

The 'Fallible' Purports

Decoding an *Ungwang* Doctrine

By

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Commemorating the Advent of Śrī Advaita Ācārya

This paper is the beginning of an exploration of the section 'The Case of Draupadī' in The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article. Kindly read my earlier papers, [The Draupadī Incident](#) and [The Real Dharmarāja](#), sequentially, to accurately comprehend the content of this paper.

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The Infallible-Fallible Hybrid Guru

The first statement in 'The Case of Draupadī' reads:

Prabhupada emphatically taught that the Guru's teachings are infallible because the Guru is simply repeating Shastra. Prabhupada made it very clear that a Guru is not infallible when not repeating Shastra.

For simplicity, I wish to call this 'The Infallibility-Fallibility Statement'.

This statement has two components:

- 1) Prabhupāda emphatically taught that the guru's teachings are infallible because the guru is simply repeating śāstra.
- 2) Prabhupāda made it very clear that a guru is not infallible when not repeating śāstra.

'The Case of Draupadī' section is preceded by emphatic assertions and explanations that there are no śāstric references for the attempted disrobing of Draupadī. Consequently, the thread of reasoning that emerges is explicit and fairly simple to grasp:

The attempted disrobing of Draupadī is not found in śāstra. Guru is fallible when not repeating śāstra.

We are led to an unambiguous and inescapable conclusion: Śrīla Prabhupāda was fallible in 'The Case of Draupadī' because he was not repeating śāstra. At least seven of his purports are fallible. Here's the list:

1. Bg 1.11 purport

2. Bg 11.49 purport
3. SB 1.8.24 purport
4. SB 1.13.3-4 purport
5. SB 1.15.16 purport
6. SB 2.8.20 purport
7. SB 3.1.43 purport

Since the generic term *guru* has been used in 'The Infallibility-Fallibility Statement', several of our previous ācāryas were fallible in the 'The Case of Draupadī' because they were not repeating śāstra. Here's the list of fallible previous ācāryas and references to their fallible writings:

1. Śrīpāda Madhvācārya¹ in Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya 21.347-348
2. Śrīla Vṛndāvana dāsa Ṭhākura in Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata Madhya 10.64-66
3. Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his Dig-darśinī commentary on Śrī Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta 1.5.39
4. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his Krama-sandarbhā commentary on SB 1.8.24
5. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura in his comments on Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata Madhya 10.64-66.

It is perhaps the first time that an article has appeared on the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava horizon which asserts the notion of fallibility in the scriptural commentaries of Śrīla Prabhupāda and the previous ācāryas. References from Śrīla Prabhupāda in support of this noxious notion are conspicuous by their absence both in *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* and in the Bhaktivedanta Vedabase. There is a good reason.

Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us about only two types of gurus:

- 1) The real guru and
- 2) The false guru

The real guru is infallible in his teachings because he always repeats śāstra and the teachings of the previous ācāryas. The false guru is fallible in his teachings because he does not always repeat the teachings of śāstra. The third type of guru, a new variant of a real guru who is sometimes fallible in his teachings and at other times infallible, is a preposterous invention of *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article*. This concept of a bipolar infallible-fallible hybrid guru who oscillates between fallibility and infallibility has no locus standi in paramparā scriptural exegesis.²

¹ **Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** in Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi (Chapter 6, Footnote 8) observes that the śikṣā of Madhvācārya, the ādi-ācārya of our sampradāya, should be accorded special honor: *sādhu sampradāyera ādi ācārya nirdiṣṭa śikṣāke viśeṣa sammāna karibe. śrīrāmānuja, śrīmadhvamuni, śrīnimbāditya o śrīviṣṇusvāmī, ihārā nija nija sādhu sampradāyera ādi ācārya. madhvamuni amādera ādi.*

² **SB 4.16.1 purport:** The spiritual master is one who follows the instructions of his predecessors, namely the *sādhus*, or saintly persons. A bona fide spiritual master does not mention anything not mentioned in the authorized scriptures.

Śrīla Prabhupāda clarifies³ the position of a real guru:

If you want perfect knowledge, you must approach guru. And who is guru? Guru means the representative of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. *Ācāryam mām vijānīyān nāvamanyeta karhicit* [SB 11.17.27]. "Ācārya," Kṛṣṇa says, *mām vijānīyāt*, "he is Myself. I am. Because he is My perfect representative—he won't speak anything nonsense; he will speak something or everything which he has heard from Me—therefore he is ācārya." **Ācārya means one who knows the śāstra and practically uses in his life, and the same thing, he teaches to his disciple. That is called ācārya.**⁴

In this elegant explanation, we understand that a real guru or ācārya means "one who knows śāstra". In Kṛṣṇa's words "He is My perfect representative" and "He speaks everything which he has heard from Me—therefore he is ācārya". Such a guru "won't speak anything nonsense" and "if you want perfect knowledge", not an infallible-fallible hybrid version of knowledge, "you must approach guru".

There have been two attempts to mitigate or address some of the concerns caused by *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article*:

1. A revised, second version of *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* has been released.
2. A separate write-up which begins with a defense of 'The Infallibility-Fallibility Statement' and then proceeds to other subjects outside the scope of the *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* has also been released. I shall refer to the beginning portion of that write-up hereafter simply as *The Sequel*.

It is important to note that the revised version of the *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* retains the same doggedly stubborn line of reasoning as the original article with no observable change in conclusions. [There are a few deletions, a few tweaks and a fresh hermeneutically incongruent statement.](#) The grossly unintelligent and irresponsible component in 'The Infallibility-Fallibility Statement' that the guru is not infallible in 'The Case of Draupadī' when not repeating śāstra has been snipped. However it would not be prudent to assume that the absence of that component in the revised version represents correction of an error. There is not even an acknowledgement of error, let alone any semblance of clarification, to purge the minds of unsuspecting readers of any misunderstanding implanted by the original version of *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article*. *The Sequel* sheds light on the actual position.

³ Prabhupāda's lecture on SB 3.26.32, January 9, 1975, Bombay (emphasis mine)

⁴ The emphasized portion is Śrīla Prabhupāda's rendition of a **Vāyu-purāṇa** verse found in the book **Śrī Gauḍīya-kaṅṭha-hāra**, a collection of authoritative scriptural statements frequently quoted by **Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura** and published during his manifest presence with his full approval: *ācinoti yaḥ śāstrārtham ācāre sthāpayaty api / svayam ācarate yasmād ācāryas tena kīrtitaḥ*

The Sequel

The Sequel begins with a critic who quotes 'The Infallibility-Fallibility Statement' and then attacks it.

Here's the quote:

Prabhupada emphatically taught that the Guru's teachings are infallible because the Guru is simply repeating Shastra. Prabhupada made it very clear that a Guru is not infallible when not repeating Shastra.

Here's the critic's attack:

But if Srila Prabhupada is fallible in his own books, how could anything else he says in them be trusted.

At this point, *The Sequel* offers its official defense. Here's how it reads:

In fact my quote above gives Prabhupada's own criteria for his statements. I suggest above not that we doubt everything Prabhupada says. I say exactly the opposite: we should take Prabhupada seriously when he sets self-limits. As we know, Jayadvaita Swami directly asked Prabhupada if a pure devotee knows everything, and Prabhupada insisted that only Krishna knows everything.

Thus [the critic]⁵ ironically suggests that we accept all that Prabhupada says as true, even if to do so, we must reject as untrue the limits that Prabhupada places on his own statements.

The Sequel ends there.

English Language Competence Requirement

The Sequel distinctly focuses on whether Śrīla Prabhupāda is fallible in his own books. That is eminently clear from the precisely worded argument of the critic. In its response to the critic, *The Sequel* attempts to defend 'The Infallibility-Fallibility Statement' by paraphrasing Śrīla Prabhupāda's clarification to Jayādvaita Mahārāja that a pure devotee is not omniscient like Kṛṣṇa⁶.

This is rather surprising. It is bizarre to assert that an ācārya can be sometimes fallible merely because he is not omniscient. *Infallibility* and *omniscience* are two different concepts.

⁵ Initials of the critic's name appear in the original

⁶ Morning Walk, April 8, 1975, Mayapur

They are not interchangeable. I have elaborated upon that later in this section. It is unusual to discover an article of the form, style and content as *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* fall short of English language competence requirement.

The terrible mix up between *infallibility* and *omniscience* significantly dents the validity of the 'The Infallibility-Fallibility Statement'. The conversation between Śrīla Prabhupāda, Jayādvaīta Mahārāja and others touches upon a fairly broad range of topics but *The Sequel* confines its attention only to that portion where *omniscience* is discussed. An examination of the full conversation reveals that in a later portion Śrīla Prabhupāda completely shatters the validity of the 'The Infallibility-Fallibility Statement'.

Here's the relevant excerpt:

Nalinī-kānta: Whatever the spiritual master says, that is also perfect?

Prabhupāda: Yes. Because he says nothing concocted. Whatever he says, he says from śāstra, and guru.

Any serious reader of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books would know thoroughly well that only God is omniscient. An ācārya is not God, not omniscient and does not know everything like Kṛṣṇa does. It is thus entirely natural to observe great liberated ācāryas set self limits to the extent of their vast, flawless knowledge. Consequently their brilliant scriptural teachings are firmly embedded within the ambit of their knowledge. They are not prone to speculate beyond the extent of their knowledge. The words 'perhaps', 'maybe' and so on do not feature in the lexicon of such great ācāryas. They are definite in their presentation of scriptural teachings because they speak only what they know and what they know is perfect because their knowledge is received from authorized sources. Thus a liberated ācārya does not have to be omniscient to be infallible. Śrīla Prabhupāda emphatically confirms this in his reply to Nalinī-kānta Prabhu as found in the excerpt above.

The Sequel speaks of "the limits that Prabhupāda places on his own statements" by referring to the fact that Prabhupāda is not omniscient. It is important to carefully note that Śrīla Prabhupāda does not place limits on his own statements, rather he places limits only on the **extent** of his knowledge. This distinction is crucial. *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* has missed it entirely, again confirming a failure to meet English language competence requirement.

Since the *The Sequel* limits itself to the critical domain of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, I do not wish to digress and make a sweeping generalization of the infallibility of all of Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements both inside and outside his books. That can be examined, discussed and resolved in a separate paper. For the purposes of this paper, I have only tried to emphasize that all portions of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books are infallible.

Also please bear in mind that my remarks about the failure of *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* to meet English language competence requirement have been merely in reference to semantic distortions and not grammatical inaccuracies.

“The Specific Procedure of the Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Movement”

The writings of the great liberated ācāryas have the weighty status of being as good as 'śruti-pramāṇa' or 'Vedic versions'. *They are as epistemically valid and axiomatically true as the Vedas.*

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura elucidates⁷:

What are the scriptures? They are nothing but the record by the pure devotees of the divine message appearing on the lips of the pure devotees. The message conveyed by the devotees is the same in all ages. The words of the devotees are ever identical with the scriptures.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī confirms in his *Sarva-saṁvādinī* that sense perception (pratyakṣa) can be classified as sense perception of the *enlightened* (vaiduṣa-pratyakṣa) and that of the *unenlightened* (avaiduṣa-pratyakṣa). Vaiduṣa-pratyakṣa is free from human defects such as mistakes, and is the basis of Vedic scriptural sound (śabda).⁸

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in a letter⁹ who these enlightened souls are:

The statements of Thakura Bhaktivinoda are as good as scriptures because he is **liberated person**. Generally the spiritual master comes from **the group of such eternal associates of the Lord**; . . .

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura describes¹⁰:

There is an eternally impassable line of demarcation between the savior and the saved. Those who are really saved can alone know this. Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda belongs to the category of the spiritual world-teachers who

⁷ Essay entitled “Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda” published in the *Harmonist*, December 1931 (emphasis mine)

⁸ **Sarva-saṁvādinī** on Anuccheda 9 of *Tattva-sandarbhā*: *tathā hi, pratyakṣam tāvan mano-buddhīndriya-pañcaka-janyatayā ṣaḍ-vidham bhavet. pratyekam punaḥ savikalpaka-nirvikalpaka-bhedena dvādaśa-vidham bhavati. tad eva ca punaḥ vaiduṣam aviduṣam ceti dvividham. tatra vaiduṣe ca vipratipatti-bhramādi-nṛ-doṣa-rāhityāt, śabdasyāpi tan-mūlatvāc ca. aviduṣa eva saṁśayaḥ.* That the śabda referred to above is Vedic scriptural sound is evident from *Sarva-saṁvādinī* on Anuccheda 10 (ibid): *yo nija-nija-vidvattāyai sarvair evābhyasyate, yasyādhiḡamena sarveṣāṁ api sarvaiva vidvattā bhavati, yat kṛtayaiva parama-vidvattayā pratyakṣādīkam api śuddham syāt, yaś cānāditvāt svayam eva siddhaḥ, sa eva nikhilaitihya-mūla-rūpo mahā-vākya-samudayaḥ śabdo'tra grhyate. sa ca śāstram eva. tac ca veda eva.*

⁹ Letter to Janardana, 26 April, 1968, New York (emphasis mine)

¹⁰ Essay entitled “Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda” published in the *Harmonist*, December 1931 (emphasis mine)

eternally occupy the superior position. . . . **His works belong to the class of the eternal revealed literature of the world, . . .**

Śrīla Prabhupāda further explains¹¹ in a lecture:

We have to follow the footprints of the ācāryas. Ācārya means paramparā. One ācārya is following the previous ācārya. An ācārya does not manufacture anything, something novel. He follows the previous ācārya. And therefore he, he's ācārya. . . . Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's versions are accepted as **Vedic versions, śruti-pramāṇa**. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says that the statements of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura are as good as Vedic evidences.¹² Therefore we quote from Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura often. Not, not only Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura—Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī and the Six Gosvāmīs, they are authorities. So we have no difficulty. *Tāndera caraṇa-sevi-bhakta-sane vāsa*. That's all. Let us follow the footprints of the ācāryas, Gosvāmīs, and live together as sincere, serious devotees. Then our life is successful. It is not very difficult. *Bhakta-sane vāsa. Tāndera caraṇe*. We should live together as devotee and follow the footprints of the ācāryas. **Don't manufacture concoction. Then it will be spoiled. Simply try to follow.** They'll protect. They'll give protection. Because Kṛṣṇa says, *aham tvām sarva-pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi* [Bg. 18.66]. So if we take shelter of the ācāryas, that means we take shelter of Kṛṣṇa. *Yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādaḥ*. If the ācārya, guru, is satisfied, then we must know certainly that Kṛṣṇa is satisfied. *Yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādaḥ. Ācāryam mām vijānīyāt* [SB 11.17.27]. So this is the principle, and **the ācāryas give us direction**. It is not very difficult. Simply we have to be, become very serious and sincere. Then everything is all right.

Since "ācāryas give us direction", it would be pertinent to examine whether the direction given by the ācāryas and the direction given by the revised version of *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* are in harmony or whether they contradict each other.

Here's the direction given by Śrīla Prabhupāda on the attempted disrobing of Draupadī in his comments on SB 1.8.24:

Once Draupadī was dragged out, and attempts were made to insult her by stripping her naked in the vicious assembly of the Kurus. The Lord saved Draupadī by supplying an immeasurable length of cloth, and Duryodhana's party failed to see her naked.

¹¹ Lecture on *The Nectar of Devotion*, November 13, 1972, Vṛndāvana (emphasis mine)

¹² **Śrī-Narottama-Prabhor Aṣṭakam** (7), found within **Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's** *Stavāmṛta-laharī*, describes Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura thus: *prāmāṇyam evam śrutiavad yadiyam tasmai namaḥ śrīla-narottamāya*.

Here's the direction given by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, "the greatest philosopher of all ages in the world"¹³, in his comments on SB 1.8.24:

asat-sabhāyā draupadī-vastra-varadhanādi

(Kṛṣṇa protected the Pāṇḍavas) from the vicious assembly by increasing Draupadī's clothes, etc.

In contrast, *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article*, both in its original and revised versions, does not repeat the version of the ācāryas but comes up with a new direction through an attempt to 'directly' study the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, academic historical studies, Wikipedia and seemingly sophisticated human reasoning.

Here are relevant excerpts from the revised version of *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* which showcases its direction:

The Bhagavatam mentions the insult to Draupadī four times in these verses: SBh 1.8.5, SBh 1.15.10, SBh 3.1.7, SBh 11.1.2. Remarkably in all four cases, the Bhagavatam states that the insult to Draupadī was touching/pulling her hair. There is not a word about disrobing, nor about Yudhisthira gambling her...

... In fact, if we study feudal law, I believe we get a clue to the gambling match which took place in a type of Vedic feudal society.

From Wikipedia: "... feudalism describes a set of reciprocal legal and military obligations among the warrior nobility, revolving around the three key concepts of lords, vassals, and fiefs."

I that (sic) Yudhisthira gambled away his brothers in the sense that he gambled their legal and military obligation to him as their older brother and King ...

... The relationship between husband and wife in Vedic culture is not political or military and cannot be negotiated or gambled in the same way. Interestingly, neither the Bhagavatam, nor the CC mentions the attempt to disrobe Draupadī.

If for the sake of discussion we assume that the Kurus did attempt to disrobe Draupadī, then why did Yudhisthira remain silent?...

The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article presents an intellectually stimulating, new discovery, forty-nine years after the inception of ISKCON and thirty-seven years after the disappearance of our Founder-ācārya, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

¹³ Prabhupāda's article "Lord Chaitanya & His Teachings" in *Back to Godhead*, Volume 3, Part 7 (June 5, 1956)

Prabhupāda. This new discovery that there was no attempt to disrobe Draupadī stands as a brilliant testament to the effectiveness of human rational analysis and modern academic tools to decipher the truth of Vedic histories which have eluded the grasp of great liberated ācāryas across generations and across the four sampradayas. The final step before launching into a celebration would be to attentively hear the verdict of Śrīla Prabhupāda, our Founder-ācārya, on the status of this new discovery:

We have no new discovery. We don't manufacture. This is our process. We simply follow the predecessor's instruction. That's all. Our movement is very easy because we haven't got to manufacture something. We simply **repeat the words** and the instruction given by the predecessor. Kṛṣṇa instructed Brahmā, Brahmā instructed Nārada, Nārada instructed Vyāsadeva, Vyāsadeva instructed Madhvācārya, and, in this way, then Mādhavendra Purī, Īśvara Purī, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, then the Six Gosvāmīs, then the Śrīnivāsa Ācārya, Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, Viśvanātha Cakravartī, Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Gaurakīśora dāsa Bābājī, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, and then we are doing the same thing. There is no difference. That is the specific procedure of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.¹⁴

Shaking Hands With A Clenched Fist

The new discovery in the *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* contradicts the direction provided by Śrīla Prabhupāda and the great liberated ācāryas in our paramparā. The clause "If for the sake of discussion we assume that the Kurus did attempt to disrobe Draupadī..." openly and clearly reveals that *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article*, does not accept the attempted disrobing of Draupadī as an absolute, historical fact. This is an untenable position and presumably to keep any controversy at bay, it has contrived an ingenious, hermeneutically incongruent statement:

I do not deny or reject Prabhupāda's teaching on this matter, I simply focus on what I find in the Bhagavatam.

This statement leaves us wondering that if Śrīla Prabhupāda was not focusing on the Bhagavatam while writing his Bhagavatam purports describing the 'The Case of Draupadī', what was he focusing on? Since Śrīla Prabhupāda is longer physically present with us, it would be difficult to get an answer. For an indefinite period, the following Bhaktivedanta purports would then remain a mystery:

- 1) SB 1.8.24
- 2) SB 1.13.3-4
- 3) SB 1.15.16

¹⁴ Arrival address, June 20, 1975, Los Angeles (emphasis mine)

4) SB 2.8.20

5) SB 3.1.43

The mystery extends upwards all the way to Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's Krama-sandarbha commentary on SB 1.8.24. If Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, was not focusing on the Bhāgavatam while commenting on 1.8.24, what was he focusing on?¹⁵

It is interesting to note that the mystery also seemingly extends downwards to the BBT commentaries on SB 10.78.16 and SB 11.1.2 by HH Hṛdayānanda Mahārāja, HG Gopīparāṇadhana Prabhu and HG Draviḍa Prabhu. In regard to their commentaries, we are not in as mysterious a situation as Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's commentaries. Although HG Gopīparāṇadhana Prabhu is longer physically present with us, HH Hṛdayānanda Mahārāja and HG Draviḍa Prabhu are still with us and reachable. However, it doesn't seem necessary to reach them because HH Hṛdayānanda Mahārāja in his brilliant *Preface* to his team's annotated translation of the Bhāgavatam has illuminated the status of their commentary and what they were focusing on, or the method of their work, without any ambiguity:

[B]y our strictly following the disciplic succession called in Sanskrit *guru-paramparā*, this edition of the Bhāgavatam will continue to be throughout its volumes a liberated work, free from material contamination and capable of elevating the reader to the kingdom of God.

Our method has been to faithfully follow the commentaries of the previous ācāryas and exercise a careful selectivity of material based on the example and mood of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Sarcasm excluded, there are no unsolved mysteries in Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's Bhāgavatam exegesis. We do have a definite answer from Śrīla Prabhupāda about each of his Bhāgavatam purports. This has been discussed in the penultimate section of this paper.

The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article's position on the attempted disrobing of Draupadī, both in its original and revised versions, is an automatic denial and rejection of Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings, and effectively constitutes an act of disobedience to our Founder-ācārya¹⁶, even if it is unintentional. This is plain common sense. It cannot be simultaneously true that there was an attempt to disrobe Draupadī and there was no attempt to disrobe her. It either happened or did not happen. They are mutually exclusive possibilities. Consequently, the statement "I do not deny or reject Prabhupāda's teaching on this matter" in the revised version of *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article* is a euphemistic afterthought lacking even a modicum of credibility.

¹⁵ See footnote 26.

¹⁶ Refer to the section 'Philosophical Speculation and Mental Speculation' in [The Draupadī Incident](#).

As they say in some parts of the world, "You can't shake hands with a clenched fist."

Śrīla Prabhupāda delivers it more powerfully¹⁷:

You cannot disobey the previous ācārya or guru. No. You have to **repeat** the same thing. **Not research.**

And more elaborately¹⁸:

At the end of every chapter, the author [Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī] admits the value of the disciplic succession. **He never claims to have written this transcendental literature by carrying out research work.** He simply admits his indebtedness to the notes taken by Svarūpa Dāmodara, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī and other authoritative persons. This is the way of describing transcendental literatures, which are never meant for so-called scholars and research workers. The process is *mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ*: one has to strictly follow great personalities and ācāryas.

In the paramparā system, the impeccable status of an ācārya's writings is accentuated by the fact that even an opinion different from the ācārya's opinion is not admissible, let alone any denial or rejection of his teachings on any subject matter.

Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasizes¹⁹:

Any opinion different from the opinion of the spiritual master is useless.

And Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura remarks²⁰:

Any meaning of the scriptures that belittles the function of the devotee who is the original communicant of the divine message, contradicts its own claim to be heard.

Studying Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam: *Ungwang* Is Not The Qualification

The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article, in both its original and revised versions, heavily relies upon a 'direct' or literal reading of śāstra to formulate its aberrant assertions. In the paramparā system, we understand śāstra not 'directly' through literal reading, erudite scholarship or sharp intelligence. We access śāstra exclusively through the commentaries

¹⁷ Lecture entitled "What is a Guru?", August 22, 1973, London (emphasis mine)

¹⁸ Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya 8.312 purport (emphasis mine)

¹⁹ Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi 12.9 purport

²⁰ Essay entitled "Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda" published in the Harmonist, December 1931.

and explanatory writings of the great liberated ācāryas. In ISKCON, Śrīla Prabhupāda, our Founder-ācārya, is the *summum bonum* representative of the previous ācāryas and our final authority on the true meaning of śāstra. His books are our law books.

To explore this a little, I propose to examine SB 10.9.11:

*kṛtāgasam tam prarudantam akṣiṇī kaṣantam añjan-maṣiṇī sva-pāṇinā
udvikṣamāṇam bhaya-vihvalekṣaṇam haste grhītvā bhiṣayanty avāgurat*

kṛta-āgasam—who was an offender; tam—unto Kṛṣṇa; prarudantam—with a crying attitude; akṣiṇī—His two eyes; kaṣantam—rubbing; añjat-maṣiṇī—from whose eyes the blackish ointment was distributed all over His face with tears; sva-pāṇinā—with His own hand; udvikṣamāṇam—who was seen in that attitude by Mother Yaśodā; bhaya-vihvala-īkṣaṇam—whose eyes appeared distressed because of such fear of His mother; haste—by the hand; grhītvā—catching; bhiṣayantī—Mother Yaśodā was threatening Him; avāgurat—and thus she very mildly chastised Him.

When caught by Mother Yaśodā, Kṛṣṇa became more and more afraid and admitted to being an offender. As she looked upon Him, she saw that He was crying, His tears mixing with the black ointment around His eyes, and as He rubbed His eyes with His hands, He smeared the ointment all over His face. Mother Yaśodā, catching her beautiful son by the hand, mildly began to chastise Him.

The manner of this chastisement has been revealed by Śrīla Prabhupāda in a lecture²¹:

"You have broken the butter, and You have distributed to the monkeys, You rascal. Then how You will live? I kept the butter for You so that You will eat and You'll become fatty. And You have broken that, and You have distributed the butter to the monkeys, so You must be punished." So the aim is to serve Kṛṣṇa, not that Yaśodā is thinking, "My butter is spoiled by this child. Therefore He should be punished." He [she] is anxious to see that "Kṛṣṇa may not starve for want of butter. He's child. He does not know. He has distributed the butter to the monkeys." But Kṛṣṇa knows that "These monkeys are not ordinary monkeys." Those monkeys, they have taken birth in Vṛndāvana and come to Kṛṣṇa. Do you think they're ordinary monkeys? They're devotees. They're devotees. They're playing as monkey for Kṛṣṇa's satisfaction. These are the **intricate** meanings of understanding Kṛṣṇa's līlā. Therefore Kṛṣṇa says, *janma karma me divyaṁ yo jānāti tattvataḥ* [Bg. 4.9].

So to understand kṛṣṇa-līlā... So therefore we have to understand Kṛṣṇa-līlā, Kṛṣṇa, from these books, Bhāgavata, Bhagavad-gītā, **but not directly.**

²¹ Lecture on SB 1.8.32, October 12, 1974, Mayapur (emphasis mine)

Therefore Caitanya Mahāprabhu recommends, *bhāgavata giyā paro bhāgavata sthāne*. **Just try to understand Bhāgavata or Bhagavān from the realized soul, ...**

Śrīla Prabhupāda cogently imparts a cardinal hermeneutical principle that we should not try to understand Kṛṣṇa's pastimes from Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 'directly'. Without hearing a realized soul's explanation of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, *the intricate details of Kṛṣṇa-līlā* would remain inaccessible. Śrīla Prabhupāda's expert elucidation of mother Yaśodā's chastisement of little Kṛṣṇa is an intricate detail that cannot be fathomed by a literal reading of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam's texts.

In his purport to Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya 9.102, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains:

According to the śāstras: *bhaktiā bhāgavatam grāhyam na buddhyā na ca ṭikayā*. One should understand the Bhagavad-gītā and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam by hearing them from a real devotee. One cannot understand them simply by erudite scholarship or sharp intelligence.

Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī, whom Kṛṣṇadasa Kavirāja Gosvāmī refers to as *pāṇḍityera avadhi*—the limit of learned scholarship²²—instructs a brahmana from Bengal:

*yāha, bhāgavata paḍa vaiṣṇavera sthāne
ekānta āśraya kara caitanya-carāṇe*

yāha—just go; bhāgavata paḍa—read Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam; vaiṣṇavera sthāne—from a self-realized Vaiṣṇava; ekānta āśraya kara—fully surrender; caitanya-carāṇe—at the lotus feet of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

"If you want to understand Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam," he said, "you must approach a self-realized Vaiṣṇava and hear from him. You can do this when you have completely taken shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu."

Śrīla Prabhupāda paraphrases Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī's instruction in a lecture²³ and explains:

"If you want to know about Bhāgavata, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, then **you study Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam from a person bhāgavatam, whose life is Bhāgavatam**. From such person, if you read, if you understand Bhāgavata, then you will benefit." **It is not a scholarship. Because you know ungwang, that is not the qualification.** Bhāgavata should be studied from the person whose life is Bhāgavata. This is the instruction of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's personal secretary.

²² Cc Madhya 10.110

²³ Lecture on SB 1.15.51, December 28, 1973, Los Angeles (emphasis mine)

It is generally and sufficiently well understood in ISKCON that "Bhāgavata should be studied" from Śrīla Prabhupāda, "whose life is Bhāgavata", through his infallible Bhaktivedanta purports. *Ungwang* is not the qualification to access the content of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Deficiencies of *Ungwang* Scholarship

The attempted disrobing of Draupadī and the manner of chastisement of little Kṛṣṇa by mother Yaśodā are not the only topics that have not been spelled out in the Sanskrit texts of the Bhāgavatam which we study in our daily classes. There are several other topics which have not been mentioned in them.

For example: There is not a word in them about letter writing in Kṛṣṇa-līlā and interestingly enough an opinion has emerged among some followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda that there was no letter writing in Kṛṣṇa-līlā. This is a classic hermeneutical error. The great liberated ācāryas have confirmed the existence of letter writing in their Bhāgavatam commentaries and a tiny sample of the evidence has been presented in footnotes.²⁴

The richness of meaning embedded in the texts of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam perpetually remains hidden from sādhakas and others non-liberated beings who attempt to 'directly' approach these texts.²⁵ The great liberated ācāryas who have privileged access²⁶ to these texts have shared their naturally non-contradictory objective insights through their infallible Bhāgavatam commentaries, all of which splendidly reveal the historical truths and details of Kṛṣṇa-līlā as it occurred in our universe 5,000 years ago. It behooves all serious students of Kṛṣṇa consciousness to approach the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam through the commentaries of the

²⁴ Śrīdhara Svāmī's Bhāvārtha-dīpikā on SB 10.52.37: rukmiṇyā svayam ekānte *likhitvā datta-patrikām* mudrām unmucya kṛṣṇāya prema-cihnām adarśayat. brāhmaṇaḥ śrī-kṛṣṇānujñayā vācayati śrutveti.

Sanātana Gosvāmī's Vaiṣṇava-toṣaṇī on SB 10.52.36: evam atra śrī-brāhmaṇa uvāceti vaktavye śrī-rukmiṇy uvācety uktyā brāhmaṇa evāsau śrī-rukmiṇy-uktaṁ sandeśam *patra-pāṭhena* nyavedayad iti svataḥ eva sidhyati . . .

Śrīnātha Cakravartī's Caitanya-mata-mañjuṣā on SB 10.52.36: tasmai sarvam avarṇayad iti kṛṣṇājñayā brāhmaṇaḥ svayam eva *patrikām* papāṭhety arthaḥ. asyāyam bhāvaḥ: śrī-kṛṣṇo'pi tām praty utsuka-cetās cirata eva. *patri-vācane* ānandāśru kadācid bhavati kadākṣara-sandarśaram bhavati kadācid bhavati na vā. brāhmaṇas tāralyam jñāsyati. atas tasmai vācayety uktavān.

Jīva Gosvāmī's Brhat Krama-sandarbhā on SB 10.52.36: kṛṣṇājñayā brāhmaṇaḥ svayam eva *patrikām* papāṭhety arthaḥ. ayam bhāvaḥ. śrī-kṛṣṇo'pi tām praty utsuka-cetās cirata eva. tena *patri-vācane* ānandāśruṅākṣara-darśanam na syād iti tasmai vācayety uktavān śrī-bhagavān. In his Laghu Vaiṣṇava-toṣaṇī comment on SB 10.52.36, he remarks that in the opinion of Śrīdhara Svāmī, Śrī Rukmiṇī-devī sent a message to Lord Kṛṣṇa through a letter (*patrikā-dvāreti* tu svāmy-abhiprāyaḥ).

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's introductory remark in his Bengali translation of SB 10.52.36: anantara rukmiṇī pradatta *patrera* āvaraṇa unmocanapūrvaka kṛṣṇake tāhā pradarśana kariyā tānhāra anumatikrame pāṭha karilena, *ai patre erūpa likhita chila* . . .

²⁵ yāha, bhāgavata pada vaiṣṇavera sthāne / ekānta āsraya kara caitanya-caraṇe (Cc Antya 5.131)

²⁶ According to Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, one of the features of Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's Sandarbhas is that they reveal the hidden meanings of the texts of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. See his Tattva-sandarbhā-ṭippanī (Anuccheda 7) where he quotes the authoritative meaning of sandarbha: *gūḍhārthasya prakāśaś ca sāraktiḥ śreṣṭhatā tathā / nānārthavattvaṁ vedyatvaṁ sandarbhaḥ kathyate budhaiḥ*. This substantiates that Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī had privileged access to the texts of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and that his commentary on them flawlessly explicates their factual content. It is also clear that his Bhāgavatam commentary, like all other authorized paramparā commentaries, does not contain flights of creative imagination. Thus the authority of his remark on SB 1.8.24 that there was an attempt to disrobe Draupadī is beyond question.

great liberated *ācāryas* and through no other means, as demonstrated by the brilliant example set by HH Hṛdayānanda Mahārāja, HG Gopīparādhana Prabhū and HG Draviḍa Prabhū, in their completion of the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam commentary begun by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's Masterstroke

The central topics discussed in this paper range from Śrīla Prabhupāda's technique in his Bhāgavatam exegesis, 'direct' study of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and the qualification, infallibility and scope of knowledge, of a real guru. The concluding portion of a lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.7.5 by Śrīla Prabhupāda²⁷ is an extraordinarily clear and an eloquent masterstroke covering the entire gamut of these topics.

In this section of the paper, I have presented an analysis of that lecture excerpt in a question and answer format. For simplicity of analysis, I have divided the excerpt into four parts. Please bear in mind that although I have quoted the four parts separately, I have maintained its sequence without any loss of continuity.

Here's the first part of the excerpt:

So this Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is meant for persons who want to finish this life of *anartha*, meaningless life. For them is Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. Vyāsadeva has given us. We should study very carefully, and we have tried to give each and every word's meaning and the translation and the purport consulting all the big, big *ācāryas*. *Ācāryavān puruṣo veda*. One who is following the footsteps of the *ācārya*, he knows. He knows everything. So that is explained everywhere. *Evam paramparā-prāptam* [Bg. 4.2], by the *ācāryas*. We don't create any meaning. *Ācāryavān*. One has to accept a bona fide spiritual master and take knowledge from him. *Vidvān*. *Vidvān* means who is following *vidvān*.

QUESTION. What was Śrīla Prabhupāda's technique in his Bhāgavatam exegesis?

ANSWER. "We have tried to give each and every word's meaning and the translation and the purport consulting all the big, big *ācāryas*". It is unmistakably clear that every single verse in Śrīla Prabhupāda's Bhāgavatam exegesis scrupulously and naturally conforms to impeccable paramparā standards of knowledge acquisition, possession and transmission because "*Ācāryavān puruṣo veda*. One who is following the footsteps of the *ācārya*, he knows".

QUESTION. What does following in the footsteps of "the big, big *ācāryas*" mean?

ANSWER. It means two things:

²⁷ Given on September 4, 1976 in Vṛndāvana (emphasis mine)

- a) Śrīla Prabhupāda approached every verse of the Bhāgavatam only through the explanations of "big, big ācāryas", and not 'directly' nor through a mix of literal reading and sophisticated reasoning. We need to do exactly as Śrīla Prabhupāda did, which means to approach every verse of the Bhāgavatam exclusively through the Bhaktivedanta purports. Otherwise we are not "following the footsteps of the ācārya".
- b) Śrīla Prabhupāda's words, "We don't create any meaning" distinctly convey that we don't discover an idea that has not been explained by any of the predecessor ācāryas. The concept of *creation of meaning* is significant. It means to come up with an idea that is *new* in the history of the disciplic succession. We are then guilty of not "following the footsteps of the ācārya".

QUESTION. Who is *Ācāryavān*?

ANSWER. The word *Ācāryavān* means one who possesses an ācārya just like Bhagavān means one who possesses bhaga or opulences. "Ācāryavān. One has to accept a bona fide spiritual master".

QUESTION. Who is a person in knowledge or *vidvān*?

ANSWER. It not enough to merely accept an ācārya but one also has to take knowledge from the ācārya. Then one is a *vidvān*. "One has to accept a bona fide spiritual master and take knowledge from him. *Vidvān*". Śrīla Prabhupāda then rephrases it to clarify it further, "*Vidvān* means who is following *vidvān*". So, one becomes a *vidvān* or person in knowledge by following an ācārya, who is a person in knowledge.

QUESTION. An ācārya is a person in knowledge but he is not omniscient. So, can his teachings be considered infallible?

ANSWER. Yes. Absolutely. Even the words of a fool, when in line with an ācārya's teachings, can be considered infallible. Śrīla Prabhupāda answers this in the second part of the lecture excerpt.

Here's the second part:

I have given this example many times, that I may be a fool, but if I have learned from a person that this is called microphone... So a child, if he says, "This is microphone," that is correct. Because the child is fool, when he says "This is microphone," that is not foolish, because he has heard it from the authorities, from his father or from his teacher, that "This is called microphone." And if he says correctly that "This is microphone," that statement is correct, although he may be a child, a fool. Similarly, *ācāryavān puruṣo veda*. Anyone who is following ācārya, whatever he says it is correct.

Because he does not manufacture. He says what he has heard from the ācāryas exactly like the child, what he has heard from his father, from the superior, he speaks." So that is the position of guru.

QUESTION. What is the status of a guru?

ANSWER. Śrīla Prabhupāda answers this in the third part of the lecture excerpt.

Here's the third part:

Guru is respected as good as God. Why? Only for this qualification, that he does not speak anything nonsense. He speaks only what he has heard from the ācārya. *Ācāryavān puruṣo veda.*

It is clear that a bona fide guru is respected as good as God only due to the qualification that he speaks only what he has heard from his predecessor ācāryas. To speak anything else is considered nonsense.

In the fourth part, Śrīla Prabhupāda concludes his lecture on an emphatic note:

Ācāryopāsanam. In the Bhagavad-gītā it is said *ācāryopāsanam*. So Vyāsadeva is our ācārya; therefore we offer vyāsa-pūjā. On the birthday of guru we offer vyāsa-pūjā. Actually, it is not directly Vyāsa, but because the bona fide guru represents Vyāsadeva, his pūjā is also vyāsa-pūjā. *Mad-bhakta-pūjā abhyadhikā.* To worship Vyāsadeva, worship the bona fide spiritual master and worship the Lord, they are the same. Rather, Kṛṣṇa says that if you worship His bona fide representative, that worship is better than directly worshiping. Directly it is not possible to worship the Supreme Lord. One has to go through the ācārya. Therefore Vyāsadeva is the original ācārya. *Lokasyājānato vidvānś cakre sātva...* [SB 1.7.6]. **So we have explained many times how to become vidvān. Vidvān does not mean one has to become a big grammarian, logician. No. Vidvān means one who follows the previous ācārya who is representative of Kṛṣṇa. He is vidvān.**

How one becomes a *vidvān* and how one does not become a *vidvān* have been spelled out by Śrīla Prabhupāda here. One does not become a *vidvān* by academic scholarship, with expert training in logical reasoning or debating skills or by becoming a Sanskrit scholar or a "big grammarian". No, that is not the way.

One becomes a *vidvān* only by strictly repeating the teachings of the predecessor ācāryas and through no other means. Prabhupāda wanted all of his followers to become such *vidvāns* for only then can they establish Kṛṣṇa in the West and East and deliver the inhabitants of these lands.

The Meaning of *Sarvam Etad Ṛtam Manye*

The paramparā system dictates that 'The Infallibility-Fallibility Statement' or statements of that type can only be applied to philosophical opponents, renegades and other bound mortals and not to the great liberated ācāryas. The history of our Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava disciplic succession substantiates this understanding with attendant examples. *The Draupadī and Dharmarāja Article's* and *The Sequel's* attempt to apply 'The Infallibility-Fallibility Statement' to the writings of Śrīla Prabhupāda and the previous ācāryas, is thus a stunning transgression of sacred paramparā standards of scriptural hermeneutics and a glaring exhibition of philosophical naivety.

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains²⁸ in a lecture:

*sarvam etad ṛtam manye
yan mām vadasi keśava* [Bg. 10.14]

Arjuna said. Just like modern scholars, they cut some portion, "Oh, this is not fact; this is some imagination." The devotee does not do that—*ardha-kukkuṭī-nyāya* [Cc. Ādi 5.176]. *Ardha-kukkuṭī-nyāya*—to accept some portion and reject other portion—this is not the business of the devotee. **A devotee accepts each and every word of Kṛṣṇa.** That is devotee. Not that..., not only Kṛṣṇa **or Kṛṣṇa's devotee who is in the paramparā system.**

Śrīla Prabhupāda makes it clear that we accept not only each and every word of Kṛṣṇa but also each and every word of a "devotee who is in the paramparā system". We cannot "cut some portion" of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and say "Oh, this is not fact; this is some imagination". Otherwise, "just like modern scholars", we would be guilty of *ardha-kukkuṭī-nyāya* or half-hen logic. "The devotee does not do that" because "this is not the business of the devotee". *We cannot reject, ignore or gloss over any portion Śrīla Prabhupāda's writings. We have to accept all portions. This is important.*

Śrīla Prabhupāda continues:

So devotee means who accepts everything *in toto*, either spoken by Kṛṣṇa or by His devotee. That is *sarvam etad ṛtam*. Arjuna said this: "I accept whatever You have said."

There is no meaning in saying that we are Prabhupādānugas if we do not accept Śrīla Prabhupāda's books *in toto*. *Prabhupādānugas are those who accept whatever he has said in them. "That is sarvam etad ṛtam".*

²⁸ Given on February 12, 1974 in Vṛndāvana (emphasis mine)