CHAPTER III

SURVEY AND ANALYSIS OF SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES ON WOMEN AND SOCIETY

This chapter is an attempt at analyzing a cross section of studies carried out on women as a category, determined by various factors. The attempt is to discern factors involved in making women what they are and also the way they are summed up and depicted by sociologists. Given the heterogeneous nature of Indian Society, it is perhaps unrealistic to draw paradigms but an attempt will be made to construct a general picture of Indian women as they have been living out here lives, under different conditions and circumstances. This is the reason why studies of different regions and varying orientation will be given equal consideration. The chapter will thus be divided into various sections reflecting different aspects of women before arriving at any conclusions, regarding an Indian woman's motivation for survival, as also her role and status in a social environment which is largely male dominated and male centred. Rehana Ghadially has provided an important direction by taking into account diverse aspects of women's life style to show how women embody and represent the complexities of external systems.

Women And Society in the 40s

Since the focus on the study of women is in the decades between the 1940s and 1980s, it would be useful to take a look at
some socio-historical features of the period. In the decade of the 40s, Indian Society had assumed and imbibed complexities which defied characterization in general terms. External factors like colonialism had set into motion forces of integration on one level and disintegration on the other. A Society structured on traditional and age old institutions of religion, marriage and agrarianism was speedily being exposed though only in parts to western and modern thought and concepts. Indigenous political theories which had moulded Indian society as a heterogeneous entity had been reinterpreted, redefined and even replaced by western political theories for the expedience of Colonial rule. Such changes gradually became instrumental in restructuring institutionalized patterns of behaviour among members of dominant classes and communities. While forces of colonialism were being resisted and opposed through widespread mobilization, there was, at the same time, a marked tendency to adopt western values of modernity and emancipation from traditional taboos, inhibiting individual and social progress and development. The national movement was characterized by a struggle also for the education and emancipation of women. Traditional practices which manifested serious onslaught on the dignity of women were sought to be abolished. However, concepts of equality and progress percolated to classes of the ruling elite and their influence and benefit limited to such classes. The Indian elite constituted people with affluent background or easy access to affluence. This enabled them to travel, socialize and directly
imbibe western education and co-related values. While women, on the whole, were excluded from public enterprises, and they remained largely invisible. There were some women who were encouraged to transcend the confines of closed, sheltered, domestic units. Such women belonged exclusively to elite classes. Thus, western education and enlightenment became a class privilege for small pockets of women whose exposure to social privileges gave them entry into what was considered to be a man's world. It was this class of women who pioneered Indian English creative arts and other fields of socially useful work, not so much out of individual choice but more because of the circumstances, prevailing at the time. Women from this class also occupied some position of authority in the administration. Thus, the kind of social change ushered in by western colonialism, superficially touched only a section of women, making inroads into their personal lives, but the ultimate change seemed to be more in a shift of emphasis rather than any radical basic change.

In this context, Liddle and Joshi have observed the close relationship operating between class and gender. "Thus, if women emerged as individuals, their specific status is secondary to their being products of general social conditions at a particular juncture in Indian socio-history." There was a distinct movement from caste hierarchy to class hierarchy as a result of which privileges of the upper castes transferred themselves to the upper classes. In this process, daughters and later, wives
of upper castes acquired privileges of the upper classes of which they became a part. As a result of indigenous change, educated daughters of old privileged castes began to enter those areas of professional work which was considered respectable and compatible to their status. Therefore, though western culture acted as catalyst to the emancipation of women, it was not the sole determining factor. This change according to Liddle and Joshi was rather a part of the logic of the emerging class structure. "The new freedom, which women of the professional classes enjoy, is limited by the forms of male control which the class system, strengthens rather than dismantles". Women in India, so far, according to the above study, are assumed to have sought to resist limitations imposed upon them mainly because they have been able to draw upon a stock of cultural imagery, which represents women not as weak and passive but as endowed with power and energy. However, despite this cultural stock imagery, women have emerged as a suppressed lot, anchored to their multiple role sets and in some sections struggling to change their socio economic conditions but finding little or no support not only from male counterparts but often even from other women. Though a strong belief prevails that because India always had a female culture in which women inspired by Shakti Cults sought a meeting with males rather than a subordination to them, yet women by and large are not highly motivated to alter their suppressed position. Moreover, they are more or less willing to compromise with their subordinate position, assuming it to be the general
lot of women. Therefore, western culture which imparted on ideology of liberation to women of elite classes did little to change the status of female subordination to men. This is because British women too had failed to change their secondary status. Both societies were structured along class and high caste stratification which in turn rested on sexual hierarchy in which the male was the superior head and the female the lower being whose decision making power was also curtailed because of the nature of her duties. A study of the rise of the middle classes in a small town of Britain showed that the development of class was associated with the increased privatization of women, who gradually disappeared from public life and whose work became increasingly circumscribed and confined to the domestic sphere. In India, a similar process was observed, a process identified not as a consequence of colonialism but one which was discerned as an inherent aspect of on-going social change. Known as the process of 'Sanskritization', it alters the life style of those who had acquired a higher material status, indirectly affecting lives of women. "It immures them and changes the character of the husband wife relationship. Among the less Sanskritized "Low" castes, conjugal relations appear to be more perceptibly egalitarian than among the sanskritized high castes". While sanskritization imposed constraints on women, the process of westernization exposed women to a culture of Western Liberalism which inspired women of the elite upper class to move away from sanskritized values. In this context Srinivas observes that
"greater controls over women were due to an increase in high caste culture, whereas greater freedom for women was brought about with the adoption of western culture".  

Indian Society, in the middle of the twentieth century faced two distinct processes of internal and external social change which had direct bearing on the status of women. However, issues which concerned women were confined to women of elite classes and as such the same issues percolated to more broad based movements for change. "The Leadership of the women's movement, like that of the nationalist movement emerged from the urban English educated middle class. They were not the orthodox groups, with whom the British allied themselves, but the middle class consisting of government servants and professional people". As a result, a large number of the elite acquired a British culture which permeated into their own culture. Women of this class stood, as it a were, on the periphery of two diverse cultures, and the issues they were exposed to concerned their own lot even though they found widespread support. In this connection, Vina Mazumdar points out, "Widow remarriage, dowry, polygamy and property rights were predominantly the concerns of women in the higher castes and the middle classes. The Hindu women's Right to Property Act even succeeded in depriving some lower caste women of their customary right to the first husband's property on remarriage". While the gradual emergence of women's issues was linked with the felt needs of elitist women the British approach
to women's issues stimulated women's movements. The three major women's organizations which were set up between 1917 and 1927, were initiated mainly by British women. The pioneers', namely, Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, Dorothy Jinarjadasa and Lady Aberdeen, supported women's suffrage, for which cause they opposed the British government. Amongst the Indian women, it was Lady Tata who took up the cause of women. Thus, while attention was being given to the problems, of women, this attention, had its source in the limited, perhaps narrow based biases of a handful of women. However, their contribution to the general awareness achieved by similar sections of women helped the dual causes of nationalism and feminism.

The situation depicting the status of women, as it existed in the 40s, was however, hardly different in terms of change compared to what prevailed in the twenties. Yet, with the leadership provided by Mahatma Gandhi, Annie Besant and wives and daughters of other influential families, a small number of women become instrumental in initiating an organized women's movement.

As part of colonial restructuring British authorities introduced major laws liberalizing women's legal position between 1772 and 1947. "Personal law mainly comprised those areas which particularly affected women, such as marriage and inheritance, with each community following its own law which was usually a body of custom. The most restrictive texts prohibited women from owning family property apart from personal marriage gifts and
prescribed monogamous and indissoluble marriage, although men could be polygamous, but Custom provided exceptions to the constraints, particularly in South India. Amongst the lower castes, marriage was rarely considered indissoluble, and lack of property inhibited the development of detailed inheritance rules". Moreover, as Mazumdar explains further, "with the British policy of non interference in personal religious matters, western educated judges decided personal law on the basis of developing precedent which resulted in making personal law more stringent by imposing the moral constraints of upper caste women in the form of binding legal statute".

According to the observations made by Mazumdar, 1976 legal changes undertaken by the British had the effect of curbing low caste women's customary freedom and imposing new constraints, though new policies towards women helped the upper castes to loosen their constraints from their social domestic roles. Thus, British policies, in the long run, reaffirmed the suppressed conditions operating against women by making them more widely prevalent than they were. Those who transcended their closed life patterns did so at another cost, for they acquired, through western education, a critical perspective without the empowerment to change those patterns. The situation of educated women caught helplessly in traditional form of survival has been appropriately dealt with by some women novelists, who have themselves been products of urban Western education. Their characters and situations are representative of the new class of women. The
forties witnessed a variety of changes which had direct bearing on women of different strata. In many respects the new situation was somewhat ironical because it resulted in taking away normative rights of women and replacing them with a series of dependencies, impoverishing the lot of women on the whole. Among women of the upper strata, the degree of liberalization seemed to be in direct proportion to their objectification and alienation.

A report on the changes that affected the Nayars of Malabar in Kerala underlines the far reaching impact of new legal statutes. The report also reveals how the separation of sexuality from economic dependence empowers women with a greater degree of autonomy and control. The following observation highlights this nexus, while establishing accounts of systematic inroads made towards the subjugation of women.

"The Nayars represent a form of family organization in opposition to the patriarchal structure of the North Indian Brahmin family, where property is owned in common by men and inherited through the male line, and men have control over women's sexuality. In the Nayar family, property is owned in common by the men and women, who are in control of their own sexuality within certain broad limits. The separation of sexuality from subsistence is one of the most important features of the family structure for women: the people with whom the Nayars engage in sexual relationships are not the people on whom they depend for economic survival. As a result, there is no
basis for economic exploitation within the sexual relationship, nor does economic dependency provide a basis for sexual exploitation. There is no Sati, Purdah or female infanticide. It is also significant that in this region females outnumber males, in contrast to other regions of India, where lack of care, if not positive neglect of females is common". This form of family organization ensured female control over her resources, without any subjugation of the male. The report is significant in that it points to the relation between status of woman and family structure. However, this organization was generally viewed as dispossession of the males by the British administration and soon with support of orthodox Hindu Brahmins, the system was openly criticized. Change, thus, brought in its wake demolition of traditional organizations in which women exercised sexual and economic freedom. Soon after independence, the matrilineal form of family structure was destroyed by the government. The uniformity, prevalent patriarchal family structure survived through female subjugation: Land Reform and reform of personal law, supported by all political parties in Kerala was effective in dissolving matrilineal structure of the family. Such a situation indicates that even though the matrilineal structuring was confined to an extremely small section of people it was consciously eradicated on such tenuous grounds that it was not representative of the general norm of women's sexual and economic dependence on the husband, after marriage. Referring to the constitutional move against
matrilineal family organisation as Iravati Karve reports, "After Independence, some of the younger educated men were ashamed of their parents' relationship and saw their father as male concubines to their mothers. Today, the man is the breadwinner, the woman is expected to have only one male to look after his needs". It has been further maintained that the change in family structure was not the inevitable result of urbanization and industrialization, but the product of concerted legal and economic actions undertaken by the British with the support of patriarchal groups to eradicate a form of living which was at odds with their own.

It has been generally accepted that British Colonialism helped to reinforce greater subjugation of women within the patriarchal family, destroyed a system which ensured women's freedom, unknowingly imposed high caste restrictions onto lower caste women because of their consistent policy not to upset those orthodox groups who maintained control over rural area and collected large parts of revenue for them. While the administration instilled and legalized patriarchal ethos by de-recognising matrilineal systems in whatever isolated forms they existed, the liberating influence came from British women who were politically antagonized towards the British government. Thus, Indian women through their exposure to British women political activists, developed a consciousness which aligned them with broader issues of rights and emancipation. Their own right
to vote struck a common cause with the goals of nationalism. Women's suffrage was first raised by the Women's Indian Association in 1917. Even though Indian women were enfranchised before British women, the actual effect was quite different from the apparent one. Indian nationalists, i.e. the men gave their full support to women's suffrage, because it helped the nationalist cause, since any increase in Indian political representation was likely to be unfavourable to the British. However, on the level of personal role and status, Indian women were not able to get necessary support. Thus the situation in which Indian women found themselves, was beset with contradictions. While on the one hand, they were considered politically in a more advantageous position, on the other, they were deprived of basic rights of choice, education, work, marriage and treated above all like chattel, with the onus of supporting a family lying very often, on them. Those who articulated the need for change laid greater emphasis on the need to change or reform personal law. Joshi points out, "The demand for a Hindu Code reforming areas of Personal law such as marriage, divorce and inheritance was initiated by the All India Women's Conference in 1934. The changes to women's position embodied in the Hindu Code provoked opposition which highlighted contradictions among nationalist men. They supported the principle of sexual equality and its implementation through women's suffrage, which undermined Britain's position of power. But they opposed the implementation of the principle in marriage
and inheritance, which threatened their own privileges as men in the "family". In 1943, the issue came before the Legislative Assembly, who commissioned a draft Hindu Code. The draft code gave a widow the same share as a son in the husband's property and gave a daughter half a son's share; polygamy was banned, inter-caste marriage legalized and some divorce made possible. An agreement was reached on political and economic issues (such as suffrage and employment) but not on domestic issues (such as marriage, and inheritance) with the result that the clause forbidding discriminatory marriage and inheritance laws was excluded from the constitution. The statement that, "The state shall endeavour to secure that marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and shall be maintained through mutual cooperation, with equal rights of husband and wife as a basis", was removed from the code and did not reappear.

The 1940's witnessed significant changes in the legal structure relating to personal law, disempowering women over matters affecting their status by reinforcing patriarchal norms. The code brought out differences within women's organizations as also in the nationalist movement, over the woman's question. In this context, it has been observed, "Opposition to changes in personal law was strenuous amongst the more conservative quarters within congress and the Assembly. When it came to implementing the principle of sexual equality in domestic arena, many nationalist men were forced to admit that whilst they were determined to resist national subordination, they did not want to
forgo their domination of women". Nationalism, therefore, took on different meanings for men and women. The change of government did not have any impact on the personal lives of women who continued living under patriarchal norms, even though, it was envisaged by those women who spearheaded the freedom movement along with men, that the lot of women would improve once freedom was ushered in. However, Indian independence did not have any impact on the traditional systems, under which women laboured. This is substantiated by the observation that since patriarchal forms of family, were an ideal norm, it was not incidental that the resistance encountered by women's movement came in personal areas of marriage and inheritance in the Hindu code and the guarantee of domestic equality in the Constitution. "Equality in the areas of politics and employment was granted, but it was precisely the area which characterizes women's subordination, the very feature which distinguishes gender oppression from other forms, namely in personal, domestic, sexual and family relations, that the men resisted in conceding their privilege". 16

The situation in which women found themselves during the 1940's was, in many ways, a landmark because it showed two directions:

a) Gender based issues, specific to women, did not receive the necessary attention when linked with broad national issues. Besides being side stepped, some aspects were completely squashed, because they directly affected male privileges.
b) Upper class nature of women's issues, took away customary, unquestioned privileges of lower caste women and ultimately reinforced greater subjugation to male domination.

The situation of the time can best be summed up as one replete with contradictions, with nominal gains and ultimate losses moving as it were, antithetically with different sections of women either totally alienated, or disillusioned or making compromises, like placing the issue of nationalism above that of women's status, believing that after Independence, the constitution will look after women's rights. Given the diversity of Indian culture, and the heterogenity of norms operating in various subcultures, it is, unscientific to use blanket descriptions of women's status, for instance, "The lot of Indian women improved with independence", or "the lot of women deteriorated further" because personal law gradually was giving way to constitutional statutes. Moreover, the process of Sanskritization showed that the aspirations of social elevation and mobility entailed greater subjugation to male dominance which, in the given context was evidently acceptable, because it was considered to be an inherent feature of privileged classes. The Social situation of the period characterized by various trends manifested itself in the rise of a new class. It was through the middle class created by the Britishers' need for educated Indians, that the status of women especially the urban women, became visibly different, with more and more daughters of
middle class families enrolled in schools and gradually in
colleges. However, the impact of education on girls was not
revolutionary, because women continued to conform to traditional
roles of wives and mothers. Education was considered more often
an embellishment for marriage which became the pivotal activity
to which women's interest was mentally directed. Thus,
education, as part of middle-class privileges for women had
contradicting effects on the position of women. Structures on
women's activities, similar to those prevalent amongst the urban
elite were also imposed on women of the middle class. It was
perhaps through such contradictions that a new consciousness,
confined to a small percentage, began to be felt while at the
same time more and more women fell into gilded traps of so-called
domestic bliss. It was again through the middle class that
women's enslavement to domestic chores coupled with wage earning
occupations, came to be identified as a violation of women's
rights. Kamala Bhasin, 1978 has the following observation of
middle class women of Chandigarh: "There has been some
improvement because of various social and economic factors, but
even today, the majority of women live in perpetual subservience,
self denial and self sacrifice". It has also been observed
that despite the fact that the number of women taking outside
employment increases towards the top of the occupational and
educational hierarchy, the vast majority of educated middle class
women are still confined to domestic activities. By far the
large proportion of employed women occurs in the lowest
occupational class. It is further suggested that the class structure, rather than destroying gender divisions within the caste system, may be building upon them, whilst changing their forms. The other effect was that new economic opportunities became available for some women of the middle class, especially in the fields of medicine and teaching in response to the needs of women of upper castes. Independence widened opportunities for middle class women still further, especially in government service and public sector industry ... so the rise of the middle class, combined with the continued segregation of the sexes, provided opportunities for women from the more liberal families of the class to enter professional occupations. Evidently, factors like British attitude to education, the nationalist movement, the trauma of partition accounted for women from middle classes to seek employment opportunities and earn a certain degree of independence from male dominion. However, employment and professional occupation did little to shake off the low esteem and secondary status of women because of patriarchal ideology and family structures, which required male heirs for inheritance, religious rituals and care of elders. The dominant influence of such factors left girls of upper and middle class families with no choice but to be preoccupied with marriage and conform to socialized roles of wife, housewife and mother. A conspicuous deviation from socialized roles forms an extremely mild, though, socially important trend in a small proportion of women. Moreover, contrary to the expectations of women in the
van guard, modernization, westernization and education were inclined to perpetuate gender division mainly because of patriarchal ideology.

Studies conducted on the status of women under colonial conditions have shown that colonisers saw women in non western societies as oppressed and servile creatures, beasts of burden and chattel who could be bought and sold, eventually to be liberated by the civilizing influences of western progress. This perspective caused greater exploitation and suppression of women, giving greater impetus to practices like prostitution. In this context, it has been observed, "As with the origin of exploitation itself, the imposition of capitalist exploitation linked the subjugation of people generally with the special subjugation of women". 18

It may thus be concluded that the overall effects of Colonialization were detrimental to women, a situation they did not accept passively. It was inevitable that antagonism between the sexes should develop and that in a short term perspective, the interests of women and men would not always coincide.

The study of India 19, on the whole, suggests that women's subservience was reinforced, especially of those women who through Sanskritization moved into the higher classes. Women, from protected, privileged classes moved towards middle classes and through exposure to education and public work spheres
underwent newer experiences but their roles as mothers, daughters-in-law and monogamous wives, remained unchanged.

Evans Pritchard's study, 1940 of non western cultures indicates women's subservience to men as part of a natural order of things. His political message as it emerges through the conclusion drawn from his study is that the problems of sexual inequality as also of other forms of inequality cannot be solved by an insistence on absolute equality, but rather by recognition of differences, exercise of charity and acknowledgment of authority. The so called natural order of things was acceptable and unquestioned by both men and women in the Indian society, till experience of sexual discrimination began to be articulated. However, most cross cultural studies, Meillassoux, (1960) Ortner, (1974) recognize the reproductive contribution of women, childbearing and/or childrearing as decisive in confining women to a supposedly less prestigious sphere of activities than that of men.

By making a survey of the decade of the 40's, various forms of suppression and exclusion from key public spheres together with a growing consciousness among women of their real status, becomes significant in this study of women and society. Some studies conducted by the second generation sociologists writers, after Indian Independence are based on reminisceness of women who were directly/or indirectly involved in the freedom struggle. Mrinal Pande's study of post Independent Indian women has as its
starting point, the reflections of her grandmother, who recalls her own refusal of active participation in the freedom struggle. "If, after marching with Swaraji men, I still have to come home and boil Kitchri for everyone, this march is not for me". It is an awareness of this level which underlines the contradictions in the psyche of many women of the time. At the same time, an observation, such as the above, also reflects, the co-existence of feudal forms of existence and identification with social causes that lie beyond the traditional confines of women. The situation also led to numerous cases of frustrated men and isolated women. Pande observes, "I began to see the profound historical changes and the terrible social convolutions which she (grandmother) must have faced and which made her into the bundle of contradictions that she had become. Feudal India became independent in her time. The Princely states wherein she had grown up, were parcelled off; offices and pensions were dissolved and women like her were left to fend for themselves while dejected men took to drinking". Such a situation gradually became more and more prevalent, where women, due to circumstances created either by external factors or by the waywardness of husbands were left to fend for themselves. Thus, the onus of survival and helping others to survive is often left entirely to women. The situation also finds frequent representation in works of Indian English Fiction of a later decade.

Generalizing the alienation and isolation of women, it is further observed, "Overwhelmingly and throughout history, women
have inhabited a world that warriors (men) either just leave behind, or arrive at only to destroy and loot". The absence of women from this group and men's hatred or contempt for anything remotely female, is in common with the observation of other feminists who have shown how, from time to time women are left merely to manage what has been abandoned or left in disarray. In a number of cases, women receive support from one another which creates a certain degree of solidarity and eases survival. Though, this did not reduce the degree of male dominance or exploitation, it made survival possible.

Questions have often been raised as to why the feminist movement in India has its basis among urban women of a particular class and whether the urbanization of this movement has not moved it away from causes that really matter and from women who really need help? The really poor and oppressed women of the working classes in India are far more likely to suffer discrimination and oppression at home and in the place of work, and that they would also be most defiant of authority and open to change in the status quo, having been its worst victims. Yet, it was not this group of women which articulated women's issues, even though they participated in political struggles, picketing against liquor and imported cloth and then marching to jails. Feminism in India as an ideology came most naturally to the educated upper/middle class women, who were the first to experience (and the only ones who had the capacity to articulate events that were radicalizing
for women, such as joining the organized sector as (1) salaried workers and discovering how it actually treats even the best qualified women. (2) Marrying educated young men with radical ideas from educated and liberal Indian families, and discovering that even there, marriage is not exactly a partnership, let alone an equal one. (3) Having children while working and discovering the problems and conditions related to maternity rights. The denial of basic rights to working women highlights the contradictions prevailing in a society which worships fertility and the mother goddess and exhibits that veneration as central to the cultural norms (4) The middle class salaried woman finds herself being constantly marginalized.

The study of feminism and the Indian middle class women points to the rationale of the beginnings of the movement in the middle classes as also the disillusionments and frustrations of this very section of women.

The historical cultural background of India during the forties continuing into the fifties provided the necessary impetus to organize around women's issues by making them specific. The upper class exposure to education created a gradually increasing number of women well acquainted with western literatures, philosophy and history. This knowledge, combined with widely prevalent emphasis on social reform created the base for viewing women-related issues critically. However, this also resulted in the isolation of middle class feminists. This
isolation prevailed on two levels (a) Due to lack of support from men and (b) due to divisions among women themselves regarding the nature of issues, as also due to their identification with traditional social values. When issues were taken up, they revealed the basic pattern of Indian society and the power relationships at home and work place.

Marriage - Institution and Norm

The institution of Marriage is synonymous with the lives of Indian women as one learns from socio-literary studies conducted on women. The joys, the pains and the inevitability associated with marriage have been articulated in various forms. A popular marriage song, cross cutting different communities, is representative of typical social attitudes and a common emotion that hold women together, where marriage is concerned "Why, O father have you given your palace to my brothers, but married me to a foreigner? Why have you married and banished me so far away? Are we, fragrant buds of your garden grown only to be given away, one day?" The preceding lines, while questioning the basic principles of marriage also question the basic rights of women. Yet marriage emerges as an insight into the most poignant reality of Indian society and what increases its poignancy is the stamp of permanence which it has acquired. Rituals of 'Kanyaddan', 'Doli', 'Vidai', 'Ruksat' of the giving away of daughter ensure the transfer of a daughter to her rightful owner. The following analysis of marriage through various
studies already conducted brings out the tenacious way in which marriage arrests the psyche of individuals, women, and society, while a subsequent chapter based on an empirical study of women and society brings out some shades of differences. Most of the studies under review here entail, descriptions of marriage ceremonies and rituals, roles and duties of affiliated family and community members, without much emphasis on attitudinal changes if any. There are also detailed accounts of gifts and endowments made at the time of marriage and what is highlighted is that the central and most crucial aspect of marriage is the transaction of the bride only between males - the giver is the father and the receiver is the groom. This process of exchange from one male to another depicts marriage, as an arrangement between males to further their interests, ensuring control, authority and sexual division of labour.

Studies of the social status of women in India may be classified according to the regions and communities they span and/or the nature of their investigation. While most studies\(^\text{22}\) are based on deriving conclusions from data collected on different stages of women's 'lives' others\(^\text{23}\) have a more general perspective drawing associations between status and system. While different approaches underline different aspects, identifying them either as problems or inherent factors, the overall complexion of women's situation is generally described as sordid. In a survey study of the History of Hindu womanhood,
Kamala Gupta, explains how the status of women has been degenerative because of women's complete economic and financial dependence which is ensured through the institution of marriage. "Manu treated women as caged birds in the household and regarded them as unworthy of sharing the serious responsibilities of men. Even in this limited sphere, a Hindu woman was not always an absolute mistress as in the Vedic Period." Through the practice of polygamy and patronage to institutions like the Harem during early and middle eighteenth century under the Hindu Rajas, the role and development of women was shown as severely circumscribed. Further, women were forced to lead cloistered lives to make them suitable for marriage or else they were nurtured for sexual fulfilment. Educational opportunities of development for women suffered greatly due to early marriage and the rigid Purdah system. Seclusion and confinement to domestic lives considerably restricted the accomplishments of women. However, Gupta indicates that women who gradually acquired the appellation of 'ladies', belonging to economically better off classes, received education under private tutors. But, in their case too, accomplishments were limited to serving aesthetic functions such as those which would be productive for marriage house keeping and raising a family. Referring to the low status of women clinched by their marriage, Sheila Ortner, 1988 explains, that the secondary status of women in society is one of the true universals a pan-cultural fact, established through marriage. In this context, Ortner poses the question, "What
could be common to every culture such that all cultures place a lower value on women? Women everywhere must be associated with something which every culture devalues. All cultures recognize and make a distinction between human society and the natural world. Culture attempts to control and transcend nature, to use it for its own purposes. Culture is therefore superior to the natural world and seeks to mark out or 'socialize' nature, in order to negotiate and maintain relations between society and the forces and conditions of the environment". The suggestions may be applied to the Indian society in order to explain differences in status of women attributed to different cultural factors. For instance, the position of Hindu women varied according to changes in society from time to time. Polygamy and prostitution resulted in lowering the age of marriage, whereas threats from aggressors further debilitated the legal rights which women possessed. Moreover, with the entrenchment of social tenets such as those propagated through Manu Smriti, attitudes to women changed, reducing them to purely functional roles realized through marriage. Women were, therefore, relegated to a strictly delimited category by stating a 'natural' association of women with children and the family.

Since women are confined to the domestic context, their main sphere of activity becomes intra and inter familial relations, as opposed to men, who operate through their women, as it were in the public and political domain of social life. Behavioural
taboos and restrictions, are sanctioned through the concept of pollution which women face at the time of menstruation and childbirth. When women themselves imbibe notions of pollution vis-a-vis their own bodies, they tend to degenerate themselves further in comparison to men. Thus, the category or construct 'woman' takes on a specific dimensions which perpetuates itself through marriage.

However, at this point it is important to consider the reasons, why for a long time, sexual inequality was not considered to be an issue, but continued to be an inherent feature of the social structure. One of the reasons could be that different social activities based on sexual differences were not viewed as manifestations of sexual inequality. Marriage was thus looked upon, not as an institution structured on hierarchical positions of superiority and inferiority but rather as a structure based on co-ordinating activities.

For instance, Andre Beteille, 1977 does not conceive of inequality between men and women. He states, "There are two major manifestations of inequality in contemporary societies... property and social class and race". Other Sociologists, however, have been influenced to a large extent by the feminist approach to social reality. Britten and Heath, 1983 conclude that the status of married women makes a significant contribution to the position of the family in the social system. Countering Beteille's stand, Goldthorpe argues that sexual inequality
means that wives are dependent upon their husbands for the determination of their life chances and that the paid employment of wives has little impact on their situation. Both the ideology of marriage and the institution are crucial determinants with regard to the status of women, as it also decides the kind of occupation, paid or otherwise that women are either sanctioned to take on or compelled to resort to because of the sustenance that it provides. Marriage, apparently poses as one of the most obstructive factors in the course of a woman's development. Surveys of women and education in India reveal that for a large number of women, education posed merely a stop gap till marriage, and this at a time when education became more readily available to women, especially in urban areas.

In an attempt to study, sexual inequality, reinforced through arranged marriages, Patricia Caplan focuses on the upper class women of a South Indian City to make some important revelations. One of the conclusions drawn is that arranged marriages tend to perpetuate sexual inequality. Caplan has also pointed to the greater risk which women face on account of marriage because of childbirth which escalates the rate of maternal mortality. This in turn leads to a tendency of neglecting female children who grow up with greater handicaps or risk factors. Marriage determines the specificity of a woman's role in the family - service to the husband and bringing forth male progeny. The underlying irony of the status of a married woman is that she is the most deprived member of the family and
receives the least nourishment in terms of the calorie intake. This neglect is also due to the custom of 'sequential feeding' (Dandekar, 1975). Women, who have usually processed and cooked the food, and in many rural areas helped to grow and harvest it eat after the men (and sometimes after the children) whatever is left over.

Various studies (Allen, 1982; Fuller 1980; Wadley 1975; 1980) have reviewed marriage as a universal norm in Indian society to the extent that even the relativity newer classes like the urban middle and upper class urban families are no exception, to this norm. There are various reasons for this – one is the fact that most women are economically dependent and therefore, could not choose to remain unmarried, except in the case of a very tiny minority. In the course of reviewing marriage in the Indian society, it is important to hold back generalizations because of diverse communal ideologies. But the most widely prevalent ideology is that of female sexuality in Hinduism, which believes that a woman's sexuality is dangerous unless it is controlled by a male. The underlying assumption is that women's power (Shakti) must be 'tamed' and then regulated into useful purposes, namely, the bearing of children, particularly sons.

The life cycle of Indian women shows a considerable contrast between their roles as wife and mother. The position of a wife is one of subordination, that of a mother is much more powerful. Observations and investigations show that it is through her
status as a mother that a woman is able to redeem her position as wife. As a mother, she controls the socialization of children, the running of the household and later her daughter in law. This pattern is not peculiar to middle class urban women. It is deeply embedded in Hindu thought and shows little sign of change in an urban middle class environment. It is also pointed out that motherhood is deified not fatherhood; mothers are seen as strong and powerful. In the sacred scriptures of the Shastras, it is said that the father is a hundred times more venerable than the teacher and the mother a thousand times more venerable than the father.

"There is no shelter like the mother. There is no refuge like her. There is no defence better than her. There could be no one dearer than her". Describing the mother in such eulogized terms vests her with a certain degree of diversity which makes her role socially necessary and coveted. A woman’s own ideal is a woman, who is the mother of children, especially sons, who are grown up and married with children of their own, because such a woman, if she retains her physical and mental health, command respect and allegiance within and outside the family.

Since the mid twentieth century was almost a paradoxical period in Indian society when the past and the present, the indigenous and the alien were intertwined, as it were, in an effort to merge and yet seek or retain respective identities, it becomes important to look at the socio cultural trends which
affected marriage and the position of women in Britain. Trends affecting women in England were inclined to be influential, since women of the educated, upper class were exposed to such trends. "A significant development for mid nineteenth century England, significant also for the Indian society was the rise of the new middle classes", whose consumption of food, furniture, china and other luxuries increased rapidly, as did their numbers of servants. The new middle classes rapidly developed their own culture, just as they have done in India, and much of this cultural production was the work of women. An important aspect of the culture of the middle classes was based on an ideology of domesticity for women, facilitated by the separation of the home from the work place, and the increasing confinement of women of this class.... An idealized view of home developed, described in terms like, "a place apart, a walled garden, in which certain virtues too easily crushed by modern life could be preserved; or a temple of purity a heaven of peace in a hostile world." However, it must be noted that married middle class women took up only selective occupations, considered respectable at the time, i.e. in the forties and continue to be employed largely in what is today referred to as traditional occupations.

Studies which have attempted to investigate married women's position vis-a-vis, economic and social development in the Indian society have found that despite assumptions, there is no correlation between a married woman's status and development. It is
observed, "Those who suggest that women's status improves with economic development, fail to take into account, the widespread structures of patriarchy, which keeps women in subordinate positions".\footnote{32} Despite the variety of roles a married woman performs, she is still regarded a biologically reproductive entity, rather than socially productive.

A survey of large communities of Indian society reflects the value attached to marriage and the position of married women. The common point between various ideologies revolves around duties ascribed to a woman by divine ordinance and how she is required to fulfil those duties in accordance with established social norms. Deviation often leads to various forms of severe punishment.

a) For women of Christian community, the Roman Catholic Church has played a major role in reinforcing and perpetuating the subordinate position of women by advocating stoic behaviour. The major aspects of catholicism affecting women include a glorification of motherhood and female suffering, personified in the image of the Virgin Mary and an encouragement to accept one's lot on earth in preparation for a better life in heaven. Women are expected to be guardians of faith, virtue and moral order, including among other things the silent endurance of unhappy marriages and financial penury. The power to exercise choice is strictly curtailed because of strict normative gender role systems. Most are brought up with the idea that their main role
is to become mothers and to give birth to large numbers of children, usually all those that "God Wills". Moreover, legal marriage is regarded as ideal, which curtails further free choices that women may want to exercise. There are only minor variations in the attitudes vis-a-vis marriage, and most can be generalized as arrangements between males. In some cases, free unions and matrilocal residence tend to prevail, but they are more or less outside the legal frame.

b) Under Islam, the division of gender roles is extremely pronounced. Women are not only segregated from men, but they are also frequently subject to seclusion or purdah. Fatima Mernissi, 1985 suggests that rigid control of Muslim women stems from a conception of women, that is markedly different from that of the west. "In the west, women's inferiority' has been tied to an idea that they are sexually passive, physically weak and in need of protection from men. Muslim women, on the other hand, are regarded as extremely powerful, capable of making men lose their faith leading to disorder or chaos provoked by sexual attraction and threatening in terms of their potential to divert men's devotion from Allah".33

According to Islamic faith, marriage is compulsory. Polygamy (upto four wives) is permitted and practised in many muslim societies, though, with the proviso that a man treats his wives equally. Polygamy is an extremely significant variable in the equation of female subordination and male privilege. Married
women often see their co-wives as rivals, thus preventing the development of any genuine female solidarity. Polygamy also allows man to fulfil his sexual appetite, at the same time as distracting from the formation of strong conjugal bonds with individual women. Inequality within marriage is institutionalized by Islam law, assigning women a low status.

c) Hindu religion has a ambivalent attitude towards women, with the dominant ethos being "derogatory and unjust" and as Maitraye Mukhopadhyay (1984) explains, "Women, especially those married, have absolutely no worth in themselves. The reason for this ambivalence derives on the one hand from the fact that Hindus can deify and worship the Female Principle (Shakti) but on the other hand, despite the real flesh and blood women".

d) Buddhism, like other popular religions of the Indian society ascribes special importance to marriage for women, with particular emphasis on socialization towards marriage and household duties.

In an attempt to compute the status of women in South East Asia, Toni Seager and Ann Olson, 1986 have mapped women's status, for the world as a whole, using a compound index comprising women's literacy, suffrage, contraceptive use, paid work and life expectancy on a scale of 0 - 100. According to the scale, marriage is ascribed with the highest degree of popularity and women's status appears in inverse relation to marriage. The earlier the age at marriage, the lower the status of women, the
greater the number of childbirths, and eventually a lower life expectancy.

Through some of the studies made so far, it is evident that marriage is central to a woman's life and determines her social psyche, as also her life expectancy. Married women, in turn, as mothers, socialize their daughters into the ideal norms regarding women. The tenacity with which women cling to the institution of marriage has been brought out in a number of surveys. One such study points out that enforcement of social legislation faces a number of hurdles, because women themselves, do not want to break away from the holy wedlock and do not reject the idea of nurturing any number of children. Subordination of women and reinforcement of role divisions established by marriage received careful scrutiny from Mahatma Gandhi who as a vocal supporter of women against the tyranny of marriage, wrote, "Marriage is probably the oldest social institution and the most abused... In this unequal struggle of women against social tyrannies imposed on them, nothing has played so crucial a part as marriage. It is, in fact, the base from which continuous attacks on them are made. For men, it is a cloak, which covers a multitude of their feelings, the betrayals of their social obligations." Gandhi saw role allocation, as the source of stigma and when women find marriage tyrannical, the cause is ascribed to role stereotyping. The resultant exploitation has, to day, through radical feminist perspective been analyzed as part of sexual inequality, which is
considered as Primary and more fundamental than occupational inequality. In this context, Christine Delphy argues that wives form a class which is exploited by men resulting from patriarchal structures. With this position, Delphy argues, that the main axis of differentiation in society is gender. Similarly, Janet Finch has documented the importance of a wife's unpaid labour for many men, in enabling men to carry out the duties and obligations of their occupations. The conclusion that may be drawn is that marriage is an arrangement by which a wife becomes a necessary appendage to a husband, a servicing being for the patriarch and his household.

A revealing study, based on oral dialogic method, made of Dalit women in a Pune slum, brings into focus the extremely low status of a woman as wife. The study provides evidence to conclude that of all the different stages and roles that women of this socio economic strata experience, the role of wife proves to be the most oppressive and psychologically dissatisfying. Women, as daughters-in-law and wives, in these oral histories, experience relative powerlessness and lots of sufferings, especially at the hands of the mother in law, until they conceives and bear a son. In her specific role as a wife, the Dalit woman feels a complete failure, as its fulfillment requires reciprocity from her husband, which he does not give. He does not see her as a person, but only as a woman in a prescribed role, in which she performs certain prescribed duties, largely as an object of sex. Her feelings of humiliation in having to
subject her body and mind to her husband leaves a permanent scar on her psyche". 40

What is important about this study is the way it generated, through a relevant method of extracting data, a picture of identifiable experience among women. The dialogue led towards self education and self examination. "On analyzing the narrations, an important aspect of the fact of self image was discovered - the gap between the self's image of itself and its image in the eyes of society was seen to be at its narrowest, in a stable or structured society". 41

It was found, the father was the all powerful master of the house. He was generally a source of heartbreak and trouble for the mother. Mother worked like a slave at house work, outside work at giving birth to and bringing up all the children. As a wife, a woman felt that she had to suffer untold hardships on account of children and brutality of husband, especially in the early years of marriage. Most narrators indicated that their marital relationship improved, becoming more congenial towards the middle old age. This shows that the institution of marriage stabilizes over perhaps two to three decades. What was common to the early years of marriage of every narrator was that marriage was characterized by untold misery and mounting pressures and demands. What the life of married Dalit Women amounted to was coping with their day to day, traditionally assigned roles. While most of these women spoke highly of the brother sister
relationship, yet they were painfully aware that once married the door to their father's house was perpetually closed to them. It is this virtual exile from the parental home that has generated the current problem of bride burning or extreme harassment leading many a bride to suicide.

Even a cursory survey of a cross section of married women of different strata reveal that marriage, though the accepted, unquestioned norm is uncogenial for the wife whose main role in the initial stage of marriage is to provide service to all members of the husband's family. Sociologists have attributed this situation and role of a women to the patriarchal system inherent in the Indian society structured on a hierarchical pattern of co-existence. Moreover, the study show that most narrators also retain an intense awareness of oppression which they saw their mothers face. However, because they had never been aware of their mothers' powerlessness they were always full of admiration for the determined way in which they managed to cope. For this reason, most of them have cited their mother as the ideal, they would like to emulate, and thus the cycle of oppression for the married woman goes on endlessly. Yet, the study of Dalit married women showed that they were closer to their natal families and could turn to them in times of difficulty in contrast to women of other strata. However, in the view of these women men are regarded as totally useless and brutally indifferent to the toil and travail that women have to
go through. The common belief they hold is, "The role of the wife is still the most important role she is called upon to fill in the earlier half her married life. Since this is one role that depends entirely on the corresponding role of husband for its success (or, for its evaluation as successful), all these women regard their wifely roles as failure". In the course of these dialogues, it was also revealed that the continuous thwarting of a woman's desires and emotions in her role of wife, makes that role repugnant to a women. In her role as a wife, the married woman suffers greatly due to injustice and double standards. In this role, it would be safe to assume a woman's oppression and exploitation at their highest, while her self-esteem is at its lowest and this fact seems to cross cut class differences.

In order to understand and reasons for the low status of wives in the Indian society, it would be useful to look into the past to determine whether the status is inherent and therefore inevitable or whether it is a manifestation of various social arrangements. At the same time, it would be useful to find out what is being undertaken on different levels to ameliorate the status of women, aiming specifically at marriage, since marriage sanctions violence and exploitation, reinforced by cultural norms. Proverbs like "Wives and rugs should be beaten regularly" are held as truism in most societies. Focusing on the helpless position of a wife, Sushma Sood, highlights the extent of violence to which a wife is subjected, almost as part of her
A woman is trained right from her childhood that the man she is going to marry will be her "Pati Parmeshwar", Husband is God, and if the wife wishes to have her salvation - Gati, it can only be through subservience to him and total obedience, irrespective of whether he is good or bad. This delineation of the unquestioned power structure in favour of husband constitutes the marriage gradient which is strengthened through reference to scriptures in order to further the impact of this ideology on women. It has been observed that religion has at all times been giving support and sanction to the lowly position of a wife. Lalita Parihar, points out, "marriage meant that a woman's identity as an individual was suspended. She was merely a part of her husband's property. This legal ownership of his wife gave man the legal right to beat her". Blackstone, 1770 in his critique on the laws of England, pointed out: "The husband might give his wife moderate correction, for he is to answer for her misbehaviour. The law thought, it reasonable to entrust him with this power of restraining her by domestic chastisement in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct in his servants or children". Moreover, the behaviour meted to wives is considered to be entirely a personal matter and it was only with the rise of feminist consciousness that public attention was drawn to the plight of wives. J.S. Mills's initial debate on this issue, 1850 led to the Act for the prevention and Punishment of aggravated assaults on women and children. However, the Act proved to be only a token gesture to allay public concern because
the prevailing norm which was in actual operation, believed in the implicit right of man to punish his wife. The non bargaining position of a wife is summed up as follows: "Patriarchal domination, economic dependence and a legal system constructed by powerful interests and classes controlled by men, has meant not only that women are bound to their position because they cannot escape but they are conditioned not to want to escape". 46

Since marriage is the norm and reproducing male children, within the family, the primary aim, sexuality outside marriage is condemned as evil. Moreover, patriarchy and the concept of private property have a close nexus with the chastity of women. Their sexuality has to be strictly controlled and their dependent status maintained. Consequently, they become subject to physical and mental abuse, and the prevailing ideology provides hardly any redemption. This also gives rise to the dichotomy of 'Good' Vs "bad" woman, judged on the basis of how women express their sexuality. Those whose sexuality is controlled by marriage conform to the image of "good" women and those who violate the prescribed limitations are marginalized as "bad" women. 47 It has also been verified that most women conform to this norm or rather find it extremely difficult to break away from it. "The whole social structure at every level - legal, economic, religious and social, works towards this goal. But while the social structure is external, the primary responsibility of making women conform to the norm rests on men (the patriarchs) for their corresponding
female dependents. The ideology gives the sanction and the 'dependency' confers the power. While all women are exposed to it in varying degrees, married women by virtue of patriarchal family structure, become most vulnerable as they have to leave the safety and familiarity of their natal family and live in alien and hostile 'marital homes, where they are the most vulnerable since the power balance is tilted totally against them'.

The almost chattel like condition of women as wives is clearly sanctioned by religion and ethics. Moreover, the power of checking and punishing women lay in the hands of individual men, and it was left to them to define the 'norms', the 'deviance' and also the severity of punishment. The inbuilt social sanctions for violence were from time to time checked by social reformers. However, social reform movements of the nineteenth century in India addressed themselves specifically to issue like Sati, and widow remarriage. "Such movements, had in no way changed the power balance within the family and the basic inequality within".

Though Gandhian politics opened new frontiers for married women, and created other commitments besides those to husband and family, yet the old values and priorities were never substituted, since marriage and related responsibilities in the Hindu fold of life is traditionally considered essential for procreation and continuation of the family line. Despite this, folklore from various Provinces of India, manifest a negative and degenerative attitude to wives in general, "A woman is a lump of clay the
luckless man loses a house, the lucky man loses a wife". Such proverbs reflect the general attitude towards women, affecting their development and status in society. Ashish Nandy observes, "Gandhi tried to give women a new dignity by making a new equation between womanliness and political potency, denying in the process, the western association between maleness and control over public affairs and state craft, rejecting the martial tradition in India, which like martial traditions in most other societies, debased womanhood, abrogating the colonial identity which equated femininity with passivity, weakness, dependence, subjugation and absence of masculinity". However, this attempt to widen a woman's personality led merely in over emphasising certain other aspects of a woman's multiple roles, without substituting or deleting other roles. A "Working", married woman is more of a fragmented person rather than one identified with being a housewife. This is attributed to the pervasive social norm defining a woman's role once she is married. Traditionally she lives with her husband, in a partilineal joint family household where she is likely to play a submissive role and adapt to her husband's family. Rules of proper conduct for wife and husband are clearly prescribed in religious books such as the Mahabhartha, the Ramayan and the other Dharamshastras. These epics have significant influence in shaping the behaviour of wives. Sita, Savitri, Gandhara and other characters in various episodes exemplify the proper and ideal behaviour of wives. Middle class housewives who venture out to work, usually for
economic reasons add to their responsibilities without cooperation from other members of the family. However, J.A. Dubios observes "Although, ideally, a woman plays a submissive and subordinate role in the family, in reality, the woman in India exercises considerable power in family matters in addition to being the sole authority in the household". In considering the wife role, both males and females think that a woman's most important task is caring for children and husbands, that she is suited for certain kinds of jobs, that she should give up her new job if it inconveniences the family members and that she should work only where there is financial need. The woman should be protected throughout her life, she should assume the domestic role even if she is educated. Irawati Karve observes, "Even if women work, they have to move towards establishing harmony in the domestic as well as outdoor roles, in the interest of the family, nation and society at large". The functional role of the wife anchored to child breeding and rearing has descended from what the Scriptures prescribed. According to the Rigveda, "the status of the wife in the new house was well understood. As she arrived at her new house with her husband, people gathered to have a look at her and to bless her for being the high lady of the new house". The word dampati (Lord of the house) for both the bride and the bride groom indicates that both had equal authority about the house. The authority vested in the wife was also linked with her role in being instrumental in perpetuating the family line. This becomes clear because of the special protection a
woman receives even after she is widowed. Underlying this attitude to the woman was the belief that the girl was given to the family, hence when the husband died, his younger brother could take her as wife. The legal texts, make it clear that the attachment was not for lust but for begetting a son and that again was not for gaining any share in the property, but for the performance of religious duties. The original idea as translated by later socio historians that the widow just became the wife of the younger brother of the late husband, because it was the moral duty of the latter to see that she was not deprived. As the son was the most desired wealth in life, the special mode of alliance known as "Niyoga" for begetting a son was customarily practised. Another person could be appointed by the elders of the family to carry out this task. But, in no case, was the woman likely to exercise her choice, thus emphasizing the restricted role and function of the woman concerned. Continuing up to 500 A.D. the practice of Niyoga was believed to be the divine aid for fructification, so that women were not divorced from the social end which they were expected to serve through the family into which they were married.

The reason for taking into account the social attitude towards a woman's marital status as described in the Rigveda is to understand the extent to which traditional customs have determined the status of a woman over centuries, victimizing her and making her culpable, resulting into extreme objectification
of the contemporary woman. Further studies of the Indian family and household, the primary socializing agents highlight how passivity inculcated in the personality of the growing girl, in order to make her primarily a domestic servicing person.

Conclusions drawn from various accounts of women in the Vedas point to the ways in which marriage as a sacrament secured the position of a wife in a polygamous society, for even as she was superseded and not loved by the husband she was always to be maintained. Home was the centre of the activity of women, and the wife was assigned a central place in it. There she performed her married duties through unremitting service and was partner of her husband in pursuit of the four Purusharthas, that is, Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Gaining by advice and experience of the elders and protection of her husband, she was cherished and respected, for on women depended the prosperity and future progeny of the family.

Child marriages as a common custom have also been cited as being responsible for the deterioration in the position of the wife. Formerly, she used to be a religious partner of her husband. But, as a child bride, uneducated and immature, she looked up to her husband as a guide and deity. Polygamy further deteriorated a wife's position, as she became psychologically insecure in the family. It is evident that even when customs underwent modification a wife's self esteem and societal position remained unchanged. Deprived of political and economic right
the Indian wife, over centuries survived silently in conformity with social norms and male dictates.

As a social institution marriage persists with unshaken tenacity and different surveys point to similar conclusions regarding the pattern of socialization of girls into marriage, the low status of wives and their oppressive role sets under which they are compelled to function. If there are any deviations from the norm of getting married and remaining unmarried, they are not only marginal but quite ineffective in bringing about any significant change in the social, psychological views of marriage. The rising middle class urban employed woman has not opted out of marriage for the sake of occupation but rather taken in marriage along with her salaried or enterpreneurial occupation. The empirical study, which forms part of this research, has identified the source which has created a consciousness reviewing the compulsations of marriage.

**Girl Child - Family and the Indian Household**

Accounts of ways in which girls are brought up in families, have by and large, emphasized the discrimination which is meted to them as against male counterparts from the time of birth through different stages of their development. What is brought out starkly, is that girls undergo a greater number of deprivations in terms of immediate or long term benefits, with the result that they come to occupy a lower status in terms of
sexual and social hierarchy. However, what identifies their relatively lower status which is taken for granted, is the extent of violence to which they are subjected giving rise to social biases and practices, which have assumed alarming and manifold dimensions. Before exploring various accounts of the position of a girl, it is pertinent to question whether the low status of a daughter is an inherent feature of the Indian household or whether it is a result of extraneous factors which have brought about a growing victimization of the girl.

A look at the accounts of the girl child in the Scriptures, mainly Hindu, show that the social attitudes and conditions under which daughters were brought up were not as discriminatory, violent and negative as they became over time and through social change. Contrary to common assumptions, the birth of a daughter was not always an accursed, unwelcome occurrence as is illustrated in the Vedas. If the birth of a female child was less welcome it was only because of the parents' concern with her marriage. However, the desire of parents to have daughters was commonplace. The custom of performing religious rites and pilgrimages for the sake of the birth of a daughter prevailed popularly. Those not so blessed sometimes adopted daughters. A maid was not only an object of affection at home but was considered an auspicious person whose presence was required on ceremonious occasions. Her education was well looked after and she was assigned important duties at home. At times she saved her parents from calamities which is indicative of her developed,
social individuality and altruism. A maiden had a comfortable life at home. Under the benevolent protection and care of her father or kinsmen and in their default, under the protection of the king. She had full freedom of movement and development. Girls were treated with the love and care which helped in their development as individuals without suffering any privations when compared to their male siblings. It was only later when women became objects of lust, requiring protection from their immediate families that they were looked upon as sources of anxiety and burden for the parents. Consequently, their birth caused, disappointment and bitterness which was manifested in a negative attitude towards daughters, for which they suffered mainly by being denied rights assigned, readily to their brothers. However, some studies of the status of women in the Vedic times have pointed to a general preference for a boy.

"The birth of a girl grant it elsewhere here grant a boy".55

However, this preference was not as deep rooted and prevalent in the Vedic society, as it is do-day Neera Desai observes "This prayer itself is suggestive. In present day India, this wish for a boy has assumed inhuman and grotesque proportions. Leading to systematic and institutionalized ways of female 'degradation and elimination'.56 It is assumed that the status of daughters would be accorded greater value in matrilineal societies of the kind that existed in Kerala in the
South and among Garos and Khasis in the North eastern parts of India, since they provide a qualitatively different social setting for women in those areas, but they have hardly affected the country's ethos and can be termed as insignificant exceptions. However, what is significant is that a daughter enjoys greater respect and comfort in matrilineal homes by virtue of not being alienated from her land and home. Her function as an instrument of procreation and sexual gratification is not crucial to her existence.

The religious cultures in which girls are brought up are also conducive to generating a low self esteem. The Koran for instance, repeatedly stresses the superiority of men over women. The Koran says, "Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God had gifted, the one above the other. Virtuous women are obedient, careful during the husband's absence because God hath on them been careful".57 In Buddhism also nothing is said in favour of girls. The image that is conveyed to them of women is that their company is considered to be an obstacle in the development of higher powers in man. What the Buddha tells his disciple, is known to be taught to girls, "Women are warm, angered, Ananda/Women are full of passion, Ananda, / women are envious, Ananda, women are stupid / That is the reason, Ananda, that is the cause, / Why women have no place in public assemblies, do not carry on / business, and do not earn their living by any profession."58 Such victims were not merely parts of theory confined to private readings but quoted and used as
illustrations for the socialization of girls. When western education became a part of general education, in India, it conveyed sexist biases which were a part of western thought. In defining the purposes of education, Rousseau gave the following prescription: "The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honoured by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to make life sweet and agreeable to them - these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy". Such ideologies became an inseparable part of the culture of socialization of girls.

Moreover, the philosophy of Manu had the most dynamic and long lasting impact on the severe discrimination against girls right from the time of their birth. Manu equated the birth of a girl with the birth of a Shuddhra, on the basis of which he denies women various religious privileges and enjoins upon them to enslave themselves to men who are like their gods. "In childhood must a female be dependent on her father; in youth, on her husband, her lord being dead, on her sons, if she has no sons, on the near kinsmen of her husband, if she be left no kinsmen, on those of her father, if she has no paternal kinsmen on the sovereign; a woman must never seek independence". The culture generated through Manusmriti was crippling for the development of girls who, as daughters were brought up on
extremely low self esteem and physically confined to domestic
tasks, limiting their freedom of action. Manusmriti
consolidated a socio religious culture with marked deviation from
the Vedas. However, the study of daughters through time poses
specific hurdles on account of dearth of material. Sudhir
Kakar, 1984 attempts to answer the self posed question, "How
then, do daughter fare in 'Mother india'? Kakar states that it
is in fact, difficult to conduct a study on girls''. 60 Karve
explains, "The reason for this lies in the fact that data, of all
kinds, are uneven or unavailable. Anthropological accounts,
refer implicitly or explicitly, to the development of boys, and
skim the subject of female childhood or skip it altogether.
Myths, too are sparing of their bounty towards daughters, for in
a patriarchal culture, myths are inevitably manmade and man
oriented. Addressing as they do the unconscious wishes and fears
of men, it is the parent son rather than the parent daughter
relationship which becomes charged with symbolic significance''. 61
Anthropological accounts have pointed to the marked preference
for sons all over India, and at the same time, allusion to the
intimacy and relaxed affection of the mother daughter bond.
Statistics 62 point to the higher rate of infant mortality,
showing also that whatever health care and schooling are
available in India, daughters are the last to receive it. In the
realm of literature, there are parts of the oral tradition -
Ballads, folk songs and couplets sung by women in different parts
of the country, a few folk tales which give clues to the
psychological condition of daughterhood in India. Rites and rituals related with marriage and pregnancy are performed for the sake of a male infant and of magically changing the sex of the unborn child if it be a female. Other customs like beating of drums, blowing conch shells and lavish payments to the midwife on the birth of a son point to the overwhelming preference for sons. No overt forms of rejoicing accompanies the birth of a daughter. Women's folk songs reveal the painful awareness of inferiority and discrepancy at birth, between the celebration of sons and the mere tolerance of daughters. A North India folk songs depicts this difference:

"Listen, O Sukhma, what a tradition has started! Drums are played upon the birth of a boy But at my birth only a brass plate is beaten". (63)

In citing cases of institutionalized discrimination against daughters, sociologists have found adequate support for the discrimination by virtue of economic and religious concerns. The presence of a son is considered absolutely necessary for the proper performance of many sacraments, especially those carried out upon the death of parents and imperative to the well being of their souls. Besides her ritual insignificance, a daughter is considered to be a source of expense without any concrete return to her natal family. It is this attitude which is represented in the texts summing up a daughter as a drain while a son as the savior of the family. As in other patriarchal societies, the preference for sons over daughters, leads to the cultured
devaluation of girls, which has for centuries remained contained without finding expression in acrimony or intra sex antagonism. Nor has discrimination led to any serious modes of defiance against males. However, that does not indicate that a girl is free from a complex of inferiority when compared to males. Clinical findings through psychotherapy of upper middle class women have revealed hidden feelings built up since girlhood. "I am girl and thus worthless and bad", is often encountered below the surface of an active, emancipated femininity.64 One patient suggested that her parents' separation took place because of her father's disappointment that she was born a girl and not a boy. Some of the traits connected with low self esteem, suicidal tendency, depressive moodiness, extreme touchiness and morbid sensitivity in interpersonal relations - are distinctly revealed through their self revelations in the course of non clinical interviews,65 of urban educated upper class women. On the other hand the less educated rural women gave went to similar feelings through the medium of old songs, "God Rama, I fall at your feet and fold my hands and pray to you, never again give me the birth of a women".

The internalization of low self esteem traits led to a state in which girls had no sphere of their own, except those in which they were encouraged to carry on traditional patterns of existence even through their games with other children. Thus, Kakar points out that girls grow up without the notion of independent livelihood and activity and concentration on
cultivating a femininity which manifests itself in everything which is dominated and controlled by men.

Yet, as girls they also experience a special kind of lenient affection and compassionate extension from their mothers. It is this, as Karve points out that generates sufficient confidence and strength of will to survive. 66 Karve highlights how Indian girls are assured of their worth by whom it really matters, by their mothers. The cultural devaluation of girls is often compensated by the special maternal affection reserved for daughters. "This special affection, contrary to expectations derived from social and cultural prescription is partly to be explained by the fact that a mother's unconscious identification with her daughter is normally stronger than with her son". 67 Moreover, in Indian society the cultural and familiar attitude to a daughter is that she is considered a 'guest' in her natal family, treated with the solicitous concern often ' accorded ' to a welcome outsider who, all too soon, will marry and leave her mother for good. Thus, in her natal home, a daughter experiences a variety of emotional transformations resulting from dualistic attitudes towards her. She is loved because of her qualities yet creates resentment because she is to be married off and thus becomes a liability to her parents.

Throwing light on the circumstances of a girl's development, Sudhir Kakar informs, "In traditional India, every female is born into a well defined community of women within her particular
family. Although by no means does it always resound with solidarity and good will the existence of this discrete sphere of femininity and domesticity gives women a tangible autonomy and exercise of power. It also allows a special kind of inviolate feminine privacy and familiar intimacy. Getting along with other women in this sphere, learning the mandatory skills of house holding, cooking and childcare, establishing her place in this primary world: these relationships and these tasks constitute the 'dailiness' of girlhood in India. Moreover, other women in the family - her mother, grandmother, aunts, sisters and sisters-in-law are not only an Indian's girl's teachers and models but her allies against the discrimination and inequities, of that world and its values. Often enough in the 'underground' of female cultures as reflected in ballads, weddings songs and jokes women do indeed react against the discrimination of their culture by portraying men as vain, faithless and infantile. All these factors help to mitigate (if not to prevent) the damage to a girl's self esteem when she discovers that socially, she is considered inferior to a boy, a discovery which usually coincides, with the awareness of gender identity in Late Childhood. A girl's identification with the group of women who relate to a culture essentially different from a male culture, helps her in accepting her position and establishing a purely functional identity. Recourse to statements like God has made girls for such purposes, reaffirms her identity because it vests it with specific meaning. Being moulded into womanhood is
not a traumatic experience for the Indian girl who is socialized into the process through the structure and ethos of a family. "Late childhood marks the beginning of an Indian girl's deliberate training in how to be a good woman, and hence the conscious inculcation of culturally designated feminine roles. She learns that the 'virtues' of womanhood which will take her through life are submission and docility as well as skill and grace in the various household tasks".69 A girl grows up with clear notions of feminine, unfeminine, and desirable skills associated with women.

Reporting on the training of young girls in Mysore M.N. Srinivas reports; "It is the mother's duty to train her daughter up to be an absolute docile daughter-in-law. The Kannada mother dins into her daughter's ears certain ideals which make for harmony (at the expense of her sacrificing her will) in her late life".70

Tuned to acquiring a husband and socialized into sacrificing all for the happiness of her family, girls in India observe rituals and fasts so that they develop the internal strength to carry out their domestic duties as retained by tradition and convention. A girl's identity is thus established through her marriage and other males in her life, at different stages. Kakar points out, "In the bratas, the periodical days of fasting and prayer which unmarried girls keep all over India, the girl's wishes for herself are almost always in relation to others; she
asks the boons of being a good daughter, good wife, good daughter-in-law, good mother". Thus, Kakar points out that, in addition to the virtues of self effacement and self sacrifice, "the feminine role in India also crystallizes a woman's connections to others and embeds her in a multitude of familial relationships".

The self esteem of a growing girl is also observed to undergo a number of changes depending on the stage of development. Usually, she experiences, low self esteem at puberty when male female discrimination becomes actually effective. The notions of purity and pollution become operative as the girl begins to represent the dualism which is the hallmark of Indian woman. Kakar explains that this developmental stage is also a time of instinctual turbulence and emotional volatility, her training in service and self denial in preparation for her imminent roles of daughter-in-law and wife is stepped up. In order to maintain her family's love and approval, the 'narcissistic supplies' necessary for self esteem, the girl tends to conform, and even over conform, to the prescriptions and expectations of those around her. Daughterhood for an Indian is much more rewarding than motherhood both culturally and psychologically. In contrast to the son's, a daughter's training at her mother's hands is normally leavened with a good deal of compassion. Manu, in his dictates on how girls should be brought up, expressed, that kindness should be shown to the
daughter as she is physically more tender and her emotions are more delicate, and other ancient commentators forbid any harshness towards her even in words.

The Indian girl thus internalizes the specific ideals of womanhood, and conforms her behaviour to social approval. Kakar points out the irony of an Indian girl's coming of age, which is that to be a good woman and a felicitous bride, she must more than ever be the perfect daughter. Constraints operating on both daughter and family are tremendous, and even though in the process of growing up, girls have been able to sublimate their sense of acrimony, yet they are exposed to constant reminders of their inferiority or liabilities, which are known to manifest themselves in the form of crippling self esteem and overt or clandestine female infanticide.

In order to resolve the problems posed by a daughter's sexuality, an Indian girl is usually married during early adolescence between the ages of twelve and eighteen; the average age of a Hindu bride fifteen to sixteen. In urban areas, or among higher castes where daughters are more likely to receive some kind of formal education, the age may be somewhat higher.

The traditional ideal holds that a girl should be married soon after her first menstrual period, for it is feared that "if she remains, long a maiden, she gives herself to whom the will". 73
The custom of early marriage, recognizes and is designed to guard against the promiscuous resurgence in adolescence of a girl's playful childhood sexuality and the threat this would pose to Hindu Social organization. "To marry one's daughters off propitiously is considered one of the primary religious duties of Hindu parents". 74

Stringent norms govern a father's obligation towards his daughter. It is reported, "Reprehensible is the father who gives not his daughter at the proper time". 75 If married at eleven or twelve, the girl may remain in her parents' home for another three to four years before moving away to live with her husband. When she joins her husband, she is only a young adolescent and vulnerable to the universal psychological problems of that age. It has been observed that the whole process of feminine adolescent development is normally incomplete at the time an Indian girl gets married and is transplanted from her home into the unfamiliar, initially forbidding environment of her in-laws. 76 The early stage of a girl's development in India is characterized by the psychological trauma of change of residence through matrimony. The agony, pain and sorrow of a married adolescent is reflected in popular folk ballads and songs, for instance:

"O, Kapfu, a bird, you are from my mother's side
Speak, O speak in the courtyard of any parents
My mother will hear you:
She will send my brother to fetch me"
The early marriage of an Indian girl strikes the death knell of girlhood for her, because she is aware and society prescribes that a girl can never go back to her parents' home. Thus, in a way, the doors of a home which had showered affection on her have been closed for her and this is in conformity with the tradition of society. Her complaints and longings seem to fall on deaf ears. "O my friend! My in-laws' house is a wretched place. / My mother-in-law is a very hard woman / she struts about full of anger". The girl's plight lies in the fact that even if her husband turns out to be unworthy there is no going back for her. Manu has instructed, "Though destitute of virtue or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by the faithful wife". The growing girl is brought upon precepts like, "By violating her duty towards her husband a wife is disgraced in this world, after death, she enters the womb of a jackal and is tormented by the punishment of her sin". Although treated with a great deal of indulgence and affection during the years just before her marriage, a young Indian girl's fortunes are almost reversed as soon as she is married around the age of puberty. Kakar sums up the identity of an adolescent girl by pointing out, "The identity struggle of the adolescent Indian girl is confounded by the coincidence of marriage, the abrupt and
total severance of the attachments of childhood, and her removal from all that is familiar to a state of lonely dependency upon a household of strangers.

Studies have commonly pointed to the precarious lives girl children lead from the time of their birth. Evidently there prevails a deep rooted cultural intolerance of girls as individuals in their own rights and this lack of tolerance reflects itself in the irresponsibility of parents towards daughters. This also explains the perpetuation of foeticide and infanticide of girls, initiated by their own mothers. Moreover, there is a social sanction at the behest of which women feel free to take decisions which have a bearing on the lives of girls. Moreover, social trends, which resulted in termination of women in the previous ages have changed only in form. The end result, which is elimination of girls as foetuses or infants has undergone little change.

In a case study of Female Infanticide in contemporary India, Krishnaswamy points out, "The form of oppression of women is the practice of female infanticide". The rationale for the existence of the practice was inadequate food supply (Scrimshaw, 1978) and therefore, it became part of an adaptive strategy. In most traditional studies of the custom of female infanticide the rationale provided is almost the same - i.e. the sacrifice of females for the survival of a society. Questions that arise are, "Is the survival of a society linked with the elimination of
females alone? or "If females are the nurturers of a society, how is their elimination justified in a move to save society from disintegrating under its own weight?". Answers can be directly associated with the patriarchal ethos of traditional societies, where female infanticide, is an excuse for survival. Pakrasi, 1970 points out that various theories have been propounded in order to understand the basic relationship between population increase, want of essential necessities, and the need for an artifice for restricting rapid multiplication of consumers. Referring to these theories, Krishnaswamy states, "The theories have justified the existence of female infanticide at a time when human civilization was still primitive and employed crude techniques and had reasons to eliminate their female members. But none of them hold true in the modern context". The fact that female infanticide persists and has taken on, what may be termed as 'modernized' institutionalized forms reflects the utter disregard that prevails for women. Investigating the situation, Pakrasi, 1965 shows the dearth, almost the non existence of written evidence of female infanticide in India prior to the coming of the British. However, "it has been shown that when the British came to India, the practice was common almost throughout India: from Gujarat in the West to the Eastern Borders of Utter Pradesh, from Punjab in the North to Madhya Pradesh in the South. Contrary to common assumptions, there were only three tribal groups among whom this practice was prevalent at the time. The Nagas of the North eastern region, the Khonds
of Orissa and the Todas of the Nilgiri hills. However, female infanticide was suspected among several communities belonging to middle or upper classes: the Rajputs who were distributed in almost all the provinces of northern India, the Sikhs and Muslim Pathans of Punjab, Khatris of North western India, Kanbis of Gujarat, Jats, Giyars, Tagas, Ahars, Minas, and Aturs all of whom were inhabitants of North western India. 84

Krishnaswamy's study of the Kallar community of Tamil Nadu explains the practice by stating, "One of the several reasons advanced for the existence of this practice was the prevalence of hypergamous marriages, a custom which forbids the marriage of a woman with a person of lower social standing. This invariably led to the giving of large dowry to secure a bride groom of high social status. "This custom reduced women to a source of financial drainage which gave rise to an old Tamil saying that even a King with five daughters is sure to become a pauper. The financial burden of marrying off a daughter, and the social stigma of having an unmarried daughter in the house forced people to kill infant girls at birth". 85

Superstitious beliefs were also an important source for making female infanticide a commonly acceptable norm. People believed that too many female children brought ill luck. Besides, another common belief that prevailed was, that the killing of a female child ensured that the subsequent child would be male.
David and Blake, 1956 cited a possible explanation of the practice by relating it to inefficient family planning. Female infanticide was equated with abortion the major difference being that in this case the pregnancy is being selected according to sex. Pakrasi points out "The Nagas practised infanticide only to avoid raids by their strongest neighbours in quest of wives". The study of Kallar community brings out the motivation for this custom. Members of the community openly admit to infanticide as if they were narrating their cultural habits. One of the respondents said: "since I do not want the first child to be a female baby I wanted it to be killed. But my husband feels that we should wait for the second child. If that also happens to be a female baby, we will definitely kill the second one".

The midwife at the local maternity centre was able to provide abundant evidence of customary prevalence of female infanticide. Some of the deliveries she performed at the centre which happened to be female babies were done away with. She narrated ways in which members of the community accomplish this task of killing their own infant daughters. In one instance the father stepped on the throat of his infant daughter a few hours after the female baby was born while the mother was still unconscious; a second method was to feed the female infant with the poisonous milk of a wild plant or the oleander barries known for their lethal poison with a little sugar - to ensure instant death. The custom was so ingrained in the people that every
Kallar household has this plant growing in the courtyard for use at any appropriate time such as the birth of an unwanted female baby. The third method of killing a female baby is stuffing few grains of coarse Paddy into the mouth. The infant breathes the grain into the windpipe and chokes to death. Further evidence was provided by a doctor of a government hospital in the capital of one taluk, Usilampatti, when he reported how women of Kallars disappeared with their female babies after delivery and after a week returned to report natural death. The statistics at this hospital indicate the magnitude of this practice. Of the 1200 total number of deliveries performed on an average per year to women belonging to the Kallar caste, nearly 600 are female babies. Out of this an estimated 570 babies vanish with their mothers soon after their birth. Hospital sources estimate that nearly 80% of these vanishing babies, i.e. more than 450 become victims of infanticide. Similar trends are also observed in private nursing homes primary health centres and maternity hospitals/centres. The people responsible for executing female infanticide are either the parents on their volition or incited by the in laws. A prolonged record of failure to deliver male infants has often led to divorce.

As a result of widespread female infanticide the sex ratio among the population below 10 years has shown that 70% of the Kallar children are now males. The lowest sex ratio was found in Usiampatti taluk - which is a predominantly Kallar area. Among the Kallars the custom of female infanticide has been
attributed to relative economic backwardness of the community and the social importance of males. While this has been compared to 'pride and purse' motivation for female infanticide in other communities of North India, Krishnaswamy points out that in no other community in modern India, the economic value of male children is as pronounced as among the Kallars. The religious motivation for female infanticide among the Kallars, is more or less in keeping with the rest of the Hindu communities whose scriptures assign various duties to be performed only by sons. For instance, Pind daan, performed after death ensures one to reach moksha (heaven) but it is a ritual which can be performed only by a dead person's son. The importance of a son assumes greater significance at the time of a father's death, since only the son can light the funeral pyre, and the role of a daughter is non existent.

Moreover, there is little that the Law has been able to do in the face of persisting female infanticide. The infanticide Act of 1870, which was instituted by the British still exists, yet there is not sufficient evidence which suggests that this law has convicted people for the crime of infanticide. The practice persists for the same reasons that were identified ever since female infanticide was discerned. However, the methods have undergone radical change, especially in the urban and rural centres. In a study of the abuse of advanced technologies for eliminating female foetus, Vibhuti Patel reveals the extent to
which amniocentesis has become widespread for sex determination and pre-selection of sex prior to birth. Vibhuti reports, "Though Bombay and Delhi are the major centres for sex determination and pre-selection tests, technique of amniocentesis is used even in the clinics of small towns and cities of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan. Justification for these techniques is apathy expressed by a team of doctors of Harkisanddas Narrotamdas Hospital (Pioneers in this trade). In developing countries like India, as the parents are encouraged to limit their family to two off springs, they will have a right to quality in these two as far as can be assured. Amniocentesis provides help in this direction". While the test is widely meant for detecting foetal irregularities, yet its perverse application of sex determination leading to abortion in the case of female foetus has become alarmingly pervasive. Surveys conducted in Maharashtra, Bihar, Delhi and Punjab showed that between 1978 and 1983, around 78,000 female foetuses were aborted after sex determination tests. Observations show that femicide is gaining ground rapidly because population control theorists advocate this test because they think the government can achieve Net Production Rate of One (NRRI), i.e. replacement of a mother by only one daughter, with the help of sex determination test. According to them, if there are less number of women there will be less growth of runaway population. By encashing on socio cultural values that treat birth of a daughter in the family as a
great calamity and perpetuate modern methods of femicide to achieve Net Reproduction Rate of One (NRRI) as per the projections of the population control programmes of the Government of India. In a society which has a tradition of female infanticide, amniocentesis is bound to take root easily, but what makes it more pervasive and insidious is that it is practised by all, irrespective of their class, caste, religion, educational or cultural background, while female infanticide was limited only to certain castes.

Arguments favouring amniocentesis for the sake of smaller, balanced families overlook the sexism involved. Parents would hardly go in for amniocentesis if it involved a male foetus for the sake of subsequent female child in order to have a balanced family. Sex determination tests are having the most adverse affect on sex ratio which is visibly declining in most regions of India. No matter what the point of view being forwarded in favour of amniocentesis the socio-cultural motivation have definitely made them a source for thwarting the right of girls to even take birth, let alone the various degrees and kinds of discrimination they are subjected to compared to their male siblings.

In her study of Hindu women in Northern India, Kamala Gupta explains, "Ordinarily and undoubtedly, girls were less welcome than boys during the period under consideration, i.e. (1206-1707 A.D.). The birth of a girl was taken as an inauspicious event in
the family. In order to avoid this sort of humiliation, some sections among the Rajputs killed their daughters soon after their birth, because it involved heavy marriage expence. This aspect along with the presence of infanticide was not consistent with religion and humanity. Unmatched as well as early marriage was customary in those days.

A study of Marathi Dalit Women\textsuperscript{94} reveals the discriminations between male-female siblings from an early age. A girl is made to undertake numerous daily tasks for the family. This responsibility is looked upon as her training for the future. These tasks include bringing up younger siblings, shopping, cooking even helping out the mother in her outside job, if she is working as a servant. A. Ramanamma in his study\textsuperscript{95} of violent discrimination against girls points out that the Hindu version of the mania for sons in India is typical also of the sikh, muslim, Buddhist and other communities. The birth of a son is greatly desired and the godly blessings for the expectant mother are that she will give birth to a male child. Even the blessings showered on the bride at the marriage ceremony is, "May you be blessed with eight sons". A short time, after marriage, the ceremony called "Garbhadhana" is performed by the husband. It consists of an offering and a prayer to the sun by the husband and wife for the conception of a son. The last line of their prayer by the husband is, "Oh faithful wife, give birth to a son who will live long and perpetuate our life, "Three months after conception the
Pumsavana ceremony for obtaining a son, is performed. In the Atharva Veda, one of the four most sacred Hindu texts, mantras are prescribed for chanting so that if by chance the foetus is female, it will be transformed into a male. Such beliefs and practices generate negative attitudes towards females.

K.M. Kapadia's study described the family position of a female child, as follows: "A female child does not usually receive the same attention and affection that is bestowed upon a male child in a Hindu family and this attitude tends to intensify into indifference and coldness towards her. While some castes practising hypergamy have stopped at this intentional neglect of a female child, others have gone to the extent of practising female infanticide, which is generally known to have been a practice among the Rajputs and there is little doubt that other castes like the Anavils and the Kulnis resorted to it under the stress of economic pressure". Anthropologist, T.N. Madan, observes that among the Kashmiri Pandits, "Sons are particularly auspicious and therefore greatly desired, daughter's birth makes even a philosophic man gloomy, whereas a son's birth is like sunrise in the abode of gods".

The reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries caused very little change in the social concept of begetting a son or a daughter. Even the legal emancipation of women in Independent India, and the large scale education and
employment of women in modern occupations have not greatly modified the traditional psychology regarding female children. Thus, the obsession for a son is a structural and cultural affiliation of the Indian society.

Discrimination between girls and boys, beginning even before birth is being studied and noticed by UNICEF (1986) and other social scientists', and what is being highlighted is the organized pattern of discrimination against growing girls and older women in India. This is reflected in the sex ratio statistics which point out that India is the only country in the third world, where the ratio of men to women has been declining over the years. The ratio declined from 972 females per thousand males in 1901, to 935 in 1981 and 48% female to 52% male in 1991. India is also one of the handful countries where female infant mortality exceeds that of the male, notwithstanding the fact that the female child is biologically stronger at birth. A recent survey of infants, toddlers and pre-scholars showed that within their combined age groups, 71% of females suffered severe malnutrition, as against 28% of the males. Statistics also show that boys are taken to hospital for treatment of common diseases in twice the number of girls. Boys do not fall ill more infrequently they are merely provided more health care by parents who value sons more than daughters.

In the widening gender gap in India, the female literacy rate is barely half that of males. In the population aged 7
years and above. Literacy rates according to the 1991 census were 64.13% males and 39.29% females.99

Ramanamma's study shows that the plight of India's girls aged fifteen years and under is so dismal that about 140 million of these cry out desperately for caring and sensitive attention. They form 20% of the nature's population but are denied adequate food and care because their parents are themselves, the victims and prisoners of brutal tradition and economic circumstances in which the female shoulders the responsibility. For her sins, she is burnt alive as an adult bride over dowry demands or if she is a child bride, she may be condemned to a life of penurious widowhood even before the marriage is consummated, or burnt alive as sati, even against her wishes. Reports on sex determination tests followed by femicide, are currently the greatest threat to the survival of girls.

Leela Dube, has pointed out that customs like Polyandry, sharing a wife (outside wedlock) abduction or purchase of women, wherever prevalent has led to various forms of exploitation and oppression of girls. The wave of sex determination tests is proving to be the most blatant form of extermination of the female sex.

Dr Marie M. Mascarchrus, Director CREST, Bangalore reports that sex Determination Test Clinics have sprung up in the remotest of places where potable water is less easily available. Punjab was the first State to start the commercial use of
amniocentesis and educated respondents to a questionnaire showed that they all "know about the test and found it useful". Moreover, doctors often abet and aid the couple and in laws, by giving false reasons for the abortion.

In her study of violence against women, within the family, P.M. Lata states, "In India, we have a unique situation of co-existence of all forms of violence, especially of elimination of women, e.g. selective female foeticide, female infanticide, bride burning and Sati. The incidence of violence of all forms within the family has also gone up". However, at the same time, awareness about the existing violence has also gone up.

Differential sexual patterns of socialization show how myths and ideals are operationalized. Through the use of a variety of techniques of socialization such as imitation, role modelling and selective reinforcement, children's behaviour is channelised to take a particular shape and form. This differential treatment is meted out by a variety of social agents such as parents, teachers, peers and symbolic agents such as television and books. The end product is a package of personality traits attributed to men and women what psychologists label as femininity and masculinity.

The plight of the girl child in India is so miserable that the government is compelled to launch action programmes in order to redeem her status. A report by Razia Ismail states that there
are at least 200 million Indian girls who are devalued even before they are born ... "If we look objectively at the girl child situation, we find in it the single largest challenge to social development". 101 Stressing on the need for a girl child to develop the right to choice Ismail says, "it is important for the girl child to be saved from early marriage, which involves her personal life and health". Ismail advocates a radical change in the socialization/teaching patterns so as to bring about necessary changes in the perspectives which girl children grow up with.

At the same time it is also important, as Devaki Jain states that macro level programmes of the Government need to be directed in ways that will alleviate the miserable conditions especially of working girl children. In her study of representative life and work patterns of girls aged between five and fourteen Devaki Jain shows how 70% of girls do not go to school. "Perhaps this will be so till their mothers and fathers earn enough to manage without their labour time, or there is a good care centre for children, where for zero cost, the sibling can be left, or where firewood and water are nearby and affordable". 102 These girls have long working hours 14-15 hours a day and their daily chores include collecting fuel, water, helping in cooking, looking after younger sibling, tending to work in the fields or selling services of self at small amounts, which however, matter a great deal to the families of these girls.
From the preceding accounts of conditions under which Indian girls are compelled to grow up, it is evident that they are a victimized lot because of social cultural sanctions which are inbuilt in the traditional/patriarchal systems, governing the lives of women.

The Women in an Indian Household

A review of the position of a woman in her family and household is important to assess her position in society at large as also to evolve a picture of her psychological state. A woman seems to be caught in a chain of well defined duties with rights to which she gains access towards the latter part of her life, when she has established herself as the mother in law in the family. The Indian family is structured on a system of interrelated rights and duties and principle of deference towards the elder and especially towards the males. The politics of the Indian family is co-related with the basic exercise of authority and power, which draws its legitimacy from a connection, with the male line.

In her study of the position of Indian women in a typical Indian household, Mrinal Pande observes, "The subjugation of women within the four walls of the home, is constantly being re-enacted in male subjugation of other men and women in the public domain in the name of gender, caste or religion. The majority ideology that justifies domination of women and minorities has
become so generalized in society in time, that those that are dominated may also be frequently seen assessing the world through the filter of this very ideology. Thus, a woman who may smart or chafe under the domination of a chauvinistic husband and his family, may herself revel in, the chauvinistic behaviour of her own sons. She may even go on duplicating the behaviour of her in laws towards women who enter her family through her men such as a 'bhabi' (Brother's wife) and a daughter in law'.

Woman's status and behaviour tend to replicate previous and existing models and this accounts for the persistence of familial attitudes towards women. Man constructed biases appear to be natural and god given, even to women. As a result of such attitudes, women in a household are always at the receiving end.

Leela Gulati's study of women in rural households shows that women's contribution to the household survival in terms of income and survival is more than a man's and yet she is more deprived in terms of consumption. Her work within the domestic confines as well as outside yields a greater resource for sustenance, yet she is underrated and receives proportionately a lower share of the net return in terms of food or spending power. In her study of an agricultural labour household in Kerala, Gulati notes, that when both men and women are employed, the man eats 11% less calories and the woman 20% less, but when both are unemployed and poverty is acute, the man eats 20% less than the required amount, whereas the woman's calory intake is cut down by as much as 50%.

Batliwala and Mathur have noted a similar starvation of
women in extreme poverty in Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka. Women thus operate within their households with basic handicaps. Their responsibilities towards sustenance of the family are greater and when they are sole earners and heads of their family units, their plight is even more acute.

Similarly other studies\(^5\) focusing on gender relations bring out the structured patterns of discrimination operating in households. The household is a fairly common form of social organization in most regions of the developing world and often represents the primary site for the structuring of gender relations and women's specific experience. Olivia Harris, 1981 observes that the household is central to a woman's life. It denotes an institution whose primary feature is co-residence, and it is generally assumed that people or rather members of a household live in one space and share in the servicing of one another. The structure of the household pivots around the sustenance providing duties conducted mainly by women. "Co-residence implies a special intimacy, a fusing of physiological functions, as distinct from other types of social relations.... It is undoubtedly the case that whether or not it coincides with a family of procreation, household organization is fundamental to ideologies of womanhood, and that households are, in material terms the context for much of women's lives".\(^6\)

Though structured around power relations, a household derives its essential character from the processes of biological
as well as social production and this ensures its perpetuation. It is here that a woman becomes the chief agent of the specific activity of procreation for which a household came into existence and gradually associated. The woman is therefore, overwhelmingly involved in a broad spectrum of reproduction. Biological reproduction comprises childbirth and lactation; physical reproduction involves the daily regeneration of the wage labour force through cooking, cleaning, washing etc.; social reproduction refers to the maintenance of ideological conditions which reproduce class relations and uphold the economic and social status quo. A woman contributes specifically, though often in various invisible ways to maintaining the status quo, through budgeting, saving and interacting.

Analyzing gender stratification within a household, Devaki Jain shows that data for such an analysis could be derived from intra household. "Women from within households have the common experience of facing different forms of intra household subordination, whatever the caste or class and this common experience within this world of household could not only provide the basis of organization but also provide perspectives which could be called feminism, or the method and articulation of women".¹⁰⁷ The study of women in intra household analysis has generated new data concerned with the position of women in sexual power relations within a domestic unit. The study has also brought into focus various aspects of a household and how they
are diluted or strengthened depending on the position of the woman. Devaki Jain states that poverty and unemployment in rural areas have resulted in the phenomenon of migration, which in turn has led to a dilution of the family. Concurring with this development is the economic phenomenon of female headed households where women are breadwinners and nurturers. Thus, the traditional form of the household invites a different interpretation. In the Indian context, the theory of the sociological family suggests that it is a homogeneous unit, with strong ties of interdependence and loyalty. The customary formal and nonformal rules that operate within it, are often described as the microcosm of the world—or larger society. However, Jain points out, how true this is of the economic family, for the economic household contains in it the economic characteristics of the larger world: namely unequal distribution of economic power between men and women. This unequal distribution of power relates to benefits accruing from ownership, capital, access, responsibility and gender. "The less the resources within a family, the greater is the inequality within it".108

Because of inherent gender and power hierarchies, within a traditional family, attempts have been made over time to move away from family to new forms of collective organization. The communes of China and Vietnam, the Kibbutz of Israel, the Ashrams of Gandhi and the new communities in Europe and North America are examples of this attempted change. While most of them arose out of an interest, in reorganizing production and distribution,
Gandhi's efforts arose out of a recognition of the tyranny of the family, on women. Marriage becomes a form of institutionalized exercise of sexual inequality where the woman is the natural victim, according to Gandhi. Moreover, women perceive themselves as cut out for roles which are considered central to the domestic unit the basic chores of cooking, cleaning and caring which occupy them completely, and which men never or seldom do. As in the society at large, within the family too, women's roles are somehow considered supplementary or even secondary, with a great degree of importance attached to the roles of men who have control over the spending power of the family and manage to dictate their terms. The structurally inherent tilt towards men in the family has its base both in mythology as well as in reality. If it is prescribed that whatever girls and women are engaged in, is inferior in status. Reality too shows that girls and women are occupied with unchanged, repetitive reproductive activities. If engaged in other activities they too are usually of the supportive kind, requiring low skills and carrying low wages. Perpetuating the secondary status of a woman, within and outside the family is women's own self perception.

Consequently, the statistical picture that emerges is that the roles of an overwhelming majority of women are familial roles. While women of lower communities often work outside the home for economic reasons and women of the urban elite frequently participate in non earning activities for social reasons, the
majority of women confine themselves primarily to the home centred roles of daughter, sister, daughter in law, wife and mother roles which are in reality and mythologically ascribed a secondary status. Within this structure, when a woman seeks other roles leading to her employment, she does so generally in the event of demise of husband, father or a gradual break up of inter family ties - e.g. no paternal uncle, elderly cousin or brother to assume responsibility for survival of another.

However, despite severe restrictions and limitations on women within the traditional household structure, it is only here that a woman is able to find a sufficient amount of support, generally of an emotional nature. This need is met with usually through her relationship with brothers, for a girl especially. Even after marriage the brother sister tie is likely to remain steadfast and in adverse circumstances, she is able to turn to him, except when intra family power relations begin to manifest through the relation between women. The role of the brother is of special note because he is deemed a protector, one in whom a sister can confide, turn to and who always helps. The trust, benevolence and also intimacy between brother and sister act as buffer between an oppressed woman and the rest of the world. This phenomenon is fairly prevalent in India, irrespective of region, caste and class. Perceiving themselves as being central to the household, women are generally able to take a great deal of battering and during the early stages of their marriages it is their natal family which provides them with a great deal of
support, both of emotional and financial kind. Thus, there exists a certain degree of overlapping of emotions, rights and duties and this the "woman carried to and fro with her. Even though the identity of a woman is established through her marital household, yet psychologically she feels alienated because of her position in the family, until such time that she becomes a mother. Moving towards middle age, a woman gradually begins to feel more empowered. This is especially so if a woman has become the mother of sons, because a great deal of misgivings that a woman experiences as part of her role as wife or daughter-in-law tends to be compensated by the emotional support and satisfaction she derives from her son. Through her son a woman is able to generate a structure of defences and she is able to develop a cultural individuality, which sustains her. This has also explained the hostile relationship between mother in law and daughter-in-law, who seems to usurp her authority as mother of sons and emotional support which she received readily from her son. This accounts for the rather high incidence of women ill treating other women - those co-joined in relationships of mother in law, daughter in law, sister in law. However, as Ruth Vanita, 1981 points out, this situation is also a reflection of gendered power relations, because by ill treating another woman, "She does not enhance her own power as a woman, rather she enhances the total power of men as a group. Through the patriarchal family women can get power only as agents of domination and oppression within the male dominated family
structure. The woman who comes to gain the upper hand, usually has the support and approval of the powerful men. The tussle role among women plays a crucial role in most families. The deep rooted identification of a woman with her household has also accounted for not only her own survival but also the survival of the household and the family which is held together through it. This factor has challenged the views of many an analyst regarding the oppressed and demeaning status of the Indian woman. The household may or may not be a homogenous unit, yet its persistence reflects not only its functionality but assures a woman the status that is prescribed at various levels. Each individual woman in a household is exploited either by her father, husband or father in law. Evidently, women, through patriarchal systems are transformed into household dependents, surviving entirely on the man's earnings or whatever monetary contribution, men think is necessary for the upkeep of the home and family.

The relation between women and their men's households takes on a new dimension as society shifts from feudal structure to a capitalist structure. Carol A Brown in her research on female headed families has brought out this dimension. She explains, "European colonial governments often liberated women from Purdah, Sati, bride price, domestic slavery, harems and the like. On the other hand, if the pre existing society was one in which women had economic power within the family or in the market place, that
power had also to be broken. By giving men exclusive rights to jobs, land holding, trading licenses etc., the colonial governments relegated women to becoming unpaid reproducers of the family's labour power, dependent upon their husbands.\(^{110}\) The household thus closed in upon its female members requiring their services, which though undervalued and unpaid were nevertheless indispensable. Moreover, any service that women engaged in outside the domestic unit for personal and familial reasons, did not happen to substitute any of the services which fell to the lot of women by virtue of their being women but rather became an addition to it. In the words of Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, "Working wives carry a double burden, since the sexual division of household labour gives them primary responsibility even when they go out to work, married women are both producers and mothers. The household setting of work facilitates the combination of productive and domestic activities. Married women adjust their time to meet the demands of production in the interest of the family economy".\(^{111}\) The double burden of women is again a contribution of the structured pattern of the household which underlies the ironies and contradictions manifested through the lives of most women. Yet the tendency to cling to the marital household is very strong and this is primarily due to the discriminatory attitudes that women without the sanctity of household, suffer from. A shift from Joint to nuclear families, from male headed families to female headed families does not amount to freedom from oppressive gender relations, because the
male-female relations that determine the essential character of a household remain the same. What can make inroads into traditionally closed domestic structure is a shift from patriarchy along with capitalism. While this view is inherent in the socialist feminist perspective, it has yet to gain ground in order to make it viable, since women are yet unable to perceive themselves as having an identity without the household to live in and work for.

Consequently the Indian woman is synonymous with the Indian housewife. A study showed that only four out of a thousand women above the age of 45 had never married. One of the reasons cited for this is the mother model and role which a household nurtures. Joy Paulson observes, "The mother figures of tradition encompass the image of teacher, of courage, sacrifice and morality, as well as the abstract concepts of all embracing motherhood, Mother Earth, Mother country, Mother of destruction. The mother provides the most potent model for the individual woman, a model which may well give her the ability to withstand adversity or change (and adapt to it) better than do men". Male female relations in the household are inherently hierarchical. The sexual division is further visible not only in the day to day functions of a household but also in structure. In those areas which were under Islamic rule, this was formalized in the custom of Purdah (female seclusion). Women's living quarters were physically segregated from men's and women covered
their heads and bodies in front of men. Their contacts with men were limited to those who were immediate kin.

Hannah Papanek points out, "There are two aspects to Purdah: separate worlds, a division of labour by sex which enforced mutual dependency of the sexes, and a symbolic shelter for women that served as an important aspect of their protected status. Under purdah, women's work was confined to the household and such tasks as shopping in the bazar were the responsibility of men. Though a small percentage of families actually observed purdah, the principles of female seclusion and segregation of the sexes were widespread". Degrees of sexual segregation varied with different classes and castes, there being greater enforcement in the upper segments. However, owing to desired upward mobility, households which acquired some degree of elevation in their financial status, corresponded this with a change in their social status by ensuring greater sexual segregation. Paulson's survey of housewives from different classes and communities shows that all women in general regard themselves as Keystone of the family, whether joint extended or nuclear. Marriage and children were considered as the basic ingredients of an ideal life. There seems to be a remarkable continuity in the patterns and structure of the traditional Indian household resting as it does on a mutual understanding of service by the woman and control cum regulation by the male.
Bhatty's study substantiates the general observation that change and social mobility of whatever degree fail to have much effect on the basic structure of the household, and the position of the woman vis-a-vis the household. It appears that both law and custom operate as discriminatory forces against women of Uttar Pradesh household where the study was largely conducted. Another factor determining structure of households is that of emulation. In this case the non Ashraf women are forsaking their freedom in choice of husbands in the process of becoming like the Ashraf women. The trend of emulation is so strong, that any change in the households may be detected through the behaviour pattern of the women.\(^{115}\)

The major influences affecting the household woman relation is education and urbanization, whereas among the lower classes it is economic progress or increase in the per capita income. However, what largely creates a stagnancy where muslim women are concerned is the Muslim Personal Law which has yet not been substituted by any legislation similar to the Hindu Code Bill.

Forms of address used especially by women are important indicators of a woman's position in the structure of their households. The use of plural forms has often denoted show of respect usually to those in positions of greater power or higher status. Ullrich has shown how these forms are generally used by women while addressing the male members of their family. The male members, however, are not obliged to reciprocate - in fact,
it is customary for them to use only singular forms of address to women, unless they be of the rank of mother or wife of the head of the family. "Gender hierarchy within the household reflects itself in the linguistic forms of address attributing the male a degree of higher status". That the trend continues till date signifies the strong hold the custom has within traditional as also modern homes.

**Women - Education and Employment**

One of the most significant and visible changes specific to urban regions and spreading to suburban areas is the access to education which an increasing number of women has been able to attain. A wide range of studies has been conducted on the impact of education on the role and status of women and the extent to which this carries importance, in the future lives and developmental patterns of women. One of the foremost questions in this direction is the extent to which education has led women to take up voluntary employment for economic independence, self expression and improved social status. Since in India, the rural urban dichotomy provides different sets of values and variables, it would be relevant to consider education in the context of urban populations of women. In the rural context where literacy has yet to gain ground among women, talk of education and women, especially formal education would be quite out of place. Yet, employment of rural women forms almost an inherent feature of their existence. Thus, a study of women, education and
employment would be a study which cannot be based on any generalizations. However, one of the ironies regarding women and employment that has emerged is that while a very small percentage of women is able to exercise the right to work for income and self expression, a large number which is subjected to work, does not regard it either as a right or privilege but rather as - a compulsion for survival of self and the family. A survey of women who have benefited from education reveals that most of them seek employment and pursue employment only when it does not encroach upon their commitment to raising a family or maintaining a household. But here again there is a great deal of variation subject to regional and cultural factors. Yet, it is important to take into account how education has made inroads into the lives of women. Despite the traditional attitude to education for women, education has become a part of life styles of girls at least upto the secondary level, especially among middle class and upper class strata of urban society. Yet education itself has not, in any significant way changed stereotyped role allocations and gender differences that characterize the Indian Society. However, there is a school of thought which believes that the main purpose of educating women is not to make them more efficient and active units in the process of socio economic or political development, but to make them more capable of fulfilling their traditional roles in society as wives and mothers.
The important role of education in effecting a significant change in the status of women is highlighted by achievements associated with women from Kerala. In a study on women in Kerala, Murickanan concludes, "Kerala women have distinguished themselves in various sectors of public life in India and internationally. Kerala has the unique distinction among the states of having a sex ratio with an excess of women over men. The increasing number of women in Kerala during the first five decades of the century contrast sharply with the decreasing number of women in the Indian sex ratio". This reversal in trend has been attributed to the fact of education, and awareness of health which prevails among Kerala women. This also accounts for the phenomenon of a steadily rising age at marriage of the female population. Moreover, the wide disparity that exists in the rest of India between male and female education is almost non-existent in Kerala. Comparatively, the younger lot of women in the age range of 25-28 were conscious of their political rights and had a definite political ideology. But one of the important contradiction that the study brought out was the attitude to Dowry. While a large number seemed to be unaware of the Dowry Prohibition Act, the others indulged in raising and giving a dowry so as to ensure a marriage. The evident conclusion is that marriage plays a pivotal role in the lives of women, even if they are highly educated and economically self-reliant. Though education has modified the age at marriage, it has not altered the imperative need for marriage. Yet, on the whole it was found
that except on the issue of marriage, the higher level of education among women affected changes in attitude towards religion, choice of marriage partners and employment. D'Souza's study of the correlation between women's employment and family status indicates, that continuity manifested itself in both the higher or the lower classes and changes were noticed only in the middle classes. The factor has been generally attributed to the easy access that women of this class have to education. Studies conducted in determining the impact of education on women revealed that those women who, by virtue of their educational training and degrees, got employment outside their homes, reflected changes in their attitudes and life patterns. Mary Trembour's survey of women in education reflected major deviations. She observes of school teachers employed in a Bombay Primary School, "They were a vivid example of change and tradition in India. Only one of the ten lived in a joint family, two younger women and two older women were unmarried. Their unanimous opinion of the main difference between themselves and their mothers was that they were educated and their mothers not. The other striking fact was that none of the married women used any birth control method except self-control, but only one had as many as four children and she had continued until she produced a boy." The motherly role was strong among teachers because their profession allowed them to devote themselves to their homes and children without creating any contradictions in their lives as teachers. Persuading women to join teaching professions was
part of the government programme to encourage a larger number of girls and women to enroll for education.

The role of Christian missionaries in the spread of education for girls was significant but schools for girls became exclusively for those belonging to elite families. Constitutional directive to give free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen could not be fulfilled. Though efforts to eradicate illiteracy have gained some ground cross cutting various regions yet the figures for women remain dismal. Moreover, in the matter of higher education for women in India, the country lags far behind. Enrolment in professional courses is also extremely low. In her study, Aleyamma George, points out, "The gap in the education of boys and girls is wide and we should take appropriate measures to narrow down the existing gap. It is established that literacy and education play a decisive role in the improvement of women's status and these in turn are related to fertility." The linkages that George sees between education and women's status also serve as indicators of the low and oppressed position of women within the family and in society.

Analyzing the economic status of women employees in offices, Martin Oppenheimer states, "A woman office worker is a proletarian by her position as a wage earner, her being a woman introduces a second oppressive condition to overlay her first
exploitative one". A woman is subject to exploitation by virtue of her womanliness regardless of the roles she adopts. Her work as an employed salary earner does not negate her role sets within a family. "Her position in the office is by and large clerical, entailing a higher degree of exploitation, whereas within the family, her role of sustainer entails a high degree of self effacement, sacrifice and service. As new categories of jobs were created, for instance, through telecommunications, it was women who were recruited to operate them. In a variety of clerical occupations, the proportion of women has steadily increased since the 70's".

In a survey of Employment and incomes of women, Kumaresh Chakravarty reveals an increasing recognition of economic inequality between men and women in participation rate, wages, and conditions of work. This is a direct manifestation of social cultural milieu in which women are oppressed and sexually exploited. Chakravarty observes, "In this vast country, in hundreds of forms, social oppression of women exists. Relatively well known are the landlord's on the master's right of the first night, the highly sanctified bargaining for fixing the price (dowry) of the bride groom in the marriage market, the widow's bondage and the woman's exclusive responsibility for 'Protection of Chastity'; discrimination in religious rituals; unequal access to educational opportunities and, most barbarous of all, the killing, rape and burning of poorer women, particularly Harijans." Traditional obscurantism and structural or inherent
exploitation of women continue into the so called modern salaried occupations. Women in India are further discriminated on the basis of different religions, communities and castes. The largest proportion of low caste Hindus, tribals and Muslims are among the poorest of the poor. Occupationally, the scheduled castes and tribes in particular constitute the bulk of poor peasants, landless labourers including bonded labour, migrant labourers including casual or contract labour, handloom weavers, domestic servants, sweepers, and scavengers. Whichever occupation involves both men and women, the survey reflected an inferior and highly discriminatory position of women, in terms of work and income. Moreover, wages of women workers as part of the family income, renders a great proportion of women's labour as unpaid and thus undervalued. Besides this, women's limited access to skill training, keeps them away from specialized services and jobs in factories and offices. Chakravarty points out, "Women's emancipation, reflect the general level of emancipation of the society. At the present stage, the primary need for such emancipation is a revolutionary transformation of agrarian relations, where the literacy rates are the lowest and more than 80% of women are employed in agriculture".125

The scene of urban employment of women is different only in the nature of employment and not in any way the quality and status of work apportioned to women in contract with men. While looking into the problems of working women in urban areas,
Wandana Sonalkar uses as her premise Engels' perspective, "The emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as long as women are excluded from socially productive work, and restricted to housework, which is private". With the gradual development of capitalism, women have been largely pushed back into the sphere of housework on the one hand, while on the other hand it has created a large class of semi skilled labour consisting of women as well. However, employment of female labour is restricted to the most monotonous tasks, particularly where fine work and delicate handling is involved - the electronics industry, dressmaking, canning and so on. Women are rarely employed in supervisory capacities, even in these industries. Women are also employed as nurses, teachers, typists and secretaries, that is, in jobs where they carry out the jobs of looking after children and serving men. Sonalkar observes, "In the early part of British rule in India, thousands of Indian women were employed in mines, plantations textile mills and construction work. Through the destruction of domestic handicrafts, large numbers of women came to the cities. But the job opportunities for women, remained meagre in the cities, so men came alone to seek jobs, and prostitution become an ubiquitous feature of urban areas ever since. The main problem for women in Indian cities is still the lack of jobs".

Sonalkar also points to the disbalances created in female occupation owing to the vested interests of the British regions. For instance, Household industry activities like handloom
weaving, oil pressing, beedi making and tobacco processing and agarbatti making, has a traditionally employed female labour. Where these processes are becoming mechanized, women's employment is hit hard. Female textile workers have been thrown out of jobs in thousands since the early sixties. There was thus, a conspicuous decline in the number of females workers engaged in traditional household and mechanized industries. The influence of advanced capitalist countries today acts both economically and ideologically in a manner, detrimental to the progress of women's emancipation in India. Modern capitalism can only show us the image of woman pushed back to the hearth, brought into public life only to be degraded as a commercial object. Modern imperialism strangles the life of our economy, so that the oldest forms of subjugation of women also thrive at the same time.\textsuperscript{128}

The working life of women outside their homes is both insecure and discriminated against. Most women who enter the work force do so, for pressing economic reasons and not because they are emancipation linked. Their retrenchment and comparative lower wages amount to a higher degree of victimization.

Leela Gulati's account of sex discrimination in wages states how this discrimination can take on a number of forms. "The most blatant is paying women less than men for the same type of work. There is the practice of restricting women to low paid jobs and denying them access to better paid positions which are reserved exclusively for men. A subtler form of discrimination is that in
whatever jobs to which women have access, they are employed for fewer hours, days or weeks, so that the quantum of work is considerably less than that available to men. The last two types do not and need not show any obvious wage differentiation because, on paper, men and women are paid the same wage for the same type of work. In reality since women are restricted to low paid jobs there is in effect a sort of wage discrimination. Similarly a lower quantum of work is bound to result in women earning less. This also amounts to wage discrimination.¹²⁹ Justification for wage discrimination is presented from various perspectives. V.B. Karnik points out that "an argument is always put forward that the work turned out by a woman is not of equal value to that turned out by a man and on that ground lower wages are fixed for women in a number of cases".¹³⁰ The wide range of arguments and perspectives indicates a permanent disability where equality of wages and occupations between men and women is concerned. From the women's point of view, women prefer to exercise their options for greater flexible hours and more sedentary jobs. However, in order to protect the rights and interests of working women, ordinances¹³¹ putting forth equal wages for equal work and maternity benefits have been promulgated, but they have yet to be translated in letter and spirit, before they can be of some meaning to women on the whole. This is mainly because there is no effective machinery for implementation of these ordinances.
In a study of construction workers, Chitra Ghosh points out, "The denial of equality in work and wages and the deprivation of basic amenities and minimum standards are particularly significant in the case of women workers. Women are paid less on the grounds that they work on small jobs which do not require the specialized skills of the bricklayer or cement maker". 132 Even in the higher echelons of work which requires professional expertise, gender discrimination is visible. For instance, child birth, traditionally regarded as highly polluting is confined mainly to women practitioners, serving as 'dais'. Today, approximately 90% of obstetricians and gynecologists are women, continuing the tradition. In the supposed more highly skilled areas of surgery and cardiology women are more or less marginalized and are dominated mainly by male practitioners. Medicine is one of the highest-status, most lucrative, respected professions for women as for men, in India. Ever since the introduction of modern medicine by missionaries in the later decades of the nineteenth century there has been a relatively high proportion of women entering the profession, in part, initially because of the concern of missionaries to improve the health care of women through training women physicians. The proportion of women practising today in the profession is between 6 and 10%.

Joyce Lebra's study indicates that daughters of high caste families, regarded as unattractive and less likely to make 'good marriages' were encouraged to go into medicine or teaching, by
which they could be self supporting. "Today, however, the percentage of married women in medicine has risen considerably. This goes to show also the importance of marriage in the lives of Indian women. Even highly placed professionals, marry for reasons of family and social security. Medicine offers one of the oldest and most prestigious professions for women in India, although because of the cost of training involved, it remains confined to upper caste women whereas nursing draws women from lower castes and various communities. However, despite the highly specialized field which is demanding, women in this profession still place marriage as an important priority". 133

Statistics reflect the declining rates of female participation in economic production, which leads also to further impoverishment of women as social beings, Kishwar Points out, "The three main sources of employment in the organized sector are factories, mines and plantations. Between 1951 and 1971, women's share of total employment in factories declined by more than 20% and this trend has continued well into the 80's." 134 This trend is the consequence of a situation in which jobs are passing on to men, but this does not ensure a secure place in the family for a woman. "Men tend to spend a large proportion of the income on drinking, smoking and other forms of personal consumption. They may also leave one wife and marry another, the first woman thus being forced to face and take care of the children by herself. The portion of men's earnings which reaches
the wife and children is often insufficient for their upkeep. In the heart of Delhi, wives of workers in one of the oldest and largest textile mills of North India do piece rate jobs, earning about a couple of rupees a day for long hours of work. Many of these women seem desperate for employment, but the textile mills where the husbands work do no employ a single woman worker in the factory. 135

The degraded status ascribed to women workers is also a contribution of the overall view, that women are marginal to the occupational structure and when they do step into it, the reasons are never strong enough. Occupation for women is regarded generally as a stop gap till the appropriate source of income can be revived. However, essential tasks such as fuel gathering, water fetching and scavenging in conditions of extreme scarcity fall upon women who thereby become the main providers for individual families and communities.

A United Nations report in 1980 came to the conclusion that women perform nearly two thirds of the work hours in the world. Similarly several micro level studies in India show that a woman's working day is much longer than a man's. Apart from assisting in income generating tasks, women are indispensable for survival tasks. It is pointed out that most of women's energy is expended on life supporting tasks, regardless of season. In comparison, men perform only seasonal types of energy expending jobs, such as ploughing, which usually takes place only once or
twice a year or else they are involved in shift duties which spread over fixed hours and in between these shifts, men usually eat and sleep.

On the other hand, as Kishwar observes, "women's labour is so devalued that even while performing tasks which are crucial for the survival of the family, they are not provided with access to even the simplest technological aids. The only tools they have are their two bare hands, a bucket, a heavy mortar or stone for grinding and a few very simple utensils for cooking. Thus women's jobs are characteristically those which are intensely labour intensive. Women were performing more than 15 hours of hard labour every day, including field work".136

The comparatively lower gains in literacy and education made by women, and the gradual easing out of women from jobs in favour of men, as also the marginalization of women in urban work sectors and prestigious professions is symptomatic of the advancing devaluation of women which has not only affected her survival adversely but has also thwarted her social standing. A key result of this unfavourable situation for women is the geographical spread of higher mortality rates for women as compared to men in most areas of the country. The phenomenon indicated in the census reports as a low sex ratio for women, was once primarily a special characteristic of the North India but it has spread to almost all of South Indian plains as well, where until a few years ago the sex ratio among adults was slightly in
favour of women. G Sharadamma shows how, "The emergence of a deficit of females in South India coincides with the consolidation of local control by upper and middle peasant castes in most areas. It can be assumed that it is the hegemony of these castes' culture that has led to a lowering in women's survival chances". Moreover, as discussed earlier, several communities in the South, which until not very long ago were matrilineal and matrilocal, have been rapidly giving way to patrilineal and patrilocal family structures with increasing male dominance and resultant female isolation and dependence.

Drawing a continuity in the situation of women, Kishwar points out how, "women's social position in urban areas, including that of the formally educated elite groups is a reflection of the deep rooted norms set in the villages of India. This culture of women's oppression is not just a hangover from the traditional past, but as much the product of very modern economic and political development of the last century or more. The prevailing family structure, because strongly biased in favour of men tends to generate many forms of oppression for women, inspite of a nurturing inter dependency which is also an essential feature of the Indian situation.

**Women And the Indian Constitution**

Women face higher risks regardless of the field in which they act out their role sets. The gradual decline in their population is thus a cumulative effect of the attitudes towards
women, as also their functions to which they are enslaved. This has become a persistent and widely prevalent picture of Indian women even though there are various level at which efforts are being made to alter the situation. It is important to look into the laws and their amendments from time to time to find out whether the Constitution is attuned to the deteriorating status of women. The Constitution of India promulgated in 1950, accepts the principles of equality between men and women. The comprehensive Hindu Code Bill, intended to implement those principles, contains a number of acts specifically related to the status of women in marriage and in the family. The Hindu marriage Act of 1955 sets the minimum age of marriage at fifteen for girls and eighteen for boys. This is the same age set in 1929 by the Child Marriage Restraint Act. However, the law is blunted by the statement in the legislation that a marriage contracted in violation of the law is nevertheless valid. Conservative members of the community who regard child marriage as good might prefer to pay the fine rather than have their young daughters unmarried. But census figures show the age at marriage of girls as having risen from 13.2 at the turn of the twentieth century to 17.2 in the decade of the 70's.

The Act also makes unilateral provision for divorce. Because it is alien to Indian social patterns, divorce is only rarely resorted to. Divorced and separated women in 1971 accounted for only one half of one percent of the female
population over the age of ten. Prior to the 1955 Legislation, divorce was abhorred most strongly by women in the higher castes. Today it is the upper caste and rich and educated women who are taking advantage of the law. It is probable that illiterate rural women are unaware of the legal provisions, but continue to practice customary divorce.

The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 providing for equal inheritance by son, daughter, widow and mother, has implications for widows. Legally, they can no longer be kept in economic subjection to their affines. Though widow remarriage is substantiated by the 1955 Hindu Marriage Act, but, as is the case with divorce, widow remarriage runs counter to high caste social norms. Furthermore, if widows do in fact, inherit, or if they can find employment, return to their families or live comfortably with their in laws, there may be no advantage in remarrying, especially if they are no longer very young.

The Dowry Prevention Act of 1961 prohibits the giving or receiving of Dowry. This Act, has like the others not been effective. It is easily circumvented since dowry can be called a gift if made at the time of marriage. Moreover, as is the case with other recent legislation, much of the population is unaware of the Act. More salient, the giving and receiving of dowry are regarded as a status symbol. Finally, there is a fear that if dowry is not paid, or even if it is publicly opposed, a husband will not be found. A great number of ills can become the lot of
women which are interrelated owing to the compulsion of marriage and what seems to be, staying married. Therefore, the status of wife/daughter in law, is socially and economically the most sought after, and at the same time the most oppressive in the chain of relations. When a married woman is also engaged in an occupation for wage/salary outside the household, her oppression takes on added dimensions.

The Objectification of Women

The gradual deterioration of the social esteem in which women are held has resulted into the creation of a variety of factors which contribute to a total objectification of women in the Indian society. Whether they are educated or uneducated, rural or urban, women have been reduced to instruments for serving the needs of an overarching, external social structure. There emerges a direct co-relation between the social attitudes to women and the higher incidence of sexual offences against women, which become an unshakable stigma for them, making them out to be more of offenders than victims. This has been attributed to ways in which women are portrayed in advertising and film magazines. The films also portray them merely either as Sita types or the other woman or else as sexual objects. The gross objectification of women is manifested most blatantly in offences like femicide as discussed earlier, the growing incidence of rape, sexual abuse and what has become a typically Indian phenomenon viz. dowry deaths.
Sushma Sood underlines the dichotomy which Indian women experience. She refers to the old Sanskrit adage which states, "Where the women are held in high reverence, there do the gods reside. It is believed that a society grows if the women grow, if they partake of the spirit of progress, for they are the proverbial domestic legislators they are the matrix of social life". The Indian woman's tale as Sood points out, "whether it is the tale of Seeta, Gandhari or Draupadi, had always been a tale of subservience. She symbolizes a curious intermeshing of low status, ritual contempt, sophisticated sexual partnership and deification". It is perhaps this multifaceted image of the Indian woman that provokes a mixture of responses ranging from reverence, contempt, tyranny violence that Indian women are subject to.

Lalita Parihar explains the phenomenon of violence by showing how it is a necessary concomitant of the patriarchal order and the problem of wife beating is not confined to one particular strata of society. However, "this problem was earlier treated as a private matter occurring behind closed doors and therefore never looked upon as part of a wider context which define the position of women". Moreover, as Mahajan explains, "Why this negative aspect of the family was not touched upon before was because the family sociologists and historians using the consensus model had perceived the family as an arena of love, affection, gentleness and centre for solidarity and warmth. Such
preoccupation had made them immune to the stark realities of infanticide of girls, anguish of widows, wife battering and child abuse, and the recent phenomenon of dowry deaths and the destruction of female foetus. The conflict model, on the other hand, demands that the family is also to be studied as a centre of exploitation, assault and violence, ranging from the punishment of children to the torture of wives and daughters-in-law.141 Lack of reportage and therefore, action against family violence can be attributed also to an apathetic attitude of the society, which has relegated intra family violence to a form of individual pathology and has led the members of the family and elites to believe that physical conflict in the family is something other than violence. Moreover, owing to the low status and dependency of women and children on the instigators of violence, namely the men, there was sufficient motivation to remain silent and reserved about the sufferings inflicted upon them. Women were trained to accept them for whatever kind they were and in turn to train their children, especially daughters to abide by the norms of obedience. Kautilya, Manu and later Smriti writers demanded from the wife not only to merge her individuality with that of her husband but also to accept her husband as god. A study of intra family violence reflects that conjugal violence, that which is perpetuated by the husband against the wife, is by far the most common. Next only to women's violence against women springing from jealousy as in the case of co-wives or mother in law/daughter-in-law relationship. Most
studies show that socially dependent people accept humiliation and violence without raising any objection.

A study conducted in Jallandhar district, 1985 revealed that 22% husband admitted to indulgence in violence against wives, among upper castes while 75% made the same confessions among the lower castes. While a large percentage of women corroborated their husbands' statements, among the lower castes all the victims agreed that there prevailed a culture of social approval of violence against women that made it an inherent feature of marital relations. Wife beating has become a normative form of violence which is seldom spoken of or interfered with. However, the result of the Jallandhar study is significant in that it explodes the caste myth which has propagated that family violence has been the characteristic of the lower classes. Family violence transgresses the boundaries of caste and class. Moreover, as Mahajan points out, Violence prevails because of social dependence of wives on husbands. This dependence and consequent physical ill treatment is inculcated in girls since their childhood. The parents not only adopt differential content of socialization but consciously make their daughters dependent. The high degree of tolerance of violence shown by women can be attributed to the fact, that at the time of marriage, daughters are told not to leave their husband under any adverse circumstances. Vidhu Mohan explains the phenomenon by stating, "It seems highly probable that girls, through their socialization in learning the traditional women's role, also
learn that they have little direct control over their lives, no matter what they do ... they learn that their voluntary responses really do not make such difference in whatever happens to them. Thus, it becomes extremely difficult for such women to believe that their cognitive actions can change, their life situation.143 This attitude on the other hand meets its counterpart in the male psyche as brought out by Strauss, who states, "There seems to be an implicit, taken for granted cultural norm which makes it legitimate for husbands to beat their wives and this implies that the marriage license is also a hitting license".144 Moreover, what is prevalent to a discernible degree is the way in which cultural norms further reinforce men to take pride in wife beating. Popular sayings cross cutting societies uphold and champion the male prerogative to indulge in wife beating, creating a widely prevalent culture of violence.

The attitudes towards women have their sanction from religion and consequently are enacted with impunity by which women remain helpless, unquestioning victims. In the various case studies of battered women from diverse, socio economic strata, it is pointed out that whatever may have been the reason for battering, a woman had gradually became a door mat, subservient and fearful that the other person may leave her and tolerant of more and more harsh and abusive treatment. It was only when she was taught to assert, build up self esteem and self
regard, have something meaningful to rely upon, be financially independent and develop herself, that she started to stage a come back.145

In India the statutory law, channelizing protection of battered wives does not exist and not many cases of this nature come before the court. "Patriarchal domination, economic dependence, and a legal system constructed by powerful interests and classes controlled by men has meant not only that women are bound to their position because they cannot escape but they are conditioned not to want to escape".146

Agnes points out that, "as many as thirty specific forms of violence against women have been identified. These range from sterilization, abuse, through pornography to outright murder. Violence against women is often seen as an assault against her body, but more importantly it is a negation of her integrity and personhood. The act of sexual violence has been a powerful factor in restricting women's behaviour and sexual freedom. Thus, as Langley points out, "The struggle against violence is the struggle against the unequal distribution of power both physical and economic between the sexes. Various surveys have shown that 50% of all marriages involve some degree of physical abuse of the woman. One such survey of battered women - 25 from middle class and 25 from working class showed the following results.147

1 The age of women who reported from being beaten ranged from 16 to 65.
2 The educational background of the women, ranged from illiterates to postgraduates.

3 60% of these women lived in nuclear families and the rest in joint families. The family structure did not have much effect on marital violence.

4 50% of the women were beaten within the first six months of marriage.

5 60% of the women had children disproving the fact that the presence of children leads to a decrease in violence.

6 The monthly income of the family ranged from Rs. 150 to Rs. 5000.

7 90% of the men from middle class abstained from alcohol, while in the working class, a large percentage were habitual drinkers. Not all of them beat their wives while they were drunk.

8 Women from middle class backgrounds had husbands who were lawyers, journalists, public prosecutors, executives and successful businessmen.

9 The immediate cause of violence as reported by the women were:

a) Arguments over money
b) Jealousy and suspicion of the woman's character
c) Instigation by in laws
d) Housework
e) Alcohol
f) Women's desire to work outside the home or woman's high self esteem

g) Disputes over children

h) Extramarital affairs on the part of the husband.

It was also found that in most cases, it was the men who instigated acts of violence, by holding women responsible for whatever ills, the women referred to. Violence usually took on severe forms with women as the sufferers and victims. Women did try to find assistance at some time or the other usually resorting to parental assistance in the first year of marriage but succumbing to the pressures and persuasions from parents to give their marriages another chance. Women suffered and tolerated violence only because they found themselves helpless and lost in the world of dominating males and male biased social norms. Instead of trying out different forms of survival, women who were victims of violence merely stayed on in the households which proved humiliating and offensive for the women. Those who did seek relief by opting for temporary separation returned disillusioned and bitter to live on uncompromising terms of their husbands. Life for such women becomes a mere existence, often for the sake of children.

Society outside, labels this return of the wife as a sign of compromise and adjustment which are generally regarded as the two most important ingredients of a normal, fruitful marriage. It was also found that in most cases, the beatings continued, but
the women concerned had learnt to accept the violence as something inevitable. While greater degree of economic independence is helping women to liberate themselves from physical violence, yet, the high incidence reflects an unchanging social attitude. As Flavia points out, "Women are physically and psychologically abused by their husbands and then kept in their place by a society that is indifferent to their plight. They are blamed for getting beaten, then blamed for not ending their beatings. They are blamed for not seeking help, yet when they do so, they are advised to go home and change their own inappropriate behaviour. Not only are they held responsible for their own beatings, they must also assume responsibility for their husbands' mental health. If only they were better persons, the litenry goes on, they would find a way to prevent their own victimization". The constitutional equality of man and woman has obviously not redeemed a woman's situation of being treated as an object of lost love, contempt and violence. If women are still being worshipped they are only those who have been deified.

One of the current forms that objectification of women has taken on is the widely prevalent form of dowries attached to brides. In a study of unnatural deaths of young married women in Delhi for the year April 1981 to March 1982, Khan and Ray found that according to the official record of 179 cases of unnatural deaths, 12% were dowry related. Of these 3 out of 5 were suicide, and the rest homicide. On the basis of interviews with
parents in law and husbands of the young women, 18% of the unnatural deaths were estimated to be dowry related. Another survey showed that in Maharashtra there was an increase of 64% of dowry of deaths in one year on the basis of figures for 1984 and 1985. A survey conducted on the reportings made by Maunushi, the analysis showed that 69% of the cases were from Delhi, 8% each from Punjab and U.P. and 3% each from Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Majority of these women victims were married to professionals and 20% of them were employed in different professions.\textsuperscript{148} The rationale behind the spate of dowry deaths is attributed to a total breakdown in respect for women as individuals who are being used as the means of fulfilling materialistic needs and sheer greed. The involvement of women in perpetrating dowry offences does not absolve them but rather reduces them to the symbols of unequal power relations as manifested within families.

Even though more and more educated women are seeking economic independence, their position at home remains dependent and exploitative. Referring to the denial of fundamental Rights to women, which has made them easy victims of violence and contempt, Kishwar states, "The present family structure in India ensures the subordination and exploitation of women in a way that puts them beyond the purview of most of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution...whatever its limitations, the family is also one of the few arrangements which provide the little support that is available to women".\textsuperscript{149} Yet there are
cases of extreme humiliation to which, women, when subjected become matters, that families of victims like to shy away from, suppress or disown. However, with the consciousness of women's fundamental rights being instilled gradually, battered families are being given the support to expose and bring to book perpetrators of sexual and physical offences against their female members.

Reviewing the increasing incidence of Dowry Deaths, Viewpoint reports "The real killer is not, dowry nor its rapacious in laws, it is the overwhelming pressure to keep a marriage going at all costs, no matter what the humiliation and suffering a woman has to undergo". In an attempt to analyze the situation arising out of dowry related deaths, Kishwar explains, "The term 'dowry death' and 'dowry murder' first began to be used around 1977-78, when investigations by women's organizations began to reveal that many of the deaths of married women which had for years been camouflaged by the police as accidents or suicides were actually, murders or induced suicides, preceded by prolonged physical and mental torture at the hands of husband and in laws. But instead of just describing them as wife murders or induced suicides women's organizations and the media began to call them dowry deaths. The reasons ascribed for this are:

1 To the woman's parents, dowry demands loom the largest because this is the one form of harassment which has to be
born by them as well. All other forms of torture have to be borne by the woman alone.

2 Wife murder is no less frequent among the poorer classes both in rural and urban areas. Wives get battered to death among the urban poor and landless poor. in villages more often over quarrels resulting from money disputes, accusations of extra marital relations and objections to the woman not providing money for the man's liquor. In Most of the cases among the poor dowry demands are not an important theme. 151

If dowry deaths have been labelled as a species of violence peculiar to India, battering of wives and girl friends is widespread even in societies where dowry is not practised, such as Europe, America and in the tribal communities of India. Wife battering whether in India or in the west, cannot be attributed to women's qualities or the lack of them. Its purpose is to humiliate, and to destroy a woman's sense of self esteem, so that she comes to accept her subordinate or servile role. In India, as Kishwar points out, the number of deaths due to physical abuse are higher than in the west, it is because Indian women are economically less independent. Their fathers would rather feed the monetary demands of their sons in law instead of letting their daughters have those amounts of money so as to learn to fend for themselves rather than submit to the whims of their husbands and in laws.
The high incidence of murders today is mainly the extreme by product of an inhuman system of exploiting women, getting them to give up their own hopes and live to serve others in whatever manner is required of them. The low self esteem that prevails among women and the domineering attitude towards them as manifested by society in general are responsible for a range of sexual offences against women, prime among these pertains to rape. The extreme objectification of women which makes rape a common offence is furthered by the projection of the female body as dehumanized or in enslavement. Besides this, sadism and violence are also projected freely for the purpose of entertainment which involves victimization of women in a way which is viewed as lighthearted fun. However, this leads to gross degradation of the female form with enduring results on the psyche of the viewers and readers. The psychological responses to sexualized representations of women tend to perpetuate the images.

Sohail Abdulali's study of the incidence of rape in India shows how it is a unique phenomenon which goes beyond the variable of sexuality in many ways, for instance, the way in which it is used by landlords to quell tribal uprising, or the way in which institutions such as the police and the military are party to perpetrating rape. It is reported that every two hours a rape occurs somewhere in India. Since this is the reported picture, the actual figure would be a great deal higher, since
the reportage on rape tends to be low. Explaining the high occurrence and under-reporting of rapes in India, Abdulali explains, "until the anti rape movement began in 1980, rape was only an issue with political parties and caste groups for whom it was a symbol of political and caste oppression. It was not in the interest of their groups to take up the cause of those women who are raped by men of their own or a lower class. These rapes could not fit into an analysis of class based capitalist oppression, and thus no political purpose was served by examining them. Failing a feminist explanation of rape, the only way to explain these rapes in a male dominated society was by putting the responsibility for being raped primarily on the victim. Given this attitude and the concept of women's elusive 'Izzat', or honour it is no wonder that the majority of reported rapes are those which are committed by men in position of power on women who are affected by this power. Other reasons for the under-reporting of rape include the lack of trust between law enforcement agencies and the public and attitudes towards rape which result in high social costs for the victims". More vicious than other social crimes against women is the crime of rape which makes out the victim to be an instigator in the crime in the way that the victim feels socially extracised instead of socially assisted and as the Mathura Rape Case illustrate what is typical in the circumstances of rape is the condemnation of the victim, and freedom for the offenders.
While rape is the greatest deterrent for women in expressing their freedom of mobility and work it emerged as a powerful tactic, "because raping women is a way of demoralizing and defeating men, as it has been in patriarchal culture for thousands of years". 155

In order to understand rape in the context of the status of women and to counteract it, it is important to see it not only as sexual violence used as an exclusive prerogative of men in the government, the police and the military but also to take account of the fact that women are raped at work, on the streets in the fields, and homes by men who are their employees, acquaintances, neighbours, relatives, in laws and husbands. "Though caste related rape is important in Indian society where castism and sexism are both very strong. The rape of lower caste women is a socially sanctioned way to express sex and class domination. Even without castism, sexism is present in all strata of society and so is rape. 156 The factor of widespread rape, is a singular important indicator of the low and insecure status to which women in India are relegated. Just as marriage, and marital violence cross cut classes and communities, similarly, rape as an instrument wielded by men to terrorize and use women is one of the most distinguishing features of a gender divided society. As Abdualali points out, the main point is to try and create an understanding of the many dynamics involved in the use of rape in India, Personal and societal, sexism, political opportunism and

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castiest practices... Rape is dependent to a large extent on power based exploitative relationships and attitudes towards women prevalent in Indian Society. One of the reasons which treats rape victims criminals may be attributed to the widely prevalent ideology which represents women as the source of all evil. W.I. Thomas argues that unadjusted girls are those who use their sexuality in a socially unacceptable way to get what they want from life. "She is equated with a cunning sexual enchantress a theory which often takes away the onus of rape as a crime from the men". The condemnation of a rape victim is a typical patriarchal attitude which has its way on the rulings made in courts of law, whenever such cases are taken up for justice.

The Status of Women in India

The preceding analysis of studies on various aspects of women's lives in India highlight different facets of their experience, pointing out to ways in which they live in a society which is pluralistic, castest, sexist, and feudal, bordering on various forms of urban modernization. Law and custom have contributed to obliterating the identities of women, excluding them from male patterns of life, and forcing them to conform to patriarchal norms. Typical features of the social structure in which Indian women have survived are the practices of dowry, sati, widow, isolation, and discrimination in opportunities. The net result is a serious decline in the numerical status of women, to the extent that in those parts of India where femicide is
being practised almost as a matter of right, the female population among children up to the age of 12 shows a ratio of 3 girls to every 10 boys. Continuing dehumanization of women and the prospects of female extinction make it imperative to look at women from women's point of view so as to make efforts to reorder the unfavorable male - female relations that prevails in society. While social reform movements coupled with the freedom movement strengthened the cause of women, but it was only when women themselves began to question their status both at home and in the society, that some of the unquestioned atrocities and many of the inequalities began to be perceived and methodically opposed.

In 1975, Indira Gandhi, while referring to the directive principles, stated, "Our women have more rights than women of other countries, but there are large areas wherein women are suffering where they are not conscious of their rights". Going by the constitutional rights and subsequent amendments for women, and a situation of oppression and exploitation of women, the gap between consciousness of law and its effectiveness is a fact to contend with. Women continue to become victims of various social tyrannies and discriminations not because of absence of appropriate legal machinery but more because of either lack of awareness and/or inability to resort to the existing machinery.

Child marriage which was identified as the main scourge against the equality and healthy development of women was first
sought to be eliminated legally through the Child Marriage Restraint Act passed in 1929, declaring it an offence for a man to marry a girl under fifteen years of age. Similarly the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1939, the Indian Divorce Act, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, the Hindu succession right to strengthen the position and rights of women, became available, yet, women have cross culturally within the country seen to suffer from denials and deprivations. The situation goes to point out the deeply inherent and tenacious social values, which have created illustrations and representations idealizing the happily married and obedient wife and daughter who subsequently progress to satisfied mothers of sons. If women have to suffer victimization that too is conceived as part of their womanly lot.

It is evident that in the Indian society, norms are more effective than the laws and customs more meaningful than social change and above all what emerges as a typically striking feature of Indian women cross cutting class, community, religion and caste is the penchant for marriage and one's own family. In contemporary times when literacy and education have opened up new avenues for women, this traditional penchant remains dominant. Those women who opt for a life outside marriage today are perhaps as few and far between as those that were in earlier times. The pervasive trend to marry and stay married, in the Indian society, regardless of many obvious drawbacks impinging upon the personal individuality of women, has been substantiated by all the studies undertaken for review here as also by the empirical survey.
conducted through this research. However, there is no attempt at weaning women from marriage, initiated either by women's organizations or individual women. The Committee on the status of women, 1971-74, brought forth a voluminous report on the conditions under which women in India survive, accompanied by numerous recommendations and proposals. Yet two decades later, male female discriminations, their hierarchical social positions and increasing onslaught on their dignity, self esteem and survival are part of the evidence against deteriorating social conditions for Indian women. This deterioration in some cases, stagnancy in others and progressive outlook in an exceptionally few find their representations through women novelists substantiating the interrelations between cultural literary forms and social reality.

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