CHAPTER-3

THE LAITY

It is well known that Buddhism became widespread in various parts of India because of the popularity of the principles of the faith which appealed greatly to the masses consisting primarily of the people of the middle class and those belonging to the lower strata of the society.\(^1\) In a general way we can designate these people forming the backbone of Buddhism as the Laity. In short, they refer to the lay followers of the faith, and their number was so great during the period that the \textit{Jātakas} mostly refer to them. To count the number of the lay followers of Buddhism as gleaned from the \textit{Jātakas}, will be a futile exercise. To do so will mean virtually to refer almost to all the people that the \textit{Jātakas} have in some way or the other mentioned in different contexts of socio-religious condition of that period.\(^2\)

We are taking some selected lay women worshippers in order to understand the position of women in the middle and lower strata of the society. In order to have a comprehensive picture of the society in terms of the position of women in the middle and lower strata we have to mention some important events which have been depicted in the \textit{Jātakas}. For our study we take up following \textit{Jātakas} as examples for the comprehensive picture of women in the middle class and in the lower strata of the society.

In the first category, we have taken note of those women having respectable birth and those who had also taken up professions, which were not immediately despised or looked down upon in the society. For example, women who were the lay followers served their husbands in academic, military and business pursuits. Some of them even were the wives of noblemen and merchants and others who served under the royal house in various capacities.
In the category ‘women from lower strata’, we have taken note of the slave girls and those women who had lowly professions. In this category we have also taken note of the prostitutes, call girls, public women and the like, although they frequently were the attractions of the many high ups of the society.

(A) Women of Middle strata of the society

In the Vessantara Jātaka there is a reference of middle class women, whose name was Amittatāpanā. She was young wife of the old Brahman Jūjuka of Kālinga. She had been given away by her parents in payment of a debt. He had been sent by his young wife Amittatāpanā to find slaves for her, because when she went to the well for water, the other women had laughed at her. She insisted on being provided with servants. It was in order to meet her wishes the Jūjuka went to Vessantara to beg for the Vessantara’s children to be used as slaves. Herein, we find that woman could be demanding due to the position she occupied. In Durājana Jātaka a young Brāhmaṇ of Takkasila fell in love with a woman and married her. She was very capricious and her husband neglected his duties. Women respected to high esteem in middle class families also.

Sometimes their husbands neglected their essential duties and too much worried about the moods of their wives. No doubt feelings of women in middle strata of society were cared. In Kaccāni Jātaka, we get a reference in which women asked her husband to choose between herself and his mother. It shows nothing important. But one aspect of liberty that was enjoyed by women in ancient Indian society was to express her feelings, whether bad or good. She had great say in household affairs, so she dared to compel her husband to cast out his mother from house. Same story is narrated in Takkala Jātaka, in which same role of woman is reflected. According to the Samyutta Nikaya, Women as wife acquired a position of command and behaved themselves queen in their own homes. Woman in the family acquired a position of command and behaved herself like a queen in their homes.
Avavādakā was a Licchavi girl. Her father was a Nigantha who had come to Veśālī to hold discussions and that there he met a Niganthanī whom he married. Avavādakā and her three sisters learnt from their parents one thousand thesis for discussion, on the death of their parents the sisters became parībhajikās. They would set up at the city gate a Jambu Twig, as a challenge to anyone to hold philosophic discussion. Here we find the reference and evidence of women who were highly educated, which gave them the confidence to challenge even learned men in discussions and debates. This is reflective of the high respect that some ladies commanded, and could not be ignored. According to Rigveda, Atharvaveda, both men and women were expected to speak to Vidatha. Vidatha was a political assembly. From a reference in Rigveda, It is clear that female participants were not mute, rather they were taking active part in the deliberations. In Buddhism unmarried girls were not looked down upon in the society. They could lead their life freely.

In a different context we find another interesting glimpse of the middle class women. Here, we will come to know that there existed a system of second marriage for middle class women. They were helped not only by the king but also from the Buddha, the Master of the Faith. Kāṇā was daughter of Kaṇṇamātā a middle class woman. She visited her mother after marriage. Her mother not wishing her to return empty-handed, asked her to wait till she had some cakes. When cakes were ready, a monk came at the door, whom Kāṇā gave cakes. Four times Kāṇā’s husband sent message for her and all the times same thing happened. In anger, her husband took another wife. When Kāṇā came to know then she was greatly annoyed and abused every monk. No monk dared go into her street. When Buddha came to know about this incident, visited Kāṇā’s home. He convinced Kāṇā with arguments. King saw Buddha returning from Kāṇā’s home, on learning what had happened. He adopted her as his daughter and arranged her marriage with rich noble man.
In *Dhammapada Commentary*\(^{12}\) there are references which support this tradition that remarriage of woman did not look down upon in the society. As a mother woman was definitely honoured.

Kisāgotamī was identified as lizard in *Tittira Jātaka*. She came from poor family in Savatthi. She was from Setthikula, which had fallen on evil days. Her real name was Gotamī. She was married in a rich family by whom she was disdainfully treated. But as soon as she bore a son, she was shown respect. In *Tittira Jātaka* there is a story of lizard who was identified later in the story with Kisāgotamī.\(^{13}\) In this, we find that woman received high esteem when she became a mother. Motherhood was a nature’s gift for women, which brought them to a higher pedestal than the rest of the ladies. Interestingly, in this *Jātaka* story, Kisāgotamī was not in the best of light, because she had married in a rich family which ostensibly was not very much favoured for the ordinary people of the middle class. But, as the story has it, Kisāgotamī was elevated in her status and position once she became a mother. The people around her seemingly parted company with her after her marriage in a richer family. But it is unique evidence of not only getting back her previous status but also becoming glorified in the eyes of the society, immediately after she had the grace of motherhood.

In fact, time and again in various other *Jātakas*, we find references to the importance of the motherhood as the criteria for evaluating the status of the females.\(^{14}\) In this connection we should refer to *Mahākapi Jātaka* in which the Bodhisattava was born as the Mahākapi or the Great Monkey.\(^{15}\) In the Jungle, the King used to come for hunting animals, who were dreaded from this pastime of the king. Accordingly, a deal was laid out between the animals and the king who agreed to kill only one animal a day from that jungle. The animals decided to offer one member from each family everyday for being the king’s game, one day it was a turn of mother monkey she was very sad because she had to breast feed.
After knowing this problem of the mother monkey the Bodhisattava offered himself in her place. When the king came to know about this, he realized his fault and got advice from the Bodhisattava monkey. In this context motherhood has been glorified as supreme not only in this world, but also in the heaven. However, it should be mentioned that there are alternative versions of this Jātaka story narrated in the changed context. Moreover, the glorification of motherhood is also there in the Ruru Jātaka, which is concerned with the mother deer. Through animals ideal message was conveyed. References are made in the Therīgāthā commentary to glorify the status of mother whether it is discussed in Jatakas through the stories of animals like mother monkey and mother dear. In Saṁyutta Nikāya, Dhammapadda commentary, Sutta Nipāta Motherhood is glorified in every Buddhist text. In Therīgāthā commentary, there is a reference in which reference of Kisa-Gotami showed that woman got due honour in the family and society when she became mother.

There are references to some bad women, who had to face the consequences of the misdeeds. We have a reference to a wicked wife named Kosiya of a Brāhmaṇ who lay in bed throughout pretending to be sick and spent her nights in enjoyment. Husband worked hard to supply her with dainties. Brāhmaṇ discovered the truth and treated her harshly. She then knew that her wickedness was exposed and she abandoned her evil ways. This story exposed the weakness of women who behaved differently because of senselessness and shamelessness.

Time and again the Jātakas have exposed the dark side of some mischievous women, the intention of such story is to point to the fact that women were not always heavenly because of their being the potential mother. Of course, occasionally poverty was doubtless a factor which led the women astray at times. But the Kosiya Jātaka story does refer to a woman who fell from her status due to
her own individualistic fault. In *Ucchittha-bhatta Jātaka*, there is a story of Brāhmaṇ’s wicked wife who received her lover, when her husband was away.19

She prepared a meal for her lover. One day Brāhmaṇ came back before expected time. He caught his wife. He gave a sound beating to both of them. This Jātaka tale tells us that wicked woman were there in all stratas of society. In general women enjoyed, freedom in ancient days. In *Gahapati Jātaka*, there is reference to a wicked woman.20 She had an affair with village headmen. When her husband went out, her lover visited her. Along with wickedness of woman, it shows that woman enjoyed lot of freedom. She was not restricted to talk with male members of the society. This Jātaka tale is enough to show the position enjoyed by women of middle class in the society.

In the *Culladhamuggaha Jātaka*, not only virtuous women are discussed, but her evil nature of deceit has been shown.21 Along with bad qualities of woman, one thing is concluded from this story that married woman was not afraid to indulge in an affair with another man which reflects women’s right to freedom during that time, which enabled her to indulge in evil actions. Another example of a bad woman is found in the *Rādha Jātaka*. In the *Rādha Jātaka*, there is a reference of Brāhmaṇee Kosiya.22 Her husband was a Brāhmaṇ in Kusi. When Brāhmaṇ was away, his wife admitted men to her house and her husband set the birds to watch. He told the birds to watch his wife and report to him any misconduct. But birds two parrots flew away saying that they could not live there any longer. Birds knew that if they did admonish her, it was useless.

It reflects that woman in middle class families were trusted by their husbands so blindly to that extent, any report about their bad character by anybody was not accepted by them. Actions were only in that cases in which husbands caught their wives themselves. According to *Milindapāṇha*, in the Aryan society adultery was treated with sever rules of punishment.23 According to Bhuddhism adultery with another’s wife is serious, heinous crime. Woman or man who
indulge in the adultery, are not able to achieve nirvana. But in the *Dhammapadda Commentary*, Buddhists do not favour severity against the woman.

In *Succaja Jātaka* there is a reference to women of middle class family. The story is about a landowner of Sāvatthi, who went with his wife to collect a debt. They arrived at Sāvatthi, they went to Setavanna, where they met Buddha. This shows that women in middle class families enjoyed equal rights as their husbands. They participated in business affairs and religious affairs too. According to *Dhammpada commentary* Woman was no mere household drudge, but she had authority in the home and respect equally in the all important issues with her husband.

In *Suvannamiga Jātaka*, there is a reference of a girl, who married an unbeliever. Before marriage, she belonged to family devoted to the two chief disciples. But, she was allowed to practice her own religion as she desired. She finally succeeded to persuade her husband to listen to a sermon of Sāriputta and both husband and wife became Sotapannas. This suggests that she enjoyed enough freedom and was free to do anything. Her influential position cannot be ignored in this *Jātaka* tale, because she transformed her unbeliever husband. According to Buddhism, i.e., *Samyutta Nikāya*, woman’s position in the family was important and full. She enjoyed the right of almsgiving and learning the Dhamma she had a considerable amount of authority.

In *Suvannahasma Jātaka*, there is a story of widow of a Brāhmaṇ. She had three daughters. After death the Brāhmaṇ was born as a golden goose, and remembering his past birth, he flew where his wife and daughters lived and gave one of his golden feathers. In this *Jātaka*, there is a picture of women from middle class of the society. After the death of Brāhmaṇ the family was in a bad economic condition. But the Brāhmaṇ was reborn elsewhere as a golden goose, and as he remembered his earlier birth, he desired to visit the place, where he saw the miserable condition in which his wife and children were living. He became perturbed and in order to help them, he shed one golden feather from his body.
everyday in the house, so that his wife and children could manage sustenance by selling its gold.

This way the golden goose exhausted all his feathers and he became an ordinary goose of white colour. The story is very touching at one end, but at the same time it reflects, how the wife had to remain completely depended economically on the husband. The widow mostly did not have other economic means for survival. Kalyāṇadhamma Jātaka gives a reflection of a good position of woman in middle class families.30 She enjoyed the right to live according to her own wishes. In this story there is a reference to a merchant who became ascetic, himself but not his wife. She was free to enjoy a life of a householder and right to the property of her husband.

In the Kāka Jātaka Madhurācikā was a woman of middle class of Sāvatthi.31 She was a wife of a man who joined order in his old age with his friends. All these friends used to eat at his house. They were looked after by beautiful woman. When she died, they all lamented greatly. Woman was so independent, even in middle class families that she had freedom to choose their life style. In this Jātaka tale, we have reference to a woman, whose husband became a monk and renounced his household but she remained independent to enjoy her life in the house as housewife. In the Indriya Jātaka, there is a reference to a monk, who was satisfied with his food and alms. So, he sought his wife of former days. She provided him every comfort and good food.

In this Jātaka story, we get information that women in middle class family were not depressed, but they were free to choose their way of life.32 In this Jātaka, fair light has been thrown on the fact that when husband became monk, woman was not forced to join the order. She was free to lead a householder’s life. Suvannahāṁsa Jātaka, Kalyanadhamma Jātaka, Kaka Jātaka, Indriya Jātaka give a reflection of succession of woman over the property of her husband. In the
There are references which reveal us that property was left to the wife.

In the Manicora Jātaka, there is a reference to a woman of middle class. This woman was so virtuous that God came for her help on the earth. Women by their actions benefited not themselves but their whole family and clan. The Bodhisattava was once a householder in a village near Benares. He had a most beautiful wife named Sujātā. She wished to meet her parents. So they prepared some sweetmeats and started their journey for Benares. On the way Sujātā was seen by the king of Benares. He hatched a conspiracy against the Bodhisattva, because he wanted to possess Sujātā as his wife.

But Sakka’s (The God of Honour) throne was heated by Sujātā’s good deeds. Sakka helped Sujātā. The king was beheaded and set the Bodhisattva on the throne. In this story there is reference to a virtuous woman, who was instrumental in transforming a man through her own nature and of elevated disposition. In Bāhiya Jātaka, there is a reference to woman of an ordinary family, who became a queen. She was not beautiful and not from a royal family. But king was pleased with her quickness and decency. Women from middle strata of the society, sometime got high rank because of their virtues and good samskāras. This shows that women from middle class families also could enjoy status of queen. In Ucchanga Jātaka, we are rendered with a information about the bravery of woman in middle class society.

Story is about the woman from a village in Kosala, who obtained from the king of Kosala, the release of her husband, brother and son who were ploughing on the outskirts of a forest. They were caught by king’s men, who were mistaken for bandits. While they were being tried, a woman came to the palace. She was summoned and questioned by king. The king was pleased with her arguments, so he released all three. This story depicts the picture of a brave, intelligent, educated woman in middle strata of the society. In Kakkata Jātaka, there is a reference to a
good virtuous woman of middle strata, who saved her husband by her good samaskāras.37

In this Jātaka tale, we get a reference to a lady of landowner of Sāvatthi, who showed her bravery, when she and her husband were caught by robbers. Robber’s chief wanted to make her as his wife, but, her strong loyalty towards her husband impressed robber’s chief. So, he released both husband and wife. So brave woman were also present in the middle class families, not only in noble and royal palaces. Due respect to landowner’s wife by robbers’ chief throws light on the fact that woman of middle class got respect in society because of the good qualities. In the Ucchanga Jātaka, Kakkata Jātaka, Manicora Jātaka and in the Bahiya Jātaka virtue is highlighted of the common woman from the middle strata of the society. A wife who combined the two qualities of chastity and devotion was looked upon as a jewel bother under Brahmānism38 and Buddhism.39

In Asātamanta Jātaka, the teacher had a mother aged 120 years. When the youth came to learn to his teacher, he was asked by his teacher to look after his old mother. But mother of the teacher fell in love with student of his son. She wanted to get rid of all the obstacle coming her way that was his son. She made a plot to kill her son. But plot was disclosed and failed. From this story, we learn that sometime she was very dangerous and treacherous too. This story tells the evil nature of women that was uncommon mostly in middle class families, because women in middle class families got less chance to misuse full liberty and freedom.40 Asatamanta Jātaka reflects that motherhood was honoured in the society to a great extent. Sometime woman took advantage of this relation. In the Milindapanthā,41 it is said that he who has slain his mother or his father will not admit into the order.

In the Kulāvaka Jātaka Sujā was one of the four wives of Magha and his maternal cousin. Her husband was engaged in various forms of social service.
Three of Magha’s wives Sudhammā, Cittā, Nandā who had helped him in his good acts. Sujā claimed kinship with him, spent her time in adorning herself.

It refers to multiple wives of one person. In view of this system of polygamy one can presume that women of middle class families had sometimes to share their partners. Among the multiple wives there existed a hierarchical ranking in terms of status and position. During the Vedic age and Buddhist epoch, there was no hard and fast rule against the polygamy. It is mentioned in the Majjhima Nikāya

(B) Women of the lower strata of the society

The picture of women in the lower strata of the society was not always as bright as the other women of superior sections of the society. They were looked down upon in the society because sometimes of their birth and sometimes due to professions that they had to follow. In this category reference has been made to a number of slave girls and this itself is a very important reflection of the society on women in the then conditions. There is no doubt that slavery itself is a dark spot in the social system and when it percolates into the female domain, it is merely deplorable. The Jātaka stories have plenty of references to female slavery.

We now refer to a few examples from the lower rung of the society, wherein both good and bad lights emerged either through the characters or through the contexts of the narration. Buddhism had two distinctively different approaches; one was meant for the spiritual and intellectual message pertinent to the people of the higher strata of the society. The other trend was for the people of the lower category, who did not usually possess high degree of perception and application of the mind. For the first category of the people, there was the entire Buddhist literature containing various texts of philosophical, metaphysical and spiritual aspects of life. The essential literature for the masses, constituting mostly the people of the lower strata of the society, consisted of the early understandable
story type compositions, giving the same message, as mentioned earlier for the higher group of people.

But, it was the form of a story containing moral, which could easily be grasped by the ordinary people. The Jātaka stories served essentially for this purpose. In view of the above, the Jātakas give a better glimpse of the people, for whom they were meant. Moreover, it is understandable that the women in Indian society have also been given a status lower than that of the male. The Jātakas contained references and reflections to many women characters, and from these references and indirect implications, it is possible to get an idea about the position of the women of the lower strata of the society. But, it should be kept in mind that the purpose of the Jātakas was to convey a social message on ethics and morality envisaged by Buddhistic norms. However, the glimpses of the status of the women in the lower strata of the society and other from the Jātaka stories are also quite substantial.

In the Ghaṭa Jātaka, Nandagopa was the serving woman of princess Devagabbha.⁴⁷ Nandagopa helped her princess in the time of trouble. Devagabbha was princess and daughter of Mahākamsa, king of Asitaṅjana. It was predicted that her son would destroy the lineage of Kamsa, so she was imprisoned in a room built on a single pillar. She was helped by her serving woman. Her name was Nandagopa. With the help of her serving woman, Nandagopa, she entered into an intrigue with Upśāgara, whom she afterwards married.

They had ten sons and one daughter. Nandagopa serving woman of Devagabbha, bore ten daughters, their births coincided with those of ten sons of Devagabbha. She exchanged her daughters for the latter’s sons. Self-sacrifice is an exemplary hallmark of womanhood. But a sacrifice of the mother in favour of the children of the mistress is rare indeed.⁴⁸ In this Jātaka story of Nandagopa, we have a distant echo of the story of Krishṇa from the womb of Devki and exchange of the son for the daughter of Yasodharā. But the reasons for the exchange in the story of the Jātaka and in the Krishṇa legend are different. Nandagopa of the
Jātaka story consciously sacrificed her children, whereas the exchange of Devaki’s son was due to a divine ordination.

Moreover, the Jātaka of the Nandagopā shows, how trustworthy a maidservant could be. The story obviously was intended to project the idea that the women of the lower strata of the society were elevated in the eyes of the people because of their trustworthiness and large heart of sacrifice. Good Position of female slaves or lower strata woman in the Ghata Jatakas Bhaddasala Jataka, Katthahari Jataka, Kesva Jataka, is supported by the Buddhist texts like Dhammapada commentary. In the royal establishments, they waited upon the queens, buying flowers for them and looked after the jewels of the ladies in the royal Harem.49

Nāgamuṇḍā was a female slave.50 She became mistress of Mahānāma the Sakyan. She was the mother of Vāsabhakhattiya.51 Vāsabhakhattiya was the daughter of female slave, Nagamunḍā. Vasbhakhattiya married with Prasenajit and became the consort of the king of Kosala. Vāsabhakhattiya’s son, Viḍūḍabha succeeded to the throne of Kosala after Prasenajit.52 Vāsakbhakhattiya’s origin from a female slave has been discussed in Bhaddasāla Jātaka, Kaṭṭhahāri Jātaka, Kesava Jātaka. From this, we come to know that a girl of slave, who represented the lower strata of the society, was not doomed forever, because, she bore a son from the king Prasenajit, she received enough attention and prestige by virtue of her son, who virtually illegitimate, was eligible to succeed the king.

This is unique example of succession right admitted to a mother in favour of her son. The Jātakas, perhaps represent a stage of social history, where discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate was not strictly followed. Moreover, in this aspect no distinction was made between the case of a woman of higher society and a woman of the lower strata. The Buddhistic approach to the sociological system has been highlighted through this story, and that is why, the
same story has been repeated in a number of occasions in different Jātakas mentioned above.

In the Kunāla Jātaka Pañcapāpā was the daughter of a poor man of Benāres. She was ugly but her touch was ecstatic. One day, she happened to touch Baka, king of Benāres, and he became infatuated with her. He visited her home in disguise and married her. Later, wishing to make her his chief queen, but fearing the mockery of others because of her ugliness, he devised a plan by which the citizens should become aware of her divine touch. Owing to the jealousy of other queens, she was cast adrift in a vessel and claimed by king Pāvāriya. Baka, hearing of this, wished to fight Pāvāriya, but they agreed to compromise.

From that time Pañcapāpā lived for a week at a time in the house of each king. This story reflect selfish, bad, greedy attitude of society about the poor women, who was economically weak and exploited by the society, which represent the merciful position of women of the lower strata. In the Sujātā Jātaka information render us about the status of lower strata women who get high rank of queen by her virtue and attractiveness. One day, the king heard a fruiter’s daughter Sujātā, hawking sweets and falling in love with her voice, he sent a proposal of marriage to her and made her his queen. So this Jātaka shows that mobility of status due to qualities and virtues was a hallmark of the status of women in the Jātaka period.

In the Sattubhasta Jātaka, light has been thrown on the fact that sometime character of beauty enabled woman of lower strata to become a mistress in higher rich family. Once, when they became in the family, they were not discriminated being from the lower strata. But, they got respect and provided every comfort, which they wished. In the Jātaka story, a rich man got married with lower strata woman. But, when she became his wife, she was honoured. When she demanded a maid for her help in household works, that her wish was also fulfilled. So, we
cannot say that society always kept bad trend towards lower strata woman, but, attitude was different in different circumstances.

Udumbarādevī in Mahāummagga Jātaka, who was wife of king of Mithilā. Before entering in family, she was a daughter of tailor. King married with her due to many qualities in her. So, we have noticed one point in the Jātakas that girls from lower strata sometimes got unusually better status by their own qualities. In Katthahāri Jātaka, Brahmadatta king of Benāres fell in love of stick gatherer woman. He became intimate with her and the Bodhisatta was conceived then and there. The king gave his signet-ring to her and instructed that if the child was a boy, he should be brought to the court.

Later on, the king refused to accept her and her son, but ultimately, one day he accepted her son and her as queen consort of him. This story gives the picture of the society of those days, when woman from lower strata could get the chance to attain higher status and position in the society, just on the basis of great virtue of motherhood that was ornament for any woman in those days and even today. It shows that on the basis of good and fundamental qualities, a woman of lower strata got due respect. Motherhood was respected at any cost that is why even a slave, when became a mother of king’s children, she was also respected by getting a place in royal palace. So, position of woman of lower strata was not always in bad terms. We cannot make a fundamental view about the bad position of lower strata woman, sometimes it might be good. In the Majjhima Nikāya Polygamy was the customary right of king. Sometime king did not give due respect to his wife. In some cases woman from the lower strata of the society raised to the status of queen or chief queen due to their, chastity, devotion, motherhood.

In the Silavimamsa Jātaka, Pingalā was a slave who arranged for a meeting with her lover. As soon as, she finished her work, waited outside her master’s house, expecting his arrival. At the end of the middle watch, she gave up waiting
and slept peacefully. Here, we have an example, where extraordinary freedom was given to the slave girl.\(^{60}\)

In the *Nānacchanda Jātaka*, there is a reference of slave girl, Puṇṇā. She was slave of a Brāhmaṇ chaplain of Benāres. King gave him a boon. Chaplain went home to consult his family, as to what boon he should beg. His wife, his son Chatta and his slave Puṇṇā, each wanted something different. He reported this to the king, who gave to each, what he had desired. She was given almost equal status as the other members of the society.\(^{61}\) This shows that sometimes, even the slave girls could merge with the family, so much so, that no distinction or exclusiveness of treatment was meted out to her. A slave girl is an outsider, having no blood relation with the other members of the family.

But, if she possessed extraordinary features of love, affection and sense of belonging to the family, she could easily be like another member of the family. In the *Nimi Jātaka*, Nimi succeeded his father, the king of Videha country. The fame of Nimi was spread to Tāvatimsa, the gods desired to see him. Nimi saw a palace in the Cātummahārajājika world of Goddess Bīrāṇī. He learnt her story of her previous birth.\(^{62}\) In the time of Kassapa Buddha, a goddess Bīrāṇī was a slave in the house of Brāhmaṇ, whose name was Ashoka. He invited eight monks to feed daily at his house and asked his wife to arrange to feed them. This she refused to do, as did also his daughters. But their slave agreed to carry out this work. She did it most carefully and with great devotion. As a result of this, she was reborn in heaven. This story also speaks of virtues and qualities of a slave girl, while the other female members of the family refused to do the good act of the feeding of the monks.\(^{63}\) The slave girl did something different.

She fulfilled the obligations of the family, and this entitled her to a better life in the next birth. In the *Vātamiga Jātaka*, there is reference of good behaviour and honour by the upper strata towards the woman of lower strata.\(^{64}\) The story was related to Cullapinḍapāthika-Tissa, who was son of a rich noble man. He became
monk, which shocked his parents. But his parents took services of a slave girl, who enticed him back to the lay life.

In this story, we got a good picture of good position of woman from lower strata, because in this Jātaka, there is discussion about the comforts, which were provided by the master to a slave girl in the form of her reward. So, it was not necessary that lower strata was always in suffering conditions, sometime attitude of upper strata towards lower strata women was so good, which was generally not possible at that time or even in our own ages. Kaṭṭhaka Jātaka is a story of a son of female slave of the Bodhisatta. He took birth in her mother’s master house and got every chance to grow up. His name was Kaṭṭhaka. In the company of master’s son, son of female slave learnt many arts.

He married with a rich merchant’s daughter by using false name of treasurer as his father. This Jātaka tale shows good treatment of master with her female slave and his son, which was rare in ancient days of the society and even in our days. So, we cannot make a bad view about the master and slave relationship that is generally not taken in good terms. So, woman from lower strata also got respect and good treatment. Puṇṇalakkhanā a slave girl of Anāthapindika’s wife. The girl borrowed a costly jewel belonging to her mistress and went to the pleasure garden. There a thief became friendly with her and planned to kill her. She came to know about his plan. She pushed him into the well and threw a stone down on to his head.

Here, the reflection that we get is of the confidence and faith that often rested on the slave girls. They were not always treated with suspicion and punishment. At the same time, we also learned from the story that the slave girls who constituted the lower strata of the society were not invested with greed and other types of mischief of the mind. In order to highlight, the Buddhistic ethics of morality and the glory of faith and trust, this Jātaka story was floated. In Kāka
Jātaka reference of a slave woman, who was careless about her duty, which gives a proof of liberal attitude of her master.

In the Majjhima Nikāya female slaves are mentioned as the part of property of wealthy merchants or Householders. Women were engaged in the profession of domestic female salves. They performed so many duties with faithfulness. Female slaves treated very well.

In the Mūsika Jātaka, there is a story of a slave woman, whose name was Mūsikā. Mūsikā was slave woman of king Yava. One day, on going to prepare the king’s bath, she saw his son, sword in hand, waiting to kill the king. when the prince found, he was discovered by Mūsikā, he cut Mūsikā into two pieces and threw her into the lake. Here is an example of a slave girl. Who sacrificed her life for her master. It depicts that slave girls treated so good they did not afraid to lost their life for their master. There is only reference in canonical literature to a slave woman who was maltreated.

In Vattaka Jātaka, there is story of a gaily-decked woman, who was hired by some rich persons. When she failed to return, her mother complained to the king, so the Setthiputtra was told to restore her. This Jātaka tale shows that people of lower strata were secure in the society, if they had any problem, even higher authority of the state helped them. They were free to carry on their profession, whether that was prestigious or not. We cannot say, women from this stratum were unsafe.

In Vāttagasindhava Jātaka, where we rendered with an information that feelings of lower strata woman were respected. A beautiful woman fell desperately in love of landowner of Sāvatthi. But, she died of love, because landowner went away and never returned. When he heard about her death, he discussed with Buddha. In this Jātaka tale, discussion of woman with Buddha proves her good position. So, we can say, emotions and feelings of women from this stratum of
society kept some weight. In the *Milindapañha*\textsuperscript{71} prostitution is mentioned in a long list of trades and professions. This profession was permitted by the social code of the day, was more openly recognized then than now.

In the *Kuṇḍaka-Kucchi-Sindhava Jātaka*, there is reference about the lower strata woman, who became a rich in a single day by the mercy of Sāriputta. In this *Jātaka* tale, we get a picture of good attitude of society and state towards old poor woman, who wished to feed a monk at her house.\textsuperscript{72} But, she was poor. So, she was helped by king and rich people, so that she could be able to respect the Sāriputta. In this way, she got so much wealth. This story itself is a proof of a good position of woman of lower strata in the society. So there is no doubt that woman’s position was good.

Women of lower strata were not always looked down upon by the society. They were respected by people, if they indulged in good activities. In *Kuṇḍaka-Kucchi-Sindhava Jātaka* reference of a acceptance of an invitation of slave woman’s food by the Buddha is a great symbol of respectable position of lower strata women. As lay disciple woman was even from lower strata, respected in the society and by the members of the order and by the Master himself.\textsuperscript{73} So, this view is proved to be wrong here in this *Jātaka* tale that woman from lower strata was maltreated. Maltreatment and bad attitude towards slaves are not concept of ancient time, it may be possible even in our modern era. Term of lower strata of woman does not mean that they were looked down upon in the society.

To join the order lower strata woman was eligible. In *Junha Jātaka*, one hundred slave girls were given to Brāhmaṇ. This reference shows that woman of lower strata as slaves were not free. They were bound for whole life for their master\textsuperscript{74}. In the *Majjhima Nikāya* female slaves are mentioned as the part of property of wealthy merchants or Householders.
In the *Andabhūta Jātaka*, we find a reference of a poor woman who sold her newborn infant girl to a rich Chaplin for getting some money and costly presents. Sometime people of higher society did not hesitate to adopt a child from lower strata. They brought up with all comforts and provided every type of privilege. Women guards were posted for the safety of the girl child. This Jātaka story is self explanatory about the good status of woman from the lower strata. In the *Dhammapada Commentary* is mentioned that woman was the keeper of a paddy field, cotton-fields, palace guards.

Reference of an old woman in village in *Tūṇḍīla Jātaka*, who took drink in the company of lewd men, because men wanted two pigs of an old woman to slaughter. Here is not special but one important point is reflected about the habits of woman of that time. It was rare, but, woman took intoxicants and drinks, which were usually for men. It proves that woman got freedom to what extent.

In the kingdom of Seri was a place named Andhapura. There was a decayed family, which by the time had lost all the sons and brothers and their wealth. The sole survivors were a girl and her grandmother. They got their daily bread by working for hire. Grand daughter demanded a trinket. So, old lady asked the merchant. Please exchange our bowl by trinket to your sister. So, during that time strangers gave due respect to other girls of the society as their sister. In the same story another merchant came and he called old lady as mother. So, at that time in society women got respect and men or male members of the society recognized all stranger women as their sisters and mothers. In the *Dhammapada commentary*, we have references which evident to self supporting women who were engaged in a trade or a profession.

After making a comprehensive study of the *Jātaka* stories and other Buddhists texts about the position of women of middle and lower strata of the society of that period, it can be perceived that women of the middle strata were provided with all facilities and comforts of that time. They were free to acquire
higher education, to take part in philosophical discussions and choose their life partner. Their had the property rights in difficult times. The women from the lower strata of the society of that time were the essential part of the day-to-day life of the people. As it has been noticed from the Jātaka tales that women from this category command. The trust, respect, security and reward from the society and state.

In the middle strata of the society. Woman was no mere household drudge, but she had authority in the home and respect equally in the all important issues with her husband. According to Buddhism woman’s position in the family was important and full. She enjoyed the right of almsgiving and learning the Dhamma she had a considerable amount of authority. Women in the middle strata of the society acquired a position of command and behaved themselves queen in their own homes. Woman in the family acquired a position of command and behaved herself like a queen in their homes.

In the middle strata according to Buddhism unmarried girls were not looked down upon in the society. They could lead their life freely and got education. In the earlier time, women were also chanted mantras in the yajanas during the Rigvedic period. In Dhammapada Commentary there are references which support this tradition that remarriage of woman did not look down upon in the society. We have instance of kana who remarried again. As a mother woman was definitely honoured. In Therīgāthā commentary, there is a reference in which reference of kisa-Gotami showed that woman got due honour in the family and society when she became mother. References are made in the Therīgāthā commentary to glorify the status of mother whether it is discussed in Jātakas through the stories of animals like mother monkey and mother deer. In Saṁyutta Nikāya, Dhammapadda commentary, Sutta Nipāta Motherhood is glorified in every Buddhist text.

No doubt in the middle strata of the society we have references of wicked wives. According to Milindapāṇha, in the Aryan society adultery was treated with
sever rules of punishment. According to Buddhism adultery with another’s wife is serious, heinous crime. Woman or man who indulge in the adultery, are not able to achieve nirvana. But in the Dhammapada Commentary, Buddhist do not favour severity against the woman.

Suvannahañña Jātaka, Kalyanadhamma Jātaka, Kaka Jātaka, Indriya Jātaka give a reflection of succession of woman over the property of her husband. In the Therīgāthā commentary, there are references which reveal us that property was left to the wife. In the Ucchanga Jātaka, Kakkata Jātaka, Manicora Jātaka and in the Bahiya Jātaka virtue is highlighted of the common woman from the middle strata of the society. A wife who combined the two qualities of chastity and devotion was looked upon as a jewel bother under Brahmanism and Buddhism. Asatamanta Jātaka reflects that motherhood was honoured in the society to a great extent. Sometime woman took advantage of this relation. In the Milindapectha, it is said that he who has slain his mother or his father will not admit into the order. During the Vedic age and Buddhist epoch, there was no hard and fast rule against the polygamy. In the middle strata, man could maintain three to four wives.

Good Position of female slaves or lower strata woman in the Ghata Jātakas Bhaddasala Jātaka, Katthahari Jātaka, Kesva Jātaka, is supported by the Buddhist texts. In the royal establishments, they waited upon the queens, buying flowers for them and looked after the jewels of the ladies in the royal Harem. Polygamy was the customary right of king. Sometime king did not give due respect to his wife. In some cases woman from the lower strata of the society raised to the status of queen or chief queen due to their, chastity, devotion, motherhood. In the Majjhima Nikāya female slaves are mentioned as the part of property of wealthy merchants or Householders.

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