

# A Critique of the Śāstric Advisory Council's System of Hermeneutics

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### PREFACE

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GAUḌĪYAS DO NOT HAVE THEIR OWN SYSTEM OF INTERPRETATION  
IS THE SAC'S OVERARCHING PRINCIPLE SUPPORTED BY ŚĀSTRA  
DO THE SAC'S HERMENEUTICAL TOOLS PASS "THE GRAIN OF RICE TEST"?

### GAUḌĪYAS DO NOT HAVE THEIR OWN SYSTEM OF INTERPRETATION

#### IS THE SAC'S OVERARCHING PRINCIPLE SUPPORTED BY ŚĀSTRA?

INTRODUCTION

THE FULL ANALYSIS

*The SAC has not justified their choice of basis for their overarching principle.*

*None of the evidences the SAC puts forward in support of their overarching principle supports it.*

*The SAC's overarching principle contradicts the Vedic principle of the revealed scriptures as primary evidence.*

*The SAC's overarching principle makes Śrīla Prabhupāda subordinate to the preferences of the person who has to decide which of his statements best apply*

#### DO THE SAC'S HERMENEUTICAL TOOLS PASS "THE GRAIN OF RICE TEST"?

SAC TOOL 3: EXAMPLE OF BOGUS TĀRATAMYA OR DISTINGUISHING OF HIERARCHY:

*Analysis of SAC's hermeneutics tool (Tool-3):*

*What should be the correct method or what are the main lapses in the method recommended by SAC?*

MISUNDERSTOOD PRINCIPLE AND MISAPPLIED TOOL - PRINCIPLE 21 AND TOOL 36 PRESCRIBE FEMINIST ARGUMENTS:

*Wrong guiding principle - Principle 21:*

TOOL 36 VOUCHES FOR ANTI-VARṆĀŚRAMA AND IS BASED ON EGALITARIAN IDEAS:

*Tool 36 propounds feminist ideas - women to live independently:*

CONCLUSION – "GRAIN OF RICE TEST"

## Preface

On page 135 of the Śāstric Advisory Council's ISKCON Hermeneutics Supplementary Material manual, the SAC gives the following hierarchy of the *śāstras* and their commentators.

In the six *Sandarbhās*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī employs *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* as the main *pramāṇa* and all other scriptures, including *Vedas*, are employed to justify the conclusions given by the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Therefore, for the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavas, the gradation of authority among the Vedic scriptures (*śruti*) is as follows:

(1) *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, book incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, and its interpretations as done by Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī, Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* and other Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas*. This also includes the six *Sandarbhās*, since they are mostly elaborate commentaries on various verses of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

(2) Other *Purāṇas/Itihāsas/Vedas/Vedānta-sūtra/Bhagavad-gītā/Pañcarātra* as well the six *Vedāṅgas* or limbs of the *Vedas* (*vyākaraṇa*: grammar, *chanda*: prosody, *śikṣā*: phonology, *nirukta*: etymology, *kalpa*: ritual instruction, *jyotiṣa*: timekeeping) and the entire umbrella of Vedic literature (*brāhmaṇa-grantha*: commentaries on Vedic hymns, *sarvānukramaṇī-grantha*: index of Vedic hymns, *brhad-devatā*: theology of Vedic hymns, etc.).

The SAC's statement that "Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī employs *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* as the main *pramāṇa*" and uses all other scriptures to support the conclusions given by the *Bhagavatam* is correct. But the hierarchy of Vedic scriptures they give is not, because the SAC has included in its first category the commentaries of *ācāryas*. This puts their commentaries on a higher level than even the *Vedas*, and no bona fide *sampradāya* will accept that conclusion.

The commentaries of *ācāryas* are always considered *smṛti*, not *śruti*, because their commentaries are recollections (*smṛti*, from *smaraṇam*, or memory) from what they have heard from *śruti* (*bhaktyā śruta-grhītayā* – SB 1.2.12). And because their commentaries are *smṛti*, their authority is necessarily at or beneath that of the literature in the SAC's category 2 above. But the SAC has nevertheless made the mistake of making the authority of the commentaries of the *ācāryas* equal to or greater than that of the *Vedas*.

Of greater concern is that this error is not an ordinary mistake but instead derives from a misguided conception of *pramāṇa-śāstra* on the part of the SAC. The specific character of their misconception is discussed at length in the following essays "Gauḍīyas do not have their own system of interpretation", "Is the SAC's overarching principle supported by śāstra?", and by "Do the SAC's hermeneutical tools pass 'the grain of rice test'".

Such misconceptions as being propagated by the SAC will result in grave misunderstandings, which must be corrected in order to prevent members of our own society, ISKCON, from falling away from the path of bhakti.

Oṃ tat sat,  
July 4, 2021

## Executive Summary

### Gauḍīyas do not have their own system of interpretation

1. The SAC says that “The **Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas have their own system of interpreting** Uttara-mīmāṃsā, i.e. Vedānta-sūtras.” (*Supplementary Materials handbook, p.109*)

We respond:

- This claim is unfounded. If we have our own system of interpreting Vedānta then why should any other sampradāya accept it? Lord Caitanya challenged Māyāvādīs who accepted His arguments (see Cc. 1.7 and 2.6). Baladeva Vidyabhūṣaṇa wrote Govinda Bhasya and was accepted by all sampradāyas.
- Neither Śrīla Prabhupāda nor any other ācārya ever asked us to have our own system of interpretation of śāstras. We do find abundant evidence to the contrary.  
*His work, the Vedānta-sūtra, is as dazzling as the midday sun, and when someone tries to give his own interpretations on the self-effulgent sunlike Vedānta-sūtra, he attempts to cover this sun with the cloud of his imagination. (SB 1, intro)*
- This is the SAC version of *jato mata tato patha*. It means that Gaudiya-vaisnavism is just one of the many ways in which Vedanta can be interpreted.
- Based on this faulty view, the SAC comes to believe that our ācāryas had their own system of *śāstrārtha nirṇaya* and used the old system only where it supported their conclusions.

2. The SAC continues: “whatever parts of Pūrva-mīmāṃsā are unopposed to Vedānta are acceptable to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas” and that “Mīmāṃsā techniques can be engaged with if they are helpful in establishing the glory of Kṛṣṇa-bhakti. They are not to be engaged with in case they go against the conclusions of bhakti.”

We respond:

- There is big logical fallacy here:
  - A purva-mimamsaka will come and say that they accept only those parts of Vedanta that are unopposed to Purva-mimamsa. Sankara follower will say “mimamsa technique can be engaged with if they are helpful in establishing impersonal brahman as supreme and not in case they go against it.” Sai-baba’s followers will say “mimamsa technique can be engaged with if they are helpful in establishing Sai-baba as supreme and not in the case they go against it.” And so on...
  - What if someone would say “mimamsas technique can be engaged with only if they are helpful in defeating the SAC’s Vaisnava Hermeneutics methodology?”
- The SAC’s above claim means that our acaryas followed the half-hen-logic, or selective quoting. Such purpose-targeted methodology is known as Jalpa in Vedic terms<sup>1</sup> (or wrangling) and is akin to Mayavada which uses a similar methodology in interpreting sastras.
- Consequence: ISKCON preachers will have their different understandings about the conclusions of śāstras and Śrīla Prabhupāda, and they will want to accept some instructions from them wherever it supports them and not others.

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<sup>1</sup> Jalpa “is that type of discussion in which each party has a prejudice for his own view and thus tries to gather all possible arguments in his own favor.” (Suhotra Swami, Six systems of philosophy)

3. The SAC continues: For example, (in Cc. Adi 4.35) Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is making use of a mīmāṃsā linguistic technique named “śābdī bhāvanā” which says that an instruction in the imperative mood (vidhiliṅ) given in śāstra must be followed. However, if an ISKCON devotee takes this as a general rule and tries to apply it to all Vedic statements, then there are also Vedic statements such as *śyenenābhicaran yajeta*: “A person desirous of killing his enemy should perform Śyena-yāga sacrifice.” The term yajeta here is also in the same imperative mood named vidhiliṅ. Yet Vaiṣṇavas will not take it as an order from the Veda and perform this sacrifice.

We respond:

- Krishnadas Kaviraja Gosvami uses the “*vidhilin*” principle and establishes that after hearing about the mercy of the Lord one must engage in His service. Then *mīmāṃsākas* will say that he should also accept the “*vidhilin*” principle everywhere else in understanding the *śāstras*.
- According to the SAC *Hermeneutics*, in response to the *mīmāṃsākas*, he will say, “I used this principle only because it supports my conclusion at this place, and I will reject this principle wherever it doesn’t support.”
- Such an answer marks the defeat of our *sampradāya*, just as the below statement marked the defeat of Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī in discussing with Lord Caitanya: “because we belong to his sect, we accept it *although it does not satisfy us*” (*Ādi 7.136*). Also see CC 2.9.274-75 which marked the defeat of the Tattvavādīs of Udupi. Similarly, SAC’s *Hermeneutics* defeats our *sampradaya* right from its beginning.

4. Then why do the Gaudiya Vaisnava Acaryas not accept syena-yajna as imperative action?

We respond:

- There are three types of vidhi : Apurva-vidhi (usually called vidhi), Niyama-vidhi, and Parisankhya-vidhi. The vidhilin form of statement can be used in mentioning any of the above vidhis, but only the apurva-vidhi is meant for imperative action, not the other two.
- Knowing that the syena-yajna injunction is parisankhya-vidhi, our acaryas (and even mimamsakas and advaitins) do not accept the syena-yajna as imperative action.
- In parisankhya-vidhi the intended meaning is opposite to the one stated in the injunction. For instance, the sastras gives the order “you should have sex with your wife every month at sastrically appropriate time.” But it actually means “don’t have sex with anyone other than your wife, and that too only at times specified in sastras.”

5. The SAC quotes a verse in Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī’s Padyāvalī that criticizes those mīmāṃsā philosophers who are not interested in bhakti, to establish that purva-mimamsa is opposed to bhakti.

We respond:

- The Karma-mimamsa interpretation of purva-mimamsa is what our acaryas are against and not purva-mimamsa itself. Just as our acaryas are not against uttara-mimamsa (vedanta) but are against its interpretation by Sankaracarya. This is so for all vaisnava acaryas
- The renowned ācārya Vedānta Deśikan of the Rāmānuja sampradāya has written a commentary on Pūrva-mīmāṃsā named “Seśvara-mīmāṃsā,” that refutes the karma-mīmāṃsā philosophy by establishing that Pūrva-mīmāṃsā opines the existence of the absolute Godhead.
- Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.5.11) itself uses parisankhya-vidhi etc. from Pūrva-mīmāṃsā to refute the karma-mīmāṃsā philosophy.

## Is the SAC's Overarching Principle Supported by Śāstra

- 1) **The SAC has not justified their choice of basis for their overarching principle.** The SAC's overarching principle makes Śrīla Prabhupāda out to be ISKCON members' primary *pramāṇa* ("Śrīla Prabhupāda first"), and the SAC tries to support this with statements about guru from the *śrutis* and other *śāstras*. But a different overarching principle should have been based on statements from scripture that affirm that scripture (*śāstra*) is the primary *pramāṇa* and that also mention *ācāryas* as *pramāṇa* (e.g. *Āpastamba-dharmasūtra* (2-3): *dharmajñāsamayaḥ vedāśca*, "The authority for prescribed duties is those who know the law, and their authority is the Vedas alone," and also *Manu-saṁhitā* 2.6 and *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* 1.7, etc. also affirm). The SAC does not justify their own choice of starting point, and a wrong starting point will have devastating consequences, such as in Śrīpāda Śaṅkarācārya's choice to make *tat tvam asi* as his *mahā-vākya*, which resulted in a wide-ranging misinterpretation of *Vedānta-sūtra* and *śāstra* generally (see CC Adi 7.128 purport).
- 2) **None of the evidences the SAC puts forward in support of their overarching principle supports it.** But their evidence supports all bona fide gurus generally as being "the representative and conveyer of the essence of the tradition and *paramparā*" for their disciples' understanding and application—this is true even for Śrīla Prabhupāda's successors. As quoted by the SAC, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "You cannot imagine what my spiritual master said. Or even if you read some books, you cannot understand unless you understand it from me." Why would this apply only to Śrīla Prabhupāda and no one else? It doesn't. Hence, none of the evidence the SAC cites supports their overarching principle.
- 3) **The SAC's overarching principle contradicts the Vedic principle of the revealed scriptures as primary evidence.** Śrīla Prabhupāda is the most important source of Vedic knowledge for modern audiences similar to how a doctor is the most important source of medical knowledge and its application for a patient. But when doubts arise about the meaning of anything Śrīla Prabhupāda said or did, or what any *śāstra* or *ācārya* has said, then the SAC's overarching principle does not necessarily apply. This is because the *śāstras* consider the works of *ācāryas* as having the authority of *smṛtis*, which are not the primary evidence in the Vedic system. Only the *śrutis* and other literature like the *Bhāgavatam* are considered the highest evidence. An example of the words of a great *ācārya* (Madhvācārya) being subordinate to *śāstra* is found in Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to SB 6.19.13. The SAC's overarching principle is therefore not generalizable to other *ācāryas* and therefore cannot be a principle.
- 4) **The SAC's overarching principle makes Śrīla Prabhupāda subordinate to the preferences of the person who has to decide which of his statements best apply.** Making Śrīla Prabhupāda our primary *pramāṇa* has several adverse consequences: a) evidence from *śāstra* and other *ācāryas* is easily dismissed as "jumping over the *ācārya*"; b) because one can produce a statement from Śrīla Prabhupāda that supports almost any idea, that also makes other sources superfluous; and consequently c) decisions as to which of Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements or some other statement from *śāstra* or *ācāryas* is applicable will be decided mainly by the personal preferences of the decision-maker. The SAC's overarching hermeneutical principle is therefore a formal declaration of a long-standing tradition that regards Śrīla Prabhupāda as ISKCON's only source of spiritual knowledge, not unlike how Buddhists consider Buddha their only source of knowledge. This guarantees no resolution of important conflicts over Śrīla Prabhupāda's various statements. And this further perpetuates the gradual disintegration of ISKCON, not unlike how, after the disappearance of Lord Buddha, the Buddhists quickly fragmented into many sects with major doctrinal disagreements.

## Do the SAC's hermeneutical tools pass "the grain of rice test"?

In this essay, we examine SAC's recently developed course on hermeneutic principles and their associated hermeneutical tools for their fidelity and integrity against the Vedic standards as well as against the standards given to us by Śrīla Prabhupāda from his teachings (written and spoken). The famous saying "a grain of rice

indicates the quality of the pot of rice it was cooked in” holds good for this exercise as well. We examined the SAC’s Tool 3, Principle 21, and also Tool 36, and the following is a short summary of our analysis:

1. As part of Tool 3, the SAC hermeneutic course imposes upon its students an artificial ascending process (*āroha pantha*) of learning, which is an antithesis of the Vedic standard process of distinguishing and harmonization.
2. As part of SAC principle 21, the SAC course speculates that Nārada Muni employed “reverse psychology” to encourage Dhruva Mahārāja to adopt the spiritual path. We establish with evidence that Śrīla Nārada Muni did not employ the SAC’s purported trick of “reverse psychology”, and Dhruva Mahārāja was not an ordinary child of mundane character.
3. As part of principle 21, the SAC course perpetuates misguided principles in the name of understanding the mood and mission of Śrīla Prabhupāda, resulting in a hermeneutic tool (tool 36) that propagates ideas such as books are not the basis, propounds anti-Vedic cultural ideas such as women can be independent, varṇāśrama is not important,” and other feminist narratives, all of which are against the core teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Overall, the SAC process of gathering knowledge (*āroha pantha*) is a modern egalitarian method based on western concepts in the guise of Vedic hermeneutics.

## **Gauḍīyas do not have their own system of interpretation**

On page 109 of the SAC’s Supplementary Materials handbook, there is a section titled “Note on the use of *mīmāṃsā*,” and Damodāra Dāsa’s comments on this section are presented below (the labels SAC and DD respectively stand for the SAC and Dāmodara Dāsa, the SAC sections are also indented):

SAC: The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas have their own system of interpreting *Uttara-mīmāṃsā*, i.e. *Vedānta-sūtras*.

DD: This claim is unfounded. If we have our own system of interpreting Vedānta then why should any other *sampradāya* accept it? However, we know that Baladeva Vidyabhūṣaṇa wrote his commentary and was accepted by all *sampradāyas*. Where did Śrīla Prabhupāda or any other *ācārya* say that having our own system of interpretation of *śāstras* is okay? Then it becomes equated to Śaṅkarācārya’s trick to establish his own philosophy by interpreting *śāstras* (even he did not claim that it is his own system to interpret *śāstras*). Lord Caitanya challenged Māyāvādīs based on standard rules of interpretation accepted by all and Māyāvādīs had to accept them (detailed refutation is found in Lord’s converting Sarvabhauma Bhattacārya).

Thus our claim is that the system of *śāstrārtha nirṇaya* (interpretation is not the right term), reaching to conclusion about what is *śāstra*’s actual intended meaning, is common among all *sampradāyas* and that only forms (and has formed for eons) the basis of *śāstrārthas* (*śāstric* discussions) among different *sampradāyas* in the Vedic times.

Thus, because the very foundational understanding of the SAC here is faulty, what follows below is just seen through a faulty lens (as presented above). Hence they come to believe that our *ācāryas* had a different system of hermeneutics (which is actually not the right term to be used for systems of *śāstrārtha nirṇaya* in Vedic texts as well as dharma) and that they used old systems only where it supported their conclusions.

SAC: The attitude of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas towards *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* is summarized by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in the *Paramātmā-sandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 105 as follows:

**pūrva-mīmāṃsāyāḥ pūrva-pakṣatvenottara-mīmāṃsā-nirṇayottara-pakṣe’sminn avasīyāpekṣyatvāt,  
aviruddhāmśe sahāyatvāt**

**Translation:** Since *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* is usually the *pūrva-pakṣa* (the first position of argument), it is certainly expected to be known in order to understand the conclusions of *Uttara-mīmāṃsā*. Moreover, since *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* is helpful in some places where it is not opposed to *Uttara-mīmāṃsā* [therefore it should be known].

For this reason, it can be easily understood that whatever parts of *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* are unopposed to *Vedānta* are acceptable to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.

DD: The above quote of Jīva Gosvāmī is correct, but what the SAC claims to be “easily understood” is not correct. The above quote only establishes the point that *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* should be studied by the (Uttara-mīmāṃsakas) Vedāntīs also. One of the reasons given is that its parts which are not against *Uttara-mīmāṃsā* are helpful.

However, it doesn't mention any procedure wherein we just selectively quote *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* wherever it is helpful to establish *Uttara-mīmāṃsā*. If done so, immediately the Pūrva-mīmāṃsakas will bring the opposing quote to defeat you, because you base yourself on their *śāstra*. Then you cannot say that we do not accept that part of *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* but only what we quoted.

This procedure that the SAC concocts, that of selectively quoting *mīmāṃsā* rules (using them as tools) when helpful to establish our point, is actually the hidden procedure of Advaitavādīs, and specifically of Neo-Māyāvādīs. By this procedure anyone can establish his point. For instance, the Pūrva-mīmāṃsakas will quote only the parts of *Uttara-mīmāṃsā* wherever they support their philosophy and reject others. So, the SAC's Hermeneutical Tools are equally usable by any sect to establish their philosophy and results in *jato-mata tato-patha*.

**So this is one of the very fundamental cracks in SAC's understanding about how our ācāryas used mīmāṃsā rules.**

The SAC thinks that due to differences between the hermeneutics of different groups, there are different interpretations of *śāstras* and thus different *sampradāyas* and sects. However, this is untrue. If the SAC's understanding is taken as fact, then we can never challenge Advaitins and bogus gurus, because they have their own interpretation systems and accept some things from the *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* or *Uttara-mīmāṃsā* according to their own purposes.

A potential consequence of this understanding could be that, later, inside ISKCON there will also be great preachers who can have their different understandings about the conclusions of *śāstras* and Śrīla Prabhupāda, and they will want to accept some instructions from them wherever it supports them and not others.

SAC: Mīmāṃsā techniques can be engaged with if they are helpful in establishing the glory of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*. They are not to be engaged with in case they go against the conclusions of *bhakti*.

In some cases, the linguistic techniques specified in *karma-mīmāṃsā* are utilized by our Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authorities. For example, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu uses a *Mīmāṃsā* linguistic technique as specified in the following verse.

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi 4.35:

**'bhavet' kriyā vidhiliṅ, sei ihā kaya  
kartavya avaśya ei, anyathā pratyavāya**

Translation: Here the use of the verb “bhavet” which is in the imperative mood, tells us that this certainly must be done. Noncompliance would be abandonment of duty.

Here Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is making use of a *mīmāṃsā* linguistic technique named “*śābdī bhāvanā*” which says that an instruction in the imperative mood (*vidhiliṅ*) given in *śāstra* must be followed.



However, if an ISKCON devotee takes this as a general rule and tries to apply it to all Vedic statements, then there are also Vedic statements such as *śyenenābhicaran yajeta*: “A person desirous of killing his enemy should perform *Śyena-yāga* sacrifice.” The term *yajeta* here is also in the same imperative mood named *vidhilin*. Yet Vaiṣṇavas will not take it as an order from the *Veda* and perform this sacrifice. Even if a Vaiṣṇava is desirous of killing their enemy, they will not engage in such destructive *yajñas*, because the mood of the Vaiṣṇavas is never to avenge themselves.

DD:

#### Side Point:

Although a side point, it is worth noticing that the above verse and thus logic was not given by Lord Caitanya but Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī. I point this out because it has been repeatedly found in the SAC’s works that their research has not been of a high standard, in that they frequently make mistakes like this one. Sometimes some of their mistakes have been very detrimental and misleading. For instance, in their 2013 paper on female *dīkṣā-gurus*, they boldly claimed that *Pañcarātras* do not have any instruction that prohibits women from becoming *dīkṣā-guru*, a claim that turned out to be false.

#### Back to main point:

Herein the SAC tries to get a little deeper into the techniques of *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* to understand what is going on here, where Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī is using this *pūrva-mīmāṃsā* technique. However, due to their faulty assumption that *mīmāṃsā* techniques are accepted on account of their utility in supporting the conclusions of *Uttara-mīmāṃsā*, the SAC erroneously concludes that Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī used this particular *mīmāṃsā*-technique only to support his argument.

To better understand how this conclusion is in error, let us say that some *ācārya* used the technique of “*vidhilin*” to establish that after hearing about the mercy of the Lord one must engage in his service.

Now, this means that the *ācārya* has accepted the principle of “*vidhilin*” as being indicative of an imperative action. So, the *mīmāṃsākas* will trap him by saying that he should also accept the “*vidhilin*” principle everywhere else in understanding the *śāstras*. In response to the *mīmāṃsākas*, the *ācārya* says, “I used this principle only because it supports my conclusion at this place, and I will reject this principle wherever it doesn’t support.” Such an answer is unimaginable in Vedic discussions; one is declared defeated if he puts forward such argument, because he has contradicted himself. We do not see any of our *ācāryas* do this nor do we see Śrīla Prabhupāda doing this.

Doing this marks the defeat of our *sampradāya*, just as the below statement marked the defeat of Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī in discussing with Lord Caitanya:

ācārya-kalpita artha,—ihā sabhe jāni  
sampradāya-anurodhe tabu tāhā māni

“We know that all this word jugglery springs from the imagination of Śaṅkarācārya, and yet because we belong to his sect, we accept it although it does not satisfy us” (Ādi 7.136).

Which means if we say that we accept this statement as true because Śrīla Prabhupāda (our *ācārya*) has said it, although it goes against all rules of *śāstras* and *sādhūs*, then we are also defeated. Thus, the SAC’s system of hermeneutics starts with an idea that marks the defeat of our *sampradāya*, or at least of Śrīla Prabhupāda and ISKCON.

There is another, similar statement from CC 2.9.274-75 that marks the defeat of the Tattvavādīs of Udupi:

ācārya kahe,—tumi yei kaha, sei satya haya  
sarva-śāstre vaiṣṇavera ei suniścaya  
tathāpi madhvācārya ye kariyāche nirbandha  
sei ācariye sabe sampradāya-sambandha

The Tattvavādī ācārya replied, “What You have said is certainly factual. It is the conclusion of all the revealed scriptures of the Vaiṣṇavas. “Still, whatever Madhvācārya has established as the formula for our party we practice as a party policy.”

Thus, SAC’s methodology of hermeneutics is defeated right from the beginning.

**Then why do we not accept śyena-yajña as an imperative duty although it is mentioned in “vidhilin” form?**

This is because the idea of the “vidhilin” form of statement being always indicative of imperative duty is something concocted by the SAC. It is not the idea of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī or any of any bona fide Vedic *sampradāya*, or of *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* or *Uttara-mīmāṃsā*.

The *śābdī-* and *ārthī-bhāvanās* that the SAC just mentioned have no direct connection with indicating an imperative or non-imperative course of action (duty, or more specifically *dharma*). *Śābdī-bhāvanā* means that the motivation for action comes from the words or injunctive statements of *śāstras* whereas *ārthī-bhāvanā* means that the motivation for action comes from the descriptions of actions of dharmic people (or more specifically from the desire to achieve the goal that has been already understood through *śābdī-bhāvanā*).

For instance the phrase “*agnihotram juhoti*”<sup>2</sup> is in *ārthī-bhāvanā* still it is taken as an imperative action. In fact, if one goes a little deep into the procedures of analyzing a statement in *mīmāṃsā*, then even the “vidhilin” (*śābdī-bhāvanā*) is converted to *ārthī-bhāvanā* and then analyzed because *ārthī-bhāvanā* contains all elements for analysis of a statement. As this is more technical I will not get into details of it here.

The topic here is to find out which action is imperative, meaning not doing which there will be sin incurred. So let us go with some of the basics about injunctive statements in *śāstras* as analyzed by *mīmāṃsā* (and accepted by all *ācāryas* of all *sampradāyas* alike).

**One of the sources for below analysis:** the famous sloka of SB 11.5.11, Jīva Gosvāmī, quotes from Kumārila Bhaṭṭa<sup>3</sup>:

“विधिरत्यन्तमप्राप्तौ नियमः पाक्षिके सति । तत्र चान्यत्र सम्प्राप्तौ परिसंख्या विधीयते ॥”

vidhir-atyantam-apraptau niyamaḥ pākṣike sati |  
tatra cānyatra samprāptau parisāṅkhyā vidhiyate ||

<sup>2</sup> Chandogya Upanisad 5.24.2

<sup>3</sup> Jīva Gosvāmī explains this in great detail. I am not going to repeat it all because this will need a lot of *mīmāṃsā* understanding for the readers to understand it. I am just summarizing it. A point to note is that Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam itself is using this rule and categorization of vidhis in order to establish that the purpose of *śāstras* is *nivṛtti-mārga*, not *pravṛtti-mārga*, and that whatever allowances may be there for sense gratification mentioned in *vidhi* form in the *śāstras*, the *śāstras* are nevertheless for the sake of directing one towards getting rid of material attachments.]

Injunctive statements are categorized into three types:

1. *Apūrva-vidhi* (usually called *vidhi*)
2. *Niyama-vidhi*
3. *Parisaṅkhyā-vidhi*

***Apūrva-vidhi*** is an injunction which is known only through the mentioned *vidhi* statement and not from anywhere else. For instance, injunction about doing *agnihotra* (*agnihotram juhoti*) cannot be obtained from anywhere else if it had not been injuncted in *śāstra*. No man can speculate for any number of years and reach the conclusion that the *agnihotra* should be done.

***Niyama-vidhi*** is an injunction which you find in the mentioned *vidhi* statement as well as have some other sources also for the information. For instance, with regards to some sacrifice, it is mentioned in a *vidhi* statement that the paddy should be threshed through the process of “*avahanana*” i.e. beating it. Now the information about threshing paddy is available from normal course of society also and doesn't needs any *śāstric* injunction to know it. But there are different procedures to thresh paddy and the procedure to thresh paddy by beating it is just a one of them. Thus, the *vidhi* statement mentioned above is needed to limit the scope of which process to use to take out rice from paddy which needs to be used in this yajna. Thus, this injunction is a *niyama-vidhi* which fixes the scope of what is already known from other sources but only as a part of information available there.

***Parisaṅkhyā-vidhi*** is a very peculiar one. In this type of *vidhi* statement, the actual meaning or injunction is exactly the opposite of what is directly visible in the statement. For instance, in Rāmāyaṇa, Vāli says *pañca-pana-nakhaḥ bhaksyah* – five types of five nailed animals should be eaten. So, if you take it that it must be done, then eating of five kinds of animals mentioned above becomes an imperative action and not doing that becomes sinful. However, exactly the opposite is meant here. It actually means that animals should not be eaten. How do we say that? Because this is a *parisaṅkhyā-vidhi*. How is it understood to be a *parisaṅkhyā-vidhi*? Because the motivations (*bhāvanās*) of killing and eating meat, wine, sex etc. are naturally found always in everyone and thus there is no need of any injunction to motivate anyone for these things. So, when a statement like the one above is mentioned, it is actually directed towards controlling that tendency and aimed at bringing it to zero.

**Summary :** In *Apūrva-vidhi*, the *vidhi* statement is the only way to get information and thus the motivation for action is mentioned there. In *niyama-vidhi* you partly find the information about performing a certain action; but because it is mixed with other action, in order to control the scope of it, a *vidhi* statement is given. In *parisaṅkhyā-vidhi* the information and thus motivation about performing a certain action is always naturally available from other sources like attachment, etc., and thus a *vidhi* statement is directed towards controlling it with the aim of bringing it to zero, to give it up.

So now coming back to the *śyena-yajña*, the injunction or *vidhi* statement for *śyena-yajña* is considered as *parisaṅkhyā-vidhi*. This means it is meant to control the violent tendency of taking revenge from one's enemy by way of injunction. The injunction says that if you want to take revenge, then you must perform the *śyena-yajña*. Otherwise, a great sin will be incurred. So, this rule will control his violent tendency and is aimed at bringing it to zero. (This is something like killing a goat in front of Kali only once in a month in order to eat meat.) Thus, it is not accepted even by *mīmāṃsākas* that the *śyena-yajña* should be performed<sup>4</sup>.

It is not that our *ācāryas* do not accept the *śyena-yajña*, although that is injuncted in *vidhilin* and thus imperative

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<sup>4</sup> DD: *ucyate: naiva śyenaḥ kartavyatayā vijñāyante / yo hi hiṃsitum icchet, tasya ayam abhyupāya iti hi teoām upadeśaḥ / "śyenenābhicaran yajeta" iti hi samāmananti, na "abhicaritavyam" iti / -- Pūrva-mīmāṃsā, 1.1.2, Sabara Bhasya (see Appendix 1 for more details)*

(according to the SAC, not anyone else) because it goes against the principles of bhakti. The SAC thus selectively rejects this rule of *mīmāṃsā*. However, our *ācāryas* (and for that matter even Mīmāṃsākas and all Vedāntīs) properly apply rules of *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* to come to understand that *śyena-yajña* is not an imperative course of action and basically a *parisaṅkhyā-vidhi*, which means one must resist from it.

SAC:

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.18.48:

**tiraskṛtā vipralabdhāḥ  
śaptāḥ kṣiptā hatā api  
nāśya tat pratikurvanti  
tad-bhaktāḥ prabhavo 'pi hi**

**Translation:** The devotees of the Lord are so forbearing that even though they are defamed, cheated, cursed, disturbed, neglected or even killed, they are never inclined to avenge themselves.

Thus, the linguistic techniques of *mīmāṃsā* are useful only when they facilitate service of Kṛṣṇa or service of Kṛṣṇa's devotees, associates etc. When these principles of *mīmāṃsā* go against Kṛṣṇa-bhakti, then the devotees do not follow them. A verse in Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Padyāvalī* criticizes those *mīmāṃsā* philosophers who are not interested in *bhakti*.

*Padyāvalī* 57, composed by Mādhava Sarasvatī:

mīmāṃsā-rajasā malīmasa-dṛśāṃ tāvan na dhīr īsvare  
garvodarka-kutarka-karkaṣa-dhiyāṃ dūre 'sti vartā hareḥ  
jānanto 'pi na jānate śruti-sukhaṃ śrī-raṅgi-saṅgād ṛte  
su-svādum pariveśayanty api rasam gurvī na darvī sprśet

**Translation:** Those whose eyes are blinded by the dust of the *Karma-mīmāṃsā* philosophy cannot fix their hearts on the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Their intelligence is atrophied by illogical conclusions dictated by pride, and thus they stay far away from the topics of Lord Hari. Although they study and know the *Vedas*, they cannot understand the true pleasure of knowing the *Vedas*, due to staying away from devotee association. Their condition is exactly like that great ladle which is capable of distributing sweet juices to everyone but which cannot taste the juice itself.

DD:

**One must understand here that our *ācāryas* were against the philosophy of *karma-mīmāṃsā* and not against the procedures of *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā*.** There is a big sect of *karma-mīmāṃsākas* who interpret *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* in a *nirīśvara* (godless) way, coming to the conclusion that there cannot be any absolute person or God who controls everything and who is the final authority. They furthermore conclude that the principles of karma are the Absolute, and any *īśvara* who is existent is bound to reward the fruits of karma if one follows the karma duties. This is the philosophy that our *ācāryas* refute—not only our *ācāryas* but *ācāryas* of all Vaiṣṇava *sampradāyas* refute this philosophy.

This does not mean that *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* opines this *karma-mīmāṃsā* philosophy. Vedānta Deśikan (a most famous *ācārya* of the Rāmānuja *sampradāya* after Rāmānuja) has written a commentary on *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā*

named “*Seśvara-mīmāṃsā*,” which establishes that *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* opines the existence of the absolute Godhead and thus refutes the *karma-mīmāṃsā* philosophy.

Vedānta is called *Uttara-mīmāṃsā* and is largely considered to be known as Śaṅkarācārya’s philosophical basis. Our *ācāryas* reject Śaṅkarācārya’s philosophy but not Vedānta. Similarly, *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* is largely known through *karma-mīmāṃsā* philosophy, but that does not mean *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* is rejected, but the *karma-mīmāṃsā* philosophy is rejected. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* itself uses *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* (SB 11.5.11) to refute the *karma-mīmāṃsā* philosophy.

**Appendix 1:** Śyena-yajña not accepted as imperative duty even by Mīmāṃsākas – Sabara Bhasya on Purva Mīmāṃsā 1.1.2 [Translation by Ganganath Jha]:

iti yajatiśabdavācyaṃ eva dharmam samānanti / ubhayam iha codanayā lakṣyate, artho 'narthāś ca - ko 'rthaḥ? - yo niḥśreyasāya jyotiṣṭomādih / - ko 'narthāḥ? - yaḥ pratyavāyāya śyeno vajra inour ity evamādih / tatra anartho dharmā ukto mā bhūd ity arthagrahaṇam / - katham punar asāv anarthāḥ? - hiṃsā hi sā, sā ca pratiśiddhā / - katham punar anarthāḥ kartavyatayā upadiśyate? - ucyate: naiva śyenaḍayaḥ kartavyatayā vijñāyante / yo hi hiṃsitum icchet, tasya ayam abhyupāya iti hi teoām upadeśaḥ / "śyenenābhicaran yajeta" iti hi samāmananti, na "abhicaritavyam" iti /

**As a matter of fact, the Veda indicates both what is *moral* and what is *immoral*.—“What is *moral*?”—That which is conducive to good, such as the *Jyotiṣṭoma* and other acts.—“What is *immoral*?”—That which leads to evil (sin), such as the *Shyena*, the *Vajra*, the *Iṣu* and other (malevolent) acts.—Thus the *Sūtra* has used the term ‘*artha*’, ‘what is conducive to good’, in order to preclude the possibility of the *Immoral act* (which is *not* conducive to good) being included under the term ‘*dharma*’.**

**Objection :—“Why should the *immoral* act be so called?”**

**Reply :—**Because it involves inflicting of injury, and the inflicting of injury has been forbidden.

**Objection :—**“How then is it that an *immoral* act (in the shape of the *Shyena* sacrifice, for instance) is enjoined as something that *should be done*?”

The answer to this is that the *Shyena* and other such (malevolent) sacrifices are nowhere found to be spoken of as *what should be done*; they are indicated only in the form that ‘if a man desires to inflict injury upon another, the performance (of the *Shyena*) would be the means for that purpose’; what the Vedic text says is only that ‘one desiring to inflict injury may perform the *Shyena*’ (cf. *Saḍviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa* 8. 1-2),—not that ‘one should inflict injury’. [The man is urged to undertake the performance of the *Shyena* entirely by his desire to inflict injury, not by any Vedic text enjoining that act as what ought to be done.]

## Is the SAC's overarching principle supported by śāstra?

### Introduction

An odd thing about the SAC's overarching principle (page 21) is that it is not a complete sentence:

“Understanding tradition through Śrīla Prabhupāda, accepting Śrīla Prabhupāda as the representative and conveyer of the essence of the tradition and *paramparā*, in the most appropriate way for our understanding and application.”

There are two participles ("understanding" and "accepting"), but no verb. Is this a mistake? Instead of "in," did the SAC mean to use "is" (as in "is the most appropriate way for our understanding and application")?

This phrase is repeated verbatim on page 34:

“Thus, we can come to understanding *śāstric* statements according to this overarching hermeneutic principle: *Understanding tradition through Śrīla Prabhupāda, and Śrīla Prabhupāda as the representative and conveyer of the essence of the tradition and parampara, in the most appropriate way for our understanding and application.*”

And it is again repeated verbatim on page 270:

“In examining the above, we can thus see that using the ten tenets gleaned from Śrīla Prabhupāda's summary of the *catuḥ-ślokī* of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, as given in his purports to those verses as they are quoted in the Caitanya-caritāmṛta, perfectly follows the over-arching principle of ISKCON hermeneutics. That principle is: *Understanding tradition through Śrīla Prabhupāda, accepting Śrīla Prabhupāda as the representative and conveyer of the essence of the tradition and paramparā, in the most appropriate way for our understanding and application.*”

It seems that “in” is a deliberate choice, and yet the resulting phrase is somewhat obtuse. For a concept as important as this, it should be stated plainly and unambiguously, as with a principle like “becoming initiated by the spiritual master and learning how to discharge devotional service from him” (NOD 6). No interpretation is needed for this; its meaning is self-evident. The meaning of the SAC's overarching principle, however, is not easily grasped.

So, after reading the SAC's evidence and explanation, here is the approximate meaning the SAC likely intended by their overarching principle:

1. **Understanding tradition through Śrīla Prabhupāda:** This corresponds to the *pramāṇas* presented in the evidence section. *ācāryavān puruṣo veda* “One who approaches a bona fide spiritual master can understand everything about spiritual realization” (Chāndogya Upaniṣad); and “You cannot imagine what my spiritual master said. Or even if you read some books, you cannot understand unless you understand it from me” (Lecture, Dec. 8, 1973). The SAC seems to be saying we cannot understand the tradition independently of Śrīla Prabhupāda.
2. **accepting Śrīla Prabhupāda as the representative and conveyer of the essence of the tradition and *paramparā*:** This is supported by the SAC's examples of Śrīla Prabhupāda's fidelity to the *śāstras* and the commentaries of previous *ācāryas*. The SAC quotes in its entirety the late Gopīparāṇadhana Prabhu's 2003 *Back To Godhead* article titled “Serving the Words of His Predecessors,” and they say that this article “shows how Śrīla Prabhupāda incorporated the commentaries of his predecessors in his purport,

in a way suitable for our understanding and favorable for our bhakti” (25) The SAC seems to be saying here that while there are other means for understanding “the essence of the tradition and *paramparā*,” those means (commentaries of other *ācāryas*, other bona fide *śāstras*, etc.) are meant to help us better understand what Śrīla Prabhupāda has taught, and then through Śrīla Prabhupāda, and through him alone, can we understand “the essence of the tradition and *paramparā*.”

3. **in the most appropriate way for our understanding and application:** This corresponds to the SAC’s generally stated means for harmonizing different statements coming from Śrīla Prabhupāda, previous *ācāryas*, and *śāstra*. “That harmonious understanding should be applied appropriately according to time, place, and person” (32); and “We do well to find the traditional principles, see how they have been applied in various circumstances, both ancient and by Śrīla Prabhupāda, and then adjust for the particular needs and circumstances of our time” (33). By this, the SAC seems to indicate (i.e. not stated directly) that a living decision-maker (a devotee, of course) utilizes the criteria of time, place, person and circumstance to choose the most appropriate understanding and application from among Śrīla Prabhupāda’s works, *śāstra*, or tradition.

In this regard, none of these assertions taken alone seem to be unreasonable. And taken together as a whole, the conclusion presented by the SAC may also seem to be reasonable. Yet one might still wonder that if this is how we are supposed to think of Śrīla Prabhupāda in matters requiring the application hermeneutics, then would not Śrīla Prabhupāda himself and other disciples of previous *ācāryas* have thought similarly about their own *ācāryas*? And if this is universally true, then there should be some *pramāṇas* from *śāstra* or other *ācāryas* that more efficiently and precisely describe and explain the same overarching principle. The SAC’s overarching principle therefore shouldn’t be a new thing; it should be something ancient. There should be a statement from *śāstra* that directly supports it. Yet no *śāstra-pramāṇa* is quoted by the SAC in direct support of their conclusion.

Such *pramāṇas* exist, however, and with them, a much simpler, much shorter, and much stronger presentation could have been made. But those *pramāṇas* would not have supported the same conclusion that the SAC reached. According to the first words of *Daśa-mūla-tattva* (1), *āmnāyaḥ prāha*, the Vedas are the principal scriptural evidence, and the other nine principles are derived from the Vedas. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī says in *Tattva-sandarbhā* (9, *Samvādinī*), *śabda eva mūlaṁ-pramāṇam*, the Vedas are the root *pramāṇa*, and *Vedānta-sūtra* (1.1.3) also says, *śāstra-yonitvāt*, the Vedas are the basis. Therefore the hermeneutical system Śrīla Prabhupāda himself taught is that *śāstra* is in the central *pramāṇa*, and all other *pramāṇas*, including *guru-vākya* and *sādhū-vākya*, are subordinate to *śāstra*.

Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, *sādhū-śāstra-guru-vākya, cittete kariyā aikya*. One should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words of saintly people, the spiritual master and the *śāstra*. The actual center is the *śāstra*, the revealed scripture. If a spiritual master does not speak according to the revealed scripture, he is not to be accepted. Similarly, if a saintly person does not speak according to the *śāstra*, he is not a saintly person. The *śāstra* is the center for all. (CC Madhya 20.352 purport)

So, according to this description from Śrīla Prabhupāda himself, the words of the guru and of saintly persons cannot be the central *pramāṇa*, because *śāstra* is. Hence, the SAC has made an error in making Śrīla Prabhupāda their overarching hermeneutical principle. Although it seems to be “pro-Prabhupāda,” all that can be said about it is that this is not the system that Śrīla Prabhupāda himself taught, nor has any bona fide *ācārya* taught it.

What follows are the specific details of the SAC’s argument for its overarching principle and the consequences of such a system. The actual system to be followed and the *śāstric* evidence for it are also presented.

Om Tat Sat

## The Full Analysis

According to the SAC, the basis of their hermeneutical system is stated as follows (numbers in parenthesis indicate page numbers in the SAC's Supplemental Materials document):

“Overarching Principle: Understanding tradition through Śrīla Prabhupāda, accepting Śrīla Prabhupāda as the representative and conveyer of the essence of the tradition and *paramparā*, in the most appropriate way for our understanding and application.” (21)

Here are the problems with it:

### **The SAC has not justified their choice of basis for their overarching principle.**

For their evidence, their starting point is *ācāryavān puruṣo veda* and *yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau* (21). They make guru the basis of their overarching principle. Other verses like *śāstra yonitvāt* (*śāstra* is the basis) are at least as reasonable a starting point, but the SAC does not explain their choice or discuss alternatives they may have considered but rejected. Whether wittingly or unwittingly, a wrong choice of starting point will cause great misunderstanding, just as Śaṅkarācārya chose *tat-tvam asi* as the *mahā-vākya* by which he has widely misinterpreted *śāstra*. In this regard, Śrīla Prabhupāda comments,

Śaṅkarācārya, however, has never stressed chanting of the *mahā-vākya oṁkāra*; he has accepted only *tat tvam asi* as the *mahā-vākya*. Imagining the living entity to be God, he has misrepresented all the mantras of the *Vedānta-sūtra* with the motive of proving that there is no separate existence of the living entities and the Supreme Absolute Truth. This is similar to the politician's attempt to prove nonviolence from the *Bhagavad-gītā* (CC Adi 7.128 p.)

So, not only is it not self-evident that guru should be the basis of the SAC's overarching hermeneutical principle, the SAC's lack explanation for their choice with regard to other potential alternatives suggests they have not given enough thought to their choice of starting point.

### **None of the evidences the SAC puts forward in support of their overarching principle supports it.**

All the references in the overarching principle's Evidence section equally apply to all bona fide gurus, not just to Śrīla Prabhupāda. As quoted by the SAC, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “You cannot imagine what my spiritual master said. Or even if you read some books, you cannot understand unless you understand it from me.” (22). This also applies to Śrīla Prabhupāda's own successors. Just as Śrīla Prabhupāda had to deal with issues never before dealt with by any *ācārya*, his successors will have to do similarly. Hence, their standing as an authorized source of dharma will be just as important for the progress of their own disciples (see next point on authorized sources of dharma). The SAC's overarching principle is therefore too narrow for their cited evidence, which supports a different conclusion (one's immediate guru is “the representative and conveyer of the essence of the tradition and *paramparā*”). Consequently, none of the SAC's quotations supports their overarching principle.

### **The SAC's overarching principle contradicts the Vedic principle of the revealed scriptures as primary evidence.**

The SAC's “overarching principle” of Śrīla Prabhupāda as primary evidence contradicts the Vedic principle of the revealed scriptures as primary evidence.

The SAC's overarching principle means that whenever there is some difference between Śrīla Prabhupāda and any other source, such as the writings of other *ācāryas*, other *śāstras*, the Vedas, and so forth, then Śrīla Prabhupāda's version takes precedence. The SAC says, “We privilege Śrīla Prabhupāda's vision and explanations over those of others” (24). Unless “time, place and person” (32) suggests that some other understanding or



application recommended in *śāstra* or tradition is more appropriate, the conclusions of these other sources are not “the most appropriate way for our understanding and application.” The SAC’s overarching principle in precept and practice generally means “Śrīla Prabhupāda first” (32) before all other evidences.

But this contradicts the Vedic principle of the revealed scriptures (*śrutis*) as primary evidence because, according to Vedic authorities, the words of an *ācārya* are considered to have authority on the level of the *smṛtis*, and the *smṛtis* are subordinate to the *śrutis* (Vedas) and other literature with *apauruṣeya* status such as *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. Therefore Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “One should at once quote from scriptural authority to back up what he is saying” (BG 17.15 purp.). Although the words of an *ācārya* are an essential source of Vedic authority, they can never be primary evidence.

The words of an *ācārya* are classified as *smṛti* because, as per the meaning of “*smṛti*,” an *ācārya*’s words are a recollection of what he has heard from the Vedas and other authorized Vedic literature (*bhaktiyā śruta grhītayā* – rendering devotional service in terms of what one has heard from the *Vedānta-śruti*, SB 1.2.12). In *Manu-saṁhitā* (MS) 2.6, Lord Manu enumerates four sources of dharma: the Vedas, the *smṛtis*, the exemplary behavior of *sādhūs* and also their preferences. The Vedas are primary evidence—“Only the Vedas are the root of dharma” (*vedo ’khilo dharmamūlam*). But if the Vedas only are the root of dharma, then what need is there for any other source? And also, what need is there even for Lord Manu to say this when the Vedas have already established it?

In responding to these objections, Medhātithi in his *Manu-bhāṣya* commentary explains that the authors of the *smṛtis* write their works in order to make dharma more easily understood. “The authors of treatises on Dharma proceed to compose their works for the expounding of their subject for the benefit of such persons as are not learned (in the Vedas).” Fundamentally, this is what *ācāryas* do—they write works that attempt to make spiritual topics more easily understood by others. So, Manu’s definition of *smṛti* includes the works of all *ācāryas*.

And as per Manu, the qualification for such works is that their authors must be recognized as having exemplary character and are without any self-interest (*śīlā*) and are also learned (*tadvidām*) in the *śrutis* and *smṛtis*. Medhātithi observes that in ordinary dealings, people do not hesitate to accept the word of a man they regard as learned and of exemplary character, and whose opinion is not motivated by selfish interest. In the course of time, those works produced by such men, when also recognized by other similarly qualified men, acquire the status of *śāstra*. Therefore, *smṛti* is not only based on *śruti*, it also derives its authority from the learning, the exemplary character, and the absence of any self-interest on the part of the author other than a desire to explain dharma “as it is.”

As per Lord Manu’s definition, the written works of *ācāryas* like Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, the Six Gosvāmīs, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, and, of course, Śrīla Prabhupāda, etc., are also to be understood as being in the category of *smṛti*. Even the works of those who are not, strictly speaking, pure devotees but nevertheless are learned and exemplary *brāhmaṇas*, like Chanakya Pandita, are also considered *smṛti*. Śrīla Prabhupāda, for example, often quoted Chanakya Pandita as an authority. Whether a work is from a pure Vaisnava or an exemplary *brāhmaṇa*, it is considered *smṛti*.

Nevertheless, the SAC’s intuition that Śrīla Prabhupāda is “the representative and conveyer of the essence of the tradition and *paramparā*” is justified, but only when no doubt has arisen as to what he meant. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s “loyalty to the Vaiṣṇava tradition of scriptural commentary” (25) is nicely shown in several examples given by the SAC. In particular, the SAC quotes in full the late Gopīparāṇadhana Prabhu’s 2003 Back To

Godhead article titled “Serving the Words of His Predecessors.” The article demonstrates the close correspondence between Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *Bhāgavatam* purports and the *Bhāgavatam* commentaries of previous *ācāryas*, which, as shown by Gopīparāṇadhana Prabhu, were incorporated by Śrīla Prabhupāda into his purports “in a way suitable for our understanding and favorable for our bhakti” (32).

Moreover, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s guidance on matters not found in the *śāstras* or discussed by previous *ācāryas* also substantiates the SAC’s view that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the most important *ācārya* for modern audiences. As further explained by Medhātithi in his *bhāṣya* on *Manu-saṁhitā* 2.6 and 12.108 - 113, the words of those qualified to write *smṛti* have the authority of *smṛti* even on topics not explicitly mentioned in either the *śrutis* or *smṛtis*. This is because it is presumed that such learned, exemplary followers of dharma would neither say nor do anything that is opposed to the revealed scriptures. Śrīla Prabhupāda himself had to address issues not found in the *śāstras*, such as utilizing air transportation and settling questions as to whether sannyasis may conduct marriages or meet with politicians, whether women could reside in ashramas established in Western countries, etc. Given Śrīla Prabhupāda’s vast learning, exemplary character and purity, and also his practical advice on matters never before discussed in *śāstra* or the tradition, it is reasonable for the SAC to say that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s commentary and teachings are most appropriate for the understanding of a modern audience.

But when some doubt arises as to what Śrīla Prabhupāda himself meant by anything he said or did, or there is some doubt about what some other *śāstra* or *ācārya* says, “Śrīla Prabhupāda first” as a principle does not necessarily apply. This is because Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own statements are one of many kinds of evidences whose strength relative to one another has to first be known before the correct understanding can be determined through established rules for reconciling conflicts.

One of the rules mentioned by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in *Tattva-sandarbha (Saṁvādinī* 11.54) is that when there are conflicting statements, one must first decide which is the stronger statement and which is the weaker (*yatra tu vākyāntareṇaiva virodhaḥ syāt tatra balābalatvaṁ vivecanīyam*), and that this applies to statements from different *śāstras* as well as to statements within the same *śāstra* (*tac ca śāstra-gataṁ vacana-gataṁ ca*). After identifying which are the stronger and weaker statements, then the rule to apply is that the weaker statement is to be interpreted in accord with the stronger statement (*tac ca virodhitvaṁ parokṣa-vādādi-nibandhanam cintayitvetaravākyasya balavad-vākyānugato 'rthaś cintanīyah*).

An example of this rule is found in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport to SB 1.3.15 (also quoted by the SAC on page 35), which shows how *śāstra* resolves a conflict between the statements of two *ācāryas*.

According to Śrīpāda Śrīdhara Svāmī, the original commentator on the *Bhāgavatam*, there is not always a devastation after the change of every Manu. And yet this inundation after the period of Cākṣuṣa Manu took place in order to show some wonders to Satyavrata. But Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī has given definite proofs from authoritative scriptures (like *Viṣṇu-dharmottara*, *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, *Harivaṁśa*, etc.) that there is always a devastation after the end of each and every Manu. Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī has also supported Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, and he (Śrī Cakravartī) has also quoted from *Bhāgavatāmṛta* about this inundation after each Manu. Apart from this, the Lord, in order to show special favor to Satyavrata, a devotee of the Lord, in this particular period, incarnated Himself (SB 1.3.15).

In this example, the question as to whether there is a devastation after the change of each Manu arises, because Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī says there is not always one but Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī says there is always one. The deciding factor is the proofs from authoritative scriptures, which confirm that a devastation always occurs. Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī’s statement is then interpreted to be in accord with the evidences from *śāstra*.

Another example involving a difference between an *ācārya* and *śāstra* is found in Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to SB 6.19.13, wherein a question is raised as to whether Śrīmatī Lakṣmīdevī is a jīva. In the *Prameya-ratnāvalī*, Śrīla Baladeva Vidyabhūṣaṇa settles the question by interpreting Śrīla Madhvācārya's opinion (the weaker *pramāṇa*) in a way that is compatible with a statement from the Viṣṇu Purana (the stronger *pramāṇa*). It is thus further concluded in the *Kānti-mālā* commentary that "the descriptions of Lakṣmī as being different from Viṣṇu are stated when an eternally liberated living entity is imbued with the quality of Lakṣmī; they do not pertain to mother Lakṣmī, the eternal consort of Lord Viṣṇu."

This example is important because it shows that the SAC's overarching principle does not apply to other *ācāryas* when conflicts between evidences need to be resolved. In this case, Madhvācārya's opinion is the weaker evidence, and the statement from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is the stronger evidence. If statements of an *ācārya* on the level of Madhvācārya sometimes have to be considered the weaker evidence, then the same will be true for Śrīla Prabhupāda. Consequently, the SAC's overarching principle has no application in any hermeneutical situation, where conflicts need to be resolved. The traditional Vedic hierarchy of *pramāṇas*, however, includes the words of *ācāryas* and is always applicable.

A final example involving the resolution of a conflict between guru and *śāstra* comes from Śrīla Prabhupāda's own personal experience. In the *śāstras* are general prohibitions against committing violence against other living beings—*mā himsyāt sarva bhūtāni*, "Do not commit violence toward anyone." Yet one time, when Śrīla Prabhupāda encountered a poisonous snake at his Gurudeva's *āśrama*, his Gurudeva, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, ordered the snake to be killed. And in Śrīla Prabhupāda's mind a doubt about that action remained until it was finally resolved by *śāstra*.

So I thought, "How is it that Guru Mahārāja ordered the snake to be killed?" I was a little surprised, but later on I saw this verse, and then I was very glad: *modeta sādhuḥ api vṛścika-sarpa-hatyā*, "Even saintly persons take pleasure in the killing of a scorpion or a snake." It had remained a doubt, how Guru Mahārāja ordered the snake to be killed, but when I read this verse I was very much pleased that this creature or creatures like the snake should not be shown any mercy. (SPL 4: "How Shall I Serve you?")

In this case, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was "the representative and conveyer of the essence of the tradition and *paramparā*" for Śrīla Prabhupāda's own understanding, in the same way that Śrīla Prabhupāda is for us. Nevertheless, *śāstra* is the central authority, or root *pramāṇa*, and in this case the statement from *śāstra* was sufficient to resolve the doubt.

These examples and many more demonstrate that in a hermeneutical situation, wherein some conflict between evidences must be resolved, the words of an *ācārya* are considered subordinate to *śāstra*. Śrīla Prabhupāda therefore says, "The *śāstra* is the center for all."

According to Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, this is the way an incarnation should be accepted. Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, *sādhu-śāstra-guru-vākya, cittete kariyā aikya*. One should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words of saintly people, the spiritual master and the *śāstra*. The actual center is the *śāstra*, the revealed scripture. If a spiritual master does not speak according to the revealed scripture, he is not to be accepted. Similarly, if a saintly person does not speak according to the *śāstra*, he is not a saintly person. The *śāstra* is the center for all. Unfortunately, at the present moment, people do not refer to the *śāstras*; therefore they accept rascals as incarnations, and consequently they have made incarnations into a very cheap thing (CC Madhya 20.352 purport).

Although the words of the *ācāryas* are authorized and necessary, they cannot be the overarching hermeneutical principle the SAC wants to establish. This is because *śāstra* itself is the topmost *pramāṇa* that all other *pramāṇas* are subordinate to. The SAC's insight that Śrīla Prabhupāda is most appropriate for our understanding is true in the sense that the physician is the best way for a patient to learn about and apply medical science. Similarly, Śrīla Prabhupāda's hands-on dealings with his Western disciples made him the best way for them. But when there is a need for *samanvaya*, or reconciling conflicting texts, Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements are one of many kinds of *pramāṇas* that have to be considered and their strength relative to each other assessed. In such a situation, Śrīla Prabhupāda's words are not necessarily the strongest *pramāṇa*. The SAC's overarching principle thus has no standing as a legitimate hermeneutical principle, but the traditional system of Vedic *pramāṇas* includes the words of *ācāryas* and is always applicable.

**The SAC's overarching principle makes Śrīla Prabhupāda subordinate to the preferences of the person who has to decide which of his statements best apply.**

The final step in the SAC's hermeneutical process is that a living decision-maker determines which statements from previous *ācāryas*, *śāstra*, or Śrīla Prabhupāda are best suited according to time, place, person and circumstance. As per the SAC, one should "find the traditional principles, see how they have been applied in various circumstances, both ancient and by Śrīla Prabhupāda, and then adjust for the particular needs and circumstances of our time" (33). Although there is *śāstric* support for this, the SAC's overemphasis of Śrīla Prabhupāda as the primary *pramāṇa* puts all evidence from *śabda* on the same level, since *śāstra* according to *śāstra* itself is primary evidence (37), and our previous *ācāryas* have their own high qualifications that put them and Śrīla Prabhupāda on the same level. If everything is primary, then nothing is primary.

And because one can find a quote from Śrīla Prabhupāda to support almost any point, evidence from *śāstra* or previous *ācāryas* can always be overridden. In this regard, in a 2007 essay titled "ISKCON's Search for Self-Identity," Dr. Thomas J. Hopkins notes that in ISKCON disputes over the various, conflicting statements made by Śrīla Prabhupāda are rarely settled, ". . . because the volume of Prabhupāda's statements and writings over the years is so great, and they have been so carefully recorded and made available, that a careful search of the cumulative records—an activity at which ISKCON's various factions have become adept—can usually turn up something to prove almost any point." If one can prove almost any point with a statement from Śrīla Prabhupāda, and if Śrīla Prabhupāda is primary evidence, then "Śrīla Prabhupāda first" becomes "only Śrīla Prabhupāda." Thus, the SAC's overarching principle weakens the authority of *śāstra* and previous *ācāryas* to the point of being superfluous, and it elevates the decision-maker's opinion above all other *pramāṇas*.

The historic ritvik controversy is a good example of this, because the ritvik and anti-ritvik sides implicitly accept the idea that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the primary *pramāṇa*. In 1995, the GBC published a work titled *Gurus and Initiations in ISKCON* (GII), whose purpose was to give members of ISKCON "an accurate and up-to-date text of ISKCON's laws governing gurus and initiation" along with the reasoning and evidence used by GBC members in creating those laws. Overall, the GBC's book was a response to the ritvik proxy-guru theory, and it also included the statements of a number of *ācāryas*—particularly on the subject of what a disciple should do if his *dīkṣā-guru* deviates.

A treatise titled *The Final Order* (TFO), however, rejected this evidence and accused the GBC of trying to bypass Śrīla Prabhupāda. "The chapter [by the GBC] begins by asserting the importance of approaching a current link, and not 'jumping over' (GII, p. 27). However, the authors proceed to do precisely this by quoting numerous previous *ācāryas* in an attempt to establish principles never taught by Śrīla Prabhupāda." Among ISKCON's members, such criticisms tended to blunt the force of arguments that did not rely primarily on Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Although the anti-ritvik side sometimes independently quoted *śāstra* and *ācāryas*, writers in this group tended to avoid doing so if Śrīla Prabhupāda did not also quote them. For example, the GBC's direct response to the proxy-guru theory, titled "On My Order Understood," exclusively quotes Śrīla Prabhupāda and no other independent source, except as quoted by Śrīla Prabhupāda himself. Even at the highest levels, the debate over ritvikism did not rise above "Śrīla Prabhupāda said this" versus "Śrīla Prabhupāda said that," as Dr. Hopkins described it. Hence, the debate itself did not settle the matter, and ISKCON eventually splintered into majority non-ritvik and minority ritvik factions.

The SAC's elevation of Śrīla Prabhupāda to the position of primary *pramāṇa* has no precedent in either *śāstra* or the Vedic tradition. As already pointed out, the SAC's *pramāṇas* in support of their overarching principle apply to all bona fide *ācāryas*, including Śrīla Prabhupāda's own successors. None of these *pramāṇas* point specifically to Śrīla Prabhupāda and exclude the rest. But even taking Śrīla Prabhupāda as ISKCON's foundational *śikṣā-guru*, which he undoubtedly is, the works of an *ācārya* are still considered to be *smṛti*, not *śruti*, the highest category of *śabda-pramāṇa*. As per *Manu-saṁhitā* 2.6 and other *śāstras*, Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements, exemplary behavior and personal preferences each are a source of dharma, but none are the primary source. So, there is no precedent in either *śāstra* or the Vedic tradition for the SAC's overarching principle, which instead more closely resembles the Buddhist doctrine of Lord Buddha being the only source for understanding the truth.

In this regard, the philosopher Mādhavācārya has commented in his *Sarva-darśana-saṅgraha* that although Buddhism has only one teacher (the Buddha) it has nevertheless fragmented into numerous sects.

"Though the venerated Buddha be the only one teacher, his disciples are fourfold in consequence of the diversity of views; just as when one has said, 'The sun has set,' the adulterer, the thief, and the divinity students, and others understand that it is time to set about their assignations, their theft, their religious studies, and so forth, according to their several inclinations" (page 15, translation by E.B. Cowell, A.E. Gough).

And among ISKCON's followers there is a similar, emerging diversity of views that are best explained as primarily reflecting the inclinations of their proponents, who each say that his own view is based on the true teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda. The SAC's overarching principle merely formalizes the long-standing idea of Śrīla Prabhupāda as ISKCON's "Buddha" (or "Jesus Christ," etc.).

Śrīla Prabhupāda therefore says that such rampant speculation arises on account of not accepting the principles of Vedic knowledge.

"According to the Buddhists' fifth principle, Lord Buddha is the only source for the attainment of knowledge. We cannot accept this, for Lord Buddha rejected the principles of Vedic knowledge. One must accept a principle of standard knowledge because one cannot attain the Absolute Truth simply by intellectual speculation. If everyone is an authority, or if everyone accepts his own intelligence as the ultimate criterion — as is presently fashionable — the scriptures will be interpreted in many different ways, and everyone will claim that his own philosophy is supreme. This has become a very great problem, and everyone is interpreting scripture in his own way and setting up his own basis of authority. Yata mata tata patha. Now everybody and anybody is trying to establish his own theory as the ultimate truth" (CC Madhya 9.49 p.)

As per the *śāstras*, Śrīla Prabhupāda is a source of dharma, and for his followers he is the best way in the same way that a doctor is the best way for a patient to learn something about medical science and apply it. But when

there is need for reconciling conflicting statements between different *śāstras* and *ācāryas*, and even between Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own statements, the SAC’s overarching principle is against the Vedic principles of knowledge. These principles already account for the words of great *ācāryas* and explain their strength relative to other kinds of evidence. So, continuing to follow the SAC’s overarching principle ensures that others can continue to put forward their own ideas in the name of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s and contribute to the further fragmentation of ISKCON.

## Do the SAC’s hermeneutical tools pass “the grain of rice test”?

### SAC Tool 3: Example of bogus *tāratamya* or distinguishing of hierarchy:

The first and foremost problem with this section of the SAC hermeneutics tool (Tool 3 on page 117) is that the title and the content have very little connection to each other. Perhaps this is due to the authors treating *śāstra* and Śrīla Prabhupāda statements as one and the same. In other words, the whole hermeneutic course material dances around a dubious *tāratamya* between *guru-vākya* and *śāstra-vākya* with minimal reference to *sādhū-vākyas*. In fact, Śrīla Prabhupāda himself had given the process of *tāratamya* in his purport to CC Madhya 20.352, which unfortunately the SAC has completely neglected without even a mention of this most significant purport that is a direct instruction on this topic of hermeneutics, as cited below:

“One should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words of saintly people, the spiritual master and the *śāstra*. **The actual center is the *śāstra*, the revealed scripture.** If a spiritual master does not speak according to the revealed scripture, he is not to be accepted. Similarly, if a saintly person does not speak according to the *śāstra*, he is not a saintly person. **The *śāstra* is the center for all.**”

Ignoring Śrīla Prabhupāda’s most important instructions on *tāratamya*, the SAC as a group has attempted to create a novel process of *tāratamya* spread across various sections of their writings, thereby violating yet another important instruction of Śrīla Prabhupāda as mentioned below (bolding added):

“The standards I have already given you, now try to maintain them at all times under standard procedure. **Do not try to innovate or create anything or manufacture anything**, that will ruin everything. Simply do as I am doing and be always serious and sincere to serve Kṛṣṇa, and He will give you intelligence (on) how to do everything.” – [Letter to: Bali-mardana, Pusta Kṛṣṇa, Sep 18, 1972, Los Angeles]

The above two quotes are very significant, since these are Śrīla Prabhupāda’s direct instructions on keeping *śāstra* as the “*mūlam-pramāṇam*,” the standard process of harmonizing *guru-vākyas* and *sādhū-vākyas* in accordance with *śāstra-vākyas*, and not to introduce anything new or innovate or manufacture any new processes or frameworks. Thus any Vedic hermeneutics course that does not keep these two instructions in focus is not only deviating from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings but, as warned by His Divine Grace, is on a slippery slope of ruining everything.

### Analysis of SAC’s hermeneutics tool (Tool-3):

Whereas this tool recommends a method of *tāratamya* by seeking guidance from *śāstra* itself, SAC also recommends applying the same method of distinguishing and seeking guidance with reference to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements as well. This creates an ambiguity of whether SAC treats Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements as standalone and equivalent to *śāstra* or independent of *śāstra* in certain cases?

Whereas, on page 117, in the section dealing with SAC’s method of understanding the statements of Śrīla Prabhupāda, step 1 recommends that we check whether Śrīla Prabhupāda interpreted his own statements or

not. The problem with this method is that how can one be sure that one is understanding Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements or their interpretations without any error? Is that the process to understand *guru-vākya*s such as the statements of Śrīla Prabhupāda? In many of his purports, specifically BG 17.15, Śrīla Prabhupāda himself instructs us about such processes of understanding in spiritual circles. Accordingly we find in his purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* 17.15, as below:

“The process of speaking in spiritual circles is to say something upheld by the scriptures. One should at once quote from scriptural authority to back up what he is saying.” [BG 17.15 purport]

The step 2 of this tool recommends the students consult directly the *śāstras* if “they think” Śrīla Prabhupāda has not sufficiently interpreted his own statements. Moreover there is no mention of consulting *sādhū-vākya*s of one's own tradition and other Vaiṣṇava traditions, but to seek directly the *śāstras* for further clarifications, which only exacerbates the situation of incorrect *tāratamya* process as given by Vaiṣṇava *ācārya*s. Furthermore, the SAC, as part of step 3 and step 4, recommends the students to seek guidance from Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers to interpret Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements, which is nothing but returning back to *guru-vākya*s since the followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda are in *guru-vargya*. So we can clearly detect the lack of recommendation to consult *sādhū-vākya*s in this methodology as one among many serious lapses.

### **What should be the correct method or what are the main lapses in the method recommended by SAC?**

Step 1 should have recommended that the students to understand Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements in relation to *śāstra* and as well as evaluate all other *ācārya*s' interpretations (*sādhū-vākya*s), if any, in relation to *śāstras* by keeping *śāstra* as the center of all. In other words, just follow Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions as he has given in his purports, specifically the purport to CC Madhya 20.352.

Again, this is yet another instance of the deficiency of this course, which exposes the fault of not keeping *śāstra* as the center of all, or *mūlam-pramāṇam*. Hence, by not recommending the students of hermeneutics course to understand the statements of Śrīla Prabhupāda (*guru-vākya*) and *sādhū-vākya*s in harmony with *śāstra-vākya*, the SAC is clearly violating Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions on this topic.

On page 117 SAC recommends the students to discriminate and on their own determine the right interpretation, when there are varying interpretations among the followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda, which makes the case for “the last straw that breaks the camel's back.” Hence, the steps laid out in this section of the SAC hermeneutics tool is merely following “*āroha-pantha*” and they are prescribing the same for ISKCON devotees to follow, which is not the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda and other Vaiṣṇava *ācārya*s. This course relies on a modern and mundane method of ascending process of acquiring knowledge and hence not suited for a devout community of scholars.

### **Misunderstood principle and misapplied tool - Principle 21 and Tool 36 prescribe feminist arguments:**

#### **Wrong guiding principle - Principle 21:**

In this section SAC advises us to understand Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements based on his mood and mission. Question is how can we be certain that we have understood it in the right way and how to be sure that our own understanding is not influenced by the four defects of “*āroha pantha*?” We will demonstrate with an example from the section of “Evidence of Tool 3,” page 119 which demonstrates that the SAC's conclusion is based on *āroha pantha* and hence is prone to four defects.

Evidence for Method in regards to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements

**For step one, an example**

From the lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā* 6.40–42, New York, September 16, 1966: Govinda dāsī: You said that after leaving this body, this body is gone, you’ll part with Kṛṣṇa consciousness and go to a higher place? [indistinct]

Prabhupāda: No. If you make perfection of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then after leaving this body you go directly to Kṛṣṇa. But if you are not perfect, if you have simply executed a certain percentage only then you’ll get the chance of another human body either in this planet or any other planet to execute the balance.

In this example Śrīla Prabhupāda interprets his own statement and hence, there is no need for another authoritative interpreter.

**For step two, an example**

If we would not have Śrīla Prabhupāda’s answer to Govinda dāsī (as quoted above), we would have to depend on *śāstra* to interpret this statement.

Govinda dāsī’s query was, whether after leaving the body, every devotee will leave with Kṛṣṇa consciousness to a higher planet. If we look into the pages of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, we get the same answer as Prabhupāda had given.

*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 5.5.6:

***prītir na yāvan mayi vāsudeve na mucyate deha-yogena tāvat***

**Translation:** As long as one has not developed love for Lord Vāsudeva, one is certainly not delivered from having to accept a material body again and again.

In this case, we can see that depending on *śāstra* will bring us to the same answer.

The SAC’s evidence in support for step 1 of tool 3 is a conversation in which Govinda Dāsī repeats in her own words something she has heard from Śrīla Prabhupāda, followed by Śrīla Prabhupāda who then corrects her. And from this example, the SAC concludes that “. . . Śrīla Prabhupāda interprets his own statement and hence, there is no need for another authoritative interpreter.” It should be noted, however, that Śrīla Prabhupāda does not actually “interpret his own statement” but corrects Govinda Dāsī’s misstatement that she attributes to him. It is Govinda Dāsī’s statement, not Śrīla Prabhupāda’s, that is “interpreted” (page 119). Let us consider their evidence in support for step 2, in which they try to show that had there been no reply from Śrīla Prabhupāda, we would have approached *śāstras* (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 5.5.6) for answers. Again, the verse SB 5.5.6 is not directly stating the things that Śrīla Prabhupāda stated. Śrīla Prabhupāda clearly stated that we would get a human body to continue our Krishna consciousness from the point where we left off in the previous body. So this proves that SAC members started on the wrong footing of “āroha pantha.” These kinds of mistakes are proliferated in their document in its entirety.

On page 86, under the section “Principle 21” and its associated “tool 36” (page 232), the SAC states that we should understand Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements by his application based on his mood and mission. There is a problem with this approach: by applying their principle (21) and its associated tool 36 they come to a conclusion that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s personal communication is more important to devotees of ISKCON than the instructions contained in his books, making his books less relevant.

Let us consider some examples from page 86 through 90 that explains the principle of applying time, place, and



circumstances in regards to understanding Srila Prabhupada's mood and mission. As part of explanation, the SAC author(s) cite as evidence that Dhruva Maharaja get a "reverse psychology," as cited below:

Dhruva Maharaja gets reverse psychology

With Dhruva, a small child, Nārada used reverse psychology. Usually, if you tell a child to do something he will say "no!" Therefore, sometimes you must tell him to do the opposite thing.

When Dhruva went to the forest to perform austerities Nārada told Dhruva: You are only a little boy, attached to sports and games. Why are you so affected by words insulting your honor? You should know that dissatisfaction is due to the illusory energy, which gives you karma according to your previous life. These austerities in the forest are very difficult for anyone to perform, therefore, I think it's better that you just go home. When you grow up, you can think of an austere life. One should be satisfied in happiness and distress.

Actually, Nārada was testing Dhruva's determination. When Dhruva firmly rejected Nārada's advice, then Nārada instructed him in yoga.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also used reverse psychology. When some teenagers were revving up their motorbikes near the temple in New Vrindavan a disciple suggested that they tell them to stop it. Śrīla Prabhupāda replied that if we tell them to stop then they will do it even more.

The above passage is presented on page 87 as an overarching principle, but we do not find any of our ācāryas including Śrīla Prabhupāda state that Dhruva Mahārāja was tricked by Nārada muni in terms of "reverse psychology." These are some interpretations inserted to arrive at a pre-meditated agenda of trying to project Śrīla Prabhupāda's casual personal instructions contained in correspondences and other informal communications as carrying more weight than those instructions contained in his books. The principle 21 contains mental speculations and hence the application of that principle in tool 36 also gives us the wrong conclusions as will be established in next paragraphs.

We have already shown that the SAC's main overarching principle of keeping Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements as the center, or *mūlam-pramāṇam*, is not what Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed us in his purport to CC Madhya 20.352. Let us consider the following snippet from page 232, under the heading "Tool 36:"

Evidence and Explanation:

**By Nārāyaṇī Devī dāsī:**

Śrīla Prabhupāda said many things in his books which appear very strict, but in his application to his followers, he adapted the principles of *śāstra* to different contexts according to his mood and mission. So the statements in his books sometimes appear to contradict his more compassionate application of those statements.

**The mood and mission of a pure devotee may sometimes be more compassionate than the statements of *śāstra*, or devotees' own statements in explaining *śāstra*.**

Here we find yet another violation of Śrīla Prabhupāda's instruction to keep his books as the basis for understanding. There are also specific instructions from Śrīla Prabhupāda to not rely on personal correspondences as globally applicable formula. The statements emphasized above clearly shows the offensive nature of minimizing *śāstra-vākyas* or divorcing *guru-vākyas* and *sādhu-vākyas* from that of *śāstra-vākyas*. The following letter from Śrīla Prabhupāda to Brāhmaṇanda clearly states that all information in the letters

pertaining to specific context are personal and confidential and that they are certainly not meant to be widely published:

".. I shall request you not to circulate all my letters that I address to you. Letters are sometimes personal and confidential, and if all letters are circulated, it may react reversely. I have already got some hints like that with letters I sent to you regarding Kirtanananda and Hayagriva. So in the future please do not circulate my letters to you. All my letters to you should be considered as confidential, and if you want at all to circulate, you just ask me before doing so." - [Śrīla Prabhupāda's letter to Brāhmaṇanda, 28 September, 1969]

One may argue that in two separate letters addressed to Gargamuni (Feb 5, 1969 and Feb 17, 1969), Śrīla Prabhupāda had indicated that reprinting of letters sent to Gargamuni may be undertaken at a lower priority. Nonetheless, the letter to Brāhmaṇanda is more recent (dated six months later), and it clearly distinguishes the intent of personal communications being confidential (not for circulation) and not for general reference material. Furthermore, there are numerous instructions contained in letters, dated in mid-seventies as cited below, which clearly emphasises Śrīla Prabhupāda's statement, "Books are the basis."

Books are the basis of our Movement. Whatever appreciation we are getting on account of our books, it is because we are following the path chalked out by exalted devotees. We are not writing something whimsical.

Letter to: Tusta Kṛṣṇa—Bombay, 9 January, 1976

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Śrīla Prabhupāda said:

Whatever I have wanted to say, I have said in my books. If I live, I will say something more. If you want to know me, read my books.

From TKG's Diary, June 9, 1977

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You may please me the most by reading my books and following the instructions therein and by becoming fully Krishna Conscious in this life time.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, in a letter to Bahurupa -- Bombay 22 November, 1974

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The conversation between Śrīla Prabhupāda and Revatīnandana clearly establishes the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda wants his disciples, followers, and everyone else to refer to his books for personal instructions. This is in opposition to the statements made as part of SAC's Principle 21 and its associated tool 36.

Revatīnandana: I have read your books, and I have heard you lecture. And so many things they are asking, I am..., have no capacity to answer them. But you must have the capacity because you know Kṛṣṇa. Therefore they want to ask you personally.

Devotee (1): So that is the...

Prabhupāda: So far I am not so able to answer. I admit my fault.

Devotee (1): Oh, so then that is...

Prabhupāda: I cannot answer.

Devotee (1): I understand. Okay? But they are saying, the general conception of you is that because you know Kṛṣṇa...

Prabhupāda: You can... You...

Devotee (1): [interrupting] Excuse me. Because you know Kṛṣṇa, therefore you know everything about the material world and can answer all questions.

Prabhupāda: So whatever I know I have explained in my books. Beyond that, I have got no knowledge.

Devotee (2): If that is the case, Śrīla Prabhupāda, that does not diminish our respect for you in the least, because we have always held...

Prabhupāda: So what can I do? **I say that whatever I have got experience, I am explaining in my books. I have explained. It is not possible for me to answer every individual person. It is not possible.**

Devotee (2): We respect that. We understand. It is just that because they are saying these things...

Prabhupāda: **I have got my advanced students. They can answer.** If they are unable to answer, if you do not find answer from my books, then it is hopeless.

Devotee (1): Ah! But your advanced students are saying if they give an answer that, **because they have been appointed by you, therefore their answer is perfectly correct, because...., absolutely correct on all things in the relative world, because they have been appointed by you, and because you know...**

Prabhupāda: You may... That's all right. If you don't believe them, you can finish business.

Devotee (2): **But are they correct? That's what we want to know.**

Prabhupāda: **Yes. They are correct.**

Room Conversation — June 26, 1975, Los Angeles

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Another letter on the same topic sent on behalf of Śrīla Prabhupāda, as below:

My dear Prana Prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances. **I have been instructed by His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda to reply your letter** dated July 9th, 1977.

In discussing with His Divine Grace I summarized your desire to have access to all of the many tapes which Golden Avatar has for the purpose of transcribing them into rough manuscript form to be published later on as cross references or in some other form. His Divine Grace was not very enthusiastic at all about this idea. **Śrīla Prabhupāda commented, "This is not necessary. My books are sufficient. Let**

**all of my disciples read my books.** This idea is over-burden. **It will mean to many readings. Let them read whatever is there and digest it. Everything I have wanted to say I have said in my books.** This will only be superfluous. **Tell him to concentrate on reading my books, not on studying such transcriptions. Does he think he will find something else in these transcriptions that are not in my books?"** ... Formerly when I visited St. Louis temple with Tripurari Maharaja, we both noticed at that time that there was a tendency on many persons there part, to study so many other "Prabhupāda's teachings." But now you have been fortunately blessed with the good direction from your own Spiritual Master to simply satisfy yourself in your thirst for transcendental knowledge by studying Śrīla Prabhupāda's existing books. Actually you should know that Prabhupāda's books are better than His speeches. This is because He concentrates tremendously and chooses each word when He writes these books. This is not my opinion but He Himself has said this to me.

...

Your servant,

Dear Ramesvar, This gives a definitive statement by His Divine Grace in case any other persons are thinking to do this also. TKG

- Letter from Tamal Krishna Gosvāmī, Vrndavana, July 20, 1977

Hence, the SAC's guiding principle to keep Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal communications contained in his letters and conversations above the instructions contained in his books and lectures is a problem, and it explains why many contentious issues have been forcing a lop-sided argument based on modern egalitarian methods, instead of facilitating a traditional Śāstrārtha or discussions based on Śāstric injunctions. We will now proceed to show how using a bad principle, the tool 36 attempts to infiltrate the feminist and egalitarian ethos into the very fabric of ISKCON.

### **Tool 36 vouches for anti-varṇāśrama and is based on egalitarian ideas:**

Despite overwhelming evidence against relying on his personal communications as primary evidence, the SAC and its authors clearly violated Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions yet another time while applying their overarching principle (21) in the application for Tool 36 (231). The author(s) try to stitch two separate purports but come up with a controversial conclusion that Śrīla Prabhupāda at times "innovated" and "created" his own stance on issues related to women even though those stance deviated from the Vedic standards. In this way they proliferate such apa-sampradaya concepts as over-arching principles and develop tools to support such narratives. For example, the SAC states on page 233:

We can find an example in relation to Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements about women. He often spoke strongly about women being less intelligent and subordinate in society. Taken on their own, these statements may give a particularly harsh view of Śrīla Prabhupāda. And yet, in his application, Śrīla Prabhupāda was compassionate and innovative.

*Bhagavad-gītā* 1.40:

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.

In *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* Śrīla Prabhupāda describes his preaching application in relation to women in his movement. This can help us better understand his statements about women, in light of his mood and mission.

*Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi 7.32:*

An *ācārya* who comes for the service of the Lord cannot be expected to conform to a stereotype, for he must find the ways and means by which Kṛṣṇa consciousness may be spread. Sometimes jealous persons criticize the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement because it engages equally both boys and girls in distributing love of Godhead. Not knowing that boys and girls in countries like Europe and America mix very freely, these fools and rascals criticize the boys and girls in Kṛṣṇa consciousness for intermingling. **But these rascals should consider that one cannot suddenly change a community's social customs.** However, since both the boys and the girls are being trained to become preachers, those girls are not ordinary girls but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, to engage both boys and girls in fully transcendental activities is a policy intended to spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. These jealous fools who criticize the intermingling of boys and girls will simply have to be satisfied with their own foolishness because they cannot think of how to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness by adopting ways and means that are favorable for this purpose. Their stereotyped methods will never help spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, what we are doing is perfect by the grace of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, for it is He who proposed to invent a way to capture those who strayed from Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The above example given by SAC is highly subjective. Such selective citations, from an ocean of teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda, only creates speculative controversies that Śrīla Prabhupāda was a propounder of anti-traditional concepts whereas in actuality he has written and spoken volumes emphasizing the role of women as submissive wife to her husband and a loving mother to others. He also emphasized the need to establish Varṇāśrama farm communities. In this purport, by stating that one cannot make sudden changes, Srila Prabhupada clearly demonstrated his intention to introduce gradual changes to the western social custom of free intermingling. He segregated such intermingling by getting them married although he was a sanyasi. There are other purports that explain that part.. So this purport is misused for propagating feminist agenda. Note the words, “one cannot suddenly change a community's social customs.” So Śrīla Prabhupāda did change such customs gradually.

The ramification of this can be easily perceived in their application of tool 36, in which they conclude that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not consider that *varṇāśrama* is important for ISKCON, he did not want his spiritual daughters to be dependent on their husbands etc., Let us consider a snippet from page 234 of the SAC paper:

Regarding protection of women

Kīrtanānanda wanted to call all women book distributors to live on the farm in New Vrindaban so as to better do their *varṇāśrama* duties.

Here was Śrīla Prabhupāda's reply in a letter to Karandhara from October 6, 1973:

So far as the women distributors who have left New York and Boston temples and have gone to New Vṛndāvana, they should return immediately and resume their original service. In Caitanya Mahāprabhu's movement, everyone is a preacher, whether man or woman it doesn't matter. I do now know why Kīrtanānanda Maharaja is encouraging our woman devotees not to go out on saṅkīrtana for book distribution. Everyone should go out.

**When the husbands left the women to remarry Śrīla Prabhupāda did not recommend remarriage.**

Letter to Govinda dāsī, April 30, 1974:

These are material relationships and have nothing to do with spiritual advancement. Engage your life fully for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Only chant Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* day and night, read books and expressing the philosophy in your own words write articles for publishing in Back to Godhead. Don't bother anymore with rascals like Gaurasundara or anyone else. Take Kṛṣṇa as your supreme protector and Kṛṣṇa will help you in all respects. Practice this prescription and you will be happy eternally.

Letter to Dinadayādri, May 26, 1974:

There is no question of your returning to Nara-Nārāyaṇa. He has remarried, and I also informed him when I was in Los Angeles last time, that he should keep his one wife, living peaceful in Los Angeles. You have got one child, so now make Kṛṣṇa your husband and take shelter of our temple. So take spiritual instructions from your elder Godbrothers and sisters, forget the past, and make all progress in Kṛṣṇa consciousness without any material lamentation or hankering.

Once again, the above 2 out of 3 citations are in regards to a situation that concerned individuals and cannot be used as a blanket cover for entire movement. Each and every individual situations can vary due to time, place, and circumstances. If we start to be attached to private correspondences but forget standard instructions then we will end up creating a heretic movement. The statement emphasized in above cited passage, seems to be stemming out of unawareness of Vedic tradition. Śrīla Prabhupāda merely followed the vedic custom of in which men are allowed to re-marry for a purpose, but they can never divorce the previous ones nor that the women generally did not remarry, especially when her previous husband is alive. Hence, by not allowing Govinda Dasi from getting re-married he did follow the vedic custom of protecting women and not allowing women to re-marry.

Now, in regards to the other citation that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not want Kirtananada Maharaja to pull women out of sankirtan parties is altogether a different topic not connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda discouraging women's role in a varnasrama farm communities.

We will consider some more examples from the SAC paper to expose the hidden agenda behind such efforts to standardize deviations. While taking a statement out of context from a personal letter written to Haṁsadūta, Oct 19, 1974, they highlight the specific portion in which Śrīla Prabhupāda says:

“Regarding the farm, farm opening is not very essential, but if you can do it conveniently, then do it. The *varṇāśrama* system is for convenience sake in the material world. It had nothing to do with spiritual life. Acceptance of *varṇāśrama* means a little easy progress to spiritual life, otherwise it has no importance to us.”

The above quote referred to in SAC tool 36 (p235) is only a partial quote, which was intended for a completely different purpose. The original context for Prabhupāda sending this instruction to Hamsadūta was that he did not want to invest a lot of money in buying a farm when at that time; the priorities were totally different. In a book titled *Śrīla Prabhupāda and His Disciples in Germany, Vedavyāsa dāsa*, the writer, narrates the complete context of Hamsadūta's correspondence under the chapter, "15. Mit funf Mark sind Sie dabei!" In that chapter the writer claims that Hamsadūta wanted to buy farm lands in Germany from the money raised through sale of LP records and books, but Śrīla Prabhupāda, at that juncture, did not want the money to be spent on farm land but wanted the money to be spent on *prasādam* distribution at ISKCON Māyāpur. A Vedabase software search yields some more results, among which, is a book written by another ISKCON devotee; that writer has also used the same Hamsadūta correspondence from page 59 as supporting evidence for his context, which is far different from that of Śrīla Prabhupāda's originally intended message.

However, if you refer to Śrīla Prabhupāda books, in numerous purports he has repeatedly emphasized implementing *varṇāśrama* dharma within Krishna conscious societies. He has even presented a framework in his books at various levels on how to implement *varṇāśrama-dharma*. So, this proves that using the method prescribed in Principle 21 and tool 36 will only lead ISKCON creating more and more controversies and thus detract devotees away from Śrīla Prabhupāda books and lectures.

### **Tool 36 propounds feminist ideas - women to live independently:**

Again, using the misleading guiding principle of employing Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal letters to devotees as a global panacea, Tool 36 propounds feminism and women's liberation by raking up issues such as "women are less intelligent" and alleging that Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted his woman disciples to be independent. They misrepresent Śrīla Prabhupāda by quoting his personal letters to devotees in order to create their feminist narrative that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not want his female disciples to be in a *varṇāśrama* society but live independently in the name of book distribution. They also quote other letters sent to Govinda Dāsī and Mālatī Dāsī to establish that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not get his women disciples remarried when their husbands left them but instead allowed them to live independently. However, this is a wrongheaded feminist narrative the SAC is promoting, since another letter, cited below, proves that Śrīla Prabhupāda never encouraged separation of married husband and wife and never encouraged women to live independently:

"You should always live with your husband and help him with his personal comforts, and he will look after your all necessities of life. There is no question of separation. By mutual agreement and advancement of Krishna Consciousness you can stop sex life, but there is no question of separation. Separation is artificial. As Hamsadūta advances in Krishna Consciousness then by his company you will also profit. So the husband and wife are mutually beneficial. This idea of separation was developed also in Govinda Dāsī, but I have sent her back to her husband, and she is now following my instructions. There is no question of separation between husband and wife until the time when the husband takes sannyasa. At that time the wife cannot remain with the husband. Even in the vanaprastha state, or retired life, the wife remains with the husband, but without any sex relations." - (Letter to Himavati, Jan. 24, 1969)

Furthermore, Śrīla Prabhupāda did follow the Vedic custom of men being allowed to remarry but can never divorce the previous ones. Hence, by not allowing Govinda Dāsī to get remarried, he did follow the Vedic custom of protecting women and not allowing women to remarry.

## **Conclusion – “grain of rice test”**

Apart from the scriptural injunctions, common sense says that “a prescription for cure” is always unique and varies from patient to patient. However, the SAC has attempted to create a standard for interpretation that is fundamentally based on “*āroha pantha*” (filled with the four defects conditioned life) and has also attempted to standardize exceptions as rules for the entire movement. In other words, what they are attempting is something like taking a prescription drug and trying to put it on the counter for anyone to try it. Hence it is not only illusory but extremely dangerous to accept and adopt SAC’s recommendations to consider a specific prescription as a universal panacea.