

An Approach to Women in Vedic Culture: *the Social Arguments of Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 1 and its Relationship with the Manu Samhita*

Javier Gradin Moreno, Department of Communication Sciences:
Indian Traditional Philosophy, International Relations and Publicity
profesor.javiergradin@uie.edu.es +511985575521

Accepted 19 September 2011

The article addresses the weighty issue of sexism in the Vedic culture. It uses both the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Manu Samhita* as the basis for the exegesis of Arjuna on the social arguments and the definition of qualities for women and men in view of the pivotal role of the family to transcendence and the individual's spiritual, moral and ethical obligations.

Keywords: Sri Krishna, Arjuna, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Manu Samhita*, Codes of Yajnavalkya, *Vairagya Martanda*

INTRODUCTION

All Vedic literature has three characteristics: its invocation context as literature, its purpose, and people's rights to receive its message.

The *Gita*, as spoken by Sri Krishna covers five key areas of knowledge: Isvara (God), Jiva (living entities), prakriti (material nature), kala (time) and karma (activity).

The aim is to give the knowledge by which we can awaken our consciousness of Krishna and every human being is called to listen and understand the information disclosed in this sacred conversation.

All those related to the Vedic culture know they can be accused of some "sexism." Scriptural emphasis on the differences between men and women, and the consequences of a read-out –of-context, could lead to ready-conclusions of a social-religious machismo.

Sri Krishna, the original speaker of the *Gita*, says:

māh hi pārtha vyapāçritya
ye 'pi syuù pāpa-yonayaù
striyo vaiçyās tathā çüdrās
te 'pi yānti parāà gatim

"O son of Pāthā, those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth—women, vaiçyas [merchants] and çüdras [workers]—can attain the supreme destination." (BG 9-32).

Sri Krishna here clearly explains that everyone can get to the ultimate goal as it makes no difference at the finish. But the differences are clearly present when one speaks of lower stock. Traders and workers are influenced by the mode of ignorance. Therein lays the difference.

WOMAN and the MODE of IGNORANCE

What is the reason why [the] woman is related to the mode of ignorance?

Sri Krishna says in Gita 10-34:

kértiù çrér väk ca näréääà
smâtir medhä dhâtiù kñamä

"Among women, I am fame, fortune, fine way of speaking, memory, intelligence, perseverance and patience."

In this world's most famous conversation, we see that there are a number of salient qualities mentioned, but none of these qualities is related to the mode of ignorance. Moreover, within the six qualities of Bhagawan highlighted, fame and fortune are literally present and memory and intelligence are present as knowledge.

The reason is somewhere else then.

There is one Purua (enjoyer), which is the Supreme Lord Himself. Everything else is intended to give pleasure to the Supreme Lord. And here, we see the female condition implicit in all living entities. And this goes for men and women.

The Vairagya Martanda explains the reasons:

*eka Jattir sarva srsta vidha ca ca brahmana Adau
pavitrah loop ta panditadhikah prakrter sarvah*

(Vairagya Martanda 5 / 13)

"In the beginning of creation, Lord Brahma created one category of women. They were of high quality, intelligent, pure women who appeared the wisest." (Translation mine).

*hi sa kanya Kedara dharmah ksayam Sapena gatah
Tada Kopen dhatra vinirmita ca ca krtya stri*

(Vairagya Martanda 5 / 14)

"When the daughter of Kedara, Sri Vrindadevi said a curse, destroying real and natural occupation, then the angry Brahma created a class called krtya women." (Translation mine).

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*stri krtya Nirmita trividha pure brahmana Jattir
Pratham utama adhama ca sa ca madhyama vraja*

(Vairagya Martanda 5 / 15)

"Such a woman krtya was previously defined within the three categories of maximum quality, the medium quality, and of lower quality by Brahma." (Translation mine).

*uttama kincit pati sa dharma bhakta samanvita
Haram also pranante'pi ayasah na karam kurute*

(Vairagya Martanda 5 / 16)

"Women of the highest quality are spiritually inclined and faithful to their husbands. Even at the expense of their lives, they will not accept a lover and the defamation that would come with having one." (Translation mine).

*yatnad raksita Gurun ca na bhajan Haram bhayat
yatha ca sa kincit krtrima PATIM madhyama bhajet*

(Vairagya Martanda 5 / 18)

"Any woman, duly protected by spouse, parent, etc., and who does not fear to accept a lover, which is a disrespect to her husband, is said to be a second-class woman." (Translation mine)

*vamsaja atyanta'sad dust adhama tatha parama
durmukha duhsila adhama Kalahan sila vita*

(Vairagya Martanda 5 / 20)

"A short woman, who has a bad temper, which is irreligious, tough by nature, aggressive and problematic to speak to, is said to be of a lower quality" (my translation).

We see clearly that the distinction is noted in its relations with the couple and their behavior.

SOCIAL and SPIRITUAL DIVISIONS in the VEDIC SOCIETY

The *Manu Samhita* deals with the duties and regulations of the social and spiritual divisions of the Vedic society with the aim to encourage, through the application of these duties and regulations, the natural relationship we have with Krishna making smart people who can apply such knowledge, the ideal receptacle.

Since Arjuna is a king. He's a warrior, trained from birth in the *dharma shastras*, or scriptures to govern in an ideal form of society.

He was not only a tremendously important person of his lineage (son of Indra, raised by his mother Kunti with her husband Pandu) but also had a transcendental role as a cousin, friend and confidant of the glorious Krishna. While there are more esoteric aspects to the relationship, these details are sufficient for the perception of the discourse.

In the *dharma shastras* like *Manu Samhita* and codes of *Yajnavalkya*, we learn the codes by which a society is governed first class.

There are two *dharmas sva* or specific dharmas for humans: one is located in the plane released, and when they overcome the bondage of the material modes, and the other is when it is not released. Here comes the *Manu Samhita*.

Each *Varna ashram* has duties and regulations.

In Chapter 18:43 the *Gita* describes Arjuna's attributes with which he works as a king: heroism, power, determination, skill, courage in battle, generosity and leadership.

These define the basis of both Arjuna's life and the arguments presented in the following lines: In mantra 31 we can see how Arjuna reaffirms his desire not to fight (visible from mantra 29 where physical symptoms manifest as a product of anxiety).

The Family

First is the family. It is a realm of no use if I kill my family.

In verse 189 of the *Manu Samhita*, we find the following: "Kshatriyas protect the people, give gifts, offer sacrifices, study the Vedas, and abstain from carnal pleasures."

It is the mantra that defines the duty of the *Kshatriyas*. We then see that Arjuna defines his first argument based on the first definition of duty. Without hesitation, he understands that his relatives, present on the other side of the battlefield must be protected. A kingdom is not worth their deaths. It is impossible to be happy that way.

Mantra 32 (to 35) of the *Bhagavad Gita* is the same thread, where Arjuna makes a list of all those connected to him, and his natural responsibility to them, ethics and morality, is above his duty to legally recover the kingdom, which belongs to him.

In mantra 36, there is a new term: sin. Sin does not only seize it, but also Krishna (speaking in the plural and the plural includes the Lord as part of the conversation).

Four Deadly Sins

In the *Manu Samhita*, 9235, we found four deadly sins: one who kills a brahmana, who robs a Brahmin, who drink Sura (one drink) and who defiles the bed of his guru.

We see then, that in the design of Arjuna, the first two are mortal sins. No kings, in their right minds would agree to participate in something that goes against their ethical codes.

Mantra 37 shows a difference between them (Arjuna and the Pandavas) and those that are opposite (the Kurus). And this difference is the knowledge of what is wrong, and as evil, must be avoided. We know that greed is a door that leads to hell (BG 16.21).

In the *Manu Samhita* 22.4.3.4.5 topic, we find that "taking what is not given to you, hurting a living entity without a law that allows for it and having sex with another man's wife, are three kinds of sinful bodily actions." We then see that greed is described explicitly in two of these three activities.

In mantra 39 of the *Gita*, we find the following: "With the destruction of the dynasty, it destroys the eternal family tradition, and with it the rest of the family comes to irreligion."

MANU SAMHITA CONFIRMS ARJUNA'S WARNING

As a final argument, it is no coincidence that the *Manu Samhita*, when describing the cause of social degradation, reads as follows: 17.16.1: "By establishing a cross caste of adulterous men, then there is sin, which cuts the roots and causes the destruction of everything. "

This argument will be used by Arjuna almost verbatim in mantra 40: "O Krishna, when irreligion is prominent in the family, the women of this become contaminated, and degradation of women, O descendant of Vrsni! Arise unwanted children. "

In 41 the details grow: "An increase of unwanted population is a sure cause of a hellish life both for the family and for those who destroy the family tradition. The ancestors of such corrupt families will fall down, because the celebrations in providing food and water will be stopped completely. "

Manu Samhita 7:3, says, "Degraded marriages, by omitting the performance of sacred rites, and neglecting the study of the Vedas, and disrespecting the Brahmans, the great families fall."

This warning of Arjuna is confirmed so vividly in the *Manu Samhita*, and also in text 42 of the *Gita*: "Because of the wickedness of those who destroy the family tradition, and thus caused the appearance of unwanted children, all sorts of community projects and welfare activities for the family are devastated."

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the article, it was surmised that the entire Vedic literature is threefold. The conclusion of these mantras uttered by Arjuna is in text 43: "O Krishna, maintainer of the people! I heard through the discipleship succession that those who destroy family traditions dwell always in hell."

This conclusion is the logical conclusion of the *Manu Samhita*, which ends with a hope, detailing "the results from the actions. Learning from this supreme blessing ensures a brahmana. "

Arjuna says to learn to avoid the bad is the key in chapter 1 of the *Bhagavad Gita* (a summary of morality prevailing in Vedic culture), from which we also find a special emphasis on the care

of women, and the consequences we suffer when the opposite happens (war, pestilence, failure of social projects).

While we must go back to the beginning of time, the conclusion is simple: women should be protected, so they can develop first class qualities, and thus, society as a whole will benefit. This is not sexism; it's just a matter of social common sense.

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