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## HINDU WOMAN IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF RELIGION APPROACH

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### Abstract

The background of this research takes a different position with many writings discussing Hindu women who are generally said to be marginal and alienated from their cultural structure and social system. Even if it is associated with customs and culture, one of them is through the patrilineal system as it applies in Bali, they are considered to have no contribution at all. Another theme that is also often found in many types of research is the ambivalent attitude that worships Hindu women while at the same time degrading them, especially concerning women's bodies. There are not many writers who re-discuss this theme from the anthropology of religion or religious anthropology which views women in the scriptures not only as a theological and divine dimension but also as an open space for how women can see themselves and act in their culture. Through qualitative research methods using the perspective of religious anthropology based primarily on Hindu scriptures, this study found in-depth interviews and participatory observations and anthropological perspectives of religion enriched with literature studies in the form of holy scriptures, this study found so many important roles of Hindu women who not many people know. The negative stigma about women, the natural-cultural dichotomy, and those who consider Hindu women to be sub-ordinate can only be enlightened through this research..

**Keywords:** Hindu woman, Holy Scripture, Anthropology of Religion.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A Hindu woman has always been discussed with an uneven focus. One of them is a large stream of gender inequality. This problem has been widely studied, [1], [2], [3] even narrated in the form of fiction. [4], [5], [6] There has also been an extensive review of the disadvantaged position of Hindu women. [7] The issue of gender inequality is also too often associated with the impact of cultural structures, especially Bali which practices a strict patrilineal system, [8] even though in the parental and matrilineal systems, according to Moore in Arjani, the woman remains in the subordinate position of man, marginalized and oppressed. [9]

In the end, these studies fell to a single conclusion, namely the position of Hindu women who were very weak in front of men. The effects of patrilineal practices most often discussed are inheritance rights, [10], [11], [12], and the position of women both in families and in indigenous communities. [13] Thus, the issue of gender inequality becomes dominant affecting the collective memory of many people. The most serious thing is that this construction unwittingly reinforces the distinction created by men and women. Bourdieu called this situation a taste of culture that was celebrated together [14].

Inequality accepted by Hindu women is a sexy and tempting issue to be revealed, especially global ethics has also long demanded equality between men and women, both in the private and public spheres. This problem has also been widely challenged [15], although equality between women and men has been widely decided both at the world conference on women and explicitly in the Human Rights Act, as can be read in full at the UN Human Rights Center. [16]

However, discrimination against women is still common, even has been accepted for a long time by several tribal tribes, one of them is the Kaulong tribe in New Britain whose women are considered polluters from before puberty until after menopause. [17] Continuing Moore, men through the patriarchal system have the power to fully control women in various fields

of life, [18], [19] including by the country. [20], [21]

Some Hindu thinkers try to explain this inequality, [16], [22], [23] but the negative stigma is too strong to be labeling and stereotype. This stigmatization will not be easy to erase, other than because of the cultural structure and social system adopted, this problem is also legitimized by mythology, stories, and misunderstandings of many people, especially Hindus, to the sounds of the scriptures. [24] As a result, both men and women have the same share to make gender inequality enduring.

This article wants to clarify the ideal position of Hindu women contained in the scriptures. This is important for the writer to say because not many people understand it correctly, and not many authors do it because it is considered too flat and normative. Though God's revelation conveyed through the scriptures can be an initial guide to understanding Hindu women. The author realizes this ideal effort is not easy because the problem of gender inequality experienced by Hindu women is channeled through culture, habits, and other social norms.

By elaborating on the contents of the holy book, this article wants to restore the awareness of many people that treating women unfairly is a form of human denial of the truth advocated by God. This absolute truth is a reminder that Hindu women have firm projections into the future, not the other way around being weak at the crossroads. [25] Whereas in Hindu manuscripts there are very many great women, some of whom are even believed to be saints and holy scripture writers, one of which is the amazing Upanisad. [26] In the 19th century, Hindu women were even admired as spiritual mistresses in India, two of which are Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Anandamayi Ma. [27]

The holy books that are used as the main source in this article are the Sruti Catur Weda Samhita, which consists of the Rgveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda, as well as other Smrti books. This article also does not contradict the ambiguity of several holy books which in some parts adore women, but at the same time denigrate women. [24] In this way, readers from all walks of life will become more convinced and know clearly how the true position of a Hindu

woman is, not understanding what has been interpreted subjectively. This article takes its firm position as an essentialist work that wants to invite Hindus and readers to return to the teachings of religion that are ideal and absolute.

## II. METHOD

The main material in this article is the development of the results of field research conducted with a qualitative approach through interview and observation techniques. In-depth interviews were conducted with Hindu women from ordinary women to intellectual women and Hindu figures, while direct observations were made during inter-caste marriages that were still taking place in Bali. By doing this method, the writer can explore as much as possible their views of them, their position in the Hindu scriptures, as well as their work in the public sphere. Field data collection and processing are then analyzed through a reflective literature study by making religious anthropology a theoretical framework based on the sounds of Hindu scriptures, especially *Sruti* and *Smrti*.

### Theoretical Framework

The sounds of the *Sruti* and *Smrti* scriptures revealed in this article are not merely understood as linguistic problems but should also be anthropological problems. The sound of the holy book as a religious language cannot only be related to theological issues and then consider it to be a divine language because there is an active interaction between humans, the environment, and the culture that surrounds it. This means that religious language involves aspects of linguistics, theology, and anthropology simultaneously. This assumption is in line with the study of religious anthropology which studies religious people through a religious approach. Therefore, the anthropology of religion can also be called religious anthropology.

The use of religious anthropology as a broad framework for analysis in this article is not to conclude the right or wrongness of the contents of the Hindu scriptures about women. This is because religion as an anthropological study of religion is seen as a cultural phenomenon, not

a religion that is revealed directly by God. Therefore, what is contained in a holy book must also be seen as the way humans will act, behave, and be cultured that is fully influenced by the religion they profess.

Anthropologically, human actions are influenced by religion and it can interact with the environment and culture, in view [28] because religion is the center of culture and religion has the power to control all aspects of human life. More or less the same opinion is said [29] which refers to religion not only as part of the culture but also at the core of culture. Considering religion as the core of culture, religion can be a way of life, determining the direction and accuracy of life which is seen as good and bad.

In connection with this article, understanding the sound of the scriptures as a language of religion will always experience limitations if only approached phenomenally because after all the subjective experiences of humans who believe in the contents of the scriptures can only be actualized through their actions, behavior, and culture. Therefore, religious language can also be an identity symbol used by humans to be in social and cultural space.

By revealing the position of Hindu women who in the scriptures are said to have many important roles, anthropologically the language of religion can be used as a guide for them to act and interact. Women's problems especially about their bodies have long been a heated discussion. In fact, for a long time, the body has only been placed as part of nature, whereas the body is also an organism that acts culturally.

Departing from view [30], the findings in this article want to place the woman's body as a primary category in social and cultural theory which was previously only placed in a space. Turner said as the great discourse of "society" and "culture", the body is positioned as a fundamental category that encompasses human existence at all levels, ranging from cultural, social, psychological to biological.

The results of the analysis that mentioned the important roles of women in Hindu scriptures, this article at the same time wanted to leave the one-sided discussion that only placed women and their bodies as sub-ordinate, but also began to become a primary category. Unlike Cartesian

in the dualism between body and soul, or Foucault which only places the body as nothing more than discourses of power.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Hindu Woman as Wife

When a woman decides to marry, she and her husband will carry out various heavy tasks, but her duty as a wife will place herself in a higher position than a man or her husband. This is because if she can carry out these tasks very well will deliver her to become a very noble creature. In her marriage to build a family, one of the abilities that men do not have is giving birth to a child who is *suputra* or a good child. The important role of a woman can be dominant when she is a wife.

In Hindu holy scriptures, women as wives are called by four special titles. *First*, as *ardha anggani*, namely the world, life, and men will not be balanced and perfect if not accompanied by women. This explanation can be found in the Sathapata Brahmana IV.2, with the statement “as long as a man does not have a wife, he will not get offspring, as long as he is never perfect”. Furthermore, the Brahmin book I.2 states “in terms of the role of the wife in the husband's life, the husband feels more perfect since he got a wife”.

*Second*, as *jaya*, the wife not only gave birth to her child but she and her husband felt born again. The wife and husband are born again together with the child born through the encounter of sperm and egg. The book of Brahmana 33 states “He who gives birth becomes victorious because he gives birth to himself again”.

*Third*, as *sahadharmini*, that a wife has the same in carrying out the duties and obligations with her husband, especially in terms of spiritual life. This equation gives birth to strong synergies to arrive at the highest goal in the worship of God. The Book of Rgveda I. 72.5 states: “May his wife and husband, with the good ways of life by both of them, constitute the main impetus in the success of worship of God. May all be one in the mind to overcome the negative forces in their lives, and that they will receive eternal holy rays in

heaven”.

*Fourth*, as *dharma patni*, namely the wife plays an important role in carrying out religious activities, worship ceremonies to God. The Book of Yajurveda XIX. 94 states with *Patni sukrtam bidharti*. That is, “the wife carries out religious ceremonies”. The Atharvaveda XIV.2.24 also states *Aroha carma-upa sida-agnim esa devo hanta raksamsi sarva*. It means, “O noble wife, sit on deerskin and make offerings to the god Agni who removes all types of dirtiness/environmental pollution”.

There are many other respects given to woman as wife, for example she must be a star in his family. The Book of Rigveda X.85.43 says *Virasup, devakama syona sam no bha va dvipade, sam catuspade*. It means, “The bride should give birth to brave children, worship the gods, be friendly and pleasing to everyone and become the stars of her family”. A wife must be a wise discussion partner. The Book of Rigveda X.85.26 states *Vasini tvam vidatham a vadasi*. It means, “O bride, become a housewife, speak well in academic discussions”.

Likewise, a wife should have an obligation to be able to become a family supervisor. The Book of Yajurveda XIV.22 says *Yantri rad yantri-asi yamani dhruva-asi dharitri*. It means, “A wife is a family overseer, who is smart, she regulates the others and she herself follows the rules. He is a family asset that supports the family”. The Book of Ayurveda III.53.4 states *Jayed astam maghavan sed u yonih*. That is, “A wife is also no different from the embodiment of the family itself which will be the source of family welfare”. Atharwa Weda XIV.2.20 states that *Adha sarasvatyai nari pitrbhyas ca namas-kuru*. That is, “A form of respect for parents can be demonstrated well by a wife, as well as worship of Goddess Saraswati”.

A wife is also said to be a lover of her family. The book of Rgveda 85.46 states *Samrajni svarure bhavam Samrajni svasrvam bhava Nanandari samrajni bhava Samrajni adhi devrsu*. It means, “O woman, be a lady and guide in-laws, sister-in-law and sister-in-law”. Likewise, in Atharvaveda XIV.2.27 it says *Syona bhava svarurebhyah Syona patye grhebhayah Syona-asyai sarvasyai vise Syona pustaya-esam bhava*. It means, “O noble wife, be

friendly with in-laws, family members of your husband and servants (helpers). Hope you benefit all". Atharvaveda (XIV.2.26) also stated that *Sumangali pratarani grhanam Suseva patye svasuraya sambhuh Syona svasvai pre grhan viseman*. It means, "O noble wife, enter this house, decorate with jewelry, get rid of the suffering of your husband's family, serve your husband well, act kindly to your in-laws".

### **B. Hindu Woman as Mother**

Hinduism as a part of the Eastern world whose mindset is spiritually based has contributed a lot to occupy men and women. Maternal or motherhood is the spiritual transformation of a wife (wifeness). A wife might be able to ask and take, but for a mother, her privilege is only to give. If a woman being a wife will be socially significant, then a woman as a mother will be very spiritually significant. Hindu tradition and culture train everyone to view all women as a form of Divine motherhood. A mother is more worthy of respect than a father or teacher according to Hindu texts.

Woman as a mother is worshiped as a devi. Taittiriya Upanishad Shikshavalli I.20 stated *Matru Devo Bhava*. It means, "Goddess". Mother is a dewi, so in Hindu theology, the manifestation of God in the form of a dewi is worshiped as great as the worship of the gods. Hindu worship of God in terms of motherhood or femininity is a form of intimacy between worshippers and those worshiped. Hindu teachings consider the maternal or feminine aspect to be Goddess because it is full of beauty, tenderness, forgiveness, and other qualities. God worship in the form of *sakti* or maternal elements has long been believed, for example, worship of Saraswati, Laksmi, Durga, Gayatri, and others. The great goddesses are worshiped as symbols that God is worshiped as an aspect of the noble mother who always compassionates and loves the holy devotees.

This worship of the goddesses is explained in the book of Bhagavadgita IX.17 which states that "I am the father and mother of the universe, and I am the creator of all. I am the

highest known, the one who sanctifies, the holy Om and the three Vedas". Based on this, the worship of God in the form of a mother or *sakti* is an interesting contribution to Hinduism. A devotee will feel comfortable with this noble mother because in her worship there will appear about the power of divinity everywhere that always radiates love, intelligence, and wisdom. Responding to the description above, Svami Vivekananda, a reformer in 20th century Hinduism stated, "A society cannot develop by only providing education to men and negating women. Men and women can be analogous to like a pair of bird wings. If one wing of the bird is removed, surely the bird cannot fly". Svami Vivekananda's statement was intended as a tribute to the position of a woman who is highly respected because every woman is the incarnation of a noble Mother.

The position of a woman in the context of being a mother is stated in the book *Manawadharmasastra III.56* namely *Yatra naryastu pujiyante Ramante tatra dewata, Yatra itastu na pujiyante Sarwastalah kriyah*. It means, "Where women are respected, there the gods feel happy, but where they are not respected, there is no sacred ceremony that is rewarding". The Book of *Manawadharmasastra IX. 57* also stated *Cosanthi jamayo yatra winacyatyacu tatkulam, Na cocanti tu yatra ita wardhate taddhi sarwada*. It means, "Where women live in sadness, the family will quickly be destroyed, but where women do not suffer, the family will always be happy".

The statement from the holy book can be reflected that the mother is a panacea for all disasters. A mother in the household if flogged suffering, then in a short time, the family will be destroyed, and vice versa, when the mother in the family is happy, the whole family in the household will be happy. Departing from this, the role of Hindu women is in all aspects of life both in family life, in addition to its basic role as a housewife who is obliged to accompany her husband, foster, and save the household. A woman is called a wife when she is a husband's companion, and as a mother when she has children. Mother has a role in shaping the growth of a child's character because the mother is the embodiment of the house itself. The Book of

Ayurveda III.53.4 states *Jayed astam maghavan sed u yonih*. It means, “Yes, Sang Hyang Indra, his real wife in the form of the house. he is the basis of that family's prosperity”.

The important ability of a mother to educate her children is expected in the book of Rgveda III.33.19 with the statement of *Shri hi brahma babhuvitha*. It means, “A woman is a scholar and a teacher”. Therefore, a woman and mother must also be intelligent. The Book of Rgveda X. 159.2 states *Aham ketur aham murdha-aham ugra vivacani*. It means, “I am a leader, a prominent scholar and a woman orator or an expert at speaking”. With this important ability, a mother is entitled to get the respect of the whole house. The Book of Manawadharmasastra III. 55.58 states “What a marriage institution will fall apart when women are harassed by men, namely their husband, brother-in-law, father or grandfather”.

### C. Hindu Woman as Sakti

In Hindu divine philosophy, the gods in carrying out their functions as manifestations of God have *sakti*. The three main Gods or Tri Murti must be accompanied by their *saktis*. Dewa Brahma as the creator has *sakti* Dewi Saraswati, Dewa Wisnu as a preserver has *sakti* Dewi Sri and Dewa Siva as the returner in the world to its origins has *sakti* Dewi Uma or Durga. Without these *saktis*, the three main Gods cannot work. In layman's view, *sakti* is often simplified as a wife even though this meaning is not quite right.

In the Hindu tradition and Vedic literature, there are many dewis who have divine power from God. [31] One of the *sakti* in Hinduism who is seen as the embodiment of a holy mother and has strength and force is the mother Durga. [32] Even if a Hindu wants to be a priest, he must first marry a woman not to fulfill her biological needs as a husband, but in order to gain strength. In Saiwa's teachings, this is clearly an ethos of *sakti*. [33]

In the book Aiteriya Brahmin I.2.5 is stated expressly with *Tasmat puruso pittva kstsnataranivatmanam matyate*. That is, “a

husband is said to not reach the position as a pure clergy unless he is accompanied by his own wife in these spiritual activities”. The same thing is explained in the Sathapata Brahmana V.2.18 which states that “a husband will not be able to enter heaven alone he must call his wife to accompany himself in symbolic climbing in the offering ceremony”. Still about *sakti* that must be possessed by a man, mentioned in the Sathapata Brahmin book V.1.6.10, which provides important information for the virgin, that “God will not accept offerings offered by a young man or those who do not have a wife”.

Woman as *sakti* who has awesome power is very much explained in the Tantra books. [34], [35] Cosmic strength even comes from the power of women. Hindu cosmology places woman or *prakerti* with *yonih*, while man or *purusa* with *lingga*. Macrocosm and microcosm creation would never have happened if *lingga* had not met *yonih*.

The *sakti* utterance for women is the highest form of respect for the woman who is conceived of as mother *perthivi*. Earth is a symbol of mother *perthivi* who in Hindu teachings is called the heaviest in the world. The word of heavy refers to the heavy duties and obligations of a woman, as well as to refer to her power or *sakti*. Furthermore, special respect for women is embodied even more sacred in the term *gayatri mantram*, a concept that illustrates that *gayatri* is the mother of all mantras.

### D. Hindu Woman in History and Story

The glory of Hindu women is found in historical records. In the Hindu orthodox tradition as mentioned in Sarvanukaramanika, recorded in the history of 20 Hindu women who have sharp intuitions as great Rsikas. They are believed to have played a big role in compiling the Rgveda scriptures. Some of these women were Lopamudra, Visvavara, Sikita Nivavari, and Gosha who were respectively compilers of the Scriptures of the Rgveda I. 179, V.28, VIII. 91, IX.81. 11-20 and X. 39-40. Then there are Indrani and Sachi as compilers of the Rgveda X.145 and 159 scriptures.

The figures of Gargi and Maitreyi are believed to be women who have been in dialogue with Rsi

Yajnavalkya in their efforts to find the absolute truth. The collection of dialogues was later gathered in Maitri Upanisad. In the information obtained in the book *Asvalaya Griya Sutra* III.4.4 which states that female leaders such as Sulabha Maitreyi, Vadava Prathiteyi, and Gargi Vachaknavi are still honored. Even keen-looking writers and scholars always remember their obligation to pray during the *Brahmayajna*.

Some Hindu female figures who are considered as exemplary figures are widely told in the biggest epics in Hinduism, both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, one of which is Dewi Kunti. She is the wife of Maharaja Pandu and mother of five famous sons, Panca Pandawa, who because of her heroic character has brought Kunti as one of the important female figures in a complicated political dispute with the Korawa. Kunti is also regarded as a mother who can bring her children out in great trouble and deliver them to the peak of political power by occupying Yudhistira as king of Hastinapura.

While in the *Bhagavata Purana* book there is a special woman named Tulasi Dewi who is a figure from Waisnawa religious system, which because of her inner purity, can protect her husband from death while fighting against Krishna. She, who was waiting for her husband to come home, solemnly recited mahamantra, which she did not realize was the mantra that prevented her husband from death. In the *Ramayana* book, there is also the holy figure Sabhari Dewi who gets the highest deliverance or moksa after getting *prana* from the Lord.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Hindu women have been over-exploited from the weak side, especially when it comes to biological aspects, namely their bodies. The other weak side is the inauspicious position in the cultural structure and social coating system. Patrilineal which is practiced strictly with biased interpretation has cornered women as if they have no chance to defend themselves. Even though using the anthropological perspective of religion in understanding the language of religion as stipulated in the scriptures, Hindu women who are whole soul

and body have a very important role in their lives and culture. This is a big asset to act beyond the negative stigma that has been attached to women. In many Hindu scriptures, both *Sruti* and *Smrti*, Hindu women are very great. The woman is a wife, mother, and sakti. Even in historical records and stories, Hindu women are also very special. These data and facts must be known holistically and comprehensively so that the essential sounds of the holy scriptures can guide the ideal way of thinking and become a way of life that guides them through life.

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