

# Ethics and Human Values in Indian Culture: A Feminist Perspective



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## Abstract

Violence and crime against women have persisted in this patriarchal society since ages. Gender injustice has existed all over the world. Women are made to feel secondary at structural level and men enjoy the authority to speak about things that matter in our lives – money, house, children, career, cars, budgets, transfers, postings, marriage, birth and deaths. The natural division of labour, i.e. women procreating and men earning bread and butter got defiled in course of time because the male authority part became suffocating and the reproductive process became subservient. Long years of suppression resulted into degeneration of human values. And men devoid of higher values and ethics are no better than animals. Hence, the unresolved conflicts between men and women resulted into feminist movements of all sorts. The paper highlights the projection of women as embodiment of divine powers and somewhere between the lines; it is the return of eternal values and attributes, which can remedy the degradation of ethics and morals, which have infiltrated into our society. The study veers around the idea that the Indian value system has the potential to find a balanced solution to the man-woman relationship. .

**Keywords:** Gender Justice, Sexual Abuse, Eve-Teasing, Molesting, Discrimination, Polygamy, Manusmriti, Kautilya, Culture, Vedic Era, Social Stigma, Christianity, Modernization, Medieval, Democracy, Transparency, Etc

## Introduction

In terms of ethics and human values world today is standing at the most disgraceful juncture. The repeated occurrences of molestation of women worldwide and especially of girl child in India has shamed the humanity to a point of no return. Girls from developing countries are being deceived, betrayed, raped and sold for prostitution. If, protested upon by the girls, major or minor, they are being murdered, butchered and burnt alive. On the one hand, the proclamation of women empowerment exhorted them to come out of their homes, educate, adopt careers and contribute significantly, the resources of half the humanity to the society building, on the other, a heinous and despicable act is being perpetrated on them if, they do so. Girls are living under fear and they cannot venture out alone in the night. Not even in smart cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore, Ranchi and Patna, can young girls live independently without fear factor. Not at all.

The spiralling incidents of eve-teasing, molesting, killing, burning of the abducted girls. Seven years after Nirbhaya case and stringent laws enacted thereafter, is a dangerous indicator of mutilation of social and cultural values in India. How can such unethical happenings, be tolerated with muted postures from otherwise vociferous debaters intellectuals on issues of secularism, nationalism, free thought, minorities and mob lynching etc. ? This silence among intellectuals is very disturbing. The attitude that such errors happen (Mulayam Singh – Uttar Pradesh), it is terribly concealed and patriarchal in nature.

## Aim of Study

The aim of this study is to invite attention from men-women from India and abroad to take cognizance of the worsening conditions of women in our society, in spite of the miraculous developments of Science and technology. If researching minds can penetrate the impregnable, it is not impossible to remedy the vulgar and sick mindset of menfolk towards women. UN charter on human rights prescribes to impose stringent laws and measures, wherever there is breach of laws. What worse infringement of human rights can take place than rape, gang rape of 3 years old to 60 years old women? Deformity and destruction of the highest moral value

has happened by denying women her dignity who is the birth giver of man. Therefore, it is high time to recognize the pristine value system of Vedas and Upanishads to restore women's dignity by integrating into one global values system in the world in the interest of women kind. Diversity should not pose a hurdle in defining the universal values from whichever source it comes. We should have an open window in the globalized world.

#### **State Policies and Culture**

Culture plays an important role in the development of any nation. Indian civilization is the most led back ancient civilization known in the history. Unfortunately, due to its liberal attitude and life style, it was invaded time and again by Mongols, Arabs, Turks, European, Moghuls, Chinese and Pakistan. Apart from these invasions, India is also the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and other Tribal sections. Therefore, there has been a significant fusion of cultures amongst all of these. Presently, culture of India refers collectively to the thousands of distinct and unique cultures of all religions and communities present in India. More so, Secularism has been adopted as the constitutional position in India, which means state plays no role in promoting any religion. But this stand has mired the country into minority-majority divide. Hence, the role of state policy in shaping the culture of a country is important. In India religion as founded in Vedic era is supposed to lay down some discipline and restrictions on individual, familial, inter-personal and societal relationship. Too many major initiatives were taken to prevent the fissiparous tendencies in the modern polity of India. The first one was a seminar at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla in 1972 and the second one was public discussion on a draft policy document prepared by Union Ministry of Human Resource Development in 1992\*. In the light of new global challenges, the state needs to formulate a culture policy. The issue of culture policy was also raised during post W.W.II in the wake of urbanization, modernization and proliferation of electronic mass media. Initiatives were taken by World Conference on culture policies, Mexico 1982. Even UNESCO started extending support to member states in updating their cultural policies to meet their needs of globalization. Some 30 states have taken steps in this regard. In a nutshell, a cultural policy is essential to cope up with the onslaughts of foreign values on indigenous lifestyle. Here the champions of women rights worn to be careful because the 'Indian culture' advocates tend to misuse the culture phrase for victim-blaming and shifting all responsibilities of protecting the feminine morality on the victim women\*\*.

#### **Women in Indian Culture**

We will be doing great injustice to our most ancient culture of mother worship if we do not take into account the position of women in Vedic era. Women were held in high esteem and power during this period. They were included in decision-making, religion and administrative functions. There were women 'rishis' like Lopa, Mudra, Apala, Gargi and Maitreyi. They enjoyed political and high intellectual position and education was prevalent to a large

extent, however economically weaker sections preferred boys to girl child.

First discrimination started in Later Vedic period. Educational rights and facilities were curtailed, which further deteriorated, with invasions of different cultures in medieval period leading to polygamy, child marriage, Sati and Purdah system. Kautilya imposed more stigmas upon them. They were supposed to be under husband's permission but they were permitted to have their successor born with other men, if husbands were impotent. Manusmriti dictated them to live under the guardianship of fathers, husbands and sons. During the Mauryan period kings employed female bodyguards and spies. A large section of women were pushed into prostitution and Devdasi culture in the medieval period during Arab and Moghul invasions.

Thus, the status of women in India has under-gone many phases of ups and downs. Modern texts presents diverse and conflicting views on the position of Hindu women, ranging from feminine leadership as the highest goddesses like Durga, Laxmi and Saraswati on the other limiting her role to an obedient daughter, housewife and mother. Christianity, in modern times led the wave of English education in Indian woman. Modern women owe a lot to western cultures, but it is also responsible for the contemporary moral crisis.

Declaration of Manusmriti seems to be translating in reality, "where women are revered, there the gods rejoice; but where they are not, no sacred rites bears any fruits". The fate accompany of women in India today is a global discourse. Crime against women in all forms of murders, molestations, rapes, domestic violence, sex determination and dowry deaths have risen many more times higher than even the BPL level (32%) and illiteracy rate (37%). At a closer analysis, poverty, illiteracy and crime against women seem to be interlinked. It is too late not to question our state policy towards culture and education. An education, which is failing to protect women and children from crime, exploitation, slavery, drudgery and human trafficking, should be reviewed in the light of Human Rights Charter of United Nations. A state culture policy is desirable to awaken Indian women and the society to their ancient strength but it needs to synthesize the concept with modern education to protect women from further de-gradation and de-humanization like Nirbhaya case. The contemporary trend of LGBTQ, live-in relations, 3-Talaqs, love Jihad, molestation and rapes of dreaded nature are destabilizing not only women but the future of the children.

#### **Policy of Reporting Crime**

Incidents of Reported incest rape cases increased from 46.8% from 268 in 2011 to 392 in 2012. Although lowered down, there were 11% rape cases reported in 2016. 29 Lakhs FIR were registered in India in 2016. Delhi and Kerala – among the most literate states, recorded the highest rate of crime.

The biggest change after 2012 was in the reporting of molestation. However, by international standard India is in the bottom third of 115 countries where rapes were reported. India also became a part

of "#METOO" movement where women of the status of celebrity and successful entrepreneurs also came out in the open to register their old stories of how they were raped by powerful men or Ministers, Bollywood, administration and social media during their struggle periods. Under trial, Indrani Mukherjee, in case of Sheena Bora – (her daughter) murder case has given shocking exposures of how ex-home minister Chidambaram, sexually misused many women to pass favours.

How unsafe women were in the hands of the highest boss of Home Ministry, is pointing fingers at the failures of state policies to preserve our culture and women? It is the bounden duty of the state, of such a big stature and the largest democracy of the world to ensure the security, education, career and health of our girls and women who are the caregiver, nurturers and backbones of the family system of India.

Reporting creates public fear of tarnishing the image, that is why element of transparency is so much hyped to ensure good governance. Many high profile cases like Asaram Bapu, Ram Rahim, Dinesh Chandra Dixit, Ashuji Maharaj, Kuldeep Senger, and Chinmayanand sexual harassment of a law student of Shahjahanpur case are very poor indicators of very low cultural values prevalent even among the "so called" Godmen and Gurus. Credit goes to the young reporters with cameras in their hands to eke out a career by exposing such crooked stories. Media, the fourth leg of democracy, if lives upto its role honestly by bringing up clandestine cases into the open, it will be a much needed service to the society. Regular cases of police/CBI raids to bust sex rackets in the posh colonies of metros are being reported. Thanks to electronic and social media.

#### **Attitude of Police Administration to Women Cases**

According to latest media reports the victim of Chinmayanand case expresses fear for her life in UP. It is so unfortunate to hear this for a state, which happened to be heartland of Lord Sri Ram, Sri Krishna, Sankat Mochan Hanuman, the immortal Lord Shiva and his chaukidar Kaal Bhairav who is supposed to be the inspiration and first in command of the police line of Uttar Pradesh. All transferred IGS and DIGs take their pledge to server the state under the protection of Kaal Bhairav. Then which police dimension is so weak that the police stations are not even registering the FIR cases of molestation, rapes, life threats, murders and disappearance of girls from their areas and houses.

As is well known, the Mathura rape case was an incident of custodial rape in India on 26 March, 1972 a young tribal girl was raped by two policemen within the jail.

The recent case of JNU student's rape and alleged inaction on part of police, once again exposes the police attitude to refuse to register FIR. Since this report contains information that is first in point of time, the very objective of registering FIR is to record first hand report so that a prompt investigation can be done before the accused can flee or tamper with the evidences. When police turns down a women's plea, in serious distress, she is stigmatized and doomed to suffer in silence. Hence, majority of victims spend a

mentally broken life. Has police become anti-women or hate women brigade?

In order to cope up with the deteriorating social culture, India needs to have a comprehensive national cultural policy, says Vikram Sampath. Many western countries to, under the guidance of UNESCO have taken recourse to this path. The soul objective of this effort is meant to preserve the character, mental sanity and self-esteem of our growing girls, so that life does not become a stigmatized burden for them.

#### **Conclusion**

If we go by our ancient scriptures like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vedas, Upanishads, it has been clearly mentioned that men and women both have originated from one and same divine power, so none are inferior to each other. Both are complementary and supplementary to each other. In fact, there is a beautiful concept of "Ardhnarishwar" in Hindu religion, which depicts God as neither man nor woman, but a combo of male female opposites joined into one. It is a philosophy unique to Hindu religion only. The message is clear that there is no scope of discrimination between the two. The kind of turmoil, strife, crime and conflict have become an everyday feature of our existence. Inputs from ancient Indian values and morals can enlighten the path of man-woman relationship to attain peace and harmony in the world. Sexual assault on women is a heinous crime against humanity and guilty must be punished. A One Stop Center aimed in this direction, to reduce the pain and privation of sex-victims is being inaugurated by Union Minister for Women and Child Development. Smriti Irani was advised by JS Verma committee post Nirbhaya. Some 640 centers are under the plan.

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