CHAPTER II

Position of Women in Scriptures &
Vedic and Post Mahabharata Period.
Position of Women in Scriptures & Vedic Period.

According to Brihadaranyaka Upanishad⁴, man is completed by the equal halves of man & women like halves of a shell completing the whole shell ardhavrigalamiva. The women fill up the void in men’s lives—not only as equal partners but infinitely more superior to them in their inherent & special rights as mothers.

If god made man in His own image then the Mother of god made woman as the reflection of the Holy Spirit. The Mother Universe bestowed in her womb the primordial Truth, which could never be vanished. It is eternal, pure, resilient, all pervading.

A befitting praise to the Devi in the Devi Mahatma status, “all forms of knowledge are aspects of thee, and all women in the universe are thy form”.

⁴ Great Women of India by Yogi Mahajan
In the scheme of creation man & woman were born as equals, complementary to each other, as the two wheels of chariot. There are two types of wheels rotating because they are similar yet are not similar. In Indian marriage the question of competition or equality is not considered.

This consciousness follows from the archetype Purusha & Prakriti. Pursha, the male principle of the universe, yang, is the external witness of the Play of prakruti, the female principle of universe, yin, which spontaneously creates all material reality. Parvati is Shiva's Shakti necessary for involving him in creation. Shiva is described as sky, Parvati as the earth, Shiva is subject Parvati is object. Shiva is ocean Parvati the sea. Shiva is a sun, Parvati the light. The two are actually one different aspects of the ultimate reality.

Ardha Natnareshwara concept in India illustrates that show the man & woman are complement to each other. Though they have different roles to play each is the component of other & incomplete without the other.
Position of women in Vedic era:

From the Rig-Vedic age women were partners with men in all spheres. Women studied both the physical & metaphysical knowledge & become great scholars, seers & teachers. When Yajnavalkya wanted to divide his property between his two wives Katyayani & Maitrey, the latter elicited to accept saying, what should I do with all the worldly wealth through which I cannot gain immortality?

The “Ramayana” places the mother in the highest position. In “Kishkindha kanda” of Ramayana, states that the wife is the self of the man. In “Ayodhya kanda” the mother is enjoined to be honored as much as the father.

In “Mahabharata period”, women were well versed not only in philosophy but also in all branches of knowledge. They enjoyed equal rights with men in all respects. The great ascetics Sulbha roamed from place to place in search of truth. Even Raja Janaka respected Sulbha’s knowledge & drew inspiration from her. Harivansha wife of Prabhasa attained the highest perfection in Yaga & expanded the Brahma Vidya.
Arundhati wife of great sage, Vasistha who equaled her husband in knowledge and intellect.

Gargeyi, Maithreyi, & Sulabha are famous for their spiritual debates. In several mantras it is said that, women of this country have given its man folk valor, spiritual illumination, piety, & intellectual brilliance.

A woman’s dharma was held above her family attachments. Dharma rested on the foundation of a women’s strength of character. Heroic queens Kunti & Draupadi were exemplary characters & paragons of virtue, sacrifice & righteousness. Draupadi’s fiery words to her defeated son were an example of her fortitude.

All these philosophers, saint or poet though were learned remains absorbed in her own work & can not even think of self assertion or self advertisement. Even Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi explains that, “A women should stay in the background and a man in the fore front. She should help him in the forefront. She should help him in the background for she is current of his power.
She must remain within her moryadas i.e. the norms and boundaries of social conduct, which lend her dignity honour & protection. Her greatness lies in the service to others & through being the mother of great children. You cannot create flower. But least you can nature innocent lines & cast the mould of her statesmen & patriots.

As we know lord Ram is known as Kausalya’s Ram, Krishna is known as Yashoda’s Krishna, A great king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaja is the great output of Jijamata. Sita is held as ideal wife & great mother of Lava & Kusha. Gandharai is known for her impartiality. Kunti great mother of Pandava’s & she upholds Dharma. Draupadi’s arguments about Dharma in Kuruabha are also famous.

In fact the great wars in Ramayana & Maharashtra were fought to uphold the dignity of women. In famous “Vidhura Neeti” Vidhura stresses that women should be specifically looked after because they are worthy of being worshiped.
Position of Women in Post Mahabharata Period till foreign invasions:

The goddess earth is the great mother, we worship her as Bharat Mata the land of the Indian subcontinent mother worship inspired the freedom struggle. During freedom struggle Bharat Mata had to be liberated from foreign yoke. The great Bengali Poet Bankimchandra stirred the soul of the Indian masses in his inspiring hymn “Vande Mantaram” (hail to thee my mother).

In post Maharashatra period there was certain shift in attitudes & recreations of women because of well spread trade, wealth for centuries together, leisure & Peace. Music & dance became very popular which has brought some looseness in morals. Some puranas describe women as fickle minded, frivolous, untruthful. The great stress was given on physical purity & chastity which slowly led to the preference of marriage in early age.

Buddism gave much stress on sanyasa so viewing women as incarnation of evil trying to men was considered. Upnayana ceremony
became formal without vedic mantras marriage ceremony also Slowly equated to Panama. Therefore the Vedic education was slowly got devised to women. And so, the intellectual advancement & status suffered a set back in principle. But in actual practice women continued to share the earlier respect & achievements in social life.

There are galaxies of poetesses in the 7th century. Lick poetess Vijaynka was ranked as a peer of Kalidas in vaidharbhi style of composition. Kshanavati an astronomer & Lilawati a mathematician were very famous. Many women excelled in temple, architecture, philosophical debates, warfare, trade & industry, administration etc. child marriage did not take roots as prevalent practice women were not punished for adultery. A woman was allowed to remarry in case of unheard for long period of her husband or his death, importance or outcaste etc.

Sati & Devadasi practices started. Devadasi system started for entertaining deity by unmarried girls on festive occasions in temples with their songs. There was slight
appreciation of the practice of a women becoming a sati out of intense love, devotion & attachment to her husband. There are a lot of examples of widely respected widows like Prabhavati Devi of Vakataka dynasty, Mayanalla Devi of Gujarat, Karpura Devi of Aimer. Sonless widows inherited the property of their husbands.

**Changing Social Scenario due to foreign invasion**

India had to face invasion by Arab, Afghan, Pathan, Turk, Mughal & Europeans who were not mere barbarians but also flag bearers of definite ideologies, which they compelled upon us. We tried to protect our cherished values by rigidifying the customs needs at that time and codifying religious injunctions, which ultimately got codified as laws. These invasions lead to increase in child marriages and a decline in women’s education through home education was wide spread.

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5 Ancient women in India
The spirit of sacrifice of Indian women is beyond record. Each tale of sacrifice is more breath taking than the other. So many lives have been sacrificed at the alter of Bharat Mata. Mother India that even soil of Bharat is worthy of worship. Nobility in women does not depend upon race, cast & creed but upon ideals. It is the outcome of their dharmic way of life.

For example, Dhatri Panna Dasi of Mewar gave sacrifice of her won son for saving life of Udaising second son of Maharana Sanga. She placed her own son in the cradle in place of Udaising & Ranbir murdered him considering as Udaising.

Queen Chinnammaji was a woman of such extraordinary administrative skill & genius that her husband entrusted the reins of government to her hands. She gave shelter to Shivaji’s son Rajaram. She repulsed the Moghal army & totally routed it. Aurangjeb was impressed by her valor she also defeated Mysore army.

Ahilyabai Holkar a great devotee of siva, while performing daily routine she would
always militate & may & thus receive tremendous inner strength & guidance to face mounting challenges of life. Ahilya showed rare administrative ability & the Peshwa, the ruler gave her complete charge of the state. She was a very kind & humane person, well known for justice but if required she could rule with an iron hand.

Rani Chennamma queen of Kittur was the first ruler to defy & overcome the mighty British Empire. After death of Raja Mallaraja Desai the little state prepared under her benevolent rule. In he rule women & children were always respected & sheltered. Thus is a maryada (code) strictly adhered to in Indian culture. In fierce battle with British Rani was imprisoned & she died after 5 years.

The Ruins of the ancient palaces of India tell tales of unbelievable honour, beauty & sacrifice of Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi. Each stone of the Kjamso fort is a monument to glory. Indian historians paid rich tribute to their Queen saying that, even the soil of Jhansi is sanctified by the Heroic sacrifice of the martyrs. She bravely defended the fort of
Jhansi against British but compelled to make dramatic escape through British ranks. She joined powerful commander Tatya Tope. She fought valiantly until a bullet hit her & she fell to ground. The British commander general Rose was so struck by her superhuman force that he saluted her fallen body saying.

“We may have won the battle but the glory goes to Jhansi Ki Rani” Jijabai, the mother of Shivaji was the most outstanding Queen of Maharashtra. In a conflict between her husband & father, well verse in the duties of a married woman the determined Jijabai had the fortitude to stand by her husband. Jijabai brought up Shivaji on the foundation of Dharma. She taught him to regard women in high esteem. Jijabai was a great social reformer & was ahead of her time.

Queen Tarabai-wife of Rajaram bravely led Maratha forces, moving from fort to fort & displaying a rare military genius. She is a tigress Queen who by dint of her courage did not allow Aurangjeb to impose Moghal rule in Deccan.
Rani Padmini, Queen of Chittor possesses the power o perpetually & to save her honor, she burnt herself in ceremony of Jauhar. Allaudin Khilji, Muslim ruler, wanted to possess her after seeing her exquisite beauty & threatened to besiege he palace. So Queen Padmini’s soldiers launched surprise attack on sultan but finally overpowered them. When Queen did not see signal of victory she assembled the women in the fort & addressed them saying- “let our honor is defiled by these barbaric men let those among you who desire, to perform Jauhar enter into the fire. “Then offering prayer to goddess Jagadamba, they peacefully gave up their souls in the fire to vindicate their honor.

Women Freedom Fighter:

Sarojini Naidu is affectionately known as the Nightingale of Bengal. A poetess turned freedom fighter. She so believed that “until & unless we raise the fallen women in this country & make their voice heard, India’s salvation would remain a distant freedom. A Cambridge graduate, she championed the
cause of women emancipation & succeeded in getting the resolution passed for women’s franchise. She charged Indian youth with “give me liberty or death. She was first governor of U.P. independence.

Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya-during the civil Disobedience movement 1930 openly prepared salt & sold it even in the high court premises. When she was taken to court for trial she invited the magistrate to buy salt & asked him to resign & join the movement. She started selling salt in the courtroom for this she was jailed for six months. The woman of war became the artisan’s messiah after independence. She received Padma Bhushan Award.

Cornelia Karuna Salve was a very active, dynamic & serve child. She was determined & became the first woman graduate in Mathematics Honors from Fergus on college under the tutelage of the great mathematician. Rangler Paranjape she even studied law. She was a principle of St. urasula’s High School Nagpur. Out of Rs. 125 monthly salary she surrendered Rs. 100 as management refused to
take it she gave it away to charity. Her husband Barrister Shri P.K. Salve & she herself with their patriotic zeal found vent in the meeting with Mahatma Gandhi. There after every Saturday Cornelia would go to clean the colonies of untouchables Harijans. She took part in Chitnis Park meeting. For which she was arrested but later released because she had little children to look after.

**Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi**- in 1942 the principle of Nirmala’s college reported Cornelia about her underground activities in the freedom struggle & how she had led a procession boldly facing the British soldiers. Tears of admiration filled Cornelia’s eyes & she said, “I am a very proud of mother to have such a brave girl” she had complete trust in her daughter, knowing that one day she was destined to transform the world when she was pregnant with her, she had a great desire to see a lion in the open. Shri Nirmala Devi is not only the freedom fighter but also much more than it as she gives spiritual realization to thousands of seekers of truth.
Position of women in 19th century:

Till the beginning of 19th century the bad practices of sati, Kulinism, purdah were limited to few castes in few areas, but the picture appears to be very bleak. The emancipation of women & liberation movements started & gave a different direction to the understanding and lives of women. British pointed India in bad shape. They have praise for Indian women in beginning; in order to loot us they had to destroy the social fabric system of education trade etc. woman was increasingly considered merely as an object of enjoyment. The McCauley’s education system aimed at cutting the very roots of our culture did have some effects on the social structure.

It is necessary to take reference of the first lady lawyer of India specially when the subject is about of position of women in domain of law.

Cornelia Sorabji6 (1866-1954) was a pioneer woman lawyer of India whose formative with the high noon of the British Empire. She occupies a

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6 Academic Books – Cornelia Sorabji – India’s Pioneer Woman Lawyer - http://www.oup.co.in
significant place in Indian history a crucial role in trying to open up the legal profession to women much before they were to plead before the courts of law. This detailed biography uses rich and hitherto unused a remarkable individual who has remained neglected in studies on India’s transition to also in the historiography of women and gender.

A Parsee and daughter of a convert to Christianity, Sorabji was the first woman to study the second Indian woman barrister, and among the early Indian women to practice at the Court. She was also appointed to a senior office under the British Indian government interests of the purdahnashins, the women in purdah who owned property accomplishments, she failed to develop a critique of the Empire, and by opposing I politics in the Gandhian era, she placed herself on the wrong side of history.

With considerable skill and insightful analysis, the author has succeeded in dissent Sorabji from the established stereotypes in nationalist of feminists studies. She also life to the complexities of gender issues in colonial India, and raises questions about it her life from the perspective of emancipatory politics of gender.
The foreign rule in India saw a sudden shift in the way of life of women. Except for a few examples of great women, the period of independence struggle & the post independence period did not see much of improvements in the conditions of the common woman. In the present day scenario in India, though quite a lot of contributions to the nation building are earning from women they are being locked upon as mere commodities & their beauty consciousness has been exploited in various ways.

United Nations commissions on the Status of Women:

United Nations established a body in 1946 to monitor the situation of women & to promote women's rights. The commission's work has been instrumental in bringing to light all the areas in which women are denied equality with men. These efforts for the advancement of woman have resulted in several declarations & conventions of which the convention on the elimination of all forms
of Discrimination against women is the central & most comprehensive document. Indian constitutions and gender equality

The preamble of our constitution, which is key to open minds of makers, enshrined the principle of gender equality. Part 3 fundamental Rights & Duties part 4 directive principles not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.