

Glory of womanhood

In this country of Bharat was born Savitri,
the woman of chastity,
Who could fight with Yama, the God of Death,
and bring back to life her dead husband.
In this country of Bharat was born Chandramathi,
the paragon of virtue,
Who suffered the terrible ordeals
of her husband, Harischandra.
Sita, the devoted consort of Rama
and the divine daughter of Mother Earth,
Who demonstrated her chastity by coming out of
blazing fire unscathed, was born in this Bharat.
Damayanthi, also a woman of pristine purity and
chastity, who stood by her husband Nala
Through thick and thin, was born in
the sacred land of Bharat.

Embodiments of Love! This Bharat is the land of sanctity and chastity, which has given birth to such great women of exceptional character, who lent glory to Bharat as a nation of heroic women.

From ancient times, the presiding deity of *Gayathri mantra*, *Gayathri Devi*, has been worshipped as the Mother of the *Vedas*, which are held as the most ancient and authoritative scriptures of wisdom. *Gayathri mantra* originated in this holy land. The glory of this *mantra* has spread all over the world.

The people of Bharat have worshipped *Gayathri* in several ways and have redeemed their lives. *Gayathri* has been worshipped in four forms: (1) *Sathyavathi*, (2) *Angavathi*, (3) *Anyavathi*, and (4) *Nidhanavathi*. All the four are equally sacred, and elicit limitless grace of the Divine.

The first one, *Sathyavathi*, signifies the existence of *Atma* in every being, just as butter is present in every drop of milk. It proclaims, “*Ekatma sarvabhutantaratma* (One *Atma* is present in all beings).” There is one *Sath* (truth), which is spoken of in many ways by the wise.

The second one is *Angavathi*, which signifies the five elements present in all beings and also the five senses of hearing, touch, vision, taste, and smell. There is nothing in this world that is not composed of the five elements. This *Angavathi* is *pancha bhuta swarupa* (the embodiment of the five basic elements).

The third one, *Anyavathi*, refers to the attributes of the different forms of the Divine. For example, Lord Siva is associated with trident, three eyes, etc. Vishnu is always described as having conch, discus, mace, and so on. We call him *Sankhachakragadapani*.

Ganapathi is identified by his elephant face and big belly. He is first to be worshipped in all rituals. Saraswathi is described as one with *veena* in hand, through which she is

teaching the Divine sound principle as *Nadabrahma*. Thus *An-yavathi* signifies the different constituents of the forms of the Divine.

Nidhanavathi, the fourth, teaches the nine types of worship, namely, *sravanam* (hearing), *keerthanam* (singing the glory of God), *smaranam* (thinking of the names of God), *pada-sevanam* (service), *vandanam* (prostration), *archanam* (worship), *dasyam* (servitude), *sakhyam* (friendship), and *atmanivedanam* (surrender).

The world is symbolised by these four forms of *Gayathri*. That is why it is described as Nature (*Prakriti*), a female form (*Sthri*). We refer to our native country as motherland.

The importance attached to women in Bharat

Bharat (India) has always accorded a high place to women as the upholders of all social virtues. The very fact that in mentioning the names of the divine couples like Vishnu and Lakshmi, Siva and Parvathi, the name of the consort is given the first place, as in Lakshmi Narayana, Uma Maheswara, shows what importance *Bharatiyas* (people of Bharat) attached to women.

People generally speak of women as the weaker sex. At last, now *Bharatiyas* recognize that women cannot be considered as weak. The woman in charge of the home plays the main role in bringing good name and fame to the home. Not only in respect of individual homes but also in the good name of the country and the world the woman plays the main role. From ancient times, woman has been accorded a high place in the society.

The scriptures have ascribed seven virtues to women as a class: *sathya* (truth), *prema* (love), *dharma* (righteousness), *santhi* (peace), *sahana* (tolerance), *ananda* (bliss), *svanubhuti* (spirituality).

The woman at home has been held in high esteem as *Grihalakshmi*, the goddess of prosperity of the home. When her husband faces difficulties, the wife readily shares the burden and is prepared to do anything, to undergo any suffering or even sacrifice her life for the welfare of her husband and the family. It is the woman of the home who is behind the good reputation of the home. The woman is the embodiment of sacrifice. Though the male counterpart may also do sacrifice, it will be with a selfish tinge, while the woman's sacrifice is absolutely selfless. Therefore, we should be proud of our women.

High status of women in ancient India

If *Bharatiya* culture and morality have survived despite long periods of foreign rule, it is to no small measure due to the courage and fortitude of the nation's women. As the earlier speaker, Dr. Geetha Reddy, has pointed out, women shine as soldiers with the weapons of *sathya* and *dharma*. They will not normally tell lies. There may be occasions when a few of them may do so unknowingly. But, by and large, they as a class uphold truth and righteous conduct. They follow the *Vedic* injunction, *Sathyam vada, dharmam chara* (speak the truth and practice righteousness).

Once, King Janaka conducted a discussion regarding the most suitable person who should confer honour on him as a scholar. Even though there were great sages and highly learned scholars like Yajnavalkya in the assembly, he decided that Gargi was the fittest person from whom he should receive it.

This is an example to prove how women have been held in high esteem from ancient times by ordinary citizens and kings too. While women were held in high esteem in ancient times, in later years there was a decline in their status, and even ascetics denied proper recognition to them.

For instance, when sage Mathanga wanted to admit the great woman devotee Sabari into his *ashram*, many of his disciples who were renunciants raised objection. But the noble Mathanga recognized the extraordinary merit of Sabari's chastity, sincere devotion, and dedication toward pursuit of liberation and admitted her to his *ashram*. She finally proved to the world how devoted she was to Rama and how she got liberated after worshipping Him true to the teachings of sage Mathanga.

Women's role in home and society

Because of the evil influence of modern education, people consider women as toys and tend to treat them as puppets. The women have very auspicious and noble qualities. But men consider them as cooks to be confined to the kitchen and the four walls of the house. What they forget is that women not only manage the affairs of the family but also look after the health and well-being of all the members of the household.

The Government has now started conferring the honorific titles of Padmashri, Padmabhushan, etc., on its chosen citizens. But women have had more respectable and valuable titles of *Grihalakshmi* (the goddess of prosperity of the home), *Dharmapathni* (devoted wife), *Ardhangi* (the better half), etc. They had these titles because of their good qualities and spirit of sacrifice.

Questions are raised like who will look after the home if women go to offices and who will teach her children if the mother goes to school to teach other children, and so on. Some say that though the woman goes to work to solve the financial problem, bigger problems may have to be confronted by her going to work. But, in the modern world, it is necessary for the women to share the burden of maintaining the family with their husbands, so the women should also pursue studies as much as possible and take up suitable jobs to share the burden of the

family. It would smack of selfishness if the males prevent them from going to work for which they have acquired the requisite qualifications.

Women can control the whole world by themselves by virtue of their inherent qualities of love and spirit of sacrifice (*prema bhava* and *thyaga bhava*). Anger is alien to women, and it is more rampant in men. Though there may be instances when a woman may give vent to anger, such occasions are few and far between while in men the reverse is the case.

Savitri fought with the God of Death (Yama) and succeeded in getting her husband back to life. Can you find any instance in the scriptures or history where a husband was prepared to do sacrifice for his wife? If the wife is dead, he is ready to have a second marriage. Such unfair things are happening in the world in respect of women. That is why it was decided to celebrate not only 19 November but the 19th of every month as *Mahila Day*.

Women are heirs of our ancient culture

Women devotees in the Sai Movement are participating in large numbers enthusiastically in service activities such as helping the women of weaker sections to learn some useful trades like tailoring, etc., so that they can earn some money for the family and also spend their time usefully. If such activities are taken up all over the country, the country will prosper. This sacred work is typical of the culture of our ancient country.

Women are the heirs of our ancient culture. Culture means refinement. Women are the torch-bearers of refinement and they are toiling for the emancipation of the nation.

Geetha Reddy spoke about the exploits of great women in the battlefield like Rani of Jhansi, who fought a terrific battle and gave up her life rather than surrendering to the foe when she was overpowered. She lived up to the teachings of the *Ve-*

das that only through sacrifice can one attain liberation. Even in this *Kali* Age, there may be some exceptional cases where women may not be following *sathya* and *dharma*. But mostly they live up to these ideals.

However, they are not encouraged to show their ability. Even in the family, they have to face obstacles and confrontations. If women are given due recognition and encouragement, they will shine with brilliance in all fields and will serve the house, country, and the entire world gloriously, contributing to the welfare of the entire humanity.

Women show dedication and sincerity in work

No doubt, there may be a few who may not be having good qualities characteristic of a woman. But in any class of society, this is inescapable. Take, for example, the orange fruit. In order to enjoy the juice you have to peel out the bitter portions of the outer skin and seeds. Even so, the fruit of human life has much bitter portions as outer skin. You have to remove this and weed out the seeds of bad qualities, so that you can taste the sweet juice inside.

If man follows the example of the woman to imbibe sacred and sacrificial qualities, the world will definitely improve. They say “*Udhyogam purusha lakshanam* (a man is known by his job)”, as though only males can do jobs. It is a misnomer. Women are also doing all types of jobs equal to men. In fact, women work more sincerely and with dedication.

Recently, Swami questioned a director of the Indian Telephone Industries when he came to see Swami about the percentage of women employed in the industry. He said 99% of the employees were women and added that women did ten times better work than men. They don't stop or step out until the allotted work is completed. They have the work culture better than men.

Nowhere in any sacred text is it stated that women should only cook and not do work like men.

As a matter of fact, even man has to learn cooking and house-keeping to help his wife in times of need. Awareness is life. Awareness means total knowledge and not partial knowledge. This enthusiasm is full in women. Even men should make effort to learn everything.

Women have hidden power immanent in them. You have to encourage them to exhibit their talents. An army commander, who makes all *sepoys* in the army shiver before him, shivers before his wife when she confronts him after he reaches home. Similarly, the principal of an institution, before whom the students may shiver with fear, may himself feel shiver going down his spine when confronted by his wife for an explanation why he came late.

God makes no distinctions

Generally, the term *Purusha* is taken to mean only males, basing on physical form. It is not true. *Purusha* represents the *Atma* or *Chaitanya* in all, which is in the body from top to toe. *Purusharthas* (prime goals of life) are four, namely, *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha* (right conduct, wealth, desire, and liberation). This does not apply only to males. It is common to both males and females.

Actually, women follow the fundamental *Dharma* truly, while men act selfishly. One who realizes divinity is *Purusha*. *Swadharma* means *Atmadharma*, not the *dharma* pertaining to the body. This is explained in the *Bhagavad Gita*. This was the ideal followed by the ancients.

Artha does not merely mean wealth or money. It means wealth of wisdom. Both men and women have the right to experience non-duality, which is real wisdom.

Kama is the desire not for worldly objects but for God.

Moksha (liberation) is the fourth objective of life. Desire for *moksha* is common to all, whether men or women. *Moksha* is *moha kshaya* or shedding of bodily attachment. Without following the senses or mind, if you follow conscience, you can progress toward *moksha*.

Women should be encouraged to play their roles

In order to teach the subtleties of the scriptural texts, and encourage women to play their role in society, 19th is fixed as *Mahila Day*. *Dharma* can be made to occupy its position in society and restored to its pristine glory only by women. But men also have equal right and they should participate in this mighty and sacred effort so that the country will prosper. Even if men don't actively participate, they should at least let the women do the work without interference.

Krishna said in the *Gita*, “*Ananyaschinthayantho maam ye janah paryupasathe* (whoever worships me: to the exclusion of all others),” “*thesham: nithyabhiyukthanam yogakshemam vahamyaham* (I look after the welfare of such unwavering devotees).” This is an assurance to one and all with no distinctions of any kind. Everyone should cultivate a similar sense of universality.

The Divine is omnipresent. Differences based on caste, creed, sex, or nationality have to be given up. God has no distinctions. You should also practice this principle of equality.

God is everywhere. You cannot restrict Him to your narrow limits as though He is confined only to the form contained in your small picture frame. It is a folly to think so. He has thousands of forms and names. When you are doing *Sahasranama archana* (worshipping the thousand names of the Lord) you mention each of the thousand names and offer a flower. All are offered to only that one picture and not to thousands of pictures. All may refer to one God only. You may say Allah, Jesus, Rama or Krishna and so on. But all refer to only

one God. If you say the form you worship is the only God, you are limiting the Infinite to a narrow finite entity.

Give up all religious differences. There is only one religion, that of love, There is only one caste, that of humanity. There is only one language, that of the heart. I spoke earlier of the four parts of *Gayathri* and five elements. All are divine. They have no caste or creed or any such difference.

If you realize the unity, you get purity and divinity. You are forgetting this and breed feelings of enmity and community. God has no such distinction of community, nationality or sex. In ancient times, they did not have such differences. Do not give room for any such feelings. God is one and everyone in this world has equal right to enjoy His Grace.

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