

## Manusmriti and women's empowerment

Harken to Swami Dayanand Saraswati's Vedic view to get the right perspective

On T.V. Channel "Republic" run by India's most popular anchor Mr. Arnab Goswami, I was surprised to listen to the slighting remarks of Dr. Taslim Rehmani in a debate session on 6 May, 2018 when he disgraced and discredited Maharishi Manu portraying him as anti women. Just because of the ignorance of the panelists present in the debate, no one pointedly rebutted Dr. Rehmani when he misquoted a saying of Sant Tulsi Das as that of Manu.

Women of India in particular should express their deep debt of gratitude to Swami Dayananda Saraswati who made a significant contribution for their emancipation and empowerment. On the authority of Vedas as well as Manusmriti (without interpolations), he strongly pleaded for restoring the status of women which they enjoyed during Vedic times. Swamiji quoted extensively from Vedas and Manusmriti in his works to carry out crusade against obnoxious practices and to bring about social reforms specially in the areas of education of women. It was mainly the spirit of Maharishi Dayananda and the various guiding principles, such as, woman is not a slave but a comrade as propounded by Vedas and Manusmriti which were the main force behind various reform programmes of Arya Samaj relating to women empowerment as well as Dalit upliftment.

Vedic tradition recognises women as more relevant for sustaining the society. Vedas talk about her rare virtues. Rig Veda(6.61.4) says 'Pra no devi Saraswati, vejevahirvajinivati. dhinamavitrayuvatu' i.e., The goddess of learning (Saraswati), endowed with divine virtues, powerful and protector of intelligence, may protect us by bestowing strength on us. Rig Veda even goes to the extent of comparing the position of women with that of Brahma - the high priest of Yajna. Rig Veda 8.33.19 says Istri hi Brahma babhuvitha. Atharvaveda describes her as the symbol of religion or truthful behaviour. Maharishi Manu says in Manusmriti(2.145) that the rank of one acharya (principal) is equal to 10 ordinary teachers, the rank of one father is equal to that of 100 acharyas. The rank of one mother is equal to that of 1000 fathers. Why did Manu give such a high position to mother who is a woman? Just because a learned mother inculcates in her children good sanskars and education as a first Guru. These thoughts received from mother go deep into the mind of the child forming his attitude and values of the later age.

Was Maharishi Manu against women? The answer is 'Certainly Not'. The well known German Philosopher, Nietzsche was highly impressed by Manu and paid him rich tributes for showing reverence to women. At one place Nietzsche says " I know of no book in which so many delectate things are said of woman as in the Law Book of Manu."

Since Lot of people have misconceptions and misgivings about Maharishi Manu and interpretation of Manusmriti, I think a time has come when spurious interpolations on the basis of thorough research should be removed from Manusmriti as various scholars of Arya Samaj have done in the last over 150 years and came out with several editions of Vishudh Manusmriti. Arya Samaj made Vishudh Manusmriti(without interpolations) as a major weapon to carry out its social reform programmes relating to upliftment of downtrodden classes and women. Contrary to the traditional belief, today women students in all Arya Samaj Kanya Gurukuls do Ved Path, wear Yajyopavit(holy thread) and conduct Yajnas. Dr.Urmila Rustagi and Dr.Sudesh Narang in their book "Manu/Manusmriti an Appraisal" pub.by J.P. Publishing House, Delhi have written extensively on independence of woman and her right to Vedic education.

#### THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE MANUSMRITI

Excerpts from the book "Opposition to Manu Why?" By Dr.Surendra Kumar, former Principal, Govt.College Gurgaon/presently V.C., Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar. Dr.Surendra Kumar is also the author of Vishudha Manusmriti (Without Interpolations) published by Arsh Sahitya Prachar Trust,Khari Baoli, Delhi):

##### Women Held in Highest Esteem

"It is clear that the internal evidence of the Manusmriti that the anti women picture of Manu presented by some is baseless and contrary to facts. The provisions concerning women in Manu have been inspired by his sense of respect, justice and goodwill and his concern for their security and equality with men. Here are some facts of evidence in support:-

Maharshi Manu is the first great man of the world to have given the society the highest ideal about women which adds remarkably to the dignity, status and self respect of women.

Yatra Narestu pujyantey ramantey tatra devata

Yatreto too na pujyantey sarva tatrafla kriya. (Manusmriti 3-56)

The correct meaning of the verse is: Gods (who stand for divine qualities, good deeds, sweet nature and blessings for the family, for obedient children and other coveted possessions) make their abode in the household in which women are treated with respect. However, where they are not shown any respect, all ventures and undertakings end in a smoke. There can be no better proof to show the reverential attitude of Manu towards women than the extremely respectful and beautiful adjectives used for women by him. He says that women in the family are instrumental in bringing good luck to the household, they are respectable; they are illuminating by their very presence and decorative in appearance they are a symbol of prosperity they are the mistresses and the sole managers of the household; they are heavenly in influence; they are conducive to a smooth worldly

journey (ix-11,26,28;v-150). He adds that people wishing for their welfare must respect women, and that those families and households in which women have to suffer slights, go to dogs. According to him the real happiness and welfare of a household lies in the happiness and welfare of the women in it (Manu Smriti III-55-62). So he instructs the husband and the wife in the household to remain happy and satisfied with each other, not to act against each other and not to indulge in any such activity as may lead to their separation (Manu Smriti IX-101-102). Only one verse will suffice to bring out Manu's feelings:

Prajnarth mahabhaga pujhra grihdipatya

Istriya triyashc geheyshu na visheshosti kashchan (Manu Smriti 1-26).

It means that women bring good luck to a household through procreation; they deserve respect and reverence; they irradiate the house with their presence. In fact there is no difference between the goddess of wealth and women."

## 2. SON AND DAUGHTER HAVE EQUAL STATUS

"Those unacquainted with Manu's code will be pleasantly surprised to be informed that Manu is the first law-giver to have ordained that son and daughter enjoy an equal status in the family. He has given this concept a constitutional validity. He says: "putrena duhita sama" (Manu Smriti 9-130) which means that daughter is at par with son in every respect."

## 3. SON AND DAUGHTER: EQUAL PARTNERS IN PARENTAL PROPERTY.

"Manu regards both the son and the daughter as equal heirs to parental property. This opinion finds a mention in the Manusmriti in Chapter IX-130,192. This very view has been quoted in the Nirukta as follows:

Avishashna putrnam dayo bhavti dharmata

Mithunana visergadoo manu svembhuvobriveet(Nirukta iii-1-4)

It means in the beginning of the creation Svayambhu Manu ordained and declared that there is equal right for son and daughter in the ancestral parental property. Manu has in fact enhanced the importance of girls in the house-hold by laying down that only daughters (and not sons) are entitled to inherit the personal property of the mother(Manusmriti IX-131)".

#### 4. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE SAFETY OF WOMEN'S PROPERTY

"Manu has ensured that nobody usurps the property of women under the impression that they are weaklings. He has laid down that people making such attempts, howsoever close they may be to the concerned woman, should be given the same punishment as has been prescribed for thieves (Manusmriti IX-212, III-52, VIII-2,29)."

#### 5. STRINGENT PUNISHMENT FOR CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

"Manu has tried to ensure the security of women by laying down that the kidnappees and killers of women should be awarded capital punishment and the rapists be banished after being tortured (VIII-323, IX-323, VIII-352). Manu has given clear instructions for the redressal of all difficulties, big or small, facing women. Men have been instructed not to quarrel with mother, wife and daughter (IV-180). There is a provision for punishment to persons levelling false charges against them; to those deserting women even when they are innocent; to those who fail to fulfil conjugal obligations towards women (VIII-275,389, IX-4)."

#### 6. MARITAL FREEDOM TO WOMEN

"Manu has an ideal approach on the subject of marriage of women. He has conceded to her the freedom of marrying a man of her choice who in her opinion is the most suitable for her (IX-90,91). He has allowed remarriage of a widow and has also sanctioned Niyoga(temporary attachment to a member of the opposite sex for a definite purpose such as procreation, etc)(IX-176,56-63). Marriage is a symbol of affection and respect for girls and, therefore, according to Manu dowry in any form is highly improper and hence forbidden(III-51-54). Earnestly wishing for happiness to women he suggests that it is better to remain unmarried lifelong than to marry a wicked and vicious man (IX-89)."

#### 7. JOINT OBLIGATION AND WOMAN'S INDISPENSABILITY IN THE PERFORMANCE OF RELIGIOUS RITES.

"The participation which women get in every field of activities of men in India as sanctioned by Vedic religion is of unique nature and is not to be seen elsewhere. Here no religious rite, no social ceremony and no household venture can be accomplished without women being associated. Manu also has the same creed to propound. So he entrusts the job of accomplishing religious rites and ceremonies to women, and gives directions that such rites should not be carried out without their participation. (IX-11,28,96)/ During Vedic period women enjoyed all rights such as the right to study the Vedas, right to the wearing of YAJNOPAVITA(sacred thread), right to doing YAJNA(sacrificial ceremony), etc. They used to embellish the position of Brahma (the director)

in the yajna ceremony. They would acquire the position of seers (exponents) of Vedic hymns after having received high education. Manu who regarded Vedas as of AXIOMATIC AUTHORITY in all religious matters was a great advocate of high education and all religious rights for women as ordained in the Vedas. That is why he rules that all the rights relating to women should be carried out under their own supervision with the chanting of Vedic hymns by them (II-4,III-28)."

#### 8. PREFERENCE TO WOMEN

"The admirers of 'Ladies first' culture will be gratified to learn that Manu has instructed that we should step aside to make way for women on a priority basis. He also rules that the newly married women, the unmarried girls, ailing expectant and old women should be provided food first and then alone should husband and wife in the family take meals together(II.138, III.114, 116). All these provisions in Manu indicate the high degree of sense of respect and affection he had for womenfolk."

#### 9. MANU NOT IN FAVOUR OF UNRESTRAINED FREEDOM TO WOMEN

"It will be only pertinent to clarify in this context that Manu is an admirer of virtues and a great detractor of vices. So he accords all respect to the virtuous ladies and provides for all punishment to the vicious women. One of the characteristics of these provisions of Manu is that he is not in favour of unlimited liberty for women which may make her unsafe and consequently be extremely harmful to her. So he has warned women against jumping the security cover provided to her by the father or by the husband or by the son because such a misadventure on her part can bring a bad name to two families - one her parents' and the other her in-laws' (V-149,IX-56). However, by no means does it mean that Manu is anti-women's lib. This only implies that the first social requirement of women is security which may be provided to her by the State's law and order machinery or some man or by her own valour. Her own valour, more often than not, fails to protect her in a world dominated by sensual dacoits have required male protection and patronage. However, it will not be proper to assess Manu's contentions in the present day political perspective. Today there is a law-enforcing government and yet thousands of women have been criminally assaulted and thus compelled to go to dogs. Rape and subsequent killing of women is the order of the day and the rule of law is rendered ineffectual. The real import of Manu's words can be realized vis-a-vis a situation when there is looseness in administration consequent upon a change in the system of government following violent incidents. It is in such a situation that Manu's words prove to be perfectly true.

This analysis make it clear that the provisions made by Manu are neither anti-shudra nor anti women. They are in fact, extremely fair, just, impartial and even -handed. Manu has said nothing objectionable, nothing exceptionable."

## E - SPURIOUS INTERPOLATIONS IN THE MANUSMRITI AND THEIR SCIENTIFIC EXAMINATION

"The aforementioned discussion leads us to the inevitable conclusion that the Manusmriti does have in it a large number of verses carrying noble canons and commandments. However, it is also a fact that the extremely objectionable verses which anti-Manu writers have been quoting and underscoring are imputed to Manu and his Manusmriti. This makes the scripture a carrier of paradoxes. If the later type of verses were also accepted as really from the original Manusmriti it would mean that the book has in it on the one side just and fair rules and regulations and unfair and unreasonableness and hence despicable proposals and postulates on the other. The crucial question is: Is it an acceptable position that a book should originally carry in it such paradoxes and self-contradictory statements and commandments? When there are no apparently self-contradictory statements in the composition of even ordinary writers of average intelligence how can there be such paradoxical statements in the write-up of such a legal luminary and religiously righteous sage. A plain, simple and incontrovertible explanation to this is one and only one: The just and noble laws are those giving due consideration to a man's potentialities, actions and abilities are originally written by Manu and those against these principles, and putting a premium on partial, unreasonable and unjust approach are interpolations added to the Manusmriti from time to time designed to suit the vested interests of interpolators. This explanation gets upheld as correct and just if we make a reference to Manusmriti itself. The original verses are contextually relevant and written in a sober style which matches with the principles of due consideration for an individual's merits, actions and potentialities so clearly upheld by Manu. The interpolated verses are in a different style and are not only irrelevant and out of context but also thematically discordant. Thus we can determine which verses are original and which ones are interpolated. In brief can be stated the following as guiding principles for telling the original from the interpolated:-

Again the verses quoted in this article suggesting that women should be given due regard, should enjoy social freedom, have equality with men and have the right to education including the right to study the Vedas are original and those negating these postulates are interpolations.

Some readers may be interested in going deep into the question of which verses are original and why, which verses are subsequent motivated additions and why. They are urged to refer to the Manusmriti(Complete) in Hindi published by the Arsh Sahitya Prachar Trust, 455-Khari Baoli, Delhi. This book carries an appraisal of the book on the strength of arguments based on internal evidence and tells the original verses from the interpolated ones on the basis of universally acceptable yardsticks. This edition of the Manusmriti will prove very useful in securing information regarding the original subjects taken up in the scripture for discussion, regarding the interpolated verses clearly stating why they are decisively and conclusively interpolated and not original, regarding some of the misgivings about the Manusmriti and their resolution in a convincing manner. THIS IS THE LATEST RESEARCH ON INTERPOLATIONS IN THE MANUSMRITI. It is essential to make it clear here that the interpolated verses are no longer a subject of controversy. Instead they have been accepted as such decisively, conclusively and finally. It is a fact of history supported by

written evidences that they have been made motivated additions to the ancient Sanskrit literature from time to time. The Mahabharata which originally carried only 10,000 verses has gradually become a stupendous volume of about one lakh verses. Today's Ramayana carries hundreds of more shlokas and those in a hand-written version which is about one thousand years old and which is still lying preserved in the Nepalese archives. The Manusmriti is also sailing in the same boat. As a matter of fact a larger number of additions, alterations and interpolations have been carried out in it. The reason obviously is that it is more related and relevant to the day-to-day conduct and concerns of human beings. So it was subjected to manipulations by vested interests. The scholars of all shades and hues are unanimous on the issue of interpolations in the Manusmriti. The commentaries available on it bear a direct testimony to this fact. The later-day commentaries carry a larger number of verses. There are 170 more verses in Kullukabhata's commentary (12th century) than those found in that of Meghatithi (9th century). Till then the extra verses in the former had not been assimilated in the main body of the commentary and so had to be given in large brackets. There is a variation in the number of verses found in other commentaries."

Note: Dr.Surendra Kumar has attempted to pin point the interpolated shlokas with reason and logic on the basis of 7 measures and held 1471 verses as interpolated out of 2685 verses of Manusmriti. After deletion of interpolations he came out with two editions, one Vishudha Manusmriti with 1214 uninterpolated verses and the other present Manusmriti of 2685 verses.

British researchers like Wooler, J.Jolly, Keith and MacDonell and the Encyclopaedia Americana also accept that the Manusmriti carries a large number of interpolations.

"Maharshi Dayanand, the founder of the Arya Samaj regards only the original and interpolations-free Manusmriti as authentic. He has pointed out some interpolated verses and has urged scholars to identify other such verses for expurgating this great work.

Mahatma Gandhi in his book entitled 'Varna Vyavastha' accepts that the objectionable verses found in the Manusmriti are subsequent motivated insertions. Dr.Radhakrishnan, Rabindranath Tagore and other national leaders and scholars too are of the same opinion.

Hence the need of the hour is that the original Manusmriti should be reckoned as authentic, and the opposition to Manu on the basis of interpolated shlokas should be rebutted because Manu and Manusmriti are worth taking pride in and not something condemnable. We should not drag such invaluable and important heritage of our country in the dirty politics of vested interests, and thus should not desecrate it by subjecting it to indignities and insults."

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The teachings of Vedas and Maharishi Manu had a great impact on Swami Dayananda Saraswati and on account of their scriptural authority that he could continue his tirade against obnoxious customs and evil practices. Dayananda a great Vedic scholar who had understood the dominating spirit of

Manusmriti(without interpolations) could successfully debate with the orthodoxy - the so called custodians of Vedic Dharma and meet them on their own ground.

Swami Dayananda's attempts to relieve the cribbed and cabined womanhood of India were fully backed by his inspirational Vedic knowledge which provide for a lofty position to women both at home and in the society. Manusmriti (3-57) says that the society in which women are depressed is soon vanished. Society where women are free from suppression always moves forward;

Shochanti jamyo yatra vinash utuashu,tatkulum,

na shochanti tu yatritaa vardhatey tadhi sarvada

(Y.K. Wadhwa)