CHAPTER I
THE FIGURES OF WOMEN IN PRE-BUDDHIST DAYS

The Buddha who was singularly free from the ethnic illusions had used the word, 'Āryan' as a rule that is not only stood for all but also the best in humanity. In addition the way he penetrated for all beings including for liberation was called the 'Āryan Path'.

In India the salvation of humanity was linked with the spiritual leadership of the Āryans and the country they inhabited was known as Āryavartha, the best of all possible worlds and on the one hand it is 'non-Āryan', or 'un-Āryan' for the worst.

According to historians that those Āryans who moved to the South-East of Europe and came to be known as Greeks, conquered the Minoan civilization of Crete and other regions, while the Persians who conquered Mesopotamia came under the cultural influence of the Babylonians. That branch of the Āryans who made inroads into India and settled down in the Punjab. It was appeared came to contact with what is now known as 'the Indus Valley Civilization.'

The spirit of the civilization of pre-Buddhist days and its excellences were highed light to realize its limitations and to understand the position and status of women in it. For this purpose these two points of views are again essential. One is a woman on social point of views in the civilization and the other is religious point of view in the condition of such civilization. Both are concerned the status and position of women in the time immemorial especially the pre-Buddhist days in India.
1:1 Women on the Social point of view

Firstly, it is to be already known that the position of women in early uncivilized societies. In communities that have not yet emerged from Barbarism there hardly exist that men were more superior to women. Ill-usage, underfeeding and overworking are pushed to the greatest limit, compatible with the preservation of the race. Women are divorced, abandoned, sold or killed at the mere whim of men. They have to carry about children and also serve as beasts of burden, when the tribe moves from one place to another. The treatment thus meted out to them need not cause any surprise; in primitive life the muscle was an indispensable element in success and the men were stronger in it than the women.

The man fought with the animals and enemies to protect women and children; he chased the big game to feed the family. Physical prowess, bodily vigour and muscular strength thus naturally established men's permanent superiority over women who besides lacking these qualities was periodically in a most helpless condition a few weeks before and after her frequent confinements. Man had not yet developed sufficient culture and sensibility to make him feel and realize that women undergo these trials and tribulations for the sake of the race and therefore deserve to be treated with utmost sympathy and consideration. It was taken for granted everywhere that women as such can have no rights and privileges. They were inherently inferior to men and therefore must be always subordinate to them.

For instance, in ancient Greece a writer has trenchantly put it; "There was no woman question at Athens because all women were as mere
vegetables and there was no woman question at Sparta because both men and women there were little better than animals."\textsuperscript{10}

In ancient times in all patriarchal societies the birth of a girl was generally an unwelcome event. Almost everywhere the son was valued more than the daughter. He was a permanent economic asset of the family. He lived with his aged parents and did not migrate like the daughter to another family after the marriage. He perpetuated the name of his father's family. As he grew into adolescence and youth, he could offer valuable co-operation to his family, when it had either to defend itself or to attack an enemy. The daughter on the other hand had no fighting value whatever. He therefore hardly ever welcomed the birth of a daughter. Sometimes he abandoned her after her birth; sometimes he even killed her.\textsuperscript{11}

The very little information can be gleaned from the evidence now available concerning the customs of the Indus Valley people and the position of their women in society and other matter relevant to our subject. An interesting find from Mohanjo-daro is the bronze of a dancing girl. The features indicated in the find are like those of figurines discovered at Kulli in Baluchistan. It is opined the scholars that the merchants returning along the southerly caravan routes may have brought with them girls whose exotic dancing and unsophisticated charms and it might also be thought to tickle the fancy of the tired businessmen of

\textsuperscript{10} A short History of Women. 172
\textsuperscript{11} Women in Hindu. 3
Harappa or Mohanja-daro. It is the first figure of the women that came down from historian point of view.

In ancient Indus Valley, it was more favorable to women that the abundance of female figurines with rich ornaments, the comparatively lesser importance given to males. According to P. Thomas, it thus was possibly a matriarchal of the type of ancient Egypt.

However it should be considered the political condition of the Indus Valley Civilization. It was, in fact, Dravidians, who were the native of this place. This Dravidian civilization seems to have been widely distributed in India at the time of the Aryan conquest. There were so many wars that took place between Dravidians who were the native and Aryans, who came from South-East of Europe. This political condition heightened also lights the position of women of this period.

Men are mostly engrossed in military or semi-military activities, and they have to rely to a very great degree on the help and co-operation of women in the normal spheres and activities of family life. Under such circumstances women can clearly and convincingly demonstrate to men that they are little useful members of society and their co-operation is very valuable in securing prosperity in peace and victory in war.

What the general duties of the women at that time are should be considered again. They used to take an active part in agriculture and the manufacture of cloth, bows, arrows and other war materials. They could

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12 Prehistoric India:
13 Ibid: 7
not be therefore treated with an air of patronage or contempt because the cheap or forced labor of the enslaved population was not yet available to the Āryans for the tasks mentioned above. It would appear that the general freedom and better status which women enjoyed in the Vedic age were largely due to men being engrossed in the work of conquest and consolidation.

Samhitas also refer to female workers in dyeing, embroidery and basket-making. It is interesting to note that the Vedic Samhitas have special words to denote female workers in the above crafts, which have disappeared in the later literature. This circumstance would show that women even in the higher circles were manufacturing bows and arrows, cloth and baskets in the Vedic period, but gave up these plebian professions in later times. Women in the lower strata of society, however, continued to weave cloth, prepare baskets and participate in agriculture as before.\footnote{Women in Hindu: 179}

It may be pointed out that women in the age of Homer, 1000 B.C, occupied a much more honorable position in Greek society than they did in the days of Pericles, 500 century B.C. In the Homeric age women were productive and valuable members of society for the absent of slaves, however, slavery had become in the age of Pericles an established institution and all manual work in the household was done by slaves. The wife lost nearly all her occupations and she became a parasite and society ceased to respect to her. In the Buddhist literature, it is also used to record everywhere that there were many slave women in the Royal Kingdom.
and that even the Prince Siddhattha, Buddha-to-be in future, had a lot of slave women in his early days in the Royal Palace.

The Vedas, the earliest literary composition of the Hindus, are mostly religious in character and give little insight into the social conditions of the people of India. The earliest known literary compositions of the Indo-Āryans are the hymns of the Rig Veda. Though the nucleus from which the Rig Veda developed had its origin in the homeland of the Āryans, the work in its present form is definitely a product of the Indian soil. The composition is essentially religious in character and only incidentally treats secular subjects. Rig Vedic Āryans were also regarded as patriarchal and a man had almost absolute power over his wife and children. In spite of this, the position of women in Rig Vedic society was much higher than in later times. A girl after marriage went and lived in her husband's house and marriage was generally arranged by parents. The bride was a full-grown girl and consummation took place on the fourth night after marriage.

In the Rig Vedic period, women also took part in the intellectual and spiritual life of the community. Sacrifices were performed and oblations offered to the deities, jointly by the husband and wife. One prayer runs as follows:

"Gods! May the husband and wife who with one mind, offer oblations and purify them, propitiate you with the Soma ever mixed with milk; constantly associated, may they acquire appropriate sacrificial viands; may they be able to offer sacrifices."
In the Rig Vedic age, marriage does not appear to have been compulsory for women. Women could grow old in their parents' houses without public censure.

The position of women, as stated above, is vividly seen before the marriage that took place between non-Āryan and Āryan. However, the introduction of the non-Āryan wife into the Āryan household is the key to the general deterioration of the position of women that gradually and imperceptibly started at about 1000 B.C., and became quite marked in about 500 years.

The author of the book named "Indian Women through the Ages" assumed that in all Indo-Āryan literature, all the non-Āryans were blessed with a stronger sex nature than the Āryans and these were better looking than their enemies. And a consequence, when a non-Āryan male found an Āryan lady under opportune circumstances, he made love to her and when his suit was rejected he had recourse to rape.\textsuperscript{15}

Āryan ladies are always mentioned in Brahmanic literature as particularly loyal to their race. Besides, not a single instance of an Āryan lady who married or bestowed her favors willingly on non-Āryans out of wedlock will be found in it. So the only course open to a non-Āryan who was taken by the looks of a charming Āryan lady was to cultivate the virtue of self-restraint or abduct the object of his desire and many non-Āryans had recourse to the latter expedient when they could. The most notorious case of this nature was the abduction of Sītā, wife of Āryan hero Rāma, by

\textsuperscript{15} Indian Women: 53
Rāvana, the Raskhasa king of Lanka, which forms the main theme of the Rāmāyana.

It is difficult to find in the whole Hindu literature that an approved case of regular marriage between an Āryan woman and a non-Āryan man. In fact the only instance of the marriage of a Pratiloma nature is the wedding of Devayani and Yayati. The behaviors of Devayani and her marriage are more in keeping with Asura conventions than with Āryan tradition.

The Mahābhārata further mentioned an age in which inter-racial marriages were common. It is here noted that in the most of these inter-racial marriages and philandering the men were Āryans and the women, non-Āryans. The idea is perhaps linked with the patriarchal notions of property rights in women. The Āryans have always held the view that a woman marrying below her caste or status demeans herself and her family whereas no such stigma is attached to a man marrying a woman below his caste.

According to Uddalaka Śvetaketu, one famous sage in the Mahābhārata, he legislated as follows:

"One woman can make love to one man only......If a woman is unfaithful to her husband, from today onwards, it will be a sin, equivalent to the killing of a foetus, bringing unhappiness to her."

Women were beginning to be considered generally impure, and particularly so during their menstrual periods, pregnancy and child-birth. Besides, 'below her navel a woman is always unclean.'
Panchachuda revealed to the saint the nature of woman:

"Women, even if high-born and blessed with beauty and efficient guardians, love to transgress the codes of society, and rebel against all restraints. None is more inclined to sin that women. Women are the root of all troubles. Even when married to noble, handsome, wealthy men, women are inclined to be faithless when opportunities arise."

According to Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, it is told that a wife should take her meals after her husband had finished his, and a wife who does not answer back to her husband even under grave provocation is praiseworthy; elsewhere, a disobedient wife is enjoined to be taught obedience by physical force.

According to D.N. Majumdar, the author of Race and Cultures of India, it is stated that a man had a right to his ancestral property. And any property brought by a married man into his wife's family was reverted after his death, to his own family along with his ashes. What a man earned during his sojourn in his wife's house naturally went to his wife who maintained him.

In culture circles, the wife was regarded as the co-owner of the family property along with her husband. It is supported by the term dampaṭi in Sanskrit, dampaṭi or dampaṭi in Pāli. However, there was a belief in very early times in India that women were regarded as chattel. They were given away as gifts in the Vedic age, as mentioned above, which glorify

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17 Indian Women Through: 165
the gifts of generous donors. In the Mahābhārata, it is stated that Dhritarashtra proposing to give hundred females slaves of Krishna as a token of his regard for him. The Mahābhārata also states that the assembly began to hiss loudly when Dharma proceeded to stake his wife. It would therefore appear that though the husband's proprietary right in the wife was theoretically recognized, its actual exercise met with a stern social disapprobation. It was felt that only intoxicated or inhuman person could think of exercising it. In the Vedic age, it was also only a confirmed gambler who would sometimes stake his wife.

Political saturation, as another factor, also issued the position of women in the pre-Buddhist days. It is well known that Buddhism emerged in Northern India in the 6th century B.C. This is an era of vital developments in the political history of India. The society felt a qualitative difference of the emergence of great kingdoms in place of small kingdoms, the destiny of which had been decided by this time. The dynamics of four great kingdoms were predominant at the time of the Buddha. They are Avanti, Vatsa, Kosala and Magadha. Two of these four, that is Kosala and Magadha, had come to the forefront relegating the other two into the background. The outcome of this development was the gradual establishment of political stability in Northern India. The signs had appeared of the authority of an unitary state over entire Northern India during the time of the Buddha itself. The noticeable achievement of this process was the de-escalation of conflicts in the society that had been torn apart under the Tribal, Republican and Monarchical systems. It is not

19 Rig: I. 126.3
20 Mahabharata: V. 86.8
21 Mahabharata: II., 86, 40
22 Ibid: II., 89, 17
said that war disappeared totally under the system of great kingdoms. What it is said is that the perpetual warfare was disturbed by an interval of peace, since the demand for and necessity of war had diminished with the emergence of great kingdoms. There is no doubt that it occurred to a thinker of the caliber of the Buddha, under these circumstances, that the demand existed for man in the old society had to be reviewed and resurveyed.

It should be remembered here that a qualitative change occurred in the economic and productivity spheres too during the time of the Buddha. It should be paid attention to one of the many contributory factors of this change. That is nothing but the use of iron. It is generally believed that iron was introduced to the society in Northern India in the eighth/seventh century B.C. There is evidence in the Pāli Canon and in the Jātaka stories to show that iron was used in mass scale and even in the Buddhist Order in the day of the Buddha. Due to this, gigantic change took place in two fields. They are production of military warfare and agricultural equipments. It seems that iron replaced wood in India for these purpose in the seventh/sixth century B.C.

Therefore, there is no doubt that reorientation and re-evaluation had automatically emerged regarding manly labor need for warfare and essential for agricultural pursuits. The society would have felt the iron axe, rod and manmoty, used for the first time in place of wooden counterparts, and the plough with iron accessories as miracles. Iron was instrumental to a revolutionary change in transportation too. Old carts

23 See: Sattha means knife.
24 See: Ayopatta means iron-bowl.
were invigorated. Ship industry received a new life. There is evidence in the Buddhist literature about a net of trade routes that covered the entire Indian peninsula busy with caravans and the ships that transported goods from India to the rest of the developed world at that time and vice versa.

The result of all this was to challenge the demand that existed for man's labor in ancient India. This brief survey would reveal that an economic and social environment which awakened a thinker of the caliber of the Buddha to reappraise the then existent authority of man with a new approach had dawned in India in the sixth century B.C.  

The ancient Tamils were a hardly martial people, who thought it a disgrace to die a natural death and always courted death in the battlefield. In an old poem of ancient Tamils, it is said that the triple object of their life was war, women and wine and a story typical of the spirit of the ancient Tamils. However, they always compare the son as tiger. The following dialogue is beautiful example to support it. A woman, when asked where her son was, answered:

"I know not where my son is but he will appear, without doubt, in some battlefield, for this (pointing to her abdomen) is the cave that gave birth to that tiger."  

An investigation of the social role of women during the time of the Buddha as well as the pre-Buddhist era in India is paramount to understanding the position of women in Buddhism. Since this aspect is dealt with in detail in various documents on various topics, only a resume

25 Reappraisal of the Position of Women: 5-6
26 Indian Women Through the Age:
which is extremely essential for this thesis is attempted here. Since the fifth and the ninth chapters of the Manusmṛti incorporate the views that had been held on women in India for a long period, one can understand how women were appreciated and evaluated during and before the time of Buddha. The social belief prevalent at the point of time is that by nature woman seduces man in this world. It was declared that woman would never be independent as she is looked after by the parents during childhood, by the husband during youth and by sons during old age.

It was accepted that there is no religious life for women. The Manusmṛti states that women have no sacrifices of their own to perform nor religious rites or observances to follow. Obedience to the husband alone would exalt the women in the heaven. When Māra tells Bhikkhunī Somā, as reported in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, that "no woman with the two finger wisdom which hers, could ever hope to reach those heights which are attained only by the sages," what is reiterated is nothing but the condemnation that the society had towards women during this period.

Since the Manusmṛti was compiled some time after the Buddha's passing away, one can arrive at the wrong conclusion that the above statements elucidate the post-Buddhist position in the Indian society. However, the scrutiny of evidence proves otherwise. There is a reference in the Taitiriya Samhita to the effect that the birth of a boy was celebrated joyously rather than a girl's birth. It is stated there that when a girl was delivered, the midwife kept her aside silently, but if the women had given birth to a boy she lifted him up and showed him to the people.

27 Manu. II. 213
28 Manu: IX. 3
29 Ibid: V. 155
30 S.N: I. 129
31 Taitiriya Brāhmaṇa. VI. 5, 10
Atharva Veda prescribes special mantras to be chanted and rites to be performed for the purpose of obtaining a male child.\textsuperscript{32} According to Aitreya Brāhmaṇa, a son fulfils all the expectations of a family, while a daughter is an extra burden.\textsuperscript{33} It is a known fact that this secondary position bestowed on women was not confined to the Indian societies in the world.

1:2 Women on Religious points of view

The religious factor that could be emphasized here in order to understand the position of women in pre-Buddhist day is the theory of creation accepted as an absolute truth in almost all religions except Buddhism. It is believed that the entire organic and inorganic environment was truly created by an omnipotent God. According to the Christian theology, woman was created from a rib of man. In Hindu theology too, the primordial man, Manu, comes to the sense first. The rest were created next. Accordingly, woman is secondary creation. Therefore she can in no way overcome the authority of man. Her doing so amount to a rejection of the wish of the omnipotent God. This shows that theistic religions cannot theoretically offer equal position to both man and woman. God always appointed, send or named a man as his messenger or representative. Similarly, man is empowered to enjoy ecclesiastical authority and privilege in all theistic religions. It is, therefore, not a matter for us to be surprised when religious freedom, sometimes absolutely and at other times partially, is taboo to women in theistic religions.

\textsuperscript{32} Atharva: III. 23
\textsuperscript{33} Aitreya Brāhmaṇa. VII. 18
The social status of an individual was vitally connected with the place which religion accorded to him in its rites and rituals. Privileges accorded or denied to women by religion will therefore throw valuable light on their position in society.

A.S. Altekar suggested in his book, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization,* as follows:

"In his early history man is seen excluding woman from religious service almost everywhere because he regarded her as unclean, mainly on account of her periodical menstruation. During this period the woman was the object of the greatest dread."34

The first remedy of Āryans must have thought of was to declear the non-Āryan wife to be unfit for association with her Āryan husband in religious rituals after their inter-racial marriage. It is recorded as follows:

"The black non-Āryan wife may be her husband's associate in pleasure, but not in religious rituals."35

The Āryans also regarded the woman was as untouchable during her monthly period as early as the Indo-Iranian age. According to Vendidad, 16 it is known that like the Hidus, the Iranians also used to segregate women during this period and regard them as religiously impure. The Vedic age assigned this temporary impurity of women to their taking over from Indra one third the sin of Brāhmaṇa murder, which he incurred when he had killed Vritra.36 During this period, therefore, Hindu society has been regarding women as extremely impure and temporarily

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34 Women in Hindu: 194
35 Vishnu, ch. 26 & V.D.S., XVIII, 17
36 T.S., II, 5,1, 5-7
untouchable. Yet women have been regarded as impure during the time of confinement also. The phenomenon of menstruation is repeated at the child-birth. It was besides apprehended that evil spirits would be haunting the mother during her confinement on account of their eagerness to kill new-born babies.

On the other hand, according to Vedic thought, maidens and bachelors had no admission to heaven; gods accepted no oblations offered by the unmarried. It was essential to offer the ordained sacrifices to gods for procuring happiness and prosperity both here and hereafter, and they could be properly performed by the husband and the wife officiating together.

The Vedic age held that 'Brahmacarya' discipline and training was as much necessary for girls as it was for boy. It was apprehended that if the most important religious Sanskara of Upanayana was not performed in the case of girls, women would be automatically reduced to the status of Sudras; how then could Brāhmaṇas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas be born of them?

1:3 Modern scholars' point of views

In the modern age the scholars who are interesting the position of women in the particular point of view evaluate by doing proper research study and assume by adding their point of views. It is one of the important factors to the study of the position of women and it should be stated.

37 Women in Hindu: 343
38 A.V.: XI. 5, 18
39 Hārīta. XXI, 20 quoted at Par. Mād., Vol.1 part 2, p. 48
I.B. Horner firstly suggested in her book named "Women under Primitive Buddhism" by quoting a statement of Aitreya Brāhmaṇa which firmly denies polyandry, and clearly refers only to this existence: "for on man have many wives, but one wife has not many husbands at the same time." She, therefore, was, according to the standard of thought at the time, the property of one man only, that although preceding epochs had been slightly relieved by the cult of the mother, they were otherwise depressingly uniform in their branding of women as inferior to men, never to be considered as anything but as a man's property.

According to pre-Buddhist thought, "a woman's plain duty was to become married" recorded by Macdonell and Keith. And this view was denied by I.B. Horner by giving the following suggestion in the Buddhist point of view.

"Although this notion was never entirely superseded, the strength of the idea that to be unmarried was a disgrace in a woman diminished under Buddhism. A woman no longer felt bound to marry to save her self-respect and that of her family, but, on the contrary, found that she could honorably remain unmarried without running the gauntly of public scorn. That a single life was a wasted life, or a life open to scoffs and sneers, became to a great extent an anachronism."

It is added, by diving two classes; Buddhist society and the other society, that among the better classes in Buddhist Indian society, the great

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49 Aitareya Brāhmaṇa. l.i., 23
41 Women Under., 160
43 Women Under. 25
majority of women were supported by children, husband, or father. They did not do much, if any, work beyond their household tasks as mother, wife, or daughter. But among the poorer people the case was different, and there are various records which refer to self-supporting women who were engaged in a trade or a profession in the Pāli Canon.\textsuperscript{44}

I.B. Hornor concluded by taking various observing the position of women during pre-Buddhist day as follows:

"In the pre-Buddhist days the status of women in India was on the whole low and without honor. A daughter was nothing but a source of anxiety to her parents; for it was a disgrace to them and inauspicious as well if they could not marry her; yet, if they could, they were often nearly ruined by their lavish expenditure on the wedding festivities. Nor was she of any ceremonial benefit to her father, for she was powerless to participate in his funeral rites and in cases where these had not already been insured by the birth of a son, distress at the birth of a daughter was almost unmitigated."\textsuperscript{45}

1:4 Buddhists attitude toward Child-marriage

The concept of marriage in ancient India is essential for a woman and it is also tried to focus without looking the age of the bride and it brought out the child-marriage prevalent in the modern age.

In post-Vedic literature and in the earlier codes, there is no insistence on pre-puberty marriage. And as such modern scholars are divided in their

\textsuperscript{44} Women Under: 83
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid: 1
opinion about the antiquity of child-marriage in India. The later law-givers, however, have left on this point that a girl had to be married before she menstruated.

While Manu did not consider post-puberty marriage as sinful, Yajnavalkya was of the opinion that the parents of a girl who did not give her away in marriage before puberty "will be visited by the sin of the destruction of the fetus at every time of her menses."

Yāma, another law-giver, thought that "by beholding a maiden in her menses before marriage her mother, father and her eldest brother: these three go to hell."

According to the law-giver Marichi it is said that "a father who gives in marriage a girl of eight goes to haven, the giver of a girl of nine, Vaikunta; one who gives his daughter in marriage before she attains the age of ten attains the haven of Brahma. But the father of a girl married after puberty goes to hell."

Parasara, the self-styled law-specialist of Kali Yuga, wrote that "if a father fails to give away his daughter in marriage when she has reached the twelfth year, her ancestors drink her menstrual flow every month. The father, mother and eldest brother of a maiden seeing her in her menstrual course, go to hell. The Brahmin, who, blinded by ignorance, marries her, is unfit to converse or dine with; he is the husband of a Sudra woman."\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{46} Indian Women : 224-225
Of the race suicide caused by child-marriage, an eminent modern authority may be quoted.

"Woman was allowed no choice in the selection of her husband, and she was married at an age when she was incapable of understanding the real significance of marriage and exercising her own judgment and discretion. Womanhood was sacrificed at the alter of supposed social convenience and purity, and out of its ashes rose a race of cabined, cribbed and delicate creatures too fragile for the propagation of life, too ethereal to be of any earthly use. With women's degeneration began the degeneration of the people which has continued to the present time with rapid and disastrous acceleration."^47

The Brahma Purana recommended marriage of girls between the age of four and ten; in her eight year a girl was known as Gaurī and this come to be looked upon not only the ideal age of marriage for a girl but also a general rule that marriages of girls in the later Puranica and Dharma Sastra period, were performed between the ages of four and ten, though there were exceptions.

By this time marriage was also made compulsory for a woman without whom she could hope to go to heaven. For a girl, it becomes the equivalent of the Upanayana, initiation for boys and the age of eight was considered the ideal for both marriage for the girl and Upanayana.

As marriage became a religious obligation for the salvation of girls, lawgivers naturally toed the line, and maintained that it was better for parents

^47 Rig Vedic India:
to get their daughters married even to unworthy persons than to let them remain unmarried. As a result economic incentives were freely employed to get unwanted girls married; the lot of defective or deformed girls was particularly pitiable; they were married to persons who were given large dowries but in practically every case the girl was superseded by a more desirable co-wife.  

In the story of Thera Revata, the Dhammapada of Khuddaka Nikāya mentioned the case of child-marriage too. The story took place due to the Buddha, while residing at the Jetavana monastery, uttered with reference to Thera Revata who is the youngest brother of the Chief Disciple Sāriputta and dwelling in the Acacia, Khadira, forest.

Revata is the only one of the brothers and sisters of Sāriputta who had not left home for the homeless life. His parents are very anxious to get him married. Revata is only seven years old when his parents arranged a marriage for him to a young girl and the same age. At the wedding reception, he met an old lady who is one hundred and twenty years old, and he realized that all beings are subject to ageing and decay. So, he ran away from the house and went straight to a monastery, where there are thirty monks. Those monks had been requested earlier by Thera Sāriputta to make his brother a novice if he should come to them. Accordingly he was made a novice and he took a subject of meditation from those monks and left for and acacia forest, thirty yojana away from the monastery. At the end of the Vassa he attained Arahanship.

\[\text{Indian Women: 227}\]
The custom of child-marriage does not appear to have been prevalent for there is little mention of it in the canonical literature. One illuminating reference is found in the Bhikhunīvibhanga where a girl of less than twelve years old, ānādvādasavassā is ordained by the nuns. She is said to be a bride, gihigata which according to commentary, is one who cohabits with a man, purisantaragatā. This case and the rule to which it give rise leave no room for doubt as to the occurrence of child-marriage.

At the same time this incident is recorded far on in the Bhikhunīvibhanga and many possible have been added to the rules at a later date, when the custom had become more usual than it appears to have been in the early days of Buddhism.

In the Dhammapada Commentary instances are recorded of girls who were immured in their parents' house and parents took steps to preserve the reputation of the family. It is said that when the girls reach the age of sixteen "they burn and long for men." Sometime parents feared that before they could bring their daughter the man of their choice, she might elope with some undesirable person, as Paṭācārā did.

The evidence against child-marriage may be adduced from the dictum which is found in the Dhammapada Commentary for this apparently points in the same direction. The great merchant, Ghosaka, who is Sāmāvati's adoptive father, refused to give her to the king at his request, declaring:

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49 Dīp. A: on verse. 102-103
50 Thig. A: on X. vii
"We householders do not give young girls, *mayāṃ gahapatikāṇāma kumārikā....na dema*.

However, finally, he gave his adoptive young girl to the King for fear and agreement of her because they are maltreated and ill-used.\(^{51}\)

Child-marriage also produced a good many other evils. When married at the age of seven or eight, girls had precious little time for education. Initiation into Vedic literature was, of course, prohibited for women from the very early times. But girls in later India had no time for secular education even if they wanted it, not at any rate for learning the art of reading and writing. And as literacy became difficult, the conventions arose and it is made illiteracy holy and knowledge of letters sinful.

In medieval India, feminine literacy was considered the accomplishments of prostitutes and a girl who knows how to read or write was reckoned a menace to society as the art was feared to facilitate intrigue by correspondence with forbidden friends and paramours.

1:5 The Custom of Satī, *Suttee*

The position of the widow in society of the day of the pre-Buddhist age is one of the most important topics that is dealing with the critical study of the position of women in pre-Buddhist days and has to discuss and elucidate. The treatment which she receives, after her husband's death, is often an index to the attitude of society towards women as a class as follows:

\(^{51}\) Dhp. A: on verse, 98
1) Was she allowed to survive her husband, or was she compelled to die with him?
2) If permitted to survive, could she marry again if she so desired?
3) Did she receive a humane and considerate treatment from the family and society?

There are the main topics in connection with the position of the widow. Here we shall take up the second question that is regarding the problems of Sati and the rest will be discussed in the next. Therefore the question of the Sati custom will engage in this context and it will be discussed with a general survey of the position of the widow from age to age.

In prehistoric times there prevailed a belief in several societies that the life and needs of the dead in the next world are more or less similar to those in this life.\(^52\) It therefore became a pious duty of surviving relations to provide a dead person with all the things that he usually needed when alive. Especially when an important personage like a king, a nobleman or a warrior dead, it was felt that his usual paraphernalia should be 'sent' with him. He would of course require his wives, horses and servants in the next world and it would therefore be necessary and desirable to kill these all, and burn or bury them with him.

Such a belief should have given rise to the custom of burning or burying the husband also along with the wife. Man, however, wielded supreme power in society almost everywhere and was not prepared to sanction a custom adverse to his own interest and comfort. In ancient times the

\(^{52}\) Women in Hindu: 115
custom of Satī, the sacrifice of the widow ascending at the funeral of her husband, was widely prevailing.

Although there is no direct evidence to show that it prevailed in the Indo-European age, the fact that it was practiced among the Gauls, the Goths the Norwegians, the Celts, the Slaves and the Thracians would justify the inference that it was probably well established among the Indo-Europeans. It was quite common among the Scythians. In China if a widow killed herself in order to follow her husband to heaven, her corpse was taken out in a great procession.\(^5^3\)

What the general prevalence of this custom is, among the primitive warlike tribes, is not difficult to understand. Fighting races are very jealous of their women and often prefer to kill them rather than take the risk of their going astray after their husbands' death. There was also the general belief, already referred to, that the warrior will require in the next life all those things that were near and dear to him in this existence. It was therefore as reasonable to bury his clothes, bows, arrows and horses as to inter his wife. In fact the wife is usually the dearest relation of a man and the visitations of a chief's ghost were popularly attributed to his desire to be united with his quondam queen. Why not lessen these dreaded visitations by burning or burying her along with his remains? This custom also made the life of the patriarch very safe; it practically eliminated all possibility of any one among his numerous mutually envious wives intriguing against his life. They all knew that even if successful, they had no chance of surviving him. They were, therefore, all care and attention

to see that no preventable accident intervened to shorten the husband's life.

The real reasons for the custom of sacrificing the wife at the husband's death existed among the Ṛṣyaṇs in the Indo-European period. By the time they entered India, it had, however, gone out of vogue. It is not mentioned in the Avesta nor in the funeral hymns of the Rig Veda, where it would certainly have been mentioned if it had been in existence. It is true in the great controversy that raged at the time of the legal prohibition of the Satī custom by Lord William Bentick, it was argued that the custom had a Vedic sanction. It was maintained that the funeral hymn in the Rig Veda refers to widows ascending the funeral pyre.

The case, however, could be rendered plausible only by fraudulently changing the last word of the stanza from 'agre' into 'agneh': the verse in question refers to women with their husbands living coming forward to anoint the corpse before it was consigned to frames, and contains no reference whatsoever to any widow immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre.

A passage in the Aukhya Śākhā of the Samhitā quoted in the 84th 'anuvāka' of the Nārāyaṇīya Taittirīya Upanisad refers to a prayer by a widow to god Fire that she was about to follow the 'anugamana-vrata' or the Satī custom and that she may be able to bear the ordeal and reap the promised reward.

54 Rig: V. x. 18,7  
55 Women in Hindu: 117  
56 Rig: V. x. 18,7  
57 Wilson's Collected Works, II. 295-296
The Nārāyaṇīya-Upanisad is however a late work; the passage from the Aukhya Śākhā quoted in it is otherwise not known to us from any other source. Thus it is not concluded from it that the Sātī custom was recognized as a ritual in the Vedic period.

The Artharva Veda, however, shows that the funeral ritual of the Vedic age preserved some formalities reminiscent of the archaic custom of Sātī. It shows that it was still customary for the widow to lie by the side of her husband's corpse on the funeral prayer; she was, however, asked to come down and a prayer was offered that she should lead a prosperous life enjoying the bliss of children and wealth. It is therefore clear that the Vedic age expected the widow rather to remarry than to immolate herself.

The Mahābhārata recorded only a few case of Sātī. The most important among them is that of Mādrī. But in her case, it is interesting to note that the assembled sages try their best to dissuade her from her resolve. Mādrī, however, is unmoved by their arguments. She says by showing three reasons that she is determined to die with her husband. The first reason is that because she was the cause of his death. The second is because she would be unable to control her passions and the third is because she might find it difficult to treat evenly her sons and stepsons.

In the Mausala-parvan of the Mahābhārata it is stated that four wives of Vasudeva, Devakī, Bhadrī, Rohini and Madirā, ascend his funeral pyre. When the news of Krishṇa's death reaches Hastināpura, five of his wives,

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58 Artharvaveda. Xviii. 2, 1
59 Mahā. I. 138, 71-72
60 Ibid. XVI, 7. 18
Rukumāṇī, Gāndhārī, Sahyā, Haimavatī and Jambavatī ascend the funeral pyre, of course without their husband's body.

Purāṇas refers only a few case of Sati. This shows that the custom was gradually coming into general vogue when Purāṇa were given their present form and it does not prove its antiquity. It is interesting to note that some of the Sati cases in Purāṇa are the imaginary creations of a later age and go against the earlier tradition. Thus the Mahābhārata is unaware of any Yādava widows having burnt themselves on their husband's funeral pyre; according to Padmapurāṇa, however, all of them became Satīs.61

There were, however, several thinkers, who were altogether opposed to the idea of giving even a qualified recognition to the custom of Sati. Thus Medhatithi admits that the custom has been mentioned by Anirvassmrti, but maintains that it has no authoritative value, for it is opposed to an express Vedic text which prohibits suicide to all.62

Virāṭa takes a more decisive stand and positively prohibits the custom. He points out that the widow can do some good to her husband, if she survives and offers him the prescribed oblations at the Srāddha; if she ascends the funeral pyre, she will be only incurring the sin of suicide.63

61 Uttarakanda. Chap: 279
62 Manu: V. 157
63 Quoted by Apararka on Yaj: I. 87
Devaṇabhaṭṭa, a 12th century writer from south India, maintains that the Satī custom is only a very inferior variety of Dharma and is not to be recommended at all.\(^{64}\)

To the poet Bāṇa, during 625 A.D, however, belongs the credit of offering the most vehement, determined and rational opposition to this inhuman custom. He says that to die after one's beloved is most fruitless. It is a custom followed by the foolish. It is a mistake committed under infatuation. It is a reckless course followed only on account of hot haste. It is a mistake of stupendous magnitude. It does no good whatsoever to the dead person. It does not help him in ascending to heaven; it does not prevent him from sinking into hell. It does not at all ensure union after death; the person who has died goes to the place determined by his own Karman, the person who accompanies him on the funeral pyre goes to the hell reserved for those who are guilty of the sin of suicide. On the other hand, by surviving the deceased, one can do much good both to oneself and to the departed by offering prescribed oblations for his happiness in the other world. By dying with him one can do well to neither.\(^{65}\)

It is clear that Bāṇa was struck with horror by the tendency to eulogize the Satī custom, shown in some quarters in his days, and was anxious to offer the most determined opposition to it. It pointed out that woman was the embodiment of Supreme Goddess, and boldly declared that if a person burnt her with her husband, he would be condemned to eternal hell.\(^{66}\)

\(^{64}\) Vyavaharakanda. 598
\(^{65}\) Kadambari. Purvadha. 308
\(^{66}\) Mahanirvanatantra. X. 79-80
Unfortunately this crusade sponsored by wise thinkers failed to have any effect. The custom continued to gain in popularity mainly among fighting classes. The theory of Karman also was modified so as to support the Sātī custom. There was no doubt that normally a relation could not join a dead person in the other world by dying after him, as the Karman of the two persons would lead them to different destinations. The Sātī, however, was an exception; the merit of her self-sacrifice was more than sufficient to annihilate her husband's sins and raise him to heaven to live in eternal union with his wife.

The Sātī was originally a Kshatriya custom. The accounts of the Greek historians make it clear that it was confined only to fighting classes in the 4th century B.C.\(^67\) The Brihaddāvata, while recognizing the validity of the custom among Kshatriyas, doubts whether it could be permissible for other castes to follow it.\(^68\) The Padmapurāṇa extols the custom to the sky, but expressly prohibits it to Brāhmaṇa widow to the funeral pyre, will be guilty of the dreadful sin of the murder of a Brāhmaṇa.\(^69\)

The Buddhist literature also is unaware of the custom of Sātī. If it had existed in the days of the Buddha, one feels certain that the Buddha, who is great Sakya sage, would have started a vehement crusade against it. He, who opposed sacrifices to gods, because dumb animals were immolated therein, would certainly have been exasperated by a custom that entailed the burning of human beings alive. Hence, even in Kshatriya circles the custom was not prevalent in 500 century B.C.

\(^{67}\) Women in Hindu: 128
\(^{68}\) Brihaddāvata. VII. 15
\(^{69}\) Srishtikhandā. 49, 72-73