

## THE PREDICAMENT OF A WOMAN IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

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**“ Kayresi Dasi, Karyshu Mantri  
Roopecha Laxmi, Kshmaya Daridri  
Bhuktesu Mata, Shayanesu Rambha  
Shatkarna Yukta, Kuladharm Pathi”**

These Sanskrit lines are very much familiar to us. Loosely translated, these lines mean that a wife should serve her husband like a slave, give him proper advice, look as beautiful as the goddess Laxmi, forgive all his sins however terrible they may be, feed him like a mother and serve him like a prostitute in bed. The wife who has all these qualities in her is a good wife and according to the patriarchal society, is a perfect woman. These lines, often quoted as advice to wives, clearly show the injustice meted out to women who are expected to give top priority to their husband's pleasure.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that women, who are physically and mentally equipped to perform on par with men, have not only been denied existence as complete human beings, but also deprived of the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, their thoughts and their anguish. As *Sushila Singh* puts it: “Human experience for centuries has been synonymous with the masculine experience with the result that the collective image of humanity has been one sided and incomplete. Woman has not been defined as a subject in her own right but merely has an entity that concerns man either in his real life or his fantasy life.”<sup>1</sup>

In India we may trace back to the old age of Vedas and Upanishads where women were worshipped like a goddess, it was believed that gods live there, where women are respected. The position of women in ancient India was free. Women were well educated and respected members of society. A wife shared all her husband's privileges. We hear of Gosha and Lopamudra who were skilled in composing hymns and philosophical debates. The Vedic wife was supreme in her household and free to do what she liked. Woman of ancient India was believed to be an intelligent financier even Manu assigns to her the duty of collecting and spending money and

keeping down expenses with a frugal hand. The *Manu Smriti* which has been widely accepted in India as a text laying down the rules of social behavior, declares: “ Day and night, women must be kept in subordination to the males of the family: in childhood to her father, in youth to her husband, in old age to here sons.....Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be worshipped as God.”<sup>2</sup>

Though always it is said that men and women are equal. Still the male ego refuses to accept a secondary position in marriage. And if the wife is superior in any field she will be the victim of her husband's frustration which manifests itself in the form of sexual sadism. As Sarita, the protagonist of the novel “ *The Dark holds no Terrors*” by Shashi Deshpande, makes up an imaginary speech which sarcastically sums up the conditions necessary for a successful marriage: “A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an M.A. You should be a B.A. If he is 5”4” tall you shouldn't be more than 5’3” tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety, if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctored-nurse, executive- secretary, principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it is not worth it. He'll suffer. You'll suffer and so will the children. Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage must be an equal partnership. That's nonsense, rubbish.”<sup>3</sup>

There are so many female victims in society who are raped by their own relatives. Women are not safe even in their family also. Rape within marriage is also common. The husband attacks on her wife like an animal without concerning the wish and interest of the wife. According to men ‘love’ means to make physical relation but to women it is always related to emotions and she shatters if husband compels her to make physical relation by saying ‘ I love you’ : “Please, he says, please, ‘I love you’. And over and over again until he has done, ‘ I love you’. Love ! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing.”<sup>4</sup>

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Almost all the religions of the world give sanction to female subjugation by the male members of society, thereby perpetuating the myth of female servitude. Marriages are made in Heaven. So it should be an equal bond but we know the conditions of women in their married life. Marriage is, perhaps, the most complex of human relationships. It is defined as a “cultural phenomenon which sanctions a more or less permanent union between partners conferring legitimacy on their offspring”.<sup>5</sup> Marriage is not simply a social institution. It is inextricably linked to religion and religion, being a potent force in our country, determines more or less the code of conduct in marital relationships. The Bible categorically tells the woman:” Wives submit yourselves to your husbands as to the Lord”<sup>6</sup> As we are talking about the women’s condition and situation how can we forget the dowry system and *purdah* system. If husband and wife are equal than why we have this social evil, called dowry, in our society. It is made by the male society who just want to be superior. Women are also the human beings they also have the same rights which man has. As *Dorothy Parker* has written” I can not be just to books which treat of woman as woman ..... My idea is that all of us men as well as women should be regarded as human beings.”<sup>7</sup>

Now-a-days, women are educated and exposed to Western ideas. That’s the reason that

they are caught between tradition and modernity. The woman of today stands poised on the threshold of social change in an unenviable position. She is intensely aware of the injustice heaped on her and unlike her counterpart a generation ago, she does not believe that woman is an inferior being who must remain passive and submissive.

Today women are fighting for their own identity. They are on the waking up to the releasing knowledge that there is more to life than dependency on husband or parents and social acceptance. The woman is self-sufficient in all aspect. There are so many stories about the violence inflicted on women by men. We can’t deny that there is double standard of morality in society regarding men and women. The whole existence of woman hinges on female awareness and consciousness. The women must be aware of her own identity. A woman should perform her duty as a mother, daughter, sister and wife but she should not forget that she is an individual person and she has her own individuality in this patriarchal society. Thus, in a nut shell we may conclude that it is clear that since time immemorial woman has been given an inferior position in society. Yes, the Indian women in this era are born at a time when there is much awareness about her rights, liberty to express her ideas, freedom to enjoy finance and chance to stand for a cause. Still .....the silence continues!

### References

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- 3- Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 1990), p.137.
- 4- Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding vine* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 1992), p.67.
- 5- Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner, *Dictionary of Sociology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin,1984),p.127.
- 6- Ephesians, 5:22, *The Bible*
- 7- Simone de Beauvoir; ‘Introduction’ *The Second Sex* (1949), Trans and Ed. H.M. Parshley (London, Vintage Classics 1997), p.14.