CHAPTER-1
TRADITIONAL VALUES OF WOMEN'S LIFE:

Woman's life has had been full of struggle. From the very beginning, woman had been present in the society and literature in two mutually contradictory forms. On one hand she was praised as a Goddess and on the other hand she was condemned. Condemnation for woman has not been limited in India, but in almost all the religious literature in the world. The famous Latin saint Tartulian has written about the woman, "Thou art the devil's gate, the betrayer of the true the first deserter of divine law". According to saint Augustian, "What does it matter whether it be in person of mother or sister; we have to be beware of Eve in Woman." Shankaracharya has called woman a gate to hell. Woman has reached the present stage after passing through the eras of rise and fall. Behind woman's rise and fall there have been many strong historical reasons which can not be ignored.

Vedas are considered to be the base of Hindu literature and values. During the Vedic period the woman enjoyed equal status with man. For her intellectual and spiritual progress she travelled along with man. In the religious area she had equal rights with man. In those days woman was educated in the use of arms like man. She participated in the war along with the
members of the family. In those days there were many women poets too. So they also became the 'Mantra Drastha' of Rig Veda. Of these the names of Ghosha, Apala, Lopamudra, Shachi are indicated in Rig Veda.

In the Pre-Vedic Period the society was matrilineal. In the earlier stage of man, when marriage sacrament was not in vogue, all the men and women in a group were husbands and wives to each other. For this reason, the progeny was recognised with the mother. So, only the mother could say the progeny to be her own. For this reason, the progeny was named after the mother. Man and woman participated together in war and hunting. The senior most lady of the group was considered to be the leader. Every one was expected to function according to her orders. The remanents of such matrilineal society can be seen even at present. The Nairs in Kerala and the Khasis and Garos in Meghalaya are matrilineal people. The name of the family is according to the mother's clan. Nairs put many constraints on women and limit them to the home but the woman of Khasi and Garo, because of their economic contribution enjoy more freedom.

The Puranas also contain many indications of matrilineal social organisation. In the 'Devi Bhagwata' the name of the spouses of the 'Devis' are not found. All the 'Devis' like Durga, Shailputri, Chandraghanta, Kali,
Maha Kali, Siddhidatri were called 'Jagatjanani' even by the men. So the progeny of Aditi were called Aditya, the progeny of Danu were Danav and the progeny of Diti were called Daitya. They are based on the name of their mothers. In those days woman was called 'Shakitrupa' and 'Buddhirupa' in stead of 'Abala' and 'Buddhihina'. So, it is clear that in those days woman occupied an important place in the society.

In the Post-Vedic-Period the physical weakness of woman became her weakness. She did not enjoy the same position of respect which was enjoyed by her in the early Vedic Period. Man started encroaching upon her rights. The religious rights of woman restricted in the Upanishad Kal and Brahmin Kal. In the Ramayana the status of woman was not equal to man. Differences in status were seen in the Aryan and Non-Aryan woman. Aryan women like Indumati and Sita could have Swayambar while the Non-Aryan women like Ruma's and Tara's position are pathetic. Bali had to sacrifice his life for keeping Ruma, the wife of his younger brother. Not only this but when Bali did not come out from the cave having a duel with Dundavi, Sugriva believing him to be dead returned to Kishkindha and took his position, his wife Ruma, throne and along with Bali's wife Tara also.
In the Mahabharata women were called the burning fire, maya and poison. It is said in the end that just as the Yama is never satiated with the dead, so too women are not satiated with men.

In the Puran and Smriti age the condition of woman was towards the downfall. She was considered dependent in that age. The 'Shastrakaras' have given three reason for female dependency. Firstly, because of her being 'abala' that is physically weak; Secondly, because of being incapable of self-dependence; and thirdly, because of the fear of genetic pollution.

In the Manu Smriti, we find the contradictory position about woman. On one hand woman's life values and rights were totally restricted by man, while on the other hand it was proclaimed, "Yatra naryastu pujjante ramante tatra devata" that is where women are honoured God dwell there.

In the Boudhya age, Gautam Buddha tried to give equal status to woman. In the beginning, influenced by the condemnation for woman he restricted the entry of woman to the 'Sangha' but after considering that such restriction was contradictory to the essence of his principles, he approved the entry of woman.
In the later Boudhya age, this ideal of Buddha remained restricted to the level of principles only. Many women in search of 'Nirvan' became buddha nuns but get lost in the darkness of corruptions rampant into the 'Matha' and 'Vihara'.

In the Hindi literature of earlier period woman is presented in two contradictory forms. On one hand the 'Siddha' and 'Natha' preached for avoiding woman while calling her 'Maya', on the other hand the 'Charan poet' while describing her form and beauty called her the means of enjoyment. Dr. Ram Gopal Sharma in his *Hindi Sahitya Ka Itihas* has described the social position of as that the woman had become only object of enjoyment. She was beginning to be the object, to be bought and sold and abducted.\(^{11}\)

In the Middle age, the condition of woman had become critical. Abducting good women and enjoying them had become the interest of the rich people. Well to do Muslims purchased Hindu girls in large numbers and kept them in their home. According to Parashu Ram Chaturvedi that the woman did not enjoy the status and respect the purda system had become the necessity of the day, even then there was provision for women education and woman contributed towards the production of art and literature.\(^{12}\)
In the Middle age, the largest unit of Hindu society was village and the smallest, the family. Woman was compelled to make adjustment in the living even if her husband was heading towards degradation. She was unaware of the real pride of her chastity. The 'Sant poet' of Middle age have described woman as of inferior form. For them woman symbolised the impediment in 'Bhakti' and 'Mukti' both. The tendencies of the 'Sufi poet' were mostly to paint the woman in the form of the beloved as well as the wife. The 'Sagun bhakti' poets presented woman in a variety of forms - mother, wife, beloved, daughter that is, all the forms that a woman could take. Specially in the 'Ram bhakti Kavya' woman has been presented in various forms. Scholar differ in respect to Tulsi Das's view of woman. According to a scholar Dr. Mata Prasad Gupta Tulsi das was not liberal. Dr. Ram Kumar Verma along with some other critics consider that Tulsi Das has shown respect towards woman. If we consider 'Manas' impartially, it would be clear that the signs of condemnation for women were presented only, when women reacted in contradiction to 'Dharma'. Besides the inspiring mother, honourable wife and obedient daughter, Tulsi Das has described all forms of woman in 'Manas'. The expression of the complete beauty of woman's life is the unique characteristic of 'Manas'. The great tradition of ideal Indian women which is related to the age has been established by Tulsi Das in his 'Manas'.
The Post Middle - Era was an era of social degradation. Because of the rise of feudalism, the condition of the common people was critical. The rulers and rich class were well-off with out any labour. To purchase a woman and to enjoy her had become the main purpose in their life. Social conditions always have their impact on literature. Woman had to become the central point of lust in the 'Ritikalin poetry'. Dr. Nagendra in his Ritikal Ki Bhumika has described the condition of the woman of that age that in 'Ritikal' the man did not show love to a particular woman as an individual but her womanness.

The Modern Era brought new consciousness and a message of awakening. Religious reformation movements were launched in this age. There was change in the political scene. There was the propagation of English education and the activities of Christian Missionaries. Because of these, there was turbulence in the middle-classes of Hindus and Muslims and the attention of the Indian intellectuals was focused towards their own religion, society and culture, thereby paving the ways for different social and religious movements. An urge to express the change in the conservative society was explicitly expressed. These thinkers very well knew that in order to bring about a change in the traditional society, it is necessary to change the down trodden status of
woman, because woman has an important role in the society. For this reason they opposed firmly those ill-conventions and practices which brought the woman to her degraded position. These reformatory movements later on prepared the way for freedom movement. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the messenger of new awakening first of all assimilated seriously the progressive elements in the western thinking and then tried to Indianise them. In order to establish his principles, he set up the Brahma Samaj. The ban on 'Sati' is one of the notable incidents in the history of India. He considered the polygamy to be the root cause of 'Sati'. He campaigned for the upliftment of woman and her economic independence. After Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the leadership of Brahma Samaj had gone to Devendra Nath Tagore but he did not make any special effort for social reforms. Keshab Chandra Sen wanted to divert Brahma-Samaj towards social reform as it was influenced by Christian religious and social organisation. For this reason, he organised Indian Brahma Samaj as a new organisation. The main focus of his social reform was on the problems of woman --

i) The Propagation of woman education,

ii) Widow re-marriage etc.

He gave them the practical shape. Through his efforts he got Brahma marriage act, passed in 1892 in
order to give recognition to the inter-caste marriages. His other achievement is that he opposed the child marriage.

There was one institution named Paramhans which worked secretly for the social reform. In 1867, this institution led the establishment of Prathana Samaj due to the inspiration from Keshab Chandra Sen. Primarily Prarthana Samaj had four aims --

i) To destroy castism,
ii) Widow remarriage,
iii) To establish Nights schools for woman-education,
iv) To establish institution for children and widows.

The Chief Characteristic of the Prarthana Samaj which distinguished it from contemporary institutions was that it was not religious but entirely social. Religion was not brought in the social area. This institution like the Brahma Samaj neither Indianised the Western thoughts nor harped upon the Indian glory like the Arya Samaj. It always remained conscious of the practical aspect. The credit of its success goes to Mahadeva Govinda Ranade, under whose inspiration 'Bharatiya Rastriya Samajik Sammelan' was established in 1888. It was the first social institution at the national level.
Swami Dayananda Saraswati formally established the Arya Samaj in 1875. In the 19th century, Arya Samaj was the only reformation movement which opposed the foreign rule and amended 'Swaraj' in its place. In the 20th Century, when all the institutions were lost in history, Arya Samaj still existed in its own place. Swami Dayananda Saraswati the founder of Arya Samaj had said that the foreign rule cannot be compared with 'Swadeshi Raj'. In fact, Swami Dayananda gave the modern form to the word 'Swaraj'. Arya Samaj had been the only institution which was not limited to the cities, but spreading across the villages influenced the Indian public life. It opposed ignorance, mal-practices, idol-worship, sacrifices, seclusion, dowry, child-marriage and incompatible marriages. It raised the voice for widow re-marriage, woman education and for the untouchables. Arya Samaj had its own place in the history.

Many other reformatory institutions were established besides the above mentioned. In 1856, a bill for widow remarriage was passed due to the effort of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. He campaigned for the first time for widow remarriage based on the opinion of the 'Shastra'. At the same time he opposed polygamy. As a result of the speeches of Annie Besant, many woman organisations were established. Among them were - Bharat Estri Mandal, Puna
Sewa Sadan, Sarojani Dutta Mahila Samaj, Mahila Brahma Samaj are noteworthy. All the social reform movements of the 19th century aimed at the upliftment of woman and to give her proper status. Due to efforts of these reformers, woman got the political rights but she got the economic rights only after independence. Even now, in spite of all these, woman has not yet attained complete social rights. She is treated as second class citizen. Previously she was exploited within the four walls of the house but now she has to face many problems inside as well as outside the house.

Country wide social movements had their impact on literature. The clarion call of the thinkers that if the upliftment of the Indian society is to be done, it is not possible without the upliftment of woman. Woman is the mother, without the education of the mother, the progeny cannot attend the abilities and without able progeny the salvation of the country is not possible. Woman has tried to put this thought in practice, the contemporary discussion will be presented at the proper place.
PERSONALITY OF WOMEN:

Indian way of life is based on family model and for this, it is incomplete without woman. She directs the family as mother, and life-partner. Woman is equated with 'Prakriti' in Indian Philosophy. The 'Bhagwat Gita' speaks about the creation as a result of the meeting of 'Prakriti' and 'Purusha' --

"Prakritinam swamvastam visrijami punaha punaha"  

The personality of woman starts from 'Kanya' and reaches acme in the form of mother through other forms of sister, beloved and wife. Besides this, woman is given the status of the 'Devi' and is given more magnanimity. The development of the two aspects of woman -- respect and condemnation can be seen in her being 'Kanya'. On one hand she has the greatness of 'Devi', and on the other parents became worried when she is born. In Vedic age 'Kanya rup' had been very important. Vedic literature provides for the wish for 'Kanya' as well as the provision for her rearing. 'Brahmin Kanyas' were educated by Vedic learning. Kshatriya girls learned the art of archery. Boys and girls were taught together in the Gurukula. Atreyi learned along with Lava and Kusha in the Ashram of Valmiki. Fine arts was specially taught to the
girls. Girls were also provided with the sacred thread. They were also free to choose the spouses for themselves. Swayambharas were organised where impressed by the strength, character and physical beauty, the 'Kanya' used to garland the youth. In the later age, Manu considered the marriage sacrament as 'Upanayana Sanskara' for girls. In the period of Puranas, 'Kanya' was considered as 'Devi'. Probably from this time onward 'Kumari Puza' came in vogue. The presence of Kanyas' was considered essential in all the auspicious occasions. This feeling of respect is still prevalent.

In the later age, due to the importance of inheritance and the desire for salvation, the birth of a male child became important. And religious practices for the prevention of female birth also developed. This situation can be seen as the result of the conservative practices of dowry and problems concerned with widow. Although, the incidences of female infanticide are seen in the middle ages but such incidences became less prevalent due to the influences of contemporary conditions. It was more prevalent among the wealthier and upper sections of the people in certain areas. In 1789, Janathan Duncan, the then British resident of Benaras discovered the practice among the Raj Kumars of that place. The Jadeja of
Kalhiawar and Kutch, Kuchwah Rajput of Allahabad, the Chouhan Rajput and Pathak Ahirs of Mainpuri were addicted to the crime. In the Punjab, too, it was widely practised. Even in the modern society the birth of the female child was not welcomed. Very few guardians provide for the education of the daughters like the of their sons. She is only trained from the very beginning the behaviours in the future in law's house, talking in a low tone, walking slowly with her head down, blushing etc. But it is also not a fact that all the girls suffocated within the four walls of the house. Now-a-days girls have stepped into almost all the areas of life. Given the right opportunity and proper environment, they can prove themselves second to none.

In the role of a sister the woman has importance on the occasion of 'Bhaiya Duza'. She is assured full protection from her brother. But if she happens to be a widow living in her parent's house economically dependent then she has to bear the ill-treatment of her brother and sister-in-law. She is blamed at every step. However history bears the testimony to the fact that many brothers had sacrificed their lives for their sisters.

Woman has been considered as epitome of
love. Literature expresses beauty, soft and heart touching feeling because of feminine love. Woman had been a source of inspiration for almost all the successful men in the world. There were women in history who attained fame in the role of beloveds and they had helped their lovers to become great. People like Kali Das, Nepolean as a conqueror, Michael Faraday the scientist and many others who built the history and those who renounced the world are testimony of the fact that love has contributed an important part in their lives. Woman as a lover is of two types -- one who remain attached and completely devoted there by deriving the pleasures of the union, and the other who continue to inspire without the union even though she harbours intense passion for her lover.

In the 'Aadikal' of Hindi literature that form of beloved is high lighted for whom the lover faces the hardship and in the end becomes successful in getting her. The poetry of this age abound in the description of those women who were ready to sacrifice their existence for the sake of their lovers. The 'Prem Margi' poets have given more attention to the description of woman in the form of beloveds. There had been many notable and ideal beloveds like Padmawati Madhumalati, Hansawati, Iudrawati. The poets belonging to 'Krishna Bhakti Dhara'
have made the love theme as paramount in their poetry. Even the famous 'Ram Bhakt' poet Tulsi Das could not remain unaffected by love. He has expressed in his 'Ramcharitmanas' the 'Purba Raaga' of Rama and Sita --

"Tasu bachan ati Siyahi sohane
Daras lagi lochan akulane
Chali agra kari priya sakhi soyi
Priti puratan lakhai na koi." 16

In 'Ritikal' woman could not rise above sensuous environment of the age. She could not establish any high ideal as a beloved. The 'Ritikalin' mentality about the beloved's role is seen in Pre-Premchand novels. Their love shows the lack of seriousness. And in order to satisfy their physical desires they delve in the exhibit dramatic behaviours. Though in the Premchand - era, woman is presented in the form of an ideal beloved, in the Post premchand Novels, we see changes in her traditional ideals. For the woman in love their appears to be no restriction of a particular object of love, in other words, she could be attracted to any one.

Wife is called home, she is the organiser and regulator of the household. According to Manu, wife is worth worshipping. In her happiness lies the happiness of the family and in her sorrow there is a possibility of
the whole family becoming sorrowful --

"Striyam turoch manayam sarva tadrochate Kulam
tasyam kharochmanayam sarvameva na rochate." 17

So, in the interest of the family, father, brother, husband and other members of the family should always respect the lady of the house --

"Pitribhi bhatribhischaitah patibhirdevaratistatha
pujyja bhushayitabyashch bahukalyanamipasubhi." 18

In the role of wife, the honour and the personality continued to be the same, down to the Ramayana and Mahabharata age. In the Ramayana, there was an establishment of the pride of woman in the role of wife. Polygamy is a cause. Example can be seen in the incident which occurred in Dasharatha's life. This is the reason why Rama had restricted the honour of having only one wife. The acme appears in the reference to the absence of Sita. Rama became ready to participate in the 'Ashwamegha Yajna' along with the golden image of Sita but could not think of taking another wife. From the beginning, rule and regulations are imposed in the form of duties along with the rights of a woman in the role of wife. In the service of her husband lies here destiny. To be attracted to other man is considered to be the greatest sin. Describing the characteristics of a chaste wife, Mahu has clearly
expressed that she should not indulge in the corruption of mind, words and deeds. The sanction is found in Manusmriti having a corrupt woman being devoured by dogs.

The laws made by 'Smritikaras' about woman's duties gradually gave rise to her dependency and helplessness. Putting Droupadi in bet by Yudhishthira is a mockery of the role of woman as a wife. Woman gradually started changing from companion to a slave. She was married for the service of her husband. Not only this, we find in the 'Sati Pratha', the height of degradation of the role of wife. Not only in this world but also in the 'Paraloka' man could not make the woman free from slavery. When 'Sati Pratha' was banned, the fundamentalist and custodians of religion awakened the norms of community, the religion specified the conducts for widows. They were expected to eat only at one time a day, work hard, wear white robes and thus were considered as 'Devis'. But these 'Devis' were not permitted in marriages and other auspicious celebrations. They were only utilised to prepare the 'Pinda' for 'Shradha'. A.S. Altekar has clarified the condition of widows thus, "the widow did not receive much intelligent sympathy from society as a whole.

If she continued to live in the family of her husband, she had to work as a drudge; if she lived separately, she was
given a pittance as her maintenance. She had to spend her life with her head shaven and arms bared; she was an out-caste on festive occasion, -- a bad oman her very sight being regarded as most inauspicious." Sharat Chattopadhyaya in his essay 'Narir Mulya' has written that man can bring many women to his house while his wife is alive but the twelve year old widow has to live as a 'Devi'. This system makes the status of the entire woman folk of the country very low. It is difficult to stop this just by writing. To liberate the woman from the curse of being a widow, widow remarriage movements were started. Among contemporary reformers, many of them presented practical ideals in this direction. But these movements could not influence the society at large. The picture of the status of Radheshyami widows of Braj and the widows of Varanasi in itself is a paradox.

Polygamy reduced the importance of woman as a wife. Because of this bad tradition woman had to lose the right of property. Whereas, for getting a successor, man was free to marry many women. Some examples of polygamy can be seen in Smriti, Ramayana and Mahabharata ages. It is said that Manu had ten wives, Yajanavalka had two, Dashratha three and Srikrishna Sixteen thousand wives besides he used to celebrate the 'Rasa'. Polygamy was more prevalent among the kings who used to marry the princesses from other countries in order to strengthen their
political relations. Among the general people, this tradition was for continuity of the family as well as the desire for a son who can offer 'Pinda'. This might be because of any reason, but it is clear that this tradition contributed in making the standard for the life-values of woman more pitiable. At present this old tradition is gradually dying out. Only the Muslim law seems to be uninfluenced by the changing conditions, otherwise in almost all the communities the law for monogamy is accepted.

The status which a woman gets in the role of a mother is not found in any, other role. In the compound word 'Mata-Pita', the word mother comes fast. According to Manu --

"Upadhyayan dashacharya acharyanam shatam pita
Sahasram tu pitrinmata gauravenatirichyate". 24

'Acharya' is ten times more honourable than 'Upadhyaya', father is hundred times more honourable than 'Acharya' and mother is thousand times more honourable than the father. The importance of the highest honour of the woman in the role of a mother can be seen in the 'Sloka' of Gita 'Twamewa mata cha pita twamewa' in which every theist prayed to God primarily in the form of mother.
There is no doubt that in the Indian philosophy and religion womanhood has bloomed fully in the role of mother. Mother plays a vital role in the character building of progeny, more than the father. The first word that a child utters is 'Ma'. Mother therefore has been the cherished ideal of every Hindu woman.

Among the various roles of woman, the role of daughter-in-law is also significant. The personality of the woman in the role of daughter-in-law is a challenge to her. After marriage, every Indian girl has a fear in mind about the types of in-laws that she would get. In the vedic age the daughter-in-law was honourably well comed because by that time she had completed her education. Along with the practice of the child marriage, the behaviour of the mother-in-law changed into ill-treatment to the daughter-in-law. This was because she was very young and uneducated and also not expert in house hold work. Dowry system further adversely affected the condition of woman. Even now-a-days because of the greed for dowry many women are burnt.

We have seen that the personality of the woman has always been beneficial, her inspirational values as wife and mother has benefited the husband and the sons. Whenever the man has transgressed his path, the woman has given him the correct direction. As nature induces vibration in human so does the woman give life the man.
In literature woman has always been established as a source of inspiration and power. In the modern literature the traditional life-values are breaking. The depiction of woman in literature today has become wider and deals with her activities as well as her wider influence in the individual life as well as the life of the society. Personal freedom of the woman, complexes, stress, transgression all are included in the present literature.

WOMEN AND SOCIETY:

A woman occupies an important role in the human social-life. The condition of woman in the society can give easily the clue to the development of the society. The smallest unit of the Indian society is family. We can not think about family without woman. In the olden days the basis of organisation of Hindu society was joint family. The joint family besides husband and wife contained children as well as the relatives up to four - five generations. Due to the industrialization, the joint family disintegrated and members scattered here and there. Thus, the agriculture based society lost its traditional frame and the family was restricted to husband, wife and children. Both the wife and husband have become the earning members of the family. The woman is no longer subordinate to masculine authority but they think
that they are equal to males. Husband and wife have become equal partners of life. Friendly relation gave a new direction to the male-female relationship.

Down the ages woman had been downtrodden. All her life she had been under the supervision of father, husband and the sons. Her birth produced gloom in the family. On becoming a widow she was to burn along with the husband in order to prove her chastity in the eyes of the society. The people in the society participated in this suicidal celebration with pride.

Woman has been always exploited in the name of religion, tradition and customs. The woman, be a mother or daughter, sister or wife, had to be under the supervision of man. The standards created by man gave her life the direction. The problems in a woman's life mostly related to her relation with man. In this context Dr. Ranabir Rangra said that the civilization, law and the education have broken the physical shackles but the deep centuries old predispositions of slavery held the soul and even after struggling, she was not able to free her self. Many problems seen in the life of the woman are analysed in the subsequent paragraphs --

PROBLEMS RELATED TO MARRIAGE:

The idea of the male-female pair is
eternal. And this idea found expression in the form of marriage system. According to ancient Indian history Shwetaketu son of Uddalak established this system. Dirghatama Rishi is also considered to be the founder of marriage sacrament. Whosoever might be the founder of marriage, the truth is that the marriage is the social acceptance of the physical relationship of male and female. So, we can consider marriage as a social celebration.

Marriage is the foundation of family life. It is considered to be a sacrament in Hindu society. Accordingly husband and wife are considered to be the partners through many previous lives. Marriage is most important in the life of woman. Marriage, therefore, determines the fate of a woman to a much greater extent then it does the destiny of a man. A good marriage is a welcome protection for woman, a bad one is worse than a painful chain.28

Like other areas of the life, woman has been dependent in marriage also. There has been mention of Swayambara in the religious literature, for example, in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata age, high caste woman like Sita, Droupadi, Damyanti etc. had their Swayambaras. Swayambara was, however not the right of woman. In the
later ages because of the economic reason besides various forms of marriages, woman was beginning to be the object of "Dana". The materials given along with the marriage became the economic compulsion in the form of dowry. Consequently many distortions entered in the marriage system. Marriage did not remain the sacred relationship but became a problem. Because of these distortions many traditions appeared in the society, for example, incompatible marriages, child marriages, multiple marriages, marriages of the old etc. These problems weakened the society. Specially woman had to bear the grind of these problems.

**INCOMPATIBLE MARRIAGE:**

Incompatible marriage among other marital problems is mostly related to economic problems. Incompatible Marriage is generally considered to be a marriage where there is dissimilarity of age and ability between husband and wife. In the ancient Indian social system, there was a definite direction that at the time of marriage both the bride and bride groom should attain maturity. In the Vedas, it is said that after marriage both the husband and wife following each others nature and behaviours by helping each other should remain friendly throughout life. From this, it is clear that the
similarity of husband and wife in every area of life is necessary. But because of economic problems, unequal marriages became prevalent and a new form of female slavery and exploitation appeared. Besides the economic problems, other social disposition and the desire of the parents to make them free from the responsibilities is also responsible for the problem of unequal marriage. The parents want to put their responsibilities on the others to make themselves free even when the other person is not worthy of it.

CHILD MARRIAGE:

Child marriage has been a burning problem in Indian society. This tradition has affected the Hindu community adversely. This problem has been related to the problem of unequal marriage and widow problem. In vedic age the girl was married after the attainment of maturity. In later ages, marriage was insisted upon before the attainment of puberty. Smritikaras have specially insisted that the girls should either be married before attaining puberty or within three months after her first menstruation. It is clear that they were in favour of pre-puberty marriage in normal circumstances. Opinion was obviously divided at this time. Some thinkers pointed out that life was transitory, and if
marriage was intended to ensure the continuance of the family, the bride should not to be young when it is performed. Other contended the absolute chastity was to be most desired, and so we should select a bride who should not have even dreamt of sexual love.\textsuperscript{29}

Because of Muslim invasion and expansion of imperialism, the child marriage became essential in the Hindu society. Indian history bears testimony to the fact that the Muslim rulers in order to show their supremacy and power, resorted to various types of atrocities on the Hindus. They also tried to use the Hindu woman for the satisfaction of their lustful desires. Because of this, the Hindus started to give in marriage daughters at an early age. So that, they might get the protection of their husbands. It can also be said that by giving in marriage their daughter at an early age, they felt relief and free from their responsibility of protecting her. Whatsoever the reason might be, child marriage created the problem of widow. Because of her early marriage, the innocent girl sometimes could not know when she became the bride or a widow. After becoming widow at her early age, she had to live the whole life observing hard rules and regulations, self control and decorum. Thus, because of child marriage the widow problem became a big curse. In 1929 the British
government put a ban on the child marriage by passing "Sharada Act". Because of the spread of education, this practice has already been dead in the cities but it can be seen even today in some villages.

MULTI MARRIAGE:

Multiple marriage in the form of polygamy and polyandry, both are found in India. Polyandry is found only in some schedule tribes, for example, Todas of Nilgiri, Khasas of Jaunsar, Babar district of Uttar Pradesh and some tribes in Kinnor and Lahol spiti of the district of Himachal Pradesh.

Polygamy is more prevalent than polyandry. Polygamy has been an important cause of woman's pitiable social condition. In Hindu Code Bill of 1954 polygamy is prohibited. In modern legal organisation, only the Muslim community is allowed to have more than one wife.

Polygamy became prevalent because of the barrenness or illness of woman or inability to bear a son etc. Presently, one more factor is becoming prominent, that is the inability to communicate between uneducated wife and the educated husband. So, even today polygamy is
seen among the Hindus which may be due to the ignorance of women about their right and their social confirmity.

DOWRY SYSTEM:

Dowry system has been the greatest problem in the marriage. Many ill practices in the society come from it. Dowry problem may give rise to incompatible marriage, child marriage, multiple marriage, widow problem and prostitutions etc. When the parents are not able to provide the dowry, they are compelled to marry their daughter to some unworthy man. So, because of the ill practice of dowry, the girl becomes a curse to her parents.

It is difficult to state that when the practice of dowry started. During Vedic age, the parents used to give the bedding etc. to the daughter at the parting time. Besides this the gift boxes, cow, blanket etc. are also mentioned. Valmiki Ramayana mention that Sita was given lavish amount of "Kanya dhana". In Mahabharata, Droupadi, Subhadra and Uttara were mentioned to have brought the horses, elephants, diamonds etc. in large amount along with them. According to A.S. Altekar, "It is only in medieval times and in Rajputana that we find the dowry system assuming alarming proportions. This
however, happened only in the case of royal and aristocratic families. The extra ordinary pride, which the Rajputs took in the ancestry was mainly responsible for this developments".  

Besides the practice of dowry, the practice of bride price is seen in some Patriarchal tribes. In one of the tribes a woman can leave her husband for his misbehaviour by giving some compensation. The 'Rit' of Himachal Pradesh and 'Natara' of Madhya Pradesh are among such practices. In the poorer sections bride prices is prevalent in which due to inability of debt payment girls are offered. In some tribes wives are sent for prostitution, who earn money for the repayment of their husband's debt.

Because of dowry, married life has become a problem. And due to the social and economic inequality dowry has become only an allurement. The same dowry which started in the form of 'Daana' gradually became distorted into an ill-practice. At present due to the dowry problem many wives are burnt.

WIDOW PROBLEM:

Widow problem is a complicated social
problem. Woman is worst exploited as a widow. She had to live the life restricted by the social decorum. Before the legal ban on 'Sati', the problem of the widow was not prominent in society. Woman had to burn along with her husband. People in the society participated in this suicidal programme with joy and fervour. If unwilling, she was thrown forcibly in the pyre of her husband. Drums were beaten inorder to drown the cries of the widow. Woman was considered as Devi if she followed the sanctions of the widow life, if not, she was called 'Kulta'. She was expected to wear white dress and work hard and eat simple vegetarian tasteless food. Widows were not allowed in social celebrations. Organisations like the Brahma Samaj supported the re-marriage of widow, in order to solve the widow problem. Contemporary reformers give this idea a practical direction, but still in the name of widow problem she continued to remained exploited.

Although there have been changes in people's attitude towards widow but the condition of widow is still far from satisfactory. The condition of Radheshyami and widow of varanasi, who live on begging are clear examples of such conditions.

Because of legal reforms, the woman gets the share in the property of her husband, besides this, the widow of a government servant gets life long pension.
These reforms are beginning to have positive effects on their conditions.

**PROBLEM OF PROSTITUTION:**

Prostitution is another curse in the life of woman. Starting from earlier time this problem has kept on changing various forms. The reason behind the prostitution problem may be excess concern for purity, child marriage, incompatible marriage, problem of widow marriage and dowry.

In earlier times, in order to solve their political problems diplomatically, women were used. 'Nagar Badhu', 'Raj Nartaki' and 'Vishakanya' etc were the earlier forms of prostitution. But woman had a status in this form of prostitution.

Because of the economic insecurity woman was brought to prostitution. And due to the modern industrialization, this illegal body trade became a profitable industry. The patriarchal system restricted the woman within the four walls of the house and deprived her of education. When she came out of the house, due to the lack of mental strength and confidence, she took the wrong path. Woman has not choosen this path because of her
interest but various social conditions have diverted her towards this filthiness.

There have been some problems which are prevalent in India or some parts of it, due to conservative thinking, traditional superstition naked inhumanness in her life and has tolerated it. Purda pratha, Devadasi pratha and Goli pratha are some such practices.

**PURDA SYSTEM:**

In ancient India Purda system was not prevalent. Woman in Vedic age did not observe purda. Even in the later Vedic-age, we do not find any sign of purda. Only ladies of the royal family observed it. This system got stronger with the coming of Muslim invasion. Muslim culture had purda, which they have not been able to leave. One of the causes behind the purda was the lustful tendencies of Muslim Kings. Many beautiful girls found themselves in their 'Harem'. The Hindu society felt very much concerned about the protection of the religion, race and culture. Because of this, purda system gradually became stronger and stronger.

Because of the prevalent of the purda, the woman found herself confined within the four walls of the
house. Consequently she could not develop herself socially and remained backward as compared to man. In the 19th century, the social reformers, because of their attention to the pitiable status of woman and to give her equal status in the society, raised their voice against the purda. The woman could not remain untouched from the freedom movement by Mahatma Gandhi. He played a big role in the uprooting of the purda system. But even after five decades of freedom, purda has not been completely eliminated. In villages, it is still in vogue.

**Sati System:**

'Sati' is mentioned in the Vedas. According to Atharava Veda, the widow sat on the pyre of her husband, but returned at the request of the society by saying that she should make use of the property and look after the child. In the Mahabharata, mention is made of Madri, who committed Sati. Manu also considered Sati as Valid.

As the time passed the voluntary 'Sati' system became a compulsion. In the middle ages, its prevalence was reduced in the Brahmin society but it got support and encouragement in Rajputa society. The lustful nature of the Muslim ruler had produced a feeling of insecurity in the Rajputa Women and they used to jump on
the pyre in order to save their honour after hearing the
death of their husbands in the battle field.

During the British-age, this Sati system had taken an inhuman form. If a woman did not commit Sati Voluntarily she was forcefully made to commit it. The custodian of religion pushed the woman towards the burning pyre of her husband in the name of the glory and decorum of Hindu society. Trumpets were sounded in order to drown the cries of the helpless woman. In the 19th century due to the effort of the famous social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy, William Bentick put a legal ban on it. Even after this ban the system remained prevalent in Rajputana. The recent Roop kunwar incident of Devarala village of Rajasthan is a shameful and inhuman incident.

DEVADASI SYSTEM:

In the beginning, Devadasi system was restricted to a single community and was considered to be a practical aspect of a particular 'Sadhana'. Later on, this system could not remain restricted in the religious area. Because of the change in the human tendencies, this system could not remain under control. This practice gradually entered in to the social area from the religious
area. The money earned by Devadasi became the property of the temple. This system was found in the religious form in other countries like Babylon, Iran and Egypt.

Dr. I.S. Gilada, honourary secretary, All India Health Organisation has written in INFA report that three thousand girls every year are inducted in Devadasi system in Belgum district of Karnataka. He has written that despite the legal ban in Karnataka since 1983, more and more girls are the victims of the evil system. These Devadasies have to adopt prostitution. Twenty percent of the prostitutes of Bombay are Devadasi.

**GOLI SYSTEM** :

This practice was found particularly in Rajesthan. This practice unlike the Devadasi system which is connected to religious practices is found in the royal families. In order to satisfy the lust of the kings and princesses, special types of slave girls were recruited in royal palaces. In old age the condition of these women were like regaling wars in foul semlling mud.

Woman had been exploited by different social ill-practices in the name of religion and tradition. At present many such practices are more or less
dead, but they are present in one form or the other and continue to exploit the woman.

WOMEN AND HER STATUS IN THE SOCIETY:

Woman has an important place in the society. Man is the smallest unit of the society and his social life is incomplete without woman. Indian society has a special place for religion. The prestige of the society is determined by different religious faiths, traditions, customs and pre-dispositions. Religious traditions had deeply influenced the status of woman, because there are many religious communities in India woman occupies a higher or a lower status in different religious communities. Just as a woman occupies a high status in the role of mother in almost all religion, she is despised in the role of 'Kamini'. The status of woman in different religious societies are discussed under the following headings:

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE HINDU SOCIETY:

On one hand woman is considered an object of worship, on the other hand her freedom is negated by keeping her under the dependence of father, husband or the son. Mention has been made of observance of 'Brahmcharya'
and of getting education along with the acquiring of household duties. The highest form of woman is depicted in the description of 'Devies' in Vedas. In the later ages, they became gradually dependent. She was considered ideal only in the form of mother and wife. A practice of 'Kanyadana' in marriage makes the personality of woman weaker. The practice of preventing the woman in religious ceremonies at the time of 'Meusus' and pregnancy, and connecting these stages with impurity makes this idea stronger that the women are naturally inferior to man. Woman observes fast for the long life of the husband and sons. She gets respect in the form of mother and wife but her widowhood is considered unfortunate. She is segregated in social and religious celebrations thinking her inauspicious. There is a belief in the Hindu religion that a widow is inauspicious and it is cleared her shadow may not heralded misfortune to others. A Hindu woman after marriage has to wear show sign but such practices are not for man.

Boudhya, Jain, Sikh etc. appear as revolt to Hinduism. These religions made efforts to change the religious and spiritual practices related to woman. But their efforts were limited to the theoretical aspects. In these religions, woman also occupied a higher position in
the form of mother and wife. Her status remain lower than that of man.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE MUSLIM SOCIETY:

Quran, the Muslim scripture treats man and woman equally. In the later age, the interpreters of Quran verse kept woman lower than man. Woman recite Quran like man and have faith in it, but upto this time, she has never been Imam or Maulavi. The prevalence of purda in the Muslim society made the status of woman more pitiable. Woman occupies a low-status than man. Marriage is a contract in which the right of woman is not equal to that of man. Muslim society keeps the monopoly of multi-marriages and the right to divorce for man only. At the time of marriage both bride and bride groom enter into the contract. After becoming widow the woman is allowed to re-marry. The practice of paying the 'Mehar' provides some security to the woman in case of divorce. But this seldom happens.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE CHRISTIAN SOCIETY:

In the 'Bible' the woman is described as the one who illusioned and mislead. Dutiful and respectable relation between the husband and wife is
emphasised. As such the position of woman is higher. Monogamy is practiced in Christian society. In the 'Bible' such qualities of woman as expertness like family management, having compassion to the poor and intelligence are emphasised. The Christian woman can take part in all the religious celebrations. The identity and duties of woman are accepted in the Christian religion. Marriage is not the only destiny of her. Because of such traditions, the position of woman in Christian society is important.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE PERSIAN SOCIETY:

Woman occupies an honourable position in the Persian society. She has rights in the area of property, religion and others. This religion has given the right of divorce and re-marriage to the woman. The restriction of participation in the religious celebration during the 'mensus' exist. Man are free to marry a non-Persian woman but the woman are not allowed to do so.

THE POSITION OF WOMAN IN THE TRIBAL SOCIETY:

Woman enjoys important rights in the Tribal society. She plays an important role in the religious activities of the society. Howsoever they do not participate in the worship of Tribal God and Goddess.
Woman of the Matrilineal tribes participates in the worship of the ancestral Gods. In all the Tribal society the period of 'mensus' is an uncleaned period. During this period, she can not participate in religious ceremonies. Tribal woman has economic freedom, and because of this she occupies the higher status in the society.

After reviewing the status of woman in different religions and societies, we find that there are little differences between the status of woman. The reformatory movement of the 19th century tried for equal rights for woman but their efforts were restricted within the boundary of their own religions. Secondly, their aim was to get the woman out from the four walls of the house and give her the status in the family. It is clear that these movement had their maximum effects on urban middle class. In this context, the movements of non-co-operation started by Gandhiji played an important role in woman-consciousness. Before that the woman who was suffocating within the four walls of the house jumped into the freedom movement. When all the leaders were imprisoned and the movement became weaker, women gave support to it. So, Gandhiji has an important hand in the woman awakening. Freedom of the country brought the message of equality for woman. In the Indian constitution woman was given equal rights. But, because of the society being moulded in the
cast of feudal-economic-system and dependent on agricultural - civilization and patriarchal family organisation, could not give equal status to woman. Although as the result of industrialization, there is a change in the ideology but even now it is felt that more time may be required to leave the conventions of a long past. The social condition of woman can be seen as a special example of cleavage between the status and role given by law and those given by social traditions. In principle, though this is possible to woman, in reality, very few can attain it.

CONCEPT OF AN IDEAL WOMAN:

It is difficult to establish the concept of an ideal woman in relation to the development of the society. The main reason for this difficulty is that the related moral definition had been changing according to the time. Human ideas differ according to the age, time and social ideology. For example in the Muslim society, woman is prevented from being seen. In western culture, the dancing together of man and woman is allowed. Physical purity is the hallmark of the Hindu woman.

With the prevalence of property the question of inheritance was raised which strengthened the idea of purity of woman. The ideals of Indian woman can be
estimated from the Vedic age. The honour, decorum and status depended on her service to the husband. Under the protection of the parent in the form of 'Kanya', the ideals of the girls include -- well-mannered, simple, obedient as ideals. According to the ancient Hindu thinking, the complete ideal of woman lies in her being sub-servient to husband. In order to establish such ideal the rules for purity in marriage are harder. The acme of woman's life is seen in the role of the mother.

The Vedic 'Rishies' have given magnanimous status to the woman. She is the force behind pleasure and prosperity in human life. Woman has sublime qualities like forgiveness, compassion, attachment, love, non-violence, kindness and maternal feelings in her. During this age, she was given importance in the form of not only the server of home but the queen. Surya is established as an ideal Hindu bride. Indrani proved herself as an ideal wife by her sacrifice and renunciation giving strength of Indra. 'Aditi' is the embodiment of the prime mother and freedom.

During the Ramayana and Mahabharata age the ideal of woman lay in her 'Patiwrata Dharma'. In Ramayana, Sita and in Mahabharata, Savitri, Damayanti, Shakuntala, Loopamudra etc. present the high ideal of 'Patiwrata
Dharma'. As an exception Kunti gave birth to Karna and Matsyagandha gave birth to Vyasa as Virgins.

The authors of Smritis describing the life of woman have given a clear direction about the duties and rights of woman. Not only Manu, but all the authors have similar views regarding marriage. According to them a girl must get married before her puberty. However Manu says that in the absence of finding a suitable bride groom the girl can live with her parents through out her life --

"Kamamamaranattisthedagrihe Kanariturmatyapi
Nachaivainam prayachechhetu gunahinaya kahirchita." 38

According to Manu, the girl should be given all the love in her marital life --

"Anyonayasyavyabhicharo bhavedamaranaantikah
Esa dharma Samasena jneyah Stripunsayoh para" 39

Against the orthodoxy of the Brahmin age, Gautam Buddha established "Buddha dharma' and tried to give equal status to woman. Gautami, Kshema, Sujata, Amrapali, Kundala - Kesha etc. present an ideal form of woman in Buddha age. But after Gautam Buddha their moral standards only remained as the matters of principles. The sex desires of Bhikshus made Bhikshunies the object of enjoyment.
After Buddha Deva, Tulsi Das appeared as the greatest 'Lokanayaka' and his 'Manas' was called the 'Jana - Manas'. Tulsi Das has Portrayed the bad condition of social life in the middle ages in his 'Kaliyuga - Varnan'. He decided to refine the society while presenting the ideal woman in the 'Rama family', he gave due respect to woman. He presented the ideals of purity and worshipable ancient ideals in the form of sita which was the necessity of the contemporary condition of the society. The women of Tulsi Das present the high ideals of woman in the roles of Kanya, wife and the mother. Tulsi Das presents the three forms of woman, Uttam, madhyam and adham as following --

"Uttam ke as bas man nahi, sapnehi aan purush jag nahi
madhyam parapati dekhai kaise, bhrata pita putru nijajaise
dharma bichari samujhi kul rahai, So nikista triya
srutisam kahai
binu awasar bhazate raha joi, janew adham nari jagasoi".40

Actually, woman was restricted to the husband, family and children in the agricultural civilization. If we take a bird eye view of the woman and her ideals from the Vedic age to pre-modern age, it becomes clear that so far, whatever ideals are presented, are the product of agricultural society. Some ideals are thought of because of the influence of contemporary problems.
The modern age has revolutionised the traditional ideal. But in the literature of the modern transitional age, woman could not cross the 'Laxman Rekha' of physical purity. Even, in the writings of author like Premchand, we find glimpses of the ideal of 'Patiwratya Dharma' as the ideal of woman. He has however raised his voice against the prevalent woman's exploitation, but his characters never seemed to cross morality.

During the post - Premchand period, the questions regarding values in woman's life came to light. Traditional moral standards started changing. For the first time the personality of woman and her feelings were accepted. Now-a-days literature is being written regarding woman's personal feeling, conflict, complexes, suffocation and her going astray.

Now the question arises as to what should be the limit of physical purity in an ideal woman. Different religious believes have different recognitions about it. Can those standards be applied -- in the present changing age which the society has got traditionally? The traditional ideals were Valid in that age, but presently, in the changing time, it is necessary to have changes in the ideals of woman. Woman is beginning to get freedom in economic areas. She is participating with man in almost
all the areas. As such to demand the traditional ideal from her would not be congruent with the contemporary condition.
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