

# **A Social Model for ISKCON**

by a subcommittee of the Indian Continental Committee

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## Introduction

Srila Prabhupada openly expressed his disappointment that often his disciples were unable to act in accordance with basic regulative and moral principles they vowed to follow at initiation. At one point he even decided to no longer offer *sannyasa* or sanction marriages.

But this hypocrisy should be stopped. There have been so many fallen down. First of all there will be no *sannyasi* anymore. I have got very bad experience. And at least, we are not going to create new *sannyasis*.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

These same difficulties and their resultant miseries, which were widespread during Srila Prabhupada's time, arisen from failure to control the sex impulse, are still occurring today—resulting in fallen leaders, bewildered followers, broken marriages, and a general lack of faith in the ability of ISKCON's leadership to create a healthy social system for its members. While some progress has been made within certain sections of ISKCON (e.g. stricter rules for the *sannyasa* order) there is still no collective consensus as to what social system will be most conducive for fulfilling ISKCON's overall purposes.

At the annual GBC meetings in 2000, an attempt was made to rectify a degree of ISKCON's social complications. But to date a definite social model soundly rooted in Vaisnava *sastra* and tradition has yet to emerge. Therefore, as a step toward building such a consensus, a discussion was initiated between the Indian Continental Committee (ICC), represented by a delegated subcommittee, and the GBC Body.

The ICC subcommittee felt that some points of discussion would be difficult to address for want of a clear and concise social model to refer to. Hopefully the social model presented herein is concise yet accurate enough to help the discussants evaluate existing social policies as well as formulate effective social policies in the future.

One might ask why a model of anything is necessary for our better understanding? The following example illustrates why: In ISKCON's past, many devotees, out of a desire to follow Vedic culture, have had arranged marriages. Many of those marriages failed. Because of so many failures, some have come to believe that Westerners attempting to implement Vedic culture is generally not a good idea. They conclude that trying to adopt Vedic culture results in disruption, abuse, and other social problems. But this conclusion has two defects — it fails to account for devotees who have succeeded in varying degrees to implement Vedic culture, and it assumes the motivations in all cases were proper and that there were no misunderstandings. Not all arranged marriages that involved Western devotees failed. Some of these arranged marriages worked out wonderfully. Srila Prabhupada himself spoke with pride about these successes, sometimes mentioning disciples by name.<sup>3</sup> Including these successes in the former analysis leads to different conclusions: Some who attempted may have done so improperly; one or both partners may have had tainted motives, etc. It is not enough to draw conclusions from events without recourse to

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation: 7 January 1977, Bombay

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Svati: 1972, India

<sup>3</sup> “And you know our Jagatarini, wife of Bhurijana, she was a theatrical girl and earning millions of dollars, but she has given up everything. You have seen his wife, you all, Bhurijana's wife? She is a nice girl, educated, qualified. But she is satisfied. I asked her to go and marry Bhurijana. She never saw her (him). She never saw her (him), what kind of husband she is going to accept. But simply on my word, she came, and she came from Los Angeles to Japan and got married. Similarly I am asking one girl. She is a French girl, Mandakini. So I am asking her to go to Russia and marry one boy. She has never seen. So they obey in such a way.” (Room Conversation: 18 April 1972, Hong Kong)

guru, *sadhu* and *sastra*, nor is it enough that we quote guru, *sadhu* and *sastra* without attempting to show how they explain events before our eyes. The exercise of creating a model helps us to reexamine questionable assumptions and helps us see our prejudices for what they are. Indeed, this subcommittee found that the preparation of this social model forced the members to consider facts not before considered and forced us to reexamine some of our assumptions.

In preparing this model, special attention was given to what *sastra* and Vaisnava-*acaryas*, especially Srila Prabhupada, expect of us. For instance, Srila Rupa Goswami emphasizes that any solution not approved by *sastra* could yield even more trouble:

*sruti smriti puranadi pancaratra vidhim vina  
aikantiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate*

“Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the Upanisads, Puranas and Narada-pancaratra is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society.”<sup>4</sup>

It is our sincere hope that whatever faults might exist in the premises or conclusions of this paper will be brought out, so that all may benefit from an accurate model of a social structure for ISKCON worthy of the high Krsna conscious ideals of our parampara.

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<sup>4</sup> *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* 1.2.101, as quoted in *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, Chapter 7, text 3, purport

## Srila Prabhupada's Social Plan

Srila Prabhupada thought highly of his Western disciples, both the men and women. On many occasions he praised their enthusiasm to actively promote the *sankirtana* movement. Indeed he considered the active preaching by his female disciples to be a “new thing” in the history of Gaudiya Vaisnavism:

So I am especially proud how my householder disciples are preaching Lord Caitanya's Mission. This is a new thing in the history of the Sankirtana Movement. In India all the *acaryas*, and their descendants later on, acted only from the man's side. Their wives were at home because that is the system from old times that women are not required to go out. But in *Bhagavad-gita* we find that women are also equally competent like the men in the matter of Krsna Consciousness Movement. Please therefore carry on these missionary activities, and prove it by practical example that there is no bar for anyone in the matter of preaching work for Krsna Consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

In Europe and America boys and girls mingle unrestrictedly and have equal rights; therefore it is not possible to completely separate the men from the women. However, we are thoroughly instructing both men and women how to preach, and actually they are preaching wonderfully. Of course, we very strictly prohibit illicit sex. Boys and girls who are not married are not allowed to sleep together or live together, and there are separate arrangements for boys and girls in every temple. *Grhasthas* live outside the temple, for in the temple we do not allow even husband and wife to live together. The results of this are wonderful. Both men and women are preaching the gospel of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Lord Krsna with redoubled strength.<sup>6</sup>

Aware of the disease of illicit sex in Western society and the concomitant difficulty for unmarried men and women thereof to avoid intermingling, Srila Prabhupada thus engaged both sexes in active preaching. As mentioned above, the results were wonderful. Nonetheless Srila Prabhupada cautioned his disciples that in Western society “equal rights” for women was the cause of so much social disturbance:

**Ms. Nixon:** How do you feel about women's liberation?

**Srila Prabhupada:** So-called equal rights for women means that the men cheat the women. Suppose a woman and a man meet, they become lovers, they have sex, the woman becomes pregnant, and the man goes away. The woman has to take charge of the child and beg alms from the government, or else she kills the child by having an abortion. This is the woman's independence. In India, although a woman may be poverty-stricken, she stays under the care of her husband, and he takes responsibility for her. When she becomes pregnant, she is not forced to kill the child or maintain him by begging. So, which is real independence—to remain under the care of the husband or to be enjoyed by everyone?<sup>7</sup>

Suppose a woman is trying to become man artificially, how long it will go on? How she can be happy? That is not possible. Actually, in the Western countries at least we see that the woman class, they want equal rights with men. And there is. There is no distinction. But it is my experience, the woman class, they are not happy in the Western countries.<sup>8</sup>

Just like in the Western countries, the women declare that “Why we should not have equal rights with the man?” But by nature it is different. The man is the enjoyer, and the woman is the enjoyed. That is the position. *Bhokta* and *bhogyā*. There are many social problems in your country—I do not wish to discuss—but it is very grave problems.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to Himavati: 20 December 1969

<sup>6</sup> *Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta*, *Adi-līla* 7.38, Purport

<sup>7</sup> *Science of Self Realization*, ch. 1: “What Is Krsna Consciousness?”

<sup>8</sup> Lecture on *Bhagavad-gīta*: 8 December 1972, Ahmedabad

<sup>9</sup> Lecture on *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.16.7: 4 January 1974, Los Angeles

Srila Prabhupada recognized the sincerity and achievements of his Western lady disciples and thus encouraged them to participate fully in preaching activities. Yet he considered that due to natural bodily differences, women would never share equal rights with men and that any attempt to artificially institute such would result in social turmoil:

**Indian man:** Tilaka's(?) wife, she told me. . . She was very upset you know. One day she, when she came to see you and that one rascal yogi was there and he said that in the Vedas everything is mentioned that we can drink and woman and the man have equal right. Then you answered her, and she was also saying the same thing and you answered her, "Okay, if woman and the man have equal right, then why not your husband begot the children. . . Why not you begot the children in the womb of your husband?" And she was very upset, you know. She said, "Prabhupada sometimes say the things like that which are unreasonable, you know."

**Prabhupada:** It may require. . . No, I said that "If you are equal rights, then make some arrangement: sometimes you become pregnant; sometimes he becomes pregnant. Why there is not right, equal right?"

**Indian man:** She was telling me when. . . She. . . I said that "Prabhupada sometimes says these things that we feel all ashamed, you know, because. . ."

**Devotee (2):** The medicine is not always palatable for these people.

**Prabhupada:** But in speaking spiritual understanding we cannot make any compromise. What to speak of in Mauritius, in Chicago I told. There was great agitation in papers.<sup>10</sup>

Srila Prabhupada recommended that while cultivating *bhakti*, men and women should also observe social customs that encourage basic moral behavior—essentially, that men should be responsible providers and caretakers and that women be shy and chaste. But how could Vaisnavis remain shy and chaste while simultaneously preaching aggressively?

75-07-30

Srimatis Jagaddhatri, Pasupati,  
Sailogata, & Pamela devi dasis  
Dallas

My Dear Daughters:

Please accept my blessings. I am in due receipt of your letter dated July 29, 1975 and have noted the contents. Regarding the problem of how to be aggressive on Sankirtana and submissive in the temple, my request to you is that you should go on being aggressive on Sankirtana. I myself was aggressive in coming to your country. No one invited me. Even you boys and girls did not invite me. But, I came and I preached aggressively, and therefore you are now my disciples. So now you well know you have to approach the men and women of your country, and it may appear that superficially that you have to disturb them. They are doing their business peacefully, and you come and disturb them, "Please take this Krsna book."

Of course it is good that you are concerned about being chaste, shy, and submissive amongst your godbrothers. Canakya Pandit said that every man should see all other women as mother, and similarly a woman should see all men as son. So what is your difficulty? If you are completely aggressive on Sankirtana, there should be no material aggressiveness and pride remaining. You have to distinguish between devotees and non-devotees.

Aggression for the cause of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu is pure. If you become completely absorbed in such aggression to spread *sankirtana* movement, there will be no question of wanting to lord it over in the temple. Preaching purifies us of these material tendencies for sense gratification. It is simply a matter of time that you will see this. Do not worry. Krsna will help you.

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<sup>10</sup> Morning Walk: 10 December 1975

I hope this meets you in good health.

Your ever well wisher,  
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami  
ACBS/bs<sup>11</sup>

**Jayatirtha:** He said you can become humble by becoming aggressive for Krsna. (laughter) One girl was asking that “When we are doing sankirtana, I must be very aggressive, but when I come to the temple, then I’m supposed to be very humble.” Prabhupada’s answer was...

**Prabhupada:** “A lamb at home, a lion in the chase.” (laughter) When you are chasing, you must be a lion. (laughter) But when you come home, you do not try to chase the devotees. (laughter)<sup>12</sup>

**Yogesvara:** Here’s a problem. The women today want the same rights as men. How can they be satisfied?

**Prabhupada:** Everything will be satisfied. Just like our women, Krsna conscious, they are working. They don’t want equal rights with men. It is due to Krsna consciousness. They are cleansing the temple, they are cooking very nicely. They are satisfied. They never say that “I have to go to Japan for preaching like Prabhupada.” They never say. This is artificial. So Krsna consciousness means work in his constitutional position. The women, men, when they remain in their constitutional position, there will be no artificial (indistinct). . . (loud traffic noises)<sup>13</sup>

Srila Prabhupada wanted that his lady disciples maintain their enthusiasm for preaching while simultaneously cultivating shyness and chastity, and that his males disciples become responsible in all aspects of their lives. (“First become conscious, then become Krsna conscious.”) If men are irresponsible or women unchaste, then their day-to-day lives and Krsna consciousness activities are consequently disrupted. As we have seen in ISKCON’s history, such disruption affects preaching at all levels.

Srila Prabhupada and previous *acaryas* recommended as the best path to peace and enlightenment the cultivation of *bhakti* while simultaneously observing moral and social prescriptions of *sastra*. If a group applies social rules and customs recommended by *sastra* but fails to develop *bhakti*, then its social system necessarily becomes a means for one class to exploit others (for example, India’s caste system). And if people perform *bhakti* yet neglect moral and social precepts recommended in *sastra*, then their practice of *bhakti* becomes crippled and absurd. In the history of Gaudiya Vaisnavism this latter phenomenon spawned and nurtured *sahajiyaism*. *Bhakti* adds transcendental value to basic moral precepts and the social rules and customs thus engendered; observing moral rules and customs creates a situation favorable for cultivating pure *bhakti*. Both *bhakti* and the moral social prescriptions of *sastra* must therefore be practiced simultaneously; neither should be neglected. This basic understanding forms the cornerstone of the social model presented herein.

## A Note on Varnasrama-dharma

The Vedic literature contains volumes of information regarding proper social organization, generally referred to as *varnasrama-dharma*, and Gaudiya Vaisnavas accept principles of *varnasrama-dharma* as being mostly favorable for Krsna conscious life. Yet within ISKCON discussions of *varnasrama-dharma* are generally inconclusive. We suggest that this is due to varying concepts of what *varnasrama-dharma* is, and hence a need to define as exactly as possible the term *varnasrama-dharma*.

Some aspects of *varnasrama-dharma* exist in every social structure, even those of the modern West. Everywhere we find teachers, leaders, merchants, and workers. Everywhere are students, householders, retired persons, and renunciants. So there is no question of avoiding *varnasrama-dharma* in ISKCON’s

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<sup>11</sup> Letter to Jagaddhatri, Pasupati, Sailogata, Pamela: 30 July 1975, Dallas

<sup>12</sup> Conversation with writer Sandy Nixon: 13 July 1975, Philadelphia

<sup>13</sup> Morning Walk: 27 May 1974, Rome

social organization. Although it is not expected that within ISKCON all Vedic social principles will be fully implemented in the foreseeable future, ISKCON's leaders should appreciate that the information about *varnasrama-dharma* in Vedic literature is a vast repository of tried and tested knowledge. This knowledge should be studied, understood, and utilized in solving problems of social organization and management. Not that a particular policy should be implemented merely because it is Vedic or within *varnasrama-dharma*, but in attempting to solve social problems we should first turn to the sources of perfect knowledge that constitute the Vedic literature and its corollary *smṛti sastras*. Certainly these should not be shunned or neglected or relegated below modern theories of social organization propagated by conditioned souls.

## The Compulsions of a Preaching Society

The members of ISKCON are charged with the task of giving Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the entire world, to radically change people's lives on a wide scale. Therefore Srila Prabhupada instituted projects in major cities of the world to facilitate vast numbers of people in living according to true spiritual principles. And so we see that ISKCON's domain of functioning encompasses people at various stages of devotion:

- People who have chronic difficulty in following basic moral principles yet nonetheless assist ISKCON's preachers and try to serve Kṛṣṇa in various ways.<sup>14</sup> They are commonly identified as Life Members, FOLK members, people who attend the Sunday program, or those who accept *prasadam* and render some service. For some, taking *prasadam* and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is their only service.
- Persons who observe basic moral principles and perform *sadhana-bhakti* under the guidance of a spiritual master.<sup>15</sup> This group is commonly termed "active members." They also engage in direct preaching or perhaps live in and contribute to an ISKCON farm project.
- Those who have actually awakened their love for Kṛṣṇa.<sup>16</sup> Such devotees with some rare exceptions are exemplary in their practice of *sadhana-bhakti*<sup>17</sup> and their undeviating commitment to broadcasting the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa.<sup>18</sup> They are rare in this world.<sup>19</sup>

The interrelationship of the above-mentioned three classes of devotee may be compared to that of various parts of a tree. Just as a tree's sustenance depends on the roots, without the mercy of pure devotees there can be no Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. Just as the roots of a tree support the trunk and branches, similarly the pure devotees provide spiritual nourishment for the intermediate devotees, who closely assist the pure devotees and preach on their order. Guided by the pure devotees, they derive inspiration from serving them, and in turn are able to guide and help neophyte devotees, who may be compared to the twigs and leaves attached to the branches of a tree. These neophytes, by sincerity of effort and the mercy of intermediate and pure devotees, are thus gradually elevated to the intermediate and eventually the advanced stages of *bhakti*.

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<sup>14</sup> If you cannot practice the regulations of *bhakti-yoga*, then just try to work for Me, because by working for Me you will come to the perfect stage. (*Bhagavad-gīta* 12.10)

<sup>15</sup> My dear Arjuna, O winner of wealth, if you cannot fix your mind upon Me without deviation, then follow the regulative principles of *bhakti-yoga*. In this way develop a desire to attain Me. (*Bhagavad-gīta* 12.9)

<sup>16</sup> Just fix your mind upon Me, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and engage all your intelligence in Me. Thus you will live in Me always, without a doubt. (*Bhagavad-gīta* 12.8)

<sup>17</sup> People who have actually awakened their love for Kṛṣṇa may also engage in *raganuga-bhakti*, and their practice of devotional service at times may seem to be outside the purview of *sadhana-bhakti*. However, for the purposes of this paper, we assume that even if someone in ISKCON is a *raganuga-bhakti*, that the behavior of he or she, like Prabhupada, will be in the mode of setting an example for others.

<sup>18</sup> When a person realizes himself to be an eternal servitor of Kṛṣṇa, he loses interest in everything but Kṛṣṇa's service. Always thinking of Kṛṣṇa, devising means by which to spread the holy name of Kṛṣṇa, he understands that his only business is in spreading the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement all over the world. Such a person is to be recognized as an *uttama-adhikari*, and his association should be immediately accepted according to the six processes (*dadati pratigrhṇati*, etc.). (*Nectar of Instruction*, verse 5, Purport)

<sup>19</sup> "Pure devotional service is rarely achieved." (*Nectar of Devotion*, ch. 1)



There is no question that the mercy of the pure devotee is essential to establishing Kṛṣṇa consciousness in society at large. What is not so obvious is the importance of the efforts of the intermediate devotees in establishing the *sankirtana* movement. Their work is also essential for elevating the rest of society, particularly neophyte devotees. Since intermediate devotees canvas on behalf of the *parampara*, often they will be the only contact that neophytes have with the *parampara*. The faith and inspiration that neophytes should derive from the intermediate class of devotees depends on how nicely the latter practice the teachings of the *parampara*. Even non-devotees may become attracted to the intermediate devotees' exemplification of the *parampara*: *yad yad acarati srestas . . .*

Whether material or spiritual, the elevation of both the neophytes and non-devotees depend on others' exemplary acts. Social regulation is therefore essential for the intermediate devotees.<sup>20</sup> As explained by Rupa Goswami, the performer of *bhakti* must not neglect social (*varnasrama*) principles described in *sastra*.<sup>21</sup> Otherwise for society there will simply be disturbance—social unrest, *sahajiyaism*, and other unfortunate side effects. Just as the loose morals of modern society is sometimes the cause of even fully committed devotees being dragged again to sinful life, conversely ISKCON communities with solid traditions of high moral standards provide strength to new or weak members for avoiding sinful activities.

Admittedly, in effect social rules are invisible boundaries that keep some in but others out. Community traditions of high moral standards and the consequent distancing of those who do not maintain these standards might be viewed by some as impediments to preaching. But such boundaries are necessary for preserving the integrity and effectiveness of ISKCON's temple devotees and active members. Because these boundaries maintain the exemplariness of the intermediate devotees, whose association and example is more or less essential for the elevation of neophytes and non-devotees, they preserve the means by which neophytes and non-devotees can acquire the qualifications to move past these boundaries. These boundaries then should not be seen as barriers that keep the unprivileged outside of an exclusive club. Rather, they should be seen as gateways that are the means for the unqualified to cross over to the camp of the qualified.

Surely the long-term advantages gained by maintaining high standards, in terms of the spiritual benefit accrued by those protected by such boundaries, will far outweigh the alleged preaching benefits of being "merciful" to the spiritually weak. Indeed high standards themselves verily constitute preaching, and will in time attract those capable of following strict standards. Even if the number of active members and temple devotees is less because of higher standards, the lowering of standards would merely drain sincere devotees' enthusiasm for spiritual practice, the result being that preaching either becomes mundane or stops altogether. Members of socially strong communities will gain strength to preach widely, and by their preaching will encourage those below standard to improve themselves.

Building upon Srila Prabhupada's basic social theme that men should be responsible and protective, and women shy and chaste, the balance of this presentation describes sound principles of social organization pertaining to dealings between men and women, applicable to ISKCON.

## Cooperation Between Men and Women

A man's role in *varnasrama-dharma* cannot be understood independently of women; nor can a woman's role be understood separately from men. Indeed the very continuance of the human species depends on cooperation between the sexes. Even the various injunctions and prohibitions of the *sannyasa-asrama* are based on dealings with women. Thus strictures pertaining to a man's dealings with women are a most important aspect of the *varnasrama-dharma* institution.

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<sup>20</sup> ISKCON's active members and temple devotees.

<sup>21</sup> *sruti-smṛti-puranadi-pancaratna-vidhim vina, aikantiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate (Bhakti-rasamṛta-sindhu 1.2.101)*

## Women

Women occupy a special position within *varnasrama-dharma*. According to *Manu-smṛiti*, if the women of a family or community are happy, then peace and prosperity will flourish. But if the women are ill-treated, misfortune will befall everyone.

Women must be honored and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire (their own) welfare. Where women are honored, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards. Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers. The houses on which female relations, not being duly honored, pronounce a curse, perish completely, as if destroyed by magic.<sup>22</sup>

Women are gifted with many wonderful qualities that are generally not as prominent in men:

In every country and in every sect of religion it appears that the women are more interested than the men. This simplicity [of women] of acceptance of the Lord's authority is more effective than showy insincere religious fervor.<sup>23</sup>

Women in general, being very simple at heart, can very easily take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and when they develop love of Kṛṣṇa they can easily get liberation from the clutches of *maya*, which are very difficult for even so-called intelligent and learned men to surpass.<sup>24</sup>

The example of the learned *brahmanas* and their wives is vivid. The wives of the *brahmanas*, because they were inspired by pure devotional service, did not care for any kind of opposition. They immediately went to Kṛṣṇa. But the *brahmanas*, although they had come to know the supremacy of the Lord and were repenting, were still afraid of King Kamsa because they were too much addicted to fruitive activities.<sup>25</sup>

“Among women I am fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and patience.” . . . The seven opulences listed—fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and patience—are considered feminine. If a person possesses all of them or some of them he becomes glorious.<sup>26</sup>

When these qualities are maintained and encouraged, society becomes very peaceful and happy. Conversely, we learn from *Bhagavad-gīta* that when support and protection for women is absent, irreligion and hellish social conditions become prominent. Therefore it is essential for the peace, prosperity, and spiritual advancement of any society that its womenfolk be protected, well care for, honored, and worshiped.

## Men

Men and women have different but complementary and equally essential roles in *varnasrama-dharma* society. To complement the role of women as the nurturers in society, men are responsible for creating the favorable environment within which women and all others may be peaceful. . The material world is a dangerous place. Unless the dangerous elements are curbed, the natural gifts of women are quickly transformed into suffering for all. Vedic literature explains that the unleashed charms of women in any society exacerbates lust and creates havoc in that society.

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<sup>22</sup> *Manu-smṛiti*, 3.55–58, The Laws of Manu, Translation by G. Bühler, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1993, page 85

<sup>23</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.8.20, Purport

<sup>24</sup> *Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead*, ch. 23

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Bhagavad-gīta* 10.34 and Purport

As far as the women class are concerned, they are accepted as a power of inspiration for men. As such, women are more powerful than men. Mighty Julius Caesar was controlled by a Cleopatra. Such powerful women are controlled by shyness. Therefore, shyness is important for women. Once this control valve is loosened, women can create havoc in society by adultery. Adultery means production of unwanted children known as *varna-sankara*, who disturb the world.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore an essential element of a peaceful society is the role of man as protector and lord:

Actually the woman must always be protected by her husband. We always speak of the goddess of fortune as being placed on the chest of Narayana. In other words, the wife must remain embraced by her husband. Thus she becomes beloved and well protected.<sup>28</sup>

A further understanding to be derived from this example is that a woman, however powerful she may be in the material world, must be given protection, for as soon as she is unprotected she will be exploited by Raksasas like Ravana. Here the words *vaideha-raja-duhitari* indicate that before mother Sita was married to Lord Ramacandra she was protected by her father, Vaideha-raja. And when she was married she was protected by her husband. Therefore the conclusion is that a woman should always be protected. According to the Vedic rule, there is no scope for a woman's being independent (*asamaksam*), for a woman cannot protect herself independently.<sup>29</sup>

Because association with women is much restricted in the *sannyasa*-, *vanaprastha*-, and *brahmacari-asramas*, the responsibility of protecting women rests mainly with married men. Indeed a specific duty for the *grhastha* man is the protection of women and children. Thus the natural domicile for a woman is within the *grhastha-asrama*. And a society that attempts to protect women without deferring to the *grhastha-asrama* will result in widespread misery and failure. However, because even renunciants sometimes have to deal with women, the *sastras* also describe the kinds of business and constraints they must observe in their transactions with them.

### ***Dealings Between Renunciants and Women***

In the matter of dealing with women, the guidelines for *asramas* of the renunciants (*bramacari*, *vanaprastha*, and *sannyasa*) are relatively simple: associate with women as little as possible, only as much as necessary—no more. In the course of preaching one encounters so many women interested in spiritual life, so renunciants must not deny them the right to cultivate Krsna consciousness. Yet if not careful, in the name of preaching a renunciant can transgress restrictions for associating with women and eventually fall down.

If one accepts *sannyasa* at an immature stage, there is every possibility of his being attracted by women and lusty desires and thus again becoming a so-called *grhastha* or a victim of women. Such a person is most shameless, and he is called *vantasi*, or one who eats that which he has already vomited. He certainly leads a condemned life. In our Krsna consciousness movement it is advised, therefore, that the *sannyasis* and *brahmacaris* keep strictly aloof from the association of women so that there will be no chance of their falling down again as victims of lusty desires.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore renunciants must by all means minimize their association with women. Women should also be very reserved in their dealings with renunciants, similar to how the renunciants should deal with them.

It is very precarious condition. So we want to give them, all of them, "Come and live." But when you come here, if you get husband we have no objection. But don't canvass. That is not good.

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<sup>27</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.9.29, Purport

<sup>28</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.26.17, Purport

<sup>29</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 9.10.12, Purport

<sup>30</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.15.36, Purport

And that is making our sannyasis fall down. Of course, it is difficult, that young men, young women living, intermingling.<sup>31</sup>

Just as renunciants can fall down because of associating too intimately with women in the course of preaching, similarly in the name of service women can fall by seeking intimate association with renunciants. The same considerations are there for women in dealing with members of the *brahmacari*- and *vanaprastha-asramas*.

### ***Dealings Between Husbands and Wives***

Unlike the other *asramas*, the *grhastha-asrama* allows men and women to intermingle, but under restrictions. Even though *grhastha* men are allowed to associate with women to a degree that is forbidden to renunciants, still the principle of restricted association between the sexes applies also to *grhasthas*:

When one indulges in illicit sex life, as defined by the *sastras*, either by thinking, planning, talking about or actually having sexual intercourse, or by satisfying the genitals by artificial means, he is caught in the clutches of *maya*. These instructions apply not only to householders but also to *tyagis*, or those who are in the renounced order of life.<sup>32</sup>

All the rules and regulations apply equally to the householder and the sannyasi, the member of the renounced order of life. The *grhastha*, however, is given permission by the spiritual master to indulge in sex during the period favorable for procreation.<sup>33</sup>

By the nature of his duties a *grhastha* man must associate with women—especially his wife, daughter(s), or mother. Since the quintessential relationship in family life is between husband and wife, we discuss that relationship in detail.

### **Husband's Duties**

Men have three chief roles for their families: provider, protector, and guide.

The wife of King Puranjana was lying on the ground because she was neglected by her husband. Actually the woman must always be protected by her husband. We always speak of the goddess of fortune as being placed on the chest of Narayana. In other words, the wife must remain embraced by her husband. Thus she becomes beloved and well protected. Just as one saves his money and places it under his own personal protection, one should similarly protect his wife by his own personal supervision. Just as intelligence is always within the heart, so a beloved chaste wife should always have her place on the chest of a good husband. This is the proper relationship between husband and wife.<sup>34</sup>

I ask all my disciples to get married. I don't allow these boys living with boyfriend, girlfriend. No. You must get yourself married, life like gentlemen, treat your wife as assistant, treat your husband as your provider.<sup>35</sup>

... he (husband) must act always as her spiritual guide by being perfect example of devotee.<sup>36</sup>

The most contentious of these three duties is that of the husband as guide for his wife, particularly a spiritual guide. Often the husband is not an ideal devotee—he might be only a nominal or mediocre

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<sup>31</sup> Conversation: 7 January 1977, Bombay

<sup>32</sup> *Nectar of Instruction*, verse 1, Purport

<sup>33</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.12.11

<sup>34</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.26.17, Purport

<sup>35</sup> Press Interview: 30 December 1968

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Mr. Loy: 7 November 1972, Vrindavan

devotee—and so the wife is not inclined to take instruction from him. Also, because modern women are accustomed to the notion of equality with men, they are not inclined to accept even a qualified husband as a guide. Still, the ideal is that a husband must become a first-class man, or a *brahmana*.

## Wife's Duties

Within the institution of *varnasrama-dharma*, the primary qualification for women is chastity.

So women should be trained up to be very faithful and chaste. Then the life will be very happy. That is the only education for woman. And man should be educated how to become first-class man, a *brahmana*. Then the whole atmosphere will be very happy. The man, first-class man, *brahmana*, *samo damah titiksa*, and woman, very faithful to such husband and chaste. Then the home is happy.<sup>37</sup>

*strinam ca pati-devanam tac-chusrusanukulata  
tad-bandhusv anuvrttis ca nityam tad-vrata-dharanam*

“To render service to the husband, to be always favorably disposed toward the husband, to be equally well disposed toward the husband’s relatives and friends, and to follow the vows of the husband—these are the four principles to be followed by women described as chaste.”

[From the Purport] It is very important for peaceful householder life that a woman follow the vow of her husband. Any disagreement with the husband’s vow will disrupt family life. In this regard, Canakya Pandita gives a very valuable instruction: *dampatyoh kalaho nasti tatra srih svayam agatah*. When there are no fights between husband and wife, the goddess of fortune automatically comes to the home. A woman’s education should be conducted along the lines indicated in this verse. The basic principle for a chaste woman is to be always favorably disposed toward her husband.<sup>38</sup>

Of course the eternal duty of all living entities is devotional service to Lord Krsna. But this fact should not be mistaken to indicate that because chastity is ultimately meant for Krsna, that worldly chastity is optional, even if the husband is not a strong devotee. Certainly not only all women, but everyone should be chaste to Krsna, because all are *prakrti* of Krsna, the *purusa*. Yet *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, other scriptures, and Srila Prabhupada himself insist that chastity also refers to the proper conduct of a woman toward her husband. Notwithstanding that, there is no guarantee that a chaste woman is advancing spiritually. Thus the question: “Is chastity (particularly to a husband who may be a mediocre devotee) optional for a Vaisnavi?” To properly answer, we must understand the relationship of the mundane with the transcendental, as well as our current state of spiritual realization.

Ultimately, everything in the world has spiritual value, for nothing is separate from Krsna:

O Brahma, whatever appears to be of any value, if it is without relation to Me, has no reality. Know it as My illusory energy, that reflection which appears to be in darkness.<sup>39</sup>

Since everything has spiritual value, what is the spiritual value of chastity to a husband? The value is that it helps to create a situation conducive for conditioned souls to advance spiritually:

The Lord says here that any sacrifice which is meant for human welfare should never be given up. *Vivaha-yajna*, the marriage ceremony, is meant to regulate the human mind so that it may become

<sup>37</sup> Room Conversation with Sandy Nixon: 13 July 1975, Philadelphia

<sup>38</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.11.25 and Purport

<sup>39</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.9.34

peaceful for spiritual advancement. . . . All prescribed sacrifices are meant for achieving the Supreme Lord. Therefore, in the lower stages, they should not be given up.<sup>40</sup>

For persons in lower stages, mundane duties must be performed because they help one to advance in spiritual life. But who in ISKCON is in the lower stages of spiritual advancement? Almost everyone. And those few who are transcendental to material nature should act in such a way that others will benefit by following their example. For their own and others' spiritual advancement, not only are Vaisnavas required to be dutiful husbands, but Vaisnavis are required to be chaste wives. Thereby husband and wife create a very peaceful atmosphere and make home life very conducive for their Krsna consciousness. Or even if only one spouse acts virtuously, such exemplary behavior is usually sufficient to elevate the less advanced partner. This phenomenon can be understood as follows:

**As the ignorant perform their duties with attachment to results, the learned may similarly act, but without attachment, for the sake of leading people on the right path.**

[PURPORT:] A person in Krsna consciousness and a person not in Krsna consciousness are differentiated by different desires. A Krsna conscious person does not do anything which is not conducive to development of Krsna consciousness. He may even act exactly like the ignorant person, who is too much attached to material activities, but one is engaged in such activities for the satisfaction of his sense gratification, whereas the other is engaged for the satisfaction of Krsna. Therefore, the Krsna conscious person is required to show the people how to act and how to engage the results of action for the purpose of Krsna consciousness.<sup>41</sup>

Generally the husband acts as the spiritual guide for his wife. And it is commonly understood that the wife shares in the spiritual advancement of her husband. Yet what if the wife is more spiritually advanced than her husband? After all, this is Kali-yuga, the age of topsy-turviness. Srila Prabhupada actually said that if a wife is more spiritually more than her husband, then he may accept her as guru. But that rarely happens. Because of false ego and neophyte tendencies, a husband will likely not recognize that his wife is more advanced than himself. In such a situation, then, how can a wife uplift her husband? Lesser women who merely think themselves more advanced tend to nag and criticize their husbands, who by nature never appreciate such impudence. Then, due to acrimony or frustration from not being able to enlighten her husband, the so-called spiritually superior wife leaves her husband. But actually, such a wife could not have been spiritually advanced, because the active principle for preaching is *sad-acara*, or exemplary behavior. And what is exemplary behavior for a wife? Chastity. Great women such as Mandodari had the worst of husbands—in her case, Ravana—yet she is celebrated as one of history's greatest chaste women, on the level of Mother Sita, the wife of Lord Rama; and Draupadi, wife of the Pandavas. Furthermore, chastity is what ultimately conquers the mind of even the cruelest husband:

If any wife wants to be happy with her husband, she must try to understand her husband's temperament and please him. This is victory for a woman.<sup>42</sup>

To many, these recommendations for feminine behavior will seem far fetched or impractical in this day and age. But women who have taken shelter of these instructions, even in the modern age, have practically attained the benefits of chaste behavior, which include the creation of a peaceful home life and even the transformation of a fallen, belligerent husband into a responsible, caring Vaisnava. In this regard, we present some personal accounts submitted by Krsna conscious women.

### **An American Dharma-patni**

“There is a woman here in America who has experienced some success in encouraging her non-devotee husband in Krsna consciousness. They live in North Carolina and had been married for years already when

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<sup>40</sup> *Bhagavad-gita* 18.5, Purport

<sup>41</sup> *Bhagavad-gita* 3.25 and Purport

<sup>42</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 9.3.10 Purport

she found Krsna consciousness—and he didn't. He was always agreeable about her participation in it, but it was “her thing” and he didn't want to be involved. She understood his need to be independent and not pressed into anything, so she just kept serving him nicely, with the new understanding of how important it is to be a *dharma-patni* in order to bring out the best in her husband. At first she couldn't bring herself to cook meat for him, but then at one point, inspired by Pisima's example, the teachings of Srila Prabhupada, and Helen Andelin (author of *Fascinating Womanhood*, Bantam, 1965), she apologized to him sincerely for the way she had all of a sudden refused to touch meat and without much warning left him stranded in that regard, having to either get it for himself or forgo it. She expressed repentance and promised to serve and please him more selflessly and unconditionally from that day forward. She even promised to cook meat for him. He was amazed. This softened his heart, and out of compassion he told her (to her relief) that she did not have to cook meat for him. But that conversation did not end without further effect. Impressed and delighted by this reaffirmation of her love and consideration for him, he reciprocated by showing more open-mindedness to her interests, specifically Krsna consciousness.

“Some of the remarkable things he did as he became more favorable included building a small altar for her (though he wouldn't worship at it) and setting aside one room of the house in which he wouldn't smoke or behave disrespectfully. He also visited the temple with her (though he was more inclined to go when it was his own idea than when she had asked him to) and would actually do service there. Finally, the crowning miracle thus far, without getting any hints from her he suggested that they should move nearer to the temple, which was hours away—‘nearer,’ as in moving into the actual community of devotees!”<sup>43</sup>

## A Modern Indian Dharma-patni

“One particular lady in Bombay had recently become a devotee. This lady used to go often to the ISKCON temple in Bombay, but her husband soon objected to that. New devotees commonly exhibit fanaticism in their practice of Krsna consciousness and this lady was no exception. Soon after becoming a devotee she started criticizing her husband for eating meat and drinking alcohol. Before long the husband and wife started having nasty fights, and the husband eventually spent all his spare time, and money, at bars and nightclubs instead of going home after work.

“One day this woman asked some of the lady preachers in the temple what she should do about her husband. The lady preachers recommended that she cook meat for her husband, serve him alcohol, and be very kind to him yet continue to actively cultivate Krsna consciousness. The principle they advocated and explained was that although cooking meat and serving alcohol were sinful activities, if she could supply these things to her husband instead of him seeking them elsewhere, she would gain control of her husband's senses, which would mean being in control of him. And being in control of him would mean that she would be able to influence and reform his mentality. So the woman accepted their advice.

“Within one year, not only did this woman's husband stop eating meat and drinking alcohol, he even started regularly coming to the temple with her! By the power of chastity, in every sense this woman delivered her husband from *maya*, what to speak of saving her marriage and creating a Krsna conscious home life.”<sup>44</sup>

## The Social Reality of ISKCON: Not Yet Perfect

From the earliest days of ISKCON, its members have suffered from various anomalies:

Prabhupada's former servant, Ranacora, had recently left his position. Although supposedly a *brahmacari*, he had never been a serious *brahmacari*. He had even seduced one of the young women devotees in New York. Prabhupada had found out and had asked the girl why she had

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<sup>43</sup> Contributed by Mother Phalini (ACBSP) to the “Dharma-patni” PAMHO conference

<sup>44</sup> Contributed by Krsna-kirti das (HDG), as told by his wife, Urmila devi dasi (GKG)

indulged in sex with Ranacora if she wasn't planning to marry him. Prabhupada's "Why?" had so disarmed the girl that she had been unable to answer.<sup>45</sup>

The most serious problems that women have experienced within ISKCON are exploitation and abuse, caused mainly by 1) irresponsible men, 2) failure to recognize that a woman's protection is the *grhastha-asrama*, and 3) unchaste women.

### **Irresponsible Men**

Irresponsible men also provoke adultery in society, and thus unwanted children flood the human race at the risk of war and pestilence.<sup>46</sup>

Now so many cases are there of unhappiness by the wife who has been abandoned by her husband against her wishes. So how can I sanction such thing? I want to avoid setting any bad example for future generations, therefore I am so much cautiously considering your request. But if it becomes so easy for me to get married and then leave my wife, under excuse of married life being an impediment to my own spiritual progress, that will not be very good at all. That is misunderstanding of what is advancement in spiritual life.<sup>47</sup>

Irresponsibility among men stems principally from a lack of training. Since most men who join ISKCON were raised in a morally defunct society, it is no wonder that irresponsibility among our male devotees is so widespread. Of course Krsna consciousness is so powerful that it quickly nullifies one's material conditioning. Thus the disease of irresponsibility can persist only if a man is not properly engaging in devotional service, whether by his own willful neglect or because of inadequate guidance from authorities.

### **Recommendations**

Within ISKCON there are two classes of irresponsible men: those who are spiritually weak but willing to cooperate with authorities, and those who are spiritually weak but do not respect authority.

Men of the first category need to associate with both renunciants (generally *sannyasis*) and advanced *grhasthas* who exemplify peaceful *grhastha* life. Service to renunciants and advanced devotees is essential for *grhasthas*. Indeed *sastra* provides many examples of *grhasthas* dutifully rendering selfless service to *tyagis*, who reciprocally give spiritual guidance and inspiration to householders.

Nowadays more *grhasthas* live outside than inside ISKCON temples, and they are inclined to respect their initiating spiritual master and *sannyasis* more than for the local temple president. Hence we recommend that gurus and *sannyasis* be more active for meeting and engaging such independent *grhasthas*, who should be taught to regard these renunciants as essential family members. Association with *grhasthas* who have demonstrated themselves to be good examples are also necessary. And as far as possible, exemplary senior *grhasthas* should also preach by establishing communities and visiting junior *grhasthas*, perhaps even "adopting" them (particularly the newlyweds) as joint family members so as to provide them practical training and assistance.

Renunciants such as *brahmacaris* must be taught to properly respect women, and this also includes training *brahmacaris* to minimize their association with women. As a matter of training future *grhasthas*, such training also helps minimize the propensity to commingle with women other than one's wife and thus minimizes the possibilities of falling down with other women.

Being significantly averse to senior association, men in the second category, whether married or not, should be avoided. Particularly, if independently of ISKCON authorities a man proposes marriage to a

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<sup>45</sup> *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrita* ch 24: "New Jagannatha Puri"

<sup>46</sup> *Bhagavad-gita* 1.40, Purport

<sup>47</sup> Letter to Madhukara: 4 January 1973, Bombay



woman residing within an ISKCON temple, then she should understand that he is to be avoided. And if he persists, then she should complain to temple authorities, who must then strictly discipline his behavior.

Women who are looking to marry also need to protect themselves from the association of irresponsible men of either the first or second category. The best protection women can provide for themselves is to voluntarily depend on their spiritual authorities to help them find suitable husbands. Otherwise, by unrestricted mixing it is very likely that a girl will marry an irresponsible boy since once one falls in love, it is difficult to factually understand the character of the person one has fallen in love with. We recommend that women should not canvass for a partner, but instead should depend on authorities or trusted senior Vaisnavas to help them find a suitable husband. Since many devotees now live independently of temples, it is especially important to take shelter of senior devotees because once one is married, both husband and wife are probably going to live separately from the temple. This means that ISKCON as an institution has virtually no control over how devotees may conduct themselves in a marriage, and so there is little ISKCON can do if the marriage goes awry. Thus the communal effort spent in finding a suitable partner can never be overstressed.

### ***Failure to Recognize that Women's Protection is the Grhastha-asrama***

Although the *grhastha-asrama* is the natural domicile for women, it seems that this fact has been mostly overlooked throughout ISKCON's history. This is one example:

In total, there were at least five women's parties operating just before Srila Prabhupada's disappearance. Each party had approximately twenty-five or more members. More than sixty women were asked to serve on Jiva's party. Of these, at least twenty were approached by Jiva for illicit sex. Five of these women were 'legally' married to Jiva. There have been reports of at least three abortions.

These women had little or no shelter because the women's parties were apparently supported by both temple leaders and Governing Body Commissioners. When women went to temple authorities they were sent back to the party where they were publicly admonished and punished. Three GBCs were sent to investigate Jiva's party more than a year before its final demise but no action was taken, perhaps because the cash collections were very high.<sup>48</sup>

Srila Prabhupada had been consulted thus:

**Satsvarupa:** A legal committee of Balavanta, Adi-kesava, and Ramesvara will investigate whether certain techniques are legal or illegal according to the laws. Then one of the popular means to distribute books is by women's party. A party of women will travel under the care of a man devotee. But in taking care of the women, we have noted that some of these parties have been preaching a false philosophy of the relationship of the man who's taking care of the women, and that philosophy is that the sankirtana leader is the eternal husband and protector of the women in the party. We want that this philosophy should be rejected. If a man is taking care of a number of women in a sankirtana party, he should be regarded as the son as well as a representative of the spiritual master, of Srila Prabhupada, and not the husband of these women.

**Prabhupada:** Husband, but why he does not marry them? (laughter)

**Satsvarupa:** Well, sometimes there may be as many as twenty women in a party.

**Kirtanananda:** They would like to.

**Prabhupada:** We have no objection if one marries more than one wife. That I have stated. But law does not allow it. So do the needful.<sup>49</sup>

Although speaking in a jocular manner, Srila Prabhupada recommended that the women be married. He did not approve of Satsvarupa Maharaja's recommendation that the man in charge of such a party should

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<sup>48</sup> Mother Sudharma's presentation to the GBC, March 2000

<sup>49</sup> Room Conversation with GBC Members

identify as the women's "son." Rather, Srila Prabhupada's recommendation was that the ladies should be married. Although Srila Prabhupada frequently elaborated on the necessity for all women to marry, it seems that we in ISKCON have, to varying degrees, neglected this principle.

Another example of neglect of the *grhastha-asrama* is that ISKCON rarely (if at all) gives honorable mention to men who are setting good examples, what to speak of enlisting them to train younger men to be responsible householders. On the contrary, there is much propaganda that the average ISKCON man is a deadbeat. This naturally discourages the responsible men who, if encouraged, could be effecting positive reform.

### **Recommendations**

Temple life should be little different than family life in the sense that superiors should be concerned about their subordinates just as a mother and father are concerned about their children. Vedic civilization is based on family life; even the king and queen of a country are considered as father and mother of the citizens (*atma-mata guroh patni brahmani raja-patnika. . .*). Similarly, a temple president and his wife<sup>50</sup> should consider the *brahmacaris* and *brahmacarinis* under their charge as their own children. This model of Krsna conscious temple life will counteract impersonal tendencies, which have caused suffering in many of our temple communities. ISKCON's leadership should support Krsna conscious *asramas* and promote them as extended or joint Krsna conscious families.

Since a young woman should be protected by her father or husband, the best *asrama* situation for young *brahmacarinis* in ISKCON is to reside in a temple run by a senior *grhastha* couple, who should assume in spirit the role of her foster parents.

ISKCON's leadership should recognize and encourage responsible *grhastha* men to help junior *grhasthas* adjust to their responsibilities.

Temple leaders should encourage marriage of women and discourage divorce.

### ***Women Without Husbands and Women Who Do Not Want to Marry***

Some women who join ISKCON were previously divorced or are averse to marrying, so how should ISKCON accommodate them?

And Narada advised the wife of Hiranyakasipu, "My dear daughter, you don't worry. I shall give you protection. Your husband has gone away. So long he does not come back, I will give you protection. You come to my ashram."<sup>51</sup>

Thus within their means, ISKCON leaders at varying levels should care for these unprotected women.

It seems that Prabhupada regarded ISKCON as a fresh start for women, because here we see that he recommends marriage for women who already have children:

So your decision is very good, but at the moment we have many girls and either too young or they are engaged or they are too old. There are a few nice girls who are available, specifically Tulsi Devi and Anna Radha Devi but both of them also have little babies and Tulsi Devi is, I think, a little older than you are. So if you like we may ask these girls if they are just now desirous of marrying.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Sometimes temple presidents are *brahmacaris* or *sannyasis*. Srila Prabhupada, being a renunciant himself, is the best example of how superiors in all *asramas* deal lovingly with subordinates.

<sup>51</sup> Conversation: 25 August 1968, Montreal.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to Nandakisora: 11 December 1968, Los Angeles

Yet Srila Prabhupada did not want his female disciples who gave birth to children within ISKCON to remarry. And if they did remarry, they could not be maintained by ISKCON:

Regarding the suggestion that you remarry, I have never suggested such thing, so you need not trouble yourself with this. As I have told you in Los Angeles, I wish that the mother's who have no husband at present should not remarry, but should dedicate their time to seeing that their children are brought up very nicely in Krsna Consciousness. Your boy, Birbhadra, has just arrived here, and he will be taken care of by Kirtanananda Maharaja.<sup>53</sup>

If you have a child and you are not married, still, having child is the same as being married, so there is no more marriage. Marriage is not for sense gratification, not that we get married twice, thrice in a year. No, if you have got a child there is no need for more marriages. But if you cannot stay in Krsna Consciousness unless you have got a husband, that is all right, but the responsibility is not ours for your maintenance or other things, so if want to get married both you and your husband must make your own arrangements.<sup>54</sup>

Everyone wants more than one wife. That is human nature. This means their mind is not being diverted to Krsna. Because they are not madan mohan, they are madan dahan, they are in the Cupid's fire. You want them to have more wives under GBC supervision. You will supply the maintenance? What is this nonsense? They must go outside the Society to do it. And, the sort of marriage where they are not satisfied cannot be allowed. Nor can women with child strictly she cannot marry again.<sup>55</sup>

With regard to women who choose not to remarry, suitable arrangements must be made for them:

If someone comes to Krsna it is our duty to give them protection. Krsna has informed us in Bhagavad-gita that even women and sudras and others inferior class of men can take refuge in Him. So the problem is there, the women must have a husband to give protection. Of course, if the women can remain unmarried, and if there is suitable arrangement for the temple to protect them, just like in the Christian Church there is nunnery for systematic program of engaging the ladies and protecting them, that is also nice.<sup>56</sup>

Anyone who cannot collect money, they should go to Mayapur and live there and simply eat and sleep, like women and widows. I shall arrange for their eating and sleeping. But in cities, those should live who can collect and earn. The widows are not earning in Hindu society, they eat and sleep at others' expense. So if you are not able to earn in Calcutta, better all go to Mayapur and eat and sleep and I shall accommodate all widows, women, and others at Mayapur and Vrindaban. Otherwise why should we maintain such large establishment in Calcutta simply for eating and sleeping and spending. These two places will be reserved for those who cannot collect. For them I am making provision. Only the active members who can collect, they shall live in the city. Eating, sleeping members, they shall live in Mayapur, that's all.<sup>57</sup>

### **Recommendations**

These recommendations apply to ISKCON widows and women who choose not to marry at all.

Srila Prabhupada makes distinction between productive members and unproductive members ("eating, sleeping members"). Widows who are not active may retire to Mayapur or Vrindavan. And perhaps ISKCON should consider establishing and maintaining a widows' ashram. Unwed women who are

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<sup>53</sup> Letter to Silavati: 14 June 1969, New Vrindavan

<sup>54</sup> Letter to Navina: 19 July 1972, London

<sup>55</sup> Letter to Bhagavan: 7 September 1975, Vrindavan

<sup>56</sup> Letter to Madhukara: 4 January 1973, Bombay

<sup>57</sup> Letter to Bhavananda: 14 July 1972, London

productive may be afforded minimal space within the temple, or separately in a nunnery, as suggested by Srila Prabhupada. Women devotees who remarry must not be maintained by ISKCON.

For maintaining the women who qualify, how much can ISKCON afford?

My dear Kirtiraja das,

Please accept my blessings. I am in due receipt of your letter dated Dec. 31, 1974 and have noted the contents. Any householder devotee who is working full-time (with his wife) as a sankirtana book distributor, of temple managerial duties, artist, cook, etc. shall be provided food, shelter, and other bare minimum necessities by the temple itself. They should not cook their own meals separate from the temple meals. If they have children, then some minimal allowance may be given according to the number of children. If they want anything extra or over and above what the temple president sees as absolute necessity, then they should work outside--the temple cannot pay for anything beyond the bare necessities. And definitely, the BBT cannot pay any salary to anybody. Our philosophy is "simple living and high thinking"—not sense gratification. The temple presidents and leaders (elder students) must show this by example. Temple or asrama means for renunciation and renounced persons. If one is engaged in self-realization process, then his material necessities become almost nil. Persons who do not like this can work outside.

Regarding food-stamps and welfare, if we have to fabricate some lie, that is not good. It can be done only if it is completely honest.<sup>58</sup>

### ***Unchaste Women***

Nowadays in the West when a marriage fails usually the husband is blamed, although formerly the wife would be considered the cause for divorce. Since nowadays few seem to believe that a woman can be responsible for a failed marriage, more explanation is required. The idea that women themselves could be the major cause of their ill treatment is a bitter pill to swallow, and often elicits immediate and acrimonious protests. A simple example from common experience illustrates this:

A devotee couple has been married for some time yet their married life is not harmonious. They have children and have been living apart from an ISKCON temple for some years. Because the husband had spent most of his adult life living in the temple as a *brahmacari*, he has no particular material qualification; thus whatever employment he has been able to acquire pays little more than the legal minimum wage. It being difficult for the wife to live on that meager income, she habitually nags her husband for more. Initially he bears the criticism, but soon enough, he can no longer tolerate it. Various outcomes could ensue: bitter arguments, violence, separation, or divorce rendering the woman unprotected yet burdened to care for the children.

Since we have already discussed the problem of irresponsible men, now we consider this question: Is it possible that a woman may bear responsibility for her own misery due to marital strife or separation? This question is usually overlooked because women are generally regarded as innocent. Yet women also have free will and thus may choose either to follow or ignore moral and religious principles. As men have particular duties prescribed in *sastra*, so do women. Therefore it should be understood that a woman's willful neglect of religious principles will likely yield unfortunate results such as losing protection.

Regardless of the outcome in the above example, the woman disregarded the principle of chastity. As previously stated, chastity is defined by four modes of behavior:

To render service to the husband, to be always favorably disposed toward the husband, to be equally well disposed toward the husband's relatives and friends, and to follow the vows of the husband—these are the four principles to be followed by women described as chaste.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Letter to Kirtiraja: 12 January 1975, Bombay

Women who practice chastity can significantly reduce the likelihood of an altercation with her husband, what to speak of separation or divorce. We do not say that domestic problems are always caused by the wife. Nor do we say that women are mostly to be blamed. But we aver that women are sometimes guilty of misbehavior that fosters domestic strife.

Although within ISKCON there is a perceived need to train men to be dutiful, the perceived need to train women to be chaste is conspicuous by its absence. If men who come to ISKCON through preaching have to overcome the social irresponsibility that is second nature to them, is it reasonable to conclude that women who share a similar cultural background do not have significant cultural *anarthas* that must overcome? We think that the reasonable answer is that the women who come to ISKCON also have social *anarthas* that are no less serious than the *anarthas* possessed by men who come to ISKCON. Men who come to ISKCON are generally irresponsible, and so they have to be trained to be responsible. Similarly, women who come to ISKCON are by upbringing unchaste, and so they have to be trained to be chaste.

Training women in chastity (and shyness, etc.) is essential for preventing many of the domestic problems women may otherwise encounter. But if ISKCON's women resist adopting the principles of chastity, then even a successful program of broad, comprehensive training of men to be dutiful, responsible and caring will still fail to afford adequate protection for women.

Some maintain that it is unnecessary to train women in chastity because, it is reasoned, if the men are strong in Krsna consciousness, then the women will automatically follow. Nevertheless such following must come from to a willful desire to follow. For example, in a guru-disciple relationship the guru is considered spiritually stronger than the disciple; by guru's grace the disciple automatically becomes strong in Krsna consciousness. But if the disciple is disobedient, foolish, disrespectful, etc., he cannot make spiritual advancement in spite of having a bona fide guru. Similarly, if a husband is Krsna conscious and dutiful but his wife defiant, ill-mannered, etc., she will not benefit from her husband's association and may soon become bereft of it.

### **Recommendations**

Out of faith in Srila Prabhupada and his example, ISKCON devotees have accepted many practices that are deemed fanatical or radical to non-devotees—following the four regulative principles, vowing to daily chant the Hare Krsna *maha-mantra* for hours, rising well before dawn, wearing , *tilak*, shaving the head and wearing dhoti, or keeping the hair braided and wearing sari—and hence must sometimes have to endure unpleasant dealings with relatives, co-workers, or the general populace for our acceptance of Krsna as our Lord and Prabhupada as our guide.

Having come this far in accepting the Vedic way of life and knowing that the Vedic ways can only help us in our Krsna consciousness, why should we hold tight to our cultural *anarthas* and refuse to accept the principles of responsibility and chastity, respectively, for men and women? Those of us who became devotees gave up many *anarthas* and accepted new customs because at some level we *understood* the value of doing so. Therefore we recommend that within ISKCON there should systematic and compulsory study of social responsibility for men and chastity for women, as found in Srila Prabhupada's books.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.11.25 + purport

<sup>60</sup> Srila Prabhupada's standing criticism of his disciples has been that they do not read his books sufficiently, so we consider that our reluctance to accept those things favorable to Krsna consciousness and reject those things unfavorable is based on our lack of sincere study of Srila Prabhupada's books.

## Conclusion

Herein it has been established that a primary purpose of *varnasrama-dharma* is to minimize male-female association in order to create a social environment conducive for practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It was also shown that difficulties as faced by women in ISKCON today have been ongoing since when Srila Prabhupada was personally with us, and that his recommendation for correcting such problems has been and continues to be that ISKCON institute *varnasrama-dharma*. According to Srila Prabhupada's teachings, proper dealings between women and men of all social statuses was also described. That many women in ISKCON have been exploited and abused was recognized as a significant problem, of which three main underlying causes were identified: irresponsible men, failure to recognize the role of the *grhastha-asrama* in protecting women, and women who are socially accustomed to unchaste behavior. These causes were further analyzed, and recommendations given to correct them.

Finally, a point that was not mentioned but is essentially a summary observation of the analyses and recommendations made: it will take time to correct these problems, thus meriting patience in so doing. As mentioned previously, a significant factor in perpetuating these problems is the backward cultural conditioning of many men and women who have joined ISKCON. Since purification in the course of practicing *bhakti-yoga* is a gradual process, we can expect that only gradually will devotees who sincerely practice *bhakti-yoga* become free of such *anarthas*. And since there is constantly an influx of new devotees via preaching, old problems will wear new faces. Another fact often overlooked is that ISKCON membership will always include practitioners of varying degrees of sincerity. Therefore ISKCON's leaders should effectively identify various grades of devotees and deal with them accordingly. In all circumstances, women members of ISKCON must cooperate with authorities in regard to dealings with men; otherwise women greatly risk associating with insincere men and thus meet with unnecessary difficulty.

We conclude with words of Srila Prabhupada on *varnasrama-dharma*:

### TRANSLATION

Being an incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Rṣabhadeva was fully independent because His form was spiritual, eternal and full of transcendental bliss. He eternally had nothing to do with the four principles of material misery [birth, death, old age and disease]. Nor was He materially attached. He was always equipoised, and He saw everyone on the same level. He was unhappy to see others unhappy, and He was the well-wisher of all living entities. Although He was a perfect personality, the Supreme Lord and controller of all, He nonetheless acted as if He were an ordinary conditioned soul. Therefore He strictly followed the principles of *varnasrama-dharma* and acted accordingly. In due course of time, the principles of *varnasrama-dharma* had become neglected; therefore through His personal characteristics and behavior, He taught the ignorant public how to perform duties within the *varnasrama-dharma*. In this way He regulated the general populace in householder life, enabling them to develop religion and economic well-being and to attain reputations, sons and daughters, material pleasure and finally eternal life. By His instructions, He showed how people could remain householders and at the same time become perfect by following the principles of *varnasrama-dharma*.

### PURPORT

The *varnasrama-dharma* is meant for imperfect, conditioned souls. It trains them to become spiritually advanced in order to return home, back to Godhead. A civilization that does not know the highest aim of life is no better than an animal society. As stated in *Srimad-Bhagavatam*: *na te viduh svartha-gatim hi visnum* [SB 7.5.31]. A human society is meant for elevation to spiritual knowledge so that all of the people can be freed from the clutches of birth, death, old age and disease. The *varnasrama-dharma* enables human society to become perfectly fit for getting out of the clutches of *maya*, and by following the regulative principles of *varnasrama-dharma*, one can become successful. In this regard, see *Bhagavad-gita* (3.21-24).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 5.4.14

## Miscellaneous Quotes

**Prabhupada:** No. They are not... So our point is, we are not going to bring back the old type of Hindu society. It is not that. Our...

**Prof. Kotovsky:** It is impossible.

**Prabhupada:** It is impossible. Our idea is that best ideas from the original idea. Just like in the Bhagavata there is a description of communistic idea, and it is being described to Maharaja Yudhisthira. So if there is something good, good experience, why it should not be adopted?<sup>62</sup>

Of course, in your country they marry as a matter of joke, immediately divorce after week or after seven days. But marriage means to take full responsibility of a woman. That is real marriage, Vedic marriage. We, when I get married our boys and girls, the boy takes this vow that "I take responsibility of your maintenance throughout your whole life," and the girl promises that "I desire to serve you throughout my whole life."<sup>63</sup>

Even the husband becomes diseased and paralyzed, the wife cannot give, give him up. "Oh, he is my husband." Similarly, wife. Either she becomes diseased or so many things, the husband and wife combined together for life. There was no question of divorce. There was no question of divorce, even they do not like each other, even they fight. Fight there must be, whenever there are two men or woman. That is individuality. Therefore Canakya Pandita says, *dampatyē kalahe caiva bambharambhe laghu-kriya*. Whenever there is fight between husband and wife, it should be neglected. The formula of Canakya Pandita is given like this: Aja-yuddhe. When the goats are fighting, as it is very insignificant... If you understand that in the door two goats are fighting, you don't care for it.<sup>64</sup>

So the problem is there, the women must have a husband to give protection. Of course, if the women can remain unmarried, and if there is suitable arrangement for the temple to protect them, just like in the Christian Church there is nunnery for systematic program of engaging the ladies and protecting them, that is also nice. But if there is sex desire, how to control it?<sup>65</sup>

**Prabhupada:** No, no. That is not... Then how Caitanya Mahaprabhu allowed the woman to stand on His shoulder?

**Dr. Patel:** He is, was a mahaprabhu. Not for us...

**Prabhupada:** No, no, no. That is the criterion, that if one is perfect devotee, then it is all right. And so long he is not or she is not perfect devotee, then there is restriction.

**Dr. Patel:** In the sadhana stage.

**Prabhupada:** Yes.<sup>66</sup>

**Woman reporter:** What happens when women are not subordinate to men?

**Prabhupada:** Then there is disruption. There is disruption, social disruption. If the woman does not become subordinate to man, then there is social disruption. Therefore, in the western countries there are so many divorce cases because the woman does not agree to become subordinate to man. That is the cause.<sup>67</sup>

**Brahmananda:** Actually, they are just feeling frustrated because it is a fact that woman has been exploited by the men. So now they want to counteract this.

**Prabhupada:** No, we don't say that woman should be exploited by men. We say the man should be responsible and give protection to woman.

**Brahmananda:** But they feel so angry from the exploitation that they cannot accept that actually a man could protect them.

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<sup>62</sup> Conversation with Prof. Kotovsky: 22 June 1971, Moscow

<sup>63</sup> Conversation: 20 October 1968, Seattle

<sup>64</sup> Lecture on *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 12.2.1: 18 March 1968, San Francisco

<sup>65</sup> Letter to Madhukara: 4 January 1973, Bombay

<sup>66</sup> Morning Walk: 17 December 1975, Bombay

<sup>67</sup> Television Interview: 9 July 1975, Chicago

**Prabhupada:** That is bad experience. But the ideal is different. Ideal is that man must be first-class and he must be responsible to take care of the woman, and she should be given all protection, all necessities. That is the duty of man.<sup>68</sup>

**Yogesvara:** But today there seem to be so few qualified husbands.

**Prabhupada:** Because you do not train the boys to be qualified. You train them to become debauch. What can be done? You train them from brahmacari, then they'll be responsible husbands. Both the girls and the boys should be trained up. Then they'll be responsible husband and wife and live peacefully. In their young days, if you give them freedom, they'll spoil. What can be done? Young, youthful days, if you give them full freedom, they'll be misguided and spoiled.

**Translator:** She's asking that since in these Western countries the families are so broken up and the women sometimes cannot find a qualified husband, what should she do?

**Prabhupada:** That, here is the society. You train them. You have got all children. You train them in that way, so that... Whatever is done is done. Now you can make very good society, Krsna conscious society. Not that one mistake has been done, you should continue. Rectify it.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Room Conversation after Press Conference: 9 July 1975, Chicago

<sup>69</sup> Room Conversation with French Commander: 3 August 1976, New Mayapur