CHAPTER-VII

CONCLUSION

The present research work was taken with the intent to finding the background to a problem, which continues to defy explanation and yet remains in the society as a index of a base society. The girl child received a boost as an aspect of study during the last decade of the past century after the International Year of the Girl Child in 1992. We have attempted to place the Girl Child in various environs with in family and society at large.

The aforesaid appraisal brings out that the general understanding of the vedic society as an 'egalitarian' one may not wholly true. Yet that it afforded a mere recepactable equality to both boys and girls of the family cannot be denied. It can be clearly held that they, the girls, although not always desired were definitely showered with affection and loving upbringing. As the society evolved into complexed patriarchal society, the son preference gained ground and the birth of a girl child gradually became an unhappy event. Conceptual changes required the services of a male progeny and so the girl child was looked upon with disdain and this became reflected in the epics more vividly. However the perceptible change is to be viewed in the sutra and finally categorical in the Smṛtis. The Buddhist writings too do not deviate from this notion. While logic was extended to accept the birth of a girl child with cheer yet the inherited prejudices could not be discarded. So also in the Jain scripture where the male child always received precedence over the female child. It was difficult to discern the social attitude to the girl child from the secular literature available for our period of study. The factors contributing or leading to this changed outlook have been discussed in the chapter on Infancy. They were social,
economic and cultural. The social responsibilities of a father of a girl child far outweighed those of a male child when grown up would be the life support of the parents and the rise of the sacrificial cults made them believe that ‘he’ and not ‘she’ would be the deliverer. The male child was a boon to be asked for and extensive ways of getting a male child were innovated.

Once born the socialization process was set rolling. A number of rites ‘saṃskāras’ had to be gone through at the pre-natal and post-natal period of the birth of the child. These have also been described and analysed in the chapter II: from the Garbhadhāna to Puṁsavāna, to Śīmantonnayana, Jātakarma, Nāmakaraṇa, Niṣkramaṇa, Annaprāśana, Chūḍākarāṇa and Karṇavedha. Initially there appears to have been no distinction in the performance of these for a male or female child. Later however, the change is witnessed where they were either altogether dispensed with for the girl child or were performed without the sacred mantras although she continued to receive affection and protection at her father’s home. The protection gradually through times became mere related to protecting the chastity of the girl child to anything else as brought out in the chapter. Yet for the better part of our study there does not appear to have been excessive restriction which may have been placed on her freedom of movement and action. She is generally seen playing in the house, outfields, gardens, attending fairs and festivals and having access to educational pursuits. This liberal upbringing helped the girls to grow up into women of purpose. The situation underwent a change towards the later period of our study and this has been explained to some degree of satisfaction. Categorical generalization cannot be made for we are still a little unsure whether our sources reflect the pulse of the commoner as well as that of the elite.
In chapter III an analysis has been made of the antiquity, concept, relevance of education in India and discussed the opportunities extended to the girls in this pursuit. Education / learning for most part of ancient India was imparted by the teacher to the pupils who gathered around him and came to live in his house as members of his family. The family functioned as a domestic school, an āśrama or a hermitage where the mental faculties of the pupils were developed by the teacher's first being the mother as till to-day, constant attention and personal instruction. Education was treated as a matter of individual concern and did not admit of the method of mass production applicable in industry.

The opportunities of education provided to girls since the vedic period have been analyzed comprehensively. During the vedic period girls enjoyed equal status and rights with boys so far as educational opportunities were concerned and appear to have received all forms of education. They enjoyed equal share in learning vedic studies and in the performance of religious rituals, as vedic religion required propitiating supernatural powers and the rituals demanded performance of them jointly by as the husband and wife in later life. Infusion of a spirit of piety and religiousness, formation of character, development of personality, inculcation of civic and social duties, promotion of social efficiency and preservation and spread of national culture may be described as the chief aims and ideals of ancient Indian education. It was emphasized that gods would be friends of only those who are wise and learned. Those only were regarded as learned who could not only recite the texts but could also understand and interpret them. Every householder of the age therefore naturally regarded the education of his children as a sacred duty. No distinction was made in this connection between boys and girls; the education of both received the same attention at least up to the higher
Ordinarily the guardian discharged his duty to teach his wards regularly at home. There is nothing, which suggests that she was denied education, for the initiation ceremony (a passport to education) was performed for both boys and girls. It is held that the woman who wears the sacred thread is capable of doing many responsible jobs. Not only did they get initiated, they managed to complete their educational pursuits. Further, it is clearly stated that young maidens after completion of their education as 'Brahmachārins' should unite with their husbands. This willingness to provide education to the girls benefited the girls in another aspect. It did not let girl child marriage become a practice in society since education required time in a number of years.

The changing social milieu with emergence of castes divisions in the later vedic period largely contributed to a changed attitude towards the girl child. Yet, what needs to be observed even in this changing social evolution is that in spite of being relegated to a 'unwanted' or 'undesired' category, the girls continued to receive education, which in all likelihood continued to be mainly associated with vedic thought and religion. The period of the Upaniṣad and the Sūtra can justly be regarded as the most creative period of Hindu culture in literature, arts and sciences. With a view to enlist the help of the whole society for this work, upanayana ritual was made obligatory for both boys and girls, at about the beginning of this period. This gave a great impetus to the spread of both literary and higher education. Brahmacharya discipline was still rigorous, but towards the end of the period the marriageable age of girls began to be gradually lowered which adversely affected their education. During the earlier part of this period however, there was no dearth of women philosophers and scholars, some of whom used to organize schools and hostels for girls. Majority of girls received their education at home, as was the case with boys also.
during the earlier periods. The educational system paid as much attention to the cultivation of the vedic studies as that of grammar and philology, mathematics and astronomy, epic and legal literature. Education was regarded as a serious proposition and society was anxious that its benefits should be extended to as large a class as possible. Various steps were being proposed and adopted to see that students did not stop their studies at the end of their courses. Educational system continued to be successful in forming character, building up personality, extending the bounds of knowledge and preserving the heritage of the past. It undoubtedly promoted social happiness and efficiency; it enabled India to be at the vanguard of progress in the contemporary world and the girl child was part of that system. Although a little after this period beginning of sex role differentials does emerge in education. The girls were more likely to take to learning singing and dancing (since these accomplishments began to be considered unfit for men) and some other pursuits rather than in the so-called intellectual pursuits.

The age of Dharmaśāstra was, however, a distinctive setback to the cause of education for girls as a whole. Child marriages became the order of the day towards the end of the period, and so their education suffered considerably. Only daughters of high caste families used to receive education during this period. The lowering of the marriageable age of girls naturally involved the corresponding lowering of the marriageable age of the boys. Brahmacharya discipline consequently became slack and nominal and towards the end of this period; the educational system could produce only a limited number of young men possessing a developed personality, characterized by self-confidence and self-reliance. This was to a great extent due to the stricter rigid rule of the varṇa system, which would ultimately lead to debarring of educational opportunities to a large section
of society including girls. During this period upanayana of kṣatriyas and vaiśyas became a mere formality. This development gave a severe blow to the general and cultural education of the warrior and farmer families, the trader, the artisan, the girl as a class, and this reduced their general efficiency. The education gradually began to become too much specialized and narrow. The same defect arose in the course of time in liberal education as well. There was too much of specialization in logic and philosophy, astronomy and mathematics; there was no broad-based secondary course of education. upanayana for the girls became a mere formality. Besides, that formal education for girls was no longer taken seriously is evident on account of the disappearance of any gurukulas where in the girl pupils received their education. There is no reference whatsoever in the text which can be associated with brahmachārini. This denial of vedic education was also due to the increased volume of vedic texts, and the preference of pre-puberty marriage for the girls. They were therefore unable to devote the required time frame to master the vedic religion and texts. The loss of freedom in life also contributed to her being no longer capable of undertaking rigorous schedule of learning.

Under the early history of Buddhism however, the permission given to women to enter the order gave a fairly good impetus to the cause of female education, especially in the aristocratic and commercial sections of society. A large number of ladies from these circles joined the order and became life long students of religion and philosophy. Their example must have given an indirect encouragement to the spread of education among laywomen as well. The Arthaśāstra also refers to armed Amazonian guards of the royal palace, which suggests that women were imparted military training. There are references to their training in fine arts. Megasthenes states that women pursued philosophical studies. However, learning in the
Strictest sense of the term was denied to the girls even during this period. Marriage became the goal and salvation for her.

In the chapter IV we have defined the institution of marriage and traced its evolution in human civilization. Western sociological interpretation were discussed as opposed to the Indian philosophies. On biological and psychological considerations, we can say that the natural and inherent inclinations of men and women are the basis on which the origin and evolution of social institutions have developed. The system of marriage arose out of the need of the satisfaction of the basic instinct of sexual appetite of men and women. In other words, the sexual relations between people of opposite sex resulted in the institution of marriage followed by the creation of family and the progeny.

According to the evolutionary theory, the system of marriage was the result of a slow evolutionary process. Before the establishment of the system of marriage, hybridity was in vogue. As time passed, this hybridity and free sex was gradually replaced by monogamic permanent union of a male and a female. The concept of family was also the result of this process.

The Indian theory regarding the origin of marriage is found in a figurative and symbolic fashion of various kinds in the Sanskrit literature. Briefly, it is the theory attributing it a divine origin. The clearest enunciation of this theory of divine origin is found in the Brhadāraṇyka Upaniṣad. According to this, there was one solitary purūṣa. He could not indulge in amorous dalliance all alone, so he needed a companion. He divided himself into two and created a woman. They became husband and wife. On the basis of this principle, the wife is called the better half and the concept of ‘ardh-nārīśvara’ was born.
A study of the system of marriage in ancient India is necessary for a proper understanding of any social cultural order more so the Indian system. For Hindus, marriage became a sacrament and its fulfillment alone leads to proper development of a man's personality. Marriage is thought to be a 'yajña' or a pious act and men/women who do not enter the household stage after marriage are considered to be impious or 'yajña-vi-hina'. Marriage constitutes the process of taking a virgin girl to her husband's house through a special procedure. The vedic Indian marriage was a holy and religious union of a man and woman, which was based on spiritual values and which was to be permanent. Rare instances of separation are far too few to warrant attention or raise queries of the existence of divorce. According to Manu, marriage is a beneficial popular custom, which keeps within 'ethical and decent limits, the relation between men and women'.

The continuity of the existence of society and its development as also the realization of the values of life in human society have all been possible as a result of the institution of marriage. That is why, during the vedic age, the parting advice of a preceptor to his pupil used to be to enter into the household stage and beget children so that the lineage is not disrupted. This advice was based on the concept prevalent in the vedic society that a man's development of personality remained incomplete till the time he does not enter into the matrimony or grhyastha. The vedic guru (teachers) on the occasion, the Samāvartana Saṃskāra (sacrament), used to advice the snātakas (one who enters the household stage) that they should not disrupt the lineage. Those persons who did not marry were considered degraded. A bachelor was an incomplete man and a wife was a person's better half. The majority of the Gṛhyasūtras begin with the sacrament of marriage. As a matter of fact, the institution of marriage is the
source and nucleus of all Gṛhyasūtra and sacraments. With the development of religious and social consciousness in Indian society, it became essential for every young man and woman to be bound in the ties of matrimony. The belief was that a celibate was an incomplete man and a man along with his wife, who was sometimes considered as a better half constituted a whole man. Sūtrakāras, Gautam and Baudhāyana have said that the household stage is the only important stage. According to them the first stage viz. the brahmacharya (celibate) was merely a preparation for the second stage viz. the household stage. The remaining two stages get succour, when necessary, from the household stage. Vāsiṣṭha and Viṣṇu dharmaṣūtras also consider the household stage to be of prime importance.

In the Śruti literature as also in the later period, the four-stage system had came to be regarded as of divine origin. Hence, it became the sacred duty of each individual to follow the system. The Śruti literature has attributed the greatest importance to the household stage. Manu opines that just as all living beings depend on air for their life, so all living creatures depend upon the householders for their subsistence and the household stage is their lifeline. The nucleus of the entire social structure is the household stage, which comes only after marriage.

Forms and kinds of marriages prevalent in early India have been discussed. Rgveda mainly refers to three kind's viz. Ārśa, Āsura and Gāndharva. The later vedic literature enumerates eight traditional forms. On the basis of social and religious austerity, they are divided under two heads, viz. Prashasta or approved and Aprashasta or disapproved. Under the first head are the first four kind's viz. Ārśa, Daiva, Brāhma and Prājāpatya. The second includes Āsura, Gāndharva, Rākṣasa and
Paiśācha. The swayamvara marriage is frequently mentioned in the Epics as a distinct form. The Dharmaśāstras consider this similar to the Gandharva kind. Hence, it has not been dealt with as a kind of marriage by itself in these texts.

In the early Indian marriage system, it was customary to investigate the families of the prospective bride and groom, both from their mothers as well as the father's side before the couple wed. This investigation was necessary in the interest of the future health and happiness of the married couple. This, however, appears to be later practice. The Śmrītis have given a long list of families in which matrimonial alliances should not be made. Good families in which such alliances could be made were judged by the culture and ethical norms, religious practices, traditions and customs of those families.

The marriageable age of the boy and girl at different period of time in history has not been constant but leading to an assessment of girl child marriage. The age of both the boy and girl are considered important and a detailed discussion on the favoured age group for the girl has been done in a historical perspective. The question of the right age for marriage is a debatable one for there was no constant age for it in our period of study.

From the point of view of social ethics, the age of the girl was considered more important. But this age varied according to diversity and circumstances and reasons. From the evidences available in the Rgveda at several places, we can say that the suitable age for the marriage of a girl was when she was mature and fully developed physically. This alludes to an evidence that girl child marriage was possibly not in vogue then. In the sūtra age also women were married when they became adults. In the age
of Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata too the girls were married when they attained adulthood.

At a later age, however, the marriageable age of the girl gradually came down. There were many social and historical reasons for this including

- the stoppage of vedic education to girls;
- the absence of Upanayana for girls;
- the non-participation in yajñas by the girls due to complexities of religious acts and
- the early onset of menstruation in girls therefore the emphasis of virginity being important in marriage.

The difference between the age of the bride and groom according to Manu śrīti stands at the ratio between the age of the bride and groom at 1:3. The ideal difference between their ages has been fixed by Āyurveda (the science of medicine). Suśruta has said that the age of the groom should be 25 years and the bride 16 years. This point of view was considered important from a social and health point of view.

With regard to the qualifications of the bride and the groom, the qualifications of the bride were considered more important. This is because the family arrangements and the begetting of children depended more upon the bride. Hence, the physical fitness and good character of the girls was considered necessary. She should be younger than the groom and should be a virgin. She should also be capable of bearing children so that the progeny should increase in number. The family of the bride was examined also in consideration of the fact that she may give birth to intelligent, healthy, sagacious children having wisdom. These qualifications did
undergo slight changes through the period of our study. The qualifications of the groom were also judged from various angles.

Any individual be it a man or woman, boy or a girl becomes a member of a larger social unit. This social unit in our country has been regulated by a peculiar system termed as the caste system. Chapter V studies the place of a girl child in relation to her caste. Since this is one of the most significant feature of Indian social structure the socialization of a child is greatly influenced by the norms laid down for a particular caste. The chapter has dealt with origins and theories propounded to explain the varṇa theory in early India. The intra relationship between the four varṇas has been explained and how it affected the upbringing of the girl child has been accounted for. Privileges and the deprivations to birth of the girl in a particular caste have undertaken.

From the oft quoted statements from the Vedic texts it is quite evident that women played an important role, particularly in religious life. Therefore it was imperative to study a girl’s participation in religious acts of sacrifice both in her preparation in it in her later life as a woman and as a wife. A man could not become a spiritual whole unless he was accompanied by his wife. The gods were thought not to accept the oblation offered by a bachelor. In social and religious gatherings they occupied a prominent position, since they could perform sacrifices independently and were not regarded as an impediment in religious pursuits. Marriage in fact was a religious necessity to both the man and the woman; neither could reach heaven without being accompanied by his duly married consort. So the girls had to be inducted into the religious participation early in life.
The religious position assigned to women during the period of Brāhmaṇas is significant in that the need of women for religious and social welfare first began to take a clear shape. Women had significant part to play whenever ceremonies took place for bringing about the birth of a son or for conferring blessings on the progeny. Sacrifices in which a woman had an important part to play were Asvamedha, Varunāpraghasa and Vājapeya. Women were allowed to read holy texts and they played the role of preceptor. In short, woman was a partner in the religious life of a man.

In the period of Upaniṣad the ideal picture of a woman as a wife (patni) as the other half of the husband (pati) have been beautifully delineated and explained. Ceremonies for begetting a son was described as a religious duty. She was viewed not as an object of sensuous pleasure, but as an inseparable partner-in-life performing the religious obligations of a man. In the higher sections of society, the sacred initiation of girls was common. Religious and secular training possibly became available only in the case of the girls of rich and cultured families. Further a change is perceived soon. There arose a tendency to curtail the religious rights and privileges of the average woman; many functions in the sacrifice which formerly could be performed by the wife alone, now came to be assigned to male substitutes of the family. Some sacrifices like 'Rudrayajña' and 'Sītāyajña' continued to be performed by women alone, and the service of the sacrificial fire continued to be entrusted to the wife in absence of the husband. They continued to recite their vedic prayers every morning and evening, and performed sacrifices on their husband’s behalf, when they were otherwise preoccupied.
In the early India, satisfactory position of women was the influence of religion. Asceticism was at a discount in the vedic age. Maidens and bachelors had no admission to heaven; gods accepted no obligations offered by the unmarried. It was essential to offer the ordained sacrifices to gods for procuring happiness and prosperity, both here and hereafter, and they could be properly performed by the husband and the wife officiating together. Wife was not an impediment but an absolute necessity in the religious service. To enable her to discharge her religious duties properly, it was necessary to ordain that her upanayana should be duly performed.

On the basis of our analysis it emerges that the girl child has undergone periods of change during our the time frame of our study. Although never treated at par at any stage of the historical transition with her male counterpart, she has been through a socially declining state. This is reflected by way of denying to her social rights, curtailment and subsequently total exclusion of intellectual growth, an almost subservient relationship in marriage, caste affected status and relegation to the deprived class and participatory but normally a secondary role in most religious undertakings in almost all religious faiths for most of the period of our study.