CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION
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In the foregoing chapters we have surveyed the different sides and activities regarding the status of women in Smṛti Literature and also in others. We now propose in the concluding chapter to make certain and analyse the general attitude of the society, prospect and some suggestions towards women.

We have seen that the status of women were changing from age to age. Therefore, naturally the attitude of the society was not the same in different periods. That is why, we have to look and note for the ups and downs in the general attitudes towards women to find out how far man is prepared to rise up the prejudices and Judges the women by an equitable standard.

From the discussions, in the foregoing chapters it may be said that very early times Hindu Society has shown its concern for women in diversity of ways. Since very early times, the killing of woman was regarded as a very disgraceful offense. For the offense of killing woman Manu prescribed the capital punishment (Manu. IX. 232). In the early period, it was a very great sin to accept a bride-price. For the same offense law courts were usually to place upon a lighter punishment upon women than upon men (Arthaśāstra, IV. 12)

There are, however, some passages in Sanskrit literature, both religious and secular, which are of opposite nature. In one side it is prescribed that woman & prosperity are not two different things and she was to be honoured like the Goddess of prosperity. On the other hand, it is also prescribed that women are very fickle (Ṛg. X. 95.15); women are falsehood incarnate (Mait. S.I. 10.11), in this context the reference shows that women of bad character, women are cruel and malicious by nature (Rāmāyana, III. 45.27.28.31). But, there seem to be the generalisation made in different situations.

From about the beginning of the Christian era, as we have shown already, a woman deserves no independence, ceases to receive proper education and is to be married at an early age. As a result, they were inferior to men in intelligence, education and the experience of the world.
We have already seen in the previous chapters that the position, power, status and disabilities of the daughter, the wife and widow went on changing in course of time. All types of freedom and privileges in their lives, they enjoyed, but as centuries rolled on, the situations went on changing perhaps towards hostility.

From our discussion in the preceding chapters, we may say that in the \( \text{Rgvedic} \) age (C. 2500 B.C. to century 1500 B.C.), the position of women was fairly satisfactory on the whole. Girls were educated like boys and had to pass through a period of Brâhmachârya. Ordinarily girls were perhaps less welcomed than boys; the marriage of girls used to take place at the age of 16 or 17. The ideal marriage of the vedic period was a religious sacrament which made them joint owners of the household. A few verses show that brides were sometimes sold in marriage or even carried away by force; in the rich and royal families, polygamy prevailed to some extent, but ordinarily monogamy was the rule; the sati custom was not in vogue; the widow, if she liked, could contract another marriage either regularly or under the custom of niyoga. They were inherently inferior to men and therefore, must be always subordinate to them. The main disabilities which women suffered from in this period, they could not hold or inherit any property.\(^1\)

Though, in this thesis we have not dealt with the age of later saimhitâs, Brâhmaṇas and Upaniṣads (C. 1500 B.C. to C. 500 B.C.), it may be said briefly that in this period, the position of women was changing gradually. Some changes that might have taken place in this period may be stated as “The proprietary rights of women were being recognised; the position of the female education had turned away; Divorce was permitted to the wife; the sati custom was unknown and the widow had the options of staying either with her brother-in-law or with an outsider; there was no indication regarding tonsure of the widows; purdah was also unknown but women had desisted to attend from the public meetings.”\(^2\)

\(^{1}\) As Altekar cited in “ The position of women in H.C.” p. 339.
\(^{2}\) I bid. pp-340-343.
As we come to the age of sutras, the epics and the early smrtis (i.e. C. 500 B.C. - C. 500 A.D.) position of woman started becoming worse. The marriages of Aryan men with non-Aryan women were taking place. Manu (III 14 & 16), Vismu (XXVI.5) & Vas Dh.S. XVIII 17 also state similar opinion.

In the end of this period, it seems that girls could not get adequate education, unless she remained unmarried till about the age of 22 or 24. During the first half of this period, a few girls could continue the vedic studies & rituals. Upanayana was usually performed at about the age of 9 or 10, but the same age was regarded as the time of marriage. Therefore, it may be said that early marriages prescribed by the sūtra & smṛtikāras were an effective obstruction in their higher education. In this period girls were married soon after the attainment of puberty. Marriage was regarded as a religious sacrament like the vedic period, but divorce and remarriage was permitted in certain circumstances.

The wife could not take same step, even if her husband abandoned her. During the first of this period, the widow remarriages and niyoga were continued, but public opinions were against this custom. The then society stopped and opposed to niyoga and widow remarriages. Whether vedas have declared that a son was necessary for securing heaven, but Manu says (V. 159):

अनेकानि सहस्त्राणि कुमारशशचा रिणाम ।

दिवं गतानि विप्राणामकूल्म कुल संततिम ॥

The widow should not ever think of remarriage, but the smrtis permitted the husband to remarry immediately after the death of the first wife. The purda system however, was yet prevalent only in the small section of the royal families. The only direction in which the position of women improved, that was only the proprietary rights in this period. The sati custom came back to life in this period and niyoga gradually stamped out. A woman should not be compelled to niyoga against her wish (Baud. Dh. S. II 1. 20) says it clearly “नाकाम्या सनियोज्या स्वातः ।”
In the age of later smṛtis, commentators and digest writers (C. 500 A.D. to C. 1800 A.D.), we have seen that proprietary rights of women improved and on the other side, in all the other spheres position of women continued to worsen. Such as, Upānayaṇa of women completely stopped; the marriageable age of girls was lowered down again; widow marriages were prohibited, in this period, the sati custom had become prevailed. The smṛtis advocated the doctrine that the husband was the wife’s god and her only duty was to obey and serve him.

In this period the custom of sati was opposed by the society and majority of smṛtis affirm positively that the custom could bring no spiritual salvation. The smṛtis and their commentators laid down to about the 11th century that it would be sinful for a Brāhmaṇa widow to burn herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. The tonsure of the widow which prevailed about the 8th century A.D. and in this period, with the disappearance of Buddhism, this custom gradually disappeared. The purdah system was also opposed down to the 12th A.D. “It is true that there was no female education worth down to the middle of the 19th century. It may be that early marriages might have been common in many countries in ancient and medieval times; but that would not justify the conduct of later smṛti-writers in disapproving the earlier custom of post puberty marriages.”

Modern India does not justify the practice of sati, regarding niyoga, it is better to say that niyoga was a survival from the remote past, that gradually it became rarer and rarer till in the first century of the Christian era it came to be totally prohibited. To come to the modern times, today, opinion of educated people is most favourable to making marriages monogamous and efforts are being made to secure absolute monogamy by legislative action.

In the modern period, the problems of Indian women is totally different. From the chap-IV & appendix 1, it may be said that at present there are various atrocities against women like domestic violence, dowry deaths, satī (though rare), widowhood etc. There is an inherent discrimination against women in the social

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3 As Atkekar cited in “The position of women” in H.C. p-358.
4 As Kane P.V. cited in “H.D.S.” Vol-II, part-1, p-554 & 607.
structure. The main factor or it may be said main foe of the women’s explosion is female education and their economical solveney. When they will be able to acquire these then they would not be considered as inferior to a man. Therefore, some actions need to be taken by Governments, intergovernmental organisations, academic and research institutions and the private sector. Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits to both the girls and boys thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Discriminations in girl’s access to education persists in many areas, owing to customary attitudes, early marriages and pregnancies, inadequate and gender based teaching and educational materials, sexual harassment etc. Girls undertake heavy domestic work at every early age, girls and young women are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in poor scholastic performance and early drop outs from the education system. This has long lasting consequences for all aspects of women’s lives.\textsuperscript{5} The present Government of India has already passed the bill for girls that they can study up to class XII as a full free student ship & upto class V is compulsory.

Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objective of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

To stop this many provisions are being made by Governments. Initiatives of women’s organisations and non-governmental organisations all over the world to raise awareness on the issue of violence against women and to contribute to its elimination are being taken. For economically independence of women, also measures are being taken such as an equal pay for equal work to both men & women.

If this is done successfully, women would not be socially, morally, economically, physically and sexually exploited in India within short period. They

\textsuperscript{5} “Forth world conference on women” Benjing, China, p-29, 4-15 September, 1995.
have to come out from the traditions and social sanctions (which have hampered their development) to build up their position in the higher level of the society. The social awareness and wish of the woman can change their lots from the lower status in the male dominated society.

To sum up, to improve the status of women in the society certain remedical actions are required:
1. There should be change in the socialization process.
2. Women is responsible for her own victimisation. There should be change in woman’s own attitude towards her.
3. They have to become educated and economically independent.
4. Majority of women are unaware of their rights. Again there is a need of educating them and making them aware of their rights.
5. Women should forget their old concept and men should co-operate with them to develop both. This is the need of the hour today.

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