Chapter – 1

WOMAN IN INDIAN ETHOS

History and literature are complementary to each other. History is a record of facts of past based on sources. The historian in search for the fact is likely to miss the life of the common human being, the impulse and emotion which governed and dominated the feelings of the people living at a particular time. To have a vivid picture of the past, one has to study the literature along with history. Thus, the study of history is incomplete without the study of literature. Literature is a social product and as such it inevitably reflects the life of the era out of which it springs. Literature reflects the spirit of an age as Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales is regarded as the mirror of the Fourteenth century England. It is in the literature of a nation that we find the history of its life and the motives of its deeds. In this connection W.H. Hudson rightly says, "We care for literature on account of its deep and lasting significance. A great book grows directly out of life; in reading it, we are brought into large, close and fresh relation with life and in that fact lays final explanation of its power. Literature is the vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about different aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language."1 Language is the main vehicle

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of literature. Literature is absolutely language based and language being a cultural phenomenon; it is all but wholly contained by its local and the socio-historical forces that are in operation through ages in the particular locale.\textsuperscript{2} Literature expresses the immediate hopes and aspirations of society, of down trodden and the destitute. It has also the power to shape and mould the spirit of an age according to its new ideals. The writings of Rousseau kindled the flame of the French Revolution which in its turn stirred the minds of the people with the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

On the other side to understand the literature of a period the knowledge of history is required. For example if a person wants to study Shakespeare’s drama 'King Lear', he/she has to understand the Renaissance. So the study of literature is essential for the better understanding of history and vice-versa. This is as true of devotional literature as of literatures any other form. Devotional literature contains 'the religious writings that are neither doctrinal nor theological, but designed for individuals to read for their personal edification and spiritual formation.'\textsuperscript{3} Devotional writers do not particularly write on material matters yet they are the product of the society, they give valuable information about the life of their age. For example the writings of Guru Nanak Dev enshrine the spirit of the Fifteenth century India as the writings of Martin Luthar reflects the

\textsuperscript{2} Satinder Singh, ed., Comparative Indian Literature, Punjabi Adhiyan School, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1990, p. 43.

spirit of Europe during the same period. Viewed thus, literature becomes a source of history. The scope of history is too vast, not only confined to past politics; it touches almost every domain of human life. Study of the literature of a period may also help to explore some important facts which still remain unexplored due to the absence of historical sources. It is in accordance with these views of literature that the study of the Bhakti period devotional literature (Guru Granth Sahib and Contemporaneous Braj literature) has been undertaken to analyse the condition of woman during the period under study. Guru Granth Sahib and Braj literature belong to the two different categories of Bhakti i.e. 'Nirguna' and 'Saguna'. This work is an attempt to compare these two categories of Bhakti to have a comprehensive idea about the condition of woman during the period under study. But before taking this task it will be useful to trace the general condition of woman in Ancient Indian ethos through available sources.

In the pre-Aryan India a mother dominated (matriarchal) social system was prevalent. E.B. Havell writes that the pre-Aryan social structure was different from the Aryan, "In being matriarchal instead of patriarchal. Their mothers and children formed the nucleus of the settled society. They could never realize the Fatherhood of God; the Earth Mother embodied all their ideals of the Divine India were their mother, not their father."\(^4\) This is also evident from the Sankhya Shastra which is a pre-Aryan work. Its antiquity is obvious when one

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finds that it is mentioned even in *Rigveda*. In the basic postulates of *Sankhya, Prakriti* is at the forefront and though the *Purusha* is also there, all the strings of creation and desolation are in the hands of *Prakriti*. Paul Thomas, an Indian scholar invokes archaeological evidence in support of the conjecture that the pre-Aryan civilization was woman centered. Many figures of goddesses discovered in the archaeological finds of *Harappa* and *Mohan-jo-daro* suggests that the popular deities of the Pantheon were predominantly feminine and that the society was matriarchal. He writes, "The importance of mother-worship in religion, the abundance of female figurines with rich ornaments, the comparatively lesser importance given to males, would all indicate that society in Ancient Indus Valley was more favourable to women than to men; it was possibly a matriarchate of the type of Ancient Egypt." The status of woman was very high in all walks of life at that time. As no socio-religious role or power was assigned to *Purusha*, apart from cohabiting with the female-*Prakriti* for procreation.

The earliest known literary compositions of the Indo-Aryans are the hymns of the *Rigveda*. There are many indications in Vedic literature which goes to prove that Vedic Aryans were patriarchal,

9 Jodh Singh, "Gender Discrimination and Sikh Ethos", p. 29.
and a man had almost absolute power over his wife and children.\textsuperscript{11} Why Vedic Aryans were patriarchal? To quote R.P. Sharma’s words, “Scarcity of food and the daily cycle of hardships may have turned the early Aryans into professional hunters and food gatherers... They could not afford to be non-violent and vegetarian. Besides, their surroundings may have compelled them to keep their women and children inside the caves. They had to be protected from wild beasts and the hazards of nature. They could not be allowed to accompany men on hunting expeditions. Circumstances like these may have made it expedient for adult males to assume the role of Providers and Protectors of their women and children. It was no linguistic accident that the Vedic word for 'husband' and 'brother' came to mean, 'the protector' (\textit{Bharta/Bhrata}) and that for 'wife' and 'sister', the Protected (\textit{Bharya/Bhagini}).\textsuperscript{12} Thus Rigvedic gods were full-blooded martial male deities who helped them in their campaigns, confounded their enemies, protected their fields and cattle and were generally worshipped for enhancing their welfare.\textsuperscript{13} In spite of male dominance, woman as wife and mother was esteemed. Indeed, it may be argued that Vedic religion had an appreciation of both femininity and complementarily between husband and wife, albeit within a patriarchal structure.\textsuperscript{14}

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\textsuperscript{11} Paul Thomas, \textit{Indian Women through the Ages}, p. 50. \\
\textsuperscript{12} R.P. Sharma, \textit{Woman in Hindu Literature}, pp. 14-15. \\
\textsuperscript{13} Paul Thomas, \textit{Indian Women through the Ages}, p. 40. \\
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Ordinarily girls were less welcomed than boys as one finds a very frequent longing for a male child in the *Rigveda*: "May we possess a family of males."\(^{15}\) It is surprising, however, that no desire for the birth of a daughter is ever expressed in the entire range of the *Rigveda*.\(^{16}\) The *Atharvaveda* leaves no doubt that son was preferred to daughters.\(^{17}\) But it must be added that it did not lead to female infanticide during this period.\(^{18}\) Once the temporary feeling of disappointment was over, the family took keen interest in the daughter as it did in the son. The young girl was called by the name *Duhitri* indicating her principal duty in the Vedic family; namely, milking the cow.\(^{19}\) Her name is also interpreted as the potential nourishes of a child.\(^{20}\) Thus milking the cow and preparing clarified butter and curds seem to have been her chief concern. She had to perform other duties as well like working for the spinsters, weaving cloth and embroidering garments. They brought water in jars from wells and watched the standing crops in fields.\(^{21}\)

Girls were educated like boys. It appears that in Vedic period women were on an equal footing with men in the matter of receiving the knowledge of the sacred literature.\(^{22}\) They had free access to

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educational opportunities and discrimination in education on the basis of sex was unknown. *Upanayanam* was common to boys and girls. There were women who continued studies throughout their lifetime, they were known as *'Brahmavadinis'*.\(^{23}\) Name of twenty three *Brahmavadinis* are found in *Rigveda*. Some famous are *Gargi, Romasa, Ghosha, Lopamudra, Apala, Atreyi, Indrani, Vak* and *Godha*.\(^ {24}\)

Child-marriage was unknown during this period.\(^ {25}\) A maiden according to the *Atharvaveda* after completing her *Brahmacharya* only, is entitled to marry a husband.\(^{26}\) Educated brides of this age had an effective voice in the selection of their partners in life.

The *Rigveda* does not give detailed account of the forms of marriage prevalent at that time, but there are indications in the hymns, of *Swayamvara*, marriage by capture and contract marriage.\(^ {27}\) In some marriages love played an important role; there is a mention in the *Rigveda* of festival like the *Samana* to which young women went well adorned with ornaments and bright garments and possibly met eligible young men; many marriage negotiations might have started from here.\(^{28}\) Religious and sacramental conception of marriage was present.\(^ {29}\) The purpose of marriage was to procreate children and


\(^{24}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{25}\) S. Vats Shakuntala Mudgal, *Women and Society in Ancient India*, p. 159.


\(^{27}\) Paul Thomas, *Indian Women through the Ages*, pp. 51-52.

\(^{28}\) *Ibid.*

perpetuate the race. Monogamy seems to be the general rule. Polygamy was limited to the aristocratic families only. Polyandry too seems to have existed in Rigvedic times. The twin Asvins (Gods of Medicine in India) had a common wife in Surya; Rodasi is mentioned as a lady attended by numerous husbands in the form of the Maruts (storm gods).

Seclusion of women was absolutely unknown. In social and religious gatherings they occupied a prominent position. No religious and social work was considered to be completed without the active support of one’s wife. A.S. Altekar observes that her presence and cooperation was absolutely necessary in religious rites and ceremonies. To quote him, "The wife used to pound the sacrificial rice, give bath to the animal that was to be immolated... Women’s participation in Vedic sacrifices was thus a real and not a formal one; they enjoyed the same religious privileges as their husbands."

If a wife had the misfortune to be widowed, she had to ascend her husband’s funeral pyre. The Sati custom was not in vogue at all. The remarriage of a widow to the younger brother of her husband was a very common practice. This is evident from a Rigveda hymn read along with one in Atharvaveda, according to which immediately after

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30 B.S. Upadhyaya, Women in Rgveda, p. 93.
32 Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, p. 52.
33 B.S. Upadhyaya, Women in Rgveda, p. 48.
36 Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, p. 49.
the death of husband, the wife, lying by his side on the funeral
ground, was raised by his brother and led back home to become his
wife. Even when she was not actually married to the brother, the
latter was expected to raise issues to her in Niyoga.

Niyoga is the custom of the young widow allying herself with the
younger brother of her husband for the sake of progeny (son). In the
absence of brother-in-law, she can get offspring’s by cohabiting with a
Sapinda or a Sagotra relation. The practice of Niyoga known as
Levirate was prevalent even among Ancient Greeks and Romans.

Mother was an object of great honour at that time. In the Vedic
hymns mother is called Matri. Whenever she is spoken of along with
father her name begins the compound i.e. matara-pitara.

Illegitimacy is as old as the Rigveda which is indicated in some
hymns. Considerable stigma was attached to illegitimate children and
one comes across references in the Rigveda of the exposure of
infants. A famous hymn in the Rigveda seems to indicate that
marriage between a brother and a sister was not regarded with favour,
though not altogether unknown. There are clear references in Vedic
literature to a state of promiscuity in Ancient Indian society. Even the
Vedic gods such as Pusun and Prajapat are known to have had

37 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
38 M.A. Indra, The Status of Women in Ancient India, p. 112.
39 Clarisse Bader, Women in Ancient India, p. 52.
40 B.S. Upadhyaya, Women in Rgveda, pp. 150-51.
41 Ibid., p. 198.
42 S. Vats Shakuntala Mudgal, Women and Society in Ancient India, p. 40.
incestuous relationships with sisters, mothers and daughters. The main disability from which woman suffered in this age was proprietary one. She could not hold or inherit property.

There are some denunciated hymns in Vedic literature which held women not only in disrespect but even in positive hatred:

"With women there can be no lasting friendship; hearts of hyenas are the hearts of women."

or

"Women have a fickle mind, women can be easily won over by one who is handsome and can sing and dance well."

Thus it can be said that the position of woman seems to have deteriorated considerably by the Rigvedic times when compared with earlier age.

Coming to the later-Vedic period in Indian literature, one get a clear picture of Indo-Aryan social life and condition of woman from the Brahmanas, the Upanishads and the Grihya Sutras. The changes which took place during this period in the position of women were gradual. The desire for a male issue was as strong as before. At that period this belief was established that sons alone were competent to

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46 B.S. Upadhyaya, Women in Rgveda, p. 159.
48 Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, p. 54.
redeem their parents from hell and daughters were incapable of performing this spiritual function.\textsuperscript{49} A passage in the \textit{Aitareya Brahmana} says that while the son is the hope of the family, the daughter is a source of trouble to it.\textsuperscript{50} Elaborate ceremonies began to develop during that period for ensuring the birth of sons.\textsuperscript{51} Though sons were generally preferred, the desirability of having learned daughter was not entirely lost sight off, yet the \textit{Brihadaranyaka Upanishad} mentions a ritual by which a person prays for the birth of a daughter who should be a \textit{Pandita} or learned lady.\textsuperscript{52}

In the higher section of society the girls used to go through a course of education. There was, however, a gradual decline in female education as the period advanced.\textsuperscript{53} Child marriage had not come into vogue by the \textit{Grihya Sutra} period. Further, some \textit{Sutras} make provisions for the girl being in her menstrual period at the time of marriage. The marriageable age for the bride continued to be about sixteen.\textsuperscript{54} Marriage ceremony was made more elaborate by adding new rites and rituals i.e. introducing the fire as a witness in the marriage ceremony and other rituals the \textit{Pani-grahana} and \textit{Saptapadi} – seven steps or rounds together.\textsuperscript{55}

In the \textit{Grihya Sutras}, first time, a definite classification of different forms of marriage was given. \textit{Asvalayana} classified them into

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} S. Vats Shakuntala Mudgal, \textit{Women and Society in Ancient India}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{51} Paul Thomas, \textit{Indian Women through the Ages}, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{52} S. Vats Shakuntala Mudgal, \textit{Women and Society in Ancient India}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 341.
\textsuperscript{55} Paul Thomas, \textit{Indian Women through the Ages}, pp. 66-68.
eight and this classification has been followed by other Sutra writers as well as the authors of the epics and law codes. These eight forms of marriage were Brahma; Daiva; Prajapatiya; Arsha; Gandharva; Asura; Paisacha and Rakshasa.\textsuperscript{56}

In the Brahma form the father carefully selected the son-in-law and married his daughter to him according to proper religious rites. In Daiva form a daughter was offered in marriage to an officiating priest by the sacrifices. In Prajapatya form the bride was given away by a guardian instead of father. In Arsha form the father of the bride was permitted to accept a pair of cattle, a cow and a bull from his son-in-law for facilitating the performance of sacrifices. Gandharva was a love marriage. Asura was bride purchase. Paisacha was drugging and raping of bride. Rakshasa was marriage by capture.\textsuperscript{57}

The birth of a son became necessity at that time. For this, it became obligatory for a man to marry again and raise sons if first wife failed to give birth to a son. Thus the practice of polygamy seems to have planted itself more firmly.

Sati custom was altogether rare and widow had the option of remarriage. Grihya sutras, which describe in detail the important ceremonies of domestic life including the cremation ceremony, are silent about it.\textsuperscript{58}

Their proprietary rights continued to be unrecognized, the only exception being in favour of marriage gifts of moveable property

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 62.
\textsuperscript{57} A.S. Altekar, The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization, pp. 37 to 47.
\textsuperscript{58} S. Vats Shakuntala Mudgal, Women and Society in Ancient India, p. 175.
(Istridhan). In the Satapatha Brahmana it is mentioned that a disobedient wife is enjoined to be taught obedience by physical force. The Maitrayani Samhita places woman on par with dice and drink, and describe her as one of the major evils in society.

Thereafter the decline in the status of women started when the grip of priest class (Brahmans) became more and more strong on society with the writings of many Smritis and Purans. Many of the religious ceremonies earlier performed by woman then were shifted to the priests (Brahmans). The sentiments of ‘Suchi’ and ‘Asuchi’ came into existence. A woman was began to be considered generally ‘Asuchi’ (impure) and particularly so during their menstrual periods, pregnancy and child birth. She was not eligible to perform religious acts like Homas during this period.

Among the Smritis, Manu Smriti is the most important. Manu is emphatically in favour of marrying girls at a tender age. He states that a man aged thirty years shall marry a maiden of twelve or a man of twenty-four a girl of eight years of age. 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 foetus at every time of her menses."

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60 Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, p. 58.
62 V. Janapathy, Indian Woman through the Ages, p. 55.
63 Ibid.
64 Manu Smriti IX cited from M.A. Indra, The Status of Women in Ancient India, p. 94.
65 Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, pp. 224-25.
By this time marriage was also made compulsory for a woman without whom she could not hope to go to heaven. For a girl, it became equivalent to the *Upanayanam* for boys, and the age of eight was considered ideal for both, marriage (for the girl) and *Upanayanam* (for the boys). Because of early marriage in that period the girl students almost seemed to have disappeared. One does not come across such a word as *Brahmavadinis* anywhere in the codes of *Manu* and *Yajnavalkya*. The woman was considered incompetent to study Vedic lore. This in competency of woman reduced her to an inferior status of *Shudra*, who was also debarred from performing any sacrificial act. This is the reason why in numerous metrical texts of the *Smritis* and *Epics Istri* and *Shudra* are generally classed together in one category.

After marriage, the husband’s family often looked on her as a dangerous figure, a temptress, until she bore her first child, preferably a son, after which she was safe.

The practice of polygamy was treated as a privilege reserved for the twice born classes in the time of Manu. And in this regard *Brahman* was considered as the most fortunate who could keep as many as four wives. Likewise a *Kshatriya* could marry three wives. Similarly a *Vaishya* was entitled to two wives. A *Shudra* was allowed one wife only.

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68 Katherine K. Young, "Hinduism", p. 81.
The subjugation of woman started in the *Smriti* period. *Manu* and *Yajnavalkya* prescribed a subordinate social role to woman. *Manu* stated, "In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband; when her lord is dead to her son; a woman must never be independent." The same idea has been developed by *Yajnavalkya*. He advised men, never to entrust three things to the control of others i.e., riches, books and women, for he added, they are spoiled and defiled by them.71

*Manu* is of the view that the main duty of wife is to serve her husband because with the service of the husband she can get salvation. He says, "There is no sacrifice, pious practice, or fast which concerns women in particular; she must cherish and respect her husband and then will she be honoured in heaven."72

*Manu* and *Yajnavalkya* discouraged the act of self immolation (*Sati*) by equating it with suicide. The legislator commands the wife whom death had deprived of her support not to contract new ties. *Manu's* objection to widow remarriage was that a gift could be given away only once.73 He submitted widow to an ascetic life, whereby through prayer and penitence she might rejoin her husband whom she had lost.74 He approved divorce under certain condition, "A barren wife may be superseded in the 8th year, she whose children all dies in

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the 4th year, she who bears only daughter in the 11th year, but she who is quarrel-some without delay.75

He raised the status of mother above the father. He said, "A mother is more to be revered than a thousand fathers."76 Thus it may be said that Manu has assigned to woman a dependent though not a dishonourable status in society.77

The position of woman was improved in the sphere of proprietary rights in this period as Manu advocated that the widow should be recognised as an heir to her husband's property.78

The great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, which are also a source representing the socio-religious life of India, the North India particularly. In these epics detailed account about the position of women in society is available. The birth of a female child, no doubt, was less welcomed than that of the male, but it did not lead to female infanticide. Some parents who desired daughter but were not so blessed sometimes adopted daughters.79 Sita, Kunti, Sakuntala and Parmadvara all were adopted daughters.80 A maiden was not only an object of affection at home but also considered an auspicious creature whose presence was required on ceremonious occasions. They were

75 Ibid., p. 60.
76 Ibid., p. 63.
80 Ibid., p. 34.
presented at the coronation of Rama. Moreover, the brotherless daughter was known as 'Putrikadharmini' which meant that her son was to inherit his maternal grandfather's property and perform his funeral rites.

Education in the wider sense was denied to a girl.\textsuperscript{81} Child-marriage was prevalent. \textit{Mahabharta} says, "A person of thirty years of age should marry a girl of ten years of age – or a person of one and twenty years of age should marry a girl of seven years of age."\textsuperscript{82} One of the main reasons for child-marriage, advocated by later law-givers, was that the fertile period of a woman should not be wasted. \textit{Sita} appears to have been married at the tender age of six.\textsuperscript{83} In the case of marriage, a girl to some extent had freedom to select her life partner as the \textit{Swayamvara} form of marriage was very popular.\textsuperscript{84} The husband was not only a friend, but an ideal, preceptor and God of the wife. She has to worship him with single-minded devotion. It was the belief that through the services rendered to the husband a \textit{Pativrata} attained the highest heaven.\textsuperscript{85}

The practice of polygamy had been very widely prevalent in the epic period. The motive behind this practice at that time was not religious. A man, if only he had a desire, could marry another wife without being subject to any social opprobrium. Two wives had been

\textsuperscript{81} V. Janapathy, \textit{Indian Woman through the Ages}, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{82} Mahabharta, Anushasan Parva, Ch. 44, cited from Paul Thomas, \textit{Indian Women through the Ages}, p. 164.
\textsuperscript{83} M.A. Indra, \textit{The Status of Women in Ancient India}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{84} Paul Thomas, \textit{Indian Women through the Ages}, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{85} Mahabharta III, cited from Shakambari Jayal, \textit{The Status of Women in the Epics}, p. 41.
married to Pandu; Kunti and Madri. Arjuna married Draupadi, Subhadra, Ulupi and Uttara.

Polyandry, a custom by which a woman is taken as a common wife by a number of men, rarely prevailed. The only classical instance is given by the Mahabharata in which the five Pandava brothers had a common wife-Draupadi. This marriage took place only to save the mother Kunti from untruth because she had commanded her sons by saying, "Enjoy all of you, that which you have obtained."

Intercaste marriage had also taken place as Bhim an Aryan prince married a Rakshasi, the non Aryan and a son was born from this marriage.

The earliest reference to the practice of Purdah was found in the Mahabharata. It was prevalent among the women of royal families. When Draupadi was dragged to Hastinapura from Indraprastha by Dussasana, it was lamented, 'as being a high born lady, she was not seen by the sun and the wind'.

At that period, prostitution had also been allowed to creep into society which is proved from the description of royal families and processions to war. The camp-followers in the army of Duryodhana included 'merchants', spies and prostitutes.

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86 Clarisse Bader, Women in Ancient India, p. 227.
88 Clarisse Bader, Women in Ancient India, p. 238.
89 Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, p. 156.
Sati custom was prevalent during that period. The Mahabharata gave two instances of Sati. Madri immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her husband Pandu.\(^{91}\) The four wives of Vasudeva namely Devaki, Bhadra, Rohini and Madira burnt themselves with the body of their husband.\(^{92}\) The attitude of Mahabharata towards Sati was, more or less, neutral. There was no condemnation and no undue praise showed to Sati. If any widow loved her husband so well that she thought it was impossible to live after him, she could follow her husband, but it was neither compulsory nor even generally recommended. However it appears that it was confined to certain royal clans at that time.\(^{93}\)

Widow-remarriage and divorce were becoming unpopular among the Indo-Aryans, but the need for sons remained paramount. Hence Niyoga began to be widely practised as a legitimate method of procuring sons for dead men.\(^{94}\)

The epics prescribed a conduct of veneration and respect towards mother. She was considered the creator, nourisher, educator and the greatest preceptor of her child and thus of her race and society. Of the two parents, the mother's role was greater and more significant. Mother is placed higher than the preceptor, father and even higher than the whole earth. There was no preceptor like her. She was infact the highest preceptor.\(^{95}\) In Mahabharata a parallel

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92 A.S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, p. 120.
between mother and earth has been often drawn because of the fact that the earth suffers without protest when ploughed, it instead provides life-giving corn to nourish people. So does the mother who nourishes and sustain children while she herself may be undergoing unspeakable sufferings.96

The religious rights of woman were curtailed. Impurity imposed upon the woman, lack of education, admission of non-Aryan woman into Aryan families, may all have been responsible for her exclusion from the Vedic sacrificial religion.

In epic literature a large number of derogatory couplets are founded regarding woman. The Mahabharta is more outspoken in condemning woman ruthlessly and holding her sex in utter disrespect and infamy. It is stated that there is nothing that is more sinful than woman. Verily women are the roots of all evils.97 Even the Ramayana does not entertain very high regard to the women. They are said to be creature of illusion, devoid of religion, fickle, crooked and frightful as Kṛtya power, which brings destruction.98

The Buddhist canonical literature provided the information regarding the views of Buddha towards woman. The Jataka books, the Milindapanha and the Vinayapitaka, particularly the portions of it known as the Bhikkhuni – Khandhaka (that is the tenth and last Khandhaka of the Cullavagga) and the Bhikkhuni – Vibhanga.

96 Ibid., p. 148.
Buddha initially objected to instituting an order of nuns but was finally persuaded by his disciple Ananda.\textsuperscript{99} It was on the initiative taken by women themselves that Buddha had to concede religious liberty to them. It is narrated in the text of Cullavagga, which is second book of Vinaya-Pitaka, that Gautama’s foster-mother Mahaprajapati, begged to be admitted into the Sangha but he refused, then she approached Ananda to intercede on her behalf. She had came on foot all the way from Kapilavastu to Vashali, where Buddha was staying at that time and Ananda seeing her swollen feet, weary and distressed, pleaded on her behalf. Buddha turned down Ananda’s proposal to find an order of nuns.\textsuperscript{100} Then Ananda asked the master,

"Are women, Lord, capable when they have gone forth from the household life and entered discipline proclaimed by the Blessed one? Are they capable of realising the fruit of conversion, or of the second path, or of the third path or of Arhantship?"\textsuperscript{101} Buddha replied, "They are capable, Ananda."\textsuperscript{102}

Buddha’s acceptance of capability of woman and Gautami’s service prepared a ground for the admission of women into Sangha. But Buddha’s permission to woman was conditional. It placed nuns under a more rigorous discipline than monks. He demanded from

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 32.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
them strict observing of *Atthagurudhamma* (the Eight Chief Rules).\textsuperscript{103} Some of the restrictions placed upon the nuns were no doubt reasonable ones; thus it was laid down that they should avoid the company of men with doubtful character; that only monks of unquestioned purity and integrity should be allowed to preach nuns; that they should always live together in groups of two and three etc. Some other rules, however, betray a lack of confidence in the character and judgement of woman. First rule among these lays down that a nun, though 100 years old, must stand in reverence before a monk, though he may have been just initiated in the *Sangha*.\textsuperscript{104}

Further an Almswoman’s (*Bhikshuni*) position is shown to be different from an Almsman’s (*Bhikshu*), not only in degree but also in kind.\textsuperscript{105} It is said in *Milindapanha* that an Almswoman cannot create a schism in the order but only an Almsman.\textsuperscript{106} The Almswoman neither preach to the Almsmen nor to the other Almswomen but only to the laity. It is said that a woman can neither be a *Buddha* nor a universal Monarch. It makes a thorough denial of the potency of women to rise to the pinnacle in any of the realms.\textsuperscript{107} *Buddha* is of the view that the entry of women into *Sangha* will soon harm it. He says, “If, *Ananda*, Women had not received permission to enter the order, the pure

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{103} I.B. Horner, *Woman Under Primitive Buddhism*, Oriental Publishers, Delhi, 1975, p. 118.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 119.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p. 290.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Ibid., p. 291.
\end{itemize}
religion would have lasted long, the good law would have stood fast a thousand years. But since they have received that permission it will now stand only for five hundred years..."\textsuperscript{108}

After Buddha's permission for admission of women into his Sangha, their status elevated tremendously.\textsuperscript{109} The birth of a female child was not attended with great sorrow and encumbrance, as it was done before. In the Jatakas two persons named Brahmadatta\textsuperscript{110} and Kasiraja\textsuperscript{111} and a Brahman woman\textsuperscript{112} all are recorded to have put up a prayer for either a son or a daughter. Gautama himself admonishes the King Pasenadi of Kosala for his sorrow that the queen Mallika had given birth to a daughter. Buddha upholding the honour of womanhood uttered the following weighty remarks, "A woman – child, O Lord of men, may prove even a better offspring than a male."\textsuperscript{113}

Contrary to all previous legal tenets of Dharma Shastras, the Buddhist canons hold that the adoption of a daughter is quite valid. This is a remarkable innovation. For the first time in the Indian devotional literature the female children were given such a creditable position.\textsuperscript{114} The Buddhist period does not lack the instances of the adoption of daughters. Samavati was adopted by the householder

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{108} Paul Thomas, \emph{Indian Women through the Ages}, p. 82, also see Harcharan Singh Sobti, "Image of Women as Reflected in Jatakas", p. 35.
\textsuperscript{109} M.A. Indra, \emph{The Status of Women in Ancient India}, p. 215.
\textsuperscript{110} Jataka, 521 cited from I.B. Horner, \emph{Woman Under Primitive Buddhism}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{111} Jataka, 538, \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{112} Jataka, 509, \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{113} Samyutta Nikaya cited from I.B. Horner, \emph{Woman Under Primitive Buddhism}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{114} M.A. Indra, \emph{The Status of Women in Ancient India}, p. 186.
\end{footnotes}
Mitta.\textsuperscript{115} Buddha did not subscribe to the prevailing Brahmanic view that a son was indispensable for man's salvation.\textsuperscript{116}

There are no records of female infanticide in Buddhist literature because of the influence of the doctrine of non-violence (Ahinsa). Female education was given great importance among the ladies in commercial and aristocratic families. Some educated ladies figured amongst the Buddha's chief disciples. These were Queen Khema, Dharampala, Gutta and Anopama.\textsuperscript{117} Some of them like Sanghamitra, the daughter of Ashoka, even went to foreign countries to spread the gospel of Buddha.

The custom of child-marriage did not appear to have been prevalent, for there was little mention of it in the canonical literature. The cause for abstaining from marrying daughters at a tender age was given by the merchant Goshaka, the father of Samavati, in an answer to a king who asked for the hand of the former's daughter. Replying in the negative, even to the monarch, he says, "We householders do not give young girls for fear that they are maltreated and ill used."\textsuperscript{118} No age was prescribed as the correct marriageable age, but girls probably got married between the age of sixteen and twenty. Visakha, for example, was married when she was sixteen.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} I.B. Horner, Woman Under Primitive Buddhism, p. 23, also see Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{117} I.B. Horner, Woman Under Primitive Buddhism, p. 104.
\textsuperscript{118} M.A. Indra, The Status of Women in Ancient India, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{119} I.B. Horner, Woman Under Primitive Buddhism, p. 28.
Buddha did not consider marriage as an inviolable sacrament. A woman was not felt bound to marry to save her self-respect and that of her family, but, on the contrary, she found that she could honourably remain unmarried. He maintained that celibacy was superior to sex life. He treated marriage as the greatest impediment to all nobler and sublime pursuits. His definite view was that a married life was full of hindrances and defiled by passions. Buddha himself, a year after his marriage, renounced the world and lived a strictly celibate life.

From a reading of Pali classics, it is clear that monogamy prevailed at that time. The practice of polygamy was prevalent only among aristocracy. King Pasenadi had five wives: Mallika, Vasabha, Ubbiri, Soma and Sakutla. King Udena has Samavati as his chief consort and two other Vasuladatta and Magandiya as his junior wives. Bimbisara is also mentioned to have two wives, one Khema and the other Chellana.

There is only one reference to the practice of polyandry in the Jatakas. Princess Kanha is said to have had five husbands at the same time.

Buddhism also checked the spread of Purdah which is prevailed in some royal households. There is a legend which purports to say that Yasodhara, the wife of Buddha; appeared unveiled in public and

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120 Ibid., p. 25.
122 Ibid.
when criticised by some elders proudly told them that a woman's modesty was not to be preserved by the veil but by her own will power.\footnote{124}{Paul Thomas, \textit{Indian Women through the Ages}, p. 98.}

Viewed in the light of canonical literature it becomes clear that widow burning (\textit{Sati}) was not practised. It appears from the scriptural data that widows went unabashed in the Buddhist ages. If they chose to stay at home, no severe austerities were imposed upon them against their will. Moreover, they had the right to inherit property.\footnote{125}{I.B. Horner, \textit{Woman Under Primitive Buddhism}, p. 75.} But widow remarriage was not very popular.\footnote{126}{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 77.}

As a mother she was honoured and revered. Her importance was insisted upon again and again. It is stated in \textit{Jataka}, "A mother like a sire should be reverend with honour crowned."\footnote{127}{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 9.}

\textit{Buddha} never hinted that woman had not the same chance as man or was in any way unfitted by her nature to attain \textit{Nirvana}. The way of salvation was open to woman. He was of the view that the unending bliss of \textit{Nirvana} was not monopoly of any particular class and sex. Any human being could aspire to it and could endeavour for its attainment. The sex distinction evaporated on the path of spirituality.\footnote{128}{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 104.}

Jain texts were mostly written by monks who believed in the superiority of the celibate life to that of the married life. They considered woman, as the temptress who perpetuated miserable
life. She is called 'Nari' (Na-ari) because there was no worse enemy for man than she; she is Mahila because she charms by her wiles and graces; she is called Padma because she accelerates a man's passion; she is called Mahitiya because she creates dissention; she is Rama because she delights in coquetry; she is called Angana because she loves the Anga or body of men; she is Josiya because by her tricks she keeps men under subjection; she is Vanita because she caters to the taste of men with her various blandishments.

From the time of Parasvanath up till now, women have been admitted to the religious order of nuns. There is however some difference of opinion between the Digambaras and Swetambaras about their title to liberation. Digambaras hold the view that there is no Nirvana for women. The crucial point in the development of faith reached when woman also sought permission to enter into it. Uttara, the sister of Shivabhuti was the first to raise the question. The solution was very difficult. How could the teacher allow women to go naked? It was impossible conception, Shivabhuti, therefore, refused her admission and declared, "No woman attain Moksha without rebirth as a man." On the other side Swetambaras maintain that a woman can attain salvation. This sect is of the view that there is no harm to the soul by the wearing of white garments.

130 Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, pp. 110-11.
In Jain literature there is much information preserved which throws light on the general condition of woman in society at that time. In this literature four types of marriage were approved namely marriages arranged by parents; Swayamvara; Gandharva and Asura. It does not appear to have approved the Rakshasa and Paisacha forms of marriage recognised by the Grihya Sutras. Monogamy was the general rule, but Kings and nobles were polygons and had harmes of considerable size. Some sort of Purdah was observed by the ladies of the royal clans. Trisala, mother of Mahavira, is said to have listened to the interpretation of her dreams, foretelling the birth of her illustrious son, by sitting behind a curtain. At that time Sati does not appear to have been prevalent in India at large extent, but later Jain texts mention it. The Jain law is more liberal with regard to the status of widow than the Hindu law. The great divergence between the Hindu and the Jain law lies in the point that according to the Mitakshara, it is the son who is the direct heir to his deceased father in preference to his widowed mother. In the Jain law, it is the widow who has a claim to property over the son. According to the Vardhaman Niti, "If a lady is good, she shall become the owner of all the property of her husband, whether there is a son or

132 S. Vats Shakuntala Mudgal, Women and Society in Ancient India, p. 239.
133 Ibid.
134 Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, p. 113.
135 S. Vats Shakuntala Mudgal, Women and Society in Ancient India, pp. 240-41, also see Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, p. 110.
136 M.A. Indra, The Status of Women in Ancient India, p.266.
not, she shall have full powers like her husband."\textsuperscript{137} *Arhan Niti* makes the point still more clear by declaring that on the death of husband, his wife succeeds his estate, and in the absence of his wife, his son.\textsuperscript{138} Mother was held in great esteem. *Trisala*, mother of *Mahavira*, was given the highest place in *Jain* literature.

*Yogic* literature like Buddhism and Jainism, also stressed the need of renouncing worldly life and woman for the attainment of salvation. *Yogis* used derogatory words for woman in their writings. *Yogi Gorakh Nath* called woman *Baghani*, a she-wolf who robbed man of his youthful *vigour*.\textsuperscript{139} They take vow to remain celibates forever. But reports from various areas show that marriage is common among *Yogis*. Married Yogis were called *Bindi-nagi, Samjogi* and *Grhasta*.\textsuperscript{140} Among *Yogis* marriage was usually at an early age, widow remarriage was allowed, polygamy was practiced and divorce was permissible.\textsuperscript{141}

It is to be noted that some women received initiation into *Yogic* orders. These were either married women, or those who entered the sect after the death of their husband.\textsuperscript{142} Some of them were also in charge of temples.\textsuperscript{143}

Then came the period of the *Rajputs*, who ruled India after the death of *Harsha Vardhana* till Muslims invaded and occupied the country. During this period women suffered from several handicaps

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., p. 53.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p. 35.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., p. 10.
although their honour was dear to Rajputs. The birth of a girl child was not received with favour among Rajputs. Tod writes that Rajputs were often heard to exclaim, "Accursed the day when a woman child was born to me."\(^\text{144}\) They were denied the right to study Vedas but were free to receive secular education and military training. Female-infanticide was there.\(^\text{145}\) This practice among the Rajputs was of great antiquity and arose from combined motives of pride and poverty.\(^\text{146}\) The practice of 'Jauhar' was very common among the Rajputs. This is the practice in which the womenfolk immolated themselves 'ex-masse' on a burning fire. Rani Padmini, wife of Raja Ratan Singh, the Rana of Mewar and his other wives performed 'Jauhar' after his defeat from Ala-ud-din Khalji. Another example was, the 'Jauhar' of Rani Karmeti and other ladies of Chittor at the time of its siege by Bahadur Shah in 1535.

Thus, on the whole, in Indian society of pre-Turkish period, the position of women was swiftly changing. The rights of freedom and honour enjoyed by them in the Ancient period gradually dwindled in the social sphere.\(^\text{147}\)

The Turks brought their own heritage which they derived from the Arabs and the Abbasids. Their coming to India did not bring any good change in the position of women. Female infanticide was widely


\(^{145}\) V. Janapathy, *Indian Woman through the Ages*, p. 146.


prevalent inspite of the Prophet's saying that the birth of a daughter did not bring her father any shame; bringing her up and educating her was rather a means of salvation for him. He said, 'If a man of whom only daughters are born, bring them up properly, the same daughters will become a covering for him against hell.\textsuperscript{148}

In respect of the partition of ancestral property or the property of the father among his children, a daughter is as much as an heir as a son under Muslim law and the son does not exclude a daughter from a share in the father's property and she had also the right to sell it. She retained this right even after her marriage. According to the Muslim law the Muslim lady was further safeguarded after her marriage, through Mehār, whereas a Hindu woman had no right to the property of her husband's parents.\textsuperscript{149} Mehār is the amount of money sanctioned to the woman at the time of marriage. Mehār is of two types. In the first type, the woman is entitled to the Mehār only after she has been divorced or after her husband’s death. In the second type the money has to be given to the woman right at the time of marriage either in cash or in kind.\textsuperscript{150}

Female education was limited only to the women of upper class. The field of fine arts specially attracted their attention and the art of

\textsuperscript{149} S.C. Roy Choudhary, \textit{Social, Cultural and Economic History of India (Medieval Age)}, Delhi, 1980, p.162.
music and dance was fairly popular. Some ladies of the royal dynasty or the aristocratic class wielded much influence in politics. Sultan Rezia is a notable example of it. She was first lady Sultan among Muslims, who ruled the vast empire of her father with remarkable energy and ability.

To the Muslims marriage was not a sacrament as understood by the Hindus and Roman Catholics, but a secular institution mainly based on the theory of contract. Divorce among the Muslims was, therefore, easier than the Hindus. Divorce is of two types among the Muslim i.e. Talak and Khula. Talak is a kind of divorce which depends on the will of the husband without any legal proceeding. In this type a man has to repeat the word Talak three times and send his wife away. Talak can be effective after the period of Iddat. Iddat is the period of three months after Talak during this period the husband should not cohabit with his wife. Khula is special forms of divorce among Muslims by which the wife can get separated from her husband and break the matrimonial bonds. A Muslim woman cannot divorce herself, but she may obtain a divorce in a court of law under certain conditions. According to the Muslim Marriage Act, for instances a Muslim woman can claim divorce in case her husband take another

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153 Paul Thomas, *Indian Women through the Ages*, p. 245.
wife, on the ground that there is inequality of treatment either psychologically or economically.155

The system of polygamy was very common. It lowered the position of woman as Muslim law allowed a man to keep four wives at a time. Apart from four wives he is allowed to keep concubines and slave-girls if he could afford them.156

According to Muslim law the main duty of wife is to stay at home and perform household duties. She has to obey all the orders of her husband. She is not free for public appearance. In the earlier days of Islam, woman was free to visit the Mosque and pray. This practice was later condemned as good men found it difficult to concentrate their mind on prayers in the presence of women; by the Third century of the Muslim era, the practice of letting women attend the Mosque generally felt into disuse, though among certain sections of Muslims it has continued to the present day.157

The Prophet of Islam instructed the Muslims to respect their wives and mothers. Dealing with wives the Prophet said, “The best blessing among the blessings of the world to a man, is a virtuous wife”.158 He said that one’s God and Prophet, is his mother. He has said, “Paradies lies at the feet of the mother”.159

155 Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, pp. 245-46.
156 Ibid., p.243.
157 Ibid., p. 250.
158 L. Sebasti and S.J. Raj, Quest for Gender Justice : A Critique of the Status of Woman in India, pp. 43-44.
159 Ibid., p. 207.
The Sultans of Delhi had large harems and a considerable part of their time was spent in the company of their wives and concubines. But their harems were not as elaborated as they developed in the times of the Mughals. Mughals, who inherited the traditions of Chengiz Khan and Timur, had great harems. In these harems their mothers, wives, sisters and other ladies resided. The mother of the Emperor was the most respected and next to her was the chief queen (Maharani). European travelers particularly Bernier and Mauncci have supplied plenty of information about the Mughal ladies way of life in the harems.¹⁶⁰

Mughals allowed their females sufficient political rights and thus enabled them to take active part in politics. A notable example of it was Nur Jahan. She was a powerful lady of masterful personality who retained political power in her hands for as many as eleven years. But Mughals did not seem to have conceded to her the right of sovereignty.¹⁶¹

During Mughal period female infanticide was continued in some sections of both the Hindus and Muslims.¹⁶² According to Bernier, Mughal princesses usually remained unmarried as their parents considered son-in-law a possible danger to succession. Shahjahan’s two daughters, Jahanara and Roshanara grew into spinsters, which

¹⁶⁰ Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, p. 254.
¹⁶¹ Rekha Misra, Women in Mughal India, p. 17.
led to a good deal of talk in the town. Jahanara was a partisan of Dera, Shahjahan’s eldest son, while Roshanara was a staunch ally of Aurangzeb, the youngest one. While Aurangzeb was the Viceroy of the Deccan, it was Roshanara who kept him informed of all that was happening in the imperial capital. It would appear that there was an agreement between the two that when Aurangzeb would ascend the throne Roshanara was to be married as a reward for her services: an agreement, by the way, respected by Aurangzeb in the breach rather than in the keeping.¹⁶³

Child marriage found detailed references in European travel accounts during the period under study. Both Hindu and Muslim had fallen prey to this social evil. Tavernier, Manucci and Thevenot, as they have noted, say that the normal age for marriage of Hindu girls was between four to ten years.¹⁶⁴ Manucci has provided information about it through instances that in Sind and Ajmer, a few women have children even at the age of nine or ten years.¹⁶⁵

Manucci admitted the prevalence of the custom of dowry among the Hindus, offered to the bride-groom side. He further indicates that the Muslim society, particularly its richer and higher sections, could not remain altogether unaffected by the Hindu system of dowry.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., Vol. III, p. 61.
Manucci and Thevenot recorded that polygamy was a practice prevalent both among the Hindus and the Muslims especially those belonging to the richer sections of the society.\textsuperscript{167} Thevenot mentioned that the result of polygamy was the bitter relationship existing between the co-wives in the household of a polygamist\textsuperscript{168} De Laet referred that an average Hindu remained Monogamous except in the case if a wife proved to be barren, he had the liberty to marry again with the consent of the Brahmans.\textsuperscript{169}

Considerable discussion has been going on whether the Purdah was prevalent in Ancient India or not. Some hold that it was quite unknown in the pre-Muslim days. Others maintain that royal Hindu ladies used to wear veils even before the advent of Turkish rule in India. To conclude, it can be said that in pre-Turkish times Purdah was confined to a small section of Hindu society but with the advent of Turkish rule it gained powerful impetus owing to the culture of the conquerors.\textsuperscript{170} At the time of Akbar it was observed with greater rigidity. Badauni writes, "If a woman was found running the danes and bazars of the town and while doing so did not veil herself. She was to go to the other side and become a prostitute."\textsuperscript{171} European travelers referred to the prevalence of Purdah in Mughal Indian

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\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., p.71; Jean De Thevenot, Voyages De Mr. De Thevenot, III part, ed., Surendranath Sen, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, National Archives of India, New Delhi, 1949, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{168} De Laet, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{169} De Laet, Description of India and Fragment of India History, tr. J.S. Hoyland, Delhi , rpt. 1975, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{171} K.N.Chitnis, Socio-Economic History of Medieval India, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 1990, p. 88.
\end{flushleft}
society. Manucci accepted the Purdah as a part of Muslim culture. Thevenot linked it with religion and recorded, “If these Indian women be idolaters they go bare faced and if Mohammedans, they are veiled.”172 Johan Marshall observed that the rigour of Purdah was so strict that even male doctors were not allowed to see the ladies of princely and noble families. He mentioned, “A curious method was adopted for diagnosing the disease without seeing the patient’s face or felling her pulse. A handkerchief was rubbed all over the body of the patient and then put into a jar of water. By its smell the doctor judged the cause of illness and prescribed the medicine.”173 De Laet mentioned that unlike Muslim women Hindu ladies did not cover themselves from head to toe. It was enough to have a sheet of cloth or Dupatta to cover their heads. It was everywhere a common sight to see water-carrier women walking along the streets without any Purdah.174 The main disadvantage of the Purdah was that women were denied knowledge of the outside world and the pleasure of a mixed society.

The plight of a widow was very miserable in medieval India. She had to commit Sati. If she did not do so, then she was condemned to a life of humiliation. She was asked to shave her head, put on a simple rough cloth, sleep on a coarse cloth spread on the ground and lead an extremely simple life. Her appearance on festive occasions or in religious ceremonies was considered to be inauspicious. It was feared

172 Thevenot, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, p. 53.
174 De Laet, Description of India and Fragment of India History, p. 81.
that the sight of such a woman would forestall success in important matters. Foreign travelers specifically Alberuni, Ibn Battuta, Mannuci and Bernier have described this custom in detail. Alberuni in the Eleventh century was familiar with this practice; it was regarded as a meritorious act. The widow who refused to become Sati was ill treated as long as she lived.\textsuperscript{175} Ibn Battuta noticed an example of Sati near Pakpattan and several others elsewhere in India.\textsuperscript{176} Bernier referred to the sad plight of Hindu widows. He concluded that the main reason behind the cruel and dreadful practice was the element of compulsion sought to be legitimised by Brahmans.\textsuperscript{177} Bernier says, “Many person whom I then consulted on the subject would have persuaded me that an excess of affection was the root-cause why these women burn themselves with their deceased husbands; but I soon found that this abominable practice is the effect of early and deeply rooted prejudices. Every girl is taught by her mother that it is virtuous and laudable in a wife to mingle her ashes with those of her husband and no woman of honour will refuse compliance with the established custom. Besides there was also the question of prestige of the family, if a widow expressed her unwillingness for it, the people began to doubt her fidelity and affection towards her departed husband.”\textsuperscript{178}

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\begin{enumerate}
\item Alberuni cited from, J.S. Grewal, Gender Perspective on Guru Nanak, ed., Kiran Pawar, Women in Indian History : Social, Economic, Political and Cultural Perspectives, Vision and Venture Publications, Delhi, 1996, p. 142.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid., pp. 310-11 and 313.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
though many Muslim rulers especially Akbar tried to abolish Sati among the Hindus, the institution, however for all practical purposes, flourished without much hindrance.¹⁷⁹

Prostitutes or the public women are also described in considerable details in the accounts of Bernier, Manucci and Thevenot. These public women and dancing girls were invited on special occasions like feasts, festivals and marriages etc. They also provided suitable recreation to inmates of the harem, maintained by the Emperor and the Nobles.¹⁸⁰ Dancing and singing was the sole occupation of the women belonging to a caste called Kanchani.¹⁸¹

The foreign travelers, thus, have given extensive information about the role and position of Indian woman during Mughal period. They have also furnished detailed information about the life of royal ladies in the harem. But the travelers are strangely silent about the domestic and social position of Muslim wives. Meera Nanda concludes that their silence constitutes an implied comment on the unenviable lot of Muslim wives who probably were the victims of the polygamous lust of their husbands.¹⁸²

Thus, a large number of factors-cultural, social, economic, religious and historical are responsible for lowering the position of Indian woman from Ancient to medieval period.

¹⁷⁹ Paul Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, p. 263.
¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 273-74.
¹⁸² Meera Nanda, European Travel Accounts During The Reigns of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb, p. 119.
It was in such a scenario that the Bhakti movement began. Bhakti is understood as monotheism based on a loving devotion to a personal God.\textsuperscript{183} It is divided into 'Nirguna' and 'Saguna' and more recently between Vaishnava Bhakti and Sant tradition. The ‘Nirguna’ and ‘Saguna’ model was first popularized by Hindi scholars such as Ramachandra Shukla, P.D. Barthwal and Parashuram Chaturvedi.\textsuperscript{184} Ramachandra Shukla was the first important scholar who propounded the notion of 'Bhakti Kal' and divided the Bhakts (devotees) into two distinct theological categories—Kabir, Raidas, Dadu among other, placed in the Nirguna category and Ramanujacharya, Vallabhacharya and Surdas the Saguna category. Shukla’s view of the Medieval Bhakti movement as consisting of two distinct theological categories has since been accepted by most of the Hindu scholars irrespective of their differences with him on other issues.\textsuperscript{185} P.D. Barthwal in his work 'The Nirguna School of Hindi Poety' produced one of the earliest general works in English on the Saints and their utterance (Banis). His work is particularly important for information on many obscure Saints of the later medieval period.\textsuperscript{186} Barthwal’s work was later superseded by Parashuram Chaturvedi’s encyclopedic study, 'Uttari Bharat Ki Sant Parampara' which gives an account of most medieval and modern

\textsuperscript{183} Bindu Mattoo, \textit{New Horizons (A Socio-Economic Study of the 16th Century India)}, Sanjay Parkashan, Delhi, 2003, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{184} Rameshwar Prasad Bahuguna, “Beyond Theological Differences : Sant-Vaishnava Interaction in Medieval India,” \textit{Indian Historical Review}, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1, Indian Council of Historical Research, Delhi, June 2009, p.56.

\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Ibid.}, 57.

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Ibid.}. 
Saints.\textsuperscript{187} The last four decades have witnessed a surge of Western scholarly interest in medieval \textit{Sants}.\textsuperscript{188} Most Western scholars have depended heavily on the \textit{Nirguna-Saguna} model popularized by the Hindi scholars.\textsuperscript{189} Karine Schomer and W.H. Mcleod, edited, \textit{The Sants: Studies in Devotional Tradition of India} is the most influential and comprehensive study of Medieval Saints by Western scholars.

\textit{Saguna Bhakts} worship the incarnations of God like Vishnu, Rama and Krishna, but \textit{Nirguna Bhakts} (devotees) believe in one formless God and have no faith in idol worship or incarnate gods. Ramanujacharya, Ramananda, Vallabhacharya and Ashtachhap writers are the prominent \textit{Saguna Bhakts} (devotees) whereas Namdev, Kabir and Guru Nanak are included among \textit{Nirguna Bhakts}. These \textit{Bhakts} wrote devotional poetry in praise of God in the vernacular language instead of \textit{Sanskrit}. Though they did not write purposely on material matters yet their writings by employing similes and metaphors throw valuable light on life around them. Woman has received a considerable attention in their writings. 'Guru Granth Sahib' has been taken as the best available primary source for the understanding of \textit{Nirguna} exposition and for \textit{Saguna Bhakti} contemporaneous 'Braj literature' is useful. Braj literature contains the literary works of \textit{Braj Bhasha} which was the richest form of \textit{Hindi} in the medieval age. In this work the focus of Braj literature is

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{187} Ibid.
\bibitem{188} Ibid.
\bibitem{189} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
primarily limited to the works of Ashtachhap writers as they are the contemporary to the Sikh Gurus. Furthermore their works are the best writings of Braj Bhasha as after them this language had lost its prestige and Khadiboli Hindi (Modern standard Hindi) began to supplant it.\textsuperscript{190} On the basis of Guru Granth Sahib and Braj literature this work will compare the two famous categories of Bhakti to explore the feminine dimension pertaining to them. Their devotional writings have consisted specifically poetry.

Their devotional poetry is marked by intensity and spiritual insight. Metaphor is the most important factor in their poetry. The metaphors create imagery. Every poetic image is to some degree metaphorical.\textsuperscript{191} If there is no image, there will be no poetry because imagination contains reality.\textsuperscript{192} Every poetic image serves mainly two purposes. It gives shape to poet’s experiences along with depicting the world around him/ her. B. Ifor Evans defines imagery, “As a form of mysticism which has its roots in the objective world around the poet because he receives his immediate experiences in his struggle that he does in order to exist and make this world better for all to live in.”\textsuperscript{193}

The composers of Guru Granth Sahib and Braj literature have used a wider range of imagery in their writings. The abstract spiritual ideas and subtle thoughts are saved from becoming obscure and misty

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{190} Richard Barz, \textit{The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhacarya}, Thomson press, Faridabad, 1976, p. 100.
\item \textsuperscript{192} Jaggit Singh Grewal, \textit{Imagery in the Adi Granth}, Punjab Parkashan, Chandigarh, 1986, pp. 2 and 262.
\item \textsuperscript{193} \textit{Ibid.}, p.2.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
only through the use of poetic imagery. Both ideologies (Guru Granth Sahib and Braj literature) have used imagery to make the masses understand their higher spiritual experiences.

S.S. Kholi has divided the imagery of Guru Granth Sahib into two groups: imagery from Nature and imagery from daily indoor life. The first group includes the images from the life of countryside, the weather and its changes, the seasons, the sky, the sunrise and dawn, the clouds, rain and wind, sunshine and shadow, the garden, flowers, trees, growth and decay, pruning and grafting and weeding, the sea and ships, the river and its banks the weeds and grasses, pools and water, animal, birds and insects, sports and games. The second group of imagery includes the images from the daily indoor life i.e. eating, drinking, cooking, the work of the kitchen, washing and wiping dust, dirt, rust and stains, the body and its movements, sleep and dreams, clothes and materials, patching and mending, common handicrafts, the feel of substances, smooth or soft or sticky, fire, candles and lamps, sickness and medicines, parents and children, birth, death and marriage. Kholi’s classification of imagery of Guru Granth Sahib is drawn from Spurgeon’s division of the images of Shakespeare into two groups i.e. images from Nature and images from daily indoor life.

194 Ibid., p. 263.
196 Ibid., p. 130.
J.S. Grewal in his work ‘Imagery in the Adi Granth’ divides the imagery, used in Guru Granth Sahib, in three sections. The first section deals with imagery from Nature. It includes images of sea, river, pools, trees, flowers, bushes, animals, birds, insects, seasons, weathers, sky, sun, moon, battlefields, kinesthetic images, day and night, light and darkness, games, etc. The second section concerns the images of indoor life. It includes images from occupation, houses, homes, kitchen, forts, nectar and poison, fire, human relations, ornaments, human body, diseases, learning, birth and death. The third section of miscellaneous imagery includes images from mythology, history, religion, heaven and hell and all other images from the world of music, colour, path, metals, machines, dirt and dust.197

This division can be applied to the imagery in Braj literature also. Braj writers have also used images from Nature, from indoor and outdoor life to explain their spiritual ideals. The writers of both ideologies have almost the same type of spiritual, social, political and intellectual experiences.198 Therefore, in their poetical compositions they repeated the same thoughts and applied the same images. A few examples of the similar imageries used in both ideologies will not be out of order rather it will help to understand these ideologies properly. Both ideologies have used the imagery of the clouds and lightning. It is stated, “the Lord does not come home, I feel miserable and sigh; the flash of lightning frightens me”:–

198 Ibid., p. 10.
In both ideologies the imagery of the weather and its changes has been used to depict month by month the sufferings of the lonely woman (Jivatma) for union with Husband (God). The entire Baramaha of Guru Nanak, Guru Arjan Dev and Nanddas is an example of it. In the month of Chet, the lovely spring has come, and the bumble bees hum with joy. The forest is blossoming in front of my door: I wish my Lord would return to home:-

In both ideologies the imagery of mother-child love has been used for depicting the love of God and devotee. It is stated that just as a mother takes care of her child, attentively watch over her/ him and thinks about her/ his needs similarly God looks after a devotee:-

Guru Granth Sahib and Braj literature have also used domestic imagery. In both ideologies the imagery of mother-child love has been used for depicting the love of God and devotee. It is stated that just as a mother takes care of her child, attentively watch over her/ him and thinks about her/ his needs similarly God looks after a devotee:-


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199 Guru Granth Sahib, Tukhari Baramaha Mahala 1, p. 1108.
200 Kumbhandas, Pad-Sangrah, ed., Dr. Hargulal, Ashtachhap Ke Kavi Kumbhandas, Parkashan Vibhag, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 2008, Pad 192, p. 122.
201 Guru Granth Sahib, Tukhari Baramaha Mahala 1, pp. 1107-08.
203 Guru Granth Sahib, Gauri Mahala 4, p. 168.
Parmananddas has used the similar imagery:-

क्यों न जाई ऐसे के सरन।
प्रतिपालै पौले माता ज्यों चरन कमल भवसागर तरन। 204

The imagery of wife-husband is also used to depict the love of God and devotee. Human soul (Jivatma) is represented as the wife who is forever seeking union with her Husband (God):-

रजुना पेठि विगामै निपूङ्ति ठाई।
निपूङ्ति पिवि महल नीले राम्बू चिदियाई। 205

Surdas have used the similar imagery. He stated that if anybody (male-female) worship the Lord Krishna with Bharta Bhava (husband) will get salvation without doubt:-

जो करो भरता-भाव हदय धरि हरि-पद ध्यावे।
नारि पुरुष कोउ होइ, श्रुति-स्थर-चा-गति सो पावे। 206

In Guru Granth Sahib the imagery of female activity of churning milk and obtaining butter is symbolically used for meditating on the Divine Name and obtaining Amrita, the Divine elixir.207 Ashtachhap writers have also used the imagery of milk and milk products to the level of spirituality. They compared Goras208 to the Rasa of senses i.e. pleasure achieved or enjoyed by senses.209 It is explained by

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204 Parmananddas, Pad- Sangrah, ed., Dr. Hargulal, Ashtachhap Ke Kavi Parmananddas, Parkashan Vibhag, Govt. of India. New Delhi, 2008, p. 12.
205 Guru Granth Sahib, Gauri Mahala 5, p. 198.
207 Guru Granth Sahib, Suhi Mahala 1, p. 728.
208 'Goras' means milk and milk products i.e., curd, yoghurt and butter etc.
Ashtachhap writers in 'Dan Lila' where the Lord Krishna demanded from the Gopis to give him Dan in form of 'Goras' which indirectly is a demand to sacrifice pleasure of senses.\(^2\)

Both ideologies seem to be well-versed in Yoga and its diction. They have also used imagery from Yogic practices to explain their spiritual ideas. It is stated that Yogis should give up the Yogic practices. They are advised to meditate on Divine Name:-

\[\text{Guru Granth Sahib, Ramkali Mahala 1, p. 879.}\]

Analogy and comparison have been also used to express ideas. It is stated that as the bubble in the water well up and disappears again, so is the world created from the God and it again mingled in God:-

\[\text{Guru Granth Sahib, Shloka Mahala 9, p. 1427.}\]

The lives of animals and birds are also used in order to form imagery. One is familiar with the animals and birds in day to day life. As these images have the quality of familiarity in them, they are very useful in making to understand quite easily the most complicated and

\[\text{Ibid., pad 23, p. 57.}\]


\[\text{Guru Granth Sahib, Shloka Mahala 9, p. 1427.}\]

\[\text{Surdas, Sursagar, Pad 10/4620, Vol. II, p. 574.}\]
confusing spiritual experiences of the Saints.\textsuperscript{215} Both ideologies have used the imagery of fish in water to express \textit{Bhakti} towards God:-

\begin{quote}
\textit{मेंढ़ महली कुम की टेर तुष गिम तिन्ह में।}\textsuperscript{216}
\textit{मानहु 'सूर' काठि डारी हैं, बारी मध्य तै मीन।}\textsuperscript{217}
\end{quote}

Both ideologies have used the imagery of black bee. It is stated in Guru Granth Sahib that the plant of the lotus is in full bloom and the black bee enticed and fascinated by its love, encircles it. It becomes beyond the control of the human soul to bear the pangs of separation of the Super soul, (God):-

\begin{quote}
\textit{चबू घरमू डले दर्प मजसँ करुणे।}
\textit{कर कू क्ले में दर्प पति वर्जी वरुणे।}\textsuperscript{218}
\end{quote}

\textit{Ashtachhap} writers have also used the imagery of black bee to explain the \textit{Gopi} pangs of separation from Lord Krishna in \textit{Bharmargit}. Krishna sends \textit{Udho} to \textit{Braj} after he has gone to Mathura. \textit{Udho} has taken the massage of \textit{Krishna} to \textit{Gopis}. The \textit{Gopis} in their distress and disorientation directed their laments to a passing black bee by confusing both \textit{Udho} and black bee as messengers. Because of this these poems are known as \textit{Bhramargit}. Name given after the name of black bee (\textit{Bhramar}):-

\begin{quote}
\textit{ताहि भाँवर सो कहत सबै प्रति उत्तर बातें।}
\textit{लर्क बिकर्कन जुला प्रेम रस रूपी घातें।}\textsuperscript{219}
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{215} Jagjit Singh Grewal, \textit{Imagery in the Adi Granth}, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Guru Granth Sahib, Bilwal Mahala 5, p. 847.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Guru Granth Sahib, Tukhari Baramaha Mahala 1, p. 1108.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Nanddas, \textit{Nanddas Granthawal}, p. 160.
\end{itemize}
To conclude, the reason for the common imagery used in both ideologies (Guru Granth Sahib and Braj literature) is that they have the similar social, economic, political and religious environment. Their imagery has wider coverage. It touched each and every aspect of life. This imagery is far away from hard and fast rules of the poetry rather it is based on reality. Both ideologies have used common imageries which are mentioned above. This similarity will help to understand their views and thoughts which will be discussed in the next chapter.