



SUIDHA NEWS



SUIDHA - Where the good life gets better

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➤ From the MD's Desk:

Dear Friends,

Dasara Greetings to all of you. We are just coming out of a series of holidays. This has caused some inconvenience in that some of the services in Suidha have been hit. We are trying to minimise this inconvenience.

The Ladies Club is working hard towards organising sports for the staff. I wish them well in this endeavour.

The entrance gate and security cabin work is almost complete. It will be officially inaugurated soon. Phase-1a is behind schedule by 2 months. We are pushing the contractors to complete the work as soon as possible.

It has become fashionable for a minority of share holders to write sarcastic, acerbic and derogatory emails about the functioning of the board and circulate it to all the share holders. Strangely, none of these issues is raised in the AGM - the forum designed to discuss issues concerning the company. These emails achieve nothing more than vitiating the atmosphere and causing unpleasantness. At this stage of our lives, in a retirement community like ours, it would be nice to avoid unpleasantness.

All of us must remember that we are a public limited company, bound by certain laws of the land and the directives of the shareholders in the form of articles of association and the RVM. The Board is functioning within this framework. It also has the responsibility to 'listen' to the majority opinion. That the board is doing it, is proved by the support it received in the recent AGM. It is impossible for any board, however well intentioned it may be, to satisfy everyone.

It is a challenge to find the right 'partner' for the Assisted Care Facility. We have an open mind and we are working on several options. We will keep all of you posted about the developments.

Regards
Dr. K. Lakshman



SNL Archives: All back issues of Suidha News Letter are available at: <http://suidha.co.in/news-letters.html>

Note: Download the desired back issue for activating the hyperlinks in the document. Then read it at leisure.

Website: <http://www.suidha.co.in> Phone: 91-080-26951000 / 212 Email : contact@suidha.co.in

➤ Event Highlights:

✚ 17-09-2016: Fall Prevention Awareness

The new Neighbourhood WhatsApp Group along with the Suvridha management arranged a lecture programme on "Fall Prevention Awareness" to commemorate the "Fall Prevention Week". Mr. C. Rajendran, Cottage # 99, welcomed the gathering and introduced the speakers of the day. Dr. P M Chandrasekhara made a detailed power point presentation on preventive measures that are normally recommended by experts and those incorporated while envisaging the Suvridha project. He also listed out the preventive measures that are on the drawing board. After the presentation, there was an interactive session with the seniors. The next speaker was Dr. Asha Naik who is a very learned and popular chief physiotherapist at Sagar Hospital, Bangalore. She explained and demonstrated some important dos and don'ts through a vivid power point presentation. At the close of the session, she encouraged some seniors to participate in demonstrating few simple exercises to get a feel of it. She has taken interest to even examine and suggest postural remedies for a few residents with their specific locomotion problems. Mr. Chandrakanth Bhat compered the programme and proposed the vote of thanks to all the participants who made the whole programme very interesting and successful. Here is a link to photos taken on the occasion. <https://goo.gl/photos/UxYc7JnVwnr12RBu5>



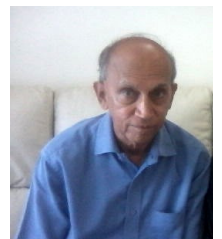
✚ 19-09-2016: All about Electronic Gadgets : Session - 2

Ms. Nanditha, daughter of Mr. SM Subbarao, Cottage # 139, conducted the second session on digital technology. During this interactive session she covered topics like Downloading Apps (including WhatsApp) on the phone; Mobile data and Wi-Fi; Remote Problem solving instantly by someone present elsewhere, by accessing your phone or computer and Listening to music and watching movies.



✚ 26-09-2016: Kannada classes – an initiative

Mr. SM Subbarao, Cottage # 139 has taken initiative to conduct spoken Kannada classes for the interested Suvridha Residents as well as some of the office staff who are making best use of this opportunity. For some who wish to learn Kannada script also, additional classes are being held. Mrs. Ramaa Subbarao, Resident Director, is ably assisting her husband in this welcome welfare activity.



2-10-2016: Gandhi Jayanthi celebrations

On this occasion, coincidentally “World Elders Day” was also celebrated with Dr. C Munichoodappa as the chief guest. At the outset of the programme homage was paid to Late Dr. B G Benakappa of cottage # 1. Dr. Munichoodappa, being a close associate of the Late Dr. B G Benakappa for many years, recalled his contribution towards getting the cabinet approval to start the old age care as well as the rehabilitation centre under the section 109.



Dr. P M Chandrasekhara in his address warmly recalled the “Swachha Suvidha” programme which was initiated on previous Gandhi Jayanthi in the year 2015. He hoped all Suvidhites would join hands to make it an on-going way of life at Suvidha. He then talked about healthy living of the silver haired persons and turning the rest of their life into a golden phase under the topic “Turning Silver into Gold”. After the presentation, the seniors clarified their doubts in the interactive session.

The Chief Guest Dr. C Munichowdappa who is an eminent diabetologist with a long standing experience addressed the gathering and presented his views on role of balanced moderate diet for healthy living.

Dr. K Lakshman concluded the programme with vote of thanks to the seniors on dais and the audience for making the function a grand success.

10-10-2016: Auydha Pooja Celebrations

Auydha Pooja was celebrated in the afternoon with devotion and enthusiasm. All the staff and residents participated in the worship of the diety and received the blessings and Prasad.

➤ Suvidha On The Move :

- **Phase 1a:** The final external plastering of last cottage and approach road to the new cottages are under completion.



- **Main Gate & Security:** Front elevation and the security cabin project are taking final shape with the installation of gates. Beautification of the approach road is progressing well with the arrival of flower pots and the interlocking cement bricks.



- **Green House project:** The Propagation Room and the Green House have been completed. The photos of these facilities are given below.



- **Solar Project:** The solar project is progressing well. Roof top solar panels are being fixed and some are ready to get connected to the grid.



➤ **Suvidha Family News:**

- On 21-09-2016, Mr and Mrs. P K Nayaks as well as Smt. Indira Rajaram sponsored a staff lunch. The staff very much appreciated the generous gesture.
- On 27-09-2016, Mrs. Raji And Dr. Jinka Subramanya hosted a sumptuous lunch to the staff of SUVIDHA. They were at the reception to welcome the invitees. It was an enjoyable event for all.

➤ **Suvidha Talent Corner:**

Under this banner, we introduce to our readers, the contributions of our Suvidha family members who have developed substantial special skill-sets as hobbies. Hope you will all enjoy such presentations. We welcome all such talented members to participate in this endeavor.

- **Birds of SUVIDHA:** This is a series of beautiful and at times stunning pictures of birds that are either resident of or visitors to our Village. Mr. Ashok Dey, a permanent resident of SUVIDHA since November 2010, has been able to photograph as many as 101 different species of birds in the Village.



DARTER



I had first seen the **Darter** aka **the Oriental Darter (*Anhinga rufa* aka *Anhinga melanogaster*)** -- commonly called the **Snake Bird** -- in our Lake in early 2012. After a very long absence it has started visiting our Lake again since early September -- an indication that our waterbody is in good health with plenty of fish. The common name of this species is obviously because of its long snake-like neck and the manner in which it holds and sways only its head and neck above water while the rest of its body is almost wholly immersed.

Between 85- 97 cm from beak to tail, it is a large water bird with long slim head and neck, dagger-like bill and long tail. Essentially black in colour it has silvery grey streaks on the back and velvety brown head and neck. It is found in fresh water bodies as also among mangroves in coastal waters throughout the sub-continent (except in the northwest, the northeast and the Himalayas) and in Myanmar and Sri Lanka. Its staple food is fish and it chases them below the surface at high speed. Its neck bones are so designed that it can shoot out its bill at its quarry as if powered by a spring. In South India it nests between November and February. The nest is a platform made of twigs built gregariously amidst mixed heronry, usually near waterbodies and the typical clutch consists of 3-4 eggs.



- **Butterflies of SUVIDHA:** India has over 1,500 species of butterflies. Mr. Ashok Dey, a permanent resident of SUVIDHA since 2010, has been able to photograph and identify 47 species of butterflies inside our Village until now. Our Newsletter will carry this series comprising pictures and descriptions of butterflies of SUVIDHA.

BLUE TIGER



To those of you whose morning walk is when the sun has just begun to warm up our Village, the **Blue Tiger** (*Tirumala limniace*) is quite a common sight -- flapping slowly, fluttering and sometimes gliding between flowering bushes and frequently settling on flowers -- especially during the monsoon and post-monsoon months. A large butterfly, with a wing span between 90 - 100 mm, and quite strikingly marked with numerous pale blue streaks and spots against a black or dark brown background, this species is difficult to miss.

The species is found all over the sub-continent, in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, and at altitudes up to 2000 metres. It avoids very dense forests and arid areas. It is fond of wet soil and is found among *cosmos* and *lantana* hedges and bushes. Before and after the rains they can be seen migrating in very large numbers -- a few hundred to a few thousand individuals. The male of the species has a brush at the tip of the abdomen which it pushes out and strokes pouches of specialized scent scales to scatter the scent to attract the female.



Blue Tigers (with Plain Tiger)

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➤ **Readers' Corner :**

Rethinking Gender: Based On Sanskrit Texts – Part II

Courtesy: Dr. T. S. Rukmani, PhD, D Litt., Resident of Suvidha Village, Cottage # 73-74
(Presently, the author is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.)

In Part I of this paper I presented a general assessment of the prevailing attitude amongst scholars, both western and Indian, regarding the position of women in Hinduism. One can view the position of women in different ways as Amartya Sen mentions in his book *The Argumentative Indian* (2005). One can either examine the way society attended to the overall well being of women equally with men in many areas, in which of course the society failed miserably. On the other hand, we can also examine whether women themselves found space to exert their agency in spite of their handicaps that a patriarchal society imposed on them. We do find evidence to show that Hindu women did indeed find space to exercise their choices in different fields. In Part II, I try to point out through Sanskrit textual references that women have had some 'agency' in deciding how to run their lives. Available evidence may be meager but is sufficient to provide another lens to view the position of women in Hinduism.



Part II

Coming back specifically to the women's issue in Hinduism, for too long, feminists and women studies scholars have quoted Manu's dictum of women not having any independence of their own. That has become the standard picture of how Hinduism is viewed vis-à-vis its women folk. Needless to say this is too neat a formulation and the paradigm breaks down when one gets other statements from the same text regarding women, of quite a different nature. While there are other verses in the MS that praise women (III.56-57), we also get statements like forbidding a brāhmaṇa from accepting food when the woman is a sacrificer (IV.205). Then we have the statement that women can give evidence in a court of law (VIII.68). In one place Manu allows conversation of men with women who earn their own living (VIII.362). How does that score if women do not have any independence whatsoever? Surely women have agency when Manu says that after three menstrual periods she can choose her own husband. Manu's prejudice against *niyoga* is well known but he has to concede its sanction in society (IX.66). Manu's opposition to a brāhmaṇa marrying a śūdra is quite evident even though it was backed by *śāstra* (IX.149). There are also instances where a young woman is given the freedom to choose her own husband (IX.90-91) as well as evidence of unwed mothers in society (IX.172). Thus to rely on single statements like "A woman does not deserve freedom" is flying against the face of the whole text. This could have been a proverbial saying or a maxim that had gained popularity (cf. Olivelle 2005: 6) which explains its occurrence in the Mbh as well (V.37.3, 17; V.38.10-11; XIII.46.14).

Smṛti texts are contextual and address themselves to the times of the author as we know from the *Bṛhaspati Smṛti* (1.25.16 cited in Olivelle: 29). One is reminded again of the *Devala Smṛti* advocating the purity of women, after their monthly period, even if they had been molested, which is seen as addressing the question of women molested by foreigners. Of course that does not prevent the author from adding his own views within the work, but he cannot ignore what is prevalent if his work has to gain legitimacy. That Manu's work did enjoy legitimacy for a long period implies that he did not ignore the customs that were prevalent in society. Thus we find two voices of Manu in the MS; one that speaks to the society in terms of what were the prevalent customs and the other a moralistic tone in which Manu's own voice is heard. "Nevertheless, dharma is not just law but also right living, and when Manu uses his moral voice, he often contradicts what he may have said within the legal context" (Olivelle, 2005: 31) Olivelle argues that authors of texts like the MS were not very different from scholars of all times. "They gave their texts a particular structure; they argued for particular positions in law and morality; they disagreed with other experts, both their contemporaries and their predecessors; and they had particular social, economic, and political axes to grind" (ibid.: 6). For Manu, the brāhmaṇa represents all that is best in human nature and he devotes much of his work to describe the *dharma* of the brāhmaṇa. He also uses what is known as *atīśayokti* or exaggerated speech especially in praise of brāhmaṇas which, after all, has to be taken with a pinch of salt.

Reading Tanika Sarkar's "*Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*" I was struck by the conclusion she draws for valorizing married women, who were the retainers of Hindu culture, by middle class men as well as by authors like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 18th /19th century Bengal, as due to a weakening of the men's position in the outer world due to the British usurping all the decision making areas. By glorifying women and by being able to assert their authority within their homes at least, the men felt a sense of their importance restored. Whether that was in fact the case or not can be debated. One can similarly argue that Manu's work written sometime between the second century BCE and second century CE, besides covering the usual Smṛti material, was also probably pushing Manu's agenda/ideology of reinstating the glory of the brāhmaṇas at a time of brāhmanical revival after the Aśokan period.

For a nuanced reading of Vedic material, and how one can get very different perceptions of women's role in Vedic times, one can profitably read Stephanie Jamison's *Sacrificed Wife Sacrificer's Wife* and her article "Roles for Women in Vedic Śrauta Ritual" (Sharma, 2005) as well as Laurie Patton's edited volume *Jewels of Authority*. Jamison mentions that "In hospitality and exchange relations women play a significant role. This is brought out in the Soma sacrifice" (ibid: 12). Findly, in *Jewels of Authority*, quotes *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 6.2.1.1-2 in the context of the "guest reception or hospitality for Soma" which throws light on the agency of the woman/*patnī* in the sacrifice. I quote it in full as it captures the importance attached to the wife in the ceremony:

(The sacrificer/household) offers hospitality for the continuity of the sacrifice. The wife touches (the cart) from behind, for the wife is the mistress of the household goods, in this way (the household) offers what is approved by the wife... Now this touching (of the cart) from behind of the wife is for the uninterruptedness of the sacrifice. Thus the approval of the wife is an important part of the successful completion of the sacrifice.

Findly has shown with ample evidence from texts that, within the marriage a woman enjoyed agency, in deciding what is given in a sacrifice, *bhikṣā* to a *brahmacārī* and to a *saṃnyāsīn*. There is no authority exercised by the husband in telling her what to do in these circumstances. However, even though there is acknowledgement of her independent agency in these circumstances, one recognizes that the agency and authority is derived from the institution of marriage and not independently. I wonder if one could also cite the instance of members of the same

caste following different occupations in the *R̥gveda* as an instance of the woman exercising her own choice (RV.ix.112). Since this example comes from a brāhmaṇa family one could also infer that women did go out and work, in which case they must have had some say in what job they did as seen in this instance.

Women from other *vargas* like the Vaiśyas, for instance, as evidenced by what the *Amarakośa* states under *vaiśyavarga*, followed the 'vṛtti' (occupation) of agriculture, tending cattle, and trade (*striyām kṛṣṇṇ pāsupālyam ceti vṛttayah*). The *Amarakośa* also has the interesting example of independent women teachers called *upādhyāyā* or *ācāryā* as opposed to the wives of a male *ācārya/upādhyāya*.

Brahmavādinī

Vedic society was one which valued marriage very highly. If then, in a society that prized marriage as very high, a woman decided not to go through marriage, that would be a decision expressing not only her choice but also indicating her resolve to stand up to the pressure of society to go against its norms. That involves agency and power to take an independent decision. In Vedic society, we do find such women like Gārgī. Gārgī, as a learned woman, could have remained content as a composer of hymns like the 27 *ṛṣikās* mentioned as composers of hymns. But Gārgī is not content with the ordinary, and is looking for answers to fundamental questions. Gārgī can be called a *brahmavādinī*.

The term *brahmavādinī* looks as though it was applied to both the composer of hymns, as one can surmise from the *Bṛhad-devatā*, classifying *ṛṣikās* like Lopāmudrā, Romaśā and so on as *brahmavādinīs*, as also to those who chose to remain unmarried, pursuing a life of learning, to which category Gārgī would belong. *Hārīti Smṛti* (ca 6th BCE) classifies women as being of two kinds i.e. *brahmavādinī* and *sadyovadhū*. Mookerji understands *Hārīti Smṛti* xxi.23 to imply that a *brahmavādinī* is a Kumārī "who does not marry" (1989: 208). But even if the Vedic *brahmavādinī* was married, and yet chose to continue a lifelong devotion to study, that would again indicate her exercising her own choice. Similarly, when Maitreyī opts for being educated in the Upaniṣadic lore, she is exercising her choice, as there is no indication whatsoever that Yājñavalkya tried to dissuade her from her decision.

The *brahmavādinī* is a woman of learning, whether within or outside of marriage. It is what she stands for that is important. According to Findly "...in the figure of Gārgī, the Indian tradition affirms women as productive colleagues in the on-going search for truth" (Khandelwal: 39). She is one who can make up her mind and can speak with confidence in an assembly of scholars, questioning even the learned Yājñavalkya. The statement in the *R̥gveda* III 55.16 that unmarried, young and learned daughters should be married to learned bridegrooms, can be understood to mean that she had a say in the marriage. One could, perhaps, read the *Vāksūkta* and the *Sūryasūkta* as proclaiming the virtues of a *brahmavādinī* and *sadyovadhū* respectively (The Cultural History of India, Vol.II: 604). Mookherjee calls attention to *Kauśītakī Brāhmaṇa* vii.6, where a lady called Pathyāsvasti proceeded to the north for study and obtained the title of Sarasvati for her learning (1989:105).

The image of the *brahmavādinī* was a powerful image which exerted perpetual influence and it never faded away from the cultural memory. Thus, even when male offspring are prized, the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* (Br.Up.) does not forget to remind us that there is a *mantra* which can ensure the birth of a *paṇḍitā* or learned daughter (6.4.17). In the *Gṛhyasūtras* of Āśvalāyana and Sāṅkhyāyana the names of three *brahmavādinīs* are mentioned, i.e. Gārgī Vācakovī, Vaḍavā Prāthithyē and Sulabhā Maitreyī" (The Cultural History of India, Vol.II: 604) thus drawing our attention to the presence of such women in society. It is generally acknowledged that the Vedic period was not unfair to women and so the examples of the *ṛṣikās* and *brahmavādinīs* need not surprise us. The subsequent period of subjugation of women and her low educational status would naturally lead to her lack of agency. But again that is not entirely true, for women continued to exercise their choice in adopting a life of learning, in times that were not so favorable.

Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and subsequent grammatical literature give evidence of women who were *ācāryas* and *upādhyāyās*. "The Vārttika on [Pāṇini] iv, I, 48 makes this quite clear [that] women teachers, not their wives, are called *Upādhyāyī* or *Upādhyāyā*, and *Ācāryā*. Bhaṭṭojidīkṣita explains these terms to mean ladies who are themselves teachers...." (*yātu svayamevādhyāpikā*, Mookherjee, 1989: 245 note 1). In fact, Pāṇini mentions that a woman teacher was called *ācāryā* while the wife of an *ācārya* was called *ācāryāṇī*, one to be formed by adding the affix *ṭāp* and the other by the affix *āni*. The memory of the *brahmavādinī* is also recalled by the *Bālamānoramā*, (Mookherjee, 1989: 245 and note 2). While Pāṇini refers to women belonging to Vedic *śākhās* (IV. 1. 63) and mentions *Kaṭhī* as an example of a female student of the *Kaṭha-śākhā*, the *Bālamānoramā* and *Kāśikā* talk of a *bahvṛcī* i.e. one who studies many hymns (ibid). The *Amarakośa*, as already mentioned, also distinguishes between one who is an *upādhyāyā* or *ācāryā* as independent women teachers as opposed to the wives of male *ācārya/upādhyāya*. Thus the memory and practice of a *brahmavādinī* continued, even after the early Vedic times.

Gavin Flood has shown how tradition plays a role in determining “the architectonics of ascetic claims” (2004: xi). I would like to extend the imagery of “architectonics” not only to the ascetic claims, but also to other powerful images that a tradition has developed which includes that of a *brahmavādinī*. I cannot agree more with Flood when he says, “Although in one sense tradition is constructed in a shared imagination, this is not to say that tradition is made up and unreal, but is in a constant process of (re)construction in the flow of temporal continuity from the past” (ibid: 8). Thus the *brahmavādinī* image is part of the tradition and lives in the imagination and continues to reconstruct itself.

When one looks at the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and even the *Purāṇas* the figure of the *brahmavādinī* continues. Anasūyā, Kuntī, Damayantī, Draupadī, Gāndhārī, Rukmiṇī and others continue to fire the imagination of the public and help keep the image of the *brahmavādinī* alive. But one has to admit that it is in the mouth of the poets that they come alive and might not represent what was available in society at those times. But it is difficult to believe that, authors of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* would talk about women like Sāvitrī, Damayantī and Rukmiṇī, for example, who chose their own spouses and took daring steps to attain the men of their choice, which would be totally against the prevailing norms, unless their was historical and cultural memory that perpetuated these examples of courageous women in society. So also the daughter of Kuni-Garga refused marriage because she did not find any one suited for her (Śalyaparvan: 52.3-25). The illustrious Sulabhā who is also mentioned in the lineage of *ācāryās* in the *Āśvalāyana Gr̥hyasūtra*, similarly refused marriage, for no one could match her learning. She is immortalized in the Mbh, as the yogī who defeated Janaka in his own court (Śāntiparvan, 320). Śaṅkara makes reference to Sulabhā in connection with her yogic *siddhis*, in his commentary on Brahmasūtra III.3.32.

That there was respect for the views of women and they were consulted before any major event, is amply justified in the epics. For instance, after the thirteen year sojourn and when there was a dispute as to whether the Kauravas would restore their legitimate share of the kingdom to the Pāṇḍavas, a meeting was held by the Pāṇḍavas, along with Kṛṣṇa, as to the next course of action. Everyone gets to express their views and Draupadī was also asked as to what her views were regarding the future course of action. Similarly when Kṛṣṇa went to the court of the Kauravas as an ambassador of the Pāṇḍavas to plead justice, Gāndhārī was called in to persuade her intransigent son to listen to reason. (Mbh. 5.129). One can cite any number of examples of this nature, all of which indicate that women were not treated as chattels but had a contribution to make in important decisions and their advice was also sought for. Chuḍālā in the *Yogavāsishṭha* is again a *brahmavādinī* and was responsible for leading her husband Śikhidhvaja in the path of wisdom.

Women like Meerā, Mahādeviakkā, Āṇḍāl and others of the medieval period of *bhakti* (devotion), are known to have exercised their independence and walked out of their marriages, which for a Hindu woman would be considered the most daring act. I would argue that it is the presence of *brahmavādinīs* like Gārgī in the tradition, that gave Meerā and others the courage to act in accordance with their conviction on the one hand, and, on the other, enabled society to accept their behavior as well. Gārgī and Maitreyī are highly respected figures in the tradition and their images could always be recalled to lend legitimacy for women’s empowerment. As Khandelwal remarks in her ethnographic study *Women in Ochre Robes*, women taking up *saṁnyāsa* do consider themselves belonging in the tradition of Gārgī and Maitreyī even today

Women as Saṁnyāsiniṅ

Of all the institutions available in Hinduism, the one of the *saṁnyāsini* seems to be the single one which denotes the ultimate decision that an individual takes as to how to conduct one’s life. We do know that by the time of the Br.Up., the *saṁnyāsa* stage was known (4.4.22) and was even defined as the one where there is no more attachment left. It is significant that it is in the Br.Up. again that we meet with the *brahmavādinī* Gārgī. While there is evidence of *munis* as wanderers in R̥gvedic society (X. 136) there is no specific mention of women wanderers (*parivrājikās*) in that period. Even though the *muni* resembles the *saṁnyāsini* of later times as a wanderer, he is more of a yogī, having some *siddhis* resembling the *siddhis* of a yogī. But if Yājñavalkya is the Upaniṣadic ideal of a *saṁnyāsini*, who has chosen the last stage after a life of learning and reflection, it is possible to conceive of the *brahmavādinī* as being similar to a *saṁnyāsini*. From the evidence in the Br.Up., Gārgī has certainly chosen to devote herself to life long learning and the life she has chosen is similar to that of a *saṁnyāsini*.

When we examine the women’s question within the broad ideology of *nivṛtti* or *saṁnyāsa*, that seems to have evolved as a religious and philosophical ideology by the time of the Upaniṣads, as mentioned above, we come across some interesting facts in the texts. The literal meaning of *nivṛtti* is only withdrawal or curbing one’s natural inclination. Thus there is a sense of exercise of one’s own agency in the concept of *nivṛtti*, at least etymologically. *Pravṛtti* as engagement in the conventional religious life of the community and its opposite *nivṛtti* as disengagement with conventional religious life is very much in use in the *Bhagavadgītā* and in the Mbh. According to Hemachandra, cited in the *Śabdakalpadruma*, *nivṛtti* has many synonyms like *uparama*, *virati*, *aparati*, *uparati* and *arati*. It is interesting to note that the *Amarakośa* states *vārtā*, *pravṛtti*, *vṛttanta*, *udantaḥ* as synonyms of *pravṛtti* but does not list *nivṛtti* in its list. *Pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* have got entrenched in the Hindu tradition both in a religious and philosophical sense, as engagement and disengagement, but

when exactly *nivṛtti* got its special significance of complete withdrawal, associated with the life of a *saṃnyāsīn* is difficult to decide. As *vṛtti* is activity, *pra-vṛtti* could easily have come to denote intense involvement in worldly activity by force of the prefix 'pra', while its opposite could have been viewed as *ni-vṛtti* again emphasizing the negative force of the prefix 'ni'. This is also possible when the fourth *āśrama* as *saṃnyāsa* got to be defined as withdrawal from attachment to the three *eṣāṇas* as mentioned in the Br.Up. If then *saṃnyāsa* is the fourth stage of life, *nivṛtti* would be the way of conducting one's life in *saṃnyāsa*. Thus, *nivṛtti*, one can assume, gradually also got centered round the institution of *saṃnyāsa*, denoting one who is engaged in the pursuit of liberation or *mokṣa*. Both the individual *saṃnyāsīn* and the institution of *saṃnyāsa*, where looked upon as sites of *nivṛtti*. Śaṅkarācārya in his introduction to the *Bhagavadgītā*, talks about the twin ideology of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* as having different goals, one aimed at *abhyudaya* or worldly wellbeing, and the other at achieving *nḥśreyasa/mokṣa* or liberation.

In this paper, I identify *nivṛtti* with *saṃnyāsa*, which is *nivṛtti* par excellence. I shall try and look at the concept of *nivṛtti* and the mode of life as a *saṃnyāsīnī* with reference to women in Hinduism, based on evidence from available published texts. "A woman taking *saṃnyāsa* is a transgressive act and a good place to explore issues of woman's agency" (Khandelwal:43). I shall use the words *saṃnyāsīnī*, *tapasvī*, *bhikṣuṇī tāpasī*, *śramaṇī*, etc., to denote such a person as we find these terms used indiscriminately in the literature of the period.

The existence of *bhikṣuṇīs* in society is evidenced in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Mbh. We find examples of women who have adopted the lives of *saṃnyāsīnīs* as we see in the case of Śabarī in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. She was the disciple of sage Mātanga and her *āśrama* was situated on the bank of the Pampā river (*Rāmāyaṇa*: III.74). This means she was not only herself a *śramaṇī/bhikṣuṇī*, but that she ran an *āśrama* to which presumably, students came. Śaṅḍilī (Mbh. V. 113.6) is another *tāpasī* who attained perfection and is described as a great yogī. It is not as if the *saṃnyāsīnī* model has been perpetuated only in the *itihāsa* and *Purāṇas*, which are viewed somewhat differently, as they are different from literary works composed by well known authors like Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti and so on. The image of the *tāpasī/saṃnyāsīnī* is present in all these literary works as well. Thus when Śakuntalā is getting ready to go to Duṣyanta's court, she is blessed by *tāpasīs* living in Kaṇva's *āśrama* as mentioned in the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. It is also significant that mention is made of at least three *tāpasīs* who bless Śakuntalā and another *tāpasī*, Gautamī, the elder, accompanies her to Duṣyanta's palace. Bhavabhūti mentions Ātreya, in his *Uttararāmacaritam*, who is shifting from Vālmīki's *āśrama* to another one, as she finds it difficult to compete with Lava and Kuśa at Vālmīki's *āśrama*. This can mean that both men and women continued to be taught at the guru's *āśrama* and also there were many *āśramas* to choose from. Bhavabhūti also mentions Kāmandakī in his *Mālatīmādhavam*. Vidyāraṇya in his *Jīvanmukiviveka*, a highly philosophical book written by one who belongs to Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta *sampradāya*, also reiterates the competence (*adhikāra*) for women to assume *saṃnyāsa*. Talking about *vividīṣā-saṃnyāsa* he says that women are also entitled to it. He further elaborates that females may renounce before marriage or after the death of their husbands; they can go out and beg for alms (like the men), hear the *śāstras* dealing with *mokṣa*, meditate on *ātman* in seclusion and (even) assume the *tri-daṇḍa* emblem (1978, *Jīvanmukiviveka*: 4). Vidyāraṇya talks about mental renunciation (*mānasa karmādityāgaḥ*) in the case of those in the other *āśramas* as well, who for some reason are not able to take up *saṃnyāsa* (ibid 4). *Brahmavādīnīs* like Maitreyī could very well fit into that category.

These are all literary and philosophical works, well received by the public, and would, therefore, will be describing the conditions of society as valued by its readers. Good literature, one assumes, conveys the values dear to the readers. Sanskrit literature also combines the double bind of literature and philosophy that the culture as a whole believes in. *Saṃnyāsa*, as one that promotes the ultimate value of selflessness and dispassion, will appeal to the reader and known example will therefore be used by writers to further the value of *saṃnyāsa* in the readers. One need not therefore consider these examples as imaginary ones.

There are references to *saṃnyāsīns/tāpasīs* in Smṛti literature and in Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*. Even though these are well known, it needs to be reiterated in order to correct a one sided picture of women in Hinduism. Manu has reference to female wanderers/ascetics (MS 8.365). Kauṭilya's prohibition against initiating women into *saṃnyāsa*, can only make sense if women were being initiated into *saṃnyāsa*. He goes against his own dictum when he advises the king to employ *parivrājikās* as spies and they also seem to have been employed in the job of spinning, by the superintendent of weaving (Artha. I.12.8, II 23.40). Megasthenes makes reference to women philosophers who accompany their husbands to the forest, probably a reference to the *vānaprastha* stage of life (*The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II.565).

When I interviewed Swami Maheshanandaji Maharaj of the Niraṅjanī Akhādā and Swami Veda Bharati, again a Mahāmaṇḍaleśvara of the Niraṅjanī Akhādā, they both affirmed the presence of female *saṃnyāsīnīs* since a long time. They cited the example of the Junā Akhādā which is a purely female organization, and which is also headed by a female since the time it was established. They were not sure when it was established but guessed that it might have been at the time of Śaṅkarācārya. Lynn Teskey Denton also mentions the Junā Akhādā in her book titled *Female Ascetics in Hinduism*. The date is not of significance in our discussion, but the presence of a *saṃnyāsīnī* organization which

confirmed the tradition's continuity of the female *saṃnyāsini*. Both the above Swāmis I interviewed also uniformly confirmed that there were at least 35 *saṃnyāsini āśramas* in Hardwar itself. And we are also familiar with the gathering of female *sādhus/sādhvīs* at the time of the various *Kuṃbhamelas*. Denton goes further and says that the census figures between 1891 and 1931 of the Government of India indicate large *Nāthapanthi* and *Daśanāmi Nāga* populations with approximately equal numbers of male and female members; thus in 1891 there were 436 Jogis (men) and 430 Jogins (women) in Banaras, she says in the same book. This is indeed revealing and flies in the face of handed down common knowledge.

The *saṃnyāsini* today is an ubiquitous phenomenon. There are *saṃnyāsini*s not formerly initiated into the order, like Amṛtānandamayī Mā, while there are others formally initiated like those belonging to the Śārada-maṭha. We also have politician *saṃnyāsini*s like Uma Bharati, who have been formally initiated as *saṃnyāsini*s and who engage in political work, even holding offices like being the Chief-minister of a state and being a cabinet minister. In the figure of a *saṃnyāsini*, women have been able to use a paradigm that ensures respect in society, guarantees independence and agency for oneself, and further the traditional image of a renouncer working for the welfare of the world in a selfless manner.

I have tried to point out that, when one reads extant Sanskrit texts closely one realises that there are many examples in the literary, religious & philosophical Sanskrit texts which stand testimony to the fact that women did have the freedom to participate in decision making situations as also to choose what they would like to do with their lives,

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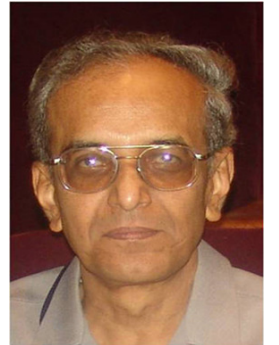
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Road Map to tread the Last Years of Life - Part III

Compiled by Dr. P M Chandrasekhara, Cottage # 75

Assistance : [Assisted Living] :

Our greater longevity has coincided with the increased dependence on families which results in pain and unhappiness for all those involved. Taking care of a debilitated, elderly person in our medicalized era is an overwhelming combination of technological and the custodial issues. Today, assisted living is regarded as something of an intermediate station between independent living and the life in a nursing home. But when Keren Brown Wilson, one of the originators of the concept, built her first assisted living home for the aged in Oregon in the 1980's, she was trying to create a place that would eliminate the need for nursing homes altogether. She'd wanted to build an alternative, not a halfway station. Wilson believed she could create a place where people could live with freedom and autonomy no matter how physically limited they become. She thought that just because you are old and frail, you shouldn't have to submit to life in an asylum. In her head she had a vision of how to make a better life achievable. And that vision had been formed by the same experience – of reluctant dependency and agonized responsibility taking care of her disabled mother.



The bookish daughter of a West Virginia coal miner and a washer women, neither of whom were schooled past eighth grade, Wilson was an unlikely radical. When she was nineteen years old, her mother, suffered a devastating stroke. Jessie was just fifty-five years old. The stroke left her permanently paralysed down one side of the body. Although, her

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intelligence and perception were unaffected, she needed help. Wilson was just a college student, She had no income, a tiny apartment she shared with a roommate, and no way to take care of her mother. There was no where for Jessie but a nursing home. Wilson arranged for one near where she was in college. It seemed a safe and friendly place. But Jessie never stopped asking he daughter to “Take me home”. “Get me out of here”.

Wilson became interested in policy for the aged. When she graduated, she got a job working in senior services for the state of Washington. As the years passed, Jessie shifted through a series of nursing homes, and she did not like a single one of those places. Meanwhile, Wilson got married and completed her Ph.D. in gerontology. When she told her mother about her PhD, Jessie asked her a question that Wilson says changed her life: “Why don’t you do something to help people like me?” Importantly Jessie wanted to live in an apartment instead of a patient in a bed!.

Wilson didn’t know what to do when her mother told her these things. Her mother’s desires seemed both reasonable and - according to rules of the place she’d lived – impossible. Wilson felt badly for the nursing home staff, who worked hard taking care of her mother and were just doing what they were expected to do, and she felt guilty that she couldn’t do more herself. At the same time, she was convinced that nursing homes would not accept any things like what Jessie envisioned. The institutions or the nursing homes were designed in every detail for control of their residents [patients]. The fact that this design was supposed to be for health and safety – for their benefit – made the places only that much more benighted and impervious to change. Wilson decided to try spelling out on paper an alternative that would let frail elderly people maintain as much control over their care as possible, instead of having to let their care control them.

The key word in her mind was *home*. Home is the place where your own priorities hold sway. At home, *you* decide how you spend your time, how you share your space, and how you manage your possessions. Wilson began sketching out the features of a new kind of home for the elderly, a place like the one her mother had pinned for. She approached retirement communities and builders. None were interested. The idea seemed impractical and absurd. So, she and her husband decided to build the place on their own. They worked with an architect to lay out the plan in detail. They went to bank and did not succeed in getting a loan. They found a private investor, who backed them and signed the deal after giving up majority ownership and accepting personal liability for failure. Then the state of Oregon threatened to withhold licensing as senior housing because the plan stipulates that people with disabilities would be living there. Wilson spent several days camping out in one government office after another until she had secured an exemption. And in 1983, their new “Living centre with assistance” for the elderly- name ‘Park Place’ – opened in Portland.

By the time it opened, Park Place had become far more than an academic pilot project. It was a major real estate development with 112 units, and they filled up almost immediately. The concept was as appealing as it was radical. Although some of residents had profound disabilities, none were called patients. They were all simply tenants and were treated as such. They had private apartment with a full bath, kitchen and a front door that locked (a touch many found particularly hard to imagine). They were allowed to have pets and to choose their own carpeting and furniture. They were given control over temperature settings, food, who come into their home and when. They were just people living in an apartment. Wilson insisted over and over again. But, as elders with advanced disabilities, they were also provided with the sorts of help with respect to personal care and medications. There was a nurse on site and the tenants had a button for summoning urgent assistance at any time of day or night. There was also help with maintaining a decent quality of life – having company, keeping up their connections in the outside world, continuing the activities they valued most.

With “assisted living” as Wilson’s concept became known, the goal was that no one ever had to be institutionalized. The services were, identical to the services that nursing homes provide. But here the care providers understood they were entering someone else’s home, and that changed the power relations fundamentally. The residents had control over the schedule, the ground rules, the risks they did and didn’t want to take. If their mind faded to the point that they could no longer make rational decisions, then their family – or whomsoever they’d designated – could help negotiate the terms of the risks and choices that were acceptable. With “assisted living”, the goal was that no one ever had to feel institutionalized. At the same time, her philosophy was to provide a place where residents retained the autonomy and privacy living in their own homes.

The state monitored the experiment closely. When the group expanded to a second location in Portland – this one had 142 units and capacity for impoverished elderly people on government support – the state required Wilson and her husband to track the health, cognitive capabilities, physical functions, and life satisfaction of the tenants. In 1988, the findings were made public. They revealed that the residents had in fact traded their health for freedom. Their satisfaction with their lives increased and at the same time their health was maintained. Their physical and cognitive function actually improved. Incidence of major depression fell. And the cost for those on government support 20 percent lower than it would have been in a nursing home. This programme proved an unmitigated success.

TO BE CONTINUED....

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