



Vaisnavi Sanga

A Quarterly Newsletter for The DEvoted Vaisnavis of ISKCON



Hare Krishna and Welcome to Vaisnavi Sanga. I am honored as the newly appointed editor to share with you the activities and services of your God-sisters all over the world.

This issue highlights the ISKCON Women's Ministry Conference. Both Hridayananda Goswami and Mukunda Goswami called this conference a watershed event in ISKCON history and were profoundly moved by the quality of thoughtful presentations given by the women there.

Vaisnavi Sanga will bring you news of upcoming events and conferences, share with you the valuable services of your God-sisters, update you on Women's Ministry projects, and inspire you with interesting philosophical and practical information.

Our hope is that you will be encouraged to actively participate in the conferences and workshops, to submit articles and become involved. We all have our contribution to make to both the Ministry and to ISKCON. This ministry is for you and it needs to hear from you.

I am especially enlivened by the section, "Letters to the Editor." Vishaka dasi has agreed to help as she is needed. We are looking forward to stimulating and productive exchanges.

For years I have been praying for some way to increase my service to Srila Prabhupada. I have missed the close association of other Vaisnavis and the feeling that I am somehow contributing to the welfare of Srila Prabhupada's disciples and grand-disciples. I look to you for inspiration as I try to serve you in a meaningful way.

I remain your servant and God-sister,

Karalapati devi dasi

News from Around the World

February/March: ISKCON Women's Ministry delegates, Malati dasi and Jyotirmayi dasi, and GBC deputies, Vraja-lila dasi, Dhyana-kunda dasi, and Prasanta dasi, are to attend the GBC meetings in Mayapur this year.

Audio cassettes of LA conference are available. Contact Krishna devata dasi at 3765 Watseka Ave. #16, Los Angeles, CA 90034, phone: 310-842-8568.

Video cassettes of LA Conference are available. Contact Siddhanta dasa at ITV, P.O. Box 1015, Culver City, CA 90232, phone: 800-310-VIDEO.

Week before Gaura Purnima: IWM mini-conference and other gatherings will take place at Mayapur. Organization is informal and may be spontaneous.

July: The 1st European Women's Conference in Radhadesh will be held the day before and on the first day of the European Communications Conference. Contact Hari dasi at 63 Divinity Rd, Oxford, OX41LH, UK or Hari.HDG @com.bbt.se.

Next Fall: Hridayananda Goswami, Radha dasi, and Nandimukhi dasi are organizing a conference in Berkeley called "Vaisnavi Saints."

September: The U.S.A. East Coast Women's Ministry Conference will be held at either Gita-Nagari, Alachua, or New Vrindaban. It will focus on the organization and structure of the Ministry.

Satyaraja's book: Copies now available of Vaisnavi: Women and the Worship of Krishna."

IWC and Crisis@com.bbt.se:

These online services are now available. If you want association with other Vaisnavis to discuss philosophy or practical topics, or if you have a major crisis and need help, contact Madhusudani Radha at IWC@com.bbt.se to subscribe.

DEVI incorporation: With Radha dasi's help the Women's Ministry has officially filed its papers for incorporation under the name, The Devoted Vaisnavis of ISKCON.

Now: Volunteers needed internationally to distribute Women's Ministry survey and literature, to organize meetings, and to interface with temple leadership. Only serious enquiries please.

Vaisnavi Sanga deadline: 4/2/98 is submission deadline. The next issue will feature Vaisnavis around the world.

Your editor, Karalapati devi dasi, joined ISKCON in Los Angeles in 1970. Blessed with personal service to her guru, Srila Prabhupada, she sometimes cooked his breakfast, assisted his servants, and was responsible for maintaining and looking after his quarters daily. She maintained them with the consciousness he was always personally present. He often was. Los Angeles temple felt like the center of the universe; so many devotees came to see and hear His Divine Grace.

Unusual at the time, her service was to finish her university education. Taking this to heart, she organized preaching programs on campus, gave lectures, created exhibits, and distributed books. She graduated with degrees in English and art. Her service has been varied through the years including looking after brahmacharins, drawing and painting, deity worship, taking out traveling parties, public relations, Indian life membership, assistant to Mukunda Goswami, typesetter for the Spanish BBT, and finally, working with Nalith Pacific Foundation and Atreya Rsi preaching Krishna consciousness in a more sectarian way, ie. right livelihood, vegetarianism, environmental ethics, and interdenominational religious concerns. Other places she has served have been the women's temple and gurukula in Seattle and Philadelphia in the last half of the '70's, Bhaktividdanta Manor, Nairobi, Toronto, Ottawa, and Berkeley in the '80's.

She currently owns a successful photography/design business in the San Francisco Bay Area. She married James Northey in 1987. She has no children.

1st ISKCON Women's Conference, LA, 12/5-7/97

This article will be more editorial in nature as I share my impressions of the Women's Conference in Los Angeles. I will leave it to the video and cassette tapes and the book to be published next year or to individual papers that can be ordered from DEVI to give you more detailed information about the presentations, the discussions, and the workshops. My intention is to show how such conferences and the work of the Women's Ministry can change someone's life. Please forgive me if I leave devotees out who made major contributions to the conference. It is not possible to mention everyone.

First, women not normally involved in leadership positions came forward to help organize the Los Angeles event. Among these women were second generation devotees like Krsna devata and Shakuntala, and other more experienced devotees like Vaikunthapriya, Radha dasi, Gunamay, and Jagarini. If Jagarini had not invited me I would never have even known about the conference. Nandimukhi dasi, from 26th second Avenue in New York, and Pranada dasi and of course Sudharma dasi from Alachua were also instrumental in organizing the conference. We owe them many thanks for their hard work.

Even when they encountered obstacles they adopted the "can do" mentality discussed by Vishaka, Kausalya, Malati, and Jyotirmayi, in their presentations. The latter Vaisnavis talked about what the movement was like in the "early days," when we were a family of young men and women serving together more out of affection for our spiritual father, Srila Prabhupada, than from any other motive. We went anywhere and were willing to do anything to please him. There was no distinction between what a man could do for Krsna and what a woman could do. We were all devotees doing the needful.

Things changed over time and much of the first day of the conference was spent discussing how these changes have affected our lives. A major point was that when women are disrespected all Vais-

navas are disrespected. No wonder many men felt they could not be leaders in ISKCON society from the grhastha asrama. As Radha dasi put it, these issues are not "women's issues," they are Vaisnava issues.

Something I noticed right away was that it was not only women participating in the conference. There were GBC men like Hridayananda Goswami, Mukunda Goswami, and

Bir Krsna Goswami. Other men I noticed who actively made presentations were Dayananda dasa, Garuda dasa, Anuttama dasa, Yogesvara dasa, and second generation Aniruddha dasa.

There was an atmosphere of respect and support among all the devotees attending. Hridayananda Maharaja seemed visibly moved as he listened to Bimala dasi and the

Bio and excerpt from "Humility, Chastity, Surrender, Protection- What do they mean?"

Vishaka dasi is probably best known in ISKCON as a photographer. Since 1971 she has made thousands of photographs of Srila Prabhupada, his followers, and devotional activities. For many years she also wrote for Back to Godhead Magazine and assisted her husband, Yadubara dasa in making documentary films about the Hare Krishna Movement. Recently she illustrated and authored a children's book on Bhagavad-gita, "Our Most Dear Friend" and is currently working on an illustrated Bhagavad-gita for adults. Yadubara and Vishaka have two daughters, Amrita, age 15, and Hari priya, age 4.

In her future, Vishaka sees the possibility of making the teachings of Bhagavad-gita real in her life: of allowing humility to overcome pride, inner joy to overcome hankering and lamenting, forgiveness to overcome anger, magnanimity to overcome greed, and appreciation to overcome envy. In short she aspires to make progress in Krishna consciousness.

The following is an excerpt from her presentation at the Women's Conference in Los Angeles: "Three of the four qualities that are the topic of this discussion—humility, chastity, and surrender—concern the way women relate to men (as well as the way disciples relate to the guru and the living entity to the Supreme Lord). The fourth, protection, concerns how men relate to women (and the spiritual master's and Krishna's relation to surrendered souls). Let us look at Srila Prabhupada's example in this regard.

By enthusing and encouraging us in our service to Lord Krishna, by teaching us the magnificent science of Krishna consciousness, Srila Prabhupada protected his women disciples from the spiritual damage caused by the influence of three modes of material nature. By his words and example, we became detached from our flawed body and mind. Because he evoked our spiritual consciousness, his was the greatest protection. And as our protector he



Pranada, top left; Jyotirmayi, bottom left
Pranada, Vraja-lila, Nandimukhi, Jagarini, Nanda, & Hari not shown



Marge Legaye, Vishaka, Malati, Kausalya, and Jyotirmayi



Hridayananda Maharaja (Berkeley) "The most inspiring program that I have attended in many years...there cannot be any doubt that these ladies are great souls and advanced devotees. If we let them, they will make an outstanding contribution to Srila Prabhupada's movement."



was personally concerned for our happiness. Srila Prabhupada spoke not to our meanness and baseness, but to our greatness. By doing so, he evoked that quality in us—our spiritual identity as part and parcel of Krishna and of belonging to Him. We as women rose to his view, leaving aside our disqualifications.

Srila Prabhupada imbued us with the desire to be all we could be and do all we could do for Krishna. His calling impelled us to stretch beyond our boundaries; to acquire a "can do" mentality; to repeatedly bring our consciousness to the highest, most protected platform of enthusiastic devotional service to the Supreme Lord, Sri Krishna. Thus propelled, Yamuna and Kausalya led kirtanas before thousands, Malati and Hemavati lectured, Palika and Vishaka became part of Prabhupada's personal entourage touring America. In his personal dealings with us, Srila Prabhupada was a gentleman with the nobility and gratitude of the Pandavas. In response, our chastity to him as our guru, our savior, was unquestioned. Our humility before and surrender to him was a given. And there reposed, these very qualities were sources of ecstasy.

Now kindly allow me to express some personal feelings. This Women's Conference is a genuine cry from women. It is a cry to our men to become the learned leaders they are meant to be. To become men who respect women as mother in the Vedic, not Western, sense. To become men who want women to love their life in devotional service to Lord Krishna. In Srila Prabhupada's words, "our leaders shall be careful not to kill the spirit of enthusiastic service, which is individual and spontaneous and voluntary. They should try always to generate some atmosphere of fresh challenge to the devotees, so that they will agree enthusiastically to rise and meet it." (letter to Karandhara 12/22/72)

At the moment tremendous amounts of talent are being lost to our Society just because that talent wears a sari. We humbly request our men to be on our side. To want women to be empowered to be all they can be for Krishna, to do all they can do for Him, to realize their full potential in every area of their genius, for as Srila Prabhupada stated, "every person is his own genius." In this way our women will blossom and our men will blossom even more than they have already. This will be good for the women, good for the men, and good for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness."

second generation talk about what it was like to grow up in ISKCON or to be a single mother with no means of support. Mukunda Goswami and Bir Krsna Maharaja encouraged us to draft concrete proposals for change to present before the GBC body and they offered their help. A position paper on the place of women in ISKCON, a proposal for more women as members of the GBC, as temple presidents, and even as gurus was also encouraged. I kept thinking that as the movement became larger and more institutionalized, instead of being less bodily conscious we became more so. How can that be? Why can't we serve and be engaged according to our capacity? Why can't we be encouraged to reach to the height of our realization and manifest that realization in service?

The atmosphere was hopeful as we talked openly in a supportive environment about everything from spousal and child abuse to dead-beat dads. For the revitalization of ISKCON much work has to be done. Pranada reminded us that this work is not just for us to have a better today, but so that our sons and daughters and future generations will have a better tomorrow. Krsna devata re-

minded us that we must speak up and not remain silent when the preaching is inappropriate. If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem and by remaining silent we are just as guilty as those who are committing the wrong. Karandhara once said to me, if you see something has to be done you should take it that Krsna is personally showing you this and it now becomes your duty to either take care of it yourself or see that it is taken care of.

One of the foundations of this work is that we give up our fear of being personal and caring for one another. Malati dasi shared with us the story of her life as a much loved spiritual daughter of Srila Prabhupada, to someone who left the movement, and finally on her death bed was brought back to the service of her guru and given another opportunity to serve. Her humility is very moving. She knows both nescience and Krsna consciousness and we are so fortunate to have her association.



How did the conference affect me? I am filled with hope that I can help make a difference, that I have a voice, and I am encouraged that there are strong women serving in traditional as well as non-traditional capacities who can be roll models. I am working on cultivating my relationship with them. I am confident that The DEvoted Vaisnavis of ISKCON will be a philosophically sound and positive force for change that cannot be dismissed or ignored. We must become involved and associate with one another with love and compassion. I can say love, because if we are cultivating our love for guru and Krsna then it must also include His devotees.

—Karatapati devi dasi

Dayananda and Garuda dasa lead a workshop

The aims and benefits of DEVI, The DEvoted Vaisnavis of ISKCON,

also known as the ISKCON Women's Ministry, are listed below. Our mission is to develop an enduring network of support through association, education, and representation for the women of the Krishna consciousness movement. It's aims and benefits are seven-fold:

AIMS:

- 1) Provide facility for Vaisnavis to be spiritually strengthened by increased association together.
- 2) Ensure appropriate facility for the women of the Krishna consciousness movement to serve and remember the Supreme Lord, as well as preach His glories to others
- 3) Facilitate integration for women within ISKCON by opening channels of communication and by ensuring Vaisnavi representation within all levels of ISKCON management
- 4) Develop, provide, and/or ensure spiritual, vocational, and asrama training for the women of the Krishna consciousness movement
- 5) Ensure a base of financial support through the development of a Vaisnavi Chamber of Commerce
- 6) Provide practical and emotional support through crisis prevention assistance; educate ISKCON communities as to the causes, effects, symptoms, and preventative measures for various abuses such as domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and abandonment
- 7) Focus value upon the individual contributions and sacrifices of the women of the Krishna consciousness movement and to encourage others to value, respect, and protect spiritual "motherhood"

BENEFITS:

- 1) Increased association will deepen the devotional relationships among the women, hearten the Krishna conscious life-style and reinforce ISKCON society development.
- 2) Women's absorption in devotional practice and vigor in their preaching will speak to the world of the authenticity and dynamic nature of our movement, and will provide valuable human resource development.
- 3) Systematic communication will clarify misunderstandings, expose exploitation, and lessen the burden for individual contact between women and renunciants.
- 4) Spiritual, vocational, and asrama training will ensure complete and proper use of women's God-given talents in Krishna's service.
- 5) Financial development will contribute to community security and eradicate the need for single mothers to depend on government subsidy, low income work/or paraphernalia sales for their livelihood.
- 6) Crisis prevention assistance and education will lessen instances of abuse and provide necessary support when abuse occurs.
- 7) Focused appreciation of the contributions and sacrifices of women Vaisnavis will rebuild our movement's social integrity.

Letters to the Editor: Articles or visual materials should include name, address, telephone, fax or e-mail address. They should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope if return is requested. When shipping protect artwork or photographs with cardboard. Articles submitted within the body of an e-mail facilitate easy handling. Donations to expand this newsletter or to cover postage and printing are welcome. Forward all newsletter correspondence to: **Vaisnavi Sanga**, c/o Karalapati devi dasi, 1001 Bridgeway, Suite 541, Sausalito, CA 94965 phone: 415-381-6278 fax: 415-381-1935 e-mail: Karalapati@aol.com

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