CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion: Position of Women in relation to the contemporary socio-economic aspect.

In Bengal,' the origin of the cult of the Female Principle was spontaneous which evolved out of the prehistoric Mother Goddess cult symbolizing the facts of primitive life'.

The origin of the anomalous position of the Male Principle in the Sakta religion which found its best expression in Bengal and also in the philosophical Sankhya of which the cradle-land was Bengal may presumably be traced to the anomalous position of the males in a matriarchal society. The male element was introduced at first as her insignificant lover, but at later became the co-equal and eventually the pre-dominant partner. But in Bengal the peculiar tenacity with which the cult of the Female Principle in its highest form has survived in the lives of the masses is quite striking. The Sakta Devi in her developed form absorbed within herself innumerable goddesses representing different streams. The cult of Female Principle received a great impetus from the Buddhist concept of *Sunya* or *Prajna* popularized by Mahayanaism and its offshoots which led to the development of a pantheon of female deities.

In the Tantras many of the Buddhist female deities were identified with Sakta goddesses. The most outstanding Sakta revival was furnished by the Tantras which
necessitated an understanding and a general acceptance of the Female Principles in the religious worship.

All kinds of religious endeavours of India have a common background. In all the esteric schools the absolute reality is conceived of possessing in its nature the potency of two aspects or attributes. In Hindu Tantrism these two aspects of the absolute reality have been conceived as the Siva and Sakti, or the primordial male and female.

In Tantrism the division of the creatures of the world into the male and female has an ontological reason behind it. The male and the female represent in the visible world the division which is present in the nature of the absolute as Siva and Sakti, and the perfect union of Siva and Sakti is the highest reality. Within the physical body of man and woman reside the ontological principles of Siva and Sakti, therefore to realize the absolute truth, or in other words, to obtain the highest spiritual experience man and woman first of all realize themselves as manifestation of Siva and Sakti and unite together physically, mentally and spiritually, and the Supreme bliss that proceeds from such union is the highest religious gain.

The condition of women as reflected in the terracotta art of West Bengal from earliest to late mediaeval period is very interesting. The female terracotta figurines of the Maurya-Sunga phase of Bengal were mainly cult figurines. In the Kushan phase all of sudden we notice certain changes had been reflected in the terracotta art of the society. The earlier cult figurines replaced in certain cases by secular themes, reveal the role of woman in different spheres of life. The domestic scenes such as mother and child,
Dampati or a male figure with a female partner, erotic scenes, and the birth giving mother, toiletry scenes, and women feeding birds or animals depict an affluent life. Bengal during Gupta period witnessed most prosperous life, like other parts of Ganges valley. The terracotta art reflects the most sophisticated and elegant terracotta female forms following the classical idiom.

We have already mentioned in the previous chapters that the entire plain was either under the dominance of different dynasties or cultural influences. So the abundant terracotta figurines found from this region have helped us to study the social character and behavioral pattern through the ages.

Women in India have always been the topic of interest since ancient times. They can be the appropriate examples of perfect homemaker with their incomparable quality of calmness of mind. They could handle even the toughest situation easily. The Indian women are completely devoted to their families. It is said that women in ancient India enjoyed equivalent status and rights with men in all spheres of life. Further women were properly educated in the early Vedic period. References can be found in the works of Grammarians and Katyayana. Women had the liberty to select their husbands.

Part played by women for the procreation of children was considered very important. It was a sacred duty of married couple to approach each other in the proper time for the sake of progeny, so that the race might continue. This samskara is therefore very important from the cultural point of view. A purposive man approaching his wife in an
attitude of religious serenity— which, he believes, will consecrate the expected child— with the blessed intention of having progeny.

After the consecration is ascertained, the womb is consecrated by the secondsamskara called pumsavana. It was thought necessary that through the treatment of pregnant mother the child in the womb should be influenced and so medical and mental treatment of the mother was prescribed. From all over India including Bengal many terracotta female figurines related to child-birth, fertility of the women have been recovered.

The condition of women in society deteriorated during mediaeval period. At this point of time several evil practices like child-marriage, sati and female infanticide were practiced largely. Purdha system was started. No effort was made to abolish the purdha system which was strictly observed in high class families of both Hindu and Muslim communities. Polygamy was common in Mohammedan and especially among the Hindu upper class society in the later phase of late mediaeval period. As Alberuni corroborated that— ‘Hindues take but one wife and never divorce her till death except for the cause of adultery’. They could marry a second time only if the first wife proved to be barren.

The Zenanas were high class ladies who lived in seclusion while the royal concubines used to live Harems guarded by the eunuchs. The Devadasis in the name of God were forced into a life of religious prostitution. All these are the manifestation of different aspects of the exploitation of women.
Indian society in the mediaeval ages appears to have been more or less static. Its dominant feature was custom. Of many evil customs, none was perhaps more prevalent than child marriage, which was in vogue among the Hindus and Muslims alike. Political and social circumstances compelled a father, at least among the Hindus, to have his daughter married as early as possible. Customs forbade girls to remain in the house of their parents for more than six to eight years from birth.

Widow remarriage, except for the lower caste people, had disappeared almost completely in Hindu society during the early to late mediaeval age. No efforts were made to reintroduce this custom by any of the mediaeval rulers.
Notes:


2. Ibid, p 356.

3. Ibid, p 357.


Boundary of West Bengal.
Districts of West Bengal

1. Darjeeling
2. Jalpaiguri
3. Cooch Behar
4. North Dinajpur
5. South Dinajpur
6. Malda
7. Birbhum
8. Murshidabad
9. Bardhaman
10. Nadia
11. Purulia
12. Bankura
13. Hooghly
14. North 24 Parganas
15. West Midnapore
16. Howrah
17. Kolkata
18. South 24 Parganas
19. East Midnapore