CHAPTER-II
INFANCY

Birth: Son Preferred to Daughter

The status of women in a particular society is best judged by the manner in which the birth of a female child is received. In the present Indian scenario be it a Hindu, Muslim or a Christian household, a baby is welcomed with open arms if it be a boy and a meek acceptance of it be a baby girl. In ancient times in all patriarchal societies the birth of a girl was generally an unwelcome event. Almost everywhere from the earliest times, the son was valued more than the daughter and it appears to be no different in ancient India as a son was "the cancellor of his father's debt to his forbears". 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. He perpetuated the name of his father's family. Sonlessness was as much deplored as poverty; "consigns not, agni, to malignity; (doom) us not to the absence of posterity; nor, son of strength, to the want of cattle, nor to reproach: drive away (all) animosities". "Auspicious agni, bestow (upon us) at the rite, food (the source of) happiness and renown". This was because sons served not only to defend the interests of the family against enemies and to keep up the continuity of the lines but to prevent the dead ancestors from starving in the next world, as sons alone could offer oblations to the manes and therefore a daughter was considered more of a handicap than a support. The vedic society was essentially patriarchal and the Indo-Āryan consciousness of feminine inferiority asserted itself from the very birth of a child. The fulfilment of the desire for an offspring, and male offspring in particular, was the chief aim of the vedic marriage: "Agastya, penance has not been practiced in vain: since the gods protect
us, we may indulge all our desire: in this world we may triumph in many conflicts, if we exert ourselves mutually together". "Divine Twashtri, being well pleased, give issue to our procreative vigour, whence (a son), manly, devout, vigorous, wilder of the (Soma bruising) stone, and reverencing the gods, may be born". "Let us not sit down, Agni, in an empty dwelling, (nor in those) of (other) men: let us not be without successors; or being without male posterity, let us, friend of dwellings, (by) worshiping thee, (come to abide) in houses filled with progeny". These are only a few illustrations exhibiting the ideal aim of marriage to beget progeny.

As he grew into adolescence and youth, he could offer valuable cooperation to his family, when it had either to defend itself or to attack an enemy. The daughter, on the other hand, had no or little fighting strength and efficiency of their community. 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. In the concluding portion of the Rgveda, "Indra is invoked to grant ten sons to the bride, make her husband the eleventh". Macdonell observes: "In the Rgveda we come across hymns with prayers for sons and grandsons, male offspring, male descendants and male issues but not for daughter". Abundance of sons is constantly prayed for along with material welfare but no desire for daughters is expressed. Perfect harmony and happiness are prayed for in conjugal life, which (it is hoped) will be long enough to bless the couple with sons and grandsons "Blessed with youthful and adolescent offspring, and both having their persons richly ornamented, they pass (happily) their whole life". "We implore to day the especial protection of the mighty, the great, the irresistible, gods, that we may obtain riches, and male progeny we solicit to day this protection of the gods". "Abide here together, may
you never be separated; live together all your lives, sporting with sons and grandsons, happy in your own home".\textsuperscript{11}

The fulfillment of desire for offspring, and male offspring in particular, was the chief aim of marriage as stated above. The son alone could perform the funeral rites for the father and continue the line. The adoption of sons was recognized, though not favoured: "one not acquitting debts, although worthy of regard, yet begotten of another, is not be contemplated even in the mind (as fit) for acceptance: for verily he returns to his own house; therefore let there come to us (a son) new-born possessed of food, victorious over foes".\textsuperscript{12} 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 grandsons 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: "Since a hundred years were appointed (for the life of man), interpose not, gods, in the midst of our passing existence, by inflicting infirmity on our bodies, so that our sons become our sires".\textsuperscript{13} So irrespective of the general acceptance of an egalitarian society prevailing in the early vedic times, such references point to the contrary.

However, it may be argued that such references are to be had from the interpolatary sections of the Rgveda yet the son preference does appear interspersed in the rest of the body text of the Rgveda as well. However, the desire for sons can be explained due to the prevailing politico-socio environment of the period. Generally, birth of a daughter was not believed to be an occasion of joy. Although the hymns of the Rgveda say nothing in this regard. Besides we find prayers for the birth of a son, we do not find any reference depreciating the birth of a daughter. The vedic
father seems to be as happy with daughter as with that of a son. He considers both as ornaments of gold: "Blessed with sons and daughters may they enjoy their full extent of life decked with ornaments of gold".14

Atharvaveda however offers clearer evidence of a preponderant desire for having sons and blessings are sought for the same: "O woman, give birth to a male son. Bring forth another male after him. The mother shalt thou be of sons born and hereafter to be born".15 It is not only a desire but charms are given to facilitate the birth of sons - a hand amulet tied around was bound to give Goddess Aditi a son: "I give thee power to bear a child: within thee pass the germ of life! Obtain a son, O Woman, who shall be a blessing unto thee, be thou a blessing unto him".16 If the goddess were desiring sons, the common women could not be expected to be any different. Probably the most conclusive feeling expressed here is evidenced from the following: "Prajāpati, Anumati, Sinivali have ordered it; Elsewhere may he effect the birth of maids, but here prepare a boy".17 In a prayer to God Pinga God it is fervently sought that he may preserve the babe a birth and produce not a female child: "Pinga, preserve the babe at birth, make not the boy a female child. Let not Egg-eaters mar the germs: drive the Kimidins far away".18

The Atharvaveda contains charms and rituals not only to ensure the birth of a son in preference to that of a daughter but also for changing foetus into a male child: "As arrow to the quiver, so let a male embryo enter thee. Then from thy side be born a babe, a ten-month child, thy heroic son".19 "An able bodies husband should cohabit with a calm, tranquil wife. This ceremony of producing a son will certainly produce a son. Let us men instill semen in women".20 "O woman, give birth to a male son. Bring forth
another male after him. The mother shalt thou be of sons born and hereafter to be born".\(^{21}\) "By the use of the auspicious seeds yielded by the herbs named Rishbhak, do thou O woman, Obtain thy self a son: be thou a fruitful mother-cow".\(^{22}\) "May those herbs whose father is the sun, the earth their mother and their root the rainy cloud, may those healing plants assist thee, O woman, to obtain a son".\(^{23}\) The necessity of having a female issue is accepted but no one is particularly enthusiastic to welcome her as an addition to the family, while a boy was very much a ‘wanted’ child.

The later vedic literature continues this trait and we have a clearer picture of the girl child being regarded as a cast aside at her birth itself. As the Brāhmaṇas are mainly concerned with the ritualistic side of the sacrifice, they throw little light on the subject of our survey. As the period was marked by the growth of rituals, the position assigned to women in the great sacrifices deserves examination. During this period, religion and social life were so intermingled that one could not be distinguished from the other. Life expressed itself to a great extent through religious ceremonials.

It is here that the need of women for religious and social welfare first begins to take a definite shape. The eschatological belief that the spirits of the dead would wonder as restless ghosts on earth or sink down to hell in default of the offerings due to them, had gained firm root in the land and all religious ceremonies centered round this essential provision for bliss i.e. in the next world. In all the great sacrifices, a certain part of their ritual was performed for the birth of a son who could continue the cult of worshipping the spirits of ancestors. Hence it was thought that one could secure good in the other world only through the oblations offered by a son.
In the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa this is explicitly expressed in the legend of Sunahshepa. Harishchandra, the son of Vedhas of the Ikshvaku race, was a king who had no son, though he had a hundred wives. In his house there lived the Riṣis, Parvata and Nārada. Once the king addressed Nārada thus: “Since all beings, those endowed with reason (men) as well as those without it, wish for a son, what is the fruit to be obtained by having a son?” Nārada replies, “The father pays a debt in his son, and gains immortality, when he beholds the face of a son living who was born to him. The pleasure which a father has in his son, exceeds the enjoyment of all other beings, be they on the earth, or in the fire, or in the water. Fathers always overcome great difficulties through a son. (In him) the self is born out of Self. The son is like a well-provisioned boat, which carries him over.” Here the arguments extended are clearly stated with the son being the harbinger of support in this world and the next to the father. The son alone is taken as a part of the father.

As the thoughts turned to getting a son to provide for the future grew stronger, the daughters came to be looked upon as encumbrances and however inconsistent it may seem, ceremonies were performed with the special object of avoiding the birth of a daughter. The eagerness for a son kept away all thought that without a woman the race might become extinct. So much so that in the Taittirīya Samhitā new and full Moon sacrifices are specially instituted for avoiding the birth of a daughter. The main ceremony constituted of throwing a piece of Kuśā grass upwards, by repeating a Mantra, signifying that all upward movements are connected with males and the reverse with females. In this, the birth of a girl did not cause much rejoicing and she (the infant) was put aside while the boy was raised aloft by the parents with expressions of joy. The open preference for a male issue continues with the couple seeking and praying
for a male issue at a special ceremony the 'Puṣavana saṃskāra'. This takes over from the earlier charms of Atharvaveda facilitating the birth of a son.²⁶

One finds here a singular departure from the earlier periods. While earlier it was only a question of desiring a son and there is no perceivable disdain for her, now not only is she not desired but is being regarded as a source of trouble. In sum total, a daughter is a curse.²⁷ In the narrative of Nārada and Harishchandra referred to above, Nārada, after explaining the utility of a son, concludes his remarks thus: “Food preserve life, clothes protect from cold, gold (golden ornaments) gives beauty, marriages produce wealth in cattle; the wife is the friend, the daughter object of compassion, but the son shines as his light in the highest heaven.”²⁸ Even in such social environment where she is not desired, there is a definite acceptance of an accomplished daughter’s birth being preferred to that of a useless unworthy son as will be shown later.

In the Upaniṣads, daughter does not appear as an unwanted baby. The Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad is devoted to the ceremonials for a son. It is described as a religious duty.²⁹ There are various references related to the birth of a son: “He who wishes, ‘may a son be born to me, who will be a reputed scholar, attend assemblies, speak words that one likes to hear, be versed in all the Vedas and attain full longevity’, should have rice cooked with meat; that of a young or mature bull - and with his wife eat it mixed with ghee. Then they would be able to produce such a son”.³⁰ Women is conjectured as the Vedi of a sacrifice and son the fruit of the offering obtained for benefit in the next world.³¹ Yet the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad even prescribed a rite for procuring a long-living and scholarly daughters: “He who wishes, ‘may a daughter be born to me, who will be a scholar and
attain full longevity', should have rice and sesame cooked together, and
with his wife eat it mixed with ghee. Then they would be able to produce
such a daughter". The ratio might differ, as there are rites for having three
different kinds of sons as opposed to one for a daughter, but the desire to
have a daughter was nonetheless present. From these references it is quite
clear that in the vedic period, a daughter was not as welcome as a son.
The former was still not considered the source of trouble to the family. Yet
the ancient Āryans were very anxious for having male children whom they
considered as the hope and a permanent economic asset of the family in
the desire appears to become an obsession and the women themselves
find ways to give birth to a son. The acquisition of sons was considered to
be the primary aim of marriage. The logic being that the son rescues the
souls of the deceased ancestors from the hell into which they might fall
without his birth.

The epics appear to redefine the term ‘pūtra’. A ‘pūtra’, son, is so
called because he protects his ancestors from the ‘hell’ – ‘put’. ‘since a son
delivers his sire from the hell named put, a son goes by the appellation of
‘Pūtra’, he protecting his (departed) ancestors in everyway’. So great is
the desire to beget a son by now that the father of a son is regarded as
having conquered the earth and attained eternal happiness: “A man
conquers the world by the birth of a son; he enjoys eternity by that of a
grandson; and, the great grand-fathers enjoy eternal happiness by the birth
of a grandson’s son”.

In the Rāmāyaṇa parents are seen performing sacrifices or
practicing penance for the sake of a son, “Aggrieved on account of a son, I
have no happiness on earth, and, therefore, I have intended to celebrate a
horse – sacrifice.” ‘So, I would like to perform a horse-sacrifice. And by the
grace of the saint's son. I shall obtain my desire". But here there is no prayer for the birth of a daughter. This is not at all surprising, for the son as a perpetuator of the family line and as deliverer of his father from hell has ever remained a source of greater delight to the heart of a father in the epics. In his conception of an ideal state Vālmīki also expected the mothers to bring forth sons. The sight of the first male issue was an occasion of immense joy for the mother. In fact, nothing was more dear to a mother than a son born of her limbs and coming out from her heart as it were. There are no such sentiments expressed with regard to the daughter and we shall not be far wrong in surmising that the birth of a daughter in the epic society was not a welcome event.

The Mahābhārata looks at the necessity of a son in the family from another angle as well which is one of affection. The child is looked upon as a great bond of affection in the family, the center to which the love of the parents converges: "what is a greater happiness to a father than what the father feels when his son, running to him, clasps him with his (tiny little) arms though his body is full of dust and dirt", and "even the exhilarating or soft touch of the sandal paste, or that of a woman, or of water, is not so pleasing as that of one's own infant son, looked into his embrace", truly "there is nothing in the world whose touch is more pleasing than that of a son".

No such expressions are found with reference to a daughter. "The Brāhmaṇas utter the following vedic mantras (on behalf of the father); at the birthday ceremony of the child". "You are born of my body; you have sprung from my heart. You are myself in the form of my son live for one hundred years". "My life depends on you. The continuation of my race also depends on you. Therefore live in happiness for one hundred years".
"The man who, having begotten a son who is his own image, does not look after him, never gains the higher world". Giving birth to a son was also taken as a sacred act performed by a woman. “The ‘Pitrīs’ (ancestors) have said that the son continues the race and supports the relatives; therefore to give birth to a son is the best of all sacred acts”.

In the sūtras also, the birth of a son was preferred to that of a daughter. This is evident from the verses of Āpastamba who says that “a wife who bears sons, her husband shall not take a second wife. If she fails to give birth to a son or bears only daughters, the husband shall take another wife”.

In the Pāraskar Grhya Sūtra also there are references in favour of a son birth: “Men and both Mitra and Varuṇa; men are both the Asvins; men are Indra and Surya. May a man be born in me! Again suaha! With (this verse) a wife who desires to conceive, (should offer) the first (oblation).

Once again, the sūtras also continue to find charms and treatment to secure the birth of a son: “If she does not conceive, he should, after having fasted, under (the Nakshatra) Pushya, lay down (in his house) the root of a white-blooming Simhi plant, and on the fourth day, after (his wife) has bathed, he should in the night time crush it in water and insert it into her right nostril with (the verse), this herb is protecting, over coming, and powerful. May I, the son of this great (mother), obtain the name of a father!”

What is important at this period is the definitive preference for a son and a scorn for a birth of a girl child.

The scorn for the birth of a female child cannot be more clearly expressed than in the following verses which are to be recited by the husband at the time of the wife’s monthly period: “Or, may a male embryo enter thy womb, as an arrow the quiver; may a man be born here, a son
after ten months. Give birth to a male child; may after him (another) male be born; their mother shalt thou be, of the born, and (to others) mayst thou give birth. In the male verily, in the man dwells the sperm; he shall pour it forth into the woman: thus has said Dhātar, thus Prajāpati has said. Prajāpati has created him, Savitar has shaped him. Imparting birth of females to other (women) may he put here a man. From the auspicious sperms which the men produce for us, produce thou a son; be a well-breeding cow. Roar, be strong, put into her an embryo, achieve it, a male, thou male, put into her; to generation we call thee. Open thy womb; take in the man's sperm, may a male child be begotten in the womb. Him thou shalt bear; (having dwelt) ten months in the womb may he be born, the most excellent of his kin.46 The mother of sons continued to receive praises and it was believed that 'gods and the fathers came to witness the ceremonies at the birth of the son at the house of the twice-born'. Here the desire for sons becomes preponderant and it can therefore be concluded that by now the birth of a girl child was scourged and almost wholly undesired.

Kauṭilya also certainly prefers the birth of a son to that of a daughter. A daughter migrates to another family after marriage and hence she is of no help in continuing the family-line, offering oblations to ancestors etc.47

As we come to the Smṛtis, we find that the birth of several daughters is mentioned amongst the bad omens. Manu holds that a wife who bears only daughters may be superseded in the eleventh year: "A sterile (wife) may be over-married in the eighth year (after marriage); if her children have died (she may be over-married) in the tenth (year); if she bears (only) female (children), in the eleventh (year), but instantly, if she says
disagreeable things". If the mother of the girls could be treated so shabbily the infant girl definitely would not have been welcome as an addition. Yājñavalkya agrees with Manu: “One can take a second wife, (if his existing wife) drinks intoxicating liquors, suffers from any disease, is wicked, barren, dissipates money, utters unpleasant words, gives birth to female issues (only), and is inimical to her husband”. Nārada is of the opinion that a husband should not show love to woman who gives birth to female children: “Let him not dignify with his love a barren wife, nor one who only bears daughters, nor one who deserves blame, nor one who is constantly at variance with him; if he does, he partakes of her faults”. However, what is of importance here is that such feelings are expressed in case of a sonless wife who gives birth to female offsprings only. Possibly they were aware of the importance of a girl child and she would be a welcome addition in case the family already had a son.

That the birth of a daughter was rarely welcomed in India from early times is even evidenced in Pāli literature. Pāli texts invariably do not speak favourably about the birth of a daughter. Buddhist society, too, was not utterly averse to this tradition. In the Samyutta Nikāya, King Pasenadi felt displeased to hear of Queen Mallikā being delivered of a female child. The Buddha consoled him by saying that girls breed noble men, who protect the world. Thus, the Buddha gave a new outlook to the society. His attitude was rational, which prompted the society to perhaps give a more fair treatment to daughters. Some thinkers have even pointed out that a talented and well behaved daughter may be better than a son. The Avadāna Śatakam narrates that when the daughter was born in the family, every one was glad and therefore she was named “Someti”. This is, of course, one of the rare examples quoted in the Buddhist texts where the birth of a female child was rejoiced in. Although the Buddhist society
accepted the rational outlook of the lord, it could not entirely discard inherited prejudice. One cannot deny that the general tendency of the people was partial to the birth of a son. In the Katthahāri Jātaka, King Brahmadatta said thus to the young wood-picker: “If you beget a son, bring him to me with this signet-ring, but if you give birth to a daughter, then sell this ring and rear her”. In the Uddālaka Jātaka also, Chaplain Bodhisatta is stated to have said to the maiden, “If it be a boy, then bring him to me when he grows up; or if it be a girl, sell this seal ring and nourish her”. The Aṅguttara Nikāya explains as to why parents desired the birth of a son. It is said that there are five things, which make one wish for a son. They are: (i) a son will feed us, (ii) he does the work, (iii) he keeps the continuity of lineage, (iv) he inherits wealth, (v) he gives alms to the departed. Thus, the Aṅguttara Nikāya provides the reason for partiality being shown to the birth of a son in the society.

Similarly, it has been clearly noticed in the Jain scriptures that the male child always has the precedence over the female child. The Christian theology says that man was created in the image of God and the woman was created for man alone. Almost the same idea permeates the entire Indian literature, right from the Vedas down to the heterodox Buddhist and Jain texts.

The first and the foremost reason for the gradual and general undesirability for daughter was the problem of her marriage. Not to say of ordinary fathers, even a king’s heart was filled with trouble regarding the marriage of his daughter. A father worried for the marriage of his daughter leaves no stone unturned to find out a good husband for her. But when he fails in his attempts, he becomes really sad. As ill luck would have it, if the father while selecting a bridegroom makes a wrong choice, it pains him
throughout his life. When a father succeeds in getting his daughter married, he feels great relief.\textsuperscript{58}

The Rāmāyaṇa tells us that when Sītā came of age and her marriage had to be arranged, her father's anxiety became as intense as that of a poor man, who suddenly loses all his little money: "(In time) seeing me fit for the company of a husband, my father in distress was plunged in thought, like a poor man that has lost his wealth".\textsuperscript{59} Of course, such references can be interpreted variously such as the sense of loss of the father, who felt that he would have to be parted from his daughter. But this is not evidenced from the following passages. Not only the anxiety of daughter's father the narrative goes on to observe that daughter's father even if occupying a position as exalted as that of the king of gods, has to put up with insult, not only from his equals but also from his inferiors: "Even if the father of a girl be like to Śakra himself on earth he reaps odium at the hands of his equals and inferiors". "Perceiving this obloquy at a short distance, the king was plunged in a sea of anxiety, but could not cross it, like one that has no raft".\textsuperscript{60} Even when he succeeds in making a very good selection of a son-in-law, his anxiety does not terminate; he has to wait anxiously to find out whether the marriage will eventually be a happy one.

As a natural consequence of the circumstances, in the literature belonging to the later period of Indian civilization, passages about the undesirability of the birth of daughters become more numerous. In this period it can be observed that while the son is the hope of the family, the daughter is a source of trouble to it. A similar idea occurs in the Mahābhārata as well: "O descendant of Bharata, seeing her, Vivashwata thought, there was none who had beauty, accomplishments, good
behaviour and learning to be fit for her husband. In spite of the bridegroom being good and deserving, if the members of her husband’s family are not good natured and accommodative the worry of the father of the girl does not come to an end. In such a situation his daughter’s life is made hell and for this the father has to repent all his life. Painful feelings of the parents at their first separation from their daughters at the time of their departure to their husband’s place has also been another reason for the general dislike or undesirability for daughters. Similar situations can be cited and viewed in the present Indian scenario.

Religious beliefs and prejudices also led people to prefer a son to a daughter. It was believed that a sonless man could not reach the world of bliss. Manu also regards a son as a deliverer of his parents from hell called ‘Put’. But as daughter’s ‘gotra’ changed after marriage, she could not render any religious benefit to her parents. This would deny to the person that ultimate aim of salvation or ‘mokṣa’.

A daughter on account of her physical delicacy and weakness could not help her father in the battle-field. She, on the other hand some times became the cause of war. We often find royal families involved in wars on account of their daughters and when they were defeated they had to surrender them to the victor despite the fact whether the victor was endowed with good qualities or not. The father had to be ever vigilant regarding her protection from forcible molestation at the hands of unsocial elements of the society. When engaged otherwise he, for her safety, placed her in the custody of a responsible person who could provide her proper protection.
Desire for Birth of Daughter

It is true that ritual for the birth of a daughter did not become as popular as the Puṁsavāna, one prescribed for procuring the birth of a son; but it clearly shows that cultured parents were often as anxious for daughters as they were for sons. The elevated position of the woman is also apparent from the fact that seeing a woman occurs as a good omen in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad: "After performing the Mantha-rite, if a man sees a woman, let him know that his effort has reached fruition". She was not an unwanted baby. The ratio might differ, as there are rites for having three different kinds of sons as opposed to one daughter, but the desire to have a daughter was nonetheless present during the early period. In cultured circles such a daughter was regarded as the pride of the family. In lower sections of society where the custom of the bride-price prevailed, the birth of a daughter may have been a welcome event, we however, have no direct evidence preserved reflecting such views.

Daughter's birth was considered beneficial as it was through her that the parents got happiness not only here but also in the other world. From the religious point of view also, the birth of a daughter was a necessity. It was only through 'Kanyādāna' that the father was freed from the debt he owed to the society while accepting the hand of a girl as his wife. In marriage it is the daughter, and not the son, who enables the father to get the great merit of prthvīdāna or the 'gift of the earth'. She is thus really better than the son.

There are cases on record where daughters like Kuntī and Lopamudrā have saved their parents from dire calamities: "Kuntī father, king Kuntibhoja, had become very nervous when the angry sage Durvāsā
came to stay with him as his guest; Kunti, however undertook the onerous responsibility of attending upon the guest and keeping him in good humour. She performed her task with remarkable success. In order to save the family from the ire of Agastya, Lopamudra consented to marry the sage, fully conscious of her ability to persuade him in course of time to lead the normal life of royal comfort: "O ruler of earth, you should not grieve on my account. O father, bestow me on Agastya and save yourself by giving me away". To a cultured parents both should be equally welcome: "Some men think that father’s affection for his son is greater; other (think that father’s affection) for his daughter (is greater); but mine is equal". There can be no doubt that these arguments were definitely advanced to counteract the harm that was done by the prevailing tendency to depreciate the birth of a daughter. Owing, however, to the circumstances described above they did not carry the day.

Manu thinks it futile to pray to gods to grant only sons and not daughters. He regards such a wish against commonsense. Manu states "May the progeny increase among us". It is clear from his statement that he wants the increase of progeny in general and not of sons alone. Certain passages in the Smṛti even seem to prove that daughters were considered as equal to sons and they inherited wealth. According to Manu, “A son is even as one self, such a daughter is equal to a son, how can another heir take the estate”. Nārada says, “On failure of a son the daughter succeeds her father’s property, because she continues the lineage just like a son, both a son and a daughter continue the lineage of their father”.

It will be thus seen that if there are passages in later literature showing that the birth of a daughter was unwelcome, 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!

Further, it has been opined that we do not come across any evidence which definitely proves a bias against a girl child. Can this be accepted for when she is not desired (for there is not a single hymn where a desire for a girl child is specifically expressed), does it not portray that she was accepted if born, though not desired and welcomed?

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. Even in such social environment where she is not desired, there is a definite acceptance of an accomplished daughter's birth being preferred to that of a useless or unworthy son. This clearly indicates that the writers of the ancient Indian literature have the highest regard for the daughter and this had gone a long way in raising her social status. These things were done to impress upon her as also upon the society that she was in no way less desired by and beloved of her parents than her brother.

**Process of Socialisation: Saṃskāras**

Once a child is to born some performance are undertaken to announce the birth and seek blessings for the new born and the family. These
performances/rites are termed as sarşskāras. Different rites through different ways are performed the world over.

The word sarşskāra defies every attempt at its correct translation into English—ceremony or Latin caerimonia does not give the full meaning of this word. Rather it corresponds with Sanskrit-Karman, religious act in general. Sarşskāra does not mean "more outward religious rite, polite observances, empty form, stately usage, formalities and punctilious behaviour", as it is generally understood. Nor does it mean rites and rituals alone by which we understand, "form of procedure, action required or usual in a religious or solemn ceremony or observance, or a body of usages characteristics of a church". A better approach to the rendering of sarşskāra in English is made by the word 'sacrament' which means "religious ceremony or act regarded as outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace". Applied by the Eastern, pre-reformation Western and Roman Catholic churches to the seven rites of baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders and matrimony. Sacrament also means confirmation of some promise or oath; things of mysterious significance, sacred influence and symbol. Thus it overlaps many other religious spheres which, in the Sanskrit literature, are covered by śuddhi, 'purification', pṛayaścitā, 'atonement', vrata, 'vows' etc.

The word sarşskāra is derived from the Sanskrit root 'sarşskṛghan' and is used in a variety of ways. It is seldom found in the early Vedic literature. But its allied word 'Sarşskrita' occurs frequently enough. In the Rgveda it is used in the sense of purified: "Harm not, Āświns, the perfected (rite), but coming now most quickly, be glorified on this occasion: be present at the opening of the day, with protection against destitution, and be prompt to bestow happiness upon the donor (of the offering)". The
Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa uses the term in the sense of preparing or purifying ‘havis’ (offering) for the gods: “He now takes the pestle, with the text, ‘A large, wooden stone art thou!’ for it is a large stone, and made of wood, too. He thrusts it down, with the text, ‘Do thou prepare this oblation for the gods! Do thou prepare it thoroughly!’ thereby saying, ‘Get this oblation ready for the gods! Get it quite ready!’” In the Śūtras of Jaimini the word ‘samskāra’ has been applied several times in the sense of some purificatory rite. Śābra, the commentator on the Jaimini śūtras explains the term sāṃskāra as an act which makes a certain thing or person fit for a certain purpose. The Tantravartika regards ‘samskāra’ as those acts and rites that impart fitness and further adds, ‘fitness is of two kinds’. It arises from the removal of taints (sins) or by the generation of fresh qualities. Sāṃskāra generated fresh qualities, which ‘tapas’ brings about the removal of sins.

So we find that the word ‘sāṃskāra’ has got its own peculiar associations gathered round it through its long history. It means religious purificatory rites and ceremonies for sanctifying the body, mind and intellect of an individual, so that he/she may become a full-fledged member of the community. The sāṃskāra with their paraphernalia were regarded as producing a peculiar indefinable kind of merit for the man who underwent them a ‘a peculiar excellence due to the rites ordained (by the śāstrās) which resides either in the soul or the body’. It was in this collective sense that the word sāṃskāra was used. These sāṃskaras in the Indian though began before the conception of a being and culminated after death of the individual rather continued as well.
The Pre-Natal Saṃskāra

(i) The Garbhādhāna (Conception)

The rite through which a man placed his seed in a woman was called Garbhādhāna. This rite was not a religious fiction but a ceremony corresponding to fact, though its adherents, later on, fought shy off and ultimately, abandoned it.

We know nothing about sentiments and rites, if any, regarding the procreation of children and the ceremonial procedure accompanying it in the pre-Vedic times. It must have taken a very long period for the evolution of this saṃskāra. In the beginning, procreation was a natural act. A human pair copulated, whenever there was a physical demand for it, without any anticipation of progeny, though it was an obvious consequence. The Garbhādhāna saṃskāra, however, presupposed a well established home, a regular marriage, a desire of possessing children and a religious idea that beneficent gods helped men in begetting children. So the origin of this saṃskāra belongs to a period when the Aryans were a advanced from their primitive conditions.

During the vedic period we see that parental instincts found their expression in many utterances containing prayers for children: “Drink, Āświns, the Soma, and satiate yourselves, come hither; give us progeny; give us wealth; united with the dawn and with Sūrya, give us, Āświns, strength.” The theory of three Debts (trins) was in the process of evolution in the vedic period: “A Brāhman on birth is born with a three fold debt of pupilship to the Rṣis, of sacrifice to the gods, of offspring to the Pitrs.” The begetting of children was regarded a sacred duty binding on every individual. Moreover, there are many similies and references in the vedic hymns bearing on how to approach a women for conception: “An able-
bodied husband should cohabit with a calm, tranquil wife. This ceremony of producing a son, will certainly produce a son. Let us men instill semen in women”. Thus an idea and, perhaps, a simple ceremony regarding conception were coming into existence in the vedic period.

Though the ritual procedure adopted in the Garbhādhāna must have assumed a fairly ceremonious shape before the codification of the saṃskāra in the Grhyasūtras, we do not get an exact information about it in the pre-sūtra period. But we come across many prayers in the vedic hymns pointing to the act of conception: “Let Viṣṇu prepare the womb; Let Tvāṣṭar adorn thy form; Let Prajāpati pour on; Let Dhātar place the embryo. Place the embryo, O Sarasvatī; Let both the Aśvins garlanded with blue lotus set thine embryo.” A verse in the Atharvaveda contains an invitation to wife to mount the bed for conception: “Being happy in mind, here mount the bed; give birth to children for me, your husband.” Descriptions of actual copulation are also found in the literature: “Pushan, inspire her who is most auspicious, in whom men may sow seed, who most affectionate may be devoted to us, and in whom animated by desire we may beget progeny.” From the above references we gather that in the pre-sūtra period the husband approached the wife, invited her for conception, prayed to gods for placing the embryo into her womb and then finished fertilization but this does necessarily mean that there was a special rite associated with it. What is important/significant is that the rites were to be performed for an offspring, till this time not necessarily for a son. The Garbhādhāna ceremonies are, for the first time, systematically dealt within the Grhyasūtras. According to them, since marriage the husband was required to approach the wife every month when she was ceremoniously pure after her monthly course. But before the conception, one had to observe various vows according to the desire of possessing different types
of sons-Brāhmaṇa, Śrotriya (one who has read one śākhā), Anūchāna (who has read only the Veḍāngas), Rasikalpa (who has read the kalpas), Bhrūna (who has read the sūtras and the Pravachanas), Rṣi (who has read the four Vedas) and Deva (who is superior to the above). At the end of the vow, cooked food was offered to the fire. After this, the pair were prepared for cohabitation. When the wife was decently decorated, the husband recited vedic verses containing similes of natural creation and invocations to gods for helping the woman in conception. Then embracing began with verses containing metaphors of joint action of male and female forces, and the husband rubbed his own body with verses expressing his fertilizing capacity. After embracing, conception proper took place with prayers to god ‘Pūshan’ and an indication to scattering semen. The husband, then, touched the heart of the wife, reclining over her right shoulder with the verse, “O thou whose hair is well parted. Thy heart that dwells in heaven, in the moon, that I know; may it know me. May we see a hundred autumns”. A changed perception is viewed for now there is a definite emphasis for a son.

The Dharmasūtras and the Smṛtis add little to the ritualistic side of this sāṃskāra. Rather they lay down rules regulating the performance, e.g. when the conception should take place; recommended and prohibited nights; astrological considerations; how a polygamous man should approach his wives; conception a compulsory duty and its exceptions; the right of performing the samskāra etc.

**Time of Performance**

The Dharmasāstra are unanimous at the point that the Grabhādāhāna ceremony should be performed when the wife was physically prepared to conceive. The proper time for conception was from the fourth to the
sixteenth nights after the monthly course of the wife. The majority of the Gṛhyaśūtras and the Śrīts consider the fourth night ceremoniously pure for conception. But according to Gobhila Gṛhasūtra, ‘conception should take place after the stoppage of the flow of impure blood. The woman, before the fourth night, was regarded untouchable and a man approaching her was polluted and also taken to be guilty of abortion, because his semen was scattered in vain’.

Among the nights later ones were preferred. Baudhāyana says that “one should approach his wife from the fourth to the sixteenth night, specially the alter ones”. Āpastamba and others endorsed the same view. Children conceived on later nights were regarded more lucky and meritorious. The sex of the would be child was believed to be determined by the number of night on which the conception took place. Even nights were selected for the birth of a male child and odd ones for a female child: “Son are born on the even days and daughters on the odd ones (of the menstrual period). Hence, one, desiring the birth of a son, shall visit his wife on an even day”. It was thought that quantity of semen and menstrual discharge was responsible for the sex of the child: “Even on an odd day, a comparative excess of the paternal element gives rise to the birth of a male child, a comparative excess of the maternal element gives rise to the birth of a daughter. A sexless child, or a twin (a son and a daughter) is born when the paternal element is equal to the maternal one”.

Certain dates of the month were prohibited for conception. The eighth, the fourteenth, the fifteenth and the thirtieth, and all the Parvas were specially avoided: “Sixteen days or nights (commencing with the day of the menses) are the menstrual period of the womankind; of them one should know his wife on the night of an even day (such as, the fourth, the sixth, or the eighth night). This is ‘Brahmacharyam’. On the other hand, one should
avoid 'Parva' days and the first four days (of the menses)". These days were meant for religious observances, and therefore any sexual act was eschewed on them. But there may be other reasons why these nights were forbidden. The ancient Indians were well conversant with astrology and astronomy. When they could fix the paths of the sun and the moon, they would have observed that their conjunction on different dates produced different effects on the earth. It is a common place knowledge of physical geography that, owing to the attraction of the moon and increase of the watery substance, the physical condition of the earth becomes abnormal on the 'Parva' dates and consequently the health of the animal world is not sound. So it was thought advisable that such an important act as the Garbhādhāna should not be performed on these dates. The study of the Garbhādhāna saṃskāra is very interesting from the cultural point of view. Here we do not find a primitive man expressing wonder at the prospects of a child and only seeking the help of gods to secure it, nor is conception here a haphazard accident without any desire for the progeny.

(ii) The Puṁsavana (Quickening A Male Child)

After the conception was ascertained, the child in the womb was consecrated by the saṃskāra named Puṁsavana. By Puṁsavana was generally understood 'the rite through which a male child was produced'. Vedic hymns recited on this occasion mention Pumān or Pūtra (a male) and favour the birth of a son: "As arrow to the quiver, so let a male embryo enter thee. Then from thy side be born a babe, a ten-month child, thy heroic son". The word Puṁsavana is rendered into English by 'a rite quickening a male child'.

As already stated as early as the Atharvaveda we get prayers for male children: "Give birth to a male, a son, after him let a male be born;
mayest thou be mother of sons, of those born and whom thou shall bear etc".°°°° We do not know what exact kind of rite was performed. But the above verses bear testimony to the fact that some kind of celebration was made with these prayers. The ceremony is called Prājāpatya in these hymns: 'I perform the Prājāpatya (the ceremony of Prajāpati) etc'. "I give thee power to bear a child; within thee pass the germ of life! Obtain a son, O woman, who shall be a blessing unto thee. Be thou a blessing unto him".°°°° Some sort of medicinal herb was also given to the pregnant woman with the verse: "May those herbs whose father is the sun, the earth their mother and their root the rainy cloud, may those healing plants assist thee, O woman, to obtain a son".°°°° Thus the main features of the later day saṁskāra are found in the vedic period. But the rules regulating the various aspects of the saṁskāra cannot be traced in the Vedas but that it was a male child that was wanted becomes essential.

During the Grhyasutra period the Puṁsavana saṁskāra was performed in the third or the fourth month of pregnancy or even after, on the day when the moon was on a male constellation, on Tiśya particularly: "Now the puṁsavana (i.e. the ceremony to secure the birth of a male child)."°°°° Before (the child in his mother's womb) moves in the second or third month (of pregnancy)".°°°° The pregnant woman was required to fast on that day. After bath she would put on new clothes. In the night the prouts of the banyan tree were pounded and the juice was inserted into the right nostril of the woman with the verses beginning with 'Hiranyagarbha'°°°° etc. According to some Grhyasūtras Kuśakantaka and Somalata were also to be pounded with the above.°°°° If the father desired that his son should be Viśyavān or virile, he should place a dish of water on the lap of the mother and touching her stomach recited the verse 'Suparnosi': "And he puts gall of a tortoise on her lap. If he series, 'May (the son) become valiant', he
recites over him (i.e. over the embryo), modifying the rite, ‘The Suparna art thou’ (the Yagus) before (the formulas called) ‘steps of Visnu’.

The Smṛtis deal with the proper time when the saṁskāra should be performed. According to Yājñavalkya as in the sūtras it should be performed before the foetus begins to move in the womb: “Garbhādhānam (takes place when conception is formed) during the menses; Purūṣavānam (formation of a male child), before the moving of the foetus.”

The time of performance ranged from the second to the eighth month of pregnancy. It was due to the fact that the symptoms of conception became visible in the case of different woman in different month. The Kulācāra or family custom was also responsible for this variation. Brhaspati differentiates between these periods. In the first pregnancy, the saṁskāra should be performed in the third month. In the case of women who have already given birth to children it should be performed in the fourth, sixth or even in the eighth month of pregnancy. In the first conception, the symptoms show themselves earlier than in the others. That is why later periods are prescribed in the subsequent cases.

The Smṛtis also discuss the question whether this saṁskāra should be performed in every pregnancy or not. According to Saunaka this rite should be repeated in every conception, because by touching and feeding, the foetus becomes purified; moreover by the force of the verse recited in this saṁskāra, one obtains the memory of the past lives. So, it is prescribed in every conception. In the Mitākṣarā on Yājñavalkya, we find an eliminating tendency where Vijñāneśvara says “These Purūṣavana and Śimanta being Kṣetra saṁskāras should be performed only once.” Therefore no generalization or agreement can be held to be available on the issue. However if it can be established that it was to be performed in
every conception then inference can be drawn that a boy child was the wanted child as opposed to a girl child. In the opinion of Suśruta the banyan tree has got the properties of removing all kinds of troubles during pregnancy, e.g., excess of bile, burning etc. He says, “Having pounded with milk any of these herbs, Sulaksmaṇā Bataśunga, Sahadevi and Viśvadeva, one should insert three or four drops of juice in the (right) nostril of the pregnant woman for the birth of a son. She should not spit the juice out.” Insertion of medicine into nostrils is a common thing in the Indian system of treatment. Therefore, it is evident that the ritual prescribing it was undoubtedly founded on the medical experience of the people. Putting a dish of water on the lap was a symbolical performance. A pot full of water denoted life and spirit — in the would be child. Touching the womb emphasized the necessity of taking every care by the expectant mother, so that the foetus should be healthy and strong in the womb and abortion may not take place. The hymn ‘Suparna etc’. or ‘of beautiful wings’ expressed the wish that a handsome child should be born.

(iii) The Śīmantonnayana (Hair-Parting)
The third saṁskāra of the embryo was Śīmantonnayana. The rite was called Śīmanta, in which the hair of a pregnant woman were parted. The purpose of this samskāra was partly superstitious and partly practical. People believed that a woman in her pregnancy was subject to attacks of evil spirits and some rite should be performed to ward them off. The only pre-sūtra reference to this ceremony is found in the Mantra-Brāhmaṇa: “As Prajāpati establishes the boundary of Aditi for great prosperity, so I part the hair of this woman and make her progeny live to a old age.” In the same Brāhmaṇa reference is also made in a simile between the Udumbara tree and a fertile woman: “This tree is fertile. Like it be fruitful etc”. In the Grhyaśūtras the saṁskāra is described at length and all the features are
fully developed. The religious intention of the saṃskāra was to bring about prosperity to the mother and long life to the unborn child. Physiological knowledge of the Indian was also responsible for instituting this rite. It had been established that from the fifth month of pregnancy the formation of the mind of the would be child begins. Therefore, the pregnant woman was required to take utmost care to facilitate this process, avoiding any physical shock to the foetus. This act was symbolically emphasized by parting her hair. Another purpose of the saṃskāra was to keep the pregnant woman in good cheer. To address her as Rākā or “fullmoon night”, Supeśā, or “of beautiful limbs” and parting and dressing the hair by the husband himself were methods used for it.

The Āsvalāyana has preserved this belief. It says, “Evil demons bent on sucking the blood, come to woman in the first pregnancy to devour the foetus. In order to remove them, the husband should invoke the goddess Śrī, as the lurking spirit leave the woman protected by her. These invisible cruel flesh-eaters catch hold of the woman in her first pregnancy and trouble her. Therefore, the ceremony named Śīmantonnayana is prescribed.”

The Grhyasūtras, the Smṛtis and the astrological works discuss the proper time of performing this saṃskāra. The Grhyasūtra favour the fourth or the fifth month of pregnancy: “In the fourth month of pregnancy the Śīmantonnayana (or parting of the hair) is performed”. The Smṛtis and the astrological books extend the period up to eight month or up to the birth of the child. Some writers are even more liberal. According to them, if delivery took place before this saṃskāra was performed, it was celebrated after the birth of the child, placing it on the lap of the mother or putting it into a box. The later periods indicate that the original sense of the
sāṁskāra was being lost and it was becoming a farce. In this particular sāṁskāra only the well being of a foetus was considered and none advocating the performance of this refers to protecting a male child.

Post Birth: Socialisation (Family Environs)

Not only were there pre birth rites to be performed, equal importance was given to the post birth sāṁskāras. 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 – especially the Western, it is nurtured in a family group comprising many members and is cared for by many of them. It is necessary, in order to understand the period of birth and infancy in ancient India, to look at the kind of the world into which the infant is born. The traditional pattern is the 'joint family', which has been in operation from early vedic times to the present. The industrial and political development of modern times is weakening it but so far not destroying it. It is based upon the patriarchal family system, with authority and inheritance passing through the male line. When a boy marries he brings his bride to his father's home, and the couple becomes a part of the joint family. Living in the house are his younger brothers and their families, his married sons and their families, and his unmarried sons and daughters. His sisters and married daughters have become members of their husband's families.

In ancient Indian history child lives within a world of such a family. Boys have considerable freedom to play in the streets and fields, but girls, especially those from better homes, are usually strictly circumscribed, living more or less within the house and courtyard, playing with members of the family or with approved neighbour's children. This, then, is the world of
people into which an Indian infant is born. It is necessary now to understand the social attitude and rites the birth of a child, the mother’s responsibility for the care of the child, the significance of being a female child, and the normal care and training of an infant after birth. It is not always possible to ascertain the chronological origins of some of these rites which are being enumerated here.

The Śaṁskāra of Childhood

(i) The Jātakarma (Birth Ceremonies)
The Jātakarma ceremony was to be performed at the birth of the child. Here the father touches and smells the child and utters benedictory mantras into its ears, expressing his wish that it may be endowed with long life (āyus) and intelligence. The child is then fed with honey and butter and is thereafter fed on the breast by the mother for the first time. The umbilical cord of the child is cut after this. General care is taken to ensure the safety of the mother and the child. Following Gṛhyasūtras, Manu also prescribes that before the navel-string is cut, the Jātakarma saṁskāra must be performed for a male child and while sacred formulas are being recited he must be fed with gold, honey and butter.¹²³ No distinction is specified as to whether any difference is to be made for a boy or a girl child.

(ii) The Nāmakaraṇa
The Nāmakaraṇa rite was to be performed on the tenth or twelfth day after the birth of the child when it is given a name. The question of naming is important according to some authorities, and certain broad rules had to be followed in order that the same may refer to the family, the community and the social class to which the person belongs. In Manu’s opinion for instance, the name given to the newborn baby should be such as to signify
his varṇa. Thus the name of a Brāhmaṇa should denote something auspicious and imply contentment; this last word is taken by some to mean, 'ending in sarman'. So again, the name of a Kṣatriya should denote power and imply his duty of protection. That of a Vaiśya should denote wealth and express prosperity. Lastly, a Śūdra’s name should denote something simple and humble and his duty of service. The names of women should be easy to pronounce; they should not imply anything dreadful, possess a plain and unambiguous meaning, and must be pleasing and auspicious, besides they should end in long vowels and contain a term of benediction. This indicates that this was to be performed for a girl child as well as for the boy child.

(iii) The Niṣkaramaṇa (First Outing)
The Niṣkaramaṇa ceremony is performed in the fourth month after the birth of the child’s. Here the child is as if, presented to the Sun; and thus its first contact with the greatest natural force that wields power over the world, as also its first contact with the world outside the home, to be ritually celebrated. This would need to be performed for both the boy and girl child.

(iv) The Anna-Prāśana (First Feeding)
The anna-prāśana (anna-boiled rice, cooked food; prāśana-eating) rite is performed in the sixth month after birth. The child is now fed with cooked food for the first time. Here the problems of the upkeep and maintenance of the growing body of the child occupies the minds of the parents. Here too this sarīṃskāra would need to be performed for the infant irrespective of the sex of the child.
(v) The Chūdākaraṇa (Tonsure)

The Chūdākaraṇa, or the first tonsure of the hair, for the sake of dharma, is performed in the first or the third year, or at any age according to the tradition in the family. This ceremony is perhaps intended to celebrate the child's introduction to the rules of bodily hygiene. That the sarṇskāra of the girl should be performed without mantras began as early as the sūtra period.

(vi) The Karnaṇvedha (Boring the Ears)

Karnaṇvedha is the piercing of the ear-lobes of the child. In this sarṇskāra the ears of the child are pierced. The piercing of the lobes of the child seems to be an ancient custom. It appears that it is an early custom of Āryans but it had not been given the status of sarṇskāra. The Karnaṇvedha sarṇskāra could be done in the seventh or eighth month. Its significance cannot be established.

Was There Female Infanticide?

Today, the most important aspect of the girl child is the fast declining male/female ratio in the country. The statistical figures of the census of India, 2001 have left the people aghast. One of the most important factors responsible for this is the sex determination tests being carried out. These are nothing short of female infanticide. The question arises has this phenomena of infanticide been passed down to us through history. The feeling of dejection and dissatisfaction at the birth of a daughter during the earlier periods was a fleeting one. As the thought turned to getting a son to provide for the future, daughters came to be looked upon as encumbrances and, however inconsistent it may seem, ceremonies were performed with the special object of avoiding the birth of a daughter as stated and established above. The eagerness for a son kept away all thought that
without a woman the race might become extinct. In the new and full moon sacrifices of the Taittirīya Samhitā, a ritual is specially instituted for avoiding the birth of a daughter. In fact, the Yajurveda has a reference to a custom of exposure of new-born daughters. It is now generally admitted by the Indian and European scholars that Weber has wrongly interpreted the passage as a custom of female infanticide because it merely refers to the traditional habit of Indian midwives of keeping the child aside on the ground if it was a daughter, and of lifting it up if it was a son. The passage has no reference to the abandonment of unwanted daughters.

The exposure of female children was one of the means by which daughters could be avoided. In course of the Soma sacrifice there are certain rituals in which the female child is left behind and the male is taken up: "They go to the final bath; they deposit the pots, but lift up (the vessels) for Vayu; therefore they deposit a daughter on birth, a son they lift up." This is referred to in the Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā and the Kāṭhaka Samhitā. Zimmer and Delbruck support the existence of the exposure of female children, whereas Bothlingk dissents on the ground that the custom meant only the disposal of a daughter in marriage. From the epics it is clear that the doctrine of non-violence was gaining ground. Thus in the society in which foetus-murder was considered to be a crime, there could be no possibility of infanticide of the female infant. There was no custom of infanticide of the baby girl and after little dissatisfaction they welcomed and treated the girl child as equally as a son. Hence girl was not considered inferior in strict sense of the term and the question of infanticide could not have arisen.

If female infanticide was not in vogue during the time of sarḥhitās and its subsequent literature, it would wrong to think that it would have
emerged during the time that followed it i.e. when the Śrītis were written. Śrīti writers have denounced infanticide vehemently. They says that the father who does not give his daughter in marriage at proper time commits the crime of killing an embryo as many times as her period of menstruation passes by without her having a husband. Thus in the society in which foetus-murder was considered to be a crime, there could be no possibility of killing of female infant.

If female infanticide had at all been practised, it must have been confined to a very small section of society. If the evil had been fairly common, Śrīti writers would certainly have denounced it very vehemently or atleast referred to it in some manner. When we note how eloquent they grow in condemning the conduct of a father who would accept bride-price for his daughter in marriage, we cannot but conclude that they would have consigned to the most dreadful hell those parents who were guilty of exposing their daughters at birth, because they were unwelcome. Śrīti writers regard the destruction of an embryo as the most heinous crime; the murder of a child born alive could not have escaped their thundering denunciation be it a boy or girl. So too would have been referred to by Kautilya who takes up crimes of various kinds and recommends punishments but we do not encounter the crime of infanticide in this treaties either.

**Daughter the Source of Anxiety**

No doubt, the birth of a daughter began to be considered as an unhappy event and a source of trouble to the family. People were not anxious for having a daughter. They craved for numerous sons but not for a single daughter. Daughter, though endowed with good qualities was a source of trouble even to kings and queens. Daughter was generally not greeted at
her birth, not because her father looked down upon her and hated her; rather his over tenderness and great affection for her made him feel that she would be a source of anxiety to him all her life. So it was his great concern for his daughter’s well-being that made him wish that no daughter be born to him. Society also expected a very high moral reactitude from a maiden. It treated the lapses of men with leniency but those of maidens were dealt with severity. In the age of the later Sarhhitās and the Brāhmaṇas also male progeny continued to be distinctly preferred to female ones. The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa declares that a daughter is a source of misery while a son is the saviour of the family. It further observes that while the son is the hope of the family, the daughter is the source of trouble to it.

The daughter in those days, as even now, was a source of anxiety; inasmuch as she was to be given away in marriage. Her future welfare and happiness depended entirely on the character and ability of her future husband. It was a great worry for the parents to find a suitable husband, obviously a more difficult task in an age when the daughter too may have had a voice in the matter. Still when the story part of the great epic was being written, various forms of marriages were prevalent. Adherence to some of these forms e.g. Gāndharva and Asura might have made this task easy and sometimes a source of income for parents. Marriage of the daughters was, nevertheless, an important and sacred duty of the father, more so in the didactic portions. Generally, a father only laments the birth of a daughter when he is unable to get an eligible match for her: “The being father to a daughter is misery to every one that seeks honour. O daughter, one does not know who shall ask for one’s daughter”. “Whenever may a daughter be conferred, a daughter stays, placing in uncertainly the three
races (the races respectively of her father, mother and husband) to which she is related".  

In the Śṛṭis daughter was a source of anxiety. The father was the real guardian and protector of the daughter as long as she was not married. When she comes of age, it was father’s duty to give her in marriage at the right time. If he failed in his duty he became an object of contempt. Giving his daughter in marriage at the right time was so important a part of the father’s duty that even a king had to spend some of his precious time in thinking over the problem of his daughter’s marriage. The statements of Śṛṭi writers clearly show that the question of the marriage of the daughter was to be considered very seriously. Moreover, her future welfare and happiness depended entirely on the character and ability of her husband.  

In the time of Buddhism, daughter was nothing but a source of anxiety to her parents. She was a disgrace and inauspicious to them, if they could not get her married. For the happiness in the other world the birth of a son to perform funeral rites was considered essential. It was only in these circumstances that she has been declared a source of anxiety.  

**Girls as Object of Affection**  
Human behaviour is not a biological inheritance but flows from interaction with and communion with the social group around. The latter plays an important role in the development of human personality. In order to meet the needs of the changing environment, the norms of social behaviour constantly keep changing and nowhere are these more markedly evidenced than in relation to the girl child as a daughter in the house.
These changes are reflected in literature, serving as it does, as a mirror of social mores at a given time.

The birth of a baby girl was by no means inauspicious as already established more so, as is believed to have been the case at a later age. The prayers in the Rgveda plead for a son, but there is no depreciation of a daughter. A girl was known by a number of names: Kanyā and Duhita (from which probably the English daughter is derived) were the most common. A hymn to Ushā, (dawn) depicts Kanyā as a growing girl: "Like a maid (kanyā) developing in body, O Goddess, thou goes to the Gods who wish what thou longest for." Kanyā, as explained by Sāyanachārya is a 'growing' and 'lovely' girl. Another word for a maiden, Kaninaka is defined by Yaska as 'lovely girl' but is also referred to by Sāyana or 'a lovely doll'. Later this word denoted the pupil of an eye, and it is perhaps from the affection felt for a girl that it acquired this meaning. The only child, a daughter, in the family was known as ‘Putrikā’. It was not a stigma for an only daughter to remain unmarried in her father’s house. A ‘Putrikā’ could perform the funeral rites of her father, even if she had married. But Duhita was the commonest word for a girl used in the Rgveda.

We have already seen how the passages, showing that the birth of a daughter was an unwelcome event, were a natural result of the greater anxiety which the parents felt for her well-being and happiness. Once the temporary feelings of disappointment was over, the family took as keen an interest in the daughter as it did for the son. On his return from a journey the father would recite a prayer for the welfare of his daughter just with the same solicitude as he did for the happiness of his son.

Goddess of fortune was regarded as residing in the person of the unmarried daughter; so she and not the unmarried boy, was regarded as
an object of good omen. Unmarried girls were, therefore, among the persons selected to receive Rāma on his return to Ayodhyā from his long exile and to offer him the coronation ablution (abhisheka). It is interesting to note that Rāma receives this important religious bath first at the hands of unmarried girls, and only then of his trusted generals and ministers.\textsuperscript{152}

The life of daughters and even adopted daughters at their parental homes proves that they were brought up with great care and affection, and were never to be displeased.\textsuperscript{153} Some fathers felt equal affection for the sons and daughters: “Some men think that father’s affection for his son is greater, other (think that father’s affection) for his daughter (is greater); but mine is equal”.\textsuperscript{154} The example of Devyānī indicates that sometimes fathers were so fond of their daughters that they even spoilt them. Such was the power of Devyānī over her father and the tenderness felt by him for her that the Devas felt that the affection for his daughter would gain them anything and so instruct Kacha to please her in order to gain the knowledge of Sanjīvīṇī from Śukrāchārya and he acts accordingly: “You can also adore Devyānī, the favourite daughter of that illustrious man. You are capable of conciliating them both. There is none else who can do it”. “You are sure to obtain that knowledge by gratifying Devyānī with your conduct, liberality, sweetness, and general behaviour”.\textsuperscript{155}

Manu also holds that daughter was the object of the highest tenderness and emotionally delicate so she was never to be displeased: “He shall look upon his slaves as his own shadow and his daughter as the respectable of highest affection, worried by them, he must patiently bear with such a worry”.\textsuperscript{156} Father should have equal affection for the sons and the daughters, rather greater kindness was to be shown to the daughter as she was physically more delicate. Manu makes every efforts to see the
position of the daughter elevated to its highest. He says that no house-holder should pick up any quarrel with her: "He must not quarrel with his parents, sisters daughters-in-law, son’s wives and brothers and slaves". 157

Further, Manu is very anxious about the well-being of the daughter. He says that the daughter should be kept well dressed and gracefully decked in ornaments and that she should be honoured and adorned by father and brother if they want prosperity in their homes: "Seeking many a blessing (i.e. God's gift) in life, her father, mother, husband, or husband’s younger brother shall maintain a bride with a respectful love, and give her ornaments for the decoration of her person". 158 "Women should (always) be adored by the husband, brother, father, kinsman, mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband's younger brother and the other relatives with ornaments, clothes and food". 159 He further says that if she is honoured, the gods rejoice, but when she is neglected and consequently feels unhappy then all rites and ceremonies done in the house bear no fruits. Where she grieves that family quickly perishes. But where she does not grieve, it ever prospers. Houses on which an unhonoured damsel pronounces a curse perish as if by magic: "(The deities smile on the family) where the females are honoured (held in respect); fruitless are the acts (in the family) where they are dishonoured". "Prosperity reigns supreme in the family where females do not grieve; the family, in which they grieve, suffers a speedy destruction". "Like a fiend-cursed home, utterly perisheth the house, which its daughters, through suffering mortifications, do but (sadly) imprecate". 160 All these attest to the fact that the life of daughter at her parental home was one of comfort and proves that she was brought up with great care and affection, and was never to be displeased.
The daughter also on her part did not fail to respond to the affection shown to her by her parents. She was sentimentally sympathetic, helping, loving and co-operative towards her parents. She preferred the lap of her parents even to the post of the chief queen. For any adversity that befell her father's family, she held herself responsible, and for this she even went to the extent of getting ready to burn her inauspicious body in fire.

A general antipathy towards women gradually evolved and since the time of the vedic period observations about women tended to become derogatory like woman's mind is ungovernable and her intellect has little weight. Woman's love is always fickle and her heart is like that of the hyena (Vrka), woman is evil personified and even a woman endowed with all virtues and qualities is for inferior to the worst or lowest of man: "verily Indra said that the mind of a woman is not to be controlled, he declared also that her intellect was small".¹⁶¹ "Urvasi: Die not, Pururavas, fall not, let not the hideous wolves devour thee. Female friendships do not exist, their hearts are the hearts of jackals".¹⁶² These uncomplementary comments cannot be brushed aside as light-hearted cynicism. They offer index to social attitude towards women that was taking root. Girl is placed on par with dice and drink and she is described as one of the major evils in human society. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa rank her as inferior even to a bad and evil man.¹⁶³

Yet an elevated place of the girl is apparent from the fact that seeing a woman occurs as a good omen in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad: "About this, there is this verse (mantra). If, while performing the rites for desired ends, the performance sees a woman in his dreams, he should know his rite to have borne fruit, from this vision in his dream-yea, from this vision in his dream".¹⁶⁴ She was not an unwanted baby. The Brhadāraṇyaka even
prescribes a rite for procuring a long-living and scholarly daughter as referred above. The ratio might differ, as there are rites for having three different kinds of sons as opposed to one daughter, but the desire to have a daughter was none the less present. Although, the fulfillment of a woman was in becoming the mother of a male child. It has been said that Prajāpati made woman to provide a firm abode for the seed of man. A pregnant woman was to be carefully nurtured as she nurtured the child within her. She was specially honoured on giving birth to a son. She was called Ilā and Maitrāvaruṇī and highly acclaimed for bearing a brave son. Her protection of her young had already become proverbial in the Praśna Upaniṣad.

Nowhere in the epics is the birth of a daughter considered on unhappy event: “There rose from the (sacrificial alter) a daughter, called Panchāli, who was blessed with good fortune, she was beautiful, her eyes were smiling and large.” Had it been so the custom of adopting daughters would not have existed at all, but the daughter adoption was frequent enough. Sītā, Kuntī, Śakuntalā and Pramadvarā were all adopted daughters. It may be argued, that Sītā, Śakuntalā and Pramadvarā, had just fallen to the lot of their adoptive fathers but they could have been easily disposed off to others by them just as King Uparichara gave away Satyavatī although she was gifted with beauty and possessed every virtue. The birth of a daughter was sometimes desired as the affection felt for her and the son-in-law was much greater than that felt for the son. The merits of ‘Kanya-dana’ as well as the worlds attained on a son being born to one’s daughter were factors that gave some importance to her birth. More over, the son was not absolutely necessary for performing the death rites of the ancestors. The brotherless daughter was known as putrikādharmiṇī which meant that her son was to inherit his maternal grand-
father's property and perform his funeral rites. Yayati attained heaven through the grace of his daughter's son even though he had sons. One who has no son is allowed to appoint his daughter, so that her son may perform his funeral rites and śrāddha: "If a sonless man marries his daughter to another on the stipulation that, 'son born of her womb shall do my śrāddhas and offer me oblations', that daughter is called a Putrika". Manu tells us that the great Dakṣa Prajāpati, the lord of all created beings, himself followed this rule and appointed all his daughters to give their sons into his family, in order to multiply his race: "In this way Putrikā (compacts) were created of yore for the increase of his progeny by the patriarch (lord of creatures) Dakṣa himself". Some passages do prove that daughters were considered as sons, and that they inherited wealth and kingdoms.

The son of an appointed daughter inherited the whole estate of the maternal grandfather. If a son is subsequently born to the maternal grandfather, both of them are to share equally in the estate: "In the event of the birth of one's son after the creation of the Putrikā that son and the son of the Putrikā daughter shall have equal shares in his estate, in as much as a female can not have the privileges of eldest born relation". The separate property of the mother, however, is shared by the unmarried daughter; the son of the appointed daughter has no share in it. A daughter who is not married till her father's death is to receive from each of her brothers, after the father's death, one-fourth of his share. There is no mention here as to whether it could be denied to a young daughter (0-16 years). Most likely not. Thus from the religious point of view as well as that of inheritance the son was not utterly indispensable.

On the contrary there are examples to prove that some people were eager to have daughters. For it was ordained that by performing śrāḍha on second day of the bright fortnight one got several daughters. According
to one passage the good results of visiting a certain holy place was getting a hundred daughters. As rewards for penances performed, bright and famous daughters were born. It was the general belief of society that the Goddess of wealth resided in maidens. Chastity was considered to be a perfect ornament of woman-kind. The maiden, as the personification of chastity was naturally thought to be propitious. Thus their presence was required in auspicious ceremonies like coronations as referred to earlier. They went out to welcome and to send off the distinguished guest. When the heroes went to battle, they touched the maiden along with other lucky objects.

The Smṛti writers provided for punishment where a maiden was deformed. Manu says, "The man who out of malice says a maiden 'she is not a maiden' shall be fined one hundred panas if he can not prove her blemish: "He, who out of spite, calls a virgin, unvirgin, shall be fined a hundred panas, on his failure, to sub-stantiate his statement". "If a man activated by hatred says of a girl, she is no maid, he is to be fined a hundred panas if he cannot prove her shame". We see that the personal right of a maiden not to be defamed was subject to the limitation that the right was not violated by a truthful imputation. Yājñavalkya also lays down the same rule, for he says that he who falsely blames a maiden is to be fined a hundred panas. The fine imposed by the king in such cases of defamation clearly shows that the violation of this right of the girl was treated as a crime.

Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards. Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers. The houses on which female relations,
not being duly honoured, pronounce a course, perish completely, as if destroyed by magic. Hence men who seek their own welfare, should always honour women on holidays and festivals with gifts of ornaments, clothes and (dainty) food.\textsuperscript{188} During the begging ceremony at the time of initiation it was the women of the house of whom the student was required to beg alms. Manu clearly says, "Let him first beg food of his mother, or of his sister, or of his own maternal aunt, or of some other female who will not disgrace him by a refusal".\textsuperscript{189}

To assure women's chastity, specially of higher classes, they were kept in seclusion and were not to be seen in public. Even Aśoka refers to separate apartments for women.\textsuperscript{190} Women of respectable classes who did not go out but had to work for living were to receive yarns from the weaving establishment through maid servants.\textsuperscript{191} Of course women of lower classes such as dancers, wandering minstrels, fishermen, fowlers, cowherds, vintners could move out in company of other men.

In the Buddhist literature the position of women had become better than it was in earlier times with a result that the birth of a female child was not considered so unwelcome an event.\textsuperscript{192} This age was, indeed, a wonderful, progressive, welfare age in the history of Indian culture and civilization, resplendent with new lights, new lives, new beauties, new enterprises, new successes, and will always remain a matter of great and justifiable pride and glory to us all. Specially, this was an age of immense inspiration for women, heralding the advent of another golden age and showing magnificently what heights women could reach and what treasures attain. Thus, the huge host of a very learned, very saintly, very benevolent, very courageous women of those days prove clearly the honourable place they had in society and the equal rights they enjoyed.\textsuperscript{193}
Women were highly regarded in Jain society. That is why it was prescribed that in emergencies like flood, fire or robbery, a woman must be rescued first. The Jain law did not believe in the spiritual indispensability of the son. It is argued that in the world, many men having sons are seen in the low position and begging for grains and sonless Tirthankaras are found to attain the five great acquisitions; their lotus feet are adornable by the gods of gods and they are possessed of insight into the three worlds. The attitude of the Jain texts towards the secular position of women was almost the same as in the preceding age. In household affairs, the position of Jain women did not undergo any distinct change; she continued to be a household drudge whose activities were confined mainly to the four walls of the house.

**Rights and Privileges**

Having studied and discussed the position of the girl child in the family, her socialization and assessing her position as a daughter it is necessary to consider, the general arrangements made for their protection, freedom of movement, and action. This will at once disclose to us the concern of the society for them and the steps it was taking for starting them off in life.

The attitude of the ancient societies towards women was conditioned by her various relationships with man as already evidenced. As a wife, a mother, a sister, a daughter and a daughter-in-law, she was respected and loved. For her centripetal qualities of nourishing, conserving, and inspiring she was an asset like the Brāhmaṇas, children and cows, and as such she received all protection, care and enjoyed various types of privileges from the beginning of her childhood. At the same time, being a weaker being, she was subjected to certain controls, restrictions and prohibitions.
The first and the foremost right of the daughter, while at her father's residence was to get sufficient protection from her parents, the king and the society. She being the personification of chastity and virginity was to be kept under protection like pious oblations to gods. The duty of protecting the daughter was primarily the responsibility of her father, who is described as protecting her like a precious gem.\(^{196}\)

The mother was also equally responsible for guarding her daughter. Even a widowed mother, though herself helpless did not shirk her duty of protecting her daughter and took proper steps in this direction: "she seeketh men as she who hath no brother, mounting her car, as't were together riches. Dawn, like a loving matron for her husband, smiling and well attired, un_masks her beauty."\(^{197}\) In the absence of the parents this responsibility was shouldered by her brother. If none of the guardians of the daughter was there to protect her it was the duty of the king to give her due protection like his own daughter and save her from any untoward incident. Even a sage leading a retired life felt it as his duty to protect a maiden who had fallen in the hands of criminals. When a maiden was in distress and there was none to protect her, it was the duty of any chivalrous man to protect her from the danger and give shelter to her.\(^{198}\)

The daughter claims her support from parents not for nothing, but for her devotion to them: "As she who in her parents' house is growing old, I pray to thee as Bhaga from the seat of all, Grant knowledge, mete it out and bring to it us here: give us the share wherewith thou makest people glad".\(^{199}\) They care for her as much as they do for their son; or it may be said – even more, as the father is found to worship the daughter (Kúmáří) as an emblem of virginity, as an emblem of purity, of tenderness, devotion, and what not.\(^{200}\)
A woman is supposed to be never able to take care of herself so that after her father's death she had to live under the guardship of her brother till her marriage, as otherwise she would go astray. Of such importance was the protection of a maiden that the kings were ordained, despite their multifarious duties, to protect them. "If the king does not take steps for his own safety and does not protect his subjects, the latter first meet with destruction which ultimately overtakes the king himself."^201 Perhaps this protection, which was a social duty of the king, was given to those maidens who were orphans. It was, however, the duty enjoined upon a father to protect his daughters: "In childhood, the father protects her, the husband protects her in youth. When she becomes old, her sons protect her. At no period of her life is woman free". 202 Yet it appears that they had also great independence in their father's homes. It is really surprising how Kunti could hide the fact of her pregnancy and if her parents knew about it perhaps they did not mind. R.S. Sharma holds that greater, promiscuity was permitted in society during that period. Although at another place the son of a maiden according to later didactic portions was considered a disgrace: "Pride destroys the prosperity of persons of little wit. A maiden, if she conceives, becomes stained. A Brāhmaṇa incurs reproach by remaining at home".203 Even in Kunti's case, it might have been so as she abandoned her child and has a sense of guilt throughout her life: "A twice-born ascetic named Durvāsās, who is full of anger, came to my father's house for begging alms I succeeded in pleasing him by the purity of my conduct and of my minds as also by refusing to notice the many wrongs he did".204 But there was in existence another social standard according to which one did not mind such incidents. Krishanā states that those conversant in scriptures recognized a Kānīna (Kānīna is a maiden's son), as the legitimate son of his mother's husband", "You, O Karṇa, know the eternal instruction of the
Vedas and you are fully conversant with all the subtleties of the holy books". "The two classes of sons called 'Kāṇīṇa' and 'Sahodha', which are begotten on a girl (before her marriage) have for their father, the man married by their mother – so it is said by people conversant with holy books". "You, O Karṇa, are born in that way and you are therefore morally the son of Pāndu; and according to the rulings of the holy books, come and be a king". 205 he was even ready to coronate Karṇa, in case he agreed; "Let the wives of kings and daughters of kings bring for your anointment (in the kingship). During the sixth period Draupadī too will come to you as to a husband". 206 This does not give legitimacy to Karṇa but also implies that chastity though valued for a maiden, loss of it did not write undue shu on her. Vyāsa, himself a 'Kāṇīṇa', does not deplore the circumstances of Karṇa's birth: "Thus addressed by Kunti, Vyasa, that foremost of all persons, said to her in reply, - blessed be you, all that you have said to me will happen". 207 From the conversation between Śarmishṭā and Devayānī we may well infer that Devayānī was only worried lest the father of Śarmishṭā's children turned out to be Yayāti, otherwise there was no restriction on the maidens and they could have 'Kāṇīṇa' son through Brāhmaṇa ṛṣis, without knowing their lineage. "O timid maiden, it is all right if that is the case. If you know the lineage, the name and the family of that Brahmaṇa, tell me I wish to hear them". "O lady of sweet smilies, that Rishi was as effulgent in asceticism and energy as the sun. Seeing him, I had no power of making these enquiries". 208 From the modern standard, however repugnant the custom may appear to be, it shows that the society then was a freer one. There was no downright or perpetual condemnation attached to any one for no fault of his own. The sins of parents were not visited upon the children and thus Vyāsa, a Kāṇīṇa was greatly revered.
Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that father's were always careless about the duty of protection of their daughter's virtue. In the Mahābhārata in another incident. Agni loved King Niśa's daughter and was accepted by her. One day in the guise of a Brāhmaṇa he was enjoying the pleasure of the maiden's company. The virtuous King on the discovery of the truth, punished the Brāhmaṇa according to the law: "It was said in the king Niśa's palace and in the houses of all (men) that the illustrious Agni wanted to marry that beautiful maiden; and he was (in fact) accepted by her". "One day when he (agni), assuming the form of a Brāhmaṇa, was enjoying at pleasure in the company of that handsome girl, he was discovered by the king. The virtuous monarch then ordered the Brāhmaṇa to be punished according to law". This clearly indicates that such relations were forbidden by law and protection was accorded. It was natural that such a symbol of purity and an object of affection was to be given sufficient protection by the family and society. Mitter has stated that the protection here means the protection from vice. This statement of Mitter coincides with the statement of Manu who ordained that maiden must particularly be guarded against evil inclinations, however trifling they may appear, for if she is not guarded, she will bring sorrow to her father's family: "Women should be especially protected from the slightest of corrupting influences (such as, a bad company etc.), since an unprotected woman aggrieves the two families (i.e., those of her father and husband)". Manu further says that the father's family goes to eternal death, if maiden is not well protected, because the character, family and self largely depend on her. It was, however, the duty enjoyed upon the king to protect the damsels in the absence of their fathers and other relatives: "By assiduously protecting his wife, a man protects (the purity of his) progeny and family, as well as his character, self, and virtue". According to Manu, king must take care of
those whose family is extinct: "So shall he protect the estates belonging to sterile or sonless women, to women who have not got any sapinda relation (and whose husbands are absent in distant countries, to widows, and to chaste but sickly wives".\(^{213}\) While commenting on Manu, Govindarāja\(^{214}\) has explained that the king should guard those maidens who have no protectors. In commenting on the Yājñavalkya Smṛti, Mitākṣarā says that until her marriage the father of the girl shall protect her against the doing of something prohibited and in the absence of her father and other relatives, it is duty of the king to give her proper protection: "A father should protect (a woman when she is) a maiden; a husband after she is married; and a son, in her old age; in the absence (of a legitimate protector) the kinsmen (should protect her); independence is not for womankind".\(^{215}\) Viṣṇu also holds the same view: "He shall administer punishment unto those who deserve it, proportionate to their guilt".\(^{216}\) So it is obvious that protection which was a social duty of the king, was given especially to those maiden who were orphans.

While responsibilities were placed on the guardians including the Kings certain duties were laid down for the girls as well. At another places Manu says that she must not seek to separate herself from her father, by leaving him she would make her own family contemptible: "She must not wish separation from her father, husband or sons; a woman living separate from these becomes condemnable in both families".\(^{217}\)

Where her right of self choice for a bridegroom is concerned she appears to have some right and independence. It is not a full freedom but is conditional one. Of course, these are a much later rules and the situation by then had changed drastically. If the father failed in his duty of giving his daughter in marriage at the right time she becomes free to choose her
husband. According to Manu, "Three years let a damsel wait, though she be marriageable, but after that time let her choose for herself a bridegroom of equal caste and rank". Here Manu does not allow the maiden to choose her husband from any castes as she likes. But this self-choice of maiden should fall upon a suitable person of equal caste. Kullūka\textsuperscript{219} says that she is to choose a man of equal caste. Manu further says, "If not given in marriage she herself seeks a husband, she incurs no guilt nor does he whom she weds".\textsuperscript{220} Vishṇu also holds the same view: "An unmarried woman, who passed three monthly courses, may choose a husband on the expiry of her third menstrual period".\textsuperscript{221} But Yājñavalkya and Nārada are silent on self-choice of maiden. They entrusted all responsibilities upon the father and denounced him if he failed to give his daughter in marriage at the right time. So far as Manu is concerned, we have already stated that he was in favour of the self-choice of maiden. Though there was no sin in such a self-choice yet it was not in keeping with the grace and modesty expected of a daughter. It was a right formally granted in law but seldom encouraged in actual practice. That is why Manu does not like to encourage self-choice on the part of the girl although the act is not totally forbidden for her. He is not in favour of allowing the daughter in such cases of self-choice to take way with her such ornaments as have been given to her by her parents or brothers, if she does so she is regarded as a thief: "A girl, who through her own endeavours has taken a husband, must not take away the ornaments, etc. given to her by her father, mother or brother, in as much as by so doing she will be guilty of theft".\textsuperscript{222} The analysis of the contents of Smṛtis and their commentators clearly shows that the protection of damsels and their dependence were in tended to prevent them from straying away into the path of vice.
In the Arthāśāstra, the precedence enjoyed by women in certain matters is clearly evidenced. A father is the guardian and protector of a daughter. He should marry her in a well-matched family, to a suitable husband. Chastity is the most desirable virtue of a daughter. If she transgresses social limits, it proved to be a headache for the father the fire in the form of sorrow burns him. The provision of protection was extended even to daughters of ganikās and rupādāsi. Female slaves were regarded as inviolable, and in case of childbirth both mother and infant earned their emancipation. Outrages on orphans were severely dealt with.

No discrimination was made between male and female progeny in a Buddhist family. The Buddha has even stated that a female child could prove to be a better offspring than a male child. That a daughter began to be adopted like sons in this period is evidenced here too. The idea of woman's independence was, quite inconceivable. In the Vinaya Piṭaka ten types of protection to woman have been described. Each of which is supposed to be under the protection, supervision and guidance of someone, who may be either the mother (māturakkhitā), or the father (piturakkhitā), or the brother (bhāturakkhitā), and so on. From another account, one is given to understand that after a girl was married, she was to be governed by the will of her in-laws and the parents lost every right upon her; when a married girl, who is not treated well in her husband's house, sends a message to her mother to call her back, the latter receives flat refusal to such proposals and finds herself a failure in rendering any help to her daughter. By the very nature of their sex their freedom was circumscribed, for they needed protection from possible dangers. Perhaps for the reason that a daughter had to be guarded more than a son, the former was not as welcome as the latter. Right thinking people, however,
were always there to exert their influence against such trends.\textsuperscript{229} The daughters got the same patronage and love in the family as the sons.\textsuperscript{230} In the Jain society women were highly regarded. That is why it was prescribed that in emergencies like flood, fire or robbery, a woman must be rescued first.\textsuperscript{231} There is however little evidence/data available in these texts for the reconstruction on this in a greater detail.

**Freedom Extended to the Girls**

Freedom is considered by all nations as a fundamental right of all human beings – men as well as women. Freedom exists when a person is free to do whatever he/she desires according to his/her wisdom and conscience. Being a person, women must have individual personality. It means that she should have something of personal experience and of personal life. That is, each woman must have her own moral, social and spiritual life.

To preserve the sanctity of life and dignity of woman as a person, her life should not be used as a means that should be treated as an end-in-itself. Therefore to use her as a tool is a moral offence. Equality is the basic human value. With out it, legal, social and economic justice is impossible. Equal treatment should be granted to all men and women without making any differentiation of sex even at their young ages. The principal of equality does not require that we deny the reality of the human condition. What it does require is that equal opportunity should be guaranteed to every person, so that he/she has the freedom and opportunity to achieve the maximum development of his or her physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual potentialities according to his or her capacity without any hindrance on the ground of race, caste, religion, sex, colour, language or on account of his or her social and economic position. It is explicit from this principle of equality that equal opportunity must be provided to girls as they are
'individual'. Inequality should not be imposed by any men or society while it has already been imposed by nature.

Each society has its own conventions and customs. And a society which provides equal customary rights to all men and women, can be considered socially high. A society which is based on such principles of equality of the sexes can be said to be the most cultured and civilized society, an egalitarian society. Now the question is whether these supposedly fundamental rights of freedom were available to women in vedic literature or was she treated differently in this regard.\textsuperscript{232}

At the dawn of the vedic age, in ancient India women had considerable freedom. Girls were educated like boys and had to pass through a period of brahmacharya (celibate life). 'The marriage of girls used to take place at the age of 16 or 17 year. Educated brides of this age had naturally an effective voice in the selection of their partners in life.\textsuperscript{233} Occasional love marriages, which eventually enjoyed the blessings of the parents, are also noted. Women moves freely in society, often even in the company of their lovers.\textsuperscript{234} In social and religious gatherings they occupied a prominent position. Women had absolute equality with men in the eyes of religion; they could perform ritual sacrifices independently and were not regarded as an impediment to religious pursuit.

At the samana or popular festival, common in vedic times, both men and women mixed freely. Descriptions of these happy gatherings often occur in the Rgveda in the form of similes but with no direct picture.\textsuperscript{235} All types of people met here. Sportsmen and horse racers, and both young and old women, who sought partners in life. The festival usually lasted all night or as long as 'ceremonial fires lasted'. The time was spent in recreation and relaxation. Women young and grown-up, are described as
decorating themselves to participate in it. Young women, especially unmarried girls, are described as utilizing this opportunity for meeting and conversing with strangers, this is reminiscent of the Greek festivals.\textsuperscript{236} The meetings were held in large open spaces and there were games of skill and competitions. Though the girls were free to talk to men they were not courtesans. Among western scholars, Pischel\textsuperscript{237} thinks it to be a popular festival or social gathering in which men and women took part.\textsuperscript{238} "With holy thoughts, the pious have thrown open doors fain for chariots in the gods' assembly.

Like two full mother-cows, who lick their younglings, like maidens for the gathering they adorn them.\textsuperscript{239} In this verse the word 'agru' is used which means a virgin. "Along the traces of the wind they hurry, they come to him as dames to a Samana.\textsuperscript{240} In the above, the word 'Yoshah', which stands for a woman, also means a girl, a maiden, a young woman and a wife, according to Monier Williams.\textsuperscript{241} It is therefore, evident that the festival was attended by women, young and old as also by you.

A description of the samana festival can be gathered clearly of how it was performed. At the center of this area was reserved a place where a fire was brunt, around which all people met. This indicates the time of the festival. It was possibly held in the winter season, so that a fire was necessary as in all cold climates to warm the people. Pischel thinks that the meeting was generally held at night, as he thinks that the fire is described as being alight until morning, when the gathering dispersed. But verse\textsuperscript{242} where the 'goddess' Ushā is described as the creator of samana, seems to imply that the festival began early in the morning, just at daybreak.

This seems to have been prevalent in the earliest days of the Rgvedic period, and must have continued for some time for a passage in
the tenth mandala of the Rgveda describes it as an ancient one, and although the festival continued to be celebrated, its scope was restricted, and women were later not allowed to join it freely: "From olden time the matron goes to feast and general sacrifice. Mother of Heroes, Indra's Queen, the rites ordainer is extolled. Supreme is Indra over all". More likely with the passage of time the young girls were no longer permitted to attend it any longer and restrictions began to be placed on a girl's movement in social gatherings.

The relative freedom allowed to women in the vedic period can be attributed to political and religious causes. Altekar held that, 'The general freedom and better status which women enjoyed in the vedic age were largely due to men being engrossed in the work of conquest and consolidation. Women used to take an active part in agriculture, and the manufacture of cloth, bows, arrows and other war material. They were thus useful members of society, and could not be therefore treated with an air of patronage or contempt'. Young women were permitted to express their likes and dislikes at the time of marriage. Since they moved freely in society and remained unmarried upto such an age, some love marriages were inevitable. For this the younger girls would need to mingle freely with boys. As grown ups, the women occupied an honoured position in the household and so they could move freely in family and society and took an intelligent part in public affairs.

As the Brāhmaṇas are mainly concerned with the ritualistic side of the sacrifice, they throw little light on the subject of our survey. During this period, religion and social life were so intermingled that one could not be distinguished from the other. Life expressed itself to a great extent through religious ceremonies.
Women are now forbidden to go to the assembly. This is mentioned both in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa and Maitrāyaṇī Sarñhitā. The Maitrāyaṇī Sarñhitā places a woman at par with dice and drink, and describes her as one of the major evils in human society. She is declared to be untruth in human society and is connected with Nirriti. Nirriti is the presiding deity of the Atharvaveda and spells are often pronounced to get rid of her influence. Taittirīya Sarñhitā and Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa rank her as inferior even to a bad man.

Yet even in these, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. So for an all-round development of human personality recreation is essential can be evidenced. Maiden were not exception to this. They, too, for their proper growth and development, physical and intellectual, needed recreation. Though the rights of freedom and honour enjoyed by women in the ancient period had gradually dwindled in the social sphere, yet what remained with them was not altogether insignificant. With the approval and permission of the father or the mother she could go the gardens for recreation, to tanks and rivers for taking bath, to attend festivals and fairs and to worship gods either in the company of her girl-friends or under the protection or reliable persons deputed by her father. They sometimes on the occasion of festivals and other ceremonies also presented dance on public stage.

The references, however, in the Rāmāyaṇa, in which a daughter is brought up with fond care by a father are numerous and very explicit. About Śitā it is said that she was fondly brought up, amidst all comforts in the house of her father and is shown as going out with friends. Unique is the case of king Kuśanābha who had as many as hundred daughters. They enjoyed themselves, dancing, singing and playing. This and the
evidence of Trinabindu's daughter, who freely visited lovely spots for sports in the company of her girl friends, show that there was no restriction in the family on the movement of a daughter. In fact, in a well-administered state maidens of noble birth, bedecked with ornaments, sporting and frolicking freely in the streets was a common sight. Moreover, the maidens were considered as harbingers of good luck and prosperity and their presence was held propitious on all occasions of social and religious importance were also not restricted: "They who put impediments in the path of Brāhmaṇas and kine and maidens, O Yudhiṣṭhira, have to sink in hell". They used to go to gardens for sports, and sometimes were courted by lovers when they were out for pleasure: "O ruler of men, Aṅgirasā's wife possessed good behaviour, beauty and accomplishments. The lady, then assuming the disguise". "Went to the fire. That charming lady thus spoke to him, O Agni, I am afflicted with desire; you should satisfy me". Mixed parties were arranged at Raivataka mountain and it was on her way back from such a party that Subhadrā was abducted: "And having walked round the hill, was returning towards Dwārkā. The son of Kuntī, struck by the arrows of the god of love, suddenly rushed towards that faultless Subhadrā and forcibly took her upon his chariot. There upon that best of men, having seized that lady of sweet-smiles, proceeded (in haste) on his golden car towards his own city".

The great independence exercised by maidens in shaping their own future and the loss of such independence due to gradually increasing parental control over the decision of the question of marriage. There were, however, some bold women like Śūrpanakhā, Ulūpi, Hidimbā, Gangā and Devayānī who took the initiative. "And bleeding profusely, the grim visaged Rākṣasī, lifting up her arms, and roaring, entered the mighty forest". "Do you not know that this dense forest is the abode of Rākṣasa. Here dwells
the wicked-minded Rākṣasa, named Hidimbā. "O King, there is a Naga, named Kaurava, born in the race of Airavata. I am his daughter, I am the Nāga maiden, named Ulūpi." Such exceptional cases may have been the result of bold individual temperament and not necessarily the rule. This, however, indicates the unusual freedom maidens had in selecting their partners to be dealt with in detail in the chapter on marriage.

One of the undoubted early references to the seclusion of women occurs in Pāṇini where they have been described as 'āsuryampaśyā' (who do not see the sun). This does not refer to the woman folk of ordinary status but to the royal ladies who were not allowed to come into the public gaze. The question to be considered is that can we conclude that such restrictions were being placed on the young girls as well or only when they had grown-up. The latter appears to be nearer the truth for the idea of chastity had become strong by this period. Even Aśoka refers to separate apartments for women. Women of respectable classes who did not go out but had to work for living were to receive yarns from the weaving establishment through maid servants: "And those women who do not stir out those living separately, widows, crippled women or maidens, who wish to earn their living, should be given work by sending his own female slaves to them with a view to support them." Of course women and the daughters of lower classes such as dancers, wandering minstrels, fishermen, fowlers, cowherds, vintners could move out in company of other girls and men. Women of lower castes enjoyed more freedom: "Accompanying a man on the way is no offence in the case of the women of dancers, watering minstrels, fishermen, fowlers, cowherds, vintners and others who give freedom to their women." Evidently, though there was no strict seclusion of women in the days of Kautilya, their free and unrestricted movements were no longer favoured. They occupied a
position of dignity and honour not only within the precincts of their homes, but also in the wider sphere of national life. He has prescribed very severe punishments (even whipping in public) for a woman who was found wandering at will, or engaging herself in amorous sports, drinking or doing such other unlawful things, in the face of an order to the contrary. A woman was not allowed to go anywhere or to carry on any transaction in the company of forbidden persons. Obviously such acts were not likely to be done by girls and yet they would be kept away from the public eye. But it does not mean that they were rigorously confined within the four walls at the house and secluded from all contact with the outside world.

Buddhist days were also happier ones for women, and due to the great encouragement they received from the Buddha's compassionate outlook towards all humanity. All human beings were equal and could attain Nirvāṇa if they so wished. The reaction against Brahmanism was complete until once again Brahmins some how came into power. But during the Buddha's time and the benevolent rule of Chandragupta, Aśoka and other benign emperors, women definitely regained a part of their lost freedom and status. Learning also was once again allowed to the weaker sex.

The idea of woman's independence was however, quite inconceivable. The liberality we come across is in the matter of spiritual and personal life. A woman had the option to lead a spiritual life according to her wishes or to get married and take up family life. But it does not appear that such a choice was freely exercised by her.

I. B. Horner has thus narrated the general condition of women in the Buddhist epoch: "The birth of girl-children was no longer met with open-eyed and loud-voiced despair; for girls had ceased to be despised and looked upon as encumbrances. They were now allowed a good deal of
liberty. Matrimony was not held before them as the end and aim of their existence, and they were not regarded as shameful if they did not marry; but if they did, they were neither hastened off to an early child-marriage, nor bound to accept the man of their parent's selection. Princes and ladies of high degree seem to have had some voice in the matter of choosing their husband.265 The freedom women had in the choice of life partner and joining the Samgha clearly indicates that they enjoyed appreciable personal liberty.266

Women in Jainism enjoyed a good deal of freedom also. They appeared in public without any restriction. They could go out to visit their friends and relatives, shrines, gatherings, and festivals.267

The above evidences and analysis brings out the position a girl child attained on her arrival into this world. This never remained static throughout the period of our study. Although she may not have shared an equal sense of belonging and desirability in relation to a boy child yet she was showered with attention, affection and certain rights for a greater part of the history.
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