

ANCIENT HISTORY



According to Smriti tradition of India in about 500 BCE, women's designation is viewed as subservient from birth through their lifetime till death. They depict the society's miniature whose contribution does not count before the eyes of men. The paper outlines the thoughts of Hesiod, Livy, Ban Zhao, and the author of the, *Middle Assyrian Laws* about the, *Laws of Manu* with regard to women's place in society. Apart from the *Laws of Manu*, their thoughts are reflected in the, *Theogony/Works and Days* by Hesiod, *From the Founding of the City* by Livy, *Lessons for Women* by Ban Zhao, and *Middle Assyrian Law*. These literary works that prevailed then are categorical about women's place in the society in regarding their roles to their husband and the society, their privileges, marriage life, lifestyle, women's personality, womanly qualification and personal attributes.

ROLE OF WOMEN TO THEIR HUSBANDS AND THE SOCIETY

In the traditions of Smriti, women are supposed to be highly submissive and extremely loyal to her husband. Smrti (1992), author of the *Laws of Manu* describes the role of woman as entailing worshipping of her husband and never do anything that can displease him. In fact he says that a wife who despises and violates her duty towards her husband is a disgrace in this world and therefore is destined for the womb of the jackal where she is hoped to be tormented by disease.

According to the *Theogony/works and Days*, Hesiod affirms the Smriti belief

that a woman is a present that was given to Epimetheus (man) by Zeus (god). She is a symbol of beauty and an object that brings honor to any man who possesses it. Epimetheus has every right over the woman including deciding her demise. Similar views are reflected in the, *Books from the founding of the city* where a woman is expected to carry herself with honor and dedication to her duties to her husband failure to which she loses her honor.

Apart from that, every woman is to restrain herself from performing any kind of sacrifice or ritual of the community. They are only required to prepare food and wine for libation but not to get involved in the ritual ceremonies. According to Buhler, this means that women are also not recognizable before the eyes of Zeus the god and cannot therefore intercede in any way. Zhao describes three stages that a baby girl goes through immediately after birth. She is first placed under the bed denoting that women are lowly and weak. Therefore they grow up with utmost humility to all people of the society and eventually extend the same total humility to their husbands.

The second stage entails giving a baby girl a potsherd or fragments of pottery to play with. This according to Zhao signifies that women should practice labor and always consider being industrious as their primary duty. Women are therefore required to serve the entire society through different errands whether they are difficult or easy or whether they enjoy doing it or not. They should always retire late to bed and expected to rise early the next day to duty. She is also required to complete all her tasks tidily and systematically. Where she gets offended by other people's behaviors, women should endure and even bear the disgrace. No woman is expected to be nagging her husband as well as other members of the society for whichever reasons (*Middle Assyrian Laws*).

Finally, the family is supposed to announce the birth of the baby girl to her progenitors through an offering. By this ritual women are sworn to esteem the continuation of the observance of worship in the home as their primary duty. The society bestows a myriad of roles on a woman even without considering her humanly nature as a weak sex who should be understood and helped.

WOMEN'S PRIVILEGES

A woman's greatest privilege according to Smṛiti is that they stand high chances of entering heaven to enjoy worth their husbands only on account that they handle themselves gently decent. The woman who is married through recitation of sacred texts by husband enjoys happiness and pleasure given by her husband both in season and out of season, and in this world and even the world to come. A woman is assigned to only one husband both in this world and the next one. Hesiod too describes how Smṛiti traditions view women honorably as beautiful objects which should remain virtuous and pious as not to lose their honor through erroneous behavior that would prevent them from entering the eternal life.

Additionally women have the privilege of earning praises depending on how they respond to the directives from the authorities above them and particularly the men. Livy's 'From the founding of the city' states that downright adherence of the woman to commands from her husband and even from the parents-in-law in case the husband is deceased is the only way that ensure that a woman gets praised. Hesiod on the other hand alluded that the Smṛiti community exalted a woman depending on how she carried herself. This was viewed by women as a great privilege which is rare to come by.

WOMEN'S MARRIAGE LIFE

The marriage of a woman is a dramatic one. The man for who a woman is proposed by her parents remains the bona fide husband of the woman and h is required to marry her formally through reciting the sacred texts. A woman is not supposed to do anything independently behind the back of her husband for that will displease her husband and make her look a disgrace. In case her husband dies, Smrti says that the wife should not remarry instead be self-controlled and stay chaste for that is the most excellent duty which is usually preserved for ladies alone.

Besides a woman is not supposed to cohabit nor bear children after the demise of the husband or if she does she becomes a disgrace and a destitute in the community. Children born out of wedlock are not recognized and the mother risks becoming a Paraptirva, meaning a remarried woman. She and her sons are perceived would enter hell where they would be tormented by disease.

According to Zhao, any woman who becomes adulterous, risks her ears and eyes being chopped off because she would be viewed as a disgrace to the community of Smriti. Men are wholly permitted to scourge, bruise and destroy the ears of an adulterous woman. However in the event that another irresponsible man ravishes a woman, the ravisher shall be obliged by the community to marry the ravished woman as a punishment. Similarly, Zhao says that husband and wife are required to be intimately connected Yin and Yang in heaven and relate individually to gods and dynasties. Yang who represents husband is distinctively rigid as Yin the representative of a woman is yielding. In this case the wife is authorized even by the heavens to be adorable and yielding to her husband. Husbands on the other hand are

authorized by heavens to remain rigid and manipulative to their wives.

WOMEN'S LIFESTYLE

Women are supposed to live a lifestyle that is characteristic of purity and decency beginning from her mode of presentability up to character. According to Hesiod, all people men and women were created by Zeus and given clear instructions on how to conduct their entire lives in a manner that would not be contemptible. They are to contrive their activities to derive the benefits the Zeus would have bestowed in the earth and be desirous for piety in order to qualify to enter heaven. They should abuse anything that Zeus would have directed them to do including their traditional roles to each other, to the community as well as to progenitors.

In this life Smṛti in the *Laws of Manu* describes a woman's position as being dependent to male gender throughout their lifetime. The Smṛiti laws admonish women never to do anything on their own either as a girl, as a young woman and even in their own house without the knowledge of their husband. Women's activities are manipulated by the decisions of their husbands or generally male figures.

When a girl is still young, Smṛti says that she is that she is inclined to her father for any direction on what to do, in fact, it is the role of the father to make a choice for his daughter's spouse and that choice is irrefutable. While in her marriage a woman is inclined to her husband for all directions. Here the husband is even allowed to administer punitive measure to his wife whenever she violates the customary regulations. According to Livy's 'From the founding of the city', in case the husband dies, the parents-in-law have to

take charge in ordering the woman to behave and perform duties in accordance to the provisions of the customs of Smriti. No woman is to contravene the wishes and the opinions of the parents-in-law about right and wrong. Whatever that she is commanded to do by her in-law parents whether it is wrong she should do as well as whether it is right. This is because traditionally women of Smriti are barred from challenging any authority that is heralded above them by the Zeu.

PERSONALITY AND WOMANLY QUALIFICATION

The womanly qualifications are based in her personality. Her qualifications are categorized into four groups namely; womanly virtue, womanly words, womanly bearing and womanly work. Womanly virtues entail instructions that admonish a woman not to be so brilliant as to perform activities in an exceptional manner different from others. They are to be modest according to Zhao in the, *Lesson for Women*. Similarly, regarding the qualification of womanly words, a woman is required to be neither clever in debate nor keen in conversation. This is meant to reduce women to their usual cocoons of being subjective to their husbands and the society. Furthermore, womanly bearing stipulates that women are not supposed to be pretty nor wear a perfect face and form and finally womanly work qualification cautions women from doing their tasks skillfully than others. This helps to eliminate cases where some women may want to be outstanding from the rest and it promotes uniformity and togetherness.

Concerning a woman's personality and personal attribute, a woman is supposed to carefully guard her chastity, control her behavior in every motion and model each act in the best usage possible. This is a way adopted

to ensure women remain modest in behavior to be submissive to their lords. Similarly, they should be careful with their choice of words by avoiding use of vulgar language, speaking only during the time which is appropriate and avoiding verbosity which wears other people.

Concerning personal grooming, Zhao says that Smriti traditions always encouraged women to scrub filthy away, keep their clothes and ornaments fresh and clean, wash their heads and bathe their bodies regularly as a way of keeping themselves away from disgraceful filth. Beside women should be wholeheartedly devoted to saw and to weave articles that would enable them fend for the family. In line with that they should always express love and avoid gossip and silly laughter which discredits many women. The greatest virtue of all according to Zhao happens to be maintenance of hygiene and order. Women are charged with a significant role of preparing food and wine for guests from all walks of life. To succeed in this they are supposed to be orderly and observe cleanliness to avoid embarrassing the husband and the community.

Concerning other personal attributes, the Middle Assyrian Laws stipulate that women should not steal from the temple or from her husband. She is also prohibited from uttering blasphemous words that can be ridiculous to Zeus. Doing that would be contemptible and that will attract a harsh penalty including cutting off her nose and ears. Harsh penalties are labeled on vices to intimidate a woman to do what the Smriti community perceives to be right. Similarly no woman is expected to be violent towards her own husband or any other man in the community. Women are to handle themselves with utmost gentleness and whole submit and respect their husbands (*Middle Assyrian Laws*).

CONCLUSION

The *Laws of Manu* regarding the position of a woman are detailed and restraining. A woman has been reduced to nothing but a miniature which has no constructive contribution in the society. What I can see from the laws is that women are being manipulated by the male gender to their own convenience but nothing to be enjoyed by the women themselves. Some of the situations considered the only women's privileges such as entering heaven because of their submissiveness to their husbands are irrational since it is difficult to determine what the real judgment of a human being shall be on the last day. At the same time life is to be lived fully but not to be endured the way women in Smriti community have been made to live.