

## An analysis of the paper “Some Evidence Regarding Education and Guruship for Vaishnavis”

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### Introduction

Among scholars, the position of women in the Vedic culture is a cause for controversy and debate because of different, sometimes contradictory statements found in Vedic literature. As we know from the *Mahābhārata*, *nāsau ṛṣir yasya matam na bhinnam*—sages have their own opinions and often contradict other sages. Thus the only path to the truth is *mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthah*—the path traversed by great authorities. That is why we would like to analyze through the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda and our previous ācāryas some of the different quotes and arguments presented in the paper “Some Evidence Regarding Education and Guruship for Vaishnavis,” authored by Bhaktarupa Prabhu and Madhavananda Prabhu.\* Since their paper substantially relies on the authority of lesser-known scriptures and commentators, we will examine their evidence within the broader context of the sources they quote. That is, we want to determine whether their translations of these scriptures and commentators can be legitimately inferred from the context of these same sources. Also, the wide use of exotic sources by the authors raises the question as to whether they are introducing opposing scriptures. “One should not introduce any opposing scripture” (*Nectar of Devotion*, Ch. 8, “Offenses to be avoided”). We will therefore also weigh the authority of these statements within our Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava tradition. As fidelity to the conclusions of our *sampradāya* is essential for the propagation of the Krishna consciousness movement, this is a serious issue that must be deeply deliberated upon. That is why we decided to produce this analysis.

The authors of the paper have done otherwise wonderful service to the society of devotees. They are sincere and have given their lives for the service of Śrīla Prabhupāda. And although it is certain their intent is not malicious, it nonetheless seems that in their research they sometimes relied on someone's incomplete research, since some of the arguments are extrapolated, misleading, taken out of context or even fallacious. Falling to their feet, we heartily apologize before them for our impudence in trying to analyze their arguments. We sincerely hope and pray to them and to all the devotees that they will not take this friendly analysis as a personal attack and will not be offended by our presentation. The reason for this analysis was our apprehension that someone in the position of authority or leadership may base their decisions on such in many ways imbalanced evidence.

All the quotes from the paper will be marked by the borders on both sides:

The present paper is primarily an exploration into *śāstra* regarding the roles and responsibilities of *vaiṣṇavīs*.

However, their paper unfortunately does not give a balanced, broad view of the roles and responsibilities of *vaiṣṇavīs*, but what seems a partial view, not considering the vast multitude of other explicit and implicit examples and direct instructions from the *śāstra*.

Of course there have been several examples of women philosophers (the famous examples of them are Maitreyī and Gargī from the *Bṛhad-aranyaka-upaniṣad*) or even dīkṣā-gurus (like Jāhnavā Ṭhākuraṇī or Hemalatā Ṭhākuraṇī) but still, their number is much less than the male representatives and we are left with no explanation as to why it is so.

\* 11 Jan. 2013, *Dandavats*, 31 Dec. 2014 <http://www.dandavats.com/?p=11189&paged=3>

## WOMEN IN THE VEDAS

The Vedic age can be described correctly only in the language of the Vedas and its supporting literature — the various *brāhmaṇas*, *upaniṣads*, etc. The following passages offer an insight into the position and rights of women in the Vedic age.

### CREATED AS EQUAL HALVES

The *Bṛhad-āranyaka-upaniṣad* (1.4.3) contains the following passage —

*sa dvitīyam aicchat. sa haitāvān āsa yathā strīpumāṁsrau sampariṣvaktāu. sa imam evātmānam dvedhāpātayat. tataḥ patiś ca patnī cābhavatām. tasmād idam ardhabṛgalam iva sva iti ha smāha yājñavalkyaḥ.*

He (the Supreme Lord) desired a partner. Assuming a form as great as the form of a man and woman combined, he divided this great form of himself and thus two equal parts fell, from which husbands and wives, respectively, were produced. Therefore, Yājñavalkya said that both of us are like two equal halves of a shell.

First of all, it should be noted that there is no such word as “equal” in the original Sanskrit quote from *Bṛhad-āranyaka-upaniṣad*, 1.4.3, which the paper takes liberty to use twice. It says only that “two parts fell” (*dvedhāpātayat*) and “two halves similar to a pea” (*ardha-bṛgalam*). If someone objects that *ardha* means precisely an equal half because a half cannot be unequal—that is not so, because we also see the word *ardha* in the famous logic of half-hen or “*ardha-kukkuṭi-nyāya*”, where the upper part of the hen's body was cut to save only the lower part which produced eggs. Obviously they were the halves (*ardhas*), but not equal.

Second, the text preceding this clearly states that the original person was male - *ātmaivedam agra āsīt puruṣavidhaḥ* (1.4.1). [emphasis added]

Third, it is the woman who “fills the space” lacking in a man at the time of marriage and not vice versa - *tasmād ayam ākāśaḥ striyā pūryata eva* (continuation of the same passage from the *Bṛhad-āranyaka-upaniṣad*, 1.4.3).

If they were equals in all respect, then how do we explain this statement from the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Bṛhad-āranyaka-upaniṣad*:

*śrīr ha vā eṣā strīnām yan malodvāsāḥ. tasmān malodvāsasaṃ yaśasvinīm abhikramyopamantrayeta* (6.4.6)  
*sā ced asmai na dadyāt kāmam enām avakriṇīyāt. sā ced asmai naiva dadyāt kāmam enām yaṣṭyā vā pāninā vopahatyātīkrāmet. indriyena te yaśasā yaśa ādada iti. ayaśā eva bhavati* (6.4.7)

Translation (by P.Olivelle, slightly edited): “Surely, a woman who has changed her clothes at the end of her menstrual period is the most auspicious of women. When she has changed her clothes at the end of her menstrual period, therefore, one should approach that splendid woman and invite her to have sex [as is clear from the next verses the sex is for procreation]. Should she refuse to consent, he should bribe her. If she still refuses, **he should beat her with a stick or with his hand and overpower her**, saying: “I take away the splendor from you with my virility and splendor.” And she is sure to become bereft of splendor. If, on the other hand, she accedes to his wish, he should say: “I confer splendor on you with my virility

and splendor." And then they are both sure to become full of splendor.”<sup>[1]</sup> (According to the *Mahābhārata* and other scriptures, if the wife refuses when her husband approaches her with a desire to have a child, she commits a sin).

Even in our Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇava tradition it is an accepted fact that the wife (or more generally a woman) is not equal to her husband. This is directly described in one of the most elevated scriptures, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Ādi-līlā*, 10.137 and *Antya-līlā*, 2.104-106), where Mādhavī Devī, although being a great vaiṣṇavī, is still described as “*ardha-jana*” (half a person) while her brother, Śikhi Māhiti is described as a full, third person among the three and a half closest associates of Mahāprabhu. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments: “The three were Svarūpa Gosāñi, Śrī Rāmānanda Rāya and Śikhi Māhiti, and Śikhi Māhiti’s sister, Mādhavīdevī, being a woman, was considered the half. Thus it is known that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had three and a half confidential devotees.” (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi-līlā*, 10.137, purport)

This is again corroborated by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura in his *Anubhāṣya* commentary to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi-līlā*, 11.26, where he gives a list of descendants of Gaurīdāsa Paṇḍita. In that list Rāiyā Kṛṣṇadāsa is the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Annapūrṇā, being a woman, is similarly enumerated as 22½. Śrīla Prabhupāda also follows his Guru Mahārāja's numbering in his BBT edition of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*.

### EQUAL RIGHTS TO EDUCATION AND CELIBACY

Direct evidence supporting the equal right to education is found in the *Atharva-veda* (11.5.18) as follows,

*brahmacaryeṇa kanyā yuvānaṁ vindate patim*

Through *brahmacarya* a girl attains a suitable husband.

So what is this *brahmacarya*? Sāyaṇa, the most prominent commentator on all the four Vedas, comments on the above *Atharva-veda* section:

*brahmacaryeṇa brahma vedaḥ tad-adhyayanārtham-ācaryam*

The word *brahmacaryeṇa* means “by all efforts employed to study the Vedas in order to know Brahman”.

The commentary here is mixed with the commentary to the previous verse (11.5.17) and incorrectly translated - there is no such part as “in order to know Brahman”, the word “*brahma*” means “the Vedas”, says Sāyaṇa<sup>[2]</sup> (just as in the SB1.1.2—tene **brahma** ḥṛdā ya ādi-kavaye... - “He imparted **the Vedic knowledge** unto the heart of Brahmā (*ādi-kavi*)”).

The verse 11.5.17 with the commentary is as follows:

*brahmacaryeṇa tapasā rājā rāṣṭram vi rakṣati*  
*ācāryo brahmacaryeṇa brahmacāriṇam icchate*

“Through *brahmacarya* the king particularly protects his kingdom. Through *brahmacarya* the teacher desires [to have] a *brahmacari*[-disciple].”

**Sāyaṇa-bhāṣya:** *brahma vedaḥ, tad-adhyayanārtham ācaryam ācaraṇīyaṁ samid-ādhāna-*

*bhaikṣacaryordhvaretaskatvādikaṁ brahmacāribhir anuṣṭhīyamānaṁ karma brahmacaryam.*

**Translation of the commentary:** “*Brahma* means ‘the Vedas’, the activity to be performed by the *brahmacaris* in order to study them, such as igniting the firewood, begging alms, lifting up the semen etc. is called *brahmacarya*.”

This part of the *Atharva-veda* is indeed very interesting, however if we are to accept that it establishes women's equal rights to education we will have to accept an exactly equal right of a king, an ox, a horse and the demigods who are similarly described in the same section:

*anaḍvān brahmacaryeṇāśvo ghāsam jigīrṣati (11.5.18)*

“Through *brahmacarya* the ox and the horse desire to eat grass”

*brahmacaryeṇa tapasā devā mṛtyum apāghnata  
indro ha brahmacaryeṇa devebhyaḥ svar ābharat (11.5.19)*

“Through *brahmacarya* and austerity the demigods defeated death. Through *brahmacarya* Indra brought heaven for the demigods.”

The *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* speaks of two ladies attaining to complete Vedic knowledge:

*tebhyo dadhāra kanye dve vayunām dhāriṇīm svadhā  
ubhe te brahma-vāḍinyau jñāna-vijñāna-pārage*

*Svadhā*, who was offered to the *Pitās*, begot two daughters named *Vayunā* and *Dhāriṇī*, both of whom were impersonalists and were expert in transcendental and Vedic knowledge. (4.1.64)

Another example of a lady who attained to complete Vedic knowledge is *Devahūti*, who is also called *brahmavāḍinī* in the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* (3.33.12):

*maitreya uvāca  
iti pradārśya bhagavān satīm tām ātmano gatim  
sva-mātrā brahmavāḍinyā kapilo'numato yayau*

“Śrī Maitreya said: The Supreme Personality of Godhead Kapila, after instructing His beloved mother, took permission from her and left His home, His mission having been fulfilled.”

However, in the purport to the next verse (3.33.13) Śrīla Prabhupāda clearly states that in spite of being a self-realized knower of the Absolute Truth (*brahmavāḍinī*) a woman still should be dependent, stay at home and practice *bhakti-yoga*:

*sā cāpi tanayoktena yogādeśena yoga-yuk  
tasminn āśrama āpiḍe sarasvatyāḥ samāhitā*

“As instructed by her son, *Devahūti* also began to practice *bhakti-yoga* in that very *āśrama*. She practiced *samādhī* in the house of Kardama Muni, which was so beautifully decorated with flowers that it was considered the flower crown of the River *Sarasvatī*.”

**Purport:** “Devahūti did not leave her house, because it is never recommended for a woman to leave her home. She is dependent. The very example of Devahūti was that when she was not married, she was under the care of her father, Svāyambhuva Manu, and then Svāyambhuva Manu gave her to Kardama Muni in charity. She was under the care of her husband in her youth, and then her son, Kapila Muni, was born. As soon as her son grew up, her husband left home, and similarly the son, after discharging His duty towards His mother, also left. She could also have left home, but she did not. Rather, she remained at home and began to practice *bhakti-yoga* as it was instructed by her great son, Kapila Muni, and because of her practice of *bhakti-yoga*, the entire home became just like a flower crown on the River Sarasvatī.” (SB3.33.13)

### SOME HYMNS RESERVED FOR THEM

There are many hymns in the *Ṛg-veda* that are reserved for recitation only by women. An example (*Ṛg-veda* 10.159.1-2) speaks about a woman’s qualification to speak on transcendental topics:

*ud asau sūryo agād ud ayaṁ māmako bhagaḥ  
ahaṁ tad vidvalā patim abhy asākṣi viṣāsahīḥ*

*ahaṁ ketur ahaṁ mūrdhāhamugrā vivācanī  
mamed anu kratuṁ patiḥ sehānāyā upācaret*

Let my good fortune rise with the rising sun. May I attain my husband, defeat my enemies, and may I always be very tolerant. May I be an excellent knower of the Vedas, and a powerful speaker on the same. May my husband always be pleasing and behave tolerantly towards me.

Actually, there is nothing transcendental in this hymn. It would be interesting to know on what authority the authors gave such a highly esoteric translation. Until we know what *ācārya* gave such an interpretation of the verse, we would rather stick to the traditional meaning. It is a hymn where the speaker (Śacī Paulomī, Indra's consort) prays for destruction of her rivals (*sapatnī*).

In the Sanskrit text itself, there are no such things there as “excellent knower of the Vedas” or “a powerful speaker on the same.” Sāyaṇa<sup>[3]</sup> explains the word “*ketuḥ*”, which the authors chose to translate very specifically as “the excellent knower of the Vedas”, in more general words as “*sarvasya jñātrī*” - “knower of everything.” “*Ahaṁ mūrdhā*” means “may I become prominent [as a head]” and “*ugra vivācanī*” means “may I evoke good speech - even if my husband is in an angry mood, I will always make him speak pleasant words.”

For comparison, here is the English translation by Ralph T. H. Griffith on the basis of *Sāyaṇa-bhāṣya*<sup>[4]</sup>:

Sun hath mounted up, and this my happy fate hate mounted high.  
I knowing this, as conqueror have won my husband for mine own.

I am the banner and the head, a mighty arbitress am I:  
I am victorious, and my Lord shall be submissive to my will.

Even if we accept that women sometimes might have studied some parts of the Vedas, it does not establish this right for each and every part of the Vedas—since it would contradict the direct statement from the crest-jewel of all authorities, *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* (1.4.25)—*strī-śūdra-dvijabandhūnām trayī na śruti-*

*gocarā*—“The less intelligent classes of men, namely women, śūdras and unqualified sons of the higher castes, are devoid of necessary qualifications to understand the purpose of the transcendental Vedas.” (from Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to SB1.4.25). The possible reconciliation of these two contradictions may be analogous to the well-known example of the *Rathakāras*, discussed in the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* (6.1.44-50) and used by Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa in his *Siddhānta-darpaṇa* (2.3) to show that even *śūdras* are sometimes eligible to study the Vedas and recite the appropriate mantras, but only those “some” portions of the Vedas that are directly prescribed for them to study. Or a similar logic given by Jaimini in his *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* (6.1.24) can be applied here too. We will discuss that later.

### ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE THE GAYATRI AND THE SACRED THREAD

The Yama-smṛti specifies the right of women to study Vedas and receive the thread,

*purā-kalpe tu nārīṇām mauñjī-bandhanam-iṣyate  
adhyāpanam ca vedānām sāvitrī vacanam tathā*

Previously women were initiated with Brahmin threads and would teach the Vedas and acquire knowledge of the *Gāyatrī*.

Thus, there are quite a few places in the Vedas where women have been encouraged to teach and perform all kinds of sacrifices, including initiations.

The verse the authors cite does not mention a Brahmin thread - “*mauñjī*” is a belt, made of sacred grass (*muñja*) which is tied (*bandhanam*) around the waist at the time of *upanayana*. (See, for example, *Manu-saṁhitā*, 2.42-43,169-171).

This quote from *Yama-smṛti* is incomplete, it goes on as follows<sup>[5]</sup>:

*pitā pitṛvyo bhrātā vā nainām adhyāpayet paraḥ  
sva-gr̥he caiva kanyāyā bhaikṣa-caryā vidhīyate  
varjayed ajinam cīram jaṭādhāraṇam eva ca*

Translation (by Prof. V.P. Kane):

“In former ages, tying of the girdle of *muñja* (i.e. *upanayana*) was desired in the case of maidens, they were taught the Vedas and made to recite the *Savitṛī* (the sacred *Gāyatrī* verse). Either their father, uncle or brother taught them and not a stranger and begging was prescribed for a maiden in the house itself and she was not to wear deer-skin or bark garment and was not to have matted hair.” (*History of Dharma-sastra*, in 5 Volumes, 1930-1962, Vol.2, p.295—from now on all the references to Prof. Kane or his *History of Dharma-sastra* are made to this edition).

Since the girl was restricted (her initiation was only to her close relatives, and she had to beg alms only from her own house), it is unfeasible that she taught the Vedas to others. Thus the phrase “[women] would teach the Vedas” seems extrapolated. Nevertheless, the authors give a reading of the text that defies its very context: “Thus, there are quite a few places in the Vedas where women have been encouraged to teach and perform all kinds of sacrifices, including initiations.” However, it is clear that they have given an unwarranted extrapolation, since the text itself gives no evidence of actual “encouragement for performance of **all** kinds of sacrifices” what to speak of **giving** initiation.

This quote from the *Yama-smṛti* is usually accompanied by the quote from the *Hārīta-smṛti* that is also quoted in the paper under the title “TWO TYPES OF LADIES”. We will discuss both of them here:

The *Hārīta-smṛti*, which is much older and broader in its outlook than the current edition of the *Manu-smṛti*, speaks about two types of women as follows,

*dvividhāḥ striyaḥ. brahma-vādinyaḥ sadyo-vadhvaś ca. tatra brahma-vādinīnām upanayanam agnīndhanam vedādhyayanam sva-gr̥he-ca bhikṣācaryā iti. sadyo-vadhūnām tūpasthite vivāhe kathañcid-upanayana-mātram kṛtvā vivāhaḥ kāryaḥ (21.23)*

There are two types of ladies — the *brahmavādinī*, who doesn't desire to marry, and the *sadyo-vadhū*, who wishes to marry. For the *brahmavādinī* there is provision for receiving the sacred thread, conducting the fire sacrifice, studying the Vedas, and begging alms at her own home.

The *sadyovadhū* at the time of marriage should only be invested with the sacred thread and then married.”

Again, the text does not mention “the sacred thread” but only the “*upanayana*”, which for boys was certainly performed with the investiture of the sacred thread but, as we have seen above, there are several points that make it quite different from the boys' *upanayana*, namely:

- Only a close relative could perform the *upanayana* for girls and not a stranger;
- A girl could not go out of her house to beg alms (as boys did)
- She was not to wear deer-skin or bark garment and was not to have matted hair (as was the case with boys).

So, we can safely doubt the extrapolated assumption that they were “invested with the sacred thread.”

We should also say that the same *Vīramitrodaya* (where these quotes from the *Yama-* and *Hārīta-smṛtis* appear) concludes the discussion about “Initiation of women” by saying:

*purā-kalpa iti vacanān nāsmīn kalpa iti gamyate. ata eva manuḥ:  
vaivāhiko vidhiḥ strīṇām saṁskāro vaidikaḥ smṛtaḥ  
patisevā gurau vāso gr̥hārtho'gniparikriyā*

“From the words *purā-kalpe* we can understand that it is not for this age. Therefore Manu has said: “The marriage ceremony is stated to be the Vedic sacrament for women (and to be equal to the initiation), serving the husband (equivalent to) the residence in (the house of the) teacher, and the household duties (the same) as the (daily) worship of the sacred fire.” [this verse appear in the *Manu-saṁhitā*, 2.67].

These two quotes from *Hārīta* and *Yama smṛtis* are interesting in several ways. First of all, they are not found in any of the present editions or editions of these two *smṛtis*. They are known only from the medieval *smṛti* digests that include these quotations, such as *Vīramitrodaya* (which was used by the authors, it was written ca. 1610-1620 AD), *Smṛti-candrikā* (ca. 1150-1225 AD) and also *Nirṇaya-sindhu* (1612 AD). All of them agree that the words *purā kalpe* refer to the previous ages and not applicable now.

*Smṛti-candrikā*<sup>[6]</sup> adds:

*ādi-purāṇe 'pi -  
yas tu kārta-yugo dharmo na kartavyaḥ kalau yuge |  
pāpa-prasaktās tu yataḥ kalau nāryo-narās tathā ||*

“In the *Ādi-purāṇa* it is said: “The dharma for Satya-yuga is not to be performed in Kali-yuga. Otherwise men and women in Kali-yuga will become strongly attached to sin.””

These two quotes from the *Yama* and *Hārīta smṛtis* have been of the favorite quotes of those who wish propagate a Hindu version of equal rights movement. Some of them go so far as to say that there were equal rights for women and men in everything and then greedy and proud priests edited the old scriptures and wrote their own to denigrate women. No need to mention, but we as Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers cannot subscribe to such views.

And finally, this verse speaks about “*purā-kalpa*” – the bygone age, not the present age. It implies that such rules for “equal rights” although might have been in practice in the previous ages, may not be applicable in the present age.

*anye kṛta-yuge dharmās tretāyām dvāpare 'pare  
anye kali-yuge nṛṇām yuga-rāsānurūpataḥ*

One set of duties (is prescribed) for men in the *Kṛita* age, different ones in the *Treta* and in the *Dvapara*, and (again) another (set) in the *Kali*, in a proportion as (those) ages decrease in length. (*Manu-smṛti*, 1.85, the same verse also appears in the *Parāśara-smṛti*, 1.22).

Here are some examples of things that were prevalent in the human society in the previous ages but now are absent or even sinful:

1. The famous ancient Vedic authority *Āpastamba*, who is also mentioned in the paper we are discussing, says that in the previous ages demigods lived together with humans on this planet: *saha deva manuṣyā asmil loke purā babhūvuḥ* (*Āpastamba-dharma-sūtra*, 2.7.16.1)<sup>[7]</sup>
2. *Mahābhārata* says that in the previous ages women were not restricted and there was no marriage as we know it now:

*anāvṛtāḥ kila purā striya āsan varānane  
kāma-cāra-vihāriṇyaḥ svatantrās cārulocane  
tāsām vyuccaramāṇānām kaumārāt subhage patīn  
nādharmo 'bhūd varārohe sa hi dharmāḥ purābhavat* (*Ādi-parva*, 113.4-5)<sup>[8]</sup>

“Long ago women were not at all restricted, O lovely one. Women were self-reliant in those remote times and could go where they liked and enjoy in their own way. From childhood, fine lady, they were not faithful to their husbands, and yet their behavior was not irreligious, for that was the religious principle of those former days.”

No need to cite many other examples, but if we are not satisfied with whatever direction Śrīla Prabhupāda and previous *ācāryas* have given us, here is what the traditional ancient Vedic scholar *Āpastamba* has to say in this regard in his *Dharma-sūtra* (he explains that the rules that contradict dharma that were once in vogue, are not applicable in the Kali-yuga):



*dr̥ṣṭo dharmā-vyatikramāḥ sāhasam ca pūrveṣām  
teṣāṃ tejo-viśeṣeṇa pratyavāyo na vidyate  
tad anvīkṣya prayuñjānaḥ sīdaty avaraḥ*<sup>[9]</sup>

“Transgression of the law and violence are found amongst the ancient (sages). They committed no sin on account of the greatness of their lustre. A man of later times who seeing their (deeds) follows them, falls.” (*Āpastamba-dharma-sūtra*, 2.6.13.7)<sup>[10]</sup>.

And lastly, although the *Hārīta-smṛti* speaks about performing *upanayana* for women, interestingly we can hardly think of any example of this from the *śāstra*.

## JAIMINI AND AITISAYANA

This is perhaps the most interesting part of the paper.

Jaimini is the renowned composer of the literature known as *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā sūtras*. According to the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* (1.4.21), he is the professor of the *Sāma-veda* and the direct disciple of Vyasadeva.

Jaimini's *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā sūtras* have been referred to by many ācāryas in their works, e.g. Srīla Jīva Goswami in his *Kṛṣṇa-sandarbhā* and Srīla Baladeva Vidyabhūṣaṇ in his *Govinda-bhāṣya*. Both these ācāryas quote *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā sūtras* as a valid and acceptable authority.

As Jaimini was compiling the *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā sūtras*, he wished to tackle the case of equal rights for women in all sacrifices (including *dīkṣā*). He was well aware of the school of a certain sage named Aitīśayana, who had declared that all these sacrifices were only for the higher three classes and not for women and *sūdras*. Jaimini discussed this issue in the first chapter of the sixth part of his *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā sūtras*. The famous Vedic commentator Shabara-swami commented on these *sūtras*.

As we will see now, the authors' claim that Jaimini “wished to tackle the case of equal rights” is not at all true. But before that, some remarks:

1. The last phrase “including *dīkṣā*” is again an extrapolation.
2. “The famous Vedic commentator Shabara-swami commented on these *sūtras*.” Śābarasvāmī however wasn't a Vedic commentator per se, in fact there is no other known work of Śābarasvāmī except for his commentary on Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsā-sūtras*.

“We are reproducing here the entire section along with the commentary of Shabara-swami.”

It is both unfortunate and ironic that the authors did not reproduce the entire section. Perhaps relying on someone's unfinished work, they also left the discussion unfinished on the point that seems to suit the purpose of such a paper. The discussion, in fact, continues and we will reproduce the lengthy but necessary section from that part of the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtras*<sup>[11]</sup> after analyzing the following quote from the paper:

The entire discussion revolves around the word *svarga-kāmaḥ* in the following aphorism in the *Śruti* —

*darśa-pūrṇa-māsābhyām svarga-kāmo yajeta* (*Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra* 3.9.4)

One who desires heaven should perform the *Darśa* and *Pūrṇa-māsa* sacrifices.

Jaimini in the *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā sūtras* (6.1.3.6) presents the view of the opposite party (*pūrva-pakṣa*) first,

*liṅga-viśeṣa-nirdeśāt puṁ-yuktam-aitiśāyanaḥ* (Sūtra 6)

The Sage Aitisayana says that since the gender used in the aphorism is masculine (*svarga-kāmaḥ*), therefore only males are eligible.

**Commentary:** *darśa-pūrṇa-māsābhyāṁ svarga-kāmo yajetetyevam-ādi samāmnāyate. tatra sandehaḥ. kiṁ svarga-kāmaṁ puṁāṁsam-adhikṛtya yajetety-eṣa śabda uccaritaḥ? atha vā'niyamaḥ striyaṁ puṁāṁsam ca? iti. kiṁ prāptam? puṁ-liṅgam-adhikṛtaṁ mene aitiśāyanaḥ. kutah? Liṅga-viśeṣa-nirdeśāt. puṁ-liṅgena viśeṣeṇa nirdeśo bhavati, svarga-kāmo yajeteti. tasmāt puṁān-ukto yajeteti, na strī.*

**Translation of Commentary:** The aphorism 'One who desires heaven should perform the *Darśa* and *Pūrṇa-māsa* sacrifices' is seen in the Vedas. In that there is a doubt. Is the aphorism recited keeping in mind only a male, or both male and female? The sage Aitisayana says that only males are eligible. Why? It is because the masculine gender has been specified in the word *svarga-kāmaḥ* in the aphorism. This word refers to a man, and therefore only men are allowed, and not women.

Jaimini then gives his conclusion:

*jātim tu bādarāyaṇo 'viśeṣāt tasmāt stry api pratiyeta jāty arthasyāviśiṣṭatvāt* (Sūtra 8)

Vyasa, however, says that both ladies and men belonging to the upper three classes are fit for all sacrifices, as there is no distinction of class between males and females in the word *svarga-kāmaḥ*.

**Commentary:** *tu-śabdaḥ pakṣam vyāvartayati. naitadasti puṁso 'dhikāra iti. jātim tu bādarāyaṇo 'dhikṛtām manyate sma āha. kim-ayam svarga-kāma iti jāti-śabdaḥ samadhigataḥ? netyāha. katham tarhi? yaugikaḥ, svargecchā-yogena vartate. kena tarhi śabdena jātir-uktā yā adhikṛteti gamyate. nava ca vyaṁ brūmo jātivacana iha śabdo 'dhikāraka iti. kim tarhi? Svarga-kāma śabdenobhāva 'pi strī-puṁsāvadhī kriyate iti. ato na vilakṣitaṁ puṁ-liṅgam iti. kutah? aviśeṣāt. na hi śaknoty-eṣā vibhaktiḥ svarga-kāmaṁ liṅgena viśiṣṭum. katham? lakṣaṇatvena śravaṇāt. svarge kāmo yasya tam eva lakṣayati śabdaḥ. tena lakṣaṇenādhikṛto yajeteti śabdena ucyate. tatra lakṣaṇam-aviśiṣṭam striyām puṁsi ca. Tasmāc-chabdenobhāva 'pi strī-puṁsāv-adhikṛtāv-iti gamyate. tatra kenādhikāraḥ striyā nivartyate? vibhaktiyā iti cet. Tan-na. kasmāt? Puṁ-vacanatvāt. strī-nivṛttāv-aśaktiḥ. puṁso vibhaktiyā punar-vacanam-anarthakam-iti ced na. ānarthakyo 'pi strī-nivṛtter-abhāvaḥ. parisankhyāyām svārtha-hāniḥ. parārtha-kalpanā prāpta-bādhaś ca. na cānarthakyaṁ. nirdeśārthatvāt. tasmāt stry api pratiyeta jāty arthasyāviśiṣṭatvāt.*

**Translation of Commentary:** By the word 'tu' in this *sūtra*, the *pūrva-pakṣa* is refuted. It is not that only males have the right. Those belonging to the upper three classes, whether men or women, are bonafide, as said by Vyasadeva. A question is to be asked here. Is the word '*svarga-kāmaḥ*' to be considered as a word which defines a group or as a word which points to a single person? The other party says, It cannot point to a group, because the way in which it is grammatically formed points only to a single person, and that also a male.

However, we (the *uttara-pakṣa*) say that the word '*svarga-kāmaḥ*' cannot refer only to a male. Why? Because of its non-speciality. The word cannot be restricted only to the male species because

it emphasizes eligibility over gender. The emphasis is on the fact that “One who desires heaven should perform sacrifices.” The rightful performers of the sacrifice are indicated by the word 'yajet'. If it is said that the word 'svarga-kāmaḥ' is of masculine gender by rules of grammar, then we (the *uttara-pakṣa*) say that it is not so, for assuming that only males are indicated will lead to the following problem:

The purpose of the word *svarga-kāmaḥ* is to state that whosoever desires to go to heaven should perform the sacrifices. Since it is a well-observed fact that even women desire heaven, if the purpose of the original aphorism was to state that only men should perform the sacrifices then the language would have had to include specific wording to state that it did not apply to women.

Therefore, women are also included in the three higher *varṇas* that can perform sacrifices.

However, this translation of the commentary to the *sūtra* 6.1.8 is not fully accurate.

The question is from the *pūrva-pakṣa*:

- Is the word *svarga-kāmaḥ* that is denoting the whole genus (*jāti*)?
- No.
- Then what is it?
- The word *svarga-kāmaḥ* should be taken in its etymological meaning (*yaugikah*) as “those who have the desire for *svarga*.”
- Then by which word is the [entitled] genus denoted?
- We do not say that there is a word denoting a genus, but by the word “*svarga-kāma*” both men and women are entitled and the masculine gender is not essential here.”

And the authors conclude:

“Thus, in the opinion of Vyasa-deva, even women are eligible to perform all sacrifices.”

This is, however, completely misleading and the discussion ends here for some unknown reason (perhaps the authors inadvertently used somebody's biased work, for it is unimaginable that they deliberately ended the discussion here). But in the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtras* Jaimini goes on to give the complete *siddhānta* on this issue. In the next, 4th *adhikaraṇa* starting with *sūtra* 17 he discusses the respective roles of a man and woman in the performance of sacrifices\*. There Jaimini and his commentator Śābarasvāmī clearly state

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\* In *sūtras* 6.1.10-12 *pūrva-pakṣa* continues by saying that a sacrifice can be performed only by a person possessing property (*dravyavattvāt*), but since women do not possess any property and are themselves the property of father or husband (e.g. according to the *Manu-saṁhitā* (8.416): *bhāryā dāsaś ca putras ca nirdhanāḥ sarva eva te. yat te samadhigacchanti, yasya te tasya tad dhanam* - “A wife, a son, and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong.”), they cannot perform sacrifices. It is interesting to note Śābarasvāmī's commentary to the *sūtras* 13 and 14 which give the answer to *pūrva-pakṣa* - being faithful to *karma-mīmāṃsā* tradition he urges to reject *smṛti* if it contradicts *śruti*:

*yadi smṛtim anurudhyamānā paravaśā nirdhanā ca syāt, yajetety ukte sati na yajeta. tatra smṛtyā śrutir bādhyeta. na caitan nyāyāyam. tasmāt phalārthinī satī smṛtim apramāṇikṛtya dravyaṃ parigrhṇīyād yajeta ceti.*

Translation of the commentary (slightly edited translation by G.N. Jha) “If *smṛti* states that a woman should be without property, but *śruti* instructs her to perform a sacrifice (*yajeta*) if she has a desire for heaven, then if she follows the *smṛti*, remains without property and does not perform sacrifices, she commits a mistake by overruling *śruti* with *smṛti*, which is inappropriate. Therefore if she desires the fruits, she should disregard the *smṛti* as unauthoritative, obtain the necessary property and perform the sacrifice.”

that this injunction to perform a sacrifice does not give men and women equal right in it because they themselves are not equal. Here is the sequence:

In *sūtra* 17 Jaimini states that husband and wife should perform sacrifice together as a joint effort:

*svavatos tu vacanād aikakarmyaṃ syāt*

“Although they both possess property their action should be one [joint] because of the statement to that effect.”

**Commentary:** *svavantāv ubhāv api daṃpatī ity evaṃ tāvat sthitam. tatra saṃdehaḥ, kiṃ pṛthak patnī yajeta, pṛthag yajamānaḥ, uta saṃbhūya yajeyātām iti. kiṃ prāptam? pṛthakvena. kutaḥ? ekavacanasya vivakṣitatvāt. upādeyatvena kartā yajeteti śrūyate. tasmād ekavacanam vivakṣyate, yathā na dvau puruṣau saṃbhūya yajeyātām, tathātrāpi draṣṭavyam.*

**Translation:** “It has been settled that both husband and wife possess property. The doubts that arises now is ‘Should the wife perform the sacrifice separately from the sacrificer or should they perform sacrifice together?’

[Pūrva-pakṣa]: They should perform the sacrifice separately.

- Why?

- Because singular number was expressed regarding the performer - 'yajeta' - “he should perform sacrifice.” Therefore singular number was expressed and just as two men cannot perform the sacrifice, our situation should be seen similarly.”

[Siddhānta]: *evaṃ prāpte brūmaḥ, svavatos tu vacanād aikakarmyaṃ syāt, vacanāt tayoh sahakriyā. evaṃ hi smaranti “dharma cārthe ca kāme ca nāticaritavyeti”, tathā “sahadharmaś caritavyaḥ sahāpatyam utpādayitavyam” iti.*

“To this we reply: Although they both possess property they should perform the sacrifice together because of the statement to that effect, that establishes their joint effort—From the *smṛti*: “In the matters relating to *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* she should not be ignored” and “The *dharma* should be performed together and the children should be begotten together.”

*ucyate, smṛtivananena na śrutivacanam yuktaṃ bādhitum. neti brūmaḥ, iha kiṃcit karma strīpuṃsakartṛkam eva, yathā darśapūrṇamāsau jyotiṣṭoma iti, yatra patnyavekṣitena yajamānāvekṣitena cājyena homa ucyate, tatrānyatarābhāve vaigunyaṃ.*

“But it is not proper to reject statement of *śruti* in favor of the *smṛti*”.

To this we reply: No, there is no problem here. There are some sacrifices that must be performed by the man and the woman together, like *Darśa-pūrṇamāsa* or *Jyotiṣṭoma* during which one should

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The question whether a wife possesses property or not (*strīdhana*) is a cause for debate among *dharma-śāstra* experts. At least for *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā*, in *sūtra* 16 Jaimini clearly says that there is a text that establishes that women have property and Śabaravāmi cites interesting verse (which is a paraphrase of the *śruti* verse from *Taittirīya-saṃhitā*, 6.2.1.1) - ***patnī vai pāriṇāyasyeṣṭe patyaiva gatam anumataṃ kriyate*** - “The wife is the mistress over the household property and she acts according to the wishes of her husband.” So the wife does have property, but that property is not independent from her husband and her household.

offer oblations of ghee examined by both the wife and the sacrificer (*yajamāna*). If the either of them is absent—the sacrifice will be defective.”

Having seen that *Darśa-pūrṇamāsa* sacrifice is to be performed by husband and wife together (and in the absence of either the ritual will be defective) we can doubt the etymology of the name “*Paurṇamāsī*” given by the authors: “Ladies who performed these sacrifices are thus rightfully known as '*Paurṇa-māsī*'. At best, *Paurṇamāsī* is not that woman who performed the *pūrṇamāsa* sacrifice (by herself) but who helped her husband, the officiating priest (*yajamāna*), in such sacrifice. But even then, why only *Pūrṇamāsa*, which is only one half of the full *darśa-pūrṇamāsa* sacrifice, why don't we hear about a woman who also performed the *Darśa* sacrifice and is thus rightfully known as “*Dārśī*”? More on this below.

And then comes the most interesting *sūtra*:

*tasyā yāvad uktam āśīr brahmacaryam atulyatvāt* (6.1.24).

“To the wife pertain only those functions that are distinctly laid down for her, – as also the 'invoking of blessings' and 'celibacy'; **because she is not equal** (to the husband).”

**Commentary:** *darśa-pūrṇamāsābhyāṃ svarga-kāmo yajeta, jyotiṣṭomena svarga-kāmo yajetetyevamādiṣv etad uktam strī-puṃsayoḥ sahadhikāra iti. athedānīm saṃdihyate, kiṃ sarvaṃ yājamānaṃ patnyā kartavyam, uta yāvad uktam āśīr brahmacaryaṃ ceti. kiṃ prāptam? sarvaṃ yājamānaṃ patnyāḥ syāt, sāpi hi yajamānā, tulyatvāt. tasmāt sarvaṃ tasyā iti. evaṃ prāpte brūmah, tasyā yāvad uktam syāt, vacana-prāmāṇyāt, āśīḥ brahmacaryaṃ ca syāt. kasmāt? atulyatvāt, atulyā hi strī-puṃsāḥ, yajamānaḥ puṃmān vidvāṃś ca, patnī strī cāvīdyā ca. kim atah? yady evaṃ hy etad atulyatvam. etad ato bhavati, kratv-artheṣu yāni yājamānāni śravaṇāni, teṣūpādeyatvena śravaṇād vivakṣitaṃ liṅgam, tena teṣu patnī na syāt, yāni ca kratv-arthāni samantrakāni teṣv avidyatvāt patnī na syāt. tat patnyā adhyayanasya prayojakaṃ syād iti yady ucyeta. tan na, asaty api prayojakatve tasya nirvṛttir bhaviṣyati. asti hi tasya puṃmān nirvartakaḥ, yac ca kratv-artham, tad ekena yena kenacin nirvartayitavyam. tasmāt pratiśiddhasya patnyā adhyayanasya punaḥ prasave, na kiṃcid asti pramāṇam. atas tad api patnī na kuryāt, yās tv āśīṣaḥ, yac ca brahmacaryaṃ, tat puruṣaṃ prati guṇa-bhūtam, na tatrānyatarena kṛte sidhyati, anyatarasya hi saṃskāro hīyeta. na ca tatropādeyatvena yajamānasya śravaṇam. tasmāl liṅgam apy avivakṣitam. ata āśīr brahmacaryaṃ cobhayor api syāt. yac cāhatyocyate, yathā “patnyājyam avekṣata” iti. tasmād atulyatvād asamāna-vidhānā patnī yajamānena bhavitum arhatīti.*

**Translation:** “In connection with such injunctions as — ‘*darśapūrṇamāsābhyāṃ svargakāmo yajeta*’ (‘Desiring heaven, one should perform the *Darśa-pūrṇamāsa* sacrifices’) and ‘*jyotiṣṭomena svargakāmo yajeteta*’ (‘Desiring heaven, one should perform the *Jyotiṣṭoma* sacrifice’) - it has been settled that the man and his wife are jointly entitled to the performance of such sacrifices. The doubt that arises now is – Are all the functions laid down as to be performed by the 'Sacrificer' to be performed the wife also? Or, is she to perform only what is actually laid down as to be done by her—such functions, for instance, as the 'invoking of blessings' and 'celibacy'?

[Pūrva-pakṣa]: “All that is laid down as to be done by the 'Sacrificer' (*yājamāna*) should be done by the wife also, she is as much a 'Sacrificer' (*yājamāna*) as the husband because she is equal [to him]. Therefore everything should be done by her also.”

[Siddhānta]: “To this we reply: To the wife pertain only such functions as are distinctly laid down

for her, because such direct injunction is authoritative. She also has to perform the invoking of blessings and celibacy. Why so? **Because she is not equal to the husband.** The husband is a male and is learned [in the Vedas] while the wife is a female and is not learned.”

Question: ‘What if there is an inequality?’

Answer: ‘What happens is this: – (a) There are certain details subserving the purposes of the sacrifice which are directly declared as to be performed by the “Sacrificer”;--and as in all these texts, the Sacrificer would be the 'Subject', the [masculine] gender of the term speaking of him would have to be regarded as significant.—and hence the wife would not perform these details; – (b) then, there are certain details subserving the purposes of the sacrifice which have to be performed with *Mantras*; – and these also could not be performed by the wife, because she does not possess the requisite knowledge.—It might be argued that—" these texts themselves might be taken as indicating the necessity of women learning the Veda ". – But that is not possible; because even without the text indicating the necessity of such learning by the wife, it would be possible for the details in question to be adequately performed; because there is a performer already, in the person of the Husband ; and what subserves the purposes of the sacrifice may be done by either one of the two. Consequently there can be no authority for making any exception to the general prohibition of Vedic study for the woman. —It follows therefore that such details as require the reciting of *Mantras* cannot be performed by the wife.

As regards the 'Invoking of blessings' [or, the *Embellishments*] and the 'celibacy',—these subserve the purposes of the *performer*; so that these could not be regarded as complete if done by only one of the couple; because if only one did them, the embellishment of the other would remain defective. Nor in the case of these does the 'Sacrificer' appear as the 'subject'; and hence the masculine gender in this case could not be taken as significant. —For these reasons, the 'Invoking of Blessings' (or, *Embellishments*) and 'Celibacy' would have to be done by both—husband and wife. **What is distinctly laid down as to be done by the wife—as for instance, 'the wife should examine the Clarified Butter'—has to be done by her alone.**

**From all this it follows that on account of inequality, the wife does not stand on the same footing as the husband** (in the matter of the performance of details).” (End of translation, emphasis added).

This whole discussion from the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* was based on the *śruti* injunction cited many times by Āpastamba (“*svarga-kamam yajeta*” from *Āpastamba-śrauta-sūtra*), so here is what the same Āpastamba says about women directly offering oblations:

*na strī juhuyāt*<sup>[12]</sup>

“A woman should not offer oblation in the *Agnihotra*.” (*Āpastamba-dharma-sūtra*, 2.6.15.17)<sup>[13]</sup>

Or:

*striyānupetena kṣāra-lavaṇāvarāṇna-saṃsṛṣṭasya ca homaṃ paricakṣate*<sup>[14]</sup>

“They reject a sacrifice performed by a woman or by one who has not received the initiation, and a sacrifice of salt or pungent food, or of such food as has an admixture of a despised sort of food.” (*Āpastamba-gr̥hya-sūtra*, 8.3)<sup>[15]</sup>.

“Later commentators also give the example that the statement '*brāhmaṇo na hantavyaḥ*' — a *brāhmaṇa* should never be killed — also includes a *brāhmaṇī*. This shows that even though male species may be indicated in an aphorism, it often includes females.”

Although no mention is made as to who those later commentators are and what text they commented upon, this prohibition from *dharma-śāstras* is mentioned by *Patañjali* in his *Mahābhāṣya* commentary on *Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī* (1.2.64).

Still, as we saw in the *mīmāṃsā-sūtra* discussion above, the gender is sometimes crucial and sometimes not. In order to understand each case, an *ācārya* or commentator is needed. So a mere example of “*brāhmaṇo na hantavyaḥ*” does not in fact establish proper hermeneutics for **all** cases.

It appears from the *śāstra* that in relation to women this rule is sometimes applicable and sometimes not.

For instance, according to the *Vasiṣṭha-dharma-sūtra*, which was also quoted in the paper and will also be treated below, it is applicable only when the woman is *ātreṇī* (has bathed after her menses) or if she is engaged in a sacrifice<sup>[16]</sup>:

*brāhmaṇīm cātreṇīm hatvā savana-gatau ca rājanya-vaiśyau*

“If someone kills a *Brahmin* woman who is an *Ātreṇī* or a *Kṣatriya* or a *Vaiśya* engaged in performing a sacrifice, [the penance is the same as for a *Brahmin*].” (20.34).

Otherwise, for killing a woman at a time other than directly after her menstrual period different penance is prescribed, which again shows inequality:

*anātreṇīm rājanya-hiṃsāyām* - “For killing a *Brahmin* woman at a time other than after her menstrual period, the penance is the same as for killing a *Kṣatriya* man.” (20.37)

*rājanyām vaiśya-hiṃsāyām* - “For killing a *Kṣatriya* woman, the same as for killing a *Vaiśya* man.” (20.38)

*vaiśyām śūdra-hiṃsāyām* - “And for killing a *Vaiśya* woman, the same as for killing a *Śūdra* man.” (20.39)

*śūdrām hatvā saṃvatsaram* - “If someone kills a *Śūdra* woman, he should perform the same penance for one year.” (20.40)

Moreover, the original *sūtra* contained the name of a sacrifice, '*Pūrṇa-māsa*'. Ladies who performed these sacrifices are thus rightfully known as '*Paurṇa-māsī*'.

Standard dictionaries (Sanskrit thesauri like *Amara-koṣa* (1.4.265) and *Śabda-kalpa-druma*, or Sanskrit-English dictionaries like those of *Apte*, *Monier-Williams* or *MacDonell*) do not mention this meaning of this word at all. All of them agree that the word means “the day of full moon.”

And here is the derivation of the word given by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Hari-nāmāmṛta-vyākaraṇa* (sūtra 1133 (or 2423 in the full *Bṛhat* version), translation by Matsyāvātāra prabhu):

so 'tra vartata iti pūrṇamāsāt keśava-ṇaḥ, anyāyāder mādharma-ṭhaḥ

sah—that; atra—in this; vartate—occurs; iti—thus; pūrṇa-māsāt—after the word pūrṇa-māsa (“full moon”); keśava-ṇaḥ—the pratyaya keśava [ṇ]a; anyāya-ādeḥ—after the words anyāya (“injustice”) and so on; mādharma-ṭhaḥ—the pratyaya mādharma ṭha.

“Keśava [ṇ]a is applied after the word pūrṇa-māsa in the meaning “that occurs in this,” and mādharma ṭha is applied after the words anyāya and so on in the same meaning.”

**Vṛtti** (explanation) by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī: paurṇamāsī tithiḥ, ānyāyikaḥ autpātikaḥ nāva-yajñikaḥ.

**Translation of the Vṛtti**—Thus we get paurṇamāsī tithiḥ (“the lunar day in which the full moon occurs”). Examples of anyāyāder mādharma-ṭhaḥ are ānyāyikaḥ (“that in which an injustice occurs”), autpātikaḥ (“that in which a calamity occurs”), and nāva-yajñikaḥ (“that [time] in which an offering of the first-fruits of the harvest occurs”).

**Amṛtāsvādinī-ṭīkā** (Commentary by Gopāla dāsa): When we have the meaning pūrṇamāso 'tra vartate (“a full moon occurs in this”), we get paurṇamāsī. Similarly, when we have the meaning anyāyo 'tra vartate ānyāyikaḥ (“an injustice occurs in this”), we get ānyāyikaḥ, and so on<sup>[17]</sup>.

## MANU-SAMHITA

Srila Prabhupada often quoted the following selections from *Manu-samhitā* [7] :

*na strī svātantryam-arhati* (9.3)

Women should not be given independence.

And also,

*pravṛttir eṣa bhūtānām nivṛttis tu mahā-phalaḥ* (5.56)

Everyone in material life is attracted to furthering the way of attachment (*pravṛtti-mārga*), but the greatest treasure is to be gained by following the path of detachment (*nivṛtti-mārga*).

However, Srila Prabhupada did not always support the conclusions of this literature:

Yes, but we do not keep him *sūdra*. A devotee is no longer *sūdra*. We are creating *brāhmaṇas*. Just like these Europeans and Americans. They, according to *Manu-samhitā*, are *mlecchas*, *yavanas*. But we are not keeping them *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. Just like these European and American boys. They are accepting the Vedic regulative principles: no illicit sex, no meat-eating, no intoxication, no gambling. So they are no more *sūdras* or *caṇḍālas*. They are *brāhmaṇas*. (Room Conversation, 5 June 1974.)

According to the *Manu-samhitā* you are all *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. You cannot touch the *Manu-samhitā*, what to speak of translating it. So if you try to follow the *Manu-samhitā* then you become a *mleccha* and *yavana* and your career is finished. (Secretary's letter to Madhusudana, 19 May 1977.)



Śrīla Prabhupāda may have not always supported **all** the conclusions of the *Manu-saṁhitā* (although this is debatable), but he definitely supported at least its conclusions regarding the duties of women by repeatedly referring to *Manu-saṁhitā* in this regard.

## CONTRADICTIONS

*Manu-saṁhitā* says different things about women. Sometimes its thrust is to speak highly of them:

*prajanārthaṁ mahā-bhāgāḥ pūjārḥā gṛha-dīptayaḥ (9.26)*

Women are to be worshipped. They are extremely auspicious. They are the illuminators of the home.

*yatra nāryastu pūjyante ramante tatra devatāḥ  
yatraitāstu na pūjyante sarvās-tatrāphalāḥ kriyāḥ (3.56)*

Wherever women are worshipped, the demigods reside, and wherever they are not worshiped, all activities end in failure.

While some other sections speak derogatorily:

*pauṁścalyāc cala cittāc ca naisnehyāc ca svabhāvataḥ (9.15)*

Women are by nature adulterous, fickle-hearted, and devoid of all love.

*nirindriyā hy amantrās ca striyo 'nṛtam iti sthitiḥ (9.18)*

Women are to be considered as devoid of all sense, devoid of all mantras, and full of falsity.

Sometimes we even find both kinds of statements in the same chapter — Chapter 9. No statement is offered directly in *Manu-saṁhitā* that resolves this incongruity.

But *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* also “speak derogatorily”, for example:

*kvāpi sakhyam na vai strīṇām vṛkāṇām hṛdayam yathā*

“...you should know that the heart of a woman is like that of a fox. There is no use making friendship with women.” (9.14.36)

*striyo hy akarunāḥ krūrā durmarśāḥ priya-sāhasāḥ  
ghnanty alpārthe 'pi viśrabdham patim bhrātaram apy uta*

“Women as a class are merciless and cunning. They cannot tolerate even a slight offense. For their own pleasure they can do anything irreligious, and therefore they do not fear killing even a faithful husband or brother.” (9.14.37)

Should we also reject *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* because of that? Of course not. Rather, we should see that there is an agreement between the *Manu-saṁhitā* and the *Bhāgavatam*. These statements may seem “derogatory” but actually they are not—no spiritual authority (*ācārya* or *śāstra*) will ever speak of women derogatorily.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives us the proper perspective on how to resolve this “apparent incongruity”:

“Good population in human society is the basic principle for peace, prosperity and spiritual progress in life. The *varṇāśrama* religion's principles were so designed that the good population would prevail in society for the general spiritual progress of state and community. Such population depends on the chastity and faithfulness of its womanhood. As children are very prone to be misled, women are similarly very prone to degradation. Therefore, both children and women require protection by the elder members of the family. By being engaged in various religious practices, women will not be misled into adultery. According to Cāṇakya Paṇḍita, women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy. So the different family traditions of religious activities should always engage them, and thus their chastity and devotion will give birth to a good population eligible for participating in the *varṇāśrama* system. On the failure of such *varṇāśrama-dharma*, naturally the women become free to act and mix with men, and thus adultery is indulged in at the risk of unwanted population. Irresponsible men also provoke adultery in society, and thus unwanted children flood the human race at the risk of war and pestilence.” (Purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* 1.40).

And:

“A woman's nature has been particularly well studied by Kaśyapa Muni. Women are self-interested by nature, and therefore they should be protected by all means so that their natural inclination to be too self-interested will not be manifested. Women need to be protected by men. A woman should be cared for by her father in her childhood, by her husband in her youth and by her grown sons in her old age. This is the injunction of Manu, who says that a woman should not be given independence at any stage. Women must be cared for so that they will not be free to manifest their natural tendency for gross selfishness. There have been many cases, even in the present day, in which women have killed their husbands to take advantage of their insurance policies. This is not a criticism of women but a practical study of their nature. Such natural instincts of a woman or a man are manifested only in the bodily conception of life. When either a man or a woman is advanced in spiritual consciousness, the bodily conception of life practically vanishes. We should see all women as spiritual units (*aham brahmāsmi*), whose only duty is to satisfy Kṛṣṇa. Then the influences of the different modes of material nature, which result from one's possessing a material body, will not act.” (Purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 6.18.42).

As for different kinds of statements in the *Manu-saṁhitā*—that alone is not a solid reason to altogether reject it as non-authoritative. One may easily understand and relate to the praise of women—they should be protected and respected, at the same time one may not so easily relate to the negative statements. However, such negative statements about women are present in many Vedic scriptures (sometimes even word for word). As we understand from Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport quoted above all these statements are meant to ensure women's protection.

We do not want to focus on these statements, however just to give an example we will reproduce some of them here:

*tasmāt striyo nirindriyā adāyādīr api pāpāt puṁsa upastitaram (Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda, Taittirīya-saṁhitā, 6.5.8.10)*

“Therefore women are powerless, have no inheritance, and speak more humbly than even a bad man”<sup>[18]</sup> (compare with the *Manu-smṛti*, 9.18 cited above).

Such “derogatory” statements about women are also there in the *Ṛg-veda*, which has many hymns composed by the female Ṛṣis. If the contradictory statements about women are sound reasons for a scripture to be considered interpolated then we will also have to put the *Ṛg-veda*, which has been accepted by the authors as authoritative, in the same category. The authors quoted two verses from the 10<sup>th</sup> *Maṇḍala* of *Ṛg-veda* to show that women have qualification to speak on transcendental topics, however the same 10<sup>th</sup> *Maṇḍala* also says the following “derogatory” things about women:

*na vai straiṇāni sakhyāni santi sālāvṛkāṇām hṛdayānyetā (Ṛg-veda, 10.95.15)<sup>[19]</sup>*

“With women there can be no lasting friendship: hearts of hyenas are the hearts of women.” (Compare with the verses from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (9.14.36-37) quoted above).

This is a hymn composed by Urvaśī (the Ṛṣi of this *sūkta*), who is a woman herself and thus she probably knows what she is speaking about. Also, according to the authors, she must have “taught and initiated others in these hymns, for only the creator of a hymn or those coming in the creator's disciplic succession can initiate others”, so we can safely assume that *Manu-smṛti* and similar works got this knowledge from such *śrutis*. A few other examples:

*abhrātaro na yoṣaṇo vyantaḥ patiripo na janayo durevāḥ  
pāpāsaḥ santo anṛtā asatyā idam padam ajanatā gabhīram (Ṛg-veda, 4.5.5)*

“Like youthful women without brothers, straying, like dames who hate their lords, of evil conduct, They who are full of sin, untrue, unfaithful, they have engendered this abysmal station.”

*indraś cid ghā tad abravīt striyā aśāsyam manaḥ  
uto aha kratuṁ raghum (Ṛg-veda, 8.33.17)*

“Indra himself hath said, The mind of woman brooks not discipline, Her intellect hath little weight.”

*strīr eva tad-anugāḥ kurute tasmāt striyaḥ puṁso ’nuvartmāno bhāvukāḥ (Śukla Yajurveda, Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa, 13.2.2.4)*

“He thereby makes women to be dependent, whence women are sure to be attendant upon man.”<sup>[20]</sup>

So, nothing wrong with Manu on this.

## INTERPOLATIONS

Taking note of this and other points, various scholars have opined that the *Manu-saṁhitā* we see today has suffered from considerable interpolation.

Again, we are not told who those “various scholars” are. Śrīla Prabhupāda or any other previous ācārya never said this. A scholar named Patrick Olivelle, who is a famous authority on the *Dharma-śāstra* in the secular world, prepared the Critical Edition of the *Manu-smṛti*. He discusses there possible contradictions and interpolations and here is what he says about Chapter Nine that has both kinds of statements (“derogatory” and “high”):

“Chapter Nine: This chapter addresses the last three grounds for litigation: marital law, inheritance, and gambling. The sections on marital law and inheritance are remarkably free of obvious redactional interventions.” (Olivelle, Patrick. 2004. *The Law Code of Manu*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.51).

There of course might have been some cases of interpolation, but as we shall see below, it certainly wasn't that “considerable”.

In the introduction to the earliest known commentary on the *Manu-saṁhitā* by Medhatithi, we find the following verse written by the scribe of the commentary:

*mānyā kāpi manu-smṛtis-tad-ucitā vyākhyāpi medhātithēḥ  
sā luptaiva vidher-vaśād kvacid-āpi prāpyam na tat-pustakam  
kṣoṇīndro madanaḥ sahāraṇa-suto deśāntarād-āhṛtaiḥ  
jīṛṇoddhāram-acīkarat tata itas-tat-pustakair likhyate*

Earlier, there was another *Manu-saṁhitā* with a suitable commentary by Medhatithi. That is, however, lost now due to the influence of providence and is no longer available. The king named *Madana*, the son of *Sahāraṇa*, procured some scattered portions from various places and the remaining book was rewritten.

First, this verse does not say at all that “there was another *Manu-saṁhitā*”. It simply says that *Manu-smṛti* is “*mānyā*” - venerable.

Second, Medhatithi's commentary with most certainty is not the earliest commentary—it was preceded by Bhāruci's commentary (see below).

This section of the paper offers an interesting methodology—no ācārya, no authority has ever said that present *Manu-saṁhitā* is different from the original version and only because some scribe in some manuscript says that, and we are now obliged to accept that without question, as if it were a Vedic injunction. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that current editions of *Manu-smṛiti* have changed little over time if they have changed at all.

This issue is also addressed by Prof. V.P. Kane in his “*History of the Dharma-śāstra*”, Vol.1, p.269:

“In several Mss. of the *bhāṣya* at the end of several *adhyāyas* occurs a verse which says that a king named Madana, son of Sahāraṇa, brought copies of Medhātithi's commentary from another country and effected a restoration (*jīṛṇoddhāra*). This does not refer to the restoration of the text of Medhātithi, but to the completion of the library of the king, who was Madanapāla, son of Sadhāraṇa and flourished, as we shall see later on, in the latter half of the 14th century. ”

“Later on” means on the p.381-389 of the same Vol.1. The Madanapāla, son of Sadhāraṇa (Sahāraṇa in

Prakrit) was the king and a great patron of learned men and is attributed with several works, many of which were actually composed by his protege Viśveśvara Bhaṭṭa, the most famous of them is *Madana-pārijāta*—which is a work on *smṛti*. Madanapāla also compiled an Ayurvedic work called “*Madana-vinoda-nighaṇṭu*”, which is a dictionary of drugs. Besides that he also wrote several works on astronomy, among which - a commentary on *Sūrya-siddhānta* “*Sūrya-siddhānta-viveka*” completed in 1402 AD.

It is established that Medhātithi lived not earlier than 820 AD and not later than 1050 AD (Kane, Vol.1, p.275). So even if we still doubt that Medhātithi's commentary and his version of *Manu-smṛti* is different from the present version, such doubts have no ground whatsoever because besides Medhātithi there were many other old commentators of the *Manu-smṛti*, like for example:

- Bhāruci, 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> AD, who is identified as one of the proponents of the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* philosophy before Rāmānuja\*.
- Govindarāja, ca. 1050-1100 AD;
- Kullūka Bhaṭṭa, ca.1150-1300 AD;

Their readings almost entirely agree with Medhātithi's (except for several verses that are not commented upon by Medhātithi), and Kullūka Bhaṭṭa usually follows Medhātithi in his commentary while Medhātithi in many ways follows Bhāruci. None of them mention that previously there was another, different version of the *Manu-saṃhitā*. So if their versions agree with that of Medhātithi, then how could Madanapāla arrange “rewriting the remaining book” in 14<sup>th</sup> century AD?

Or, in words of Prof. Kane (Vol.1, p.273): “From Medhātithi's bhāṣya it is perfectly clear that the text of Manu on which he commented was practically the same that we have now.”

Another proof is that there is another very famous *dharma-śāstra* called *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* which, according to scholars (Kane, Olivelle) was “written” not later than 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. Here is what they say about it:

“Yājñavalkya (1.4) places Manu at the head of his list of the authors of *Dharmaśāstras*, the first such list in existence. Yājñavalkya's dependence on the MDh has been considered in detail by Kane (1960-75, I: 430) and I agree fully with his conclusion: “The correspondence of Yājñavalkya's words with the text of Manu is in most cases very close, so much so that one cannot help feeling that Yāj. had the *Manusmṛti* before him and purposely made an attempt to abridge the some loose expressions of Manu.” Indeed, the abridgment and the tighter organization of the material are the main features of Yājñavalkya. He has between 1003 and 1010 verses depending on the recension, as opposed to the 2680 in the MDh. We have clear examples of Yājñavalkya's making a single pithy verse out of several prolix ones of Manu.” (Olivelle, Patrick. 2004. *The Law Code of Manu*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.67).

*Manu-smṛti* did not deserve such attack and criticism by the authors of the paper we are critiquing. No one in ISKCON seems to try to introduce its teachings about *prayascittas*, *śrāddha* etc. But we just cannot deny that Śrīla Prabhupāda referred to Manu almost every time he spoke about women's duties. A mere search

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\* See:

- Kane, Vol.1, p.264-268
- J.Duncan, P.Derrett (ed.), *Bharuci's Commentary on the Manusmṛti*, Vol.1, Wiesbaden, 1975; pp.4-17.
- P.Olivelle, *Dharmaśāstra: a textual history*, in “*Hinduism and Law: An Introduction*”, Edited by Timothy Lubin, Donald R. Davis and Jayanth K. Krishnan. Cambridge University Press: 2010, pp.52-54.

in the Vedabase among his *vāṇī* for the words *Manu-smṛti* or *Manu-saṁhitā* returns more than fifty references, and the great majority of them are related to the protection of women and, less, to the capital punishment of murderers and general praise of *Manu-saṁhitā*. For instance:

“The revealed scriptures, like *Manu-saṁhitā* and similar others, are considered the standard books to be followed by human society.” BG, 3.21p.

“As for behavior, there are many rules and regulations guiding human behavior, such as the *Manu-saṁhitā*, which is the law of the human race. Even up to today, those who are Hindu follow the *Manu-saṁhitā*. Laws of inheritance and other legalities are derived from this book. Now, in the *Manu-saṁhitā* it is clearly stated that a woman should not be given freedom. That does not mean that women are to be kept as slaves, but they are like children. Children are not given freedom, but that does not mean that they are kept as slaves. The demons have now neglected such injunctions, and they think that women should be given as much freedom as men. However, this has not improved the social condition of the world. Actually, a woman should be given protection at every stage of life. She should be given protection by the father in her younger days, by the husband in her youth, and by the grown-up sons in her old age. This is proper social behavior according to the *Manu-saṁhitā*. But modern education has artificially devised a puffed—up concept of womanly life, and therefore marriage is practically now an imagination in human society. The social condition of women is thus not very good now, although those who are married are in a better condition than those who are proclaiming their so-called freedom. The demons, therefore, do not accept any instruction which is good for society, and because they do not follow the experience of great sages and the rules and regulations laid down by the sages, the social condition of the demoniac people is very miserable.” BG16.7p.

“The *Manu-saṁhitā* is the standard lawbook for humanity, and every human being is advised to follow this great book of social knowledge.” SB2.1.36p.

“The conclusion is that if we want real peace and order in the human society, we must follow the principles laid down by the *Manu-saṁhitā* and confirmed by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa.” SB7.8.48p.

And this one is especially relevant here:

“As we learn from the history of the *Mahābhārata*, or "Greater India," the wives and daughters of the ruling class, the *kṣatriyas*, knew the political game, but we never find that a woman was given the post of chief executive. This is in accordance with the injunctions of *Manu-saṁhitā*, but unfortunately *Manu-saṁhitā* is now being insulted, and the *āryans*, the members of Vedic society, cannot do anything. Such is the nature of Kali-yuga.” (SB10.4.5p).

So this is what is most important for us—Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke many times from *Manu-saṁhitā* and especially in relation to the protection of women. One cannot prove that *Manu-saṁhitā* is entirely non bona-fide simply by juxtaposing quotations about *mlecchas* and women.

#### NOT APPLICABLE IN KALI YUGA

Even if one were to believe that the *Manu-saṁhitā* that is found today is not an interpolated version of the

original one, one would still be discouraged to accept it as a current authority by the following statement of the *Parāśara-smṛti*

*kṛte tu mānavā dharmās tretāyām gautamāḥ smṛtāḥ  
dvāpare śāṅkhalikhitāḥ kalau pārāśarāḥ smṛtāḥ (1.24)*

The *Manu-saṁhitā* is applicable in *Satya-yuga*, the *Gautama-smṛti* is applicable in *Tretā-yuga*, the *Śāṅkha-likhita-smṛti* is applicable in *Dvāpara-yuga* and the *Parāśara-smṛti* is applicable in *Kali-yuga*.

Unfortunately, we are not provided here with any examples from the *Parāśara-smṛti* to see how it is different from *Manu-saṁhitā* and what exactly makes it applicable in *Kali-yuga* to the extent that it becomes even more applicable than the *Manu-smṛti*. In fact, although stating that *Mānava-dharma* is for *Kali-yuga*, *Parāśara-smṛti* refers to *Manu* so many times that one cannot help but think that *Manu* is the foremost authority on *Dharma* that *Parāśara* encourages us to follow. (For some examples of such quotes—see the “History of *Dharma-sastra*”, Vol.1, p.194).

Besides that, *Parāśara-smṛti*<sup>[21]</sup> (9.51) calls *Manu* “the knower of all scriptures”:

*manunā caivam ekena sarvasāstrāṇi jānatā  
prāyaścittaṁ tu tenoktaṁ goghnaś cāndrāyaṇaṁ caret*

“The performance of a Chandrayana has been enjoined by *Manu*, **the only one who knew all the scriptures**, as an expiation, under any circumstance, for the sin of cow killing.” [emphasis added]

As for the *Parāśara-smṛti* being the main *dharma-sāstra* for the *Kali-yuga*—it is in fact debatable, considering that *Manu-smṛti* is highly comprehensive and fully describes all the details of different divisions of *dharma*, while *Parāśara-smṛti* is much lesser and does not describe all the intricacies of *dharma*. In fact the section on *Vyavahāra*, which must describe legal procedures, is entirely absent from the *Parāśara-smṛti* (this was analyzed as early as 1830 by T.Strange in the Preface to his book “Hindu Law”<sup>\*</sup>).

So, here are some relevant quotes from the *Parāśara-smṛti*:

It also sometimes “speak highly” about women:

*striyo vṛddhās ca bālās ca na duṣyanti kadācana (7.35)*

“Women, old people and children are never contaminated.”

And it also prescribes their dependence on the husband:

*daridraṁ vyādhitaṁ mūrkhāṁ bhartāraṁ yāvamanyate  
sā śunī jāyate mṛtvā sūkarī ca punaḥ punaḥ (4.16)*

“That wife who disrespects her husband because of his poverty, disease or ignorance, after death again and again becomes a female dog and a pig.”

\* See: T.A.Strange, *Hindu Law*, London, 1830, p.xii.

*patyau jīvati yā nārī upoṣya vratam ācaret  
āyusyaṃ harate bhartuḥ sā nārī narakaṃ vrajet* (4.17)

“That woman who undertakes a fasting vow when her husband is still living takes away the life span of her husband and goes to hell”<sup>s</sup>

*apṛṣtvā caiva bhartāraṃ yā nārī kurute vratam  
sarvaṃ tad rākṣasān gacched ity evaṃ manur abravīt* (4.18)

“If a woman without asking permission from her husband took up a vow, all the results of such vow go to the rākṣasas, **thus Manu said.**”

And it seems that *Parāśara-smṛti* is similarly “not so broad in its outlook”:

*prāpte tu dvādaśe varṣe yaḥ kanyāṃ na prayacchati  
māsi māsi rajas tasyāḥ pibanti pitarāḥ svayam* (7.5)

“If the girls has reached the age of twelve and the parents have not yet given her in marriage, they should personally drink her menstrual liquid month after month.”

*mātā caiva pitā caiva jyeṣṭho bhrātā tathaiva ca  
trayas te narakaṃ yānti dṛṣtvā kanyāṃ rajasvalām* (7.6)

“The mother, father, elder brother of the girl—all these three go to hell if they see that her menstruation began.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda once mentioned this injunctions from the *Parāśara-smṛti*:

“I do not know exactly what is that śāstra, but they say that if the girl before marriage has menstruation, then the father has to eat that menstrual liquid.” (Morning Walk -- Māyāpur, February 9, 1976).

So the words of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura are very much relevant here:

“Moreover, the rules and regulations of a particular *Dharma-śāstra* were followed according to the particular place. In the opinion of some persons, at the beginning of the Kali age the *Manu Dharma-śāstra* and the doctrine of *Parāśara Muni* were prominently accepted, while the other twenty *Dharma-śāstras* were neglected. Others say that the doctrine of *Hārīta* was prominent and the activities prescribed by the other *Dharma-śāstras* were neglected. **Generally, whatever one found convenient was accepted, without regard for other's consent and liking.**” [bold emphasis added] (Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava, Prakṛti-jana-kāṇḍa<sup>[22]</sup>).

#### NOT A PRINCIPAL AUTHORITY

<sup>s</sup> In his *Dig-darśini-ṭikā* commentary to *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (12.73-74) Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī quotes this verse along with a verse from the *Manu-smṛti* (5.155): *nāsti strīṇāṃ pṛthag yajño na vratam nāpyupoṣaṇam, patiṃ śuśrūṣate yena tena svarge mahīyate*—“No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women apart from their husbands; if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven”. He explains that this verse refers to those who did not ask permission from their husbands or to those women who are not *vaiṣṇavas*.



A similar point is made by Srila Madhvācārya in his work *Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya*:

*vaiṣṇavāni purāṇāni pañcarātrātmakatvataḥ  
pramāṇāny eva manvādyāḥ smṛtayo 'py anukūlataḥ*

*Purāṇas* which establish the supremacy of Vishnu are authority as they convey what is stated in *Pañcarātra*. *Smṛti śāstras* like those of Manu and others are also authority so far as they are consistent with these. (Part I)

As we have already shown above, *Manu-saṁhitā* is very much consistent with the best among the Vaiṣṇava *Purāṇas* – the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Thus it is remarkably the only *smṛti* named by Madhvācārya (*manv-ādyāḥ*, but not “*parāśara-ādyāḥ*”, although Parāśara was the father of Vyāsa, Madhvācārya's guru, or *hārīta-ādyāḥ*). So, this also indirectly shows the preeminence of the *Manu-smṛti* over all other *smṛtis*.

Not only Śrī Madhva but many other *ācāryas* also mention and laud *Manu-saṁhitā*. Sanātana Gosvāmī quotes it many times in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (e.g. 1.92, 3.213, 3.310, 4.84, 4.351, 9.274, 11.796); Jīva Gosvāmī quotes it in his *Tattva-* and *Bhakti-sandarbhās*, as well as in his *Gopāla-campū* and Śrīdhara Svāmī even states in his commentary on the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* that Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma Themselves studied *Manu-smṛti* from Sandīpani Muni ('*dharmān' manv-ādi-dharma-śāstrāṇi* – commentary to 10.45.34).

Citing *śruti* (*Taittirīya-saṁhita* from the *Kṛṣṇa-Yajur-veda*), Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa also defends the authority of Manu in his *Govinda-bhāṣya* (2.1.1):

*manor āptatvaṁ tu taittirīyāḥ paṭhanti— “yad vai kiṁ ca manur avadat tad-bheṣajam” iti*

“However, Manu is authoritative because it is said in the *Taittirīya-saṁhitā* (2.2.10.2) “whatever Manu has declared is a cure.”

The authors previously told us that Jaimini's *Pūrva-mīmāṁsā sūtras* are “a valid and acceptable authority” because “they have been referred to by many *ācāryas* in their works, e.g. Srila Jiva Goswami in his *Kṛṣṇa-sandarbha* and Srila Baladeva Vidyabhushan in his *Govinda-bhāṣya*”, but here we see that those very *ācāryas* also refer to the *Manu-saṁhitā*, then why the authors want us to reject it?

So, we just cannot dismiss the words of our Founder-*Ācārya*:

“As we learn from the history of the *Mahābhārata*, or "Greater India," the wives and daughters of the ruling class, the *kṣatriyas*, knew the political game, but we never find that a woman was given the post of chief executive. This is in accordance with the injunctions of *Manu-saṁhitā*, but unfortunately *Manu-saṁhitā* is now being insulted, and the *āryans*, the members of Vedic society, cannot do anything. Such is the nature of Kali-yuga.” SB10.4.5p.

Another *smṛti* says:

*vedārtha-pratibaddhatvāt prāmānyaṁ tu manoḥ smṛtam  
manv-ārtha-viparītā yā smṛtiḥ sā na praśasyate*

“Manu, however, is the authority, the tradition declares, because he is firmly anchored to the

meanings of the Vedas. Any *smṛti* opposed to the tenor of Manu is not approved.” (*Bṛhaspati-smṛti* as quoted in “Olivelle, Patrick. 2004. *The Law Code of Manu*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.69”).

## APPARENT CONTRADICTION IN THE HARI-BHAKTI-VILĀSA

### POSITIVE EVIDENCE

*tāntrikeṣu ca mantreṣu dikṣāyām yoṣitām api  
sādhvinām adhikāro 'sti sūdrādīnām ca sad-dhiyām* (1.194)

In all matters of initiations in *tantras* and *mantras*, saintly ladies have all rights, and so do the *sūdras* and others who are dedicated to serving their spiritual masters. (The word '*adhikārah*' is to be noted in the original Sanskrit.)

*āgamoktena mārgēṇa strī-sūdrair api pūjanam  
kartavyam śraddhayā viṣṇoś cintayitvā patiṁ hṛdi* (1.195)

Through the path shown in the *āgamas*, ladies and *sūdras* can also worship the deities. They should faithfully perform such worship, thinking about their respective Lords in their hearts.

*strīṇām apy adhikāro 'sti viṣṇor ārāadhanādiṣu  
pati-priya-ratānām ca śrutir eṣā sanātani* (1.197)

Ladies too have all right to conduct the worship, etc., of Lord Vishnu, and so do those girls who are unmarried and desire a suitable husband. This is the verdict of the eternal *śruti*. (Again, the word '*adhikārah*' is to be noted in the original Sanskrit.)

*agastya-saṁhitāyām śrī-rāma-mantra-rājam uddiśya—  
śucivratatamāḥ sūdrā dhārmikā dvija-sevakāḥ  
striyaḥ pati-vratās cānye pratilomānulomajāḥ  
lokās cāṅḍāla-paryantāḥ sarve 'py atrādhikāriṇaḥ* (1.198)

In the *Agastya Saṁhitā*, indicating the *Śrī-rāma-mantra-rāja*, it is said, “All have equal qualification for this mantra, whether they be a *sūdra* who is dedicated to his vows and eager to serve the *brāhmaṇas*, ladies who are dedicated to their husbands, or dog-eaters who are born of any type of marriage (*pratiloma* or *anuloma*).

*svapna-labdhe striyā datte mālā-mantre ca try akṣare  
ekākṣare tathā mantre siddhādīn naiva śodhayet* (1.211)

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

*gr̥hasthā vanagās caiva yatayo brahmacāriṇaḥ  
striyaḥ sūdrādayaś caiva sarve yatrādhikāriṇaḥ* (1.218)

The *gr̥hastha*, *vānaprastha*, *sannyāsī*, *brahmacārī*, ladies and *sūdras* are all eligible to receive the [*Gopāla*] *mantra*. (The word '*adhikāriṇaḥ*' is again to be noted in the original Sanskrit.)

*striyo vā yadi vā śūdrā brāhmaṇāḥ kṣatriyādayaḥ  
pūjayitvā śilā-cakraṁ labhante śāśvataṁ padam (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 5.452)*

All attain to the eternal spiritual world by worshipping the *śālagrāma-śilā*, whether a lady, a *śūdra*, *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, etc.

### NEGATIVE EVIDENCE

*yoṣito nāvamanyeta na cāsām viśvased budhaḥ  
na caiversyur bhavet tāsu nādhikuryāt kadācana (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 11.708)*

A wise man should not disregard, nor put faith in a woman. He should not become envious of them and **should never give them any authority or rights.** (Emphasis added.)

### RESOLVING THE CONTRADICTION

The compound word *nādhikuryāt* in the negative evidence directly contradicts the word *adhikāriṇāḥ* in the previous positive evidence. How to resolve this contradiction?

The emphasis on the word *adhikāra* here is artificial. It has a broad range of meanings. For instance, Apte's dictionary<sup>[23]</sup> tells us that the word means: “superintendence”, “position”, “authority”, “watching over” and then also “a right”, “authority”, “a qualification”, “a claim”, “privilege”. So in one case it is used in the sense of “right” and in another—in “position of authority”. When someone has a right to something (*adhikāri*) it does not necessarily mean that he is in a position of authority (as a superintendent). Depending on the context, the word means different things. The authors apparently have not considered this.

Thus in the first set of quotes the *adhikāra* is “eligibility” for worship and **receiving** the mantra, while in another the *adhikāra* is the “power” or “authority” that is not to be given to women. Thus, the contradiction is only apparent.

“The *nādhikuryāt kadācana* statement in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* which speaks against women being given authority or rights has been taken from the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*. A closer look at the current editions of the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* gives the original Sanskrit text of the statement in a different way that completely changes the meaning:

In the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* editions published by two separate publishers, the same verse is found as follows,

*yoṣito nāvamanyeta na cāsām viśvased budhaḥ  
na caiversyā bhavet tāsu na dhik kuryāt kadācana (3.12.30)*

A wise man should neither disregard nor put faith in a woman. He should not become envious of them and **should never curse them.** (Emphasis added.)

A simple change from *nādhikuryāt kadācana* to *na-dhik-kuryāt kadācana* (changing 'nā' to 'na' and 'ku' to 'kku') makes a world of difference in the way the verse is understood.

Some may be inclined to think that this version of *na-dhik-kuryāt kadācana* might be a recent interpolation

in the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*. However, in the commentary of Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī (written sometime between 1350 and 1450 AD) on this verse of *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* the alternate reading is recognized:

*na dhik kuryāt dhik-kāraṁ na kuryāt* (commentary on the same verse)  
'Na dhik kuryāt' means one that should not curse them.

In this way all of the statements of *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* can be reconciled.

Unfortunately resorting to variant readings from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* does not in fact resolve this apparent "contradiction" in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* but gives rise to another question: How should we understand that Sanātana Gosvāmī and Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī intentionally or unknowingly used the reading of the verse that causes contradiction and then commented upon it without mentioning or resolving the possible contradiction?

Other points to consider:

1. The reading "*na dhik kuryāt*" is not a standard one as given in the Critical Edition of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>[24]</sup>, which means that only a minority of manuscripts gives this reading;
2. Different editions of Śrīdhara Svāmī's commentary on the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* have completely different commentaries to these two alternate readings of the verse\*, so obviously one of them could easily be such "recent interpolation". Given the fact that *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* and most of the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* manuscripts agree on the "*nādhikūryat*" reading, one may be inclined to stay with this version.

So, in such a situation without proper critical process we shall hardly know which reading of the verse is actually correct and was actually commented upon by Śrīdhara Svāmī.

## OTHER SMṚTIS AND ITIHASAS

There are a number of other *smṛtīs* that differ with the *Manu-smṛti* regarding women and their rights. A few examples:

### WOMEN CAN CHANT GAYATRI

*manasā bhartur-aticāre tri-rātraṁ yāvakaṁ kṣīraudanaṁ vā bhuñjānāghaḥ śayītoradhvaṁ tri-rātrād-apsu nimagnāyāḥ sāvitry-aṣṭa-śatena śīrobhir-juhuyāt-pūtā bhavatīti vijñāyate* (Vasiṣṭha Smṛti [16] 21.7)

If a lady thinks ill of her husband in her mind, then she should keep barley grains for three nights in water and offer them along with flowers in sacrifice while chanting *Gāyatrī* for a hundred and eight times. Thus she becomes purified.

Unfortunately, *Vasiṣṭha-smṛti* does not actually support the idea that women can chant *Gāyatrī*. In this verse the past participle passive "*nimagnāyāḥ*" is in genitive case and the whole construction of the phrase is genitive absolute (*sataḥ ṣaṣṭhī*), meaning that the offerings and oblations with mantras should be done **while** the wife is immersed in water. In such state she cannot offer anything in fire.

So, it is actually such a wife, who should be eating (*bhuñjānā*) only barley (*yāvakaṁ*) or rice boiled in milk

\* See, for example: *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, Śrīdhara Svāmī *kṛta Sva-prakāśākhya-ṭīkā sahitam*, edited by Jīvananda Vidyāsāgara Bhaṭṭācārya, Kolkata, 1882 ["*nādhikuryāt*"] and *Śrī Viṣṇupurāṇam*, *Viṣṇucittyātma-prakāśākhya Śrīdhariya vyākhyā-dvayopetam*, Veṅkaṭeśvara Steam Press, Bombay, 1907 ["*na dhik kuryāt*"].

(*kṣīraudanam vā*) for three days (“nights” - *tri-rātram*) and sleep on the ground (*adhah śayitā*) then (*ūrdhvam*) after three nights (*tri-rātrād*) she should immerse herself in the water (*apsu-nimagnāyāḥ*) while her husband performs 800 oblations with *Sāvitrī* (*gāyatrī*) mantra and *Śiraḥ-mantra* (*āpo jyotī raso'mṛtaṁ brahma bhūr bhuvaḥ suvar om namaḥ*—both of these mantras are recorded in *Taittirīya-Āraṇyaka*, 10.35.1).

For comparison, here is a literal translation of the verses by G.Buhler<sup>[25]</sup> (which is also affirmed by P.Olivelle<sup>[26]</sup>):

*manasā bhartur aticāre trirātram yāvakaṁ kṣīrodanam vā bhuñjānādhaḥ śayitordhvam tri-rātrād apsu nimagnāyāḥ sāvitrī-aṣṭa-śatena śirobhir juhuyāt pūtā bhavatīti vijñāyate*

“If (a wife) has been mentally unfaithful to her husband, she shall live on barley or rice boiled in milk during three days, and sleep on the bare ground. After the three days (have expired), the (husband) shall offer eight hundred burnt-oblations, (reciting) the *Sāvitrī* (and the *Mantra* called) *Śiras*, while she is immersed in water. It is declared in the Veda that she becomes pure (thereby).” (21.6).

Footnote to this *sūtra* by G.Buhler: “Afterwards in order to purify her who is immersed in water, i.e. has plunged into water, he shall offer eight hundred, i.e. (such) a number of burnt-oblations with the *Śiras*, i.e. (the words) “Om, ye waters, who are splendour, juice, and ambrosia,” &c., which are joined to the *Gāyatrī*.”— [the commentary by] Kṛṣṇapaṇḍita. The *Śiras*, or ‘head,’ is again mentioned below, XXV, 13; see also Vishnu LV, 9. This and the following two rules refer to offences committed with males of equal caste.”

*vāk-sambandha etad eva māsam caritvordhvam māsād apsu nimagnāyāḥ sāvitrīyāś caturbhir aṣṭa-śataiḥ śirobhir juhuyāt pūtā bhavatīti vijñāyate.*

“If (a wife) has held an (improper) conversation (with another man), she must perform the same penance during a month. After (the expiration of) the month, (the husband) shall offer four times eight hundred burnt-oblations, (reciting) the *Sāvitrī* (and the *Mantra* called) *Śiras*, while she is immersed in water. It is declared in the Veda that she becomes pure (thereby).” (21.7).

*vyavāye tu saṁvatsaram ghrta-paṭam dhārayed gomaya-garte kuśa-prastare vā śayitordhvam saṁvatsarād apsu nimagnāyāḥ sāvitrīyāṣṭa-śatena śirobhir juhuyāt pūtā bhavatīti vijñāyate*

“But if (a wife) has actually committed adultery, she shall wear during a year a garment smeared with clarified butter, and sleep on a mat of *Kuśa* grass, or in a pit filled with cow-dung. After (the expiration of) the year, (the husband) shall offer eight hundred burnt-oblations, (reciting) the *Sāvitrī* (and the *Mantra* called) *Śiras*, while she is immersed in water. It is declared in the Veda that she becomes pure (thereby).” (21.8).

Additional relevant information regarding *Vasiṣṭha-smṛti*:

1. *Vasiṣṭha-smṛti* equates women with *sūdras* at least in relation to the *ācamana*: *strī-sūdraṁ sprṣṭābhir eva ca*—“Women and *sūdras* become pure simply by touching [the water]” (3.34). A similar quote appears in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (3.193) – *strī-sūdrāvāsya-saṁsparśa-mātreṇāpi viśudhyataḥ* – “Women and *sūdras* are purified by simply touching water to their mouth”.
2. The chapter on *strī-dharma* opens with the *sūtra* “*asvatantrā strī puruṣa-pradhānā*” (5.1) - “A woman

is not independent, the males are her masters” and Vasiṣṭha further substantiates this statement by quoting the famous verse from the *Manu-smṛti* (9.3):

*athāpy udāharanti:  
pitā rakṣati kaumāre bhartā rakṣati yauvane  
putraś ca sthavire bhāve na strī svātantryam arhati*

“Now they quote also (the following verse): 'Their fathers protect them in childhood, their husbands protect them in youth, and their sons protect them in age; a woman is never fit for independence.’” (*Vasiṣṭha-smṛti*, 5.3).

Besides this quotation, Vasiṣṭha directly quotes from or refers to Manu more than 50 times—much more than from anyone else! (For the detailed description—see *The History of Dharma-sastra*, Vol.1, pp.54-57).

So, the statement “*Vasiṣṭha-smṛti* differs from Manu regarding women and their rights” does not seem to be true.

3. While describing *upanayana* (in chapter 11) and studying the Vedas (in chapter 3) and the duties of women (chapter 5) Vasiṣṭha does not say a single word about women undergoing initiation (while he prescribes different ages for *upanayana* for different *varṇas*), so it is a question then—if they did not receive *Gāyatrī* and other mantras from the guru, how would they know it to utter 800 times as a *prāyaścitta*?

#### SAME RIGHTS IN VEDIC MANTRAS

Śrīla Madhvācārya quotes the *Vyoma-saṁhitā* in his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* (1.1.1) as follows,

*āhur apy uttama-strīṇām adhikāraṁ tu vaidike  
yathorvaśī yamī caiva śacyādyaś ca tathāparā*

Elevated ladies are definitely entitled to the Vedas, just like *Urvaśī*, *Yamī*, *Śaci*, etc.

An elaborate analysis of this topic (on the basis of the *bhāṣya* and its sub-commentaries) can be found elsewhere on the Internet.

And it is ironic that the authors quote Madhvācārya on this since we do not know any example of a famous historical woman saint in the *Madhva-sampradāya*.

#### TWO TYPES OF LADIES

The *Hārīta-smṛti*, which is much older and broader in its outlook than the current edition of the *Manu-smṛti*, speaks about two types of women as follows,

*dvividhāḥ striyaḥ. brahma-vādinyaḥ sadyo-vadhvaś ca. tatra brahma-vādinīnām upanayanam  
agnīndhanam vedādhyayanam sva-grhe-ca bhikṣācaryā iti. sadyo-vadhūnām tūpasthite vivāhe kathañcid-  
upanayana-mātram kṛtvā vivāhaḥ kāryaḥ (21.23)*

There are two types of ladies — the *brahmavādinī*, who doesn't desire to marry, and the *sadyovadhū*, who wishes to marry. For the *brahmavādinī* there is provision for receiving the sacred thread, conducting the fire sacrifice, studying the Vedas, and begging alms at her own home. The *sadyovadhū* at the time of marriage should only be invested with the sacred thread and then married.

We have partially discussed this section above. Again, as we have pointed out, the phrase “*sva-gr̥he ca bhikṣācaryā*” means that she should beg alms at her own home, while boys could go out to get *bhikṣā*—another evidence of inequality.

Moreover, this quote from *Hārīta-smṛti* is not complete, it is said further that the ceremony of *samāvartana* (finishing the education) for girls should be performed before the appearance of menses (*prāg rajasah samāvartanam iti hārītoktyā* – quoted in *Vīramitrodaya, Saṁskāra-prakāśa*, p.404). Prof. Kane writes about this quote as follows: “Therefore such *brahmavadinī* women had *upanayana* performed in the 8th year from conception, then they studied Vedic lore and finished student-hood at the age of puberty.” (*History of Dharma-sastra*, Vol.2, p.295). Even if we accept this somewhat unusual for *dharma-śāstras* statement as authentic, it is still just another example of inequality.

As for the *Hārīta-smṛti*—there are several *dharma-śāstras* under the name of *Hārīta-smṛti* but this particular version of it that contains all these quotes (which is a *sūtra* work - *Hārīta-dharma-sūtra*) to the best of our knowledge has not yet been published and exists only in quotations scattered over different commentaries on *dharma-śāstra* and only a single manuscript of it has been found\*. Given all this—that we still do not know the general outlook and contents of the work—how can we come to the conclusion that it is “much older and broader in its outlook than the current edition of the *Manu-smṛti*”?

Earlier the authors tried to prove that the original *Manu-smṛti* has been lost and therefore we should not rely upon it and here we are encouraged to rely on the *Hārīta-smṛti*, however the irony of it is that the *Hārīta-smṛti* has not yet really been found!

Another serious problem with the proposal that the current edition of *Manu-smṛti* is not “broad in its outlook” is the implication that anyone who accepts it as an authority (Śrīla Prabhupāda has certainly said that *Manu-saṁhitā* is an authority) must also be “not so broad in his outlook”.

Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode makes similar points about different types of ladies:

*strī-loka śuddha-bhakta ha-ile anya strī-lokake nāma vijñayera pasārī ha-ite pārena. puruṣādigake nāma dite pārena nā. tabe adhika bayaḥprāptā mānyā strī sthala-viśeṣe satarka tāra sahita puruṣa-digera nikaṭa nāma vikraya karite pārena. nāma pracāra-sthale vṛddhā o bālikā strī vyatīta sambandha-rahita anya strī-lokake kona puruṣa-pracāraka avalokana vā sambāṣaṇa karibena nā.*

Women who are pure devotees can also become traveling saleswomen for distributing the holy name, but they cannot give the holy name to men. According to time, place and circumstance, and with great care and caution, mature women can distribute the holy name to men. Apart from

\* For more information see:

1) Parāśara-dharma-saṁhitā with the commentary of Sāyaṇa-Mādhavācārya, edited by V.S. Islampurkar, 1893, Vol.1, p.16-17.

2) The Indian Antiquary, Vol.25 (1896), p.147-148;

3) V.P.Kane, The History of Dharma-sastra, Vol.1, pp.70-75.

elderly women or very young girls, men preachers should avoid discussion with women. (*Godruma-kalpāṭavī*)

*strī-lokera gṛhasthāśrama o sthala-viśeṣe vānaprastha vyatīta anya kona āśrama svīkartavya naya. kona āsādhāraṇa-śakti-sampannā strī vidya, dharma o sāmārthya lābha kariyā yadi brahmacarya vā sannyāsa-āśrama grahaṇa kariyā sāphalya-lābha kariyā thākena vā lābha karena, tāhā sādharmaṇataḥ komalaśraddha, komalaśarīra o komalabuddhi strī jātira pakṣe vidhi nahe*

Women are allowed to enter only the *gṛhastha āśrama* and in special cases the *vānaprastha āśrama*. Although some women, being exceptionally qualified by achieving high education, expertise in understanding the scripture, and the power of abstinence, may take to the *brahmacārī* or *sannyāsī āśrama* and obtain all success, it is not the normal rule, as women are usually of weaker body, faith, and discriminating power. (*Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta*, chapter 2, part 4)

And here is yet another quotation from Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, which appears in his Bengali translation of the *Samskāra-dīpikā* by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī<sup>[27]</sup> where it is stated that even women can accept *sannyāsa* if they are qualified. In his translation Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura gives his vision of it:

The original text of the *Samskāra-dīpikā* :

*...yathā śrī-maharabhoḥ pārśadasya śrī-dāmodarasya śikhā-sūtra-tyāgena kaupīna-dhāraṇena ca (kintu) yoga-paṭṭanam vinā sannyāsenā svarūpākhyā abhūt. yathā śrī-mādhavī-vaiṣṇavī apīti. (22)*

Bengali translation by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura (bold emphasis added):

*yemana, śrī-mahāprabhura pārśada śrī-dāmodarera yoga-paṭṭa vyatīta śikhā-sūtra-tyāga o kaupīna dhāraṇera dvārā sannyāsa-grahaṇe 'svarūpa' ākhyā haiyāchila. yemana, śrī-mādhavi vaiṣṇavī-o—ini **grhe thākiyā** cira-khaṇḍa-dvaya grahaṇa-pūrvaka sannyāsa lābha kariyāchilena.*

English translation:

“Just like Mahāprabhu's associate Śrī Dāmodara, who gave up his *śikhā* and sacred thread and accepted a loincloth but not the traditional saffron cloth of a *sannyāsī*, became known as Svarūpa after taking *sannyāsa*. Or just like Śrī Mādhavī, who although being a women, *vaiṣṇavī*, attained *sannyāsa* by taking two pieces of torn cloth and **remaining at home.**”

Pay attention to the bolded words in the Ṭhākura's translation above.

Although apparently *Samskāra-dīpikā* allows some women to take *sannyāsa*, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura in his translation shows the proper way to do that—and it is quite different from the way men take *sannyāsa* and leave home.

### WOMEN ARE NOT ON THE LEVEL OF SUDRAS

There is sometimes an idea that women are on an equal level with *sūdras* or even lower than them. *Hārīta*, too, in the same *smṛti*, rejects the idea by giving a solid argument as follows,

*na sūdra-samāḥ striyaḥ. nahi sūdra-yonau brāhmaṇa-kṣatriya-vaiśyā jāyante. tasmāc-chandasā striyaḥ*



*saṁskāryāḥ.*

Ladies are not the same as *sūdras*. Why? Because it is not possible that *brahmanas*, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas* will be born from the womb of a parent who is *sūdra*. Therefore, one must educate and initiate ladies in all sacrifices [or else they'll become *sūdras* and there will be fear of everyone degrading into *sūdras*].

Although the argument appears to be solid and sounds like “broad-minded”, still one can easily notice the unspoken premise in it: “a *brāhmaṇa* is one who is born from a *brāhmaṇa* father and *brāhmaṇī* mother, and a *sūdra* is one who is born from the *sūdra-yoni*”, or, in other words, the same “caste by birth” consideration. Śrīla Prabhupāda repeatedly said “*janmanā jāyate sūdraḥ saṁskārād bhaved dvijaḥ*” - it does not matter which *yoni* (womb) one is born from, until the *saṁskāras* are performed by mere birth one is a *sūdra*.

Again, until we see this recension of the *Hārīta-smṛti*, we can retain doubts regarding its “broad outlook”, since in another, more well-known version of it, *Laghu-hārīta-smṛti*, there is a verse that also speaks about the same “birth considerations”:

*brāhmaṇyām brāhmaṇenaivam utpanno brāhmaṇaḥ smṛtaḥ*

“The child born of a *brāhmaṇa* in the womb of a *brāhmaṇa* wife is known as a *brāhmaṇa*.” (*Laghu-Hārīta-smṛti*, 1.15, as quoted by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura in “*Brahmana and Vaisnava*”, *Prakṛti-jana-kāṇḍa*).

From another angle of vision this quote also does not really prove that people will not degrade into *sūdras*—because birth alone does not determine the *varṇa*, so given the fact that the women are not on the level of *sūdras*, it will not save their sons from degrading into *sūdras* because according to the *śāstra*, people in Kali-yuga are indeed degrading into *sūdras*, the only remedy is *vaiṣṇava-dikṣā* and *harināma*. It is not that only by the birth from a non-*sūdra* woman, one automatically becomes non-*sūdra*.

In the following lecture Śrīla Prabhupāda speaks about differences between women, men and *sūdras*:

“So this combination, Vedic idea that woman must be under the... They have got three stages of life. First stage under the father, second stage under the husband. Therefore initiation, to the woman, there is no need of, I mean to say, sacred thread, because she's considered to be the half body of her husband. She's half-shareholder in everything of the husband; therefore there was no necessity. Even you'll find in the picture of Rāmacandra and Sītā, Rāmacandra has got sacred thread but Sītā hasn't got. That is the system. So this is Vedic system, that woman is given the *mantra* but not the sacred thread. Even she's born of a *brāhmaṇa* father, there is no such system. No. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* you'll find, *stri-sūdra-dvijabandhūnām*.

*mām hi pārtha vyapāsṛitya ye 'pi syuḥ pāpa-yonayaḥ  
striyo sūdrā tathā vaiśyās te 'pi yānti parām gatim [Bg. 9.32]*

“For... From becoming Kṛṣṇa consciousness there is no, I mean to say, deter, anything that can hamper for becoming Kṛṣṇa conscious. But so far this Vedic system is... And this offering of sacred thread, formerly in the Vedic age it was offered only to the *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, higher class, not to the *sūdrās*.

So at the present moment everyone is *śūdrā*. Then why the sacred thread is offered? No, the sacred thread is not offered to the *śūdrā*, it is offered to the highest *brāhmaṇa* in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. And how? Because in India the caste system is by birth. But that is not recognized. So even one is not born in a *brāhmaṇa* family, a *kṣatriya* family, still Sanātana Gosvāmī says that by the process of initiation, any man can become a twice-born *brāhmaṇa*.” (Initiation Lecture, Boston, May 21, 1968).

So, the distinction was retained—although everyone was “spiritually equal”, still only male disciples received the sacred thread from Śrīla Prabhupāda, while female disciples didn't.

### OTHER EXAMPLES OF WOMEN IN THE VEDIC AGE

The time depicted in *Rāmāyaṇa* is considered to be when the Vedic Age was at its highest point. In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, we find the following evidence regarding ladies,

*sā kṣauma-vasanā hṛṣṭā nityaṁ vrata-parāyaṇā  
agnim juhoti sma tadā mantravat kṛta-maṅgalā (2.17.10)*

And cheerful Kauśalyā, who was dressed in fine silk and was dedicated to her vows, offered a fire sacrifice by uttering mantras to make everything very auspicious.

Commentary to this verse by Govindarāja<sup>[28]</sup> from the *Śrī-sampradāya*, written on Lord Venkateśvara's order:

*juhoti hāvayati. ata eva hāvayantīm iti vakṣyati. brāhmaṇair iti śeṣaḥ.*

**Translation:** “Offered oblations” means that she had others to offer them [on her behalf]. That is why [in the next verse] it is said “*hāvayantīm*” [Rāma saw her mother as] “offering sacrifice through others.” It means “through the *brāhmaṇas*”. [End of the translation]

Here is the next verse (2.17.8) where the causative verb *hāvayantīm* is used:

*praviśya ca tadā rāmo mātur antaḥ-puraṁ śubham  
dadarśa mātaraṁ tatra hāvayantīm hutāśanam*

“Then, having entered the auspicious inner chambers of His mother, Rāma saw her there having oblations offered in the sacrifice on her behalf.”

Another commentary by Satya Tīrtha (*Madhva-sampradāya*):

*juhoti sma svayam evājuhota. nanu strīṇāṁ vedādhikārābhāvāt katham juhotīty uktam iti cen na.  
daśarathasya vaivasvata manutvena tat-patnyāḥ kausalyāyā mānavītvenottama-strītvād vedādhikāra  
sambhavāt. “āhur apy uttama-strīṇāṁ adhikāraṁ tu vaidike” ity ādi-smṛteḥ. tad uktam vāmane:*

*bhaviṣyad antare bhūtvā manur vaivasvato bhavān  
tava vaṁśe bhavāmy aṅga rāmo dāśarathiḥ svayam*

*punar daśaratho bhūtvā tvam evāsi pitā mama  
mad-datta piṅḍa-dānena muktis te bhavitā dhruvam iti*

*na kevalam svayam juhōti api tu brāhmaṇair apīty āha - hāvayantīti.*

**Translation:** “*Juhoti*” means that she indeed personally offered oblations. If you say “But women are not qualified to study the Vedas, so how it is said that she offered oblations?” we reply no, it is not so. Because Daśaratha was Vaivasvata Manu, his wife was the wife of Manu, therefore she was in the category of highest ranked women (*uttama-strī*) and therefore it was possible for her to study the Vedas. The primeval *smṛti* says: “But it is said that women of the highest rank have the eligibility to study the Vedas.” It is described in the *Vāmana-purāṇa*:

“You were Vaivasvata Manu. I belong to your dynasty, my dear, as Rāma, son of Daśaratha. Again, having become Daśaratha, you are my father. By my offering of *piṇḍa* you will surely attain liberation.”

She did not only offer oblations herself, but also through the *brāhmaṇas*, that is why the causative word “*hāvayantī*” is used.

And even *Sat-kriyā-sāra-dīpikā*, which is a *vaiṣṇava-smṛti*, does not seem to endorse women uttering mantras in *lāja-homa* during *vivāha*—when a bride offers *lāja*, the priest (or husband) chants *mantras*:

*om iyaṁ nāry-upabrute agnau lājān āvapatnī  
dīrghayur astu me patiḥ śataṁ varṣāṇi jīvatvedhantām nau hari bhaktiḥ  
svāhā - idam kṛṣṇāya idam na mama*

“This woman speaks, while offering *lāja* to the fire: May my husband be long lived, may he live a hundred years. May our devotion to the Lord flourish.”<sup>[29]</sup>

Even if we accept that Kauśalya directly offered oblations into the fire, we can safely conclude that this is just another instance of a rule that is not applicable in Kali-yuga (as confirmed by Apastamba above) since we do not find so many examples of this in the *śāstra*.

## THE PATH OF THE TANTRAS

However, the path of the *Tantras* and *Āgamas* was open to women and *sūdras*. The endorsement of this path by Sri Caitanya and his associates is evident from the stark contrast that the following statement shows in its attitude towards the *sūdras*:

*kībā vipra kibā nyāsi sūdra kene naya  
yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā sei guru haya (Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya 8.128)*

Whether one is a *brāhmaṇa*, a *sannyāsī* or a *sūdra*—regardless of what he is—he can become a spiritual master if he knows the science of Krishna.

Śrīla Prabhupāda makes it evident in his purport on this verse of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* that the term ‘guru’ can be applied equally to *vartma-pradarśaka*, *śikṣā* and *dīkṣā gurus*.

However, neither Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu nor Śrīla Prabhupāda in his purport say anything about women-gurus—men are mentioned three times - ‘vipra’, ‘nyāsi’, ‘sūdra’, but not ‘strī’, ‘nārī’ or ‘yoṣitī’. So we

see this as another extrapolation.

### THE TANTRAS ARE A BONAFIDE WAY OF WORSHIPPING THE LORD

Some *vaiṣṇavas* cringe upon hearing the word 'tantra', associating the term with ritualistic drinking of alcohol and performance of ritualistic sex.

The statement “The *Tantras* are a bonafide way of worshipping the Lord” is a very general and hence a very bold one, since the word 'tantra' historically **is** a term usually denoting non-orthodox practices like drinking alcohol or performance of ritualistic sex. That's precisely why some *vaiṣṇavas* cringe upon hearing this word. So without explanation of exactly which *tantras* are bonafide (*Vaiṣṇava-tantras* (*Sātvata-tantras*) as opposed to *Śākta-tantras* or *Śaiva-tantras*), the authors risk an unpleasant confusion. This is another example of extrapolating the “**allowed**” *tantras* to mean “**all**” *tantras*.

In the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*, however, Krishna clarifies the situation:

*vaidikas tāntriko miśra iti me tri-vidho makhaḥ  
trayāṇām ipsitenaiva vidhinā mām samarcaret* (11.27.7)

One should carefully worship me by selecting one of the three methods by which I receive sacrifice: Vedic, *tāntric*, or mixed.

In their commentaries on this verse our *ācāryas* explain the word '*tāntric*' as follows:

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura:

*evam tāntrikaḥ gautamīya-tantrādy-uktaḥ  
“Tāntrika means procedures described in works such as *Gautamīya-tantra*”.*

[*Gautamīya-tantra* is a bonafide *Vaiṣṇava-tantra*; other *tantras* may be not]

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura:

*“vaidika, pāñcarātrika o miśra-vidhi-sakala bhajanīya vastuke samyag-rūpe pūjā karite samartha haya”*

*“The Vedic, **Pāñcarātrika**, and a combination of both, are the three methods to properly worship the Supreme Lord.”*

So, the '*tāntric*' means “*pāñcarātrika*” method.

### THE PATH OF THE TANTRAS IS MORE PROMINENT IN KALI YUGA

The *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* also says:

*taṁ tadā puruṣaṁ martyā mahā-rājopalakṣaṇam  
yajanti veda-tantrābhyām paraṁ jijñāsavo nṛpa  
iti dvāpara urv īśa stuvanti jagad-īśvaram  
nānā-tantra-vidhānena kalāv api tathā śṛṇu* (11.5.28, 30)

My dear King, in *Dvāpara-yuga*, men who desire to know the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is the supreme enjoyer, worship him in the mood of honoring a great king, following the prescriptions of both the Vedas and *tantras*. 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 *tantras* (revealed scriptures).

Srila Sridhara Swami says in his commentary on this verse:

*nānā-tantra-vidhāneneti kalau tantra-mārgasya prādhānyam darśayati*

By the word *nānā-tantra-vidhānena* in the verse, the predominance of the path of *tantras* [over the Vedic Path] is shown in *Kali-yuga*.

Again, in his commentary on the verse 11.5.28 Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura explains that the “*tantra*” here means specifically the “*Pañcarātra*”:

*'veda-tantra' – śabde vaidika o tāntrika arthāt āgama vā sātvatā pañcarātra-vihita mārge*

“The word *veda-tantra* means the path of the Vedas and the *Tantras*, or *Āgamas* – the *Sātvata Pañcarātras*”.

This is perfectly confirmed by the verses following directly after 11.5.28 quoted above:

*namas te vāsudevāya namaḥ saṅkarṣaṇāya ca  
pradyumnāyāniruddhāya tubhyaṁ bhagavate namaḥ*

*nārāyaṇāya ṛṣaye puruṣāya mahātmane  
viśveśvarāya viśvāya sarva-bhūtātmane namaḥ (11.5.29-30)*

“Obeisances to You, O Supreme Lord Vāsudeva, and to Your forms of Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. O Supreme Personality of Godhead, all obeisances unto You. O Lord Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, O creator of the universe, best of personalities, master of this cosmos and original form of the universe, O Supersoul of all created entities, all homage unto You.”

This *catur-vyūha* concept described here is a prominent feature of the *Pañcarātra* literature, but not of the *Śākta-tantras*.

Thus the word '*tantra*' in a title doesn't automatically make a book bonafide.

### THE TANTRAS ALLOW FEMALE GURUS

*Śākta-tantras* (like *Rudra-yāmala*) surely do, but, again, are they authoritative for the *vaiṣṇavas*?

An interesting logic—the authors want us to presume that all *tantras* are bonafide and since some of them (*Śākta-tantras*) allow female gurus—we have accept the conclusion as bonafide.

The *Rūdra-yāmala-tantra* (2.32) says in regard to female gurus:

*sādhvī caiva sadācārā guru-bhaktā jitendriyā  
sarva-mantrārtha-sarvajñā sadhavā pūjane ratā  
guru-yogyā bhaved eṣā vidhavāṃ parivarjayet*

A saintly and righteous lady who is dedicated to her guru, a knower of all the *mantras*, all knowledgeable and who is constantly engaged in worship of the Lord, is eligible to become guru, except for a *vidhavā*, a lady whose husband has passed away.

From this verse it seems that the preferred candidates for women gurus are those who are duly married. However, the same book says that even the *vidhavās* are allowed if the mantra is a transcendental mantra and not a material one:

*siddha-mantra yadi bhavet gṛhṇīyād vidhavā-mukhāt (2.113)*

If the mantra is a *siddha-mantra* or a transcendental *mantra*, it can be accepted from a *vidhavā*.

Just to give another interesting example—before the verse *guru-yogyā bhaved eṣā vidhavāṃ parivarjayet* quoted above there is another interesting verse:

*ananta-guṇa-sampannā rudratva-dāyini priyā  
guru-rūpā mukti-dātrī śiva-jñāna-nirūpiṇi*

“She [such guru] is endowed with all good qualities, **she bestows the position of Rudra** and is very dear. She is guru-like in appearance, she is the giver of liberation and **she explains the Śiva wisdom.**” (2.109)<sup>[30]</sup> [emphasis added].

We are repeatedly told by our *ācāryas* that *tantras* acceptable for the *vaiṣṇavas* (*sātvatas*) are the *pañcarātras* (such as *Nārada-pañcarātra*, *Hayaśirṣa-pañcarātra* etc\*). The problem here is that *Rudra-yāmala-tantra* is by no means a *sātvata-tantra* (*pañcarātra*). The contents of the *Rūdra-yāmala-uttara-tantra* clearly shows that it is not at all a *vaiṣṇava-tantra*, but a *śākta-tantra* associated with the tantric “Kashmiri School of Kaula tradition<sup>§</sup>” (see Muller-Ortega, Paul (1989), *The Triadic Heart of Śiva*, Albany: State University of New York

\* Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes in his “*Apasampradāyera-svarūpa*”:

“There are two kinds of *smṛti-śāstra*:

- 1) spiritual, or *sātvata smṛtis*;
- 2) material, moral or fruitive work oriented *smṛtis*.

*Satvata smṛtis* include: *Sri Bharadvaja-samhita* (included in *Narada-pancaratra*), *Brhat-samhita*, *Visnu-samuccaya*, *Vaikhānasa-samhita*, the *Agama-pramānyam* compiled by sage Alabandaru, the *Sadacara-smṛti* compiled by sage Purnaprajna, the *Krsnamṛta-mahānava*, the *Smṛty-artha-sāgara* by Chadari Nrsimhacarya, the *Prameyamala* by Viraraghava, the *Prayoga-candrika*, the *Vaiṣṇava-dharma-sura-druma-manjari* by Samkarsana Saranadeva, the *Smṛti-ratnakara* by Vitthalacarya, the *Sri Hari-bhakti-vilasa* by Śrīla Gopala Bhatta Gosvami Prabhu, the *Sri Sat-kriya-sara-dipika* and the *Samskara-candrika-paddhati* by Śrī Dhyana Candra.”

§ The *Kaulas* are famously described in the following verse:

*antaḥ śāktāḥ bahiḥ śaivāḥ  
sabhāyāṃ vaiṣṇavo matāḥ  
nānā-rūpa-dharāḥ kaulā*

Press, p.57-58) and hence quoting it does not prove anything.

Here is what scholars have to say about *Rudra-yāmala-tantra*:

“The *Rudrayāmala* is perhaps the most mysterious of all *Yāmalas*. It is encountered everywhere, yet always vanishes after closer inspection. It is even uncertain if an original *Rudrayāmala* ever existed, despite the fact that the title figures in all old lists of *Yāmalas*. More than fifty texts adorn themselves with this generic designation beside their own title (type: "text X from the *Rudrayāmala*"), but a "*Rudrayāmala*" without more is not found or clearly apocryphal. The practice must have set in early; the first instance is perhaps furnished by the *Parātrimśikā* and its example was followed by the *Vijñāna-bhairava* which calls itself "*Rudrayāmaliya*". Other works joined these worthy predecessors, so that the *Rudrayāmala* developed into the foremost locus of ascription in Hindu Tantric literature.” (T.Goudriaan and S.Gupta, *Hindu Tantrik and Śākta Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1981, p.47).

So, we leave it to the scholars of the tradition to decide:

- whether this *Rudra-yāmala-Uttara-tantra* is a completely different tantra from that *Rūdra-yāmala* which is only once quoted in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (2.28) in relation to the exceptions in the time for initiation\*;
- or whether there are several different tantras with the same name (or several tantras belonging to *Rudra-yāmala* and *Uttara-tantra* being only one of them) (The most likely option in our humble opinion);
- or whether it is the same *tantra* which was considerably interpolated later (which is very unlikely);
- or if there is that verse quoted in *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* in the modern versions of *Rudra-yāmala-tantra*;
- or whether this is just another example of the following consideration, that was also quoted by authors themselves: “It is Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī’s opinion, however, that to follow the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* strictly is to actually follow the Vaiṣṇava rituals in perfect order. He

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*vicaranti mahi-tale*

“Inwardly *śāktas*, outwardly *śaivas*, and in the society nominally *vaiṣṇavas*, the *Kaulas* assuming various forms traverse the earth.” (*Śyāma-rahasya-tantra* and *Kaulāvali-nirṇaya*, 10.85).

This description is also quoted by Śrīla Prabhupāda in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya*, 3.85: “In Khaḍadaha, sometimes people misunderstood Nityānanda Prabhu to belong to the *śākta-sampradāya*, whose philosophy is *antaḥ śāktaḥ bahiḥ śaivaḥ sabhāyām vaiṣṇavo mataḥ*. According to the *śākta-sampradāya*, a person called *kaulāvadhūta* thinks materially while externally appearing to be a great devotee of Lord Śiva. When such a person is in an assembly of Vaiṣṇavas, he appears like a Vaiṣṇava. Actually Nityānanda Prabhu did not belong to such a community. Nityānanda Prabhu was always a *brahmacārī* of a *sannyāsī* of the *vaidika* order. Actually He was a *paramahansa*. Sometimes He is accepted to be a disciple of Lakṣmīpati Tīrtha. If He is so accepted, Nityānanda Prabhu belonged to the *Mādhva-sampradāya*. He did not belong to the *tāntrika-sampradāya* of Bengal.”

Here we also see that Śrīla Prabhupāda, following his spiritual master's commentary, uses the word “*vaidika*” to contrast the “*tāntrika*” conception that people had about Lord Nityānanda.

\* A work named “*Rudra-yāmala*” is also quoted in: Jīva Gosvāmī's *Rādhā-Kṛṣṇārcana-dīpikā*, Viśvanātha Cakravartī's commentary on *Ujjvala-nīlamanī*, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī's *Sat-kriyā-sāra-dīpikā*, Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī's *Gaura-govindārcana-smaraṇa-paddhati*, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī's *Sādhana-dīpikā* etc. The striking feature of all these quotations is that they all speak about pure bhakti and about the glories of Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā, gopīs and Vṛndāvana—but all this is conspicuously absent from the *Rudra-yāmala-uttara-tantra* under discussion.

claims that the *smārta-samāja*, which is strictly followed by caste *brāhmaṇas*, has influenced portions that Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī collected from the original *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. It is therefore very difficult to find out Vaiṣṇava directions from the book of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī.” (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, 2.1.35, purport)

Whatever it may be, but from the contents of the *Rudra-yāmala-tantra* that the paper refers to it is clear that it is not applicable for the vaiṣṇavas, because among many other things that *Rudra-yāmala-tantra* describes are:

- Three types of *sādhaka's* nature - *paśu* (animal), *vīra* (heroic) and *divya* (divine) - a concept typical to the *śākta-tantras* (verse 2.6 and many other places). The description of the *paśu-bhāva* (animal attitude) begins in the same 2nd chapter quotes from which were used in the paper.
- *Kuṇḍalinī* (in many places—e.g. 22.14) and 108 names of *kuṇḍalinī*—36th Chapter.
- The famous tantric “*hamsa mantra*” (reversed “*so'ham*” - “I am him”) 22.91-108.
- The abominable “*śava-sādhana*” (a particular tantric practice with a dead body)—in the 24th chapter.
- The notorious *pañca-mākāra* practice (with meat, wine, fish, sex and mudras)—26.129-246 (where it is also stated “*māmsāśī sa bhaved eva*”—“such *sādhaka* should become meat-eater”)

So we would rather not rely on this suspicious quote from such a *Tantra*.

And besides that, the paper unfortunately does not provide a single quote from any *vaiṣṇava-tantra* (*Pañcarātra*) that allows women to become gurus. Of course, *Pañcarātra* allows anyone to **receive** *dīkṣā*—either woman, *śūdra*, *mleccha* etc., for example:

A part of the *Nārada-pañcarātra* called *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā*<sup>[31]</sup>, which has been referred to by many *ācāryas* in their works (e.g. Śrīla Prabhupada in his purport to the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* (4.31.10), Śrīla Bhaktisidhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura in his commentary on *Caitanya-bhāgavata* (1.8.7), Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura in his article called “*Apa-sampradāyera-svarūpa*” and Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī in his *Sat-kriyā-sāra-dīpikā*) says:

*prāptum icchan parām siddhiṁ janaḥ sarvo 'py akiñcanaḥ  
śraddhayā parayā yukto hariṁ śaraṇam āśrayet*

All those materially bereft people who desire to attain the highest perfection of life should take shelter at Lord Hari with great faith.

*na jāti-bhedam na kulaṁ na liṅgaṁ na guṇa-kriyāḥ  
na deśa-kāla nāvasthām yogo hy ayam apekṣate*

This yoga (or *prapatti*, self-surrender) does not depend on caste distinctions, nor on the birth in particular family, nor on the gender (or the external symbols of different *aśramas*), nor on the qualities or activities of the candidates. It also does not depend on the time, place and circumstances.

*brahma-kṣatra-viśaḥ-śūdrāḥ striyaś cāntarajās tathā  
sarva eva prapadyeran sarva-dhātāram acyutam*



*Brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas, śūdras*, women and even outcastes—all of them undoubtedly can attain Lord Acyuta, who is the supporter of everyone. (*Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā*, 1.13-15)

*Bhagavad-gītā* (9.32) and *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* (2.7.46) make similar famous statements.

However, the same *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā* prohibits women to **give** *dīkṣā*:

*na jātu mantra-dā nārī na śūdro nāntarodbhavaḥ  
nābhiśasto na patitaḥ kāma-kāmo 'py akāminaḥ*

A woman should never become initiating guru, and also a *śūdra*, a person born from an improperly mixed marriage, a very sinful and defamed person, a fallen person or one who is full of material desires. (1.42)

From this list we have the *apavāda* (exception) for the *śūdra*—on the basis of Lord Caitanya's statement “*kībā vipra kibā nyāsi śūdra kene naya*”, so we still have to find another proof for female initiating gurus.

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