

ABHAYA MUDRA DASI

War on maya

Abhaya Mudra Dasi

Recently there have been discussions among devotees regarding whether a woman can take the post of a diksha guru. In the pursuance of solving this difficult issue three distinctive factors should be examined. The first is the women's psychology; second, the technicalities that operate in the society of devotees today; and third the mechanics that control the world at large.

By the influence of material Nature and the Supreme Lord, the mentality of the woman is distinctly different from that of a man due to the fact that they are souls housed in different bodies. Regardless of the type of body we find ourselves born with, our nationality and our race, it is undeniable that the material conditions into which we have been born affect our mental frame. And neither are devotees exempt because material conditions affect devotional attitudes. Women have the specific facility to give birth. It does not matter whether a woman has given birth or not in her life: she looks upon herself as a mother and carries herself with that dignified importance. And she expects to be treated in a respectful way for her position.

Additionally, this universal fact about a women's physical structure as mother also affects her mentality. The equality of women as a sort of universal mother naturally makes them feel that they should be treated with equality. It is seen that when an exceptional woman is respected her female friends become envious. This resentment amongst women longing for equal treatment is illustrated in the story of the poisoning of the son of King Chitraketu described in Shrimad Bhagavatam (6.14.42/43).

“Shri Shukadeva Gosvami continued: Being neglected by their husband and seeing Kritadyuti's opulence in possessing a son, Kritadyuti's co-wives always burned in envy, which became extremely strong.”

As their envy increased, they lost their intelligence. Being extremely hardhearted and unable to tolerate the King's neglect, they finally administered poison to the son.

Therefore, considering the situation of most women at large, it is a delicate issue whether or not it is reasonable to allow an exceptional member of the fair sex to become a diksha guru. Young girls will not have a problem respecting that experienced Matajee, although her “peers” will certainly try to somehow poison her efforts. So, while considering a specifically qualified women for becoming diksha gurus we must also take into account the ramifications that are created by the situation. Even if the opportunity for the Woman Guru is kept open theoretically, this open-minded approach to a knotty situation will keep the peace within ISKCON.

Let's look now the workings operating within ISKCON at present. Many devotees are in favor of women obediently following stri dharma or the duty of women as wives and mothers. One writer proposed that men should take initiation from a woman only if she is able to die with her husband at his burning ghat (although committing Sati really has nothing to do with spirituality). Sati has to do with attachment to a

husband which is easily formed when a woman is married to the right man at early age. My own grandmother, who certainly was not a devotee of Shri Krishna, died shortly after my grandfather's death due to her deep attachment to him. She is not an exceptional example even in modern times when the Sati rite is forbidden. But this kind of attachment can be formed only in a society whose strength lies in the fact that it is based on varnashrama. Some devotees want women to act on the level of varnashrama when, in fact, such a society is far from being in place. Moreover, in the system of varnashrama there is an undying respect for the role of the woman as mother which ensures that woman will be protected.

Thus today's devotees should first understand the importance of motherhood in society. As devotees we should establish strong family units wherein compatible couples who are joined according to character and taste (as explained by Shrila Prabhupada <http://srimad-bhagavatam.com/?g=25504>) can execute their devotional activities in an atmosphere of mutual peace and respect. As long as there is any disrespect in the family, then varnashrama dharma cannot be properly established. Daily we experience that the International Society for Krishna Consciousness has not yet attained the functional model of varnashrama of which StriDharma is an essential element. Therefore, it seems a bit irrelevant to discuss the dharma of women—either as wives, mothers, devotees or gurus—since these duties are not yet properly established in our society.

It is a fact that the divorce rate in ISKCON is at least as high than the rate in the society of karmis. At least in the country I live in, Bulgaria, husbands and wives tend to have a far better rate of fidelity than I have witnessed in ISKCON. So much did husband and wife infidelity displease Shrila Prabhupada, that despite the fact that His Divine Grace introduced the concept of Vedic marriage to the West, he wrote the following letter to a woman disciple:

Letters : 1972 Correspondence : January : Letter to: Svati — India : LT_720200_A1 :

So your husband has gone but you should not be too much worried, your husband will come back to Krsna consciousness, if not now then later. Anyone who has tasted the bliss of Krsna consciousness he cannot stay away for a very long time. So you should not be too much concerned. Do not be too much worried—forget the past, do not be attached to it for we are only thinking of how we may now please the Supreme Personality of Godhead and the devotees are always optimistic for the advancement of their spiritual progress. So in the meantime there is no question of any more marriage by you so you will become freed from the entangling grip of maya which means sex life. Just see, so many people are suffering so much just for a little sex life. I am so much disturbed by problems caused by sex life that I am not going to sanction any more marriages. Our devotees must do it at their own risk from now on and they must provide their own income for living together outside the temple or if they live in the temple they must live separately.

So who is teaching who? Is it not reasonable to expect that devotees should rise to that level which is socially accepted before attempting to reestablish varnashrama dharma (and stri dharma)? Devotional service to Shri Krishna comes first and foremost before any social or religious duty. This is the main instruction given by Shri Krishna for every one His devotees in Bhagavad Gita 18.66

sarva-dharman parityajya

mam ekam sharanam vraja

aham tvam sarva-papebhyo

mokshayishyami ma shucah

Finally we should consider the world we live in and its effects upon devotees. Today devotees are very much part of the big society since properly insulated and self-sufficient communities have yet to be established for devotees to function independently from the large society. Many devotees, torn between karmi work and maintaining their families, barely find time to execute their devotional duties. It could be said that struggling devotees who “have their feet in two boats” are not really part of varnashrama dharma, but are part of some phantasmagorical new world order. For many, where exactly they stand in this or that world is open to speculation. To expect that devotee women that work karmi jobs to maintain their families are able and willing to follow stri dharma is a bit of a stretch to ask. They are already under pressure from so many quarters. In pursuance of its irrational sense gratification, the world at large has spun out of control and has gone certifiably insane.

With its unknown elite pulling the strings, this demonic world under the control of mad men is on the verge of cataclysm. In the crucial hours before us, it may be out of place to discuss whether women, men or whoever else is supposed to follow their quiet dharma. Dear friends, such notions are for such times as when everything is going fine. But when there is war and we are supposed to fight Maya with all our reserves, we should employ all our soldiers with full power. There are many examples in history when an important city is attacked and the citizens are on the verge of destruction. Then women also join alongside the men and engage in the struggle for life or death. This is our situation today. Maya’s soldiers are attacking and they are sometimes engaged in the most deplorable and wicked tactics. They are like Trojan horses that have been smuggled inside the very fortress of the city of our devotion.

It is unwise to mistake that everything in our Society is at peace and that we are now on the verge of establishing varnashrama dharma. No, this ideal of a perfect varnashram civilization is a dream for the future. Just see how the world is being rapidly destroyed. Nature is crying because of demonic exploitation. People in general are being sedated by drugs into thinking “I’m OK, you’re OK” when actually they are being fattened up for mass extermination. There is a real war before us. Therefore devotee women should also be called up to fight in the army of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. At least in times such as those before us women should be prepared to preach in every possible way, and the qualified amongst them should become gurus. And those who have a qualified guru and are strong enough to take on the challenge should initiate. There are billions of living confused and deluded human beings stumbling through this world who need salvation while the number of initiating gurus is limited. The more devotees who can initiate the better regardless of their gender, nationality and race. It must be understood that due to the strong responsibility that comes with initiation that a guru can take on only a limited number of disciples. Thus every devotee should qualify himself or herself to become diksha gurus now at this crucial moment in time.

Many living entities may approach the Society with the burden of heavy karma and a guru must be able to take on that burden of sinful reactions physically as well as mentally. Even from our astrological practices, which are based upon Krishna consciousness, that when a devotee comes to us with some karmic burden we must help in removing that karma to help the devotee clear his path to advancement. When a pandit or guide accepts the burden of karma which affects him or her, what to speak of a guru. Only by the mercy of our gurus and Shri Krishna, upon whom we completely depend, is the burden of taking on such karma minimized. A guru must be prepared to take on burdens. It is not a position for accepting the reverential worship of others and personal glory only. It is a post that comes with responsibility. There are many devotees who understand these risks and do not wish to become diksha gurus despite their personal qualifications. But such qualified members should be encouraged. A devotee does not mind giving his or her life to serve the mission of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Shrila Prabhupada wanted that all his disciples become gurus:

“We got this information from His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur, and that knowledge is still going on. You are receiving through his servant. And in future the same knowledge will go to your students. This is called parampara system. It is not that you have become a student and you’ll remain student. No. One day you shall become also guru and make more students, more students, more. That is Chaitanya Mahaprabhu’s mission, not that perpetually... Yes, one should remain perpetually a student, but he has to act as guru. That is the mission of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu... So we should become always a very obedient student to our guru. That is the qualification. That is the spiritual qualification.”

Hyderabad, December 10, 1976 Lecture

The line between siksha guru and diksha guru is very subtle; often one guru develops to become the other:

“According to shastric injunctions, there is no difference between shiksha-guru and diksha-guru, and generally the shiksha-guru later on becomes the diksha-guru.” SB 4.12 Purport

The qualification for becoming a diksha guru should be determined by the desire of a certain person who longs for initiation for him or her. There cannot be a diksha guru when there is no disciple. This is the decisive factor. If someone is inspired by a particular advanced devotee then he or she can become his or her diksha guru ... And then, when peace prevails in the world and the fortress of the town of devotion is secured and varnashrama reestablished, at that time women can go back and practice their stri dharma. This is the ideal.

www.vedicastrologers.org