

WOMAN SUPPRESSION EFFECTS OF RELIGION BUT NOT TRUE RELIGION

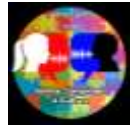
Partha Sarkar

*Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy
Govt. General Degree College, Mohanpur
Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal-721436*

Abstract: *This paper is expected to start with an analysis of the school-religions like Christianity, Hinduism and Islam etc. Scriptures of these historical religions often show male dominance over the female. There are several scriptures of historical religions which are supported such male dominance over the female. The allegation is not baseless as there are ample evidences of male preponderance over the female in various religious scriptures. But here I will confine myself what is stated in some Hindu religious scriptures. This paper it has been also analysed that the charge of woman suppression against religion is quite correct for historical religions only not for true or actual religion as true religion can't permit such discriminations or malpractice.*

The relationship between religion and gender discrimination is a complex one. As religion plays a vital role in shaping cultural, social, economic and political norms in many parts of the world. Similarly, gender role and the status of women and men in society are deeply tied to the manner in which religious texts have been interpreted for centuries by those in positions of authority and this position held predominantly by men. Early Vedic period there was no suppression over female but it was shown in the time of latter Vedic period. If we investigate the Hindu texts in very carefully then we can find that from the latter Vedic period women were suppressed by the men. In that time Hindu tradition gives more importance to the men rather than women. Women suppression have been founded not only in Hindu tradition but Islam, Christian etc.

Etymologically 'Dharma' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'dhri', which means to sustain or uphold or support. In brief dharma refers to something which sustains or supports the society and the universe. In the scriptures dharma bears several connotations like duty, moral law, code of conduct, custom, natural course of things, morally good behaviour etc. on the other hand, 'Religion' is derived from the Latin word 'religio', which means to bind up or bind together. Etymologically religion means something which binds the individual together to



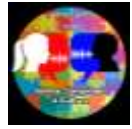
form a society. Though Etymologically “religion” means something which binds the individual together to form a society and as such it cannot permit any discrimination whatsoever on the basis of class, caste and gender. But we have seen how the core of gender discrimination comes from the misuse of historical religion. Hence, it is very problematic that such religion plays a contradictory role in our life and society. Because one hand its core business is to build, sustain and promote peace and love throughout the globe, on the other, it is a powerful source of gender discrimination, violence, and various injustices etc.

There are many religions and every religion claims the superiority of its philosophy, mythology and rituals and we can see, sometimes compels the followers of the others religion to accept them, not only these but also, they supported and cultivated woman suppression. this paper is expected to discuss women suppression in some Hindu texts. Historical religion endorses the norms of patriarchy because historical religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Islam etc. often show male dominance over the female.

An allegation is often made against religion, that it is one of the powerful sources of male-female binary and one of the chief sources of women’s suppression reigning in the Indian society. The allegation is not baseless as there are ample evidences of male preponderance over the female in various religious scriptures. If we carefully observed that the nature and status of men and women as found in modern times must have its root in the tradition. Throughout the history of mankind women were confined to the domestic sphere, while public life was reserved for men. Traditionally, male behaviour has been considered the norm, and women have been viewed to some degree as inferior. However, religion in its true sense can never be accused of being the source of social injustice, nor can it be blamed as a source of male dominance in the society.

This paper is expected to start with an analysis of the school-religions like Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Scriptures of these historical religions often show male dominance over the female. Scriptures of historical religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Islam etc. which are supported such male dominance over the female. But here I will confine myself what is stated in some Hindu religious scriptures.

Now I have considered some remarks from Manu Samhita which was made by Manu. Manu has made a strong comment on the autonomy of the ladies. To him a lady cannot have any autonomy or independence because during the whole life she has to depend on others. Her parents protect a woman in her childhood, her husband in youth and her sons in the old age.

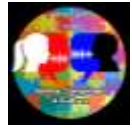


Though in the society, there was a mutual dependence in between man and woman. A man always depends on the women for the smooth running of the family and protections of his own health. A woman also depends on a man in respect of her care and security. Another example, “Putratha kriyate varya” is a popular statement of Hindu scripture, and it signifies that the purpose behind marrying a woman is getting a male child from her. By this utterance the speaker is not only underestimating the importance of female child but also degrading of the women class as a whole.

Manu also states that women have no right to teach Vedas. If it is said that women are not permitted to reach or read Vedas, there is a justification. Manu has pointed out the primary duties of the women which are to serve the interest of the family and manage the house holding business including nourishing husband and children. Women have no right to do job outside of the house. Man is the earner while woman is the saving and spending agency. She looks after child's character and engages herself in building her own character.

In Hindu tradition, we can find same discrimination at marriage ceremony where marriage is not only a sex-fulfilment but also an economic and social responsibility. It is taken as an eternal union of a man and a woman for the performance of various social duties. In the Vedic time no boy or girl is married in an early stage but in Manu Samhita, Manu recommends the marriage of boy only after the completion of his study but this rule does not applicable for girl. According to him, an individual of thirty years old is allowed to marry a girl of twelve or a man of twenty-four should marry a girl of eight years old. It is very difficult to think that an eight-years old girl has promoted to marry and religious text supports it. Manu also mentioned the girl must come from a good respectable and virtuous family of equal caste and must free from bodily defects and disease but the same instruction for male we can't see in Manu's codes.

In the time of Manu, a man alone has the special rights in regarding of marriage which is a sole component of life which is obligatory to each individual after the completion of study. To him marriage is a social custom which regulates proper relation in between husband and wife. It also regulates sex relation and relation of child to the society. Marriage is sacred duty through which our desires are accomplished and these are neither to encouraged nor completely suppressed. Marriage for Hindu is more a discipline that discipline enables an individual to live a normal and balanced life. Manu recognised eight types of marriage like, Brahma, Daiva, Arsa, prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Raksasa and Paisaca. Among these forms of marriage some declare a clear discrimination over women. When an individual boy

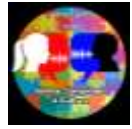


abducts the lamenting girl from her father custody forcibly after killing the relatives of the girl who are not in favour of marriage it is called Raksasa form of marriage. Sometime an individual marriage a girl in a solitary place where she is asleep or intoxicated or becomes mad it is called Paisaca form of marriage. The last one of marriage is not supportable because a girl is married when she is not normal. Not only these but Arsa a form of marriage clears discrimination over women. This type of marriage is not acceptable because it is a kind of sale of daughter to the groom which is the root of present dowry system.

Sometimes Manu permits a temporal marital relationship. He remarks when a man dies without any child, his widow is allowed to have a son through her brother-in-law or other relatives for the welfare of the dead husband. This temporal marital relationship is permissible till she is pregnant or having two or more sons. By this utterance Manu directly underestimating the importance of female child and also degrading of the women class as a whole. Manu also supports the remarriage of the widow on account of the fact that she still remains associated with her deceased husband as a married woman. A wife is always advised to worship her husband as a deity and She must not displease him. She should always maintain her patience, chastity and self-control.

According to Manu the Hindu Law giver, in a “Pratiloma” marriage, where an upper caste woman is marrying a lower caste man, the woman falls into the trap of social disadvantages and humiliation. Her caste is determined by her husband’s caste. We can find such several cases in our society. such as R Uma Devi born to an upper caste family but, married to a boy from the fisherman caste. She secured admission in Kurnool medical college as a member of the backward caste. But against this, the college appealed to the court arguing that Uma Devi can’t claim her husband’s caste. But the verdict came in her favour because her identity is reckoned in accordance with her husband. Here we can see the similarity between Manu’s code and the court verdict which falls under the modern secular constitution of India. We can see both endorse the norms of patriarchy.

In the time of Manu, though women were dominated and suppressed, they were respected in the society. A lady has got the sole responsibility to maintain peace and happiness in a family. As a result, she has to sacrifice by discharging her duty with perfect control her thought, speech and acts. To control her thought, speech and acts means to discharge her duties without being absent minded, without protesting against and without activity. It is pointed out that in this connection no major distinction is made between the social rights of men and those of women. As men and women together are allowed to perform the sacrificial

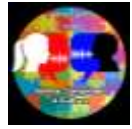


rights, both of them have right to become a performer of sacrifice which is evident from a number of suktas. Apart from these, it is very important to note that the women are given military training in the Vedic time as evidenced from the Rgvedic mantras. There many examples of the heroism and fighting ability of the ladies in the battlefield. The queens of the famous kings use to fight without any fear in the front portion of the battlefield. It will be incomplete if it is not mentioned the heroic incidents of Mudgalani whose name was written in red letters in the history of Vedic literature for their military excellent and war- diplomacy. Mudgalani, a wife of Mudgala, has driven the chariot of her husband in the battlefield with great energy and shown her military excellent in killing the enemies of her husband. It is cleared that in early Vedic period there are no suppression or oppression or domination over female but it is shown in the time of latter Vedic. If we investigate the Hindu texts in very carefully then we can find that from the latter Vedic period women are suppressed and oppressed by the men. In that time Hindu tradition gives more importance to the men rather than women.

In the Manusmriti it is said that woman do not have any right to inherit properties of her father or of her husband, only men or the male child of the family have right to pertain to the property. It was also found in Regvedic period. There is a small group consisting of members belonging to minority, who has argued in favour of the right of inheritance of the daughter along with son.

In Mahabharata we find a very beautiful derivative meaning of the terms bharta and Patti that is husband. An individual is called bharta because he takes the responsibility of providing food and cloth to his wife. In the same way, a husband is called pati as he nourishes and protects his wife. A husband is called Barada also, because he provides the wife with sons. Here a wife is also called Jaya, because husband being entered into womb of her in the form of semen takes place birth as son. So, clearly, we can see, it has been neglected to woman class.

The religious scriptures promoted such practice that the child preference in the family becomes highly unfavourable to women. This entrenched mindset furthers the idea of female infanticide, as a result eliminating female child at birth and considering them as an economic burden. Women were treated as an expensive and uneconomical commodity in her own family.



The very same discrimination we can also be seen in the two Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. In the Ramayana Ram with the order from his father Dasharatha went to exile for fourteen years. During the time period his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana was his only companion. But unfortunately, the king of Lanka Ravana captured Sita. Then Ram to rescue his wife attacked Lanka and eventually killed Ravana to save his wife. But after that he refuses to accept Sita as a wife, because he was concerned by the fact whether she still remained virgin or not. He even asks her to prove her virginity. In the Mahabharata we can see same discrimination where Draupadi was used as a play thing and insulted by the Kauravas when an attempt was conducted by the Kauravas prince Dushshasana to disrobe her in a public place. This attitude towards Sita and Draupadi point out that the discrimination was from very beginning.

These seeds of gender discrimination were planted long ago and today we see the reflection and the evil results of it. Even the incident from Kerala's Sabarimala temple on October, 2018 was still fresh in our memories, where we have seen the authority prohibited the entrance of 10-50 years old women in the temple just because of their physical menstruating. Even today also we can see at our home where woman cannot perform any ritual activities at time of her menstruation.

Though women may officiate over domestic rituals in a few cases but they are almost never seen in the conducting of rituals in public place like temples even today we cannot have a single priesthood in any of the Shakti Peeths in India but male Brahmins can perform the worship rituals in temples. In West Bengal, there are several shakti peeths such as Kalighat, Tarapeeth, Dakshineswar etc. Where we can see only male priests but can't find a single women priest. In most Hindu temples in India, male priests direct and control the worship, acting as purified vehicles for the intimate relationship with the deity and offering the only access to divine power for the women. In the terms of religion everyone must be equal, there must not be any bars between man-woman, rich-poor and superior-inferior.

Above said charge of gender discrimination against religion is quite correct for historical religions only not for true or actual religion as true religion can't permit such discriminations or malpractice. This true or actual religion is universal religion as the concept of Universal religion rejects all the differences, inequalities, social injustices etc. that are based on historical religions and their doctrines, myths, rituals and practices. It was mainly concerned in the remodelling of religious values and attitudes which were completely based upon one



and the only thing that is the humanity. It is a solution for all the problems that arises in the domain of religion and prevents the destruction of society from all kind of religious conflicts which we are facing in the present times. The concept of universal religion that is propounded by Swami Vivekananda is the key solution not for just the problem of gender discrimination but applies on those problems which are rooted in all the religious conflicts around the globe as it accepts all the diversity of the world either in the terms of cultures, ideologies or religion itself

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