Chapter – 4

DEPICTION OF WOMAN : THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

Woman in the medieval Indian society was regarded as inferior to man; her position, at any rate, was subordinate to his. The practice of polygamy, child marriage and Sati was prevalent at that time.\(^1\)

Women were secluded for fear of dishonour. Their spiritual, intellectual and physical development was obstructed and social status curtailed.\(^2\) The social laws and customs which came to be evolved in the changed set-up, stamped women with the stigma of mental deficiency and created in them a profound sense of inferiority complex.\(^3\) Thus due to the growing sense of insecurity and social upheavals which followed the Muslim expeditions and loot, plunder and massacre, the Hindu women in Northern India lost their high social status.\(^4\)

Turning from spiritual to the social context, one finds the depiction of woman as girl, wife, widow and mother in both ideologies. Ashtachhap writers have provided a vivid picture of woman in her social milieu. They authenticate the presence of child marriage, dowry, Purdah, Sati and miserable condition of a widow in the society during

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the period under study. But they neither opposed these social vices nor raised a voice against them. Thus, it may be argued that regarding social condition of woman, *Ashtachhap* writers merely echoed the traditional views and could not protest against social inequalities towards woman due to the social pressure of their society.

On the other side, in Guru Granth Sahib these social evils are strongly opposed for the upliftment of woman. The composers of Guru Granth Sahib have taken revolutionary steps to eradicate these social vices. Guru Nanak is the first to have championed the cause of womanhood in the Indian society. He has, particularly pointed to the orgy of dishonouring of womenfolk by *Babar's* soldiers near *Saidpur*, later on called *Eminabad*.\(^5\) He wrote in *Raga Asa* that the beautiful women whose foreheads were beautifully arranged with hair plaits and painted with the sacred vermillion mark, had their tresses clipped with the sword of *Babar* and dust was thrown on their shaven heads and dishonoured necks:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ਫਿੰਤ ਫਿੰਤ ਮੈਚਿ ਫ਼ਟਾਫ਼ ਮੰਝੀ ਪਰਿ ਸੰਚਿਤ} & \parallel \\
\text{ਮੇ ਫਿੰਤ ਲੰਡੀ ਮੰਝੀਅਰਿ ਗਲ ਹਿੱਂਚ ਆਤੇ ਪੁਰੀ} & \parallel \text{6}
\end{align*}
\]

This portrayal of suffering is universal and it includes the plightful condition of all women whether belonging to *Hindu, Muslim, Bhatti* and *Thakur* denomination:

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Women's state of suffering is defined in three ways: suffering due to dishonour; suffering by physical death and suffering due to emotional stress:

Seeing such a pitiable condition, Guru Nanak felt need to give woman a proper place in the society. Thereafter the status of woman in the society remained his deep concern. In this connection Upinder Jit Kaur rightly remarks:

“Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith, raised his voice for justice to women and provided the Scriptural basis for equality which was not to be found in the Scriptures of other Indian born religions. It is noted that he pleaded, the cause of women and strove for their liberation in the Fifteenth century, whereas the women's emancipation movement in Europe started much later, in the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth century.”

During medieval period the birth of a male child was welcomed and that of a daughter was looked down upon as misfortune. Both the Hindus and the Muslims accorded a preferential treatment to the male members of the society. A female member was considered to be inferior in all respects—a son was always preferred to a daughter. An

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7 Ibid., p. 418.
8 Ibid.
earnest desire for a male offspring was quite intense even among the Mughal Emperors as Babar was anxious to have a male child. Gulbadan Begum refers to this in her work *Humayun-Nama*. Mughal Emperor Akbar has resolved that if Almighty God should bestow a son on him, he would go on foot from Agra to Muin-ud-din Chishti’s mausoleum, a distance of about 140 kos. While noticing this kind of preferential longing for a boy in contemporary society Guru Granth Sahib refers to the pleasure on the birth of a male child where it is said that the strained relationship between husband and wife can become better with the birth of a son:

\[
\text{तौंडी मेंडी ठटे ठड़लुँ} ||
\]

\[
\text{धूकी ठिंडू थड़े समाखिण्ड} || 12
\]

Noticing preference given to boy and a special treatment to him in the society, Guru Granth Sahib authenticates that people at that time considered a son to be the binding link between the parents:

\[
\text{माँटि घाट चेवे बेटा तीम्बा ममूटे चढ़उँ नहूँती} || 13
\]

Here it must be kept in mind that these references of Guru Granth Sahib only occur to authenticate the preference given to boy in the contemporary society not to support this view.

*Ashtachhap* writers also mentioned about the joy and pleasure at the birth of a male child:

\[
\text{आज गोकुल में बजते बघाईं} |
\]

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12 Guru Granth Sahib, Majh Mahala 1, p. 143.
13 Ibid., Sorath Mahala 1, p. 596.
नंद महर के पुत्र भयो है आनन्द मंगल गाई। 14

Ashtachhap writers referred to a special tradition among Braj people where they celebrated the birth of a boy by sprinkling a mixture of milk and turmeric and dancing at the same time:

पूत जायो रानी जसोदा, देत हैं मुदित असीस री।।
ऑगन कीच मरी दधि हरी, नांचत अपने टोल री।।15

In Ashtachhap writings, there is also mention of celebration on the birth of a girl. Dr. Hargulal has informed that in the contemporary society the birth of a girl was equally a source of happiness like boy.16

People were also in habit of going to congratulate the parents of a girl after her birth:

कुंवरी जनम तिहारे सुनिकें हैं उठियाथों वेग।।17

On the birth of Radha, who in general represents a female child, there was great pleasure in her house. Dhadhi and Dhadhian had come to sing songs of joy and Radha's mother gave them 'Dan'

कुंवरी परगटी गान गावत ढाड़ी ढाड़िन आए।
कीर्तिजू की कीर्ति सुनि हम बहु जावक पहिराए।।18

Those mothers who gave birth to capable daughters were praised by the society at that time:

ताकँ इक कमनीय मुकन्या। जिहि अस जनी जननी सो धन्या।।19

14 Parmananddas, Parmanandsagar, Pad 3, p. 2.
15 Krishandas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 838, p. 327.
17 Chaturbhujdas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 10, p. 51.
18 Parmananddas, Parmanandsagar, Pad 161, p. 53.
19 Nanddas, Nanddas Granthawali, p. 105.
Nanddas mentioned that those mothers who gave birth to capable girls were praised by people during the period under study.

भान बड़े कौरति रानी के ऐसी कन्या जाई।

But in general the birth of female child was considered inauspicious so the deplorable custom of female infanticide was practised in most parts of Northern India during Mughal period. It was chiefly practised among Rajputs. It was also practised among the upper classes of both the Hindus and Muslims. Different methods were adopted to put an end to the life of an infant girl. Warish Shah, a medieval Qissakar, describes stifling, poisoning and drowning as some of the methods of infanticide.

Guru Granth Sahib strongly opposed this evil. According to Guru Granth Sahib it is sinful to slaughter a Brahman or a cow or a daughter as it has curse for millions of evils:

खुबसूरत तैली भानु बंद्वा भलाहरी ला पाठू॥

दिलार दिलीद्वा बंद्वा घरीमा मन में भलाहरी॥

In this regard the observations of Prabhjot Kaur are worth mentioning, “Sikh Gurus stood for a healthy balanced society with equal rights for all members, girls as well as boys; a society where every human could live a life of dignity, free from all kinds of fear;

20 Krishandas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 896, p. 355.
where no one was denied as basic right as to be born. Something needed to be done to put the unhealthy trends in the reverse gear”.

It is surprising to see that in Ashtachhap writings there are not any mention of this evil.

There is also reference to the kind of life which an unmarried girl is expected to lead in her parental house. In both ideologies word Iani Bali is used for girl child. After the age of twelve some restrictions were put upon girls. They were not allowed to move out of their houses. They were advised by their parents to stay at home under their protection:

बार बार जननी समुझावति।
काहे कौं जहें--तहें डोलति, हमकौं आवंति लजावति। ।

Girls had less freedom as compared to boys at that time. Chaturbhujdas’ Gopis were saying to Krishna that nobody asked him if he went late to home but if they were late their mothers became angry with them:-

tेरी कोऊ कही करेगी! हमें घर लीजिये माई।

Radha’s mother was advising her that as she was now grown-up, so she should not wander here and there:

अब राधा तू भई सयानी।

25 Ibid., Tilang Mahala 1, p. 722, also see Krishandas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 160, p. 59, Kumbhandas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 122, p. 100.
27 Chaturbhujdas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 30, p. 44.
The relation between the father and the daughter is of great affection as Guru Granth Sahib records:

कान्ह लगाई देति मोहि गारी, ऐसे बड़े भए कब तैं वै।

If a girl was abused by her mother, she would complained against her mother to her father:

या बात बाबा आवं दै।

It is also mentioned in Braj literature that unmarried girls pray to God and subject themselves to some severe practices in order to get good husbands:

ब्रज-बनिता रबि कौं कर जोरै।

गौरी-पति पूजति, तप साधति, करत रहति नित नेम।

हमकु देहु कृपन पति ईश्वर और नहीं मन आन।

or

पूरव पुनः कौन ब्रज किन्हों? बर पायी जु गोपाल।

On the other side, Guru Granth Sahib emphasized only on the service of the Guru for achieving good husband:

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29 Guru Granth Sahib, Sorath Mahala 1, p. 596.
31 Ibid., Pad 10/1400, Vol. 1, p. 422.
32 Krishandas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 57, p. 21.
Child marriage had become a common feature of the social life at that time. The girls were married at an early age. Surdas saying that a girl of twelve was considered to be of marriageable age, bears a testimony to this:

सूर मुख पट देतি काहै न, बरषा ज्ञानास भारि।।

Kumbhandas in his work writes about the engagement of Radha and Krishna immediately after the birth of Radha. From this it becomes clear that there was child marriage in the contemporary society.

In Guru Granth Sahib there is also a reference to the child marriage. Word Iani Bali and Ianariey are used for a child bride. Guru Granth Sahib does not favour the idea of child marriage but it only explained the tradition of early marriage in the contemporary society. Further it seems to show sympathy for such girls who are married long before they could understand the meaning, rights and duties of a married woman:

हिशाती घाजी बिशा बसे सा यह वेद त होँ दे॥

Emperor Akbar seems to have disliked child marriage and he tried to check this practice as far as possible. Abul Fazl writes:
He abhors marriages which take place between man and woman before the age of puberty. They bring forth no fruit and His majesty thinks them even hurtful; for afterwards, when such a couple ripens into manhood, they dislike have connection and their home is desolate.\textsuperscript{39}

Akbar fixed the age of marriage for boys and girls. Girls were not to marry before the age of fourteen. It is also obvious from \textit{Ain-i-Akbari}, “Boys were not to marry before the age of sixteen, nor girls before fourteen, because the offspring of early marriage is weakly”\textsuperscript{40}

Some parents married their daughters only at the adult age. Guru Granth Sahib authenticates the presence of adult marriage. There are references of adult girls in Guru Granth Sahib who were still unmarried:

\begin{quote}
\textit{\begin{center}
जब नेपार के मैं हठ पेटीमाथः धाति पञ्चुटी धाति रघन नीहि।
\end{center}}\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

It seems that there were no intercaste marriages in the society. From the references available in \textit{Ashtachhap} writings it appears that the marriage generally took place between boys and girls of the same caste:

\begin{quote}
\textit{\begin{center}
अब गोकुल को जैवौ छाँड़ी, अपजस हू न अपाति।
तू बृजभानु बड़े को बेटी, उनकें जाति न पाति।
\end{center}}\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} Abul Fazl, \textit{Ain-i-Akbari}, Vol. 1, tr., Blochmann, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, rpt. 1977, p. 287.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 204.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Guru Granth Sahib}, Suhi Mahala 1, p. 763.
Even in Bani of Guru Granth Sahib there is not any reference to the inter-caste marriage.\textsuperscript{43}

Abul Fazl also supports this view. He says:

“In the present Kali Yuga no one chooses a wife out of his own caste, nay, each of these four being subdivided into various branches, each subdivision asks in marriage only the daughters of their own equals.” \textsuperscript{44}

Marriage of a daughter was a thing of great consideration by the parents. They were mainly worried to find out a suitable match for their daughters. In Nanddas’ work ‘Shyam Sagai’ when Yashoda came with the offer of Radha and Krishna’s marriage, Kirti (Radha’s mother) did not become agree immediately but answered after some thought:

रानी उत्तर दयी, सु हीं नहिं करीं सगाई।
सूधी राधे कुंवरि, स्याम है अति चरबाई।\textsuperscript{45}

Guru Granth Sahib considered marriage a spiritual nuptial rather than only a physical relation. It is stated that they are not said to be husband and wife whose bodies merely come together, rather they alone are called husband and wife, who have one soul in two bodies:

यह धिरु देवति ह आप्नीआपि धवति दिखवठे देवी॥
देव मेंडि दृषि भूचड़ी यह धिरु देवीपे मेंडि॥ \textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Abul Fazl, \textit{Ain-i-Akbari}, Vol. III, tr., H.S. Jarrett and revised by J.N. Sarkar, Delhi, rpt., 1978, p. 339.
\textsuperscript{45} Nanddas, \textit{Nanddas Granthawali}, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Guru Granth Sahib}, Suhı Mahala 3, p. 788.
It is a spiritual bond of souls as God Itself unites wife and husband:

यह ध्वनि भेलु ब्रह्म पृथ्वी मधि भिलाप्तिभार सभा॥

Married life, *Grihasta*, is celebrated in Guru Granth Sahib to restore to woman her due place and status equal to a man in life. Celibacy which by implication negates this equality is denied. It is said that a person can attain liberation even living with progeny and wife:

महिलाओं दी अमृती रिकार्टी॥

पुत्रु वस्त्र उपचे गाँव धारी॥

One can achieve salvation even by living a joyful life comprising of playfulness, enjoyment, of dressing and eating:

रत्नगर महिलाओं बेटियों पृली उड़े नथर।

उमनिन्दा वेलिनिया वेलिनिया मार्गिनिया उड़े उड़े नथर।

Husband and wife are complementary to each other, so a man should not leave woman who is his other half:

मुंतौद लीटे उड़वे मे उड़िन्दा अभिनव वा विश्वा वलीख॥

अप वलीखी तांवी ह नंदे उं दे चिंतू दी बलीख॥

*Ashtachhap* writers also realized the importance of married life (*Grihasta*) and woman in family life. They go to an extent of saying that, without woman in home husband and children can not survive. So, she is an essential part of home:

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Here it must be kept in mind that among them Surdas, Parmanaddas, Nanddas, Krishandas and Govindswami did not follow the path of Grihasta. They remained unmarried for whole life.

Ashtachhap writings witnessed the presence of dowry in contemporary society. Surdas informed about the practice of offering of dowry by the parents of daughter at the time of her marriage:

और बहुत दयज़ दीन्हे उन, करि विवाह ब्राह्मण।

Nanddas in his work 'Bhasha Dasham Sakand' informed that on the marriage of Devaki and Vasudev (parents of Krishna), father of Devaki offered a handsome of dowry:

भयी विवाह परम रंग भीनोः।

The marriage of a girl sometimes became a serious affair due to rigorous observance to this system. Even the suitability was sometimes disregarded by the parents at the cost of a heavy dowry. The nature of dowry varied according to the economic standard and the social status of the families concerned. Sometimes for the sake of dowry a young man would marry older woman than himself. In Guru Granth Sahib dowry was condemned as mere show of one's ego.

54 Nanddas, Nanddas Granthawali, p. 193.
and riches. It is stated that material dowry is false, egoist and a vain show, whereas the real dowry is the blessing of Lord’s Name:


Further it is stated that real dowry was not the material possessions but the inculcation of virtues, which was the permanent asset of a human being:


After marriage, the girl lived in the joint family of her husband, where mother-in-law exercised control over her and her commands were to be carried out. If the bride failed to come up to her expectations, her life became miserable:


Apart from mother-in-law other members of family i.e. father-in-law and brother-in-law, sometimes also exercised control over her:


56 Guru Granth Sahib, Sri Raga Mahala 4, pp. 78-79.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., Asa Mahala 1, p. 355.
59 Parmananddas, Parmanandsagar, Pad 727, p. 253.
60 Guru Granth Sahib, Ramkali Mahala 5, p. 963.
Ashtachhap writers also approved the existence of strained relations between wife, mother-in-law and sister-in-law:

सामु ननद घर त्रास दिखावे।  

or

जाने सास ननद बैरिन सब, बन में आजु ने भटकौ।  

Infact she has to please each and every member of her husband's family by rendering every possible domestic service:

सबसे रहे अधीन ठहल वह सबकी करती।  
सास-ससुर और भसुर-ननद देवर से ढरती।  
सबका पोषन करै सबन की सेज बिछावे।  

To make her free from these inequalities, Sikh Scripture honoured the womenfolk as the symbol of domestic harmony and happiness, social cohesion and unity. She is considered the noblest in all the family. She is the counselor of her husband's younger and elder brother. Blessed is the house, where in-she has appeared:

रिहें पुत्ते बंदू सुभभमी।  
मजल मुड़ेंगी डेढ़ मेंठती।  
मड़ भवन्दचे भगि मवमेट।  
भडी डेढ़ डेढ़ तेमट।  
षेल म जिश्न जिस्न धुवारी भगि।  

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62 Parmananddas, Parmanandsagar, Pad 374, p. 127.
63 Ibid., cited by Suman Sharma, Madhya Kaleen Bhakti Adholan Ka Samajik Vivechan, p. 215.
64 Guru Granth Sahib, Asa Mahala 5, p. 371.
Sometimes, such an able wife became successful to overcome the control of her husband’s family then she did not care of mother-in-law and sister-in-law:

सालु ननद हारी दे गारी। सुनति नहीं कोऊ कहति कहा री।।
तजी सीख सब सास ससुर की लाज जनेंज जारे।।

Guru Granth Sahib also states that when wife moved away from the dominating influence of her mother-in-law then she had large power in the management of the household:

ममू रिखती घड़ी मिर शे मंडर टली॥

At that stage a wife had no fear of brother-in-laws and not even of mother-in-law:

रेल नेट भुटे दृढ़ि ममू वा डुब विम॥

Husband also exercised a good deal of control over wife. Sometimes she had to bear the anger of her husband:

परमानन्द त्यों हठ मंडयो ज्यों घर खसम गुस्सया।।

She had to remain under her husband’s supervision. Chaturbhuujdas seems to support this view by concluding that it was unsafe to allow her to remain out of house after night fall:

चतुर्भुज प्रभुमिरिघनन अवारी वन व्यों रहे अकेली अबला।।

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67 Guru Granth Sahib, Ramkali Mahala 1, p. 931.
68 Ibid., Sorath Mahala 1, p. 642.
69 Parmananddas, Parmanandsagar, Pad 702, p. 244.
70 Chaturbhuujdas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 14, p. 59.
Other Ashtachhap writers especially Nanddas and Kumbhandas had used word ‘Abla’ (weak) for the wife:

तुम अबला अज्ञान हमारे चरित न जानो। ॥ 71

or

अबला बुधि सुनि डरि गई बली डरें जग माहिं। ॥ 72

Wife had to take the permission of husband for going outside. This is made clear when Krishna questioned Gopi’s about their coming out of homes when their husband’s were still back there.

तुम कुल-बाधू भवनही नीकी, रैनि कहां सब आई।
अपनै अपनै घर पति-जन सी, कैसे निकसन पाई। ॥ 73

Guru Granth Sahib negates the traditional view that wife should live in the custody of husband. Its a remarkable step as no one condemn this view from Manu’s time. Husband and wife both are according to Guru Granth Sahib, complementary to each other. So, husband should not exercise control over wife. Guru Granth Sahib believes that male and female both are created by Almighty God, so, there is no difference between them:

राजी पूजन पूजन मध राजी मध तेजे पूजन भवने॥ 74
पूजन भवि राजि राजि भवि पूजन पूजन धृतम धिबरिह॥ 75

Surdas also expressed the similar view:

परकूल एक नाम है बोऊ, कियों पूरण कियों नारि। ॥ 76

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71 Kumbhandas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 26, p. 62.
72 Nanddas, Nanddas Grathawali, p. 158.
74 Guru Granth Sahib, Nat Mahala 4, p. 983.
75 Ibid., Ramkali Mahala 1, p. 879.
Married women were advised to cover their head. Muslim women observed the Purdah with greater rigidity than the Hindu women. Purdah is a Persian word which literally means 'a curtain'. This Purdah was something to screen off the women from the view of the males.\textsuperscript{77} Referring to the Purdah among Muslims, De Laet says "the Mohammadan women do not came out into public unless they are poor or immodest; they veil their heads and draw the hair forward in a knot from the back."\textsuperscript{78}

All the Ashtachhap writers throw light on the practice of Purdah in the contemporary society. A milder and less elaborate from of Purdah, commonly known as Ghoonghat appears to have been observed by Hindu women:

\textit{दे पूर्णहट-पट ओट बबाकी टेढ़ी बाह धरवै।} \textsuperscript{79}

Further it is stated that after seeing Lord Krishna gopi has cast off veil:-

\textit{पूर्णहट में न समात, नयन दरसन-मदमाते।} \textsuperscript{80}

At some places these writers seem to support this custom. This becomes clear from the following couplet of Parmananddas:

\textit{मैया मोहि ऐसी दूलहिन भाव।}

\textit{.....................................................।।}

\textit{.....................................................।}}
This custom does not permit woman to mix freely with other members of family. Guru Granth Sahib openly condemned *Purdah*. It is compared to suppression and emphasis is given to cast it off:

रूप भट्टी भवि गेटी पुप्पट वेलि चली। 

In Guru Granth Sahib Purdah word occurred. It is stated that in the end false *Purdah* will not help:

चित्र गुप्ता तव केषा भागाधि उव वेदिष्ट पुवरण तेजा विले॥

*Ashtachhap* writers specifically Surdas, to some extent also condemned this custom and supported the view to cast off veil:

नाच कछयो तब पूँढ़ट छोरयो।

लोक-लाज सब फटकि पछीरयो। 

or

पूँढ़ट ओट तत्र सरिता ज्यों, स्याम सिंधु कै सन्मुख आए।

Further Guru Granth Sahib declared that there is no merit of wearing *Ghoonghat* or *Purdah*. False pride has been attached to the *Purdah* by the people:

पुप्पट वचे वी दिई घड़हट।

सित सम पाँच बृह बले भाटी॥
The *Purdah* which is worn only for public show is in vain. Real *Purdah* means to fix your mind on one Lord. Body may wander from place to place:

\[ \text{पुर्दाह उड़िे उड़िे प्रिय सच्छे} || \\
\text{वटि युन गानि बुर्ति अनु सच्छे} || \]  

87

Guru Amardas expressed his strong disapproval of the *Purdah* when he exhorted the *Rani of Haripur* against it when she came to the *Sangat* with a veil on. *Mahima Prakash* relates a story that not caring of the Guru's proclamation against *Purdah*, the queen of ruler of *Haripur* visited him in *Purdah*. Spontaneously the words fell from the Guru's mouth; why has this mad woman came here? And actually when the woman went out, she became mad.  

88 This shows Guru's strong dislike for the *Purdah* system.  

89

Here it should be noted that the vast masses of women did not wear any veil of a specific kind. There are references of such women in Guru Granth Sahib where a woman, carrying a pitcher full of water is depicted without any veil.  

90 Similarly we get numerous instances of such women in Braj literature who went out of their houses.  

91

During medieval Period, the practice of polygamy was prevalent in the society. Abul Fazl informs us that Akbar had seraglio of 5000

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women supervised by a separate female staff. A large harem was a privilege of aristocracy, the prerogative of chieftains and fashion of the age. It was common among the Hindus and Muslims. Ashtachhap writers authenticate the presence of practice of polygamy in society.

One can see the mention of word 'Sot' in their writings:

यह कही मुख, मन सोचई, भई सौंत हमारी।

or

सूरज-प्रभु की बड़ी सुहागिनि, उपजी सौंति बजाई।

They informed that in a home where there were two wives, there was always dispute:

जाके गृह जै नारी हैं लाहि कलह नित होह।

Guru Granth Sahib also informed about the presence of this custom in society at that time. In Sikh Scripture word 'Sokan' is used for other woman apart from wife:

भीड़ी आफिधा धिन्न जी साजी॥

मण्डिवारिव धञ्ज जी बङ्गड़ दुःशानी॥

It is mentioned that with the coming of the second wife, the importance of the earlier one was lessened in the family. Many a times old wife was given in marriage to other person:

93 Ibid.
97 Guru Granth Sahib, Asa Mahala 5, p. 394.
Guru Granth Sahib not only authenticates the presence of this custom but also condemned it. It is stated that if a man has physical relation with a large number of women, he has to born again and again. He can not get rid off from transmigration:

ने लथ दिसालीश्च डेंग लतगिः सद धंड रप्न वभागिः।
विखद मत्तुलु मधु र फरदी दिनिदिनिनेली भापिः।

Bhai Gurdas states that a man should marry only one woman in his whole life.

Nanddas also emphasized to maintain relation only with one's wife:

नित ही लिय के रस बस रहै।
अबर सुंदरी सपन न चाहे।

Both ideologies throw light on the existence of adultery in society during medieval period. There were women who had relation with other men apart from their husbands:

पियु ब्याकरा शरि अमधा धर गुआई राज धिमारु॥

Ashtachhap writers also mentioned about those women who had relation with other men:

98 Ibid., Asa Kabir, p. 483.
101 Nanddas, Nanddas Granthawali, p. 141.
102 Guru Granth Sahib, Sri Raga Mahal 3, p. 89.
Surdas says that if a woman has relation with another man she can not get salvation:

तजि भर्ती रहि जारहिं लीन। ऐसी नारी न होइ कुलीन॥

Men had also relation with other women part from their wives:

धन जोबन मद ऐंडी-ऐंडी, ताकत नारि पराई॥

Guru Granth Sahib condemns those men who indulge in adultery and have relation with other women:

बलभूत कभी सह रत्नी धर बिंड भेंत त शुष्क॥

पिन्ह झूठि बत्बे बते बढ़ढ़ूँगे मेंज रुँख भांि रूख॥

The man who has the habit to watch on other's wife will be punished at the time of his death:

कैं हाड़े रत्नी दुःखि वृस्त मरै वृष्ट॥

उवांति रत्नि धर्मसीव्र शूरि अंदशि ठाड़॥

Derogatory words like 'sinner' and 'blind' have been used for the man who has relation with other woman instead of his wife:

भर दी रत्नि दिखाती भ्रंग॥

भर रत्नी खिड़ि खाले घंग॥

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104 Nanddas, Nanddas Granthawali, p. 130.
107 Guru Granth Sahib, Dhansari Mahala 5, p. 672.
108 Ibid., Gauri Mahala 5, p. 315.
Both ideologies emphasized on the sanctity of married relationship by declaring that anyone from husband and wife who has relation with other may suffer from physical diseases:

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Either of them who played false to the other was an object of the disgust of the society:

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On one side Ashtachhap writers demand fidelity both from husband and wife for the smooth running of relationship but on the other side they announced that a wife should not leave her husband if he has guilty of having relation with other woman:

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But Guru Granth Sahib suggests that fidelity is essential not only for a wife but for the husband too.

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110 Ibid., Malar Mahala 1, p. 1256.
114 Guru Granth Sahib, Ramkali Mahala 1, p. 933.
A woman was considered to have become impure and untouchable for certain number of days after delivery. It was known as *Sutak*. The word *Sutak* has been derived from *Parsut* which means impure.\(^{115}\) The foreign travellers have noticed this strange custom. Manucci says,

“When she is in child-bed, she has a little liberty and during her periods she has to retire to a separate room kept for this special purpose. There no one approaches her. Her food is left at a distance, no one approaches her.”\(^ {116}\)

Alberuni also mentioned about this custom. According to him the days of impurity differed caste-wise, for the *Brahman*, these days were eight, for *Kashatriya* twelve, for *Vaishya* fifteen and for *Sudra* the days of impurity were thirty.\(^ {117}\)

This custom was also prevalent in *Japan* and *China*. *Japanese* literature dating back to the *Kojiki* mentions the segregation of women into parturition huts.\(^ {118}\) Even up till the early Twentieth century, the *Chinese* regarded the sight of a pregnant woman as offensive and her visit to temples as most irreverent.\(^ {119}\) Jews and Christians too believe in performing cleanliness rituals after childbirth. Christians draw on the imagery and symbolism of the purification of the Virgin. The

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\(^{116}\) N. Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, p. 147.


\(^{119}\) *Ibid.*
Jewish Law book states the law of impurity and ceremonial purification of women after giving birth which is double the number of days in case of the birth of a female child, there by meaning, that the birth of a female child caused double the pollution.\(^{120}\)

It is stated in Guru Granth Sahib that if one believes in the impurity of *Sutak*, then such impurity occurs everywhere. Inside the cow dung and wood are found worms. Not even one grain of corn is without life in it. Water itself is a living substance, imparting life to all vegetation. How may *Sutak* impurity be believed when even in the kitchen it is occurring? Impurity is not washed away by purificatory rituals, it is removed by true knowledge alone:

\[
egin{align*}
\text{n} & \text{e बचि मूड़वे भैंठीमश भस दै मूड़वे वेंटि II} \\
\text{वो} & \text{ठे भागे ठबटी भरूची शीरा वेंटि II} \\
\text{सेठे रहे अंते वे सीखा बम्ब न वेंटि II} \\
\text{वरिष्ठ धर्मी नीठी तै संहु वरिष्ठ मड़ वेंटि II} \\
\text{मूड़वे विठि वति वहीमे मूड़वे धे वमेंटि II} \\
\text{ठबटी मूड़वे रेंट रा ठेंड़े विमणर हुंड़े पैंटि II}^{121}
\end{align*}
\]

The impurity of *Sutak* is condemned as mere superstition. It is said if birth causes impurity, then it can be found in water and on earth where the creation is going on incessantly. Impurity is attached to birth and also to death. All mankind by the superstition of impurity is ruined:

\(^{121}\) *Guru Granth Sahib*, Asa Mahala 1, p. 472.
Guru Granth Sahib do not approve of any superstition regarding who is polluted and who is not. For them, the only pollution is the impurity of mind which leads to the un-cleanliness of character that ultimately contaminates the whole society, leading to all the ills, the likes of which the Gurus had to work against throughout their lives, to make life worth living for the common people. Ashtachhap writers are silent about this custom.

Another superstition directed against women is the prevalence of taboos regarding menstruation, a natural biological phenomenon. In most of the cultural groups, a menstruating woman is considered unclean and inauspicious. Pliny in his Natural History says, “The menstruating woman spoils harvests, devastates garden, kills seeds, makes fruit fall and kills bees; if she touches wine, it urns into vinegar; milk sours…”

Guru Granth Sahib strongly condemned this custom by declaring that impurity lies in the heart and mind of a person and not in the stained garment:

नन रे । मृदु माँग रे । मृदु मुद्म ठपपपदि चेष्टिः ॥

ननमे मृदु मुद्में दृष्टि मृदु मुद्म धन विलक्षिती॥ १२२

122 Ibid., Gauri Kabir, p. 331.
124 Guru Granth Sahib, Majh Mahala 1, p. 140.
The condition of that woman was very miserable at that time that had lost her husband. She had to burn herself with the dead body of her husband. This practice was known as Sati. Foreign travellers specifically Ibn Battuta, Alberuni and Manucci have described this custom in detail. But it is very surprising that it is only Surdas among Ashtachhap writers who has thrown light on this custom. All other writers are silent about it. Surdas may be seemed to support this view by announcing that a woman who had become Sati, would get rid off from transmigration and never born again:

\[
\text{जैसे सुमज लेत चढ़ि धावै। जैसे सती बहुर नहिं आवै।}^{125}
\]

The act of burning was performed both with the dead body of the husband or without it. To burn along with dead body was one of the types of Sati called Sahmarna or Sahgaman. The second type of Sati was known Anumarna or Anugaman according to which on the receipt of information about the death of her husband in distant land, the wife would burn herself along with some symbols of her husband.\(^{126}\) Abul Fazl divides Sati into a number of categories as: those who are forced to become Sati; those who burned themselves on account of their devotion; those who considered it necessary on account of family traditions and customs; and those who were dragged into fire against their will by the relatives.\(^{127}\)

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that a procession was formed to take the woman to the place of cremation. The *Brahmans* and other relatives joined the procession and showered their profuse greetings on the widow with regard to the glorious fortune that she attained.  

Guru Granth Sahib strongly condemned the custom of *Sati*. It stood for the right of the widows to live as human beings in their own right after the death of their husbands. Guru Amardas says that they are not to be called *Satis* or the truly faithful ones who burn themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands. Those alone are true *Satis* who become lifeless with the very shock of separation from their husbands. Those are also known as *Satis* who spend life in noble conduct and look after their husbands well:

\[
\text{महीना टेकि ह आफीमालि से महीना लगि नलिंकि} \\
\text{तरह महीना साजीमालि मि बिजे क्षेत मलिंकि} \\
\text{डी मे महीना साजीमालि मील मंदिबि उलिंकि} \\
\text{मेहिंकि माधि अवधि हिंद धूमि मंगलिंकि}  
\]

C.H. Payne rightly says, "Guru Amar Das is chiefly remembered for his vigorous crusade against the practice of *Sati*." G.B. Scott acclaims Guru Amardas as 'first reformer who condemned the prevailing Hindi practice of *Sati*.'

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Guru Granth Sahib throws light on the fact that all women did not become *Sati* willingly. They were compelled by their family and relatives to do so:

जगान्नाथ ज्ञान वे भव बिज्ञ

अथ उद्व तये भवे भिचि भट्टीवे बीवे बज्वि संभविव

In Guru Granth Sahib the word 'Sati' has been used in different connotations, it implies truthful, immortal, disciplined, virtuous, generous and pure etc.

सिमु सर सरी वेट्टि वैमे तांि

Guru Arjan has also criticised this custom. He says that she who burn herself in the fire under the pressure of her mind does not attain union with her husband and wanders through many births. On the other side, a woman who obeys the will of God with contentment and good conduct, suffers no pain from the Yama:

सले र धाति हो दल सलेही

विषाणु संभमि सरी हिन्दि वेट्टि

देवा देयी भल वाणि सलासी भाति।।

पिथस मंजु र परै बजु मेति बजुसी।।

मील संभमि पिथस आजिबा भाते।।

दिमु राती बजु बन्धु र समाने।।

Thus, Guru Granth's message gives a new meaning to the word of *Sati* and tries to improve the condition of widow in the

133 Ibid., Gauri Kabir, p. 328.  
134 Ibid., Gauri Mahala 5, p. 185.
contemporary society. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that some of the Mughal Emperors, particularly Akbar also tried to ban this practice. He is said to have issued an order that a woman should not be forced to become a *Sati*.\(^{135}\)

But it is very surprising that apart from Surdas no other *Asthachhap* writer informed about the prevalence of this cruel custom nor raised a voice against it. Surdas’ reference about this is very short.

Society looked down upon that widow who did not perform *Sati*. She was advised to lead her remaining life in a particular manner. She was asked neither to sing nor to listen to music; nor to desire to be honoured by anyone. She should not play jokes with anyone, should not eat anything with warm effect; should not take cold water, nor apply oil to her hair or body; should not take part in any game; should not sleep on a cot; should bathe in cold water and not seek after hot water; should not take sweet dishes; should not put on ornaments on feet or toe; should live a life of truth or *Dharma* by thought, word and deed; should try to have control over her senses by undertaking austere fasts and should live in obedience of her son. She was advised to wear rough and coarse clothes:

\[\text{मुख लघु डंगा रत्न धिति हिदुर्गी दुष्कर्मः} \]\(^{136}\)

\[\text{जीर बी रति से मुख महवाड़ि लघु त मैलै देने} \]\(^{137}\)


\(^{136}\) *Guru Granth Sahib*, Maru Mahala 5, p. 1102.

\(^{137}\) *Ibid.*, Suhi Mahala 1, p. 763.
Thus Guru Granth Sahib authenticates the bad condition of widow in society:

A widow had to spend all her life as a neglected creature as widow remarriage was not allowed.\(^{139}\)

Guru Granth Sahib favoured the idea of widow-remarriage in order to prevent a widow from becoming a victim to temptation.\(^{140}\)

Although there is no direct reference to widow remarriage but one of the hymn state that a wife can get satisfaction only from her husband and from none else, it can be said that Guru Granth Sahib favoured the idea of widow remarriage so that a widowed woman could lead a normal and socially respectable life:

The profession of prostitution has been in vague in India since the time immortal. A hymn of Guru Granth Sahib has confirmed the existence of prostitution in Ancient times:

\(^{138}\) Ibid.


\(^{141}\) Guru Granth Sahib, Gauri Mahala 1, p. 226.

During the Muslim rule the evil appears to have spread far and wide. Guru Arjan Dev informed that people had no scruple in visiting prostitutes:

\[\text{निकृष्ट यथा त अलम भाई} II
\]
\[\text{घेमंश दातन बिहि तु महाकाले} II\]

The father of a prostitute’s child cannot be recognized due to this practice:

\[\text{सिद्धु घेमंश घुट यथा से ववीधे सिद्धु देवत ब्रजं सह्रं गे} II\]

Among Ashtachhap writers Nanddas also mentioned about this practice:

\[\text{गनिका-गज-गीढ़ रत्न, गोतम की नारी रत्न} II\]

Those who were in the habit of visiting the prostitutes did not care to realise the feelings of their wedded companions. Guru Nanak has portrayed in the following hymn the feeling of a young lady whose husband visits a prostitute:

\[\text{चूमा वैटा बलीकृष्ण सिद्धु भुंपे मष्ट वणी मष्ट बण} II\]
\[\text{फेंटे देम बलीवीचे भुंपे मष्ट दुः आलजन} II\]

Another hymn also refers to this practice where it is stated that thieves, illicit lovers, prostitutes and touts keep company together, as do irreligious men, who eat out of the same bowl. They do not know the praise of True Lord and evil abides within them:

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144 *Guru Granth Sahib*, Bhairo Mahala 5, p. 1143.
146 Nanddas, *Nanddas Granthawali*, p. 279, also see p. 66 & 91.
Guru Granth Sahib not only authenticates the presence of this evil in society but also condemned this practice. It is stated that these women were good in talking but their actions were always bad. They were looked beautiful but their hearts were unclean:

Guru Granth Sahib declared that not only women were prostitutes but the men’s who were morally degenerated were also like prostitute:

So, Guru Granth Sahib equally applied word prostitute to both woman and man. Apart from the evil of prostitution there was trade of women on the frontier area. G.S. Chhabra informed, "On the frontiers of Punjab, there was an open trade in women where they were measured and sold under different standards."
Sahib there are references to the practice of offering women in charity at pilgrimage places:

\[ \text{Guru Granth Sahib does not appreciate this practice. It is stated as a useless practice. One is advised to purify oneself and worship the Name of Lord to achieve liberation instead of performing these types of rituals:} \]

\[ \text{Whatever might have been the position of woman as a girl and wife but as a mother great importance is given to her in both ideologies. Mother exists as a person upon whom depends creation and nutrition in Guru Granth Sahib. Conception and birth are from mother. A hymn of Guru Granth Sahib refers to the indispensability of woman as a mother. It refers, in fact, to her indispensability for procreation. The hymn states that it is from woman, the condemned one that we are conceived and it is from her that we are born. It is the woman who keeps our race going. It is the woman who is sought when one loses one's previous wife. It is she with whom we establish our social ties. Then why denounce her from whom even Kings, great men} \]

\[ \text{152 Guru Granth Sahib, Ramkali Namdev, p. 973.} \]

\[ \text{153 Ibid.} \]
and commoners are born? From woman is born another woman, without woman there is none:

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Further it is stated that only God (who is according to Sikh Scripture is Nirguna) is free from woman:

On the other side, Ashtachhap writers as they believed in Saguna form of God, declared that even God is not free from woman. In their writings they have praised mother Devaki as she has given birth to the Lord:

Guru Granth Sahib stated that in the warmth (of mother’s womb) we are inseminated:

In this connection Nikky Singh rightly says, "In the Sikh world view the mother is thus crucial to the origin of life. She is the matrix out of which everything that is originates and evolves." 

154 Ibid., Asa di Var Mahala 1, p. 473.
155 Ibid.
156 Nanddas, Nanddas Granthawali, p. 198.
157 Guru Granth Sahib, Gauri Mahala 1, p. 156.
Further Guru Granth Sahib explained that the nutrition of child depends upon the mother. Child's first attraction is to the mother's breast milk. Second, to the recognition of the mother and the father:

पितृते भिक्षार्थ रचना घट युग ||
दृष्टे भाषित वध जी मुख || 159

At the first stage of its existence, child takes to the (mother's) milk:

पितृते पवने वेदि वे स्मारकिम्ब भिषु दलित युग अचै दु ||
की भीमे घेतृतिकम्ब एस्मारकिम्ब भिषु भाद थिरू मुड रेड || 160

These verses of Guru Granth Sahib indicate the physical and psychological reliance of the child upon mother. From the mother's milk child fulfill its physical need as well as breast milk is its primal psychological experience, which then leads on to recognition of the mother and the father.

Ashtachhap writers also explained the physical dependence of child upon mother by explaining feeding activity:

सुस चुंबन स्तनपान दे लाल ते बैठार्ति गोद || 161

Guru Granth Sahib explained that if a person is great it’s credit goes to his/her mother who has given birth to him/her:

ढ़ुढ़ दृष्टे अभक्ष जडू सदेवी भाषिम || 162

159 Guru Granth Sahib, Majh Mahala 1, p. 137.
160 Ibid., Sri Raga Mahala 1, p. 75.
161 Govindswami, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 79, p. 64.
162 Guru Granth Sahib, Majh Mahala 2, pp. 138-139.
A person is asked to take advise of her/his mother in difficult times because it is believed that mother has the capacity to solve all the problems of a child:

\[ \text{मेरे बच्चे मे बिखु अभ्य भागी} \]
\[ \text{जिन बिठू मैं न देश तैबे भागी} \] \[163\]

In Guru Granth Sahib mother has been given equal place at par with Guru:

\[ \text{गुरूदेव भाँगु गुरूदेव धियर गुरूदेव महबी धरमेवर} \]

Guru Granth Sahib by recognizing importance of mother compares Mati (wisdom) to her:

\[ \text{भद्रा मति धियर मंडेशु} \] \[165\]

or

\[ \text{मति महान मंडेशु धियर मति मुख ममकेशु} \] \[166\]

So, a person should recognise Mati (wisdom) as mother and should work according to it.

In Ashtachhap writings mother is depicted as a very loving person. This is exemplified through the Yashoda who showers all love, care and consideration on her child, Krishna:

\[ \text{जनमी देखि छबि, बलि जाति} \]
\[ \text{जैसें निधनी धरौहिं पाएं, हरण दिन अरू राति} \] \[167\]
Being mother, Yashoda is ready to give her everything to anybody who make her child learn how to walk:

यास्होदा पत्नी जो मेरे नान्हरे गोविंद पी पी चलन सिखाओ। ।168

She makes efforts so that her child may learn how to walk and how to dance by clapping her hands:

सिखवति चलन जसोदा मैया।

अरबराह कर पानि गहवत, डगमगाह धरनी धरे पैया।।169

अोंग स्याम नचावहीं, जसुमति नेंदरानी।

तारी दै-दै गावहीं मधुरी मुदु बानी।।170

Yashoda is so much absorbed in love of her son that she says to other ladies to allow her son to take what he want, in return she will pay double price:

माई लैन देहु जो मेरे लाल हि भावे।

दद्धि मांलन चौगमनो देउंगी या सुत के लेखे जाकी जितो आवै।।171

To conclude, it may be said that both ideologies depicted woman playing different roles as a girl, wife and mother. Braj literature only authenticates the presence of social evils i.e. Purdah, Sati, child-marriage etc. in society whereas in Guru Granth Sahib these social evils are strongly opposed for the upliftment of woman. In Braj literature woman’s position is subordinate to her husband. But in

168 Chaturbhujdas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 5, p. 35.
171 Chaturbhujdas, Pad-Sangrah, Pad 5, p. 35.
Guru Granth Sahib she exists as an independent person. The Sikh Scriptural message is not the subjugation of the female to the male.\textsuperscript{172}

Literature under study is full of numerous references to the dress, ornaments, make-up and activities of a woman which is the subject matter of the next chapter.