

Indian Feminine Myth In Changing Socio- Economic Scenario

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Abstract: This research work examines the feminine myth in the changing socio-economic scenario of India through pre-hunting period, Vedic period, medieval period, freedom struggle to post-independence era. The present scenario in this age of technology and computer, the Indian female is no more ready to be revered just as Grih-lakshmi rather she is equating herself with male counterpart in every sphere of life and career.

Key words: Sanatan, patriarchal, hierarchal, Hindu society, Myth, Grih-Lakshmi, subordinate, cravings.

The genesis of the Indian feminine myth can be found in the *Sanatana* Patriarchal Hierarchical Hindu Society. It may be claimed that there have been two cultures in operation in India: one, characterized by *Purus Pradhanya*, the other by *Prakriti Pradhanya*. In one, the cosmic principle is conceived in terms of the male and in other, in terms of the female. The *Purus Pradhanya* of the *Sanatana* Hindu Society has its origin in the pastoral economy of the early Vedic people. The chief source of income was cattle rearing, and the chief cattle was the bullock. One of the recognized characteristics of Pastoral economy is the dominant role of the male, cattle rearing, like hunting belonged to the domain of the male.

The development of the economic life is co-related to the social importance of the gender. The original pre-hunting, stage of human life was characterized by female domination. With the development of hunting, however the social supremacy was shifted to male. In the later stage when the pastoral economy developed, this male supremacy came to exercise even greater hold. Moreover, with introduction of agriculture, the situation was reversed to some extent.

There was a revival of female domination. We may recall the Vedic female figure like Maitreyi and Gargi. There are some remnants of an early Pre-Vedic agricultural economy dominated by the female. We may notice that the *Khasi* of Assam - their economy remains almost wholly agriculture - based - still retains the matriarchal pattern with the woman enjoying social supremacy. At the later stage, agricultural economy developed and passed into the hands of male, but some of the cultural features of its early stages remained attached to it. The Indian masses, the tillers of the land, by and large, have stuck to the idea of mother goddess. In Raja Rao's novel, it is a female deity who presides over the agricultural village of Kanthapura.

In India, the people tend to view the woman in two diametrically opposite ways: she is seen both as socially inferior and as mother. Her social inferiority came into being in support of the economy. The fact is that the operative ideology of our *Sanatan* Hindu social structure is male dominated which has been a part of Brahmin domination. With the growth of Brahmanism, the male domination came to aggressively imposed on the lives of the people; Manu debarred the woman from the study of the Vedic scriptures. Our *Sanatan* Patriarchal hierarchical Hindu System absorbed the elements of the ideology underlying the *Vedic* and *Upanishadic* social formations structure: its thinking, its ideology continued to be male dominated.

The issue of woman's economic and social inferiority and her simultaneous elevation in the form of mother or *Grih-lakshmi* or *Shakti* is basically one of the ideological mystification that is the masking reality with imaginary relation. This is the basis of Indian feminine myth.

It is evident from our culture that at the one side we treat women as goddess in the form of Lakshmi, Saraswati, Durga and the very next moment all the heinous and illegal offences are being committed against them. The status of women deteriorated to its lowest ebb during medieval period. With the rise of Feudal system of economy, the women started being treated as a commodity. They were strictly prohibited from participating in economic, social and political activities. They were told to keep themselves inside the house, and if necessary, to go out only in *pardah* (veil). During the Mughal Period, the system of polygamy, *sati* and *jauhar* was highly prevalent in the society. Though, overall position of women in the Mughal Period was low, there were many women of outstanding ability, like Rani Durgawati of Gondwana, Rani Karnawati, Meera Bai, Tara Bai etc. whose fame is still relevant today. But in general the status of women always remained subordinate to man, having no right to say anything about her right.

In fact, the social, economic, cultural and religious backbone of Indian society is based on patriarchal structure which gives secondary status to women. Woman is supposed to be under the protection of father during childhood, under the protection of husband during youth and under the protection of son during old age. Thus she becomes life-long dependent on male in a male dominated society.

Her duties have been fixed to serve like a *dashi* (servant); to feed like mother, to give advice like minister, and give conjugal sanction like *Rambha* of Heaven. Thus, female being treated as goddess or *shakti* as per Indian culture seems to be a total myth up to the medieval India with only few exceptions.

This feminine myth came under certain pressure when a new middle class began evolving from the intercession of the *Sanatana* Hindu Social formation around the middle of the nineteenth century. Raja Ram Mohan Ray opposed the Sati System of widow being sacrificing her life on the pyre of her deceased husband and Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar advocated widow-remarriage and efforts of both the social reformers got legislation during the British rule. Many such reformations for emancipation of woman found their way during that period. In the first war of

independence, Rani Lakshmi Bai emerged as the saviour of the Indian concept of *Nari-Shakti*. In this league women like Kasturba Gandhi, Aruna Ashaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu and many others played a very crucial role and had bravely participated in the freedom struggle and some of them even sacrificed their lives on the altar of the country.

In the post-independence era we see a rapid change in the attitude of the Indian women. They have started feeling independent existence. They now understand the rights vested to them by the constitution of India. With the progress of time, spread of education, development of technology, the scenario of feminine myth in Indian society began to change drastically. The Indian woman has now understood the feminine myth of Indian culture and she is no more ready to accept her status as *Griha-Lakshmi*, rather she is ready to equate herself with the man in every sphere of life and career. Introduction of computer based economy made her expectation easier and she is now able to fathom the depth of all the spheres which were until meant for male only. In this league, our modern fiction writers like R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao have aptly tried their best to expose the Indian feminine myth and the post-independence scenario of Indian woman's cravings for independent existence and individual recognition.

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