CHAPTER-VII

WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT IN SUBAH OF BIHAR

Women were never given any Rights of liberty and equality. They were always treated as inferior as an item or showpiece in the house. Women were considered as Machines for giving birth to children. The condition of women was so bad that if she gave birth to a girl child she was treated in a humiliated manner. The boy child was seen as ‘kul-ka-deepak’ (taking the family name ahead in generations).

The Muslim ruling class seldom brought women outside home with them so it seems clear that wives, and certainly female slaves, were acquired from Bengal. Female slaves served in the households but details such as their origins or the roles they played in these families is difficult to ascertain. Tales of abduction and rape of Hindu women abound in historical accounts but are narrated without detail. Violence against women has become, nevertheless, the set explanation for growing rigidity in adherence to customs such as child marriage.

**Women Education:**

Although there were some Hindu girls who attended *pathshalas* and literate women known for their education, formal education for women was rare. The belief that education for girls contributed to early widowhood seems to have been widespread and, along with the emphasis on early marriage and concern for female chastity, meant females who learned to read did so in the home rather than in schools. Muslim women were not only refrained from being educated but also not allowed to step out of the house. They were asked to eat after their husbands have eaten. They were given the remains of their husband’s food to eat.
This is of eight kinds:—

1. Bráhmya.* The girl's father with other elders of the family visit the bridegroom and bring him to his house where the relations assemble. Then the grandfather, or brother, or any other male relation, or the mother, says before the company:—“I have bestowed such and such a maiden upon such and such a man.” The bridegroom in the presence of the same company gives his consent. Certain incantations are then pronounced and the Homa sacrifice is performed. It is then declared that the girl's mother has borne male children and was of smaller stature than her husband,* and that the bridegroom is not impotent, and both parties declare that they have not been subject to leprosy, phthisis, dyspepsia, hemorrhoids, piles, ehronic issue of blood, deformity of limb, or epilepsy. At the nuptials an attendant of the bride washes the feet of the bride and bridegroom and draws the sectarial marks upon them. Three vessels filled severally with rice and curds, after certain incantations have been pronounced, are then given to them to eat. When this is concluded they are dressed out and taken to a retired chamber and a curtain is hung between the bride and bridegroom. The father takes each of the young people and turns them facing the east and a Bráhman repeats certain prayers and places in the hand of each some rice and five betel-nuts. The curtain is then removed and they present to each other what they hold in their hands. The Bráhman next places the two hands of the bride in those of the bridegroom and repeats certain prayers and then reverses the ceremony; after which he binds them both with loose-spun cotton thread, and the girl's father taking her hand gives her to the bridegroom and says, ‘May there be ever participation between you and this nursling of happiness in three things—in good works, in worldly goods, and tranquillity of life. “Finally, a fire is lit and the pair are led round it seven times,* and the marriage is completed. Until this is done, the engagement may be lawfully cancelled.
2. **Daiva** (of the Devas). At the time of a sacrifice, all is given away in alms and a maiden is bestowed on the Bráhman performing the sacrifice. The betrothal is then made and the other ceremonies are conducted as aforesaid.

3. **Ārsha** (of the Rishis). This rite takes place when a pair of kine have been received from the bridegroom.

4. **Prájápatya** (of the Prájápatis). The man and woman are brought together and united by this bond.

5. **A´sura** (of the A´suras). The maiden is received in marriage after as much wealth has been presented to her kinsmen (as the suitor can afford).

6. **Gándharva** (of the Gándharvas). The pair entertain a mutual affection and are voluntarily united in wedlock without the knowledge of others.

7. **Rákshasa** (of the Rákshasas), is the forcible seizure and abduction of a girl from her people by the ravisher to his own house and there marrying her.

8. **Paisácha** (of the Pisáchas). This rite receives this name when the lover secretly approaches a girl when asleep or intoxicated or disordered in mind.

Everywhere there is some difference in the preliminary betrothals, but the concluding ceremonies are after the manner above described. The four rites are lawful for a Bráhman; and besides the second, all are within his privilege. The fifth is lawful to a Vaiśya or a Śúdra; the sixth and seventh for a Kshatriya. The eighth is held disgraceful by all.

A dower is not mentioned in the case of Bráhmans, and divorce is not customary: In the former ages of the world, it was the rule for Bráhmans to take wives from among all the castes, while the other three castes considered it unlawful to wed a Bráhman woman. The same practice obtained between all superior and inferior castes reciprocally. 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.

Although there are numerous classes of Brâhmans, the noblest by descent are from the (seven) ishis, Kaśyapa, Atri, Bharadvája, Viśva-mitra, Gotáma, Angiras, and Pulastya.* Each of these has numerous ramifications. When any member of one of these families attains to any worldly and spiritual eminence and becomes the founder of any class of institutes, his posterity are called by his name. The family caste of each is called Kula (Hindi kul) or gotra, (Hindi gotar), and the rule is that if a youth and maid be of the same gotra, however distant be the relationship, their marriage is unlawful; but if one be of a separate kula, they may lawfully marry. Kshatriyas, Vaiśyas and ´Súdras are dependent for their marriage ceremony on a family priest (purohita), and each class has a special Brâhman from one of the seven lines of descent. If the maid and the youth have their several family priests belonging to the same kula, their marriage is held unlawful. When united in marriage, the wife leaves her own gotra and enters that of her husband.

When the betrothal is first proposed the lines of paternal and maternal ancestry of both the woman and the man are scrutinised. In computing either of the two genealogies, if within each fifth degree of ascent the lines unite, the marriage is not lawful. Also if in the two paternal genealogies, they unite in any generation, the marriage cannot take place. Scrutiny of the maternal descent on both sides is not necessary. If in the paternal genealogies of both parties, consanguinity through a female occurs in the eighth generation, it is held lawful, but if in the paternal lines of both, consanguinity through a female occurs in the sixth generation it constitutes a fresh (impediment of) kinship. The same result occurs if the consanguinity occurs in the sixth generation by the mother's side.

Until the elder brother is married, the younger may not lawfully be so. It is held expedient that the bride should not be under eight, and any age over ten is thought improper. The man should be twenty-five, and marriage after fifty years of age, they
regard as unbecoming. Excepting in the king, it is not considered right for a man to have more than one wife, unless his first wife is sickly or proves barren, or her children die. In these cases, he may marry ten wives, but if the tenth proves defective, he may not marry again. If his first wife is suitable, and he desires to take another, he must give the first a third part of his estate.

It was the custom in ancient times for the daughters of kings when they sought a husband, to hold a great festival. Her suitors were assembled together and the damsel attended the banquet in person. Of whomever she made choice, she placed upon his neck a string of pearls and flowers. This custom was called *Svayamvara*, or self-choice.

Quando mulier mensium suorum expers sit quod post quatriduum contingit, si maritus ejus intra duodecim dies proximos in quibus satis probabile est conceptus, ineat eam, necesse est illi perlutum esse. In reliquis temporibus dissimilis est ratio et manus pedesque lavare satis esse censeant. Per totum tempus mensium coitum in crimine ponunt. In diebus his, vivit mulier in secessu, neque cibum mariti nec vestimenta tangit neque ad culinam accedit ne contaminet eam.

**REGULATIONS REGARDING MARRIAGES:** (2)

Every care bestowed upon this wonderful tie between men is a means of preserving the stability of the human race, and ensuring the progress of the world; it is a preventive against the outbreak of evil passions, and leads to the establishment of homes. Hence His Majesty, inasmuch as he is benign, watches over great and small, and imbues men with his notions of the spiritual union and the equality of essence which he sees in marriage. 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 having connexion, and their home is desolate.
Marriage between near relations His Majesty thinks highly improper. He says, “The fact that, in ancient times even, a girl was not given to her twin brother, ought to silence those who are fond of historical proofs. Marriage between first cousins, however, does not strike the bigoted followers of Muhammad's religion as wrong; for the beginning of a religion resembles, in this regard, the beginning of the creation of mankind.”

His Majesty disapproves of high dowries; for as they are rarely ever paid, they are mere sham; but he admits that the fixing of high dowries is a preventive against rash divorces. Nor does His Majesty approve of every one marrying more than one wife; for this ruins a man's health, and disturbs the peace of the home. He censures old women that take young husbands, and says that doing so is against all modesty.

He has also appointed two sober and sensible men, one of whom enquires into the circumstances of the bridegroom, and the other into those of the bride. These two officers have the title of Tů́íbegí, or masters of marriages. In many cases, the duties are performed by one and the same officer. His Majesty also takes a tax from both parties, to enable them to shew their gratitude. The payment of this tax is looked upon as auspicious. Mançabdárs commanding from five to one thousand, pay 10 Muhurs; do. from one thousand to five hundred, 4 M.; do. to Commanders of one hundred, 2 M.; do. to Commanders of forty, 1 M.; do. to Commanders of ten, 4 R. The latter fee is also paid by rich people. The middle classes pay 1 R., and common people 1 dám.* In demanding this tax, the officers have to pay regard to the circumstances of the father of the bride.

Child Marriage:

The marriage customs of Hindus and Muslims had many similarities. Early marriages were much in vogue amongst the Hindus, with seven considered the proper age for a girl to be married. To leave a daughter unmarried beyond twelve years of age was to risk the displeasure of one's caste. The Muslims also betrothed their children between the ages of six and eight, but the
marriage was generally not solemnized before they had attained the age of puberty.

Among the wealthier classes polygamy and divorce are said to have been very common. The custom of secluding women, known as purdah, was very strictly observed. Marriage negotiations were undertaken by the professional broker or the friends of either party. The marriage ceremonies were more or less the same as they are at present, and the character of the average Indian or Pakistani home and the socio-ethical ideas which influence it have not undergone any fundamental change. The son's duty to his parents and the wife's duty to her husband were viewed almost as religious obligations. "Superstitions played a prominent part in the daily life of the people. Charms were used not merely to ensnare a restive husband but also to secure such other ends as the birth of a son or cure of a disease. The fear of the evil eye was ever present ... and the young child was considered particularly susceptible. ... People believed in all sorts of omens." (3)

The prevalence of child marriage meant that among Hindus there were many child widows and they were required to follow strict rules in terms of dress and diet. It is not known when Hindu women first began practising purdah or seclusion, but it was probably in the period between the 16th and 18th century and linked with fear of abduction and greater emphasis on chastity. These customs: child marriage, compulsory widowhood without remarriage, and restrictions on women's mobility were the hallmark of the Hindu upper castes, and not necessarily followed by the lower castes.

**Child Marriage**
Child Marriage
SINGÁRA, or Ornaments of Dress:

A woman is adorned by sixteen (4) things:—(i). Bathing. (ii). Anointing with oil. (iii). Braiding the hair. (iv). Decking the crown of her head with jewels (v). Anointing with sandal-wood unguent. (vi). The wearing of dresses and these are of various kinds. The sleeves of some reach to the fingers, of others to the elbows. A jacket without a skirt called angiyá (Sansk. angiká) was chiefly worn, and instead of drawers, a lahängá which is a waist-cloth joined at both ends with a band sewn at the top through which the cord passes for fastening. It is also made in other forms. Others wear the ānīyá which is a large sheet worn over the lahängá, part of which is drawn over the head and the other end fastened at the waist. These three garments are of necessity. The wealthy wear other garments over this. Some wear the veil* and pāe-jámas. (vii). Sectarial marks of caste, and often decked with pearls and golden ornaments. (viii). Tinting with lampblack like collyrium. (ix). Wearing earrings. (x). Adorning with nose-rings of pearls and gold. (xi). Wearing ornaments round the neck. (xii). Decking with garlands of flowers or pearls. (xiii). Staining the hands. (xiv). Wearing a belt hung with small bells. (xv). Decorating the feet with gold ornaments. (xvi). Eating pán. Finally blandishments and artfulness.

Women’s Condition:

The sources agree that Hindus and Muslims followed different customs but also remark on those cases where Muslims observed Hindu customs and Hindus adopted Muslim customs. The Muslim ruling class seldom brought women with them so it seems clear that wives, and certainly female slaves, were acquired from Bengal. Female slaves served in the households but details such as their origins or the roles they played in these families is difficult to ascertain. Tales of abduction and rape of Hindu women abound in historical accounts but are narrated without detail. Violence against women has become, nevertheless, the set explanation for growing rigidity in adherence to customs such as child marriage.
Although there were some Hindu girls who attended pathshala and literate women known for their erudition, formal education for women was rare. The belief that education for girls contributed to early widowhood seems to have been widespread and, along with the emphasis on early marriage and concern for female chastity, meant females who learned to read did so in the home rather than in schools. The prevalence of child marriage meant that among Hindus there were many child widows and they were required to follow strict rules in terms of dress and diet. It is not known when Hindu women first began practising PURDA or seclusion.

These customs like child marriage, compulsory widowhood, without remarriage, and restrictions on women’s mobility were the hallmark of the Hindu upper castes, and not necessarily followed by the lower castes. The sources say less about Muslim women, but mention customs such as polygamy and seclusion as common. Little is known about education or age of marriage.

The Indian woman’s position in the society further deteriorated during the mughal period. When Sati among some communities, child marriages and a ban on widow remarriages became part of social life among some communities in India. The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought the purdah practice in the Indian society. Polygamy was widely practised especially among Hindu Kshatriya rulers. In many Muslim families, women were restricted to Zenana areas.

In spite of these conditions, some women excelled in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion.(8) Razia Sultana became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi. The Gond queen Durgavati ruled for fifteen years, before she lost her life in a battle with Mughal emperor Akbar's general Asaf Khan in 1564. Chand Bibi defended Ahmednagar against the mighty Mughal forces of Akbar in 1590s. Jehangir’s wife Nur Jehan effectively wielded imperial power and was recognized as the real force behind the Mughal throne.
The Bhakti movements tried to restore women's status and questioned some of the forms of oppression. Shortly after the Bhakti movement, the message of equality between men and women had spread.

**Jauhar:**
Jauhar refers to the practice of the voluntary immolation of all the wives and daughters of defeated warriors, in order to avoid capture and consequent molestation by the enemy. The practice was followed by the wives of defeated Rajput rulers, who are known to place a high premium on honour.

**Sati:**

**Sati System**
Sati is an old, largely defunct custom, among some communities in which the widow was immolated alive on her husband's funeral pyre. Although the act was supposed to be a voluntary on the widow's part, it is believed to have been sometimes forced on the widow.

*Sati* is the act of immolation of a woman on her husband's funeral pyre. It refers to one who either immolated herself willingly or through societal inducement and compulsion. *Sati* was *ideally* performed as an act of immortal love, and was believed to purge the couple of all accumulated sin.

**Polygamy:**

The practice of marrying more than one wife. The sources say less about Muslim women, but mention customs such as polygamy and seclusion as common. Little is known about education or age of marriage.

**Purda System:**
It is a system of keeping women off from the sight of men other than their immediate family members. Women, when outdoors, were required to be completely covered by *burkha* (veil). Muslim women above the labour class never moved out except in a covered *palanquin* or a hackney carriage or a boat. Purda syste, prevented women in the past from receiving formal education at schools and colleges. So much was the orthodoxy about purda that ROQUIAH SAKHAWAT HOSAIN, a well-known activist for emancipation of Muslim women, had herself used elaborate veil while she moved out of her home.

Purdah is the practice among some communities of requiring women to cover their bodies so as to cover their skin and conceal their form. It imposes restrictions on the mobility of women, it curtails their right to interact freely and it is a symbol of the subordination of women. It does not reflect the religious teachings of either Hinduism or Islam, contrary to common belief, although misconception has occurred due to the ignorance and prejudices of religious leaders of both faiths.

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**NOTES AND REFERENCES:**


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