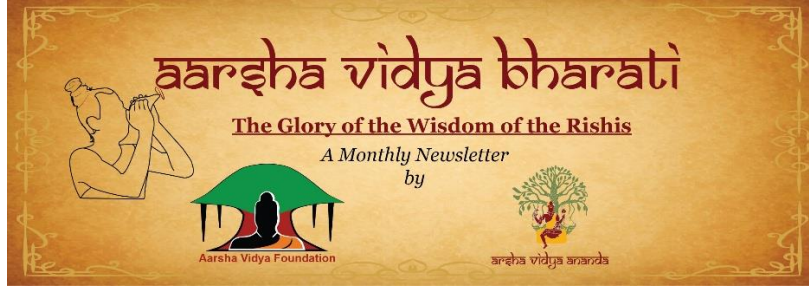

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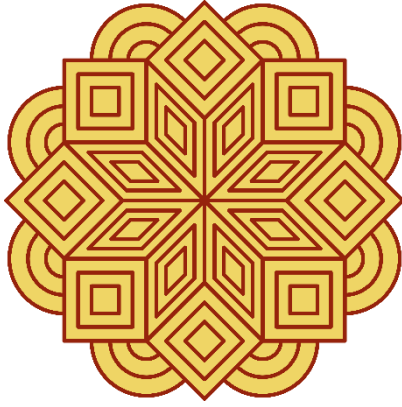
A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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Glory of Gr̥hasthāśrama

By Shashi Ramakrishnan, Mumbai



When Swamini wanted me to write about this subject, I felt proud, thrilled and perplexed.

In the meantime, many months of lockdown have culminated, and my life partner and I had so many arguments and differences. Is it Eno or a Saridon? Or is it a Crocin or a Dolo? Is the roti under-cooked or the rice over-cooked? The usual domestic tiffs?

I flashed back and tried to figure out the happiest moments of my life. Was it when I became a mother on 29 December 1967 and delivered my son in Calcutta or when I was credited by my seniors for setting up the ZTC centre in Pune? Or just the joy of hitting the right note on my sitar or delivering a perfect lecture for young teens in college?

That's when I realised that both happy and unhappy moments are concerned with *Gr̥hasthāśrama*. Now I am 80. And my main aim in life is to take care of my husband (and best friend) and gain *Mokṣa* - '*athāto brahma jijñāsā*'. I realise that to gain *Mokṣa* one requires *Śat saṃpatti*; and qualities like *viveka*, *vairāgya*, calmness, equanimity *jijñāsā*, and *mumukṣutvam*.

In my youth I was afraid of almost all things. I was a good student. I looked forward to school. But I was always looking over my shoulder. I was always anxious. What if I don't come first! As a result, I would have a solemn pout and prone to panic attacks.

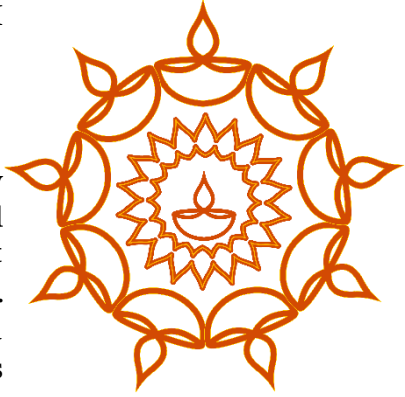
Every time an exam loomed large; and worse still my results, a doctor would be summoned. Other than exams, I was afraid of death. If anybody had dengue, I would have morbid thoughts about it for 24 hours. Also, I was not happy with my not-so-good looks. I was petrified what people would think of me. When my husband accepted my marriage proposal, I felt complete. I remember I was dancing with joy.

Post marriage when my husband was scrubbing the kitchen and when he started throwing vessels into the sink as they were dirty, I wanted to throw the vessels.

Point is, my lesson in *śama-dama*, was it glory or insult. However, it was one of the stepping stones in emotional management. When I became pregnant in 1967, I died a million deaths

every day. The gynaecologist said it may be a Caesarean since I was working, plus my office assignments kept me busy. Finally, when I became a mother, I felt I had won a marathon.

I belong to Punjab. But I learnt the language of my husband: Tamil. When I started speaking my mother-in-law was very happy but the others jeered and mocked. My husband asked me to stop talking in Tamil to avoid further heartburns. At that time, I was not sure whether I was learning *vairāgya* or *titīkṣā*. I was navigating the stormy seas. My husband's angry persona taught me *viveka*; that is discrimination between what is permanent and temporary. I learnt to tolerate (master) his irritation.



I felt, married life will be heaven if one can master *śama-dama*. *Śama* is restraining of outgoing mental propensities. *Dama* is restraining of external sense organs. After our marriage we were in Calcutta. Regular trips to my parent's home in Chandigarh was not possible because religious functions were to be performed at my in-laws house. Since my husband is the eldest son, I was not sure whether I learnt to crib or was it a lesson in renunciation and peace of mind. And so it was; and in return I received love from my sisters. That is, my husband's sisters.

On cue, *titīkṣā*, *samādhānam*, *mumuṣutvam* followed. Did I enjoy the cribbing? Did I relish the do and don't? Perhaps the answer is not yes, nor is it no.

I do identify with a line from the Bollywood movie Rajnigandha. The line is: "*kitna such hai bandhan mein*".

Yes, I loved it when my husband corrected me. Plus his unconditional and total absolute support. I knew he was not a typical Indian male who will eye another woman though he loves to flirt at times.

Listening to Vedanta I learnt a word *upādhi*. That's when I realised, Oh yes, anger is the *upādhi* for my husband. I heard Lord Krishna saying that among the angry people I am Shashi's husband. And so, *upādhi* can be a glorious celebration and I seem to believe it and enjoy it.

I feel all of us are terrorists to each other. We are nice to everybody except to one another. I realised our love is covered with *māya* plus misunderstandings plus fakeness. 'As though' - What is visible is ok but one should dig deeper to understand better.

I conclude with a line from Dickens: These were the best of times these were the worst of times.

I conclude that life is glorious. The two of us are happy although we disagree with each other most of the times.

My son (now 55) has been awarded various prestigious playwriting awards. He is the editor of a magazine since the past two decades. My daughter in law is a Nobel Prize contender. She was head of the political science at Mithibai College. That's when she did photo documentation of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy. She has travelled to the USA, UK, North Korea, Sri Lanka on government invitations. She has curated film fests and poetry fests. Plus



essayed a guest appearance in two internationally acclaimed films: The Ship of Theseus and Court.

Now I remember, I have not mentioned one important milestone. It was a tough day at and I sat all alone in the office. Suddenly I felt giddy. One of my assistants Shikka saw me. I developed such a complex that I found it difficult to sit anywhere, except in a corner. This went on for many years. My husband supported me and stood by me. When I missed my promotion in LIC he defended me like a tiger.

Thank you everyone. I along with my husband await validation of *Aham Brahma Asmi!*