

Why can't women become priests of Pashupati *Baburam Dhakal*

(Translated by Navin Singh)

Why are men only the priests of Pashupati ? On one occasion when a girl student of Balmiki Campus expressed her desire to become a priest of Pashupati to her Guru, the Guru reprimanded her and told her not to attend his class if she had such aspirations. The student had not expected to hear such a vehement reply from her teacher to her simple question. She was upset as well as excited by her Guru's remarks. She was upset because she did not expect such a reply from her Guru and she was excited at the prospect of starting a revolutionary movement to prove that women were capable of becoming priests. Although, she did not want to reveal her name at present because of the fear that her Guru would kick her out of class and her vocation would be incomplete, she has aims to becoming a full fledged priest in future. She has the ambition to finish her studies and fight with the society to become the first women priest.

There are many other girl students who have the same ambition. Among the three hundred students studying in Balmiki Campus in Kathmandu, 45 are girl students. Similarly, three thousand students are undergoing higher studies in 12 Sanskrit Campuses all over the country and out of them 400 are girl students. Some of the girl students have aims to specialise in the field. But, the above incident shows that teachers discourage girls from having such ambitions through threats which mentally affect the students. Is it a crime to have aims of becoming a woman priest ? Why cannot women become priests outside or even conduct rituals within a household when they are the ones who usually conduct prayers in the morning in their own homes ?

Sanskrit professors claim that women cannot become priests because they cannot clearly express the Vedic verses of the Sanskrit language and due to their menstrual cycle. According to Professor Ram Chandra Gautam, the Hindu religion does not allow women priests to accept *Dan* (offerings) after prayers since all the religious scripts have mentioned that a man priest should accept the offerings. He adds that on one hand we stress on implementing the religious traditions and on the other hand we cannot say that we will not follow the religious scripts. He further adds that scriptures such as Hevadri, Nirnaya Sindhu, Brahmin Sindhu, etc., clearly mention that women should not conduct *Shraddha* (religious rite for the dead) and other Vedic works. But, none of the scriptures ban women from reciting and listening to *Puran* (scripture).

When the professor was reminded that all the religious scriptures were recited and written by men, he did not have a strong reply. He just advised me not to go against the religious scriptures by writing that women can become priests.

According to female Sanskrit students, none of the Hindu religion scriptures mention that women should not conduct rites and prayers. Uma Pokhrel who is in her third year in Balmiki Campus agrees with the above statement and feels that if someone claims that it has been mentioned in the scriptures than that person is wrong. Uma Pokhrel conducts her own prayers at home and when necessary she also conducts rites for her neighbours. She feels that she can even conduct marriages, *bratabandha* (religious rites of boyhood) and *Shraddha* and she is not fearful of what the society will say. She has not thought about taking up priesthood as a profession but she adds that Sanskrit is not a language which is only to conduct religious rites, it can be used in many other forms.

Other female students of Sanskrit Rama Adhikari whose aim is to become an astrologer priest, Tanuja Dahal and Sabitri Sapkota are also of the same opinion.

I am not of the opinion that all females students of Sanskrit must conduct religious rites but I feel that those who want to do so should have their rights. But, till today the Sanskrit intellectuals have been preventing women from conducting the religious rites with one excuse or the other. More than any scientific reason, it seems like the men in the profession want to keep women away from income generating activity. Otherwise, if women can conduct prayers and rites inside their homes, why are they barred from doing it outside where they get offerings and cash ? The fact that the intellectuals cannot clearly answer these questions is proof of their intentions.

At present, debates and discussions have been going on whether to make Sanskrit language compulsory, optional or to ban it completely. It has to be accepted that these debates will only hamper the development of Sanskrit language. In this context, it is time that Sanskrit should be refined and used according to the modern age. For this purpose, there should be an end of gender discrimination in reading, understanding and implementing all the scriptures based on Sanskrit language. Otherwise, there looms a fear of the language becoming obsolete in this modern day and age. The responsibility of taking this action and making the language universal among women, men and communities lies in the hands of the intellects of the Sanskrit language or does it not ?

Women Entrepreneurs are increasing their income

- *Bishnu Shital*

(Translated by Navin Singh)

Sabitri Mainali of Jorpokhari, Paanchthar has clearly understood that a housewife who can earn some income by staying home gains social prestige, decreases the family burden and acquires mental satisfaction. Sabitri is not only a housewife, she is also a social activist who believes that men and women should share equal responsibilities in the society. She also believes that women who are economically strong and have skills and capabilities to generate income are always respected and they gain a special prestige in the society.

Prabha Budathoki of Siuchatar Kathmandu is also of the same opinion and she has already generated a high income by acquiring skills to run a cottage industry. Sabitri has a hot grams industry in Manamaiju, Nepal and Prabha produces soap in Siuchatar. Not only have they themselves profited from these industries, they have also contributed to the country and the society by providing employment to others. Sabitri has provided employment to many other girls in her hot grams industry and she has also opened a convention store for her husband. Both of these women have given a new lesson to other girls who believe that women should only limit themselves to domestic chores.

Sabitri does not have to find a market for her product since other retailers come to her shop to drop off merchandise and they take her hot grams along with them. Therefore, she does not have to worry about getting products for her shop and she does not need cash for the products. Most of the retailers know her industry as Laxmi Food Industries. She keeps herself busy from 4 in the morning till 11 at night. But, she is so satisfied with the progress of her industry that she never tires of working. She has also been able to spare time for social work. Her industry sells approximately 400 kgs of packed hot grams on a daily basis.

There are many cottage and small industries which women can do from their homes. Small industries such as soap, candle, incense, instant noodles, tailoring, boutique, thangka, etc., can be established with little training. Ramila Lamichhane of Siuchatar believes that women who have the energy and strength in their hands do not have to remain unemployed. Her husband Binod Lamichhane helps her with her soap industry in the mornings and evenings.

Udaya Sharma of Cottage and Small Industry Training Center, Tripureswore has been a witness to how the bond among family members increases after a woman starts generating income. Udaya has been providing training to women since the last 20 years and she does not have a record of how many women she trained. But, she derives satisfaction from the fact that many of those women she trained have become successful entrepreneurs. Thirty-two years before, she was married to a respectable Poudyal family in Tanahun but she still looks like she is thirty. She believes that she looks young because her job was very self-satisfying since she was sharing her skills with the rest of the people. Although, she was married at a very tender age, she had the aim to gain skills and to share it with others right from her childhood. She came to Kathmandu 29 years ago and participated in various trainings. She had the capability to effectively train others. She was always worried about the situation of women, which she had also faced, in the country. She was providing trainings even before she became a government employee. But, after joining the government service she feels that she has been able to reach further more. Udaya feels that Nepali women are economically downtrodden and dominated because they are forced to spend most of their time in unproductive work such as collecting wood, grass, etc., and they do not have any skills. Other women are also of the same opinion. Due to lack of skills and capabilities, they are always economically dependent. Women who have been able to acquire business skills and run a business gain prestige in the society and they are economically independent. They are able to share their happiness with the family as well.

Developing skills in small and cottage industries has gained more importance due to the deteriorating employment situation faced by the country. The investment in high technology and theoretical education is going to waste because the country has not been able to establish big industries and the industries which had been established have slowly closed down. This adverse situation has given rise to unemployment and poverty. In this situation, it is very important for women to gain business skill and to become economically self-dependent. Most of those women who had the courage to become business entrepreneurs have become successful.

There are many examples of women such as Udaya Sharma who have been gaining skills, providing skills on small industry and at the same time conducting household chores as well as generating income. There are others who have been successful in selling their products, creations and talents abroad to the larger community.

Successful women such as Mira Bhattarai – President of Handicraft Products Association, Rita Singh of Ama Impex, Aruna Shakya of Lumuna Need Craft have been able to export their products and generate foreign currency. Other popular women who have been able to provide employment to many and who pay high taxes to the government are Indira Sapkota of Cottage Industries, Sulochana Shah of Trading for Development and Rita Bhandari of Trading Craft. Other courageous women are Padmasana Shakya of Manushi Art and Craft, Meena Karki of New Himalayan Sky Export and Laxmi Sharma of Laxmi Woodcraft.

Nara Kumari Karki of Baneswore is a unique example of courage and determination. Although she has already lost both of her legs, she has been able to establish a cloth industry. The name of her industry is Makura Textile and she has set an example of hiring handicapped people.

The problems faced by women lawyers

- *Gagan Bista*

(Translated by Navin Singh)

Indira Shrish was determined to follow the line of justice when she grew up after she witnessed and heard of violence against women and their dominance since her childhood. Born in Baglung, situated in the remote hilly district, she was motivated by these incidents to study law in order to

fulfill her aim of providing legal services to women victims. It has already been six years since she has been practicing law and she is already accustomed to the daily challenges and competition that she faces. As per her aim to prove that women can also fully contribute in the legal sector, she is fully active.

According to her, women should have the determination to prove something and if they have that determination nothing is impossible. She spends her mornings and evenings in her law firm and her afternoons in the courtroom. The time that she spends in her work does affect the family in some ways but, she believes that if a person has deep rooted feelings, nothing can come in the way. Women have been competing with men in this profession.