

## CHAPTER FOUR

*The Characteristics of a Chaste Woman\**

*Sūta said:*

1. O great sage, O holy Sir, on being asked by the sage, what did the Devas say? Kindly narrate it for the good of all the worlds.

*Śrī Vyāsa said:*

2. On hearing the words of Agastya, the Devas respectfully glanced at the face of Bṛhaspati (the preceptor of gods).

*Vākpati said:*

3. Listen, O illustrious Agastya, to the purpose of the visit of the Devas. You are blessed. You have achieved whatever should be achieved. You are honoured even by great men.

4. Are not there ascetics in every hermitage, on every mountain, in every forest? O excellent sage, but your status is entirely different.

5. You possess the glory of austerities. The Brāhmanical refulgence is established in you. The glory of merit of the highest type is in you. There is liberal-mindedness in you. You have a (steady) mind.

6-9. This auspicious and chaste lady Lopāmudrā is your partner in the holy rites. She is more or less like a shadow of your body and a (mere) mention of hers is a giver of merit. It is certain that no one else is considered as excellent as this lady among the chaste ones by Arundhatī, Sāvitrī, Anasūyā, Śaṅḍilyā, Satī, Lakṣmī, Śatarūpā, Menā, Sunīti, Samjñā and Svāhā. These chaste ladies are respectively the wives of Vasīṣṭha, God Brahmā, Atri, Kauśika, (Satī, the first consort of) Śiva, Viṣṇu, Svāyambhuva Manu, Himālaya, Uttānapāda (Dhruva's father), Vivasvān (the Sun-god), Agni (Fire-god). O sage, she takes her food after you have had it; when you stand, she also

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\* The chapter is important from sociological point of view. It portrays the status of women (wives) vis-a-vis men (husbands). It is a digest of Smṛti-laws about the duties of married women, especially with relation to the husband.

stands; when you have gone to sleep completely, she goes to bed and she gets up before you.

10. She never comes before you unadorned; when you go elsewhere for some work, she eschews all ornaments.

11. She never utters your name, so that your longevity becomes best assured; she never mentions the names of other men.

12. Though assailed by angry words (by you), she never expresses her displeasure; though beaten (by you), she continues to be pleased with you. If you say "Do this", she replies, "O lord, know that it has been done."

13. When she is called (by you), she leaves off all her other domestic duties and comes near you quickly (and says), "Wherefore, O Lord, have you addressed me; let that pleasure be given to me as favour."

14. She does not stand at the doorway for a long time; nor does she lie near the doorway and block it. She does not give anything to anyone unless asked by you to give.

15. Without being specifically told so, she gets ready all the requisite things for the worship of the deity such as holy water for the observances, Darbha grass, leaves, flowers, raw rice grains etc.

16. She waits for the correct time, fetching the requisite thing at the proper time without being perturbed, nay, taking delight in the same.

17. She takes in the leavings of her husband whether cooked food or fruits and other things. If anything is given to her, she says, "It is your great favour" and then accepts it.

18. She never eats anything without sharing it with gods, manes, guests, servants, cows and mendicants.

19. She soberly dresses and adorns herself; she is efficient (in her job); she is cheerful, she is averse to wastage and over-spending. Without being permitted by you she never takes up holy observances, fasts and vows.<sup>1</sup>

20. She avoids from a distance visiting community festivities; she never goes on pilgrimage or for witnessing marriage celebrations (without you).

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1. For the prohibition of non-permitted observance of vows see Manu V.155.

21. If the husband is comfortably seated, sound asleep or in a sportive mood, she never disturbs him by waking him up casually or even for her personal intimate reasons.

22. In the event of the monthly course, she never shows her face (to her husband etc.) for three days. Till she gets purified by her bath thereafter, she never makes her utterance heard by others.

23. After her cleansing bath (on her fourth day), she first looks at the face of her husband and not of anyone else, or after meditating on her husband in her mind, she looks at the Sun.

24-25. A chaste woman sincerely wishing for the long life of her husband shall never be without these: turmeric, saffron, sindūra (red lead), collyrium, blouse, betel leaves, splendidly auspicious ornaments, combing of the hairs and ornaments on the braid of hair, hands, ears etc.

26. A chaste woman never has close companionship with a washerwoman (or a woman in the monthly course), a rationalist, sceptic or heretic, a Buddhist recluse (woman) or a woman of Kāpālika sect or an unfortunate wretched woman.

27. This chaste lady never speaks to a woman who hates her husband. She never remains alone anywhere. She never takes her bath anywhere in the nude.

28. A chaste woman never sits on the mortar or pestle or broom or (grinding) stone or any mechanical contrivance, nor on a raised platform on either side of the front door (or threshold).

29. She never exhibits shameless boldness except at the time of sexual dalliance. She loves whatever her husband is interested in.

30. This is the holy vow for a woman; this alone is the greatest piety; this is the only divine adoration that she never transgresses the words of her husband.

31. She will never disregard her husband whether he be a eunuch, one in a miserable plight, sick, old and senile, affluent or poor.

32. When the husband is delighted, she should be delighted; when he is gloomy and morose, she also should be gloomy and morose. She shall be of meritorious deed if she identifies (herself with her husband) during affluence and in adversity.

33. When ghee, salt, oil etc., are wanting, she should not openly say, "We don't have this and that". A chaste woman never subjects her husband to overstrain.

34. A woman desirous of having holy bath in sacred waters near holy shrines should drink the water with which the feet of her husband are washed. To a woman her husband alone is far superior to even Śaṅkara or Viṣṇu.

35. If a woman disregards the wish of her husband and observes holy vows, fasts etc., she shall reduce the life span of her husband. After death she goes to hell.

36. If a woman resents and retorts, when she is told anything, she is reborn as a bitch in a village or a vixen in a desolate forest.

37. This is cited as the most important and decisive of all rules to be followed by women that they should enjoy everything after worshipping the feet of the husband.

38. A woman should never occupy a high seat. She should never go to other men's houses. She should never utter words that could cause (her or others) to be ashamed.

39. She should never utter slanderous words. She should avoid quarrels. She should never speak aloud or laugh in the presence of elders.

40. An evil-minded woman who forsakes her husband and commits sexual offences (with a paramour) is reborn as a cruel owl residing in the hollow of a tree.

41. If on being beaten, a woman wishes to beat in retaliation, she is born as a tigress or a female cat. A woman leering at another man becomes squint-eyed.

42. If a woman keeps her husband away and herself enjoys sweet dishes, she is born as a sow in a village or a flying fox feeding on its own faeces.

43. If a woman addresses (her husband) disrespectfully and unpleasantly by using 'thou' (instead of respectful 'you'), she becomes dumb. She who is always jealous of her co-wives, becomes wretched again and again.

44. She who glances at others avoiding the sight of her husband is reborn one-eyed, deformed in face or ugly in features.

45-46. On seeing her husband returning from outdoor work, the wife should hasten to give him light meal and water, and betel-leaves; she should fan him, massage his feet, speak

pleasing words dispelling his fatigue and worry. Thus, if a woman delights her husband, all the three worlds will be delighted with her.

47. Limited is what a father could give; a brother gives but limited gifts; a son too gives only limited. Hence a woman should always worship her husband who gives unlimited (gifts).<sup>1</sup>

48. Husband is the god; husband is the preceptor; husband alone constitutes piety, holy place and pious vows and observances. Hence a woman should forsake everything and worship her husband alone.

49. Just as a lifeless body becomes impure in a moment, so also a woman bereft of her husband is always impure even though she may bathe scrupulously.

50. A widow devoid of conjugal bliss and weal is the worst of all inauspicious things. There would be no success in a venture, if one sees a widow (at the outset).

51. A sensible man should avoid such a woman bereft of all conjugal bliss and even her blessings, except in the case of his (widowed) mother.<sup>2</sup>

52. At the time of the marriage of a girl, the Brāhmaṇas should pronounce, "Be a constant companion to your husband alive or dead."

53. The husband should always be followed by a woman like a body by its shadow, like the moon by its light or like a cloud by lightning.

54. If a woman joyously follows her (dead) husband from the house to the cremation ground (to immolate herself along with him), she certainly derives the benefit of a horse-sacrifice at every step.

55. Just as a snake-catcher pulls out a serpent from its hollow, so also a chaste woman snatches her husband from the messengers (of god of Death) and takes him to heaven.

56. On seeing a chaste woman from a distance, the messengers of Yama flee after discarding her husband, though he might have been a man of misdeeds.

57. "We, the messengers (of Death), do not fear fire or

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1. Quoted from Mbh, *Śānti*, 148.6; also echoed in MtP 210.17-18. For Godhood of the husband to wife see Mbh, *Anuśāsana* 146.58.

2. Repetition from SkP III.ii.7.50-51.