



CONCERNS FOR PRABHUPĀDA'S MOVEMENT

Presentation by representatives of the ISKCON India Leadership on the
FDG/VDG controversy



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ISKCON INDIA
Śrīdhāma Māyāpura

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Dīkṣā means upanayana-saṁskāra

Basu Ghoṣa dāsaḥ

General Secretary, ISKCON India Governing Council; Temple President, ISKCON Baroda

Respected members of the GBC,

Namonamaḥ. Jaya Prabhupāda!

Women cannot be dīkṣā-gurus as dīkṣā means *upanayana-saṁskāra*—in English, “the sacred thread ceremony.” Prabhupāda, and before him Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, introduced the sacred thread ceremony for those not born in families of the *dvijas* (twice-born), i.e. *śūdras*. And we know they did not give the sacred thread to women.

Prabhupāda explained:

“Therefore, according to Vedic system, a boy born in a brāhmaṇa family, he is allowed all the saṁskāras, reformatory, purificatory process, but the girl is not... so therefore even born in a brāhmaṇa family, a woman is taken as woman, not as brāhmaṇa.”¹

Prabhupāda introduced “the Vedic system.” He did not invent something new. We all know this—“As it is”!

Prabhupāda:

“One who cannot be brought nearer to a spiritual master cannot have a sacred thread, and thus he is indicated to be a śūdra. The sacred thread on the body of a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya or vaiśya is a symbol of initiation by the spiritual master.... The duty of the spiritual master is to initiate a disciple with the sacred thread ceremony...”²

Further, Jīva Gosvāmī explains dīkṣā in his *Bhakti-sandarbha* (283):

“Even though born in a brāhmaṇa family, one cannot engage in Vedic rituals without being initiated and having a sacred thread. Although born in a brāhmaṇa family, one becomes a brāhmaṇa only after initiation and the sacred thread ceremony. Unless one is initiated as a brāhmaṇa, one cannot worship the holy name properly.”³

Prabhupāda:

¹ In his lecture on July 16, 1969, at Los Angeles.

² Prabhupada’s purport to CC Adi 1.46.

³ From the purport to CC Adi 15.108

“When one is accepted as a brāhmaṇa in the sacred thread ceremony under the pāñcarātrika system, then he is dvija, twice-born.”⁴

In *Kṛṣṇa Book*:

“According to Vedic injunction, women are not allowed to undergo the purificatory process of initiation by the sacred thread.”⁵

Why would Prabhupāda have published this if it were not true?

Prabhupāda explained that there is a principle: a man can have the sacred thread, but woman cannot.

“Therefore initiation, brahminical symbolic representation, is given to the man, not to the woman.”⁶

So, dīkṣā is the sacred thread. This fact is proven by tradition and numerous quotations from Prabhupāda. In the Vaiṣṇava/Vedic *sampradāyas*—the Gauḍīya, Rāmānuja, Mādhva, Vallabha/Viṣṇusvāmin, and Nimbārka *sampradāyas*—no woman is given the sacred thread (dīkṣā/initiation).

Women dīkṣā-gurus must not be introduced in ISKCON for the sake of appeasing egalitarian sentiments. Just as homosexual marriage and the so-called “ṛtvik system” of initiation are *apasiddhānta*, so is the idea that women can be dīkṣā-gurus, as women cannot have the sacred thread.

We have it from Prabhupāda that Sunīti could not be Dhruva’s dīkṣā-guru “being a woman,” despite being his *pātha-pradarśaka-guru* and *śikṣā-guru*.⁷

Prabhupāda told Satsvarūpa that varṇāśrama college was only “for men. Women should automatically learn how to cook, how to cleanse home.” Thus Prabhupāda did not intend women leading society.⁸

Prabhupāda wrote: “women are similarly very prone to degradation...,”⁹ “women are like children... not given freedom,”¹⁰ “women are always the property of father, husband, or sons”—all citing śāstras.¹¹ Prabhupāda did not appoint women as temple presidents, GBCs, trustees, or ṛtvik-gurus, nor discuss post-departure initiations with them.

⁴ From the purport to SB 3.33.6

⁵ From Chapter 23

⁶ From Prabhupada’s lecture at LA on Sept 22, 1972 on SB 1.3.17

⁷ Prabhupada’s purport to SB 4.12.32

⁸ Prabhupada’s 1974 conversation with Satsvarupa at Vrindavan

⁹ From the purport to Bhagavad-gita 1.40.

¹⁰ From the purport to Bhagavad-gita 1.67

¹¹ From the purport to SB 3.22.25,

So, Prabhupāda clearly taught that women are not to be brāhmaṇas, and thus not formal dīkṣā-gurus. This was his outlook for both ISKCON and society in general.

“The entire varṇāśrama scheme is intended to enable people to become Vaiṣṇavas. *Viṣṇur asya devatā*. When people worship Lord Viṣṇu as the Supreme Lord, they become Vaiṣṇavas. Thus people should be trained to become Vaiṣṇavas through the system of varṇa and āśrama.”¹²

Prabhupāda:

“Everything will be satisfied. Just like our women, Kṛṣṇa conscious, they are working. They don’t want equal rights with the men. It is due to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They are cleansing the temple, they are cooking very nicely. They are satisfied. They never said that ‘I have to go to Japan for preaching like Prabhupāda.’ They never say. This is artificial. So Kṛṣṇa consciousness means work in his constitutional position. The women, men, when they remain in their constitutional position...”¹³

In conclusion, constitutionally women cannot be brāhmaṇas; only men can, even if from a śūdra family. Thus women cannot be dīkṣā-gurus whose duty is to initiate disciples with the sacred thread.

¹² From Prabhupada’s purport to SB 9.10.50

¹³ Prabhupada’s Morning Walk @ Rome, Italy, on May 27, 1974

TPC adjustment requires adhikāra

Kṛṣṇa-kīrti dāsaḥ, Convenor, ISKCON India Scholars Board

Dear Mahārājas, Prabhus, and Mātājīs, Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

In my presentation before you, if there is one thing I would like you to remember, it is that our conception of “time, place and circumstance” (TPC) is not the same as Prabhupāda’s. And I would additionally like you to remember that the current female dīkṣā-guru (FDG) controversy is a result of persons on all sides being inadequately qualified to make an authorized TPC decision.

TPC is different in the minds of different devotees due to their experience and realization in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. Prabhupāda says that if one does not accept the principles of Vedic knowledge, “the scriptures will be interpreted in many different ways, and everyone will claim his own philosophy is supreme.”¹⁴ If everyone does that, then, just as night is certain to follow day, schism will follow. Quoting William Blake’s couplet “Both read the bible day and night” does nothing to save us.

To find a way back from schism, we should ask, “What is the qualification of someone fit to make a TPC adjustment to scripture?” The answer, according to *Manu-saṁhitā*, is someone who is called a “cultured brāhmaṇa”—a śiṣṭa-brahmana.

*anāmnāteṣu dharmeṣu katham syāditi ced bhavet |
yaṁ śiṣṭā brāhmaṇā brūyuh sa dharmah syādaśaṅkitaḥ || 108 ||*

“If the question should arise—‘How should it be in regard to those points upon which the laws have not been declared?’—[the answer is]—what the cultured *Brāhmaṇas* declare, that shall be the undoubted law.”—(12.108)¹⁵

But what is the qualification of a śiṣṭa-brāhmaṇa? The qualification is given in the next shloka:

*dharmenādhigato yaistu vedaḥ saparibr̥mhaṇaḥ |
te śiṣṭā brāhmaṇā jñeyāḥ śrutipratyakṣahetavaḥ || 109 ||*

“Those *Brāhmaṇas*, by whom the Veda, along with its supplements, has been learnt in the right manner, and who are guided directly by the revealed texts,—shall be regarded as ‘cultured.’”—(109)

¹⁴ CC Madhya 9.49.

¹⁵ Ganganatha Jha, trans., *Manusmṛiti with the Commentary of Medhatithi*, Verse 12.108, Wisdom Library, last updated February 16, 2018, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/manusmṛiti-with-the-commentary-of-medhatithi/d/doc202289.html>.

Manu’s definition is very similar to the definition of the *uttama-adhikārī* given by Prabhupāda in *Nectar of Devotion*, chapter 3.

“The first-class devotee never deviates from the principles of higher authority, and he attains firm faith in the scriptures by understanding with all reason and arguments. When we speak of arguments and reason, it means arguments and reason on the basis of revealed scriptures.”

Though not the same as an *uttama-adhikārī* Vaiṣṇava, the concept of a *śiṣṭa-brāhmaṇa* tells us who is allowed to say what to do in situations the scriptures do not explicitly cover. An *uttama-adhikārī* Vaiṣṇava necessarily has the same authority to make TPC adjustments.

Not being an *uttama-adhikārī* means lacking expertise in *śāstra*, which increases the risk of making TPC adjustments contrary to *śāstra*. When such devotees attempt adjustments, problems arise. Prabhupāda notes in NOI 5 that disciples of non-*uttama-adhikārī* gurus cannot advance well under their gurus’ “insufficient guidance,” which results in poor TPC decisions. ISKCON’s history shows many adjustments failed or caused serious issues. For the past twenty-five years, the FDG controversy has been fraught with adhoc, divisive rulings.

Thus, we should begin with the presumption that our knowledge is deficient and requires further study. The ISKCON India Scholars Board, especially Śrīdhara-śrīnivāsa Prabhu, has researched *dīkṣā* across our paramparā and other Vaiṣṇava traditions. Findings reveal that practices once thought to be mere TPC details—such as *japa-mālā* with 108 beads, bead size progression, or blessings from elders before becoming a *dīkṣā-guru*—are in fact scripturally grounded.

Therefore, only TPC rulings firmly grounded in *śāstra* and consistent with all evidence—pro and con—can be accepted. Anything less is partial or speculative, and unfit to guide ISKCON’s future. A *śāstra*-based understanding of TPC alone can resolve the controversy without doubt or division.

Can a Vaiṣṇavī be appointed Dīkṣā-Guru?

Śrīdhara-śrīnivāsa dāsaḥ

Author and Senior Scholar, ISKCON India Scholars Board

Respected Maharajas, GBC members, and all ISKCON leaders. Jaya Śrīla Prabhupāda. Namaḥ Sadase.

ISKCON follows *pāñcarātri*ka-vidhi for all types of initiations (first, second, *sannyāsa*) –

- We are following *pāñcarātrikī*. (Letter to Satsvarūpa, 7-Aug-1977)
- Our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement adopts this *pāñcarātri*ka-vidhi, as advised by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī. (SB 4.31.10 purport).
- *Dīkṣā* is offered according to *pāñcarātri*ka-vidhi. My spiritual master inaugurated this *pāñcarātri*ka-vidhi, and we are following his footsteps. (Lecture, 29 Mar 1971)

Not acknowledging Pāñcarātra scriptures for initiations automatically cancels the initiation status of all those whose prior status was *sūdra* or lower, including women.

- “The students and disciples are initiated according to authorized *pāñcarātrikī* regulations. According to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā*, anyone, including so-called low-born men, who may take shelter unto the Lotus Feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa or His devotees, is sanctified by initiation process.” (Letter, Jun 12, 1968).

Even if ISKCON considers that it follows *bhāgavata*-vidhi, Śrīla Prabhupāda says that *pāñcarātri*ka process must be followed.

- The students of the Bhāgavata school are engaged in the devotional service of the Lord, according to *pāñcarātrikī* regulations, and therefore the Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsīs* have multiple engagements in the transcendental service of the Lord. (BG 5.6 purport)

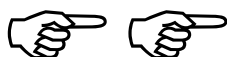
For details, please refer to the booklet titled *Harināma Dīkṣā*, which we have included with this transcript. The booklet details the *śāstra-pramāṇa* from *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, *Nārada Pāñcarātra*, and other scriptures.

Can a Vaiṣṇavī be officially appointed as śikṣā-guru?

Unless such an appointment and ceremony is described in *guru*, *sādh*u, and *śāstras*, it cannot be considered. Otherwise, relying on a speculative system of *guru-śiṣya* relationship to solve a practical problem will be akin to *ṛtvikism*, which also created its own speculative initiation system in order to solve the practically felt problem of falling

dīkṣā-gurus. In our detailed research of *pāñcarātri*ka scriptures we have not come across any reference to any formalized appointment of *śikṣā-gurus* and *śikṣā* ceremony.

Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā Authenticity Highlights



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Section highlights:

1. The importance of the *pāñcarātra saṁhitās* in relation to *vaiṣṇava-dīkṣā*.
2. The *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā* is a section of the *Nārada-pāñcarātra*. *Pāñcarātri*ka is an authorized process equivalent to the *vaidika* process, whose aim is to guide one, irrespective of his caste, towards total surrender to the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu. The *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā* elaborates the *pāñcarātri*ka process of initiation of all classes of people into exclusive worship of Lord Viṣṇu through *prapatti-yoga*, or the *śraṇāgatī* process. In other words, it is the scripture that gives us the process for implementing a *daiva-varṇāśrama* society.
3. In his commentary to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* canto 1, Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣṇa cites the *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā* (verses 1.42, 43, 44) to explain how Vidūra, although a *śūdra* by *varṇa* because he had the power (*pratyakṣa-kriṣṇa*) to see the Lord (*pareśa*) face to face, was an exception to the general rule and instructed King Dhṛtharāṣṭra regarding spiritual knowledge.
4. Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī cites the *Nārada Pāñcarātra Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā* (verses 3.22-25) as the scripture that describes the performance of the *pañca-saṁskāras*,
5. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura cites the *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā* (verse 2.34) as the *pramāṇa* for Lord Caitanya's *upanayana-saṁskāra* in *Caitanya-bhāgavata* (Ādi-khāṇḍa 8.7), which explicitly mentions gurus giving initiation to their sons.
6. Śrīla Prabhupāda, in his purport to SB 4.31.10, instructs us to refer to many quotations in the *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā* regarding the implementation of *Daiva-varṇāśrama*.

Nārada-pāñcarātra Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā

The *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā* is part and parcel of the *Nārada-pāñcarātra* and hence it is to be understood that any reference to the *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā* is actually referring to the *Nārada-pāñcarātra*. Although based on the Vedas and the *Vedāṅgās*, the *pāñcarātra* is said to be equivalent to the Vedas, and that it was spoken by the Lord Himself to five Ṛṣis (Śaṇḍilya, Upagāyana,

Śrīla Prabhupāda's Cultural Framework

Sītā-rāma dāsaḥ

Temple Council Member (TCM) ISKCON Juhu, ISKCON Hyderabad

1. Śrīla Prabhupāda established this movement through *harināma-saṅkīrtana*, book distribution, *prasāda* distribution, Deity worship, and Vedic (Vaiṣṇava) culture.
2. Culture plays a very important role in all the above aspects, as it educates *sādhakas* about rules, values, and philosophical understanding, which are essential for every practice.
3. Vaiṣṇava etiquette naturally flows from a strong cultural foundation.
4. Similarly, the roles and responsibilities of men and women, including appropriate dress codes, are very important aspects of this culture.
5. If culture were not important, Śrīla Prabhupāda would not have introduced *dhotī-kurta* for men and *sārīs* for women as standard dress. These practices have a deep psychological and spiritual impact.
6. Śrīla Prabhupāda was a *mahā-bhāgavata*, a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa, who made all necessary adjustments that he felt were important during his physical presence.
7. We should not selectively take quotes from here and there to adjust present-day ideas and then present them as Śrīla Prabhupāda's words, ignoring the context of time, place, and circumstance.
8. VDG represents a major philosophical change. If Śrīla Prabhupāda had wanted this, he would have very clearly and repeatedly stated that both men and women should become gurus and give initiation. Such a significant change would have been explicitly mentioned as a future direction.
9. In India, or anywhere in the world, it is already a great challenge to preach and help women understand their roles and duties based on scripture, along with dress codes, as taught by Śrīla Prabhupāda. Adding VDG on top of this would be disastrous to Śrīla Prabhupāda's cultural framework.

We strongly believe that a woman, as a mother, plays a vital role in the life of every child. She is the carrier of culture and instils it in the child. She is, in fact, the first *śikṣā-guru* of every child. By faithfully following this role, she naturally commands love and respect throughout her life.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to establish these values among devotees so that Vedic (Vaiṣṇava) culture would preach itself through practical example, rather than overwhelming people with statements such as "Śrīla Prabhupāda said," while introducing compromise or speculation.

We do not wish to offend anyone, but we will never accept philosophical speculation or cultural compromise. Such compromises open the gates to many future speculations, which we do not even wish to think or speak about.

Similarly, just because there are challenges in the guru system within ISKCON, and even if there is no single document addressing every aspect of initiation, it does not mean that we should adopt the *ṛtvik* philosophy simply as a “safe” option to avoid future fall-downs. That approach itself is speculative and unacceptable. And we similarly do not want to repeat the same error with the Vaiṣṇavī Dīkṣā Guru issue, either.