



Spiritual Perspectives

Seeing the World through Spiritual Eyes
For Friends and Followers of Mukunda Goswami

Unity in Diversity — Vaishnavi Gurus in ISKCON

By Radha devi dasi

ISKCON's Governing Body Commission (GBC) recently ended a decade long, detailed consideration of the Vaishnavi *diksa* guru question. A newly passed resolution permits Vaishnavis (female devotees) to act as initiating gurus in our institution. However, the details of the resolution allow for wide variation in the application of this principle.

The question of whether Vaishnavis should be allowed to initiate disciples has long divided our society. Despite years of debate, neither supporters nor opponents of Vaishnavi *diksa* gurus have shown much inclination to change their views. Some have

feared that this issue might permanently divide ISKCON as each side believes the question goes to the spiritual foundations of our faith. However, unity in diversity is a principle that allows us to reach compromise even on deeply held spiritual beliefs.

In adopting a policy that allows for Vaishnavis to initiate, the GBC relied on Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition which includes multiple examples of Vaishnavi *diksa* gurus, including Jahnava Thakurani and Gangamata Goswami. The GBC also gave weight to Srila Prabhupada's own statements, including a 1969 letter in which he said:

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

will be allowed to initiate and increase the numbers of the generations." (Letter to Hamsaduta on January 3, 1969).

In spite of accepting that both tradition and our founder's instruction allow Vaishnavis to initiate, the GBC took into account the objections of opponents of the practice. The resolution allows regional GBC bodies to "opt

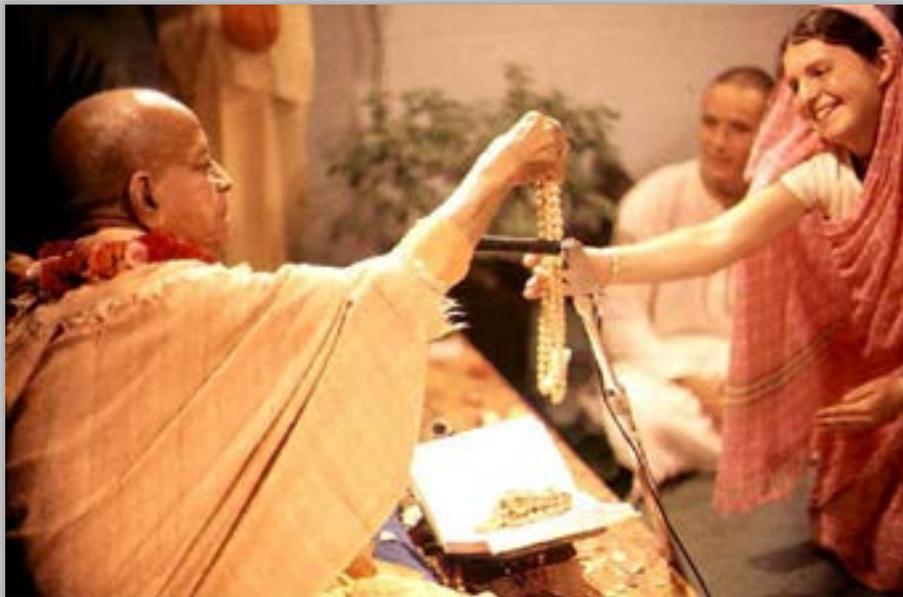
out" of permitting Vaishnavis to initiate candidates in their areas.

Long-time opponents of allowing Vaishnavis to initiate, have condemned this resolution and continue to advocate for its repeal. Supporters of Vaishnavi *diksa* gurus describe the resolution as falling

short. In the face of Srila Prabhupada's express desire for Vaishnavis to give initiation, they ask, how can the GBC allow regional leaders to forbid such initiations?

In fact, this issue highlights a deep cultural divide between devotees from different parts of the world. ISKCON leaders in India, in particular, have long imposed gender differences based on their understanding of appropriate gender roles. While Srila Prabhupada appointed many of his female disciples as pujaris, going so far as to have them train other (male) devotees in deity worship, ISKCON's Indian leaders have mostly prohibited Vaishnavis from acting as pujaris in India.

In addressing the Vaishnavi guru issue, the GBC has applied the principle of unity in diversity. Their resolution recognizes the need for different standards on some issues, depending on the cultural differences at play. Srila



ISKCON Vaishnavi Ministry

Prabhupada endorsed this principle in explaining why he allowed his female disciples to take up what some of his godbrothers thought were inappropriate roles in his new society.

“Not knowing that boys and girls in countries like Europe and America mix very freely, these fools and rascals criticise the boys and girls in Krishna consciousness for intermingling. But these rascals should consider that one cannot suddenly change a community’s social customs.” *Chaitanya-caritamrita Adi-lila 7.32* purport

Just as Srila Prabhupada adjusted gender roles in America to accommodate cultural dif-



ISKCON Vaishnavi Ministry



GBC Member Dinasharana dasi addresses the Governing Body on the subject of Vaishnavi Diksa Gurus in 2014 (<https://iskconnews.org>)

ferences, the GBC now adjusts the resolution on Vaishnavi gurus to accommodate cultural differences elsewhere.

ISKCON is an international organization facing cultural variations in different regions of the world. If we are going to be effective, we have to be sensitive to cultural variations. Srila Prabhupada expressed this thought most easily and eloquently by saying we have to be attentive to time, place and circumstance. While there is no philosophical bar to having Vaishnavis give initiation, some communities may not be ready to accommodate this practice.

ISKCON UK to Celebrate 50th with Once-in-a-Lifetime Krishna Spectacular

By Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, November 9, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2KYelLA>

Fifty years ago, in 1969, three couples – Mukunda and Janaki, Gurudas and Yamuna, and Shyamasundara and Malati – were inspired by Srila Prabhupada to start the first ISKCON center in London. At the time, London was the music capital of the world, with bands like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Cream, and Moody Blues conquering global pop culture.

The devotees knew what they had to do to make an impact, and they approached it fearlessly. Befriending The Beatles, they went on to release the George Harrison-produced “Hare Krishna Mantra” single on the The Beatles Apple record label. On its first day, the record sold 70,000 copies, and the Hare Krishna Mantra instantly became a household name. Within weeks, the devotees had appeared on Top of the Pops, singing “their song.”

The Hare Krishna Movement in the UK had taken off!

Eight days before the installation of Sri Sri Radha Londonisvara at the first ISKCON temple in the UK, at Bury Place, the same pioneering devotees performed a kirtan show with their Radha Krishna Temple band in the Hammersmith Town Hall.

Now, on Sunday November 24, 2019 – eight days before the 50th anniversary of Radha Londonisvara’s installation – devotees are set to put on a “Krishna Spectacular” just down the road at the Eventim Apollo in Hammersmith to celebrate 50 years of Hare Krishna in the UK.

Recently restored to its art deco glory, the Apollo has been an iconic music venue for decades – The Beatles played sixty gigs on the very stage where devotees will appear – as well as the

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Natya Nectar will bring thrills to Krishna Spectacular

site of the famous “Live at the Apollo” stand-up comedy series. It’s a venue befitting what is set to be a “once-in-a-lifetime” experience, according to organizers. An epic multimedia theatrical production about Bhaktivedanta Swami’s Journey, the Hare Krishnas’ London Story and the Glory of the *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna Spectacular at the Apollo will be a unique-one time show for which performers like Natya Nectar, Jahnavi Harrison and Samadhi Dance Company are all preparing bespoke pieces.

The event will gather over 3,000 people to celebrate and chant together, including three of the original pioneers (Malati Devi, Gurudas Prabhu and Shyamasundar Prabhu), Radhanatha Swami and over 300 Prabhupada disciples and UK pioneers from all over the country. The event is also expected to attract newcomers, and devotees are invited to bring their work colleagues and family members not affiliated with the Hare Krishna Movement.

On Sunday, November 24, doors will open for Krishna Spectacular at the Apollo at 3 p.m., and the show will run from 4 p.m. till 8 p.m. To begin with, Srila Prabhupada’s murti from the ISKCON London temple will arrive to a standing ovation, and will be given a prime seat to view the whole show. A voiceover by senior UK devotee Kripamoya Das will then set the scene, before the first piece, entitled “Abhay,” illustrates Srila Prabhupada’s journey bringing the Bhakti-yoga tradition from Vrindavan, India to the West. Performed by the award-winning Samadhi Dance Company from the Netherlands, it will incorporate classical and contemporary dance, live music and audio recordings of Srila Prabhupada aboard the Jaladuta, as well as his disciples Tamal Krishna Goswami and Rukmini Devi Dasi.

“We wanted to present Prabhupada as Abhay, in his mood of fearlessness, which is core to being a pioneer,” says show producer Anantacharya Das. “And to show that Prabhupada is the original pioneer, and every generation of his followers can imbibe his fearless mood.”

The story of how the Hare Krishnas came to London will then be told through spoken word, vintage photography and videography, and four key dramatic scenes portrayed by actors. These scenes will include Shyamasundara’s first meeting with George Harrison at Apple Records; the recording and release of the massive-selling Hare Krishna Mantra single; Srila Prabhupada’s arrival in London – where he was greeted like a king, bypassing immigration and riding in a Rolls Royce straight to John Lennon’s Estate; and Krishna’s appearance in London with Sri Sri Radha Londonisvara being installed in the UK’s first ISKCON temple.



Jahnavi Harrison will perform with her band

Soundtracking the scenes will be four live songs by kirtan artist Jahnavi Jivana Dasi (Jahnavi Harrison) and her band, including a cover of George Harrison’s “Give Me Love” from his Living in the Material World album, and Jahnavi’s own tracks Vrikshavalli Hare Krishna, Hari Om: May We All Be Blessed, and Mama Deva Deva: My Everything.

Performing the scenes, meanwhile, will be young devotees who are all professional actors, having graduated from acting school. They include sisters Anahita and Lalita Hughes as Yamuna and Janaki, Harry Hughes as Mukunda, Namamali Harrison as Gurudas, and John Hubbard as Shyamasundar. Malati Devi will be played by

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https://bit.ly/2KYeLLA

Vraja Sundari Keilman performs with Samadhi Dance Company

Alice, an acting student who is not a practicing Hare Krishna, but who just happened to visit Bhaktivedanta Manor days before she was asked to play the part. “It can’t be a coincidence,” she said.

After the dramatic reenactments, the real Malati, Gurudas and Shyamasundara will speak, sharing their memories of the early days. Jayadev’s Mantra Choir, featuring students of the Bhaktivedanta Manor Gurukula as well as children from Geetanjali Academy of Fine Arts, will then conclude the first part of the show by singing the *maha-mantra*, with the audience joining in.

“This may be the first time ever in the UK that we’ve had 3,000 people chanting altogether in one place,” says Anantacharya. “So that’s a really unique feature of this program.”

After an intermission, Radhanath Swami will introduce the second part of the Krishna Spectacular with an overview of the science of self-realization, and how the *Bhagavad-gita* has impacted people around the world.

Natya Nectar, a Delhi-based dance company which was founded by second-generation devotee Goura Prema Riggan and has appeared on India’s Got Talent, will then premier for the first time anywhere in the world its Cirque du Soleil-style show “Reflections.” Using multimedia, theatrical production with Indian classical and contemporary dance and music, acrobatics, and spoken word poetry with spectacular visual and lighting effects, Reflections illustrates the journey of the *jiva*, or living being.

Battling the six enemies of the mind: lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and jealousy, the *jiva* finds himself in a place of complete helplessness. When he surrenders to God, Krishna appears to him in a dream. In the dream, the *jiva* becomes

Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, and Krishna speaks the wisdom of the *Bhagavad-gita* to him, guiding him to self-realization.

ISKCON London temple president Jai Nitai Das will then conclude the event by introducing the Govindam recording by Yamuna Devi that is played every morning in ISKCON temples around the world, while Srila Prabhupada in his murti form is carried onstage. Prabhupada’s *pranam* mantra, along with an English spoken word version for the benefit of newcomers, will then be chanted, followed by an ecstatic grand finale kirtan led by Kripamoya Das.

Organizers will also tease a final “magic moment” which won’t be revealed until the very end of the show. A special element of the Krishna Spectacular is that every aspect of it has been put together by ISKCON youth.



https://bit.ly/2KYeLLA

Jayadev conducts a Mantra Choir

“They’ve been born and raised in the movement, and then developed and perfected their individual Krishna-given gifts in the performing arts,” Anantacharya says. “Now, Krishna Spectacular is uniting them all to make a unique offering to Srila Prabhupada in service of the people of London and the UK.”

The team’s vision for the show, and for the entire 50th anniversary of ISKCON UK, is to recognize the past; establish a future legacy and vision for Bhakti Yoga in London; inspire the wider community to participate; forge new relationships; and present the culture of Bhakti in a relatable and integrated way.

The latter is inspired by an interaction between Srila Prabhupada and a British journalist, recounted in Shyamasundara’s memoir *Chasing Rhinos*:

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Journalist: “Why have you come to our country? We have our own culture, our own God, our own beliefs. Why have you come?”

Srila Prabhupada: “Your country, England, ruled over India for many generations, and in the span of that time you took so much of our wealth to London, but you forgot to take our greatest wealth, our spiritual culture. I have come to give you freely what you forgot to take from us.”



Natya Nectar's 'Reflections' will include aerial acrobatics

Major Street in Ahmedabad Renamed In Honor of Srila Prabhupada

By: Daiva Rama Das, *ISKCON News*, November 25, 2019

<https://bit.ly/2DlnZE0>

ISKCON's temple in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India, is situated in a prominent area of town, and occupies a central and very visible location. Immediately across from the temple is a Bus Stop that has had the name of ISKCON Cross Road BRTS Bus Stop for a long time.

Now, the main street the temple is on itself got renamed after ISKCON founder



The street in front of the ISKCON Ahmedabad Temple. The road sign reads, in Gujarati, “Bhakti Vedanta Marg”



ISKCON Ahmedabad

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada as “Bhaktivedanta Swami Marg.”

The inauguration took place on Friday November 22nd, in the presence of Gopal Krishna Goswami, Anuttama Das and other GBC & bureau members, the Mayor of Ahmedabad Bijalben Patel and Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation Standing committee's Chairman Amul Bhatt, Local Member of Legislative Assembly Bhupendra Patel and about 150 devotees and other people.

Govardhan Eco Village Creates Vrindavan Biodiversity Park

By Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, November 9, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2OQvy1h>



<https://bit.ly/2OQvy1h>

The replica of Keshi ghat and the Yamuna River in Govardhan Ecovillage

Taking inspiration from the symbiotic biodiversity of the original Vrindavan Dhama in Northern India, Govardhan Eco-Village – ISKCON’s 140-acre farm in the foothills of the Sahyadri mountain range, Maharashtra – has created a “Vrindavan Biodiversity Park.”

The park is landscaped on the theme of the twelve forests of Vraja, boasting replicas of the original temples of Vrindavan.

Visitors can book a full experience, walking through the elaborate recreation of Vrindavan, as devotee guides take them back 5,000 years ago to the pastimes of Lord Krishna described in the Vedic scriptures.

The tour begins with a video show and orientation, preparing them with the right mood to enter Vrindavan. A blissful Vrindavan *parikrama* with live kirtan and fascinating

stories of Krishna’s pastimes follows. It includes visits to an 85-foot tall Madan Mohan Temple replica, Raj Bhog *arati* at the Sri Sri Radha Vrindaban Behari Temple, a walk around Govardhan Hill with its sacred ponds and *samadhis* (memorials to the Goswamis of Vrindavan), and a chance to participate in a traditional Yamuna *arati*, offering fire lamps at the banks of the “Yamuna” river.

Devotees headed by Director Gauranga Das say it’s “a welcome respite away from the stress of this world,” and that the many temples



<https://bit.ly/2OQvy1h>

A Worshipable Govardhana Shila

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and their gardens “offer peaceful spots for inspiration and quiet meditation.”

While at Govardhana Eco Village, guests can also visit the community’s goshala, which cares for 100 cows, its educational institutions like Bhaktivedanta Vidya-pitha, and its Ayurvedic Center. Finally, they can see its ecological/sustainability projects, such as the rain water harvesting system devotees use to irrigate their crop fields, as well as symbiotic waste recycling, alternative energies, and green building technologies, all used to ensure a minimum carbon footprint.



Lord Krishna with Srimati Radharani and the gopis

Below are scences from the Govardhan EcoVillage. From left to right: Samadhis of the Goswamis near Govardhan Hill, 85-foot tall replica of Madan Mohan temple, Krishna and his cowherd friends enjoy a picnic lunch



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Personal

Message...



Dear Friends,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Srila Prabhupada directed that his name appear on all ISKCON-related publications. This statement needs to be updated to include all ISKCON-related electronic publications, including websites, blogs and the like.

Srila Prabhupada's actual wording went like this: "His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder-acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness." This became GBC resolutions that read as follows:

- All ISKCON publications such as books, magazines, newsletters, leaflets, fliers, invitations, etc., should clearly display the full name and titles of Śrīla Prabhupāda including Founder-Ācārya, Prabhupāda, and His Divine Grace, for example:

"His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda
Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness"

ISKCON LAW 2.3.1

- All ISKCON temples and prominent buildings which do not already have Śrīla Prabhupāda's name inscribed upon them, shall install plaques stating Śrīla Prabhupāda's full name and his position as the Founder- Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. This shall also apply to prominent buildings of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Bhaktivedanta Institute and any other society founded by Śrīla Prabhupāda or affiliated to ISKCON.

ISKCON LAW 2.3.3

Srila Prabhupada translates the *Caitanya-caritamṛta*, *Madhya-līla* verse 5.81 as follows: "The young brāhmaṇa took this opportunity to speak: 'Please write this down on paper in black and white so that you may not again change your word of honor.'" The Bengali word, *patra*, is translated by Srila Prabhupada in this verse as "paper," although "paper" as we know it did not exist when the *Caitanya-caritamṛta* was written. At that time, most writing was done on palm leaves, as confirmed in numerous other *Caitanya-caritamṛta* verses. Moreover, "black and white" is an informal English term that refers to something that is put into writing. All this goes to show how essential Srila Prabhupada thought the written word was.

If we examine most US publications, we will find the "parent" company, the ultimate owner, is named somewhere, at least at the bottom of a front or back page. This publishing industry tradition is considered extremely important.

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Colophon from WIRED magazine

We often find that out of forgetfulness and weak Kṛṣṇa consciousness, Srila Prabhupada's name and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (sometimes abbreviated to ISKCON) are nowhere to be found in some publications (printed and electronic), nor do they appear on the outside of ISKCON and BBT buildings.

The days of the "superguru" and "gurupies" are generally behind us. However, we often forget that there would be no temples, books, Deities, *harinamas*, or *prasadam* without Srila Prabhupada's extraordinary appearance.

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswami.

