18

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE HINDU WOMAN : WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR IT ?

In the journal of the Maha Bodhi for March 1950 there appeared an article on "The Position of Women in Hinduism and Buddhism" *by Lama Govinda. His article was a rejoinder to an article which had appeared in Eve's Weekly of January 21, 1950, and in which the Buddha was charged as being the man whose teachings were mainly responsible for the downfall of women in India. Lama Govinda did his duty as every Buddhist must in coming forward to refute the charge. But the matter cannot be allowed to rest there. This is not the first time such a charge is made against the Buddha. It is often made by interested parties who cannot bear his greatness, and comes from quarters weightier in authority than the writer an Eve's Weekly can claim. It is, therefore, necessary to go to the root of the matter and examine the very foundation of this oft repeated charge. The charge is so grave and so vile that the readers of the Maha Bodhi will, I am sure, welcome further examination of it.

Such a charge against the Buddha can be supported on two grounds only -

The first possible ground may be the reply which the Buddha is reported (in Chapter V - *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*) to have given to a question put to him by Ananda. It reads as follows :

"9. How are we to conduct ourselves, (asked Ananda)
with regard to womankind ?
As not seeing them, Ananda.
But if we should see them,
what are we to do ?
Not talking, Ananda.
But if they should speak to us,
Lord, what are we to do ?
Keep wide awake, Ananda."

* See Appendix—II.

There is no denying that the passage in question is to be found in the text of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* as published by the Oxford University Press. The point, however, is not whether the passage exists or not. The point is that if any argument is to be built upon this passage, is it not necessary to prove that the text is original and genuine and not a latter interpolation by the *Bhikkhus* ?

Any one who knows the central teachings of the Buddha is quite bewildered after reading the Sutta Pitaka as we find it now wrapped about by the mythical drapery, disfigured by additions of purely Brahmanic ideas entirely foreign to the original Buddhist thought and distorted by the twists and turns given to it by monastic ideas intended to enforce monastic ideals. So much so that one is inclined to join in wonder with Mrs. Rhys Davids[1], and ask :-

> "Where in these pages of (the *Sutta Pitaka)* is Gotama? How much of them, how little, is a blend of (it may be) original saying clearly or confusedly reproduced, of fillings by ages of successive narrators, of memory-schemes drawn up by teachers, not teachers of the multitude but of orally learning pupils, of efforts, often clumsy, by editors to set down in writing much that had long been more fluently told ? And all of them, narrators, teachers, editors, were men whose choice of ideals of life differed from that of the rest of the world, differed the more in proportion as they were sincerely not of the world as well as not in it. Through this distorting medium he has to read, and ask himself which sayings, put into the mouth of a certain accredited 'teacher and way-shower" of truth, are likely to have come from such a man as he is recorded to have been ?"

There is therefore nothing very extravagant in the suggestion that this passage is a later interpolation by the Bhikkhus. In the first place the Sutta Pitaka was not reduced to writing till 400 years had passed after the death of the Buddha. Secondly, the Editors who compiled and edited them were Monks

[1] : Preface (xiii) to Kindred Sayings, Vol. II.

and the Monk Editors compiled and wrote for the Monk. The statement attributed to the Buddha is valuable for a Monk to preserve his rule of celibacy and it is not unlikely for the Monk Editor to interpolate such a rule.

There are two other considerations which go to support the suggestion that this passage is a later interpolation.

(1) Firstly, from the Table given in the introduction to this *Sutta* (to be found on page 72 of the Digha Nikaya, part II, in the S.B.B. Series, by Davids) it will be noticed that great many of the passages which occur in this *Sutta* also occur in other *Suttas*. It is important to note that this passage does not occur in any other *Sutta* notwithstanding the fact that they contain so many other passages from this *Sutta*.

(2) Secondly, from page XXXVIII of the introduction to this *Sutta* (published in Vol. XI of the S.B.E. by Davids) it appears that there exists a Chinese version of this *Sutta*. But this Chinese text also does not contain this particular passage.

Let us go further and apply the test of probability. Was there any reason why Ananda should have asked such a question? Was it in keeping with the known relations of Buddha with women ? There is evidence to show that such a question could not have been asked by Ananda and that if such a question had been asked, the Buddha could not have given such a reply. The conduct of Ananda and of the Buddha toward women as reported in the *Pitakas* is so contrary to the possibility of such a question being raised and such an answer being given.

On the point as to whether there was any necessity for Ananda to ask such a question it is relevant to note that in the same Chapter of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta,* only a few *gathas* removed from those quoted above, the Buddha describes how sweet was Ananda and how he was loved by all. Out of them I quote below the two following *gathas*—

> "16. Brethren, there are these four wonderful and marvellous qualities in Ananda.
>
> If, brethren, a number of the brethren of the Order should come to visit Ananda, they are filled with joy on beholding him; and if Ananda should then preach the truth to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while the company of brethren is ill at ease, brethren, when Ananda is silent.
>
> If brethren, a number of the sisters of the Order..... or of devout men, ... or of devout women, should behold him; and if Ananda should then preach the truth to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while the company of sisters is ill at ease, brethren, when Ananda is silent."

From this it is clear that it was usual for Ananda to meet women, not only sisters but devout women who were not members of the Order. He used to see them, meet them and talk to them. Why then should Ananda have asked such a question ? The Buddha knew that the women used to meet Ananda. He raised no objection before. Why should he have thought of interdicting and forbidding all contact with women ? The whole passage is so unnatural that it must be regarded as a later monastic interpolation.

There is another instance in the life of Ananda which stands in stark contrast with the passage in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutra*. As is well known, in the first *Sangiti* (Council) five complaints were made against Ananda. They were :—

(1) that he failed to ask which parts of the *Vinaya* were in the opinion of the Buddha the lesser parts for which he gave authority to the *Sangha* to alter and amend;

(2) that he stepped on the Robe of the Lord during retreat when sewing it;

(3) that he caused the body of the departed Lord to be saluted first by women so that it was soiled by their tears ;

(4) that he did not ask the Lord to live for a cycle, and

(5) that he was principally instrumental in getting women admitted to the *Sangha.*

To all these charges Ananda pleaded guilty. Whether he should have pleaded guilty or not is another matter. What is of interest is the third charge. For it has great relevance to the issue in question. Why did Ananda allow women to touch the body of the Master if the advice given by him as mentioned in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is true as a fact ? Would he so flagrantly and knowingly disobey the advice given by the Buddha a few minutes before?" The answer must be in the negative. What follows from this negative answer ? What follows is that the Buddha had not given such an advice as is alleged against him. For if he had given such an advice, Ananda could not have acted contrary to it. It therefore stands to reason that no such advice had been given by the Buddha.

Let us now consider the question from the side of the Buddha. Would it have been natural for the Buddha to give such a reply ? The answer to this question must depend upon Buddha's course of conduct towards women. Did the Buddha avoid meeting women as is suggested by the advice he is reported to have given to Ananda? Where are the facts ?

Two examples at once come to mind. One is that of Visakha. She was one of the eighty chief disciples of the Buddha with the title of "Chief of Alms-givers'. Did not Visakha at one time go to hear Buddha preach ? Did she not enter his monastery ? Did the Buddha act towards Visakha in the manner he directed Ananda to act towards women ? What did the *Bhikkhus* present at the meeting do? Did they leave the meeting?

The second instance that comes to one's mind is that of Amrapali of Vaisali. She went to see the Buddha and gave him and his monks an invitation for a meal at her house. She was courtesan. She was the most beautiful woman in Vaisali. Did the Buddha and the *Bhikkhus* avoid her ? On the other hand they accepted her invitation-rejecting the invitation of the Licchavis who felt quite insulted on that account- and went to her home and partook of her food.

Other examples are not wanting. The *Nandakovada Sutta*[1] tells of Mahaprajapati Gotami having brought five hundred alms-women with her to the Buddha when he was staying at Sravasti with a request that he should instruct them in the Doctrine and Discipline. Did the Buddha run away from them ?

The *Samyutta Nikaya*[2] reports that Kokanada, daughter of Pajjuna, when the night was far spent shedding radiance with her effulgent beauty over the whole *Mahavana,* came into the presence of the Buddha when he was staying at Vaisali.

The reports of frequent visits of Queen Mallika, wife of King Pasenajit, to the Buddha for religious instructions are scattered in the *Pitakas.*

From these instances it is clear that the Buddha did not shun women and women were not afraid of going to the Buddha.

It is true that the Buddha did advise[3] the Bikkhus not to make it a habit to visit families of lay disciples for fear of human weakness yielding to frequent contacts with women. But he did not forbid such visits nor did he express any disdain about women as such.

It is also true that the Buddha was dreadfully keen in maintaining celibacy. He was painfully aware of the fact that, to use his own words,[4] "Women doth stain life of celibacy". But what did he advise ? Did he advise the *Bhikkhus* to shun all contact with women ? Not at all. He never put any such interdict. Far from doing any such thing what he did was to tell the *Bhikkhus* that whenever they met any women, do *ye* call up the mother-mind, the sister-mind, or the daughter-mind[5] as the case may be *i.e.* regard a woman as you would your own mother, sister or daughter.

The second possible ground which an opponent of the Buddha can rely upon in support of the accusation is the opposition of the Buddha to women joining the *Sangha* and in making the *Bhikkhuni Sangha* (when he ultimately allowed it) subordinate to the *Bhikkhu Sangha.* Here again a further analysis of the situation is necessary. Why did the Buddha oppose the

[1] : Majjima Nikaya II. P. 309.

[2] : Vol. I P. 40.

[3] : Anguttara Nikaya III P. 190.

[4] : Samyutta Nikaya I. P. 53.

[5] : Kindred Saying IV, P. 68.

demand of Mahaprajapati to take *parivraja* (ordination) ? Did he oppose it because he was of opinion that women were a low class whose admission would lower the status of the *Sangha* in public esteem ? Or did he oppose it because he was of opinion that women intellectually and morally were incapable of realizing the ideal of His Doctrine and His Discipline? The second of these two questions was definitely put to the Buddha by Ananda in the course of the argument when he found the Buddha somewhat adamant. The Buddha gave an unequivocal answer leaving no room for doubt or dispute. He said that women were fully capable of realizing His Doctrine and His Discipline and that was not the reason why he refused their demand for taking *parivraja.* It is clear from this that the Buddha did not regard woman as inferior to man either in point of intellect or character. That he opposed the admission of women because he held them in low esteem and feared that they might lower the prestige of the *Sangha* is an argument which is hardly worth mentioning. For if that was his feeling he would never have admitted them at all.

To the argument that he made the *Bhikkhuni Sangha* subordinate to the *Bhikku Sangha,* the answer in question behind this arrangement there was no consideration as to superiority or inferiority, what lay behind this arrangement were consideration of purely practical character. In admitting women to be *Parivrajikas* (nuns) the Buddha had to face two questions. Should there be only one *Sangha* for men and women ? He decided to have two separate *Sanghas.* He was afraid that in a confraternity of men and women *Parivrajakas* the rule of celibacy would be completely lost. While therefore admitting women, he thought, it was necessary to use his own words, a dyke between them by creating two separate organisations. Having decided to create two separate organisations he was faced with another question. If there are to be two separate *Sanghas*- one for men and one for women- were they to be quite independent and separate organisations or was there to be some sort of inter-relation between the two ?

On the first issue no other decision was possible except that the women's *Sangha* should be separate from the men's *Sangha.*

This was an inevitable consequence which followed from the Rule of celibacy which was binding on both. The Buddha knew what a great force the sex instinct is with life of both man as well as woman. To use the Buddha's own words it is this instinct which drives a man in woman's bondage and a woman in man's bondage. This force, if given an opportunity to have its full force, the rule of celibacy could not last for a minute. To save the rule of celibacy he had to organise two separate *Sanghas.*

To take up the second issue : was any decision possible other than the one the Buddha took ? The women who joined his faith were raw women. They had to be instructed in His Doctorine and they had to be trained in His rules of Discipline. Who could undertake this task ? To whom else could He have entrusted this work ? To none except the male *Bhikkhus* of his Order. For they were already instructed in His Doctrine and trained in His Discipline. And this is what He did. Now what was the relationship that was forged between the *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis* by entrusting the work of instruction of the latter to the former ? This is a necessary question to raise. Without it the explanation of the insubordination of the *Bhikkhuni Sangha* to the *Bhikkhu Sangha* does not become quite clear. The obvious answer to this question is that by entrusting the work of training the *Bhikkhunis* to the *Bhikkhus,* their relationship became one of teacher and pupil. Now does not the relationship of teacher and pupil involve some authority for teacher over the pupil and some submission or subordination on the part of the pupil to the teacher ? What more did the Buddha do ?

In this connection it is useful to compare the relationship between monasteries and nunneries in the Christian Church. Are not the nunneries subordinate to the monasteries ? Of course they are[1]. Can anybody therefore say that Christianity treats women as inferior to men ? Why then should a different interpretation be put upon the arrangement made by the Buddha for regulating the relations between the *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis?*

So far as the *Sutta Pitaka* is concerned there is absolutely no ground for the charge that the Buddha had a prejudice against women and was for ever exhorting men to beware of them.

[1] : See Article "Nuns" in the Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. XI. P. 164.

II

Let us pass from particular instances to the general attitude of the Buddha towards women in general. Did the Buddha hold women in low esteem ? I am sure that whoever reads references to women by the Buddha which occur in the sacred literature of the Buddhists will be convinced that far from doing anything which would have the effect of degrading the woman, the Buddha all along tried to ennoble woman and to elevate her. Let me give a few illustrations in support of this view.

The birth of a daughter has been from ancient past regarded as a calamity by the people of India generally. Did the Buddha share this sentiment ? His attitude towards this question was quite the contrary to the traditional view as is illustrated by this advice to King Prasenajit. Once King Prasenajit was visiting the Buddha at Sravasti in Jeta's garden. A messenger from the Royal Palace came and informed him that his wife Queen Mallika had given birth to a daughter. On hearing this news the King went off his colour and looked sad and dejected. The Buddha noticed this change on his face and asked him for the cause of it. On being informed of it the Buddha said,[1] "Why be sorry? A woman child, O Lord of men, may prove even a better offspring than a male. For she may grow up wise and virtuous... The boy that she may bear may do great deeds and rule great realms..."

In answer to a question as to why some families rise and others decay, the Buddha is reported to have told the *Bhikkhus* that[2] —

> "Whatsoever families, monks, having attained greatness of possessions fail to last long, because they seek not for what is lost, they repair not the decayed, they eat and drink to excess, they put in authority a woman or a man that is immoral. Whatsoever families.. fail to last long all of them do so because of these four reasons or one or other of them.
>
> "Whatsoever families, monks, do last long, all of them do so because they seek for what is lost, repair the decayed, eat and drink in moderation, and put in authority a virtuous woman or

[1] : Samyutta Nikaya : Vol. I, P. 110.

[2] : Anguttara Nikaya : Vol. II, Pp. 254-255.

man. Whatsoever families... do last long, all of them do so because of these four reasons or one or other of them."

In describing to the *Bhikkhus* what happens when a Monarch "who rolls the wheel, *i.e.,* who is destined to be a *Chakravarti* (world monarch) appears in the world, the Buddha is reported to have told the monks that[1]—

> "Whenever such a monarch appears there is the appearance of the seven treasures: the treasure of the Wheel, the Elephant, the Horse, the Jewel, the Woman, the House-father, and the treasure of the Heir Apparent."

On another occasion the Buddha, speaking of the value of a woman to the world, said,[2]

> "Woman is the commodity Supreme because (as the commentator adds) she is of indispensable utility, or because through her *Bodhisattvas* and world rulers take birth."

How can a person in whose view the birth of a daughter was not an occasion for sorrow and might well be an occasion of joy, who held the view that those families are saved from a downfall which place a woman in authority over their affairs, who had no hesitation in describing woman as one of the seven Treasures and a thing of supreme value, be described as a hater or despiser of woman ? These statements are typical of the general sentiments entertained by the Buddha towards womankind. Can anybody say that they are calculated to bring the woman into ridicule and contempt ?

III

Those who see a social wrong in the Buddha placing the *Bhikklumis* under the authority of the *Bhikkhus* do not realize what a revolutionary act it was on the part of the Buddha to have allowed women to take *Sannyas* or *Parivraja* (Monkhood). Under the Brahamanic theory women had already been denied the right to acquire knowledge. When the question of *Sannyas*

[1] : Anguttara Nikaya : Vol. V. P. 83.

[2] : Samyutta Nikaya : Vol. I. P. 62.

came they did to the Indian woman another wrong. As a matter of history *Sannyas* was not an ideal of the Brahmins who worshipped the Vedas and who, for a long time, refused to recognise the *Upanishadas* as sacred literature. *Sannyas* was the ideal of the *Upanishadas* and the end of *Sannyasa* was to realize the *Upanishadic* doctrine that the *Atman* is *Brahma.* The Brahmins were dead opposed to the life of *Sannyas.* Ultimately they yielded but subject to certain conditions. One of the conditions was that women (and *Shudras)* were not to be eligible for *Sannyas.*

It is important to understand the reason why the Brahmins debarred woman from taking *Sannyas* because it helps to understand the attitude of the Brahmins towards woman which was in sharp contrast with that of the Buddha. The reason is stated by Manu. It reads as follows : —

> IX. 18. Women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their *Sanskars* (rites) are performed without *Veda Mantras.* Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the *Vedas.* The uttering of the *Veda Mantras* is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the *Veda Mantras* they are as untruth is.

Although Manu was later than the Buddha, he has enunciated the old view propounded in the older *Dhanna Sutras.* This view of the women was both an insult and an injury to the women of India. It was an injury because without any justification she was denied the right to acquire knowlege which is the birthright of every human being. It was an insult because after denying her opportunity to acquire knowldege she was declared to be as unclean as untruth for want of knowledge and therefore not to be allowed to take *Sannyas* which was regarded as a path to reach *Brahma.* Not only was she denied the right to realize her spiritual potentiality she was declared to be barren of any spiritual potentiality by the Brahmins.

This is a cruel deal with women. It has no parallel. As Prof. Max Muller[1] has said, "However far the human may be from the Divine, nothing on the earth is nearer to God than man, nothing on earth more Godlike than man". If this is true of man why is this not true of woman ? The Brahmins had no answer.

[1] : Hibbert lectures on Religion, Page 379.

By admitting women to the life of *Parivrajika,* the Buddha, by one stroke, removed both these wrongs. He gave them the right to knowledge and the right to realize their spiritual potentialities alongwith man. It was both a revolution and liberation of women in India. To quote the words of Prof. Max Muller : —

"The history of India teaches us that the galling fetters of the old Brahmanic law were broken at last, for there can be little doubt that we have to recognise in Buddhism an assertion of the rights of individual liberty, and more particularly, of the right of rising above the trammels of society, of going, as it were into the forest, and of living a life of perfect spiritual freedom, whenever a desire for such freedom arose."

This freedom which the Buddha gave to the women of India is a fact of far greater importance and out-weighs whatever stigma which is said to be involved in the subordination of the *Bhikkhunis* to the *Bhikkhu Sangha.* This was not an empty freedom. It was freedom which they keenly enjoyed and sang about "O free indeed! O gloriously free am I....." sang Mutta[1] - a *Bhikkuni,* who was a Brahmin girl. Mettika, another *Bikkhuni,* also a Brahmin girl, sang -".... so sit I here upon a rock. And over my spirit sweeps the breath of liberty[2]."

As Mrs. Rhys Davids Says-[3]

"To gain his freedom mobility ..... they, like their later Christian sisters, had laid down all social position, all domestic success, they had lost their world. But in exchange they had won the status of an individual in place of being adjuncts, however much admired, fostered, and sheltered they might, as such, have been. 'With shaven head, wrapt in their robe'-a dress indistinguishable, it would seem, from the swathing toga and swathed undergarments of the male religieuxs - the Sister was free to come and go, to dive alone into the depths of the wood, or climb aloft."

[1]: Psalms of Sisters No. XI.

[2]: *ibid No.* XXIV.

[3]: Preface to Therigatha.

In allowing women to become *Bhikkhunis* the Buddha not only opened for them the way to liberty, he also allowed them to acquire dignity, independent of sex. To her freedom she could, in the words of Mrs. Rhys Davids :

"Wed the other austere joy of being recognized, at least by her brother *Arahants,* 'as a rational being, without reference to sex. As such she breathed the spiritual atmosphere, she shared the intellectual communion of that religious aristocracy called in the *Pitakas, Ariyas,* with whom she claimed that power of seeing all things as they really are' which the Buddhist called being awake.

'How should the woman's nature hinder Us-us Ariyas says Soma, a Bhikkhuni[1] :

"What can that signify to one in whom

Insight doth truly comprehend the Norm ?

To one for whom the question doth arise :

Am I a woman in such matters, or

Am I a man ? or what not am I, then ?

To such an one is Mara fit to talk !"

This is not all. The Buddha in allowing women to become *Bhikkhunis* he opened them the way to equality with man. As observed by Mrs. Rhys Davids[2] "It is true that the *Bhikkunis* were technically appointed juniors in perpetuity to the *Bhikkhus.* It is equally clear that, by intellectual and more eminence, a *Theri* might claim equality with the highest of the fraternity. In the Psalms an instance occurs, in xxx, vii, where Bhadda associates herself in spiritual attainment with the great Kassapa, successor, as head of the Order, to the Founder himself. In this connection it should be noted that the Buddha did not place any premium on virginity as such. He kept his way open to all classes of women— married, unmarried, widows and even to prostitutes. All could acquire merit, freedom, dignity, an equality along with man."

[1] Psalms No. XVI.

[2] Preface to Therigatha P. P. XVI-XXVII.

IV

There can be no doubt that there has been an utter downfall in position of women in India from what it once was. One cannot say much about the part they played in ancient time in state-craft. But there is no doubt that they did occupy a very high position in the intellectual and social life of the country.

That at one time a woman was entitled to *upanayan* is clear from the *Atharva Veda* where a girl is spoken of as being eligible for marriage having finished her *Brahmacharya.* From the *Shrauta Sutras* it is clear that women could repeat the *Mantras* of the *Vedas* and the women were taught to read the *Vedas.* Panini's *Ashtadhyay* bears testimony to the fact that women attended *Gurukul* (College) and studied the various *Shakhas* (Sections) of the *Veda* and became expert in *Mimansa.* Patanjali's Maha Bhashya shows that women were teachers and taught Vedas to girl students. The stories of women entering into public discussions with men on most abstruse subjects of religion, philosophy and metaphysics are by no means few. The story of public disputation between Janaka and Sulabha, between Yajnavalkya and Gargi, between Yajnavalkya and Maitrei and between Sankaracharya and Vidyadhari shows that Indian women in pre-Manu's time could rise to the highest pinnacle of learning and education.

That at one time women were highly respected cannot be disputed. Among the Ratnis who played so prominent a part in the coronation of the King in Ancient India was queen and the King made her an offering' as he did to the others. Not only the King elect did homage to the Queen he worshipped his other wives of lower castes[2]. In the same way the King offers salutation after the coronation ceremony to the ladies of the chiefs of the *Srenies* (guilds)[3].

This is a very high position for women in any part of the World. Who was responsible for their fall ? It was Manu, the Law Giver of the Hindus. There can be no other answer. To leave no room for doubt, let me quote some of the laws made by Manu regarding women and are to be found in the *Manu-Smriti.*

[1] Jaiswal—Indian Polity, Part ii P. 16.

[2] *ibid* P. 17.

[3] *ibid* P. 82.

II. 213. It is the nature of women to seduce man in this (world). For that reason the wise are never unguarded in (the company of) females.

II. 214. For women are able to lead astray in (this) world not only a fool, but even a learned man, and (to make) him a slave of desire and anger.

II. 215. One should not sit in a lonely place with one's mother, sister or daughter; for the senses are powerful, and master even a learned man.

IX. 14. Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age; (thinking), '(It is enough that) he is a man', they give themselves to the handsome and to the ugly.

IX. 15. Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however, carefully they may be guarded in this (world).

IX. 16. Knowing their disposition, which the Lord of creatures laid in them at the creation to be such, (every) man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them.

IX. 17. (When creating them) Manu allotted to women (a love of their) seat and (of) ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct.

This shows how low was woman in the opinion of Manu. The laws of Manu against women are of a piece with this view.

Women are not to be free under any circumstances. In the opinion of Manu :—

IX. 2. Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control.

IX. 3. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never for independence.

IX. 5. Women must particularly be guarded against evil inclinations, however trifling (they may appear); if they are not guarded, they will bring sorrow on two families.

IX. 6. Considering the higher duty of all castes, even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives.

V. 147. By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.

V. 148. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.

V. 149. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; by leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families contemptible.

Woman is not to have a right to divorce.

IX. 45. The husband is declared to be one with wife, which means that there could be no seperation once a woman is married.

Many Hindus stop here as though this is the whole story regarding Manu's law of divorce and keep on idolizing it by comforting their conscience with the thought that Manu regarded marriage as sacrament and therefore did not allow divorce. This of course is far from the truth. His law against divorce had a very different motive. It was not to tie up a man to a woman but it was to tie up the woman to a man and to leave the man free.

For Manu does not prevent a man from giving up his wife. Indeed he not only allows him to abandon his wife but he also permits him to sell her. But what he does is to prevent the wife from becoming free. See what Manu says :—

IX. 46. Neither by sale nor by repudiation is a wife released from her husband.

The meaning is that a wife, sold or repudiated by her husband, can never become the legitimate wife of another who may have bought or received her after she was repudiated. If this is not monstrous, nothing can be. But Manu was not worried by considerations of justice or injustice in framing his law. He wanted to deprive women of the freedom they had under the Buddhistic regime. Manu was outraged by licence and in putting a stop to it he deprived her of her liberty.

A wife was reduced by Manu to a level of a slave in the matter of property.

IX. 416. A wife, a son and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong.

When she becomes a widow Manu allows her maintenance, if her husband was joint, and a widow's estate in the property of her husband, if she was separate from his family. But Manu never allows her to have any domination over property.

A woman under the laws of Manu is subject to corporal punishment and Manu allows the husband the right to beat his wife.

VIII. 299. A wife, a son, a slave, a pupil, and a younger brother of the full blood, who have committed faults, may be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo.

Under Manu a woman had no right to knowledge. The study of the Veda was forbidden to her by Manu.

II. 66. Even for a woman the performance of the *Sanskaras* are necessary and they should be performed without uttering the *Veda Mantras.*

Offering sacrifices according to Brahmanism formed the very soul of religion. Manu forbids women from performing sacrifices. Manu ordains that :

XI 36-37. A woman shall not perform the daily sacrifices prescribed by the Vedas. If she does it, she will go to hell.

To disable her from performing such sacrifices Manu prevents her from getting the aid and services of a Brahmin priest.

IV. 205-206. A Brahmin must never eat food given at a sacrifice performed by women. Sacrifices performed by women are inauspicious and not acceptable to God. They should, therefore, be avoided.

Finally, a word regarding the ideal of life, Manu has sought to place before a woman. It had better be stated in his own words :-

V. 151. Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives and when he is dead, she must not insult his memory.

V. 154. Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a God by a faithful wife.

V. 155. No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women, apart from their husbands; if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven.

Then comes the choicest texts which form the pith and the marrow of this ideal which Manu prescribes for women : -

V. 153. The husband who wedded her with sacred *Mantras,* is always a source of happiness to

his wife, both in season and out of season, in this world and in the next.

V. 150. She must always be cheerful, clever in the management of her household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils, and economical in expenditure.

This the Hindus regard as a very lofty ideal for a woman !!!

As though to put a coping stone on his edifice of disabilities of women Manu declared a new rule that killing a woman was only an *Upapataka* i.e. it was a minor offence.

XI. 67. Liquor, slaying women, *Sudras, Vaishyas,* or *Kshatriyas,* and a theists (are all) minor offences.

One can quite understand why Manu should have said that the killing of a *Sudras, Vaishya or a Kshatriya* was only an *Upapataka.* He was trying to establish that the Brahmin was superior to all these and only the killing of a Brahmin was *Mahapataka.* But why did he not apply the same rule to women ? Only because a woman, in the eyes of Manu, was a thing of no value.

In the face of these quotations can anybody doubt that it was Manu who was responsible for the degradation of women in India ? Most people are perhaps aware of this. But they do not seem to know two things. They do not know what is peculiar in Manu. There is nothing new or startling in the Laws of Manu about woman. They are the views of the Brahmins ever since Brahmanism was born in India. Before Manu they existed only as a matter of social theory. What Manu did was to convert what was a social theory into the law of the State. The second thing they do not know is the reason which led Manu to impose these disabilities upon women, *Sudras* and women were the two chief sections of the Aryan Society which were flocking to join the religion of the Buddha and thereby undermining the foundation of Brahmanic Religion. Manu wanted to stem the tide of women flowing in direction of Buddhism.

It is for this that Manu imposed these disabilities upon women and crippled them permanently. Those who doubt this might well consider the following injunctions contained in Manu Smriti —

V. 88. Funeral rites and obsequies which are performed on the death of a person shall be withdrawn (i.e, shall not be performed) from those who are born out of intermixture, from those who are addicted to asceticism and from those who have ended their lives by committing suicide.

V. 89. They shall also be withdrawn from women who have joined a heretic sect, who have too freely. who have injured a child in their womb or their husband and those who drink wine.

This injunction is among others aimed at (1) those who are addicted to asceticism and (2) women who have joined a heretic sect. In this injuction asceticism refers to *Parivrajakas* i.e. those who have abandoned their homes and taken to *Sannyas* and, in referring to a heretic sect, there is no doubt that Manu has in mind the Buddhist religion. It is therefore clear that when Manu declares that no funeral rites and obsequies shall be performed, for an ascetic or a woman who has joined a heretic sect, what Manu does is to prohibit performance of funeral rites and obsequies of a member of a family-whether male or female-who has joined the Buddha's religion. In other words he wants them to be treated as though they were disaffiliated and ho longer belonged to the family. Manu was the greatest opponent of the Buddhist religion. This is the secret of the many inequities which he heaped upon women. For he knew that if the home is to be protected against the invasion of Buddhism it is the woman who must be put under restraint. And he did it. All responsibility for the decline and fall of woman in India must be fastened upon Manu and not upon the Buddha.

In the compass of a few pages I have endeavoured to present the story of the Rise and fall of the Hindu woman. I have also endeavoured to offer an explanation as to who was the author of their fall and why he brought it about. I hope that the

unprejudiced and the impartial will realize that it was not the Buddha who can be held responsible for the tragedy. If anything the Buddha endeavoured to ennoble the woman it was to raise her to the level of man.[1]

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[1]: Magazine— 'Maha Bodhi' May-June 1951, Vol. 59, Pp. 137-151.