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Position of Women in Manusamhita

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Abstract

Manusamhita is well known as a book of laws and orders which were usually followed during the post Vedic era in the ancient Indian society. It was composed by Manu during 400 BC to 400 AD reflecting not only the status of society but also the status of women in that erstwhile classed society. Then the women were the victim of the existing crude castism, gender bias and mastery of male community. They were treated as second class or inferior peoples of society in every stages of their life and were dominated by the father, husband, son and other males of the society. The present paper deals with the status of women in the society during that period.

Keywords: Manusamhita, Castism, Gender bias, Post-Vedic era

Article

The era of Manu has been supposed to be started just after the Vedic era although it could be thought that it was written during 400 BC to 400 AD. And, gradually it became the most important book of law and order of the ancient Indian society. Manu, the composer of Manusamhita, was the forward generation of God Brahma and Brahma forwarded the rules and regulations to his next generation through the process of sruti (hearing). And, the risi as well as Manu carried forward the Brahma's sruti in the way of smriti (remembering). So Manu risi was the seer (observer of rules) rather than creator (maker of rules). In this respect it should be noticed that risi of the Vedas who composed Samhita were popular yet the most popular was Manu's Samhita in the later period undoubtedly.

Afterward the Vedic era the women position in the social order to family unit was also very pitiable. Women could not work without restraint out of the margin of her dwelling (5|147). As well as the feminine was under her father all through maiden and was under her husband throughout her marital life and was under her son during her old age (9|3). Service for one's husband was the chief blessed work of a lady and that work was similar with *brahma-caryasrama* or *gurugriha* (in the house of one's teacher or *guru*) (2|66). Separate oblation or *yajna*, vow or *brata*, fast or *uposva* were completely absent for women (5|155). In case of law and order, a woman's evidence was not permissible or accepted apart from only in case of a further woman's tryout (8|68). They could argue only for obtaining the gifts those had obtained from their marriages (8|416). Widows were present in that world to prove the absence of *sahamaraṇa* or dying together with the dead body of her husband. And, there are other supporting examples were found in *Manusamhita* -- widows will take the sacred fruits (5|157) and widows will spend their time in *Brahmacarya* (5|160) etc.

The social condition of *sudra* women was so deprived that if a *brahmana* created any conjugal relation with a *sudra* lady then the status of *brahmana* became deteriorated (3|17). Even if *brahmana* inhaled the breathed out air of a *sudra* or gives a child in the womb or *garbha* of a *sudra* lady then that was to be treated as sin and he could not be forgiven for this incident (3|19). Mother gives births yet her status was not held high in the society. During later *Vedic* society the birth of *brahmana*, *ksatriya*, *vaisya* occurred twice: first during his birth and other during the *upanayana* festival or *upanayana* (2|169). So from this, a clear picture is portrayed to us i.e. the actual mother has less important than the social customs i.e.; *Upanayana* during later *Vedic* era. Even the exposure of female face was prohibited (2|179). To identify the level of female status in society another example can be sighted here -- with the devotion to one's mother people can achieve the present world, with the devotion to one's father; people can achieve middle world or *madhyam-loka* but with the devotion to *guru* he can achieve *brahma-loka* or source of universe (2|233). Females were allowed to take meal only after eating of the male members and all the guests (3|11); so from this we see the status of female in society. The name of female was taken parallel to dogs, pigs and *sudra* (3|239). A lady after the birth of her child, was similar with the *candals*, dead bodies and menses females (5|85).

By a girl, by a young woman or even by an aged one, nil must be done autonomously still in her own house (5|147). In infancy a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her husband was dead -- to her sons; a lady

must not at all be independent (5|148). Females might not think about separation from her father, husband or children because it was so disgraceful for her paternal and marital families (5|149) and her nature would have to be cheerful, spotless and inexpensive (5|150).

Him to whom a lady's father might give his daughter or her brother might give his sister with the father's permission, she should obey as long as her husband lived and when he was dead, she must not insult his memory (5|151). For procuring good fortune to brides, the recital of benedictory texts i.e.; *svastyayana* and the sacrifice to the *Pragapati* were performed at wedding. And, the betrothal by the father was the cause of the husband's command over his wife (5|152). The husband, who wedded her with holy texts, always gave pleasure to his wife, both in season and out of season -- in this world and in the next (5|153). If the husband was characterless, lustful and destitute of good quality yet the wife would serve him as her God (5|154) – this was the tradition. They had no the right to participate in any *yajna* but they were supposed to move the heaven due to devoting all the services to her husband (5|155). She did not express anything against her husband not even in his absence (5|156). Even female might not pronounce her husband name (5|157).

They society believed on single minded, discipliner -- *brahmacarini* (5|158). Marriage of a widow was not common then and after the death of her husband the widow might move to obtain the system of *brahmacarya* (5|160). The childless mother might not move to other person to fulfill her maternity (5|161).

Female did not move to another better male even if her husband was in lacking ability (5|163) of wealth, family and culture. They were suppressed under the rules of males for example. If a wife was ditching on her husband then she should be marked as polluted and after her death she would be reborn as jackal (5|164). The female who would serves to her husband with pure heart and mind they were called as *swadhvi* or virtuous women (5|165, 9|29) and her dead body may be cremated with *agni* and *yajna* (5|168). The best performance of the wives during the society of later *Vedic* period was *patiseva* or serving ones husband. Controlled in her speech, body and mind, and by thus faithfully discharging the duties of matrimony, a wife acquired glory in her life and attained the region of her husband, after death. (5|166). People might capture in war females for the king's service it was like winning of wealth, animals etc. (7|96). Maids engaged in the king's service, shall be daily paid their wages at rates varying according to the nature of their posts and services. (7|125).

The king must avoid the women (7|149). Because women in special who disclose the counsels of kings (7|150). Respectful and well-dressed ladies, well-exafined that they do not secrete any weapon or poison in the folds of their garments, shall fan him, and carry his water goblets, and burn fragrant and incense before him (7|219). Having taken his meal, he must sport in the company of the ladies of the seraglio and having reposed a little, he must again pond on the affairs of the state. (7|221).

Again vehicles, sleeping place, setting place, foods, ornaments and aromas were maintained and cared by females in house (7|220). Women are dominated by their husband at all-time (9|2). But females were protected by father at her unmarried stage, by husband during her younger time and by son during old age and this tradition existed in all Varnas (9|3, 9|6).

The feeling of possessiveness by a woman towards her husband was completely prohibited in society and if any female could dare to do then the male would wait for one year for her and after that he will take over all the wealth and stop the sexual relation with that lady (9|77).

Females were mainly engaged in religious works, cooking (9|11) demarcated as adulterated or *byabharini* when the six negative drawbacks were found among them like -- Wine-drinking, evil company, separation from the husband, idle rambling, sleep at the improper time, and residence in another's house. These were the six factors which tend to defile a woman (9|13). Of a wife who slights her husband for his sickness or for his addiction to wine or gambling the husband must forswear the bed for three months, and she must not be allowed to use her beddings and ornaments during that period (9|78). Women have no power to judge the age and beauty of males (9|14). The females were respected and glorified by their husband's superiority (9|23, 24). A lady was not allowed to show her irritation or her anger. To inherit the father's property the females were denied this right during presence of any male. If the father had no sons and the son of the daughter was present then that son would enjoy the right of wealth (9|133,127). The *sudra* woman and her child's standing were too poor in society. If any *brahmana* marry the *sudra* lady in respect of sexual feeling then after the birth of a new baby; he or she has no right on the wealth of his or her *brahmana* father (9|178).

To keep some rights and respect of female, different rules was present during the later *Vedic* society through *Manusamhita*. The people who wished to use the wealth, cloths and vehicles of female slaves that person will move to decent (3|52).

In later *Vedic* society the rule of *jibseva* was tradition among *brahmana* and a belief was that *brahmana* who was maintained it very well, he would move to sacred heaven (3|93). In society unmarried and pregnant lady could access more facility during the time of guest feeding and they were allowed to take meal even before the guests (3|114). That was also the part of humanity of the society. According to *Manu's* law book the *brahmana*, *ksatriya*, and *vaisya* were the three twice-born castes -- the *sudra* is the fourth and there were no sub-castes among *sudras* and there was no fifth caste (10|4). The *brahmana* (who is well versed in the *Vedas*) got the highest rank in Indian religious world and in whole mankind *brahmana* was the greatest for conservation of all matter of religion. So the 'law book of *Manu*' reflects the theme in which the status of *brahmana* caste was reflected in later *Vedic* era relative to other caste.

Where the women i.e.; sisters, daughters, wives, brother's wives etc. in a family become sad then the mankind will be destroyed in very fast and where they don't feel sadness the mankind will improve always (3|57). They were respected in society for their reproductive capacity (9|26) and for this they are called *ksetrabhuta* (9|33). At house the status of wife was parallel to the *sri* or *laksmi* -- the god of wealth (9|26). Females were treated as *ksetrasvarupa* -- field and males were as *vijabhuta* -- seeds and with these two the new life is developed (9|33).

This science was dealt in *Manusamhita*. But among them the status of *seed* was too superior (9|35). If any male was unproductive then that lady was moved to another male for reproduction (9|54) or to her brother in law (9|59). Through this it can be proved that the aspiration or desire of female was controlled by males as well as females. If a lady couldn't give birth of a child then that lady was treated as unproductive, moreover the reproduction capacity of males was ever judged. If the society decided for a widow to birth a child then that widow may be allowed to establish a relationship with the elder or younger brother of her husband (9|63).

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