Chapter – 1

POSITION OF WOMEN IN PRE-MEDIEVAL PERIOD-
CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES

Indian society is cohesion of Hindu and Muslim culture. India at the eve of Muslim invasion was basically a Hindu society. As a result of Muslim invasion the two cultures had interactions with each other. Political changes made social changes inevitable. When we talk about society the study of the various aspects related to the women becomes necessary. We get a better understanding of the position of women in society when we study various practices, traditions, customs and rituals related to women. The well being and prosperity of a society depends upon the status accorded to women in that particular society.

A comparative study of these customs and practices of ancient India and medieval India is necessary to find out what exactly was the place accorded to the woman, in both the eras. Some historians assert that only in the ancient period women enjoyed a privileged position and as Muslims invaded India the position of women deteriorated.¹ Altekar opines that the education of women suffered with the coming of Muslims². In this way the deterioration in the status of women is attributed to the coming of Muslims in India.

But when we study the societal conditions of ancient India we find that the women enjoyed a privileged position in the Vedic period and with the passages of time their position deteriorated ³ in all aspects. By the coming of the Muslims in the beginning of the eleventh century the position of women had been already reduced to the status of the shudras.

The treatment given to females in any particular society reflects the societal conditions of that particular society. Since Indian society has been patriarchal in nature. Law givers like Manu, Yajnavalkya, Yama, Marichi prescribed laws for

¹ Rekha Pande, Religious Movements in Medieval India, Gyan publishing House, New Delhi, 2005, p. 248.
women. These law givers insisted that girls must marry before they attain puberty. Law-giver Manu says something very strange regarding the women he is of the view that ‘in childhood woman is to be dependent upon her father, in youth on her husband, and in old age on her son, woman is never fit for independence.’

Education a useful tool in the hands of women which makes her strong and independent in many ways was how far imparted in ancient India is discussed in this chapter.

This chapter proposes to investigate what were the societal conditions of ancient India regarding the women and what was the place given to women is the matter of concern of this chapter. The most important part of a woman’s life is marriage and marriages did take place in ancient Indian society too. How marriages were solemnized, what was the marriageable age and the most important the institution of polygamy is discussed in this chapter. The study of female slavery in ancient India explains how lower class women were treated by their masters. Beside these the position of widows, the presence of widow remarriage, institution of divorce, presence of purdah, presence of Sati system, moral lapses such as adultery and wine drinking, the presence of sex workers and devdasis in the society, presence of women administrators in late ancient period are various other topics which are dealt with in this chapter.

For better understanding of the position of women, the laws of Manu in Manusmriti have been studied. This provides a better picture of the place accorded to women in later Vedic period. Secondly, the accounts of Abu Zaid, an early Arab geographer and extracts of Chachnama in History of India by its own historians, Elliot and Dowson, volume one have been studied. Alberuni’s India is a good source of gaining a better understanding of women in late ancient India, at the time of Muslim invasion. Along with these primary sources, information is collected from various secondary sources on ancient India.

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Education

The position of women was much better in the Rig-Vedic period than in subsequent times\(^5\). The girls could attend lectures by the gurus and learned the Vedas as the early age of marriage was not customary. Women could at all time take up a life of religion though they were not a substitute of male priests. A few Vedic hymns were ascribed to women seers.\(^6\)

Some of the hymns in *Rik Samhita* are actually attributed to women; twenty such hymn composing ladies are named in the *Sarvanukramanika*.\(^7\)

Swami Madhavananda and Ramesh Chandra Majumdar are of the opinion that there is no valid reason to doubt that some of the Rig-Vedic hymns were actually composed by women Lopamudra, Apala, Vishwavara, Sikata Nivavari and Ghosha are some of the famous women names have been preserved in the literature.\(^8\)

*Brhadaranyaka* Upanisad tells of a learned lady and philosopher Gargi Vakaknavi who attended the lectures of the sage Yajnavalkya.\(^9\) She was one of the most celebrated examples of women’s learning.\(^10\) Gargi and Yajnavalkaya were two philosophers of the Vedic age who were on continuous debate on some topic. The lady Gargi, for a time so nonplussed him with her searching questions that the sage could only jestingly reply, “Gargi, you must not ask too much, or your head will drop off”\(^11\) At this stage the sage arbitrarily threatens Gargi with dire consequences if she persists in questioning him.\(^12\) This shows the discomfort of the sage towards her.

The grounds for such higher education were prepared in childhood. The girls like boys underwent the *Upanayana ceremony* (sacred initiation) at an early age, perhaps the age of eight and began the Vedic studies.

\(^6\) A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That was India*, Surjeet publications, Delhi, 2013, p. 178.
\(^7\) Swami Madhavananda and Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, ed., *Great Women of India*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayawati, Almora, 1953, p. 5.
\(^8\) *Ibid.; Ancient Indian Society*, op. cit., p. 43.
\(^9\) *The Wonder That was India*, op. cit., p. 178.
\(^11\) *The Wonder That was India*, op. cit., p. 178.
\(^12\) ‘Beyond the Altekarian Paradigm: Towards a New Understanding of Gender Relations in Early Indian History’, op. cit., p. 76.
An interesting observation made in the *Atharva Samhita*(11.5.18) that by Vedic studentship a girl wins a young husband. This shows that high education was regarded as a necessary accomplishment. One can discern by this statement of *Atharva Samhita* that girls would have been self-interested in attaining education. When the practice of early marriage ceremony came into vogue the *upanayana* ceremony was reduced to a mere formality and then (*upanayana*) was dropped altogether putting an end to her education. The discredit for reduction in the age of marriage goes to the law givers like Manu.

In later Vedic age we hear two classes of women students, *Brahmavadinis* and *Sadyodvahas*. *Brahmavadinis* were who did not marry and pursued their studies throughout life. They were students of theology and philosophy. *Sadyadvahas* were those who continued their studies till their marriage. Some of the teachers were Gargi, Vadava, Pratitheyi, Sulabha, Maitreji.

Thus we can conclude that the higher education including Vedic studies was open equally to men and women, and many ladies excelled themselves not only as Vedic scholars but also as great philosophers, debaters and teachers. It may be asserted that the general position and status of Indian women in the Vedic Age was much higher in matters of education.

By the time of the *smritis*, around the beginning of the Christian era, Vedic knowledge was almost closed to women. And early marriages were encouraged and became obligatory. This directly affected girl education and there was very little opportunity for women to have higher education. The lack of Vedic knowledge made them unfit to perform sacrifices and various *sanskara*. The Vedic studies became very extensive and lengthy commentaries written on the texts needed many years to specialize in the subject. As the learning of the Vedas will require about at least nine years and if a woman begins to learn them at the age of eight by the time she finished her education, she will be mature and will possess the knowledge which is useless in

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13 *Great Women of India*, op. cit., p. 5.
14 *Ancient Indian Society*, op. cit., p.43
15 *Great Women of India*, p. 5.
16 *Ancient Indian Society*, p. 43.
17 *Great Women of India*, p. 5.
18 *The Wonder That was India*, op. cit., pp. 178-179; *Ancient Indian Society*, pp. 42-43.
her future existence as a mother and wife. The highest duty which has been prescribed for her is to serve her husband by which she can attain heavenly bliss.

The upanayana or initiation into Vedic studies having been stopped, women lost the status of dwija or twice born and came to be regarded as shudras i.e. creatures unfit for reciting or even listening to Vedic hymns.

The formality of upanayana was continued during the last period down to 200 A.D. It was completely stopped from 600 A.D.

Altekar considers the further lowering of marriageable age proved a setback to promotion of female education in 8th -9th century, but adds that some primary education would have been imparted to the girls.

Still women were still competent enough to become poets like men without any gender biasness. Rajshekhara (8th century A.D) writes that he had heard and seen the daughters of kings, nobles and courtesans. Wives of jesters were well versed in sciences and were accomplished poetess.

B.N. Sharma states that education among women flourished during the first millennium of the Christian era. There were few famous lady scholars and poetesses during the period. Some of the notable poetesses were Reva, Roha, Madhavi, Anulakshmi, Rahai etc.

Vijayanka’s fame was second only to that of Kalidasa. She seems to have attained a really high position among Sanskrit writer. Surprisingly enough some women were attracted towards medical studies and were also physicians. They had specialization in medical studies. A treatise on this subject was written by a lady

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20 Ibid., p.155.
21 Great Women of India, op. cit., p.16.
22 Ibid., p. 40.
24 B. N. Sharma, Social Life in Northern India( A.D.600-1000), Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1966, p. 31.
26 Ibid.
physician. Her name appears as Rusa in the Arabic garb, it was translated in the eight
century A.D. into Arabic at the orders of Khalifa.\textsuperscript{27} But the number of doctor was
small and the profession was usually picked up by the widows in some doctors’
families.\textsuperscript{28}

In the 9\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D. higher education of women was confined to those who
belonged to aristocratic and affluent families. Dancing girls were also inclined
towards education.\textsuperscript{29} Shri Somadeva Suri, who lived in the Rashtrakuta, court also,
declared that discrimination between men and women was justified only in physical
respect but in intellectual sphere women were superior to men.\textsuperscript{30}

More than two thousand and five hundred years intervened between the Rig-
Vedic Age and the close of the ancient period at about A.D. 1200. Many changes
happened in Hindu society during this period. It is inevitable that the status and
position of women too would have undergone many changes.

In the matter of education there was existence of number of women scholars in
different phases of ancient Indian history. Unfortunately, early marriages restricted
the education of girls but there was no restriction or discrimination if a girl was
talented and eager to pursue higher learning.

Altekar is of view that during the Muslim rule the percentage of literacy among
Hindu women declined with great rapidity.\textsuperscript{31} It can only be asserted for the girls in
aristocratic and affluent families which experienced a setback due to invasion but the
position of education in the common strata of society was very poor and as the
marriageable age was lowered it deprived girls from primary education.

B.N. Sharma opines that in spite of their confinement within four walls of the
house, women were not without education. The entire literary evidences prove that in

\textsuperscript{27} The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day, op. cit.,
p. 19; Great Women of India, op.cit, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{28} Great Women of India, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{29} Position of Women in Hindu Civilization, op. cit., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{30} Social Life in Northern India, op. cit., p. 31; B.P. Mazumdar, Socio-Economic History of
\textsuperscript{31} Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day, op. cit., p. 23.
urban areas they were trained in fine arts. Singing, dancing and playing on musical instrument were suitable subject for a girl born in an aristocratic family.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Female Slavery}

This fact cannot be ignored that slaves, male as well as females were an important section of society.\textsuperscript{33} They were the helping hands of the person who possessed them. The slaves were very important for their owners as all the menial work of the household was done by them. The treatment for this integral section of society was very harsh. They were sometimes treated equivalent to \textit{shudras} and were provided with difficult living conditions.

Their position can be judged by the fact that they were declared by law to have no wealth exclusively of their own; the wealth they may earn is regularly acquired for the man whom they belong.\textsuperscript{34}

How the institution of slavery came into being has been a matter of concern of many historians. Basham writes that the \textit{Mahabharata} declares that it is a law of war that the vanquished should be the victor’s slave and the captive would normally serve his captor until ransomed.\textsuperscript{35} There were several other types of slaves, children born of slaves normally become the slaves of their parents’ master, and slaves were usually bought, given away or mortgaged. A text speaks of ten thousand women slaves captured form various countries and given by Anga to his \textit{Brahmana} priest; but there is no mention of male slaves.\textsuperscript{36} There were certain unusual circumstances like famines in which a helpless person was compelled to sell him or herself. A person might he reduced to slavery for crime or debt, All these types of slavery are recognized in the \textit{smriti} literature and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Social Life in Northern India, op. cit, p. 29.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Socio-Economic History of Northern India, op. cit., p.189.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Indian Women Through the Ages, op. cit., p. 222.
\item \textsuperscript{35} The wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 152.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ancient India, op. cit., p. 55.
\item \textsuperscript{37} The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 153.
\end{itemize}
To steal women was also found in early ancient India and is also a custom reprehended by Aryan law. The purpose of capture of women was to admit them into slavery. The duty was of the king to prevent the women from being stolen.

Katyayana (3rd century Sanskrit grammarian and Vedic priest) is of the view that an independent woman on being married to a slave also become a slave and had to serve her husband’s master. This has been approved by Devannabhatta. Female slaves are mentioned in Khathasaritsagara (11th century work)

These slave girls were married to hired-servants and Brahmans. Thus, they were used for domestic work as well as fulfilled the sensual desires of males. Sometimes a wife of king might be made a slave if staked at play.

We are told by Jimutavahana (12th century Sanskrit scholar) that if a female slave is inherited by a number of persons, she should serve all the share holders by turns. It shows that one female slave was property of many people and she had to serve them turn by turn. We can easily judge the miserable condition of female slave in late ancient India.

The duties of the slave especially female slave included cutting of vegetable, pulverizing (spices), washing the floor, sweeping, bringing fuel, water etc. Menial works like cleaning of gutters were also a part of the duties assigned to a female slave and any negligence of these duties or not following the orders of master were severely dealt. The punishment, which was to be given for mutation of duty, was also proclaimed in public before the agreement of slavery was entered into.

It is advised that the slaves would not be ill treated. The law books have laid certain codes for kind treatment given to slaves ‘A man may go short himself or stint his wife and children, but never his slave, who does his dirty work for him’. But whether practically these codes were enforced or not is a matter of doubt.

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39 Socio-Economic History of Northern India, op. cit., p. 186.
41 Socio-Economic History of Northern India, op. cit., p. 186.
42 Ibid., p. 187.
43 The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 152.
Some law books have limited the right of a master to give corporal punishment to his slave. ‘A wife, a son, a slave, a servant or a younger brother may, when they do wrong, be beaten with a rope or a cane but only on the back and not on the head. If a man beats them otherwise he should be punished as a thief.’

Sources also mentioned about slave trade. It was a common practice though condemned. Those who buy or sell slave women were regarded as sinful.

The Arthasastra, is more concerned about the chastity of slave girls. It insists that the chastity of slave girl must be preserved by her master. The master who assaults a slave girl must set her free and pay her compensation, and if she has a child by her master, even with her own consent, both mother and child become free. Thus slavery existed in ancient Indian society but the treatment given to slaves was not rigid but considerate.

Alberuni describes the inhumane treatment given to slaves when they escape from the Muslim countries and reach their own countries and want to embrace their religion again. The following was the description he has given.

‘The Hindus order that they should fast by way of expiation, and then they bury them in the dung, stale and milk of cows for a certain number of days till they get into a state of fermentation. Then they drag them out of dirt and given them similar dirt to eat.’

Alberuni informs us that the Brahmins when enquired about this way of the expiation denied it and are of the view that no expiation is possible for such an individual. If we notice the statement of Alberuni we see that the female as well as male slaves were not in a good state in late ancient India at the eve of Muslim invasion. They were forced to live life of a destitute.

The institution of slavery continued form ancient India to medieval India and was a well known feature of both the ages. At the same time it was also found in other

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44 The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 152.
parts of the world. Initially, the rulers who ruled India were slaves and hence the dynasty was also named as slave dynasty. The description of both male and female slaves is found in the sources of Sultanate period the treatment given to slaves was not such harsh as sometimes we notice in ancient India.

Marriage

In ancient days the marriage was the source for uniting two souls into one, but according the Dharmasastras there was no union but only it was means of merging of the woman into man, as a river merging into ocean. Romila Thapar is of the view that rules of the marriage were rigidly enforced and marriage was primarily a social institution.

Marriage had three main purposes: the promotion of religion by the performance of household sacrifices, progeny, whereby the father and his ancestors were assured of a happy after life and the line was continued and rati, or sexual pleasure. In marriage while a man’s eligibility was judged by his intellectual and spiritual accomplishments, the girl’s desirability was solely dependent upon her physical attractions. Marriage was made compulsory for a woman without which she could not hope to go to heaven. Thus the law givers of the time made marriage a religious obligation for the salvation of girls.

The reason to believe that marriage was a religious obligation is that the samhita of the Rig-veda has fortunately preserved one particular hymn (10.85) which proves that not only the institution of marriage but also the ideals which characterized it in India in later days were already deeply rooted in the mind of men. It is (Rig Veda) perhaps the oldest written document in the world which gives an ideal picture of the marriage system with all that it involves in a civilized society.

47 Indian Women Through the Ages, op. cit., p. 220.
49 The Wonder That was India, op. cit, p. 165.
50 Indian Women Through the Ages, p. 221.
51 Ibid., p. 226.
52 Great Women of India, op. cit., p. 2.
53 Ibid.
This remarkable hymn is regarded as the earliest expression of human thought concerning marriage viewed as a sacrament and a willing union of two loving hearts and also confirms the fact that the institution of marriage was fully developed long before the end of the age represented by the samhita of the Rig Veda. The hymn holds out before us the pleasant picture of a happy home where husband and wife, faithful to each other, pass their lives in peace and prosperity, and spend the well-earned rest in old age amid sons and grandsons.

This hymn of Rik Samhita expresses the high ideals of married life i.e. lifelong faith, devotion and love between the husband and wife. Institution of marriage is justified by every religion but when the age of marriage for a girl was reduced it had its own drawbacks and proved harmful for the girls.

In the Vedic age girls were married after maturity. But unfortunately, Manu and other lawgivers recommended early marriage for girls.

From the time of the Dharmasutras we find opinions slowly growing in favor of an early marriage of girls. Some of them recommend marriage not later than three years after the attainment of puberty, whereas others shorten the period to three months. The main idea behind this move was to preserve the physical purity, since it was that one should marry a girl who should not have even dreamt of sexual love.

But the real intension behind this idea is different. The lowering of the marriageable of age or marrying girls in childhood effected her education. Girls married at an early age could hardly achieve proper education beyond the elementary stage. Thus depriving them of higher learning particularly vedic studies. They lacked knowledge of Vedas which made them unfit to perform the sacrifices and various samkaras (Sacraments). The women thus lost the status of dwija or twice...
born, and came to be regarded as *shudras*. Thus the law givers gave women a status of inferiority. Lowering the age of marriage by the law givers took away the freedom of girls to choose their husband. As an unmarried girl a woman had to depend on her father, and being married on her husband and as a widow on her son.\textsuperscript{62}

The childhood marriage had its own drawback. The marriage had been the turning point in the life of girls. Early marriage deprived them of any education only of name, regarded as ineligible for any holy sacraments and religious sacrifices, and too young to exercise any influence on the choice of her husband and the position of wife steadily deteriorated. Instead of possessing co-ordinate authority and equal partnership with the husband in dealing with household affairs her status confined to that of an obedient and humble servant to her lord.\textsuperscript{63}

A very heart moving drawback of the child marriage was marital faithlessness on the part of the husband.\textsuperscript{64} Early marriages were naturally followed by early maternity, which increased the mortality among women between the ages of fourteen and twenty two.\textsuperscript{65} The enormous disparity between the ages of the two parties naturally helped the spread of the practice of having concubines in society.\textsuperscript{66} To some extent a polygamous society was also a result of early marriages of girls.

**Polygamy**

There are clear references in Indian literature to a state of promiscuity in ancient Indian society. A passage in the *Mahabharata* describes in detail how such a state of things existed in Indian society, till it was prohibited by a sage named *Shwetaketu*, who was shocked to find his own mother going out with a stranger in the presence and with the full approval of this own father.\textsuperscript{67} *Markandaya Purana* gives many examples to prove that polygamy existed. *Daksha* and *Prasuti* had twenty four daughters and *Dharma* married thirteen out of them.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{62} *Ancient India*, op. cit., p. 131.
\textsuperscript{63} *Great Women of India*, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{64} ‘Position of Women in Hindu Civilization,’ op. cit., p. 64.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} *Great Women of India*, op. cit., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{68} *Ancient Indian Society*, op. cit., p. 28.
Kings were polygamists some were king Kavitra who had three wives, King Aviksit and Marutta also had many wives. Savarocisa, Manu’s father is also said to have four wives. The popularity of polygamy was well established in ancient India and cannot be denied. Kings and chiefs were almost invariable polygamous, as were many Brahmins and wealthier members of the lower orders. But the ordinary people of India were generally monogamous.

The presence of co-wives was a discordant factor in the married life of a woman. Oppression or torment caused by rival wives is referred to in Rik Samhita. By this we can assert that polygamy prevailed in the age of the Rik Samhita. One more reason for the institution of polygamy was the absence of a son to a woman. Son was believed to be necessary for spiritual salvation and so absence of a son from a wife justified the second marriage. One Dharmsutra (Apastamba, ii, 5, 11 f) definitely forbids a man to take a second wife if the first one is of good character and has borne him son.

Alberuni has discussed polygamy and states that a man may marry one to four wives. He is not allowed to take more than four wives but if one of his legitimate wives dies, he may take another one to complete the legitimate number. However, he must not go beyond it. He also informs that some Hindu think that the number of wives depends upon the caste; that accordingly a Brahmin may take four, a Kshatriya three, a vaisya two wives and a shudra one. Man of a caste may marry women of his own caste. Number of wives also depended on the means of a person.

It is very surprising when we come to know that law giver like Patanjali considered maid servants and shudra women as mere objects of pleasure for the men of upper caste.

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69 Ancient Indian Society, op. cit., p. 28.
70 R.C. Majumdar, Advanced History of India, Macmillan, Madras, 1981, p. 190
71 The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 173.
72 Ibid.
73 Great Women of India, op. cit., p. 7.
74 ‘Position of Women in Hindu Civilization’, op. cit., p. 68; The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 173; Social Life in Northern India, op. cit., p. 17.
75 The Wonder That was India, p. 17.
77 Ibid.
79 Ancient India, op. cit., p. 130.
During Vedic period the girls were married after attaining maturity and marriage was not an obligation but as time passed the law givers stated their own rules. Lowered the age of marriage for a girl and rules of marriage were rigidly enforced. The women were not given any propriety right; the intention was to keep the status of woman at a low level and to develop a patriarchal system in which male dominance prevailed.\(^{80}\)

In ancient India if a daughter was born the worriers of the parents came into being as if their problems were born. Daughters were unwanted creature in the family. The *Rig-Veda* does not say anything direct on this point, but the prayers for ten sons in the marriage hymn, without any reference to any daughter, seem to indicate that the girl was less welcomed than the sons.\(^{81}\) The presence of this hymn asserts that sons were preferred than daughters. The people pray for son which is proved by the two Rig-Veda hymns in which the prayer for sons is performed\(^{82}\)

**Widow Remarriage**

In early ancient India or Vedic society a widow could generally remarry.\(^{83}\) Evidences show\(^{84}\) that the remarriage of widow was fairly common in earlier times. It is proved by the story of Nala and Damayanti in which the lady decides to hold a second *swamyvara* after she was separated by her husband for many years and assumes that her husband is dead.

Nileshvari. Y. Desai is of the view that widow remarriage gradually came into disrepute during the period 300 B.C to 200 A.D\(^{85}\) and from about 600 A.D the widow remarriage was considered something wrong and people grew prejudiced regarding the remarriage of the widow. A.S Altekar goes one hundred years back and asserts that from 500 A.D the widow remarriages were completely prohibited.\(^{86}\) Both the historians (Miss Nileshvari.Y.Desai and A.S. Altekar) consider smriti writers responsible for this prohibition of widow remarriage. Manu writes that ‘no where a

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80 *Ancient Indian Social History*, op. cit., p. 32.
81 *Great Women of India*, op. cit., p. 6.
82 Ibid.
83 *The Wonder That was India*, op. cit., p.186; *Ancient Indian Society*, op. cit., p. 45.
84 Ibid.
85 *Ancient Indian Society*, op. cit., p. 45.
second husband is permitted to a respectable woman'.\textsuperscript{87} In this way the practice of widow remarriage gradually disappeared among the higher classes. The ksatriya father did not ever think of marrying his daughter whenever the son-in-law died \textsuperscript{88} in the battle field.

Behind not marrying a widow there had absolutely absurd reasons. According to the \textit{Markandaya Purana} a man who marries his daughter twice is verily born as a worm (15.13) and who marries a widow is considered to be a sinner. Moreover, the good deeds done by the son and daughter of a remarried widow are stated to bear no fruits for themselves and also the son of the remarried widow is not allowed to attend the \textit{Sraddha}\textsuperscript{89} ceremony of his mother, when she dies. All these ideas clearly state that the widow remarriage is disapproved in \textit{Markandeya Purana}.\textsuperscript{90} Thus, we see that widows were not remarried and they lived a lonely and destitute life. By reading the description of Alberuni regarding the widows we see that widows preferred to be burnt because as a widow they were extremely ill treated as long as they lived.\textsuperscript{91} The queens when widowed were usually burnt whether they wished or not the reason provided was that they would commit something unworthy which would defame the deeds of their illustrious husbands.\textsuperscript{92}

The life of a widow lady was extremely miserable and painful. The widows who survived turned into nuns, remained enclosed into their houses, wore white clothes discarded ornaments and embellishments, performed fasts and austerities.

During Kautilya’s time widows had to earn their living by spinning,\textsuperscript{93} weaving and taking to domestic duties.\textsuperscript{94}

She had to live a life of an ascetic, sleeping on the ground and eating one simple meal a day without honey, meat, wine or salt. She had to regulate her days by austerity in hope of being remarried to her husband in the next life.\textsuperscript{95}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{The Wonder That was India}, op. cit., p.186.
\item A ceremony performed for the peace of the departed soul.
\item \textit{Ancient Indian Society}, op. cit., p. 45.
\item \textit{Alberuni’s India.}, op. cit., p.155.
\item Ibid.
\item \textit{Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day}, op. cit., p. 23; \textit{Great Women of India}, op. cit., p. 42.
\item \textit{Social Life in Northern India}, op. cit., p. 18.
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The law and epics are of the view that the state should provide pension to the widows of the soldiers dying on the battle field.\(^9^6\) The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya states down that the state should provide special facilities to destitute women to help them earn a living by spinning. [Arthashastra 11, 23].\(^9^7\)

There was a selfish reason behind the idea of engaging women in spinning work. It is very strange when we notice that the law givers had a better understanding of the society and the laws were made especially to make use of weaker section of society like women and *shudras*. Cloth was much costlier in ancient India\(^9^8\) and medieval India and was in great demand in the neighboring countries down to the beginning of the last century.\(^9^9\) The production of cloth in bulk and after that export of the same would have brought a handsome amount of money to the country and state would have flourished.

When we study the sources of medieval India we find same stress of the historians on the spinning activity. Isami and Amir Khusrau insist that women should engage themselves with spinning wheel instead of casting their looks in different directions.

We find that the freedom of a widow was curtailed by the prohibition placed on her remarriage and her happiness took the place of sorrows. Widows were regarded as in auspicious on occasions of festivals but also had a positive aspect of their life when they were respected by their sons and controlled their household affairs.\(^1^0^0\) A widow was an embodiment of devotion, self sacrifice and service of humanity. Instead of claiming for the right of remarriage she resigned herself to her lot and led a life of service and self sacrifice.\(^1^0^1\)

It is noteworthy here to mention about *niyoga* or levirate system in which an issue less widow woman could have an off spring from the brother in law after her husband dies. Only issue less women with their consent could carry out *niyoga*.

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\(^9^5\) *The Wonder That was India*, op. cit., p.186.
\(^9^7\) *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day*, p. 23.
\(^9^8\) *Ibid*.
\(^9^9\) *Ibid.*, (Cited from, Moreland, India at the death of Akbar.)
\(^1^0^0\) *Great Women of India*, op. cit., p. 47.
\(^1^0^1\) *Ibid.*
Divorce

Divorce was not practiced in early societies prior to Kautilya. But in Arthashastra, Kautilya has elaborately discussed the issue.\textsuperscript{102} Divorce was allowed in special provocation\textsuperscript{103} but it is formally stated that one should not separate from his wife.\textsuperscript{104} According to some of the grounds on which divorce could be sought was absence of compatibility between husband and wife or if apprehensive of actual physical danger from his or her partner.\textsuperscript{105}

The Arthasharta would allow divorce ever after religious marriage, to a wife who has been deserted by her husband and lays down waiting periods of from one to twelve years, which vary according to circumstances and class.\textsuperscript{106}

Position of Mother

Manusmriti the most celebrated and the most ancient of all the Smritis pays a great tribute to woman. It is stated that a mother excels thousand fathers in glory (2.145-6).\textsuperscript{107} In Atri Smriti (14) another ancient smriti, mother is stated to be the greatest guru or object of veneration on earth.\textsuperscript{108}

One who troubles a mother and gets her curse and is the most unfortunate person because a mother’s curse is not averted and it has no antidote, although all other curses may be averted.\textsuperscript{109}

Lakshmidhara on certain conditions recommends that a son may abandon his father but must not abandon his mother ever if she is excommunicated.\textsuperscript{110} No doubt, mother was honored is all the ages and almost by everyone. Amir Khusrau, also emphasizes the importance of mother.

\textsuperscript{102} The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p.173.
\textsuperscript{103} The Social and Military Position, op. cit., p. 297.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 312.
\textsuperscript{105} The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 20.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p.110; Ancient Indian Society, op. cit., p. 44.
\textsuperscript{107} Great Women of India, op. cit., p. 110.
\textsuperscript{108} Great Women of India, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{109} The Social and Military Position, op. cit., p. 314, Ancient Indian Society, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{110} Socio-Economic History of Northern India, op. cit., p.136.
Purdah in Ancient India

_Rig-Veda_ depicts free intermingling of young boys and unmarried girls\(^\text{111}\) and gives no evidence that married women were in any way secluded.\(^\text{112}\) But kings kept their wives in seclusions. _Arthashartra_ explains the _antahpura_, or royal harem which was closely guarded and its inmates were not allowed to leave it freely.\(^\text{113}\) In the royal harem, the only attendants allowed to enter were the hunchbacked, dwarfs and decrepit chamberlains.\(^\text{114}\)

The purpose was to protect the royal ladies from the evil eyes of males and protect their chastity. _Sukra_ does not allow a young man to be appointed in the inner apartment even if he be a friend. (Sukra Niti, Sara III, VV, 282-283)\(^\text{115}\)

Thus, we see that free intermingling of the royal ladies with even intimate friends was not allowed. The purpose was to maintain a distance from unwanted males and maintain the chastity of women. Where free mixing of young boys and girls were allowed in society we find unwanted love affair, illegitimate children and even elopements.\(^\text{116}\)

The ladies of high families used a piece cloth to veil their faces. By this male outside the family was not able to get attracted from the beauty of a female of a high family. Some of the ladies so strictly followed the _purdah_ that they only saw the faces of their husband.\(^\text{117}\)

In _Mahaviracharita_ of _Bhavabhatti_, _Rama_, finding that _Parasurama_ was coming to see him says to _Sita_, ‘Dear one, he is our superior, therefore turn aside and veil yourself.'\(^\text{118}\)

Hence there are sufficient examples to conclude that in ancient India veiling of face from other males was a customary practice. Bimla Sen is of the view that reason

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\(^{111}\) Socio-Economic History of Northern India, op. cit., p.179; The Social and Military Position, op. cit., p. 238; Great Women of India, op. cit., p.10.

\(^{112}\) The Social and Military Position, p. 238.

\(^{113}\) The Social and Military Position, p. 283.

\(^{114}\) The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 179.

\(^{115}\) Social Life in Northern India, op. cit., p. 24.

\(^{116}\) Ibid.

\(^{117}\) Great Women of India, p.10.

\(^{118}\) Social Life in Northern India, op. cit., p. 24.

\(^{118}\) Ibid.
for adoption of this custom was the additional protection it offered to the women, and there is some evidence that women themselves welcomed the custom at the time.\textsuperscript{119} Chachnama describes how Ladi, the wife of Dahir uncovered her face and said, \textit{I am Ladi the wife of Dahir}, at one more place Janki, the daughter of Dahir is described as unveiling herself in front of the Khalifa for the purpose of communication. \textsuperscript{120}

B.N. Sharma’s\textsuperscript{121} view is that \textit{purdah} before the Muslim rule in India could have been partial. \textit{Purdah} system became fairly well grounded in northern India by 1200 A.D with the advent of Muslims culture.

\textbf{Sati}

The widows had to suffer a great deal of humiliation and misery and the only way for them to get rid from all this was to immolate them in the pyre of their dead husbands.\textsuperscript{122} Fortunately, no reference is found of \textit{Sati} in Vedic period and Manu and Yajnavalkaya have forcefully protested the burning of the widow.

The word ‘\textit{Sati}’ means a woman who is virtuous and truthful and as an extension of the term, a woman who is chaste and totally devoted to her husband.\textsuperscript{123} Moreover, the extreme devotion towards the husband impelled them to end their lives on the pyre of their husbands. The custom gained popularity because of the beliefs, like \textit{Sati} is a sure means of reunion with the dead husband and that by performing it the widow managed to wipe out the sins committed by her husband.\textsuperscript{124}

\textit{Smriti} writers (Brahaspati and Visnu)\textsuperscript{125} stated that a woman is devoted to her husband who died on the funeral pyre of her husband and would enjoy eternal bliss in heaven.\textsuperscript{126} Medhatithi admits that the custom has been mentioned by \textit{Angirassmriti}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, \textit{The History of India as Told by its Own Historians-The Muhammadan Period}, Vol. I, Low Price Publication, Delhi, 2008, pp. 210-211.
\item \textsuperscript{121} \textit{Social Life in Northern India}, op. cit., p.25.
\item \textsuperscript{122} \textit{Alberuni’s India}, Eng. Tr., Sachau, op. cit., Vol. II, p.155; \textit{The Wonder That was India}, op. cit., p.188.
\item \textsuperscript{124} \textit{Indian Women Through the Ages}, op. cit., p. 231.
\item \textsuperscript{125} ‘Social Status of Women in Dharmasastras’, op. cit., p.157.
\item \textsuperscript{126} \textit{Social Life in Northern India}, op. cit., p. 20.
\end{itemize}
but maintains that it has no authoritative value. The custom of Sati became gradually popular and came into general vogue from 400 A.D. Abu Zaid confirms the practice of Sati and says that wives of a king burnt themselves with the corpse of their husband but it was voluntarily and they were not compelled to burn themselves. He even informs us of voluntarily burning of old men and women when they become old and their senses do not respond properly.

Earlier the Brahmin women were exempted from Sati and the custom was more prevalent among the Kshatriyas. Sati from 8th century onwards was also the outcome of the internal struggle for supremacy. The Palas, Prathiharas and Rashtrakutas were often at wars with each other. Constant wars inevitably increased the number of war widows and the widows of the defeated army could never feel secure under the protection of the conqueror. Thus, they prefer self immolation.

Manu also opposes the women to be burnt by means of Sati, he considers women as pujarha grhaadiptayah-“worthy to be worshipped and the lamp that lights the household.” Vasistha and Yajnavalkya (3 century A.D) are also silent on this matter. The poet Bana (625 A.D) has the credit of opposing this inhuman custom and writes that it is a custom followed by the foolish. The women of advance age and those who had young children were exempted from being Sati.

**Adultery and Wine drinking**

People of ancient Indian society were also not devoid of moral lapses. Adultery and wine drinking were present in the society. Adultery is considered as severally punishable offence according to Hinduism as well as Islam; still every era had people who were indulged in adultery.

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129 History of India as Told by its own Historians-The Muhammadan Period, op. cit., p. 6.
130 Ibid., p. 9.
132 ‘Social Status of Women in Dharmasastras,’ p. 159.
133 ‘Sati- The Event and the Ideology’, p. 25.
134 Ibid.
A woman was expected to be chaste and pure in her conduct in every stage of her life. Emphasis was on married ladies who had to be very chaste and lived a life of obedient wives. Some smritis make the husband liable to pay a heavy fine for deserting a virtuous wife.\footnote{Great Women of India, op. cit., p. 23.}

Adultery was considered greatest evil which undermined the chastity of the women and shook the very base of the sacred institution of marriage and destroyed the religious acts and the life of man. It was considered to be the most harmful to a man’s life than anything.\footnote{Ancient Indian Society, p. 40}

When we talk about the adultery of woman a penance is prescribed in most cases after which a wife is restored to all her ordinary right.\footnote{Great Women of India, p. 23} There are also references of severe punishment for an adulteress. Although there is a general rule that women are not to be executed\footnote{The Social and Military Position, p. 280} yet through a terrible law an adulterous wife shall be slain in a much worse manner than that implied by simple Vadha or execution.\footnote{Ibid., p. 310}

The laws books vary in their attitude towards the adulterous wife. The criterion of punishment of the adultery committed was decided by that caste of the person involved. If a woman committed a willful intercourse with a man of low caste according to Manu and some other sources such woman should the torn by dogs.\footnote{The Wonder That was India, p. 172} But the adulteress who stayed with a man of higher cast was more fortunate. Most authorities agree\footnote{Ibid., p. 173} that she should be made to wear dirty clothes sleep on the ground and eat only enough food barely to sustain life until her next menstruation. Surprisingly, she might due restore to her husband’s bed and her old position in the household.

The man involved in adultery was to be tied upon an iron couch and roasted. In the case of adultery with the guru’s wife the stress of punishment is the man’s: and
he is also roasted till death and afterwards reborn as wolf or according to Manu as a jackal.\textsuperscript{143}

*Lakshmidhara* states that a son should abandon his father who cohabits with a female of low caste. This shows that rigid caste system prevailed and followed strictly by the inhabitants. As the same time this statement of *Lakshmidhara* confirms that adultery existed in society.

There are certain hymns in *Rig-Veda* \textsuperscript{144} which seem to look upon the existence of the paramours as nothing abnormal. Unmarried girls had affairs with males and to our surprise we find birth of illegitimate children and even of destruction of the fetus.\textsuperscript{145} These moral lapse were due to the free association of grown up boys and girls in festival and other social gatherings\textsuperscript{146}

The wine drinking was considered as the chief stumbling-block of the ancient Hindu society.\textsuperscript{147} Men and Women used to drink freely, there were many kinds of simple wines, and women preferred a sweeter kind of wine than men.\textsuperscript{148} Queens also used to take wine habitually. *Hemchandra* says that the queen Mayanalladevi (10\textsuperscript{th} - 11\textsuperscript{th} century) had to give up her drinking habit while Siddharaja was in her womb.\textsuperscript{149}

**Sex workers in pre-medieval India**

In almost all important cities even in the famous city of *Pataliputra* a seat of learning lived sex workers. *Chandbardai* tells us that when; one entered *Kannauj* one could see the gambling houses and dances of the prostitutes and rich markets full of dealers in gold, jewellery and clothes.\textsuperscript{150} Indeed prostitutes were found in ancient India too. They were a normal feature of city life.\textsuperscript{151} Basham says that they were not bound by the rules and restriction which limited the freedom of the high caste wife,\textsuperscript{152} these were also known as *vesya*, or *ganika*. It was essentially an urban phenomenon.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[143] *The Social and Military Position*, op. cit., p. 311
\item[144] *Great Women of India*, op. cit., p. 9.
\item[145] Ibid., p. 10; *Socio-Economic History of Northern India*, op. cit., p. 135.
\item[146] *Great Women of India*, p.10.
\item[148] Ibid., pp. 64-65.
\item[149] *Socio-Economic History of Northern India*, op. cit., pp. 360-361.
\item[150] Ibid., p. 249.
\item[151] *Ancient India*, p. 158; *Indian Women Trough the Ages*, op. cit., p. 238.
\item[152] *The Wonder That was India*, op. cit., p.183.
\end{footnotes}
The beginning of urbanization led to the emergence of a class of alienated women who involved themselves in prostitution for their subsistence.\textsuperscript{153}

Vatsayayana regard prostitution as old as human civilization\textsuperscript{154} Sandhyakaranandi, Dhoyi, Ksemendra, gives a highly interesting list of persons whose visit was welcomed to the prostitutes as they were like the veritable kalpa tree (Fulfilling all desire)\textsuperscript{155} the list of persons include the only son of a rich man, a young man whose father is dead, an amatya or minister of a king, son of a merchant, physician who looks for a ailing minister for a long time, son of a famous guru, passionate ascetic, irresponsible prince, village official, notable and rich musician, a merchant who is visiting the city for the first time, an erudite scholar and a hard drunkard. The list shows that the clients of the prostitutes were drawn from all the classes of society not excluding an ascetic or an erudite Scholar.\textsuperscript{156}

The existence of this institution speaks of the popularity among the common man. The prostitutes were protected and supervised by the state, Arthashastra suggests that the superintendent of prostitutes was responsible for the care and supervision of palace courtesans, and the inspection of brothels and collected two days earnings from each prostitute every month as the tax given to the government.\textsuperscript{157}

The courtesans were a different class of prostitute meant for the royalty these also acted as concubines. These were prostitutes who were maintained by kings and chiefs in palaces. These were salaried servants who often attended king’s person. Prostitutes of this type accompanied the king wherever he went and even awaited him in the rear when he went into battle. Alberuni is of the view that harlotry was encouraged in the country by the rulers for their own selfish ends\textsuperscript{158} ‘The kings’ he remarks ‘make them an attraction for their cities, a bait of pleasure for their subjects; for no other but fanciful reason. By the revenues which they derive from the business

\textsuperscript{153} Sachindra Kumar Maity, \textit{A.L. Basham, My Guraji and Problems and Perspectives of ancient Indian History and Culture}, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1997, p. 316.
\textsuperscript{154} Socio-Economic History of Northern India, op. cit., p. 370.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 184.
\textsuperscript{158} Social Life in Northern India, op. cit., p. 27.
both as fine and taxes, they want to recover the expenses which their treasury has to spend on the army'. 159

Devadasis

The god in the temple was treated like an earthly king. He had wives, his ministers and attendants and the paraphernalia of the court including his attendant prostitutes.160 These were often the children of mother of the same profession, born and reared in temple precincts, but they might be daughter of ordinary citizens.161

These were various situations, when a girl was offered to the temple authorities. In the time of dire circumstances like famine when the parents had nothing to eat they sold their daughters to the temple authorities and the beautiful girls were purchased and brought up and they grew up as devadasis. The daughters of such pious parents, who were first to be born among all the siblings were given to the temple in keeping some special vow. A bringer of evil to the family was the considered, the unfortunate fifth girl. So she was also given to the temple in order to avoid the coming of evil. Two more cases in which a girl was born at an inauspicious conjunction of stars or with certain mystic marks portending evil and parent who did not wish such girls to ruin them gave them to the gods who were capable of counteracting their evil influence.162

The earliest record of the religious prostitution comes from a cave at Ramgarh, in the Vindhya hills, some 160 miles south of Banaras, which contains two significant Prakrit inscriptions which shows that they were written not long after the days of Ashoka.163

The popularity of the temple depended upon the voluptuous attendants (devadasis) who attracted the number of pilgrims rather than deity. Right minded Hindus often protested against the institution.164 There was strong protest of prostitution by the smriti writers, one source (Gautama, xxii, 27) even mentions that

160 The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 185.
161 Ibid.
162 Indian Women Through the Ages, op. cit., p. 238.
163 Ancient India, op. cit., p. 159; The Wonder That was India, op. cit., p. 185.
164 Indian Women Through the Ages, p. 239.
the murderer of a prostitute commits no sin and should incur no punishment at law.\textsuperscript{165} At the same time the \textit{Manusmriti} (9.232) says that a person killing a woman or a Brahmin or an infant is to be meted out a capital punishment.\textsuperscript{166} According to \textit{Markandeya Purana} those who kill a woman and an infant go to hell (2.19). Elsewhere also it states that killing a woman, a \textit{brahmin}, a teacher and a cow amounts to a great sin. One killing a woman, a cow and a Brahmin is considered to be an apaviddha (ie, contaminated by people).\textsuperscript{167}

Thus, we see that when a person kills a common woman he is desirable of severe or capital punishment but when prostitute is killed the murderer is liable to meet no punishment and is said to have committed no sin. The prostitutes were also a part of society and to their murderer equal punishment should have been given as in the case of common women. By this discrimination of punishment given to a murderer of a prostitute and to a murderer of a common woman we can judge the social status given to the prostitutes. Prostitutes were considered undesirable elements in the society and so the person who killed a prostitute was considered not a sinner. By this we see the double standard of the \textit{smriti} writers who considered a prostitute no better than a cow, a \textit{brahmin}, a teacher and a common woman. By this view of the \textit{Smriti} writers that whoever kills a prostitute commits no sin and should not be given any punishment it is clear that according to them the prostitutes were undesirable and there was a great discrimination among women if they belonged to a class of sex workers.

\textbf{Women Administrators}

In early ancient India women as rulers were undesirable and it was said that ‘\textit{when a woman is the ruler, men sink like stone boats}’\textsuperscript{168} and women warriors were as unfamiliar as independent queens but girls in royal families were given both military and administrative education during the late ancient period. Queens by their own right were rare; but we have examples of dowager queens like \textit{Vijyabhattrika} of Chalukya family (650 A.D) and \textit{Sugandha} and \textit{Didda} of Kashmir (10\textsuperscript{th} – 11\textsuperscript{th}) centuries.\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{165} \textit{The Wonder That was India}, p. 186
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Ancient Indian Society}, op. cit., p. 48
\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 315.
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Great Women of India}, pp. 42-43.
Strirajya or women kingdom is often mentioned in Indian literature. In seventh century, Chinese traveller, Huien Tsang mentions two Strirajas. The Vakataka queen Prabhavati Gupta was the daughter of the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II Vikramaditya (376-414 A.D) of northern India and the chief queen of king Rudrasena II of the Vakataka dynasty ruling over wide regions of Deccan. The queen after the death of her husband made her son Divakarsena as crown prince and she ruled for fifteen years.

In the 8th century Rani Bai the sister of Dahir, vigorously fought against the Arab general Mohammad bin Qasim, at the head of her soldiers. After the death of her husband she burnt herself to death when she saw no chance of escape.

A.S Altekar is of the view that queens reigning independently in their own rights were few with the exception of queen Didda of Kashmir. He blames the political thinkers of the period who opposed the direct accession of women to the throne.

The study of the Vedic age confirms that it was a glorifying age for the women folk. Women were highly educated they were philosophers, educationist and also had knowledge of Vedas. In spite of the patriarchal character of the family, the position of women was much better in the Vedic period than in subsequent times. Girls normally married after puberty and there were girls like Ghosha who remained unmarried and grew up in the home of their parents. Woman had liberty through which they could freely mix with young men and have love affairs. She could take part in sacrifices with her husband though some unmarried women like Visvavara and Apala offered the sacrifice all by themselves.

The institution of marriage seems to have been established. But we have also some evidence of incestuous relationships. Change comes after 200 A.D. The

171 Social Life in Northern India, op. cit., p. 32.
172 Ibid.
173 The Position of women in Hindu Civilization from Pre-historic Times to the Present Day, op. cit., p. 185.
174 Ancient India, op. cit., p. 48.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
formality of *upanayana* (Sacred Initiation) was continued during the last period down to 200 A.D. It was completely stopped during this period and the religious status of women, even of the *brahmin* class was universally recognized to as low as that of the *shudra*. The ineligibility for *upanayana* unfortunately reduced the status of women to that of *shudras* and it had prolonged effects on their social status.

It will not be wrong to call the age of *Smriti* as the Dark Age for the women. The lawgivers had proved this by writing such remarks for women ‘*In childhood a woman is to be dependent upon her father, in youth on her husband and in old age on her son; a woman is never fit for independence*’

The above statement of *Manu* proves that a patriarchal system was willingly enforced and tended to keep the status of women at a low level by curtailing their freedom.

The rights of women in practically all law books are identified with those of *shudras*, slaves and children. *Manu* writes ‘*women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age; thinking it is enough he is a man, they give themselves to the handsome and the ugly*. (IX,14)\(^{177}\)

*Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they may be guarded in this world.*\(^{178}\)

*Knowing their disposition which the Lord of Creatures laid in them to be such, every man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them.*\(^{179}\)

*When creating them, the Lord of creatures, allotted to women a love of their bed, of their seat and of ornaments, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct.*\(^{180}\)


\(^{178}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{179}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{180}\) *Ibid.*
For women no sacramental rite is performed with sacred texts, thus the law is settled; women (who are) destitute of strength and destitute of the knowledge of the Vedic texts, are impure as falsehood itself, that is the fixed rule. “181

This was the thinking of Manu for women later law givers were harsher in their thinking for women. A law giver Daksha is of opinion that “A good wife was not born but made.” “182

Contrary to this in both Manu and Yajnavalkya we find passage using men to honor women and keep them contended and happy, because they are of the view that where women are unhappy, neglected and sorrowful misfortunes over take the household.

The guidelines which the law givers had provided for treating the women were based on a harsh and humiliating treatment towards women. According to them women in a family were to be dealt in strict ways. The question is when a man is advised to deal with her wife in strict ways how it is possible that the wife will remain happy and contended?

Upto the Upanishadic age the social position of women was very high183 they were considered in many respect equal to men. Child marriage was unknown and no girl could be married against her wishes, they composed Vedic hymns and suffered from no religious disabilities. After that gradually their social and religious standards deteriorated and their education was neglected. Both upanayana and Vedic studies were denied to them. Their marriageable age was considerably lowered and social evil like Sati became prominent.

The society where the practice like Sati, prevailed, where girls devoid of education were married before puberty, widows, even if a girl of tender age became a widow was not allowed to remarry, how it is possible that women in that society would have remained happy and contended. Manu, asserts that ‘where women are honored there the gods are pleased but where they are not honored no sacred rite yields any reward’ (111-56). He further says ‘where the female relations live in grief

182 Ibid.
183 Social Life in Northern India, op. cit., p. 10.
that family wholly perishes but where they are not unhappy that family even prospers’ (111-57). The same venerable Manu regard women by nature, as of such depraved character that they are sure to go astray if they are not kept under rigid control.

Verses 14 and 15 of chapter IX in Manusmirti\(^\text{184}\) depict the licentious and grossly sensuous character of women in general in such terms as cannot be reproduced without violating decency and modesty. The creator ‘Implanted in them carnal passions,\(^\text{185}\) love for ornaments, impure desires wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct’(9.17) In view of their inherent wicked character they must be carefully guarded, specially by their husbands, to whom they are naturally disloyal (9.15-6). We also find the view of Manu for wife who has committed fault. According to him ‘she may beaten with a rope or a spilt bamboo’(8.299).

If we consider this statement of Manu we find that women were theoretically honored but practically they were given a subservient position in patriarchal society.

Regarding the social practices and customs of ancient India we notice that certain practices like purdah, polygamy and Sati are found in medieval India also. Regarding purdah one discerns that it became a common and rigorous practice in the harem of Sultan where as in ancient India it was not so strictly followed there are few references where we find women veiling themselves.

It is praiseworthy that the inhumane practice of Sati had no existence in the Vedic period and no divorces were practiced. These two customs came into being later on. Divorce was introduced in order to get rid of a partner, if apprehensive of a danger and absence of compatibility existed among husband and wife. As a part of human nature divorces are also found in the Sultanate period but the cases are rare.

When we compare the late ancient society and the society in the Sultanate era we see that there was influx of Muslim population hence the social conditions became different from the earlier times. The historians of the medieval India have described the social conditions considering the Muslim population but we get a good description of Hindu society at the eve of invasion by the work of Alberuni.

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\(^{184}\) Great Women of India, op. cit., p. 19.

\(^{185}\) Ibid.
Features of royal class ladies are almost similar; education was imparted to them by private tutors in the royal apartments. They did not go to a primary school for education and also no higher education was imparted to them. In Sultanate the education imparted was religious but for women in Hindu Royalty we do not find them gaining religious education rather they preferred military education and also received it. Receiving military education was restricted in Sultanate period on grounds of purdah. In this way we can conclude that most of the practices like female slavery, polygamy, Sati, prostitution were a part of society in both the eras. There were rare women administrators also in some regional kingdoms of Sultanate and the only woman who ruled at the Sultanate was Razia but ancient society was familiar with women administrators.