

Report on Survey Soundness

Background

My name is Krishna Kirti das, Convenor of the ISKCON India Scholars Board. I hold an MS in Statistics, and this report summarizes my professional opinion on the soundness of a poll conducted on January 8, 2026, at ISKCON Vishakhapatnam, during a joint conference of the Bureau and the IBAC, with select officers and members from the ICC.

H.H. Bhanu Maharaja and H.H. Bhaktivinoda Maharaja presented a summary report and recommendations of the GBC-Bureau joint committee on VDG (Vaishnavi diksa-gurus). Immediately after, all attendees—both in person and online—were enjoined to take a poll designed to capture responses to their recommendations.

The poll consisted of six questions from the committee (Survey 1) and ten from H.H. Bhanu Swami (Survey 2) with a free-text comments field. Notably, neither the full position papers underlying the presentation nor the final survey results were shared with ISKCON India leadership. Thus, the leaders present at the meeting were asked only to evaluate a high-level summary of the findings and recommendations, without access to detailed positions, evidence, or raw data for scrutiny.

Summary Analysis

The surveys themselves suffer from serious methodological weaknesses that limit their reliability for policy-making or scholarly analysis. Key faults are detailed per question in the Appendix. The main categories are summarized below with illustrative examples:

1. Inconsistent conditions

Responses were taken before, during, and after public criticisms of both the committee's handling and the content of its summary were aired. This timing variability likely introduced order effects and response bias (see global administration issues in the Appendix).

2. Not representative

In addition to Bureau members, only select ICC and IBAC officers participated; this convenience sample is not representative of the broader ISKCON India leadership body (detailed in global issues, Appendix).

3. Over-reliance on binary choices

Complex issues were reduced to Yes/No or simple dichotomies, losing nuance on a topic that involves degrees of clarity, conditional acceptance, and śāstric distinctions (e.g., *utsarga-apavāda*, general rule and exception).

Examples:

- Survey 1 Q2 forced a binary judgment on whether Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions are "clear" or "ambiguous," excluding "partially clear" or "context-dependent" views (Appendix recommendation: Likert scale).
- Survey 2 Q1–Q5 and Q7–Q10 similarly collapsed acceptance, restrictions, and modifications into Yes/No, omitting graded or conditional options (see Appendix classifications for each).

4. Leading questions and biased / restrictive framing

Several questions presuppose agreement with a position or embed assumptions that nudge respondents toward particular answers.

Examples:

- Survey 1 Q4 (“Those giving siksha and are qualified to be Gurus should be recognised officially as Siksha Gurus. This includes those in female bodies.”) assumes official recognition is desirable rather than testing it (Appendix).
- Survey 2 Q5 (“Women siksa gurus should accept only women as disciples”) presupposes gender-based restrictions, potentially contradicting *Upadeśāmrta* text 1’s principle of worldwide discipleship for one who controls the urges (Appendix).
- Survey 1 Q6 ties sensitivity to regional adjustments in a culturally loaded way, assuming the GBC decision’s validity (Appendix).

Conclusion

This survey is best viewed as input for a more rigorous pilot survey rather than a definitive gauge of ISKCON India leadership opinion. Professional assistance in survey design—from question wording and response formats to sampling and administration—should be engaged from the outset. Professional help in interpreting the results should also be sought.

Results from such a pilot could then inform a properly sampled, balanced survey of ISKCON India leaders. As currently constituted, the combination of binary response formats, leading/restrictive wording, ambiguous terms, and non-representative/inconsistent administration undermines validity and reliability (see Appendix for item-by-item classification and the net effect summary). While the two open-text fields (Survey 2 Q6 and final Comments) offered some opportunity for nuance, they cannot fully offset the cumulative methodological issues in the structured items.

Appendix- Classification of survey questions by methodological problems

Below, each question is quoted in full with its allowed responses, followed by a classification and justification based on the problems identified in the Report on Survey Soundness. (Issues like “inconsistent conditions” and “non-representativeness” apply to the administration context rather than individual questions, so they are noted globally at the end.)

Survey 1 (Committee’s six questions)

Q1: Is the FDG issue about a principle (cannot be changed) or a detail (can be adjusted according to time, place and circumstance)?

Response: Principle, Detail.

- **Problem—Oversimplification (binary conceptual frame):** Forces a dichotomy between “principle” and “detail,” of the entire issue as a whole, when such a dichotomy is more appropriate to parts. For example, in addition to what are called *apūrva-vidhis* (a vidhi that allows no deviation, like not drinking alcohol), there are *niyāmas*, or semi-obligatory regulations. There is also *utsarga* and *apavāda*, or general rule and exception relationships. And the śāstric rules in this debate are better modelled according to these rules. Hence, this question oversimplifies the matter.

Q2: Do you think that the instructions of Srila Prabhupada are clear on the topic of women initiating or are they ambiguous?

Response: Yes / No.

- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** Complex hermeneutical assessment reduced to Yes/No; many may find “partially clear” or “context-dependent.”
- **Recommendation:** Likert scale response would be more appropriate here.

Q3: The primacy of Srila Prabhupada, in the life of a follower of ISKCON, should be implemented firmly by an official ceremony - *Acharya Sambhanda* , before they even take Diksha . (This will be designed to be distinctly different from Diksha ceremonies prevalent already in ISKCON)

Response: Yes/No.

- **Problem—Leading and biased framing:** Presumes that “primacy... should be implemented firmly” via a new ceremony; tests agreement rather than exploring whether such a ceremony is desirable or doctrinally warranted.
- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No graded agreement or alternatives.
- **Recommendation:** A free-text field would have likely captured more accurate and frank responses. The surveyor considers the proposition unobjectionable, whereas many do consider it objectionable. And even a “No” response would not capture the nature of a categorical objection.

Q4: Those giving siksha and are qualified to be Gurus should be recognised officially as Siksha Gurus . This includes those in female bodies.

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Leading and biased framing:** Assumes official recognition is desirable; “This includes those in female bodies” nudges toward inclusion without testing whether recognition itself is contested.
- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No room for conditional acceptance (e.g., qualifications, contexts, *utsarga-apavāda* (general rule-exception) relationship, etc.).

Q5: We in ISKCON need to have an official white paper on "Guru Tattva" well researched and laid down as we understand it now, from the instructions and books of Srila Prabhupada.

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Leading framing:** Assumes the need for an “official white paper,” testing agreement rather than exploring alternative approaches (e.g., conferences, symposiums, commentaries, etc.).
- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No scale for priority or scope.
- **Recommendation:** A free-text field would have been useful here.

Q6: Should we as Indians, also be sensitive towards the mandate of Srila Prabhupada , to bring Krishna Consciousness to the foreign lands and allow well thought out adjustments, to the GBC's decision of Female bodied devotees initiating?

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Leading and culturally loaded framing:** Ties acceptance to “we as Indians” and “allow well thought out adjustments,” biasing toward accommodation framed as sensitivity. It also assumes that the GBC’s decision is a valid one and that accommodation of female gurus is based on regional preferences rather than fidelity to Śāstra.
- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No space for nuanced positions (e.g., specific adjustments, conditions, or objections).

Survey 2 (Ten questions posed by H.H. Bhanu Swami)

Q1: I accept women as siksa gurus.

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** Collapses acceptance into Yes/No, excluding conditional acceptance (e.g., qualifications, contexts). There are *vartmapradarśaka-guru* and *śravāṇa-guru*, which are two divisions of *śikṣā-guru*.

- **Problem—Ambiguity in scope:** “Accept” could mean doctrinal, institutional, or practical acceptance—undefined. For example, mother is also a guru. *janañ na sā syāt . . . na mocayed yaḥ samupeta-mṛtyum*. Yes/No answers here can represent many different notions.

Q2: I accept women as siksa gurus to function in India.

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Cultural framing:** It is not clear whether this is referring to some sort of institutional guru or any kind of informal guru.
- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No room for conditional acceptance.

Q3: Women should be officially recognized as siksa gurus in a ceremony.

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Leading framing, ambiguity:** Assumes that a ceremony itself is acceptable. So, does a “no” response object to women being officially recognized, or to conducting a ceremony? Or both?
- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No graded agreement or alternatives. Mostly yes or mostly no would give some better insight.

Q4: Women siksa guru should have restrictions such as over 50 years.

Response: Yes/No.

- **Problem—Leading and restrictive framing:** Presupposes restrictions and offers a single example (“over 50 years”), biasing toward arbitrary age-based thresholds (why not 49, or 51 years?). Again, *utsarva-apavāda* relationship based on competency and realization would be a better model.
- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No space to propose alternative qualifications.

Q5: Women siksa gurus should accept only women as disciples.

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Leading and restrictive framing:** Presupposes gender-based disciple restrictions rather than asking whether such restrictions are necessary; contradicts the cited principle that one fit to control the six urges can “make disciples all over the world.”
- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No room for conditional or doctrinally reasoned exceptions.

Q6: Other conditions for having women siksa gurus. Pl mention here or use space below:

Response: Free text

- **Strength—Nuance via open-text:** Allows respondents to propose qualifications or conditions beyond binary constraints.
- **Limitation—Placement:** As one of two free-text questions, it does not sufficiently counterbalance the overall binary/leading structure.

Q7: I accept the GBC resolution permitting female diksa gurus with the amendment clauses for regional opt-outs (culturally sensitive resolution).

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No scale for agreement or alternative formulations.

Q8: I prefer the following modification of the GBC resolution: "Restrict the number of VDG giving first and second initiation, to Srila Prabhupada Vaisnavi disciples only."

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Insufficient information in survey or presentation:** This issue received at best very brief mention, if at all, in the presentation. And certainly no context is given in the survey. This is a new idea in the debate that has little awareness outside of the committee.
- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No graded preference or comparative options. Likert scale would have been better response choice.

Q9: I prefer the following modification of the GBC resolution: "Restrict Vaisnavis, Srila Prabhupada disciples, to giving first and second initiation to only women."

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No room for alternative modifications. Likert scale would have been a better response choice.

Q10: I prefer the following modification of the GBC resolution: "Allow VDG Srila Prabhupada disciples, to give only first initiation and not second."

Response: Yes/No

- **Problem—Leading and restrictive framing:** Presents a single restrictive pathway; excludes balanced or expansive options.
- **Problem—Over-reliance on binary choices:** No scale or alternatives. A Likert scale AND a free-text field would have been better.

Comments: Any other comments on this issue of VDG may be made here.

Response: free text

- **Strength—Nuance via open-text:** Provides space for broader commentary. This is a breath of fresh air.
- **Limitation—Offset:** One open-text field cannot fully mitigate the cumulative bias of preceding binary/leading items.

Global administration issues (apply to the whole poll, not individual items)

- **Inconsistent conditions:** Responses were collected before, during, and after public criticisms, likely influencing answers.

- **Non-representative sample:** Limited to select ICC/IBAC/Bureau attendees, not the broader ISKCON India leadership.

Direct takeaway

- **Dominant problems across items:** Over-reliance on binary choices; leading and restrictive framing; ambiguous or culturally loaded wording.
- **Net effect:** Reduced validity and reliability for policy or scholarly inference; results risk reflecting the survey designers' frames more than respondents' nuanced positions.