



RELIGION AND CULTURE : FEMINIST SOCIAL THOUGHT AND ACTION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

*This paper is an attempt to trace the way in which religion and culture are intertwined in Indian conceptualization of the woman. And it tries to analyze the feminist interventions through history, against the patriarchal notions of 'the woman'. The religion, caste and gender hegemonies are rectified in the texts of religion in India and this is explained through the verses of **Manu-Smrti**, being the social organizing handbook in Indian culture. The patriarchal politics of Hinduism were generated and propagated through the texts that were considered sacred. At the foyer of brahmanical revivalism after Buddhist period, one can watch the concepts of inferior role assigned to women in the form the text **Manu-Smrti** prescribed. This paper makes the analysis of*

the verses of the text and initiates the discussion on subordination of women in Indian culture. It also exemplifies how some women in India responded to such a social situation and inspired the change towards women's freedom.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Culture, Feminism, Hinduism, Manu-Smrti.

INTRODUCTION

Religion and culture have ever been concepts of extensive exigency in all the stages of change in any society. Same is the case with a stage of the social transformation in terms of gender. Clubbing the two concepts of religion and culture is an unavoidable task as they form the main strategies of social organization infused through scriptures, in a province like India. Malory Nye has written about the approach that

could be labeled as the study of 'religion and culture'.¹ According to her, religion is not something abstract and God-given, but it is integral to other cultural activities and is the fundamental aspect of culture.

The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz also has defined 'religion as a cultural system'.² The points posed by Malory Nye are crucial in the Indian context because the usage of the term 'religion' becomes a noun, adjective, adverb or even verb as she said. Interesting is her explanation that, this issue sounded with the explanation on religion of Hinduism that as

sanatana dharma, making religion as a verb. The beginnings of such Indian problematic can only be constructed through reflections on the earliest texts.³ Vedas and the texts created thereafter by claiming the Vedic ideas as their roots are quintessential to understand religion and culture in India. This paper is an attempt to do such replications on Indian scriptures, especially *Manu-Smrti* and Epics that emerged in around the beginning of Christ era, to analyze the feminist social thought that lead a social action in India for the welfare of women.

¹ Nye, Malory. *Religion: The Basics*, Routledge, London, 2003, p.2- 21

² Ibid.,p.37 Also see, Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of cultures*, Westview, Basic Books, 1973

³ Krishna,Daya. *Classical Indian Thought*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p.8

RELIGION, CULTURE AND GENDER

The significance of texts to religions and cultures are noted by scholars along with the political engagements with them. The importance of religious texts are not yet denied much by any politics in India though there had been a few instances such as burning Manu-Smrti. Scholars such as Malory Nye also maintain the magnitude of religious texts though trying to put aside Max Muller's preferential suggestion for the reference that the sacred texts could produce.⁴ Although they think it is vital to read other forms of texts than the religious ones, the relevance of analyzing such texts of Hinduism is not denied by them as these texts exercise as the main outlet of culture and religion in India. Especially the Smrticodes which are believed to 'be written out of Vedic inspiration'⁵ to make a social order has enormously propagated the amended concepts of Hinduism so as to make it a dominant religion in the contemporary condition. And the well-known Manu-Smrti, that is considered as the law-book of Hindus could be found as the most anti-woman Sanskrit core of Hinduism, according to Pandita Ramabai, who refused to remain Hindu and converted to Christianity because of the androcentric nature of Hinduism.⁶

But there are arguments that religions always provided subordinate position to women no matter whether that is Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or any other.⁷ The most vocal example of such a view is Mary Daly, who argues that the concept of belief in a male deity leads to profound sexual inequalities.⁸ Similar forms of androcentricism of religion and culture has been of great discussion among feminist theorists. Accordingly, the lies about the nature and function of woman that are intrinsic to patriarchal religion have informed the legal, educational, political, economic, and medical/psychiatric systems of our society and are accepted as 'natural truths' by even the most modern and atheistic citizens.⁹ This stream of feminist theorizing put forward the relevance of female Goddesses and female spirituality while it upset 'God's natural laws'¹⁰ on 'natural roles of the sexes'¹¹. There are opinions that women's spirituality would help the reestablishing of collective female consciousness to develop a way of life which doesn't need hierarchy.¹² This might change the status of women as anomalies in many cultures which have male-biased ideological foundations. There were Buddhist nuns in India during BC600 such as Soma, Sumangalamata, Nandutara and Vimala who addressed women's spirituality and their status in religious matters. Their rhetorical self-deprecation echoed by many women activists and writers later on. Sumangalamata celebrated the life by becoming a homeless world-renunciation and escaping the pestle and cooking pots of the 'householder'.¹³ Soma also fought against conceptions such as the domestication of women and her cooking skill, by attacking

⁴ Nye, Malory., 2003, p.157,149

⁵ Krishna, Daya. *Classical Indian Thought*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p.17

⁶ See, Omvedt, Gail. *Dalit Visions : The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity*, Reprint. New Delhi, Orient Longman, 2006. Chakravarti, Uma. *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1998. In 1882 Ramabai founded Arya Mahila Samaj (undoubtedly the first autonomous women's organization in India) and then shortly after departed for England where she converted to Christianity. For this, she was condemned by even the moderate Brahmins who had originally sponsored her efforts. Anyhow, Ramabai's activities are the empirical evidence for the feminist move proving the anti-woman elements of Indian scriptures.

⁷ There are discussions on Qur'an and Bible showing that they are basically women friendly, but the later interpretations made them male-centric. The issues of translating Qur'an and the language of interpretation being anti-woman inflicting such ideas in the real life situations etc. have been discussed by various writers. See for eg., Al-Faruqi, "Towards a New Theology for Quranic Exegesis", *Islamic Studies*, March 1962. For some discussions on Bible and Women, see, *Jeevadhara*, XXI No.122 March 1991

⁸ Nye, Malory. *Religion: The Basics*, Routledge, London, 2003, p.74-75

⁹ Spretnak, Charlene (ed). *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement*. Anchor Press, U.S.A, 1982, p.xi

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p.385

¹³ De Lamotte, Eugenia., Meeker, Natania., O'Barr, Jean. (eds.) *Women Imagine Change: A Global Anthology of Women's Resistance; From 600 BC to Present*, Routledge, New York, 1997

the ideas about the 'two-finger intelligence of women'.¹⁴ This proves how deep is the historical root of the women's subordination inside the basic social institution named family in any religious structure.

HINDUISM AND GENDER: TEXTUAL LOCATION

The patriarchal politics of Hinduism were generated and propagated through the texts that were considered sacred. At the foyer of *brahmanical* revivalism after *budhist* period, one can watch the concepts of inferior role assigned to women in the form the text *Manu-Smrti* prescribed. The modern Indian culture also takes the text *Manu-Smrti* to construct and preserve more rigid form of the family.¹⁵ The cultural construction of the concept of 'woman' and 'her space- family' could be observed as gullied by the codes of Manu which is celebrated as a banner of Hinduism and Indian culture even in the contemporary India. Scholars have explained the cooperative mission of culture and religion to form the gendered identities, to make statements such as 'women tend to be more religious, but men make effective religious leaders or men should be the religious leaders'.¹⁶ This idea is reflected in *Manu-Smrti*, as it clearly states that the women have no right for doing religious rituals and only men are supposed to do that. It is clear from the verse saying:

Nastistreenamkriyamantrairitidharmevyavasthitih
Nirindriyahyamantraschastriyo/nrtamitisthitih (Chapter IX: Verse 18)

The translation of this verse has been done as follows, by M.N. Dutt (Sharma, 1998:394):- 'The purificatory rites of women are (i.e. must be performed) without the Vedic mantras; this is the decision of the law code. And for this disqualification of *Mantra*-less-ness, women are like unto inorganic things. This is the conclusion.' The low status given to the women's existence as inorganic things, is clearly drawing the religious reason as having no right to chant *mantras*. Thus the verse itself ensnares not only the religious reasons of women's stumpy status but even the very existence of women as mere objects of men. It is contradictory to the scientific evidence of African origins of humans and the oldest divinity of the 'dark mother'.¹⁷ The disgruntlement on the religious conditions with which women were objectified and deemed to be inorganic was visible in feminist studies.

Judith Butler has explained about the powerful discourse of gender that is created by religion and culture, and the way in which behavior is shaped through culture and religion.¹⁸ And the texts that claim to be the authority of religion or culture doubtlessly becomes the tools or agents to propagate the gendered concepts to form the behaviour or mind-set of the people inhabiting in any particular area. The hermeneutical attempts on the religious/cultural texts could see the gender disparities involved. The cultural complexity of India, because of its population including people from various religions encompasses a massive amount of research enterprises in the country. Anyhow Hinduism is known and accepted as the primordial form of religion in India by various scholars as well as the general public. But the discourse on Hinduism as the core religion has grown into the critical issue, if it is a religion at all.

Sister Nivedita says, Hinduism as a religion, is coupled with its resistance power as a civilization and this furnishes one of the most startling paradoxes in the history of human.¹⁹ She explains Hinduism as originally derived from veritable network of religions in which the co-ordinating element was the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Doniger, Wendy and Smith, Brian K. Trans. *The Laws of Manu*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1991, see, p. xvii

¹⁶ Ibid., p.77

¹⁷ Birnbaum, Lucia Chiavola. *Dark Mother: African Origins and Godmothers*, Author's choice press, USA, 2001, see p.3. African and African American scholarship and the popular understanding about the African origins of humans is dealt within this section of the book. Proceeding from the fact it elaborates on the oldest divinity known as 'dark mother'.

¹⁸ Doniger, Wendy and Smith, Brian K. Trans. *The Laws of Manu*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1991, p.77

¹⁹ Sister Nivedita (Margaret E. Noble), *Religion and Dharma*, Longman, Green and Co. London, 1915, p.1

philosophy now known as *Vedanta*.²⁰ Nevertheless, noteworthy is the blindness of the orthodox school of *Vedanta* about the existence of female-self while it assigns every phenomenon in the world as the manifestations of *Brahman* which is evidently masculine being explained as pure consciousness. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty says, Hinduism has always been noted for its ability to absorb potentiality schismatic developments.²¹ But it doesn't seem to be much absorbing the gender issues while it had the gendered mode of *purusha* and *prakrti* concepts in the *Sankhya* philosophy. While *purusha* is the conscious self, *prakrti* is explained as unintelligent and unconscious, but uncaused all-pervading principle which is the cause of the production of objective world. This could be found as a basis of gendering in the history of Indian philosophizing. There are references showing the tendency of *Sankhya* thought to pervade all the literature of ancient India including the *Smritis*, *Srutis* and *Puranas*.²² Anyhow, the philosophical background of India and its religions are renowned, in spite of the various counter arguments for Hinduism being conceived as the ideology of Hindu religion. Hinduism was just meaning the way of life of the people who lived on the Indus valley, according to Persians who used the term in the beginning. These points facilitate to view Hinduism not just as a religion for the so-called Hindus and to subvert the meanings of the usages of the term as well. The gendered structures of the religion and culture in the present form of Hinduism nowadays could be reflexively traced in the increasing religious fundamentalism as a political agenda visible in the social life in India. Foucault describes religion as a political force, in the discussion about religion and politics in the West,²³ which may seem to be true for the present religious situations in India as well.

Every religion has got some particular idea as its corner stone. For example, the religion in Ancient Egypt is around death, Persia around the mystery of Good and Evil, Christianity around the redeeming love of divine incarnation.²⁴ Like this way, Hinduism in India is said to be aiming at the heights of *Vairagya* (non-attachment) and *Moksha* (liberation). *Atmalabha* (self-realization) is the summum bonum of Hinduism as per some interpretation.²⁵ Hinduism is also taken as a misnomer for a religion that has no name nor a prophet nor a single authority to swear by.²⁶ It is described as neither fatalism nor pessimism, neither asceticism nor quietism, neither agnosticism nor pantheism, neither illusionism nor polytheism.²⁷ Then we have to see the view, the main feature of Hinduism is the ideology of *sanatana dharma* which means eternal order.²⁸

There are opinions that it is not fundamentalist or sectarian to keep an order and it is the only way to eliminate chaos in the life.²⁹ Even though it doesn't promote any religious fundamentalism, there are unaddressed questions about the *sanatana dharma* the Hinduism put forward. Who are the people supposed to maintain the order in the world and life, by following the doctrine of *santana dharma*, is a problem to be deeply analyzed. This also tags on the issue how the order is destroyed so that there should be some people to make it up and maintain. All such issues are ostensive to women, putting that they are by nature chaotic, and men are supposed to order the women's lives and thus fulfill the great duty of retaining the eternal order. Almost all social theorists considered 'woman as permanently subversive force within the order', as Rousseau said. Woman has been considered as a threat for social and political order through out the mainstream socio-political history. Both Eastern and Western thinkers propagated the idea that women are 'in opposition to civilization' as Freud said in his book 'Civilization and its Discontents'. There are enough evidences to argue that the civilization promoted by

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, 'The origin of Heresy in Hindu Mythology', *History of Religions*, Vol.10, 1970, p.271

²² Kapoor, Subodh (Ed). *The Systems of Indian Philosophy*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p.277

²³ Carrette, Jeremy R. (Ed.) *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault*, Manchester University Press, UK, 199, p.107

²⁴ Sister Nivedita (Margaret E. Noble), *Religion and Dharma*, Longman, Green and Co. London, 1915, p.1

²⁵ Naganathan, G. *Spirituality: Hindu Scriptural Perspectives*, New Age Books, New Delhi, 2004, p.29

²⁶ Ibid., p.1

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., see back cover.

Hinduism, no matter in any of its varied versions, conceptualized women as some creatures to be controlled by men who are the authority to sustain the ordered civilizations. Some verses from *Manu-Smṛti* are the best referential in this occasion. For example, the eleventh verse of ninth chapter speaks of the way in which the life of the woman should be ordered by their men.

*Arthasyasamgrahachainamvyayechaivaniyojayeth
Sauchedharme/nnapanktyamchaparinahyasyavekshane (IX: 11)*

That means the women 'should be (may be) employed' (*niyojayeth*) in taking care of the wealth of her husband and the expenditure of it. And she should be employed in the activities such as keeping cleanliness of the people at home, cooking for them and looking after the furniture. This is really provocative for any gender sensitive study, as it is strictly regulating the woman's life and ordering her activities in the day-to-day life. Though the usage *niyojayeth* leaves the semantic freedom to see the meaning as 'should be' or 'may be' employed, the idea that 'someone else would employ her' is the surplus meaning derived from this, and that would be the men according to other related verses. Moreover this has the broad meaning that the woman could be transgressing if their life is not ordered in this way. This fact is literally advocated in a following verse. The fifteenth verse of the same chapter talks about the innate fickleness of women to transgress against their husbands out of erotic fancies, though they are well protected (IX: 15).

According to Pandita Ramabai, *Manu-Smṛti* is one of the best examples for scriptural attempt to make women hateful beings in the eyes of the world. Her conversion testimony stressed that 'there were only two things on which all the *Dharmasastras*, the sacred epics, the *Puranas*, and the modern poets, the popular preachers of the present day and orthodox high-caste men, were agreed. That is, women of high and low caste were bad, worse than demons, unholy that they could not get *Moksha* as men could'.³⁰ In spite of her initial acceptance of most assumptions of Hindu nationalism,³¹ she finds the core of Hinduism as fundamentally patriarchal. It is evidential from the eighteenth verse of ninth chapter in *Manu-Smṛti* that authenticates the point saying that the women are deprived of *mantras* (*nastistreenamkriyamantrairiti dharma vyavasthithi*) and so that they are not supposed to do religious duties. They are apparently appeared in the textual reference such as they can attain *moksha* by fulfilling the duties to the husband as suggested in the following verse.

*Nastistreenamprthagyajnonavratamnapyuposhanam
Patimsusrooshateyenatenasvargemaheeyate (V: 155)*

[A wife has no other religious rite of vow of her own than an unflinching devotion to her lord, whereby she will be glorified in heaven (Sharma, ed., 1998:254)]

Verse 146 of fifth chapter uses the term '*streedharmam*' to preach about the duties of women. But the duties described in the verses from 146-166 are just the duties at home and towards her husband (V: 146-166). Tarabai Shinde who wrote '*stri-purusha Tulana*' (comparison of women and men) in 1882 attacked the whole pattern of life laid out for women by Hinduism and its scriptures.³² She

³⁰ Omvedt, Gail. *Dalit Visions, Tracts or the Times/8*, p.27. See, *Dalit Visions : The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity*, Reprint. New Delhi, Orient Longman, 2006

³¹ Ibid. Ramabai and Tarabai who were living in the nineteenth century had raised their voices against what Partha Chatterjee has described as the 'nationalist resolution of women's question'.

Also see,

De Lamotte, Eugenia., Meeker, Natania., O'Barr, Jean. (eds.) *Women Imagine Change: A Global Anthology of Women's Resistance; From 600 BC to Present*, Routledge, New York, 1997

³² Ibid. Tarabai was concerned about the atrocities against women and she raised voice against widows being blamed for trying to dispose their babies etc. Also see, Susie Taru and K. Latha, 'Tarabai Shinde', De Lamotte, Eugenia., Meeker,

raised the question in public what is the *stri-dharma*. She thought the *dharma* which is mere devotion to a single husband behaving according to his whims is nonsense and she screamed out various reasons for breaking the model of '*pativrata*'. Although '*Stri-purushaTulana*' is not a reasoned critique of the Hindu scriptures, it is a satirical attack on them in a language of familiarity.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata were also a part of the lives of the majority but according to some views this did not necessarily make them part of a religion, as was made out by religious spokesmen.³³ When Hindu nationalists began to turn such texts into 'scriptures', women like Tarabai and Ramabai had to show aggression, to find a different direction for the discussions on woman based on ancient texts. Although the recent scholar MeeraKosambi thinks it is hard to deal with that feminism,³⁴ Tarabai and Ramabai could be considered as the powerful critics of early feminism in India who fought against the concepts of *pativrata* which standardizes the role, identity and sexuality of a woman by legitimizing the misogynist family structure.

CASTE AND GENDER HEGEMONIES

In a discussion around Religion and Politics, it is impossible to keep silence about Caste. Caste and Class have been ever present in the modernized Indian society formed after the long process of social sorting. The construction and representation of third world woman has been under discussion by various scholars in the sense that it has been reinforced by modernization process.³⁵ One could easily derive an idea that the caste system prevailing in India at present might have had a reference from *Manu-Smrti*'s *schaturvarnya* concept though it was positively interpreted as a system according to the job assignments. According to Romila Thaper, in the Indian situation the *varna*-based lineage society gave a shape and form to caste structure and the *varna* system has played a vital role in the social stratifications.³⁶ Then the lineage elements that structure the family and the woman's subordination in it would have greatly influenced by the text *Manu-Smrti*. In this sense it has laid down the base for a hierarchical social structure in terms of caste, class and gender.

Subordination of woman is a common feature of almost all stages of history, and is prevalent in large parts of the world. Uma Chakravarti says, the general subordination of women assumed a particularly severe form in India through the powerful instrument of religious traditions which have shaped social practices.³⁷ She puts it as a marked feature of Hindu society that its legal sanction for extreme expression of social stratification in which women and the lower castes had been subjected to humiliating conditions of existence. Her opinion strengthens the conviction that caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organizing principles of *brahmanical* social order created or propagated by texts like *Manu-Smrti*. She reminds about the limited focus that has left a major lacuna in our understanding of social processes which have shaped men, women and social institutions in early India.³⁸ Her article is the best reference to argue that the basis of the conceptualization of woman as a subordinate being, and the foundation of gender-power-relations in the social institution family should be traced back to the early Indian society. Family and the household, being the conceptual and

Natania., O'Barr, Jean. (eds.) *Women Imagine Change: A Global Anthology of Women's Resistance; From 600 BC to Present*, Vol. I, 221-223, Routledge, New York, 1997

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See, Chaudhuri, Maitrayee. Ed. *Feminism in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2004, p.xiii,xiv

Also see, Kosambi, 2000, p.27

³⁵ See, Marchand, Marianne H., Parpart, Jan L. Ed., *Woman and Place: Feminism, Post-modernism and Development*, Routledge, NY, 1995

³⁶ Thaper, Romila. *From Lineage to State*, Oxford University Press, 1984, p.18

³⁷ Chakravarty, Uma. 'Conceptualizing Brahminical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Class, Caste and State' *Economic and Political Weekly*. 28, No.14 April 3, 1993, p.579

³⁸ Ibid.

architectural spaces from where people get the first lessons of power relations are running basically with a male politics. May be the nature of exercising power would be different according to the class and caste to which the families belong to. But the negotiation of women to the power structures has becomes ever stronger with the discourse produced by the textual concepts, as power is inscribed in every relationship. And the patriarchal form of family model of *Manu-Smrti*, reflected in the present society entails the negotiating attempts of women as patriarchy is fundamentally about power relations. In patriarchy, women's interests are subordinated to that of men and which has been probed by feminist theorists.³⁹ Power is the politics of everyday life,⁴⁰ and it is exercised in social institutions including family, to maintain woman's subjugation.

Caste is a strong arena of power politics and that also is connected to the gender inequality. The social stratification in India has situated women as the points of entrance into the caste system as Uma Chakravari said.⁴¹ She explains this in terms of the regulation of sexuality of women. The lower caste male whose sexuality is a threat to upper caste purity is conceived as something that has to be institutionally prevented from sexual access to women of the higher castes.⁴² At the same time according to *Manu-Smrti's* reference, the higher caste men are allowed to have sex or marry with a lower caste woman if needed (see, III: 43,44 , speaking about the conditions of such inter-caste marriages). And this is akin to the fear of black male priapism and the converse exploitation of black women to service their masters, which was integral to slave society in the American South in nineteenth century. In apartheid South Africa as well, mixed marriage was prohibited by law.⁴³ The anxiety about their sexuality is the reason for women are suggested to be carefully protected by her family men. This is proposed clearly in the verses of *Manu-Smrti*, saying, the female should be protected by her father in her adolescence, by her husband in her youth and by the son in her old age (IX:3). Dr. Ambedkar's argument that the untouchables also had the same culture of Hindu community,⁴⁴ verifies the fact that this kind of textual authority was followed not only by the upper caste but by the lower caste people as well. So the cultural tendency to control women's freedom was irrespective of caste/class status in the Indian context, though the modes of control differ. The entire working of caste/class power, in the contemporary society has something in relation with the oppression of women as the subaltern, which is being addressed by feminist political movements in Indian region.

FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS: POLITICAL AND THEORETICAL

The constitutional equality that Indian women and women in many other countries enjoy today is the result of the political struggles by feminist women in the West, according to Ilina Sen.⁴⁵ Though it is a point of debate, it is true that the women in India were silent and passive by the cultural control for long time. Though there are many feminist attempts in India by the mid-twentieth century, the women in colonial period and earlier were under patriarchal powers. One can see the migration of Pandita Ramabai during the colonial period as one strategy to rebel against the religion that subordinated and tortured women in India. It could be drawn as a political step though it involved religious conversion, instead of transcending religion.

³⁹Weeden, C. *Feminist Practice and Post-structuralist Theory*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1987

Stewart R. Clegg, *Frameworks of Power*, Sage Publications, London, 1989

⁴⁰ Stewart R. Clegg, *Frameworks of Power*, Sage Publications, London, 1989, p.150

⁴¹Chakravarty, Uma. 'Conceptualizing Brahminical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Class, Caste and State' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28, No.14 April 3, 1993, p.579

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Weeds, Jeffrey. *Sexuality*, Ellis Horwood-Tavistock Publication, 1986, p.39

⁴⁴ Ambedkar, B.R. *Essays on Untouchables and Untouchability*, Book-II-Social, in Vasant Moon (Compiled), Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol.5, Education Department, Govt. of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 1989, p.133

⁴⁵ Menon, Nivedita. Ed. *Gender and Politics in India*, OUP, New Delhi, 1999, p.371

The situation of women in the West was also not under any egalitarian concepts. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries women in Europe, Britain and America faced blatant discrimination in wages, employment, education and they had to fight even for the voting right and legal equality.⁴⁶ This fact shows to what extent women were subordinated worldwide, because of the power being invested in the men folks. Any ideologies that have come during eras to fight against oppressions have never solved the woman's issues properly. An idea of a new democracy has been proposed by feminist politics raising the need for the conceptions of freedom, equality and alliance informed by a variety of political and philosophical sources.⁴⁷ A catalogue of feminist practices of the past two decades would include entries of black, cultural, ecological, lesbian, liberal, materialist, socialist and third-world politics. And deconstructive, psychoanalytic, semiotic feminisms along with the Foucauldian, Lacanian and Marxist feminisms,⁴⁸ have interrogated into the existing phallogocentric power structure and the politics behind it.

The feminists have problematized the Marxian class concept and methodology that has deeply influenced the social stratification analysis. The gendered division of labour forming the power structure was an issue addressed by feminist during this time. It is evidential that in spite of all other social changes happened in the caste division of labour proposed by the *Manu-Smriti*, the gender division of labour prevalent in the present Indian society reflects the same textual ideas. This issue about the structure and function of family has been addressed by feminist politics with a critique of Marxian views of labour and labourer. VimalRanadive criticizes feminists for making the question of women's 'unpaid labour at the house' as an issue and finds their attempts to ascribe value to it as absurd.⁴⁹ Though there are such views that won't find any meaning in feminist discourse, sensitive explorations into these matters occurred in social thought. The most insightful arguments of this issue from within the socialist tradition are found in the works of Alexandra Kollantai. She goes a step further and view the 'double-labour' concept extended as if 'triple insupportable burden'- that are of a wage-worker, housekeeper and mother.⁵⁰ The woman of our family model is expected to do all these three jobs at once. Given the sacramental relationship of women with house work and domestic labour, to what extent public productive labour liberates her with some power and to what extent it crushes her further, is really an open question to be deciphered.⁵¹ These type of problems has to be addressed within the context of the political economy of women's reproductive and domestic labour.⁵² The patriarchal monogamous family has traditionally been the most important site for women's domestic labour and reproductive labour for reasons related to norms of descent and transmission of inheritance through the male line.⁵³ These sites are often organized on class and caste lines and so the political challenges to oppressive forms of caste, class and gender often overlaps. Unlike in the West, the numerous religions and castes in India control women, making a woman's freedom and identity a complex issue on various levels. It has been a constant subject of feminist discussions and has been addressed by autonomous women's groups.⁵⁴ The interference of various factors such as religion, caste, class and politics has been a mainstream discussion in Indian society nowadays. Indian feminism discussed it in depth and the issues of religion and related cultural influences are still to be pursued.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Dean, Jodi. *Feminism and the New Democracy*, Sag Publications, London, 1997, p.3

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.146

⁴⁹ Menon, Nivedita. Ed. *Gender and Politics in India*, OUP, New Delhi, 1999 p.375

⁵⁰ See Ibid. Also see Kollantai, A., *Communism and the Family*, Bookmarks, London, 1984.

⁵¹ See Ibid., p.376

⁵² Tapan, Meenakshi. Ed. *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, 245-47

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Subrahmanian, Maya (2019). Autonomous Women's Movement in Kerala: Historiography. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 20(2), 1-10.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Indian culture has a lot to do with the Hindu religion and it controls the women's lives enormously. If politics involve religion is still a complex question to be addressed in terms of analyzing activism by people like Ramabai who converted from Hinduism to Christianity. Even in the present context the enormous influence of *brahmanical* patriarchy in the social stratification in India, is a noticeable background for the political moves against gendered oppressions. Segmentation is the basis of patriarchal socialism or capitalism- separation of women and men, of theory and practice, of learning and working, of experience and belief, of production and product, of means and ends, of mind and body, of race, of class, of age, and , interestingly enough of religion and government.⁵⁵ The integration and recognition of relationship between all these could be the basis for the sanity and power of feminism.⁵⁶ Integration of self-change and institutional change is the revolutionary practice to tackle with the hierarchies within the religion, caste, class and gender paradigms. Some recent feminists suggest that the task of our age is to draw on our spiritual heritage and through re-establishing our collective female consciousness, to develop a way of life which doesn't need hierarchy at its base. According to them, this kind of a politics of feminist spirituality assumes to free our minds and our bodies from our cultural restrictions as well as legal restrictions.⁵⁷ At the same time conscious social action and activist research, based on critical reflections on ancient texts of religion could be a solution for favourable social change.

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⁵⁵ Spretnak, Charlene, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement*, Anchor Press, USA, 1982, p.382

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See Ibid., p.385 for this idea.

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