

Feminism and Hindu Scriptures

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Introduction:

Feminism is a term highly used and highly misused term. Most of the feminists are left-wingers and running NGOs and grabbing fat donations and grants in the name of the empowerment of women and equality to women. However, all these activists have an agenda. In Western countries they are anti-Whites, in India, they are anti-Hindus. Nevertheless, they are silent or supportive of the oppression of women in Islamic society, black societies and countries ruled by Communist governments. In India, their agenda is very aggressively anti-Hindu. Feminist thinkers and activists very aggressively target the Hindus and Hinduism. Their bold advances are controlled by their own vested agenda and goals. They use different parameters in Hindu and White societies but just opposite parameters in Islamic, Black societies and Indigenous societies.

There is no denying the fact that women have been facing oppression and they do no longer want to be ignored and silenced in the name of religion or tradition. Even a modern feminist uses the prototypical female body and its role in the modern feminist social and empowerment movement. The prototypical female body is depicted and analyzed from the outlook of behaviour through the lens of utility and socialization, mostly in terms of what their agenda and society deems to be fit and acceptable female utility.

Abstract:

Hindu society gives maximum power and respect to women. Hinduism does not need any movement like feminism. Historically, women are brought up and taught to be kind, gentle, modest and tolerant. However, in Hindu societies, apart from these qualities, women are also worshipped as goddesses and warriors. Hindus reward and worship these submissive and passive manners as well as aggressive, bold and lofty behaviours with the honour of true womanhood or true femininity. Unfortunately, the pigeonholes that feminist aims to beaks is the very meek qualities it claims against because voices of feminist women still support to this aspect of women rather they have turned woman a market commodity.

The term Feminist, a much- misused label in discussions is the idea that keeps on changing with different types of feminists, with the place, time, religion and colour. The feminist archetype is portrayed in poor light and branded as man- bashing, fashionable, and reluctantly but fatally single or without a legally and socially acceptable male partner. Hinduism and Hindu scriptures give a very high place to women and no such movement is required there.

Keywords: 1- Nirbhaya, 2- stigmatise, 3- stigmatise, 4- *rishis*, 5- Ushas, 6- *Rigveda*, 7- Vishpala, 8- *Puranic*, 9- *Ramayan*, 10, empowerment.

Open a newspaper or any news channel. Rape and gang rape news items are always there. After the Nirbhaya gang rape-murder all sections of society, now take it a brutal crime. The outburst of protests and grief that followed the Nirbhaya gang rape-murder rattled the nation and forced us to make a society in which women are free and safe. In speeches, all fully accept that women have the fundamental right to equality and to take independent decisions but nobody is ready to give them equal rights even in the matters of their love, romantic and sexual lives or the pursuit of education and employment.

Ours is a society that not only discourages violence against women but given them equal right in every step of family life. If violence occurs, it is not the slip of a woman but it is the fault of man. The society cannot stigmatise the woman victim or fault her for somehow provoked the criminal or violence but offer her support and sympathy and condemn the criminal, i.e. the man.

This is Indian society. Nevertheless, such a concept about a society appears like a utopian imagination. Still, our nation is plagued by khap panchayat, triple talaq, burqa, hijab, halala, polygamy, mutha, gentile mutilation, Sharia courts etc. which are the basically anti-woman concept and in some cases these kangaroo courts ordered rape and gang rape as a punishment for blaming so called 'inappropriate relationship' and politicians supporting rapists and blaming the woman for rape.

However, for this utopia, we wouldn't have to move far. We simply need to study and understand *Rigvedic* period India. The *Rigveda* mentions a rape. The victim is Ushas (Dawn), who escapes to a cave, shocked and distressed. She is then befriended with minstrel or junior *rishis* who track her to her secret abode and tender praise and support. Singers and musicians gather in front of Ushas's cave praising her beauty, sparkle and gleam and cajoling her to come out in open, which she eventually does.

It was informed in one of the hymns that the rapist is punished and an arrow is shot at him. Society did not punish Ushas. It rallied behind her and supported her boosting her self-esteem and helping her come out from post-traumatic despair into a happy and normal life.

In the *Rigveda*, physical, mental and psychological violence against women is discouraged besides sexual violence. This is demonstrated in the famous hymn, sung at the time of funeral and death. It was narrated in the hymn that a woman who cries and lies down, sad and dejected, beside her dead husband is urged and encouraged to get up and hug the world and life of the living with happiness, amusement, delicious food and melodious music and song. She is even encouraged and advised to take the hand of a good suitor who could be a prospective second husband.

Other *Vedic* hymns mention illustrate a woman fighter, Vishpala, the warrior queen of the *Rig-Veda* who participated and fought at night in the Battle of Khela. She was not perturbed or stopped even after losing a leg. She rejoined the battle after getting an iron leg. (*Rigveda*)

Hindu scriptures are first and greatest feminists. The society and description of the scriptures never stigmatised neither the rape survivor nor the children born as a result of rape or children born out of wedlock. However, the father or the offender who deserted child in this manner was looked down upon, whosoever he might be.

Several *Puranic* texts also record and discuss another rape. The Great *rishi* Brihaspati rapes Mamta, the wife of his brother. Although Brihaspati was a very powerful *rishi* but nobody hid his name. The child was raised by his maternal grandparents without any stigma before being accepted and adopted by king Bharata. He also became exceptionally learned. He and his descendants composed the hymns that comprise Book 6 of the *Rigveda*. While the child thrived, Brihaspati was reviled. Mamata was neither stigmatised, nor deserted by her husband.

(*Puranas* Story)

In the *Ramayan*, due to the crime of rape, an entire clan perished. In the great Hindu epic the *Ramayan*, Danda, a *Suryavanshi* prince was a serial rapist but he was exiled and disowned by his father to the

Dandakaranya forest. There he again raped Abja, the daughter of his teacher, Shukracharta. Infuriated Shukracharya curses Danda-he and his entire clan perishes.

Meanwhile, ruling people came to know that Abja had conceived and became pregnant from the rape. They bring her to Ayodhya, the capital of Suryavanshis, with grand honour. She becomes queen and her child, Harit, later ascends the throne and became the ruler. The rape victim and her child both flourish and no one questioned their rights to the throne. Illegitimacy carried no stigma and shame.

It would be in the fitness of things to mention the episode of 'Yama-Yami-Samvada' from the sacred *Vedic* literature between brother and sister, Yama and Yami. In the *Rigveda* it was mentioned that Yami makes serious pleas to enjoy sex with her brother. Yama rejects her advances on ethical and moral grounds. Nevertheless, here a young woman is trying to assert her freedom of love and sex oblivious of the morals and traditions.

(Story from the *Rigveda*.)

The respect and empowerment of women in India is not only as old as the story of Sati whom many scholars mention in this background. In the story of Sati the genesis of feminism can be found. Sati was the truly devoted and respectful first wife of Lord Shiva who challenged and disobeyed his monopoly on understanding herself by testing Rama to know him about his reality whether Rama was the incarnation of God Vishnu whom Lord Shiva considered his Lord. Sati also disobeyed her husband's advice and participated in the *yagya* arranged by her father. She challenged and opposed the supremacy or patriarchy of males by jumping into the holy fire of *yagya* due to the insult to her and husband by her father.

In the secular Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*, by saint Valmiki, Sita insists to accompany her husband Lord Rama to the forest, ignoring the dangers, motivated by her unconquerable longing to be with her husband according to her '*Pativrata*', dharma and Lord Ram had to accept her argument. This indicates her freedom, equality and empowerment in Hindu society.

In the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharata*, it is mentioned that women had the full authority to choose their husband. *Swayamvars* were organised and men had to prove their merit and talent to get married. Ram himself participated in a *Swayamvar* and broke the bow of Lord Shiva to win Sita. Even the mighty King Ravan was afraid to touch Sita without her consent, fearing disaster.

(*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* Tales)

Swayamvara, in ancient India, was a practice of choosing a husband by the girl, from among the suitors. *Swayam* in Sanskrit means self and *vara* means groom in this context.

The girl has full freedom to choose a husband. In the famous Hindu epic the *Mahabharat* it was illustrated that women have higher powers in deciding about their husband. Draupadi's marriage was also solemnised in this manner.

It was also illustrated that some *Vedic* women were strong and very martial. Far from being helpless women and meek victim like those women were very strong and soldierly. In a legendary and popular hymn about Mudgala's wife, cattle robbers steal all his cattle. The couple is left with an old and weak bull and a rusty farm cart with only one wheel. Mudgala makes some temporary and quick repairs. The couple chased the robbers, his wife holding the wheel and driving the cart pulled by the old and weak bull. Robbers were captured due to her strength and skill. Not only this they capture all their own cattle but they took some of the cattle of the robbers.

In this matter, the views of Vatsyayana and his *Kamasutra* must be mentioned. Vatsyayana was against the forced sex and warns the husbands not to have sex when wives are unwilling:

“Women, being of a tender nature, want tender beginnings, and when they are forcibly approached by men with whom they are but slightly acquainted, they sometimes suddenly become haters of sexual connection, and sometimes even haters of the male sex. The man should, therefore, approach the girl according to her liking.”

Vatsyayana also warns men against any type of sex with the women without their consent. He points out that woman does not like “forcibly enjoyed” by “one who does not understand the hearts of girls”: girls starts hating not only the sex but mankind in general. In such cases, all blame lies with the man or the rapist and no disposition to blame women for being raped or gone forceful sex.

Hindu sages knew to position sensuality in the true perspective. The illustrations and positions of the *Kamasutra* are women oriented. In the very first chapter of the book, an imagery interlocutor asked *rishi* Vatsyayana about the basic role of humans. *Rishi* Vatsyayana replies that there are four *Purush Arthas* (a goal with action) in the life of a human: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*.

(*Kamasutra*)

In his essay for the BBC, famous British historian William Dalrymple wrote about pre-colonial Indian literature and views that women were not at all related with sin. Britishers imported this idea to India,” Women were not associated with temptation but instead with fertility, abundance and prosperity, and there is an open embrace of sexuality as one route to divine.”

(The Times of India, New Delhi, March 7, 2021, p-19, ‘How a female nude came to stand tall in Kerala.’)

According to famous sculptor, Kanayi Kunhiraman “nature is nude and there is no shame in it. It is men who introduced the concept of chastity to repress women.”

(*ibid.*)

For a happy and successful life, each of the first three *Purush Arthas* (a goal with action) must be pursued in the right and proper proportion. Fourth, the *moksha* (liberation of the soul), leads automatically to a part or reward of balanced and disinterested life.

According to Vatsyayana marriage does not give a man an absolute right to his wife’s self and body. It was a great and revolutionary thought when marital rape is not criminalised even in modern society. Both Vatsyayana and Kautilya, the author of the *Arthashastra*, uphold that wives have the right to divorce, break the marriage or remarriage under such situation. Women have many options to come out violent marriage.

Recently Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) denied clearance certificate to Prakash Jha’s film ‘Lipstick Under My Burkha.’ The Board says that it is a “lady oriented film”, focusing on their “fantasy above life”. It is far from clear why a film that is “lady oriented” is bad, or why women’s fantasies can only have a certain altitude. However, Hindu mythology is full of such fantasies.

Since Nihalani and his team have a problem with a “lady oriented film”, perhaps it may in the fitness of things for them to read some Hindu mythology.

Once, Lord Shiva was meditating. Kamadeva, the god of love, disturbed Shiva. On this, Lord Shiva burnt the god of love, Kamadeva. Lord Shiva asked Parvati for a boon. Parvati the goddess replied:

“Now that Kama has been burnt, what can I do with a boon from you today? For, without Kama, there can be – between man and woman – no emotion, which is like ten million suns. When emotion is destroyed, how can happiness be attained?” Parvati said, revive Kamadeva because without him she did not yearn to demand anything at all. Shiva had to revive Kama as Pradhymna, the son of Krishna and Rukmini.

(The *Bhagwata Purana*)

Rebirth of Kamadev was “woman-oriented” desire for love and sex. Kamadev declares: There is no hero, no proud woman, no learned man too powerful for me. I pervade the whole universe, moving and still, beginning with Brahma the Creator.”

(The *Saura Purana*)

In another Hindu scripture it has been described that woman is the real master of sexual urge and all the sexual organs are meant for her:

“Woman is fire, Gautama: the phallus is her fuel; the hairs are her smoke; the vulva is her flame; when a man penetrates her, that is her coal; the ecstasy is her sparks.”
(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*)

Famous Hindu scriptures, the *Harivamsha*, the *Vishnu Purana*, and the *Bhagwata Purana*, narrated in explicit detail about forceful and uninhibited desire and “lady oriented” love games (*leelas*) played by the *gopis* (*sakhis*) with Krishna (*sakha*) in Vrindavana. The *gopis* frolicked different *leelas* with Krishna without any concern about whether *Sawaria* (Krishna) likes the *leelas* or not.

In the *Gita Govinda* by Jayadev, immortal and glorious love play between Krishna and Radha is the main theme. In the story Krishna was *Sringaramurtimam*, the quintessence of the sensual mood; Radha was Raseshwari, his full-blooded equal. Bihari, Chandidasa and Vidyapati wrote immortal and sensual love poetry during the medieval period.

The 18th century Basohli and Kangra of the *Gita Govinda* paintings or the Erotica drawings in Odisha on the palm leaf are also worth mentioning here. In the paintings of Khajuraho and Konarak, where ladies are equal partaker in all kinds of sexual and love acts and “fantasy above life”, is also highly appreciable work. The graphic erotic descriptions of Kalidasa are of significance here.

The result is that in a country where the vast majority idolises *Shakti* as the supreme female power, feminism is not needed.

Early every morning, millions of Indians begin their day hearing family elders chanting the names of the *panch kanyas* or five virgins – *Ahilya*, *Draupadi*, *Kunti*, *Tara* and *Mandodari* – from the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Hindus believe that uttering the names of these five (pious) women every day can destroy the greatest of sins. Some other names like *Sita* and *Savitri* and *Arundhati* here also come in this category.

In fast-changing India, where people, especially the new generation moving beyond religious divide, inhibitions are left behind, cyberspace is omnipresent, women are freely and self-confidently of their sexuality and desires, fake and foolish feminism is not loved.

It would be idyllic if violence against women simply didn't exist. A woman's self-worth and honour must be respected. Hopefully, we can use our ancient ancestors' social norms for inspiration and insight in moving towards such a society.

On the one hand, feminism is almost finished and now it is a hated term as has been very aptly summarised by famous Hollywood and Bollywood actress Lisa Haydon,

I don't like the word 'feminist'. I don't think women trying to be men is (sick) feminism. I also don't believe in being outspoken for the sake of it, or just to prove a point. Feminism is just an overused term and people make too much noise about it for no reason. Women have given these bodies to produce children, and the spirit and tenderness to take care of people around us. It's fine to be an outspoken and working woman. I don't want to be a man. One day I look forward to making dinner for my husband and children. I don't want to be a career feminist.

(The Times of India, 'Delhi Times,' New – Delhi, India, Monday, May 23, 2016, pp.1& 8.)

Famous film actress, Vidya Balan's very rightly summed up the term feminism, when she was asked, “The word 'feminism' is dropped very often these days. Do you think it's misconstrued? What's your take on feminism?”

“If by feminist, you mean somebody who values herself, her body, her space, her choices or the right to her choices, yes I am a feminist. But I am definitely not a man-hater. Because a lot of people equate feminism with that and that's very disturbing. Yes, you are challenging the status quo by wanting to assert yourself, your individuality and your individual space. I am at the centre of my universe and I happen to be a woman. I don't feel any lesser than anyone else and I won't settle for anything lesser. I won't settle for anything but the best.”

Conclusion:

The need of the day is not aggressive feminism but intersectional feminism. Radical feminism is ruining the fight against women. All should come together and share thoughts and ideas to change the perspective and make an impact on the policies and legislation for the empowerment of women. Feminists should follow Hindu scriptures to purge their minds and ideology of characterization as aggressive, angry and bashing feminists.

Term Feminist has become directly contradictory to the archetypal female figure and femininity traits that society encourages and accepts. They should not be bashing man, motherhood, patience and warrior-hood of women. Without these qualities, women are incomplete. Feminists have fewer merits but more shortfalls and now it carries a social and moral stigma – most believe this role does more damage than good.

Reference:

(Lasyapriya Sundaram, TNN | Apr 12, 2017, 01.00 AM IST, The Times of India, Entertainment.)

