Male Sexuality Enmeshing With Rise Of Fascism

Valorizing celibacy

The renouncing of sexual life by young men is reified by other cultural beliefs regarding loss of strength by the falling of the seed. The valorization of brahmacharya (celibacy) is taken to incredible lengths in Hindu religion. Thus, religious texts are replete with statements like, “Brahmacharya is so powerful that by strictly following it one can win over death”. As Alter (1992) puts it: “A wrestler must not only abstain from sex, he must also build up his stock of semen and ensure that once built up it is as potent and strong as it can possibly be. The basis for this preoccupation is a belief that physical, personal, and intellectual strength emanates from semen. Semen is the locus of a person’s moral character and physical prowess”.

In fact, Bhishma Pitamaha, the patriarch of the epic Mahabharata as a result of being a dedicated brahmachari was granted the boon of death-at-will and the power to change the course history of Hastinapur. These conceptions, however, are not only part of a mythical past but remain present day beliefs. Sri Asaram Bapu, a contemporary religious guru with a sizable following, claims that sex is not a healthy activity. Asaramji, after bemoaning the pernicious influence of Dr. Sigmund Freud, attempts to harness the prestige of medical science to tradition and enjoins his followers to follow one Dr. Molvil Keith, M.D. who declares: “This seed (semen) is marrow to your bones, food to your brains, oil to your joints and sweetness to your breath and if you are a man, you should never lose a drop of it till you are thirty years of age and then only for the purpose of having a child which shall be blessed by heaven”. (The Times of India, September 29, 2000).

With the increase in the legal age of marriage and age of consent, adolescent boys in India have few socially acceptable outlets for their sexual drives.

Reverence of brahmacharya along with beliefs about loss of semen leading to weakness of the body, mind and spirit acts as a block to masturbation. Even when “indulged” in, it comes ridden with guilt, anxieties and fears about the consequences. On the other hand, “mother ****** and “sister-******” are the commonest abuses and are part of routine speech across the country. In fact, interventions in incidents of harassment of women in public spaces often takes the shape of abusing the perpetrator as “Sister ******” while simultaneously trying to make him feel ashamed by enquiring whether he does not have mothers and sisters at home, in a way encapsulating the contradictory feelings of Indian males towards women in their family. The rigid incest taboo in India, like in most societies, is indicative of the need to prohibit sexual feelings towards family members which are regarded as “un-brotherly” and “non-son-like” vis-à-vis boys/men and their mothers and sisters. These feelings for the “pure” mother and “virgin” sister evoke strong feelings of guilt and remorse. Sexual fantasies involving close family members along with lack of interaction and sexual activity among peers, fuels further frustration accompanied by feelings of guilt and perversion.

Thus the suppression of sexuality, the intimate mother-son bond along with powerful images of powerful decapitating “Kali”(commonly depicted dancing nude with a garland of human skulls and holding a severed head in one of several hands gripping various weapons), and the son

giving up his potency to his father is the mixed bag of the Indian male psyche. Kakar (1997) posits that in Indian society, rather than conflict, the son seems to require an oedipal alliance with the father for autonomy vis-à-vis the mother and terms it “Maternal Enthrallment”.

In fact, two vignettes from Kakar (1997) are worth recounting: “Mohan, too, we saw, became passionless whenever the motherly woman he fancied in the bus turned to face him. But instead of celibacy, he tried to hold on to desire by killing the sexual part of the mother, deadening the lower portion of her trunk, which threatened him with impotence. Furthermore, the imagined sexual overpowering of the mother, in the face of which the child feels hopelessly inadequate, with fears of being engulfed and swallowed by her dark depth, is not experienced by Mohan in the form of clear-cut fantasies but in a recurrent nightmare from which he wakes up screaming”(p.68).

The second vignette seems illustrative of the father-boss-fuehrer interconnection: “He compared himself to a frightened mouse in the presence of his father and felt that this trait had persisted all through his life. If anyone argues loudly, he said, especially, my boss, I have to agree and cannot say what I believe to be true. In these sessions it became clear that Deven’s fear of his father had largely to do with his sexual impulses. Whenever he talked of his attraction towards some girl or of his masturbation, it was in a very low, ‘mouse-like’ voicewhich I could hardly hear and this happened almost always at the end of the session when he could get away quickly. After any such confession, he would close his eyes tightly, clasp his hands on his stomach in an attitude of praying and cross his legs, as if protecting his genitals from retaliation” (p.78).

An ingredient which holds vital importance for our purposes comes from the “Father” of Indian Psychoanalysis, Girendrasekhar Bose (the moving spirit behind the formation of the Indian Psychoanalytic Association in 1922): “The respectability of the mother image is sought to be neutralized by the substitution of the mother by the sister or women of lower social status and even prostitutes. There is impaired potency and obsessional fear of not being able to satisfy the woman in the sexual act. The small penis complex receives a further strengthening from this source, the child’s penis being considered too small for the mother” (emphasis added) (1928).

Role of suppression of sexuality

This paper is underpinned by the Reichian postulate that suppression of sexuality causes repression within the individual psyche and makes it a fertile ground for the spread of reactionary ideologies like fascism (carried forward by Deleuze and Guattari to the arena of the purpose served by Oedipalisation of desire). The pioneering works of Kakar and Bose show the particularities and causative factors which contribute to the suppression of sexuality in Indian society. Observing that economic distress incites people to rebellion, while sexual distress prevents rebellion against both forms of suppression, Reich (1942) offers insights into the causative processes: “The moral inhibition of the child’s natural sexuality, the last stage of which is the severe impairment of the child’s genital sexuality, makes the child afraid, shy, fearful of authority, obedient, ‘good’, and ‘docile’ in the authoritarian sense of the word. It has a crippling effect on man’s rebellious forces because every vital life-impulse is now burdened with severe fear; and since sex is a forbidden subject, thought in general and man’s critical faculty also become inhibited. In short, morality’s aim is to produce acquiescent subjects who despite distress and humiliation, are adjusted to the authoritarian order”.

Deleuze and Guattari(2004) acknowledging the radical contribution of Reich, the first to posit sociological reasons for the suppression of sexuality by society and repression by the individual, write: “But social repression should not be understood by using as a starting point a familial repression co-extensive with civilization – far from it; it must be civilization that must be understood in terms of social repression inherent to a given form of social production” (p.129). Referring to the thesis of suppression of sexuality and sublimation as transcendent requirements for “Civilization”, Reich in his inimitable manner remarks: “One becomes a bit skeptical and asks how is it possible for the masturbation of small children and the sexual intercourse of adolescents to disrupt the building of gas stations and the manufacturing of airplanes” (p.63).

Deleuze and Guattari carry Reich’s legacy forward and further the understanding of the role of suppression of sexuality in society: “It is therefore of vital importance for a society to repress desire, and even to find something more efficient than repression, so that repression, hierarchy, exploitation, and servitude are themselves desired. It is quite troublesome to say such rudimentary things: desire does not threaten society because it is a desire to sleep with the mother, but because it is revolutionary. And that does not at all mean that desire is something other than sexuality, but that sexuality and love do not live in the bedroom of Oedipus, they dream instead of wide open spaces, and cause strange flows to circulate that do not let themselves be stocked within an established order”(p.127).