

An Overview of Gender Representation in India Parthasarathy Rajalakshmi

Indian social reality is intermeshed with diverse cultures that are reflected in variant gender relations ranging from patriarchal forms to matrilineal practices in different parts of India. With the exception of a few communities like the Khasi and Garos of the Meghalaya and the Nairs and Maapillais of Kerala (where people rejoice when a girl is born; where a woman proposes marriage; where a house bears the name of a woman; where the child takes the mother's initials and her clan's name; and where a family without a daughter is considered a dying clan) all other communities and caste divisions follow a patriarchal system in which male domination and female subordination is the norm.

The patriarchal social structure was introduced into India by the Aryans who were also the founders of the Hindu society which has survived from the Vedic period to this day. The Aryans were essentially experimenters who were seeking the best formula for a group of people to live harmoniously with each other. Their experiment and final decision on the role of men and women in society, along with various foreign invasions and the consequent amalgamation of cultures, have shaped the destiny of Indian men and women for the past three thousand years. It is worth understanding the process in detail.

The nucleus of Aryan society was the joint family. The Aryans also introduced a monumental spiritual heritage through the Vedas and the Upanishads that included hymns of sacrificial rituals, instructions for invocation during ceremonies, descriptive passages praising different deities, and of discourses on religious philosophy. It is by inference from these sources that we have come to know of the status of women and men.

It appears that during the Vedic period, the Aryan settlers had a high regard for their women. The Aryan wife was not servile as she was destined to be later on. The Aryans gave their daughters equal opportunities with their sons for receiving education. Girls had the choice to get married (Sadyodavahanis) or pursue their studies and remain unmarried (Brahmavadinis). Women were trained in academic, war, medical, and administrative skills. However, with the Hindu society's proclivity towards favouring girls

who married and produced children, the education of girls began to erode. Gradually a woman became her own worst enemy because she stayed on the path of least resistance and chose to become a dependent, rather than learn to be self-sustaining. The laws of the Manu Smriti further degraded the status of women. Manu, the famous law-giver of 200 B.C. emphasized woman's secondary role in life and the necessity to keep her dependent upon men from the cradle to the grave (in childhood on her father, in youth on her husband and in old age on her son). Manu prescribed early marriage for girls (between the ages of 8 and 10) and declared that a married woman could own no property. Manu was also responsible for the deification of the husband. Even when a husband is a drunkard, leper, sadist or wife-beater, he is to be worshipped as God. The next logical downward step for women was 'sati' – the immolation of the wife on the funeral pyre of her husband. Gradually the practices of destroying female children at birth, infant marriage, polygamy, prostitution, mass burning of widows upon defeat in war became common and sanctioned by religion. Gautama Buddha, in the 5th century B.C., disapproved of child marriage and 'sati' but did little to ameliorate the sorry state of Indian womanhood. The Buddhist emphasis on celibacy made women appear to be the seducers of good men.

Muslims began invading India from about 1000 A.D. and ruled large parts of the country for the next 700 years. Although Islamic law entitled a woman to own property and to divorce her husband, most Hindus who were converted to Islam continued to observe their own customs. Property and divorce remained the prerogative of the male. Muslims also introduced the institution of purdah, and the seclusion of women in harems. The poorer classes and a section of the upper caste treated widowhood as an abomination. Their heads were shaved; they were not allowed to wear jewellery and could dress only in the plainest white.

A big breakthrough came when a small band of enlightened Indians like Rammohun Roy brought reforms against certain orthodox Hindu practices. Gradually laws were passed against 'sati', child marriage, dowry, and polygamy. Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins were responsible for founding many women's organizations of which the most active today are the National Commission for Women, the National Council of Women of India and the National Federation of Indian Women. Woman now in the Independent India attempts to alter her relationship with man in order to accumulate self-respect,

and regain her lost equality with him but with great difficulty. Women are expected to maintain traditional customs and practices. Being unable to compromise between old customs and new life styles some women live with an eternal sense of guilt and remorse. Their own educational and career achievements fail to give them self confidence and a sense of fulfillment.

Indian Constitution guarantees equality of status and opportunity to all citizens of India regardless of sex, caste, and creed. The Indian parliament has passed appropriate bills like the Special Marriage Act, the Dowry Prohibition Act, and the Act against Eve-teasing. These legal measures, along with access to education and careers, have led many people to think that Indian women have won the battle of equality long ago and are making steady progress, especially after national independence. This myth has primarily grown out of some visible improvements in the life of women from the urban educated middle class over the last century or so. There has been no obvious discrimination against women in professions in matters of pay and other facilities. The first few women police officers, judges, film makers, parliamentarians, and women pilots have, far from facing visible discrimination, been given distinct encouragement. The press, too, has given a great deal of sympathetic coverage to such women, projecting them as role models, creating a feeling that there is little a woman cannot do, no position she cannot reach, provided she has the ability and will power. The reality is that even in such professional circles, women are in the minority and must struggle in order to assert their will and make their voices heard and counted.

Even among the urban middle class, the power exercised by the family structure and the kin group over the lives of women in the name of customary practices has been, and is, a potent weapon in keeping women oppressed and powerless. Neither formal education nor the ability to earn an independent income has brought about the expected changes in the lives of urban educated women. Their education is usually tailored to the requirements of the marriage market. Even those few women who earn a substantial income seldom are able to have real control over their own or their family's income. Most of them have to go through arranged marriages and there is evidence that the dowries given for well-educated and working women are often more exorbitant than for less-educated or illiterate women. This is partly because parents have to seek even 'better qualified' husbands for their 'highly qualified daughters' .

In fact, a working woman may have to be doubly subservient in order to prove that working outside the house and bringing in an independent income have not corrupted her or caused her to deviate from the traditional womanly role. Even highly educated and well employed women often have to hand their entire salary over to their husbands or mothers-in-law and receive a small amount for daily expenditure. Except for a handful of women in elite professions, by and large, most urban educated middle class women remain confined to lower grade professions, for example, as nurses, secretaries, typists, receptionists, and primary school teachers. In these professions, they remain at the lowest rungs where they cannot influence decision-making and where avenues of promotion scarcely exist.

Thus, the equality and freedom that the modern Indian woman is supposed to enjoy have been, by and large, potential factors, not facts. Laws, rights, and privileges are not intrinsically useful if they stay in statute books. Their application has to be enforced and protected. It is when through usage they become traditions that they acquire an abiding characteristic. And this requires usage, not by just a few alert individuals, but by all the women and men of the country. It is true that there are women chief ministers of states like Ms. Mayavati, Ms. Mamtha Banerji, Ms. Jayalalithaa, Ms. Sheila Dixit and Ms. Vasundara Raje. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, the leader of the ruling coalition party is also a woman. Yet it cannot automatically be assumed that this is a uniform and lasting progress for the remainder. Women are still struggling to get 33% of representation in the parliament. More than 70% of women are illiterate and are below the poverty line. It is again a fact that there are elected women leaders in the rural administrative bodies. But in many places, the male relatives of the women leaders practically take the power in their own hands. Even the women chief ministers do not show any significant strategy different from that of male ministers in governing their states. These women are found to be emulating their male counterparts in their political dealings which are mostly corrupt and self-serving. Their justification of such a state of affairs seems to be that in order to survive in politics, the domain of men, they have to resort to similar strategies used by men.

While efforts to change the condition of life of Indian women are confined to narrow stratum of urban, educated middle-class women, the vast majority of Indian women who live in rural areas have been largely ignored. Vast differences distinguish the lives

of women in different parts of the country and within different caste, class, religious and ethnic groups. Unless the bulk of the Indian female population progresses with conscientious effort, it will not be a permanent change or development. The moot question is, what is it that is preventing them from giving up outdated and irrelevant traditional practices? The answer lies in the influence that Indian mythology has on the Indian psyche, especially with reference to their gender consciousness.

Myth and Religion

In India, religion is an integral part of Indian psyche and way of life; thus, almost all art forms and cultural practices are religious and are based on Indian mythology and folk legends. In the process of being and becoming a man and a woman in Indian society, the rich heritage of folklore, myths, epics and sagas play a vital role. In spite of changing mores and life-styles, Indian men and women are still expected to conform to the role models projected by Indian popular myths. Women continue to be deified, defiled, and enslaved by the role models defined by cultural lore. They continue to live within themselves and the heritage of the past. However, recently Indian women, while continuing to hold onto some of their rich heritage, also want to create a new world with a different quality of relatedness to men. Some women writers have challenged the representation of women and men in mythology. They feel that women have to deconstruct the existing mythology and reconstruct a new mythology in order to discover the reality of women.

According to the Indian mythology available to us, women are expected to remain within the threshold of a boundary line constituting marriage and family. If they want to go beyond the Lakshman Rekha, dangers are lurking. The images of Seeta, Renuka and Ahalya are deeply embedded in the psyche of Indians striking a note of warning that women should always be within the control of the men in their family. Women can attain divine stature if they worship and serve their husbands. As evidence to such a 'theory,' the stories of Nalayini, Anusuya, and Kannagi are cited. But the fact remains that there are no male role models for the Indian men to emulate except the epic hero Rama, who symbolizes an ideal son, brother, student and emperor. Unfortunately, he falls short of the requirements of an ideal husband from a feminist point of view.

The concept of 'Arthanareeswara' (androgyny) has been an acknowledged category in India from ancient times, stemming from the *Vedas*, the very basics of Indian thought. The 'Arthanareeswara' image in traditional discourse goes beyond gender, beyond identity. It is the emergence of the idea of bisexuality, which is present in every human being – the complementary traits of the male and the female, which are inevitable. But this image which speaks of a harmonious man-woman relationship is found among the temple sculptures and not among the daily lives of people.

Literature

The attitude of a culture is reflected in its literature, which not only represents men and women as they are but also shows how they are moulded into their stereotypes. If the touch-stone method of Arnold is used to study gender representation in Indian literature, one can easily affirm that the literature produced in any one region of India can certainly vouch for the similarity and uniformity of cultural representation of the whole of India. For an analysis of gender representation in Indian literature, Tamil literature is taken up here.

Tamil culture and literature have been popular since prehistoric times. When one analyzes Tamil proverbs and well-known ancient literary works, one can see how an attitude of pity, condescension, indulgence, indifference, neglect and mock-exaltation is expressed in the portrayal of women. The birth of a girl seems to have often brought disappointment in the family circle. Due to the dowry menace, and the great responsibility involved in bringing up daughters safely in society and safeguarding their virginity, people often prefer sons to daughters. The patriarchal belief that only a son can perform the funeral rights of his parents also is a reason for the preference of a son who is expected to take care of his parents in their old age. People consider it below their dignity to stay in the house of their married daughter for more than a few days. Some Tamil proverbs bring out the fact as to what value is accorded to the sons and daughters in Tamil society: 'Even a king with five daughters would become a mendicant' ; 'An honorable house needs only a girl to ruin it' ; 'Bring up a boy sternly but a girl with indulgence, as the boy is the preserver of the family's prestige while the girl is a decorative piece' .

According to Tamil culture, the natural traits of a woman are supposed to be fear, ignorance, shyness, sobriety and modesty. Laughter is not associated with the personality of a 'good woman' . A laughing girl and a weeping boy cannot be trusted, says a proverb. But when it comes to any reference to a mother, the following proverbs glorify her image: 'There is no temple greater than a mother' ; 'Thirst can be quenched only with mother's milk' . The next step to glory for a woman is ideal wifedom. Literary works in Tamil reflect the very same social values that the proverbs speak of. Girlhood is a preparatory ground for marriage and wifedom is the best state to be in. A woman's entire early life trains her to aspire for marriage and, once married, to remain so since only that will bring her glory. She should respect her husband even if he happens to be a piece of stone or a blade of grass.

Marriage being the most important destiny for a woman, the code of conduct for a woman is safeguarding her chastity. Tirukkural, the bible of the Tamilians emphasizes the image of a woman primarily as a wife who is a home-maker and husband-worshiper. A wife who worships not god but her husband every morning could bring rains at her command. But for a man, his profession comes first. The 'manly' thing is not to listen to the words of women. The Tirukkural says that even a coy woman is better than a man who takes orders from a woman, and a sane man will never attach himself to a woman (quoted in Lakshmi, C.S., *The Face Behind the Mask* 3).

When one considers the present literary scenario in Indian writing in English, women writers seem to outnumber men writers. Some of the popular contemporary Indian women writers who write fiction in English are Nayanthara Saghal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukerjee, and Gita Hariharan. Arnthathi Roy, the Booker Prize winner for her book *The God of Small Things* has become a full-time social worker supporting the cause of socially downtrodden women. These writers have represented the issues faced by upper and middle-class, educated women in their writings. Regional writers from every state do touch upon the miserable position of the doubly marginalized women from the lower classes and castes.

Mass Media

The responsiveness of the media to gender can be captured through indicators of gender diversity and gender portrayal. Gender portrayal cannot exist independently of

the market or the hierarchical socio-cultural realities. Basically, traditional gender types are represented in various mass media. The complex range of gender subjectivities can provide an appearance of media's simultaneous sensitivity and bias on gender issues. The prevalence of gender discourse in the Indian context has ensured that the impact of gender differentiating structures in terms of atrocities such as sati, rape, female foeticide, dowry deaths, denial of access to facilities and resources, and the poor quality of participation in availed avenues are well reported. Such coverage is interspersed with images of typed male-female roles - beauty as an empowering product and female honour as the epitome of Indian culture while physical strength and authoritarian attitudes are the predominant traits of masculine identity. However, when one studies the representation of women in different media, it is mostly the urban, educated, middle class women, who are represented and hence an illusion is created that women's status has been radically changed in India.

In the absence of well defined and institutionalized policies, procedures and mechanisms guided by gender-just concerns among media persons, the messages conveyed fall in the realm of individual attribution of meaning. The reporting of a rape case may be perceived to be a woman's due for flouting the code of social conduct, a warning or mobilization for grievance redress depending on the audience. Moreover, the lack of formalized structure allows the media to selectively appropriate and represent gender issues contextually in conjunction with dominant socio-political norms. Thus, gender representation in the media in India is open to the influence of competing tendencies, be it the market, cultural capital, communalism, electoral politics or women's empowerment articulations.

Visual Media: Television

Due to poor access to knowledge and information on developmental programs, social and cultural barriers, and the low level of confidence in seeking and using knowledge, women's participation in TV programmes presents a low profile. Women appear frequently as announcers and news readers on television. The next role for them is to compeer light programmes as stop-gap arrangements in between regular features like the news, serials, movies, and educational programmes. They also appear as interviewers but only to interview persons from the cinema field or medical lines.

Interviews with politicians, heads of large firms, or popular sporting figures are often done by men. In such interviews, sometimes there may be a young woman present along with the male interviewer just to add some glamour to the scene.

The images of men and women presented in TV serials are contrary to reality. It is generally accepted that in many ways they reflect men's fantasy. Consistently and systematically, women are being exploited to the advantage of men's self esteem. Advertisements especially are used to build the macho image of men. Whatever the forces may be -commercial, political, or cultural- they are dominated by men. Hence what one could find on TV is reality wrapped up in the ideals imagined by men in influential positions. In the present cultural context of the empowerment process of women, the aggressive reactions of men are reflected in the portrayal of women as negative characters - 'vindictive or weak'. These characters are projected as worse enemies of the women themselves.

With regard to the drama serials, almost all are women oriented. But women are often projected in dual images: on the one hand they are weak, dull, docile, sacrificial, and emotional who try to protect traditional values and on the other, they are cunning, egoistical, volatile, and tend to destroy traditional values. The concept of truly emancipated and empowered women as discussed in women's forums and academia is yet to enter the stories that are written mostly by men. Again, women are often characterized as being money minded and for the sake of money they will sink even to the extent of committing criminal acts. While the villainous females indulge in personal vendettas, the weaker women are always seen swimming in an ocean of tears. The villainous female character is represented in such attractive and powerful roles that they outshine the virtuous and traditional female characters.

In most of the serials, the male characters are mere shadows and they are easily manipulated into being accessories of the villainous female characters. Some male characters are projected as oppressors while some are shown as victims of their own oppression. Men are represented as corrupt politicians, rich business crooks, drunken and oppressive husbands, faithful household servants, benign fathers and fathers-in-law in contrast to tyrannical mothers and mothers-in-law, brutish policemen, and so forth. Such portrayals of men, like those of women, do not give a true picture of men.

Most of the advertisements suggest that women are supposed to perform household duties and only some women could work outside as well, while men only work outside and rarely perform household duties. Women are shown as consumers capable of staying beautiful and cheerful even while washing clothes, cleaning utensils, or cooking and caring for family members. It definitely sounds like the dream-girl of the opposite sex, who could respond to fantastic demands without really much effort on his own side except that some men are still shown either as a he-man, a protector of the family or a macho-man. In order to sell their products, advertisers try to please men by perpetuating the myth that women are accepted by men, only because of their attractive physical appearance and intensive services. The worst advertisement is one in which a motor cycle is described as a woman's body and how a man can derive pleasure while driving it. When women are shown in their domestic roles as brides, wives, mothers and mothers-in-law, men are shown in a variety of roles like sports persons, company executives, drivers, construction workers, doctors, architects, lawyers, and of course as husbands and fathers too. In commercial advertisements, women appear for cosmetics, food and cleaning products. Even advertisements for bathing soaps and shampoos invariably convey the message that women bathe for beauty and men for cleanliness.

This unrealistic and unfair representation of men and women by advertisers does great harm since the commercials are repeated over and over again often within the same hour. This repetition reinforces certain attitudes in the minds of the viewers and therefore serves to reinforce society's attitude towards men and women.

Cinema

Cinema is a powerful medium that can make or mar a society. It is often said to reflect the society in which it is produced. Cinema is an integral part of modern Indian culture and the Indian film industry is the largest in the world. Indian cinema characterized by the diversity of its genre, language, regionality, and budget, can be seen as a crucial resource for understanding the dynamics of gender and sexuality in contemporary India. The stereotypical representation of women as dependent upon men characterized the cinematic landscape for a large part of the twentieth century. Except for a very few movies that were made with consideration for feminine sensitivities, post colonial

cinema has been dominated by hero-oriented movies with women reduced to mere props for adding glamour and dance sequences. Men are always represented as virile and powerful, protective of women who are projected as vulnerable and weak. The films are evidence of the brute reality of hundreds of millions of women internalizing the roots of their own destruction. Women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearances coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. The song-and-dance sequences of the Indian cinema serve mainly to present the female body as a spectacle to satisfy the voyeuristic pleasures of the male gaze. Most of the films are shot to make money. Feminists see cinema as a key carrier of contemporary cultural myths. Cinematic representations of men and women are far from reality.

In recent years a few women have made their presence conspicuous by producing movies which focus on women's issues. Deepa Mehta's film *FIRE* (1996) has tackled the theme of lesbianism among dissatisfied urban Indian wives. Though this film obtained international acclaim in India, it was considered a blot on Indian culture and womanhood. Indian cinema mostly represents women in stereotyped binary oppositions-the goddess and the whore. The goddess categories are revered mothers; devoted wives, demure sisters; and the romanticized girlfriends. The whore categories are villainous and fallen women who are sensuous vamps, courtesans, and prostitutes. Among these stereotyped women, the 'real' Indian woman is often lost or ignored. The popular theme in present-day cinema is 'romantic love' in its different dimensions. Since the cine field is very much in the control of men, women are represented as objects of desire and possession. All the longings, frustrations, fantasies and hopes of men are reflected in the films.

Print Media - Newspapers and Magazines

Media/journalists are a part of society and consume the same cultural values; hence they cannot escape their influence. Even if they hold individual values and views, they have to conform to the social concurrence. Violence against women has been a major issue on the feminist agenda. But we cannot say that the media is equally concerned about this issue. Events like bride-burning, rape, mysterious/unnatural death, eve-teasing, domestic violence, kidnapping, police atrocities, and infanticides are reported

as occurrences and not discussed as 'issues', except in stray articles in special editions published on weekends. Such stories are largely gathered from police records or hospitals and published with the newspaper bylines. They are investigated mainly when the victim comes from an affluent family or has political connections or when the story has a political or communal angle to it. Women in most incidents of violence/crime appear as passive actors, quoted by officials. In these cases, women may not be the sources providing news. It may be said that mainly two kinds of events related to women make news: sensational news of violence/crime and reformatory news dealing with officials' activities towards reforms which concern women's lives.

The front page of a newspaper rarely carries news related to women's issues. The items on women's news are mostly found on unclassified pages. A meagre percentage of women's news is found on the sports, economy and business pages. Interestingly the articles in the Saturday and Sunday magazine sections/supplements are mainly written by women. The authors are women academicians, women activists, and women journalists. It may be noted that in the case of editorials also there is meagre coverage of women's issues on the agenda as the most important item in any newspaper. Nonetheless, it is encouraging that the media takes note of feminist books, plays, and articles for reviews.

The media draws from a ready reservoir of gender differentiating stereotypes, myths, legends and symbols. This becomes more dangerous when it is represented by a media that is considered egalitarian and secular since no filters are used while decoding their message.

The factors that give rise to this low coverage of women's issues include male domination in the media profession, the lack of women in power positions, the general lack of interest in women's issues, and the vested financial interests of newspapers. While the state media has defined gender guidelines and policies, these remain unstated in most private media institutions. These policies are women-centred, rather than gender-centred. In order for the media to reflect gender rights in a sustained and cogent manner, gender sensitive guidelines and mechanisms have to be evolved. While adherence to principles of equality can be lauded, procedures and systems evolved to promote empowerment must be screened through the assumption of gender rights.

Gender diversity within the media is an effective strategy only when supported by gender sensitivity and the integration of gender-just norms.

Conclusion

Indian men and women still have to discover their basic identity which should be neither male nor female but human. This identity encompasses the other two identities and is a liberating and life-giving force which can revitalize the whole of human society. The woman's identity is to go beyond the threshold of social transition so as to get in touch with her being and personhood on the psychological level. There should be mutual respect and recognition on the part of man and woman and both must develop their concern and consideration for each other. Only a gender fair society can become an ideal human society.

Bibliography

- Arya, Sunanda. *Mass Media and Public Opinion in India*. Jaipur: Printwell Publishers, 1989.
 Bathla, Sonia. *Women, Democracy and the Media*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998.
 Chanana, Karuna, Ed. *Socialisation, Education and Women: Explorations in Gender Identity*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1988.
 Joshi, Ila. *Women Dimension on Television*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Co., 1991.
 Joseph, Joni .C. *Mass Media and Rural Development*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1997.
 Lakshmi, C. S. *The Face Behind the Mask: Women in Tamil Literature*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd., 1984.
 Naipaul, V.S. *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.
 O' Flaherty, Wendy Doniger. *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.
 Parikh, Indra. J & Pulin K Garg. *Indian Women: An Inner Dialogue*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989.
 Reddy, P.A. & Jayalakshmi. M. *Exposure of Women to the Mass Media*. New Delhi: Classical Publishing Co., 2004.

Glossary

- Ahalya – the wife of Gautama, was seduced by Indra and then released from her husband's curse by Rama.
 Anusuya - a virtuous woman who is referred to in the *Ramayana*. She is the wife of Sage Atri. When the three Gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva try to humiliate her, she transformed them into babies with her power of chastity.
 Arthnareeswara – Lord Shiva wears a male earring in one ear, a female one in the other, symbolizing his dual nature (Arthnareeswara, half-man, half-woman). It is believed that He is half himself and the other half constituting of his wife Parvathi.
 Kannagi – In the epic *Cilappatikaram*, Ilanko depicts the transformation of the chaste wife Kannagi into a goddess after she avenges the unjust death of her husband.

Kauravas: Sons of King Dhritarashtra in *the Mahabharata*

Lakshman Rekha – the line drawn by Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rama in the *Ramayana* for protecting Seetha, Rama's wife against any danger.

Manu Smriti: *Manu Smriti* or Laws of Manu, a renowned code of Hindu law said to have consisted of 100,000 verses. The primary purpose of the book, which contains rules for the observance of ceremonies and rituals, and moral and social instruction, appears to have been to strengthen the institution of the caste system in India.

Nalayini – the faithful wife who took her leper husband to the prostates house.

Renuka – wife of sage Jamadagni and mother of Parasurama, an avatar of Lord Vishnu. She was killed by her son at the order of her husband who thought that she had been disloyal to him.

Seeta- Lord Rama's wife in the *Ramayana* for whose sake a war was fought.

インドにおけるジェンダー表象概論 パルタサラティ・ラジャラクシュミ

このペーパーではインドにおける現代に至るまでのジェンダー表象およびグローバル化の中での変化のありかたの包括的分析を行う。インドの社会実情は多文化混在性と密接に結びついており、それは地域により父権主義的なものから女系制まで存在するジェンダー関係の現状にも反映されている。ここでは、ジェンダー観の発達および内在化に強い影響を与えた5つの要素に焦点を当てて議論したい。具体的には、インド神話体系・宗教・歴史・文学およびマスメディアを取り上げる。

多面的なインド文化では、多くの対立的要素、例えば伝統とモダニティ、都市文化と地方文化、精神主義と現実主義、識字文化および非識字文化といった事柄が共存するパラドクスが見られる。他言語・他宗教・他民族・階層社会というインド社会の多様性にも関わらず、そこにある統一のアイデンティティが確実に存在しているのは、やはり文化活動の影響に負うところが大きいだろう。神話体系はインド文化にとって最も豊饒な基盤のひとつであり、現在に至るまでインド社会の精神性の根源はヒンドゥー教聖典であるプラナーの編まれた時代にある。ジェンダーによるステレオタイプや役割の発展過程の研究において、叙事詩や民話、伝説が参照される要因はここにある。

インド社会内の父権的構造によって採用されてきた宗教原理や伝統についての議論は、ジェンダーによる差異化がいかに着実に男性の社会における優位性を確立し女性の生を周縁化してきたか、また寡婦殉死や持参金制度、女兒殺し、寡婦や未婚婦人の蔑視、強姦をはじめとする女性に対する暴力全般などの社会悪の根源がここにあることを明らかにする。

外国勢力の侵入の歴史を辿ると、紀元前325年のギリシャによるパンジャブ地方侵入および紀元747年のアラブ侵入、15世紀に始まるムガル帝国による支配、イギリスによる植民地支配などによる数次にわたる男性優位性思想導入の影響を見て取ることができる。

文学はそれを生んだ社会を映す鏡の役割を果たす。一般大衆向け作品に見られるジェンダー表象は男女に対するステレオタイプ化されたイメージとアイデンティティの変化を見せてくれる。過去において、そしておそらく現在においても、女性に対するイメージには両義的なものがあり、神格化されたイメージと侮蔑的で貶められたイメージが並立して見られる。男性キャラクターの描かれ方と照らし合わせると、現代社会における女性の地位および役割の変化の中、アイデンティティクライシスが進行しつつあることが見て取れるだろう。

映画やテレビドラマ、広告や印刷メディアが男女の生活におよぼす影響は非常に大きい。映画は現在の社会の傾向を指し示す理想的なメディアである。年間製作本数の膨大さにおいて

インド映画界は世界最大規模を誇る。メディアテキストの多義的な意味性に女性性の現実ではなく男性の幻想の反映を見て取るのは難しくない。娯楽映画では、男女を伝統的アイデンティティのもとに表現するため、さまざまな方策をとっている。採算性が最優先されるため、男性観客向けアピールとしてセックスと暴力に力点が置かれている。インド社会全域に浸透しているテレビも映画に影響を与えている。連続ドラマの多くは女性を中心に据えているが、否定的な側面が強調されている。そこでは女性は悪意に満ちているか、あるいは弱い人間として描かれる。広告で男性の下着からトイレ・浴室用製品にいたるまで、グラマラスな人形として女性イメージが多用されている。

締めくくりとして、インド社会の精神性と文化構造の継続性および安定性が、黙々たるインド女性によって保たれてきたことを示したい。この文脈において、女性の人生は徳性の担い手として娘・妻・母としての義務と役割を果たすことにあると考えられてきた。全人格的存在としての個人が役割の枠組みから離れることは許されず、女性の多くが、既成の枠組みを超えるのではなく、その枠組みを尊厳あるものとして扱い、結果としてそれを保持してきた。しかし現在、成長と生活の場には新しい状況がある。現在女性が立っている空間はいまだかつて存在したことのない場所だ。そこには新しい指針が打ち立てられなければならない。女性が旧来の世界を脱却し、新しい世界に足を踏み入れ、新しい意味性を獲得し作り出すためには、まず自らの内面に潜む因習を乗り越える必要がある。現在の世界的および地域的状況は、女性と男性が対話に基づき、平等で幸福な人間社会を協力で築くことを行動に移す環境を整えつつある。