

A Reply to the GBC Action Order 305 (2009)

and the Sastra Advisory Committee's paper “Female Diksa-gurus in ISKCON”

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Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's diksa-guru.

SB 4.12.32 purport

Dear members of the GBC,

Please accept our humble obiesances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

This is a response to the GBC Action Order 305 (2009)¹, which authorized female diksa-gurus.² We very strongly believe that for females to function as diksa-gurus is completely against sastra and the traditions and standards of Lord Krsna's Vedic civilization. We agree with Srila Rupa Gosvami, who stated that the kind of so-called bhakti that is not based on sastra simply creates a disturbance in society:

*sruti-smṛti-puranadi-pancaratra-vidhim vina
aikantiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate*

Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the Upanisads, Puranas, and Narada-pancaratra is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society.

Bhakti-rasamṛta-sindhu 1.2.101

The very fact that we, the IRGB, feel impelled to respond to GBC Action Order 305 indicates the potential polarizing effect likely to ensue if this Action Order is not rescinded. The following statements from that resolution raise some troubling thoughts:

Whereas there is a factual need for more diksa-gurus in ISKCON to accommodate the worldwide preaching;

¹ Before reading the response it would be wise to read the paper by the Sastra Adisory Council that it is responding to, which can be downloaded here. <https://gbc.iskcon.org/female-diksa-guru/>

² In 2009 I was asked to present a draft paper rebutting SAC's pro-FDG paper at the Indian Regional Governing Body (IRGB) meeting in Puri. As a result, the IRGB created a committee tasked with writing a formal response to the Sastric Advisory Committee paper entitled “Female *Diksa-gurus* in ISKCON.” I was the lead author. This current paper (2010) is the condensed version of a much larger paper.

Whereas there are mature female preachers qualified to take on diksa-guru responsibilities.

Certainly it is true that in a few geographical locations in the world (particularly India) ISKCON's preaching is booming. But in many other parts of the world (particularly North America and other Western zones), preaching has declined to the extent that it is commonly said, "Most temples have more Deities than devotees at mangal artika." While we do not wish to discourage the many sincere, hard-working preachers in the West, unfortunately that is the current scenario.

We also note that the desire to have female diksa-gurus is being pushed by leaders of zones wherein the state of ISKCON is in decline, where prospective initiates are not exactly waiting patiently in queue for female diksa-gurus to be created so that they can become initiated. In India, where persons are actually waiting for initiation, we do not see any need to contravene the sastra and create female diksa-gurus. We also note that in those zones where ISKCON is in decline, academics have observed the rise of feminism, and also have noted that, for obvious reasons, the feminists are loath to be called feminists.³ So the question arises: What is the actual motive for pushing this agenda? Is it for "pushing on the preaching," or perhaps for pushing something else?

Canakya Pandita stated:

A brahmana sees through the sastra, a king through his spies, a cow through her nose, and ordinary people with their eyes.

And, Lord Krsna gave His opinion:

He who discards scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination. One should therefore understand what is duty and what is not duty by the regulations of the scriptures. Knowing such rules and regulations, one should act so that he may gradually be elevated.

Gita 16.23-24

Since the GBC is the ultimate executive body of ISKCON, an organization whose aim is to reestablish Krsna's Vedic civilization, it is therefore incumbent upon the GBC to base all of its policy decisions firmly on the bedrock of sastra, rather than to conform with modern social trends. For indeed, to be "modern" is not actually modern at all, since even in ancient times Manu deprecated modernism as just another form of maya:

All those (doctrines), differing from the (Veda), which spring up and (soon) perish, are worthless and false, because they are of modern date.

Manu-smṛti 12.95-96

³ Rochford, E. Burke, *Hare Krishna Transformed*. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 124-125.

To be "modern" is to exist in the ephemeral present, which has no duration. This is the definition of *asat*—nonexistent, unreal.

Those who are seers of the truth have concluded that of the nonexistent [*asat*] there is no endurance and of the eternal there is no change. This they have concluded by studying the nature of both.

Gita 2.16

Moreover, we should be careful not to allow our (Western influenced) materially conditioned nature to—by introducing secular, egalitarian values—undermine the sacred mission that we are pledged to fulfill.

The great danger of conversion in all ages has been that when the religion of the high mind is offered to the lower mind, the lower mind, feeling its fascination without understanding it, and being incapable of rising to it, drags it down to its level by degrading it.

George Bernard Shaw

We in ISKCON have two choices: **either to affect society or be affected by society**. The former will fulfill our mission; the latter will destroy it. In the following quote from former U.S. Attorney General and Federal Judge Robert H. Bork, please simply substitute "ISKCON" for "Roman Catholic Church" and contemplate the situation:

Radical egalitarianism and individualism have altered much in American life. The question of just how irresistible they are, the test case of whether any institution can maintain its integrity in the face of the deforming pressures of a modern liberal culture is, of course, the Roman Catholic Church. What is to be seen is whether the church can maintain its doctrines and its institutional structure in the face of pressure both from without and from within.

The Roman Catholic Church is the test case because, as Hitchcock put it, 'few religions in the history of the world have placed more emphasis on doctrinal purity, liturgical correctness, and moral authenticity than has the Catholic Church. . . . If at almost all times in the history of the church, a concern for orthodoxy has been paramount, the contemporary Church has an eerie feel about it precisely because of the absence of that concern.' If, despite powerful and orthodox American bishops, orthodoxy is no longer a major concern in the American church, that is surely a sign that the church is giving way to the culture. The church's opposition to abortion, homosexual conduct, and the ordination of women is under attack and appears to be a minority position among the Catholic laity, perhaps even among the American bishops. If the church gives way on any of those issues, the culture will have effectively destroyed it. The other reason the church arouses hostility is that its structure is hierarchical and authoritative, in addition to the fact that its priesthood is male. It has clear lines of

authority of the pope. These are matters that create no small outrage in the egalitarians of our time, and one sees even within the church demands that it be democratized, that it accept beliefs and behavior it has always condemned, and that it accept radical alterations of its ancient structure. Columnists pronounce the church out of touch with the people in the pews and find that reason for the church to change.

That is not reason for the church to change. The protestant mainline denominations are out of touch with the people in the pews because the churches' leadership changed, moving well to the left of their membership. That is a different situation than a church that is trying to remain unchanged while the culture changes its members. If the church changes doctrine and structure to follow its members' views, it is difficult to see the value of that church and its religion. Religions must claim to be true and, in their essentials, to uphold principles that are universal and eternal. No church that panders to the zeitgeist deserves respect, except from those who find it politically useful, and that is less respect than disguised contempt.⁴

As a basis for making its decision, the GBC has used the conclusions of the SAC paper, as evidenced by the statement:

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

Therefore we shall respond to that paper and demonstrate how it is wrong and does not prove its thesis, and that consequently the GBC should rescind Action Order 305 (2009) and thereby avoid creating a disturbance to society.

Anomalies

Before dealing with the philosophical aspects of the SAC paper, we wish to bring to the attention of the GBC two anomalies. The first concerns **Urmila devi dasi**, who [in 2010 when this paper was written] was the woman to be nominated as a *diksa-guru*, and hence was the very reason that the SAC was asked to research the matter. However, since Mother Urmila was also a member of SAC, a very clear conflict of interest resulted, which is why the SAC stated:

SAC members felt that the circumstances of the task were valid, and the topic interesting, and so accepted the task. Urmila-devi, however, being a SAC member involved in this case before the GBC, excused herself from the **discussion** and writing of this paper.

⁴ Bork, Robert, H., *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, New York: Regan Books, 1997, 292-293.

Yet this turned out to be a **false** statement. On our inquiring about the veracity of this statement, two SAC members (HH Bhakti Rasamrta Swami and Sriman Mukunda Datta Prabhu) stated that while Mother Urmila did not participate in the actual writing of the paper, she was definitely involved in the discussions that constituted the substance of the document. To exactly what extent her involvement might have swayed the outcome of the SAC paper is conjectural, but the fact that the SAC chose to cover up her involvement is in itself troubling.

(It is interesting to note that the new candidate for female diksa guru, Narayani Mataji, is a newly appointed SAC member. It seems that being appointed as a member of SAC is part of the [*Cursus honorum*](#) for becoming a female diksa guru.)

Secondly, the SAC wrote:

Furthermore, in order to ensure that all sides of the topic were properly represented, SAC accepted a temporary member representing Vaisnavas raised in Bharata where one might question the propriety of female devotees as gurus due to cultural background.

This statement is actually misleading. That sole member from Bharata, Devamrta Prabhu [now H.H. Bhakti Rasamrta Swami], explained that his involvement was very limited, and only in the initial stages:

I was involved in the initial stages. I helped in the research with the Madhva *sampradaya*. But then since I was not able to cope with my heavy load of other services I withdrew myself from the SAC after speaking to the convener, Purnacandra Prabhu (now Goswami).

While Devamrta Prabhu's leaving was not the SAC's fault, the SAC should have replaced him with someone else, or better still, with several others born in India. Not only did the SAC not do this, but it falsely stated that native-born Indians were actively involved and "properly represented." Again, that simply was not true.

These two anomalies of obfuscating the truth are completely incongruent with brahminical behavior, which of course the SAC is supposed to embody. Besides damaging the credibility of the SAC, such a discrepancy sows doubt in the minds of the reader: Was the SAC paper fair and unbiased, or was it written from a strictly "Western-centric, modernist, feminist" position, **with a predetermined conclusion already in place?** This lack of transparency on the part of the SAC seriously undermines its credibility.

Women Cannot be Diksa-gurus

We now consider the philosophical aspect of the matter at hand. In his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.12.32, Srila Prabhupada stated in very clear, explicit, unambiguous, and conclusive terms that a woman cannot be a *diksa-guru*:

Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's *diksa-guru*.

The SAC wrote sixteen pages in attempt to undermine Srila Prabhupada's categorical statement. Therefore, now we shall concisely adumbrate the line of thought and the salient points in our argument against the *purvapakshin* (respected opponent). The dilated version (100+ pages), with a detailed exegesis explaining all points, citations, references, dialectics, and responses to objections, etc., is available from the IRGB's secretary, Basu Ghosh dasa Adhikari.

Women Must not be Given Authority

The position of *diksa-guru* is obviously one of authority. The *sastra* clearly states that one should not give authority (secular or spiritual) to women. The SAC trivialized and dismissed these sastric directives by stating: "After all, being a mother is also a role of authority." We find this statement to be lacking in intelligent discrimination— similar to the argument given by meat-eaters that eating vegetables also requires killing. Whereas to be a mother is an aspect of women's *sva-dharma*, to be a *diksa-guru* is not. In *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* 11.708, the *Visnu Purana* 3.12.30 is quoted, regarding how a *grhastha* should work in this world:

*yosito navamanyetana casam visvased budhah
na caiversur bhavet tasu nadhikuryat kadacana*

A wise man should never insult women, nor should he trust them. He should never become jealous of women, **nor should he ever appoint them.**

Srila Sanatana Gosvami comments, *nadhikuryat adhikaram na kuryat; yad va sribhyo 'dhikaram na dadhyat ity arthau*. *Nadhikuryat* means one should not appoint women; in other words, **one should not give authority to women.**

There is a similar statement in the Mahabharata (*Sabha Parva, Lokapala Sabhakhyana Parva*, section 5; Ganguli edition, PDF version, p. 654), wherein Narada says to Yudhishthira:

Consolest thou women and are they protected in thy realm? I hope thou placest not any confidence in them, nor divulgest any secret before any of them?

And in the *Ramayana* 2.100.49, Lord Rama asks Bharata:

Do you keep your womenfolk pacified? Are they duly protected by you? I hope you do not repose excessive faith in them and do not confide your secrets to them.

In Krsna's Vedic Culture Women Must be Socially Restricted

Manu said that a woman must never be independent, not even in her own home:

By a girl, a young woman, or even an aged one, nothing must be done independently, not even in her own house. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons. A woman must never be independent. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons. By leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families **contemptible**.

Manu-samhita 5.147-9

This certainly places many **restrictions** on her and excludes her from many social functions, what to speak of her being a *diksa-guru*. A *diksa-guru* must be able to make independent decisions, be fearless in traveling, in going into the public, etc.— all of which are restricted for women. Who would be protecting a female *diksa-guru* when, in the course of executing her guru-ship, she had to travel away from home? Would her male guardian (father, husband, son) always accompany her? If not, then she would be separating herself from her family, thereby making her family "contemptible."

The ruler who moves about is venerated, as also the *brahmana* and the yogi who travels, but a woman who wanders gets destroyed.

Canakya Pandita

We now consider the arguments presented by the SAC regarding why women should be *diksa-gurus*. Please note that in none of the "positive" evidence it presented was the SAC able to controvert Srila Prabhupada's categorical statement (in reference to Suniti) that women cannot become a *diksa-guru*. In their attempt to contradict Srila Prabhupada, the SAC depend heavily on inference, secondary and tertiary levels of evidence, and extrapolation. **The question arises: Is the SAC forcing the evidence to meet a predetermined goal?**

SAC Relies on the Sakta Text Kularnava-tantra for Support

*svapna-labdhe striya dattemala-mantra ca try-aksare
ekaksare tatha mantra siddhadin naiva sodhayet*

One should not test a mantra attained in a dream, a mantra given by a woman, a *mala-mantra* [mantra over twenty syllables] or mantras of one or three syllables for *siddha*, and so on.

Kularnava-tantra 15.97

SAC claims: "This verse points to the fact that, in the past, women sometimes gave mantras. One could then assume that women, on occasion, had acted as *diksa-gurus*."

On researching this statement, we found that the translation of the text has proven to be controversial, with very opposing views about its precise meaning. But leaving that aside, we see that this statement in no way negates Srila Prabhupada's very direct and explicit remark:

Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's *diksa-guru*.

Bhagavatam 4.12.32 purport.

Furthermore, even if the above statement actually says exactly what the SAC claim it says, the fact that the SAC supported its position by quoting *Kularnava-tantra* is itself very dubious. The SAC's position is: "If *Kularnava-tantra* supports that women can be *diksa-gurus*, then we should also." But, *Kularnava-tantra* is a **Sakta** text, not a Vaisnava text, and thus supports many things that are incompatible with Vaisnavism. For instance, one of the central tenets of the *Kularnava-tantra* is the method of worshiping Durgadevi with the *panca-makaras*:

The ingredients to be used in the worship of Devi are of many kinds. These comprise, in the Kaulachara, *madya* (**wine**), *mamsa* (**meat**), *matsya* (**fish**), *mudra*⁵ (grain), *maithuna* ([**sex** with] woman)—well known as "the five m's" (*panca-makaras*, each item beginning with *ma*).

Avalon, Pandit, & Vidyaratna, 1965, p 47

Since the *Kularnava-tantra* supports the ritual use of wine, meat, fish, and sex in worship, should we also adopt such practices? Should we also worship Devi instead of Krsna? Not only is it dubious to use the *Kularnava-tantra* as evidence, but it is even dubious to assume that *Kularnava-tantra* supports the notion that women may be *diksa-gurus*, for the *Kularnava-tantra* consistently describes gurus as male—for example, in such statements as:

The initiated shall always please his guru, **guru's wife**, guru's son, [and] adherents of the Kaula path of *sakti*, in the measure of his means.

Avalon, Pandit, & Vidyaratna 1965, p 110

What to speak of women becoming a *diksa-guru*, on the very same page as the above it is stated that a woman cannot (even) be initiated without the permission of her male guardian:

The competence of the widow for *diksa* is subject to the consent of her son; of the daughter to that of her father, of the wife to that of her husband. **A woman has no right of her own for getting *diksa*.**

In conclusion, when we consider that the *Kularnava-tantra* is not a Vaisnava text but a *Sakta* text (which promotes practices that Vaisnavas consider abominable and tamasic), that in the *Kularnava-tantra* the guru is always referred to as a male, and that a woman cannot even receive *diksa* without the permission of a male guardian, we conclude that to quote the *Kularnava-tantra* in

⁵ In some texts it is written "*mala-mutra*"—stool and urine.

support of females being a *diksa-guru* is **no evidence at all**. Moreover, the *Kularnava-tantra* certainly cannot be used to negate Srila Prabhupada's statement:

Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's *diksa-guru*.

SB 4.12.32, purport

“I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta.”

The SAC quote:

I want that all of my spiritual sons and **daughters** will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta, so that the family transcendental diploma will continue through the generations. Those possessing the title of Bhaktivedanta will be allowed to initiate disciples. Maybe by 1975, all of my disciples will be allowed to initiate and increase the numbers of the generations. That is my program.

Letter to Hamsaduta—Los Angeles, 3 December 1968

According to the levels of evidence described by Jayadvaita Swami in the VedaBase, this is third-class evidence, as per the hierarchy:

- Books; Legal documents and similar papers
- Lectures
- Letters
- Conversations

The above statement is not on par with Srila Prabhupada's statement—in his books—about Suniti. Moreover, that letter was written in 1968, whereas in 1974 Srila Prabhupada made his statement about Suniti—which strongly suggests that the statement of 1974 supersedes that of 1968 (according to the rule that a later statement supersedes an earlier one).

There is also another reason why the above and similar statements cannot be considered good evidence: In the early days of ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada had high hopes for his disciples—that by the power of the holy name and the process of *bhakti-yoga* they would quickly rise above the modes of material nature and be allowed to initiate even as early as 1975. But as time passed, Srila Prabhupada experienced that his disciples were struggling to overcome their material conditioning, and this gave him a new perspective. Hence, even after 1975, none of his disciples were initiating. We discuss this in detail in the full version of our paper (available from Basu Ghosh dasa Adhikari).

Boys and Girls Become Spiritual Master

The SAC quoted a very long speech by Srila Prabhupada that ended with the following paragraph:

So I hope that all of you, **men, women, boys and girls, become spiritual master**, and follow this principle. Spiritual master, simply, sincerely, follow the principles and speak to the general public. Then Krsna immediately becomes your favorite. Krsna does not become your favorite; you become Krsna's favorite. Krsna says in the *Bhagavad-gita*, *na ca tasmad manusyesu kascin me priya-krttamaï*: 'One who is doing this humble service of preaching work, Krsna consciousness, nobody is dearer than him to Me.' So if you want to become recognized by Krsna very quickly, you take up this process of becoming spiritual master, present the *Bhagavad-gita* as it is. Your life is perfect. Thank you very much.

Vyasa-puja Lecture—22 August 1973, London

While a *diksa-guru* should do as Srila Prabhupada describes above, what Srila Prabhupada is actually describing is the *varṇa-pradarsaka-guru*, the guru who shows the way and also gives instruction. **In the above quotation Srila Prabhupada indicates that one becomes a spiritual master by "speak to the general public" not by giving diksa.** Srila Prabhupada wrote that such gurus need only very little qualification; even a small child can be such a guru:

From the very beginning of life. Just like Prahlada Maharaja advised, *kaumara acaret prajno dharman bhagavatan iha* [SB 7.6.1]. The boys... He was five-years-old boy. He said, 'My dear...' He was preaching amongst his class friend. This is Vaisnavism. Even a five... **Just like our Sarasvati, Syamasundara's daughter.** She also preaches. She goes sometimes, 'Do you know what is Krsna?' If somebody says, 'No, I do not know'-'The Supreme Personality of Godhead.' You see? This is natural. Simply one has to be given the chance. Because this, I mean to say, **small girl** has got the chance to live amongst Krsna conscious people from the very birth, she's developing that 'Oh, I shall also preach. I shall also preach.' Developing. Similarly, advancement of Krsna consciousness means you will be, I mean to say, pushed how to preach, how to preach.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.1.2—August 15 1971, London

SAC has highlighted: "So I hope that all of you, men, women, boys and girls, become spiritual master."

According to the Oxford English Dictionary: "**boy**. A male child below the age of puberty."

Hence by the juxtaposition of "men and boys" and "women and girls," we can conclude—**according to the logic used by the SAC—that Srila Prabhupada wanted prepubescent children to become *diksa-gurus*.** Of course, such a conclusion would be absurd. However, Srila Prabhupada did want all of his followers to be gurus in the sense of being preachers. Hence, this *pramana* presented by SAC is of no use in supporting that a female can be a *diksa-guru*—that is, unless they contend that small children also should be allowed to be *diksa-gurus*.

Srila B. R. Sridhara Maharaja Quoted by SAC

As did Srila Prabhupada, Srila B. R. Sridhara Swami also conceded that women of the caliber of Jahnava-mata, the wife of Nityananda Prabhu, could become a *diksa-guru*. But he qualified his statement by adding that they were rare: **"Yes, very rare. The number can be counted on fingers, lady *acaryas*."**

Since both Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Swami said that for a woman to become a *diksa-guru* was "very rare," why did the SAC ignore that point? While paying mere lip service to statements by Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Swami—that such instances were very rare—the SAC has recommended a drastically lower prerequisite for women to become a *diksa-guru*. Acceptance of this lower standard would contravene the historical rarity of women ever functioning in the role of *diksa-guru*. The SAC then averts the issue of qualification by stating, "It is difficult to ascertain someone's level of *bhakti*." If this is indeed a fact, then logically the SAC should be **more cautious** and conservative, not less so, about recommending for ISKCON a new practice not in accord with the prescribed duties for women. "Exceptions to the rule" must be indeed truly exceptional, and not whimsical. In such matters, commonsense wisdom dictates: "If not fully certain, don't do it."

Srila Sridhara Svami actually derogated female gurus

Srila Sridhara Swami tells us that after Jahnava-mata several female gurus appeared in her line, but because they were not exceptions to the rule, as was Jahnava-mata, they delivered "dead mantras":

But their mantra is dead. We are after a living mantra ... We have to follow the spirit. Otherwise, after Jahnava-devi, the wife of Lord Nityananda, up to Bipin Goswami, from whom Bhaktivinoda Thakura took initiation, there are so many unknown lady gurus. Through them, the mantra came to Bipin Goswami, and from him Bhaktivinoda Thakura received the mantra. We accept Bhaktivinoda Thakura, **but should we count all those ladies in our disciplic succession? What was their realization?**

It seems clear that Sridhara Maharaja's disparaging those lady gurus was to add weight to the

proposition that Bhaktivinoda Thakura's diksa by Bipin Bihari Goswami was at best insignificant. But why? Because those ladies were not of the stature of Jahnavadevi (and therefore should not have been *diksa-gurus* in the first place), and hence delivered "dead mantras." (The full text may be [found here](#)).

The implication by Sridhara Maharaja is clear: we should not repeat that same mistake and create another *apasampradaya* of lady gurus.

Qualified Female Diksa-gurus are Very Rare

As noted by Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Swami, bona fide female *diksa-gurus* are extremely rare—so rare that Sridhara Swami said that during the past five hundred years the number of females who were *diksa-gurus* can be counted on the fingers of one hand; so rare that, when pressed on this point, Srila Prabhupada gave only one example: Jahnavadevi, the wife of Lord Nityananda and expansion of Srimati Radharani. One would think that such statements by Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Swami would be sufficient to dissuade anyone from taking such an unnecessary risk that could very likely degrade the parampara and create an *apasampradaya* (as had already been noted by Srila Sridhara Swami). But after much hand wringing, and what could be described only as word jugglery, the SAC concluded "Yes, we should follow such extremely rare examples," and that a woman in ISKCON may become a *diksa-guru*.

However, SAC's conclusion is just the **opposite of the opinion** of our *purvacaryas*, who did not think it wise to follow such rare examples. In the following statement regarding female *sannyasa*, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati states that it is not advisable to follow the exceptional cases. And while the issue of female *sannyasa* and female *diksa-gurus* is very similar, still, they are not identical. But what is identical about these two issues is that each is a rare exception. Consequently, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati's statement "**Imitation of exceptional cases is not advisable**" is as applicable to female *diksa-gurus* as to any other exceptional case. As did Sri Rupa Goswami, Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati averred that such imitation creates a disturbance in society:

The *sannyasa-asrama* is not suitable for women. Performing Hari-bhajana **while remaining at home** will bestow auspiciousness upon them. **In the name of giving women *sannyasa*, *bhek*, and so on, much disturbance exists in the world. Imitation of exceptional cases is not advisable.** Persons wishing to have detailed knowledge of *bhek* and related topics may see *Samskara-dipika*, by Srila Gopala Bhatta Goswami Prabhupada.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, from the Gaudiya 16.11.256

We also note that for women Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati stressed that staying in the home, the grhastha asrama, will be auspicious for women, not being travelling preachers.

And regarding the imitating of the non-vegetarian diet of some *maha-bhagavatas*:

In Dacca, one Prana Gopala Brahmachari challenged Srila Sarasvati

Thakura by declaring it acceptable for Vaisnavas to take non-vegetarian food, citing Garuda and Jatayu (famous devotees in an eagle and vulture form respectively) as non-vegetarians. But Srila Sarasvati Thakura rebutted, 'There are innumerable Vaisnavas who abjure meat and fish. **A few exceptions do not neutralize the rule.** Flesh is the ordained food for those particular bodily forms. It is not approved for all.'

Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Vaibhava, vol. 2, p. 92

The SAC Drastically Lowers the Standard

SAC wrote: "It is difficult to ascertain someone's level of *bhakti*."

This statement logically suggests that one should be more—not less—prudent regarding the permitting of women of unascertainable *bhakti* to hold positions of spiritual authority previously held only by expansions of Srimati Radharani. But apparently the SAC considers that the difficulty of being able to ascertain a women's level of *bhakti* is a license to lower the requirements for women to become a *diksa-guru*.

In our full treatment of this issue (of 100+ pages), we several times registered our agreement with Lord Caitanya's statement (in Cc 2.8.128) that anyone, regardless of material bodily designation, "can" be a *diksa-guru* if they know the science of Krsna consciousness. But this point **must be reconciled** with Lord Krsna's statements (in *Gita* 2.47, 3.20–23, 35, and 18.47) that even if someone is liberated, they should not be attached to renouncing their prescribed duties, but should perform those duties as an example for others to follow, and that it is better to execute one's own duties (even poorly) than to perform (even perfectly) another's duties. **In other words, not that because one can do something that they should do it.** One should do only that which is within the compass of their *sva-dharma* as defined in *sastra* otherwise as Rupa Gosvami predicts there will be disturbance in society.

The prescribed duties of a woman (*stri-dharma*), as defined by Narada Muni in *Bhagavatam* 7.11.25–29 and other authentic *sastras*, do not include her being a *diksa-guru*. Therefore even if liberated, a woman should not take up such a duty. For this reason, Srila Prabhupada said that Suniti could not be a *diksa-guru*. Only in a very rare and extraordinary circumstance would even a fully liberated soul in a woman's body act in a capacity that was outside the realm of *stri-dharma*.

Therefore, we find it distressing that the SAC has recommended lowering the standard making it very cheap to the point that for a Vaisnavi to be considered a candidate for *diksa-guru* in ISKCON **she need only be a Srila Prabhupada disciple in good standing with a living family member and a siksa-guru to pass the SAC criteria.**

“Rare” According to Mimamsa

Mimamsa is the Vedic philosophy and science of scriptural interpretation (hermeneutics). It can be

applied to any subject, particularly the Vedic texts. Jaimini used *mimamsa* to explain how Vedic sacrifices were to be performed; Vyasadeva used it to interpret texts for realizing Sri Kṛṣṇa. Jaimini's text is simply called *Purva* (earlier) *mimamsa* or *Karma mimamsa*, while Vyasadeva's is called *Uttara* (later) *mimamsa* (and also called *Brahma-sutras*, *Vedanta-sutras*, etc.)

In – *A Note on the Application of the Mimamsa Principles to Hindu Law* – it is stated:

The commentators on the *smṛti* texts have very freely resorted to the application of the *mimamsa* rules in the interpretation of the texts.... Hindu jurists quite as much as English jurists recognize the well-known canon of interpretation that a special text or statute forming an exception to a general text or statute should be construed strictly and applied only in the cases falling clearly within it; the *Mitaksara* [*dharmasastra* text on Hindu law, popular in Bengal] itself recognizes the principle that where an exception exists to a general rule, the exception should be confined within the strictest limits so as not to encroach unduly upon the general rule. ⁶

If I have killed someone and want to be judged innocent of murder, I must prove that the killing was done in self-defense (the exception to the rule); otherwise, I will receive capital punishment. If the criteria for determining what is an exceptional case is not sufficiently strict, social chaos would ensue—the streets would be soaked in blood.

Regarding whether women should function as *dikṣa-gurus*, we must first consider that even if a woman is fully liberated, she should nonetheless perform her *stri-dharma* (not some other *dharma*), for the edification of other women, as dictated by Lord Kṛṣṇa (Gita 2.47, 3.20–23, 35, and 18.47). Within *stri-dharma*, there is no scope for women to be a *dikṣa-guru*. Hence, a rare soul like Jahnava-devi, who is an incarnation of Ananga-manjari (the pleasure potency of Lord Nityananda and younger sister of and expansion of Srimati Radharani), is a true exception. A woman who is struggling in *sadhana-bhakti* would not be a bona fide exception.

Why was Jahnava-devi an Exception?

When Jahnava-devi took up the role of *dikṣa-guru* five hundred years ago, the social conditions in India were much more stable than in today's globalized Western *varna-sankara* society. Five hundred years ago, women accepted that they needed protection and dependence upon guardians. In today's *varna-sankara* societies, it is unsafe for everyone, especially women, due to the unlimited freedom given to individuals and to the resultant false feeling of independence that is engendered. Five hundred years ago, people had more respect for women and would treat all women as mothers. But nowadays, the situation has degraded to a totally opposite state: instead of all women being treated as mothers, practically all women are regarded as free objects/agents for sex pleasure, be it gross or **subtle**.

We must also remember that only **after** Nityananda Prabhu had already completed His *lila* did

⁶ *Mimamsa Sutras of Jaimini*, vol 1, pp. ccxxxiii–ccxl

Jahnavadevi assume the role of a *diksa-guru*—**to continue her husband's mission**—for, as an exalted chaste wife and disciple of her husband, she felt duty-bound to do so. After all, She is the Goddess of fortune (hence, most exceptional) and was expected to continue her husband's mission. Thus She became a prominent figure in a natural sequence of events. But again, it was most exceptional. Nor was this the first time that the Goddess of fortune had become an acarya. The *adi-guru* in the Sri sampradaya is Sridevi Herself. But after Her, we know of no other bona fide female *diksa-gurus* in that line.

Today's social conditions are most degraded, but even in the best of times these roles of *diksa-guru* or *sannyasa* for women are not supported by *sastra* or previous Vaisnava *acaryas*. Jahnavadevi's situation was totally unique even for the more socially stable past; Her assuming the role of *diksa-guru* after the departure of Prabhu Nityananda must not be artificially imitated.

SAC Ignored why Jahnavadevi and Others Were Exceptional

Unfortunately, SAC did not even superficially discuss the remarkable unique singularity of Jahnavadevi or the other few bona fide female *diksa-gurus*. Why were they exceptions to the norm? If we analyze why Jahnavadevi and a few others were so exceptional and then strictly apply that standard (as required by *mimamsa*) for judging whether a certain Vaisnavi is exceptional, **that process will completely nullify the conclusions drawn by SAC.** Rather than strictly defining the criteria for being an exception such as Jahnavadevi, the SAC simply ignored the reasons why such Vaisnavis were so extraordinary. Instead, by fiat, the SAC created its own standard for determining "rareness," a standard which turns rare into something relatively common place. This raises disturbing questions. Why did they do this? Was it just innocent incompetence? Or, were they eliminating an obstacle to a predetermined goal? In any case the creator of dharma is Krsna, not the SAC:

*dharmam tu saksad bhagavat-pranitamna vai vidur rsayo napi devah
na siddha-mukhya asura manusyaù kuto nu vidyadhara-caranadayah*

Real religious principles are enacted by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Although fully situated in the mode of goodness, even the great *rsis* who occupy the topmost planets cannot ascertain the real religious principles, nor can the demigods or the leaders of Siddhaloka, to say nothing of the *asuras*, ordinary human beings, Vidyadharas and Caranas.

Bhagavatam 6.3.19

And:

No person, even if he be very learned, should express a decisive opinion all by himself, in regard to the disputed points of dharma. The way of dharma is very subtle. It has many loopholes and is inscrutable. Excepting Svayambhuva Manu, none of the *devas* and sages can pronounce a judgment on dharma.

For Manu's opinion on the position of women, see *Manu-samhita* 5.147–9 (quoted earlier in this text).

Taking into account Lord Kṛṣṇa's statements (Gita 2.47, 3.20–23, 35, and 18.47), we conclude that even a liberated soul performs their prescribed duties for the edification of others; that to be an exception to this standard one must at the very least be at the liberated state; and (in the case of women) that even among liberated Vaisnavis only a rare few would qualify as an exception. When we examine Jahnava-mata, we understand that not only is she a *nitya-siddha*, but is also in the category of *lakṣmi-tattva* (being the eternal consort of Sri Nityananda Prabhu, who is Himself *visnu-tattva*). This is indeed very extraordinary, within the strictest limits. Yet, when we contrast the SAC's guidelines to the GBC against the *mimamsa* definition of what constitutes a bona fide exception we are disappointed and find cause for questioning as to how such absurd conclusions were arrived at especially as it seems to be a **pattern of behavior**.

Daiva-varnasrama-dharma is Poorly Understood by ISKCON's Leaders

We have done little within ISKCON to promote this most important social aspect of Srila Prabhupada's mission, largely because our leaders have yet to understand many aspects of the *daiva-varnasrama-dharma* system, or how to apply it in a practical way. It therefore seems contradictory and even contemptuous to push forward the very controversial topic of female *diksa-guru*, the very concept of which militates against *daiva-varnasrama-dharma*.

Since understanding and implementing *daiva-varnasrama-dharma* remains unclear for many leaders, how then can they be so clear and justified to establish something which is in fact antithetical to *daiva-varnasrama-dharma*? Will it not, in fact, create problems for future generations by legislating unwarranted precedents? We dilate on this topic in our larger essay on the subject.

What Does it Mean to Cooperate and Please Srila Prabhupada?

Srila Prabhupada said that if we, his followers, want to demonstrate that we love him, we will cooperate to spread this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. And how do we cooperate? By performing our prescribed duties in *daiva-varnasrama-dharma*, according to our constitutional position (psychophysical nature), as men and women, for the pleasure of Lord Kṛṣṇa. By rejecting our prescribed duties, we create conflicts and instability. To legislate that Vaisnavis may become *diksa-gurus* would create disharmony (it already has and it will increase). Therefore in the past such instances have been extremely rare and exceptional. Women should cooperate by performing their own God given prescribed duties, and thereby come to resemble the ideal ladies of the *Bhagavatam*. Then they would be the kind of "person *Bhagavatam*" that Srila Prabhupada

said we should learn from.⁷ A woman should make her life perfect by performing her natural, Divinely ordained prescribed duties (*stri-dharma*), according to her psychophysical womanly nature, for the purpose of pleasing Lord Kṛṣṇa. By setting such an example, she would thus be a genuine guru.

Everything will be satisfied. Just like our women, Kṛṣṇa conscious, they are working. They don't want equal rights with men. It is due to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They are cleansing the temple, they are cooking very nicely. They are satisfied. They never say that 'I have to go to Japan for preaching like Prabhupada.' They never say. This is artificial. Kṛṣṇa consciousness means work in his constitutional position. **The women, men, when they remain in their constitutional position**, there will be no artificial (indistinct) (loud traffic noises).

Morning Walk—27 May 1974, Rome

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have shown that SAC was not able to refute Srila Prabhupada's categorical statement:

Suniti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Maharaja's *diksa-guru*.

Bhagavatam 4.12.32, purport

Additionally, on analysis there is strong evidence of a pattern of behavior suggesting that SAC attempted to force a predetermined conclusion in line with modern, secular values of feminism. Therefore, the GBC should rescind Action Order 305 (2009) authorizing female *diksa-gurus* and abrogate their support for the SAC paper which the said Action Order is based on.

As previously stated, the above presentation is merely a shortened version of our larger essay and gives only the salient points of our argument, without delving into detail. Should our respected readers have any questions or objections to this essay, we humbly request that they first read the entire unabridged paper, for very likely such questions or objections are answered therein. If after a careful reading of the full paper one is still not satisfied, one may correspond with Basu Ghosh Dasa Adhikari for further discussion. Again, a complete copy of the paper may be obtained from him.

⁷ Lecture by Srila Prabhupada on *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.7.8—7 September 1976, Vrndavana

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