A Brief Analysis of Prāṇadā devī dāsī's book *Rishikas & Vaishnavis: Women as Gurus*

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Introduction

In June of 2026, Prāṇadā devī dāsī published a book titled *Rishikas & Vaishnavis: Women as Gurus,* wherein she presented a number of women who contributed to various areas of Vedic culture throughout history, along with some examples of those who acted as *dīkṣā-gurus* within the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*. In the fourth chapter, she makes the claim that it is a "myth that only a Vaishnavi of Jahnava Thakurani's caliber, i.e., an eternally liberated associate of Sri Krishna or Mahaprabhu, can fulfill the role of diksha-guru", and dedicates the rest of the chapter to refuting this myth by citing various examples of female *dīkṣā-gurus* from Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava history. This paper seeks to evaluate the efficacy of her refutation by addressing the question, "Are each of the female *dīkṣā-gurus* mentioned in the fourth chapter of Prāṇadā's book *sādhakas* or non-*sādhakas*?"

The criteria by which we propose to determine whether or not the following personalities are *sādhakas* are primarily twofold:

1. Descriptions of activities or events wholly impossible to be performed or experienced by *sādhakas.*
2. Statements directly identifying them as non-*sādhakas.*

Śrīmati Lakṣahīrā

Despite her inclusion in this list, there is no account in mainstream Gauḍīya literature that corroborates that Śrīmati Lakṣahīrā, the prostitute delivered by Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura, acted as a *dīkṣā-guru*. Nevertheless, all evidence indicates that she was not a *sādhaka* at the time of her becoming a celebrated devotee. *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna* states:

> রামচন্দ্র-কর্তৃক শ্রীহরিদাস ঠাকুরের সাধনা-ভঙ্গে নিযুক্তা হইয়া তাঁহার সঙ্গপ্রভাবে 'পরম মহান্তী' হইয়াছিলেন
>
> "Being engaged by Ramācandra Khān to break the *sādhana* of Haridāsa Ṭhākura, she became *parama mahāntī* by his (Haridāsa Ṭhākura's) immense power." (*Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna*, from the History of Jessore-Khulna p. 364–365)

That the words *parama mahānti* indicate her *siddhatva* is confirmed by *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*:

তুলসী সেবন করে, চর্বণ, উপবাস ।
ইন্দ্রিয়-দমন হৈল, প্রেমের প্রকাশ ॥

[By] Serving tulasī, chewing [her food without swallowing], and fasting, her senses became controlled and *prema* manifested [in her]. (*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Antya-līlā* 3.141)

The words *premera prakāśa* in the above *payāra* indicate that she was experiencing symptoms of *prema-bhakti*. Śrīla Prabhupāda's translation reflects this:

...and as soon as her senses were controlled, symptoms of love of Godhead appeared in her person. (Ibid.)

Such symptoms are only genuinely manifest in those who are at least on the level of *bhāva*:

व्यक्तं मसृणितेवान्तर् लक्ष्यते रति-लक्षणम् ।
मुमुक्षु-प्रभृतीनां चेद् भवेद् एषा रतिर् न हि ॥

If softness of the heart, the symptom of *rati*, becomes clearly visible in persons desiring liberation, or in other unqualified persons, then it is not real *rati*. (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.3.41)[1]

Thus, it can be concluded that Śrīmati Lakṣahīrā was not a *sādhaka* but was at least on the level of *bhāva* when she became a celebrated devotee and perhaps also took disciples.

Śrīmati Sītā Ṭhākurāṇī

Śrīmati Sītā Ṭhākurāṇī is well-known as the wife of Advaita Ācārya. The author quotes Nityānanda dāsa's *Prema-vilāsa* to demonstrate that she gave *mantra-dīkṣā* to her two servants, Nandinī and Jaṅgalī. The following description comes in the 24th *vilāsa* of *Prema-vilāsa*:

সীতা দেবীর দুই দাসী জঙ্গলী নন্দিনী ।
কৃষ্ণ মন্ত্রে দীক্ষা সীতা দিলেন আপনি ॥

Sītā devī herself gave *dīkṣā* into *kṛṣṇa-mantra* to her two servants Jaṅgali and Nandinī.

[1] The word *rati* is used interchangeably with the word *bhāva*.

पुराणे नात्य-शास्त्रे च द्वयोस् तु रति-भावयोः ।
समानार्थतया ह्य् अत्र द्वयम् ऐक्येन लक्षितम् ॥

In the Purāṇas and Nātya-śāstra, *rati* and *bhāva* have the same meaning. Thus they will have the same meaning in this work also. (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.3.13)

However, also in the 24th *vilāsa*, Nityānanda dāsa identifies Sītā devī as *yogamāyā*:

> যোগমায়া দুর্গা ভগবতী সীতা হয়।
> তার প্রকাশ শ্রীদেবী জানিহ নিশ্চয় ॥
>
> Bhagavatī Sītā is *yogamāyā* Durgā. Know it well that her expansion is Śrī devī. (Ibid.)

The above *payāra* closely mirrors Kavi Karṇapūra's description of her identity in *Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā* (83):

> योगमाया भगवती गृहिणी तस्य साम्प्रतम ।
> सीता-रूपेणावतीर्ण श्री-नम्ना तत् प्रकाशतः ।।
>
> Now, *yogamāyā-bhagavatī,* his wife, has descended in the form of Sītā. Śrī is her expansion.

Thus it may be concluded that Śrīmati Sītā Ṭhākurāṇī was not a *sādhaka*.

Śrīmati Jaṅgali devī and Śrīmati Nandinī devī

As mentioned previously, Śrīmati Jaṅgali devī and Śrīmati Nandinī devī were the servants and disciples of Sītā Ṭhākurāṇī. As the author herself states, these two Vaiṣṇavīs are identified by Kavi Karṇapura as Jaya and Vijaya:

> नंदिनी जंगली ज्ञेय जया च विजया क्रमात
>
> Nandinī and Jaṅgalī are known as Jaya and Vijaya respectively. (*Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā* 89)

Since Jaya and Vijaya are *nitya-pārṣadas* of the Lord, it is to be concluded that they were not *sādhakas*. A further look into their lives more clearly indicates their spiritual stature:

> নন্দিনী সেবয়ে শ্রীসীতার চরণে ।
> জঙ্গলী তপস্যা করিতে গেল এক বনে॥
>
> জঙ্গলী থাকয়ে যেই জঙ্গলের মাঝে।
> ব্যাঘ্র ভল্লুকাদি যত পশুর সমাজে॥
>
> সেই বনে গৌড়েশ্বর শিকারোতে গেল।
> পরমা সুন্দরী নারী দেখিতে পাইল॥
>
> তপস্বিনী বেশে নারী করয়ে তপস্যা।
> তাঁর সতীত্ব নাশিতে রাজার মনে দিশা॥
>
> নিকটে আসিয়া দেখে পুরুষ বিশেষ।
> রাজার মনে সন্দেহ হইল অশেষ॥
>
> রাজা বোলে তপস্বিনী তুমি নারী না পুরুষ।
> জঙ্গলী বোলে নারী আমি, না হই পুরুষ॥
>
> নারী জনে নারী দেখে পুরুষে পুরুষ।
> কারে কোনকালে আমি না কহি পুরুষ॥

সজ্জনে আমারে নারী দেখে সর্বক্ষণ।
মা মা বলিয়া মোরে করে সম্ভাষণ॥

পুরুষে পহিলা মোরে দেখয়ে প্রকৃতি।
মন দুষ্ট হৈলে দেখে পুরুষ আকৃতি॥

...

রাজা বোলে মা আমি অপরাধী বড়।
চরণের ধূলি দিয়া মোরে তুমি তার॥

জঙ্গলী রাজারে কৃপা করিলেন বড়ি।
রাজা তথি করিয়া দিলেন এক পুরী॥

সে স্থানের নাম জঙ্গলী টোটা সবে কন।
জঙ্গলীর ঐশ্বর্য্য আমি কৈল প্রকটন॥

Nandinī served the lotus feet of Śrī Sīta. Jaṅgalī went to one forest to do *tapasya*. She stayed in the jungle in the company of animals like tigers and bears. The king of Gauḍa went to that forest to hunt and saw a most beautiful woman. The woman was in the dress of a *tapasvinī* and was doing *tapasya*, and the king got the idea to break her chastity. Coming close, he saw the form of a man, and the king became doubtful. The king said, "*Tapasvinī*, are you a man or a woman?" Jaṅgalī replied, "Women see a woman, men see a man. I never address anyone as a man.[2] Saintly persons see me as a woman and always address me as "Mother, mother." A man initially sees me as a woman, but if his mind becomes corrupted, he sees the form of man.

...

The king said "Mother, I am a great offender. Please be merciful to me and give me the dust of your lotus feet." Jaṅgalī was very merciful to the king, and he gave her one city. The name of that place is Jaṅgalī-ṭoṭā. Thus I have expounded the opulence of Jaṅgalī.

As is clear from the above narration, the activities of Jaṅgalī were far from ordinary and certainly impossible to be performed by a *sādhaka*. Noteworthy here is that there is no mention of Jaṅgalī initiating the king, nor anywhere in *Prema-vilāsa* of her or Nandinī initiating any disciples. The author does not cite the source for her claim that they did.

The author does cite that Jaṅgali-ṭoṭā has become a center for the *sakhī-bhāva* or *sakhī-bhekī sampradāya.* This came to be because of claims made about Jaṅgalī's identity in Lokanātha dāsa's *Sītā-caritra*, a book which the author cites in her own. *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna* states:

> কিন্তু লোকনাথের সীতাচরিত্র গ্রন্থে জানা যায় যে জঙ্গলী নারী ছিলেন না। শান্তিপুরের নিকট হরিপুর গ্রামের যজ্ঞেশ্বর চক্রবর্ত্তী বা রাজকুমার সীতাদেবীর নিকট হইতে দীক্ষা গ্রহণ করেন। তাহার নাম পরে জঙ্গলী প্রিয় হয়।

[2] Some sources allege that she said, "I was never a man." (*Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna*)

> But, from Lokanātha's Sītā-caritra, it is known that Jaṅgalī was not a woman. The prince of Haripur, near Shantipur, took initiation from Sītā devī. His name after [initiation] is Jaṅgalī-priya.

The claim made here is that Jaṅgalī was a man who took on a female name after his initiation. *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna* states that this Jaṅgalī-priya took at least one disciple, a man, whose name thereafter became Hari-priyā (another female name). Though the full text of *Sītā-caritra* could not be located by the author of this analysis, a summary of its contents was, and therein the sixth chapter is described as follows:

> সীতার শিষ্যদ্বয়ের কথা; নীতিশিক্ষা সীতার অদ্‌ভুত চরিত; শিষ্যদ্বয়ের স্ত্রীভাব ও স্ত্রীবেশ-ধারণ ।
>
> The story of Sītā's two disciples; moral teaching and Sītā's amazing character; Her two disciples adoption of *strī-bhāva (*feminine emotions) and *strī-veśa* (feminine dress).

Thus it appears that Sītā Ṭhākurāṇī's servant Jaṅgalī later became erroneously identified with a *sakhī-bhekī* due to her having displayed both female and male forms to the king of Gauḍa, and it is still unclear whether the real Jaṅgalī (or Nandinī) factually took disciples or not.

Śrīmati Nārāyaṇī devī

Nārāyaṇī devī is famous as the mother of Śrīla Vṛndāvana dāsa Ṭhākura, to whom Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu showed special mercy. *Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā* (43) states that Śrīmati Nārāyaṇī devī is the incarnation of Kilimbikā, the daughter of Ambikā, an associate of Śrīmati Rādhārāṇi.

> अम्बिकायाः स्वसा यासीन्नाम्ना श्रील-किलिम्बिका ।
>
> कृष्णोच्छिष्टं प्रभुञ्जान सेयं नारायणी मता ।।
>
> She who was previously known by the name Śrīla Kilimbikā, who was the younger sister of Ambikā, and who always ate the remnants of Kṛṣṇa, she is Nārāyaṇī.

Since Śrīmati Nārāyaṇī devī is an associate of Kṛṣṇa in Goloka, it is concluded that she was not a *sādhaka*. As the author admits, the claim that Nārāyaṇī devī initiated disciples is unsubstantiated and no such accounts are found in mainstream Gauḍīya literature.

Śrīmati Jāhnavā devī

Śrīmati Jāhnavā devī is known to be a *nitya-siddha*, being the *śakti* of Nityānanda Prabhu. She is not a *sādhaka.*

Śrīmati Īśvarī Draupadi Devī and Śrīmati Gaurāṅga Priyā devī

These two women are the wives of Śrīnivāsa Ācārya. Yadunandana dāsa writes of them in his work *Karṇānanda* as follows:

শুদ্ধ রাগানুগ দোঁহার ভজন একান্ত।
পরকীয়া ভাব দোঁহার ভজন নিতান্ত॥

কি কহিব দোঁহাকার নৈষ্ঠিক ভজনে।
কর্ম জ্ঞানাদিক কভু নাহি শুনে কাণে॥

> Both were one-pointedly absorbed in *śuddha-rāgānuga-bhajana.* Their *bhajana* was absolutely, purely *parakīyā-bhāva*. What can I say about their steadfast *bhajana*? They never heard *karma* or *jñāna*, or anything else [opposed to their *bhajana*] with their ears.

The above excerpt gives some hint of their exalted status; however, a much more specific indication is given in the course of a narration in *Karṇānanda* about the exalted status of Śrīnivāsa Ācārya's disciple Rāmacandra Kavirāja:

প্রভু কহে শুন দুঁহে সাবধান হইয়া।
আনিনু প্রসাদ আমি রামচন্দ্র লাগিয়া॥

দুর্লভ এই প্রসাদ করিলে ভোজন।
আজি হৈতে হইল দুঁহে রামচন্দ্র সম॥

ব্রহ্মা দুর্লভ এই শ্রীরাধাধরাম্বৃত।
তাহা পান কৈলা এবে হৈলা কৃত কৃত্য॥

অন্যের আছুক দায় শ্রীকৃষ্ণের দুর্লভ।
রামচন্দ্র হইতে তুমি পাইলা এ সব॥

> Prabhu (Śrīnivāsa Ācārya) said: listen carefully, both of you. I brought this *prasāda* for Rāmacandra. If you take this *prasāda* you both become the same as Rāmacandra. This nectar from Rādhā's lips (betel *prasāda*) is rare even for Brahmā. Having taken it, your lives are fulfilled. What to speak of others, what is rare even for Śrī Kṛṣṇa you have obtained by the mercy of Rāmacandra.

Rāmacandra Kavirāja is known as a *siddha* Vaiṣṇava. That Īśvarī and Gaurāṅga Priyā became "the same" as Rāmacandra, having taken the remnants of Śrīmati Rādhārāṇi, indicates that they achieved the same kind of *siddhatva* as him, and thus they were not *sādhakas*.

Śrīmati Hemalatā Ṭhākurāṇī

Hemalatā Ṭhākurāṇī is one of three daughters of Śrīnivāsa Ācārya. The following account is given in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna*:

হেমলতা দেবী অর্দ্ধকালীরূপে বিখ্যাত। দুই হস্তে অন্ন ব্যঞ্জনের থালা ধারণ করিয়া ব্রাহ্মণ-ভোজন-কালে পরিবেশন করিতে করিতে হঠাৎ মাথার বস্ত্রাবরণ স্থানচ্যুত হয়। দেবী তৎক্ষণাৎ স্কন্ধদেশ হইতে অপর দুই হস্ত উদগত করিয়া যথাস্থানে বস্ত্র বিন্যস্ত করেন।

Hemalatā devī is famous as Ardhakālī (a form of Kālī devī). Once, while feeding brāhmaṇas, the sāri covering her head slipped. Devī suddenly manifested two more arms from behind her shoulders and placed the cloth back in its place.

The statement that Hemalatā devī is famous as Ardhakālī is uncorroborated. Furthermore, the *līlā* narrated here, though attributed to Hemalatā devī, is recorded in Prema-vilāsa as having been performed by Sītā Ṭhākurāṇī. These accounts are spurious, but that they are attributed to her gives an indication that she was seen as someone capable of performing mystic acts possible only for those who are spiritually exalted. Nevertheless, for lack of any reliable corroboration of their factuality, they cannot be taken as evidence.

Though we find no explicit statements regarding her spiritual status, nor much about her life at all, it is clear that she was not an ordinary devotee, being the daughter of a *nitya-pārṣada* and a recipient of his mercy, which she was capable of distributing widely:

তবে প্রভুর নিজ কন্যা নাম হেমলতা ।
তাহারে করিলা দয়া করি প্রসন্নতা ।।

তাঁর শিষ্য উপশিষ্য অনেক হইল ।
তিঁহো প্রেমামৃতে সব মহী ভাসাইল ।।

Then, Prabhu (Śrīnivāsa Ācārya), being pleased, gave mercy to his own daughter, whose name was Hemalatā. Her disciples and grand-disciples became great in number and she inundated the entire world in the nectar of *prema*. (*Karṇānanda*, 1st *niryāsa*)

An authorized account given in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna* describes her rejection of Rūpa Kavirāja:

কথিত আছে ইনি শ্রীশ্রীরূপাগোস্বামীপদের নামে সহজিয়া মতপোষক এক জাল গ্রন্থ বাহির করিয়া প্রকাশ করার চেষ্টায় এবং নিজ গুরুর প্রতিও কটাক্ষ করায় শিষ্যাভিমানী রূপ কবিরাজকে সমাজচ্যুত করিয়া গলার কণ্ঠী ছিঁড়িয়া দেন।

It is said that because Rūpa Kavirāja published a fraudulent text promoting *sahajiyā* philosophy in the name of Śrī Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmi and for disrespecting his own guru, Hemalatā expelled him from society and broke his *kaṇṭhī-mālā.*

That her chastisement of Rūpa Kavirāja resulted in his expulsion from Vaiṣṇava society also indicates that she was accepted almost unanimously by Gauḍīyas as an authority within the *sampradāya*, something only possible for someone of truly elevated spiritual stature. Her breaking his *kaṇṭhī-mālā* also demonstrates her transcendence to the traditional *dharmas*

governing women's behaviour, which were certainly rigidly observed at the time she was on the planet. Thus, the birth and activities of Hemalatā strongly suggest she was an especially empowered devotee, though no explicit indication of her spiritual stature is found in the narrations about her life.

Śrīmati Kṛṣṇapriyā and Śrīmati Viṣṇupriyā

Kṛṣṇapriyā and Viṣṇupriyā are the daughters of Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's disciple Gaṅgānārāyaṇa Cakravartī. *Narottama-vilāsa* gives the following information them:

> শ্রীচক্রবর্তীর পত্নী নাম রামনারায়ণী ।
> জগৎ বিদিতা বিষ্ণুপ্রিয়ার জননী॥
>
> বিষ্ণুপ্রিয়া কন্যা কৃষ্ণপ্রিয়া ভক্তিরাশি ।
> শ্রীরাধার অনুগ্রহীতা যে রাধাকুণ্ডবাসী॥
>
> Śrī Cakravartī's wife was named Rāmanārayaṇī. She was the mother of the world-famous Viṣṇupriyā. Viṣṇupriyā's sister was Kṛṣṇapriyā, the embodiment of devotion who was favored by Rādhā and resided at Rādhā-kuṇḍa. (*Narottama-vilāsa*, 11th *vilāsa*)

Kṛṣṇapriyā's being described here as the "embodiment of devotion" and her being "favored by Rādhā" indicate that she was at a very advanced level of devotion, and not an ordinary Vaiṣṇavī. Furthermore:

> গঙ্গানারায়নের দুহিতা বিষ্ণুপ্রিয়া।
> শ্রীগোবিন্দ সেবা রসে সদাহর্ষ হিয়া॥
>
> তাঁর কন্যা কৃষ্ণপ্রিয়া ভক্তি মূর্তিমতী।
> রাধাকুণ্ডবাসী ঠাকুরানী যাঁর খ্যাতি॥
>
> গৌড় হৈতে ব্রজে গিয়া সর্ব্বত্র ভ্রমিল।
> নিয়ম করিয়া রাধাকুণ্ডে বাস কৈল॥
>
> Gaṅganārāyaṇa's daughter was Viṣṇupriyā. Her heart was always blissful due to the *rasa* of serving Govinda. Her sister, Kṛṣṇapriyā was the embodiment of devotional service and was famous as the *ṭhākurāṇī* who lived at Rādhā-kuṇḍa. From Gauḍa to Vraja, they traveled everywhere and then made a vow to live at Rādhā-kuṇḍa. (Ibid, Appendix)

That both sisters wandered from Gauḍa to Vṛndāvana, travelling to various places on the way before deciding to stay in Rādhā-kuṇḍa indicates a level of renunciation not present in ordinary *sādhakas*. Kṛṣṇapriyā's *siddhatva* is confirmed in the following account of how Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's *śilā* came to be entrusted to her:

মুকুন্দ দাসের অতি প্রাচীন সময়।
ভোজনে অরুচি হইল উদরাময়॥

কৃষ্ণপ্রিয়া ঠাকুরানী ঐছে পথ্য দিল।
হইল ভোজনে রুচিরোগ শান্তি হৈল॥

মুকুন্দ করিয়া দৈন্য কহে বারে বারে।
মাতার সমান স্নেহ করিলা আমারে॥

কৃষ্ণে যে তোমার ভক্তি কি জানিব আমি।
গোবর্দ্ধন শিলা রসে যোগ্য হও তুমি॥

এত কহি গোবর্দ্ধন শিলা তাঁরে দিলা।
অল্প দিনে শ্রীমুকুন্দ অপ্রকট হইলা॥

গোবর্দ্ধন শিলা সেবা করে ঠাকুরানী।
যৈছে তাঁর প্রীতি তাহা কহিতে না জানি॥

শিলায় সাক্ষাত দেখে ব্রজেন্দ্র নন্দন।
যে দিন যে রঙ্গ তাহা না হয় বর্ণন॥

> In Mukunda dāsa's old age, he had a severe stomach problem which caused him to have no appetite. Kṛṣṇapriyā provided him with a diet such that his illness was cured. Mukunda humbly said again and again, "You have shown me affection just like a mother. What can I know about your devotion to Kṛṣṇa? You are qualified to receive the rasa of [Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's] Govardhana *śilā.*" Having said this, he gave her the *śilā* and within a few days Śrī Mukunda left this world. I do not know how to describe the love with which Ṭhākurāṇī served the *śilā.* In the *śilā,* she saw Vrajendra-nandana Himself, and what pastimes happened on what day cannot be described. (Ibid, 11th *vilāsa*)

That Kṛṣṇapriyā was able to daily see and relish the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa while worshipping the *śilā* indicates that she was a perfected soul, as such spiritual visions do not regularly occur on the level of *sādhana.*

Aside from her association with Kṛṣṇapriyā and the above details of her renunciation, there is little readily available information about Viṣṇupriyā. However, her extraordinary renunciation and transcendence to worldly *dharma*, as well as her "always relishing the *rasa* of service to Govinda within her heart" certainly indicate that she was not an ordinary *sādhaka*, and thus in all likelihood Viṣṇupriyā was a perfected soul.

Śrīmati Sucaritā devī

Aside from the information provided by the author, which comes from Karṇānanda, no information is readily available about the life of Śrīmati Sucaritā devī from standard books of our *sampradāya*.

Śrīmati Gaṅgāmātā Gosvāminī

Gaṅgāmātā Gosvāminī was a disciple of Hari dāsa Paṇḍita, the chief *sevait* of Rādhā-Govinda in Vṛndāvana. Aside from the information present in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna*, which is translated and paraphrased in the author's book, Sundarānanda Vidyāvinoda wrote an elaborate account of Gaṅgāmātā Gosvāminī's life and activities in his book *Śrī Kṣetra.* Therein, he writes:

> শচীদেবী স্বপ্নযোগে শ্রীজগন্নাথের দ্বারা আদিষ্ট হইলেন, "যেদিন গঙ্গায় স্নানযোগ, সেইদিন তুমি শ্বেতগঙ্গায় স্নান করিবে । গঙ্গাদেবী তোমার সঙ্গপ্রার্থিনী হইয়া শ্বেতগঙ্গায় উপস্থিত হইবেন ।
>
> Śacīdevī (Gaṅgāmātā) was ordered by Jagannātha in a dream, "On the day of the auspicious timing for bathing in the Gaṅgā, bathe in the Śveta-gaṅgā. Gaṅgā devī, praying and longing for your association, will be present there."

Despite the lack of an explicit statement defining her exact spiritual stature, her exceptional service and vows of renunciation, the Lord's numerous personal interventions in her life, and Gaṅgā devī's praying for her association all indicate that it is highly unlikely that Gaṅgāmātā Gosvāminī was on the level of *sādhana*.

Śrīmati Icchā devī

Śrīmati Icchā devī was the wife of Rasikānanda. Gopījana Vallabha's *Rasika-maṅgala* identifies her as follows:

> লক্ষ্মী অংশে অবতীর্ণ ইচ্ছা পাট বংসী।
> জন্মে জন্মে তেকারণে রসিক প্রেয়সী॥
>
> A portion of Lakṣmī descended as Icchā, his chief queen. For that reason, birth after birth, she is the love of Rasika. (*Rasika-maṅgala*, 12th *laharī*)

Because Icchā devī is an *aṁśa* of Lakṣmī and the eternal consort of Rasikānanda, she cannot be classified as a *sādhaka.*

Conclusion

Of the fourteen examples of female *dīkṣā-gurus* Prāṇadā devī dāsī cites in the fourth chapter of *Rishikas & Vaishnavis*, eleven are confirmed *siddhas:*

Śrīmati Lakṣahīrā
Śrīmati Sītā Ṭhākurāṇī
Śrīmati Jaṅgali devī
Śrīmati Nandinī devī
Śrīmati Nārāyaṇī devī
Śrīmati Jāhnavā devī
Śrīmati Īśvarī Draupadi devī
Śrīmati Gaurāṅga Priyā devī
Śrīmati Kṛṣṇapriyā devī
Śrīmati Gaṅgāmātā Gosvāminī
Śrīmati Icchā devī

Of those eleven, six are *nitya-siddhas:*

Śrīmati Sītā Ṭhākurāṇī
Śrīmati Jaṅgali devī
Śrīmati Nandinī devī
Śrīmati Nārāyaṇī devī
Śrīmati Jāhnavā devī
Śrīmati Icchā devī

Aside from these eleven, the three others are unconfirmed, either because the historical record in each does not clearly point one way or the other, or there is insufficient evidence to make any assessment at all.

Śrīmati Hemalatā Ṭhākurāṇī
Śrīmati Viṣṇupriyā devī
Śrīmati Sucaritā devī

Thus, none of the evidence the author cites supports her contention that it is a myth that only a Vaiṣṇavī who is "an eternally liberated associate of Sri Krishna or Mahaprabhu can fulfill the role of diksha-guru." Indeed, the evidence produced would more strongly support the opposite conclusion. However, there is a more fundamental flaw in her presentation, in that it relies on evidence which cannot reliably support its conclusion.

A publication which intends to establish the eligibility of *sādhaka* Vaiṣṇavīs to act as *dīkṣā-gurus* must demonstrate that such a practice is doctrinally sound, rather than simply historically precedented. History documents that an event occurred; doctrine evaluates its validity and significance to the present.

To illustrate this, we may look to the sixth chapter of *Rishikas and Vaishnavis* and the example of Śrīmati Jayaśrī Gosvāminī, the *ācārya* of the Shree Guru Prapanna Ashram and a grand-disciple of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. Leaving aside the question of her authority as a *dīkṣā-guru*, Jayaśrī Gosvāminī presents herself as a *sannyāsi* and openly initiates many of her female disciples into *sannyāsa*. If precedent alone decided authority, then the practice of offering women *sannyāsa* could be implemented in our own institution simply on the basis of Jayaśrī Gosvāminī's precedent. However, in reality, doing so would violate the teachings of our *ācārya,* Śrīla Prabhupāda, who explicitly rejected such a practice as characteristic of "so-called

spiritual societies" (SB 3.24.40) and such *sannyāsis* themselves as "pretenders and prostitutes" (Letter to Brahmānanda). That Jayaśrī Gosvāminī's practice exists as a matter of historical fact does nothing to grant it authority because it is not supported by doctrine.

Many more such examples of historically precedented deviations could be cited from the history of our *sampradāya*, including: offering fish to Kṛṣṇa, allowing the guru to take the virginity of one's newly wedded wife, chanting various concocted mantras, men dressing as *gopīs*, gurus performing *rāsa-līlā* with their disciples, *et cetera ad nauseam*. Again, the status of these practices as historical does nothing to mitigate their status as deviations.

Thus, though we welcome any opportunity to hear of the devotional feats of the great personalities cited in the fourth chapter of *Rishikas and Vaishnavis*, it must be remembered that authority derives not merely from precedent but from doctrine. By relying wholly on historical examples to the exclusion of doctrinal statements, Prāṇadā devī dāsī's presentation fails at a fundamental level to differentiate deviation from tradition and thus does not sufficiently address the question of women's eligibility as *dīkṣā-gurus*.

About the author

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