

Tradition and Innovation: Exploring Swami Prabhupada's transformative role in establishing ISKCON in America

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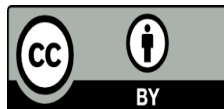
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Tradition and Innovation: Exploring Swami Prabhupada's transformative role in establishing ISKCON in America

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Abstract

This research paper explores the significant concept of innovation within the evolving traditions, with a particular focus on the innovative ideas introduced by Swami Prabhupada, the pioneering figure in establishing of ISKCON movement in America, commonly known as Hare Krishna movement. Swami Prabhupada's journey to America, guided by the directive of his spiritual mentor Bhakti Siddhanta, aimed to propagate the teachings of Krishna to the Western world. This paper aims to analyze comprehensively Swami Prabhupada's role in introducing novel ideas that expanded beyond the traditional scope of the guidelines preached by Prabhupada's spiritual masters. Central to this exploration is the inquiry into whether those innovative ideas align with the continuum of already established teachings of the tradition or represent a deviation from it. By dissecting these various ideas and beliefs which Swami Prabhupada introduced, this paper seeks to provide insights into their implications for the ongoing trajectory of the tradition. Furthermore, the paper acknowledges the pivotal role of Swami Prabhupada's strategic initiatives and leadership that played a crucial role in the spread of ISKCON in the West. In conclusion, this research endeavors to seek the interplay between tradition and innovation within the context of the ISKCON movement, shedding light on its evolution and impact on broader spiritual discourse and the propagation of novel ideas to make it adaptable to the Westerners.

Keywords: ISKCON, Hare Krishna movement, Tradition, Innovation, Swami Prabhupada, New Religious Movement

1. Introduction

a. What is a tradition

Religious traditions play a pivotal role in mapping and reshaping the ideas and beliefs of its followers while paving its path towards spirituality in achieving salvation by adopting various methods and practices. The term "tradition" is a commonly used word, but its meaning remains elusive due to various factors. This ambiguity arises because tradition is often taken for granted as something basic and obvious, leading to its neglect in general discussions. To gain a comprehensive understanding of its usage, one must delve into more instructive and didactic research through standard referenced works and dictionaries. The widely accepted and relatively neutral meaning of "tradition" involves the general process of passing down something, whether orally or in writing. However, there are more concrete senses in which "tradition" refers to the specific content being passed down—this content is sometimes

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vaguely defined as “custom” or anything perceived as “old.” Importantly, it entails the selective labeling of certain content as “tradition” or “traditional.” H.B. Acton elucidates it as:

“A tradition is a belief or practice transmitted from one generation to another and accepted as authoritative, or deferred to, without argument.”¹

Moreover, ‘tradition’ goes beyond the frequent recurrence of similar beliefs, practices, and works across generations. This repetition results from normative consequences sometimes intentional, linked to presenting and accepting tradition as a norm. This normative transmission connects the generations, acting as an inertial force that shapes society over time.² In the realm of diversity, three pivotal points stand out in dictionary entries and usage for tradition. First, ‘tradition’ holds diverse meanings, encompassing both process and product, with wide and narrow applications. Second, despite its apparent neutrality, the term is emotionally charged often tied to deeply held academic, moral, or political values. Third, despite variations, recurring themes exist, though there may be no unanimous agreement on the precise definition or identification of these features and what qualifies as ‘tradition’.³

b. New Religious Movement (NRM)

Another important expression to tradition is the terminology of ‘new religious movements’ generally known as NRM’s, which arose in the middle of the 20th century. The term “New Religious Movement” is frequently used to refer to different traditions that have developed or evolved within the context of spirituality, faith, or belief systems in scholarly, religious, and societal contexts. Although the term ‘NRM’ is widely used in academia, its precise definition remains elusive, leading to ambiguity over which groups it covers. While terms such as ‘sect’ and ‘cult’ have specific connotations, they are less common in current religious discourse. A ‘sect’ typically diverges from its foundational religion while preserving orthodox practices, whereas a ‘cult’ introduces entirely new religious ideologies. For example, the Heaven’s Gate tragedy in 1997 exemplifies a cult due to its distinct beliefs. Academics often opt for the neutral term ‘new religious movement’ to sidestep biases, despite its conceptual challenges.⁴

Wallis categorizes ‘NRMs’ into three distinct orientations concerning their relationship with society: world-rejecting, world-affirming, and world-accommodating. Each NRM either aligns with societal norms, outright rejects them, or adopts a neutral position, adapting to societal conventions with minimal endorsement or critique.⁵

According to Wallis, these divergent attitudes play a pivotal role in shaping the organizational dynamics and behaviors of these religious entities, as well as determining their interactions with society at large. To bolster his perspective, Wallis delves deeply into the specific beliefs and practices of various NRMs and their leadership figures. He underscores the importance of employing theoretical frameworks in NRM research, which facilitates more nuanced comparisons across groups and yields comprehensive insights into the overarching

¹ H. B. Acton, “Tradition and Some Other Forms of Order: The Presidential Address,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 53 (1952): 1–28, 2.

² Edward Shils, *Tradition* (USA: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 24-25.

³ Ruth Finnegan, “Tradition, But What Tradition and For Whom?” *Oral Tradition* 6, no. 1 (1991): 104–24. 105.

⁴ Paul Oliver, *New Religious Movements: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 5-6.

⁵ Roy Wallis, *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life*, 1st edition (London: Routledge, 1984), 4.

characteristics and operations of such religious movements.⁶ Bainbridge and Stark offer a nuanced analysis, asserting that grasping the social and psychological roots of New Religious Movements (NRMs) unveils key insights about their character and structural dynamics. Their methodological approach is notably innovative, emphasizing the need for theoretical ingenuity to decipher the complexities surrounding NRMs. Aligning with Wallis's perspective, they deploy specific theoretical models—including psychopathology, entrepreneur, and subculture-evolution models—to elucidate the multifaceted reasons behind NRM formation.

These frameworks are grounded in the broader notion that traditions function as systems of exchange, with each model highlighting distinct rewards and costs. Crucially, Bainbridge and Stark highlight the complementary nature of these models, underscoring their intersectional utility in understanding NRMs. Serving as pivotal conceptual instruments, these models guide empirical studies and foster coherent explanations of religious innovation. As scholars apply these frameworks to concrete examples, they contribute to the iterative process of refining and enriching theoretical understanding. The collective aspiration within this scholarly domain is to transcend superficial descriptions of NRMs, striving instead to establish comprehensive explanatory frameworks for this complex social phenomenon.⁷

Among the variety of new religious movements in the West, ISKCON i.e. International Society For Krishna Consciousness, is the leading Hindu movement which propagate the message of Krishna to the Western people under the leadership of Swami Prabhupada.

2. Swami Prabhupada and his Religious Reforms

a. Brief introduction of Swami Prabhupada

Abhay Charan Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of ISKCON, was born in Calcutta, India, on September 1, 1896. Raised in a devout Hindu family, he received an extensive education, including Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy. Despite moderate success in the pharmaceutical industry, he increasingly devoted himself to religious pursuits. In 1932, Bhaktivedanta received initiation from Bhakti Siddhanta Sarasvati, marking a pivotal moment in his life. By 1954, conflicts over his religious commitments led him to leave his family and fully embrace religious life. He spent the next decade in India, writing, preaching, and attracting disciples. Despite discouragement, Bhaktivedanta embarked on a journey to the United States in 1965, following his spiritual master's instructions. Arriving with few possessions, he stayed with a sponsoring family in Pennsylvania. His mission to spread Krishna philosophy in America, within five years A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada transformed a small following into a global movement. By 1970, ISKCON, born from his efforts, gained widespread attention, endorsed by media and embraced by countercultural icons like Allen Ginsberg and the Beatles. ISKCON's evangelistic approach aligned with the spirit of the sixties, with devotees participating in public events, anti-war protests, and even sharing their religious dances at rock concerts and festivals.⁸

⁶ Lorne L. Dawson, ed., *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader* (Malden, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 34.

⁷ Ibid, 35.

⁸ Charles Selengut, *Charisma and Religious Innovation; Prabhupada and the Founding of ISKCON*, ISKCON communications, Vol. 4, no. 2, December 1996, <https://www.iskconcommunications.org/iskcon-journal/vol-4/charisma-and-religious-innovation>.

b. A sannyasi can officiate the marriage ceremony

In spreading Krishna's teaching in West, Swami Prabhupada incorporated many novel practices which his spiritual teachers and the already established guidelines of Gaudia Vishnavism hadn't been practiced. One of the novelties, which Prabhupada had incorporated is that he allowed a sannyasi who can perform the marriage ceremony for his disciples, which was not accustomed before. This act is somewhat is prohibited in the already teachings of Veda as an act of a devotee. In the Veda, there exist three distinct divisions known as kandas, which are karma-kanda, jnana-kanda, and upasana-kanda. It is ultimately recommended to transcend both karma-kanda and jnana-kanda and embrace solely upasana-kanda or bhakti-kanda, which is superior level for to Love of Godhead that cannot be attained through the execution of karma-kanda or jnana-kanda.

Yet, by dedicating one's fruitive activities to the Supreme Lord, one may purify the polluted mind, thus ascending to the spiritual realm. However, at this juncture, the association of a pure devotee becomes indispensable, for it is only through such association that one can become a pure devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna. Upon reaching the stage of pure devotional service, the practice of 'Sraṇam kīrtanam'⁹ becomes paramount. Through the execution of the nine items of devotional service, commencing with 'Sraṇam kīrtanam', one achieves complete purification by excluding all the worldly or materialistic activities. In this manner, one reinstates their original constitutional position of rendering loving service to the Lord. Only then can one follow Krishna's directives, as expressed in Bhagavad Gita:

*"Always think of Me, become My devotee, worship Me, and offer your homage unto Me. Thus, you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend. Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear."*¹⁰

Moreover, in the Madhya lila, it is reiterated as *"In every revealed scripture there is condemnation of fruitive activities. It is advised everywhere to give up engagement in fruitive activities, for no one can attain the highest goal of life, love of Godhead, by executing them."*¹¹ So, pure devotional service can only be comprehended and attained through the association of genuine devotees. Furthermore, Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Sarasvati Thakura elucidates that when the younger brahmana served the older one with the intention of pleasing Krishna, it transcended mere worldly transactions. Krishna is pleased by the service rendered to Vaisnavas only. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu would not have approved of discussions about marital matters unless they were exchanged between Vaisnavas. Although marriage arrangements and ceremonies are part of ordinary material karma-kanda sections of scriptures, Vaisnavas are not engaged in such transactions.¹²

⁹ Engaging in hearing, chanting, remembering, serving, worshipping, offering prayers, becoming a servant, considering as a friend, and surrendering to Lord Viṣṇu constitutes pure devotional service. Dedication to these nine methods indicates profound wisdom and complete knowledge, as one serves Kṛṣṇa with body, mind, and words. Srimad-Bhagavatam, 7.5.23-24

¹⁰ Bhagavad-Gita, 18.65-66.

¹¹ Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami, *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* (Los Angeles: Tthe Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), Madhya lila, 9.263.

¹² Śrila Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura, *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita Madhya* 5.24, Translation and Purport, A Sannyasi Should Not Take Part in a Marriage Ceremony - Vaniquotes," accessed May 5, 2024, https://vaniquotes.org/wiki/A_sannyasi_should_not_take_part_in_a_marriage_ceremony_between_a_young_boy_and_a_young_girl._However,_this_is_not_a_karma-kanda_activity,_because_our_purpose_is_to_spread_the_Krsna_consciousness_movement.

Contrary to conventional expectations, Srila Prabhupada not only participated in but also conducted a marriage ceremony on March 29, 1971, during the Bombay festival, which greatly delighted the audience. It marked the first occasion they witnessed serious Western devotees marrying in a traditional Vedic ceremony. During the ceremony, Srila Prabhupada delivered a poignant message about his young followers, stating, “My Guru Maharaja ... Srimad Bhakti Siddhanta Sarasvati Maharaja Prabhupada was creating more brahmacharis and sannyasis for preaching work, but I am creating more grihasthas, because in Europe and America the boys and girls intermingle so ... it is very difficult to keep one brahmachari. So, there is no need of artificial brahmacharis. It is sanctioned. My Guru Maharaja wanted to establish daivi-varnashrama ... It doesn't matter whether one is sannyasi or one is grihastha or a brahmachari. The main principle is bhagavad-bhajan. But practically also, I may inform you that these married couples are helping me very much because ... For practical example, I may say that one of my godbrothers, a sannyasi, was deputed to go to London to start a temple, but three or four years he remained there, and he could not execute the will; therefore, he was called back. Now, I sent three married couples - all of them are present here - and they worked so nicely that within one year we started our London temple, and that is going on very nicely.”¹³ He emphasized that the primary principle is bhagavad-bhajan, regardless of one's marital status, and highlighted the practical contributions of married couples in his mission, underscoring their valuable assistance in establishing temples and spreading Krishna consciousness effectively.

c. Initiation of Female Diksha Guru (FDG)

Another thought-provoking issue is related to Gayatri Mantra and Female Diksha Guru (FDG). In Hinduism, females are often depicted with ambiguous or complex attributes. The concept of the female in Hindu ideology embodies an inherent duality.¹⁴ She is portrayed as both fertile and benevolent, yet also aggressive and malevolent. A well-known saying about the goddess encapsulates this duality, portraying her as Lakshmi during times of prosperity, bestowing wealth upon households, and as a bringer of misfortune during times of adversity, leading to ruin. An example of this dual nature is evident in the South Indian goddess Mariyamman, whose name signifies “*changing lady*,” representing both death and life, destruction and creation.¹⁵ A prevalent myth recounts the tale of Kali, one of Siva's wives, whose fierce power was harnessed by male gods to defeat a formidable enemy. However,

Yamuna Devi, “*Marriage Ceremony at Bombay Festival*,” accessed April 8, 2024, <https://srilaprabhupadalila.org/read/8822>.

¹⁴ Unlike Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, Hinduism has thousands of authoritative texts that were written over a 3,000-year period rather than one. Additionally, Hinduism takes on many different forms and frequently seems more diverse than united within the geographical region of South Asia. Therefore, every given behavior or belief could be refuted by others or contradicted elsewhere.

¹⁵ Pre-600 B.C. Vedic literature, which was introduced by northern Aryan migrants, highlights the wealth and goodness of female characters. Subsequent literary advancements in Hinduism present the feminine as hazardous. This most likely shows how the Aryan religious complex incorporated Dravidian beliefs. The earliest Dravidian literature that is known to exist, notably Tamil literature, makes many references to deadly female power. This motif is absent from Aryan Sanskrit literature, which did not appear until later. The contemporary Hindu, on the other hand, is unaware of these historical advancements and is only aware of the dual perception of femininity as both good and fruitful and hazardous and dangerous. George L. Hart III, “*Woman and the Sacred in Ancient Tamilnad*,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1973): 233–50. For detail see: Brenda E. F. Beck, “*Maryamman: The Vacillating Goddess*,” mimeographed (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1971), p. 2.

when Kali's rampage threatened the world's destruction, her husband, Siva, intervened, symbolizing the male's control over dangerous female energy.¹⁶

In Srimad Bhagavatam, women are portrayed as inherently self-interested, capable of acting against their loved ones' interests for personal gain. It is stated as "To satisfy their own interests, women deal with men as if the men were most dear to them, but no one is dear to them. Women are supposed to be very saintly, but for their own interests they can kill even their husbands, sons or brothers, or cause them to be killed by others."¹⁷

Moreover, Kasyapa Muni extensively studied women's nature, concluding that they require protection to prevent their innate selfish tendencies from surfacing. According to Manu, women should not be granted independence at any stage of life but should be cared for by their father in childhood, husband in youth, and grown sons in old age. Contrary to the intrinsic qualities described earlier, the external allure of women, as delineated by Kasyapa Muni, is often viewed from a materialistic perspective. A woman's visage is likened to the enchanting lotus blossom of autumn, radiant and captivating. Just as the lotus blooms in its peak beauty during this season, so too does a woman in the bloom of her youth exude irresistible allure. In Sanskrit, a woman's voice is termed as "nari-svara", acknowledging the inherent charm in the melodies they weave. In contemporary times, cinema artists, particularly female singers, are revered, some amassing substantial wealth solely through their vocal talents. Yet, as cautioned by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, a woman's singing holds peril, for it can ensnare even the most resolute sannyasi. Sannyasa entails renouncing the company of women, yet exposure to their voices and beauty can lead to downfall. Even the esteemed sage Visvamitra succumbed to the allure of Menaka. Hence, those aspiring for spiritual elevation must vigilantly guard against beholding a woman's countenance or being charmed by her voice. To admire a woman's beauty or voice is a subtle deviation for a brahmachari or sannyasi, as elucidated by Kasyapa Muni's insightful discourse on feminine features.¹⁸

In some Vaishnava traditions, women are advised against chanting the Brahma gayatri mantra, reserved traditionally for men. However, in ISKCON, women participate in the Brahma gayatri chant as part of their meditation practice. Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Thakura introduced the practice of conferring the Brahma gayatri mantra upon his male disciples as part of his efforts to establish "daiva varnasrama." This policy, while reflecting the circumference rather than the center of the sampradaya's ideals, aimed to emphasize the significance of Vaisnava diksa over brahmana diksa. Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Thakura's decision to impart this mantra and sacred thread exclusively to male disciples was motivated by a desire to counter prevailing societal perceptions favoring smarta brahmanism over Gaudiya Vaishnavism. However, contrary to the practice and caution adopted before, Swami Prabhupada extended this privilege to both male and female disciples, underscores the

¹⁶ Hinduism has male deities that are both destructive and wicked, but they are not the same as female deities. Unlike Kali, male deities and demons seem more reasonable in the problems they cause and do not take the thought of killing too personally. Guy Welbon believes that there is a difference between male-driven (plotted) and female-driven (plotless) action. The female's non-logical nature dominates her acts, whereas the male's logic governs his. Susan S. Wadley, "Women and the Hindu Tradition," *The University of Chicago Press* 3, no. 1 (1977): 113–25. Wellesley Editorial Committee, ed., *Women and National Development: The Complexities of Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press Journals, 1977).

¹⁷ Srimad Bhagavatam, 6.18.42.

¹⁸ Ibid, "Purport" accessed May 5, 2024, <https://vedabase.io/en/library/sb/6/18/41/>.

equality and accessibility of spiritual initiation within his mission, particularly in the context of spreading Vaishnavism in the West.¹⁹

Swami Prabhupada emphasized that the qualification for assuming the role of a guru is not contingent upon scholarly expertise, but rather on sincerely adhering to the fundamental principles outlined in Krishna's teachings. These principles involve consistently contemplating Krishna, offering obeisance, and worshiping him, whether through formal rituals or simply by maintaining a constant awareness of Krishna. Even those lacking formal education can serve as gurus by sharing Krishna's teachings with others, underscoring the importance of humility and persuasion in guiding individuals toward spiritual principles. Ultimately, Prabhupada encouraged individuals of all backgrounds, regardless of gender or age, to aspire to become spiritual guides by embodying these principles and leading others to surrender to Krishna.²⁰

In an interview with Prof. O' Connell, Prabhupada affirmed that women can indeed assume the roles of learned scholars (panditas) and achieve spiritual perfection, as asserted by Krishna without any limitation. He further stated that a woman can become a guru upon attaining spiritual perfection, citing Jahnava Devi as an exemplar. According to Prabhupada, gender does not impose any restriction on guruhood; instead, the key criterion is a deep understanding of Krishna consciousness. He compared this qualification to other professions where gender is not a barrier if one possesses the requisite expertise. Therefore, a woman who comprehensively grasps Krishna consciousness can certainly become a guru.²¹

Furthermore, Srila Prabhupada actively encouraged and at times, insisted that his female disciples lead kirtanas, speak publicly, and participate in book distribution. While he expressed disapproval of women leading nations, he saw no issue with them holding leadership roles within his spiritual community. For instance, during the early stages of the movement in the late 1960s, he appointed one of his earliest female disciples, Yadurani Devi Dasi, to oversee all male and female artists producing paintings for his books.

Subsequently, in the spring of 1970, when forming the Governing Body Commission (GBC) as the administrative body of ISKCON, he included women among the disciples under consideration for the position.²² Srila Prabhupada emphasized the spiritual equality of all souls, regardless of gender or other superficial distinctions. He explained that while individuals may have different roles based on their material bodies to maintain social order, on a spiritual level, everyone is equal. He affirmed that women could attain the highest spiritual perfection and become panditas (learned scholars) without any restriction, citing Krishna's teachings. Despite superficial distinctions, such as bodily differences, women in the Western Krishna consciousness movement actively engage in chanting, dancing, and embracing Krishna consciousness. However, to maintain propriety, women and men may be

¹⁹ "Women and the Gayatri Mantra," June 17, 2002, <https://swamitripurari.com/2002/06/women-and-the-gayatri-mantra/>.

²⁰ Srila Prabhupada, "Śrī Vyāsa-Pūjā Lecture, London, August 22, 1973," accessed May 5, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/classes/festival/sri_vyasa-puja/london/august/22/1973.

²¹ Srila Prabhupada, "Interview with Professors O'Connell, Motilal and Shivaram, June 18, 1976, Toronto," accessed May 5, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/conversations/1976/jun/interview_with_professors_oconnell_motilal_and_shivaram/toronto/june/18/1976.

²² "Back to Godhead magazine, Vol. 33, No. 2, Mar/Apr 1999," accessed April 8, 2024, <https://www.krishna.com/what%E2%80%99s-woman-do>.

separated superficially, although their rights and spiritual opportunities remain equal.²³ To maintain their focus on the goal of life—dedicating themselves to pure, uninterrupted devotional service to Krishna—men and women in the Krishna consciousness movement are advised not to mix freely unless they are married. However, it’s essential to recognize that they possess equal rights, particularly the crucial right—the privilege—to serve the Lord according to their inherent tendencies and heartfelt desires. Ultimately, the true duty, or dharma, of women aligns with that of all living beings: to serve Krishna eternally. Therefore, a woman who earnestly and sincerely serves the Lord in any capacity of her choosing deserves honor and encouragement.

Srila Prabhupada underscores this principle in his Purport to Srimad-Bhagavatam emphasizing that everyone should be allowed to offer service to the Lord to the best of their abilities, and each person’s service should be valued and appreciated, as this mirrors the activities of Vaikuntha, the spiritual realm, where all are servants of the Lord, serving according to their capabilities.²⁴

Moreover, in Hindu culture, menstruating women traditionally adhere to certain rules and practices. Menstruation is viewed as a period of purification, and as such women are often secluded from places of worship and objects associated with them for the duration of their menstrual cycle. These practices stem from ancient cultural beliefs and restrictions surrounding menstruation in Hinduism.²⁵ The origin of the myth of menstrual impurity dates to the Vedic era, where it is linked to the slaying of Vritras by Indra. According to Vedic texts, the “guilt” of committing brahmana murder, represented by Indra’s actions, is said to manifest monthly as menstrual flow in women, symbolizing their absorption of a portion of Indra’s guilt.²⁶ There have been reports, such as one from a religious leader in Gujarat, suggesting severe consequences for menstruating women who engage in cooking for their husbands, warning that they may be reborn as dogs in their next life, while men consuming food prepared by menstruating women may be reborn as bullocks.²⁷ However, Srila Prabhupada offered a more relaxed perspective on this matter. Responding to a letter from Amsu Das regarding the worship of women during menstruation, he explained that while according to Smarta tradition, women are prohibited from touching deities during their menstrual period, the Goswami tradition allows it, though it’s generally preferable to avoid

Srila Prabhupada, “*Interview with Professors O’Connell, Motilal and Shivaram*, June 18, 1976, Toronto,” accessed May 5, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/conversations/1976/jun/interview_with_professors_oconnell_motilal_and_shivaram/toronto/june/18/1976.

²⁴ Srimad-Bhagavatam 7.5.12.

²⁵ Nicki C. Dunnavant and Tomi-Ann Roberts, “*Restriction and Renewal, Pollution and Power, Constraint and Community: The Paradoxes of Religious Women’s Experiences of Menstruation*,” *Sex Roles* 68, no. 1–2 (January 2013): 121–31, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-012-0132-8>.

²⁶ Johnson H, “*Understanding and Debunking Menstrual Taboos in India*,” *Indiana University*, 2019, 6–13. Suneela Garg and Tanu Anand, “*Menstruation Related Myths in India: Strategies for Combating It*,” *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* 4, no. 2 (2015): 184–86, <https://doi.org/10.4103/2249-4863.154627>.

²⁷ Swami Krushnaswarup Dasji, “*Menstruating Women Cooking Food for Husbands Will Be Reborn as Dogs, Says Godman*,” *The Hindu*, February 18, 2020, sec. India, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/menstruating-women-cooking-food-for-husbands-will-be-reborn-as-dogs-says/article30852624.ece>.

such practices. However, he emphasized that service to the Lord should never be interrupted for any reason, including cooking duties.²⁸

d. Establishment of spiritual initiation system for distant disciples

Moreover, as the movement experiences a surge in young recruits worldwide, Srila Prabhupada finds it impractical to personally initiate everyone. To address this, he has established a system wherein his most esteemed disciples serve as officiating priests to conduct initiation ceremonies on his behalf. The process begins with a letter of recommendation from a temple president, affirming the readiness of certain devotees for initiation. Srila Prabhupada then chants on the required sets of beads, which are sent in time for the yajna, or fire ceremony. Subsequently, he designates a specific sannyasi or GBC member to preside over the yajna during the initiation ceremony. This approach allows Srila Prabhupada to initiate thousands of new devotees without being physically present at every center. By the end of 1972, however, the influx of new members necessitates further adaptation of the initiation process. Srila Prabhupada communicates with Kirtanananda Swami, delegating him the responsibility of chanting on beads for devotees in America and Canada. Expressing the growing challenge and expense of sending numerous beads sets over long distances, Srila Prabhupada proposes a solution to streamline the initiation process. He suggests appointing Kirtanananda Swami to chant on beads for new disciples in America and Canada, while assigning a similar responsibility to another disciple, Revatinandana for the European continent.

Despite this delegation, the initiates will still be considered Srila Prabhupada's disciples, with the chanting on their beads by his appointed representatives carrying the same significance as if he were personally conducting the ceremony. The initiates are instructed to continue sending their initiation requests, along with the temple president's recommendation, to Srila Prabhupada. He will then provide them with a spiritual name, which will be recorded by his secretary. Finally, Srila Prabhupada will correspond with Revatinandana and Kirtanananda Swami, instructing them to purchase beads, chant on them, and dispatch them to the new initiates along with his letter. This modified process alleviates the burden of postage expenses associated with sending bead sets via airmail, particularly for second initiations involving sacred threads. In a letter to Revatinandana dated January 4, 1973, Prabhupada shares how he empowered Revatinandana to initiate devotees on his behalf. Initially hesitant about chanting on their beads, Revatinandana expressed his concerns to Prabhupada. However, Prabhupada reassured him, emphasizing that empowerment itself sanctifies the process. He encouraged Revatinandana to chant rounds as he usually does, striving for purity in his chanting.²⁹

Furthermore, Prabhupada began incorporating modern technology into brahmana initiation procedures. In a letter to Bhutatma dated January 5, 1973, he explains his method of utilizing tape recorders to transmit the Gayatri mantra. Due to the impracticality and expense of sending beads through airmail, Prabhupada delegates Kirtanananda Swami and Revatinandana Swami to chant on beads for new devotees in their respective regions. He instructs Bhutatma to conduct the fire yajna for nine devotees and provides the sacred threads and Gayatri mantras for the initiates.³⁰ Addressing concerns raised by some Gaudiya

²⁸ Srila Prabhupada, "Letter to: Amsu: Vrindaban 13 August, 1974," accessed May 5, 2024, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/vrindaban/august/13/1974/amsu>.

²⁹ Srila Prabhupada, "Letter to: Revatinandana, Bombay 4 January, 1973," accessed May 5, 2024, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/bombay/january/04/1973/revatinandana>.

³⁰ Srila Prabhupada, "Letter to: Bhutatma, Bombay 5 January, 1973," accessed May 5, 2024, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/bombay/january/05/1973/bhutatma>.

Vaishnavas regarding the transmission of transcendental sound vibration through technology, Prabhupada offers a broader perspective in a letter to Rupanuga dated October 19, 1974. He asserts that the spiritual potency of sound is not limited by its mode of transmission. Prabhupada explains that *“Why distinguish between chanting and book distribution, these books I have recorded and chanted, and they are transcribed. It is spoken in kirtan. So, book distribution is also chanting. These are not ordinary books. It is recorded chanting. Anyone who reads, he is hearing.”*³¹

e. Introducing new deities in Temples

Another innovation is related to the introduction of new deities in temples. Srila Prabhupada introduced several adjustments and innovations concerning the worship of Deities, whether involving new Deities or minor alterations to existing practices, which were not utilized by his predecessors, Bhakti Siddhanta and Bhakti Vinoda Thakura. One such innovation was the introduction of Deities named as “Gaura and Nitai”. Srila Prabhupada often instructed his disciples to utilize these Deities through his letters. For instance, in a letter to Jayatirtha dated 1974 from Bombay, Srila Prabhupada advised against the worship of Gaura and Nitai Deities by householders attending the temple regularly, stating that such worship was redundant when temple Deity worship was already being performed. However, he permitted their worship for those living far from the temple and unable to attend regularly.³²

In another letter to Madhava devi, Srila Prabhupada approved the creation of plaster forms of Deities, specifically Gaura-Nitai, praising her artistic skills in this medium. He wrote:

*“Please accept my blessings. I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated May 1974. Yes, there is no objection to your casting clay forms of Deities into plaster. I understand you are a nice artist in this medium, so make Deities of Gaura-Nitai and send me photographs of the forms.”*³³

He also mentioned plans to install Gaura-Nitai Deities in Australia in a letter to Alfred Ford, indicating his approval of their use in worship.³⁴ Additionally, Srila Prabhupada reported on the successful installation of Gaura and Nitai Deities in Melbourne, Australia, in a letter to Prabhakar.³⁵ Furthermore, in a letter to Candradevi Dasi, Srila Prabhupada addressed the idea of being more attached to Deity worship than to marriage, cautioning against living at home where meat was consumed, as it would be offensive to worship Deities in such circumstances. He suggested a transition from worshipping Lord Jagannath Deities to Gaura-Nitai Deities if desired.³⁶

³¹ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to: Rupanuga: Mayapur 19 October, 1974,” accessed May 5, 2024, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/mayapur/october/19/1974/rupanuga>.

³² Srila Prabhupada, “740501 - Letter to Jayatirtha Written from Bombay - 1974,” accessed May 5, 2024, https://vanisource.org/wiki/740501_-_Letter_to_Jayatirtha_written_from_Bombay.

³³ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to: Madhava, Bombay 9 May, 1974,” accessed May 5, 2024, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/bombay/may/09/1974/madhava>.

³⁴ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to: Alfred Ford, Mayapur 5 April, 1975,” accessed May 5, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/mayapur/april/05/1975/alfred_ford.

³⁵ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to: Prabhakar, Honolulu 31 May, 1975,” accessed May 5, 2024, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/honolulu/may/31/1975/prabhakar>.

³⁶ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to: Candradevi — Toronto 7 August, 1975 75-08-07,” accessed May 5, 2024, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/toronto/august/07/1975/candradevi>.

Moreover, during a morning walk, Srila Prabhupada clarified doubts about the transportation of Gaura-Nitai Deities, emphasizing the need for proper care and maintenance when transporting them between temples.

“When he was asked that St. Louis temple, has come to this festival and they brought with them their installed Deities, which are Gaura-Nitai. I wasn’t sure that was right of them to do that. And They’re now on the altar of the Chicago temple, but the Deities are not in the St. Louis temple. They left one man there. Better to keep the temple open with the Deities there? Prabhupada replied: No, no. When there is a Deity, it must be taken care of. Satsvarupa further asked: They should not be transported to another temple? Prabhupada replied: No. No harm.”³⁷ These instances illustrate Srila Prabhupada’s allowance for the worship of Gaura-Nitai Deities, despite it not being a prevalent practice in Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

f. Four regulative principles

Another important change is seen in introducing of Four regulative principles by Swami Prabhupada instead of sticking to sixty-four principles: compulsory for a devotee to fulfill. It is said that the devotional service lies dormant within every living being, as each is inherently part and parcel of the Supreme Lord, naturally inclined to serve the whole. This parallels the body’s parts serving the body; similarly, every living entity, being a fragment of the Supreme Lord, is meant to serve Him. When not engaged in such service, one is in a diseased state; yet upon engaging all senses in loving service to the Lord, one returns to a healthy condition. A devotee should employ their senses in the Lord’s service following scriptural directives and the guidance of a genuine spiritual guide. Initial devotional training involves absorbing the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Srimad Bhagavatam through hearing. Through this aural reception, one awakens to the dormant devotional service within the heart.³⁸

Even after realizing that devotional service is the sole path to life’s perfection, one must continue following scriptural injunctions.³⁹

Upon firmly grasping the significance of devotional service, a person surrenders to the Supreme Lord. Surrender manifests through six symptoms: performing actions conducive to devotional service, relinquishing all unfavorable actions, having unwavering faith in Krishna's protection, recognizing Krishna as the sole maintainer, understanding one’s dependence on Krishna’s will, and considering oneself the humblest, completely reliant on Krishna's mercy. A devotee who abides by these principles constantly thinks, *“I am Your eternal servant.”* Thus, they become purified. The Srimad Bhagavatam states that by surrendering completely to the Lord and desiring to serve Him, one attains liberation from the cycle of birth and death, and shares in His opulence. To reach such a pinnacle in devotional life, one must adhere to scriptural guidance. Even when elevated in devotional practice, one should not think themselves beyond scriptural regulations, believing they can transgress

³⁷ Srila Prabhupada, *“Morning Walk — July 4, 1975, Chicago,”* accessed May 5, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/conversations/1975/jul/morning_walk/chicago/july/04/1975.

³⁸ Narada-bhakti-sutra, *“The Sixty-Four Regulative Principles (of Devotional Service),”* accessed April 13, 2024, [https://vaniquotes.org/wiki/The_sixty_four_regulative_principles_\(of_devotional_service\)_are_as_follows:_\(1\)_To_accept_a_bona_fide_spiritual_master._\(2\)_To_become_initiated_by_the_spiritual_master._\(3\)_To_engage_oneself_in_the_service_of_the_spiritual_master.](https://vaniquotes.org/wiki/The_sixty_four_regulative_principles_(of_devotional_service)_are_as_follows:_(1)_To_accept_a_bona_fide_spiritual_master._(2)_To_become_initiated_by_the_spiritual_master._(3)_To_engage_oneself_in_the_service_of_the_spiritual_master.)

³⁹ Sri Swami Sivananda, *Narada Bhakti Sutra* (Bombay: Sadbhakti Parakash Printing press, 1957), sutra no. 12.

them.⁴⁰ As per the Padma Purāṇa, the fundamental essence of all scriptural regulations is the constant remembrance of Lord Vishnu or Krishna, ensuring they are never forgotten. Hence, our lives should be shaped in a manner where every action prompts recollection of the Supreme Lord. Any deed evoking remembrance of the Lord is a regulated aspect of devotional service, while any action leading to forgetfulness of the Lord is prohibited for a devotee.

Lord Caitanya, in the Caitanya Caritamrita, delineates sixty-four such regulatory principles crucial for attaining the highest level of devotional service. Even upon reaching this pinnacle, Sutra no. 12 emphasizes the continued adherence to scriptural injunctions in devotional life.

The sixty-four principles are outlined in Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita.⁴¹ On the contrary, Swami Prabhupada introduced his own four regulative principles and emphasized that a bhakti should stick these four principles instead of following the 64 regulative principles. These four regulative principles are “*abstaining from all illicit sexual connections, refraining from meat-eating, avoiding intoxication, and abstaining from gambling.*” Swami Prabhupada reiterated these principles in numerous letters to his followers. For example, in a letter to Arundhati, “*He expressed his pleasure in her sincere commitment to Krishna consciousness. He encouraged her to chant sixteen rounds daily, read one chapter of Bhagavad-Gita As It Is each day, and strictly adhere to the four regulative principles. He assured her that by following these principles, her life would progressively become more joyful in devotional service.*”⁴² Similar guidance can be found in his other correspondences.⁴³

g. Chanting of 16 round Maha-Mantra

Another issue is related to the chanting of 16 round Maha-Mantra. According to the Krishna Consciousness movement, the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra— “*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*”— is believed to awaken love for Krishna, enhance self-awareness and motivation, and provide a taste of blissful, eternal life beyond the cycle of birth and death. It is regarded as a powerful method for self-realization and spiritual awakening. In the time of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, it was customary for Vaishnavas, including householders, to chant a minimum of one lakh or 100,000 names. Mahaprabhu himself taught this practice, as recounted in the Sri Caitanya Bhagavata: “*As devotees invited the Lord (Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu) to dine in their homes, the Lord used this opportunity to discuss this topic. When invited to dine, the Lord smiled and said, ‘First, you should become a lakshevara. I dine only in the house of a lakshevara.’ Hearing this, the brahmanas became anxious. They prayed to the Lord, ‘O Gosaani, not one*

⁴⁰ Srimad-Bhagavatam, 11.29.34.

⁴¹ Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami, *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* (Los Angeles: Tthe Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), Madhya 22.115-28

⁴² Srila Prabhupada, “*Letter to: Arundhati* — Los Angeles 26 January, 1969,” accessed May 6, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/los_angeles/january/26/1969/arundhati.

⁴³ Srila Prabhupada, “*Letter to: Uttamasloka* — New Vrindaban 7 June, 1969,” accessed May 6, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/new_vrindaban/june/07/1969/uttamasloka. “*Letter to: Vibhavati* — New Vrindaban,” accessed May 6, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/new_vrindaban/june/12/1969/vibhavati. “*Letter to: Giriraja* — Los Angeles 5 July, 1969,” accessed May 6, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/los_angeles/july/05/1969/giriraja. “*Letter to: Laksmimoni* — Los Angeles 10 July, 1969,” accessed May 6, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/los_angeles/july/10/1969/laksmimoni. “*Letter to: Brahmananda* — Los Angeles 16 July, 1969,” accessed May 6, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/los_angeles/july/16/1969/brahmananda.

of us possesses even a thousand names, let alone a hundred thousand. If You do not accept meals from us, let our entire household be consumed by fire.’ The Lord replied, ‘Do you know who is a laksessvara? It is someone who chants a hundred thousand holy names daily. I call that person a laksessvara. I dine only in the house of such a person, not in the houses of others.’ Hearing this compassionate statement, the brahmanas gave up their anxiety and became joyful. ‘O Lord, we will chant a hundred thousand names. Please accept meals in our homes. It is our good fortune that You are teaching us in this way.’”⁴⁴

When Srila Prabhupada initially introduced Krishna consciousness to the West, he instructed his disciples to chant 64 rounds or 100,000 holy names, following the instruction of Gauranga Mahaprabhu to everyone. Indeed, Gauranga Mahaprabhu would only dine in the homes of devotees who chanted 100,000 names of the Lord. This teaching was also passed down by Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Thakur, the founder of the Gaudiya Matha and guru of Swami Prabhupada, who was the son of the seventh Goswami Srila Bhakti Vinoda Thakur. However, Srila Prabhupada realized that his disciples from the West were unable to chant 64 rounds, so he reduced the chanting to 32 rounds. Eventually, recognizing their limitations, he set the minimum requirement at 16 rounds.⁴⁵ Therefore devotees in the line of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu must chant at least sixteen rounds daily, and this is the number prescribed by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Swami Prabhupada stated that Haridasa Thakur daily chanted 300,000 names. There is no need to imitate Haridasa Thakur or the other Goswami’s, but chanting the holy name a fixed number of times daily is essential for every devotee.⁴⁶

This is narrated also in *The Hare Krishna Explosion*: “Now that you have beads,” Swamiji says the next morning, “you should chant sixty-four rounds every day.” “Sixty-four rounds?” To pronounce every word of the mantra distinctly, we require five minutes to chant a round. Sixty-four rounds would take over five hours. “Impossible!” we say. “We’ll never have the time.” “All right,” Swamiji says. “Thirty-two rounds.” “Impossible,” we say. “We’ll never be able to do it. It’s way too much.” “All right,” Swamiji says. “Sixteen rounds. No less.”⁴⁷ He discusses this topic in “The Nectar of Instruction” and a few other sources, stating: “The Krishna consciousness movement recommends sixteen rounds daily because individuals in the Western countries often struggle to maintain focus for extended periods while chanting on beads. Hence, this minimum number of rounds is prescribed. Nevertheless, Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Thakur advocated chanting a minimum of sixty-four rounds of Japa (equivalent to one hundred thousand names), considering anyone who falls short of this standard as fallen (patita). According to his estimation, practically all of us fall into this category. However, by earnestly endeavoring to serve the Supreme Lord sincerely and

⁴⁴ Vrindavana Dasa Thakura, *Sri Chaitanya Bhagavata* (Asiatic Society, 2011), Antya, 9.116-125.

⁴⁵ One Maha Mantra = 16 names of the Lord – 3 transcendental words of Hare, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.
One round in a japa mala = 108 Hare Kṛṣṇa Maha Mantra = 1728 names of Krishna. 16 rounds = 27,648 names of Krishna and 64 rounds = 110,592 names of Krishna. LakshaNam, “How to Chant 64 Rounds,” *Chanting 64 Rounds* (blog), 2016, <https://chanting64rounds.wordpress.com/2016/02/08/how-to-chant-64-rounds-lesson-1/>.
“64 Rounds Harināma – Radha Govinda International,” accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.dharmavira.com/64-rounds-harinam/>.

⁴⁶ Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami, *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* (Los Angeles: Tthe Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), Madhya 7.37, Purport.

⁴⁷ Hayagriva Dasa, *Hare Krishna Explosion* (Palace Press, 1986), 63.

without deceit, we can anticipate the mercy of Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, renowned as patita-pavana, the redeemer of the fallen.”⁴⁸

h. Introduced the chain of Prasadam Restaurants

In addition to that, for the spearheaded ISKCON’s growth, Srila Prabhupada introduced various transformative approaches while staying true to its core values. His vision aimed at fostering a tighter-knit community and teaching a simpler, more authentic way of life, which led to the establishment of self-sufficient farm communities, ashrams, and spiritual retreat centers. He also envisioned the revitalization of society through the distribution of sanctified food, which led to the creation of initiatives like Food for Life and Govinda’s vegetarian restaurants. The Sunday Feast, a weekly event at every ISKCON center, further promotes this mission. Jashomatinandana Das expressed his belief that it is the divine will for ISKCON to establish a network of eateries across India. The first of these restaurants, spanning 35,000 square feet, has already opened in Ahmedabad, with plans for another in Vadodara by year-end. ISKCON aims to operate over 10 such restaurants nationwide, with a total of 22 planned within two years, including 12 through franchising. While ISKCON has global restaurant chains, this marks its inaugural venture in India.

Additionally, the Hariram Harekrishna temple complex in Juhu, Mumbai, hosts an in-house restaurant serving chhappan bhog, a sumptuous spread of 56 food items. The temple also manages the Hare Krishna Bakery, offering baked goods like pizzas, cakes, and mango milkshakes. Often dubbed the ‘kitchen religion,’ Krishna Consciousness gained fame for its founder, Srila Prabhupada, who initially cooked for his disciples in New York, and has since

become renowned for its pure vegetarian cuisine.⁴⁹ Srila Prabhupada outlined plans for Hare Krishna restaurants as the next phase of ISKCON’s expansion. These eateries, to be established worldwide, would serve as hubs for distributing sanctified food and promoting Krishna consciousness. The restaurants would operate cafeteria-style, with patrons serving themselves from counters. Prabhupada emphasized a one-time charge system, discouraging waste but allowing patrons to take what they can eat. The food, cooked fresh and offered to Lord Caitanya before serving, would include a variety of sweet and savory dishes, emphasizing cleanliness and freshness. To ensure profitability, Prabhupada advised starting small, with company-owned restaurants adhering to strict corporate by-laws. These regulations, including guidelines for advertising, pricing, and operational hours, would be legally enforced to protect the restaurant chain’s integrity.

Additionally, proprietary spice blends would be pre-mixed and distributed weekly to maintain consistency across all locations. Overall, the aim was to create a welcoming environment where customers could enjoy delicious, nutritious meals while subtly experiencing Krishna consciousness through music and ambiance.⁵⁰ Prabhupada emphasized the importance of opening Hare Krishna restaurants in various letters to his followers. In a letter to Srutakirti, Prabhupada encouraged opening a restaurant in Boston, citing its potential among the city’s young population.⁵¹ Moreover, Prabhupada advised Jayatirtha das that a separate entrance for

⁴⁸ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *The Nector of Instruction* (New York: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1975), text 5.

⁴⁹ Business Standard, “Restaurant Chain with Krishna Consciousness,” July 22, 2004, https://www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/restaurant-chain-with-krishna-consciousness-104072301113_1.html.

⁵⁰ “Pratyatosa - New Idea For Preaching Krishna Consciousness - Suggested Standards for Starting a Successful Chain of Prasadam Restaurants,” accessed April 17, 2024, <https://pratyatosa.com/?P=26>.

⁵¹ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to: Srutakirti — Mayapur 14 March, 1976,” accessed May 6, 2024, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/mayapur/march/14/1976/srutakirti>.

the restaurant, distinct from the temple, would be acceptable. He said: “Concerning the idea of having a restaurant with the temple, if the temple and restaurant are mixed then it is not a good idea. However, if the restaurant is having separate entrance and the activities of the restaurant do not mix with the temple at all, then it is possible, otherwise not.”⁵²

He also suggested naming the restaurant “*Hare Krishna Restaurant*” and recommended featuring Lord Caitanya’s picture and playing Sankirtana music in each establishment.⁵³

Prabhupada approved of the idea of offering vegetarian dishes to attract people to the restaurant and gradually introduce them to Krishna consciousness.⁵⁴ While cautioning against haphazard ventures, Prabhupada advised focusing on making life members and distributing literature, emphasizing the need for a well-organized approach. “*I want to open a restaurant, but I need to save up enough money to decorate it. Nothing should be done carelessly.*”⁵⁵

Prabhupada underscored the importance of food distribution programs, suggesting they should be conducted meticulously to attract people to Krishna consciousness while addressing their material needs.⁵⁶

i. Ekadashi signifies feasting, not fasting

Finally, the issue of Ekadashi is also an important ritual which Swami Prabhupada relaxed its regulations. No doubt Ekadashi i.e. fasting - an activity in which a devotee abstains from eating - an important ritual in Vaishnavism. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, from His childhood advocated observing a fast on Ekadashi, a practice echoed in the Bhakti-Sandarbhya by Srila Jiva Goswami. The Skanda Purana warns that consuming grains on Ekadashi results in severe spiritual consequences, likening it to committing heinous acts against close relatives and even falling from the celestial abodes. On this day, all food is prepared for Lord Vishnu, yet Vaishnavas are instructed not to partake even of His prasadam. It is a fundamental principle for Vaishnavas to only accept food offered to Vishnu, yet on Ekadashi, they abstain from even Vishnu’s maha-prasadam, saving it for the following day. It is strictly forbidden to consume any form of grain on Ekadashi, regardless of whether it is offered to the Lord.

Similarly, Ekadashi’s significance is underscored in Sri Caitanya-Caritamrta.⁵⁷

Ekadashi, meaning “the eleventh day,” occurs twice monthly—on the eleventh day after the new moon and the eleventh day after the full moon. Vishnu is especially pleased with those who adhere to the Ekadashi vrata, and failure to observe it by consuming grains is considered sinful as it disobeys the Lord’s directive. While Ekadashi fasting benefits health, its primary

⁵² Srila Prabhupada, “760624 - Letter to Jayatirtha Written from New Vrindaban, USA, 1976” accessed May 6, 2024, https://vanisource.org/wiki/760624_-_Letter_to_Jayatirtha_written_from_New_Vrindaban,_USA.

⁵³ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to: Batu Gopala — Vrindaban 16 August, 1974,” accessed May 6, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/vrindaban/august/16/1974/batu_gopala.

⁵⁴ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to: Tusta Krsna — Bombay 9 November, 1975,” accessed May 6, 2024, https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/bombay/november/09/1975/tusta_krsna.

⁵⁵ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to: Hamsaduta — Nairobi 8 October, 1971,” accessed May 6, 2024, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/nairobi/october/08/1971/hamsaduta>.

⁵⁶ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to: Giriraja — Tokyo 23 April, 1972,” accessed May 6, 2024, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/tokyo/april/23/1972/giriraja>.

⁵⁷ Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami, *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* (Los Angeles: Tthe Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), Adi 15.10. Adi 10.71, Translation and Purport, Adi 14.39, Purport, Adi 15.9, Purport, CC Madhya 22.116, Translation, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, *Teachings of Lord Chaitanya* (Calcutta, India: International Society for Krishna Consciousness, 1968), Chapter 16.

purpose is to please Krishna. Regular observance of Ekadashi is vital for spiritual advancement in Krishna consciousness.⁵⁸ Devotees must abstain from certain foods on Ekadashi, including grains, dahl, legumes, mustard seeds, sesame seeds and their derivatives. Care must be taken even with powdered spices, as mixing them with flour renders them unsuitable for Ekadashi. Accidental ingestion of even a small grain breaks the fast. Only under rare circumstances, and with explicit permission from one's guru, may a devotee unable to fast due to health concerns consume grains on Ekadashi.⁵⁹

Moreover, a passage from the Skanda Purana is quoted in the Bhakti-Sandarbhā warning that a person eating grains on Ekadashi becomes a murderer of his mother, father, brother, and spiritual master. He even falls even if he is promoted to a Vaikunṭha planet.⁶⁰ Sri Prabhupada relaxed the strict fasting rule, permitting the consumption of fruits or maha-prasadam when necessary for service. As mentioned in his morning walk while discussing with Ramesvara (a devotee), when he asked: *"I've heard that fasting on Bhima-Ekadashi is equivalent to fasting on all other Ekadashi's. Is that correct? Prabhupada replied: Indeed. Ekadashi is intended for fasting, whether it's Bhima or Arjuna. However, since fasting might be challenging for us, we resort to consuming a few fruits... Otherwise, the essence of Ekadashi lies in fasting. Tamala Krishna (another devotee) asked: Is it advisable to abstain from all food if possible? Prabhupada said: Yes. But don't lie down and sleep. If it doesn't affect one's service, one can fast all day."*⁶¹

Furthermore, Prabhupada also relaxed the strict adherence to the Ekadashi fasting once in a week, as expressed in a letter sent to Pradyumna, states: *"Regarding the vows and chanting method you have adopted, it is very nice. But do not impose something which will be difficult to execute. There is no need to fast once every week. Two days fasting per month on Ekadashi is sufficient. Besides that, there are other special fasting days. Spiritual realization depends on austerities and vows, but in this age, by the Mercy of Krishna and Lord Caitanya, we need not undergo very severe penances, as we are unable to do it. The rules and regulations which we have already prescribed, that is sufficient for ordinary men."*⁶² Additionally, Gargamuni Dasa, one of Swami Prabhupada's disciples, recounted his experience: *"In the beginning, at 26th Second Avenue, on Ekadashi days, we believed it was meant to be a day of fasting. So, I perhaps was the sole individual who... I refrained from lunch on those days, fasting at least until evening. I thought it would foster spiritual advancement; I crafted my own philosophy, a personal invention, you see. However, we should always discuss matters with the spiritual master before acting, rather than devising our own service. So, I didn't discuss this with Prabhupada; I simply didn't show up for lunch. After the second or third Ekadashi,*

⁵⁸ Srimad-Bhagavatam, 9.4.29.

⁵⁹ "Ekadashi Observance," accessed April 18, 2024, <https://iskcondesiretree.com/page/ekadasi-observance>. Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami, *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* (Los Angeles: Tthe Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), Madhya 1.35, Purport.

⁶⁰ Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami, *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* (Los Angeles: Tthe Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), Adi 15.9, Purport

⁶¹ Srila Prabhupada, "760607 - Morning Walk - Los Angeles -1976," accessed May 6, 2024, https://vanisource.org/w/index.php?title=760607_-_Morning_Walk_-_Los_Angeles&hl=ek%C4%81da%C5%9B%C4%AB+means+fasting.

⁶² Srila Prabhupada, "691111 - Letter to Rudra Written from London - 1969," accessed May 6, 2024, https://vanisource.org/w/index.php?title=691111_-_Letter_to_Rudra_written_from_London&hl=fasting+per+month+on+Ekadasi.

Prabhupada inquired, 'Where is Gargamuni?' They fetched me, and Prabhupada said, 'Ekadashi means feasting, not fasting, so on Ekadashi, you should feast. In those days, Ekadashi was practically a feast because we prepared dishes we didn't have during the week—various chutneys, fruit salads, potatoes with sour cream, and many other delightful items. Prabhupada made tomato chutney, pineapple chutney, raisin chutney, and all these different types of chutneys, which paired excellently with potatoes. So, it became a feast, and I ceased fasting on Ekadashi.'⁶³

In a similar vein, Swami B.V. Tripurari recounted an exchange with Srila Prabhupada where a Godbrother questioned whether Ekadashi is auspicious or inauspicious. Is the observance of Ekadashi meant to counteract negative stellar influences, or is it inherently auspicious? Srila Prabhupada clarified that Ekadashi is indeed the most auspicious and emphasized that it's not merely about fasting but about feasting. He explained that "Upavasa," often translated as fasting, means to "reside nearby," signifying the principle of drawing closer to the Godhead. While every day is sacred, Ekadashi is highlighted as "Hari's day" to encourage devotees to deepen their connection with Bhagavan through Hari-bhakti. The essence of Ekadashi observance lies in this pursuit of spiritual proximity, rather than rigid fasting. If fasting leads to lethargy or pride, it defeats its purpose.⁶⁴

Conclusion

In conclusion, tradition serves as a cornerstone of human existence, shaping their beliefs and actions across the globe. Whether rooted in religion or secular customs, traditions hold significance in societies worldwide. Academics delve into the discussion of traditions, seeking to understand their essence and impact on humanity, in anthropology and sociology and others. While some traditions thrive, others evolve or face scrutiny, particularly those associated with controversial movements labeled as cults, such as Aum Shinrikyo or Heaven's Gate. Due to cult's negative connotation, academicians now often use more neutral terminology for the new evolving traditions as New Religious Movements.

Among the rich complexity of traditions stands the Hare Krishna movement, also known as ISKCON, founded by Swami Prabhupada in America. Responding to the call of his spiritual mentor, Bhakti Siddhanta, Prabhupada embarked on a mission to spread the message of Hare Krishna in the West. Notably, he introduced many new adaptations to the tradition, beginning with renaming the movement to ISKCON, distinct from its Indian moniker, Hare Krishna or Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Furthermore, Swami Prabhupada's reforms extended beyond nomenclature, including the establishment of a female guru called guru diksha system in America, diverging from the tradition's norms in India.

He also revised the practice of chanting rounds from 64 to 16 and simplified the regulative principles from 64 to 4. Additionally, he started the Hare Krishna restaurant chain, by implemented stringent guidelines for food service for the purpose of spreading his ideology among the Westerns. In this strategy of reform, raises a question about the necessity of innovation within established traditions, especially when introduced to new cultural landscapes. Prabhupada's adaptations aimed to make the tradition more palatable and relevant to Western audiences without forsaking its core tenets.

Rather than rejecting tradition outright, he sought to integrate it seamlessly into the Western milieu, recognizing the need to adapt while preserving authenticity. Prabhupada's rationale

⁶³ "Ekadasi Means Feasting, Not Fasting," accessed April 18, 2024, <https://srilaprabhupadalila.org/read/11973>.

⁶⁴ "The Inner Meaning of Ekadasi | Harmonist," May 28, 2015, <https://harmonist.us/2015/05/the-inner-meaning-of-ekadasi/>.

for these changes stemmed from a pragmatic understanding of human limitations and the evolving societal context. He emphasized adherence to the essential principles over stringent austerity, believing it sufficient for ordinary individuals to follow prescribed guidelines. Ultimately, Prabhupada's adjustments can be viewed as the continuation of a tradition rather than a departure. By embracing change while upholding fundamental values, ISKCON evolved into a global phenomenon, transcending cultural boundaries and fostering spiritual growth.



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