The Way Of Wives
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INSIGHT

The Way Of Wives

In fourteen new paintings, Chennai artist S. Rajam portrays the domestic duties that married Hindu women traditionally perform to further their family in dharma

Family life, however full, remains empty if the wife lacks the lofty culture of the home.
Tirukural, Verse 52

The above aphorism is fully 2,200 years old, yet today in South India its message of how family life best thrives is honored and followed. Wives and mothers there remain apart from the competitive, breadwinner world of men. This is the way of tradition for Hindu wives. Its outward expression is found in the duties and chores that give rise to the creation of a stable home and the raising of a fully functioning family. Each action is performed with a profound mindfulness based on knowledge of the workings of subtle energies and in a belief in the existence of unseen angelic beings--the guardian devas of family members--and the aid they give. For example: ordinary doorways and windows are seen as portals through which either helpful or antagonistic beings can enter. So daily decorating of entryways entreats guardian devas to allow access only to those who will strengthen and support the family. Similarly, the energy a woman embues into a meal

during its preparation can increase the health of all who partake of it, or, if negative, contribute to illness and distress. Clothing and other possessions are known to respond to care or neglect just as people do. A woman's personal hygiene and grooming is important to her own well being, as it is to the family. Similarly, each of the duties depicted in this Insight have esoteric and mystical aspects to be discovered and developed by the intuitive woman.

Chennai-based musician and artist, S. Rajam, 80, has painted fourteen portraits [three appear on this month's gatefold] of Hindu wives in activities that make up their core duties as homemakers. His art follows the sequence of a day, from morning to dusk.

The contemporary workplace demands masculinity--aggressiveness, intellectualism and dispassion. It was built on and is sustained by such manly qualities. The "way of the Hindu wife" depicted in Rajam's paintings remains intentionally aloof from man's competitive world. That is its strength. Rajam's art depicts wifely duties as they have been performed for thousands of years. The same rituals can be found today in villages and urban centers.

To urban wives and those living abroad, some of the tasks may seem irrelevant and the methods outdated. Rajam hopes modern Hindu individuals will discover how each duty relates to the current household environment. The rustic tools shown may need to be replaced with electric utensils and food processors. Even the refrigerator door could be transformed into a place of blessing by daily posting a freshly ink-jetted

kolam design upon it. With applied intuition and ingenuity, similar modernization of each of these principles will move them meaningfully into the future.