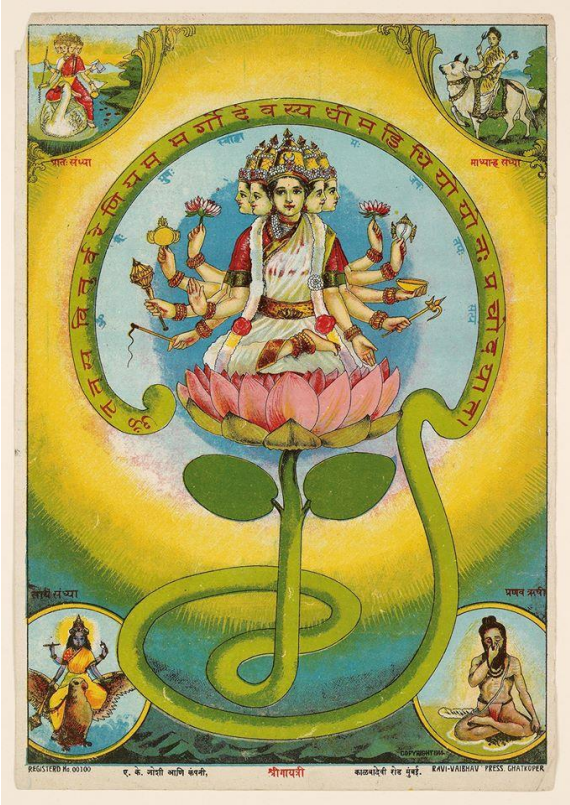


Brahma-gāyatrī mantra in ISKCON

VARṆĀŚRAMA, BHAKTI, PRINCIPLE OR DETAIL?

Śāstric Advisory Council to
ISKCON's Governing Body
Commission
2021

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Maṅgalācaraṇa

nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale
śrīmate bhaktivedānta-svāmin iti nāmine
namas te sārasvate deve gaura-vāṇī-pracāriṇe
nirviśeṣa-śūnyavādi-pāścātya-deśa-tāriṇe

Translation: I offer my respectful obeisances unto His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda, who is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa, having taken shelter at His lotus feet. Our respectful obeisances are unto you, O spiritual master, servant of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī. You are kindly preaching the message of Lord Caitanyadeva and delivering the Western countries, which are filled with impersonalism and voidism.

om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya
janmādy asya yato 'nvayād itarataś cārtheṣv abhijñaḥ svarāṭ
tene brahma hṛdā ya ādi-kavaye muhyanti yat sūrayaḥ
tejo-vāri-mṛdāṁ yathā vinimayo yatra tri-sargo 'mṛṣā
dhāmnā svena sadā nirasta-kuhakaṁ satyaṁ paraṁ dhīmahi

Translation: O my Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, O all-pervading Personality of Godhead, I offer my respectful obeisances unto You. I meditate upon Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa because He is the Absolute Truth and the primeval cause of all causes of the creation, sustenance and destruction of the manifested universes. He is directly and indirectly conscious of all manifestations, and He is independent because there is no other cause beyond Him. It is He only who first imparted the Vedic knowledge unto the heart of Brahmājī, the original living being. By Him even the great sages and demigods are placed into illusion, as one is bewildered by the illusory representations of water seen in fire, or land seen on water. Only because of Him do the material universes, temporarily manifested by the reactions of the three modes of nature, appear factual, although they are unreal. I therefore meditate upon Him, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is eternally existent in the transcendental abode, which is forever free from the illusory representations of the material world. I meditate upon Him, for He is the Absolute Truth. (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.1.1)

vedeṣu yajñeṣu tapaḥsu caiva
dāneṣu yat puṇya-phalaṁ pradiṣṭam
atyeti tat sarvam idaṁ viditvā
yogī paraṁ sthānam upaiti cādyam

Translation: A person who accepts the path of devotional service is not bereft of the results derived from studying the *Vedas*, performing sacrifices, undergoing austerities, giving charity

or pursuing philosophical and fruitive activities. Simply by performing devotional service, he attains all these, and at the end he reaches the supreme eternal abode. (*Bhagavad-gītā* 8.28)

yathā kāñcanatāṁ yāti
kāṁsyaṁ rasa-vidhānataḥ
tathā dīkṣā-vidhānena
dvijatvaṁ jāyate nṛṇām

Translation: Just as bell-metal attains *kāñcana-tā* (gold-ness, similarity to gold) by following the procedures of alchemy, similarly by following the procedures of *dīkṣā* , *dvija-tva* (*dvija*-ness, similarity to twice-born individuals) is produced for humans. (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 2.12)[1]

jayatāṁ suratau paṅgor
mama manda-mater gatī
mat-sarvasva-padāmbhojau
rādhā-madana-mohanau

Translation: Glory to the all-merciful Rādhā and Madana-mohana! I am lame and ill advised, yet They are my directors, and Their lotus feet are everything to me. (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 1.15)

Methodology

Hermeneutics

By *ISKCON hermeneutics* we refer to the discipline and methodology that considers *how* to appropriately study, understand, apply, explain and perpetuate the teachings of *guru-sādhu-śāstra*. Such a discipline comes from the Vaiṣṇava tradition itself.

Hermeneutic principles used in developing this paper

Note: These principles are from a Śāstric Advisory Council document on ISKCON hermeneutics.

- Understanding tradition through Śrīla Prabhupāda, accepting 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.

[1] We have used a literal translation here as doing so is pivotal to the reconciliation of paradox and apparent contradictions in the specific topic, as explained in the paper itself.

- Hierarchies are present within *śāstra* and between *śāstras.*
- Consideration of context, including historical circumstance, is essential to gaining *śāstric* insight.
- Insight emerges through apt dialogue, and through mediation, resolution, or reconciliation of paradox, apparent contradiction, and multiple views.
- The highest truth aims at the welfare of all.
- We understand Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements by his application of them in relation to his mood and mission.
- Education in *śāstra*, delivered by the self-realized teacher (guru), helps preserve disciplic succession.

Hermeneutic tools used in developing this paper

Note: These tools are from a Śāstric Advisory Council document on ISKCON hermeneutics and enable one to apply hermeneutic principles.

For each part of this paper, we summarize with the following hermeneutic process, explained in the SAC hermeneutic document in the section about concise statements of reaching conclusions (the "*siddhānta*" of a discussion). The practitioner is expected to arrive at the conclusion, *siddhānta,* by following a particular process:

viśayaḥ saṁśayaś caiva
pūrva-pakṣas tathottaram
nirṇayaś ceti siddhāntaṁ
śāstre 'dhikaraṇaṁ smṛtam

Translation: First comes the *viśaya* (topic of discussion), followed by *saṁśaya* (doubt), *pūrva-pakṣa* (hearing one side); *uttara-pakṣa* (hearing the other side); deciding in favor of a side (*nirṇayaḥ*) and finally *siddhānta* (conclusive statement). (*Bhāṭṭa-cintāmaṇi* of Śrī Gāgā Bhaṭṭa)

One may also refer to hermeneutics tool 37 in the SAC materials, where we detail two related and slightly different processes.

Additionally, we have used the following hermeneutic tools:

- Consider *Pramāṇas* (sources of authority)
- Which Text Provides a Higher Level of Authority?
- Consider One's Own Cultural and Individual Perspectives, Along with One's Life Experiences
- We Should Understand *Śāstra* from Many Angles of Vision

- Understanding of *Guru-Sādhu-Śāstra* is Only Possible with *Jīve Dayā*
- Choose the Most Merciful Meaning
- Consider How Śrīla Prabhupāda Applied His Statements In His Mission
- Refer to Tradition (*paramparā*)
- Study Holistically and Repeatedly

Translations

Translations are generally from Śrīla Prabhupāda, when available. In cases where Śrīla Prabhupāda translated the same verse in different ways in various places, we have chosen the translation most relevant to the topic at hand. In some cases, SAC members translated verses even where Śrīla Prabhupāda gave translations, in order to note something particular in the original that is relevant to the immediate topic. When verses are quoted where Śrīla Prabhupāda did not give a translation, we may use BBT translations, translations by SAC members, or translations appearing in published books by, for example, Bhānu Swāmī. Translations from *Śrī Caitanya bhāgavata* are generally from Śrī Vṛndāvana dāsa Ṭhākura's *Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata*, Vrajraj Press, 1999, trans. Bhumipati dāsa, ed. Pundarika Vidyānidhi dāsa

Paper Development

Members of the Śāstric Advisory Council

Core members: Ādi-puruṣa dāsa, Bhakti Prabhāva Swāmī, Brijbāsī dāsa, Hari Pārṣada dāsa, Nārāyaṇī Devī dāsī, Sarvajña dāsa, Urmilā Devī dāsī (chairperson)

Associate members: Bhakti Vijñāna Goswāmī, Caitanya-caraṇa dāsa, Drutakarmā dāsa, Gaurāṅga dāsa, Girirāja Swāmī, Gopāla Hari dāsa, Gopīnāthācārya dāsa, Kanāi Kṛṣṇa dāsa, Kṛṣṇa Kṣetra Swāmī, Rādhikā-ramaṇa dāsa

Secretaries: Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī, Rukmiṇī Devī dāsī

Please note:

- Brijbāsī dāsa was on a leave of absence at the time of writing this paper, and so did not contribute to discussing, writing, or reviewing this paper in any way whatsoever.
- Bhakti Prabhāva Swāmī joined SAC on July 30, 2020 and was involved in the paper from that date.

GBC EC's Request and the process for working on the paper

The Executive Committee (EC) of ISKCON's Governing Body Commission (GBC) first wrote the Śāstric Advisory Council (SAC) chairperson on May 8, 2020, to request research on the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*. After some correspondence to clarify the EC's scope and desire for the research and paper, the SAC accepted this service on May 20, 2020. The EC wrote, "The focus should be on giving of the *brahma gāyatrī* and *brāhmaṇa* initiation (for both men and women) and how that relates to the Vaiṣṇava tradition." The EC members also wrote that they were interested in research into principles and details and that the topic was in relationship to questions of implementing *varṇāśrama*.

First, SAC members held a conference call, required in their protocol at the beginning of a new project. Then, SAC started working by email, WhatsApp, and Google Docs. In a Google Drive folder, SAC collected a large number of references, interviews, quotes, and other primary and secondary source material. Referencing that material, the chair set up a basic beginning outline of a paper in a Google doc. Some SAC members wrote directly into the Google doc. Others uploaded their writing to the Drive, so that a secretary or the chair would then insert their work (sometimes with some summarizing) into the doc. Other members contributed through email or WhatsApp and the chair then uploaded their work to the Drive, to later be added to the doc. Some members made contributions primarily through the conference calls, and the chair or a secretary uploaded those contributions to the online doc. Some members also had calls directly with the chair to discuss some delicate or technical points, and these conclusions were then shared with the group. There were several drafts of the paper. After members worked on the draft, the chair would take the doc off-line to integrate all members' comments, corrections, and suggestions and then re-post for further work. Those members who were not present on any of the conference calls listened to the recordings of the calls and/or reviewed the papers on Google. All members had access to the online drafts for proofreading and editing. Rukmiṇī Devī dāsī did the final proofreading, including for Sanskrit diacritics, and took minutes of the meetings. Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī organized all the conference calls and discussed with each member their desired contributions. She kept everything on track. The chair also took minutes of the meetings and did the final formatting and design.

Consultants for this paper and acknowledgments for help outside the SAC

The SAC often consults with experts outside of the Council, and for this research on the Brahma-*gāyatrī* the GBC's Executive Committee especially urged SAC to widely engage consultants and do interviews. Persons interviewed or consulted with are not included in SAC

discussions, nor do they have access to shared SAC emails, Google Drive folders, or Google docs. They are not included in SAC conference calls. Persons interviewed for this paper (in no particular order) were: Bhānu Swāmī (about the nature of *dīkṣā* and to understand the *saṁśaya*(s) and the *pūrvapakṣa*(s)); Bhaktividyāpūrṇa Swāmī (in regard to the Mayapur boys' *gurukula* policy of awarding the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to young uninitiated boys as part of an *upanayanam* ceremony); Bhakti Vaibhava Swāmī (about the Brahma-*gāyatrī* and its place in ISKCON); Bhakti Vikāśa Swāmī (in regard to his practices in giving of second initiation and *gāyatrī mantras* and his implementation of *varṇāśrama*); Govinda dāsī, Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī, and Satsvarūpa Mahārāja (in regard to the history of the first brahminical initiation of women in ISKCON). SAC members also interviewed Praṇava dāsa, [Ferdinando Sardella], head of the Bhaktivedānta Research Center, who wrote his PhD thesis on Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī (about the initiation practices of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī); Gaura Keśava dāsa (in regard to the practices of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas); Garuḍa dāsa, disciple of Siddhasvarūpānanda, (in regard to the practices of Siddhasvarūpānanda); Kundalatā dāsī (in regard to the practices of Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja); Trilokanātha dāsa (in regard to the practices of Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja and Śrīla Bhakti Ballabha Tīrtha Mahārāja); Rasarāja dāsa (in regard to the practices of Śrīla Bhakti Pramoda Purī Mahārāja); Bhaktivedānta Bhāgavata Mahārāja and Narasiṁha Selvester (in regard to the practices of Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja and the *dīkṣā* gurus in his organization); Kṛṣṇābhiṣeka dāsa (in regard to the practices of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura); Gopikā Devī dāsī and Prāṇa Kṛṣṇa dāsa (in regard to the practices of Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja); Abhisek Bose, Professor at Calcutta University and a disciple of Shrivatsa Goswāmī in Vṛndāvan as well as member of the Bhaktivedānta Research Center (in regard to the line coming from Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Goswāmī and the practice of giving the sacred thread and the Brahma-*gāyatrī* in our *sampradāya* in general); Viśākhā Devī dāsī [Ramos], disciple in the Nityānanda parivara in Vṛndāvana (in regard to the *dīkṣā* practices of the Nityānanda parivara and other Gauḍīya lines in the Vṛndāvana area); and Mālatī-mañjarī Devī dāsī [Miriam Saha], who works with Satya Nārāyaṇa dāsa in connection with the Jiva Institute in Vṛndāvana (in regard to the *dīkṣā* practices of the Gadādhara parivara, Nityānanda parivara, the Manipuri line from Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, and other Gauḍīya lines both in Bengal and the Vṛndāvana area). SAC especially wants to thank Bhṛgupāda dāsa (Dr. Måns Broo) who did extensive research into the *dīkṣā* practices of various Gauḍīya groups. He interviewed the following persons on behalf of the SAC: Pradyumna Brahmacārī at the Gauḍīya Mission, Manotoṣa Brahmacārī at Rādhā-Govinda Trust (established by Swāmī B.H. Bon Mahārāja), Śrī Gurumātā Jayashree Devī (guru of a Gauḍīya Maṭh temple, Guru Prapanna Ashram, Kolkata), Kalākaṇṭhi dāsī (grand-disciple of Swāmī Sadānanda, the only German disciple of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī), B.P. Padmanabha Mahārāja, and Prabhupāda Nityagopāla Goswāmī of the Nityānanda Vaṁśa. Śivarāma Swāmī gave permission to use excerpts from his published book chapter on the Brahma-*gāyatrī*.

Record of attendance at conference calls for this paper

On June 1, SAC held its mandatory conference call at the beginning of each new project. In attendance were: Ādi Puruṣa dāsa, Bhakti Vijñāna Goswāmī, Drutakarmā dāsa, Gaurāṅga dāsa, Gopāla Hari dāsa, Hari Pārṣada dāsa, Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī, Kanāi Kṛṣṇa dāsa, Kṛṣṇa Kṣetra Swāmī, Nārāyaṇī Devī dāsī, Rādhikā Ramaṇa dāsa, Rukmiṇī Devī dāsī, Sarvajña dāsa, Urmilā Devī dāsī.

On June 6, SAC held a second conference call. In attendance were: Ādi Puruṣa dāsa, Bhakti Vijñāna Goswāmī, Drutakarmā dāsa, Hari Pārṣada dāsa, Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī, Kanāi Kṛṣṇa dāsa, Nārāyaṇī Devī dāsī, Rukmiṇī Devī dāsī, Sarvajña dāsa, Urmilā Devī dāsī.

On June 16th, SAC held a third conference call. In attendance were: Ādi Puruṣa dāsa, Bhakti Vijñāna Goswāmī, Caitanya Caraṇa dāsa, Gopāla Hari dāsa, Hari Pārṣada dāsa, Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī, Kanāi Kṛṣṇa dāsa, Kṛṣṇa Kṣetra Swāmī, Nārāyaṇī Devī dāsī, Rādhikā Ramaṇa dāsa, Rukmiṇī Devī dāsī, Sarvajña dāsa, Urmilā Devī dāsī.

On June 23rd, SAC held a fourth conference call. In attendance were: Caitanya Caraṇa dāsa, Hari Pārṣada dāsa, Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī, Kanāi Kṛṣṇa dāsa, Kṛṣṇa Kṣetra Swāmī, Nārāyaṇī Devī dāsī, Rādhikā Ramaṇa dāsa, Rukmiṇī Devī dāsī, Sarvajña dāsa, Urmilā Devī dāsī.

While the EC encouraged the SAC to engage consultants for this paper, on June 24, 2020, they explicitly requested the SAC to work with Bhakti Vikāśa Swāmī to understand his views on applying *varṇāśrama*, specifically in regard to the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*. As the SAC wanted to give Mahārāja's points and practices deep attention and consideration, a sub-committee of SAC members met by Zoom conference on July 6, 2020 for this purpose. Members attending were: Bhakti Vijñāna Goswāmī, Gaurāṅga dāsa, Hari Pārṣada dāsa, Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī (secretary), Sarvajña dāsa, and Urmilā Devī dāsī. On July 28th, a second sub-committee Zoom conference call was held to discuss the results of the interview of Gaurāṅga dāsa with Bhakti Vikāśa Swāmī and to discuss what further questions and discussions would be helpful to have with Bhakti Vikāśa Swāmī. Members attending were: Bhakti Vijñāna Goswāmī, Gaurāṅga dāsa, Hari Pārṣada dāsa, Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī, Sarvajña dāsa, and Urmilā Devī dāsī.

On August 14th, SAC held a fifth conference call. In attendance were: Ādi Puruṣa dāsa, Bhakti Prabhāva Swāmī, Bhakti Vijñāna Goswāmī, Caitanya Caraṇa dāsa, Drutakarmā dāsa, Girirāja Swāmī, Gopāla Hari dāsa, Hari Pārṣada dāsa, Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī, Kanāi Kṛṣṇa dāsa, Kṛṣṇa Kṣetra Swāmī, Nārāyaṇī Devī dāsī, Rādhikā Ramaṇa dāsa, Rukmiṇī Devī dāsī, Sarvajña dāsa, and Urmilā Devī dāsī.

On September 10th, SAC held a sixth conference call. In attendance were: Ādi Puruṣa dāsa, Bhakti Prabhāva Swāmī, Caitanya Caraṇa dāsa, Drutakarmā dāsa, Gopāla Hari dāsa, Hari Pārṣada dāsa, Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī, Kanāi Kṛṣṇa dāsa, Kṛṣṇa Kṣetra Swāmī, Nārāyaṇī Devī dāsī, Rādhikā Ramaṇa dāsa, Rukmiṇī Devī dāsī, Sarvajña dāsa, and Urmilā Devī dāsī.

On September 24th, SAC held a seventh conference call. In attendance were: Ādi Puruṣa dāsa, Bhakti Prabhāva Swāmī, Bhakti Vijñāna Goswāmī, Caitanya Caraṇa dāsa, Drutakarmā dāsa, Gopāla Hari dāsa, Hari Pārṣada dāsa, Kalāsudhā Devī dāsī, Kanāi Kṛṣṇa dāsa, Kṛṣṇa Kṣetra Swāmī, Nārāyaṇī Devī dāsī, Rādhikā Ramaṇa dāsa, Rukmiṇī Devī dāsī, Sarvajña dāsa, and Urmilā Devī dāsī.

Limitations

This paper touches three very big areas of research, which are *varṇāśrama*, *guru-tattva*, and what is the proper way to define what are necessary changes and to implement them in our society. Those areas require deep research and could be the topics of separate papers.

Introduction and the questions

The deceptively simple questions of who has the qualification to chant the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*, and the place of that *mantra* in our Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, necessitate opening up a wealth of complex yet spiritually enlivening topics.

These are the questions that this paper attempts to answer:

1. Is the Brahma-*gāyatrī* a Vaiṣṇava *mantra*, the chanting of which is part of *bhakti*, or it is a part of *varṇa dharma*?
2. If persons are sincere in the practice of *sādhana bhakti*, are they qualified to be initiated into the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, or are there other qualifications?
3. Is initiation into the chanting of the *brahma gāyatrī* based on distinct considerations as compared to initiation into other sampradayic *vaiṣṇava-mantras*?
4. Is initiation into Brahma-*gāyatrī* a principle or a detail?

This paper is first divided into four parts to explore each of those four questions. At the beginning of each part we list the topic (*viṣaya*), and the questions as above (*saṁśaya*). Next, we list two points of view (*pūrvapakṣa* and *uttara-pakṣa*). We then explain the decision of which point of view is correct (*nirṇayaḥ)* and finally, the conclusion *(siddhānta)*. The fifth part of this

paper contains our conclusions, including how we used hermeneutic principles and tools to arrive at them. That part of the paper ends with our recommendations.

In Part One we look at the *mantra* itself—its origins, meanings, and how it's chanted. The main purpose of this section is to explore the connections between the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* and the practice of pure *bhakti*, as distinct from something primarily or exclusively in the realm of *varṇāśrama*. The richness and depth of this section establishes the connection between the Brahma-*gāyatrī* and the *Bhāgavatam* as well as meditation on, and worship of, the Divine Couple of Vraja.

In Part Two we examine who is qualified to chant the Brahma-*gāyatrī*. In that section the relationship between being a devotee of Kṛṣṇa and having an external *varṇa* designation is analyzed, particularly in reference to receiving *gāyatrī mantras*. There is a particularly important quote from a conversation in this section where Śrīla Prabhupāda states that brahminical initiation is given to all serious devotees, regardless of the *varṇa* classification of their work. Also, of great significance in that section is the explanation of the fact that the qualification for chanting the Brahma-*gāyatrī* extends to all Vedic *mantras*.

In Part Three we discuss *gāyatrī dīkṣā* itself. Of great importance here is the account of the first time Śrīla Prabhupāda gave women disciples *gāyatrī dīkṣā*, including the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*. Different versions of the story have been given over the years, and we did interviews with those present as well as referencing audio and documents from that time to clarify details. Our research does not support a version of this history that has been used as the main reason for various attitudes and policies regarding women in ISKCON.

In Part Four we explore the very difficult subject of differentiating between principles and details. Using that lens, we discuss *varṇāśrama*, *bhakti*, and their relationship. Various learned persons in ISKCON have done much research and publishing on the topic of *varṇāśrama* and its relationship to practitioners of *bhakti-yoga*. Yet much understanding remains partial and leads to very divergent views. While this small section of one paper is of necessity limited in scope and doesn't pretend to present full research on that complicated topic, hopefully it sheds light on the foundational issues. Of particular note in this section is the sub-section regarding who has the *adhikāra* to introduce changes in ISKCON, to be able to understand Śrīla Prabhupāda's intentions and whether or not he would approve of such changes. In this section one can also find substantial descriptions of the variety of practices within the Gauḍīya sampradāya, one of the main points of interest in the initial inquiry from the GBC's EC. Additionally, the split in the Śrī sampradāya shows the import of the matter before us.

The final section, Part Five, gives philosophical and institutional conclusions (concepts and application). This section contains a description of how the hermeneutical qualities, principles

and tools were used in reaching our conclusions. The four options in the institutional conclusions section are the crux of the issue for ISKCON's leaders to consider. Finally, in this section we offer our recommendations based on the research.

In the appendix, we have a section of empirical research from sociologists of religion about the interplay of principle and detail, and the effects of that interplay on a religious organization.

Part One: Understanding the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*

Hermeneutic Overview of Part One

1. ***viṣaya*** – topic: The Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* bestows higher qualification upon the initiated
2. ***saṁśaya*** – doubt: Is the Brahma-*gāyatrī* a Vaiṣṇava *mantr*a, the chanting of which is part of *bhakti*, or it is a part of *varṇa dharma*?
3. ***pūrvapakṣa*** – one viewpoint: While certain practitioners of *bhakti* may chant the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, it's a part of *varṇāśrama* and should be applied as a *varṇāśrama* practice
4. ***uttara-pakṣa*** – another viewpoint: There are ways of understanding and meditating on the Brahma-*gāyatrī* that are related to the worship of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa
5. ***nirṇayaḥ*** – deciding in favor of a side: Chanting the Brahma-*gāyatrī* can also be done exclusively as a practice of *bhakti*
6. ***siddhānta***– conclusion: It is possible to chant the Brahma-*gāyatrī* as part of *varṇāśrama* or exclusively as a part of *bhakti*, as well as a mix of both, and Śrīla Prabhupāda gave it to his disciples primarily as a part of *bhakti*

The Value of Understanding the Mantra

Understanding the meanings, origins, nature, and presiding Deity of the mantras we chant is an important aspect of our devotional service. As Kṛṣṇa Himself states in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 10.24.6:

jñatvājñātvā ca karmāṇi
jano 'yam anutiṣṭhati
viduṣaḥ karma-siddhiḥ syād
yathā nāviduṣo bhavet

Translation: When people in this world perform activities, sometimes they understand what they are doing and sometimes they don't. Those who know what they are doing achieve success in their work, whereas ignorant people do not.

It can be a serious matter to avoid such knowledge of our mantras, as explained in Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's commentary on *Caitanya-bhāgavata Madhya-khaṇḍa* 18.149:

> The mundane Durgā is a portion of and under the control of Yogamāyā. This spiritual energy, Yogamāyā, has engaged Durgā of the material world as her maidservant and entrusted her with the service of protecting mantras [footnote in the original: This Durgā hides mantras from anyone who after receiving initiation in kṛṣṇa-mantra does not chant that mantra, does not worship the predominating Deity of that mantra, or does not respect that mantra.]

It is fitting therefore, to devote some time and care to understanding the nature of the mantra. Such is of value for those of us who chant this mantra daily, in addition to being an essential part of the questions at hand.

Brahma-*gāyatrī*: *varṇāśrama* or *bhakti*

In the following sections on the origin and meanings of the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, one can easily understand that the *mantra* can be chanted as a form of purification in *sattva-guṇa*, as part of brahminical *varṇāśrama* duties. At the same time, the Brahma-*gāyatrī* can be understood as part of the *aṅgas* of pure *bhakti*, depending on the mood and intent of the person meditating. As Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in the *Nectar of Devotion*, chapter 11: "Under these prescribed duties of *varṇa* and *āśrama* there are many activities which belong to devotional service in Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

As explained in the section from Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī below, the *Bhāgavatam* is an explanation of the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, and the *Bhāgavatam* rejects all cheating religion (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.1.2: *dharmaḥ projjhita-kaitavo 'tra paramo nirmatsarāṇāṁ satāṁ*). The Brahma-*gāyatrī* itself can be seen as pure *sanātana dharma*.

It is also crucial to keep in mind Śrīla Prabhupāda's mood and mission to spread pure devotional service. He only gave eight *mantras* as part of initiation—the Hare Kṛṣṇa *maha-mantra* and seven *mantras* at *gāyatrī dīkṣā* (as well as an additional *mantra* for *sannyāsīs*). Certainly, he would only give those *mantras* to his disciples that were part of unalloyed devotional service to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

There may be some confusion and misunderstanding because we often refer to *gāyatrī dīkṣā* in ISKCON as *brāhmaṇa* initiation. Initiation into the *gāyatrī mantras* is necessary in order to perform *aṅgas* of *bhakti* that are also associated with *brāhmaṇa varṇa* duties in *sattva guṇa*, such as Deity worship and performance of *yajñas*. Some bona fide followers of parts of the vast Vedic tradition view chanting Brahma-*gāyatrī*, Deity worship, performing *yajñas*, and teaching *śāstra* as strictly part of the *dharma* of a particular *varṇa*. But Śrīla Prabhupāda saw them as part of *bhakti* for serious and advanced practitioners. In other parts of this paper, we discuss the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda established that devotees whose means of livelihood and general service could be classified amongst the other *varṇas* still receive *gāyatrī*-initiation, including the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*.

The *praṇava*: *oṁkāra*

Oṁkāra is eternal

The Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* begins with the praṇava, *oṁkāra*, and to understand this *mantra* we first need to understand its *bīja*, or seed.

The *praṇava* is the seed of all the Vedas. This is specified in the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* as follows:

eka eva purā vedaḥ
praṇavaḥ sarva-vāṅmayaḥ

Translation: In the *Satya-yuga*, the first millennium, all the Vedic *mantras* were included in one *mantra — praṇava*, the root of all Vedic *mantras*. (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 9.14.48)

vedaḥ praṇava evāgre

Translation: In the *Satya-yuga*, the *praṇava* constituted the entirety of Vedic text. (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.17.11)

The *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* confirms this fact:

'praṇava' se mahā-vākya — vedera nidāna

Translation: The Vedic sound vibration *oṁkāra*, the principal word in the Vedic literatures, is the basis of all Vedic vibrations. (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi*, 7.128)

This same understanding is also well-rooted in the *Upaniṣads*:

sarve vedā yat padam āmananti
tapāṁsi sarvāṇi ca yad vadanti
yad icchanto brahmacaryaṁ caranti
tat te padaṁ saṅgraheṇa bravīmy om ity etat

Translation: O Naciketā! That auspicious conclusion which all the Vedas describe; that conclusion which is obtained by executing all austerities; that for which the desirers of liberation practice *brahmacarya* — I explain that to you in brief. That is — *om*[2]. (*Kaṭhopaniṣad* 1.2.15)

Śrīla Prabhupāda's explanation of *om*, the *praṇava*

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes extensively on the *praṇava*, *oṁkāra*, in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi 7.128 as follows. Although this is a long quote, this purport shows how Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas' meditation on the *praṇava* is harmonious with our goal of Kṛṣṇa *prema*:

> On the basis of all the *Upaniṣads*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī says that *oṁkāra* is the Supreme Absolute Truth and is accepted as such by all the *ācāryas* and authorities. *Oṁkāra* is beginningless, changeless, supreme and free from deterioration and external contamination. *Oṁkāra* is the origin, middle and end of everything, and any living entity who thus understands *oṁkāra* attains the perfection of spiritual identity in *oṁkāra*. *Oṁkāra*, being situated in everyone's heart, is *īśvara*, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, as confirmed in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.61): *īśvaraḥ sarva-bhūtānāṁ hṛd-deśe 'rjuna tiṣṭhati*. *Oṁkāra* is as good as Viṣṇu because *oṁkāra* is as all-pervasive as Viṣṇu. One who knows *oṁkāra* and Lord Viṣṇu to be identical no longer has to lament or hanker. One who chants *oṁkāra* no longer remains a *śūdra* but immediately comes to the position of a *brāhmaṇa*. Simply by chanting *oṁkāra* one can understand the whole creation to be one unit, or an expansion of the energy of the Supreme Lord: *idaṁ hi viśvaṁ bhagavān ivetaro yato jagat-sthāna-nirodha-sambhavāḥ*. "The Supreme Lord Personality of Godhead is Himself this cosmos, and still He is aloof from it. From Him only this cosmic manifestation has emanated, in Him it rests, and unto Him it enters after annihilation." (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.5.20) Although one who does not understand concludes otherwise, *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* states that the entire cosmic manifestation is but an expansion of the energy of the

[2] Regarding the spelling of the *praṇava* in this paper: When the term is by itself, it ends in simple *m*, i.e., *om*. When it is combined in a *samāsa* (compound) and it is not the final term, it ends in *ṁ*, e.g., *oṁkāra*.

Supreme Lord. Realization of this is possible simply by chanting the holy name of the Lord, *oṁkāra*.

One should not, however, foolishly conclude that because the Supreme Personality of Godhead is omnipotent, we have manufactured a combination of letters—*a*, *u* and *m*—to represent Him. Factually the transcendental sound *oṁkāra*, although a combination of the three letters *a*, *u* and *m*, has transcendental potency, and one who chants *oṁkāra* will very soon realize *oṁkāra* and Lord Viṣṇu to be nondifferent. Kṛṣṇa declares, *praṇavaḥ sarva-vedeṣu*: "I am the syllable *om* in the Vedic *mantras*." (*Bhagavad-gītā* 7.8) One should therefore conclude that among the many incarnations of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, *oṁkāra* is the sound incarnation. All the *Vedas* accept this thesis. One should always remember that the holy name of the Lord and the Lord Himself are always identical (*abhinnatvān nāma-nāminoḥ* [*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* Madhya 17.133]). Since *oṁkāra* is the basic principle of all Vedic knowledge, it is uttered before one begins to chant any Vedic hymn. Without *oṁkāra*, no Vedic *mantra* is successful. The Gosvāmīs therefore declare that *praṇava* (*oṁkāra*) is the complete representation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and they have analyzed *oṁkāra* in terms of its alphabetical constituents as follows:

a-kāreṇocyate kṛṣṇaḥ sarva-lokaika-nāyakaḥ
u-kāreṇocyate rādhā ma-kāro jīva-vācakaḥ

oṁkāra is a combination of the letters *a*, *u* and *m*. *A-kāreṇocyate kṛṣṇaḥ*: the letter *a* (*a-kāra*) refers to Kṛṣṇa, who is *sarva-lokaika-nāyakaḥ*, the master of all living entities and planets, material and spiritual. *Nāyak*a means "leader." He is the supreme leader (*nityo nityānāṁ cetanaś cetanānām* (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.2.13)). The letter *u* (*u-kāra*) indicates Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, the pleasure potency of Kṛṣṇa, and *m* (*ma-kāra*) indicates the living entities (*jīvas*). Thus *om* is the complete combination of Kṛṣṇa, His potency and His eternal servitors. In other words, *oṁkāra* represents Kṛṣṇa, His name, fame, pastimes, entourage, expansions, devotees, potencies and everything else pertaining to Him. As Caitanya Mahāprabhu states in the present verse of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *sarva-viśva-dhāma*: *oṁkāra* is the resting place of everything, just as Kṛṣṇa is the resting place of everything (*brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham* [*Bhagavad-gītā* 14.27]).

Sandhyā

Although we loosely refer to Gāyatrī, a more precise term is Sandhyā, indicating junctures of the day. In the front cover painting (now at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), the center shows the combined deity of Sandhyā, surrounded by the mantra along the stem. The top left shows Gāyatrī (the presiding deity of forenoon), the top right shows Sāvitrī (the presiding deity of noon) and the bottom left shows Sarasvatī (the presiding deity of evening). In this paper, we sometimes use *sandhyā* and Brahma-gāyatrī interchangeably.

The eternal nature of *sandhyā*

As explained above, oṁkāra is eternal. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* also states the eternal nature of the *sandhyā*:

yā ca sandhyā jagat-sūtir
māyātītā hi niṣkalā
aiśvarī kevalā śaktis
tattva-traya-samudbhavā

Translation: She who is known as "*sandhyā*" is the fountain-head of the entire universe; she is beyond material energy and is non-fragmentable. She is the undivided energy of the Supreme Lord and she appears from the combination of the three eternal *tattvas*. — (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 3.311)[3]

In this way, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī has explained in the above verse that the sandhyā emerges from *oṁkāra*, which itself combines the three tattvas.

The definition of the term "*sandhyā*":

The *Bṛhat-pārāśarīya-dharma-śāstra* (2.10–11) specifies the definition of the term *sandhyā*:

divasasya ca rātreś ca
sandhiḥ sandhyeti gīyate

[3] Note by Hari Pārṣada dāsa: There is no commentary by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī to this verse. The three eternal *tattva*s are Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī and the Jīva. These three are denoted by the three syllables of the *praṇava* — ***a*** denotes Viṣṇu ; ***u*** denotes Śrī (Lakṣmī) and ***m*** denotes the *jīva*. This is specified by Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī in his commentary to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* (10.69.17). The three *tattvas* **do not** refer to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava terminology of ***cit*** (*jīva*), ***acit*** (*māyā*) and ***īśvara*** (*viṣṇu*) here because if *acit* (*māyā*) is one of the *tattvas*, then it would be contradictory to the adjective *māyātītā* (beyond *māyā*) applied to *sandhyā* in this very verse.

sopāsyā sad-dvijair yatnāt
syāt tair viśvam upāsitam
madhyāhne 'pi ca sandhiḥ syāt
pūrvasyāhno 'parasya ca
pūrvāhnāho 'parāhnaś ca
kṣapā ceti śruti-kramaḥ

Translation: The conjunction points of day and night are known as *sandhyā*. They should be worshiped diligently by a saintly twice-born individual, because by doing so the entire universe is worshiped automatically. In the afternoon too there is a conjunction of the first half of the day with the second half. Therefore, forenoon, noon and evening — this is the sequence of *sandhyās* given in the *śrutis.*

(As quoted in *Dharma-śāstra-saṅgrahaḥ*, page 497. Compiled by Vaikuṇṭha-vāsī Śrī Bābū Sādhūcaraṇaprasādajī. Khemraj ShriKṛṣṇadas Prakashan. Mumbai. 1995)

The presiding deities of the three *sandhyās*:

The three presiding deities of the three *sandhyās* are listed in the *Vādhūla-smṛti* (117) as follows:

gāyatrī nāma pūrvāhne
sāvitrī madhyame dine
sarasvatī ca sāyāhne
saiva sandhyā tridhā smṛtā[4]

Translation: The lady named *sandhyā* is understood to be threefold — (a) Gāyatrī is the name of the forenoon *sandhyā* ; (b) Sāvitrī is the name of the noon *sandhyā* and (c) Sarasvatī is the name of the evening *sandhyā*.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī also lists these three deities in his *Gāyatrī-vyākhyā*:

gāyaty ukthāni śāstrāṇi
bhargaṁ prāṇāṁs tathaiva ca
tataḥ smṛteyaṁ gāyatrī
sāvitrī yata eva ca

[4] *Vādhūla-smṛtiḥ*, critical edition by Dr. Braj Bihari Chaubey. Published by Katyayan Vaidik Sahitya Prakashan, Hoshiarpur, Punjab. 2000

prakāśinī sā savitur
vāg-rūpatvāt sarasvatī

Translation: "Thus, after performing the rites prescribed for the junctures of the day, one should chant and remember the Gāyatrī, which is the metrical form of the *ukthas* (a type of recited verse), the scriptures, splendor (*bharga*), and the life-airs (*prāṇa*).

This Gāyatrī is called Sāvitrī because she illuminates the sun (*savitṛ*). She is called Sarasvatī because she has the form of speech (*vāc*). The supreme Brahman is called Bhargas because he is that light or splendor. That which shines is *bharga*. This is stated by many Vedic hymns."

Meanings, origins, and nature of the *mantra*

The *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* specifies that the entirety of the *Vedas* (which includes the *gāyatrī*) has emanated from the breathing of the Lord:

asya mahato bhūtasya niḥśvasitam etad yad ṛg-vedo yajur-vedaḥ sāma-vedo 'tharvāṅgirasa itihāsaḥ purāṇaṁ vidyā upaniṣadaḥ ślokāḥ sūtrāṇy anuvyākhyānāni vyākhyānānyasyaivaitāni sarvāṇi niḥśvasitāni

Translation: From the breathing of the Supreme Lord emanate the *Ṛg-veda*, *Yajur-veda*, *Sāma-veda, Atharva-veda, Itihāsas, Purāṇas*, various arts, *Upaniṣads*, verses, *sūtras*, their elucidations and explanations. (*Bṛhad-āraṇyaka-upaniṣad* 2.4.10)

It is also said in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 2.6.1:

chandasāṁ sapta dhātavaḥ

Translation: [The *virāṭ-puruṣa* (the universal form of the Lord)] 's skin and the other six layers are the generating centers of the Vedic hymns

Purport: His skin and the other six layers of bodily construction are the representative generating centers of the seven kinds of Vedic hymns, like the Gāyatrī. Gāyatrī is the beginning of all Vedic *mantras*, and it is explained in the First Canto of *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*.

The origin of *gāyatrī* as the Lord's skin is also stated in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 3.12.45 (*gāyatrī ca tvaco vibhoḥ*) and 3.13.35 (*chandāṁsi yasya tvaci*), the latter that Śrīla Prabhupāda translates as "the touch of Your skin."

Furthermore, let us turn to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 2.4.22, which Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 8.265[5], in relationship to the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*:

pracoditā yena purā sarasvatī
vitanvatājasya satīṁ smṛtiṁ hṛdi
sva-lakṣaṇā prādurabhūt kilāsyataḥ
sa me ṛṣīṇām ṛṣabhaḥ prasīdatām

Translation: May the Lord, the best of the sages, be pleased with me! Inspired by him, at the beginning of the *kalpa*, Sarasvatī, whose aim is to reveal Kṛṣṇa, appeared from the mouth of Brahmā and revealed proper memory to carry out creation in his heart. (Bhanu Swami's translation)

Śrī Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's commentary: "Just as the Lord made the *Vedas* flow from the mouth of Brahmā, may he let the description of his pastimes flow from my mouth!" That wish is expressed in this verse. Inspired by the Lord, Sarasvatī, the form of the *Vedas*, appeared (*prādurabhūta*) from Brahmā's mouth (*āsyataḥ*) at the beginning of the *kalpa* (*purā*), and revealed (*vitanvatā*) proper memory in his heart. Sarasvatī shows (*laksaṇā*) Kṛṣṇa (*sva*) as the object of worship. The Lord says [*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.14.3]:

kālena naṣṭā pralaye vāṇīyaṁ veda-saṁjñitā |
mayādau brahmaṇe proktā dharmo yasyāṁ mad-ātmakaḥ ||

Translation: By the influence of time, the Vedic knowledge was lost at the time of annihilation. Therefore, when the subsequent creation took place, I spoke to Brahmā the Vedic knowledge in which *bhakti* is the essence. (end commentary)

From the above verse and commentary, it seems that the Lord inspires Sarasvatī to give the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* to Lord Brahmā. We may then ask about the identity of Sarasvatī. In his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 2.4.22, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that at this time there were no created beings other than Brahmā and the "*Vedas* are therefore called *apauruṣeya*, or not imparted by any created being." We may note that Brahmā also received the Gopāla *mantra* from Sarasvatī, who is described in the *Brahma-saṁhitā* 5.24 as: *tasya divyā sarasvatī*, which in the edition attributed to Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī is translated as "the goddess of learning Sarasvatī, the divine consort of the Supreme Lord."

[5] This purport is quoted elsewhere in the paper. Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes the entire Brahma-*gāyatrī* in this purport and says the Deity of the *mantra* is Lord Caitanya.

As explained in *Caitanya-bhāgavata Ādi-khaṇḍa* 13.21:

viṣṇu-bhakti-svarūpiṇī, viṣṇu-vakṣaḥ-sthitā
mūrti-bhede ramā,—sarasvatī jagan-mātā

Translation: Sarasvatī is the personification of devotional service to Lord Viṣṇu. Being nondifferent from Lakṣmī, she eternally resides on the chest of Lord Viṣṇu. She is the mother of the universe.

It is of interest that before beginning his commentary on chapter 87 of the Tenth Canto of the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*, Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī wrote a prayer that begins with *vāg-īśā yasya vadane*, meaning that Sarasvatī resides within the mouth of the Lord (in this prayer, the form of Nṛsiṁha). In that sense there may be a connection between the Lord's breathing of the *gāyatrī* and the role of Sarasvatī.

Thus, the *gāyatrī* is as eternal as the *Vedas,* manifested by the Lord's own consort, personified *bhakti*. We will explore the various ways the presiding Deity of the *mantra* can be understood.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's various explanations

Deity of the *mantra* as the sun

Śrīla Prabhupāda translated the Brahma-*gāyatrī* as follows: "Let us meditate on that worshipable effulgence of the divine sun who enthuses our meditation." The word-for-word he gave is:

> *om* –O Lord; *bhūr* — the planetary system; *bhuvaḥ* — the next higher planetary system; *svaḥ* — the heavenly planets; *tat* — that; *savituh* — of the sun; *vareṇyaṁ* — worshipable; *bhargo* — effulgence; *devasya* — of the divine; *dhīmahi* — let us meditate; *dhiyaḥ* —meditation; *yaḥ* — who; *naḥ* — us; *pracodayāt* — enthuses;

Here, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains the Brahma-*gāyatrī* as sun worship on a morning walk — May 7, 1975, Perth:

> Mountains. [pause] ...it is said that sun is the source of everything within this universe. Maintenance of all living entities. It is the origin. The source within the universe is the sun. So therefore this Gāyatrī *mantra* is worshiping the sun, *om bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ tat savitur vareṇyaṁ bhargo devasya dhīmahi.*

And in his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 5.16.1 he writes: "In the Gāyatrī *mantra*, we chant *om bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ*. The word *bhūr* refers to Bhū-*maṇḍala*. *Tat savitur vareṇyam*: the sunshine spreads throughout Bhū-*maṇḍala*. Therefore, the sun is worshipable."

Kṛṣṇa says in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.11.13 that worship of the sun is required:

sūrye tu vidyayā trayyā
haviṣāgnau yajeta mām

Translation: [My dear Uddhava], one should worship Me within the sun by chanting selected Vedic *mantras* and by performing worship and offering obeisances.

The word *yajeta* is a *vidhi-liṅ*—an injunction of the imperative mood and is thus a rule.[6]

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes about the relationship between the Brahma-*gāyatrī* and the universe in his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 5.21.12 as follows: "Thus the chariot of the sun-god, which is *trayīmaya*, or worshiped by the words *om bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ*, travels through the four residences mentioned above at a speed of 3,400,800 *yojanas* in a *muhūrta*."

The abovementioned verse describes the motion of the sun in its yearly orbit (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 5.20.30, Śrīmad-*bhāgavatam* 5.21.7), which takes place in one plane. The Gāyatrī *mantra*, on the other hand, refers to the three planetary systems, *bhūr*, *bhuvaḥ*, and *svaḥ*, which are planes situated at successive vertical elevations. Sadāputa dāsa (Dr. Richard L. Thompson) gives a summary description of this vertical dimension:

> ...we have discussed the plane of Bhū-*maṇḍala*, and we have largely confined our attention to the two-dimensional region of space that this plane defines. In addition to this plane, which we can think of as horizontal, Vedic cosmology also has a vertical dimension....
>
> Along this vertical direction, the universe is divided into three and also fourteen subdivisions. The three subdivisions are called the three worlds: lower, middle, and upper. These worlds are often referred to by the names Bhūḥ, Bhuvaḥ, and Svaḥ, as well as the names Pātāla, Martya, and Svarga (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 3.11.28 purport). However, these two sets of names are not synonymous. Svaḥ and Svarga both denote the realm of the demigods, which lies above Bhū-*maṇḍala*. Bhūḥ or Bhūrloka refers to the earthly planetary system, including Bhū-*maṇḍala* and this earth (ŚB 4.20.35 purport), and Bhuvaḥ or Bhuvarloka refers to a planetary system lying between Bhūḥ

[6] Śrīla Prabhupāda explains it sometimes as an imperative, and it certainly has an imperative force, to the extent that 'if you want x result, you must perform y'. As a *vidhi-lin* optative, it can also be technically more in the realm of desire or intention than compulsion.

and Svar (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 2.5.40 purport). Apparently, human beings live in both the Bhūḥ and Bhuvaḥ systems (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.9.45 purport).

—Richard L. Thompson, Vedic Cosmography and Astronomy, Los Angeles, BBT, 1989, p. 83

The three parts of the *gāyatrī mantra* are described in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 5.9.5 in this way:

vyāhṛtibhiḥ sapraṇava-śiras tripadīṁ sāvitrīṁ

Synonyms: *vyāhṛtibhiḥ*—the utterance of the names of the heavenly planets (*bhūḥ*, *bhuvaḥ*, *svaḥ*); *sa-praṇava-śiraḥ*—headed by oṁkāra; *tri-padīm*—three-footed; *sāvitrīm*—the Gāyatrī *mantra*

Sāvitrī Devī is one of the three Sandhyā deities, namely the deity of the noon juncture, when the sun is brightest, and also relates to Savitṛ, the sun. Here referring to the mantra as *sāvitrīm* highlights the fact that this *mantra* focuses on that source of light and enlightenment. *Vyāhṛtibhiḥ* means the planetary systems. The sages divide the planets and stars in the universe into groups of 14 or 3 or sometimes 7. In *gāyatrī* they are divided into three: *bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ*: Earth, the heavenly planets, and the planets of the sages. Sometimes the *ācāryas* explain that these three divisions are elements of our own embodiment. As the mystic yogīs know, the universal body exists in a microcosm in our own body. Just like the universe is the body of Lord Brahmā, we have, also, a little universe in our own body. Sometimes *bhūr* is considered the gross body, *bhuvaḥ* the mind, and *svaḥ* the intelligence. Then the next word in this verse is *sa* meaning "with", and then the words *praṇava-śiras*. *Śiras* means head or chief, and *praṇava* indicates *oṁkāra*. The word *praṇava* is understood as a joining of *pra* and *nu*. The simplest meaning of *nu* is simply to make a sound. The prefix *pra-* has a sense something like "forth". So, *praṇava* would be the bringing forth of a sound, especially a humming or droning sound. Since "*om*" is, in one sense, the most fundamental sound, it is called *praṇava*. However, because there could be many essential sounds, *om* is here referred to as the *praṇava-śiras*, the chief of all sounds. Then *tripadīṁ* means three steps or three feet. In fact, *gāyatrī* indicates that meter used in poetry. If you count the syllables in the rest of the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, it may seem that the first of the three main lines has seven, however counting the final ṁ of *vareṇyaṁ* as a short syllable it is eight. The total structure of the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, therefore, is the chief of all sounds, *om*, and then the names of the three planetary systems, with the core of the *gāyatrī mantra* three lines of eight syllables each. When the verse refers to the mantra as *tri-padīm* ("three-footed"), each of these eight-syllable lines is one of the padas ("feet").

Deity of the *mantra* as Lord Nārāyaṇa

In his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 5.7.13 Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the worshipable Deity of the *mantra* is Lord Nārāyaṇa:

> The predominating Deity within the sun is Hiraṇmaya, Lord Nārāyaṇa. He is worshiped by the Gāyatrī *mantra*: *om bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ tat savitur vareṇyaṁ bhargo devasya dhīmahi*. He is also worshiped by other hymns mentioned in the *Ṛg Veda*, for instance: *dhyeyaḥ sadā savitṛ-maṇḍala-madhya-vartī*. Within the sun, Lord Nārāyaṇa is situated, and He has a golden hue.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda writes regarding the Deity of the sun in his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 5.23.3:

> All the demigods are living entities who have been appointed to their various posts as the masters of the moon, the earth, Venus and so on because of their great service and pious acts. Only the predominating deity of the sun, Sūrya Nārāyaṇa, is an incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda explained in a Room Conversation with Allen Ginsberg — May 14, 1969, Columbus, Ohio:

> He is incarnation of Nārāyaṇa, Sūrya-nārāyaṇa. He is powerful. He is driving in four horses. He has got chariot of four horses and very powerful. *Yac-cakṣur eśa savitā*. [Brahma-saṁhitā 5.52] Savitā, his name is Savitā. The Gāyatrī *mantra* is *om bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ tat savitur vareṇyaṁ bhargo devasya dhīmahi*. That is worshiping the sun-god.

Surya Nārāyaṇa and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava meditation

We note that, while Śrīla Prabhupāda gave various explanations about the Deity of the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*, in the main translation he gave to all disciples he translated "*savituḥ* — of the sun." If we take the Deity of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to be Surya Nārāyaṇa, there are many ways in which we can understand our meditation to enrich our practices and goal of *prema* for Kṛṣṇa, rather than as a *mantra* related primarily to *brāhmaṇas* in *varṇāśrama*.

In terms of *sādhana*, in the *Bhāgavatam* we find that great Vaiṣṇava saints such as Bharata regularly meditated on a *mantra* for Surya Nārāyaṇa. *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 5.7.13-14:

> Mahārāja Bharata worshiped Lord Nārāyaṇa by chanting the hymns given in the *Ṛg Veda*, and he recited the following verse as the sun rose.

paro-rajaḥ savitur jāta-vedo
devasya bhargo manasedaṁ jajāna
suretasādaḥ punar āviśya caṣṭe
haṁsaṁ gṛdhrāṇaṁ nṛṣad-riṅgirām imaḥ

Translation: "The Supreme Personality of Godhead is situated in pure goodness. He illuminates the entire universe and bestows all benedictions upon His devotees. The Lord has created this universe from His own spiritual potency. According to His desire, the Lord entered this universe as the Supersoul, and by virtue of His different potencies He is maintaining all living entities desiring material enjoyment. Let me offer my respectful obeisances unto the Lord, who is the giver of intelligence."

Our Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava meditation on Surya Nārāyaṇa can be a stimulus to meditation on Kṛṣṇa's divine *līlā*. As we elaborate below, Śrīmati Radharani worships the sun daily. She is also given shelter by the sun, who brings her to Kṛṣṇa in Dvārakā. And the sun is the father of the Yamunā, who also appears as Viśākhā-gopī.

Many of our Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* discuss the fact that Śrīmati Radharani regularly worships the sun as part of transcendental *līlā* to obtain the favor of Kṛṣṇa. As explained by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja in his Kuṅkumākta Kāñcanābja Śrī Rādhikāṣṭaka, verse 2:

kṛṣṇa-nitya-saṅgamārtha-padma-bandhu-rādhikā

Translation: She worships the sun-god daily in order to attain the continual association of Her beloved Kṛṣṇa.

In Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Lalita Mādhava* scene 1, text 32, there is more explanation of Śrīmati Radharani's relationship with the sun: "*Nārada:* To his friend, childless Satrājit who, praying for undying wealth and the best child, worshiped him with all his heart, the sun-god gave two gifts: the jewel of the invincible Śaṅkhacūḍa demon, and the younger girl (Śrī Rādhā), who is now known by the name Satyabhāmā."

Regarding Viśākhā-gopī, in his commentary on *Śrī Manah Siksa*, verse 9, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes:

> Vidyabhūṣaṇa cited the following verse to confirm that the river Yamunā is a non-different manifestation of Śrī Viśākhā:
>
> ***viśākhorasi yā viṣṇor***
> ***yasyāṁ viṣṇur jalātmani***
> ***nityaṁ nimajjati prītyā***

tāṁ saurīṁ yamunāṁ stumaḥ

> **Translation:** We offer prayers to the daughter of Sūrya (the sun god), the Yamunā River, where Lord Viṣṇu [Kṛṣṇa] sports with delight in her waters, and whose spiritual body is Viśākhā. (Commentary on *Yamunāṣṭakam*, Verse 1)

Vidyābhūṣaṇa further remarks on the above verse as follows:

viśākhā yamunā-vapur iti vicāreṇa
yamunā-stutyā tat-stutir, iti vidyābhūṣaṇaḥ

Translation: Śrī Viśākhā is considered to be the spiritual body of the Yamunā. Thus by humbly offering prayers to the Yamunā, one automatically offers prayers and worship to Śrī Viśākhā.

By contemplation on the role of Surya Nārāyaṇa in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* in Vṛndāvana and Dvārakā, a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava can enrich meditation on the Brahma-*gāyatrī* in daily practice.

Deity of the *mantra* as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives another explanation of the word *savitur* in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* Madhya 8.265 as follows:

> Here Śrī Rāmānanda Rāya admits that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is the Supersoul. It is the Supersoul that inspires the devotee; therefore He is the original source of the Gāyatrī *mantra*, which states, *om bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ tat savitur vareṇyaṁ bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*. Savitā is the original source of all intelligence. That Savitā is Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Deity of the *mantra* as Kṛṣṇa

In this letter to Maṇḍali Bhadra dated 2 November, 1969, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the *mantra* is a meditation on Kṛṣṇa:

> The meaning of the first Mantra is "I meditate on the sun-god who is maintaining the three worlds." Savitur is the name of the sun-god, but the greatest *savitur* is Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, it is meditation on Kṛṣṇa who is the master of all the cosmic manifestation.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's Explanation of the *Gāyatrī Mantra* in Relation to the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*

Some Initial Context

The word *dhīmahi* at the very end of the first verse is a clear indication to most commentators that the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* intends to explicate the meaning of the Gāyatrī. After all, is not the proper classical form for the first-person plural optative *dhyāyema*? Furthermore, one of the final verses of the *Purāṇa* (12.13.19) also ends with *dhīmahi*, signifying that the entire text was expounding on the Gāyatrī.

Śrī Madhvācārya quotes a verse from the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* ascribing the meaning of the Gāyatrī to the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*, and Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī quotes this same verse in the *Tattva-sandarbha* (*anuccheda* 21):

artho 'yaṁ brahma-sūtrāṇāṁ bhāratārtha-vinirṇayaḥ
gāyatrī-bhāṣya-rūpo 'sau vedārtha-paribṛṁhitaḥ
purāṇānāṁ sāma-rūpaḥ sākṣād bhagavatoditaḥ
dvādaśa-skandha-yukto 'yaṁ śata-viccheda-saṁyutaḥ
grantho 'ṣṭādaśa-sāhasraḥ śrīmad-bhāgavatābhidhaḥ

Translation: This (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*) is the meaning of the *Brahma-sūtras* and determines the meaning of the (*Mahā*)*Bhārata*. It is a commentary on the Gāyatrī and it is reinforced by the meaning of the *Veda*. It is the essence of the *Purāṇas*, and it is directly spoken by Bhagavān. It has twelve books, a hundred divisions, eighteen thousand verses, and the name "*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*." (*Bhāgavata-tātparya-nirṇaya* 1.1.1, p. 4)[7]

Śrī Śrīdhara Svāmī quotes verses from two other *Puraṇas* in this regard:

dhīmahīti gāyatryā prārambheṇa ca gāyatry-ākhya-brahma-vidyā-rūpam etat
purāṇam iti darśitam. yathoktaṁ matsya-purāṇe purāṇa-dāna-prastāve
"yatrādhikṛtya gāyatrīṁ varṇyate dharma-vistaraḥ. vṛtrāsura-vadhopetaṁ tad
bhāgavatam iṣyate."

Translation: "*Dhīmahi*"—by beginning with the Gāyatrī, it is shown that this Purāṇa consists of that Brahman-knowledge called Gāyatrī. As it is said in the *Matsya Purāṇa*, during the discussion of donating a *Puraṇa*, "That text which begins with the Gāyatrī, which describes all

[7] This verse is also quoted in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 25.143-4.

the details of *dharma*, and which has (the story of) the killing of Vṛtrāsura is called the *Bhāgavatam*."

The phrase *yatrādhikṛtya gāyatrīm* is also found in the *Agni Puraṇa* (272.6), to which Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī credits the verse when he quotes it in the *Paramātma-sandarbha* (105). Continuing Śrī Śrīdhara Svāmī's commentary on *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.1.1:

purāṇāntare ca "grantho 'ṣṭādaśa-sāhasro dvādaśa-skandha-saṁmitaḥ.
hayagrīva-brahma-vidyā yatra vṛtra-vadhas tathā. gāyatryā ca samārambhas
tad vai bhāgavataṁ viduḥ."

Translation: ... And in another Purāṇa, "That book which has eighteen thousand verses and twelve books, where the Brahman-knowledge of Hayagrīva and the killing of Vṛtra are described, and which begins with the Gāyatrī—the wise know it as the *Bhāgavatam*." (*Bhāvārtha-dīpikā* 1.1.1)

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī reads *vadhotsiktam* (drenched with the killing of Vṛtra) in place of *vadhopetam*.

Śrī Śrīdhara Svāmī also says:

tat tu hṛdā manasaiva tene vistṛtavān. anena buddhi-vṛtti-pravartakatvena
gāyatry-artho darśitaḥ

He says the line "*tene brahma hṛdā ya ādi-kavaye*," ("he revealed the Veda to the first sage through the heart") elucidates the meaning of the Gāyatrī. The Gāyatrī is a prayer asking the Lord to inspire the intelligence, and the first being to be thus inspired was Brahmā. Since he received the four-verse *Bhāgavatam* at the beginning of creation, the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* can be considered a form of the Gāyatrī.

Śrla Jīva Gosvāmī follows Śrī Śrīdhara Svāmī closely in this discussion, repeating all of his quotations from other *Purāṇas*. In particular, Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī seizes the phrase "*yatrādhikṛtya gāyatrīm*" ("that text which is based on the Gāyatrī"), and attempts to show that both the Gāyatrī and the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* have Bhagavān as their primary subject matter. The Gāyatrī is the root-text, he argues, from which the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* arises and upon which it comments. Jīva explains the meaning of the Gāyatrī twice in the *Bhāgavata-sandarbha*: first in the *Tattva-sandarbha*, and then in our passage at the end of the *Paramātma-sandarbha*. In both places, he quotes a series of verses from the *Agni Purāṇa* that explains the Gāyatrī word-by-word. Only in the *Paramātma-sandarbha*, however, does he make an explicit correlation with the first verse of the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*. We may tabulate his scheme as follows:

Gāyatrī	**First Verse of the *Bhāgavatam***
om	*janmādy asya yataḥ*
bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ tat	*yatra trisargo 'mṛṣā*
savitṛ	*svarāṭ*
vareṇyam bhargaḥ	*param*
dhīmahi	*dhīmahi*
dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt	*tene brahma hṛdā yaḥ*

Rādhāmohana Tarkavācaspati, a Gauḍīya commentator from the eighteenth century, gives a different schema in his commentary on the *Tattva Sandarbha*. The correlations are as follows:

savituḥ – janmādy asya yataḥ; vareṇyam – param; bhargaḥ – satyam; devasya – svarāṭ; dhīmahi – dhīmahi; and ***dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt – tene brahma hṛdā ya ādi-kavaye.***[8]

The Meaning of the Gāyatrī from the *Paramātma-sandarbha* of Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī

We now turn to Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's commentary on the Gāyatrī *mantra*, found near the end of *Paramātma-sandarbha* (*anuccheda* 105):

> In the same way, the meaning of the Gāyatrī is also clear. In the verse, the phrase *janmādy asya yataḥ* is the meaning of the *praṇava* (*oṁkāra*), because it denotes Brahman's possessing the energies of creation, etc.[9] So it is said in the commentary on the Gāyatrī in the *Agni Purāṇa* 216.7, "That light is Bhagavān Viṣṇu, the cause of the birth, etc., of the universe." *Yatra trisargo 'mṛṣā* is the meaning of the three *vyāhṛtis*.[10] The intention in both places (*janmādy asya yataḥ* and *yatra trisargo 'mṛṣā*) is to convey the idea that the three worlds are non-different from that (*tat*, Brahman). *Svarāṭ* denotes the supreme splendor that illuminates the sun (*savitṛ*). *Tene brahma hṛdā* indicates a prayer for inspiring the activity of the intelligence. "Out of compassion, may he inspire the activities of our intelligence toward meditation upon him."[11] Thus, it is said,

[8] Joshi R.V., (1964) "The First Verse of the *Bhāgavata-Mahāpurāṇa*" *Purāṇa*. 6(2), p.387

[9] Patrick Olivelle's translation of verses 1-2 of *Māṇḍukya Upanisad*: "The whole world is said to come from Brahman in the form of *oṁkāra*, and *oṁkāra* constitutes the world. As the *Māṇḍūkya* puts it, '*om*—this whole world is that syllable! ... The past, the present, and the future—all that is simply *om*; and whatever else that is beyond the three times, that also is simply *om*—for this Brahman is the Whole.'"

[10] The three *vyāhṛtis* comprise the invocatory phrase, "*bhūḥ bhuvaḥ svaḥ*," which names the *trisarga*, or three realms of the universe.

[11] Thus, *tene brahma hṛdā* explains "*dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*" in the Gāyatrī.

"Commencement takes place with the Gāyatrī."[12] And that splendor which is mentioned in the Gāyatrī, and confirmed by "*antas tad-dharmopadeśāt*," [Vedānta-sūtra 1.1.20] and which possesses a primeval and infinite form, should alone be the object of meditation. So also, we have the statements of the *Agni Purāṇa*, in order:

> Thus, after performing the rites prescribed for the junctures of the day, one should chant and remember the Gāyatrī—which is the metrical form of a type of recited verse, the *ukthas*; the scriptures; splendor (*bharga*); and the life-airs (*prāṇa*).
>
> This Gāyatrī is called Sāvitrī because she illuminates the sun (*savitṛ*). She is called Sarasvatī because she has the form of speech (*vāc*). The supreme Brahman is called Bhargas because he is that light or splendor. That which shines is *bharga*. This is stated by many Vedic hymns.
>
> *Vareṇyam* is what is superior to all splendor, namely, the supreme abode.
>
> "Indeed, it is always desirable, both for those who want heaven and for those who want liberation.
>
> It is devoid of the waking, sleeping, and other states of consciousness. The root *vṛṇ* has the sense of 'choosing' (*varaṇam*).
>
> Thinking 'I am Brahman,' for liberation we should meditate on the supreme light, the eternally pure, enlightened, single, eternal splendour (*bharga*), the supreme master.
>
> That light is Bhagavān Viṣṇu, the cause of the birth, etc., of the universe.
>
> Some declared it to be Śiva, some the form of Śakti, some Sūrya, some Agni, and some—the *agnihotrīs*—declare it to be the Daivatas. Indeed, Viṣṇu assumes the form of Agni and the others. He is praised at the beginning of the Vedas as Brahman.

[12] This is a line from the second quotation by Śrī Śrīdhara Svāmī above.

> The supreme abode of Viṣṇu, who is God (*deva*) Savitṛ, is called '*tat*.'
>
> '*Dhīmahi*,' from the root '*dhā*,' means, 'Let us carry it with the mind.'
>
> May that splendor (*bhargas*)—namely, Viṣṇu, who has the form of Sūrya and Agni—inspire (*codayāt*) the intelligence (*dhī*) of us (*naḥ*)—all the living entities, who are experiencing the seen and unseen results of all our activities. Directed by the Lord, one goes either to heaven or hell.
>
> This entire universe, beginning with unmanifest matter (*mahat*), is possessed by the Lord. Hari, God, the pure *puruṣa* and master, plays by creating, etc.
>
> Through meditation, this *puruṣa* should be seen in the orb of the sun.
>
> That supreme abode of God Viṣṇu, Savitṛ, is true, vast, and always auspicious. Indeed, it is the desirable fourth state.
>
> That *puruṣa* who is Āditya (the sun god), who always induces people's good actions, etc.—I am he, the most excellent." (*Agni Purāṇa* 216.1-18)
>
> That text which is based on the Gāyatrī, which describes all the details of *dharma*, and which is drenched with the killing of Vṛtrāsura is called the *Bhāgavatam*." (*Agni Purāṇa* 272.6; quoted by Śrī Śrīdhara Svāmī above)

And so on.

Therefore, because the words "*bhargas*," "Brahman," "*para*," Viṣṇu," and "Bhagavān" are all of the same category, wherever they are used in these verses, they should be understood to refer to Bhagavān. Here and there, *ahaṁgrahopāsanā* (meditation of the form "I am Brahman") is enjoined. This is due to the reason that one becomes qualified to worship the Lord only when one has attained some similarity to him. (Śrīla Jīva Goswāmī gives more explanation of the *Agni Purāṇa* verses in the *Tattva-sandarbha*, *anuccheda* 22)

Swāmī B. R. Śrīdhar's Explanation of the Meaning

Among the followers of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, including ISKCON leaders and scholars who have studied the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, this explanation that Śrīla Prabhupāda's godbrother, Swāmī B.R. Śrīdhar, gave, is well-known. We include it here to give a complete picture of the way the *mantra* can be understood and to comply with the GBC's request to research within the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* as a whole.

After engaging in the daily practice of chanting the Gāyatrī *mantra* 432 times, Śrīla Prabhupāda's beloved godbrother Swāmī B. R. Śrīdhar wrote a Sanskrit verse glorifying Śrī Gāyatrī Devī:

Śrī Gāyatrī-nigūḍhārtha

bhvādes-tat-savitur-vareṇya-vihitaṁ kṣetrajña-sevyārthakaṁ
bhargo vai vṛṣabhānujātma-vibhavaikārādhanā śrī-puraṁ
bhargo jyotir-acintya-lilana-sudhaikārādhanā śrī-puraṁ
bhargo dhāma-taraṅga-khelana-sudhaikārādhanā śrī-puraṁ
bhargo dhāma-sadā-nirasta-kuhakaṁ prajñāna-līlā-puraṁ
devasyāmṛta-rūpa-līla-rasadherārādha-dhīḥ preriṇaḥ
devasyāmṛta-rūpa-līla-puruṣasyārādha-dhīḥ preṣiṇaḥ
devasya-dyuti-sundaraika-puruṣasyārādhya-dhīḥ preṣiṇaḥ
gāyatrī-muraliṣṭa-kīrtana-dhanaṁ rādhā-padaṁ dhīmahi
gāyatrī-gaditaṁ mahāprabhu-mataṁ rādhā-padam dhīmahi
dhīr-ārādhana-eva nānyad iti tad rādhā-padaṁ dhīmahi

He then gave a commentary in English, of which we provide an extractive summary here:

> What is the meaning of *Gāyatrī*? It means in Sanskrit, *gānāt trāyate*, "A particular kind of song which gives us salvation, relief and emancipation." *Gāyatrī* is called "*Veda-Mātā*" – the Mother of the *Vedas* – as *Gāyatrī* has produced the entire *Veda*. The first emanation is the transcendental syllable *om* (*oṁkāra praṇava*), then comes the *Gāyatrī*, the *Vedas*, the *Vedānta-Sutras*, and then finally, the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* – the mature fruit of all Vedic conclusions. The meaning, the purport of the *Gāyatrī Mantra* is found in the full-fledged conception of the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*....
>
> The general meaning of *Gāyatrī* is, "That song which grants us emancipation – liberation." Liberation must have meaning in the positive line. Liberation does not only mean, "to be free from the negative side," but continued positive

attainment. The definition of true emancipation in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* is positive attainment. *muktir hitvānyathā rūpaṁ sva-rūpeṇa vyavasthitiḥ*: "Liberation is the permanent situation of the form of the living entity after he gives up the changeable gross and subtle material bodies." (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 2.10.6)...

The word "Gāyatrī" comes from two Sanskrit words – *gānāt* and *trāyate*. *Trāyate* means "Positive attainment up to the final stage (*svarūpeṇa vyavasthitiḥ*)". We are to take this meaning. *Gānāt* means, "Not mere sound, but musical sound." This musical sound draws us to Mahāprabhu's *saṅkīrtana* that carries the touch of the flute of Kṛṣṇa. We find divine sound and music there. Now we shall analyze what is the *Brahma Gāyatrī Mantra*....

Om is the seed mantra which contains everything within it. *Bhūr* is where we are – the world of our experience, the world of our sense perception. *Bhuvaḥ* is at the back of that – our mental acquisition. The effect of our mental acquisition takes us to our present position of experience. It is not by accidental existence that we are here in this world of our experience. We have acquired such a position by our previous *karma*. And the area of our previous *karma* is called *bhuvaḥ-loka*. *Bhuvaḥ-loka* is the mental sphere. This physical sphere is only an outcome of that mental sphere. The present world of experience is the product of our previous mental impulses.

Svar means *buddhi-loka*, the plane of decision-making. What to do? What not to do? What I like; what I dislike. This is called *saṅkalpaḥ/vikalpaḥ*. I like this; I don't like that – this is the soil of the mental world of acceptance and rejection. You may like to do something, but you may not do that – otherwise you will be a loser. This faculty of reason is *svar-loka*. In this way, in this mundane world, there are different planes of existence – *Bhūr-*, *Bhuvaḥ-*, *Svaḥ-*, *Mahar-*, *Jana-*, *Tapaḥ-* and *Satya-loka*. The negative side has got these seven planes of life from *Bhūr-loka* up to *Satya-loka* where the creator, Lord Brahma lives. The master of the whole world of experience of the negative side lives in *Satya-loka*. The four Kumāras – devotees who hold high positions as saints – also reside in *Satya-loka*.

These seven layers of the material world, from the gross to the subtle, are dealt with in detail in Śrīla Sanātana Goswāmī's *Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛtam*. The negative side, consisting of the combination of the three modes of material nature that produces this world, finishes in *Satyaloka*. Then begins *Virajā*, the verge of equilibrium of the negative side – the last limit of material consciousness. And the verge of equilibrium of the positive side is *Brahmaloka*, the beginning of the

"Land of Service" – the equipoised verge of the positive world. Then, the world of reality, the world of dedication and service, the soul's world proper, begins there in *Śiva-loka* and continues further in the plane of Vaikuṇṭha. The devotee, Śiva, then Śrī Nārāyaṇa in the Vaikuṇṭhas. In this way, they develop into *Kṛṣṇa-loka*, Vṛndāvana. The seven planes that are represented in the *Gāyatrī Mantra* by *Bhūr*, *Bhuvah* and *Svah*, are summarized in one word – *tat*.

Savitur means Surya, the sun. Sun means figuratively, 'that which illuminates all objects.' This – the three gross and subtle strata of the world – is shown to us by a particular light. What is that? That is *jīvātmā* – the soul. The sun does not show us the world, but the soul's influence does. It is not the sun, but it is really the soul that shows us this world. In *Bhagavad-gītā* 13.34 we find, *ekaḥ kṛtsnaṁ lokam imaṁ raviḥ*: "This world is really being expressed to us by the *ātmā*, the soul which is just like the sun." The sun can show us the color-world, the ear can reveal the sound-world, the sense of touch can reveal the touch-world, etc. However, in the center is the soul who gives us an understanding of the environment, the world of perception. This perception is possible only because of the soul. The soul is like the sun as it is showing everything – *tat savitur*.

To summarize, all these seven strata of our experience are reduced to one word, *tat* – that. Who is showing us "that"? The illuminator – the sun is showing us. "Sun" here means soul. The soul means not the "universal soul", but the "individual soul". ...The sun can show us everything. If there is no sun, then everything is dark and we cannot see anything. The soul is light, the subject, and the objects are these seven planes of experience. If the *ātmā* – the soul – withdraws, then everything is gone. This kind of consciousness gives birth to the path leading to Goloka.

Vareṇyam means *pūjā*, worshippable, venerable and reverential. Our soul is venerable. The soul is the subject and this world is its object. However, there is another domain that is venerated and worshipped by the soul. This is the Supersoul, *Paramātmā* area. "*Bhargo*". *Bhargo* means the Super-subjective area where the Supersoul, the Super-subject resides. *Bhargo* means: *dhāmnā svena sadā nirasta-kuhakaṁ satyaṁ paraṁ dhīmahi* (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.1.1) In the first verse of *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* it is mentioned that here we are going to deal with another world, by whose rays all misconceptions are brushed aside. In its own pristine glory, it shows the very abode of the Lord....So, the subject is the soul, and the object is the world of mundane experience. And the subject's venerable area that is superior to the subject – the soul – is that Super-subjective area. *Bhargo* means, "More subtle than the soul, and holding more important position

than the *jīva*-soul." That is the Supersoul area. *Bhargo* means, in general, ordinary light. But, really it is the Supersoul Who can see and can show everything in more detail. Just as an X-ray can show us what the ordinary eye cannot see, so *bhargo*, the *svarūpa-śakti*, the higher more powerful light, can also reveal the soul. Then *bhargo* belongs to whom? It belongs to *Deva*, pertaining to *Deva*....

bhargo vai vṛṣabhānujātma-vibhavaikārādhanā śrī-puraṁ

Bhānu means the sun, or who illuminates by light. Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is the daughter of King Vṛṣabhānu so the word *bhanu* has been selected. This represents Her personal extended self. *Vaibhava* means that which comes out as extended self. *Prabhāva* is the central representation and *vaibhava* is the outer extension. The very gist of the *svarūpa-śakti* is Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and the whole *svarūpa-śakti*, the internal potency, is Her extended self....

Devasya means belonging to *Deva*. What is the meaning of *Deva*? *Deva* means, "Who is very beautiful and playful." That is Śrī Kṛṣṇa – Reality the Beautiful. He is non-differentiated substance but is full of *līlā* – Divine Pastimes. *Deva* means beauty and pastimes combined. His domain is *bhargo* which is venerated by the *jīva*-soul. What is that? It is the *svarūpa-śakti* – the *vaibhava*, the extension of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. She holds the full-service responsibility and energy to serve Śrī Kṛṣṇa. So *bhargo* is no less than the *vaibhava*, the extended body of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī containing everything for the service of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This is the *Rasarāja-mahābhāva* conception. *Bhargo* represents *Mahābhāva*, the Predominated Moiety, and *Deva* - Kṛṣṇa – represents *Rasarāja*, the Predominating Moiety.

Dhīmahi in the *Gāyatrī Mantra* means, "*Bhargo Devasya Dhīmahi*". We are invited, "You come and meditate." What sort of meditation is possible there in that Super-subjective area? That meditation is in the sense of culture – cultivation of service to the Higher by the practice of veneration and worship. This sort of experience is possible there. *Dhīmahi* is not abstract meditation but means *Kṛṣṇānuśīlanam* – to participate in the spontaneous flow of the current of devotion in that Super-subjective area, Vṛndāvana.

Dhiyo yo' naḥ pracodayāt – And what will be the result? The capacity of your cultivation will be increased. *dāsa' kare vetana more deha prema-dhana* "I pray that You accept me as Your servant and give Me the salary of ecstatic love of God." (*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta: Antya-līlā* 20.37)

(Swāmī B. R. Śrīdhara, *Poetry of a Saint: Sermons of the Guardian of Devotion* Volume 5, pp. 124-131)

Śivarāma Swāmī's Explanation

A few notable ISKCON leaders have written about the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*. We include this explanation as it is well-researched, thorough, and uses "many angles of vision." As mentioned in the methodology section, Śivarāma Swāmī granted permission to excerpt and summarize this and the other sections of his book used in this paper.

Śivarāma Swāmī writes in *Nava Vraja Mahimā*, book 7, on the meanings of the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*:

> Let us consider Śrīla Prabhupāda's translation of Brahma-gāyatrī: "Let us meditate on that worshipable effulgence of the divine sun who enthuses our meditation." This general translation is widely accepted, even by the class of *brāhmaṇas* critical of Śrīla Prabhupāda for giving the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to western devotees and devotees not born in *brāhmaṇa* families.
>
> Certain conclusions in the direct meaning of this translation, however, invite us to search for interpretations in line with Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings and the parameters just mentioned.[13] One variance of the literal meaning is that it apparently encourages devotees to meditate on the sun, a practice clearly at odds with Śrīla Prabhupāda's strong rejection of demigod worship. This seeming contradiction is resolved by taking the words "divine sun" to mean the predominating Deity within the sun, Lord Sūrya-nārāyaṇa, whose golden hue is described in the *Ṛg Veda*. (see *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's statements on 12.6.66)
>
> ....Śrīla Prabhupāda offers two other meanings of "divine sun" (*savitur*), which are even more consistent with the direct philosophical conclusion of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The meaning of the first *mantra* is, 'I meditate on the sun god who is maintaining the three worlds.' *Savitur* is the name of the sun god, but the greatest *savitur* is Kṛṣṇa.

[13] "...one should fix one's mind in pure devotion upon Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana pastimes," "such mental absorption develops alongside the necessary faith when, free from offense, one regularly chants Lord Kṛṣṇa's divine names," "all *rasas* are made perfect in the divine couple's pastimes," and other tenets of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scriptures and *ācāryas*.

“Therefore it is meditation on Kṛṣṇa, who is the master of all the cosmic manifestation.” (letter to Maṇḍali Bhadra, November, 1969)

And elsewhere Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: “That Savitā is Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu.” (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 8.265)

…

When I take *savitur* to mean Kṛṣṇa, to me the *mantra* says: “*Om*. Let us chant and hear the divine glories of the self-effulgent creator and worshipable Deity of the three worlds, Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

“He kindly reveals to pure devotees His original form as a playful cowherd boy in the supreme abode of Gokula, where He is always accompanied by His spiritual counterpart, beautiful Rādhārāṇī.

“Let us meditate on He who spoke the *Bhagavad-gītā*, who inspires His devotees to regain their eternal spiritual forms and moods of love in His eternally effulgent realm through selfless service to Rādhā.”

When I take *savitur* to mean the *jīva*, I take the *mantra* to say: “*Om*! The subject we must understand within the material world is the self, the luminous soul that sees and knows its own environment.

“After realising the transcendental nature of the soul we should turn our attention to the source of all effulgence, the dual form of the Absolute Truth, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, in Their original home, Goloka.

“Let us always enthusiastically absorb ourselves in service to the divine couple by meditating on Them with a controlled mind, and by selflessly engaging in active service to Them with our senses.

“As a result of cultivating service to Kṛṣṇa through Rādhā, we will, by Her grace, attain our eternal loving devotional mellow in the spiritual body of a cowherd within the effulgent realm of Vraja.”

When I take *savitur* to mean Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu — and by natural extension, to also refer to the chanting of the Lord’s holy names (*harināma-saṅkīrtana*) — to me the *mantra* says:

"*Om*! Let us meditate upon the holy names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and upon effulgent Lord Gaurāṅga, the merciful deliverer of Kṛṣṇa's names. And as we do, let us inspire others to do the same.

"The holy name and Lord Gaura always inspire us to withdraw our attention from the pleasures of the three worlds and instead to fix it on spontaneous loving service to the divine couple in Vraja.

"By Rādhā's grace, our practice of pure devotional service will at last reveal a spiritual body best suited to assist Her pastimes with Kṛṣṇa and, if we so desire, a second spiritual body fit to serve Gaurāṅga.

"Thus, by the power of the holy name, devotees may simultaneously and eternally relish the festival of Lord Kṛṣṇa's *rāsa* dance in Vṛndāvana and Gaura's *prema-saṅkīrtana* in Śvetadvīpa.[14]"

When I combine all three interpretations, to me the *Brahma-gāyatrī mantra* says: "*Om*! Let us meditate upon Kṛṣṇa who has appeared recently as Gaurāṅga to usher in the process of *nāma-saṅkīrtana*.

"Let us meditate upon the deliverer of the three worlds who frees us from material miseries, teaches us knowledge of the self, and awards us the privilege of loving devotion in Vraja under Rādhā's guidance.

"Inspired by Him to pursue our assured eternal identity and spiritual form, let us please Him by our pure *sādhana* surcharged with the taste of giving His mercy to those ignorant of that divine treasure."

Gāyatrī-devī becomes a *gopī*

In considering the place of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* in our *sādhana*, this pastime of Gāyatrī-devī can also aid our meditation on the relationship between the *mantra* and our goal of *prema* for Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana.

Śivarāma Swāmī recounts the following in his *Nava Vraja Mahimā*, book 7:

> (From *Padma Purāṇa Sṛṣṭi-kāṇḍa* 17.5.15-28) Once Lord Brahmā was preparing for a sacrifice. His wife, Sāvitrī, was late, and so he installed an unmarried girl

[14] Śivarāma Swāmī's footnote: Śvetadvīpa is that portion of Goloka Vṛndāvana where Lord Caitanya eternally revels in *prema-saṅkīrtana* along with His companions.

named Gāyatrī from the cowherd community as his wife for the purpose of the function. Gāyatrī's relatives shortly came looking for her, and they were understandably disturbed to find that she had been taken away from their society and married without their permission. Lord Viṣṇu, seeing Gāyatrī's father so upset, promised that when the sacrifice was complete, He would personally take birth amongst the cowherds in Vṛndāvana, along with Gāyatrī. Furthermore, Viṣṇu told the other *gopas* that He would accept their daughters as well. At this everyone was satisfied. Thus, at the time of Kṛṣṇa's earthly appearance, Gāyatrī took birth as a *gopī.*

Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda narrates further details of this pastime (this is from *Jaiva Dharma* chapter 32. It is different from that of the *Padma Purāṇa* text, although he cites that as his source). After her marriage to Lord Brahmā, Gāyatrī-devī gave birth to the four *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads*, and other transcendental literatures. Later, Gāyatrī came to know that the *Upaniṣads* had succeeded in becoming *gopīs*. She then recalled Lord Viṣṇu's vow and began to hanker for the perfection of being a *gopī* in Śrī Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. To that end, Gāyatrī then took up rigorous devotional practices, and with the help of the *Gopāla-tāpanī Upaniṣad*, she received Kṛṣṇa's blessing and took birth in Vraja where her desire was at last fulfilled....

The Gāyatrī *mantra* is eternal. How it seems to appear from Gāyatrī-devī, the *sādhaka* goddess, should be understood as a pastime, just as it appears that Agni gives Kṛṣṇa His own eternal disc-weapon as a gift. Since the time Gāyatrī became a *gopī*, she has been glorifying the divine couple from the five faces of her personified *mantra*-form, tasting divine bliss and giving it to those who meditate upon her. (The five faces correspond to the five principal feature of the *mantra*: 1) *om*—the seed 2) *bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ*—the *mahā-vyāhṛtis* 3) *tat savitur vareṇyaṁ*—representing the knowledge of relationships 4) *bhargo devasya dhīmahi*—indicating the process of surrender, and 5) *dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*—glorifying the ultimate goal, *prema*.)

Bringing together and harmonizing the various explanations of meaning

Followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda may wonder upon whom they should meditate while chanting the Brahma-*gāyatrī*: the sun, Surya Nārāyaṇa, Śrī Caitanaya Mahāprabhu, Kṛṣṇa, or Radha-Kṛṣṇa?

The answer is that all are possible, depending on the mood and intention of the devotee. For reference, we note that the *gopīs*, in separation, called to Kṛṣṇa as *hā nātha* (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 10.30.39). In their case, they were not using a secondary name of "master" or "Lord" as a worshipper in a contemporary church, mosque, or temple might do. They were calling for Vraja Kṛṣṇa, the master of their life.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to *Caitanya Caritāmṛta Ādi* 5.132 regarding the name Rāma in the *mahā-mantra*:

> if someone says that the "Rāma" in "Hare Rāma" is Lord Rāmacandra and someone else says that the "Rāma" in "Hare Rāma" is Śrī Balarāma, both are correct because there is no difference between Śrī Balarāma and Lord Rāma. ... Those who are aware of the *viṣṇu-tattva* do not fight over all these details.

It is perhaps significant that it is our *sampradāya*-guru Lord Brahmā who states in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 3.9.11:

nātha puṁsām

yad-yad-dhiyā ta urugāya vibhāvayanti

tat-tad-vapuḥ praṇayase sad-anugrahāya

Translation: O my Lord, You are so merciful to Your devotees that You manifest Yourself in the particular eternal form of transcendence in which they always think of You.

Purport: The statement here that the Lord manifests Himself before the devotee in the form in which the devotee likes to worship Him indicates that the Lord becomes subordinate to the desire of the devotee—so much so that He manifests His particular form as the devotee demands. This demand of the devotee is satisfied by the Lord because He is pliable in terms of the transcendental loving service of the devotee.

A relevant and interesting example is in Gajendra, who prayed to the Supreme without knowing exactly who the Supreme is. Still, the demigods knew not to come, and only Viṣṇu came, as explained here in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 8.3.30:

śrī-śuka uvāca
evaṁ gajendram upavarṇita-nirviśeṣaṁ
brahmādayo vividha-liṅga-bhidābhimānāḥ
naite yadopasasṛpur nikhilātmakatvāt
tatrākhilāmara-mayo harir āvirāsīt

Translation: Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: When the King of the elephants was describing the supreme authority, without mentioning any particular person, he did not invoke the demigods, headed by Lord Brahmā, Lord Śiva, Indra and Candra. Thus none of them approached him. However, because Lord Hari is the Supersoul, Puruṣottama, the Personality of Godhead, He appeared before Gajendra.

In contrast, when Atri Muni prayed, he was unsure of to whom he was praying. When Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Śiva appeared before him, he asked whom he had called (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 4.1.26):

ahaṁ vas tebhyaḥ ka eva bhavatāṁ ma ihopahūtaḥ

Translation: I offer my respectful obeisances unto all of you and beg to inquire whom of you three I have called by my prayer.

Therefore, Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers may fix their meditation according to the various explanations of the *mantra* as we have given in this paper, according to their individual desires and realizations which may change as they progress in *bhakti*. As it is dangerous to give imaginary meanings, all understandings should be based firmly on *guru-sādhu-śāstra*. If there is any doubt, one should get confirmation from one's spiritual master or senior Vaiṣṇavas.

Utterance and printing of the *mantra*

The three ways of uttering *mantras* from *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* — *Vācika* (spoken), *Upāṁśu* (murmured), and *Mānasa* (silent)

According to *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad* 2, *upāṁśu* (murmured and barely audible) is a thousand times more effective than *vācika* (clearly audible), and *mānasa* (silent, within the mind) is a million times more effective:

japo nāma vidhivadgurūpadiṣṭa-
vedāviruddhamantrābhyāsaḥ . taddvividhaṁ vācikaṁ mānasaṁ ceti .
mānasaṁ tu manasā dhyānayuktam . vācikaṁ dvividhamuccai-
rupāṁśubhedena . uccairuccāraṇaṁ yathoktaphalam . upāṁśu
sahasraguṇam . mānasaṁ koṭiguṇam

It is well known that many groups associated with the Indic and Vedic tradition sing the Brahma-*gāyatrī* publicly and loudly.[15] The *Gāyatrī-parivāra* popularized the public chanting of *Gāyatrī* throughout India. They even recorded it on tapes and publicized it. Some musicians associated with ISKCON have followed this trend by recordings of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* that are available for purchase or viewing on the Internet. Also, ISKCON has produced a movie, "A Simple Temple," at which the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* is sung in the beginning. This movie is played in outreach even to completely uninitiated newcomers.

In this purport, already quoted in this paper, Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes the entire Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*:

> Here Śrī Rāmānanda Rāya admits that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is the Supersoul. It is the Supersoul that inspires the devotee; therefore He is the original source of the *Gāyatrī mantra*, which states, *om bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ tat savitur vareṇyaṁ bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*. Savitā is the original source of all intelligence. That Savitā is Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. (purport *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta Madhya* 8.265)

There are numerous other places in his books where Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes parts of the *mantra*. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 4.8.53 about his publishing of the whole *mantra*:

> Nārada Muni uses the word *japaḥ*, which indicates that the *mantra* to be chanted is very confidential. One may ask, "If it is confidential, why is it mentioned in the writing of *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*?" It is confidential in this sense: one may receive a published *mantra* anywhere, but unless it is accepted through the chain of disciplic succession, the *mantra* does not act. It is said by authoritative sources that any *mantra* chanted without having been received from the disciplic succession has no efficacy.

It is perhaps fascinating that Śrīla Prabhupāda says the entire *mantra* in the following room Conversation with Allen Ginsberg — May 14, 1969, Columbus, Ohio:

> Allen Ginsberg: Do you use *Gāyatrī mantra* also?
>
> Prabhupāda: Yes.
>
> Allen Ginsberg: I know some of it. *om bhur...*

[15] It is also sung in the opening theme music of the 2004 US television series Battlestar Galactica.

Prabhupāda: Yes. *om bhur bhuvaḥ svaḥ tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*. This Gāyatrī, this is called.

Allen Ginsberg: In *Bhagavad-gītā* Kṛṣṇa says, "Among poetic meters, I am *Gāyatrī*."

Prabhupāda: Yes. *Gāyatrī* is the origin of Vedic knowledge. Without *Gāyatrī*, nobody is accepted as competent to study. That is the beginning, spiritual master, *dvija*, second birth. First birth by the father and mother, second birth by the spiritual master, father, and mother, *Gāyatrī*.

Allen Ginsberg: Do you teach *Gāyatrī mantra* to your disciples also?

Prabhupāda: Yes. Not in the beginning. When they are little advanced.

Even though Śrīla Prabhupāda did publish the entire Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* in his books and the *mantra* is well-known among those of Indian background and "spiritually inclined" persons, Śrīla Prabhupāda never had us sing the mantra publicly. He wrote in a letter to: Maṇḍali Bhadra —2 November, 1969: "Regarding the *Gāyatrī Mantra*, to say it silently is also chanting. Every *mantra* is recommended to be uttered silently, but specifically this *Mahā* (Hare Kṛṣṇa) *Mantra* can be chanted both ways: loudly and silently." Śrīla Prabhupāda made the giving of the *gāyatrī mantras* confidential and did not distribute the paper on which was written all seven of the *mantras* given at second initiation. The paper said in all-caps: "Not to be distributed to anyone except initiated disciples and to them only by His Divine Grace personally." He never personally sang any of those *mantras* publicly, nor instructed any of his disciples or followers to do so.

Relationship of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* with the other *mantras* given at brahminical initiation and with the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*

Not to give *om* at *dīkṣā*, but to give only *klīm*, would not demonstrate an understanding that these *bījas*, or seeds, of *mantras*, are non-different. To differentiate between these two *bījas* is not founded in *tattva*. In the *Gopāla-tāpani-upaniṣad*, *Uttara*, Verse 58 it is stated:

klīm oṁkārasyaikyatvaṁ paṭhyate brahma-vādibhiḥ

Translation: The complete oneness of *klīm* and *om* is understood by the knowers of the *Vedānta*.

Extract of Commentary by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī and Śrīla Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī: *klīṁ-kāra oṁkārayor ekaṁ evaikyaṁ tasya bhāva aikyatvam ekatvaṁ dvayam idaṁ tulya-svarūpaṁ tulya-śaktikaṁ tulya-pratipādyaṁ ceti praṇava-vyākhyānena tasyārthaḥ kathitaḥ iti . brahmavādibhir vedārtha-tattvajñaiḥ.*

Translation of Commentary: Between *klīm* and *om*, there is oneness. There is oneness of *bhāva* (mood) and these two are the same in their *svarūpa* (original identity), their *śakti* (potency), their *pratipādya* (indicated deity), and thus by explaining the *praṇava*, *klīm* is also explained. The term *brahma-vādibhiḥ* in the verse means — by those who know the correct *tattva* of the meaning of the *Vedas*.

Śivarāma Swāmī writes in *Nava Vraja Mahimā*, Volume 7, of the relationship between the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, the other *mantras* given at second initiation, and the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*:

> Gāyatrī *mantras* have the potential to act like the *mahā-mantra* because in essence they are also names of Kṛṣṇa, only preceded by a *bīja* and followed by an offering of respect and a call for meditation. Herein lies the reason *Brahma-gāyatrī* can purify the heart but cannot by itself reveal one's eternal identity or one's love for the Lord unless accompanied by deliberate meditation on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.
>
> *om*, *savitur*, *bhargaḥ*, and *deva*, for example, are secondary names of the Lord that have the power to liberate but not to bestow *prema* like primary names such as Kṛṣṇa, Govinda, or Gopījanavallabha. The Lord's secondary names (*gauṇa-nāma*) describe the Lord's connection with the creation and bring benefits up to liberation, but more importantly give one a chance to chant the primary names.
>
> In contrast, the Lord's primary names (*mukhya-nāma*), such as Rāma, describe the Lord as He is in the spiritual world. Empowered with His full potencies, they grant all perfections, including *prema*. Since the *Brahma-gāyatrī* is the monarch of all mantras and can in no way be less than its subjects, Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* have revealed its esoteric meanings in terms of Lord Kṛṣṇa's primary names.
>
> In this way our authorities have disclosed the ultimate intention of *Brahma-gāyatrī* as it relates to the *pāñcarātrika-mantras*, giving us a spiritually consistent understanding and meditation. The *Brahma-gāyatrī* is like the closed bud of the white lotus of *nāma-saṅkīrtana* that unfolds through the various *pāñcarātrika-mantras* into its fully blossomed and aromatic form, the Kāma-*gāyatrī*.

Here, as in many places, Śrīla Prabhupāda also equates chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* and the *praṇava*, as in this purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 7.15.31:

> Here the chanting of *oṁkāra* is recommended because in the beginning of transcendental realization, instead of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, one may chant *oṁkāra* (*praṇava*). There is no difference between the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* and *oṁkāra* because both of them are sound representations of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, *praṇavaḥ sarva-vedeṣu*. In all Vedic literatures, the sound vibration *oṁkāra* is the beginning. *om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*. The difference between chanting *oṁkāra* and chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* is that the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* may be chanted without consideration of the place or the sitting arrangements recommended in *Bhagavad-gītā* 6.11.

In the following purport from *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 7.76, Śrīla Prabhupāda discusses the relationship of *dīkṣā* into *gāyatrī mantras* that qualify one for Deity worship, with one's chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra*:

> To chant the holy name of the Lord, one need not depend upon other paraphernalia, for one can immediately get all the desired results of linking with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. It may therefore be questioned why there is a necessity for initiation or further spiritual activities in devotional service for one who engages in the chanting of the holy name of the Lord. The answer is that although it is correct that one who fully engages in chanting the holy name need not depend upon the process of initiation, generally a devotee is addicted to many abominable material habits due to material contamination from his previous life. In order to get quick relief from all these contaminations, it is required that one engage in the worship of the Lord in the temple. The worship of the Deity in the temple is essential to reduce one's restlessness due to the contaminations of conditioned life. Thus Nārada, in his *pāñcarātrikī-vidhi*, and other great sages have sometimes stressed that since every conditioned soul has a bodily concept of life aimed at sense enjoyment, to restrict this sense enjoyment the rules and regulations for worshiping the Deity in the temple are essential. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has described that the holy name of the Lord can be chanted by liberated souls, but almost all the souls we have to initiate are conditioned. It is advised that one chant the holy name of the Lord without offenses and according to the regulative principles, yet due to their past bad habits they violate these rules and regulations. Thus the

> regulative principles for worship of the Deity are also simultaneously essential.

It should be noted that in the above purport "initiation" refers to the *dīkṣā* that qualifies a disciple for Deity worship, and therefore not to what we in ISKCON call "first initiation." Similarly, in this letter to Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī on September 4, 1972, from New Vrindaban, he wrote:

> Second initiation is real initiation. First initiation is the preliminary, just to make him prepared, just like primary and secondary education. The first initiation gives him chance to become purified, and when he is actually purified then he is recognized as a *brāhmaṇa* and that means real initiation. The eternal bond between disciple and spiritual master begins from the first day he hears.

For further perspective on the relationship between *harināma* and *Gāyatrī* initiations, Śrīla Prabhupāda stated succinctly in this Room Conversation with a Sanskrit Professor on August 13, 1973, in Paris:

> "...first initiation, according to Jīva Gosvāmī, that is sufficient. Chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*, that is sufficient. But still, to purify them more, the second initiation, *Gāyatrī*, is given."

In a similar vein, Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami wrote in his diary under the heading of August 3, 1977 (we do not have an audio recording of this statement):

> Satsvarūpa Mahārāja inquired in a letter about the difference between first and second initiation. Śrīla Prabhupāda explained, "First initiation is more important. You can go without second initiation. First initiation stands strong. If it is executed very thoroughly, that is sufficient. The Vedic system was to give sacred thread at the first initiation.[16] We follow *pāñcarātrikī*. Vedic initiation was given to persons born of a *brāhmaṇa*. That is not possible in this age. Therefore, he has to be prepared by *harināma*, then second."

Therefore, while *harināma* in the form of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra*, received from a bona-fide guru, is sufficient to achieve the ultimate goal of life, the support from the *gāyatrī* mantras in *dīkṣā*, and then engaging in Deity worship, is

[16] In other words, traditionally initiation was not separated into a first and second part.

highly recommended. After all, as Rūpa Gosvāmī writes in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.74:

atha aṅgāni—
guru-pādāśrayas tasmāt kṛṣṇa-dīkṣādi-śikṣaṇam

Translation: The list of *aṅgas* is as follows: Taking shelter of guru; then after initiation, acquiring knowledge[17]

In text 84 Rūpa Gosvāmī states that the items he listed in text 74 constitute the principal or most important *aṅgas* of *bhakti*. Therefore, *gāyatrī-dīkṣā* should not be minimized or neglected for devotees.

Summary and Conclusions of Part one

The nature of the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* can be understood from its *bīja*: *om*, its meter, its structure, its origin, and its presiding deity. *Om*, the *praṇava*, is eternal. Originally the *Vedas* consisted only of *om*. The chanting of *om* was the only spiritual practice in the beginning of Satya yuga, before a division of *varṇas*. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that *om* is the Lord himself. In one sense the *mantras* we call *gāyatrī* can be called *Sandhyā*. Like the *praṇava*, the *gāyatrī mantra* is eternal. Each of the three times a day the *mantra* is chanted, it is named differently with a different presiding Deity. The origin of *gāyatrī* is the Lord's breathing or His skin, and Sarasvatī manifests the *mantra*, by the grace of the Lord, to Brahmā. The Deity the *mantra* addresses can be understood variously. In examining the Brahma-*gāyatrī* as explained by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, Śrīla Prabhupāda, his god-brother B. R. Śrīdhara Swāmī, and Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciple Śivarāma Swāmī, we can conclude that the Brahma-*gāyatrī* can be an integral part of the practice of *bhakti-yoga* for devotees of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. It is historically accurate that chanting the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* can also be viewed as a practice of those in the *brāhmaṇa-varṇa* as part of their *varṇa dharma*. The same could be said about Deity worship—that it is one of the means of livelihood for those in the *brāhmaṇa varṇa*. ISKCON members involved in Deity worship are, however, immersed in that activity as an *aṅga* of pure *bhakti*, regardless of what apparent and external *āśrama* or *varṇa* they are in.

[17] Bhānu Swāmi comments: This comment echoes the traditional Vedic system of initiation, in which a person receives Vedic initiation (*upanayana*) with Vedic *gāyatrī-mantra*. This qualifies him to study the *Vedas*. This tradition continued even with *pañcarātric* initiation and study.

Part two: Qualifications to chant the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*

Hermeneutic Overview of Part Two

1. ***viṣaya*** – topic: The Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* originates in the *Vedas*, and only the twice-born are authorized to chant it. It is not a *mantra* for public congregational chanting.
2. ***saṁśaya*** – doubt: If persons are sincere in the practice of *sādhana bhakti*, are they qualified to be initiated into the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, or are there other qualifications?
3. ***pūrvapakṣa*** - one viewpoint: Only males who engage in brahminical work as a means of livelihood as described in *śāstra* are qualified to chant it, regardless of one's practice of *bhakti-yoga*
4. ***uttara-pakṣa*** – another viewpoint: If the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is taken as a Vaiṣṇava *mantra* rather than a meditation reserved only for a specific *varṇa*, then the qualifications involve only considerations of *bhakti-yoga*
5. ***nirṇayaḥ*** – deciding in favor of a side: Without consideration of *varṇa* or gender, anyone who, under the guidance of a bona fide guru, has received Kṛṣṇa's holy name and is engaged in devotional service with faith, dedication, cleanliness, honesty, eagerness, and maturity can be qualified to receive the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*. Statements in *śāstra* that restrict ladies from the *praṇava* and Brahma-*gāyatrī* also restrict the *śūdra*-born from chanting the *praṇava* and Brahma-*gāyatrī (what to speak of those born outside varṇāśrama-dharma)*. Such a standard cannot be applied to the society of Vaiṣṇavas.
6. ***siddhānta***– conclusion: While there are śāstric statements about *varṇa* and gender qualifications in regard to *gāyatrī dīkṣā* and there are reasons for such restrictions, there are also śāstric statements opposing that view, also with solid reasons. Śrīla Prabhupāda strongly and repeatedly favored the *śāstras* and śāstric statements that do not discriminate at all based on birth, *varṇa* occupation, gender, and other external considerations.

Important note: Qualification for Brahma-*gāyatrī* extends to all Vedic *mantras*

As noted elsewhere in this paper, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 4.8.54 in reference to the *kṣatriya* prince Dhruva getting a *mantra* with the *praṇava*, that: "*om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya* is known as the *dvādaśākṣara-mantra*. This *mantra* is chanted by Vaiṣṇava devotees, and it begins with *praṇava*, or *oṁkāra*. There is an injunction that those who are not *brāhmaṇas* cannot pronounce the *praṇava mantra*."

If we in ISKCON restrict the chanting of Brahma-*gāyatrī* to *brāhmaṇas* by birth, or even *brāhmaṇas* by qualities and occupations, and perhaps in addition by gender, we would also, logically, have to similarly restrict any chanting of the *praṇava*, or the chanting of any Vedic *mantras*. Obviously, such restriction would apply to chanting Śrīla Prabhupāda's *praṇāma mantra*, to the chanting of the *dvādaśākṣara* (twelve-syllable) *mantra* "*om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*", to any *Bhāgavatam* verse with the *praṇava* in it, and to the *Śrī Isopanisad* (which, an *Upaniṣad*, is considered as one of the *śrutis*, in the same category as the *mantras* of the *Vedas*). It is of note that Śrīla Prabhupāda engaged even uninitiated persons in chanting these Vedic *mantras*, and encouraged wide distribution of the *Śrī Isopanisad*.

Birth, family lineage, *saṁskāras*, *varṇa*, gender

There are many parts of scripture and tradition that mention birth as a qualification for chanting the *praṇava*, Brahma-*gāyatrī*, and Vedic *mantras* in general. Birth is mentioned in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 10.8.6: *janmanā brāhmaṇo guruḥ* (at birth a *brāhmaṇa* is a guru), and *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 10.86.53: *brāhmaṇo janmanā śreyān* (by birth, a *brāhmaṇa* is the best). One's birth also involves one's family lineage: *dharma-śāstras* specify *avyavacchinna* (unbroken) lineage, with the *saṁskāras* having been performed in that lineage (Cf. "He, whose father and grandfather have not been initiated, (and his two ancestors) are called 'slayers of a *brāhmaṇa*." *Āpastamba Dharma-sūtra* 1.32). Birth can also involve gender, as often women were and are excluded from chanting the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, as we find mentioned in Kṛṣṇa's time as described in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 10.23.43-44:

nāsāṁ dvijāti-saṁskāro
na nivāso gurāv api
na tapo nātma-mīmāṁsā
na śaucaṁ na kriyāḥ śubhāḥ
tathāpi hy uttamaḥ-śloke
kṛṣṇe yogeśvareśvare
bhaktir dṛḍhā na cāsmākaṁ
saṁskārādimatām api

Translation: These women have never undergone the purificatory rites of the twice-born classes, nor have they lived as *brahmacārīs* in the *āśrama* of a spiritual master, nor have they executed austerities, speculated on the nature of the self, followed the formalities of cleanliness or engaged in pious rituals. Nevertheless, they have firm devotion for Lord Kṛṣṇa, whose glories are chanted by the exalted hymns of the *Vedas* and who is the supreme master of all masters of mystic power. We, on the other hand, have no such devotion for the Lord, although we have executed all these processes.

Taking birth in a specific family can naturally provide one with certain advantages or disadvantages. Prahlada Mahārāja condemns his birth in a family of demons (see *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 7.9.26) and Lord Kṛṣṇa glorifies birth in a family of transcendentalists (see *Bhagavad-gītā* 6.42). A section of the *Vedānta-sutra*, titled *apaśūdrādhikaraṇam* (Vs 1.3.34-38), discusses how and why *śūdras* are disqualified from hearing and studying the *Vedas*. The conclusion in *sūtra* 1.3.36, *saṁskāra-parāmarśāt tad-abhāvābhilāpāc ca*, and its commentaries, is that the *śūdras* perform no purificatory or reformatory rituals, *saṁskāras*. An example from *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* is given, where Jābāla did not have the required *saṁskāras*, but proved with his honesty that he had a brahminical character. After ascertaining this, his guru Gautama made arrangements for the *saṁskāras* and taught him the *Vedas* (as quoted by Baladeva Vidyābhuṣaṇa in his commentary to Vs 1.3.37). Considering Śrīla Prabhupāda's practice of instituting a certain test period for his male and female disciples, which ascertains their willingness to take the requisite vows and undergo the *saṁskāras*, the prohibition would not seem to apply to such individuals.

Some reasons for śāstric statements and traditions that restrict the chanting of Brahma-*gāyatrī*, along with other Vedic *mantras*, and the study of the *Vedas*

The Spiritual Value of Birth in a Good Family

There can be great spiritual advantages to taking birth in a family of Vaiṣṇavas or *brāhmaṇas*. As Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself states in *Bhagavad-gītā* 6.43:

tatra taṁ buddhi-saṁyogaṁ
labhate paurva-dehikam
yatate ca tato bhūyaḥ
saṁsiddhau kuru-nandana

Translation: On taking such a birth, he revives the divine consciousness of his previous life, and he again tries to make further progress in order to achieve complete success, O son of Kuru.

Purport: King Bharata, who took his third birth in the family of a good *brāhmaṇa*, is an example of good birth for the revival of previous transcendental consciousness.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also writes in his purport to the previous verse, *Bhagavad-gītā* 6.42:

> Birth in a family of *yogīs* or transcendentalists—those with great wisdom—is praised herein because the child born in such a family receives a spiritual impetus from the very beginning of his life. It is especially the case in the *ācārya* or *gosvāmī* families. Such families are very learned and devoted by tradition and training, and thus they become spiritual masters. In India there are many such *ācārya* families, but they have now degenerated due to insufficient education and training. By the grace of the Lord, there are still families that foster transcendentalists generation after generation. It is certainly very fortunate to take birth in such families.

One of many concrete examples is given in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 2.3.15:

bāla-krīḍanakaiḥ krīḍan

kṛṣṇa-krīḍāṁ ya ādade

Translation: Even while playing with dolls, he [Mahārāja Parīkṣit] used to worship Lord Kṛṣṇa by imitating the worship of the family Deity.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to the above verse about the fortune of his own childhood, the childhood of his spiritual master, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, and Mīrā. He uses the term "lucky Vaiṣṇava families."

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to *Nectar of Instruction*, verse 5 a warning to respect those who have a spiritually conducive family and tradition:

> A devotee who has attained the title of *gosvāmī* but is not born of a *brāhmaṇa* father or of a *gosvāmī* in the family of Nityānanda or Advaita Prabhu should not be artificially puffed up by thinking that he has become a *gosvāmī*. He should always remember that as soon as he becomes materially puffed up, he immediately falls down. This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is a transcendental science, and there is no room for jealousy.

It is certainly a qualification for *dīkṣā* to be born and raised in a family where from a young age one is learning *śāstra*, worshiping the Deity, observing cleanliness and etiquette, and so forth.

The *Vedas* are difficult to understand

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives as a reason for restricting initiation into *mantras* and Vedic study the difficulty of understanding the *Vedas*. He writes in the introduction to the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*[18]:

> The Vedic mantras are too difficult for an ordinary man. Women, *śūdras* and the so-called twice-born higher castes are unable to penetrate into the sense of the *Vedas*. And thus the *Mahābhārata* as well as the *Purāṇas* are made easy to explain the truths of the *Vedas*.

He makes the same point here in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 6.147:

> Considering that women, *śūdras* and *dvija-bandhus* (unworthy sons of the twice-born) cannot understand the Vedic hymns directly, Śrīla Vyāsadeva compiled the *Mahābhārata*. Actually, the Supreme Personality of Godhead is *vedeṣu durlabham* (untraceable in the *Vedas*), but when the *Vedas* are properly understood or when Vedic knowledge is received from devotees, one can understand that all Vedic knowledge leads to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

In *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 7.11.24, Nārada Muni explains that *śūdras* should perform *yajñas* without *mantras*:

śūdrasya sannatiḥ śaucaṁ
sevā svāminy amāyayā
amantra-yajño hy asteyaṁ
satyaṁ go-vipra-rakṣaṇam

Relevant synonym: *amantra-yajñaḥ*—performance of sacrifices simply by offering obeisances (without *mantras*)

Translation: Offering obeisances to the higher sections of society [the *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*], being always very clean, being free from duplicity, serving one's master, performing sacrifices without uttering mantras, not stealing, always speaking the truth and giving all protection to the cows and *brāhmaṇas*—these are the symptoms of the *śūdra*.

Purport: .... A *śūdra* may attend sacrifices and Vedic ritualistic ceremonies along with his master, but he should not utter the *mantras*, for these may be uttered only by the members of the higher sections of society. Unless one is completely pure and has been raised to the

[18] Śrīla Prabhupāda is recounting the conversation between Lord Caitanya and Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya in this passage. Here Śrīla Prabhupāda may be elaborating on *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 6.148.

standard of a *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya* or *vaiśya*—in other words, unless one is *dvija*, twice-born—the chanting of *mantras* will not be fruitful.

So, in a situation where one has a low birth, and has not been raised from that platform, birth can be a consideration, as Lord Balarāma explained when he referred to mixed parentage (*pratiloma-jaḥ*, in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 10.78.24) in his decision to kill Romaharṣaṇa.

Possibility to misuse the power and knowledge acquired by chanting *Gāyatrī mantras*

A person's qualities affect how knowledge is used. One offense to the holy name is to explain the glories of the name to the faithless. The same principle applies to Vedic *mantras* in general. On the one hand, a person's faith is independent of their gender or the *varṇa* designation of their occupation. At the same time, as explained previously, certain groups of people may have more difficulty with understanding the *Vedas*. For those who are not Vaiṣṇavas, the influence of the modes of passion and ignorance may be such that they would misuse the understanding of *mantras* to propagate harmful philosophies and practices in the name of *bhakti*. As we read in *Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata Ādi* 13.184:

veda-guhya kahile haya paramāyu-kṣaya
paraloke tā'ra manda jāniha niścaya

Translation: [Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu said] "If one discloses topics that are more confidential than those of the Vedas, then know for certain that his duration of life is diminished and his advancement in the next life will be checked."

Purport by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura: If one reveals the confidential meaning of a mantra, he is not actually benefited in this world; rather, the speaker only gains a shortened lifespan for endeavoring to reveal the mystery. If one reveals the purport of the most confidential Vedic mantras to faithless persons, then those unfortunate persons will misuse the purport of the mantras by preaching mundane *bāula*, *sahajiyā*, and *smārta* philosophies as the path of devotional service. Therefore, even the mistake of accepting an unqualified disciple yields adverse results.[19]

The potential for misuse is also great because *Gāyatrī mantras* are one of the means to get Vedic knowledge, which can bring abilities to manipulate the material energy of the Lord. We see examples of how those with knowledge of the *Vedas* get the power to influence different

[19] Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, Śrī Vṛndāvana dāsa Ṭhākura's *Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata: Ādi-khaṇḍa*, Part Two, Vrajraj Press, 1999, trans. Bhumipati dāsa, ed. Pundarika Vidyānidhi dāsa, pp. 297-8

aspects of this world. While chanting *mantras*, *brāhmaṇas* change reality. For example, as stated in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 6.4.27: *manīṣiṇo ...vahniṁ yathā dāruṇi pāñcadaśyaṁ*,

Translation: "Learned *brāhmaṇas* who are expert in performing ritualistic ceremonies and sacrifices can extract the fire dormant within wooden fuel by chanting the fifteen Sāmidhenī *mantras*."

Another example is in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 9.9.22, where Saudāsa was cursed by Vasiṣṭha to become a Rākṣasa. By studying the *Vedas*, *brāhmaṇas* get mystic powers, as well as knowledge about different aspects of this world. There is a risk that without possessing qualities of a real *brāhmaṇa*, such as being *alampaṭaḥ*, free from selfishness (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 3.22.2), such people could use that knowledge and power in their selfish personal interests, which may in turn harm people. Therefore, traditionally knowledge was given only to those who proved their qualification to use it only in the context of service of the Supreme Lord. This constraint applies not only to the *brāhmaṇas*, but to all the *dvijas*, namely *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*. *Brāhmaṇas* used to get the highest knowledge and power, *kṣatriyas*—less, and *vaiśyas*—even less. *Śūdras* used to only get knowledge from what are called the *śilpa-śāstras*: technical knowledge regarding their service and profession. These restrictions were made in order to make it possible to use higher knowledge to correct a situation among those without such knowledge. We find a vivid example of how such a correction was practically applied in the story of Vena Mahārāja in the Fourth Canto. He was empowered by the *brāhmaṇas* to rule the country, but then misused his power and position against them. Despite all his knowledge and power, he was then destroyed by the power of the *brāhmaṇas*, who killed him with special *mantras* from which he could not protect himself. So the potential for misuse is one of the reasons why some people without required qualifications used not to receive *mantras*, such as the *brahma-Gāyatrī*.

A person's association and obligations affect how knowledge is used

Another reason why the giving of certain *mantras* and knowledge was restricted to those of certain occupations, regardless of the person's propensities, is that one's brahminical qualification might be depleted is if one serves those who have lower consciousness. Lord Kapiladeva warns us about such association in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 3.25.20:

prasaṅgam ajaraṁ pāśam
ātmanaḥ kavayo viduḥ
sa eva sādhuṣu kṛto
mokṣa-dvāram apāvṛtam

Translation: Every learned man knows very well that attachment for the material is the greatest entanglement of the spirit soul. But that same attachment, when applied to the self-realized devotees, opens the door of liberation.

To be able to give sound advice, a *brāhmaṇa* needs to be able to openly speak the truth. A *brāhmaṇa* who is dependent for livelihood on somebody who has selfish motives may not be able to speak freely, fearing that the patron could deprive the *brāhmaṇa*, along with any dependents, of what is necessary to support life. Therefore, we see the verses from the Seventh Canto, Chapter 11, showing how there are different levels of earning the livelihood for the *brāhmaṇas*, where the more one is independent of others the better it is. Moreover, by serving somebody who is lusty and greedy, a *brāhmaṇa* can develop the same qualities. Being thus attached to material things, such *brāhmaṇas* can become contaminated and lose their ability to understand the intentions of the Supreme Lord for themselves, let alone to give pure knowledge and understanding to others.

On the other hand, if they are serving those who have the same intention, namely to perform *yajñas*, engaging all the citizens in these *yajñas* according to their particular situations, and their leaders give them freedom to act without external restriction and to speak what they feel necessary, then *brāhmaṇas* become very effective in transferring knowledge to all classes of society. Especially the kings or *kṣatriyas* were interested to get advice from such independent *brāhmaṇas* in order to understand how to rule the country in the most effective way. Therefore, in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* Seventh Canto, Chapter 11 we also see verses speaking about special privileges given to *brāhmaṇas*, to support their effectiveness in the society. At the same time, these privileges entail that they must personally take responsibility if they have misused that freedom, or if they have become corrupted while serving those who were not pure enough. Therefore, while trying to understand why the *Vedas* forbid *brāhmaṇa*s to live by *śva-vṛtti* (serving those with lower consciousness), we can not only look at the injunction itself, but consider the reason and the mood behind that external rule.[20] Such consideration will help us to understand how to apply the injunction on a personal basis, to help those who are willing to perform brahminical activities to do so in the most effective way.

Cleanliness

It's possible that one reason *śūdras* and women did not, in general, get Brahma-*gāyatrī* traditionally has to do with cleanliness. Śūdras may be doing ritually unclean work. Śrīla

[20] We intentionally did not do extended research on the livelihood of *brāhmaṇas* so as not to increase the volume of this paper. We focused on the mood and intention of the injunctions rather than specifics.

Prabhupāda said: "By birth, everyone is a *śūdra. Śūdra* means unclean." (Morning Walk — June 14, 1974, Paris)

In *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 10.23.43-44 we find a description of women as unclean:

nāsāṁ dvijāti-saṁskāro
na nivāso gurāv api
na tapo nātma-mīmāṁsā
na śaucaṁ na kriyāḥ śubhāḥ

The *brāhmaṇas*' wives are described as *na śaucaṁ*. Women have regular times of ritual impurity, and, besides that, if they have young children they will be constantly touching impure things such as diapers and saliva. It would be difficult for women of child-bearing age, therefore, to chant *gāyatrī* three times a day in a ritually pure state. The occupation of caring for young children may also make it difficult for women to strictly adhere to specific timings to chant *gāyatrī.*

Such problems of cleanliness may apply to both men and women in the modern working world. Most people who work outside their homes couldn't apply ritual cleanliness at least to the chanting of their noon *gāyatrī*, and might have job-related time constraints, as well. Muslim countries deal with this problem by having a culture in which stopping work for prayer at specific times and having rooms for cleaning and so forth are very accepted.

In any case, women in general and those who work in offices, factories, etc. would certainly have challenges in following rules of timing and cleanliness for *gāyatrī*, especially noon *gāyatrī*. Such practical considerations might have been part of the long-standing reasons for them not receiving the Brahma-*gāyatrī.*

In regard to such considerations of ritual purity, we find two examples in the pastimes of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu where he disregarded such prohibitions. One was where he embraced Sanātana Goswāmī when the latter's body was covered by oozing sores. Sanātana had avoided the main road where he might touch Jagannātha's *pūjārīs* and pollute them—an avoidance that pleased the Lord. Yet, the Lord Himself hugged the apparently polluted body—indeed, made a habit of doing so. Another instance is where Lord Caitanya danced with the dead body of Haridāsa Ṭhākura. Generally, a dead body, what to speak of a dead body of someone considered "Muslim," would be ritually impure. But we find no suggestion that Mahāprabhu observed the prevailing rules of contamination after dancing with Haridāsa Ṭhākura's dead body.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's only recorded or written instruction regarding women's monthly ritual impurity is as follows in a letter to: Amsu: — Vrindaban 13 August, 1974:

> According to the *smārta vidhi*, women cannot touch deity during menstrual period but the *goswāmi viddhi* allows. But it is better not to do it. One thing is that the *sevā* can never be stopped for any reason. This also for the cooking.

After Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the *gāyatrī mantra*s to disciples in Boston in May, 1968, he gave the following instructions:

> The next morning, when we were all comparing what Guru Mahārāja had said to us after he whispered the mantras into each of our right ears, we discovered that to most of us, both men and women, he had said, "Take a shower after passing stool and keep your nails cut short." However, to me he had simply said, "So, business is increasing." At first I thought he meant that since I was already busy with many services for him, now there would be still more to do. Later, when I looked up the subject of *gāyatrī-mantras* in Teachings of Lord Caitanya, I discovered that in the *mantra* there was another spiritual business beyond the realm of its external utterance. Sincere recitation of the *mantra* is the source of an unlimited spiritual treasure, bestowing an experience of the transcendental pastimes of the Lord and His associates, while beckoning the reciter to join with Them. I became convinced that it was this business that Guru Mahārāja was referring to.[21]

Clearly, Śrīla Prabhupāda felt that women and those of various occupations were able to meet the standards of cleanliness that he gave as the baseline for receiving the Brahma-*gāyatrī* and doing service for the Deity.

Importance of *saṁskāras*

In *Civilization and Transcendence* (Ch. 10), Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

> The real aim of *saṁskāras* is to bring a rascal to the platform of knowledge. *janmanā jāyate śūdraḥ*: by birth, everyone is without any knowledge. The purpose of *samskāras* is to gradually bring a person who has no knowledge of spiritual life to the spiritual platform.

[21] Jadurāṇī dasi, *The Art of Spiritual Life: A Memoir*, New Delhi, Gauravani Publications, 2019, p. 137

So, having these *saṁskāras* (purificatory processes) is a preparation for spiritual life. In this wedding lecture on November 17, 1971, Delhi, Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions how *vaidika dīkṣā* was given to someone in terms of *saṁskāras*, not just birth in a *brāhmaṇa* family in terms of biology:

> So in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, everything is being performed according to the scriptural injunction. It is not that we are manufacturing something.
>
> ***yaḥ śāstra-vidhim utsṛjya***
> ***vartate kāma-kārataḥ***
> ***na sa siddhim avāpnoti***
> ***na sukhaṁ na parāṁ gatim***
>
> [*Bhagavad-gītā*. 16.23]
>
> So, our initiation, our accepting a disciple as *brāhmaṇa*, they are all strictly according to Vedic injunctions. In this Kali-yuga, there is no *vaidika dīkṣā*, because *vaidika dīkṣā* depends on the persons being a, I mean to say, sanctified *brāhmaṇa*. A sanctified *brāhmaṇa* means that before his birth, the *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra* is observed. If it is not observed, then he immediately falls down to the category of *śūdra. Kalau śūdra sambhava.*

It is of note that while establishing the importance of *saṁskāras* in a family to be a *brāhmaṇa*, Śrīla Prabhupāda, as usual, asserts that the brahminical initiations he gave—that included the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*—were done "according to Vedic injunctions."

Birth, gender, and *varṇa* restrictions apply only to non-Vaiṣṇavas

Even though there are some places in *śāstra* where the qualification for the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is by birth, there are also many objections to qualifications by birth. While presenting codes of behavior, *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* distinguishes between ladies and *śūdras* who are Vaiṣṇavas and those who are not:

> ***ato niṣedhakaṁ yad yad vacanaṁ śrūyate sphuṭam***
> ***avaiṣṇava-paraṁ tat tad vijñeyaṁ tattva-darśibhiḥ (5.453)***

Translation: Therefore, wherever restrictive statements are to be found in scriptures [regarding *śūdras* or women], those statements are understood by the learned souls as applicable to non-Vaiṣṇavas only.

yathā—
brāhmaṇasyaiva pūjyo 'haṁ śucer apy aśucer api
strī-śūdra-kara-saṁsparśo vajrād api suduḥsahaḥ
praṇavoccāraṇāccaiva śālagrāma-śilārcanāt
brāhmaṇī-gamanāc caiva śūdraś caṇḍālatām iyāt (5.454 – 455)

Translation: For example, the Lord says, —I am to be worshipped only by the *brāhmaṇas*, whether they are clean or unclean. The touch of the hands of a woman or *śūdra* is worse than a thunderbolt to me. If a *śūdra* utters the *praṇava* [*om*], worships the *śālagrāma-śilā*, or cohabits with a *brāhmaṇa* lady, then such a *śūdra* will attain the more degraded status of a dog-eater.

As anyone familiar with Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings knows, he frequently made the point that one's birth, family, and previous *saṁskāras* or lack of them was not considered as qualification for chanting the *gāyatrī mantras* he gave. As he says in this initiation lecture:

> So this is a chance given by the *pāñcarātrika* system. It doesn't matter how he is born. Nobody is responsible for his birth, but everyone is responsible for his work. So you work like a *brāhmaṇa,* like a Vaiṣṇava, and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, and chant this *Gāyatrī mantra*, and your life will be sublime. So don't neglect it. You are being initiated according to the order of our predecessors, Caitanya Mahāprabhu, *pṛthivīte āche yata nagarādi grāma* [*Caitanya-bhāgavata Antya* 4.126]. ["In every town and village of the world, the chanting of My name will be heard.] (Brahminical initiation lecture, May 25, 1969 New Vrindaban)

Here is an example from *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*, *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 4.31.10 purport where Śrīla Prabhupāda rejects consideration of birth, with reference to *śāstra*:

> In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness society, unless one is twice initiated—first by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and second by the *Gāyatrī mantra*—he is not allowed to enter the kitchen or Deity room to execute duties. However, when one is elevated to the platform on which he can worship the Deity, his previous birth does not matter.
>
> ***caṇḍālo 'pi dvija-śreṣṭho***
> ***hari-bhakti-parāyaṇaḥ***
> ***hari-bhakti-vihīnaś ca***
> ***dvijo 'pi śvapacādhamaḥ***
>
> "Even if one is born in the family of a *caṇḍāla*, if one engages in the devotional service of the Lord, he becomes the best of *brāhmaṇas*. But even a *brāhmaṇa* who is devoid of devotional service is on the level of the lowest dog-eater." If a

person is advanced in devotional service, it does not matter whether he was born in a *caṇḍāla* family. He becomes purified. As Śrī Prahlāda Mahārāja said **(***Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 7.9.10):

viprād dvi-ṣaḍ-guṇa-yutād aravinda-nābha-
pādāravinda-vimukhāt śvapacaṁ variṣṭham

Even if one is a *brāhmaṇa* and is qualified with all the brahminical qualifications, he is considered degraded if he is averse to worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead. But if a person is attached to the service of the Lord, he becomes glorified even if he is born in a *caṇḍāla* family. Indeed, such a *caṇḍāla* can deliver not only himself but all his family predecessors. Without devotional service, even a proud *brāhmaṇa* cannot deliver himself, and what to speak of his family. In many instances in the *śāstras* it is seen that even a *brāhmaṇa* has become a *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*, *mleccha* or non-*brāhmaṇa*. And there are many instances of one's being born a *kṣatriya* or *vaiśya* or even lower and, in the eighteenth year, attaining elevation to the brahminical platform by the process of initiation. Therefore, Nārada Muni says in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 7.11.35:

yasya yal lakṣaṇaṁ proktaṁ
puṁso varṇābhivyañjakam
yad anyatrāpi dṛśyeta
tat tenaiva vinirdiśet

It is not a fact that because one is born in a *brāhmaṇa* family he is automatically a *brāhmaṇa*. He has a better chance to become a *brāhmaṇa*, but unless he meets all the brahminical qualifications, he cannot be accepted as such. On the other hand, if the brahminical qualifications are found in the person of a *śūdra*, he should immediately be accepted as a *brāhmaṇa*. To substantiate this there are many quotations from *Bhāgavatam*, *Mahābhārata*, *Bharadvāja-saṁhitā* and the *Pañcarātra*, as well as many other scriptures.

Śrīla Prabhupāda differentiates in this Room Conversation of August 7, 1971 in London, between the "universal idea" of the Vaiṣṇavas and those who consider birth a qualification. He thus distinguishes Vaiṣṇavas from followers of Śaṅkarācārya, who only award *sannyāsa* to those born of *brāhmaṇa* lineage:

Śaṅkara had no universal idea, but still the Śaṅkarites, they won't accept outside *brāhmana* caste. They won't allow *sannyāsa* unless he's a caste *brāhmaṇa.* It is still going on. That is their strict principle. Now it is dwindling—that is a different thing. But we Vaiṣṇavas, we, according to *Bhagavad-gītā*, whatever one may be, if

he takes shelter of Kṛṣṇa consciousness he's eligible to go back to home, back to Kṛṣṇa.

māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya
ye 'pi syuḥ pāpa-yonayaḥ
striyo vaiśyās tathāśūdrās
te 'pi yānti parāṁ gatim

[*Bhagavad-gītā* 9.32]

(end Room Conversation)

Some might think that Śrīla Prabhupāda's mood that he consistently exhibited was meant to be a temporary emergency tactic and that he wants us to eventually institute activities related to *varṇa* by birth. But he didn't want us to implement *Manu-smṛti* statements as evidenced in the following quote:

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

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes in *Jaiva Dharma*, chapter 3: "The *varṇas* are determined by nature, birth and actions. When *varṇa* is determined only by birth, the purpose of the system is destroyed."

As Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in his lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā* 4.12-13 on July 29, 1966, in New York:

> Similarly, Lord Caitanya also says the same thing, and Kṛṣṇa also says the same thing. Never it is, He is stressing on birth. Birth is no consideration. Nobody is responsible for his birth...If I want to enter into the kingdom of God, or Kṛṣṇa, if we want to be Kṛṣṇa consciousness, there is no impediment...Because it is transcendental subject matter, it does not depend on any material condition...So it is open for everyone. *Catur-varṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭam* [*Bhagavad-gītā* 4.13]. That is a chance given, that you can become a *brāhmaṇa*, you can become a great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and you can become the spiritual master of the world.

In fact, Śrīla Prabhupāda had such a singular focus on the spiritual qualifications as opposed to the bodily designations and birth, that it can be called his signature approach. In his purport to *Nectar of Instruction* verse 6, Śrīla Prabhupāda denounces the practice of discriminating against

"American *goswāmīs*." It would be uncharacteristic of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement to rescind Śrīla Prabhupāda's pronouncement, "You are not this body" or limit it only to the males, etc.

Claims without *pramāṇas* for why there are restrictions on birth and gender

In our research into practices both of ISKCON preachers and of those in other Gauḍīya groups, we encountered some claims without *pramāṇas* about the effect of chanting the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, with reasons why women or *śūdras* or non-*brāhmaṇas* should not chant it. Those claims or statements are not listed here so as not to inadvertently give them credence. Some of the same claims were encountered multiple times from a number of preachers in various groups, which might appear to give them a level of authority. Some are found in published books. It is wise, in general, to apply a large amount of caution, and possibly total rejection, to claims that have no support from *śāstra* or previous *ācāryas*. Of course, disciples may accept statements from their guru as authoritative even without any citation of *śāstra* or the works of previous *ācāryas*. However, it is best if ISKCON preachers do not repeat unsubstantiated statements or use them as a basis for *bhakti* practices.

Implications for ISKCON

It should be fairly obvious that adopting restrictions on *dīkṣā* and *mantras* according to birth, family lineage, family *saṁskāras*, occupation (assuming one's occupation is not involved with the four sinful activities), and gender would disqualify the vast majority of ISKCON's current and potential members from receiving the Brahma-*gāyatrī*. If such restrictions were fully applied according to *śāstra*, most of ISKCON's members also could not chant Śrīla Prabhupāda's *praṇām mantra*, *Śrī Isopanisad*, many *Bhāgavatam* or *Bhagavad-gītā* verses, or anything containing the *praṇava*. It should be obvious that such a situation is not Śrīla Prabhupāda's desire. Indeed, it would take the "I" out of ISKCON. At the same time, ISKCON members can respect and acknowledge the genuine advantages for spiritual life that come from birth in *brāhmaṇa* and Vaiṣṇava families. Gradually, ISKCON members are founding family lineages where *bhakti-yoga* is an intrinsic part of life.

Qualifications in *bhakti-yoga*

When going through these qualifications in *bhakti-yoga*, we do well to always remember that all good qualifications are due to the mercy of guru. We should never be proud of our so-called

qualifications, and always strive to display Vaiṣṇava qualities. As stated in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 6.2.35:

so 'haṁ tathā yatiṣyāmi
yata-cittendriyānilaḥ
yathā na bhūya ātmānam
andhe tamasi majjaye

Translation: I am such a sinful person, but since I have now gotten this opportunity, I must completely control my mind, life and senses and always engage in devotional service so that I may not fall again into the deep darkness and ignorance of material life.

Purport: Every one of us should have this determination. We have been elevated to an exalted position by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa and the spiritual master, and if we remember that this is a great opportunity and pray to Kṛṣṇa that we will not fall again, our lives will be successful.

Devotion, faith, and dedication

While the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, as quoted earlier, makes reference to prohibitions on non-Vaiṣṇava *śūdras* and women worshiping the Deity, it also contains injunctions that allow women and persons of any *varṇa* to receive all *mantras* and initiations if such persons have devotion to guru, faith, and dedication, as we can see in these references:

tāntrikeṣu ca mantreṣu dīkṣāyāṁ yoṣitām api
sādhvīnām adhikāro 'sti śūdrādīnāṁ ca sad-dhiyām (1.194)

Translation: In all matters of initiations in *mantras* given in *tantras*, saintly ladies have all rights, and so do the *śūdras* and others who have dedicated their intelligence to serving their spiritual masters.[22]

āgamoktena mārgeṇa strī-śūdrair api pūjanam
kartavyaṁ śraddhayā viṣṇoś cintayitvā patiṁ hṛdi (1.195)

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

strīṇām apy adhikāro 'sti viṣṇor ārādhanādiṣu

[22] The word *adhikāraḥ* ("rights") is to be noted in the original Sanskrit. *Sat-dhiyām* indicates those who meditate on truth or are absorbed in the truth.

pati-priya-hitānāṁ ca śrutir eṣā sanātanī (1.197)

Translation: Ladies who desire the benefit of their husbands too have all right to conduct the worship, etc., of Lord Viṣṇu. This is the verdict of the eternal *śruti*. (Again, the word *adhikāraḥ* is to be noted in the original Sanskrit.)

agastya-saṁhitāyāṁ śrī-rāma-mantra-rājam uddiśya—
śucivratatamāḥ śūdrā dhārmikā dvija-sevakāḥ
striyaḥ pati-vratāś cānye pratilomānulomajāḥ
lokāś cāṇḍāla-paryantāḥ sarve 'py atrādhikāriṇaḥ (1.198)

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

Thus, we find in various parts of the same authoritative source sections regarding qualification by birth, and sections that downplay or outright deny the importance of birth. Śrīla Prabhupāda consistently favored the latter.

Honesty

One traditional qualification to receive *gāyatrī* involves not birth, but truthfulness, as in this well-known account that Śrīla Prabhupāda tells during one of his early initiations of disciples into the *gāyatrī mantras*:

> the *pāñcarātrika* system, it gives chance to a person, if he has got symptoms. Just like this boy has got the symptom to become a *brāhmaṇa*, to be Vaiṣṇava. Just like in the Jābāla *Upaniṣad*. This, by symptoms, he was accepted *brāhmaṇa*, a small boy like this. Satyakāma Jābāla. Satyakāma. He went to Gautama Muni: "My dear sir, will you initiate me?" Just like this boy can ask us. Oh, he was very kind: "Oh, yes. Very nice boy. What is your father's name?" "Oh, I do not know." "Oh, just ask your mother. Go." Mother says, "I do not know whose son you are." He came back. "What your mother says?" "Oh, Mother says she does not know who is my father." "Oh, you are *brāhmaṇa*. Oh, you are *brāhmaṇa*. Come on. I shall initiate you." He was so truthful. That is real symptom of *brāhmaṇa*, *satya*, *śama*. He does not disclose that "I do not know." Everyone will try to hide if he does not know his father's name. But here is a boy, "Oh," he said, "Oh, you are *brāhmaṇa*. Come on. I shall initiate you." This is *lakṣaṇa*, symptom. "Such a truthful boy. Never mind what he is born, how he is born." This system is not

> new. Therefore, we shall have to accept by the symptom. If one is inclined to go to Kṛṣṇa—he is chanting, he is doing, following the principles—then, according to Nārada's version, *yasya hi yal lakṣaṇaṁ syāt*, here is the *lakṣaṇa*, symptom, *varṇābhivyañjakam*, to understand to what class he belongs. Now, he is truthful—he belongs to the *brāhmaṇa* class... The *lakṣaṇa* is there; the symptom is there. *Yasya hi yal lakṣaṇaṁ varṇābhivyañjakaṁ tat tenaiva vinirdiśet* [*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 7.11.35]. ... If he is a liar, immediately he is *pañcama*, less than *śūdra*. You see? So these things were done. People have misused the whole thing: "Now I am born of a *brāhmaṇa*. By force I am *brāhmaṇa*." (Brahminical Initiation Lecture — May 25, 1969, New Vrindaban)

In the above instance, Śrīla Prabhupāda, as he generally did, quotes *śāstra* to substantiate his point about truthfulness over birth and body as the qualification to receive the *gāyatrī mantras*.

Advancement in regulative devotional practice

Śrīla Prabhupāda instituted a simple system in ISKCON for deciding on the qualification for receiving *gāyatrī mantras*, as he explains in this Room Conversation in Columbus, Ohio on May 14, 1969:

> Allen Ginsberg: In Bhagavad-gītā Kṛṣṇa says, "Among poetic meters, I am Gāyatrī."
>
> Prabhupāda: Yes. Gāyatrī is the origin of Vedic knowledge. Without Gāyatrī, nobody is accepted as competent to study. That is the beginning, spiritual master, *dvija*, second birth. First birth by the father and mother, second birth by the spiritual master, father, and mother, Gāyatrī.
>
> Allen Ginsberg: Do you teach *Gāyatrī mantra* to your disciples also?
>
> Prabhupāda: Yes. Not in the beginning. When they are little advanced.

Here Śrīla Prabhupāda succinctly explain his qualification standards:

> I am arranging how the *Gāyatrī mantra* should be given to the advanced students. You can simply let me know how many of our students are fit for this purpose. Unless one is strictly following the first initiation process and following the regulative principles, one should not be recommended for the *Gāyatrī mantra*. (Letter to Yamunā and Gurudāsa Los Angeles April 16, 1970)

In this letter to Nityānanda dāsa from Rome on May 27, 1974, Śrīla Prabhupāda gives the following as a qualification: "Especially if one cannot even rise early for *maṅgala āratī* he should never be given brahminical initiation."

Śrīla Prabhupāda here includes a time period and reiterates that both "boys and girls" are to be initiated with the *Gāyatrī mantra.*

> So then this is the beginning of initiation, and those who have chanted at least for one year, then the next initiation is to offer him *Gāyatrī mantra.* Some of the students, boys and girls, will be offered this *Gāyatrī mantra.* (Initiations and Gāyatrī of Devotees Going to London — August 11, 1968, Montreal)

Sincerely eager to chant the *mantra*

In the following purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 24.331, Śrīla Prabhupāda specifically discusses when women, *śūdras*, and others not in brahminical occupations are qualified to receive *dīkṣā mantras.* His criterion is eagerness. He writes as follows:

> The following injunction is given in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (1.194) regarding *mantra-adhikāra*, the qualification for receiving mantra initiation:
>
> ***tāntrikeṣu ca mantreṣu dīkṣāyāṁ yoṣitām api***
> ***sādhvīnām adhikāro ' sti śūdrādīnāṁ ca sad-dhiyām***
>
> "*Śūdras* and women who are chaste and sincerely interested in understanding the Absolute Truth are qualified to be initiated with the *pāñcarātrika-mantras.*" This is confirmed by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.32):
>
> ***māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya ye ' pi syuḥ pāpa-yonayaḥ***
> ***striyo vaiśyās tathā śūdrās te ' pi yānti parāṁ gatiṁ***
>
> "O son of Pṛthā, those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth—women, *vaiśyas* [merchants] and *śūdras* [workers]—can attain the supreme destination."
>
> If one actually wants to serve Kṛṣṇa, it doesn't matter whether one is a *śūdra*, *vaiśya* or even a woman. If one is sincerely eager to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* or *dīkṣā-mantra*, one is qualified to be initiated according to the *pāñcarātrika* process. However, according to Vedic principles, only a *brāhmaṇa* who is fully engaged in his occupational duties can be initiated. *Śūdras* and women are not admitted to a *vaidika* initiation. Unless one is fit according to the estimation of

> the spiritual master, one cannot accept a *mantra* from the *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* or the *vaidika-vidhi*. When one is fit to accept the *mantra*, one is initiated by the *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* or the *vaidika-vidhi*. In any case, the result is the same.

At least ten or twelve years old

In a room conversation with a Sanskrit professor, on August 13, 1973, in Paris, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Ten to twelve years. That is the Vedic system. Twelve years old, he can be initiated."

In his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 2.3.22, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote:

> One should worship the Deity with one's family, following the directions and regulations of *arcana-vidhi*. Any member of the family who is above twelve years of age should be initiated by a bona fide spiritual master, and all the members of the household should be engaged in the daily service of the Lord.

Śāstra courses and degrees

Śrīla Prabhupāda gave many reasons for wanting a program of graduated *śāstra* degrees. Several times he linked the *bhakti-śāstri* degree to receiving the *gāyatrī mantras*, as in the following conversation on a morning walk on January 6, 1976, in Nellore:

> Prabhupāda: Whatever books we have got, it should be studied. *Bhakti-śāstrī* means *Nectar of Devotion*, *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Nectar of Instruction*, *Beyond Death*—in this way we select some ten books. That is *bhakti-śāstrī*.
>
> Acyutānanda: So when will that...
>
> Prabhupāda: Then we come to *Bhāgavata*, then we come to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, in this way.
>
> Acyutānanda: That'll be wonderful.
>
> Prabhupāda: So from next year, unless one passes *bhakti-śāstrī*, he cannot be second-initiated. First initiation is open for everyone: "Come on. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa." That will purify him. Then let him understand what is *bhakti*.

> Yaśodānandana: This is very good, because then those that will become second..., those that will have second initiation will have to know the scriptures, will have to know your books.
>
> Prabhupāda: Yes, that is... Now there is...
>
> Mahāmśa: And unless they know your books, they will never be fixed-up devotees.
>
> Prabhupāda: Yes.
>
> Acyutānanda: Many times people give second initiation because they need a *pūjārī* in the temple.
>
> Prabhupāda: No.

And this letter to: Tusta Kṛṣṇa — Bombay 9 January, 1976:

> All our *brāhmaṇas* and anyone wanting to become *brāhmaṇa*, will have to sit for examination once a year at Māyāpur. They will be expected to know *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Nectar of Devotion*, *Nectar of Instruction*, *Śrī Iśopaniṣad*, a book soon to be published on Deity worship, as well as all the small paperbacks. If they pass the examination they will be awarded *Bhakti-śāstri* certificate.

At the same time, Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasized that these exams were optional, not mandatory, as in the following letter to Svarūpa Dāmodara, January 10, 1976, from Bombay:

> I have also suggested for the G.B.C.'s consideration, that we introduce a system of examinations for the devotees to take. Sometimes there is criticism that our men are not sufficiently learned, especially the *brāhmaṇas*. Of course, second initiation does not depend upon passing an examination. How one has molded his life — chanting, attending *āratī*, etc., these are essential.

And in this letter to Satsvarūpa Mahārāja, February 3, 1976, from Māyāpur:

> Regarding the examinations, the idea is that anyone, after studying the books, who wants to gain the title of *Bhakti-śāstri*, can take the exam. This is academic — just like a *brāhmaṇa* with śāstric knowledge and a *brāhmaṇa* without. It is optional — one who wants may take.

The main point here is that one possible qualification for receiving the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* and other *mantras* at *dīkṣā* is demonstrated proficiency in *śāstra*. This

qualification does not depend on the *varṇa* status of one's occupation or on gender, or any other such consideration. Śrīla Prabhupāda had this qualification open to "anyone."

Chanting the Lord's Holy Name qualifies one as a *brāhmaṇa*

While the holy name and *gāyatrī mantras* are given at the time of initiation, Śrīla Prabhupāda prepared and qualified persons for initiation by giving them the holy name. As he writes in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 7.128: "One who chants *oṁkāra* no longer remains a *śūdra* but immediately comes to the position of a *brāhmaṇa*."

The relationship between qualifications in *bhakti-yoga* and those of *varṇa*, *saṁskāras*, and lineage

It is not sufficient to be twice-born by birth, qualities, and even initiation. One should also be a Vaiṣṇava. Otherwise, as stated in Śrīmad-bhāgavatam 11.5.5:

vipro rājanya-vaiśyau vā hareḥ prāptāḥ padāntikam
śrautena janmanāthāpi muhyanty āmnāya-vādinaḥ

> On the other hand, *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*, even after being allowed to study the *Vedas* by receiving Vedic initiation, become bewildered since they interpret the meaning of the *Vedas*. (trans. Bhānu Swāmī)

The transformative process of *dīkṣā*

Regardless of what one was prior to receiving *dīkṣā* from a bona-fide Vaiṣṇava guru, the process of *dīkṣā* is transformative. In the following purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 5.1.35, Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes this well-known verse about how, just as bell-metal can become like gold through alchemy, so through *dīkṣā* one can have the qualities of a *dvija*, those who are twice-born:

yathā kāñcanatāṁ yāti

kāṁsyaṁ rasa-vidhānataḥ
tathā dīkṣā-vidhānena
dvijatvaṁ jāyate nṛṇām

[*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 2.12*]

Śrīla Prabhupāda then explains the import of that verse as follows:

> When a person, even though a *caṇḍāla*, is initiated by a pure devotee into chanting the holy name of the Lord, his body changes as he follows the instructions of the spiritual master. Although one cannot see how his body has changed, we must accept, on the grounds of the authoritative statements of the *śāstras*, that he changes his body. This is to be understood without arguments. This verse clearly says, *sa jahāti bandham*: "He gives up his material bondage." The body is a symbolic representation of material bondage according to one's karma. Although sometimes we cannot see the gross body changing, chanting the holy name of the Supreme Lord immediately changes the subtle body, and because the subtle body changes, the living entity is immediately freed from material bondage. After all, changes of the gross body are conducted by the subtle body. After the destruction of the gross body, the subtle body takes the living entity from his present gross body to another. In the subtle body, the mind is predominant, and therefore if one's mind is always absorbed in remembering the activities or the lotus feet of the Lord, he is to be understood to have already changed his present body and become purified. Therefore it is irrefutable that a *caṇḍāla*, or any fallen or lowborn person, can become a *brāhmaṇa* simply by the method of bona fide initiation.

As Rūpa Goswāmī states: *dīkṣāsti cet praṇatibhiś ca bhajantam īśam śuśrūṣayā* (*Upadeśāmṛta* 5), one should offer humble obeisances to the devotee who has undergone spiritual initiation [*dīkṣā*] and is engaged in worshiping the Deity. In his purport in the *Nectar of Instruction*, Śrīla Prabhupāda comments:

> The process by which a devotee becomes attached to Kṛṣṇa is described in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Antya* 4.192):
>
> ***dīkṣā-kāle bhakta kare ātma-samarpaṇa***
> ***sei-kāle kṛṣṇa tāre kare ātma-sama***
>
> **Translation:** At the time of initiation, when a devotee fully surrenders to the service of the Lord, Kṛṣṇa accepts him to be as good as He Himself.

Of course, it is not a matter of formality. As *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* comments in his purport to *Nectar of Instruction* verse 5, after quoting the above verse:

> When a person is serious about accepting *dīkṣā*, he must be prepared to practice austerity, celibacy and control of the mind and body. If one is so prepared and is desirous of receiving spiritual enlightenment (*divyaṁ jñānam*), he is fit for being initiated. *Divyaṁ jñānam* is technically called *tad-vijñāna*, or knowledge about the Supreme. *tad-vijñānārthaṁ sa gurum evābhigacchet*: [*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12] when one is interested in the transcendental subject matter of the Absolute Truth, he should be initiated. Such a person should approach a spiritual master in order to take *dīkṣā*. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.3.21) also prescribes: *tasmād guruṁ prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam*. "When one is actually interested in the transcendental science of the Absolute Truth, he should approach a spiritual master."
>
> One should not accept a spiritual master without following his instructions. Nor should one accept a spiritual master just to make a fashionable show of spiritual life.

Is a Vaiṣṇava also in a particular *varṇa*?

The view of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu and the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas*

The view that there is only one *varṇa* for Vaiṣṇavas—which, practically, means that there is no *varṇa* for Vaisṇavas—is one of the unique aspects of our tradition. It is emphasized again and again by our *ācāryas*, not just in contrast with the caste-conscious '*Smārtas*', but also in contrast with other Vaiṣṇava traditions. In the *Rahasya-traya-sāra*, for example, Vedānta Deśika (a Śrī Vaiṣṇava guru/philosopher and one of the most brilliant stalwarts of Śrī Vaishnavism in the post-Rāmānuja period) argues that Vaiṣṇavas should certainly be honored in accordance with the degree of their devotion, irrespective of caste, but their devotion does not eradicate caste distinctions. "The idea that devotees of Viṣṇu have the same caste,' he writes, 'is a foolish claim. [...] Equality due to the destruction of such things as caste will happen only at the time of liberation." Especially in regard to social customs, he says that Vaiṣṇavas should uphold such social conventions, and each Vaiṣṇava 'should not discard their castes; they should render service to the Lord according to what is prescribed as competent for that caste.' (N. Raghunathan (translator), *Śrīmad Rahasyatrayasāram of Śrī Vedānta Deśika, Madras, The Samskrita Academy,* p. 563; slightly modified)

By contrast, as quoted in the previous section, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu claims that one who has received *dīkṣā* is transcendental and of the same quality as the Lord.

Our tradition has always emphasized this point and argued that the caste of Vaiṣṇavas is of no real consequence. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī in particular liked to cite a verse that is found in many of the texts of our *ācāryas*: "[...] one who thinks of caste (*jāti*) in relation to a Vaiṣṇava [...] is a resident of hell" (*vaiṣṇave jāti-buddhiḥ... yasya vā nārakī saḥ*). (*Padma Purāṇa*)[23]

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī argues that the practice of *sādhana-bhakti* destroys one's karma, which includes the manifest (*prārabdha*) karma, which is the body. (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.1.21-22) He cites the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* (3.33.6) in support: even a 'dog eater' who chants Kṛṣṇa's name, praises him, bows down to Him or merely remembers Him once 'becomes at once eligible for Soma offerings'. This is, he explains, because the 'bad birth' (*durjāti*), which is generally considered to disqualify one from performing Soma rituals, is destroyed by the engagement in *bhakti*.

The commentaries on this section are interesting and to some degree relevant to this discussion. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, following the lead of Śrīdhara Svāmī, argues that, even though an 'outcaste' person who engages in devotional practice destroys all his karma—including the 'manifest' (*prārabdha*) karma of the ritually impure body in which he was born—and is thus technically eligible for such ritual, as the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* claims, such an 'outcaste' Vaiṣṇava should nevertheless not perform Vedic ritual. The reason is that he would not have performed the required rituals to grant him the status of being a 'twice-born' (*dvija*)—such as the *upanayana*—which would ordinarily have been undergone during childhood and which every *brāhmaṇa* is required to observe in order to be eligible for Vedic ritual.

Viśvanātha Cakravartī, however, is more radical in his view. Yes, he argues, an 'outcaste' Vaiṣṇava should not perform Soma rituals, but not because he is unqualified for them in any way. Rather, it is merely because he would not have faith (*śraddhā*) in such acts—and, as Kṛṣṇa teaches in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (17.28), anything done without faith is, as it were, non-existent (*asat*)! Moreover, he argues, *brāhmaṇa* Vaiṣṇavas who do perform such Vedic rituals, he says, only do so because they do not wish to create controversy among the non-Vaiṣṇavas. To argue otherwise, he says, is to offend the Vaiṣṇavas.

In other words, the Vedic tradition (which includes *varṇāśrama*) is not synonymous with the Vaiṣṇava tradition. The Vaiṣṇava tradition includes the Vedic tradition, but is beyond it. This relationship between the Vedic and Vaiṣṇava traditions is what Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī

[23] Śrīla Prabhupāda quoted this verse in his purports many times, e.g., in purports to *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 2.4.18, 4.21.12, 5.17.14, 10.3.46; and to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 7.115, Madhya 15.277 and 20.217, as well as *Antya* 4.191 and 6.294.

Ṭhākura also taught, repeatedly, and why we cannot reduce his innovation of awarding the Brahma-*gāyatrī* and the sacred thread to the Vedic system of *varṇa*.

We would expect that all bona fide gurus and lines in the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* consider the position of a Vaiṣṇava superior to the position of a *brāhmaṇa* and teach that perfection of life requires only being a devotee of the Lord without any requirement of also being designated as a *brāhmaṇa*. Yet, many Gauḍīya lines today only give the designation of "*brāhmaṇa*" to those born in *brāhmaṇa* families. In general in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya*, *dīkṣā* and *varṇa* are unrelated. *Varṇa* is not a prerequisite for *dīkṣā*.

In fact, the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Antya*, 16.13 denotes a particular Vaiṣṇava as *śūdra* due to being born in a *śūdra* family. Thus, a person can be a Vaiṣṇava as well as a *śūdra* by birth according to this verse of the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*.

Generally, *dīkṣā* also does not change a person's occupational means of livelihood, unless the previous livelihood was sinful. Some confusion of *dīkṣā* and *varṇa* designation may be inevitable, as receiving *dīkṣā* allows a disciple to formally worship the Deity. As Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī writes in *Upadeśāmṛta* verse 5:

dīkṣāsti cet praṇatibhiś ca bhajantam īśam

Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the above as "the devotee who has undergone spiritual initiation [*dīkṣā*] and is engaged in worshiping the Deity." A person who is a *brāhmaṇa* in terms of *varṇa* also has the *adhikāra* to worship the Deity, and we often use the term "brahminical initiation." Yet, a devotee's engagement in Deity worship includes an essential preliminary practice of *bhūta-śuddhi*, or non-identification with the body and any material designations. In the official ISKCON manual for Deity worship, this meditation begins with *nāhaṁ vipro*, "I am not a *brāhmaṇa*." (*Padyāvalī* 74, quoted in *Caitanya-cāritāmṛta Madhya* 13.80)

Sanātana Goswāmī defines a Vaiṣṇava as follows in his purport to *Bṛhad Bhāgavatamṛta* 1.1.12:

> The standard definition of Vaiṣṇava is given in the *Padma Purāṇa* (*Svarga-khaṇḍa* 31.112–113):
>
> ***sāṅgaṁ sa-mudraṁ sa-nyāsaṁ***
> ***sa-ṛṣi-cchanda-daivatam***
> ***sa-dīkṣā-vidhi sa-dhyānaṁ***
> ***sa-yantraṁ dvādaśākṣaram***
> ***aṣṭākṣaram athānyaṁ vā***
> ***ye mantraṁ samupāsate***
> ***jñeyās te vaiṣṇavā lokā***

viṣṇv-arcana-ratāḥ sadā

"Vaiṣṇavas should be understood to be those who regularly worship Lord Viṣṇu and chant either the twelve-syllable *viṣṇu-mantra*, the eight-syllable *mantra*, or some other *mantra* of His. They should have properly received the *mantra* through initiation and, along with the *mantra*, should have been instructed in the secondary rituals and the hand gestures and bodily markings pertaining to the *mantra*. Such Vaiṣṇavas should know about the meter in which the *mantra* is recited, the sage who transmitted the *mantra*, the Deity the *mantra* worships, the method of preliminary meditation on the *mantra*, and the symbol by which the *mantra* is visually represented."[24]

Śrīla Prabhupāda on the apparent *varṇa* of a devotee and receiving *gāyatrī dīkṣā*

Śrīla Prabhupāda would sometimes write or speak of an equivalency between Vaiṣṇavas and *brāhmaṇas*, as in this translation and purport of *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 4.21.38:

brahmaṇya-devaḥ puruṣaḥ purātano
nityaṁ harir yac-caraṇābhivandanāt
avāpa lakṣmīm anapāyinīṁ yaśo
jagat-pavitraṁ ca mahattamāgraṇīḥ

Translation: The Supreme Personality of Godhead, the ancient, eternal Godhead, who is foremost amongst all great personalities, obtained the opulence of His staunch reputation, which purifies the entire universe, by worshiping the lotus feet of those *brāhmaṇas* and Vaiṣṇavas.

Purport: The Supreme Person is described herein as *brahmaṇya-deva*. *Brahmaṇya* refers to the *brāhmaṇas*, the Vaiṣṇavas or the brahminical culture, and *deva* means "worshipable Lord." Therefore, unless one is on the transcendental

[24] In his commentary on *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.2.4, Śrīla Viśvanāth Chakravartī Ṭhākura lists the necessary preliminaries before chanting Vedic *mantras*. The meter of *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* is said to be *gāyatrī* (because of the initial allusion to the Gāyatrī). Bhānu Swāmī comments on his translation of Śrīla Viśvanāth Chakravartī Ṭhākura's commentary: Before reciting a *mantra* or a scripture, it is customary to utter the name of the sage who revealed the *mantra* (in this case Vyāsa), the meter (*gāyatrī*), the form of the Lord who is the subject of the *mantra* (Kṛṣṇa), the *bīja* of the work or *mantra* (*om*), the *śakti* of the work or *mantra* (Sarasvatī), the *adhiṣṭhātṛ-devatā* or presiding Deity of the work or *mantra* (Nara-nārāyaṇa), and the purpose of uttering the *mantra*. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī writes about the *gāyatrī* meter in his commentary on *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.1.1: *chando'tra gāyatrī jñeyaḥ—dhīmahi ity uktatvena tayaivārabdhatvāt* ("The *chandas* (meter) of the book is known as *gāyatrī*, because it is used in the very first verse.")

> platform of being a Vaiṣṇava or on the highest platform of material goodness (as a *brāhmaṇa*), he cannot appreciate the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Here is a Room Conversation on June 5, 1974 in Geneva where Śrīla Prabhupāda writes of making all his disciples *brāhmaṇas*:

> Yes, but we do not keep him *śūdra*. A devotee is no longer *śūdra*. We are creating *brāhmaṇas*. Just like these Europeans and Americans. They, according to *Manu-saṁhitā*, are *mlecchas*, *yavanas*. But we are not keeping them *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. Just like these European and American boys. They are accepting the Vedic regulative principles: no illicit sex, no meat-eating, no intoxication, no gambling. So they are no more *śūdras* or *caṇḍālas*. They are *brāhmaṇas*.

Yet, while saying his disciples are *brāhmaṇas*, Śrīla Prabhupāda did not want or expect all his disciples to necessarily earn their livelihood by doing brahminical jobs. Therefore, in trying to understand the relationship between being a Vaiṣṇava and having a *varṇa*, one may raise the question as to whether or not one can call a Vaiṣṇava a *śūdra* if one's livelihood is in the category of *śūdra* work, or if one is a paid employee even in a non-*śūdra* type of career (such as university professor or judge or business owner). The following letter from Śrīla Prabhupāda to Gopāla Kṛṣṇa dāsa, on April 27th, 1974 from Hyderabad is especially instructive when we consider the historical context of ISKCON at this time. There was preaching and sentiment against householder life, women in general, and married men starting in 1974, though it didn't reach its peak until sometime later. Gopāla Kṛṣṇa dāsa was, at the time, a householder, working for an advertising agency. Śrīla Prabhupāda had initiated him into the *gāyatrī mantras* years before this letter was written:

> "There is no question of a devotee becoming a *śūdra* if he does certain work. No, a devotee is never a *śūdra*. He is transcendental. Because their activity is done in transcendental loving service unto the Lord, it is all on the transcendental plane, *Brahma bhūyāya kalpate.* [*Bhagavad-gītā* 14.26] You should not quit your present job, it is good service to Kṛṣṇa. Although you may be working hard, you are always working for Kṛṣṇa; so do not be confused about your position and never forget Kṛṣṇa in any circumstances."

From another angle of vision, a Vaiṣṇava is not a *brāhmaṇa*, either, and thinking in that way is a hellish mentality. As Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in this lecture on *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi-līlā* 7.5, on March 7, 1974 in Māyāpur:

> These are *nārakī buddhi*. *Vaiṣṇave jāti-buddhiḥ*. The Deity as material, *śilā-dhīḥ*, considering as metal or stone or wood, and *guruṣu nara-matiḥ*, and guru as ordinary human being... *Vaiṣṇave jāti-buddhiḥ*: a Vaiṣṇava, to consider, "Here is

> American Vaiṣṇava and here is a *brāhmaṇa* Vaiṣṇava..." No, Vaiṣṇava is Vaiṣṇava. This is absolute.[25]

In his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 4.21.37 Śrīla Prabhupāda says:

> The simple definition of *Vaiṣṇava* is given by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu: a person who immediately reminds one of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, is a Vaiṣṇava. In this verse, both Vaiṣṇavas and *brāhmaṇas* are mentioned. A Vaiṣṇava is a learned *brāhmaṇa* and is therefore designated as *brāhmaṇa*-Vaiṣṇava, *brāhmaṇa-paṇḍita* or as a Vaiṣṇava and *brāhmaṇa*. In other words, a Vaiṣṇava is supposed to be a *brāhmaṇa* already, but a *brāhmaṇa* may not be a pure Vaiṣṇava. When a person understands his pure identity, *brahma jānāti*, he immediately becomes a *brāhmaṇa*. In the *brāhmaṇa* stage, one's understanding of the Absolute Truth is mainly based on the impersonal view. When a *brāhmaṇa*, however, rises to the platform of personal understanding of the Supreme Godhead, he becomes a Vaiṣṇava. A Vaiṣṇava is transcendental even to a *brāhmaṇa*. In the material conception, the position of a *brāhmaṇa* is the highest in human society, but a Vaiṣṇava is transcendental even to a *brāhmaṇa*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda perfectly explains the relationship between being a Vaiṣṇava, externally working in a particular *varṇa*, and receiving *gāyatrī dīkṣā*, including the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, in this morning walk on April 20th, 1974, in Hyderabad:

> Nitāi: He was on the airplane when we were coming here to Hyderabad. And he was asking what our program was. And I was telling him that first of all, in order to relieve the confusion of society, we wanted to establish the Vedic culture with this *varṇāśrama* system. And he asked me what would be the program that we would have for a man who works in the factory.
>
> Prabhupāda: He is a *śūdra*.
>
> Nitāi: Would we retrain him as a farmer?
>
> Prabhupāda: No, if he is prepared. If not, let him remain. But we can utilize that *śūdra* also.
>
> Nitāi: He can remain in the factory. But simply we would...
>
> Prabhupāda: Yes. But he cannot do the work of a *brāhmaṇa*. He cannot be trained as a preacher. But he can help. Just like my legs. The legs cannot do the

[25] Here Śrīla Prabhupāda is referring to the same verse from *Padma Purāṇa* mentioned in the previous section, which he cites in the purport to *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 2.4.18 and several other purports.

work of brain, but it can help me; I am walking. So leg is as important as the brain. Similarly, *śūdra* is as important as the *brāhmaṇa*, provided he helps the movement, Kṛṣṇa conscious. That is wanted, not that artificially a *śūdra* should be working as a *brāhmaṇa*. No. But everyone should be engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That is required.

Nitāi: So in that case, he is a *śūdra*, and he is also doing the work of a...

Prabhupāda: Then he is not a *śūdra*. One who is engaged in Kṛṣṇa's service, he is neither *brāhmaṇa* nor *śūdra*. He is devotee. He is *brahma-bhūta*. *Brahma-bhūyāya kalpate* [*Bhagavad-gītā* 14.26]. Apparently, he looks like *śūdra*. Just like we have got so many men from different quarters, but we do not belong to that quarter anymore. *Vaiṣṇave jāti-buddhiḥ*. Therefore, anyone who takes, "Oh, here is an American Vaiṣṇava, here is an Indian Vaiṣṇava," that is *nārakī*. He is Vaiṣṇava. That understanding required.

Mahāmśa: Just like that devotee who was making garlands for Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Mahāmśa: He is a devotee. He is not a *śūdra* making garlands.

Prabhupāda: No. He is not an ordinary gardener.

Pañcadraviḍa: Or that devotee who was making leaf bowls for worshiping the Ganges.

Prabhupāda: Any engagement, any engagement for Kṛṣṇa, he is Vaiṣṇava. If he is under the guidance of his spiritual master and doing the business according to direction, he is Vaiṣṇava. He is above all these.

Pañcadraviḍa: A *śūdra*, if he is working, he cannot take *brāhmaṇa* initiation, but he can take *hari-nāma*, is that it?

Prabhupāda: Just like sometimes our men, my devotee, they wash the cupboard. Does it mean he is a *mehtar*? No. He can go to the Deity room also. He is not a *mehtar*, or sweeper. But sometimes we do that. So devotee is above all these consideration. But because there is management, they should appear as *brāhmaṇa*, as *śūdra*, as *kṣatriya*, like that.

sa guṇān samatītyaitān
brahma-bhūyāya kalpate

māṁ ca yo 'vyabhicāreṇa
bhakti-yogena yaḥ sevate

[*Bhagavad-gītā*. 14.26]

A devotee, because he is working as a *śūdra*, he is not a *śūdra*; neither he is a *brāhmaṇa*. He is already in the spiritual platform. But for management we have to do that. One can do the *śūdra*'s work nicely—let him be engaged in that way. Why he should imitate?

Mahāṁsa: Does he get second initiation?

Prabhupāda: Everything he will get.

Mahāṁsa: He gets.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Second initiation means recognized: "Now he has become fully competent Vaiṣṇava." Just like master is teaching the servant, "Now you give massage in this way, this way." But that does not mean he has become servant.

Pañcadraviḍa: What if the *śūdra*..., person working as *śūdra* says, "I can do so much. I can..."

Prabhupāda: First of all, try to understand. A devotee is neither *brāhmaṇa* nor *śūdra*. He may act like a *śūdra*, but he is not *śūdra*. He may act like a *brāhmaṇa*; he is not *brāhmaṇa*. He is Vaiṣṇava. Just like *gopīs*. The *gopīs*, they are village cowherd women. They are, according to social construction, they are not very high class. They did not belong to the *brāhmaṇa* class. But their worship, method of worship, has been taken the highest. *Ramyā kācid upāsanā vrajavadhū-vargeṇa* [Śrīnāth Cakravartī, *Caitanya-manjusa* 1]. They were village girls, and practically their character was also not good, because at dead of night they are going to Kṛṣṇa. But why they have been taken as the most..., topmost devotee of Kṛṣṇa? Because the love was so, I mean, high class. It is the test, how much one has learned to love Kṛṣṇa. That is wanted. Apparently he may appear as a *brāhmaṇa,* a *śūdra* or *vaiśya*. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. The only business is to see: *sa vai puṁsāṁ paro dharmo yato bhaktir adho*... [*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.2.6].

In this morning walk on November 2, 1975 in Nairobi Śrīla Prabhupāda clarifies that initiation is spiritual, unrelated to *varṇa* designations:

> Brahmānanda: Is it possible for a woman to become a *brāhmaṇa*?
>
> Prabhupāda: He is... Woman is a *brāhmaṇa*'s wife. Then she is automatically a *brāhmaṇa*.
>
> African man (6): Suppose she doesn't want to get married for the rest of her life, just wants to serve the Lord?
>
> Prabhupāda: So in his spiritual position everyone is a *brāhmaṇa*.
>
> Brahmānanda: But you give brahminical initiation to unmarried women.
>
> Prabhupāda: Yes. But on spiritual point she is *brāhmaṇa*. On the spiritual platform there is no such distinction.

Although there were certainly times that Śrīla Prabhupāda conflated Vaiṣṇavas and *brāhmaṇas*, or Vaiṣṇava *dīkṣā* and brahminical life, there were also many times when he distinguished between them, as in this discussion on *varṇāśrama* on a morning walk on March 12, 1974, in Vṛndāvana:

> Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: In our centers we are awarding *brāhmaṇa* initiation, second initiation...
>
> Prabhupāda: No, no. Initiation should go on. Even... You do not understand what I have said, that that is for Vaiṣṇava. A Vaiṣṇava and Viṣṇu... Just like Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu, He's not human being, but He was acting like human being; similarly, Vaiṣṇava is transcendental, but for proper management of the material world, one should be acting like *brāhmaṇa*, one should be acting like *kṣatriya*. That is required. Just like actually we are doing so. Some of you are preaching, and some of you are cleansing the temple. It does not mean that a *sannyāsī* who is preaching, he is better than that man who is cleansing. The... Their position as Vaiṣṇava is the same. But for the management, one is cleansing, one is seeing the construction, one is going to preach—like that. That should be there. It is not that "Because I have taken *sannyāsa*, therefore I cannot anymore do anything." If need be, he has to act as *kṣatriya*, or a *śūdra*. It doesn't matter.

In the above quote, Śrīla Prabhupāda clearly distinguishes between having people externally work in a particular *varṇa* and receiving Vaiṣṇava *dīkṣā* into the *gāyatrī mantras*, including Brahma-*gāyatrī*. There are also times when Śrīla Prabhupāda indicates that those who are not

mature in devotional service benefit from *varṇāśrama* designations, e.g., as Śrīla Prabhupāda discussed with Hari-śauri dāsa in 1977.

Mediation, resolution, or reconciliation of paradox, apparent contradiction, and multiple views on *varṇa*

As initiation into chanting the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* and conceptions of being a *brāhmaṇa* are related, we have explored whether and how a Vaiṣṇava is in a particular *varṇa*. In doing so, evidence and quotes we have cited in this paper may appear to be contradictory or confusing. What do we mean when we call a second-initiated devotee in ISKCON a *brāhmaṇa*? We therefore turn to the hermeneutic principle: Insight emerges through apt dialogue, and through mediation, resolution, or reconciliation of paradox, apparent contradiction, and multiple views. As SAC member Kṛṣṇa Kṣetra Swāmī wrote in our hermeneutical materials about this principle:

> If a positive culture of dialogue is maintained, differing or multiple views can be conducive to enriched understanding of an issue. When there are varied views, mature devotees will take this as an indication that the truth lies somewhere amidst such views, not necessarily in the form initially assumed by any of the participants in discussion. Also, while acknowledging differences among the views, they will look for similarities and common ground, as promising areas for arriving at an understanding. They will also show patience, aware that it may not necessarily happen that clear understanding emerges from a given discussion; rather, it could take several discussions, possibly over a longer time, before clear understanding emerges. Sometimes unresolved issues persist because they are ill-conceived in the first place, requiring re-framing; and sometimes what is needed is to clarify and bring to the surface what is the unspoken, deeper issue behind an immediate issue. Related to this point, sometimes what is needed is to clarify what precisely is at stake, and for whom. This may involve recognizing and distinguishing between political interests and theological/philosophical questions (while also acknowledging that these may not be so easily separated). Also it may be helpful, when faced with multiple, strongly held views, to determine which of the hermeneutic tools offered in this program are being implicitly applied. By making these explicit, it may be possible to discern a better way to apply the tools, with possible application of additional interpretive tools.

To apply the above hermeneutic principle, we will use the hermeneutic tools of "considering the statements of *sādhu-śāstra-guru* from many angles of vision" and "determine the meaning

of a word or phrase (among several possible meanings) according to the author's intent." In doing so, we note that categories of *varṇa* are used in three ways:

1. birth and family heritage along with *upanayana*
2. a person's nature, means of livelihood, and commensurate dharma, along with *upanayana*
3. levels of spirituality and freedom from the modes of nature, along with *upanayana*, used as synonymous with Vaiṣṇava

1) *Brāhmaṇa* defined as birth and family heritage along with *upanayana.* **Evidence:** *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 1.193: *brāhmaṇa-jāti tārā, navadvīpe ghara* — "The brothers Jagāi and Mādhāi belonged to the *brāhmaṇa* caste, and their residence was in the holy place of Navadvīpa." Also *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* (10.86.53) says clearly — *brāhmaṇo janmanā śreyān* — "By his very birth, a *brāhmaṇa* is the best of all living beings in this world."

2) *Brāhmaṇa* defined as a person's nature, means of livelihood, and commensurate dharma along with upanayana. **Evidence:** *Bhagavad-gīta* 4.13: *cātur-varṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭaṁ, guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśaḥ*, **translation:** According to the three modes of material nature and the work associated with them, the four divisions of human society are created by Me.

Also *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 9.260:

śukla-vṛttiś ca
śrī-viṣṇu-dharmottare trtiya-kāṇḍe —
pratigraheṇa yal labdhaṁ yajyataḥ śiṣyatas tathā
gunānvitebhyo viprasya śuklaṁ tat tri-vidhaṁ smṛtam[26]

Translation: And now *śukla-vṛtti* (earning by respectable means). In the third *kāṇḍa* of the *Viṣṇu-dharmottara-purāṇa*, it is said —For a brāhmaṇa, three types of *śukla-vṛtti* are — (a) whatever is obtained as charity during a *yajña* (sacrifice), (b) or from a disciple or (c) from a qualified person.

And Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 4.111: "*A gṛhastha-brāhmaṇa* partaking of the *varṇāśrama-dharma* institution can secure various types of paraphernalia to worship Lord Viṣṇu through his honest labor."

[26] In addition, *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 9.263: *kramāgataṁ prīti-dānaṁ prāptaṁ ca saha bhāryayā aviśeṣena sarveṣāṁ dhanaṁ śuklaṁ prakīrtitam* **Translation:** Also there are three types of *śukla-vṛttis* which are allowed for all four *varṇas* — (a) obtaining something in inheritance, (b) obtaining something as charity from a beloved and (c) obtaining wealth as dowry bought by one's wife.

3) *Brāhmaṇa* defined as levels of spirituality and freedom from the modes of nature, along with *upanayana*, used as synonymous with Vaiṣṇava. **Evidence:** *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 2.12:

yathā kāñcanatāṁ yāti
kāṁsyaṁ rasa-vidhānataḥ
tathā dīkṣā-vidhānena
dvijatvaṁ jāyate nṛṇām

Translation: As bell metal, when mixed with mercury, is transformed to gold, a person, even though not golden pure, can be transformed into a *brāhmaṇa*, or *dvija*, simply by the initiation process.

Also, Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.16.4:

> The formula is *brahma jānātīti brāhmaṇaḥ*. A *brāhmaṇa* is one who has understood Brahman, and a Vaiṣṇava is one who has understood the Personality of Godhead. Brahman realization is the beginning of realization of the Personality of Godhead. One who understands the Personality of Godhead also knows the impersonal feature of the Supreme, which is Brahman. Therefore one who becomes a Vaiṣṇava is already a *brāhmaṇa*.

Sometimes, as in the conversation in Nairobi in 1975 quoted previously, the same term is used in more than one way from one sentence to the next.[27]

Regarding the first way of understanding "*brāhmaṇa*," birth designations of *varṇa*, including considering gender, are clearly irrelevant to Śrīla Prabhupāda in relation to giving the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to a disciple, and equally clearly do not change after *dīkṣā*. We are warned not to judge devotees by such birth and bodily designations (*Upadeśāmṛta*, Verse 6).

In regards to the second way of understanding "*brāhmaṇa*," in relation to an individual's nature, means of livelihood, and commensurate dharma, we find that Śrīla Prabhupāda consistently stated that such criteria were not relevant to receiving *gāyatrī dīkṣā*. Nor would such considerations change after *dīkṣā*. Indeed, in a number of cases, Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted his second initiated disciples to continue to work at a variety of outside employment. He also

[27] There can be fourth definition of *brāhmaṇa* that is not relevant to the context of this paper. In the spiritual world devotees may appear as belonging to the various *varṇas* as part of *līlā*. Nārada and Uddhava discuss in *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* 3.5.64-70 that the residents of the spiritual world have no designations of *varṇa* and *āśrama*. Yet, the Lord appears like a dutiful householder king and devotees appear to be *brāhmaṇas* , *vaiśyas*, etc.. "Oh, how very curious that this Lord plays in the highest abode above Vaikuṇṭha the same way as in the world of mortals, just to satisfy His dear devotees!" (verse 70 translation)

wanted his second initiated disciples to render a variety of services within ISKCON that could be categorized as being in any of the four *varṇas*.

It is in the third definition of understanding "*brāhmaṇa*," that *dīkṣā* is notably transformative, changing a person into a *brāhmaṇa* and beyond any type of designation. What changes is that the devotee gets the opportunity to go above passion and ignorance and finally to transcendence. As Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.2.20:

> ...success is possible when one is above the modes of passion and ignorance, or, in other words, when one is actually a *brāhmaṇa* by qualification. A *brāhmaṇa* is the symbol of *sattva-guṇa*, or the mode of goodness. And others, who are not in the mode of goodness, are either *kṣatriyas, vaiśyas, śūdras* or less than the *śūdras*. The brahminical stage is the highest stage of human life because of its good qualities. So one cannot be a devotee unless one at least qualifies as a *brāhmaṇa*.

Will a devotee who is now above the modes, or below that, in *sattva-guṇa*, then do brahminical work for a livelihood, or exhibit the psychophysical nature of a brāhmaṇa in terms of occupational duty?[28] If we use the *Bhagavad-gīta* as our guide, the choice is not to follow one's nature or to externally take up the occupations of a *brāhmaṇa*. In *Bhagavad-gītā* 3.33 it is clear that one's tendency to a particular type of work and nature does not change upon becoming a devotee of the Lord:

sadṛśaṁ ceṣṭate svasyāḥ
prakṛter jñānavān api
prakṛtiṁ yānti bhūtāni
nigrahaḥ kiṁ kariṣyati

Translation: Even a man of knowledge acts according to his own nature, for everyone follows the nature he has acquired from the three modes. What can repression accomplish?

In verse 18.59, Kṛṣṇa makes a similar point: *te prakṛtis tvāṁ niyokṣyati*—you will follow your own nature regardless of surrender or not.

Rather, in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.2.36:

kāyena vācā manasendriyair vā
buddhyātmanā vānusṛta-svabhāvāt

[28] *Śāstra* does not give direction that one should try to change one's nature in terms of occupational duty. The notable example of someone who did so is Viśvamitra Muni. We note that changing his occupational duty from *kṣatriya* to *brāhmaṇa* took him thousands of years, and was difficult, with at least two instances where he fell from the meditative practice he was engaged in to make that transformation. (*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa Bāla* 56.24–65.19)

karoti yad yat sakalaṁ parasmai
nārāyaṇāyeti samarpayet tat

Translation: In accordance with the particular nature one has acquired in conditioned life, whatever one does with body, words, mind, senses, intelligence or purified consciousness one should offer to the Supreme, thinking, "This is for the pleasure of Lord Nārāyaṇa."

The above is the choice—to work for Kṛṣṇa or for our false ego. Arjuna is not directed to act externally like a *brāhmaṇa* in mood or occupational duty. He is directed to use his nature as a *kṣatriya* in transcendence. As we quoted above from Śrīla Prabhupāda in Nairobi (November 2, 1975): "in his spiritual position everyone is a *brāhmaṇa*."[29] Arjuna's *kṣatriya* activities are not

[29] Pūrṇacandra Goswāmī writes on *Bhagavad-gītā* 4.19-24 in his *Gītāmṛta*: 'The sages say that such a person is a worker for whom the reactions of work have been burned up by the fire of perfect knowledge. Such a man of understanding acts with mind and intelligence perfectly controlled and gives up all sense of proprietorship over his possessions. He acts only for the bare necessities of life and is satisfied with gain which comes of its own accord. His work merges into transcendence. Therefore Arjuna, your work of fighting, if done in knowledge, is like a *brāhmaṇa* offering a sacrifice in a temple. Your bow Gāṇḍīva is the spoon, your arrows are the ghee and the Kaurava army is the fire. You are the *brāhmaṇa* in this sacrifice Arjuna and by your complete absorption in this meditation you will certainly reach the spiritual kingdom."

Mahābhārata Udyoga Parva 139.29–49 (including many Sanskrit terms for various specific roles in the *yajña*), Karṇa speaking to Kṛṣṇa: "O thou of Vṛṣṇi's race, a great sacrifice of arms is about to be celebrated by Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son. Thou, O Janārdana, will be the *upadraṣṭṛ* of that sacrifice. The office of *adhvaryu* also, O Kṛṣṇa, in that sacrifice, will be thine. The ape-bannered Bībhatsu accoutred in mail will be the *hotṛ*. (His bow), Gāṇḍīva will be the sacrificial ladle, and the prowess of the warriors will be the clarified butter (that is to be consumed). The weapons called Aindra, Pāśupata, Brāhma, and Sthūṇākarṇa, applied by Arjuna, will, O Mādhava, be the *mantras* (of that sacrifice). Resembling his father, or perhaps, excelling him in prowess, Subhadrā's son (Abhimanyu) will be the chief Vedic hymn to be chanted. That destroyer of elephant ranks, that utterer of fierce roars in battle, that tiger among men, the exceedingly mighty Bhīma, will be *udgātṛ* and *prastotṛ* in this sacrifice. King Yudhiṣṭhira of virtuous Soul, ever engaged in *japa* and *homa*, will himself be the Brahmā of that sacrifice. The sounds of conchs, tabors, and drums, and the leonine roaring rising high in the welkin, will be the calls upon the invited to eat. The two sons of Mādrī, Nakula and Sahadeva, of great fame and prowess, will be the slayers of the sacrificial animals; rows of bright cars furnished with standards of variegated hue, will, O Govinda, be stakes (for tying the animals), O Janārdana, in this sacrifice. Barbed arrows and *nālīkas*, and long shafts, and arrows with heads like calf's tooth, will play the part of spoons (wherewith to distribute the *soma* juice) while *tomaras* will be the vessels of *soma*, and bows will be *pavitras*. The swords will be *kapālas*, the heads (of slain warriors) the *puroḍāśas* and the blood of warriors the clarified butter, O Kṛṣṇa, in this sacrifice. The lances and bright maces (of the warriors) will be pokers (for stirring the sacrificial fire) and the corner stakes (for keeping the fire-wood from falling down). The disciples of Droṇa and Kṛpa, the son of Śaradvata, will be the *sadasyas* (assisting priests). The arrows shot by the wielder of Gāṇḍīva and by (other) mighty car-warriors,and by Droṇa and Droṇa's son, will play the part of ladles for distributing the *soma*. Sātyaki will discharge the duties of the chief assistant of the *adhvaryu*. Of this sacrifice, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son will be installed as the performer, while this vast army will be his wife. O thou of mighty arms, when the nocturnal rites of sacrifice will begin, the mighty Ghaṭotkaca will play the part of the slayer of (devoted) victims. The mighty Dhṛṣṭadyumna, who sprang into life from the sacrificial fire, having for its mouth the rites celebrated with *mantras*, will, O Kṛṣṇa, be the *dakṣiṇā* of that sacrifice. For those harsh words, O Kṛṣṇa, that I said before unto the sons of Pāṇḍu for the gratification of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son,—for that wicked conduct of mine,—I am consumed with repentance. When O Kṛṣṇa, thou wilt behold me slain by Arjuna, then will the *punaściti* of this sacrifice commence. When the (second) son of Pāṇḍu will drink the blood of the loudly roaring Duḥśāsana, then will the *soma*-drinking of this sacrifice have taken place! When the two princes of Pañcāla (Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Śikhaṇḍi) will overthrow

driven by an ego in *rajo guṇa*. His activities are driven by love for Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Brahman. The term *rājarṣi*, or king who was a ruler by occupation but a saint by disposition, speaks to this concept. We can, thus, say Arjuna is like a *brāhmaṇa* in the sense that he has transcended passion and ignorance. At the same time, it should be understood that even if Arjuna is denoted as *brāhmaṇa*-like in this definition, he never acted as a *brāhmaṇa* socially. Thus, this definition has no relevance when it comes to *vyāvahārika* (practical) social intercourse.

Arjuna is continuously in Kṛṣṇa's association; he is Kṛṣṇa's intimate friend and devotee. An eternal associate of the Lord such as Arjuna is beyond the modes of nature and beyond the bounds of *varṇāśrama*. Such a devotee situated in transcendence has no duty to fulfill and has no obligation toward others. His only occupation is unalloyed service to the Lord. Yet, such a devotee performs his prescribed duties to set an example for others. As Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna in *Bhagavad-gītā* (3.17–18,20):

yas tv ātma-ratir eva syād
ātma-tṛptaś ca mānavaḥ
ātmany eva ca santuṣṭas
tasya kāryaṁ na vidyate
naiva tasya kṛtenārtho
nākṛteneha kaścana
na cāsya sarva-bhūteṣu
kaścid artha-vyapāśrayaḥ
...
karmaṇaiva hi saṁsiddhim
āsthitā janakādayaḥ
loka-saṅgraham evāpi
sampaśyan kartum arhasi

Translation: But for one who takes pleasure in the self, whose human life is one of self-realization, and who is satisfied in the self only, fully satiated—for him there is no duty. A self-realized man has no purpose to fulfill in the discharge of his prescribed duties, nor has he any reason not to perform such work. Nor has he any need to depend on any other living being... Kings such as Janaka attained perfection solely by performance of prescribed duties. Therefore, just for the sake of educating the people in general, you should perform your work.

Droṇa and Bhīṣma, then, O Janārdana, will this sacrifice be suspended for an interval. When mighty Bhīmasena will slay Duryodhana, then, O Mādhava, will this sacrifice of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son be concluded." (Kishori Mohan Ganguli trans., numbered as Ch. 141)

Janaka Mahārāja was not obliged to perform his duties as a *kṣatriya* in the *varṇāśrama* system, nor was he driven by the modes of passion and ignorance. Yet, he engaged his skills and nature in service to Lord Kṛṣṇa, for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa and to set an example for others. In his purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* 3.17, Śrīla Prabhupāda states that this teaching applies to all devotees who are fully Kṛṣṇa conscious.

> A person who is fully Kṛṣṇa conscious and is fully satisfied by his acts in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, no longer has any duty to perform. Due to his being Kṛṣṇa conscious, all impiety within is instantly cleansed, an effect of many, many thousands of *yajña* performances. By such clearing of consciousness, one becomes fully confident of his eternal position in relationship with the Supreme. His duty thus becomes self-illuminated by the grace of the Lord, and therefore he no longer has any obligations to the Vedic injunctions.

Jīvana-muktas or fully Kṛṣṇa conscious persons are not obliged to fulfill the Vedic occupational duties of any of the four *varṇas*. The activities of a pure devotee are on the platform of *śuddha-sattva*. Being firmly situated on that platform, they are obliged only to the Lord.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda said in an Evening *darśana*, on July 11, 1976, in New York:

> ...as soon as you become Kṛṣṇa conscious, you become the best *brāhmaṇa*. That is also stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā: sa guṇān samatītyaitān brahma-bhūyāya kalpate* [Bg. 14.26]. He immediately becomes on the Brahman platform. And *brāhmaṇa* means one who knows *brahma. Brahma jānāti iti brāhmaṇa.*

Will a devotee in ISKCON who receives brahminical initiation that includes the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* become a *brāhmaṇa?* Yes, in the sense of having a potential of living a life in *sattva-guṇa* and beyond, in transcendent Kṛṣṇa bhakti. As Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in the purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam 1.2.2:*

> Ultimately the aim of *varṇāśrama-dharma* is to turn a crude man into a pure devotee of the Lord, or a Vaiṣṇava. Anyone, therefore, who becomes a Vaiṣṇava accepted by the first-class Vaiṣṇava, or *uttama-adhikārī* Vaiṣṇava, is already considered a *brāhmaṇa*, regardless of his birth or past deeds.

In the sense of birth, one's parents and birth family remain as they are. In the sense of psychophysical nature, *gṛhastha* devotees will continue to have a livelihood that is suitable for their proclivities. In terms of occupational duty, *gṛhastha* devotees may spend as much or more time doing the activities of *bhakti* as they spend earning a livelihood. Some of these activities of *bhakti* resemble the livelihood of a *brāhmaṇa*, such as Deity worship and study of scripture. But, unless the *gṛhastha* devotee was already a *brāhmaṇa* in terms of livelihood, such *bhakti* activities

are not a means of sustenance. Devotees who are *vānaprasthas* and *sannyāsīs* do not have any *karma-adhikāra* in any *varṇa*, and therefore engage only in *bhakti* according to their taste under the direction of a spiritual master. They can be called *brāhmaṇas* only under the definition by spiritual advancement. A similar situation occurs when devotees who worked in other than brahminical livelihoods when they were in the *gṛhastha āśrama* enter *vānaprastha* life and retire from occupational duties to engage fully in *bhakti*. *Brahmacārīs* in the traditional system have an education where they "understand the values of life along with taking specific training for a livelihood" (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* purport 2.7.6). Thus, while *brahmacārīs* may receive *gāyatrī dīkṣā* and be *brāhmaṇas* in terms of spiritual advancement, they still receive training and association as befits their individual proclivities for their occupational duties as future *gṛhasthas*.

In conclusion, the understanding of what a *brāhmaṇa* means in terms of birth and family heritage, and the *brāhmaṇa* defined as a person who engages his nature as a means of livelihood by partaking in *varṇāśrama-dharma*, are both related to traditional *varṇa* definitions. But the *brāhmaṇa* defined in terms of levels of spirituality is of a superior pure spiritual nature. Because of being situated in transcendence, such a *brāhmaṇa* who is in *bhakti* has developed the superior qualities of a Vaiṣṇava. In ISKCON our *dīkṣā*-gurus are not like traditional *kula*-gurus initiating people into an occupational or social designation, even if it is a social designation used in devotional service. They are Vaiṣṇavas initiating people into a transcendent supra-mundane reality.

Summary and Conclusions of Part Two

It is important to note that, according to *śāstra* and tradition, someone who is not qualified to receive initiation into the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* would also not be qualified to receive and chant any Vedic *mantra*, or any *mantra* with *om*, the *praṇava*.

When the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is viewed as part of the *varṇa-dharma* of the *brāhmaṇas*, then the qualifications for receiving it in *dīkṣā* and chanting it are related to brahminical qualifications in terms of *varṇa*. There are those who claim to be followers of the *Vedas* who understand such *varṇa* qualification to be strictly according to one's birth. Some such persons may define "birth" as only biological heritage, and others may add that the families must be performing the *saṁskāras*. Others may understand one's qualification to be a combination of birth, qualities, and way of livelihood. Those in any of these categories may include gender. Thus, they may disqualify a woman born in a *brāhmaṇa* family. They may even disqualify a woman who is not only born in a *brāhmaṇa* family, but who also has brahminical qualities as described in *śāstra*, and who works brahminically as a scholar, etc. We in ISKCON philosophically define someone in

the social divisions (*varṇa-dharma*) as a *brāhmaṇa* according to a combination of *saṁskāras* (specifically *gāyatrī-dīkṣā*), qualities, and way of livelihood.

When the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is viewed as part of *bhakti-yoga*, then according to *śāstra*, as we find from Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements, the qualifications for receiving it in *dīkṣā* and chanting it are: time spent following the process of *sādhana bhakti* under the guidance of a spiritual master, devotion, faith, dedication, cleanliness, honesty, maturity (which can include being of a sufficient age), and a sincere eagerness to chant the *mantra*.

It is easy to understand the confusion between the two viewpoints, because in ISKCON only those with *gāyatrī dīkṣā* are allowed to do services associated with *brāhmaṇas*, such as Deity worship and *yajñas*. Furthermore, we also often call that initiation "*brāhmaṇa* initiation." Indeed, Śrīla Prabhupāda expected followers of the *Vedas* outside of ISKCON to recognize those with *gāyatrī* initiation to be as good as or better than a *brāhmaṇa* by *varṇa* considerations. Yet, *dīkṣā* into the Brahma-*gāyatrī* and other *mantras* is not indicative of social position or *varṇa*, even putting aside birth entirely and just considering *guṇa* and karma. Devotees of Kṛṣṇa who receive *gāyatrī dīkṣā* may have propensities and livelihoods that appear to be in any of the *varṇas*. At the same time, they are qualified to do the *aṅgas* of *bhakti* that are also in the *brāhmaṇa varṇa*. Their designation of "*brāhmaṇa*" indicates the opportunity to be on the transcendent platform, not a social status in terms of *varṇa*.

From a philosophical point of view, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that a Vaiṣṇava is above all *varṇa* designations and should not be considered in terms of *varṇa*, even that of a *brāhmaṇa*. In Part Three there is further information on the relationship between Vaiṣṇavas and *brāhmaṇas* in terms of *dīkṣā*.

Part three: *Brahma-gāyatrī dīkṣā*

Hermeneutic Overview of Part Three

1. ***viṣaya*** – topic: The Brahma-*gāyatrī* has been handed down as an initiation *mantra* in the Sārasvata-Gauḍīya *paramparā*.

2. ***saṁśaya*** – doubt: Is initiation into the chanting of the *brahma gāyatrī* based on distinct considerations as compared to initiation into other sampradayic *vaiṣṇava-mantras*?

3. ***pūrvapakṣa*** - one viewpoint: initiation into Brahma-*gāyatrī* is primarily a practice of *varṇāśrama*, not so much of *bhakti*, and therefore it should be instituted and practiced primarily according to *varṇāśrama* rules.

4. ***uttara-pakṣa*** – another viewpoint: In our society of ISKCON our founder-*ācārya* gave disciples the Brahma-*gāyatrī* according to principles of *daivī-varṇāśrama* and as a limb of *bhakti*.

5. ***nirṇayaḥ*** – deciding in favor of a side: Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta combined initiation into the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* with initiation into the *sampradāya mantras*, and Śrīla Prabhupāda continued and deepened that practice as he gave the *mantras* to qualified devotee men and women from all parts of the world irrespective of family backgrounds and *varṇa* designations.

6. ***siddhānta***– conclusion: For Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and for A.C. Bhaktivedanta Śrīla Prabhupāda, the inclusion of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is part of a deep philosophical and śāstric based stance on the position of Vaiṣṇavas and *brāhmaṇas*. The practice is, therefore, an essential principle for their branch of the *sampradāya*.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

In order to understand *dīkṣā* in our line, we look at this relevant article where Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura describes the *mantra* part of *panca-saṁskāra*, the five elements of *dīkṣā*, which consist of *tapa*, *nāma*, *mantra*, *ūrdhva-pundra*, and *yāga*. The following is a translation of an article written in Bengali, entitled *Panca-samskāra*, by Srīla Thākura Bhaktivinoda. The article was originally published in his journal, *Sajjana-toṣaṇī* (vol. 2/ 1) in 1885:

> Out of affection, Śrī Guru next gives a *mantra* that allows his student to experience easily the nectar of Śrĭ Harināma. A *mantra* is a prayer that contains the name of the Supreme Lord that is inflected grammatically in the dative case, such as Krsnāya or Rāmāya. The *mantra* also includes certain adjectives that qualify the name of the Lord, thus expressing a particular mood or taste. By giving a *mantra*, Srī Guru helps his *śiṣya* [disciple] taste Harināma, selecting a suitable mood or mellow for him. When we say *namaḥ*, obeisance to Śrī Hari, we employ the fourth, i.e. the dative, case ending. The dative case expresses the proper relationship between the worshipped, the worship and the worshipper, thus allowing the taste of Śrī Harināma to be easily experienced.
>
> There is no end to the happiness of a person who has received *mantra*. Those who analyze the meaning of the Eighteen-syllabic *mantra*, generally used in the worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, know that the *mantra* is a condensed sampling of the taste

available from the Lord. The same also applies to the twenty-four-syllabic *gāyatrī* and other *mantras*, such as the Kāma-*gāyatrī*, that are used to worship the Lord. Those who have not received *mantra* can only speculate about the taste of Harināma, but unfortunately, most of their considerations are useless. Therefore, one must receive *mantra*. Those who have received *mantra* consider this the most important *saṁskāra*.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura

Summary of Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's view

The practice of awarding the Brahma-*gāyatrī* during Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava initiation (*dīkṣā*) apparently goes back to Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. He instituted this, and Śrīla Prabhupāda followed this practice. Śrīla Sarasvatī's Ṭhākura's move was controversial, and received a lot of criticism, but also is very central to Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's thinking and mission.

Running through all of Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's writings is a staunch criticism of *jāti-gosāñi*, or those who have reduced brāhmaṇism to seminal lineages regardless of qualifications: rather, they should be the guardians of the spiritual heritage of Vaiṣṇavism, but they have become materialistic, power-hungry priests whose main interest is the promotion of their own families, their 'seminal lines'. Many Vaiṣṇavas in colonial Bengal were of low caste, and were therefore looked down upon by these 'caste' *brāhmaṇas*, but as he argued at length in his book *Brāhmaṇa O Vaiṣṇava* ('*Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava*'), Vaiṣṇavas—whatever their worldly, family background—were not only the ideal embodiment of brahminical values, but indeed superior to *brāhmaṇas*. This is why he initiated his disciples not just in the Brahma-*gāyatrī*—for centuries the most potent symbol of brāhmaṇism—but also gave his (male) disciples the sacred thread (*upavīta*).

This practice is not a detail, but an essential aspect of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's teachings, which he underscored again and again. That previous generations of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas may not have awarded the Brahma-*gāyatrī* at initiation (*dīkṣā*) does not change this fact. Śrīla Prabhupāda saw himself first and foremost as Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's disciple (*namas te sārasvate deve*), who preached Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's message as he received it from him (*gaura-vāṇi-pracāriṇe*). Given how important this point was to Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, we should be very hesitant to just dismiss it.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said that we, as members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, are all Sārasvatas:

> Sanātana Gosvāmī and Rūpa Gosvāmī belonged to the Bharadvāja-gotra, which indicates that they belonged either to the family or disciplic succession of Bharadvāja Muni. As members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we belong to the family, or disciplic succession, of Sarasvatī Gosvāmī, and thus we are known as Sārasvatas. Obeisances are therefore offered to the spiritual master as *sārasvata-deva*, or a member of the Sārasvata family (*namas te sārasvate deve*), whose mission is to broadcast the cult of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu (*gaura-vāṇī-pracāriṇe*) and to fight with impersonalists and voidists (*nirviśeṣa-śūnyavādi-pāścātya-deśa-tāriṇe*). (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 10.84, purport)

As is clear from what follows, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura did not see the awarding of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* in terms of family lineage or *varṇa* as it is commonly understood. This initiation had nothing to do with the nature of the disciple or his *varṇa*, but rather everything to do with the nature of Vaiṣṇavism. Indeed, he fought hard to defeat the view of Vaiṣṇavism that thinks of Vaiṣṇavas as belonging to a specific *varṇa*.

Distinction between Vedic initiation into *Gāyatrī* (second birth) and Vaiṣṇava initiation (third birth)

The following is from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, *Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava*, Vrajraj Press, 1999, trans. Bhumipati dāsa, ed. Pundarika Vidyānidhi dāsa, "Appendix 1: Excerpts from the writings of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura", pp. 160-162, translating *Sajjana-toṣaṇī*, Vol 19, Part 7-8:

> "We know that apart from seminal birth, a living entity takes another birth in the family of an *ācārya*. When a living entity attains his second birth, he becomes freed from the condemnation of taking only one birth. The *ācārya* and Gāyatrī give him a second birth, called *sāvitra*....
>
> "The twice-born student receives knowledge of the *Vedas* and Vedic literatures from the *ācārya*....
>
> "...Being under the control of insignificant greed or material enjoyment, a student returns home after completing his formalities with the *ācārya* simply to engage in fruitive activities. One who considers material assets very insignificant and useless for spiritual life and is attracted towards spiritual life

accepts *bṛhad-vrata* (celibacy) rather than returning home, or he returns home and accepts spiritual initiation.

"The spiritual *ācārya* is known as guru. He awards third birth to the living entities by giving them initiation, in the form of imparting transcendental knowledge. In this third birth a person engages in spiritual cultivation and attains freedom from material conceptions. We have already discussed that a *vaṁsa* does not expand only through *śaukra-janma*, or seminal birth, rather it also expands through *sāvitra* and *daikṣa janmas*, or Vedic and spiritual initiations."

Smārtas unfavorable for devotional service

"Many *smārtas*, who oppose each other, have taken birth in different places at different times. Until a living entity's spiritual perception is awakened, he considers the *smārtas*, who are travelers on the ascending path, as followers of Vedic literatures who are either worldly or devoid of service to Hari; but when he leaves behind the activities at different times and places of *smārtas* whose attempts are always unfavorable for devotional service, he continually follows the spiritual *smṛtis* in the kingdom of devotional service.

"...many superficial devotees follow Raghunandana's *smṛtis*, which are against Vaiṣṇava principles, and thus uproot their spiritual propensities....Although this spiritual community identifies itself as Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava, members have in no way tried to safeguard the prestige of *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, which was compiled under the order of Śrīman Mahāprabhu. Whenever they have had an opportunity to follow the *smārta* doctrine, which is opposed to the teachings of Śrīman Mahāprabhu, they have readily accepted it. In this way they are accumulating Vaiṣṇava *aparādhas*, totally uprooting the eternal truth, and permanently obstructing the path of devotional service to Kṛṣṇa."

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, *Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava*, Vrajraj Press, 1999, trans. Bhumipati dāsa, ed. Pundarika Vidyānidhi dāsa, "Appendix 1: Excerpts from the writings of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura", pp. 167-168, translating *Sajjana-toṣaṇī*, Vol 24, Part 5-6

The evidence against giving the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to women, and to men of lower *varṇas*, comes from *smṛtis* other than *Hārita smṛti* and *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. In this light, it's particularly important to read the following passage from Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, where he states in no uncertain terms that devotees must disregard those other *smṛtis*.

> The question may now arise in the minds of many people that when the main foundations of the *smṛti* writers is one, then why are the conclusive regulations different? In answer to this, we can say that the writers of the Vaiṣṇava *smṛtis* are servants of the Lord whereas the writers of the *smṛtis* meant for persons attached to material enjoyment are sense gratifiers. The materialists have no taste or faith in the worship of the Lord. Therefore, it is impossible to get impartial regulations from such persons.
>
> Although the Hindu communities are forced to follow the regulations of ordinary *smārtas*, the pure devotees who also belong to Hindu communities are not obliged to follow the *smṛtis* of the materialists. In the society of devotees it is not possible to follow the Vaiṣṇava *smṛtis* and at the same time respect the *smārta* regulations. That would be simply a sign of weakness and foolishness. When due to the influence of their knowledge the devotee householders will come to understand their own literatures and prestige, then they will no longer be dependent on others. The devotees should lead their lives in Kṛṣṇa's family according to the Vaiṣṇava *smṛtis*. Then the godless *smārtas* will never be able to dominate them.
>
> If the Vaiṣṇava devotees spend their lives following the instructions of the spiritual master, then there will be no possibility of disturbances in this world.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, *Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava*, Vrajraj Press, 1999, trans. Bhumipati dāsa, ed. Pundarika Vidyānidhi dāsa, "Appendix 1: Excerpts from the writings of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura", p. 178, translating *Sajjana-toṣaṇī*, Vol 18, Part 2

Initiation, *Varṇāśrama*, and *Brāhmaṇas*

The most articulate and elaborate expression and defense of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's practice of awarding Brahma-*gāyatrī* that we have come across is found not in the writings of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura himself, but in an article (or, rather, a series of articles) written by one of his leading disciples, Prof. Nishikanta Sanyal. The article, entitled 'Who is a *Brāhmaṇa*?', was published serially in The Harmonist, the official publication of the Gauḍīya Maṭh, of which Śrla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was the editor. (The Harmonist, XXVIII, No. 3, pp. 82–86; XXVIII, No. 4, pp. 121–126; XXVIII, No. 5, pp. 142–146; XXVIII, No. 8, pp. 244–247; and XXIX, No. 1, pp. 17–20. The final article states 'To be continued', but we have not found further installments.) Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura worked very closely with Sanyal, and was actively involved in Sanyal's literary career (indeed, it is tempting to think of Sanyal as one of the principal 'mouthpieces' of his guru). Anyone familiar with Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's tone of teaching will immediately recognize it in this passage.

The entire article is worth reading, and pertinent to our current discussion. Still we have extracted some passages of it below that are of particular importance to the discussion. What comes before the first passage we cite is a long discussion on the imperfections of *varṇāśrama* as it is practiced today and on the importance, as well as the degradation, of *brāhmaṇas*.

In the second installment, Sanyal first discusses initiation:

> Śrī Caitanya and His associates abstained from trying to change or reform the practices of society. This sensuous life cannot be reformed into the higher life. One has to enter the higher life by wholly discarding the mundane. Śrī Caitanya enjoins the method of persuasive propaganda by word and conduct to wean the people of this world to the higher life. The literary work of His associates and followers embodying His teachings have come down to us. But the movement has been exploited from an early phase by ambitious worldly persons for antisocial purposes. This departure from the teaching and practice of Śrī Caitanya proved necessarily unfortunate in its results and is even now a great stumbling block in the way of a right understanding of their real nature.
>
> True to the spiritual purpose of the *varṇāśrama* institution, Śrī Caitanya authorized the process of initiatory admission into the spiritual life. This was rendered practicable by the simultaneous appearance of a very large number of transcendental teachers in the company of the Supreme Lord. They taught the Truth to all those who were attracted by their supermundane personality to receive Him at their hand by the method of unconditional submission. Those who were so inclined were admitted by them into the spiritual life by the *saṁskāras* (purificatory ceremonies) of *dīkṣā* and *upanayana* prescribed by the *pañcarātra* (the section of the Vedic literature containing the rational treatment of the five-fold spiritual knowledge). Śrī Caitanya did not follow the hereditary method of the *dharma-śāstras* which they themselves declare to be unsuitable for the present highly polemical Age, which is given to hair-splitting arguments for defending rank materialism. Śrī Caitanya and His associates did not try to supplant the hereditary *brāhmaṇas* as leaders of secular society. The Lord vanquished their leaders in controversy and in the immortal literary works of His associates and followers transmitted to all succeeding generations a complete and systematic presentation of the life of pure service to the Lord.
>
> Śrī Caitanya recruited His followers from all ranks of the people irrespective of caste, creed or color. They were initiated into the spiritual life by the ceremonies of *dīkṣā* and *upanayana*, by the rationalistic method of the *pañcarātra*. The test of disposition alone was accepted by Him in determining eligibility for

> *upanayana*. The claim of heredity was ignored as being unsuitable and forbidden by the Scriptures for the Iron Age. Thus was formed a vast association of individuals, recruited from all classes of the people, who were admitted into the spiritual life by submitting to receive the same by the method of unconditional submission to the bonafide transcendental *ācārya*. All this is in strict accordance with the special scriptural dispensation for the Iron Age. All recruits were hereby automatically lifted to the status of a *brāhmaṇa* in the real sense of the term as possessing the proved spiritual disposition by the testimony of the bonafide transcendental teacher. This is the spiritual *varnāśrama* institution (*daiva varnāśrama dharma*) which can contain, as in the Satya Yuga, only one Spiritual *varṇa*, viz. that of the *brāhmaṇas*, all the rest being *śūdras*. It is also an association of individuals and is wholly outside and independent of the hereditary social or domestic arrangements which are the products of history. It is the actual realisation in the life of the individual of the pregnant principle of the *Gītā* which may be rendered by the beautiful words of the Christian Gospel, "Leave all and follow Me." (The Harmonist, XXVIII No. 4, p. 125-126)

In the next installment (The Harmonist XXVIII No. 5, p. 142), Sanyal continues on this theme, and again states that "the *daiva varṇāśrama* 'institution' thus consists of one *varṇa* or class, viz. that of the spiritually disposed (*brāhmaṇas*)." Essential to attain this stage, as was already said, is 'unconditional submission' to the guru, and initiation (*dīkṣā*) is essential for this. It is then that he discusses the relationship between *pāñcarātra dīkṣā* (when the Vaiṣṇava *gāyatrīs* are received) and Vedic *upanayana* (when the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is received). As he explains in the passage below, the latter is preparatory to the former, and when it is seen and practised in this way the 'Vaiṣṇava' *upanayana* (which he calls the *daikṣya sāvitra*, 'the *upanayana* that belongs to the *dīkṣā*') is fundamentally different from that performed by the materialistic, 'seminal' *brāhmaṇas* (which he calls the *śaukra sāvitra*, 'the *upanayana* that is related to the semen').

He writes:

> When the disposition to serve the Truth fully manifests itself, then and then only the Spiritual teacher is in a position to impart the Spiritual vision to the disciple. The Spiritual vision is thus closely associated with the disposition to serve. The Spiritual vision cannot, indeed, be had except by grace. The disposition to serve implies this. Hence the necessity of *dīkṣā* or initiation by the Spiritual preceptor. But the *dīkṣā* should not be supposed to be a limited worldly process. It stands for the eternal and continuous necessity of grace by which alone our spiritual vision can be kept up. *Dīkṣā*, therefore, belongs to the category of eternal entities, and the substantive process is not really intelligible except to the initiated.

Dīkṣā, therefore, marks the high-water level of spiritual pupilage to which the ceremony of *upanayana* seeks to introduce. *Dīkṣā* is the higher process and implies *upanayana* as its preliminary. The disposition is the only thing that matters. The *upanayana* of a person after *dīkṣā* by the *pañcarātra* method brings out clearly this true meaning of the ceremony of investiture with the holy thread. It demolishes the theory of seminal, i.e. hereditary spiritual community. It puts the whole system into relationship with the spiritual guide by vindicating the supreme necessity of grace as the only sanction underlying all arrangements.

The student prior to his attainment of the grace of the spiritual preceptor in the form of *dīkṣā* has only a probationary status. The student who is admitted to the study of the scriptures after *dīkṣā* occupies the higher plane to which the probationer has no access. This makes the *daikṣa sāvitra* ceremony categorically different from the *śaukra sāvitra*. The second birth ceremony of one who has already attained his third birth is merely doing over again what has already been done before. The *daikṣa brāhmaṇa* is alone entitled to perform direct spiritual service. The twice-born student who has received only the *sāvitra saṁskāra* by reason of his seminal birth is not entitled to the worship of Viṣṇu, which is the only function of all *brāhmaṇas*. Finally, the *sāvitra saṁskāra* on the strength of seminal birth permitted by some of the *gṛhya sūtras* and *dharma-śāstras*, is forbidden in the Kali Age due to the degeneracy of the hereditary *brāhmaṇas*. The *dīkṣā* provided by the *pañcarātra* confers the tentative vision of the spiritual service which is perfected by a course of training under the spiritual preceptor represented by the process to which the candidate for spiritual living is introduced by the *sāvitra saṁskāra*. This is the only dispensation authorized by the scripture for the present controversial Age.

It is now possible to deal with the popular fallacy that one can be a Vaiṣṇava without being a *brāhmaṇa*. This "castial" view of Vaiṣṇnavism and brāhmaṇism requires to be discarded for all if one is sincerely inclined to understand the true spirit of those institutions. The *brāhmaṇa* is not a person of this world. The true *brāhmaṇa* must be a constant and exclusive worshipper of Viṣṇu, i.e. Vaiṣṇava. The mere twice-born is not a *brāhmaṇa*. The *brāhmaṇa* is the Vaiṣṇava in embryo. The *brāhmaṇa* is the disciple of the Vaiṣṇnava. But he is not entirely above all activities of this world as the latter is. The *brāhmaṇa* has still got to discharge a duty to the secular society. This duty consists in instructing all classes of society in the principles of the Truth. This is the practical side of his discipleship under the Vaiṣṇava preceptor. But all this also applies only to the spiritual or *daikṣa brāhmaṇa* and not to the hereditary *brāhmaṇa* who is not

> recognized by the scriptures as possessing the spiritual nature, especially in the Kali Yuga. (The Harmonist XXVIII No. 5, p. 145)

In other words, the receiving of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* during a Vaiṣṇava initiation (*dīkṣā*) has nothing whatsoever to do with the worldly *varṇa* system which is not just hereditary but is also—in theory, at least—based on occupation. As he states in a later passage:

> "The 'Vaiṣṇava' householders of the code of Śrī Caitanya are *paramahaṁsas*. They might belong externally to any class of the secular society. There is no distinction between a 'Vaiṣṇava' householder appearing in a hereditary *brāhmaṇa* family and another descended from a *śūdra* lineage. They are, neither of them, either *brāhmaṇa* or *śūdra*. They may submit externally to the customs of any class without any real possibility of ever getting identified with any worldly class." (The Harmonist XXVIII, No. 8, p. 246)

As we have seen, Sanyal argues that the Vaiṣṇava 'appropriation' of the Vedic tradition, as with the *daikṣya sāvitra*, is on a different level than the Vedic tradition. The 'divine' (*daivī*) *varṇāśrama* he discusses is pure Vaiṣṇavism, where there is no distinction between Vaiṣṇavas, because there is only one *varṇa*, that of the true *brāhmaṇas*. All Vaiṣṇavas are *brāhmaṇas* in this sense, even if they are not *brāhmaṇas* in a worldly sense. This is a very different understanding than the one that is commonly held in contemporary Vaiṣṇava society, and as is clear from the above, it is on this level that we have to understand the initiation rituals and *mantras*.

In the penultimate installment of the series, Sanyal does address what seems today to be the more common understanding of a spiritual *varṇāśrama*. After discussing at length how *varṇa* is irrelevant to Vaiṣṇavas, and how Vaiṣṇavas are above such mundane distinctions, he discusses how Vaiṣṇavas might nevertheless relate to the wider society. The passage is not directly relevant to the topic being discussed, but we cite it in its entirety, because we believe it helps us to understand, by contrast, how what he has been saying about *varṇāśrama* earlier is very different from how we may understand *varṇāśrama* today. When he writes below about the 'spiritual community', he means the '*varṇa*-free' or 'one-*varṇa*' society of Vaiṣṇavas, who are initiated with the '*daikṣya sāvitra*', which he has analyzed before. The concept of *varṇāśrama-dharma* he talks about here is thus different from that: this is about how a non-Vaiṣṇava society can yet be guided by Vaiṣṇava principles. He writes:

> There is, therefore, no real point of contact anywhere between the spiritual community and the hereditary secular society. The former is essentially individualistic. A 'Vaiṣṇava' is never born, nor can he die. Therefore, neither birth nor death are really of any importance to him....This cannot be comprehensible to those who are not Vaiṣṇavas. Worldly people also value the principle of social freedom. But they value such freedom for ensuring increase

of worldly enjoyment. This they are pleased to call by the high-sounding names of progress, prosperity, well-being, happiness. They are naturally very anxious to secure these. It is for this reason that they devise such institutions as those of marriage, divorce, etc. But how can these institutions find a place in the code of the 'Vaiṣṇavas'?

All that is feasible is to set up a purely spiritual community with its own code of regulations to be administered by those to whom the authority may be delegated by the head of the community who can be no other than the *paramahaṁsa*.

The existence of the spiritual community is, however, bound to react beneficially on the practices and ideas of the secular societies that may exist alongside the spiritual. There need be no opposition of interest between the two groups. Many of the regulations of the non-spiritual *dharma-śāstras* are regarded as being of a salutary character by those who look at them from the worldly point of view. The spiritual code has nothing to do with such regulations. The 'Vaiṣṇavas' have no ambition of regulating secular society from within. They know very well that the secular can by no means be improved into the spiritual. The two are categorically different from one another.

The *varṇāśrama* institution is, therefore, of the nature of a purely secular arrangement. But this arrangement itself may or may not be opposed to the spiritual outlook and guidance. If it is not opposed to the ideal of spiritual living it can only do so by frankly admitting its own inferiority and avoiding all rivalry. It should also allow any of its members to be freely enrolled in the spiritual community. It should, by all means in its power, encourage conversion to spiritual life. If the secular society is organized and administered in this spirit, it should be appropriately described by the designation of '*daiva*'. Any secular society which is deliberately opposed to spiritual living, is no less appropriately termed '*asura*'. The difference between the two is described in the *Gītā*.

It is not possible for the secular society to be converted en masse into the spiritual. It is, however, possible to convert it into the *daiva varṇāśrama* society. It is also possible that *daiva varṇashrama* classification itself is not based on heredity. The *Gītā* says so. It will be necessary to study all the implications of the position. For this purpose also the...guidance of the *paramahaṁsas* is necessary, for avoiding conflict with the spiritual society. But as a *daiva varṇashrama* society happens to be a carefully graded organization it should not be possible

> to do without the leadership of the *brāhmaṇas* within the society. The *brāhmaṇas*, as leaders of the *daiva varṇashrama* society, are nearest in position to the society of the 'Vaiṣṇavas'. They should, therefore, be fully alive to the unconditional superiority of the 'Vaiṣṇavas' in all matters. (The Harmonist XXVIII, No. 8, pp. 246-47)[30]

In the last paragraph above, Sanyal does not understand the word *paramahaṁsas* in a narrow sense, as referring only to the highest class *sannyāsīs*. Vaiṣṇavas are *paramahaṁsas*. Earlier he writes, as cited above: "The 'Vaiṣṇava' householders of the code of Śrī Caitanya are *paramahaṁsas*." (p. 246)

Śrīla Prabhupāda

The first times Śrīla Prabhupāda gave *gāyatrī-dīkṣā* to his disciples: the real history

According to Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī, Śrīla Prabhupāda first gave initiation into the *gāyatrī mantras* to Kīrtanānanda dāsa and Acyutānanda dāsa in India in 1967. Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī and Govinda dāsī both recount that Śrīla Prabhupāda next gave *gāyatrī* initiations in May of 1968 in Boston on three days: the 6th, 7th, and 9th. (Please note that the only transcript we could locate for the initiation on May 6th is incorrectly dated as May 21th.) Govinda dāsī has told the story over an email interview, and Jadurāṇī recounts the history in her book *The Art of Spiritual Life*, pages 134-137. (Annapūrṇā Devī dāsī was the third woman to receive *gāyatrī mantras* at this time, but we do not know how to contact her.)

On May 6th, Śrīla Prabhupāda was giving *gāyatrī mantra* to some men disciples. Govinda dāsī had initially stayed away as she was upset that the men had asked Śrīla Prabhupāda for *gāyatrī mantra* when he was in ill health. Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī and Annapūrnā Devī dāsī were present, but the men there pushed them to the back and away from the ceremony. Govinda dāsī entered in the middle of the ceremony, and when she arrived, according to Govinda dāsī, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Yes, I couldn't imagine how you could stay away. You love to hear me speak." According to Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī, he said, "Oh, I was just thinking, 'Where is that girl?' And now Kṛṣṇa has sent her here." Whatever he said is not in the transcript, which breaks off

[30] Please note in all the above extracts from the Harmonist, we have for the most part followed the spelling used by Sanyal, though we have silently corrected a few obvious typos, and adjusted some spellings, capitalization, and formatting to our standards.)

in the middle of the lecture. Professor Joseph O'Connell was present, and Śrīla Prabhupāda explained how his giving of *gāyatrī mantras* was according to *śāstra*:

> the Vedic regulation is that unless one is born by a *brāhmaṇa* father, he cannot be initiated according to the Vedic regulation. But to take birth in the *brāhmaṇa* family, that is now oblivion, at the present moment. Because in the *brāhmaṇa* family formerly, not only in the *brāhmaṇa*; *kṣatriya* family and *vaiśya* family also, there was a *garbhādhāna* ceremony. ... So at the present moment this ceremony is not observed. Even in rigid families they have already given up. And the *śāstra* injunction is, as soon as one gives up this ceremony, *garbhādhāna* ceremony, he at once falls down to the classification of a *śūdra*. The whole family...
>
> So *kalau śūdra-sambhava*. Therefore, the general enunciation is that in this age everyone has to be accepted as born-*śūdra*. But this principle is accepted always, by birth everyone is *śūdra*. *Janmanā jāyate śūdraḥ*. Everyone is born *śūdra*. Then? *Saṁskārād bhaved dvijaḥ*. *Dvija* means this *saṁskāra*. This *saṁskāra*... By gradual process of cultivation of knowledge, of behavior, of rules and regulations, one becomes a *dvija*. *Dvija* means twice-born. .... So Sanātana Gosvāmī says, because he has enunciated this rule for the so-called rigid *brāhmaṇas*, they say, "Without taking birth in a *brāhmaṇa* family there is no possibility of one's becoming a *brāhmaṇa*." But *Bhagavad-gītā* does not say like that. *Bhagavad-gītā* says, *cātur-varṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭaṁ guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśaḥ* [*Bhagavad-gītā* 4.13]. "These four principles of caste—*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*—I have created that division." Now it is creation of God. Nobody can nullify it.
>
> .... The symptoms of a person qualifying himself to become a *brāhmaṇa* or *kṣatriya* or *vaiśya* or *śūdra*, that is the main principle. If that symptom is found elsewhere, he should be accepted in that classification. Suppose a man is born in a *śūdra* family or less than a *śūdra* family, but if his qualities are just like *brāhmaṇa*, then he should be accepted as *brāhmaṇa*. That is Bhāgavata's...
>
> So this process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a manufacturing process of *brāhmaṇa*, Vaiṣṇava. Vaiṣṇava means surpassing the brahminical stage.

The next day, on May 7th, according to Govinda dāsī and Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī, Śrīla Prabhupāda held *gāyatrī* initiations for them and Annapūrṇā Devī dāsī entirely of his own volition without prior discussion and without their request. Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī writes:

> Brahmānanda suggested that Śrīla Prabhupāda had given brāhmaṇical initiation to us girls only because he knew in his heart that we were upset and he wanted to please us. I didn't believe that at all. Although I didn't have the scriptural evidence to back up my

> conviction, I knew at least that he is a bona fide representative of an unbroken chain of disciplic succession of self realized *gurus*. He would not have initiated such a major change to scriptural procedures just to please a couple of young women. I would find out some of the many scriptural references in the years to come.

It is of great and significant interest to go through the whole transcript of Śrīla Prabhupāda's lecture at the first time he gave *gāyatrī* initiation, including of course the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, to women. Here are some excerpts that convey his main points. One can note that he both speaks about women's social position in terms of women being married, and of the fact that *bhakti* transcends gender and social situations. As usual, Śrīla Prabhupāda expertly addresses both the temporary external duties according to the body and the eternal duties of the soul. First Śrīla Prabhupāda speaks about a traditional approach to giving *mantras* to women: that they shouldn't be independent, should always be under protection, and so on. But then he brings it to another level — of complete surrender to Kṛṣṇa — and says that all those external things are secondary. At the same time, we should remember that was at the very beginning of our movement, and that Śrīla Prabhupāda later on started introducing some of the rules of *varṇāśrama*. Yet he never gave any indication that he or his followers should change his initial decision regarding giving *gāyatrī dīkṣā* to women:

> So at least for one year chanting regularly, observing the rules and regulation, one comes to the platform of spiritual platform. And then, another initiation, this is called *dīkṣā*. That is also *dīkṣā*, that is first process. This *dīkṣā*, second process, is not very essential. The essential is to chant. In this age, there is no need of this second initiation. But those who are going to be recognized as properly initiated, so this second installment was introduced by Sanātana Gosvāmī. *Dīkṣā-vidhānena dvijatvaṁ* [*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 2.12], his twice birth he's completed.
>
> And so far men are concerned, they are offered the sacred thread. Not the woman. The idea is woman, every woman, is supposed to be married. ...so marriage is so much compulsory according to Vedic civilization for woman. Woman's independence is never allowed by Vedic *smṛti*. *Smṛti* means regulation, Vedic regulation. Woman must be under the care of father so long she is not married, and then in her youthful age she must be under the care of the proper husband, and she must be under the care of elderly children in old age.
>
> Now you will see how much husband takes care of the wife, how much it is obliging. You will see from the history of *Rāmāyaṇa*. ...

So the idea spread here. So many women in this country say that "We are not going to be slave, slave of some man." ...

This is also in India. But the *śāstra* does not allow that. It is not slavery, actually; it is grand protection. If the husband is nice, then wife's position is very secure.... Therefore initiation, to the woman, there is no need of, I mean to say, sacred thread, because she's considered to be the half body of her husband. She's half-shareholder in everything of the husband; therefore there was no necessity.

Even you'll find in the picture of Rāmacandra and Sītā, Rāmacandra has got sacred thread but Sītā hasn't got. That is the system. So this is Vedic system, that woman is given the *mantra* but not the sacred thread. Even she's born of a *brāhmaṇa* father, there is no such system. No. In the Bhagavad-gītā you'll find, *strī-śūdra-dvijabandhūnāṁ* [*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.4.25].

...The open formula is that the..., to get out of the clutches of *māyā* is very, very, very, very, very, very difficult, but *mām eva.* Kṛṣṇa says, "One who surrenders unto Me becomes fully Kṛṣṇa conscious,"*māyām etāṁ taranti te*. [*Bhagavad-gītā* 7.14]

So that should be our business. We are a *brahmacārī*, a *gṛhastha* and *vānaprastha, sannyāsa*. So *sannyāsa* may not be accepted; that doesn't matter. Those who are *brahmacārīs,* please follow the rules. If to remain as *brahmacārī* is disturbing, get yourself married; live peacefully, husband and wife. Of course for woman, there is no such rule for becoming *brahmacārī,* because every girl was compulsorily married by the father.

But anyway, if you can remain *brahmacāriṇī* that is very nice, very nice. But if not, get yourself married, live peacefully. Don't be disturbed. Don't be implicated. Remain always pure, because we are aiming to be promoted in the purest kingdom, spiritual kingdom. So we should always remember that, that we are making progress in a different line.

....Only *Buddhi-yoga*. And *buddhi-yoga* is *bhakti-yoga*. Why? That *buddhi-yogaṁ dadāmi taṁ yena mām upayānti te*.[*Bhagavad-gītā* 10.10] That "I'll give in that intelligent *yoga* by which he can come to Me." And what is that *yoga* by which one can go to Him? That is *bhakti. ....* "Those who are intelligent, they can take to this *yoga* system, *bhakti-yoga*, and by which one can approach Me." It is declared in many places of the authoritative scripture, that there is... Now just like Kṛṣṇa

says to Arjuna, "I am speaking to you this system of *Bhagavad-gītā, yoga*," *bhakto 'si*, "because you are My devotee." [*Bhagavad-gītā* 4.3]

He doesn't say "Because you are warrior, you are *kṣatriya*, you are Hindu, you are Indian." Not all these nonsense. He said, *bhakto 'si*: "Because you are My *bhakta*." So *bhakta*, anyone can become *bhakta*. There is no question of becoming Indian, *kṣatriya*, *brāhmaṇa,* or this or that. Anyone can become *bhakta*. How anyone can become *bhakta*? That is also stated in *Bhagavad-gītā*:

māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya
ye 'pi syuḥ pāpa-yonayaḥ

[*Bhagavad-gītā* 9.32]

Translation: O son of Pṛthā, those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth—women, *vaiśyas* [merchants], as well as *śūdras* [workers]—can approach the supreme destination.

"Any living creature, born in any sinful family, doesn't matter. If he takes My shelter," *te 'pi yānti parāṁ gatim*, "he also attains the highest perfection."

So there is no such restriction. Everything is there spoken by Kṛṣṇa. So we are doing just according to the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Simply we have to know where these things are available. Execute this *bhakti-yoga*, this *kīrtana* and this *mantra,* and chanting, and never mind in whatever occupation you are engaged; that doesn't matter. Be happy. I may be present or not present, the guidance is always there. So you can make progress very peacefully, nice. All right. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

We should carefully note that Satsvarūpa Mahārāja tells the account of these brahminical initiations with some significant differences. (His account is missing entirely from the 2017 edition of the Vedabase for computers, but it can be found in an online Vedabase. Note that in his account, he uses "Mr. Matthews" as a pseudonym for O'Connell)

He says that Govinda dāsī was late because she was upset that she was not included in the initiation and feigned illness, but Govinda dāsī says she was late because she was upset that some devotees had pressured Prabhupāda to have an initiation when *he* had been ill. Satsvarūpa Mahārāja writes that Govinda dāsī and Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī were upset that Prabhupāda did not include them in the initiation on the first day, but they say they were upset because the men pushed them to the back of the room. Satsvrupa Mahārāja writes, "Prabhupāda could detect their mentality, although they didn't openly voice their complaints." Satsvarūpa Mahārāja then connects the performance of the next day's

brahminical initiation of the three women to Prabhupāda's response to the women's dissatisfaction. In a recent email correspondence, Satsvarūpa Mahārāja says that the impression he had at the time is what he wrote in *Lilāmṛta*.

We do not know, of course, the reason why Śrīla Prabhupāda gave *gāyatrī mantras*, including the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, to those three women disciples one day after he initiated several men. Two of those women were upset—for whatever reason—the first day, and they did not verbally communicate their feelings to Śrīla Prabhupāda. We do know that Śrīla Prabhupāda explained in his lecture that day that his actions in initiating the women were firmly based on *śāstra*. He did not give another reason. As quoted more completely in another part of this paper, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 24.331:

> If one actually wants to serve Kṛṣṇa, it doesn't matter whether one is a *śūdra*, *vaiśya* or even a woman. If one is sincerely eager to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* or *dīkṣā-mantra*, one is qualified to be initiated according to the *pāñcarātrika* process. However, according to Vedic principles, only a *brāhmaṇa* who is fully engaged in his occupational duties can be initiated. *Śūdras* and women are not admitted to a *vaidika* initiation. Unless one is fit according to the estimation of the spiritual master, one cannot accept a mantra from the *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* or the *vaidika-vidhi*. When one is fit to accept the *mantra*, one is initiated by the *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* or the *vaidika-vidhi*.

The above quote gives us indication from Śrīla Prabhupāda himself as to his possible motives and rationale—the women were "eager to chant the *dīkṣā-mantras*"—perhaps evidenced by their mood that Śrīla Prabhupāda noticed. They were "fit according to the estimation of the spiritual master" and thus given the seven *mantras* at brahminical *dīkṣā*. In any case, to suggest that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the *dīkṣā-mantras* to women in Boston because he felt pressured by them to do so is highly presumptuous. What matters is that he gave these *mantras* to them at that time, and then he continued with this policy in subsequent initiations. We have no evidence that he ever indicated that at some time in the future the giving of the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* to women should be stopped.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gave *gāyatrī mantras*, including the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, to disciples regardless of the occupation they had for their livelihood, regardless of their *āśrama* or marital status, and regardless of their gender. For example, he wanted his brahminically-initiated householder disciple Gopāla Kṛṣṇa dāsa (now Mahārāja and a member of the GBC) to keep his job at an advertising agency. As mentioned later in this paper, Śrīla Prabhupāda fully accepted his brahminically initiated women as *brāhmaṇas*. He wanted them to lecture, to worship the Deities, and to cook in temple kitchens. He had Yamunā Devī dāsī install Deities in India. He allowed them to perform fire *yajñas*:

"I remembered Rāmeśvara coming into the art room just after seeing Prabhupāda in Hawaii a year earlier. He told me that some of the *sannyāsīs* there tried to convince Prabhupāda to stop me from giving classes because I was a woman; they insisted that only they should be giving classes.

According to Rāmeśvara, Prabhupāda disagreed. He told them, "your position as a *sannyāsī* is a material consideration. The qualification for preaching is beyond these things."

I remembered when Prabhupāda gave brahminical initiation to Śāradīya two days before he performed her marriage ceremony. Her husband did not receive brahminical initiation until two years later, at which time Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to Vaikuṇṭhanātha (April 4, 1971), "I am enclosing herewith your sacred thread, duly chanted on by me.

"Ask your wife to chant this *mantra* and you hear it and if possible hold a fire ceremony as you have seen during your marriage and get this sacred thread on your body. Śāradīya, or any twice-initiated devotee, may perform the ceremony."

(*The Art of Spiritual Life, A Memoir by Jadurāṇī dasi*, Page 496)

Second-initiated devotees who had outside employment during Śrīla Prabhupāda's manifest presence

Śrīla Prabhupāda specifically encouraged Gopāl Kṛṣṇa dāsa (now Gopāl Kṛṣṇa Goswāmī) to continue with his work, saying that his activity was on the transcendental plane (27th April, 1974):

"There is no question of a devotee becoming a *śūdra* if he does certain work. No, a devotee is never a *śūdra*. He is transcendental. Because their activity is done in transcendental loving service unto the Lord, it is all on the transcendental plane, *Brahma bhūyāya kalpate*. [*Bhagavad-gītā* 14.26] You should not quit your present job, it is good service to Kṛṣṇa. Although you may be working hard, you are always working for Kṛṣṇa; so do not be confused about your position and never forget Kṛṣṇa in any circumstances."

Śrīla Prabhupāda's assertions that his actions were based on *śāstra*

Śrīla Prabhupāda made a specific choice to put women on the altar; he could have done otherwise. Śrīla Prabhupāda consistently stated that his policies in regard to giving initiations, designating his disciples as *brāhmaṇas*, and engaging his disciples in traditional brahminical service was in accord with eternal śāstric principles rather than a temporary adjustment. For example, he writes in his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 4.8.54:

> *om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya* is known as the *dvādaśākṣara-mantra*. This *mantra* is chanted by Vaiṣṇava devotees, and it begins with *praṇava*, or *oṁkāra*. There is an injunction that those who are not *brāhmaṇas* cannot pronounce the *praṇava* mantra. But Dhruva Mahārāja was born a *kṣatriya*. He at once admitted before Nārada Muni that as a *kṣatriya* he was unable to accept Nārada's instruction of renunciation and mental equilibrium, which are the concern of a *brāhmaṇa*. Still, although not a *brāhmaṇa* but a *kṣatriya*, Dhruva was allowed, on the authority of Nārada, to pronounce the *praṇava oṁkāra*. This is very significant. Especially in India, the caste *brāhmaṇas* object greatly when persons from other castes, who are not born in *brāhmaṇa* families, recite this *praṇava mantra*. But here is tacit proof that if a person accepts the Vaiṣṇava *mantra* or Vaiṣṇava way of worshiping the Deity, he is allowed to chant the *praṇava mantra*. In *Bhagavad-gītā* the Lord personally accepts that anyone, even one of a low species, can be elevated to the highest position and go back home, back to Godhead, simply if he worships properly.

In the following conversation, Śrīla Prabhupāda specifically addresses initiating women (Room Conversation with a Sanskrit Professor — August 13, 1973, Paris):

> Prabhupāda: Therefore, by birth a *brāhmaṇa* is not made. By character.
>
> Professor: Yes, I agree with that. And what about girls? Do you initiate girls? Or not?
>
> Prabhupāda: Eh?
>
> Professor: Do you initiate girls?
>
> Prabhupāda: Oh, yes. So many girls. *Striyo śūdrās tathā vaiśyās te 'pi yānti parāṁ gatim.*

Professor: That's...

Prabhupāda: [aside:] Find out this verse, *māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya*. Give him, Paṇḍita Mahāśaya.

māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya
ye 'pi syuḥ pāpa-yonayaḥ
striyo vaiśyās tathā śūdrās
te 'pi yānti parāṁ gatim

[Bhagavad-gītā. 9.32]

Professor: Just like Gārgī and... Yes.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Gārgī. *Etad viditvā yaḥ prayāti sa brāhmaṇaḥ* [*Gargopaniṣad*; cf. also *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.8.10].

In that same conversation, Śrīla Prabhupāda equates his *dīkṣā* program with *upanayanam*. As an aside, his assertion would indicate that in order to establish *varṇāśrama* in ISKCON there is no need to give only the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* to young devotees separate from the regular initiation system Śrīla Prabhupāda established[31]:

Professor: I see. But to get the initiation, you have to be how many years old?

Prabhupāda: At least ten years.

Professor: Ten years.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Ten to twelve years. That is the Vedic system. Twelve years old, he can be initiated.

Professor: Yes, yes. It is the same as the *upanayana*.

Prabhupāda: Yes. *Upa* means "near," and *nayanam*, "to bring." *Upanayana-saṁskāra*.

[31] As noted in the Conclusions section of this paper, one cannot receive the same *mantra* twice from two different gurus. And, by definition, the person who gives *upanayana* is a *dīkṣā-guru*. Therefore, the institution of a separate *upanayana* in official ISKCON and ISKCON-related projects and centers creates a conflict both with the current guru authorization system and with the śāstric prohibition against having two *dīkṣā-gurus* for the same *mantra*(s).

Śrīla Prabhupāda makes this important point in this Wedding Lecture on November 17, 1971, in New Delhi:

> So in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, everything is being performed according to the scriptural injunction. It is not that we are manufacturing something.

Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes *Bhagavad-gītā* 16.23 and *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 7.11.35 and explains that he initiates disciples according to qualification. He then says:

> So this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, the initiation ceremony, the marriage ceremony, the sacred thread ceremony, whatever we observe, they are strictly according to the *śāstra*. That is our point.

We should not, therefore, take it that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave *dīkṣā* in general, and the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* in particular, under some sort of social or cultural pressure, as he consistently asserts that his actions in giving initiations are śāstric. Certainly, there are other śāstric statements that oppose what Śrīla Prabhupāda did. But, as stated in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.20.17:

nṛ-deham ādyaṁ su-labhaṁ su-durlabhaṁ
plavaṁ su-kalpaṁ guru-karṇadhāram
mayānukūlena nabhasvateritaṁ
pumān bhavābdhiṁ na taret sa ātma-hā

Translation: When one wants to cross a large ocean, one requires a strong boat. It is said that this human form of life is a good boat by which one can cross the ocean of nescience. In the human form of life one can obtain the guidance of a good navigator, the spiritual master. One also gets a favorable wind by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, and that wind is the instructions of Kṛṣṇa. The human body is the boat, the instructions of Lord Kṛṣṇa are the favorable winds, and the spiritual master is the navigator. The spiritual master knows well how to adjust the sails to catch the winds favorably and steer the boat to its destination. If, however, one does not take advantage of this opportunity, one wastes the human form of life. Wasting time and life in this way is the same as committing suicide.

It is the responsibility of the guru to choose which "winds" of the Vedic injunctions will help the boats of his disciples to cross over the ocean of material life. Therefore, Śrīla Prabhupāda, being an *ācārya*, favored for his ISKCON society the śāstric statements about the universal application of *bhakti* over those with various restrictions.

ISKCON leaders and Śrīla Prabhupāda engaging women in brahminical *sevā*

Śrīla Prabhupāda consistently engaged women in the same brahminical services as men. He asked them to give discourses on *śāstra* both to devotees and the public (Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī, Himāvatī Devī dāsī, Yamunā Devī dāsī, Mālati Devī dāsī), to install Deities even in India (Yamunā Devī dāsī), to cook in temple kitchens (Yamunā Devī dāsī even in India, as well as many other women around the world), to serve the Deities on temple altars including being the head pujārī (Nārāyaṇī Devī dāsī in India, Yamunā Devī dāsī, Śilāvatī Devī dāsī, and many others), and to perform fire *yajñas* (Śāradīya Devī dāsī). As quoted elsewhere in this paper, this letter exemplifies Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal mood and policy (Letter to Vaikunthanatha & Śāradīya on 4 April, 1971 from Bombay):

> Ask your wife to chant this *mantra* and you hear it and if possible hold a fire ceremony as you have seen during your marriage and get this sacred thread on your body. Śāradīya [name of his wife], or any twice-initiated devotee, may perform the ceremony.

This letter to Uttamaśloka dāsa, on August 13, 1974 from Vṛnḍāvana, was typical of Śrila Prabhupāda's instruction:

> Regarding women worshipping the Deity, in the *Bhagavad-gītā* it is stated: *striyo vaiśyas tathā śūdras, te 'pi yānti parāṁ gatim*.[*Bhagavad-gītā* 9.32] The idea is that everyone who is properly initiated and following the rules and regulations can worship the Deity.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda turned over the management of his society to his young disciples, all these services except temple cooking were forbidden to women in many or most places, de facto, de jure, or both. When these prohibitions were brought to Śrīla Prabhupāda's attention, he consistently asserted that the brahminically initiated women were equally qualified with their godbrothers in performing brahminical service. The following letter to Ekāyanī on December 3rd, 1972 from Bombay is one clear example:

> I have noted the contents with great concern. I do not know why these things inventions are going on. That is our only business, to invent something new programme? We have already got our Vaiṣṇava standard. That is sufficient for Madhvācārya, Rāmānujācārya, it was sufficient for Lord Caitanya, six Gosvāmīs, for Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, for my Guru Mahārāja Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, for me, for all big big saints and *ācāryas* in our line—why it shall be inadequate for my disciples so they must manufacture something? That is not possible. Who

> has introduced these things, that women cannot have chanting *japa* in the temple, they cannot perform the *āratī* and so many things? If they become agitated, then let the *brahmacārīs* go to the forest, I have never introduced these things.

Statements such as those in the above letter were sometimes disregarded. Even at the time of this writing, brahminically-initiated women in various parts of the world rarely, if ever, are allowed to do the same brahminical service in temples as the men are. It is understandable that, because of not seeing brahminically-initiated women serve as *brāhmaṇas* in ISKCON, many devotees, including leaders, may come to see these women as less than *brāhmaṇas* in fact. Placing further restrictions on them—such as denying them the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*—are thus not entirely illogical from such a perspective.

Often, women are denied or excluded from brahminical service on the basis of Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements about women's material limitations. Yet, such decisions do not take into consideration Śrīla Prabhupāda's frequent statements and instructions about the potency of *bhakti*, as he says in this room conversation on December 27, 1976 in Bombay: "Women, it is only possible in our Vaiṣṇava *bhakti-yoga*—women and men can be given equal right. There is no other system."

Sometimes the exclusion of women stems from *śāstra* and Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements directing avoidance of the association of women. Yet, Śrīla Prabhupāda makes the point, as on this morning walk on March 27, 1974 in Bombay, that

: "...they avoid that trap, they avoid association of women. But these women are not ordinary women. They are preachers. They are preachers. They are Vaiṣṇava. By their association, one becomes a Vaiṣṇava."

Ancient Vedic Evidence on Women and Brahma-*gāyatrī*

As discussed above, the Brahma-*gāyatrī* has been handed down as an initiation *mantra* in the Sārasvata-Gauḍīya *paramparā*. In the organization he founded, ISKCON, Śrīla Prabhupāda included the Brahma-*gāyatrī* as part of second initiation for everyone—both men and women, and regardless of one's birth or classification of qualities and work (*varṇa*). Before we begin to consider whether this Brahma-*gāyatrī dīkṣā* is exclusively a practice of *varṇāśrama* or is also a practice of *bhakti*, we set the stage with a little bit of background about its previous role in *varṇāśrama* itself. Śrīla Prabhupāda explained his practices in terms of *śāstra*. And, he engaged

women in all brahminical activities. We might wonder whether there is any precedent in the Vedic literature or tradition for giving the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to women. We have already quoted evidence from *śāstra* about not giving *gāyatrī* to women. Śrīla Prabhupāda, as great *ācārya*, is possibly unique in our Gauḍīya *sampradāya* in giving the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to women, although women do receive *gāyatrī dīkṣā* mantras in all branches of the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava-*sampradāya*. At the same time, there is ample evidence that in very ancient times at least, women of the higher three *varṇas* did receive the *Gāyatrī.*

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

purā-kalpe tu nārīṇāṁ mauñjī-bandhanam-iṣyate
adhyāpanaṁ ca vedānāṁ sāvitrī vacanaṁ tathā

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

(As quoted in the *Vīramitrodaya*, *Samskāra Prakāśa* (pp 402,403,404,405) of Mahāmahopādhyāya Paṇḍita Mitra Miśra, Edited by P.N. Sharma, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, Printed by Jai Kṛṣṇa Das Gupta, Vidya Vilas Press, Benares. 1919.)

Śrī Mādhavācārya in his commentary to *Parāśara Smṛti* (Hārita XXI) says: "If the *saṁskāra* of *upanayana* was not performed in the case of girl, women would be reduced to the status of *śūdras*; how then could *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas* be born of them?"

In the *Ṛg Veda Saṁhitā* many *mantras* were authored by women, referred to as *ṛṣikās*. Here is a partial list of the verse numbers of the Vedic *mantras* and the women sages who manifested them: 4.18: Aditi; 10.72: Aditi Dākṣāyaṇī; 8.91: Apālā Ātreyī; 10.107: Dakṣinā Prājāpatyā; 10.39 and 10.40: Ghoṣā Kākṣīvatī; 10.134: Godhā; 10.86: Indrāṇī; 10.153: Indramātaraḥ; 10.142: Jaritā Śārṅgā; 10.109: Juhū Brahmajāyā; 1.171: Lopāmudrā; 10.127: Rātri Bhāradvājī; 1.126: Romaśā; 10.159: Śacī Paulomī; 10.108: Saramā Devaśuni; 10.189: Sārparājñī; 8.1: Śaśvatī Āṅgirasī; 9.86: Sikatā Nivāvarī; 9.104: Śikhaṇḍinī Kāśyapī; 10.151: Śraddhā Kāmāyanī; 8.71: Sudīti Āṅgirasī; 10.85: Sūryā Sāvitrī; 10.85: Urvaśī; 10.125: Vāk Āmbhṛṇī; 10.28: Vasukrapatnī; 5.28: Viśvavārā Ātreyī; 10.154: Yamī; 10.10: Yamī Vaivasvatī.

In the *Bṛhad-devatā* (2.82) of Śaunaka Ṛṣi, the names of no less than twenty-six women who have contributed hymns to the Vedas are listed. This means that they have composed, practiced, taught, and initiated others in these hymns, for only the creator of a hymn or those coming in the creator's disciplic succession can initiate others. Many of these hymns can still be found today in the *Vedas*. (*The Bṛhad-devatā attributed to Śaunaka*, Arthur Anthony Macdonell, Published by Harvard University. 1904.)

Śrīmad-bhāgavatam 4.1.64 is conclusive proof of Vedic educated girls (*brahmavādinīs*) since the verse names two of them (*brahmavādinyau*). Śrīla Prabhupāda's translation is as follows: "Svadhā, who was offered to the Pitās, begot two daughters named Vayunā and Dhāriṇī, both of whom were impersonalists and were expert in transcendental and Vedic knowledge."

Madhvācārya's inclusion of ladies into Vedic education shows that such was accepted in his time.

> "It seems, formerly wives of Sāmavedic priests were entrusted with the sweet singing of difficult *Sāma*-chants; afterwards this task was transferred to the male priests or *Udgātṛs*. 'These *Udgātṛs* actually perform the duties of their wives (in singing *Sāma*-chants)', says S.B. [*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*] 14-3-1-35.[33]
>
> [33]. '*Patnīkarmaiva ete atra kurvanti yadudgātāraḥ*'."

Jogiraj Basu, *India of the Age of the Brāhmaṇas*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1969, p. 50

> "Yama, the author of *Yama-smṛti* says—'The maidens were entitled to the investiture with the holy thread or *Upanayana saṁskāra* in the days of yore; they studied the *Vedas* and uttered the *Sāvitrī mantra*.[5] Another author of *Smṛtiśāstra*, Hārita also records this self same *śloka* with the only variation of '*Purā Kalpe tu nāriṇām*' in place of '*Kumāriṇām'*. He makes the following observation also:—There are two kinds of women, viz. *Brahmavādinis* and *Sadyovadhūs*. Amongst these the *Brahmavādinis* were entitled to *upanayana*; they tended the holy fire, studied the *Vedas* and begged alms in their own homes. The other type, viz, *Sadyovadhūs* were given away in marriage after a brisk ceremony of investiture with the holy thread.[6]
>
> ***"[6] 'Dvividhā vai striyo brahmavādinyaḥ sadyovadhvaśca. Tatra brahmavādinīnāmupanayanani agnīndhanaṁ vedādhyayanaṁ svagṛhe bhīkṣācaryā ca; sadyovadhūnāṁ tūpaṣite vivāhe kathañcit upanayanaṁ kṛtvā vivāhaś kūryaḥ'."***

Jogiraj Basu, *India of the Age of the Brāhmaṇas*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1969, p. 214

A woman can be a *brāhmaṇa* as mentioned in *Ṛg-veda* (8.33.19) as follows: *strī hi brahmā babhūvitha*. The *Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa* (5.6.8) advises that wives of the priests have to chant the *Sāma Veda* along with a *vīṇā* when a *yajña* is being conducted. *Śukla Yajur Veda*, *Mādhvandina Saṁhitā*, Hymn 36.24 *taccakṣur-deva hitam*..., is to be chanted only by a woman.

In addition to evidence in the *Vedas* themselves, Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* 5.14.49 says that Sītā Devī performed *sandhyā vandanam*, a rite that includes the chanting of the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*. In 2.20.15 we learn that Kausalya was performing the *agnihotra* (fire sacrifice).

As Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in this lecture on *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā* 20.110-111 on November 17, 1975 in Bombay:

> All of them are on the platform of animal conscious. This is the modern civilization. India was never meant for that. *Paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ*. This high culture we have lost now. *Paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ*. They never distin... *Vidyā-vinaya-sampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini, śuni caiva śva-pāke*... [*Bhagavad-gītā*. 5.18]. Because there was no bodily concept of life. This is India's prerogative. But now we are also developing the bodily concept of life and becoming one of the animals.

Summary and Conclusion of Part Three

Looking at the understanding of *dīkṣā* in our *paramparā* starting with Bhaktivinoda, we find that he stresses how *dīkṣā mantras* enable initiates to easily experience the nectar of Harināma and bring great happiness. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī included the Brahma-*gāyatrī* in *dīkṣā*, at least for his male disciples, as a way of demonstrating that Vaiṣṇavas are equal to, or superior to, *brāhmaṇas*, in response to the *jāti-gosāñi brāhmaṇas* who objected to non-caste *brāhmaṇas* performing priestly duties. Considering that in Kali-yuga considerations of birth and heredity, and even occupation, were unsuitable to determine one's eligibility for *dīkṣā*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta gave *dīkṣā* including *upanayanam*, as part of transcendent *bhakti* and *daiva varṇāśrama*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda awarded the *gāyatrī mantras*—including the Brahma-*gāyatrī*—to all his disciples who had demonstrated sincere following of his basic program, such as a daily minimum of sixteen rounds of the Hare Krishna *mantra,* for a year. He first gave *gāyatrī* to Kirtanānanda and Acyutānanda in India, and then to some men in Boston, in 1968. The following day he gave *gāyatrī dīkṣā* to three women—Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī, Govinda dāsī, and Annapūrṇa Devī dāsī, and a few days later to a group of devotees who had traveled there. Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī and Govinda dāsī each said that they were upset for various reasons the day before their initiation. They report being upset because of the men pushing them to the back of the room and because of Śrīla Prabhupāda giving initiation when he was in poor health. Both of them, as well as Satsvarūpa Mahārāja, attest that no one spoke to Śrīla Prabhupāda about these concerns, and no woman asked Śrīla Prabhupāda for initiation into the *gāyatrī mantra*. When Śrīla Prabhupāda gave second initiation to the ladies, he spoke about the social

position of women. He also spoke about the transcendent nature of *bhakti* and that his giving of the *gāyatrī mantras* to the women was in accord with *śāstra*. Śrīla Prabhupāda also gave *gāyatrī dīkṣā* to men who had regular employment in a variety of work. He consistently engaged all his second-initiated disciples in full brahminical services regardless of gender or occupation—Deity worship, *yajñas*, giving śāstric lectures, and so forth. Specifically regarding women, in ancient Vedic times women also received *dīkṣā* in the Brahma-*gāyatrī* and even the sacred thread, thus establishing a basis in tradition and *śāstra* for Śrīla Prabhupāda's practices.

Both Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda include the Brahma-*gāyatrī* as part of *dīkṣā* as part of a deep philosophical and śāstric based stance on the position of Vaiṣṇavas and *brāhmaṇas*. Its inclusion is thus an important aspect of how they defined *dīkṣā* for their followers.

Part Four: Principles and Details

Note: The topic of Part Four could easily span many books

Hermeneutic Overview of Part Four

1. ***viṣaya*** – topic: Principles of *varṇāśrama* and *bhakti* remain as they are throughout time, and details can, and in many places must, be changed.
2. ***saṁśaya*** – doubt: Is initiation into Brahma-*gāyatrī* a principle or a detail?
3. ***pūrvapakṣa*** - one viewpoint: initiation into Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya mantras* such as the Gopāla *mantra* and the Kāma-*gāyatrī* are sufficient, and initiation into the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* is only for males who engage in brahminical work as a means of livelihood, as described in *śāstra* as part of *varṇāśrama dharma*
4. ***uttara-pakṣa*** – another viewpoint: while the Gopāla *mantra* is sufficient to have *dīkṣā* in the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* in general, receiving all the *mantras* Śrīla Prabhupāda gave solidifies one's position in his branch of the *sampradāya* and unifies ISKCON
5. ***nirṇayaḥ*** – deciding in favor of a side: for the specific purpose of worshipping the Lord within the sun as specified in the Eleventh Canto of the Bhāgavatam, *bhakti* is a more important consideration than *varṇāśrama* regarding initiation into the Brahma-*gāyatrī*
6. ***siddhānta***– conclusion: Initiation into the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* is a detail in terms of the practices in various *sampradāyas*, or branches of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*. In most branches of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* we were able to investigate, the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is

not included in *dīkṣā* for anyone, although in Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 7.45 he indicates that it is given in some branches. Śrīla Prabhupāda's program of *dīkṣā* as he gave it in regard to a disciple's *adhikāra*, vows, and the *mantras* a guru gives, is a fixed practice of ISKCON that should be maintained, due to the 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

Varṇāśrama: Principles and Details

ISKCON members know well that Śrīla Prabhupāda often wrote and spoke about the importance of *varṇāśrama*. It should be emphasized, however, that it is the principles he wanted to establish. It is not possible—or even desirable—to try and establish details of *varṇāśrama* at the present time. In any case, such details change according to time, place, and circumstances. Most importantly, making an adjustment towards details of *varṇāśrama* can be problematic, because doing so can miss the bigger vision of *daivi-varṇāśrama*, which has as its leading function that of supporting *bhakti*, supporting pure devotional service. Regarding the importance of the principle, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains as follows in his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 4.21.33:

> As stated in the Eighteenth Chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā*, *sva-karmaṇā tam abhyarcya*: one has to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead by one's occupational duties. This necessitates accepting the principle of four *varṇas* and four *āśramas*.

While we accept the principles, many of the details of *varṇa* and *āśrama* are not applicable, or even possible, at any given time and place. The following is one example of the many places in which Śrīla Prabhupāda makes this point. This is from his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.1.11:

> *Ātmā*, or self, is distinguished from matter and material elements. It is spiritual in constitution, and thus it is never satisfied by any amount of material planning. All scriptures and spiritual instructions are meant for the satisfaction of this self, or *ātmā*. There are many varieties of approaches which are recommended for different types of living beings in different times and at different places. Consequently, the numbers of revealed scriptures are innumerable. There are different methods and prescribed duties recommended in these various scriptures. Taking into consideration the fallen condition of the people in general in this age of Kali, the sages of Naimiṣāraṇya suggested that Śrī Sūta Gosvāmī relate the essence of all such scriptures because in this age it is

> not possible for the fallen souls to understand and undergo all the lessons of all these various scriptures in a *varṇa* and *āśrama* system.
>
> The *varṇa* and *āśrama* society was considered to be the best institution for lifting the human being to the spiritual platform, but due to Kali-yuga it is not possible to execute the rules and regulations of these institutions.

The above quote is also a caution against finding quotes in various scriptures to support specific rules and regulations that apply to *varṇāśrama*, but not to *bhakti*. Such should be avoided. It is very easy to think of many details of *varṇāśrama* that are not applicable at present and could even be harmful to practitioners of *bhakti*. Here is one example from Kṛṣṇa Book, Chapter 61:

> Hearing this kind of pinching talk by Rukmī and hearing the loud laughter of all the other princes present there, Lord Balarāma became as agitated as burning cinders. He immediately took His club in His hand and, without further talk, struck Rukmī on the head. From that one blow, Rukmī fell down immediately and was dead and gone. Thus Rukmī was killed by Balarāma on that auspicious occasion of Aniruddha's marriage. These things are not very uncommon in *kṣatriya* society.

Certainly, at the present time we would not want to have a society where killing of relatives (or competitor suitors) became commonplace among members of government at weddings! As a general rule, we can heartily embrace principles of *varṇāśrama*, and look with great caution upon any details.

Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī confirms in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.2.200) that devotees may apply some of the rules and regulations of *varṇāśrama-dharma*, but only if they are conducive for pure devotion:

laukikī vaidikī vāpi yā kriyā kriyate mune
hari-sevānukūlaiva sa kāryā bhaktim icchatā

Translation: One should perform only those activities—either worldly or prescribed by Vedic rules and regulations—which are favorable for the cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

By way of illustration, some principles of *varṇa dharma* in general are to link one's means of livelihood to one's nature, to be trained in the *dharma* of our occupation, to avoid work not our nature except for brief emergencies, to do honest work, to do work that provides real value to society, to offer all aspects of our work to the Lord (both the process and the result), to give in charity from the results of our work, to engage in regular *yajña* in addition to our livelihood, to

protect the purity of our area of *varṇa*, to protect the specific area from which we get our wealth (for example, if we draw wealth from cows, we protect cows; if we draw wealth from the citizens we protect the citizens; if we draw wealth from a trade we protect the integrity and craft of that trade; if we draw wealth from knowledge we protect the purity of that knowledge), to work without false ego, to work without a sense of proprietorship, to avoid lethargy or inaction, to compete within our area of work, and to cooperate with other areas of work.

Some principles of *āśrama dharma* in general are to choose our *āśrama* in accord with our psychophysical nature, for the majority of people to connect their *āśrama* with their age and natural biological processes, to aim towards detachment, to make gradual progress, to accept the facilities and austerities of one's own *āśrama* and not those of others, and to dedicate everything to the Lord at each stage.

Overall, even though we are devotees, we generally have to play some roles in our life, and when we do so, our work should be according to the particular dharma given in *śāstra* for the role we are playing. Doing so benefits both individuals and society as a whole. If we want principles for specific *varṇas* and *āśramas*, Śrīla Prabhupāda lists some in his purport to Bhagavad-gītā 16.1, such as purification of existence for *sannyāsīs*, charity for householders (note that in *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.5 Kṛṣṇa says that everyone should give in charity; however, for householders it's a regular continual practice), Vedic study for *brahmacārīs*, and austerity for *vānaprasthas*. *Tejas* is particularly a principle for *ksatriyas*, cleanliness for *vaiśyas*, not expecting honor particularly for *śūdras*, and simplicity for the *brāhmaṇas*. Kṛṣṇa lists *varṇa* principles in *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.42–44, and there are also lists in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.17.16–19. Lord Kṛṣṇa personally spoke both of these sets of lists, and they can certainly be applied at the present time.

In contrast, here are some details of *varṇāśrama* (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.17.22–24):

> The twice-born member of society achieves second birth through the sequence of purificatory ceremonies culminating in Gāyatrī initiation (*upanayanam*). Being summoned by the spiritual master, he should reside within the guru's *āśrama* and with a self-controlled mind carefully study the Vedic literature. The *brahmacārī* should regularly dress with a belt of straw and deerskin garments. He should wear matted hair, carry a rod and waterpot and be decorated with *akṣa* beads and a sacred thread. Carrying pure *kuśa* grass in his hand, he should never accept a luxurious or sensuous sitting place. He should not unnecessarily polish his teeth, nor should he bleach and iron his clothes. A *brahmacārī* should always remain silent while bathing, eating, attending sacrificial performances,

chanting *japa* or passing stool and urine. He should not cut his nails and hair, including the armpit and pubic hair.

There is no harm—and often much benefit—from teaching and practicing the principles of *varṇa* and *āśrama* at the present time. Again, an abundance of caution is in order when trying to practice details, however. ISKCON members need some intelligence and care to distinguish between *śāstra*, our *ācāryas*, and Śrīla Prabhupāda giving descriptions of details in other times and places, and prescribing details for ourselves.[32] A key guide is to observe how, specifically, Śrīla Prabhupāda applied *varṇa* and *āśrama* principles in his mission and to understand his mood and intent in doing so. As stated by Mahāprabhu (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 17.186):

tarko 'pratiṣṭhaḥ śrutayo vibhinnā
nāsāv ṛṣir yasya mataṁ na bhinnam
dharmasya tattvaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyāṁ
mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ

Translation: Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu continued, "'Dry arguments are inconclusive. A great personality whose opinion does not differ from others is not considered a great sage. Simply by studying the *Vedas*, which are variegated, one cannot come to the right path by which religious principles are understood. The solid truth of religious principles is hidden in the heart of an unadulterated, self-realized person. Consequently, as the *śāstras* confirm, one should accept whatever progressive path the *mahājanas* advocate.'"

Finally, we should keep in mind that details of *varṇāśrama* change from one time to another. As Lord Kṛṣṇa personally says (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.17.10–11): "In the beginning, in Satya-yuga, there is only one social class, called *haṁsa*, to which all human beings belong.....In Satya-yuga the undivided *Veda* is expressed by the syllable *om*."

From *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.17.14, it appears that not only the four *varṇas*, but also the four *āśramas*, were introduced in Treta-yuga. Such a conclusion correlates with the information Pāṇḍu gave Kunti in the *Mahābhārata* as to the moral basis for her conceiving children with demigods.[33] (Critical Edition of *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi-parva*, Ch. 113)

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[32] Though an extensive coverage of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper, the topic could be an area for future research work.

[33] Pāṇḍu said to Kunti, "Women formerly were not immured within houses and dependent on husbands and other relatives. They used to go about freely, enjoying themselves as best as they liked. O thou of excellent qualities, they did not then adhere to their husbands faithfully, and yet, O handsome one, they were not regarded sinful, for that was the sanctioned usage of the times. That very usage is followed to this day by birds and beasts without any (exhibition of) jealousy. That practice, sanctioned by precedent, is applauded by great *ṛṣis*. O thou of taper thighs,

Of course, there are appropriate and necessary changes in what constitutes *dharma* during much shorter periods of time than from *yuga* to *yuga*! We can think of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī who traveled in cars and met with political leaders, although Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu consistently refused to meet with the king of Purī or accept any external luxuries.

In other words, many specific details of *dharma* for the different *varṇas*, the *āśramas*, for men, and for women change over time. They are not eternal principles of even ordinary *dharma*, what to speak of transcendent *dharma*.

Bhakti practices: Principles and Details

In *Nectar of Devotion*, Chapter 6, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

> Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī proposes to mention only basic principles, not details. For example, a basic principle is that one has to accept a spiritual master. Exactly how one follows the instructions of his spiritual master is considered a detail. For example, if one is following the instruction of his spiritual master and that instruction is different from the instructions of another spiritual master, this is called detailed information. But the basic principle of acceptance of a spiritual master is good everywhere, although the details may be different.

Before moving to a focus on principles and details of *dīkṣā* in *bhakti*, we will briefly consider sun worship as a *vidhi* of *bhakti*, in terms of principles and details.

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.11.43-45, Kṛṣṇa gives Uddhava a list of persons and areas of worship. The part of the first of these verses that concerns us is as follows, and was quoted earlier in this paper regarding the sun as the Deity of the Brahma-*gāyatrī*:

sūrye tu vidyayā trayyā
haviṣāgnau yajeta mām

Translation: My dear Uddhava, one should worship Me within the sun by chanting selected Vedic *mantras* and by performing worship and offering obeisances.

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the practice is yet regarded with respect amongst the Northern Kurus. Indeed, that usage, so lenient to women, hath the sanction of antiquity. The present practice, however (of women's being confined to one husband for life) hath been established but lately." (Kishori Mohan Ganguli trans., numbered *Ādi Parva* Ch. 122)

One may say that we may ignore this instruction, giving the example that Rūpa Gosvāmī prescribes Gaṇeśa worship that we do not do in ISKCON. But Śrīla Prabhupāda directly instructed his disciples not to include Gaṇeśa worship in their *sādhana*. In this case, however, we have sun worship prescribed by the Lord Himself with the word *yajeta*, a *vidhi-liṅ* or injunction of the imperative mood.[34] As Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī writes in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 4.35: "the verb... in the imperative mood, tells us that this certainly must be done. Noncompliance would be abandonment of duty."

Furthermore, Śrīla Prabhupāda did, indeed, include sun worship by Vedic *mantras* for all his brahminically initiated disciples. For one who suggests that we could fulfill this *vidhi* in another way, Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī says in his commentary to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.11.43 that the worship of the sun should be done "*sūktaiḥ*" (through hymns). The sub-commentator Śrī Rādhāramaṇa Dāsa Gosvāmī further explains *sūktaiḥ* as *vaidika-vākyaiḥ* — "through Vedic sound." We do not have any tantric *mantras* for sun worship. Therefore, if the Brahma-gāyatrī is eliminated from *gāyatrī dīkṣā* for some groups of devotees in ISKCON, those devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's line cannot perform this *vidhi* that Śrīla Prabhupāda instituted. The principle of following the guru's directions would thus be violated, though other gurus in the Gaudiya *sampradāya* apply this *vidhi* differently.

We now turn our attention to the principle of *dīkṣā* and the details of the *adhikāra*, vows, and *mantras* that comprise what we are calling the *dīkṣā* "contract." That will be the focus for the rest of Part Four.

Śrīla Prabhupāda had a uniform initiation "contract," so to speak, with all his disciples. He gave everyone the same Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* and asked for a vow of a minimum of sixteen rounds. He asked each disciple to vow lifetime following of no intoxication, no illicit sex, no gambling, and no eating of meat, fish or eggs. He gave each and every second initiate the same group of seven *mantras*: the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, two *mantras* to guru, two *mantras* to Lord Caitanya, the eighteen-syllable Gopāla *mantra*, and the Kāma-*gāyatrī mantra*.

We may suggest that Śrīla Prabhupāda's uniform and consistent exchange between himself and disciples—what *mantras* he gave and what vows he asked for—is part of his empowerment and genius at creating a worldwide Kṛṣṇa conscious society on a truly international scale, regardless of local cultures, history, and so forth.

[34] We use the expression 'imperative mood' here in a non-technical sense. Although the *vidhi-liṅ* is generally translated in English as the optative mood, whereas the loṭ form is the imperative, the *vidhi-liṅ*'s context of prescription has imperative force. The general sense in the context of ritual prescription is, 'If you wish to accomplish x, then you **must** perform y'. This is the mood of the *vidhi-liṅ yajeta* used in the verse referred to here.

However, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava history and practice is generally not uniform in the same way. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura did not have all disciples take a vow of chanting a certain number of rounds as a universal minimum standard, for example (please see the section of the paper regarding various Gauḍīya lines). Our Śrīla Prabhupāda related to his servant Śrutakīrti dāsa how in *gṛhastha* life he had chanted sixteen rounds a day. Some disciples chanted a lower or higher minimum. Among the various followers in the line from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta, many *dīkṣā* gurus do not ask for vows of following the four regulative principles or of chanting a certain minimum number of rounds. Or, they may have various vows of a *japa* minimum for different disciples. Some well-known *dīkṣā*-disciples of our Śrīla Prabhupāda who have started their own organizations have adjusted the *mantras* and vows from what our Śrīla Prabhupāda gave. According to Bhaktivedānta Bhāgavata Mahārāja, Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja would sometimes give only the eighteen-syllable Gopāla *mantra* to children who had not yet received *dīkṣā* but wanted to engage in Deity worship. He did the same for some former ISKCON members who came to him for shelter and who had only received *harināma* initiation, and who had rejected their *harināma* guru; then later he would give them full *dīkṣā* with all *mantras*. From our research, it seems that the other gurus coming from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta did not give Brahma-*gāyatrī* to women, though they did give that *mantra* as part of *dīkṣā* to men regardless of birth or occupation.

If we go back hundreds of years, we find a variance in the *mantras* given in the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*. As mentioned, Śrīla Prabhupāda gave all brahminical initiated disciples an eighteen-syllable Gopāla *mantra*. As he writes in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 5.221:

> In his own planet, Lord Brahmā, with the inhabitants of that planet, worships the form of Lord Govinda, Kṛṣṇa, by the *mantra* of eighteen syllables, *klīṁ kṛṣṇāya govindāya gopī-jana-vallabhāya svāhā*. Those who are initiated by a bona fide spiritual master and who chant the Gāyatrī *mantra* three times a day know this *aṣṭādaśākṣara* (eighteen-syllable) *mantra*.

However, in *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta*, Sanātana Goswāmī writes of a ten-syllable Gopāla *mantra* (*Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* 2.1.36-37):

tatratya-devīṁ kāmākhyāṁ
śraddhayānu-dinaṁ bhajan
tasyāḥ sakāśāt tuṣṭāyāḥ
svapne mantraṁ daśākṣaram
lebhe madana-gopāla-
caraṇāmbhoja-daivatam
tad-dhyānādi-vidhānāḍhyaṁ
sākṣād iva mahā-nidhim

The relevant word-for-word translation is as follows: *mantram*—the *mantra*; *daśa-akṣaram*—of ten syllables; *lebhe*—he received; *madana-gopāla*—of Madana-gopāla; *caraṇa-ambhoja*—the lotus feet; *daivatam*—whose object of worship; *tat*—of that; *dhyāna-ādi*—for the meditation

> **Commentary:** The ten-syllable Gopāla-*mantra* is defined in esoteric terms in the book *Krama-dīpikā*, an old Vaiṣṇava *tantra* by Keśava Ācārya. Vedic and tantric *mantras* should be chanted only by qualified persons who have received them through proper initiation.

To explore other bona fide *gāyatrī mantras* used in our Gaudiaya *sampradāya*, we can turn to the work of Śrī Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī. "There are many disciples of Vakreśvara Paṇḍita in Orissa, and they are known as Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas although they are Oriyās. Among these disciples are Śrī Gopālaguru and his disciple Śrī Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī." (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 10.17 purport).

Śivarāma Swāmī writes about the book of Śrī Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī in *Śuddha-bhakti-cintāmaṇi*, Chapter 28:

> According to Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda, Caitanya Mahāprabhu instructed Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī to disseminate confidential knowledge of the path of spontaneous worship. [*Jaiva-dharma*, Chapter 39] Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī followed the Lord's instruction and made notes in his diary on the two aspects of such worship, the internal or esoteric (*antaḥ-panthā*) and the external or exoteric (*bahiḥ-panthā*). Vakreśvara Paṇḍita received the exoteric path, which was later recorded by Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī in a work called Śrī *Gaura-govindārcana-smaraṇa-paddhati*, and Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī received the esoteric path, which he recorded in writings such as *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali* and *Manaḥ-śikṣā*.

Śrī Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī's book, has, therefore, bona fide Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava mantras. For example, he gives this instruction in his book:

> The *guru-gāyatrī* is: *śrīm gurudevāya vidmahe gaura-priyāya dhīmahi tan no guruḥ pracodayāt*
>
> The meaning of the *guru-gāyatrī* is that although the guru is actually a direct form of Śrī Hari, he is to be meditated on as being a dear one of Śrī Gauracandra. May that Gurudeva engage us in the service of his lotus feet.

In another place in the same book he writes:

> He shall meditate on the mantra and Śrīman Mahāprabhu as such:
>
> *mantra*: *klīṁ gaurāya svāhā*
>
> *gāyatrī*: *klīṁ caitanyāya vidmahe viśvambharāya dhīmahi tan no gauraḥ pracodayāt*

Referencing the *Gautamīya-tantra*, he lists both the ten-syllable Gopāla mantra (*klīṁ gopī-jana-vallabhāya svāhā*) and the eighteen-syllable Gopāla *mantra* that our Śrīla Prabhupāda gave. He also lists *gāyatrī mantras* for each of the *pañca-tattva* and for Śrīmati Radharani. Yet we in ISKCON do not chant these *mantras*. Thus, specific *mantras* are a detail of *bhakti*, relative to the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura chanted 15 *gāyatrī mantras* that he received at *dīkṣā*, including ones for Anaṅga Mañjarī, Rūpa Mañjarī, Lalitā Devī, and Jāhnavā Devī.

According to some of his descendants and members of his spiritual family that know his standards through his biological family, these *mantras* have been passed down until the present day to both the men and women, coming through the Ṭhākura's sons and daughters, including Lalit Prasād, Rādhikā Prasād, and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, among others. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī gave all fifteen of these *mantras* to disciples before he took *sannyāsa*. After taking *sannyāsa* he gave his disciples, including *sannyāsīs*, the seven *mantras* that our Śrīla Prabhupāda gave. So, Bhakti Pradīpa Tīrtha Mahārāja, and whoever came to Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākur before his passing, got all the *mantras*. But the *brahmacārīs* and *sannyāsīs* in the Gauḍīya Maṭha got only seven *mantras*, in keeping with the principle of worshipping the *rāga* path from a distance till one gains *adhikāra* through *sādhana* in the *vidhi* path.

Those who received all fifteen *mantras* also passed down all those *mantras* to their disciples. This history is described by persons such as the daughter-in-law of Rādhikā Prasād, and in the book *Sarasvatī Jayaśrī* that Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākur personally edited and Kṛṣṇābhiṣeka dāsa translated in 2008, which remains awaiting publication by Praṇava dāsa.

During the nineteenth century, various *kāyasthas* (the second *jāti*, or division by birth, of the Bengali system) were involved in debates about whether they could participate in Vedic education. Some of them got the Brahma-*gāyatrī* mantra along with the sacred thread. In Midnapore, the followers of Shyamananda Pal started developing what scholars called "neo-

brahminism" which included wearing the sacred thread. (Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 182) Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, who appeared in the *kāyastha* lineage, did not wear the sacred thread, out of respect for the request of his *dīkṣā* guru Bipin Bihāri Goswāmī, and the social etiquette that existed at that time. However, many of his children, including Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and Lalit Prasād Ṭhākura, did wear it. They were both active in *kāyastha* society and wrote the two books *Brāhmaṇa O Vaiṣṇava* and *Brahma Kāyastha,* respectively, which spoke to the ongoing debates between *kāyasthas* and *smārta brāhmaṇas.*

At the same year as Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura began an annual Śrī Navadvīpa-dhāma *parikramā* under the guidance of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, he

> gave *dīkṣā* to Vinoda-bhari at the Yogapiṭha on Śrī Gaura-pūrnīmā evening after the completion of the *parikramā.* After the *dīkṣā* ceremony was over, Vinoda-bihārī went to his guru, and at his lotus feet, humbly requested the *guru-mantra.* Until then Śrīla Prabhupāda [Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura] had not given the *guru-mantra* to anyone. When Śrīla Prabhupāda heard Vinoda-bihārī's earnest request, he became silent [and] began to reflect. Seeing him silent, the *brahmacārī* again expressed his ardent desire: "Must a disciple approach some other guru to receive the *guru-mantra* and instructions on service to guru?" Hearing this, Śrīla Prabhupāda smiled, and with great affection gave Vinoda-bihārī the *guru-mantra*. After this, Śrīla Prabhupāda started to give the *guru-mantra* to others as well. (Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja, *Ācārya Kesarī Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī: His Life and Teachings*, Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, New Delhi, 2013, p. 29)

Lines coming from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī

Regarding other Gauḍīya gurus in the line from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, what is loosely referred to as "Gauḍīya Maṭh" in the present day is not a monolith. Practices cannot universally be assumed to be uniform among institutions or even among gurus within the same institution. However, from our inquiries so far to comply with the GBC's request to research within the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* as a whole, the following does appear to be uniform among the Sārasvata Gauḍīya gurus about whom we asked: At first initiation (*harināma*) Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* is given, not Brahma-*gāyatrī* (or *guru-gāyatrī*, Gaura-*gāyatrī*, etc.). At second initiation (which may be very shortly after first initiation, even the same day or a few days later), women do not receive Brahma-*gāyatrī.* Men do receive Brahma-*gāyatrī* at second initiation. This includes men working at salaried jobs such as mining engineer, software developer, etc. We did not find any cases of the new initiates speaking vows at either initiation.

They often were recommended for initiation by some senior Vaiṣṇava who would tell them about following the four regulative principles, chanting *japa*, and other practices, and inquire about their personal practices. They would be given instructions by the guru, individually or collectively or both, at the time of initiation. Śrī Gurumātā Jayasree Devī, to our knowledge the only female guru of a Gauḍīya Math temple, Guru Prapanna Ashram, Kolkata, does not give female disciples the Brahma-*gāyatrī*. In this regard: "Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* is not given separately to the women because they are themselves *gāyatrī swarūpinī*. Gāyatrī is inherently in them. So Gurumātā, following the instructions of her *gurudeva*, doesn't give Brahma-*gāyatrī*. *Brahma gāyatrī* is passed down to the disciples in male body by Gurumātā's godbrother or her appointed disciple." We note that there are other women in Bhaktisiddhānta's line who give *dīkṣā*, but are not leaders of any *maṭha*. One such lady *dīkṣā-guru*, a disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta's only European disciple, Sadānanda dāsa, did not give the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to her disciples. At least one of her disciples, Kalākaṇṭhī dāsī, personally received *harināma* and the Gopāla-*mantra*. Kalākaṇṭhi dāsī was interviewed for this paper. She wrote about Sadānanda dāsa and the Brahma-*gāyatrī* as follows:

> In a letter to Vāmanadāsa from 1954 he [Sadānanda] further explains the greater powers of *harināma* compared to the *pañcarātrika* method, comprising Gopāla-*mantra* and so forth (without mentioning Brahma-*gāyatrī*, unless it is to be included within "etc."):
>
> "I must have written to you earlier that the *pañcarātra mantra* leads to the realization, experience and participation in the *sevā* in a certain situation of the *līlā*, when the circularly progressing and increasing *līlā* comes to a resting point in the colorful changing roundelay; as under the shadow of the *kalpataru* [desire tree] in Vṛndāvan in the nightly *līlā* intermission, when all *gopīs* sit around Both in orderly circles, or in the *līlā* intermission at noon, when they do so on a huge lotus shaped swing. These [intermissions] are like water vortices – in which the current is stopped, as it were. 1) The *mantra* gives freedom from ignorance, the sickness of thirst and a clear understanding of the essence of Both and Their seva. 2) The *mahāmantra* "Hare Kṛṣṇa..." gives *bhāgavata prema*. In *rāgānuga-bhakti* both are combined: *mahāmantra* and *mantra-japa* of Gopāla-*mantra* together with *guru-gāyatrī*, Kāma-*gāyatrī*, Rādha-Kṛṣṇa-*gayātrī* etc. The latter at the times of *sandhyā*: at dawn, noon, dusk."
>
> Elsewhere, however, he explains the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, in line with Sāyaṇa's commentary on the *Ṛg Veda*:
>
> "*Bhargas* is the power of knowledge emanating from the Paramātmā, which cuts the knot of the heart (erroneous concept of the self) and makes the *upādhis* or

> covers shrouding the *ātmā* with their *vāsanās* and *saṁskāras* wither. The word *bhargas* comes from *bhrāj* or roasting, turning into ashes, and is already used in the Vedic language for heating grains, which thereby lose their ability to germinate and whose husks are roasted to ashes."
>
> Besides this, the only other reference to Brahma-*gāyatrī* in his archive is in his translation of *Caitanya-candrodaya-nāṭakam*:
>
> "It is not proper to wrestle with Him, the Prabhu, by force. Because what He Himself wants and thinks, he induces in the *citta* of His Own. The sun communicates its *tejas* [effulgence] to the *surya-kānta-maṇi* [star ruby]. But the *surya-kānta-maṇi* cannot get rid of its own heat." The seed of hope that we had planted in our hearts, has been burnt by the forest fire of our *dur-daiva* (miserable fate) (*bharjita*)." (*bhargo devasya dhīmahi*: the *bīja* (seed) of ignorance shall be burned, roasted. (Brahma-*gāyatrī*))
>
> Here he leads us to think of Caitanya as the spiritual Sun, as the effulgent form of Rasarāja-Mahābhāva He reveals to Rāya Rāmānanda – and the *bhakta* as the *surya-kānta-maṇi* (star ruby), in whose heart all ignorance and misconceptions are burnt to ashes in the presence of Him.[35]

We asked disciples of Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja, Śrīla Bhakti Pramoda Purī Mahārāj, Śrīla Bhakti Ballabha Tīrtha Mahārāj (disciple of Śrīla Bhakti Dayita Mādhava Mahārāja), and Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja (disciple of Śrīla Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Mahārāja). Other than disciples of Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja, these disciples did not have *yajñas* during their initiation.

If we examine Gauḍīya groups that previously had some affiliation with ISKCON, and perhaps also an affiliation with other Gauḍīya branches, we find quite a bit of variance. Tripurāri Swāmī does a fire *yajña*, and initiates make vows, but their vows of the amount of *harināma japa* are individual. He gives Brahma-*gāyatrī* to all his second-initiated disciples, men and women. According to Swāmī B.P. Padmanabha Mahārāja, the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is given to both men and women within Vrinda and Śrī Caitanya Saṅgha, two movements with their origin in ISKCON but, like Tripurari Swāmī's society, influenced also by the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda's godbrother Swāmī B.R. Śrīdhara Mahārāja. Siddhasvarūpānanda rarely, if ever, gives *gāyatrī mantras*. He gives only *harināma* initiation. He asks all disciples to vow to chant fifteen rounds daily "so they will not think they are better than ISKCON."

[35] We have altered some capitalization and spelling for consistency with this paper.

Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja would sometimes give just the Gopāla *mantra* (i.e., the eighteen-syllable *mantra*) to some children and youth (aged 9, 10, 13, etc.) without giving them full *dīkṣā*, so they could assist with Deity worship at home or a temple. Śrīpāda Daṇḍi Mahārāja did that, as well. Additionally, Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja gave some former ISKCON devotees who only had first initiation just the Gopāla *mantra* so they could worship the Deity. Those persons would all, presumably, take full *gāyatrī dīkṣā*, with all the *mantras*, later. Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja did not give the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to women. He included a fire *yajña* as part of the initiation. If for some practical reason a *yajña* could not be performed then, he would ask them to participate in the next *yajña* taking place at a festival or other occasion.

Various Gauḍīya lines other than from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī

We have included this section as part of the question as to whether the chanting of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is a principle or a detail of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practice and to comply with the GBC's request to research within the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* as a whole. The information here is descriptive of what various Gauḍīyas outside of the line of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta do. There is no evaluation or judgment of these practices implied or intended. Rather, these descriptions are presented with the utmost respect. We acknowledge our sources in the methodology section that lists the consultants for this paper and the areas of information they provided.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 7.45, following the purport of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta :

> There are many Vaiṣṇava families in Bengal whose members, although not actually born *brāhmaṇas*, act as *ācāryas* by initiating disciples and offering the sacred thread as enjoined in the Vaiṣṇava *tantras*. For example, in the families of Ṭhākura Raghunandana Ācārya, Ṭhākura Kṛṣṇadāsa, Navanī Hoḍa and Rasikānanda-deva (a disciple of Śyāmānanda Prabhu), the sacred thread ceremony is performed, as it is for the caste Gosvāmīs, and this system has continued for the past three to four hundred years. Accepting disciples born in *brāhmaṇa* families [in Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta's commentary, this sentence reads: Accepting disciples of all *vārṇas*, beginning with *brāhmaṇas*[36]], they are bona fide spiritual masters who have the facility to worship the *śālagrāma-śilā*, which is worshiped with the Deity. As of this writing, *śālagrāma-śilā* worship has not yet been introduced in our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, but soon it will be

[36] Bengali text from the *Anubhāṣya: ihārā adyāpi viprādi sakala varṇera dīkṣā-gurura kāryya o ṣālagrāmādira arccana kariñā āsitechhena.*

> introduced in all our temples as an essential function of *arcana-mārga* (Deity worship).

It is reasonable to assume that the offering of the sacred thread may have included the giving of the Brahma-*gāyatrī*. Further indication of the same is given by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta, who in his book Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava, page 96, wrote: "the *saṁskāra* of *brāhmaṇa* initiation by qualification was begun long ago and is still practiced today in the *sampradāya* of Śrī Śyāmānanda-deva, the branch of Śrī Nityānanda, the *sampradāya* of Śrī Kṛṣṇadāsa Navīna-hoḍa, and the branch of Gaura's follower Raghunandana."

According to Dr. Abhisek Bose,

> As far as I can recall, the descendants of Narahari and Raghunandana Ṭhākur also wear the *upavita*. They are called Sarkāra Ṭhākura and have *brāhmaṇa* disciples. In fact, whenever there is a 'Ṭhākura' added to the surname, we can guess non-*brāhmaṇa* descent. For example, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura.

Indeed, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura was the son of the *kāyastha* king Kṛṣṇānanda Datta, and had disciples from *brāhmaṇa* lineages, such as Gaṅgānārāyaṇa Chakravartī. (The surname Chakravartī belongs to a *brāhmaṇa* lineage.)

It has proved difficult to find information about *mantras* and initiations in Gauḍīya lines other than from Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. There are many Gauḍīya lines in the Vṛndāvana area, as well as in Bengal, Orissa, and Manipur. However, it was difficult to communicate with leaders, especially during a pandemic. We were not able to find information regarding the current members of the lines listed in the purport, above. Of those persons we were able to contact, it was expressed by some of these Vaiṣṇavas that there is hesitancy about revealing such things to ISKCON management as the information might be used for critical judgment. Finally, as expressed by one of the persons we interviewed, "this is the most confidential domain in any tradition and somehow I have not felt comfortable to enquire into that area or crossing the threshold [to learn about the practices of other lines]." We were able to research from very reliable contacts in the Vṛndāvana area. The research revealed that in the Nityānanda *parivara*, the *mantra* given at *dīkṣā* is the Gopāla *mantra*, though other *mantras* may be given as well. Sometimes the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* is given at the same time, and other times it is given first. Some branches give the Kāma-*gāyatrī* at the same time as the Gopāla *mantra*, and others give the Kāma-*gāyatrī* only to renunciates who will engage in intensive *līlā-smaranam*. Prabhupāda Nityagopāla Goswāmī of the Nityānanda *vaṁśa*, Navadvīpa, didn't know of any Gauḍīyas apart from those following Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī that give the Brahma-*gāyatrī* during *dīkṣā*. However, as indicated in the quote from Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's purport to *Caitanya*

Caritāmṛta Ādi 7.45 [37] given previously, such branches do exist. In the line from Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, they receive four *mantras* (most likely including the Gopāla *mantra*) but not the Brahma-*gāyatrī*. The ceremony is simple, without fire *yajña*. Kṛṣṇa Ksetra Swāmī noted that, in his experience, whenever the Rādhā Ramaṇa Goswāmīs have rituals they want performed for themselves—such as hair-cutting—they hire family priests who may be *smārtas*. In the *Gadādhara parivara*, in addition to the Gopāla *mantra* and Kama *gāyatrī*, they receive Guru and Gaura *mantras*, but these are different from what is given in ISKCON. In these and other Gauḍīya lines as represented in Vṛndāvana and Bengal, including those that originate in Manipur from Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, initiations are usually fairly private—maybe one or two people, without fire *yajña* and without vows, including vows of a certain amount of rounds of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*. If persons take such vows—whether for a certain period of time or lifetime—such is not done at the time of *dīkṣā*. Initiates are expected to display good behavior, and will receive personal instruction about their chanting, personal practices such as food, and worship. In many lineages, only those born in *brāhmaṇa* families chant the Brahma-*gāyatrī* mantra.

It is most significant that, regardless of differences in details, throughout the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava-*sampradāya* as a whole *dīkṣā* and *varṇa* have no relationship. When disciples receive *dīkṣā* into the *sampradāya mantras* of any particular branch, such *dīkṣā* does not indicate or change their *varṇa*. As quoted previously in this paper, Śrīla Prabhupāda makes the same point repeatedly, even though he included the Brahma-*gāyatrī* as part of *dīkṣā*.

Śrī Vaiṣṇavas

We have included this section as part of the question as to whether the chanting of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is a principle or a detail of Vaiṣṇava practice. The information here is descriptive of what non-Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas do. There is no evaluation or judgment of these practices implied or intended. Rather, these descriptions are presented with the utmost respect.

There are two main groups of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas in regard to the question of who is qualified to chant Vedic *mantras*. The Vādakalāi are very caste-conscious. They are the line of the Śrī *sampradāya* favoring the *śāstras* that discriminate by birth. Therefore, to avoid giving "*om namo nārāyaṇāya*", a Vedic *mantra*, from the *Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣada*, to their non-male-brahminical followers, they change "*om*" to "*um*", "*um namo nārāyanāya*" or sometimes simply "*namo nārāyanāya*". Or sometimes even "*namo nārāyaṇa*" because some people object to adding the dative case to "*Nārāyaṇa*," because it makes it sound like a *mantra*. So they consistently take

[37] As quoted by Śrīla Prabhupāda in his own purport to that verse.

the position that *śūdras* and women, what to speak of *mlecchas*, are not supposed to chant anything which is even remotely similar to a Vedic *mantra*.

The other group, the Tenkalāis, are consistent in a different way. They disregard the caste system altogether, based on a śāstric rationale. They say that *śāstra* says that everyone, no matter who, has to chant "*om namo nārāyaṇāya*" for salvation. In the original *śāstras*, in the Upaniṣads, there is no restriction about this. That comes later, in certain *dharma-śāstras*, specifically in the *Apastamba Dharmasūtra*. So the Tenkalāis say everyone should chant. They give everyone this *mantra* "*om namo nārāyaṇāya,*" and everyone chants.

They do follow *varṇāśrama*. However, they only follow those rules of *varṇāśrama* which do not contradict their Vaiṣṇavatā, the fundamental principles of Vaiṣṇavism.

Current Indian practice

In modern India it's become common to have women chanting *om*, the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, and other Vedic *mantras*. In many cases such recordings, or live performances, are broadcast in temples such as Tirumala. A famous Tamil *brāhmaṇa* woman chants the *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma*, and M.S. Subbalakshmi chants *om* as well as the *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma*. In North India women chant the Brahma-*gāyatrī* out loud in song. At the same time, there are groups that stick to certain traditions that only allow *brāhmaṇa*-born males to chant any Vedic *mantras* or *om* at all.

> Current Indian practices of chanting *gāyatrī* have been influenced by mid-nineteenth century reformists. In the 1860s, Brahmo Samājis and other 'reformists' (Hindu 'modernisers') debated the propriety of wearing the sacred thread. From the late nineteenth century, both Ārya Samāj members and followers of Swāmī Vivekānanda were encouraged to participate in public rites of incorporation which involved the investiture with the sacred thread and the imparting of the sacred formula known as the *gāyatrī mantra*.
>
> (Susan Bayly, 1999, *Caste, Society and Politics in India*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 172-173.)

Summary Regarding Other Practices

From the above examples, one can find variance in our Gauḍīya *sampradāya* in terms of specific *mantras* given, and specific vows taken. The principle is to accept *dīkṣā* and to follow the *dīkṣā* and *śikṣā* gurus, but their instructions may vary.

After all, as Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in *Nectar of Devotion* chapter 19: "There are many societies and associations of pure devotees, and if someone with just a little faith begins to associate with such societies, his advancement to pure devotional service is rapid."

If we go back many thousands or millions of years, and go beyond the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*, we find even more variance. For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 5.7.14 in relationship to the daily *sādhana* of Bharata Mahārāja:

> In the *Ṛg Veda*, the predominating Deity of the sun is worshiped by, this *mantra*: *dhyeyaḥ sadā savitṛ-maṇḍala-madhya-varti nārāyaṇaḥ sarasijāsana-sanniviṣṭaḥ.* Nārāyaṇa sits on His lotus flower within the sun. By reciting this *mantra*, every living entity should take shelter of Nārāyaṇa just as the sun rises. According to modern scientists, the material world rests on the sun's effulgence. Due to the sunshine, all planets are rotating and vegetables are growing. We also have information that the moonshine helps vegetables and herbs grow. Actually Nārāyaṇa within the sun is maintaining the entire universe; therefore Nārāyaṇa should be worshiped by the *gāyatrī mantra* or the *Ṛg mantra*.

The question before the Governing Body Commission is whether any variance is acceptable among ISKCON *dīkṣā* gurus in the "*dīkṣā* contract," or if ISKCON should continue the uniformity of what the guru and disciple gave that Śrīla Prabhupāda established. We will examine the points on each side in the conclusion.

The Current State of ISKCON Regarding *dīkṣā*

Presently in ISKCON we know of several instances of changes to the specifics of the exchange between guru and disciple before *harināma* initiation, at *harināma* initiation, or at second initiation. We will look at three categories of the *dīkṣā* "contract": the *adhikāra* or qualifications of the disciple, the vows the disciple makes, and the *mantras* the guru gives. In this paper, we are not considering the *adhikāra* of the guru in general, though we do discuss in our conclusions and recommendations about who is qualified to make changes in Śrīla Prabhupāda's *dīkṣā* "contract."

Adhikāra of the disciple

Please note that there is a large section of this paper about the qualification, or *adhikāra*, specifically to receive the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*. In that section we discuss various ways in which Śrīla Prabhupāda describes qualification. Here we focus on what is happening currently in ISKCON. It is perhaps obvious that many of these adjustments are done for very good and sound reasons. Such reasons can include weeding out insincere persons, ensuring that disciples have local guidance when the *dīkṣā* guru rarely visits and cannot keep up communication with all disciples, and so forth. This section is not about judgment or evaluation, but an objective report of what is happening.

Gāyatrī mantra before *harināma*

In regards to qualification for initiation, there are some leaders (and parents) who give the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to a young person as part of Deity worship. For example, a formal public ceremony of *upanayanam* for the students is held at the boys' *gurukula* in Māyāpura Dhāma. Although traditionally *upanayanam* is understood as *dīkṣā*, a leader there categorizes the giving of Brahma-*gāyatrī* to the students there as establishing a *śikṣā* guru relationship, and compares the devotee giving the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to a *vartma-pradarśaka* guru. He states that if, later, any of these boys' *dīkṣā* gurus give the Brahma-*gāyatrī* again that is acceptable, or if they respect that the boy already received the *mantra* at *gurukula*, that is also acceptable. We will look at this situation further in the conclusion. It should also be noted that the giving of Brahma-*gāyatrī* as part of *upanayanam* is part of the practice of individual families for whom such is a tradition in their lineage. Here we are referring to instituting *upanayanam* as a standard ceremony in an ISKCON-affiliated project.

Gender and occupation

A significant change in *adhikāra* is at least one instance of which we are aware of a guru in ISKCON who does not give brahminical initiation at all to people with a salaried job. He explained that he gave second initiation to someone he categorized as a "*śūdra*" but without the Brahma-*gāyatrī*. He said that he presently does not give the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to any women disciples.

Time to wait for initiation

Perhaps the most widespread change in *adhikāra* for *dīkṣā* in ISKCON is in regard to time to wait to get initiated. The following conversation with the GBC on March 27, 1975, in Māyāpura illustrates Śrīla Prabhupāda's general policy regarding waiting time:

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Is there any fixed amount of time that one has to be in the Society to get first, *hari-nāma*, initiated? Because I...

Prabhupāda: That we have already fixed, six months to one year.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Six months to one year. And for *brāhmaṇa* initiation?

Rūpānuga: One year, you said, after that.

Prabhupāda: No, within one year. That's all. If one, within one year, one does not become to the standard, then he's unfit.

.....

Rūpānuga: Śrīla Prabhupāda, after first initiation, one has to wait one year to get second initiation?

Prabhupāda: Six months.

We should note that Śrīla Prabhupāda himself sometimes changed his time standards for initiation for individual persons. He initiated a disciple in Russia after only three days, for example, and there were those to whom he gave *harināma* initiation after only a few weeks. There are a number of times when he gave *harināma* and *gāyatrī dīkṣā* at the same time or with less than a six-month interval. There were other disciples who, for various reasons, waited longer than six-months for *harināma* initiation, or had a longer than six-month interval between *harināma* and *gāyatrī dīkṣā*. However, as a general policy, Śrīla Prabhupāda followed the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* in recommending that guru and disciple test each other for one year.

Today in ISKCON various gurus have a wide disparity of general policies of a minimum time one must be following the process before getting *dīkṣā*. The GBC rules state that persons should spend six months worshipping Śrīla Prabhupāda as guru, and then another six months with a relationship with a particular guru before receiving *harināma*. Yet, some ISKCON *dīkṣā* gurus have a general policy of a minimum of five years or more. With some gurus, waiting for ten years to receive *harināma* is common. With other ISKCON gurus, they give *harināma* after a month or two of the devotee having a relationship with them. Because a recommendation from a temple president is required, the variety in rules of various temples also comes into play. So a guru who normally requires six months may have prospective disciples who need to get a recommendation from a temple president who requires two years. Again, we are discussing this change in regard to a general policy applied to all or the vast majority of candidates, not in regard to discretion applied to individuals.

Local mentors, local service, charts, etc.

A number of *dīkṣā* gurus have a general requirement for all *dīkṣā* candidates to have a mentor or counselor (arguably a type of *śikṣā*-guru) in addition to themselves as *dīkṣā* guru. Often this requirement can only be met by a geographically local mentor, and often one from an approved list from the local temple authorities. Sometimes this local mentor is a general requirement from a temple or zone, such that candidates for *dīkṣā* from a particular guru may only have this extra requirement depending on where they live.

Similarly, some temple presidents and some *dīkṣā* gurus may have a requirement of a certain amount of service done over time at a local ISKCON temple. There may also be certain requirements of *sādhana* charts, some of which further require, for example, that the daily *śāstra* class one attends must be the official one at the local temple. There are even temple presidents who charge a fee for writing a recommendation letter.

Courses and degrees

The GBC has recently added a disciples' course as a general requirement for *harināma* initiation. Additionally, many *dīkṣā* gurus require a Bhakti-śāstri degree for *gāyatrī dīkṣā*. We can note here that the idea of those who receive *gāyatrī dīkṣā* first having a Bhakti-śāstri degree came from Śrīla Prabhupāda himself, although he did not make it an absolute mandate. Those *dīkṣā* gurus, temple presidents, or zone who absolutely require a Bhakti-śāstri degree as *adhikāra* for *gāyatrī dīkṣā* are thus adding to Śrīla Prabhupāda's *dīkṣā* "contract."

The European Regional Governing Body, during the mid-2000s, voted a resolution prescribing that candidates for second initiation must first pass the Bhakti-śāstri examinations. This adds a condition to the eligibility required for receiving second initiation.[38] We should note that in 2003 the GBC accepted the paper of the Śāstric Advisory Council that passing an examination in *śāstra* could not be an absolute requirement to become a *dīkṣā* guru. Any *dīkṣā* guru, local ISKCON leader, or ISKCON zone who makes having *śāstra* degrees an absolute requirement to receive *dīkṣā* creates a contradiction. Obviously, one cannot give *dīkṣā* without also having received it. So, if degrees are required to receive *dīkṣā* then de facto they are required to be a *dīkṣā* guru.

It should be noted that at the time when Śrīla Prabhupāda referred to Bhakti-śāstri examinations as a condition for second initiation, the extensive Bhakti-śāstri courses as they are offered today were not yet available. Moreover, the Bhakti-śāstri examinations at the end of the 1970s were limited to an exam consisting of a series of questions. It was quite simple

[38] http://eurorgb.com/euro-rgb-meeting-radhadesh-october-7-2013

compared to today's more complex assessments consisting of short closed-book questions, open-book questions and essay writing. It should also be noted that while there are times when Śrīla Prabhupāda said he would require *śāstra* degrees, at other times he said it was voluntary. And he never, in fact, mandated them.

In 2019, the ISKCON Board of Examination discussed the different standards applied by *dīkṣā* gurus for second initiation. This is an issue for the board, since for enrollment in the Bhaktivedānta course, brahminical initiation is required.

SAC wishes to emphasize that the move towards thorough education of disciples, both through the disciples' course and *śāstra* degrees, is of great benefit for ISKCON members and ISKCON as a whole. What is of note here is that an absolute mandating of such education changes the part of Śrīla Prabhupāda's *dīkṣā* "contract" in the area of the disciples' qualification.

Overall: Variation in ISKCON leaders and ISKCON initiating gurus determining *adhikāra* for initiation

ISKCON leaders and ISKCON initiating gurus may differ widely in terms of determining eligibility for awarding disciples *harināma* (first) and brahminical (second) initiation.

For example, the European Regional Governing Body mandating Bhakti-śāstri examinations for second initiation, as noted in the previous section, creates an inequality with other parts of the world, where such a pre-condition is non-existing. It also, as noted above, conflicts with the general GBC requirement to be a *dīkṣā* guru.

Moreover, the motives and timelines for awarding second initiation are varying and are different for practically each individual ISKCON initiating guru. Some initiating gurus offer second initiation on request of temple authorities; this mainly because there is a need for *pujārīs* at the temple, and they barely consider whether the candidate has a moderate understanding of the scriptures. Other gurus will offer second initiation only when the disciple is well acquainted with the scriptures. Waiting times are hugely different from guru to guru, going from respecting the minimum term of one year, up to five years or more, after first initiation. In addition, there are several initiating gurus who are hesitant to offer second initiation to women, or to devotees who work under the supervision of an employer, or they only offer second initiation when in their estimation the disciple is highly qualified. Additionally, as discussed in this paper, the offering of the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* separately from the other *gāyatrī-mantras*, and/or given by other devotees than the *dīkṣā*-guru, is another issue. This variety of conditions, which were not introduced by Śrīla Prabhupāda, developed since the early 1980s.

The above situations mean, for example, that a guru who does not require a *śāstra* degree for second initiation, or who does not require disciples to have a local mentor, etc. may be forced to do so if a prospective disciple lives in a temple or zone that requires it. In general, the current ISKCON system grants local ISKCON leaders more authority than *dīkṣā*-gurus in the realm of determining the *adhikāra* of disciple.

Possible reason some gurus may be adjusting the *adhikāra* for initiation

The question of *adhikāras* of disciples brings up the whole question of the *adhikāra* of the spiritual master. In examining how many *dīkṣā* gurus in ISKCON have increased—sometimes significantly—the *adhikāra* for taking initiation, we can consider one possible reason. Some *dīkṣā* gurus might not be confident that they are an *uttama-adhikārī*. Therefore, they might conclude that they do not have the potency required to accept the karma of disciples and to inspire them to turn from their past material inclinations towards full dedication to the Lord in pure devotional service. So such gurus might want to put some additional restrictions on their disciples in order to give their disciples an opportunity to practice some more, listen to lectures, understand the philosophy, and acquire a genuine taste for spiritual practice. By such extra preparation, these gurus may feel that their disciples won't be a burden. As Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī writes in this regard in *Bhagavat-sandarbha* text 49:

kṛpālor asamarthasya duḥkhāyaiva kṛpālutā
samarthasya tu tasyaiva sukhāyaiva kṛpālutā

Translation: For one who shows compassion to others, but is not qualified to do so, his compassion will become the source of suffering [both for him and those whom he helps]. But for the qualified person his compassion will become the source of happiness [both for him and the others].

Therefore, we may consider the problems leading to such changes being introduced. Later in the paper we will discuss who is capable of understanding what changes are necessary according to the changing situation, and who is qualified to introduce them.

Mantras given or not given by the guru

It is perhaps obvious that when gurus in ISKCON make adjustments in *mantras* they often do so for good and sound reasons. Such reasons include wanting to institute *varṇāśrama* to please Śrīla Prabhupāda, or to assist disciples with worship and meditation. This section is not about judgment or evaluation, but an objective reporting of what is happening.

As mentioned in the section on *adhikāra*, at least one *dīkṣā* guru has subtracted the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra* from *dīkṣā* for certain initiates based on their occupation or their gender. We also know of one ISKCON *dīkṣā* guru who, for some time, added a *gāyatrī mantra* for Lord Nityānanda to what he gave his disciples, and of another one who added a *gāyatrī mantra* for Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Because generally disciples do not discuss what *mantras* they did or did not receive at *gāyatrī dīkṣā*, there may be other instances of which we are not aware where *dīkṣā* gurus in ISKCON are adding, subtracting, or changing the *mantras* they give at second initiation from what Śrīla Prabhupāda gave.

It may be that some ISKCON *dīkṣā* gurus prescribe the chanting of the *Pañca-tattva mantra* also, at the time of first initiation, although Śrīla Prabhupāda never did this.

Vows of the disciple

As noted in the section about other Gauḍīya lines and groups, the taking of vows at initiation is not generally part of our tradition. Śrīla Prabhupāda instituted the taking of lifetime vows at initiation for all of his disciples, and he limited those vows to five—the chanting of sixteen rounds and giving up of illicit sex, intoxication, gambling, and eating meat, fish, and eggs.

It is perhaps obvious that when gurus make adjustments in vows they often have good and sound reasons for doing so. Such reasons include dealing with the growth of groups that have splintered off from ISKCON and the convictions of individual gurus that disciples will benefit by additional or different vows. This section is not about judgment or evaluation, but an objective reporting of what is happening.

There is currently a GBC resolution to add loyalty to ISKCON and the GBC to the vows of *harināma* initiation. Only some *dīkṣā* gurus follow this resolution, and Śrīla Prabhupāda asked for such loyalty oaths only from positional leaders (GBC members and temple presidents), to be renewed annually (see the minutes of the 1975 GBC meeting). He did not include institutional loyalty oaths as part of initiation into the *sampradāya*, although fairly early in the movement he did have disciples who left ISKCON to join other Gauḍīya groups. Gurus in ISKCON's past (who have since left ISKCON) have added items to vows for all disciples, such as reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books for one hour a day.

There are individual *dīkṣā* gurus presently in ISKCON who add vows to the *dīkṣā* ceremony such as reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books a certain amount of time daily, listening to Śrīla Prabhupāda's lectures a certain amount of time a day, chanting more than sixteen rounds on *Ekādaśī*, and so forth. Recently at an ISKCON initiation, a devotee took a lifetime vow to never offend a Vaiṣṇava and not to hear any Vaiṣṇava *aparādha*. Some *dīkṣā* gurus do not add such vows as a general practice, but ask disciples at the time of *dīkṣā* to volunteer such additional

lifetime vows. As a sidenote, in some rare instances gurus have reduced vows for individual and extraordinary cases, such as having a disciple who was born deaf chant only four rounds (which took him over two hours as he meditated on pictures) or when persons are initiated on their deathbed with no expectation of being able to chant 16 rounds.

Changes in ISKCON: Principles or Details

Having reviewed the range of practices of *dīkṣā* in our Gauḍīya *sampradāya* in general and in ISKCON in particular in regards to the disciples' *adhikāra*, the disciples' vows, and the *mantras* given, it is clear that these areas are all details of the *dīkṣā* contract, not principles of *bhakti* in the *sampradāya* as a whole. It is crucial to understand that whether and how these are changed depends on the *adhikāra* of the guru and the time, place, and circumstances. However, we do find that within each branch or sub-branch of our *sampradāya*, there is consistency in these details, which is related to the maturity of the branch that may have evolved the details over time.

Who has the *adhikāra* to introduce changes in ISKCON: Understanding Śrīla Prabhupāda's intentions and whether or not he would approve of such changes

When examining the changes in *adhikāra* of disciples, mantras given, and vows taken at dīkṣā within our Gauḍīya *sampradāya*, and specifically regarding the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, It is clear that within a *sampradāya* some persons do make such changes. In our examination of ISKCON, the persons making such changes are individual *dīkṣā* gurus, regional zonal leaders, individual temple presidents, or the whole GBC body. Sometimes these changes are made on the basis of helping disciples to be stronger and more fixed in *bhakti*. Sometimes these changes may be made because *dīkṣā* gurus feel a lack of qualification or desire to guide any but the most serious disciples. Some changes serve to limit the "power" of the *dīkṣā* guru. In some cases, changes in the *dīkṣā* "contract" have the aim of ensuring that ISKCON has members who are loyal to local centers or to the society as a whole in terms of their time and contributions. If *dīkṣā* has considerably different meaning depending on the individual guru, temple leader or the whole zone, then the unity of ISKCON may be adversely affected. Such a serious situation leads us to ask, who in ISKCON has the *adhikāra* to make changes to the *dīkṣā* contract?

Of course, while present on this planet, Śrīla Prabhupāda made all the key decisions regarding the practice of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness in ISKCON, and kept his final say in all the decisions made by other administrators. He based everything on śāstric injunctions, applying them according

to *deśa*, *kāla* and *pātra*, (time, place, and circumstances) on the basis of the *yukta-vairāgya* principle. In some cases he made liberal changes such as having women live in a temple, and in some cases he introduced stricter rules such as having all disciples take the same vows at initiation. Moreover, Śrīla Prabhupāda changed some of the things he applied in the early years, seeing them not completely suitable for changing situations. For example, instead of sending *sannyāsīs* overseas to preach as his guru had done, he sent three married couples. Later, he reverted to mostly sending *sannyāsīs* to preach. After Śrīla Prabhupāda's departure, various changes have been introduced, sometimes in a liberal and sometimes in a stricter direction. In all cases, those who make such changes may be completely convinced that only what they are doing is what Śrīla Prabhupāda would have done in that situation, and he would have been only pleased with them. Thus, being motivated by the desire to please their spiritual master, they might go through immense troubles, including confronting others who have different visions and approaches. One of the explanations for those who want to take a stricter approach is to say that Śrīla Prabhupāda made liberal adjustments as a temporary emergency, *āpad-dharma*. He writes in the purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* (7.11.17):

jaghanyo nottamāṁ vṛttim
anāpadi bhajen naraḥ
ṛte rājanyam āpatsu
sarveṣām api sarvaśaḥ

Translation: Except in a time of emergency, lower persons should not accept the occupational duties of those who are higher. When there is such an emergency, of course, everyone but the *kṣatriya* may accept the means of livelihood of others.

Purport: The occupational duty of a *brāhmaṇa* should not be accepted by persons in lower social orders, especially *vaiśyas* and *śūdras*. For example, an occupational duty of the *brāhmaṇa* is to teach Vedic knowledge, but unless there is an emergency, this professional duty should not be accepted by the *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas* or *śūdras*. ... Sometimes *brāhmaṇas* protest against our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement for creating *brāhmaṇas* from Europeans, or, in other words, from *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. This movement, however, is here supported in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*. At the present moment, society is in a chaotic condition, and everyone has given up the cultivation of spiritual life, which is especially meant for the *brāhmaṇas*. Because spiritual culture has been stopped all over the world, there is now an emergency, and therefore it is now time to train those who are considered lower and condemned, so that they may become *brāhmaṇas* and take up the work of spiritual progress. The spiritual progress of human society has been stopped, and this should be considered an emergency. (end of purport quote)

Some devotees could conclude from the above quote that, if and when the emergency is finished, we should revert back to the "normal" condition. But before coming to that

conclusion, we should make sure whether Śrīla Prabhupāda indicated that he established those practices temporarily or as a permanent adjustment for the welfare of the future followers. In the case that the adjustment was permanent, there is no need to change it. We can reverse it only if Śrīla Prabhupāda gave an instruction or indication to revert back to the normal condition after the emergency situation finishes. In the case of his *dīkṣā* "contract" we find consistency over the eleven years Śrīla Prabhupāda was on the planet. As detailed earlier in this paper, we do find changes and variation in *dīkṣā* "contracts" in different branches of our *sampradāya* both at the present moment and over time.

Ideally, the person to make such changes is an *ācārya*. *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 10.2.31 explains what happens when an *ācārya* makes necessary changes:

svayaṁ samuttīrya sudustaraṁ dyuman
bhavārṇavaṁ bhīmam adabhra-sauhṛdāḥ
bhavat-padāmbhoruha-nāvam atra te
nidhāya yātāḥ sad-anugraho bhavān

Translation: O Lord, who resembles the shining sun, You are always ready to fulfill the desire of Your devotee, and therefore You are known as a desire tree [*vāñchā-kalpataru*]. When *ācāryas* completely take shelter under Your lotus feet in order to cross the fierce ocean of nescience, they leave behind on earth the method by which they cross, and because You are very merciful to Your other devotees, You accept this method to help them.

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains "The *ācārya* gives the suitable method for crossing the ocean of nescience." When an *ācārya* who is dear to the Lord, and wishes to help others in the changed situation, modifies the practice, the Lord mercifully accepts the modification. One who is not so qualified can potentially make changes that may spoil that internal message of the *paramparā*. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī in his article "Ṭhākur Bhaktivinoda", written for the magazine The Harmonist, December 1931, vol. XXIX No.6,[39] speaks on who can understand Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. By extension, it applies to understanding all the previous *ācāryas*, including Śrīla Prabhupāda. This is quite a long article and worth reading in its entirety. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta warns, "There are persons who have got by heart almost everything that he wrote without being able to catch the least particle of his meaning." Rather, "The personal service of the pure devotee is essential for understanding the spiritual meaning of the words of Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda.... The Message conveyed by the devotees is the same in all ages. Before we open any of the books penned by Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda we should do well to reflect a little on the attitude, with which as the indispensable pre-requisite, to approach its

[39] http://www.bvmlu.org/SBSST/tb.htm

study." We in ISKCON need similarly to understand the teaching of our founder-*ācārya* "from within."

Therefore, there is a need to have a developed system of researching and making necessary changes. One attempt in that direction was made by establishing ISKCON hermeneutics. As a science of understanding and applying the instructions of *sādhu-śāstra*-guru, with training and expertise, it gives a powerful methodology to resolve contradictions, particularly if those who use it apply not only the principles and tools, but also imbibe the qualities needed for revealed truth.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda did not appoint one *ācārya* to decide such matters after his disappearance, the GBC body has the overall responsibility to have the proper and deep discernment to decide what should be changed and in what way. As ISKCON has matured, the GBC have established councils, committees, and associations such as the SAC, the SABHA, and the deputies to aid in this process, all of which have shown positive results already.

While making such decisions in ISKCON, the key principle would be to at least theoretically accept that one's knowledge or existing opinion might be imperfect, being ready to change it with further realization. Also, all such persons and groups do well to keep in mind that politicized research having one's own agenda won't bring real understanding. As confirmed in *Kena Upaniṣad* 2.3:

yasyāmataṁ tasya mataṁ
mataṁ yasya na veda saḥ
avijñātaṁ vijānatāṁ
vijñātam avijānatām

Translation: Whoever denies having any opinion of his own about the Supreme Truth is correct in his opinion, whereas one who has his own opinion about the Supreme does not know Him. He is unknown to those who claim to know Him, and can only be known by those who do not claim to know Him.

If one feels completely powerless, and therefore intensely prays to the Supreme Lord and the previous *ācāryas*, that mood brings genuine results. We see how it was the main source of success of Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Goswāmī, as he admits his qualification of writing about the pastimes of Lord Caitanya in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 21.1:

agaty-eka-gatiṁ natvā
hīnārthādhika-sādhakam
śrī-caitanyaṁ likhāmy asya
mādhuryaiśvarya-śīkaram

Translation: Offering my obeisances unto Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, let me describe a particle of His opulence and sweetness. He is most valuable for a fallen conditioned soul bereft of spiritual knowledge, and He is the only shelter for those who do not know the real goal of life.

He takes full shelter of Lord Caitanya, and by His mercy describes Him, otherwise inconceivable. Similarly, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, his predecessor, was empowered by the same Lord Gaurāṅga to become an *ācārya* of the whole Gauḍiya *sampradāya*:

śrī-rūpa-hṛdaye prabhu śakti sañcārilā
sarva-tattva-nirūpaṇe 'pravīṇa' karilā

Translation: By entering the heart of Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu empowered him to ascertain properly the conclusions of all truths. He made him an experienced devotee whose decisions correctly agreed with the verdicts of the disciplic succession. Thus Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī was personally empowered by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 19.117)

Kṛṣṇa empowers one whose only motive is to please Him, and one's superiors, by one's efforts to understand the situation and give the proper solution. When a council, committee, or managing body consists of such sincere devotees, they can be actually effective to give proper advice. And, multiple councils, committees and managing bodies can also work together to reach a proper conclusion in cases where there is disagreement within groups or between groups. In some cases another party can act as judge to solve the contradictions, as Madhvācarya proposes in the *Kathā-lakṣaṇa.*[40]

The choice regarding the *dīkṣā* "contract" in ISKCON involves the relationship between the *dīkṣā* gurus and the GBC, and the relationship between individual GBC members and the GBC body. It also involves the complex relationships local leaders have with their zonal leaders, the *dīkṣā* gurus who have disciples there, and the GBC body as a whole. It's worth noting that in the current situation, local leaders and zonal leaders effectively have control over determining *adhikāra* of disciples in their areas.[41] While the GBC has made great strides in the last decade or so to define these relationships between the *dīkṣā* gurus and the GBC and between local leaders and each of the former, and then function with clear relationships in place, the variance in current *dīkṣā* "contracts" throughout ISKCON at present speaks to the need for increased clarity in their application.

[40] The *Kathālakṣaṇa* is a brief text setting out the proper types of debate and discussing *vāda*, *jalp*a, and *vitaṇḍā*, as discussed in the SAC's hermeneutics materials.

[41] From an abstract standpoint, such a situation, probably intended to avoid corruption in gurus, presents a ripe environment for corruption in local leadership. Perhaps corruption in local leaders is easier to manage, institutionally, than corruption in gurus.

Additionally, while the topic of the Brahma-*gāyatri* can be understood and applied in ISKCON with the research and hermeneutically sound conclusions presented here, the topic is part of broader issues. The fact that there is much confusion and misunderstanding about *guru-tattva* and *varṇāśrama*—both closely related to the topic at hand—is important. Until there is greater clarity on these two vast and complex subjects, there will be a continual stream of questions about specific topics such as the one this paper addresses.

All these questions should be discussed by the leaders of our Society. The responsibility is very grave. There must be a clear strategic understanding how ISKCON will make changes necessary to solve the problems that will inevitably arise as our Movement spreads in a constantly changing world.

The Relationship between *Varṇāśrama* and *Bhakti*

Varṇāśrama, as explained by Lord Caitanya to Rāmānanda Rāya, is external. *Bhakti*, however, is the eternal nature of the soul.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in the *Nectar of Devotion*, chapter 2:

> Thus, the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is so nice that there is no need of even designating oneself *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*, *brahmacārī*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha* or *sannyāsī*. Let everyone be engaged in whatever occupation he now has. Simply let him worship Lord Kṛṣṇa by the result of his activities in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That will adjust the whole situation, and everyone will be happy and peaceful within this world. In the *Nārada Pañcarātra* the regulative principles of devotional service are described as follows: "Any activities sanctioned in the revealed scriptures and aiming at the satisfaction of the Supreme Personality of Godhead are accepted by saintly teachers as the regulative principles of devotional service. If one regularly executes such service unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead under the direction of a bona fide spiritual master, then gradually he rises to the platform of serving in pure love of God."

In *Nectar of Devotion* chapter 11, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes to further explain:

> The system of *varṇāśrama* and the prescribed duties under this system are so designed that the conditioned soul may enjoy in the material world according to

> his desire for sense gratification and at the same time gradually become elevated to spiritual understanding. Under these prescribed duties of *varṇa* and *āśrama* there are many activities which belong to devotional service in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Those devotees who are householders accept Vedic ritualistic performances as well as the prescribed duties of devotional service, because both are meant for satisfying Kṛṣṇa. When householder devotees perform some Vedic ritualistic duties, they do so to satisfy Kṛṣṇa. As we have previously discussed, any activity aiming at satisfying the Supreme Personality of Godhead is considered devotional service.

To understand this statement of Śrīla Prabhupāda's, we can turn to Rupa Gosvāmī's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.185:

karma svābhāvikaṁ bhadraṁ japa-dhyānārcanādi ca
itīdaṁ dvividhaṁ kṛṣṇe vaiṣṇavair dāsyam arpitam ||185||

Translation: There are two categories of this *varṇāśrama-dāsyam* offered by the Vaiṣṇavas to Kṛṣṇa: offering the auspicious among the prescribed actions according to one's nature and offering only actions such as japa, meditation and Deity worship.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's Commentary:

> There are two types of offering obligatory actions in *varṇāśrama*. *Svābhāvikam* here means those impressions attained from previous lives which give one a particular identity in the *varṇāśrama* system. Among those actions prescribed by that identity, only those that are auspicious are offered to the Lord, and not others (such as cleaning oneself with earth after passing stool). As well, *japa* and other spiritual actions (which are part of *varṇāśrama* activities) are offered. If the Vaiṣṇava offers these two types of actions to Kṛṣṇa, they are called *dāsyam*.

While some activity in *varṇāśrama* is the same as activity in *bhakti*, overall *varṇāśrama* duties are not necessarily part of *bhakti*, as Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī explains in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.246:

***saṁmataṁ bhakti-vijñānāṁ bhakty-aṅgatvaṁ na karmaṇām* ||246||**

Translation: The consensus of those knowledgeable of *bhakti* is that karma (*varṇāśrama* duties) is not an *aṅga* of *bhakti*.

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's Commentary:

> Someone may argue as follows. "True, there is a glorification of all the *aṅgas* of pure *bhakti* (above all other processes), but Parāśara Muni has glorified karma as well:
>
> ***varṇāśramācaravatā puruṣeṇa paraḥ pumān***
> ***viṣṇur ārādhyate panthā nānyat tat-toṣa-kāraṇam***
>
> 'The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Viṣṇu, is worshiped by the proper execution of prescribed duties in the system of *varṇa* and *āśrama*. There is no other way to satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead. One must be situated in the institution of the four *varṇas* and *āśramas*.' *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 3.8.9
>
> This *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* verse substantiates that *karma* is an *aṅga* of *bhakti*, for in that verse there is evident approval for worshipping Viṣṇu in combination with *varṇāśrama* activities."
>
> However, the author states that the consensus (*sammatam*) of those thoroughly experienced in *bhakti*, the pure devotees, including even Parāśara Muni himself, is otherwise. Parāśara Muni has also said in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*:
>
> ***yajñeśācyuta govinda mādhavānanta keśava***
> ***kṛṣṇa viṣṇo hṛṣīkeśety āha rājā sa kevalam***
> ***nānyad jagāda maitreya kiṣcit svapnāntareṣv api***
>
> "O Maitreya, King Bharata simply said, 'O master of sacrifice, O Acyuta, Govinda, Mādhava, Ananta, Keśava, Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, Hṛṣīkeśa!' He said nothing else, even in his dreams." *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 2.13.9–10
>
> *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 3.8.9 and other similar statements are spoken for those who are not currently eligible for *śuddha-bhakti*.

We can thus understand that the designations and activities of *varṇāśrama* may be adopted by the practitioner of *bhakti yoga*, but are not essential. If there is a conflict, the practices and principles of *bhakti* are higher. Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī explains (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.63-64) that there is no sin if a practitioner of *bhakti* neglects an aspect of *varṇāśrama*. However, no one should neglect *bhakti*. Definitely nothing of *bhakti* should be abandoned in order to favor an aspect of *varṇāśrama*.

Yet, at the same time, *varṇāśrama* descriptions abound in the Vedic scriptures, including *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*. The importance of *varṇāśrama* can be understood from the *Bṛhad Bhāgavatāmṛta* 2.2.204 purport:

> In *Śrī Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (3.8.9), Aurva Ṛṣi tells King Sagara:
>
> ***varṇāśramācāra-vatā***
> ***puruṣeṇa paraḥ pumān***
> ***viṣṇur ārādhyate panthā***
> ***nānyat tat-toṣa-kāraṇam***
>
> **Translation:** The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Viṣṇu, is worshiped by the proper execution of prescribed duties in the system of *varṇa* and *āśrama*. There is no other way to satisfy the Lord." One who adheres to this *varṇāśrama-dharma* does not cease from all activity, thinking his life's work complete. Yet he does nothing else (*nānyat*) than worship Lord Viṣṇu.
>
> This statement from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* clearly implies that worship of Lord Viṣṇu is the summit of all *varṇāśrama* duties. Other than worship of Lord Viṣṇu, no path (*panthāḥ*)—neither karma, nor *jñāna*, nor any other process—is a cause of the Lord's satisfaction (*tat-toṣa-kāraṇam*). These other methods have no independent power to satisfy Lord Viṣṇu. Therefore unless they are engaged in the service of *bhakti* they are useless.
>
> Nevertheless, the Lord enjoins that *varṇāśrama* duties should not be given up:
>
> ***śruti-smṛtī mamaivājñe***
> ***yas te ullaṅghya vartate***
> ***ājñā-cchedī mama drohī***
> ***mad-bhakto 'pi na vaiṣṇavaḥ***
>
> **Translation:** The *śruti* and *smṛti* comprise My orders. If someone violates these scriptures, he breaks My commands and thus becomes My opponent. Even if he professes to be My devotee he is not a Vaiṣṇava. [Cited in *Bhakti-sandarbha* 173]
>
> The Lord says this because performing *varṇāśrama* duties can help one progress toward the path of devotional service. At least in the lower stages of spiritual development, one should not abandon one's prescribed duties. The duties of *varṇāśrama* must be maintained, especially by persons who are on the *pravṛtti-mārga*, the path of material development, and who lack faith in the transcendental process of *bhakti*.

The Supreme Lord makes statements like these to encourage people to adhere strictly to their prescribed religious duties. However, many other statements throughout the revealed scriptures also say that the scope of obligatory material duties is limited. Such duties, limited also in their benefits, may be ignored without harm when they conflict with more important spiritual responsibilities. Thus devotees dedicated to the path of *bhakti* are not considered fallen if they fail to carry out some of their karmic commitments. As declared by the Personality of Godhead in *Śrī Padma Purāṇa*:

mat-karma kurvatāṁ puṁsāṁ
kriyā-lopo bhaved yadi
teṣāṁ karmāṇi kurvanti
tisraḥ koṭyo maharṣayaḥ

Translation: If persons doing My work fail to execute some other karmic duties, thirty million exalted sages carry out those commitments on their behalf."
Similarly, in the same *Purāṇa*, Devadyuti prays:

yasmin jñāte na kurvanti
karma caiva śrutīritam
nireṣaṇā jagan-mitrāḥ
śuddhaṁ brahma namāmi tam

Translation: Persons who know this pure Supreme cease performing the duties enjoined by the *śrutis*, lose all ambitions, and become friends of the whole world. To Him I bow down.

At the same time, one who has abandoned everything is the best, as Kṛṣṇa says to Uddhava in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.11.32:

ājñāyaivaṁ guṇān doṣān
mayādiṣṭān api svakān
dharmān santyajya yaḥ sarvān
māṁ bhajeta sa sattamaḥ

Translation: Such a saintly person must be considered the most learned of men. He perfectly understands that the ordinary religious duties prescribed by Me in various Vedic scriptures possess favorable qualities that purify the performer, and he knows that neglect of such duties constitutes a discrepancy in one's life. Having taken complete shelter at My lotus feet, however, a saintly person ultimately renounces such ordinary religious duties and worships Me alone. He is thus considered to be the best among all living entities.

Ultimately, it is up to the *sampradāya ācāryas*, as well as each respective guru, to decide how to apply *varṇāśrama* rules to individual disciples. It depends on the *adhikāra* of the disciples as they progress on the ladder of *bhakti*. *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.21.2 speaks about the need for determining such qualification:

sve sve 'dhikāre yā niṣṭhā
sa guṇaḥ parikīrtitaḥ
viparyayas tu doṣaḥ syād
ubhayor eṣa niścayaḥ

Translation: Steadiness in one's own position is declared to be actual piety, whereas deviation from one's position is considered impiety. In this way the two are definitely ascertained.

On every step of the ladder there are sets of *guṇas* — positive recommendations, and *doṣas* — negative things to avoid. As Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explained in verses 2.7–8 of his *Upadeśāmṛta Bhāṣyā*:

niẏama-agraha āra niẏama-āgraha
dvi-prakāra doṣa ei bhakta-galagraha
eke svādhikāra-gata niẏame-varjana
āre anẏa-adhikāra niẏama grahaṇa

Translation: The faults of both being negligent of rules and being obsessive about rules are burdens to devotees. In one, there is rejection of the rules meant for one's stage, and in the other, there is adherence to rules meant for stages other than one's own.

Further elaborating on that verse of *Upadeśāmṛta* in the *niyamāgraha* section of his *Bhaktyāloka*, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that it's up to the guru to determine what would be the *vidhis* (prescribed regulative practices), and what would be the *niṣedhas* (forbidden activities) in every particular situation. Thus, the guru acts as the captain of the ship guiding the disciple, as confirmed in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.20.17:

nṛ-deham ādyaṁ su-labhaṁ su-durlabhaṁ
plavaṁ su-kalpaṁ guru-karṇadhāram
mayānukūlena nabhasvateritaṁ
pumān bhavābdhiṁ na taret sa ātma-hā

Translation: When one wants to cross a large ocean, one requires a strong boat. It is said that this human form of life is a good boat by which one can cross the ocean of nescience. In the human form of life one can obtain the guidance of a good navigator, the spiritual master. One also gets a favorable wind by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, and that wind is the instructions of Kṛṣṇa.

The human body is the boat, the instructions of Lord Kṛṣṇa are the favorable winds, and the spiritual master is the navigator. The spiritual master knows well how to adjust the sails to catch the winds favorably and steer the boat to its destination. If, however, one does not take advantage of this opportunity, one wastes the human form of life. Wasting time and life in this way is the same as committing suicide.

Ācāryas show the whole path, and gurus help their disciples to walk that same path and to reach its goal. Gurus may apply different principles prescribed in the Vedas, changing those sets of *vidhis* and *nisedhas* as the disciples progress along the way, as was already quoted before from *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.200:

laukikī vaidikī vāpi yā kriyā kriyate mune
hari-sevānukūlaiva sā kāryā bhaktim icchatā

"One should perform only those activities—either worldly or prescribed by Vedic rules and regulations—which are favorable for the cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

In addition, both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describe three levels of devotees according to their qualification and show how they act differently. These are *svaniṣṭhita*, *pariniṣṭhita* and *nirapekṣā*. Basically, *svaniṣṭhita* devotees are still on such a level that they need to follow some of the instructions of the Vedas regarding material activities to make progress. They will get benefited, and thus come to the transcendental level. Although *pariniṣṭhita* devotees are already beyond those prescriptions, they still follow them in order to set a proper example. *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 7.10.23 shows how Prahlada Mahārāja, a *mahā-bhāgavata* devotee, was instructed to become king of the Daityas, and to rule for a long time in order to help them make spiritual progress. And a *nirapekṣa* devotee is one who is on the highest level of spontaneous devotional service, completely indifferent to all rules and regulations. Such persons are rare; they are described in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 11.2.40 as follows:

evaṁ-vrataḥ sva-priya-nāma-kīrtyā
jātānurāgo druta-citta uccaiḥ
hasaty atho roditi rauti gāyaty
unmāda-van nṛtyati loka-bāhyaḥ

Translation: By chanting the holy name of the Supreme Lord, one comes to the stage of love of Godhead. Then the devotee is fixed in his vow as an eternal servant of the Lord, and he gradually becomes very much attached to a particular name and form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As his heart melts with ecstatic love, he laughs very loudly or cries or shouts. Sometimes he sings and dances like a madman, for he is indifferent to public opinion.

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains it in his lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā* 7.1 on January 22, 1977 in Bhubaneswar:

> So a systematic society means *varṇāśrama-dharma*. But there is another way. That is another way, that is called transcendental society, or Vaiṣṇava society. As it is stated in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata*,
>
> ***kecit kevalayā bhaktyā***
> ***vāsudeva-parāyaṇāḥ***
> ***aghaṁ dhunvanti kārtsnyena***
> ***nīhāram iva bhāskaraḥ***
>
> [*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 6.1.15]
>
> Simply by becoming devotees of Vāsudeva, *vāsudeva-parāyaṇa*, everything can be adjusted. When Rāmānanda Rāya answered Caitanya Mahāprabhu about the systematic society of human being, Caitanya Mahāprabhu rejected. He said, *eho bāhya āge kaha āra* [*Caitanya-caritāmṛta. Madhya* 8.59].

Thus, clearly, Śrīla Prabhupāda affirms the position of our previous *ācāryas*, that *varṇāśrama* principles and practices are subordinate to the principles and practices of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*. On a practical level, some devotees of Kṛṣṇa, not yet being completely mature, may personally benefit from following some aspects of *daivi-varṇāśrama*. Others may follow to set an example, or follow incidentally as part of their service. And other devotees may be aloof from *varṇāśrama* considerations altogether.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission for *varṇāśrama*

As ISKCON developed, Śrīla Prabhupāda increasingly talked about *varṇāśrama*, and even wrote in his purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 5.19.19: "The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, however, is being propagated all over the world to reestablish the *varṇāśrama-dharma* system and thus save human society from gliding down to hellish life."

We should take care, while fulfilling Śrīla Prabhupāda's *varṇāśrama* desire, to ensure that our understanding is complete and accurate. For example, Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswāmī wrote in *Prabhupāda Appreciation* (Philadelphia, Gita-nagari Press, 1991) Ch. 17: "Misuse of Prabhupāda's Authority":

> We often hear devotees quote Prabhupāda, saying that he had completed only fifty percent of his work, to defend development of *varnāśrama*. But what is the origin of this statement? In *Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* we find it as follows:
>
> "We have all met together, Śrīla Prabhupāda. We want you to remain and lead this movement and finish the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*. We said that you must remain for at least another ten years. You have only done fifty percent of your work."
>
> Śrīla Prabhupāda was listening carefully without any movement, but when Brahmānanda said "fifty percent," he frowned and said, "No." (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* 54: At Home in Vṛndāvana)
>
> Although Prabhupāda is purported to have used this figure of fifty percent [also][42] in London in 1977, it was originally spoken by Brahmānanda and not approved by Prabhupāda.

While it is clear that Śrīla Prabhupāda felt the development of *daivi-varṇāśrama* to be important, this development should support the other areas that Śrīla Prabhupāda developed, not erode them.

Summary and Conclusions of Part Four

There is no harm—and often much benefit—from teaching and practicing the principles of *varṇa* and *āśrama* at the present time. An abundance of caution is in order when trying to practice details, however. ISKCON members need some intelligence and care to distinguish between *śāstra*, our *ācāryas*, and Śrīla Prabhupāda giving descriptions of details in other times and places, in contrast with prescribing details for ourselves. A key guide is to observe how, specifically, Śrīla Prabhupāda applied *varṇa* and *āśrama* principles in his mission and to understand his mood and intent in doing so. In regard to *bhakti*, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes (*Nectar of Devotion* Ch. 6): "Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī proposes to mention only basic principles, not details. For example, a basic principle is that one has to accept a spiritual master. Exactly how one follows the instructions of his spiritual master is considered a detail."

Śrīla Prabhupāda had a standard *dīkṣā* "contract" with all disciples consisting of the *adhikāra*, or qualifications for receiving initiation, the vows a disciple would take, and the *mantras* he would give. Traditionally and at the present moment, however, we find much variance in these three within the broad Gauḍīya *sampradāya*, and even between the practices of Śrīla

[42] The original word was "again" but such is not consistent with chronology, as the conversation with Brahmānanda happened in October 1977, after the visit to London.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. The variance in the Śrī *sampradāya* has resulted in a major branch that denies anyone except for males in *brāhmaṇa* family lineages any Vedic *mantra* or the *praṇava*.

In ISKCON today there have been changes to Śrīla Prabhupāda's *dīkṣā* "contract." The GBC have mandated changes to disciples' *adhikāra*, and both local temple presidents and individual ISKCON gurus also have general or mandated standards that differ from Śrīla Prabhupāda's. There has been addition of formal vows—both by GBC mandate and by individual gurus for their disciples in general. Some gurus do not mandate additional vows across the board but encourage individual disciples to add to their vows at the time of *dīkṣā*. Individual gurus add or subtract *mantras* from what they give to second initiates, either for all disciples, or in giving different *mantras* to various disciples. Because devotees do not generally discuss what *mantras* they receive at second initiation, it is difficult to know how widespread this sort of practice is. It is important to note that deciding what can be changed and in what way may have serious consequences. Thus, such decisions involve deep humility and surrender as well as training in the principles and tools needed to distinguish principles from details.

When we examine the relationship between *varṇāśrama* and *bhakti*, we find that while some activity in *varṇāśrama* is the same as activity in *bhakti*, overall *varṇāśrama* duties are not part of *bhakti*, as Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī explains in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.246. We can thus understand that the designations and activities of *varṇāśrama* may be adopted by the practitioner of *bhakti* yoga, but are not essential. If there is a conflict, the practices and principles of *bhakti* are higher. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī explains (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.63-64) that there is no sin if a practitioner of *bhakti* neglects an aspect of *varṇāśrama*. However, no one should neglect *bhakti*. Definitely nothing of *bhakti* should be abandoned in order to favor an aspect of *varṇāśrama*. Śrīla Prabhupāda explicitly stated that establishing *varṇāśrama* is part of his mission and desire, and such development should support the other areas Śrīla Prabhupāda developed, not erode them.

When we consider what are principles and what are details in *varṇāśrama*, what are principles and what are details in *bhakti*, and the relationship between *varṇāśrama* and *bhakti*, we also need to consider who has the *adhikāra* to decide these distinctions in ISKCON. As we can readily see from looking at the changes made in what was Śrīla Prabhupāda's *dīkṣā* "contract," there are currently individual *dīkṣā* gurus, temple presidents, and the GBC body who are all making these decisions.

Part five: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusions: Philosophical

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī and Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī clearly state that *bhakti* "destroys" the material body. And the Lord Himself says, as stated in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Antya* 4.191-2:

prabhu kahe,—"vaiṣṇava-deha 'prākṛta' kabhu naya
'aprākṛta' deha bhaktera 'cid-ānanda-maya'

Translation: Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu said, "The body of a devotee is never material. It is considered to be transcendental, full of spiritual bliss.

dīkṣā-kāle bhakta kare ātma-samarpaṇa
sei-kāle kṛṣṇa tāre kare ātma-sama

Translation: "At the time of initiation, when a devotee fully surrenders unto the service of the Lord, Kṛṣṇa accepts him to be as good as Himself."

This was the theological reasoning for Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's decision to award the Vedic *gāyatrī* to his disciples, as Prof. Sanyal explained in The Harmonist. Śrīla Prabhupāda reiterated that view, as we have seen in this paper. Although the specifics of the *dīkṣā* practice in the Gauḍīya tradition may not be uniform, this conviction in the independence and the supremacy of *bhakti* is a principle that has always defined the followers of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Not all Vaiṣṇava traditions teach this. But it is because of this teaching about the nature of *bhakti* that we have non-*brāhmaṇa* gurus in our tradition, such as Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, as well as female gurus, such as Hemalatā Ṭhākurāṇī and Jāhnavādevī in the seventeenth century; it was this principle that Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura made, as it were, the cornerstone of his entire teachings, and that his disciples defended in the debates at Jaipur in the early eighteenth century.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura famously fought for this, against what he called 'apparent Vaiṣṇavism' and the 'casteism' he saw encroaching on Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. And it

was also this principle that Śrīla Prabhupāda himself had faith in when he travelled to the West and preached to, and indeed initiated, *yavanas* and *mlecchas*.

To argue that, for whatever reason, a Vaiṣṇava or a Vaiṣṇavī is ineligible for the Vedic *gāyatrī* at least seems to undermine this fundamental theological principle of the independence and supremacy of *bhakti*. This is such an important topic in the writings of our *ācāryas*, that were it undermined we'd lose one of the most defining characteristics of our Gauḍīya identity. Perhaps there is a way that the non-awarding of the Vedic *gāyatrī* to some disciples, based on a material designation, may be justified without denying this principle, but there is a huge burden of proof on anyone trying to make such a justification.

Regarding *varṇāśrama*, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, all our previous *ācāryas*, and Śrīla Prabhupāda himself, encouraged acceptance of principles. Overall *varṇa* principles include having a livelihood that is in accord with one's nature, giving in charity, offering one's work and the result of one's work to the Lord, having an honest livelihood, and so forth. Overall principles of *āśrama* include having attachment and detachment appropriate to one's stage of life and having every life stage function as a shelter from illusion and a platform for devotional service.

But following details of *varṇāśrama*—even if given in *śāstra*—may displease the Lord in particular times, places, and circumstances, as happened when Brahmānanda Bhāratī wore a deerskin. (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 10.154) Therefore, how Śrīla Prabhupāda practically applied such details is our main guide, and adjustments continue in response to a changing environment. While principles of *varṇāśrama* generally are supportive of pure *bhakti*, details may not be.

Hermeneutic Character Qualities, Principles and Tools Underlying the Philosophical Conclusions

In coming to this conclusion, we have used the following hermeneutical principles, from the Śāstric Advisory Council's research on hermeneutics. First, we understand our 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. From this principle we see how Śrīla Prabhupāda's giving of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* to all second initiated disciples is a practical and emblematic application of the stance of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and our prominent *ācāryas* on the position of Vaiṣṇavas. To apply this principle involves having the devotional quality of fidelity to text and tradition, particularly loyalty and gratitude to gurus and tradition. With that disposition, we use the hermeneutical tools of referring to *paramparā*, and studying holistically and repeatedly.

Second, we understand Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements by his application of them in relation to his mood and mission. From this hermeneutical principle we examine Śrīla Prabhupāda's many statements on *varṇāśrama*, including statements about women, *śūdras*, or *brāhmaṇas* who take employment. Prabhupāda's consistent application and mood was to give first and second initiation to sincere candidates regardless of these *varṇa* and gender considerations. He had a mission to establish *varṇāśrama*, but always as subordinate to universal *bhakti*. To resolve apparent contradictions between Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements and his application requires humility and a service mood, especially avoiding pointless debate or egotistically trying to win an argument, and reflection on personal motives. Without such qualities one could mistakenly superimpose one's own desires or viewpoints on Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements or actions. With that humble disposition, we thus use the hermeneutical tool of considering how Śrīla Prabhupāda applied his statements in his mission.

Third, we keep firmly in mind that hierarchies are present within *śāstra* and between *śāstras*. Using this hermeneutical principle allows us to privilege *śāstras* and śāstric statements about the universal right of all living entities, particularly human beings, to take up the practices of *bhakti yoga*. While there are other *śāstras* and śāstric statements about restrictions of spiritual practices based on birth, occupation, gender, and so forth, these sources are secondary and must be understood using yet another hermeneutical principle, namely, that consideration of context, including historical circumstance, is essential to gaining śāstric insight. In this regard, we also employed the hermeneutical tool of knowing which text provides a higher level of authority for a particular question.

Fourth, we reference the hermeneutical principle that insight emerges through apt dialogue, and through mediation, resolution, or reconciliation of paradox, apparent contradiction, and multiple views, particularly in the sections regarding principles and details. With this demarcation, seemingly tangled or contradictory statements become clear. In order to understand the different ways in which a Vaiṣṇava can be called a *brāhmaṇa*, this principle is essential, and a section of this paper (at the end of Part Two) focuses on this reconciliation. This principle also works well with the principle already mentioned: the fact that consideration of context, including historical circumstance, is essential to gaining śāstric insight. Using these two hermeneutic foundations allows us to determine what is a *varṇāśrama* principle and what is a *varṇāśrama* detail, what is a *bhakti* principle and what is a *bhakti* detail, as well as the relation between *varṇāśrama* and *bhakti*. In order to apply this principle, the hermeneutic qualities of respect, patience, and comfort with ambiguity, are essential.

Fifth, the hermeneutical principle that education in *śāstra*, delivered by the self-realized teacher (guru), helps preserve disciplic succession, especially informed the sections of this paper that deal with Śrīla Prabhupāda's śāstric reasons for his actions and policies regarding *dīkṣā* in the areas of the qualification (*adhikāra*) of disciples, the vows he asked of them, and the

mantras he gave. Śrīla Prabhupāda was emphatic that he based everything on *śāstra*. The qualities of fidelity to text and tradition, as well as humility and a service mood, are essential here, especially acceptance of sacred authority to understand how Śrīla Prabhupāda never deviated from the intentions of the previous *ācāryas*. In this regard, the hermeneutic tools of considering *pramāṇas* and considering one's own cultural and individual perspectives, along with life experience, enable us to firmly follow *śāstra* as Śrīla Prabhupāda taught and applied it

Finally, the hermeneutical principle that the highest truth aims at the welfare of all guides us to the philosophical conclusions of this research. Like Śrīla Prabhupāda did himself, we look at these questions using the hermeneutical tools of choosing the most merciful meaning, and that understanding of *guru-sadhu-śāstra* is only possible with *jīve dayā*. In order to apply those tools, the hermeneutic qualities of benevolence and generosity, of being kind and merciful, are essential. Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to make the Vedic *mantras* and Vedic scriptures available to any dedicated and sincere seeker of the Absolute Truth. He had disciples distribute the *Śrī Iśopaniṣad* in the airports and on the streets of the world. He had everyone chant *om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya* before class without consideration of *varṇa*, gender, birth, or previous actions. Our *mantras* for *tilaka* and the *praṇāma* mantras he gave us contain *om*. We accept his policies and actions regarding *dīkṣā* as a principle for those of us in ISKCON because such policies and actions were part of a broad and deep ocean of mercy to everyone. He was merciful not just to a few Jagāis and Mādhāis, or to one prostitute, or to one person born to non-Hindu parents, but to everyone.

Conclusions: Institutional

Specific considerations regarding the Brahma-*gāyatrī*

There are several problems and potential problems with *dīkṣā* gurus in ISKCON separating giving of Brahma-*gāyatrī* from the rest of the *mantras* Śrīla Prabhupāda gave to all his disciples at second initiation. We should note that this separation can occur in at least two ways: 1) by giving only Brahma-*gāyatrī* as an *upanayanam* ceremony, either to persons without even first initiation or persons with only first initiation; and 2) by giving second initiation with all the mantras except Brahma-*gāyatrī* to persons not designated, for various reasons, as *brāhmaṇas*. Let us examine each of these two scenarios more closely:

First scenario: The problem with instituting *upanayanam* in ISKCON occurs when the person who receives Brahma-*gāyatrī* later takes second initiation from an ISKCON approved *dīkṣā* guru. As Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes: "Guru may be of two types: one who gives *dīkṣā* with *mantra* and one who gives spiritual instruction. They should be considered equal in importance by one

who wants to advance quickly. A person can accept only one *dīkṣā* guru, but may have many *śikṣā* gurus. (*Harināma cintāmaṇi*: Chapter 6 - Disregarding the Guru). Śrīla Prabhupāda similarly writes in *Kṛṣṇa Book*, chapter 80: "The spiritual master who instructs the disciple about spiritual matters is called the *śikṣā*-guru, and the spiritual master who initiates the disciple is called the *dīkṣā*-guru. Both of them are My representatives. There may be many spiritual masters who instruct, but the initiator spiritual master is one."

Therefore, if the person who gave *upanayanam* is a Vaiṣṇava, then it is not acceptable for the initiate to receive the same *mantra* again at the time of second initiation, or there will be a breach of etiquette, or even an offense, on the part of both *dīkṣā* guru and disciple. Those who give *upanayanam* are, by the śāstric definition of the term, *dīkṣā* gurus. But in many cases they are not authorized ISKCON *dīkṣā* gurus, their relationship with the initiate is unclear, and the situation later at the time of second initiation is awkward for everyone involved. (We note that traditional *brāhmaṇa* families are likely to give their children *upanayanam*. Here we are referring to regular ceremonies of ISKCON leaders or in ISKCON-affiliated projects).

Second scenario: The problems with removing Brahma-*gāyatrī* from the *mantras* given at second initiation—except for initiates that the guru deems as *varṇāśrama brāhmaṇas*—are many. Most obviously, the practice sends a philosophical message that the chanting of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* is subject to external qualifications rather than the qualifications that Śrīla Prabhupāda established and frequently preached about. The practice also sends a message that the *mantra* itself does not transcend the material sphere.

Moreover, Brahma-*gāyatrī* is not just part of *varṇāśrama*. Śrīla Prabhupāda established it as one of the effective means of purifying a disciple's heart and achieving the highest goal. In the previous sections it was shown how Brahma-*gāyatrī* chanted with the proper mood formed through the medium of *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*, its commentary, can be understood as a part of spontaneous devotional service. While defining *dīkṣā* in his *Bhakti-sandarbha*, *anuccheda* 283, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī quotes this important verse to prove that the *mantras* given by the gurus are the medium of transferring transcendental knowledge:

divyaṁ jñānaṁ yato dadyāt
kuryāt pāpasya saṅkṣayam
tasmād dīkṣeti sā proktā
deśikais tattva-kovikaiḥ

Translation: Learned exponents of the Absolute Truth declare that the process by which the spiritual master imparts *divya-jñāna* to the disciple and eradicates all sins is known as *dīkṣā*.

He then explains *divya-jñāna*, or divine knowledge:

> ***divyaṁ jñānaṁ hy atra śrīmati mantre bhagavat-svarūpa-jñānaṁ tena bhagavatā sambandha-viśeṣa-jñānaṁ ca***
>
> *Divya-jñāna* is transcendental knowledge of the Lord's form and one's specific relationship with the Lord contained within a *mantra.*"

This means at the time of initiation, the guru gives the disciple a *mantra* which, in course of time, reveals the particular form of the Lord Who is the object of one's worship and the *bhakta*'s specific relationship with the Lord in one of the relationships of *dāsya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya* or *mādhurya.*

As an *ācārya*, Śrīla Prabhupāda considered it necessary to give Brahma-*gāyatrī* to his disciples from different *varṇas*, both male and female; removing it from their practice may hamper or slow down their progress.

By restricting Brahma-*gāyatrī* to very few, even among those who are second initiated, we would give those *brāhmaṇas* that receive the Brahma-*gāyatrī* a social status above that of Vaiṣṇavas in general. It was specifically to avoid such a situation that Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta gave Brahma-*gāyatrī* widely. In time, if Brahma-*gāyatrī* is selectively given, there may be brahminical services (such as performing *yajñas*) open only to those who chant the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, even among second initiates.

One of the greatest dangers is the possible further extrapolation. We may note that the śāstric justification for giving the Brahma-*gāyatrī* only to a certain subset of those otherwise qualified for second initiation applies to any chanting of the *praṇava-mantra* (*om*), or, indeed, any Vedic *mantra.* If we follow the śāstric statements that men who get paid salaries, or do manual labor for a livelihood, or women in general, (what to speak of those who could be considered *mlecchas* and *yavanas*), may not receive or chant Brahma-*gāyatrī*, then those same śāstric statements prohibit those same categories of people from chanting *om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya.* Nor can they chant *nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale, śrīmate bhaktivedānta-svāmin iti nāmine.* They could not, therefore, chant any verse in the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* or *Bhagavad-gītā* that contains the *praṇava*, nor any *mantra* of the *Śrī Iśopaniṣad*. It is even possible to say that the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*, found in the *Upaniṣads*, is Vedic, and therefore among the list of restricted *mantras.* Lest one imagine such a scenario to be exaggerated or alarmist, it is well to keep in mind that a major branch of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya*, the Vādakālai, has such restrictive practices.

Dikṣā—the *adhikāra* of the disciple, the vows, and the *mantras*

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted the GBC to annually discuss "unity in diversity" and, throughout ISKCON's history there has been a multiplicity of moods and emphases in various centers and from different leaders. The question before the GBC is what extent of diversity among official centers and leaders is desirable or at least acceptable, and what areas of unity are essential. While this paper is limited to the scope of the chanting of the Brahma-*gāyatrī mantra*, some of the points here have further-reaching implications.

Regarding specifically the chanting of the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, or more broadly what *mantras* each initiate receives and what vows each initiate makes, we need to consider the relationship between the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* as a whole and the institution of ISKCON. As we have demonstrated in this paper, currently there is variance within the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* as to what *mantras* are given at *dīkṣā* and what vows initiates make, and lesser variance in *adhikāra*. So, in terms of the *sampradāya* as a whole, such things are in the realm of detail, not principle. However, it is a principle to follow the instructions of the spiritual master. If the specific exchange Śrīla Prabhupāda established at initiations is taken as his instruction for his whole ISKCON, then any change to that exchange, that "contract," so to speak, between guru and disciple, would be changing a principle. ISKCON leadership has been strongly moving in the direction of unity under Śrīla Prabhupāda as the pre-eminent *śikṣā*-guru for all of ISKCON. In terms of Śrīla Prabhupāda as *śikṣā* guru, it is hard to think of any practice more fundamental from the position of the disciple than the vows of sixteen rounds of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* daily, no intoxication, no meat, fish, or eggs, no gambling, and no illicit sex. Those vows are listed throughout Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, lectures, conversations, and letters. And it is hard to think of any practice more fundamental for the position of the *dīkṣā* guru than the giving of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* and a new name at first initiation, and the giving of seven specific *gāyatrī mantras* at second initiation. It is also hard to think of anything more fundamental than Śrīla Prabhupāda's view of *adhikāra* that is independent of a person's nationality, race, occupation, gender, and other bodily features. Śrīla Prabhupāda's *adhikāra* for disciples was their sincerity, eagerness, and demonstrated following of his basic program of four regulative principles and a minimum of sixteen rounds.

We should note that changes in *adhikāra*, vows, and *mantras* have already occurred in ISKCON, in some cases as a GBC resolution, and in some cases as the policies of individual *dīkṣā* gurus or temple presidents. Continuing to move in that direction, by accepting that individual *dīkṣā* gurus and disciples—or the GBC as a whole—can make such changes, means that ISKCON is, or will become, a loose umbrella organization encompassing many branches and sub-branches of Śrīla Prabhupāda's branch of the Sārasvata branch of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*. Such could be

justified as philosophically and traditionally acceptable. But it is unlikely to be the vision and desire of Śrīla Prabhupāda regarding his institution.

From every perspective—*śāstra*, tradition, Śrīla Prabhupāda's expressed desire, and even empirical studies of the sociology of religion—it is wise to have diversity under the overall umbrella of ISKCON and the authority of the GBC. Diversity acts like the indentations intentionally placed in a long concrete driveway—they allow the concrete some movement and prevent irregular cracks and damage. At the same time, all those perspectives—*śāstra*, tradition, Śrīla Prabhupāda's expressed desire, and even empirical studies of the sociology of religion—show that if core teaching or practices change, the very identity of a religious group is compromised. It is therefore essential for ISKCON's leadership to identify core philosophical tenets and core spiritual practices for ISKCON. It is also essential for ISKCON's leadership to acknowledge that some tenets and practices that are core for ISKCON may not be so for the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* as a whole.

The question is not only a matter of practice, but also of philosophical orientation. There are, indeed, bona-fide śāstric statements limiting the chanting of the *praṇava* (*om*) to *brāhmaṇas* according to criteria such as birth, *saṁskāras*, qualities, occupation, and gender. There are also bona-fide śāstric statements giving all human beings access to the *Vedas* and Vedic *mantras* if they have eagerness, cleanliness, honesty, and are deemed fit by their spiritual master. Śrīla Prabhupāda consistently and frequently—in his books, lectures, conversations and letters—quoted the latter as the authorization for his practices and denied that the former were applicable. Indeed, he often said that the former were for those in mundane consciousness. If parts of ISKCON or particular *dīkṣā* gurus instead privilege the former group of quotes, they depart not only from Śrīla Prabhupāda as pre-eminent *śikṣā*-guru of ISKCON. They also depart from the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* as a whole. It was Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself who emphasized the universality of *bhakti* practices and dismissed as "external" the details—and we could say even the principles—of *varṇāśrama*.

Four Options for *adhikāra*, vows, and *mantras* for *dīkṣā* in ISKCON

We have provided four options for the institution of *dīkṣā* in ISKCON, analyzed in terms of three key components: 1) *adhikāra* of the disciple, 2) lifetime vows the disciple takes as part of

initiation, and 3) *mantras* the guru gives. These options are listed in order from the most desirable to the least desirable.[43]

Option #1:

Accept Śrīla Prabhupāda's system for initiations—*adhikāra* of a disciple, vows taken at initiation, and the *mantras* given—as a principle for any and all *dīkṣā* gurus in ISKCON, and for ISKCON as a whole. No one can add, adjust, or subtract anything from Śrīla Prabhupāda's system in these three areas as a general rule. There can be general recommendations—even strong recommendations, but not rules—for additional *adhikāra* such as *śāstra* degrees, as long as such recommendations are firmly supported with Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions directly related to initiation. Individual gurus may adjust the *adhikāra* for individual disciples (but not as a general rule) in terms of requiring more time, or particular services, particular śāstric study, mentors, and so forth, to facilitate the cultivation of bhakti or practical service. However, there can be no individual adjustment of *adhikāra* on the basis of nationality, race, gender, occupation (except for those occupations directly supporting the four sinful activities), or related considerations. Gurus may give instructions to some or all disciples in addition to the vows of *dīkṣā*, such as asking disciples to regularly read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books for a certain amount of time, but such instructions should be separate from the *dīkṣā* vows. Individual disciples may take vows in addition to *dīkṣā* vows on a short or long term basis in consultation with their guru, but not as part of *dīkṣā.*

Pros: The meaning of "ISKCON *dīkṣā* guru" and "initiated ISKCON member" is clear and unambiguous. *Dīkṣā* in ISKCON is in accord with Śrīla Prabhupāda's unequivocal and often repeated instructions in his books, lectures, conversations, and letters. The unity in ISKCON is strongly rooted in Śrīla Prabhupāda's core practices. There is a clear line between principle and detail. There is a clear identity of ISKCON as a distinct branch of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya.*

Cons: Individuality in guru-disciple relationships will need to be established in areas other than *dīkṣā*, while *dīkṣā* is easier to monitor and "control." *Dīkṣā* norms of *adhikāra*, vows, and *mantras* will not be responsive to changes in time, place, and circumstance.

[43] In the appendix we discuss three processes of organizations managing diversity and change: enclaving, cloning, and uprooting. In regards to the *dīkṣā* "contract" Option 1 involves none of them, although those who disagree may end up uprooting to form new organizations. Options 2 and 3 involve institutionally led enclaving. Option 4 (ISKCON's current direction) involves institutionally led cloning or possibly uprooting.

Option #2:

Individual gurus may formally appeal to the GBC for permission to add vows to *dīkṣā* as a general rule for all their disciples, such as loyalty to ISKCON, more *japa* on *Ekādaśī*, and so forth. But neither individual gurus nor ISKCON as a whole can change *adhikāra* or *mantras*, except for individual adjustment of *adhikāra* as described in option #1.

Pros: Change is regulated and will have to be carefully considered. Serious deviations might be avoided. The two main demarcations of a branch of a *sampradāya* in regard to *dīkṣā—adhikāra* and *mantra*—are preserved.

Cons: As of this writing, it is well-known that many initiated devotees find it difficult to stick lifelong to the five vows Śrīla Prabhupāda had at every initiation. Adding more vows as a general practice may put an unnecessary burden on disciples and cause many disciples to commit the offense of disobeying their guru. There is no precedent in our *sampradāya* for having many lifetime vows as part of *dīkṣā*, and we would thus be differing from both Śrīla Prabhupāda and the *sampradāya* as a whole. Having various public lifetime vows as part of *dīkṣā* could also set up a kind of competitive spirit where disciples try to choose gurus based on the number and strictness of vows.

Option #3:

In addition to individual adjustments in *adhikāra* and personal vows as described in option 1, individual gurus may formally appeal to the GBC for permission to make additions, subtractions, and changes in *adhikāra* or vows or *mantras* as a general rule for all their disciples. The GBC may also choose to make such changes for ISKCON as a whole. The latter is already occurring in the area of *adhikāra* and vows. Such decisions should be made on the basis of the Vaiṣṇava exegesis[44] and considering the points made in the section of this paper about who has the *adhikāra* to make changes in ISKCON.

Pros: Change is regulated and will have to be carefully considered. Serious deviations might be avoided. Change according to time, place, and circumstances necessary to the proper functioning of the society can occur with due consideration.

Cons: Serious deviations from Śrīla Prabhupāda's mood and mission may become standard in parts of ISKCON. Disciples of those gurus may not make as much progress as they would have by following Śrīla Prabhupāda's program. Factions and criticism may increase over who has

[44]Exegesis is an analytical explanation of scripture.

the better or purer or more Vedic standard, or the standard that is more effective for preaching. ISKCON may cease to be a unified branch of the *sampradāya* (each *sampradāya* branch shares the same understanding of *adhikāra* and *mantra* for *dīkṣā* in their branch. Vows are not taken at *dīkṣā*, generally, and are very individual within each branch).

Option #4:

Individual gurus may decide on their own, without asking or informing the GBC, to make additions, subtractions, and changes in *adhikāra* or vows or *mantras* as a general rule for all their disciples. The GBC may also choose to make such changes for ISKCON as a whole. Both of these situations are happening at the time of this writing. (Note that as of this writing individual temple presidents also decide on changes to *adhikāra*.)

Pros: Full diversity is part of ISKCON. Disciples would have deeply different choices among *dīkṣā* gurus all of whom claim an affiliation with ISKCON.

Cons: It would become increasingly challenging to define ISKCON or an ISKCON guru, which may pose some legal issues. The basis for unity in ISKCON would be difficult to define, understand, or legislate. From the point of view of tradition, many distinct branches of the *sampradāya* would have some sort of affiliation with the organization "ISKCON," but ISKCON itself would not be a branch of the *sampradāya*.

Recommendations for ISKCON leadership

ISKCON leaders would do well to encourage diversity and innovation among official ISKCON projects, centers, and leaders in details—such as how congregations serve members, how resources are secured from members, educational programs, methods to recruit new members, new services, leadership training, implementation of various social structures related to *varṇāśrama*, and alternative organizational structures—while identifying and preserving the core philosophy and core practices of *bhakti*. In addition, various ISKCON leaders or groups will emphasize different aspects of Śrīla Prabhupāda's seven purposes of his society and various *aṅgas* of bhakti. At the same time, all parts of ISKCON, as a branch of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* and as *rūpānugas*, follow Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's definition of pure *bhakti* and therefore do not cover *bhakti* with karma, *jñāna*, yoga, or *varṇāśrama*.[45] The principles of *varṇāśrama* may be adopted in any official ISKCON project and by ISKCON leaders. At the same time, the details of

[45] *anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyaṁ jñāna-karmādy-anāvṛtam anukūlyena kṛṣṇānuśīlanaṁ bhaktir uttamā* (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.1.11)

varṇāśrama should not change the core initiation process Śrīla Prabhupāda practiced, and they should be applied according to time, place, and circumstance with great care and discretion.

Those who wish to change core teachings or core practices of ISKCON for official ISKCON centers and projects, or for their *dīkṣā* disciples, may still have an honored place in the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* as a whole while not specifically operating under the leadership of the GBC and the umbrella of ISKCON. As we have seen historically, various non-ISKCON groups in the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*, whether they originated outside of ISKCON or split from ISKCON, or a combination of the two, have provided shelter for those who disagree with ISKCON's core and have also indirectly given impetus to ISKCON itself to get closer to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

We recommend that Śrīla Prabhupāda's practice of initiation be a core ISKCON practice for all ISKCON *dīkṣā* gurus, and all official ISKCON projects and centers, namely:

1. Initiates making vows to chant a minimum of sixteen rounds daily of the *mantra* Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare, as well as giving up intoxication, illicit sex, gambling and the eating of meat, fish, and eggs.
2. Gurus giving the specific seven *mantras* that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave, to all initiates at what we call brahminical initiation or second initiation, and directing them to chant them three times a day at morning, midday, and evening.
3. Gurus requiring the *adhikāra*, qualification for initiation, of approximately a year of sincere and serious following of Śrīla Prabhupāda's basic program of devotional service, making no distinction of birth, nationality, race or ethnicity, previous *saṁskāra*, marital status, gender, or classifications within the *varṇas* (such as occupational livelihood) as to who would be eligible to take those vows and receive those *mantras* in full.

To preserve the principle of Śrīla Prabhupāda's core practice of what a disciple vows to a *dīkṣā* guru and what a *dīkṣā* guru awards a disciple, neither the GBC nor any ISKCON *dīkṣā* guru should add to, subtract from, or change these exchanges for any group of disciples or in general. Any such absolute mandates now operative as ISKCON resolutions should be rescinded or changed to recommendations.

Separate from the process of *dīkṣā* itself, gurus may instruct their disciples in the practices of *bhakti* beyond the basic vows and *mantras*. Individual *dīkṣā* gurus may adjust the *adhikāra* for *dīkṣā* for individual prospective disciples as the guru feels is in the individual disciple's best interest. Such adjustment could be made to facilitate the disciple's practice of *bhakti*, by adjusting waiting time before *dīkṣā*, services, study, and so forth, but the guru may not change *adhikāra* in areas such as birth, nationality, qualities and work in terms of one's means of livelihood, gender, race, etc. Rare individual exceptions in vows may be made, at the discretion

of the *dīkṣā* guru, for persons with disabilities or in an emergency. Individual disciples may, with their guru's permission, take additional vows or chant additional *mantras* on a short- or long-term basis, but not as part of the requirements for *dīkṣā*.

All the seven *mantras* Śrīla Prabhupāda gave to all initiates at second, brahminical, initiation are understood as *dīkṣā mantras*, and whoever gives any of those *mantras* is the initiate's *dīkṣā* guru. As Śrīla Prabhupāda never instituted the separate giving of the Brahma-*gāyatrī* in an *upanayanam* ceremony, ISKCON members should stick to the principle of following Śrīla Prabhupāda's example of how he gave this *mantra*. Rather than a separate giving of the Brahma-*gāyatrī*, qualified devotees of at least ten or twelve years of age may receive regular initiation as practiced by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

It is important to teach—without speculation—the history of the *gāyatrī* initiations that Śrīla Prabhupāda performed. For example, based on thorough interviews of those who were there, and reviews of historical documents and audio, there is no account that women pressured or discussed or even asked Śrīla Prabhupāda's to give them second initiation before he did so in Boston, 1968. When Śrīla Prabhupāda discussed his explanations for giving *gāyatrī* initiation to women, or to men who worked for salaries, or in other than brahminical occupations, he gave reasons according to *śāstra* and never said that he was making a temporary circumstantial adjustment, or one that should be adjusted later.[46]

It is also important to have firm *pramāṇas* for statements about the effects of chanting the Brahma-*gāyatrī* and about the qualifications of those who can receive this *mantra* from a spiritual master. There are several unsubstantiated claims on these topics—some in printed books by ISKCON leaders. Śrīla Prabhupāda was careful to base his actions on *śāstra*, and his followers do well to follow in his footsteps. Such is especially important regarding a *mantra* Śrīla Prabhupāda gave at *dīkṣā*.

It is of note that some of what prompted this research was individual ISKCON *dīkṣā*-gurus making changes to Śrīla Prabhupāda's *dīkṣā* "contract" with the aim of moving towards *varṇāśrama*. Some ISKCON leaders express, publicly, frustration that the general ISKCON society seems to do little or nothing about *varṇāśrama*, and they thus make their own "experiment." In response, global leadership can take effective and meaningful steps towards integration of *varṇāśrama* principles into ISKCON projects. Even small steps regarding principles—such as prioritizing devotees' individual propensities when engaging them in service—can significantly facilitate the satisfaction and enthusiasm of ISKCON members. We can thus work together to fulfill this desire of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Such steps will also reduce the

[46] The burden of proof is on those who make the claim that a consistent and oft-repeated practice was an exception.

tendency of those understandably eager for *varṇāśrama* to introduce various details that may not be suitable for the present time, place, and circumstance, or may adversely affect ISKCON's cohesion.

Diversity must flourish in a personalistic society. Details must change as society changes and we adopt principles of *varṇāśrama*. While doing that, keeping Śrīla Prabhupāda at the center by preserving his *dīkṣā* program unifies ISKCON as a branch of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's tree of devotional service. That unity provides the consistent center among our many varieties of loving devotional service to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

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Appendix: Sociology of Religion: Relevant Empirical Research

As the core of the question in this paper is the consideration of the relationship between principles and details, we will find it helpful to consider how religious groups in general deal with this relationship. We reference two of the leading world experts in sociology of religion, and one of the top leaders in management and organizational structure and culture.

We look first at the research of Roger Finke, a Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies at the Pennsylvania State University, who is noteworthy not only for playing a major role in recent transformations of both theory and research methods in his field, but also for leading a large number of other scholars to create the Association of Religion Data Archives, which since 1996 has operated a major digital library of questionnaire data and teaching resources.

Finke writes (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43:1 (2004) 19–34 "Innovation and Tradition"):

> Religious groups sustain organizational vitality by preserving core religious teachings as they introduce innovations for serving members and adapting to their changing environment.
>
> ....The core teachings are the beliefs and practices considered essential for full membership in a religious movement ... distinctive beliefs (e.g., new prophesies,

> spiritual gifts, worldview) and distinctive practices (e.g., special diets, required prayers, moral codes), these core teachings help form the unique identity of the group.

Finke's research shows that the vitality of a religious organization depends on preserving core teaching and practice, while innovating in the following ways:

- how congregations serve members
- how resources are secured from members
- changes in educational programs
- forms of worship
- methods to recruit new members
- new services
- leadership training
- alternative organizational structures

He lists three sources for such innovations:

- Independent congregations.
- Abundance of organizations and loosely organized movements that share core teachings.
- Selected internal groups within the larger organization that support core teachings while being given freedom to innovate.

We now look at relevant sections from the research of Rodney Stark, an American sociologist of religion. After teaching at the University of Washington for 32 years, Stark moved to Baylor University in 2004, where he is co-director of the Institute for Studies of Religion. He writes (Chapter Sixteen: "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model", in *Cults and New Religious Movements*, edited by Lorne Dawson, Blackwell Publishing, 2003):

> Religious movements will continue to grow only to the extent that they maintain sufficient tension with their environment — remain sufficiently strict. Speaking precisely to this proposition, the leader of a rapidly growing evangelical Protestant group noted that it was not only necessary to keep the front door of the church open, but that it was necessary to keep the back door open, too. That is, growth not only depends upon bringing people in, but in letting go of those who don't fit in. The alternative is to modify the movement in an effort to satisfy those who are discontented, which invariably means to reduce strictness.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda himself says (Lecture on *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 1.2.10 in Delhi on November 16, 1973):

> I have to arrange according to the country, according to the circumstances, as far as possible. ... So we have to adopt *deśa-kāla-patra* ... But we are keeping our principles as it is, but making arrangement according to the circumstances. That is required.

And, as Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote on the Vyāsa Pūjā of His Divine Grace Prabhupāda Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Saraswati in February 1936:

> The line of service
>
> As drawn by you,
>
> Is pleasing and healthy
>
> Like morning dew.
>
> The oldest of all
>
> But in new dress
>
> Miracle done
>
> Your Divine Grace.

What ways do other highly successful (in terms of number of members and years of existence) religious organizations have for handling diversity while preserving core teachings? We now turn to Henry Mintzberg, Cleghorn Professor of Management Studies in the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill University in Montreal. His research has dealt with issues of general management and organizations, focusing on the nature of managerial work, forms of organizing, and the strategy formation process. He has also been promoting the development of a family of programs for practicing managers in the private and health sectors. He earned both his MS and his PhD in Management from MIT's Sloan School of Management.

He details three methods (with Frances Westley, "Cycles of Organizational Change" in *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol 13, Special Issue: "Fundamental Themes in Strategy Process Research", Winter, 1992, pp.39–59).

The first is "enclaving," as done by the Roman Catholics, with orders such as the Humiliati, Franciscans, and Dominicans. The organization tolerates and enclaves change, which diffuses at controlled intervals throughout the rest of the organization. Enclaving requires "constant vigilance and receptivity on the part of top management," otherwise eventually schisms can occur. Enclaving requires constantly managing a unity in diversity balance, keeping up a

rhythm of stability and change. Of the three approaches, enclaving leads to the largest parent group.

The second is "cloning," as done by various Protestant churches. With cloning, there are many national churches, smaller sects, and denominations, where baptism in one church gives one membership in all, but the only connection between churches is that of doctrine. This process is reminiscent of Śrīla Prabhupāda's letter to Rāyarāma (unknown place, unknown date):

> With reference to the boys holding *kīrtanas* independently, our propaganda should be like that. That people may open different centers of their own, or each and every householder may have his own class at home. Not that everyone is required to join the society; they may take the idea from the society and introduce in their private life. And if possible, let us sell to them the paraphernalia of *kīrtana*: *karatālas*, *mṛdaṅga*, Deities, etc.

It's worth noting that Śrīla Prabhupāda makes a distinction between this cloning process and "joining the society." Cloning facilitates friendliness and interchange among sister organizations, though there may gradually come a point where a particular cloned organization becomes "other." Cloning leads to a balance of unity and diversity within groups and between groups. This system requires little organizational oversight in terms of management but does depend on a high quality of communication and presentation to reap the benefits while avoiding friction and confusion.

The third is "uprooting," as done in Buddhism, where mature students wander alone to create new groups. This system gives members considerable autonomy, prevents hierarchies, and requires very high member commitment, a high tolerance for ambiguity, and members who "accept their leader's direction for the overall pattern of their lives." With this expectation, the process of change is less traumatic. Clear and firm boundaries can facilitate amicable relationships among distinct Vaiṣṇava organizations. There may be strong cohesion within each small organization, while the coupling among different units may be nearly nonexistent. The "uprooting" approach leads to the greatest diversity among organizations, and the greatest unity within each, much smaller, organization.

Mintzberg notes that these processes are not mutually exclusive, and some combination may occur within a religion or business over the course of history.