminical activities traditionally reserved in the Vedic society only for male born and properly trained *brāhmaṇas*.

Appendix 2: Mukṭā-carita on women initiating

The following are excerpts from Mukṭā-carita by Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, which explicitly mention initiations by women.

tatas tuṅgavidyā prāha—asmābhir api śrī-bhagavatī-pāda-padma-siddha-mantra-śiṣyā-nāndīmukhī-sakāśāt siddha-mantram ekam ādāya katham na tathodyamaḥ kriyate ?

Then Tuṅgavidyā said: ‘Nāndīmukhī, the disciple at the lotus feet of Paurṇamāsī, received this siddha- mantra from her. Why don’t we also, having taken the same mantra from Nāndīmukhī, make endeavor in this matter?’

sarvāḥ—bhadram vadati tuṅgavidyēti nirṇīya tat-pārśvam upetya sa-vinayam ātmābhilāṣam nivedayāmāsuḥ |

All gopīs replied: ‘Well said, Tuṅgavidyā!’. Having decided to do so, they went to Nāndīmukhī and humbly disclosed to her the desire of their hearts.

...

atas tasya mayi madhurām prītim anavadhārya tat-pūrṇāmśām yathārtha-nāmnīm tuṅgavidyām bhagavatī-mukhāt niśamya satvarābhīṣṭa-lābhāya enām gurutvenāsādyāsyāḥ sakāśāt mahādevī-mantra-rājam didīkṣiṣurahaṁtvāmbhagavatya-advitīyāmprapanno ’smi|

Therefore, haven’t obtained her love to Me, I will approach Tuṅgavidyā, who is non-different from her and named accordingly. I will request her to give Me the king of mantras, mahādevī-mantra (Rādhā-mantra), which she received from Bhagavatī Pūrṇamāsī and thus became guru. I am eager to become a disciple of yours, who are non-different from Bhagavatī Pūrṇamāsī, in order to quickly obtain My desired goal. I take full shelter of you.

nāndīmukhī vihasya | sulakṣaṇa prathamam tāvat śāstra-nirṇīta-gurūpasattir vidhīyatām |

Laughing, Nāndīmukhī replied: “O Sulakṣaṇa (endowed with wonderful qualities)! In this case, you should do what śāstras order as the very first duty of a disciple – serve the guru.”

...

iti niśamya sarvāsu sa-smitam tuṅgavidyā-mukham avalokayantīṣu tayāpy ucchalitāntarānandam āvṛtya bhrū-bhaṅgena saroṣam iva mām iṣad avalokya bhāṣitam | nāndīmukhi tvam siddhā tapasviny asi | tasmād etad-vidhinā tvam evainam dīkṣaya | tadāsya siddhāto mantra-grahaṇāt svābhīṣṭa-kāma-lābhho jhaṭiti sampatsyata iti vyāhṛtya sakrodham grhāya gacchantīm kareṇa grhītvā vyāghoṭya

Hearing that, all the gopīs giggled as they looked at Tuṅgavidyā’s face. She tried to conceal her inner ecstasy overwhelming her and, knitting her eyebrows as if in an angry mood, addressed Nāndīmukhī: “You are a perfected renunciate. Therefore, it is you who should initiate Him according to this procedure. If He receives the mantra from a perfect person,

then He will very quickly achieve the desired result.”

Having said that, in a great anger she was about to leave the place and go home. Viśākhā caught her with the hand and stopped her.

viśākhā vihasya nāndīmukhīm prāha—nāndīmukhi! asya samprati prāpta-vyalīkasya dīkṣā-dāne mahān eva pratyavāyaḥ syād ity ācāryeyaṁ tvām prati krudhyati ||

Laughing, Viśākhā said to Nāndīmukhī: “Nāndīmukhī! Certainly, it would be a great fault to initiate this duplicitous person. Your guru will be angry at you.”

nāndīmukhī sacintam iva—sakala-gokula-jīvanībhūtasya katham tad-doṣa-dhvaṁso bhavati ?

Nāndīmukhī became thoughtful and said: “He is the life of all living entities in Gokula. What can He do to purify Himself from His faults?”

viśākhā—prāyaścittācaraṇenaiva |

“He should observe some rites of atonement,” replied Viśākhā.

nāndīmukhī—tato bhagavatītas tad-doṣa-vihita-niṣkṛtiṁ sampādya puruṣottamam enaṁ śuddham vidhāya dīkṣayantu bhavayataḥ |

Nāndīmukhī said: “Then let Bhagavatī Pūrṇamāsī determine the proper penance, so that Puruṣottama can be purified of His crimes. Then you can give Him initiation.”

tac chrutvā campakalatā prāha—mugdhe ! ujjvala-maṇi-saṁhitāyām eva vivṛto ’sti tan-niṣkṛti-vidhir bhavatyāḥ prāyeṇa gocaro na bhavatīti tayaiva kathā-prasaṅge kathitam asti ||

Hearing her words, Campakalatā said, “O foolish women! The method of atoning for such sins can be found only in the Ujjvala-maṇi-saṁhitā. You don’t know that method and therefore should learn it from this book.”

...

tato ’ham vihasya—nāndīmukhi ! seyaṁ candramukhī sāmāñjasya-ratā lalitādivad dvandva-pātinī na bhavati | ato vinā mūlyenāpy asyai santuṣṭena mayā mauktikāni deyaṇi | kintv iyaṁ mantra-vidāṁ mūrdhanyā tataḥ śvaḥ paraśvo vā parama-śuciḥ satī rahaḥ sthānam āgatya snānādinā parama-śucaye kāntadarpābhīdhācārya-nirukta-mantra-ṣaṭcalaṁ mahyam upadiśatu | yattheha vṛndāvane gopenaiva mayā surādhikā-śrī-drutam eva labhyate

At this, I laughed and said, “Nāndīmukhī! This Candramukhī seriously tries to bring unity, unlike Lalitā and her friends who are happy to escalate the points of contention. Therefore, with great pleasure I would have given her some pearls as a gift. However, since she is the best

amongst the knowers of mantras, she should, either tomorrow or day after tomorrow, come to a secluded place. There she should initiate Me, purified by taking bath and performing other rituals, in the mantras received from the great ācārya Kāntadarpa. Thus, although I am just a simple cowherd boy of Vrindavan, I will attain the tree, bringing the wealth surpassing even that of the demigods.”

Note: One may argue that Paurṇamāsī and Nāndīmukhī, being liberated souls, were not bound by Vedic restrictions. However, the gopīs are also liberated souls, but their violation of Vedic norms for the sake of Lord Kṛṣṇa is glorified not because of them defying Vedic norms by dint of their liberated position, but because, despite acting as ideal women of the Vedic society, they demonstrated that service to Kṛṣṇa has the highest priority surpassing that of all Vedic injunctions that they were following perfectly. In other words, it is the liberated position of devotional service, and not their own that the gopīs epitomize by their selfless service.

Similarly, the fact that Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī describes Paurṇamāsī and Nāndīmukhī initiating or willing to initiate others, including Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is meant not to show that liberated souls can do anything they please and get away with it, but that Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmī had no reservations about females initiating, neither did the members of the highly traditional society of Vraja, often cited as the epitome of the Vedic culture.

Appendix 3: Śrīla Prabhupāda on traditional and spiritual roles of men and women

Śrīla Prabhupāda outlined roles in various categories. Here he gives two categories, conditional and constitutional:

When a living entity is conditioned, he has two kinds of activities: one is conditional, and the other is constitutional. As for protecting the body or abiding by the rules of society and state, certainly there are different activities, even for the devotees, in connection with the conditional life, and such activities are called conditional. Besides these, the living entity who is fully conscious of his spiritual nature and is engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or the devotional service of the Lord, has activities which are called transcendental. Such activities are performed in his constitutional position, and they are technically called devotional service. (Bg 9.30 purp.)

With regards to varṇāśrama duties and training, Prabhupāda explained that men and women have different roles in some areas. Even in varṇāśrama, men and women sometimes have very similar roles. For example, regarding āśrama duties, Krishna says to the gopis during rasa lila, “And most importantly, a woman must take care of her children.” At the same time, “Naradaji saw that Lord Kṛṣṇa was engaged as an affectionate father petting His small children.” So, both men and women take care of their children, although such care is primarily the woman’s duty.

Another example is that in the fourth canto of Bhāgavatam, the duties of both men and women in the vānaprastha āśrama are given, and both the man and women perform similar austerities. (SB 4.28.35-36 for the austerities of the man, and SB 4.28.44 for the austerities of the woman). Devahūti also performs vānaprastha austerities and meditation after the departure of her husband and son. Visnupriya performs vānaprastha austerities after the sannyāsa of Lord Caitanya.

Regarding varṇa duties, Prabhupāda explains,

That’s what I... Similarly, weaver, that cloth weaving, “kat, kat.” The wife is spinning, her husband is weaving, the children is weaving, and combinedly at the end of the day there is a cloth. And people were satisfied with simple necessities. They would not charge very much for the labor. And one nice cloth requires half a pound cotton. (Room conversation on Varṇāśrama—July 14, 1977, Vṛndāvana)

So, while it is primarily the man’s duty to earn the livelihood, the woman may also assist in such varṇa duties. From the above we see that men and women have some different, and some overlapping, duties in regards to conditional activities.

Regarding constitutional or spiritual duties, Śrīla Prabhupāda consistently stated and practiced, that men and women should receive the same training and have the same duties, with the qualifications being whether or not a person is initiated and following, but not according to the body.

Regarding lecturing by women devotees: I have informed you that in the service of the Lord there is no distinction of caste, or creed, colour, or sex. . we want so many preachers, both men and women. (Letter to Jaya Govinda, 8th Febuary, 1968)

So far as girls or boys lecturing in the morning, that doesn’t make any difference. Either girl or boy devotees may deliver lecture if they choose to do. We have no such distinction of bodily designations, male or female. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is on the spiritual platform. As such, anyone who is a devotee of the Lord, following in this line of disciple succession, can

deliver lecture, on the teachings of Bhāgavad-gītā, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, etc. (Letter to Śyāmā Dāsī, 21st October, 1968)

Regarding your questions the examinations to be given, the girls will also be able to take these. In Kṛṣṇa consciousness there is no distinction between girls and boys. The girls also may become preachers if they are able. (Letter to Himavatī, 24th January, 1969)

Regarding gurukula training, Bhāgavatam states:

A chaste woman should not be greedy, but satisfied in all circumstances. She must be very expert in handling household affairs and should be fully conversant with religious principles. (SB 7.11.28)

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted both boys and girls in gurukula to learn his books, to learn Sanskrit, and to be trained as preachers. In these following quotes Prabhupāda is referring to all the children, not only the boys:

The important members of ISKCON should give careful attention to our Dallas school, where children are being taught Sanskrit and English to become perfect brāhmaṇas. (CC Adi 17.103 purp.)

I am very glad to hear that all of you have been such a great help to Stoka Kṛṣṇa there in our Dallas Gurukula and I can understand that all of you are very sincere boys and girls and quite eligible for going back to Home, back to Godhead. Now I very much appreciate your activities for conducting our school to the highest standard of Krishna Consciousness behavior, and I consider your work the most important in the society because you are shaping the future generation of our Krishna Consciousness preachers, and this is not any small thing. (Letter to Rūpa Vilāsa (Robert McNaughton), Candrikā (Carol McNaughton), Bhavatāriṇī (Debbie Watt), Bhanutanya (Debra Wolin)—Los Angeles, 20 June, 1972)

I am especially stressing the importance of our Dallas Gurukula for training up the next generation of Krishna Consciousness preachers. This is the most important task ahead. (Letter to Satsvarūpa—Los Angeles 1 July, 1972)

Prabhupāda also sometimes encouraged girls' education on a high level:

Some of our girls may be trained in colleges and take teacher exams, and their husbands also. (Letter to Satsvarūpa — Delhi 25 November, 1971)

We have seen your note regarding Sarasvatī Mahārāja, and you may engage one Sanskrit teacher for Sarasvatī so she shall become a very great scholar, just like Jīvā Gosvāmī was trained in Sanskrit language from early childhood and no one could surpass him in all of India. (Letter to Bhavānanda — London 1 August, 1972)

In addition, he wanted the girls to know how to be chaste, faithful wives and good cooks but such was not part of Prabhupāda's gurukula curriculum.

What is this training to become wives and mothers? No school is required for that, simply association. (Letter to: Chāyā — Calcutta 16 February, 1972)

Appendix 4: Bhakti-ratnākara on Jāhnavā Devī

In the *Bhakti-ratnākara*, there are accounts of the activities of Jāhnavā Devī. Although it is not directly stated in the *Bhakti-ratnākara*, presumably these activities were carried out at the time she was giving initiations. Jāhnavā Devī had an exalted status, but like Caitanya Mahāprabhu, who was God Himself, she for the most part observed the rules and customs of human society, so as to set an example.

In the Eleventh Wave there is a description of Jāhnavā Devī's visit to Vṛndāvana after the Kheturī-grama festival. The impression we get is that she did some things that both men and women devotees do, but that she also behaved in some ways specific to a cultured woman. For example:

162. In her heart Śrī Jāhnavā Devī thought, "I will go to Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's place and see him personally."

163. Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī lived in a secluded cottage. Slowly, slowly he chanted the holy name and performed his devotional activities.

164. Going ahead of the others, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja stood before Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī.

Comment: A male guru may have directly entered the cottage of Raghunatha dasa, but Jāhnavā Devī had a male devotee precede her and announce her presence. This would make the point that a woman may be a guru but still observe proper etiquette between male and female.

165. Taking advantage of the opportunity before him, he said, "Śrī Jāhnavā Devī has come here."

166. When Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī heard these words, wonderful spiritual love filled his heart. His eyes filled with tears, he went out to meet her.

Comment: Again the same point. Roles of male and female are being respected. Instead of Jāhnavā entering the cottage of Raghunatha, he came out to see her.

167. As Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī approached, Śrī Jāhnavā Devī could see that although he was very thin and emaciated, he was still effulgent like the sun.

168. Who has the power to know Śrī Jāhnavā Devī's heart? Tears flowed from her eyes. She had no power to stop them.

169. Somehow regaining her peaceful composure, she then offered respectful obeisances to Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. For Śrī Jāhnavā Devī, who is filled with ecstatic spiritual love, this action was somehow appropriate.

Comment, the female offered obeisances to the male, and not vice versa.

170. What person, hearing the words Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī spoke to Śrī Jāhnavā Devī would not feel his heart split into pieces?

171. When Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī met Mādhava Ācārya and the other visiting devotees, every person felt wonderful spiritual love overflow in his heart.

172. A wonderful flood of tears flowed from every eye. After some moments everyone became peaceful again.

173. Seeing Jāhnavā Devī, the Vrajavāsīs of Ariṣṭ-grāma became joyful.

174. For three or four days Jāhnavā Devī stayed at Rādhā-kuṇḍa. With great care she cooked many delicious foods.

Comment: Jāhnavā, although a guru, performed a typical motherly, female function.

175. She offered the food to Lord Kṛṣṇa and then, with a joyful heart, she hosted a feast for all the Vrajavāsī Vaiṣṇavas.

Comment: this appears to show Jāhnavā behaving in an appropriate female manner, although a guru.

176. Honoring that feast, every devotee felt great bliss and spiritual love arise within him. Who would not yearn to see these activities?

177. Śrī Jāhnavā Devī's wonderful activities are beyond the touch of the material world. Who understands them? I am worthless like a pile of ashes. I have no intelligence to understand them.

Comment: So in summary, it may be possible for both men and women to be gurus, while preserving some difference in conduct according to gender.

More from *Bhakti-ratnākara*, Eleventh Wave:

186. Jāhnavā Devī informed Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī of her desire to see Govardhana Hill. 187. Falling to the ground, offering respectful obeisances, and plunged in humbleness, Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī gave his consent.

188. Hearing Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's humble words, what person would not feel his own heart break? How can I describe what Śrī Jāhnavā Devī felt then in her heart.

Comment: This appears to be another example of Jāhnavā taking an appropriate action, consistent with her status as both exalted devotee (guru) and being in female form. She took permission from the male devotee, showing him proper respect. And he in turn offered respect to her. There seems to be mutual respect between these male and female devotees, acting appropriately in their cultural situation. Here is another example from *Bhakti-ratnākara* showing Jāhnavā, although a guru, behaving appropriately as a female.

189. In the midst of her servants and followers, Śrī Jāhnavā Devī slowly, slowly went from Rādhā-kuṇḍa to Govardhana.

Comment: She was not wandering around alone, but in the protective company of male servants and followers. Here is more from *Bhakti-ratnākara* Eleventh Wave:

196. At some times, with great care cooking rice, vegetables, and other delicious foods, Śrī Jāhnavā Devī fed the Deity Śrī Govinda.

197. At other times, cooking rice and a variety of vegetables, Śrī Jāhnavā Devī very joyfully fed the Deity Śrī Gopīnātha.

198. At other times, in a short times cooking a great variety of foods, Śrī Jāhnavā Devī earnestly fed the Deity Śrī Madana-mohana.

199. She also fed the Deities Rādhā-Dāmodara, Rādhā-ramaṇa, and Rādhā-vinoda.

200. With the prasādam remnants of the meals she offered the Deities she fed the Vaiṣṇavas. Who has the power to describe the bliss they all felt?

Comment: Again, Jāhnavā, although a guru with followers, behaves in a womanly fashion.

201. In her heart Śrī Jāhnavā Devī longed to hear the Gosvāmīs' books. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī read then aloud to her and she listened.

202. By hearing Śrī Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛta and the other Gosvāmī books, Jāhnavā Devī was overcome with the ecstasy of spiritual love. She could not become peaceful again.

Comment: Jāhnavā seems here to preserve male/female etiquette by taking the position of hearing from the male devotee. Our purpose is not to suggest what the specific rules for female dīkṣā-gurus in ISKCON should be, but to make the general point that there can be different behavior for male and female gurus, appropriate with their status as guru and gender. This example will serve to preserve the different proper male/female roles for nonguru men and women in ISKCON. Of course, at times Jāhnavā displayed internal and external behavior not to be imitated, but at times she behaved in a way that is exemplary for more ordinary humans taking the role of guru or leading devotee. It is those things we are focusing on.

In the Thirteenth Wave of Bhakti-ratnākara we see Jāhnavā Devī performing other actions consistent with her position as guru/spiritual leader and woman. For example she arranged the marriage of her co-wife Vasudha's son Vīracandra. Also:

273. To Rādhā-Gopīnātha, Jāhnavā Devī offered various gifts she had brought from Gauḍa-deśa.

274. Śrī Rādhikā-Gopīnātha ate the grains, vegetables, and other foods Jāhnavā Devī had brought.

Comment: These activities, although they could be carried out by a male, seem to reflect Jāhnavā's womanly nature. Our point is not that the duty of female gurus in ISKCON would be to just cook for devotees and bring gifts of garments and jewels and foodstuffs to deities, but just, again, to suggest that a woman may be a guru and still behave in society in a womanly way consistent with the culture.

283. After some days Prabhu Vīracandra obtained His mother's permission to travel to Vṛndāvana.

Comment: Jāhnavā not only arranged for her cowife's son's marriage, but also behaved in a motherly way to him. This indicates that it is not inconsistent for a woman to be a spiritual leader (guru) and also take care of family responsibilities, to children and other relatives for example.

To summarize, it should be possible for ISKCON to honor both Prabhupāda's instruction that there can be female dīkṣā gurs and Prabhupāda's instructions about different roles and behaviors for men and women. The example of Jāhnavā is in this regard relevant.

Appendix 5: Reasons for FDGs in terms of principle and details

As Prabhupāda explains:

Deśa-kāla-pātra (the place, the time and the object) should be taken into consideration ..Therefore it is a principle that a preacher must strictly follow the rules and regulations laid down in the śāstras yet at the same time devise a means by which the preaching work to reclaim the fallen may go on with full force.(CC Adi 7.38 purp.)

Among devotees, there will not always be agreement as to what is a principle that cannot be changed, and what is detail that can, and in some cases must, be changed. Taking this fact into consideration, there are at least three proper reasons to have women initiate in ISKCON, none of which is associated with wanting to be “politically correct.” We can also consider a fourth situation for those strongly opposed to women giving dīkṣā.

Reasons for having women give dīkṣā:

- 1) For those who understand women giving dīkṣā as a principle of the śāstras, the reason is that we are following siddhantic principles, Gauḍīya history, and the direct statements of Śrīla Prabhupada who said he wanted all his spiritual sons and daughters to initiate disciples. This reason has nothing to do with political correctness, but with the principle of the guru’s body being irrelevant in terms of qualification.
- 2) For those who understand women giving dīkṣā as a detail, some will understand such a policy as a fit response to the time, place, and circumstance of the modern world where women regularly take positions of teachers. Because a preacher is *required* to adjust accordingly, such a response is a śāstric imperative, not political correctness.

How did Śrīla Prabhupāda respond to the world situation with regards to women, in his time? He wrote:

When Lord Caitanya delivered Jagāi and Mādhāi He was also a householder, but when Jagāi and Mādhāi were actually reclaimed, His wife, Viṣṇupriyā, was not there. But in this case and in many other cases also, I find that my disciples combined together, husband and wife, are doing this preaching work so nicely. So I am especially proud how my householder disciples are preaching Lord Caitanya's mission. This is a new thing in the history of the sankirtana movement. In India all the ācāryas and their descendants later on acted only from the man's side. Their wives were at home because that is the system from old times that women are not required to go out. But in Bhāgavad-gītā we find that women are also equally competent like the men in the matter of Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Please therefore carry on these missionary activities, and prove it by practical example that there is no bar for anyone in the matter of preaching work for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. (Letter to Himavatī, December 20th, 1969)

In this quote Prabhupāda refers to an eternal principle of the Bhāgavad-gītā that women are “equally competent like the men in the matter of Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement” and also refers to a cultural and historical situation where formerly women were not “required” to preach (he does not say “allowed”) but the modern situation is different.

Śrīla Prabhupāda himself directly makes the point that we need to accept that anyone, in any body, can be a dīkṣā-guru if we want to spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement worldwide. So, again, Prabhupāda is taking an eternal principle that guru is not according to body and applying that principle to the present circumstances: “According to such caste gurus, birth and family ties are considered foremost. However, the hereditary consideration is not acceptable to Vaiṣṇavas. The word guru is equally applicable to the vartma-pradarśaka-guru, śikṣā-guru and dīkṣā-guru. Unless

we accept the principle enunciated by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement cannot spread all over the world.” (purport CC Madhya 8.128 [note that Prabhupāda also references this verse when talking about women being gurus]).

Perhaps in the past there were many women who were qualified to give dīkṣā did not do so because of a social system that “did not require” them to preach. But in today’s society women are no longer in such a position. In nearly every country and culture of the world, including India, women are expected to fully function in society. In such a circumstance, restricting qualified women from initiating their disciples is against the requirement of preachers to teach according to circumstances. In 1936, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda delivered this poem as a Vyasa-puja homage for His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī:

*The line of service
As drawn by you,
Is pleasing and healthy
Like morning dew.
The oldest of all
But in new dress.
Miracle done.
Your Divine Grace.*

3) Among those who see women giving dīkṣā as a detail, some may view women giving dīkṣā as a continuation of Prabhupāda’s policy of engaging women in various ways while gradually moving to a society where women are, again, “not required to go out” and preach. In this view the principle of guru’s qualification not including body can be applied whether or not women give dīkṣā. Such devotees would understand the policy of women giving dīkṣā as a temporary one within the scope of the thousands of years of Mahāprabhu’s movement. With this perspective, one can say that since women are taking roles of public leaders anyway, we will have these women lead for Krishna so as to have women preach to women to follow the regulative principles, chant Hare Krishna, and lead a sattvic varṇāśrama lifestyle. As varṇāśrama is actually introduced, the need for having women preachers will gradually and naturally diminish, and at that time the only lady gurus will be extremely rare. This reason is also not that of political correctness but of following Prabhupāda’s strategy.

4) A fourth situation are devotees who disagree with the three above reasons. These devotees also understand women giving dīkṣā as a detail, a circumstantial adjustment. Such devotees may feel that allowing women to give dīkṣā would encourage the existing and degraded situation of women having freedom and influence in society. Such persons say that we should now institute a society where women are “not required to go out” to preach and that we should now abandon Prabhupāda’s policy of engaging women fully as preachers. Support from this point of view comes from statements such as the following: “Modern education has artificially Devīsed a puffed—up concept of womanly life, and therefore marriage is practically now an imagination in human society. The social condition of women is thus not very good now, although those who are married are in a better condition than those who are proclaiming their so-called freedom. The demons, therefore, do not accept any instruction which is good for society, and because they do not follow the experience of great sages and the rules and regulations laid down by the sages, the social condition of the demoniac people is very miserable.” (Bg 16.7 purp.).

For those who hold this view, we can suggest that they create enclaves within ISKCON where they can start to set up societies according to their vision, based of course on sadhu-śāstra-guru. Those devotees who are ready for such a life and who are attracted to it can thus find shelter and remain under ISKCON’s umbrella and the authority of the GBC. The GBC can request that such communities create charters that are subject to GBC review and amendment. The GBC can require that such charters must be fair and holistic. These charters could not simply restrict women but would have to holistically apply śāstric statements about class divisions to both men and women.

Appendix 6: Analysis of Śrīla Prabhupāda's “not so many” statement

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

Prabhupāda: Yes. Jāhnavā Devī was – Nityānanda'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 kṛṣṇa-tattva-vetta sei guru haya.*[52]The qualification of guru is that he must be fully cognizant of the science of Kṛṣṇa. Then he or she can become guru. *Yei Kṛṣṇa-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 Kṛṣṇa consciousness perfectly, she can become guru.[10]

The original SAC paper of 2005 about FDGs sought to explain that Śrīla Prabhupāda's statement “not so many” could be because of two reasons:

- 1) internal: not as many women as men achieve the spiritual qualification necessary to be a guru, and/or
- 2) external: there are social or śāstric factors that restrict women from acting as guru.

Let us examine each of these reasons.

1) Internal reasons: Are women less likely than men to achieve the spiritual qualification necessary to be a guru?

Prabhupāda writes,

In the body of a man there is a greater opportunity to get out of the material clutches; there is less opportunity in the body of a woman.[53]

The reason for this lesser opportunity is the modes of nature,

The whole world is captivated by the two modes of material nature rajo-guna and tamoguna, passion and ignorance. Generally women are very much passionate and are less intelligent. [54]

Indeed, Kṛṣṇa Himself seems to say that although anyone can attain perfection, it is easier for some than for others:

O son of Prtha, those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth—women, vaiśyas, and śūdras —can attain the supreme destination. How much more this is so of the righteous brāhmanas, the devotees and the saintly kings. Therefore, having come to this temporary, miserable world, engage in loving service unto Me.[1]

We might conclude from the above that in any process of self-realization, including bhakti-yoga as taught by Lord Caitanya, women will be less likely than men to advance to the qualifications needed to be a guru. However, Prabhupāda also says that in terms of bhakti-yoga, women can be as, if not more, qualified than the men to make advancement:

Women in general are unable to speculate like philosophers, but they are blessed by the

Lord because they believe at once in the superiority and almightiness of the Lord and thus offer obeisances without reservation. The Lord is so kind that He does not show special favor only to one who is a great philosopher. He knows the sincerity of purpose. For this reason only, women generally assemble in great number in any sort of religious function. In every country and in every sect of religion it appears that the women are more interested than the men.[55]

We find this nature of women to be conducive to bhakti in the story of the brāhmaṇa's wives who went to Kṛṣṇa. Their husbands continued in their reservation and fear of Kamsa and did not go to Kṛṣṇa, even after appreciating the saintliness of their wives.

In the following letter, Prabhupāda explains that the general disqualification of women in spiritual matters can be an asset in bhakti:

I can understand that you have considerably advanced in Kṛṣṇa consciousness because your heart is simple. Girls and women are generally very soft-hearted and they take things very easily, but then there is also chance of being misled. So you chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa will keep you from being misled.[56]

In terms of ability to advance in bhakti, Prabhupāda generally stated that all persons have ability to advance. Here Prabhupāda explains that women who chant the holy name and follow the regulative principles should not be considered as women in terms of lower birth or qualification:

*The word papa-yonayah means "born into a lower class." According to the Vedic system of classification, women, vaiśyas, and śūdras belong to a lower social order. A low life means a life without Kṛṣṇa consciousness. High and low positions in society are calculated by considering a person's Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A brāhmaṇa is considered to be on the highest platform because he knows Brahman, the Absolute Truth. The second caste, the kṣatriya caste, also know Brahman, but not as well as the brāhmaṇas. The vaiśyas and śūdras do not clearly understand God consciousness, but if they take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa and the spiritual master, they do not remain in the lower castes (papa-yonayah). It is clearly stated: te 'pi yanti param gatim." Unless one has attained the highest standard of life, one cannot return home, back to Godhead. **One may be a śūdra, vaiśya or woman, but if one is situated in the service of the Lord in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one should not be considered stri, śūdra, vaiśya or lower than śūdra.** Though a person may be from a lowborn family, if he is engaged in the Lord's service he should never be considered to belong to a lowborn family. The Padma Purāṇa forbids, vikṣate jati-samanyat sa yati narakam dhruvam. A person goes to hell quickly when he considers a devotee of the Lord in terms of birth... Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a very simple process. One need only chant the holy names of the Lord and strictly follow the principles forbidding sinful activity. In this way one can no longer be considered an untouchable, a visayi or a śūdra.[57]*

Here is another simple and direct statement:

In Kṛṣṇa consciousness there is no distinction between girls and boys. The girls also may become preachers if they are able.[58]

The practical applications of the "not so many" understood in terms of women's inherent abilities are fairly simple. If women's "less opportunity to get out of the material clutches" applies to bhakti yoga in Lord Caitanya's movement, then not as many women as men will be interested in, or qualified for, serving as dīkṣā-guru, regardless of policy, procedures, or any external teachings or

instructions. If, on the other hand, Lord Caitanya's samkirtana movement gives women equal opportunities for advancing to the qualifications of guru, should qualified women be restricted simply because they are women?

2) Now we can examine if there are external reasons for the "not so many." Are there restrictions in the Vedic scriptures regarding qualified women acting as a guru?

In this lecture excerpt Prabhupāda explains that some scriptures restrict women from receiving (and therefore giving) gāyatrī-dīkṣā. He also gives the reason:

Woman, they are generally equipped with the qualities of passion and ignorance. And men also may be, but man can be elevated to the platform of goodness. Woman cannot be. Woman cannot be. Therefore if the husband is nice and the woman follows, woman becomes faithful and chaste to the husband, then their both life becomes successful. There are three qualities of nature: sattva, rajas, tamas. So rajas, tamas generally, that is the quality of woman. And man can become to the platform of goodness. Therefore initiation, brahminical symbolic representation is given to the man, not to the woman. This is the theory. Therefore the combination should be that the husband should be first-class devotee, Kṛṣṇa conscious, and woman should be, woman should be devoted to the husband, faithful, so that she would help the husband to make progress in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Then their both life is successful.[59]

From the above quote, we can see that external restrictions are recommended in some scriptures because of an internal disqualification. Internal disqualification is also the reason why these same scriptures only allow brāhmaṇa-born men to receive and give dīkṣā. Indeed, such scriptures allow only brāhmaṇa-born men who are in the gṛhastha-āśrama to initiate.[60] Therefore, if these scriptural restrictions are applied to women, they must be applied to most men in Kali-yuga also. These statements would also have to be applied so that women and non-brāhmaṇa-born men could not receive gāyatrī-dīkṣā.

We should note that there are no scriptures which allow women (or lowborn men) to receive dīkṣā but not give dīkṣā. We should also note that there are no scriptures which allow low-born men to receive and give dīkṣā but do not allow such for women.

Finally when considering scriptural or social restrictions on women giving dīkṣā, we should be aware that there are also many scriptural statements that *do* give women all facility for chanting Vedic mantras, getting dīkṣā, performing yajnas, and giving dīkṣā. Indeed, the Vaiṣṇava scriptures give equal facility to all human beings in these areas regardless of birth or sex.

There is ample śāstric evidence that women can recite the Vedas, receive the sacred thread, chant the brahma gāyatrī, and give dīkṣā.[24]

Which scriptures did Prabhupāda want us to follow, those that restrict women and low-born men from receiving and giving dīkṣā or those that do not? If we examine his practice, as he explains it himself:

So far your question regarding women, I have always accepted the service of women without discrimination.[61]

What allows women and low-born men to be qualified enough to receive and give dīkṣā?

Prabhupāda told women that their method of surpassing the modes of nature and attaining perfection was to chant Hare Krishna, as in this letter already quoted:

I can understand that you have considerably advanced in Kṛṣṇa consciousness because your heart is simple. Girls and women are generally very soft-hearted and they take things very

easily, but then there is also chance of being misled. So you chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa will keep you from being misled.[56]

We do not find that Śrīla Prabhupāda, in practice, felt that the only path for women to “get out of the material clutches” was to follow a husband who is in the mode of goodness or to wait for a next birth as a man. Again, to repeat what was quoted before, Prabhupāda’s practice was that women could attain perfection in this way:

“One need only chant the holy names of the Lord and strictly follow the principles forbidding sinful activity.”[57]

In this letter Prabhupāda clearly makes the qualification and the process the same for both men and women:

One who will pass this examination will be awarded with the title of Bhaktivedanta. 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.[12]

Here we will look at an analysis from CC Madhya 8.128 to show how Prabhupāda used śāstric support for his stance that anyone can be dīkṣā-guru:

*kiba vipra, kiba nyasi, śūdra kene naya,
yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vetta, sei ‘guru’ haya*

Objection: The above verse only refers to men in the varṇas and āśramas. Women are not included.

Answer from the purport: As far as Kṛṣṇa consciousness is concerned, *everyone* is capable of becoming a spiritual master because knowledge in Kṛṣṇa consciousness *is on the platform of the spirit soul*. To spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one need only be cognizant of the science of the spirit soul. It does not matter whether one is a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya, śūdra, sannyāsī, gṛhastha or *whatever*. [3]

Answer referencing the verse: One who has attained the perfection, she can become guru. But man or woman, unless one has attained the perfection.... *Yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vetta sei guru haya*. [3] The qualification of guru is that he must be fully cognizant of the science of Kṛṣṇa. Then he or she can become guru. *Yei kṛṣṇa-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 Kṛṣṇa consciousness perfectly, she can become guru. [3]

Objection: Maybe according to this verse, women could be a śīkṣā-guru or a vartma-pradarśaka-guru but not dīkṣā-guru.

Answer from the purport: Sometimes a caste guru says that *ye Kṛṣṇa-tattva-vetta, sei guru haya* means that one who is not a brāhmaṇa may become a śīkṣā-guru or a vartma-pradarśaka-guru but not an initiator guru. According to such caste gurus, birth and family ties are considered foremost. However, the hereditary consideration is not acceptable to Vaiṣṇavas. The word guru is equally applicable to the vartma-pradarśaka-guru, śīkṣā-guru and dīkṣā-guru. [3]

Objection: According to śāstras only male brāhmaṇas should give dīkṣā. Exceptions are for

emergencies.

Answer from the purport: This injunction given by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is not at all against the injunctions of the śāstras. In the Padma Purāṇa it is said: *na śūdrā bhagavad-bhaktās te 'pi bhāgavatottamāḥ sarva-varṇeṣu te śūdrā ye na bhaktā janārdane.*[3]

Objection: The brāhmaṇa thread is very important and Prabhupāda did not give the thread to women.

Answer from the purport: Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura therefore introduced the sacred thread ceremony... Sometimes a Vaiṣṇava who is a bhajanandi does not take the savitra-samskara (sacred thread initiation), but this does not mean that this system should be used for preaching work. There are two kinds of Vaiṣṇavas—bhajanandi and gosthy-anandi. A bhajanandi is not interested in preaching work, but a gosthy-anandi is interested in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness to benefit the people and increase the number of Vaiṣṇavas. A Vaiṣṇava is understood to be above the position of a brāhmaṇa. As a preacher, he should be recognized as a brāhmaṇa; otherwise there may be a misunderstanding of his position as a Vaiṣṇava.[3] [Comment: giving the thread to men is a preaching strategy, not an indication of spiritual status.]

Objection: Women should only give dīkṣā in an emergency if there are no qualified men.

Answer from the purport: It is stated in the Hari-bhakti-vilasa that one should not accept initiation from a person who is not in the brahminical order if there is a fit person in the brahminical order present. This instruction is meant for those who are overly dependent on the mundane social order and is suitable for those who want to remain in mundane life.[3]

Objection: Having women give dīkṣā would harm the spread of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

Answer from the purport: This verse is very important to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.. Unless we accept the principle enunciated by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement cannot spread all over the world.[3]

The above analysis clearly shows that Prabhupāda had a firm śāstric basis for his insistence that anyone, regardless of body, could be vartma-pradarśaka-guru, śīkṣā-guru and dīkṣā-guru. In this purport he says that any contrary śāstric injunction “is meant for those who are overly dependent on the mundane social order and is suitable for those who want to remain in mundane life.” We should remember that the Vedas contain instructions for those in each of the modes. They contain instructions, even in the transcendent realm, for both impersonal and personal realization. They contain instructions for all varieties of yoga. Prabhupāda informed us of these different instructions for different people (such as the offering of animals in sacrifice) and at the same time emphasized the śāstras that form the basis of ISKCON and his direct practice.

The practical conclusion is that as Prabhupāda’s followers our policies are in line with the statements of sadhu-śāstra-guru that say giving dīkṣā is a matter of spiritual qualification, not body or birth, while acknowledging that there are parts of the Vedic canon that promote the concept that dīkṣā-gurus must be married, male, born-brāhmaṇas.

One additional point should be considered in this connection, taking into account the view of some devotees who feel that Prabhupāda applied the śāstric statements allowing women to be fully disciples and preachers only in the beginning of ISKCON, with the intention that as ISKCON progressed, his disciples would gradually change to a society where the restrictive system was in place. There is indirect evidence in favor of this view, primarily limited to Prabhupāda’s statements about his desire to implement varṇāśrama. If, however, by implementing varṇāśrama we understand that women stop taking dīkṣā, being temple pujaris, giving Bhāgavatam class, or any other similar activities, we would also have to stop these activities for non-brāhmaṇa-born men. Such a system is asuric varṇāśrama, not daiṁi varṇāśrama, and there is no evidence that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s frequent statements about wanting varṇāśrama would involve such restrictions. Rather, alongside

Prabhupāda’s instructions about varṇāśrama, he also frequently made statements such as: “You, all my disciples, everyone should become spiritual master.”[15] and “I wish that in my absence all my disciples become the bona fide spiritual master to spread Krishna Consciousness throughout the whole world.” [62]

References

1. BG 9.32
2. SB 2.7.46
3. CC Madhya 8.128
4. Mukunda dāsa, a disciple of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, in his Artha-ratnālpa-dīpikā commentary on Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu (1.1.21) proves that śva-paca, or a dog-eater, is the lowest position in Vedic culture:

prārabdha-haratvam, yathā tṛtīye yan-nāma-dheya-śravaṇānukīrtanād yat-prahvaṇad yat-smaraṇād api kvacit śvādo 'pi sadyaḥ savanāya kalpate kutaḥ punas te bhagavan nu darśanāt

Translation: Here is proof of destroying prārabdha-karma, from the Third Canto of Bhāgavatam: To say nothing of the spiritual advancement of persons who see the Supreme Person face to face, even a person born in a family of dog-eaters immediately becomes eligible to perform Vedic sacrifices if he once utters the holy name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead or chants about Him, hears about His pastimes, offers Him obeisances or even remembers Him. (SB 3.33.6)

mukunda-gosvāmi: yad iti | śvādo yato 'nyo nīco nāsti so 'pi kalpate samartho bhavati sadyas tasminn eva kṣaṇe vaidharmye brāhmaṇasya surāpāne sadyaḥ pātityavan nāticitram idam

Translation: “In the verse, beginning from yan-nāma, it is stated that even a dog-eater, no one is lower to whom [in the Vedic culture], immediately becomes eligible [to perform Vedic sacrifices], whereas a brāhmaṇa, who violates his dharma and engages in drinking, loses his position. There is nothing too amazing about that fact.”

5. Madhya 18.121-122
6. CC Madhya 11.89 purp.
7. Tattva-sandarbha, 15.3
8. CC Adi 1.35 purp.
9. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Godruma-kalpāṭavī, 2nd chapter
10. **Prof. O'Connell:** Is it possible, Swamiji, for a woman to be a guru in the line of disciplic succession?

Prabhupāda: Yes. Jāhnavā Devī was – Nityānanda'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 kṛṣṇa-tattva-veṭṭa sei guru haya. The qualification of guru is that he must be fully cognizant of the science of Kṛṣṇa. Then he or she can become guru. Yei Kṛṣṇa-tattva-veṭṭa, 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 Kṛṣṇa consciousness perfectly, she can become guru.

Indian man: Well, to understand Kṛṣṇa consciousness, do you not require adhikari?

Prabhupāda: Adhikari means he must agree to understand. That is adhikari. ...

Indian man: Is this agreement due to learning or out of...?.

Prabhupāda: No, Kṛṣṇa says sarva-dharman parityajya mam, you surrender, you become qualified. You agree, “Yes, I surrender, Kṛṣṇa says.” Then immediately you become qualified. (Interview with Professors O'Connell, Motilal and Shivaram, June 18, 1976, Toronto)

11. Room Conversation — June 29, 1972, San Diego:

Prabhupāda: So a crazy man's statement is not accepted. Child's statement, crazy man's statement, unauthorized person's statement, blind man's statement, we cannot accept.

Ātreya Ṛṣi: A woman's statement?

Prabhupāda: Huh?

Ātreya Ṛṣi: A woman's...

Prabhupāda: If a woman is perfect in Kṛṣṇa consciousness... Just like Jāhnavā Devī, Lord Nityānanda's wife, she was ācārya. She was ācārya. She was controlling the whole Vaiṣṇava community.

Ātreya Ṛṣi: Lord Nityānanda?

Prabhupāda: Wife. Jāhnavā Devī. She was controlling the whole Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava community.

Ātreya Ṛṣi: Do you have references about that in any of your books, Śrīla Prabhupāda?

Prabhupāda: I don't think. But there are many ācāryas. Maybe somewhere I might have mentioned. It is not that woman cannot be ācārya. Generally, they do not become. In very special case. But Jāhnavā Devī was accepted as, but she did not declare.

12. Letter to Haṁsadūta, January 3, 1969
13. Letter to Himavatī, January 24, 1969
14. Room Conversation, San Diego, June 29, 1972
15. Śrī Vyasa-pūjā lecture, London, 22 August 1973
16. Letter to Malafī, 25 December 1974
17. Morning walk “Varṇāśrama College” – March 14, 1974, Vṛndāvana
18. Lecture on BG 9.29-32 – New York, December 20, 1966
19. Lecture on BG 1.40 – London, July 28, 1973
20. CC Madhya 24.331 purp.
21. In the famous analogy from the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.20.17, human body is compared to a perfectly constructed boat and the instructions of the Personality of Godhead in the Vedic scriptures to favorable winds impelling it on its course. Spiritual master acts as the captain by choosing appropriate instructions according to the level of spiritual advancement of the particular disciple. Furthermore, in the commentary to the verse from Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.101:

*śruti smṛti-purāṇādi-pañcarātra-vidhiṁ vinā
aikāntikī harer bhaktir utpātāyaiva kalpate*

Translation: Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the Upaniṣads, Smṛtis, Purāṇas and Nārada Pañcarātra is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society.

Śrīlā Jīva Gosvāmī writes: *śruty-ādayo 'py atra vaiṣṇavānām svādhikāra-prāptās tad-bhāgā eva jṣeyāḥ | sve sve 'dhikāra [bhā.pu. 11.21.2] ity ukteḥ*. Translation: “Śruti and other Vedic scriptures should be accepted according to the individual Vaiṣṇava's qualification, as it is mentioned in the verse:

*sve sve 'dhikāre yā niṣṭhā sa guṇaḥ parikīrtitaḥ
viparyayas tu doṣaḥ syād ubhayor eṣa niścayaḥ*

Translation: Steadiness in one's own position is declared to be actual piety, whereas deviation from

one's position is considered impiety. In this way the two are definitely ascertained.

22. SB 5.26.23 purp.

23. SB 6.18.42 purp.

24. See paper “Some Evidence Regarding Education and Guruship for Vaishnavis”, by Bhakta Rūpa Dāsa and Mādhavānanda Dāsa, January 2013.

25. CC Madhya 8.58-68

26. NOD 6 purp.

27. *“Caitanya Mahāprabhu has said that anyone who knows the science of Kṛṣṇa should be accepted as spiritual master, regardless of any material so-called qualifications, such as rich or poor, man or woman, or brāhmaṇa or śūdra.”*(Letter to Śilāvātī Devī, June 14, 1969)

“We especially have to try to attract the educated young men and women in your country so that in future there will be many strong leaders to keep our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement strong” (Letter to Govinda dāsa, April 7, 1973)

“These women are not ordinary women. They are preachers. They are Vaiṣṇavas. By their association one becomes a Vaiṣṇava” (Morning walk, March 27, 1974).

“In India all the ācāryas and their descendants later on acted only from the man's side. Their wives were at home because that is the system from old times that women are not required to go out. But in Bhāgavad-gītā we find that women are also equally competent like the men in the matter of Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Please therefore carry on these missionary activities, and prove it by practical example that there is no bar for anyone in the matter of preaching work for Kṛṣṇa consciousness” (Letter to Himavatī, December 20, 1969).

“I am counting on you boys and girls to push on this movement and preach vigorously all over the world, and we shall be successful.” (Letter to Amogha, January 29, 1973).

“Prabhupāda was smiling and looking directly from one devotee to another. ‘I want each of you to go and start a center...’ ‘The girls also?’ Rukmiṇī asked. ‘There is no harm,’ Prabhupāda said. ‘Kṛṣṇa does not make distinction—female dress or male dress’” (“Prabhupāda” by Satsvarūpa dāsa Gosvāmī).

28. Prabhupāda: *Now our policy should be that at Dallas we shall create first-class men, and we shall teach the girls two things. One thing is how to become chaste and faithful to their husband and how to cook nicely. If these two qualifications they have, I will take guarantee to get for them good husband. I'll personally... Yes. These two qualifications required. She must learn how to prepare first-class foodstuff, and she must learn how to become chaste and faithful to the husband. Only these two qualification required. Then her life is successful. So try to do that... Ordinary education is sufficient, ABCD.* (Morning walk, Chicago, July, 10, 1975.)

29. CC Adi 7.38 purp.

30. “Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu wanted to invent a way to capture the Mayavadis and others who did not take interest in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. This is the symptom of an ācārya. An ācārya who comes for the service of the Lord cannot be expected to conform to a stereotype, for he must find the ways and means by which Kṛṣṇa consciousness may be spread. Sometimes jealous persons criticize the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement because it engages equally both boys and girls in distributing love of Godhead. Not knowing that boys and girls in countries like Europe and America mix very freely, these fools and rascals criticize the boys and girls in Kṛṣṇa consciousness for intermingling. But these rascals should consider that one cannot

suddenly change a community's social customs. However, since both the boys and the girls are being trained to become preachers, those girls are not ordinary girls but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, to engage both boys and girls in fully transcendental activities is a policy intended to spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. These jealous fools who criticize the intermingling of boys and girls will simply have to be satisfied with their own foolishness because they cannot think of how to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness by adopting ways and means that are favorable for this purpose. Their stereotyped methods will never help spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, what we are doing is perfect by the grace of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, for it is He who proposed to invent a way to capture those who strayed from Kṛṣṇa consciousness.”(CC Adi 7.31–32 purp.)

31. “I am simply surprised that you want to give up your child to some other persons, even they are also devotees. For you, child-worship is more important than Deity-worship. If you cannot spend time with him, then stop the duties of pujari. At least you must take good care of your son until he is four years old, and if after that time you are unable any more to take care of him then I shall take care. These children are given to us by Kṛṣṇa, they are Vaiṣṇavas and we must be very careful to protect them. These are not ordinary children, they are Vaikuntha children, and we are very fortunate we can give them chance to advance further in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That is very great responsibility, do not neglect it or be confused. Your duty is very clear.” (Letter to Arundhati, July 30, 1972)
32. “The nursery school program is very good. That is good that the mothers are being freed to increase their devotional service. It is not that women should only produce children, but they are meant for advancing in devotion.” (Letter to Jayatīrtha dāsa, November 20, 1975)
33. Bhakti-ratnākara, 11.162-202, 13. 273-283
34. Jayadvaita Swami writes: “At a meeting in Topanga Canyon in 1980, Tamal Krishna Mahārāja stated that Śrīla Prabhupāda had never appointed the eleven rtviks to be anything more than rtviks. “If it had been more than that,” he said, “you can bet your bottom dollar that Prabhupāda would have spoken for days and hours and weeks on end about how to set up this thing with the gurus, but he didn’t...” (Jayadvaita Swami, “Where the Ritvik People are Wrong”)
35. Letter to Madhusūdana, November 2, 1967
36. “I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of Bhakti-vedanta, so that the family transcendental diploma will continue through the generations. Those possessing the title of Bhakti-vedanta 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. So we should not simply publish these books for reading by outsiders, but our students must be well-versed in all of our books so that we can be prepared to defeat all opposing parties in the matter of self-realization.” (Letter to Hamsadūta, December 3, 1968)
37. Such as Kuntīdevī, Nāndīmukhī, Gauranga-priyā (the second wife of Śrīnivasa Ācārya), Jāhnavā Mātā
38. Prabhupāda said: “...According to the *Manu-saṁhitā* you are all *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. You cannot touch the *Manu-saṁhitā*, what to speak of translating it. So if you try to follow the *Manu-saṁhitā* then you become a *mleccha* and *yavana* and your career is finished.” (Secretary’s letter to Madhusūdana, 19 May 1977)
39. “Here is an important point. Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu wanted to invent a way to capture the Māyāvādīs and others who did not take interest in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. This is the symptom of an ācārya. An ācārya who comes for the service of the Lord cannot be expected to conform to a stereotype, for he must find the ways and means by which Kṛṣṇa consciousness may be spread. Sometimes jealous persons criticize the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement because it engages equally both boys and girls in distributing love of Godhead. Not

knowing that boys and girls in countries like Europe and America mix very freely, these fools and rascals criticize the boys and girls in Kṛṣṇa consciousness for intermingling. But these rascals should consider that one cannot suddenly change a community's social customs. However, since both the boys and the girls are being trained to become preachers, those girls are not ordinary girls but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, to engage both boys and girls in fully transcendental activities is a policy intended to spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. These jealous fools who criticize the intermingling of boys and girls will simply have to be satisfied with their own foolishness because they cannot think of how to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness by adopting ways and means that are favorable for this purpose. Their stereotyped methods will never help spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, what we are doing is perfect by the grace of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, for it is He who proposed to invent a way to capture those who strayed from Kṛṣṇa consciousness. (CC Adi 7.31-32 purp.)

40. “Yes, if it is any credit for me, that is what you have written that I tried to give aural reception to the words of my Spiritual Master, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Mahārāja, and thus I tried to engage my tongue in repeating the same words without any change. (Letter to Kīrtanānanda, May 6, 1970)

“I have not done anything personally, very wonderful. I am simply serving my spiritual master, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Mahārāja and all the ācāryas in the disciplic succession. If I have done anything of credit it is that I have not changed their teachings. I have not added anything of my own interpretation.” (Letter to Bhīma, Kṛṣṇadasa, Sanat Kumāra, Nityānanda, Sāmba, Joseph, May 16, 1974)

41. Room conversation, August, 19, 1976
 42. Room conversation – June 28, 1976
 43. Letter to Yamunā, Dīnatāriṇī — January 13, 1976
 44. Letter to Rayarāma – Seattle 15 October, 1968
 45. Lecture – Bombay, March 18, 1972
 46. Shukavak Das, “Hindu Encounter with Modernity”
 47. NOI 5 purp.: “When a neophyte devotee is actually initiated and engaged in devotional service by the orders of the spiritual master, he should be accepted immediately as a bona fide Vaiṣṇava, and obeisances should be offered unto him. Out of many such Vaiṣṇavas, one may be found to be very seriously engaged in the service of the Lord and strictly following all the regulative principles, chanting the prescribed number of rounds on japa beads and always thinking of how to expand the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Such a Vaiṣṇava should be accepted as an uttama-adhikārī, a highly advanced devotee, and his association should always be sought.”
 48. For example, SB 11.3.21:

*tasmād guruṁ prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam
 śābde pare ca niṣṇātām brahmaṇy upaśamāśrayam*

Translation: Any person who seriously desires to achieve real happiness must seek out a bona fide spiritual master and take shelter of him by initiation. The qualification of his spiritual master is that he must have realized the conclusion of the scriptures by deliberation and be able to convince others of these conclusions. Such great personalities, who have taken shelter of the Supreme Godhead, leaving aside all material considerations, are to be understood as bona fide spiritual masters.

49. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, with commentaries by Jīva Gosvāmī and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, translated by Bhānu Swami, p.45.
50. CC Madhya 16.186 purp.
51. Letter to Vaikuṅṭhanātha and Śarādīyā, April 4, 1971
52. Letter to Balāi, January 25, 1968
53. CC Madhya 8.128
54. SB 3.31.41 purp.
55. SB 4.27.1 purp.
56. SB 1.8.20 purp.
57. Letter to Indirā and Ekayani, December 17, 1967
58. CC Madhya 8.36 purp.
59. Letter to Himavatī, January 24, 1969
60. Lecture of SB 1.3.17 – Los Angeles, September 22, 1972
61. CC Madhya 4.111
62. Letter to Guru dāsa, May 26, 1972
63. Letter to Madhusūdana — Navadvīpa, November 2, 1967