

CHAPTER X

BRAHMA VIDYA AND WOMEN

- Q. You were talking of strict regimen. Men too should follow this, is it not?
- A. Of course! They too are flesh and blood, bone and marrow. They too are afflicted with illness. Each and every person who is afflicted with birth and death and suffering from this cycle is in need of this medicine. And whoever helps himself to this treatment has to follow the regimen too. Man or woman, whoever neglects the regimen, cannot get rid of the illness. Men cannot afford to say that they are free from it. They have to stick to it closely and observe it strictly. Even if they have had *Brahmopadesam* (initiation into the spiritual path of Brahma-realisation), if they are devoid of virtues like *Sama* (purity) and *Dama*, (control of sensory organs) they cannot save themselves, whether they are men or women.

- Q. But then, Swami, why do many scholars learned in the Sastras declare that women have no right for acquiring Brahma Vidya? What is the reason?
- A. There is no reason at all in declaring that women are not entitled to Brahma Vidya. Vishnumurthy taught Bhudevi the glory of the Geetha. Parameswara taught Parvathi the Brahma Thathwa through the Guru-Geetha. That is what the Guru-Geetha means when it says, “*Parvathi Uvaacha.*” What do these words mean? Besides, Easwara initiated Parvathi into Yoga Sastra and Manthra Sastra. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad mentions that Yajnavalkya taught Maitreyi this very same Brahma Vidya. This is a well-known fact. Now, you can yourselves judge and draw your own conclusion whether women are entitled to Brahma Vidya or not.
- Q. There are some others, Swami, who declare that women are not entitled to Brahmacharya and Sanyasa. Is it true? Do the Vedas prohibit it?
- A. The Vedas have two sections: Karma Khanda and Jnana Khanda. The Karma Khanda is for beginners, for the undeveloped; and the Jnana Khanda is for the more advanced, the developed intelligences. There is no reference to men or women in connection with these. The beginners are worldly. How can they understand the immortal message of the Jnana Khanda about the Atma? In the Brihadaranyaka we have

- mention of Gargi and Maitreyi who shine in the spiritual splendour of Brahmacharya and Sanyasa. In the Mahabharatha also, we have Subha Yogini and other women who are ideal women, full of virtue.
- Q. Can women win Brahma Jnana, even while leading the householder’s life?
- A. Why not? Madaalasa and others were able to get Brahma Jnana while in the Grihastha stage of life, the householder status. You must have heard of these from the Yogavasishta and the Puranas, how they attained the height of auspiciousness, Brahma Jnana itself. Then again, do not the Upanishads declare that Kaathyayini, Sarangi, Sulabha, Viswaveda and others were adepts in Brahma Jnana?
- Q. Swami, are there any women who have attained Brahma Jnana while in the Grihastha stage? And who attained it while in the Sanyasa stage? Or any who realised it while in the Vanaprastha Stage? Are there women who got it in the Brahmacharya stage of life?
- A. Do not think that there are no women who have realised Brahma Jnana while in any one of these stages. Choodaala attained it while a Grihastha; Sulabhayogini won it while a Sanyasini. Maitreyi attained it while in the Vanaprastha stage of life. And Gargi got it in the Brahmacharya stage. There were other great women of Bharath who have achieved this height. Why, there

are even today many who are of this great category. I simply mentioned some four names because you came up with that question now; so do not in the least lose enthusiasm. There is no need for loss of heart.

Q. When we have so many examples of women who have attained Brahma Jnana, how is it that so many argue against it? Why do they impose limitations on women?

A. It is sheer absurdity to deny women the right to earn Brahma Jnana. But in worldly matters, it is necessary that some limitations are respected by them. They are laid down only in the interests of Dharma and for *Lokakalyan* (peace and prosperity all over world). For the sake of the upkeep of morals and for social health in the world, women have to be bound by them. They are too weak to maintain certain standards of life and disciplines. They have some natural handicaps. That is the reason for these limitations.

This does not mean any fundamental inferiority. Why, even Pundits and men learned in the Sastras acquire their Jnana through the reverential homage they pay to the Feminine Deity, Saraswathi. The patron Deity of Vidya, as well as of Wealth and Jnana are all three feminine. They are Saraswathi, Lakshmi and Parvathi. Even in customary correspondence, when women are addressed, they are referred to as, “To...who is equal

to Lakshmi” etc. You always speak of Maatha-Pithaa, Gowri-Sankara, Lakshmi-Narayana, Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna, etc. The feminine name comes first and then the masculine. From this itself you can gather how much reverence is paid to women here.

Q. The distinction between man and woman—do you condemn it as *Mithya* (real and unreal) *Jnana* or do you value it as *Atma Jnana*?

A. My dear fellow, the Atma has no such distinction. It is eternally conscious, pure, self-effulgent. So it can only be *Mithya Jnana*; it can never be *Atma Jnana*. It is a distinction based on the *Upadhi*, the mask, the Limitation. The Atma is neither masculine, feminine nor neuter. It is the form that limits and deludes and that wears these names.