

Dr. Ambedkar's Exposition of the Subjugation and Oppression of Women caused by Manusmriti In 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India'

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The place and status of today's women is nothing but the result of an incessant and seminal work of some of the greatest social reformers in the world, like Mahatma Fule, Raja Rammohan Roy and the giant, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The miserable plight and exploitation of the women in general in India had been such that no description can give it enough justice and words may also fall short. The women's status in society in pre-independence India was parallel with or a little closer to that of the Untouchables. And all this was only due to the tyrannical inhibitions and perpetuated regulations imposed upon them by the Brahmins and their religious or holy books. A plethora of saints and sages, apart from 330 million Gods of Hindus, took birth in this soil and many strove a little or more for their rights and prerogatives. But to our dismay, nothing could bring them out of the infernal dungeon of Hindu convictions they were subjected to suffer in. As Dr. Ambedkar says in regard to the untouchables that none of these saints could do more than preaching lessons and talking religion, and none of them was able to restore the rights of the untouchables, the same can be said to have done by them for women in India. The Indian woman has always been considered a stuff of indulgence by both the Brahmins and the Hindu scriptures and she also took pride in strengthening the fetters of her own slavery. For thousands of years the humiliatory treatment of woman in this country went on, but no High-caste person felt sympathy for them, nor even the Almighty Gods and Goddesses they worshiped could think in a humanistic way about them and stop the oppression and tyranny that the Indian Woman was suffering through. However, only a human can come to human's help and two such great men came to their rescue to whom we know as Mahatma Fule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, who took the cudgels on behalf of women in their erudite hands and broke the age-old shackles off the Indian women with great strokes of logical deliberations.

The present paper attempts to cast some reflections on the exposition of the inhuman treatment of women by Brahmins and the base approach towards women as propounded and propagated by 'Manusmriti'- the holy book of Hindus. It primarily takes into consideration the Hindu scripture 'Manusmriti' which was the constitution of Hindu people till recent times, and the unjustifiable laws against woman that had made their life utterly miserable and which were revealed by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in his seminal book 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution'.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar knew that the Hindu Scripture 'Mausmriti' was deliberately designed and created by the Brahmins who wanted to keep hold upon all the other Varnas, and hence they wrote it in such a way that Brahmin would be reverd as 'the Lords of the Land' and thus their status above the Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras would naturally and automatically be

taken to be granted by all. Dr. Ambedkar knew that it has constitutional status in ancient India till recent times and was followed adheredly by all the castes and Varnas. This very practice of the laws of Manu was responsible for the Varnashrama and the suppression and oppression of the Shudras and Women together. Dr. Ambedkar knew this and hence decided to burn this Volumn of tyrannic rules-Manusmruti.

While revealing how Brahmin perpetuated their own status and prerogatives over others by making themselves as Earthgods, Dr. Ambedkar calls Manusmruti as “a fraud to deceive people” and exposes how tyrannic and suppressive laws had been imposed by Manu on both the Indian woman. He reveals that, “the origin and purpose of the revolution by Pushyamitra against the Mauryas was to destroy Buddhism and establish Brahmanism is evidenced by the promulgation of Manu Smriti as a code of laws”(Rev.104). He exposes this book of frauds in many respects.

1) The Base Opinion of Manu about Woman:

Dr. Ambedkar attacks the base opinion of Manu in his book of laws about woman in general and strikes his first stroke at it. He reveals in his research work biased and prejudiced view was propagated by this book by citing examples from it:

Manu can hardly be said to be more tender to women than he was to the Shudra. He starts with a low opinion of women. Manu proclaims :

II. 213. It is the nature of women to seduce men in this (world): for that reason the wise are never unguarded in (the company of) females.

II. 214. For women are able to lead astray in (this) world not only a fool, but even a learned man, and (to make) him a slave of desire and anger.

II. 215. One should not sit in a lonely place with one's mother, sister or daughter; for the senses are powerful, and master even a learned man.

IX. 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.

IX. 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).

IX. 16. Knowing their disposition, which the Lord of creatures laid in them at the creation, to be such, (every) man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them.

IX. 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. (Rev. 238)

Here is an example of what a Brahmin thinks about a woman in general, that she is the most disloyal creature ever, she is meant only for seduction of men and she should be guarded always

by men. These are the kind of views that we find perpetuated in society as well which denies every freedom to woman.

2) Laws that Fortified Patriarchy:

One of the most degrading elements for the women in Manusmruti was its making the patriarchic laws general and compulsory to each and everyone in India and thus causing the isolation of woman from all the social activities that need a certain amount of freedom. The kind of patriarchy we observe in India is a malpractice spread by Brahmins for their own pleasure and indulgences. Dr. Ambedkar reveals this as:

I refer to the laws contained in the Code of Manu regarding marriage of girls and the life of widows.

See the law that Manu promulgates regarding the marriage of females.

IX. 4. Reprehensible is the father who gives not (his daughter) in marriage at the proper time.

IX. 88. To a distinguished, handsome suitor of equal caste should a father give his daughter in accordance with the prescribed rule, though she has not attained (the proper age), i.e. although she may not have reached puberty.

Here, Manu propounds that a girl who hasn't even reached her puberty should be married in her childhood days which is also a direct acceptance of the Child-Marriage of the girls. Dr. Ambedkar says, "By this rule Manu enjoins that a girl should be married even though she may not have reached the age of puberty i.e. even when she is a child." (Rev. 126)

Further, he goes on to reveal the inhuman laws imposed upon the Widows. Because of all these mal-practices, the Child-marriage had become common in India and the girls who have lost their husbands soon after the marriage, had to lead a lonely and isolated life though most of them were still young. Dr. Ambedkar reveals how such unjustifiable laws had been imposed on women:

Now with regard to widows Manu promulgates the following rule.

V. 157. At her pleasure let her (i.e. widow) emaciate her body, by living voluntarily on pure flowers, roots and fruits ; but let her not, when her lord is deceased, even pronounce the name of another man.

V. 161. But a widow, who from a wish to bear children, slights her deceased husband by marrying again, brings disgrace on herself here below, and shall be excluded from the seat of her lord (in heaven).

V. 162. Offspring begotten on a woman by any other than her husband, is here declared to be no progeny of hers; no more than a child, begotten on the wife of another man belongs to the begetter; nor is a second husband anywhere prescribed for a virtuous woman.

This is the rule of enforced widowhood for a woman.

This shows how biased attitude Manu promulgated towards widows. The callous inhibitions that were declared for widows to prevent her from re-marriage were exclusive only for her. Manu was left free to marry again and again with any other woman even after the death of his wife. Clearly, this rule was made general in order to fortify the patriarchic attitude of the Brahmin who saw a woman from greedy eyes. Dr. Ambedkar further exposes the ideas of Manu on Sati:

A reference may also be made to Sati or a widow who burns herself on the funeral pyre of her husband and thus puts an end to her life. Manu is silent about it.

86. When deprived of her husband, she must not remain away from her father, mother, son, brother, mother-in-law or from her maternal uncle; otherwise she might become liable to censure. Here again Yajnavalkya does not suggest that a widow become a Sati. But Vijnaneshwar, the author of Mitakshara a commentary on Yajnavalkya Smriti makes the following observation in commenting on the above Sloka.

"This is in the case of the alternative of leading a celibate life vide the text of Vishnu^[75] : "After the death of the husband, either celibacy or ascending the (cremation) pile after him."

Vijnaneshwar adds as his opinion that 'There is great merit in ascending the funeral pyre after him.' (Rev.126)

Thus Manu thinks it unnecessary for a widow to live longer than her deceased husband or even to marry after him. He thinks that it worthwhile for a widow to cremate herself on the pyre of her husband in order to save herself from the impurities or indulgences. This view of Manu has made the lives of millions of widows in India miserable and unbearable. Still few people take pride in worshipping Manu. There dies the spiritualism of India. In the words of Dr. Ambedkar, the true cause of this patriarchy is:

From time immemorial man as compared with woman has had the upper hand. He is a dominant figure in every group and of the two sexes has greater prestige. With this traditional superiority of man over woman his wishes have always been consulted. Woman on the other hand has been an easy prey to all kinds of iniquitous injunctions, religious, social or economic. But man as a maker of injunctions is most often above them all. Such being the case you cannot accord the same kind of treatment to a surplus man as you can to a surplus woman in a Caste." (127-28)

Further, the Brahmin who took Shudra woman as impious and dirty did not feel ashamed of devouring the Shudra woman and brides of other in the name of religion. Dr. Ambedkar exposes this fact about the Brahmins in ancient India in these words:

Ludovico Di Varthema who came to India as a traveller in about 1502 A.D. records the following about the Brahmins of Calicut :

It is an understatement to say that it is only a right to first fruits as the 'right to the first night' was called in the middle ages in Europe. It is more than that. It is a general right of the Brahmin against the lower caste to claim any woman of that class for mere prostitution, for the mere satisfaction of sexual appetite, without burdening the Brahmin to any of the obligations of marriage.(151)

3) Individual and Social Inhibitions:

There are some laws in Manusmruti that directly check freedom of women, whether she is a girl, a woman or a widow. A woman in these laws has been made totally dependent on the male ones, like brother, father, husband or in-laws. Her character has been doubted to be the most uncertain and fickle and through this suspicion she has not even allowed to go beyond the threshold of the house. Dr. Ambedkar reveals these laws:

The laws of Manu against women are of a piece with this view. Women are not to be free under any circumstances. In the opinion of Manu :—

IX. 2. Day and night women 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.

IX. 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.

IX. 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,

IX. 6. Considering that the highest duty of all castes, even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives.

V. 147. By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.

V. 148. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons: a woman must never be independent.

V. 149. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; by leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families contemptible. Woman is not to have a right to divorce.

Manu's law against divorce had a very different motive. It was not to tie up a man to a woman but it was to tie up the woman to a man and to leave the man free. For Manu does not prevent a man from giving up his wife. Indeed he not only allows him to abandon his wife but he also permits him to sell her. But what he does is to prevent the wife from becoming free. See what Manu Says :

IX. 46. Neither by sale nor by repudiation is a wife released from her husband.

The meaning is that a wife, sold or repudiated by her husband, can never become the legitimate wife of another who may have bought or received her after she was repudiated. If

this is not monstrous nothing can be. But Manu was not worried by considerations of justice or injustice of his laws. He wanted to deprive women of the freedom she had under the Buddhistic regime. He knew, by her misuse of her liberty, by her willingness to marry the Shudra that the system of the gradation of the Varna had been destroyed. Manu was outraged by her license and in putting a stop to it he deprived her of her liberty.

Thus Dr. Ambedkar with his unrelenting logics put up all the curtains over these age old practices consolidated in society by Manu. This injustice and inhuman treatment to woman was given in India till Dr. Ambedkar did not established new human laws in India through his Constitution.

4) Woman Reduced to Slave or a Parasite:

There is no other country and no other society in the history of mankind where the mother of all mankind has been so reduced to a mere slave and all the kinds of tyrannical injunction have been decreed against her. The decrepit and pitiful condition of the Indian woman, who was denied even the commonest rights of education and employment, was a natural corollary of the unjust and monstrous laws prevailed in society by Manu. Dr. Ambedkar directs his censure at these laws:

A wife was reduced by Manu to the level of a slave in the matter of property.

IX. 146. A wife, a son, and a slave, these three are declared to have no property, the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong.

When she becomes a widow Manu allows her maintenance if her husband was joint and a widow's estate in the property of her husband if he was separate from his family. But Manu never allows her to have any dominion over property.

A woman under the laws of Manu is subject to corporal punishment and Manu allows the husband the right to beat his wife.

VIII. 299. A wife, a son, a slave, a pupil, and a younger brother of the full blood, who have committed faults, may be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo.

In other matters woman was reduced by Manu to the same position as the Shudra.

Thus a woman who had golden days in Buddhist regime, had been reduced to mere a slave or a parasite dependent upon others. An atmosphere has been created to generate malice and suspicion against woman which will result in the decomposed condition of woman in society. No dignified task was allotted to her, nor any dignified status was given to her in Hindu society, though she was worshipped in form of Goddesses. This is the paradox of Hindu, or in other words Brahmin, society that has never been recognized and understood before Babasaheb Ambedkar that has plagued the whole Hindu Community.

5) Forbidden to Education, Chanting of Vedas and Performing Sacrifices:

It is quite surprising that the society which revere woman in form of Goddesses should prohibit even a necessary education or learning outside home. This happened because all the

education was confined to the male Brahmins who wanted to keep their right to Vedas intact and their monopoly undisturbed. They knew that as long as the women, Shudras and other unprivileged classes remain illiterate and poor, their authority will remain unquestionable and secure and will last longer. Hence, they propagated such laws through Manusmriti that impinged upon the people's minds that education is their exclusive right and no other class or woman has been privileged to have it. Dr. Ambedkar exposes it in this way:

The study of the Veda was forbidden to her by Manu as it was to the Shudra.

II. 66. Even for a woman the performance of the *Sanskaras* are necessary and they should be performed. But they should be performed without uttering the Veda Mantras.

IX. 18. Women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their Sanskars are performed without Veda Mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas. The uttering of the Veda Mantras is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the Veda Mantras they are as unclean as untruth is.(143)

This the Hindus regard as a very lofty ideal for a woman!!! The severity of these laws against Shudras and women show that the phenomenal rise of these classes during the Buddhist regime had not only offended the Brahmins but had become intolerable to them. It was a complete reversal of their sacred social order from top to bottom. The first had become last and the last had become first. The laws of Manu also explain, the determined way in which the Brahmins proceeded to use their political power to degrade the Shudras and the women to their old status.(150)

All the religious and sacred activities were also forbidden to a woman, because she was considered unintelligent creature good only for household chores and pleasure of man. This becomes clear from:

Offering sacrifices according to Brahmanism formed the very soul of religion. Yet Manu will not allow women to perform them. Manu ordains that :

XI. 36. A woman shall not perform the daily sacrifices prescribed by the Vedas.

XI, 37, If she does it she will go to hell.

To disable her from performing such sacrifices Manu prevents her from getting the aid and services of a Brahmin priest.

IV. 205. A Brahman must never eat food given at a sacrifice performed by a woman.

IV. 206. Sacrifices performed by women are inauspicious and not acceptable to God. They should therefore be avoided. Woman was not to have any intellectual pursuits nor free will, nor freedom of thought. She was not to join any heretical sect such as Buddhism. If she continues to adhere to it till death she is not to be given the libation of water as is done in the case of all dead.

Finally a word regarding the ideal of life, Manu has sought to place before a woman. It had better be stated in his own words :

V. 151. Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives and when he is dead, she must not insult his memory.

V. 154. Though destitute or virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.

V. 155. No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women, apart from their husbands; if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven. Then comes the choicest texts which form the pith and the marrow of this ideal which Manu prescribes for women:

V. 153. The husband who wedded her with sacred Mantras, is always a source of happiness to his wife, both in season and out of season, in this world and in the next.

V. 150. She must always be cheerful, clever in the management of her household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils, and economical in expenditure.

Thus, the culture of supposing the Indian woman incapable of doing anything and witless animal has been created by handful of selfish and cunning Brahmins through 'Manusmruti' which soon became the code of conduct in India after the Counter-Revolution of Pushyamitra against Buddhism in nearly about 185 B.C. the condition of woman in Buddhist period was most favourable and the status of woman had also reached a dignified level. This was a intolerable for Brahmin who always saw woman as inferior and a thing of indulgence and thus after revolution of Pushyamitra, they formed such laws and rules for society that created the darkest history of India.

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