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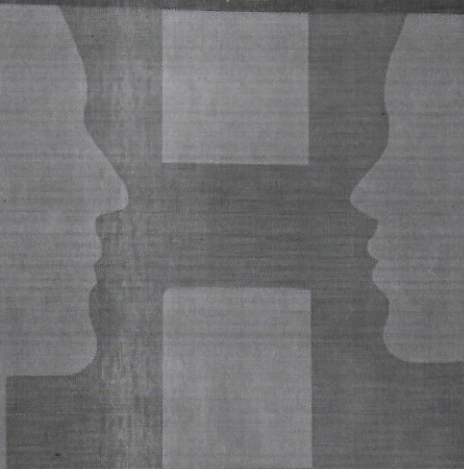
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JODHA AKBAR: A STUDY OF WIFE IN THE REEL WORLD DECONSTRUCTING DOMESTIC IDEOLOGY

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According to Manu, the lawgiver, wife must live for her husband and children. Verses of Chapter nine of *The Laws of Manu* says, "the wife is visible form of what holds together the begetting of children, the caring of them when they are born, and the ordinary business of everyday" (Verse 27) and "Children, the fulfilment of duties, obedience, and the ultimate sexual pleasure depend upon a wife, and so does heaven, for oneself and one's ancestors" (Verse 28). The threefold purpose of marriage, according to the *Smritis*, is the performance of religious rites, sensual pleasure and procreation. She is *bharya* (who is fed by her husband), she is *kamini*, *rasini*, *kanta* (who attracts and pleases men), and she is *jaya* (who gives birth to her husband's children). Manu, clearly does not give a woman an existence apart from these roles. He even goes to the extent of saying that even though the husband is destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere he must be worshipped as God. Simone de Beauvoir also says that "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society" (445) and John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) observes that "no slave is a slave to the same length, and in so full in a sense of words, as a wife is" (40). In Indian culture, marriage is a bondage that extends beyond the husband's death and in a way, a trap which negates her rights to individuality, independence and self-realization.

Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) observes that marriage is not a reconciliation of man and women, but the subjection of female at the hands of the male. "He thereby obtains a superior position that has no need of any legal special privilege. In the family, he is bourgeois, the woman represents the proletariat" (80). As a man is a taker of woman and the woman is a giver in marriage, she becomes man's half and takes his name, his religion, family, class and becomes the "domesticated slave". She is forced to be the sole or primary caretaker of childhood and is prevented from being a free human being. In marriage a woman is completely uprooted from her parental family and is forced to disconnect from her past.

In mythical terms the dominant feminine prototype still is the chaste, patient, self-denying, long suffering wife, Sita, admirably supported by figures like Savitri, Damayanti and Gandhari. Interwoven with this are the symbols of Indian wifehood, *choodiyaa*, *mangalsutra*, *haankun*, *sandoor* and *ghoongat*, which constitute the rigid codes of a circumscribed life and are stamps of male ownership. The code of conduct called *stree dharma* and the concept of *paivratan* developed in days of *Ramayana*, prohibits them to cross the *lakshman rekha* of traditional norms. The only aim of wife's life is

to obey and follow the command of her husband as it is said, *Pitru Vakyam Hanardanam*, "i.e. the father's will is the husband's will is the will of God."

According to Virginia Woolf (1942), the unselfish woman wife encapsulates the qualities of the "Angel in the House" who:

... was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; as there was a draught she sat in it - in short she was constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all - I need not say it - she was pure (150).

Women were thus habitually identified with goddesses, particularly *grihalakshmi*, a domestic version of goddess of wealth, Lakshmi. They were usually seen either paragons or as an insult to their race. Thus the *putana nari* is a product of the male imagination. Women always occupied an ambivalent status in Indian society on one hand she is valorised as *grihalakshmi*, the goddess of domestic space, the bringer of peace, prosperity; and on the other hand she is hidden behind veil, subjugated by the male dominance. Her positions fall anywhere between the Mother of goodness and Devil's discipline, between virgin and whore, between symbol of enlightenment and wisdom and the cunning temptress and usurer. Women have been deemed responsible for the creation of humanity but they also been tagged as the agent of humanity's downfall. A woman's body is portrayed as the source of all pleasure but also the source of temptation and in historical terms, Christianity has presented her as image of the conniving Eve and the devout Mary. In society treated women as inferior to men. There was great deal to separate the role of wife, concubine and the value of a woman's life was not held high. In Hinduism woman is both Shakti and Sita - strong independent and aggressive, the other cool submissive and dutiful. In the Hindu tradition was thought to have a dual nature - benevolent and malevolent. The key to this concept lies in the metaphor of women as the fertile field. Woman as the of seed, which allies women with nature (powerful is dangerous). Hindu women are considered hence their role as dutiful wife - when they ally sexuality (nature) to be controlled by a man. In the mother, the duality is apparent since in this women control their own sexuality. In addition, exists an antithesis to the wife in the person of