
Assessing the Rationale for Pativrataadharma : A Critical Analysis of Stridharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan.

Dr. Swasti Alpana

Department of History

Satyawati College, University of Delhi.

Abstract – Subordination of women and unequal power relationship existed in almost all the early societies despite their extraordinary socio-cultural variations. The degree and nature of that subordination have been conditioned and regulated by the socio-cultural norms of that given society in which women reside. Unique to this process and degree of subordination in Indian cultural tradition is the legitimization of *pativrataadharma*, the embedded ideology of the devoted wife. However, in essence it contains solely one principle that of unquestioned devotion and selfless service to the husband in which lies the wife's salvation, and therefore women's only worth-while goal. *Pativrataadharma* was used as a unique and effective device to bestow subordinate status to women. Shaped by the orthodox tradition the general subordination of women in India assumed particularly severe form through the glorification of submissive wife as *pativrata* hence, Internalized by women as a mark of distinction. Our ideas of male and female roles and responsibilities derive less from empirical facts and observations and more from norms and expectations conceived by the ideologues and designed with the aim to sustain the patriarchal structure.

An attempt has been made in this research paper to explore the roots of patriarchy leading to the general subordination and its construction with idealization of *pativrataadharma*/ unquestioned 'devotion to husband', which has earned pride of place in Indian tradition.

Keywords – Chastity, Hindu family, *Stridharma*, *Pativrata*

Introduction- This paper interrogates Tryambakayajvan's *Stridharmapaddhati*, a treatise written by a traditional brahmin pandit in eighteenth century . This treatise is one such exclusive Sanskrit treatise that professes the orthodox view of 'submissive devoted wife', whose duties,

goal and identity derive solely from her husband , as the ideal wife. Tryambakayajvan's work provides a glaring account of the patriarchal ideology of *pativrata* and wifehood, drawing upon the evidences from epics and dharmashastra. While decoding women's domestic and religious obligations, his view clearly endorses the dharmashastric view on wifely obedience and propagates passive devotion as the highest duty enjoined upon women. Tryambakayajvan's general rulings on the conduct appropriate to women virtually illustrate and reiterate Manu's dictum of chastity and wifely fidelity as the highest expression of virtuous women in his work. Interestingly, this chaste- *pativrata* model was internalized by women as the most prized virtue , ensuring them the very heaven and thus salvation , therefore visibilised as self-imposed.

The family has always been the basic and concrete unit of social institution in all civilized societies. Hindu family as a social unit has imbibed through ages the traditions, sentiments and norms of social behavior and served as a convenient medium to transmit the same to its individual members. The fundamental Character of traditional Hindu family is its joint nature; it is an ideal towards which families aspire to confirm with varying degree of success. The most crucial aspect of Hindu family structure resides in the hierarchy of power relations based on patriarchal norms and traditions. Ironically the notion of *pativrata* refers to perfection of women. in a Hindu family. A critical analysis of the cultural of tradition reveals that the nature and extent of the subordination of women in early Indian society was shaped largely by legitimizing the 'deadweight of tradition' by enunciating the patriarchal ideology of *pativrataadharma* . It has been noticed that the greatness of Indian tradition has ofsten been gauged on the touchstone of righteous women as valorised by epithet like 'devi' for best loved- *pativrata*, drawing parallel and exemplifying virtuous wife, a tag that is incessantly associated with Sita, Savitri, Anasuya, Shakuntala and a host of other similar religious and mythological ideal *pativratas*. In this context, a critical analysis of Tryambakayajvan's rulings on idea of devoted wife reveals that, what *pativrata* symbolized aptly was really the 'service role' of wife, as he emphatically declares that the foremost duty for women is 'service to one's husband'. (पतिशुश्रूषां मुख्यो धर्मः) Sdhp. 48v.

I will explore here (tentatively) the relationship between Hindu family/ household and how the weaving together a range of concern within the household was accompanied by an insistence on complete subordination of the wife in the household , specifically focusing on the notion of ‘chastity’ and the ideology of *pativrata* that attempted to lay down and legitimize the paradigms for the ideal wife.

From socio-religious point of view, the subordinate position of wife in Hindu family is also sanctified by scriptures, for example, the insistence on complete subordination of wife is found in Manusmriti which is perhaps the most acknowledged among early Indian prescriptive texts. According to Manu¹,” men should exercise control over women in order to protect birth (*prasuti*), the family (*kula*), the one’s Self (*atman*), and duty (*dharma*). Medhatithi (one of the earliest commentaries on Manusmriti) observes that women should have no freedom of action regarding the great objects of human existence (*dharma, artha, kama*). But should obtain permission of their husband before spending money on such acts.”² Significantly as enumerated by Manu the same attitude is reflected in Tryambakayajvan’s Stridharma-paddhati which clearly expounds the systematic glorification of pursuit of *Stridharma* , that of the assiduous performance of selfless service and dutiful obedience as the sure path to salvation for women, and thus their only worth-while goal. As a hermeneutic device epics like Mahabharata has been often quoted by Tryambakayajvan as he admits that women are innately wicked(*strisvabhava*), the same pervasive conception of women is presented in Mahabharata is that of women’s ‘innate’ nature “*strisvabhava* labelled as promiscuous, inherently fickle and untamed”.³ Correspondingly, while discussing essential nature of women as inherently sinful Tryambakayajvan reiterated the same view regarding the innate wicked nature of women which according to him is proven by their birth as *strisvabhava*. As he assumes that since a woman is being born as a woman itself is evidence that she is committed sins in her previous life.

¹ Manusmrti, Sacred Books of the East, Vol.XXV.IX 2,5,6,7.

² Comment on Manusmrti, op.cit.IX.2.

³ Mbh.XIII.38

As professed by the conformists, the Ideological control upon wife through the idealization of chastity and the projection of *pativrataadharma* as the mark of a virtuous women may be regarded as the source for the subordination of women in the household. In this context it is imperative to highlight that Tryambakayajvan echoes the same sentiment that for a *pativrata*, chastity in thought and deed has be the crucial constituent of *pativrataadharma*. If one looks at the literal meaning of 'chastity' it appears that the term means unsullied/pure, here interestingly, the concept of *pativrata* is interlinked with the issue of chastity. A systematic analysis of the terms used for husband vis-a-vis wife clearly reveals the endorsement of unquestioned loyalty to the husband and never expressing even a desire to censure him is a crucial feature of *pativrataadharma*, the only route to women's salvation. As the word *pati* is used most often for husband, it is also used otherwise compounded with other words or separately, without any kinship connotation, signifying "lord, master or possessor", *Pati* in the sense of master or ruler is also addressed as *dampati* (the lord of the house) and a wife acquires her main identity from being a *patni* who is the wife of the head of the patriarch. In addition, the literal translation of the word *pati* refers to authority, employer or hero. Thus, the term *pati*, from the very beginning as per the literary record, signifies, "the possessor" or "the ruler", as also "the husband". The legal position of the husband, which became quite prominent in the later literature, made it very clear that *pati* means husband, and the term is used liberally to denote husband as the possessor of his wife.

Methodology : The present study adopts an interpretative qualitative research methodology to unravel and analyze the nature and basis of the subordination of women which is traced to a single source viz., patriarchal ideology of *Pativrata*. Focusing on the religious traditions and the normative literatures this study seeks to attempt a critical examination of the text Stridharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan as a primary source, through triangulation of theoretical perspectives, prescriptive texts and narratology from a gender point of view highlighting the source and nature of the subordination of women which assumed a severe form through the powerful device of social and cultural norms that simply dictates how women ought to behave.

Stridharmapaddhati Text and Context :

The Stridharmapaddhati is the only extant treatise written by Tryambakayajvan of Thanjavur in late 18th century, the title of the text translates simply as the “ Manual to the Religious Status and Duties of Women”. Written in Sanskrit from a highly conventional perspective the importance of this text lies in the fact that it is the only extant work which is entirely devoted to the specific subject of womanhood. Although many digests deal with topic pertaining to women, Stridharmapaddhati is the only complete text solely dedicated to the issues of womanhood. The view and attribution of Stridharmapaddhati is sourced mainly from Manu Smriti, Dharmasashtras, Dharmasutras, Puranas , epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata and some verses from Vedic texts are also incorporated.

Textual analysis of prescribed norms and traditions highlights the fact that religious traditions and prescriptive norms played an instrumental role in legitimizing the orthodox code of conduct to be followed by women, deeply rooted in patriarchy and thus culminating into a kind of invasive enslavement of women in early India.

According to Hindu religious tradition *pativrata* is regarded as a mark of virtuous women and the condition that a *pativrata* wife should treat her husband as her only god is somewhat emphatically pronounced in almost all the prescriptive texts. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the notion of chastity as per the religious tradition is not applicable for the husband thus reflecting an exacting patriarchal norm. I wish to argue that women’s general subordination operates at four levels of control: a. production b. reproduction c. socialization and d. sexuality. The mechanism of control mostly operated through three devices and at three different levels: a. through ideology b. through the concept of *stridharma* or duty of wife and c. through the notion of *pativrataadharma* or sole and unquestioned devotion to husband. The study reveals that the extent and form of subordination of women in Hindu family is to some extent conditioned and shaped by the ideology and customary practices. Here, I would like to underscore that it is mainly in the epics that a thoughtfully crafted notion of *pativrataadharma* was heaped on women as a self-denying, passive- *dharma*. In this context, it would be worth mentioning that it is in the epics that a well-conceived ideology of *pativrata* was articulated and

sanctified. The most prevalent notion of wife in the twin epics Ramayana and Mahabharata is that of *pativrata*/devoted wife. Similarly, Tryambakayajvan's view of *pativrataadharma* as enumerated in Stridharmapaddhati clearly reiterates the orthodox view of unquestioned devotion to the husband, suggesting that the entire existence of wife should be dedicated to her husband without regard for her own self, which is exemplified by archetypes of *pativrata* par excellence like Draupadi, Savitri, Anusuya and many other ideal women.

Unravelling Tryambakayajvan's ideals of *Pativratadharma* as enumerated in Stridharmapaddhati : A critical Reflection

Embracing the conformist notion of *pativrata* /devoted faithful wife has occupied pride of place in Tryambakayajvan's Stridharmapaddhati, in his opinion *pativrataadharma* is the only duty enjoined upon the wife. Unquestioned obedience and loyalty to the husband and never entertaining even a thought to censure him is one of the most important aspects of the *pativrata* code as graphically illustrated by Tryambakayajvan. The twin epics Mahabharata and Ramayana have been often quoted to reinforce the ideal of *pativrata*/devoted wife whose devotion is and selfless service is expected to extend beyond husband's lifetime and prescribed as the foremost duty to last till her last breath.

मुख्यो धर्मः स्मृतिषु विहितो भर्तृशुश्रूषणं हि स्त्रीणामेतत्पितुरनुमतं कार्यमित्याकलय्य ।

तत्कुर्वाणाऽभजत वपुषो भर्तुरर्थं हिमाद्रेः कन्या सा मे दिशतु सततं धर्ममार्गप्रवृत्तिम् ।।१।। Sdhp.1v 2-4.

In the very first verse of the text Tryambakayajvan explicitly states that "obedient service to one's husband is the primary religious duty enjoined by sacred tradition for women" Sdhp.1v. 2-4. Hence, women's role as a *pativrata* is the most valorized one in the Stridharmapaddhati.

While codifying the duties of *pativrata* under the general heading of 'duties common to all women' (*strinamam sadharana dharma*) in Stridharmapaddhati, most of the textual attribution made by Tryambakayajvan comes from twin epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. Reiterating upon the traditional point of view on the status and duties of wife, the following enumerated passages of Stridharmapaddhati which comes from Mahabharata in the form of *samvada*/

dialogue between Draupadi and Satyabhama where the nuances of *pativrata dharma* were narrated threadbare by Draupadi, the blessed wife of Pandavas. In praise of the *pativrata* wife the entire conversation revolves around the portrayal of Draupadi as a celebrated *pativrata*.

The obligation that how the *pativrata* wife should treat her husband is narrated by Draupadi as she engages in *samvad*/ dialogue with Satyabhama and in that process expounds on the ideal of *pativrata dharma* and richly elaborates about the secret of her power over Pandavas.

कथयामासतुश्चित्रां कथां कुरुयदूत्थिताम् ।
अथाब्रवीत् सत्यभामा कृष्णस्य महिषी प्रिया ॥
साताजिती याज्ञसेनीं रहसीदं सुमध्यमा ।
केन द्रौपदि वृत्तेन पाण्डवानधितिष्ठसि ॥
लोकपालोपमान् वीरान् पुनः परमसंहतान् ।
कथं च वशगास्तुभ्यं न कुप्यन्ति च ते शुभे ॥ Sdhp. 27v.10
तव वश्या हि सततं पाण्डवाः प्रियदर्शने ।
मुखप्रेक्षाश्च ते सर्वे तत्त्वमेतद्विहीहि मे ॥ Sdhp.28r.5

While addressing Draupadi," Satyabhama, the daughter of Satrajit questions about the secret of her influence over the Pandavas asks , how is it that, those heroes who rival the creator of this world , the supremely warriors, remain obedient to you and never gets angry with you"? 27v.10

In the course of *samvad* / conversation, the inquisitive Satyabhama asks " how she succeeds in gaining control over her five husbands as they all look to your face for guidance" ? Sdhp.28r.5

व्रतचर्या तपो वाऽपि स्नानमन्त्रौषधानि वा ।
विद्यावीर्यं मूलवीर्यं जपहोमागमास्तथा ॥ Sdhp.28r.6-7
ममाद्याचक्ष्व पांचालि यशस्यं भगदैवतम् ।
येन कृष्णे भवेन्नित्यं मम कृष्णो वशानुगः ॥
ममाद्याचक्ष्व पांचालि यशस्यं भगदैवतम् ।
येन कृष्णे भवेन्नित्यं मम कृष्णो वशानुगः ॥

एवमुक्त्वा सत्यभामा विरराम यशस्विनी ।

पतिव्रता महाभागा द्रौपदी प्रत्युवाच ताम् ॥

असत्स्त्रीणां समाचारं सत्ये मामनुपृच्छसि । Sdhp. 28.r. 8-10

In quest of becoming a *pativrata* par excellence like Draupadi , she further raises question by asking the following : “ is it the result of her religious vows; austerities; ritual bathing in sacred waters; chanting of mantras; using herbs; through the power of knowledge; primal energy; offerings into the fire or the sacred tantric rituals of *aagama* texts”. Sdhp. 28r.6-10.

अवधानेन सुभगे नित्योत्थिततयैव च

भर्तारो वशगा मह्यं गुरुशुश्रूपयैव च ॥ Sdhp. 29 v.7-8.

Hers Draupadi states that , “as a result of my attentiveness, my eternal readiness, and my devoted services to my elders, I have managed to control my husbands”. Sdhp.29v.7.

As outlined in Mahabharata and Agnipurana, Tryambakayajvan here reinforces the same ideals of a devoted wife as enumerated , “ that by serving the husband obediently and affectionately forms the only obligation for wife, and by performing this duty affectionately they can conquer the heaven, as suggested by Draupadi that dutiful obedience begets obedience from Pandavas, her husbands(भर्तारो वशगा)” . Sdhp.29v.7. The service rendered by Draupadi as a dutiful wife to various members of the household also reflects the significant understanding of the internal dynamics of household relations.

Draupadi’s advice in the course of the conversation clearly echoes the ideal that husband is the main repository of woman’s happiness and for women there is no god like husband.

नैतादृशं दैवतमस्ति सत्ये सर्वेषु लोकेषु सदैवकेषु ।

यथा पतिस्तुष्यति सर्वकामा लभ्याः प्रसादात् कुपितश्च हन्यात् ॥ Sdhp.31 r.2-3

“ There is no deity like one’s husband-in all the god-filled worlds; when he is pleased, through his grace (*prasadat*) desires are fulfilled; when angered, he kills” Sdhp.31 r.2-3.

Similarly, Tryambakayajvan states that the ideal woman always regards her husband as a god and devoted service to the husband as her only goal , as a woman it is prescribed that she should have no regard for her own self as well as her maternal family.

As illustrated in the following verse it becomes clear that ideal , “ women should relinquish her own family , including her mother and father. After her marriage the husband becomes a woman’s family; the husband alone is a woman’s religious duty, and her chief austerity.”

||Sdhp.32r.1-2.

प्रत्युत्तरं तु न ब्रूयाः पत्यौ क्रुद्धे कदाचन ।।

मा कुरुष्व सपत्नीत्वं कृष्णायां चर सौहृदम् ।

मातरं पितरं वाऽपि माऽस्मान् स्मर कदाचन ।।

पतिरेव स्त्रियो बन्धुः पतिरेव स्त्रियो धनम् ।

पतिरेव स्त्रियो धर्मः पतिरेव महत्तपः ।। इति ।।Sdhp.32r.1-2.

The emphasis on wifely religious duty as a co-partner in husband’s religious acts is verbatim quoted from the conversation between Uma and Maheshvara from the *Anushashanparva* of Mahabharata , in which Uma is stating that “the religious duty of a woman (*stridharma*) is created at the time of marriage, by her relative, in the presence of *agni* (the sacred marriage fire) ,she becomes her husband’s partner in the religious sphere (*sahadharmachari*)”. ||Sdhp 32r.2-4.

Uma further enumerates the characteristic features of the ideal wife addressing her as *dharmacharini*, one who participates in the religious duty of her husband and who ‘takes his vow as her own’. Sdhp 32r.2-4.

तथा चानुशासनिके उमामहेश्वरसंवादे -

स्त्रीधर्मः पूर्वमेवायं विवाहे बन्धुभिः कृतः ।

सहधर्मचरी भर्तुः भवत्यग्निसमीपतः ।। Sdhp 32r.2-4.

सुखभावा सुवचना सुवृत्ता सुखदर्शना ।

अनन्यचित्ता सुमुखी सा भवेद्धर्मभागिनी ।। Sdhp.32r.5

Further, Tryambakayajvan informs that “women cannot perform any religious act independently of their husbands: they cannot even worship any god other than their husbands, that for women there is no god like husband, “a virtuous woman always regards her husband as a god... for the husband is God for women; the husband family; the husband is the goal. There is no goal, no deity like the husband”. Sdhp.32r.5-6

देववत्सततं साध्वी भर्तारं प्रतिपश्यति ।

शुश्रूषां परिचारं च विधिवद्वा करोति च ।।

नान्यभावा ह्यविमनाः सुवृत्ता सुखदर्शना ।

सा साध्वी नियताहारा सा भवेद्धर्मचारिणी ।। Sdhp. 32r.5-6.

परुषाण्यपि चोक्ता था दृष्टा दुष्टेन चक्षुषा ।

सुप्रसन्नमुखी भर्तुः या नारी सा पतिव्रता ।। Sdhp. 32r.7.

Here Tryambaka's insistence that serving the husband obediently and affectionately forms the sole duty of wife as for women there is no god like husband clearly negates the very identity of a woman.

पतिर्हि देवो नारीणां पतिर्बन्धुः पतिर्गतिः ।

पत्या समा गतिर्नास्ति दैवतं वा यथा पतिः ।। Sdhp.32v 8-9

पतिप्रसादः स्वर्गो वा तुल्यो नार्या न वा भवेत् ।

यद्यकार्यमधर्मं वा यदि वा प्राणनाशनम् ।। Sdhp. 32v.10

पतिर्भूयाद्दुरिद्रो वा व्याधितो वा कथंचन ।

आपन्नो रिपुसंस्थो वा ब्रह्मशापार्दितोऽपि वा ।।

आपद्धर्माननुप्रेक्ष्य तत्कार्यमविशङ्कया ।

एष देवि मया प्रोक्तः स्त्रीधर्मो वचनात्तव ॥

या त्वेवंभाविनी नारी सा पतिव्रतभागिनी ॥ इति ॥ Sdhp.32v.11 -33r.1

Thus, the entire conversation between Uma and Maheshvara centered on the issue of religious duty of a woman (*stridharma*) emphatically stating that for a woman the only religious obligation is to be subordinated to her husband.

Intertwined with the idea of reaping the rewards of obedient service, the conversation between Sumana and Sandili conveys the same sentiment that the only duty enjoined upon women is to serve their husbands obediently and lovingly, and by performing this duty sincerely they can conquer the *devaloka*/ heaven. As stated by Sandili in the course of conversation she also points out that “due to her meritorious conduct as *pativrata* she earned her place in *devaloka*/ heaven and not just by wearing ochre robes of the renunciates, the bark garments of the hermits, the matted locks of the ascetics or by shaving her head.” Sdhp.33r.6-8.

सर्वज्ञा सर्वतत्त्वज्ञा देवलोके मनस्विनी ।

कैकेयी सुमना नाम शाण्डिलीं पर्यपृच्छत ॥

केन वृत्तेन कल्याणि समाचारेण केन वा ।

इमं लोकमनुप्राप्ता त्वं हि तत्त्वं वदस्व मे ॥ Sdhp.33r.2

इति पृष्टा सुमनया मधुरं चारुहासिनी ।

शाण्डिली निभृतं वाक्यं सुमनामिदमब्रवीत् ॥

नाहं काषायवसना नास्मि वल्कलधारिणी ।

न च मुण्डा न जटिला भूत्वा देवत्वमागता ॥ Sdhp.33r.4-7

अहितानि च वाक्यानि सर्वाणि परुषाणि च ।

अप्रमत्ता च भर्तारं कदाचिन्नाहमब्रवम् ॥

देवतानां पितॄणां च ब्राह्मणानां च पूजने ।

अप्रमत्ता सदा युक्ता श्वश्रूश्चशुरवर्तिनी ॥ Sdhp.33r.10-11.

By performing obedient service to one's own husband is the primary duty of wife, and in that lay her great glory.

अरुन्धतीव नारीणां स्वर्गलोके महीयते ॥

एतदाख्याय सा देवी सुम,नायै तपस्विनी ।

पतिधर्म महाभागा जगामादर्शनं तदा ॥

इत्थं सकलदोषान् परित्यज्य धर्मपरैव भवेत् ॥Sdhp 33v.7

Interestingly, it would be worth mentioning that Tryambakayajvan in the concluding chapter of the Stridharmapaddhati , returns to the same idea at which he began by stating that the primary duty of women, as ordained by smriti, is to be obedient to her husband (मुख्यो धर्मः स्मृतिषु विहितो भर्तृशुश्रूषणं हि स्त्रीणामेतत्पितुरनुमतं कार्यमित्याकलय्य ।) Sdhp.1v. As the same point is reinforced in the final section of the text where he stresses that “ a wife should serve her husband without regard to her own life and dignity. she should willingly accept whatever her husband does ‘even sale of herself’ (भर्तृकृतात्म-विक्रयस्य), and she should obey his will ‘even when it conflicts with other religious duties (इतरधर्मोपमर्देन च कर्तव्यत्वात् मुख्यो धर्मः)”. Sdhp.48 v.7-8.

Underscoring the significance of the term *patishushrusha* (पतिशुश्रूष) by analogy with “service to one's husband' as owed by the pupil to his teacher, it implies both obeying husband's orders and administering to his physical needs, thereby comprising “every action that provides pleasure, to one's husband-guru”.Sdhp.48v.7-8.

पतिशुश्रूषणंतु प्राणानामविगणनया कर्तव्यत्वात्,

भर्तृकृतात्म-विक्रयस्य अङ्गीकर्तव्यत्वात्,

इतरधर्मोपमर्देन च कर्तव्यत्वात् मुख्यो धर्मः ॥ श्रीः ॥ Sdhp.48 v.7-8.

Reiterating the ideals of *pativrata-dharma* , Tryambaka's Stridharma-paddhati epitomize wifely fidelity and chastity as a mark of distinction.

Conclusion -

In conclusion we may say that the wife's obligations were subordinated to her husband. As professed by Tryambakayajvan for a *pativrata*, obedient service and chastity in thought and deed constitutes the vital component of women's *dharma* (*stridharma*) as professed , the requirement that an ideal wife should treat her husband as her only god and extending selfless service to the husband has received somewhat greater attention .

Notes and References:

All the Sanskrit verses from the Strīdharmapaddhati (Sdhp) are from श्री: त्र्यंबकरायमखिनिवद्धा स्त्रीणामावश्यक , धर्मपद्धति: ,Krishnamoorthy Iyer, S,R (tr), South Madaveethi, Vilapuram, 1957.

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