Initial Response to SAC's Paper

'Brahma-gāyatrī mantra in ISKCON'

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Abstract

In Kṛṣṇa's Vedic civilization, *upanayana* — the investiture with the sacred thread and *brahma-gāyatrī* — is exclusively conferred upon qualified men, with women and *śūdras* being excluded. In the early days, Śrīla Prabhupāda, to pacify a few irate female disciples who had revolted because of not getting second initiation, started the practice of granting *brahma-gāyatrī* to his female disciples but without the sacred thread, implying they were not genuine *brāhmaṇas*. As time passed and senior devotees gained deeper knowledge of Kṛṣṇa's Vedic culture they realized what had happened. Some who had by now become initiating gurus reverted to Kṛṣṇa's original standard and ceased giving their female disciples *brahma-gāyatrī* at the time of second initiation and became more stringent with male disciples, reserving it only for those displaying brahminical tendencies. This shift challenged those advocating for Female Diksa Gurus in ISKCON and other feminist initiatives. Consequently, the GBC approached SAC for guidance on this matter and SAC provided *āpasiddhāntik* and heterodox arguments to sanction *brahma-gāyatrī* for women and unqualified men.

This essay serves as an initial response to SAC's paper. Here, we highlight that SAC concocted its method of textual interpretation (that yields predetermined results) while disregarding Kṛṣṇa's original method — *Mīmāṁsā*. We emphasize the importance of understanding the guru's "*mano-'bhīṣṭaṁ*" (mind's desire) when interpreting his actions, which are ultimately rooted in *śāstra*. SAC misunderstands our *dīkṣā* process. Since *brahma-gāyatrī* is part of our *dīkṣā* protocol we must first understand how our system of *dīkṣā* works. Thus we analyze the initiation framework in our *sampradāya* — which contains elements of *Bhāgavata*, *Pañcarātrika*, and *Vaidika* traditions. Next we show that SAC ignored the fundamental question on which everything hinges — Why did Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura introduce *upanayana*? And, show that after answering this question SAC's whole argument collapses. We also discuss the GBC's flawed resolutions which they based on SAC's non-peer reviewed paper.

Dear Maharajas, Prabhus and Matajis,

Please accept my humble obeisance. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

This is the first of many salvos responding to the recent SAC paper "*Brahma-gāyatrī* mantra in ISKCON."[1] In this opening critique, I won't delve into a meticulous point-by-point rebuttal of their extensive 177-page paper, the product of a team's two-year effort. Those detailed responses from the *Śāstra-cakṣuḥ-pariṣat*[2] will follow. Instead, I will scrutinize a few select points to underscore the glaring weakness of their position in general.

Preliminary Remarks

Before starting I would like to make some preliminary remarks about the term "hermeneutics" that SAC employs as their guiding principle. "Hermeneutics" is originally a Christian concept that has morphed into a plethora of man-made academic disciplines, covering diverse domains such as Queer Bible Hermeneutics,[3] Lesbian Hermeneutics,[4] Marxist Hermeneutics,[5] Ecological Feminist Hermeneutics,[6] Postmodern Hermeneutics,[7] and more.[8] This strongly suggests that influences from Abrahamic faiths and atheistic secular academia have seeped into SAC. This doesn't inspire confidence. Why does SAC, where the "S" stands for "*Śāstra*," use the terms and language of *mleccha* and *yavana* academia in documents meant for a *Vaiṣṇava* audience?

> It is one of Prabhupāda's great fears that ISKCON devotees will become increasingly polluted by outside influences not strictly in line with our sampradāya's pure devotional principles.[9]

SAC had previously been criticized in "A Critique of the Śāstric Advisory Council's System of Hermeneutics"[10] for creating a custom-made system of "hermeneutics" to achieve a predetermined (feminist) objective.

In Kṛṣṇa's Vedic culture, there already exists a system of textual interpretation that Kṛṣṇa created called *Mīmāṁsā.* The following explanation about the special position of *Mīmāṁsā* is an extract from my unpublished monograph provisionally titled, *Is the Term "Vedic Astrology" a Misnomer?*

> To fulfill all the needs of Vedic study in Kali-yuga, specialized disciplines like *Nyāya* (a logic system that recognizes Vedic authority) and *Mīmāṁsā* were used to understand

[1] https://archive.org/details/brahma-gayatri-sac-complete_202401
[2] An assembly of those whose eyes are *Śāstras*. (Who see through *Śāstras*.)
[3] https://blog.smu.edu/ot8317/queer-bible-hermeneutics-ot8317-at-perkins-school-of-theology/
[4] https://www.wjkbooks.com/Products/0334029589/when-deborah-met-jael-lesbian-biblical-hermeneutics.aspx
[5] https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8CJ8Q88
[6] https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/41623/chapter-abstract/353456419?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false
[7] https://publish.iupress.indiana.edu/projects/the-hermeneutics-of-postmodernity
[8] For a lengthy discussion of the many varieties of what the *yavanas* call "Hermeneutics" see https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/
[9] Hari Śauri Dāsa, *A Transcendental Diary: Travels With His Divine Grace a. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, June 1976 - August 1976* (Alachua, Florida: Lotus Imprints, 1994), 534.
[10] https://archive.org/details/critique-of-sacs-hermeneutical-system_202311/mode/1up

the meaning of the Vedas. The *Kena-upaniṣad* (4.8) asserts that complete knowledge requires three elements: Veda, *Vedāṅga*, and *Satya*. While others misinterpret "*Satya*" as truth, Śrīpāda Madhvācārya, in his commentary,[11] refers to the work called *Śabda-Nirṇaya* to clarify that "*Satya*" here refers to *mīmāṁsā*. Thus, both *mīmāṁsā* and the *vedāṅgas* are crucial for comprehending the Veda according to the Veda itself (*Kena-upaniṣad*). All three components must be utilized to achieve *samanvaya*[12] in understanding the Vedic texts — and thus truly grasp Vedic knowledge. This implies their simultaneous existence throughout time.

Mīmāṁsā when applied to the *karma-khaṇḍa* section of the Vedas by Jaimini Ṛṣi was called *Pūrva Mīmāṁsā* or *Karma Mīmāṁsā* and is used to properly understand the performance of the *yajñas* described in the *Brāhmaṇam* section of the Vedas. And when *mīmāṁsā* was applied by Vyāsadeva to the *jñāna-khaṇḍa* of the Vedas (*Aranyakas* and *Upaniṣads*) it was known as *Uttara Mīmāṁsā* or *Vedanta Sūtra*. Notably, the principles of *mīmāṁsā* find applicability in various disciplines, including *Dharma śāstra*, exemplified by Vijñāneśvara's *Mitākṣarā* commentary on *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*.

Other specialized disciplines including predictive astrology were part of the *vedāṅgas*. Thus, as we shall see, *jyotiṣa* included both astronomy and astrology because *jyotiṣa,* as the "eye of the Veda*,"* was for seeing past, present, and future.

We note that while subjects like *Nyāya*, *Mīmāṁsā*, and *Vyākaraṇa* are not directly mentioned or explained in detail in the *Veda Saṁhitās* they are still considered Vedic because without them the Vedas cannot be understood. Thus subjects like *Nyāya* and *Mīmāṁsā* are along with the Vedas and *vedāṅgas* counted as Vedic *vidyās*.[13] Similarly, astrology, *kāla vidyā* the science of time, was also necessary to understand the Vedas because *kāla* the Time Factor is one of the energies of the Lord,[14] as we previously noted. And, *kāla* refers to more than just the measurement of time.

Since Kṛṣṇa already created a perfect system (*Mīmāṁsā*) why use something different unless there is an ulterior motive?

On page 9, SAC informs us that one of their hermeneutic tools is, "We Should Understand Śāstra from Many Angles of Vision." And while Śrīla Prabhupāda did say:

> Our Krishna philosophy is so luxurious that you can explain the same idea from many many angles of vision and thus relish the Truth in this way and help others to increase their understanding.
>   *Letter to: Hayagriva, 18 January, 1972*

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[11] Srisa Chandra Vasu, *The Upanishads, With Commentaries By Madhvacharya, Part 1, Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, and Manduka,* (Allahabad: The Panini Office, 1909). Or, https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/kena-upanishad-madhva-commentary/d/doc486104.html

[12] "*Samanvaya,*" in Sanskrit refers to harmony, coordination, or integration. It signifies the act of reconciling apparent contradictions and of bringing together or coordinating various elements or ideas to create coherence and unity. It can also imply consistency or the alignment of different aspects towards a common goal or purpose. See also Baladeva, *The Vedāntasūtras of Bādarāyaṇa: With the Commentary of Baladeva (Govinda Bhāṣya),* trans. Srisa Chandra Vasu (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1979), 21. And, B. N. K. Sharma, *The Brahmasutras and Their Principal Commentaries: A Critical Exposition, (Sastranidhi, Dvaitavedantarasajna, Madhvamunipriya), Vol 1* (2008), 21-24, 32-38.

[13] *Mīmāṁsā, Nyāya,* and the *Vedāṅgas* are mentioned as belonging to the 14 (or sometimes 18) *vidyās* (lores) in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (3.6.28-29) and *Brahmānda Purāṇa* (1.2.35.87-89). And *Matsya Purāṇa* (3.2-4, 53.6) states that the *Mīmāṁsā* and *Nyāya śāstras* emanated directly from the breathing of *Nārāyaṇa* along with the Vedas, *Vedāṅgas*, and *Purāṇas*.

[14] See, for example, *Bhagavad-gītā* (11.32) and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (3.26.16–18).

Then why does SAC take so much trouble (177 pages worth) to deny the angle of vision that females not be given *brahma-gāyatrī*? Any angle but not that one. Put plainly, SAC's use of "Many Angles of Vision" suggests disregarding the evident and opting for intricate, indirect approaches to achieve a predetermined outcome distant from the truth. This is especially egregious when the "many angles" that SAC proposes deviate from the standard and time-honored practices of our *ācāryas*—including our founder-*ācārya*.

SAC, using their "hermeneutics" has ignored the intention and purpose of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. We shall now critique SAC's paper.

Critique of SAC's Arguments

..And one who is very clever at juggling words will be
considered a learned scholar. ... and one who is
audacious will be accepted as truthful.
  The Symptoms of Kali-yuga. Srimad Bhagavatam 12.2.4,6

In this analysis, we shall limit our critique to one salient point that is sufficient to undermine their argument. First, some background information.

Mano-'bhīṣṭaṁ

*śrī-caitanya-**mano-'bhīṣṭaṁ***
sthāpitaṁ yena bhū-tale
svayaṁ rūpaḥ kadā mahyaṁ
dadāti sva-padāntikam

When will Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī Prabhupāda, who has established within this material
world the mission to fulfill the **desire** of Lord Caitanya, give me shelter under his
lotus feet?

Understanding the guru's mind is a crucial trait for a disciple to fulfill the guru's wishes. The top-tier disciple comprehends the guru's mind intuitively, executing the desires without explicit instruction. A second-class disciple requires explicit guidance on the guru's desires before acting.

The third-class disciple, even when instructed, remains inept and unable to meet the guru's wishes. As for the fourth-class disciple, disobedience persists even after being explicitly directed by the guru.[15]

We cannot always understand by seeing examples. If a bona fide guru does something it has to be ultimately understood based on *śāstra* and the teaching of the *ācāryas* (sadhus). If we are not in a position to directly consult our guru and we must make a major decision in a situation that is

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[15] See, for example *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* 6.1.7-9

unfamiliar to us or not mentioned by our guru then we must take guidance from śāstra. Why? Because that is also where the *ācāryas* get their guidance.[16] Otherwise, we become like:

The Guru and the Foolish Disciples.

Once, a guru went to the *Gaṅgā* for a bath along with his disciples. Before entering the water, he secured his valuables by wrapping them in a cloth and burying them in the sand. To mark the spot, he inserted a small stick into the ground. After the bath, he attempted to retrieve his belongings but was confounded as countless sticks now dotted the river bank. He asked his disciples what happened. They replied, "Guruji, we saw you put sticks in the sand so we followed your example and did the same." The foolish disciples by **imitating without knowing the guru's purpose**, ruined the guru's business.

The moral of the story: Proximity to the guru and witnessing his activities are not sufficient. One must know the basis of his actions, and why he does it. **The ultimate basis of the *ācārya's* action is *śāstra*. So we have to understand based on *śāstra*.**

To demonstrate this Śrīla Prabhupāda told how once he was in Māyāpura when a snake was found at the *āśrama*. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura ordered it to be killed. Prabhupāda was doubtful as to why a *sādhu* would order the killing of a creature and this created a doubt in his mind. But, later when he read in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.9.14) where Śrī Prahlāda said that even *sādhus* are happy when a snake or scorpion is killed then Śrīla Prabhupāda had all his doubts removed because he could understand that Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura actions were based on *śāstra*.

A guru is only a guru if he follows *śāstra*. A *sādhu* is only a *sādhu* if he follows *śāstra*. An *ācārya* is only an *ācārya* if he follows *śāstra*.

> *Sādhu, śāstra,* guru, they'll speak the same thing. Guru means who speaks on the basis of *śāstra*; otherwise he's not guru.
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.7.32 -33 — September 27, 1976, Vṛndāvana*

And,

> Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, *sādhu-śāstra-guru-vākya, cittete kariyā aikya.* One should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words of saintly people, the spiritual master and the *śāstra.* The actual center is the *śāstra,* the revealed scripture. If a spiritual master does not speak according to the revealed scripture, he is not to be accepted. Similarly, if a saintly person does not speak according to the *śāstra,* he is not a saintly person. The *śāstra* is the center for all.
> *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta 2.20.352p[17]*

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[16] If something is not mentioned in *śāstra* then we are directed to follow *śiṣṭācāra* the example and practice of virtuous men learned in Kṛṣṇa's Vedic culture. See *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.19.17) and *Manu Smṛiti* 2.6. This principle is most crucial when the *śāstric* basis of some action is lost or forgotten, which does happen.

[17] "p" refers to the purport of that verse.

So unless we know the mind of the guru, his purpose for doing something it is dangerous to imitate lest we become foolish disciples.

Types of Dīkṣā

Let us continue. Since *brahma-gāyatrī* is part of our *dīkṣā* process we must understand how our system of *dīkṣā* works. (If you want to skip this part now and go to the main argument click this <u>link</u>, you can return later.) For our purposes, two distinct types of *dīkṣā* are relevant: *Vaidikī* and *Pañcarātrikī*, each serving different ends. While typically the order is *Vaidikī* followed by *Pañcarātrikī*, they can be undertaken interchangeably or concurrently. Crucially, these *dīkṣās* are lifelong.

In addition to these, other forms of *Vaidika-dīkṣā* exist, notably those that consecrate the *yajamāna* (sacrificer) before specific *yajñas* (sacrifices) like the *Agniṣṭoma* or *Aśvamedha*. Given the finite duration of these *yajñas*, this *dīkṣā* is temporary, concluding with the *Avabhṛtha-snāna* at the *yajña's* termination. Similarly, there is a parallel category of *Pañcarātrikī yajña dīkṣā*, some being temporary while others are lifelong. This latter category is of importance to the discussion and we will return to it later.

Bhāgavata-dīkṣā?

Since we are primarily a *Bhāgavata Sampradāya*[18] (stressing the Holy Name) what about *Bhāgavata-dīkṣā?* *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (2.15.108) informs us that **no *dīkṣā* is required** to chant the Holy Name.

> *dīkṣā-puraścaryā-vidhi apekṣā nā kare*
> *jihvā-sparśe ā-caṇḍāla sabāre uddhāre*

> One does not have to undergo initiation or execute the activities required before initiation. One simply has to vibrate the holy name with his lips. Thus even a man in the lowest class [caṇḍāla] can be delivered.

And,

> *kṛṣṇa-mantra haite habe saṁsāra-mocana*
> *kṛṣṇa-nāma haite pābe kṛṣṇera caraṇa*

> Simply by chanting the holy name of Kṛṣṇa one can obtain freedom from material existence. Indeed, simply by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra one will be able to see the lotus feet of the Lord.
> *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta 1.7.73*

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[18] Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, *Brahmana and Vaisnava,* trans. Bhumipati Dasa (New Delhi: Vrajraj Press, 1999), 90.

Thus it seems there is no *Bhāgavata dīkṣa* or any *dīkṣa* for that matter in regards to chanting the Holy Name.[19]

But as Brijbasi Prabhu explains in his edifying essay "Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahā-mantra from the Caitanya-Vaiṣṇava Perspective,"[20] there are caveats (emphasis mine).

> What follows from the above statements and especially from the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* verse (Ādi 7.73), is that the *hari-nāma-mantra* gives exactly these results: it destroys one's sins (as a side effect – this is *"saṁsāra-mocana"*) and gives one transcendental knowledge of relationship with Kṛṣṇa (as the main result – *"kṛṣṇera caraṇa"*). Thus anyone can take to the chanting of Hari-nāma and get the results even without having undergone the process of mantra-dīkṣā *(pāñcarātrika-dīkṣā)*.

> However, there is a **more subtle consideration** here, which is mentioned by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura in his commentary on *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* (6.2.9-10) which further clarifies the importance of guru and dīkṣā:

> "Those persons who are offenders against the Lord's name but have no tendencies of *karma, jñāna,* and so on, are engaged in performing devotional service by hearing, chanting, and so on, yet have not received initiation because they have not taken shelter at the lotus feet of a *guru* — they also should be called by the name Vaiṣṇava. Indeed, the word Vaiṣṇava can be understood as derived by the *sūtra* [of Pāṇini's grammar] *sāsya devatā* ("that is his Deity") or else by the *sūtra* that reads *bhaktiḥ* ("that is his object of devotion"); thus those who by their initiation have made Viṣṇu their Deity and also those who by their practice of worship have made Viṣṇu their object of worship are both called Vaiṣṇavas, since there is no other term to properly describe them. For these Vaiṣṇavas also, as for the ones described before, there is no fall into hell and so on; such is the opinion of some. But this opinion is not very cogent; since it is said in the verse beginning *nṛ-deham ādyam* that the *guru* is the pilot of the ship, they cannot easily obtain the Supreme Lord without a *guru*. **Therefore it is said that only those saintly persons who in a previous lifetime had achieved the shelter of the feet of a *guru* can merely by the power of their worship obtain the Personality of Godhead; one cannot otherwise obtain the Supreme Lord just by his devotion**."

> "Well, we see that even Ajāmila, who hadn't taken shelter of a *guru,* easily obtained the Supreme Lord. So this should be explained as follows: Those who like cows and asses simply graze their senses on objects of gratification and have no idea even in their dreams of who is God, what is devotion, and what is a *guru* can like Ajāmila and others who uttered the names of Lord Hari be saved by *bhakti* alone even without a *guru* by the method of *nāmābhāsa* and what it involves. Lord Hari alone is the proper object of worship, devotional worship is the means of obtaining Him, the *guru* is the proper person to give instruction about these matters, and in the past it was devotees instructed by *gurus* alone who obtained Lord Hari — even if one can make these specific discriminations, he may adopt the viewpoint of such scriptural evidence as the

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[19] Within *Gauḍīya Math* circles, it is often asserted that Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta received *"Bhāgavati dīkṣa"* from Gaura-kiśora dāsa Bābājī. However, though the name is similar this *Bhāgavati dīkṣa* is not in relation to the chanting of the Holy Name but in regard to a *śikṣā* paramparā. For further details see: Bhakti Vikasa Swami, *Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Vaibhava Vol 2* (Vallabha Vidyanagar, Gujarat: Bhakti Vikas Trust, 2010), 227.

[20] Brijbasi Dasa (Kostyantyn Perun). 2022. "Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahā-Mantra From the Caitanya-vaiṣṇava Perspective: Journal of Vaishnava Studies". *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 24 (2):216-60. https://archive.org/details/hare-krsna-maha-mantra-from-the-gv-perspective-by-brijabasi-prabhu_202401/page/n15/mode/1up

statement "There is no need to pay any regard to initiation, proper rituals being performed, or preliminary purification. This *mantra* consisting of the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa bears fruit simply by touching one's tongue" and take the examples of Ajāmila and others like him to decide "Why do I have to take the trouble of accepting a *guru*? I can expect to obtain the Supreme Lord simply by *nāma-kīrtana* and other devotional practices." But then, because of his grievous offence, namely that of disregarding the *guru,* He cannot obtain the Supreme Lord. Rather only when in the same life or the next life his offense is dispelled can he take shelter of a divine spiritual master and obtain the Lord." (end of commentary).

Thus, anyone can attain perfection by chanting of the holy names, however, **if a person deliberately avoids surrendering to guru and being disciplined by him, he commits an offense and will not get the result of his chanting**.

And, Śrīla Prabhupāda confirms the need for a *dīkṣā guru* (emphasis mine).

One should always remember that a person who is **reluctant to accept a spiritual master and be initiated is sure to be baffled** in his endeavor to go back to Godhead. One who is not properly initiated may present himself as a great devotee, but in fact he is sure to encounter many stumbling blocks on his path of progress toward spiritual realization, with the result that he must continue his term of material existence without relief. Such a helpless person is compared to a ship without a rudder, for such a ship can never reach its destination. **It is imperative, therefore, that one accept a spiritual master if he at all desires to gain the favor of the Lord**. The service of the spiritual master is essential. If there is no chance to serve the spiritual master directly, a devotee should serve him by remembering his instructions. There is no difference between the spiritual master's instructions and the spiritual master himself. In his absence, therefore, his words of direction should be the pride of the disciple. If one thinks that he is above consulting anyone else, including a spiritual master, he is at once an offender at the lotus feet of the Lord. Such an offender can never go back to Godhead. It is imperative that a serious person accept a bona fide spiritual master in terms of the śāstric injunctions. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī advises that one not accept a spiritual master in terms of hereditary or customary social and ecclesiastical conventions. One should simply try to find a genuinely qualified spiritual master for actual advancement in spiritual understanding.
Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta 1.1.35p

Additionally, Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī tells us that he had a *mantra-guru,* which Śrīla Prabhupāda translates as "initiating spiritual master"(emphasis mine):

mantra-guru *āra yata śikṣā-guru-gaṇa*
tāṅhāra caraṇa āge kariye vandana

I first offer my respectful obeisances at the lotus feet of my **initiating spiritual master** and all my instructing spiritual masters.
Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta 1.1.35

If there is no *Bhāgavata dīkṣā* then what kind of *dīkṣā* did he have? The conundrum is solved by the guru initiating the disciple into the Holy Name on the principles of *Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā,* more on that later.

Vaidika-dīkṣā

In Kṛṣṇa's Vedic society with typical social support systems, the male children will get their *upanayana* (*Vaidika-dīkṣā*) at an appropriate age depending on their *guna* and which varna they aspire to. Ideally, *brāhmaṇa*[21] boys get *upanayana* at 8 years after conception, *kṣatriya* boys at 11 years, and *vaiśya* boys at age 12.[22] If they miss getting the *upanayana* within an upper limit (ie. 16 for *brāhmaṇa*, 22 for *kṣatriya*, and 24 for *vaiśya*) then they are known as,"'*Vrātyas*' (apostates), despised by all good men."[23]

Reverting to the *dīkṣās*, in a healthy culture the boy would get his *upanayana* at a young age and then be qualified to attend a *veda pāṭhaśālā* and learn the Veda by memorizing at least one Veda. Thus the *upanayana* makes him a *dvija* and qualifies him to study the Vedas. As *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtras*[24] (1.1.1.9-10) state (on the strength of a *Brāhmaṇam*) the purpose of learning *sāvitri gāyatrī* is for the sake of entering the world of Vedic study:

> *upanayanaṁ vidyārthasya śrutitas saṁskāraḥ*
> *sarvebhyo vai vedebhyas-sāvitryanūcyata iti hi brāhmaṇam*

> The initiation [*upanayanaṁ*] is the consecration in accordance with the texts of the
> Veda, of a male who is desirous of [and can make use of] sacred knowledge. A
> *Brāhmaṇam* text declares that the *Gāyatrī* is learned for the sake of all the [three] Vedas.

However, though he is a *dvija* he is not allowed to worship the Deity in a Vaiṣṇava temple. To worship the Deity, he must become a Vaiṣṇava. At a later time if he so inclines and wants to become a Vaiṣṇava then he can approach a guru for *pañca-saṁskāra* — the *Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā* for consecrating a Vaiṣṇava. That is the "*trija*," third birth — more details on this below.

Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā

Before discussing *Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā* a few remarks on *Pañcarātra* are warranted. The basic tenets of *Gaudīya siddhānta* and practice derive principally from the two inseparable sources of *Pañcarātra* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. The subjects of both overlap, and they are in perfect harmony. *Bhāgavatam* emphasizes and expounds more the *siddhāntas* of *bhakti*, whereas *Pañcarātra* supplies details about the *Bhāgavatam's* conclusions and principles, detailing themes related to the execution of *bhakti* (procedures for initiation, etc.), as also essential principles of *bhakti* and the glories of the *bhakti* process. For instance, the well-known verses that begin *sarvopādhi-vinirmuktaṁ* and *ārādhito yadi haris tapasā tataḥ kiṁ* are from *Pañcarātra*. *Pañcarātra* also describes the *catur-vyuhas*, Hari's features in different forms, and cognate topics, and gives many particulars concerning *nama-kirtana* and its

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[21] See Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's comments on *Caitanya-bhāgavat* 1.8.7 Sri Vrindavana Dasa Thakura and Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, *Sri Caitanya Bhagavata*, trans. Bhumipati Dasa (Vrndavana: Ras Bihari Lal and Sons, 2001). Any other references to *Caitanya-bhāgavat* are to this edition.

[22] *Manu* 2.36

[23] Ibid. 2.38-39

[24] See also, "The Position of *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtras* in the Vedic Corpus." https://archive.org/details/position-of-apastamba/mode/1up

varieties, as also many *sahasra-namas* and their glories. *Pañcarātras* instruct how temples should be constructed and how festivals honoring the Lord should be observed and other *bhakti* related topics.

Bhāgavatam teaches what is to be done and why; *Pañcarātra* informs how to do it, with practical details. For instance, *Bhāgavatam* describes *bhakti* in the three modes and above the modes (*nirguṇa*), and *Pañcarātra* specifies the activities of *bhakti* to be performed by the body, mind, and words according to these divisions. Another example: *Bhāgavatam* instructs to chant the Holy Names and gives philosophical reasons why; *Pañcarātra* directs to chant on a tulasi mala with 108 beads, starting at the large end, and so on. But it would be reductive to think of the *Pañcarātra* solely as a "how to" manual only covering the practical details. They are so much more than this.

For example consider *Śrī Brahma-saṁhitā* one of the most iconic and essential texts in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.* This *pañcarātra*[25] text was personally brought by Lord Caitanya from extreme South India to Bengal and Odisha for the benefit of His devotees.[26]

> In the temple of Ādi-keśava, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu discussed spiritual matters among highly advanced devotees. While there, He found a chapter of the *Brahma-saṁhitā*. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was greatly happy to find a chapter of that scripture, and symptoms of ecstatic transformation — trembling, tears, perspiration, trance and jubilation — were manifest in His body.
>
> There is no scripture equal to the *Brahma-saṁhitā* as far as the final spiritual conclusion is concerned. Indeed, that scripture is the supreme revelation of the glories of Lord Govinda, for it reveals the topmost knowledge about Him. Since all conclusions are briefly presented in the Brahma-saṁhitā, it is essential among all the Vaiṣṇava literatures.
> *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta 2.9.237-240*

In the purport to the last two verses Srila Prabhupada writes:

> The *Brahma-saṁhitā* is a very important scripture. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu acquired the fifth chapter from the Ādi-keśava temple. In that fifth chapter, the philosophical conclusion of *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva* (simultaneous oneness and difference) is presented. The chapter also presents methods of devotional service, the eighteen-syllable Vedic hymn, discourses on the soul, the Supersoul and fruitive activity, an explanation of Kāma-gāyatrī, *kāma-bīja* and the original Mahā-Viṣṇu, and a detailed description of the spiritual world, specifically Goloka Vṛndāvana. The *Brahma-saṁhitā* also explains the demigod Gaṇeśa, Garbhodakaśāyī Viṣṇu, the origin of the Gāyatrī *mantra*, the form of Govinda and His transcendental position and abode, the living entities, the highest goal, the goddess Durgā, the meaning of austerity, the five gross elements, love of Godhead, impersonal Brahman, the initiation of Lord Brahmā, and the vision of transcendental love enabling one to see the Lord. The steps of devotional service are also explained. The mind, *yoga-nidrā*, the goddess of fortune, devotional service in spontaneous ecstasy, incarnations beginning with Lord Rāmacandra, Deities, the conditioned soul and its duties, the truth about Lord Viṣṇu, prayers, Vedic hymns,

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[25] Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvati Thakura, *Sri Brahma Samhita With Commentary of Sri Jiva Goswami* (Madras: Sree Gaudiya Math, 1973), vii. https://archive.org/details/shri-brahma-samhita-trans-by-bhakthi-siddhanta-sarasvati-gosvami-thakur-ocr/page/n6/mode/1up
[26] For more details see *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.1.120; 2.9.237-241; 2.9.309,323; 2.11.143

Lord Śiva, the Vedic literature, personalism and impersonalism, good behavior, and many other subjects are also discussed. There is also a description of the sun and the universal form of the Lord. All these subjects are conclusively explained in a nutshell in the *Brahma-saṁhitā*.
    Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta 2.9.239-240p

This indicates the philosophical depth of *Pañcarātra* and why it is vital to our *sampradāya*.[27]

Reverting to *Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā* (*pañca-saṁskāra*[28]) it consists of *ūrdhvapuṇḍra* (*tilaka* - the footprint of the Master), *dāsya nāma* (named as an eternal servant of Hari), *tāpa* (marked with the symbols of his Owner[29]), *mantra* (various *Pañcarātrika mantras*), and *yāga* (Deity worship).

Using some of the mantras that he has received from his guru, the student begins the worship of *śālagrāma śilā* or *śrī murti*, the Deity of Kṛṣṇa. This is known as *yāga*.

By receiving *pañca-saṁskāra*, the five sacraments, a faithful person enters into *bhajana-kriyā* or the personal worship of God, which eventually leads to pure love for Śrī Hari. Now the "*trija*" (born for the third time) who has gotten *pañca-saṁskāra* is qualified to worship in the temple or at home according to the standards of *Pañcarātra āgama* appropriate to their situation and traditions of their *sampradāya*.

How a qualified man becomes a trija

How a qualified man becomes a *trija* is revealed in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (emphasis mine):

> *kiṁ janmabhis tribhir veha*
> *śaukra-sāvitra-yājñikaiḥ*
> *karmabhir vā trayī-proktaiḥ*
> *puṁso 'pi vibudhāyuṣā*

A civilized human being has **three kinds of births**. The first birth is by a pure father and mother, and this birth is called birth by semen. The next birth takes place when one is initiated by the spiritual master, and this birth is called *sāvitra*. The **third birth**, called *yājñika*, takes place when one is given the opportunity to worship Lord Viṣṇu. Despite the opportunities for attaining such births, even if one gets the life span of a demigod, if one does not actually engage in the service of the Lord, everything is useless. Similarly, one's activities may be mundane or spiritual, but they are useless if they are not meant for satisfying the Lord.
    Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.31.10

The first birth is from the parents. The second, *sāvitra*[30] is the *Vaidika-dīkṣā*. And as explained in the [purport] to this śloka the third birth called *yājñika* is via *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*. (This is another

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example of where the *Bhāgavatam* mentions the principle of something, in this case third birth, but the details of how it is done is from the *Pañcarātra*.)

In the case of *mlechas, yavanas, pañcamas,* or *vrātyas* the situation is different. They usually, but not always, become interested in *Vaiṣṇavism* long after the time of *upanayana* has passed. So they would get *pañcarātrikī dīkṣā* (*yājñika*) first and then if qualified *upanayana* (*Vaidika-dīkṣā*).

Note that both the words *yāga*[31] and *yajña*[32] mean the same thing and are derived from the verbal root '*yaj*' which means to worship, to sacrifice, or to bestow. This will be an important consideration later on. The subtle distinction is that *yāga* pertains to Deity worship.[33]

Furthermore, we should also note that *mantra saṁskāra* (in *pañca-saṁskāra*) is not a one-time event because at different times for different purposes different mantras may need to be given. For example, initiation into a particular mantra such as the *Nṛsimha mantra*[34] or the *sannyāsa mantra* given at the time of *sannyāsa* would also be part of the *mantra saṁskāra*. As would any Deity-specific mantras required for doing puja that were not given before. For example, in *Pañcarātrika agama* temples there are different levels of *arcana* each requiring specific mantras that need to be given — the highest being *arcaka dīkṣā* (*cakrābja maṇḍala dīkṣā*) which is given to the head priests. So when it comes to *mantra saṁskāra* there is some flexibility according to the need of the disciple.

Chanting of the Holy Name as a part of Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā

We previously alluded *supra* that initiation into the *hare kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra* was via *Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā*. We shall now provide the *pramāṇa* to substantiate this assertion.

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* we find the following verses (emphasis mine):

> *iti dvāpara urv-īśa*
> *stuvanti jagad-īśvaram*
> *nānā-**tantra**-vidhānena*
> *kalāv api tathā śṛṇu*

> O King, in this way people in Dvāpara-yuga glorified the Lord of the universe. In Kali-yuga also people worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead by following various regulations of the revealed scriptures. Now kindly hear of this from me.
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.5.31*

The purport to this verse states:

> According to Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura the word *nānā-**tantra**-vidhānena* indicates the importance in Kali-yuga of the Vaiṣṇava scriptures known as the **Pañcarātras or Sātvata-pañcarātras**. … Such devotional processes as **chanting the holy names of the Lord** and worshiping His Deity form are elaborately

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[31] https://tinyurl.com/5n859p4h
[32] https://tinyurl.com/4twedh48
[33] *Nārada-pañcarātra (Bhāradvāja-saṁhita) Pariśiṣṭa* 2.48-50 https://archive.org/details/VDNAP/page/n129/mode/2up
[34] Lakshmithathachar and Varadachari, *Isvarasamhita Volume 4*, 1287.

described in the Vaiṣṇava *śāstras* known as *Pañcarātras.* Such **tantric** scriptures are referred to in this verse, and it is stated that in Kali-yuga these devotional processes, taught by great *ācāryas* such as Nārada Muni, are the only practical means for worshiping the Lord. This will be more clearly explained in the following verse.

kṛṣṇa-varṇaṁ tviṣākṛṣṇaṁ
sāṅgopāṅgāstra-pārṣadam
yajñaiḥ saṅkīrtana-prāyair
yajanti hi su-medhasaḥ

In the Age of Kali, intelligent persons perform congregational chanting to worship the incarnation of Godhead who constantly sings the names of Kṛṣṇa. Although His complexion is not blackish, He is Kṛṣṇa Himself. He is accompanied by His associates, servants, weapons and confidential companions.
  Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.5.32

Directly reading the text reveals that in verse 31 Karabhājana Yogendra tells King Nimi that in Kali-yuga people worship the Lord through different *tantras*[35] (*Pañcarātra āgama*). Then in the 32nd verse, the method of worship is described. He says that intelligent people will worship Kṛṣṇa (or Gaurāṅga) through "*yajñaiḥ saṅkīrtana-prāyair*," that is, through the arcana process (*yajñaiḥ*) in which *saṅkīrtana* is performed as the chief part (*saṅkīrtana-prāyair*). All ācāryas who have commented are unanimous on this point. In other words arcana must be performed accompanied by *saṅkīrtana*, because it is the *saṅkīrtana* which makes the *arcana* successful. That is why we see that in ISKCON and the Gauḍīya Math that along with the *āratis* (and *homas* for *yajña*, etc.) that *saṅkīrtana* of the *mahā-mantra* goes on, which actually is the main process enabling the *ārati* etc. in yielding its proper result.

Some think that *Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā* is only for Deity worship and not required for the *mahā-mantra*. Any doubt about this is cleared by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's commentary on *Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata* wherein Lord Caitanya instructs Tapan Miśra (emphasis mine):

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare
ei śloka nāma bali' laya mahā-mantra
śola-nāma batriśa-akṣara ei **tantra**

"Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. This verse is called the *mahā-mantra*. It contains sixteen holy names of the Lord composed of thirty-two syllables."
  Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata 1.14.145-146

These sixteen holy names composed of thirty-two syllables in the form of an address are called the *mahā-mantra*. **According to the process of *Pañcarātra [tantra]*, this *mahā-mantra* should be chanted both in *japa* and in loud *kīrtana*.** For one who chants this *mahā-mantra* in loud kīrtana, the seed of love of God sprouts within his heart by the influence of that loud kīrtana; and by the progressive mercy of the holy names, that person soon becomes expert in the science of the goal of life and the

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[35] Not to be confused with the tamasic *Śaiva*, *Śākta*, and Buddhist tantric traditions.

process for attaining it.
Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata 1.14.146p

Therefore the conclusion is that the *mahā-mantra* is to be chanted according to the process of *Pañcarātra* (*tantra*).

Saṅkīrtana-yajña Dīkṣā

We previously alluded *supra* to a *dīkṣā* wherein the *yajamāna* (sacrificer) is consecrated to perform a *yajña*. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.5.32) tells us that in the Kali-yuga *saṅkīrtana* is the prescribed *yajña*. Initiation into the chanting of Holy Names can be likened to the *yajña-dīkṣā* for the Kali-yuga. Haridāsa Ṭhākura, recognized as the *nāma-ācārya* supports this assertion (emphasis mine).[36]

*"saṅkhyā-nāma-saṅkīrtana — ei 'mahā-**yajña**' manye*
*tāhāte **dīkṣita** āmi ha-i prati-dine*

"I have been **initiated** into a vow to perform a great **sacrifice** by chanting the holy name a certain number of times every day.
Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta 3.3.240

The *Caitanya-maṅgala* describes the *saṅkīrtana-yajña* as a Vedic sacrifice where the living entities ears are sacrificial openings, the tongue — a ladle, and Lord Kṛṣṇa's glories — sacrifical ghee. For an in-depth exploration of the correlation between *saṅkīrtana-yajña* and Vedic sacrifices, kindly consult *Caitanya-maṅgala* 2.21.81-90.[37]

Dīkṣā in the Gaudiya Sampradāya

While our *sampradāya*[38] contains elements of *Bhāgavata*, *Pañcarātrika*, and *Vaidika*, our *dīkṣā* is based only on *Pañcarātra*, and *Vaidika*.

Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā is the *pañca-saṁskāra* previously described *supra*. Each of the *saṁskāras* can be bestowed separately, all at once, or in portions as the guru decides.[39]

In ISKCON's first initiation, three of the *pañca-saṁskāras* are formally given (*ūrdhvapuṇḍra, tāpa*, and *dāsya nāma*). And, in the second initiation, the other two — *mantra* and *yāga saṁskāra* are

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[36] Remarkably some people conclude that because a *dīkṣā* guru is not named or a *dīkṣā* ceremony described for Haridāsa Ṭhākura therefore one doesn't need to be initiated! This is a variation of *argumentum ex silentio* (argument from silence), it is not a strong argument because absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Haridāsa Ṭhākura clearly states that he was initiated, just because we don't know (at this time) who his guru was doesn't nullify that he was initiated by a guru and that no guru is required for others.

[37] https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/chaitanya-mangala/d/doc1112748.html

[38] Specifically followers of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

[39] *Nārada-pañcarātra (Bhāradvāja-saṁhita) Pariśiṣṭa* 2.54-56
https://archive.org/details/VDNAP/page/n131/mode/2up

bestowed.[40] The *Pañcarātrika mantras* given in the second initiation are the *guru bīja, guru gāyatrī, kāma bīja,* etc. required to do Deity worship and *dhyāna.[41]*

With the completion of *pañca-saṁskāra* (all five are required), the person is now a fully consecrated Vaiṣṇava. Nothing extra is required, it is sufficient. This is open to everyone regardless of species,[42] race, social class, or gender.[43]

It is important to remember that *brahma-gāyatrī* (the topic of the SAC paper) does not make one a Vaisnava and is not required for chanting the Holy Name or worshipping the Deity.

Then as an extra for the men, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura would then give them *upanayana* — sacred thread and *brahma-gāyatrī* (the *Vaidika* element). Previously they were *[vrātyas](#)* and not within the time limit of *upanayana*, but having become *dvijas* via *pañca-saṁskāra* they were now born anew and eligible for *upanayana* if they had the requisite character and qualities.

Upanayana, as *Manu* explains is only for males, for women *Vivāha* (marriage) is equivalent.[44]

<div align="center">

vaivāhiko vidhiḥ strīṇāṁ saṁskāro vaidikaḥ smṛtaḥ
patisevā gurau vāso gṛhārtho'gniparikriyā

</div>

For females the rites of marriage have been ordained to be their "Vedic Sacrament," the serving of the husbands their "residence with the Guru," and the household duties their "tending of the sacred fire."
  Manu-saṁhitā 2.67

With this background, we can now approach SAC's first and main argument found on page 16 of their above-mentioned paper.

SAC's first and main argument

Hermeneutic Overview of Part One
1. ***viṣaya*** – topic: The Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* bestows higher qualification upon the initiated
2. ***saṁśaya*** – doubt: Is the Brahma-*gāyatrī* a Vaiṣṇava *mantra*, the chanting of which is part of *bhakti*, or it is a part of *varṇa dharma*?
3. ***pūrvapakṣa*** – one viewpoint: While certain practitioners of *bhakti* may chant the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, it's a part of *varṇāśrama* and should be applied as a *varṇāśrama* practice
4. ***uttara-pakṣa*** – another viewpoint: There are ways of understanding and meditating on the Brahma-*gāyatrī* that are related to the worship of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa

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[40] It appears that in the *Gauḍīya Math, dāsya nāma* was sometimes included in the second initiation, and sometimes in the first. As stated it is the guru's prerogative regarding what order, how many, and when the individual *saṁskāras* are given.
[41] For example, Lord Brahmā meditated in the *kāma bīja* to create the universe.
[42] Garuda and Hanuman, for example, are not humans.
[43] *Nārada-pañcarātra (Bhāradvāja-saṁhita) Pariśiṣṭa* 1.14-15 https://archive.org/details/VDNAP/page/n107/mode/2up
[44] There is a misconception prevalent among contemporary *nāstika* scholars, including some devotees in ISKCON, that in ancient Vedic culture, females underwent the *Upanayana* ceremony — receiving the sacred thread and the *brahma-gāyatrī*. This assertion is thoroughly examined in detail at this link: https://guru-sadhu-sastra.blogspot.com/p/women-upanayana.html

5. **nirṇayaḥ** – deciding in favor of a side: Chanting the Brahma-*gāyatrī* can also be done exclusively as a practice of *bhakti*

6. **siddhānta**– conclusion: It is possible to chant the Brahma-*gāyatrī* as part of *varṇāśrama* or exclusively as a part of *bhakti*, as well as a mix of both, and Śrīla Prabhupāda gave it to his disciples primarily as a part of *bhakti*

After reading the above six points we see that SAC has ignored the fundamental question, "Why did Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura introduce *upanayana*?" You do not become a Vaiṣṇava with *upanayana*. *Pañca-saṁskāra* is the requirement for that. Many *dvijas* (*Smārta, Śaiva, Śākta, Gāṇapatya,* etc.) have had *upanayana* but are not Vaiṣṇavas.

According to the historical record, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura at that time was at war with the caste *brāhmaṇas* and wanted to show that Vaiṣṇavas were also *brāhmaṇas* by their character. **This is the crucial point**, because the *pūrvapakṣa* (SAC) ignores it and goes off on a tangent that *brahma-gāyatrī* is an aspect of bhakti, etc. Then from this position via indirect and circuitous routes SAC tortures us into its strained conclusions.

Previous *Gauḍīya ācāryas* like Gaura-kiśora dāsa Bābājī, Vamsi dāsa Bābājī, and Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī were not chanting the *brahma-gāyatrī* for any purpose, what to speak of for bhakti.

Brahma-gāyatrī as we have shown above is part of *Vaidika dīkṣā* as it allows the qualified male student to enter into the world of Vedic studies, something that women and *śūdras* are barred from. So there is something very wrong with SAC's whole approach. SAC has completely ignored Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's *mano-'bhīṣṭaṁ*.

Why did Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura introduce upanayana in a manner unconventional at the time?

SAC does not ask but ignores the most obvious and crucial question — Why did Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura introduce *upanayana* in a manner unconventional at the time? If we know the answer to this then everything falls into place. If Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura introduced *brahma-gāyatrī* for the practice of bhakti then SAC is correct but if he introduced it for a different reason then SAC's whole argument collapses.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura explains the reason for *upanayana* — sacred thread ceremony — in his commentary on *Caitanya-bhāgavata.* (Emphasis mine.)

> **The sacred thread ceremony is meant to give one the qualification for studying the Vedas**, because the *Brahma-sūtras* state that *śūdras*, or those without sacred thread, are not eligible to hear *Vedānta*. After accepting *Pañcarātrika* mantras and being properly initiated according to the *Śrī Nārada Pañcarātra* a person must observe the ten *saṁskāras*,[45] or purificatory rites, and thereafter hear the meanings of the mantras.
> *Sri Caitanya-bhāgavata 1.8.7p*

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[45] *Saṁskāras* here refer to the standard *Vaidika saṁskāras* like *garbhodana, upanayanam, vivaha,* etc.

This is the same reason given by Āpastambha that we previously quoted. And we note that Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura states, "After accepting *Pañcarātrika* mantras …" one must observe the *Vaidika samskāras*. And that is exactly what he established by giving *upanayana* after *pañca-saṁskāra.*[46]

And regarding Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's war with the caste *brāhmaṇas* Śrīla Prabhupāda has stated his other reason for introducing it:

> Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura introduced the sacred thread ceremony for his Vaiṣṇava disciples, with the idea that people should understand that when one becomes a Vaiṣṇava he has already acquired the qualifications of a *brāhmaṇa*. Therefore in the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, those who are twice initiated so as to become brāhmaṇas must bear in mind their great responsibility to be truthful, control the mind and senses, be tolerant, and so on.
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.7.13-15 purport*

And Śrīla Prabhupāda confirms that he is awarding the sacred thread for the same reason (emphasis mine):

> Prabhupāda: Yes. Why we are accepting in Europe and America, call them brāhmaṇa? They are not born in brāhmaṇa family. **But why we are giving them sacred thread? Only for quality and work.** That is said in the *śāstra*. Nārada Muni says that the quality and symptoms is the real platform of judging who is *brāhmaṇa*, who is *śūdra*. Nārada said, and Śrīdhara Svāmī has commented upon him that birth is immaterial. **Quality and work is to be considered.**
> *Morning Walk — December 8, 1973, Los Angeles*

This contradicts SAC's assertion that, "Śrīla Prabhupāda gave it to his disciples primarily as a part of *bhakti.*"

Reverting to Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, he awarded *upanayana* because it is the gateway to Vedic study and it was part of his war against the caste *brāhmaṇas*.

In conclusion, SAC's position crumbles and becomes indefensible due to their misrepresentation of the rationale behind bestowing *upanayana*—the sacred thread ceremony. SAC authors are guilty of either being grossly ignorant, bad actors with mischievous intent, or both. In any case, they are bogus according to the principle of direct interpretation.

> Anyone who wants to establish his own opinion or philosophy certainly cannot explain any scripture according to the principle of direct interpretation.
> *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta 2.25.49*

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[46] According to H. H. Bhakti Vikasa Swami the protocol that Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura established in the *Gauḍīya Matha* was that *upanayana* — the *Brahma-gāyatrī mantra* and sacred thread, was given later on the same day in a separate ceremony after the six *Pañcarātrika* mantras were given.

The GBC Resolution

How could the GBC pass a resolution based on SAC's counsel, especially considering the historical dismissal of their controversial papers on social issues? Take SAC's 2005 pro-FDG paper, challenged in 2009-2010 [by a paper I wrote](#) representing ISKCON India. Furthermore, [SAC's 2013 FDG](#) paper never saw the light of day due to its poor quality. The substantial resistance from ISKCON India, approaching schism, is precisely why the GBC has reevaluated its stance on FDG, prompting the imposition of a moratorium.

Considering the historical backlash on such issues, why did the GBC rush to pass a resolution before soliciting opposing views? Especially (as we have demonstrated) when there are obvious significant holes in SAC's arguments. (And this is just the beginning.)

Getting to the GBC resolutions the most egregious part of the resolution muddies the waters (emphasis mine):

> 2. Initiating gurus at second initiation shall give the specific seven mantras that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave to all initiates at what we call **brahminical** initiation or second initiation, and direct them to chant them three times a day at three sandhyās (at morning, mid-day, and evening).
>
> 3. Gurus and those who recommend initiation candidates shall not make any distinction of birth, nationality, race, ethnicity, previous saṁskāra, marital status, gender, or **classifications within the varṇas (such as occupational livelihood)** as to who would be eligible to take those vows and receive those mantras in full at first and second initiation.

"We should not think that everyone has to become a brāhmaṇa."

If I am reading this correctly, the GBC is asserting that, for *brāhmaṇical*[47] initiation, one doesn't have to embody *brāhmaṇical* qualities! This is an imaginative approach to implementing *varṇāśrama-dharma*.[48] Whether working as a grave digger, auto mechanic, store clerk, or any salaried employee (*śūdra*), one should still be designated a *brāhmaṇa*. This, I assume, is deemed "progressive." However, *varna* for a male[49] entails *guna* and *karma*, where *karma* is the work aligned with his *guna*. The GBC's resolution directly contradicts Śrīla Prabhupāda's guidance for ISKCON.

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[47] While it is true that in Krsna's Vedic culture, Vaiśyas and Kṣatriyas also got *upanayana* there is abundant evidence that Śrīla Prabhupāda envisioned ISKCON as an institution for producing *Brāhmaṇas*.

[48] There is abundant evidence that Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to establish *varṇāśrama-dharma* in ISKCON. The letter to Sudāmā that we have quoted below strongly suggests that *brāhmaṇical* initiation was integral to this. For a collection of quotes wherein Śrīla Prabhupāda stresses that establishing *varṇāśrama-dharma* is his next project see https://guru-sadhu-sastra.blogspot.com/p/varnasrama-srila-prabhupadas-plan-for.html

[49] Females have no varna. Why? Because while females do have different gunas they all have the same karma to follow — *stri-dharma* — as explained in *Srimad Bhagavatam* 7.11.20-25. This is a controversial topic that we will dilate on later.

He opposed the idea of "bogus *brāhmaṇas*" not inclined to *brāhmaṇical* standards and cautioned about awarding the second initiation. Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasized that not everyone must become a *brāhmaṇa* and those not adhering to *brāhmaṇical* principles should revert to being *śūdras*. (Emphasis mine.)

> The presidents must be very careful on recommending *gāyatrī* initiation. After all, we are criticizing false caste brāhmaṇas, **if we ourselves are bogus *brāhmaṇas* then our position is very bad. Now that we are more and more trying to implement the *varṇāśrama* divisions of society, we should not think that everyone has to become a *brāhmaṇa*.** For example you are developing a farm there; so those who work the farm do not necessarily have to be a *brāhmaṇa* if they are not inclined to the *brāhmaṇical* standards. In this way, be careful about awarding the second initiation.
> *Letter to: Sudāmā, Rome 26 May 1974*

> Now there should be examination whether so-called *brāhmaṇas*, they are actually following the *brāhmaṇa* regulative principle and chanting the mantra regularly. **Otherwise they should be converted again śudra.** If we become safe simply by having a thread and do not do properly, then what is this? This should be examined. Every individual should be asked, "Now chant this *gāyatrī-mantra*."
> *Morning Walk – December 12, 1973, Los Angeles*

Śrīla Prabhupāda was just repeating Kṛṣṇa's Vedic standard that a *brāhmaṇa* is known by his occupation, the work he does.

> *na yonir nāpi saṁskāro na śrutaṁ na ca santatiḥ*
> *kāraṇāni dvijatvasya vṛttam eva tu kāraṇam*

> Therefore, neither the source of one's birth, nor his reformation, nor his education is the criterion of a *brāhmaṇa*. The *vṛtta*, or occupation, [work] is the real standard by which one is known as a *brāhmaṇa*.
> *Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana 143.50*

This suggests that Śrīla Prabhupāda initially displayed leniency regarding the second initiation but later tightened the standards. **This implies that reverting to the original norm in Kṛṣṇa's Vedic culture, where females are excluded from the *brahma-gāyatrī*, is not unreasonable but preferable.**

Returning to the GBC resolution, how is the GBC going to reconcile its resolution with Śrīla Prabhupāda's direct instruction on the matter?

Our position is that while it is absolutely true that everyone regardless of species, race, social status, or gender is eligible to receive *Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā* via *pañca-saṁskāra* and thus be consecrated as a *Vaiṣṇava* and eligible to chant the Holy Name and worship the Deity according to *Pañcarātrika agama*,[50] the same is not true for *upanayana* — investiture with the sacred thread and *brahma-gāyatrī*. These are two different *dīkṣās* that have been misunderstood as being one because of the way they are administered, the nomenclature used, and the social milieu.[51]

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[50] Females and Śūdras to worship at home.
[51] Śrīla Prabhupāda's god-sisters, who were following *Strī-dharma*, and knowing Kṛṣṇa's Vedic culture did not make this mistake.

The first initiation for everyone consists of some portions of the *pañca-saṁskāra*. While the second initiation for everyone is the rest of the *pañca-saṁskāra*, plus the *Vaidika upanayanam* which is for qualified males only.

A female can still get second initiation by completing the *pañca-saṁskāra*, but she is **not** eligible for the *Vaidika upanayanam* — investiture with sacred thread and *Brahma-gāyatrī*

Suggested Change in Nomeclature

To remove confusion and bring more clarity we suggest that the GBC may (or may not) want to consider a change in the nomenclature for the initiations. Something like:

First *Pañcarātrika* initiation, Second *Pañcarātrika* initiation, and *Vaidika upanayana*. Where:

- First *Pañcarātrika* initiation — three of the *pañca-saṁskāras* are given: *ūrdhvapuṇḍra*, *tāpa*, and *dāsya nāma*

- Second *Pañcarātrika* initiation — *mantra saṁskāra* (*guru bīja*, *guru gāyatrī*, etc.) along with *yāga saṁskāra* are bestowed

- *Vaidika upanayana* — investiture with the sacred thread and *brahma-gāyatrī*

Males and females are eligible for first and second *Pañcarātrika* initiation. However, only qualified males (i.e. having *brāhmaṇical* tendencies) are eligible for *Vaidika upanayana*.

It should be stressed that it is the *Pañcarātrika-dīkṣā* that is more important because it allows us to chant the Holy Name, worship the Deity, and qualifies the males of appropriate nature to get *upanayana*.

Final Remarks

We have shown that SAC employs the *yavana* system of "hermeneutics" rather than Kṛṣṇa's system of *Mīmāṁsā* for textual interpretation. And that SAC, by using their bespoke "hermeneutics" has ignored the intention of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. And that the GBC without waiting to see if there was any pushback on the SAC paper hastily passed a seriously flawed resolution — a fact that loudly cries out for a reasonable explanation.

Despite the obvious incompetence and corruption in SAC (see below) and even though the GBC have known about this malaise for a long time, we do not expect them to dissolve SAC or remove its leader Urmilā Dāsī. Why? Because it appears that the GBC is complicit with SAC and that SAC provides the GBC with the product they want. As Mukunda-datta Prabhu — a charter member of SAC (and later whistleblower) who ultimately resigned due to the consistently unethical behavior of prominent SAC activists — wrote in 2014 (emphasis mine):

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> Frankly, I sense the current SAC and its recent [2013] paper are both contaminated by partisan interests, partly because of the following:
>
> 4. Pre-existing SAC demographics were stacked so as **to favor only one conclusion**; I noticed a goal-oriented methodology operating by default—as if **the outcome was considered a foregone conclusion**, rendering SAC research but perfunctory.
>> [_Politically Motivated Wrongdoings of the Sastric Advisory Committee_](#)

SAC gives the GBC a patina of plausibility for their actions and nothing more. Thus we do not expect any change because SAC is doing exactly what the GBC wants in its ongoing campaign to bring ISKCON in line with modern trends such as feminism and to purge from ISKCON Śrīla Prabhupāda's desires regarding *varṇāśrama-dharma*.

With every new paper on social issues that it publishes, SAC further proves how ill-motivated it has become over the years since its inception. At the turn of the century, Pūrṇacandra Mahārāja originally envisioned a *brāhmiṇical* body that could advise the GBC—an important step toward fulfilling Śrīla Prabhupāda's mandate to implement *varṇāśrama-dharma* within ISKCON. Instead, SAC gradually became hijacked into functioning as a prominent group of socio-political activists whose chief aim seems to be obstructing his Divine Grace's order. At least this is the clear trajectory taken since Urmilā Dāsī became its chair.

As previously stated this is just the opening salvo, detailed point-by-point rebuttal(s) are being prepared to give the proper *siddhānta* and guidance for sincere followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Further Reading

[The Position of Apastamba Dharma Sūtras in the Vedic Corpus](#)

[In Defense of Manu-saṁhitā](#)

[Introduction to _Pañcarātra_](#) (A short overview of the system.)

[Pancaratra Texts and Madhvacharya](#) by a recognized Madhva Scholar, [Veeranarayana Pandurangi](#) — this paper gives ample *pramāṇa* of Madvacarya's views of the *Pañcarātras.*

A video discussion on the same topic by H.H. Bhakti Vikasa Swami.

[My Policy Regarding Brahminical Initiation](#)