

Interviews of Shri Vaishnava Scholars by HG Nityananda dasa

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Renowned scholar Chetalur Shrivatsangacharya Swami of Shri Sampradaya who has received President Award for his specialization in the field of various sastras.

Question:

Can wome chant Vedic mantras?

Answer:

In Valmiki Ramayana, Sundara Kanda at the Episode where Hanuman having seated at top of simsapa tree in Ashoka vatika, looks at Mother Sita and contemplates how to meet Mother Sita. .Near by was a beautiful lake. In that place, a Shri Vaishnava commentator Govinda Raja comments that Hanumanji is thinking that Mother Sita may come to this lake for performing her Sandhya Gayatri chanting. There in Govinda Raja Acarya quotes this particular verse - *purayugeshu narinam* that it is not uncommon or unrighteous that Sita being a woman could have performed the Sandhya rites which includes chanting of the gayatri mantra because as she belonged to the Treta Yuga and in the previous yugas women had rights for chanting Vedic mantras and it was proper at that time but this shouldn't be followed in the age of Kali.

Question:

Why women are forbidden to perform certain rituals like chanting of the Vedic matntras in the age of Kali

Answer:

Mahabharata mentions that just before the Kali yuga began all the rishis assembled in Naimisharanya and approached Vedavyasa and as the Kali yuga approached, Vyasadevaalongwith other rishis after finishing their morning regular bath, they went to the lake exactly at the time of the beginning of Kali yuga and again performed their bathing and rituals.

At that time Vyasadeva, dipped in the water 3 times and chanted: *Kali sadhu shudra sadhuh striyasadhvyah* and he came out chanting like this, taken thrice bath and other sages asked Vedavyasa what is the reason for this unusual 3 times bathing and chanting *Kali-sadhuh, shudra-sadhuh, striya-sadhvyah*. [Glorious or fortunate indeed is the age of kali,sudras(Of this age), and women(of this age).] Vedavyasa didn't reply immediately but again later after the noon duties and their lunch program sages again asked.

That time Vedavyasa replied that I said shudra sadhu because in the previous yugas, even the Sudras are also have ordained to perform certain simple fire sacrifices(which of course doesn't involve the vedic mantras) but now in this age of Kali even without performing such rituals(since now in this age of Kali they are prohibited to do so)and simply by performing their prescribed duties they can perfect their lives. And Kali sadhu because just by chanting the holy names of the Lord in Kali yuga one can attain perfection.

And striyah sadhvyah {women of this Kali age are fortunate or glorious} because in the previous ages ladies (dvija) also were ordained for chanting Vedic mantras and performing Vedic rituals and wearing of sacred thread and maunji but in this age of Kali they come in forbidden category for women(except uttering of few sentences of vedic mantras that also with out svara by wife as she assists her husband in certain house hold rituals like laaja homa and so on.).

So the ladies are not entitled to chant (all)Vedic mantras{but just few selected} and performing Vedic rituals, just by taking care of their household responsibilities primarily assisting husband and raising children they perfect their lives easily. That is the reason Vedavyasa said that chanted these 3 sentences as he took his bath when Kali yuga began. infact the word Brahmana means Brahma bhanati or Brahma hanati. Brahma means Vedas one who chants the Vedas is called Brahmana. When the women are not entitled to chant Vedic mantras how they can be called as Brahmani, however the wife, daughter, mother of Brahmana can be called as Brahmani because of being related to a Brahman husband/ father,mother/ son, daughter. So in this way the qualification of Brahmana also fits to them. But definitely they are not entitled to chant the Vedic Mantras but still the term Brahmana can be applied to them. Such are the traditions according to the Shastras.

So even though the verses are quoted that the women are qualified to chant Vedic matras but all the acaryas are saying that such kind of rules are not meant for this age of Kali (like asvamedha yaga,cow sacrifice,sannyasa of different type etc), these are meant for the previous ages.

Thus it shouldn't be taken as evidence that ladies have equal rights with men in such kind of duties. This is also the opinion of other Previous Acharyas.

Question:

In the Shri Vasihnvasampradya are women diksha guru or samashrayena acharyas? If yes why, if not why not?

Answer:

In Shri vaishnava Samradaya, women are not diksha guru or samashrayena acharyas. The reason can be many. Sometimes reasons may not fully understood but according to the

Parampara and the previous acharya system, women were not given the role of samashrayena acharyas/ diksha gurus.

Diksha also involves the fivefold samsakaras in which there is a samsakara called tapa samsakara. In The Tapa samsakara, when the hot conch and disc marks is placed on the candidate shoulder, there are certain Vedic mantras to be chanted for which women are not qualified. These are all few of the reasons why women are not given samashrayena acharya (Diksa Guru) position.

Question:

What about Lakshmi/ Shri? Is she not a Samashrayenaacharya guru?

Answer:

Lakshmi being the consort of the Lord who is in the divine status. She is the only exceptional special case who is in the diksha guru parampara, Narinamuttamavadhu- performs a special role of initiating Guru, other than that no women in the entire Parampara has taken up that role.

Shri bhashyam Swami of Mysore

Question:

In the ShriVasihnavasampradya are women dikshaguru orsamashrayenaacharyas? If yes why, if not why not?

Answer:

Women are never had a position of samashrayena acharya/diksha guru in the entire parampara. So being Shistacara (standard set through the prvious acarya's examplery activities)till now no women has accepted or no women has been given the role of Samashrayena Acharya or Diksha Guru role. There are many more reasons in which more details can be given.

Lakshmi Thathachar Swami of Melukote who founded Melukote Sanskrit Research Academy

Question:

In the ShriVasihnavasampradya are women dikshaguru orsamashrayenaacharyas? If yes why, if not why not?

Answer:

Women may be devotionally more qualified and advanced than many men, may be even more qualified and advanced than a or male SamashrayenaAcharya Diksha Guru and even they could be source of inspiration and object of veneration and worship in some cases for a SamashrayenaAcharya Diksha Guru (male) but the official role of Diksha Guru or Samashrayena Acharya is not given to them by the Shastra or the Shishtacara or the examples set by the previous Acarya parampara.

Question:

What about Lakshmi/ Shri? Is she not Samashrayena acharya guru?

Answer:

Lakshmi is in a special category, she is almost non-different than Narayana. Her position is a special position where she is the only Acarya who has done such a thing.

Question:

What about Andal or Goda Devi? Is she not a SamashrayenaAcharya or Diksha Guru?

Answer:

No not at all Godadevi or Andal is not at all SamashrayenaAcharya or Diksha Guru. She never had any disciples. Of course her devotional service, her examples and her songs and her verses were chanted by the great Acharyas in the Parampara. Though she is the transcendental consort of Lord Narayana who descended in the material world for transcendental pastime and great preacher through her example, still she is not officially an initiating Guru or SamashrayenaAcharya in the Parampara.

Question:

Is it not such kind of partiality shown from men and women?

Answer:

This is not partiality, this is a system where people are doing their respective capable duties. For example for a Sannyasi chanting of the mantra 'Om' is prescribed. When the Pranava mantra is chanted properly according to the system it gives the chanter the quality of sterility, it makes the person sterile if really chanted properly .

But if women also says that I am also equal to man who is a Sannyasi, then it gives undesired result that such as a woman becomes infertile. It is not partiality but a different injunction and different rules according to the capability and the nature of different personalities.