CHAPTER-VI

DIFFERENTIAL STATUS OF THE GIRL CHILD
ON THE RELIGIOUS BASIS

In the present age when religions is gradually losing its hold on popular mind, (although recent political events have revived the fervour to some extent), the subject may appear as of no great importance. The case, however, was quite different in the past. Religious rights and privileges were valued most highly; even political and proprietary rights faded before them in importance. The social status of an individual was vitally connected with the place which religion accorded to him/her in its rites and rituals. Privileges accorded or denied to women, in particular to girls, by religion will therefore throw valuable light on their position in society. In order to make an assessment of these one needs to study the involvement of the girls in the religious undertaking practices first at the domestic level and later her participation and preparation for social ceremonies, if any. This can be inferred from the freedom and rights accorded to her to perform and participate in the daily and community rituals. The debarment from the performance of such rituals attests to her seclusion from religious activities and reflects her subordinative position, if it so emerges.

The present chapter studies this role in relation to the existing religions of the times under study. We begin with her involvement in the Vedic, early and later religious activities; later with the emergence of the heterodox sects, was there any deviation of her participation in religious rites and paths in these sects. Both these were ascetic religions, and they have not devoted much attention to the duties and ideals of laywomen. The founder and leaders of both these movements shared the indifference to, or
contempt of women, initially which is almost universal among the advocates of the ascetic ideal. The Buddha was reluctant to admit women to his Church – Sārnīgha. The Digambara Jains held that women can never get salvation except by first being reborn as men. It may be added here that Buddhism did not subscribe to this dogma. Apart from these, the role and involvement of the girls/women in the Chārvāka system and the Ājīvikas is also being studied in this chapter.

The most salient feature of the religious life of ancient India was the performance of sacrifices. Almost every undertaking started with a sacrifice with both males and females participating in them. We observe that in the vedic literature, women had the freedom for performance of sacrifices by themselves. In a sense they enjoyed more freedom than men in this because men could not perform sacrifice without women.¹ In the Athavaveda we find a prayer ‘to accompany the preparation and presentation of sacrificial offering to the gods by a householder and his wife for prosperity and happiness on earth and heaven’.² Only certain conditions were applied one such being that she should not be in her monthly course.

The Āryans also did regard the woman as untouchable during her monthly period. This was the case as early as the Indo-Iranian age. Like the Āryans, the Iranians also used to segregate women during this period and regarded them as religiously impure.³ The vedic age assigned this temporary impurity of women to their taking over from Indra one third the sin of brāhmaṇa murder, which he incurred when he had killed Vritra.⁴ Therefore Hindu society has been regarding women as extremely impure and temporarily untouchable during this period. Even the sight of their person and the sound of their voice were to be avoided. Hygienic rules often appear in the form of religious taboos in Hindu culture, and there can
be little doubt that the complete isolation of the post puberty girls and women that was insisted upon during this period was partly due to the desire of ensuring complete rest which is so desirable for them.

Except during the periods of menstruation and confinement, women were not regarded as impure by religion during the early times. It is true that a ceremony to purify the wife before her participation in sacrifices has been enjoined.\(^5\) We cannot however, attach much importance to it, for a similar purification has been prescribed for men also.\(^6\) In the vedic age women enjoyed all the religious rights and privileges, which men possessed. They used to receive vedic education. The Atharvaveda observes that a maiden can succeed in her marriage only if she has been properly trained during the period of studentship.\(^7\) That women are, like śūdras, ineligible for vedic studies is the view of a later age as established in Chapter III; lady poets themselves were composing hymns, some of which were destined to be included even in the vedic Saṁhitās. They therefore could recite vedic mantras as a matter of course. Obviously having being granted the opportunity to learn these during their early years.

Child bearing was regarded as the special function of women, and evil spirits were believed to be anxious to visit them during their mensurating periods to prevent conception. A vedic stanza in the marriage hymn prays that the bride should have no evil eye, and hopes that she would not be the cause of the sudden death of her husband: “Not evil-eyed, no slayer of they husband, bring weal to cattle, radiant, gentle-hearted; loving the gods, delightful, bearing heroes, bring blessing to our quadrupeds and bipeds.”\(^8\) We can understand this strange prayer only if we note the belief of the early times that evil spirits, haunting the person of the bride, render her touch and sight very dangerous to her husband. Another
stanza of the marriage hymn expressly refers to a female spirit taking possession of the bride and attempting to do harm to her husband through her person: "Give thou the woolen robe away; deal treasure to the brahman priests. This female fiend hath got her feet, and as a wife attends her lord". The prayer, referred above praying that the bride may not be the cause of her husband's death is a magical formula intended to immunize the husband from the possible consequences of his contact with the evil spirits, haunting his bride at the time of the menstruation and consummation.

From the vedic time down wards women have been regarded as impure during the time of confinement also. The phenomenon of menstruation is repeated at the child-birth. Now it was besides apprehended that evil spirits would be haunting the mother during her confinement on account of their eagerness to kill new-born babies.

Although, marriage, and not renunciation was the ideal recommended for the girls by the society yet womanhood was not an impediment in the path of religion, her presence and co-operation were absolutely necessary in religious rites and ceremonies. This naturally increased her religious value. Man could not become a spiritual whole, unless he was accompanied by his wife. It has been stated that gods do not accept the oblations offered by a bachelor. The husband alone cannot go to heaven; in the symbolical ascent to heaven in the sacrifice, he has to call his wife to accompany him on the occasion. A son was indispensable for spiritual well-being in the life to come, and he could be had only through the wife. She was thus indispensable from the spiritual and religious points of view. This circumstance was responsible for ensuring the girls religious freedom and a privileged role in these pursuits for she would have to be
prepared during her childhood for her forthcoming role in the religious pursuits as a wife.

Even in the later vedic days women could participate in the performance of sacrifices with men. He could not go for sacrifice without his wife because in every sacrifice it was compulsory that the wife must accompany the husband in the performance of the rites. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, "No sacrifice was considered to be completed without the participation of wife because the wife is considered as one half of the sacrificer". Not only as a partner, there are some special sacrifices like Śītāyajña, Rudrabali and Rudrayajña which were exclusively performed by women. Not only this but women in vedic times even had the right of offering the great horse sacrifice 'Aśwamedha', the most exalted of all religious sacrifices.

Besides, while husbands needed to be accompanied by the wives, women could perform sacrifice alone in the absence of their husbands or even as individual. Indrāni in one place proudly claims that she had started some rites and rituals. Whether what Indrāni did might have been possible for only some of the cultured ladies of the vedic age, we have no direct evidence on the point. However we do have evidence that some women, especially unmarried ones, offered vedic sacrifice all by themselves.

At one place we find a maiden taking a shoot of the Soma shrub while returning from her bath and straightway offering it in sacrifice to Indra when she reached home. In another place we find a lady named Viśvavārā, getting up early in the morning and starting the sacrifice all by herself. In the vedic age there were no images to worship or temples to visit. The Bhakti school, advocating simple prayer to God by mere songs of
devotion, was yet to be thought off. So the offering of sacrifice was the only popular and well-established method of worshipping divine powers. Naturally therefore it could not be interdicted to women, especially because they were all initiated into vedic studies after their upanayana. All of them therefore could offer sacrifices after their initiation. Once again it may have been that these privilege were accorded to only a section of the society. Such examples which may have been exceptions rather than the rule are plentiful in the vedic literature.

Even during the Upaniṣadic period by which period caste system had emerged the husband and wife had to perform certain rites together and what is surprising is that even śūdra wives of the dvija husbands enjoyed this privilege. Janaśṛuti a wealthy śūdra, in one of the Upaniṣads, wished to study the Vedas and for fulfilling this purpose he offered a thousand cows, a necklace and a pair of bulls yoked to a chariot to sage Raikva, but the sage refused to teach the Vedas to the śūdra. Then he offered his beautiful daughter in marriage to Raikva and the sage took the tempting bait. The learned man was then obliged to initiate his wife into the study of the Vedas and the lady instructed her father in the vedic lore. During this period, the intellectual classes diverted their attention from the active to speculative life. To them riddles of universe were more attractive than the monotonous transactions of daily rituals. The sages spent their lives in quest of the supreme truth and in solving the mysteries of creation, occasionally through discussions as well. The question arises whether the girls would also have had the privilege to deliberate such philosophies and be permitted to seek such knowledge. In the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, there is reference to a certain ritual for a father who desires his daughter to be a scholar (pandita) and the same upaniṣad mentions Maitreyī, the wife of Yājñavalkya, discussing problems of deepest philosophical and
metaphysical import with her husband. Although such references are available they are far and few and yet they do attest to the existence of the girls beginning their religions orientation early and blooming into theorists as they grew up. Apparently in this period also the religious status of women was not inferior to that of men as it became in the later ages.

Apart from participating and offering sacrifices, the duty of chanting musically the Sāma songs also seems to have been usually performed by the wife (later on it came to be entrusted to a special class of male priests called Udgātris). The wife used to pound the sacrificial rice, give bath to the animal that was to be immolated and lay in bricks, when the altar was to be built. She participated with her husband in the preparation of the offering, the consecration of the fire, the offering of the oblations and the concluding ceremonies. She herself had to recite some, not all formulae. It is true that sometimes these had to be dictated to her, but the case was probably the same with her husband also with reference to the prayers in many of the sacrifices. Women's participation in vedic sacrifices was thus real and not a formal one.

Here a question arises that if intercaste marriages were permitted during this period, what was the religious status of the wife who belonged to a lower caste? Was she free to participate in sacrifice? Jurists of vedic time gave a dvija's wife of the lower caste full religious privileges if she were the only wife of the husband. But a śūdra wife or a wife for whom a bride-price had been paid was, however not entitled to any religious rights. Such situations, however, do not necessarily fall within the ambit of our study for such marriages would usually be solemnized and contracted between adults and rarely if at all in her childhood.
Situations changed with the passage of time. The wife was originally entitled to offer oblations in the Gṛhya fire in the absence of the husband as stated above, but gradually a son or a brother-in-law began to act in her place.\(^{25}\) Of course she continued to perform the evening sacrifice even during the Sūtra period. Rituals dominate every page of the Gṛhya literature and this ritual chiefly centred round the daily fire. Gobhila Gṛhya Sūtra states that ‘even the wife can offer the morning and evening oblations, for the wife is as it were the house and that fire is the domestic fire.’\(^{26}\)

Certain passages in the epics prove that the maidens were given vedic education (as already stated in chapter III). Women were able to perform sacrifices alone, even without their husbands. In the Rāmāyaṇa, Kauśalyā on the eve of Rāma’s installation offered oblation to fire reciting ‘mantras’.\(^{27}\) Similarly when Vālī was going to fight Sugriva, Tārā performed ‘swastyayana’ with the chanting of ‘mantras’ and so also Kauśalyā when Rāma was going to the forest.\(^{28}\) Women continued to recite daily vedic prayers (Sandhyā).\(^{29}\) Tārā had knowledge of the Vedas.\(^{30}\) In the Mahābhārata too mention is made of a learned Brāhmaṇī who wanted to be enlightened on the mysteries of religion, life and death.\(^{31}\) Śivā another ascetic woman was well versed in the Vedas.\(^{32}\) Even rishis, deities and the manes went to Arundhati to learn the secrets of religion and duty and were duly instructed by her.\(^{33}\)

It seems that when the epics were first written the conservative attitude of the Dharamśāstras had not gained ground. Those women who performed penances for the liberation of soul must have had initial intellectual and philosophic education during their childhood. At any rate the fact is undeniable that they had excellent mental training to which they must have been introduced at an early age. The austerities performed by
Ambā and Anusūyā were beyond the capacities of many rishis. The reference of a hermitage near Kurukṣetra, which was a seat of women ascetics, deserves special mention. Here, observing the vows of brahmacharya (celibacy) from her young age, a brāhmaṇī maiden rose to reach a high point in ascetic eminence. At another place, the daughter of King Śândilya, self-restrained, wedded to severe vows, performed austerities, usually too hard to be accomplished by women. On the basis of merits thus acquired she obtained a place in heaven, and was worshipped by the gods and brāhmaṇ. Disā and Swayamprabhā had taken the vow of celibacy i.e. of brahmacharya and were living as ascetics. In the epics we come across such words as ‘Bhiksaunīs’, ‘Provrajitā’ and ‘Tapaswinī’, which clearly point to the fact that the girls were trained in such a manner that they too practised asceticism and performed penances. This, however was limited/restricted to girls of the affluent Āryan families. Penances were sometimes performed with some worldly object in view. Nevertheless, these examples also indicate that the girls were inculcated with considerable mental discipline and physical endurance which would compare well with similar attainments of their male counter parts in religious pursuits.

Mention of udgātris and laying of the bricks by the brāhmans may indicate that the passages describing sacrifices in the epics may be depicting the time when most of the sacrificial work was now beginning to be allotted to males as opposed to the earlier periods. The Pravargya ceremony an awful, mystic and recondite affair has been mentioned in both the epics but nothing is mentioned about the wife's, a woman's, participation in this rite. The symbolic rite of uniting with the horse is shrouded in mystery and is very difficult to understand. There is no agreement between scholars on this point. This degrading and incredible
custom, from the present standards, may have been a survival of some
kind of fertility rite as Aswamedha was also performed for having progeny.
Although the substitution of the golden Sītā indicates Rāma's affection and
love for her yet this does not speak of any active participation of the women
in the sacrifices. The whole description of a wife's participation does show
that gradually a woman's part in sacrifices was becoming symbolic, formal
and insignificant. The same conditions are described in other contemporary
literature.

The old narratives of Sulabhā, Swayamprabhā and Pingalā indicate that there were women ascetics and philosophers who had
mastered the mysteries of life and death. They were likely to discuss their
knowledge in august conferences as it appears from the accounts of
Sulabhā. It has been shown elsewhere that so far as vedic sacrificial
religion, coronations and srāddhas were concerned the wife had an
important role to play. They continued to perform sacrifices independently. Thus to begin with their religious status was in no way
inferior to that of men. The conditions in the various sacrifices described in
the epics are different, as will be shown presently, so the above mentioned
conditions either depict traditions when the story part of the epics was
being enacted and not necessarily depict the prevailing conditions.

Aśwamedha, Agniśktoma and many other sacrifices are mentioned in
the epics and these could not be performed without the aid of a wife
(patnī). By considering the nature of the actual participation the real status
of women in the society can be assessed. It must, however, be borne in
mind that if sometimes there is no reference to the role of the wife, the
omission may be due to the fact that it was beyond the province of the
epics to describe religious ceremonies in details. Moreover, when the epic
The data was being reduced to writing the role of women in sacrifices was becoming formal. The later composers, therefore, were writing from memory or hearsay and may not have known the details. Obviously, the younger girls would also have stayed away from such orientations since they were not be required to perform them later in life.

From the Smṛtis, Manu explicitly prohibits a girl and a married woman to offer an agnihotra: "Neither a maid, nor a young woman, nor a man of small knowledge, nor a fool should be the officiating priest (hotar) at a fire-oblation, nor a sick man, nor one not initiated". No sacrifice, no vow, no fast was to be observed by women separately from their husband. Even the recitation of the vedic hymns is now forbidden in the case of women: "This course, but without sacred texts, is all to be performed for females, at the due of (their) bodies."

Manu postulates the view that women cannot study the Vedas. Full mastery of the vedic lore required a close and accurate study for about twelve years at the least. But we know that in Manu's times girls had definitely to be married off by the age of fourteen. So girls could not get enough time to study the Vedas accurately. And it was believed that if there was a single mistake in pronunciation or if a vedic mantra was misapplied, it would not only fail to produce the desired result but would also bring about the ruin of the reciter. To protect the females from this dreadful consequences, resulting from defective recitation of the vedic mantras, she was exempted from the compulsory study of the Vedas and subsequently shouldered the role of a male participator as a wife. By the very nature of their sex their freedom was circumscribed, for they needed protection from possible dangers therefore their access to learning sacrificial rites diminished. Right thinking people, however, were always there to exert
their influence against such trends. Although the daughters got the same patronage and love in the family as the sons, vedic studies seem to have become restricted, if not altogether prohibited, for women. As time passed they lost access to the sacraments involving vedic mantras, though they could get the education required to make them into good cultured housewives.

Yājñavalkya opines that all religious rites in the case of a woman must be carried out in silence. The woman here is not required to utter the mantras. The marriage ceremony alone should be conducted with recitation of the sacred texts and obviously here religious participation and freedom for the females appears to have been lost. For when she observed nothing in her childhood she would automatically not have been capable of performance in her later life. Yet there are evidences to show that women could continue adopt asceticism. There are frequent references in the Arthaśāstra itself to female ascetics. Kauṭilya, however, prescribes punishment for a person who converted women to asceticism. The Śrautastras permit a woman to accompany her husband to the forest to lead the life of a Vānaprastha. Daily pūjā was also arranged by them and five daily oblations were often performed by the women. If she was found negligent of her duties, she was punished.

The participation in sacrifices presupposes vedic study, and girls used to devote themselves to it during their maidenhood as clearly brought out in the chapter on education. The initiation ceremony (upanayana) of girls used to take place as regularly as that of boys at the normal time. This was the case as early as the Indo-Iranian age. (The Parsis have still preserved this custom, Naojot ritual, which corresponds to Hindu upanayana, is even now performed by them regularly in the case of girls
and the boys). The vedic age held that brahmacharya discipline and training was as much necessary for girls as it was for boys. It was apprehended that if the most important religious saṃskāra of upanayana was not performed in the case of girls, women would be automatically reduced to the status of Śūdras; how then could brāhmaṇs, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas be born of them. ‘upanayana’ of women was absolutely indispensable, if the cultural tradition of the different Āryan classes was to be preserved.

After their upanayana girls used to follow discipline more or less similar to that of boys. They were, however, shown certain concessions while undergoing their studentship. They were not to grow matted hair. Like boys, they were not required to go out to beg their daily food. As far as possible, they were to be taught by their near relations which could be the father, the uncle or the brother. They were permitted to discontinue their course when their marriages were settled. A few, however, continued their studies for a much longer time and were known as brahmavādinī. It is a pity that most of the above rules about the upanayana of girls should have to be gathered from works written at a time when the custom was rapidly going out of vogue, or had already ceased to be followed. We therefore get only very sketchy and insufficient information on the subject.

We have seen how after their upanayana, girls used to specialize in vedic theology and philosophy. Some of them went on to be amongst the authors of vedic hymns, the reading of which was going to be prohibited to their sex by a later period. Women held that they were inherently entitled to study the Vedas; we find a sweetheart flatly declining to marry her lover, when she suspected that he was disinclined to reveal to her some of his vedic dogmas and theories. When upanayan of girls was common, it is
needless to infer that they would offer morning and evening prayers as regularly as the boys. In the Rāmāyaṇa Sītā is depicted discharging this religious duty at least twice.⁶⁹

During the age of the Brāhmaṇas the volume of Vedic studies became very extensive, as a number of subsidiary sciences were developed and lengthy commentaries were written on Vedic texts. The spoken dialect of the age had begun to differ considerably from the language of the Vedic hymns, and the theory had found universal acceptance that to commit a single and even a most minor mistake in the recitation of a Vedic mantra would produce disastrous consequences to the reciter.⁷⁰ As a natural consequence, society began to insist that those who wanted to undertake Vedic studies must be prepared to devote a fairly long period, of about 12 to 16 years to the task. At this time girls had begun to be married at about the age of 16 or 17, and could thus give only 7 or 8 years to their Vedic studies. So short a period was quite insufficient for an efficient grounding in the Vedic lore in the age of the Brāhmaṇas. Vedic sacrifices also became very complicated at this time; they could be properly performed only by those who had studied their minute intricacies very carefully. As a consequence the participation of women in sacrifices gradually became a mere matter of formality for the reason cited above. For some time wives continued to perform the duties that were formerly allotted to them in sacrifices, but gradually a tendency arose to allot most of the sacrificial work to males. Many sacrificial duties that could be once discharged by the wife alone. Came to be assigned to male substitutes in the age of the Brāhmaṇas.⁷¹ In some rituals like the Srastarārohaṇa, women continued to take a prominent part and recite the Vedic mantras down to c. 500 B.C.,⁷² but the practice gradually became unpopular.
Manu śṛti, which was composed at about 200 B.C., goes a step further and declares that girls’ upanayana should be performed without the recitation of vedic mantras.\(^\text{73}\) But immediately in the next verse it is stated that it is really the marriage ritual of girls which corresponds to the upanayana ritual of boys.\(^\text{74}\) It is therefore clear that upanayana of girls, even as a mere formality, was dying down by the beginning of the Christian era. Yājñavalkya therefore takes the logical step of prohibiting upanayana altogether in the case of girls,\(^\text{75}\) and all later Smṛti writers follow his lead, though some of them like Yāma admit that once upon a time girls used to have the privilege of upanayana and vedic studies.

Similar reasons may be put forward for the denial of the gradual vedic religious participation for the girls in the epic recessions. These grounds were still stronger in the case of non-Āryan women, who were denied vedic education in case they entered Āryan homes. Temperamentally, however, they would not have had any appreciation for the vedic sacrament. More devout by nature and more fond of ceremonies than men, these non-Āryan women could have had little appreciation for the vedic sacrament. This deficiency was sought to be remedied by the fusion of Āryan and non-Āryan cultures. Thus the non-Āryan woman, by bringing her own ritualistic religion might have contributed to the development of the Paurāṇika devotional cult which came later. This new religion was particularly suited to the disposition of women, not confined to men, naturally gave place to the observance of new devotional religion. We can find a parallel to this in our own times, in the case of the girls educated in secular institutions or the European women married into orthodox Indian homes. Their outlooks and training makes them averse to the Hindu sacraments which are being abandoned.
The woman who was once a Sahadharmiṇī in the vedic rituals, after the above mentioned circumstances remained a custodian of customs, superstitions and rites without mantras. As the theological education was the only intellectual education available in those days; women, denied of the benefit of this education, had their intellect completely clogged and unorientated. This was a great calamity for liberal Hindu culture. This led not only to the extinction of the brahmavedinis but to a more pervasive damage to society by making room for the vitiating influence of ignorant mothers.

**Women in Buddhism and Jainism**

During the Buddhist period, the woman of India attained remarkable success and achieved glory in the sphere of education, culture and spiritual potentialities/possibility. The Therīgāthā (songs of the Nuns) clearly illustrate the high degree of proficiency attained by the Buddhist women in India. In the famous canonical work, it is said: "And be it woman, be it man, for whom such chariot doth wait, but that same car; into Nibbāna’s presence shall they come". These lines clearly show that the Buddha himself was willing to afford women equal chances and opportunities with men and never suspected their capacities. Although, it is true that initially the Buddha was not very enthusiastic in admitting women into the order.

The Buddha was willing to impart sacred teaching to women only when they could receive it along with their husbands. Thus the householder named Pokkhāra Sadi went to the Buddha along with his wife and both of them received instructions in dharma from him. The Buddha was strictly against the notion that women should retire from household and resort to the state of homeless mendicant. He believed that women were full of inconsistencies and with them there was no difference between truth and
untruth. Due to this prejudice, the Buddha was at first disinclined to admit women to the Buddhist order. But later on, after repeated pleadings of Ānanda, his most favourite disciple, he consented to permit women to enter into the state of ‘houselessness’. Therefore, he introduced a new institution, viz. the institution of Bhikkhunis as distinct from Bhikkhu Sarṅgha. The first convert to this Bhikkhunī Sarṅgha was his own mother Mahāprajāpati Gautami. Thus started a new and separate religious body of alms-women. The first sermon, which the Buddha delivered to Mahāprajāpati and her companions was the same as that which he used to deliver to monks on their admission to the order. The Buddha thus gave equal status to women converts so far as the first teaching was concerned. But that does not actually mean religious freedom. The rules which the Buddha framed for Bhikkhunī Sarṅgha clearly indicate that he had no idea either of granting religious independence or religious equality to female disciples. Few examples of such rules will make our point more clear. Such rules naturally made the Bhikkhunī Sarṅgha subordinate to Bhikkhu Sarṅgha for all practical purposes. But one thing must be pointed out here that, though the Buddha did not believe in the independence of women and he wanted them to remain under the control of men even in the sphere of religion, yet he was the man who prepared the stage for the actual religious emancipation of women for he held that sex did not stand in the path of attaining bodhisattva.

In Buddhist literature we read about a number of pious women who devoted their lives to the cause of religion. Thus we learn about such women as Sukhā, Patāchārā, Bhaddha-Kundala-keśā, who were renowned for their religious predilection. Women like Mahāprajāpati, Kiśā Gautarnī and others stunned the people with their severe austerities and spiritual pursuits. Besides these women who took part in the active field of religion
by joining the monastic order, there were other laywomen whose religious activities also demand attention. Suppiyā was a living example of such laywomen, whose human qualities have been extolled in the Mahāvagga.\textsuperscript{84} However at how early an age could a girl get initiated into the buddhist order is not generally specified. It could not have been at the girl child stage for initially they were permitted only if they came along with their husbands. Gradually since they reached greater heights they may have been admitted at a still earlier stage by themselves but it not stated so.

The attitude of the Jain texts towards the religious position of women was almost the same as in the preceding age. Jaina women could achieve brilliant success in the sphere of education as depicted in the earlier chapter. Jaina women appear to have enjoyed equal privileges with men in religious and culture sphere as well. Women were given full facilities for the highest kind of education which was spiritually oriented. This is substantiated by the fact that Mahāvīra the last and most celebrated of the twenty-four Jaina Tirthankaras was very liberal in his outlook and never hesitated to admit women to the order. The Jain literature is full of such stories wherein ladies are said to have renounced their worldly pleasure in the pursuit of knowledge and penances.\textsuperscript{85} According to the ‘Bhagavatī Sūtra’ all the daughters and sons-in-law of King Chetaka were the followers of Mahāvīra and were successful in converting others to their faith. Jayantī, the sister of king Chetaka was also a devout lady who had become the disciple of Mahāvīra when the latter visited Kauśāmbī.\textsuperscript{86}

In the sacred books of Jainism, there are many more accounts, though somewhat exaggerated, which give us a vivid idea of what achievements women had gained for themselves and of how deeply the faith had penetrated their sex. Thus in the Kalpa Sutta we read that the
noble almswoman Pushpachula with 38,000 other female disciples of Lord Parashvanath attained to the superior rank of Sadhvīs. Shrāvikas or laywomen also with Sumana at their head reached the same status.\footnote{87}

Further we are convinced of the fact that the Jain sect really meant what it enjoined and its reverential references to womanhood were expressions of sanguine hopefulness of its great and bright future. The tenets of the Śvetāmbara sect at least are characterized with a commendable spirit of sincerity and catholicity. They do not deny women any spiritual height which they as female ascetics can aspire to and reach through their independent efforts. According to these Śvetāmbara doctrines, women are placed on an equal footing with men, so far as the pursuit and achievement of religious ideals are concerned. Besides being Sādhvis and Upādhyayas, women had the freedom to mount the next higher stage of development, i.e. that of an Ācharya. Even the last two—that of an Arhata and a Siddha of the five stages were not denied to them. It is quite possible for women to become Siddhas,\footnote{88} if they put in requisite amount of sacrifices, penances and austerities of the severest kind. However, as in Buddhism we are really unable to discern how early or rather how young (age wise) girls could be inducted into these sects.

The Ājīvika Asceticism

Next to Buddhism and Jainism, Ājīvīkism emerged as a third heretical sect, rejecting the sacrificial polytheism of the Āryans and the Upaniṣadic monism. It has already been pointed out that when the Buddha was staying at Rājagaha with 1250 monks, King Ajātasattu felt the need of spiritual help and his six ministers suggested the names of six heretical teachers, each capable of satisfying the king. The Sāmaṅnaphala sūtta of the Dīgha Nikāya\footnote{89} mentions Makkhali Gosala as one of the six teachers, (each of
whom being referred to as the leader of an order, the founder of a sect), revered as a saint, respected by people and a homeless wanderer of long standing.

The cardinal point of Makkhali Gosala’s doctrines was the belief in Niyati (fate) controlling every action. It leaves no room for human volition, which is practically ineffectual. Of course it is an admitted fact that the Buddhist and Jaina texts prove the existence of the doctrine of Niyati even before the time of Makkholi Gosala. It is quite natural that the climate and geography of India favoured the rise of a fatalist attitude to life. Natural catastrophies like flood, draught, famine, epidemic diseases etc. impress on Indian mind the truth of the Ājīvika theory that ‘human effort is useless’.

The term ‘Ājīviya’ means one who follows some rules with regard to one’s livelihood. The Buddhist texts refer to ‘Samyagājīva’ as one of 8 paths to be followed by monks. It may not be unlikely that a class of mendicants who lived originally by a profession as a means of livelihood was gradually known as ‘Ājīviya’. The term ‘mankhatva’, as applied to Gosala means the profession of exhibiting pictures. It is very likely that the Ājīvikas earned their own bread by their profession of showing pictures and not by mere begging. Pāṇini refers to Maskarin as a Parivṛjaka who is equated with Maskarin. Patañjali explains that ‘this kind of wandering mendicant was called Maskarin not so much because he carried a staff as ‘because he professed to have renounced all activities’. The reference by these two, Pāṇini and Patañjali, is to the fact that there were two grades of the Maskarins or Eka-dandins. In the lower grade the ascetic carried an actual staff, in addition to a begging bowl and a strip of loin-cloth. In the higher grade of Paramahamsa. He abandoned even these three
possessions, claiming absolute renunciation as his only staff of reliance. 

Gośāla is also represented in the Mahābhārata as Manki.  

The Ājīvika Initiation  

The initiation in the Ājīvika sect was rather a painful ordeal as evidenced in the Jātaka’s and else where. Nudity appears to have been one of the conditions that the new members had to abide by. How early could the initiation take place is not clearly stated but the story of Jambukā indicates that a novice was also initiated, while still a child. Women were also allowed to enter into the order of Ājīvikas as evidenced by the Anūguttara Nikāya giving us the sixfold classification of Ājīvika ascetics; and they were almost of the same status as the male ones suggests that it may have been possible for girls to be inducted into the fold.  

Penances  

The Bhagavatī Sūtra gives us some idea of Gośāla’s severe penances like raising his hands high in the sun-shine, rejection of six consecutive meals, living on mere beans or rice-gruel and on one sip of water in the beginning of his asceticism. He gained thereby the power of fiery energy at the end of six months. His penances and meditation in the house of his female devotee Hālāhata at Śrāvasti are also referred in the same text.  

The Ājīvika asceticism is also suggested by the description of the practice of severe penances by Bodhisattva born as an Ājīvika. The Ājīvika theory of self-torturing asceticism as the means to liberation is also referred to in the Tamil text Civaṇṇana-cittiyana.  

Some of the Ājīvika penances are also described in the Jaina Aupapātika sūtra. It may be noted that some of the Ājīvikas like the Jainas led solitary life in earlier days, as evidenced by the conversation
between Ādraka and Gośāla in the Sūtrakrtānga. Under Gośāla the sect was organized into a Sarhgha with its own corporate and social conduct.

It is interesting to note that Ājīvikism was open to all, irrespective of caste or sex. Janasāna, the Kulūpaga Ājīvika, attached to the court of Bimbisāra was originally a Brahmin, while Pānduputta, already referred to is the son of a wagon-maker which trade had lost all social prestige in the days of the Buddha. The Vinaya tells of a relative of Bimbisāra turning an Ājīvika. This faith gained the greatest support from the industrial and mercantile classes as did the other heterodox sects. The Jain and Buddhist literature generally depict the followers of the sect as devoted to useless and hypocritical fasts and penances. Therefore one can not be justified in believing, on the strength of Jaina evidence, that the Ājīvikas were necessarily as debauched and degenerate as the characters in that play however. That the Ājīvika order was capable of survival for two thousand years, that it produced scriptures, and a philosophy and logic of its own, is proof that at least some of its members were educated, thoughtful, and sincere. The references to stern Ājīvika austerities and to the Ājīvika practice of Ahirñsā in the texts which we have quoted, indicate that, however relaxed their discipline may have been in some respects, the Ājīvikas generally pursued their religious quest by the traditional Indian paths of pain, fasting, and gentleness and such doctrines did attract the girls.

**Materialism**

The school of Materialism in India seems to be very old. References are found to it in the epics and in the early Buddhistic literature. Garbe says ‘Several vestiges show that even in the pre-Buddhistic India proclaimers of purely materialistic doctrines appeared’. It must have arisen as a protest
against the excessive monkdom of the Brāhmaṇa priests. The externals of
ritualism which ignored the substance and emphasized the shadow, the
idealism of the Upaniṣads unsuited to the commoners, the political and the
social crises rampant in that age, the exploitation of the masses by the
petty rulers, monks and the wealthy class, the lust and greed and petty
dissensions in an unstable society paved the way for the rise of Materialism
in India in the post-Upaniṣadic and pre-Buddhistic age. But Materialism in
Indian Philosophy has never been a forceful force. Born in discontent, it
soon died in serious thought. Though the materialistic way of life, the way
of enjoying the pleasures of the senses and the flesh is as old as humanity
itself and will surely last as long as humanity lasts, yet Materialism as
metaphysics has never found favour with the Indian philosophers. Jainism
and Buddhism arose immediately and supplied the ethical and spiritual
background which ejected Materialism.

The word ‘Chārvāka’ has come to acquire a number of meanings. It
was sometimes held that perhaps there lived a person by the name of
Chārvāka after whom this school was named. The word ‘Chārvāka’ is
etymologically derived from two Sanskrit words – ‘Cāru’ which means
smart, suave or pleasant or popular and ‘Vāka’ which means word or
statement; thus ‘Chārvāka’ means pleasant words or congenial expression.
Bṛhaspati is regarded as the traditional founder of this school. Chārvāka,
after whose name this school is so called, is said to have been the chief
disciple of Bṛhaspati. References to the Chārvākas are also found in the
Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata and Manusmṛtis. In the Majjhima Nikāya we find
a references to Ajita-Keśakambalin, a materialist who believed only in
perception and in four elements. Another tradition holds that it came to be
called ‘Chārvāka’ from the Sanskrit root ‘Cārva’ which means to ‘Chew’ or
to ‘ingest’ which further conveys the sense of eating and drinking in life
which is one of the main intention of this school. The school of Čārvākas has been given the name of ‘Lokāyatavāda’ which means a system of philosophy most popular with the people. It is also held that perhaps there had been some treatise of the term ‘Lokāyata’ in which the tenets of this school were enshrined, but no book of this name is extant today.¹⁰⁶

They believed in the existence of four elements only and regarded perception as the only means of knowledge. Garbe, D. Chattopadhyaya and G.C. Pande feel that this school originated in the pre-Buddhist period. Probably it arose as a reaction against the excessive ritualism of the Brāhmaṇas and the idealism of the Upaniṣads.

Čārvāka and His Philosophy

Philosophy of the Čārvākas evolved as an unorthodox system of Indian thought, because it does not believe in the authority of Vedas nor does it accept the principles of vedic thought according to which performance and immortality of the self (Ātman), the cycle of birth and death, the doctrine of Karma and Liberation as the goal of human life. The 'seeds of the Čārvākas' point of view are to found in the vedic literature itself. Before the origin of the Čārvāka's Philosophy, the Ājīvika system of thought of a philosopher named Upak was available; this was similar to the school of Čārvākas, because this too did not believe in the doctrine of Karma. It believed in facte, free morals and atomism. This was a clear indication towards naturalism. But the materialistic and naturalistic tradition was developed fully in the system of the Čārvākas.

In the Čārvāka philosophy, perception is regarded as the only valid source of knowledge. The validity of inference is rejected as a leap into the dark. Thus the Čārvākas admit the existence of four elements-earth, water, fire and air-only and reject the fifth, the ether, because it is not
perceived but inferred. Similarly they reject soul, god, heaven, etc. because they are not seen. This view has been criticized by all systems of Indian philosophy. To refuse the validity of inference is to refuse to think and discuss. Sensual pleasure is regarded as the 'summum bonum' of life. Eat, drink and be merry; for once the body is reduced to ashes, there is no hope of its coming back here again. There is no other world. Death is identical with mokṣa. All religious ceremonies are means of livelihood of the priests. If a beast slain in a sacrifice goes to heaven why then does the sacrificer not sacrifice his own father? If beings in heaven are gratified by our offerings in the śrāddha here, why then not give food from down below to those who are standing on the house-top? The Vedas have no authority. They were written, in the view of Chārvākas, by men-cheats, hypocrites and flesh-eaters. Reference is also made to certain unclean customs connected with the horse-sacrifice. Of Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa only Kāma or sensual pleasure is regarded as the end and Artha or wealth is regarded as the means to realize that end. Dharma and mokṣa are altogether rejected. Pleasure is regarded as mixed up with pain, but that is no reason why it should not be acquired. 'Nobody casts away the grain because of the husk'. Should nobody cook because of beggars? Should nobody sow seeds because of animals?

The Chārvaka philosophy never became popular in India. It was denounced as the philosophy of the low-cultured people. The very word Lokāyata means ordinary (uncultivated) people. Rāma describes the Chārvākas as fools who thought themselves to be wise and as experts in leading people to destruction. Its unpopularity has been explained owing to its rejection of the authority of the Vedas denouncement of the Brāhmaṇa priests, rejection of God; denial of the soul, and assertion of the reality of matter. The main causes of its unpopularity should, therefore, be sought in
its denial of all those human values which make life worth-living such a philosophy was not likely to attract the attention of women. They may have been used as the means by the adherents of the philosophy for sensual pleasures but no reference of women supporting or subscribing to these ideas is available.

Taboos Imposed on the Girl Child Through Religious Sanctions and Traditional Prohibitions

Taboo is a Polynesian word taken to mean "what is prohibited". The ethical conception of man in early times was influenced by magical determination of things injurious. The science of medicine and hygiene were also helped by it. There were many taboos connected with the conception of life. Life was the central mystery of the world for early man. He attached mystery and danger with every thing connected with it. Its genesis, growth and end were all mysterious. It was thought necessary to take precautions against dangers and to give vent to the sense of mystery at various occasions of life. This gave birth to various restrictions that later on crystallized into well defined taboos about pregnancy, birth, childhood, adolescence, youth, marriage, death and corpse.

There were taboos connected with lucky and unlucky days, months and years. Unfavourable incidents, economic and astronomical, and occasions, like death, disease and defeat stamped days, months and years as unlucky. There are many such beliefs, the origin of which is lost in a remote antiquity. Out of the vast experience of a community there evolved a system of taboos connected with them. There were other prohibitions also that were based on rational grounds. The female sex were bound to be placed under greater taboos under the emerging patriarchal societies of the world more so for the girls as they were growing up.
The Menstrual Blood; Sacred and Acursed

It is interesting to note that there is a deeply ingrained dread which primitive man universally entertains of menstrual blood. In his early history man is seen excluding woman from religious service almost everywhere because he regarded her as unclean, mainly on account of her periodical menstruation. During this period the woman was the object of the greatest dread. The case is on record of an Australian aborigine going stark mad because he had unknowingly touched the blanket used by his wife during her period, and then killing first his wife and then himself under the influence of his frenzy. The dread which this Australian felt was shared by the average man in his early history, when he did not know the physiological causes of the mysterious phenomenon, which he feared so much. Almost in every place of the world, the first menstruation of a girl is observed by certain rites and customs of which the most marked is seclusion in a hut specially constructed for this purpose. It is remarkable that the two rules, not to touch the ground and not to see the sun are observed either separately or conjointly by girls at puberty in many parts of the world, and in some parts of India, boys also have to observe these customs as parts of 'upanayana' rites. Fraer suggests more than one hundred examples from different tribes of the world to show that these taboos are really significant in relation to the puberty rites. According to Fraer, the general effect of these rules is to keep the initiated one suspended, so to say, between heaven and earth. Being shut off both from the earth and from the sun, he or she can poison neither of these great sources of life by his or her contagion. The precautions thus taken to isolate are dictated by a regard for the safety of the initiated one as well as for the safety of others. For it is thought that the initiated one would suffer if he or she were to neglect the prescribed regimen. (The Zulu girls believe
that they would shrivel to skeletons if the sun were to shine on them at puberty). A number of societies in India even today as elsewhere in the world strictly seclude their girls nay even women, during their monthly courses. The reason for this is the dread with which they regard the menstrual period of girl/women. This also holds good in the case of many African tribes. Among the Bagandas, a menstruating woman cannot drink milk, come into contact with any milk-vessel, touch anything that belongs to her husband nor cook nor handle anything else. Among the Bhuiyas of South Mirzapur in India the menstrual blood is dreaded. Among the Kharwars of the same region, a menstruous woman is kept in outer ‘vārāṇḍā’; she is not allowed to enter the kitchen or cowshed; nor she touch the cooking vessels. The South Indian women generally seclude themselves during their monthly periods and observe a number of rules such as not to drink milk, not to milk cows, not to touch fire, not to lie on a high bed, not to walk on common paths, not to walk by the side of flowering plants and not to observe heavenly bodies. In Himachal Pradesh also a menstruating girl and woman are secluded and kept away from cooking duties, not enter a temple premises and stay away from contact. Varieties of such taboos are evidenced variously almost in every part of the country. These are no longer of recent origins but find evidence in earlier literature as well. Pliny’s account of the effects produced by a menstruating woman expresses substantially the beliefs which are still current among most of the rural populations of Europe. In his book the list of dangers apprehended from menstruation is longer than any furnished by mere savages. Menstrual blood is also dreaded in the Mosaic law book of the Holy Bible as well as in the Quran.

The Brahmanical law books hold that the menstruating female must be dreaded. A woman during her menstrual period must not touch any
man or woman belonging to any class; she must not touch any type of
animal; nor even she should touch another monstrous woman.\textsuperscript{122} A
brāhmaṇī engaged in dinner must not look at a woman in her menses.\textsuperscript{123} In
the first day of her courses she must be treated as a Cāṇḍāli, in the second
day as a brahmaghatinī and in the third day as a rajakī.\textsuperscript{124} The father,
mother, and elder brother, all these three (relations) of a girl who
menstruates before her marriage, go to hell by seeing her thus in her
periods.\textsuperscript{125} She remains impure for three days; she must not give ‘anjana’
in her eyes, dip in water, lie on the ground, sleep in daytime, touch the fire,
clean the rope, brush her teeth, see the heavenly bodies and use utensils
of copper, brass and steel during her menstrual courses.\textsuperscript{126} It is not only in
such social interaction that such taboos are laid down. These were
automatically placed in religious undertakings as well.

In the Grhya sūtras we find that a student must not see a woman in
her courses.\textsuperscript{127} After the ‘Samavartana’ a student must be careful at least
for three days so that he may not come across a menstruating woman.\textsuperscript{128}
Vedas must not be recited before a woman who is in her monthly
impurity.\textsuperscript{128} Those who have retired from family life should not also see a
menstruating woman.\textsuperscript{130} A student must not talk or play with girls in their
menses.\textsuperscript{131}

According to the Grhya sūtras, “for three nights or twelve nights or a
year after ‘upanayana’, the brahmachāri should not eat ‘ksāra or
lavaṇa’”.\textsuperscript{132} (It is interesting to note that abstinence from salt is one of the
leading features of the puberty rites among many African tribes as well).\textsuperscript{133}
The initiated one has obligations to his teacher’s wife and son and has to
follow a number of taboos.\textsuperscript{134} He should speak the truth, bathe every day
and avoid honey, meat and perfumes; he should not look at the sun, sleep
by day, rub oil on the body, put collyrium in the eyes, hold an umbrella, wear shoes and go in a cart. He must avoid love affairs, touch of girls, gambling, playing on musical instruments, dancing, singing and other works of this sort. He must not injure animals, use rough words, drink wine and so on. However, whether such rules were to be observed for the girl's initiation or for her puberty rites is not referred to in the sūtra.

Similarly, in Buddhist sangha also, the initiated one has to undergo a number of taboos. These taboos are ten in number, called 'dasasikkhapadāni' or ten precepts. Many of the monastic institutions and ascetic practices of the Jainas have been inherited from the older religious classes of Indian society, since brahmanical ascetics and buddhists resemble them in many of their precepts and institutions. Instructions and taboos similar to those stated above for novices are furnished in details in the Jaina sūtras, and these are more or less similar to those found among the Brāhmanas and Buddhist texts. The question whether these were applied to those girls/women being inducted into the order is not clearly stated but it can be assessed that those for girls would more likely be stricter ones.

The above evidences lead us to believe that the girls faced a number of religious disabilities although most of them in their post puberty periods. In the modern feminist movement in India, we hardly notice any effort made to get them redressed. This is natural. When men themselves have given up vedic sacrifices, women naturally feel no inclination to agitate for the right to perform them. Although, the Aryasamāj, which has revived these sacrifices, has extended the right of performing them to women as well; the same may be restricted to theoretical permissiveness. In the modern materialistic world, the average woman feels no grievance.
for being deprived of the right to become a nun. She looks with a contemptuous smile on a dogma, which would declare that she is ineligible for spiritual salvation, because of her sex. Upanayana has become a meaningless formality even in the case of boys; women naturally feel that they have nothing to gain by becoming re-eligible for it. It is true that the religious disenfranchisement that resulted from the ineligibility for upanayana produced a disastrous consequence upon the general status of women in society; but women have realized that improvement in this direction in modern days depends mainly upon the spread of education and the acquisition of economic rights and independence. They therefore naturally feel no inclination for initiating an agitation for the restoration of their old religious rights and privileges.
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