



The Eternal Feminine Aspects in the *Saga* and its Relevance to the Pandemic Age

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Abstract

The term Eternal Feminine was coined by Goethe. It is interesting to note that the term is the synonym of Adya Shakthi, the concept which finds its origin in India. The paper analyses how the term is universal and is relevant to the Pandemic period. Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's Saga of Seven Mothers: Satisaptakam portrays the divine aspects of feminism and emphasizes the role of Nature in human life. It stresses the need for the realization of the Divine in every aspect of the universe and life. Of course, the Pandemic period projects the mortal nature of human existence. Life is a journey but it is a journey towards Death, which is inevitable and unpredictable too. Saga preaches how to extend a prudent gesture towards this exigency. Motherhood in its right perspective and Feminism in the right connotation are also under the scrutiny of this paper.

Keywords: Eternal Feminine, Adya Shakthi, Pandemic, Need of Divinity.

Literature, the mirror of life abounds in instances to prove the adage, when the roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the storm. This paper focuses on the efficacy of this statement with the aid of the epic poem *Saga of Seven Mothers: Satisaptakam* by Dr. K. R. Sreenivasa Srinivasa Iyengar. The *Saga* stands a solution to several issues. Tradition vs. Modernity has been a subject of constant conflict amidst the youth of the present generation. The *Saga* answers that modernity is tradition in its right perspective. Feminism and its ideals have often been misconstrued. The *Saga* preaches feminism in its right context. Pandemic is the present tornado to prove that nothing works. The *Saga* has the remedy in the Seven Mothers. The author has chosen seven mythical women characters- seven strong women as protagonists. By re-telling the tales of the age's yore, the author answers several paradoxical quizzes. This paper, thereby ventures to analyze *Saga's* relevance to the pandemic period.

The Pandemic has created an anxiety in many that this is a precursor of the Doomsday. The physical, emotional and the financial trauma is quaking the entire globe. The tremor and its impact will last for days to come. Psychological therapy is the need of the hour. The after-effects of the Covid- combat are detrimental. More than psychological, only a spiritual solace will be a permanent healing. Faith is the formula of spiritualism as Rational thinking is the principle of Science. To survive Covid, apart from medical aid, Faith, Hope, determination, mental courage and stamina to fight alone, (as 'isolation', 'self- quarantine' are its demand) and adaptation to the new life- style in all aspects, positive thinking etc., are



essential equipments. In other words, all these are the Eternal Feminine qualities. More than the victims, the nurses and the doctors are exercising these qualities. They are the Eternal Feminine in the present scenario. Humble pranams to their feet, as they are the saviours who are exhibiting their patriotic and military zeal in the Covid situation.

The *Saga* conveys a clear-cut message how the humanity can draw power and inspiration from the mythical women whose inner strength has served them with natural wisdom, potency and all essential characteristics to combat any crisis in life 'Single-handed'. Feminism stresses individually but the mythical women without losing their 'individuality', stress and dramatize the values of harmony, humanity, humility and selflessness. The Pandemic monster is sapping all the humanness from mankind. The media recently telecasted the sad plight of an old widow mother deserted by her own children as she had been afflicted by Covid. The daughter refused to let her stay even one night, inside the compound. Only the police and the hospital were her ultimate refuge. The daughter is rational but rationally bereft of humanness is detrimental to society.

Metaphorically, the daughter symbolizes the modern man and the old mother, the mother Earth. The lack of gratitude is obvious. Myths preach the eternal value 'dharma'. Righteousness, the English term cannot wholly determine the right connotation of 'dharma'. Pandemic is a punishment. It is a curse out of Pandora's Box. The offence is lack of *dharma*. Whenever humanity indulges in exploitation, and other inhuman deeds, Nature reflects its anger in the form of such disasters and epidemics. Human fail to comprehend Nature myths narrate the tales of demons like Mahishasura, whose blood drops when fell on earth created new versions of demons. Modern rationalists and atheists queried its authenticity. Now, Pandemic produces mutated versions of corona which is a modern quandary and scientists are yet to unravel its mystery. Small pox too was contagious, deadly and demanded quarantine. People took refuge in Goddess, who has ever protected the humans and *devas* from the demonic torments. She is the Eternal Feminine. The term has its own history. Goethe has coined the term 'Eternal Feminine'. He exalts the Eternal Feminine in his *Faust II* thus:

Everything that can be perceived
Is only a symbol;
the imperfect which cannot be realized,
here makes itself reality
that which cannot be described,
here finally completed itself
It is the eternal feminine,
Always attracting us to the higher. (traditioninaction.org)

The French author Chateaubriand (1768 – 1848) in his *Memories d'outre Tombe* describes the Eternal Feminine as the one who possesses beauty, charm, goodness, delicacy and affection – the qualities that are feminine.

The Tamil poet Subramania Bharathiar (1882 – 1921) has celebrated the Eternal Feminine as the Muse, the source of inspiration of all his poetry in his Tamil poem, *mangiyathor nilavinile*.



Victor Hugo (1802 – 1885), the French poet, dramatist and novelist, in his poem *La Fin de satan* has portrayed the Eternal Feminine as the celestial angel who tries to reconcile Satan to God. Eternal Feminine has the capacity to change evil to good.

Teilhard Chardin (1881 – 1955) the well known French Jesuit priest and scientist in his *L' Eternal Feminine* describes the Eternal Feminine as the envelope of God. Eternal Feminine attracts man to God and God to man. He describes it further as 'all – powerful – love'. The Tamil poets *Alvars* and *Nayanmars* have portrayed the same in *Nayagan* and *Nayaki bhava*.

Hans Eichner (1921 – 2009) in his essay, "The Eternal Feminine: An aspect of Goethe's Ethics" has described Eternal Feminine as the redeeming power of love.

In the Indian context, the Eternal Feminine is conceived as *Dasa Maha Vidyas*, the ten wisdom Goddesses. They are:

- Kali the Eternal Night
- Tara the Compassionate
- Shodashi, the sixteen year old
- Bhuvaneshwari, the creator
- Chinnamasta, the Goddess who beheads herself
- Bhairavi the frightful
- Dhumawati, the Goddess who widows herself
- Bagalmukhi, who seizes her own tongue
- Matangi, lover of Pollution
- Kamala, seated on the Lotus

These Goddesses as hierophanies have got replicated in the seven mothers. The Seven mothers in the *Saga* are Devahuti, Sukanya, Devayani, Damayanti, Draupadi, Renuka Devi and Kannagi. In the west, they are represented through the study of Sophiology, Mariology, and Great Mother etc., Sophia is the Goddess of Wisdom in Greek, as Goddess Saraswathi. Russian Mysticism considers Sophia as Mother Earth, as the Hindu cult considers Prakriti as Goddess of Nature. Wisdom is an Eternal Feminine quality. Sophia is an epitome of Beauty, Truth and Goodness and they in turn are Eternal Feminine attributes. Beauty is a symbol of Divine blessing. As John Keats said, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever", beauty is a symbol of divine bliss too. Goodness and beauty are considered as the internal and the external aspects of Beatitude.

According to Frithjof Schuon (1907 – 1998) a German metaphysician, poet and a painter, Beauty is the splendour of Truth. He echoes plato in this. In his *Esoterism as principle and as way*, he expresses thus:

Woman manifests beauty as such, so much so that there is no beauty superior to hers, when contingency has not separated her from her prototype; then one may discern in beauty as such features of femininity, of passive perfection, of virginal purity, of maternal generosity; of goodness and love (45).



Eternal Feminine is an aspect of Divinity. It is nobility compounded of beauty and virtue. It forgives, frees from bondages and unifies. In Christianity, there is “Ave gratia plena” – Angel’s statement to marry which means “full of grace”.

Schuon’s observation of feminism is vivid in his *Gnosis, Divine wisdom*

Feminism, far from being able to confer on woman ‘rights’ that are non – existent because contrary to the nature of things, can only remove from her, her specific dignity; it is the abolition of the eternal feminine, of the glory that woman derives from her celestial prototype. After all, the revolt of one sex against the other, like the cult of youth or the contempt of intelligence, is indirectly a revolt against God (54).

He assures that Beauty, Truth, Grace, Creativity, Mercy, purity, Chastity, generosity and Virginal are Eternal feminine qualities. The Great Mother, in Greek is Gaia or Gaea. In Roman Myth, she is Tellus or Terra. This concept has energized the modern ‘Gaia Theory’ which was formulated by the scientist Dr. James Lovelock as ‘Gaia Hypothesis’ in 1960. It is an ecological hypothesis which considers living and non – living parts of the earth as a complex interacting system. This is the theme of the global research today.

In Japan the Great Mother is Kuan Yin – ‘She who hears’ and ‘She who listens’. In Sanskrit Avalokitesvara means the one who hears the cries of the world. She is all compassionate. She grants the prayer for children and assists in delivery and assists in delivery. She transports the souls after their death. Some have felt and seen her in the valleys and woods, in China and Japan. Compassion and helping are the nature of Eternal feminine. Mother Mary is also Great Mother. Mary remained a virgin before and after begetting Jesus. Mother Mary is an advocate for the people of God. The Grace obtained by Christ is dispensed to humanity through Christ. Vaishnavism too has the same rule. Mother Lakshmi is the advocate for representing the need of the devotees to Lord Vishnu. *Lalita Sahasranamam* is full of the attributes of the Eternal Feminine. It describes Mother Goddess as the creator, protector and Destroyer. The attributes are Tranquility, patience, benignity, compassion, dignity, impartiality, Unconditional Love and mercy and majesty.

The Bengali poet Saint Ram Prasad (1720 – 1781) in *Mother of the Universe* sings thus:

Sometimes you appear as the peaceful helpmate
Seated beside Shiva in quiet harmony,
Sometimes you manifest as the radiant cosmos
And its countless living beings
Sometimes you play as the incomparable Radha
Courageous lover of Lord Krishna
Othertimes you manifest a Mother Kundalini
The evolutionary potency
Coiled at the root of the subtle body
But this mad poet refuses to pay heed
To any theology, any philosophy
I can only weep;



Ma, Ma, Ma !

This is your sweetest name

Transcending all descriptions (13).

Simplicity is the core of her wisdom. She is a supreme warrior and in the battlefield of human suffering dissolves the demons of egocentricity at the individual and the collective level. As Goddess Mahalakshmi, she is an amalgamation of beauty, order and richness. As Mahasaraswathi, She represents accuracy, precision, perseverance, hard work, consciousness, discernment, tireless efforts, perfection to the core, diligence, order, efficiency, laboriousness, meticulousness, indefatigable will, integrity and flawlessness. Nothing is trivial for her. She is against self – deception, pretence, carelessness, negligence, indolence, laziness, dilemma, hasty careless work, clumsiness and misinterpretations.

To quote from *The Mother* again about the manifestations:

...There are emanations. An emanation of the Mother is something of her consciousness and power put from her which so long as it is in play, is held in close connection with her, and when its play is no longer required, is withdrawn back into its source, but can always be put out and brought into play once more. But also the detaining thread of connection can be served or loosened and that which came forth as an independent divine being with its own play in the world. All the Gods can put forth such emanations from their being, identical with them in essence of consciousness and power though not commensurate (62).

These emanations constitute Eternal Feminine. The seven mothers of the *Saga* are miniature representations of Eternal Feminine, the archetypes of *Shakti* in human form.

The Seven mothers have self – concept. In *The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for meaning* (1981, 1995) Fowler assures that one's self – concept is sure to influence one's personality. What you believe, that you are. Jung, the disciple of Freud is of the opinion that man wishes to remain a child. He likes to reside in the unconscious and reject everything that is strange and challenge – posing. The craving for pleasure and power is another common human trait. According to him, what stops one to evolve is, one's failure to open up to new and unfamiliar experiences which one deems as a threat to the sense of self. Protected life shuts the door of evolution. To grow, one should come out of the comfortable zone. No development of a wider and higher consciousness occurs if one refuses the exposure to learn.

The Seven Mothers even as a child and maiden accept challenges, take risk and are willing to travel the road not taken. The kind of existence they prefer enables them to dive deeper and deeper into the unsure waters of life and gain a richer perspective thereby undergoes this conflict or tension. In his book, *Childhood and Society* (1974) Erikson specifies them. They are as follows:

Basic Trust Vs Basic Mistrust

Autonomy Vs Shame and Doubt

Initiative Vs Guilt

Industry Vs Inferiority



Identity Vs Role Confusion

Intimacy Vs Isolation

Generativity Vs Stagnation

Ego Integrity Vs Despair

Hope, Will – power, Purpose, Competence, Fidelity, Love, Care and Wisdom are the basic virtues. Without them, all other values lose their spirit and relevance. The union of the opposites in the seven mothers has resulted in sublimation and a balanced personality. It is an inner process and it enables one to be self – dependent. The Chinese and Buddhist philosophies deem this conflict as “Middle Way”, “Golden mean” and “Middle pillar”. The resolution is named “Total Surrender to the Self”, “One – pointedness” and “Wholeness of the Psyche”. Jung explains thus:

In Physics, this process is called covalent bonding, where elements unite because of mutual deficiencies. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts because of a synergistic quality. This quality of ‘wholeness’ is represented in psychology as the archetype of the Self” (Nwbotanicals.org)

The wholesome personality possesses a flexible ego which works with the Self and thereby avoids wrong decisions guided by intuition. Ann Belford Ulanor, Professor of Psychiatry and Religion in her book *The Feminine in Jungian Psychology and Christian Theology* quotes Jung:

This experience of relating to the larger center of the self is felt as the sub – ordination of one’s personal wishes to a greater power and meaning. There is a religious quality to this experience that is often experienced as ‘finding one’s way’, ‘following the will of God’, ‘serving not oneself but Christ within etc., (81)

It is the process of Individuation. According to Jung man is inwardly whole. Eternally, he views life in parts. Individuation means the process of coming to know, giving expression to and harmonizing various components of the psyche. It is a transformational process of integrating the conscious with the personal and collective unconscious. Such a person can seek out remedy for others. The seven Mothers have undergone this transcendent function and thereby serve as role models as balanced personalities. When they face a crisis in life, they fight alone.

Devahuti, in marrying Kardama Prajapati, has to forego royal pleasures and comforts. She happens to adapt herself to the forest and its environ, the ascetic food of fruits and the saintly way of sleeping on the floor. Bereft of jewels and royal attires, she wears the saffron. Kardama often goes to trance. As a lonely woman, she musters her strength to feed him and protect him from falling down. She happens to spend sleepless nights to aid him in his spiritual mission. Day and night she spends her life in feeding and nursing him. She wins in her battle of enabling Kardama to attain his spiritual goal. Extra – ordinary patience, selflessness, determination, faith in her inner strength, courage, sacrifice and motherly attitude to wage a lonely battle, are her eternal feminine qualities.

Sukanya, the royal princess too is forced by circumstances to marry Chayavana, the blind and rugged looking ascetic. Like Devahuti, she faces the crisis alone. The situation is



similar in both cases. Sukanya's is worse in the sense that Chayavana is old and blind. When she prays Aswin twins, the divine doctors, they tempt her to marry them as a fee for restoring the eyesight of her husband. They also test her chastity by challenging her to identify the right Chayavana when they assume his form. Her inner force guides her to choose the right Chayavana. All the qualities of Devahuti are found in Sukanya, to prove her an aspect of the eternal feminine.

Devayani is cheated by Kacha in love. Yayati, her husband drugs her to enjoy the company of her rival Sarmishta. Devayani has the guts to redeem her from all the traumas and collects herself to lead a contented life independently. The stories of Damayanti and Draupadi, the struggles they overcome to lead a peaceful life at the end are familiar to anyone. Renuka Devi by following her instinct chooses Jamadagni as her soul – mate. But suspicion drives him to behead Renuka Devi who ultimately reveals her identity as mother Goddess. Her husband's suspicion and her own son willing to behead her show that death is imminent. She only worries about the curse that will befall on her son for murdering his own mother. She is selfless, ready to face death to prove her chastity and divinity. Kannagi's story, crisis and the eternal feminine qualities in her is well – known to people of Tamilnadu.

The conflicts and crises may differ. To face them in a right way, with the right attitude and aptitude needs a great counseling and *Saga* serves as a therapy to all ills. *Saga* is the panacea to the pandemic.

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