CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

History has at times been defined as "the study of man's dealings with other men, and the adjustment of working relations between human groups". These relationships are manifold. They can be between one individual to another, one family to another family, one race with another race, one caste to another caste-the list would be endless but perhaps the most important one is between man and woman. The most acceptable and an obvious one between the two is that of a husband and wife as mates with the responsibilities of a family, of a household and finally from the coming together of two as the father and mother. They may bring into the world/family a son's and a daughter's. While the former the world over is received with open arms (especially in our country), the latter is accepted (at times rejected) with mute acceptance. What of this 'Girl'? What of her relationship? It is in the light of this that the present work attempts to define the girl child relationship in the family, community and the society at large in early India. The beginnings of the history of India go back to that remote period when man first settled in this region. We need not discuss whether he migrated from outside or emerged here by a process of evolution from his animal ancestors. But in any case, the earliest man has left little evidence to enable us to investigate his thoughts, desires, activities, achievements or relationships. We can only dimly discern his gradual growth as a sentient being amid the geological changes and physical and biological environment in which he found himself. To begin with, he was essentially a part of the plant and animal life that surrounded him, reacting passively to the climate and geographical configuration of the land. But he slowly gained consciousness of those powers and potentialities which
distinguished him from other animals and enabled him to dominate over
nature rather than remain its slave.

The greater part of this process of evolution which covered a long
period of time, is only a matter of inference based on very slender
evidence. The study of this fascinating subject has made some progress in
Europe and other parts of Asia, while so far as India is concerned, it is still
in its infancy. The little that is known shows that the prehistoric period in
India presents features very similar to what we meet with in Western Asia
and Europe.

As we proceed with our narrative we gradually realize that the
different phases of Indian history present a striking parallel to those of other
countries which can boast of a culture and civilization going back to remote
antiquity. The stone implements and other remains of the Paleolithic and
Neolithic periods prove that human civilization began here in the same way,
if not at the same time, as in other parts of the world. The development of
this civilization through the copper and iron ages presents features which
though not identical, yet offer sufficient similarity in detail with what we
know of from many other countries. The discoveries in the Indus Valley and
adjacent regions have further emphasized the close association between
the cultures of India and those of Western Asia, and there by link up Indian
history with that of the most ancient period of the world known to us. India
now takes her place side by side with Egypt and Mesopotamia, as a
country where we can trace the dawn of human civilization and the
beginnings of those thoughts, ideas, activities and movements which have
shaped the destinies of mankind all over the civilized world. Our knowledge
of ancient culture and civilization of India is mainly based upon
archaeological evidence. The antiquity of Indian history and culture as
gleaned from the vedic literature, the earliest literary sources for reconstruction of ancient Indian history, does not go beyond the second millennium B.C.

However, extensive strides have been made in the field of archaeology during the last two centuries. The historians too have become dependent upon the archaeologists for information about periods for which written records are not available. This is particularly so in the case of India, where practically the entire history of the pre-Muslim period is extensively built up on the study of materials recovered by the investigator and excavator during the last one and a half century. It may be observed that while archaeological exploration has been placed on a fairly strong foundation in this country especially since independence and much has been achieved so far in bringing to light and interpreting first-rate material for the reconstruction of India's ancient history, a good deal yet remains to be done, and it would require the unabated efforts of generations (of properly equipped archaeologists) to bring the task to a reasonable state of completeness. This would help in filling the gaps still remaining unsolved.

It is strange (and somewhat difficult to explain) that skeletal remains of Early man in India, particularly in the prehistoric and early historical times, should be so scanty. This lack of material has not allowed us to postulate with certainty about racial movements in ancient times, and any appraisement or reconstruction of movements of peoples in India, some four or three or even two thousand years ago, is bound to remain largely hypothetical, and based on or inferred. The present work too to some extent fall in this category.
The very word ‘Woman’ is a symbol of eternal mystery and enchantment, as if it is not enough that she is flesh and blood, but that she must be something higher than what she is. Woman, it seems, was created to make the world more beautiful and man more ardent in his appreciation of beauty. Women have always been misled by this imposed ideal of womanhood. Be it her gentle manners and natural tenderness, or her lack of physical strength, she has always found herself hidden behind a mist of illusions, fenced in on all sides and forced away from the real world into the seclusion of a helpers and disposed life. It is the unfair system that fostered the absurd notion that she has no place in the world of work outside her home. Man is the maker of that world, and woman’s duty is to make him a home. It is this complex relationship at the most simple plain that creates civilization anywhere and the civilization of a country is best understood by a thorough study of the position of its women. The woman in the various phases of her life as daughter, wife and mother not only protects and invigorates the man to the best of her power but safeguards his interests even at her own cost. As soon as the man folk begins to misjudge this latter magnanimity of woman as her weakness, a nation begins to sink slowly into the depth of degradation and misery. In the long history of Indian civilization, our society has faced innumerable odds-constant invasions from outside, intermixture of heterogenous faiths and thoughts, ruthless persecution and so on. Certainly changes there have been many with the consequence that, social conditions changed a good deal from period to period. Even then, ancient Indian literature exhibits an uniform spirit of reverence for womanhood and Vedic religion does not deny any right to women, not in the least the religious rights. True there have been ups and downs in the position of women in India, but they have never been shorn of their inherent goodness and greatness on account of oppression or
excessive depression at varied periods of time. Along with national regeneration from period to period, the liberties and possessions of women appear to vary and that is only natural in a patriarchal society, but even then, there is the constant attitude of very deep respect for women, more so of girls, ingrained in the Indian mind.

Civilization is to a great extent the result of a society's capacity to control some of the strongest and most selfish impulses embedded in the human nature. No class of similar importance and extent as that of women, was placed in the infancy of society in a position of such absolute dependence upon men, and the degree in which that dependence has been voluntarily modified and relaxed naturally serves as a rough test of the sense of justice and fair play developed in a community. The marriage laws and customs enable us to realize whether men regarded women merely as market commodities or war prizes, or whether they had realized that the wife is after all her husbands' valued partner whose co-operation was indispensable for happiness and success in family life. The rules about sex morality enable us to know the ethical tone of the society and ascertain how far men were prepared to be themselves judged by the standard they had set for women. The degree to which women were given a voice in the settlement of their marriages and the management of their households, and the extent to which their propney rights were recognized, illustrate man's capacity to control the natural love of self, pelf, power and possession, which is so firmly implanted in every human heart. The sense of sympathy that is developed in a community can very well be tested by the treatment it metes out to the widow. The genuineness of its appreciation of the value of education can be ascertained by finding out whether its benefits were extended to the fair sex. The progress in fine arts like music and dancing
depends a good deal on the facilities given to women for specializing in them.

Demographically India is the second largest country of the world with the population having crossed the billionth mark recently. A population belonging to different religious faiths and cultural communities spread over a diverse geographical area. It has also acquired the dubious distinction of being the only country where the ratio of woman to man has been on the decline and the only country where life expectancy, for woman is lower than for man. It is the sex differentials in childhood mortality which make for the largest and the most significant contribution towards this low sex ratio.

Woman has been treated with some contempt and regarded as the inferior and weaker sex once to often in a man’s world and patriarchal societies in particular irrespective of how important contribution to the social evolution may have been. In India where we have a distinct social order, the position of women has been a subject of research for almost a century now. An exhaustive review of literature on this is attempted later in this chapter. What was relatively ignored was the treatment meted out to the girl child, for this in itself is indicative of her position in society in her later life. It has received some attention during the last decade, more so since the International Year of the Girl Child.

This is, indeed, a most interesting, exhilarating and enchanting subject, also a very important and fundamental one-as, by common consent, the position of women in a society goes a long way in helping one to have a correct understanding of its innermost nature – its real ideas and ideals, feelings and desires, aims and objects, outlook and standpoint, vision and mission, values and vows and what not. In short, it shows us, to
no mean extent, 'what heights have been reached by that society, what ends reached, what treasures gained'. For, women are generally regarded as the 'weaker' sex, and human nature being what it is, the temptation to ignore them, oppress them, underrate them may be quite natural on the part of societies the world over-as often found. But still, if, inspite of this, a particular nation or society is wise, just and liberal enough to treat them as equals, and give them equal opportunities in all respects, then that, indeed, would be a great point in its favour, a grand step in its forward march, a glorious fulfillment in its purpose of life.

From this standpoint, India has always and with justice, stood before the whole world, as a great paradox, puzzle or mystery. Very difficult to understand, explain or solve. For, in this vast and variegated land of ours, the domestic, social, political, legal, economic position of women manifests so many ups and dawns, so many varieties and variations, so many vagaries and vacillations, so many differences and diversities, so many revisions and re-orientations that it may seem very difficult, at first sight, to assess the real position of the Indian women in family, society, state or to envisages the correct attitude of Indians towards their women folk. It has been to trace, analyze, interpret, at times infer and bring forth a historical picture of the that early stage of her life that the present study has been undertaken. Whether she has been accorded a position of equality and pride or of discarded concern and a subjugated role in the history of indian civilization.

The history of the position and status of girl child is therefore of vital importance to the student of indian civilization. The subject is a very wide and comprehensive one, for we shall have to ascertain not only the general estimates formed about girls in the different periods of our long history, but
its actual effects also upon the diverse spheres of their activities during the
different stages of their life. The best way to begin our enquiry is to study
the condition of women during their childhood and to find out the general
arrangement made about their training and education. This will at once
disclose to us the concern of society for women and the steps it was taking
for properly starting them off in life. For this we must study the complexity
of roles which the girls perform in society and in the socio-economic,
culture, religious and political fields. It is also important to find out how they
understand these domains of society and act in response to them. The role
of women differs from society to society and from time to time. In several
societies women enjoyed higher status than men and in some societies
they enjoyed equal status to men. If we examine societies where women
had enjoyed higher status we may see that they had complete, or at least a
major role in economic activities.

An infant born in any society immediately becomes a member of
various groups, but primarily of a family group in a cultural matrix. In India,
as in most cultures, an infant is closest to its mother, but more than in many
cultures, it is nurtured in a family group comprising many members and is
cared for by many of them. In ancient times in all patriarchal societies the
birth of a girl was generally an unwelcome event. Almost everywhere the
son was valued more than the daughter. He was a permanent economic
asset of the family. He lived with his aged parents and did not migrate like
the daughter to another family after the marriage. The primitive man,
however, could not take such a long view of the situation. In actual fighting,
he found the woman a handicap rather than a help. He therefore hardly
ever welcomed the birth of a daughter.
The ancient Indian history offers vague yet conclusive indications towards a bias against the girl-child. The 'egalitarian' society of the vedic period has often been exemplified yet references contrary to such a conclusion are numerous. One invariably comes across references where in blessings of the gods are sought for the birth of a son so that the couple may be playing with your sons and grand sons live in this house cheerfully. A woman takes pride in being the mother of sons and by being so feels she cannot be treated as a helpless being. However, the desire for sons can be explained due to the prevailing politic-socio environment of that period since the pastoral societies were involved in struggles and strifes and needed the services of brave fighters.

On the other hand, it has been opined that we do not come across any evidence which definitely professes a bias against a girl child. There is not a single hymn in the early vedic texts where a desire for a girl child is specifically expressed. However, we find one of the early Upaniṣad recommending a certain ritual to a householder for ensuring the birth of a scholarly daughter. It is true that this ritual did not become as popular as the Puṃsavāna, a ritual prescribed for procuring the birth of a son; but it clearly shows that cultured parents were often as anxious for virtuous daughters as they were for sons. Some thinkers have even pointed out that 'a talented and well behaved daughter may be better than a son'. In cultured circles such a daughter was regarded as the pride of the family. It has, however, to be granted that once born there is no evidence of discrimination on the basis of her sex. She does not appear to be deprived of love, attention or opportunities. Nāmakaraṇa (naming ceremony) was performed for the boys and girls. They could be initiated in vedic studies and were entitled to offer sacrifices to gods; the son was not absolutely necessary for this purpose. The initiation ceremony 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 that they managed to complete their educational pursuits and got recognized support by the fact that there are many authoresses in the vedic texts. Further, it is clearly stated that young maidens after completion of their education as 'Brahmachāris' should unite with their husband. This willingness to provide education to the girls benefited the girls in another aspect. It added to their desirable qualities for marriage.

The marriage of the daughter was not a difficult problem; it was often solved by the daughter herself. As time passed on, the circumstances gradually changed. The reasons why daughters were relatively less unpopular in ancient India during the early centuries are not difficult to understand. The importance of ancestor-worship increased and sons alone were regarded as eligible for offering oblations to the manes; daughters could not perform this very important religious duty. Child marriage came into vogue from around the beginning of the Christian era. As a natural consequence of the circumstances, in the literature belonging to the later periods of Indian civilization passages about the undesirability of the birth of daughters become more numerous. The reason was not so much the hatred of her sex as the all engrossing anxiety to see that she was well placed in life and enabled to lead it in comfort and happiness. It has further to be pointed out that the prevailing view that the daughter is less desirable than the son, though popular, was not accepted by all social thinkers. There were some among them who realized that it was causing great harm to society and felt that it ought to be counteracted. They therefore, championed the daughter's cause, and pointed out that patricides have been a monopoly of the male sex; no father is ever known to have been killed by a daughter either in history or in legend.
The changing social milieu with the emergence of castes divisions in the later vedic period also largely contributed to this changed attitude towards the girl child. However, what needs to be observed even in this changing social evolution is that inspite 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 although other forms of educational curriculum were also introduced. Another evident change during this period is the beginning of sex role differentials emerging in education. The girls were more likely to take to learning singing and dancing since these accomplishment were considered unfit for men, rather than in the so called intellectual pursuits.

It is needless to say that the achievements of the Indian women, right from the vedic to date illustrates how they have all along been equal partners with men in all walks of life. The involvement of the Indian women in the national struggle for independence initiated by Mahatma Gandhi has especially highlighted the women's equal, at times better, contribution in the national efforts and this state of affairs has given rise to the idea that the Indian women are endowed with certain unique qualities, as substantiated by the fact that they are participating in the different fields of social activity of the highest levels of leadership and decision making more than in any other society of the world.

The Indian civilization has given woman such a place in the society where she can make her best contribution in the social activity in conformity with her potentials and abilities without having to lose her fundamental femininity. An analysis of the various institutions and practices in a society reveals that even the impediments faced by a particular section of the
society may prove to be a blessing in disguise. The girls brought up in an atmosphere with preference to the boys were indirectly made more conscious to their responsibilities ranging from looking after themselves and others, management of the kitchen and looking after the younger children. The preferential treatment for the male child resulted, paradoxically enough, in developing the female child into a stronger personality to face the situations in her future life as wife and mother. Instead, the male children having developed in a preferential atmosphere could not develop a corresponding emotional strength and were ever dependent on the women’s care first of the mother, then on the sisters and later on the wife’s care.

Apart from the above-cited paradoxical fact, attempts have often been made to justify the various traditions of the Indian society ignoring a realistic presentation. For instance, in justification of the child-marriage, it came to be argued that this practice helped a girl to know, whom she had to love before any sexual consciousness awakened in her. Further, in justification of the permanent economic dependence of women (from childhood till death) it was argued that she would make herself ridiculous by claiming an identity of temperament and functions with men. “Evidently the Indian society presents an ethnic museum containing a vast range of marital mores. Almost all forms of marriage known in the world had their vogue in India at different periods of the history”.³

The term ‘egalitarianism’ refers in respect of the position of women in the society as well as in the family. It is easier to assess her position in the society from the availability of opportunities of participation in the social and productive activities as also a gainful employment. But her position in the family presents many difficulties in regard to such an assessment.
It is evidently a grave mistake to speak of women as a homogeneous social class. It is undeniable that like men, all women can hardly be treated as having the same social and intellectual status. Further, the disabilities to which women have been exposed in the past, have not affected all women in the same way and to the same extent, nor did all inequalities apply to all women.

Therefore, an essential requisite for the proper understanding of the position of women in a given epoch is to study the problem not in an isolated manner but in the context of the material culture of the society concerned. Failure to do so leads to curious distortions. This is particularly evident in the case of early vedic society. Indian scholars have generally noted with deep satisfaction and pride that the condition of women in the vedic age was much better than that of the women in other primitive communities which had not yet emerged from ‘barbarism’, there were hardly any checks on the tyranny of men over women and that in these communities, women were underfed and over-worked, but the position of women in the vedic age was ‘much better than what we ordinarily expect it to have been’. It is obvious that such remarks reflect only popular misconceptions about the so-called barbaric or primitive peoples rather than any ethnographic knowledge. Anthropologists have shown that even in hunting societies, which sub-ordinated women to men in certain respects, men did not exercise the amount of control over women as they did in class societies. However, it is being increasingly demonstrated that the role of women as the gatherer has been grossly underestimated owing to the male bias in anthropology; and it is held that early societies were largely egalitarian in which relationships between sexes were based on reciprocity and not on subordination. Society in the Rgvedic period had certainly gone beyond the stage of gathering and hunting but it was still
predominantly pastoral and nomadic, and did not produce enough surplus to allow any section of society to be completely subordinated or to be withdrawn from the process of production. Ignorance or neglect of this basic feature of early Vedic society has led scholars to misconstrue much of the evidence found in the Rgveda and project to early Vedic times what happened much later in a different socio-economic set-up.

In the Indian thought, there is a fundamental affirmation of the female principle. Brahman, the transcendent and imminent absolute is neuter, rather beyond the differentiating qualifications of sex, beyond all limiting the individualizing characteristics, whatsoever. However, one of the principal manifestations of the godhead is ‘Ardhanārīśwara’ signifying that the lord, who is half man and half woman, symbolizes the unity of man and woman. Another similar manifestation is the dynamic symbol of the divine couple.

In all the forms of Indian art, viz. sculpture, painting, dance etc., the God and the Goddess are the first self-revelation of the absolute, the female personifying the activating energy (or Śakti or the dynamism of time). Thus both male and female are essentially one.

The ancient Indian thought recognizes no fundamental distinction between the two sexes and both are considered as inseparable parts of the human souls, which have a natural attraction towards each other. This natural attraction between the two manifests itself in the sexual attraction as well. This trend of thought resulted into the development of a unique-standard of behaviour and values, in which the people cared more for giving than for taking. Both the partners of the matrimonial tie tried to add to the happiness of each other. This ensured an absolute harmony in their relations, and an even-increasing contribution of both men and women to
the welfare of the society at large. It is a historical fact that the Indian woman was enjoying too much respect in the society upto the vedic and post-vedic period.

However, from the post-vedic period there started a decrease in the earlier honour granted to the women mostly in the economic and cultural spheres. Thus there have been casual attempts to deprive her of her religious and ritual equality, e.g. Mahāvīra and Buddha, the two greatest religious reformers of the 6th century B.C. also did not grant them equal rights of admission to monastic life. It was with the persistent efforts of Ānanda, the favourite disciple of Buddha, that the women got permission to enter the religious order of the Sāṃgha. Of course, there have been reactionary movements in favour of the women which often assumed an unimaginable character. So much so, that the woman was raised to the position of divinity. The woman was regarded not merely as a symbol of sex, but an object of adoration for the attainment of ultimate happiness.

Yet, it is extremely unfortunate that the Indian woman has been subjected to cruel and unjust behaviour in regard to her role as a wife. As and when she chose to reject that role, whether in the ancient or medieval times, and assume that of a philosopher, religious devotee, tighter or artist, she was treated as an equal. The contribution made by the women seers to the vedic and Upaniṣadic literature and the protection and continuity of artistic traditions during the medieval periods as also the role of women in the modern Indian social and political sectors all substantiate the honourable position enjoyed by the Indian women.

With the expansion of education and the increasing industrialization and urbanization since the attainment of national independence, the Indian
women are getting more and more opportunities to enter almost all spheres of social, administrative, legal and political activity. During the past few years, much thought has been given to the principal of egalitarianism between the sexes on individualistic level. It seems that the human society is conceived to comprise two groups of opposite sex, hostile to each other. This tendency is fundamentally very unfortunate from the point of view of the larger interests of the humanity in her search for happiness. However, every social trend has certain historical facts in its background.

Judging from the modern point of view, we find an element of consent and mutual co-operation as the basis of married life among the members of the lower castes, whereas among the upper castes, there was evidently a strong sense of possession over property and wife alike. Besides this, the woman of the upper castes, not being engaged in the productive or economic activities, were fully dependant upon their husbands, whereas the women of the lower castes enjoyed much more freedom and economic independence due to their equal participation in the productive activities.

In the heart of some of the most prosperous pockets of the country. There is a darkness that has manifested itself in some of the most damning statistics to emerge from the 2001 census. As independent India has moved ahead, its attitude toward the girl child has, as the 2001 census suggests, regressed to the dark ages. From 276 girls per 1,000 boys in 1961, the sex ratio has fallen below the 900 mark for the first time. What is more revealing is that the imbalance is most pronounced in some of India’s wealthiest parts.

The worst offenders are Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab Rajasthan and also Himachal Pradesh. The fashionable and affluent district of south-
west Delhi has witnessed a 50 point drop in the past decade. Clearly, the Indian preference for a male child remains deep-rooted and dangerous. Every year, an increasing number of girls are being killed before they are born. Despite being illegal, the sex-determination industry has become more brazen in its operation, more sophisticated in its techniques and more commonly available.

India, be it rich or poor, continues to treat its daughters as unwanted citizens. A country that considers half its human resource pool as unworthy of being born can only have a bleak future. One of the most damning statistics regarding India’s girl child shows that the preference for a son runs across rich as well as poor households, educated as well as illiterate families. And despite being illegal, the sex-determination industry has become more brazen in its operation.

During pre-partition India, girls were considered ‘burdens’ and parents killed or abandoned their newborn girls. More than half a century later, urban India which should have provided the blueprint for a completely new order of cultural thought and practice still clings to the same beliefs. It kills girl children before they are born. Education, global exposure and affluence, all of which translates into easier access to expensive technology have made it easier to select the sex of the child. If there is a choice, it is always for a male child. Despite a stringent law, doctors and patients manage to evade it. That is the message of a study by India’s registrar general and census commissioner, the Ministry of health and family Welfare and the United Nations Population Fund.

Based on the 2001 census figures, the study finds that in the 0-6 age group, the most prosperous states of India have the lowest sex ratio. South-West Delhi for instance, where some of the richest and most
educated of Indians reside, has a child sex ratio of only 845 as against 904 in 1991. This is the sharpest decline in the sex ratio in the country. The findings were serious enough for the UN to urge India to take urgent steps to address the problem. The heinous practice of female foeticide in villages, a result of the age-old belief that a male child is necessary for devolving inheritance, is now an urban reality. Female foeticide is just one facet of the vast anti-women behavioural spectrum in India. How much choice educated urban women have itself is a debatable issue. The tragedy is that even women who have the choice, opt for a male child. On the other hand, there are hundreds of cases of forced sex-determination tests, forced abortions family wars and property disputes, all for want of a son.

Education, exposure and affluence have not brought values such as equality. It has brought consumerism and a commodification of relationships. Women prefer sons, as it is often the only way to increase their status in the otherwise subordinate life. The biggest shift has been in technology. Easy sex-determination and latest abortion techniques have reduced the risk rate for women, earlier exposed to fatal complications if they terminated advanced pregnancies. Two decades ago, doctors used to openly advertise sex selection tests for families desperate for male heirs. In a democracy, people should be allowed to make decisions. But statistics show that it is the rich who yearn for male offsprings more than anybody else and doctors are making the most of it. If medical ethics had not failed, we would not have had millions of missing girls. Clearly, had the medical community refused to be a party to the crime, female foeticide would not have been a grim reality.

Female foeticide will disempower Indian women. As sociologists stress, it is only empowered women who raise similar children and nurture
strong families. Fewer girls will also mean that their childhood, their marriage and their future will come under a variety of social and physical threats, where only those who have power, wealth, influence and are male will dictate their choices in life.

Marriage is considered to be the be all and end all of a woman's life, whether she is inclined or equipped for this highly demanding 'profession' or not. Wifehood and motherhood, she is told, are the culminating glories of life. If she deviates from this she runs the risk of losing her character, her status and even sympathy of society. To unwind this highly tightened coil of sāṁskāra is not that easy, especially where women themselves have no will to do so. Yet, try we must because, whatever one may say, the well-being, health and prosperity of a family, group, community and nation are closely interlinked with the healthy outlook and capability of the women who should form 50 percent of the population. The saying 'educate a woman and you educate a whole family', has much truth in it.

At the outset, both men and women should set before them a goal in life to be achieved through the concerted effort they make through their life's opportunities. The nearer to a universal ideal that goal is kept, the greater is the sense of fulfillment, achievement and its by products happiness, peace and harmony.

In India, we have always had such a goal in the vedantic ideal of divinity of humans and spiritual solidity of the entire universe, with its web of interrelationships and inter-dependencies. To visualize such an ideal and make it practical in one's life was considered to be the aim of human life, its dharma, whatever may be the path one chooses in life, work, worship, knowledge, or any of the human efforts righteously worked out.
For women, the easiest and simplest, in consonance with the natural gifts bestowed on them, wifehood and motherhood have been traditionally accepted to be the fittest path. Under normal conditions in society, in a welfare state or a Rāmarājya as we may envision it, such a career offers a woman immense scope for expansion, growth and self unfoldment. There is no doubt about it. But over the centuries there has been a steady decline and deterioration in the human value system, a deviation from the ideal. Thus, under the conditions prevalent in our country or in the world at large, life has ceased to be simple and straight forward. Wifehood and motherhood continue to be the main occupation of women, but without providing the earlier satisfaction and scope for expansion and fulfillment. They have simply become physical states, hardly ever vouchsafing the spiritual status that could have normally accompanied them. This void has robbed women of their opportunities for self-unfoldment through wifehood or motherhood. Divorces, suicides and a host of atrocities perpetrated by men and women may have their source in this dissatisfaction and frustration.

Review of Literature
The beginnings of women’s studies in ideological writings can be said to have been made with the publication of Rām Mohan Roy’s first tract on ‘sati’ (1918) in which he tried to prove that the burning of widows was not an ancient custom prescribed by the ‘Dharmaśāstras’ but a later evil which came to be practiced in the region where the widow had the right of inheritance. Since then, the zeal for social reform has provided a strong incentive for the study of women in ancient India and valuable monographs.
There has been a grievous misunderstanding about the position of women in India, so-much-so that one may sometimes came across certain embarrassing, however, innocent questions in this regard. As against this, most of the Indian writers felt it their pious duty to establish that all was good in the earliest periods of Indian history, and the degeneration started in the later periods. In this connection, the analysis of the various social aspects contained in the Pāli literature was made by R. Fick, Rhys Davids and that contained in the Jain literature was examined by J.C. Jain and B.C. Law; the epics were examined by Hopkins and Meyer and the Dharmāśāstras were taken up by Jolly, Jaiswal, Kane and others.

The above-cited attempts were, however, isolated ones and did not present a composite picture of the social structure based on all these sources together. Such a concerted approach was first undertaken by the Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavan in its series on the History and culture of the Indian People. Further, it is well known that as generalizations apply equally to both the primitive and civilized societies, the sociological background of a society can hardly be understood only from a single source, be it literature or otherwise.

Women's studies in India have largely attracted monographic studies on their place in society and religion. Important studies were undertaken analyzing their status in ancient India from the beginning of the last century. One of the earliest works undertaken by B.C. Law 'Women in Buddhist India' (1927) dealt with the women and Buddhism. I.B. Horner's 'Women under Primitive Buddhism' (1930) analyzed the traditional attitude towards women. The focus of his work was on traditional attitudes towards women, their paths to salvation, and the images of the feminine in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature. In it we read of women of sincere aspirations
and earnest will, seeking the more, the better, in life, whether they mothered the world in the home, or mothered it in the ‘homeless’ to which they went forth. The new spirit has largely outgrown the idea, that the career of a recluse is the best way either to save one’s self or to develop the mandate of a new world. A.S. Altekar’s ‘The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization’ (1938) traced and analyzed the position of women in his work from the prehistoric times to the present day and it indicated the general lines on which the various problems that confront Hindu women (and therefore men also) should be tackled in order to arrive at a fairly satisfactory solution. There are some monographs which deals with the position of Hindu women in particular periods of Indian history, but no work has as yet been undertaken which reviews their position throughout the long history of Hindu civilization. Indra’s ‘The Status of Women in Ancient India’ (1940) is a cultural survey of the status of women in ancient India. The author has attempted to depict it as it was-good, bad or indifferent, although his work throughout has been of that in the early Aryan society represented by the vedic literature, where it is concluded that women enjoyed a much better position - social, religious and political then, than they did in the later ages of the Dharmasāstra. In this book the author has also attempted to give a reasoned account of women’s place in Hindu society. P. Thomas’s main attempt in his book ‘Indian Women Through the Ages’,(1964) gives us a connected account of the gradual subjection of women in India, which started from very early times and continued right down to the eighteenth century, and their emancipation, which began in the nineteenth century and found its fulfillment in the economic, social and political equality established in law and guaranteed by the constitution of the Republic of India. Indian women have held the women characters of the Epics as ideals and ‘The Status of Women in the Epics’ by Shakambari
Jayal (1966) was an added contribution to women's studies. Deep rooted notions about such characters have stood in the way of a scientific and objective study of the various customs, manners and status of women as gleaned from the Epics. While the Rāmāyana, on the one hand, mirrors ideal characters for people to look up to and follow, the Mahābhārata on the other, with its variety of situations and characters through generations, gives a truer insight into the character and position of women in ancient India. J.J. Meyer in his book 'Sexual Life in Ancient India' (1971) further gave a true and vivid account of the life of woman in ancient India, based on the immense mass of material imbedded in the two great Epics, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana. It is restricted in its scope as it mainly deals with sexual life in the epics. Diana Y. Paul's work on 'Women in Buddhism' (1979) breaks new ground in offering a mine of information on women. The only generalization that can perhaps be made with any validity about the position of women in Buddhist texts and the role she played and still plays is that neither her position nor her role was ever negligible or trifling. This work breaks new ground in offering evidences from a number of Buddhist texts concerned with Mahāyāna Buddhism, and gives a mine of information on women. The ambivalent attitude towards women that has been apparent in Buddhist lands in all ages and epochs is well portrayed. On the one hand, woman was regarded as a danger, potential and actual, to a man's perilous progress along the way to welfare; and, on the other hand, she was shown, as in the guise of the Nāga princess who was nothing less than a Boddhisatva on a footing equal to that generally claimed by man as his special spiritual prerogative. This study presents these two aspects without prejudice, fear, or favour. A.R. Gupta also described the women's position in his work on 'Women in Hindu Society' (1982). He presents this work as a 'modest contribution to our national
efforts to involve the women in the task of achieving economic progress and eradication of social injustice'. G.D. Banerjee's contribution in the field of women's studies also deserves mention. His work 'Hindu Law of marriage and Stridhana' (1984) is a unique contribution to the literature on law and deals most exhaustively with Hindu law of marriage and stridhana. The monograph entitled 'Status of Women in Vedic Times' by Lila Samatani (1985) witnesses a fresh attempt to erase an impression of woman's subjugation during the vedic times and to show how proud a position she had possessed in the great vedic age. It was the position for which the present day feminists are seeking. 'Women in Ancient India' by Clarisse Bader (1987) is a book about the period during which it was said that 'gods lived wherever women were worshipped'. It is a deep study of the part played by the women in the ancient Hindu society. In describing woman under the different conditions of daughter, mother and widow, endeavour has been made to trace their position from the vedic times, by following its successive development through the ages and commenting on the various episodes drawn from the hymns and poems and paurānic and epic tales as also from the dramas of various periods. J.C. Jain in his work 'Women in Ancient Indian Tales' (1987) described the life and manners of men and women in ancient India mainly from Jain texts. Women are depicted here in all their forms, upright virtuous women who fight to maintain their chastity, those who were highly trained in the art of erotics, privileged courtesans patronized by the nobility, and bawds and procuresses, who played an important role in getting the lovers united. The sixth century B.C. has left its mark on Indian history mainly because it witnessed an intense preoccupation with philosophical speculation. Buddha, being one of the most important thinkers of that period has attracted maximum writing on himself, his thoughts, and his ideas. However
there is a lacuna in historical writing, especially in the field of social history dealing with the major concerns of the Buddha, the society in which he lived, and the connection between the two. 'The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism' by Uma Chakravarti (1987) makes a historical investigation into the relationship between early Buddhism and the society in which it was located. It analysed the social and economic categories of society at the time of the Buddha and contributes to an understanding to the category of the 'gahapati' which appears prominently in early Buddhist literature. The work has also examined the principles on which the Buddhist system of stratification was based and investigates the social origins of the two major components of early Buddhism; the 'bhikkhus' and the 'upāsakas', including the treatment to the women under these categories. 'The Making of Womanhood: Gender Relations in the Mahābhārata' by Shalini Shah (1995) is based not only on a close examination of relevant passages bearing on female child, wife, mother and widow but also on the application of anthropological findings to the subject. The author links gender relations to various types of society in which they appear in the Great Epic. She throws fresh light on the problems of matriarchy, patriarchy and status of woman in a polyandrous set-up. The study questions several older generalizations made in women's studies relating to ancient India and thus prepares the ground for further investigation. The title of Kumkum Roy's work 'Women in Early Indian Societies' (1st ed. in 1999 and rpt. in 2001) is by itself a suggestion toward the need for a much larger space than has so far been accorded to women in the academic discourse. The historical experience of India, in combination with contemporary ethno-sociological realities, does indeed point to the need to explore plurality and to strive towards fresh perspectives on gender relations. Gender relations in historical societies within the overarching frame of patriarchy are inevitably
becoming a major focus of the social history of such societies. Indirect studies on allied subjects have also reflected and added to information on the gender roles in early India. One such area being education.

Education was regarded as a source of illumination and power, which transforms and ennobles our nature by the progressive and harmonious development of our physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual powers and faculties. It enables us to live as decent and useful citizens of society and indirectly helps us to make progress in the spiritual sphere, both in this life and in the life to come. 'Education in Ancient India' by A.S. Altekar (1934) opens with a discussion of the conception and ideals of education. It also deals with some educational principles and postulates, the caste system and education etc. gives information about the social life in ancient India sufficient to understand the educational problems. The line of treatment so far followed in the book isolated the different topics like primary education, female education etc. and traced their history and development from age to age. 'Ancient Indian Education' by R.K. Mookerji (1947) was intended to fill up a gap in the literature on the history of education, which has not taken adequate account of the unique contributions made by Hindu thought to both educational theory and practice. The work brings together for the first time the representations of educational scenes and figures to be found in old Indian sculpture and painting. In 'Philosophy of Education in the Upaniṣads' by Jogeswar Sarmah (1978) an attempt has been made to collect the materials on education in all its facets as revealed in the upanisads and to arrange and discuss them systematically under appropriate heads. The opportunities provided to women in this sphere have also attracted studies 'Women Education Through the Ages' by N.L. Gupta (2000) aims at presenting an overall picture of women's education through various phases of Indian
history i.e. vedic period, Post-Vedic period, Jain-Buddhist system, Muslin rule, British rule and in the post-independence era. Various factors and phenomena responsible for bolting or opening the doors of education for women have been critically analysed.

Caste is the main basis of the present Hindu society and nobody can properly understood the Hindu law and social institutions without a good knowledge of the system of caste and the rules concerning it. 'Origin and Growth of Caste in India' by N.K. Dutt (1931) presented a systematic and comprehensive history of caste and caste rules tracing as far as possible the successive stages of development from the early vedic age to recent times, and also the fundamental principles of social psychology which have been at work behind the apparently diverse and sometimes inexplicable manifestations of caste-spirit with regard to the various institutions of Hindu society. P.H. Prabhu's work on 'Hindu Social Organization' (1940) is a serious and scientific account of Hindu social organization. It deals with topics of educations, marriage, family, the place of women in Hindu society, the system of caste with accurate learning and great discrimination. This is an attempt towards constructing a picture of the Hindu social organization and institutions from the point of view of their socio-psychological foundations and implications 'Caste in India' by Emile Senart (1975) is so vast and has given birth to so many weighty tomes, and his aim has been to discover in what light the religious and literary tradition of India appears where caste is concerned. The pertinacity of the institution of caste continues to pose serious problems in the restructuring of Indian society into a more egalitarian system by eliminating the traditional practice of discrimination on account of birth and gender. To understand the reasons of its continued stranglehold, it is necessary to unfold the contextual nature of its dynamics, which has regulated social relations and shaped
consciousness of its constituents. The work 'Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change' by Suvira Jaiswal (2000) is an attempt in that direction. The work provides a critique of the current theories of caste system which locate its essence in endogamy and argues that the present morphology of caste is the result of the changes the institution has undergone over centuries of its existence, but its origins are embedded in the ecology of the vedic cattle-keepers. The work subjects the applicability of the 'avante-garde' concepts of 'lineage mode of production' and 'homo-hierorchicus' to a critical scrutiny. Finally, it points to the role of caste in providing 'unity in diversity' and limiting the impact of social movements such as the Ārya Samāj.

Methodology
The present work is an attempt at a linear study of the literary sources as distinct from religious or social bindings. Comparative analysis on the basis of both religious sources as also on time has been made in order to arrive at the possible conclusions. Particular periods have been studied to get a linear development of the topic. Where religious sources for a specific period are to be considered, inter-religious conclusions have been attempted to be drawn. Which is to say that sources pertaining to different religious thoughts have been synthesized and possible inferences drawn there in. Corroboration has also been attempted by using archaeological sources wherever possible although not too sufficiently. This has involved both a descriptive as well as an analytical evaluation.

The period covered for study has been from 'The Early Vedic Period to A.D. 2nd Century.' The period covered is significant since it marks the presence of a supposed egalitarian society and a subsequent degradation especially in the gender relations.
Sources of the Study

The present study has been undertaken to trace the status of girl child with the help of primary and secondary sources. The original or primary sources drawn upon include the early Vedic and later Vedic literature, the Epics, Dharmasūtras, and the Dharmaśāstra literature. An exhaustive study of The hymns of the Rgveda, Atharvaveda, Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Brhadāraṇyak Upaniṣad, Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Kauśitaki Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad, the two Epics, The Mahābhārata, The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra, Manu Smṛti and Yājñavalkya Smṛti has been attempted. The Buddhist and Jain sources in Pāli, Prākrit and Sanskrit also have been tapped and corroboration have been attempted amongst these sources. From the Buddhist and Jain literary sources I have mainly used Aṅguttara Nikāya, Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, Nāyā-Dhammakahāṇa, Vivāgasuyam, Sūyagaḍgāṅga, Uttarādhyāyāḥ, Bhagavati Sūtra and Brhat-Kalpa. From amongst the secular literary sources, Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini, Arthaśāstra of Kautilya, and Patañjali’s Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya have also been used. The secondary sources are commentaries, translations and general works done by the different writer on this subject. An attempts to use archaeological support wherever possible to describe and support any hypothesis that may emerge from a perusal of the literary sources has been done.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

2. A. Bose, Demographic Diversity of India 1991 Censuses; State and District Level Data – A Reference Book, New Delhi, 1991.
3. H.C. Chakladas, Social Life in Ancient India, p. 204.