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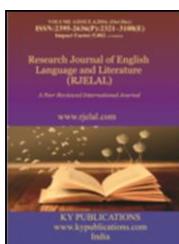
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FEMININE SWAY IN THE MODERN WORLD OF INDIA- A NEW PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

India is a society in transition, and the societal roles and responsibilities are evolving between men and women. There are some interesting profiles evolving amongst modern Indian women. The modern Indian woman is an enigmatic creature of mythic proportions. She is shackled yet free, manipulative yet gullible, straight forward yet coy. Modern Indian woman is the daughter of India, but more importantly the mother of India's destiny.

Key Words: Women in modern India, Diverse profiles, Enigmatic features of mythic proportion

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Women in literature, through the centuries, have been based on the mythic models from the Ramayana and the puranas: sita the silent sufferer-the archetype of Indian woman hood; the earth-mother, forbearance personified; the playmate and beloved Radha; the devotee Meera. Pattern on these models, the woman is often passive, accepting the dynamic role of the man in her life. Manu Smriti is the only book, overwhelmingly assumed to be responsible for regulating women to an inferior status; but the code of Manu are replete with contradictions. There is one section that has made great impact that which disallows any freedom for a woman:

“Pitaa rakshathi koumaree,
Bhartaa rakshathi yauvaneer;
Putroo rakshathi vardhakeer,
Na stri swaatantryam Arhati”
(Sastri, 1983, IX, 3)

(The father protects the women during childhood, the husband during her youth, and the son during her old age; a woman does not deserve freedom)

A woman is therefore inculcated with the idea of martyrdom, of pride in patience, of the need to accept a lower status through the mythical models

of Sita, Savithri, Gandhari, etc. Following these models, she is taught to be shy, gentle and dignified as a person, pure and faithful as a wife, and selfless, loving and thoughtful as a mother; her assignment is:

Karyeshu Dasi ,Karyeshu manthri,
Rupecha Lakshmi,Kshamaya Dharitri.
Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayaneshu Rambha,
Shat Karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni.
(Like a slave while working/serving; a minister while counseling/advising: Goddess Lakshmi in her looks/personality: the earth in forbearance/endurance; a mother while feeding; Rambha a celestial prostitute, in bed; these six are true characteristics of an ideal wife)

But the present concept is altogether changed, though our lot is different from that of the Western. In most Western culture and literature as Swami Vivekananda notes “the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in the motherhood” (Ranade, 1975, 17).

It may be the influence of ‘Feminist movement,’ which dates back from the enlightenment (when the liberal egalitarian and reformist ideals of the period



began to be extended from the bourgeois, peasants and Urban laborers to woman as well) that the scenario is completely different; now they can feel the voice, as the poetess Langston Hughes puts forwards:

“I’se still goin,’honey,
I’se still climbin,’
And life for me ain’t been a Crystal stair.”
(L.Hughes, 1974)

(Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen”)

The voice of the 'trouble' is annoying as Samuel Johnson says, “Nature had given women so much power that the law had wisely decided not to add to it” (Times of India, 21st Dec.2000)

We can feel the undeniable presence of women in society and their significant role: we are to be unconventional in portraying women.

India is a society in transition, and the societal roles and responsibilities are evolving between men and women. While traditional role-playing is still seen in many households, there are some interesting profiles evolving amongst modern Indian women.

The first profile is those women balancing both professional and domestic roles, within a traditionalistic family set-up. In-laws and spouses in such traditionalistic families are often unsupportive of the woman's professional ambitions. An economic-independent woman makes them feel insecure and threatened. Ironically, most secretly, they like the economic benefits that a working woman brings. However, they remain non-cooperative as it feeds their ego, often resulting in taunts of the woman's work in an attempt to "keep her in her place". Spouses in such families often do not lend a helping hand in domestic work, not because they can't but because they won't. Professionally, the expectations from women employees are often higher. This is seen globally too, where women have to run twice as fast to prove themselves. Male colleagues often feel insecure and threatened by rapidly-rising women colleagues. Requirements of modern corporate jobs often require attending events out-of-office, or travelling to other cities with male colleagues. This is often a fodder for biased families to deride the women on her moral character, which is even more

tragic. This evolving segment of women, balancing both homes and work, is seen not only in urban cities amongst educated women, but also in rural areas where women are tackling work challenges along with domestic roles. This was seen in *December-1*, a Kannada film where the wife runs a business of selling rotis (Indian bread) to complement the family's meagre resources. In such traditionalistic families' intent on massaging their egos, the expectations from stubborn elders are often high. Any flimsy excuse is good enough to paint the women as falling short of responsibilities. Time constraints means inability of the women to always be present for events at home or at children's schools, resulting in self-pangs of guilt. The struggle for single-mothers in this segment is even worse. A lot depends on the presence (and

However, this profile has another side as well. Many families are taking it in a healthy spirit, and supporting the women in their dual role. Many men are participating in domestic work. Women in such supportive environments are faring well, and emerging high on performance and low on stress, quite unlike their counterparts who live in less supportive environments. Many organizations have healthy work-cultures which treat men and women at par, and do not tolerate illogical discrimination. In this society under transition, it is partly the woman's luck where she was born, or married into, or working.

The second profile is those women who want the advantage that this modern evolution brings, but will not work themselves, out of their own choice. Such women demand that their men play a dual-role in this age of equality, but they do not make the effort of entering jobs themselves. In effect, such women are still doing their traditional roles of domesticity, but they expect men to participate equally in professional and domestic work. They take recourse by calling themselves career-homemakers. But that is sheer injustice towards women who are actually working (as in the first segment) and managing both work and homes, because those women are doing the job of homemaker along with their professional careers. In many cases, such working women are balancing their dual roles without any support from elder

family members, while the homemaker segment often gets the advantage of elders' support as they are perceived as less threatening. Of course, there are also exceptions in all segments. Nevertheless, this is an emerging segment which prefers the convenience of not working since it is less stressful, but raises the red-flag of feminism if men do not bend. That is not wrong, but does seem a tad biased. After all, if equality in expectations is the name of the game, then expectation should be both-sided, not one-sided. Feminists might brand this opinion as misogynistic, but the state of the men in such households is as tragic as the state of the women in the first segment. The state of those men is pertinent since in many instances, expectations of lifestyle standards of the wife are often made in comparison with a household of dual-earning members. This effectively means that this single-earning man has to provide a lifestyle standard, which dual-earning members are achieving in the other home. Such an expectation can be a bit unjust on the man, in this case!

The objective is not to brand homemakers negatively. This profile serves an important societal role for the smooth functioning of family tasks. In most cases, homemakers do not make lifestyle standard comparisons with dual-earning households. But there is still that emerging profile which prefers the advantage of modernism, while retaining the convenience of traditionalism.

The third profile is those women who have leapt totally into the professional arena, at the cost of their personal lives. Some career-women are paying such disproportionate effort towards their work, and their home-life is suffering resultantly. In many cases, men are filling the void on the domestic front. But there is also the occasional case where neither the man nor the woman is willing to bend from their preferred respective roles. Such instances are often leading to cases of estrangement or separation. Children under custodial arrangements suffer the most. There is also a growing profile of "newly-single" thirty-something or forty-something folks who are searching to fill an emotional void in their personal lives. There are also women who are delaying marriage as they want to rise in careers first. However, late marriages are also giving rise to

cases of childbirth problems in thirty-something women, which is a biological challenge in itself.

There is nothing wrong in this pursuit for career ambitions. In fact, many women have accomplished exemplary achievements in their careers. However, the void in personal lives is also taking a toll in some cases, and bringing with it its own set of challenges. There are social-groups now emerging in Indian cities engaging people in activities. These groups help in connecting new people, and thus provide an opportunity to build new relationships. The challenge is to build a new relationship when they are already carrying past baggage. Counseling centres are emerging for children too, since they have seen a harsh side of human relationships at an impressionable age, hence face trust issues.

In conclusion, these are some profiles emerging in India's evolving society. The economic empowerment of women is a healthy phenomenon. The deal is to manage the challenges and adjustments that this situation calls for.

The modern Indian woman is an enigmatic creature of mythic proportions. She is said to have arisen out of combination of the stereotypes ranging the gamut from downright repressive to conservative to progressive to liberal. She is often thought to be a lurking presence, coming out in Indian Women in certain times and certain situations, being suppressed at others, but that has been changing of late. She has several curious abilities: to impact and to neglect, to give life and let it be taken away, to revolt and to supplicate, to sway and to be ignored. She is shackled yet free, manipulative yet gullible, straightforward yet coy. She is praised as a paragon of "Virtues" in this day and age and reviled as a whore of "Vices" of this day and age.(blogger, Harish Aditham)

Modern Indian woman is the daughter of India, but more importantly the mother of India's destiny.

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