Chapter IV

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SOCIETY

Man is a social animal by nature and he is well adapted for social living. He is dependent on the community during the whole course of life. On the basis of this common nature men belong together and form the greatest family of mankind. It is said that "In every individual the one and the same human nature is realised".¹ The desire for the company of fellowmen, the spirit of sacrifice, language, mutual attraction of sexes etc. oblige man to live as a social animal. Society helps man towards a sufficiently clear and sound knowledge of God. "In his anxiety to secure help for self-protection, a sort of gregorious instinct developed in him, and the importance of social values and their utility in one's life began to dawn upon him."² The instinct of self-preservation and self-protection helped them to organize themselves into class or tribes. These tribal groups


increased in number and later took the name of society. With the progress of civilization these tribal societies developed into new civilized agricultural and industrial societies.

The course of evolution of societies passed through savagery, barbarism and civilization. During savagery the natural products were in abundance and people wandered from place to place in search of food. The mode of the society was of the hunting and gathering type. It was the most primitive form of society. These societies gradually changed into more cultured barbarism. Cultivation and cattle breeding were the main occupation and hence it is also known as horticultural societies. "It took almost 300,000 years for man to change from food-gathering to a food producer."³ "The first appearance of horticultural societies is traced to the middle East between 10 and 12 thousand years ago."⁴ Civilization in the period acquired knowledge of the further working up of natural products, of industry proper and art. The Industrial Revolution paved the way for the industrial societies. The industrial societies of modern period are far advanced than the original industrial societies.


The word society is derived from the Latin word 'socius' which literally means a companion. A social group exists when two or more people are in contact with and mutually aware of one another. A group is an aggregate of individuals which persists in time, which has one or more interests and activities in common, and which is organized. A group refers to any collection of persons "who are bound together by a distinctive set of social relations." Thus society has been variously defined by different sociologists. In the International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences it is defined as a "relatively independent or self-sufficient population characterised by internal organization, territorially cultural distinctiveness and sexual recruitment." A society is "a form of organization involving relatively sustained ties of interaction among its members, relatively high degrees of interdependence among its members and characterised by a high degree of autonomy." In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan "society is an organism of different grades, and human activities differ in kind and significance. But each of them is a value so long as it serves the common end." Society is defined "as the


total complex of human relationships, a complex of forms or processes, living and growing by interaction."\textsuperscript{9}

Human societies are controlled by a system of moral rules and the both are mutually binding. The system of moral rules is built upon the web of 'shoulds' and 'oughts'. Man being the basic constituent of society is the unit of reckoning and activity. He is the limbs and arteries of the society. In the words of C.P.Bhatnagar, "He is to society what brightness and warmth are to the sun."\textsuperscript{10} A society is the child of time and exists only as a time sequence. Hence it is always in the process of becoming.

The Indian society is probably older than any other national societies in the world. Indian social thought has its moorings in the far remote past. It can be traced to the pre-Vedic period, when the Aryans entered Bharat and settled down on the Gangetic plains. During this period there was considerable assimilation of culture on both sides. "It was on the Dravidian system that the foundations upon which the


Indo-Aryan economic super-structure was built."11 The Dravidians formed the bed rock of the whole texture of Hindu culture and civilization. The Dravidian element is an important factor in Hindu thought and marks the beginning of its synthesis. The process does not end. Hinduism continues to grow and absorb new practices, beliefs, rites and rituals as it comes in contact with new cults, sects and religions. Hinduism has been a rare example of cultural synthesis, both in thought and practice, from a very ancient past to the present day. But it has retained its vitality and continuity of thought. It has confronted with various practical and social upheavals, foreign in various of different religions and faiths, immense natural calamities and epidemics. But after the crises it reasserted itself with fresh vigour by discovering new values from within itself to replace the old decaying ones.

According to the Sociologists, in Ancient times in India the society was matriarchal. "Indo Aryan society in its most ancient form was matriarchal and that women dominated the political and social life of the community."12 Dravidian


societies were also matriarchal. In the matriarchal Dravidian societies, "the mother with her children formed the nucleus of a settled society." 13 It was the duty of the mother to bring up the children. Father had little concern for them. "The activities of family, therefore became centered in the motherhood." 14 The institution of the family and the kinship relation within it contributed to the enhanced status of mother in society. The relationship of mother and child is one of direct cognition. The infant "offspring of the mother could never be in doubt." 15 But the role of father might be very obscure and even non-existent. The mother being regarded as the soul-source of family and the material instinct being doubtless probably explains the priority of mother right in primitive society. Thus mother became the fountain head and the self sufficiency source of the family.

The primitive societies had much in common with the nature of animals. In animal societies we can see that the females dominate over the group. The herd instinct is found stronger in females than in males. The females are invested with the duty of watching, spying and scouting of animals even if males

are present. When enemies attack females fight last and die at their posts. So the hunters shoot down the lioness first. Likewise it is in the female section of the human society that the altruistic instincts of suffering for a cause, the sacrifice of self-interest for the sake of posterity are implanted more strongly. The mother's love is the fountain head of love, sympathy and pity. Thus we can see that in almost all primitive societies women dominated and they were the owners of land, cattle etc. Man was the master of what he hunted only. Among the people of Formosa, the Eskimoes, the bushmen of South Africa, the aboriginals of East Africa, Sumatra and Australa, we can find the matriarchal societies. The Egyptians were a race among the ancients who attained a high level of civilization among the matriarchal lines. The Greeks and Indians venerated the females in the form of mother goddess.

The mode of living also was a factor that determined the type of social set up. During the primitive period the people lived hunting and gathering. Hunting was the work of men and women did the work of gathering. Hunting led men to live away from the family for long periods of time. Food seeking was the only occupation of men. Women did the rest of the work in the house and clan. Thus the predominance of women came into existence in the society.
In a society where women dominate we can see the mother goddesses cult predominant "Clan life in which the mother is the head of the group is likely to lift the Mother Goddesses into a Supreme position". So also the Dravidian culture was predominated by the Mother cults. The female dieties enjoyed the highest place among the Gods. This shows the social organization in which women were respected and held high. "The superiority of the goddesses over the gods and priestesses over the priests can thus reasonably be explained in terms of social system in which maternity counts more than paternity". According to K. Damodaran "This predominance of goddesses correspond to a stage of social evolution where primitive agricultural matriarchy prevailed". The Vedas and Puranas trace the matriarchal ancestry to the Vedic period. According to the Vedas the primordial Sakti which precedes everything is a female principle. The position of women is dealt with in detail towards the end of this chapter. It is seen that most of the tribes have taken their names from their mother. Thus man was known by his mother's name. All these show that the primary principle from which the modern societies evolved is the matriarchal form of society.

16. ibid.
17. ibid., p. 24.
The existence of matrilineal families in South India can be shown as a continuation of the matriarchal ancient societies. Among the Nayars of Malabar we can see the best examples of the matriarchal form of society. "Among them women are the hereditary proprietresses of wealth and men are but managers of property." The Nayar joint families are otherwise known as Taravads. A tarawad consists of women and their children and the children of their daughters. The son's children belonged to their mother's tarawad. When the number of members of a tarawad increases it splits into minor families called tavazhi. In matrilineal societies marriage is of a typical form called the matrilocal type. The rulership of Travancore devolves upon a man in preference to a woman, but the Maharaja's son is not the heir-apparent, but his sister's son. This system of inheritance which the Travancore kings followed is known as alia-santana. Thus in Kerala we have references of many tribes and castes known to have followed the system of matrilineal inheritance.

The social and cultural set up of the pre-Aryan people began to change as a result of the coming of the Aryans to

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* Matrilocal type of marriage is known as Sambandham. It is a mere making arrangement than a sacrament in which the husband is only an occasional visitor. The marriage can be split up at any moment at the will of either of the two.

** Alia-santana is the form of inheritance from mother's brother to his sister's son.
India. When the Aryans entered India they were a type of nomadic war like pastoral people. They grouped themselves in order to protect themselves from danger and also for hunting. As time passed they began to settle down in the fertile plains of India.

Their new way of life gave rise to many changes in their social and cultural life. Families and clans emerged from the gangs. New civilization began to develop. Settled life gave rise to the development of agriculture. The change from hunting life to agricultural life also paved the way for the transition from a matriarchal society to a patriarchal type. When agriculture developed in its most productive form, the patriarchal form of society was established. By the time of Rig Veda, the society had changed into the patriarchal form. In the Rig Vedic period, the father was the patriarch, possessing supreme control of the household and other social institutions. As men occupied top most position in society, the position of women began to degrade. Consequently goddesses were subordinated. The wives of gods did not have equal significance. They were only shadowy reflections of the gods having no independent power. This shows the dominance of male factor in society.

The Rig Veda reveals that the Aryans had a well organized society and it was by no means low. The Vedas point to a human society which was simple and contained quite natural and modest desires about progeny, pelf, health and other material
objects. "Veda thinks in terms of physical and material well

The Vedic society was not so rigid as it became later with the development of the caste system. The varna system recognizes the importance of different social classes in society. In the Rig Vedic period the Aryans appeared to have been divided into five principal class or tribes possessing a homogeneous civilization, worshipping common gods, performing common religious rites observing common social customs, subsisting on the products of agriculture and living in well organized village communities. The natural resources were abundant and the struggle for existence was not so keen. People were content and joyous. The economic life of the people centered round the ownership of cattle and the like. Bartar system was the existing type of trade. Agriculture became their main occupation. They built towns and fortified palaces and led a collective living through mutual love and concord. Systematic attempt was there to build up samahridaya and samajñānam at all social levels. Atharva Veda wants this samajñānam to be practised in relation not only to one's own people but also to foreign peoples. The root of democracy can be traced even from the Rig Vedic times. The very concept of Sabha and Samithi or assembly found in the Rig Veda establishes the fact

that even in that hoary past the institution of democracy was present in the then prevailing society. The Vedic people were highly religious minded and performed religious rituals and they also took part in different kinds of social activities. There were social institutions like Vidatha where poets recited their works and extolled their deity, where yajnas were performed. Public deliberations, dice-playing and gambling were other activities. There were Samithis for public discussion. Celebrations and festivals were much colourful. Away from the urban and rural life the Aryans had a quiet atmosphere in the forest where the acharyas taught their students.

Indian Social thought is unique. Its cultural backgrounds, religious and philosophical principles are distinctive. It takes on the relation of man not simply to other human beings but to all life.

The social aspect of a society can be revealed through the forms of marriages, family, status of women etc.

MARRIAGE

The institution of marriage is very important for the study of society. It covers one of the most important periods of one's life and hence has a significant influence on the
society. "One of the central aspects of social life in any society is marriage, it is especially so in the Hindu society on account of the endogamous nature of the caste system". 21 The Hindus carry the idea of marriage a step further by recognizing it as a sacrament. It is an instrument to be used in pursuing the higher goals of life. Marriage is the foundation of the social fabric. It is the social institution established to bring about the all round well-being - physical, mental, spiritual and social for both husband and wife and also to guarantee the perpetuation of the human species. It is considered an essential duty of all Hindus.

To the sociologists marriage is a primary relationship and essence of which lies in the personal relationship between the partners. So far as the Hindus are concerned marriage is a religious sacrament and one of the chief samskaras prescribed to each one of them. In the words of Prithvi Nath Tikoo "Vivah (marriage) according to the religious scripture is one of the major samskaras (sacraments) binding the couple not only in this life but also in the life there after". 22


Samskaras are purificatory rites which sanctify the life of a Hindu". The Samskaras give a spiritual touch to the important events in an individual's life. They relate to the stages of life of an individual. All aspects of life of an individual from conception to cremation can be purified by a suitable samskara. Swami Sivananda mentions 'fifty two' samskaras. Of these ten* are considered to be most important.

An examination of the history of Hinduism, reveals that the institution of marriage is well established in the Rig Veda which is the earliest Veda. The earliest reference of the institution of marriage is in the Rig Veda. The institution of marriage among the Aryans had already been in a highly developed state in the remote past when their forefathers were living together in a common home land. It was considered a sacrament and the basis of marriage was the spiritual unification of the couple by magic mantras. Marriage was considered obligatory for man as it enabled him to become a house holder and perform sacrifices. It is after marriage that a man enters into the second stage of life.

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24. ibid.

* The ten chief samskaras are garbhodharana, pumsavanam, simantam, jatakarma, namakarana, annaprasanam, chudakaranam, upanayanam, samavaranam and vivah.
namely grihasthaśrama. "It was with this samskara, that a man or woman used to enter the portals of grihasthaśrama".25 "Marriage is a bodily rite, sarira samskara, which every man and woman should perform".26 Since the establishment of the system of Ashramas the whole society depended upon the householder for its maintenance. According to Veda and Smriti, the householder's is upheld as the best of all the Ashramas, for it is he who supports the other three ashramas. Since the establishment of the system of ashramas the whole society depended upon the householder for its maintenance. Married life is highly praised in Brahmana literature. The Satpata Brahmana holds that a man becomes complete only after he has taken a wife. Manu says that "The householder is as necessary for society as the breath is for the body".27

"The aims of Hindu marriage are said to be dharma, praja (progeny) and rati (pleasure)".28 Ram Gopal says, "The procreation of progeny and the attainment of spiritual merit through mutual co-operation were regarded as the chief purposes of...


27. Manu. 3-77.

Aryan marriages."29 It was considered a social and religious duty towards the family and the community, and there was little idea of individual interest. The Aryans believed that every man was born with three debts, namely debt due to Rishis, debt due to Pitrs and debt due to Gods. Marriage and procreation of the progeny were considered as the discharge of the debt to Pitrs and hence considered as a duty. The mantras recited at the time of marriage shows that the chief aim of marriage to them, was procreation of progeny.

The various definitions of marriage reveal the importance of it as a social aspect in fulfilling one's duty. According to Ram Nath Sharma "Marriage is a religious sacrament, in which a man and a woman are bound in permanent relationship for the physical, social and spiritual purpose of sexual pleasure, procreation and observance of dharma."30 The Sutras regard marriage as an indissoluble bond uniting two souls. "Marriage is a perfect life partnership of a man and woman, which is rooted in mutual love and care of human life."31 To Dr. S. Radhakrishnan the


The aim of marriage is the enrichment of the personality of husband and wife. "Marriage is a fellowship between man and woman who seek to live creatively in a partnership for the pursuit of the four great objects in life - dharma, artha, kama and moksa".  

Usha Jain states marriage as "an irrevocable tie which makes the couple husband and wife in the eye of the law and of the public." Betrand Russel says, "I believe marriage to be the best and most important relation that can exist between two human beings". It is the focal point of Hindu life and possess both subjective and objective views. The subjective aspect of marriage is the psycho-physical gratification. The objective aspect is the perpetuation of kula. The subjective aspect of marriage is subordinated to the objective aspect of marriage. "Marriage thus involves recruitment not only for the purpose of biological reproduction but also for the maintenance of an orderly replacement of family culture".

"Marriage for a Hindu is a religious sacrament for without a wife he cannot discharge his debt to the Devas and Pitrs and cannot secure heaven for himself"

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after death". 36 Plato remarks that "Every individual is bound to provide for a continuance of representatives to succeed himself as minister of the Divinity". 37 It is obligatory for a Hindu to beget a son and he is incomplete until he begets one. For the "son performs the funeral rites of the father on his death and also ensures the continuance of his line". 38

Marriage was not an institution in the primitive society. It developed out of a primeval habit. In the primitive period it was the habit for a man and a woman or several women to live together and to rear their children in common. The tribal organisation was not based on marriage. "The men and women of the tribe lived together in promiscuous relationship which seemed to be subject to no regulation, but only to the immediate and temporary inclination of the individual man and woman." 39 According to certain anthropologists marriage was a measure adopted in primitive days in order to protect women from the ruthlessness and brutality of primitive men. Another aim of

37. Plato, Leges, 6-773.
marriage was to safeguard the interests of children. In the beginning marriage was merely a mutual arrangement between two parties. Thus family began to shape as an institution where father was the guardian and mother was his helpmate and nurse of their children. Slowly it became a custom and then sanctioned by law and at last transformed into a social institution. It is an institution that assures the multiplication of the race, and forms a vital part of the legitimate texture of society.

In the Hindu institution of marriage the relation between husband and wife is of a peculiar type. They are not two independent persons but one forms the complement of the other. Husband and wife together constitute one whole. Only with mutual relationship they can attain self development. They can never achieve perfection in isolation. That is why the wife has been often described in Hindu scriptures as ardhanga (half self). The wife is half body and man is not complete without a woman. Manu says that the creator (Brahma) having divided his own body into two, became male by one half and female by the other. So divided man and woman become a perfect person only when united again in wedlock. Hence marriage is the enrichment of the personality of the husband and wife. "In the Rig Veda it is stated that the wife and the husband being equal halves of one substance, are equal in every respect, therefore both should join and take part in all
affairs, religious and secular". The wife and the husband are each other's spiritual companions who would share their joy equally and stand by each other in calamities that may confront them in their life's journey.41

The Hindu concept of man and woman as a whole can be seen even in the Deity. A Deity is not complete without his consort. Thus we have Vishnu and Lekshmi, Radha and Krishna, Siva and Sakti as the guardian deities of marital life. Siva and Sakti represent the complete fusion of man and woman. Kalidasa calls them inseverable as word and sense. We have many reference of half Siva and half Parvathy represented in a single figurine. This association of half Siva and half Parvathy is known as 'ardha nariswara'.42 This image signifies the co-operative interdependence, separately incomplete and jointly complete masculine and feminine functions of the Supreme Being. The word 'dampati' also refer to the two joint owners of the household. The words pati and patni refer to husband and wife who form the master and mistress of the house. Panini says that a wife is called a patni only when she takes part in the performance of sacrifices along


42. S. Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View Of Life, op. cit., p. 60.
with her husband. Hence a Brahmin husband and a Sudra wife cannot be called pati-patni. There are also references of Dharma patni and grahapati in Hindu scriptures. Dharma patni refers to the ritual function of the wife. The first lady in the house is called grahapati. In a polygamous family there would be more than one wife. King Dasaradha in Ramayana had three wives, Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. The term Bharta and Bharya refer to the complementary nature of husband and wife. Bharta indicates the ultimate authority of the husband over his wife and Bharya denotes the protected and the maintained. Bharya depends on Bharta mainly for food and shelter. There are also references like Sahacari and Sahadharmacari devoting the wife's inseparable union with her husband. King Janaka offered the hand of his daughter Sita to Rama that he may accept her as his sahadharmacari. In Saivism Siva and Sakti form the first cause and the instrumental cause of the world respectively. "The Absolute in itself is called Siva and the Absolute in relation to object is called Sakti". In Samkhya, prakriti and purusa stand for the divine unity of man and woman. The idea of man and wife becoming one for all purposes and times has gone deep into the fabric of Indian culture.

Hindu scriptures lay down certain rites and ceremonies to be performed for marriage to be complete. The rites form a long sequence of practices and taboos which may commence at the moment when the marriage is just thought of and last till it has been concluded. These rites are prominent at the betrothal and wedding and also during the period lying between these two events. Hindu marriage is considered to be sacred and hence completed only on the performance of sacred rites accomplished as per the sacred formula. The main rites are homa or offering to the sacred fire, panigraha or taking the hand of the bride, and saptapadi or taking seven steps together around the fire. All these rites are performed with the help of a Brahmin in the presence of the sacred fire while Vedic mantras are being chanted. The marriage rites are so important that if any one of them is not properly performed the marriage may be legally questioned. Homa offerings include oblations offered to Pushan, Bhagu and Aryaman who are the presiding deities over prosperity, good luck and conjugal fidelity respectively. Kanyadana and panigrahana follow it. In kanyadana the bride's father gives her hand to the bridegroom. Taking of the hand of the bride, reciting certain 'mantras', forms panigrahana. Of all the Aryan marriage rites

* 'I take your hand for good fortune'.
saptapadi** is regarded as the most important. Marriage becomes complete and irrevocable only on the completion of the saptapadi. So it is said that if the bride groom dies before the completion of the saptapadi, the bride is still a maiden and not a widow. In saptapadi the bridegroom leads the bride signifying the conjugal relationship in which the husband leads and the wife follows him in all matters of life. Then the bride sacrifices grains in the fire and prays. 'May my husband live long. May my relatives increase.' At the end of saptapadi the bride passes into the family of the husband. "Marriage is a composite rite comprising several subordinate elements which have to be done in a certain order and the last of which is the seeing the constellation of the seven sages, it brings about the status of woman as a person's wife". 44

Great importance is given to the forms of marriage in the Sutras. "It was believed that if the form of marriage was solemn and dignified, the progeny born out of it would be good and noble". 45 Based on the nature of acquiring a wife marriages can

** The seven steps taken in the saptapadi stands for seven things in the life. They are, the first step for sap, second step for juice, third step for thriving wealth, fourth step for comfort, fifth for offspring, sixth for seasons and seventh step for friendship.


45. Ram Gopal, op. cit., p. 205.
be classified into eight groups. They are Brahma, Daiva, Arsa, Praja-patya, Asura, Rakshasa, Gandharva and Paisaca. Of these the first four forms represent the patriarchal family and the rest four represented the matriarchal family. The Rakshasa, Asura, Gandharva and Paisaca are the unapproved forms of marriages and they belong to the pre-historic times.

The Brahma, Daiva, Prajapatya and Asura are the approved forms of marriages. When a man obtains a wife without asking for obtaining her and with due honour, it is called Brahma. If the father, pouring a libation of water, gives away in marriage his daughter, adorned with ornaments and decorated, to a suitable man of virtuous conduct and great learning, who has been invited and honourably received by the father himself, it is called the Brahma form of marriage. "When oneself invited a man endowed with learning and character and gives him to his daughter after having dressed and worshipped is called Brahma form". 46 When the daughter is given in marriage to the officiating priest, that form of marriage is called Daiva. The gift of a daughter decked with ornaments to an officiating priest who is performing a Sradha sacrifice for the giver, during the course of its performance, is called the Daiva form of marriage. "While a sacrifice is being performed, if one gives away his daughter, after having decked

her, to the priest who is officiating at it, is called Daiva form”. It is called Daiva because the marriage is settled during the course of the performance of a sacrifice to the Gods. It is not held high since it is mixed with religious affairs. With the disappearance of Vedic sacrifices, Daiva type of marriage also disappeared. In the praja patya form of marriage the bride is offered to the bride groom with the due rites. The father gives away his daughter in marriage after having addressed the bride groom and the bride with the words, "May both of you perform together your duties and with due honour to the bride groom". The couple are enjoined to be inseparable companions in the discharge of their religious duties”. When the father having decked them, gives away the daughter with the words, "May you both together perform your duty" making them also repeat them is called praja patya”. Arsa form which ranks the last among the approved forms of marriages is a modified form of Asura marriage in which the father of the bride has to accept something like that of the bride-price. If the father gives away his daughter according to the sacred law, after having received from the bride groom a cow and bull, it is called the Arsa form of marriage. The father of the bride accepts the bride price for facilitating the performance of sacrifices. Manu describes Arsa form as "when the maiden is

47. ibid., Verse, 28.
48. ibid., Verse, 30.
given away in due accordance with rule, after taking in obedience to law, from the bride groom, one or two pairs of cow and bull is called Arsa form". Jaimini and Sabara defend the view that Arsa is a form of Asura marriage and state that the gift given for religious purposes could not be regarded as bride-price. The prices of articles vary in the market according to their quality. In Arsa marriage all sons-in-law offer the same present to their fathers-in-law. So it cannot be called a bride-price.

The paisaca form of marriage is the most condemned of all and is of greatest ambiguity. The bride is either duped very often by making her over drunk, or physically over powered by the bride groom in order to make her yield to his passion. It is a marriage by seduction. If a man carries off or seduces a maiden, who is unconscious in sleep or by intoxication it is called the paisacha form of marriage. "When the man approaches the girl by stealth, while she is asleep, or intoxicated or unconscious it is the paisaca form". Smritis included paisaca form only because old tradition knew of it and also wanted to eliminate it as a form of marriage. Vasistha and Apasthamba do not recognize paisaca marriage at all.

49. ibid., Verse, 29.
50. ibid., Verse, 34.
The Rakshasa or khatra marriage goes back to the pre-historic time when women were regarded as prizes of war. It is a marriage by capture when it is difficult to get one in ordinary way. In Khatra marriage the victor carries away the bride and marries her. Fight is needed either because women offer real resistance on account of the ill-treatment which they receive from their husbands, or because it is regarded as a point of honour for the warrior that he should have for his wife a woman whom he points out as a trophy of war, or because parents are unwilling to lose the service of their daughters. If a maiden in tears is forcibly abducted from her home by the bride groom, or his companions, after slaying or wounding her relatives, is called Rakshasa form of marriage. "The forcible abduction of a maiden from her home, while she cries out and weeps after her kinsmen have been slain or wounded and their houses broken open" is called Rakshasa form of marriage. "The forcible abduction of the maiden from her home, while she is crying out and weeping, after having beaten her wounded and pierced is called Rakshasa form". Krishna justified the act of Arjuna as carrying away Subhadra. Arjuna did not like Brahma marriage since it considered bride as

52. Ganganath Jha, op. cit., Verse, 32.
an object of gift like cattle and more over it did not show a warrior mentality. Krishna himself proved khatra marriage good by carrying away Rukmini. In Rig Veda, Vimada is described as having won his bride in a battle. In Mahabharata Bhishma won the daughters of king Kasi as bride for his brother Vichithra Virya. Rakshasa and Paisacha forms are mentioned with a view to condemn such practices. Traces of Rakshasa marriage still remain in the marriage customs and procedures prevailing in some part of the country. In the marriage songs of Gujarat and U.P. which are sung at the time of departure of the bride, the bride groom is compared to a robber.

In Asura Vivah the bride groom gets the bride by paying a reasonable price for her. If a suitor obtains a maiden after having gladdened her kinsmen with money, it is called the Asura form of marriage. It is disgraceful for the girl and her family if she is married for nothing. This shows the worthlessness of the girl and low status and low reputation of the family. The price is meant as a compensation for the loss of her service in her parents’ family. Sometimes a part of it is returned as a gift to the bride groom. "When one carries away the maiden, after having given of his own will, as much wealth as he can do to the kinsman, as well as to the bride herself is called
Asura form. In certain uncivilized societies the bride groom even serves the father-in-law for a period of time as a compensation for the price. In Dharma Sastras Asura marriage is considered a better one. It ensures a value and a respected position for the woman in the society. There are certain references of Asura marriage in Indian literature. At the time of the marriage of Kaikeyi, Gandhari and Madri, a heavy bride price had to be paid to their guardians. "Madri was purchased by Bhishma from her father". In Dharma sutra Baudhyaṇa warns the guardians against their selling of daughters. He also warns the husbands that a purchased bride would not become a legal wife at all.

"The mutual union of the bride and the bridegroom through love is to be known as gandharva. It has sexual intercourse for its end and has its source in lust". If a maiden and her lover unite themselves in love, it is called the gandharva form of marriage. It is a simple and pure love marriage. From the Vedic age the Gandharvas have been well known for their amourous disposition and the marriage which was consummated before the due performance of the sacred rituals come

53. ibid., Verse, 31.
54. Mahabharata, 1-105-4.
55. Ganganath Jha, op. cit., Verse, 32.
to be known after them. In this type of marriage "the partners fall in love with each other and immediately proceed to consummate their contemplated marriage". 56 Kalidasa in Sakuntalam mentions the gandharva marriage of Dushantha with Sakuntala. There have been diverse opinions as to include gandharva as an ideal form of marriage. Bandhyana Dharma Sutra approves it as it presupposes reciprocal attachment. "The gandharva form is also recommended for all castes by some authorities because it is based on mutual love." 57 Kama Sutra also regards it as ideally good. Mahabharata regards gandharva as an approved form of marriage. But in the course of time it ceased to be an ideal form of marriage. When child marriage became prevalent there was no scope for mutual love.

As to the choice of partners in a marriage there are broadly two types. They are exogamous and endogamous. Generally, the society imposes limits on the choice of partners biologically possible. Endogamy was the order of the day during the age of the Sutras. The rule prescribing marriage within one's own group is called endogamy and outside one's group is exogamy.


57. Baudhyana Dharma Sutra 1-11, 20-16.
Endogamy and exogamy co-exist in the same society. The Todas of India are divided into endogamous halves, each of which comprises a number of exogamous class. From the biological point of view, the most healthy and intelligent offsprings arise from exogamous types of marriages. Marriage of persons of similar characteristics are known as homogamy. It is also known as assortative or assortive mating. Marriage of persons of different characteristics is termed heterogamy. Hypergamy is a marriage in which the husband is of higher social status than the wife.

As to the number of conjugal pairs in a marriage, there are different types of marriages. Polygamy is a condition according to which a man can have many wives. Polygamous marriages are repugnant to the high ideals of marriages as set out in the Rig Veda. However the custom seems to have been established since the time of Brahmanas. Polygamous family resulted from the patriarchal family. Here the man is of far greater value and importance than woman. It was prevalent among the royal and other noble families. Manu prescribes polygamous marriage. Until the passage of the Hindu marriage Act in 1955 every Hindu was free to marry a number of women. The barrenness of wife is a reason for taking a second wife. So also wealthy traders and healthy warriors took a second wife. But among the higher castes ekapatnivrata prevailed as seen in Ramayana in the
case of Rama. King Dasaradha was an exception and possessed three wives. Polygamous marriages are prevalent among the Muslims also. Polyandry is the condition of a woman having many husbands. It is a rare type of marriage and it is less common. An instance of polyandrous marriage is in Mahabharata where Draupadi marries the five sons of King Pandu. Among the Nayars of Malabar there was the custom of a woman marrying more than one husband. There are two forms of polyandry, the fraternal and disparate. In the fraternal form the husbands are brothers and in disparate the husbands are not related. The Nayars of Kerala practised both fraternal and disparate polyandry. According to Westermarck the causes of polyandry are many. The disequilibrium in the ratio of sexes will lead to polyandry. The economic cause such as the need to keep the family property undivided would make polyandry a panacea. The prolonged absence of men from the homes may lead to polyandry to ensure support and protection to the women. The desire to have children despite his physical inadequacy may induce a man to call in another person to sire his children.

In olden days before the sacred laws were finally arranged and shaped, the Aryans who wanted to multiply and settle down in India married persons outside their caste. But in the traditional Indian Society an individual was not allowed to interact socially with certain castes. They had to marry with in
their own endogamous group. The Aryans could not help marrying aborigins of India and the offsprings called Sankaras came into being. Eventhough intercaste marriages were prohibited, scriptures prescribed two types of intercaste marriages under certain social circumstances. They were the anuloma and pratiloma marriages. "If a male marries a female belonging to the lower class the marriage is called Anuloma and the offspring is less pure than the father". When the female married a male belonging to a lower caste it was called pratiloma. The offsprings of such mixed marriages were known as Varna Sankaras. The anuloma Sankaras formed the backward castes called Artyajas and they included people like washerman, cobbler, fisherman etc. The pratiloma Sankaras were considered the most sinful and base born and they belonged to no caste. The hybrid of a Brahmin lady with a sudra man was called chandala. Chandalas were of two types. Those born as Chandalas and those who became Chandalas by sinful conduct. "The smritis trace the innumerable castes to intermixture of the four varnas, by means of anuloma and pratiloma marriages".


The Indian society where the joint family system was the norm, marriages were largely arranged by parents and elders. Arranged marriages, child marriages and prohibition of widow marriage were measures taken to preserve the caste hierarchy. Arranged marriages helped to maintain the social stratification in society. Parents had full control over the members. It provided chances for the preservation of ancestral line. It also strengthened the kinship group.

Child marriage was an ancient Hindu practice origin of which can be traced to the long past. It is difficult to determine how the custom of early marriage originated. In the Vedic period the practice of child marriage was unknown. During the period the father did not force any match on his daughter without her consent. "Down to about 3rd century B.C. girls could remain unmarried till the age of 16". The marriage age of a woman was very high during the Vedic period. Both men and women had full freedom in the choice of their partners and only after this that the elders proceeded for the marriage ceremonies Maiden "when of proper age and education used to take their husbands after their hearts". Swayamvara or selection of husbands by the

girls themselves was one of the modes of selecting the bridgegroom prevalent among the princess.

The idea of child marriage might have originated due to certain economic, social and religious beliefs. There was a belief among the parents that if a girl happened to stay back at home even after puberty, it was a great sin on their part. So they were duty-bound to get her married before she attained maturity. Others thought that girls were an economic liability and this also encouraged the idea of child marriage. A.L. Basham wrote that "A woman was thought to be naturally libidinous; an unmarried girl attaining puberty would proceed to find a lover, however strictly her parents guided her, once she had lost her virginity she would become unmarriagable and the parents would have the choice of the disgrace and expense of maintaining unmarried daughters indefinitely, or even greater disgrace of casting her out to become a beggar or prostitute". 62 Tagore gives another reason. According to him it is advisable to get the girl safely married before the age at which sex attraction may become distinctively powerful. Mughal invasion has also been responsible for the practice of child marriage. "Mohammedan religion forbids the carrying off of married women as slaves or concubines. So the

Hindus, as a means of protection resorted to marrying their daughters not only at the approach of puberty, but even as infants". 63

Early marriages have certain undesirable results. Child marriage leads to maternal and infertile mortality. It also implies cohabitation resulting in grave physical effort on the girl and the evils of premature child birth. Another serious drawback of child marriage is that they are married when very young and have not required experience and intelligence to make happy choices as regards partners resulting in the unhappiness of life afterwards. Moreover the period of childhood has to be used for education and gaining knowledge.

FAMILY

Family is an institution found in all human societies. It is the foundation of social life and forms the nucleus of the social structure. It is the functional unit of society. "The whole society begins with the family because a society is a living entity that must be continually be

replenished". Family performs the functions of biological and social reproduction and provides for the continuity of the biological species. Family becomes an institution "when an association serves broad rather than narrow interests, and does so in an accepted, orderly and enduring way". It is a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. "A Family consists of that group of kinsfolk who are in continuous and fairly close contact with one another". Kinship is a close and enduring relationship and begins with the family and is extended through it. It is the most reliable and durable of all social relations.

Marriage lays the legal foundation for the family. It is the community of parents and their children. The union of man and woman based on mutual understanding and love, is the real germ of the home. "Arising out of indissoluble, monogamous marriage, it is the most important community and the one closest to nature". The origin and goal of family are nature.

64. G. David Mandelbaum, Society In India (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1970), p. 31.


According to Hindu concept family is the result of the sacrament, i.e., marriage and the divine insistence on family is primarily for procreation and education of children. There is an organic natural unity and the relationship between parents and children is not of mere association but one of genuine community. It is the group with the most intimate interaction and the most frequent and continuous face to face contacts.

The family has its origin in the fact that the human infant is born after nine months of gestation during which the mother is hampered in her ability to provide for herself, and for a long period after birth the child requires constant care and supervision. The primary responsibility for bearing and rearing children ever remains with the family. "In the dawn of social awareness when men and women, propelled by the fear of extinction through neglect, and the necessity of self-preservation organized themselves into little groups which became more numerous and more harmonious with the pace of time". 68 The family produces "...new raw recruits for society in the form of new born infants and socialises them sufficiently so that they can play adult roles in the other institutions of the society". 69 Family is the

68. C. P. Bhatnagar, op. cit., p. 18.

fundamental multipurpose organization for many of the principal life functions of the individual and society. It has to impart both personal and social functions. Personal functions include psychological as well as physical security. Social function includes procreation and child socialization. Regulation of sexual behaviour, contribution of social and economic life and contribution of order in society are also included in the social function. It is not only a reproductive unit and a socializing agency, but it also provides each person with his main link to the whole society. "A man is born, brought up and attains a distinct personality in the environs of family". 70 It is the family that preserves, protects, and develops the human race, self protection, growth of the race and continuity of caste are invested with the family. "It is the first place where an individual is socialised". 71 Family is prior to all societies. In Aristotle's and St.Thomas Aquina's opinion the responsibility of providing for the needs of daily life lies within the family.

The real centre of the Hindus is the home. Family or Kudumba formed the basic unit in Aryan society. Lesser units


of the social structure were the extended family (kula) and the joint family (kutumba). Family was the unit of society during the Vedic period. "In the Rig Vedic period we find a home well established with the father as the patriarch". The early Aryan family was called gotras, and their class gosthis. An aggregate of gosthis formed the grama. Earlier the Aryans were pastoral nomadic people moving with their cattle. When the people had taken to agriculture they settled down in houses. The home primarily owed its origin to woman who was the great embodiment of spiritual and moral force. Home was the natural instinct of women to have adequate protection to herself and to her children in their helpless state of infancy.

The family reached its strong position in ancient society through the power vested in the father and the worship of ancestors. The ancestor worship was a widely prevalent cult found in many parts of the world. The important principles of Hindu family have arisen from the ancestor worship. The primitive people believed in the survival of soul after death and its existence in a new life apart from body. But early man not being able to conceive the idea of spirit as distinct from material substance believed that soul was a material thing. They believed

that the soul just like body needed material things for the survival. As a result they began to provide food and drink for the departed souls. The food was laid out as for a feast and the souls of the dead were invited to come and eat and be nourished thereby. The observances varied with the change of the time and places. Tarpana or libation of water was poured for the refreshment of the pitri. Sradha was necessary for the welfare of those who have gone to the other world. It also enabled him to retain his position in heaven. Pinda transformed the departed soul into a blessed one. Some people fed the dead daily, others monthly and annually. There were many modes of preparing food for them. The belief behind these offerings was that if they did not receive the attention, they would become wandering and harmful ghosts. These offerings were merely services and did not take the form of worship during the earlier period.

As time passed the belief passed to a developed stage in which the dead ancestors were regarded as powerful beings controlling the welfare of the family. The theory of transmigration became accepted by the ancient Hindus since the period of the Upanisads. This conception changed the whole view of the destiny of man after death and it contradicted the old conception of ancestor-worship. But ancestor-worship continued with the same ceremonials with a change of conception altogether.
This new mode of conception was that the soul carried with it a gross body and so it required offerings of pinda. After the burning of the dead 9 days of funeral rites were to be observed in order to convert the preta into pitri. On the 11th day of the death, a sradha was held which was repeated monthly for one year and annually afterwards. When the Brahmins succeeded on getting the authoritative religious position the whole religion of the Aryans began to change. Stringent rules were laid down for every detail of every sacrifice. At this stage the service of the dead changed into worship. The family paid them great reverence in order to receive their loving care over the family. The ancestor worship has modified the organization of the family. As a result of ancestor worship patriarchal families arose and they formed the nucleus of the Aryan state. Father was the family priest and he alone knew the particular rite which was traditional in the family. These rituals had to be maintained unchanged and the favour of the dead was to be retained by the father. The father had to pass these rites to his son at the time of his death. Moreover it was the right of the son to inherit the father's property, girls did not inherit the property unless she was the only child in the family. As the high priest in the family, the father, was the acknowledged head of the family. The reverence and power which his priestly position brought him made him supreme in the home.
The patriarchal families originated from the supreme position of male member in a family. "This type of family is called patriarchal because the father has so much power". In the earlier times the family organization was looser than the later and with the establishment of the ancestor worship father became supreme. The property of the family was altogether in his hands. All the features of a Hindu family have arisen directly from the supreme position of the father. Every man must marry and beget a son in order to continue his line of tradition. Marriage with Sapindas, the relations of father or mother three generations upward and three generations downward was not allowed. Ancestor worship established the absolute authority of the husband in the family. Moreover there was the universal desire for sons and consequently arose the tendency to loath female children. Thus the status of women in society began to decline and as a consequent polygamy became widely practised. Male children received education and girls were deprived of education. Child marriage grew up as a usual custom, widow remarriage was prohibited and sati became a practice.

A corollary of the patriarchal family was the joint family system. "A corporate family has been a historical feature

of the Indian society". The joint family system originated in the Vedic period. "They lived together with their sons and grand sons, and their domestic economy was founded upon the principles of the joint family systems". From the Vedic age to the nineteenth century, India witnessed a system of joint family in which people of three or four generations used to live together. In Rig Veda there are references where purohit blessing a newly married couple to have sons and grand sons. The tradition of the joint family has perdured through the Dharma Shastra period upto the present age. We could find many family units consisting of as many as 30 or 40 people. "In India the unit of society has always been a consanguine or joint family organization known as kula from Vedic times". The eldest member of the family was known as karta or grahapati or graha swami. He had the right to make decisions for family. He was the supreme authority over the familial, communal and social activities regarding the family. Owning lands and other properties in common were under the authority and management of a pater familiar. The epics contain lengthy discourses in praise of joint family system. In Mahabharata, Vidura vigorously defends a joint family.

74. C. P. Bhatnagar, op. cit., p. 31.


A joint family came into existence when two or more lineally related kinfolk of the same sex, their spouses and offsprings, occupied a single homestead and were jointly subject to the same authority or single head. Joint families generally arose, existed and persisted because they carried out activities in a more extensive way. Property was traditionally held in common by the head of the family. Strict family discipline was one of the characters of joint family. In a joint family the members were held together by common participation of family worship, common food prepared in the house and the common authority over the properties. All the male children with their wives and unmarried girls live in the same house under the supreme control of the eldest male member. The earnings of the members and the landed property were used in common for the welfare of the family. Every member owed complete obedience to the head of the family. One could not undertake anything of importance according to his own will.

Joint family system fostered by the ancient Indians on humanitarian grounds had its merits and demerits. It solved the problems of the poor and protected its disabled and unfit members. Members who were useless or weak were well taken care of. There was a feeling of responsibility for all others. "Members were related by an interlocking pattern of mutual dependence".  

Individual was only second; the primary being the family. Individuals were made conscious of his or her membership of a larger unit of society. There would be no selfish motive, for each had to contribute for the welfare of the whole family. Every woman in the house was the mother of all the children and cousins were considered more nearly related as if they were brothers or sisters. Rights and duties, sentiments and authority constituted its unity. The strength and unity of family life made the society compact and balanced.

The opportunity for personal development had been checked by the joint family system. There was no room for personal opinions. All the members were controlled and guided by the head of the family. Thus the individual did not get opportunity for the development of self-reliance. Individuality was subordinate to collective solidarity.

Extended families were another version of joint family. It consisted of two or more nuclear families affiliated through an extension of the parent-child relationship rather than husband wife relationship. The members belonging to extended families did not live in the same house. But they lived close together and engaged in common activities. There were also compound families. They were concrete groups formed through the
amalgamation of nuclear family units or parts of them. It consisted of a polygamous household consisting of one, one's wives, and their respective children.

Nuclear family refers to a group consisting of a man, a woman and their children. It is the only prevailing form of family or basic unit from which more complex familial forms are compounded. It exists as a distinct and strongly functional group in every known society. It is probably the oldest type of family going back to the earliest ancestors of man. "The nuclear family is the universal form of family relation always fulfilling distinctive and vital functions". 78 In the nuclear families the clustered relationships are eight in number. They are husband-wife, father-son, father-daughter, brother-brother, sister-sister, brother-sister mother-son and mother-daughter. The four fundamental functions of social life such as sex, economy, reproduction and education are assembled in the nuclear families. The sexual and reproductive functions are essential for the existence of society. Education promotes the cultural development. The social utility of nuclear families gives universality to it. It forms the centre of religious worship. Every adult belongs to two nuclear families, the family of

orientation and the family of procreation. The family of orientation is the one in which he was born and the family of procreation is the one which he establishes by his marriage. In a nuclear family the kins groups are in a primary relation to each other. Modern societies tend to remain nuclear. With the cultural development the pattern of family also has changed. Industrialisation and geographical mobility have favoured the nuclear families. In modern times the urban middle class joint families are splitting up. But the relations persist and they get together on important occasions such as festivals, marriages etc. The home remains the centre of a family's sense of identity. Ultimate authority still rests with the oldest member in the family. In the nuclear families the authority of husband and wife are the same as in the Vedic period. Hence we can see the bilateral type of descent which is associated with higher civilization, in the modern nuclear families. The other types of descents are the matriarchal and the patriarchal and which correspond to the matriarchal and patriarchal societies respectively.

The ancestor-worship and the power vested in the father produced moral results of very great value. The sacred rites binding together the living and the dead led the members to think more of their unity. The rites led them to think of family
as an organism, part of which has already passed and part of which was not yet born. They thought of family as a constantly growing unit and this filled them with great reverence and pride. The sacredness of the hearth arose from the ancestor-worship. The ancestors were worshipped at their hearth. All the holiest and most touching scenes in the life of a Hindu were connected with the hearth. It was the focus of joy and sorrow of the home. In the early Vedic society, the right of keeping the sacred fire alight in every household belonged to and, in fact, was obligatory upon every member. But gradually it became restricted to the priestly class.

The importance given to sacrifice and ritual by the Vedas established firmly the institution of priesthood. In the beginning the performance of sacrifice was a simple affair. Every householder lighted his own sacred fire and recited some verse in praise of Gods and poured the soma offerings. He performed the ancestor worship every month with the pinda. Pinda is the cake or ball of rice offered to ancestors. The primitive religion and worship of the Indo-Aryans gradually changed and became more and more elaborate and complicated. Slowly the priestly class began to usurp the father's right in the religion of the family. Every householder was a priest unto himself so far at least as the performance of daily ordinary religious duties were concerned.
"Every father of a family was his own priest and his home was his temple." It was only on special occasions when any big religious sacrifice had to be performed that the vicarious services of experts, well versed in the mantras and acquainted with the detailed processes of performing it, were requisitioned. These experts formed a class by themselves and gradually their operation grew in complexity.

In the Chhandas period Rishis were the priests of their families. During the Mantra and Brahmana period the religion and worship assumed the gross superstitious characteristic. In this period a priesthood was systematically created. The Brahmanas greatly affected the social evolution in ancient India. The term Brahmana originally denoted devoted worshippers and sages, but after the ceremonial worship became highly developed and complicated the term came to be employed for minister of religion and it came to signify one particular class of priests with certain special duties. They believed that the secret of the prosperous life lay hidden in the performance of sacrifices, observances of rites and belief in myths. This increasing dominance of the idea of sacrifices gave rise to the


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office of the priesthood. "Priesthood became a profession and a hereditary one."80 "When the Brahmans succeeded in winning an authoritative religious position, the whole thing began to change."81 The most ancient name of a professional priest was Purohita. Vasistha and Viswamithra were the purohitas of King Sudasa. Purohita performed the ordinary sacrifices. The priests were specially trained persons for special occasions. At first these priests had been few in number and each could perform all the functions in connection with a sacrifice. But in course of time, as the sacrifices became more and more complex, separate functions were assigned to different persons and there grew up various orders of priests. We find visible marks of growing complexity in priestly functions in the Rig Veda. In the earlier hymns there are scant references to the priests. Where they are mentioned, they are spoken of as priests or rtwicks. In the hymns of later origin there is a great array of priests. Different functions were assigned to different priests. They were called by different names. In the third mandala, two classes of priests the adwarya and hotra or vipra are mentioned. "Seven vipras with five adwaryas watch thy favourite seat."82 Of these

81. J. N. Farquhar, op. cit., p. 82.
82. Rig Veda, 3-7-7.
the vipra or hota recited or sang praises unto the gods and the adhwarya performed the various dispositions of sacrifices such as making the altar, preparing the offerings etc. In the second mandala, we find the number greatly increased. Besides the hota and adhwarya, quite a number of other priests are frequently mentioned.

POSITION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY

The term 'Egalitarianism' refers to the position of women in society as well as in the family. Indian culture attaches much importance to women and hence India has been symbolised as Mother India, keeping in view the exemplary qualities of women namely patience, endurance, love, affection, sympathy and generosity. The famous song Bande Mataram composed by Bankim Chandra was sung to the Mother-goddess or Mother India. The position of women supplies a good test of the civilization of the people. There are many literary evidences to show that the status of women in ancient India was very high and a respectable one. It reveals the advanced civilization of India.

The position of women has varied from time to time. During the early Vedic period women enjoyed a high status in society. "The condition of women in India during the Vedic age
was immensely superior to what we find now." 83 "The Vedic age was more liberal in its attitude towards women than the long period following the composition of the law of Manu." 84 Rig Veda depicts the exalted position of Aryan women in the Vedic age. Man and woman were equal in importance. No one was superior or inferior. Women studied the Vedic literature like men and some of them like Lopa mudra, Ghosa and Sikta-Nivavari, figure among the authors of the Vedic hymns. Rig Veda describes how a maiden could take a soma twig and offer it by herself as a sacrifice to Indra. Women possessed equal rights and responsibility with her husband in the family. She was regarded as the indivisible part of her husband and her presence was inevitable. She was the joint owner of the household along with her husband. Words like nari, jani, jaya, dampati, dara, ardhngi etc. denote the position she held in the family and society. The wedding hymns in the Rig Veda depicts the exalted position of women. "In ancient India, however, they not only possessed equality of opportunities with men, but enjoyed certain rights and privileges not claimed even by the male sex." 85 Hindus worshipped Divinity in the form of motherhood. This shows

83. Raja Ram Mohan Rai, op. cit., p. 60.
84. Richard Lannoy, op. cit., p. 103.
the exalted position of women in the early period. "Woman is the mother of the race and is the liaison between generations." 86 She has been not only the symbol of generations but also the link joining the various threads of family. "Motherhood has been the cherished ideal of every Hindu woman and the apotheosis of the mother has reached a greater height in India than anywhere else." 87 The goddess Adhiti typified motherhood. Motherhood was the essential and most characteristic trait of this divinity. Rig Vedic Aryans used to take refuge under her protection. She was frequently invoked to release men from guilt or sin. She was believed to punish the evil doers in the society. Saraswathi and Lekshmi were other goddesses of the period. The chief forms of mother goddesses were that of the spouse of Siva in her benevolent aspect as Parvathi, Girija, Gouri, Annapurna, Jagadamba and Shitala and in her grim aspect as Durga, Kali, Chandi etc. "In social hierarchy woman as mother is placed first and precedes the father and the preceptor". 88 "Her status and dignity was such that the term Mata was used before pita." 89


88. Taittiriya Upanisad I-11.

89. Vanitha Purihar, op. cit., p. 75.
is described as the ornament of the house, empress of the house and as the life and soul of the home. In a joint family she was the co-ordinator among the various members of the family. The young girls were fondly caressed and affectionately brought up by the parents. They were called by the name duhite denoting daughter. The care and consideration given to them show that they were by no means low. The period before marriage was utilized for imparting education to girls. Women students were divided into two classes, Brahmavadins and sadyodvatas. The former were life long students of theology and philosophy and the latter used to prosecute their studies till their marriage.

In Vedas and Upanisads we have many glorious instances of women who were erudite scholars, skilful debaters, great teachers and seekers of spirituality. In Brahdaranyaka Upanisad there is a reference to Gargi, who rose twice in King Janaka’s assembly and put questions to Yajnavalkya there by proving that she was a Brahma vadin of a superior type. Since the very inception of Indian History women had great craving for knowledge. A good example is Maitreyi, the second wife of Yajnavalkya. Maitreyi proved that she preferred the spiritual bequest to mere earthly possessions. According to Upanisads woman is created to make the man complete. She is his own equal half share and created to free him from fear and to give him delight. During the Upanisadic period seeing a woman was considered a good omen and the mother of a female child was honoured. The Indian
conception of Brahman which is beyond the differentiating qualification of sex also proves the non differentiating of man and woman. The godhead ardhanariswara signifies the unity of man and woman. The forms of Indian art, sculpture, painting, dance etc. reveal both male and female are an essential one. Both are in separable parts of the human soul.

The position of woman slowly began to change, with the development of the idea of private property women gradually lost her independent position. When the free tribal society gave way to the more developed one women also lost their position. Her physical weakness and other disadvantages assigned to her a lower-status. The helplessness and subordination made her fall lower and lower in the scale. During the time of Brahmanas, the system of joint family arose and consequently resulted in the low position of women. Manu in his codes has ascribed equality to women. But taking into consideration the precious position women had in society Manu laid down certain rules for them. A woman as a wife and mother received much respect. The position of a wife is better than the position of daughters or widows. The passage "A wife is a comrade, a daughter a misery, and a son a light in the highest heaven", shows the position of women. "Manu was

the first law giver to assign to the women a definite role in the society as well as in the family". 91

The position of women in the epic period was one of the flowering of the Vedic ideal. Women of the epic period were gentle tactful and generously beautiful and dignified. The epic, Ramayana depicts wife hood as one of the closest of human relationships. But we can see seclusions of women during the epic period. In certain places in Ramayana woman is referred to as the causes of hostilities. Instances of Kaikeyi, Manthara, Surpanaka and Sita reveal the fact. Mahabharata says, the wife is the half of man, the wife is the best of friends, the wife is the root of the three fold worldly activity, the wife is the root of salvation. As a mother, her position in the family is supreme in the absence of father. Kunti received great respect and exercised much influence in guiding the activities of her sons.

The Mughal period was one of the worst possible times as far as the condition of women is concerned. They were given less freedom. "The Muslim conquest of India made the Hindus recede more into the shell of isolation." 92


the medi eval period and the recent past was due to the lack of a proper understanding and fundamentalist attitude of various social and religious institutions. Some of the causes that led to the degradation of women during the period are as follows.

The parda was an evil custom in the Hindu religion, which came into prominence with the coming of Muslim rule in India. Both Hindu and Muslim women wore parda when they appeared in public. In those days Hindu women were prohibited from even visiting the temples. The parda provided the ladies with practically a life long imprisonment and restrained them from exercising mind and body. Foreign invasions and the growing insecurity of women were responsible for the growth of parda system in Hindu society. Hindu women took to parda as an insignia of respectability and was also a protective measure to save the honour and maintain the purity of caste system and there by the social order.

Dowry was another evil that degraded the condition of women. It was considered as the anti thesis of the bride-price which once existed in the Hindu society. It was in the medieval period that the dowry system emerged into an alarming condition. It did not exist in ancient India. When marriage was considered as a dana or gift, the royal families and some rich families used to give some gifts to the son-in-law at the time of marriage. The
development of the dowry system can be traced to the extraordinary pride which the Rajputs took in their ancestry. A Rajput youth of the bluest blood would be the most sought after by the parents of any Rajput girl. Consequently his price in the marriage market rose high up. The restrictions on inter-caste marriages limited the sphere of matrimony and consequently helped the dowry system positively. The highest face of dowry system emerged from it. It has turned out to be the most evil practice that leads to murder, suicide and homicide of victims. It still exists in our society as a persistent evil, to eliminate which social reformers work hard.

The practice of Sati was an evil which crept into the Hindu society fairly at an early period. The word Sati literally means chastity. The custom originated from an incident committed by Sati, wife of God Siva, who burnt herself in the sacrificial fire of her father when her husband was insulted by not being invited to that sacrifice. Sati was performed to prove one’s chastity and loyalty to one’s husband. "The ideal of pativrtya gave rise to and glorified the practice of Sati or immolation." 93 It was the loyalty and fidelity of Savithri that has brought back her husband’s life from the God of death. The

ideal of pativrtya became so deep in Hindu women that "immolation became not only customary but a woman's highed aspiration." The Indian custom of Sati demanded a supreme sacrifice from a high class Hindu widow. If a husband died, his widows were expected to accompany him to the funeral pyre and to be cremated by his side. If the husband died at a distant place the widow observed Anumarana.* Agni pariksha in Ramayana is a form of Sati in which Sita proves her chastity.

Self immolation was practised from time immorial in one shape or another. Some are of the opinion that the custom had its origin in husband-murder. Kautilya in Arthasastra has mentioned many a number of cases where wives poisoned their husbands. So Sati must have originated as an effective measure to stop the undesirable practice of husband-murder. Thus an institution which started as a preventive against husband murders developed into a religious duty. The motive behind it may be either spiritual or personal. Burning of widow is only one form of Sati. There was another type of Sati known as Ma-Sati. Hindu women due to their intense love and affection for their offspring frequently immolated themselves with their dead children. Self immolation was not confined to women alone. But it was common

94. *ibid.*, p. 171.

* Anumarana is a form of Sati in which the widow burnt herself with some of the articles of her dead husband.
among men also. Arjuna was about to slay himself more than once. Bharata, the younger brother of Rama was also saved from the sacrificial fire.

In the earlier periods the act of Sati was based on certain religious principles. The rite of Sati was performed in order to obtain the same husband in the next births. There was yet another belief that if a widow did not become Sati, her husband and ancestors would fall from heaven. Probably Sati might have arisen from the idea that "happily married people should never be separated and proceed together in the next life." 95 Rig Veda, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Sutras do not recommend the ideal of Sati. But there are references of widows lying near the dead husbands and later each being led to the world of living by the younger brother of the dead husband. "Rise, come into the world of life O woman! come, he is lifeless by whose side those best. Wifehood with this, thy husband, was thy position, who took thy hand and wooed thee as a lover." 96 In the Vedic period widows were not regarded as degraded persons but they were given chances to live and were allowed to remarry. Levirate is a form of

95. Katherine Savage, op. cit., p. 51.
marriage in which the widow was taken by the late husband’s younger brother. Examples of levirate marriage are seen in the Ramayana as Sugriva marrying Tara, the widow of Bali and Vibhishana, Mandodari, the widow of Ravana. Niyoga practice was the religious duty of begetting a son from the brother of the dead husband. A son raised under niyoga was called khetraja.97 Service of the family and society were also considered to be the duty of a widow. Certain Shastras recommended an ascetic life for a widow.

At about 400 A.D. when the Puranas were given their present form, the custom of Sati gradually came into vogue. During 700-1100 A.D. the practice became frequent in North India. It became widely prevalent in Rajputana in the medieval era (1300 A.D.). Rajputs honoured Sati with religious devotion. Sati which symbolised the most extreme attitude to widows gained popularity in the Gupta and post Gupta periods. The custom was actually encouraged by certain Castes. Social and economic causes might have led to the practice of immolation. The breaking up of the joint family system helped in popularising the custom of Sati. By the coming up of the nuclear families the widow became lonely

97. A. R. Gupta, op. cit., p. 56.
and she had to face the adversities of life. Moreover if the husband had not left any property, she had to face the financial problems also. Another reason which favoured Sati was the cruel attitude towards the widow. A widow was considered an ill omen and was degraded in the society. She was denied of all worldly things. The life of a widow was restricted by numerous social taboos. Appearance of a widow on certain occasions of life such as marriage and birth was considered unauspicious. She had to be confined within the walls of zenna and cannot harbour any cheerful thoughts. Ramayana says that the greatest danger that can overcome a woman is widowhood. Mahabharata observes a widow as a piece of flesh pounced upon on all sides by the wicked. This attitude of the relatives and rest of the society must have had such psychological impact on a widow that she must have found Sati an easier way to do away with her miseries. "The stigma attached to widowhood and the cruel treatment meted out to the widow who did not commit Sati were such that most women chose Sati as a lesser evil than widowhood."98 The sentiment of Sahagamana and Sahamarana must also have led a widow to become a Sati. Prohibition of widow remarriage could also be another reason for Sati. Child marriage also increased the number of Satis. When a widow became a Sati, the property of her dead husband was to go to

his brothers. A widow of the 19th century who did not marry had full control over her husband's property till her death.

Naturally Sati was observed by the full consent of the widow and considered it as a religious rite on her part. But there were many instances of forced Satis. Raja Ram Mohan Roy himself witnessed one forced Sati and was compelled to put an end to this inhuman practice. In a petition to the Governor-General, Raja Ram Mohan Roy had pointed out that the women were induced by the persuasions, and were forced upon the pile and bound down with ropes and pressed down with green bamboos until consumed by fire. Numerous Sati impressions (hand impressions) and the composition of Sati purana proved that the custom of Sati had acquired the status of a well organized practice. Sati stones were often erected at the place where the widow had observed Sati. They were elevated to the position of Devis and were worshipped by women. The practice of Sati reveals the position of women during those days. In places where women were worshipped as mother goddesses, there was no question of widow burning. Where women occupied a low status in society Sati was popular. In Bengal the practice was too common. But towards the South the practice was seldom found.

From the sixth century onwards efforts were being made to prevent Sati. But force of tradition kept the practice
alive in certain regions. The abolition of Sati was effected legally owing to the combined effort of three forces. The measures adopted on the grounds of administrative necessity by the Company's Government in India, the attempts of certain Christian missionaries and the growth of an enlightened Indian opinion under the spirit of Renaissance owing its birth to Raja Ram Mohan Roy, were able to put an end to Sati legally. Lord Bentick took personal interest and initiative to strike boldly at the practice. The Prevention of Sati Act of 1829 made the burning or burying widows alive culpable homicide, punishable with fine and imprisonment. However the act was not enough to put an end to Sati. The Pandits were of the opinion that if widows were not burnt alive the foundations of the Hindu society would be shaken. They also regarded the Act as an interference with the rights of women's chance of burning their sins and securing salvation straight away.

As far as the highest ideal of Hindu is concerned, Sati is an immoral act. For the realisation of the self an individual has to undergo the four asramas successfully. By becoming Sati, the chances of the last two asramas are denied to the widow. Since Sati being an unnatural death, the chances of self realisation becomes unfulfilled. Just like murder, suicide, homicide etc., Sati also closes all doors for Salvation for the self. A woman is not only a wife but also a mother. She has to
fulfil her duties as a mother. Hence Sati is not advisable from the point of self-realisation. A wife is not born along with her husband. So there arises no need for co-death. From the empirical point of view each individual is independent and has the right to fulfil one's duty for the realisation of the self. Moreover a widow has to fulfil those duties which her husband left undone. Sati sacrifices "were in fact murders according to every Sastra, as well as the commonsense of all nations". Widow-burning in India is a counterpart of European witch burning.

The image of women has undergone far reaching changes during the long course of the history of Hinduism. In spite of many changes regarding educational facilities and domestic, social, political legal and economic rights, the women of India have remained fundamentally unchanged. When independence was achieved, the position that women occupied in India's political and social life came as a surprise to the outside world who were accustomed to think of Hindu women as being backward, uneducated and held down by a reactionary social order. The women awakening movement and their claim to social equality is nothing less than the reorganisation of Hindu society on a modern basis. Under the able leadership of Mahatma Gandhi the Indian women proved their merit on the political field by their active participation in the struggle for Independence. As governors,

Cabinet Ministers and as Ambassadors, Indian women made their mark in the history. Dr. Annie Besant was the first woman to be elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1917. Later Mrs. Sarojini Naidu in 1925 and Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1959. Mrs. Basanti Devi was the first among the women to be arrested for participation in the Independence Movement. Rani Lekshmi Bai was an outstanding character among Indian women. Gouri Lekshmi Bai and Parvathi Bai ruled over Travancore during the early 19th century. In the words of Smt. Sarojini Naidu "the power of self surrender and self-realisation had been the typical characteristics of Indian woman hood." 100 In the west women have fought for and achieved the fullest measure of equality with men in all fields of life. Women are equal in all respects but they regard their position as lower to men. As regards the ultimate reality there is no differentiation between one's self and another's. Man and woman are complementary parts of a whole and hence equal in every aspect. But certain laws and regulations are drawn in order to safeguard the position of women from the stronger community, namely, men. Proper education to both the sexes can bring about the right awareness that woman is no way inferior to man and thus the status of woman in the present society can be improved to the level equal to that of man.