

A woman in silhouette, wearing a sari, is shown from the side, holding a lit diya (oil lamp) in her right hand. The background is a warm, out-of-focus bokeh of lights, suggesting a festival or a temple setting. The overall mood is contemplative and spiritual.

What's a Woman to Do?

Part 2:
Reflections on
Why We May Misunderstand
Srila Prabhupada's Teachings
Regarding Women

Visakha Dasi

What's a Woman to Do?

By Visakha Dasi:

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Regarding Women

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Dedicated to His Divine Grace
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
and his followers, generous souls
who forever try to evoke the divine within us.



His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder-Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

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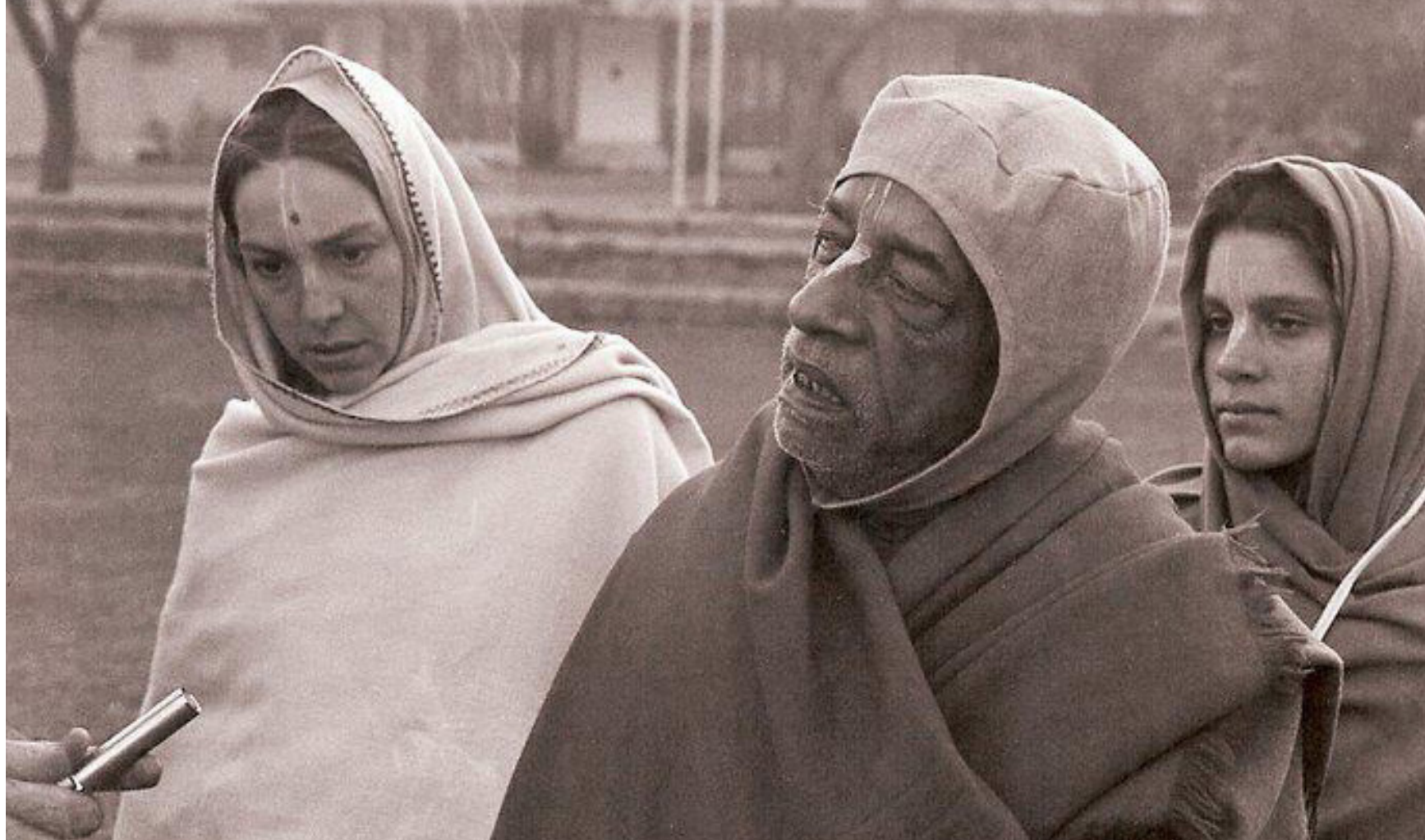
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Introduction

Srila Prabhupada repeatedly requested all his followers to regularly read his books. Since most of us (his followers) are conditioned souls, we may bring our conditioning into our reading of his books and as a result, not have a balanced understanding of them. In this booklet we will look at some ways his teachings can be misunderstood and reasons why such misunderstandings may occur.



Dronacharya

I. A Vaishnavi saves an unqualified brahmana (and the possibility of confirmation bias)

In the introduction to the first part of What's a Woman to Do? I mentioned that one of the factors that contributes to the misunderstanding perpetually swirling around women's services in Srila Prabhupada's movement is the male/female psychocultural dynamic of men tending to feel superior to women, and women tending to defer to men. This dynamic may induce us to have certain preconceptions about the intelligence and abilities of members of the opposite sex that may not be true, and these preconceptions can also set us up for confirmation bias.

We show a confirmation bias when we favor information that confirms our preexisting beliefs and discount evidence that does not. We also show a confirmation bias when our desire for something to be true overrules an objective study of the evidence. Confirmation biases may lead us to form incorrect or unbalanced conclusions.

Let's look at the pastime of Draupadi and Asvatthama from the First Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

After the battle of Kurukshetra, Asvatthama, son of the great brahmana Dronacharya, snuck into the Pandava camp and mercilessly murdered Draupadi's five sleeping sons. Arjuna chased and caught Asvatthama, and brought him back to face the grieving Draupadi. Srila Prabhupada comments:

"When he was brought before Srimati Draupadi, she, although begrieved for the murder of her sons, and although the murderer was present before her, could not withdraw the due respect generally offered to a brahmana or to the son of a brahmana. This is due to her mild nature as a woman. Women as a class are no better than boys, and therefore they have no discriminatory power like that of a man. Asvatthama proved himself to be an unworthy son of Dronacharya or of a brahmana, and for this reason he was

condemned by the greatest authority, Lord Sri Krishna, and yet a mild woman could not withdraw her natural courtesy for a brahmana.

“The specific word used in this sloka is vama-svabhava, ‘mild and gentle by nature.’ A good man or woman accepts anything very easily, but a man of average intelligence does not do so. But, anyway, we should not give up our reason and discriminatory power just to be gentle. One must have good discriminatory power to judge a thing on its merit. We should not follow the mild nature of a woman and thereby accept that which is not genuine. Asvatthama may be respected by a good-natured woman, but that does not mean that he is as good as a genuine brahmana.” (SB 1.7.42, purport)

Srila Prabhupada explains that because Asvatthama failed to act like a brahmana he was liable to be rejected from the exalted position of a brahmana. Thus Lord Sri Krishna and Arjuna were right to condemn Asvatthama. And Srila Prabhupada points out that a good woman like Draupadi didn’t consider the matter from the scriptural angle but instead based her actions on custom, offering Asvatthama

the same respect she would have offered his father, even though his actions were abominable.

Srila Prabhupada writes: “Draupadi desired that Asvatthama be at once released, and it was all the same a good sentiment for her. This means that a devotee of the Lord can tolerate all sorts of tribulation personally, but still such devotees are never unkind to others, even to the enemy. These are the characteristics of one who is a pure devotee of the Lord.” (SB 1.7.43, purport)

So Srila Prabhupada first spoke negatively about Draupadi’s lack of discrimination when she offered respect to Asvatthama, then praised her for her extraordinary kindness in offering him respect.

This is reminiscent of the beginning of the Battle of Kurukshetra when, out of attachment to his family members and respect for his superiors, Arjuna refused to fight and dropped his bow. Critical of Arjuna’s position, Srila Prabhupada commented: “This is a typical calculation of material life.” (Bg. 1.32–35, purport) Yet a little later he said, “All these symptoms are due to soft-heartedness resulting from his being a great devotee of the Lord.” (Bg. 1.45, purport)

So what does this have to do with men, women, and confirmation bias? Let’s look at the pastime and Srila Prabhupada’s comments on it a little closer.

By Draupadi’s estimation, Arjuna was indebted to Dronacharya because Drona had taught him the military arts. In Drona’s absence his son was his representative. So respect was due to his son, Asvatthama, no matter what Asvatthama may have done to her family. Additionally, Draupadi was feeling the devastating loss after the murder of all her children. Could she wish such grief on another mother? She could not. She told Arjuna: “My lord, do not make the wife of Dronacharya cry like me. I am aggrieved for the death of my sons. She need not cry constantly like me.” (SB 1.7.47)



In both cases – Draupadi’s and Arjuna’s – Srila Prabhupada sharply criticizes mundane sentiment and praises their Vaishnava soft-heartedness and compassion.

Regarding Draupadi’s decision to spare Asvatthama, the Srimad-Bhagavatam tells us: “King Yudhisthira fully supported the statements of the Queen, which were in accordance with the principles of religion and were justified, glorious, full of mercy and equity, and without duplicity.”

Srila Prabhupada explains, “Maharaja Yudhisthira, who was the son of Dharmaraja, or Yamaraja, fully supported the words of Queen Draupadi in asking Arjuna to release Asvatthama ... If ingratitude were shown to such a benevolent family, it would not be at all justified from the moral standpoint. The wife of Dronacharya, who was the half body of the great soul, must be treated with compassion, and she should not be put into grief because of her son’s death. That is compassion. Such statements by Draupadi are without duplicity because actions should be taken with full knowledge. The feeling of equality was there because Draupadi spoke out of her personal experience.... Draupadi was herself a mother, and therefore her calculation of the depth of Kripa’s grief was quite to the point. And it was glorious because she wanted to show proper respect to a great family.” (SB 1.7.49, purport)

“Nakula and Sahadeva [the younger brothers of the King] and also Satyaki, Arjuna, the Personality of Godhead Lord Sri Krishna, son of Devaki, and the ladies and others all unanimously agreed with the King.” (SB 1.7.50)

Earlier, Srila Prabhupada writes, “Women as a class are no better than boys, and therefore they have no discriminatory power like that of a man ... We should not follow the mild nature of a woman and thereby accept that which is not genuine” (SB 1.7.42, purport) as an apparent rebuke to Draupadi’s mercifulness in sparing Asvatthama. Here, however, we find that Lord Sri Krishna Himself, along with Yudhisthira Maharaja, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva, and



others agree with Draupadi’s decision. Srila Prabhupada calls Draupadi “a pure devotee of the Lord,” (SB 1.7.43 purport) and the Bhagavatam itself declares that her statements “were in accordance with the principles of religion and were justified, glorious, full of mercy and equity, and without duplicity.” (SB 1.7.49) Srila Prabhupada concurs: “[The] statements by Draupadi are without duplicity because actions should be taken with full knowledge.” (SB 1.7.49 purport)

Krishna expected Arjuna to kill Asvatthama because of his heinous crimes, but also not to kill him because of his glorious parentage, so Arjuna was forced to reconcile apparent contradictions and come up with a plan of action. We too are expected to accommodate the apparently different understandings of Draupadi’s behavior. Seen materially, Draupadi’s forgiveness (like Arjuna’s) displays a lack of discrimination because she bases it on mundane social custom rather than scripture; seen spiritually, Draupadi’s heartfelt compassion and astounding forgiveness are expressions of her transcendental Vaishnava qualities, qualities characteristic of Krishna’s pure devotees.

But if we approach this Srimad-Bhagavatam pastime with a particular bias, we may hear only the negative remarks Srila Prabhupada makes about Draupadi’s behavior – and women in general – and ignore the glorious qualities

highlighted by this Vaishnavi. Or we may hear only the positive remarks about Draupadi and disregard the statements Srila Prabhupada makes about mundane women. Such imbalanced hearing is the result of confirmation bias.

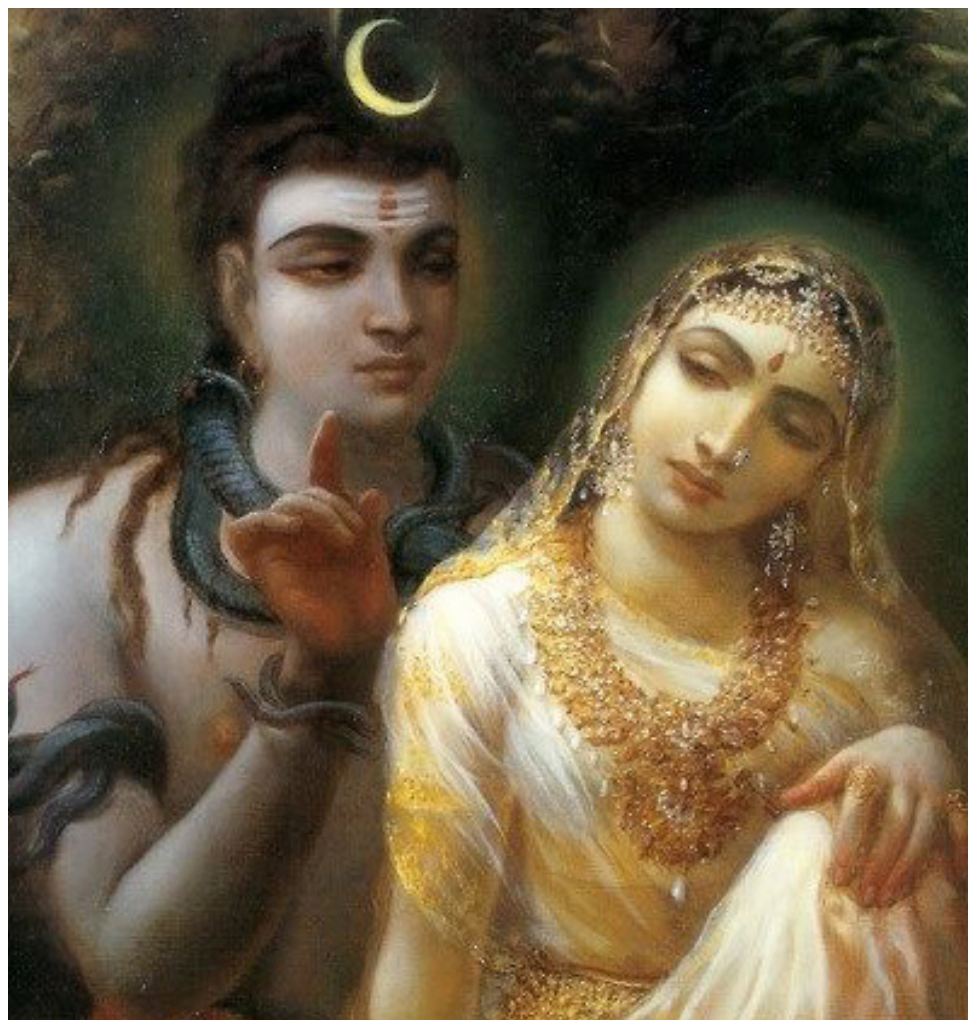
Srila Prabhupada is trying to spiritually awaken us by teaching us through opposites and contradictions; he is contrasting the material with the spiritual. He wants us all to be aware that material compassion has no value (“Material compassion, lamentation, and tears are all signs of ignorance of the real self ... Compassion for the dress of a drowning man is senseless” Bg. 2.1, purport), and so he speaks strongly. He writes, “In human society all over the world there are millions and billions of men and women, and almost all of them are less intelligent because they have very little knowledge of spirit soul.” (SB. 2.3.1, purport) Spiritual compassion, on the other hand, is a characteristic of a pure devotee. (A pure devotee can also show material compassion. For example, Srila Prabhupada showed material compassion when he said that nobody near the temple should go hungry, when he cared for his sick disciples, etc.)

When Prabhupada makes contradictory statements, it is important to look to his personal behavior and his treatment of others as a deciding factor. We can’t simply look at his words and ignore his behavior.

Srila Prabhupada’s presentation of spiritual life is rich and nuanced, but our own psychological and cultural blinders can bias us, leaving us with mundane or sentimental opinions rather than transcendental, scriptural ones. We need to hear Srila Prabhupada with open minds and hearts and also with some awareness of where we are biased, because otherwise, our conditioning can flatten our experience of Krishna consciousness and turn it into something shallow and skewed. When that happens, we successfully drain our perception of transcendence from its beauty and wealth of faith.

2. A powerful daughter rebukes her father (a challenge to our functional fixedness)

In the introduction to the first part of What’s a Woman to Do? I mentioned that when we came to Srila Prabhupada’s movement we brought with us various cultural, societal, familial, and personal expectations about what men and women can and cannot, or should and should not, do. This can lead us into a cognitive bias called functional fixedness, or the tendency to see individuals (or things) as having only one function – the one we have learned to

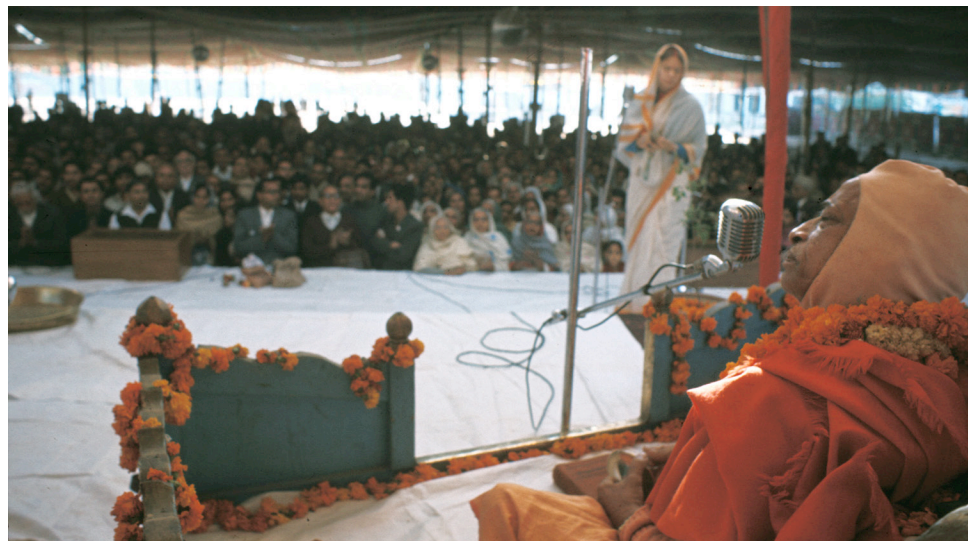


associate with them. Functional fixedness can prevent us from seeing the full range of abilities a person (or uses an object) may have, which can leave us stuck in rigid patterns. In terms of men and women, functional fixedness may make us fail to realize that, for example, a woman may be more than a mother or supportive wife. She may also perhaps be a highly accomplished yogi, as in the example of Sati in the Bhagavatam's Fourth Canto.

The Bhagavatam describes Sati, wife of Lord Siva and daughter of Daksha, as "enlightened, beautiful, and chaste." (SB 4.2.13 purport) When her father holds a great sacrifice and fails to invite Lord Siva, Sati decides to go anyway, even without her husband. It's described that as she watches the various demigod couples flying toward the sacrificial arena, she wants to dress in her own finery and attend. Srila Prabhupada writes, "It is a woman's nature to want to decorate herself with ornaments and nice dresses and accompany her husband to social functions, meet friends and relatives, and enjoy life in that way. This propensity is not unusual, for woman is the basic principle of material enjoyment. Therefore in Sanskrit the word for woman is stri, which means 'one who expands the field of material enjoyment.'" (SB 4.3.9, purport)

Sati's husband, Lord Siva, known as the best Vaishnava, was not invited to this sacrifice because of an earlier unpleasant exchange with Daksha. Trying to persuade him, however, Sati says, "I do not have much knowledge about self-realization. I am poor because I do not know the actual facts. I am attracted by my birthplace, and I want to see it." (SB 4.3.11, purport)

(An aside: Later, we find that Sati used this statement as a ruse. Srila Prabhupada writes, "She did not actually come to her father's house to participate in the function, although before coming she pleaded with her husband that she wanted to see her sisters and her mother. That was a plea only, for actually at heart she maintained the idea that



she would convince her father, Daksha, that it was useless to continue being envious of Lord Siva. That was her main purpose." SB 4.4.16, purport This pastime may offer us another example of confirmation bias, because as Srīmad Bhagavatam states of Sati, "This less intelligent act [of going to her father's house against her husband's wishes] was due to her being a weak woman." SB 4.4.3 Do we give more emphasis to one of his statements in favor of the other?)

Although Siva advised Sati not to go, and he himself refused to go, Sati left for her father's house, where she was not welcomed by Daksha or the other men present. The women, however, did not follow the men's example. Srila Prabhupada writes, "The mother and sisters of Sati could not follow the others, who did not receive Sati very well. Due to natural affection, they immediately embraced her with tears in their eyes and with loving feelings. This shows that women as a class are very softhearted; their natural affection and love cannot be checked by artificial means. Although the men present were very learned brahmanas

and demigods, they were afraid of their superior, Daksha, and because they knew that their welcoming Sati would displease him, although in their minds they wanted to receive her, they could not do so. Women are naturally softhearted, but men are sometimes very hardhearted.” (SB 4.4.7 purport) The purpose of Vedic sacrifice is to develop attraction to and love for Lord Vishnu, and one who has developed such love must also love and respect Vishnu’s devotees. “Thus when Sati saw that her father was performing great sacrifices but had no respect for the greatest devotee, Lord Siva, she was very angry. This is fitting; when Vishnu or a Vaishnava is insulted, one should be angry.” (SB 4.4.10 purport)



Sati proceeded to give Daksha a number of sound arguments about why he should honor Lord Siva. “Since Sati was a chaste woman and the wife of Lord Siva, it was her duty to establish the elevated position of Lord Siva, not only by sentiment but by facts. Lord Siva is not an ordinary living entity.” (SB 4.4.16 purport)

But failing to convince her father Sati decided to give up her life “in order to compensate for the great sin she had committed by hearing blasphemy of Lord Siva. The instruction set forth here in Srimad-Bhagavatam is that one should not tolerate at any cost the activities of a person who vilifies or blasphemes an authority. Since Sati was the representation of the external potency of the Lord, it was in her power to vanquish many universes, including many Dakshas, but in order to save her husband from the charge that he employed his wife, Sati, to kill Daksha because he could not do so due to his inferior position, she decided to give up her body.” (SB 4.4.17 purport)

In front of everyone Sati sat in a yogic pose and immolated herself.

Srila Prabhupada writes, “Either she learned yoga from her husband or she was enlightened because she was the daughter of such a great king as Daksha. The perfection of yoga is that one can give up one’s body or release oneself from the embodiment of material elements according to one’s desire.” (SB 4.4.24 purport)

Back to functional fixedness. At the beginning of this pastime, Sati appeared to be an ordinary woman who wanted simply to dress up and attend a social function. Here, however, we learn that she gave up her body according to her desire and thus had perfected her yoga practice. In this chapter she is referred to as “a great soul,” (SB 4.4.29 purport) and Lord Siva himself calls her “most worshipful one.” (SB 4.3.24)

Due to functional fixedness we may be blind to what a woman can do.



3. A wife curses a proud devotee (and the possibility of attentional bias)

In the histories given above, we've seen some examples of contradictory teachings, each serving its purpose. Similarly, Srila Prabhupada's statements, personal example, and mood related to women vary and may sometimes appear contradictory. These apparent contradictions may lead to our misunderstand his teachings.

What do we do with contradictions? One thing is, we should be careful to avoid something called attentional bias, which is the tendency to pay attention to some things while ignoring others. Unlike impartially analyzing all the information to discern important points, attentional bias is often unconscious, considers only some of the available information, and is a result of our situation in the modes of material nature. The pastime of Parvati and Chitraketu can exemplify our attentional bias.

Here are texts from *Srimad-Bhagavatam* along with Srila Prabhupada's purports to them that explain the situation:

(a) "One day while traveling, Chitraketu came upon Lord Siva embracing Parvati, surrounded by an assembly of Siddhas, Charanas and great sages. Seeing Lord Siva in that situation, Chitraketu laughed very loudly, but Parvati became very angry at him and cursed him." (SB 6.17 Summary)

(b) "The Supreme Personality of Godhead wanted to bring Chitraketu to Vaikunthaloka as soon as possible. The Lord's plan was that Chitraketu be cursed by Parvati to become Vratasura so that in his next life he could quickly return home, back to Godhead." (SB 6.17.4-5, purport)

(c) "For Parvati to be embraced by Lord Siva was natural in a relationship between husband and wife; this was nothing extraordinary for Chitraketu to see. Nonetheless, Chitraketu laughed loudly to see Lord Siva in that situation, even though he should not have done so." (SB 6.17.4-5, p)

(d) “Not knowing the prowess of Lord Siva and Parvati, Chitraketu strongly criticized them. His statements were not at all pleasing, and therefore the goddess Parvati, being very angry, spoke as follows to Chitraketu, who thought himself better than Lord Siva in controlling the senses.” (SB 6.17.10)

(e) “The difficulty was that Chitraketu, having become a great devotee of Lord Vishnu, Sankarshana, was somewhat proud at having achieved Lord Sankarshana’s favor and therefore thought that he could now criticize anyone, even Lord Siva. This kind of pride in a devotee is never tolerated. A Vaishnava should always remain very humble and meek and offer respect to others.” (SB 6.17.10, purport)



(f) “Chitraketu thought himself a better controller of the senses than Lord Siva, although actually he was not. Because of all these considerations, mother Parvati was somewhat angry at Chitraketu.” (SB 6.17.10, purport)

(g) “Mother Parvati was justified in punishing Chitraketu, for Chitraketu impudently criticized the supreme father, Mahadeva, who is the father of the living entities conditioned within this material world.” (SB 6.17.15, purport)

(h) “Mother Parvati spoke to Chitraketu exactly like a mother who says to her naughty child, ‘My dear child, I am punishing you so that you won’t do anything like this again.’” (SB 6.17.15, purport)

(i) “It is the duty of a mother to chastise her beloved son, even in the case of the Supreme Lord. It is to be understood that mother Durga [Parvati] was justified in punishing Chitraketu.” (SB 6.17.15, purport)

(j) “Srila Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakur comments that Maharaja Chitraketu’s being cursed by Parvati should be considered the mercy of the Lord. The Lord wanted Chitraketu to return to Godhead as soon as possible, and therefore he terminated all the reactions of his past deeds. Acting through the heart of Parvati, the Lord, who is situated in everyone’s heart, cursed Chitraketu in order to end all his material reactions.” (SB 6.17.17 purport)

From the above, it’s abundantly clear that Chitraketu should not have criticized Lord Siva, that Chitraketu was proud, and that Krishna Himself, acting from within Parvati’s heart, orchestrated Chitraketu’s being cursed. At this point, however, the pastime becomes more nuanced, for Lord Siva does not approve of Parvati cursing Chitraketu.

(a) “Lord Siva tried to convince his wife, Parvati, that her cursing of Chitraketu was not very sensible.” (SB 6.17.34–35, purport)

b) “These were all friendly jokes; there was nothing serious for which Chitraketu should have been cursed by Parvati. Upon hearing the instructions of Lord Siva, Parvati must have been very much ashamed for cursing Chitraketu to become a demon. Mother Parvati could not appreciate Chitraketu’s position, and therefore she cursed him, but when she understood the instructions of Lord Siva she was ashamed ... Upon being informed by Lord Siva, mother Parvati could understand that she was wrong in cursing Chitraketu.” (SB 6.17.34–35, purport)



How could Parvati be wrong in cursing Chitraketu if Krishna inspired her from within the heart to do so? And do we pay attention to the many impressive justifications

for Parvati’s action or the criticism leveled at her for that same action? Somehow, Parvati should have and should not have cursed Chitraketu.

“But which is it?” we ask. Even in the material world difficult situations may arise where we have to choose between two options which are right from one perspective and wrong from another. As it’s said, “damned if you do and damned if you don’t.”

Spiritually, we know that the Lord’s and His devotees’ pastimes must be approached with care, caution, and loving devotion. Since the Lord is simultaneously and inconceivably the same as and different from His energies, therefore “The materialistic demeanor cannot possibly stretch to the transcendental autocrat...” (Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, Sri Brahma Samhita Foreword). Our mundane minds, bound to the confines of this world, cannot grasp how such apparent opposites as cursing and not cursing are both simultaneously correct.

Such inconceivability may be beyond our grasp because, “One who is in the mode of goodness is... somewhat elevated, for he can gradually understand what is God. In the modes of passion and ignorance, no one can understand God.” (Teachings of Lord Kapila verse 14, purport) In other words if, due to our situation within the modes of material nature, we take the lesson from one side of this pastime and not the other, it may be because we are under the influence of the modes of material nature. And that influence can lead to attentional bias: we pay attention to one aspect of the pastime while simultaneously ignoring the other. In fact, the Bhagavatam validates and offers us valuable lessons from both aspects.

Like the Srimad-Bhagavatam, Srila Prabhupada’s statements, example, and mood related to women may appear to us to vary widely and even be contradictory, but perhaps it’s our black-and-white thinking that prevents us from seeing the unity behind his statements, example, and mood.

4. Lessons from two lovers (and the possibility of logical fallacy)

In the history of Urvashi and King Pururava from cantos Nine and Eleven of Srimad-Bhagavatam we find that sexual attraction clouds Pururava's thinking. Urvashi, using sharp words, tries to clear his mind and, after much time, seems to succeed. Hearing this pastime we may arrive at a false conclusion about women due to a logical fallacy, or an error in our logical thinking. In other words, swayed by our own emotional weight and pattern-seeking we may mistakenly draw conclusions from two things that are related in some ways but not in all ways. Here's an example of the particular type of logical fallacy I'm thinking of:

Green mangos are mangos. (true)
Green mangos are sour. (true)
Ripe mangos are mangos. (true),
Therefore ripe mangos must be sour. (false).

As the pastime unfolds, Urvashi, a heavenly society woman, and the earthly king Pururava became attracted to each other and so engaged in a sexual relationship on earth. Then Indra, king of heaven, missing Urvashi at court, conspired with others to make Pururava break a promise he had made to Urvashi. When the promise was broken Urvashi left Pururava. Greatly disturbed by her absence, Pururava tried to win her back. Seeing that Pururava was wasting his life due to his attachment to her, Urvashi tried to help him let go of her by speaking sharp words to him about the nature of women. She said, "Women as a class are merciless and cunning. They cannot tolerate even a slight offense. For their own pleasure they can do anything irreligious, and therefore they do not fear killing even a faithful husband or brother." (SB 9.14.37)

After repeated disappointments in trying to reclaim his lost love, Pururava finally realized the futility of mundane

attachment. "Because I allowed my intelligence to become dull and because I failed to control my senses, the great confusion in my mind did not go away, even though Urvashi herself gave me wise counsel with well-spoken words." (SB 11.26.16)

King Pururava then understood that Urvashi was not to blame for his pain. After all, he himself had mistakenly considered Urvashi an object for his personal enjoyment and had therefore suffered a reaction according to the laws of nature. Pururava accepted that he was the offender for having tried to exploit Urvashi's body. One who mistakenly thinks that the Lord's illusory energy exists for one's personal sense gratification certainly brings an avalanche of material fear and anxiety down on his head. Pururava said, "What difference is there between ordinary worms and persons who try to enjoy this material body composed of skin, flesh, blood, muscle, fat, marrow, bone, stool, urine, and pus?" (SB 11.26.21)

Commenting on this pastime Srila Prabhupada writes, "Unless elevated to spiritual consciousness, everyone is conditioned and fallen, what to speak of women, who are less intelligent than men. Women have been compared to sudras and vaisyas (striyo vaisyas tatha sudrah). On the spiritual platform, however, when one is elevated to the platform of Krishna consciousness, whether one is a man, woman, sudra, or whatever, everyone is equal. Otherwise, Urvashi, who was a woman herself and who knew the nature of women, said that a woman's heart is like that of a sly fox. If a man cannot control his senses, he becomes a victim of such sly foxes. But if one can control the senses, there is no chance of his being victimized by sly, foxlike women." (SB 9.14.36, purport)

If from this pastime we develop a negative impression of women devotees, we've committed a logical fallacy. It looks like this:

Materialistic women are women. (true – they’re spirit souls in women’s bodies)

Materialistic women have sly, foxlike hearts. (often true)

Devotee women are women. (true – they’re spirit souls in women’s bodies),

Therefore devotee women have sly, foxlike hearts. (false).

In fact, women devotees are Vaishnavis; they are qualitatively different from both male and female materialists. In other words, when we follow the spiritual master’s instructions, the polluted workings of the mind is checked. We gradually acquire spiritual understanding and develop our propensity for selfless loving service to the Lord, which will one day bear the fruit of love of Godhead.

For one engaged in the Lord’s service and the service of His devotees, not only are dullness, fear, and ignorance destroyed, but one attains the highest happiness, as confirmed by Lord Krishna Himself in the Bhagavatam’s Tenth Canto where He tells the gopis that they have to accept their own service as the ultimate reward of their devotion to Him, since nothing awards as much happiness and knowledge as devotional service itself.

Devotees, whether male or female, are the refuge of persons afraid of falling into a miserable condition. Krishna Himself says, “My devotees are one’s real worshipable deities and real family; they are one’s own self, and ultimately they are nondifferent from Me.” (SB 11.26.34) Devotee women and materialistic women are not the same. In Srila Prabhupada’s words, “On the spiritual platform, however, when one is elevated to the platform of Krishna consciousness, whether one is a man, woman, sudra, or whatever, everyone is equal.” (SB 9.14.36, purport)

Conclusion

Unfortunately, biases and fallacies can lead to poor decisions, bad judgments, and lousy attitudes. Even in the face of contrary evidence, such attitudes can stubbornly persist, and entire organizations can be adversely affected. Put simply, we may be hearing and seeing through the colored lens of our faulty thinking and biases – biases left over from our pre-Krishna conscious conditioning.

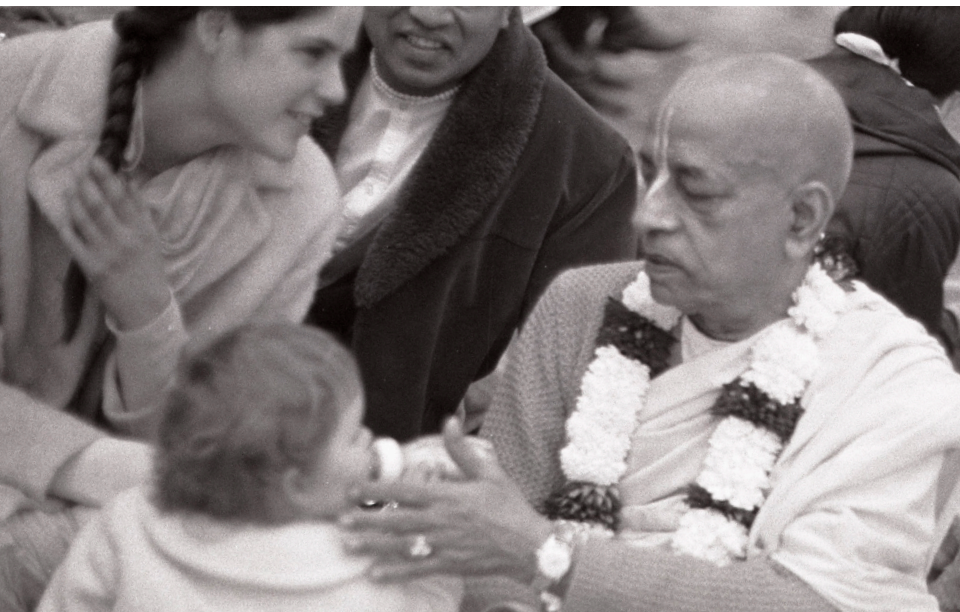
The root of the problem is that we’re conditioned souls. We’re meant to become free of our conditioning by hearing and chanting, remembering and worshiping Krishna. But when we don’t do these activities purely we do them with our unique mixtures of spiritual practice and conditioning. Srila Prabhupada writes, “There are different devotional activities, such as hearing, chanting, remembering, worshiping, offering prayer, rendering service, and surrendering everything, and each of them can be divided into three qualitative categories. There is hearing in the mode of passion, in the mode of ignorance, and in the mode of goodness. Similarly, there is chanting in the mode of ignorance, passion, and goodness, etc.” (SB 3.29.10, purport)

Hearing influenced by the modes means we are failing to hear in a full and balanced way. The solution? To recognize that our devotional service is still conditioned and to consciously struggle against that conditioning. Srila Prabhupada encouraged us to strive to come at least to the mode of goodness, and then to transcend the modes entirely. Failing this, we may adopt attitudes and behavior because we’re influenced by an unbalanced understanding. It’s time for us all to become balanced, which is usually not easy. It takes time, repeated and complete hearing, and our open-hearted and ongoing endeavor. If we can try in this way, however, that attempt itself will be our success.

Let us keep our commitment to spiritual advancement alive, and not get diverted by subtle or not-so-subtle agendas. If we stay in a spirit of inquiry, we may enter a magical world of spiritual wonder and discovery and joy.

Addendum

Not long ago, a traveling preacher came to Alachua and mentioned one purport in what I felt was an imbalanced way. That purport is: “Here is a difference between male and female that exists even in the higher statuses of life—in



fact, even between Lord Siva and his wife. Lord Siva could understand Citraketu very nicely, but Parvati could not. Thus even in the higher statuses of life there is a difference between the understanding of a male and that of a female. It may be clearly said that the understanding of a woman is always inferior to the understanding of a man. In the Western countries there is now agitation to the effect that man and woman should be considered equal, but from this verse it appears that woman is always less intelligent than man.” (SB 6.17.34–35)

Let us try to balance this statement with others from the Srimad-Bhagavatam:

Kindly let me know the whereabouts of that beautiful woman who always saves me when I am drowning in the ocean of danger. By giving me good intelligence at every step, she always saves me.

PURPORT

There is no difference between a good wife and good intelligence. One who possesses good intelligence can deliberate properly and save himself from many dangerous conditions... if one gets a chaste wife, accepted through a religious marriage ritual, she can be of great help when one is threatened by the many dangerous situations of life. Actually such a wife can become the source of all good intelligence. With such a good wife, the family's engagement in the devotional service of the Lord actually makes a home a grhastha-asrama, or household dedicated to spiritual cultivation. (SB 4.26.16 verse and purport) ... A person who does not have a chaste wife accepted by religious principles always has a bewildered intelligence. (SB 4.26.17 purport)

A wife is therefore supposed to be an inspiration and should keep the husband's intelligence in good order so that they can combinedly prosecute the affairs of family life without impediment. (SB 4.27.2 purport)

Srimati Vindhyavali said: O my Lord, You have created the entire universe for the enjoyment of Your personal pastimes, but foolish, unintelligent men have claimed proprietorship for material enjoyment. ...



PURPORT

Bali Maharaja's wife, who was most intelligent, supported the arrest of her husband and accused him of having no intelligence because he had claimed proprietorship of the property of the Lord. (SB 8.22.20 verse and purport)

And from Srila Prabhupada's own example: "Alex and his wife came to visit Srila Prabhupada and to inform him of their activities... His Divine Grace encouraged them... 'This is intelligence-according to time and circumstance, try to push Krishna consciousness. You have to see in which way they will be able to accept. Your wife has understood – very intelligent girl. Dadami buddhi-yogam tam. [Bg 10.10 To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me.]" (TKG's Diary, July 1977)

"From among themselves they selected Guru dasa to be the temple president, since he and his wife, Yamuna, were the most active preachers. In fact, Yamuna was doing as much or even more than her husband. Though it was normally the function of the president to recommend new devotees for initiation, Prabhupada had so much faith in Yamuna's opinion that upon her advice alone he was accepting the three new devotee girls from France as his disciples." (Servant of the Servant, TKG, 9)



Visala das: "I brought my wife to Bombay with me and I said to Srila Prabhupada in front of her, 'Srila Prabhupada, the brahmacharis for years have kind of criticized the women, saying they're less intelligent, their brain is smaller, they're lustier, things like that. Is that true?' And Srila Prabhupada's answer was, 'You are chanting Hare Krishna and your wife is chanting Hare Krishna. Where is the question of being less intelligent?' I remember reading in Caitanya-caritamrta in Prabhupada's purport, 'The women in our movement are preaching. Therefore, they are as good as their brothers.' Then I said to Srila Prabhupada also, 'Srila Prabhupada, I understand that the husband is representative of the spiritual master and the wife is representative of her husband. Srila Prabhupada, should she do everything I ask?' And Srila Prabhupada said, 'And you should be so arrogant?'" (Following Srila Prabhupada DVD 6 March–April 1974)

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Visakha Dasi has been a disciple of Srila Prabhupada since 1971. As one of Srila Prabhupada's official photographers, she traveled with him in the US, Canada, Europe, and India. She has written many *Back to Godhead* articles as well as five books. Visakha also assists her husband, Yadubara Das, in making films – most recently the ninety-minute, award-winning documentary, *Hare Krishna! the Mantra, the Movement, and the Swami who started it all*, which has been translated into twenty-four languages and screened in theaters throughout the world. Visakha is currently the president of Bhaktivedanta Manor in the UK.

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