

HOLY LIES: MAN'S RELIGION, WOMAN'S BONDAGE



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Across India, debates about women's bodies often surface. In fact, it is striking that public discourse about women is almost always tied to their bodies. A remark by a public figure or religious authority may spark discussion, but beneath the noise lies something far older than any single controversy. At the core of this idea of "the woman as the body" is an old belief that treats women as physical stuff to be owned, utilized, and consumed.

A recent statement put it bluntly: *If a woman has no sindoor in her hair, the plot is vacant.* It reflects a mindset where a woman is seen as land and the man as her owner, meant to plough, sow, and build. This is not an isolated remark but part of a long tradition that kept women under lifelong guardianship: first with their father, then their husband, and finally their son. History carries the same imprint, with armies rewarded not only with land and wealth but also with women treated as spoils of war.

SEEDS OF ORGANIZED RELIGION AND PATRIARCHY WERE SOWN TOGETHER

As humans left the wilderness and began farming, society changed. Agriculture

demanding steady physical energy, and without machines or fuel, strength came from human muscle. Women spent much of their most active years in pregnancy and childcare, often with little gap between births. Without contraception and with high infant mortality, they remained tied to the home, while men could devote their full strength to labour in the fields.

Farming created surplus and property, and with it came the need for rules of ownership. Men, being physically stronger, took charge of both work and governance. Organized religion arose in this climate, carrying these power dynamics into its teachings. At the same time, women were both needed and feared. Their ability to bear children meant more hands for labour, making control over their bodies critical. Their very presence stirred a desire men often did not understand, and what is not understood easily turns into fear. That fear soon became the urge to dominate.

FROM MANUSMRITI TO MEDUSA: STORIES THAT FRAMED WOMEN AS SINFUL

Ancient codes such as the Manusmriti prescribed that a woman must remain under male authority throughout her life, forbidding widow remarriage and policing her sexuality. Similar principles appeared in Buddhism and Confucianism, where women entered spiritual orders only under male supervision, and among Digambara Jains, who taught that liberation was possible only if reborn as a man.



Western traditions told the same story. In Genesis, Eve was blamed for humanity's fall and condemned to childbirth pain and subservience. Greek myth held Pandora responsible for unleashing all human suffering. In Jewish lore, Lilith's demand for equality with Adam turned her into a cursed figure, linked with infant death. In the Ramayana, the tale of Ahalya shows how even when a woman was deceived, the burden of blame fell on her while the man's role was overlooked. The same culture that once revered women like Gargi and Maitreyi now punished Ahalya into silence, turning wisdom into suspicion and reverence into control.

Across cultures, these stories framed women as sinful or dangerous, shaping religions into systems that kept them under con-

trol. Yet even today, women throng the very temples that once arose to subjugate them.

VEDANTA'S EARLIER VISION

Yet it was not always so. The Vedantic tradition once honored women not as bodies but as seers. Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra, Ghosha, and others stood among the greatest of their time, deliberating on the Self with supreme clarity. So deep was their insight that learned men would approach them with reverence, seeking answers to questions of existence. Their example reminds us that Indian wisdom, at its core, did not see gender as a barrier to truth. It was only later, with the rise of organized religion and social control, that women were tied down to the body and circumscribed

by rules of purity, lineage, and obedience.

HOW EARLY CONDITIONING SHAPES A WOMAN'S SENSE OF SELF

Across India, especially in small towns and villages, from the moment a female child is born, the course of her life is marked out for her. Her education, opportunities, and even the spaces she can inhabit are shaped by her gender from the very beginning. From her earliest years, she is taught to be conscious of her body. She frequently adjusts her dupatta, already aware of watching eyes. These are the first bars of a cage forming within.

As she grows, her life follows a pattern she never chose. Even in her own home, she is called *paraya dhan*, someone else's prop-

erty. When the time comes to "settle," it is rarely in a place she has built through her own aspirations. Instead, her future is decided by others, shaped more by marriage and biology than by her own desires. Can a mind uprooted like this ever grow deep roots?

From childhood, families and institutions enforce separation between boys and girls, denying them the chance to form natural friendships. Ordinary interaction turns into craving, fear, and guilt. What could have been a simple, healthy connection becomes charged with tension. In trying to restrain desire, society feeds it. By shrouding her in secrecy and keeping her hidden, society robs her of ease and denies both sexes the chance to meet as conscious beings instead of biological roles.

WHEN A WOMAN BECOMES ONLY HER BODY

Across cultures and centuries, the same pattern repeats. Whether it is Draupadi's disrobing or Sita's exile, or Western epics like Helen of Troy, wars were waged over a woman's so-called "honour." What was being defended was not her as a conscious being, but her sexuality. Rarely do we hear of Draupadi's knowledge of the Vedas or Sita's wisdom; their existence beyond the body is largely forgotten.

This is patriarchy's great deception: convincing women that their bodies are their greatest asset. Its grip is so deep that even a father may neglect his daughter's education yet guard her chastity as if it were his own honour. The world has taught us to see a woman first as her sexuality, with everything else as secondary.

WHEN HER VIOLATION IS MISTAKEN FOR DISHONOUR

If a man commits rape, he is rarely seen as having lost his honor; yet if a woman is raped, the community often declares her ruined. When a woman's body is harmed, why is her dignity tied to her body at all, and why is it further reduced to just her sexual organs? This belief is also what allows such crimes to remain hidden, as her worth is seen as tied to her body and she is expected to stay silent.

If someone spits at the sky, does the sky lose anything? In the same way, when a woman is harmed, her dignity does not vanish with the act. From an early age, women hear the same lesson: "Your value lies in chas-

tity. Keep yourself for the one society approves." It is this belief that drains love from so many relationships. As a result, much of sexual intimacy, before or after marriage, is less a meeting of self-aware individuals and more an exchange between conditioned beings, guided by what culture forbids or allows.

BEYOND BODY AND GENDER: VEDANTA'S PATH TO FREEDOM

Vedanta is no abstraction. It challenges the long conditioning that has made women mistake obedience for virtue and control for purity. Both men and women grow within cages shaped by gender roles, bound by identities passed down to them. It is not enough that we are socially and legally equal; so long as we see ourselves as biological first, our relationships will remain physical and exploitative.

The revolution begins with a single question: *Who am I?* The day a woman lives from that question, she ceases to be a body in bondage and becomes a consciousness in freedom — and the world around her must change.

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