
Honored Scholars:

Surely you would agree that the Hindu sampradayas are facing challenges posed by technological, sociological, and political changes. These changes demand responses from the intellectual traditions of Hinduism and they cannot be ignored. Embracing the effects of technological revolution, many Swamijis now encourage the dissemination of the doctrines that they uphold by using the Internet, digital recording devices, and the like. H.H. Visvesa Tirtha, the Swamiji of the Pejavara matha of the Madhva sampradaya, for example, has permitted the development of a Madhva web site where devotees, whether in India or in the West, can download devanagari texts, read about basic Madhva positions, and listen to commentaries and discourses given by the Swamiji himself. His choice to rise to the demands of his dispersed devotees shows a commendable willingness to change with the times, in ways that maintain, strengthen, and expand the tradition first developed by Sri Madhvacarya in the 13th century.

I am also confident that the Swamiji and the scholars at the Purnaprajna Samshodana Mandira debated about the implications that this technological change could have for their doctrine and their community. Their decision, moreover, was neither hasty nor uninformed.

Though many sampradayas have had little difficulty reacting to technological challenges, sociological ones pose the greatest hurdles: there are a growing number of devotees who seek initiation into mathas and into sastraic learning who, according to smrti, do not have adhikara and, therefore, do not qualify. How should the esteemed leaders of the Hindu traditions rise to this challenge posed by their devotees? Should the anadhikarins be offered diksa? Should their pleas be ignored? Does granting dika conflict with age-old doctrines?

Not surprisingly, the solution can be found in the history of darsana itself. Controversial issues were addressed by use of samvada, where the participants were required to present their opposing positions under the jurisdiction of a prasnika. In this connection, I would urge the esteemed leaders of the Hindu sampradayas to rise to the current sociological challenges by agreeing to participate in dialogues with those seeking to expand adhikara to include devotees who have not been traditionally granted diksa. Encouraging debate or participating in one does not mean admitting defeat. Rather, it means imitating the founders and scholars of the great traditions of thought in Hinduism who sought, and did not avoid, controversial debates. Just as technological change has proven to be a way to strengthen the traditions of Hindu thought, so might sociological change. No matter the outcome of the debates, the Hindu sampradayas will be made stronger if they were to occur.

In the spirit of samvada.
Humbly yours,

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