

Woman, Mother, and the Other: Unraveling the Matrix of Feminine Self

Zairu Nisha

A woman as a mother in Indian society is a subject of great reverence. The mother is considered an embodiment of the divine mother goddess. But due to the pronatalist Indian social structure, a woman has less value outside of marriage and motherhood. The question arises here—as a personified goddess, is she equally valued in her real life and free to make her procreative choices as an independent Self? There is continued inequality and persistent sexism between men and women that structure the way they are viewed in society. Men construct the idea of women from their own perspective instead of what women are in reality, expressing themselves as the subject and women as “the other.” Ancient scriptures state that a woman is created to facilitate men in the act of procreation. For this, society further imposes various restrictions on her subjectivity through social practices to control her sexuality and maternal body. This paper explores and examines the social layers of a woman in general, and the way mythology perpetuates the idea and influences her life even today. Illustrations of various mythological texts glorify her position solely as subjugated procreator and caregiver, not as a woman as self but as mother and the other. In the contemporary social context of globalization and the consequential challenges presented to the traditional ways of life, the contentious issues in relation to these texts will be taken up for discussion and analysis. This paper concludes with caution that a real woman cannot be seen as the personification of goddesses in relation to the oppressive elements of a patriarchal society. Her pseudo-glorification merely unravels her enslaved otherness, and cannot be her empowered Self.

Keywords: culture, mother goddesses, mythology, motherhood, otherness

Zairu Nisha works in the Department of Philosophy, Ramanujan College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India. She can be contacted at zairunisha@gmail.com.

Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir declares in her seminal text, *The Second Sex*, that “Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth” (p. 143), represents the disproportionate power relationship between men and women in a patriarchal society. Indian society is not an exception to it! In India, the ideal woman is envisaged and venerated as the mother in popular culture. In many ancient religious scriptures, literature, mythologies, folk art, and culture, women are highly glorified as the personification of the divine mother goddess who facilitates man in the sacred act of procreation. Goddesses are regarded as the universal feminine energy and latent power (Goddess Shakti) through whom God creates, preserves, and destroys the universe. However, like many other societies, Indian society structurally is patriarchal and pronatalist (Jayaram, p. 1) and perceives a woman not as a subject but as the other. For instance, many religious texts clearly illustrate the *otherness* of a woman in terms of her subjugated position in comparison to men in society and reproduction as a primary life purpose. It was further explicit at the time of freedom struggle when Indian national identity was gendered by using a new multifarious maternal metaphor in the form of “Mother India” to reaffirm the adoration of motherhood and to appeal to Indian women to perpetuate and maintain their traditional roles as mother and wife (Zairunisha, p. 140). In the present time of globalization when women are becoming aware of their capacities and rights as equal citizens and questioning traditional gender-oriented roles, the emerging socio-political forces claim to naturalize women’s traditional role as mothers, and this has deleterious implications for a woman’s life world. Thus, the given instances present a dichotomy between Self and the Other, and due to this a stark divide between a goddess and the representation of a goddess as a woman, mother, and the other in society. It is the social reconstruction of women in which they continue to remain oppressed and circumscribed by dominant patriarchal ideologies. They are viewed as the other and extolled for their role as mothers/reproducers of a male child.

This paper underlines and elucidates the ideological role ascribed to women in Indian society, the construct based on men’s perceptions of them that tend to unevenly portray women as the other while men are portrayed as the self and the subject. It analyzes masculine social constructions of women, mothers, and motherhood and their relation to the otherness ascribed in mythological texts which glorify the maternal self while subjugating women’s position as mothers in a patriarchal gender hierarchy. The portrayal of women and gender in these texts is significant and illuminating as it serves the accessible ways of comprehending the dichotomy of Self and the Other in the context of a marginalized and excluded group. In doing so, an attempt will be made to understand the otherness of women in society in terms of their subjugated status and the symbolic respect paid to them as mothers in the real world. The paper further focuses on the way women’s traditional role is preserved by the few contemporary religious and

socio-political forces regardless of modern and technological developments that present new challenges.

The Ideology of Indian Woman in Ancient Scriptures

In India, motherhood is a subject of apotheosis (Bhattacharya). The idea, “*Matru Devo Bhava*,” meaning mother is a Goddess (*Taitariya Upanishad*) shows high adoration for women as mothers. The real mothers are envisaged as divine mother Goddesses attributed with these qualities which are explicitly illustrated in the *Dharma Shastras*, *Manusmriti* and *Vedic texts*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, performed in rituals and cultural practices, etc. I have discussed a few scriptures to strengthen my argument. These texts have been mentioned here for their crucial and perpetual role in prescribing values and measures for the ideal Indian woman, even today. Society takes its exemplars of ideal womanhood mainly from these texts and expects that Indian women live their lives accordingly. It is significant to mention that all these texts were written from the point of view of men hailing from the upper caste. Their purpose may be to control women’s public and private domain by religiously glorifying and institutionalizing their capacities as mothers, whose essential work is to bear male children and take care of their families. There is no other way for a woman to maintain her social status and prestige. As Kaker mentions in his book *The Inner World*:

The roots of this solicitous respect for the pregnant women lie deep in a religious and historical tradition which equates woman with “mother,” and views the birth of a male child as an essential step in the parents’ and family’s salvation. “To be mothers women were created, and the fathers men, Manu states categorically”. (p. 88)

Unfortunately, women were excluded from studying or reading these texts, as their bodies are considered to be inferior and impure to touch the holy scriptures because of their maternal functions such as menstruation, pregnancy, parturition, and menopause. The availability of these texts exclusively in the Sanskrit language was another obstacle as it was not a language taught to women and common people. In this manner, these texts restricted feminine embodiment to maternal embodiment by creating and recasting de-sexualized, gendered, chaste, sacrificial versions of powerful mythical icons for ideal women. In this regard, Kumkum Roy claims that “The bond between the sacrificial fire and the goddess in Vedic rituals is compared to a mother who is full of milk and performs nurturing role” (p. 35). In this way, the association of women with goddesses is merely to justify that their goal in life is to have children and embrace motherhood.

The first significant text I would discuss is *Manusmriti*, also known as “Manava-dharma-shastra” which is one of the earliest literary sources generally, accepted as the fundamental law book. It is the most authoritative and widely used

sacred text by upper-caste Hindus for determining righteous duties and conduct that cover and govern every aspect of their life. It is received as the first foundational traditional text of India on law and jurisprudence which reflects the social, legal, and religious practices and institutions of Indian society. The set of rules of the text makes it incumbent on Indian citizens to follow them, in accordance with their location in the Varna order¹ and their gender, in the name of divine will. Manu, the author of *Manusmriti*, was a sage who is considered to be the first son of Brahma (the supreme creator), and the progenitor of the human species. He wrote this book primarily to establish and maintain the male-dominated power structure by sanctioning and naturalizing obligatory duties and responsibilities of each individual within the stratification of their caste and gender. It is difficult to determine the exact time of the composition of *Manusmriti*; however, according to some historians, it was written during the post-Vedic period or any time between 200 BCE and 200 CE (Jayaram, V).

Manu was a firm believer in the divine hierarchical social order, and articulated a strict and rigid gender hierarchy. He gave detailed attention to women's situation and the complexities of life. He discussed women's role as daughters, wives, mothers, and widows in which he gave the highest status to women as mothers but also imposed several restrictions on them. At one place he says, "Where women are adored, there the Gods are delighted; but where they are not worshipped, all religious ceremonies become futile" (2.143). Concomitantly, Manu posed hard restrictions on women by mentioning that they were not entitled to get freedom at any cost and presented them as inferior and disloyal to men. He perceived women as naturally weak and unfaithful by saying that:

It is the very nature of women to corrupt men here on earth; for that reason, circumspect men do not get careless and wanton among wanton women (2.213). By running after men like whores, by their fickle minds, and by their nature lack of affection, women are unfaithful to their husbands even when they are zealously guarded. Knowing that women's nature is like this, as it was born at the creation by the Lord of Creatures, a man should make the utmost effort to guard them (9.15–17).

Not only this, Manu warned that even women from one's own family are not reliable at any stage of their life and viewed them as a serious sexual threat to the family. He prescribes that "No one should sit in a deserted place with his mother, sister, or daughter; for the string cluster of the sensory powers drags away even a learned man" (2.215). It shows that for Manu, chastity is the condition of being an ideal good woman, and the only way to her emancipation. But, those who fail

¹Hinduism believes in a hierarchical caste system also known as Varna system, consisting of four categories: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. Shudra or Dalit caste is considered the lowest caste; treated as "untouchable," they were forced to live apart from the other three castes.

and lose their chastity have to suffer punishment. He further adds “A virtuous wife who remains chaste when her husband has died goes to heaven ...[but] a woman who is unfaithful to her husband is an object of reproach in this world; [then] she is [re]born in the womb of jackal and is tormented by diseases born of her evil” (5.164). In this way, he emphasizes women’s weak character, and their incapability of taking proper care of themselves. They are constantly in need of protection, and are therefore their freedom has to be restricted. He commands that: “Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence” (9.3). Women from their birth to the end of their life are the property of men in the forms of father, husband, and son. Manu also placed a great emphasis on motherhood and the birth of sons over daughters as only sons have been given the rights to perform funeral and other religious rituals. According to him, daughters are brought up to perform their role as future good mothers and are blessed with the motherhood of many sons (Bhattacharji). He compares those women’s fortune with goddess Lakshmi who is the mother of sons, “there is no difference at all between the goddesses of good fortune who live in houses and women who are the lamps of the houses, worthy of reverence, and greatly blessed because of their progeny” (9.26). Women, according to Manu, are created by God only for the procreation of sons, there is no other work assigned to them.

The other significant text to be worth mentioning is *Ramayana* meaning “the journey of Rama” is a poetic epic also called “Adikavya” (first poem) that presents a picture of the ideal Indian life through the story of King Rama (an incarnation of the god Vishnu) and his wife Sita, viewed as mother goddess Lakshmi (consort of Vishnu). Rama was banished from the kingdom of Ayodhya for 14 years by his own father king Dashratha to fulfill his vow given to his third wife Keikeyi. Sita accompanied Rama in his exile as an ideal wife; so did Lakshman as an ideal brother. In this way, *Ramayana* teaches the duties of relationships by illustrating ideal icons such as the ideal father, the ideal wife, the ideal mother, the ideal son, the ideal brother, and the ideal king which is fundamental to the Indian consciousness. It is a common belief that *Ramayana* was written by a great sage Valmiki, during Treta yuga, that is, second of the four aeons of Hindu chronology² before 10,000 to 12,000 BCE (Parmar) but, as per recent Indological research, it may have been composed during 500 BCE (Chandra).

Various interpretations of the text *Ramayana* are available in Indian languages which present Rama and Sita as an ideal married couple to be followed in Indian households. Sita is the daughter of king Janaka and is well known as a pious and dedicated wife of Rama and mother of his sons. As she says, “For a woman, it is not her father her son, nor her mother, friends nor her own self, but the husband who in this world and the next is ever her sole means of salvation”

²Hindus believe in a cyclic chronology consisting of four aeons (yugas), namely—Sat yuga, Treta yuga, Dwapar yuga, Kali yuga with the eternal return of the cycle.

(Ramayana of Valmiki, 1962, p. 233). Manu also encourages this view by saying, "A virtuous wife should continuously serve her husband like a God... it is because a wife obeys her husband that she is exalted in heaven" (pp. 5, 154–155). In their story, it is said that Ravana kidnapped Sita and later on was killed by Rama. After his death, Rama also asked Sita to prove her chastity two times by fire ordeal. However, regardless of its positive result, Sita was sent to the forest to spend her remaining life where she ends her life by sacrificing herself to mother earth. This is a fate of an ideal woman whose life is dedicated to serving her husband and sacrificing her life to justify her fidelity. The most popular version of Ramayana in Indian households is known as *Ramacharitmanas*, written by Goswami Tulsidas, has a similar story portraying subjugated and secondary position of a woman in many places by comparing them with drums, illiterates, low-caste Shudras, and animals that are entitled to be beaten and scolded frequently (5.58). The text illustrates the devalued and vulnerable situation of women in a patriarchal society in which they are compelled to perform virtuous acts and accept their subordinate position as their fixed destiny. It is so unfortunate that Sita, regardless of her righteous duty and dedication toward Rama and her family, was compelled to take complete responsibility for her misfortune. Whereas, Rama is called *Maryada Purushottam* meaning the "man of honour" and a virtuous man despite his unrighteous behaviour for Sita. He is viewed as the ideal son, husband, and father of his sons.

For Indian women and men, Sita personifies the ideal woman. She is venerated as a goddess and projected as a quintessence iconic illustration of an obedient, dutiful, and faithful wife, as well as a caring mother. Women were taught to follow and practice their ideal Sita's footsteps in their life by learning to remain pure, chaste, gentle, and loyal toward their husbands in spite of their rejection and misconduct. They do fasts, prayers, sacrifice their own desires to ensure the well-being of their husbands and sons, and accept their emancipation within this confine. In his work *The Inner World*, Sudhir Kakar has pointed out:

The ideal woman is personified by Sita, the quintessence of wifely devotion, the heroine of the epic Ramayana. Her unique standing in the minds of most Hindus, regardless of region, caste, social class, age, sex, education, or modernization, testifies to the power and pervasiveness of the traditional ideal of womanhood ... It is through the recitation, reading, listening to, or attending a dramatic performance of this revered text that a Hindu reasserts his or her cultural identity as a Hindu, and obtains religious merit. The popular epic contains ideal models of familial bonds and social relations to which even a modernized Hindu pays lip service (p. 74).

Similarly, daughters are also expected to emulate the ideal of Sita gradually in their life for future preparation as good wives and mothers. They perceive their mothers as ideal and develop an intimate bond with them. One can say here that

as an influential divine idealistic role model for Indian woman, Sita represent whole Indian social system. As Kakar has put in the same book:

From earliest childhood, a Hindu has heard Sita's legend recounted on any number of sacral and secular occasions; heard her qualities extolled in devotional songs; and absorbed the ideas feminine identity she incorporates through the many everyday metaphors and similes that associated with her name. Thus, "She is as pure as Sita" denotes chastity in a woman, and "She is a second Sita," the appreciation of a woman's uncomplaining self-sacrifice. If, as Jerome Bruner remarks, "in the mythologically instructed community there is a corpus of images and models that provide the pattern to which the individual may aspire, a range of metaphoric identity," then this range, in the case of a Hindu woman, is condensed in one model. And she is Sita (p. 74).

Mahabharata is another popular text in Indian families, considered one of the greatest epics ever written in the history of human civilization which means the "great (Maha) story of (ancient) India (Bharat)." It is written by seer Krishna Dvaipayana Vedavyasa and later on many more additions have been included by others. According to Hindu chronology, it was compiled and developed later than Ramayana in Dwapar Yuga, that is, third of the four eons or Vedic period to 400 BC, but some other sources claim its time between 1100 BCE and 800 CE (Parmar). It is a long tale between two family lineages; the Kauravas and Pandavas, which culminated in a war whose main accidental reason was the insult and humiliation of Pandava's wife Princess Draupadi. Mahabharata presents the complexities of human finitude through its complex characterization, poetic style, moral values, and spiritual knowledge, with lots of historical information about ancient Indian life world.

Like Ramayana, Mahabharata also depicts and legitimizes a devalued and subjugated condition of women. Though a mother's status is claimed to be higher than a father's (2.145), women are represented as objects to be subjugated. One of the verses in Mahabharata expresses the deep bond between mother-child relations by saying that "people feel old not when their hair have grown grey but when their mother is no more" (12.258.28). Not only this, at one place it is mentioned that since mother is venerated, her anger can cause destruction, so her will must be respected and obeyed even if it is wrong or hard (5.128.1). Vasuki says that "for mother's curse there is no antidote although all other curses may be averted." In spite of mother's alleged strong position in the family, fathers claim their ownership over their progeny. The Chapter Adi Parva of Mahabharata describes that "a son is his father's, being generated by him, mother is merely a lather-bag or serves as an incubator" (1.90.31) which reminds us of the Greek God Apollo who declares that "It is not that a woman who begets the one who is called the child; she is merely the nurse of the germ she has conceived. The one who begets is the

male; like a foreigner she preserves the young shoot” (Shah, 95). In a similar vein, as already discussed earlier, Manu had also stated that “of the seed and the womb, the seed is superior. All creations of life assume the qualities of the seed. The qualities of the womb are never shared by the seed” (9.35,37).

Similar to the earlier above two texts, Mahabharata also supports the birth of sons rather than daughters. The desire of becoming immortal can only be fulfilled by the birth of a son is strongly evident in Mahabharata which says the man himself is born again and again in form of a son in his wife’s body (1.90.32). At another place, it is mentioned that only son can protect from the fire of hell (puta) therefore he is called “putra” (1.68.38). Only the son can contribute toward of salvation of their father as well as the ancestors from the world of death (Yamloka) by performing funeral rituals (Sraaddha). Thus, every woman desires to be the mother of sons for the completeness of their life. As Kunti, the mother of Pandavas says to Madhava (Lord Krishna) that once a woman has given birth, she regards that the mission of her life is complete and she could happily leave for the other world (1.146.7). In this manner, for women achieving motherhood (of a male child) always remains social and religious duty instead of seeking sexual pleasure.

Apart from this, women have no right to make their own autonomous choices. Such is the case in the story of princess Draupadi, compelled to accept the five Pandava brothers as her husbands because Kunti has ordered her to do. Kunti didn’t think of anyone else choice as she was the mother of Pandavas. In Mahabharata, women are depicted as nature that is *Prakriti* and men as *Ksetrajna* who has complete control over them, “Women should be understood as causing the characteristics of the world. They are the nature, being the field; men are the form of the field. They are the eternal embodiment of the senses, hidden in passion” (12.206.7–8). It is evident that there are many such stories of women’s pain, unequal treatment, injustice, coercion, and enslavement that are easily available and show their imagery of ideal women sacrificing their lives for their husbands and family in the name of the goddess. In this sense, there is a grave disconnect between the glorification of motherhood in sacred texts and women’s lived experiences of being a mother. Illustrating the reality of mother Goddess, Kamala Ganesh argues that:

The mother-goddess can be interpreted as expressing ideas of power, autonomy and primacy in the widest sense of the terms. She conveys not so much the idea of physical motherhood but a world view in which the creative power of femininity is central; the goddess mediates between life and death and contains in herself the possibility of regeneration. (p. 73)

Thus, while mothers are glorified and deified as a symbol of procreative universal power, in everyday life they are deprived of even bodily and reproductive agency. This dominant patriarchal religious ideology has been so pervasive in Indian history that it continues to control and regulate the lives of women today.

Mother, Motherhood, and Motherland

From the outset of the British Raj in India, freedom fighters viewed the country as the motherland which is a contrary ideology of the westerner's fatherland. It was a common perception that Britishers were intruders who had captured the *Matribhoomi* (Motherland) and had to be thrown out for gaining *Svaraja* (self-rule/independence) which was informed by the ideals of Ramayana's *Ramaraja* (rule of Rama) and Manusmriti. In order to rebuild India's identity as an independent nation, recourse was taken to revive and re-appropriate the ancient Indian religious heritage (Zairunisha, p. 145). This expression of nationalism was influenced by ideas of the *Ramabhakti* and *Deshbhakti* (*The Indians*, Kakar, p. 136)—great devotion toward Lord Rama as the highest divine icon and loyalty toward “Mother India” as *Bharatmata* (Motherland India) by involving multi-faced maternal metaphor that includes mother language, motherland, and motherhood for mobilizing the people to participate in freedom movement regardless of their ideological differences and divisions in terms of gender, caste, and sects. This time, a famous Bankim Chandra's song “*Vande Mataram*,” turned into a strong political slogan and voice of the nation. Also, all ferocious mother goddesses such as Bhagavati, Chandika, Mahakali, Durga were worshipped to unite the countrymen against the exploitation of Britishers.

Simultaneously, women of all castes, classes, and religions were motivated to take part in the freedom struggle for independent Mother India. In this direction, Gandhi took the initiative to encourage women to come out of their homes and participate in the freedom movement. He knew the importance of mythological icons to unite men and women together. Gandhi used traditional values with the icon of Sita as a national role model for Indian women by deifying their chastity, and devotion toward their maternal and domestic role for the rehabilitation of traditional Indian heritage. In a gathering of women, he expressed his views in the following words: He adds that “...attain the virtues of Sita, and to wear clothes made by their own hands as Sita used to do and also follow the example of Sita by leading a simple and pure life (p. 525).” Although in response to Gandhi's call many women enthusiastically joined the freedom movement yet, this participation was not very large and varied between 10 and 15% of the women in different regions and caste groups.

In spite of women's active participation in the freedom movement, it was expected from them that they should preserve their traditional roles and values as good housewives and mothers to produce valorous sons for Mother India's freedom. By recasting the mythical ideals of Sita and Savitri, nationalists attempted to control and represent the view of sexed gendered identity within Hindu nationalism that highlights women's chastity. Their femininity was envisaged under the influential traditional ideology that accepts female sexual identity as the mother of heroic sons who predominantly serves the nation. In other words, nationalism imagined men and women in a gendered way—heroic brave men and self-sacrificing chaste women.

There is no doubt that British rulers played an important role in alleviating women's condition from various forms of oppression and stereotypical roles by legally prohibiting evil practices such as widow burning, child marriage, and female feticides, rampant in Indian society. In this scenario, Hindutva and radical forces from various religious consciousness emerged as a strong reaction to the missionary work of Christian missionaries and the spread of Western values. These responses against the British administration and works were very authoritative. This negative aspect has been criticized by Jyotsana A. Gupta in the following words:

By extolling an ideology that apparently rested on a show of the empowering women, it was reinforcing a social philosophy of deprivation for women, it was a signal to women to sacrifice everything for their men folk. The internalisation of this so-called ideal that nationalism put up for women simply reinforced the traditional notion that the fruition of women's lives lay in producing heroic sons. The nationalist ideology, therefore, simply appropriated this orthodox bind on women's lives by glorifying it. This renewed ideological legitimacy made it even more difficult for women to exercise their choice or autonomy in the matter. (pp. 98–99)

Finally, the republic of India was achieved with the vision of equality, justice, and freedom for all citizens without any gender, class, or caste discrimination. The constitutional directive principles of state policies included the provision of universal education, adequate means of livelihood for men and women, equal pay and opportunity for equal work, and protection of men and women from abuse. This required effective measures for a radical transformation of Indian society to break the hold of caste and gender hierarchies. However, the issues related to the rights of women's reproductive health and autonomy, children, *Dalits*, and minorities continue as a challenge to the democratic governance of the country (Gautam, 55). In this situation, radical forces claimed to hold the command of preserving traditional culture in the country.

Modern India and The New Women

The imagery of modern India is envisaged as a global India. The incessant increase of globalization, modernization, and neoliberal economic transformations have greatly affected the Indian economy and the lives of common people. The emergence of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, information technology, digital marketing, and hypermobility for quick exchange of merchandise and services, has provided exceptional access to ideas, goods, services, and values at a global level. The new Indian women are also conscious of their rights and capacities and able to contribute to society as aware citizens. They have begun to raise voices against pervasive traditional ideologies and reinterpreting the ancient texts from egalitarian perspectives. However, it cannot be denied that the persistent

traditional ideology of womanhood has a powerful social, mental, and physical influence on young girls, women, and mothers. Regardless of the excess of education and employment, they are regulated by scriptural ideals of “good” and “bad” women. This deified essentialization of motherhood further marginalizes and circumscribes women from political, social, and economic spheres of life. In this scenario, there are only domestic responsibilities remain to perform as they think that this is the realm they actually belong to. Along with that their sexual expression is also strongly suppressed or confined to heterosexual norms and values. Condemnation of such norms may cause their social castigation and elimination. It is problematic for working mothers to equalize their two distinct roles since they have to adjust their preferences in accordance with the requirements of being a responsible and good mother along with the new responsibility as a working woman. Kakar mentions the mythological account of a good mother in the inner world as:

Mythological and religious representations of the “good mother” as she is personified in the widely worshipped goddesses, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Parvati, or Gauri, allow us to elaborate on the Indian experience of this “basic trust” ... the central feature of “good mother,” incorporated by every major goddess in the Hindu pantheon and dramatized either in her origins or in her function, is not her capacity to feed but to provide life-giving reassurance through her *pervasive presence*. (p. 95)

It is a known fact that a new Indian woman has to perform well in the public realm and take care of their family which creates physical and psychological stress. Sometimes the disbalance between these two realms is deleterious for family relationships even for those women also who belong to the privileged background. Incapability in taking proper care of the family due to career responsibilities further develops guilt in them and is a strong reason for their social stigmatization. They are called “greedy,” “evil” and burdens on society that should be abandoned. Such otherness is not only limited to working women but also applicable to childless, sonless, and celibate women. They are forced to get married or rejected by society. Contrarily, Indian tradition has a positive attitude toward males as they are allowed to remarry many times getting a male child for the perpetuation of family lineage and they are not guilty about it. Such a scenario makes women’s life more vulnerable and complex. They are under the constant feeling of threat and insecurity because of such situations that women cannot ignore.

In this way, the personal identity of a woman is attached to the domain of mother, mothering, and motherhood that generates apprehensions regarding her freedom, choice, dignity, and subjectivity and the view of the other toward her. Their individuality is dependent and under the protection of and associated with their son, father, or husband’s identity. Due to this reason, they always stand second in choice and decision-making for themselves and for the family. This also reveals the complex relationship between discourses of women’s rights and

human rights. They are assigned equal rights and opportunities by the Indian constitution but due to their subjugated status in society and their family, they are unable to exercise these rights in the real world. Here it is relevant to mention that such traditional interpretations of women as mother goddesses further perpetuate and are passed from one generation to another by mothers to daughters. Mothers are seen as the ideals of their daughters and they encourage their daughters to train themselves primarily as full-time caring mothers according to scriptural prescription.

Conclusion: Female Embodiment and Otherness

The paper has explained and expounded the way continued discrimination between men and women, and the persistent unequal subjugated status of women show how they are perceived in and by society. The socially created gap between the glorified symbolic representation of motherhood, and the real mothers have become the reason for their otherness. De Beauvoir raised her voice against such patriarchal oppression and discrimination and asserted that the root of all these problems resides in men's construction of women as "the other" whereas they define themselves as the subject and "the self." Women also perceive and define themselves exclusively in relation to men. In this way, men are the ruling and regulating authority of the world and interpret everything from their own perspective. Contrarily, women are constructed and defined not by themselves but by men, not as the subject but as the object. Noticeably, the creation of the other is the fundament of human consciousness. De Beauvoir explains the process of the making of the other in these words, "Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself ... the subject can be posed only in being opposed—he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object (p. xxi)." Gradually, these formulations turned into societal norms and customs which are followed and internalized by common people of society as an inevitable part of their culture and tradition. Because of this reason, despite the strong voice of the right to equality, justice, and freedom, women's constant sexist oppression, exploitation, and subjugation continue. They could not speak openly because they are regarded as the other and the silent witness of their destiny. The phallogocentric ideology of otherness of women is so influential that marginalizes women and plays a significant role in their invisibility, exclusion, and negligibility in the social arena. Further, it is facilitated and institutionalized by the oppressive patriarchal mindset of males that circumscribes females from all social and political domains by glorifying and privileging them as mothers. Surprisingly, this patriarchal mindset is never seen as unnatural and biased toward both men and women. They assume that men's view of women is fair and devoid of all prejudices and the universal truth which is deeply engrained as social norms in them. However, this situation is far from reality itself in the context of women as mothers.

It is explicit that the adoration paid to women as mothers is only confined to the domain of heterosexual norms of mothering that further oppressed and

marginalized the status of women in society. The modern technological era has played a significant role in improving the economic, cultural, and social position of women from all castes and classes in India, it seems they are still pressured to live their lives within this scriptural traditional framework of otherness. Education has opened new doors for them, and they have started exploring new possibilities and opportunities in every field. However, to sustain the deep-rooted Indian ideology of motherhood, influenced by powerful mythological scripts of Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Manusmriti, it seems that Indian women still have to make a substantial struggle against these regressive authorities to protect their freedom.

In the path of searching the emancipation for themselves from the unbearable weight of the imaginary glory of forced motherhood, women need proper health care, education, adequate social support for maternity, and a right to have full freedom and control over their bodies, including their procreative choices. Undoubtedly, women are biologically different from men, but it does not mean that they are physically and mentally inferior, and thus dependent bodies, only appointed for care work and procreation of sons. They are as much capable of generating equal work for society as men do. But traditional constraints and boundaries are not only a barrier in the way of women's overall development and emancipation but also a barrier to socio-cultural progress and human emancipation from poverty, illiteracy, domination, and exploitation. In this scenario, we need to change our mindset of otherness toward female and feminine embodiment that it is not just a maternal embodiment but more than that. Their bodies are also capable of contributing the same hands in politics, science, economic, cultural, and social aspects of society. It can only be possible by giving them a free environment to grow and flourish. In this way, a society cannot be emancipated in which women are glorified as bonded procreative laborers and perceived as the other. In this regard, Percy Bysshe Shelley asked the very basic question—"Can man be free, if woman be a slave?" the answer is—transcend the Self and Other dichotomy and Master-Slave Dialectic to discover your "true human identity." Thus, the otherness of women can only be removed by accepting them as independent selves instead of objects of procreation.

References

- Agrawala, P. K. (1984). *Goddesses in ancient India*. New Delhi: Abhinav. Print.
- Allchin, F. R., & Allchin, B. (1968). *The birth of Indian civilisation*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Print.
- Altekar, A. S. (1959). *The position of women in Hindu civilisation*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas. Print.
- Atharv Veda* (Transl. A. C. Sastri & R. Sastri). (1928). Varanasi: Chowkhamba. Print.
- Babb, L. (1975). *The divine hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in central India*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Print.

- Bagchi, J. (1990). Representing nationalism: Ideology of motherhood in Colonial Bengal. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25, 42–43, WS65–WS71. Print.
- Bhattacharji, S. (1990, October 20–27). Motherhood in ancient India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, p. WS50. Print.
- Biardeau, M. (1995). *Hinduism: The anthropology of a civilization* (Transl. R. Nice). New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Print.
- Chandra, S., & Parmar, R. (2013). *How old are the Mahabharata and Ramayana?* Quara Official Website. N.pub. N.d.
- Chaturvedi, B. (2014). *The Mahabharata: An inquiry in the human condition*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan. Print.
- Chaturvedi, B. (2015). *The women of the Mahabharata*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan. Print.
- Chitgopekar, N. (Ed.). (2002). *Invoking goddesses: Gender politics in Indian religion*. New Delhi: Har-Anand. Print.
- Daly, M. (1985). *God the father: Towards a philosophy of women's liberation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. Print.
- Das, R. M. (1961). *Women in Manu and his seven commentators*. Varanasi: Kanchana. Print.
- Das, T. (1998). *Ramcharit Manas* (Transl. H. P. Puddar). Gorakhpur: Geeta Press. Print.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949, 1952). *The second sex*. New York, NY: Random House. Print.
- Devi Mahatmaya Puran* (Transl. R. Datta). (1999). Gorakhpur: Geeta Press. Print.
- Dhand, A. (2008). *Woman as fire, woman as sage: Sexual ideology in the Mahabharata*. New York: State University of New York Press. Print.
- Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Memorial Lecture. *A working woman* delivered by Justice Leila Seth. Organized by Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, India. 18 December 2015. Print.
- Gandhi, M. K. (1969). *Collected works*. Ahmadabad: Navajivan Press. Print.
- Ganesh, K. (2010). In search of the great Indian goddess: Motherhood unbound. In M. Krishnaraj (Ed.), *Motherhood in India* (pp. 73–105). New Delhi: Routledge. Print.
- Gautam, S. P. (2006, March). Globalization, democracy and social justice. In G. Irfan (Ed.), *Ethics, values and social transformation. Conference Proceedings of International Conference on Ethics, Values and Social Transformation*. Karachi: Oxford University Press. Print.
- Gokhale, N., & Lal, M. (Eds.). (2014). *In search of Sita: Revisiting mythology*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. Print.
- Gopalasastri, N. (Ed.). (1935). *The Manusmriti*. Varanasi: Chowkhamba. Print.
- Gupta, J. A. (2005). *New reproductive technologies women's health and autonomy*. New Delhi: Sage. Print.
- Jayaram, V. (2015). *Traditional status of women in Hinduism*. Hinduwebsite.com. n.pub. n.d.
- Kakar, S. (2007). *The Indians: Portrait of a people*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. Print.

- Kakar, S. (2015). *The inner world: A psychoanalytic study of childhood and society in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Print.
- Kinsley, D. (1987). *Hindu goddesses: Visions of feminine in the Hindu religious*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. Print.
- Liechty, M. (2003). *Suitably modern: Making middle-class culture in a new consumer society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Print.
- Marglin, F. A. (1985). Female sexuality in the Hindu world. *The Harvard Women's Studies in Religion Series*, 92, 39–60. Print.
- Massey, D. (1994). *Space, place and gender*. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press. Print.
- McGrath, K. (2011). *Stri: Feminine power in the Mahabharata*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan. Print.
- Menon, R. (2003). *The Ramayana: A modern retelling of great Indian epic*. New York, NY: North Point. Print.
- Meyer, J. J. (2015). *Sexual life in ancient India*. New Delhi: Life Span Publishers. Print.
- Muller, M. (Ed.). (1965). *The hymns of Rig Veda*. Varanasi: Chowkhamba. Print.
- Parker, A., Russo, M., Sommer, D., & Yaeger, P. (Eds.). (1992). *Nationalisms and sexualities*. New York, NY: Routledge. Print.
- Ramayana of Valmiki, vol. 1: Ayodhyakanda* (Transl. H. P. Shastri). (1962). London: Shantisadan. Print.
- Sanday, P. R. (1981). *Female power and male dominance: On the origins of sexual inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Print.
- Sarkar, T. (2001). *Hindu wife, Hindu nation: Community, religion and cultural nationalism*. New Delhi: Permanent Black. Print.
- Shah, S. (1995). *The making of womanhood: Gender relations in the Mahabharata*. New Delhi: Monohar. Print.
- The Atharvaveda: Sanskrit text with English translation* (Transl. D. Chanda). (1982). New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal. Print.
- Van Buitenen, J. A. B. (Ed., and Trans). (1980). *The Mahabharata* (12 Vol.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. Print.
- Zairunisha. (2016). Motherhood in Hindu religion: Glorification without emancipation. In V. Reimer (Ed.), *Angels on earth: Mothering, religion, and spirituality*. Demeter Press. Print.