

Women's Ministry: International Conference, Radhadesh, June 1998

THE POWER OF WORDS

by Gaurangi Dasi

NB : I edited the text a little in November 2014

INTRODUCTION

The importance of words and sound vibrations:

- Everything proceeds from sound: in the beginning was the word of God and the entire cosmic manifestation is generated from the sound of Krishna's flute.
- We transmit ordinary and spiritual knowledge through words.
- The exchange of words and communication is an essential element in relationships
- A few sweet words is the humblest gift the poorest person on this planet can offer to anyone.
- We all experienced the power of words in our own life:
 - Sweet and kind words stay with us for life, we cherish them.
 - Sharp and cruel words hurt, cut, and discourage us; they are hard to forget and can even kill our spirit.

Double function of the language and the words we use:

The words and language we use have a double function:

1) They express and reflect our interior world, our thoughts and ideas

The kind of words we use to describe things or talk about others express and reveal who we really are: our frame of mind, feelings, intentions, motivation, level of realisation, degree of culture, etc.

We've all made some lapsus in the past, spoken some words apparently by mistake and unwillingly, but these words were exactly expressing what was on our mind at that particular time, even while we were trying to conceal our true thoughts and feelings in the first place.

2) They also influence the way we think and perceive the world and reality.

The eskimos have at least 15 different words to describe "snow".

There are many words in sanskrit that have no english equivalent: in sanskrit there are several words to describe varieties of love (kama, priti, prema, bhava, etc), whereas in English there

is only one word (love): you love God, ice cream, swimming, your wife, your country, or your dog. The English language is less refined: it uses the same word to express totally different realities and experiences.

Topics we will present now related to the power of words :

A- Brief examination of some words and expressions used by the anticult movement (in France, where I live) and other oppressive groups, and their effect.

B- Examination of words and expressions used in the sastras and ISKCON to describe and address different groups of people, especially women, and their effect.

C- Why these language problems in ISKCON are serious ones?

D- Practical suggestions for improving the situation in ISKCON.

A few remarks about my presentation:

I was strongly encouraged to refer to specific quotes from sastras and from what Srila Prabhupada said. But then I realised a few things:

- This is a monumental work: for example, if I had wanted to analyse all the contexts in which Srila Prabhupada refers to women as "less intelligent", and what he meant by that, I would still be doing the research work and not speaking today. Of course this would be a very helpful research, which could be done later on, either individually or collectively.

- I assume that you all know well the sastras and what Srila Prabhupada said and that you are also aware of his over-all mood.

This presentation is mainly addressed to devotees who have been in ISKCON for some time, know the philosophy and have practical experience of life in ISKCON temples.

- By using quotes and counter quotes, we could definitively get a better understanding of Srila Prabhupada's teachings and mood, but this could also be a lengthy debate, and right now we have no time for that. My intention is more to appeal to the essence of the philosophy, common sense, basic psychology and human decency, in other words to bring things to the level of our every day life in examining how certain words we use affect us and our environment. I will also examine a few examples of non-verbal language, since it is a very good part of communication : expression, gestures, intonation, etc

In preparation for this presentation, I read through the articles and posts of the International Women's Conference on the internet. Among the topics discussed were: the "inauspicious character" of widows, whether the grhasthas producing baby girls were "fallen" or not and the males sexually "weak", what does the word "vedic" really refer to, are women equal to sudras, etc. There were many different quotes from the sastras and Srila Prabhupada on these topics , but what interested me the most were the words of wisdom spoken by various devotees. These words helped me reconfirm my intuition that we have to deal with things at a practical level, examine how we understand, or misunderstand, the philosophy, and apply, or misapply it, and the effect it has on our members, ISKCON as an institution, and the public in general.

- I studied linguistics, the analysis of language, which made me aware of the importance and the power of words. That is why I choose a more scientific analytical approach rather than a philosophical one, even though the two are obviously linked.

A- The language of the anticult movement and other oppressive or repressive groups

- Since I am now working in the Communications Department (Note : it was in the late nineties in France), I have read plenty of newspaper articles presenting "cults", new religious movements and the Hare Krishna movement in particular in very unkind and unfair terms. In France we even received the official label of being a "dangerous cult". I realized how difficult it is to get rid of the influence of negative designations and I read many reports showing how these designations have ruined people's lives and careers. Once someone has been labeled a member of a cult, the stigma seems to be very hard to remove, whether the accusations made were true or not.

- So I thought that a brief analysis of the language of the anticult would be interesting to show the impact of the words we choose to describe someone or represent them.

- I also listed expressions used by other oppressive or repressive groups to give further striking examples of the tactic of labeling people and groups.

1) Comparison of words used by the anticult movement to describe an established religion or a cult

AN ESTABLISHED RELIGION	A CULT
The word "religion" indicates something serious and respectable.	The word "Cult" (or "secte") evokes something strange, unusual, weird, unauthorized, bizarre, irrational , r even dangerous.
A religion is spreading its influence	A cult is proliferating (like a cloud of dangerous insects) People get contaminated by a cult The influence of a cult is compared to a tidal wave (synonym of catastrophe, danger)
Proselytism	Propaganda
Believer (he is sincere)	Adept (it implies he chose the wrong path)
Priest, pastor, monk, rabbi, etc (respectful words)	Guru (genrally used in a demeaning way), charismatic leader, cheap messiah (self-proclaimed, not legitimate).

AN ESTABLISHED RELIGION	A "CULT"
Spiritual influence of the priest or pastor	Mental manipulation
Religious conversion	Brainwashing
Transmission of religious values	Mind control
Religious vocation	Mental destabilisation
	Coercitive (by force) persuasion
Apostles, disciples	Accomplice (for criminal activities)
Catechetism (legitimate and honorable transmission to the children of religious ideas and values in which the parents believe)	Indoctrination
	Recruitment
Faith (It seems solid and sincere)	Belief (Relative and subject to controversy, qualified as being outrageous and irrational), myths, legends
Liturgy:	Strange incantations, mascarades
Vesper, morning prayer, etc	Weird nocturn rituals
Religious clothes and paraphernalia	Disguises, silly costumes, trinkets

2) Words used by different oppressive groups

Group	Words used	Reality behind the words
Nazis	The final solution	Extermination and torture of millions of Jews in concentration camps.
Abortion	Tissue removal Voluntary ending a pregnancy	Cold blooded murder of the baby in the womb of the mother
American army during the Viet nam war	Hamlet pacification	Setting population on fire with napalm, torturing and killing men, women and children.
Anticult groups and deprogrammers	Deprogrammation	Kidnapping and violent actions (physical, sexual, mental and psychological) against people professing different faiths or ideas

Communists in Cambodia	Reeducation	Sending all the intellectuals to work in the rice fields and/or killing them by the thousands.
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3- Consequences of using this language

Mukunda Goswami made a few interesting remarks in his article "New Religious Movement is a four-letter word", the language of oppression (ICJ, Vol 3 N° 2):

- Calling or labelling another person or group differently of the way he, she or they wish can wage **psychological warfare**.

- **People or groups that accept false labeling can loose important battles for their God-given rights**, even before a single shot is fired.

- In recent decades we invented hate words for citizens of other countries especially when "our country" was at war with them, we used slurs for racial and religious groups. **Systematic and calculated misnaming and disinformation campaigns have become part of the century's shame.**

* Effects of the words and labeling tactics used by the anticult groups, the enemical governments and the medias in general:

- To deny, denigrate, insult, ridicule and blaspheme minority religions

- To create fear, hatred, intolerance, prejudice and ignorance amongst the ignorant or innocent population

- To ruin the lives of individuals: it is very hard to recover from calomny as the wrong labels and harsh words used stick in the minds of the individual victim and of the public in general.

- To hide or justify atrocities committed against some groups: illegal actions, harassments, tortures, crimes, etc

B) The use of language in ISKCON, especially in relation to women

- Before I present the lists I have compiled, I would like to stress that this kind of language is not used systematically in all ISKCON centers or by the majority of its members, but extremes behaviours did exist and still do, and all these examples are true. I chose the worse and most striking ones to make my point. Some derogatory words such as "fringie" have almost disappeared from the ISKCON scene, at least in some areas. I heard a few stories that made me think that what is going on in some temples in Eastern Europe now is what happened in the US and Western Europe around 20 years ago. In order to avoid unhappy history to repeat itself, devotees must become aware of the way they speak to each other and about each other and present the philosophy.

1) Derogatory or demeaning language used towards certain ISKCON groups

2)

Life situation	Language used
A devotee not agreeing with the leaders's policies or decisions	an envious snake
Devotee living outside a temple	a fringie
A husband who is considerate to his wife, loving and caring	a henpecked husband
Children (spirit souls, devotees of God)	products of sex life
Any man who behaves normally towards women, is appreciative and supportive of them.	a man controlled by women
Acting as obnoxious jerks, pushing women, standing in front of them, being rude and disrespectful.	putting women in their place, being a real man, a real brahmacari (and not a lusty one)
Demeaning of women, not giving them participatory rights, giving them the worse facilities, treating them like little children, etc	protection of women

3) Demeaning, derogatory language towards women : labeling and name calling

4)

Life situation	Language used
A woman (me) making a wrong maneuver while driving a car	stupid cow
A sannyasi's comment while looking at a group of female devotees	the herd of cows
Woman being fed up and angry	hysterical woman
11 year old girl not covering her head	prostitute
or women with problems living in the asram	prostitute
Married women devotees whom the husband is preparing to leave to take sannyasa	hot piece of stool
Young brahmacarinis who want to get	maya devis

married	
Sick sankirtana devotees needing rest (as addressed by a temple president)	witch, in maya
Young brahmacarinis who have been approached by male devotees for association for marriage, either through proper channels or directly	unchaste women of bad reputation
Women devotees who are doing full time temple service	half a person half a devotee
Older female devotees interested in retiring in the holy dhama (a swami's comment)	lusty, loose, licentious and lazy Western ladies
Dedicated and intelligent female devotees concerned about the welfare of women in ISKCON and the future of the preaching mission.	-women's libbers, women activists, -revolutionaries -frustrated women (in need of a man) -women who don't cover their heads -immature new women with problems -women needing 3 or 4 kids to cool down

Further analysis of the principle of scapegoatism and name calling:

a- The principle: call the dog a bad name and hang him

- Call a religious or alternative group a "cult" and oppress and persecute them
- Call the women "stupid, less intelligent, agents of maya, etc", and ignore, disrespect and abuse them.

b- What does this accomplish?

- By labeling people, we are discounting human beings and creating social rejection
- We avoid facing our own imperfections and problems by accusing the other
- We justify unethical or cruel behavior by hiding behind words

- We avoid hearing what the other person has to say, or how he/she feels by hiding a disturbing reality behind technical words
- We avoid taking personal responsibility for a situation
- We create destructive results: emotional damage, loss of self-esteem, fear, anxiety, depression, devotees leaving the movement or taking great distance from it, suicidal thoughts, etc.

3- Selective language:

By selective language I refer to the fact that some devotees and Bhagavatam speakers choose to quote only certain verses or emphasize specific words, at the detriment of all the others presented in the sastras or by Srila Prabhupada.

I will only give here a few brief examples to illustrate the principle without getting into any lengthy analysis.

a- Most quoted words and expressions:

- Women being the agent of maya, or maya personified, less intelligent, possessing the heart of a sly fox, lusty, untrustworthy, spiritually inferior and more materialistic.
- You cannot trust a woman or a politician (Canakya Pandit)
- Woman compared to a witch during the day and a tigress at night, by sucking the blood of the husband (SB 5-14-3)

b- Less quoted verses and expressions:

- All the verses describing the good qualities of women: how she is the goddess of fortune, a great friend, more simple and devotional, the other half of a man, etc. An exhaustive list needs to be done.
- "When one is elevated to the platform of Krishna consciousness, man or woman, everyone is equal"

c- Incompletely quoted words and expressions, not always presented in the original context in which they were introduced:

Example: Women being less intelligent:

- Srila Prabhupada said "generally"
- He said this applies to materialistic women, not devotees
- He gave the following explanations:
 - They are more prone to material enjoyment" (SB 3-23-54): however, by this definition, lots of men are also less intelligent.

- When they let themselves be exploited by men
- Srila Prabhupada mentions many times that in Kali Yuga men are less intelligent than in former ages. Thus the question of whether statements about the relative intelligence of men and women apply at all in this age remains undecided.
- Srila Prabhupada uses that word in an archaic sense, as a synonym for "rational", whereas the modern meaning is "smart". Nobody is going to argue that men are more rational than women, but plenty would argue against the idea that men are smarter than women, since neither direct observation, nor sastra, nor Srila Prabhupada's activities give credence to such an idea.
- Psychologists say there are so many kinds of intelligence and so many kinds of intelligence tests

4- Distortive language:

By distortive language I refer to the fact of giving correct and innocent words a subtle meaning and negative connotations. A good example of it is the word "mataji"

a- Original meaning and connotations of the word:

The word « mother » evokes many positive things: the first guru, love, care, affection, protection, understanding, comfort, etc.

b- Proper use of the term:

By seeing all women, except one's wife, as mothers, men will develop respect and affection for them, because one is not supposed to feel lusty towards his mother or want to exploit her.

c- Negative connotations of the term:

-Because of poor treatment of women and mothers in ISKCON, many women even came to the point of cringing when they were addressed with that term.

- Men in ISKCON do not always treat women as mothers, because some of them might have treated their own mother rather poorly

- With the institutionalisation of the inferiority of women, the words "mataji", "mother" or "woman", became associated with some inferior status and a lot of negative qualities.

- The words « matajis » are sometimes used to put women back in their place, the back of the temple or some corner. Several times in ISKCON, I have seen these kinds of signs: "devotees" on this side, and "women" or "matajis" on the other. What are the implications of this sort of language? As Radha Dasi was observing, we thus marginalize women. This statement creates a psychological space in which women can be ranked a little bit lower than the rest of the vaisnavas, who oddly enough, turn out to be all men. The language creates a space in which this minimization of women is possible. Clearly, not everybody uses these statements in a negative way, but those of us who are immature and have not completely overcome their conditioning naturally find those spaces and take advantage of them.

- Intonation alone, coupled with unfriendly facial expressions, can also convey a very derogatory meaning to a very innocent word.

5- Words in need of a definition:

Many words we use in ISKCON need a very clear definition, such as the word "vedic". Even amongst scholars of religion, there are endless debates going on about its meaning. As Radha Dasi pointed out in her presentation in Los Angeles, so far ISKCON has failed to define this term. To some extent, it means "in line with the purposes and teachings of the Vedas", but ISKCON must more clearly articulate how the Vedas describe women's roles. So far, ISKCON spokespersons have failed to address the plurality of women's roles described in our own texts, focusing only on one or two examples from one or two women's stories. Currently, the term has a more common usage as a substitute for the phrase "vaguely historical". Women are often told that they cannot lead kirtan, for instance, because it would not be vedic for them to do so, in spite of the example of women in our own sampradaya who have done so.

In one of the famous purports glorifying the preaching efforts of his lady disciples (CC, Adi Lila, Chapter 7, verse 32) "These girls are not ordinary girls, they are as good as their brothers preaching Krishna Consciousness", Srila Prabhupada indicates that the test of a woman's participation role being appropriate or not is not whether it is vedic or not, but whether or not it helps spread Krishna consciousness.

Even though ISKCON is not really clear about the meaning of the word "vedic", it has been used in specific contexts, usually to get women to become humble, submissive and cooperative, or to prevent them from rendering certain services and taking positions of responsibility. It seems that the term has been used in political ways, sometimes very inconsistently, when the men wanted to achieve a specific result from women. For example, women were prevented from leading kirtans in the temple, because it was not vedic, but nobody objected when these same ladies were sent on "sankirtana" to collect donations by flirting with men and pinning a flower on their suit while speaking sweet words, running the risk of being raped on door to door, running around dark parking lots or going to sinister bars at night to get donations. I used to do some of these things and go out with another tall black lady, who was carrying a knife and a club, in case of some attack. In case you have in mind an image of the perfect "vedic woman", I am sure she would not match that dream picture.

Here are a couple of true stories to show you how words and philosophy can get perverted by immature and unscrupulous people.

1- One male devotee who wanted to go see a prostitute was asking his wife to be "vedic" by allowing him to do so; she would have thus followed in the footsteps of that great devotee often quoted as a most chaste lady, because she accepted to do menial service for a prostitute so that her husband could use her services without any cost on his part.

- Bir Krishna Maharaja recounts how he was accused of being non-vedic, weird, disobedient to Prabhupada's instructions and deviating from Krishna Consciousness, just because his eating habits happened to be different from other people and he could not take his meals in the middle of the day.

So much for the word "vedic"!

6- Unspoken language

a- The Mayapur samadhi:

- The puspa samadhi of our founder-acarya, His Divine A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, is certainly one of the most important memorials in ISKCON. Unfortunately it seems to convey a rather negative unspoken message since the bas-relief going around the samadhi representing the sankirtana movement of Lord Caitanya features hundreds of men (1071, I counted them), 8 women and 3 children, even though the original photos from which the paintings were done had women in them. We do not want to minimize the hard labor and sincerity of the artists who executed this work, but we wonder how such a mistake happened in such a prominent pilgrimage place which will become the spiritual capital of the world. Many devotees have commented on it and expressed their shock and surprise.

What is the unspoken message to all the women in ISKCON, most of them very actively engaged in the sankirtana movement of Lord Caitanya?

- You do not count because you have the wrong kind of body
- Tough luck, girls, you are not fortunate enough to have a male body in this life. Hopefully you'll get one in your next life.
- You are not valued
- All your hard work and sacrifices on sankirtana (usually referring to collecting lots of laxmi) do not mean anything to us
- You are not part of the movement of Lord Caitanya
- You do not exist
- You should not exist

b- ISKCON publications:

At one time ISKCON reviews and magazines were only or mainly portraying male devotees, and usually the brahmacari or sannyasi section. Happily in general, things have changed over the years.

c- Bodily language:

It is said that action speaks louder than words. Unfortunately we have seen many rude gestures and behaviors towards women in our movement:

- Men snapping fingers at their wives or other ladies, to order them to do something
- Rude gestures to indicate that someone should move to a different location
- Men not opening doors for ladies with bags, boxes or babies

- Men abruptly closing the door in front of women, as they are going in or out
- Men sitting in the space usually reserved for the women
- Men obstructing the view of the murtis for the women (when they could stand someplace else and still see Them also)

C- Why these language problems in ISKCON are serious ones?

1- The treatment of women in ISKCON is one of the main points the anticult movement strongly objects to.

The anticult people have valid reasons to be alarmed:

a- What they see and hear going on in some ISKCON temples (what have just been described)

- By systematically using negative and derogatory expressions, one commits verbal abuse, which has serious psychological repercussions already listed above; a person may even start to believe all these negative things and identify with them.
- Verbal abuse is often followed by physical abuse. Unfortunately there are many cases of wife beating in devotees families.

b- What they have heard about India and the situation of women there

To some extent it is true that India has a cultural bias towards women. When people hear these strong statements made in ISKCON without proper explanations and understanding, they might think that our books also represent this cultural bias and it simply reinforces all the negative things they have heard taking place in India:

- Women being treated as servants or sometimes slaves to men and their husbands
- Men usually being given preference in the family (general facilities, education, access to food and clothing, medical facilities, etc)
- Women having no freedom or power to decide for themselves
- Women being killed and tortured in many ways because of the dowry system
- Baby girls being killed in or outside the womb
- The ancient sati rite still being forced sometimes upon unwilling women (there was a time when women entered the fire willingly, but due to abuses, this practice has been made illegal by the British)

2- We have institutionalised the crude and rude behavior of men towards women:

Hridayananda Maharaja spoke very eloquently on that topic. The following is just a summary of the points he made at the last Women Ministry's conference in Los Angeles.

- When devotees joined the Krishna Consciousness Movement, they also rejected a lot of simple normal culture, like being a gentleman, being kind and compassionate. At the beginning of the movement, there was respect and affection between men and women, then things began to change.
- Somehow some men thought and are still thinking that it is not bona fide to be nice to women; they are not a man if they do it; they are supposed to play this role, to be obnoxious, rude, crude, and inconsiderate, and that is the proof that they are not lusty.
- It is a false idea to think that you can conquer lust by despising women. You think that you will not fall down if you despise a woman enough and so you pump yourself up, cultivating hatred and hostility towards women. This false idea of conquering lust like that has totally failed and everyone knows that the men who are the most adverse to women are the ones who are going to fall the hardest.
- The real way to conquer lust is by learning to offer all respects to women. If you feel reverence for women as your mother and feel deep respect, you will conquer lust. Because you cannot simultaneously respect someone and want to exploit them. The opposite of exploitation is a desire to serve."

Happily there is hope in that area as we see that things have improved over the years.

Hridayananda Maharaja's experience of going around the temples and having isthaghostis with the men was that they felt quite relieved that someone finally told them it was bona fide to be a gentleman and many of them even thanked him. The men want to be devotees and do the right thing but they adopted an illusion and they have been taught the wrong thing.

3- We are creating obstacles to the preaching of ISKCON

This derogatory language and negative attitudes towards women is very detrimental to the preaching:

- It is not based on the philosophy: we are not these bodies, the greatest devotees are Krishna are the gopis and Radharani is in charge of Goloka.
- Intelligent men and women are turned off
- It is Vaisnavi aparadha
- Devotees are embarrassed to bring intelligent people to the movement or the temples
- We might mainly attract men who already have bad feelings towards women

4- We are insulting Srila Prabhupada's character

- Women have been and are being insulted or ill- treated because of our lack of understanding the fundamental principles of our philosophy taught to us by Srila Prabhupada. To even imply that Srila Prabhupada would in any way accept or condone the mistreatment of women in our society is to insult and defame his character and morality. A true vaisnava cannot tolerate the infliction of harm on any other living being, what to speak of another vaisnava. Jyotirmayi Dasi in her report and many other lady disciples of Srila Prabhupada can tell you how Srila Prabhupada treated them, with love, affection, respect and encouragements.

- Some male members in ISKCON expressed the belief that Srila Prabhupada said that

"you can beat a wife and a mrdanga". One male member even believed that our vaisnava etiquette permits wife beating as long as he used a leather belt on her back or a sapling on her legs. We can see how some misguided and misinformed members of our movement quote Srila Prabhupada to justify their abuse. Srila Prabhupada may have quoted that common saying, but to imply that he was endorsing such action is misleading and dangerous.

5- We are doing the same thing anticult groups are doing against the Hare Krsna movement : using derogatory language

- How can we expect to be treated fairly as a movement when we ourselves use the same unfair tactics towards a group of people inside our movement?

Recently one honest reporter confessed to one of our leaders that he could not use friendly words when describing us, otherwise he might loose his job and be labeled a cult lover or supporter. Similarly some men in ISKCON wrongly think that they cannot speak nicely to and of women (their wives, co-workers, etc), without loosing their face and reputation and be called a dancing dog in the hands of women, someone controlled by the fair sex, lusty, in other words not a real man.

- The same element of bad faith can be found in the anticult and some men in ISKCON: they select only what fits their purpose or hidden agenda, whether consciously or not, and ignore all the rest.

D- PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Here are a few humble suggestions I am making. Your suggestions are also welcomed of course.

We can then discuss these together, as well as the means to implement them.

1) Understand correctly the sastras's and Srila Prabhupada's strong statements

The fact is that there are strong statements in the Bhagavatam and other sastras about women, made by the speakers in the sastras or Srila Prabhupada in his purports. Unfortunately we have some devotees in ISKCON who now think that the bad treatment towards women is justified in the philosophy, and they will quote these strong statements to justify them. Even though the mass of ISKCON devotees do not think like that happily, they may wonder what to do with these strong statements.

Here are a few alternatives:

a- Reject these statements and the whole philosophy with them:

Some people will throw out the whole philosophy of Krishna consciousness because of reading or hearing some of these strong statements. This points out the need to correctly understand these statements, present and explain them properly, in a faithful but palatable way. Obviously most devotees will not reject statements coming from the scriptures or Srila Prabhupada, or try to change what he gave us, but they are sometimes perplexed or confused about what to make of them.

b- Figure out ways to get around what Srila Prabhupada said:

It is a tricky thing to do for sure and could be dangerous for one's spiritual life because it leaves room for interpretation, choosing and picking what one likes to hear and rejecting the rest.

c- Find ways to understand what Srila Prabhupada said in a way that is not offensive to the women or to Srila Prabhupada himself:

This is what I have been trying to do all these years in ISKCON. I was thus very happy when I heard Hridayananda Maharaja formulating it in a clear manner. So I will more or less repeat what he said on this topic in Los Angeles:

- Some generalizations are valid, otherwise you could not have a varnasrama system, you could not classify people's external propensities according to certain standards
- The way he understands a lot of these heavy statements: These are the worse cases. If you make a list of all the strong statements about men, you'll find very quickly: they're hogs, dogs, camels, asses and many other things. Just the way the vedic literature is presented in terms of sanskrit and Srila Prabhupada's english, whenever heavy statements are made about the stupidity and sinfulness of human beings, it is the masculine that is used. It says that the men have all these bad qualities, so they take the brunt of that also.
- In practice we see that there are many great women. It cannot be the case that Srila Prabhupada or the Bhagavatam want us to think that these great women like Kunti, or Draupadi, or other vaisnavis present in this conference, are lusty, greedy, envious and so on. Obviously that is not the conclusion we are meant to come to.

So Hridayananda Maharaja's personal understanding is that although some generalisation must be valid (otherwise there could not be coherence or sanity in the world), these generalisations are exceptions, and they are the worse case scenario: if a man or woman gives in to their lower propensities, that is what it can lead to. Obviously these heavy statements do not apply to Vaisnavis or to Vaisnavas.

2) Follow Srila Prabhupada's example

Try to absorb his mood (caring, compassionate, encouraging, equal vision), adopt his attitudes and behavior.

3) Compile a booklet of words, expressions and clichés in need of a definition or explanation:

Briefly analyse the different contexts in which these words were presented and make a synopsis of it in the light of all the other statements made by Srila Prabhupada on the topic, his own personal example, basic psychology, our preaching tactics, sheer common sense and human decency.

Here is a partial list of expressions that require investigation:

- Women are like children
- The vedic woman
- You can beat a wife and a mrdanga
- You cannot trust a woman or a politician
- Women are less intelligent
- Women are ten times more lusty than men
- How Madhavi was half a devotee of Lord Caitanya
- Why widows are considered inauspicious, etc

4) Encourage male lecturers to follow certain guidelines

- **Speakers should avoid derogatory words and expressions towards women: stop the denigration of the feminine principle and qualities.** The Bhagavatam class or any other lecture is not a forum to let out one's personal frustrations and feelings.

- **Speakers should try to make balanced presentations: not focusing exclusively on negative aspects of certain class of people.**

Srila Prabhupada often said that woman is maya for men and man is maya for women. It is always good to keep the balance and not focus exclusively on one group, especially when many women still do not get the opportunity to give Bhagavatam classes and express themselves .

- **Speakers should define their words and put them in the right contexts, instead of making sweeping generalisations.**

- **Male speakers should avoid making fun in a covert way of ladies having problems**

CONCLUSION

There is a definite need in ISKCON to watch out for our language, analyse it, understand it, and rectify it when necessary. The psychology of a population, a group or an individual is revealed very clearly in his vocabulary. Our vocabulary is revealing who we are:

loving and compassionate people, true vaisnavas and transcendentalists, or bigotted, hard hearted, narrow-minded and sectarian people.

I will end with a couple of relevant quotes:

"Nothing so violently opposes men against each other as the fact of putting opposed realities behind the same words"

"It happens very often that men kill each other for words they do not understand. They would embrace each other if they could understand each other." Anatole France

So let's keep on trying to understand Srila Prabhupada, the sastras and also each other. We might not all end up embracing each other, but we will make ISKCON a better place and what Krishna and Srila Prabhupada intended it to be.

HARE KRISHNA!