

Showing Radharani's Lotus Feet

Position Paper - ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry

Position Statement

Srimati Radharani's lotus feet should not be ever shown publicly at ISKCON temples, whether on a daily basis or particularly on festivals such as Radhastami and Gopastami.

Supporting Information

- Srila Prabhupada wrote a clear written response in a letter to the head pujari of ISKCON Los Angeles in 1973, which was the western headquarters of ISKCON. ISKCON LA had one of, if not the most established deity worship programs whereby Prabhupada gave extensive instructions on the subject. Among other questions related to the deity worship in ISKCON LA, the head pujari's first question was apparently whether Radharani's feet can ever be shown. Srila Prabhupada's response was, *"Your first question, shall Srimati Radharani's feet be showing, the answer is no, they should never be seen. Krsna's feet, however, should be showing."* The deity worship instructions he gave to ISKCON LA is understood to establish principles and standards for other temples to follow. The instruction in this letter cannot be relegated by some to fall under the category of being just a personal instruction from Srila Prabhupada to an individual disciple as the nature of the questions were for how the worship should be conducted publicly at a prominent ISKCON temple. To this day, ISKCON of Los Angeles never shows Radharani's feet based on this clear instruction they received. (See *References section below for full letter*)
- The ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry has been unable to determine any circumstance where Srila Prabhupada instructed, approved, or even witnessed Radharani's lotus feet being publicly viewed in an ISKCON temple. It seems that the practice of showing Her feet in ISKCON temples on Radhastami and/or Gopastami became popular in ISKCON sometime in the 1980's. We must assume that he was certainly aware of this practice in some Vrindaban temples, including Radha-Damodar Mandir, where he resided for many years. However, there is no record of him introducing this as a practice for any festival observance.
- Srila Prabhupada emphasized that we worship Radha-Krishna in the mood of Laxmi-Narayana with awe and reverence as one would worship a king and queen. This worship is based on primarily on *pancaratriki vidhhi*, emphasizing the mood of awe and reverence. Showing the feet of a queen is generally not compatible with this mood of worship he instructed for deity worship in ISKCON. However, if Srila Prabhupada instead emphasized us to worship Radha-Krishna as a young cowherd boy and girl based on *raga-marga* principles which is quite prominent in some Vrindaban temples, then arguably there could be scope for license to show Radharani's lotus feet in ISKCON temples. The indisputable fact is that Srila Prabhupada consistently instructs in Srimad Bhagavatam purports, letters, and

lectures that our worship in ISKCON of Radha-Krishna deities is in the mood of worshipping Laxmi-Narayana. He particularly states in a letter, *“This is why we should worship Radha-Krsna in Their Laksmi-Narayana feature with all respect and reverence. If we deviate from this standard then we shall be prakṛta-sahajīya, or a person who takes things very cheap.”*

(See References section below for purports and letters on this topic)

- ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry requested the GBC body to vote on this topic at their AGM meeting in Mayapur in 2014. They were asked via questionnaire, “Do you feel it is acceptable to show Radharani's lotus feet?” and requested to respond by selecting “yes”, “no”, or “undecided”. A 65% majority of the GBC body responded that it is not appropriate to ever show Radharani's feet.

Countering Argument

- Some devotees who believe that it is acceptable to show Radharani's feet annually on Radhastami and/or Gopastami in ISKCON temples cite one known instance where Srila Prabhupada apparently gave consent specifically for the Radha-Damodara deities during a bus tour program when he attended the Rock Opera performance at the Syria Mosque in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania held on Govardhan Puja, 1972. This was not regulated worship at an ISKCON temple.
- Radha-Damodara have been residing in Gita Nagari for many years now and Radharani's feet are not shown.

** See References section for accounts of this instance, along with first-hand devotee understandings of this.*

References

Bombay

4 January, 1973

73-01-04

My Dear Dhruvananda,

Please accept my blessings. I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated December 17, 1972, and I have noted the contents with care. You have asked me several questions about the deity worship in Los Angeles, so I shall answer them one after another: **Your first question, shall Srimati Radharani's feet be showing, the answer is no, they should never be seen. Krsna's feet, however, should be showing.**

I do not know when I have said to anyone that Krsna should not wear anything black color, nor I know where I have given any permission to wear black color, but there is no harm if sometimes Krsna dresses something black. Sometimes in Vrndavana they dress Him in black.

Yes, the leaves of Srimati Tulasi Devi may be offered to all Visnu-tattva expansions of Krsna, including Nityananda and Balarama.

You may dress Lord Caitanya in the standard way, main things is do it nicely, don't make it funny. In your Western countries Lord Caitanya should be entirely covered, He should not appear bare-chested.

Why you are pouring water over the head of Radha and Krsna deities? Big deities should not be bathed in this way, using water or other things. Rather they are bathed daily by mantra, do you not know these things? Under no circumstances shall we bathe the Jagannatha deities with anything water or liquid, they should be bathed with mantra also. Now you are asking if Lord Jagannatha carries flute? Why this nonsense question? You are asking me so many concoctions and manufactured nonsense. Don't bother my head in this way any more. From now on unless I order you do something change or in addition, go on with the usual standard way. You manufacture ideas and then I have to waste my time. I have given you everything already, there is no need for you to add anything or change anything. Why you are asking these things? Who has given you such freedom? Pujari should operate entirely under the supervision of temple president and GBC, not independently. The greatest danger to our movement will come when we manufacture and create our own process for worshiping the deities. So don't ask any more new questions, whatever is going on, follow it just to the exact standard as I have given you, that's all.

=> Letter to: Dhruvananda -- Bombay 4 January, 1973

9 October, 1974
74-10-09
Brooklyn

My Dear Pariksit dasa:

Please accept my blessings. I am in due receipt of your letter dated September 13, 1974 and have noted the contents. The answers to your questions are as follows:

1. Regarding Krsna das Kaviraja, there is no such information, but as far as possible, he was brahmacari.
2. Lord Nityananda and the associates appeared in the room.
3. The stick held by Lord Nityananda is like your sketch.
4. The bodily hues of the devotees of Lord Nityananda, why green? But, it can be done, there is no harm.
5. You can continue not showing Srimati Radharani's feet.

I hope this meets you in good health.

Your ever well wisher,

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

ACBS/bs

=> Letter to: Pariksit -- Mayapur 9 October, 1974

Establishing ISKCON Radha-Krishna Worship in the Mood of Laxmi-Narayana

Generally the worship of the Lord begins with the worship of Narayana, or Visnu, whereas the worship of Lord Krsna and Radha is most confidential. Lord Narayana is worshipable by the pancaratrika-vidhi, or regulative principles, whereas Lord Krsna is worshipable by the bhagavata-vidhi. No one can worship the Lord in the bhagavata-vidhi without going through the regulations of the pancaratrika-vidhi. Actually, neophyte devotees worship the Lord according to the pancaratrika-vidhi, or the regulative principles enjoined in the Narada Pancaratra. Radha-Krsna cannot be approached by the neophyte devotees; therefore temple worship according to regulative principles is offered to Laksmi-Narayana. Although there may be a Radha-Krsna vigraha, or form, the worship of the neophyte devotees is acceptable as Laksmi-Narayana worship. Worship according to the pancaratrika-vidhi is called vidhi-marga, and worship according to the bhagavata-vidhi principles is called raga-marga. The principles of raga-marga are especially meant for devotees who are elevated to the Vrndavana platform.

The inhabitants of Vrndavana -- the gopis, Mother Yasoda, Nanda Maharaja, the cowherd boys, the cows and everyone else -- are actually on the raga-marga or bhagavata-marga platform. They participate in five basic rasas-dasya, sakhya, vatsalya, madhurya and santa. But although these five rasas are found in the bhagavata-marga, the bhagavata-marga is especially meant for vatsalya and madhurya, or paternal and conjugal relationships. Yet there is the visrambha-sakhya, the higher fraternal worship of the Lord especially enjoyed by the cowherd boys. Although there is friendship between Krsna and the cowherd boys, this friendship is different from the aisvarya friendship between Krsna and Arjuna. When Arjuna saw the visva-rupa, the gigantic universal form of the Lord, he was afraid for having treated Krsna as an ordinary friend; therefore he begged Krsna's pardon. However, the cowherd boys who are friends of Krsna in Vrndavana sometimes ride on the shoulders of Krsna. They treat Krsna equally, just as they treat one another, and they are never afraid of Him, nor do

they ever beg His pardon. Thus the raga-marga, or bhagavata-marga, friendship exists on a higher platform with Krsna, namely the platform of visrambha friendship. Paternal friendship, paternal service and conjugal service are visible in the Vrndavana raga-marga relationships.

Without serving Krsna according to the vidhi-marga regulative principles of the pancaratrika-vidhi, unscrupulous persons want to jump immediately to the raga-marga principles. Such persons are called sahajiya. There are also demons who enjoy depicting Krsna and His pastimes with the gopis, taking advantage of Krsna by their licentious character. These demons who print books and write lyrics on the raga-marga principles are surely on the way to hell. Unfortunately, they lead others down with them. Devotees in Krsna consciousness should be very careful to avoid such demons. One should strictly follow the vidhi-marga regulative principles in the worship of Laksmi-Narayana, although the Lord is present in the temple as Radha-Krsna. Radha-Krsna includes Laksmi-Narayana; therefore when one worships the Lord according to the regulative principles, the Lord accepts the service in the role of Laksmi-Narayana. In The Nectar of Devotion full instructions are given about the vidhi-marga worship of Radha-Krsna, or Laksmi-Narayana. Although there are sixty-four kinds of offenses one can commit in vidhi-marga worship, in raga-marga worship there is no consideration of such offenses because the devotees on that platform are very much elevated, and there is no question of offense. But if we do not follow the regulative principles on the vidhi-marga platform and keep our eyes trained to spot offenses, we will not make progress.

=> SB 4.24.45, SB 4.24.46, SB 4.24.45-46

Regarding your question about why we dress the Deities in very opulent fashion and not as simple cowherds boy and girl, this is an intelligent question and the answer is that according to the regulative principles we cannot worship Radha-Krsna now. Radha-Krsna worship is meant for persons who have already developed spontaneous love of God. In the training period we are only worshiping Laksmi-Narayana. We worship Radha-Krsna because Laksmi-Narayana is there also, but actually we are not worshiping Radha-Krsna with our present Deity ceremonies; we are worshiping Laksmi-Narayana. Narayana is there when Krsna is there, but actually we do not worship Radha-Krsna in Their original form. This is why we should worship Radha-Krsna in Their Laksmi-Narayana feature with all respect and reverence. If we deviate from this standard then we shall be prakṛta-sahajiya, or a person who takes things very cheap. We worship Laksmi-Narayana and because Radha-Krsna includes Laksmi-Narayana there is no necessity of installing a Laksmi-Narayana Deity. It is just like a king who is engaged in administering justice. Actually that business belongs to the justice department. But what is the justice department? It is all part of the king's energy, and the king also has the power to execute this function.

=> Letter to: Madhusudana, 24th January, 1969

Actually, although Radha-Krsna is worshipped in Vrndavana which is like a simple village, but we worship Laksmi-Narayana and the worship is accepted by the Radha-Krsna Deity. Actually, in our present status we cannot worship Radha-Krsna. But as all the Visnu murtis

are situated in Krsna, therefore our Radha-Krsna worship is transferred to Visnu, Lord Narayana. Visnu worship is the regulative devotional principles, and Radha-Krsna worship is spontaneous service of eternal feelings. Therefore, as Laksmi-Narayana is the Deity of great opulences, similarly our Radha- Krsna murtis should be worshipped with great pomp and dignity. Krsna will give you the proper intelligence to do this very nicely. So far as prayers, you may sing Hare Krsna, Govinda jaya jaya and Govindam adi-purusam.

=> Letter to: Satsvarupa, 12th February, 1969

Accounts of Instance Regarding Showing Radharani's Feet During Radha-Damodara Program

"Srila Prabhupada had seen these Deities on a number of occasions. They had presided, along with His Divine Grace, at the 1972 New Vrindaban Vyasa-puja celebration. Once Prabhupada had asked why Srmati Radharani's dress was so long as to make Her Look almost like mother Yashoda with her small boy, Damodara. Visnujana explained that he had thought Radharani's lotus feet should be fully covered." "You do not like to see Radharani's Lotus feet?' Prabhupada chided. And from that day onward, especially on festive occasions, Radharani's lotus feet would be slightly showing."

=> Servant of the Servant - Tamal Krsna Goswami

Regarding the Deity worship, Prabhupada asks Visnujana why Radharani's dresses are so long as to make her look like Mother Yasoda with her small boy, Damodara. Visnujana explains that he had thought Radharani's lotus feet should be fully covered.

"Oh? You do not like to see Radharani's lotus feet?" Prabhupada says with a twinkle in his eye.

Visnujana at once understands that since Radha-Damodara are the childhood forms of the Lord, it would not be immodest for Radharani to display Her lotus feet. From this time onward, especially on festive occasions, Radharani's lotus feet are slightly shown.

Sankarsana: Radha-Damodara would stay up late to do these concerts, so Prabhupada gave permission for Them to get up later in the morning. Radha-Damodara would take rest for six hours, so whatever time They went to bed, They would get up six hours later. Visnujana asked Prabhupada directly in Pittsburgh, and Prabhupada authorized it in that situation. Visnujana also got permission to show Radharani's lotus feet, which is normally not done.

=> Radha Damodar Vilasa - Vaiyasaki dasa

Govardhana Puja 1972

Vishnujana Swami wants to make sweet rice to offer to Radha-Damodara. He loves this festival and prepares enough sweet rice in two large pots. His idea is to satisfy all the Atlanta devotees with Radha-Damodara's maha-prasadam. After a blissful kirtan his pleasure is to honor each person by personally serving everyone the sweet rice.

Radharani's lotus feet are visible for this occasion as special nectar for the devotees. She is the only Radharani Deity whose lotus feet are revealed. She has two outfits that are cut so that Her lotus feet can be seen. On the day She reveals Her lotus feet the devotees go mad in ecstasy. It isn't a common thing, just on special occasions. Amoghalila is particularly attracted by this pastime. Still, he wonders if it is bona fide and approaches Vishnujana Swami.

Taking him gently by the arm, Maharaja escorts Amoghalila to a quiet place and explains how Srila Prabhupada had come on the bus for Radha-Damodara's darshan in Pittsburgh.

"Damodara's outfit displayed His lotus feet as He stood on the base that was locked into the bus altar for stability. Radharani's long dress, however, not only covered Her feet but the base as well, making Her look much taller than She really was. After offering obeisances, Srila Prabhupada gazed at the two Divine forms and quietly commented, 'Radharani looks more like Mother Yasoda.'

"I was feeling embarrassed, so I replied, 'Radharani's lotus feet are covered out of respect.'

"Prabhupada looked at me, 'Oh, you don't like to see Radharani's lotus feet?' I was really surprised. 'Yes, you can show Radharani's lotus feet,' he continued, 'because She is at the Damodara age.'

"It was a moment of enlightenment. And ever since that day, devotees can have the darshan of Radharani's lotus feet." Amoghalila is satisfied to hear this nectar story from Maharaja.

Sachi Dulal: The thing I liked about Radha-Damodara was that the bus was nicely painted and kept really clean. The brahmacharis were clean and nicely dressed. Radha-Damodara were so sweet and so beautiful. They were nicely taken care of. They were the only Deities in the movement where Radharani's lotus feet were shown. I always relished that.

When people come on the bus for darshan, Vishnujana Maharaja explains how Silavati began showing Radharani's lotus feet many years ago when Radha-Damodara first came to America. Prabhupada had given his sanction because Radha and Damodara are at the kumara age of young children so it's all right. Silavati was the foremost pujari at the time having been trained personally by Srila Prabhupada.

=> Radha-Damodara Vilasa II - Vaiyasaki dasa

From: "Sankarshan Das Adhikari"

Subject: RE: Radharani's lotus feet

Version 1 - September 11, 2018

Date: 3 September 2012 7:33:23 PM AEST

To: "Nrsimha Kavaca dasa"

Dear Nrsimha Kavaca Prabhu,

Please accept my obeisances.
All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Due to my traveling and preaching I am heavily backlogged on my emails. That's why I have taken so long to reply to your important email.

I heard this directly heard it from His Holiness Vishnujana Maharaja on the morning of 9 September 1972 at the ISKCON center in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. This was the morning after the famous Rock Opera performance at the Syria Mosque, which was attended by Srila Prabhupada.

He told me that Prabhupada had instructed him that Radha Damodar could be awakened 6 hours after they took rest. This was because they were up late as the stars of our Rock Opera and could only take rest after the opera was finished.

He also told me that Prabhupada gave us permission to show Radharani's lotus feet. I understood this as a special instruction for Sri Sri Radha Damodar on the Road Show, not as a general principle for all deities. Also, I do not assume that this applies to Radha and Damodar where they are now stationed on the altar at Gita Nagari. I support your analysis that her feet should not be shown.

I hope this meets you in the best of health
and in an ecstatic mood.

Your servant,

Sankarshan Das Adhikari