

Priti-laksanam

A Forum for Vaisnava Discussion

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 1991

Contents

A Note from the Editor	page 1
Letters	
Priti-laksanam is the Life of our Society	1
Renewed Hopes for My Wife	1
Psychology and Astrology	2
A Perspective from England	3
A Society Without Envy	3
Essays	
United We Stand; Srila Prabhupada on Japa Policy	4
Women in Krishna Consciousness	8
Does the Size of the Brain Determine Intelligence?	10
More Letters	
Forward with Srila Prabhupada's Ways	10
How Can I Come Back [to ISKCON]?	12
Let's Come Clean	13
A Catch-22	13
Where Are Your Women Gurus?	14
Srila Prabhupada Is Not Chauvanistic	15
Excerpts from a Letter to Bhakti-Caru Swami	16
Krishna Consciousness Is Not Sexist	16
The Roles of Men and Women	17

“Offering gifts in charity, accepting charitable gifts,
revealing one's mind in confidence, inquiring confidentially,
accepting *prasada* and offering *prasada*
are the six symptoms of love [*priti-laksanam*]
shared by one devotee and another.”
— *Nectar of Instruction*, Text Four

Priti-laksanam
c/o P.O. Box 90143
San Diego, CA 92169

A Note from the Editor

This issue of *Priti-laksanam* deals extensively with women in Krishna consciousness—their realizations, hopes, fears and resolve.

We hope that in future issues we'll address the variety of topics we highlighted in our original brochure. In order to accomplish this we need to hear from you. We do not want to limit our discussion to women in Krishna consciousness; we want to address the broad spectrum of Vaisnava relationships.

The purpose of the newsletter is to share thoughts among aspiring Vaisnavas. It is not to only criticize. I realize that in opening up the discussion there appears to be negativity directed toward the "greater ISKCON." This needs to be placed in proper perspective, as the newsletter's very name decries antagonism or rebellion.

The point of the discussion is to allow a venue where devotees on the path of Krishna consciousness can voice their concerns and be heard by the broader ISKCON community and the GBC. I hope that all the contributors have the same intent in mind that I do, and I feel that those in this issue do.

The discussions are raised out of concern; we care. We care enough about Prabhupada's mission to speak out. *Priti-laksanam* is meant to provide constructive criticism, not to tear apart ISKCON, it's founder-*acarya* Srila Prabhupada, it's manager's or it's devotees. Because the issues addressed here are delicate and could be misunderstood, the newsletter is confidential.

Satsvarupa Maharaja coined a phrase, which is my guiding light in these types of discussions: "ISKCON, with all thy faults, I love thee." I hope the readers and contributors of *Priti-laksanam* will also use this as a beacon. The discussion should not raise doubts about the potency of Krishna consciousness, the devotees of Srila Prabhupada, or ISKCON. The discussion is to be used as what it is intended: constructive criticism to better our institution. Let us work cooperatively and sympathetically together to see that Prabhupada's movement becomes the strong movement that it should be.

But where is the *Krishna-katha*? you may rightly ask. After all, the loving relationships referred to by the term "*priti-laksanam*" are based on hearing and chanting about Krishna.

We certainly hope that *Priti-laksanam* is used for Krishna-katha yet we want to address seemingly mundane subjects that demand the attention of managers in ISKCON. Dealing with these subjects will improve our preaching and support our hearing and chanting.

On a final note: Some of the material printed here is repetitious. We've been hearing these points

for some time now.

This indicates that something must be done by the leaders of our Society. Ignoring the unrest will not make it go away. Correcting mistakes sooner than later is most always a better policy.

How much can it hurt to apologize and rectify any wrongs done?

Pranada Devi Dasi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

***Priti-laksanam* Is the Life of Our Society**

We have in hand your *Priti-laksanam* brochure, for which we thank you very much. We would have responded earlier, but Radhika's arrival sent us spinning.

Priti-laksanam, the verse in which it appears, and Srila Prabhupada's purport contain vital knowledge for our Society. I especially love this line: "The International Society for Krishna Consciousness has been established to facilitate these six kinds of loving exchanges."

Priti-laksanam is nothing less than the very life of our Society, the "inner life" of Krishna consciousness that we want to taste and spread everywhere. In fact, it is so vital I don't see how BTG can do without it. A real magazine for real people? Not without *priti-laksanam*, loving exchanges among devotees. If BTG is our backbone, then *Priti-laksanam* is our spinal cord, sending vital messages to the body of devotees.

Take the response to your brochure and write up a column immediately [for *Back to Godhead*]. This column alone will sell the magazine because readers will write you constantly. Look at all the bleeding hearts who write VVR. Devotees are starving. *Priti-laksanam* is solid bread for the hungry. PLEASE DO IT!

Suresvara Dasa
Gita-nagari

Renewed Hopes for My Wife

After seeing your ad in the *ISKCON World Review*, I was delighted to see that someone was finally addressing this issue [women in Krishna consciousness]. It has been a major stumbling block for my wife.

She has grown tired of "male dominated" religions. When she saw that Radharani was part of worship, her hopes grew. She feels that women are, and always should have been, the other "half" of religion.

My wife would be more open to Krishna consciousness if she felt that should would not be a

second-class citizen, subservient to men, and limited in opportunity and ability to use her skills.

We have read (and people do read many things) in a non Krishna conscious book that Prabhupada once said: "A woman has half the brain of a man." Is this true, and if so, what did he mean?

Mr. O'Conner
San Diego, CA

(Please see the question and answer by Sadaputa dasa on page 10 for an answer .)

Psychology and Astrology in Krishna Consciousness

I just received *Priti-laksanam* and am thrilled. *Priti-laksanam* has the potential to help clarify many controversial and complex issues that face all devotees at present, what to say about in the years to come.

At present I am working toward graduating this coming spring from Temple University with a degree in psychology. I intend to continue on into graduate school in clinical psychology.

As mundane as that may sound, I believe many unique preaching opportunities will be opening up to me in my career pursuit. You may also know that Visnugada Prabhu is working on his masters degree in psychology and has some similar aspirations for using his psychological knowledge for preaching purposes. Of course, we both deeply appreciate the "psychology" of the *Bhagavad-gita* and even have hinted to one another that research could be done using the paradigm of the *Gita* to develop a "first" (an ultimate) psychotherapy session. Krishna consciousness with Jungian concepts.

Even Srila Prabhupada appreciated Jung's perspectives and felt that he was the most sensible of all the western philosophers (*Dialectic Spiritualism*, pp. 509-535). Of course, the philosophy of Krishna consciousness should never be watered down, but I believe that many of Jung's concepts can be used for psychotherapeutic purposes. The concept of midlife crisis and individuation closely parallels many senior devotee's struggles.

Psychopathology is just as much rampant in ISKCON as it is in secular society and I for one feel that some formal devotee counseling services should be organized. This is certainly a controversial topic that needs to be looked at from a sastric and scholarly perspective. Obviously, the philosophy of Lord Caitanya is capable of alleviating all of our material mental miseries and bringing us to a transcendental platform, but I believe that many times devotees have difficulties that need immediate attention before they can peacefully proceed

with the process of *sadhana bhakti*.

Let's face it, how many times have we seen troubled devotees get inadequate "counseling" from spiritual authorities that may be ill-equipped to handle emotional and behavioral problems that can be solved by a trained therapist? Many devotees do in fact go to nondevotee psychotherapists to help them cope with difficulties that were not resolved by Krishna conscious practices alone.

The problem is that non devotees, no matter how psychologically expert they may be, cannot be sensitive to the unique difficulties and struggles of a devotee and therefore such "therapy" may lead a devotee to reject Krishna consciousness altogether. On the other hand, some devotees (old and young) who may be in need of therapy may not get treatment and therefore will suffer various psychological disorders that could be avoided.

This is a complex issue with no easy answers, but the devotional communities should, hopefully, be open to discussing them.

Along with the controversy of formalized psychological counseling for devotees comes the controversy of astrological counseling. Srila Prabhupada discloses that in Vedic culture the *brahmanas* were trained not only in the science of Krishna consciousness, but also in *Jyotisha-veda* and *Ayurveda* (Cc. *Adi-lila*, Ch. 17, text 103 & 104). Srila Prabhupada never stressed the utilization of *Jyotisha sastra* but he also recognized it as a science that was important in Vedic culture. He even recommends that it is the duty of a father in Vedic society to understand the astrological position of his children and do what is needed for their happiness (Bhag. 10.8.5).

Can we infer that Vedic astrological research needs to be done in order to clarify the differences of opinion that exist in regard to *Jyotisha* and it's relationship with ISKCON and with the Vaisnava tradition in general? Would anyone be so bold as to suggest a board of astrology for ISKCON? If such a board could possibly be made and astrological knowledge be standardized, then could adequate counseling needs and even marriage arrangements be a reality? Again, these are issues that have no easy solutions or quick answers.

All of your suggested topics for discussion fall under the larger umbrella of *daiva-varnasrama* development. Any concerned devotee should feel obligated to contribute to the ongoing discussions so that the multifarious Krishna conscious realizations and perspectives are heard and considered by the assembled Vaisnavas.

The philosophy of Krishna consciousness as given to us by Srila Prabhupada is a deep reservoir of spiritual knowledge and culture that every devotee has some unique relationship with. Seemingly

contradictory perspectives can be harmonized by mature Vaisnava relationships and mutual respect. Your new format of *Priti-laksanam*, if it gets the blessings of the Vaisnavas, should be a catalyst for the development of mature and enthusiastic preaching objectives and for the evolution of devotee relationships that function on the basis of love and trust. This is indeed something that we all eagerly desire and look forward to.

Ramanatha-suka Dasa
Philadelphia, PA

A Perspective from England

I received your pamphlet, a forum of Vaisnava discussion on relationships and was impressed by the idea. I would like to share one observation that I have as follows. If we were to look for governments around the world that most closely resemble a Krishna conscious government according to present trends, my opinion is that North Korea, Albania and Iran are the closest. I say this because they offer a very controlled environment, they restrict association of their members to only people who are following the same philosophy and lifestyle and in the case of Iran they completely ban illicit sex, gambling, alcohol and drugs. They also have almost Vedic punishments for things like adultery, theft, etc. Whilst economic development and democracy are not essential elements of a Krishna conscious state, they must be faced in building a credible society.

Recent political and social events around the world do tend to support the theory that the more democratic a country the more socially stable it is and the more economic development is evidenced.

Under the headings that you have listed I would give the following, for whatever it is worth to contribute to general discussion on the subjects. Under management and leadership issues I feel that until our Society develops formal management training and succession systems we are always going to be in a situation where we are placing square pegs into round holes. In other words, we look for somebody who can do a job rather than selecting from a list of suitable candidates.

On the subject of woman's issues I feel that the women in this case are their own worst enemies. The Society as a whole only needs to select the best person for the job regardless of sex, age, race, etc. Of course, when I say job I am talking about preaching, management activities, etc. I feel that the women in our Society need to challenge and defeat the present deficiencies *by their activities and example*.

There is no doubt that there is sometimes misogynous tendencies amongst our Society's management (as in any society), but when so much of the

decision-making process is in the hands of the *sannyasis* that is not a precalculated, nasty thing, it is simply a natural result. We need a few chaste women with a lot of courage and a developed sense of philosophical reality as well as diplomacy. As you said roughly half of the world's population are women and our Society needs to reflect that.

Regarding the householder issue, my experience is that the vast majority of initiated devotees leave active devotional service and *asrama* life for financial reasons. This should be addressed by giving training to *brahmacaris* and *brahmacarinis* that takes for granted they are going to be married, will have to support themselves, and will be living outside of the *asrama* after a certain period of training is undertaken. In this way we will produce responsible, socially adjusted, spiritually inclined individuals who are not only guilt-free but gilt-edged.

The congregational issue is probably the biggest yet to develop, there are problems our Society will face. Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and so many of the world's religions have split irreparably over the issue of whether a church should be congregational or priest dominated. It is not hard to construct an argument for trying to justify either situation. Clearly Vaisnavas do not have to fall into either a congregational or priest denomination. They simply aspire to render service to the best of their ability to other Vaisnavas.

A congregation is essential and if we as a Society put as much energy into that, as we do into publishing and distributing, then we would very quickly have a congregation of substance. If we call them members of ISKCON they will behave like members of ISKCON. If we try and treat them as something less than that will simply be a miscarriage of justice as the ISKCON management and temple presidents are continually changing and are coming into and out of the "congregation" anyway. The congregational development would also help solve the match-making problem that you have pointed out.

Amita Dasa
England

A Society Without Envy

I just received a copy of the *Priti-laksanam*. This service [publishing *Priti-laksanam*] has the potential to unite us and bring about an understanding and cooperation on a large scale. Thank you.

I'd like to share with you some things I have learned over the years. According to *sastra* women should be respected with kindness and seen by other men as mother. Men should know what mother means so that they will treat us properly,

and we must know how to behave as mother.

The husband and wife relationship is very important. There should be genuine love and trust. I believe astrology is very useful in uniting two people of similar dispositions so they can happily help each other progress in spiritual life. If husband and wife are happy [spiritually] then there will be children with good dispositions. Women have the power to make or break a marriage by their behavior and understanding of a man's psychological nature.

My understanding concurs with Srila Prabhupada. Women should be married and provided for, spiritually and materially, by their husbands. For those single women or widows we should have *asramas*. A mature, devoted, advanced woman should be in charge of the *asrama* to organize such protection. She should be maintained by the temple and the women should engage in temple worship and management according to their different natures and propensities.

I feel that currently ISKCON does not understand *varnasrama*. But more important is that purity, humility and love and trust must be there first. Appreciating the qualities of a devotee, whether they are a man or woman, and giving them facility to engage in service as they are qualified should be done. To do this we must give up envy.

Pracetana Devi Dasi
Vancouver, Canada

United We Stand: Srila Prabhupada's Japa Policy

The following is from a letter written by Manasa Ganga Devi Dasi in November, 1988 to devotees in the Philadelphia ISKCON community.

I propose we reestablish an important, though often ignored, policy of Srila Prabhupada's. This policy states that all devotees are to chant in the temple room during *japa* period.

Several factors prompt my proposal, the most immediate being that winter is upon us and the women do not have a place to chant.

This proposal, however, is not merely a plea to alleviate physical hardship for the women, although that is important; it is also an attempt to address some misconceptions that have contributed to discrimination against women within ISKCON, policies (like those pertaining to the *japa* period) that are contrary to the instructions of Srila Prabhupada.

Some devotees may view this proposal as unwelcome, as a threat to the status quo, and to you I would say that if this proposed change in ISKCON policy is in keeping with Prabhupada's instructions, then it is a healthy and progressive challenge that

will benefit everyone; it is a change that will unify and strengthen rather than divide and weaken our *yatra*.

If we can work with a shared understanding of what it means to be members of a Vaisnava community— of what it means in practice to afford everyone equal spiritual opportunity— and if we can work in concert rather than in discord, then we have a chance of withstanding, even of reversing, the heavy onslaught of Kali-yuga. Without a sense of community and mutual respect, our unity is necessarily divided, our strength diminished, and our potential for casualties increased.

The Current Japa Policy: Separate But Not Equal

The *japa* policy in many ISKCON temples is that only men chant in the temple room and the women must chant elsewhere. The rationale is that we should segregate the sexes to avoid sexual distraction. Thus it has become widely accepted within ISKCON that it is all right to exclude women from certain temple privileges, that in the name of keeping male devotees unagitated, it is better to be separate but not equal. And to preserve this perspective, the current policy has ordained privilege to one group of devotees at the expense of another.

Last winter, however, when I read Pranada Prabhu's letter to Saudamani Prabhu regarding *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class, I realized that our *japa* policy does not reflect Prabhupada's instructions. In fact, not only did Prabhupada object to excluding women from the temple room, but he also objected to any devotee leaving the temple room to chant *japa* elsewhere. Quite simply, Srila Prabhupada wanted all available devotees to chant together in the temple room during *japa* period.

Two questions come to mind when I consider this discrepancy between our daily practice and Prabhupada's instructions. First, why did Prabhupada oppose segregation of the sexes during this particular devotional activity? And, second, why has his instruction been ignored? To address these questions it is necessary to reconsider what is meant by equal opportunity in devotional service and why this equality is basic to the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition. We also need to look at how this philosophical perspective is reflected in Prabhupada's instructions.

Vaisnavism: A Tradition of Spiritual Enfranchisement

The Krishna consciousness tradition is one of universal enfranchisement (of allowing everyone the right to take part), not of elitism (of making spiritual practices accessible only to a select group), as has been characteristic of impersonalist traditions.

In the forefront of the battle against the disen-

franchisement policies practiced by the impersonalists were Lord Caitanya and His associates. They propounded an egalitarian model of spiritual practice, laying the groundwork for a worldwide movement that would have at its core the principle and practice of nondiscrimination. This vision of equality is expressed in the seventh chapter of the *Caitanya-caritamrta Adi-lila*.

*patrapatra-vacara nahi, nahi sthanasthana
yei yanha paya, tanhakare prema-dana*

“In distributing love of Godhead, Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His associates did not consider who was a fit candidate and who was not, nor where such distribution should or should not take place. They made no conditions. Wherever they got the opportunity the members of the Panca-tattva distributed love of Godhead.” (Cc. *Adi* 2.7.23)

Because Lord Caitanya practiced spiritual equality in His mission, the Mayavadis criticized Him for slumming—for preaching to and converting the *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. Yet by making great devotees of lowly-born persons, Lord Caitanya rendered moot the then current practice of biases based on birth and bodily designation. Three texts later Prabhupada’s purport underscores this point of spiritual equality.

“Here again it may be emphasized that although jealous rascals protest that Europeans and Americans cannot be given the sacred thread of *sannyasa*, there is no need even to consider whether one is a gentleman or a rogue because this is a spiritual movement which is not concerned with the external body of skin and bones. Because it is being properly conducted under the guidance of the Panca-tattva, strictly following the regulative principles, it has nothing to do with external impediments.” (Cc. *Adi* 2.7.26)

Prabhupada often received criticism for his application of the principle of spiritual equality. One challenger argued, “If men and women chant together, then why don’t they sleep in the same room together?” Prabhupada replied that, although men and women in ISKCON have equal rights, there is a clear line of demarcation indicating where comingling of the sexes should end.

“It is the concern of the *acarya* to show mercy to the fallen souls. In this connection *desa-kala-patra* (the place, the time, and the object) should be taken into consideration. Since the European and American boys and girls in our Krishna consciousness movement preach together, less intelligent men criticize that they are mingling without restriction. 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....Therefore it is a principle that a preacher must strictly follow the rules and regulations laid down in the *sastras* yet at the same time devise a means by which the preaching work to reclaim the fallen may go on with full force.” (Cc. *Adi* 2.7.38) [Emphasis added]

Srila Prabhupada’s Instructions

Srila Prabhupada’s insistence on providing everyone with facility for spiritual culture is expressed in his firm position of allowing women the privilege to chant in the temple room—the most spiritually auspicious room—during *japa* period.

Unfortunately, many years later, many senior devotees have forgotten and newer devotees have not even heard Prabhupada’s unequivocal and uncompromising instructions in this matter. To reacquaint us with what Prabhupada wanted, I would like to quote from his letter to Ekayani dasi in 1972. At that time, the authorities at the New York temple had just instituted a policy that excluded women from the temple room during *japa* period.

“... I do not know what these things inventions are going on. That is our only business, to invent something new programme? We have already got our Vaisnava standard. That is sufficient for Madhavacarya, Ramanujacarya, it was sufficient for Lord Chaitanya, six Gosvamis, for Bhaktivinoda Thakur, for my Guru Maharaja Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, for me, for all big, big saints and acaryas in our line— why it shall be inadequate for my disciples so that must manufacture something? That is not possible. Who has introduced these things, that women cannot have chanting *japa* in the temple, they cannot perform the arati and so many things. That is not possible. Who has introduced these things, that women cannot have chanting? If they become agitated, then let the brahmacharis go to the forest, I have never introduced these things. The brahmacharis cannot remain in the present of women in the temple, then they must go to the forest, not remaining in New York City, because in New York there are so many women, so how they can avoid seeing? Best thing is to go to the forest for not seeing any women, if they become so easily agitated, but then no one will either see them and how our preaching work will go on?” (Letter to Ekayani Devi Dasi, December 3, 1972)

This letter to Ekayani Dasi is not a lone instruction. Srila Prabhupada relates the same position with even greater force during a morning walk in Nairobi in 1975. When a devotee mentioned to Srila

Prabhupada that devotees sometimes leave the temple to chant their *japa* elsewhere, Prabhupada replied.

“Why do they walk other places? Who says that you go or walk other places? No, you should chant in the temple room. Why should you go to other place? Why should you go outside? Who has allowed him to go outside? There’s no need. That is the chance of falling down. Why you should go outside? We are arranging for the temple, for the food— why? Because everyone should stick to the temple and the principles. Why you should go outside? That should be stopped! They cannot go outside.” (Morning Walk Conversation 10/30/75 Nairobi) [Emphasis added]

In the same conversation the same devotee further explained to Srila Prabhupada the attitude held by some men about chanting in the temple room when women are present.

Devotee: “What I meant to say is that he says that he does not want to chant with women in the temple room. I have seen this before. He says, ‘I do not want to chant in a room with women. I’d rather be away from the women.’”

Srila Prabhupada: “That means he has got distinction between men and women. He is not a *pandita*. *Panditah sama darsinah*. He is a fool. That’s all. He is a fool. So what is the value of his word? He is a fool. He should always consider, “There is a woman, that’s all right. She is my mother.” That’s all. *Matrvat para daresu*. Suppose you sit down with your mother and chant. What is the wrong? But if he is not so strong, then he should go to the forest. Why should he live in the Nairobi city? On the street there are so many women. He’ll walk on the street closing the eyes? [Laughter] This is all rascaldom. They are rascals. They are not devotees. Simply rascals.”

The Direct Meaning of Srila Prabhupada’s Instructions

For some devotees it is enough to hear Srila Prabhupada’s instructions and to act upon them, but others have found ways to evade them.

The most often-used evasive argument is that chanting in the presence of the opposite sex is distracting. And its companion argument is that we are not on a very elevated platform. This line of reasoning has potentially dangerous ramifications in that it can be used as a basis for modifying any of Srila Prabhupada’s instructions. It is akin to what Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura describes in the *Caitanya-caritamrta* as *laksana-vrtti*. *Laksana-vrtti* means “indirect meaning,” and it is mentioned in reference to how the Mayavadis give distorted interpretations of the Vedic literature. Instead of accepting Krishna’s instructions in a simple, straightforward way, the Mayavadis go to

great lengths, creating all sorts of convoluted mental puzzles to justify their interpretations of the scriptures. But Prabhupada cautions us about the dangers of such mental jugglery.

“The Vedic literature is to be considered a source of real knowledge, but if one does not take it as it is, one will be misled. For example, *Bhagavad-gita* is an important Vedic literature which has been taught for many years, but because it was commented upon by unscrupulous rascals, people derived no benefit from it, and no one came to the conclusion of Krishna consciousness. Since the purpose of *Bhagavad-gita* is now being presented as it is, however, within four or five short years thousands of people all over the world have become Krishna conscious. That is the difference between direct and indirect explanations of Vedic literature. Therefore Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu said, *mukhya-vrttye sei artha parama mahattva*: to instruct Vedic literature according to its direct meaning, without false commentary, is glorious. Unfortunately, Sri Sankaracarya, by the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, compromised between atheism and theism in order to cheat the atheists and bring them to theism, and to do so he gave up the direct method of Vedic knowledge and tried to present a meaning which is indirect....” (Cc. *Adi* 2.7.110)

Similarly, we must learn to hear and act on the instructions of *guru*, *sastra*, and *sadhu* exactly as they are presented— as *mukhya-vrtti*— without qualification or manipulation. To concoct our own meaning is what Prabhupada refers to as being “overly intelligent.”

The we-are-not-so-elevated rationale also harbors another and, perhaps, more serious form of defiance. It implies that we think we are smarter than Prabhupada. Prabhupada knew his disciples. He chanted in the temple room with them, and he knew their level of Krishna consciousness and their spiritual capabilities. If he gave us specific instructions and we do not follow them, pleading that we are not so elevated, then we are saying that we know better than Prabhupada. So even though Prabhupada said we should chant together, we have decided we are too distracted. Shouldn’t we let Prabhupada be the judge?

Changing One’s Consciousness Is a Practical Activity

One final comment needs to be made about the belief that we are not yet elevated enough to chant in the same room with the opposite sex. Inherent in this line of reasoning is a fundamental misconception of how change of consciousness actually occurs. The misconception is that a change in consciousness must precede a change in activity: “I have to become more Krishna conscious before I can chant in the presence of the opposite sex without

distraction.” As opposed to: “If I faithfully attend the morning *japa* period and chant with the other devotees (men and women), I will make solid progress in Krishna consciousness.”

Prabhupada taught us that by practice we can learn to do anything. Just as learning to chant unoffensively results from practice, so learning to concentrate one’s mind and not be distracted by those around us also comes from practice. By following the rules and regulations under the guidance of a spiritual master, we revive what was there all along— our dormant love for Krishna.

This process of elevating one’s consciousness is described in *Bhagavad-gita* (12.9) as *abhyasa-yogena*, which means “by the practice of devotional service.” In a class on this text, Ravindra-svarupa Prabhupada explains:

“The process of *abhyasa-yogena* is the revival of what’s already there. It’s not importing something into our psyche. It’s clearing away the garbage. It’s not that first I revere Krishna and then I bow down, but rather that first I bow down and then I learn to revere Krishna. It’s practical.

“Prabhupada used the example that in India, where marriages are arranged, a young girl may not yet know her husband, but the practice is that she begins to serve him— cook his food and things like that. And by that practice, actual feelings of love and attachment arise. So, if you go through these devotional practices, it evokes the feelings and realizations.”

If we hope to rise above the dualism of male and female and to begin relating as Vaisnavas, then we must practice it. Prabhupada gave us the morning program (his precise, practical application of *abhyasa-yogena*), and he told us that if we follow this program rigidly we will not fall into *maya*. Faithfully attending the morning program consists of *mangala-arati*, *japa* period, greeting the Deities, *guru-puja*, and *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class. By Prabhupada’s standard, the *japa* segment of our program is notably faulty: it is a “new programme” tainted by “manufactured invention.”

The Issue of False Lordship

A mistaken sense of ownership is conspicuous in the partiality with which ISKCON management appropriates use of the temple room. Our false sense of proprietorship— our desire to be Krishna— causes us to perceive reality as dual (male and female, happiness and distress, etc.). By reinforcing an atmosphere of temple room ownership, the current *japa* policy serves to abet rather than mitigate that illusion. In the *Bhagavad-gita* Prabhupada explains that to be “free from the delusion caused by pride” and to begin the surrendering process, we must give up our illusion of false proprietorship.

“. . . One has to get out of the false notion that

human society is the proprietor of this world. . . . One has to cultivate knowledge of what is actually his own and what is actually not his own. And when one has an understanding of things as they are, he becomes free from all dual conceptions such as happiness and distress, pleasure and pain. He becomes full in knowledge; then it is possible for him to surrender to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” (Bg. 15.5)

Prabhupada’s instructions are explicit: We transcend duality by giving up false proprietorship. Not vice versa. We must give up our pride, our self-delusion, our desire for prestige, and our desire to avoid our *anarthas*, if we are going to surrender to Krishna and see one another as spirit.

To continue denying women access to the temple room during *japa* period, therefore, is spiritually harmful not only to the women but also to the men. To exclude one group of devotees fosters the notion that the temple room belongs to the group that is not excluded, thus promoting a better-than-thou attitude among the favored group. While feeling superior to others may provide some false sense of security, it amounts to nothing more than a mental concoction that binds one to illusion. The only thing that is truly our own is our relationship with Krishna.

Conclusion on Japa

This proposed reinstatement of Prabhupada’s desires should not be seen as taking away from the men but as boosting the spiritual strength of everyone in our community. If we feel distracted by the opposite sex while chanting together in the temple room, then rather than running away from our problems, let us take advantage of the opportunity to acknowledge that Krishna is holding up a mirror to our *anarthas*, challenging us to confront them. If we avoid confronting our *anarthas*, how can we make spiritual advancement? As Srila Prabhupada points out, *maya* will simply be waiting, ready to ambush us with our festering *anarthas* as soon as we leave the shelter of the temple room and the sound of the holy name.

By strictly and respectfully relating to one another as Godbrother and Godsister, rigorously routing out the diseased tendency to relate on a lesser platform, the women will get the opportunity to develop their fullest spiritual potential. Furthermore, we can all begin to eradicate the unhealthy notion that the temple room is the property of a select group. We are all spirit souls, and to the extent that we create an atmosphere reflecting that realization, the overall spiritual climate and attractiveness of the Krishna consciousness movement— both for women and for men— will be enhanced.

As always, our spiritual success lies in pleasing our spiritual master. Let us, therefore, ensure that success by owning up to our past mistakes and

rectifying a longstanding error. Srila Prabhupada wanted to build a house in which the entire world can peacefully live. We can help by maintaining a temple room in which an entire community of Vaisnavas can peacefully chant.

Manasa Ganga Devi Dasi

Women in Krishna Consciousness: A Sociological Perspective

Plato and Aristotle proclaimed that women are humans, but it was not until 550 AD that the Council of Macon acknowledged that women had souls. In 1988, the ISKCON Current Affairs Seminar of Towaco, New Jersey, debated whether or not women can be *brahmanas*. Some conferees said women belong to a certain *varna* by qualification, i.e. a *brahmani*, or woman *brahmana*. Others argued that women belong to the *varna* of their husbands. Still others argued that women are not members of any *varna*, but are automatically categorized as *sudras*, the lowest caste. Some suggested that Srila Prabhupada gave brahminical initiation to women just to pacify them, but it did not constitute real brahminical initiation.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, the Christian church developed its doctrines at meetings and councils. ISKCON, with its various seminars, conferences, and GBC meetings, seems to be going through a similar process. The discussion in Towaco about women in ISKCON did not reach any conclusion. Some favored a liberal viewpoint, and others preferred a more traditional, doctrinal view. Thus, the question remained unresolved. The question still remains unresolved, even now, in 1991.

There are several important aspects to the woman question, beyond the debate about being satisfied as a housewife and mother. The first thing to settle is whether or not a woman can be a *brahmana*. Another question is whether women can give the morning class, initiate, or hold other positions of responsibility within the ISKCON society. We must study our scriptures closely to understand the dignity of women in Vedic culture. We learn about great *brahmana* women like Sita Thakurani and Mother Saci; *kshatriya* women like Sita, Rukmini, and Kunti; transcendental *vaisyas* girls like Radharani and the *gopis*. There were even noble *sudra* (and less-than-*sudra*) women like the prostitute converted by Haridas Thakur and the prostitutes in Dvaraka, who were all great souls. We can also study historic evidence of women *gurus* in the Vaishnava line.

But when men discuss the subject in *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, their discussion usually involves a cliché-ridden critique of women's liberation. They

say "women's lib" means that "women want to be equal with the men." But is equality the real issue or is this some kind of uneducated generalization? Perhaps equality is not the goal. The spirit soul is equal, but the body (including mind, intelligence, and ego) of a woman is different from that of a man.

One of the main platforms of the women's lib movement is that women are oppressed—they are the subordinate factor in a male-dominated society. Women are generally regarded as inferior and relegated to the less important, lower-paying jobs.

As subordinates, women are rewarded for pleasing the dominant group. They are taught to develop certain characteristics: submissiveness, passivity, docility, dependency, lack of initiative, inability to act, to decide, to think, and the like. In general they develop qualities more characteristic of children than adults—immaturity, weakness, and helplessness. If subordinates adopt these characteristics they are considered well-adjusted.

Women's liberation basically describes a situation where women strive for other characteristics, like intelligence, initiative, and assertiveness. But it may be questioned whether women can totally overcome their basic "faults" of weakness, vulnerability, and emotion. Perhaps these "lesser" qualities are simply part of the bodily makeup.

Yes, women have all the qualities that are deemed inferior by society. They are basically emotional, weak, and vulnerable; just the qualities that men are taught to overcome and control in themselves.

As women embody traits that men want to deny, devotees of Krishna symbolize qualities that the general society claims it can conquer through science. For example, society at large may resent the devotees, who represent devotion and surrender to God, gentleness, and compassion.

Society needs devotees and can benefit from hearing their message, and in the same way, women embody an important side of human nature that must be integrated and accepted.

For the past two decades, the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class has been dominated by men. Of course there are other forums where women can preach, but the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class is a special realm of preaching. Because of the nature of *asrama* life, the morning class sets the mood of the temple and solidifies the social norms within ISKCON. The people who give the morning class are respected as community leaders and opinion makers. By denying women the privilege of giving the morning class on a regular basis, their status in the community of Vaisnavas is non-existent. This is an important avenue of suppression.

Some women want to give classes, and because of the precedent set by Srila Prabhupada in the early years of the movement, they are gradually getting

the opportunity. Women *Bhagavatam* speakers will undoubtedly become more prevalent in ISKCON as time goes on. But it can only happen if men become sympathetic to the women's view. It is similar to the suffrage movement, which only became successful when men agreed to help.

Women will never become the same as men. But women have certain natural gifts to offer society that should not be seen as inferior. Lord Krishna mentions the feminine qualities in *Bhagavad-gita*: fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness, and patience. These positive traits spring from the woman's basic intuitive and emotional makeup.

We must not subscribe to the ideas of the materialistic society that portray one sex as the embodiment of strength and the other as the embodiment of weakness. Emotion and intuition should not be viewed as social evils to be done away with, but as important interpersonal tools. Women have special abilities to accept and deal with emotions, and are able to foster growth, cooperation, and harmony. ISKCON can definitely benefit from these gifts. Women also excel in creativity. Many of ISKCON's finest artists, writers, photographers, and designers have been women.

Women have excelled in the preaching field. Perhaps this is due to their innate ability to communicate; perhaps it is society's willingness to accept spiritual knowledge from a feminine source. Perhaps it is a combination of the two. But since women are good preachers in the field, they would probably turn out to be good preachers in the temple as well. Of course to give *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class, a woman would have to be thoroughly learned in the philosophy. She would have to be exemplary in following the rules and regulations and attending the morning program.

I would also like to comment on how ISKCON's present attitude toward women is perceived by the general public. For the purposes of this discussion we may focus on individuals who are favorable to Krishna consciousness. We want to attract people to the movement and once attracted, we want to engage them in some part of the *varnasrama* scheme. Some people can move into the *asrama*; others can chant and offer vegetarian food to Deities or pictures in their homes.

But preachers might find it difficult to present the "Vedic" idea of women in a society that embraces the equality of women. Assuming that Vedic culture is pure and perfect, being given by the Lord, we can only conclude that there is something wrong with our interpretation. When the understanding is faulty, the presentation can only be unattractive.

To see how a distorted understanding of Vedic culture can affect the preaching, let us follow this

scenario:

A college student comes to the temple to do research for a psychology project and interviews a *brahmacari*. She pops the question, "What is the role of women in the Hare Krishna Movement?" The young man explains that the soul is equal, but the bodies are different. The woman's body is inferior—at best half as intelligent—due to being lusty in the last life. It is just a stroke of bad *karma*. But if the woman gives up her false ego of wanting to be equal to men, then she can find true happiness.

The woman nods passively and decides she will never join ISKCON.

It would certainly be foolish to preach like that to Blacks, Mexicans, or Orientals, but it is commonly accepted when dealing with women. Thus, the Hare Krishna movement drives away potential members. What intelligent human being would purposely put themselves into a situation where they become part of an oppressed group?

This kind of preaching goes on perpetually, even in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* classes, and it can dishearten women already living in the *asrama*. Because it is done in the name of the *Vedas*, it forces older women devotees to become apologists for the chauvinistic men.

We are followers of Srila Prabhupada, and whatever we have learned about Vedic culture has come from him. He came to the West and initiated disciples from what is considered the lowest culture: the society of meat-eaters. That in itself is controversial among adherents of the caste system, who doubt whether any of us from the West—men or women—could actually be considered *brahmanas*.

But Srila Prabhupada gave initiation to the people of the West with the understanding that anyone who is a Vaisnava—a worshiper of Visnu or Krishna—has already surpassed the qualification of *brahmanism*.

I hope the movement's leaders can officially adopt a more liberal attitude toward women. This will bring us more in line with Srila Prabhupada's statement when he said, "Since both boys and girls are being trained to become preachers, those girls are not ordinary girls, but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Krishna consciousness."

The problems in ISKCON are there. But once recognizing them, the next step is to act. ISKCON devotees need to develop respect for one another as devotees and not become overly absorbed in the bodily conception of "I am a man" or "I am a woman." Srila Prabhupada told us that the spirit soul is equal and that women who become devotees are as intelligent as their Godbrothers.

Nandini Devi Dasi
Salem, OR

Does the Size of the Brain Determine Intelligence?

A Question and Answer during a Srimad Bhagavatam Class [6.4.18] Led by Sadaputa Dasa in Philadelphia on March 15, 1990

Manasa Ganga Dasi: What is the correlation between brain size and intelligence? Some devotees will use Prabhupada's statement to a woman reporter in Chicago about a man having 64 ounces of brain and a woman 32 ounces to put down women as being less intelligent, as being an inferior species.

Sadaputa Dasa: The situation there is this. First of all, Srila Prabhupada said that on a couple of different occasions. The impression that I had was that he was joking with the persons involved. And you have to stop and think about what he was saying. He cited his authority for that statement about the women's brains and so forth from a person at the Scottish Churches College. The point is this was a European medical doctor who had supposedly performed a study to demonstrate that women's brains are only 32 ounces. So you have to ask why would Srila Prabhupada cite a European medical doctor for any purpose. Srila Prabhupada repeated over and over and over again that the speculative process is not a genuine path to knowledge, and that science is full of cheating and so on. He stressed that endlessly. So how is it that suddenly he turns around and starts citing this European medical doctor on the sizes of brains? So as far as I can see he was joking, and some people fail to get the point.

Women's brains tend to be smaller than men's brains, that's a fact, it's correlated with women's body size. The size of the brain tends to be correlated with the size of the body. People with bigger bodies tend to have bigger brains. Many whales have much bigger bodies than we do. Porpoises even have bigger brains proportionately to human beings, from what I've understood. An elephant certainly has a bigger brain than a human being.

In any case, with the human race you have a correlation between body size and brain size. Furthermore, there's no obvious correlation between brain size and intelligence as measured by different criteria. If you look at geniuses, Anatole France had a brain of 1000 cubic centimeters which is unusually low. It practically puts him in the range of the *Pithecanthropus erectus*, the famous ape man. [Laughter]

On the other hand, I'm told that Turgenev, a Russian author, had a brain volume of about 2,000 cubic centimeters. So there you have a factor of two in the size of the brain. So it's the quality of what's there that counts, not the amount. So I think that

Srila Prabhupada was kidding.

Now for the statement about women being less intelligent, Srila Prabhupada also made an interesting comment to one woman. He said, "Well, if you think you're a woman that means you are less intelligent, because you're supposed to understand that you are a spirit soul and that your real identity is transcendental to these bodily designations." So if one insists on thinking on the bodily platform, that's less intelligent. Different people have different tendencies in this regard. All of us have the same ultimate level of intelligence and that is spiritual. Because ultimately the brain is not intelligent.

That's the whole point of what I was saying in this class. The brain is some kind of apparatus that is involved with the operation of the body. And it's a fact that if your brain is damaged that will make it very difficult for you. But the brain is not the real source of your intelligence. Ultimately that's the soul. So the soul is vastly intelligent compared to the kind of intelligence that anyone in this room has ever exhibited. Consider what Brahma can do. That's an example of what the soul is capable of. Intelligence is covered over to different degrees by illusion and the essence of that illusion is identification with the body. Therefore, those persons who tend to be more strongly identified with the body are in that sense less intelligent. That's the real meaning of being less intelligent. To be more intelligent means to really understand the real situation of the soul and then to act accordingly.

Then another point is that intelligence is brought to us by Krishna. That's stated in the *Bhagavad-gita*. It's a question of whether we're willing to receive what Krishna will give us, then we can have unlimited intelligence. If we don't take advantage of it and remain attached to unintelligent ways of thinking, then Krishna will say, "Well, that's what you want, so that's what you get," and we continue with our *karma*.

More Letters to the Editor

Forward with Prabhupada's Ways

I have indeed thought about many aspects of these issues [women in Krishna consciousness] deeply, as I have witnessed much and also heard from other women of many other similar situations through my years at various temples since joining in 1973. Because of this, I have been rather overwhelmed by the whole thing [the situation for women in ISKCON]. And I certainly don't pretend to know the answers. Yet, I realize these issues are very important and will not go away on their own accord, and thereby need discussion and correction.

I will try to offer a basic summary of what I have been thinking. Parts of it may be a little angry, and I hope you can understand.

I think more can be done to effect changes than just acting like ladies. Of course, we can always act like ladies, but how long has this been going on with little change on the men's part? Just like the *guru* problem before so many beneficial changes were made, if the men are committing offenses to the Vaisnava ladies by their actions and attitudes toward them, then this is not good for them and their devotional creepers, and they need to be made aware of them in order to truly correct the situation for their own devotional benefit, as well as ours. Out of compassion for them we can tolerate, fine, no problem (as we have done for years already), but I do think it is time for positive changes to be made in this area, which will be better for preaching and for everyone all around.

The crux of the problem, I feel—taking in all of the observations, events, Vaisnava inter-relating (or sometimes lack of it), temple policies—lies in some very fundamental, deep-rooted attitudes, which a large majority of men in ISKCON seem to have, or have brought to the movement. And in some cases, is actively encouraged and promoted amongst themselves. I feel that if the heart of this problem is addressed and gradually corrected, that most probably answers to all the detailed questions (should women offer *mangala-arati*, give *Bhagavatam* class, etc.) will become more clearly revealed.

My conclusion results partially in what I have learned from speaking with several ISKCON men, including what I also learned from my former husband, of past and present “behind the scenes” conceptions promoted in *brahmacari asramas* and in mentorships among many of the men in our movement. In summary, it is that many men (not all) in the movement have seemingly had a more difficult time in making a distinction that women in Krishna consciousness are Vasinavis not just regular “*karmi*” women. Much of this type of thinking can be due in part to the attraction to the female bodily form, which must be so deluding to some of them, that they must have difficulty seeing little else (especially in the neophyte stages). But I've been told that new men joining, would be explained devotee women's position in the temple by their older mentors as, “It makes no difference if a woman lives in a temple or doesn't (or how advanced she is), they are all the same, a woman is a woman. They are all lustier than men, can't make much spiritual advancement. They're unclean. They are less intelligent.”

I am not being over reactive by saying that in some instances the men have acted like they have a hard time seeing the women devotees in the temple

as human beings even. If attitudes such as these persist (as shocking and unbelievable as they are), it is no wonder that the men have acted like they have toward women and that such radical change-over in policies manifested in '74 - '75.

Women were no longer allowed to give classes, so many changes were made, and, in essence, our presence in the temple and in our devotional services were just barely tolerated. Of course, attitudes such as these aren't quite so severe these days as they used to be in the mid '70s, but I do believe that vestiges of them firmly remain, and have become accepted as almost matter of fact, even among women who have tolerated and accommodated them for so long.

Basically, in addition to a few possible factors (as some early leaders were women-hating and that we come to the movement with our own contaminations and misconceptions), my over-all observation and impression about what took place, includes the possibility that many devotees developed a misconception about what is Vedic and Vaisnava, as opposed to what is currently “Hindu” or Indian culture. In some devotee's minds, I think the two are blended to a degree, and it becomes a real gray area.

As we know, the modern day Indians have distorted the caste system, and many have a hard time accepting the Krishna conscious version as coming down from Lord Caitanya, that a spirit soul can become purified and elevated to the highest devotional platform by following the regulative processes in devotional service in disciplic succession, no matter what caste, race, or type of body one has. This process is so wonderful, that even a dog can go back to Godhead, as described in the *Caitanya-caritamṛta*. So are women excluded? Of course not. But the current Indian system is very external, body and birth oriented, and they are still very attached to this. As a matter of fact, their caste system has become so degraded nowadays that it is practically used for financial gain only, with women being exploited, burned for their dowries, etc., instead of being protected, as they were in former times.

It wasn't until around 1974 or 1975 when all these radical changes by some male leaders in ISKCON were made into temple policies. It should be noted also, that it was during these very same years that huge numbers of devotees began going to India for pilgrimage for the first time. A lot of new standards, procedures, and policies on just about everything began flowing back to the West with these devotees on their return.

Along with other reasons I've already mentioned, I feel that many devotees, men and women, but especially the *sannyasis* and leaders, became very influenced by the “Hinduism” or “Indian culture” they experienced there, and they thought we

were supposed to imitate similar things in the West.

In other words, women in India don't join temples or *asramas*, which makes the position of Western women who do join temples and independently take up spiritual training much harder to define within that context. There is practically no precedent of women in current Indian society renouncing their materialistic families to follow a purificatory and regulatory life under the instructions of a *guru*, like in ISKCON and especially in the West. With no other reference point to follow (in spite of Srila Prabhupada's example for preaching), I feel our GBC leaders began to "externalize" our position as "just women," forgetting the internal substance and reason why we had taken up this process along with them— to become purified, to preach, and to go back home, back to Godhead.

Srila Prabhupada initialized some changes to facilitate preaching Lord Caitanya's movement. But even in our traditional Vedic past and our disciplic line we have had some amazing Vaisnavis. They were no less chaste or no less "out of place" than other women in Vedic society, but they were truly outstanding and dedicated devotees of the Lord. And Srila Prabhupada, Krishna's very dear pure devotee, initiated some new things in the West in order to spread Krishna consciousness— giving his women disciples brahminical initiation, allowing them to live in his temples. He said all of his disciples could go on the altar, all could preach, all should initiate after his departure. This was his desire.

If a disciple becomes qualified to do any of these things, is it the business of some others to say they can't based on the body they have? I think that is some pretty big nonsense, quite frankly. If Srila Prabhupada established certain standards in the beginning of our movement, they are authorized, and bona fide for us. Yes, they can be done. We are not trying to become Indians, or Hindus, or follow some form of current, distorted, caste system. We are a spiritual society meant to elevate the masses and ourselves.

The solution is a spiritual one. It is to begin allowing Vaisnavis to give *Bhagavatam* class, Sunday feast lectures, offering *mangala-arati*, leading *kirtans* (don't we listen to Yamuna's Govinda prayers every morning, which Prabhupada was adamant insisted should remain?), and engage in all types of preaching. I feel this will be the medicine to alleviate this negative type of thinking and go a long way in achieving better Krishna conscious attitudes and respect among the male devotees. They should see their matasjis engaged in devotional service, and not see them as objects for sense gratification, villains, vampires, or prostitutes to be put to the back of the temple room. There will be much increased benefit

for the consciousness and devotional development of the lady Vaisnavas and the men as well.

Of course, because things have been instituted for many years there will be much resistance coming from the men and women. But when devotees become accustomed to the changes and see this on a regular basis as the norm I don't think anyone will think anything of it after a while.

Anonymous

How Can I Come Back?

I read with extreme interest the material you sent. I feel that my responses must necessarily be two-fold; that of a bloomed woman devotee who has felt chewed-up by management and frustrated by policies concerning women in ISKCON, and that of an academic with an eye to what is "acceptable."

Let's say that part of a hypothesis is that the institutionalization of second-class citizen status for women has diminished:

1. The preaching capabilities of ISKCON overall.
2. The spiritual advancement of all devotees in the movement because to commit Vaisnava *aparadha* is extremely serious and effects the chanting of devotees and the effectiveness of preaching.
3. The spiritual advancement of women within ISKCON (because of discouragement, inability to perform certain kinds of enlivening devotional service, and the general depression and anger that comes from being the object of irrational, impersonal bias and prejudice) *gurur na sya syat*. Why have these women come to Krishna consciousness except that they wish to preach and become spiritually advanced? If actual practices within the movement discourage them, then are they not being cheated in the name of Lord Caitanya?

4. That institutionalized behavior within the movement has necessarily suppressed women's voices and led to women devotees leaving the movement or failing to join (extremely heavy point because how would Srila Prabhupada feel about that!)

Finally, but not most insignificantly, in every culture to date (and there are volumes of studies) where the status of women has been lowered, violence against women and neglect have followed. There is no exception. We see this happening on a large scale in India currently with bride-burning, and extreme rise in the incidents of rape and murder and of course of female infanticide. Is ISKCON then to follow the Kali-yuga patterns of the rest of the world?

All people who are oppressed in some ways necessarily internalize that oppression. It leads often to low self-esteem and a belief that they are really inferior but often their statements of inferior-

ity are extremely telling and poignant.

Oppression of women leads to depression, to low self-esteem and to misinterpretation of the philosophy on a grass roots level. If it is hard for the older devotees, it must be hell for new persons.

The juxtaposition of misconceptions of the younger devotees and the anger and indignation of older devotees who remember clearly what Srila Prabhupada said make a very strong case.

From my own perspective the position of women in ISKCON is a deciding factor in my decision not to return to the movement. After all, what would my position be? In Hindi there is an expression: *Dhobi ka kutta na gar ka na ghat ka*, "The *dobhi's* dog is neither of the house nor of the river." In other words, neither fish nor fowl. For women who do not want to be pushed into marriage nor farmed out as *sankirtana* machines the position is precarious at best. Of course, *maya* is *maya*, but why make it harder than it already is to become Krishna conscious in a difficult age?

I am researching the institutionalization of religion and the routinization of religious groups. I am afraid to say that you will find disturbing parallels to the institutionalization of ISKCON. But if Lord Caitanya's movement is to grow and be a dynamic viable philosophy, the devotees cannot be ignorant as to seeds of mundane processes wherein certain people and groups struggle for power within a religious framework. Such processes have strangled Christianity and the Islamic faiths, are extremely insidious and are usually supported by some stagnant notion of tradition and the systematic oppression of certain groups.

Titiksa Devi Dasi
New York

Let's Come Clean (A letter written to the BTG editors)

I was called to action by the editors' sarcastic treatment of Starr Allen's letter in the July/August issue of *Back to Godhead*. In that very issue the history of ISKCON's case of male chauvinism is vividly portrayed (compare the photos on pages 35-39 with 42-51 in that issue). [There are almost no pictures of women in photographs portraying ISKCON's development from 1974 or 1975 onward.]

There is a problem of male chauvinism in our Society, which I believe is a great stumbling block to our preaching. Before we can begin to rectify this problem, we must regret we have been party to it, and before we can feel regret, we must realize that this problem actually exists.

Why can't we admit that we men have caused the women in our Society considerable suffering?

We have (a) immaturely tried to foist an "Indian" or "Vedic" model upon women, (b) made them the butt of our own frustrations, (c) in the name of spirituality, repressed them with our parent's and grandparent's chauvinistic conditioning (we were not as transcendental as we believed), (d) enjoyed the power afforded by a male body in ISKCON, (e) seen women as sex objects to be either rejected or enjoyed, and not as individual people, (f) done more than our fair share of "loving" (or should I say lusting) and leaving, and (g) forced women to be more than ever conscious that "I am this body," and then blaming them for being too much on the bodily platform.

Until we come clean about these inebrieties it will be hard to be cured. We'll just delude ourselves into the weak defense: "It may have been like that in the past, but that is over now."

Rohininandana Dasa
England

A Catch 22

What has been the response to *Pritt-laksanam* and to the articles written by the women in the BTG? Is there any hope for improvement?

At this point in my life I feel that I do not want to be involved in any temple. I would much rather identify myself with some small householder community.

I have become more and more distant and aloof from the temples we have lived in. I have two small daughters and I feel very strongly that I do not want them to grow up in the kind of atmosphere I've seen in some temples. I overheard one *brahmacari* refer to my 18 month old daughter as an envious woman because she was crying for a toy that a five year old boy was playing with. This is a sick environment that I do not wish to be identified with.

For a short time we lived in Vancouver and I felt very enlivened about devotional service. It had been a long time since I had lived somewhere where women were treated like normal human beings and since then I find it intolerable to live in a temple where you feel like you are committing a mortal sin if someone happens to have to walk past you. I just cannot live like this anymore. I do not believe in it and therefore I do not want to support it by accepting it.

Below is a proposal I had wanted to present at our temple board meeting. But after speaking with the other women I felt too discouraged and hopeless. They said this [ill treatment of women] was just the history of this temple and they didn't feel it could be changed. The past leadership has always been a down on women. My husband also discouraged me

from making the proposal because he felt I was not involved enough with the temple. But it is a Catch-22 because I don't feel I can be involved unless there are some changes.

My question to you is: "Is there any plan on an International scale to get things improved? Is there any hope? Is there anything I can do to help?"

Proposal to Temple Board

I would like to propose that the women have access to one side of the temple room during all temple functions and be allowed to stand up near the altar during all aratis and kirtanas and near the *vyasana* during all *Guru puja* ceremonies.

If the men feel one side of the temple is not enough room I would like to propose they could also use the area in the rear of the temple near Srila Prabhupada's *vyasana*.

I hope you will take the time to discuss this proposal with an open mind and a serious Krishna conscious attitude.

Some reasons for this proposal:

1. When the women are expected to stand in the back there is always a sense of an unspoken message: "You are not really welcome here but we will tolerate it if you stay out of sight."

2. In all fairness, is there any Krishna conscious reason why women should not have equal opportunity to take *darsana* of the Deities during *kirtana*? It is difficult to meditate on Their Lordships when 50 men are dancing in front of you and you're expected to stand 20 feet from the altar.

3. For preaching: Our new *bhaktas* are trained to go out and preach and see all living entities as spirit soul. But it seems they are also trained in a way that makes it very difficult to see a Vaisnava woman as a spirit soul.

4. For our children: What should a young mother tell her child when he asks her to come up with him to see the Deities during *kirtana*? Should she say—"No I'm not allowed to because I'm a woman." Do we really want our children to grow up thinking this is Krishna consciousness?

5. For Srila Prabhupada: Srila Prabhupada has set the standards and lifestyle for ISKCON and this standard did not come from Srila Prabhupada. When men complained about Yamuna singing Srila Prabhupada said if they were agitated they should live in the forest. He did not say the women should carry the burden of this agitation.

I was once in Srila Prabhupada's room for a *darsana*. There were hundreds of devotees visiting from neighboring temples. Before lecturing he insisted that the women (who were all at the back) come sit up front on one side of his *vyasana*. At least 5 *sannyasis* and about 20 men had to move to make room for the women. Srila Prabhupada sat quietly for about 5 minutes while everyone was re-

locating themselves and getting situated. Srila Prabhupada was setting the example by his behavior. After witnessing that particular pastime of Srila Prabhupada I have always found it very frustrating to watch the present standard that has evolved in our temples.

Anonymous

Where Are Your "Women" Gurus?

I am writing to you concerning an issue which I believe requires the serious and concentrated efforts of all aspirants who believe in Prabhupada's message. That issue is putting forth active support in designating a female spiritual master(s) who will be capable of initiating new disciples into the disciplic line of succession.

The reason why I seek this determination are many:

1. While it is not important to look upon spirit soul as male or female, it is nevertheless essential to affirm the fact that females are capable of making serious spiritual advancement.

If there were no female devotees in ISKCON who demonstrated the qualifications of a spiritual master, I would remain silent and hope that one day such a person would appear. However, after hearing the lectures and discussions of women devotees at the Sunday festival, I am convinced that the time is ripe making this request to install a female initiating *guru*.

2. While ISKCON is fighting against religious persecution and narrow-mindedness externally, with the Robin George case, we as devotees must examine our own conditioning and judge whether the restrictions placed on women which bar the qualified from executing more expert service is in the best interest to Lord Krishna and His devotees.

As you may know, Srila Prabhupada first gave *brahmana* initiation to male devotees. However, on the following day, he also initiated women devotees who had demonstrated the necessary qualifications. This may not be acceptable to some people who are highly socialized and steeped in ethnocentrism. However, there is a vast difference between judgments based on socialization and those based on spiritual insight.

3. As a college student studying for my master degree, I have the opportunity to discuss Krishna consciousness with many students and professors. However, one of the biggest stigmas that the temples are giving to the public is the disadvantage of women which to some borders misogynist behavior.

While I do not agree with this accusation. I do believe that the devotees (both male and female) are long overdue in advancing those female devotee(s)

who are qualified and yet, are kept from the service which would more expertly honor Lord Krishna.

One professor, after reading *Bhagavad-gita* and several of Prabhupada's books, became highly interested one Sunday when listening to a lecture of one of the ladies here. However, when it had to be explained that this devotee has still not been accepted as an initiating *guru* in the disciplic line of succession, nor any other woman, a great problem arose in trying to convince this guest that Krishna consciousness goes beyond the bodily concept of awareness and is actually based on spiritual equality. The professor's argument was as follows:

"The Christian churches have, due to strong patriarchal bias, kept women from serving God as priests and pastors. However today we can find many female priests and pastors because the churches are becoming aware of the necessity of judging the soul within the body instead of the body. In the same way, it is time for the devotees of Krishna to practice more of what they preach by considering the qualifications of their most dedicated servants."

At this time, I find it difficult to convince myself that ISKCON is executing superior judgment in this matter.

In all sincerity, I believe this request to be in the best interests of the Hare Krishna movement and will please Lord Krishna exceedingly.

Ms. Higgins
New York

Prabhupada is not Chauvinistic

You have raised an important question in *ISKCON World Review*. The question is important since half of mankind are women. Of course, this question (and the answer to it) does also say a lot about the role of men in ISKCON.

I know from my work here in Germany in the ISKCON department for public affairs that we have to deal with the widespread assumption that ISKCON is chauvinistic, that ISKCON reduces the women's understanding to home, children and kitchen. According to this assumption ISKCON is to be compared with fundamentalistic Islam like Iran and can (at least in this regard) not provide any perspective for modern western countries like USA and Europe.

A devotee should know that Srila Prabhupada was not a chauvinist. This should not be ISKCON's policy toward women in our movement. Nevertheless, we have to face the fact that ISKCON is not only the home of the rare pure devotees but an institution for spiritual upliftment and as such there are

also—men and women devotees—who are still under some kind of material influence, including improper behavior toward women. Often this is misunderstood as being in accordance with Srila Prabhupada and *sastra*. That makes it much worse because the misbehaving devotee does not even know that he is misbehaving.

In my opinion two things should be done in ISKCON (1) research the topic and reform the understanding within ISKCON where necessary, and (2) present the genuine Vedic understanding to the public.

We should not present a material concoction as spiritual truth, nor should we give a false modern understanding.

A significant number of devotees with relevant arguments (so it seems to me) are more or less dissatisfied with the factual role of women in our Society. An inventory of the situation could be taken. Thorough research about Srila Prabhupada's desire for women's role in ISKCON should be made. From these areas a reform could take place.

This discussion is, in my opinion, required and unavoidable. But it should not be done outside the framework of ISKCON. For now it should remain a private discussion.

As for discussing the topic with outsiders it should be dealt with independently of the internal ISKCON discussion. We would have to explain the fundamentals of spiritual philosophy: what is the self and the body, what is the nature of material designations in the light of the spiritual reality, etc. And we would have to explain the meaning and interrelation of relative truths even in spiritual life and a spiritual society.

I am studying other cultures where women and men are separated. Some findings show that the women are less influenced by the presence of men, i.e., they don't feel a need to "produce" for men. By tradition men and women have different duties and places to perform their duties. Men are obliged to leave their home during the day and the woman is the master of the household affairs. Men and women become more peaceful, less agitated and free from stress. To differentiate between the role of women and men seems natural, but the difference doesn't imply one is better nor worse than another.

To explain these things in a detailed manner would be helpful for ourselves and others. It is much more helpful in our scientific age to present things in a scientific way. Sectarian logic can hardly convince anyone.

I would like to use the knowledge I've acquired during my study of sociology to do research work and rectify wrongs where they may be.

Sukrta Dasa
Germany

Excerpts from a Letter to Bhakti-caru Swami

Thank you for your talks and encouragement in Vrndavana. You inspired me very much. Truly I am happiest when I am preparing books for glorifying Lord Krishna and Srila Prabhupada, but frustration has haunted me these past few years. I appreciate your discourse on the Personality Kali and it makes me more determined to push onward.

On the grass roots level, ISKCON as Srila Prabhupada wanted it is barely recognizable. Perhaps with persons like yourself placed in positions of power things may be reconciled—provided you can survive the political aggressiveness of the Westerners. Srila Prabhupada had great *siddhi*, still, the American government often out of his control and creating havoc with his plans.

One issue for which I have personal concern is the devotee women of ISKCON. These devotee women are very advanced souls, many of them previously *yogis*, and they are suffering so many atrocities at the hands of ISKCON authorities. I see it all over the world.

In early times with Srila Prabhupada things were not this way at all. The mood was changed due to several leading men having very antagonistic attitudes toward women.

For example, one leading man ousted all the women from the temple and tried to pass a resolution that no women could be initiated. Srila Prabhupada stopped him and chastised him. Such things happened many times, and Srila Prabhupada did his best to protect the female devotees, but now since he has left, the situation is deplorable. Therefore most of my elder Godsisters have gone away. Even Srila Prabhupada's sister was mistreated in Mayapur—such a great Vaisnavi! These *aparadhas* do not go unnoticed by Srila Prabhupada or by Srila Radharani, and in due course of time they have effect.

Each morning my heart cries when I see my Godsisters out in the cold in Vrndavana at the Samadhi *mangala-arati*. And I think, if only Srila Prabhupada were here present and he saw his daughters out in the cold, coughing, and shivering, he would immediately chastise this administration, and correct things. It would be so inexpensive to arrange for cloth panels in the door way, but it is the consciousness that no one cares. The women in ISKCON, especially the older ones, have done sincere service for many years and yet they are not only unappreciated, many of them are deliberately mistreated due to repressed hostilities of various authorities.

Therefore, Srila Prabhupada originally wanted that the women be represented on the GBC, so that they were cared for and protected and their needs

were met. He knew the men would not be attentive to this so he deliberately placed two women on the original GBC for this purpose—even though there were certainly other suitable men he could have chosen at the time. He wanted this.

Of course, all these things will be corrected in time. You asked me why I keep myself hidden away. Maharaja, I am waiting until Krishna corrects the situation as it has been too much painful to see this past 12 years. I have felt very much grief.

Anonymous

Krishna Consciousness is Not Sexist

My sincere thanks for this opportunity to comment on my experiences with the Krishna consciousness movement. My observations are based solely on personal experience and are not necessarily indicative of the experience of other women who have come into contact with the movement. Thus, I have framed this as an informal letter.

On a number of occasions I have noticed what I perceive to be an anti-woman bias on the part of certain people I have come into contact with at the temple. Other visitors have indicated they perceive that the movement has a sexist orientation.

The matter most often raised by outsiders is the question of why women stand in the back of the temple room. A number of visitors I have brought to the temple (students, attorneys, my mother, my brother) have mentioned this phenomenon as something that troubles them about Krishna consciousness. The fact that women stand in the rear of the temple room is seen as an indication that women are discriminated against in the movement.

I am also troubled by it because the explanations I've been given to justify it seem intellectually dishonest. I have been told that women have to stand in the back because they provide too great a distraction for the men. There appears to be two flaws in this reasoning. First, it ignores the fact that women are prone to be distracted by men as men are by women. We are told, on the one hand, that women are more prone to lust than men. The same men who make this pronouncement then tell us that we should stand in the back to avoid distracting them from Krishna.

Who worries about the potential that these allegedly lusty women are prevented from seeing the Deities because all the men of the temple are in the way? Does it make sense that the ones who are supposedly the most prone to lust are placed in the position that allegedly encourages lust? The inconsistency in these two positions makes it difficult to believe that the men who tell us we must stand in the back are sincere.

More importantly, artificially segregating men and women seems to foster the illusion of the bodily conception. The foolishness of this artificial separation between men and women is underscored by numerous things. It is simply unrealistic to suppose that a *brahmachari* can work in the temple gift shop and refuse to speak to a woman. Similarly customers at Govinda's will not be very understanding if their requests for more tomatoes at the salad bar are met with silence and downcast eyes. This behavior is often mistaken for rudeness.

Furthermore, my observations indicate that truly empowered devotees do not make such artificial distinctions.

Finally, fostering an artificial separation between men and women has not prevented devotees from falling down. Plenty of illicit affairs have taken place, even between devotees who regularly took their assigned places at the front or the back of the temple room. I suspect that this way of distinguishing between the sexes is actually a factor in fall downs, since it reinforces a sexual conception of others.

Another matter which has been raised by visitors to the temple and people I work with is the question of why there are no women in positions of power in the movement. Temple presidents, business managers, etc., are virtually all male. The one response I have seen [in *Back to Godhead*] stated that women did have important positions in the movement and used Yamuna Devi Dasi as an example. There are two problems with this response. First, it ignores the fact that women are greatly under represented in the temple hierarchy. The fact that one or two women write for the BTG or publish books does not change the fact that the leadership of this movement is 99% male. If anything, the presence of a few women in leadership roles smacks more of tokenism than anything else. Moreover, the best example of a woman in leadership role was the author of an award winning cookbook merely underscores the powerlessness of women in the movement. There are, to my knowledge, no women with any policy-making authority. This absolute lack of representation at the level where decisions affecting the lives of all devotees (including women and children) are made causes the movement to be unresponsive to women's needs.

Beyond their needs it's difficult to get your service done. I had a *bhakta* from the temple contact me about a civil suit that was being filed against him.

When I became involved in the matter, I attempted to contact the temple president. I needed his consent before I could act on behalf of the temple in negotiating with the property owner. Not being personally acquainted with the temple president, I called the temple number and asked to speak with him. After going into a lengthy and time-consuming

explanation of who I was and what I wanted with the devotee who answered the phone, I was told that I could not speak to the temple president and that I should have my husband call back if it were important. Needless to say I did not have my husband call. As it is constituted today, anyone who refuses to take business calls from women is going to miss a lot of opportunities to advance Krishna's cause.

The first time I ever went to a temple was in L.A. I had a fantastic conversation with an elderly female devotee who was a Prabhupada disciple. We talked about the role of women in American society and within ISKCON. I told her I had some doubts about the movement in this regard. I just had trouble believing that a woman should always obey a man simply because he was a man.

This devotee told me that in traditional Vedic society a wife was expected to obey her husband without question. Then she pointed out the differences between our modern age and the traditional Vedic society. What was appropriate in a saintly age, she said, is not always appropriate in Kali yuga. Then she drew a lesson from the *gopis* of Vrindavana. They disobeyed their parents and husbands, she said, in seeking the association of Krishna.

So the real authority, she concluded, is not male representatives of our society, but Krishna Himself. That conversation is the one reason why I've always believed that Krishna consciousness is not inherently sexist, in spite of the contrary evidence that abounds.

Rebecca Hickox
San Diego, CA

The Roles of Men and Women

... these are subjects that I am very concerned about. I feel that social issues are the most profound potential trouble and potential asset of Krishna consciousness. After all, Srila Prabhupada called this the International Society for Krishna consciousness. Practically, in my view, even the fundamental basis of the guru-issue is really a social issue as much as an issue of spiritual authoritarianism. I am both relieved that a formal group is formed and that it is requesting and considering views of other senior devotees, yet I am also weary.

Why women? What is the role of men in ISKCON? You can't define one without the other.

Obviously we live in a non-Vedic, non-God conscious world. Outside of ISKCON the mood is that men and women are totally equal in all respects, and must be given equal opportunities, etc. The values presented in the Vedic scriptures, and Srila Prabhupada's instructions appear to be dan-

gerously archaic to many modern liberals. They accuse us of living in the past, or of threatening to destroy all of the so-called advancement made in what they perceive as equal rights. Because this is the mood of the masses in the non devotee world, it appears to have had an influence upon the thinking of many devotees.

However, devotees do not live in the non-God conscious world. We live in the Krishna-conscious world. Our society is supposed to be based 100% upon Srila Prabhupada's instructions. For myself, it is very clear the position of women within our Krishna conscious society. In short, a woman's position is that she *must always* remain dependent upon a man. Either her father, her husband, her brother, her son, or if she is somehow unfortunate, then she must render herself dependent upon a temple president. That is practically the *only* instruction that Srila Prabhupada gave, over and over and over again and again and again. What devotee can dispute this?

Obviously, the modern godless civilization will decry such a philosophy as cruel and unfair. But, Srila Prabhupada stated on one tape very plainly how devotees should deal with public opinion.

. . . And a woman must be trained to be chaste and faithful to her husband, and she must know how to expertly cook. That is a woman's duty and position. That is all, according to the founder-*acarya* of ISKCON.

But, let me bring up another point, one that is often lost in the calculations. A point Srila Prabhupada stressed first is that the men must be trained to become first-class. It is not that the women must become faithful and chaste to a third-class man. The men must be trained to be first-class, and responsible. If a man is irresponsible, if he is a cheater, a womanizer, if he is attached to sense gratification, then he not only should not have a wife in Krishna consciousness according to Srila Prabhupada, Prabhupada doesn't even want that such a person be allowed to stay in our society.

The men must be first-class. First-class means brahminical, *Vaisnava* etiquette, devotional, responsible. Srila Prabhupada did not like his wife, but he carried out his duty in society of being a responsible family man. He took *sannyasa* after his children were grown up.

Too free of intermixing will cause agitation. But the point is that it is not the women who are at fault. It is the fall-down of the men. The men are the ones who are either lacking in training, or who have fallen from first-class behavior.

A first-class man will never think of marrying a woman who has been married to another man, either if the husband is still alive or if she is a widow.

A first-class man will never marry a prostitute,

or even a girl who has stayed out too late at night.

A first-class man will never marry a woman who has got children from another man.

A first-class man will only marry a qualified woman.

That means that the ladies must be trained up to develop the attitude that no one will want to marry a divorced or widowed woman. Then no woman would ever think about leaving her husband. In other words, the wife will know that if I leave my husband, or he leaves me, then my life is utterly ruined. No one in Krishna consciousness will ever marry me again. I'll be a widow for life.

To help enforce this there should be made higher standards for the leaders of our society. No man should be able to assume a role of authority or responsibility who does not show that he is a first socially responsible.

In other words, if they've married a woman who is a divorcee or if they've left their wife, they should not receive a position of responsibility.

Ameyatma Dasa
Three Rivers, CA

[Note: Ameyatma Prabhu submitted voluminous material promoting polygamy. Unfortunately, due to the amount of material, we are unable to publish it all here.]

What are your concerns and interests?

Write us your thoughts and suggestions about any issue you feel pertains to the healthy development of Srila Prabhupada's society. What are your perceptions and realizations about leadership in ISKCON, householders, congregation, social services, children, etc.?

Share this newsletter with a friend. Just remember: This newsletter is confidential. Feel free to photocopy *Priti-laksanam* and distribute it to other ISKCON members and well-wishers.

If you know someone who would like to be on our mailing list, please send their name and address to us. We still have more brochures available for distribution, also.

Let's use this forum to share progressive ideas that are completely in keeping with promulgating our *priti-laksanam* according to *guru, sastra, and sadhu*. Haribol!