

**THE ARGUMENTS OF SEED-FIELD THEORY IN HINDUISM: AN EXAMINATION
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FEMINIST ONTOLOGY**
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Introduction:

What is popularly known by the word ‘Hinduism’ is one of the greatest world religions. But it is neither religion in popular western sense of ‘religion’ nor any ‘ism’ - it is *Sanātana Dharma*, the Eternal Law of the universe. The word *Dharma* is derived from the root *dhì* which has the meaning of “to hold, maintain and keep”. It is the unique principle known as *rta*. This *rta* is *Dharma - Ṛtasya dharman* (*R̥gveda*:1/90). It refers to the power which upholds the universe and society. In Hinduism, *Dharma* required for self-satisfaction, purity of mind and getting liberation of life. In this connection, here we are searching for the ontology of womanhood or what is essence of woman. Ontology of experience treats woman as a human being having equal status with male counterpart. But the social construct historically ignores this philosophical reality and as a result politics of discrimination continues in societies with norms and sanctions from religious law books.

As we have said that woman is a human being just like a man, they are the half-sky in the world. But when we see the law books of religious orientation, such as Hindu or Vedic *Dharma* in our society, we see that woman is not being treated as a human being at par with male-counterpart. She is usually treated as a means, not as an end. Her identity is socially constructed by male-chauvinistic power structure. Like other religions in Hinduism, marriage and procreation are very important in the family system. Here the question arises: what is the status of women in this system? We have seen that the role of wife and mother is idealized for women in Hinduism. Down the ages, it has been worshipping the mother figure. So, we have instituted our searching for the actual scenario of the status of woman as a mother in Hinduism.

Women’s status in marriage and procreation

In the period of *Smṛti*, the right of the education of women was almost completely denied. Many religious rules had been imposed on women such as the nuptial ceremony is stated to be the Vedic sacrament for women (and to be equal to the initiation), serving the husband (equivalent to) the residence in (the house of the) teacher, and the household duties (the same) as the (daily) worship of the sacred

fire.¹ These were the main role of married women in Indian society. It is said in the *Mahābhārata* that the structure of domestic system (*gārhsthya dharma*) and society is dependent on marriage custom.² In support of marriage custom, it is said that the wife is the main medium of achieving *trivarga* (*Dharma, Artha, and Kāma*), three pursuits of life of the husband.³ The physical enjoyment is not only the main reason of family system but also essential reason in getting spirituality (*Dharma*). Though, it is considered that marriage is the main religious act in the life of women.

But the marriage system is not coming from the ancient times. Śvetaketu told his father, Uddāloka that “I am doing this rule, from now, man and women in the society will not be sexual arbitrariness. If someone breaks my rules, sin will be committed to killing foetus”.⁴ In that time, polygamy was the rules for both man and woman in society which was prohibited by the Śvetaketu’s rules. But it is stopped for the woman, not for the man. The *Taiterīya Samhitā* clearly says that “a husband may have many wives but one woman cannot be many husbands”.⁵ Though it is needed for the both man and woman, in the Vedic injunction marriage is the essential duty for woman. In result, unmarried women were condemned in the then society. And it is said that they are not found in superior place.⁶ Here this ‘superior place’ means the heaven. If a woman is unmarried, she cannot go to the heaven after her death. For this reason, the daughter of Ṛṣi Kunigarg at her old age was forced to marry Ṛṣi Prākṣṛṅgaban before her death for only one day. In this way, she took the superior place as heaven. But unmarried Bhisma was worshiped as a pious and godly person throughout his lifetime. How could we explain the necessity of marriage only in woman’s life? It is persuaded in the *Vaśiṣṭha Dharmaśāstra* that “woman has to be protected in childhood by her father, in youth by her husband and in her old age by her son”.⁷ We see that one of the objectives of dharma is to protect the human society. And this responsibility of protecting women has come upon men sometime as a

¹ *Manusamhitā* :2/67

² *Mahābhārata, Anusāsanaparva*: 45/9

³ *Mahābhārata, Vanaparva*:312/102

⁴ *Mahābhārata, Adiparva*:122/10-20

⁵ *Taiterīya Samhitā*: 6/6/4/3

⁶ *Mahābhārata, Śalyaparva* 52/10

⁷ *Vaśiṣṭha Dharmaśāstra*:5/1-2

father, sometime as a husband or sometime as a son. Naturally the question arose, what is the reason for protecting women?

The main goal of patriarchy is to protect the family and to keep the inheritance of family property. So, it is ruled that the woman have one husband and necessity to protect the woman. If it is not done, the children's fatherhood will not be properly determined. However, the purity of family inheritance does not dependent only on women. Because we see, there were *anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriage. A higher-class man when marries a lower class (*śudra*) woman - it is *Anuloma* marriage. It is not condemned. A lower-class man marries a higher-class woman - it is *pratiloma* marriage. This system is condemned in society. A *Brāhmaṇa* could marry a *śudra* woman and their child becomes a *Brāhmaṇa*. But if a *Brāhmaṇa* woman could marry a *śudra* or any other class of male as partner, their child could not become a *Brāhmaṇa*. His status was decided by the status of his father. If all the controlling power is in the hand of *Brāhmaṇa*, whatever they did, it would have become a rule.

Marriage has become essential for women who have lost their right to education. Unmarried women were condemned. Marriage is the highest achievement and goal of a woman's life. A married woman controlled by her husband and husband's parents. The purpose of marriage is for the devotedly serving and giving pleasure to the husband and to bear and raise children, particularly son. If a woman denies fulfilling her husband's sexual pleasure, then as Yājñavalkya advised that "If she is not willing, he should buy her over; and if she is still unyielding, he should strike her with a stick or with the hand and proceed, uttering the following *Mantra*, 'I take away your reputation', etc. She is then actually discarded."⁸ Here women have no right to their own body and no given importance of her willing.⁹

In the views of Manu, "Woman is viewed solely as the mother and the wife and those roles are idealized. The ideal wife is one who is faithful and who gives service to her husband and his family members without any complain is virtuous."¹⁰ There are no identity of woman without the relations with father, husband and son

⁸ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*: 6/4/7

⁹ *Manusamhitā*: 9/28 and 9/29

¹⁰ *Ibid*

(offspring) in this patriarchal system. It is denied selfhood or personhood of a woman. The ontological autonomy as being human has been subjected to sub-ordination because of social construct.

The main objective of the marriage is to produce progeny, especially son for keeping and protecting inheritance of family property. We found the prayer for son in the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, *Dharmaśāstras*, *Gṛhyasūtras* and the great epics. “The woman is considered evil; daughter is a curse.”¹¹ The daughter is the cause of sorrow.¹² Kṛṣṇa said that “as a result of the sin of previous birth, one is born as a woman”.¹³ The girl child is unwanted but there was prayer for son in many ceremonies such as *garvādhān*, *pungṣaban*, *simantayan* etc.¹⁴ But the *Bṛhadāryaṇyaka Upaniṣad* tells about the birth of a daughter. “If man wishes that a learned daughter should be born to him, and that she should live to her full age, then after having prepared boiled rice with sesamum and butter, they should both eat, being fit to have offspring.”¹⁵ It is considered an exception. Yājñavalkya tells in this *Upaniṣads*, “the wish of the son same as the wish of the wealth”.¹⁶ Manu said the importance of sons, “Because a son delivers (*trāyate*) his father from the hell called ‘Put’, he was therefore called *putra* (a deliverer from Put) by the Self-existent (*svayambhu*) himself”.¹⁷ It may be presumed that since son protects the old parents and gives them support when they are incapable of supporting them, help them to reduce suffering (‘put *naraka*’), people desire children. If it is also done by a daughter, then a son and a daughter can perform the same duty to the aged parents. “Immediately on the birth of his first-born a man is (called) the father of a son and is freed from the debt to the manes; that (son), therefore, is worthy (to receive) the whole estate”.¹⁸ This is not enough; there had been recognition of different kind of sons in *Manusmṛti*. “The legitimate son of the body, the son begotten on a wife, the son adopted, the son made, the son secretly

¹¹ *Aiteriya Brāhmaṇa*:6/3/7/3

¹² *Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*: 1/59/1

¹³ *Mahābhārata, Bhiṣma Parva* :33/32

¹⁴ *Sankhyalāyaṇa- Gṛhyasūtras*:1/19/6; *Aśvalāyaṇa- Gṛhyasūtras*:1/13/6; 1/14/4, *Atharvaveda*: 3/5/3/2 *Atharvaveda*: 8/3/5/5

¹⁵ *Bṛhadāryaṇyaka Upaniṣad*: 6/4/16

¹⁶ *Bṛhadāryaṇyaka Upaniṣad*:3/5/1

¹⁷ *Manusamhitā*:9/138

¹⁸ *Manusamhitā*:9/106

born, and the son cast off, (are) the six heirs and kinsmen”.¹⁹ “The son of an unmarried damsel, the son received with the wife, the son bought, the son begotten on a remarried woman, the son self-given, and the son of a *śudra* female, (are) the six (who are) not heirs, (but) kinsmen”.²⁰

Women’s Status in Seed-Field Theory

Now the question is: What is the role of women in producing a child? We have seen that son freed his father from debt, gives him immortality. But it was not said, a mother had not given any immortality. However, it is said, ‘Mother is the heaven of the heaven’. But there as such no place the heaven of heaven in any *Śāstras*. In other words, this patriarchal society had not given proper honour for women in most of the instances, but worshiped the mother status. That is very much doubtful.

In the context of the role of women in producing child, let us examine the arguments of ‘the seed-field theory’ which is presented in all *Śāstras*.²¹ A woman is called the field that acts as a nourishing agent for the growth of a seed. Man is called a seed (semen/sperm) that has the power to reproduce its own kind. The whole *Manusmṛti* speaks for the supreme importance of seed. Because of, the offspring of all created beings is marked by the characteristics of the seed.²² It is notable that in the form of a child, both father and mother have their own characteristics. Because of twenty-three chromosomes from female and twenty-three chromosomes from male come together to produce a cell that develops into a child. Manu did not accept the mother characteristics in the form of a child. This science of reproduction was not perhaps known to the ancients Indians. But due to the social constructs of the patriarchal society there is always emphasis more on the male. However, this scientific discovering of modern genetic investigation was not known during Manu’s time. It is said that “Seed, sown on barren ground, perishes in it; a (fertile) field also, in which no (good) seed (is sown), will remain barren”.²³ Even the child productive

¹⁹ *Manusamhitā*:9.159

²⁰ *Manusamhitā* 9.160

²¹ *Manusamhitā* 9/33 and 10/69

²² *Manusamhitā* 9/35

²³ *Manusamhitā* 10.71

role of the women was brought down to the level of zero. In the *Mahābhārata*, Droṇācārya was born without women's womb.²⁴ Is it believable? Simultaneously we have seen, in the *Ādīparva*, without the existence of women man is helpless to getting own child. Pāṇdu was unable to produce children by curse of Ṛṣi Kindam. In fact, he was perhaps impotent. So, he requested Kunti to get children from another male person.²⁵ Gradually, she had conceived by the *Dharma*, Bāyu, and Indra and given birth Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhima and Arjuna. Mādri also went to the same way and she given birth Nakula and Sahadeba by the two *Aświnikumāras*. This practice is called Niyoga.²⁶ This practice is to suppress the men's helplessness in case of man's impotency. And side by side, this practice established man's supremacy and therefore it permits man to use woman as a means of reproduction. Here also applies the analogy of land and woman. "In the case of the land, whosoever owned the land owned whatever was there in the land?"²⁷ Similarly, it was thought that whosoever was the husband owned and he owned all the children of woman. The children born out of Niyoga did not belong to the person concerned but to the rightful owner or the husband.

The new Genetic theory explains the human reproduction in terms of genes. It states that the ovary produces egg cells in the female, and the testis produces sperm cells in the male which are unite within a womb of a woman.²⁸ Thus sperm cells and egg cells together develop a human embryo and woman is nourishing the embryo in her womb. This implies that female has a more responsible function than male in reproductive system.²⁹ It is hard to deny that female and male bodily experiences differ in many ways. Women have unique bodily experiences - ovulation, menstruation, pregnancy, child birth, and breast-feeding but men have not such as

²⁴ *Mahābhārata, Ādīparva*: 63

²⁵ *Mahābhārata, Ādīparva*: 120/37

²⁶ Similar to the *Niyoga* system now a days, there are build Sperm banks which provide the opportunity to have a baby to single women and coupled lesbians and to heterosexual couples where the male is infertile.

²⁷ *Manusamhitā*: 9/51

²⁸ The eggs are then fertilized in the laboratory with her partner's sperm. The embryos are cultured in the IVF laboratory for two to six days. The embryo transfer procedure is done which places the embryos in the woman's uterus where they will hopefully implant and develop to result in a live birth.

²⁹ Meena A. Kelkar, *Subordination of Woman: A New Perspective*, Discover Publishing House, New Delhi, 1995, p.81

bodily experiences and they have experience of ejaculation of semen which helps to reproduction of life. Here specifically female bodily experiences actually confer on women superiority.³⁰ Patriarchal society has denied to accept it and established the opposite view.

According to Mill, “It is not that all process is supposed to be equally good, or all persons to be equally qualified for everything; but that freedom of individual choice is now known to be the only thing which procures the adoption of the best processes, and throws each operation into the hands of those who are best qualified for it”.³¹ It should be admitted that freedom of individual choice is very important for getting dignity of human being. The power system is hidden in the depth of society. So, the new genetic theory could not change the attitude towards woman. Even today the female foetuses have been killed behind the worship of mother figure.³²

Concluding Remark

The most important question of equality as a person remains unaddressed in Hindu society. Very often religious society uses the Scriptures in a dogmatic way and applies the social construct upon women. As a result, we see much such discrimination. Like the Scriptures of the world religions, Hindu social behaviour is also controlled by the patriarchal power-structure and consequently the status of women remains as a second class one. However, due to western education now a day it has been changing very slowly, it is still having a subordinate status. The distress becomes more because of the support of this patriarchal supremacy by the senior ladies. At present day, if couples have failed to birth children, this failure has to impose totally on woman only. Proper value education as a person, as a human being can enable a woman to see her own face with the philosophical mirror of wisdom. Philosophy of religion being a critical and second order activity will open the door of making sociology of Religion here with an understanding of personhood.

³⁰ This is an Eco-feminists’ argument.

³¹ Mill, J. S. *The Subjugation of Women*. Everyman’s Library, London. 1970. p.235

³² Current sex ratio in India, 2017 is 945 females per 1,000 males.

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