Preface

The present study of women in early India explores one of the less frequented areas in the field. The tradition of the gaṇikās has been engendered in the studies of women issues or in the reinterpretation of the early Indian literature. Although certain valuable contributions have been made in this area, an examination of the entire domain still needs development. The purpose of undertaking the study of the gaṇikā tradition is to provide an elaborate study of the identity, position and both the public as well as the private life of these women in the society through exploration of the literary tradition as well as art remains of early India. The basis of this investigation is to deconstruct the stereotypical image of the gaṇikās. These cultural women need to be viewed within their space and the interplay of gender relations. The study of the tradition along with the institution of prostitution was inevitable.

The chapters of the thesis are broadly classified into various themes based on the literary and art sources available on the gaṇikā tradition as well as the institution of prostitution. With a brief introduction to the subject of the study and scrutinising of the work of various theorists on feminism and gender, prostitution and early Indian socio-economy, polity and culture, the work traces the institution from the period of mid first millennium BCE to twelfth century CE. The aim was to follow the transitions that the tradition went through in the various socio-economic and political phases during the span of the period mentioned above. The transitions are traced in the roles and duties that were expected of them along with their association with the artistic graces and erotics and in the conceptualised image of the gaṇikā. The household of the gaṇikās has been taken up for discussion with the task of examining its specific locus within the city and further looking at the gendered authoritative position and associates involved within the household. The royal and the elite
patriarchal household of the city have also been discussed for a more comprehensive understanding of the \textit{gaṇikā} household. A study of the significant characters of \textit{gaṇikā} represented in the Brahmanical and Buddhist literature from the ancient to the early medieval period and an analysis of the diverse reflection these characters provide to break the stereotyped image has been inevitable.

This examination of the tradition in the literary and the art sources is a significant exposure in the area of gender studies since the \textit{gaṇikās} as well as the sex workers has been subject to the patriarchal contempt as they had certain authority in the public space which was out of bounds for the common women. Their uncontrolled sexuality has always been an issue of anxiety in the society. The exploration of the various available sources have illustrated extensive diversity within the tradition and how these women formed an independent identity in the history of early India.

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