

Some Evidence Regarding Education and Guruship for Vaishnavis

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INTRODUCTION

In ISKCON, while women are generally recognized informally as spiritual teachers, no woman has so far been formally allowed to serve as an initiating spiritual master, *dīkṣā-guru*. Now there is a proposal to allow a woman to take up this role, and this has created some controversy. The resulting discussion has inspired many devotees to look more closely at the roots of our movement to find authoritative answers from guru, *sādhū*, and *śāstra* about what are absolute principles and what are possible adjustments. The present paper is primarily an exploration into *śāstra* regarding the roles and responsibilities of *vaiṣṇavīs*. We examine statements on the social and spiritual role of ladies from the Upanishads, the Vedas, and some of the principal commentaries on them. Since for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas the authority on religious ritual is *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, we also examine the texts therein as well as some relevant points from Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī's *Dig-darśinī-ṭīkā* commentary. This paper does not offer any conclusions. We present herein excerpts from these literatures in the hope that they will be of some value for the followers of ISKCON's Founder-Acharya His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Srila Prabhupada expected ISKCON's managers to deal with complex issues that they may come to face by considering all aspects and arriving at a decision through proper discussion:

Personally I wish all the existing GBC may be trained up so perfectly that in the future in my absence they can manage the whole Society very nicely and strongly. That is my desire. At least in this stage of my life it is not at all desirable that there be any factions amongst yourselves. Try to settle up amicably and correct yourself. One man is trained up with great difficulty, especially in spiritual life. Everyone has got some weakness and deficiency. It is better to correct or mend it than to break it. It will be best to discuss this in an open meeting of the GBC and then do the needful. (Letter to Hamsaduta, 29 September 1974.)

A bibliography has been provided at the end of this paper that specifies the sources used in its preparation.

WOMEN IN THE VEDAS

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

CREATED AS EQUAL HALVES

The *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka-upaniṣad*^[1] (1.4.3) contains the following passage —

sa dvitīyam aicchat. sa haitāvān āsa yathā strīpumāṁsau sampariṣvaktau. sa imam evātmānam dvedhāpātayat. tataḥ patīś ca patnī cābhavatām. tasmād idam ardhabṛgalam iva sva iti ha smāha yājñavalkyaḥ.

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

EQUAL RIGHTS TO EDUCATION AND CELIBACY

Direct evidence supporting the equal right to education is found in the *Atharva-veda*^[2] (11.5.18) as follows,

brahmacaryeṇa kanyā yuvānaṁ vindate patim

Through *brahmacarya* a girl attains a suitable husband.

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

brahmacaryeṇa brahma vedaḥ tad-adhyayanārtham-ācaryam

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

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

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

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

SOME HYMNS RESERVED FOR THEM

There are many hymns in the *Ṛg-veda* that are reserved for recitation only by women. An example (*Ṛg-veda*^[3] 10.159.1-2) speaks about a woman’s qualification to speak on transcendental topics:

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

*aharī ketur aharī mūrdhāhamugrā vivācanī
mamed anu kratuṃ patiḥ sehānāyā upācaret*

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

TRANSMITTERS OF VEDIC KNOWLEDGE

In the *Brhad-devatā*^[4] (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 list of women is as follows,

*ghoṣā godhā viśvavārā apālopaniṣanniṣat
brahma-jāyā juhūr-nāma agastyasya svasāditiḥ
indrāṇi cendramātā ca saramā romaśorvaśī
lopāmudrā ca nadyaś-ca yamī nārī ca śaśvatī
śrīr-lākṣā sārparājñī vāk-śraddhā medhā ca dakṣiṇā
rātrī sūryā ca sāvitrī brahma-vādīnya īritāḥ*

Ghoṣā, Godhā, Viśvavārā, Apālā, Upaniṣat, Niṣat, Brahmajāyā also known as *Juhū, Aditi* – the sister of *Agastya, Indrāṇi*, the Mother of *Indra, Saramā, Romaśā, Urvaśī, Lopāmudrā*, the river *Yamī*, the river *Nārī* and the river *Śaśvatī, Śrī, Lakṣā, Sārparājñī, Vāk, Śraddhā, Medhā, Dakṣiṇā, Rātrī* and *Sūryā* – also known as *Sāvitrī* – are famous as knowers of Brahman and are [the contributors of Vedic hymns].

ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE THE GAYATRI AND THE SACRED THREAD

The *Yama-smṛti*^[5] specifies the right of women to study Vedas and receive the thread,

*purā-kalpe tu nārīṇām mauñji-bandhanam-iṣyate
adhyaṅpanam ca vedānām sāvitrī vacanam tathā*

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

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

JAIMINI AND AITISAYANA

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

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

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

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

darśa-pūrṇa-māsābhyāṃ svarga-kāmo yajeta (*Āpastambha Śrauta Sūtra* 3.9.4)

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

Jaimini in the *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā sūtras*^[6] (6.1.3.6) presents the view of the opposite party (*pūrva-pakṣa*) first,

liṅga-viśeṣa-nirdeśāt puṃ-yuktam-aitisāyanaḥ (*Sūtra* 6)

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

Commentary: *darśa-pūrṇa-māsābhyāṃ svarga-kāmo yajetetyevam-ādi samāmnāyate. tatra sandehaḥ. kiṃ svarga-kāmaṃ puṃāṃsam-adhikṛtya yajetety-eṣa śabda uccaritaḥ? atha vā'niyamaḥ striyaṃ puṃāṃsam ca? iti. kiṃ prāptam? puṃ-liṅgam-adhikṛtaṃ mene aitisāyanaḥ. kutaḥ? liṅga-viśeṣa-nirdeśāt. puṃ-liṅgena viśeṣeṇa nirdeśo bhavati, svarga-kāmo yajeteti. tasmāt puṃān-ukto yajeteti, na strī.*

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

Jaimini then gives his conclusion:

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

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

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

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

However, we (the uttara-pakṣa) say that the word 'svarga-kāmaḥ' cannot refer only to a male. Why? Because of its non-speciality. The word cannot be restricted only to the male species because it emphasizes eligibility over gender. The emphasis is on the fact that "One who desires heaven should perform sacrifices." The rightful performers of the sacrifice are indicated by the word 'yajet'. If it is said that the word 'svarga-kāmaḥ' is of masculine gender by rules of grammar, then we (the uttara-pakṣa) say that it is not so, for assuming that only males are indicated will lead to the following problem:

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

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

Thus, in the opinion of Vyasadeva, even women are eligible to perform all sacrifices.

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

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

MANU-SAMHITA

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

| *na strī svātantryam-arhati* (9.3)

| Women should not be given independence.

And also,

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

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

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

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

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

CONTRADICTIONS

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

| *prajanārthaṁ mahā-bhāgāḥ pūjārhā gr̥ha-dīptayaḥ* (9.26)

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

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

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

While some other sections speak derogatorily:

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

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

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

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

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

INTERPOLATIONS

Taking note of this and other points, various scholars have opined that the *Manu-saṁhitā* we see today has suffered from considerable interpolation. In the introduction to the earliest known commentary on the *Manu-saṁhitā* by Medhatithi^[8], we find the following verse written by the scribe of the commentary:

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

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

Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura also speaks about *Manu-saṁhitā*'s interpolations in his introduction to the *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā*^[9],

The *varṇāśrama* system continued purely for a long time, until Jamadagni and his son Parashuram, of *kṣatriya* natures, claimed themselves as *brāhmaṇas*. By following a *varṇa* contrary to their nature out of self interest, they created friction between the *brāhmaṇa* and *kṣatriya* classes. Because of this seed of enmity between the two classes, the procedure of judging *varṇa* by birth became fixed. In time, this system of *varṇas* without reference to nature entered covertly in the *Manu-saṁhitā* and other scriptures.

NOT APPLICABLE IN KALI YUGA

Even if one were to believe that the *Manu-saṁhitā* that is found today is not an interpolated version of the original one, one would still be discouraged to accept it as a current authority by the following statement of the *Parāśara-smṛti*^[10],

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

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

NOT A PRINCIPAL AUTHORITY

A similar point is made by Srila Madhvācārya in his work *Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya*^[11]:

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

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

APPARENT CONTRADICTION IN THE *HARI-BHAKTI-VILĀSA*

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* is the law book of the *Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavas*. Evidence is found in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* regarding ladies giving *mantras*. Before we consider that, there is a certain precaution which Srila Prabhupada gives us regarding *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*:

Actually, *Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī* collected only a summary of the elaborate descriptions of *Vaiṣṇava* regulative principles from the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. It is *Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī*'s opinion, however, that to follow the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* strictly is to actually follow the *Vaiṣṇava* rituals in perfect order. He claims that the *smārta-samāja*, which is strictly followed by caste *brāhmaṇas*, has influenced portions that *Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī* collected from the original *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. It is therefore very difficult to find out *Vaiṣṇava* directions from the book of *Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī*. It is better to consult the commentary made by *Sanātana Gosvāmī* himself for the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* under the name of *Dig-darśinī-ṭīkā*. Some say that the same commentary was compiled by *Gopīnātha-pūjā Adhikārī*, who was engaged in the service of *Śrī Rādhā-ramaṇājī* and who happened to be one of the disciples of *Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī*. (Purport to *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, *Madhya* 1.35)

Having seen this, let's examine the positive and negative evidence from *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*^[12] regarding female *dīkṣā* gurus:

POSITIVE EVIDENCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*gr̥hasthā vanagās caiva yatayo brahmacārīṇaḥ
striyaḥ sūdrādayas caiva sarve yatrādhikārīṇaḥ (1.218)*

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

*striyo vā yadi vā sūdrā brāhmaṇāḥ kṣatriyādayaḥ
pūjayitvā śilā-cakraṃ labhante śāsvataṃ padam (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 5.452)*

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

NEGATIVE EVIDENCE

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

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

RESOLVING THE CONTRADICTION

The compound word *nādhikuryāt* in the negative evidence directly contradicts the word *adhikārīṇāḥ* in the previous positive evidence. How to resolve this contradiction? The *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta* (5.327) says:

*virodho vākyayor yatra nāprāmāṇyaṃ tad iṣyate
yathāviruddhatā ca syāt tadārthaḥ kalpyate tayoḥ*

An explanation of two apparently contradictory statements should leave no scope for ambiguity. Instead, an explanation which leaves no contradictions should be sought.

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

In the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* editions published by two separate publishers^{[13][14]}, the same verse is found as follows,

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

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

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

Some may be inclined to think that this version of *na-dhik-kuryāt kadācana* might be a recent interpolation in the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*. However, in the commentary of Śrīla Śrīdhar Svāmī (written sometime between 1350 and 1450 AD) on this verse of *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*^[15] the alternate reading is recognized:

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

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

HARI-BHAKTI-VILASA ON RESTRICTIONS OF WOMEN AND SUDRAS

While presenting codes of behavior, *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* distinguishes between ladies who are *vaiṣṇavas* and those who are not:

*ato niṣedhakaṁ yad yad vacanaṁ śrūyate sphuṭam
avaiṣṇava-param̐ tat tad vijñeyam̐ tattva-darśibhiḥ (5.453)*

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 'ham̐ śucer apy aśucer api
stri-śūdra-kara-saṁsparśo vajrād̐ api suduḥsahaḥ
praṇavocāraṇāccaiva śālagrāma-śilārcanāt
brāhmaṇi-gamanāc caiva śūdraś caṇḍālatām̐ iyāt (5.454 - 455)*

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* [om̐], worships the *śālagrāma-śilā*, or cohabits with a *brāhmaṇa* lady, then such a *śūdra* will attain the more degraded status of a dog-eater.

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī explains the mood of this verse in his detailed purport as follows:

*tad eva śrī-nāradoktyā pramāṇayati — brāhmaṇeti. satām̐ vaiṣṇavānām̐ śūdrāṇām̐, śālagrāme śrī-
śālagrāma-śilārcane, anyeṣām̐ asatām̐ śūdrāṇām̐. ataeva śūdrām̐ adhikṛtyoktam̐ vāyu-purāṇe—*

*ayācakah̐ pradātā syāt̐ kṛṣim̐ vṛtty artham̐ ācaret
purāṇam̐ śṛṇuyān nityam̐ śālagrāmam̐ ca pūjayet̐ iti.*

*evam̐ mahā-purāṇānām̐ vacanaiḥ saha—brāhmaṇasyaiva pūjyo 'ham̐ iti vacanasya virodhān
mātsarya-paraiḥ smārtaiḥ kaiścit kalpitam̐ iti mantavyam̐. yadi ca yuktyā siddham̐ sa-mūlam̐ syāt̐
tarhi cāvaiṣṇaviḥ śūdrais̐ tādrśibhiḥ ca strībhis̐ tat-pūjā na kartavyā, yathā-vidhi gṛhīta-viṣṇu-
dīkṣākaiś ca taiḥ kartavyeti vyavasthāpanīyam̐. yataḥ̐ śūdreṣv̐ antyajeṣv̐ api madhye ye vaiṣṇavās̐ te
śūdrādayo na kilocyante. tathā ca nārādiye—*

śvapaco'pi mahīpāla viṣṇor bhakto dvijodhikah̐ iti

*itihāsa-samuccaye—
na śūdrā bhagavad-bhaktam̐ niṣādam̐ śvapacam̐ tathā
vikṣate jāti-sāmānyāt sa yāti narakam̐ dhruvam̐ iti*

*pādme ca—
na śūdrā bhagavad-bhaktās̐ te tu bhāgavatā narāḥ̐.
sarva-varṇeṣu te śūdrā ye na bhaktā janārdane iti*

*etad-ādīkam̐ cāgre vaiṣṇava-māhātmye vistareṇa vyaktam̐ bhāvi. kim̐ ca, bhagavad-dīkṣā-prabhāvena
śūdrādinām̐ api vipra-sāmyam̐ siddham̐ eva. tathā ca tatra—yathā kāñcanatām̐ yāti ity ādi. etac ca
prāg-dīkṣā-māhātmye likhitam̐ eva. ata eva tṛtīya-skandhe devahūti-vākyaṁ [Śrīmad-bhāgavatam̐
3.33.6]—*

*yan-nāma-dheya-śravaṇānukīrtanād̐
yat-prahvaṇād̐ yat-smaraṇād̐ api kvacit.
śvādo 'pi sadyaḥ̐ savanāya kalpate*

kutaḥ punas te bhagavan nu darśanāt iti

savanāya yajanāya kalpate yogyo bhavatīty arthaḥ. ata eva vipraiḥ saha vaiṣṇavānām ekatraiva gaṇanā. tathā ca hari-bhakti-sudhodaye śrī-bhagavad-brahma-saṁvāde—

tīrthāny aśvattha-taravo gāvo viprās tathā svayam
mad-bhaktās ceti vijñeyāḥ pañca te tanavo mama iti

caturtha-skandhe [Śrīmad-bhāgavatam 4.21.12] śrī-pṛthu-mahārāja-varṇane—
sarvatrāskhalitādeśaḥ sapta-dvīpaika-daṇḍa-dhṛk
anyatra brāhmaṇa-kulād anyatrācyuta-gotrataḥ iti

acyuto gotra-pravartaka-tulyo yeṣāṁ vaiṣṇavānām tad vyatirekeṇa cety arthaḥ. tathā tan-
mahārājasyoktau [Śrīmad-bhāgavatam 4.21.37]
mā jātu tejaḥ prabhaven maharddhibhis
titikṣayā tapasā vidyayā ca
dedīpyamāne ṅjita-devatānām
kule svayaṁ rāja-kulād dvijānām iti
atra śrī-svāmi-pādānām ṭikā—mahatyas ca tārddhayaś ca tābhir yad-rāja-kulasya tejas tat tasmāt
sakāśād dvijānām viprāṇām kule ajito devatā-pūjyo yeṣāṁ vaiṣṇavānām, teṣāṁ kule mā jātu
prabhavet. kadācid api prabhavaṁ na karotu. kathambhūte samṛddhibhir vināpi svayam eva
titikṣādibhir dedīpyamāna iti

purañjanoktau [Śrīmad-bhāgavatam 3.26.24] ca—
tasmīn dadhe damam ahaṁ tava vīra-patni
yo 'nyatra bhūsurā-kulāt kṛta-kilbiṣas tam
paśye na vīta-bhayam unmuditaṁ tri-lokyām
anyatra vai mura-ripor itaratra dāsāt iti

tatrāpi saiva ṭikā—he vīra-patni yas te kṛtāparādhaḥ. tasmīn ahaṁ brāhmaṇa-kulād anyatra
anyasmin muraripu-dāsād itaratra ca damam dadhe, daṇḍam karomīty adi. idṛśāni ca vacanāni śrī-
bhāgavatāu bahūny eva santi. itthaṁ vaiṣṇavānām brāhmaṇaiḥ saha sāmyam eva sidhyati

kiṁ ca—viprād dviṣaḍ-guṇa-yutāt [Śrīmad-bhāgavatam 7.9.10]

ity ādi-vacanair vaiṣṇava-brāhmaṇebhyo nīca-jāti-jātānām api vaiṣṇavānām śraīṣṭhyam
nirdīśyatetarām. ata evoktaṁ śrī-bhagavatā śrī-hayagrīveṇa śrī-hayaśīrṣa-pañcarātre śrī-
puruṣottama-pratiṣṭhānte—
mūrtipānām tu dātavyā deśikārdhena dakṣiṇā
tad ardham vaiṣṇavānām tu tad ardham tad dvijan manām iti

ato yuktam eva likhita sarvair bhagavataḥ paraiḥ pūjya iti. tathā ca brahma-vaivarte
priyavratopākhyāne dharmā-vyādhasyāpi śrī-śālagrāma-śilā-pūjanam uktam—
tataś ca vismitaḥ śrutvā dharmā-vyādhasya tad vacaḥ.
tasthau sa ca samānīya darśayāmāsa tāv ubhau
nirnikta-vasanau vṛddhāvāsanasthau nijau gurū
śālagrāma-śilām caiva tat-samīpe supūjitam iti

atrācāras ca—satām madhya-deśe 'smin viśeṣato dakṣiṇa-deśe ca mahattamānām śrī-vaiṣṇavānām
pramāṇam iti dik. evaṁ śrī-bhāgavata-pāthādāv apy adhikāro vaiṣṇavānām draṣṭavyaḥ. yato vidhi-
niśedhā bhagavad-bhaktānām na bhavantīti devarṣi-bhūtāpta-nṛṇām pitṛṇām [Śrīmad-bhāgavatam
11.5.41] ity ādi-vacanaiḥ. tathā karma-parityāgādīnāpi na kaścid doṣo ghaṭata iti tāvat karmāṇi
kurvīta [Śrīmad-bhāgavatam 11.20.9] iti, yadā yasyānugṛhṇāti bhagavān [Śrīmad-bhāgavatam 4.29.46]
ity ādi vacanaiś ca vyaktam bodhitam evāsti. (Dig-darśinī commentary on Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 5.454 –
455)

Translation: These two verses are spoken by Sri Narada. It should be noted that *vaiṣṇavas* born in *śūdra* families have the right of worshiping the *śālagrāma-śilā*. *Śūdras* and ladies who are not *vaiṣṇavas* are barred. *Vaiṣṇavas* born in *śūdra* families have the right, as specified in the *Vāyu-purāṇa* as follows:

The *śūdra* should donate to the renunciates, work for agricultural and mercantile activities, listen to the *purāṇas* regularly, and worship the *Śālagrāma-śilā*.

Seeing the differences that the original verse has from the *Vāyu-mahā-purāṇa* and other *purāṇas*, certain envious *smārta-brāhmaṇas* consider these *purāṇic* statements to be interpolations. It is to be known that a non-*vaiṣṇava śūdra* or woman, even if fully knowledgeable in the rituals, is not to perform any deity worship. However, there are all provisions for a lady or *śūdra* who is properly initiated in a *vaiṣṇava* line. Those who are *vaiṣṇavas* amongst people born in *śūdra* or outcaste families are not to be considered as *śūdras*. This is given in the *Nāradya Purāṇa* as follows,

“O King! A *vaiṣṇava* from a dog-eating family is greater than a twice born *brāhmaṇa*.”

Also, the *Itihāsa-samuccaya* says,

“The devotees of the Lord are not *śūdras*, aborigines, or dog-eaters. One who sees them with such an ordinary caste-impelled vision certainly goes to hell.”

And the *Padma-purāṇa* says,

“Those who are devotees of the Lord are never *śūdras*. In fact, they are known as *bhāgavatas*. Those who are not *vaiṣṇavas* in all the four castes are to be known as the actual *śūdras*.”

Similar glorification of *vaiṣṇavas* has been elaborately described previously in this book (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*). It is proved therein that by *Vaiṣṇava* initiation, *śūdras* etc. also attain the level of a *brāhmaṇa*. The verse *yathā kāñcanatām yāti kāṁsyaṁ rasa-vidhānataḥ* (Just as bell-metal mixes chemically to produce gold, all men attain the status of a *brāhmaṇa* by the process of initiation). This was already written previously in the section describing the importance of initiations. Thus, the following statement of *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* [3.33.6] is justified,

“To say nothing of the spiritual advancement of persons who see the Supreme Person face to face, even a person born in a family of dog-eaters immediately becomes eligible to perform Vedic sacrifices if he once utters the holy name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead or chants about Him, hears about His pastimes, offers Him obeisances or even remembers Him.”

The word ‘*savanāya kalpate*’ here means that such a person becomes eligible for Vedic *yajñas*. Therefore, the *vaiṣṇavas* are counted on the same level as the *brāhmaṇas*. Furthermore, in the *Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya*, the Lord says:

“Holy places, banyan trees, cows, *brāhmaṇas*, and myself — these five forms are present in the body of my devotee.”

Also, in the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* [4.21.12], it is said regarding Maharaja Prithu,

“Maharaja Prithu was an unrivaled king and possessed the scepter for ruling all the seven islands on the surface of the globe. No one could disobey his irrevocable orders but the saintly persons, the *brāhmaṇas*, and the descendants of the Supreme Personality of Godhead [the *Vaiṣṇavas*].”

Here, the word *acyuta-gotra* indicates *vaiṣṇavas* who are on the same level as those sages who originated the other *brāhmaṇa-gotras*, family lines.

Also, Maharaja Prithu himself says in the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* [4.21.37],

“The *brāhmaṇas* and *vaiṣṇavas* are personally glorified by their characteristic powers of tolerance, penance, knowledge and education. By dint of all these spiritual assets, *vaiṣṇavas* are more powerful than royalty. It is therefore advised that the princely order not exhibit its material prowess before these two communities and should avoid offending them.”

Here, *Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī* comments, “Great material opulence and the royalty exhibited by those who belong to royal families should not be shown in front of those who are born in *brāhmaṇa* lineages or the *vaiṣṇavas*, the worshippers of Lord Ajita. Even a slight show should not be made. Why so? For these personalities are effulgent, even without great jewels and opulences, simply on the strength of their tolerance and austerity, etc.”

Similarly, King Puranjana says in *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* [4.26.24],

“O hero’s wife, kindly tell me if someone has offended you. I am prepared to give such a person punishment as long as he does not belong to the *brāhmaṇa* caste. But for the servant of Muraripu (Krishna), I excuse no one within or beyond these three worlds. No one can freely move after offending you, for I am prepared to punish him.”

Here, too, *Srila Sridhara Swami* translates the verse in his commentary as follows, “O hero’s wife. I shall punish whosoever has offended you, except if he be a *brāhmaṇa* or a servant of Lord Krishna.”

Similar statements are to be found in plenty in the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*. By this, the similarity of *brāhmaṇas* and *vaiṣṇavas* is proved. Moreover, by the verse 7.9.10 of the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*, it is indicated that the *vaiṣṇavas* born in castes lower than the *brāhmaṇas* are even greater than them.

Having said this, Lord Hayagriva also says in the *Hayaśirṣa-pañcarātra, Puruṣottama-pratiṣṭhā* section, as follows,

“The worshippers of the deities should be given half of the donations, the *vaiṣṇavas* should be given half of that, and the *brāhmaṇas* should be given half of what the *vaiṣṇavas* have been given.”

Therefore, all devotees are certainly worshipable. Furthermore, in the *Brahma-vaivarta-purāṇa*, in the narration of King Priyavrata, we find that the hunter named Dharma also worshipped the *śālagrāma-śilā*. The verse is as follows,

“And hearing their words with great amazement, Dharma the hunter stood still and saw both his gurus. Both of them were aged, dressed in fine garments, and seated on an elevated seat. In front of them, Dharma the hunter carefully worshiped the *śālagrāma-śilā*.”

Now a description of practical conduct amongst *vaiṣṇavas* — amongst the devotees in the central and especially in the southern parts of India, it is seen that all *vaiṣṇavas* have the right to recite the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* and other literature. No restrictions are seen on the devotees of the Lord, since all of them are viewed under the privilege of the *devarṣi-bhūtāpta-nṛṇām-pitṛṇām* verse from *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* [11.5.41]. Moreover, they are not considered to be at fault for giving up their ordinary duties according to the *tāvat-karmāṇi-kurvīta* verse from the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* [11.20.9] and also according to the *yadā yasyānugṛhṇāti bhagavān* verse from *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* [4.29.46].

OTHER SMRTIS AND ITIHASAS

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

WOMEN CAN CHANT GAYATRI

manasā bhartur-aticāre tri-rātraṁ yāvakaṁ kṣīraudanaṁ vā bhūñjānāghaḥ śayītorbhvaṁ tri-rātrād-apsu nimagnāyāḥ sāvitrī-aṣṭa-śatena śirobhīr-juhuyāt-pūtā bhavatīti vijñāyate (Vasiṣṭha Smṛti^[16] 21.7)

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

SAME RIGHTS IN VEDIC MANTRAS

Śrīla Madhvācārya quotes the *Vyoma-saṁhitā* in his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*^[17] (1.1.1) as follows,

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

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

TWO TYPES OF LADIES

The *Hārīta-smṛti*^[18], which is much older and broader in its outlook than the current edition of the *Manu-smṛti*, speaks about two types of women as follows,

dvidvidhāḥ striyaḥ. brahma-vādinīyaḥ sadyo-vadhvaś ca. tatra brahma-vādinīnām upanayanam agnīndhanaṁ vedādhyayanam sva-grhe-ca bhikṣācaryā iti. sadyo-vadhūnām tūpasthite vivāhe kathañcid-upanayana-mātraṁ kṛtvā vivāhaḥ kāryaḥ (21.23)

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

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

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

Women who are pure devotees can also become traveling saleswomen for distributing the holy name, but they cannot give the holy name to men. According to time, place and circumstance, and with great care and caution, mature women can distribute the holy name to men. Apart from elderly women or very young girls, men preachers should avoid discussion with women. (*Godruma-kalpāṭavi*^[19])

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

Women are allowed to enter only the *gr̥hastha āśrama* and in special cases the *vānaprastha āśrama*. Although some women, being exceptionally qualified by achieving high education, expertise in understanding the scripture, and the power of abstinence, may take to the *brahmacārī* or *sannyāsī āśrama* and obtain all success, it is not the normal rule, as women are usually of weaker body, faith, and discriminating power. (*Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta*^[20], chapter 2, part 4)

WOMEN ARE NOT ON THE LEVEL OF SUDRAS

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

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

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

OTHER EXAMPLES OF WOMEN IN THE VEDIC AGE

The time depicted in *Rāmāyaṇa* is considered to be when the Vedic Age was at its highest point. In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*^[21], we find the following evidence regarding ladies,

*sā kṣauma-vasanā hr̥ṣṭā nityaṃ vrata-parāyaṇā
agnīm juhōti sma tadā mantravat kṛta-maṅgalā (2.17.10)*

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

THE PATH OF THE TANTRAS

The path propagated by the *smārta-brāhmaṇas* was a restrictive one as far as education for ladies and *sūdras* was concerned. Examples of this could be found in many places:

| *amantrikā tu kāryeyam strīṇāmāvṛdaśeṣataḥ* (*Manu-saṁhitā* 2.66)

| All *saṁskāras* for ladies are to be done without any mantras.

| *sāvitrī praṇavam yattu lakṣmīm strī-sūdrayornecchantī* (*Nṛsimha Tāpanī Upaniṣad*^[22], 3)

| Do not give *brāhmaṇa* initiation to women or *sūdras*.

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

| *kībā vipra kibā nyāsi sūdra kene naya*

| *yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā sei guru haya* (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya* 8.128)

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

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

THE TANTRAS ARE A BONAFIDE WAY OF WORSHIPING THE LORD

Some *vaiṣṇavas* cringe upon hearing the word ‘*tantra*’, associating the term with ritualistic drinking of alcohol and performance of ritualistic sex. In the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam*, however, Krishna clarifies the situation:

| *vaidikas tāntriko miśra iti me tri-vidho makhaḥ*

| *trayāṇām īpsitenaiva vidhinā mān samarcaret* (11.27.7)

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

THE PATH OF THE TANTRAS IS MORE PROMINENT IN KALI YUGA

The *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* also says:

| *taṁ tadā puruṣaṁ martyā mahā-rājopalakṣaṇam*

| *yajanti veda-tantrābhyāṁ paraṁ jijñāsavo nṛpa*

| *iti dvāpara urv īśa stuvanti jagad-īśvaram*

| *nānā-tantra-vidhānena kalāv api tathā śṛṇu* (11.5.28, 30)

| My dear King, in *Dvāpara-yuga*, men who desire to know the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is the supreme enjoyer, worship him in the mood of honoring a great king, following the prescriptions of both the Vedas and *tantras*. O King, in this way people in *Dvāpara-yuga* glorified the Lord of the universe. In *Kali-yuga* also, people worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead by following various regulations of the *tantras* (revealed scriptures).

Srila Sridhara Swami says in his commentary on this verse:

nānā-tantra-vidhāneneti kalau tantra-mārgasya prādhānyam darsayati

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

It is therefore not surprising that in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* many *tāntric* scriptures are quoted. A partial list is as follows:

Viṣṇu-yāmala-tantra (quoted in 2.6 etc.)
Nārada-tantra (quoted in 2.23 etc.)
Rūdra-yāmala-tantra (quoted in 2.29 etc.)
Gautamīya-tantra (quoted in 1.170 etc.)
Trailokya-sammohana-tantra (quoted in 1.179 etc.)
Sammohana-tantra (quoted in 2.147, 2.185 etc.)
Sanat-kumāra-tantra (quoted in 11.57 etc.)
Bhāgavata-tantra (quoted in 12.376 etc.)

THE TANTRAS ALLOW FEMALE GURUS

The *Rūdra-yāmala-tantra*^[23] (2.32) says in regard to female gurus:

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

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

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

siddha-mantra yadi bhavet grhṇīyād vidhavā-mukhāt (2.113)

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

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