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Philosophy of Sex and Gender

Second Short Paper

Cosmological Masculine Propaganda

In explaining the symbolic violence of masculine domination, Pierre Bourdieu suggests that we have fully internalized patriarchal modes of thinking which have corrupted our unconscious perception of the world. In an androcentric fantasy, the natural laws of the universe are made of the same determinations which characterize masculinity. Thus, masculine attributes of domination complement the whole cosmos, enabling what Husserl coined the “doxic experience”, which “apprehends the social world and its arbitrary divisions, starting with the socially constructed division between the sexes, as natural, self-evident, and as such contain[ing] a full recognition of legitimacy” (Bourdieu 9). The social world, supported by a primarily material understanding of psycho-social relationships, constructs the body as a defined sexual reality with embodied social perceptions. These perceptions are applied to all things of the world, including universally recognized sets of opposites such as up/down, right/left, straight/curved, and which even extend to mythological structures such as sun/moon, internal/external, and good/evil. Thus, masculine domination not only regulates our perception of human bodies, but it also regulates our perception of the entire cosmos, perpetuating violence against both the material and spiritual bodies.

These harmful perceptions are imbued in one of society's most important narrative devices: mythology. One example is the *Ramayana*, one of the great Indian poems composed over 2000 years ago. The *Ramayana* is a sacred devotional text detailing the story of Ram, an incarnation of God, and his quest to save his beloved Sita from the clutches of the evil King Ravana. The poem is immensely popular in India and throughout the world, and is a vital topic of contemporary relevance (Britannica). As a story centered on the masculine form of God rescuing his beloved, androcentric notions dominate the interpretation of the *Ramayana*.

However, scholars like Shruti Chakraborti have engaged in reconstructing the mythological structure given to Sita, the feminine form of God. In the critical study, "Subverting Patriarchal Interpretation of the Ramayana through a Feminist Lens", Dr. Chakraborti writes, "In patriarchal societies, myths are constructed according to androcentric terms... Reality is often subdued and a perceived reality surfaces and dominates the cultural landscape... The mythic images of women are often stereotypical in nature and these stereotypes contribute to imposing a gender identity on women" (160).

One example of this in the *Ramayana* is the interpretation of the order in which Ram, Sita, and Ram's brother Lakshmana walk through the forest while in exile. With Ram in the lead, Sita in the middle, and Lakshmana in the rear, an androcentric interpretation of the order suggests that Sita, representing *maya*, or the world as illusion, is blocking Lakshmana from seeing God (Ram). By his efforts he must look past Sita to see God. However, in a reconstructed interpretation, Sita is not an obstacle that Lakshmana (man) must overcome. By her grace, Sita steps aside and allows Lakshmana to see God, signifying the indivisible nature of masculine and feminine, and subverting the "sets of opposites" which uphold the patriarchy. With this instance,

one sees how “there are always alternative ways of using a myth. If patriarchy has used the Sita myth to silence women... women have picked up the Sita myth to give themselves a voice” (Dev Sen 19). Critical study and reinterpretation of humanity’s most profound perceptions is essential to undermining the patriarchy and subduing masculine domination on its quest for infinite self-perpetuation.

Works Cited

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