

# Reply by Bhakti Vikasa Swami to Dhanurdhara Swami's critique of "Mothers and Masters"

Based on and expanded from a talk given on Dec 28, 2016 at Kutralam, Tamil Nadu, India: <http://bvks.com/11706/>

(Dhanurdhara Swami's critique of *Mothers and Masters*, quoted extensively below, can be found at:

<http://wavesofdevotion.com/2016/12/26/monday-moral-diversity-book-banning-and-the-conservative-liberal-polemic-in-iskcon/>)

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This is a comment on a blog posting by his Holiness Dhanurdhara Swami which was posted on December 26, 2016, entitled *Moral Diversity, Book Banning and the Conservative/Liberal Polemic in ISKCON*. It concerns a book that I published under the title, *Women: Masters or Mothers?*, now renamed *Mothers and Masters*. I have a long-standing friendly, respectful, and appreciative relationship with Dhanurdhara Swami. Although we haven't had much interaction, there's always been mutual respect.

His blog posting is a mixture of praise for the book mixed with some bashing, and I'm going to respond mostly to the bashing. I appreciate that he's taking the trouble to critique the book. He's not afraid to do so in a negative way. I appreciate that, because presently within our movement there is some idea that we should only praise others and not criticize. I don't agree with that. There should be criticism also. Otherwise everything becomes wishywashy. I appreciate that he's had the boldness to comment. Because mostly our leaders don't comment on anything unless it is politically safe to do so. It's not politically safe to comment on this book. He doesn't identify himself as a leader but he is inasmuch as he is rightfully looked up to as a spiritual leader. That doesn't mean that I agree with everything he says or does but I have to appreciate that he is a long-standing *sannyasi* without any institutional backing for many years. He's not only maintained his *sannyasa*, but has flourished as a preacher. So kudos to him for that.

I'm going to reply to his critique. He wants to extend critique of the book to a critique of the whole conservative/liberal polemic in ISKCON. And I'm going to reply with my opinion of his opinion, plus I'm going to address some generic points that he did not directly mention but that are related and that often come up. We're not supposed to engage in eating, sleeping, mating or defending, at least on the bodily platform, but I have made a series of statements in this book and it's coming under criticism so I should defend it and not just "Well my opinion, your opinion." We want to find out or bring out what is the truth and what is best for everyone. It's not just that "OK, no one should say anything wrong about me." I have taken a position and now it's under attack and I seek to defend that position.

It's not a personal matter. We are discussing the whole direction of the Krsna consciousness movement - which is not a small thing because this movement is supposed to save the world from its degradation. That's Caitanya Mahaprabhu's mission. That is Srila Prabhupada's mission. And that's actually the major subject of this book. In one sense the role of women does take up the major part of this book and the book is titled after that. But really that's a sub-plot to the main theme of the

book, which is dealt with in the first one-third or so of the book; it is about the direction of Krsna consciousness movement.

What is the social direction of our movement? Srila Prabhupada made it clear that he wanted to establish *varnasrama-dharma*. We, as a movement, have not been serious about that and have, until recently, been officially, practically opposed to that. That's a major problem for our movement if we don't follow Srila Prabhupada's direction on that.

Srila Prabhupada said that the Gaudiya Math failed because they did not fulfill Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati's order to establish a GBC. And while ISKCON still is governed by the GBC that Srila Prabhupada established, it will also fail if it doesn't fulfill the order to introduce *varnasrama-dharma*.

So these are important issues, very important issues. If we, as a movement, are to please Srila Prabhupada, we have to follow what he says or at least attempt to do so. And my thesis in this book is that we are not doing so, and that we should do so.

This will be probably be a fairly long talk and I'll be going over many points that I've gone over before several times, in response to criticisms. Just like Srila Prabhupada would speak on various points, again and again and again because people would raise them again and again and again. Now as soon as I say, "Just like Srila Prabhupada," people will accuse me of imitating Srila Prabhupada. No, its not; we have to follow his example. Srila Prabhupada preached Krsna consciousness. There were repeated objections to what he was teaching and he would repeatedly reply to them. I am doing the same. A preacher has to respond to challenges. Srila Prabhupada wanted us to be preachers.

Now my first objection or one overwhelming objection here is that Dhanurdhara Swami does not actually quote from my book at all or anything from guru, sadhu, or *sastra*. The only thing he quotes, and that's the basis of his whole critique, is some university professor. So in my humble opinion, this is a lot of the problem that our movement is facing. We give a lot of importance to social analysis or whatever; we give a lot of importance to some university professor. What about Vyasadeva? What about our *acaryas*? What about Srila Prabhupada? Dhanurdhara Swami is giving some social critique but with no direct reference to Srila Prabhupada.

I plan to read most of what he's written here. He begins:

I recently started to write a review of a book that was banned in ISKCON, but my book review soon morphed into something else: a study of moral diversity as a template to bridge the gap between the Society's conservative and liberal wings.

After reading the whole article I don't see anything that suggests how the gap can be bridged. We can say that within ISKCON there are conservative and liberal wings but we should be careful not to box anyone up too much into these categories. A better description might be strong links in the *parampara* - those who want to maintain what Srila Prabhupada said - and weak or broken links, those who rely on non-sastric speculation and speculators to interpret Srila Prabhupada's mood and mission.

The conservative/liberal dichotomy is a very broad (and non-sastric) brush to paint everything with. Even if we accept to use to those terms, Dhanurdhara Swami takes some professor's analysis of differences between conservatives and liberals, but doesn't actually offer any practical direction to bridge the divide.

Maybe we should first consider why there is such a divide. Srila Prabhupada's instructions are there

for everyone to see. Isn't it that we, as a movement, should ascertain what Srila Prabhupada wanted and work unitedly? That should be considered first. Dhanurdhara Swami continues:

Three months ago, I was included as a receiver to a flurry of impassioned but reasonably well-reasoned protest letters from the disciples of Bhakti Vikasa Swami to a long list of ISKCON leaders, arguing that it was improper for the GBC to ban their guru's book *Women: Masters or Mothers?*

Yes, impassioned. You can see the correspondence I had with the GBC Executive Committee, of how they dealt with me and banned the book. It was pretty mean. We are, after all, persons, and it's not surprising if people become impassioned about it. Why not be impassioned? We're discussing about Srila Prabhupada's movement. This is our life, our service to Srila Prabhupada. Dhanurdhara Swami writes:

I was a little annoyed at first. I am not an ISKCON leader.

Yes, officially he's not an ISKCON leader.

and I hadn't read or seen the book, or even had an interest to do so. But as I received letter after letter, my interest was piqued to find out why this book was such a controversy. I protested to the writer of the next letter I received, "I am not an ISKCON leader, nor even technically in ISKCON, and I have not even read the book. If you choose to continually copy me on your complaints, at least send me a copy of the book!" And she did.

In a sense, whether I agreed with the author's opinion or not, I couldn't fathom why the book should be banned. It was mostly quotes from Srila Prabhupada espousing the more traditional view of the role of women in society, and the author gave many reasonable and well-argued supporting arguments. The cover was too provocative.

What is meant by "too provocative"? It definitely was provocative. Too provocative? That's a value judgment. De gustibus non est disputandum. Provocative covers are meant to arouse interest. How about the cover of Srila Prabhupada's *Srimad-Bhagavatam* Fifth Canto—Kali decapitating the dacoits who wanted to kill Jada Bharata? What about Nrsimha-deva ripping Hiranyakasipu to pieces? That's on the cover of Srila Prabhupada's *Srimad-Bhagavatam* Seventh Canto. Both were approved by Srila Prabhupada. Another widely-distributed BBT book, which came out after Srila Prabhupada departed, features on its cover a figure of a man with a cow's head preparing to decapitate a cow with a man's head. Provocative! Too provocative? What's too provocative? Who will say?

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] and some parts were too polemical—some bordering on the pejorative.

There's a problem with adversely calling something pejorative. It's like saying "you shouldn't criticize others." By saying that, you're criticizing them. So if you're saying "bordering on the pejorative," it's also a kind of pejorative. Anyway, Dhanurdhara Swami continues:

especially in discussing a topic with such a history of abuse—but I just couldn't justify the ban, and neither could the GBC.

This an important point—"discussing a topic with such a history of abuse." So I should have taken it more easy? The background of how this book came to be written has got a lot to do with the response to the history of abuse of women within ISKCON. The response to the abuse has been similar to that of the *karmis*—feminism. Empower women. Treat them as equals. Give them equal roles, women's rights. A lot of this is about men allowing themselves to be emotionally blackmailed by women. Men also were and are abused; I know many examples. The difference is that most men

don't moan about it or try to gain advantage by manipulating others by it.

Anyway, a lot of what I'm writing about is that our movement has gone off track, toward social egalitarianism, cultural Marxism. As a movement, we could have responded thus: "We need to get our act together and create the social model that Srila Prabhupada gave us—responsible men divided into four divisions: *brahmanas*, *ksatriyas*, *vaishyas*, and *sudras*, all trained to respect women. And women respected, but in a socially different and subordinate role, acting as assistants to their husbands," We could have responded in that way, but we didn't. More from Dhanurdhara Swami:

The GBC soon rescinded their restrictions, but I still felt that this was a book and a subject matter that sorely needed to be addressed. I initially decided to write a careful book review addressing in depth the various issues and arguments raised, but when I realized what that would entail, I hesitated. I would not only have to deal elaborately with each, or many, of the book's points, either defending or refuting them, but I would also risk getting drawn into a long and fruitless debate with people entrenched in their views, an exercise I definitely had no interest in or time to initiate. I decided that it would be better to just highlight the core issue and address the controversy in a more general way.

In Dhanurdhara Swami's commenting in a general way, what we're left with is largely nothing but his opinions. I'm not saying his opinions don't have any basis, but in trying to just present a synopsis, he hasn't quoted from the book. And we get statements both, "I felt that this was a book and a subject matter that sorely needed to be addressed." Okay so that's a praising statement and then we'll find, as we go through his article, statements where he adversely criticizes me. But because he doesn't provide any quotes from the book, then it just comes off across as his opinion about it, which is disappointing considering that Dhanurdhara Swami is a very learned, thoughtful, and deep devotee, absorbed in *sastra*. I find this review is atypical of him and I'd be happy to discuss with him but we have to discuss on the basis of the book rather than just some general statements about it.

Dhanurdhara Swami opines:

it would be better to just highlight the core issue

What is the core issue? It seems that he thinks that the core issue is moral diversity. He'll get to that. He seems to see that the issue is more about the way I come over rather than the actual issues that I discuss in my book. What I get from his essay is that he is concerned more with how people will feel and respond, that they not be alienated; that sensitivity is more important than issues, and feelings more important than facts.

But what is the core issue? The core issue of the book is the whole social direction of our movement, which Dhanurdhara Swami's critique doesn't address at all. He writes about avoiding a long and fruitless debate with people entrenched in their views which suggests, as he does several times throughout the article, that myself or my followers—those who support me in issues concerned with this book—are unreasonably opinionated fanatics, entrenched in their views, unwilling to have a reasonable discussion. So there is a bit of pejorative from Dhanurdhara Swami's side. Or at least insinuation. He may not have been conscious of or intended it to be that way.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] While pondering how to tackle the issue, I came across a relevant lecture by Jonathan Haidt, a NYU professor of sociology, entitled "The Moral Roots of Conservatives and Liberals." I thought his lecture neutrally addressed the core principles at the root of the conservative/liberal dichotomy, so I became inspired, as a contribution to this discussion, to summarize his study, apply his thesis to the Mothers/Masters dichotomy, and

then suggest where Maharaja's otherwise thoughtful social analysis based on Srila Prabhupada's teachings fell short.

In his lecture, Professor Haidt described his comprehensive cross-cultural study of what constitutes the moral mind. He found that there are five universal qualities that form the basis of moral diversity—an analysis of morality that perfectly conceptualizes what we espouse in our tradition"

This is highly speculative. What does he mean by the moral mind? What is his conception of morals? Most people in the world think that it's moral to treat humans well but animals don't matter. He's come up with this template for analyzing moral diversity but then some other scholar will reject it and come up with some other template. Someone else could analyze ISKCON's social divide according to behavioral psychology or Marxist theory, but that's not the way we are taught to approach issues. We are taught by Srila Prabhupada to approach issues according to guru, sadhu, and *sastra*, none of which in his whole essay Dhanurdhara Swami has even once quoted.

Actually there is no morality without Krsna consciousness. Morality means to act as Krsna wants. Dharman tu sakshat bhagavat pranitam: dharma, morality, is given by Bhagavan. Bg 18.78, wherever there is Krsna is morality.

I'm not going to read through and quote all this stuff from Professor Haidt because I'm underwhelmed by his whole presentation and that so much importance is given to it. One of his speculations:

A moral person makes judgments and deals with others free from arbitrary discrimination (the Golden Rule).

But why should we accept this? We judge according to guru, sadhu, and *sastra*. Arbitrary discrimination? We **do** discriminate. We discriminate according to *sastra*. According to *sastra*, some people are demons, and most people are deluded and are in *maya*. So it's not that we accept this new age idea to just be nonjudgmental. We can be open to others and give them a fair chance, to present Krsna consciousness to them and not presume that they are wrong or they are bad. But we, as preachers, are supposed to see that by the grace of Srila Prabhupada we are in a better position than others. (For more discussion of nonjudgmentalism, see my book *On Speaking Strongly in Srila Prabhupada's Service*.)

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] Professor Haidt felt the need to explain how in-group loyalty, for which liberals have much less regard, is also an important moral quality

Debatable. In my experience (and is widely corroborated), liberals talk much about individualism and free speech but can be as clannish as anyone else. Not all, but many, only allow free speech if you agree with their basic outlook, and can become ferocious if you don't. They combine together and make social and political groupings, and organize protests. Within ISKCON, a group of feminists clubbed together and took political action to ban my book. So this claim of Professor Haidt is debatable.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] Professor Haidt cannot by any means be pigeonholed as a conservative ... "Conservatives speak for the institutions and traditions and seek order even at the cost of the those at the bottom."

So now I'm being pigeonholed by Dhanurdhara Swami as a conservative, a point he will make clearer later in this essay. "Not much concerned about people ... the cost of those at the bottom."

But *varnasrama-dharma*, which is the subject of *Mothers and Masters*, is meant to establish a non-exploitive society. Maybe mundane conservatives don't care for those at the bottom. According to modern egalitarian ("liberal") thinking, *varnasrama* is conservative and exploitive and just wrong because it is hierarchical—some people are on the top and some people are on the bottom; some people have more privilege than others. So this whole critique by Dhanurdhara Swami has very little relevance to *varnasrama*, because *varnasrama* isn't exploitive. It is hierarchical but is not exploitive. It does not "seek order even at the cost of those at the bottom." Within *daiva-varnasrama-dharma*, those at the top, spotless brahmanas like Vyasadeva, wrote so much to help all fallen people including women, sudras, et al. (See SB 1.4.25.)

From the preface of *Mothers and Masters*:

Srila Prabhupada's mission was "*sarve sukhino bhavantu*: Let everyone be happy" - to educate people how to be happy in this lifetime by practicing Kãñëa consciousness within *varnasrama-dharma*, and to thus prepare in the best possible way for the next life. To this end, Srila Prabhupada wanted that his disciples show an ideal example to the world by establishing Krsna conscious communities, wherein everyone performs his prescribed role - for instance, and importantly, that men are really men and women are clearly women, by dress, behavior, and temperament. Moreover, protected women are an auspicious source of energy to man,<sup>[i]</sup> being naturally motherly and affectionate, shy, and chaste, and ensuring that their children are healthy and bright. Consequently, the men actually become inspired to assume responsibility for protecting and providing. All happily cooperating together, they live on the lap of nature, depending on Krsna's bounty.

*Mothers and Masters* is the first publication to present a multi-faceted case for the traditional approach to Krsna consciousness, whereby everyone can be happy in the Vedic way as described by Srila Prabhupada. I humbly request all followers of Srila Prabhupada, especially those who have objected to this book, to patiently and carefully consider the points outlined herein, and to excuse any excesses or inaccuracies that they might perceive, so that all of us might come to a better understanding of these matters and thus conjointly strive to fulfill the great *varnasrama* mission mandated by Srila Prabhupada.

So this model, in which conservatives are supposed to be seeking order even at the cost of those at the bottom, is inapplicable to what I espouse in the book.

He [Professor Haidt] concludes that both conservatives and liberals have something substantial to contribute, and that the most highly evolved people are those who are morally diverse, as represented in his template for the moral mind.

Even if we accept his analysis, it's only analytical. What's the solution? Dhanurdhara Swami opened his critique by saying that he is giving a study of moral diversity as a template to bridge the gap between the society's conservative and liberal wings, but what is his practical formula to bridge the gap? The analysis mentions highly evolved people. What do you do with all the unevolved people (this I presume is meant to include myself)? What's the gap-bridger?

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] What I find most helpful in Professor Haidt's discussion is that it provides a template to help reconcile Srila Prabhupada's apparently contradictory social viewpoint: his strong affinity for the social traditions of India in contrast to his sometimes liberal outlook toward their application, especially in terms of his statements about women.

By the way, in *Mothers and Masters* I was quite reticent about Çréla Prabhupäda's statements concerning women. I didn't include or dwell on about many of the statements that Srila Prabhupada

gave about, for instance, women being less intelligent than men or nine times more lusty or that the understanding of a woman can never be on the level of a man. Or that famous one—a woman likes a man who is expert at rape. I didn't get into that at all. If there is some thesis that I'm somehow trying to be women-bashing by this book, then please consider that I could have cited certain of Srila Prabhupada's statements – but I didn't, because bashing wasn't my purpose. I'm not saying that Dhanurdhara Swami said that, although he sometimes seems to imply so. More of what he wrote:

Bhakti Vikasa Swami tries to reconcile Srila Prabhupada's conservative statements with his liberal statements in regard to women in ISKCON by explaining that the more liberal statements were only made initially, to encourage people in devotional service, but that now, as the movement has matured, Srila Prabhupada would certainly have insisted that all women in ISKCON should be more or less limited to domestic roles and strictly follow traditional behavior and etiquette.

Well, I didn't say that. I must respectfully submit that I didn't say that Srila Prabhupada would certainly insist that all women in ISKCON should be more or less limited to domestic and social roles. Here is a quotation from *Mothers and Masters*:

Although in emergencies anything can be done, if we are to demonstrate to the world that *varnasrama-dharma* is the most stable, satisfying, and enlightened form of social organization, then we shall have to train our men as responsible husbands and fathers, and our women as devoted wives and affectionate mothers. Trying to cast everyone into male roles simply underlines our failure to institute *varnasrama-dharma*, and our unwillingness to reverse this trend.

We cannot browbeat lady devotees to adopt *stri-dharma*, and to attempt to do so would likely result in offenses. Yet if we are to establish that traditional household roles for women, although scorned by feminists, are indeed what Krsna has prescribed for them and is what works best for them and for the world, then first we as a society will have to understand and emphasize this point. We shall also have to praise and adore chaste women, as *sastra* teaches us to do, rather than simply neglect them.

I make a case for accepting Srila Prabhupada's instruction to establish *varnasrama-dharma*. I'm not insisting that everyone has to immediately take it up fully. That's not very practical. But Srila Prabhupada had a vision of, and actually did, gradually introduce more and more "complexness," as Allen Ginsberg put it:

Ginsberg: But I'm wondering what future is there? What's the future of a religious observance so technical as this? So complicated as this? Requires so much sophistication in terms of diet, daily ritual, arati, ekadasi, all, the whole thing that you've been teaching, how far can that spread by it's very complexness...

Prabhupada: Yes. All are complex. The whole idea is to keep the devotees always engaged in Krsna consciousness. That is the program. Gradually, we shall introduce more and more so that he has no scope to go outside Krsna consciousness. (Conversation, 12 May 1969)

In the beginning Srila Prabhupada was very liberal. In San Francisco in 1967, among the hippies, Srila Prabhupada was very, very liberal. Gradually he introduced more rules and regulations, and although even before coming to the West he had spoken on the need to introduce *varnasrama*, he spoke about it increasingly from about 1974 onwards, seeing that *grhasthas* were falling down, *sannyasis* were falling, *brahmanas*, devotees in general were falling down. It is his main point in the 14 Feb 1977 *varnasrama* conversation in Mayapura.

Srila Prabhupada saw that without *varnasrama-dharma* ISKCON will degenerate because of intermixing of the sexes and falldowns and descent into sahajiya-ism. Note that the underlying reason for the rise of ritvikism is the falling of leaders, mostly because of mixing of the sexes.

The problem is that unless we take up the social model that Srila Prabhupada gave, which Krsna gave, then we have to continue working according to the model of the whole society around us. To much extent the whole world today is following the Western model. Yet even the term "Western" is very broad, because even if "the West" and "Western culture" could be accurately defined, still there are many different cultural sub-groups and sub-streams within it. Still, succinctly put, unless we accept the challenge Srila Prabhupada gave to introduce *varnasrama-dharma*, then we simply have to act as part of the present society. And there are problems with that. Srila Prabhupada analyzed according to *sastra* that this society is demoniac and it's not conducive for practicing Krsna consciousness. (These points are discussed in *Mothers and Masters*).

The position of Dhanurdhara Swami seems to be like that of many others: "Look, we are preaching in the world, see what it's like, we have to adjust to it." But we have a choice:: we either affect society or are affected by society. Srila Prabhupada, on the basis of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (1.5.11) chose the former.

Accepting that tact is required in preaching (I have a whole chapter on this in *On Speaking Strongly in Srila Prabhupada's Service*), we (myself and those who more or less subscribe to what I do) don't just bash people over the head and say "Change immediately and become a Vedic person," whatever that means. We understand that people's whole outlook on life has to change - Srila Prabhupada spoke of a change of heart, cultural revolution. We need a society as Krsna says to organize it, based on the quest for self-realization rather than on gross sense gratification. Otherwise what is our social aim?

We in ISKCON have a major problem, and we are so inured to it that we think that it is just normal: we preach, we bring people in, they go along for some time and then fall down - the ISKCON tube. We have become inured to the fact that so many devotees marry, then divorce and re-marry. This is not how things should be! I have addressed all these points in the book.

What's your solution to this, Dhanurdhara Maharaja? How do you propose to address this problem? Well, Srila Prabhupada already gave it. It's tough to institute, no doubt, but it is what Srila Prabhupada wanted. At least I am bringing up this discussion. What are you going to do? What is your solution to this? Do you have any solution? Or should we just go along with life as it is? It is not very satisfactory.

I [Dhanurdhara Swami] prefer to see it that Srila Prabhupada said both things because he was morally diverse.

Although actually in his books (which Srila Prabhupada gave most authority to; we accept his books as *sastra* because they are self-realized commentaries and elaborations on *sastra*), Srila Prabhupada outlines traditional Vedic social roles and denigrates the animalistic modern lifestyle. His "moral diversity" does not constitute a tacit acceptance of the animalistic lifestyle. Devotees should come to the actual standard of human life that Srila Prabhupada describes in his books.

Srila Prabhupada also says *sarvopadhi vinirmuktam tat paratvena nirmalam* - pure devotional service means to be free from mundane *upadhis*, designations. However, as Srila Prabhupada explains, as long as we are in this material world and in material consciousness. we can't artificially try to act on a platform that will cause us and others to fall down. Again, I have addressed all these points in the book.



[Dhanurdhara Swami:] He saw the need to institute the tradition of *varnasrama* with its social mores, but he also had a strong sense of care and justice.

Again, this suggests that *varnasrama* and those who presently promote *varnasrama* lack a strong sense of care and justice. That's a bit unfair, in my humble opinion.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] He balanced his sense of the ideal with a concern to encourage and empower his female disciples—or anyone, for that matter—with a strong consideration for who they were now, in the moment.

Srila Prabhupada also gave an understanding that who they were now in the moment is not the way they should be. They, we, need to change, the whole world society needs to change. Again, it's the new age thing of "just accept the people as they are." Yes, take them as they are, but try to mold them into something better, into who they really are beyond their mundane conditioning. Social engineering, if you like.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] who they were in the moment: Vaisnava members of an ancient tradition but born in a modern milieu. And it is obvious to me that he would do the same today out of a similar sense of compassion and fairness and also for the fact that few in the First World would come to Krsna consciousness if "purdah" were the face of our preaching.

That's also debatable. Srila Prabhupada said that millions would join our farms. If we can offer a social alternative, then we can demonstrate Krsna consciousness with its attendant social system. That's the challenge Srila Prabhupada gave us—to give a positive alternative. We haven't done it. It is also debatable that people wouldn't join us if we were to preach about *varnasrama* and try to demonstrate that. Because we are told that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. (Tony Blaire's sister-in-law became a Muslim!) I'm not here making a case for Islam. But overall Islam is socially very conservative. Similarly, churches that give restrictions seem to be growing, because members have something tangible to join. People see the world as becoming more and more chaotic and they seek a sense of order. Why join a church if it doesn't really teach you anything or make demands on you? In *Mothers and Masters* I have given a link to an essay by Krsna Kirti Prabhu about this.

About not preaching this in the West, the implication seems to be that we can't present such things in the West. I wrote, on page 44, that we, as Srila Prabhupada's followers,

are duty-bound to accept the challenge to demonstrate *varnasrama-dharma* as a way of living our own terms, or rather Krsna's terms, rejecting those dictated by predatory corporations and politicians. Nor it is impossible to present it to people who are at least somewhat open-minded about traditional social roles that, for instance, men and women have different mentalities and different needs, or that women should care for their children full-time and consequently must be in many ways dependent upon their husband.<sup>[ii]</sup>

This is how Srila Prabhupada preached about these things. Why can't we do the same? It's not impossible to preach all this.<sup>[1]</sup> (Consider the growth of "women against feminism" movement.) Of course, Dhanurdhara Swami doesn't say it is impossible to do so, but he doesn't seem to have taken into account that Srila Prabhupada himself preached about these things in America, even to nondevotees.

Continuing Dhanurdhara Swami's writing:

Bhakti Vikasa Swami argues that if we had senior women who held to the most traditional

line of women's deportment and temples organized strictly according to these same strictures, our preaching would be more successful.

I just discussed a little bit about that.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] I think this points out a weakness of Maharaja's presentation—that his preaching has not been on the front lines of the First World and that he thus has only limited realization of the deep sincerity and mindset of the people whom preachers in the West confront. For his view to have credibility, he or his followers would have to lead the way and show others how to impact the First World with his tone and presentation.

Regarding my tone and presentation in this book, Srila Prabhupada's books also have statements which some devotees deem to be highly unacceptable to many people in the modern world. For instance, right in the first chapter of *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, Srila Prabhupada writes (Bg 1.40, purport):

The varnasrama religion's principles were so designed that the good population would prevail in society for the general spiritual progress of state and community. Such population depends on the chastity and faithfulness of its womanhood. As children are very prone to be misled, women are similarly very prone to degradation. Therefore, both children and women require protection by the elder members of the family. By being engaged in various religious practices, women will not be misled into adultery. According to Canakya Pandita, women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy.

There are many such statements throughout Srila Prabhupada's books, from reading which a reader might presume that he is misogynistic. Yet many women who read his books have become devotees! The same complaints made about Mothers and Masters can be made about Srila Prabhupada's books. The counter-argument to this is that Srila Prabhupada dealt with women considerately; do I do so inconsiderately? I will get back to this point later.

Talking about preaching in the First World, the West, what exactly are we talking about? Even within the United States, there is a palpable cultural divide—the very point upon which Professor Haidt predicated his analysis. Literally millions of people in America are of what is widely considered a generally conservative outlook. So the proposition that in the West our approach has to be liberal, might actually alienate millions of Americans. And what do we mean by the West? What's the overall outlook say in Italy, or Russia? You could all call it the West. By the way I don't identify myself with that conservatism (GOP, Trump, etc.), and I don't think our devotees should identify themselves with the other side, liberalism, either.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] For his [Bhakti Vikasa Swami] view to have credibility, he or his followers would have to lead the way and show others how to impact the First World with his tone and presentation.

ISKCON today is hardly impacting the First World. A major reason is the loss of faith and general malaise that set in as so many leaders and general devotees fell down because of loose mixing of the sexes, which *varnasrama-dharma* is meant to curb (as described in *Masters and Mothers*). You out there in the First World need to seriously consider why there is no sign of the fulfillment of Srila Prabhupada's prediction that millions would join us. How about pursuing Srila Prabhupada's *varnasrama* formula?

I have spent most of this life in India and I feel I have more responsibility here. Especially at the present time, I feel required to be in India much of the time for overseeing *varnasrama* projects that

some of my disciples are establishing here. But that doesn't bar me from studying and teaching Srila Prabhupada's instructions for the world and commenting on the West. Just like Srila Prabhupada in India pre-1965 was commenting on the modern materialistic civilization. He hadn't been in the West. Comparing myself here to Srila Prabhupada does not mean that I am imitating him. Srila Prabhupada told us to see everything with the eye of *sastra*, as he did.

Still, Dhanurdhara Swami has given me a good challenge, to do something in the West. Actually there are what could be called two beachheads—centers in the West overseen by some of my disciples which are trying to bring in more traditional approach to Krsna consciousness. One difficulty they face is that the ISKCON world today is so compromised in so many ways that if we try to bring even the basic standards that Srila Prabhupada wanted, they come under so much opposition.

When I say traditional approach, it is more like ISKCON as I experienced it in the 1970s, not some draconian neo-Vedic autocracy. In the 70s in ISKCON in London, where I joined, we called women mother; they weren't giving class or leading *kirtanas*, but they were respected. Was that all wrong? Some people may think so.

Here is a challenge for you Dhanurdhara Swami, my dear friend—I am not saying that sarcastically—why don't **you** do it? The instructions of Srila Prabhupada to establish *varnasrama* are there. You can do it. You know the Western mentality very well. Do you think that it is impossible to bring Westerners to *varnasrama* standards that Srila Prabhupada wanted?

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] Srila Prabhupada was on the front lines and credited much of his success in the West to his liberality.

That's true. But after bringing Krsna consciousness to the West, what did he do next? He gradually increased his insistence on *varnasrama-dharma*, seeing that so many people he initiated didn't even maintain the basic four regulative principles. So Srila Prabhupada was liberal in bringing people in, but if we are going to bring them up, there has to be strictness, seriousness. We can't just live as brothers and sisters with minimal discrimination between men and women on the basis of, "We are all spirit souls." It doesn't work. It hasn't worked for the last fifty years. Therefore Srila Prabhupada wanted to establish a society with clear divisions: *brahmana*, *ksatriya*, *vaisya*, *sudra*, women.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] Those who have successfully followed suit as preachers in the First World also seem morally diverse.

Obviously there are some devotees who are successful in preaching in the West within the present paradigm of ISKCON. But we can say in another sense that the whole of our movement has not been a success inasmuch as we haven't maintained the momentum that we had when Srila Prabhupada was here, and we haven't introduced *varnasrama-dharma*. How can we say our movement is successful, if we don't do what Srila Prabhupada said? I don't want to undermine the sacrifice, dedication, and sincerity of devotees who are preaching. But how are we to measure success? By our ability to bring a few Western people every year into Krsna consciousness? Or should our success be millions joining our farms as Srila Prabhupada predicted? We haven't pursued this at all. At least we could have hundreds or dozens joining our farms. How successful are we in not just bringing people in, but keeping them in, and in communicating to them Srila Prabhupada's vision? These are all components of success.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] That is not to say that his presentations and expectations then or what he would have demanded now were liberal or divorced from the tradition. They were not; but they were tempered—or relevantly applied—out of fairness to the times in which people were

living and out of compassion for their souls.

Implies that I lack compassion for their souls.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] I appreciate many of the points in Maharaja's book about the relevance of the traditional views of Indian culture.

It's actually Vedic culture, universal culture, Krsna's culture.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] especially it's promotion of the role of mothers—as would many of the senior women in ISKCON whom he calls "suffragettes."

"Suffragettes" was the name given to women in England at the cusp of the 19th and 20th century who took political action to secure voting rights for women. In using it, I quoted a book by scholars Bryant and someone else whose name I don't remember, in which they use this term, tongue and cheek but approvingly, to state that there is a suffragette movement within ISKCON. In other words, there is a political feminist movement within ISKCON. As stated in *Mothers and Masters*, I adopted this term from them. So even outside or semi-outside observers can see that women within our movement have taken to political action to try to bring about (and have to a great extent succeeded) roles which are more in line with modern egalitarian ideas than they are with Krsna's Vedic culture that Srila Prabhupada wanted us to introduce.<sup>[2]</sup> He didn't personally introduce it. But he wanted to introduce it. Srila Prabhupada said "50% of my work is not done" in not introducing *varnasrama*.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] He has a number of legitimate concerns and important things to say. But I don't think drawing sharp lines or seeing the issue in black and white is the wholesome or realized approach that Srila Prabhupada espoused. Srila Prabhupada was able to preach a strong affinity for the tradition without losing sight of its purpose: to inspire people in Krsna consciousness through a practical application of its teachings, often in accordance with time, place, and circumstance.

Pretty pugilistic. In a roundabout way he says that I am unwholesome and unrealized and have lost sight of the purpose of the tradition. I admit I'm a fool, but I have this much sense, to know that I'm a fool and to try to stick what Srila Prabhupada taught. I'm very afraid of the kind of realization that consists of ignoring guru, sadhu, and sastra and instead basing one's theories on the speculations of some university professor.

Regarding time, place, and circumstance: how long do we practice and preach Krsna consciousness in terms of time, place, and circumstance until we introduce *varnasrama-dharma* as Srila Prabhupada wanted? Obviously there will always be preaching according to time, place, and circumstance. But I'm saying it again and again, Srila Prabhupada wanted us also to introduce *varnasrama-dharma*, so we have to find the ways and means to preach to people and show them another road.

We give them Srila Prabhupada's books, which say that this society is demoniac, it's misleading, it's taking us to hell, it is hell. But unless we actually show an alternative society, we cannot very convincingly preach about it. Unless devotees know that we are supposed to introduce *varnasrama-dharma*, how are we even going to think about showing the positive alternative?

*Varnasrama-dharma* is a positive alternative, not a negative alternative. This book, *Mothers and Masters*, is required, because the way ISKCON is today, many devotees have no idea that Srila Prabhupada so much emphasized on introducing *varnasrama-dharma*, of the cultural revolution that he spoke of. Srila Prabhupada was preaching in an emergency situation; are we always going to be in

an emergency and take that as normal? Always catering to the emergency rather than setting up our own alternative?

Continuing Dhanurdhara Swami:

At the end of last summer, one incident highlighted to me the necessity for Bhakti Vikasa Swami to adjust his presentation in a practical way. When I am in New York, I regularly visit the *harinama sankirtana* at Union Square,

Again what Dhanurdhara Swami is writing is based on how he perceives me from the book, and he is also citing how Srila Prabhupada behaved. Well, if you read Srila Prabhupada's books, you will get what might be considered a draconian (should we say "conservative"?) outlook. But then, it is contended, we should see how Srila Prabhupada actually behaved and dealt with people. It was often very accommodating (but sometimes also very demanding and angry). Devotees often say "Srila Prabhupada's books are heavy but Srila Prabhupada dealt with people kindly." So have you seen how I behave and deal with people? It's not necessarily in such a harsh way as you might think.

Anyway Dhanurdhara Swami says:

When I am in New York, I regularly visit the *harinama sankirtana* at Union Square, and one day I noticed that a young woman, born in the movement, had joined the chanting group. She had been there for several months participating in *kirtana* and book distribution and was about to return home, perhaps to attend college. Rama Raya, an exemplary Vaisnava and strict *brahmacari*, turned to me and glorified her, expressing how much her contribution would be missed. He described her as talented, dedicated, and chaste, and I could tell that she conducted herself in an exemplary manner. At the time, I was reading Bhakti Vikasa Swami's book, and the thought came to me how he might castigate her parents for granting the woman even this little "non-*varnasrama*" independence, when in fact her parents, who are strict devotees, were just being practical and morally diverse.

Here, you presume that I might just get really heavy with her parents, but is there any record or pattern of me acting thus? (You might get the same idea from Srila Prabhupada's books.) you really assume a lot, which is not necessarily in accord with the reality of how I actually deal with people. I don't go around with a club, bashing people on their head and saying "*varnasrama, varnasrama!*" I am not so un-pragmatic, I hope.

Dhanurdhara Swami says:

They had raised their child with Krsna conscious values with what appeared to be reasonable boundaries and, as dedicated and strict devotees, had set an example for her to follow. Out of concern for their daughter's situation and needs, they had engaged her in practical devotional service. What in the world could possibly be wrong with that? Wasn't that, in fact, Srila Prabhupada's mood?

Dhanurdhara Swami presumes a lot about me. I don't say that women shouldn't preach. In fact this whole article began with Dhanurdhara Swami getting a letter from a female disciple of mine. So she was preaching via the internet. But generally I advocate that men should preach to men and women should preach to women, and that just makes sense. I haven't said that women shouldn't go on *harinama*. I don't say they shouldn't go on book distribution.

"Wasn't that Srila Prabhupada's mood, to engage everyone?" Yes, but Srila Prabhupada wanted to introduce a specific format to engage everyone in. That is *varnasrama*.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] So, what about all the quotes by Srila Prabhupada describing *varnasrama* and its traditionalist values?

Yes! What about them? That's what I am saying, the book's full of it, what about them? What is our movement doing about it? What are you, Dhanurdhara Swami, doing about it?

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] If that's what Srila Prabhupada wanted,

What do you mean, "If that's what Srila Prabhupada wanted"? It's clear that he did want it. Why is there any question about it?

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] If that's what Srila Prabhupada wanted, then by all means his followers should take up the service to implement it and show others its value.

Yes, very good, do it, please. Sorry if I am coming across as being very heavy here. This is a very heavy topic. Just like Srila Prabhupada said that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati's followers neglected his orders to preach worldwide and therefore they became *asara*, useless (see CC Adi 12.10-12 and purports). Similarly, if we neglect Srila Prabhupada's orders to establish *varnasrama*, we become *asara*, useless.

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] Only as long as they don't, in trying to implement it, lose their heart and kick too many good, sincere, Krsna conscious women aside.

We shouldn't kick aside any good sincere Krsna conscious women, or kick aside anyone. Again, Dhanurdhara Swami makes insinuations, this time that I have lost my heart and by this presentation I am going to be kicking people away. I reject these insinuations. I say that if you read this book, you will accept as, Dhanurdhara Swami has said, that,

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] He (Bhakti Vikasa Swami) has a number of legitimate concerns and important things to say.

It was mostly quotes from Srila Prabhupada espousing the more traditional view of the role of women in society, and the author gave many reasonable and well-argued supporting arguments.

If you think that the book is imbalanced or whatever, could you give some practical suggestions on how to present to the Vaisnava society that our movement has gone toward a non-Vedic, non-sastric, feministic, egalitarian, materialistic, social model? (To the extent that even a respected swami, instead of quoting sastra quotes a mundane sociologist.) How do you present it in a way that "actually everything is nice, everyone is wonderful" and love, peace, and ignoring Srila Prabhupada's instructions? How do you do that? How do you get the point across? We should be yelling and screaming - impassioned. Srila Prabhupada gave the example of someone obviously flying a kite at a cliff's edge. To such a person, you don't demurely say "Ahem, excuse me ..." You have to yell, "Watch out! You are in trouble!"

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] Bhakti Vikasa Swami is an excellent writer and a substantial preacher in ISKCON. His voice for conservative values is an important one. And he does have a point. There are radical voices in the modern world that don't represent Srila Prabhupada whose influence in ISKCON is unwanted, and people do need to be educated in the value of tradition and what Srila Prabhupada wanted.

Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Dhanurdhara Swami himself is saying that there are unwanted influences within ISKCON of radical voices that don't represent Srila Prabhupada, "and people do need to be educated

in the value of tradition and what Srila Prabhupada wanted." As you accept that there are serious unwanted influences within ISKCON, why are you not going full tilt in attacking these deviations? What are you doing to stop them?

[Dhanurdhara Swami:] I just think Maharaja would be more successful if his vision were a bit more morally diverse and he showed the fairness, compassion, and practicality that Srila Prabhupada demonstrated in spreading this Krsna consciousness movement.

This is all rather vague. Dhanurdhara Swami hasn't shown how I am lacking in fairness, compassion, and practicality; it is just an accusation.

My friend Dhanurdhara Swami, I apologize if my presentation is imbalanced. With your expertise in dealing with the First World mentality, please do whatever you can to excise from ISKCON the cancer of unwanted radical voices. The tone of my presentation is not the real problem that you should be addressing; the cancer is far more serious.

I also was sent a Facebook comment about this article of Dhanurdhara Swami, that the book was banned and then the GBC unbanned it after I removed comments endorsing the Taliban. Amazing! Just amazing how misinformed people can be. And they put it on the internet without checking the facts, as if it is a fact. According to the GBC, the book was unbanned by the GBC because they had erroneously banned it. And according to the GBC member who is behind the ban and wants it re-banned, it's not a ban. You are not allowed to sell it in ISKCON centers, but is not banned. Somehow or other, because it's not a total ban, it's not a ban. This is called doublespeak, political language that deliberately obscures, disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words. There was never any protest about the book supporting the Taliban, because there is nothing in the book supporting the Taliban. So to say that the GBC unallowed or allowed the book to be sold or unbanned it because I removed the statements supporting the Taliban is just absolute speculation. We are trying to have a serious discussion here and a somewhat sympathetic comment was so divorced from reality - a complete speculation.

I wonder about the future of our movement. We urgently need to train *brahmanas*, real *brahmanas*. That requires *varnasrama* college. Anyway, Hare Krsna. Thankyou to anyone who bothered to listen or read all this. I apologize if I sound whiny or ranting.

*vanca-kalpatarubhyas ca krpa-sindhubhya eva ca*

*patitanam pavanebhyo vaisnavebhyo namo namah*

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[1] Excerpts from a letter by Sundari Radhika Devi Dasi:

Although I already distributed quotes from WMM book among karmi women, and they greatly appreciated this book. Somehow, it seems also that women all over the world, no matter what background they come from, they find this book very helpful in terms of woman's dharma, family life, taking care of children.

In WMM there is also a wonderful article written by HG Revati devi dasi about Motherhood in Krsna consciousness (it was also published on Dandavats). They love it very much.

So although HH BVKS wrote this book primarily for devotees, it seems that even women outside of ISKCON like it very much (if they are not feminists). And if they are feminists (that is the major concern of "Woman's Ministry", that feminist women outside of ISKCON would be burnt by some statements), even if they are feminists, they can get Krsna conscious perspective on these issues, based all on Srila Prabhupada's quotes from his books and lectures. If they are sincere and want to be devotees. If they are not, this book certainly will not be a reason for them to avoid Krsna consciousness. Because feminism is materialism and is not accepted by sastra, Krsna and Srila Prabhupada.

[2] Professor E. Burke Rochford noted:

"Such a cultural turn is significant because it signals the ways in which traditionalism [the *parampara*] no longer serves as the foundation of ISKCON's religious culture. In embracing gender equality, ISKCON's leaders aligned the organization with a defining feature of modern liberal culture. ... The debate about women's roles and place in ISKCON led to critical questioning of Prabhupada's scriptural commentaries, as well as to his overall authority as Krishna's pure representative. The fact that the leadership failed to act decisively on Prabhupada's behalf was an acknowledgment that his authority no longer was absolute. ... Yet as these teachings become reframed as guides for thought and action, in place of being "absolute truths," traditionalism [the *parampara*] will continue its march to the margins of ISKCON. As it does, the goal of creating a viable cultural alternative to mainstream American culture will cease to exist." (*Hare Krishna Transformed*, pp. 158-9)

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[i] See SB 4.21.4, ppt.

[ii] *Mothers and Masters*, p. 44.