CHAPTER I

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN PRE-BUDDHIST ERA

1.1 Concept of Empowerment of Women

The Concept of Empowerment is central to the ideal of sustainable development. This concept has assumed greater significance in the present times in order to liberate all human beings from the dictates of the external forces. Empowerment enables an individual to become capable of attaining freedom from want, freedom from fear and the right to lead life in a dignified manner.\textsuperscript{1} Liberation from want and fear and attainment of essential human dignity are the desired outcomes of empowerment of each and every individual irrespective of gender, race and religion. Empowerment is a process that enables an individual to gain confidence to attain, control over resources and to set agenda of one’s own life. It enables an individual to know about himself or herself, what she or he wants, and to try attain what she or he wants.

Empowerment involves the enhancement of an individual’s capacity to know, to act and to enjoy. Empowerment brings confidence, awareness, mobility, ability to choose and capacity to control all types of resources and above all to possess decision-making power.\textsuperscript{2} Empowerment can be achieved through developing positive role models. The need for empowering individuals is vital in order to identify the real and appropriate needs, encourage commitment, ensure sustainability and personal development, inculcate self-esteem and equal opportunity to share power. The aim of empowerment is to transform the society though the transformation of individuals. When an individual is empowered, he can transform the society in different ways. For example, education is considered to be prime means of empowerment. Economic

\textsuperscript{1} Hajira Kumar and Jaimon Varghese; \textit{Women’s Empowerment: Issues, Challenge & Strategies – A Source Book}, (eds.), pp. 54-55.

Empowerment involves removal of insecurity, development of skills and control over resources and decision-making processes.

Empowerment increases the spiritual, political, social and economic strength of individuals and communities. It develops the confidence in their capacities. It is a measure of people’s capacity to bring about change. Empowerment means people assuming mastery over their lives. Empowerment promotes participation of people towards the goals of increasing individual and community control.

Empowerment is an alternative strategy to the traditional way of promoting development. Empowerment attempts to humanise the system and its long term objective is the transformation of society, including the structures of power. The concept of empowerment emphasizes an improvement in the quality of life of the marginalized people.

Empowerment is a change in the relations of power. Empowerment is the process through which control is gained. Empowerment is only sustainable if the individual manages to alter his perception of himself and take control of his life.

Empowerment means “the ability to make decisions” in questions that affect the life of a person. Empowerment is understood in a tri-dimensional way: first is personal, developing a sense of oneself and self-confidence; second is relational, the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of relations; and third is collective, working together to achieve a greater impact than that which could be achieved through individual effort.

Empowerment is manifestation of redistribution of power. It is the change of self-perception through knowledge. It is multi-dimensional social process. It is enhancing the position in the power structure of the society. It is the capacity to regulate the day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms.

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3 Neelam Gorhe, Dr.; *National Level Consultation on Empowerment and Livelihoods*, p. 1.
4 Friedman, John; *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development*.
5 Sen, Ghita; *Empowerment as an approach to poverty*.
6 Judith W. Irwin; *Empowering Ourselves and Transforming Schools Educators Making a Difference*, p. 4.
7 Rowlands, Jo; *Empowerment examined*, p. 101.
8 Ashok Humar Jha; *Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions*, p. 61.
Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power. 9

1.2 Kinds of Empowerment

There are different kinds of Empowerment namely; 1) individual empowerment, 2) family empowerment, 3) organization empowerment and 4) community empowerment.

Individual empowerment is related with individual’s own progress. Such progress may be having confidence, insight and understanding and developing economic progress or spiritual progress. Such progress gives rise to personal skills such as analyzing situation and communicating effectively, developing common sense and emotional maturity, access to information and tolerance of other’s views and behavior. Individual empowerment enhances the personality of the individual.

Family empowerment means to develop intimate expressive and specific relationship among the members of a family. 10 The family is the basic group of society. In this kind of empowerment, empowerment of women in the house management is necessary for social, educational and emotional pleasures. Family empowerment enables the family to make progress.

Organization empowerment is the effect of the growth of companies and the competition of many organizations. In this kind of empowerment, capacities rather than sex, gender, class, caste etc. are important. In the organization empowerment, women, therefore can take up the position of managers, group leaders, marketing exports, counselors, organizers in consumer protection, promoters of consumer goods and bringers of success to industrial or organizations. Organization empowerment

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9 Conclusion Paper of International Conference on topic ‘Moving Towards Gender Sensitisation of Trade Policy’.
10 Nandasen Ratnapala; Buddhist Sociology, pp. 21-22.
enables the organization to grow; community empowerment enables women to lead the community.

Community empowerment means the attainment of abilities by the member of an entire community to become empowered. Community is the large social group. Community at the primary level is made of individuals who are grouped in smaller units of families. An organization is the next higher unit. Families and organizations ultimately merge into the large social groups that are known as the community, joined by a common purpose, common interest, common pursuit and common target of empowered development. Community gets itself formed as the student community, labor community, housewives community, working women community, artist’s community and others communities make societies, which in their turn form nations and even an international community is formed. Community empowerment involves women to be the leaders in the community. Equality of position for men and women in the social set up is essential for community empowerment. The empowerment of women with reference to individual empowerment, family empowerment, organization empowerment and community empowerment bring out human potentialities.

These different kinds of empowerment function at different levels, namely: 1) individual level, 2) family level, 3) institution level and 4) community level.

The concept of empowerment at the individual level is an enhancement of an individual’s capacity.

At the family level, we are concerned with the inter-relationships among the members of the family unit such as the husband, the wife and their children. The family empowerment of women is the enhancement of the management, arrangement and betterment of the family life through enhancing abilities.

At the institution level, the empowerment means creation of new structures and possibilities, as institution is a larger group of individuals working for attaining some common good.
At the community level, the empowerment is collective in its nature. Individuals are encouraged to play a role in the process of integration in society. It is linked with the psychological empowerment of individuals.

Thus, the four levels of empowerment range from a single unit to a collective group. The individual, family, institution and community are expanding groups of certain positive interests. Empowerment and its levels enable the individual as well as groups to enhance their capacities, potentialities and opportunities.

In this way, we have seen different aspects of empowerment and the role that it plays in the formation of individual’s personality as a rational, confident, independent human being. Empowerment as it deals with different aspects of human life also plays an important role while evaluating the status of an individual in the society. It tells us that an individual is empowered means he or she is independent, confident, and this is possible because he or she has realised himself or herself as well as society also has realised his or her nature. Hence, it can be said that an empowerment is a criterion for deciding the status of an individual. Once this is accepted then we can use this criterion to decide the status of women. The status of woman in Pre-Buddhist era is not an exception to this. The status of women in Pre-Buddhist era can be studied, elaborated and evaluated in the light of the concept of empowerment.

1.3 Understanding Empowerment of Women in Pre-Buddhist Era

While studying and evaluating the status of women in Pre-Buddhist era, we will concentrate on women in Vedic culture, the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata and Dharmaśāstra. The empowerment of women in the Pre-Buddhist period has been studied by using the framework of empowerment as a criterion for deciding the status of woman in the society.
1.3.1 Understanding the Empowerment of women with reference to individual empowerment

It is pointed out earlier that an individual empowerment as is related with individual level enhances all sorts of capacities of the individual either man/woman. Such capacities enable the individual to develop himself spiritually, economically, socially and morally. When an individual develops these capacities he/she has confidence, it creates self-respect, he/she can take his own decision and strengthen relation with the society. Hence, if we want to understand the empowerment of women with reference to individual empowerment in Pre-Buddhist Era we have to see whether the women had developed all sorts capacities which made her spiritually, economically independent, and enabled her to participate in decision making. We can evaluate the individual empowerment of woman with reference to the doctrine of Purushārtha. As the doctrine of Purushārtha deals with individual’s spiritual, economic, social and religious aspects, we will evaluate this doctrine from feminist point of view.

Let us see the relation between Women’s Individual Empowerment and Doctrine of Purushārtha

Purushārtha doctrine talks about the desirable goals of human life.11 There are four goals of human life, namely Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa. With reference to dharma the status of woman was negligible. It was assumed that woman did not need money because she was cared for either by her father, husband or son. Hence she had no important place with reference to artha. So, the women could not attain the economic empowerment. In order to attain the Mokṣa, knowledge was required and woman was deprived of knowledge and education. Naturally she could not attain Mokṣa. So, she was also devoid of spiritual empowerment. Her only job was to give sensuous pleasure to her husband means Kāma. This analysis of the doctrine of

11 Śrīrāma Goyala; Pre-paurāṇika Hinduism: prehistoric genesis, contribution of the Indus religion, and vedic foundations of paurāṇika Hinduism, p. 122.
*Purushārtha* shows that there was no chance for the woman to empower as pre-Buddhist society did not give space to woman to bloom.

Hence it could be that if it is the case that women had no primary importance then the problem of enhancement of their capacities does not arise. Similarly, problems of their freedom, building of the confidence do not arise. It could be further said that woman’s individual empowerment had no role to play in her life as well as in her relation with other human beings. Now let us see whether there was family empowerment of woman in Pre-Buddhist Era.

### 1.3.2 Understanding Empowerment of Women with reference to Family Empowerment

In this kind of empowerment we are concerned with her relationship with other members of the family as family is a unit which consists of husband, wife and children. The relationship a woman enjoys with the members of her household as a mother, daughter-in-law or wife is important in managing the family efficiently gives her empowerment in the family.

We can evaluate the family empowerment of woman in Pre-Buddhist Era with reference to different roles that she played while living in the society. In this context we have to consider following points:

1) Whether family keeps restrictions on her behaviour as well as her relation with other members of the family, especially men e.g. with regard to dress pattern at the time of marriage, while playing the role as a daughter, wife, mother.

2) Whether women can take decisions about their life independently.

3) Whether the society accepts and respects her role as administrator in family. That is whether the family allows her opinion in the decision-making.
These three points enable us to understand whether woman has realised her own nature as well as nature of the family and further family has realised her nature. It is because, when woman realises her own nature as well as the nature of family, she does not hesitate to become independent, because now she realises her capacities and also realises that the roles, which are assigned to her are not part and parcel of her personality, but they are assigned to her as a member of the family. Similarly, if the family also realises that assigned roles are not part of her existence or of her personality, they would not put restrictions on her. It means realisation of her own nature makes woman empowered while the family’s realisation of her nature will give her freedom. And family members will give respect to her. Hence, when we study the empowerment of women from point of view of family empowerment, we have to consider these three points.

With the help of these three points, we will study the empowerment of women in Pre-Buddhist era with reference to family empowerment.

1.3.2.1 Woman as a Daughter

The Rig-Veda mentions about the fairs called “samana” where young men and maidens flocked together to find a suitable life-partner. The samanas were held during night, were heavily attended by the young men and women and the crowd dispersed at the advent of dawn. A remarkable feature of the “samana” is that it had parental encouragement and social sanction. The girls enjoyed freedom in choosing their husband and the parents as well as society trusted them completely. The Rig-Veda at many places mentions girls “choosing” (vara) their husband. The hymn in Rig-Veda describes the great fortune of such a lady – bhadra vadhurbhavati yatsepesah svayam sa mitram vanyte jane cit – the root “vr” means to choose and so “vara” meaning husband is the chosen one. It is said about Surga – yosa vrnita janya yuvam pati. The girl married someone of her choice and she lived happily ever after. The maiden

12 Rig-Veda.X.27, quoted in Paranjape, Sucheta; Position and Role of Women in Rgveda, in Meena Kelkar and Deepti Gangavane (eds), Feminism in Search of an Identity: The Indian Context, p. 41.
crossed the threshold of virginity and stepped into the nuptial life, she was transformed into the important roles of “jaya” and “grihini”.

1.3.2.2 Woman as a Wife

The marriage hymns emphasize the fact that marriage was a long established social institution in the Vedic times. Marriage was thought of as a religions sacrament – saṃskāra – which transformed the primal male – female relationship into a social tie and an emotional bond. This added an entirely different dimension to the image of the woman. The Vedic people gave a very tender form to the primitive relationship and offered respect and honor to the Vedic women. This status and position was well received by the woman and she was extra careful in performing her role as a wife. Rig-Veda states – dasasyam putrana dehi patimekadasam kuru – meaning “give ten sons and make the husband the eleventh member.” Such women were praised. For example, in Rig-Veda, Parsu Manavi is praised as she “gave birth to twenty children.” The mantras from the marriage hymns are very eloquent and throw light on the woman’s role as a wife. It throws a light on the position of the woman as not only her husband’s lifelong companion in weal and woe but the mistress of his household and a real partner in all his activities including religious sacrifices.

In her role as a wife, a woman is asked to take care of the entire household. The list of her relatives includes the father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law and sister-in-law. This has given a fair idea about the joint family system even in the Vedic times. In a joint family the role of a woman is very decisive and mothers in their position and honor exert their power the most. Rig-Veda states the wife will be regarded like an empress by her in-laws. Visvamitra in Rig-Veda admits that the wife indeed is home – “jaya id astam”. The wife in her role as a woman of the house – “grihiṇī” looked after the entire household and acted as her housewife, secretary,

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13 Rig-Veda.X.85, quoted in Dutt, Romesh, C; *The Civilization of India*, p.7.
14 Rig-Veda.X. 86, quoted in Paranjape, Sucheta, Ibid, p. 43.
15 Rig-Veda.III. 53, quoted in Upadhya, Bhagwat, Saran; *Women in Rgveda*, p. 3.
companion and bosom friend. It is the woman who through her role of a wife and the head of the household transforms the house into a home. The Vedas consider the wife as the most auspicious one. She is the light of the home, the harbinger of many blessings and worthy of great honor. The wife is her husband’s best friend and even in a deep forest, she is like refreshment and solace to her husband.\textsuperscript{16} It shows the intimate companionship between the two the valuable contribution of the wife to her husband’s well-being is emphasized. The Rig-Veda considers the husband and the wife as the joint owners of the house. The position of equality was conferred on both the partners. The high position of the dignity of woman was upheld by her participation in religious practices and sacrifices, which was regarded as the highest right and privilege in the society of those days. The woman was entitled to all the Samskaras or religious sacraments like men, and not only were religious prayers and sacrifices jointly offered by the husband and the wife, but the wife alone could offer them in the absence of her husband. It is noticed that the highest education, including Vedic studies, was open equally to men and women and many ladies distinguished themselves not only as Vedic scholars but also as great philosophers debaters and teachers. The important women philosophers were Maitreyī, Gārgī, Sulabha etc. The dialogues of Maitreyī, Gārgī with Yājñavalkya, sulabha’s dialogue with janaka shower light on this fact. However in this context, we have to remember that woman belonging to lower caste did not have an opportunity to take education and to participate in philosophical discussions.

Rig-Veda has asked the husband and wife to perform their religious ceremonies as a pair.\textsuperscript{17} The Vedic word “daṁpati” used to denote jointly husband and wife etymologically means the joint holders of the house. Men and women form complementary links of each other. Husband and wife are equal partners in married life.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore Sage Agasti tells his wife Lopāmudrā that “In this world, we will

\textsuperscript{16} Rig-Veda.III. 53.6., X.85.37, quoted in “Women in Hinda Dharma- a Tribute” at www.hindurashtra.org/Women-in-Hinduism.pdf
\textsuperscript{17} Rig-Veda.VIII. 31.5-9, quoted in “Women in Hindu Dharma- a Tribute”
\textsuperscript{18} Atharvaveda. XIV. 2-7. in “Women in Hindu Dharma- a Tribute”.
overcome all adversities if we two exert ourselves together”.¹⁹ For a husband, his wife is his own half (ardhāṅginī) and a comrade in life (sahacharī) and an equal participant in performance and in reaping fruits of good deeds (sahadharmini). The idea of equality was most forcibly expressed in Rig-Veda. The wife and husband, being the equal halves of one substance are equal in every respect.²⁰ Therefore both should join and take equal parts in all work, religious and secular. No other scripture of the world has ever given to the woman such equality with the man as the Vedas.

The Vedic marriage hymns bless the newly-wed couples with “Oh, the newly-weds, live together forever, may you not be separated. May you two enjoy your entire long life happily in this house of yours playing with your children and grandchildren”. Long and happy life in the loving company of intimate relatives of all ages is considered to be chief objective of married life. The culmination of womanhood was to attain the status of motherhood.

The Vedic society was Yajña centric and performing the Yajña-ritual in carrying of the individual’s marriage was essential. Rig-Veda speaks of the seven steps: “With me, Nay, having paced the seven steps, we have become friends. May I retain thy friendship, and never part from thy friendship? Let us unite together: let us propose together. Loving each other and even radiant in each other’s company, meaning well towards each other, sharing together all enjoyments and pleasures, let us join our thoughts”. The vows enjoin the husband not to transgress any limits. Its refrain is “naaticharami” which means there will be no violation of norms either by the husband or the wife. Rig-Veda is addressed to the bride sitting next to the bridegroom: “happy you (as wife) in future and prosper with your children here (in the house): be vigilant to rule your household on this home and exercise your authority in marriage with this man your closely unite and be an active participant in marriage with this man, your husband so shall you full of years for a very long life, address your company – others in the house listen to you and obey and care about what you

¹⁹ Rig-Veda.I.179.3, Ibid.
²⁰ Rig-Veda.V.61.8. quoted in Indra, M.A.; The status of women in ancient India: a vivid and graphic survey of women’s position, social, religious, political, and legal, in India, p. 2.
have to say.”

Rig-Veda states further: “Come, O desire of the gods, beautiful one with tender heart with the charming look, good towards your husband, kind towards animals, destined to bring forth heroes.” May you bring happiness for both are quadrupeds and bipeds.” Rig-Veda expresses the idea of equal responsibility of the husband and the wife. The home in fact has its foundation in the wife, the wife and husband being the equal halves of one substance are equal in every respect; therefore both should join and take equal parts in all work, religious and secular. The wife was expected to be Patni – one who leads the husband through life, Dharmapatni who guides the husband on the path of righteousness. Dharma and Sahadharmacharini – one who walks with the husband on the path of dharma-righteousness. All these have become the moral precepts of social life in India and the essential ethics for married men and women.

Anasuya exemplifies the ideal of moral authority with her austerity and devotion; she could bring back the life of a sage. Anasuya was the wife of sage Atri and granddaughter of a sage and her father was Kardama Muni. When Kaushiki vowed that by the power of her chastity the sun would never rise. When the sun did not rise, Anasuya was requested to persuade Kaushiki. But her husband Kanshika, expired because of the curse. Anasuya brought him back to life by her moral authority. Anasuya then sought the blessing to have her wish for the son who would be the incarnation of Brahma, Vishnu and Shivā. Her wish was then granted and Datratreya was the incarnation of the Holy Trinity. Anasuya was thus a bright example of the moral authority of a woman.

Here we have to remember that this is the glorification of those women who obeyed the order of their husbands and social, and moral norms but women who did not obey the orders, they were cursed. Ahilyā is the striking example of this.

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21 Rig-Veda.X.85.27.
22 Rig-Veda.X. 55. 27.
23 Rig-Veda.III.61.8
1.3.2.3 Woman as a Mother

The woman as a mother has complete freedom to assert her creativity. She raised her children with conscious effort. Earth (prithvi) is referred to as mother (mata). Adityas get their names after their mother Aditi. Mother (Mata) is referred to frequently in greatest glory of Hindu women.24 The Taithriya Upanishad teaches – Matridevo bhava – “Let your mother be god to you”. The Vedic tradition recognizes mother and motherhood as even superior to heaven. In Mahabharata it is asserted: “while a father is superior to ten learned priests well-versed in the Vedas, a mother is superior to ten such fathers or the entire world”. In the legend about Madalasa it is shown how a mother can influence her child in whatever potential may be possible, whether materially or spiritually, by imparting noble thoughts to open the avenues of activities for her children. Madalasa would sing words of spiritual wisdom to keep her sons quiet in their cradles. The imparting of knowledge in childhood by their mother made her three elder sons – Vikrant, Subahyu and Shatramardan become ascetics and engages in austerities. When her husband Ritdhraj told her not to teach the same knowledge to their fourth son Alark, she sang words of being a king and ruling the kingdom, making it prosperous and defeating the enemies. In this way, she trained her son Alark from the beginning of his life in the direction he was required to take. A mother is indeed the most influential teacher for any individual and therefore deserves to be honored. The Vedic mother was very proud of her children. Indrani in her hymn states – “mama putrah satruhanah atho me duhita virat” – “all my sons are brave and my only daughter is simply great”. The Vedic woman seems to be at her best and happiest during this phase of her life – as a wife and a mother.

1.3.2.4 Woman as a Widow

Sometimes ill-luck struck and she became a widow. The position of a Vedic widow is far from the condition of widows in the later periods that had to lead a life

full of torture, suffering and deprivation. The funeral hymn Rig-Veda states how the widow lying on the funeral pyre is requested to get up and face life anew – “udirsva nari abhijiva lokam”. The Vedic society did not approve of any injustice to a widow and was sensitive to her personal loss and social insecurity. It therefore devised a way by which the widow would get back her status as a wife and enjoy the pleasures of life. No other society except the Vedic one has been so sensitive to a woman’s grief, so angry at injustice to her and so supportive of her rights.

The Vedic society realised the individuality and distinct identity of a woman and so, it respected and protected her. The woman was assured of protection and insured against injustice. She therefore developed two major qualities of self-confidence and self-respect. This is noticed in the character of Kunti, the mother of Pandava brothers and Draupadi’s mother-in-law, during her widowhood. Lord Krishna pays due respect to Queen Kunti. All the three queens of king Dashrath continued to lead their lives with dignity after his death.

Although as widows, they did not participate in any religious activity.

1.3.3 Understanding Empowerment of Women with reference to Organizational Empowerment

It is pointed out earlier that organizational empowerment is related with institutional level. In this kind of empowerment capacities of women are important. Such institutions may be economic institution, political institutions or any kind of social organization. Woman with having organizational empowerment enables her to hold power over organization. If we want to understand the organization empowerment of women in Pre-Buddhist Era we have to analyse whether women had played any role in political institutions. In considering the empowerment of women in the Pre-Buddhist Era from the political perspective, it is necessary to raise the following points:

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25 Rig-Veda.X.118. quoted in Paranjape, Sucheta; Position and Role of Women in Rgveda, p. 43.
1) Were women empowered to hold political positions? What type of positions? Whether women belonging to all groups were empowered to do so.

2) Whether women participated in political affairs, matters related to the ruling of kingdoms, matters of administration.

3) Whether women played any roles in political or any others important matters in those days.

We will explain this point with reference to political and economic organization.

The political situation of those times totally favored the rule of monarchy. The class of monarchs emerged either through succession or the victory in war. The ruling class was that of the aristocrats and the court circle. The role of women happened to be of counselors. The direct participation of women has been rarely seen, though in the case of the young successor or the mother of the monarch and in some cases, the queen indirectly held sway over political affairs. The marriages in royal families were arranged mainly keeping the political interests and political advantages in consideration. Queen Kaikeyi, Kunti – the mother of the Pandava brothers, and some other notable women participated in the political matters. The stories of the bravery of women in warfare have been mentioned in the texts of this period.

The political aspect of life in the context of women’s empowerment needs to be mentioned as a system that was very simple and free from the complexities. There was no representation and system of government. Rig-Veda indicates that women attended the sittings of the assembly on important occasions and at such times the proceedings were conducted with dignity and decorum. There is no mention of women working either as ministers in the court or as administrators. There were of course free from the management of homes where they were supreme rulers, governors and sovereigns. The repeated use of the word Garhapatya in connection with the married life of a woman in both Rig-Veda and Atharvaveda emphasizes the idea that the home was the only sphere wherein activities of women were primarily centered. “The Lord of life has given thee to me for discharging the household duties. Thou art to be my weeded

26 Rig-Veda. I.1673. Quoted in Indra, M.A.; The status of women in ancient India: a vivid and graphic survey of women’s position, social, religious, political, and legal, in India, p. 177
wife for the procreation in the household. Come thou to the house of thy husband with the choicest blessings of the Supreme Father”. Rig-Veda and Atharvaveda states “God united the couple so that the wife might beget progeny for her lord and multiply the same, remaining always in the house”.27

Further women also played a role of warrior. In the Vedic times there are indications that it was necessary for all men and women to defend themselves and their property from attacks and aggressions. There were women warriors who played a significant role in battles. They received high academic and spiritual education and vigorous physical training equally like men. Rig-Veda clearly mentions women, who went to wars, fully equipped with arms and received military training by which they were capable of becoming soldiers and warriors.28 In Taitaraya Brahamana, Indrani is said to be a goddess of army. Queen Keikayi accompanied her husband king Dashrath in a battle against enemies of Indra.29 Rig-Veda mentions the queen of king Khela, Vishpala, who lost her leg in a conflict.30 It was replaced with an iron one through the grace of Ashwins and again continued to fight. Sarama was sent by her husband in search of robbers. This powerful lady of her times discovered the hiding place of the robbers and destroyed them. Rig-Veda has given the account of Mudgalani or Indra Sena, wife of the sage Mudgala.31 She helped her husband by coming forward to drive the chariot for her husband when he was put in a tight corner. She took her husband’s bow and arrow and defeated the enemies and rescued the property. Saraswatī has been described in Rig-Veda as Vritraghni, the killer of Vritra and is said to have taken part with Indra in his fight against that demon.32 The goddess representing the primordial force stroked her bow to fight for the good of mankind to kill the demons as mentioned in Rig-Veda.33

While considering the empowerment of women in Pre-Buddhist Era from the economic perspective, the following points need to be taken into consideration.

28 Rig-Veda.V.30.9, p. 183.
29 Aitareya Brahmana.II.8.1, p. 183.
31 Rig-Veda. X.1, Ibid, p. 182.
32 Rig-Veda.II.61.7, Ibid, p. 182.
33 Rig-Veda.X-125.80, Ibid, p. 182.
1) Whether women enjoyed independence in earning money, what were the areas of earning money that they pursued.

2) Whether women enjoyed the right of inheritance, what rights they enjoyed in receiving gifts.

3) Whether women of all classes in the society enjoyed economic freedom.

These points will have to be taken into consideration in order to find out, if the women were empowered to earn some income to pursue some trade or tasks, to possess property, ornaments. It is noticed from the texts that most of the women from the classes of craftsmen actually pursued these trades like weaving, cooking, farming, housekeeping, dairy, cattle-grazing, breeding, flower and artistic embellishments like beautifying, singing, music, dancing, drawing, making images and others. The right of inheritance was enjoyed. This gave economic independence and freedom of conduct in the social sphere to women of these classes.

Women played an important role in economic activities; women did devote themselves to the spinning and weaving of clothes. In the Atharvaveda and Rig-Veda too there are clear indications that cloth-making was treated as a task of women who generally made it a point that their husbands and offspring put on clothes prepared by themselves.\textsuperscript{34} The husband as well as the wife was required to look after the tending of cows, oxen and other cattle as indicated in Rig-Veda.\textsuperscript{35}

In the Economic aspect of the life of those times, Rig-Veda gives the right to the widow to inherit as the daughter of her parents as Rig-Veda makes it clear.\textsuperscript{36} Rig-Veda mentions that the unmarried daughter who lived all her life in her parents’ house – called Amuja – generally demanded and got a share of the ancestral property for inheritance.\textsuperscript{37} Daughters whether married, unmarried or appointed had some rights of succession in ancient India. The repeated argument in favor of the daughter’s claim was that she too like the son was born of the limbs of her father. How should any other person inherit her father’s property while she alive. However some conditions

\textsuperscript{34} Atharvaveda.X.7.47, XIV.2.5 Rig-Veda.V.47.6, Ibid, p. 180.
\textsuperscript{35} Rig-Veda.VI.59, Ibid, p. 180.
\textsuperscript{36} Rig-Veda.II.2.7, Ibid, p. 189.
\textsuperscript{37} Rig-Veda.II.17.7, Ibid, p. 192.
were also kept. For example, Yājñavalkya observed that he who forsakes a wife though obedient to his commands, diligent in household management shall be compelled to pay the third part of his wealth or if poor to provide maintenance for that wife. Hence sacrifice must be performed by both jointly, because if one of them is unwilling to perform it, the gift cannot be valid. Therefore gift or money even earned by the husband is invalid if the wife’s consent is not obtained. Women as widow had ample rights to inherit their husband’s property. After the husband’s death the first successor was the widow. It was believed that the widow’s right of succession was incontestable. The truth is that the widow’s right is very deep rooted and goes back even to the Vedic times when even a childless widow was entitled to succession to her husband’s estate as stated in Rig-Veda. 38 The widow as of a right was entitled to reside in the family dwelling house. In the matter of the right of inheritance the position of women as daughters, wives, widows and mothers was the one dictated by justice and fairness. Considering the situation that prevailed in other countries in those times, ancient India allotted a highly just, fair and honorable status to the women in those days.

The concept of Stridhana (women’s right of separate ownership) is peculiar as women’s property is a comprehensive term and includes property which a woman may acquire by inheritance or partition or that which many come to her by gift from her parents, husband or his or her other relations. Yājñavalkya has defined it in Yājñavalkya as Smuriti that has been given to a woman by the father, the mother, the husband or a brother, or received by her at the nuptial fire or presented to her on her husband’s marriage to another wife as also any other separate acquisition is denominated as woman’s property. Stridhana (woman’s property) included the gifts made to a maiden – Adyyagnika, the gift at the time of marriage procession, 39 Adhyavahanika, Shulka or the bride price received on marriage from husband, Adhivedanilca – compensation given to wife by the husband on marrying another women and Anvadheya – the post-marital gift and whatever a woman acquired other

38 Rig-Veda.IX.102-11, Ibid, p. 199.
39 Yājñavalkya.II.123, p. 199.
than by inheritance and partition. The disposal of Stridhava is bound by many complicated provisions but the possession of the same was rightfully given to a woman. The scheme of institution of woman’s property was fair and liberal in the ancient times.

Apparently, it creates the impression that widows could claim their right to property. However, Yājñavalkya, the famous sage in the court of Raja Janak had talked about the claim of property by widows. The other sages have not given any comments on this issue.

### 1.3.4 Understanding Empowerment of Women with reference to Community Empowerment

In Pre-Buddhist era, this kind of empowerment talks about the empowerment of community as a whole where each member of the community is empowered. It is a collective kind of empowerment.

When we try to understand the empowerment of women with reference to community, we find that there was not a community of women as such where women could come together, try to solve their problems or fight against the injustice, inequality. For example, though women had subordinate status in the society, they were deprived of the right of self-realization. As women had no common platform to meet or discuss their problems or organize them into a group. They could not fight for their rights. We do not have any reference of women having tested against this in pre-Buddhist era.

Hence, we can say that the women belonging to Pre-Buddhist era were not empowered at the community level as there was no community of women as such.

In this way, the application of the criterion of empowerment shows that the women in Pre-Buddhist era were not empowered. This point will strengthen further if we consider important social and moral doctrines from feminist point of view. So let
us understand the empowerment of women in Pre-Buddhist era from feminist perspective.

1.4 Understanding Empowerment of Women from Feminist Perspective

The word feminism is derived from the word “feminine” which means feminine characteristics. This term is first used by Charles Fourier. Feminism this term is frequently used to refer to feminist movements in the Western countries. Although in this case, feminism is also used to refer to feminist philosophy and thought. In this sense feminism means a philosophical thought that talks about the injustice, exploitation, and suppression of women that is based on sexual discrimination. It also tries to investigate the reasons behind sexual discrimination. Different feminist philosophers have investigated different reasons behind it and have developed different feminist thoughts. Accordingly there is not one feminism but many feminisms.

While investigating the reasons behind the exploitation and suppression of women. The feminist philosophers have highlighted two reasons for the exploitation of women - patriarchy and gender bias. By patriarchy, feminists do not mean only male-dominance but male-dominance that creates hierarchical power relation in the society where men are always superior and women are always inferior and suppressed. This power relation is associated with gender bias. In order to understand this point we have to make the distinction between sex and gender. Sex is a biological fact which cannot be changed but gender is a social construction, constructed by the society. For example, male and female are biologically determined but man and woman are social construction constructed out of the need of the society. This point may be explained in this way while living in the society, an individual has to play certain roles, like role of administrator, worker, doctor etc. Similarly he also has to play certain roles like father, mother, husband, wife etc. In order to perform these roles, the individual has to develop certain characteristics which are essential for the

performance of such roles. For example in order to play the role of mother, an individual should have compassion, forgiveness etc. Here, we have to remember that all these characteristics are the characteristics that are required for the performance of certain roles. These characteristics are not the characteristics of a particular sex. Hence it is necessary to make the distinction between sex and gender.

However, patriarchal society does not make this distinction between sex and gender. Further patriarchal society advocates the hierarchy of roles and accordingly hierarchy of genders. It advocates roles of men are always superior to roles of woman. On the basis of this, it is advocated that men are always superior to women. This kind of thought creates gender bias.

This patriarchy and gender bias function in the society either explicitly or implicitly. They function explicitly by making the rules to restrict the sphere of the individual. For example, the rules are made that women cannot take medical education; this is the explicit function of patriarchy. While functioning implicitly, takes place when patriarchy does not make the rules but it creates the situation in such a way that automatically there will be restriction in the sphere of the women. For example, biological determinism advocates that women are biologically weak so they are unable to do hard work. So they have to do comparatively light work like taking care of the family. However, while restricting the sphere of women in this way, they have glorified these roles. On the basis of this glorification, it is further advocated that women have higher status in the society. Hence, such glorification is deceptive but patriarchal society always plays such type of politics with women. This type of glorification is glorification of certain roles to exercise control. For example women’s roles like mother, honest wife etc. are always glorified. However, such glorification of role does not tell us the intention behind such glorification and accordingly does not tell us whether the given society accepts or not gender equality and freedom of every individual. Hence if we want to investigate the patriarchal power politics in the society, it is necessary for us to investigate the social and moral thoughts on which certain society is based and further we have to do the feminist reading of such thoughts.
Feminist reading enables us to investigate the power politics that is behind such social and moral thoughts on one hand and on the other hand whether such thoughts indirectly advocate gender discrimination, injustice and inequality in the society. Hence, feminist reading of social and moral thoughts enables us to understand whether there is gender discrimination in the society, which gender discrimination makes women in patriarchal society suffer from injustice and inequality. Hence, it could be said that feminist reading is one of the ways of understanding the status of women in the society. The same method is also useful when we try to understand the status of women in Pre-Buddhist Era.

With the help of feminist reading of social and moral thoughts on which Pre-Buddhist society was based we will understand the status of women in Pre-Buddhist society on the one hand and on the other hand we will be able to expose the patriarchal power politics in the society. To serve this purpose we will study following the social and moral thoughts that were prevalent in those days from feminist point of 1) Doctrine of Purushārtha, 2) Concept of Rāja, 3) Caste System, 4) Ashrama Vyavastha 5) Bija Kṣetra Nyāya 6) Ideal women in Indian culture. However before discussing this point further we have to see how women in Pre-Buddhist culture have been glorified.

1.4.1 Feminist understanding of doctrine of Purushārtha – Indian moral and social philosophy revolves around the doctrine of Purushārtha. There are four kinds of Purushārthas namely, Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa. First three kinds of Purushārthas relate individual with society and last Purushārtha is related with the individual’s life. Purushārtha as an ethical theory presents an ideal model for ideal society. There are two terms in the word Purushārtha namely, Purusha which means human being independently of the consideration of caste, class, gender, race, sex etc. and Artha means desirable goal. Hence, Purushārtha means the desirable goal of every human being. There are following four Purushārthas;
Dharma means righteousness or gain, social and individual duties and Artha means wealth or material interests, Kāma means desire or pleasure and affective fulfillment, Mokṣa means salvation or liberation.\(^4\)

This theoretical presentation of the traditional doctrine of Purushārtha seems to be adequate and satisfactory. However, if we try to understand the doctrine from feminist point of view, we realise that the doctrine is inadequate and unsatisfactory as it does not give justice to women. To make this point clear let us try to understand each Purushārtha from feminist point of view:

**Dharma Purushārtha** – This Purushārtha generally refers to rules and codes of the conduct for human action of each and every individual according to his/her caste, gender, status and place. Hence, this Purushārtha is important from social, economic, political and religious point of view. Nature of the human actions that are prescribed by this Purushārthas are duties of the individual, every individual ought to follow these duties.

**Artha Purushārtha** – Woman was deprived from Artha Purushārtha in two ways 1) Artha Purushārtha is associated with caste system. There are four castes; namely, Brahmān, Kṣatriya, Vaishya and Śudra. Caste system is important form socio-economic point of view. It is because caste system presents us the social structure of the society and the profession of an individual is related with his caste. An individual belonging to particular caste has to follow the same profession that is assigned to particular caste. However we do not find any profession that is assigned to a woman. This happened because in caste system no caste was assigned to her. It is because caste of woman is decided by father’s caste when she is unmarried and by husband’s caste when she gets married that is woman does not have any specific caste, and hence no profession is assigned to her. Consequently, woman in this society was not economically independent.

\(^4\) Peter Singer; A Companion to Ethics, p. 47.
Secondly, it is said by Manu as it is mentioned earlier that when woman is unmarried she will be cared by her father, when she gets married she is cared by her husband and when she became old she is cared by her son. Now, if it is the case then it is not necessary for woman to earn the money. It is because of these reasons woman was not economically independent.

**Kāma Purushārtha** – This Purushārtha generally refers to sensuous pleasure. Women cannot desire sensuous pleasure because it is believed that she herself is a means for the sensuous pleasure of man. Further, she is not economically independent, she has no right to demand for sensuous pleasure.

**Mokṣa Purushārtha** – Mokṣa was regarded as the highest kind of Purushārtha. Mokṣa means liberation from cycle of birth and death. In principle every individual can desire for Mokṣa. But in reality this is not the case. It is because knowledge of the Vedas and knowledge of the ultimate, reality one necessarily conditions one for attaining the Mokṣa. However, a woman as being a female was deprived from knowledge and hence also was deprived from Mokṣa. Further, it is mentioned in Dharmashatra as well as in Manusmriti women were looked upon as an obstacle in the path of man’s liberation.

This Dharma Purushārtha has kept restrictions on her as all the duties that are assigned to her are related with household. That is she has to take care of her family. She has to serve her family because it is her proper nurturing makes family as well as society peaceful and happy. Thus by glorifying her role, as mother and wife, she was confined to family.

This feminist interpretation of Purushārtha exposes the patriarchal and male-dominant politics in Pre-Buddhist era. On one hand this doctrine of Purushārtha says that this doctrine is applicable to each and every individual independently of the consideration of class, gender, sex, class etc. and on the other hand it revolves around the upper caste or Brahman class. Further, this feminist interpretation throws light on women not having empowerment in Pre-Buddhist era. This feminist analysis of
*Purushārthas* also exposes the politics that patriarchal and male-dominant society play in order to suppress the woman.

### 1.4.2 Feminist Understanding of the Concept of *Ṛṇa*

Ṛṇa concept is one of the important concepts in Indian social and moral philosophy. Ṛṇa means debt. It is mentioned that Brahamana takes birth with three kinds of Ṛṇa: namely, Rishi Ṛṇa, Dev Ṛṇa and Pitri Ṛṇa⁴² and makes himself free from these Ṛṇas by following Brahmacharyashram, performing rituals and Grahsthashram respectively. These three Ṛṇas are obligatory to every Brahamana, Ksatriya and vaishya. It means Śūdra does not have these Ṛṇas and that is obvious. It is because Śūdras do not have right of Upanaya so he could not follow Brahmachryasharam. Similarly, he has no right to perform the rituals so he has no Dev Ṛṇa. Though he could marry and could have children, the duty of those children was to serve Brahma, Ksatriya, and Vaishya.

In Dharma śāstra, Śūdra, Śūdra is equated with woman and naturally whatever that is applicable to Śūdra is also applicable to woman. So like Śūdra, woman does not have Ṛṇa. Although this is the case, she is indirectly related with Dev Ṛṇa and Pitri Ṛṇa. It is because without wife, husband cannot perform the ritual and so wife is required. Similarly without wife, husband cannot make himself free from Pitri Ṛṇa. It means woman plays very important role for the fulfillment of the Ṛṇa. But unfortunately nobody recognised her contribution. Instead, she was always neglected.

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⁴² Om, Prakash; *Cultural History of India*, p. 233.
1.4.3 Feminist Understanding of Ashramavyavastha

In Ashramavyavastha, it is presupposed that there are four phases of human life. These phases are Brahmacharyashrama, Grahasthashrama, Sanyasashrama and Vanapraashashrama. Dharma Śāstra talks about those Ashramas with reference to man only. Philosophy behind this Ashrama Vyavastha is also man centered. It is because, according to Dharma Śāstra, Sudra and woman are equal. Śūdra has only grahamashram. Hence, like Sudra, women has only grahamashram. It is mentioned in Manusmriti that when husband follows Vanapraashashrama wife may or may not accompany her husband. However, a woman had no free will. As in either of the case, woman could not be free if she went with her husband she was dependent on her husband for taking the decision and if she stayed with her son then also she was dependent on her son. This shows that in Ashramavyavastha women were marginalised and had subordinate status.

1.4.4 Feminist Understanding of Karmasiddhānta and Rebirth

Karmasiddhānta accepts that there are three kinds of action; namely, Kriyān, Saṃchita, and Prārabdha. Man’s action associated with present life is Kriyān Karma. He cannot have fruits of his action in the present life but can have in the next life. This type of action is accumulated till we get the fruit of these actions in the next life. So these accumulated actions are called Saṃchita Karma. When the time comes to give the fruit of this Saṃchita Karma, it is called Prārabdha Karma. The fruit of Prārabdha Karma can be received by individual in next life only. Ātmā will take rebirth and then he will have the fruit of this Prārabha Karma.

This Karmasiddhānta and Rebirth had great influence on a woman’s life. Let us elaborate the point. It is believed that to take the birth as woman is a result of bad

44 Devendrakumar Rajaram Patil; Cultural History from the Vāyu Purāṇa, p. 153.
action in the previous life similarly, having bad husband, widowhood are also the result of bad action in previous life. This shows that Karma Siddhanta and Rebirth are interpreted in this way in order to give subordinate status to woman.

1.4.5 Feminist Interpretation of Ideal Women in Hindu Culture

1) Sītā is an ideal wife. Yet there are at least three instances of her independent decision-making abilities. The first instance is her role in her “swayamvar”. The second instance is her voluntary decision of following her husband in the ordeal of migration to the forest for a period of fourteen years. Her choice of “Rama” as her husband and her choice of being a partner in difficulties of solitary confinement in the forest prove the independence of her choices. Her empowerment as a woman is most evident in her desire to disappear and merge with mother Earth. After the two ordeals, she could have joined Rama in Ayodhya but she is so conscious of her womanly honor that she prefers to go back to Mother Earth. Sītā as an empowered woman too, upholds her devotion for her husband. In all her talks with Ravana, Sītā never hesitated to warn him fully of his danger. “Do you not feel ashamed of this heinous act, namely, running away carrying off another’s wife in the absence of her husband?” Even to Rama, she talked with firmness and quiet dignity. She remained ever devoted to Rama and even made a sacrifice of all her comforts, rights and privileges including the company of Rama, and willingly underwent personal humiliations. So that Rama could be held up as an ideal king, noted for his prowess, purity, truthfulness and sense of justice. His was to be all the glory and the necessary sacrifices hers. With her own decision-making powers, she empowered herself in spite of the odds she faced.

Ahalya, Draupadī, Sītā, Tārā, Mandodarī, Savitrī, and Indranī are portrayed as ideal wife. They uphold sincerity and dignity even in the times of adversity. It is believed that Sītā was the daughter of mother earth and ultimately returned herself in the lap of her mother. She is the incarnation of innocence and purity. Her devotion to

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46 Ramayana.III.53.3. Swami, Madhavananda; The Great Women in India, 263.
Rama is evident in her sacrifice of all comforts. She is the upholder of sanctity, faithfulness, virtue, chastity and high moral values. She exemplifies the ideal of womanhood as glorified in the Vedic culture.47

2) Savitri, the ideal wife made a choice of Satyavan but Harada, the wise sage, warned, “Satyavan is bright as the son, wise as Brihaspati, brave as Indra and forgiving as the earth but within a year from today short lived Satyavan will breathe his last, Awakened to a full sense of its dignity. Savitri’s true womanhood cast its lot in favor of pure love, chastity and self-effacement saying “The die can full but once.” On the fateful day, she followed Yama and continued to hold a discourse full of wisdom which pleased the God of Death. Finally, Yama, the divine dispenser of judgment was delighted to accept defeat from Savitri who was so pure, so loyal and so fearless. Her bold argumentation and wise persuasion illustrate her empowerment as a woman of firm strength of will.

Savitri snatched back the soul of her husband from Yama, the messenger of death. Savitri was so learned that – her father king Ashwapati, the king of Modra-Desha – could not find a suitable match for her. She decided to marry Satyavana for his simplicity and scholarship though it was forecast that he would die within a year. After Yama claimed Satyavana’s wife, Savitri followed Yama. A debate followed on the nature of spirit and immortality of soul and the riddle of life and death. Her bold argumentative skills, her knowledge of intricate philosophical issues which are the eternal riddles of humanity and her unflinching fidelity have immortalized her as an embodiment of a strong-willed, educated and powerful womanhood and therefore generations of devout housewives continue to honor her as a truly empowered woman of the Vedic culture.48

3) Draupadi was empowered as the mistress of the household, in the capital Indraprastha and also during the thirteen years of penance. Mercy and solicitude for the poor and the distressed were not the only traits she possessed, was also a woman of courage and dignity. Her empowerment is noticed in her passionate appeal, ethical

47 Advaita, Ashrama; Eminent Indian Women: From the Vedic Age to the Present, (ed), pp. 53 -54.
48 Advaita Ashrama; Ibid, pp. 63 – 64.
arguments and boldness. The loftiness of her soul, her unfailing courage, her spirit of self-sacrifice and all her moral earnestness and above her spiritual integrity makes her a unique woman - the embodiment of the ideal womanhood.

Draupadī known also as Panchali; the princess of the kingdom Panchal, Yājña-śeni; the gift of Yājña – the sacrificial fire, Krishna; having “Krishna” complexion, is most devoted to her five husbands. She regarded Lord Krishna as her ultimate protector. Lord Krishna saved her honor when Kauravas made an attempt to disrobe her. She told Satyabhama that she rose before anyone else, tolerated hunger and thirst and went to bed after the others. She performed all her duties. Draupadī encouraged her husbands to struggle for their just right and for challenging the injustice done to them. Her nobility, her wisdom and her tolerance have made her an incarnation of ideal womanhood.49

Draupadī is often cited as one of the exemplifications of womanhood as she was the ideal Dhamapatni of the Pandavas. However, Draupadī was not a Dharmapatni alone. Her moral strength came to the foreground when she had to face the situation of crisis. When Yudhisthir lost her in the game of dice, she asked few questions to Yudhisthira about the propriety of staking her in his gambling. Yudhisthir could not answer her questions. She put the moral questions to the entire assembly in the court. Her questions indicated a deep understanding of morality on her part Draupadī had revolted against the immoral conduct, deceitful action and malice exhibited by the Kauravas. Draupadī expressed her sorrow over the downfall of morality. This shows that she is in a position to give words of wisdom to her husband and so empowered.

4) Mandodarī, the chaste and virtuous, chief queen of Rāvana is the greatest sufferer of his vicious habits. Mandodarī’s clear mind made her judge herself aright. Her virtuous life made Mandodarī keenly aware of the law of retribution. The virtuous wife did her duty by repeatedly warning Rāvana.

49 Ibid, pp. 57 -58.
5) Tārā, the queen of Vali, attempted to restore Ruma to Sugriva as Mondadari tried to release Sītā but both failed on account of the attitudes of their husbands. The key-note of Tārā’s life is being a hero’s wife and this is noticed in her boldness, her administrative abilities and her large heartedness. Tārā was noted for her tact and resourcefulness which indeed made her empowered.

6) Ahalyā means one who is without “hala” ugliness; Brahma himself gave the name Ahalyā to her as she was faultless or flawless. The deity gave her to sage Gautama in marriage and the couple continued their ascetic practices with intensity and rigorous discipline. After, a penance of thousand years Ahalyā was purified by austerity. She is empowered by her austerity.

1.4.6 Feminist Interpretation of Beeja Kṣetra Nyāya

The dichotomy of male and female is articulated in the Indian tradition in terms of a model called Beeja-Kṣetra-Nyāya. The metaphor of Beeja-Kṣetra is used in order to explain the relationship between man and woman. This metaphor was not only used as a scientific truth but it became a tool of justification of the supremacy of man over woman. An essentially unequal relationship between man and woman is reflected and emphasized through the use of Beeja-Kṣetra-Nyāya. It is utilized in Indian culture to underrate the significance of woman’s contribution to biological reproduction. The Beeja-Kṣetra-Nyāya is presented in Manusmriti in chapter X, Slokas 68 to 70 and the chapter IX, slokas thirty-two to fifty-two. Beeja means seed or semen and Kṣetra means field or land. A woman is called a field that acts as a nourishing agent for the growth of a seed. Man is called a seed that has the power to reproduce its own kind. Manu states that three possibilities are possible in respect of the Beeja-Kṣetra metaphor. Some experts give greater importance to Beeja and some regard Kṣetra as prominent and some give equal importance to both Beeja and Kṣetra. Even though in principle Beeja-Kṣetra-Nyāya contains three possibilities, Manu rejects the other two possibilities.

and puts forth his view that Beeja is superior to Kṣetra. The identification and equation of Beeja-Kṣetra-Nyāya with this view itself is suggestive of the existence of male-dominance. The whole of Manusmriti speaks for the supreme importance of Beeja, illustrating through the biological law that like begets like supports it.

The metaphor compares man and woman with seed and field could be said to suggest that it comes from that period when human beings took to agriculture. When human beings started cultivation of land, land became a property or a possession. Man owned the land and he also owned the woman. As soon as man’s role in the reproduction system was realised, the mystery about motherhood evaporated and woman was looked upon as a commodity that carried the baby in her womb. Just as earth became land, woman became just a bearer. An agricultural model was superimposed on human life and there was an identification of the process of production with the process of human reproduction. Man owned the land; he sowed the seeds and reaped the harvest. A woman’s body was identified with the field, semen with the seed and the rights over the crops. This peculiar strategy relates the Beeja-Kṣetra-Nyāya to the idea of ownership, which operated within the socio-cultural world. The form of supremacy of Beeja was not only confined to the theoretical level but it pervaded the whole form of life. Krishna calls himself the father of the world because he is the giver of the seed. On the practical level, morality, art, culture, daily rituals, religious practices, marriage systems in short every aspect of life was to be structured around this metaphor of the field and the seed.

It determines the hierarchical structuring of the family wherein man was thought of as the leader of the family and woman and children became his property. Woman came to be regarded as a commodity, an object to be given or accepted as a gift. Woman was a jewel to be protected in childhood by her parents, in youth by her husband and in her old age by her children. The story of Yayati’s daughter Madkavi who is presented to Galar Muni who sells her to four kings and each of these four kings gets a son from her is a story that highlights the woman’s place in the society.
This has trivialized the status of women, her life is spent in giving birth to children, taking care of them until they grow up, and training them for their roles and doing the household work. This has resulted in the sharp boundary line and division of labor between the domestic life and the public life, domestic life being the woman’s world. Though in the Vedic period, the position of woman was glorified and the woman enjoyed equality in many respects.

During the period before the settlement as agriculturists, men as well as women were on the same footing. As the settled life began to prosper, the position of woman began to lose the prominent position. By and large, woman began to decline in the scale of significance in both the domestic life and public life. Woman was relegated to the secondary position. Subordination and even enslavement became apparent. Participation in the ritual was considered a religious necessarily because a creation requires the union of two elements; male and female. The participation of woman was not equal as only the “wife” of a man was entitled to participate and not at all the other women. It is beyond doubt that though performance of sacrifice was not taking place without presence of the wife, her role was always secondary. It is indicated in various ways that woman is required to play her secondary or even complementary role in the ritual. The stress has being put on women being neat and clear. The feminine body was regarded as impure and was considered one of the major impediments on the way to salvation.

It is an age-old and worldwide belief that a female is not strong. Although Humanity was the foremost principle and hence no difference between man and woman but in reality a woman did have an inferior status. Women were simply regarded as the bearers of the seed. The sole importance was given to the seed and never to the field. A woman is considered a substratum-adhara as she has to be below. The general freedom of woman was restricted in various ways.
1.5 Glorification of Women in Pre-Buddhist Era

When we consider the glorification of woman in Pre-Buddhist era, we find that such glorification was with reference to religion as woman was considered as goddess. Hence we will study such glorification of women from religious perspective.

The religious aspect of life in the Vedic period is closely linked with the social aspect on one hand and the ethical aspect on the other hand. The very invocation of the Atharvaveda addresses divinity as a Devī – the goddess – who while present in the waters fulfills all our desires and hopes. The close connection of women with divine revelation is judged from the fact that of the four hundred and seven sages (Rishis) who have contributed to revelations on Rig-Veda, there are twenty-one and by another count twenty-eight contributors are women (Rishikas) – female counterparts of Rishis – sage – female sages – such as Apala, Lopāmudrā, Śrāddha, Indranī and other while Gosha Kakshirah, Romosha, Sarama Devasunī, Yami Vaivasvathī, Rathir Bharadwaji, Paulornī and others. Visvavara, Shashwatī, Gārgī, Maitreyī and Apāla also appear as the women revealers of the Vedic wisdom. Romasha revealed Rig-Veda and Lopāmudrā in Rig-Veda. In order to reveal the higher knowledge of Brahman, the Universal Spirit like Gārgī – Yājñavalkya debate is quite significant because Gārgī Vachakhavi asked deeper questions about the ultimate reality.

There is the Yājñavalkya – Maitreyī dialogue in the Chandogya Upanishad. In the list of seers to whom tarpāna (offering) is made at the time of Śrāddhas (rites in memory of forefathers) appear the names of three women – Sulabha, Gārgī and Maitreyī. Both male and female deities are praised in the hymns of all the revealed texts – the Vedas and in the family prayers of all the ten lineages of Vedic sages. The female deities like Usha, Sarasvatī, Ratri, Prithvi, Kuhu, Raka, Srinivati and many others are sweetly-smiling, splendid and beautiful, possessors of wisdom, teachers of mankind and as powers capable of fulfilling the desires of human beings. The Ultimate Reality, the Supreme God, One Truth (Ekañ Sat), “Tat” is in neuter gender as if to emphasize that God is not male. The Gayatrī Mantra, the holiest prayer in the
Vedas is often symbolically represented as a Devī – a female deity – often termed as the Mother of all Vedas and giver of boons. Devī Aditi is another omnipotent protector mother of all devout worshippers and a wise guide of all humans. In the Vedas, the Divinity is presented as the Divine Mother, God as Goddess. The Shakta tradition specifically worships the Divine as the mother of the universe. Shakti is the supreme power and her incarnations such as Uma – the supreme wisdom, Mahesvari – the supreme Goddess, Durgā, Parvatī, Kālī – the supreme powers too are worshipped.

It is in this tradition that provides at the conceptual level the picture of the male and female principles working together hand in hand as equal partners in the universe. This concept is carried further to its logical climax in the form of Ardhanareeswara formed by the fusion of Siva and Sakthi in one body each occupying one half of the body, denoting that one is incomplete without the other.

Knowledge, intelligence, rhythm and harmony are all essential ingredients of any creative activity. These aspects are personified in Saraswatī, the Goddess of Learning, Music and the fine arts. Without the grace of Saraswatī, or “Saraswatī Kataksham” even Brahma cannot do a worthwhile job as a creator. Any maintenance activity needs plenty of resources, mainly fiscal resources. Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, is a companion of Vishnu. The status of the Goddesses is clearly understood from the verse recited in the daily prayers: “Yaa Brahma Achyuta Sankar Prabhu dibhibh Devaissadaa poojithaa” meaning “O Devī! Brahma, Vishnu, Shivā and others Gods always adore to you”. An important Vedic hymn, the Devisukta is addressed to Vak-speech, revelation – in which the goddess is described as the instrument that makes ritual effective: “I am the queen, the gatherer up of treasures”. The earth (prithvi) is considered female, and the goddess, who bears, maintains and who brings forth food that feeds all. Even the rivers are held in reverence. The seven holy river of India the Ganga, The Yamuna, the Sarasvati, the Narmada, the Kshipra, the Godavari, and the Kaveri are remembered in the verses chanted in the morning as are the five devoted ideal women who are considered worthy of being remembered at the dawn which include names of Śītā, Savitrī, Draupadī and others. The rivers are considered female

51 Ibid.Quoted in, Women in Hindu Dharma – a Tribute.
divinities, food and life bestowing mothers. The most holy of rivers, the best known and most honored is the Ganga. The Saraswati River is regarded as the mother Goddess.

The most venerating regard for women is found in the Vedic culture. The Vedic tradition held a very high regard for the qualities of women and has retained the greatest respect within its tradition as seen in the honor it gives for the goddess. The Goddess is portrayed as the feminine embodiment of important qualities and powers. These forms include those of Lakshmi (the goddess of fortune and queen of Vishnu), Saraswatī (the goddess of learning), Subhadra (Krishna’s sister and auspiciousness personified), Durgā (the goddess of strength and power), Kālī (the goddess of time), and other Vedic goddesses that exemplify inner strength and divine attributes – even divine power in the form of Shakti is considered feminine.

In the Vedic culture, women have always been given the highest respect and freedom, but also protection and safety. Parvatī even known as Uma, is the beloved wife of Lord Shivā, and who is the Great mother of the universe. She is the power that creates and destroys, the womb from which all things precede and to which all return. The entire universe is created and sustained by the dual powers of the divine couple. Together they represent the unitary cosmic principle and imbalance, they disturb the microcosmic equilibrium, since she represents the dynamic energy which is of the nature of the mind, and she is inseparable and non-different from the Lord himself. It is the goddess in the form of dynamic energy that is the cause of all things being seen or experienced. This dynamic energy of consciousness is known as Shivā. Thus Parvatī and Shivā (Uma-Mahesh) are two names for the same Supreme Being who is the source of all creation. Therefore, the prayer starts with “Tvameva mata cha pita tvameva” – You alone are mother and are also our father”. The Holy Trinity of Divinity in India of Brahma (The Creator), Vishnu (the preserver) and Shivā (the destroyer) is accompanied by the corresponding complementary feminine counterparts as Saraswatī (the Goddess of Learning), Lakshmī (the goddess of wealth) and Parvatī

52 Ibid.
(the goddess of strength). These goddesses are worshipped all over India, in particular during the festive occasions of Navratrī (Nine Nights) and Diwalī (the festival of lights) during the harvesting season.

In the Vedic tradition it is common to see the pairing of the Vedic male Gods with a female counterpart, thus combining both sets of powers and qualities that each would have. This is noticed in the pairs of Rādhā – Krishna, Sītā – Rama, Laxmī – Vishnu, Durgā – Shivā, Saraswatī – Brahma, Indranī – Indra and others. The combination of male and female divinities makes the complete balance in the divine spiritual powers. Through the medium of pure affection, the feminine divinities have been able to break down the most powerful citadels known to creation, especially those of evil.

The divine mystery of life is that the most powerful forces of the universe are subjugated by love and that love is most completely channeled through the feminine energy and personality. Though Durgā means the one who is difficult to know, she can be approached though love. Being considered the mother of the universe and the personification of the material energy, Durgā is bound to respond with love. The demon Mahishasur was not defeated by Vishnu, Shivā, Brahma and others but she was the combination of their powers and so she could defeat the demon out of the love for the universe. Durgā destroyed the demon that symbolized evil forces, ignorance and darkness. Durgā expressed her love and care to humanity by manifesting herself as Ambikā. She attracted the demons Shumba and Nisumba and in the form of Kāli and killed the demons. In this way, through love the Divine feminine potency takes on forms to alleviate powerful disturbances in the universe. Out of love the divine feminine potency manifests as Rādhā, the epitome of devotion to the Supreme Being. Thus, her divine reflection is mirrored in this relative world in all that is feminine, beautiful and pure. That is why the Vedic tradition placed lot of value in honoring and worshipping the Divine feminine nature along with the masculine – one without the other is incomplete. This is one of the unique traits that distinguishes Vedic culture from others and makes it unique.
In Vedic tradition, God is not necessarily a father figure but He is mother and father combined. Nature and earth are uniformly referred to as Mother Nature (Prakṛtī) and kindly Mother Earth (Prithvī Mātā). God and Nature are sometimes depicted as Husband and Wife who create the inanimate and animate Universe together just as mother and father give birth to children. Artharvaveda concludes a hymn thus:

“O Earth, my Mother!
Establish one securely in spiritual and material happiness,
and in full accord with Heaven
O wise one! Uphold me in grace and splendour.”

Rivers, their origins, their meeting points and their deltas form prominent pilgrim centers in India as in the case of the river Ganga at Gangotri (origin), Hardwar (the morning – evening floating of lamps), the confluence at Prayug – Allahabad, Varanasi and the Gangasugar. When a family entered their new home, they invoked God and asked him to dwell therein in a benevolent feminine form to make it come alive as in Artharveda:

“Queen of the mansion our shelter,
Kind devī, you are indeed constructed by the devas
May you, robed in grass, be gracious to us,
And give us brave children and wealth.”

Householder women play a leading role in this ceremony and the wife is the first one to enter the new home. This is not surprising because the wife is regarded as ‘grhyalakshmi’ or the embodiment of Devī Lakshmi presiding over the house and its welfare and prosperity. Atharveda Saunaka Samhita states “twem stri tvam pumaanasi” – “thou art the women and men”.

Atharveda Puippalada Samhita states “strii pumsau Brahmano Jatau striyah brahma uta varana” “women and men are both born from Supreme Being, women are manifestations of the Supreme Being and

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54 Ibid Atharvaveda. III. 12.5.
55 Ibid. Atharveda Saunaka Samhiaat. X.8.27.
so are these men”. Like rivers, even the forests are considered holy. Divinity in the feminine deities, rivers, forests and places continue the trend which is found in the Vedic tradition and honor the elements of Nature as in the case of the Sun God, Varun, Indra, Agni, Soma and others.

It is strongly believed that in addition to feminine aspect of the Divinity, women from the Vedic time have kept religion alive through various religious rites. There is no domestic ritual in which women cannot participate. Aitareya Brahmana confirms that the sacred rituals bear fruit only if men and women perform it as a pair. It is for this reason the housewife is to conduct her household affairs like a Samrajni – an empress. She is indeed Lakshmi of her universe – the home-gruha and is a queen commanding respect from all the members of her family. In the Vedic period, religion played a pivotal role in social life. Religion was an inseparable part of every aspect of life. The feminine principle too is inseparable from the masculine principle. Its supremacy in divinity, in nature, in divine couples, in honoring rivers and places, in respecting mothers and in performing religious rituals is accepted from the Vedic times to this day. In the religious aspect of life in the Vedic period the equality to women is guaranteed but even superiority is admitted and her supremacy is never challenged. According equality, accepting superiority and obeying the supreme sway of women was practised in the Vedic period in respect of wife in whatever stage they were. In this way, in Vedic culture, woman is glorified by treating her as goddess. However this glorification is illusory, it is because the feminist understanding and interpretation of social and moral thoughts exposes the patriarchal power politics and proves that such glorification is not real glorification but illusory glorification.

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56 Ibid. Atharvaveda Puippalada Samhita. VIII. 9.11.
57 Aitareya Brahmana. VII. 10., Ibid.
A Leap Ahead

In this way, criterion of empowerment as well as feminist understanding of concepts, doctrines and thoughts in Indian social and moral philosophy show that women belonging to Pre-Buddhist Era were not empowered. Although the glorification of women in different spheres show that women had high status in the society, it does not mean that they were really empowered. As feminist understanding of important doctrines had shown how women were marginalised. Further, if it is accepted for the sake of an argument, they were empowered but such empowerment was not achieved by them though self-realization. This kind of empowerment does not allow them to change their life according to their choice.

So the problem arises how will woman become empowered? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to know why is woman not empowered. We will try to answer these questions within the framework of Buddhist Philosophy in the next chapter.