

THE STATUS OF INDIAN WOMEN AND MANUSMIRITI

--- Mr. Krishnan Nandela

MANUSMRITI ON WOMEN

Chapter IX of Manusmiriti deals with the Eternal Laws for Husband and Wife. There are in all 336 verses in this Chapter which describes women in abysmally lowly words. While a great part of this body of laws are hateful and deserves to be immediately expunged, I will quote here only a few which I feel have contributed to the lowly status of women in India.

Verse: 2.

Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control. *Undoubtedly, Manu was the architect of women's degradation in Indian society.*

Verse: 3.

Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; **a woman is never fit for independence.** *If the women in India remained dependent over more than two millennia, it was clearly because of the stranglehold of Manu's ideas on the Indian society. Like men, women are also born free but the Indian women remained chained even in her mother's womb.*

Verse: 5.

Women must particularly be guarded against evil inclinations, however trifling (they may appear); for, if they are not guarded, **they will bring sorrow on two families.** *The evil inclinations here are nothing but her assumed tendency of being an ogress.*

Verse: 11.

Let the (husband) employ his (wife) in the collection and expenditure of his wealth, in keeping (everything) clean, in (the fulfillment of) religious duties, in the preparation of his food, and in looking after the household utensils. *With this cardinal law of Manu, I don't see any reason for the modern women to be proud of herself as the being the house wife now euphemistically known as the **Home maker**. To be a home maker or a house wife is a matter of choice but when this station is imposed on a woman after her marriage or even before when she is not allowed to earn her living, the reason is clearly found in Manusmriti.*

Verse: 14.

Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age; (thinking), '(It is enough that he is a man,' **they give themselves to the handsome and to the ugly.** *Women have been compared to **ogresses** and hence they were condemned to remain in perennial confinement. The veil and the watchful eyes of men were all over prying over the women in the Aryavarta and more particularly in the Arabvarta. Women in the veil must be scoffing at the foolishness of men for the veil gave her complete independence to pry over everything without being noticed. Perhaps, this freedom of observation caused her to accept the veil without any protest.*

Verse: 15.

Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, **they become disloyal towards their husbands**, however carefully they may be guarded in this (world). *How can you have a disloyal woman without a disloyal man and vice versa? Is sexual loyalty or fidelity a virtue? Is there confusion between loyalty to sex and sexual loyalty? Can sex, which is ephemeral and temporal can ever be superior to love that is perennial and spiritual? Sexual fidelity may be considered a virtue when you have the right to commit the so called vice. In its absence, it is no fidelity but being servile to her master's voice.*

Verse: 17.

(When creating them) Manu allotted to women (a love of their) bed, (of their) seat and (of) ornament, **impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice, and bad conduct**. *With the twice born men having more than one woman as wives and with the availability of the shudra men and women to perform the household chores, the women of the yore had very little to do. Empty headedness is the cause of all evils. Here confinement and empty headedness are the causes and love of bed, seat, ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct are the consequences. The cause and the consequence become mutually complementary. If men were to be reduced to the status of the traditional women, they would also be predisposed to these so called vices. Further, only men who are sexually obsessed with women can only imagine such characteristics and clearly Manu and his ilk were obsessed with women.*

Verse: 18.

For women no (sacramental) rite (is performed) with sacred texts, thus the law is settled; **women (who are) destitute of strength and destitute of (the knowledge of) Vedic texts, (are as impure as) falsehood (itself), that is a fixed rule**. *Women assume the caste of the man she*

marries or the father whose seed is fructified in her being. She has no caste of her own and bears no caste identities on her person.

Verse: 33.

By the sacred tradition **the woman** is declared to be **the soil**, **the man** is declared to be **the seed**; the production of all corporeal beings (takes place) through the union of the soil with the seed.

Verse: 35.

On comparing the seed and the receptacle (of the seed), **the seed is declared to be more important; for the offspring of all created beings is marked by the characteristics of the seed.** *Neither Manu and perhaps nor even the Mahatma were aware that the Earth (Woman) was not only a fertile field but also contributed the seed and that the germination of life was the result of the union of the two seeds (sperm and the egg) and that the offspring of all created beings is marked by the characteristics of the seed and the egg.*

Verse: 81. A barren wife may be superseded in the eighth year, she whose children (all) die in the tenth, she who bears only daughters in the eleventh, **but she who is quarrelsome without delay.** *The fear of the second wife and the mortal fear of banishment are instilled in the psyche of the average Indian women from the times of Manu and may be even before.*

Verse: 94.

A man, aged thirty years, shall marry a maiden of twelve who pleases him, or a man of twenty-four a girl eight years of age; if (the performance of) his duties would (otherwise) be impeded, (he must marry) sooner. *The difference here is 18 and 16 years between husband and wife. The secondary status of women is therefore cast in iron and hence immutable unless of course if the cast itself is broken.*

Verse: 104.

After the death of the father and of the mother, the brothers, being assembled, may divide among themselves in equal shares the paternal (and the maternal) estate; for, they have no power (over it) while the parents live. *The women is thus shorn off of all material possessions and made a dependent both before and after her marriage.*

Reference:

The Laws of Manu (Manusmriti) translated by George Buhler (1886) at www.sacred-text.com.

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