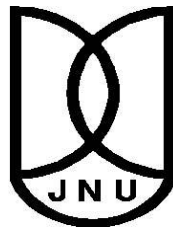


**CHASTITY AS REFLECTED IN ANCIENT INDIAN TEXTS: PRECEPT, PRACTICE AND PORTRAYAL**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES**

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**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**

**NEW DELHI-110067**

**2016**

*Dedicated to*  
*The Loving Memory of my late sister*  
*Ms. Runa Roy*

## DECLARATION

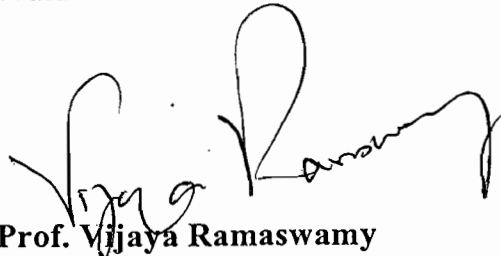
I, Oly Roy hereby declare that the thesis entitled "*Chastity As Reflected In Ancient Indian Texts: Precept, Practice and Portrayal*" submitted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** of this university is a bonafide work and has not been submitted previously for any degree to this or any other university.



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## CERTIFICATE

We recommend that the thesis may be placed before the examiner for evaluation.



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**OLY ROY**

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

Chastity involved complex situations and nuances in Ancient India. It was made more compelling for women. Only loyalty and devotion did not make a woman chaste. The very definition of chastity was mutated according to the circumstances. The value assigned to chastity shows that freedom to sexual expression posed threat to the social order. It did not appear in vacuum, but were intertwined with social institutions and practices. This work will not only concentrate on the issue as to how the concept of chastity moulded the life of a woman not only within the household but also outside, it would also take into account other social, cultural and economic notions affecting it – how the concept of chastity was understood and conceptualised in different texts and traditions not only for wives but also for maidens, a mother, widows etc and how chastity was framed for unmarried women, men, celestial damsels, courtesans, dancing girls, slaves etc. Understanding female sexuality and what it meant for the society; to examine the difference between that what was prescribed for her and that what was practised; what did she do in order to acquire the epithet of a *pativrata*? Did every perfect woman become a *pativrata*? Why women did accept such a concept or what made them accept it? Why did not she protest? What did chastity imply for women? Effect of the concept of *Pativratya*; how women were treated even if she is following the rules of *Pativratya*? Control over her chastity as a means of strengthening patriarchal authority; the concept and definition of unchaste; what was ‘unchaste’ in practicality? Effect of unchaste women in the household and over the society; Treatment meted out to unchaste women; were unchaste women accepted even if they passed the ordeal? What purpose did the ordeal serve?

It would also focus on the understanding as to what it meant for men and the role of men in framing this ideology; was it as compelling as it was for women? Multiple standards that existed in chastity; How chastity differed at different levels and what did it mean for different sections of the society? How changing circumstances did affect the concerned concept? To what extent chastity was important for maintaining the balance within the society including the *varna* system and in economic and political situation? What was the inter-influence of various religious traditions that

emerged on the very concept of chastity? and studying the various paradoxical situations.

In this work a collection of narrative literature from ancient India will be explored in regard to the topic mentioned above. Narratives were a great way to discern the concepts and ideals of the time. A narrative text is mainly a compilation of stories or poems or memoirs that not tells of what has happened but also represents the present situation, thus connecting the present to the past and establishing the relation between the two. Narrating that something has happened before in the past helps in convincing people of the ideals of the time. Such stories also help in understanding the socio-cultural notion of the time. Some texts also narrate as to how the future would be. Through various characters and their reaction people are taught as to how they should behave in the society as to maintain the balance by regarding or disregarding various ideals of the time.

The nature and language of a narrative text determines its audience because the very purpose of a narrative is to teach – by communicating and entertaining them through various stories. Thus it is important to understand the narrative framework. It is thus important to understand and observe as who is the author/authors, the characters involved and the audience targeted.

Every story focus on a problem or a crisis and through various characters and plots communicate to its audience the various resolutions. A narrative helps in establishing justification and validating of the various laws laid down in the didactic texts. The various Ancient Indian texts suffer from interpolations which in turn show how the changing circumstances moulded the characteristics of these texts and how important it was to maintain a connective relationship with the society as the main aim of a narration is social interaction.

The stories to some extent show how the various prescribed laws and precepts were followed in practice which in turn helps in portrayal of the society. It provides meaning to the didactic texts. It represents the reality. The narrative not only engages the perception of the author, the various characters but also the audience, thus forming a network and solidarity within the society.

## SOURCES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The stories in the seventeen *MahāPurāṇas* (*Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Vāyu*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Viṣṇu*, *Matsya*, *Bhāgavata*, *Kūrma*, *Vāmana*, *Liṅga*, *Varāha*, *Padma*, *Nārada*, *Agni*, *Garuḍa*, *Brahmā*, *Skanda* and *Brahmāvaivarta*), the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* have been excluded as it relatively belongs to a much later period. Other sources include the great epics, *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki and Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata*, Hāla's *Sattasāi* and the **Buddhist Jātakas** related to the topic will be critically studied in understanding the complexity and issues involved.

The *Purāṇas* were required to be recited in popular gatherings and were generally projected as the scriptures of the masses. Their popular base and mass appeal can be judged from the fact that Purāṇic lore like that of the Epics has over the centuries become deeply ingrained in popular psyche. But what is really intriguing is the extraordinary nature of exigency which compelled the Brahmanical leaders to give up their former elitist and almost inflexible stance and not only take notice of the substratum of society but also seek to win them over through a genre of literature specially composed from them. One of the major problems regarding the *Purāṇas* is that they were not necessarily composed by a single author or at any particular point of time, but by series of writers and over a period of centuries. *Purāṇas* is considered to be nothing less than a 'chemical pursuit'<sup>1</sup>. P.V.Kane's deductions are based largely on a survey of social and religious formations and developments reflected in the *Purāṇas*<sup>2</sup>. Dating the *Purāṇas* is a quite problematic. There are indeed those who date the *Purāṇa* in the Vedic period. According to many, the *Purāṇas* receive their final form during the Gupta period<sup>3</sup>. According to Ludo Rocher, it is difficult to set specific date for any *Purāṇas* as a whole<sup>4</sup>.

R.C.Hazra rightly points out that the *Purāṇas* originally dealt with five topics only. He also enumerates the reason behind its transformation to an 'encyclopaedic' nature including chapters not only on religious and social issues, but also on law, poetics, grammar, medicine, music, dancing and sculpture. He also pointed out that there were two main stages in the development. R.C.Hazra also traces as to what led to such a change. For the purpose he reviewed the early religious movements; foreign invasions

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<sup>1</sup> Nath, Vijay, *Purāṇas And Acculturation*, Manohar, 2009, pp5

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp5

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp100

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp103



and occupations and their effect on Brahmanical society.<sup>5</sup> Ancient India saw the rise of various religious movements which may be classified, according to their relation to the Vedic (comprising *Śrauta* and *Smārta*), as anti-Vedic (Jainism, Buddhism and Ajivakism), semi-Vedic (consisting of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Brahmāism) and non-Vedic (Śāktism). Besides the staunch followers of these religions, there was another class of people who were rather of a mixed type. On the one hand, they had high regard for the sectarian gods and looked upon their worship as the means of attaining salvation; on the other, they valued much the practice of the rules of the *Varṇāśrāma dharma*, and regarded the *Vedas* as the highest authority.<sup>6</sup> The Brahmanical gave dominance to the *Brāhmins* in the society. The dominance of Brahmanism continued smoothly until many new religious systems emerged, some were clear protests against the position of the *Brāhmins* and the authority of the *Vedas*, while others did not support *Varṇāśrāma dharma*. The rise and propagation of these rival faiths proved fatal to the sacrificial religion of the *Vedas* which was already on the decline. Long before the time of Manu, the *Śrauta* rites were gradually becoming obsolete and the orthodox Vedic religionists were turning *Smārtas*.<sup>7</sup>

Hazra points out that long before the time of Gautama Buddha there were revolts against the Brahmanical doctrine.<sup>8</sup> The Jains did not recognise the authority of the *Vedas*. They had little faith in caste distinctions and in the Brahmanical rites and duties.<sup>9</sup> Apart from Jainism, Buddhism and the Ajvikas, Hazra also discusses about other religious movements - Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism.<sup>10</sup> He points out that the source for the 'reconstruction' of these sources is very 'meagre'.<sup>11</sup> The earliest records of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism are contained in the *Mahābhārata*; but even then these systems do not seem to appear in their true character, because '*the priests have preserved for us, not so much the opinions the people actually held, as the opinions the priests wished them to hold.*' It is, therefore, quite probable that in the present *Mahābhārata*, which is practically a work of those who believed in the *Vedas* and the

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<sup>5</sup> Hazra, R.C., *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1987, Part II, Chapter I, 'The Hindu Society Before 200 A.D., and the Purāṇic Rites and Customs in the First Stage of their Development', pp 193

<sup>6</sup> Hazra, R.C., *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1987, Part II, Chapter I, 'The Hindu Society Before 200 A.D., and the Purāṇic Rites and Customs in the First Stage of their Development', pp 193

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp194

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp195

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp197

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

caste and the *Āśrāma* rules, and in which the attempt at popularising the *Vedas* and the *Varṇāśrāma dharma* and elevating the position of the *Brāhmins* is clearly discernible, the forms of *Vaiṣṇavism* and *Śaivism* have been influenced by the ideals and motives of its authors.<sup>12</sup> Casteless foreign races were held in great contempt by the *Purāṇic Brāhmins* who called them ‘sinners’, ‘*Mlecchas*’, and ‘inimical to Brahmanism, and that the authors of the *Purāṇas* always warned the people against disclosing the contents of these ‘holy books’ to such people. The admittance of the casteless foreigners into the *Vaiṣṇava* fold, and the encouragement to *Samnyāsa* for the practice of *Yoga*, as contrasted with the conservative and orthodox views of the *Purāṇas*, tend to show that the character of *Vaiṣṇavism*, which was accepted by these foreigners, must have been against the *Varṇāśrāma dharma* and therefore, a menace to it. From the position of women and *Śūdras* in the *Vaiṣṇavism* of the epics and the *Purāṇas* it seems that in popular *Vaiṣṇavism* also initiation was open to them, and they were allowed to worship Viṣṇu themselves.<sup>13</sup>

The early character of *Śaivism* also does not seem to have been favourable to the *Varṇāśrāma dharma* and the authority of the *Vedas*. This irreverent character of *Śaivism* seems to be hinted at in a dialogue between Dakṣa and Śiva in the *Mahābhārata*, in which the latter says that in ancient times he formulated the Pāśupata system which was ‘contradictory to, though in a very few cases agreeing with, the rules of the *Varṇāśrāma dharma* and which was ‘*denounced by the unwise*’. It is perhaps on account of their characteristic non-Brahmanical ideas and practices that the worshippers of Śiva (originally called *Pāśupatas*) have been looked down upon by the *Smṛti*-writers.<sup>14</sup> The Kāpālikas amongst the Śaivas cared little for the caste and *Āśrāma* rules, and admitted the casteless foreigners into their fold. The *Śūdras* and women were allowed to have *Dīkṣā* and to worship the deity.<sup>15</sup> By many such rites and customs of theirs they earned the hatred of the Brahmanical fold. From early times the worship of Śiva became very popular.<sup>16</sup> R.C.Hazra stated that the nature of the *Vaiṣṇavism* and *Saivism* was mainly non-Brahmanical. But he

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<sup>12</sup> Hazra, R.C., *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Motilal Banarasi Dass, Delhi, 1987, Part II, Chapter I, ‘The Hindu Society Before 200 A.D., and the Purāṇic Rites and Customs in the First Stage of their Development’, pp198

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp 200

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp201

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp202

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

enumerates that those who worshipped Visnu and Śiva were not necessarily were all influenced by non-Brahmanical ideas and practices.<sup>17</sup>

Besides the *Vaiṣṇavas* and the *Śaivas*, there grew up another sect that worshipped the *Brahmā*.<sup>18</sup>

The different sects and systems of religions created an atmosphere which did not in an orthodox way conform to Vedic or Brahmanical ideas. This atmosphere was further disturbed by the advent of the casteless foreigners. Though these foreigners accepted Buddhism, Śaivism or Vaiṣṇavism and were soon Indianised, their anti-Brahmanic manners and customs could not but influence the people, especially their co-religionists. Further trouble was brought in by the dominance of the non-*Kṣatriyas*, or rather *Śūdras* as the *Purāṇas* hold, under the Nandas, the Mauryas and probably also the Āndhras. The *Brāhmanas* always emphasised the low social status of the *Śūdras* and reduced them to servitude. In religious life also the latter enjoyed privilege and freedom. It is natural therefore, that these down-trodden *Śūdras* should have revolted against the *Brāhmanas* when they had political power in their hand.<sup>19</sup>

We have enumerated above all the forces that, acting simultaneously, produced a state of society which was favourable neither to the propagation of Brahmanical ideas nor to the orthodox *Brāhmanas*. In the latter treatises there are chapters on the description of the Kali Age which can reasonably be taken to give an account of the Hindu society during the period ranging from the time of the prevalence of Buddhism and Jainism, to the end of the Āndhra rule in western India.<sup>20</sup> The *Purāṇas* ascribe the social disorder more to the heretics, viz., the Buddhists, Jains and *Kāpālikas*. The authors of the present *Purāṇas* being *Brāhmanas*, it is not expected that the picture, they themselves present before us, of their own degradation and humiliation on the one hand and the rise of the servile *Śūdras* on the other, should be totally false.<sup>21</sup> On account of the spread of Buddhism and Jainism, the supremacy of the *Brāhmanas* was often questioned. Men of all degrees pretended to be equal with the *Brāhmanas* and

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<sup>17</sup> Hazra, R.C., *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1987, Part II, Chapter I, 'The Hindu Society Before 200 A.D., and the Purāṇic Rites and Customs in the First Stage of their Development', pp203

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp204

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp204-205

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp206

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp207-208

defiled their authority.<sup>22</sup> The *Śūdras* had a special attraction for Buddhism, because it denounced caste system and challenged the supremacy of the *Brāhmins*. They were further encouraged by the acceptance of Buddhism and Jainism by the kings who belonged to their own caste, the result being that many of them became Buddhist monks and began to preach Buddhism.

The *Purāṇas* give a dismal picture of the troubles of the *Kali* age. In spite of obvious exaggeration this description refers to the disintegration of the social fabric, on account of the vigour of Buddhism from the time of Aśoka Maurya, the position of the *Śūdras* as kings and perhaps also as high state officers and the settlement of the immoral and casteless nomads, viz., Śakas, Pahlavas and Abhiras. The picture of the Hindu society, which the *Jātakas* present, is in many respects similar to that found in the *Purāṇas*. A study of the *Jātakas* creates in us the impression that ‘the world of India was one in which the ancient priestly caste had lost its authority, that nobles and merchants were more regarded than *Brāhmins* and that the people, not excepting even the *Brāhmins*, often did not care to set much store by the Brahmanical rules of castes and *Ārāmas*. The *Brāhmins* were often found to follow professions which were against the prescriptions of the ‘lawbooks’. In the India of the *Jātakas* the gulf between the different castes was narrowed to a great extent.’<sup>23</sup>

Buddhism allowed more freedom to women especially in religious matters, and thus became instrumental to their advancement. The attractive power of Buddha’s *Dhamma* was felt as well by women as by men. The freedom which Buddhism and Jainism allowed to women could not but make them have, at least in a good number of cases, a far greater attraction for these two faiths than for Hinduism. We have given above the accounts of Indian society as gathered from two opposite sources – one Puranic and the other Buddhistic. The similarity between the two accounts is very great. In numerous cases, what the *Purāṇas* formulate, the *Jātakas* seem to illustrate. This striking agreement between the two accounts proves that they are not so much imaginary as we may take them to be, but have some historical value. These accounts show that the authority of the *Vedas* was often not recognised, the *Varṇāśrāma dharma* was neglected, and there was a remarkable increase in the number of

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<sup>22</sup> Hazra, R.C., *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1987, Part II, Chapter I, ‘The Hindu Society Before 200 A.D.’, and the Purāṇic Rites and Customs in the First Stage of their Development’, pp208-209

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp 210-211

*Samnyasins* and *Parivrajakas*. The social position of the orthodox *Brāhmins* was much lowered, and there was a gradual decrease in their numerical strength, many of them being influenced by the non-Brahmanical ideas and practices.<sup>24</sup>

Women became prone to demoralisation, and many of them took up the wandering life and thus created disadvantages to their families. In short, the condition of Brahmanism became very insecure. Consequently, the Brahmanists felt it necessary to make an attempt to re-establish the *Varṇāśrāma dharma*, the authority of the *Vedas*, and the moral rules among women, *Śūdras*, and those members of the upper castes who, being influenced by the faiths other than Brahmanism, disregarded the *Vedas* and violated the rules of *Varṇāśrāma dharma*. This attempt seems to have been made by two sections of people in two different ways, viz., by the orthodox Brahmanists who first began to preach the performance of *Gṛhya* rites through *Smṛti* works, and by the more numerous Smārta-Vaiṣṇavas and Smārta-Śaivas who introduced *Smṛti* materials into the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* to preach Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism as against the heretical religions and also to establish *Varnasrāma dharma*, the authority of the *Vedas*, and the moral rules not only among the Vaiṣṇavas and the Śaivas but also among others. That this intention was at the base of the introduction of Smṛti-matter into the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* is evidenced by the *Purāṇas* themselves.<sup>25</sup>

The contents of the *Mahābhārata* and the early *Purāṇas* (*Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Vāyu*, *Brahmāṇḍa* and *Viṣṇu*) as compared with those of the later *Purāṇas* seem also to betray such a motive of their authors. It should be noted here that this attempt of the Smārta devotees of the different gods to preach their respective faiths with a view to establishing the *Varnasrāma dharma* and the authority of the *Vedas* was responsible for giving rise to Puranic Vaisnavism, Saivism, Brahmāism, Śāktism etc as distinct from their popular prototypes.<sup>26</sup> (By Popular Vaisnavism, Saivism and Brahmāism we mean those types of religions which were current among the common people, were regardless of the Brahmanical rules of castes and stages, and imbued Tantric practices. Popular Śāktism of the Tantras)

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<sup>24</sup> Hazra, R.C., *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Motilal Banarasi Dass, Delhi, 1987, Part II, Chapter I, 'The Hindu Society Before 200 A.D., and the Purāṇic Rites and Customs in the First Stage of their Development', pp 212-213

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp213

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

Hazra points out how foreign invasions brought about changes that influenced every aspect of a tradition. As the Brahmanists and the *Smārta* sectaries began their attempts to re-establish the *Varṇāśrāmā dharma*, the authority of the *Vedas*, and the moral rules they had to face the problem poised by the foreign invasions.<sup>27</sup> They are described in the *Purāṇas* as well. Then there came the period of the imperial Guptas. During this period Brahmanical Hinduism was restored to ‘popular favour’.<sup>28</sup> But with the decline of the Guptas came the ‘irruption of the casteless and savage nomads’.<sup>29</sup> The position of the *Brahmānas* and Brahmanical culture was influenced by these changes. From the beginning of the fifth century A.D., the Vaiṣṇavas and the Śaivas were influenced by Tantricism.<sup>30</sup> But the spread of the Tantric cult did not prove ‘favourable’ for the *Brāhmanas* and the *Kṣatriyas*. All these influenced the position of women as well. The scriptures underwent major changes in order to cope with the changes that were taking place. R.C.Hazra says, “... *different religious movements and the foreign invasions it appears that the composite character of the present Purāṇas is due to the attempt made by the Smārta Brāhman sectaries to preach and popularise their respective faiths against heresies and to establish the Brahmānical rules of castes and duties and the authority of the Vedas among the followers of at least their respective religions. It should be noted that the composite Dharma, which the extant Purāṇas preach, has never been allowed by the orthodox Brahmānists to be identified with their own. However much the Smarta sectaries may have exalted the Purāṇic Dharma, it has been regarded by the orthodox Brahmānists as only inferior to the Vedic.*”<sup>31</sup> Naturally these developments influenced the life of women. Various stories and new ideals were woven to stop them from adopting other traditions that emerged with time.

**Epic literature (the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*)** is intrinsically a part of the oral tradition, composed, compiled and collated over many centuries from bardic fragments and enriched with interpolations of later times.<sup>32</sup> Epic events can rarely be precisely dated nor can one speak of an epic period nor indeed can the narrative of the

<sup>27</sup> Hazra, R.C., *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Motilal Banarasi Dass, Delhi, 1987, Part II, Chapter II, ‘The Hindu Society From the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. and the Purāṇic Rites and Customs in the Second Stage of their Development’, pp215

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp217

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp218

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pp226

<sup>32</sup> Thapar, Romila, *The Historian and the Epic*, Annals (B.O.R.I), Vol LX, 1979, pp199

epic be treated necessarily and without cross-evidence as authentic history.<sup>33</sup> By its very nature, it is not to be taken as factual evidence but as the representation of an ideal.<sup>34</sup> It contains an extensive range of social formations which co-existed in all periods, even to the present. The appeal of the epic varies in accordance with the particular society to which it relates at particular points in the text, and it is in the shifting of these segments that the historian can contribute.

In addition to the court bards, whose audience was often fastidious one, there were certainly also large numbers of wandering singers who catered for a much broader public. They passed through towns and villages and worked in a popular tradition, but of course their recitations did not need to conform to the same high standards as those of the court singers.<sup>35</sup>

The greater part of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, like the *Mahābhārata*, is the collective product of several rhapsodic poets, and both mention that recitations, often of very considerable length, were given at sacrificial ceremonies and celebrations.

The story of Bhārata that has been related by the Vyāsa is full of brilliant expressions collected from various scriptures and consists of divine metres and figures of speech, excellent words, questions and their solutions.<sup>36</sup> The *Mahābhārata* is most excellent amongst all sacred writings.<sup>37</sup> In it are described both collectively and separately wealth, virtue, desire and liberation.<sup>38</sup> It is the foremost of all works relating to desire and the best of all discoursing on liberation.<sup>39</sup> It is full of *Śrutis*.<sup>40</sup>

The oldest anthology that has been preserved is the *Sattasāī or Gathasattasāī*, compiled by **Hāla**, which also marks one of the highest points reached by short poems. As the name implies, the volume contains about seven hundred poems by various authors in Māhārāṣṭrī, the lyrical Prākṛit par excellence. Nevertheless it would be an error to suppose that because the background and the themes are of village life the poetry is of a rural nature. These poems, the majority of which are about love, are

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<sup>33</sup> Thapar, Romila, *The Historian and the Epic*, Annals (B.O.R.I), Vol LX, 1979, pp 200

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pp199

<sup>35</sup> Gonda, Jan, (Edt.)Lienhard, Siegfried, *A History of Classical Poetry Sanskrit – Pāli – Prākṛit*, Otto Harrassowitz, Classical Sanskrit Literature, Vol III, 1984, pp59

<sup>36</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 1, 2-3

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 4-5

<sup>38</sup> *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, 6

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 12

by no means simple and unconventional; on the contrary, they are frequently examples of exceedingly sophisticated verbal art: they follow set up patterns, obey strict literary rules which are product of a long period of development, and show a sure sense of taste.<sup>41</sup>

Like all *kāvya*, they were written by poets whose audiences were not the broad mass of people but an educated, mainly urban, often aristocratic public. It is also an unusually rich source of information.<sup>42</sup> It is not a man who often speaks, but it is a female voice that we hear in it. Though their form is ultimately derived from song, they were not necessarily intended to be sung. The Prākṛit in question is a stylized imitation of the language spoken by country people living south of the Vindhya, an area that for long remained beyond the pale of North Indian Sanskrit literature.<sup>43</sup>

Assigning an exact date for the text is difficult. Hāla was a king of the South Indian Śātavāhana dynasty, whose brief reign is somewhere placed around first century A.D. This date is considered too early for the text. It was most probably compiled sometime between the third century and the seventh century.<sup>44</sup>

Helmuth von Glasenapp in his book *Jainism: An Indian Religion of Salvation* points out, “*In the field of lyrical poetry, it is to the credit of Jainas that two significant anthologies of very valuable single stanzas in Prākṛta were created in their circles, or at least, they have been collected by them in the form that is available to us today – a credit which is problematic, if it is subjected to an objective evaluation, because none of these two lyrical anthologies possess a clearly recognizable Jaina character. The seven hundred stanzas (Sattasāi) composed in accordance with the popular pattern going under the name of Hāla Śātavāhana or Sālivāhana, who as one of the Āndhrabhṛtya – princes of the Deccan is considered by Jainas as their compatriot in faith, describe sufferings and pleasures of love in fascinating genre-imagery.*”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Gonda, Jan, (Edt.)Lienhard, Siegfried, *A History of Classical Poetry Sanskrit – Pāli – Prākṛit*, Otto Harrassowitz, Classical Sanskrit Literature, Vol III, 1984,pp84

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Khoroché, Peter(Tr) and Tiekén, Herman (Tr), *Poems on Life and Love in Ancient India*, Hāla’s *Sattasāi*, State University of New York Press, 2009, pp2

<sup>44</sup> Khoroché, Peter(Tr) and Tiekén, Herman (Tr), *Poems on Life and Love in Ancient India*, Hāla’s *Sattasāi*, State University of New York Press, 2009, pp2

<sup>45</sup> Glasenapp, von Helmuth, *Jainism: An Indian Religion of Salvation*, An English Translation of Der Jainismus, Eine Indische Erlösungsreligion by Shridhar B.Shrotri, Motilal Banarasisidass Publishers Pvt Ltd., Delhi, 1999, pp144



Uma Chakravarti points to the fact that “*the evidence of non-Brahmānical sources represents merely a deviant point of view and thus is less valuable as well as marginal to the dominant picture of stratification in India. This tilt has to be rectified: a more meaningful understanding of social reality, both for the past and for the present, may then emerge.*”<sup>46</sup> Uma Chakravarti in her article ‘*The Social Philosophy of Buddhism and the Problem of Inequality*’ says that one should consider how women reacted to Buddhism.<sup>47</sup> She points to the fact that Buddha showed to women an ‘*awareness of the position of disadvantage in which women were placed.*’<sup>48</sup> It also indicates that Buddha was also aware of gender discrimination.<sup>49</sup> Thus it would be interesting to observe how the concept of chastity was dealt in the *Jātakas*.

The *Jātakas* or the Buddhist birth stories are a collection of folklore that has been appropriated for the propagation of the Buddhist ideas amongst the laity. The *Jātakas* were accepted as one of the classified texts of Buddhism.<sup>50</sup> The multifarious presence of the Bodhisatta is considered as a constant reminder that the *Jātakas* are not simply folktales, but stories which have reached us mediated through Buddhism.<sup>51</sup> They were originally included in a form different from that of the Pāli Canon as it is now. While the stories themselves were written down in the form we know them today around fifth century A.D., the fact that the *Jātakas* are mentioned by name and represented through sculpture as early as the third century B.C. (from Bharhut, Central India), would suggest that their compilation and dissemination was a long-drawn process.<sup>52</sup> According to Uma Chakravarti there was not any fixed text, but, rather, one that provided a broad structure, leaving considerable room for improvisations.<sup>53</sup> The *Jātakas* describes life in both urban and rural setting.<sup>54</sup> They are said to have revealed reality.<sup>55</sup> *Jātakas* are said to provide broad characteristics of the society.<sup>56</sup> Regarding

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<sup>46</sup> Chakravarti, Uma, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of ‘Ancient’ India*, ‘Towards a Historical Sociology of Stratification in Ancient India, Evidence from Buddhist Sources’, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp68

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, *The Social Philosophy of Buddhism and the Problem of Inequality*, pp133

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp135

<sup>50</sup> Chakravarti, Uma, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of ‘Ancient’ India*, ‘Women, Men and Beasts’, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp 200

<sup>51</sup> Roy, Kulkum, Justice in the Jātakas, *Social Scientist*, Vol 24, Nos. 4-6, April-June 1996, pp27

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp22

<sup>53</sup> Chakravarti, Uma, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of ‘Ancient’ India*, ‘Women, Men and Beasts’, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp 201

<sup>54</sup> Gen’ichi, Yamazaki, *The Structure of Ancient Indian Society, Theory and Reality of the Varna System*, Published by the Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, 2005, ppxiv

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Chakravarti, Uma, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of ‘Ancient’ India*, ‘Women, Men and Beasts’, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp198-99

authorship of the *Jātakas* it is not possible to be the work of a particular set of people.<sup>57</sup> The appropriation is said to take place at the hands of the Buddhist *bhikku*. The *bhikku* worked as a mediator between the folk tale and the canonical Buddhist text.<sup>58</sup> The constitution of the audience remains uncertain. But the presence of an audience in every narration is significant. The reaction of the audience had an impact into the original story.<sup>59</sup> But the stories were not kept too ‘open-ended’.<sup>60</sup>

In regard to women the narratives in the *Jātakas* is said to “*provide a valuable insight into the points of intersection and divergence between popular culture and culture of the higher classes, as well as the Buddhist and Brahmānical traditions.*”<sup>61</sup> Uma Chakravarti moreover points out:

*“The representation of women in the Buddhist Jātakas reiterates the apparent obsession in the normative literature with the need to control women by constantly guarding them and restricting their freedom. The only distinction between the texts of the Brahmānic culture and the more popular Jātaka stories is that between prohibition and the representation of transgression: in the former transgression is only implied or viewed as a possibility; in the Jātakas, it is actually enacted by women. Apart from this, there is coalescing of the values of high culture and the more popular beliefs about the ‘essential’ nature of women.”*<sup>62</sup>

Thus each text provides with an interesting twist and thus each text will be thoroughly studied. A proper understanding of the context and the contents of the texts will be done. The stories and various theories pertaining to the topic will be dealt in details along with the various issues that may arise. Though understanding the theory of chastity and its practice is one of the major concerns of this work but other issues affecting the concept of chastity directly or indirectly will be dealt with in an analytical descriptive and empirical manner. The position of both men and women in relation to chastity will also be discussed as it will provide us with a better understanding of the subject concerned. In the proposed study an effort will be made not only to bring out the characters or situations who followed the conventional path

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<sup>57</sup> Chakravarti, Uma, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmānas of ‘Ancient’ India*, ‘Women, Men and Beasts’, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp200

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pp 201

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, pp 203-204

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, pp198-99

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp 210-211

but also who deviated from the norms as well as the paradoxical ones. The original text of some of the texts will also be referred to for understanding various terminologies and verses which not only helps in interpreting an issue in a more prominent manner but also in problematising it. The critical edition of both the epics will also be studied for a better understanding. An attempt will be made not only to understand what the text is trying to establish but also what the text is silent about.

## **CHAPTERISATION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will define the research subject and provide the historiography. A brief introduction to the theme, sources, and issues will be given for a better understanding.

### **CHAPTER 1: Conceptualising Chastity**

This chapter mainly focuses as to how chastity was conceptualised not only for wives but also as a maiden, a mother and a widow. We would also discuss as to how chastity was conceptualised for men, celestial damsels, courtesans and slaves.

### **CHAPTER 2: Conformity in the Great Epics**

Here we will see how the idealized roles helped in establishing the concerned concept and how they are bypassed and infringed upon and how infringements were treated, whether they were accepted or punished and what moulded the behaviour. How the ideal was handled among the upper class women will be studied as the principal women characters of the epics belong to the upper class. But we also find references to the *Rakshasi* women and women of other kingdoms (other than the principal kingdom mentioned in the text) and a comparative analysis can be made. Men's loyalty and devotion towards his women will also be a subject of concern. We also find the episodes of Sabari and Svayamprabha who are unmarried but have practised asceticism. It will be interesting to see how these characters outside the institution of marriage proved their purity of character.

### **CHAPTER 3: Deviance in the Great Epics**

Here we will be discussing stories which show deviance from chastity by men and women, the reason behind their digression, their reaction and how society reacted to such behaviour. The treatment meted out to them would also form an important section.

### **CHAPTER 4: Chastity as reflected in the *MahaPurānas***

By narrating the stories of the *Purānas*, the *brāhmaṇas* tried to teach people the way of life, what they thought to be correct. We find stories wherein not only men but women too are listening (a woman called Citrā in a story is shown listening to the *Purānas* when the *brāhmaṇas* were reading them). Making amendments and changes in the stories as the situation demanded, the *brāhmaṇas* tried to maintain their control over the society. The concept of chastity was made more stringent for the women but on the other hand we also find greater latitude in the freedom of movement allowed to women especially in the case of those belonging to the lower stratum. It will be interesting to see that how the interpolations and thus the social changes affected the concept of chastity. It will be explored how chastity was conceptualised, what the duties were prescribed for a *pativrata* and analysing the condition under which a woman deviated.

### **CHAPTER 5: Deviant Behaviour As Reflected in the *MahaPurānas***

In this chapter we would be discussing about women who deviated or transgressed from chastity and would be analysing the characters involved and the nature of the deviance and the basis of the circumstances. There were women who were considered as unchaste without any fault of theirs, while in some cases though they transgressed willingly, they were not considered as sinful. The issues involved in this paradoxical situation will be dealt in this chapter. The treatment meted out to the unchaste women, whether she committed it willingly or was forced, is equally interesting. Man's fall from chastity, his ordeal and punishment will also be discussed.

## CHAPTER 6: Comparative Evaluation of Conformity and Deviance in Hāla's *Sattasaī* And *Jātakas*

In the *Sattasaī* women are open about their sexuality. A female voice is given to the text. The various aspects and stages of a woman's life can be deeply understood not only within the household but outside also. Right from her childhood to meeting her lover (which was not permissible), her anxiety involved, her married life – the various problems involved, how she is being treated, the husband's younger brothers being a threat to her, her fierce competition with other co-wives, her emotions when her husband leaves her for a business trip, what happens when a wife is being abducted. All these variants will be studied to see how women felt about this very concept and how she dealt with it as it has been given a female voice.

In *Jātaka* stories we find women being depicted in a derogatory manner. Though they were considered as smelling evil and adulterous then also they were expected to be like slaves and be obedient to their husbands. But though we find that women were inherently considered as wicked in nature and that loyalty and devotion was not accepted from their but there are stories wherein we find that woman are being punished for being adulterous.

In the *Kosiya Jātaka* combines humiliation with physical punishment to cure a woman of her evil ways. The woman was brought to heal and she became as good as she had been wicked formerly. In the *Cula Paduma Jātaka*, the adulterous wife is described as a harlot by her husband, who first expounds that such a woman, deserves to die, then recommends and executes the cutting off of the adulterous woman's nose and ears. Similarly in the *Gahapati Jātaka*, the errant wife of a *gahapati*, when discovered by the husband is thrashed by him. The husband also demands damages from the adulterer saying, 'Damages please for injury done to the chattels under another man's watch and ward.' In many cases it was the man who was getting punished for involving in such a sinful act.

The *Asātamanta Jātaka*, *Kuṇāla Jātaka*, *Maṇicora Jātaka*, *Succaja Jātaka*, *Kulāvaka Jātaka*, *Kalyāṇadhamma Jātaka*, *Bandana Mokkha Jātaka*, *Bhūridatta Jātaka*, *Asātamanta Jātaka*, *Saketa Jātaka*, *Kusa Jātaka*, *Ucchanga Jātaka* will be helpful in regard to the topic. More stories will be included.

In this chapter it will be observed how the concerned concept was conceptualised and practised. The contradictions between what was framed and practised will form a major part.

## **Conclusion**

An attempt will be made to provide a total framework of the understanding of the concept of chastity and the various issues related to it as reflected in the texts concerned.

The aim of the thesis is to look at the concept using sources of different genre and also from different religious traditions, for instance the information and behavioural patterns delineated in the *MahaPurāṇas* need to be compared and contrasted with the representation of chastity in the Great Epics. This thesis also endeavours to look at the pattern of conformity and deviance within the religious traditions of Buddhist and the Jains. Towards this purpose my research has largely looked at the *Hāla's Sattasāi* and *Jātakas*. I have largely looked at the narratives and stories to analyse the research topic.

## CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUALISING CHASTITY

### INTRODUCTION

“As among the rivers Gangā is the best, among the women it is the *pativratā*.”<sup>63</sup>

Thus a *pativratā* woman held the highest stratum amongst the women. *Pativratā* literally means a woman who has made a vow (*vrata*) to her husband (*pati*). *Pativratya* denotes the concept. This research work will focus on the various intricacies and complications involved in it.

Hari, the Supreme Being is said to have illustrated the definition of a *pativratā* woman and if it was Hari who has elucidated the concept then no humans supposedly had the courage to disobey. He said,

“*pativratāchanarīptunritymhitertā*”<sup>64</sup> and

*Ā-rādhayetpātisauryapasyetsapativratā*”<sup>65</sup>.

It means that a *pativratā* is the one who always thinks and is interested in the welfare of her husband and worships the valour of her husband.<sup>66</sup> But this worship and welfare was no ordinary task. She had to play multiple roles for her husband. The roles are *kāryedāsīrtoveśyabhojanejananisamī*<sup>67</sup>, meaning a *pativratā* in performing duty is like a maid-servant (*dāsī*), in giving pleasure she is like a prostitute (*veśya*) and in serving a meal she is like a mother (*janani*) and the woman who counsels her husband like a *sumantrini* (a good minister) in his difficult times is a *pativratā*, *vipatsumantrinibhrtuhsācbhāryāpativratā*<sup>68</sup>. This implies that a wife always had to be alert and see to her husband's needs and perform domestic chores.

Her role as a *veśya* means that she had to provide him with sexual services and satisfy him. Here comes the issue of sexuality. Thus sexually she had to be both active and

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<sup>63</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 50, 49

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 55a

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 55b

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 56a

attractive for her husband. If it was diverted towards any other man, it was considered a sin. This put emphasis on her physical beauty. It also implies that she had to be aware in the art of making love. As a mother to her husband she had to be affectionate towards him and care for him as a mother do for her child. The role of a *sumantrini* means she has to be wise enough to guide him in every step and take him out of difficult situations.

The welfare of the husband was supposed to be the sole purpose of her life. Her mind, body and soul were to be dedicated to him. She had to follow each and every word of her and she did not have any option of disobeying as Hari said that a *pativratā* is the woman who does not cross the command of her husband in word, deed or mind<sup>69</sup> and eats after her husband has taken his meal.

Even if she has dedicated her mind, soul and body, that did not stop the husband from bringing another wife, if he desired so. It should be considered as a natural circumstance and she was supposed to look after the co-wife for her husband's benefit. She who is a *pativratā* should not feel jealousy (*matsaram*) if her husband brings another wife and accept her husband's honour and dishonour. She should carefully attend her husband on every bed he sleeps upon.

Appreciation of any man, other than her husband, be it her father or her brother, was a transgression. If the wife looked upon a well-dressed man whether it is her brother, father or son as a stranger is a *pativratā*. A woman has nourishing qualities. When a child is born to her, she focuses on the new-born. But a wife became a *pativratā* if adored and feared her husband more than her son.

It was also important for her to give birth to a son, as the son liberated not only the parents but also the whole generation. It was through the son that the lineage was continued.

Even if a husband is righteous it is said that he will fall off from heaven if the wife breaks her chastity. A woman is said to liberate her marital house and her parental house if performs all these duties. Thus a pressure was made upon her that if she wanted to liberate not only her marital house but her parental one too she had to be a



*pativratā*. Thus it was made a requirement for her parents too that she becomes a *pativratā* and not just a wife. The foundation, therefore, was laid right from her childhood.

Maintaining virginity before marriage became one of her compulsions. Early marriage was encouraged in order to control her sexuality right before she attains puberty and becomes aware of her sexuality. Right from her childhood she is trained for her marital life and duties, “A daughter affording a livelihood is condemned.”<sup>70</sup> A woman was kept at a safe distance from developments that were taking place. She was discouraged to have any close companionship with a washerwoman or a woman in her monthly courses, a rationalist, sceptic or a heretic, a Buddhist recluse woman or a woman of Kāpālika sect or an unfortunate wretched woman.<sup>71</sup> This means that the *Brahmins* felt threatened by them. A washerwoman was economically independent, Buddhism as we all know came into existence as a strong alternative to Brahmanism. Women were also encouraged to stay away from a rationalist or a heretic.

The entire concept of *Pātivratya* is spun around the institution of marriage which was patriarchal in nature. For men it was prescribed that they should carefully examine the characteristics of a girl as a woman of good conduct enhances the longevity of her husband and a corrupt wife, the man and his family would perish. It was through the chaste wife that a man becomes a true householder and thus upholding the other *Asrāmās* and through her only he was able to accomplish the three *Puruṣarthas* (*mokṣa*, *kāma* and *artha*).<sup>72</sup> Without *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* a man’s life did not have any value. Thus it was her responsibility to maintain the harmony of the family and thus of the society.

*Pātivratya* not only gave her honour and recognition in the society but immense power too. It was through this that she obtained salvation for herself. She is given the status of a queen and her husband that of a king of the whole of the universe. There is no existence for her without her husband. If the husband is away, she has to follow the path prescribed for her. If her husband is dead, then she had to follow a more restrained life. The life of widow was not easy at all. A widow was supposed to lead a

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<sup>70</sup> The *Padma Purāna*, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 126, 19-25

<sup>71</sup> The *Skanda Purāna*, Book IV: *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 4, 26

<sup>72</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāna*, First *Skandha*, Chapter 14, 7-20

life that was miserable and that was dedicated to her husband only.<sup>73</sup> The marriage of a widowed woman was not encouraged so that she could start her life fresh.<sup>74</sup>

Though *Pātivratya* was made the focal point of her life but the society was always apprehensive about the character and the conduct of women. It is said that women get attracted to a well-dressed man whether it is her brother or father. Her chastity is said to be there where there is scarcity of place and suitors. Even women of noble families aspires such a life. It implies that women irrespective of their class and caste never follow the conventional decency. Their activities are said to be dependent on their desires and wants. The society is warned against her nature – that if she gets an opportunity she will definitely deviate from the *Pātivratya* path. The various religious traditions framed women in such a diabolical and deplorable manner. Thus in order to control this ‘framed’ perception it was a need to manacle her by an ideal. Not only the Brahmanical tradition but the Buddhist tradition considered the idea of male dominance essential (*Kunala-Jātaka*). We get references in the *Purāṇas*, the epics (the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*) and in the *Jātakas* (such as *Kosiya Jātaka*, *Cula Paduma Jātaka* and *Gahapati Jātaka*) of punishments meted out to women for their evil and adulterous behaviour. But such constraints were not only for controlling her but also had wider connotations.

Despite of such restraints we do get references of women who deviated from the prescribed path. But what makes the whole scenario interesting and problematic is that sometimes such deviance was not considered sinful. The concept was often mutated as per the situation, the need and the characters involved. The curses, redemptions and the ordeals form a major part of this concept. She is sometimes called a *pativratā* even after performing such a ‘sinful’ activity. This can be called a paradoxical situation. It is important to study as under what circumstances she deviated from the path of *Pātivratya*, whether she performed it willingly or forcibly and how did she react under such a circumstance and when she did it willingly how her husband, her marital and parental household and the society behaved.

Mostly it was women, who had to go through ordeals in order to prove her loyalty. But here we get a reference wherein a man sets for the ordeal. It is interesting to get

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<sup>73</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 67-79

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*

such an exceptional case.<sup>75</sup> It will be interesting to observe what chastity meant for men and to what extent did they follow it. We also get exceptional cases where even a prostitute tells how chaste she is.<sup>76</sup>

The wife is supposed to treat her husband with kindness. She should feed and protect him. Religion, pleasure, wealth, nourishing, lineage are all dependent on the wife. The merits of a person himself, as well as of his deceased ancestors depend on her. That man who fails to protect his wife earns great infamy and goes to Hell. The husband is the highest deity of the wife. Through the grace of the husband, women obtain both pleasure and offspring as the reward. The husband is her *Pati* (lord) for the protection he provides. He is her *Bhartri* for sustaining her. The husband is also the one who provides her with boon, as due to him she procures an offspring.<sup>77</sup> Thus woman held a highly revered position when she maintained her chastity throughout her life, whatever might have been the consequences.

Women who were outside the sphere of this moral bounding for example the *veśyās*, were considered to be of loose character. The society were not only concerned about this women who acted outside the sphere of the Brahmanical laws and customs but were also apprehensive about the women who were promiscuous in nature, as more often than not, in various ancient Indian texts such as in the *Purāṇas* and in the Epics we find discussion how degraded these women were considered as and that they bring about fall not only for themselves but also for their family.

Men too were bounded within the concept of chastity, though it was not as regressive as it was for women. Though the *veśyās* and the *Apsarās* were outside the realm of the concept of chastity but there are references wherein they talk about their purity of character. The concept of chastity also bounded within itself the caste system. In this chapter we would see how the concept of chastity was conceptualised for different sections of the society, which was not only a parameter for deciding the character, position and status but also decided how their life should be.

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<sup>75</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Fifth *Skandha*, Chapter 26, 8-9

<sup>76</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 110, 79-80

<sup>77</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Ashwamedha Parva*, Chapter 90, 44-52

Through narration of stories which were inculcated with various morals, laws and customs, people were taught the right mode of life. These stories were ornamented with different characters; some of them were celestial and some earthly while some were great and some evil. It was through these stories which acted as a means of communication and engaging with the society.

## UNDERSTANDING THE NOTION OF CHASTITY

### THE EPICS AND THE *PURĀṆAS*

A chaste woman's highest virtue and holiest worship was keeping her vow of never transgressing the words of her husband.<sup>78</sup> Just as body without soul becomes impure, so also a woman without her husband was considered to be impure.<sup>79</sup> A chaste lady is most celebrated.<sup>80</sup>

A *pativrata*'s life was more than devotion to her husband. She had to play multiple roles for her husband. She had to be intelligent enough to help him get out of difficult situations and at the same time physically endowed with beauty, meaning she had to be sexually active for her husband and his pleasure. She had to be emotionally strong enough, to tolerate a co-wife and also look upon a handsome man whether her father, brother or son as a stranger.

Her duties as a *pativrata* had to be performed daily and every seconds of her life had to be devoted to her husband. If her husband stands up, she had to stand up along with him. She had to go to bed after he is asleep and rise before him.<sup>81</sup> When the husband goes abroad, she had to keep herself unadorned.<sup>82</sup> She was also told not to speak out the name of her husband in order to give him long life. She was not supposed to mention the name of another man.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 33

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>80</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 50,48

<sup>81</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 16

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*,17

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*,18

Even when she was dragged up by her husband, she was not supposed to cry aloud<sup>84</sup> and also stand for a long time at the door<sup>85</sup> and frequently go to the gate. She was also not supposed to take care of herself.<sup>86</sup> Before she was being told, she was supposed to get everything ready of daily worship.<sup>87</sup> She had to completely avoid watching community festivals etc., if her husband was not with her.<sup>88</sup> She, who was a chaste lady, was not supposed to go on pilgrimages or similar journeys, or for weddings without her husband. She should not wake up her husband when he is asleep, or disturb him when he is resting or engaged in pastime. She should not come in front of anyone personally when she was menstruating<sup>89</sup> and till she takes her purification bath, she does not even talk within his range. Only after taking bath properly, she had to look at the face of her husband first and after meditating on her husband, she should look at the sun.<sup>90</sup>

A chaste woman who desires for a long life for her husband had to see that the following auspicious things are available: turmeric, saffron, vermilion, collyrium, bodice, betel leaf, auspicious jewellery, hair tonics and embellishments, bangles, earrings and other ornaments.<sup>91</sup> She who is a *pativrata* does not talk to a woman who speaks unwell of her husband. She should not take bath anywhere being naked.<sup>92</sup> She should never sit on a pestle, broom, stone, and any machine or on the threshold.<sup>93</sup> She should not act boldly except during sexual union with her husband. She should always express her interest in wherever her husband shows his interest.<sup>94</sup> She should never go away from her husband even if he is impotent, miserably placed, sickly, senile, and infirm or unsteady.<sup>95</sup> If ghee, asafoetida, salt etc. are exhausted, a chaste woman was told not to mention that they are not in store at the time when the husband takes food. She should not serve food in iron vessels.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7,19

<sup>85</sup> Ibid,20

<sup>86</sup> Ibid,21

<sup>87</sup> Ibid,22

<sup>88</sup> Ibid,24

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, Chapter 7,25-26

<sup>90</sup> Ibid,27

<sup>91</sup> Ibid,28-29

<sup>92</sup> Ibid,30

<sup>93</sup> Ibid,31

<sup>94</sup> Ibid,32

<sup>95</sup> Ibid,34

<sup>96</sup> Ibid,35

Desirous of taking holy dip in a sacred *Tīrtha*, she should drink the water with which her husband's feet are washed which is equal to taking bath in a *Tīrtha*, as for a woman the husband is superior to Lord Śaṅkara and Lord Viṣṇu.<sup>97</sup>

The woman who addressed her husband in second person singular instead of the respectful plural and spoke harsh words to husband is said to have become dumb in the next birth. She, who was jealous of her co-wife, was supposed to become a shrew in every birth. She, who looked lovingly at another man when the husband is not seeing her, she, then becomes ugly, one-eyed or foul-faced. If a woman on seeing the husband returning from his visit out should hurriedly receive him with offerings of water, seat, betel leaves, fans, massaging the feet, addressing sweet words and removing sweat and with other types of services and please him. A chaste woman was not supposed to occupy a seat higher than that of her husband and frequently go to other people's houses. In the presence of elders, she should not speak loudly or call others in a loudly.<sup>98</sup> If a woman transgresses the command of her husband even though she performs holy rites, fasts and other observances, she takes away the long life of her husband. After her death, she falls into hell.<sup>99</sup>

The duty of a wife was to be with her husband, even if he was ugly or handsome, wealthy or poor. She was supposed to be with him not only in his days of happiness but also during his crisis. While Draupadī and Sītā were leaving for forest with their husbands, they were advised by their respective mother-in-laws to be a constant support for their son and serve them diligently. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, Kausalya told Sītā, while she was leaving for forest with Rāmā to be with her husband in his difficult times. She said that those women, who even being much-loved by their husbands, does not serve their husbands who are facing cṚṣi s are wicked. This is considered to be the very nature of women.<sup>100</sup> Women who are of good conduct and keep herself bounded with the moral limitations are considered to be virtuous.

The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* states that a woman proves her chastity by her devotion, loyalty and service, even if it meant following her dead husband in his funeral pyre. Bhrgu said the one who carries the body of the husband to the pyre and follows him

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<sup>97</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7,36

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 7, 42

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*,37

<sup>100</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 29, 20-25

attains heaven.<sup>101</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* like the *Skanda Purāṇa* reflects the same inclination regarding the duties and role of a chaste woman. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* says that women should look upon their husband as gods, rendering service to the husband, fulfilling his wishes, and taking care of his relatives and maintaining vows for their husband.<sup>102</sup> She should abide by the desires, great or small, of her husband with modesty and address him with pleasant words.<sup>103</sup> A woman who served her husband like Goddess Lakṣmī, with a single-minded devotion considering her husband as Lord Viṣṇu was promised happiness in heaven.<sup>104</sup> A chaste woman was promised with divine power and position. Even the gods were said to be afraid of them. The gods came to their rescue while they were in crisis.

A woman was discouraged to have any kind of social communication with that of a washerwoman or a woman in her monthly courses, a rationalist, and sceptic or heretic, a Buddhist recluse woman or a woman of *Kāpālīka* sect or an unfortunate wretched woman.<sup>105</sup> She was not allowed to speak to a woman who hates her husband.<sup>106</sup> Thus anyone who might influence a chaste woman otherwise or make her deviate from the customs was supposed to remain at a distance from her. Keeping contact with them made her impure or unchaste, thus creating a dislike or contempt in her for them as a result of which she would willingly discard any communication with such people.

To conceive and to become a mother had great significance for her, so that she could maintain her position in the marital household. The mother was also held responsible for the character of the child too. In the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* there is a mention of a story whereby a husband states so. Khaśā gave birth to two sons. The elder was born at dusk and the younger at dawn. One was *Yakṣa* and the other one was *Rākṣasa*. Her husband said that a son or daughter will be like the mother at the time of birth.<sup>107</sup> A son will have the same character and habit as his mother. The women were thus considered responsible for the character of not only the children she gave birth too, but also the society as they formed the future.

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<sup>101</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Ganpati-khaṇḍam*, Chapter 28, 11-13

<sup>102</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Seventh Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 11, 25

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 26-27

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 11, 29

<sup>105</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 4, 26

<sup>106</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 4, 27

<sup>107</sup> The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.7.55

In the *Padma Purāṇa* it is said that due to religious merit a good son is obtained. A good womb is obtained by a noble woman through religious merit. It was believed that a son was born only when a mother was not sinful in nature and is of noble character. Thus a woman was made responsible of the evil that existed in the society as the purity of her character determined the character of her son too. The wife was in a good position when she gave birth to a son, while if she did not, her fate included only sufferings as it is said, “*Fie on the childless accursed woman who is not loved in the house of her husband and is treated with contempt, like a maid servant, by other co-wives blessed with children.*”<sup>108</sup> Thus a woman had to be fertile enough to maintain her *Pātivratya* through which she gained position, recognition and honour in the society.

In order to procure this son, sexual union with another man was permitted by the scriptures. But in this regard, her consent did not exist. The *Purāṇas* and the Epics contain many stories wherein a wife is sent to another man by her husband or her mother-in-law for progeny.

The very definition of chastity was often mutated according to various dynamics of the society. Sometimes when it was not possible to bear a child from her husband she was often sent to another man to achieve the desired result (Queen Sudeṣṇā<sup>109</sup> was sent by her husband to a sage for a son). Though this meant breaking the rule of purity and loyalty but nowhere was she accused of establishing sexual relation with another man.

Here came the complexity in understanding and perceiving the meaning of chastity. The wife undoubtedly was very significant in the process for obtaining progeny. The whole process was not possible without her. So her sexuality had to be controlled. It was very important for her to give birth to a son to hold her position in the family. It was believed that a son emancipated the whole family. He brought wealth and prosperity. The wife had to be of good character as the mother was held responsible for the character of the child. It was she who nurtured the child. But as a wife she had to perform other duties as well, such as being a part of the rituals held for the good of the household and her husband. She had to attend to guests even by providing sexual

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<sup>108</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Sixth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 14, 40

<sup>109</sup> The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.74,70-82



pleasure, as one of the major duty of a man as a householder was to serve the guests (as Oghavati did).

Her life came to an end when her husband died. She was not much of a use to her husband's family, neither to hers nor to the society. Widow re-marriage was not encouraged. Examples of self-immolation are available. It was considered honourable for her to die on the funeral pyre of her husband and the only way to liberate herself and rejoin her husband in heaven. This was how her life meant to be.

In the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, Kṛṣṇa enumerates how a widow should lead her life. He said: "A widow should always be beyond desire...",<sup>110</sup> meaning that as her husband has died, thus whatever desires existed in her life should now cease to exist and embrace the suffering till death comes to her. Kṛṣṇa moreover said that a widow should not adorn herself or consume good food, or sleep comfortably, have betel leaf, or take a ride in a vehicle, should not oil her hair and should cut her hair, thus not allowing her to beautify herself so that she remains sexually inactive as result of which other men would not feel attracted towards her. She is advised to remain devoted to Narayana and perform penance on the birthday of Kṛṣṇa, Rāmā and days of Śivaratri, Narkacaturdasi, eclipse pf the sun or moon. Such a woman should consume simple food only. A widow was not allowed to participate in any kind of social gathering be it a festival or a yatra, she was not suppose to look at a person beautifully clad as it might trigger her subdued desires.<sup>111</sup> Thus she had to mourn the death of her husband throughout her life and lead a life devoted to gods only. A widow had to follow such injunctions in order to maintain the honour of her dead husband, her in-laws and for her parental family.

In the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* it is said that a bad wife destroys the husband.<sup>112</sup> So it was important for a man to carefully examine a girl and then marry her. She had to be analysed so a man's life can have a prosperous life. Her physical beauty determined her character. It is advised that if she is suffering from any disease or had a hair more or less, or her limbs, her toes and eyebrows – all these were considered as the parameter of her character. For this it was important for her to fit into the above

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<sup>110</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍam*, Chapter 83, 93

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 94-104

<sup>112</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 127, 4

eligible conditions. A good womb i.e. being conceived by a noble woman is obtained through religious merit, and a bad death is had as a result of sins.<sup>113</sup>

A woman thus was required to maintain her purity of mind and of body not only after but prior to marriage too. The family of a virgin daughter was held in an esteemed position and prestige. Though a kind of purity and serenity is related to a virgin daughter, but we will see that she is merely treated as an object of gift when she is given in marriage.

#### ***A Virgin, Her Virginitv And Social Learning***

“...a girl of excellent characteristics and good conduct enhances the longevity of her husband.”<sup>114</sup>

The Manu of the seventh *Manvantārā* on account of the bad conduct of the ritual Hotā got a daughter named Ilā.<sup>115</sup> Then he prayed to the gods that if they are pleased with him and want to grant him a boon, then she should become a son.<sup>116</sup> She was turned into a son named Sudyumna.<sup>117</sup> While he went to a forest, due to a curse he became a female and gave birth to a son named Purūrava and Sudyumna again regained his manhood and became the king.<sup>118</sup> All his sons born while he was a man, was ‘devoted to his virtue’ and ruled the earth. While Purūrava who was born while Sudyumna was a female, he did not obtain any portion of the earth. He became the ruler of a charming city called Pratuṣṭhāna.<sup>119</sup> Thus Manu’s request for converting his daughter into a son indicates the society’s unwanted desire for a daughter.

A girl was not considered fitted to be in control of herself. Her father, grandfather, brother, a member of the same family, mother or the man who formally gives her in marriage are her guardians of her life.<sup>120</sup> A woman did not deserve freedom as she would then become corrupted.<sup>121</sup> After puberty, if a girl is not married she is prescribed to wait for three years. Fourth year onward she should look for a husband herself. The children of such a girl is said to neither lose their respectability nor is the

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<sup>113</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 89, 4-11

<sup>114</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 5, 92-95

<sup>115</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 108, 7

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 10

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 11

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 12-14

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 16-18

<sup>120</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 40, 50

<sup>121</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhumikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 52, 8-44

union with such a girl is considered to be disrespectful. If she acts otherwise, she is said to get rebuked by Prajapati himself.<sup>122</sup> But a girl was never the master of her own desires. It was not expected of her that she even if a man approaches her or she chooses someone, she would marry her without the consent of her father.

Citrāngadā was the ‘chaste’ (*sādhvī*) daughter of Viśvakarman.<sup>123</sup> King Suratha felt attracted towards her.<sup>124</sup> Seeing him such, she decided to accept his proposal. But her friends warned her that as she is not self-dependant, in such a matter she should seek her father’s permission.<sup>125</sup> But she did not listen to them and was cursed by her father that she will be of marriage and will not attain conjugal pleasure and will not have any son.<sup>126</sup> Her father too was cursed by an ascetic to turn into a monkey as he did not get his daughter married as she should be given to another man and be united with a husband.<sup>127</sup>

The story conveys how it is improper of a girl to choose a man for herself without the permission of her father and at the same time it was sinful of a father if he does not get his daughter married at the appropriate time. Thus both the father and the daughter were under societal pressure and following the norms of the time was a compulsion for them to maintain their honour.

Patriarchy’s obsession over virginity can be resurrected by the way a virgin girl have been categorised. There were several types of virgins with different levels. *Gaurī* (a girl who is seven years old) is the best. *Rohinī* (who starts menstruating) is considered as *Madhyama* (middle) and *Rajasvalā* (who is more than ten years old) is considered the most low.<sup>128</sup>

If a virgin girl had her first menstruation in her father’s house without her being married, her father was to be known as a *Bhrūṇahā* (destroyer of a foetus) and that girl would be known as *Vṛṣalī* (*Śūdra* girl).<sup>129</sup> He, who marries such a girl, is known

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<sup>122</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 44, 14-17

<sup>123</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 37, 39

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 41

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 42-49

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 48-55

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 75

<sup>128</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, , Book VII: *Prabhāsa khaṇḍa*, Chapter 205,82

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvādhā*, Chapter 40, 34

as the husband of a *Śūdra*. He is an ‘*Apāñkteya*’ meaning one who is not proper to sit in the same row with others at the time of meals. Communication with him should be abandoned forever.<sup>130</sup> A girl with hairs visible before marriage kills her children, she with breasts developed destroys her family, and she who has menstruated destroys the father. It is advised to avoid such girls.<sup>131</sup> That she should get married before her menstruation begins not only implies exclusive control over her virginity and thus her body, it also indicates that marriage for a girl, rather than being an union was a duty to be fulfilled. She was treated nothing more than a medium to fulfil societal needs.

Of all *Dānas*, *Kanyā Dāna* (gift of a virgin) was considered as the best. The father was supposed to give his well-adorned daughter on an auspicious *Lagna* and *Muhūrta*. If he offers horses, elephants and garments according to his capacity, he shall stay in the region where there is no ailment. If anyone begs for wealth for the sake of a virgin, he shall be a *Karmacāṇḍāla* (*Cāṇḍāla* in action) and shall become a wood worm after death. If anyone takes food in his house, he will become pure only by means of expiation called *Cāndrāyaṇya* or *Taptakṛcchra*.<sup>132</sup>

The *Liṅga Purāṇa* also states that *kanyādāna* is the best of all charities.<sup>133</sup> A girl who possess all the auspicious symbols and is free from any faults are to be given by her parents. Then being bathed and covered in beautiful garments and ornaments she is to be given to a *Brāhmaṇa* or a religious student. Thus the concept of virginity was structured in such a manner that it was considered a matter of great respect and honour for the daughter’s father to give his virgin daughter’s hand in marriage. Thus a girl was always in fear and was apprehensive about losing her virginity before marriage as it would cause public shame not only to her but also for her family as Kuntī and Satyavatī concealed about their pre-marital sexual union.

A daughter never belonged to her father and her family. The *Mahābhārata* states that a girl who does not have any brother or father should not get married as the issue born of her would then be an heir to her father’s family. It indicates that after marriage her husband and his family is the sole owner of her and her children and the family of the bride had a position lower to that of the son or the groom.

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<sup>130</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvādha*, Chapter 40,35

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*,41

<sup>132</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book V: *Āvāntya-Khaṇḍa*, Section III: *Revā-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 50, 30-36

<sup>133</sup> The *Liṅga Purāṇa*, Chapter 41, 1-7

Though a virgin was seen with such purity and divinity but she was scrutinised before marriage not only the basis of physical beauty but how devoted she can be in her service towards her husband and household chores. For men it was prescribed that they should carefully examine the characteristics of a girl and then marries her. A man is advised to obtain a wife who has all auspicious marks and free from hereditary blemishes.<sup>134</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa* envisages that a girl possessing moral values (as per the societal customs) nurtures her husband's life while an evil one damages it.<sup>135</sup>

A girl's character was probed into by the family of bridegroom before marriage. Thus it was important for the family of the bride to make their daughter follow the path of chastity and bring her up according to the existing tradition and norms. This lesson of hers started right from her childhood. As the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* states that one should get their daughter married at the age of eight (i.e. of *Gauri* type). The *Mahābhārata* also prescribes the same. The *Anuśāsana Parva* of the text says that a man of thirty years of age should marry a girl of ten years and a man of twenty-one years should marry a girl of seven.<sup>136</sup> Even Rāmā married Sītā when she was seven.<sup>137</sup> Such early marriage was encouraged in order to control her sexuality right before she attains her puberty and becomes aware of her sexuality. By this her virginity was ensured and the husband could claim exclusive right and privilege over her body.

Lord Śiva tested devotion and loyalty of Pārvatī twice before getting married to her. When Pārvatī approached him with a marriage proposal, Śiva told her to render him 'unforbidden' service to him every day.<sup>138</sup> He did this in order to break her 'ego'. Pārvatī continued to serve him. She washed Śiva's feet and drank that water and wiped his body. After worshipping him with sixteen types of offerings she bowed to him repeatedly and used to return to her father's abode. She sometimes cleaned the place. But then also he did not take her as his wife.

On seeing her devotion in serving him and having control over her senses he was impressed. But he decided to accept when she completely overcomes her ego. When she completely overcame her ego and performed a penance that Śiva married her.<sup>139</sup> When she was performing the penance for three thousand years Śiva tested her

<sup>134</sup> The *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, Chapter 10

<sup>135</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhumikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 61, 52

<sup>136</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 44, 14-17

<sup>137</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Chapter 30, 17-18

<sup>138</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Rudreśvarasamhitā: Pārvatikhaṇḍa*, Section III, Chapter 13, 23

<sup>139</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Rudreśvarasamhitā: Pārvatikhaṇḍa*, Section III, Chapter 13, 41-60

devotion and tried to divert her. She said if she would not receive Śiva as his husband then she would forever remain a virgin.<sup>140</sup> Pārvatī even tried to kill herself by entering into fire, but she was not affected by the fire. Through such narratives wherein a goddess shows such devotion towards her husband, audiences were convinced to follow such precepts without challenging them.

Virginitly was thus a very significant condition for women to get married. It is said that a maiden who spoils her virginitly, incurs three-fourths of the sin of Brahmanicide, while the man who knows her, incurs a sin equal to a fourth part of that Brahmanicide.<sup>141</sup> Virginitly was thus treated more than a biological condition. It had sexual and social importance as it was very significant for women to retain her virginitly for getting married. The girl was considered impure and sinful if she violates the obligations imposed upon her.

### ***Physical Beauty***

*“The youth, beauty and form of woman are certainly for her husband only.”<sup>142</sup>*

A woman’s character was judged at different levels. One was her inner beauty that advocated and ascertained her truthfulness, devotion and purity of her character. Another was her physical beauty where she had to meet the socially expounded beauty ideals. Any kind of deviation from the ideal feminine beauty caused obstruction in her marriage. But this feminine beauty depended on socio-cultural factors. Her beauty did not belong to her. In various ancient Indian texts we observe that while introducing a female character or while mentioning her, she is described in terms of her physical appearance and beauty. It was on the basis of socially construed idea of beauty that she was considered apt for marriage and many texts enumerate the factors on the basis of which a man should choose his bride.

Her sexuality never belonged to her. She had to be sexually active only for her husband or else she was considered dangerous. But women who were taught to be a *pativrata* had to be beautiful for her married life and satisfy her husband. A groom is provided with detailed norms as to how he should make his choice of bride when he first sees her. This choice was completely based on physical appearance of a girl. It is

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<sup>140</sup> The Śiva Purāṇa, Rudreśvarasamhitā: Pārvatikhaṇḍa, Section III, Chapter 25, 68

<sup>141</sup> The Mahābhārata, Shanti Parva, Chapter 159, 40

<sup>142</sup> The Padma Purāṇa, Bhūmikhaṇḍa, Chapter 34

very astounding to see that how detailed analysis has been made regarding the body of a girl. The description of the norms shows the knowledge regarding a woman's anatomy and obsession over the physical beauty of a woman. Rituals to increase the beauty of different parts of the body including breasts, navel and nails, of the mind, of speech of a woman are also provided. In this Kṛṣṇa has to be worshipped with flowers and gems.<sup>143</sup>

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Nārada Purāṇa* divulge and gives a description of such norms on the basis of which a man should choose a bride for himself. The girl who had too much hair, but was not without any, one who was not very black or yellow complexioned, not crippled or deformed from birth should be chosen. He must not marry a girl who is vicious or unhealthy, of low origin or suffering from any kind of disease; one who talks improperly; one who inherits some difficulty from father or mother; one who has a beard or who has a masculine appearance.<sup>144</sup>

The *Nārada Purāṇa* man should not marry a girl who is sickly, whose eyes are round, who is born in a family of ailing persons, who has too much of hair or who has no hair at all or who is talkative.<sup>145</sup> A wise person should not marry a girl who is hot-tempered, too short or too tall, who is short of any limb or has an extra limb, who is mad, or malicious.<sup>146</sup> One should not marry a girl with heavy, big ankles or is hunchbacked.<sup>147</sup> A person of discreet personality should not marry a girl who laughs without reason, always stays in others' houses, is habitually controversial, unruly and ruthless.<sup>148</sup> A girl whose teeth and lips are too large and thick, who snorts and grumbles, who is very dark or red in complexion is also considered unfit for marriage.<sup>149</sup> But the *Nārada Purāṇa* enumerates that if the marriage had taken place during childhood when the real nature had not been known and if her defective characteristics are realized after she gained maturity, she should be forsaken.<sup>150</sup>

Though the *Nārada Purāṇa* advises to forsake a girl who does not adhere to the socially modulated beauty standards, the *Agni Purāṇa* and the *Skanda Purāṇa*<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Ganpati-khaṇḍam*, Chapter 4, 31

<sup>144</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Chapter 10

<sup>145</sup> The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 26,5

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*,6

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*,7

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*,8

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*,9

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 26,13

<sup>151</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 37, 143

states that a woman with all auspicious characteristics might be a woman of bad conduct and such a woman is even much more worse. The *Agni Purāṇa* enunciates that an ugly woman can be affectionate towards her husband and advises the husband to consider her as his life.<sup>152</sup> But again it contradicts its own statement and states that if she is physically attractive then she would possess other qualities too. Such contradictory statement and dilemma shows that men were advised not to let go off the services and benefit he could reap from the inner or outer qualities of a woman. Here one has to understand the context within which such obsession regarding physical beauty is given validity. Her outer beauty was a matter of great pride and honour for the husband and it supposedly confirmed the physical appearance of the husband's lineage. Any hereditary defect in her or in her appearance would cause the same rift in her lineage also. But at the same time the *Purāṇa* also ascribes to accept a defected girl with proper conduct which demonstrates the value her service held as a wife.

The concept of chastity was intricately woven with the concept of caste system. Belonging to the lower order meant impurity of character and getting involved with them was equally sinful.

### ***Caste And Chastity***

*"A woman born in a high family is humble and follows the tradition of the family while the one who is born in a low family possess a bad temperament, is devoid of dharma, becomes a loose woman and always denounces her husband in anger."<sup>153</sup>*

Caste and social background played an important role in stratifying the society attitude towards an individual. Within this social stratification, exists gender discrimination. Women were considered to be the pivotal agent in maintaining the balance of stratification on the basis of which various religious traditions survived. Thus on one side low caste women being demeaned while on the other hand a woman of higher and noble status was held in a great esteem. Her lineage was significant in maintaining the purity.

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<sup>152</sup> The *Agni Purāṇa*, Chapter 245, 1-6

<sup>153</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa, Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍam*, Chapter 57, 12-13



Women who are born in the lower class (*kustri*), whose parents are not of good nature are considered to be immoral and unchaste.<sup>154</sup> Wives from the lower caste or the *Śūdra* caste should be taken only for enjoyment. The righteous condemn the practice of begetting children upon *Śūdra* women.<sup>155</sup> But on the other hand the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* enunciates that a man who keeps a *Śūdra* woman as a concubine becomes a bull.<sup>156</sup>

There is a difference in attitude towards *Śūdra* women. While the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* is ignoble and opprobrious toward *Śūdra* women, the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* shows a considerate attitude towards them. Such verse in the text discourages men to treat them in such a contemptible manner and even announces punishment for such a behaviour. This shift in attitude towards the low caste women shows how Brahminical tradition in order to maintain their command over the society was welcoming such change in its norms and customs.

The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* expresses concern and anxiety regarding the low caste women. The lineage born from the *Śūdra* women becomes more degrading in the social organisation. The social position of the womb determined the virtue and position of the lineage as the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* proclaims that with the planting of seed of a painter in the unchaste *Śūdra* woman, the mason (*attalikakar*) was born. Because of his birth from an unchaste woman he fell from virtue.<sup>157</sup>

Though chastity promised her prestige and honour but it could not sweep away the antagonistic image she was framed in. Kṛṣṇa said that the love of a couple is very significant. “*The equality of a couple is the biggest fortune and is also desirable. The household in which the couple is not treated with equality, poverty dwells there and the life of both of them is of no consequence.*”<sup>158</sup> Though there has been emphasis on the love between a man and woman, but women were considered to be immoral and degraded. While Yudhishtira was grieving for the wives who lost their husbands and sons in the war, Kṛṣṇa while consoling him said that he need not to worry about the

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<sup>154</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 36-38

<sup>155</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 44, 12-13

<sup>156</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, *Dharma Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 46,25

<sup>157</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 10, 96-99

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 69, 64-65

women as, “*Women are fond of pleasure and power. By this they will shake off their sorrows and become happy.*”<sup>159</sup>

That the society was anxious and apprehensive about the promiscuous nature of women gets reflected in the conversation between Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīṣma. Bhīṣma quite briefly narrates the ‘false’ behaviour of women.<sup>160</sup> Bhīṣma narrated a story which implied that women desires sexual union for pleasure only and that is the only pleasure they derive from the opposite sex. He also mentions another story whereby a man gets converted to a woman and desired to remain son because according to him woman derives the maximum pleasure during sexual union.<sup>161</sup>

It is very crucial to understand the other side of the perspective regarding women. On one hand these Brahmanical texts articulates the importance of chastity regarding women and on the other side they hold conflicting and pessimistic attitude towards women. This apprehension implies that women were capable of posing threat and challenging the existing norms of the society that were imposed on them and the society felt threatened of them. They tried averting this threat by portraying women as demeaning and low.

#### ***UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER SIDE OF WOMEN***

*“Some women cause the family to fall and some emancipates.”<sup>162</sup>*

Men are warned against the atrocious and diabolical nature of women. They are said to bring in dreadful consequence in life of those men who are greatly attached to them. A man is advised to marry only for lineage. In order to make this perspective much more plausible, the authors often made a female the articulator who narrates such a perspective regarding the character of women.

In the *Padma Purāṇa*, Hari referred to the view of Pārvatī about women.<sup>163</sup> According to Pārvatī, the heart of women is fixed upon men only. Women get attracted to a well-dressed man whether it is her brother or father. Her chastity is said to be there where there is scarcity of place and options. The family gets blemished due

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<sup>159</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Shanti Parva*, Chapter 33, 45

<sup>160</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 19, 6-7

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 12

<sup>162</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhumikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 52

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 52

to her contact. So a man should choose wisely. Thus a man should marry one or the other for continuing the progeny only.<sup>164</sup>

It was not just goddess Pārvaī but celestial damsels were shown to conform to this very nature of a woman. Adding a female voice to it made it much more convincing for the listeners.

A celestial damsel who did not fit into the ideal of chastity is shown having an adverse attitude towards women. She said that even women of noble families, women with husbands and women endowed with beauty does not follow any limitations. There is nothing more sinful than women. They are at the roots of all sins. They might have husbands of good knowledge, of ample wealth or one who is pleasant but when they get opportunities for to go astray, they do not wait and cast off all shame and shy while establishing contact with other men. Women love only those persons who ask for their company, and approach them intimately and render them a little bit of service. They usually do not observe the limitations of traditions. If they are with their husbands it is because no man approaches them or because they are afraid of their husbands. Women do not honour any man. They do not care about the age of the man. They carry on their union with any man ugly or beautiful.

Even if women are honoured well, loved and looked after, they become attached to hunchbacks, blind men, and dwarfs. If women do not get men for their dalliance they begin to indulge in abnormal sexual activity with one another. They indulge in sexual intercourse and are fickle-minded, of evil deeds and emotionally incomprehensible even to an intelligent man. Women are never satisfied with the number of men they cohabit with.<sup>165</sup>

Urvaśī, a celestial damsel left King Purūravas after spending some time with him in dalliance. When he tried to convince Urvaśī for taking her back, she conformed to the innate nature of women as propounded by male authors of the *Purāṇas*. She said the heart of women is like the heart of wolves and is friendly to none. Women are merciless, cruel, and jealous and mind no risk for the object of love. They break all

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid

<sup>165</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhumikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 52,15-2977

relations for a new man in their life. The unchaste women always look for new paramours.<sup>166</sup>

Men were discouraged to have contact with women other than any need. A woman is said to be like a pot of ghee and man a burning charcoal.<sup>167</sup> A woman was advised never to remain in near her.<sup>168</sup> They were not supposed to be together. It is only when in absolutely necessary that he should deal with women. A person who has taken the vow of celibacy should avoid all contact with young women for the senses are so powerful that it might influence even a recluse. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* even goes to the extent that one should avoid the company of one's daughter in a secluded place.<sup>169</sup>

Verses like these brought the pious father-daughter relationship under suspicion. Even through gods such suspicion were created regarding the character of women in the minds of people.

Himavat offered his daughter Pārvatī, to Śiva. She is described as the best maiden in the world. But Śiva controlled himself. He told Himavat not to bring her near him.<sup>170</sup> He said, “A woman is a phase of illusion. As the scholars who have mastered the Vedas say particularly, a young damsel is a hindrance to ascetics.”<sup>171</sup> According to him, contact with woman causes attachment and due to them non-attachment perishes and virtuous penance is destroyed. No ascetic should have any contact with women.<sup>172</sup> He even said that woman is the root of all worldly attachment and thus destroys all wisdom and attachment together.<sup>173</sup> The *Yogins* call woman as the gate of hell. A woman is the called an illusion, a *Maya* created by God who slowly approaches like a death.<sup>174</sup>

Women were considered so dangerous that Yājñavalkya did not deter himself from saying that a husband should satisfy his wife as ‘lust in women is terrible’.<sup>175</sup> The husband's anxiety and suspicion regarding his wife's sexuality is reflected in the story discussed below.

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<sup>166</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ninth *Skandha*, Chapter 14, 36-38

<sup>167</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhumikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 52

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 18, 17b-24

<sup>169</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Eighth *Skandha*, Chapter 12, 6-9

<sup>170</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, Section III, *Rudreśvara Samhitā: Pārvatikhanda*, Chapter 1-3, 5, 8, 11

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 12, 29

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 12, 32

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 12, 33

<sup>174</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Third *Skandha*, Chapter 31, 34-42

<sup>175</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 95, 26

There was a crane named Nādījangha. In his previous birth he was born in a palace as the son of the ruler of Ānarta. Once he went to a mountain. The sage Gālava was staying there with his wife and was involved in penance only. His wife was said to have “*vanquished the whole universe with her excessive beauty*”.<sup>176</sup> Nādījangha was attracted towards her beauty and thought of abducting her. Nādījangha decided to become Gālava’s disciple and when the right moment comes he will abduct her. After becoming his disciple he impressed both of them and won their trust. But the sage did not have full confidence in his wife as he knew the general conduct of women. Hence the *Brāhmaṇa* used to sleep keeping his wife on his lap guarding her closely.<sup>177</sup> When the wife was in her menses, in regard to her impurity, she slept away a little further trusting Nādījangha. Deciding this to be the proper situation he kidnapped her taking the guise of a robber. When Gālava’s wife could recognise him she started asking for help. When Gālava rescued her he became angry and cursed him to become a crane. The ‘chaste’ woman<sup>178</sup> also cursed him the same.

The inimical and discordant attitude regarding women was reflected furthermore in Kaśyapa’s statement who was approached by his wife when he was worshipping Śiva.<sup>179</sup> He said, “*Who can fathom the motives of the actions of women whose countenance is beautiful like the fully bloomed autumnal lotus, whose speech is like ambrosia to the ear but whose heart is sharp like a razor-blade. Women whose minds are determined to achieve their own objective have no one really dear. For serving their own purpose, they will kill or cause to be killed their husband, son or brother.*”<sup>180</sup> Lord Viṣṇu in the form of a woman told the demons who were mesmerized by her beauty that no wise man should trust women. He said that the wise

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<sup>176</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 95, 67-68

<sup>177</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 95, 85

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 97

<sup>179</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, First *Skandha*, Chapter 14, 7-20,

Diti, the daughter of Dakṣa was desirous of a child and with her heart overcome with passion once desired the company of her husband, Kaśyapa, the son of Marīci. He was seated in meditation in his fire-worship hall after offering oblations of milk to the Supreme Man, the protector of sacrifices in the evening. The wife was disturbed because her co-wives were blessed with children and she was not. He completely surrendered to the devotion of his wife and said that it is not possible for husbands to become so completely obliging like her and in the next birth as well. But he told her to wait as he was involved in worshipping Lord Śiva. Though Diti was admonished by her husband but as she was overwhelmed with passion could not control herself and caught hold of the garment of the brāhmaṇa sage like a ‘shameless prostitute’. Kaśyapa surrendered himself and sat down with her in a secluded place. But soon Diti realised her mistake and became ashamed of her sinful act. Diti said that may the child in her womb be killed by goblins. But the man who praised her so much now called her impure, inauspicious and evil and cursed her.

<sup>180</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Sixth *Skandha*, Chapter 18, 41-53

people say, “*The friendship of wolves and especially of way-ward women, who are always on the lookout for ever new victims and men, is momentary and unreliable.*”<sup>181</sup>

It seems that such an offensive and defamatory picture was sketched by the authors of the *Purāṇas* in order to cover the inability of a man to control his senses. The best way to do this was to attack a woman’s body, mind and character. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* maintaining its recusant attitude, says, “*Feminine body is nothing but an accumulation of skin, flesh, blood, nerves, fat, marrow and bones and worms that enjoy themselves in feces, urine and pus.*”<sup>182</sup>

The text continues to opine that on seeing a man fresh and clean from bath their vaginal passage begins to exude excretions. Women do not tolerate their husbands who may give all that they love, who may honour or console them and who may look after them well. Women do not remain Satisfied and contented with simple love and pleasures and with ornaments and money, as with illegitimate love with other men. Women can be kept equally balanced against all these put together viz., god of death, Yama, Antaka, Pātāla, the submarine fire, the sharp edge of razor, poison, serpent and fire. Ever since the creation the defect lies in women always.<sup>183</sup>

A ‘wicked’ woman always becomes resentful of her husband and looks at him like a poison, she does not provide food to him and denounces him even if he is a noble person.<sup>184</sup> On the other hand a chaste woman is adored by the *Brāhmaṇas* and the gods. She gets up in the morning and offer prayers to the family gods and then coers the courtyard with cowdung and performs other beneficial deeds.<sup>185</sup>

Sage Agastya said since the beginning of Creation, it has been the nature of women that they love a man when he is prosperous and leave him in his hard days. Their nature is like the “*inconstancy of lightning, the sharpness of weapons and the speed of an eagle and wind*”, thus pointing to their deceptive, vulnerable and cunning side.<sup>186</sup> Rāmā’s mother Kausalya said the same when Sītā was about to leave for the forest with him.

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid, Chapter 9, 9-12

<sup>182</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Sixth *Skandha*, Chapter 26, 21

<sup>183</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Sixth *Skandha*, Chapter 18, 30-35

<sup>184</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍam*, Chapter 84, 11-12

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 14-15

<sup>186</sup> The *Rāmāyana*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 13, 5-6

Though the *Apsarās* themselves were considered loose and immoral, but that did not deter them from describing the attributes assigned to the loose women. Once Sāhasika, the son of Bali conquered the gods and visited the Gandhamādana Mountain. Tilottamā, an *apsarā* was passing on that way. Both of them felt passionate towards each other.<sup>187</sup> Tilottamā was going to have conjugal pleasure with him.<sup>188</sup> But desirous of Bali, she forgot about moon.<sup>189</sup> Tilottamā said it is very difficult to understand the mind of the ‘loose’ women. They are beyond observation.<sup>190</sup> She gets attracted towards a young and well-adorned man and even loses her consciousness.<sup>191</sup> If she is unable to attract a young man she feels ‘grieved’. When she gets a young man she forgets about the previous one. The one who is well-versed in the act of love is dearest to her. Without the love-sport she cannot be controlled by prayers, grace and love. Most of the time a wicked woman (*kulta*) is said to think about embracing a man.<sup>192</sup> She said that even she likes all those gods who are well versed in the act of making love.<sup>193</sup> These women are considered to be more dangerous than wild animals, ‘are heartless and is the cause of miseries’.<sup>194</sup>

Brahmā ordered all his sons to marry and enumerated the value of the life of a householder. But Nārada negated the values by explaining to his father about the characteristics of women. He said women are an obstacle in achieving heaven and salvation.<sup>195</sup> He called the householder foolish and said that they have three types of wives – virtuous (*sadhvi*), enjoyable (*bhogyā*) and wicked (*kulta*).<sup>196</sup> The virtuous lady is said to serve her husband for the fear of glory and fame and also for conjugal pleasure. The enjoyable lady stays with her husband for worldly pleasures and does not serve her husband.<sup>197</sup> The wicked women destroy the race of the husband. She serves her husband deceitfully and not out of devotion. Such women are desirous of others and needs more and more men to enjoy.<sup>198</sup> Nārada moreover said that by indulging in sexual intercourse with women one loses strength and while talking to

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<sup>187</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa -Janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 23, 21-22

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 23-24

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 41-42

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, 75-76

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, 79

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 84-88

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 23, 91

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 81

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, *Brahmā-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 23, 20

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, 21

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, 22-23

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid*, 25-26

them one lose his glory. <sup>199</sup> Pārvatī said, “An unchaste woman (*a-sadhvi*) produces sons who provides mental disturbance like an enemy”.<sup>200</sup>

A woman who enjoys the company of four men is considered as a *veśyā*. She is not entitled to receive any share in cooked food for gods and manes.<sup>201</sup> A widow was also sketched in a darker shade if she does not self-immolate herself when her husband died. The idea of keeping any contact with her was totally rejected. The *Skanda Purāṇa* says of all inauspicious things, a widow is the most inauspicious one. Her sight or touch destroys the merits of men.<sup>202</sup> A householder should be afraid of them.<sup>203</sup> A widow should also serve Viṣṇu, regarding him to be her husband. She should never speak or listen about sexual matters. She should never touch a man unless it is urgent to do so or is a close relative. She should never look at a man with sexual intention and give up all objects of pleasures. She should not adorn herself with fine clothes or ornaments. She should never have betel-leaves, smear the body with oil and apply collyrium. She should always be afraid of association with men like that with a serpent.<sup>204</sup>

Never can there be success of anything when a widow is seen.<sup>205</sup> All widows except one’s mother are devoid of auspiciousness. A wise man must avoid their blessings.<sup>206</sup> At the time of marriage of a girl, the *Brāhmaṇas* should recite: “She shall be the constant companion of her husband whether he is alive or not.”<sup>207</sup> If a remarried widow, *Vṛṣālī* and *Śūdrī* frequent anyone’s abode, such a *Brāhmaṇa* should be abandoned even from a distance by one who wishes one’s welfare.<sup>208</sup>

Even though women are so negatively imaged but the following noble characteristics are given female connotations. They are *Cetana* (i.e. consciousness) and *Prajna* (i.e. discernment). *Prajna* is called mother as she lives in all the worlds for the protection, nourishment and welfare of being. *Susrusa* (i.e. Service) is extremely chaste and

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<sup>199</sup> *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 23, 35

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, *Ganpati-khaṇḍam*, Chapter 2, 28

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, *Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍam*, Chapter 75,64

<sup>202</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book II: *Vaiṣṇavakhaṇḍa*, Section IX: *Vāsudeva-Māhātmya*, 11

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>204</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book II: *Vaiṣṇavakhaṇḍa*, Section IX: *Vāsudeva-Māhātmya*, 61-67

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 50

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, 51

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 52

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, Book V: *Āvāntya-Khaṇḍa*, Section III: *Revā-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 85, 76



noble, adorned with the ornaments of truth, with her body charming with every ornament. *Ksama* (i.e. Forbearance), *Santi* (i.e. Tranquility) is extremely peaceful, famous and is endowed with many auspicious things, looking charming due to many divine jewels, adorned with divine ornaments, *Daya* (i.e. Pity).<sup>209</sup>

In the *Purāṇas* we also get references to the *Apsarās* and the *veśyās*. Their position and sexuality differed. It will be interesting to observe as to how women belonging to this category were viewed. Did chastity was a concern for them or they controlled their own sexuality and how were they treated by the society?

### ***THE APSARĀS and the VEŚYĀS***

An *Apsarā* is the celestial damsel and is different from the *veśyās*. She is for the entertainment of the celestial beings and helps the gods in achieving their aims. It is through their seductive power that the gods uses to break the penance of many who poses threat to them. The *Apsarā* was sexually active and she took full advantage of her beauty. While it was so difficult or rather impossible for wives to leave their husbands, it was never so for the celestial damsels. It shows that these celestial damsels were hardly attached to the husband and his household. They were known for their dancing skills. Once when Nārada came to Śakra, Śakra told him to command one of the *Apsarās*, whom he likes to dance – Rambhā, Mīsrakeśī, Urvaśī, Tilottamā, Ghṛtāci, Menakā.<sup>210</sup> Nārada told the *Apsarās* to decide amongst themselves as one who is devoid of beauty and gestures cannot attain accomplishment in the field of dancing.<sup>211</sup> When the *Apsarās* could not decide, Nārada said he will consider that *Apsarās* who will be able to agitate the sage Durvāsa who is carrying on hard austerities. An *Apsarās* named Vapu, ‘who was proud of her capability’ decided to go to the sage.<sup>212</sup> When he understood the purpose of her arrival he cursed her.<sup>213</sup>

The *Apsarās* were beyond any limitations. Their erotic beauty was not only a source of enjoyment for the gods, but they were the medium used by the gods when they were threatened by the austerities of the sages. The *Apsarās* risked their life for the gods. They were even cursed by these sages for making them deviate from their path

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<sup>209</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter8, 58b-62a

<sup>210</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 1, 32-33

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 36

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 42

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 47-48

of penance. It was the beauty which made the sages lose their control, thus making their exquisite beauty a curse for them, but the sages were not punished for their lustful behaviour.

The *Apsarās* were sexually active and directed their beauty towards different men, sometimes out of their choice and sometimes under the order of the gods. The *Apsarās* were instrumental in achieving certain aim of the gods and for this reason they were often cursed by the sages. Viswamitra was infatuated by the beauty of Menaka.<sup>214</sup> He felt it as an obstacle in the path of his austerities and thus dismissed her. Thus he practised much more severe austerities and tried to gain the status of a *Brahmārsi*, while Brahmā wanted to confer on him that of a *Maharsi*. But Brahmā said that he has not been able to control his senses properly and thus he had to practice much more severe austerities. In order to stop his meditation, Indra for his own good sent Rambhā, a celestial nymph to break his penance. Viswamitra was attracted by her but when he understood that it was the work of Indra, he cursed her.<sup>215</sup> By cursing her through anger he lost all his austerities that he gained. It was his anger that made him lose it, but not due to the lust which he felt toward the celestial nymphs. Neither did Indra get punish nor was Viswamitra punished for transgressing from the moral code of conduct.

The interesting part lies in the fact that though the *Apsarās* were cursed without any fault of theirs, but they too cursed other gods and sages when they rejected her sexual approach. Due to the curse of Rambhā, a sage called Devala who was born from the *aṁsa* of Śiva, became physically deformed. And the *tapas* performed by him became fruitless.<sup>216</sup> Brahmā too became ‘unadorable’ because of the curse of Mohinī.<sup>217</sup> Though the *Apsarās* were considered as wicked, but even Brahmā and a sage born from the part of Śiva suffered due to the curse of such a wicked woman.

Mohinī was infatuated with passion seeing Brahmā. But Brahmā being self-controlled ignored the sensual moves of Mohinī. Mohinī could not shift her mind from Brahmā. Mohinī admitted of her physical desire for Brahmā and said that she only wanted ‘to stay in bed.’<sup>218</sup> Brahmā under the influence of the god of love was being impressed by

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<sup>214</sup> The Rāmāyana, Bālakāṇḍa, Chapter 63

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, Chapter 64, 10

<sup>216</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa -Janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 30

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, Chapter 30, 78

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 50

her singing and felt attracted towards her. But again, Brahmā controlled himself and the efforts of Mohinī became useless. By reciting the name of Hari, Brahmā ignored the passionate attempts of Mohinī.<sup>219</sup> He called Mohinī his daughter and thus Mohinī got enraged by this. She said that the lord has made her the *apsarā* of the heaven who can move at will. She cursed him that Brahmā would become unapproachable. After saying this she moved towards the abode of god of love and enjoying the union with him, she came to her senses and lamented for cursing Brahmā.

Narayana on the other hand gave a paradoxical statement that Brahmā by ignoring the sexual approaches of Mohinī has performed a sinful act, ‘an act which has been unheard in the universe’. He said women are the part of *Prakṛti* and are the form of the seed of the universe. By insulting a woman he has insulted *Prakṛti*. He said that there was no need to control his senses and that even on earth a man incurs sin and goes to hell by disregarding the sexual approach of a woman.<sup>220</sup> Such a woman being passionate always pronounces curse. A person who enjoys a *veśyā* does not incur any sin. Only a woman of high family incurs a sin. If a woman of a high family by putting efforts attracts someone goes to hell.<sup>221</sup> But the *apsarā* of the heaven, on the other hand goes to heaven according to traditions and the one who insults her, incurs sin.<sup>222</sup>

In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* a sage admits that as he failed to control his passion he deviated from his austerities and did not curse the *Apsarā*.<sup>223</sup> Kaṇḍu, an ascetic was engaged in devotion.<sup>224</sup> In order to break his devotion an *Apsarā* called Pramlocā was sent to him.<sup>225</sup> Impressed by her beauty, he lived with her for nine hundred and seven years, six months and three days.<sup>226</sup> He was enraged on the fact that he could not control his passion.<sup>227</sup> A daughter called Māriṣā was born to them.<sup>228</sup> Māriṣā in her previous birth was a queen and was left childless as her husband died. She therefore worshipped

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<sup>219</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa -Janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 32

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 49-53

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 54-57

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, Chapter 33, 58-59

<sup>223</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 15

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 12

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 13, 33

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 42

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 50

Viṣṇu.<sup>229</sup> She asked Viṣṇu to grant her a boon that she receives a good husband and a son in every birth.<sup>230</sup>

*Apsarās* are shown to be promiscuous by nature. It is said that those women who were born from that of the *apsarās* are wicked and belong to the low family.<sup>231</sup> While it was so difficult or rather impossible for wives to leave their husbands, it was never so for the celestial damsels. Urvaśī left Purūravas and returned to heaven. It shows that these celestial damsels were hardly attached to the husband and his household. Purūravas was a prince famous for his ‘liberality’, ‘devotion’. ‘love of truth’ and ‘beauty’. Urvaśī who was cursed by Mitra and Varuna descended on earth. Having seen Purūravas, she got attached to him.<sup>232</sup> Purūravas was equally impressed by her.<sup>233</sup> She agreed to him on one condition that he should never see her naked.<sup>234</sup> Due to the absence of Urvaśī the celestial world lost its beauty and they led to the dissolution of the relationship of Urvaśī and Purūravas.<sup>235</sup> She conceived due to him and being separated gave him his son.<sup>236</sup> Living with him for one night she again became pregnant.<sup>237</sup> The Gandharvas on account of Urvaśī was ready to confer a boon on Purūravas. Purūravas only wanted to get back Urvaśī. At last he was re-united with her.<sup>238</sup>

Here we have to take into account that though the *apsarās* did not belong to one or were enjoyed by many celestials, sages or kings but they were never demeaned for doing so unlike their earthly counterpart, the *veśyās*.

Though the *apsarās* were generally considered degraded for their behaviour, but their progeny from the sages, kings and gods were of high esteem. The great sage Vasiṣṭha was born of Urvaśī from Mitra and Varuna.<sup>239</sup> Purūravas, who first brought from the region of the *Gandharvas* the three kinds of fire (for sacrificial purpose) begot upon Urvaśī six sons, who were called Ayus, Dhimat, Amavasu and Dhridhayus, and

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<sup>229</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 15, 61

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid*, 64-66

<sup>231</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 24, 13

<sup>232</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Part IV, Chapter 6, 35-36

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, 37

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid*, 44-46

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid*, 50-59

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 67,73

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid*, 74

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, 78,92

<sup>239</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ninth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 13, 6

Vanayus, and Satayus.<sup>240</sup> Ahalyā, sage Gautama's wife had a son from her husband called Śatānanda.<sup>241</sup> He had a son called Satyadhṛti, who seeing Urvaśī ejaculated his semen. Twins were born from his seed, a son called Kṛpa and a daughter called Kṛpī. Kṛpī got married to Droṇa.<sup>242</sup>

There was a battle between Kaṅka, the son of king of birds and a *Rākṣasa* named Vidyurūpa. While the *Rākṣasa* was killed, his wife took refuge with Kanka and said that she will be his wife.<sup>243</sup> She was the daughter of Menakā and she was capable of assuming forms at will and thus she took the form of a female bird.<sup>244</sup> She gave birth to a daughter named Tārksī.<sup>245</sup> She got married to a twice-born who was virtuous and was conversed with Vedas and its various branches.<sup>246</sup> Droṇa who was the royal guru to the Kurus and the Pandavas was also born of an *apsarā* and two of the most revered characters of *Mahābhārata*, Śakuntalā and Satyavatī were also born from the *apsarās*.

*Veśyās*, their earthly counterpart of the celestial damsels are independent than the wife of a household. Her devotion, loyalty, sexuality did not belong to one man. Her body had to be prized in the world. Her sleep was said to dependent on other's convenience. She had to follow the wishes of others and without a show of sorrow she was supposed to laugh and sport always.<sup>247</sup> She abandoned a penniless lover like subjects abandon an incompetent king.<sup>248</sup> Her beauty not only provided pleasure but was also used for ornamentation as Lakṣmana tells Guha that if his father survives even after his separation from his elder son, the kingdom will be adorned with foremost of *ganikas*.

A *ganika* is dependent on others even for her sleep. The sole aim of her life is to Satisfy those who come to her. She has to keep on a smiling face even in the most

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<sup>240</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Adiparva*, Chapter 75

<sup>241</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ninth *Skāṇḍa*, Chapter 21, 34

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*, 35-36

<sup>243</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 2, 28

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, 30

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid*, 31

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*, 33

<sup>247</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 114, 12

<sup>248</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Tenth *Skāṇḍa*, Chapter 47, 7

difficult situations. Her own self is sold to others for monetary gain and she often meets a violent death.<sup>249</sup>

In the *Matsya Purāṇa* enumerates the practice and conduct of public women.<sup>250</sup> He also talks about the origin of such women. Śiva said there will be sixteen thousand wives of Kṛṣṇa in the *Kali yuga*. Once they will feel passionate towards Lord Sāmba.<sup>251</sup> Kṛṣṇa will come to know of it through his mental vision and will curse them that they will be carried off by bandits and enjoyed by them.<sup>252</sup> Those women will then please them through their prayers and Kṛṣṇa will show them their path of renunciation – sage Dālbhya will guide them to liberation.<sup>253</sup> When they will meet, those women will ask him about the duties of *veśyās* and will enquire how they degraded to such a position when they were united with the lord himself.<sup>254</sup> The reason behind it lies in their past. Dālbhya said that in the days gone by they were the daughters of Agni. When they met Nārada they asked him they would obtain Nārāyaṇa as their husband. Though Nārada blessed them with the boon of obtaining the lord as their husband, but at the same time cursed them for not saluting him that they would be lowered to the position of *veśyās*.

Dulbhya enumerated a story of a war between the gods and the demons. Thousands of demons were killed in the war. Indra told their widows and those women who were forcibly seized to lead the life of a prostitute and remain devoted to the kings and the *Devas*.<sup>255</sup> They were told to serve the kings and the *Śūdra* equally. They should satisfy those who would come to them with adequate money even if they are poor.<sup>256</sup> But they should not serve those who are proud. They should give gifts as charity on the day of worshipping the *Devas* or the ancestors. They should follow what the *Brāhmaṇas* tell them. Indra also asked them to maintain a *vrata*.<sup>257</sup> Then a *Brāhmaṇa* who is well versed in Vedas and is free from any ‘deformities’ should be honoured.<sup>258</sup> That *Brāhmaṇa* should be well fed and should be treated as *kamdeva* for the sake of sexual enjoyment.<sup>259</sup> That woman devotee should fulfil all his desires.<sup>260</sup> That

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<sup>249</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 114, 12

<sup>250</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 70

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-6

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-10

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-30

<sup>257</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 70, 31-33

<sup>258</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 70, 42

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 44

*Brāhmaṇa* should be then honoured along with his wife.<sup>261</sup> Beddings and other things should be sent to his house.<sup>262</sup> If the *Brāhmaṇa* gives them the permission and another man approaches them they should perform all the observances that would lead to pregnancy.<sup>263</sup> But the story does not mention as to what will be the position of the progeny.

Other women were discouraged to have any contact with her. As we see in the story mentioned below that a widow came to the level of a prostitute by coming into contact with her.

In the city of Hastinapur there lived a *veśyā* called, Ratvidagdha who had all the marks of a beautiful lady. There lived another *brāhmaṇa* lady called, Ksemankari born in a great family. She was a widow. She ardently longed for union with paramours. That *brāhmaṇa* lady formed friendship with the prostitute. The *brāhmaṇa* widow also took to prostitution. Both of them committed innumerable sins.<sup>264</sup> Thus a woman of upper caste was to stay away from the prostitutes because coming in contact with them they were also befallen.

One day a *Brāhmaṇa* who obediently used to carry out his father's orders, went to the forest. He returned there from taking with him fruits, flowers, sticks for sacrificial fire and *Kuśa* grass. On his way back, he saw a certain shameless, libidinous *Śūdra* who had drunk wine in the company of a harlot whose eyes were also swimming due to intoxication. With that woman who was standing by him, with the knot of her Sari loosened (hence in a semi-naked condition), the shameless *Śūdra* was courting, and singing and joking nearby. Seeing her embraced in arms which were erotically painted with unguents, Ajamilā, the *Brāhmaṇa*, was instantaneously infatuated and succumbed to passionate love.

Despite his attempts to control himself he was unable to stabilize his mind and calm down his heart which was agitated by the god of Love. Being possessed by the devil in the form of passionate desire for her, he lost the balance of his mind. Brooding over her in his mind, he desisted from performing his prescribed religious duties. With his entire ancestral property, he tried to propitiate her by vulgar carnal pleasures

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<sup>260</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 70, 45

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 49

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 55

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59

<sup>264</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Kriyayogasarakhaṇḍa*, 20-26a

appealing to her so that she may be pleased with him. The ‘sinful’ fellow, whose judgement was paralysed by the side-glances of that ‘wanton’ woman, soon abandoned his regularly wedded young *Brāhmaṇa* wife who was born in a good family. This stupid fellow got money from any place, by fair means or foul, and maintained the family of this woman who was now his housewife.<sup>265</sup> Ajamilā repents for being unable to subdue his lower Self, and procreating himself in the form of sons from a *Śūdra* woman. He says by leading such a life he has desecrated his Brahminhood. He mourns for leaving his ‘virtuous’ young wife who was a daughter of a Brahmin for an ‘unchaste wench’ given to drinking.<sup>266</sup> A man by no means was allowed to be in contact with a harlot as it destroyed him.

The degradable view that the Brahmins had for prostitutes is shown to be the view of the prostitutes also. The prostitutes were shown having a degradable and low feel about herself. Though she had ample of wealth and was self-dependent, she was sketched with an unhappy life. The theory, the *Brahmins* used was that as prostitutes earned from their beauty, which was temporary and the wealth they earned through it did not help them in attaining heaven and salvation. It was only through good deeds and services in the form of wealth that they attained heaven. The unclean prostitute was said to have met with distress due to restoring to many men. Though so demeaning statements have been made about the prostitutes but on the contrary it is said that a devout prostitute always engaged in worshipping deities and by being loyal and pure they go to heaven.<sup>267</sup> Maybe this ‘devout’ meant donation in the form of wealth!

A *veśyā* named Mohinī<sup>268</sup> had ample of wealth, was endowed with beauty and youth, and was also skilled in dancing and singing. Being greedy of wealth, she committed many sins. When old age afflicted her she did not have longing for young women neither did young men had any longing for her. One day she thought as to what will happen to the wealth sinfully earned by her. Thinking like this she performed some righteous acts. Mohinī constructed gardens, tanks, wells, reservoirs of water and temples. She thought of distributing it amongst the *brāhmaṇas* but they were afraid of taking the wealth from her so she decided to distribute it to her maid servants and

<sup>265</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāna*, Sixth *Skandha*, Chapter 1, 58-66

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 2, 26-27

<sup>267</sup> The *Padma Purāna*, *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 59, 94-95

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, *Uttārakhāṇḍa*, Chapter 206, 53-63



foreigners. Knowing that she will die her maid servants taking her wealth left her. After observing vows she recovered. While she was wandering in the forest the thieves not finding any wealth wounded her. Then at that time an anchorite saw her and gave her water from a holy place. At the time of her departure she longed for the status of a queen. As she had the water from the holy place she not was reborn as a queen but also became a wife '*practising acts of a good family and of a very good character.*'<sup>269</sup>

There is an interesting quotation in wherein a *veśyā* says that they are also chaste. A *veśyā* said that for women of all castes loyalty to their husbands is a great duty that gives them happiness in this world and the next. A *veśyā*, when in the charge of a man, does not unite with any other man. She then is known as a chaste woman. Therefore she should keep him only.<sup>270</sup> But there are exceptional references wherein they were highly devoted to Lord Viṣṇu. There is mention of a prostitute called Rupavati. It is said that this prostitute remained in the path of righteousness. She is described as a diligent, beautiful *veśya* who respectfully and devoutly saluted and gave gifts to *brāhmaṇas*.<sup>271</sup>

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* we get stories where a *Brahmin* marries a prostitute and he is shown suffering for such a deed. The marriage of a *brāhmaṇa* with that of a prostitute was an *Anuloma* (where the groom is of higher caste and the woman from lower caste) form of marriage. The children born of them are thus, of mixed castes and are said to be the 'unprivileged ones'.<sup>272</sup>

The whole discussion remains incomplete if we do not understand the position of another major counterpart, men. It is equally important to have a discussion regarding the position of males too.

### **MALE CHASTITY**

Mostly it were women (such as *Sītā*), who had to go through ordeals in order to prove her loyalty. But there is a story wherein a man sets for the ordeal. It is interesting to get such an exceptional episode wherein even a man's character was under public

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<sup>269</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 221, 20-24

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 110, 79-80

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 95, 125-144

<sup>272</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 96

suspicion. Though such stories do not point towards gender parity, but it implies that men were not excluded from the precept of chastity and the various ordeals involved within. The norms mentioned regarding the proper conduct of a man adheres to it. Even a royal ruler had to conform to the traditional conventions of the society. The *Agni Purāṇa* describes the rules of conduct which a king should observe in the female apartments of the palace and the virtues he should inculcate.<sup>273</sup> The king should share his bed with his wedded wives only<sup>274</sup> but should visit the wife devoted to him.<sup>275</sup>

A man was said to lose his caste by adultery.<sup>276</sup> The *Anuśāsana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* declares that people of every caste should not have sexual union with other people's wives. It shortens life.<sup>277</sup> A person wishing to enter the householder's stage should espouse a befitting girl, with no defect in heredity, habits or character, junior to him in age and belonging to his own caste. It is only after marrying the girl of his own caste if he be sexually unsatisfied he should take a girl from a class in the prescribed social order. *Smṛiti* allows the *anuloma* marriage: thus a *Brāhmaṇa* can marry a girl from the *Kṣatriya* caste, *Vaiśya* and *Śūdra* classes; a *Kṣatriya* from *Vaiśya* and *Śūdra* classes and a *Śūdra* can marry only a *Śūdra* girl.<sup>278</sup> In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* a man is warned of co-habiting with another man's wife. Even if he thinks of another woman he is re-born as a creeping insect.<sup>279</sup> The text states that co-habiting with another man's reduces the longevity of his life and he goes to hell.<sup>280</sup>

One, who enjoys the wife of others, is considered to be a 'degraded' one.<sup>281</sup> One who enjoys the company of a loose woman falls into hell for a hundred years.<sup>282</sup> The one who is lustful of woman and always thinks of them dies from the disease of consumption and in the next birth is born as a eunuch.<sup>283</sup> One who looks at the pelvic region of other people's wives, the breasts and faces of woman becomes blind and is born as a eunuch in the next birth. It is said that the children have to bear insults inflicted by society when their father establishes relationship with an illicit woman. It

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<sup>273</sup> The *Agni Purāṇa*, Chapter 224, 1

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*, 4

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, 8

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 168, 29

<sup>277</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 104, 20

<sup>278</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Eleventh *Skandha*, Chapter 17, 39

<sup>279</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 12, 125

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, 126

<sup>281</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍam*, Chapter 18,

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 85, 120-121

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid*, 201

also increases the fear of having crossbreed lineage and thus leads to humiliation.<sup>284</sup> Those men who torment their wives without their faults or abandon their good wives go to hell.<sup>285</sup> A person who is not a householder i.e. a celibate or a recluse should scrupulously avoid lustful look, touch, conversation of jokes and such other contacts with women.<sup>286</sup>

Celibacy, penance, purity, contentment, friendliness to all creatures represents the *Dharma* of a householder who goes to his wife on the days sanctioned by the scriptures.<sup>287</sup> Like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Kūrma Purāṇa*<sup>288</sup> and the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* discourage any contact with wife on days other than the days sanctioned by the scriptures. The scripture allows sexual contact with wife only for creating progeny. The story of Jaratkāru as narrated in *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* and *Mahābhārata* advocates such a practice and also entails at the same time that how sinful it is for the yogis, *Brahmācaris*, *Samnyasis*, forest dwellers and sages to accept the life of an ascetic without progeny. If he disowns his wife without a child all his austerities are lost.<sup>289</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa* invokes the same view. The text states that if a man does not visit the bed of his wife during her menstruation, he is said to have commit the sin of infanticide and the wife who does not allow so, is born as a sow in her next birth. A self-restraint on the basis of being involved in any kind of Vedic ritual at that time deprives him of funeral libations after death.<sup>290</sup>

Approaching his wife to have sexual union on days sanctioned by the scriptures is considered to be a proper code of conduct for a householder, if otherwise he acted, he was condemned for being so. Dakṣa who led a householder's life was said to be full of deceptive religious practices who only wanted to satisfy his desire of low sensual pleasure. He is described as a 'beast', addicted to women.<sup>291</sup>

By Brāhma's order Śāṅkhacūda went to Tulasī who was practising penance just at her own will for marriage. She is described as a 'charming, tender, beautiful and chaste

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<sup>284</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 14, 43

<sup>285</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 96, 49b-76a

<sup>286</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Eleventh *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 17, 33

<sup>287</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Eleventh *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 18, 43

<sup>288</sup> The *Kūrma Purāṇa*, Part II, Chapter 15, 9-11

<sup>289</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Prākṛiti-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 46, 56-57

<sup>290</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 107, 26

<sup>291</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Fourth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 2, 22-23

lady'.<sup>292</sup> Brāhma described her as the chaste lady and intelligent who is the jewel among women.<sup>293</sup> When he saw her, he told her that the entire class of women is fascinating and enchants even Brahmā. It is like an illusion and a fetter to the devout and the faithful.<sup>294</sup> After hearing to this Śāṅkhacūda addressing her as the 'foremost among chaste ladies',<sup>295</sup> said that he is not lustful and shall take her hand by Gandharva form of marriage. Tulasī was impressed by him and said that man is blessed in the world who is not weighed down by a woman. Even though he may be the observer of sacred rites, if he is overwhelmed by a woman, he becomes impure and unclean forever. The manes, gods and human beings reprimand him. Such man can never be purified till death. Neither the manes receive the balls of rice or holy waters offered by him nor do the gods accept his offering of fruits and flowers. She said she tested him to know his power and knowledge as, "A woman must test her bridegroom before wooing him."<sup>296</sup>

The texts also prescribe punishments for a man who does not conform to the prescribed conventions of the society. The person who takes away another person's wealth, children or wife, is bound with mortal cords of death and is thrown into the *Tāmisra* hell by the servants of Yama. In that hell he is subjected to various kinds of torment such as denial of food and water etc. In the same way, a person who enjoys the wife, property etc of another person by deceiving him, is thrown into the *Andhatāmisra* hell. He is tortured so that he loses his sight and consciousness. Hence such a hell is called 'Andha-Tāmisra' due to its blinding effect.<sup>297</sup>

### **CHASTITY AS CONCEPTUALISED IN THE JĀTAKAS AND THE HĀLA'S SATTASĀĪ**

*"Where women rule, the seeing lose their sight,  
The strong grow weak; the mighty have no might,  
Where women rule, virtue and wisdom fly;  
Reckless the prisoners in durance lie,  
Like highway robbers, all they steal away  
From their poor victims, careless come what may –  
Reflection, virtue, truth and reasoning  
Self-sacrifice, and goodness – everything  
As fire burns fuel, for each careless Wight*

<sup>292</sup> The Śīva Purāṇa, Rudreśvara Samhitā, Pārvatikhanda, Section III: Chapter28, 13

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, 35

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, 17

<sup>295</sup> The Śīva Purāṇa, Rudreśvara Samhitā, Pārvatikhanda, Section III: Chapter28, 20

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 31-32

<sup>297</sup> The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Fifth Skandha, Chapter 26, 8-9

*They burn fame, glory, learning, wit and might.*<sup>298</sup>

The *Jātaka* stories project that women can never be trusted as they are dangerous and can only cause harm. Even if they are loved or locked, one cannot earn their love and they would not lose any opportunity to transgress. She was objectified who were exchanged as gifts or were ornamented and given as donations. Women were called upon to impress a prince. When a king was about to leave his kingdom for forest he is said to have given away seven hundred women “*each standing in a car, with golden chains and ornaments, with lovely dress, slender waist and small, curved brows, a merry smile, shapely hips*”. High-born maidens were also given.<sup>299</sup>

Women were shown to be self-interested. The daughter of a king named Phustī, who said to have done good deeds and gave alms, when was about to die, Sakka, king of the gods realizing that her days has come to an end told her to ask for ten boons. She said that when she will conceive, her figure should not be affected. It should be in shape and ‘graceful’ like ‘*a finely fashioned...may my breasts be firm, nor white haired may I be...*’<sup>300</sup> and her body unblemished. She was made the Queen consort at the head of sixteen thousand women to the king of Sini called Sanjaya. She also asked for a ‘good’ son as a boon from Sakka.<sup>301</sup> Though she performed good deeds and donated alms, she is shown thinking of her own welfare and the beauty of her body when Sakka told her to ask for boons.

The Buddha said that even when he was in an animal form he knew about the ‘immortality’ of women and kept them under control. He refers to a woman named Kaṇhā who had five husbands and yet she desired for a sixth, a dwarf. A female ascetic named Saccatapāvī who lived in a cemetery and was devoted to the life of celibacy was involved with a goldsmith. He refers to other women who though having husband was sinfully involved with other men. He also told that men should not trust women as they are like harlots and are dangerous.<sup>302</sup>

Like the *Purāṇas* and the Epics, the *Jātakas* also articulates the view that a woman was not considered apt to control her own life. The husband was her ‘master’.

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<sup>298</sup> *Jātaka* No. 262

<sup>299</sup> *Jātaka* No. 547

<sup>300</sup> *Jātaka* No. 547

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>302</sup> *Jātaka* No. 536

Vessantārā, a king who retired into the forest with his wife and children, gave away his children when a Brahmin asked for them as slaves.<sup>303</sup> He was ready to sacrifice his wife too. When Sakka went to him in the disguise of a Brahmin and asked for his wife, he was ready to give away his wife too. That a woman did own herself is evident from Vessantārā's saying, "*From maidenhood I was his wife, he is my master still. Let him to whom so her desire or give, or sell, or kill.*"<sup>304</sup>

Women were shown to be one of the primary causes for Buddhist Brothers to leave the Order. They are shown to be the main cause of destruction and damage to a man's life. There are many stories that show a man's passionate feeling towards his wife forces him to revert from the spiritual life and it is Buddha who after delivering a speech about the destructive character of women was able make the backsliding Brother return to the spiritual Order.<sup>305</sup> Buddha described sins related to women, as the men who were ordained by him grew 'discontented'.<sup>306</sup> It is said that it is dangerous to keep wife at a neighbour's or a friend's place. A woman despises her husband for eight reasons – for poverty, for sickness, for old age, drunkenness, stupidity, carelessness, attending to every kind of business and neglecting duties towards her. She is to be blamed when she is fond of parks, gardens, river banks, visiting the houses of kinsfolk, if she is a drinker, standing before her door, given to staring. The Buddha also mentions twenty-five different ways a wicked woman is known.<sup>307</sup>

Women are described as fickle, ungrateful, treacherous, insensible, transgressing every law, shameless and acting as their heart desires. How much a man loves her, she always leaves him when he is in distress and is always after wealthy men. When they fail to get possession of their wealth they drive him away, no limits can be set upon them to control their mind. They are called 'pleasure-seekers', uncontrolled in lust and they can even kill their husbands and drink their blood. They can even run after low-caste men for wealth. A woman devours a man like fire. They cling to a wealthy

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<sup>303</sup> *Jātaka* No. 547

<sup>304</sup> *Jātaka* No.547

<sup>305</sup> *Jātaka* No. 191

<sup>306</sup> *Jātaka* No. 536

<sup>307</sup> *Jātaka* No.536

man like a creeper. Even they are guarded by their husband, they will perform a sinful activity.<sup>308</sup>

Men are advised repeatedly to ignore attraction towards women as it can have fatal consequences. In one of the *Jātaka* stories, a young maiden tries to attract and convince an ascetic that his virtue cannot be safeguarded in a forest and asked him to follow her by making a trail. He told her that he will go to after seeking permission from his father. After seeing him, his father knew that he was bound by the attraction of a woman. The father told him about the difficulties of the world of men and thus made him stay in the forest.<sup>309</sup> Thus it formed a part of teaching a son that how terminal a woman can be! The *Asātamanta Jātaka*<sup>310</sup> too intends to show that women are ‘lustful, profligate, vile, and degraded’. A son was born to a *Brahmin* family. His parents told him choose between two paths – one that of an ascetic and another that of a householder. He wanted to be a man of high social status and own property. Thus they sent him to a teacher so that he can learn to manage property. He was sent to Bodhisatta who was born as a *Brahmin* in the city of Taxila and was a famous teacher. But when he came back home again his parents wanted him to forsake the life of a householder and lead a life in the forest and worship the Fire-god. So his mother wanted him to be aware of the wickedness of women and knew that his ‘wise’ teacher will be able him to show the true nature of women. Thus his mother sent him back to his teacher to learn the ‘Dolour Text’. When he returned back to his teacher, his teacher knew what his mother wanted him to learn – ‘wickedness’ of women.<sup>311</sup>

The wife of a lay-brother who was established in the Three Gems and the Five Commandments and was ‘a devout lover of the Buddha, the Doctrine and the Brotherhood’ was a sinful and wicked woman. On days when she did ‘wrong’, she was ‘as meek as a slave-girl bought for a hundred pieces’ and on days when she did not perform the sinful activity she was ‘passionate and tyrannical’. But the husband could not understand the reason behind it. For her, he could not go to the Buddha. When Buddha came to know of it he told him that it has been told by the wise to him that it is difficult to understand women. Buddha said those on days when women

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<sup>308</sup> *Jātaka* No. 536

<sup>309</sup> *Jātaka* No. 435

<sup>310</sup> *Jātaka* No. 61

<sup>311</sup> *Jātaka* No. 61

perform wrong and sinful activities they make themselves humble and submissive towards their husband. They show themselves to be ‘meek’ in front of their husbands. While on days they did not perform such sinful activity they become ‘insubordinate to their lords’. Thus a man should never pay any heed to their likes or dislikes. He moreover told him if a wife loves her husband, he should not be glad, if she does not love him, he should forbear to grieve. He said women are like fishes in water without any direction.<sup>312</sup>

The Buddha once said to his disciple that one should not be angered at “*the naughtiness found in women, but to preserve your equanimity*”.<sup>313</sup> The Buddha told him that a man should not grieve about his wife’s misconduct as she is ‘common to all’. As wise men are aware of their susceptibility they do not get angry on them. Buddha said that women are like rivers, highways and courtyards which extend their service to all and are like ‘universal hospitality’. Thus a man should learn to be indifferent to a woman.<sup>314</sup>

Hāla’s *Sattasaī* intricately describes the rural life and thus the life of rural women. It not only describes their life, but their emotions too. The Brahmanical texts are more elite in nature. Thus through this text we get a glimpse of a life that is more grounded and realistic. Though she lives in a village, she is living a restricted life. She is allowed to peep into the outer world and not to live it. A woman tries hard to peep through the fence as if to see someone desperately as she moves unsteadily, trembling and ‘squeezing her breasts’ through the fence.<sup>315</sup> The woman is the farmer’s wife and the gaps in the fence and the ‘castor oil plant’, tells the young boys of the village that the farmer’s wife has big breasts.<sup>316</sup> Such a depiction shows that her caged life did not bring her emotional satisfaction and that she finds solace through another man who might be her lover. The other youth also notices her and her breasts, thus gets attracted towards her. The author says that she has left her body open like a door that is two inches apart, to show the young men a sample of her breasts.<sup>317</sup> It should be kept in mind that her husband being a farmer is engaged in the field all day long. She

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<sup>312</sup> *Jātaka* No.64

<sup>313</sup> *Jātaka* No. 65

<sup>314</sup> *Jātaka* No. 65

<sup>315</sup> Hāla’s *Sattasaī*, 220-221

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid* , 257

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid*, 622



being in the household for the whole day and leading a confined life has made her life discontented not only emotionally but also physically that she needs the attention of young male gazers who might make love to her.

The Hāla's *Sattasaī* also elucidates as to who is 'the perfect wife'. It says that the 'perfect' wife knows what is good for the household and what it can put up with.<sup>318</sup> They are not critical about their in-laws, neither express any grievances in the form of 'extreme politeness' nor she quarrels or shed tears.<sup>319</sup> She laughs without showing her teeth, does not cross her limitations, looks without raising her face. Such is the 'virtuous wife'.<sup>320</sup> A 'true' woman loves her husband more when he becomes 'poorer, uglier, the more decrepit'.<sup>321</sup> While she is pregnant, when her in-laws asks what she would like to eat, the perfect wife in order not to cause any discomfort for her husband, she simply asks for water.<sup>322</sup> Being aware of the family situation she does not tell anyone what she craves for while she is pregnant.<sup>323</sup> In order to protect the image of her husband, who is poor, but proud of his lineage, she scorns her own relatives who visited her marital house with rich presents.<sup>324</sup> A perfect wife is the one who knows how to wake her husband in the morning and set his mood right.<sup>325</sup>

The existence of women and the pillars of her life revolved around the precept of chastity. This involved controlling their sexuality, body and mind. Chastity formed the perimeter of their character, life and even of afterlife. If their chastity was intact, no damage would happen to their husband's life too. As in the Brahmanical tradition, in Buddhism too we find that a male heir was preferred and was recognised. A male heir was considered so important that when Bodhisatta was born as a king in Benares and a son was born to him from a slave girl, he accepted the son. But he did not accept the slave-girl as his wife. He gave a ring to his wife that if a girl was born to her then she should use it to bring her up.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Hāla's *Sattasaī*, 248

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 249

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 250

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 251

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 252

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 255

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 254

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 256

<sup>326</sup> *Jātaka* No. 487

The Epics and the *Purānas* refer to the practice of seclusion of menstruating women. They were not allowed to come in public; they were supposed to stay away from their husbands and that they should not touch them or be involved sexually, they should not adorn themselves or take bath and should be in a single piece of cloth and they should not tie their hair. The Hāla's *Sattasāi* refers to the Vindhaya Range and the Pulindas tribe, which is considered to be far away from the Brahmanical dominated region. The poem refers to a practice that women in their period smear their faces with a mixture of clarified butter i.e. ghee and a red dye. For this reason the husband has to kiss his wife with caution so that their noses and foreheads would not meet.<sup>327</sup>

A diversion can be observed in the *Jātakas* from that of the trend followed in most of the Brahmanical texts, which provided women with different options and also provided passage for liberation. Even if she was married, she could remarry for a new beginning, she could earn for her livelihood and also to support her son. Sometimes it was due to the mother, that a prince could regain his kingdom. A female slave, who was originally a princess, could regain her freedom by paying the *Brahmin* a hundred male and a hundred female slaves, with elephants, horses, bulls and gold pieces, all a hundred each.<sup>328</sup> Her path of salvation was opened, though with limitations. When there was a transgression, both the man and the woman (in some cases) were punished.

A boy named Piṅguttārā, who lived in Mithilā went to Taxila to complete his education. It was a custom in his teacher's family that if there was a daughter in his family apt for marriage she has to be given to the eldest disciple in marriage. But though he married her, he did not care for her. While he was going back to Mithila, he saw a tree and being hungry climbed it to have its fruits. But when his wife asked him to throw down some fruits, he rudely told her to climb the tree and have the fruits. But once she climbed the tree, she could not come down. Seizing the opportunity to get rid of her, he kept thorns under the tree, so that she would not be able to come down the tree. At that time the king was in the forest and seeing her beauty he fell in love with her. When he asked her if she had any husband, she told him the truth. She was brought down and was consecrated as his queen consort and was named Udumbarā.

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<sup>327</sup> Hāla's *Sattasāi*, 215

<sup>328</sup> *Jātaka* No.547

Pinguttārā, her former husband for livelihood dwelt near the city-gate and cleaned road for the king. But Udumbara recognised him and in her triumph laughed at him seeing his condition. But the king seeing her doing so, grew suspicious of her character. She told him the reason of her smile. But he did not believe her. He asked sage Mahasodha for confirmation. He asked, “*Should a woman be virtuous and fair, and a man not desire her – do you believe it Mahasodha?*”<sup>329</sup> The sage replied: “*O king, I do believe it, the man would be an unlucky wretch; good luck and ill-luck can never mate together.*”<sup>330</sup> In the story the queen former husband was called an ill-luck man while the queen of good luck. After hearing his words, he was Satisfied. As the queen’s life was saved due to Mahasodha, she asked for a boon from the king that she may be allowed to treat him like a younger brother and the king granted it.<sup>331</sup> Thus Udumbara who was never recognised as a wife and was left by her husband, could enter a new life and re-marry. Even the king accepted her, though she was formerly married to another man.

A dancer named Pāṭala who lived in a village near Benares earned his livelihood by singing and dancing. Once he went to Benares, while returning back from Benares with his wife, he started sinking into the river. When her wife saw her husband in such a condition instead of saving him she came out of the river and thought as her husband will die, she will ask him to teach her a song so that she can earn her livelihood.<sup>332</sup>

A daughter is shown to have an equal share in the property. In this story Bodhisatta was born in a rich *Brahmin* family. A sister was also born. When his parents died they left behind enormous amount of treasure. Bodhisatta decided to adopt the path of an ascetic and give the property to his sister instead. But his sister denied the rejected property and also wanted to accompany him in the life of austerity.<sup>333</sup>

The following story reflects what the women wanted, how they were treated and how Buddhism helped. And also how two parallel views ran within the same order. Once, the wives of the King of Kosala thought among themselves, “*Very rare is the coming*

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<sup>329</sup> Jātaka No. 546

<sup>330</sup> Ibid

<sup>331</sup> Ibid

<sup>332</sup> Jātaka No. 432

<sup>333</sup> Jātaka No. 480

of a Buddha; and very rare is birth in a human form with all one's faculties in perfection.”<sup>334</sup> Though are present during Buddha's lifetime, they are not able to go to the Monastery and hear ‘the truth from his own lips, to do obeisance, and to make offerings to him’. They said they live in the palace ‘as in a box’ and decided to ask the King to send for a fitting Brother to come and teach them the truth. They wanted to learn what they can from him, and be charitable and do good works and till the end they may earn profit due to their having been born at Buddha’s lifetime. So they all went to the King, and told him what was in their mind; and the King gave his consent.

Bodhisatta had a learned disciple called Chattapāṇi who had entered the Third Path. The king told him that his wives wanted to hear and learn the truth and thus told him to teach them. But he said that as per the rule of the Buddhist Order a layman cannot teach the truth in a King’s harem. The king after summoning his wives and discussing with them as to whom they would choose and ask among the Bodhisatta’s disciples to teach them, they chose Ānanda, the Elder. Ānanda held 'advanced views on the woman question.' It was he who persuaded the reluctant Buddha into admitting women to the Order, as recorded in the *Vinaya* (S. B. E. XX, 320 et seqq) The wives were delighted to have been taught by Ānanda.<sup>335</sup>

Though a path of liberation and to salvation was opened to women, but the mistrust on their body and soul never washed away. None tried. The very apprehension regarding their mind, body and soul continued. It is said that in days to come, women will become lustful for men and will have strong drink with their paramours. They will flaunt in garlands and perfumes. Women will ignore their household duties; they will keep watching their paramours even through a narrow opening of a high wall. They will plunder the store earned by the hard work of their husbands. Men will become so passionate and lustful, that they will be fully under the control of their youngest wives who will not pay any heed to their questions. The wives will become dominant, as one exercises their power over slaves and bonded-labours.<sup>336</sup> Thus their confinement, impositions and the apprehensions regarding their mind and body continued within and outside.

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<sup>334</sup> *Jātaka* No. 92

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>336</sup> *Jātaka* No. 77

## CONCLUSION

A woman was not considered fit to be independent. Pārvatī said that during childhood a chaste woman is protected by her father, after marriage she is being protected by her husband and in old age she is protected by her son. A woman who is being related to these three is *bhagyavati*.<sup>337</sup> While entering into the forest for exile Rāmā told Lakṣmana to be alert and prepared for the protection of Sītā as protection is to be given weaker sex.<sup>338</sup> Thus male dominance over a woman was compulsory without which she would transgress and in turn would affect the balance of the society.

In this chapter we have mainly discussed about how the concept of chastity was conceptualised, what was meant by chastity and various nuances involved. Loyalty and devotion was not the only thing that made a woman chaste but her daily duties and how far she performed them mattered. In addition to this was her physical beauty that mattered too. She did not control her own sexuality, as we see her beauty and every aspect of her life was for her husband. The wife in the household was made dependent on her husband as women in private sphere are hardly found to be working for their own living “*A daughter affording a livelihood is condemned.*”<sup>339</sup> Right from her childhood she is trained for her marital life and duties. Everyone had their own selfish need to train her to do so. The daughter’s family needed to mould her daughter to be a chaste woman as she emancipated her father’s family.

Chaste women were revered, while others who acted outside the tradition was considered immoral and loose. Kṛṣṇa wanted to bestow Durga on Śiva as his spouse. But Śiva was apprehensive that his devotion towards Kṛṣṇa might get distracted because “*she is passionate and could increase passion in a person.*” He said she would be an obstruct in his path of knowledge.<sup>340</sup> As he meditated upon Kṛṣṇa, he never got distracted by passion.<sup>341</sup> But Kṛṣṇa insisted and told him to follow his order for accepting Durga as his wife. He said the root of his apprehension is true for ‘*kustri*’ only and not from those who are *pativrata*. He said those women who come from well-established families and has a good parentage, and follow family morals (*kule mahati ya jata kulja kulPālika*) serves a husband like a ‘good son’. The husband

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<sup>337</sup>The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa, Ganpati-khaṇḍam*, Chapter 4, 6-9

<sup>338</sup>The *Rāmāyaṇa*, Chapter LII, *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, 94-95

<sup>339</sup>The *Padma Purāṇa, Utārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 126, 19-25

<sup>340</sup>The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa, Brahmā khaṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 6-7

<sup>341</sup>Ibid, 13

is said to be the closest relative, the lord and the god of her life (*patibharta devatam kulyayoshitam*).

Her life had to be focussed on her husband. It was her eternal duty to serve her in every possible way. Any aspect that would make her deviate was defined as sinful. A woman was kept at a safe distance from developments that were taking place. As mentioned in this chapter that a woman who keeps close companionship with a washerwoman or a woman in her monthly courses, a rationalist, sceptic or a heretic, a Buddhist recluse woman or a woman of Kāpālika sect or an unfortunate wretched woman. This means that the *Brahmins* felt threatened by them. A washerwoman was economically active, Buddhism as we all know came into existence as a movement as a strong alternative to Brahmanism. Women were also encouraged to stay away from a rationalist or a heretic. The theory of chastity as propounded by the authors of *Purāṇas*, are evidently rationally doubtful. Maybe the *Brahmins* were themselves aware of it. So the intermingling with them could have raised questions in their mind.

On the other hand the prostitutes, the celestial damsels (*Apsarās*) are economically dependent and also are not bound to one man either. The prostitutes are mostly rich and are also shown to make *danās* from their earned money to *Brahmins*. It is through these contributions that they are liberated or else they are mostly accused. But nowhere are they prescribed to be totally wiped out of the society. It means altogether the *Brahmins* could not let go such handful income. But the lack of patriarchal control over their sexuality may have lead to such accusations. So for their acceptance in the Brahmanical society they were made to serve them financially. The celestial damsels are also not bounded to one man either and leave their husband willingly and are not even accused.

Hierarchy did not exist just gender wise but it can be seen everywhere – caste, between the earthly world and that of the celestial world. The concept of chastity hierarchy wise is interesting. As we see that goddesses never had to go through such vigorous duties and ordeals too as did the earthly women. Even the celestial damsels were not abused as were their counterpart in earth, the *veśyās*.

## CHAPTER 2: CONFORMITY IN THE GREAT EPICS

### INTRODUCTION

The Epics are a great source to discern and explore the socio-cultural norms owing to its oral tradition for a great length of time and covering an extensive period even when introduced in the textual tradition and portrays an ideal society that can be obtained through various conflicts. They would be of great help in tracing the evolution of the patriarchy as an institution, how with that various ideals branched out from it with time and the conflicts involved. Both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* will provide us a useful insight as to how *Pātivrtya* was conceptualised and the different issues encased. Most of the principal belong to the upper caste or are celestials. They were represented as the ideals of the society. While we are talking about the male and female characters of the Epics we have to keep in mind that they mainly belong to the elite class. It is difficult to discern the condition of the commonality. But it was through the stories of the elite class that the ordinary people were taught the teaching and conduct of Brahmanical tradition. The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki shows the Brahmanical proclamation for the society.

The purpose of this chapter is to draw upon some of the important stories in the epics in order to study the concepts and deviance related to chastity in early societies.

The *Mahābhārata* tries to bestow upon the audience a circumstantial rationalism as to why such concept was established that made women “the prisoners of patriarchy”. Women of higher class were confined to the four walls.<sup>342</sup> The wife is always considered to be dependent. Whatever she possessed belonged to her ‘master’ i.e., her husband.<sup>343</sup> But Pāṇḍu very clearly narrates the liberty women enjoyed. He said that women formerly were not penned in within houses and dependent on husbands and other relatives. They used to go about freely, enjoying themselves as best as they liked. They did not then adhere to their husbands faithfully, and were not regarded sinful. This was the sanctioned usage of the times. Such practice was acclaimed by the *Ṛṣi s* and the ‘present’ practice i.e. of women's confined to one husband for life ‘had

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<sup>342</sup> *The Mahābhārata*, Sabha Parva, Chapter 69, 5

Draupadī said: “*She, who is never seen by even the wind and the sun in her house...*”

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 71

been established but lately'. Both the stories show how at the very outset of the establishment of patriarchy, *Pātivṛtya* was framed and imposed upon. Later on we will see how this very concept was made stringent for women and was made the only path through which a woman could obtain salvation.

Two different stories are narrated for the same. In the first version, Dirghatamas, son of a *Ṛṣi* having heard from his wife that he is not able to perform the duties of a husband became angry and told her to take him to the kings and that she will be rich. But it was not wealth that she desired for and told him that she does not want to support him as she did before.<sup>344</sup> Dirghatamas became angry and said, "*From this day I make this rule among men that every woman shall stick to one husband only all through her life. Whether the husband is dead, or whether he is alive, she must not have connection with another man. She, who will have it, will be, considered as fallen. A woman without a husband will always be liable to be sinful. Even if she is wealthy, she will not be able to enjoy it truly. Defamation and evil will always follow her.*"<sup>345</sup> Hearing this, his wife became exceedingly angry and ordered her sons to throw him into the Ganges. The sons did as they were told to do.<sup>346</sup>

It was the wife's remonstrance and the husband's need that impelled the *Brahmin* to pronounce such an imposition. It shows the man's need for a wife's support and also his anxiety that she may approach another man if she is dissatisfied with her husband. Such action will be a dishonour to his lineage. Even after the husband's death she was made bounded to her marital house and she had to maintain her devotion and loyalty for her dead husband. If in any case she went out of the marriage and went with another man (as the earlier tradition allowed) she was considered as fallen and defamed. But we see that the *Ṛṣi*'s wife ordered her sons to throw her husband to the Ganges. This shows that at the time when this story evolved women still had the option to leave her husband and the concept was evolving.

Another story tells us that the 'present virtuous practice' was established by that Swetaketu, a great *Ṛṣi* from anger. One day, in the presence of Swetaketu's father a

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<sup>344</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 104,30

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 104, 31-33

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid*, 33-35



*Brāhmaṇa* came and catching Swetaketu's mother by the hand, told her, 'Let us go.' Beholding his mother seized by the hand and taken away apparently by force, the son was greatly moved by wrath. Uddalaka, his father addressed him and told him not to be not angry because this was the practice sanctioned by antiquity. He said that women of all orders in this world are free and that men of different orders did not object to such a practice. The *Ṛṣi*'s son, Swetaketu, however, disapproved of the usage and established in the world the present practice as regards men and women.<sup>347</sup> Accordingly, since the establishment of the present usage, it is sinful for women not to adhere to their husbands. Women transgressing the limits assigned by the *Ṛṣi* became guilty of slaying the embryo. And, men, too, violating a chaste and loving wife who has from her maidenhood observed the vow of purity, became guilty of the same sin. The woman who, being commanded by her husband to raise offspring refused to do so becomes equally sinful.

The story provides us with a much more detailed scenario. It was a practise even among the *Brahmins* to seize a woman and establish relation with her. But here we see that the wife was taken by force and the husband did not do anything to save her, neither did he protest. The feeling that a wife belonged to one man, i.e. her husband only was already taking a form. In none of the two stories we see that impositions were made for the man. As per this norm, the husband was made the focal point of a woman life, establishing marriage as the significant part of a woman's life as in the former story it has been said that even if she has wealth she will not be happy. It was only through a man, her husband and loyalty and service towards him will in turn serve her life. Women and her sexuality were fettered by man to maintain his needs and his ideal. Later on this concept was used to maintain the *varna* system in order to avoid the problem of mixed castes. Thus subordination was taking its form and its branches becoming stronger and more stringent for women.

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<sup>347</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Adī Parva, Chapter 122*

## ***THE CONCEPT***

### ***The Householder and the Wife***

The epics show the sanctity of relationship between a husband and a wife of pure origin (as between Rāmā and Sītā). The relationship is based on a mutual level. On the part of the husband he had to protect his wife in any circumstance and fulfil his duties as a householder. But we see Oghavati had to give her body for enjoyment to a guest so that her husband's duty does not remain incomplete. On the contrary it has been said that to ward off difficulties one should possess wealth; by wealth one should protect his wife; and one's own self should ever be protected by wife and wealth.<sup>348</sup> The life of a householder is very superior and sacred and is called the field of success.<sup>349</sup> Vedas have declared the life of a householder to be superior to all other modes of life.<sup>350</sup>

A householder's home, even if filled with sons, grandsons, daughters-in-law and servants, is regarded empty if there is no housewife. One's house is not home; one's wife only is his house. Practising most excellent vows she never eats before the husband, never bathes before the husband, never sits before he does and never lies before him. She rejoices when he rejoices and is sad when he is. Always devoted to her husband and ever relying upon him, she always does what was agreeable to and beneficial for her husband.<sup>351</sup> Even the foot of a tree is one's home if he lives there with his wife as a companion. One's wife is his companion in all acts of virtue, profit and desire. The wife is the richest treasure of a man and is the best of penances in sickness and woe. There is no better associate in the world than the wife in acts undertaken for the acquisition of religious merit. One who does not have a wife who is 'chaste' should go to the forest as then there will be no difference between a home and a forest.<sup>352</sup>

In this section we will see how the concerned texts define *Pātivratya* and the various duties that were to be performed by the *pativrata* women. Chastity was said to provide her with immense power and protection. Significant chaste female characters

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<sup>348</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Adī Parva*, Chapter 37, 18

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid*, *Shanti Parva*, Chapter 11, 15

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 12, 6

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 144, 5-10

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid*, 12-17

are mentioned in order to make the whole concept more powerful so that women should follow them without any question.

Loyalty, love and dedication of the soul and of the body towards the husband were the prerequisite for a woman to be chaste. More often than not we see dictions being delivered in relation to the prosecution of an apt wife and a woman. When Rāmā was sent to exile, his mother Kausalya urged to him to go to forest with her son. But Rāmā tells that it is not proper for Kausalya to leave Daśaratha, her husband and go with Rāmā to exile in the forest as he says, “*the king will surely not survive if he is further deserted by you.*”<sup>353</sup> *That should not be done by you even with the mind; as it is highly deprecated.*”<sup>354</sup> He tells his mother to render his father service as long as he is alive because it is the moral code for women. Rāmā tells her about the conduct of a chaste woman and also that by serving her husband and waiting for her son to come back from exile she will attain the ‘highest object’ of her desire.<sup>355</sup>

Sītā, the ideal woman describes the husband-centric life of a woman. She said that a woman, father or son or self or mother or female companion are not the recourse. Husband alone is forever the best recourse either in this world or after her death.<sup>356</sup> Protection under the feet of the husband is better than being on top of a lofty building or in aerial cars or in moving through the sky or in attaining all types of positions.<sup>357</sup>

Sītā was adamant about going to the forest with her husband as through this devotion towards her husband she will be ‘absolved from all guilt’.<sup>358</sup> As the husband is the supreme deity because the Sruti text tells that “*Even in the other world a woman continues to be the wife of that very man to whom she was given away in this world by her parents with water in their hands according to the moral code binding on them.*”<sup>359</sup> She repeatedly calls herself *pativrata* implying her devotedness and faithfulness who shared all her husband’s joy and happiness and is capable of tolerating all the difficulties that would come into their path. Sītā was resolute enough to call Rāmā a woman in the form of a man.<sup>360</sup> She asked her husband on what ground

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<sup>353</sup>The *Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 24, 11

<sup>354</sup>Ibid, 12

<sup>355</sup>The *Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 24, 27

<sup>356</sup>Ibid, Chapter 27,5

<sup>357</sup>Ibid, 8

<sup>358</sup>Ibid, Chapter 29, 16

<sup>359</sup>Ibid, 17-18

<sup>360</sup>Ibid, Chapter 30, 3

he is leaving her who is devoted like Savitri.<sup>361</sup> She said that she will not look at any other man as other women does, who brings ‘disgrace’ to her family.<sup>362</sup> Whether it is a life full of austerities, forest life or a celestial one, it should be with him only.<sup>363</sup> The dust of a storm will be like sandal powder to her.<sup>364</sup>

Sītā said that while enjoying the forest life with her husband, she will not remember her parents where she enjoyed every comfort.<sup>365</sup> While Sītā was going for exile with Rāmā, Kausalya said those women are ‘wicked’ who does not stand by their husband who has fallen on ‘evil day’.<sup>366</sup> This is considered to be the very nature of women. Noble birth, learning, gift or even marriage cannot make her loyal.<sup>367</sup> Those women are virtuous who follow good conduct, are truthful and are obedient to the the instructions of their elders and keeps herself bound by injunctions. Kausalya, Thus Kausalya tells that Sītā like a virtuous woman should never leave her husband Rāmā.<sup>368</sup>

Anasūyā who advised Sītā on *Pātivratya* said, “*Highly fortunate worlds await those women, to whom their husband is dear no matter whether he lives in a city or in a forest; whether he is sinful or virtuous*”.<sup>369</sup> The same tone was articulated by Kausalya also while Sītā was leaving for the forest. Anasūyā said that for “*women of noble nature, the husband is the highest deity no matter whether he is ill-behaved or immoral or devoid of riches*”.<sup>370</sup> *There is none who is a better friend than a husband (baandhavam), who protects his wife in all circumstances, like the imperishable fruit of one's austerities.*”<sup>371</sup>

Anasūyā called those women ‘evil’, whose hearts are ruled by their own desires and passion and dominate their husband (*bhartrinaathaah*), does not understand the concept of virtue and do not follow him in the way she is suppose to do.<sup>372</sup> Such ‘evil women’, obtain bad name for them and ‘decline in righteousness’.<sup>373</sup> In order to avoid this degradation one should remain devoted to the husband who is the ‘lord’ for a wife

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<sup>361</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 30, 5-6

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid*, 7

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid*, 10

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid*, 15-16

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 39, 20

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid*, 23

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 39, 25

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 117,23

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid*, 23

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid*, 24

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid*, 25

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid*, 26

(*anuvrataa Satī*) and maintain her devotion and loyalty towards the husband (*pativratānaam*). If she follows the societal convictions, she becomes an honest wife to her husband (*saha dharmachaariNii*) and thus obtains ‘merit’ and ‘fame’.<sup>374</sup>

Anasūyā in the *Rāmāyaṇa* has been described as one ‘who was given to austerities and the practice of virtue’.<sup>375</sup> She is called the ‘celebrated’ and *tapaswini* Anasūyā, “*distinguished by severe asceticism and adorned with sacred vows, by whom roots and fruits were produced and the river Gangā was made to flow at a time when the world had been dried up by a drought continuing for ten years without a break, by whom great askesis was practised for ten thousand years and obstacles were done away with and by whom for the purpose of gods in a great hurry ten nights were reduced to one night.*”<sup>376</sup> Her old age and feeble body<sup>377</sup> made her sexually unattractive and at the same time denotes her wisdom. It was through her iconization that made Sītā’s conformation to the ideal path of chastity as the righteous one. Such iconization and portrayal of female characters made the precept and practice of chastity a heavenly deed.

Thus here we get a reflection of the above mentioned sage’s voice that woman in no condition could leave her husband, whatever may be the circumstance, nothing but husband fulfils her life and provide happiness. It was through her devotion and loyalty towards her husband that she could obtain heaven. Same has been said in the *Purāṇas* as well; where it is told that *pativratā* women obtain liberation for not only for her parental and marital household but also for herself. Thus such imposition was not only societal but also a psychological pressure on her. So that such an ideal becomes an inherent quality of hers, the conduct and duty of a *pativratā* woman was taught right from her childhood as Sītā said, “*Verily such a thing was taught to me by you, that a woman disunited from her husband should not be able to survive.*”<sup>378</sup>

Śakuntalā elaborated more on the duties of a *pativratā* woman when she had to prove herself to be the rightful wife of king and her purity not only to her husband but also in front of other people. She said that a wife had to perform whatever her husband has

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<sup>374</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 117, 28-29

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid*, 9

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid*, 9-12

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid*, 17-18

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 27,7

summoned her, even if it is sinful.<sup>379</sup> The woman who is devoted to her husband and it has also been said by those who know the rules of morality that a wife, when her monthly season comes should approach her husband. Śakuntalā defines a ‘true wife’ the one who has borne a son, whose heart is devoted to her lord, who knows none but her lord.

Śakuntalā also enumerates the importance of a wife. She said wife is the root of religion, profit, desire and salvation. They that have wives can perform religious acts, can lead domestic lives, have the means to be cheerful and can obtain good fortune. Sweet-speaking wives are friends on occasions of joy. They are as fathers on occasions of religious acts. They are mothers in sickness and woe. Even in the deep woods to a traveller a wife is his refreshment and solace. He that has a wife is trusted by all. A wife, therefore, is one's most valuable possession. Even when the husband leaving this world goes into the region of Yama, it is the devoted wife that accompanies him there. A wife going before waits for the husband. But if the husband goes before, the chaste wife follows close. For these reasons marriage exists. The husband enjoys the companionship of the wife both in this and in the other worlds. It has been said by learned persons that one is himself born as one's son. Therefore, a man whose wife has borne a son should look upon her as his mother. No man, even in anger, should ever do anything that is disagreeable to his wife, seeing that happiness, joy, and virtue, - everything depends on the wife.<sup>380</sup>

The above said words not only reflect the importance of a wife but also tell the audience how a woman should perform her duty. A wife is termed as a ‘true wife’ when she gives birth to a son. A husband is said to be born as the son. Thus, it was not only progeny but the birth of a son the most important aspect. There are twelve sanctioned methods of obtaining a son mentioned in *Mahābhārata*, six kinds of sons that are heirs and kinsmen, and six other kinds that are not heirs but kinsmen. They are:<sup>381</sup> *Aurasha*, the son begotten by one's own self upon his wedded wife; *Pranita*, the son begotten upon one's wife by an accomplished person from motives of kindness; *Parikrita*, the son begotten upon one's wife by a person for pecuniary consideration; *Paunarvara*, the son begotten upon the wife after the husband's death;

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<sup>379</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Adi Parva*, Chapter 122

<sup>380</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Adi Parva*, Chapter 122

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 120, 32-34

5th, *Kanin*, the maiden-born son; *Kunda*, the son born of a woman who had intercourse with four men; *Dattya*, the son given by another; *Krita*, the son bought from another; *Upakrita*, the son coming to one out of gratitude; *Sayang upagata*, the son coming himself to give him away; *Shada*, the son born of a pregnant bride; and *Hina Jonidhrita*, the son begotten upon a wife of lower caste.

*Pranita*, *Parikrita*, *Paunarvara*, *Krita* and *Kunda* are the types of son are born from a man who is not her husband. While she is taught to be devoted to one man only but when a need for the husband and his family emerges the very ideal and teachings get mutated.

Devotion towards husband and providing progeny was not the only matter of concern for the wife. She had to be caring for other family members too, as Rāmā tells Sītā to take care of his mothers and his brothers when he will be away. He said “*Keeping in front of righteousness alone, you have to respect the aged Kausalya, my mother who is getting emaciated by grief.*<sup>382</sup>...*You, in particular, should regard Bharata and Satrugna, as your brothers or sons.*<sup>383</sup>...*you should not do what is displeasing to him at any time.*”<sup>384</sup> She had to keep aside her grief and take care of each and every member as this was a part of what was righteousness prescribed for women. Rāmā even mentions that she should consider his brothers as her own brothers or sons which also express his anxiety and suspicion for his wife as he will not have a physical presence in her life now.

*Shree* is said to stay with those women who are given to truth and sincerity and adore the gods and does not stay with those women who do not look after the household properly and who always say words against the wishes of her husband.<sup>385</sup> *Shree* avoid those women who are fond of the houses of other people and have no modesty and live with those women who are devoted to their husbands, proper in their conduct and are well ornamented and well-clad.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Chapter 26,31

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid*, 33

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid*, 34

<sup>385</sup> *The Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, chapter 11,11

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid*, 12

A woman was thus taught to render service physically and mentally to her husband not only in her paternal house but the same inculcation continued in her marital house too. Following this teaching she became the ideal daughter, the ideal daughter-in-law, the ideal wife and the mother. Through this idealistic life she attained liberation, the ultimate goal of human life. A man was her only way to obtain heaven while her male counterpart had many doors opened to him to attain the liberation.

A woman's purity of body and soul was her honour and dignity. Thus we see Sītā strongly reacting to Rāvaṇa's lustful action and behaviour and even warning him. When Rāvaṇa approaches Sītā she tells about the greatness of her husband and her devotion towards him and her vow of loyalty and devotion towards him. She also warns him of the danger he is inviting by approaching her and tells him how base he is in comparison to her husband. She also tells her that it will not be possible for him to retain even if she is carried away by him.<sup>387</sup>

Sītā cautioned Rāvaṇa, "*Having laid one's hand on Sacī, the consort of Indra...one may survive long; but on treating with indignity a woman like me there is no escape from death for you even though you have quaffed the drink of immortality.*"<sup>388</sup> She even challenged Rāvaṇa's might. She said, "*Indeed the highest valour is seen in you that I have not been won by you in a combat.*"<sup>389</sup> While Rāvaṇa was taking away Sītā, Jatayu told Rāvaṇa how the wife of another man had to be respected. He tells him that the consorts of others should be protected from another's touch in the same way as his own wife.<sup>390</sup> Thus a man was punished for crossing his boundary and laying evil eye on another woman. But it was not only the man who was getting punished for his evil deeds, but women too had to undergo suspicion and suffering even when she was not at fault.

Bhīṣma advised Yudhiṣṭhira to invite those *Brāhmaṇas* whose wives wait for their return. Having fed them, he should provide them with additional food so that upon his return, his expectant wives can distribute food among their children.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 47, 33-48

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 49, 24

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 53, 6

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 50

<sup>391</sup> The *Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana parva*, Chapter 60, 14



Bhsima while on the bed of arrows said to Yudhiṣṭhira that there are regions invisible even to him. But those regions are seen by him, by women who are chaste and who have been devoted to only one husband.<sup>392</sup> Thus it is very important to know what made the women chaste in their conduct as Yudhiṣṭhira asked about the conduct of good and chaste women.<sup>393</sup>

A woman is said to attain to the region of happiness not by penances and vows<sup>394</sup> and she need not to wear yellow robes, barks of trees, or shave her head, matted locks on her head in order to acquire ‘celestial region’,<sup>395</sup> but has to be devoted and polite towards her husband, the celestials, the departed manes and the *Brāhmaṇas*. She has to wait upon and serve her mother and father in-laws.<sup>396</sup> She should never act deceitfully, never stay at the door, and speak for a long time with anybody, never perform any evil deed, never laugh aloud, never do any injury to anyone, and give out secrets.<sup>397</sup> She should serve her husband with respect when he returns from his journey for business.<sup>398</sup> While her husband is away for such a trip a wife should remain engaged in doing what is good for him.<sup>399</sup> During her husband’s absence she should remain sexually unattractive and should not apply collyrium or wear any kind of ornaments. She should never wash herself properly or adorn her body or feet.<sup>400</sup>

A woman who is devoted to her husband should never eat anything which is unknown to her husband and with which her husband will be displeased.<sup>401</sup> A wife has to rise early in the morning and do whatever is necessary for the household and its members.<sup>402</sup> She should never awake her body when her husband is sleeping.<sup>403</sup> A faithful wife should never force her husband to work harder to acquire more wealth to support his family and relatives.<sup>404</sup> The woman follows her duty attains the region

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<sup>392</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana parva*, Chapter 73, 2

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 123, 1

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid*, 6

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid*, 7

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid*, 10

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid*, 12

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid*, 16

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid*, 17

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 123, 14

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid*, 18

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid*, 19

like a ‘second-Arundhati’.<sup>405</sup> The *Purāṇas* also defines the conduct of a chaste woman but in a more meticulous and vigorous manner.

The portrayal and explanation of such a concept was often given a female voice to make it more compelling for the women. The ‘ideal’ women characters like Sītā, Anasūyā and Draupadī are sketched to meet this necessity. They are portrayed as celebrated characters who followed the path strictly and that this fame will be for any women accepting this norm. This is how the narrative literature became a tool for the authoritative group to establish their concepts amongst its audience. *Pātivṛtya* was one of the most important ways of establishing, percolating and maintaining their power and subordination at various levels of the society.

Uma, the wife of Śiva described the definition of a chaste woman. In the definition lies the characteristics and conduct of a chaste woman. It was narrated by her after hearing it from Ganga, the other rivers and female celestials.<sup>406</sup>

Uma said:

*“A woman with a good disposition, sweet speech, sweet conduct, sweet features and always looking at the face of her husband and deriving as much pleasure from it as she derives by looking at her child and who works according to the scriptures are considered to be righteous. She should listen with veneration to the duties of wedded life as given in the scriptures and observes the vows as those that are observed by her husband. She who looks upon her husband as a god, waits upon and serves him as if he is a god, surrenders her own will completely to that of her ‘lord’, and never thinks of any other man, is regarded as truly righteous in conduct.”<sup>407</sup>*

A wife is considered a ‘truly devoted wife’ who puts up a joyful attitude even when she is rudely addressed by her husband. She should not even look at the Moon or the

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<sup>405</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 123, 20

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 146, 34

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid*

Sun or a tree that has a masculine connotation. A chaste woman should serve her husband even if he is poor or diseased or weak or worn out due to travelling.<sup>408</sup>

The *Mahābhārata* text quite briefly discuss about how a man attains to salvation in regard to his behaviour towards his wife and other women. It was prompted out by none other than Mahadeva as his devoted relation with his wives, Uma and Pārvatī has been mentioned in various ancient Indian texts. Śiva said: “*Those men who treat the wives of other people as their own mothers and sisters and daughters attain heaven.*”<sup>409</sup> *Those men who never know other peoples’ wives, and who are master of their senses and are of righteous conduct also attain heaven.*<sup>410</sup> *Those men who do not seek even mentally to associate with other people’s wives even when they see them in deserted places and under the influence of desire succeed in Heaven”.*<sup>411</sup>

Though it is highly doubtful as to what extent the prescribed rules were followed for men in reality, but the divinity of a man-woman relationship as husband and wife has been mentioned which not only includes as to how a woman should conduct her behaviour and duties but also the manner a man should do the same for his household and the wife/wives.

Thus the whole cosmic and divine energy stays with the woman who is chaste. This indicated that women who followed the moral conduct prescribed for them were revered and were considered pure. But nowhere her decisions or choices helped formulating those moral conducts. A moral conduct was framed even for men. For them it was more about controlling their senses and desires. The *Mahābhārata* says that people of every caste should not have sexual union with other people’s wives. It shortens life and the adulterer has to live in Hell for as many years as the number of pores on the bodies of the women with whom he has committed his sin.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 146, 35-41

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 144, 11

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid*, 12

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid*, 33

<sup>412</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 104, 20-22

In the following section we will see how the texts throw light upon the practice of conformity. At the same time, where both aspects of conformity and deviances get collated will also be dealt here.

## THE PRACTICE

### Conformity

In this section we will discuss about women who conformed to the path of *Pātivratya* and faithfully accepted the various norms laid out for them.

A wife is said to serve her husband like a maid-servant. As a maid-servant looks upon her master, renders him service, waits upon him. In the same way a wife should also do the same. She should be like a friend who is like a support and with whom he can share everything. She has to be like a sister for obtaining other wives and at the same time should be like a mother who cares for her children and treat him affectionately. A wife had to be perfect not only in service to her husband, but also had to satisfy him mentally and physically. Her beauty had to channelize toward her husband, otherwise she was condemned.

### A *Pativrata* and her Obligation

Tradition maintained that nothing should stop a *pativrata* woman from loving her husband and maintaining her loyalty and devotion, whatever might have been the circumstance. There were two *brāhmaṇas*, Nārada and Parvata. Parvata cursed the other Brāhmaṇa, Nārada due to which he would appear as a monkey to others and also to his wife, Sukumari with whom he fell in love. As this Nārada did not inform Parvata of his feeling according to a deal they made, Parvata cursed him. Sukumari saw Nārada exactly as he had been. Just after the last of the wedding Mantras have been recited she saw her husband to have a face like that of a monkey. But for this reason she did not stop loving her husband. That ‘chaste’ princess<sup>413</sup> devoted herself entirely to him and did not in her heart desire anyone else for a husband.

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<sup>413</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Shanti Parva*, Chapter 30, 32

Sexual indulgence with another man was not only allowed for progeny but also for fulfilling husband's duty as a householder even against her will. Even if the husband came to know about it from the man involved in sexual act with his wife and, the husband is advised not to feel any jealousy or have any other feeling of vengeance, but rather he should have a sense of attaining salvation – that his duty as a householder is being fulfilled.

There was a king named Oghavat who had a daughter called, Oghavati. She was given in marriage to a man named Sudarshana, 'the learned'.<sup>414</sup> He took the vow of conquering Death by leading the life of a householder.<sup>415</sup> He told his wife never to act against the wishes of the guests and that she should serve the guests even by offering her own body (sexual favour)<sup>416</sup> '...as there is no higher virtue than hospitality to guests'.<sup>417</sup>

Once when Sudarshana went out, Dharma came to his house in the disguise of a Brāhmaṇa. He asked her to offer her body 'without any hesitation'.<sup>418</sup> He said, "*if the duties prescribed for householders be acceptable to you...satisfy me by offering up your body to me.*"<sup>419</sup> Oghavati remembering her husband's order followed what the Brāhmaṇa asked her to do. When her husband returned, he called for his wife, but following her husband's order Oghavati, 'the chaste lady devoted to her husband'<sup>420</sup> did not reply back to her husband while she was in the Brāhmaṇa's arms. Oghavati did not reply back to her husband out of shame and devotion towards her husband. The Brāhmaṇa replied to him that a "*Brāhmaṇa guest has arrived has arrived, and though tempted by your wife with various other offers of welcome I...desired only her body and this fair lady is engaged in welcoming me with due rites.*"<sup>421</sup>

Sudarshana though was filled with 'wonder', he did not feel any jealousy or anger and said, "*Do you enjoy yourself...It is a great pleasure to me! A householder acquires the*

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<sup>414</sup> The Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana parva, Chapter 2,40

<sup>415</sup> Ibid,41

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, 43

<sup>417</sup> Ibid, 44

<sup>418</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>419</sup> Ibid, 54

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, 60

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, 64-66

highest merit by honouring a guest...My life, my wife and all my earthly belongings are all dedicated to the use of my guests!’”<sup>422</sup> *Dharma* who came in the guise of the *Brāhmaṇa* told him that he was pleased with him. He said no one in the world have the power to insult the chaste lady, Oghavati, who is devoted to her husband, ‘far less to touch her body.’<sup>423</sup> She has been saved from impurity by her virtue and chastity.<sup>424</sup> She was blessed by *Dharma* that half her body will be with her husband and half will be celebrated as the river Oghavati.<sup>425</sup> The same story is mentioned in the *Līṅga Mahāpurāṇa* wherein Sudarśana told his *pativrata-m* the same thing.<sup>426</sup> Here also *Dharma* came in the form of a *Brāhmaṇa* and tested the virtue of Sudarsana’s wife. *Dharma* said that he did not enjoy Sudarśana’s wife even mentally.<sup>427</sup>

A woman not only had to bear the touch of another man for her husband but also had to bear the existence of a co-wife. Being a chaste wife not only meant that emotionally she had to be tolerable but it also meant rescuing her husband from curses. Arjuna’s wife, Ulupi, the co-wife with Chitrangada not only tolerated another wife of her husband, but she was the one who found redemption for Arjuna’s sin. Here we also see that Chitrangada was the wife who was given more importance as she had a son from her husband but we do not get any reference to any of Ulupi’s. Ulupi at first was accused by Chitrangada for the reason behind her husband’s death, though Ulupi was also the wife of Arjuna. In Chitrangada’s speech we get to know how the other wife was viewed as.

The horse of Yudhiṣṭhira’s *ashwamedha* sacrifice reached the kingdom of Manipur followed by Arjuna. The ruler of Manipura, Vabhruvahana, hearing that his father, Arjuna has arrived went out to receive him. But he refused to fight with Arjuna and he was rebuked by him. Ulupi, the step-mother of Vabhruvahana encouraged him to fight Arjuna. Ulupi was one of the wives of Arjuna. She was, therefore, the step-mother of Vabhruvahana. In the fight between the two Arjuna was killed.<sup>428</sup> Chitrangada, mother of Vabhruvahana and wife of Arjuna, after hearing the news of Arjuna’s death

<sup>422</sup> The *Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 2, 68-69

<sup>423</sup> The *Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana parva*, Chapter 2, 81

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid*, 82

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid*, 84

<sup>426</sup> The *Līṅga Purāṇa*, Chapter 29, 46-47

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid*, 59-64

<sup>428</sup> The *Mahābhārata, Ashwamedha Parva*, Chapter 79

arrived at the scene. She accused Ulupi for inciting her son to fight and for Arjuna's death. Chitrangada said polygamy (*Yahubharyyata*) is not fault with men. Women only incur fault by taking more than one husband (*vahunam bharyyata*) and told her not to possess any thoughts of vengeance.<sup>429</sup> This relationship was ordained by the 'Supreme Ordainer' himself, described as 'an eternal and unchangeable one'.<sup>430</sup> Thus, told her to fulfil her duties towards that relationship.<sup>431</sup> Saying so she sat in *Prayavow* (to sit in *Praya* is to remain seated in a particular spot, abstaining from food and drink with a view to cast off one's life-breaths) restraining her speech.<sup>432</sup> Ulupi later reviving Arjuna said that whatever she has done is for Arjuna's sake for cleansing off his sins as he has killed Bhīṣma, the son of Shantanu by improper means.<sup>433</sup>

Like Sītā, Tārā, Vali's wife also stood by her husband in difficult times though he was lustful towards his brother's wife. Tārā following the conduct of a chaste woman, thus playing the role of an advisor and a friend to her husband, warned Vali about not going into a war with his brother, as she did not have a 'good feeling' about it.<sup>434</sup> Tārā, who was acquainted with sacred texts and wanted her husband to be victorious, was grief-stricken, when her husband did not listen to her.<sup>435</sup> As Vali was dying Tārā wailed and said after living a luxurious life, now she has to suffer widowhood 'full of grief and agony'.<sup>436</sup> She decided to abstain from consuming anything and desired for death sitting close to where her husband was lying.<sup>437</sup> Vali while dying, said to his younger brother, Sugriva, that his wife Tārā is 'extremely clever' and 'intelligent' in "*discerning the most profound matters as well as deciphering the meaning of portents of various kinds as also in other ways*<sup>438</sup> *and whatever she recommends as right should be unhesitatingly done by you. No opinion of Tārā turns out to be wrong.*"<sup>439</sup>

Tārā became the wife of Sugriva, the younger brother of her husband. But nowhere in the text did we get a glimpse of Tārā's mind, as to what she desired and wanted. Her

<sup>429</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Ashwamedha Parva*, Chapter 80, 14

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 79, 18

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 81, 8-10

The Vasus after coming to the banks of Ganga uttered that Bhīṣma has been killed by Arjuna by unfair means and Ganga along with the Vasus imposed a curse on him. Hearing this Ulupi's father was in distress and went to the chief of the Vasus. He told him the method of his redemption – that when Arjuna and his son will fight in a battle, Arjuna will be killed and thus he will be washed off of his sins., The *Mahābhārata*, *Ashwamedha Parva*, Chapter 81, 18-20

<sup>434</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Kiskindhakāṇḍa*, Chapter 15, 12

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid* Chapter 16

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 20, 16

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid*, 26

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 22, 13

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid*, 14

husband handed her and her son to his younger brother, while the text is silent about her feeling when she is the consort of her deceased husband's brother. But the text shows that she continues to serve her second husband. When Laksmana approaches Sugriva to confront him, Sugriva being afraid of Laksmana sent Tārā to pacify him and Tārā like a strong-willed and dedicated woman defends her husband when he was being accused. Such episodes give an interesting turn to the Brahmanical conceptualisation of chastity and its practice.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* we get female characters who were sketched as the perfect wife. Kausalya, Sumitra, Anasūyā, Tārā and Sītā stood by their husband no matter how much they were dishonoured by their husband.

Kausalya is the ideal wife and mother who tolerated partial behaviour towards her, though being wholly devoted to him and bearing him a son – she is the ideal mother-in-law who advises her daughter-in-law not to leave her son in any condition and not to follow the conduct of a wicked woman who leaves her husband when they are despised and those women fall from their position as defined by the society.

Daśaratha after listening to Kaikeyi's plan to send Rāmā into exile wanted and praised Kausalya and applauded her in the following words: *“who has always sought to please me and speaks kind words...deserves to be kindly treated by me – waited on me like a maid-servant and a friend, a sister as well as a mother, the godly lady never kindly treated by me for fear of displeasing you.”*<sup>440</sup> Daśaratha repented for showing such a preferential behaviour towards Kaikeyi and mistreating Kausalya.

Kausalya says that she did not obtain any happiness in the past through her husband. But she had hope when her son, Rāmā was born. She is apprehensive about the fact that if Rāmā goes to exile, she will hear unpleasant words from her husband's younger wives, though she is the eldest.<sup>441</sup> Though she had Rāmā by her side, she had to face abhorrent behaviour.<sup>442</sup> Her inner struggle is reflected in her words, when she says, *“Not esteemed by my husband I have always been snubbed by him. I have been treated on a par with or even on a lower footing than Kaikeyi's servants.”*<sup>443</sup> But hearing to her, Rāmā accused Kausalya for showing more love and concern towards

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<sup>440</sup>The *Rāmāyaṇa* ,*Ayodhyakāṇḍa* , Chapter 12, 69

<sup>441</sup> Ibid , Chapter 20,39

<sup>442</sup> Ibid, 40

<sup>443</sup> Ibid, 42



her son, rather than to her husband, which he says is against the prescribed law for women as they should consider her husband her God and love him more than her son or father.

Kausalya's outburst of her sufferings tells us about the pain that a wife had to suffer due to a co-wife. Manthara while convincing Kaikeyi to make the king put Bharata on the throne and Rāmā on exile, she tells that it is not possible that Kausalya, mother of Rāmā who has been insulted in the past by her pride, due to the king's preference for Kaikeyi, that Kausalya will take revenge for such a disregard. Kausalya was the eldest of the wives of Daśaratha and thus the most aged. Kaikeyi who was younger and was the wife to whom Daśaratha was most attracted, he used to spend most of his time with her only.<sup>444</sup> Even Manthara tells that the king can even enter fire for her, as he cannot tolerate to see her in pain.<sup>445</sup> This shows how the elder and the younger wife's position within the household and in her husband's life and conveys about how the sexuality of women were perceived according to her age.

The elder wife though was wise and was revered in comparison to the younger one, but her age implied her unattractive sexuality. Thus her husband's desire for a younger wife increased, as she could continue to satisfy her husband's sexual desires and thus gaining more attention from him. But within the household the younger wife was despised for being young and sexually attractive. The same despise regarding the younger wife is articulated in Hāla's *Sattasāī*, where the elder wife is shown to be responsible for her husband's welfare, while the younger one is termed as the distraction that leads to his downfall.

The husband was attracted towards the youth and beauty of the younger woman ignoring his elderly wife who is shown to be all devoted towards her husband, while the younger wife who is shown to be aware of her sexuality is sketched in a negative manner, thus condemning the woman who being aware of her sexuality uses it to meet her own selfish demands. The same condemnation happens to Surpanakha also. Being a *Raksasi* woman she suffers the mental and physical agony while we do not the same thing happening to a *Brahamana* woman.

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<sup>444</sup> The *Rāmāyana*, *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 8, 37

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 9, 25

Kausalya was praised by all, while Kaikeyi was insulted by her own son. Bharata when came to know about Kaikeyi's misdeeds, he bitterly approached her and said that Kausalya, whose son she has sent exile to behaved towards her like her own sister and followed the right conduct.<sup>446</sup> Bharata described his mother, Kaikeyi as the one who was in awe of herself, considering herself to be 'good-looking' and 'covetous of power'.<sup>447</sup> Even all the female companions of Manthara, while she was being threatened by Satrugna, desired to take refuge under Kausalya only, whom they described as 'merciful', 'polite of speech', 'glorious' and 'knows what is right' and called her their 'unfailing asylum'.<sup>448</sup>

### **Compliance and Suffering**

The *Shanti Parva* of the *Māhabhārata* states that a woman who worships her husband obtains happiness. A husband is the one who gives her happiness and protection. A man was thus necessary for a woman to obtain happiness and salvation in her life. But this male authority and patriarchy was also the reason for her grief, a grief which made her life an ordeal.

Sītā is considered to be the ideal wife. This section will remain incomplete without mentioning her. She is considered as the symbol of mortally tolerant womanhood. She is described as a divine (*devii*) and pure-minded lady (*manssvinni aNganaa*).<sup>449</sup>

Janaka, her father obtained Sītā by ploughing the ritual field. "*She, who is prosperous and husband-devout (pativratā), will always be abiding you like your own shadow...*"<sup>450</sup> Janaka said so while giving his daughter's hand in marriage to Rāmā while observing the wedding rituals. This hymn not only reflects how important it was to inculcate such an ideal behaviour amongst the women but also that she had to follow her husband wherever he goes. Thus, when Rāmā was going to the forest she insisted Rāmā to take her with himself. Her argument was so well pronounced and assertive that Rāmā could not disobey her.

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<sup>446</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 63, 10

<sup>447</sup> Ibid, Chapter 92, 25

<sup>448</sup> Ibid, Chapter 78, 15

<sup>449</sup> Ibid, Chapter 30, 47

<sup>450</sup> Ibid

Sītā said, ‘wife gets fortune of the husband’ and thus she is also destined to live with him in the forest.<sup>451</sup> She said it was her duty to clear all difficulties for her husband. She said, “*If you depart this very day for the forest (of Daṇḍaka) which is difficult to penetrate, O scion of Raghu, I shall walk ahead of you crushing blades of Kuśa grass and thorns.*”<sup>452</sup> *Caring not for the sovereignty of the three worlds and concentrating my thought on the vow of serving my husband, I shall live happily in the forest as I would in my parental home*”.<sup>453</sup> Providing service to him regularly, observing discipline and chastity (*Brahmā chaariNii*), she would stay with him in the forest; surviving only on roots and fruits always she will not cause any discomfort to him.<sup>454</sup> Being with her husband with ‘loving devotion’, she will become sin-less, “*for husband is the supreme deity*” to me.<sup>455</sup> *Even after my death, I shall stay united with you.*” That she is and desires to be dependent on her husband (*aatmavashavartiniim*) is clear when she gives the example of Savitri, who was devoted to Satyavan, her husband. She tells him that she is his wife and a chaste woman (*sattim*). Enjoying the forest she will not remember her parental home. Thus she was the ideal wife who followed every term of the notion of chastity. She did not leave her husband when he lost everything. The unpleasantness of the forest did not deter her from accompanying him. She even called the forest ‘as sweet-smelling as honey’. The difficulties of the forest will not remind her of the luxuries of her home, thus causing misery not only to her but also her husband. As a *pativratā* woman she was satisfied that she was with her husband and even if she was given a residence in heaven, she would not live there if her husband will not be there. Only through the devotion and loyalty towards her husband that she will remain sinless and that she will maintain such devotion even after her death.

Her words imply that if a woman is with her husband, even a difficult place like a forest would be like a heaven for her, providing all the enjoyment of life – a forest life with her husband is nothing less than the luxurious life of a palace. But if a woman is separated from her husband, even the luxury of a palace or heaven does not hold any meaning or value for her. When Rāma told Sītā that it would be proper for her to stay in the palace, Sītā scorned at him and said, “*What has been uttered by you*

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<sup>451</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 27,4

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid*, 6

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid*, 12

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid*, 16

*is unworthy of valiant princes adept in the use of weapons and missiles, and disgraceful to them... and is not worth listening to.”*<sup>456</sup>

While Sītā was in the forest she was abducted by Rāvaṇa. Such was her devotion for her husband that she considered herself as useless and worthy of being dead as she was touched by another man. Rāmā recovered her from the clutches of Rāvaṇa. After the *agnipariksha* only Rāmā certified that it was her chastity that saved her from Rāvaṇa. Rāmā was filled with suspicion regarding Sītā, disowned her and told her to seek shelter elsewhere. Rāmā was afraid of social stigma.<sup>457</sup> Rāmā said to Sītā in the presence of monkeys and demons, “*I, wanting for an honour, have done this particular act, which ought to be done by a man, in killing Rāvaṇa and thus wiping away the insult meted out to me.*”<sup>458</sup> He told Sītā to go wherever she liked as he will not accept her as wife. He being proud of his lineage told her that any noble man, who was born in a celebrated race, will not take back such a woman who lived in another's home.<sup>459</sup> He said that seeing her who is endowed with ‘a beautiful form and is attractive to the sense’, who lived for such a long time made it impossible for Rāvaṇa to control his senses.<sup>460</sup>

This shows the sexual tension in Rāmā’s mind. Rāmā nowhere says that Sītā submitted to Rāvaṇa willingly. He was aware of the fact that Rāvaṇa abducted her and was forcing her to be his wife. Then also afraid of being embarrassed and dishonoured by the society he tried to discard his ‘true’ wife in order to maintain his image as a true king. But Sītā was confident about the purity of her character as she said to Rāmā, “*Have faith in me. I swear to you by my own character.*”<sup>461</sup> She was disappointed as she enumerated her sorrows by saying that Rāmā did not take into honour her sacred birth, her chastity (*shiilamcha*) and her devotion. Even after being wronged so much Sītā after doing circumbulation to Rāmā entered the fire.

Sītā was brought amongst a huge crowd of monkeys headed by Rāma when she was freed from the clutches of Rāvaṇa. Vibhīṣaṇa tried to scatter them for the sake of Sītā. But Rāma was annoyed as he considered them as his own people. In regard to Sītā he said that neither costumes, nor a protective wall or royal honours save a woman. It is

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<sup>456</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Chapter 27,3

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid, Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Chapter 115,11

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid*, 19

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid*, 24

<sup>461</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Chapter 114, 6

her character that saves her.<sup>462</sup> He moreover said that the appearance of a woman is not condemned in public while in adversity, in conflicts, during the selection of a husband, at a sacrificial or a nuptial ceremony.<sup>463</sup> He ordered to leave the palanquin and let Sītā come to him on foot alone and to let the monkeys have a look at her.<sup>464</sup> Laksmana, Sugriva and Hanuman felt distressed to hear the orders of Rāma.<sup>465</sup>

Rāma rather being happy and affectionate towards Sītā, he pronounced his suspicion towards her and justified his act on the basis that whatever he has done was to eliminate the disgrace mark that originated due to the abduction of Sītā. He was rather disrespectful towards her and was more concerned about the public opinion that raised finger on him and his family's honour.<sup>466</sup> Rāma insulted her and her character morally only to show that he is a just king. He said, "*What man of spirit and born in a noble family for his part would take back with an eager mind a woman who has dwelt in another's house...while boasting of my lineage, how can I accept again you, who were squeezed into the arms of Rāvaṇa and regarded by him with an evil eye?*"<sup>467</sup> Rāma commanded Sītā to go away and that she can have any other man, be it Laksmana, Bharata or Satrugna, on Sugriva or Vibhisana, but not on him. He said all these words to Sītā while all other men were present. He did not consider that he was disregarding her in front of other men; rather he should be protecting her in action and in words in front of other people.

In reply, Sītā told him not to treat her like a common man does to his wife.<sup>468</sup> She expressed her helplessness when she was in the clutches of Rāvaṇa and that she was not in his bondage at her own will. And that he should trust her on the basis of their love and trust and relationship as they have known each other from childhood. If he did not want her then he should not have exerted him so much to recover her and should have told her before through Hanuman, of his feeling.<sup>469</sup> She said, "*...my devotion as well as my chastity has all been ignored by you*"<sup>470</sup> decided to go for the fire ordeal.

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<sup>462</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Chapter 114, 25-27

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid*, 28

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid*, 29-30

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid*, 32

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 115, 16-18

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid*, 19-20

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 116, 5

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid*, 16

The fire-god appeared in person from the burning pyre, carrying Sītā in his arms and gave her back to Rāmā, testifying to her purity.<sup>471</sup> Then, the fire-god, the witness of the whole world, spoke to Rāmā as follows “*Here is your Sītā. No sin exists in her (na vidyate paapam). This auspicious (shubhaa) lady, whose character has been good (suvRittaa), has never been unfaithful (na atyacharat) to you who are endowed with strength of character (vRittashauNDiiryam) either by word or by mind or even by intellect or by her glances. Sītā, whose mind was directed towards you, ignored that demon even though allured and frightened through various means. Take back Sītā, who is sinless, with a pure character (vishuddha bhaavaam).*”<sup>472</sup>

Rāmā accepted Sītā after the ordeal. Through the idealisation of such behaviour it was taught to the society that even if a man abducts another man’s wife, it was also the wife who was at fault, thus condemning their character and beauty. It was through an ordeal which not only proved the purity of her character but at the same time purified her. Rāmā being afraid of the society accused Sītā without considering her support, her love, devotion and loyalty. When Sītā was confronted by Rāvaṇa she showed an aggressive attitude toward him and also threatened him that if he has abducted another man’s wife he has to meet with dire consequences. Not for a single moment did she show him that she was intimidated. But when she was wronged by her husband who was defiling her character she did not argue with her but rather went for an ordeal in order to prove the purity of her character.

Sītā, like Kausalya also follows the conduct of a chaste woman and is also a renowned character of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as an ideal woman. The great sage Agastya described women who love a man so long he is prosperous and leave him when he is suffering from adversities. But he said Sītā is not among those women and “*deserves to be mentioned among the divine ladies like Arundhati.*”<sup>473</sup>

Sītā who is shown to be of a meek and weak character and in constant need of protection emerges out strong when her dignity was harmed by the touch of another man. Sītā was previously abducted in the forest by a man-eating *Rākṣasa* named Viradha who wanted Sītā as his wife and attacked Rāmā and Laksmana.<sup>474</sup> When Rāmā saw Sītā on the lap of the ogre, he felt a pain which, according to him, ‘was

<sup>471</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Chapter 118

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid*, 5-8

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 13

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 2, 4-11

more than the death of his father and loss of his kingdom as his wife was touched by another man'.<sup>475</sup> Instead of attacking the *Rākṣasa*, Rāmā was repenting while Lakṣmana wanted to kill him. Rāmā tried to kill the *Rākṣasa* when provoked by him.

Sītā also abused Rāvaṇa even when she was held abducted by him. She repeatedly said how her Rāmā would destroy him for abducting his consort and this will not only bring about his destruction but of his own type and kingdom. Looking down upon Rāvaṇa, she said “*How can a female swan, well-known for its rare virtues, and ever sporting with a male swan among tufts of lotuses, casts its eyes on a diver bird standing in the midst of reeds?*”<sup>476</sup> Sītā’s love for Rāmā is also reflected when Rāmā could not find Sītā in the hermitage and anxious about her, his speech reflects his recognition of Sītā’s loyalty and devotion as he said, “*where is that Sītā of graceful limbs who shared my sufferings as I knocked about in the Dandaka forest, deprived of my sovereignty and dispirited.*”<sup>477</sup> That he is incomplete without his wife is also reflected as he said that he cannot live without her ‘even for a while’<sup>478</sup> and he does not desire the lordship of gods or of the earth<sup>479</sup> and that he is dead without her.<sup>480</sup> He was aware of how Sītā would feel without him, as he said “*she would be grieving due to separation from me*”.<sup>481</sup> Despite knowing about Sītā’s moralistic character, he maligned her fame publicly and she had to face a fire ordeal to prove her purity to maintain her husband’s image.

We get another reference to a wife who took refuge to fire-god, but not to prove or purify herself but to fulfil her duties as wife and to punish herself. One day in the season of spring Pāṇḍu, the king accompanied by his wife (Mādri), began to rove in the woods. Pāṇḍu felt passionate and was alone with his wife Mādri who was in semi-transparent dress. Being desirous, the king seized Mādri against her will, but Mādri resisted him as much as she could. Overcome by desire he forgot everything about his misfortune (Pāṇḍu was cursed that when he will get involved sexually he will die). When Kuntī, his first wife decided to burn herself at the pyre of her husband, Mādri said, “*This foremost one of the Bharata princes had approached me, desiring to have intercourse. His appetite insatiate, shall I not follow him in the region of Yama to*

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<sup>475</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 2, 21

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 56, 20

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 64, 3

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid*, 4

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid*, 5

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid*, 12

*gratify him?*”<sup>482</sup> Thus even after her husband’s death it was her duty to fulfil and satisfy her husband.

Draupadī referred to as ‘*Devi*’<sup>483</sup>, who was married to five men is considered as one of the celebrated *pativrata* woman. She is described as a ‘high-born’ and a ‘chaste’ (*satī*) lady.<sup>484</sup> Dhṛtarāstra called her a ‘chaste and devoted to virtue’ amongst all his daughters-in-law (*vadhūnām hi viśiṣṭā me tvaṃ dharmaparamā satī*).<sup>485</sup> Like other women described in this section, she did not protest while it was decided that she will get married to five men at a time. Like Sītā, Draupadī too did not have a natural birth. She rose from the centre of a sacrificial altar (*vedi madhyaat samutthitaa*). While the Pandavas were in exile, Arjuna won Draupadī. While the Pandavas brought her to show their mother what they have acquired, Kuntī did not see her sons and said, “*Enjoy ye all*”. The moment she saw Draupadī she realised what mistake she made. She approached Yudhiṣṭhira and asked: “*tell me how my speech may not become untrue; how sin may not touch the daughter of the king of Panchāla, and how also she may not become uneasy*”.<sup>486</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira consoled Kuntī, and addressing Dhananjaya said that as Draupadī was won by him, so he should marry her.<sup>487</sup> Arjuna said that he will do what Yudhiṣṭhira will command as they all the brothers were obedient to him.

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Yudhisthira from fear of a conflict amongst the brothers told them that ‘auspicious’ Draupadī will be the common wife to them.<sup>489</sup> While the Pandavas used to lie down with heads towards the south, Kuntī used to lie along the line of their heads, and Kṛṣṇa that of their feet. Draupadī used to lay down with them on a bed of *kusa* grass along the line of their feet ‘as if she was their nether pillow’, but never complained or disrespected them.<sup>490</sup> When the marriage of Draupadī was to take place, Draupad was informed by Yudhiṣṭhira that as he and his brother who were elder to Arjuna and that they both are unmarried. He also told him that it is a rule amongst them that any jewel won by them has to be shared and that it has been summoned by their mother too.

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<sup>482</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 125

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid, Karna Parva*, Chapter 78,12-13

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid, Sabha Parva*, Chapter 69, 9

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 71, 27

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 148

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 148

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 148

<sup>489</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 148

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 147



Thus Draupadī will be a ‘common wife’ to the brothers. And such a rule made by them cannot be disregarded.<sup>491</sup>

Drupada was not satisfied regarding such a decision. He said it has been a law that one man can have many wives, but it has never been heard that one woman can have more than one husband. He said that such an act was sinful and was not allowed by the Vedas. When Vyāsa was asked about his opinion, he said that the practice which was opposed by tradition and the Vedas has become obsolete.<sup>492</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira then said that he has heard in the *Purāṇa* that a lady of name Jatila, the foremost of all ‘virtuous’ women belonging to the race of Gotama had married seven Ṛṣi s. So also an ascetic's daughter, born of a tree, had in formerly married ten brothers, the Prachetas, ‘who were all of souls exalted by asceticism’.<sup>493</sup>

Vyāsa narrated Draupada a celestial reason. He narrated two stories as to why Draupadī is getting married to five men.<sup>494</sup> He said that formerly the celestials had once held a grand sacrifice in the forest of Naimisha. At that sacrifice Yama, the son of Vivaswat became the slaughterer of the devoted animals. Yama, thus employed in that sacrifice, did not (during that period) kill a single human being.<sup>495</sup>

Death being absent amongst the humans, the mortals increased. All the celestials went to Prajapati. He told the celestials that when Yama will be finished with the sacrifice, the problem will be resolved. The celestials went to the place where the sacrifice was taking place. There Indra saw a golden lotus being carried away. He followed it. Indra there saw a woman ‘possessing the splendour of fire’.<sup>496</sup> She was crying. When Indra asked her the reason she told him to follow her. Indra followed her. He saw a man with a young lady seated on a throne placed on one of the peaks of Himavat and playing dice. Indra told him that the universe was under his control, but the man who was playing dice did not pay any heed. Indra was annoyed by this.

The man who was playing dice was none other than Mahadeva. Seeing him Indra became scared. When Mahadeva told Indra to remove the stone of a cave, he saw there four other Indras. Mahadeva said that all of them have to take birth in the world

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<sup>491</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 147

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 148

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 149

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 149

of men and have to kill a large number of men but they would regain the region of Indra on the basis of their meritorious deeds. Then the other Indras replied that the gods Dharma, Vayu, Maghavat, and the twin Aswins beget them upon their would-be mother. Indra said that instead of going himself, he will send a portion of himself who will be responsible for the completion of this task. He also selected a woman of 'extraordinary beauty', who was Sri (goddess of grace) herself, to be their common wife in the world of mortals. The four other Indras are the other four Pandavas and the the portion of Indra was Arjuna.<sup>497</sup>

Vyāsa once again narrated another story validating the marriage of Draupadī to five men:

He said that in a hermitage there was a *Ṛṣi* 's daughter, who though was chaste, did not obtain a husband. The maiden gratified, by severe ascetic penances, the god Sankara (Mahadeva). The lord Sankara, gratified at her penances, told her himself to ask for a boon. Thus addressed, the maiden repeatedly said unto the boon-giving Supreme Lord that she desired to obtain a husband possessed of every accomplishment. Sankara, the chief of the gods, gratified with her, gave her the boon she asked and blessed her that she will have five husbands. But when she said that she desired to have only one husband, Sankara replied that as she has uttered it five times, she will have five husbands.

These two stories seem to be a later interpolation. A striking feature of this episode is that Yudhiṣṭhira tells that such a marriage already took place before. But both Draupad and Vyāsa tells that such an act is considered sinful and is opposed both in usage and in *Vedas*. If the stories of Yudhiṣṭhira is to be believed then why would have Draupad disagreed to such an arrangement. Even Vyāsa said so. And then Vyāsa provides with a heavenly connection and again tells another story. Here we find Kuntī taking her words back and that she also tried to save Draupadī from such a 'sin'. Earlier in the text it was she who said that if a woman is having sexual intercourse with more than four men, she is a harlot. Thus we find contradictory statements and stories overlapping which indicates clear interpolations.

In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* we find a reference to Draupadī where her story is constructed in such a way which illustrates that she was not married to five different

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<sup>497</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva, Chapter 149*

men but one.<sup>498</sup> The story is that once Indra for his sin of Vṛta's destruction (as he did not maintain a condition established by him) and after he dishonoured Ahalyā, his beauty disappeared. The *Daityas* wanted to vanquish him and for the same reason they were born in the races of mighty monarchs. The earth was greatly distressed by them and sought the help of the celestials. Thus the celestials in order to protect the creatures on earth divided their energy and descended on earth. When the deity *Dharma* put the energy of Indra's body in Kuntī, Yudhisthira was born, from God of wind, Bhima was born, Arjuna from Sakra's energy and the twins from Madri.<sup>499</sup> Draupadī thus was the wife of Indra only. The Yogis converted their bodies into many forms.<sup>500</sup>

The reference of legitimizing the marriage of Draupadī to five men even in the *Purāṇas* imply to the change in the position of women. Vyāsa himself says that condemning the practice of a woman marrying more than one husband has become obsolete and there are references to women who married more than one man. But the question that strikes here is regarding the woman's desire and consent in such a union, whether such a marriage was allowed for her when she desired for it? But narrowing down and narrating such a celestial aim for such a marriage indicates to the fact that polyandry was not allowed even if a man desired for it, as Chitraganda said that polyandry is not ordained.<sup>501</sup>

In all the stories subordination of women and the role and duties of a *pativrata* woman is well portrayed. Arjuna won her. But when it was decided that she will be a common wife to all, Arjuna who according to the rule should have married her did not say anything in favour of her. Rather he was performing his *dharma* toward his brothers. She was considered as an alm only as Yudhiṣṭhira said that it was a general conduct amongst them to divide an acquired gem amongst them and by no means will he break the rule. It was only Draupad, her father who opposed. Draupadī did not express any grievance while she was treated like an object.

Pritha, out of affection, pronounced a blessing upon her daughter-in-law who is “*endued with great beauty and every auspicious mark and possessed of a sweet disposition and good character that be to the husband as Sachi was to Indra, Swaha*

<sup>498</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 5

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid*, 8-23

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid*, 25

<sup>501</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Ashwamedha Parva*, Chapter 79

was to Vibhavasū, Rohini was to Soma, Damayanti was to Nala, Bhadrā was to Vaisrāvāṇa, Arundhati was to Vasishtha and as Lakshmi to Narayana.”<sup>502</sup> She blessed her to be the mother of ‘long-lived and heroic’ children. Kuntī advised her “to wait for her husbands who will be engaged in the performance of grand sacrifices and to remain devoted to her husbands”.<sup>503</sup> Though Kuntī like Kausalya was well aware of the hardships Draupadī may go through, what she blessed her with was for the betterment of her sons only.

The importance lied at Draupadī’s devotion, loyalty and service for her husbands. Though we see later in the text that the Pandavas obtains wife/ wives for themselves. Yudhiṣṭhira described her as the one “who is such that for her softness of heart, wealth of beauty and virtue, one may desire her for a wife...who is such that for the acquisition of Dharma, Artha and Kama one may desire her for his wife...who, retiring to bed last and rising from bed first, looks after the comforts of the cowherds and shepherds.”<sup>504</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira spoke these words when he was losing everything to the Kauravas in the game of dice. He already had put his brothers on stake and Draupadī was the last one he could stake. He described such when he was about to stake her as an object. The description shows that why as a stake she should be valuable to the owners.

Draupadī was always self-sacrificing and thoughtful for her husbands only. When the Pandavas lost the dice match to the Kuaravas, Draupadī was dragged to the court when she was in her menses and was dishonoured.<sup>505</sup> When Dhṛtarāstra out of affection for Draupadī, gave her a boon, she asked it for her husbands which saved them from slavery to the Kauravas.<sup>506</sup> Thus in such a situation when she herself was dishonoured and degraded that she thought only for the welfare of her husbands and not for herself as a true *pativrata* was expected to. Such an act performed by Draupadī has been described as, “We have not heard of such an act performed by any woman who are noted in this world for their beauty...when the sons of Pāṇḍu and Dhṛtarāstra were excited with anger...become their salvation...The sons of Pāṇḍu were sinking boatless in an ocean of distress, this Panchali, becoming a boat to them, brought them

<sup>502</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 201

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid*, *Sabha Parva*, Chapter 65, 35-37

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 68

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 71, 27,36

*safely to the shore.*<sup>507</sup> Thus she performed the duty as a ‘perfect wife’ was prescribed to do.

Even if we consider such a marriage a deviance we have to keep in mind that it was never her choice. She is said to marry the portions of one god only. Thus her purity remained intact.

Draupadī left Hastinapur “*bathed in tears, and clad in one piece of cloth, stained with blood, and with hair dishevelled left.*”<sup>508</sup> Her strong headedness and vengeance gets more apparent when she says, “*The wives of those for whom I have been reduced to such a plight, shall on the fourteenth year hence be deprived of husbands, sons and relatives and dear ones and smeared all over with blood, with hair dishevelled and all their feminine seasons enter Hastinapore having offered oblations of water unto the manes of those they will have lost.*”<sup>509</sup>

Dhṛtarāstra was aware of the result of Draupadī’s insult, the vengeance of a *pativrata* woman as he said afraid for his sons’ lives. He said, “*Can it be possible that even a single son of mine will be live?*” This shows the power a chaste woman possessed and how dangerous she could be when her self-respect was hurt. Draupadī did everything to make her husbands happy and satisfied but when she was insulted in a court filled with other men she could not stop herself from cursing the Kauravas for insulting her. She too abused her husbands for not protecting and supporting her when she was in a cṚṣi s. Her anger gets reflected when she says the following words:

*“During my season, stained with blood, with but a single cloth on, trembling all over, and weeping, was I dragged to the court of the Kurus! Beholding me, stained with blood in the presence of those kings in the assembly, the wicked sons of DhriTārāshtra laughed at me! While the sons of Pāṇḍu and the PancHālas and the Vrishnis lived, they dared express the desire of using me as their slave. Kṛṣṇa, I am, according to the ordinance, the daughter-in-law of both DhriTārāshtra and Bhishma. Yet, O slayer of Madhu, they wished to make of me a slave by force! I blame the Pandavas who are mighty and foremost in battle, for they saw (without stirring) their own wedded wife known all over the world, treated with such cruelty! ... This eternal course of morality is ever followed by the virtuous- Vis, that the husband,*

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<sup>507</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, Sabha Parva, Chapter 72, 1-3

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 68

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 79

*however weak, protects his wedded wife! By protecting the wife one protects his offspring, and by protecting the offspring one protects his own self! One's own self is begotten on one's wife, and therefore it is that the wife is called Jaya, A wife also should protect her lord, remembering that he is to take his birth in her womb! The Pandavas never forsake the person that solicits their protection; and yet they abandoned me, who solicited it I By my five husbands, five sons of exceeding energy have been born of me. For their sake it was necessary to protect me.”*<sup>510</sup>

Draupadī was one of those rare women who stood for her justice and burned like fire till her abuser was punished. But at the same time she like a true *pativrata* and docile wife served her husbands. In order to make her vengeance, a success Draupadu practised penances for Duryodhana's fall and the success of her husbands. She slept everyday on the bare ground and intended to continue the same till the end of the war.<sup>511</sup>

Even after enduring so much pain, Draupadī's husbands were always apprehensive about her. Rather than taking a stand, they expected Draupadī to deal with it herself. When the Pandavas were preparing for their last year in exile, they decided to go to the kingdom of Virata. Draupadī was to go as the *Sairindhri* (a class of maid servants employed in the service of others). She said it was the notion that no 'respectable' lady will enter into such a profession. Yudhiṣṭhira advised her that as she is born of a noble family and that she is a chaste lady; she should behave in such a way that the 'wicked' and 'sinful' men might not have a chance of 'deriving pleasure' from looking at her.<sup>512</sup>

Draupadī entered into the city in a dirty cloth. Even in such a circumstance she had to suffer due to the lust of another man. Yudhiṣṭhira's words – that the life of a chaste woman is full of difficulties goes true. When she entered into the kingdom all males and females came could not believe that a woman so beautiful like her can be a maid. Even Queen Sudesna could not believe her that she was a maid and was apprehensive and insecure in employing her as a maid because of her beauty. She said “*What male*

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<sup>510</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, Chapter 12*

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid, Shalva Parva, Chapter 5, 18*

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid, Virata Parva, Chapter 3, 21-22*

*person is there that will not be attracted by you?”*<sup>513</sup> She told her that she will keep her provided that the king does not desire her. The Queen was certain that the King will forsake her and will be attracted towards Draupadī. She said it will be like ‘welcoming her danger if she keeps her as a maid’. But Draupadī with pride replied her that it will not be possible as she had five Gandharvas as her husbands and they always protect her and anyone who will desire her will be killed by them and that “*no one is able to decoy me from the paths of rectitude.*”<sup>514</sup> This utterance of Draupadī shows a woman’s dependency on her husband for her protection and how vulnerable and insecure she can be in the society, be she a maid or a queen.

Despite her attempts to protect herself from the male gaze, Kicchaka, the brother of Sudesna was full of lust after seeing her. When he approached her she warned him about her husbands. That she was married did not stop him and he continued. Draupadī was physically assaulted by him in front of Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhima, the same situation she faced previously. She revoked Kichaka in front of everyone and praised her husbands. She very strongly condemned even her husbands who did not do anything even after seeing such an assault happening to their wife. She said, “*How do these mighty personages of exceeding energy quietly suffer, like eunuchs, their beloved and chaste wife to be thus outraged by the son of a Suta?*”<sup>515</sup> She did not leave king Virata and revoked him too. She said that the king does not act the way a king should and condemned his conduct ‘like that of a robber and not of a royal court’.<sup>516</sup> But her husbands did not do anything in order to keep their identity a secret. He told her to go to her apartment and said that the wives of heroes endure pain for the sake of their husbands; but undergoing trouble in waiting upon their lords they at last go to the regions where their husbands depart.

Draupadī went to Bhima to convince him for taking revenge. She condemned Yudhiṣṭhira for being submissive. But Bhima said that she should not insult him. In order to make her understand that how tolerant a wife should be, he gave example of other chaste women. He said that there was Indrasena who ‘resembled Narayani in beauty’ followed her husband of a thousand years of age.<sup>517</sup> Then he told about Sītā who after great difficulties was re-united with her husband. Lopamudra followed her

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<sup>513</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Virata Parva, Chapter 9, 24*

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid, Virata Parva, Chapter 9, 34*

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid, 28*

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid, 30-31*

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 21, 11*

husband and renounced all objects of enjoyment. He then gave the example of Savitri. In order to make him fulfil her revenge she said if a wife is protected, the progeny also remain protected.<sup>518</sup> She finally convinced Bhima to kill Kichaka.

Other Kichakas condemned her and called her an ‘unchaste woman’.<sup>519</sup> They decided to burn her with Kichaka. They acquired the permission of Virata who was aware of the power of the Kichakas. But again she was saved by Bhima. When she was returning to the palace people warned the king about her and her Gandharva husbands and that more injury can happen to his kingdom on account of her beauty as ‘men are undoubtedly lustful’.<sup>520</sup> So the king ordered her to anywhere. Rather than being given justice, she like Sītā was condemned when she became a victim of a man’s lust and was told to go to any other place. In Sītā’s instance it was her husband. But in both the stories, the common factor is the king, the upholder of justice. But both Sītā and Draupadī face abusement and dishonour publicly.

Whatever may have been the type of sanctioned marriage, a woman had to be a *pativrata* woman to save herself from various situations. As we have seen earlier that Sītā protected herself from the hands of Rāvaṇa through her purity and because she was chaste, she passed the fire-ordeal. In the same manner we see Śakuntalā fighting to prove her righteousness was saved by ‘a voice from the sky’ because of her chastity and her son. But like Rāmā, Duṣyanta was also afraid of public scandal. He said that he knew the truth that the boy was his son, but if he had taken him only on the strength of Śakuntalā’s words, his people would have been suspicious and his son also would not have been regarded as pure. Duṣyanta told his wife that as his union with Śakuntalā took place privately, so he did not certain of her purity. He said people would think that their union had taken place lustfully and not as husband and wife and that the one he has installed as a prince of impure birth.<sup>521</sup> We get the story of Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also.<sup>522</sup> But here Duṣyanta does not state as to why he did not accept Śakuntalā as his wife in the royal court. The voice from the heaven said, “*Bring up your son who is imbued with a ray of Vāsudeva. He is friendly towards Brāhmins...*”<sup>523</sup> In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa also enumerates the same

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<sup>518</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Virata Parva, Chapter 9, 40*

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 23, 5*

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 24, 4*

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 64*

<sup>522</sup> *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Ninth Skandha, Chapter 20*

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid, 22A-22B*



picture where a celestial voice tells Duṣyanta not to disrespect Śakuntalā and that she spoke the truth.<sup>524</sup>

Rāmā and Duṣyanta were suspicious and afraid of public scandal even after knowing the truth. But both these women held on to their strength of their morality and character whenever situation demanded. Sītā was unwavering about her decision of going to the forest even when her husband did not agree. She rebuked Rāvaṇa when her modesty was attacked. She left Rāma to maintain her honour and dignity and like the fire ordeal she performed such an act publicly. Śakuntalā too acted with all her strength. But even when both these women were accused by their husbands they only thought of their progeny's welfare only. When Lakṣmana went to leave Sītā in the forest, she was only concerned about Rāma only.

Chastity not only protected and rescued her from difficult situations but also gave her such immense power which made her perform such activities which even men could not endeavour for. Such power was used not only for saving her husband but also for saving the whole earth as Anasūyā did.

Anasūyā, the wife of sage Atri is considered to be the epitome. Anasūyā is described as *taam mahaabhaagam shithilaam pativraata*<sup>525</sup> and as *aaryaayaaH*.<sup>526</sup> That chastity gave a woman immense power is proved by the fact that when the earth was burnt up by famine for ten years, Anasūyā the 'virtuous woman' (*yayera*) produced fruit and roots and made the river Jahnavi to flow by performing severe penances. She practised it for ten thousand years and due to her ten nights was reduced to one night.<sup>527</sup> But this power did not come easy to her; she had to live a life of penance. It was all about self-control, compromises and self-less life.

A *pativrata* woman was shown to be self-sacrificing as we see Gāndhāri accepting the life of a blind even before getting married to Dhṛtarāstra. She is described as a beautiful, young and well-behaved woman. Bhīṣma heard from the Brahmā that the

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<sup>524</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Section IV, Chapter 19, 12-13

<sup>525</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Chapter 117, 17-18

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 118,2

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 117, 9-12

daughter of Suvala, Gāndhāri received a boon by worshipping Śiva<sup>528</sup> that the ‘amiable’ Gāndhāri would get one hundred one hundred sons.<sup>529</sup> He sent messengers to the king of Gandhara. Suvala hesitated on account of Dhṛtarāstra’s blindness.<sup>530</sup> But taking into consideration his noble lineage he bestowed ‘virtuous’ Gāndhāri on Dhṛtarāstra.<sup>531</sup>

Having heard of the blindness of Dhṛtarāstra and that her parents had consented to bestow her upon him, ‘ever-devoted to her husband’, Gāndhāri covered her own eyes with cloth with many folds so that even if she wants she will not be able to see.<sup>532</sup> She did this out of respect and love for her to-be husband. She pleased all the Kurus with her behaviour and conduct.<sup>533</sup> “She was devoted to her husband, pleased her superiors by her conduct and vow-observing nature and did not refer to any other man even in words.<sup>534</sup> Bhīṣma approached for Gāndhāri’s hand only after hearing about the boon Gāndhāri obtained. Thus progeny was the first thing that came to his mind and impressed him, was her power to give birth to male children and that too hundred of them!

On the other hand what attracted Gāndhāri’s father was the lineage of Dhṛtarāstra. He did not even consider the turmoil his daughter had to go through. Gāndhāri did not protest owing to her obedience towards her parents. She self-sacrificed her vision in order to share the pain of her to-be-husband. She was not only devoted to only one husband as it has been said with great importance that she did not even refer to any other man in words and made other members of her husband’s family happy. Gāndhāri by the merit earned through chastity cursed Kṛṣṇa. She assertively said that by the merit she has acquired by serving her husband, ‘a merit which is very difficult to attain’, she will curse him because he was indifferent to the Kurus and the Pandavas, while they were killing each other and thus he will be the destroyer of his own kinsmen.<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva, Chapter 110, 9*

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid, 10*

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid, 11*

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid, 12*

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid, 13*

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid, 18*

<sup>534</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva, Chapter 110, 19*

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid, Strīe Parva, Chapter 25, 42-45*

Gāndhāri did not argue when her marriage was arranged with a blind man. Such was also the case of Jaratkāru. Jaratkāru, wife of a Ṛṣi was brought up by her brother for a Ṛṣi to liberate his ancestors.<sup>536</sup> The Ṛṣi married her only on the condition that he will leave her when an offspring is born and will not maintain her. Not only this, he also put forward the condition that she should not do anything displeasing to him. If she does, he will leave her. The ‘illustrious’ served her husband of ‘hard life’ with the means of *Sweta Kakiya* (i.e. with the wakefulness of the dog, timidity of the deer and the sharp instinct of the crows to understand signs).<sup>537</sup> Once while Jaratkāru was pregnant the Ṛṣi was sleeping, while the Sun was setting. The wife was in great dilemma whether to wake him up or not. She thought as the Ṛṣi leads a hard routine throughout the day, she should not wake him up. On the other hand, if she does not wake him up, the time of prayer will pass and he will suffer the loss of virtue. The wife being anxious that he would lose his virtue, woke him up. But the husband took it as his insult and said that he would leave her.<sup>538</sup> Then he left her with her brother while the child was still in her womb.

The first thing that the wife kept in mind was her husband losing his virtue which he obtained through asceticism. She was also aware of the fact that he was tired and if she disappoints him, he will leave her. Even after being aware of the fact that her husband will leave her after the purpose of the marriage is met, she continued performing her duty. The story portrays that a wife should never think of herself and should see to it that her husband’s virtue is maintained. It was her responsibility. The Ṛṣi left her even before the child was born. The Ṛṣi did not see recognise the fact that he did not lose his virtue only because of his faithful and devoted wife. Even his ancestor obtained liberation through her only. It was the efficacy of a *pativrata* woman that a whole lineage was saved. Bhima also left Hidimba, a *Rakshasa* woman on the day she gave birth to a son. She agreed to the terms given by Bhima that he will return back to his mother and brothers the day she will give birth to a son.<sup>539</sup>

Another queen who suffered due to her husband’s wrong deeds is Damayanti. Nala and Damayanti fell in love in an unusual way and also achieved each other after overcoming a great obstacle when Damayanti chose him over the Gods who came to

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<sup>536</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva, Chapter 47, 2*

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid*, 11

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid*, 15-30

<sup>539</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, Chapter 55-56*

her *swyamvara*. Nala promised Damayanti that as she chose him to be her lord after rejecting the gods, he will obey her words and ‘as long as he is alive he will continue to be hers’.<sup>540</sup> Even Kali desired to possess Damayanti. He along with Dwapara made up his mind to possess her even if she was married to Nala.<sup>541</sup> Kali having found a fault in Nala possessed him.<sup>542</sup> He having entered into Nala, went to Pushkara and told him to play a game of dice.<sup>543</sup> Nala lost everything in the match. Nala and Damayanti had to leave the kingdom as Nala was not left with anything to put at stake.

In the forest Nala abandoned Damayanti as he was possessed by Kali. He told himself, “*For her spiritedness, nobody will be able to insult, on the way, this high-souled, chaste, and illustrious lady who is fondly devoted to me.*”<sup>544</sup> But when he saw himself naked he took away half of Damayanti’s cloth in order to cover himself up. He did all these when Damayanti was asleep. He felt embarrassed seeing his wife’s condition, “*My dear-loved wife, whom even the winds, or the sun could not see before, is even now lying asleep like one helpless on the ground of this inn.*”<sup>545</sup> He prayed for her protection by the gods and by her own virtue.<sup>546</sup> When Damayanti awoke she saw that her husband was not by her side and started looking for him. She could not understand what mistake she made. She did not worry about herself, but like Sītā she too was apprehensive about her husband’s welfare that how he was going to survive alone in the forest.<sup>547</sup>

While she was looking for her husband, she was consumed by a snake and was saved by a hunter. Seeing her dressed in half cloth, he felt lustful towards her. When Damayanti became aware of his purpose she was filled with anger and cursed him. At that moment only the hunter died.<sup>548</sup> After spending days in that forest, she saw a hermitage. She told the ascetics all about herself and what tragedy she has gone through. She declared that if within a few days she does not see Nala, she would renounce her body. The ascetics told her that by their ascetic power they can foresee that her future will be blissful and her royal husband being immaculate of his sins will

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<sup>540</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Vana Parva*, Chapter 57, 31-32

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 58

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid*, 3

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 62, 14

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid*, 21

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 62, 24

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 63, 11

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 63,

rule kingdoms.<sup>549</sup> Damayanti entered into the city of Suvaha, the king of the Chedis. Damayanti like Draupadī introduced herself as “*a woman, devoted to my husband and a female-servant belonging to a high caste.*”<sup>550</sup> When Queen-mother took her Damayanti told the Queen that she will stay with her only if she do not have to eat the leftovers nor she have to speak to other men. Damayanti said, “*If anybody shall solicit me repeatedly, that criminal person shall be punished by you. Or should he solicit me repeatedly, that criminal person shall be punished with death. This is the vow that I have pre-arranged. I will find out those Brāhmaṇas, who will search for my husbands.*”<sup>551</sup> Then the Queen-mother called Damayanti her own daughter and told her to be her companion and thus live with her without any apprehension.

On the other side of the story Nala helped the king of Nagas. In order to return his favour the king bites him. The king of Naga also changed his form. He said the person who is responsible for his misery has possessed him and that he had to live with his poison. He even told him that he will find his wife, daughter and sons and will also regain his kingdom. Nala then went to the city of Rituparna. He worked as the Superintendent of stables under the king Rituparna. While living there he always lamented for his wife and held himself responsible for his wife’s misery.<sup>552</sup> In the meantime, King Bhima sent *Brāhmaṇas* looking for his daughter and son-in-law. Sudeva found Damayanti. Queen-mother of the king of Chedi was also informed of the true story. After finding mark on her body, the queen-mother recognised Damayanti. Damayanti was the queen-mother’s sister’s daughter. *Brāhmaṇas* were sent in all directions in search of Nala, who were to spread out Damayanti’s grief-stricken words.

After a very long time, a *Brāhmaṇa* named Parnada came to the city of the king of the Vidarbhas and spoke to Damayanti about his visit to the city of Ayodhya. He told her what the king’s charioteer told him. This charioteer was Nala. Nala said, “*Although fallen into great calamity, the chaste women guard themselves by their own efforts; and thus undoubtedly obtain heaven (heavenly blessings). Again chaste women, even if they be forsaken by their husbands, do never become angry (with them); rather they hold their lives shielded by virtuous behaviours. She should not be angry, forsaken as*

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<sup>549</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Vana Parva*, Chapter 64, 92-95

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 65, 55

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 65, 67-70

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 67

*she was a person, who himself was foolish, overtaken by distress, and also as destitute of all happiness. It behoves the lady of unchanging youth not to be angry with a person, who was deprived of his cloth by a bird while trying for sustenance...also, it behoves the lady, treated fairly or unfairly, not to be angry with her husband, seeing him in that miserable condition, in which he was deprived of both wealth and kingdom, and oppressed with hunger, and overwhelmed with distress.”*<sup>553</sup>

Damayanti by the words spoken knew that it was her husband. So she planned to get her husband back. She told Sudeva to help her and go to king Rituparna and tell him that as it is not known that whether Nala is alive or not, a *Swayamvara* will be held “*to which all the kings and princes are rushing from all directions...At the next sunrise she will accept a second husband...*”<sup>554</sup> When Nala heard this, he ‘burned with sorrow’.<sup>555</sup> He believed that Damayanti will not be able to do it “*as she is struck by sorrow for me...especially because she has got children by me.*”<sup>556</sup> But Nala decided to go by himself and see if the whole story was real or not.

King Rituparna also went for the *swayamvara* ceremony. Impressed by Nala, king Rituparna wanted to possess the knowledge of horses from Nala and in return Nala wanted Rituparna’s knowledge of dice. While Nala gained the knowledge of dice, Kali came out of his body. When Nala was about to curse him, Kali said that from the time he was cursed by Damayanti (when Nala left Damayanti in the forest), his soul has been burning and by doing so Nala will be blessed with great fame. But Nala did not gain his real form.<sup>557</sup>

Damayanti hearing the clattering of the horses knew that it was Nala, but she could not see him anywhere as Nala was not in his real form. There were confusions regarding his form. Nala was closely observed by Damayanti’s maid and his behaviour was found to be ‘extraordinary’. Nala was oppressed seeing Damayanti filled with sorrow and told her everything. Nala told her that it was for her that he came here.<sup>558</sup> He said he could not believe that she desired to choose a second husband, “*And like an unchaste woman, she would choose one, worthy of her,*

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<sup>553</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Vana Parva*, Chapter 70, 8-12

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid*, chapter 70, 25-26

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 71, 3

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid*, 7

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 72

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 76, 16-17

whomever she likes.”<sup>559</sup> Damayanti replied that it was not proper for him, to think like that about her.

Damayanti was greatly afflicted by the suspicion of Nala and asked for the gods’ help, “*Let the three gods that preside over the whole of the three worlds, relate the whole history truly; or let them abandon me today.*”<sup>560</sup> The wind god came and testified Nala’s unadulterated character: “*O monarch, protected by Damayanti, the honour of your family, even as the wealth has much increased. We bear testimony to this, as we have been her protectors for the last three years... You should not doubt about her conduct.*”<sup>561</sup> It was the power of her unpolluted character that not only gifted her with divine power, but celestial beings helped her out in her crisis.

Like Jaratkāru and Damayanti, the fate of Ambā’s was tied at the hands of the patriarchal society. Jaratkāru and Damayanti out of their devotion and loyalty towards their husband suffered every trial and torment with silence. But Ambā due to patriarchal ego was not only unable to attain her love but she sacrificed her life. But she made this sacrifice on order to acquire justice. It was a man’s insecurity regarding women that brought Ambā to such a turn. Primarily she was taken by force by another man and when she took a stand for her love against the patriarchal conventions; her lover like Rāmā, rejected her for being touched by another man. But unlike Sītā, she did not get the opportunity to prove her purity of her character. Once again when she returned to Bhīṣma, she was rejected by him. Ambā could not go back to her own father’s abode as she knew she would not be accepted there, being rejected by other men which would bring about shame for her family.<sup>562</sup>

Bhīṣma did injustice to Ambā on multiple standards. For his family and lineage and order to maintain his vow of celibacy he rejected Ambā. Ambā like a loyal and devoted woman went against the norms and standards of the society for the man she loved. This whole episode also points to the fact that even in a swayamvara where a girl could make her choice (though with certain limitations) she could be abducted by another man (not present in the *swayamvara*). This was called the *Rakshasa* form of marriage which was considered suitable for the Ksatriyas. Thus the male authority always had an upper hand. When she returned to the man she loved, he rejected her as

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<sup>559</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Vana Parva*, Chapter 76, 21

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 76, 35

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 76, 37-39

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid*, *Udyoga Parva*, Chapter 178

she was touched by another man. Physical impurity was given more importance than mental purity. Mental purity was not visible to the society, but the bodily impurity was very much visible.

During the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, Bhīṣma did not want to fight Sikhandini. When Duryodhana asked the reason behind it, Bhīṣma's story focuses on many aspects. For getting wives for his brother, Vichitraviryya went to the kingdom of Kashi to get the princesses Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālika. When he went there he saw the three girls ornamented and kings of different places were invited. Bhīṣma challenged them. He defeated them and took the three princesses with him by force.  
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The wedding day was fixed by Satyavatī. But the eldest of the daughters of Kashi came to him and informed him she has already chosen king of the Shalwas as her husband and she was selected by him as his future wife, her father being unaware.<sup>564</sup> She told it will be not proper for him to make her his brother's wife as she is 'desirous' of being united with another man. Then it was decided that she will be permitted to go to the king of Shalwa. She was escorted by old twice-born men and maid-servants. But the king of Shalwa did not accept her as she was taken by another man and doubted on her character and told her to go back to Bhīṣma.

Ambā told him that she was loyal to him and she was taken by Bhīṣma by force and that no religion allows the desertion of the devoted.<sup>565</sup> Ambā also told him that Bhīṣma did not carry her away for himself but for his brothers and that she does not want any other husband other than himself.<sup>566</sup> Though Ambā pleaded so much to him to accept her, but Shalwa abandoned her. She was disappointed not only by Bhīṣma but also her father as he fixed valour to be her dower as if she was an object that could be sold.<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Udyoga Parva, Chapter 173*

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 174, 6*

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 175, 12*

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 175, 16*

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid, 31*



Ascetics advised to go back to her father as for a woman, only a husband or the father can provide protection. *“A husband is a woman’s refuge under smooth circumstances and in a difficult situation; a father is a refuge...”*<sup>568</sup>

Ambā’s grandfather advised to seek the refuge of Rāmā. She requested him to slay Bhīṣma. At first he refused to do so, but Hotravahana reminded him that he swore to protect those who came to him to take refuge. Rāmā agreed to fight with Bhīṣma if he would not accept his proposal. He accused Bhīṣma of robbing her of ‘virtue’ as she has been touched by him and thus it is proper only for him to marry Ambā.<sup>569</sup> Rāmā told him that because of him she will not get any husband.<sup>570</sup> But Bhīṣma rejected her on the basis that her that she accepted Shalwa as her husband.

*“Who will permit a woman, who sighs for another and who is therefore like a poisonous snake, to remain in his house knowing the great evils thereof.”*<sup>571</sup>

Bhīṣma and Rāmā entered into a fierce battle with one another. But Rāmā was unable to defeat him. Ambā then practised great austerity to find a way to defeat Bhīṣma. She was disgusted to possess a woman’s body. She felt that she was cut off from the happiness a woman gets from having a husband due to Bhīṣma. Ambā accused Bhīṣma that he has brought her to a point where she is neither a man nor a woman.<sup>572</sup> She thus wanted to be a man. As she knew being a woman she will not be able to slay Bhīṣma in the battle. Rudra blessed her so. But she would retain both the man and the woman form. She thus entered into the fire for the destruction of Bhīṣma.<sup>573</sup> In the next birth though she was born as a woman but was later converted into a male. This turn in the Ambā-Bhīṣma episode reflects the sufferings a woman had to go through due to the patriarchal limitations that were imposed on her, while being a man she her achievements could be limitless. One of them was asceticism. Asceticism for women meant her married life and her devotion for her husband. But in the epics we get reference to women who achieved salvation without a husband. But again we would see that even though achieved salvation without a husband, but this salvation was possible due to a male figure only.

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<sup>568</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Udyoga Parva, Chapter 176, 8*

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 180, 6*

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid, 19*

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid, 22*

<sup>572</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Udyoga Parva, Chapter 190*

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 189, 2-9*

### Female Ascetics

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* there is a reference to a female ascetic who attains heaven. But though she is unmarried she attains heaven by rendering service to Rāmā, a male who came to her as a guest. Kabandha told Rāmā and Lakṣmana about a forest where Rsis who were disciples of sage Matanga lived.<sup>574</sup> The forest was called *Mataṅgavana*.<sup>575</sup> They had a female attendant, ‘an ascetic’ called Sabari who was ‘long lived’ even after the sages died. She is described by Kabandha as “*The woman, who is ever devoted to virtue, will ascend to heaven*” only after seeing Rāmā, the ‘god-like’.<sup>576</sup> The place where Sabari was located was hidden from public view.<sup>577</sup>

When Rāmā and Lakṣmana reached the hermitage of Sabari, she clasped the feet of Rāmā and of Lakṣmana and attended them with due hospitality.<sup>578</sup> Through Rāmā she received the boon for her asceticism and hard penance. The sages she served told her that she will receive Rāmā and Lakṣmana as guests, “*Having seen him you will ascend to realms that know no decay.*”<sup>579</sup> “*Casting herself into the fire...Sabari, who were matted locks on her head and was clad in the bark of trees and black deerskin, rose to the heaven.*”<sup>580</sup> She obtained the same realm the Rsis achieved through their merits.<sup>581</sup> Like Ahalyā, she was also emancipated after receiving Rāmā with due rituals of hospitality. Even Marica, Kabandha<sup>582</sup> were also released from their curse after having been physically assaulted by him.

In the *Mahābhārata* the story of an old virgin lady is narrated who is described as ‘faultless and amiable’ and practised severe and rigid penances. Though her father wanted to give her in marriage, she did not wish for it, as she saw no husband who is worthy of her.<sup>583</sup> She withered her body with austerities and penances. At last when she became old she decided to go to the other world. Seeing about to renounce her body, Nārada said to her that she cannot attain the ‘blissful region’ as she did not purify herself by the rite of marriage.<sup>584</sup> He said, “*Great has been your ascetic merit, but you have no claim to blissful regions.*”<sup>585</sup> Then the old lady went to an assembly

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<sup>574</sup>The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 73, 23

<sup>575</sup>Ibid, 29

<sup>576</sup>Ibid, 27

<sup>577</sup>Ibid, 28

<sup>578</sup>Ibid, Chapter 74, 6-7

<sup>579</sup>Ibid, 16

<sup>580</sup>Ibid, 32

<sup>581</sup>Ibid, 35

<sup>582</sup>Ibid, Chapter 71-72

<sup>583</sup>The *Mahābhārata*, Shalva Parva, Chapter 51-52, 6

<sup>584</sup>Ibid, 10

<sup>585</sup>Ibid, 11

of *Ṛṣi* and said that she will give half of her penances to the man who will marry her.<sup>586</sup> A *Ṛṣi* known by the name Shringavat married her on the condition that she will live him for only one night. As per the condition she left him and went to heaven. She is described as a ‘chaste’ woman. But casting off his body soon he too followed her. Unlike in the *Jātakas*, a text that belong to the Buddhist tradition where a woman could attain to spiritualism without getting married, the epics mostly portrayed that salvation for the female ascetics was possible only through a male agent. But again we do find a reference wherein the daughter of a *Brahmani* woman described as “*chaste, observant of severe vows, self-restrained and led a life of celibacy*”<sup>587</sup> practised penances difficult for women to perform and then went to heaven.<sup>588</sup> This shows the struggle of the Brahmanical tradition to maintain its dominance through various modulations within its realm.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* again we come across another female ascetic called Swayamprabhā. The monkeys headed by Hanumān and other leaders while searching for Sītā came across a cave known as Ṛkṣakila. When they entered the cave they came across an ascetic woman<sup>589</sup> who was “*clad in bark and black antelope skin, restrained in her diet and burning as it were with glory on that spot*”<sup>590</sup> who was *vridham*<sup>591</sup>, *tapasvim*<sup>592</sup>, *dharmacarini* and *mahabhagam*<sup>593</sup>. Hanuman enquired about her and the cave. She told Hanuman that the cave was built by Maya.<sup>594</sup> He was attracted to a celestial nymph Hema, but he was killed by Indra. Swayamprabhā was the daughter of Merusāvarni and was the friend of Hema. She guards the cave on her behalf. The cave was bestowed on Hema by Brahmā.<sup>595</sup> Being pleased with her service, Hanuman offered her service in return. But Swayamprabhā said as she practices ‘righteousness’ their service will not be required by her.<sup>596</sup> Hanuman on the other hand asked for her help to get out of the cave.<sup>597</sup> Swayamprabhā said that it is impossible to leave the cave once they have entered it. But she by her ascetic power would get them out of

<sup>586</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, Shalva Parva, Chapter 51-52, 12

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 54, 7

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid*, 8

<sup>589</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, Chapter 50

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid*, 39

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid*, 41

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 51, 1

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid*, 11

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid*, 12-18

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 52, 16

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid*, 20-23

the cave.<sup>598</sup> She at once got Hanuman and the other monkeys out of the cave at once.<sup>599</sup> Swayamprabhā guided them on the nearby geographical location.

Unlike Sabari, Swayamprabhā is sketched as a stronger character. Though both of them were virtuous and were devoted to asceticism, but Swayamprabhā's spiritual journey was less bounded to patriarchy. Sabari's spiritual journey and her ultimate salvation were completed through men. Swayamprabhā on the other hand did not accept Hanuman's service, rather she helped him and his men. She too possessed knowledge of the geographical location around her cave and guided Hanuman and his men. The difference in the treatment of these two characters might entail to the reconstruction of attitude toward female ascetics. These indicate to the changes and modulation the Brahmā nical texts were going through in order to hold their ground and dominance in the society.

Within the celestial world there are the *Apsarās* and we find their mention in the epics also. It will be interesting to locate the precept of chastity among them which will help in understand how chastity was practised and portrayed amongst these celestial women.

### ***Apsarās***

An *Apsarā* is the celestial damsel and is different from the *veśyā*. She was for the entertainment and enjoyment of the celestial beings. The *Apsarās* helped the gods in achieving particular aims. It is through their seductive power that the gods used to break the penance of many who posed threat to them. All the gods and demons refused to accept them as their wife. Due to the denial by the gods and demons they came to be known as public women.<sup>600</sup> There are also other stories related to their origin. The *Mahābhārata* states that the *Apsarās* were born of Kapila.<sup>601</sup> Thus unlike the *veśyās* they were shown to have a celestial and divine origin. But even an *Apsarā* was apprehensive about maintaining her chastity when she was bound to a man for a particular period of time. During that period of time it was sinful for her to be approached by another man. If any other man imposed himself on an *Apsarā* while she was tied to a particular man, the other man was punished for such an act.

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<sup>598</sup> The *Rāmāyana*, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, Chapter 52, 24-25

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid*, 26-32

<sup>600</sup> The *Rāmāyana*, *Bālakāṇḍa*, Chapter 45, 35

<sup>601</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 63

Rāvaṇa forced himself on Rambha, the *apsarā*. Rambha also warned that it is not proper for him to do so, as he is her elder and is the wife of his brother's (Kubera) son, Nalakūbara, as she has been appointed for a certain period and that according to such a circumstance Rāvaṇa is suppose to protect her. But Rāvaṇa did not listen to her and said, “*Celestial nymphs have no husband nor are gods committed to a single wife; such is the eternal law in the realm of gods.*”<sup>602</sup> Nalakūbara was enraged by it and cursed Rāvaṇa that since he has violated her by using force he will no longer be able to approach sexually any other woman who is not willing to accept him. If he does, he will be split into seven pieces.<sup>603</sup> Hearing of such a curse Rāvaṇa did not force himself on a woman. Women who were devoted to their husbands and were abducted by him were elated to hear this.<sup>604</sup>

While the wife was mainly revered for her service, loyalty and devotion towards the husband, the *Apsarās* was famous for their beauty. Her sexual beauty was not only the source of amorous enjoyment but was also instrumental in attaining other purposes too. Their body and beauty was their identity which provided them with recognition. But they too were chained by the male dominance. The *Apsarās* became public women because they were denied a marital recognition not only by the gods but also by the demons. It was not a self-induced decision but rather a denial that did not left them with any choice.

Though they did not belong to one particular man, but when she was serving one god for a certain period of time, she belonged to him only and thus violating her was considered sinful. We find the same constituent in the *Padma Purāṇa* wherein a *veśya* says how she is like a chaste woman and postulated the same reason.

### **The Patriarchs**

We get references to man who maintained their purity of mind and controlled their senses and acted within the limitations of the morals of the society.

Lakṣmana said: “*Surely this jewel was dropped on a grassy ground by Sītā while being borne away as it looks the same in appearance.*”<sup>605</sup> He said, “*Neither do I*

<sup>602</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Uttārākāṇḍa*, Chapter 26, 38-39

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid*, 42-44

<sup>604</sup> *Ibid*, 59-60

<sup>605</sup> *Ibid, Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, Chapter 6,21

recognize the armlets, nor do I know the earrings, I only recognize the anklets due to my bowing at her feet every day.”<sup>606</sup> Laksmana said this when Rāmā was identifying the jewels dropped by Sītā when she was being abducted by Rāvaṇa. Rāmā met Sugriva to make a deal with him, according to which Sugriva would help him to locate and get her back from the clutch of the abductor. That Laksmana could not recognise Sītā’s earrings and armlets but could identify her anklets due to bowing at her feet everyday shows the strong morality of Laksmana. We see throughout the epic Laksmana following the moral code of conduct that was laid down for men and women. Even when he enters the inner apartment of Sugriva for confronting him he feels ashamed by the presence of other women and sound of their ornaments. He saw many ‘beautiful damsel’.<sup>607</sup> “Hearing the sounds of women’s girdles and their anklets Laksmana became ashamed.”<sup>608</sup> He highly became enraged at the sound of the ornaments<sup>609</sup> and filled the quarters by the twang of his bow. Laksmana...restraining his anger on the approach of a female (Tārā), stood with his head hung down, conducting himself like an ascetic.”<sup>610</sup>

The city of Ayodhya is sketched as a perfect city which implies that Rāmā had to be a perfect king meting out proper justice and according to people’s thinking and needs.<sup>611</sup> Emphasis is on the just character of the people, the spies and the ministers.<sup>612</sup> Rāmā was sculpted to be an ideal in every way, as a human, a son, kind towards his step-mother, a ruler and Sītā’s character was just his counterpart.

Rāmā’s character is in sharp contrast to that of Rāvaṇa. While Rāmā never thought of any other woman, Rāvaṇa is framed just the opposite. Sītā talks about three types of addiction. One of them is the copulation with another man’s wife. Rāmā’s devotion and loyalty towards her is reflected in her speech when she says that desire cannot originate in his mind for another man’s wife as it destroys *Dharma*. He “has not got it nor will it ever” be with him<sup>613</sup> and that he is always devoted to his wife.<sup>614</sup> While Rāmā and Laksmana were self-restrained in their behaviour towards women, their

<sup>606</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 22

<sup>607</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, Chapter 33, 24

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid*, 26

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid*, 27

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid*, 39

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid*, *Bālakāṇḍa*, Chapter 6

<sup>612</sup> “The citizens of Ayodhya were looked after by Rāmā as by a father with due regard to what was conducive to one’s good, what was agreeable to an individual and what was brought happiness to one. *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 57, 14

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 7

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 9, 5

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid*, 7

behaviour towards Surpanakha, a Raksasi is unacceptable. Like Surpanakha, Hidimba in *Mahābhārata* also proposes Bhima for marriage, but Bhima did not behave so cruelly nor did he because any physical violence on her as Rāmā and Laksmāna did.

In the *Mahābhārata* we see how Bhīṣma for his father took the vow that he would not throw his seminal fluid through the regular passage.<sup>615</sup> Keshava appreciated Bhīṣma's celibacy and said to him that while living in the climax of prosperity, he has seen him foregoing female intercourse though surrounded by female companions.<sup>616</sup>

Karṇa though did not take any such vow but he resisted to the proposal made by Kṛṣṇa to him. Kṛṣṇa tried to convince Karṇa to take the side of the Pandavas by telling about his lineage. Karṇa was born to Kuntī from the Sun-god before her marriage. Vasudeva said that the two classes of sons called *Karina* and *Sahodha*, which are begotten on a girl before her marriage, have for their father, the man married by their mother. Thus Pāṇḍu is his father.<sup>617</sup> Kṛṣṇa told him how the Pandavas will 'accept his feet'.<sup>618</sup> But Karṇa's devotion and loyalty was not shaken by such a proposal. It was an improper act on Kṛṣṇa's behalf to use Draupadī as bait to include Karṇa on their side.

During the sixth period Draupadī too will come to him 'as to a husband'.<sup>619</sup> But Karṇa did not accept his proposal and told him that Kuntī who gave birth to him did not think about his welfare and abandoned him.<sup>620</sup> A *suta* adopted him who performed all the necessary rituals. He also married wives according to his choice.<sup>621</sup> But at the same time we also see later in the *Karṇa Parva* as pointed out by Kṛṣṇa that how he deviated from the path of morality. When Karṇa's wheel sanked to the Earth, he asked Arjuna to wait for a while as it was not virtuous for Arjuna to kill him at that moment. Then Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna that where was 'virtue' when he, Duryodhana, Dushasana, shakuni brought Draupadī clad in one piece of cloth before the court and where was his virtue when he laughed at Draupadī while she was improperly dressed and in her

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<sup>615</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Udyoga Parva*, Chapter 147, 33

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid, Shanti Parva*, Chapter 51, 20

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid, Udyoga Parva*, Chapter 140, 8-9

<sup>618</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 141, 3-4

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid*, 10

season was standing at the court at Dushasana's will.<sup>622</sup> Thus virtue functioned at multiple levels. The definition of virtue changed according to situations, characters and gender.

## CONCLUSION

The difficult life of a chaste woman and the very recognition of those difficulties have been narrated in the *Mahābhārata*. Yudhiṣṭhira said that a woman's greatness is 'too difficult to be understood'.<sup>623</sup> He said that as all esteemed persons are to be respected, as also the women who are devoted to one husband. The service that chaste women offer to their husbands, seem to be very difficult. Yudhiṣṭhira said that chaste women are blameless who control their senses, restrain their minds and only think upon their husbands as gods. He said that he does not find anything more difficult than the duties of chaste women towards their husbands. He finds those women who are attached to one man, speak truth and conceive in their womb a child for full ten months and to those who in due time are suffer great troubles and extraordinary pains, to be 'wonderful'. He said women give birth to their children with great pain to themselves and they bring them up with great affection.<sup>624</sup> Yudhisthira's words expresses how a woman had to go through ordeals everyday in order to fit into the society's moralistic frame.

The epics help us to understand how the concept of chastity evolved and its definition changed with time, thus affecting the position and life of women within and outside the institution of marriage. Through idolisation of characters society was taught the moralistic code of conduct. The process of imposition of such ideals was done also through various speeches articulated by the ideal characters of the text. Anything that did not follow the customs of the Brahmanical tradition was considered impure, as was Rāvaṇa and his kingdom. But through various interpolations within the text helps us in reconstructing the concept. It facilitates the understanding of the past and the changes that the society went through influencing the scriptures of the time.

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<sup>622</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Kaṇa Parva*, Chapte 91, 2,7

<sup>623</sup> Ibid, *Vana Parva*, Chapter 204,1

<sup>624</sup> Ibid, Chapter 204, 2-12



The main aim behind the presentation of ideal characters was to teach its audience a particular code of conduct deviating which would be considered a transgression. These ideal characters always had something in common in their portrayal. Even if such characters showed traits of adamant behaviour it was suppose to be meant for the welfare of their husbands. Her chastity not only gave her honour and recognition in the society but the husband was held in high esteem. It was her chastity that saved her from the lustful eyes of other men. It was considered to be one of her duties to prove her chastity not only in front of her husband, but also in front of other people in order to avoid social stigma. But the epics show clear traits of the changing attitude within the Brahmanical society following the policy of inclusion by inculcating within itself various other traditions, castes and approach regarding women. The interesting part lies in the fact that there are many ideal characters whose code of conduct can be questioned within the prescribed norms, like Laksmana and Rāmā's behaviour towards the *Raksasis* who approached them. They were men of noble families, but their violent behaviour in such circumstances reflects the other side of their character. Reciprocation of such high born noble men in regard to their wives shows the dominance of patriarchy in the society and in the minds of men and how men helped in forming such precepts like chastity.

## CHAPTER 3: DEVIANCE IN THE GREAT EPICS

### INTRODUCTION

The treatment meted out to the one who transgresses from the prescribed path of chastity differed according to the caste and gender, both of which were intertwined. The verses in various ancient Indian texts imply how the changing social environment affected the life of men and women accordingly. The Epics are a treasure of stories, which carried within itself various moral teachings. Women were the primary focus as far as the concept of chastity was concerned as she was the main mediatory in the process of intermixture of caste, which at any rate was supposed to be avoided. The *Mahābhārata* says that one who becomes guilty of cohabitation with a woman that would lead to intermixture of caste should be punished by death.<sup>625</sup> Even the king is also advised to be ‘alert’ and ‘strict’ about it, because if he does not restrain it, an intermixture of caste takes place.<sup>626</sup> Due to intermixture of caste, even men were looked down upon and were said to have a ‘miserable’ life.<sup>627</sup> But such was not the case when a *brāhmaṇa* married a *kshatriya* or the vice versa, though there were clear indications of a Brahmanical dominance. In the Ancient Indian texts, various forms of literature were created to make the people follow this societal code. The Rāmāyaṇa shows a settled society with well-established societal system including focussed and stringent imposition over women, caste system and kingship.

The *Shanti Parva* and the *Anuśāsana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* talk very rigidly in regard to gender and caste. They were not only apprehensive about the intermixture of caste and behaviour and conduct of women but were also concerned about emergence of other new religions which provided a new way for the people upon whom Brahmanical religion looked down upon. Thus the “*rejection of one’s own religion and the following of other people’s religion was a forbidden act*”.<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Karṇa Parva, Chapter 65,22*

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid, Shanti Parva, Chapter 90,34*

<sup>627</sup> *Ibid, Karṇa Parva, Chapter 171*

A *brāhmaṇa* who married a shudra widow is sketched in a negative shade. He is shown to be a man who was ungrateful (he killed a crane who helped him when he was in cṚṣi s), as one who was shorn of ‘Brahmānic splendour’ and Vedic studies.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid, Shanti Parva, Chapter 35, 10*

In the *Mahābhārata* we find mention of practices that was followed in earlier days than that of the time of the text. Thus we get a picture of traditions and norms that were followed in the earlier days and how with the creation of patriarchy new customs, laws and morals evolved, chastity being one of them that shackled the life of women. Bhīṣma mentioned that being commanded by her father, Savitri had in ‘days of old’ chose a husband and united with him. This act of hers is praised by some while others condemn it.<sup>629</sup> Sukratu, the grandson of the great Janaka, the king of the Videhas has said that there was the ‘well-known’ sanction of the scriptures that women can enjoy freedom at any period of their life. He terms such a practice as ‘virtuous’ and says or else it would not have been mentioned in the scriptures and thus one should not ‘condemn’ it.<sup>630</sup> Thus women were comparatively independent in making choices and decisions about their life. At the same time through *Mahābhārata* we come to know that it was the patriarchal anxiety and ego about female sexuality that led to the formulation of the concept of chastity that bounded women within limitations.

Pāṇḍu in order to convince Kuntī to produce an offspring on another man narrated to her about the “*practices of earlier days as sanctioned by celebrated Ṛṣis who were fully acquainted with every rule of morality.*”<sup>631</sup> As per the early norms, women were neither confined within the boundaries of houses nor were dependent on husbands and or on their kin. They moved about freely and enjoyed themselves. They were not loyal to their husbands only and this was not regarded sinful as such behaviour was the ‘sanctioned’ custom and was supported by the *Ṛṣis* too. He said that the ‘present’ practice i.e. of women's confinement to various regulations and conventions that are devised to control women is a later development. He narrated the basis on which such restraints were imposed upon.

In order to get control of the female body and her sexuality, the evolution of the concept of chastity took place. This precept of chastity with time became more belligerent.

In the ‘present’ time of the *parva*, women are in general considered sinful as portrayed in other Ancient Indian texts too. In the *Anuśāsana Parva* of the

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<sup>629</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 45, 4

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid*, 7

<sup>631</sup> *Ibid*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 122

*Mahābhārata* we get a lengthy and detailed episode of a conversation between Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīṣma regarding the characteristics of women, their duties and the nature of relation with men. Yudhiṣṭhira said that the Ṛṣis have said that “*women in particular are false in behaviour*”.<sup>632</sup> Bhīṣma gives an account of a story which implied that women desires sexual union for pleasure only and that is the only pleasure women derive from the opposite sex.<sup>633</sup> For deriving such pleasure they do not feel any pain. He mentioned a story whereby a man gets converted to a woman and he desired to remain so because according to him a woman enjoys the most during a sexual union.<sup>634</sup>

In order to make Yudhiṣṭhira understand the deceitful and false behaviour of women, he narrated to him the conversation between Ashtavakra and the woman called Disa. Ashtavakra of severe penances wanted to marry Ṛṣi Vadanya’s daughter. But the Ṛṣi told him to go to North and meet a female ascetic. Only when he would return after meeting her, that he would give his daughter in marriage to him.<sup>635</sup> When the Ṛṣi reached North, he saw a beautiful palace made of gold and other kind of gems. It was inhabited by Ṛṣis. He was received by seven maidens. Ashtavakra lost control over his senses after seeing them. But he finally controlled his feelings. After entering into the palace he met an old lady in white robes adorned with ornaments.

The old woman approached him for a sexual union and told that union with her would give the same reward which one receives after practising severe penances. She told him to become her 'lord' and she would be obedient to him and would fulfil all his wishes. She said a woman derives maximum pleasure from a man. “*They do not feel any pain even if they walk over a desert of burning sand.*”<sup>636</sup> When under the influence of desire, they do not care about family or father or mother or brother or husband or sons or husband's brother. For achieving such pleasure they can destroy their marital as well as parental household. Even the Creator testified to this.<sup>637</sup> “*Only among hundreds of thousands women, that one woman is devoted to her husband*”.<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 19, 6-7

<sup>633</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 19, 80

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 12

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 19

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid*, 80

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid*

Ashtavakra reproached the old ascetic and said that it is not proper to approach another man's wife and such an act is condemned by the scriptures and that he desires sexual union with his own wife only in order to obtain offspring. *"After obtaining an offspring, he would proceed to the region which is difficult to obtain without severe austerities"*.<sup>639</sup>

The old ascetic again approached Ashtavakra and said *"there is no sin in having sexual pleasure with her, as she is her own master"*.<sup>640</sup> But Ashtavakra said that no woman is independent and she cannot be her own master. *"The father protects her while she is a maiden. The husband protects her while she is in youth. Sons protect her when she is aged. Women can never be independent as long as they live."*<sup>641</sup> She told him that since childhood she has adopted the vow of *Brahmācharyya* and is still a maiden.<sup>642</sup> The old ascetic told him to marry her if it is not possible for him to have any sexual union with a woman who is not his wife.<sup>643</sup> But Ashtavakra did not surrender himself to the desires of the old woman as he was to marry *R̥ṣi* Vadanya's daughter and maintained his self-control.<sup>644</sup>

The old woman informed him that all this was done to test the character of Ashtavakra. But this ordeal direct to the extended beliefs of the society – the devious nature of women remains the primary object as the female ascetic says that *"even old age cannot stop women from having sexual desires"*<sup>645</sup> and that a woman can never be independent or else she will be a threat to the society owing to her sexuality. The story also outlines as to how chastity was perceived for men.

Yudhiṣṭhira asked Bhīṣma if women are imbued with so many faults, then why men still attach themselves with them.<sup>646</sup> He said *"while men take pleasure with women, women cheat on them. At the same time it is not possible for men to escape ignore women. Women are always in search of new men."*<sup>647</sup>

Bhīṣma repeatedly enumerated the faults and adverse nature of women. He said that all human beings were righteous and with time they attained the status equal to that of

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<sup>639</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 19, 80

<sup>640</sup> Ibid, Chapter 20

<sup>641</sup> Ibid

<sup>642</sup> Ibid

<sup>643</sup> Ibid

<sup>644</sup> Ibid

<sup>645</sup> Ibid

<sup>646</sup> Ibid, Chapter 39, 3

<sup>647</sup> Ibid

deities.<sup>648</sup> This alarmed the gods and they went to Brahmā. Then he created women with the help of *Atharvan* rite.<sup>649</sup> Previously all women were ‘righteous’, but women created through this rite were sinful. He conferred upon them the desire of enjoyment and thus they started approaching other men. It is said that women have no special acts laid out for them.<sup>650</sup> The *Shruti* declares that women are bestowed with the most powerful senses and that they do not have to follow any doctrine. They are called ‘living lies’. Objects of pleasure and enjoyment and all that is ‘not respectable’ and ‘righteous’, and indulgence in carnal enjoyment were bestowed upon women by Brahmā. Men are said to be unable to restrain them within limits.<sup>651</sup>

Bhīṣma said that only great persons are capable of protecting women. They cannot be protected in any other way.<sup>652</sup> Men should not have any feeling of love or affection towards them or should feel any kind of because of them. Through virtue, men should enjoy them with ‘unwillingness’ and ‘absence of attachment’.<sup>653</sup> Virtue here meant involving with wife on account of progeny. Any other kind of involvement was considered sinful.

Bhīṣma narrated another story of ‘old times’ of how Vipula succeeded in protecting his preceptor’s wife. Ruchi, the wife of Ṛṣi Devasharman was ‘exquisitely’ beautiful. Devsharman being aware of the characteristics of women protected his wife and also knew that Indra did not have any objection in getting involved with other people’s wives.<sup>654</sup> Once the Ṛṣi had to go for a sacrifice and thus he made his disciple responsible for protecting his wife and also informed him how Indra appears in different forms to be with other women. Vipula, the disciple then decided that he would protect Ruchi by his *Yoga*-power. Through the *Yoga*-power he would enter the body of his preceptor’s wife and control her mind and yet would not touch her physically.<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>648</sup> The *Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 40, 5

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid*, 7

<sup>650</sup> *Ibid*, 10

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid*, 11-12

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 43, 22

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid*, 25

<sup>654</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 40, 18

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid*

One day Indra came approached her in the form of a ‘divine beauty’.<sup>656</sup> She was impressed by the beauty of Indra. But her body was controlled by Vipula who was living within her. She was unable to move.<sup>657</sup> Though Indra spoke politely to her and that she desired him then also she could not respond to the way she wanted and instead asked of what was the reason behind his arrival.<sup>658</sup> Indra through his power could understand everything and became afraid of the curse of the *R̥ṣi*. “*Vipula then came out, abused him and reminded him of the curses and sufferings he went through for indulging with other people’s wives.*”<sup>659</sup> Calling him ‘impure’ (*akṛtātmānam*) and unstable (*asthiram*)<sup>660</sup> he told him to be respectable towards *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>661</sup> When Devsharman came back, Vipula told him everything but not the way he entered his wife’s body.<sup>662</sup> But Devsharman knew what Vipula did and Vipula admitted to what he has done. The main aim of the story is to implicate to the audience that how a woman, though married can transgress, and thus needs to be controlled through her mind and body.

Though women have been repeatedly portrayed pessimistically, but the role of women in completing various social processes could not be ignored by any tradition or culture. It is said that Manu when departure from this world, “*made women to be kept under the protection of men as they are weak and fall an easy prey to the seduction of men, disposed to accept the love which is offered to them, and devoted to truth.*”<sup>663</sup> But there are others among women who are ‘malicious’, ‘fierce’, ‘covetous of honours’ and ‘impervious to reasons’. But at the same time he said women should be respected not because for her own self but for the good of men and their family.<sup>664</sup> The virtue of men, pleasures and enjoyment depends upon women. Thus women were needed to be protected through various precepts for meeting the patriarchal needs of the society. Right from initiation of the marriage a girl was treated not more than an object and her willingness was never considered legitimate in any circumstance.

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<sup>656</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 41

<sup>657</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 41, 5-6

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid*, 14

<sup>659</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 41, 20-21

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid*, 22

<sup>661</sup> *Ibid*, 25

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 42, 31

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 46, 8

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid*, 9

## DEFINING PROMISCUITY, DEFIANCE AND REDEMPTION

Yudhiṣṭhira who once recognised the difficulties a chaste woman faces, characterised women “*to be the root of all evil*”.<sup>665</sup> Panchachuda, an *apsarā* described the characteristics of women who defied the patriarchal norms within the institution of marriage. Thus she is not only defiling norms laid down for her and thus showing the society’s inability to control her. She said even higher born women desires to contravene the manacles imposed on them.<sup>666</sup> Even if they have husbands who are famous, rich and obedient to them, women will pay no attention to them if they get the opportunity. Given the chance they look for men who are sinful having no consideration for such a husband.<sup>667</sup>

Panchachuda continued to say that being afraid to be punished by men and relatives, women, who tend to disregard all constraints, do not transgress remain loyal to their husbands.<sup>668</sup> Women remain faithful to their husbands when they are unable to obtain a man, or being afraid of relatives, death and imprisonment.<sup>669</sup> They have liking for those men who woe them.<sup>670</sup> Women do not consider a man’s age or his appearance.<sup>671</sup> Even if she is loved by her husband who is handsome she would go for someone who is ugly and hump-backed.<sup>672</sup>

Women of respectable family are said to be resentful of women who are younger and lead an independent life. Due to their being ambiguous in nature, it is not possible to control them through affection.<sup>673</sup> They are not devoted and loyal to the husband who fulfil all their wishes, wants and protect them.<sup>674</sup> It is stated that women cannot be controlled when they desire to transgress.<sup>675</sup> Though women have originated from the same ‘eternal’ source as men have, but they have been endowed with all ‘false’ characteristics too.<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 38, 1

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid*, 11-12

<sup>667</sup> *Ibid*, 13-14

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid*, 17

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>673</sup> *ibid*

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid*, 24

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid*



Though women are sketched in a negative shadow then also we see that not only behaviour of conformity is defined for them but also of deviance. This definition of deviance was often moulded according to characters or for the benefit of the family of her husband and on a broader perspective, for the society. In the next section we will see how deviance has been defined for women and also other factors intertwined with it. But an interesting fact is that even men are also prescribed a conduct, deviating which they were considered to be sinful and were to be punished according to the scriptures.

Through the precept of chastity the sexuality of a man or a woman was to be controlled and was directed towards the institution of marriage. With advancement of time caste and social position was also intertwined. Deviating from this path meant damaging the framed idealistic conduct. The situation under which a man/woman deviates varies. It depends on the willingness of the character. If it is self-motivated, it means that the man/woman is not surrendering to the social convention. One was freed from the sin by ordeal, punishment or by performing rituals. Through these methods he was said to purify himself. Theoretically men were supposed to go through the prescribed ordeal or punishment (in some cases they do) but in most cases it was treated as if it was a natural course. When it was treated as a sinful act, it was done mostly to show the authority of the privileged section of the society. Mostly it was followed stringently for women though we get a handful of exceptions.

Śiva said that those men who cast wicked eyes upon the married wives of other men are cursed with blindness.<sup>677</sup> Men who cast eyes on naked women pass their whole life suffering from one disease.<sup>678</sup> And those who indulge in sexual union with women of castes different from their own have to take birth in their next life shorn of manhood.<sup>679</sup> Men who violate the beds of their preceptors and involve in sexual intercourse lose their manhood in their next birth.<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 145, 50

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid*, 51

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid*, 52

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid*, 53

In the *Shanti Parva* it has been mentioned that by forgiving an unchaste wife one does not incur any sin. By such treatment the woman herself gets purified while the husband may avoid sin.<sup>681</sup> But we do see that more often than not the definition of chastity, the deviance and treatment was often changed. Whether a man is learned or not, lust and anger comes naturally to a man. Women thus find it easy to guide men to the wrong path.<sup>682</sup> As contact with women cause misery, thus ‘wise’ men should avoid any kind of attachment with them.<sup>683</sup>

Though restrictions and impositions were meant for men too, but women were the focus of such a precept. Women by no means were supposed to have any connection with any man other than her husband. Chitrangada, mother of Vabhrvahana and wife of Arjuna, after hearing the news of Arjuna’s death arrived at the scene. She accused Ulupi for inciting her son to fight and for Arjuna’s death. Chitrangada said polygamy (*Yahubharyyata*) is not fault with men but only women incur fault by taking more than one husband (*vahunam bharyyata*).<sup>684</sup> But we do see that when she was needed for accomplishing the purpose of her husband’s family and for the society at large, those customs were mutated accordingly with a sanction.

### **For Progeny and the Ownership of Son**

Ancient Indian texts enumerate the importance of the union between a husband and a wife which is the beginning of a family, an offspring being the vital part of it. A man was summoned not to attach themselves to women out of love and that they should have union with them only for progeny.

Jaratkāru, a *R̥ṣi* of ‘controlled sexual desire’<sup>685</sup> married only to liberate his ancestors.<sup>686</sup> But here again we have to keep in mind that it was not the daughter who was vital here, but the son. The son rescues ancestors from the hell call *Put*, therefore he is called as *Puttra* (the rescuer from *Put*). By a son one conquers the three worlds. By a son's son, one enjoys eternity. And by a grandson's son great-grand-fathers enjoy

<sup>681</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Shanti Parva*, Chapter 35, 30

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 48, 37

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid*, 38

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid*, *Ashwamedha Parva*, Chapter 80, 14

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 13, 9-10

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid*, 27-28

happiness.<sup>687</sup> It is the son who inherits and manages the property of the family as ‘son is one’s own soul’.<sup>688</sup> It is he who performs the Shraddha and through him the ancestors of his family acquires deliverance.

Vasu, the King of Chedi made the daughter of the river who was called Girika, his wife.<sup>689</sup> Girika purifying herself by a bath after her season approached her husband. But that very day the ancestors of Vasu came to him and asked that king to kill deers to perform their *shradh*. He could not disobey the order of his ancestors, but his mind was filled with passion for his wife. The king asked a hawk to carry his semen to his wife. But the hawk had a conflict with another hawk. The semen fell into the waters of Yamuna. There lived in the Yamuna an *Apsarā* called Adrika who lived in the water as a fish. She swallowed the seed of the king. The fish was caught by a fisherman. From her stomach came out two human children, one a boy and another, a girl. The fishermen were very astonished and took them to the king. The king Uparichara (Vasu) took the male child. The female child was given to the fisherman.<sup>690</sup> This very story shows the importance of a male child. While the king did not have any difficulty in keeping the male child, but considering the female child a liability and worthless for his lineage, gave her to the fisherman.

Different difficulties lead to the creation of new customs and laws. The union between the husband and the wife always did not result in an offspring. Mostly in such cases she was sent to another man for the purpose, but nowhere male impotency gets highlighted. In such cases being held by another man was not a sin, but if she performed such an act out of her own desire that it was considered catastrophic for the society.

The son of Jamadagni, Parashurāmā, made the earth bereft of *Kshatriyas* for twenty-one times. When the earth was deprived of *Kshatriyas*, the *Kshatriya* women went to the *Brāhmaṇas* for offspring. The *Brāhmaṇas* had connection with them only during the season. It is said that the *Brāhmaṇas* did not do anything out of lust and passion.

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<sup>687</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 69-74

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 45, 12

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 63

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid*, 67

Thousands of *Kshatriyas* women conceived through their connection with the *Brāhmaṇas* and thus *Kshatriyas* of great power were born.<sup>691</sup>

Societal crisis allowed deviant modifications, but these modifications nowhere considered the wants and desires of women.

Pāṇḍu narrated the story that Madayanti, the wife of Saudasa, commanded by her husband to raise offspring went unto *Ṛṣi* Vasishtha. And after going to him, Madayanti obtained a son named Asmaka. She did this, 'moved by the desire of doing good to her husband'.<sup>692</sup> He also told her that he himself and his brothers were begotten by *Kṛṣṇa*-Dwaipayana who was not their mother's husband. He said that the Vedas declared that it is the duty of wives to do what their husbands tell them to do, even if it meant going to another man for progeny.<sup>693</sup>

The *Anuśāsana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* discusses about the ownership of a son even if he has not been begotten from the husband and has been conceived outside the institution of marriage. It has been said that his is the son from whose seed he is born from. The mother in whose womb he has been conceived does not have any right or claim over the son. The father has the societal proclaim over him. If, however, the owner of the seed disowns the son born of it, such son then becomes his, upon whose wife he has begotten. The same rule applies to the son called *Adhyuda*. He belongs to the person from whose seed he has sprung. If, however, the owner of the seed forsakes him, he becomes the son of the husband of his mother. This is what the law declares.<sup>694</sup> He, who, having begotten a son of his own loin forsakes him for some reason or other cannot be considered as the father of such son, for vital seed only cannot create relationship with a son. Such son must be held to belong to the person who is the master of the soil.<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 64, 4-7

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>694</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 49, 13

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid*, 16

Sons who are born of a maiden or of a mother who has conceived before marriage are considered disgraceful and degraded.<sup>696</sup> But it has been proclaimed that even these two should receive the same rites of purification that are sanctioned for the sons begotten by the father in lawful marriage. Thus these sons who were born due to their mother transgressing from the path of the societal morality get sanctioned by the scriptures.

Thus we get instances where a son or an offspring born outside the institution of marriage and at the same time have the proclamation of the scriptures. Even the son who has been conceived before marriage, but took birth after the marriage of his mother to another man other than his real father, gets the status of his mother's husband and not of his real father.

Manu refers to five kinds of sons; those begotten by one's self upon his own wife, those obtained (as gift) from others, those purchased for a consideration, those reared with affection and those begotten upon other women than upon wedded wives. Sons support the religion and achievements of men, enhance their joys, and rescue deceased ancestors from hell. A son is more meritorious than a sacrifice. Truth is more meritorious than a hundred sons.<sup>697</sup>

There are six kinds of sons mentioned by the religious scriptures that are heirs and belong to the kin, and six other kinds that are not heirs but are kinsmen. Thus they were religiously sanctioned. They are: *Aurasha*, the son begotten by one's own self upon his wedded wife; *Pranita*, the son begotten upon one's wife by an accomplished person from out of kindness; *Parikrita*, the son begotten upon one's wife by a person for financial reasons; *Paunarvara*, the son begotten upon the wife after the husband's death; the maiden-born son; the son born of a woman who had intercourse with four men; *Dattya*, the son given by another; *Krita*, the son bought from another; *Upakrita*, the son coming to one out of gratitude; *Sayang upagata*, the son coming himself to give him away; *Shada*, the son born of a pregnant bride; and *Hina Jonidhrita*, the son begotten upon a wife of lower caste.<sup>698</sup>

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<sup>696</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 49,25

<sup>697</sup> Ibid, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 69-74

<sup>698</sup> Ibid, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 120, 32-34

The son that is begotten upon one's wife by a person, whom he has invited for it, is called *Niruktaj*. The son that is begotten upon one's wife by somebody without his permission is called *Prasritaja*. The son begotten upon his own wife by a person degraded from his position is called *Patitaja*. There are two other sons – Vis the son given and the son made. There is another called *Adhyuda*. The son born of a maiden in her father's house is called *Kanina*. Besides these, there are six kinds called *Apadhwansaja* and six others that are called *Apasadas*. There are other kinds more mentioned in the scriptures.<sup>699</sup>

On failure of offspring of a prior class, the mother should desire to have offspring of the next class. In times of distress, men plead for offspring from his younger brothers.<sup>700</sup> The Manu has said that men failing to have legitimate offspring of their own may have offspring begotten upon their wives by others, for sons confer the highest religious merit.<sup>701</sup> The virgin wife or widow whose marriage has not been accomplished with her husband by sexual intercourse on account of his absence or death may be allowed to unite herself with her husband's younger brother or such any other relation. The husband dying before such completion of the sexual process, the virgin-widow may either surrender herself to her husband's younger brother or practice penances.<sup>702</sup> The younger brother of the husband or such other relation may thus use the virgin wife or widow, though others are of the opinion that such practice originates from desire instead of being a scriptural ordinance.

A second marriage to the younger brother of her husband is said to be rightful. The younger brother, who has married before his elder brother got married, becomes freed by observing rigid vow, with controlled mind for twelve nights.<sup>703</sup> The younger brother should marry again for rescuing his departed manes. Upon such second marriage the first wife becomes purified and her husband himself would not commit any sin by accepting her. Again we see a new inclusion that the younger brother marrying should give his wife to his unmarried elder brother. After acquiring the permission of his elder brother, the younger brother may take back his wife. By doing

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<sup>699</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 49, 3-5

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 44, 52

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

so all three of them will cleared off their sins.<sup>704</sup> Thus for acquiring progeny and maintaining the honour of her husband and his family and customs of the society, she had to compromise her mind, body and soul. Her voice did not have any existence. She was always treated as an object that can be shared, used or traded for meeting the various needs of the patriarchal society.

The society has always been apprehension about the intermixture of caste. Maintaining the purity of one's caste forms an integral part of the society. Woman is the indispensable source of the process of intermixture of caste. Thus it was important to control women through various doctrines. Mixed castes represented the transgressed behaviour between a man and a woman belonging to different castes except that between a *brāhmaṇa* and a *ksatriya*. The concept of chastity was deeply engraved with the practice of intermixture of caste as woman was the integral part of it. It is said that though a man is learned but lust form a vital part of human nature. Thus women drag men into the wrong path and cause misery for him. It was through this concept that an attempt was made to stop women from forming any union with men of lower caste.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* shows that gradation according to caste was fully recognised. A king was cursed to transform into a *caṇḍāla* because he ignored the advice of his preceptor. The caste also implicated differences in physical appearances. The *caṇḍāla* are shown to be 'black' in appearance as the king's complexion gets transformed to black when he becomes a *Caṇḍāla*.<sup>705</sup> While Rāmā was ruling over his kingdom, the son of a *Brāhmaṇa* died. The reason was that even the non-*Brāhmaṇas* were practising austerities. In the present *yuga* being talked about, i.e., the *Dvāpara yuga* penance entered the *Vaiśya*. But in this *yuga* even the *Śūdras* were practising austerities. The result of the death of the *Brāhmaṇa* boy was due to the fact that penance was practised by the low born.<sup>706</sup> Thus when Rāmā found the *Śūdra* practising austerities, he killed him and thus revived the *Brāhmaṇa* boy.<sup>707</sup>

The apprehension regarding the intermixture of caste is reflected in Rāmā's words as he said that "if he embraces unrighteousness and leading to intermixture of caste he

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<sup>704</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Shanti Parva*, Chapter 165, 67-69

<sup>705</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bālakāṇḍa*, Chapter 63

<sup>706</sup> *Ibid*, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Chapter 74, 25-30

<sup>707</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 76, 1-5

should be giving up the virtuous acts and taking to unauthorized action.”<sup>708</sup> But we do see a policy of inclusion followed in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as it is said that Rāmā meets his friend Guha, a Nishada.<sup>709</sup> Courtesans too were recognised within the realm of the society.<sup>710</sup> Thus we see an effort by the Brahmā nical order to bring the people within their circumference whom they have condemned before though with limitations. This was an attempt to maintain the dominance of Brahmā nism over other religions that were coming into existence. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* we come across Rāmā’s condemnation of Buddhism. But at the same time we have to keep in mind that though there was a policy of inclusion, which they formerly excluded socially, they were still kept outside the sphere of the core system. This policy of inclusion and exclusion which was carried on simultaneously helped to maintain a control over them.

### **Transgression and Caste**

*Brāhmaṇas* and the *Kshatriyas* were more concerned about maintaining their purity, as they were the *dvija*, the twice-born. Both these classes struggled for predominance. This struggle is also reflected in *Mahābhārata* as reflected in the story of Devjani and Yayati. Yayati for his transgression ultimately gets cursed from the *Ṛṣi*. Devjani, a daughter of a *Ṛṣi* proposed Yayati, a *kshatriya* for marriage. But Yayati replied, “*I do not deserve you. You are the daughter of Sukra, therefore you are superior to me...your father cannot bestow you on even great king.*”<sup>711</sup> Devjani said, *Brāhmaṇas* have already been mixed with *Kshatriyas*, and *Kshatriyas* with *Brāhmaṇas*.

The *Anuśāsana Parva* shows how caste and gender is intricately intertwined. If a person of a lower order begets a son upon a woman of a superior order, such a son is regarded as outside the sphere of the four established orders. Such a son is reprimanded.<sup>712</sup> When an offspring is begotten upon another person outside the institution of marriage, he is considered to be outside the sphere of the four pure orders.<sup>713</sup> It is only when they take a partner from castes other than their own, that the children they beget is bestowed with an inferior status. The son who is outside the

<sup>708</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 109

<sup>709</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, Ayodhyakāṇḍa, Chapter 50

<sup>710</sup> Ibid, Chapter 51, 23

When Rāmā was to leave for the forest, Daśaratha ordered for a detachment to accompany Rāmā which included courtesans who could speak well because it would ‘lend charm’ to the forces. Ayodhyakāṇḍa, Chapter 36, 3

<sup>711</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 79, 18

<sup>712</sup> Ibid, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 48

<sup>713</sup> Ibid



four orders transgress further by uniting with women belonging to the four principal orders and thus their progeny is degraded further. It is only from sexual union of women with persons who should not have such union with them that mixed classes originate.<sup>714</sup>

As mentioned earlier that the upper two castes i.e. the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Ksatriyas* is anxious about maintaining the purity of their caste. Thus a *Brāhmaṇa* or a *Brahmāni* woman having any kind of sexual contact that would lead to intermixture of caste was considered as a contravention from the prescribed path. His punishment and redemption has also been mentioned. The *Brāhmaṇa* or the *Brahmāni* woman had to be more alert in regard to his societal behaviour as he was considered purest of all the castes. A superior *Brāhmaṇa* is advised to marry a maiden who belongs to a family equal to his own is given away by her brother.<sup>715</sup> The reason behind marrying such a girl is that the son begotten upon a woman of a degraded caste instead of rescuing brings him grief.<sup>716</sup>

That *Shudra* who begets an offspring on a *Brahmāni* woman, after leaving his human form is born as a mouse.<sup>717</sup> If a *Brāhmaṇa* takes food which has been cooked by a woman who has neither husband nor children, it decreases its longevity. The food supplied by a prostitute is equivalent to semen. The food also supplied by a person, who secretly allow the unchastely behaviour of their wives is forbidden. The food supplied by a an unchaste woman, by one who lives on the income of dancing girls, by professional panegyrist and bards should not be taken by a *brāhmaṇa*.<sup>718</sup> This shows how the concept of chastity and caste was intricately dependent on each other and how significant chastity was to maintain the law and ordinance of the society.

Theories laid out in texts and stories were a means to control the mind and behaviour of the society to direct them to the framed moralistic behaviour which was processed within the framework of gender, caste and divinity. Following it was socially acceptable. Transgression was not socially acceptable. Such a relationship was mostly

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<sup>714</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 48

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 44, 56

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 104, 137

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 44, 90

<sup>718</sup> *Ibid*, *Santi Parva*, Chapter 37, 28-29

discrete in nature, though we find paradoxes. Within these stories other social issue to which the theory of chastity depends upon gets reflected. The justification for introducing the concept of chastity can be explained in a diversified manner. It might have been laid out to prevent men/women to be in a relationship disapproved by the authorities of the society, having intercourse outside the institution of marriage (before or after), victim of forceful sex or using sexuality especially by women outside the institution of marriage. In the next section we would discuss the concerned issues.

### TRANSGRESSION

Satyavatī had a ‘fishy’ smell as she was associated with the fishermen. Wishing to help her father, she piled a boat on Yamuna. Parashara while going for a pilgrimage saw her.<sup>719</sup> She is described as “*an object of desire with even a Sidha*”. As soon as the Ṛṣi saw her, he desired to have her.<sup>720</sup> She is described as “*having celestial beauty and possessing tapering thighs*”. He said “*O blessed girl, accept my embraces*”.<sup>721</sup> Satyavatī said, “*know me to be a girl under the control of my father...my virginity will be sullied by accepting your embraces.*<sup>722</sup>...*my virginity being sullied, how shall I able to return home*”.<sup>723</sup>

Parashara being very much pleased with her told her that she will retain her virginity even being physically involved with him.<sup>724</sup> He told her to ask for a boon from him.<sup>725</sup> Satyavatī asked for the boon that her body might be ‘sweet scented’ and the Ṛṣi granted her the wish.<sup>726</sup> She accepted the Ṛṣi’s approach.<sup>727</sup> Though she was afraid of her father, but more than that she was afraid of the Ṛṣi’s curse. She made full use of the opportunity of the embraces of the Ṛṣi, as she said, “*Therefore having got from him a great boon, I could not refuse his request.*”<sup>728</sup> The Ṛṣi ‘overpowered’ her, ‘a

<sup>719</sup> The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva, Chapter 63,69

<sup>720</sup> Ibid, 70

<sup>721</sup> Ibid, 71

<sup>722</sup> Ibid, 75

<sup>723</sup> Ibid, 76

<sup>724</sup> Ibid, 77

<sup>725</sup> Ibid, 78

<sup>726</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>727</sup> Ibid, 80

<sup>728</sup> Ibid, Chapter 105, 9

mere girl' and he also covered the place with a thick fog.<sup>729</sup> There was an odour of fish before in her body, but the *R̥ṣi* dismissed it and gave her a sweet fragrance.<sup>730</sup>

The *R̥ṣi* told her, “After bringing forth this child on the island of this river, you will still remain a virgin.”<sup>731</sup> Satyavatī came to be known as *Gandhavati*. Men could smell the fragrance of her body from a distance of a *Yoyana*. She was also called *Yoyanagandha*. After all these Parashara went back to his hermitage. On that very day she conceived. She gave birth to the child in an island. The child by the permission of his mother adopted asceticism. He went away saying that as soon as he will be remembered on any occasion, he will appear.<sup>732</sup>

The most important aspect here is to observe the class of the characters involved. One is a *brāhmaṇa* and the other belonged to a supposedly royal class. The story behind the birth and descent of Satyavatī provides her with an elevated social position or else it would not have been socially apt for a sage to get involve with the daughter of a fisherman. The first deviance we get in this episode is that from Parashara, a sage. A sage was supposed to be self-controlled. He should be in full control of his desires. But he not only approached Satyavatī but also convinced her to get sexually involve with him. Through Satyavatī’s dialogue we come to know that a girl before marriage was under full control of her father. Satyavatī also tells us that virginity was a requirement to be the perfect wife. When Parasara heard about her anxiety, he was rather happy and told her to ask for a boon. Satyavatī’s anxiety shows that she did not want to deviate from the conventional path as she had to be someone’s wife in the future.

Rather denying or by following the conventions of the society by asking the sage to marry her, she accepted his proposal and also expressed her desire to make full use of the boon she was given or she might have been cursed if she did not accept this proposal. It was through these well-established theories of curse and boon by the *brāhmaṇas* that they controlled the society – a curse damaged their life while a boon could have emancipated it.

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<sup>729</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 105, 10

<sup>730</sup> *Ibid*, 11

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid*, 12

<sup>732</sup> *Ibid*, 85

The sexual indulgence was concealed from the society by Parasara as he covered the place with fog while they were involved until she told it to Bhīṣma under an urgent crisis of progeny and she needed her eldest son to rescue her. Her fishy smell went away and she became sweet-scented. Though she conceived and gave birth to a son in an island nobody came to know about this. It was sweet-smell that attracted her future husband, Śāntanu who was a king. It was her son born out of wedlock that saved her husband's lineage. Even when she tells Bhīṣma about her wedlock, Bhīṣma did not accuse her. It was the involvement of a sage that did not make her unchaste and impure. But on the other hand she regained her virginity; she became purified (from fishy-smell to sweet-scented), she married a king and her wedlock son saved her marital household lineage. She was never accused; neither had she to go through any ordeal to prove her purity, all because she was related to a sage. This teaches the concerned audience that the sages were never unrighteous and if their embraces are accepted one becomes pure.

Physical and mental transgressions were equally sinful. Such was the case of Reṇukā. Reṇukā who had a 'pure and austere life', went to take a bath. While returning home, she saw the king of Martikavata who was known by the name of Chitraratha. The king was in the water with his wives, and he was wearing a lotus garland. And seeing his 'magnificent' form, Reṇukā was filled with desire. She could not control this 'prohibited' desire, became impure within the water, and came back to the hermitage. Her husband understood her state of mind. He accused her of abandoning her chastity. But neither did he tried to purify her or discard her, but ordered his son to kill his mother, an extreme manifestation of violence. We have the same story in the *Purāṇa* but with a different version.<sup>733</sup>

In the version narrated in the *Purāṇa*, Reṇukā does not get desirous but only appreciates the beauty of the king. This appreciation makes her unchaste. In the *Purāṇa* we get a reference that the son, Parashurāmā who beheaded Reṇukā was punished for such an act as killing own mother is the most heinous act. But no such punishment in the story mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*. But in the story mentioned in *Mahābhārata* the woman gets desirous of another man and loses her virtue. But in the *Purāṇa* it was just her appreciation. Thus we see that whatever may have been the

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<sup>733</sup> *The Vishṇu Purāṇa*, Chapter 10

situation whether she was at fault or not, involvement in such an act where she appreciates another man other than her husband was punishable as was the case with both Ahalyā and Reṇukā.

We also come across stories wherein men were punished for being disobedient. Here a woman approaches her friend's husband. While she goes unpunished, the man was cursed and he lost his youth. But he regained it from his son. In regard to this it is crucial to observe each and every character involved, as each character reflects different social issues and anxiety and stigma related to chastity.

Devjani, who was the daughter of Sage Shukra, was married to King Yayati. Sarmishtha, a king's daughter due to circumstances became her maid. When Sukra was giving his daughter, Devjani in marriage to him, he warned that Sarmishtha, the daughter of King Vrishaparva, should be honoured and he must never call her to bed.<sup>734</sup> When one thousand years have passed away, Sarmishtha, the daughter of Vrishaparva, attained puberty, and her season came. She became apprehensive of the fact that though she attained puberty but she has not chosen any man as her husband yet and that Devjani has given birth to a son. She decided to choose that man as her husband whom Devjani has chosen.<sup>735</sup> She approached the king. Sarmishtha quite consciously and willingly approached her friend's husband.

Here we see that the male character, Yayati states that when he was married to Devjani, his father-in-law commanded him not to call Sarmistha to bed but he does not express his own sexual desire.<sup>736</sup> Sarmishtha on her defence told him that one's friend marriage is the same as one's own. "*You are, therefore, as much my husband as Devjani's.*"<sup>737</sup> He fulfilled her wishes and 'thus protected her virtues'.<sup>738</sup> Sarmishtha conceived due to the connection with the king.<sup>739</sup> Devjani felt having been 'wronged' went to her father and said, "*O father, virtue has been defeated by vice. The low have risen and the high have fallen.*"<sup>740</sup> Yayati said, "*I was solicited by the daughter of the Danava king to make her season fruitful. I did grant her prayer from a sense of*

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<sup>734</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 79, 33

<sup>735</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-11

<sup>736</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

<sup>737</sup> *Ibid.*, 19

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, 24

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

<sup>740</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

*virtue...men learned in the Vedas say that he, who does not grant the prayer of a woman in season commits the sin of killing an embryo. He, who is being solicited in secret by a woman full of desire and in season, does not grant her wishes, loses virtue. The learned say that he becomes a killer of embryo...for these reasons, and being afraid of committing a sin, I went to Sarmishtha.*"<sup>741</sup> But Sukra was not convinced by his reasons, and thus, cursed the son of Nahusa and he was then deprived of his youth.<sup>742</sup>

The narrative reflects the anxiety of a girl attaining puberty who is unmarried and without any children in comparison to her friend who is married and also had children. Yayati and also Sarmishtha take the support of the sayings of the *Vedas*. But Sukra who was a sage did not sanction such an act and cursed Yayati but not Sarmishtha. In most of the cases we see that men go unpunished. In this case Sarmishtha was neither cursed nor punished. The offended in the story was the daughter of a sage, thus by getting involved with the daughter of a Ksatriya who was her maid hurt the ego of a *brāhmaṇa* who was socially superior.

Transgression by a man was more of an unrestricted socio-sexual behaviour. A man's burden was less than that of a woman if he deviated from the path of chastity both physically, sexually and socially. Most of the time men were not under any social pressure when they transgressed. Dhṛtarāstra apart from his wife, Gāndhāri had a son from his maid outside the institution of marriage. The son attained a position in the court, though lowly in comparison to other sons of Dhṛtarāstra. Physical involvement with the low caste women by the upper caste men was considered a sin. But we see that Vyāsa or Dhṛtarāstra being hardly condemned. Rather the *Śūdra* woman with whom Vyāsa was involved with was liberated from her slavery. He said, "*Your son will be greatly fortunate, virtuous and the foremost of all intelligent men on earth.*"<sup>743</sup> He was named Vidura by him. He was the God of Justice who was born on earth due to the curse of Ṛṣi Mandavya.<sup>744</sup> Thus though Dhṛtarāstra transgressed from the moral code of conduct, he was neither punished nor he was questioned, but the offspring

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<sup>741</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 79, 33-35

<sup>742</sup> *Ibid*, 38

<sup>743</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 106, 27

<sup>744</sup> *Ibid*, 28

born of such a contact was given a celestial background, negating the sinful nature of such an involvement.

In the texts we see the world of the earthly beings and the celestial beings running parallel to each other. Each has its influence on the other. It becomes quite interesting how different precepts were handled in these two worlds. It was not just the earthly beings who transgressed, but also the celestial being. But the most interesting fact here is that most of the times they were given a touch of a divine aim. In a sacrifice performed by Rudra all ascetics and celestials came. Seeing the celestial ladies of great beauty the seed of Brahmā came out and dropped upon the Earth.<sup>745</sup> The Sun took up that dust and cast it into the sacrificial fire.<sup>746</sup> Brahmā was pouring libations on fire. While doing so he became desirous.<sup>747</sup> As the seed came out he took it up and poured it on the fire with the necessary *Mantras*.<sup>748</sup> From that seed, the four orders came into existence.<sup>749</sup>

Śakuntalā was known as the daughter of Ṛṣi Kanwa. Duṣyanta was astonished to hear this. Śakuntalā then told him the truth.<sup>750</sup> Viswamitra was engaged penances which alarmed Indra. His penances would bring Indra down from his position and thus he ordered Menaka to seduce Viswamitra and break his austerities. Menaka being successful in her attempt and the Ṛṣi was filled with lust. And they then were involved with each other for a long time. As a result of their relationship, a daughter named Śakuntalā was born. Menaka gave birth to Śakuntalā on the bank of river Malini and after her birth she went away. But here we see that though Viswamitra was unable to control his sexual passion, he did not go through any punishment or ordeal for such an indiscrete behaviour.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* we get another version of the story where Indra sends Rambha to break the austerities of Viswamitra and like Menaka she was successful in doing so. And he cursed Rambha for such an act but at the same time he lost all his merits for

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<sup>745</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana Parva*, 98

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid*, 99

<sup>747</sup> *Ibid*, 100

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid*, 101

<sup>749</sup> *Ibid*, 102

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 69-74

cursing her.<sup>751</sup> It was his curse that was the manifestation of his anger that made him lose his virtue and not lust. In both the versions in different epics, the same character does not undergoes any for such a contravention, while in the *Mahābhārata*, King Duṣyanta says, “*The universally-worshipped and highly-blessed Ṛṣi is one whose seed hath been drawn up.*”<sup>752</sup> But in both the epics, Viswamitra feels desirous towards the beauty of the *Apsarās*. The stories might have a different time genre and certainly different authors, but their treatment of the male character who is a *Ṛṣi* and the upholder of the Brahmanical tradition are same. Viswamitra in both the version is not accused of sexual and mental transgression, thus maintaining the dominance of the *Brahmins* and their purity through such narrations in the society.

In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Daśaratha says, “*Brahmā, which is the goal of all living beings is attainable through the study of the Vedas and asceticism and attain that destiny which is reserved for a donor of land, for him who has maintained the sacred fire, who has taken a vow of marrying a single wife, those who have gifted a thousand vows...*”<sup>753</sup> Thus men had various options through which they could liberate themselves. A man is considered moralistic in his code of conduct if he has taken the vow of marrying a single wife. But the question arises as to what extent was this prescribed conduct was followed and whether they were condemned for transgressing.

Ascetics and kings did not suffer for their non-compliance till they remained within the sphere of Brahmanism. But those who were outside were not only sketched as vile and of atrocious character but were also meted out harsh punishment. This indicated that being outside the sphere of Brahmanism meant adversities, sufferings and deprivation.

Rāvaṇa, the king of Lanka, in *Rāmāyaṇa* is shown to be a man who is fierceful, arrogant and possessing a powerful identity with an evil intention. He is portrayed as a man exhibiting iniquity towards women. Rāvaṇa is shown to have no sense of morality towards his kin, kith, his wives or his kingdom. He did not have control over his sexual desires as he expressed his desire to Sītā in the following words:

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<sup>751</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Balakanda*, Chapter 63

<sup>752</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 69-74

<sup>753</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 64, 43-44



“Having seen you possessing the hue and brilliance of gold and clad in silk, I no longer find delight in my own consorts...Become the foremost queen.”<sup>754</sup>

In the end of the text, Rāma yana we see how Rāvaṇa was punished and killed for performing such a sinful act of laying his hand over another man’s consort. But Sītā was not the only woman who suffered humility at the hands of Rāvaṇa, but all his past deeds contributed to his death.

In the palace of Rāvaṇa, Hanumana saw a lovely house meant for sexual enjoyment.<sup>755</sup> In the palace he saw hundreds of ‘excellent women’.<sup>756</sup> Rāvaṇa’s palace was filled with *Raksasis* who were his wives and princesses who have been carried forcefully by him.<sup>757</sup> Unmarried daughters of royal sages, *Brāhmaṇas*, demons, *Gandharvas* and *Rakhsasis* were made his wives without their consent. Many women were carried away by him due to war and some on their own will. But none of them was low-born, neither devoid of beauty nor abhorrent towards her husband.<sup>758</sup>

Rāvaṇa once arrived at a forest in the Himalayas. He saw a maiden “wearing the skin of black antelope with matted locks, rich in austerities and glowing like a deity”.<sup>759</sup> He felt lustful seeing her. Her father was a *Brahmā rsi* and as she was born as an incarnation of the *Vedas*, she was named *Vedavati*. The *Rākṣasas*, *Gandharvas*, *Yaksas*, *Nagas* sought her hand in marriage. But her father refused all of them, as he wanted Viṣṇu to be his daughter’s husband. Her father was killed by a demon who approached her. Her mother entered the funeral pyre with her father in her arms.<sup>760</sup> From that time onwards she decided to marry Visnu in order to fulfil her father’s wish. She considered Viṣṇu as her husband and told him that she is practising hard penance to achieve him as her husband.<sup>761</sup> But Rāvaṇa did not listen to her and forced himself upon her. She decided to end her life and said that if her penance was ‘righteous’ and ‘virtuous’ she will be born as *Ayonijā* (not born from womb), the ‘pious’ daughter of a virtuous man.<sup>762</sup>

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<sup>754</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 47, 27-18

<sup>755</sup> *Ibid*, *Sundarakāṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 36-39

<sup>756</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 6, 42-44

<sup>757</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 9,6

<sup>758</sup> *Ibid*, 71

<sup>759</sup> *Ibid*, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Chapter 17, 2

<sup>760</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Chapter 17, 7-15

<sup>761</sup> *Ibid*, 16

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid*, 33-34

Then she entered the fire but appeared again from a lotus ‘with the radiance of a lotus’.<sup>763</sup> She was taken away by Rāvaṇa from her birth place and showed her to his ministers. His ministers warned him that if she remains with him she will become the cause of his destruction. Then Rāvaṇa threw her into the sea. Reaching the shore she reached at the middle of a sacrificial ground. She was dug out by the ploughshare of King Janaka.<sup>764</sup>

Rāvaṇa is portrayed as a man who used to force himself upon women. He never cared for the consent of women and used to carry away the virgin daughters of kings, *Rsis*, gods and *Danavas*. After killing the kin of women whom he liked, he used to shut the mouth of those women in his aerial car. They were ‘exceptionally beautiful’.<sup>765</sup> Worrying about their parents, husbands and sons they prayed for death.<sup>766</sup> Their husbands were killed by Rāvaṇa.<sup>767</sup> Thus these abducted women wished for the annihilation of Rāvaṇa and cursed him that he would meet with his death through one woman only. Through their curse Rāvaṇa lost all his lustre.<sup>768</sup>

Rāvaṇa without having any consideration of moral boundaries also became lustful toward another man’s wife. Rāvaṇa is described as the one who was in constant conflict with the gods. He is said to have twenty arms and ten heads.<sup>769</sup> He is said to have deviated from the moral path and enjoyed others’ wives.<sup>770</sup> Rāvaṇa once proceeded to the city of Bhagavati (the capital of the Nagas) vanquishing the ruler of the Nagas and a leader of the Nagas, he took away the latter’s wife.<sup>771</sup>

Rāvaṇa also forced himself on Rambha, the *Apsarā*.<sup>772</sup> Nalakūbara being enraged cursed him that he will be dead the moment he approaches a woman forcefully.<sup>773</sup> Thus Rāvaṇa who did not belong to the Brahmanical dominated region nor did he honoured or followed the Brahmā nical customs and tradition, he was not only sketched as fierceful a *Rākṣasa* can be but none of his infringement went unpunished.

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<sup>763</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Chapter 17, 34

<sup>764</sup> *Ibid*, 35-39

<sup>765</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 24, 1-6

<sup>766</sup> *Ibid*, 15-16

<sup>767</sup> *Ibid*, 17

<sup>768</sup> *Ibid*, 21-23

<sup>769</sup> *Ibid*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 32, 7-8

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid*, 12

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 32, 13

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 26, 38-39

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid*, 42-44

Daśaratha had three hundred fifty wives.<sup>774</sup> Daśaratha had special preference for his younger wife Kaikeyi, who was responsible for Rāmā's exile. Laksmana abused Daśaratha and said that being under the control of a woman, the king has become 'perverse', 'full of lust, senile and overpowered by the pleasure of sense' and he blindly follow the words of Kaikeyi.<sup>775</sup> Daśaratha too regretfully said that his decision to send Rāmā to exile was a decision that was taken out of 'excessive infatuation' in order to please his wife.<sup>776</sup> Thus we see Daśaratha, falling prey to the youth, beauty, lust and desires of a woman and neglecting his duties towards his kingdom, other wives and sons and thus transgressing from the path of morality, but that did not deter him from attaining heaven. He is condemned by his son Laksmana, only when Rāmā was sent to exile by him.

While sages were suppose to control their sensual desires to maintain their purity but neither they nor those who participated with them were being condemned or punished for not following the path prescribed by them. There was a *Brahmā cari* by the name of Cūlī who lead the life of 'virtuous conduct' and of 'austerities'.<sup>777</sup> While practising his penances a *Gandharva* girl, Somadā by name and daughter of Urmilā served him. Cūlī being impressed by her service wanted to grant her a boon. She said as she is unmarried and that she cannot be the wife of anyone else, asked him to grant a son by his spiritual power. Cūlī conferred on her 'a mind born son',<sup>778</sup> who later became a king called Brahmādatta in the city of Kāmpilyā. Just like Satyavatī and Parashara and Kuntī, a son was born to a woman before she was married. She obtained the son through a sage. In case of Kuntī, it was the Sun god. Thus Brahmanical gods and sages and those who were the followers of such a tradition were never depicted as a sinful person. They never had to face the social stigma.

On the other hand we see Rāvaṇa and Vali getting killed for being lustful towards another woman. Vali condemned Rāmā for killing him and that too from the back while he was engaged in fight with another, Rāmā in reply explains about his sinful *karma*. He said he transgressed the 'bounds of morality',<sup>779</sup> and is 'a slave of lust' and

<sup>774</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 34, 10

<sup>775</sup> Ibid, *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 21, 2-3

<sup>776</sup> Ibid, Chapter 59, 19

<sup>777</sup> Ibid, *Bālakāṇḍa*, Chapter 33, 11

<sup>778</sup> Ibid, 17

<sup>779</sup> Ibid, *Kiskindhakāṇḍa*, Chapter 18, 24-25

‘do not adhere to the path trodden by kings’.<sup>780</sup> He also co-habited with the wife of his younger brother who is his daughter-in-law even when Sugriva was alive.<sup>781</sup> “Death is the punishment ordained for a man who approaches carnally through lust a girl sprung from his own loins, a sister or a wife of his own younger brother.”<sup>782</sup>

### **Deviance Out Of Compulsion: Inverting the notion of *Pātivratya***

The concept of *Pātivratya* was altered according to the situation. A woman had to act according to the will and welfare of her husband and his family as well. Progeny was one of the issues. The sons of Śāntanu died without leaving any lineage behind. In this crisis Satyavatī asked Vyāsa (her son born out of wedlock) to beget progeny on his dead brother’s wives. Ambikā and Ambālika did so. She did so after consulting it with Bhīṣma. But there is no reference of perceiving it as unconventional. Rather Bhīṣma supported it. It was due to Bhīṣma’s act and the traditions that allowed him made Ambā unacceptable to the society and to the man she considered as her husband mentally. According to the concept a wife should remain loyal and devoted even after her husband’s death.

Like Ambikā and Ambālika, another queen, named Sudesna was also told to get sexually involve with another man to beget progeny. One day her husband, Vali who was learned in the entire religious scriptures saw him flowing along the stream. Then he approached him.<sup>783</sup> Vali saved the sage for the purpose of raising offspring.<sup>784</sup> Vali said, “*O illustrious man, I have to raise up a few sons on my wife. Therefore, beget on her some virtuous and wise sons*”.<sup>785</sup> The Ṛṣi accepted his proposal. After Sudesna came to know that he is blind, she did not go herself, but sent her old nurse. He begot on the Śūdra women eleven sons.<sup>786</sup> But the sage was aware of the fact that the woman, who came to him before, was not the queen. Then also he fathered eleven sons on her. The question lies when the sage knew that she was not the queen, why did he beget sons on her? Social convention pronounced that it was sinful for a man of

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<sup>780</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Kiskindhakāṇḍa*, Chapter 18, 12

<sup>781</sup> *Ibid*, 18-20

<sup>782</sup> *Ibid*, 22

<sup>783</sup> *The Mahābhārata*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 104, 37

<sup>784</sup> *Ibid*, 38

<sup>785</sup> *The Mahābhārata*, *Ādi Parva*, Chapter 104,39-40

<sup>786</sup> *Ibid*, 42

upper caste to get involved with that of a woman lower to him in status. Moreover she was a *Śūdra* woman. Here we see indiscrete behaviour being allowed not only by the husband, but a queen who is a woman herself treated her nurse like an object for her selfish needs.

Here we see exploitation at multiple standards. The king never asked about his wife's opinion and in the same way the queen was not bothered about what another woman can go through if she is being involved in such an act. This shows how gender and caste played their role simultaneously. Being his wife it was natural that the queen would follow what her husband summoned her and in same way the maid due to the existing social stratification and gender submitted to the orders of her mistress.

The Pandavas were born due to transmutation of the precept of chastity which was given a legal sanction. Pāṇḍu who was born because of such an involvement could not get sexually involved with his wife, Kuntī and Mādri due to a curse. Pāṇḍu who himself was born from his father's brother semen tried convincing his wife Kuntī to do the same as due to a curse he was unable to get sexually involved with his wives. Kuntī too had a son out of wedlock. She looked after the *Brāhmaṇas* and guests in her father's house. By her service she impressed the 'terrible' *Brāhmaṇa* of rigid vows, known as Durvasha (learned in the mystery of religion).<sup>787</sup> The sage could foresee the future crisis regarding progeny in her life and thus taught her a mantra through which she could call any god to procure children.<sup>788</sup> In order to test the mantra she invoked god Arka (Sun).<sup>789</sup> He appeared before her. But being afraid she told him that she only wanted to see if the Mantra works or not. But god Arka told her that his approach cannot go fruitless. He told him that accepting him is not a sin and thus they were involved in an union, as result of which, 'a great hero' was born named Karṇa with 'natural armour'.<sup>790</sup> The greatly 'effulgent' Tapanā, then 'giving Pritha her maidenhood' went to heaven.<sup>791</sup> But Pritha did not accept the child. She concealed the fact that a son was born to her before marriage as she was apprehensive about the social stigma she had to face.

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<sup>787</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 104, 4-5

<sup>788</sup> *Ibid*, 6

<sup>789</sup> *Ibid*, 8

<sup>790</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 104, 17-18

<sup>791</sup> *Ibid*, 20

Both Satyavatī and Kuntī remained pure even after such a dalliance outside the institution of marriage. In case of Satyavatī a powerful sage, and in Kuntī's episode a god was involved. Kuntī and Satyavatī did not tell anyone about their wedlock child. Pāṇḍu did not know anything about the boon. He asked Kuntī to beget offspring on another man. But Kuntī was not convinced. Through the stories narrated by Pāṇḍu it was clear that begetting on another man was allowed if there was a crisis in continuing the lineage. The crisis here is that of male impotency which was well-concealed by the authors of the text. It was only through a son that a man could attain heaven.<sup>792</sup> It was only after she was asked by her husband to beget offspring that she told him about her boon, but not about her son. She invoked three gods. When Pāṇḍu again asked her to invoke another god for the fourth time, Kuntī did not obey him. She said, "*The wise do not sanction a fourth delivery even in a season of distress. The woman having intercourse with four different men are called a Swairini, while she having intercourse with five becomes a harlot. How can a person who is well-acquainted with the scripture on this subject beguiled by desire of offspring, in 'seeming forgetfulness of the ordinance.'*"<sup>793</sup>

If her past deeds are taken into account, then she already involved herself with four men. As per what she said to her husband, she is also a *Swairini*! But Karna her former son was born the same way as others. Only because he was born before marriage that it was not sanctioned. So in order to maintain her virtue and *pativrata* image, she did not tell anything about him. Mādri's sons were born the same way. Kuntī played the role of a mother quite efficiently both for her and Mādri's sons. After marriage she diverged when her husband asked her to do so. Mādri did the same. But she did not have a past like that of Kuntī. She even burnt herself at the burning pyre of her husband, as Mādri considered herself responsible for her husband's death. As they were half-way through the sexual intercourse, Mādri wanted to satiate her husband's unfulfilled desire.

Kuntī, the elderly wife is one of the most celebrated characters but Mādri was not. So the norms laid down were never definite. Sometimes it was an imposition (as per the story) that was put upon her made her diverges from the prescribed path. Such was the

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<sup>792</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, Chapter 104, 35

<sup>793</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 123

case of Draupadī. It was a decision, wherein her opinion did not exist. She was married to five brothers. When she was dishonoured at the court, Karṇa called her *bandhakīti*, an ‘unchaste’ woman as he said, “*it has been ordained by the gods that a woman should have only one husband, she has many husbands, and therefore it is certain that she is an unchaste woman.*”<sup>794</sup>

Like Kuntī and Satyavatī, the mother of Hanuman faced the same circumstance. She in her former birth was an *apsarā* ‘foremost of celestial nymphs’ known as Puñjikasthalā. A Ṛṣi cursed her and she was born as the daughter of a monkey called Kuñjara and she came to be known as Añjanā. She became the wife of a monkey called Kesarī. She could change her form at will.<sup>795</sup> The wind-god seeing her in the human form got attracted towards her.<sup>796</sup> That ‘*su-vrata*’ woman angrily asked, “*Who seeks to violate this vow of fidelity to a single husband?*”<sup>797</sup> The wind-god ‘pressed to his bosom that irreproachable girl with his long arms.’<sup>798</sup> After hearing her rageful question, he replied that she is not violated as he entered into her with his mind and thus a son ‘powerful and richly endowed with intelligence’ will be born to her.<sup>799</sup> Hanuman is called as the “*son of Kesarī, begotten through his wife by another.*”<sup>800</sup> Thus Hanuman who held a position of high esteem in the Brahmanical tradition was born out of an infidel union. But neither the man nor the male has been degraded as both the characters conformed to the Brahmanical tradition.

Princesses not only acted as political mediators for saving her father’s kingdom, but also to save her father’s honour when a sage asked for his help. This shows the Brahmanical dominance where a woman’s body is traded for. The only consolation she is given is that she will never lose her virginity, the primary condition to be the ideal woman. The story of Madhavi is a heart-wrenching story which exhibits the extreme violation of a woman’s body within the sanctioned norms of the society.

Vishwamitra asked for eight hundred white horses each having one ear black as Dakshina from Galava, his disciple. But Galava did not have the required wealth to

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<sup>794</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Sabha Parva*, Chapter 68, 35

<sup>795</sup> The *Rāmāyana*, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, Chapter 66,8-11

<sup>796</sup> *Ibid*, 14

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid*, 16

<sup>798</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>799</sup> *Ibid*, 17-18

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid*, 29

obtain the horses. So he decided to go to his friend who was a king of the lunar dynasty and obtain these horses. He went to *R̥ṣi* Yayati. But he did not have the required wealth. He gave his daughter, Mādhavī to him but not in marriage and told him that rulers will even give their kingdom as dowry for her. The only boon that he asked for was a grandson by her.<sup>801</sup>

Galava went to Haryyashwa of the Ikshaku race. He asked him to accept her who will give birth to his children by offering a dowry.<sup>802</sup> Galava told him to give eight hundred white horses each with one black ear.<sup>803</sup> He said he got only two hundred of them and would beget one child on her.<sup>804</sup> Hearing to this, Mādhavī said that a boon was granted on her that after giving birth to each child she would regain her virginity. She told Galava to offer her to the king and going to four other kings he can fulfil his purpose and she will have four sons. Not thinking about herself she told him to do so in order to fulfil the promise he has made to his preceptor.<sup>805</sup> Then they went to the king of Kasi and to the city of Bhojas in order to acquire the required number of horses.<sup>806</sup> When Vishwamitra saw her he told Galava that he should have presented her before, and then all the four sons would have been his. He accepted her.<sup>807</sup> After a son was born, Vishwamitra returned her to Galava.<sup>808</sup> Galava after accomplishing his aim permitted Mādhavī to go back to her father and he himself went to the forest.<sup>809</sup>

The king Yayati then wanted to give his daughter, Mādhavī in marriage and thus held a *swayamvara*. Mādhavī went to a hermitage at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna.<sup>810</sup> Kings from all places came there. She 'being directed to choose a husband' selected forest as her husband.<sup>811</sup> She then practiced austerities and then reduced her body and adopted the life of a deer. She survived on grass.<sup>812</sup> Her father Yayati when fell from the heaven due to his demerit it was her sons who saved him. She gave half of her religious merit and her sons also gave theirs 'as they were ready

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<sup>801</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Udyoga Parva, Chapter 115, 12-13*

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid, 21*

<sup>803</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 116, 5*

<sup>804</sup> *Ibid, 8-9*

<sup>805</sup> *Ibid, 10-13*

<sup>806</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 117, 20*

<sup>807</sup> *Ibid, 16-17*

<sup>808</sup> *Ibid, 20*

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid, 23-24*

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid, Chapter 120, 1*

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid, 5*

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid, 7-11*



to be commanded' by her.<sup>813</sup> And thus through his daughter's merits obtained he again went back to heaven.

Mādhavī in the whole process was treated as an object devoid of any emotions or feelings. It was her father who initiated the whole process. It was not for the reason of progeny or desire for Galava, but only to fulfil the desire of his preceptor – a *brāhmaṇa*. Even the preceptor at last did not accept the horses he wished for, but like the other kings used her for procuring sons. Neither the kings nor Galava or his preceptor wanted to marry her. Right from the beginning her decision was not paid any heed, as if she did not exist as a human but rather a non-living thing.

That she would regain her virginity after every intercourse was just to conceal the aggressive nature of the whole narrative. Even if such a process was possible, such behaviour is not accepted. Nobody understood her silence and the tragedy she went through when different men imposed themselves on her. There is no mention or description of her sufferings. Even the man for whom she suffered silently, both physically and mentally did not marry her. In other stories we see that a woman is getting involved for progeny with another man within the institution of marriage at the command of her husband. But this episode goes beyond any limitations. The sons were not for her marital house. At the end her father arranges for her *swayamvara*, but she again silently protests and retires to the forest. It was her pain which reflects how degraded social norms and impositions could have been for a woman.

In every story where there has been a deviation and has not been considered sinful, the gods and the *Ṛṣis* being a common factor in them. Inclusion of the gods and the *Ṛṣis* in order to acquire progeny outside the institution of marriage was religiously sanctioned. The belief behind their inclusion might be that it increased the purity of the lineage. Pāṇḍu in order to convince his wife Kuntī to beget children from another man and particularly a *Ṛṣi* narrated stories to validate that there is no sin in indulging with a god or a *Ṛṣi* for progeny. But the fact that Kuntī disapproved of such a proposal shows how women felt when they were sent to another man for progeny. At the same time queen Sudesna, Ambikā and Ambālika sent their maids in order to escape from the situation. But ultimately they had to surrender to the patriarchal needs. But Kuntī's story reveals how uncomfortable and difficult it could have been for a woman

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<sup>813</sup> *The Mahābhārata, Udyoga Parva, Chapter 121, 20*

to tolerate the touch of another man who was neither her husband nor her lover. Such customs and laws of the society disregarded and dishonoured women. Pāṇḍu tried to convince Kuntī to beget sons from another man by narrating different stories. Kuntī to convince her husband otherwise told the story of Bhadra wherein she copulated with her deceased husband's body through divine power.

Vyushitaswa, a king of the Puru lineage married Bhadra, the daughter of KakŚivat. And they couple loved each other deeply. King Vyushitaswa died without an heir. Bhadra who was grief stricken said, "*Women serve no purpose when their husbands are dead. She, who lives after her husband is dead, drags onto a miserable existence that can hardly be called life...death, is a blessing to women without husbands. I wish to follow the way you have gone. Be kind and take me with you.*" <sup>814</sup>*I shall follow you as my own shadow...I will obey you (as your slave) and will ever do what is agreeable to you and what is for your good.*" <sup>815</sup> Bhadra embraced the corpse of her husband when a divine voice granted her the boon that he will beget offspring upon her. Thus, the corpse of her husband begot upon her seven children viz., three Salwas and four Madras. Kuntī thus told Pāṇḍu to beget offspring upon her through his ascetic power. <sup>816</sup>

Daśaratha did not have any son from his wives but had one daughter. Thus he performed a Ashwamedha sacrifice. During the Aswamedha sacrifice, the horse was consecrated on all sides and Kausalya and the other queens touched it with three swords. To acquire 'religious meirt', Kausalya then spent one night with the horse with 'a perfectly composed mind.'<sup>817</sup> Then the king's other wives along with the first wife was brought into contact with the horse. The sage Rsyasrnga, Daśaratha's son-in-law began a sacrifice for him to secure a male progeny.<sup>818</sup> This contact with the horse might have sexual connotation or it might have been the case that the contact with a sacrificial horse purified them for the process. Such stories reflect how the life of a woman regulated itself within the patriarchal norms. It was her submission and

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<sup>814</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Adī Parva*, Chapter 121, 20-21

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.*, 24

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-36

<sup>817</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 14, 34

<sup>818</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 35

subordination to the patriarchy that made her a chaste, pure and an ideal woman. Thinking beyond the patriarchal tradition proved catastrophic for her.

Śiva on his marriage with Uma was involved in a conjugal bliss, for a long time but no son or daughter was born to her.<sup>819</sup> The god feared that offspring of Śiva and Uma will bring about extinction of the worlds as he will be extremely glorious. Śiva discharged his fluid on earth as told by the gods. The fire-god assisted by the wind god consolidated it into a white mountain transforming it into white reeds resplendent in fire and thus Kārtikeya was born.<sup>820</sup> As Pārvatī cursed the gods that they will not have progeny from their wives, subsequently it was decided that Lord Śiva by placing his seed in Ganga through the god of fire that the commander of the army will be born. It is said that Ganga, the eldest daughter of Himavat and sister of Umā will regard him as his own son and it will be made even on account of her sister too.<sup>821</sup> But Ganga was unable to bear it and deposited it on earth.<sup>822</sup> Here Ganga bore the son of her sister's husband while in the *Mahābhārata* she gave birth to the sons of Shantanu to redeem celestial being from curse. In *Rāmāyaṇa* also we see that Ganga bearing a son for the well-being of the celestial being.

Compromises for progeny not only existed amongst the earthly beings, but also in the celestial world. This shows the similarity and contrast between these two worlds. It is interesting to observe how such precepts were shown to be perceived in the celestial realm.

### **Deviance by Deception**

When Brahmā created beings, all had the same features and even the same voice; there was not any difference amongst them. Then he created a woman who had all the distinctive features. She was named Ahalyā. As she was beyond any fault, she was called Ahalyā. Brahmā decided to give her to sage Gautama. But Indra desired for her. Having being refused, he got angry and violated her through his tricks.<sup>823</sup> Ahalyā was cheated by Indra who took the form of her husband and approached her. But we get other version of the story. We get her reference in the in the *Purāṇa* also. The

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<sup>819</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bālakāṇḍa*, Chapter 36, 7

<sup>820</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bālakāṇḍa*, Chapter 36, 7, 17-18

<sup>821</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bālakāṇḍa*, Chapter 37, 6-8

<sup>822</sup> *Ibid*, 22

<sup>823</sup> *Ibid*, *Uttārakāṇḍa*, Chapter 30, 19-45

story has been narrated below. It is crucial to analyse the way she has been addressed even after her deviance.

Vishvamisra narrates the legend of Ahalyā to Rāmā and Ahalyā was the wife of a sage called Gautama. On knowing the absence of Gautama's, Indra disguising himself as sage Gautama approached Ahalyā. When Gautama came to know about this, he cursed Ahalyā and addressed her as '*dusta caariniim*'.<sup>824</sup> He cursed her and said, "*You will stay here for many thousands of years without food or drink, living on air alone, and remain lying on ashes full of remorse. You shall dwell in this hermitage unperceived by all created beings.*"<sup>825</sup> Describing her as '*dur vRitte*' i.e an ill-behaved woman, he said that after being purified by the touch of Rāmā, she will get rid of her impurity and then only she can be with him.<sup>826</sup> He cursed Indra that his testicles will fall down.<sup>827</sup>

With the help of other gods Indra got back his testicles.<sup>828</sup> Sureśa i.e. Indra had vaginal marks on his body because of having outraged Ahalyā.<sup>829</sup> Then again, due to the favour of Goddess (Innrākṣī), he became well-known as Sahasrākṣa (one having thousand eyes).<sup>830</sup> And that his genital organ will be like a goat's scrotum.<sup>831</sup>

Vishvamisra asked Rāmā to enter the hermitage and redeem the curse on '*mahaabhaagaam*' Ahalyā.<sup>832</sup> Rāmā nowhere accused Ahalyā but rather praised her. He described Ahalyā as, '*mahaabhaagaam*'<sup>833</sup> (highly fortunate) and *tapasaa dyotita prabhaam* (brightened with asceticism)<sup>834</sup> and said that it is impossible to raise an eye for a stare either for gods, or for demons, or for the worldly beings on coming close to her, whom the Creator has contrived with careful contemplation as an angelic and a completely phantasm entity.<sup>835</sup>

Rāmā was impressed by the penance of Ahalyā and said that she is practising an utmost asceticism subsisting on air alone, which asceticism alone made her like a

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<sup>824</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa*, Chapter 48,33

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid*, 29, 30

<sup>826</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa*, Chapter 48,31-32

<sup>827</sup> *Ibid*, 28

<sup>828</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 49, 10

<sup>829</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa, ṣṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 746

<sup>830</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa, ṣṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 746, 4-5a

<sup>831</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, 47b-50a

<sup>832</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa* Chapter 49,11

<sup>833</sup> *Ibid*,13

<sup>834</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid*,14

flaring “Ritual Fire”.<sup>836</sup> On ending the curse of Ahalyā, Rāmā and Laksmana also touched the feet of Ahalyā in reverence.<sup>837</sup>

Ahalyā was greatly respected by the gods, “*whose limbs are depurated by the asset of her asceticism which is performed as a devotee of Gautama.*”<sup>838</sup> Even Gautama, her husband who cursed and abused her felt affectionate when he reunited with Ahalyā.<sup>839</sup>

Ahalyā gained asceticism as Rāmā said that through her penance (living as a stone) she became a blazing fire. He also said that as she was carefully crafted and created by the gods and nobody could accuse her and in no way she was impure. She was praised by Rāmā. She also continued practising asceticism along with her husband. Thus it was the involvement of a great sage and gods that saved from becoming an unchaste woman, and thus she could maintain her virtue. Ahalyā’s accusation and curse was to show the society that how righteous the sage was and when he is accepting her, she is purified by the touch of Viṣṇu, the Supreme Being.

In case of Ahalyā, Rāmā did not denounce her. But he accused Sītā when she was abducted by Rāvaṇa. He was also not ready to accept her in fear of public suspicion. Rāmā said he has recovered her due to the insult meted out to him and not for her. But it has to be kept in mind too that Rāmā did not ask Sītā to go through an ordeal, it was Sītā’s decision to go for an ideal. The ordeal not only proved her chastity but at the same time purified her as she was touched by another man. It is a paradoxical situation wherein a woman who did not do anything was to be discarded by her husband while another woman who did perform a sinful act willingly though cursed was not discarded by her husband.

What is important here is that while a woman was not at fault, then also she was punished by the male authority and is called impure as she was touched by another man. It was through a god that she received redemption and was purified. It was only after going through this process that she was accepted by her husband.

The stories reflect paradoxical situations. But it was through these situations that other issues also come to the surface. Women subordination, confining her to the patriarchal boundaries through the concept of chastity shows multiple complexities.

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<sup>836</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa* Chapter 49, 15

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid*, 16c,17a

<sup>838</sup> *Ibid*, 20

<sup>839</sup> *Ibid*, 21

The conflict between the gods and sages, caste conflict had a great impact on this concept and vice versa. The involvement of gods or sages in case of begetting gave the assurance of a male child. Moreover the involvement of gods and sages made any deviance pure. Another hierarchy that existed was that the treatment was different for women of different classes. In many of the stories we find that queens send their maids when the king or the patriarchal head tells them to beget offspring on another man. The maid sent to Vyāsa was upgraded from the status of maid. Does this mean that the chastity of the lower caste differed from that of the upper caste?

Women had to face with more stringent situations than that of the men. They were considered unchaste even if they did not have any fault. Sometimes she was made to deviate. When she was made to deviate within the patriarchal boundaries she was not considered unchaste. We do find some stories wherein men are also punished for involving in adulterous behaviour. Rāvaṇa was punished for his deeds. But at the same time Sītā was always punished (who did not have any fault). The contradictory situations made the issue much more complicated. Draupadī who was made to marry five men, at one place was considered chaste and at the same time was considered unchaste by another.

Ordeal was an important aspect for proving herself pure and for purifying also. But we also face with a complex situation here also. Here we see Rāmā giving redemption to a woman who was cursed by her husband, but it is him only who curses his own wife who did not have any fault. It was his wife only who supported her when he had to go to the forest and wanted to end her life as she was touched by another man. Anxious of public scandal and sexual tensions too he was about to discard his wife.

Men played a major role in framing this ideology and maintaining it. But they never had to conform to this path as strictly as women had to. It is interesting to observe the different dimensions of the concept being framed through the stories and the characters. But the concept of chastity did not just prevail according to caste and gender, but also as per the region. As in the *Rāmayaṇa* we see how Rāvaṇa and his kingdom was portrayed which did not follow the Brahmanical tradition. This shows

how a text was influenced by a region and also reflects how different precepts were perceived according to a region.

### **Imposition of Deviance according to region**

As the dominance according to caste became stronger, thus social imposition became stronger. But in the *Karṇa Parva* we see when Shalya denied to be Karṇa's charioteer on the basis of caste, Karṇa told him about stories which he heard from *Brāhmaṇas* who came to his house which indicates that people of the five rivers were not only derogatory but even women were unchaste. This verdict was pronounced not only on the basis of caste but according to region. This indicated that the region and the people belonging to it who did not conform to the Brahmanical norms and ordinances were considered degraded and sinful.

Karṇa said that in Dhritārāshtra's house, the *Brāhmaṇas* used to describe many pleasing regions and the lives of many ancient kings. One aged and leading *Brāhmaṇa* condemned the Valhikas and Madrakas. Thus one should always avoid the 'impure' and 'impious' Valhikas who live away from Himavat and Ganga, Saraswati, Yamuna and Kurukshetra and the Sindhu with its five tributaries.<sup>840</sup>

Karṇa said regarding the Madrakas, "*Amongst them the father, the son, the mother, the mother-in-law, the father-in-law, the maternal uncle, the son-in-law, the brother, the grandson, other relations and guests, slaves, male and female mingle together. Thus women freely mix with men whether they are known or a stranger.*"<sup>841</sup> *They move about lustfully. They indulge in free speeches amongst themselves.*"<sup>842</sup> The Madraka women having consumed liquor throw off their robes and dance. They do not follow any control in intercourse and do whatever they like. The Madraka maidens were considered shameless and were considered lowly and impure for having excessive hairs.<sup>843</sup> Thus these women did not conform to the norms of the Brahmanical tradition and precepts, but at the same time did not fit into the ideal concept of physical beauty.

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<sup>840</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Karṇa Parva*, Chapter 44,4-7

<sup>841</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Karṇa Parva*, Chapter 40, 24-25

<sup>842</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-39

There is a town of the name of Shakala, a river by the name of Apaga and a clan of the Valhikas known as Jartikkas. Their conduct is considered to be very unacceptable.<sup>844</sup> Their women drink and are nude. They laugh and dance, outside the walls of the houses and sing obscene songs. They freely mix and have sexual union with all. The ‘fallen’ Valhika woman, who does not follow any restrictions even on holy days, dance and exclaim “*Alas! Our husband, our lord is dead!*”<sup>845</sup>

Once a *Brāhmaṇa* who came to Karṇa’s house as a guest, expressed his discontent with the Vahikas<sup>846</sup> as they can, at first become a *Brāhmaṇa* and then become a *Kshatriya*. A Vahika after that will become a Vaishya, then a *Śūdra* and then a barber. Having become a barber he will again become a *Brāhmaṇa*. Attaining again to the position of a *Brāhmaṇa* he will again become a slave. One member of a family becomes a *Brāhmaṇa*. Not leading a virtuous life they act as they desire.<sup>847</sup> Such descriptions reveal how a region could influence people, tradition and customs which in turn influenced the texts. This also helps in perceiving the social, economic and cultural conditions of the regions that were not dominated by the *Brahmins*. It implies there were other existing traditions that the *Brahmins* were apprehensive about and thus condemned them. It warned its listeners of such regions, so that they do not get influenced by such customs.

Karṇa on the other hand describes quite pleasantly the regions which fall under the influence of the *Brahmins*. The Panchālas observe the duties laid down in the *Vedas*; the Kauravas observe truth; the Matsyas, Surasena perform Yajnas; the people of the east follow the conduct of the *Śūdras*. Those of the south are fallen; the Vahikas are thieves, the Saurashtras are bastards.<sup>848</sup> The Panchālas, the Kauravas, the Naimishas, and the Matsyas all these are conversant with religion. Even the old people of the North, the Angas and Magadhas follow the practice of the pious.<sup>849</sup> The Magadhas are conversant with hints, the Koshālas can understand what they see. The Kurus and Panchālas can understand half-expressed words. The Shalyas cannot understand till

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<sup>844</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Karṇa Parva*, Chapter 40, 10

<sup>845</sup> Ibid, 12-14

<sup>846</sup> Ibid, Chapter 45, 2-4

<sup>847</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Karṇa Parva*, Chapter 45, 6-8

<sup>848</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Karṇa Parva*, Chapter 45, 28

<sup>849</sup> Ibid, 30



the whole thing is expressed.<sup>850</sup> Madras is called the dirt of all nations on earth so the Madra woman is called the dirt of the entire female sex.<sup>851</sup> There is none more wretched than he whose duty consists in drinking wine, violating the bed of his preceptor, destroying the embryo by miscarriage and robbing other people of their riches...fie on the Arthas and the people of the land of five rivers.<sup>852</sup>

The conversation between Shalya and Karṇa indicated that if the Brahmanical practices were not followed in a particular region the character and life of those people were sketched in a deprecatory manner. The narration also implies to the fact that how the independent behaviour of a woman was condemned and was considered unchaste and impure. It also articulated how an ideal woman was suppose to behave. Following the prescriptive behaviour made them acceptable in the society.

## CONCLUSION

Like sexuality, transgression is a social construction. Both of them are affected by the social and cultural norms of the society. Religious institutions being the most vital part, plays a major role in the formation of social precepts and practices. How a gender or gender role should be perceived is socially constructed and again religion forms a significant role. Different social issues are intricately intertwined. Precepts, practices and perceptions change with time. The change in the position of women and female gender role and their perception too underwent changes along with their male counterpart. Though women is being considered as a vice, their importance in every social process could not be ignored, thus it became important to control them in order to control other social aspects. If deeply observed the presence of women is strong and significant like their male counterpart, the only difference lie in gender roles.

If she deviated out of social compulsion like progeny, it was not considered sinful as it meant that she complied with social norms. But if she transgressed from the prescribed path, she was called wicked and promiscuous in nature, as it meant challenging the existing social norms and traditions which a woman. But again

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<sup>850</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Karṇa Parva*, Chapter 40,34

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

<sup>852</sup> *Ibid.*, 38

considering a transgression a sin depended on other facets too, like the social status and the caste of the characters involved.

There were some instances where women were punished for the adultery they performed, while in some though they did not have any fault of their, had to suffer and go through ordeals. In many stories we see that though women committed adultery willingly they were not given any punishment or had to go through any ordeal. They were accepted by their husband without any suspicion or issue (some fought to get back their wife). Indra on account of his having coveting the body of Ahalyā was cursed by Gautama, yet for the sake of Virtue and wealth the *Rṣi* did not destroy him. (Gods and celestials are at the mercy of *Brāhmaṇas*)<sup>853</sup> The common ground on which the women were not punished and that moreover the man was abused or punished was the involvement of a *Brāhmaṇa*. Indra and other gods were punished for laying a sinful eye on their wives. Even Śiva and Kṛṣṇa (the incarnation of Viṣṇu) propagates the ‘greatness’ of the *Brahmins*. The *Brahmins* showed a very ‘liberal’ attitude when there was a question of progeny and caste. That the *Brahmins* were always apprehensive about the intermixture of caste (though they provided the means of purification for the low caste and women whom they equated) is reflected in the epics.

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<sup>853</sup> The *Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana Parva*, Chapter 153

## CHAPTER 4: CHASTITY AS REFLECTED IN THE MAHAPURĀNAS

*“A woman as well as a river, let alone, is sure to take a downward course. A woman, under such a situation brings down the honour of the family. A free woman like an uncontrolled river is ‘sportive’ in her course.”<sup>854</sup>*

### INTRODUCTION

Pārvatī in order to attain Śiva practised austerities for a year without consuming anything. She used to raise fire around her during the summer season and remained inside it for the whole day and night, practising *tapas*. During the rainy season she used to seat on the cremation ground and stared at the stone of Śiva getting wet in the rain water.<sup>855</sup> In the winter season she used to enter the cold water. During the night time when there used to be snow, she did not consume any food and performed the ‘hard’ *tapas*. Even after a year of performing such hard austerities, when Śiva did not appear before her, she decided to die by entering into the fire altar.<sup>856</sup> When Pārvatī was about to enter the fire, Śiva appeared before her.<sup>857</sup>

Pārvatī said that all women are born in human form in order to acquire their partner. *“Their birth is only meant for achieving a noble husband”.*<sup>858</sup> *They achieve the same husband whom they had in earlier births”.*<sup>859</sup> Thus marriage for women was considered more of a social obligation wherein a husband was acquired through hard penance and austerities. Through this marriage she attained her identity, recognition, honour, liberation and heaven. Her life and identity was totally submerged within the institution of marriage and patriarchal norms and restrictions of the society.

The *Padma Purāṇa* states that devotion to the husband and service to him is a woman’s ornament. Their constant purity within and out is called their ‘*full ornament*’. Good character, truthfulness, religious merit, patience and affection are the other ornaments of a woman.<sup>860</sup> All these ornaments were meant for her married life, so that she could maintain her chastity for the welfare of her husband throughout her life. The real ordeal of chastity for women began when she commenced her marital life.

<sup>854</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 109, 38-39

<sup>855</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 40, 14-16

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid*, 17-18

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid*, 19-21

<sup>858</sup> *Ibid*, 43

<sup>859</sup> *Ibid*, 44

<sup>860</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 90, 27b-33a

The wife is called *Jāya* because the husband is reborn in her.<sup>861</sup> She is remembered as *Bhāryā* because she has to be maintained. She herself only is said to be *Gṛha*, thus is called *Gṛhiṇī*. She is called *Kalatra* because she is the saviour from the sins of the worldly existence.<sup>862</sup> The wife is called a *sadhvi*.<sup>863</sup> A devoted, faithful, loyal wife is the very life of her husband. She is adored by gods and sages.<sup>864</sup> A woman who does not mentally think of another man enjoys the same position as that of Umā and earns fame in the world.<sup>865</sup>

All the members of the families of her father, mother and husband is said to enjoy the pleasures of heaven, as a result of the merit of the chaste woman. By losing her modesty and chastity, 'a woman of evil deeds' causes the fall of three families of her father, mother and husband. She becomes miserable both here and thereafter.<sup>866</sup> The question arises as to why it was necessary for women to possess such characteristics or what was the importance of a chaste wife and not otherwise. Through these beliefs the authors of *Purāṇas* institutionalized their norms.

### **The Virgin, her Caste and Kin**

A twice-born was prescribed to marry a virgin who is beautiful, born in a good family and possessed good qualities, good conduct and habits and performed righteous activities.<sup>867</sup> Maintaining the purity of the first three castes was a matter of great concern. In order to maintain this purity, a virgin with the above mentioned qualities was a requirement. Out of illusion, a man was warned not to marry a girl of low family. By marrying a low and base girl, one makes the progeny low and base. After being properly scrutinised a girl was to be taken as a bride.<sup>868</sup> A householder was said to marry a maiden who is in kin at least five degrees distant from his mother, and seven from his father, with the ceremonies prescribed by law.<sup>869</sup> The householder who marries a female who equally follows him in religious and civil conventions and

<sup>861</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book I: *Māheśvarakhaṇḍa*, Section II: *Kaumāikakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 89-90

<sup>862</sup> Ibid, Chapter 15, 7-8

<sup>863</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 16, 18

<sup>864</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 51, 5b-7a

<sup>865</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 40, 49

<sup>866</sup> Ibid, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 58-59

<sup>867</sup> The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, Chapter 26, 3

<sup>868</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 5, 92-95

<sup>869</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Chapter 10

along with her if he performs his duties, he derive great benefits from such a wife.<sup>870</sup> Thus he was prescribed not to marry a girl of the same *gotra* but a girl who was of the same religion and caste. Thus the hierarchical structure of the society was maintained through women. So it was important to gain control over her.

A princess could exercise her choice in a *svayamvara* where sometimes she could choose her husband and sometimes she was to get married to the man who complete the task provided that would prove his merit. But even in such a condition of choosing a husband, her position remained vulnerable. A king called Karandhama had a son named Avikṣita. He went to the *svyamvara* of Vaiśālīni, the daughter of Viśāla. He was not selected by her.<sup>871</sup> He fought with other kings and took her by force.<sup>872</sup> There was a battle between king Karandhama and other kings, in which king Karandhama was victorious.<sup>873</sup> When Viśāla went before them with his daughter, Avikṣita rejected her as she was seen by other kings.<sup>874</sup> But the princess desired to be his wife only.<sup>875</sup> She carried on penances so that she obtains him as her husband not only in the present birth but in other births too.<sup>876</sup> The celestials sent their emissary to save her and said that she should not kill herself by the severe penance as she would be the mother of a *cakravartin*.<sup>877</sup> She told him of her vow. Following the words of the celestials she nourished her body.<sup>878</sup> Avikṣita who decided to remain a celibate after the incident, succumbed to the pressure of his parents and decided to marry. Finally they were reunited. Vaiśālīni was originally the daughter of a Gandharva.<sup>879</sup>

In another story in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, King Nariṣyanta's son Dama possessed great strength.<sup>880</sup> Sumanā, daughter of King of Daśarna accepted him as her husband.<sup>881</sup> But many kings wanted to possess her.<sup>882</sup> They wanted to take her away by force.<sup>883</sup> A *muni* said that as her marriage has already been celebrate with Dama,

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<sup>870</sup>The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Chapter 10

<sup>871</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 119, 1,20

<sup>872</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 121

<sup>873</sup> *Ibid*,23

<sup>874</sup> *Ibid*, 26

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid*, 38

<sup>876</sup> *Ibid*, 46

<sup>877</sup> *Ibid*, 54

<sup>878</sup> *Ibid*,65

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 124, 7

<sup>880</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 130, 1-2

<sup>881</sup> *Ibid*,8-9

<sup>882</sup> *Ibid*, 10-11

<sup>883</sup> *Ibid*, 13-14

he rightly possess her.<sup>884</sup> *Rākṣasa* form of marriage is proper for a ksatriya but not when she has accepted someone else as her husband.<sup>885</sup>

Both the stories have a striking resemblance with that of the story of Amba wherein though she chose another man, Salva as her husband, she was taken away by force by Bhīṣma (who was not aware of her feelings) in her *svayamvara*. But when she did not agree to his proposal of marrying Vichitravirya she was left free. But when she returned back to Salva, he rejected her. Being in such a position she could not go back to her parental house and approach Bhīṣma for marrying her. But as Bhīṣma led a life of celibacy for a reason, he could not marry her. Then she decided to have vengeance on Bhīṣma in her next birth as a man.

Avikṣita too rejected Vaiśālīni as she was seen by other men. Salva rejected Amba because she was touched by another man. Sumana who married the man she chose, but other kings were not ready to accept it. Thus various circumstances made her life prone to various ordeals overcoming which made her gain honour and recognition in the society.

### **The Balance Within**

Pārvatī was taken by her father to Śiva for marriage. Śiva did not accept the proposal and said that one should not get attached to women. A conversation commenced between Pārvatī and Śiva implying the interdependence between a man and a woman. The togetherness of a man and a woman in the form of a husband and a wife has been enumerated in different *MahāPurāṇas*. But Śiva's reply to Pārvatī indicates the male dominance. Pārvatī bowing down to Śiva said that he was performing the penance because he possesses the energy of penance.<sup>886</sup> That energy is *Prakṛti* which is the cause of all activities. Everything is created, maintained and destroyed by it.<sup>887</sup> Without *Prakṛti*, he cannot exist.<sup>888</sup> To this Śiva said that he was performing a penance to destroy *Prakṛti* and that *Prakṛti* should not be accepted by good people.<sup>889</sup> Pārvatī argued with Śiva and said that everything will cease to exist if *Prakṛti* would

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<sup>884</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 130, 24-25

<sup>885</sup> *Ibid*, 32

<sup>886</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Rudreśvara Samhitā: Pārvatikhaṇḍa*, Section III, Chapter 13, 2

<sup>887</sup> *Ibid*, 3

<sup>888</sup> *Ibid*, 4

<sup>889</sup> *Ibid*, 8

not exist, even he would not exist.<sup>890</sup> Without *Prakṛti* everything will be meaningless.<sup>891</sup> If she is *Prakṛti* then he is *Puruṣa*.<sup>892</sup> Due to *Prakṛti*, *Puruṣa* gains meaning. Being always submissive to *Prakṛti*, all activities are performed.<sup>893</sup>

Though we come across the concept of balance that originated from the union of a man and a woman, but social norms, obligations and restraints were directed more concretely and stringently towards women, thus establishing control over them.

### **Duties of a Chaste Wife**

Kṛṣṇa enumerated the duties of a chaste (*pativrata*) woman. He said: a chaste woman should always remain worried about her husband. She takes food with the permission of her husband. Leaving *vratas*, *tapas* and adoration of the gods she should spend her time at the feet of her husband and should offer prayers to him for satisfying him. The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* enumerates how a wife should worship her husband who is a lord to her. A chaste woman should get up early in the morning; change the clothes worn by her at night and wear new clothes. Then she should adore her husband by offering him white flowers, make him bath, offer him two clean garments and then wash his feet. Then by making him sit on a pedestal, she should apply sandal-paste on his forehead, limbs, place a garland around his neck and then should adore her husband with great devotion reciting hymns from the Samaveda.<sup>894</sup>

A chaste woman is not suppose to feel attracted towards another man who is well-dressed and also does not join them in journey, festivities, dance, song and other such activities. The leftover food of her husband should always be acceptable to her and a chaste woman should not leave her husband even for a moment. A chaste woman should never enter into debate with her husband. She should also never get angry when scolded by her husband. The chaste woman should serve her husband food when he is hungry and serve him water. She should also not demand conjugal

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<sup>890</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Rudreśvara Samhitā: Pārvatikhaṇḍa*, Section III, Chapter 13,10

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid* ,13

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid* ,18

<sup>893</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>894</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-Khaṇḍa* ,Chapter 83, 128-133

pleasure when he is asleep.<sup>895</sup> By doing these she redeems thousands of her generations and also relieves the sins of her husband.<sup>896</sup>

The merit a mendicant achieves by performing tapas, austerities, *vratas*, fasting by the ascetics and the giving away of charities by the donors is achieved by a chaste woman. For this reason lord Narayana, Śiva, Brahmā, all the gods and the sages are afraid of the chaste woman.<sup>897</sup> With the dust of the feet of the chaste woman the earth gets purified and by offering salutation to a chaste woman one is relieved of his sins.<sup>898</sup> She is also considered to be competent enough to reduce the three worlds to ashes with her curse.<sup>899</sup> Only after a person performs good deeds for a hundred births that a chaste woman is born in that race. Her mother gets purified while her father is relieved from the cycle of birth and death. The above mentioned conventions were prescribed social conduct and behaviour for a chaste woman. But the whole concept of chastity was more than a social construction. It was made a belief that a ‘chaste’ woman is a requirement for the liberation and benefit of the society. Thus it was made a social responsibility for a woman to be pure and chaste.

## IMPORTANCE OF A CHASTE WIFE

*“There is no doubt that the lord of the world is pleased with him who through good luck has married a pious woman belonging to a noble family.”<sup>900</sup> Due to the corrupt wife the family would perish, therefore a man should never have a corrupt wife.”<sup>901</sup>*

It was important for a woman to be chaste and follow the impositions laid down for her. At the same time it was also the duty of a man to protect a woman because if she is not protected the intercaste mixture take place<sup>902</sup> which implies that it was not only the duty for a woman to self-control herself, but also the duty of a man to control the women or else the balance of the society would be lost.

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<sup>895</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāna*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 83, 110-118

<sup>896</sup> Ibid, 120

<sup>897</sup> Ibid, 123-124

<sup>898</sup> Ibid, 125

<sup>899</sup> Ibid, 126

<sup>900</sup> The *Padma Purāna*, *Bhumikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 61, 21-48a

<sup>901</sup> Ibid, Chapter 52

<sup>902</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*, Chapter 66, 36



Śiva convinced Nārada about taking a wife. While doing so he told Nārada about the importance of *Prākṛiti* and a wife. He said that the eternal god created the universe with the help of *Prākṛiti*. From the rays of *Prākṛiti* women have originated. She is the great force behind *Purusa*. Without *Prākṛiti*, *Purusa* is inactive and will be unable to create. As *Prākṛiti* is Nature, she feels denounced, if a woman is also censured. One who respects and adores a woman with husband and a son actually adores *Prākṛiti*. For the same reason Kṛṣṇa adores Rādhā more than other goddesses. Lakṣmi, Sarasvati, the goddess of speech, Savitri and Durga is the *Prākṛiti*.<sup>903</sup>

A wife was framed so significant that a man was advised to protect his wife by spending his wealth.<sup>904</sup> In order to protect her she was to be honoured with ornaments, apparel and food.<sup>905</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa* says that only through devotion to Śiva does one attain a chaste wife.<sup>906</sup> So he should protect and maintain his wife as a wife helps her husband to acquire virtue, profit and desire.<sup>907</sup> It is through their union only that these three *Puruṣarthas* (*mokṣa*, *kāma* and *artha*) objects can be obtained.<sup>908</sup> But in the same way a wife cannot acquire the same without her husband.<sup>909</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* enumerates the same.<sup>910</sup> Without *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* a man's life did not have any value.<sup>911</sup>

Wife is considered to be at the root of everything of a householder.<sup>912</sup> Wife is for the increase of progeny.<sup>913</sup> One who has a chaste wife in his house is considered a true householder. One who has a wife, i.e. a householder upholds all the other *Āśrāmas* (stages in life) by his own *Āśrāma* and can face any difficulties. No one is equal to her.<sup>914</sup> The stage of householder is said to be produced due to the contact of a meritorious wife.<sup>915</sup>

<sup>903</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, Chapter 30, 11-21

<sup>904</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, Chapter 30, Chapter 109, 1

<sup>905</sup> Ibid, Chapter 95, 26

<sup>906</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7

<sup>907</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 19, 61

<sup>908</sup> Ibid, Chapter 19, 70

<sup>909</sup> Ibid, 72

<sup>910</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, First *Skandha*, Chapter 14, 7-20

<sup>911</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Book II, Chapter 212

<sup>912</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 19, 64

<sup>913</sup> Ibid

<sup>914</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book I: *Māheśvarakhaṇḍa*, Section II: *Kaumārikakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 15, 3-5

<sup>915</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 59, 8-34

The *Padma Purāṇa* states the importance of a chaste wife as narrated by *Dharma*.<sup>916</sup> He said that in the house of him who has a chaste wife, devoted to good practices and aims moral merit, and is devoted to her husband, gods of great prowess stays and his dead ancestors, living in his house, acquires bliss. That household also acquires the benefit of sacrifices. The household where a chaste wife lives becomes a sacred place. Even the husband earns religious merit due to his wife.<sup>917</sup>

In the *Padma Purāṇa* a story is elucidated where a *brāhmaṇa* proficient in the Vedas but was wicked and sinful, earned religious merit due to his wife. A devotee of Viṣṇu came to his house. Seeing him he got angry and uttered abusive words. The devotee being disrespected went out of his house. His wife went to him, fell at his feet and brought him back. His wife told him to honour the devotee. Thus addressed by the ‘chaste’ one<sup>918</sup> he honoured him. He was repeatedly told by his wife as to what to do. Thus he attained religious merit due to his wife. It was through his wife that a householder attained everything.

Pro-creation was one of the most important aspects of a marriage. Thus in this process a woman was held in great reverence, as the whole process was incomplete without her. It is said that all the yogis, *Brahmācaris*, *Samnyasis*, forest dwellers, sages become recluses only after bearing out a child from their wives. In case he disowns his wife without a child all his austerities disappears.<sup>919</sup>

The *Skanda Purāṇa* clearly states that the wife is for progeny,<sup>920</sup> ‘...for chaste women a child is an excellence’ and thus by providing with progeny she becomes the giver of the sixth part of the produce and thus the Law is maintained.<sup>921</sup>

Providing with a child meant providing with a son to the family so that lineage could be maintained. The grief of a household without a son is expressed in the following sentences:

“A man who is without son does not get the fruit of his existence. The house of a sonless person is always desolate. His heart is always unhappy. Without a son freedom from the debt of one’s ancestors, deities and men is not possible...I think that sons are certainly the wealth of a person.”

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<sup>916</sup> Ibid

<sup>917</sup> Ibid, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 204

<sup>918</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 94, 49-57, 101-109

<sup>919</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Prākṛiti Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 46, 58-59

<sup>920</sup> Ibid, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 64

<sup>921</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 66, 44

The next verse too shows how a son glorified the life of a family and religious merits leads to the birth of a son:

*"A man wins the world through a son. A son emancipates his family. O glorious one due to a good son, the father and mother survive. O dear one, it is better to have one son only... one son emancipates the whole family..."*<sup>922</sup>

While there was immense social and ritual pressure on the woman to conceive and give birth to a son, but once she has given birth to the child she is relegated to the background:

*"At the time of a birth of a son there is a thought about the death of the wife. And if the wife survives, then he i.e. the husband loses his happiness. When the vulva has become impure, no union is possible. If he becomes intent on embracing her, his body gets covered with milk coming out of her breasts. Even if the union takes place, the heart of the woman necessarily goes to the child due to the child's weeping. Then he loses interest. Then, if the child falls into the couple that is united, then there is loss of joy. When the union is disrupted, the displeasure is great. When everything is limited by time, there is a possibility of union only on some occasion. At that time there is no food, no water, and no union with his wife."*<sup>923</sup>

Thus the verse testifies the abhorrent attitude towards women. It was her duty to give birth to a son. When she fulfils the duty, she is treated nothing less than a useless object which has stopped functioning. Apart from being a mother to her new born, she also has to continue satisfying her husband's sexual desires. But the pivotal issue here is that her motherhood ironically becomes a curse for her. The feelings that originate in a woman from being a mother become an obstacle for her in providing conjugal pleasure to her husband. The Hāla's *Sattasāī* also talks about a similar situation wherein a pregnant woman has to get involved in such a union. This indicates the varied dilemmas a woman underwent. On one side lies her motherhood and compulsion to provide a son to her husband, nourishing the new born, on the other is her husband and his demands. She has to strike a balance between the two significant people of her life, both the son and her husband helps her gaining a respectable position within and outside the household. It is important for a wife to attend to such desires of her husband or that might have led her husband's path to another man. Thus it was both a mental and physical pressure on her to follow the precepts imposed on her.

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<sup>922</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *UttaraKhaṇḍa* Chapter 89,4-11

<sup>923</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 110.10b-21a,

The man, who deserted his chaste wife, was said to be born as a *cāṇḍāla*. The man who killed a chaste wife was said to obtain hell and he became fallen by abandoning his wife.<sup>924</sup> Though it was said that a man who abandons his chaste wife will suffer but it rarely happened. It was for the benefit of a man that he was told not to leave his chaste wife. Her power was unparalleled. Even if a chaste wife was given so much importance and appreciation then also it is the husband who was said to be difficult to obtain, as even a defective husband was not acquired by a woman without religious merit.<sup>925</sup> The *Purāṇas* not only mentions the importance of a chaste wife but also emphasises on the consequences that may commence by being devoid of a wife.

### **DEVOID OF WIFE**

A house without a wife is said to be deprived of everything, “*she was like the wheels of a chariot which kept her marital house alive.*”<sup>926</sup> She is the owner of the stage of the householder.<sup>927</sup> So in the house of him, who is without a wife, becomes a forest. In his house sacrifices are not accomplished. Any great vow without a wife could not be accomplished. She is the means of all merit.<sup>928</sup> The religious practices of a man could not succeed without his wife. He said that he felt like a sinner in hell and he is afraid as without his wife he will become *Ardhadhadhara* (half-bodied).<sup>929</sup>

That a husband should always maintain and protect his wife as without a wife a man cannot adore the gods, the ancestral manes, the servants and the guests. In the absence of a wife or when united with a bad wife, the wealth, even when acquired by men and brought to their house is spent away. Men cannot acquire desired object without their wife and they jointly carry on pious observances to attain three-fold virtues. The wife too without her husband cannot acquire virtue, desire, wealth and off-spring which can only be acquired through conjugal relation.<sup>930</sup>

In the next section we would discuss about the various nuances that formed the background to the stories about the chaste women mentioned in the *Purāṇas*. It includes devotion and loyalty and service towards the husband, tolerating even the co-

<sup>924</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 52, 8-44

<sup>925</sup> Ibid , *Śrīṣṭīkhaṇḍa*, Chapter 37,160-166a

<sup>926</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Fourth *Skandha*, Chapter 26, 15

<sup>927</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 59, 8-34

<sup>928</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 59, 8-34

<sup>929</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 19, 73

<sup>930</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 19, 61-77

wife her husband brought to the household, compromises for progeny etc. All the nuances indicate that she did not have any existence without her lord, her husband. Thus in many stories a wife self-immolates herself indicating her non-existence without her husband.

## DIFFERENT NUANCES OF CHASTITY AND CHASTE WOMEN

*“A father offers but little, a brother offers but little and so a son. Husband is the lord; husband is the preceptor. He alone is the veritable dharma (virtue), sacred rites, holy shrine etc. Hence after setting aside everything, the wife should worship solely her husband.”<sup>931</sup>*

### DEVOTION, LOYALTY AND SERVICE

No one can render as much service as a wife even if a man devoted his entire life-time to pious activities.<sup>932</sup> Such was the value of the service provided by the wife. Now as we progress with our discussion we shall see how true this statement goes. In most of the stories we find that chastity forms the basis of their identity and existence. It was her loyalty, devotion and service to her husband that she was recognised by. As we find that when a ‘moralistic’ woman is introduced in a story, she was identified and described in the following words: *“was very chaste, devoted to her husband, always engaged in religious practices, and loyal to her husband. Her limbs were auspicious. She had a good son...She spoke the truth, she was always pure, she had a lovable form, and was dear to her husband.”<sup>933</sup>* This was how a woman was recognised – through her devotion towards her husband, her husband and his family.

A wife too desires to be born as a ‘virtuous wife’<sup>934</sup>, *“Wherever I am born again with a brilliant body whether I am not born (of a womb) or whether I am righteous person, I should necessarily attain the status of the virtuous wife of the self-possessed three-eyed lord alone.”<sup>935</sup>* These words were spoken by Satī. Satī was the wife of Śiva. She spoke these words before she entered into fire as she could not tolerate the insult meted out to her husband by her father. Dakṣa, Satī’s father who hated Śiva did not

<sup>931</sup> The *Skanda Purāna*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7.,45-48

<sup>932</sup> Ibid, Book I: *Māheśvarakhaṇḍa*, Section II: *Kaumāikakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 15, 3-7

<sup>933</sup> Ibid, Book I: *Māheśvarakhaṇḍa*, Section II: *Kaumāikakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 15, 2-8

<sup>934</sup> The *Brahmānda Purāna*, 1.2.13.59-60a

<sup>935</sup> Ibid, 1.2.13.45-48

invite Satī but invited his other daughters for a ceremonial sacrifice. On knowing that that all her sisters had arrived at her father's house she too went there. Her father not only dishonoured her, but her husband too. He also explained that their husbands are highly respected and are more praiseworthy. Satī could not tolerate the insult of her husband. Thus she decided to abandon the body born of her father. Thus it was her husband who held the highest position in her life. But in the *Vāmana Purāṇa* when Satī heard that her husband was not invited to the sacrifice ceremony by her father, she did not burn herself but died due to grief.<sup>936</sup>

The burning of Satī narrated in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* might have been a later interpolation than that of the *Vāmana Purāṇa*. By the time such a facet was added in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, the concept of chastity and various other contexts related to it became much more regressive and assertive for women, where self-destruction for her husband was revered, though self-immolation did not become a compulsion.

Serving and devotion towards had deeper nuances attributed to it. As we will see that a 'chaste' wife not only served her ailing husband but also catered to his lust for a prostitute as a service towards her husband.

A woman had a wicked, *Śūdra* husband.<sup>937</sup> He abandoned all holy rites. He had a lover – a *veśyā* whom he kept in his house along with his wife. The wife, who wanted to please her husband, served him as well as the prostitute. She washed the feet of both of them. She partook only of the leftovers of the food of both of them. She remained righteous. As both of them lay on the bed, she used to lie down beneath on the bare ground. Thus she served both of them with misery. Without caring for the advice of 'the chaste wife'<sup>938</sup> the man committed many sins. He was inflicted with disease. The *veśyā* left him with his wealth and went to a younger man.

The man realised his mistake and said: "*The sinful haughty man who does not console his wife who bows down to him, attains all inauspicious things in the course of fifteen rebirths.*"<sup>939</sup> Hearing to this she consoled her husband and brought money from her father. Considering him as lord Viṣṇu she served him and cleaned all his private parts. She did not sleep for the whole day and she prayed for him. But his condition was

<sup>936</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 4,10

<sup>937</sup> The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, Part IV, *Uttārā Bhāga*, Chapter 17, 59-89

<sup>938</sup> Ibid, 63-64

<sup>939</sup> Ibid, 69

getting worse. She sold all her bangles and bought fuel and arranged for his funeral pyre. Burning herself along with her husband, both of them attained heaven. The husband also attained heaven 'by means of her holy rites very difficult to be performed.'<sup>940</sup> Serving her husband meant serving his lady love. She not only tolerated her husband's lover, but served both of them without any complaints. But when he was in a crisis, it was his wife who came to his rescue. By means of her merits he attained heaven as he abandoned all religious observances.

More than elucidating that one should respect and honour his wife, the story concentrates on the aspect of devotion and service, a wife should render to her husband. The man not only had another woman in his life, but his mistress lived with him in his house with his wife. The wife in the form of her devotion not only served her husband but also his keep. Accepting his relationship with another woman, it was she who slept on the floor indicating how much a woman was prescribed to be tolerant, adjust and accept, thus justifying marital infidelity of a man in the society. From this emerges another interesting observance – a wife sleeping on the bare ground and in the same place her husband slept with another man on bed. They would involve in sexual activity and the wife lying right beside them on the ground has to accept such behaviour, considered as devotion towards her husband.

The prostitute when left him with his wealth on the basis of his disease, it was his wife who served her husband considering him her 'lord'. Not only this, it was her parental house that provided financial support during his crisis. When he died, she burned herself in his funeral pyre. And it was through her auspicious acts that he attained heaven. The self-immolation was another form of devotion that was being indicated. It indicated that she did not have any existence without her husband and her companionship should support her husband after his death.

Another issue that surfaces up from the story is regarding the *veśyās*. The *Purāṇas* discourages the society to have any contact with them. For a woman to have any contact with the *veśyās* indicated that it would waste them too. And if a man had any relationship with her, it would worsen their life. It also teaches the audience that public women like *veśyās* do not have the same qualities as that of a chaste woman and they focus on their financial benefit only. Such women were independent, thus

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<sup>940</sup> The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, Part IV, *Uttārā Bhāga*, Chapter 17, 89

challenging the norms of the society, thus degrading and demeaning their character was the only way to control them.

In the next two stories also we find that the wife not only served her husband who is a leper but also fulfil his wish of having sexual dalliance with a prostitute to whom he is attracted to as he was not alone capable of fulfilling his sexual wish. He did not deter himself from expressing his sexual desire for another woman. A wife had to cater to his need, whatever it was. If only she surrendered to these normative duties that she was called a 'chaste wife'.

A *brāhmaṇa* chaste lady named Sevyā<sup>941</sup> had a husband who became a leper due to his previous deeds. She was always involved in serving her husband. Once he saw an extremely beautiful *veśyā* and felt passionate towards her. When his wife, Sevyā came to know about this she wanted to fulfil her husband's desire. She went to the house of the *veśyā* and cleaned her courtyard for three days. When the *veśyā* saw Sevyā cleaning her house 'she clasped her feet'<sup>942</sup> and asked Sevyā what she wanted. The *veśyā* did not like the idea of sporting with a leper stinking with pus. She told Sevyā to bring her husband quickly as she has many people to attend to. As her husband could not walk she decided to carry him on her back. The *brāhmaṇa* was delighted and said to his wife Sevyā, 'what you have done is unbearable for even ladies.'<sup>943</sup> The husband not only attained heaven due to his wife but even the *veśyā* satisfied his sexual feelings as she was impressed by the wife's service.

The previous two stories involve common elements – the involvement of *veśyā* and a husband's lust for them, wife fulfilling their lustful desire and serving their husband in their cṚṣi s. But in the first story, the role of the husband is played by a *Śūdra*. Thus the *Śūdras* who were looked down upon, the story talks about their journey to heaven. But there is a difference between the characters of the husband, while the *Śūdra* is shown to be immoral, the *Brahmāna* on the other hand is not. It was for his previous deeds that he suffered. But as mentioned earlier, in both the episodes, another common element is the chaste wife and her duties, whether she is a wife of a *Brahmāna* or a *Śūdra*, she had to fulfil such duties. Thus it was considered pivotal for

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<sup>941</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 51

<sup>942</sup> Ibid, 31b-34a

<sup>943</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 51, 47



men whether of high caste or low to possess a pativrata woman, who could help him in his liberation.

The story also exhibits the fact that if a woman was a chaste wife she is honoured by the society. Her mind, body and soul belonged to one man who was her husband, her 'lord'. Even gods honour her. On the other side of the threshold are the *veśyās*. The stories indicate that they are never meant to be trustworthy and that sexual dalliance and money matters to them the most. While a wife followed the conduct and restraints imposed on them, a *veśyā*, a self-dependent woman was rather challenging the norms making it unacceptable for the patriarchal society that a woman can have more than one sexual relationship out of her own choice that a woman can live without her husband and is not dependent on the male counterpart.

Anasūyā is considered to be one of the best chaste wives. She along with her husband, Atri's stayed in a forest called Kāmada. Once there was a great famine extending for about hundred years<sup>944</sup>. Her husband's disciples deserted him. Anasūyā was left alone. But she served her husband. Making a beautiful clay image through mantras she worshipped Śiva. Anasūyā circumambulated her husband and Śiva. On seeing her penances the *Daityas* and *Dānavas* were disturbed. They kept themselves away from her. Anasūyā's service to Śiva was said to surpass even the penance of Atri. Anasūyā who is called 'the chaste lady'<sup>945</sup> worshipped only Atri, her husband and Śiva.

On seeing their penance the gods, sages, Gaṅgā and Śiva were amazed and stayed there for a long time. Gaṅgā even decided to help Anasūyā. They were judging as to who is much better in practising penance, Atri or Anasūyā. They decided – "*Atri's penance is good but Anasūyā's service is better*".<sup>946</sup> They moreover said that many difficult penances have been performed by sages but not like Anasūyā's.<sup>947</sup> As long as Atri was in meditation and penance, Anasūyā decided not to eat anything. One day the great sage Atri asked for water. As everywhere it was dry, the chaste lady was wondering as to from where she should bring it. Then she saw Gaṅgā. When Gaṅgā saw Anasūyā coming, she took a beautiful form. Anasūyā asked for water from her. Gaṅgā told her to dig a pit and then she entered the pit. Anasūyā told her to stay there

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<sup>944</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Koṭirudrasamhitā*, Chapter 3-4

<sup>945</sup> *Ibid*, 26

<sup>946</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Koṭirudrasamhitā*, Chapter 3-4, 30

<sup>947</sup> *Ibid*, 31

in the pit for the welfare of the beings. When Atri had the water he understood that it was not an ordinary one. Anasūyā did not want to tell him the truth. She thought, *“If I tell him the truth it will be the exhibition of my greatness. If I do not tell him, it will be a violation of my rites”*.<sup>948</sup> Then she told him that by the blessing of Śiva, Gaṅgā has come there and took her husband to the pit.

Anasūyā requested Gaṅgā to stay there forever if she is delighted and eulogised her. Gaṅgā asked for her year’s merit. She told, *“I am not so much satisfied with charitable gifts, or ceremonial ablutions in the holy centres or sacrifices or the practice of Yogic rites as I am Satisfied with chastity...the mind is not as pleased by any other means as it is pleased at the sight of a chaste lady. On seeing a chaste lady all my sins have perished and like Pārvaṭī have become chaste.”*<sup>949</sup> On hearing these words, the ‘chaste’<sup>950</sup> Anasūyā passed on a year’s merit to her. On seeing this performance of Anasūyā, Śiva calling her a ‘chaste’ lady<sup>951</sup> was impressed and told her to ask for a boon.

Anasūyā proved her devotion not only when she was there with her husband when everyone deserted him, but also when she knew that her penance was much greater than her husband. She took a step back so that Atri, her ‘lord’ remains ‘the great’. She even asked Gaṅgā to stay in the pit for the welfare of the being. This shows that a chaste woman could save the society from calamities and it was through her chastity and pure mind that she could benefit the society at a macro level. Even Gaṅgā could not deny her greatness as she was a chaste lady and said that she stays more satisfied with the chastity of woman rather than anything else.

The discussion on *pativrata* remains incomplete without mentioning the story of Sītā. She had to suffer even after following the norms of the society. It was a tragic moment that she was abandoned by her husband when she was not at fault and even proved her purity through the fire ordeal. Even the gods certified her purity. Sītā is said to be superior to Anasūyā in chastity.<sup>952</sup> Sītā is described as *“the one who is at the head of chaste ladies endowed with beauty and good character having brave sons. Her purifying behaviour is always before her. Those who reflect upon Sītā’s feet*

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<sup>948</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Koṭirudrasamhitā*, Chapter 3-4, 23

<sup>949</sup> *Ibid*, 44-46

<sup>950</sup> *Ibid*, 48

<sup>951</sup> *Ibid*, 50-51

<sup>952</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 142, 29

instantly attain perfection; by the mere thought about her, these divine functions of the worlds like origin, maintenance and destruction, take place. None else but Sītā alone creates Brahmā, Śiva and other gods like me.”<sup>953</sup> But Rāma on basis of public suspicion abandoned her when she was pregnant though he knew her to be pure. Vālmīki even warned Rāma that everyone praises about his deeds except the case of his abandoning Sītā.<sup>954</sup>

Lakṣmaṇa was the one who went to leave Sītā in forest. Lakṣmaṇa told Sītā everything. Hearing that she was deserted she felt as if she has been ‘struck by thunderbolt’. She was ‘like a good creeper with its root cut off’.<sup>955</sup> Sītā was greatly hurt that Rāma trusted the words of a washer man.<sup>956</sup> As she was the one who remained attached to his feet and ate what was left over by him. When Rāma wanted Sītā back, Sītā said, “*Though he has abandoned me, I have not, in the least, forsaken him.*”<sup>957</sup>

Lakṣmaṇa informed Sītā about Rāma’s grief that finding all the places ‘vacant’<sup>958</sup> without her he weeps. He looks at the place occupied by her. In such a moment Sītā was least concerned about the fact that Rāma abandoned her, though she was innocent and that too at such a crucial time. She was rather much anxious about her husband’s fame that has turned into infamy due to her as evident from her saying:

*“I have not been the cause of the king’s fame; on the contrary I myself am infamy. Void of good dharma, kāma and artha, what can I accomplish for him? Under the circumstances who would have faith in your autocratic king? By one like me born in an auspicious family the faults of my husband that are in my mind should never be told directly or indirectly. He does not move away from my heart in that form in which he settled in my heart at the time of our marriage.”*<sup>959</sup>

Sītā decided not to go back and told Lakṣmaṇa to take his two sons back, as they are ‘the sprouts of his family’.<sup>960</sup> She will stay back in the forest appeasing Rāma by means of his penance. When Rāma came to know of this he was so inflicted that he became unconscious. Regaining his conscious he said, “*Sītā should come back as whether a wife comes back to her husband or not, the husband is the only recourse.*

<sup>953</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa, Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 64, 28b-36

<sup>954</sup> Ibid, Chapter 66, 44-51

<sup>955</sup> Ibid, Chapter 59, 13-18

<sup>956</sup> Ibid, Chapter 58, 35-41

<sup>957</sup> Ibid

<sup>958</sup> Ibid, 70-86

<sup>959</sup> Ibid, 101-104

<sup>960</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa, Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 58, 105

*Whatever act is done by a noble woman, is done for pleasing her husband. He is now very pleased with and that she should come back to her as sacrifice, muttering prayers, penance, charity, vows, visits to sacred places, showing pity etc., all become fruitful and deities are pleased when the husband is pleased.*<sup>961</sup> After Lakṣmaṇa came to Sītā for taking her back he said, “A chaste wife does not bring to her mind the fault committed by her husband.”<sup>962</sup> Sītā after being convinced by his words and giving ‘the anger in her heart’<sup>963</sup> went with Lakṣmaṇa. After she saw Rāma she stuck to the feet of Rāma<sup>964</sup>.

The two sons of Sītā even destroyed the whole army of Rāma. When she came to know about this, thinking about the well-being of her husband Rāma, who abandoned her while she was pregnant prayed to the Sun-god to revive his army. It was the duty of the wife to think about her husband only whatever might have been the situation. It was even necessary for a wife to be with her husband even if he has committed a sin because as per Rāma’s words, husband is the only recourse for a wife and that she cannot earn merit by worshipping or by penance if she is not with her husband. Even Sītā thought about the loss she has caused to Rāma though she knew she was not at fault. The concept of self-identity and recognition and respect did not exist for a woman. It was all channelized towards her lord, her husband. It was the vow of marriage and communion that provided her with social recognition and identity.

In the next story also we see that a wife does not leave her husband even when everyone left him for his misdeeds<sup>965</sup>. There was a king in the city of Kāmpilya called Vīrabāhu. His wife Kāntimatī was ‘a highly chaste wife and faithful lady and was a great devotee’ of her husband.<sup>966</sup> He asked a sage called Bhāradvāja that what great merit he has earned, that he got such an ‘amiable and beautiful’ wife. The sage told about his previous birth. The sage narrated that in his previous birth he was a *Śūdra*, who was an ‘atheist of vicious conduct’ and used to violate the chastity of other men’s wives.<sup>967</sup> He had the same wife in his previous birth too. Though he was of such bad nature she was devoted towards him. When everyone abandoned him he went to the

<sup>961</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter64, 112-120

<sup>962</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 67, 5

<sup>963</sup> *Ibid*,6

<sup>964</sup> *Ibid* , Chapter 66

<sup>965</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book II: *Vaiṣṇavakhaṇḍa*, Section V: *Mārgaśīrṣa-Māhātmya*, Chapter 11

<sup>966</sup> *Ibid*,5b-8

<sup>967</sup> *Ibid*, 53

forest and survived by killing animals there. Even in such condition she did not leave him. Such intense devotion was shown not only by the earthly women but also by the goddesses as Lakṣmī maintained her devotion and loyalty for her husband Viṣṇu, even when Viṣṇu was not attached to her.<sup>968</sup> She did not go away from Viṣṇu.<sup>969</sup> There were also said to be many celestial nymphs, and five hundred women with him.

A chaste wife's dedication, solicitation and endurance could even bring her dead husband back to life. The story of Sāvitrī is known to all. The reference to Sāvitrī is found in *Matsya Purāṇa*.<sup>970</sup>

It is said that after her marriage she with utter devotion served her husband and in-laws who were greatly satisfied.<sup>971</sup> But only four days remained for Satyavāna to die and Sāvitrī with the permission of his father-in-law kept a fast for three nights. Sāvitrī told Satyavāna not to go away from him.<sup>972</sup> When Dharmaraja came to take Satyavāna with him, Sāvitrī stopped him from doing so. She not only brought her husband back from death but through Dharmaraja cured her husband's ailment and asked from him a boon, so that hundred sons are born to her from Satyavāna "*as there is no relief in the next world without sons.*"<sup>973</sup>

Thus a man was provided with significant reasons to possess a chaste wife as he was promised with so many privileges to the extent that he can be brought back to life after death if he had a chaste wife!

A *pativrata*'s devotion and service could cure even a blind husband and make an old aged husband young and handsome as we see Lord Manu's daughter doing so.<sup>974</sup> Thus the husband was always at benefit. And it was structured in such a way that the wife gained only when the husband benefitted.

King Śaryāti's daughter, Sukanyā being unaware offended the sage Cyavana by bursting his eyes. The sage told Manu to give his daughter to him in marriage. The king though anxious gave his daughter who was young to the old blind sage. She served her husband properly and was always obedient to him. She pleased Cyavana.

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<sup>968</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Fourth *Skandha*, Chapter 31, 22

<sup>969</sup> Ibid, 29-37

<sup>970</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 208

<sup>971</sup> Ibid, Chapter 209

<sup>972</sup> Ibid, Chapter 207

<sup>973</sup> Ibid

<sup>974</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 14-15

Once the two physician gods i.e. the two Aśvins came there. She honoured and worshipped them. Being pleased by her service and observing her chastity<sup>975</sup> they told her to ask for a boon.

Knowing what Cyavana wanted she told them to give back his sight. They not only gave him his sight back but also his youth. Cyavana impressed by her told her that she possessed supernatural powers and blessed her to enjoy riches obtained by her due to righteousness and divine which is difficult to obtain by men.<sup>976</sup> Then she asked for a child as “... *for chaste women a child is an excellence.*”<sup>977</sup> In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the same story is narrated. But when the Aśvins came it was Cyavana who asked them to restore his youth.<sup>978</sup> The Aśvins and Cyavana looked similar.<sup>979</sup> The ‘chaste’ Sukanyā unable to recognise her husband took the help of Aśvinikumāras.<sup>980</sup> Her father being unaware of this transformation, rebuked her daughter of being ‘unchaste’.<sup>981</sup> He accused of bringing shame on her father and husband.<sup>982</sup> Thus both the versions reflect that a girl by her loyalty and devotion towards her husband not only benefits her husband’s family, but also by her unconventional behaviour can let her paternal and marital family face social stigma.

A woman had to keep her devotion towards her husband intact even when she was not married to him as marriage provided her identity. So she had to maintain her loyalty and purity for her future husband and by no means could lose it, as Aśokasundarī, daughter of Pārvatī did it for her future husband.<sup>983</sup> She was not conceived from the semen of Śiva but she was perceived by Pārvatī from a divine tree. Aśokasundarī, as decided by Pārvatī was supposed to get married to Nahuṣa who was not yet born. A demon was attracted to her and he wanted to have her. Aśokasundarī denied his proposal and said that when she was born goddess Pārvatī also produced her husband who will be born in the lunar dynasty and she will obtain a son was also decided. She told Huṇḍa to give up as she was someone else’s wife.

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<sup>975</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 15, 10-16a

<sup>976</sup> *Ibid*, 21-24

<sup>977</sup> *Ibid*, 25-26

<sup>978</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ninth Skandha, Chapter 3,11

<sup>979</sup> *Ibid*, 16

<sup>980</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>981</sup> *Ibid*, 20

<sup>982</sup> *Ibid*, 21

<sup>983</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 103-116

Huṅḍa made fun of her and said that how can she marry someone who is not yet born and that he will be younger to her. It is proper that a wife could be younger to her husband and not the vice-e-versa. Huṅḍa by trick kidnapped her. Aśokasundarī cursed Huṅḍa that he will be killed by her future husband Nahuṣa and that no one can save him. Huṅḍa tried every possible way to kill him before he was born. But he failed and Nahuṣa killed him. All these years Aśokasundarī waited for her husband maintaining her devotion and loyalty towards her husband.

### ACCOMMODATING A CO-WIFE AND THE OTHER WOMAN

The *Nārada Purāṇa* states that bringing a co-wife is the most miserable of all miseries and brings in endless grief if a woman has to see with her own eyes her husband obsessed by another woman.<sup>984</sup> There will be hardly any woman in the three worlds who will survive the harassment due to the misery of being a co-wife. There is no doubt about this that it is the greatest of all miseries when there is another woman to have a share in the wealth and enjoyment of pleasures.<sup>985</sup> But nowhere in the *Purāṇas* is it told that one should not bring another wife. But in the *Mārkaṇḍeya MahaPurāṇa* we do get an instance wherein a man is criticised for having many wives – implying that there is lack of devotion in such a relationship. Svaroci had many wives. A certain Kalahaṃsa spoke to Cakravāka living in water as to how Svaroci and his other wives are lucky who enjoy with each other<sup>986</sup> which was refuted by Cakravākī who said that the person is not blessed “*because he is not shy on account of the nearness of his other wives; his heart is not on all of them.*”<sup>987</sup> *A person can love one person only and how can he love other wives?*<sup>988</sup> *They are not the beloved of their husband, nor is the husband their beloved; they are past-times (to him) like any other attendant.*<sup>989</sup>

The Cakravākī said that she and her husband are really blessed whose hearts are fixed on one person only.<sup>990</sup> She said such men are said to have neglected sacrificial duties. He is attached to another wife on the basis of lust even when he enjoys one wife.<sup>991</sup>

<sup>984</sup> The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, Part IV, *Uttārā Bhāga*, Chapter 18, 23-25a

<sup>985</sup> *Ibid*, 99-100

<sup>986</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 62, 9-12

<sup>987</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>988</sup> *Ibid*, 14

<sup>989</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>990</sup> *Ibid*, 18

<sup>991</sup> *Ibid*, 28

But such narration in ancient Indian texts is rare and that the husband or the society did not have any qualm regarding a co-wife.

Everything that is beneficial to the husband should be done by the wife. She must do what was favourable and beneficent to the lady-love of her husband. Even if his lady-love was of a lower caste, by rendering service to her, the wife would attain heaven and a place in her husband's mind. After fulfilling the wish of her husband she would derive all worldly pleasures. On seeing a co wife to be the most beloved of her husband, if a woman renders service to her, she would have attained an eternal place in heaven. The wife should not deceive her husband either through her body or through her wealth, if she wishes for splendid existence in the next birth.

The stories discussed below would clearly demonstrate as to what extent the wives had to compromise for her husband, when he brought another wife. Only if she tolerated another, younger wife that she became a *pativrata*.

Brahmā mentally created a daughter called Mohinī.<sup>992</sup> On seeing her completely endowed with the wealth of beauty Brahmā was completely overcome by lust.<sup>993</sup> Then Brahmā told Mohinī to go to king Rukmāṅgada and approach him for marriage.<sup>994</sup> King Rukmāṅgada once visited a sage called Vāmadeva. He asked him about his wife, Sandhyāvalī.<sup>995</sup> He described his wife as the most beautiful lady in three worlds. She looks upon him as if he is superior to Manmatha. Wherever 'the fair-complexioned lady' sets her feet, the earth reveals its great treasures. Her limbs are devoid of the symptoms of old age.<sup>996</sup> There are neither wrinkles nor sign of old age. Even without fire she cooks six types of dishes. "*She is a chaste woman. She is by nature munificent; she causes happiness to all living beings. Disrespect should not be caused by her through words even when she is asleep.*"<sup>997</sup> Though he had such a chaste wife then also he brought Mohinī as his younger wife. But Rukmāṅgada told her that she will be above all his wives.<sup>998</sup>

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<sup>992</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 7

<sup>993</sup> Ibid, 10-11

<sup>994</sup> Ibid

<sup>995</sup> Ibid, Chapter 10

<sup>996</sup> Ibid, 51

<sup>997</sup> Ibid, 54

<sup>998</sup> Ibid, Chapter 13, 22



By the advice of Rukmāṅgada's son, his wife served Mohinī.<sup>999</sup> Sandhyavali at the order of her husband observed a vow. He did not observe the vow as he was not allowed by Mohinī. Again when Mohinī did not allow him he left her. The king's eldest wife came to Mohinī and bowed down to her for her husband's happiness though Mohinī was the youngest.<sup>1000</sup> She told Mohinī that she will be do whatever she says if that is for the welfare of her husband. She is not afraid even if she dies or even if her son dies.<sup>1001</sup> It was the husband's happiness that made Sandhyavali accept another younger beautiful co-wife (as it was a sin if she did not) but also made her serve and even begging to her as she knew that her husband's happiness lied in his younger wife.

### **COMPROMISE FOR PROGENY**

A chaste wife not only entertained another wife of her husband but also another man for the sake of progeny. She was sent by her husband to another man for an issue as Sudeṣṇā was sent to a sage by her husband for getting a son for himself.<sup>1002</sup> The Pāṇḍavas, sons of Kuntī and also Mādrī were not born from her husband Pāṇḍu but from five different gods. Then also their chastity was intact. It was the husband who was above all. The *Garuḍa Purāṇa* states that the younger brother can go to the childless wife of his elder brother for the aim of begetting a progeny or after obtaining permission from the elders.<sup>1003</sup>

### **PRECEDENCE OF THE HUSBAND**

The *Agni MahaPurāṇa* talks about five conditions under which a widow could re-marry. The widow of a man can re-marry the brother of his husband (*dewar*) if he is living and willing to do so or else she has the option to marry whomsoever she wants.<sup>1004</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa* states that a woman, who does not take a second husband after the death of her first husband, achieves great glory and acquires the same region as that of Umā.<sup>1005</sup>

<sup>999</sup> <sup>999</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 62, Chapter 7,1

<sup>1000</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 27

<sup>1001</sup> Ibid, 38

<sup>1002</sup> The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 7-938,70-82

<sup>1003</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 95, 16

<sup>1004</sup> The *Agni Purāṇa*, Chapter 154, 5-6

<sup>1005</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 95, 22-23

Sukalā said that husband and ‘no other holy place befits young women, and no other place gives them heaven or salvation’.<sup>1006</sup> She could obtain salvation by taking bath with the water falling from his feet. *“The husband is full of religious merit.”*<sup>1007</sup> She tells that there is no other duty than serving the husband. By restoring to him she will help him and give him pleasure.

Sukalā, when came to know that her husband has gone for a pilgrimage without her, she decided to live a difficult life till her husband comes back. *“Till my husband comes, I shall sleep on a bed on the ground. I shall not eat ghee, oil, curd and milk.”*<sup>1008</sup> She gave up (eating) salt, and also (chewing) *tambula*. She also gave up (eating) sweet (things) like jaggery etc. She was full of grief; she wore a single braid of hair; she put on one bodice (only), and was unclean. She also remained with only one garment (on her person).<sup>1009</sup>

Her friends tried to console her and said that she is torturing herself without any reason. They advised her to enjoy worldly joys. Sukalā was too firm on her notion to be convinced by them. She said whatever is said by them is not approved by the Vedas. *“That woman, who, do separated from her husband, always lives alone, would be a sinful one.”*<sup>1010</sup> *Good people do not honour her. In the Vedas she is always said to be with her husband...In the scriptures the husband is always described as the sacred place for women. She should always invoke him by means of speech, body and deeds. Intent upon truthful thoughts, she should always mentally worship him.”*<sup>1011</sup>

When her husband is pleased all deities are pleased. If a woman puts on an elegant dress when her husband is dead all her beauty and complexion is reduced to the form of a dead body.<sup>1012</sup> The woman who adorned herself when her husband is dead is called ‘a prostitute on earth’.<sup>1013</sup> She says that one who restores to her husband obtains a beautiful face, ‘good fortune in the form of a son, bath, gifts, decorations, garments, ornaments, good fortune (in the form of her husband being alive), form, lustre, glory , fame and merit. Without her husband she has none.’<sup>1014</sup>

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<sup>1006</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 41

<sup>1007</sup> Ibid

<sup>1008</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 41, 32b-50a

<sup>1009</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 41

<sup>1010</sup> Ibid, 61-83

<sup>1011</sup> Ibid

<sup>1012</sup> Ibid

<sup>1013</sup> Ibid

<sup>1014</sup> Ibid

Sukalā calls a woman, an unchaste if she practiced another mode of life than that which is prescribed when her husband is alive. She calls a woman ‘wife’<sup>1015</sup> if she has good sons and good reputation. The wife would be sinful and behave ‘unpleasantly’ without her husband.<sup>1016</sup>

The painful life of a widow and that she is not meant to have any existence without her husband is reflected through the story of the *pativrata* wife of Sakti who was the son of the celebrated Arundhati and sage Vasiṣṭha. When her husband died she said that her parents, son, grandson or father-in-law does not hold any significant position in her life. Her husband is the only reason for her survival and the goal of her life.<sup>1017</sup> Her husband is the only friend (*bandhu*).

### SELF-IMMOLATION

*‘...misery of widowhood is unbearable.’<sup>1018</sup>*

*Satī* did not necessarily meant self-immolation, a connotation that it earned later. Pārvatī did not perform self-immolation out of any compulsion, primarily it was her choice. But with time the concept of self-immolation gained precedence, a woman who burned herself at the funeral pyre of her husband was held in a highly esteemed position. That she did not have any existence without her husband was validated by her self-immolation.

If a woman did not have any existence without her husband it meant that her life came to an end when her husband died. A chaste woman who follows her husband from the house to the cremation ground for self-immolation undoubtedly attains the merit of a horse-sacrifice at every step.<sup>1019</sup> If she survived her husband then would become an object of pity.<sup>1020</sup> Those women who do not die with their dead husbands should be mourned.<sup>1021</sup>

A wife who immolates herself with the dead body of her husband lives in heaven as for as many years as there are hairs on human body.<sup>1022</sup> Even if a man has killed a

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<sup>1015</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 41, 61-83

<sup>1016</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1017</sup> The *Liṅga Purāṇa*, Chapter 64, 39

<sup>1018</sup> The *Brahmānda Purāṇa*, 2.3.30.5-12

<sup>1019</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 53

<sup>1020</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 20, 32-33

<sup>1021</sup> *Ibid*, 35

<sup>1022</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 107, 30

*Brāhmaṇa* or a friend or any other person of noble behaviour, is purified by his wife who sits on his funeral pyre.<sup>1023</sup>

The ultimate finale for her chastity was her self-immolation when her husband died. She killed herself to be with her husband in the world after death. But the reason the authors of *Purāṇas* state is again husband-centric. It is said, “A woman, who enters the funeral pyre along with her husband, shall uplift him even if he is a *Brāhmaṇa* slayer, an ungrateful fellow or one defiled by great sins. Learned men know this to be the greatest expiation for women”.<sup>1024</sup> But on the woman’s part it was her pain at the loss of her husband and losing her existence that she self-immolated herself. Reṇukā, when saw her husband lying dead on the ground she fell down on the ground and fainted ‘as though struck by a thunderbolt.’<sup>1025</sup> Her sorrow can be felt from her actions:

“With her body becoming dusky-white coloured on account of the dust from the ground, with her face covered with flowing tears, she lamented much. Fallen into the sea of sorrow, she became all the more pitiable.<sup>1026</sup> She lamented and wept again and again. Struck by great misery she cried out the name of her son, “O Rāma, O Rāma.”<sup>1027</sup>

Extremely distressed due to her separation from her husband, she beat her belly twenty-times with both her hands.<sup>1028</sup> Rāma, her son made preparations for the cremation of his father’s body. Reṇuka whose mind was afflicted by sorrow said that the ‘misery of widowhood is unbearable’.<sup>1029</sup> She would not be able to survive without her husband. She said,

“I shall follow my beloved husband so that I shall proceed along with him without interruption forever in the entire world. By entering this burning pyre, I will be slightly after a long time, the dear guest of my husband in the world of *Riṭṣ* (*Manes*).”<sup>1030</sup>

After uttering these words, she decided to be firm on her decision by entering the fire.

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<sup>1023</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Dharma Khaṇḍa, Chapter 4, 14

<sup>1024</sup> The *Kūrma Purāṇa*, Part II, chapter 34, 108b-110

<sup>1025</sup> The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.30.5-12

<sup>1026</sup> The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.30.9

<sup>1027</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.3.30.14

<sup>1028</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.3.30.28

<sup>1029</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.3.30.37

<sup>1030</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.3.30.38

There are other stories which indicate that it was the decision of the chaste wife that she self-immolated herself as her life did not have any meaning without her husband and in turn it gave her salvation. There was a great *Brāhmaṇa*<sup>1031</sup> His wife was in his father-in-law's house. He took that 'lady of spotless fame'<sup>1032</sup> and proceeded ahead. But he was killed by a sinful *Brāhmaṇa*. His wife is said to be "...chaste and of noble qualities. She used to smile pleasantly and was of firm mental resolve."<sup>1033</sup> But when she lost her husband she became miserable and became badly distressed due to the separation from husband. She killed herself in the funeral pyre of her husband. She was mentally pleased in doing so.<sup>1034</sup>

In the *Vāmana Purāṇa* a queen kills herself at the death of her husband even when she was carrying his child in her womb. A king named Jyotiṣman practised penances in order to obtain a son. The *Saptarṣis* blessed him and his wife that they would obtain a son. But while she was pregnant, the king died. She being a *pativratā*<sup>1035</sup> decided to get upon the funeral pyre of her husband and kill herself along with her dead husband. She could not be stopped and she killed herself.<sup>1036</sup>

The *Purāṇas* on the other hand was much liberal towards the *Brahmin* women as the *Padma Purāṇa* says that says that "*a brāhmaṇa woman should not die by going to the cremation ground with the dead body of her husband. She becomes a killer of herself by dying with her husband. So she should not die like this and should rather become a recluse.*"<sup>1037</sup>

Even if a widow remained alive after her husband's death, her life was miserable and she was nothing less than being dead. The life of widow was not easy at all as we see Rati leading the life of a widow. The story<sup>1038</sup> goes that Lord Śiva was practising penance. He was detached because of the death of Satī. Gods were trying to unite him with Umā. Kamdeva was burned by the lord as he created an obstacle in his penance. Rati, the wife of Kamadeva expresses her sorrow when her husband died. Rati is said to have "*attained the ungraceful and inauspicious state of widowhood. She*

<sup>1031</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book V: *Āvāntya-Khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Avāntīkṣetra-Māhātmya*, Chapter 53, 36-41

<sup>1032</sup> *Ibid*, 37

<sup>1033</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1034</sup> *Ibid*, 38-41

<sup>1035</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 46, 53

<sup>1036</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1037</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Ṣṣṭīkhaṇḍa*, Chapter 52, 70b-71a

*abandoned all her ornaments on account of widowhood, covered with tears, her tresses was scattered and her face became greyish on account of dust particles.”*<sup>1039</sup>

The marriage of a widowed woman was not encouraged so that she could start her life fresh. It is said, “*What is given to the son of a widowed woman who remarries is futile like the Homa performed on the ashes.*”<sup>1040</sup> A remarried widow was seen lowly and she did not have any social prestige and honour. If a remarried widow, *Vṛṣalī* and *Śūdrī* frequented anyone’s abode, such a *Brāhmaṇa* should be abandoned even from a distance by one who wishes one’s welfare. She was regarded inauspicious and the above statement very clearly shows that not only a widow’s remarriage was discouraged but if she dared to remarry people were encouraged to outcaste her. A widow was supposed to lead a life that was miserable and that was dedicated to her husband only. Thus she was prescribed to live the following pattern. Details of it have been discussed in the *Skanda Purāṇa*.<sup>1041</sup> They are:

*“A widow who habitually lies on a couch causes the downfall of her husband. She should lie on the ground if she desired for the ultimate happiness of her husband. Cleansing of the body with fragrant unguents should never be indulged in by a widow. She should never make use of sweet scents. Whatever in the world happens to be a favourite thing of the husband, whatever is eagerly sought after by the husband, should be given as gift unto a meritorious person, with a desire to delight her own husband. In the months of Vaiśākha and Kārtikka she should have special observances such as holy bath, visiting holy places, making monetary gifts and frequent listening to the Purāṇas. Offering water-pots in the month of Vaiśākha and lights clarified butter in Kārtikka and grains, seeds etc. in the month of Māgha is highly praised in the heavenly world.”*

A widow should also serve Viṣṇu, regarding him to be her husband. She should never speak or listen about sexual matters. She should never touch a man unless it is urgent to do so or he is a close relative. She should never look at a man with carnal intention. She should give up all objects of pleasures. She should not put on fine clothes or ornaments. She should never eat betel-leaves, smear the body with oil or unguents and apply collyrium. She should always be afraid of association with men like that with a

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<sup>1039</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 52, 70b-71a

<sup>1040</sup> Ibid

<sup>1041</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 67-79

serpent.<sup>1042</sup> She should not mount a bullock even when there is danger to life. She should not wear blouses or gaudy garments.<sup>1043</sup>

A widow's restrictions did not end here. She was made to follow other habits and duties for the welfare of her husband. She was made to follow all these in the name of her husband who was made the god of her life. A widow who is fond of her husband should not do anything without asking her sons. A widow who is accustomed to observe all these vows and practices is considered auspicious.<sup>1044</sup> A widow who is chaste and who observes all these pious practices shall attain the regions of her husband. She shall not be miserable anywhere.<sup>1045</sup> If a woman considers her husband her deity, there is no difference between her and Gaṅgā. She is directly equal to Umā, the consort of Śiva. Hence a sensible man should worship her.<sup>1046</sup>

Nothing was left for her life. It was made a complete realisation for her that life comes to an end when her husband dies. Thus she maintained her devotion for her husband even after her his death.

#### **POWER AND APPRECIATION FOR A CHASTE WIFE**

From the above stories it is very clear that the stories in *Purāṇas* mainly concentrate on the chastity of a woman that too very regressively. While the authors of the *Purāṇas* made it very clear that the husband is the god and the wife should do everything to make him happy and should continue doing this even after he is dead and that for his happiness she should also self-immolate herself. In return we see that she was not only promised heaven but appreciation and power that the gods and sages possessed.

The *Matsya Purāṇa* states,

*“In that way chaste lady also fulfilled all the ambitions of her father. So the chaste lady delivered both the families of her husband and father and saved the life of her husband from the hands of Death. People should therefore revere and worship chaste ladies. The whole Universe is held up and by the virtue of the righteous ladies. The*

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<sup>1042</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book II: *Vaiṣṇavakhaṇḍa*, Section IX: *Vāsudeva-Māhātmya*, 61-67

<sup>1043</sup> *Ibid*, Book IV: *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 4, 103

<sup>1044</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 4, 104

<sup>1045</sup> *Ibid*, 105

<sup>1046</sup> *Ibid*, 106

words of the chaste ladies never go false; therefore, the people who are expecting their desires to be fulfilled should always revere such ladies.’<sup>1047</sup> Thus she was also promised the position whereby she will be worshipped like a goddess.

Wherever her foot is placed the ground becomes sanctified, a holy ground worthy of being honoured. There is no holier burden than the foot of a chaste woman placed on the earth. Even the sun fearfully touches a chaste woman. The moon and a *Gandharva* too touch her in order to sanctify themselves and not otherwise. Water always desires the contact of a chaste woman. There is no destruction of sins through Gāyatrī. She, a chaste woman is a dispeller of sins through her vow of chastity.<sup>1048</sup> Just as a snake – catcher forcibly retrieves a snake from its hole, so also a chaste woman retrieves her husband from the messengers of Yama and goes to heaven.<sup>1049</sup> On seeing a chaste woman the messengers of Yama flee. On seeing the splendour of a chaste woman even the sun feels burning sensation, even the fire gets burnt and all other luminaries begin to tremble. A chaste woman sportingly enjoys heavenly pleasures along with her husband for as many crores and ten thousand years as there are hairs on her body.<sup>1050</sup>

A chaste wife was also assured that one who harms her modesty would suffer.<sup>1051</sup> A *brāhmaṇa* afflicted by sexual urge forcibly enjoyed his *brāhmaṇa* friend’s wife. At that moment the ‘very chaste lady, drinking strong poison died.’<sup>1052</sup> He ran away and the king’s officers seeing him thought him to be a thief and killed him. Then the servants of Yama tormented him and threw him to the Raurava hell by Yama’s order. Having experienced severe torture for sixty thousand years obtained demon hood for forcibly involving sexually with a chaste lady. Indra also lost his testicles when he deceptively broke the chastity of Ahalyā.<sup>1053</sup>

Chaste ladies were promised with such a power that it could reduce Brahmā into ashes.<sup>1054</sup> Sītā who was abducted by Rāvaṇa was killed by Rāma physically but it is said that ...extremely vicious Rāvaṇa, the villain ‘...was killed by her vigour only.’<sup>1055</sup>

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<sup>1047</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 4, 106

<sup>1048</sup> Ibid, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 60-62

<sup>1049</sup> Ibid , 54

<sup>1050</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa* ,Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 55-58

<sup>1051</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 204

<sup>1052</sup> Ibid , 87-100

<sup>1053</sup> Ibid

<sup>1054</sup> The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, *Uttārā Bhāga*, Chapter 18,

<sup>1055</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *ṣṣṭīkhaṇḍa*, Chapter 35, 23



Lord Rāvaṇa lost his auspicious luck by the touch of Sītā in abduction.<sup>1056</sup> Such was the power of a chaste woman that only by mere touch of her that a villain like Rāvaṇa was killed.

This shows that chastity provided with immense power which even the gods could not challenge.<sup>1057</sup> Even the power of Dharma was negated by a *pativrata*.

There was a famous sage named Bhṛgu in the family of Brahmā.<sup>1058</sup> Once he went to the forest. At that time a very strong demon came there and snatched the sage's pregnant wife. He rebuked that chaste wife of Bhṛgu with abusive words. Then from her uterus the foetus of 'blazing eyes afflicted with fear' came out of her body like 'a fire' and told the demon to let her go or he will be reduced to ashes. Having touched the chaste lady he will not obtain bliss. He who was thus addressed fell down with his body reduced to ashes.

A chaste woman could even cause imbalance in the universe if the life of her husband was at stake and it was her chastity that endowed her with such immense authority. A sage was wrongly punished as the wealth of a rich man was stolen. He was punished by the king's people and he suffered excruciating pain. Due to his having restrained senses he did not feel the pain. In the meanwhile a loyal wife took her husband on her back to a prostitute's wife to satisfy her husband's sexual desires. Due to the contact of the leper, the stinking odour came to that sage and his meditation was disturbed. As a result of which he became aware of the pain and he cursed that whoever caused him pain would be consumed to ashes before the sun rises.<sup>1059</sup>

The leper fell into the ground and the loyal wife in order to save her husband said: "*Certainly the sun shall not rise.*"<sup>1060</sup> The sun did not rise for three days. Seeing the three worlds distressed Indra along with other gods went to Brahmā. Brahmā said: "*Due to what has happened to the chaste lady and to sage Māṇḍavya, the sun is not rising.*"<sup>1061</sup> Brahmā went to Sevyā. She told him everything. Brahmā told her that after the sun rises, though her husband's body will be reduced to ashes, her husband

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<sup>1056</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ninth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 10, 20

<sup>1057</sup> The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.3.10.27-30

<sup>1058</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 14

<sup>1059</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 51

<sup>1060</sup> Ibid

<sup>1061</sup> Ibid, *Śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, 66a

due to the gods, will become handsome like god of love. After she said ‘All right’,<sup>1062</sup> the sun rose. This implies that chaste women were shown to be given the same honour and prestige given to the sages.

The same story is there in The *Mārkaṇḍeya Mahāpurāṇa* but narrated in a different manner.<sup>1063</sup> There was a certain *Brāhmaṇa* named Kauśika who had leprosy due to his former sins. His wife served him with her mind, body and soul devoted to her husband only.<sup>1064</sup> But then also he condemned her. But she continued to serve her, as she considered him to be her lord. Kauśika wanted to go to the house of the courtesan to whom he was attracted to and told his wife to take him. He even warned his wife that if the courtesan does not embrace him she will see him dead.<sup>1065</sup> Thus the *pativrata*<sup>1066</sup> taking money with her carried her husband on her shoulders. That Kauśika while going on his wife’s shoulders pushed Māṇḍavya, who was suffering from torture after being suspected as a thief. Being pushed by Kauśika he cursed him that the one who has pushed him by his feet will die when the sun rises.<sup>1067</sup> Hearing this, the wife did not allow the sun to rise. The celestials were terrified by this. They knew at the words of that *pativrata*<sup>1068</sup> the sun will not rise and without the sun Ṛṣi ng bathing, gifts and such other acts cannot take place.

In this version of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, the gods sought the help of Atri’s chaste wife Anasūyā. Anasūyā knew about the glory of a chaste woman and that by honouring this *sadhvi* lady she will let the sun rise.<sup>1069</sup> Anasūyā listening to her problem said that she will make her husband youthful.<sup>1070</sup> She said that she always respected the chastity of a woman and therefore honours her.<sup>1071</sup> While Anasūyā practised penance the sun rose and the leper died, but he was saved. Thus her husband regained youth and his life was saved. The gods were impressed by Anasūyā and wanted to grant her a boon. She said she wanted Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva be born as

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<sup>1062</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa, Śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 51, 81

<sup>1063</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 16

<sup>1064</sup> Ibid

<sup>1065</sup> Ibid, 22

<sup>1066</sup> Ibid, 24

<sup>1067</sup> Ibid, 30

<sup>1068</sup> Ibid, 36

<sup>1069</sup> Ibid, 52

<sup>1070</sup> Ibid, 75

<sup>1071</sup> ibid, 76

her sons.<sup>1072</sup> Thus through her virtue all three gods (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva) were born as her sons.

Upabarhana had fifty wives and Malavati was one of his queens. Seeing her husband dead, she threatened all the gods that she will curse them if her husband was not brought to life. Brahmā and Dharma sought refuge in Visnu as they were afraid of the power of a chaste woman, as Brahmā said, “*This is really surprising that the glory of a chaste lady is so powerful.*”<sup>1073</sup> They were also apprehensive about the fact that their austerities will be negated if they are being cursed by her. She assertively said to Visnu that the curse of a chaste woman can never be fruitless and it can never be redeemed.<sup>1074</sup> She even questioned Dharma and said that it is improper for him to take her husband.<sup>1075</sup> At last Visnu after seeking the advice of other gods brought Upasbarhana back to life.<sup>1076</sup>

In the version of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, two *pativratā* women have been included. Instead of going to Brahmā, like in *Padma Purāṇa*, the gods went to Anasūyā, one of the celebrated chaste ladies. She herself recognised the power of a chaste woman and helped the gods in reviving the balance of the universe. What interesting here is the boon that Anasūyā asks for. She desired that Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva should be born as her sons. Thus impressing the audience with the idea that a chaste wife not only brings her dead husband back to life, but is also capable enough to restore balance in the universe, which even the gods were unable to perform but at the same time she can procure the three gods – Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva as her sons. For the society, obtaining these three gods as their sons had a divine significance. Apart from propagating the precept of chastity, such narratives were constructed in order to propagate the gods that were contained within the Brahmanical tradition.

In order to propagate the privileges one could achieve by worshipping the Brahmanical gods and following Brahmanical principles, stories were construed wherein a girl practises austerities to attain Viṣṇu as her husband. She through her penance acquires immense power which negated the power of *Dharma* and also earns blessings from Viṣṇu for her future births too. King Kedara was a great

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<sup>1072</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 16, 88-90

<sup>1073</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā -Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 13, 77

<sup>1074</sup> Ibid, Chapter 14, 24

<sup>1075</sup> Ibid, Chapter 16, 32

<sup>1076</sup> Ibid, Chapter 18

Vaiṣṇava.<sup>1077</sup> From his fire-altar, Lakṣmi appeared in the form of a damsel. She practised austerities to attain Lord Hari as her husband. Brahmā gave her the boon that she would attain Hari as her husband later.<sup>1078</sup>

*Dharma* in order to test Vṛndā's chastity came to her in the form of a *Brāhmaṇa* boy and approached to enjoy her.<sup>1079</sup> Vṛndā was enraged by this and told him that it is not proper for a *Brāhmaṇa* to cohabit with other men's wives. She said if a man forcibly imposes himself on a woman he is considered as the one who has cohabited with his mother and earns the sin of hundred *Brahmāhatyas*.<sup>1080</sup> Then also if he attempts to rape her then all the gods, the *lokapalas*, *dharma*, lord Kṛṣṇa, Mahesvara, Durga and Brahmā would arrive for her.<sup>1081</sup>

Vṛndā threatened that she is also capable enough to reduce him to ashes, a merit that she has earned by performing austerities for a hundred and eight *yugas* and lord Kṛṣṇa saves her from all difficulties and besides him the sun, the moon, the wind, the Agni, Brahmā, Śiva and goddess Durga provides her protection.<sup>1082</sup> Despite of her warning, *Dharma* who was in the guise of a *Brāhmaṇa* advanced towards her, she then pronounced a curse on him that he will be destroyed. When she was about to pronounce another curse on him, Brahmā, Visnu, Śiva and other gods appeared to stop her. They told her the truth about *Dharma*.<sup>1083</sup>

All the gods including Hari, Brahmā, Śiva, Surya, the moon, Varuna, the wind god, Agni, Yama requested her to bring *Dharma* back to life.<sup>1084</sup> Vṛndā tried to bring *Dharma* back to life, but she failed. Kṛṣṇa told her to give her age to *Dharma* which is equal to what Brahmā has attained.<sup>1085</sup> Kṛṣṇa also told her how she would attain him as her husband. He told her to go to Goloka and stay there. In the *Varāha-kalpa* she would be born as the daughter of Vrsabhanu and will be the reflection of Rādhā. Rayana who will be born from the *Goloka* would own her after marriage. While performing the divine dance she would meet Kṛṣṇa along with Rādhā and other gopis. When Rādhā will be born as the daughter of Vrsabhanu due to the curse of Sridama,

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<sup>1077</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 86, 6-8

<sup>1078</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 86, 21-25

<sup>1079</sup> *Ibid*, 26-81

<sup>1080</sup> *Ibid*, 83-88

<sup>1081</sup> *Ibid*, 91-98

<sup>1082</sup> *Ibid*, 99-103

<sup>1083</sup> *Ibid*, 107-111

<sup>1084</sup> *Ibid*, 112-122

<sup>1085</sup> *Ibid*, 126-136

at that moment Rādhā would appear together with Vṛndā as her reflection. At the time of marriage, Rayana would accept Vṛndā as his wife and would entrust the real Rādhā to her and will then disappear. Thus all the people of Gokula would treat Vṛndā as the real Rādhā. Rādhā's reflection will be the wife of Rayana. After listening to Kṛṣṇa's words, Vṛndā gave up her life to save *Dharma* and attain Kṛṣṇa as her husband.<sup>1086</sup>

Through this narration, the author not only meets certain causes, but also propagates and teaches certain precepts as well. One is narrating to people the importance being a chaste woman that she could be so powerful that she could even challenge the gods. And the other one is that how by propitiating Viṣṇu, a woman can obtain him as her husband. The most important aspect here is using the character of Vṛndā as a concealment in the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa love story, thus keeping intact the moralistic nature of their love story.

Keeping intact the purity of her character was not an easy task.

#### **MAINTAINING CHASTITY**

Rāvaṇa desired Sītā, the wife of Rāma. He disguised himself as an ascetic and was determined to abduct her. She realised his intentions and remembering her husband she sought refuge in the *Āvasathya* (household) fire. With her palms joined in devotion, Rāma's wife worshipped the fire god, the destroyer of the worlds as if he was her husband Rāma. She eulogized the fire-god. She mentally mediated on Rāma and remained silent with her eyes closed. Then out of the *Āvasathya* (household) fire, Lord Maheśvara, the bearer of sacrificial oblations, manifested himself. Desirous of getting Rāvaṇa killed he created an illusory Sītā. Taking the real Sītā the beloved of Rāma, the fire-god vanished there. Rāvaṇa took the illusory Sītā with himself in the ocean. When Rāma killed Rāvaṇa and came to know of the illusory Sītā, Rāma was delighted and surprised. Agni said to Rāma:

*“This beloved of yours is highly chaste as goddess Pārvatī. She is the greatest favourite of the goddess whom she had propitiated by means of penance. This chaste lady of good conduct is endowed with readiness to serve her husband like Bhavānī in regard to Ívara. She was protected by me because she was desired by Rāvaṇa.”*<sup>1087</sup>

<sup>1086</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 86, 137-142

<sup>1087</sup> The *Kūrma Purāṇa*, 112-139

But Sītā who was abducted by Rāvaṇa was the illusory Sītā created by me with a desire to get Rāvaṇa killed. He told Rāma to accept ‘pure’ Sītā.<sup>1088</sup>

The wife of Kusadhvaja, named Malavati gave birth to a daughter ‘who had the ray of Laksmi’ in her.<sup>1089</sup> She was also known as Vedavati and she proceeded to the forest despite the fact that the people of her country opposed it. While she was performing austerities a voice from the sky said she will have Visnu as her husband.<sup>1090</sup> Feeling disturbed she went to the Gandhamadana Mountain to practice austerities. There she met Rāvaṇa whom she served. Seeing her, Rāvaṇa got passionate. When she realised that Rāvaṇa was getting attracted towards her, she fainted. “*He then pulled the chaste lady towards him with evil intention.*”<sup>1091</sup> Finding him performing such a misappropriate behaviour ‘*Satī*’,<sup>1092</sup> Vedavati made him motionless. She pronounced a curse on him that he will be destroyed because of her, since he has ‘touched me with evil intentions’.<sup>1093</sup> She was born in the house of Janaka, named Sītā.<sup>1094</sup> While the time of her abduction came nearer Agni came to Rāmā and told that a shadow of Sītā will be created and will be given to Rāmā, while the real Sītā will stay with Agni. When Rāmā rescued Sītā, the real Sītā was given back to Rāmā when Sītā was made to perform the fire-ordeal.

The shadow-Sītā was told to perform austerities and thus she went to heaven. She emerged from the fire-altar of Drupada and was known as Draupadī.<sup>1095</sup> In the *krtayuga* Vedavati became the daughter of Kusadhvaja, in the *tretayuga* she was the daughter of Janaka and wife of Rāmā, in the *Dvapara* the shadow Sītā emerged from the fire-altar as Draupadī. As she was present in all the three yugas she is known as Trihayani.<sup>1096</sup> She was called Vedavati because all the four Vedas were at the tip of her tongue.<sup>1097</sup>

The *Rākṣasas* were not the only one to violate the chastity of a woman. Even the gods committed such as abhorred act, sometimes either to test their purity, which implies

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<sup>1088</sup>The *Kūrma Purāṇa*, 112-139

<sup>1089</sup>The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Prākṛiti Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 14, 3

<sup>1090</sup>Ibid, 9

<sup>1091</sup>Ibid, 14-15

<sup>1092</sup>Ibid, 16

<sup>1093</sup>Ibid, 18

<sup>1094</sup>Ibid, 22

<sup>1095</sup>Ibid, 81-82

<sup>1096</sup>Ibid, 83-84

<sup>1097</sup>Ibid, 64

that even chaste women should remain alert and they are under constant scrutiny, sometimes for a political reason or to satisfy their lust.

Indra when came to know of a 'wise and chaste' woman called Sukalā, he wanted to see that woman and break her chastity.<sup>1098</sup> He said: "*Having gone there, I shall destroy her self-respect, power, strength, courage, truthfulness and loyalty to her husband.*"<sup>1099</sup> Though Indra was very much aware of the power of the chaste women he wanted to break the loyalty of Sukalā. But Kamadeva warned him of the power of Sukalā which she earned by performing the duties a chaste woman. But Indra was not ready to listen to him and said quite firmly that he has destroyed the power of sages and deities. He was firm that he would break her loyalty and truthfulness. But Sukalā was not affected by his 'glory and lustre'.<sup>1100</sup>

Dharmaraja helped Sukalā. When Indra tried to seduce her and wanted to break her chastity she said that she is protected by the sons of her husband: "*Truth, Courage, Resolution, Fate, Intelligence, Dharma, Tranquillity, Forbearance, Knowledge, Piety, Gain and Restraint.*" She told Indra that she has protected herself with truth.<sup>1101</sup> Viṣṇu and Indra impressed by Sukalā's chastity and truthfulness granted Sukalā and her husband boons. Her husband asked for granting heaven to him after death.

Indra was formerly cursed by the sage Gautama for violating his wife. He became a man who forever would have the scrotum of a ram. Recognising the power of a chaste woman he said that the power of the lustre of chaste women is matchless. Even the creator or the sun is not able to bear it. The chaste women are always purified by sacred rites. Chastity of women is well known. It is not wise to subdue a chaste woman who is free from attachment. But not always divine powers came to the rescue of a chaste woman, as we see that when the chastity of a *Kṣatriya* woman was under threat it was through her own wisdom that she was rescued herself.<sup>1102</sup>

There was a powerful prince called Mādhava. Once he saw a young woman bathing in a lake. Seeing her he became passionate.<sup>1103</sup> Mādhava became so lustful that he wanted to have her even though she was married as he said, "*I shall today take her*

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<sup>1098</sup> The *Padma Purāna*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 55, 7-14

<sup>1099</sup> The *Padma Purāna*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 55, 6-7

<sup>1100</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 58

<sup>1101</sup> *Ibid*, 30-37

<sup>1102</sup> *Ibid*, *Kriyāyogasārakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 5

<sup>1103</sup> *Ibid*

even though she is Indra's woman.”<sup>1104</sup> The woman who was married told him not to commit such a sin as “by embracing the wife of another there would be pleasure for a moment only. There will be infamy in this world; the rest will be misery for more than a thousand kalpas. And after death there will be residence in hell.”<sup>1105</sup> She moreover told the prince that his existence will not be of any use if he commits the sin of kidnapping another man's wife being influenced by lustful desire.<sup>1106</sup> In order to save herself, she even told the prince about a princess who is more beautiful than her and that he should approach her. After being convinced the prince prepared himself to go to the princess's kingdom and approach her. Thus she saved herself and earned the epithet of being a 'chaste woman'.<sup>1107</sup>

The society that tried controlling a woman and her life in order to maintain the ordinances, the same society was a threat to her modesty as well. Rather than understanding her as a separate being, the society was always judgemental about her. If she followed the path imposed upon her which made her a controlled being with the shackles of patriarchy binding her, then she was considered pure and upright. But if one challenged the norms, then she earned dishonour for life.

In the *Purāṇas* we find narrations wherein such characters are moulded who though previously were treated with disrespect and were excluded from the nucleus of the society, were with time was included within the threshold of the Brahmanical tradition suggesting the realisation of the need to change in order to survive. The *veśyās* were one of those kind.

## EXCEPTIONAL CHASTITY

### *Veśyās*

There is an interesting quotation in wherein a *veśyā* says that they are also chaste like a *pativrata*.<sup>1108</sup> She said that for women of all castes being loyal to their husbands gives them happiness in this world and the next. In the same way as a *pativrata* woman remain devoted to one man, a *veśyā*, when she is serving a man she is in charge with for a certain period of time, she does not unite with any other man. She

<sup>1104</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Kriyāyogasārakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 5, 17-20

<sup>1105</sup> *ibid*, 43-46

<sup>1106</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Kriyāyogasārakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 5, 47-51

<sup>1107</sup> *Ibid*, 72-74

<sup>1108</sup> *Ibid*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 110, 79-80



then is like a *pativratā* only, as she is attending to one man for the period and providing service to him only. Attending any other man would be deviation for her. Therefore she should keep him only. It shows that they were affected as they were not regarded of a good character in the society and that they longed to be a chaste woman. But there are exceptional references wherein they were highly devoted to Lord Viṣṇu. There is mention of a *veśyā* called Rupavati. It is said that this prostitute remained in the path of righteousness. She is described as a diligent, beautiful (*sundari*), *dharmvatī veshya* who respectfully and devoutly saluted and gave gifts to *Brāhmaṇas* (*danmduttvati*).<sup>1109</sup>

There was a well-known *veśyā*.<sup>1110</sup> “*She had charming features conducive to lust.*”<sup>1111</sup> She was extremely rich. She owned hundreds of cows and buffaloes, and slaves. She did as she pleased. Yet she was devoted to Śiva.<sup>1112</sup> A *Vaiśya* once came to her house wearing a Liṅga bracelet. She was besotted by it and wanted to have it. In return she promised to be his wife for three days. She said: “*We are self-willed harlots and not chaste ladies; promiscuous sexual activity is a duty befitting our families. If you give me this gem set bangle, I shall be your wife for three nights.*”<sup>1113</sup> But the *Vaiśya* told her that his life is set in the Liṅga bangle and that if anything happens to it he will die. One day the dance platform was in fire and the bangle also burnt. Seeing that, the *Vaiśya* was so depressed that he wanted to die. He told the harlot to make a funeral pyre for him. She did so. But remembering her promise to be his wife for three nights, she as the duty of a wife wanted to die in the funeral pyre of her husband. When she was about to enter the fire, Śiva came there and told her that everything was done by him to test her devotion as “*Harlots are usually deceitful, adulterous and hoodwinkers of the common people.*”<sup>1114</sup> But she on the contrary wanted to kill herself to keep her promise. She as a boon asked Śiva to take her and all her slaves and servants to save them from the ‘terrible fear of taking another birth’.<sup>1115</sup>

<sup>1109</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 95, 125-144

<sup>1110</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 20

<sup>1111</sup> *Ibid*, 29

<sup>1112</sup> *Ibid*, 34-36

<sup>1113</sup> *Ibid*, 48-49

<sup>1114</sup> *Ibid*, 79

<sup>1115</sup> *Ibid*, 84

Thus either through Vaiṣṇavism or Śaivism, there was an attempt to include the *veśyas* and grant them social recognition.

### **Male Chastity**

*“That man is blessed in the world that is not overwhelmed by a woman. Even though he may be the observer of sacred rites, if he is overpowered by a woman he becomes impure and unclean, so he remains forever. The manes, gods and human beings censure him. A henpecked man can never be purified till death. The manes do not receive willingly the balls of rice or holy waters offered by him. Nor do the gods accept his offering of fruits and flowers. Of what avail are words of wisdom, penance, Japas, Homas, worships, learning or charitable gifts to that wretch whose mind is deadened by his thoughts of women?”*<sup>1116</sup> A man who regards another man’s wife as his mother is called a wise man.<sup>1117</sup> In *Garuḍa Purāṇa* a husband is taught to be loyal to his wife by Yājñavalkya.<sup>1118</sup> There are one or two instances where we see that a husband also goes through much distress when they lost their wife and does not marry as Rāma and Śiva did. There is another instance wherein a wife killed herself when she came to know that her husband was dead. But the husband was not dead. When he came to know about it, he was grief-stricken and thought what she has done is ‘applauded by the females only.’ But he decided to observe some vow for her. He also decided that no other woman shall be his wife and will not enjoy any other woman.<sup>1119</sup> But the constant concentration for a man was his self-control.

### **CONCLUSION**

The concept of *Pativratya* functioned in two ways. One was for the Brahmanical dominance and the other was the patriarchal. Nowhere in the *Purāṇas* have we come across any reference wherein there is mention of a woman’s desire or any regard if her desires are satisfied. She was to remain passive and follow the patriarchal rules. Under this dominance she was to operate her life, mind and body. Even if she repudiated it lost itself within the bars of the norms of the society. But repudiation

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<sup>1116</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, Section III, *Rudreśvara Samhitā: Pārvatikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 28,

<sup>1117</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 111, 12

<sup>1118</sup> Ibid, Chapter 95, 27

<sup>1119</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 21

was allowed if it benefitted her husband, family and the society, thus making Brahmanical and patriarchal dominance more firm and rooted.

A chaste woman devoted to piety (*dharma*) was said to attain welfare and happiness. No man could humiliate her. This was what a *pativrata* was promised in return of her chastity. It was important for women of all caste to maintain their chastity. Only chastity was supposed to give them happiness.<sup>1120</sup> Through this theory the authors of *Purāṇas* made it compulsory for the women to lead a chaste life. Through a chaste woman even her parental family attained salvation. She was promised invincible power and projected with so much of purity that wherever she kept her foot, the place became holy.<sup>1121</sup> Gods also came to their rescue. Even the stories are told in such a fashion that the women who heard it would feel great to be a chaste woman. All the appreciation and consolation encouraged her to be a chaste woman.

Whatsoever appreciation or salvation was promised to the wife but practically it was the men who benefitted. The wife had to serve her husband throughout the day and it was not just about the major duties like giving birth to a son she had to worry about. Every second she had to think about the welfare of her husband. She had to welcome a co-wife to be a *pativrata*, though in *Nārada Purāṇa* it is very clearly stated that a wife suffers most due to a co-wife.<sup>1122</sup> Even though they were aware of the fact that it would cause pain to the wife but what ultimately mattered was the husband. Her whole existence was shown to be uprooted if her husband died. If she did not self-immolate, the life of a widow was shown to be pitiable. She was also discouraged to re-marry. She had to be kept at a distance. This sort of picture was shown to the people so that she could remain sexually inactive when her husband passes away. If she adorned herself when her husband was away or died it meant that she was unchaste. All these were made to believe to control her. But we see a much liberal attitude towards the *Brahmin* women as they were discouraged to self-immolate when her husband died.

Here also we see that there is a hierarchy being maintained as the gods came to the rescue of the *brāhmaṇa* ladies and of incarnation of goddess Lakṣmī, Sītā. But a

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<sup>1120</sup>The *Padma Purāṇa*, Pātālakhaṇḍa, Chapter 110, 79-80

<sup>1121</sup>The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 60-62

<sup>1122</sup>The *Nārada Purāṇa*, *Uttārā Bhāga*, Chapter 18, 23-25a

*kṣatriya* woman had to help herself. Never in the *Purāṇas* we have come across where a goddess had to face such vigorous situations as did the earthly women.

A wife too desired to be born as a virtuous wife.<sup>1123</sup> It has also been stated in the *Purāṇas* that even women desired to be in the image modulated for her:

*“Wherever I am born again with a brilliant body whether I am not born (of a womb) or whether I am righteous person, I should necessarily attain the status of the virtuous wife of the self-possessed three-eyed lord alone.”*<sup>1124</sup>

The above words were spoken by Satī. If the husband says that anything is white she must also say the same. If he says it is black he, she must say the same. This is known to be real *Śuśrūṣā* i.e. service and mere menial action of attendance is not *Śuśrūṣā*. One who disobeyed her husband’s commands in order to establish her own desire was considered as the most sinful of all women.<sup>1125</sup> A chaste wife was nothing more than a female slave for her husband and it is the wife who is shown to speaking that she considers herself as such. Jāmbavātī, one of Kṛṣṇa’s wives called herself a ‘female slave’ of Kṛṣṇa. Kālindī called herself a sweeper. Satyā was won as a prize by Kṛṣṇa for his prowess.<sup>1126</sup>

Whatsoever a superior person does is emulated by other common people. Whatsoever he sets up as a standard or regards as an authority the masses (ordinary people) follow it.<sup>1127</sup> The people of this world yearn for longevity, affluence and glory of the celestial guardians of different worlds.<sup>1128</sup> These two extracts shows that why *Purāṇas* are full of stories that are about chaste women. The stories are mainly about *Brahmin* women or the queens or the goddesses. Here we also get variations within. As we see that a goddess is never questioned about their loyalty or has to go through any ordeal whereas their earthly counterpart was under constant scrutiny while the prostitutes are always degraded. An epitome was set through the stories for the ordinary people as to how they should live their life and maintain the purity of the upper caste and maintain the balance too. The authors wove a degradable and unfateful and a life full of

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<sup>1123</sup> The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 1.2.13.59-60a

<sup>1124</sup> Ibid, 1.2.13.45-48

<sup>1125</sup> The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, *Uttārā Bhāga*, 74-75

<sup>1126</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Tenth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 83, 10-11

<sup>1127</sup> Ibid, Sixth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 2, 4

<sup>1128</sup> Ibid, Seventh *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 9, 23

sufferings for those who did not follow it. It is through this mechanism that the *Brahmins* could maintain their superiority.

## **CHAPTER 5: DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR AS REFLECTED IN THE MAHAPURĀNAS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The *Skanda Purāṇa* states that a chaste wife promised her husband heaven. It has been said even if a husband is righteous, he will fall from heaven which he has acquired with great difficulty if the wife breaks her chastity (*silābhgn narinam*). Hence chastity should be preserved by women.<sup>1129</sup> Her body should be guarded by her from the touch of another man though it might be pleasurable.<sup>1130</sup> Chastity for a woman was an integral part of her for not only saving her husband but also for the family she belonged to and more significantly to maintain her honour in the society. But it was not only her devotion and loyalty towards her husband that made her chaste, but there were other nuances involved.

The most interesting part comes where a simple appreciation by a woman for a man was related to a fall from chastity while a sexual relation of a wife with another man for progeny was not. Though, the concept of unchaste like chastity was more vigorous for women, but men as a whole was not completely kept out of it. It was believed that a woman without her husband behaves unpleasantly and that if she is not controlled inter-mixing of caste takes place. Thus she had more pressure on her to maintain her chastity, but even on such situation we get the other side of the story where she slips from her loyalty either deceptively or by her own choice. But the attitude towards the notion of chastity by the authors of the *Purāṇas* undergoes changes according to the situation and thus the definition of chastity also.

The treatment meted out to the unchaste women whether she committed it willingly or was forced is equally interesting. Balance, fire, water, poison and holy water were the divine ordeals to test one's purity. These ordeals were to be instituted in cases of great offences when the accuser agrees to undergo punishment. Or one may be made to undergo the ordeal, and the other to undertake the agreement to undergo

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<sup>1129</sup>The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa*, Section I:*Pūrvārdha*, Chapter 30, 33

<sup>1130</sup>Ibid, 36

punishment.<sup>1131</sup> The balance is for women, boys, the aged, the blind, the lame, Brahmins and the sick. The ordeals of fire, water and seven *yava*, a kind of grain (weights) of poison are for the *śūdra*.<sup>1132</sup>

## UNDERSTANDING UNCHASTE WOMEN

“She is like milk in the mouth of a serpent”.<sup>1133</sup>

The woman devoid of chastity is called *Mahiṣī*. He who loves that woman is called *Mahiṣika*.<sup>1134</sup> If she leaves her *Vṛṣa* (husband) and loves another *Vṛṣa*, she should also be known as *Vṛṣalī* along with the status of a *Śūdra*.<sup>1135</sup> A *cāṇḍāla* woman, a prostitute, a virgin in her monthly course comes to the category of a *Vṛṣalī*.<sup>1136</sup> A *Śūdra* woman is also called *Vṛṣalī* and the one who comes into contact with the saliva of her lips becomes fallen.<sup>1137</sup>

The concept of chastity not only involved the purity of mind but also of body and behaviour too. She was considered impure when she was in menstruation.<sup>1138</sup> But the *Agni Purāṇa* and *Garuḍa Purāṇa* states that women are always pure. They do not get corrupted by anything. The monthly menstruation cleanses away their sins.<sup>1139</sup> A daughter is said to be enjoyed by Soma when small hair appears on the private part. Agni enjoys a virgin during her menstruation.<sup>1140</sup> When she attains puberty, *Gandharvas* enjoy her; and when the breasts appear, Fire enjoys her.<sup>1141</sup> Men enjoy them afterwards.<sup>1142</sup> Soma gave women cleanliness, Fire-god purity and *Gandharvas* gave them auspicious speech.<sup>1143</sup> The involvement of these gods helped her in maintaining her purity forever. What is more interesting is that it is said though it is said that she can never be impure then also so much of stringency regarding her conduct of mind and behaviour was imposed upon. If she was enjoyed by the gods, then no punishments and ordeals could be imposed upon her.

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<sup>1131</sup> *The Agni Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 255, 28

<sup>1132</sup> *The Agni Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 255,33

<sup>1133</sup> *The Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 34

<sup>1134</sup> *The Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvādhā*, Chapter 40, 92

<sup>1135</sup> *Ibid*,92-93

<sup>1136</sup> *The Skanda Purāṇa*, Book VII: *Prabhāsa khaṇḍa*, Chapter 205, 79

<sup>1137</sup> *Ibid*,27

<sup>1138</sup> *The Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 105,42

<sup>1139</sup> *The Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvādhā*, Chapter 40, 37

<sup>1140</sup> *Ibid*,40

<sup>1141</sup> *The Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 118, 2-15

<sup>1142</sup> *The Skanda Purāṇa* Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvādhā*, Chapter 40, 38

<sup>1143</sup> *Ibid*,39

Chastity was determined on the basis of the caste and family a woman belonged to. Moreover in the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* we see that there is an attempt by the authors to sketch a woman as an obstruction in the path of a man’s devotion towards Hari who was considered as the primary focus of his life. Kṛṣṇa wanted to bestow Durga on Śiva as his spouse. But Śiva was apprehensive that his devotion towards Kṛṣṇa might get distracted because “*she is passionate and could increase passion in a person*” and thus would be an obstruction in his path of knowledge<sup>1144</sup> as he concentrated his mind on Kṛṣṇa, he never got distracted by passion.<sup>1145</sup> But Kṛṣṇa insisted and told him to follow his order for accepting Durga as his wife. He said that his apprehension is true for ‘*kustri*’ only and not from those who are *pativratā*. He said those women who come from noble families and follow family values (*kule mahati ya jata kulja kulPālika*) serves a husband like a ‘good son’. The husband is said to be the closest relative, the lord and the god of her life (*patibharta devatam kulyayoshitam*).<sup>1146</sup>

While those women who are born in the lower class (*kustri*) and whose parents are not of good nature they are immoral and are not chaste ladies.<sup>1147</sup> Those women who consider her husband greater than Śiva and Kṛṣṇa enjoy the company of her husband for crores of *kalpas*.<sup>1148</sup> The girl who was born in a high family and was always dependent upon her husband was considered noble while the woman who is independent is wicked and these wicked and degraded women, who denounce their husbands and take interest in others, belong to lower caste.<sup>1149</sup> If a *Brahmāna* woman keeps the company of a *Śūdra*, she falls into *andhakupa* hell. She then is reborn as low-caste women and then purified.<sup>1150</sup> Yājñavalkya states that an abortion and hatred of the husbands are great sins in women and thus they should be shunned from a distance.<sup>1151</sup> A woman who drinks wine is also called ‘unchaste’.<sup>1152</sup> An unchaste married woman ‘hunts’ new persons and a wise person should not maintain an

<sup>1144</sup>The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 6-7

<sup>1145</sup>The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 13

<sup>1146</sup>Ibid

<sup>1147</sup>Ibid, 36-38

<sup>1148</sup>Ibid, 39-41

<sup>1149</sup>Ibid, Chapter 15, 16-17

<sup>1150</sup>Ibid, 20-26

<sup>1151</sup>Ibid, Chapter 105, pp318,48

<sup>1152</sup>The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 114, pp352, 21



unchaste woman because if he does so he falls both here in this world and after.<sup>1153</sup> The *brāhmaṇa* woman should drink the mixture of the products of a cow for five nights. She would be definitely purified if she gives a pair of cows and presents to *brāhmaṇa*.<sup>1154</sup> A wife who was found guilty of adultery was to be compelled to wear dirty garments, rebuked, forced to lie on the ground and single morsel of food was supposed to be the only source of sustenance(prescribed by Yājñavalkya).<sup>1155</sup>

The concept of hell, punishment and rebirth in the low caste were the means to control the concept of purity. It was not only sexuality and the sexual behaviour of a man and a woman that determined the purity, but there were other societal code of conduct involved as it has been said that the one who consumes the food of a widow having no son, or of a woman who is in her menses falls into the burning pit of iron and remains there for hundred years and in next birth is born as a washerman and a blacksmith and then only he gets purified.<sup>1156</sup> A woman gets punished in hell for speaking harshly towards her son.<sup>1157</sup> The one who looks at the breast, navel and face of other wives with passion falls into the *kunda* of crows where the crows bite his eyes and he stays there for the number of years equivalent to the hair of his body and then is reborn as a blind on earth.<sup>1158</sup> The one who does not maintain his chaste wife, does not get married, does not see the face of his son attracts *Brahmāhatya*.<sup>1159</sup> A woman, who does not see her husband as equal to lord Kṛṣṇa and then hurt his feeling, acquires the sin of *gohatya*.<sup>1160</sup>

Coming into contact with low and wicked people, being separated from the husband for a long time and living in another man's house is said to bring about the destruction of chastity and good conduct in women.<sup>1161</sup> If a woman falls from the path of sexual purity, she had to be shorn of all her rights and is to be kept dirty and discarded form

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<sup>1153</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Tenth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 60, 48

<sup>1154</sup> *Ibid*, 14b-17a

<sup>1155</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 95, 18

<sup>1156</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 95, 45-46

<sup>1157</sup> *Ibid*, 50-51

<sup>1158</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Prākṛiti-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 30, 83-84

<sup>1159</sup> *Ibid*, 168-170

<sup>1160</sup> *Ibid*, 180

<sup>1161</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 109, 16

the bed and had to given some food for survival.<sup>1162</sup> If the contravention is only mental the woman becomes pure after menstruation.<sup>1163</sup> That woman, who conceives due to cohabitation with her paramour, should be altogether abandoned totally. That woman who being infatuated cohabits with another man other than her husband should observe vows, drink the mixture of the five products of cows and give a pair of cows to a *brāhmaṇa*. She is then purified. When a childish *brāhmaṇa* woman, being deceived, cohabits with a stranger, she should be abandoned by her men.

Though the method for her purification is provided but abandoning her is the option given more importance. Abandoning her is not considered sinful.<sup>1164</sup> That woman who abandons her own husband, goes to another man with for enjoyment, invites censure fallss to a fearful hell. She lives there till the end of the *kalpa*. Then she reaches the state of a non-living. Even from there, she obtains beast hood for many births and then is born as a crippled being.<sup>1165</sup> Hierarchy was not only applied in relation to caste and gender but was also applied in defining the character and behaviour of women.

The woman having one husband is called *pativrata*, if a woman had two husbands she is called *Kulata*, and the one having three of them is called *Dharsini* and the one having four of them is called *Punscali*. The woman who enjoys the company of five men is called a *veśyā*, and if she enjoys six of them is called *Yugmi* and if she enjoys more than six women she is called *maha veśyās* and she is untouchable for all castes.<sup>1166</sup> Those men who accompany them also are sinners and goes to hell. A *veśyā* falls into *Vedhana* hell, the *yugmi* in *Dandatadana* hell, the great whore in *Jalabandha* hell, *Kulata* in *Dehacarna* hell and other wicked women in the hell named *Dalana*. *Dhrsta* falls into *Sosana* hell and they have to suffer several types of pains.<sup>1167</sup>

Though women followed the notion of chastity in their daily life to the minutest detail of their daily life then also they were considered unchaste by their husband and

<sup>1162</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 109, 52

<sup>1163</sup> *Ibid*, 53

<sup>1164</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhumikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 18, 17b-24

<sup>1165</sup> *Ibid*, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 206, 34-40

<sup>1166</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Prākṛiti-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 31, 3-5

<sup>1167</sup> *Ibid*, 27-29

society. The most tragic episode was that of Sītā who though left the pleasures of palace life and followed her husband to lead the difficult forest life and was there with her husband as a great support through thick and thin was abandoned by her husband, Rāma when she was pregnant on the basis of suspicion created by his subjects. She was told to go through ordeal not once but twice.

## DIGRESSION

The *Skanda Purāṇa* says that a beloved wife should not be abandoned even if she is raped or if she fell into the clutches of robbers. Abandoning her is not laid down anywhere.<sup>1168</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* also states that a woman is not at fault if she does not surrender herself to a man willingly. It has been clearly stated that it is not the victim but the man who forces upon himself upon the woman is at fault. One who enjoys the company of a *Brahmāna* woman forcefully earns the sin of a hundred *Brahmāhatya*.<sup>1169</sup> If a man rapes a woman is considered as the one who has cohabited with his mother and earns the sin of hundred *Brahmāhatyas*.<sup>1170</sup> A woman who is not desirous of such a sexual relation remains pure even when she is approached by an undesirable person.<sup>1171</sup> A woman who is overpowered by a strong man cannot be termed as an ‘unchaste’ woman and she does not fall from dharma. She will be purified by her regret and she will not be dishonoured, as a ‘sinner’ approached him.<sup>1172</sup> If a woman approaches another man with sexual intentions then she cannot be liberated.<sup>1173</sup> But more often than not we see that it was rather theoretical that a woman was not judged as being impure even when she was not at fault. It was considered to be the inherent nature of women to be lustful and sinful.

## By Force

Rāvaṇa desired Sītā, the wife of Rāma. By means of his *maya* he disguised himself as an ascetic and wanted to abduct her while she was alone in the forest. Sītā when came to know about the intention of Rāvaṇa took the help of *Yogi* (the fire god) mentally. The Fire-god created an illusory Sītā and took the real Sītā with him. It was the

<sup>1168</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvādha*, Chapter 40,47

<sup>1169</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Prākṛiti-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 58, 58-59

<sup>1170</sup> *Ibid*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 86, 83-88

<sup>1171</sup> *Ibid*, *Prākṛiti-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 58, 109

<sup>1172</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 61, 82

<sup>1173</sup> *Ibid*, 82

illusory Sītā that Rāvaṇa abducted. After killing Rāvaṇa, Rāma took with him the illusory Sītā but his mind was filled with suspicion.<sup>1174</sup>

Rāma after bringing back Sītā from the clutches of Rāvaṇa spoke many harsh words and abusive words to Sītā in the assembly of people. The chaste lady being insulted by him, decided to enter the fire for an ordeal. Then all the gods led by Śiva, Brahmā seeing Sītā entering into fire were ‘afflicted with fear’ approached Rāma and said, “*Sītā is extremely pure. She never violates your norms of conduct. You should not abandon her wrongly.*” That Sītā was abducted by Rāvaṇa had a divine purpose. Rāvaṇa and Kumbhakarna were his former highly devoted servants. Due to the curse of Sanaka etc. they were born on the earth. For their liberation, Sītā was seized by Rāvaṇa in the Daṇḍaka forest.<sup>1175</sup>

Agni said to Rāma:

*“This beloved of yours is highly chaste as goddess Pārvatī. She is the greatest favourite of the goddess whom she had propitiated by means of penance. This chaste lady of good conduct is endowed with readiness to serve her husband like Bhavānī in regard to Śvara. She was protected by me because she was desired by Rāvaṇa.”<sup>1176</sup>*

Sītā who was abducted by Rāvaṇa was the illusory Sītā created by Agni to get Rāvaṇa killed. He told Rāmā to accept ‘pure’ Sītā.<sup>1177</sup> Rāma made the pure Sītā to be brought to him. He accepted her who was declared pure by her entry to fire.<sup>1178</sup> But this twist is not found in the *Rāmayāna*.

Only after the gods convinced Rāma of the chastity and purity of Sītā, that he accepted her. But this was not the end to his suspicion. It was not just his suspicion that was in his mind but his fame and quest to become an ideal for the society that he abandoned Sītā. The spies of Rāma went house to house to observe about what people thought about Rāma and Sītā. Most of the subjects glorified Rāma and Sītā. One of the spies went to the houses of artisans to hear about the glory of the king, the lord of the earth.<sup>1179</sup>

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<sup>1174</sup> *The Kūrma Purāṇa*, 112-139

<sup>1175</sup> *The Padma Purāṇa, UtTārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 242, 331-339

<sup>1176</sup> *The Padma Purāṇa, Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 242, 331-339

<sup>1177</sup> *The Kūrma Purāṇa*, Pp540-543, 112-139

<sup>1178</sup> *The Agni Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 10, 23

<sup>1179</sup> *The Padma Purāṇa, Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 55, 67

A washer man full of anger physically abused his wife who had stayed at another man's house and rebuked her. He told her to go to that man's place where she stayed. He was not ready to accept her who has disobeyed her commands. But his mother advised him not to abandon her who has come back to him and who has not committed any fault and is free from any blemishes. The washer man was too stubborn to accept her and said to his mother,

*“I am not as great as Rāma as to accept (my wife) who stayed in another's house. Whatever that king does, might be lawful; (but) I will not accept my wife who has stayed in another's wife. The act of others, even though they perform meritorious deeds, is improper. I am not king Rāma who protected Sītā that had stayed in another's house.”*<sup>1180</sup>

When Rāma asked about what people thought about him, the spy said that except that Sītā stayed in the house of Rāvaṇa, he is being celebrated for killing a Rākṣasa like Rāvaṇa.<sup>1181</sup>

Rāma who was much concerned about his fame told Bharata that in his family no king was ever affected by infamy and that his fame has become 'foul'.<sup>1182</sup> Bharat considered Sītā as free from being adulterated and said that Sītā, who has been declared 'pure' by Brahmā and their father Daśaratha, should be respected and should not be abandoned on the basis of words of a washer man and that Sītā would not be able to live without him even for a moment.<sup>1183</sup> His younger brother, Śatrughna said the same.<sup>1184</sup> Though Rāmā knew that Sītā was purified by fire and is chaste but due to the fear of public scandal he decided to abandon her, thus maintaining an ideal image in the society. He admitted that he can abandon everyone for maintaining the honour of his lineage and thus he would not question the washer man.<sup>1185</sup> Lakṣmaṇa was the one who went to leave Sītā in forest. Lakṣmaṇa told Sītā everything. The Earth also did not take her daughter back as she believed that Rāma would not abandon 'sinless Sītā'.<sup>1186</sup>

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<sup>1180</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa, Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 55, 68-73

<sup>1181</sup> *Ibid*, 22

<sup>1182</sup> *Ibid*, 41

<sup>1183</sup> *Ibid*, 53-60

<sup>1184</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 58, 27b-33a

<sup>1185</sup> *Ibid*, 35-41

<sup>1186</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 59, 13-18

Sītā defending herself told that how Rāma who rescued her from the clutches of Ravana, abandon her? She questioned as to how Rāmā could abandon even after knowing that she is and is pregnant.<sup>1187</sup> But accepting his decision she said that by remembering him mentally, in deeds and speech she would live in the forest and even he did such an injustice to him she was ready to have him as her husband in every birth and though she herself knew that she was not sinful, then also she said that by remembering his feet all her sins have been destroyed and have become the ‘best chaste lady’.<sup>1188</sup>

In order to prove her chastity amongst people and her husband she said in front of the assembly that since she did not think about anyone but her husband Rāma and if she has spoken the truth, then *Dharaṇī* (i.e. the Earth) would come to her daughter and would take her back. Then goddess *Dharaṇī* took Sītā along with her. Seeing her entering the earth, not only the gods praised her, but also the men in the assembly shouted: “*Well done, well done. This is Sītā.*”<sup>1189</sup>

Rāma being grief-stricken took both the sons with him. Rāmā himself lead a strict life by maintaining the vow of having only one wife throughout his life and thus leading a pious life<sup>1190</sup> But as he suffered due to the misery for the separation from his wife the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* says that such attachment between men and women brings fear and affliction. Rāma led a strict life and continued to offer oblations to the sacrificial fire.<sup>1191</sup>

The story of Sītā is a famous illustration in the Brahmā nical tradition whereby a *pativrata* is abandoned by her husband without any fault of hers. She came under suspicion as she was abducted by another man. Rāma very well knew that Sītā was a *pativrata*. In spite of knowing the truth he abandoned her as he was much concerned about his public image ignoring the fact that how much Sītā was devoted him. She followed him to the forest when he was going for his exile leaving the pleasures of palace life. Even when she was abducted by Rāvaṇa she was head-strong enough and did not allow Rāvaṇa to strip off her modesty. When for the first time Sītā was asked to go through the fire ordeal she did it for her husband knowing that his fame is in

<sup>1187</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 59, 33-39

<sup>1188</sup> *Ibid*, 25-32

<sup>1189</sup> *Ibid*, 27-32

<sup>1190</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ninth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 10, 55-56

<sup>1191</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 11, 17-18

stake. Even after she passed the ordeal and was purified by the fire then also Rāma abandoned her. He just wanted to become an ideal for the society, but it is rather contrary that he became an ideal when he so wrongly abandoned his wife. Sītā quite naturally was made to accept his decision in the story. Sītā also accepted his abandonment of hers as she was a medium for the composers of the *Purāṇas* to show that if Sītā who was ‘the ancient Lakṣmī’<sup>1192</sup> could accept any of the orders of her husband then the other earthly beings could do the same. For a wife it is shown as the right act to accept any decision of her husband how wrong it may be.

An ordeal was suppose to purify the sin but in reality it was a show-off for the people making them believe that one is accepting a pure soul. But when Rāma told her to give an ordeal for the second time she could not tolerate it. Even the washer man who belonged to the lower category of the society was concerned about his wife’s purity and chastity. His wife stayed in another man’s house so that would cause harmful for his name. Though his mother told him to accept his wife who did not have any fault, but he did not. For the washer man’s wife there were no gods who could convince of her innocence to her husband. There was no ordeal set for her to prove her innocence. The judgement passed for her was rather direct and there was no chance for her to prove herself.

A woman was not safe from other men’s clutches in her marital household. Her sexuality though surrendered to her husband did not discourage other men of the household from approaching her. Bṛhaspati wanted to have sexual intercourse with his brother’s wife Mamāta the son in her womb prevented him from doing so.<sup>1193</sup> He not only cursed the child in her womb but also forcibly tried to deposit his semen into her but the child in her womb prevented it.

The wife of Brihaspati, Tārā was abducted by Moon for the sinful action that he performed. Tārā became pregnant on account of him.<sup>1194</sup> Sītā too was abducted by Rāvaṇa, as the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* states due to the curse of Surpanakha.<sup>1195</sup>

Candāmā was attracted towards the physical beauty of Tārā, the wife of sage Brhaspati. He tried to convince Tārā to accept his proposal of getting physically

<sup>1192</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa, Uttārākhanda*, Chapter 242, 331-339

<sup>1193</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Ninth Skandha*, Chapter 20, 36

<sup>1194</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa, Prākṛiti-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 58, 31

<sup>1195</sup> Ibid

involved with him as her husband rather being involved with her, is always devoted towards Lord Kṛṣṇa. When he approached Tārā with his proposal he was abused by her. She said whatever he has earned by his tapas *Rajasuya* sacrifice will perish if he approaches the wife of a *Brahmāna*.<sup>1196</sup> She said the man who gets attracted towards another man's wife is 'unchaste' and if he defiles her chastity he 'will suffer from consumption...and is sure to fall'.<sup>1197</sup> She invoked *Dharma, Surya, Vayu, Agni, Brahmā*, the sky, the wind, the earth, *sandhya* and all the gods as witness.<sup>1198</sup> But on hearing this he did not get afraid and took Tārā by force and involved into a sexual union with her.

Candāmā violated the purity of a chaste woman, thus he acquired a black spot on his disk.<sup>1199</sup> He took refuge under Sukra. Sukra told him that the one who enjoys the company of a *Brahmāna* woman forcefully earns the sin of a hundred *Brahmāhatya*. Sukra thus advised him to leave the *Brahmāna* woman, Tārā and relive himself of the sin.<sup>1200</sup> Sukra made Candāmā to pay his devotion to Viṣṇu to liberate him of his sin as, "*The one who enjoys the wives of others, cheating his own wives, such a sinful person falls into a terrific hell.*"<sup>1201</sup> Thus Sukra purified Candāmā and told Tārā to go back to her husband as she is pure at heart and will be purified without any repentance,<sup>1202</sup> "*A woman who is not passionate remains pure even when she is approached by an undesirable person.*"<sup>1203</sup>

Lord Kṛṣṇa blessed Tārā that Brhaspati will be born as her son.<sup>1204</sup> Brhaspati once said to Śiva that he should permit him to proceed for performing tapas and that he is no more concerned about Tārā and let her remain wherever she is.<sup>1205</sup> But Śiva said that it is not proper to perform austerities leaving his wife with the enemy.<sup>1206</sup> Brahmā proceeded to Sukra to obtain Tārā from Sukra. When Brahmā met Tārā she lowered her head out of shame for being pregnant by Candāmā and touched his feet.<sup>1207</sup>

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<sup>1196</sup>The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa, Prākṛiti-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 58, 31

<sup>1197</sup> Ibid, 32-33

<sup>1198</sup> Ibid, 35-36

<sup>1199</sup> Ibid, 44-45

<sup>1200</sup> Ibid, 58-59

<sup>1201</sup> Ibid, 69

<sup>1202</sup> Ibid, 108

<sup>1203</sup> Ibid, 109

<sup>1204</sup> Ibid, Chapter 60, 68

<sup>1205</sup> Ibid, 83

<sup>1206</sup> Ibid, 85

<sup>1207</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa, Prākṛiti Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 61,78



Brahmā told Tārā that she did not lose her glory as with his boon she will acquire the fortunes of her husband.<sup>1208</sup>

Tārā was impregnated by Candāmā and was maintained by him. The child born from Tārā was taken by Candāmā. And Tārā was given back to Brihaspati who was contended to get back his wife.<sup>1209</sup> In this story we see that Tārā has not been punished (as it should be!) but also that she was accepted by her husband without any conflict unlike the story of Rāmā and Sītā. The later interpolation of the story of Rāmā and Sītā shows that Sītā being a victim of the patriarchal norms of the society had to go through an ordeal. Though her innocence was proved, she was again had to go for an exile as a punishment meted out by her husband on the basis of the suspicion of the society.

In another version in the *Vāmana Purāṇa* we find a different twist in the story where Candāmā was cursed by Tārā. Nārāyaṇa described the abduction of Tārā. He said that in earlier times on the fourth moon day of the Bhādrapada, the moon abducted Tārā and then freed her on the fourth moon day of Āśvina. Bṛhaspati then accepted her. The ‘chaste’ lady felt ashamed because of her conception. Bṛhaspati denounced her and Tārā in anger pronounced a curse on moon.<sup>1210</sup>

We get the story of Tārā and Soma in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and in the *Matsya Purāṇa* also which gives a different direction.

In the *Skanda Purāṇa*, Soma on acquiring prosperity and affluence due to Brahmā lost all his modesty and ‘proudly abducted’ Bṛhaspati’s ‘chaste wife of great glory named Tārā’.<sup>1211</sup> He even refused to give back his wife. A son was also born to Tārā. Soma due to such a sinful union became ‘leprous and consumptive’.<sup>1212</sup> He went to Avantī, controlled his senses and took a holy bath in Somavatī and worshipped Someśvara. Maheśvara being impressed by his penances bestowed on him the boon that his body will become attractive and the place where he took his holy bath will come to be known as Someśvara.<sup>1213</sup> Tārā, termed as the ‘chaste lady’ told her son Budha that Candra is his father. Candra took Budha, his son along with him and Bṛhaspati took

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<sup>1208</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Prākṛiti Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 61, 79-80

<sup>1209</sup> Ibid, 88-98

<sup>1210</sup> Ibid, *Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 122, 3-4

<sup>1211</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book V: *Āvantya-Khaṇḍa*, Section I, *Avantikṣetra-Māhātmya*, Chapter 28

<sup>1212</sup> Ibid, 81-82

<sup>1213</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book V: *Āvantya-Khaṇḍa*, Section I, *Avantikṣetra-Māhātmya*, Chapter 28, 96

his wife back. In the *Padma Purāṇa* a saga called Budha, the son of a ‘wanton’ woman born due to infidelity.<sup>1214</sup> Budha cursed him that he would be born as a son born due to adultery on earth.<sup>1215</sup>

We get the story in *Matsya Purāṇa* also but with a slight difference that implies that Tārā with a strong desire enjoyed with Soma and there was not any abduction or use of force. In this it is narrated that Soma came across Tārā while she was roaming in the garden. On seeing her he was filled with passion. Seeing each other they both were filled with passion and thus enjoyed each other. But Soma was so impressed by her beauty that he did not feel satisfy. Bṛhaspati came to know about this through his vision and wanted to curse Soma, but he could not. So he requested Moon to return his wife.<sup>1216</sup> He wanted Tārā and also the son born due to union back.

The story of Tārā find place in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also. Here she was forcibly abducted by Soma.<sup>1217</sup> When Tārā was restored to Bṛhaspati, he told her to abort the child and said, “*Cast off, uproot from my field what has been sown there by others, oh wicked-minded woman. I shall not reduce you to ashes as you are a woman, and I am desirous of having an issue...*”<sup>1218</sup> Even the son born of her called her a woman of ‘immoral behaviour’<sup>1219</sup> and rebuked her, “*I shall not burn you to ashes for concealing your sinful act.*”<sup>1220</sup> When a son was born to her, both Bṛhaspati and Soma declared their claim over the son. Bṛhaspati on account of him being a *kṣetraja* son being the owner of the field the son is born from and Soma on account of him being a *vīryaja* son, being born from his semen.<sup>1221</sup> The version in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* shows how a husband reciprocated while the wife was being forcibly abducted by another man. Tārā, like Sītā was abducted by another man and did not have any fault of her. She was also impregnated by him. Bṛhaspati calling her a wicked woman commanded her to abort the child, as the ‘field’ belonged to him. This shows the real ownership of a woman and her womb. But this did not deter him from claiming the son even when he knew that he was born from the semen of another man, though he

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<sup>1214</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 215, 29-32

<sup>1215</sup> *Ibid*, 33-34

<sup>1216</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 23, 29-34

<sup>1217</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Ninth Skandha*, Chapter 14, 4

<sup>1218</sup> *Ibid*, 9

<sup>1219</sup> *Ibid*, 12

<sup>1220</sup> *Ibid*, 12A

<sup>1221</sup> *Ibid*, 10

was the owner of the womb. Tārā did not have any voice regarding any of the decision being made. She was just a puppet at the hands of the patriarchs.

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* too narrates the story of Tārā where she was forcibly taken away by Soma.<sup>1222</sup> For her a battle was fought between her husband, Bṛhaspati and Soma. It was called the Tāraka war.<sup>1223</sup> On the request of Brahmā, Soma gave back Tārā to Bṛhaspati.<sup>1224</sup> While she was impregnated by Soma, her husband told her not to keep Soma's issue within her and thus she delivered a son.<sup>1225</sup> Her son calling her a wicked (*dushtam*) asked her who the father was and threatened her that if she does not tell him the truth he will punish her in such a way that no woman in future will be able to speak the truth.<sup>1226</sup>

The story of Tārā, Bṛhaspati and Soma which is mentioned in different *Purāṇas*, though has a similar storyline, but has a different essence to it. In the version that is mentioned in the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, the *Vāmana Purāṇa* and the *Skanda Purāṇa*, Tārā does not feel desirous of Soma. But the one mentioned in the *Matsya Purāṇa* clearly indicates that she too felt desirous of Soma and her involvement in the union had her agreement. The one in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Tārā was deserted by her husband. This reminds of the treatment meted out to Ahalyā. It implies the susceptible position a woman held in the society. Such vulnerability originated due to the patriarchal norms that changed its attitude according to its need.

### **By Deception**

Men not only took to force but also deceptively enjoyed a woman and made her lose her chastity. Men took the form of her husband and enjoyed her. It was not just the earthly men but the gods too who participated. The stories of Ahalyā and Tārā are the most celebrated ones. The significant fact is the variations in the treatment of the women and how is the accused being punished. One should keep in mind that the female characters involved belong to the *Brahmāna* or the *Ksatriya* caste and the men are mostly gods or demons. The gods or demons by deception made the woman lose her chastity either for their pleasure or for their other self-motivated needs or for a

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<sup>1222</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Section IV, Chapter 6, 10

<sup>1223</sup> *Ibid*, 16

<sup>1224</sup> *Ibid*, 19

<sup>1225</sup> *Ibid*, 20-21

<sup>1226</sup> *Ibid*, 29-30

divine purpose. Through the characters of these stories sermons are laid out which describes the ordinances of chastity in a detailed manner.

Like Sītā, Ahalyā too had to suffer without any fault of hers (in the version mentioned in *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*). Here, her husband also recognises the fact that his wife though did not lose her chastity willingly, but as she was touched by another man that she had to suffer in order to purify herself.<sup>1227</sup> Indra, the accuser was also cursed by Gautama. The curse was like a landmark of his sinful act.

The story of Ahalyā and Indra is also mentioned in the *Padma Purāṇa* with modifications. In *Padma Purāṇa* also Indra takes the disguise of her husband and violates her. Gautama, the husband of Ahalyā not only cursed Indra but also his wife. He also told her that by the touch of Rāmā, she will get purified and then only she will be accepted by him. Sureśa i.e. Indra had vaginal marks on his body because of having violating Ahalyā<sup>1228</sup> and due to the favour of Goddess Inndrākṣī, he redeemed himself and came to be known as *Sahasrākṣa* (one having thousand eyes).<sup>1229</sup> Formerly the Creator gave his mind-born daughter to Gautama. Since then Indra had fascination for her. He thought, “*This young girl who is a gem among women and who is well-dressed and of an excellent complexion is given to a brāhmaṇa...*”<sup>1230</sup> He went to the place of Gautama. ‘The chaste wife’<sup>1231</sup> was engaged in household chores.

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<sup>1227</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa, Kṛṣṇa-jaṇma-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 47, 19-25

Indra once went to the river Mandakani for taking a bath. There he saw the ‘beautiful’ wife of Gautama. Feeling passionate about her, Indra dragged Ahalyā who was wearing a wet sari and then enjoyed her. Gautama was enraged finding his wife in a compromising position with another man. He abused Indra for performing such an act who was the son of Kasyapa. ‘the best of the gods’ and whose maternal grandfather is Dakṣa Prajapati and mother is the ‘chaste’ Aditi and he was astonished by the fact that how could their son be so ‘degraded’. Though he is well versed in the Vedas, he is passionate about *yoni*. He thus, cursed him to have hundred *yonis* on his body. He also told him the method of his redemption, that after he will adore the Surya that his *yoni* will get transformed into eyes. Following Gautama’s advice he went to the Puskara region. He told Ahalyā that he is aware of the fact that she has been forcibly enjoyed by Indra but because of the fact that she has been touched by another man. He said when a woman is enjoyed by another man whether she is desirous of it or not there is providence of purification. If she is enjoyed by another man when the woman is not lustful she is purified by penance. But if being desirous she gets indulged with a man then she cannot cook food for the gods or the manes neither can she worship them. She then has to go to the hell. Then she gets purified by suffering for her sinful actions. Thus for sixty thousand years she suffered in the forest and was purified by the touch of Rāmā and attained a charming face and was accepted by her husband. Gautama said as she borne the semen of another man though unwillingly he has to disown her. The woman who is enjoyed by others is considered to be unchaste and if any man enjoys her after that he goes to hell. The food cooked by her should not be touched; the water offered by her is like urine. One should not touch her and if anyone does so the entire merit earned by him in his entire life gets destroyed.

<sup>1228</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa śṛṅgikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 746

<sup>1229</sup> *Ibid*, 4-5a

<sup>1230</sup> *Ibid*, 9b-10a

<sup>1231</sup> *Ibid*, 13

Indra assumed the form of Ahalyā's husband, Gautama and entered the hut. 'The chaste and loyal wife'<sup>1232</sup> seeing her husband became and then Indra who assumed the form of her husband said he was overcome with passion. Ahalyā replied to him not to ask her to give up the acts for the deities and doing such thing which 'is not proper'.<sup>1233</sup> But Indra said that it is not proper to disobey her husband – "*she who disobeys his order (i.e. the husband), especially at coitus, has her religious merit lost, and she meets with misfortune.*"<sup>1234</sup> Convincing her he did what he desired.

Gautama 'understood the sinful deed of Indra'.<sup>1235</sup> Indra seeing the sage took the form of a cat and ran away. When Gautama asked who he was, Indra showed his true form. The sage therefore cursed him that for his amorous act he will have thousand vagina's limbs and his genital organ will fall. The sage told his wife that as she has been approached by a stranger, she is 'impure and sinful'<sup>1236</sup> and cursed her that she will remain all alone for a long time permeating only with bones and that men and women should see her in that condition. He cursed him though she was ignorant of the fact that Indra came in the form of her husband. Ahalyā is described as *satī pativratā Ahalyā*.<sup>1237</sup> The sage though feeling sympathetic for her, but 'overpowered with anger'<sup>1238</sup> said that when Rāma will come to the forest and after becoming aware of her story from Vasiṣṭha, Rāmā well versed in the code of conduct will say: "*She is absolutely faultless. It is the fault of Indra*"<sup>1239</sup> and thus she will be freed.

Indra being ashamed remained in water and eulogized the goddess called Indrākṣī. The goddess being impressed gave him a boon that he will have thousand eyes which will have a thousand forms resembling vulva and he will rule his kingdom and his genital organ will be like a goat's scrotum.<sup>1240</sup>

Men in most cases were kept out from ordeal and punishment. Gods like Brahmā, Viṣṇu were neither abused nor punished when they performed such sinful act. Even their earthly counterparts had such privileges.

<sup>1232</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 746, 14-16

<sup>1233</sup> Ibid, 18-19a

<sup>1234</sup> Ibid, 19b-22a

<sup>1235</sup> Ibid, 25-26a

<sup>1236</sup> Ibid, 33b-34

<sup>1237</sup> Ibid, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 56, 17

<sup>1238</sup> Ibid, 35-37

<sup>1239</sup> Ibid, 39-40

<sup>1240</sup> Ibid, 47b-50a

### **Sedition by Touch**

Brahmāna women who were the wives of *Saptarsis* were ‘beautiful, virtuous, meek, religious-minded and chaste.’<sup>1241</sup> The god of fire being smitten by them touched them. But these women being devoted to their husband was not aware of the trick. The sage being aware of the feelings of the god of fire cursed him that he would consume everything.<sup>1242</sup> He also pronounced curse on his wives and said that they will be born on earth and will have *Brahmānas* of higher race as their husbands.<sup>1243</sup> The wives of the sage said that it is not proper for him to disown them as they were touched by Agni without their knowledge.<sup>1244</sup>

Ahalyā and these *Brahmāna* women were forsaken by their husbands even when they knew they were not at fault. Like Rāmā, they had to maintain the righteous image of his in front of the society. As women were considered indigent, the concept of justice and injustice did not exist for her. That the male characters appeared upright was one of the primary purpose of these texts.

The demons who were supposedly the wicked and degraded section of the society were not the only one to perform sinful activities of laying lustful eyes on women, but the gods to whom the society looked upon and worshipped, did the same that too for meeting their own sexual needs. But there was discrimination in the nature of behaviour being meted out.

### **Infringement for a Purpose**

Jalandhara, a demon married the daughter of Kālanemi, the chief of the *Aśuras*.<sup>1245</sup> He commenced a battle against the *Devas*. Viṣṇu and Śiva were impressed by him and granted him boons. Then Nārada went to Jalandhara and told him about the beauty of Pārvatī. He said, “*The four-faced Lord himself got drowned in the ocean of her beauty and lost his courage once.*”<sup>1246</sup> Then Jalandhara impressed by the beauty of Pārvatī wanted to acquire her. This story is also mentioned in the *Padma Purāṇa*.<sup>1247</sup>

Here Jalandhara’s wife, Vṛndā shows her concern for her husband. She advised him not to fight with the ‘condemned meditating saint’ and to turn away his mind from

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<sup>1241</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 18, 77

<sup>1242</sup> Ibid, 82

<sup>1243</sup> Ibid, 85-86

<sup>1244</sup> Ibid, 88

<sup>1245</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book II: *Vaiṣṇavakhaṇḍa*, *Kārttikamāsa- Māhātmya*

<sup>1246</sup> Ibid, Chapter 17, pp 136, 7

<sup>1247</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 11

Pārvatī and calls Pārvatī ‘barren’ and told him that instead of Pārvatī he should enjoy his own wife Vṛndā. But he did not listen to her and continued his fight with Śiva.<sup>1248</sup> He even took the form of Śiva and went to her, but Pārvatī through her power came to know about it and vanished from there. When Viṣṇu came to know about this he decided to follow Jalandhara’s path otherwise he cannot be killed. Viṣṇu said, “*He is protected by the chastity of his wife*”.<sup>1249</sup> Viṣṇu went to Jalandhara, the city of *Daitya* and decided to violate the chastity of Vṛndā.

Vṛndā took refuge in a sage and asked him about her husband’s condition. He showed her husband’s pair of hands, a head and a headless trunk. Vṛndā told him to bring him back to life. Viṣṇu taking the form of Jalandhara came to her. Staying within the forest for many days he got involved with him. But she saw him in the form of Viṣṇu. She cursed him that his two gate-keepers will be born as *Rākṣasas* and will abduct his wife. He will wander in the forest due to the separation from his wife. Saying this she self-immolated herself, though Viṣṇu tried to prevent her. Though he was pacified by the *Suras* and *Siddhas* he did not get his peace of mind. Jalandhara was also killed.<sup>1250</sup> They went to *Śakti* for help. She gave them seeds and told them to sow the seeds in the place where Visnu was present. They did so. From there came Dhātrī was born of Earth, Mālatī was born of Lakṣmi and Tulasī was born of Gaurī. Since the seed offered by Lakṣmi was filled with malice and jealousy, thus the woman originating possessed the same characteristics. But Dhātrī and Tulasī served him well. Viṣṇu forgot all his miseries and went to Vaikuṅṭha with them.<sup>1251</sup>

In the *Padma Purāṇa* this part of the story is told in a slightly different manner.<sup>1252</sup> In the *Padma Purāṇa* it is said that when Viṣṇu heard from Garuḍa about the beauty of Jalandhara’s wife, Vṛndā he fascinated by her having deceived Lakṣmī went out by taking another form. It is said that Vṛndā ‘being attracted by Viṣṇu went to the forest.’<sup>1253</sup> There she saw a great ascetic in the form of her husband, Jalandhara. Due to the “*fascination of Vṛndā as superior to that derived from salvation, and as giving greater delight than derived from Lakṣmī. Then Mādhava, Kṛṣṇa who was the royal swan in the well charming and shining due to her sports, lost all his longing for*

<sup>1248</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 11,23-28

<sup>1249</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 20, 28b-29a

<sup>1250</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 21

<sup>1251</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 23, 1-7

<sup>1252</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 14-15

<sup>1253</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 14, 41-47

*Lakṣmī due to the beauty of Vṛndā.*”<sup>1254</sup> Only after the sexual union that she realised it was Viṣṇu in the form of her husband and cursed him that since he has deceived her in the form of an ascetic his wife will be abducted by someone who will take the form of an ascetic.<sup>1255</sup> Then by practising penance she obtained an immortal state as she ‘was conquered by the god, was made a receptacle of pleasures.’<sup>1256</sup>

Thus in the first version of the story we see that Viṣṇu took the form of Vṛndā’s husband as it was necessary to violate the chastity of Jalandhara’s wife, as his life was protected by her chastity only. Thus Viṣṇu violated *dharma*, for which he was cursed by the chaste lady, Vṛndā – that his life in one of his births will be abducted by his two gate-keepers who will be born as *Rākṣasas* and will kidnap his wife. In another version, Viṣṇu not due to any battle, but was rather impressed by the beauty of Vṛndā that he took the form of an ascetic in the form of her husband and performed sexual union with her. Thus she cursed him that as he took the form of an ascetic his wife will be abducted by one who will take the form of an ascetic. Both these stories provide the climax or the reason behind Sītā’s abduction (as narrated in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Padma Purāṇa*). Both the stories show how powerful a chaste woman can be that even a god like Viṣṇu could not escape her rage. In *Mahābhārata* also, Gāndhārī cursed Kṛṣṇa, an avatar of Viṣṇu on account of her merit earned through chastity.

Women were allowed to have another husband in the following adversities – if the first husband is lost, dead, has become an ascetic, impotent or fallen morally. If the husband is dead, she should be given to the brother of the deceased. In the absence of a brother she should be given as one wished.<sup>1257</sup> Righteous children were said to have born out of righteous marriage.<sup>1258</sup> But often it is seen that out of cṚṣi s regarding progeny women were sent to another man for begetting progeny in order to maintain lineage. Her inner struggle to tolerate the touch of another man was never a consideration.

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<sup>1254</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 15, 42b-46

<sup>1255</sup> *Ibid*, 51-54

<sup>1256</sup> *Ibid*, 63-66

<sup>1257</sup> The *Agni Purāṇa*, Chapter 154, 6-7

<sup>1258</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvādhā*, Chapter, 38, 10-11



### For Progeny

If the elder brother happens to be impotent, in exile, dumb or one who has renounced the world or a fallen one there is no fault in *Parivedana* (supersession in marriage i.e. the act of one's marrying before one's elder brother).<sup>1259</sup> This means if the younger brother married before the elder brother did and that too for progeny it was not considered as sinful. In *Garuḍa Purāṇa* men are said to have permission to have sexual intercourse with his deceased brother's wife for producing a son and an heir in the family till she conceives. The son born from them is then a legitimate one.<sup>1260</sup> The term *Niyoga* is used in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* to denote the legally permitted intercourse of a married woman to obtain a son with a male other than her husband, generally her brother-in-law i.e. her husband's younger brother.<sup>1261</sup> A woman was allowed to marry only once but a progeny or rather a son was so important that she was allowed to remarry if her husband was untraceable, dead, or has renounced the world or is impotent or degraded. Parāśara call these situations the emergency ones.<sup>1262</sup>

Now we would see that within one family there were so much of complexities and compromises only for progeny. Śantanu was a *Parivetter* (one who had married before his elder brother Devāpi). He was the second husband of Satyavatī, who married twice. Vyāsa (the classifier of the *Vedas*) who was a man of truthful vision and worthy of being worshipped was born of the semen virile of Parāśara who destroyed the virginity of Satyavatī. Hence he is called a *Kānīna*, son of an unmarried girl. It has been said in the *Purāṇa* that if an unmarried virgin becomes pregnant, she delivers a son of ill fame and who will be despised by people of all castes.<sup>1263</sup> But he was exceptionally treated and respected by all till now. It was he who enumerated the duties of chaste women.<sup>1264</sup> The turning point is that he was born of an unmarried woman, who married another man. Vyāsa had sexual intercourse with the wives of his step-younger brothers.<sup>1265</sup> This refers to the births of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇdu from the queens of Vicitravīrya, the son of Satyavatī and Śantanu.<sup>1266</sup>

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<sup>1259</sup>The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvādha*, Chapter 40, 105

<sup>1260</sup>The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 95, 16-17

<sup>1261</sup>The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 107, 26

<sup>1262</sup>Ibid, 28

<sup>1263</sup>The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, Part IV, *UtTārā Bhāga*, Chapter 13, 2-3a

<sup>1264</sup>The *Skāṇḍa-Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brahmā-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*

<sup>1265</sup>The *Agni Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 275, 48

<sup>1266</sup>The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, Part IV, *UtTārā Bhāga*, Chapter 28, 32

Pāṇḍu who was cursed by a deer, whose mate he killed during their sexual act could not involve in a sexual union with his wives. His wife Kuntī bore to him three sons, who were begotten by the deities Dharma, Vāyu and Indra and his wife Mádrī had two sons by the celestial sons of Aśvinī.<sup>1267</sup> Again Kuntī had a son named Karṇa from the Sun-god before she got married. She is said to perform such an act out of innocence.<sup>1268</sup> These had each a son by Draupadī.<sup>1269</sup> Thus it was a chain of compromises that followed generation after generation to continue the lineage of the family. But it did not stop with the birth of the Pāṇḍavas.

The five Pāṇḍavas enjoyed one woman Draupadī as their wife. And still they remain auspicious. These characters are neither put under suspicion nor abused. Instead the explanation provided is *“the course of religious merit is subtle. Strange are the deeds of human beings; strange are the ideas of beings... Perhaps a good deed which remained hidden grows with some auspicious act. Religious merit is subtle, and cannot be gauged in any manner.”*<sup>1270</sup> Thus the Pāṇḍavas were born of adultery (as each was born from a different person other than their legal father Paṇḍu) and cohabited with the same woman, viz. Draupadī. Still their glorification is considered holy and sacred. It is destructive of sins.<sup>1271</sup>

The whole saga gives us a picture that the sages, kings and queens were exception in all cases and were obviously the privileged section of the society who was not considered as sinner, but were a sense of purity, spirituality or we can rather say that an aura was created for whatever they did.

Queen Sudesna was sent to a sage by her husband for begetting progeny. In the same way another queen was also sent by her husband for progeny. Her husband was cursed by a *Brāhmaṇa* to live the life of a demon for twelve years. When twelve years were over he went to his queen to have sexual intercourse with her. But the queen knew that a *Brāhmaṇa* lady has cursed the king that he would die when he would involve in sexual intercourse. So the queen prevented the king from doing so. It was

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<sup>1267</sup> The *Agni Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 275, 48

<sup>1268</sup> The *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, Chapter 14

<sup>1269</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 20

<sup>1270</sup> The *Nārada Purāṇa*, Part IV, *UtTārā Bhāga*, Chapter 28, 32

<sup>1271</sup> *Ibid*, 33-34

with the king's consent that the sage Vasīṣṭha begot an issue on the queen.<sup>1272</sup> In both the cases it was sages who begot an issue on the queens as was the case with Vyāsa (his brothers' wives were sent to him). It was done in order to maintain the purity or maybe the sages increased the purity of the lineage! The queens' consent hardly mattered as it is very clear that they were treated as objects that were offered to the sages. The lineage of her marital house was all that mattered as one of the duties of a chaste wife was to listen whatever her husband told her to do even if it was physical involvement with another man. What mattered here was the selfish need of a man to continue his lineage. Even the sages fell from morality, and are having sexual relationship with another man's wife and are not even punished also. It was the sages who were above all in the society. It was they who prescribed the society as to what was correct, so they enjoyed their own privileges as did the kings.

## DEFIANCE

*“Beauty and good character becomes a cause of happiness; for that reason she, who is without character should be forsaken.”<sup>1273</sup>*

In the previous section we have discussed about those women who without any fault of theirs were unrighteously considered unchaste. But in this section we would discuss about women who did not choose to follow the prescribed notion but followed their own mind and desires though they knew that such behaviour was not acceptable. It will also be observed how they were treated due to such behaviour.

The *Padma Purāṇa* explains as to why a woman should never resort to another man other than her husband<sup>1274</sup>. He said that woman who forsaking her own husband, resorts to another man with a desire for enjoyment goes to a fearful hell. She, who deceives her husband lives there till the end of the *kalpa*. Then she reaches the state of an inanimate object. Even from there, she obtains beast hood for many existences. Then freed from that stock she is born as a crippled one. Finally such women go to a fearful hell. He goes to the extent of saying that such a sin is a fall from human being.

<sup>1272</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ninth *Skandha*, Chapter 9, 36-38

<sup>1273</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 66, 34

<sup>1274</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 206, 34-40

In this section we will be talking about women who acted in such a way and how were they treated.

The concept of transgression involves implicit and explicit nuances. When we are talking about transgression we have to keep in mind that a woman who is under so much of societal pressure is defying the social norm but not under any compulsion but through self-motivation. What make the stories in the *Purāṇas* and in other ancient Indian texts complicated is that in some circumstances even if a woman is transgressing from the path of chastity she is not deemed as impure or unchaste. Rather she becomes a celebrated character. While dealing with transgression we have to keep in mind and observe that whether a man or a woman is transgressing within or outside the institution of marriage, how he/she is being treated by the society, how is it affecting the later part of their life and also how their partner is being affected by it? Other than these it also significant to consider the person they are getting involved with and his/her behaviour towards offender. The reasons for transgressing should also be taken into account – whether she is performing it out of being unsatisfied emotionally or physically, or being lustful. In the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* we see where Dharma takes the form of a human man and then approaches the ‘chaste’ wife of another with the purpose of sexual dalliance on the basis that she can be unsatisfied sexually as her husband is a sage and a devotee of Visnu and is not well-versed in the art of making love.

In the stories we would see that the most celebrated characters of the ancient Indian myths breaking the norms not under any compulsion but rather self-induced.

### **Transgression**

A *Brāhmani* who was polluted with any kind of alcohol or is spoiled by drinking semen is to be discarded from Patiloka and she is to be born as a female vulture.

<sup>1275</sup>Chaste women are said to be on parity with Arundhatī.<sup>1276</sup> Arundhati who was in her previous birth was known as Sandhyā was Brahmā’s daughter and was mentally created by him. She performed a penance to cast off her body and was reborn as Arundhatī. She was born as the daughter of the sage Medātithi. By performing sacred rites at the order of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, she chose as her husband Vasiṣṭha. She

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<sup>1275</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 105, 26

<sup>1276</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*

is called a woman of ‘auspicious countenance’ and she also became the foremost of chaste ladies who “*deserved honour and respect from everyone.*”<sup>1277</sup>

Brahmā on seeing his daughter fell for her.<sup>1278</sup> Sandhyā’s mind was also attracted towards her him. She was struck with grief regarding her marriage. Śiva and Brahmā disappeared leaving her without any support. Sandhyā lamented as her father had a lustful desire for her. The minds of the sages, the mental sons, reputed to be pure in mind became lustful, breaking the traditional conventions. She admitted that she looked upon her father and brothers as husbands and thus she has committed the worst sin. Following the Vedic injunctions she decided to deliver herself to the fire as it was through this body that lustful feelings originated and she was not able to obtain any merit.<sup>1279</sup> Sandhyā then practised penance and worshipped Śiva. Śiva was pleased and told her to ask for a boon. No creation by her should become lustful and that her husband should be a close friend of pure mind. She moreover wanted that if any person would look at her with lustful eyes should lose his manhood and would become a eunuch.<sup>1280</sup>

Śiva being pleased with her, said that her sin has been reduced to ashes.<sup>1281</sup> He said, “*You will attain such a pure chastity as will not be attained by any other woman in the three worlds. Excepting your husband whoever looks at you with lustful eyes shall immediately become impotent and weak. Your husband shall be endowed with great fortune, penance and comely features. He shall live for a long period of seven kalpas along with you.*”<sup>1282</sup> She was delighted that it was by Śiva’s favour she could enter the sacrificial fire. Her body itself had become sacrificial offering in that sacrifice. The sun served her body into two halves and placed the same on his own chariot for the propitiation of the Pitrs and the Devas.<sup>1283</sup>

At the end of the sacrifice, the sage found his daughter in the sacrificial pit ‘shining lustroously like heated gold’.<sup>1284</sup> He took her up, bathed her and placed her on his lap. The great sage gave her the name Arundhatī. The word Arundhatī means “one who

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<sup>1277</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*

<sup>1278</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Rudra-Samhitā*, Narrative of Satī, Section II, Chapter 6-7,

<sup>1279</sup> *Ibid*, 28

<sup>1280</sup> *Ibid*, 37

<sup>1281</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Rudra-Samhitā*, Section II, Chapter 6-7,40

<sup>1282</sup> *Ibid*,45

<sup>1283</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 7, 8

<sup>1284</sup> *Ibid*, 14

does not hinder sacred rites in any manner whatsoever”.<sup>1285</sup> She became well-known in the three worlds. Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva got her married to Vasistha, the son of Brahmā.<sup>1286</sup> She is called the ‘greatest of all chaste ladies’.<sup>1287</sup> It is said who listens to her story along with auspicious rites attains all cherished desires.

Arundhatī behaved in an unconventional way and thought lustfully not only of her father but for her brothers also. Same was the case with Brahmā who got sexually attracted to her own daughter. Arundhatī practised penance and entered fire to purify herself as Sītā did. But in case of Sītā she had to enter fire not only to purify but also to prove her innocence as she was prey to her husband’s suspicion and his quest for fame. Arundhatī was guilty even though she performed penance. Then also she is called a chaste lady who deserves honour and respect. It is a striking feature that though women perform such an act which was supposedly unacceptable to the society but quite contradictorily they are called chaste.

Once Śaṅkara entered into a forest, where Ṛṣis lived with their consorts.<sup>1288</sup> Seeing him the wives of Bhārgavas and Ātreyas felt passionate towards him and lost their self-control. Only the ‘unique’ Arundhatī and Anasūyā whose ‘minds were concentrated on the worship of their husbands’ did not transgress.<sup>1289</sup> They followed him wherever he went. The Ṛṣis being enraged cursed Śiva that his Liṅga might fall on earth.<sup>1290</sup> Here we see that the wives of the Rsis does not get punished or had to go through any ordeal but Śiva gets punished, being the source of passion and lust for their wives. But the curse on Śiva has a different implication. That the Ṛṣis could even curse the gods builds an idea in the mind of the people as how powerful these Ṛṣis were and that they held an upper hand even over the gods. It implied their ascendancy and thus the Brahmanical tradition cannot be challenged by any other existing tradition.

We get stories where women suffer for transgressing from the path of chastity. A *vaiśya* man marries another woman as his first wife, Citrā was unchaste but her sin

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<sup>1285</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Rudra-Samhitā*, Section II, Chapter 7, 17

<sup>1286</sup> Ibid, Chapter 7

<sup>1287</sup> Ibid, 24

<sup>1288</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 6, 58

<sup>1289</sup> Ibid, 61-62

<sup>1290</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 6, 65

washes away when she serves a *brāhmaṇa*.<sup>1291</sup> Abandoning the family practices, she, an ‘unchaste’ wife behaved badly. She did not care for her husband and performed fearful deeds and acted sinfully. Being in bad company she always stayed in another man’s house. She was abandoned by her husband. When he married for the second time he was honoured by that ‘unlimitedly truthful chaste lady of a good mind’.<sup>1292</sup> But she continued to be sinful. She lived like a prostitute. A *brāhmaṇa* accidentally came to her house. She served him well and they were engaged in ‘strange sexual unions’.<sup>1293</sup> When he was leaving in the morning he told her the way that would wash away her sin i.e. by taking bath in the month of Vaiśākha. She too left with *brāhmaṇa* and lived with him.<sup>1294</sup>

Even though she was abandoned by her husband and had relations with other men but her sin washes away even when she had a sexual relation with a *brāhmaṇa* and for such a relation with a *brāhmaṇa*, she was not even accused, but on contrary her expiation is promised. But when she had such a union with a man of a lower caste, her sins did not perish but increased.<sup>1295</sup> There was a woman from a mean family who was married to a *brāhmaṇa* of a bad character.<sup>1296</sup> She did not put up with her husband of bad character and ‘loved other men as husbands’. Desiring to earn her livelihood she went out of the city. For a long time she was sexually united with a lustful man who was a *cāṇḍāla*. As result of union with him she gave birth to a daughter. After getting old she was born as an imp. Due to bad company she became wicked-minded. She was outcast by the people. Then she was born as a tiger and after staying in fierce hells she was born as a goat.<sup>1297</sup> Thus we can observe the striking difference between the two stories. In the previous one an unchaste woman was involved with a *brāhmaṇa* in an infidel relation, a relation not permitted by the Brahmanical scriptures, and then also she was liberated from her sins as she was indulged with a *Brāhmaṇa*. In the other story the woman was married to a *brāhmaṇa* who did not possess a moralistic character. She did not care for her husband of hers, but got involved with men of lower caste. It was expected of a wife that she would serve her husband, whether he is ugly or handsome, whether of good or bad character,

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<sup>1291</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 92

<sup>1292</sup> Ibid

<sup>1293</sup> Ibid

<sup>1294</sup> Ibid

<sup>1295</sup> Ibid, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 176, 19b-38

<sup>1296</sup> Ibid

<sup>1297</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 176, 19b-38

whether rich or poor. But she did not, thus transgressing the societal moral code of conduct. Moreover she got involved with a low caste man, thus challenging the Brahmanical morals on different levels.

The *Purāṇas* goes to the extent of saying that if a woman followed the subversive way of an unchaste woman, it meant that suffering is all that she can have and if she would have been a chaste woman a tiger would not have devoured her.<sup>1298</sup> In the story a *brāhmaṇa* lived with his wife. His wife was *Durācārā*, literally meaning ‘of bad conduct’ both in name and deeds. She used abusive language and never slept with her husband. She constantly sported with her lovers. Once she went to the forest to meet her lover at night but she did not see any of her lovers.<sup>1299</sup> Having heard her words a tiger woke up and attacked her. The tiger told her that remembering his sin of previous birth he does not ‘eat sages and good men and chaste women.’<sup>1300</sup> But he eats up ‘sinners, wicked ones, and unchaste women’.<sup>1301</sup> He ate her as she was an ‘unchaste lady’.<sup>1302</sup> After she died by Yama’s order she was put many times into the fierce yellow pools of faeces, urine and blood for crores of years and after dragging her from there, they threw her, fully helpless, weeping, with her hair loose, limbs broken, into fire. Thus, having experienced the fierce torment in the hell, wholly sinful, she was again born on the earth in the stock of *cāṇḍāla*.<sup>1303</sup>

In the three successive stories discussed above shows how gender, caste and the precept of chastity interplayed and were dependent on each other.

An ‘unchaste’ wife who dared to have a ‘*Kuṇḍa*’<sup>1304</sup> (i.e. a son born in adultery) from her paramour did not feel ashamed even when her husband died. It was due to the unchaste wife that the husband killed himself as people made fun of him and he was called ‘the husband of the unchaste woman’. But she did not feel ashamed. After her husband’s death she continued to enjoy with her lovers. Her son left her. Her lovers left her when she was old. She became a leper and started begging. The wife died after few days. *Cāṇḍālas* dragged her seizing her hair and took her out of the city. The main purpose of such stories was to make the listeners understand that the life of an

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<sup>1298</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 187

<sup>1299</sup> *Ibid*, 23-33

<sup>1300</sup> *Ibid*, 50-61

<sup>1301</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1302</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>1303</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1304</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 187, 34-45



unchaste woman was filled with miseries, not only when she was alive but even after her death.

At the time of her death, Yama's servants came and tormented her body. He ordered his servants to throw her into the *Raurava* hell. In that *Raurava* hell she remained for one period of Manu. Later she was born as an alligator eating the flesh of the dead in a cremation ground. There also, she, eating the flesh of the dead in a cremation ground. Finally it was her son who emancipated her.<sup>1305</sup> Men were encouraged to abandon such an unchaste wife as did the husbands mentioned in the previous stories or else it would be the husbands who would suffer. But the unchaste wives suffered whatever maybe the case but if she has a son she would be emancipated. Thus unchaste women were promised expiation if she had a son, it did not matter whether he was born from her lover and not her husband.

In some stories chaste women transgressed from the path of chastity after her husband's death. This shows the need of a man's control over a woman's sexuality, her mind and body. It is the story of a woman who due to her acts was reborn as an outcaste woman.<sup>1306</sup> The outcaste woman was a *Brahmin* girl in her previous birth. She was named Sauminī. She was endowed with all good characteristics. She was married to a young *Brahmin* boy. After being married to him she got indulged in sexual dalliance with him and performed all rites accordingly. When her husband died she was grief-stricken. For some time she maintained her purity. Though she was a widow, she possessed passionate feelings as she was still young. "*She then transgressed the limits of decency*".<sup>1307</sup> Her family abandoned her.

A *Śūdra* saw her wandering in the forest and took her to his house and made her his wife. She then became very fond of sexual union and consumed meat and wine. Once when her *Śūdra Śūdra* husband was away she was drunk and accidentally killed a calf thinking it to be a goat. Taking into consideration some of her good deeds, the Yama sent her back from hell to be born as an outcaste woman. She was again born as a *Cāṇḍala* woman. She was born blind. She was not married to anyone and had leprosy. She survived on the leftovers of the *Cāṇḍalas*. Once by mistake Bilva leaves had

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<sup>1305</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 187, 34-45

<sup>1306</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Koṭirudrasmhītā*, Chapter 9

<sup>1307</sup> *Ibid*, 8

fallen from her hand on the Śivā's phallic image and unconsciously observed a vow. Then she went to heaven.

In the *Skanda Purāṇa* we come across a story where in the same manner an unchaste woman attains to salvation through Hari i.e. Viṣṇu.

In one of the stories a wife is shown staying together with her husband and her lovers. An excellent *Brāhmaṇa* called Satyaśīla married Mālinī.<sup>1308</sup> Though she was richly endowed with beauty and youth he was not much enamoured of her. He was always cruel towards her and hated her. She became furious with him and wanted to win over him. Taking the advice of her friends she went to a *Yoginī* to bring a medicinal potion to control her husband. Though the medicine worked she lived as she was pleased with her vicious deeds and union with different men.<sup>1309</sup> The paramour of hers stayed on in the house under the pretext of attending to some domestic work of urgency. She had lovers belonging to all castes and creeds. The husband was powerless to say anything to him.

The sin committed by her led to her painful death. She was reborn as a bitch. But here also with the help of another god (Hari) she is saved. She asked a sage to help her out when she remembered her previous birth. She realised that if a wife acts improperly towards her husband a woman cannot attain happiness. She is then born hundred times as among the lower animals and worms.<sup>1310</sup> By the blessings of Hari she was born on the earth from Nara and Nārāyaṇa and was called Urvaśī. She obtained the status of a celestial damsel. She attained the form which can be attained by Yogins.<sup>1311</sup>

The stories in the *Purāṇas* not only portray the pattern that an unchaste wife suffers in this world but also after death, the stories also illustrate the pattern that if she worships and devotes herself to a god and a Brahmin then she gets emancipated. The Brahmins could create or mutate any ideal for their benefit and maintaining their dominance.

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<sup>1308</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book II: *Vaiṣṇavakhaṇḍa*, Section VII: *Vaisākhamāsa-Māhātmya*, Chapter 24,

<sup>1309</sup> *Ibid*, 45

<sup>1310</sup> *Ibid*, 64

<sup>1311</sup> *Ibid*, 103-106

### **Out of Crisis**

Desire was not always the reason behind a woman's violation of the ideals of the society. Sometimes she was forced to perform such an act forcibly by the man who approaches her. In most of the stories men are not punished for performing such a sinful act, but somehow or the other the woman is abused either mentally or physically.

Mamatā, the wife of Uśija was forced into a sexual union with her husband's younger brother, Bṛhaspati.<sup>1312</sup> Bṛhaspati wanted to enjoy Mamatā. Mamatā told him not to have any such desires in his mind as she was bearing a child to his brother and that the child in her womb will get angry and his elder brother, Uśija will never allow Bṛhaspati's seed to enter into her womb. She moreover said: "*So do not approach me now. After I am delivered of this seed Uśija, do as thou thinkest proper.*"<sup>1313</sup> In spite of her remonstrance, Bṛhaspati did not listen to her and 'forcibly carried out his intention'.<sup>1314</sup>

Though Bṛhaspati enjoyed Mamatā forcibly but it should be noted here that Mamatā did not comply with him but she did tell Bṛhaspati that he can enjoy her after she has delivered the son borne from her husband's seed. She was afraid that if her husband would come to know of their union she will be abandoned. But she did not deterred from saying that Bṛhaspati can enjoy her later. Neither Mamatā nor Bṛhaspati is said to have been punished for their deeds. But in the version narrated in the *Bhāgvata Purāṇa*, Bṛhaspati was punished by the son in Mamatā's womb.

In the version narrated in the *Bhāgvata Purāṇa*, Bṛhaspati cursed the child in her womb and also tried to deposit his semen which was prevented by the son in her womb. The seed that fell into the ground assumed the form of a child. Mamatā wanted to give away that child as she was terribly afraid of her husband. But Bṛhaspati told her to nourish the child as the child is born of the two brothers. But Mamatā told Bṛhaspati to nourish the child as he was born of Bṛhaspati who raped her. Both the parents abandoned the child and thus he was called *Bhara-dvāja*.<sup>1315</sup> Though urged

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<sup>1312</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇam*, Chapter 48, 32-42

<sup>1313</sup> *ibid*, 36

<sup>1314</sup> *ibid*, 37-38

<sup>1315</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇam*, Chapter 48, 37-38

by gods both of them abandoned the child and he was brought by the Maruts and was given to Bharata when his family was going to extinct.<sup>1316</sup>

A *vaiśya*, Vidhura was sexually involved with the wife of his preceptor. He is said to have performed such an act through ‘ignorance’ and the woman he enjoyed who was like his ‘mother’ was called a ‘prostitute’.<sup>1317</sup>

The woman as a result of being a victim lost her honour and prestige but the man on the other hand is said perform such an act as he was ignorant and innocent. It was more a common practice that a man was not punished or rebuked either for infidelity or for any other similar acts. If a woman was not punished for being unchaste it was an exception or there was some divine reason behind, similarly if a man was punished for such an act it was an exception. But we do get some instances where a man also suffers.

Even if a woman appreciated the beauty of a man it implied that she was being subversive. We get two stories here which is that of Reṇukā<sup>1318</sup> (the versions of the story of Reṇukā in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*<sup>1319</sup> has a similar structure and ending) and another story with different characters retold in a different manner and ending but with same framework<sup>1320</sup> where a woman’s appreciation offends the husband and thus disturbed the patriarchal conventions.

### **Out of Appreciation**

Jamadagni, a sage married Reṇukā. She was the daughter of King Prasenjit. Reṇukā lived with her husband in a hermitage and was a part of his ascetic life. She performed her duties accurately. Once when she went to take bath, on her way she saw king Chitraratha with a garland of lotuses on his neck with his queens. She felt ‘envious’ of their cheerfulness. She returned to the hermitage. Her husband understood her state of mind and considered her to be fallen from virtue and ordered his sons to kill Reṇukā. None of the sons, but Parasurāma killed Reṇukā. But it was him only who brought his mother back to life and also suffered for killing his own mother. Though she was killed on the order of her husband as he thought that just longingly looking at the glory of another man made her fallen from purity but then also Reṇukā is called a

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<sup>1316</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ninth Skandha, Chapter 20, 39

<sup>1317</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, Chapter 94, 35b-37a

<sup>1318</sup> The *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, Book IV, Chapter 7

<sup>1319</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ninth Skandha, Chapter 16

<sup>1320</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book I: *Māheśvarakhaṇḍa*, Section II: *Kaumārikakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 80-117

chaste woman.<sup>1321</sup> It was this woman who tried to self –immolate when her husband died. The following verse expresses her pain and misery:

*“With her body becoming dusky-white colored on account of the dust from the ground, with her face covered with flowing tears, she lamented much. Fallen into the sea of sorrow, she became all the more pitiable.”<sup>1322</sup>*

Parasurāma, the son of Reṇukā and Jamadagni made preparations for the cremation of his father’s body. Reṇuka who was in desparation said that the ‘misery of widowhood is unbearable’<sup>1323</sup> and thus she would not be able to survive without her husband. She said,

*“I shall follow my beloved husband so that I shall proceed along with him without interruption forever in the entire world. By entering this burning pyre, I will be slightly after a long time, the dear guest of my husband in the world of Ritiṣ (Manes).”<sup>1324</sup>*

After saying all these words, she decided to be firm on her decision by entering into the fire. Thus a woman’s life came to an end when her husband died.

Reṇukā like Sītā left her palace life for her husband and was living the forest life. They both were unquestionably devoted to their husbands then also they were punished by them instead of being recognised of their devotion. Reṇukā did not think of love mentally or physically for the king, it was just the longing of the glory of the king and his wives that she was deemed as ‘unchaste’ by her husband and made her unfit for her to live. It was through another male, her son that she came back to life. The moral that is embedded within the story is that it was not proper for a wife even to look at another man either out of desire or appreciation. Jamadagni, a sage is constructed as a role-model for the society as to how one should behave when he faces such a situation. If it is proper for a sage to behave in such a manner, then the same goes for the common people too. This was how society was taught how a precept should be followed and maintained. This is how narratives helped in promoting an ideal and convincing the society of the righteousness of such ideals. No one took into account the injustice and trauma Reṇukā had to go through. Parasurāmā,

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<sup>1321</sup>The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ninth *Skandha*, Chapter 16, 13

<sup>1322</sup>The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.30.9

<sup>1323</sup>Ibid, 2.3.30.37

<sup>1324</sup>Ibid, 2.3.30.38

her son killed her at the command of his father. But he was punished because he killed his own mother which was considered as heinous act.<sup>1325</sup>

We find another version of the story where the son was also ordered to kill his mother for such an act but he did not. Moreover even the husband was shown to be regretful of his decision.

There was a famous *Brāhmaṇa* called Cīrakārī. He was the son of Gautama. On the banks of the river Kauśikī, his mother was longingly watching king Balī who was sporting with his women folk. As she was late in returning to the hermitage he was ordered by his father to kill his own mother.<sup>1326</sup> He thought, “*sparing his mother may be an Adharma*<sup>1327</sup> and his father’s command is Dharma. No one can be happy after killing a woman and that too his own mother. Father recreates himself in his wife. He is reborn in his own wife. It is to preserve and uphold morality, chastity and spiritual lineage of the family that he does so.”<sup>1328</sup> But later Gautama regretted for doing so as he said, “*I have killed a chaste woman, my wife. Who will redeem me from this sin? The liberal minded Cīrakārī has been ordered by me in a hurry.*”<sup>1329</sup> But since Cīrakārī (he was called so as he always delayed in action), always delayed in whatever he was told to do this time also was not an exception as he pondered over the matter for a long time and could not kill his mother.<sup>1330</sup>

The difference here is that though the husband ordered his son to kill his wife but he soon realised that it is not proper to kill his wife who is chaste. As she was pleased to see another man and came late for her household work she was considered to be immoral. It is clearly told in this story that through his wife that he maintains the purity of the family. If he does not control his wife all purity is lost. The reason behind this stringency lies in maintaining the purity of the family. But the story reflects the need of a woman and her irreplaceable power. Thus though she was considered impure, then also they were accepted by their husbands for maintaining balance within their family and meeting their own needs, either mental, physical or for household duties.

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<sup>1325</sup>The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāna*, 2.3.30.38

<sup>1326</sup>The *Skanda Purāna*, Book I: *Māheśvarakhaṇḍa*, Section II: *Kaumārikakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 108

<sup>1327</sup>Ibid, 83-87

<sup>1328</sup>Ibid, 89-90

<sup>1329</sup>Ibid, 113

<sup>1330</sup>Ibid, 117-120

## The Paradox

*"Only supernatural intellect causes celestial creation; therefore those alone can understand its great secret who themselves are possessed with such an intellect. The question of any prescribed order on prohibition does not arise for the Devas. Other beings reap the fruits of their karma which Devas do not. No doubt should therefore be raised regarding the doings of the Devas, nor should the beings having sensuous bodies think of doing the same deed."*<sup>1331</sup>

One of the striking features of the stories in the *Purāṇas* is that they are very paradoxical in nature. It contradicts its own definition and norms. Now we would discuss as to when, why and for whom such mutation took place.

The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* says that in the type of relationship in which a lover is either treated like a husband or a wife is denounced in the world. Such type of illicit relationship is prohibited for the high ranking people as it brings disgrace for both men and women. But it is said to be allowed in some circumstances.<sup>1332</sup> Here in this section we would discuss about such situations.

### **Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and Gopīs**

The love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is well celebrated and is considered as an ideal example of love. But when we plunge deep into their relationship we find how much mutation of the prescribed norms took place and not only this, various angles were added to it to make it divine. Every *Purāṇa* comes with its own version of the love between Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and Gopīs. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* we find mention of the gopis and Rukimini, Kṛṣṇa's wife, but not of Rādhā. This shows how with the spread of Viasnavism there was change in the story and the relationships embedded within. On the other ahnd in the *Padma Purāṇa* and the *Brahmā vaivarta Purāṇa* Rukmini, his wedded wife is relegated to the background.

The gopis in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* used to meditate on Kṛṣṇa in an act of devotion. They danced together. They chanted the praise of Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes one of them being exhausted used to throw her arms round his neck. They though prohibited by their brothers and husband went out at night to sport with Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1333</sup> Kṛṣṇa's marriage to

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<sup>1331</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 4, 5-6

<sup>1332</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 11, 167-170

<sup>1333</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Part V, Chapter 13

Rukmini is also mentioned. Kṛṣṇa fell in love with Rukmini<sup>1334</sup> and married her in the Rākṣasa ritual. She gave birth to his son called Pradyumna.<sup>1335</sup> Rukmini bore to him other sons too and one daughter.<sup>1336</sup> Kṛṣṇa had other seven ‘beautiful’ wives – Kāṁdī, Mitravindā, *satya* Nagnajiti, *devi* Jambāvātī, *kamrupini* Rohinī, *sushila shila* Mādrī and Lakṣmanā. Besides them he had sixteen thousand other wives.<sup>1337</sup>

Vṛndāvana was the place where Kṛṣṇa sported with Rādhā and other cowherdresses. At Vṛndāvana, Rādhā was the chief goddess.<sup>1338</sup> They obtained great joy due to their proximity. It is said that Rādhā embraced by Kṛṣṇa used to tremble due to the influence of passion for kissing and embracing.<sup>1339</sup> Though Rādhā was married she had physical and mental intimacy with another man. Moreover Rādhā’s mother-in-law used to allow her to go to Yaśodā’s home to good cook food for Kṛṣṇa when Yaśodā invited Rādhā to cook food for his son. Rādhā with a desire to see her ‘lover’<sup>1340</sup> used to go to the forest after deceiving her elders.<sup>1341</sup>

Even though Rādhā did not fit into the definition of chastity, that a wife should be loyal and devoted to her husband only, both physically and mentally, then also Rādhā is described as ‘affectionate, of pure heart and the one who drinks the nectar of Kṛṣṇa’.<sup>1342</sup> Rādhā is given a special status on the contrary and is described as ‘the one who stands above any other woman and that there is no woman resembling Rādhikā’.<sup>1343</sup> She was not the only lover of Kṛṣṇa but the *Gopīs* (the cowherdresses) also loved and devoted themselves to Kṛṣṇa despite being married.

The *Gopīs* were enamoured of Kṛṣṇa. When the *Gopīs* used to hear about Kṛṣṇa’s coming, they could not be prevented by their husbands, fathers, brothers and relatives from going to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Once they went the *Gopīs* were ‘hypnotised’ and did not return.<sup>1344</sup>

It was Kṛṣṇa who supported and encouraged the *Gopīs* for being devoted to him. For his sake they left their husbands and sons. It moreover seems that he encouraged the

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<sup>1334</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāna*, Part V, Chapter 26

<sup>1335</sup> Ibid, 10-12

<sup>1336</sup> Ibid, Chapter 28

<sup>1337</sup> Ibid, 3-5

<sup>1338</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāna*, Part V, Chapter 70, 8-13

<sup>1339</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>1340</sup> Ibid, Chapter 83, 44-52

<sup>1341</sup> Ibid

<sup>1342</sup> Ibid, 19-21

<sup>1343</sup> Ibid, 48b-55

<sup>1344</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāna*, Tenth *Skandha*, Chapter 29, 8



*Gopīs* in such an act as he said that he gives happiness to those who ‘have over-ruled popular moral conventions’ for his sake.<sup>1345</sup> Though the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* called the *Gopīs* rustic forest-dwelling women as they are condemned for adultery but on the other hand in the same text they are appreciated for their ‘deep-rooted intense devotion’ to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1346</sup>

The *Gopīs* are termed as ‘respectable’ ladies who have established such an ‘unsurpassable supreme standard of devotion into the glorious Lord...which is extremely difficult even for sages.’<sup>1347</sup> As the *Gopīs* have renounced the conventions, “worldly senses of decorum, the injunction of the Vedas for righteousness, have broken all their ties which bounded them to their home, their kith and kin for Kṛṣṇa so their devotion is pure and faultless.”<sup>1348</sup> Kṛṣṇa said that hundred such women attain to the Supreme Brāhmaṇa by contact with him.<sup>1349</sup>

Saunaka asked whether the *Gopīs* were imaginary.<sup>1350</sup> Sauti said the *Gopīs* resided in the initial creation and they merged with Kṛṣṇa at the time of dissolution and Rādhā is said to emerge from the left side of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1351</sup> She was ‘dearest’ to him as she emerged from his own body.<sup>1352</sup> The *Gopīs* emerged from the body of Rādhā who are said to be ‘as beautiful’ as Rādhā was.<sup>1353</sup> They were crores in number and were ‘youthful’.<sup>1354</sup>

The framing of the story of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā is different in the *Padma Purāṇa* from that mentioned in the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* though they are given a divine form but in the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, a *Purāṇa* dedicated to Viṣṇu gives them the superior most position in the cosmic world. Rādhā is shown to be the greatest goddess from whom all other goddesses have emerged. In the text she is the wife of Kṛṣṇa. But due to the curse of Kṛṣṇa she did not bear any child to him. Kṛṣṇa implanted his seed into Rādhā.<sup>1355</sup> After the completion of a hundred *Manvantras* she gave birth to a golden egg which became the base of the entire universe, but she threw the egg into the ocean. Kṛṣṇa felt enraged and cursed Rādhā

<sup>1345</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Tenth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 46, 4-4a

<sup>1346</sup> *Ibid*, 59

<sup>1347</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Tenth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 47, 25-26

<sup>1348</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 32, 21-22

<sup>1349</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 12, 13

<sup>1350</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 5, 1

<sup>1351</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 5, 25

<sup>1352</sup> *Ibid*, 27

<sup>1353</sup> *Ibid*, 40

<sup>1354</sup> *Ibid*, 41

<sup>1355</sup> *Ibid*, *Prākṛiti-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 2, 40

that she and women who will be born from her parts will bear no progeny. So Laksmi and Sarasvati did not bear any children. But the other *Gopīs* and Rukmini and his other wives on earth bore children to him.

Kṛṣṇa through his mystical powers tricked Rādhā about his involvement with the *Gopīs*. Rādhā on discovering such an act of Kṛṣṇa used to get infuriated and cursed the characters involved. The *Gopīs* with whom Kṛṣṇa used to get involved with turned to river or any other form due to the fear of Rādhā. But nowhere we see that the *Gopīs* or Kṛṣṇa being termed as impure. They are shown to be transgressing not out of sexual desire but out of devotion. It should be kept in mind that nowhere in the text it has been mentioned that the *Gopīs* were married to him. But they bore his semen and not only that, Kṛṣṇa through his divine power helped them to acquire him as their husband in the next birth. Though devotion is said to be the main focus of the story of Kṛṣṇa and *Gopīs* we find a sexual involvement and also that the physical beauty of Rādhā and the *Gopīs* being the concern. The whole episode has a sexual tone to it. Radha's reciprocation to Kṛṣṇa's behaviour is a clear indication of how disturbing it was for her and that it was definitely an improper behaviour.

Once Ganga went to Kṛṣṇa and felt passionate towards him. At the same time Rādhā also appeared. She became angry and reminded him how he has been misbehaving with her and reminded him because of her love for him she has forgives him.<sup>1356</sup> She also told him that if she continues to behave like this, he will have to leave the *Goloka* with Ganga.<sup>1357</sup> She also enumerated about his relations with other women. Kṛṣṇa was involved with Viraja and because of Rādhā, he discarded her. She then turned into a stream. When Rādhā left for home, he went back to her and she re-appeared from the river. He is said to 'embrace her tightly'<sup>1358</sup> and he planted her semen into her. He left her hearing Rādhā's voice. Then he was caught with Sobha, Prabha, Santi and Ksma who ended their lives but their bodies were turned into virtues by Kṛṣṇa. Seeing the rage of Rādhā, Ganga sought the protection of Kṛṣṇa who held her in her feet while Rādhā wanted to drink her up. Brahmā eulogised Rādhā and said Ganga is her daughter and Rādhā gave her consent and Ganga adored Rādhā.<sup>1359</sup>

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<sup>1356</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Prākṛiti-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 11,44

<sup>1357</sup> *Ibid*, 45

<sup>1358</sup> *Ibid*, 52

<sup>1359</sup> *Ibid*, 46-127

The wife of Dharmadhvaja known as Mādhavī gave birth to a daughter known as Padmini who was the part of the rays of Laksmi. In the earlier birth she was a *gopi* known as Tulasi. While dancing with Kṛṣṇa she became passionate and before getting satisfaction she fainted and by the curse of Rādhā she was born as a human. Kṛṣṇa told her that by practising austerities in her next birth she will get the four-armed Visnu as her husband.<sup>1360</sup> But she did not have the same love for the four-armed Visnu as she had for Kṛṣṇa, but only at the advice of Kṛṣṇa that she accepted it.<sup>1361</sup>

Brahmā informed her that a part of Kṛṣṇa has been born as Samkhacuda because of the curse of Rādhā.<sup>1362</sup> Seeing her, he got passionate about her and through tapas he has already achieved her as a boon but because of the influence of Rādhā he cannot approach her.<sup>1363</sup> Padmini requested Brahmā to liberate her of the fear of Rādhā and through Brhma's bestowing on her the sixteen letter mantra of Radhika that she was freed. It was through this mantra that Rādhā will grant her the permission to ornament herself in seclusion and become the 'beloved' of Kṛṣṇa as Rādhāika herself.<sup>1364</sup>

A *gopi* named Susila once was seated in the right lap of Kṛṣṇa. She descended on earth by the curse of Rādhā and by the virtue of Kṛṣṇa she came to be known as *daksina*. The beloved cowherdesses were quite well versed in the art of love and are competent to perform all the deeds and enjoyed always the right lap of her husband. She was therefore called *daksina*. Thus in order to make the deeds of all people a success, who is well-versed in the art of love and is competent to perform all the deeds and enjoys always the right lap of the husband, she was therefore called *daksina*. Thus in order to make the deeds of all the people successful all the three cowherdesses name Svaha, Swadha and Daksina were born.<sup>1365</sup>

Rādhā is said to be the chaste Bhāratī, the dearest wife of the sage Kapila in the land of Bhārata. She is known as Sītā in Mithila, she happens to be shadow of the chaste Draupadī who appeared in the form of MaHālaksmi in Dvārkā and Rukmiṇī as well. Draupadī was born from her rays and was the wife of the Pandavas.<sup>1366</sup>

<sup>1360</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāna*, *Prākṛiti-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 15, 27

<sup>1361</sup> *Ibid*, 41

<sup>1362</sup> *Ibid*, 31

<sup>1363</sup> *Ibid*, 32-33

<sup>1364</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 11, 43-44

<sup>1365</sup> *Ibid*, 43-45

<sup>1366</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 126, 99

The *Vaiśeṣika* doctrine describes Kṛṣṇa as eternal and primeval. The *Sāṃkhya* people and philosophers describe him as an everlasting flame. The *Mīmāṃsā* philosophers call him as the form of everything and the Vedānta philosophy describes to be the cause of all. The *Yogaśāstra* of Pātañjali describes him to be beyond measure and the *Purāṇas* as the one who moves at will and the devotees always take him to be the one having eternal form.<sup>1367</sup> Rādhā too is eulogised in the *Purāṇas*. After the wedding ceremony was completed Rohini asked Kṛṣṇa as how did he like Rādhā in comparison to Rukmini. Sarasvati replied to this question. She said that the love Kṛṣṇa has for Rādhā, cannot be for Rukmini<sup>1368</sup> as Rādhā happens to be ‘the goddess of his life, she is dearer to him than all the five pranas. Rukmini is an incarnation of Lakṣmi and the bestower of all riches, Rādhā on the other hand represents the entire prowess of lord Kṛṣṇa besides being the goddess of wisdom. Durga, Narayani, Pārvatī, Savitri, Sarasvati and all other goddesses are only the rays of Rādhā.<sup>1369</sup> Rādhā is described as the most ‘virtuous’ and ‘auspicious’ of all the chaste ladies. ‘He is the one who painted the toes of Rādhā with paint.’<sup>1370</sup> The love of Rādhā, though have been idealised, but at the same time it reflects the conflict and inner struggle she had to go through to accept the inappropriate behaviour of Kṛṣṇa.

Thus Kṛṣṇa’s involvement with the Gopīs is quite extensive and even while they were performing a *vrata*, they stole her clothes which she uses to cover her body.<sup>1371</sup> We do not find any mention of the husbands of the *Gopīs*, or their husbands having any objection to it or any moral police terming them as unchaste as per the traditional conduct of behaviour. Like Sītā, an illusory image was also made for that of Rādhā when she was to get married to Rayana, a trader by profession when she was to take birth on earth.

Sudama pronounced a curse on Rādhā that she will take birth on earth turning herself into a gopi and will be separated from Kṛṣṇa for hundred years. Kṛṣṇa will incarnate on earth to relive her. Rādhā was born in the village of Gokula in the family of Vaiśya cowherd. She was born without any human contact. After twelve years she was married to a trader named Rayana. The shadow of Rādhā was married to him while the real one disappeared. After fourteen years went by Kṛṣṇa took birth as an infant.

<sup>1367</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Prākṛiti-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 129, 74-76

<sup>1368</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 109, 19

<sup>1369</sup> *Ibid*, 20-22

<sup>1370</sup> *Ibid*, *Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 109, 25-26

<sup>1371</sup> *ibid*, Chapter 27

Rayana was the real brother of Yasoda, the mother of Kṛṣṇa on earth who was an amsa of Kṛṣṇa in Goloka and was Kṛṣṇa's maternal uncle in Vṛndāvan. Brahmā performed the marriage of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā.<sup>1372</sup> But this modification is absent in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* where no previous birth in the goloka, or any curse is being mentioned. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* we find that Rādhā is being shown as married to another man, but she without any objection acquired the permission of her mother-in-law to meet Kṛṣṇa and cook food for him. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to some extent the *Gopīs* are being accused of infidelity but again Kṛṣṇa comes to their rescue and their sins get washed away. The concept of creating an illusory image or being born out of the amsa of Rādhā or Kṛṣṇa indicating that all are same were used to show the divinity and purity of the gods and goddesses which was beyond ordinary people.

Kṛṣṇa said that his devotees are never involved in sinful ways and are always engaged in noble deeds.<sup>1373</sup> The devotees do not care for their wives, sons or other members of the family and spend their time adoring him.<sup>1374</sup>

Once Nanda went to Vṛndāvana with Kṛṣṇa. By the illusion of Kṛṣṇa, the sky was covered with clouds and it started raining heavily. Suddenly Kṛṣṇa started crying and stuck to his father. Rādhā came to Kṛṣṇa all adorned. Nanda knew about the reason behind the birth of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā which he heard from the mouth of Garga. He told Rādhā to take Kṛṣṇa with her and after fulfilling the desire of her son to return his son to him.<sup>1375</sup> She carried Kṛṣṇa to a distant place. Suddenly she saw the child in her lap missing and found a boy of her age lying. He said that when he is separated from her, people call him only Kṛṣṇa and when he united with her people call him Sri Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā happens to be his Sri.<sup>1376</sup> There Brahmā also appeared, bowing Rādhā he washed her feet and started adoring her. Brahmā also performed the marriage ceremony of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā.<sup>1377</sup> Then they enjoyed conjugal pleasure.

The description of such an union between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā is vivid. Lord Kṛṣṇa who was well-versed in the love-sport united all the limbs of his body with those of Rādhā and he enjoyed eight types of sexual pleasure with her. Embracing him she was looking at Kṛṣṇa with side glance, smilingly and he injured all the limbs of her body

<sup>1372</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa, Prākṛiti-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 49, 30-42

<sup>1373</sup> Ibid, *Kṛṣṇa Janma Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 51

<sup>1374</sup> Ibid, 58

<sup>1375</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa, Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 15, 27

<sup>1376</sup> Ibid, 63-65

<sup>1377</sup> Ibid, 120-126

with his teeth. At the time of the sexual pleasure the armlets, anklets and wristlets of Rādhā were creating sweet sounds. Thereafter in the secluded place Kṛṣṇa who was well-versed in the art of making love, made Rādhā to sit on the bed and dishevelled her hair unrobing her at the same time too. Rādhā too behaved similarly. Neither of them harmed each other as both of them were well-versed in the art of making love.<sup>1378</sup> After their love-sport Kṛṣṇa again took the form of an infant. Seeing this Rādhā was grief-stricken. And then a divine voice from the sky told her that the lord will come here during Rasamandala and she leaving her shadow with him shall come there daily.<sup>1379</sup>

The union that existed between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā was considered to be sinful for the mortal beings especially for women. But as Rādhā was the lover of Kṛṣṇa, their relation had a divine status. Neither Rādhā's mother-in-law nor Kṛṣṇa's parents had any objection.

In the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* we do find criticism of Kṛṣṇa's character and conduct. But a sacred reason is mentioned for such a conduct and circumstances. Bana said to Aniruddha that his father who is the son of Kṛṣṇa owned the wife of Śambārāsura after killing him and that he was born out of her. His grandfather, Kṛṣṇa who is the Ksatriya of Mathura was the son of a *vaiśya* in Gokula known by the name of Nanda. He also described Kṛṣṇa as a wicked person who is the lover of the cowherdresses. He killed Pūtanā, a woman during his childhood, thus he is the killer of a woman. In Mathura he killed Kubjā after enjoying conjugal pleasure with her.<sup>1380</sup> Calling Kṛṣṇa 'heartless' and 'greedy' for passion said that he killed Naraka and took away the group of ladies in his house.<sup>1381</sup> The wife of his brother named Draupadī was married to five persons. His elder brother, Baladeva remains drunk and summons Yamunā, the wife of his brother at his will.<sup>1382</sup>

Aniruddha told Bana about his progeny. He said his father named, Kamadeva was the 'auspicious' son of Brahmā in earlier times.<sup>1383</sup> Because of his sins he was tuned into ashes by Śiva and at the present he happens to be the son of Kṛṣṇa. He said his mother Rati is chaste woman. She had to stay in the house of Śambāra because of the desire

<sup>1378</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 15, 156-161

<sup>1379</sup> Ibid, 172-173

<sup>1380</sup> Ibid, Chapter 115, 58-62

<sup>1381</sup> Ibid, 63

<sup>1382</sup> Ibid, 72-75

<sup>1383</sup> Ibid, 76

for her husband who abducted her forcibly. She gave her shadow to the demon and saved her chastity and Dharma knew it.<sup>1384</sup>

Rādhā on the other hand was born as the daughter of Vṛṣabhāna due to the curse of Sudāmā; she at the command of Kṛṣṇa, her ‘lord’ with crores of cowherdesses arrived in the mortal land of Bhārata from Goloka. Kṛṣṇa married Rādhā and Brahmā was the priest of the marriage.<sup>1385</sup> Pūtanā was the daughter of Bali and Bana’s sister. As she was childless in the earlier birth and looking at the incarnation of Vāmana, she desired to have a son like him and that she could feed the child with her breasts.<sup>1386</sup> Thus the lord fulfilled her desire.

Kubjā was the sister of Rāvaṇa known as Śūrpaṅkhā in her earlier birth, who passionately desired Rāma as her husband but Lakṣmaṇa severed her nose. She performed severe tapas and achieved a boon from Brahmā; as a result she achieved Visnu as her husband and then went to Goloka as a result of the embrace of Kṛṣṇa as a gopi.<sup>1387</sup>

Characters that had divine connection were kept outside the sphere of transgression. But even within this paradoxical and divine realm there were issues regarding gender parity. Rādhā had to bear Kṛṣṇa’s love and indulgences with other women and at the same time forgive him, as he was her ‘lord’.

### **Viṣṇu, Śiva, Pārvatī and Earth**

Viṣṇu was involved in sexual dalliances with many women including earth. The earth once became passionate at the beauty of Viṣṇu. She turned herself into a beautifully adorned damsel. She herself went to him and presented him a garland. Visnu implanted in her his seed.<sup>1388</sup>

Even Pārvatī, the devoted wife of Śiva whom she acquired after much austerities became desirous of Visnu. She thought that though Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu are one, but Viṣṇu is the most ‘superior and preserves *sattvaguna*’ in him.<sup>1389</sup> Her feelings were understood by Śiva and he told Pārvatī to have conjugal union with Viṣṇu as “...myself (Śiva), Brahmā and Visnu represent the everlasting Brahmān. The gods are

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<sup>1384</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 115, 77-79

<sup>1385</sup> Ibid, 86-88

<sup>1386</sup> Ibid, 91-92

<sup>1387</sup> Ibid, 93-96

<sup>1388</sup> Ibid, *Brahmā Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 9, 23-27

<sup>1389</sup> Ibid, *Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 160

without differentiation and the worldly pleasure creates difference in the form.”<sup>1390</sup> Pārvatī told Śiva not to put disgrace on her as she achieved Śiva after performing tapas.<sup>1391</sup> She told him that she will attain Viṣṇu in her next birth and will known by the name of ‘chaste’ (*Satī*) Jambāvati.<sup>1392</sup>

Śiva was once punished by the *Rsis* as their wives felt passionate towards him and followed him wherever he went.<sup>1393</sup> As a result his Liṅga fell on earth. The earth was unable to take the weight of his Liṅga.<sup>1394</sup> Balkhilyas, the hermits practised penance in the forest. Once Śiva and his wife Uma was on an expedition. The goddess saw them and told them to remove their penance as they could not attain purity ‘even when they exploited their body to the extent that mere bones and some flesh have been left with them’.<sup>1395</sup> Śiva converted his body into an ascetic naked body.<sup>1396</sup> The wives of those hermits got attracted to him and approached him.<sup>1397</sup> When their husband saw him, they made hard blows on his penis and it fell down.<sup>1398</sup> Everything became imbalanced. He took it back only after the gods agreed to worship him.<sup>1399</sup> Then he initiated the four castes in the worship of Śaṅkara – *Śaiva*, *Pāśupata*, *Kālavadana* and *Kapālin*.<sup>1400</sup>

Śiva was punished because he was the origin of the lustful behaviour of the wives of the *Rsis*. It shows the dominant position of the *Rsis*. Even though he was punished it ended in the initiation of his worship by the gods and branching of his cult. In the celestial realm Pārvatī, a goddess could express her desire to union with another man without being rebuked by her husband; her husband rather encouraged Pārvatī to have sexual union with Visnu. But such expression in the mortal realm was sinful and subversive.

Śiva once felt enamoured of Viṣṇu when he took the form of a damsel even when Pārvatī was with him.<sup>1401</sup> While running after her his semen fell on various places on

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<sup>1390</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 164-167

<sup>1391</sup> *Ibid*, 168-169

<sup>1392</sup> *Ibid*, 170-172

<sup>1393</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 6, 58, 61-62, 63, 65

<sup>1394</sup> *Ibid*, 70

<sup>1395</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 43, 45-48

<sup>1396</sup> *Ibid*, 55-56

<sup>1397</sup> *Ibid*, 57-59

<sup>1398</sup> *Ibid*, 67-68

<sup>1399</sup> *Ibid*, 88

<sup>1400</sup> *Ibid*, 86-87

<sup>1401</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Eighth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 12, 18-31



earth. Those places turned into areas of silver and gold ores.<sup>1402</sup> But when he realised that it was Viṣṇu he recovered to his normal state.<sup>1403</sup> Viṣṇu was impressed by this as he said that once deluded by such a form of his it is difficult to recover to the normal state for people who lack self-control.<sup>1404</sup> Śiva even spoke about the beauty of illusion created by Viṣṇu to Pārvatī. He even said how he submitted himself to the beauty.<sup>1405</sup> Śiva felt enamoured of the beauty of the female illusion created by Viṣṇu in front of his wife only. Viṣṇu appreciated Śiva because he was able to revert himself to the normal state though he could not control his semen. And Śiva did all these while his wife was present.

### **Brahmā, ‘the grandfather’**

Once during the time of creation, Ananta, Brahmā and Śiva went to Visnu. There the damsels who emerged out of the body of Laksmi were dancing. Looking at them Brahmā became passionate. Brahmā could not control himself and his semen fell and feeling ashamed he hid it under his cloth and threw it in the ocean. A ‘divine lustre’ emerged and sat on his lap.<sup>1406</sup> He was Agni.<sup>1407</sup>

Brahmā who also thought lustfully for his own daughter did not go through any penance or repentance. Brahmā after creating the *mānasa putras* was not satisfied. He wanted to create something that would relieve him and thus he invoked Gāyatrī. The goddess Gayatri then appeared in the form of a girl from Brahmā’s body who at first took her to be his daughter and felt lustful towards her.<sup>1408</sup> The Manasa putras contempt their father Brahmā considering Sāvitrī as their sister.<sup>1409</sup> His five heads were created out of his love for Savitri so that he does not have to turn heads to see her while she was circumbulating.<sup>1410</sup> But Brahmā lost all his powers which he gained through his asceticism as he could not control his mind.<sup>1411</sup> Brahmā being passionate married Śatarūpā and lived with her inside a lotus and Manu was born to them.<sup>1412</sup>

<sup>1402</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Eighth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 12, 32-33

<sup>1403</sup> *Ibid*, 35

<sup>1404</sup> *Ibid*, 38-39

<sup>1405</sup> *Ibid*, 43

<sup>1406</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 131, 11-17

<sup>1407</sup> *Ibid*, 30

<sup>1408</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 3, 30-33

<sup>1409</sup> *Ibid*, 34

<sup>1410</sup> *Ibid*, 35-41

<sup>1411</sup> *Ibid*, 40-41

<sup>1412</sup> *Ibid*, 43-44

Brahmā was not considered for such a sinful act and for marrying her. The offspring of Brahmā was allowed to marry within the paternal line.<sup>1413</sup> The Lord Fish said that such rules are applicable only for human kind and the primeval creation is heavenly which is presided by *Rajoguna*. The Devas does not have ‘supersensuous’ bodies and they begot progeny in a different manner. The celestials have originated in a different manner and it is difficult for human who have sensuous bodies to understand this.<sup>1414</sup> He moreover said that Brahmā is the lord of the Vedas and Gāyatrī of the *Brāhmaṇas*. She is his better-half, so she appeared from his body and thus they are ‘inseparable’. As Brahmā is the master of Savitri, he did not commit any sin.<sup>1415</sup> But even then Brahmā felt ashamed of his behaviour and cursed Kamadeva that he will be reduced to ashes by Śiva.<sup>1416</sup>

Brahmā’s infringement does not end here. Seeing Rati, the semen of Brahmā fell, but he covered it by his costume.<sup>1417</sup> When Brahmā felt desirous towards her she was made the wife of Kamadeva.<sup>1418</sup> Due to the arrows of Kamadeva, the semen of Kṛṣṇa also fell, but he placed it in the water in his assembly. After thousand years it emerged in the form of an egg from which came out a gigantic universe that formed basis of the entire Universe.<sup>1419</sup> Upabarhana, a *gandharva* once went to Brahmā and joined a function where Brahmā was eulogised. Seeing Rambha dancing he dropped his semen. He fainted there and all the guards started laughing. Brahmā cursed him that he will die and will be reborn as a *Śūdra*. He died then and there.<sup>1420</sup> But he was revived by Lord Visnu due to the fear of curse by his chaste wife.<sup>1421</sup> Brahmā was again inflicted with passion when he saw Kali and his semen ejaculated and he covered it with sand. From it originated Bālakhilya hermits.<sup>1422</sup> When Mālīni (Pārvatī) was touching the feet of Śiva, Brahmā seeing the face of Pārvatī ejaculated semen. He covered it with sands.<sup>1423</sup> Śiva said one should not kill Brāhmaṇas and thus the Bālakhilyas were born.<sup>1424</sup>

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<sup>1413</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 4, 1-2

<sup>1414</sup> Ibid, 3-4

<sup>1415</sup> Ibid, 9-10

<sup>1416</sup> Ibid, 11-12

<sup>1417</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-Khaṇḍa*, 13, Chapter 4

<sup>1418</sup> Ibid, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa*- Chapter 112

<sup>1419</sup> Ibid, *Brahmā-Khaṇḍa*, 23-24, Chapter 4

<sup>1420</sup> Ibid, Chapter 13

<sup>1421</sup> Ibid, Chapter 18

<sup>1422</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 27, 57-59

<sup>1423</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 27, 56-57

<sup>1424</sup> Ibid, 57-58

We again come across the concept of illusion in case of Kamadeva and Rati who were born out of the same father, Brahmā. In this story the shadow of Rati, the wife of Kamadeva named Mayavati remained in the house of the demon. The demon entered the labour room of Rukmini and carried away her son with great force. The demon that was without a son felt delighted and gave away the son to Mayavati. She brought up the child. Sarasvati informed her that he was not her son, but her husband. In an earlier birth Kamadeva was burnt to ashes by Śiva and the same has been born as the son of Rukmini who has been abducted by the demon. Sarasvati also told Kamadeva that Mayavati is not her mother, but his wife and thus told him to enjoy her company. Sarasvati also told him how the chaste ‘Satī’ Rati has been crying for him like the ‘bird of prey’.<sup>1425</sup> They got engaged in love-sport. While they were engaged, the demon discovered that Kamadeva was lying ‘on the breast of Rati who was anxious to enjoy conjugal pleasure’.<sup>1426</sup> The demon tried to kill Rati for being involved in such an act with his son. But Kamadeva killed him with the help of Durga and the wind god.<sup>1427</sup>

### Gods and Sages

A wife also remains *sadhvi* when a god conveys her that an unknown man is her husband. This one of the most astonishing story found in *Purāṇa*. There was a *vaiśya* named Praṇidhi. He was solely devoted to worshipping deities and guests. His wife Padmāvati is described as a ‘chaste, loyal wife, of a beautiful body, endowed with good character, born of a good family and speaking in a pleasant manner’.<sup>1428</sup> Then that *vaiśya* named Praṇidhi put his wife in his house and went for trade. His wife and her friends went for taking bath. Then a *cāṇḍāla* Dhanurdhvaja saw her and was filled with lust for her. He wanted to have her even after knowing that she was married. Then her friends told the *cāṇḍāla* Dhanurdhvaja that if he wanted to have her, then he should cast his body into the confluence of Gaṅgā and Yamunā. The *cāṇḍāla* after casting his body into the river resembled her husband and his qualities. That *cāṇḍāla* came to Padmāvati’s house. Padmāvati seeing her husband and the *cāṇḍāla* could not understand who her real husband was and asked for Viṣṇu’s help. Viṣṇu told her that

<sup>1425</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa*- Chapter 112, 18

<sup>1426</sup> *Ibid*, 20-21

<sup>1427</sup> *Ibid*, 25-29

<sup>1428</sup> *Ibid*, 20-24

both of them are her husband. Padmāvātī was not ready to accept this, as she said, “...men do not approve two husbands of one woman.”<sup>1429</sup>

The lord having addressed her as a ‘chaste lady’<sup>1430</sup> told her to come to his city and convinced her that both of them are her husband.<sup>1431</sup> Padmāvātī had a *vaiśya* as her real husband and a *cāṇḍāla* as her second husband who is said to have taken the form of her real husband after taking a dip into the water of Gaṅgā and Yamunā. Here a *pratiloma* marriage where a woman is having a husband from a caste lower to hers. But such a marriage is not considered iniquitous as it was Lord Viṣṇu convinced her that she can have both of them as her husband though she herself was not ready to accept. It seems Brahmanism allowed such mutation to show that if one was a devotee of Viṣṇu and follower of gods whom they propagated, then everything is permissible.

A married woman had an illegitimate relationship outside the institution of marriage without the knowledge of her husband and when he came to know about it he started reprimanded her. She told that she is ready to give an ordeal either by drinking poison or by entering into fire.<sup>1432</sup> Her husband told her to take up *Divyagraha* (ordeal through fire) in front of the deities and *Brāhmaṇas*.<sup>1433</sup> When she took up the ordeal she came out of the fire, though she was guilty.<sup>1434</sup> Everyone rebuked the husband.<sup>1435</sup> The husband became so angry that he wanted to curse the Fire-god.<sup>1436</sup> The Fire-god told him that the place where his wife spent with her paramour is a place where Brahmā with Rudra on his head is placed.<sup>1437</sup> After spending time with her lover she used to see the deity Rudra stationed on the head of Brahmā and wash her limbs in the holy pit placed there.<sup>1438</sup>

Listening to all these the husband left the woman of ‘loose’ conduct and the wife continued her sinful activities.<sup>1439</sup> As a result of this, such activities started taking place there. Everyone knew that if they do such things there, their sins will be washed

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<sup>1429</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa*- Chapter 112, 72

<sup>1430</sup> *Ibid*,73

<sup>1431</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Kriyāyogasārakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 4

<sup>1432</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book VI: *Nāgarakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 78, 9-10

<sup>1433</sup> *Ibid*,11

<sup>1434</sup> *Ibid*,13

<sup>1435</sup> *Ibid*, 16-17

<sup>1436</sup> *Ibid*,18-19

<sup>1437</sup> *Ibid*,20-24

<sup>1438</sup> *Ibid*, 25-26

<sup>1439</sup> *Ibid*,32-33

away.<sup>1440</sup> The same thing happened with a king who came there. The king who was old had a young wife.<sup>1441</sup> The young queen never loved the old king and used to spend time with men of her choice in the place where the shrine was located.<sup>1442</sup> When the king came to know of this place, he destroyed it.<sup>1443</sup> But the queen murdered him. This was said to be the outcome of destroying a place of *Tīrtha*.<sup>1444</sup>

In a story enumerated in the *Skanda Purāṇa* a widow called Śārādā became pregnant due to the boon of a sage. A *Brāhmaṇa* married a girl called Śārādā.<sup>1445</sup> Her husband died soon after marriage. When her husband died she went to her father's abode. One day while her parents and brothers were away, a blind sage came to her house. After she rendered service to him, he gave a boon that a son will be born to her. Though she was a widow the *Brāhmaṇa* replied that the boon will be fruitful. The *Brāhmaṇa* asked for a boon from goddess Pārvatī the boon (given to Śārādā) should come true. Pārvatī said that her husband of previous birth is born as an excellent *Brāhmaṇa*. This girl would be sexually united with her husband in his dreams and thus she will become pregnant. But when she became pregnant the kinsmen and her relatives abused her. A voice from the sky said that no sin has been committed by her nor her family has been dishonoured and that she is not adulteress. It is said, “*By the boons of deities or curses of great sages, even improper things become proper undoubtedly*”.<sup>1446</sup> Later on when she was questioned by other women everyone was amazed by her. She called ‘chaste’.<sup>1447</sup>

It is clearly stated in the story that when gods and sages are involved nothing can be sinful. This belief can be the reason that queens were always sent to sages, and as sages were involved the wives supposedly did not lose their chastity.

The sages controlled their purity by controlling their mind and desires. But we do see the semen ejaculated by Brahmā seeing a woman who was another man's wife turned into a holy place or it was preserved by the husband so that a son is born.<sup>1448</sup> After

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<sup>1440</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book VI: *Nāgarakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 78, 34-38

<sup>1441</sup> *Ibid*, 41-42

<sup>1442</sup> *Ibid*, 43

<sup>1443</sup> *Ibid*, 46-47

<sup>1444</sup> *Ibid*, 52-53

<sup>1445</sup> *Ibid*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section III: *BrāhmotTārā-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 18-19

<sup>1446</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 19, 69

<sup>1447</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 18, 10

<sup>1448</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *ṣṛṣṭikhāṇḍa*, Chapter 55

seeing Amoghā, the wife of the sage Śantanu, Brahmā ejaculated. From there rose Lauhitya. It is said to purify and is full of sacred place. Once Brahmā was overpowered with passion of love seeing her while her husband was away in the forest and his semen fell down. But he feeling distressed quickly left. When her husband saw it he told her to preserve it and a son will be born to her. “*Then the chaste, illustrious woman, obeying his order, drank for the birth of a son, the semen of Brahmā, the supreme soul.*”<sup>1449</sup> Unable to bear it she dropped it at Yugandhara. Thus Paraśurāmā was born. As Brahmā overcame his passion of love, due to the absence of jealousy of Śantanu and the chastity of Amoghā it became the excellent sacred place.<sup>1450</sup>

### **Goddesses**

The celestial women though were cursed because of their immoral behaviour, their redemption was divine. This led to the path for the development for a bigger cause in the mortal world especially affecting those characters who were involved within the sphere of Brahmanical dominance. In the *Tretā* age, Bhāratī (the presiding deity of the Vedas and wife of Vayu) was born as the daughter of a Brāhmin named Śiva.<sup>1451</sup> His daughter named Mati was termed as *Anyagā* (who has relations other than the partner). She was born along with Śacī.<sup>1452</sup> She was separated from her husband as she had an improper relation with Vāyu in human form.<sup>1453</sup> Then she was born out of the sacrifice by Drupada and was called Draupadī. She got married to Bhīmasena. That she was involved in a sinful relationship did not affect this birth of hers and she was not separated from her husband.<sup>1454</sup>

In the *Kṛta* age, Pārvatī along with Śacī, Śyāmalā, Uṣā went to the region of Brahmā.<sup>1455</sup> They expressed their passionate feeling towards him. Brahmā cursed them that they will be born as humans for such behaviour.<sup>1456</sup> They also deceived Brahmā four times, and for this reason Brahmā cursed them that they will have four births.<sup>1457</sup> In the second birth, born as human they will have relation with another

<sup>1449</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 55, 29b-30a

<sup>1450</sup> *Ibid*, 55-57

<sup>1451</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 16, 12

<sup>1452</sup> *Ibid*, 14

<sup>1453</sup> *Ibid*, 16-17

<sup>1454</sup> *Ibid*, 18

<sup>1455</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 17, 4-5

<sup>1456</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7

<sup>1457</sup> *Ibid*, 8-11

man, but in the third birth they will remain devoted to one.<sup>1458</sup> In the fourth also they will not turn disloyal and will not be separated from the husband.<sup>1459</sup> They went to Bharati and requested that as human they will not incur sin if they get united with Vayu and thus they desire to be ‘identical’ with her. She agreed to their request and was born to a Brahmin named Śiva and practised penance for the desired aim. Visnu and Śiva was impressed by her and conferred boon to all those women – that they will enjoy a person in the form of Kṛṣṇa without having any physical relationship.<sup>1460</sup> But in the second birth she will be involved in a sinful relationship with another man.<sup>1461</sup>

Vayu entered into the bodies of Yudhisthira, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. When they were physically involved with Bhāratī, Syāmalā, Usā and Draupadī, it was Vayu they were involved with.<sup>1462</sup> Thus their union was not considered sinful.<sup>1463</sup> Bharati did not have any sexual intercourse with Yudhisthira or Arjuna as they were mortals.<sup>1464</sup>

The nature of the treatment and behaviour that was shown to the celestial women and the wives of the celebrated *Brahmins* represent the hierarchy that existed in the Brahmānical society. Though the celebrated female and male characters were shown to undergo some kind of punishment, they were entrusted with a divine redemption. This was one of the ways to convince the society that if men and women of the upper stratum could undergo such treatment for a sinful conduct, then they should follow the same and it was righteous to do so. Inclusion of gods, goddesses and Brahmins proved the righteousness of such ideas.

### **Husband’s Life, Liberation and Lineage**

A *Rākṣasī* who gets physically involved with another man other than her husband is called a ‘chaste’ woman. The justification expounded is that as she did it only to save her husband, thus she is pure. Her husband abducted a princess.<sup>1465</sup> When the *Rākṣasī* enquired of her he told her that he wanted to eat her as his meal. He also told her to bring another *Brāhmaṇa*, so that they can have both the humans. But the *Rākṣasī*

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<sup>1458</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 17, 12

<sup>1459</sup> Ibid, 13

<sup>1460</sup> Ibid, 21-25

<sup>1461</sup> Ibid, 278

<sup>1462</sup> Ibid, 39-40

<sup>1463</sup> Ibid, 41-42

<sup>1464</sup> Ibid, 43

<sup>1465</sup> The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, Part IV, *Uttārā Bhāga*, Chapter 27-30

came to know that her husband wanted to marry the princess. When the *Rākṣasī* went to abduct the *Brāhmaṇa* she, impressed by his beauty wanted to marry him. She told him that if he kills her husband then both of them can marry. The *Rākṣasī* even gave *Brāhmaṇa* the *Śakti* by which the *Rākṣasa* can be killed. The *Rākṣasa* found his wife in a compromising situation with the *Brāhmaṇa* and wanted to kill both of them. But with the help of the *Śakti* provided by the *Rākṣasī* he was killed.

The *Rākṣasī* told the *Brāhmaṇa* to return with the princess to her kingdom and marry her. The *Rākṣasī* told the *Brāhmaṇa* that in order to save her husband from the sin of cohabiting with a virgin and falling into hell that he made the *Brāhmaṇa* kill her husband. When three of them returned to the princess' kingdom, the princess told her father everything and told him to ask for the *Rākṣasī*'s permission as she was the elder wife. When the king requested her, he called her a 'chaste woman'<sup>1466</sup> whose husband was killed by her. She granted the permission to let her new husband marry the princess.

When the *Brāhmaṇa* returned to his eldest wife he made both of them serve her as she was his eldest wife and thus serve her as servants. The *Brāhmaṇa* after marriage to her got involved with beautiful courtesans and brought them home for dalliance. He used all his wealth on them. When he asked his wife to give him money, the wife with all her wealth went to her father's place. It is told in the story that as she did not give money to her husband when he needed it that she was born as a lizard as 'the woman who does not dedicate her wealth and life to her husband will definitely attain this state...one should save the wealth and life of one's husband'.<sup>1467</sup> A woman is allowed to fall from chastity for her husband's life and liberation. She could do the same to bear a son for her husband.

Another issue that emerges is the inability of a woman to conceive was always well highlighted. But the impotency of a man is so well covered. But the next story provides an interesting twist wherein a *Śūdra* woman despite having a husband approaches a man who is a *Brahmāna*, higher than her caste for progeny.

A king named Drumila in the region of Kankyabhoja was childless due to some defect of his. He had a wife named Kalaavati. She went to Nārada, the son of sage Kasyapa

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<sup>1466</sup> The *Nārada-Purāna*, Part IV, *Uttārā Bhāga*, Chapter 27-30, 32

<sup>1467</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 30, 84-85



after taking permission from her husband. She stood before him well-adored. She developed a great passion for the sage as a result of which she started showing her body. The sage asked about her whereabouts. Kalavati told him about her desire to get a son from him and requested him to grant his semen. The sage was enraged by such a proposal. But despite his abuses the *Śūdra* woman kept standing in front him. At that moment Menaka passed by, and seeing her physical beauty the sage dropped his semen. Kalavati consumed the semen, 'bowing in reverence' went to her husband.<sup>1468</sup> Her husband welcomed the news and said that she is fortunate and a chaste woman.<sup>1469</sup> He distributed many riches amongst the *Brahmānas* and gave animals and articles in charity to them. When he died, Kalavati tried to kill herself onto the pyre of her husband but a *Brahmāna* saved her.<sup>1470</sup> The son thus born was said to be auspicious as when he was born he brought rainfall during the period of draught.<sup>1471</sup>

In this story there is violation of Brahmanical ideals at multiple levels. A *Śūdra* woman approaches a sage to whom she was attracted to and requested him to grant her to grant his semen. In most of the stories the husband sends his wife to another man who is willing to perform such an act. But in this story, the woman herself finds a man to procure a progeny. It might be the case that such a twist has been included intentionally to exhibit the difference between the women of the upper caste and that of the lower caste. The story at the same time displays how people of the lower caste were included within the perimeter of the Brahmanical system. Another transgression that takes place is from the sage's side, who did not accept the sexual approach of a *Śūdra* woman, but could not control his senses seeing an *āpsara*. It implies how assertive the *Brahmins* were in maintaining their high standard. He could even lose his control over his senses seeing the *Śūdra* woman. But the author of the story considered it to be improper. A *Śūdra* woman is depicted as one who did not possess the social status and beauty to impress a sage. But she managed to collect his semen which implies that submitting to the dominance of the *Brahmānas* would be blissful for the society.

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<sup>1468</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 20, 40

<sup>1469</sup> *Ibid*, 43

<sup>1470</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 20, 12-67

<sup>1471</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 21,7

## MAN'S FALL FROM CHASTITY, HIS ORDEAL AND PUNISHMENT

“A man who got infatuated by a woman was said to have ruined himself like a moth in the fire.”<sup>1472</sup>

Men theoretically were supposed to be punished if they diverged from the path of chastity. One of the obstacles in the path to heaven for a householder was approaching another man's wife.<sup>1473</sup> The *brāhmaṇa* who cohabited with a *candela* woman or an outcaste woman was prescribed to observe three fasts, *Prajapatya* and should give a couple of cows to a *brāhmaṇa*. If a *kṣatriya* or a *vaiśya* cohabited with a *cāṇḍāli* he was to observe a vow and give two cows to a *brāhmaṇa*. If a *śūdra* cohabited with an outcaste woman he was suggested to give four cows and observe a vow. If a man being infatuated, cohabited with his mother or sister or daughter, or his daughter-in-law he was to observe three vows. If a man through infatuation cohabited with the wife (other than his mother) of his father, or his mother's sister, or his preceptor's wife or his maternal uncle's should observe vows and give five pairs of cows to *brāhmaṇas*.<sup>1474</sup> He who cohabited with a prostitute was to remain without eating in mud after having thrown himself there up to his neck. He is purified after three nights and also observe vow after three nights.<sup>1475</sup> He who being infatuated by love cohabited with a *brāhmaṇa* woman was said to observe vows. Sexual intercourse with another man's wife is not a sin for a householder though it was for a *Sannyāsin*.<sup>1476</sup> Thus for a man it was never wrong to get indulged with another man's wife sexually but it was for women and his path to liberation was without any hassles.

If a *Brāhmaṇa* spent one night with a *Vṛṣālī* the sin could be wiped off if he ate what he got by alms and performed *Japa* everyday for three years.<sup>1477</sup>

There was no requital after a man cohabited with his sister, his son's wife, sister or daughter-in-law, paternal uncle's wife, the sister of his father or mother or any other woman than his own wife.<sup>1478</sup>

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<sup>1472</sup>The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Brahmā-khaṇḍa*, Chapter 8,7-8

<sup>1473</sup>The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book IV: *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Section I: *Pūrvādha*, Chapter 40, 75b

<sup>1474</sup>The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 18, 2-8a

<sup>1475</sup>Ibid, 11-14a

<sup>1476</sup>The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Eleventh *Skaṇḍa*, Chapter 21, 17

<sup>1477</sup>The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book VII: *Prabhāsakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 205, 87

<sup>1478</sup>The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 52, pp 8-44

If a man lustfully got indulged with the wife of his dead brother though she is a *Niyuktā* (one who is engaged in religious duty) should be known as *Didhiṣūpati* (husband of a widow).<sup>1479</sup> If man has intercourse with his deceased brother's wife after begetting an issue on her he becomes degraded.<sup>1480</sup> Yājñavalkya prescribes the method of redemption for such behaviour.<sup>1481</sup>

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* states that a man who indulges in a sexual intercourse with a woman whom he should not be approached or to a woman who does so with a man who is not worthy of such an approach, the servants of Yama beat them up with a whip and make the man or woman embrace the red-hot iron image of that woman or man.<sup>1482</sup> He who indulged in sexual intercourse with all sub-human beings was to be placed on a silk-cotton tree with thorns in the hell called *Vajra-kaṇṭaka Śālmālī* in the next world, and was to be dragged down on those thorns.<sup>1483</sup> Those who though born in higher caste but keep contact with low-caste women, does not maintain purity, righteous conduct and self-discipline eat only pus, excretion, urine, phlegm and dirt.<sup>1484</sup> The sinful twice-born (*dvija*) who, being blind with passion made his wife of his own caste drink his semen was to be thrown in the next world in a stream of semen in the *Lālābhakṣa* hell and was made to drink the semen.<sup>1485</sup>

Sexual involvement with a friend's wife, a virgin, a woman of a low caste, or with preceptor's wife, a woman of the same clan or one who gave birth are considered to be sinful acts.<sup>1486</sup> But improper intercourse with preceptor's wife could not be wiped off even if one makes pilgrimage.<sup>1487</sup>

A man of the higher caste committing adultery on women of the lower caste was to be levied half the fine and a man of the lower caste committing adultery on women of the higher caste double the fine.<sup>1488</sup> One who copulated with a immoral widow was to be fined hundred *paṇas*.<sup>1489</sup> A person who had sexual intercourse with the king's wife was to be burnt by fire put on straw placed around. A man was to be caught by the hair when he is having adultery with other women. The fine is highest if the woman

<sup>1479</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa* Book VII: *Prabhāsakhaṇḍa*, Chapter 207, 49

<sup>1480</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 95, 17

<sup>1481</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 105, 42

<sup>1482</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Fifth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 26, 20

<sup>1483</sup> *Ibid*, 21

<sup>1484</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Fifth *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 26, 23

<sup>1485</sup> *Ibid*, 24

<sup>1486</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 105, 9

<sup>1487</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 127, 11

<sup>1488</sup> The *Agni Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 255, 3

<sup>1489</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 258, 29

belonged to his caste. And lower if the woman belonged to lower caste. But if the woman belonged to the higher caste than the adulterer, the man should be killed and the ears of the woman should be cut off.<sup>1490</sup> A person who mated with a slave girl or a maid-servant held in captivity, though otherwise fit for cohabitation, was prescribed to be fined fifty *paṇas*.<sup>1491</sup> The fine was doubled if one copulated with slave girl forcibly. One who mated with the woman of the last caste and a woman mendicant, should be fettered and was supposed to be banished from the country.<sup>1492</sup> The caste hierarchy was maintained in case of ordeal and punishment.

If a man raped a woman, sleeping in her bed, his penis and scrotum was prescribed to be cut off and thrown in the south west quarter.<sup>1493</sup>

Though punishments were prescribed for men for committing the offence of falling from chastity but it is doubtful as to what extent it was followed as we see in the stories that the punishments or curse given to them were not as difficult as dispensed to women. There was a striking difference between the precept and the practice.

A twice born should was supposed to observe strict celibacy and should not voluntarily allow his semen to escape. This was what chastity and morality meant for men of upper caste. In many references in the Purāṇas men are told to be self-controlled the man who is not overwhelmed by a woman is blessed in the world. Even though he may be the observer of sacred rites, if he is overpowered by a woman he becomes impure and unclean.<sup>1494</sup> But an easy expiation is also available for them. He was prescribed to take bath, perform breath control and repeat the *Gāyatrī* mantra.<sup>1495</sup> It was considered improper for a man who let the menses of his wife go fruitless and concentrates on another woman. There was a son of a certain high-minded Brāhmaṇa who was born in the Bṛghu race.<sup>1496</sup> In one of his births had a wife born in Vidarbha named Pīvarī. When she was in menses he made them go fruitless.<sup>1497</sup> He was then attached to another woman called Kaikeyī and thus he sent to a Hell.<sup>1498</sup> It is said that though a man is virtuous but on account of not fulfilling his duties he goes to Hell.<sup>1499</sup>

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<sup>1490</sup> *Agni Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 258, 67-69a

<sup>1491</sup> *Ibid*,72

<sup>1492</sup> *Ibid*,73

<sup>1493</sup> *The Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 105,28-19

<sup>1494</sup> *The Śiva Purāṇa*, Section III, *Rudreśvara Samhitā: Pārvatikhaṇḍa*, Chapter28, 26-31

<sup>1495</sup> *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Eleventh *Skaṇḍha*, Chapter 17, 25

<sup>1496</sup> *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 10, 10

<sup>1497</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 14, 3

<sup>1498</sup> *Ibid*, 4

<sup>1499</sup> *Ibid*, 6

Thus though he belonged to the lineage of the Bhrgus did not deter him from a downfall and was considered sinful because his deeds affected his progeny and lineage, thus affecting the balance of the society. Such rude treatment acted as a warning to the society that they might face the same treatment if they do not follow Brahmanical conventions.

The story below speaks about a *brāhmaṇa*<sup>1500</sup> who did not escape by an easy expiation but had to suffer before and after death for stripping a woman of her modesty. His father got him out of house without any wealth. He went to the house of his friend who was a *brāhmaṇa* named Devaka. Devaka allowed him to stay in his house. When Devaka had gone somewhere, he lost his self-control and forcibly enjoyed his beautiful wife. At that moment the ‘very chaste lady, drinking strong poison died.’<sup>1501</sup> Seeing her like that he ran away and the king’s officers seeing him thought him to be a thief and killed him. Then the servants of Yama tormented him and threw him to the Raurava hell by Yama’s order. Having experienced severe torture for sixty thousand years obtained demon hood for forcibly involving sexually with a chaste lady. Here the chastity of a *Brahmāna* woman is being violated. Thus another Brahman gets punished on account of such a deed. The vital question that originates is that whether such a punishment would have been carried out if a woman of lower caste would have been violated?

In the next story a king called Durjaya<sup>1502</sup> gets attracted to a celestial damsel. But later he practises penance for committing such a sin and then returns to his wife. She was chaste, devoted to her husband, and performed religious duty along with her husband. Once that great king saw the celestial damsel Urvaśī seated on the banks of Yamuna. He was attracted by her and asked her to indulge in sexual intercourse. The celestial lady got indulged in sexual union with him for a long time. After a long time the king decided to go back to his kingdom. But Urvaśī allowed him to go on one condition that he would not indulge in sexual intercourse with any other celestial lady. After returning to his kingdom he saw his chaste wife and became extremely frightened. On seeing him in such a state of mind, his chaste wife with ‘plump breasts’ said to him that such fear does not suit a king like him. On hearing her words, the king felt

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<sup>1500</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 204,

<sup>1501</sup> *Ibid*, 87-100

<sup>1502</sup> The *Kūrma Purāṇa*, Chapter 23

ashamed of his deeds and did not speak anything. But she knew everything through her vision of knowledge. She said that expiation must be made by her for his sins.

The king went out of his city to the holy hermitage of Kaṇva. He saw the great sage. He heard from sage Kaṇva the excellent procedure for expiation of sin. The highly powerful went to the ridge of the Himalaya as directed. There he saw a *Gandharva* bedecked in a divine garland shining gloriously. He thought that such a garland is fit only for Urvaśī. He fought a 'fierce' battle with the *Gandharva* and won the garland. When he went back to Yamuna he could not find her and searched for her everywhere. He found her on the banks of lake Mānasa and gave her the garland. Again seeing her bedecked in the garland he was fascinated by her and obtained conjugal pleasure with her for a long time. Urvaśī when came to know that Durjaya was expiating his sin under the direction of the sage Kaṇva, told him to go back to him or else he would curse him and his wife would curse Urvaśī. He refused to follow her.

Urvaśī who could assume any form as she pleased, showed her hideous form. He became disgusted with her mentally. He felt ashamed of himself and decided to perform penance and began to do so. The sage Kaṇva asked him to take holy ablutions in river Gaṅgā. When he was clear of all his sins he went back to his city and performed a sacrifice. He had a son from his wife and seven sons from Urvaśī comparable to *Devas* endowed with great prowess. All of them took daughters of *Gandharvas* as their wives.

A man always had his wife to return back to and the consequences meant for them were as liberal as possible and in no way could match the treatment that a woman had to go through. He even had one son from his wife and seven sons from Urvaśī. Thus a man was always at the receiving end. The story also shows how significant physical appearance was. The king ran away seeing the frightening form of Urvaśī. Even during the serious encounter between the king and the queen (when the queen came to know about her infidelity), the author talks about her physical beauty. That Urvaśī was anxious about the queen's curse implies that a chaste wife was shown to have the same position and power a sage possessed. Such power and position would quite easily tempt the listeners of such stories to pursue the path of chastity as structured by the upholders of the Brahmanical tradition.

There is one exceptional story (discussed below) which is about a man who goes through a fire ordeal in order to prove his innocence. Unlike the case of Sītā, the man was neither doubted by his wife but was under social suspicion. This is the one and only story found in the Purāṇas where a man goes through a fire ordeal.

A prince had a noble wife. Her name was Sundari. He had to go away for some work. He wanted to keep his wife in a protected place and he went to the place of Adrohoka. The prince knew that no one in the world knew better about Dharma than Adrohoka, who has conquered his senses. Adrohoka agreed, but said that he is doing an 'improper deed'. In order to protect her, he said that she will sleep near him with his wife on his bed. The prince agreed to this. Adrohoka slept between the two wives every day. He looked upon Sundari as his own daughter. When half a year passed the prince came back and inquired about his wife's conduct. Some said well about her and some did not. Due to his religious merit Adrohoka came to know about such talks. He said to the prince that he performed a deed which is impossible but it has been in vain due to the public rumors. He decided to enter fire. But that fire did not burn him. On the contrary various kinds of leprosy fell on the people who had ill-spoken about them. Gods worshipped him with flowers and was honoured by various sages and men.<sup>1503</sup>

Unlike the episode of the celebrated Sītā, the victim here is a *brāhmaṇa*. Thus it was improper for a wife to doubt her husband but he could not escape the clutches of the society. So in order to prove his purity of character, he went through a fire ordeal to negate all rumors and those who doubted him were affected with leprosy, thus threatening the society with dire consequence if a *Brahmāna*'s character is put under suspicion. Another issue that needs to be dealt here is that the story reflects how vulnerable the position of women was in the society. The husband felt that his wife needs to be protected, though he was a prince – thus his wife needed to be controlled mentally and sexually. A woman was never trusted.

Daṇḍa, disciple of lord Śukra who approached his daughter forcibly imposed him upon her.<sup>1504</sup> He cursed him that he along with his kingdom and army would be burnt down to ashes.<sup>1505</sup> Śukra also told his daughter to practise austerities to cleanse herself

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<sup>1503</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhumikhanda*, Chapter 50, 97-133

<sup>1504</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 40, 2

<sup>1505</sup> *Ibid*, 17

of her sin.<sup>1506</sup> Thus Daṇḍa gets punished for violating the daughter of his preceptor. Here not only the man gets punished for such an improper behaviour but at the same time, the victim too was considered impure and had to practise austerities to get rid of her sins as her virtue was broken and thus would not be acceptable within the society.

The gods were in a more beneficial situation than the earthly ones. Neither were they punished nor had to go through any ordeal, rather they were granted boons. As we have seen earlier in this chapter the story of Arundhatī where Brahmā was attracted lustfully towards his daughter, but it was his daughter who performed penance to purify herself and not Brahmā. But this was not the only incident where Brahmā, ‘the grandfather’<sup>1507</sup> had committed such a sin and did not undergo any punishment. At the time of marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī, Brahmā deluded by Śiva’s power of illusion stared at the feet of Pārvatī as well as her ‘crescent-shaped nails’. Influenced by passion and lust he dropped his semen on the ground.<sup>1508</sup> When Śiva came to know about this he wanted to kill Brahmā as he ‘was overwhelmed by lust’.<sup>1509</sup> Viṣṇu and other gods eulogised Śiva.<sup>1510</sup> On hearing their obeisance, Śiva was delighted.<sup>1511</sup> His semen turned into several sparkling drops.<sup>1512</sup> Thousands of sages called Vāḷakhilyas sprang up from them.<sup>1513</sup> When Brahmā eulogised Śiva, Śiva granted him the boon of fearlessness.<sup>1514</sup> Brahmā was called ‘the grandfather’, and thus was the eldest, most wise and respected, and then also he did not have any self-control. Instead of punishing him for looking lustfully towards his wife, Śiva grants Brahmā a boon after being eulogised. Same happens with Indra. Indra had vaginal marks on his body because of having violating Ahalyā.<sup>1515</sup> Then again, due to the favour of Goddess (Indrākṣī), he became well-known as Sahasrākṣa (one having thousand eyes).<sup>1516</sup> Thus we see that in the *Purāṇas* the definitions and theories are moulded maintaining the hierarchy.

In both the stories there is an involvement of a god and a goddess. In one Śiva was being eulogised and in the other Goddess Indrākṣī. Such involvement was for the

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<sup>1506</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 40, 15

<sup>1507</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Rudreśvara-Saṁhitā*, *Pārvatīkhaṇḍa*, Section III, Chapter 49, 8

<sup>1508</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7

<sup>1509</sup> *Ibid*, 9

<sup>1510</sup> *Ibid*, 11

<sup>1511</sup> *Ibid*, 32

<sup>1512</sup> *Ibid*, 34

<sup>1513</sup> *Ibid*, 35

<sup>1514</sup> *Ibid*, 47

<sup>1515</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Śṛṣṭīkhaṇḍa*, Chapter 746

<sup>1516</sup> *Ibid*, 4-5a



propagation of a particular god or goddess which shows the emergence of different tradition branching out of Brahmanism, which in turn affected the texts.

## **CONCLUSION**

Fall from chastity involves complexities from every aspect of the society – religion, gender and caste. It was not just sexual and mental abstinence that made her unchaste but also a virgin in her monthly course comes to this category. A woman from the lower caste is also called unchaste. Even when a woman falls from chastity gains the status of a *Śūdra*. Thus we see it was the low caste and their status that people feared upon. Going to their condition and position was what people were apprehensive about.

Impurity and purity regarding women was one of the significant questions whatever caste she may belong to. It was through her husband that she gained her purity. But it was through the enjoyment of their body by the gods that they acquired purity. If such connection to the gods existed then nothing could have been wrong or impure. But if an earthly woman had any connection with another man or had an earthly lover, or was separated from her husband that she became unchaste. Even if she was loved too much by her husband she became unchaste. She in no way could have been liberated. If she was unchaste then all her rights were taken away from her.

The question arises – did any right existed for her? It was just for the sake of the story that it has been said. If she was unchaste she had to be kept dirty so that she becomes unattractive and provided with food just for sustenance. This means that an unchaste woman did not have any right to live and it was on the basis of pity that she was kept alive. Even though she did not have any fault of hers she was asked to prove her innocence and even after proving her innocence she was abandoned. Sītā was abandoned by Rāma who was an incarnation of Viṣṇu and was told to give ordeal twice. Sītā who was the incarnation of Lakṣmī, portrayed to be the ideal wife in the society accepted his decisions without protesting. They both were framed to be the ideal husband and wife for the society. It was through this vigorous behaviour towards a goddess that people were made to believe that such should be a wife who follows her husband without questioning him. In the same episode we find that chastity was a

concern for the lower caste though the lower castes were despised so much. After listening to the words of a washer man, Rāma left Sītā when she was pregnant.

The washer man's words clearly reflect that a hierarchy existed in the society. But a king is the one to whom people looked upon. Rāma in order to set an ideal for the society sacrificed his wife. For the welfare of the society even Sītā is shown to accept his decision. Rāma knew that his wife innocent, but it was just for public fame to show that his wife is pure and he is accepting a pure wife that Sītā was made to undergo so much tests. In the same way, Reṇukā was punished just because she was longing a particular lifestyle that she grew up in. Though she was a princess, she married a sage and was living in a hermitage and was always regular in her duties towards the husband. Though she was never recognised for that but just a slip was recognised by her husband and her son was ordered to kill her. It was the son who revived her. This shows a woman was always at the mercy of a man. But she was at last revived or accepted as it was a known fact that there was not any substitute for her.

Though a woman surrendered her sexuality to her husband and publicly maintained her non-sexual behaviour then also she became a prey to other men and even gods. Gods were rarely punished for such behaviour.

Indra who was cursed to have vaginal marks on his body turned into thousand eyes. Indra himself admitted that he lives in the 'foreheads, eyes, tips of their breasts, navels, waists, backs, buttocks, vaginal area, lips.'<sup>1517</sup> He even said that a woman is his abode.<sup>1518</sup> By living in the body parts of a woman he called himself the slayer of all men.<sup>1519</sup> This means that he was always active in stripping a woman of her chastity and he knew by doing this he destroyed the life of not only the woman but her husband too. But his escapade from the situation was easy. Sometimes he was not cursed only and even if he was cursed it turned into a boon.

On the other side a woman had to suffer thousand years of penance as did Ahalyā. It was through the touch of another male that she attained purity. Staying in her paternal house after marriage for a long time made a woman unchaste. Gobhila, a demon told

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<sup>1517</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 53, 11b-20

<sup>1518</sup> Ibid

<sup>1519</sup> Ibid

Padmāvati after enjoying her, that he is not afraid of her curse because she is not chaste as she not only served her husband but shamelessly was staying in her father's house. A wife had to stay with her husband like a shadow.

The composers of *Purāṇas* made it important for men to maintain chaste wives as it was through chaste wife that he gained everything and was shown to be protected by her chastity. If she lost her chastity then both her parental and marital house were doomed, a whole kingdom could also have been destroyed. Thus the pressure was made on women so that she did not dare to lose her chastity or else she was said to born in the category of lower animals or inanimate objects and that she would never come out of the circle of life. She could even be devoured by a tiger as a tiger was shown to devour only unchaste women. Punishments though were prescribed for both men and women but the punishments meted out to women were much more stringent, and were rather obvious. There was always a difference between as to what was said and done. It is said that a woman became unchaste after her husband died, so the solution was to uproot the whole problem. In chapter two we have discussed that how a widow's life was suppose to be and that she was considered inauspicious. So she was glorified only when self-immolated.

The *Brahmins* never forgot to have their own share of profit. If a woman served a *Brahmin* then she attained purity even if she had sexual contact with him though she was supposedly not to. But whatever they did was correct and as they were the theory-makers so everything was possible. It was one of the ways to maintain their power in the society.

The irony is that women or men were not considered unchaste when any gods or goddesses were involved in such a sinful act or women's sexuality was compromised for a son. This was rather set in a background of divinity and honour. Draupadī who had five husbands is also not called unchaste. Kuntī and Madrī who had sons from the gods and not their husbands are never accused. Sage Vyāsa who was himself was born from an unmarried woman was never accused because he was born from a sage. He also had sexual intercourse with his dead brother's wives for progeny. But it was this sage who framed the duties of a chaste woman. The reason behind this has also been stated is that when gods and sages are involved, everything is correct. We do observe in one of the stories that when a wife is involved in sexual dalliance with her

lover in a sacred place, though she is sinful she was deemed to be pure. There was never an ordeal for the gods and goddesses and even on earth ordeals were set according to castes. Everything was planned and set according to a hierarchy. The definition of chastity and fall from it keeps on changing as the situation or need demanded and also according to the ones involved in it.

## **CHAPTER 6: COMPARATIVE EVALUATION of CONFORMITY and DEVIANCE in HĀLA’S SATTSAĪ And JĀTAKAS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

*“Full of seductive wiles, deceitful all,  
They tempt the most pure-hearted to fall.  
Down-down they sink: a man should flee afar  
From women, when he knows what kind they are.  
Whomso they serve, for good or for desire,  
They burn him up like fuel in fire.”<sup>1520</sup>*

The *Jātakas* and Hāla’s *Sattasaī* bring into its realm the populace, thus providing the readers with an alternative perspective. This variant attitude helps in understanding the impositions and customs that were followed in the Brahmanical tradition and how they were perceived by that section of the society who did not conform to it. Observing the perspective, nature and intentions of the texts help in a better understanding of the concept concerned and its various adjuncts.

The *Jātakas* or the Buddhist stories which are a collection of folklore, was used for the propagation of Buddhist thoughts and ideas. The *Jātakas* helps us to discern the social conditions and the beliefs within the sphere of Buddhism. Narratives not only helped in establishing a particular idea or concept but making people believe that it happened made embedding the concept in people’s mind easier. The concept of previous birth not only existed in Brahmanical tradition, but in Buddhism too. The *Jātakas* also focus on the concept of previous birth and how different characters involved were affected by it.

The *Jātakas* include people of different social position and status. That the Buddha was also born of low status in his previous births show how Buddhism was attempting to negate the concept of caste boundaries. In order to have a complete understanding of a tradition it is also important to understand how a particular gender and gender roles were perceived by it, especially its attitude towards women, situating it within the social, economic and political structure. Another dominating feature of the *Jātakas* was to warn men of the vile nature of women and was advised to stay away

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<sup>1520</sup> *Jātaka* No. 263

from them to obtain a good life, as they were considered as the origin of all problems. But at the same time their social, economic and political roles are also recognised.

While in the Brahmanical tradition we see that a woman gained salvation either due to her husband or through other male agent, in the *Jātakas* we find that women were admitted in the Buddhist Order and through asceticism attained salvation, though with certain limitations. Women could walk out of marriage and re-marry when she was not recognised by her husband. In many stories we find women talking about earning their livelihood in order to support her son. There are references to men and women who transgressed, but here we observe in many stories that both men and women are punished for such an act.

One of the *Jātaka* story is about a young man who after hearing to Buddha's preaching decided to leave the life of a householder and become an ascetic. So he left his wife and children and asked the Master to ordain him. But once when he consumed the food prepared by his wife, he thought it impossible to leave his wife. She decided to test him. So she told her husband that as he stays away from the house and a household is not complete without a master, she would shift with another man with the children. The man could not accept such a proposal and decided to lead the life of a householder. When he informed the Order of his decision, the Brothers took him to Buddha.

The Buddha like in other *Jātakas* stories convinced him how the same woman in one of his previous birth caused him to fall from the stage of meditation.<sup>1521</sup> Thus such narrations (like other narrative texts) had a motive behind, explaining through various births to convince the person concerned about a particular Buddhist idea or thought. The stories generally portrayed how vicious women were and that men should stay away from them in order to attain heaven. The stories also shows how men admitted to the Order tried to revert from the Order either out of affection for his wife or out of attraction for another woman. It was by explaining the nature of women and how she proved to be harmful to him in a previous birth, that he was made to stay back. The concept of previous birth and believe in it, is the very essence of the *Jātakas*.

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<sup>1521</sup> *Jātaka* No. 423

Hāla's *Sattasaī* mainly depicts the life of the village in a very sharp contrast to that of the town. The anthology starts with a direct reference to the author, King Hāla who is said to have selected seven hundred 'elegant poems' for the concerned text. In the beginning it condemns those who cannot appreciate this work in Prākṛit, indicating its contempt for the Sanskritic culture. Mostly the woman is the orator who narrates the situation and circumstances, she is going through. In the very beginning of the text women are called 'impudent' as women in the countryside were generally considered as unruly. But they are not considered as degraded for being so, rather men are condemned for not appreciating them with poems, songs and sound of the lute.<sup>1522</sup>

That the stories in the *Jātakas* and in Hāla's *Sattasaī* also included people of different social hierarchies indicated that it also meant for a heterogeneous audience. At the same time we have to keep in mind that though these texts, which represent different traditions did not wholly deviate from the existing traditions or the Brahmanical tradition and we do find similar impositions and behaviour. As in the previous chapters (which dealt with the *Purāṇas* and the Epics), in this chapter too the concept of chastity will be dealt in relation with other issues related to it.

### **GENDER, CASTE AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS**

Social class and status, gender and other multiple factors determined behaviour and ideals of the society. Though the low-castes and women were considered as the deprived class of the society in various traditions, but there was also a policy of inclusion followed by them. Buddhism is not an exception. Though in many stories we find this deprivation but the perimeter of inclusion was more in Buddhism. Buddhism tried to provide the society a different path for a better life.

Buddhism originated as an alternative to the Brahmanical tradition. Thus there was a deliberate attempt to degrade the *Brahmins*. The *Mūla Pariyāya Jātaka*<sup>1523</sup> shows how five hundred *Brahmins* who mastered the three Vedas also studied the three *Pitakas*. Being overwhelmed with pride, they thought themselves to be equal to the Buddha. But they were made to realise their mistake by Buddha through his knowledge.<sup>1524</sup> Bodhisatta was once born as the son of the royal priest. He retired from the worldly

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<sup>1522</sup> Hāla's *Sattasaī*, 3-815

<sup>1523</sup> *Jātaka* No.245

<sup>1524</sup> *Ibid*

affairs and became an ascetic. The king of Kasi described him as ‘*brahmin*, low-born’<sup>1525</sup> (*hūna-jacco*). *Brahmins* were revered, but at the same the rituals they followed were not appreciated by the Buddhists. The king of Kosala once had sixteen bad dreams. When he told the *Brahmins* about his dreams, they told him that they had to perform a sacrifice. But the king was not contended and he went to Bodhisatta. He told him how many living creatures were afraid because of the sacrifice. Bodhisatta told him that the *Brahmins* advised him for a sacrifice only to earn their livelihood.<sup>1526</sup>

The dominance of the *Brahmins* could neither be ignored nor eliminated. The King threatened *Brahmins* that he will banish them if they cannot answer his questions, but when they answered his question, with the help of Bodhisatta he granted them rich villages.<sup>1527</sup> When a *Brahmin* asked a king for his children as slaves, he could not deny him. Moreover he told his son that if a low-born buys his daughter, her birthright would be broken.<sup>1528</sup>

The *Satadhamma Jātaka*<sup>1529</sup> was told by the Master while he was in Jetavana. In this story he tells about the twenty-one unlawful ways of earning a livelihood. In this story it is told how an upper caste Brahmin suffers as he accepts food from a low caste. Bodhisatta was born as the son of a low caste. Because a Brahmin begged for food from him, which was considered as an improper way of earning, he suffered and died. It is said, “*Food got in this way (the twenty one unlawful ways), in my religion, is like the leavings of one of the lowest caste.*”<sup>1530</sup> That Bodhisatta was born as a low caste – is an attempt to bring in the low caste within the social dimension. But showing that a *Brahmin* is suffering due to taking food from the low caste, implies that it did not totally ignored the Brahmanical custom and laws. They accepted them, but with limitations.<sup>1531</sup> A queen’s son was born in the *Vessa* Quarter, thus he named himself *Vessantara*, neither taking name from his mother’s side nor his father’s.<sup>1532</sup> Thus the policy of inclusion and exclusion existed simultaneously.

At the same time we see that a *cāṇḍāla* woman could become the queen-consort of a king. But when the son of this *caṇḍāla* queen fell in love with a low-caste woman, he

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<sup>1525</sup> *Jātaka* No. 529

<sup>1526</sup> *Jātaka* No. 529

<sup>1527</sup> *Jātaka* No. 546

<sup>1528</sup> *Jātaka* No. 547

<sup>1529</sup> *Jātaka* No. 179

<sup>1530</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1531</sup> *Jātaka* No. 179

<sup>1532</sup> *Jātaka* No. 547



was not happy about her caste. But finally he married her and the son from them became the king. The mother of the king of Sivi was named Jambāvātī, and she was the beloved queen consort of Vāsudeva the Kaṇha. The king of Sivi's mother, Jambāvātī, was of the *caṇḍāla* caste, and she was the beloved queen consort of Vāsudeva, one of the Kaṇhāgana clan, the eldest of ten brothers. One day when he went out from Dvāravatī into the park, on his way he espied a very beautiful girl as she journeyed on some business from her Caṇḍāla village to town. He fell in love, and asked her birth; and on hearing that she was a Caṇḍālī, he was distressed. Finding that she was unmarried, he turned back at once, and took her home and surrounded her with precious things, and made her his chief queen. She brought forth a son Sivi, who ruled in Dvāravatī at his father's death.<sup>1533</sup> This shows the apprehension in people's mind, but Buddhism not only gifted the society with an alternative but at the same time encouraged people to come out of their inhibitions.

Brahmādatta was king at Benares. Bodhisatta was his minister and spiritual adviser. The king fell in love with the daughter of a fruiterer. The king heard her voice and fell in love her. When he heard that she was unmarried, he sent for her and gave her the dignity and recognition of chief queen. This king when realised that his wife is filled with pride due to her up gradation from a fruit seller to a queen, abused her and decided to leave her.<sup>1534</sup>

In many of the stories we see a king marrying a woman of a caste lower than him. But at the same time we see that they do not recognise their status as a wife and accepts her only when she bore to him a male heir.

Once when Brahmādatta was king in Benares, the Bodhisatta was his chaplain. Seeing a beautiful girl he fell in love with her.<sup>1535</sup> When she conceived due to him, she said she would name the child after his grandfather's name. But Bodhisatta thought that a name of such a noble family cannot be given to a slave-girl's '*bastard*'.<sup>1536</sup> It should be kept in mind that Bodhisatta neither married the slave-girl nor wanted to give his child from her, the name of his '*noble*' family.<sup>1537</sup> Then he gave her a seal-ring saying

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<sup>1533</sup> *Jātaka* No. 546

<sup>1534</sup> *Jātaka* No. 306

<sup>1535</sup> *Jātaka* No. 487

<sup>1536</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1537</sup> *Ibid*

that if it is a girl she should use this to bring her up and if it is a boy, she should bring the boy to him. The boy was named Uddālaka. Bodhisatta told the woman to use the ring as a means of financial support if a girl child is born. This implies the preference for a male child and the privileges he enjoyed.

The same *Brahmin* once said that there is no higher or lower when one achieves sainthood. He said:

*“Khattiya, Brahmin, Vessa, Sudda and Caṇḍāla, Pukkusa,  
All these can be compassionate, can win Nirvana’s bliss:  
None among all the saints is found who worse or better is.”<sup>1538</sup>*

It is quite interesting to observe that this same Buddha did not give his son born from a slave-girl, the name of his family as he was of noble and of upper caste. He did not marry her too. His son continued to be a priest and was suppose to receive training from his father.<sup>1539</sup> It was only because a male child was born that he could receive his father’s name, recognition and status.

In another story with the same story line shows how Buddha intervenes and brings in the concept of caste equality to dissolve the issue. This is the story of Vāsabhā-Khattiyā. She was the daughter of Mahānāma Sakka by a slave-girl named Nāgamuṇḍā, and afterwards became the consort of the king of Kosala. She conceived a son by the king, but the king after coming to know of her low origin, degraded her from her rank, and also degraded her son Viḍūḍabha. Mother and son never went outside the palace. Bodhisatta told him of a king who in past days had a son by a casual wood-gatherer and gave that son his sovereignty.<sup>1540</sup> The daughter of a rich merchant’s family in Rājagaha established intimacy with a slave. Becoming anxious that her ‘misconduct’ will be known, they decided to run away.<sup>1541</sup> She also conceived due to her. Two sons were born to them and they were also admitted to the Buddhist Order.<sup>1542</sup> But nowhere in the text, were neither she nor her children considered impure.

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<sup>1538</sup> *Jātaka* No. 487

<sup>1539</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1540</sup> *Jātaka* No. 7

<sup>1541</sup> *Jātaka* No. 4

<sup>1542</sup> *Ibid*

The *Jātakas* stories also bring into light the sufferings of the low-caste and how they were treated by the society. Once the Great Being was born outside the city as a *caṇḍāla*'s son and he was named Mātaṅga.<sup>1543</sup> One day he went to the town on account of some business. At that time a daughter of a Benares merchant called Diṭṭha-maṅgalikā saw him behind her curtain. When she came to know he was a *caṇḍāla* he abused him by calling him 'bad luck' and washed her eyes with scented water.<sup>1544</sup> The people also cried out against him and called him 'vile outcast'.<sup>1545</sup> He was beaten up by people and he became senseless. When he became conscious he decided that he would not go away until he gets Diṭṭha-maṅgalikā. Deciding thus he went and lay down at the door of her father's house and Diṭṭha-maṅgalikā was given to him on the seventh day. Then she said to him, "*Rise up, master, and let us go to your house.*"<sup>1546</sup> He told her to carry him on her back as he has grown weak due to being beaten up by her people. Thus she carried him on her back in front of the whole town and went to the *caṇḍāla* settlement.

For few days Bodhisatta lived with her without transgressing the rules of caste. Then he thought that only by renouncing the world he will be able to show the highest honour to his wife and give her the best gifts. Thus on account of gathering fruits he went to the forest, adopted asceticism and achieved the Eight Attainments and Five Supernatural Faculties. After achieving thus he thought to himself that now he will be able to protect *Diṭṭha-maṅgalikā*. When he came back he told his wife that he will make her more 'glorious' and told her to tell people that her husband is not Matanga, but the Great Brahmā . People of the town worshipped him. Then he went to the *Caṇḍāla* village. The devotees of Brahmā went to the *Caṇḍāla* village and covered *Diṭṭha-maṅgalikā*'s house with white clothes, swept the ground, scattered flowers, burnt incense etc.

At that time Diṭṭha-maṅgalikā was in her monthly terms. When his thumb touched her navel, she conceived. Due to his blessings she was worshipped in the city and built a great pavilion for her and she lived there with much 'glory' and 'prosperity'.<sup>1547</sup> They

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<sup>1543</sup> *Jātaka* No. 497

<sup>1544</sup> Ibid

<sup>1545</sup> *Jātaka* No. 497

<sup>1546</sup> Ibid

<sup>1547</sup> Ibid

called her “*the wife of Great Brahmā.*”<sup>1548</sup> Due to her, the city of Benares earned a sum of eighteen crores. There Diṭṭha-maṅgalikā’s son was born who was named Maṅḍavya, the Prince of the Pavilion, by the *Brahmins*. From the age of sixteen he provided food to the Brahmins, and sixteen thousand *Brahmins* were fed continuously and alms were also distributed to them. But when Matanga saw him doing so he perceived that he was going in the wrong way and decided to ‘convert’ him and show him the right path.

Though Diṭṭha-maṅgalika was born in a caste higher to Buddha, she was given to him in marriage as it was not considered proper for a girl’s family honour in the society that a man and that too of a caste lower than her would approach her and would sit outside her home. It would cause defamation to her and her family honour. Thus for the sake of her parental family’s honour Diṭṭha-maṅgalika accepted his proposal. She called him her ‘master’ and she even carried him on her back – this was the same man whom she abused for being a low-caste.<sup>1549</sup> When he was her husband she performed all the duties of a ‘faithful’ wife.<sup>1550</sup> But for this same man of a lower-caste, she obtained great recognition and status in the society.

The above story shows how the concept of gender and caste was intertwined. She had to compromise herself for the sake of her family’s honour. The Buddha ordered her to carry him on her back, showing her the submissive status a wife owned. He at the same time maintained the protocol of the caste system and gave her the highest honour by renouncing the world. It was supposedly his spiritual status that the wife gained identity and fame, though she was of a status higher to him. This might also indicate to the fact that in the *Jātakas* we get ample of stories of backsliding brothers, who revered due to their attachment with their wife and by showing that a wife gained such a status in the society due to the spiritual attainment of her husband, would have encouraged the wives to let their husbands go off.

The *Jātaka* stories clearly show the apprehension and fear that the society possessed in regard to female sexuality and the intermixture of castes. Thus a strong dichotomy

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<sup>1548</sup> *Jātaka* No. 497

<sup>1549</sup> Ibid

<sup>1550</sup> Ibid

prevailed even within the Buddhist tradition. Bodhisatta said in the days to come, the king who has sprung from a noble race will no longer trust their old nobility and will honour the low-born and will also bestow their daughter on them. “*And the union of the noble maidens with the low-born shall be like unto the staling of the old jackal in the golden bowl.*”<sup>1551</sup> Low-born will become great lords and only their words will be followed everywhere and the nobles will become poor. They will gain influence over the king. The old-nobility will be under total control of the low-born. This shows the apprehension and the fear that the society held in regard to female sexuality and intermixture of caste.

Maintaining the existing tradition of the concept of purity and impurity remained a matter of concern in Buddhism also. In maintaining this societal concept of purity, women played a pivotal role, thus the control over female sexuality and character remained a major concern. The following story shows how the concept of caste and gender was intertwined. Caste determined the purity of a woman’s character and thus her position in the society.

At Sāvatti in the house of Anāthapiṇḍika there was always food for five hundred followers, same with Visākhā (a famous female disciple) and the king of Kosala.<sup>1552</sup> In the king’s palace no one was friendly to the Brethren. So the Brethren of the king’s palace either went to the place of Anāthapiṇḍika or Visākhā or some other place. The king asked as to with whom the Brethren will be friendly with. The Master mentioned about the Sakya families. So the king thought if he would make friendship with the Sakya family by making their daughter the queen consort, then the Brethren would become friendly with him. So he sent a message to the Sakya family that he wishes to marry one of their daughters, so that he becomes connected to them. So the Sakyas gathered and said that as they live within the sphere of the kingdom of the king of Kosala, they cannot refuse him, but at the same time if they give their daughter to him, their family custom will be broken. At that time Mahānāma, a Sakya prince said that he has a daughter named Vāsabhakhattiyā from a slave woman and from her father’s side she is of royal blood.

The messengers sent by them also informed the Kosalas that as the Sakyas are very particular in matters of birth, so they should accept the girl who eats along with them.

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<sup>1551</sup> *Jātaka* No. 77

<sup>1552</sup> *Jātaka* No. 465

The Sakyas planned it accordingly. Vāsabhakhattiyā was accepted by the King of Kosala. A son was born to her. But it was soon discovered that she was a slave and all the allowances to Vāsabhakhattiyā and her son was stopped and provided them with what was given to slave men and women. The Master then interfered into the matter and said that the Sakyas have done wrong and should have given a daughter of their own lineage. But at the same time he pointed out to the fact that Vāsabhakhattiyā is a king's daughter only and has also received the ceremonial sprinkling and that the son was begotten from the king only. He said, "...*what matters the mother's birth? The birth of the father is the measure: and to a poor wife, a picker of sticks, they gave the position of queen consort, and the son born of her obtained the sovereignty of Benares, twelve leagues in extent...*"<sup>1553</sup>

Buddha here did not totally annihilate the concept of caste as he said that the Sakyas did commit a sin by sending a girl of a low origin. He also degraded the position of women as he said that 'mother-birth' does not hold any value as women even of lower birth are raised to the position of queen-consort by kings.

## ***THE ADHERENTS***

### ***THE VIRGIN DAUGHTER AND HER ORDEAL***

Bodhisatta was once born in a *Brahmin* family. When his parents told him to look for a wife, he said he does not desire for a married life. But being pursued by them, he made a golden image and told them if they can find a wife like the golden image, he will take her to be his wife. His parents sent emissaries to search for such a girl.<sup>1554</sup>

Thus he wanted his wife to be as beautiful and pure as gold.

In the Hāla's *Sattasaī*, a girl speaks her heart out to her aunt showing her desperation to get a glance of her lover. This desperation originated due to societal clauses. She calls the villagers 'cursed' as their constant vigilance is a threat to her who will raise finger on her character if she even set her eyes on her lover.<sup>1555</sup> The girl calls them

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<sup>1553</sup> *Jātaka* No. 465

<sup>1554</sup> *Jātaka* No. 328

<sup>1555</sup> Hāla's *Sattasaī*, 502

‘sanctimonious’ who just want to show how superior they are morally. But that would not stop her from looking at her lover.<sup>1556</sup>

Her conversation reflects the societal pressure imposed on a man-woman relationship before marriage. But this pressure causes her grief and by various means she tries to acquire a glimpse of her lover.<sup>1557</sup> This girl is the village headman’s daughter.<sup>1558</sup> Being the village headman’s daughter, it was her moral responsibility to show herself as morally upright and that in no way she is indiscreet. So she does it in a manner that no one becomes aware of her feelings and thus looks at everyone in the same manner and with the same emotion she looks at her lover.<sup>1559</sup> The only thing she achieves through this is mental satisfaction.<sup>1560</sup> At the same time she is very much aware of her growing sexuality, which she uses to attract her lover amidst the crowd.<sup>1561</sup> Her self-conscious physicality helps binding her relationship with her lover.

The text also talks about the wrong choices a girl makes due to her innocence and inexperience in life which brings about great pain for her. The author tells how she ignored the warning of her friends.<sup>1562</sup> For that man she abandoned her ‘modesty’, ‘destroyed her character’ and thus gained a bad name for herself. The man treats her like any other girl.<sup>1563</sup> The author warns of such a man. Such men are said to act innocent like a young deer in its first year, but once they gain control of innocent girl, they turn their back on them.<sup>1564</sup> Using and dissipating her, cause her great pain which teaches her to weep and wail. Due to this man she disregarded all conventions. Thus the author does not accuses her or calls her impure, but on the other hand tells the man not to neglect her who has taken all risks and did not care about the society and its laws in order to have his love.<sup>1565</sup>

A woman’s life was full of ordeals and mistrust. It was considered necessary to keep women under control, in order to have access over her. Testing her character was considered significant not only for her marital life but also for her spiritual life. Bodhisatta said, “*It is impossible to keep women from going after their desires. In*

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<sup>1556</sup> Hāla’s *Sattasaī*, 610

<sup>1557</sup> *Ibid*, 484

<sup>1558</sup> *Ibid*, 370

<sup>1559</sup> *Ibid*, 367, 199

<sup>1560</sup> *Ibid*, 612

<sup>1561</sup> *Ibid*, 393

<sup>1562</sup> *Ibid*, 86

<sup>1563</sup> Hāla’s *Sattasaī*, 87

<sup>1564</sup> *Ibid*, 88

<sup>1565</sup> *Ibid*, 89

*older days, even wise men could not guard their own daughters; while they stood holding their father's hand, without their father's knowing, they went away wrongdoing with a paramour...*"<sup>1566</sup> Such was the fear of an uncontrolled female sexuality.

In one of his birth when Buddha was of sixteen years of age, he decided to search for a wife himself.<sup>1567</sup> There was an ancient and 'decayed' merchant family. In this family, there was a daughter named, Amarā.<sup>1568</sup> She is described as a 'beautiful girl with all the marks of good luck'.<sup>1569</sup> When Mahasodha saw her, he thought as she is a woman with all good marks then she can be his wife if she is unwed. Seeing him she thought if she can marry a man from such a family she can restore her own family. He spent few days observing her and also tested her character. Mahasodha took Amarā with him to the town after giving her parents whatever he has earned by tailoring and mending things for other people. To test the strength of her character, he made her sit on the gatekeeper's house and then he himself went to his own house. Then he sent some men with thousand pieces of money to her. They did as they were told to do so. But she refused them.

Mahosadha sent them for four times. On the fourth time he told them to drag her by force. When she saw him, she did not know who he was, but she smiled and wept at the same time. She said when she saw Mahosadha, she saw 'magnificence' in him and knew he has acquired it due to some good deeds in his former birth.<sup>1570</sup> After this test, he knew her to be a chaste woman. When Mahosadha married her, she sent one portion of the gift sent by the king to the king and did the same with the gifts sent by the citizens. In this way she won the hearts of the people. It was Amara who saved Mahosadha from the other royal priests who were jealous of him due to his wisdom and proximity to the king.<sup>1571</sup> Thus we notice a striking similarity with a verse mentioned in the *Padma Purāṇa* about the different roles or duties a woman was suppose to play or fulfil for her husband.

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<sup>1566</sup> *Jātaka* No. 262

<sup>1567</sup> *Jātaka* No. 546

<sup>1568</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1569</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1570</sup> *Jātaka* No. 546

<sup>1571</sup> *Ibid*



In some stories we find that a father in order to be certain about his daughter's purity of character approaches her in an unsuitable manner before giving her in marriage.<sup>1572</sup>

Such stories by conveying that it was a necessity to test the character of a girl before marriage in Buddha's time or in the previous one and in the present time too, indicates to the fact that it was a tradition that has been followed through ages. It was an ordeal that she went through to prove her purity of mind and soul. It was this purity that made her suitable for a marital life.

Most of the texts of the ancient Indian tradition though talks about the virtue and the ordeals of a woman, but rarely any texts speak out about the apprehensions of the girl about to get married or the newlywed bride. In the Hāla's *Sattasāi* the author beautifully portrays not only the anxiety of a bride-to-be or a newly wedded bride but also the amorous love involved. The author also tells us about the young girls' tension regarding husband's approach; though at the same time she wants her husband to love her. All these mark the beginning of a new phase in her life. It all starts with the search of the bridegroom. The groom is mainly her parents' choice, her decision or choice hardly matters. When the groom is selected for the girl, he becomes the obsession for the whole family.<sup>1573</sup>

After she gets married, being young and naive feels shy at the touch of her husband. This reflects the sexual tension in an inexperienced and innocent girl's mind. She does not allow her husband to touch her face.<sup>1574</sup> When he asks her a question she does not reply back, when he touches her, she hesitates and turns away, when he kisses her, she

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<sup>1572</sup>Jātaka No. 217

In this story a 'pious' greengrocer took his daughter into the woods and acted as if he has become passionate about her. And in anxiety and fear he cried:

*"All the world's on pleasure bent;  
Ah, my baby innocent!  
Now I've caught you, pray don't cry;  
As the town does, so do I."*

When she heard it, she told she is a maid and does not know the ways of sin and said:-

*"He that should keep me safe from all distress,  
The same betrays me in my loneliness;  
Here in the forest offers violence."*

After testing her character thus, he gave her in marriage to a young man.

<sup>1573</sup> Hāla's *Sattasāi*, 145

<sup>1574</sup> Ibid, 146

starts crying. That she is uncomfortable with the whole situation gets more prominent when her husband embraces her and her silence makes him ‘feel like a criminal’.<sup>1575</sup>

Moreover when her husband called her to bed, she turns away and hold on to her skirt tightly.<sup>1576</sup> All these expressions show that she has been unknown to a man’s approach and touch. But at the same time though she shy away from her husband, she knows everything about sexual life which surprises her husband. She knows what a mature woman ought to know.<sup>1577</sup> It means that she may have been taught by the elderly women in her family or through her friends. She knows it all in theory, but in practicality, she is inexperienced which shows the control of her family and society over her. The poem also tells that there has been a practice of looking at the blood-stained sheet of the bride showing that she has been a virgin and that her virgin-knot has been broken by her husband only.<sup>1578</sup> Thus it was important for a girl to conform to the morals of the society. When her relatives had a look at the sheet, her husband is said to have a ‘glint’ in his eyes, reflecting the patriarchal control.<sup>1579</sup> He has a profound proud feeling that he is the one who has broken his wife’s virginity and thus have an exclusive control over her body.

A man feels elevated when he sees his wife all meek and weak before him.<sup>1580</sup> That no one has ever seen her body, gives him the feeling of a winner.<sup>1581</sup> At the same time the girl covers that part of her body he ‘stares’ at, but at the same time, she wants him to see it. Her body is compared to a ‘spiky kadamba blossom’.<sup>1582</sup> She is completely in love with him.<sup>1583</sup> The husband tells of her dual character when she is away from him, she is like a ‘deadly poison’ and when together she is ‘sweeter than nectar’.<sup>1584</sup> She calls those women lucky who are able to move about all relaxed even when her husband is around, but women who are completely in love with their husbands, forget all about themselves when they see their husbands.<sup>1585</sup> The young wife is not only inexperienced in lovemaking but in also in household chores. She does not know

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<sup>1575</sup> Hāla’s *Sattasāī*, 147

<sup>1576</sup> Ibid, 148

<sup>1577</sup> Ibid, 155

<sup>1578</sup> Ibid, 156

<sup>1579</sup> Ibid

<sup>1580</sup> Ibid, 160

<sup>1581</sup> Ibid, 161

<sup>1582</sup> Ibid, 163

<sup>1583</sup> Ibid, 164

<sup>1584</sup> Ibid, 167

<sup>1585</sup> Ibid, 168

how to keep the cooking fire alight, mistakenly makes a lot of smoke and is frightened by the flames.<sup>1586</sup>

The Hāla's *Sattasaī* describes how futile physical beauty can be, and marital bliss should be about love and emotions which give birth to memories. With old age love, desire and passion vanishes. The days of youth become memories, which become stories to be foretold.<sup>1587</sup> When one partner dies, the other is equally dead.<sup>1588</sup> With old age, youth and physical beauty disappears.<sup>1589</sup> The nail marks on the body made during lovemaking “resemble the traces of an abandoned temple...Of the God of Love.”<sup>1590</sup> The firm and prominent breasts of women sag.<sup>1591</sup> The love vanishes from its origin.<sup>1592</sup> But her presence in the heart is still felt.<sup>1593</sup>

Though the Ancient Indian texts talk about the sanctity of marriage but maintaining the purity of marriage and of family depended on the woman and her chastity and bounded within itself immense pressure. Her sacrifices and compromises made her the ‘perfect’ wife

## ***THE FAITHFUL WIFE***

### ***HER DUTY***

In the *Sujāta Jātaka*<sup>1594</sup> Buddha mentioned about seven kinds of wife:

One bad hearted who loves others but hates her husband and destroys her ‘lord’s’ wealth. She is called the ‘*vadhakā*’. Then there is the wife who steals from whatever the husband gets for her by doing trade or in any other skilled profession or from farming. She is called the ‘*corī*’. The ‘*ayya*’ type is not sincere towards her duty; she is greedy, bad-mouthed, and full of anger and hatred. On the other hand there is the ‘*mātā*’ type who compassionately looks after her husband, tends to her husband like a mother would. She also guards her husband’s wealth. The ‘*bhaginī*’ wife respects her husband, as one does to her husband. She listens to her husband and does whatever

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<sup>1586</sup> Hāla's *Sattasaī*, 173-174

<sup>1587</sup> Ibid, 688

<sup>1588</sup> Ibid, 689

<sup>1589</sup> Ibid, 690

<sup>1590</sup> Ibid, 691

<sup>1591</sup> Ibid, 693-694

<sup>1592</sup> Ibid, 697

<sup>1593</sup> Ibid, 700

<sup>1594</sup> *Jātaka* No. 269

her husband tells her to do. The one who is glad seeing her husband after he has been long absent and is 'virtuous' and can give up her life for husband is the 'sakhī' wife. 'Calm when abused', apprehensive of violence, does not have any passion, have patience, 'true-hearted', bows down to her husband's will is called the 'dāsī' wife. The 'vadhakā', 'ayya' and 'corī' goes to hell. The one who is 'mātā', 'bhaginī', 'dāsī' and 'sakhī' type on account of their virtue goes to heaven.

In the *Jātakas* we find many stories wherein Buddha makes a king realise the importance of the wife who stood by him in difficult times, while she was ignored by her husband during his prosperous times. But at the same time we see that Buddhism though provided liberation and opened up options for women, but granted them so with certain limitations. In the *Maha-Ummagga Jātaka*<sup>1595</sup> we see that a king was ready to give away his wife to a water-demon. The wife is described as the "*chief amongst womankind, she is exceeding gracious of speech, devoted, virtuous, who cleaves to you like your shadow, not given to anger, prudent, wise, who sees your good...*"<sup>1596</sup> When asked the reason behind, the king said, "*By her sensual attractions she has made me subject to evil influence, and asks what she should not for her sons. In my passion I give her many and many a gift; I relinquish what is very hard to give, and afterwards I bitterly repent: for that fault I would give my wife to the water-demon.*"<sup>1597</sup>

Thus though a woman adhered to the ideals imposed on her to become the 'perfect' wife, she was recognised but with the same kind of antagonism reflected in the Brahmanical ancient Indian texts.

A woman was suppose to fulfil all the duties as a wife without the respect and recognition she was worthy of. King Vessantara when informed his wife that he has to go away to the forest for exile, he told her that if no man wishes to be her husband when he is gone, she should look for a husband herself and should not suffer living a lonely wife. She replied that she would not let her husband suffer alone and that she will go with him, will die with him, burn herself and die rather living without him. Maddi, his wife also went with him to the forest. Her in-laws tried to stop her, but she said that one who wants the welfare of her husband should observe her duties properly

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<sup>1595</sup> *Jātaka* no.546

<sup>1596</sup> Ibid

<sup>1597</sup> Ibid

like touching the dung, fasting, tend the fire and clean up the water.<sup>1598</sup> As they were leading the life of asceticism, she asked her husband not to go out in the wild and fetch fruits and that he should allow her to do so. Vessantara agreed.<sup>1599</sup> She used to wake up at dawn, fetched water for their drinking, cleaned the hermitage, and went to the forest for food. At evening she used to wash her children and then four of them used to have food together.

A woman was defined by her behaviour towards her parental house, her husband and in-laws. It was through this fulfilment of duties that she earned the honour of the society. Her happiness was bound within the shackles of the society's ideals and pressure. Her body and soul's main purpose was to follow these ideals and thus keeping her wants and desires chained to these shackles. She did not own herself. If it was diverted towards herself, her happiness or any man (whom she desired) other than her husband, she was considered a woman of an immoral character. The Hāla's *Sattasaī* quite explicitly reflects the fact that how important it was for a woman to be sexually active for her husband and be knowledgeable about making love in order to satisfy her husband. She made every possible effort to satisfy her husband as to make her husband content was the sole purpose of her life.

A woman needed to know the intricate art of making love for the consummation of her marriage. The husband is said to be disSatisfied when his wife makes love in the monotonous way and demands to his wife to spice it up. And when she rejuvenates their sex with different ways, the husband wonders where she learnt it from. It also reflects the anxiety of the wife that if she gets her move wrong, her husband would be unhappy and dissatisfied with her. Being a 'simple' person she has to surrender to the sexual needs of her husband and learn the complicated movements of making love as her 'lover likes fancy tricks'.<sup>1600</sup> She makes love to her husband with different positions.<sup>1601</sup>

For a wife, making her husband sexually happy, she has learned or has been taught all the movements and positions mentioned in the book which specialises in the art of making love. The book here might refer to *Kāmasūtra*, a portion of the text provides

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<sup>1598</sup> *Jātaka* no.547

<sup>1599</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1600</sup> Hāla's *Sattasaī*, 199-200

<sup>1601</sup> *Ibid*, 243

guidance on sexual life.<sup>1602</sup> Her husband likes and desires his wife to sit on him while making love. But she is unable to do while she is pregnant.<sup>1603</sup> She is not only afflicted by the weight of her womb but also not for being able to sit on top of her husband while making love to him.<sup>1604</sup> Thus the husband makes love to his wife even when she is in her advanced stage of pregnancy and it is physically difficult for her to perform such an act. But the wife even in such a condition thinks only about her husband and feels disappointed for not being able to accomplish his desires.

The society condemns for making love to a woman when she is in her menses as it is considered to be 'highly inauspicious' and 'improper' for seeing a woman in her period. But on the other hand it fills the heart of her husband with 'heavenly bliss'.<sup>1605</sup> It is the custom that no one should see and touch her when she is in her menstruation especially her husband.<sup>1606</sup> But the husband does not care about what people would say and says that his wife should also forget that she is in her menstruation.<sup>1607</sup> It is only to satisfy his physical needs that a man goes against the customs and traits of the society, and never for the cause of his wife's respect and individualistic rights and identity in the society.

Other than satisfying the sexual needs of her husband, it was a woman's duty to provide her husband and his family with a male heir. A male heir meant celebrations. In the epics and the Purāṇas we get numerous stories wherein a wife was sent to another man for a progeny, specifically for a male child.

In one of the *Jātaka* stories, a queen was sent to the road by her husband for a male child for continuing the lineage. That a male child is always preferred is quite clear from the texts. It is the male child who has the upper hand to claim for his paternal property and duty. A male child meant the liberation for the whole family.

A male child was accepted even he was born out of an illegal relationship (illegal according to the society). The biological father tells specifically to the mother that he would accept the child if it is a male and if a daughter is born; she should use the ring given to her by him. He was accepted even if he was born from a woman of caste

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<sup>1602</sup> Hāla's *Sattasāi*, 202

<sup>1603</sup> *Ibid*, 204

<sup>1604</sup> *Ibid*, 205

<sup>1605</sup> *Ibid*, 211

<sup>1606</sup> *Ibid*, 213

<sup>1607</sup> *Ibid*, 212

lower than him, a relation, which was not socially acceptable. Giving a male child also meant maintaining and upgrading her position within the family and the society and most importantly securing her relation with her husband. The husband could bring in another woman or more than one woman in order to acquire a son. A woman of a low caste became the chief-consort of a king when she gave birth to a son. She did not mean anything to him, when the child was not born. Only when she gives birth to a boy and goes to the king and proves that the child is his that she became the queen-consort.

### ***HER DEVOTION***

*“Few wives are well disposed to their husbands; most of them are ill-disposed.”*<sup>1608</sup>

Even after fulfilling the social requirements of being a ‘perfect’ wife, she had to prove the purity of her character and that she is faithful to her husband physically and mentally.

The *Canda-Kinnara Jātaka*<sup>1609</sup> is the story about Rāhula’s mother and Buddha’s wife. Buddha came to Kapilavastu and went to his wife’s palace to praise her ‘noble qualities’. There were forty thousand dancing girls who lived with her and of them, a thousand and ninety were maidens of the warrior caste. When she heard about Bodhisatta’s arrival she told them to put on yellow robes. When Rahula’s mother heard that Bodhisatta wore yellow robes; she also dressed herself in the same attire. She also gave up wearing garlands and other such things and sat upon the ground, as she heard that this has to be done. As Buddha entered the religious life, she became a widow and refused the gifts other kings sent her. Bodhisatta told the king that even in previous birth she loved him, was of faithful heart and was ‘led by him alone’. Even when she was born a fairy form she was faithful to him only. *Canda-Kinnara-Jātaka*<sup>1610</sup> tells about the qualities of Buddha’s wife – how she remained loyal and devoted when Buddha adopted the religious life.

Buddha said that in a previous birth too when they were born as fairies she was a faithful and devoted wife and also saved his life. In the previous birth when he was

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<sup>1608</sup> *Jātaka* No. 514

<sup>1609</sup> *Jātaka* No. 69

<sup>1610</sup> *Jātaka* No. 485

born as a fairy, he was struck by poison by a king who felt lustful towards Buddha's wife. But she did not succumb to his proposal and cursed the king for doing so. When she realised that her husband is still alive she challenged the gods to save her husband. Sakka came in the form of a *Brahmin* and brought her husband back to life. Thus it was the unprecedented power of a chaste woman that not only challenged the gods but saved her husband too. She lived a life of a widow when her husband was away, as this was expected of a woman when her husband was not around she would deprive herself of all desires and wants and would be sexually unattractive. We get the same essence in the *Purāṇas* as well.<sup>1611</sup> Thus by narrating the story of Buddha's wife, the ideal character of a woman was laid down. Buddha and his wife were made the epitome of an ideal man and a woman.

When Ajātasattu was conceived in his mother's womb (who was the daughter of the king of Kosala) she felt the urge to drink blood from the right knee of her husband, Bimbisara. The astrologers indicated that Ajatasattu will kill his father and seize the kingdom. When the queen heard about this, she opted for miscarriage. But Bimbisara convinced her not to do so and told her that he wanted to see his son's face (a wife's love for her husband and husband's love for his progeny).<sup>1612</sup>

King Brahmādatta had a son named Sotthisena. He had a wife named Sambulā who was "extremely beautiful" and was gifted with a 'radiant' form.<sup>1613</sup> Sotthisena was afflicted with leprosy. He left his palace life for forest. Though he tried to stop his wife Sambulā, from following him, but he failed. In the forest a goblin felt in love with her. When he tried to carry her away, Sakka rescued her. As she returned late to her husband, he grew suspicious of her and wanted to test her character and owing to the distrust regarding woman's character said:

*"You jades are ever by far too clever,  
Truth among such is a great rarity,  
Ways of the sex are enough to perplex,  
Even as the course of a fish in the sea."<sup>1614</sup>*

<sup>1611</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Śṛṅṅikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 50, 48 and The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 7, 16

<sup>1612</sup> *Jātaka* No. 338

<sup>1613</sup> *Jātaka* no. 519

<sup>1614</sup> *Ibid*



As an ordeal to prove the purity of her character, she said that if she is true and has followed the moral conventions then his disease will be warded off by her purity and truthfulness. As she said so, she sprinkled water on him and he recovered.<sup>1615</sup> Thus an ordeal was not only to prove her morality, but at the same time it was by her power of chastity that her husband gained and thus it was a proud moment for a wife as it was the sole purpose of her life to serve and save her husband.

Often her devotion was threatened within the household and she had to be wise enough to handle it single-handedly. A household includes number of unmarried younger brothers. They might communicate with the younger wife with sexual implications. But she does not inform her husband of his younger brother's behaviour not because she has impure thoughts and that her husband is sensitive but that might lead to the unwanted split in the family. She alone bears the pain of it.<sup>1616</sup> Her brother-in-law tries to kiss her in the dark kitchen and she trembles with fear.<sup>1617</sup>

The 'good' wife on the other hand tries to teach her brother-in-law the morals and limitations that should exist between them through the paintings on the walls of their houses that depict the adventures of Lakṣmaṇa, the ideal brother and the ideal brother-in-law. Lakṣmaṇa is said to be so pure by mind and soul that he never saw the face of Sītā and identified her by her feet.<sup>1618</sup> This younger brother of her husband not only approaches his brother's wife but also the headman's daughter.<sup>1619</sup> There is also reference to the 'brazen' woman who passionately kissed his brother's mouth in front of her husband.<sup>1620</sup>

Her adversities did not end here. As discussed earlier progeny was a significant issue especially for a king, his kingdom, prestige and honour, in order to maintain this prestige he was not only ready to accept a male issue irrespective of the caste he is born but could also send his wife out into the streets. But nowhere the impotency of the man gets reflected. Neither was it a matter of concern in the texts of the Brahmā nical tradition nor in any of texts dealt here.

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<sup>1615</sup> *Jātaka* no.519

<sup>1616</sup> Hāla's *Sattasaī*, 257

<sup>1617</sup> *Ibid*, 258-259

<sup>1618</sup> *Ibid*, 260

<sup>1619</sup> *Ibid*, 263

<sup>1620</sup> *Ibid*, 264

### ***Her sacrifice for Progeny***

In the Malla kingdom, in the royal city of Kusāvati, king Okkāka ruled his kingdom righteously. Amongst his sixteen thousand wives, the chief queen was Sīlavatī. She neither had any son or daughter. So the people came to the king saying that the kingdom would perish without any lineage. The subjects said to the king that if he would not have any lineage the kingdom would perish and enemies would take over the kingdom.<sup>1621</sup>

The king said, *“In my desire for a son...First of all send out into the streets for a whole week a band of dancing women of low degree, giving the act a religious sanction, and if one of them shall give birth to a son, well and good. Otherwise send out a company of fairly good standing, and finally a band of the highest rank. Surely amongst so many, one woman will be found of sufficient merit to bear a son.”*<sup>1622,</sup>

Even after this no son was born. The reason that was put forward by the subjects was that as these women were ‘immoral’ and ‘void of merit’, they did not conceive. They did not protest when the king summoned them to be sent, but when they did not conceive, that such a judgement was passed on their character. Thus in Buddhism too, reproductive power of a woman was made the parameter of purity of character. They told the king to send his chief queen to the streets as she is ‘virtuous’. Thus a demarcation and a hierarchy were maintained based on the social status of a woman.

The king gave the proposal religious proclamation, and she was then sent out to the streets. *“By the power of her virtue the abode of Sakka manifested signs of heat”* and decided to grant her two sons. One them would be Bodhisatta. Sakka went to the palace doors as an old Brahmin. When he did so, people laughed at him. He replied that being old does not mean that he would not possess sexual desires and that he has come with the hope of having the queen. Other people came to the palace after ‘washing’ and ‘adorning’ themselves to get the queen. That no man might break her virtue, Sakka went to the Queen disguised as an aged Brahmin to the door of the palace. When the old Brahmin (Sakka) took her away, they abused him. Both the king and queen were not pleased. When she came to know that it was Sakka, he granted her two sons.<sup>1623</sup>

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<sup>1621</sup> *Jātaka* No.531

<sup>1622</sup> Ibid

<sup>1623</sup> Ibid

A landowner while collecting debts fell into the hand of robbers. The chief of the robber felt passionate towards her and wanted to kill her husband. But she was a 'good and virtuous, a devoted wife.' She fell at the robber's feet and said that she would kill herself if he kills her husband.<sup>1624</sup>

The society did not follow any limitation when the need for a male progeny was an issue. Though a woman belonging to the lower stratum of the society was not recognised as a wife, it was only when a male child was born to her that she could claim for her son's right. It was only for the public exposition that a woman had to prove her purity and that the child belonged to the king only. It was due to this male child that nobody questioned her low origin.

Prince Brahmādatta and Prince Suruci decided that they would marry their son or daughter in each other's family.<sup>1625</sup> A son was born to Prince Suruci and a daughter to Brahmādatta. After their marriage, they did not have any son and he did have other wives, as based on the fulfilling of this condition that Sumedha was given in marriage to him. His subjects came to him and told him about the problem that if he does not have a son, his lineage would not continue. They told him to bring in another wife. But he told him about his vow of not marrying any other woman. He even refused to have any relation with the concubines for maintaining his vow. So when Sumedha heard about it, she decided to bring other wives for him. Thus playing the role of both a mother and a wife for him, she chose a multitude of women for him. She chose at her own will a thousand maidens of the warrior caste, a thousand of the courtiers, a thousand of the householders and a thousand of dancing girls. But again no son was born to him. Again three times women were brought to him, but of no result. The subjects came and told Sumedha to pray for a son. It was for Sumedha's devotion and purity that a son was obtained from Sakka.

King Kāsirāja who ruled in Benares had sixteen thousand wives. But he did not procure any son from them. The citizens assembled as in Kusa Jātaka and told him about their apprehensions regarding it. The king ordered his sixteen thousand wives to pray for sons. His chief consort Candādevī who was 'devoted to good works' prayed

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<sup>1624</sup> Jātaka No. 266

<sup>1625</sup> Jātaka No. 489

for a son that she should obtain a son if she had a 'virtuous life'. Through her power of devotion the seat of Sakka became hot and he was compelled to succumb to her devotion and grant her a son. Then Bodhisatta was born as her son.<sup>1626</sup>

### ***The Co-Wives and the Other Women (outside the Institution of Marriage)***

Prince Brahmādatta and Prince Suruci decided that they would marry their son or daughter in each other's family.

A son was born to Prince Suruci and a daughter to Brahmā datta. Brhamadatta asked his wife "what is the worst misery for a woman?" His wife answered to quarrel with her fellow-wives. So he decided to give his daughter to a man who would not bring in other wives.<sup>1627</sup>

Sakka was happy with Vessantara's nature and wife's devotion and after giving back his wife told him to ask for boons. One of the boons she asked for was that her husband should never desire for the neighbour's wife and should never be subjected to a woman's will.

The Hāla's *Sattasaī* elucidates the pain the co-wives go through. It echoes the feeling of the elder wives toward the younger wives. When the other wives see marks of red dye on their husband's shoulder, shed tears seeing their husband's intimacy with the younger wife.<sup>1628</sup>

Ancient Indian texts like the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* point to the pain due to having co-wives and how the elderly wives are ignored by the husband after the arrival of the younger wife who is physically more attractive.

On the wedding night, making love is the only thing in a man's mind, but when he satiates his desires with his first wife, the pleasures he enjoyed with her no longer matters to him.<sup>1629</sup> It is the youthful beauty and firm breasts of the young wife that attracts the husband.<sup>1630</sup> Her body is the cause of pain for the other elder wives while it is the source of enjoyment for the husband.<sup>1631</sup> Though she may have sound sleep after making love, but her co-wives are tortured seeing her 'weary limbs'.<sup>1632</sup> The marks showing that they made love give the other wives sleepless nights.<sup>1633</sup>

The Hāla *Sattasaī* attempts to construe how the young wife and the attraction towards her can cause harm while on the other side the elder wife is shown to be wise and

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<sup>1626</sup> *Jātaka* No. 538

<sup>1627</sup> *Jātaka* No. 489

<sup>1628</sup> Hāla's *Sattasaī*, 217

<sup>1629</sup> *Ibid*, 265

<sup>1630</sup> *Ibid*, 266

<sup>1631</sup> *Ibid*, 267

<sup>1632</sup> *Ibid*, 269

<sup>1633</sup> *Ibid*, 270

sexually unattractive. It was during her companionship that the husband fared well in his life. We get the same essence in the Rāmāyaṇa when Daśaratha, Rāmā's father is shown to be suffering due to his attraction towards his younger wife Kaikeyi. While on the other hand, Kausalya who is older is shown to be wise and thus sexually unattractive.

The text refers to the *Pulindas* tribe who live in the Vindhya hills.<sup>1634</sup> The husband of the *Pulindas* tribe is exhausted by making love to his young wife and is unable to bend the bow. But he goes into the forest so that he does not hurt his elder wife's feeling.<sup>1635</sup> This shows his happy married life unlike the village headman's and the wrestler's.<sup>1636</sup> As he grows thinner on account making love to his wife, his bow also gets thinner. His other wives get thinner out of jealousy.<sup>1637</sup> It is said that the wife has turned her hunter husband into such a condition that he needs a quiver to kill an elephant, whereas earlier he needed just one arrow to kill an elephant.<sup>1638</sup> Thus his work gets affected on account of his younger wife and her beauty.<sup>1639</sup> The peacock feather worn by his younger wife shows his love for her, but at the same time the pearl worn by the elderly wife and the less favoured shows that he once had the strength to kill an elephant.<sup>1640</sup> He has become so emotional that he is not able to kill a deer.<sup>1641</sup>

The *Jātakas* refer to the animal world which is used as a metaphor representing the social and cultural thinking of the time.

In the *Chaddanta Jātaka*<sup>1642</sup> a female elephant is shown taking revenge against her husband when he favoured his other wives. She took her revenge while she was born in a human form and her husband was still an elephant. But she was shown to be repentant for doing so. The male elephant was the Bodhisatta.<sup>1643</sup> The story shows

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<sup>1634</sup> Hāla's *Sattasāi*, 572-573

<sup>1635</sup> Ibid, 575

<sup>1636</sup> Ibid, 576

<sup>1637</sup>, 579

<sup>1638</sup> Ibid, 580

<sup>1639</sup> Ibid, 582

<sup>1640</sup> Ibid, 583

<sup>1641</sup> Ibid, 584

<sup>1642</sup> *Jātaka* No. 514

<sup>1643</sup> In this story, the Buddha was in the form of an elephant called the Chaddanta and he had two wives. He favoured his chief queen while the other established a grudge against him and made a vow that she wanted to be the chief queen in her next birth and would take revenge by sending a hunter to kill him and bring his tusks to her. She did so. When the hunter brought her the tusks, she felt sad and died that day only. While this story was told by Buddha, a girl of 'good family' embraced asceticism.

how the pain of a wife turned into so much bitterness and vengeance that she killed her husband for being more favourable and affectionate toward other wives. In the story she is condemned for killing her husband. But nowhere the Buddhist text shows any attempt to criticise the husband for such an act. It was the social and physical needs of the androcentric society that mattered.

Having more than one wife did not mean that a man did not have relation outside the marital institution. His desires and wants did not satiate by his wives only, but he required multitude of women for his fulfilment of desires within and outside the institution of marriage. The androcentric society made it easier and legitimate for men to have multiple relationships. A woman right from her childhood was taught to be devoted and loyal to one man unto her death. This included making compromises and sacrifices mentally and physically. She had to be tolerant whatever might have been the circumstance. Her emotional and physical need was not of any significance.

Her pain was not bounded within the domestic sphere, apart from the co-wives; a wife has to tolerate ‘the other women’ in her husband’s life. She comforts herself by saying that only if her husband gets involved with other women that he would value her.<sup>1644</sup> She degrades herself and calls the other women ‘virtuous’ and ‘beautiful’.<sup>1645</sup> The wife calls those women ‘loose’ with whom her husband is involved with outside the institution of marriage and with whom her husband is ‘nice’ to. She blames herself for her husband’s behaviour towards her.<sup>1646</sup>

Her husband is the most treasured and beautiful person for her. She considers herself worthless in comparison to him. But at the same time she feels that those ‘loose’ women are jealous of her.<sup>1647</sup> The wife is bound to her husband within the institution of marriage, thus she is more dignified and honoured according to the law and custom of the society. The other women are a source of temporary enjoyment for him. She degrades those women terming them to be ‘starved of love’.<sup>1648</sup> She does not accuse

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While she was listening to his story she realized that he was the elephant in one of his births and she was the wife who sent the hunter to kill him. (Jātaka No. 514)

<sup>1644</sup> Hāla’s *Sattasaī*, 277

<sup>1645</sup> *Ibid*, 279

<sup>1646</sup> *Ibid*, 281

<sup>1647</sup> *Ibid*, 282

<sup>1648</sup> *Ibid*, 283

or confront her husband for his infidelity, but abuses the other women in her husband's life.

Though she is not directly connected to the other woman, but her presence is very much there in her life. <sup>1649</sup> Both of them find place in her mind as the 'loose' woman has a place in her husband's heart and mind and she has only her husband in her heart. <sup>1650</sup> The wife searches for her place in the husband's heart. <sup>1651</sup> Her body gets thinner due to the pain of the existence of another woman other than the co-wives. <sup>1652</sup>

Though she loves him, but she grows suspicious of her husband. And start losing faith. <sup>1653</sup> Her husband never looks at her and is 'indifferent' to her. <sup>1654</sup> She blesses the disease as when she is affected by it her husband attends to her and asks about her health. <sup>1655</sup> It seems that out of courtesy he pays a visit to his wives, but to the wife he does not seem to be happy in performing this duty as he does it out of compulsion. <sup>1656</sup> They seem to be devoid of any 'true feeling'. <sup>1657</sup>

The wives are no longer dear to him, his heart lies with the other woman. Thus paying his wives a visit is devoid of any true feeling of love. It is his upbringing and might be a family custom that make him do so. <sup>1658</sup> Though the husband spends his night somewhere else, his wives bow to him 'humbly'. <sup>1659</sup> His wife curses him for his infidelity – that he will suffer the same as she is suffering when his lover will leave for showing consideration for his wife. <sup>1660</sup> Even the other woman holds a grudge against his wife/wives. The husband is alarmed even by the noise of a cockcrow when he is embracing his own wife and seems to be confused as to where he has spent his night. <sup>1661</sup> It seems he is not only confused about the surroundings but also of the woman lying beside him.

The husband gets confused with names amongst his wives and mistresses. So if he calls any of his wives by the name of his mistress, she looks distressed and in order to

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<sup>1649</sup> Hāla's *Sattasāi*, 284

<sup>1650</sup> *Ibid*, 284-285

<sup>1651</sup> *Ibid*, 287

<sup>1652</sup> *Ibid*, 288

<sup>1653</sup> *Ibid*, 289

<sup>1654</sup> *Ibid*, 290

<sup>1655</sup> *Ibid*, 294

<sup>1656</sup> *Ibid*, 297

<sup>1657</sup> *Ibid*, 298

<sup>1658</sup> *Ibid*, 299

<sup>1659</sup> *Ibid*, 302

<sup>1660</sup> *Ibid*, 301

<sup>1661</sup> *Ibid*, 304

save the situation the wife is told that it was her husband's way as to see what she looks like when jealous. <sup>1662</sup>A wife is said to be identified by her husband. Though she is filled with despair after having been called by another woman's name, she surrenders to her husband's attention and wants her husband to call her by his mistress's name if he likes it more. <sup>1663</sup>But the mother-in-law warns her son not to overdo it as she may pay him back the same way. <sup>1664</sup>

The extracts in various ancient Indian texts implies that the society was aware of the physical and mental crisis a woman went through due to the socially construed impositions, but such crisis was never recognised. Her sufferings and pain that she tolerated gave her recognition in the patriarchal world. That preference was given to the younger wife degrades women to the position of nothing more than a mere object. As she became old, she was of no use to the husband. She had existence in the household sphere for fulfilling her duties either as a mother or the daughter-in-law.

### ***The Divine Power of a Chaste Woman***

The celestial beings also came to the rescue of a chaste woman and especially when she was the mother of Bodhisatta. Brahmādatta, the king of Benares once, while roaming in the garden came across a woman, gathering sticks. He fell in love with her and became intimate with her. The woman conceived then and there. He gave her the signet-ring from his finger and dismissed her with these-words: -- "*If it be a girl, spend this ring on her nurture; but if it be a boy, bring ring and child to me.*" Bodhisatta was then born to her and he insisted going to his father, she took her to the palace. When the king asked for proof, she showed him the signet-ring. But again he denied. Then she said if he is the father of her child then he will stay in mid-air and if not, will he fall to earth and will be killed. So saying, she seized the Bodhisatta by the foot and threw him up into the air. Then the boy while hanging in the mid-air told him that he is his son and that while king maintain others, he should nurture his child more. Thus thousands hands rose up to receive him, but he went into the hands of his

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<sup>1662</sup> Hāla's *Sattasāi*, 305-306

<sup>1663</sup> *Ibid*, 309

<sup>1664</sup> *Ibid*, 307



own father. The king made him viceroy, and made his mother queen-consort. At the death of his father, he came to the throne.<sup>1665</sup>

Bodhisatta was once born as the son of a householder who lived in a village not far from the city. When he was of proper age, they married him off to a beautiful lady. “*She was a fair and lovely maiden, beautiful as a nymph divine, graceful like a twining creeper, ravishing as a sylph.*” She was called *Sujātā*. She was faithful, virtuous and dutiful.”<sup>1666</sup> She performed her duties towards her husband and his parents. She was ‘very dear and precious’ to Bodhisatta. One day she decided to meet her parents. They went in a wagon. As they entered the city, the king of Benares saw Sujata and fell in love with her.<sup>1667</sup>

Even after knowing the fact that she was married, he tried to get her. He deceitfully proved that Bodhisatta to be a thief and tried to execute him. When Sujata saw this, she thought upon her own ‘virtue’ and ‘own goodness’ and challenged the gods. She said that the gods must be away that they cannot stop the ‘wicked’ king.<sup>1668</sup> As Sujata wailed the throne of Sakka became so hot that he could not sit on it and then he thought, “*The king of Benares is doing a very cruel deed. He is making the virtuous sujata miserable, now I must go thither!*”<sup>1669</sup> So when he descended on earth he made Bodhisatta, the new king of Benares and made the wicked king of Benares executed. People knew that the wicked king was executed.<sup>1670</sup> A chaste woman not only saved her husband’s life but was also possessed the power to bring her dead husband back to life.<sup>1671</sup>

The Epics and the *Purāṇas* state that a chaste woman possesses immense power. This power even enables her to bring her dead husband back to life as Savitri did. In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* we come across a woman who stopped the Sun from R̥ṣi ng to bring her husband back to life. The gods surrendered themselves to her and gave back life to her husband. The *Jātakas* have the same implications – that even Buddhism

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<sup>1665</sup> *Jātaka* No. 7

<sup>1666</sup> *Jātaka* No.194

<sup>1667</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1668</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1669</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1670</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1671</sup> In the *Canda-Kinnara* birth, Rahula’s parents were born as a fairy. His wife was named Candā. The king fell in love with her and in order to obtain her, killed Bodhisatta. When the king approached her and told her not to be anxious and that she will go with him and will be his queen. She cursed him that that for her pain may his wife and mother pay. His wife would mourn for her husband and his mother for her son. She accused him that he has done it out of lust. When she touched her husband, she realised that he was still alive and called upon Sakka to bring her husband to life. ‘By the power of her pain’ the seat of Sakka became hot. He went there in the form of a Brahmin and sprinkled water on Bodhisatta and thus brought him to life. (*Jātaka* No. 485)

could not deny the importance attached to chastity. This shows how deeply embedded the concept of chastity was.

The apprehension regarding a woman's character and compulsion for a woman to maintain the purity of her body, mind and soul made her life the focus of constant judgement. In order to prove that her morals are intact, she had to go through ordeals not only to maintain her own prestige and honour but also of her marital and parental family.

### ***HER ORDEAL***

An ordeal meant a divine proof of the purity of one's character. Such ordeals were more obligatory for women. Purity and prove of her innocence made her socially accepted. Thus it was necessary to test the purity of character of not just the wife but of the daughter as well.

The king of Kasi did not have any son or daughter. He told his queens to pray for sons. His chief queen bore Bodhisatta in her womb and he was named Udayabhadda. A daughter was born to the king from another queen and she too was named Udayabhaddā. Udayabhadda was chaste by nature (*jātiBrahmācārī*).<sup>1672</sup> When he was of age, his parents decided to get him married. But he did not give his consent. He thus made a woman's image of red gold and told his parents that he will marry a girl similar to that image. But nowhere such a girl could be found. At last his sister Udayabhaddā, was decked, who said to have surpassed the beauty of the image and was wedded to Udayabhadda, as she was born from another womb. Then Udayabhadda was consecrated as the king. They lead the life of chastity (*Brahmā cariyavāsam*).<sup>1673</sup> Though they lived together in one chamber they were not desirous of each other. They made a promise to each other that whosoever will die first will return to the other from his new place of birth and tell him/her that he/she has been born again.

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<sup>1672</sup> *Jātaka* No. 458

<sup>1673</sup> *Jātaka* No. 458

Even after her death, he visited his past wife and tested her character. Thus it was not desirable in Buddhism that another man would approach a widow and that she should maintain her loyalty and devotion for her husband only, even when he is dead. The Bodhisatta became the Sakka of heaven. When he remembered his past he decided to meet his wife of past. He also wanted to test her character and purity of mind. While she was ‘meditating upon her own virtue’<sup>1674</sup>, Sakka took a golden dish filled with golden coins and approached her. But she negated him. She said as her husband is dead she does not desire any other man. He again approached her with a silver dish and then an iron bowl. He said as she is aging he is approaching each time with a metal value lesser than the previous one. This implies that as a woman ages, her worth in the society deprecates.

After testing her purity he revealed his true identity and that he has come to her for fulfilling his promise. As she wanted to join him in heaven, she after entrusting her courtiers with the responsibility became a recluse. She was born in the Heaven of Thirty-three as the Bodhisatta’s handmaiden after she died.<sup>1675</sup> It was only after proving her devotion and loyalty that she could join her husband in heaven. But she did not join him as his wife, but rather a handmaiden.

It was the virtuous nature of a woman that compelled Sakka to help them in their cṛṣṭis. He blessed them and fulfilled their desires. Many times it was through his sexual involvement with them that a god was conceived in their womb.

Queen Sumedha fasted and took upon the eightfold Sabbath vows and started meditating on her virtues in order to acquire a son for her husband when no son was born to her husband from the other wives. It was ‘by the glory of Sumedha’s virtue Sakka’s dwelling place began to tremble’. Then Sakka saw a young god called Naḷakāra, the Basket-weaver. He decided that he would grant the son to the virtuous Sumedha. When he met Sumedha, he asked her why she is virtuous and told her to please him.

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<sup>1674</sup> *Jātaka* No. 458

<sup>1675</sup> *Ibid*

Sumedha in reply said that she is king Ruci's consort-queen and they have been married for ten thousand years and that she has never considered her husband's wish lightly, nor considered him to be mean or base in deed or thought or word, behind his back, nor in front of him. Sumedha told how the parents of her husband while they were alive taught her and that she served them with 'extreme care unwearied day and night'. Sixteen thousand women have been her co-wives but she never felt any jealousy or anger towards them and on the contrary they are dear to hear and her 'heart is soft' for them. She treats her slaves, messengers, and servants well and provides them with proper food and pleasant place to live in. She serves those Brahmins who come begging. She keeps fasts and on the eighth of either fortnight, the fourteenth, fifteenth days she walks in holy ways (*pāṭihāriyapakkho*).

Sumedha said that if she is lying about her virtues, then her head burst into seven pieces. Sakka was impressed by her and granted her the boon of having a son. Sakka came to her in the form of Brahmin. When Sumedha asked as to who he was, Sakka said that when 'virtuous', 'wise' and 'good' women are found, those who are 'true' wives and is 'kind towards husband's mother' and is 'duty-bound' (*sassudevā-patibbatā*), when a woman is wise of heart and good in deeds, the gods come to them to bless them. Thus god Nalakara was born to her.<sup>1676</sup>

The Hāla's *Sattasāi* describes how a faithful wife maintaining her loyalty and love for her husband grows weak when her husband is far away on a journey. She keeps a track on the days he has been far away from home. The husband tries postponing his journey. He gets used to making love to his wife. He prevents starting his journey on a Tuesday or on a rainy day as such days are considered an ill omen.<sup>1677</sup> The man has to start his journey in order to earn and survive.<sup>1678</sup> The wife places a fresh mango shoot on the farewell bowl of her husband which would remind her husband of the spring which is the time of love and lovemaking.<sup>1679</sup> The wife grows thinner out of grief as her husband has to leave her and she grows so thin and weak that the bracelets on her hands become loose and slips from her hand on her husband's feet.<sup>1680</sup> The love and the grief of the wife are shackles for the husband that prevents him from going away.

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<sup>1676</sup> *Jātaka* No. 489

<sup>1677</sup> Hāla's *Sattasāi*, 429

<sup>1678</sup> *Ibid*, 430

<sup>1679</sup> *Ibid*, 431

<sup>1680</sup> *Ibid*, 432

<sup>1681</sup>There are other women too who suffers from the pangs of pain, as their husbands are away. They consult each other to know ways to survive.<sup>1682</sup>

To follow a husband to his funeral pyre was considered to be an honour for the wife. The village headman's wives were dressed to follow him on the pyre. It seemed that the 'good' wife can bring her husband to life as she gets ready to join him on the pyre, and thus her widowhood turns into marital bliss.<sup>1683</sup>

A woman's ordeal also meant being faithful, loyal and devoted to her husband in the time of crisis and tolerating the emotional pain without uttering any word. When he confronted his wife, she said that she would give a fire ordeal in order to prove her purity and that no man has ever touched her except the priest. The girl instructed her attendant to tell his son to catch her before she enters the flame. The man came and took his stand amongst the crowd. When she advanced to the burning pile, her paramour seized her by hand who cried shame on the *Brahmin* as 'who could force so fair a maid to enter the flames!' She then told the *Brahmin* that now she would not be able to complete the fire ordeal successfully as she has now been touched by another man. The *Brahmin* knew he has been tricked by his wife and he drove her off from the other man with blows.

Bodhisatta then described how wicked women are, they commit all sorts of crime, take false oaths to perform ordeals and in broad daylight they can perform such sinful activities. They are wicked and cunning and clever. They are as rude as the snake. They always desire for mate one after another. Thus it is impossible to guard them.<sup>1684</sup>

Motherhood brought in respect and recognition for a woman not only within the household sphere but also in the society especially when she gave birth to a son.

### ***A MOTHER'S LOVE AND A FATHER'S ODIUM***

*"...what matters the mother's birth? The birth of the father is the measure..."*<sup>1685</sup>

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<sup>1681</sup> Hāla's *Sattasaī*, 433

<sup>1682</sup> *Ibid*, 434

<sup>1683</sup> *Ibid*, 570

<sup>1684</sup> *Jātaka* No. 62

<sup>1685</sup> *Jātaka* No. 465

It was a compulsion for women to give birth to a male child.<sup>1686</sup> Even when she did give birth to a male child her adversities did not end here. She had to maintain a balance between that of her son and husband. The Hāla's *Sattasaī* narrates how the young mother gets angry when her son comes to her while she is making love, and the author says that at that moment any mother would curse her child.<sup>1687</sup> It also mentions the dilemma of the young wife when she is torn between her infant son and husband. Her one breast oozes milk and the other is covered with nail marks. The author says, "*Behold the housewife sitting between husband and son.*"<sup>1688</sup> On one hand she had to fulfil her duties as the affectionate mother, on the other hand she had to be sexually active in order to satisfy her husband's physical desires even if she was in the advanced stage of her pregnancy.

The dilemma that a woman goes through when she becomes a mother is reflected in the *Mūgapakkha Jātaka*. When a child is born to her, out of affection for her new born, her whole life takes a new turn and all her devotion, love and affection is diverted towards her child, nothing else matters to her. Before the child is born, the husband is the only focus of her life. But after the birth of the child, her husband takes a back seat. This phase too is an ordeal for her. In one of the *Purāṇas* it has been stated that when a woman gives birth, she is useless for her husband as they cannot get sexually involved. In the *Mūgapakkha Jātaka*<sup>1689</sup>, we see how the father reacts, when the wife ignores her, diverting her attention towards her son only. He goes to the extreme path of killing his son.

A queen committed adultery with the priest Chambhi. She poisoned her husband and made the *Brahmin* king in his place and she his queen. The *Brahmin* wanted to kill the

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<sup>1686</sup> *Jātaka* No. 538

<sup>1687</sup> Hāla's *Sattasaī*, 194

<sup>1688</sup> *Ibid*, 227

<sup>1689</sup> Bodhisatta was born to the king of Benares, Mahāpatāpa and his queen consort Candā. They named their son Dhammapāla. When he was seven months old as his mother was playing with him, she was filled with a mother's affection and love and did not pay obeisance to the king. The king was greatly angered by this and thought, "*Even now this woman is filled with pride on account of her boy, and does not value me a straw, but as the boys grow up, she will think, 'I have a man for my son' and will take no notice of me.*" He decided to kill him. Then he summoned the executioner and ordered to bring the child to him. Candā knew about the king's mind, she laid her son on the bosom and started weeping. When the executioner came, he gave a blow on her back and took away the son. When the executioner has cut off his hands and feet, Candā said, "*A mother is bound to support her children. I will work for wages and support my son.*" But he did not listen to her and had his head cut off. Having seen her son dead, she too died on the spot. The king too was unable to remain on his throne and fell down. The earth was unable to bear his wickedness and he was dragged down to the hell called, 'Avīci hell'. (*Jātaka* No 358)

queen's son from the husband she killed for the Brahmin. Queen Talatā said, “*Very good, my lord; I killed my husband for love of you, and what is the boy to me? But let us kill him secretly.*”<sup>1690</sup> But she deceived the Brahmin and saved her son.<sup>1691</sup> Thus though her lust and passion allowed her to transgress and even kill her husband, a woman's affection for her child goes unaffected. She is ready to take any risk in order to protect her child.

The *Catu-dvāra Jātaka*<sup>1692</sup> depicts how a mother also acts as an adviser to her son and as a widow protects the property of her husband. But the son ignores his mother's advice which reflects how weak the position of a mother was. She was not considered as a potential advisor, though it was her duty to act as an advisor to her marital household in times of need and cṚṣi s.

## **WIDOWHOOD**

“*Widowhood is terrible.*”<sup>1693</sup>

For a woman, death was preferred to being a widow as she was already considered socially useless. In the *Vessantara Jātaka* a queen describes how painful it can be for a woman to lead the life of a widow. She said men knock them down in the dust, pull them by hair, pull their sons and beat them up. She said even in a prosperous household ‘unkindly’ words are spoken to them by a brother or a friend. Though a widow might have ten brothers, but she is empty without her husband. A wedded wife is known by her husband. The wife who shares and supports her husband in his happiness and suffering both is praised by the gods. She said that those women who have no heart cannot feel when their husbands are in pain and desire to be in happiness.<sup>1694</sup>

Women acted as a mediator, like an object, sometimes in order to pay off a debt or to fulfil one's duty. Her life was bounded by the patriarchal benefits. Not only was her body objectified, but her soul too. Her recognition as a living being was lost in the patriarchal norms and fulfilling duties toward them.

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<sup>1690</sup> *Jātaka* No. 546

<sup>1691</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1692</sup> *Jātaka* No. 439

<sup>1693</sup> *Jātaka* No. 547

<sup>1694</sup> *Jātaka* No. 547

A woman's life was bounded by the patriarchal norms of the society. The sole purpose of her life was to remain devoted to these norms. She was a possession of the androcentric world. Her happiness, desires and wants did not have any existence. So when her husband died, her life was dead too. It was considered a sin for her if she would have desired to get married to another man for her sake. The Epics and the *Purāṇas* condemns such a woman and in no way encourages widow remarriage. The *Jātakas* on the other hand remains silent on the issue indicating that Buddhism did not deter itself from the existing traditions and customs.

Though most of the stories in the *Jātakas* are silent about widow remarriage but we find mention of widow remarriage in the Naga world. In the story Buddha is born from the man her mother marries after she was widowed. His mother, a young Nāga female in the Nāga world who lost her husband seeing the happiness of other Naga females with their husband was wandering for a husband approached a prince who was driven away by his father for marriage. She told him that she was a widow. They got married and lived together. When the king died, the prince was summoned back to the kingdom. He told her that he would make her the chief queen consort amongst his sixteen thousand wives.<sup>1695</sup> But it is interesting to observe that we do not find any mention to widow remarriage in the earthly world and the Nāga female mentioned in the story was not abused or accused for performing such an act. Moreover she approaches and takes the initiative for her marriage. But the man who was a prince from the earthly world did not have any apprehensions in marrying a widow. He also decided to make the Nāga woman, his chief queen consort.

### **THE MEDIATORS**

Daughter and wives were often used to resolve a crisis – whether personal, social, financial or political. This section would discuss how women were used as mediators to dissolve a cṚṣi s. Daughters and wives were used to resolve issues and various crises. In the kingdom of KaLiṅga, in a Brahmin village lived a Brahmin called Jujaka who deposited his money with another Brahmin family. But they spent Jujaka's

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<sup>1695</sup> *Jātaka* no. 543



money. Not being able to pay Jujaka's, they gave their daughter, Amittāpanā to him. She took great care of him.<sup>1696</sup>

The modesty of a woman was compromised for the sake of duty towards the king and kingdom. But in the whole process it was never a consideration that a woman is being used as an object. Bodhisatta was born as the son of Sivi, king of the Sivils. He was born to the chief queen and was called Sivi. In the same city there was a rich merchant who had a daughter named Ummadantī. Men were 'intoxicated' by her beauty. The trader went to the king for the purpose of marriage. The king sent *Brahmins* to examine her. When the *Brahmins* saw her they lost self-control. But the *Brahmins* went and told the king that she is a witch and thus did not send for her. She conceived a grudge against the king. In marriage she was given to the king's commander-in-chief's son called Ahipāraka who loved her dearly. It was due to giving her red robe to the disciple of Kassapa Buddha, that she became so beautiful. Once there was the Kattika festival and the king was to take out a procession. Her husband told her not to come out in the procession as by seeing her he will not be able to control his thoughts.

When the king came to Ahipāraka's house and saw Ummadanti he came under the influence of passion. He did not go further with the procession as he said that it did not suit him to celebrate but it was festival time for Ummadanti's husband as he possessed such a wife. He wished to be Ahipāraka for one night and enjoy her.<sup>1697</sup>

Ahipāraka wanted to give his wife to the king as he knew if the king would not have her, he will die and it was his responsibility to save the king. He told the king that he can give his wife back to him when his desires will be satiated and that no one else but he (Ahipāraka) will know about it. Ahipāraka also said,

*"I declare  
Henceforth she is divorced and free to all,  
Thy slave to summon at thy beck and call."<sup>1698,</sup>*

It was through his speech on law that Ahipāraka broke king's infatuation for Ummadanti. Ahipāraka's duty for the king was more important than his wife.<sup>1699</sup>

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<sup>1696</sup> *Jātaka* no. 547

<sup>1697</sup> *Jātaka* No. 527

<sup>1698</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1699</sup> *Ibid*

The Princesses and the Queens often acted as political mediators, surrendering their morals for a bigger cause. Their father, who was supposed to act as protectors, used their beauty as bait for political benefits. They could sacrifice their daughter for their kingdom's benefits. In this situation the ideals and theories laid down for their daughters did not matter to them. We hardly see the princesses or the queens opposing it. This was how they were moulded – it was their duty as princesses – to sacrifice their modesty for the benefit of their father's kingdom. It formed a part of their recognition within the political forum. The queens were the extension of the royal household and her service is developed under the patriarchal norms. Though she compromised so much for the royal household, she was seen more of a sexual beast whose lust was difficult to satiate. She was hardly in charge of the kingdom. In the *Talapatta Jātaka* an ogress wins over a king and demanded his kingdom but she succeeded in gaining power over the palace only. She even killed the king herself. But she was overcome by Bodhisatta and he ruled the kingdom. Thus a woman with such power was often projected as dangerous as an ogress. A woman who defied the norms and customs of the society has always been considered as a danger to the society.

The safety of the princesses and queens was often vulnerable. When there was a war between two kingdoms, the Queens were either carried away by the victorious kings, or were made the queen of the victorious king or the queens sometime saved themselves by running away.

Isisinga who was admitted to the Buddhist Order was practising his austerities. Sakka was shaken by his virtue. In order to take control, he stopped rainfall in the kingdom of Kāsi and told people that Isisinga was responsible for it. As a solution to this problem he told the king of Kasi that his daughter by breaking his virtue would bring rainfall to the kingdom. The king persuaded his daughter to do so. Thus for the protection of his kingdom did he talk to his daughter of such things that was improper for a father to speak to his daughter. She was sent to the ascetic with ministers. She was made to go to Isisinga in the guise of an ascetic and dressing her in 'an outer and inner garment of beautiful bark adorned with all ornaments'. She herself consciously and was also made to seduce the ascetic. By her seductive power 'his virtue was overcome'. She went back after accomplishing the goal.<sup>1700</sup>

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<sup>1700</sup> *Jātaka* No. 526

A woman's modesty was compromised not only for her married life or progeny, but also in order to achieve other aims too. Her own father who was supposedly was meant to be her protector used her. The father was more concerned about his duty as a king and not as a father. That he sacrificed his daughter's virtue and modesty for the sake of the kingdom and his subjects made him a 'great' king, but a woman's dignity was not a concern at all.

A king could even kill his daughter for the sake of his kingdom. Killing his daughter and dividing her into six pieces was his justice as a king. Compromises and sacrifices was a part of a princess' life. Being a princess or a queen came with a heavy price, which was not considered wrong.<sup>1701</sup> In the kingdom of Kampilla there was a king named Cūḷani. Brahmādatta and his adviser was a *Brahmin* called Kevaṭṭa. They planned to control the whole of India and kill the kings by trick. But due to Mahosodha, the plan failed. It was due to Mahosodha that the king Vedeha's kingdom could not be captured. Kevaṭṭa wanted to take revenge on Mahosodha. So he decided to show his king's daughter Pañcālacaṇḍī to king Vedeha who will be attracted by her beauty and planned to kill both king Vedeha and Mahasodha. So they made the beauty and accomplishments of Pañcālacaṇḍī public through verses of poets hearing to which Vedeha will get attracted to her. And so the king sent for clever poets, and paid them richly, and showed them his daughter, bidding them make a poem on her beauty; and they made songs of exceeding great sweetness, and recited them to the king. He rewarded them richly.

The *Jātaka* stories show how susceptible the position of the queens and princesses were. A war was not only a fight between two kings, but it was also a battle for the

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<sup>1701</sup> Kusa who was born of the queen of King Okkāka and the boon of Sakka was ugly but was very wise. He was made the king. He had a beautiful wife. All these happened due to their activities in the past life. Her name was Pabhāvati. Kusa's mother made such a plan that she will be able to see her husband's face only after she conceives (that it was difficult for a woman to leave her husband after she conceives and had children). But when she discovered her husband's ugly appearance, she left him and went back to her parental house. Kusa followed her and tried to persuade her to come back. But he failed to do so after repeated attempts. When Sakka came to know that Kusa (Bodhisatta) was failing in his attempts he made a plan to revive Kusa's wife. He sent seven gods as seven kings to approach Pabhāvati's father to give her hand in marriage to one of them. When the seven gods arrived they acted as if they were rivalries and can go to war for her.

Pabhāvati's father when realized that if he would give his daughter in marriage to any one of them and thus ignoring the other six, his kingdom will be attacked. So he decided to kill his daughter and divide her into seven pieces. Kusa said, "While I am still alive, shall others come and carry off my bride?" and decided to fight them. Thus he could tolerate the injustice done to his daughter and decided to even his daughter for the sake of his kingdom. (*Jātaka* No.531)

queens and saving their modesty. Sometimes they were able to escape, but more often than not we see that they had to surrender themselves to the king who has conquered her husband's kingdom and act as the other man's spouse, as did Tārā in *Rāmāyāna*.

The *Mahā-Ummagga Jātaka*<sup>1702</sup> point toward the obstacles a queen had to go through in order to save herself from the clutches of another king, when her husband lost the war to him. It was not only a struggle to save her dignity and honour, but also to save her children. Saving her own modesty and 'virtue' meant she saved her husband's prestige and honour.

A king was killed by his own brother to claim his right to the throne. When the dead king's chief queen came to know about this, she dressed herself in soiled clothes and went out of the palace. She had the 'Great Being' in her womb. But she did not know the way outside as she never went out anywhere before and had great difficulty in using the compass for knowing the directions. A *Brahmin* saved her and her son was also born in the *Brahmin's* house. The *Brahmin* considered the queen as her sister.

The other boys called the queen's son as the widow's son. When prince Mahājanaka asked his mother what it meant, she did not tell him the truth, but said that he is the *Brahmin's* son. When he tried to know the truth, he knew that his mother is lying in order to save her honour. So while he was sucking her milk, he threatened to cut her breast. Then she told him that his father who was the king of Mithilā, king Ariṭṭhajanaka was killed by his brother Polajanaka. When he thought of seizing his father's kingdom back, he thought of making money with his mother's. King Polajanaka died and left behind a daughter. When he was about to die, the ministers asked as to who should be put to throne. He answered that one who would please his daughter, Sīvalīdevī or who powerful would be the king.

The modesty and chastity of the princesses and queens belonged to the kingdom. Sometimes they had to sacrifice their chastity, sometimes had to protect and sometimes compromise. They lead more of a contractual life, a contract in which she was treated a mere object to fulfil the needs of the androcentric society. If she was sacrificing her chastity to meet the patriarchal needs of the society, she was not

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<sup>1702</sup> *Jātaka No.546*

considered immoral, but if she transgressed for her own sexual or emotional need, then it was considered as a dichotomy.

The society was most apprehensive about women who transgressed from the path of chastity for herself – thus challenging the norms and ideals of the society. In most of the religious traditions we see that women were judged and punished for such an act. But in Buddhism we see that even women were rigorously punished.

### ***THE ‘FALLEN’ AND ‘IMPURE’***

The Master said, “*Brother, womankind are all ungrateful and treacherous; wise men of old were even so stupid as to give the blood from their own right knee for them to drink, and made them presents all their life long and yet did not win their hearts.*”<sup>1703</sup>

The concept of purity and impurity was construed by the society as per the social, economic and political conditions of the time. Gender roles too were perceived accordingly. The stringent control that was laid down for women shows the pivotal position she held in maintaining these concepts. The concept of purity and being impure was differed according to the gender, caste and social position. A woman transgressing out of her desire or liking was not accepted by the society as it would mean breaking the shackles that controlled them, whereas it was never a matter of concern for men. Women were naturally considered as disloyal, selfish and dangerous. It was the societal impositions and apprehensions that was said to make her chaste. As in the voice of an unfaithful wife the reason behind the loyalty of a wife is the scarcity of a suitable young man. She does not lose any opportunity to be with another man in order to satiate her boundless desires. We get the same essence in the Brahmā nical texts as well as in the Buddhist *Jātaka* stories.<sup>1704</sup>

A woman’s maintenance of virtue depended on her virtue of maintaining her loyalty and devotion towards her husband. The *Kurudhamma Jātaka*<sup>1705</sup> tells how the Bodhisatta when he was born from the queen consort of king Dhanañjaya was king of Indapatta City, in the Kuru kingdom was observing the Five Virtues of the Kurus. Along with him queen-mother, queen-consort, younger brother, viceroy, family priest, *brahmin*, driver, courtier, charioteer, treasurer, master of the granaries, noble, porter,

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<sup>1703</sup> *Jātaka* No. 193

<sup>1704</sup> Hāla’s *Sattasaī*, 399

<sup>1705</sup> *Jātaka* No.276

courtesan, slave-girl did the same. But as once the chief-consort's daughter-in-law fell in love with the king's viceroy, she fell from 'virtue' she could not maintain the Five Virtues.

The unfaithful wife is said to have trained the dog with food and water to keep silent when her lover comes and bark when her husband arrives.<sup>1706</sup> If her husband has arrived unexpectedly she introduces her husband as one who needs a shelter.<sup>1707</sup> Even her friends help her in this illicit extra marital affair.<sup>1708</sup> The 'loose' woman rebukes the 'virtuous' wife and accuses her that she is after the barber who is of lower status than her.<sup>1709</sup> It is the due to the 'angry' mother-in-law that the young wife has to stay locked indoors under her strict vigilance.<sup>1710</sup>

The young wife had to be aware of her 'clever' sisters-in-law.<sup>1711</sup> The wife can be with her lover when the 'nasty' dog is dead, her mother-in-law is 'drunk', her husband is out and while the buffalo has broken the bolt and the villagers will be busy getting hold of the buffalo or running away from it.<sup>1712</sup> She is afraid that the travellers might cut the hanging roots of the banyan tree to let light in and that her secret meeting place behind the banyan tree will be discovered. She is also afraid that her secret meeting place with her lover will not be hidden any more when the tree loses its leaves.<sup>1713</sup>

The husband feels so insecure regarding his wife that he does not allow her to gather sweet wood flowers at night. Instead the husband goes and gathers them.<sup>1714</sup> The young wife is said to have many options to make him incline towards them and satisfy her desires. The village is full of young men and the spring; youth plays an important role in making her deviate from the path of morality. That she has an aged husband and that the poet is mentioning about the different options she may avail reflects the unsatisfied desire of a young wife that might be mental or sexual. It is said that the only way to avoid this transgression is to die, thus indicating that how dangerous it might prove for the woman to deviate and succumb to her desires.<sup>1715</sup> Her husband

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<sup>1706</sup> Hāla's *Sattasāi*, 400

<sup>1707</sup> *Ibid*, 401

<sup>1708</sup> *Ibid*, 402

<sup>1709</sup> *Ibid*, 404

<sup>1710</sup> *Ibid*, 406-407

<sup>1711</sup> *Ibid*, 410

<sup>1712</sup> *Ibid*, 412

<sup>1713</sup> *Ibid*, 413-414

<sup>1714</sup> *Ibid*, 417

<sup>1715</sup> *Ibid*, 419

stays away for months.<sup>1716</sup> The immoral, ‘false’ wife moaned her husband’s death in such a way that even her lover thought that she might join her husband on his funeral pyre.<sup>1717</sup>

In order to validate the impositions on women, stories were composed accordingly to convince the society that such control over women was a necessity. At the same time women were shown to be of such vile nature that any kind of boundaries or limitations made them chaste in nature. The *Jātakas*, in particular proclaims that they should not be punished for such an act as it is their inherent nature to be unchaste. A woman can be clever enough to deviate even when she has been kept within the boundary of four walls, when her father is holding her hand and even when kept inside a box.<sup>1718</sup> But at the same time we see that the same text consists of stories where women are punished for such an act, the need to control them and the importance of a chaste woman is emphasised upon.

Once upon a time, when Brahmādatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born as the child of the Queen-consort. At his father's death, he became the king and also proved to be a righteous king. He used to play dice with his priest and, as he flung the golden dice upon the silver table, he would sing this catch for luck:-

*"Tis nature's law that rivers wind;  
Trees grow of wood by law of kind;  
And, given opportunity,*

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<sup>1716</sup> Hāla's *Sattasaī*, 420

<sup>1717</sup> *Ibid*, 421

<sup>1718</sup> While Bodhisatta lived an ascetic life, not far from his hut lived a demon. At this time a noble lady in the kingdom of Kāsi of ‘exceeding beauty’ settled in the frontier village. The *Asura* after seeing her fell in love with him and made the woman his wife. He took great care of her. In order to keep her safe he used to put her in a box and swallow it. One day while he was taking a bath, he kept the box outside and opened it and told his wife to enjoy the open air for some time. While his wife was sitting thus she saw the son of Vāyu with a sword who was a magician too. She made a signal with her hand asking him to come to her. She put him inside the box and sat over it. When her husband came, after he has put her inside it she covered the son of Vāyu with her garment and enjoyed sinfully with him. When the *Asura* came to meet Bodhisatta, Bodhisatta made him realise that there were two people inside the box.

The *Asura* knew that the son of Vayu could kill him by his magic. He then said that though he guarded her well, she proved to be a ‘wanton’. Though he took great care of her day and night, she ‘sinned’. Though he hid her and thought that she will be his only, but as being a ‘wanton’ was her real character that she ‘sinned’. He moreover said that it is foolish to think that a man can guard a woman and that he trusts his defence. The *Asura* also said that if one stays away from the path of womankind and her treachery, he can live a life without sorrow. It was due to her that the *Asura* was nearly killed by the son of Vāyu. But the Bodhisatta told him not to harm her and enter the Order and live an ascetic life. The *Asura* thought that as he could not safeguard her, none can. So he let her go. *Jātaka* No. 436

The above lines always made the king win the game and the chaplain used to lose every penny of his. In order to save himself, he decided to search for a ‘little maid’ who has never seen another man, and then to keep her locked in his house. But then he thought that it will be difficult to search for such a girl and that he would bring a new born baby who will grow under his guard and restrictions and thus will never see any other man and will be true to one man. And in this way he will win against the king. He was skilled in prophecy and seeing a poor woman who was about to become a mother knew that her child would be a girl He paid the woman to come and be confined in his house, and sent her away after her confinement with a present. This very indicates that women used to sell their womb or babies in order to acquire some kind of property or gifts or any other kind of earnings.

The infant was brought up entirely by women, and no men, other than himself. No one was ever allowed to set eyes on her. When the girl grew up, she was subject to him and he was her master. The priest's house was seven stories high, and had seven gateways. At each of which a guard was set – a guard of women only. No man but the Brahmin himself was allowed to enter. The very baskets that contained the dust and sweepings were examined before they were passed in. Only the *Brahmin* was allowed to see the girl, and she had only a single waiting-woman. When she was grown up and was under his own control he challenged the king to a game. The king accepted his challenge. But, when in throwing the dice the king sang his lucky catch, the priest added to it – ‘always excepting my girl’.<sup>1720</sup> And then fate changed and it was now the priest who won, while the king lost. The Bodhisatta suspected the priest had a ‘virtuous’<sup>1721</sup> girl in his house and enquiry proved him right. In order to make the girl fall from virtue, he called for a wicked and clever fellow to seduce the girl.

The man convinced the woman attendant that he has become ill due to the priest's wife and said that he desires the priest's wife as he has fallen in love by listening about her grace and beauty. The attendant wanted to help her son out. She went to the

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<sup>1719</sup> *Jātaka* No.62

<sup>1720</sup> *Jātaka* No.62

<sup>1721</sup> *Ibid*



priest's wife and said that her son has fallen in love with her by listening about her beauty. The priest's wife told her to bring his son into the house. But as no man, other than the priest was allowed to enter the house and meet her, the attendant brought her son by trick. She made the women-guard run away. When the boy entered the house, he made the priest's wife fall from virtue. He used to hide himself. When the priest used to come and enjoyed his wife when the priest went out. The priest's wife and her lover even planned to hit the Brahmin on his head and executed it too. Again with the help of the older woman, the boy could get out of the house.

The boy went to the king and told him everything. The king then challenged the *Brahmin*. When the king sang his lucky song, the *Brahmin* added his line to it, unaware of his wife's fall from virtue. The king told him that his line, 'except my wife' is not true anymore as his wife has fallen from virtue and even told him how his wife along with her lover has hit him on his head. The king said, "*No woman is ever faithful to one man alone. And also to...Learn hence to hold the sex (female) in fear.*"<sup>1722</sup>

The *Andabhūta Jātaka*<sup>1723</sup> throws light on the thinking and beliefs of the society regarding a woman's inherent character – that she needed to be controlled and not trusted/how a woman's purity of character could save a man and her transgression would harm him. It was the disbelief and the condemnation regarding a woman's morality that emerged victorious. The *Jātakas* repeatedly shows that even though women were locked within the boundaries of the four walls, but given a chance they would do anything to satisfy their lust. Even the *Purāṇas* convey the same belief that a woman remains chaste only out of compulsion. The story also brings out a significant issue, that of the behaviour of women belonging to the upper two classes – the *ksatriyas* and the *Brahmins*.

In the Epics or the *Purāṇas* we hardly see a *Brahmin* being sinfully involved in a sexual relationship with another man. But the *Jātakas* elucidates the other side of the picture. At the same time we also have to keep in mind that the *Jātakas* belong to the Buddhist tradition. It would be interesting to observe how the *Brahmins* and the

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<sup>1722</sup> *Jātaka* No.62

<sup>1723</sup> *Ibid*

women concerned were treated. Regarding the kings, the queen was supposedly the ideal for other women. Rahula's mother and Buddha's wife was shown to be a *pativrata* woman. The king was responsible to maintain fidelity in the society and incur justice whenever a situation demanded so. A queen was punished by her husband in front of the royal court when she was involved in an infidel relationship. Such an act not only showed the importance of a woman's moralistic character but also the role of a king in maintaining so. We can compare such a situation with that of Draupadī's story in *Mahābhārata* wherein her modesty was threatened by another man, who was the brother-in-law of a king while she and her husbands were in exile. In the story the king failed to give justice to her. While in the *Jātakas* we see that women are publicly demeaned by the king along with her lover (in some cases), thus announcing the importance of a chaste woman in spite of despising her innate nature.

The general belief that prevailed which is not only reflected in the *Jātakas*, but also in the Epics and the *Purāṇas* is that a woman in order to satiate her lust could even approach an ugly hump-backed man, even if she had a loving and handsome husband – a woman is always in hunt for another man. Nothing concerned her, when she had to meet her desires – neither a man's caste, social position nor his physical deformities. Numerous stories have been narrated in the *Jātakas* that imply the same.<sup>1724</sup>

Brahmādatta, the king of Kasi after slaying a king carried away his chief queen who was pregnant and made her his consort. She gave birth to a daughter. When she grew up she wanted a *swayamvara* to be held for her. In that *swayamvara* she chose five husbands for herself out of lust. They were Arjuna, Nakula, Bhīmasena, Yudhiṣṭhira and Sahadeva, sons of king Pāṇḍu. By her deceitful trick she impressed each man by

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<sup>1724</sup> *Jātaka* No.536

The wife of king of Kosala, who was the daughter of king of Benares got sinfully involved with men lower than her in status and position.

The wife of king of Benares was attracted towards a cripple and taking up all sorts of risks used to meet him and got sexually involved with him. The chaplain of the king of Benares proved to him that all women are same and told him to forgive the queen. Though he forgave the queen, he had her thrown out of the palace, brought a new queen for him and got the cripple being driven away from there. He also ordered the tree to be chopped which his former wife used to get down to the crippled so that his present wife may not do the same. *Jātaka* No. 536

making them believe that she loved him more than the other. She had a hump-backed slave, with whom she got 'sinfully involved' when her husband were not there. In order to convince the slave of her love she would smear his feet with the blood of her husbands. But her husbands discovered her deceitful act and how she cheated on them for the hump-backed slave. They left her and retired to the forest.<sup>1725</sup> It is quite striking that given the socio-cultural structure of the period of the *Jātakas*, a woman was allowed to choose five husbands for herself.

It was considered as an innate nature of women to be lustful and disloyal. The above story has a similar structure with that of the story of Draupadī in *Mahābhārata*, wherein she was also married to five men, but not out of self-choice, she was rather made to, distributing her as alms. She took great care of her five husbands, the Pandavas, but never deceived them. Being a strong character, she took a stand when her modesty was at stake and was attacked by another man. She never forgave a man who tried to sexually assault her and even supported a war for vengeance. But on the other hand, the woman in the *Jātaka* story chose five husbands out of lust, a self-choice for her own benefit, thus challenging the norms and traditions of the society. She even won the trust of her husbands deceitfully. But at last she was ready to kill them for a hump-backed slave. It was traditionally believed that in order to satiate her lust, a woman could approach an ugly hump-backed man, even if she had a loving and handsome husband, she is always on a hunt for another man.

In every such stories there is a deliberate attempt to show that whether a woman is married or an ascetic she is fallen and immoral and gets sexually involved with crippled, ugly men and men who are lower in status and in position. It is shown that it is easy to lure a woman owing to her inherent infidel nature. In one of the stories we find that a young girl is temporarily involved with a king. She is shown to be without any regret, resentment or shame.

In another story king of Kosala after seizing the kingdom of Benares took away the chief queen who was pregnant. She gave birth to a son. The king of Kosala did not have any children of his own, so he was very fond of her when he grew up; he gave back the kingdom of his father to him. The queen when longed to see him, on the way

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<sup>1725</sup> *Jātaka* No. 536

of her journey dwelt in a town that was in between two kingdoms. There she met a young *Brahmin* and got sexually involved with him. On many occasions, on the pretext of meeting her son she met her lover.<sup>1726</sup>

In one of the *Jātaka* stories a woman who was the daughter of a gatekeeper of a palace was married to a king named Baka. Due to her divine touch, though she was ugly, the king got infatuated with her. Due to jealousy of other queens, she was sent off by the king. Another king called Pāvāriya saved her.

The two kings made a deal that they will share her and will not go to war for a woman. Being her first husband she belonged to Baka, but from her having rescued from the ship she belonged to Pāvāriya. While she had to cross a river to go to another king, she got sexually involved with the driver of the ship.<sup>1727</sup> Thus being considered to be innately sinful in nature made her a puppet in the patriarchal world. In one of the stories the daughter of a poor man, who had the appearance of a she-goblin acquired a soft touch because of helping out the *paccekabuddha*. The king of Benares, Baka fell into the trap of her touch and ignored other wives. The co-wives in order to get rid of her planned against her and proved her to be harmful for the king through the interpreters of dreams. The king then placed her on a ship and sent her away. King Pāvāriya fell for her touch and made her the chief consort. But King Baka could not accept this. But their councillors advised them not to go for a war for a woman.

Though the *Jātakas* story shows how Buddhism brought about caste liberation – that a woman of lowly position was able to marry a man of a much higher status (even a king), but at the same time it does not deviate from the traditional belief regarding women. Though women were given the choice of economic and spiritual liberation but the fundamental conviction never changed. Though the story shows that it was the patriarchal decision that had an existence, but at the same time by stating that she transgressed by getting involved with the driver of a ship, implies that a woman was worthy of such a treatment.

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<sup>1726</sup> Jātaka No. 536

<sup>1727</sup> Ibid

One queen was described as a sinner in front of her ministers after her husband came to know about her adultery. He disposed her from the status of queen consort and made someone else his consort.<sup>1728</sup>

Women were shown to be so vicious that she could even kill her husband who gave his blood by cutting his own knee in order to save her. Men were warned of them and were advised not to have any attachment with women as they were considered inherently dangerous. In one of his births, Bodhisatta was born to king Brahmadata of Benares. He had six other brothers. The king being anxious about their life told them to leave the kingdom and come back when they hear about his death. They went to a forest where they did not get anything to eat or drink. Being unable to bear hunger, they decided to survive at the women's cost. They got hold of the younger brother's wife and thus cut her and divided her into thirteen parts.

Bodhisatta and his wife kept aside one part. In this way, every time a wife was killed, they kept aside one part. Thus when it was Bodhisatta's wife's turn, he gave them the six parts they kept aside. They escaped when his brothers were asleep. While they were running away, the wife felt thirsty but there was not any water to quench her thirst. His wife insisted on quenching her thirst. So Bodhisatta cut his right knee and gave his blood to his wife. In the meantime a robber whose hands, feet and nose and ears were cut off as a punishment was laid in a canoe and was drifted down the river.

Bodhisatta's hut was at the bend of the river. He out of pity and kindness kept him in his hut. He collected fruits both for him and his wife. His wife fell in love with the robber and she decided to kill her husband for her lover. But Bodhisatta survived and consequently became the king.

The 'wicked' wife took her lover on her shoulders and begged for livelihood. When people asked about the robber, she said that he was her father's sister's son and the family gave him to her. And said, "*Even if he were doomed to death I would take my husband upon my shoulders, and care for him, and beg food for his living.*"<sup>1729</sup> People thought her to be a very devoted wife and advised her to go to the king of Benares

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<sup>1728</sup> *Jātaka* No. 536

<sup>1729</sup> *Jātaka* No. 193

(who was her husband) as impressed her; the king would give her gifts. When she went to the king, he recognised her and told about her truth in the court.<sup>1730</sup>

He said,

*"...women deserve to die..."*

*"With a great club beat out the scoundrel's life  
Who lies in wait to steal his neighbour's wife.  
Then take the faithful harlot by and bye,  
And shear off nose and ears before she die."<sup>1731</sup>*

But the punishment was not meted out accordingly. He had the basket fixed upon her head so fast that she could not take it off and both were driven out of the kingdom.

Kākāti was the chief queen of Bodhisatta, while he was reigning in Benares. She was 'lovely as an *apsarā*.'<sup>1732</sup> At this time a Garuḍa king came disguised as a man, and played dice with the king of Benares. He fell in love with Kākāti and carried her off with him to the dwelling place of the Garuḍas and 'lived happily with her'.<sup>1733</sup> The king missing her, told his musician, Naṭakuvera to search her. When he found out the queen, he enjoyed queen Kākāti's favours and returned home. When the Garuḍa king again came to play dice with king Bodhisatta, the Bodhisatta told the Garuḍa king in the form of song how he enjoyed the queen. Then the Garuḍa king brought the queen and gave her back.<sup>1734</sup>

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<sup>1730</sup> *Jātaka* No. 193

<sup>1731</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1732</sup> *Jātaka* No. 327

<sup>1733</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1734</sup> *Ibid*

A king named Tambā was ruling in Benares and his chief queen, Sussondī was of 'surpassing beauty'. At that time Bodhisatta was born as a young Garuḍa. He went to Benares and played dice with king Tambā. Being impressed by his beauty, people talked about him and when the queen heard about him, she longed to see him. She adorned herself. After going to the dice-chamber, she stared at the young man, though she was amongst her attendants. He too fixed his gaze on her and fell in love with each other.

The Garuḍa king by means of his power raised a storm in the city and made the whole city dark. Thus without the knowledge of any he carried away the queen to his abode and enjoyed her. King Tambe, being unaware of this and not seeing the queen, told his minister to search the queen everywhere. When he reached the Garuḍa kingdom Sussondī saw him. Whenever the Garuḍa king went to play dice, she used to come down from her place of abode. When Sussondī saw him, she embraced him, took him to her abode and also took pleasures with him. Whenever the Garuḍa king used to come back, she hid her lover. Saga when went back to his king, he saw his king and the Garuḍa king playing dice. He told the Garuḍa king about his affair with Sussondī. Then the Garuḍa king realised that though he kept her aloof in an island, he could not prevent her from performing such a sinful activity and guard her safely. Then he returned her to king Tambā. (*Jātaka* No 360)

The king had to go away from his queen, kingdom and palace for a battle. He made Paduma, the in-charge. While he was away, the king's wife fell desirous of Paduma and approached him. Paduma told her that it is sinful that a mother should approach her son with such a sinful intention. But she said she is not his mother and while the king is away, they should enjoy each other. When Bodhisatta denied her proposal, she said she would have him beheaded. When the king returned she dressed herself in soiled cloth and acted as if she was ill. She told him that Paduma has approached her and when she did not accept his proposal, he tortured her.

Without making any investigation the king sentenced his son to be beheaded. Everyone told him that his son is a good man and not to slay him on a woman's word. Being advised so; he said the whole world was on one side and his queen on the other. Hearing these words, his sixteen thousand wives lamented and tore their hair. While he was thrown down from the cliff he was saved by the deity that dwelt in the cliff and later the king of the serpents. Thus saved, he proceeded to the Himalayas and led an ascetic life. The king went to meet his son and when he realised his mistake he had the queen sentenced to death. After her death, the king is said to rule justifiably.<sup>1735</sup>

A certain courtier got sinfully involved in the royal harem. The king when found about it he told the Buddha about it. The Buddha asked him how useful is the courtier to him and whether he loves the woman in his life. The Buddha said that one should not harm a servant when he is useful and the woman is dear.<sup>1736</sup>

A queen was said to be involved in an illicit relationship with sixty-four slaves. She also tried to tempt the Bodhisatta, but when he did not surrender himself to her, she made defamed statements about him, due to which, the king threw him into the prison. When Bodhisatta was brought before the king, he told him about the whole incident. Thus he was set free. Bodhisatta also made the other slaves set free. Bodhisatta advised the king to forgive both the queen and the slaves.<sup>1737</sup>

Queen Kiṅṅarā, wife of the king of Benares named Kaṇḍari misconducted with a cripple who sat outside her window. Even when the cripple treated her rudely for coming late to him, she was apologetic and submissive. When the king decided to

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<sup>1735</sup> *Jātaka* No. 472

<sup>1736</sup> *Jātaka* No. 195

<sup>1737</sup> *Jātaka* No. 220

chop her head off, the chaplain told the king to forgive her, as all women are immoral and in order to prove this he took him to the country. When the king left the country for the tour, he handed over his kingdom to his mother.<sup>1738</sup>

A queen who was the wife of Brahmādatta misconducted with another royal groom. When the king came to know about this he summoned her in front of other ministers and made her adultery known in front of everyone.<sup>1739</sup>

Cūḷani's father was named Mahācūḷanī; and when the child was young, the mother committed adultery with the priest Chambhī. She then poisoned her husband and made the *brahmin* king in his place, and became his queen.<sup>1740</sup>

The text narrates a story about a woman of Sāvatti who have been the wicked wife of a good and virtuous *Brahmin*, a lay-brother. She used to spend nights going from place to place in the pursuit of pleasure. She never used to do any work and acted as if she was ill. When her husband asked the reason behind, she said it was the wind. The *Brahmin* served her like a 'slave'.<sup>1741</sup> While her husband was in the house, she used to lie on the bed and when he was away she was with her paramours. He went to Bodhisatta and told him that it was due to serving his wife that he does not get time to visit him. Then Bodhisatta told him how wicked his wife is, but it was not the case now, but she was of such character in the previous birth too. In the previous birth too, the wife acted as if she was ill and did not perform any household duties and spent her time with her lovers.

Bodhisatta told the *Brahmin* a way which would make and threaten his wife to do work. She was terrified by the options her husband provided her with and she understood that it was Bodhisatta's advice. Being apprehensive of Bodhisatta and that it is impossible to deceive him that she started doing her work. And the realization that the master knew of her wickedness and sinful activities made her repent, and become as good as she had formerly been wicked.<sup>1742</sup>

Neither impositions nor old age could lessen a woman's desires. She did lose any opportunity to fulfil her sexual desires. Even in one of the Buddha's birth stories

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<sup>1738</sup> *Jātaka* No. 536

<sup>1739</sup> *Jātaka* No. 536

<sup>1740</sup> *Jātaka* No. 546

<sup>1741</sup> *Jātaka* No. 130

<sup>1742</sup> *Ibid*



Buddha's mother succumbs to her sexual needs and does not feel ashamed to cater to her needs from a young man.

Bodhisatta's mother was old and he used to take great care of her – bathed, fed and tended her. For doing so, he was contempt by his neighbours. He then decided to live in the forest with his mother. In order to make his disciple teach the wickedness of women he told him to bathe his mother and while washing her he told her to say the following words: “*As you rub her hands, feet, head and back, be careful to exclaim, 'Ah, Madam! if you are so lovely now you are so old, what must you not have been in the heyday of your youth!' And as you wash and perfume her hands and feet, burst into praise of their beauty.*”<sup>1743</sup> And told him to tell without any shame whatever his mother tells him. If he disobeys him, he will stay ignorant. He did so.

When his mother asked the disciple whether he desires her, he said yes but he is apprehensive about it as his master is very strict. Thus the mother wanted to kill her own son for the person she thought loved her. Her son tricked her, thinking a piece of wood to be her son. When she came to know that she is tricked by her son, she died. Thus he taught his disciple how ‘lustful’ and ‘vile’ women are. They can become so ‘lustful’ and ‘degraded’ that they can kill their own son for it. When the disciple returned back home he announced to his parents that he will renounce the family life and become an ascetic after knowing how women are.<sup>1744</sup>

A *Brahmin's* wife was involved in an adulterous relationship. She made her husband eat the leftovers of her lover. But when the *Brahmin* found about his wife's infidelity he beat them both and taught them a lesson that they did not dare to do it again.<sup>1745</sup>

*Sujāta Jātaka*<sup>1746</sup> is a story about Sujātā, a daughter-in-law of Anātha-piṇḍika, daughter of a great merchant Dhananjaya, and younger sister of Visākhā. The Master and five hundred brothers visited Anātha-piṇḍika's house. Sujāta did not treat her husband or her in-laws properly. She did not give any alms, was termed as ‘faithless’ and ‘unbelieving’.

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<sup>1743</sup> *Jātaka* No. 61

<sup>1744</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1745</sup> *Jātaka* No. 212

<sup>1746</sup> *Jātaka* No. 269

Bodhisatta was born as the son of a householder. When he was of proper age, he was married off. His wife was a ‘wicked’ woman and was involved with the village headman. When the Bodhisatta came to know about it, he tried to test her. When he caught them red-handed he took the village headman by neck and threw him out of the house. He pulled his wife by hair, knocked her down and threatened her – “*If you ever do this kind of thing again, I’ll make you remember it!*” From that day onwards, the woman did not dare to ‘transgress even in thought’.<sup>1747</sup>

In another story we again see that a wife cheats over her husband for a robber. But in this case the robber leaves her as he feared that she might kill him too for another man, thus the story focussing on the inherent nature of a woman – she is never to be trusted owing to her selfish and fickle mind. Even Sakka intervenes to teach her a lesson.<sup>1748</sup>

### ***THE PROSTITUTES, COURTESANS, DANCING GIRLS AND THE FEMALE SLAVES***

The section discusses about those particular women whose body, beauty, talent and service was not owned exclusively by one man. These women traded themselves in exchange of some kind of support, mostly financial. They did not depend on any man for their survival. Their honour and recognition in the society is somewhat vulnerable. As their life (except those of female slaves) could not be controlled by the patriarchal world, the society was always apprehensive about them, questioning their character, morality and loyalty. They were in a way challenging the norms of the society. In the *Purāṇas* we see that they were mostly degraded upon, but later were recognised and donations were accepted by them. In the *Jātakas* they are not insulted in a direct manner and are recognised as a profession. The author of the *Sattasāi* praises the prostitutes for the enamoured attention she gets, for administering to the sexual needs

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<sup>1747</sup> *Jātaka* No. 199

<sup>1748</sup> There was a young Brahmin of Benares, who attained proficiency in archery. The youth acquired skill equal to his master. The master gave his daughter to the youth. When they were on their way to Benares, they were attacked by robbers. In the interrogation process, the wife fell in love with the robber chief and got her husband killed. The robber later realised that she can kill him too for another man. So by trick he left her alone taking all her ornaments with him. The Sakka tried to teach her a lesson. (*Jātaka* No.374)

with her artful grace and ways.<sup>1749</sup> A sort of hierarchy was maintained amongst them also.

The *Kurudhamma Jātaka* tells how the Bodhisatta when he was born from the queen consort of king Dhanañjaya was king of Indapatta City, in the Kuru kingdom was observing the Five Virtues of the Kurus. Along with him queen-mother, queen-consort, younger brother, viceroy, family priest, brahmin, driver, courtier, charioteer, treasurer, master of the granaries, noble, porter, courtesan, slave-girl did the same.<sup>1750</sup> The very mention of courtesans and slave-girls along with other socially recognised groups shows how they were accepted within the Buddhist realm.

There is mention of dancing women in the *Jātakas*. Dancing girls were called upon by the royals to acquire progeny. The *Gandhāra Jātaka*<sup>1751</sup> mentions the *nāṭakitthī*, while the *Kummāsapiṇḍa Jātaka* mentions *nāṭakīgaṇ*. A king called Mahājanaka who ruled all over the kingdoms of Videha is described as ‘wise’.<sup>1752</sup> He is said to be surrounded by dancing girls (*nāṭakitthīs*) along with a group of ministers, *Brahmins* and merchants. Once a king ordered his officials to send dancing girls into the streets “*of low degree, giving the act a religious sanction*”<sup>1753</sup> for a son. If they failed he told them to send dancing girls of high ranking. Even after this no son was born. The reason given by his subjects was that as these women were ‘immoral’ and ‘void of merit’ they did not conceive.<sup>1754</sup> They did not protest when the king summoned them to be sent, but when they did not conceive that they found them immoral.<sup>1755</sup>

The dancing girls were also used to attract a prince and bind him to the worldly and sexual passion for the welfare of the royal lineage and kingdom. Bodhisatta, the king of Benares was childless. When the king and queen offered prayer for a son, Bodhisatta was born to them. But he was not involved in any kind of pleasure which made the king anxious. There was a dancing girl who could allure any man and she told the king that she would impress the prince. The king said if she will be successful in alluring the prince, then when the prince will be consecrated as the king, she would become the chief consort. The prince was impressed by her and resolved that he

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<sup>1749</sup> Hāla’s *Sattasaī*, 203

<sup>1750</sup> *Jātaka* No. 276

<sup>1751</sup> *Jātaka* No. 406

<sup>1752</sup> *Jātaka* No. 539

<sup>1753</sup> *Jātaka* No. 531

<sup>1754</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1755</sup> *Ibid*

would not let another man have this woman and taking his sword ran through the street, chasing people. The king banished him along with the girl. But later she got involved with a hermit while she was still with Bodhisatta. At the end of the story it was the immoral character of a woman that was made responsible for such a transgression.<sup>1756</sup>

Courtesans were often shown to be wealthy and were also connected to the king and royal palace. The queens often tried using concubines for alluring their husband and prevent them from adopting the ascetic life. In one of the towns, not far from Aranjara there was river in which many men used to bathe. Courtesans used to sit along the bank of the river, thus tempting the men.<sup>1757</sup>

Senaka, a royal priest had a secret – in the sāl-grove, he laid with a harlot and afterwards killed her to get her ornaments.<sup>1758</sup>

Bodhisatta was born in a family of a householder under the star of a robber. When he grew up he lived by robbery. No one could catch him. The robber was caught by the king's men who ordered his men to cut off his head. At this time there lived in Benares, a courtesan named, Sāmā, whose price was a thousand pieces of money. She was a favourite of the king's and owned five hundred female slaves. As she stood at an open window she saw the robber being taken. The robber had a 'god-like appearance'. She fell in love with him. She thought to herself, "*By what device can I secure this man for my husband?*"<sup>1759</sup> She sent thousand pieces of money in the hands of her female attendants to be given to the governor for freeing the robber. But the governor refused and said he can do so if a man can be found as a substitute for him.

Now there was a rich merchant who was 'enamoured' by Sāmā and used to give her thousand pieces of money every day. She told the merchant that the robber is her brother and that he never used to visit her as people considered her work as a 'vile trade'.<sup>1760</sup> She lied to the merchant that the governor sent a word to her that if he receives thousand pieces of money, he would set his brother free and that she cannot find anyone to send the money. So the merchant went to the governor. The governor

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<sup>1756</sup> *Jātaka* No. 263

<sup>1757</sup> *Jātaka* No. 423

<sup>1758</sup> *Jātaka* No.546

<sup>1759</sup> *Jātaka* No. 318

<sup>1760</sup> *Ibid*

hid the young merchant in a secret place and the robber was sent to Sāmā. The merchant was executed.

Sāmā spent her time enjoying with the robber only. But the robber thought, “*If this woman should fall in love with anyone else, she will have me put to death, and take her pleasure with her.*”<sup>1761</sup> So he decided to escape. While running away he decided to take some ornaments of the courtesan. By deceiving her, he took her ornaments. But the courtesan did not realise the fact that her ‘lord’ robbed her and ran away. Being in grief, she decided that she will not rest on a couch till he sees her and will lie on the ground. She did not put on her attractive garments; neither did eat more than one meal nor enjoy any kind of pleasures. To recover her lover, she gave money to actors (who visited every town, village and city) and taught them to sing a song and told them if her ‘husband’ would be there, he will speak to them and also told them to bring him back.

The robber when met the actors, acted as if he did not believe that Sāmā is alive. The actors replied that Sāmā is alive and she would not wed another man. On hearing this, the robber replied:

*“Sāmā’s fancy ever roves  
From tried faith to lighter loves:  
Me too Sāmā would betray,  
Were I not to flee away.”*<sup>1762</sup>

Sāmā after listening to this began her old course of life.<sup>1763</sup>

Even after she saved the robber and cared for him, the robber was not convinced of her love and loyalty. She considered the robber her husband and tried getting him back in every possible way. But as in most of the *Jātaka* stories, it was the character of a woman that was stigmatised. It was through her resources that the robber was saved and even when he ran away, he robbed her of her ornaments. These courtesans were dependent on their own resources and were rarely dependent on the patriarchal norms to acquire a position in the society.

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<sup>1761</sup> *Jātaka* No. 318

<sup>1762</sup> Ibid

<sup>1763</sup> Ibid

Sulasā had five hundred courtesans under her whose price was a thousand pieces a night. She fell for a robber and when he was caught by the king's guards, she tried rescuing him and thought of leaving her 'bad'<sup>1764</sup> life and live a respectful life with him. Sulasā gave thousand pieces to the chief constable and made him free and lived with him. But the robber tried to kill her and rob her of her ornaments. Then she reminded him of how she made him free from the clutches of the royal guards and left a rich man's son for him and that for him even though she might get thousand pieces, she would not look at another man. In order to save herself she said that she will give all her money to him and be her slave. But he denied her proposal. Through her wisdom she managed to save herself and killed the man. In her previous birth too, her wisdom saved her wherein a man tried to kill her for an ornament which she borrowed from a queen. The Buddha narrated the story in order to imply that even women have wisdom. He said:

*"Wisdom at times is not confined to men:  
A woman can shew wisdom now and then.*

*Wisdom at times is not confined to men:  
Women are quick in counsel now and then.<sup>1765</sup>*

Both the courtesans, Sāmā<sup>1766</sup> and Sulasā wanted to have a marital life and leave the life of a courtesan.<sup>1767</sup>

The *Takkāriya Jātaka*<sup>1768</sup> narrates a story about a *nagarasobhanī* in Benares called Kālī who earned thousand pieces of money in a day. She had a brother named Tuṇḍila. He did not earn and wasted his life. She used to give him money. She tried to restrain him, but could not stop him. Kālī's house has been called a house of 'ill-fame'.<sup>1769</sup> The men who visited that house received garments to clothe themselves in and stayed the night there and on the next they used to put off the garments they received and put on their own clothes and went away. The courtesans are shown to be rich and prosperous who had servants of their own and also had full control on the men who visited them. Kālī did not allow her brother to enter her house when he was beaten up. They maintained a lifestyle and rules which were crafted by them.

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<sup>1764</sup> *Jātaka* No. 419

<sup>1765</sup> *Jātaka* No. 419

<sup>1766</sup> *Jātaka* No. 318

<sup>1767</sup> *Jātaka* No. 419

<sup>1768</sup> *Jātaka* No. 481

<sup>1769</sup> *Ibid*

Buddhism did not recognise merit earned based on birth or caste, but gave importance to those who earned wealth based on their own talent and calibre. It might be the case that based on this reason that these courtesans and dancing girls were recognised as a profession under Buddhism.

A courtesan, ‘beautiful and prosperous’ lived in Benares.<sup>1770</sup> A rich merchant’s son Mahādhana used to give her thousand pieces daily and took his pleasure from her. After his father died, he succeeded to his father’s position. But he did not leave her and continued dallying with her. One day when he went to her, he did not have money with him. He told the courtesan that the next day he would give her two thousand pieces. But she did not accept his deal as she thought that if she would allow her today, he might come empty handed every day. She said, “...*I am but a courtesan: I do not give my favours without a thousand prices: you must bring the sum.*”<sup>1771</sup> He spent eighty crores of money on her, but as he came empty-handed for one day, the courtesan denied him an entry and insulted him. Mahādhana started brood about the characteristics of women – that they are wicked, shameless, ungrateful and treacherous. Feeling disgusted about the qualities of women he decided to leave the life of a lay man and adopt the life of an ascetic. He left the city and went into the forest. But the courtesan’s behaviour was known throughout the city. Mahādhana was a close friend of the king. When he came to know about the incident he ordered the courtesan to find his friend or else she will be punished.<sup>1772</sup>

In the *Vaṭṭaka Jātaka*<sup>1773</sup> a girl was picked out and dressed and was left in the quarter of a Treasurer’s wife by his friends during Kattikā festival who were all married. The Treasurer’s son who lived in the Brahmā realm did not feel such a passion for such things. He rather than getting into any kind of involvement with her gave her money and sent her away. As she went out a nobleman saw her and gave her a present to accompany him home. But when the young woman did not return to her home, her mother first went to the young merchant’s home who sent her to the merchant. When the matter reached the ears of the king he ordered him to get executed. When the girl came to know about this and showed herself to the king’s men, she was handed over

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<sup>1770</sup> *Jātaka* No. 425

<sup>1771</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1772</sup> *Jātaka* No. 425

<sup>1773</sup> *Jātaka* No. 118

to her mother. The merchant while in the cṚṣi s realised that he was in such a situation only because he was a layman and if given a chance he would join the Order.

Though the courtesans were economically independent, but they also faced crisis in regard to their profession. In the *Gāmaṇī Caṇḍa Jātaka*<sup>1774</sup> we find mention of a *gāṇika* who is facing an economic crisis. She sent a message to the king conveying about her difficult situation. The king says that as she does not serve men who pay her but instead serve others that she is facing such a crisis. Thus the king was aware of such cṚṣi s that such women faced. There might have been a customary law which she transgressed and thus met with such a difficulty in her profession. The *Kurudhamma Jātaka*<sup>1775</sup> tells how the Bodhisatta when he was born from the queen consort of king Dhanañjaya who was king of Indapatta City, in the Kuru kingdom was observing the Five Virtues of the Kurus. Along with him queen-mother, queen-consort, younger brother, viceroy, family priest, brahmin, driver, courtier, charioteer, treasurer, master of the granaries, noble, porter, courtesan, slave-girl did the same. But once in a nearby kingdom there was famine. Thus the king's men went to the city of Indapatta to earn virtue. They went to the queen-mother, queen-consort, younger brother, viceroy, family priest, *brahmin*, driver, courtier, charioteer, treasurer, master of the granaries, noble and the porter before visiting the courtesan. Every one of them denied maintaining virtue due to some fault in their behaviour. The porter told them to go to a courtesan (*vannadāsī*) who maintains it. But like others she too denied it for the following reason:

Sakka, king of the gods in order to test her 'goodness' taking the guise of a youth gave her a thousand pieces, saying, "*I will come by and bye.*"<sup>1776</sup> Then he returned to heaven, and did not meet her for three years. And she, in order to maintain her honour, for three years did not accept anything from any other man. She got poorer and then she thought, "*I cannot keep body and soul together*"<sup>1777</sup>."

The courtesan decided to go to the the Chief Justices so that she gets her wage as before. She went to the court and narrated the whole incident to the Chief Justices. He said, "*If he does not come for three years, what can you do? Earn your wage as*

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<sup>1774</sup> *Jātaka* No.257

<sup>1775</sup> *Jātaka* No.276

<sup>1776</sup> *Jātaka* No.276

<sup>1777</sup> *Ibid*



before.”<sup>1778</sup> As soon as she left the court a man approached her and offered her a thousand. As she was about to receive it she held out her hands to take it. Then Sakka showed himself. Then she said “*Here is the man who gave me a thousand pieces three years ago, I must not take your money.*”<sup>1779</sup> And she drew back her hand. Then Sakka took his real form and everyone in the city gathered there. Sakka, in the midst of the crowd, said, “*To test her goodness I gave her a thousand pieces three years ago. Be like her, and like her keep your honour.*”<sup>1780</sup> He then filled her with jewels of seven kinds. Thus elaborating on her fall from virtue she said, “*Because before I had earned one wage I held out my hand for another, therefore my virtue is not perfect, and so I cannot give it to you.*”<sup>1781</sup> But the messengers replied, “*Merely to hold out the hand is not a breach of virtue, that virtue of yours is the highest perfection!*”<sup>1782</sup> And from her, as from the rest, they received the rules of virtue on their golden plate.

The *Kurudhamma Jātaka* thus not only elaborates how devoted the courtesan is to her profession but also indicates that even she maintained her loyalty and virtue even when she was into a profession where she traded her body with more than one man. The same essence can be found in the *Padma Purāṇa* where a *veśyā* elaborates how chaste she is. The reason she enumerates is that when she is engaged in providing service to one man, she does not engage with any other man, in the same way a *pativrātā* woman does. A *pativrātā* does not get involved with any man other than her husband. She serves her husband only. Here also the courtesan while she received money for her service from a man she did not involve herself with any other customer as she did not render any service to the payer.

### **EMBODYING THE PATRIARCHAL WORLD**

It is said that even wise men, who did not commit any sin for seven hundred years transgressed by hearing to a woman’s voice.<sup>1783</sup> It was always the female voice that was demeaned, controlled and subdued. The man was never held responsible for such an act.

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<sup>1778</sup> *Jātaka* No.276

<sup>1779</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1780</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1781</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1782</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1783</sup> *Jātaka* No. 159

The concept of male chastity differed from the idea and practice that prevailed for women. For women to have more than one man in her life was a taboo, whereas it was considered as a natural behaviour for men. Though infidelity was not encouraged for both men and women, but in such cases women were more stigmatised. It was not a compulsion for men to maintain loyalty and devotion for one woman. As in Hāla's *Sattasaī* and in the *Jātakas* we see that men could maintain more than one wife and even have multiple relationships outside the institution of marriage. The *Jātakas* show that it was a necessity to have more than one wife, the number exceeding to even three hundred<sup>1784</sup> and sixteen thousand also (in case of royal male members). And when a king failed to acquire progeny from them he could establish relations with other women. But it is important to observe that in the *Jātakas* we do find that both the wife and the offender gets victimised. But if the offender is Bodhisatta, he is not punished or abused. Rather he is made to realise that he should free himself of such passion and lust and it is the women who is victimised for getting him trapped in the illusion of passion.

A backsliding brother once when went on his rounds for alms, was attracted to a beautiful woman and decided to revert from the religious path of salvation.<sup>1785</sup> It was the woman who was termed to be harmful and an obstacle in his journey not only in his present birth but in his previous one too.

Bodhisatta, the king of Benares was childless. When the king and queen offered prayer for a son, Bodhisatta was born to them. But he was not involved in any kind of pleasure which made the king anxious. There was a dancing girl who could allure any man and she told the king that she would impress the prince. The king said if she will be successful in alluring the prince, then when the prince will be consecrated as the king, she would become the chief consort. The prince was impressed by her and resolved that he would not let another man have this woman and taking his sword chased people. The king banished him along with the girl. One day a hermit came to the hut and became passionate towards her. When Bodhisatta saw him, he chased the ascetic and fell down into the sea. Then the Bodhisatta thought:

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<sup>1784</sup> The Naga king had three hundred wives. (Jātaka No.524)  
Bodhisatta was born as king Sudassana. Subhaddā was his chief queen. There were eighty-four thousand women in his harem.  
(Jātaka No 95)

<sup>1785</sup> *Jātaka* No. 310

*“Not through the sea, but by your magic power,  
You journeyed hither at an earlier hour;  
Now by a woman’s evil company  
You have been made to plunge beneath the sea.”<sup>1786</sup>*

As the ascetic heard these words, he stood up in the midst of the sea, broke the illusion of passion and rose up through air and went away to his dwelling place. Seeing him, Bodhisatta also decided to free himself.<sup>1787</sup>

A similar storyline exists in another *Jātaka* story where again Bodhisatta himself gets sinfully involved with the queen. When the news of such an activity spreads and reaches the king, the king does not believe anyone, but the Bodhisatta. In the story Bodhisatta was born in a Brahmin family. After his parents’ death and donating his wealth he adopted the religious mode of life. In Benares, he stayed in the king’s palace. After seeing the Queen naked, he felt lustful towards her and got sexually involved with her. When the king heard about this, he neither believed his ministers nor his queen. It was only after Bodhisatta told him about the involvement that he believed and rather than punishing Bodhisatta or the unfaithful queen, the king helped him in coming out the ‘sinful passion’ he was involved in.<sup>1788</sup>

Once when Brahmadata was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born into a rich *brahmin* family in Kāsi. He adopted an ascetic life. Due to lack of food he took his abode in the king’s palace. Once when the king had to go to the borders, he made the queen responsible for taking care of the Bodhisatta. He felt lustful towards the queen after seeing her naked. He remained hungry and thirsty for seven days. When the king asked about his ailment he told him of his desire for the queen. Then the king replied, “*Then she is yours, I give her to you.*”<sup>1789</sup> Dressing up the queen, the king sent her to Bodhisatta. He also told her to serve him properly. But when the queen asked him whether he has forgotten that he is an ascetic and a *brahmin*, that he realised that he was overpowered by the passion of lust. Then he returned the queen to the king and went back to the Himalayas.<sup>1790</sup>

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<sup>1786</sup> *Jātaka* No.263

<sup>1787</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1788</sup> *Jātaka* No.431

<sup>1789</sup> *Jātaka* No.66

<sup>1790</sup> *Ibid*

It was deemed prestigious and natural for a man to have more than one wife. In *Jātaka* stories we see that a king had a minimum of sixteen thousand wives. It was mainly his chief consort who finds recognition in the *Jātaka* stories. She supports her husband in his difficult times. But at the same time the *Jātaka* stories reflect how the husband does not recognise his wife's devotion and services and in his good times ignore her and turn his attention towards other women. It is Buddha who makes him realise the worth of a wife.<sup>1791</sup>

Buddha made the king realise the value of the faithful and devoted wife. When they returned back to the palace, he was made the king. Sambulā was elevated to the position of chief consort. But he did not pay her any attention and honour, and spent time with other women. On account of her jealousy for other queen she grew pale and thin. The king made his son understand that it was his wife who was with him when he was in need. He said:

*“A loving wife is ever hard to find,  
As is a man that to his wife is kind.”*<sup>1792</sup>

Thus he asked for forgiveness from his wife and regained her position.<sup>1793</sup>

Even royal servants were punished for transgressing from the path of morality. A minister was once sinfully involved in the royal harem of the king of Benares. The king banished him from the kingdom.<sup>1794</sup> But on the other hand we see a certain courtier got sinfully involved in the royal harem. The king when found about it he told the Buddha about it. The Buddha asked him how useful is the courtier to him and

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<sup>1791</sup>Once a landowner was involved in a business deal with another landowner. He took his wife and visited his debtor. But the debtor could not pay him. In anger, he began his journey for home without breaking his fast. Some people on their way seeing him hungry gave him food and told him to share it with his wife. But by tricking his wife, he ate all the food. The wife knew that her husband tricked her. As they both passed by the monastery in Jetavana, they both went to the park and drank water. The Master was seated there. He asked the wife whether her husband loves her or not. Her reply was affirmative. The Master said that by the help of the wise he would learn about her worth and would honour her. Then he told them an old tale. Bodhisatta was the son of one of the king's courtier. On coming of age he became the king's adviser. The king was afraid of his son and thus sent him away, lest he would kill him. Taking his wife, the prince lived in a village of Kāsi. When he heard of his father's death, he started his journey to go back to Benares to take the kingdom. On his way someone gave him food and told him to share the food with his wife. But he did not give his wife any food and his wife was in deep grief. When he became the king, he made his wife the chief queen consort, but did not honour her. Bodhisatta observing thus decided to teach the king the significance of his wife. He told the queen in front of the king, “loveless union with the king will bring you sorrow” and thus should go elsewhere. Hearing this, the king realised his wife's worth and honoured her. (*Jātaka* No.223)

<sup>1792</sup> *Jātaka* No. 519

<sup>1793</sup> *Jātaka* No. 519

<sup>1794</sup> *Jātaka* No. 303

whether he loves the woman in his life. The Buddha said that one should not harm a servant when he is useful and the woman is dear.<sup>1795</sup>

A nobleman who followed the Order was impressed by the beauty of a woman and felt passionate towards while he went out for alms. Thus a monk not only revered because of his affection towards his wife but also of his passion which he developed for other women too.<sup>1796</sup> In the next section we would discuss about how the gender parity was maintained within the spiritual world.

### ***BENEDICTIONS AND THE RELIGIOUS POPULACE***

When Buddha decided to adopt the recluse life, his wife asked, “...*is it men only that should live the ascetic life?*”

And he replied that women too can adopt this path.<sup>1797</sup>

Buddhism showed women the path to realisation that they are individuals and can obtain spiritualism outside the institution of marriage. This implies that it recognised the fact that even women had the wisdom to acquire a position in the society based on her individualism. The *Asitābhū-Jātaka* narrates how the disappointment in a woman’s life encouraged her to join the Order. At Sāvatti, a servant of the Master’s two chief disciples had a daughter. She was married into ‘good’ family as her own. The husband used to enjoy elsewhere. But she ignored her behaviour and listened to the preaching of the two chief disciples of the Buddha and reached the Fruit of the First Path. She realised that her husband did not want her and there was no need to remain in the household. She adopted the religious mode of life. She informed her parents and became a saint. She was said to have ‘sought the highest good’.<sup>1798</sup> Her story was well known in the Brotherhood.<sup>1799</sup> In the story of the previous birth, Prince Brahmādatta was banished from the kingdom by his father for his extravagant behaviour. He went to the Himalayas with his wife Asitābhū. When he saw a woodland nymph, he went after her. Observing such behaviour of her husband, Asitābhū went to the Bodhisatta and decided to adopt the religious life. Her husband lost the nymph while following her. When he returned, Asitābhū rose up in the air she said that it is for him that she has attained such a state and thanked him. Prince

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<sup>1795</sup> *Jātaka* No. 195

<sup>1796</sup> *Jātaka* No. 251

<sup>1797</sup> *Jātaka* No. 443

<sup>1798</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1799</sup> *Jātaka* No. 234

Brahmādatṭa then realised that it was his greed and lust that made him lose his wife.<sup>1800</sup>

Within the Buddhist tradition even a woman is shown to have been not desirous of having a married life and having preference for an ascetic life. She with her husband dwells a life of purity, ignoring the carnal desires. Bodhisatta was born in a *Brahmin* family. When his parents told him to look for a wife, he said he does not desire for a married life. But being pursued by them, he made a golden image and told them if they can find a wife like the golden image, he will take her to be his wife. His parents sent emissaries to search for such a girl. During this time a holy man passing from the Brahmā world was born in the form of a young girl in the house of a Brahmin worth eighty crores. She was “*a fair and gracious maiden, like an Apsarā, endued with all the marks of a female beauty. And since no thought of evil was ever suggested to her by the power of sinful passion, she was perfectly pure.*”<sup>1801</sup> On seeing her, who was named Sammillabhāsini, chose her as the bride. She sent a message to her parents that she does not desire for a married life and when they are dead she will take up the religious mode of life. But they accepted the golden image and sent their daughter with a great entourage. “*The marriage ceremony took place against the wishes of both the Bodhisatta and Sammillabhāsini. Though sharing the same room and the same bed they did not regard one another with the eye of sinful passion, but dwelt together like two holy men or two female saints*”.<sup>1802</sup>

A woman as a female ascetic was able to cliché out a place for herself within the Buddhist Order. A female ascetic was recognised as an individual and for her wisdom. Her judgement had its own place within male dominated society. Once a religious woman was appointed by the Buddha to find out the truth about a king. When Bodhisatta was once in the city of Kampilla, a religious woman, named Bherī, used to take her meals regularly in the royal palace. She is described as ‘wise’ and ‘learned’. But she had never seen the Buddha before. She heard that the ‘wise’ Mahosadha was serving the king. He also had never seen her before, but he heard that a religious woman named Bherī used to have her meals in the palace. When Bherī saw

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<sup>1800</sup> *Jātaka* No. 234

<sup>1801</sup> *Jātaka* No.328

<sup>1802</sup> *Ibid*

him he wanted to test him to see whether he was really wise. The king being overwhelmed with Mahasodha used to give him gifts. But Mahasodha did not know whether he was doing it out of sincerity. So he told ascetic Bherī to find out the truth for him.<sup>1803</sup>

The *Suvaṇṇamiga-Jātaka*<sup>1804</sup> is a story about a girl called Sāvatti. She was the daughter in the household of an attendant of the two chief disciples at Sāvatti. She was a faithful believer who was attached to the Buddha doing salvation, devoted to almsgiving and performed deeds of piety. Another family in Sāvatti of equal rank, but of heretical views chose her in marriage. But when they approached her parents, Sāvatti's parents told them as their daughter is a 'faithful believer, devoted to the Three Treasures, given to alms'<sup>1805</sup>, but as they hold heretical values, they would not allow her to give alms, or to hear the Truth, or to visit the monastery or to keep the moral law or observe holy days and thus told them to approach another family who hold the same view they adopted. But they agreed that she can continue what she has been doing. She proved 'faithful in the charge of her duties, and a devoted wife, and served her in-laws'.<sup>1806</sup>

One day she told her husband that she wants to give alms to their family priests. Her husband permitted her to do so. She asked the family priests to stay back as long as the heretical views of her marital house are not warded off. She also told her husband to visit them. He was greatly impressed by them and started serving them. They both were established in the First Path. Her in-laws and the hired servants gave up their unorthodox views and became devoted to the Buddha, his Law and the Church. She one day told her husband that she desires to adopt the ascetic mode of life. Her husband decided to do the same. He conducted her with great pomp to Sisterhood and had her admitted as a novice and he himself also went to the Master and begged to be ordained. There is a difference in attitude towards the female saints mentioned in the Epics and the *Purāṇas*. Such support from the husband or the in-laws is absent in the Epics and the *Purāṇas*.

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<sup>1803</sup> *Jātaka* No. 546

<sup>1804</sup> *Jātaka* No. 359

<sup>1805</sup> Ibid

<sup>1806</sup> Ibid

The *Jātaka* stories though reflect that the decision of many women to join the Buddhist Order as an ascetic was bounded within the patriarchal boundaries. In one of the births when Bodhisatta's parents died, he told his wife to take his property which was eighty crores and hers too which was of the same value and enter into household life. And he will become an ascetic. She answered, "If you become an ascetic, I will become one too. I cannot forsake you."<sup>1807</sup> She took her decision within the morals and boundaries of the institution of marriage, though beforehand she decided to become an ascetic outside the institution of marriage. But Bodhisatta like his decision before decided to become an ascetic outside the institution of marriage. They donated all their money, went into the Himālaya country and both of them adopted the ascetic life. His wife died as she suffered from dysentery. She could own property both of her parental and marital family.<sup>1808</sup>

Even Buddha's wife's decision to join the Order was primarily not out of her own desire, but as both her husband and her son, the very pillars of a woman's life was absent, that she decided to join the Order. The *Abbhantārā Jātaka*<sup>1809</sup> is a story about Elder Sāriputta giving mango juice to the Sister Bimbādevī. While Buddha was living in a room at Vesāli, the chief wife of Gautama with five hundred from the Sākiya clan received initiation. Then these five hundred Sisters became saints on hearing the teachings of Nandaka. When Buddha's wife saw that her husband and son has adopted the religious wife, she thought it was useless to stay in the house and decided to join the path her husband and son chose and then would look after them. Then she joined the Order.

A woman's ordeal was not bounded within the boundaries of her marital house. Even when she joined the *Sangha* her struggle continued. She had to go through ordeals in order to prove her chastity and purity of her mind and body. It helps us to understand how chastity was perceived within the sanctuary.

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<sup>1807</sup> *Jātaka* No. 359

<sup>1808</sup> *Jātaka* No. 328

<sup>1809</sup> *Jātaka* No.281



The *Nigrodhamiga-Jātaka* is story which was told by the Master at Jetavana about the mother of the Elder named Prince Kassapa. The daughter was born of a wealthy merchant of Rājagaha. She was deeply religious and was not attached to worldly affairs. She knew that she would achieve *Arahatship*. She tried to convince her parents of taking up the doctrine of Budha, but failed. Her parents said that as they belong to a wealthy family and she is the only daughter, she cannot take vows. Thus she decided that she would convince her husband. She proved a 'devoted' wife and 'lived a life of goodness and virtue' in her new home and then she conceived but was not aware of it. When she told her husband about the impurity of body, he told her as she conceived the body so impure, she should join the Order.

After he gave lavish gifts and provided hospitality to the Order, he escorted her with a large following to the nunnery and had her admitted as a Sister. But the other Sisters observed the change in her body due to pregnancy and when asked she told them she lead a 'virtuous life'. When she was brought to Devadatta, he had her expelled without any proper investigation. Devadatta is described as someone who is "*Not being a Buddha, and not having any charity, love or pity*".<sup>1810</sup> He said, "*It will be a damaging report to get abroad that one of my Sisters is with child, and that I condone the offence.*"<sup>1811</sup> But she did not accept his order as she said that she was admitted to the Order not under Devadatta, but under Buddha and that she will go to Jetavana to Buddha for justice.

Buddha thought that as the child was conceived while she was a laywoman, yet it will give the heretics an opportunity to say that the ascetic Gotama has taken a Sister expelled by Devadatta. Therefore he decided that this case must be heard in the presence of the king and his court. He sent for Pasenadi king of Kosala, the elder and the younger Anātha-piṇḍika, the lady Visākhā the great lay-disciple, and other well-known people. And in the evening when the four classes of the faithful were all assembled – Brothers, Sisters, and lay-disciples, both male and female he said to the Elder Upāli, "*Go, and clear up this matter of the young Sister in the presence of the four classes of my disciples.*"<sup>1812</sup> Then he told Visākhā to ascertain the date of her conceive, whether she has conceived before joining the laity or after. Accordingly the

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<sup>1810</sup> *Jātaka* No.281

<sup>1811</sup> *Jātaka* No.281

<sup>1812</sup> *Ibid*

lady had a curtain put up as a screen, behind which she retired with the girl. She told before the court that she has conceived before she joined the Order, and thus her innocence was proved and she returned to her monastery. She gave birth to a boy.

One day, when the king was passing by the monastery, he heard the cry of an infant and asked his courtiers what it meant. They informed him that a Sister has given birth to a boy. The king told that a child is hindrance in the path of a Sister and decided to rear the child himself. He was named Prince Kassapa. At the age of seven he was admitted a novice under the Master, and a full Brother when he was old enough.<sup>1813</sup> It shows the obstacle a woman had to face to adopt asceticism and the interference of the king within the sanctuary. The *Tipallattha-Miga-Jātaka* ascribes to the fact that how it was difficult for women to adopt the religious life and maintaining it. Once when the Master was dwelling in the Aggālava Temple hard by the town of Āḷavi, many female lay-disciples and Sisters used to flock thither to hear the Truth preached. The preaching was in the daytime, but as time wore on, the women did not attend, and there were only Brethren and men disciples present.<sup>1814</sup>

The female disciples of Buddha were also engaged in social welfare. Visākhā was the most distinguished among the female disciples of Buddha and Bodhisatta in a previous birth. In the current birth she wanted Buddha to grant her eight boons – to grant her for lifelong “*the right to give to the Brethren cloaks for the rainy season, food to all that come as guests, food to travelling priests, food to the sick, food to those who wait on the sick, medicine to the sick, a continual distribution of rice gruel and to the Sisters all my life long robes for bathing in*”.<sup>1815</sup> She also sent money and robes to an old woman whose house Elder Sāriputta visited.<sup>1816</sup> In the *Kāliṅga bodhi Jātaka*<sup>1817</sup> Visākhā along with Anāthapiṇḍaka plants a tree.

Stories of women who followed other sectarian traditions are also narrated in the *Jātakas*. In the *Mahāpaduma Jātaka*<sup>1818</sup> a nun accused Buddha of making her

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<sup>1813</sup> *Jātaka* No. 12

<sup>1814</sup> *Jātaka* No. 16

<sup>1815</sup> *Jātaka* No. 489

<sup>1816</sup> *Jātaka* No. 254

<sup>1817</sup> *Jātaka* No. 479

<sup>1818</sup> *Jātaka* No.472

pregnant. As a result of which she suffered and met with a bad end. The *Culla KāLiṅga Jātaka*<sup>1819</sup> refers to four Jaina women who at the end adopt Buddhism.

Even within the Buddhist religious order the gender disparity and distrust regarding a woman's character continued. The benedictions varied according to gender. Lay men and women seek the advice of Buddha but their treatment varied. In some cases (*the Mahāsupina Jātaka and the Lohakumbhi Jātaka*) especially when a queen was involved she sent her husband to seek the advice of the Buddha.<sup>1820</sup> In the *Mahāsāra Jātaka* the queens being unable to hear to the Buddha are disappointed where it was Ānanda who finally preaches the queens.<sup>1821</sup> The *Kumbha Jātaka*<sup>1822</sup> refers to Visākhā and five hundred women who were friends of Visākhā. These five hundred women used to consume strong drinks. They accompanied Visākhā to hear the preachings of Buddha. While Visākhā sat respectfully, some women danced before him while some made improper gestures. The Buddha had to make them fear him that made those women run away. Thus even within the religious sphere the presence of women was depicted in a vile manner. While the *Khantivādi Jātaka*<sup>1823</sup> narrates a different perspective wherein a king was punished for being disrespectful towards the Bodhisatta as the women who accompanied him left him to hear the Bodhisatta. But again we have to keep in mind that the king suffered not because of his behaviour toward the women of his harem, but because of his sinful behaviour towards Bodhisatta.

A female ascetic named Saccatapāvī who lived in a cemetery and even left four meals a day got sinfully involved with a goldsmith. A white nun (most probably a *śvetambara*) lived in a hut in a cemetery near Benares. She was a famous nun. A 'wise' said to have said that she is a 'fickle-minded' woman and one must not pay any honour to her. He bet to get sinfully involved with her and that he will also prove that womankind is so unstable that he will even be able to have strong drink with her. Then the goldsmith disguised himself as an ascetic and then approached her. He was successful in convincing her that like him, she too was discontented with the religious path. Thus she is said to feel passionate towards him. He said that he will not reject

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<sup>1819</sup> *Jātaka* No. 301

<sup>1820</sup> *Jātaka* No. 77 and 314

<sup>1821</sup> *Jātaka* No. 92

<sup>1822</sup> *Jātaka* No. 512

<sup>1823</sup> *Jātaka* No. 313

her as his wife. Bringing her to the city, he co-habited with her and ‘handed over to his friends the worse for liquor’. They had numerous sons and daughters from the goldsmith.<sup>1824</sup>

While a female ascetic had to prove her purity of body and mind within the sanctuary, but the same did not apply when Bodhisatta himself was involved in an illegitimate affair. Thus there was similarity within and outside the sanctuary. Bodhisatta was once born in a Brahmin family, named Harittacakumāra worth eighty crores. But after his parents’ death he adopted the religious mode of life, after donating his wealth. After reaching Benares, he stayed in the palace of the king. One day when the king had to go to the frontier to sort out a disturbance, he told his queen to take good care of Bodhisatta. Bodhisatta saw the queen naked. After seeing her in such a condition, he diverted from his meditation and started ‘misconducting’ with the queen. This was known throughout the city. King’s ministers sent him a letter informing him of such an activity between the queen and Bodhisatta. But the king did not believe it. He did not believe the queen when she told it was true and he decided to ask Bodhisatta. Harittacakumāra thought that those who forsake truth cannot attain Buddhahood. “*In certain cases a Bodhisatta may destroy life, take what is not given to him, commit adultery, drink strong drink, but he may not tell a lie...*<sup>1825</sup>” Harittacakumāra said there are four passions that are ‘over-mastering’ – lust, hate, excess and ignorance. Then the king helped him to throw out his ‘sinful passion’.<sup>1826</sup> At the same time the *Jātakas* also depict how Buddhism helped women by donating to the Buddha benefitted. In the *Kummāsapiṇḍa Jātaka*<sup>1827</sup>, the daughter of the chief of the garland maker offered food to the Buddha. The Buddha blessed her and then she became the queen of the King Pasenadi.

The *Jātaka* stories put into limelight that how the process of alms-giving posed threat and made the position of the monks vulnerable. The *Culla Nārada Jātaka*<sup>1828</sup> speaks about a monk is being trapped by a mother and her daughter to make him return to the worldly affairs. The mother does so in order make her daughter’s life settled as no

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<sup>1824</sup> *Jātaka* No. 536

<sup>1825</sup> *Jātaka* No.431

<sup>1826</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>1827</sup> *Jātaka* No. 415

<sup>1828</sup> *Jātaka* No. 477

man chose her. In the *Vātamiga Jātaka* a slave-girl brings a son back to his parents after he renounces. The mother makes a deal with the slave-girl that she will hand over the authority of her household to the slave girl. The slave-girl was successful in doing so. In the *Mandhātu Jātaka*<sup>1829</sup> the Buddha in the present story warns a Brother about such lust, where the monk gets sexually attracted towards a woman while asking for alms.

The poem, Hāla's *Sattasāi* mentions about the begging nuns and the female *kāpālikas*.<sup>1830</sup> The poem narrates that the saints are inflicted by sexual passion by the 'sidelong glances of seductive women' but they are said to have total control over their senses.<sup>1831</sup> The *kāpālika* apprentice covers her body with the ashes that come from her 'lover's pyre'. That she is smearing the ashes of his body provides her bliss.<sup>1832</sup>

Buddhism provided an alternative path to emancipation, liberating men from the existing pain and sufferings that originated due to social conditions. It was not necessarily a gender-focussed movement bringing about parity or rather liberating the subservient gender. Those women who were inclining towards the spiritual life shows their dissatisfaction for life and domestic and societal control and their inner desire to break free and led a life for her own growth and development as an individual. She went through the realization that she had a life outside the sphere of marriage and the patriarchal needs and control of the society. She realised that she could have a life that only belonged to her, which she fulfilled through the spiritual and spiritual liberation though Buddhism could not free itself from the existing misogynist and patriarchal attitude of the society. When she was married and was leading a domestic life, she had to fulfil the duties of a '*pativrata*' woman and only after convincing her husband and in-laws she could adopt the ascetic mode of life. But often her decision to join the Sanghas was dependent on the patriarchal elements of the society. In most of the cases only after she gained her husband's permission that she could join the Sangha. Through Buddhism, women's influence in the field of spirituality could be felt.

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<sup>1829</sup> *Jātaka* No.258

<sup>1830</sup> Hāla's *Sattasāi*, 595

<sup>1831</sup> *Ibid*, 596

<sup>1832</sup> *Ibid*, 597

## **CONCLUSION**

*"...a wife is the ascetic's bane and men blame me and say that even when I have left the world I cannot leave my wife."*<sup>1833</sup>

The *Jātakas* and the Hāla's *Sattasaī* quite emphatically brings out the experience a woman go through within and outside the institution of marriage, though with certain limitations and also holding onto the existing traditions of the time. Audience of the *Jātakas* and Hāla's *Sattasaī* included people of different social position and status. Women also formed an integral part not only within the stories but also formed the audience. But both the texts dealt in this chapter do not talk about gender parity or a total deviation from the existing traditions and customs. Buddha himself left his wife and son, without having any consideration of her feelings and position in the society, wherein women were judged by her devotion and service towards her husband. Buddha praised his wife for maintaining her loyalty towards him even when other men approached her, thus implying the importance of chastity held by other traditions.

Buddhism did come out with a certain level of relief for women in comparison to the existing conditions of the time. Buddhism provided women with the option of obtaining salvation outside the institution of marriage unlike in Brahminism. In many *Jātaka* stories we do see that Bodhisatta makes the husband realise the worth of a wife who stood by him in difficult times. Women were not degraded for walking out of a marriage and opting for another man.

Buddhism though provided women with a certain kind of liberation that was previously absent in the society, men were encouraged to have no attachment with them.<sup>1834</sup> Women are shown to be possessing low and degrading qualities.<sup>1835</sup> Ānanda who stood for women's participation in the religious path also elucidated the faults in women. He said they are vicious in nature and can never be trusted. He moreover said:

*"Four things can never sated be...  
Ocean, kings, Brahmins, womenkind..."*<sup>1836</sup>

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<sup>1833</sup> *Jātaka* No. 539

<sup>1834</sup> *Jātaka* No.459

<sup>1835</sup> *Jātaka* No.446

<sup>1836</sup> *Jātaka* No. 536

*Brahmins* and women are often seen as lowly in the *Jātakas*. The wives of the *Brahmins* transgressing from the path of chastity was a common story and *Brahmin* themselves were not appreciated by the Buddhists. The Epics and the *Purāṇas* show the *Brahmin* to be an upright character and even if their wives deviated from the path of chastity, they were accepted only after an ordeal or their purification. The position of the *Brahmins* is shown to be so vulnerable that they approached the Buddha for counselling. Ascetics of other traditions are generally looked down upon.<sup>1837</sup>

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<sup>1837</sup> There is reference to the naked ascetics who can be presumed to be Jains who tried to be mischief with the Buddha. (*Telovāda Jātaka*, 246)

## CONCLUSION

Ideals and concepts formed over the centuries have shaped human history. Such ideals and concepts have come down to us in various forms such as through different form of literature. Ideals and concepts not only shape the society but also the human mind, their morals and way of living. They are generally man-made. Every ideal and concept has a social, cultural, economic and political background to it. They also help in resolving various crisis and tensions within the society. It helps in the organisation and re-organisation of the society. It is through these ideals and concepts that the society is understood and helps constructing history. But ideals and concepts are not static, they undergo constant changes as the situation demands. When one talks about ideals, one should keep in mind that religious traditions is an integral part of it. Religion undeniably has a great impact on various processes that takes place within the society. It influences different patterns, aspects and institutions of the society. But in the history of human civilisations we do see that there have been clashes between various ideals leading to the evolution of another ideal. This in turn also led to the development of various other religious traditions indicating multiculturalism and the variations in human thinking and philosophy.

In the Epics, the *Purāṇas* and the *Jātakas* we do observe this constant clash between various traditions. In the *Drona Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* we find the indication of the dominance of Saivism as Kṛṣṇa sought Śiva's protection, "beholding the god, the pious souled son of Vasudeva together with the son of Pritha, saluted him by touching the earth with his head, and he uttered the eternal verses from the Veda."<sup>1838</sup> Demeaning the other tradition was one of the major objectives of the texts. The *Purāṇas* refers to Buddhism and Jainism, and the stories clearly discourage people to have any contact with them. A king named Śatadhanu had a wife named Saivya. She was a *pativrata*. They worshipped Viṣṇu.<sup>1839</sup> One day they saw a heretic and the king got involved in a conversation with him. But the *pativrata* Saivya did not utter a single word.<sup>1840</sup> She came back home and worshipped Viṣṇu.<sup>1841</sup> The king as a result was born as a dog<sup>1842</sup> and she was born as the daughter of the king of Kāśī.

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<sup>1838</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, *Drona Parva*, Chapter 80, 43

<sup>1839</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 18, 53-55

<sup>1840</sup> *Ibid*, 57-59



The origin of other religious traditions mentioned in the *Purāṇas* is degrading. The story goes that the demons once won over the gods. The gods being helpless went to Viṣṇu who produced an illusory image of himself. That illusory image would make the demons deviate by disrespecting the Vedas.<sup>1843</sup> He took the guise of a naked mendicant, with his head shaven; he made them deviate from the religious path. He taught them to contempt the Vedas and also to prohibit animal sacrifice. The Asuras initiated those doctrines.<sup>1844</sup> They in turn became teachers of these false doctrines.<sup>1845</sup> They taught people that in order to attain heaven one should not perform animal sacrifice.<sup>1846</sup> Thus saying “*Know (Budhyadwam) and they saying (Budhyate), it is known that the Daityas were made to deviate.*”<sup>1847</sup> Thus making other people impressed by their teaching, they made people abandon the practices laid down in the Vedas and *Smṛtis*.<sup>1848</sup> After this when the Daityas transgressed, a war prevailed between the gods and the demons, the demons were defeated.<sup>1849</sup>

A wise man is advised to have no contact with such heretics who consider the Vedas impure.<sup>1850</sup> The same story is narrated in the *Agni Purāṇa*.<sup>1851</sup> Visnu in the form of Buddha made the *Daityas* abandon Veda and follow Buddha. He became *Arhatas*. Abandoning Vedas, they became *Pāsaṇḍinas* and thus at the end of *Kali yuga* there was the origin of mixed castes and thus the *Veda* of Vājasaneyā came into existence.

The attitude of the *Jātakas* towards Brahmānism and other religious traditions was the same. The rituals and ceremonies of the *Brahmānas* were condemned and were termed as useless. That Buddhism came as redemption for the society is clearly reflected in the stories both for men and women. At the same time the apprehension of Brahmānism is reflected in the texts whereby they forecast about the fearful future, the *Kali yuga*.

The *Kali yuga* is enumerated as a period when marriages will not be performed according to rituals, laws that guide the conduct of husband and wife will be

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<sup>1841</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 18, 60

<sup>1842</sup> *Ibid*, 62

<sup>1843</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 17, 42-43

<sup>1844</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 18, 14

<sup>1845</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>1846</sup> *Ibid*, 16

<sup>1847</sup> *Ibid*, 20

<sup>1848</sup> *Ibid*, 22

<sup>1849</sup> *Ibid*, 33-34

<sup>1850</sup> *Ibid*, 51

<sup>1851</sup> The *Agni Purāṇa*, Chapter 16, 1-7

neglected.<sup>1852</sup> Wives will leave their husbands when they will lose all their wealth and men who are rich will be considered as husband by women.<sup>1853</sup> One who will be distributing immense wealth will be considered as the lord and merit by birth will no longer be considered.<sup>1854</sup> Women will follow their own desire and will focus on Satisfying their pleasure.<sup>1855</sup> Women will pay no attention to their husbands or parents<sup>1856</sup> and will be immoral.<sup>1857</sup> Śūdras will become religious ascetics and will follow ‘impious’ and ‘heretical’ doctrines.<sup>1858</sup> Vyāsa enumerates that *Kali yuga* is good as because the region which is obtained by the twice-born after so much penance is acquired by the Śūdra only by serving and woman only has to honour their husband by mind and speech and thus does not have to go through such penances as done by the twice-born.<sup>1859</sup> He expressed his appreciation of their happiness and the other *yugas* (except *Kali yuga*) were full of austerities of the twice-born.<sup>1860</sup> But behind this appreciation lie the disappointment and the constant conflict within Brahmanism to maintain its foothold.

Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyāna* describes a perfect Brahmanic society,<sup>1861</sup> but followed by a major crisis that continues till the end. The city of Ayodhyā resembles a perfect Brahmanical society.<sup>1862</sup> It is termed as ‘prosperous’.<sup>1863</sup> It is a city that is inhabited by the ‘foremost’ of *Brāhmanas* maintaining the ‘sacred fire’, “*are adorned with good qualities, have mastered the Veda as well as the branches of knowledge auxiliary to a study of the Vedas, by high souled men who give away in abundance and are devoted to truth, as well as by eminent seers who are almost as good as Maharṣis.*”<sup>1864</sup> King Daśaratha was himself well-versed in the Vedas and performed sacrifices.<sup>1865</sup> The city is described in the following manner:

“*All the men and women of the city are by nature virtuous, well-regulated in life, cheerful and faultless in character and disposition like Maharṣis.*”<sup>1866</sup> *There is none in Ayodhyā who does not maintain the*

<sup>1852</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāna*, Part VI, Chapter I, 10-12

<sup>1853</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>1854</sup> Ibid, 19

<sup>1855</sup> Ibid, 21

<sup>1856</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāna*, Part VI, Chapter I, 28

<sup>1857</sup> Ibid, 30-31

<sup>1858</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāna*, Part VI, Chapter I, 36-37

<sup>1859</sup> Ibid, Chapter 3, 19-28, 34, 35

<sup>1860</sup> Ibid, 36

<sup>1861</sup> The *Rāmāyāna*, *Bālakaṇḍa*, 6-7

<sup>1862</sup> Ibid, 5

<sup>1863</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>1864</sup> Ibid, 22-23

<sup>1865</sup> Ibid, Chapter 6, 1-2

<sup>1866</sup> Ibid, 9

sacred fire and does not perform sacrifices...no among them is immoral and impure of origin.<sup>1867</sup> There is no member of the twice-born classes who is unbelieving, untruthful, devoid of knowledge of scriptures.<sup>1868</sup> The Kṣatriyas follow the lead of the Brāhmaṇas, the Vaiśyas are devoted to the Kṣatriyas and the Śūdras take delight in their own work while serving the other three Varṇas.”<sup>1869</sup>

The above description not only describes a society that conformed to the Brahmanical norms, but at the same time expresses its trepidation that originated with the coming of different races and traditions. The *Rākṣasa* world which is shown as opposing and a threat to the Brahmanical world of Vālmīki is categorised as a villainous one. They were considered as culturally improper. There is a reason behind every construction of characters by the author/authors that not only serves the text, but is also used to voice the concept or the ideal the author/authors follows and wish to propagate. The Lanka world shows deviation from the Brahmanical tradition.

The concept of propagation held a significant position in the narratives taking within its threshold other concepts like gender and caste, the earthly and the divine realm. Nīlā, who was the wife of Kṛṣṇa was the daughter of Agni in her previous birth.<sup>1870</sup> She desired to get married to Kṛṣṇa only. Agni, her father tried to get her married to one of the Pitṛs.<sup>1871</sup> She said there are several women who though married live like widows as they disregard Hari as their husband. One who disregard Hari, are always widows.<sup>1872</sup> She moreover said that the celestial women leave their husband and get involved with Hari in heaven. These women are honoured because they find their husband in Hari.<sup>1873</sup> If they get husbands devoted to Viṣṇu, their life becomes worthwhile.<sup>1874</sup> She emphasised that those who have husbands who are not devoted to Viṣṇu should immediately cast off their bodies and if they remember Viṣṇu as their husband at the time of leaving their bodies they do not incur the sin of committing suicide – this what has been said in the *Śāstras*.<sup>1875</sup>

In the village, where there is no recital of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and no follower of the *Bhāgavata* cult, people of that place should not even live for a moment.<sup>1876</sup> Those

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<sup>1867</sup> Ibid, 12

<sup>1868</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa*, Chapter 6, 14

<sup>1869</sup> Ibid, 19

<sup>1870</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa, Brahmā (Mokṣa) Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 19, 27

<sup>1871</sup> Ibid, 28

<sup>1872</sup> Ibid, 31-33

<sup>1873</sup> Ibid, 34

<sup>1874</sup> Ibid, 35

<sup>1875</sup> Ibid, 36-37

<sup>1876</sup> Ibid, Chapter 20, 29

who listen to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, their life becomes rewarding.<sup>1877</sup> Such stories dedicated to a particular cult were woven not only to propagate but also to impress the mind of the people with fear, tension and conflict.

The Hāla's *Sattasāi* shows how region affected the structure and style of the text. Unlike other texts, Hāla's *Sattasāi* has a female voice to it and concentrates more on female emotions and feelings. But again this text follows the same impositions of the society. The text shows how immodest it was for a woman to have a relationship with a man before marriage. It is for love that she compromises with the societal customs and jurisdiction. The same imposition and limitations applies for the wife mentioned in the text. But what makes the Hāla's *Sattasāi* different from others is that it explicitly expresses the pain of a woman and her constant struggle. When texts like *Purāṇas* put forward that the main reason behind a woman's loyalty is the scarcity of suitable suitors, the unfaithful woman mentioned in the Hāla's *Sattasāi* adheres to such a view. The loose women rebuke the virtuous wife and accuse her that she can be after the barber who has the status lower than her.

All such ideals and concepts are formed to regulate social life, moral beliefs, patterns and behaviour. The cultural patterns contribute to forming norms that provide direction to the society. Sometimes such norms do not conform to a particular set of people. There is interdependence of religious and cultural norms, social stratification, social change, social behaviour and reactions. Such behaviour and change also differs according to various hierarchies based on caste and gender. Different norms are formulated according to such concepts of gender and caste. The concept of gender and caste and various other issues, conflicts and tensions related to it is not a new phenomenon, but its origin goes centuries back.

Gender problems reflect the culture and social system of a civilisation. The social concepts and leads to the development of different pattern of behaviour based on gender. Different norms are formulated to control gender behaviour to meet different needs of the society. Such norms are embedded into the minds of the society through different forms of literature. Gender parity has never been an aim of any culture or tradition. One remains subordinated to benefit the other. If we observe the social status as reflected in various religious literatures, we would see it has been women

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<sup>1877</sup> Ibid, 32

who have remained subservient. She is a tool in maintaining the influence of power not only in politics, but also in social, economic and cultural aspect. History is witness to the fact that there has always been an attempt to subordinate the less powerful by the more powerful ones. This subordination was mainly done for fulfilling certain needs of the society. As mentioned earlier such processes were made to work through various means, one of them being literature.

Narratives were one of them. Narration of various stories portrayed as ones that happened in the past convinced people to follow various ordinances. These narrations were meant to conquer the minds of the listeners, making them follow what the authority of various traditions wanted the society to pursue. Such a scenario goes true for ancient India. Some of the narrative texts include a normative part too. The normative part in the narrative texts tell the audience about the laws and customs of the society that should be followed in an assertive manner, on the other hand the narrations convey to the audience how various people or characters have abided by them, their role and what has happened to those who did not abide by them. They are not shown to be fictional characters, thus striking the mind of the audience much more convincingly.

The narrative texts dealt were written in different time genre and naturally such texts were not penned by a single author. Dealing with texts of different traditions helps to open up different dimensions that existed simultaneously in the society. It also helps in understanding the various conflicts and tensions that existed. For example in the *Jātakas* the background provided while the Buddha intervenes resolving domestic issues show the various tensions that existed within a household and the conflicts a wife had to face on a regular basis. The texts did not they belong to a particular region. Thus they suffered from various interpolations. Amendments were made into them. The narrative texts were not only a representation of the society's beliefs and practices, but also exhibit the perspective of the author, of the tradition and beliefs he believed in. Such texts that suffered from interpolations help in tracing the transition and relating the present to the past which not only helps in constructing the past, but also helps in understanding the change that the society underwent. The *Matsya Purāṇa* conforms to this. It says that there have been interpolations in the *Vedas*, of

the *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kalpa Sūtras*, of the *Bhāṣyas* and other things too.<sup>1878</sup> It is said that in the *Dvapara Yuga* people adopted various customs and rites and thus had different opinions.<sup>1879</sup> *Śāstras* too went under changes.<sup>1880</sup> In the *Kali yuga* everyone will be studying the *Vedas* including the *Śūdras* and there will be many false devotees.<sup>1881</sup>

Maintaining purity of caste formed one of the concerns. Though men were a part of it but primarily it was the women. A woman's body was used as a symbol of family, caste and community honour. By imposing restrictions, a woman's sexuality was regulated. The *Mārkaṇḍeya Mahāpurāṇa* states if a woman is not protected the inter-caste mixture take place.<sup>1882</sup> Various stories in the narrative texts repeatedly imply how a woman can turn infidel if she is not controlled by a man either through marriage or through other patriarchal norms.

Though her fertility was considered auspicious, but her sexuality dangerous. As a courtesan's sexuality could not be controlled, she was considered as a threat and a challenge to the norms of the society. Though we see that both within Brahmanism and Buddhism they gained a social status, their economic power might have been one of the major reasons. In *Jātakas* and *Purāṇas* their desire to obtain a married life can be observed. In the *Padma Purāṇa*, a *veśya* claims that even *veśyas* are chaste owing to their devotion and service for one man at a time. The same essence can be traced within the *apsarās*.

Marriage was one of the ways that could significantly control a woman's mind, body and soul. It was through a woman that a man acquired progeny, thus continuing his lineage. Draupadī stated that progeny cannot be protected if a wife is not protected. The *Garuḍa Purāṇa* says that without a female, birth is not possible.<sup>1883</sup> It was just not any other woman, but a *pativrata* who proved to be beneficial not only for her husband but for both her paternal and marital household. It was through this devotion that she gained salvation. But in the *Jātakas*, a text that belongs to the Buddhist tradition allowed salvation to women through asceticism. In *Rāmāyāṇa* and

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<sup>1878</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 144, 12-13

<sup>1879</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*, Chapter 144, 14

<sup>1880</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>1881</sup> *Ibid*, 11-12

<sup>1882</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 66, 36

<sup>1883</sup> The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Chapter 114, 151

*Mahābhārata*, though we find references to female ascetics, but their salvation was bound more within the patriarchal norms.

A *pativrata* woman was considered to be the best amongst women. As a girl she had to be virgin in order to be pure. It was prescribed for a father that he should get his daughter married before menstruation started or else he was alleged as killer of a foetus. Prescribing marriage before she attained puberty meant controlling her sexuality before she became aware of it. Her husband had exclusive control over her mind, body and soul. This exclusivity was one of the major concerns of the society. Apprehension regarding maintaining virginity is reflected in the stories of Satyavati and Kuntī. That the concentration on maintaining virginity increased with time is reflected in difference in reciprocation of Bhīṣma and Yudhisthira respectively. It was made a compulsion for a man to have a chaste wife or else he was said to have doomed. At the same time a man was advised not to get totally attached to a woman. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* prescribes that when his need will be over, he should get detached from her. The need was to obtain progeny. Any other kind of union was considered to be inappropriate. This concept of attachment and detachment is found in the *Jātakas* as well. The pious relationship between a wife and a husband is revered in the *Purāṇas*, the epics (*Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*), the *Jātakas* as well as the Hāla's *Sattasāi*.

The wife should remain devoted to the husband; even he is of bad character. Similarly even if the wife is of bad character, he should maintain his loyalty towards her.<sup>1884</sup> A sacrifice called *Mitravinda* is performed for love between the husband and the wife who does not feel affectionate towards each other.<sup>1885</sup> One should produce progeny not on the basis of lust but for a son being afraid of the hell called *Put*.<sup>1886</sup> It was through a chaste wife that the husband obtained the three *purusarthas* i.e., *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*. Without obtaining them his life did not have any meaning.

Narrative texts that articulate incidents of the past, helps in tracing the origin of various precepts. Chastity and the need for controlling women was one of them. The story of Ashvakra and the old ascetic in the *Mahābhārata* exhibits the proper and improper societal conduct at multiple levels. The female character involved here is an

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<sup>1884</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 66, 63

<sup>1885</sup> Ibid, Chapter 69, 9

<sup>1886</sup> Ibid, Chapter 72, 16

aged woman but then also she approaches a young man for sexual union and at the same time does not talk of marriage. She also claims to be her own master. This is the transgression behaviour that challenged the norms of the society. It also indicates that a woman without any patriarchal control behaves sinfully. At the same time Ashtavakra's reply explains how chastity for men was perceived. After seeing the maidens in the palace of the old ascetic he controlled his senses and did not submit to the proposal of the old woman. He said a man should be involved with his own wife, such a union is pure only if it is for begetting progeny. It is proper for a man if he restrains himself from such a union after begetting progeny. It was through such a conduct that a man's character was judged.

In the *Anuśāsana Parva*, Bhīṣma illuminates the characteristics of women. He says in earlier times as everyone was righteous and were attaining to the status equal to that of the deities, Brahmā created women with sinful characteristics. Due to their sinful nature, they approached other men. This implies that in order to make earthly men distinct from that of the celestial ones, such sinful women were created to maintain the balance between the two worlds, or else the world of the celestials was threatened. It is due to the women, that such earthly beings fell from such a position. These women were so vicious that no scripture or sacred text could control them.

Sinful women were shown to meet with fatal outcome. A female hog lamenting on her previous deeds told that in her previous birth she was a woman called Sudevā.<sup>1887</sup> Sudevā was matchless in beauty and was dear to her father. She was married to a brāhmaṇa called Śivaśarman. Being deluded by pride and wealth of her father she did not serve her husband. Due to her contact with unchaste women, she became like them.<sup>1888</sup> Seeing her wicked acts her husband left the village.<sup>1889</sup> Her father told his daughter to go back to her husband. Sudevā went away being abandoned by everyone. She did not procure any shelter as everyone considered her 'unchaste'.<sup>1890</sup> One day she accidentally went to the house of her husband, Śivaśarman. Sudevā was served by his another wife called Maṅgalā. Being afflicted with grief, she died. For not serving her husband and her companionship with immoral women she became unchaste. Not only her husband left her but she was deserted by everyone. Companionship with such

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<sup>1887</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmīkhaṇḍa*, Chapter 51

<sup>1888</sup> *Ibid*, 30-35

<sup>1889</sup> *Ibid*, 39-46

<sup>1890</sup> *Ibid*, 31b-41a



women were discouraged and that if she followed such a path she would be outcaste by the society. Her husband married again. But Sudevā did not attain happiness and died.

Yama's messengers took Sudevā away. She was bound by chains and was thrown into a heap of ashes. A heated iron figure was pressed on her breast for deceiving her husband. She was burnt with fire in hell and was cut with blades. Sudevā was then thrown into a vessel full of mud, sand, pus, blood, faeces and insects. She was again thrown into other hells as well. She was took birth as goats, and then jackals and then that of a bitch, a hen, a cat and a rat and then finally a female hog.<sup>1891</sup> She suffered not only when she was alive but after death too.

Even Nature was portrayed to be against immoral women. A tiger states that he does not devour sages and chaste women, thus implying the dominance and power the sages enjoyed and that the same position and power was enjoyed by a woman who followed the injunctions framed by the authoritative power of the society.

Unchaste women not only became the reason for the downfall of a husband but also of a whole kingdom as well.<sup>1892</sup> In Kāmpilya there was a *brāhmaṇa*. He attracted all women with his ardent deeds. Hearing to his song the wives of citizens left their household work and went to him. The citizens complained to the king that as their wives do not stay in their house, prayer to gods and dead ancestors are not performed. Due to their wife leaving them fame has abandoned them. They are apprehensive about the fact that Lakṣmī would not stay in their house since 'piety, worldly riches and house depend upon the wife, one that depends upon the wife's piety and wealth cannot remain, when the two are lost.'<sup>1893</sup> The *brāhmaṇa* saves the women by saying that the women are like his mother. But as the women did not do anything to cleanse their sins the whole kingdom was destroyed. Those women who were attracted to the *brāhmaṇa* died having poison and were born as demonesses. Such stories not only act as a warning for subversive women but also highlight the importance of a chaste wife within the household.

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<sup>1891</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, Chapter 51, 15-27a

<sup>1892</sup> Ibid, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 206

<sup>1893</sup> The *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttārākhaṇḍa*, Chapter 206, 23-27

Maintaining chastity was never an easy task for her. The texts are full of enumeration regarding the duties of a chaste woman. It also meant compromising her body and accepting the touch of another man for continuing the lineage of her husband. Her inner struggle was never a concern. Mostly a queen was sent to a sage for begetting progeny on her. The inclusion of a god or sage was said to make everything divine. We get instances wherein women were either sent by their husbands or mother-in-law to another man for securing progeny for their lineage. In some of these stories, the queens send their maids instead. Thus there was indiscretion not only by men, but even women participated and acted as a resource. They did not take into account that another woman's mind, body and soul are being compromised. It shows how gender and caste interplayed.

The gender and caste position of the maid makes her more susceptible to exploitation. The implications of transgression were dependent on the socio-cultural factors as well. Both Kuntī and Satyavatī surrendered themselves to men who held an authoritative position. In both the stories, the female characters were apprehensive about social stigma. Owing to their vulnerable position as females in the society they had to accept the approach of such men. One must understand that while such an indiscrete behaviour is studied, it should be observed that whether the characters involved behaves so willingly or not. But again the caste and social position determined the purity and impurity of such characters. Kuntī and Satyavatī held an esteemed position, thus condemning them would have been offensive.

The concept of chastity held so much importance that the king's interference was necessary. Within the texts it is very important to observe the king's interference in maintaining justice in relation to gender issues involving infidelity etc. In the *Jātakas*, the king's interference is quite clear and significant. In the Brahmanical texts, like the *Purāṇas* and the Epics the influence is also visible. The study of the life of Draupadī and Sītā is important here. They suffered at the hands of kings and princes and faced injustice in front of the public, king and the royal court. Thus the royal space had a significant role to play in controlling the character of women. The abandoning of Sītā by Rāmā has a subjective element within it. For Rāmā being an upright king held more importance to being an ideal husband. It might have been the influence of his father's mistake due to which he was sent to exile. Same was with Yudhisthira as well. Even he was more concerned about his social image like Rāmā. To Yudhisthira

social concerns held much more importance than providing justice and protection to his wife.

Characters such as Anasūyā and Savitri were the ideals of Sītā.<sup>1894</sup> Iconizations of such characters impressed its audience and listeners and moreover convinced its audience to follow the path of chastity and impressed them with the idea that by following such characters would make them an esteemed and celebrated character.

Both Draupadī and Sītā had to suffer abuses and molestations. Though Sītā was not molested within the household, but her character was maligned and she was disrespected by her own husband who was suppose to protect her. On the other hand, Draupadī had to face humiliation both within and outside her household. It was her husband only who had put her at stake in order to save himself from slavery. Her husband did not come to the forefront in order to protect her when she was being molested by other men in front of them. Draupadī expressed her humiliation and oppression at the hands of men within the patriarchal boundaries. She abused her husbands in front of everyone to see justice. Everytime she was harassed at the hands of other men, it was she who initiated the process of revenge. Draupadī's aggressive behaviour shows the repression and abuses a woman had to go through. It also implies that though a woman was fully devoted to her husband but that did not guarantee the same behaviour from the husband's side.

Like Draupadī, Sītā expressed her grief and protest by abiding the patriarchal norms. Sītā's returning to earth shows a woman's life that was meant to be full of ordeals. Even complete devotion could not satisfy a man's mind. Not only Sītā, but also in Galav's episode, Madhavi accepts the forest life succumbing to the disappointments that life brought to them even after fulfilling each and every custom of the society. Though they are celebrated for their devotion and loyalty but such a celebration could not take away their pain, dissatisfaction and disappointments. But their tragedy was considered to be a part of their *pativrata* life. At the same time their acceptance and adoption of Nature shows their protest and unacceptance of the patriarchal world. In the *Jātakas* also there is a reflection of such a disappointment where women adopt the life of the *Sangha*. Women moved out of the inner household spaces to vent out their pain and grief. But again we have to keep in mind that the world of the *Sangha* did not

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<sup>1894</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Chapter 117,10

exist in an isolated manner. The condition within the *Sangha* was a reflection of the civic society as well. Hierarchy and gender disparity was also maintained within it.

Damayanti and Sītā were both grief-stricken by their husband's behaviour towards them; they were much more concerned about their husband's welfare. Both of them took refuge in a hermitage, thus this leads to another question – whether such hermitage acted as a refuge for women who were abandoned by their husbands? It leads to the observance that abandonment of queens by their husband might have been a common practice.

The whole existence of a woman gained its meaning within the patriarchal norms and boundaries. Reṇukā, Sītā, Draupadī left their palace life for the sake of their husband. But each of them suffered injustice at the hands of their husbands. Kuntī had to compromise herself for maintaining her husband's lineage. She was given to another king by her own father. Gāndhāri sacrificed her vision when she came to know that her husband was blind. It was for the boon bestowed upon her that she was chosen by Bhīṣma as a daughter-in-law. Amongst them Draupadī was the one who rebuked her husbands when she was not given justice or her husbands did not put an effort to save her modesty. Both Sītā and Draupadī who were abused within and outside the household were not born out of womb implying their divine existence. Rādhā had to bear Kṛṣṇa's indulgence with other women as he was her 'lord'. The same tradition was maintained in the mortal realm.

The story of Reṇukā shows how a simple appreciation by a woman can turn fatal for her. The moral of the story embedded within the story is that it is not proper for a wife even to look at another man either out of desire or appreciation. Her son helped reviving her as she was his mother, a reverence that was defined by the patriarchal norms. She did not earn justice being an individual. Here lies the gender problem.

The following verse shows how revered a woman was held when she attained motherhood,

*“A mother is called Dhātrī because she holds us within her belly. She is Jananī because she gives birth to us. She is Ambā because she causes the growth and development of our limbs. She is called Vīrasū*

*by giving birth to heroic sons. Since she renders service to infants, she is called Śvaśrū. She is called Mātā because she deserves honour and respect.*”<sup>1895</sup>

Reṇukā’s murderer was punished because she was a mother to him and not because she was an individual. She enjoyed the privileges of motherhood within the guidelines of the patriarchy created by the society. She did not earn justice on the account of being a woman, a separate individual possessing a mind, body and soul of her own. In the *Skanda Purāṇa* there is a mention of story very similar to that of Reṇukā but with a different ending where a husband realises his mistake. It is through the son’s dilemma that a woman’s position and her identity get reflected.

There was a famous *Brāhmaṇa* called Cīrakārī. He was the son of Gautama. On the banks of the river Kauśikī, his mother was longingly watching king Balī who was sporting with his women folk. As she was late in returning to the hermitage he was ordered by his father to kill his own mother.<sup>1896</sup> He thought, “*sparing his mother may be an Adharma*<sup>1897</sup> *and his father’s command is Dharma. No one can be happy after killing a woman and that too his own mother. Father recreates himself in his wife. He is reborn in his own wife. It is to preserve and uphold morality, chastity and spiritual lineage of the family that he does so.*”<sup>1898</sup> But later Gautama regretted for doing so as he said, “*I have killed a chaste woman, my wife. Who will redeem me from this sin?*” This shows that for a son his maintaining of dharma towards his father held much more significance than judging the whole circumstances and providing justice to his mother.

A woman’s ordeal continued when she had to tolerate the pain that a younger co-wife caused which is reflected in Kausalya’s words. The younger co-wife provides more Satisfaction to the husband while the elder wife who is supposedly the wiser one is the counsellor of her husband. One of the duties of the elder wife is to look for another wife for her husband if she fails to provide her with progeny or if her husband desires so. The same tone is also reflected in the *Jātakas* as well as the Hāla’s *Sattasāī*. Rather than understanding her inner conflict on the contrary it has been said <sup>1899</sup> that

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<sup>1895</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book I: Māheśvarakhaṇḍa, Section II: Kaumāikakhaṇḍa, 105,chapter6

<sup>1896</sup> Ibid, Chapter 6, 108

<sup>1897</sup> Ibid, 83-87

<sup>1898</sup> Ibid, 89-90

<sup>1899</sup> The *Nārada-Purāṇa*, Part IV, *Uttārā Bhāga*, Chapter13, 52-58

the wife who acted wickedly against the lady-love of the king, her husband, falls into hell and stays there till fourteen Indra reigns. She, who had feelings of enmity against the lady-love of her husband and tried to separate them in their love, is fried in *Tāmrabhrāṣṭa* hell.

That a woman was not allowed to re-marry had some major connotations – one, economic and the other one being sexual. The economic connotation implies that if a widow remarried she might have taken the wealth away which she obtained from her father's house. Due to her second marriage she might have also taken her son (if she had any) to her second husband's home, thus shifting the ownership. The sexual connotation meant the ownership over her body which only her first husband could have claimed that gave him immense pride and honour. Thus it was not a favourable decision to be disposed of.

Chastity gave her immense power that not only saved her husband but was also suppose to save her from other men's gaze. Like Rāmā and Yudhisthira, Nala (Damayanti's husband) believed in his wife's chastity to protect herself from another man's gaze. It was through the power earned through her chastity that was supposed to protect herself. But in many of the *MahaPurāṇas* women are revered to a position wherein she is not only worshipped but she fights against powerful demons, which the gods could not fight against.

There was a war between the deities and the demons. Mahiṣāsura acquired Indra's throne. All the *Devas* went before Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. A light was issued from the *Devas* and a woman was created. Every part of her was a contribution of a god and other celestial beings. She was the Devī. She fought with the demon that the *Devas* were not able to fight. She was also called Bhadra-Kali.<sup>1900</sup> From the body of Pārvatī, Ambika issued who was termed as Kausikī who was known throughout the Universe.<sup>1901</sup> She was called Caṇḍikā and Nārāyaṇī.<sup>1902</sup> The Gods made obeisance to her for saving them from the demons.<sup>1903</sup> She was called the divine goddess, known for three powers – for enhancement of the world, destroyer of the universe and destroying the evil.<sup>1904</sup> She was again born from the body of Gourī in order to destroy

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<sup>1900</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 80, 8

<sup>1901</sup> Ibid, Chapter 82, 43

<sup>1902</sup> Ibid, Chapter 88, 19, 28

<sup>1903</sup> Ibid, Chapter 81, 5

<sup>1904</sup> Ibid, Chapter 81, 10

the demons along with Śumbha and Niśumbha.<sup>1905</sup> When she originated from Pārvatī she was called Kālī.<sup>1906</sup> She was called *Brāhmaṇī*, one with string of beads and pitcher of water in her hand.<sup>1907</sup> She was to be known as Bhīmā-Devī, when Asuras will disturb the three worlds.<sup>1908</sup>

The creation of Devī is also mentioned in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*.<sup>1909</sup> A *Rākṣasa* named Dārūka was to be killed by Uma, as he could be killed by woman only.<sup>1910</sup> She entered into the body of Śiva to have a birth from Śiva.<sup>1911</sup> Śiva then produced Kali from his third eye with a blue throat.<sup>1912</sup> Goddess Caṇḍikā is mentioned and is shown to be with three eyes, fully armed and crushing the enemies of the gods.<sup>1913</sup> Nine forms of the goddess – Rudra Caṇḍa, Pracanda, Caṇḍogra, Caṇḍanaika, Caṇḍa, Caṇḍvati, Caṇḍarūpa, Aticaṇḍika, and Ugracaṇḍa.<sup>1914</sup> She is identical with Rambhā or Lalitā who being worshipped in the forest provides salvation to men.<sup>1915</sup> But such reverence existed in the divine realm, while in the mortal realm the life of a woman was full of sufferings and pain. Not only as wives but as daughters too they had to compromise themselves and their self-respect in order to maintain the dignity and honour of their father. Princesses had to sacrifice their modesty not only to save their father but also the kingdom as well. For the father his dharma as a king held much more importance than his duty towards his daughter.

In the mortal realm there was the existence of other precepts as well that depended on chastity, thus making it more complicated. The stories quite clearly reflect how intricately the concept of gender and caste was woven together. There was a *vaiśya* named Praṇidhi. He had a chaste wife. While he was away, a candela approached her. After he took a dip into the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna, he took the form of her husband. While she was confused, Visnu told her that both of them were their husbands though Padmavati said that it is not proper for a woman to have more than one husband. Her involvement with the candela is a *pratiloma* form of marriage. The story exhibits how caste was woven with that of issues of gender and the concept of

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<sup>1905</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapter 81, 37

<sup>1906</sup> Ibid, Chapter 82, 44

<sup>1907</sup> Ibid, Chapter 85, 14

<sup>1908</sup> Ibid, Chapter 88, 48

<sup>1909</sup> The *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Chapter 19

<sup>1910</sup> The *Līṅga Purāṇa*, Chapter 106, 9-10

<sup>1911</sup> ibid

<sup>1912</sup> Ibid, 14

<sup>1913</sup> The *Agni Purāṇa*, Chapter 50, 6

<sup>1914</sup> Ibid, 8-11

<sup>1915</sup> Ibid, 14

chastity. It also shows the struggle of survival of the Brahmanical tradition. Here a candela approaches a woman, who is the wife of a *vaiśya*. He takes the form of her husband after taking bath in the Ganga and Yamuna. The main aim of the story is to teach the mass the importance of the new Brahmanical rituals and customs and to distract the people of the lower order from getting absorbed into the other prevailing popular tradition. It also implies the change the Brahmanical norms and customs was going through.

The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa* narrates a story where a *Śūdra* woman approaches sage Kasyapa for the purpose of begetting progeny after acquiring permission from her husband, who was a king. But he did not accept his proposal. She is said to have felt passionate towards him. Sage Kasyapa ejaculated his semen seeing an *apsarā* which was collected by the *Śūdra* woman. Her husband welcomed such her and called her fortunate and a chaste woman. Welcoming such news, he distributed gifts among *Brahmānas*. When the king died, she tried to kill herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, but a *Brahmāna* stopped her. This story brings out various nuances involving caste, gender and chastity. Here the king and the queen mentioned belong to a lower caste in the region of Kankyabhoja.

The *Śūdra* after obtaining permission from her husband searched for a male agent for resolving the lineage crisis. But sage Kasyapa rejected her proposal – might on account of her caste, thus maintaining the purity of caste. This also implies that people of lower caste were still unacceptable within the Brahmanical tradition. It also exhibits the claim of dominance of the *Brahmānas* over those regions too that did not follow Brahmanical customs strictly and it was through the support of the *Brahmānas* only that they could overcome any crisis. The story displays the conflict and crisis within Brahmanism with other existing traditions.

The *Śiva Purāṇa*<sup>1916</sup> narrates a story wherein a woman turns infidel after her husband's death and later got involve with a *Śūdra*. But while dealing with the *Purāṇas* we have to keep in mind that how Brahmanical tradition embraced the customs of Saivism and Vaisnavism within its threshold in order to survive the changing circumstances. The story mentioned shows how a woman crossed the boundaries of the customs of the society after her husband's death, thus implying that

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<sup>1916</sup> The *Śiva Purāṇa Koṭīrudrasamhitā*, Chapter 9



it was through patriarchal control only that could keep the moral of a woman intact. But it was Saivism that helped expiating her sinful deeds. The different *MahaPurāṇas* celebrates a particular god, mainly Visnu, Śiva and Brahmā. In this story the woman attains liberation through Śiva. Thus the listeners of such stories whether a male or a female, is not only taught how important patriarchal control is, but also how the worship of such gods would help them in attaining salvation, the ultimate goal of human life.

The story of Tārā, Brhaspati and Soma which is narrated in different *Purāṇas*, though has a similar storyline has a different essence to it. In the version that is mentioned in the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, the *Vāmana Purāṇa* and the *Skanda Purāṇa*, Tārā does not feel desirous of Soma. But the one mentioned in the *Matsya Purāṇa*, clearly indicates that she too felt desirous of Soma. Only in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Brhaspati denounced Tārā and as a result of which she cursed Soma. In the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, Tārā revoked and cursed Soma for approaching her. But Soma carried her away. As he violated the modesty of a chaste woman, he acquired a black spot on his disk. Sukra advised him to worship Visnu to liberate him off his sins. In the *Skanda Purāṇa*, he was liberated through Śiva.

In the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, Lord Kṛṣṇa blessed Tārā and Brhaspati. But in the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, Brhaspati expressed that he did not want Tārā back. Śiva convinced him that it will not be proper for him to do so while in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Brhaspati left him for such an act. Every text had its own perspective and was written with a particular aim; sometimes it belongs to different genre and sometimes collided with different time genres. Thus it reflected different traditions, its customs and the changes that the society was undergoing which in turn led to the revision and transformation of various customs and laws that invariable affected the scriptures.

In order to keep a woman away from reasoning, she was not allowed socialising or speaking to a rationalist, a Buddhist nun etc. We find references of Buddhism in the epics and the *Purāṇas* and condemning them. The reason is quite clear. In the *Jātakas* we find reference wherein a woman talks about earning for herself, walking out of marriage and salvation that was not totally bounded within the patriarchal norms and customs.

The reference of legitimizing the marriage of Draupadī to five men is not only found in the *Mahābhārata*, but also in the *Purāṇa* as well which points to the changes the society was undergoing that helps in reconstruction and understanding the position of women. In the *Anuśāsana Parva* of *Mahābhārata* we get an account of a story that explicitly describes an ancient practice where women were portrayed as independent and that any man could approach her even if she was married. The story that which reflects such an ancient practice does not refer to the consent of the woman. Neither the stories mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* that refers to polyandrous marriage is silent about the consent of a woman. It is questionable whether she performed such an act out of her own desire or was just surrendering to the patriarchal desires.

With time we see that even courtesans being accepted by the society not only by Buddhism but also Brahmanism as well. In the *Jātakas* and in the *Purāṇas* as well, courtesans are portrayed as rich and wealthy people. In the *Purāṇas* their acceptance took place when Brahmanism was benefitted by their wealth in the form of donation. While in the *Jātakas*, their acceptance has a touch of individualism. The way the courtesans have been depicted in the *Jātakas* reflects a different perspective on social and sexual variant. Mostly she is shown to have female servants, thus the dominance of a female figure. They are not only portrayed as wise, beautiful and wealthy but their desire to have a marital life is also voiced. But both in the *Jātakas* as well as texts belonging to the Brahmanical tradition portray courtesans as an object of ornamentation.

Buddhism opened its door for women to adopt asceticism. We get many references wherein women adopt the life of an ascetic. This in turn shows the disappointments a woman had to face. At the same time they are shown to be wise too. But their path to asceticism was bounded by patriarchal chains. They needed their husband's permission to join the *Sangha*. We get references of female ascetics in the epics as well. Here the dominance of patriarchy is seen to be greater. We get references of female ascetics of other traditions as well.

The *Cullakālinga Jātaka*<sup>1917</sup> talks about the admission of four female ascetics to the Buddhist Order. A female Jain was married off to a certain Jain, skilled in maintaining five hundred different theses. The Licchavi chiefs arranged a marriage between them,

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<sup>1917</sup> *Jātaka* No. 301

four daughters and a son was born to them. These five children learned thousand theses from their parents, five hundred from the mother and five hundred from the father respectively. The parents taught them: “*If any layman refutes your thesis, you are to become his wives, but if a priest refutes you must take orders at his hands.*” The son, called Jain Saccaka lived on in Vesālī, studying the lore of the Licchavis. But the four sisters moved from one place to another for the purpose of debate and reached Sāvatti. There they were challenged by Sāriputta. He was victorious. Thus they were admitted to the ‘religious life’. They were ordained in the house of nun called Uppalavaṇṇā. And soon they attained Sainthood. Sometimes nuns of other traditions were portrayed in a negative light as well.

Brahmanism underwent changes in its acceptance and adoption of female ascetics within its realm. Even within the realm of asceticism male interference was needed for the ultimate salvation. But the story of Sabari in *Rāmāyaṇa* who is without any male control shows how Brahmanical tradition modulated its customs and laws to meet the changing needs of the society and bring into its realm the salvation of women which could be attained without a husband. This also indicates how Vaisnavism helped Brahmanical customs and tradition regain its dominance.

Despite of such developments the stereotype thinking regarding women never faded away. They were constantly labelled according to their acts. Their needs and desires were never meant to be considered. Brahmā is said to have created *krtya* woman. He divided the race of *krtya* woman into three parts: the first among them was known as *uttama*, the second was called *madhyama* and the third was known as *adhama*.

The *uttama* were extremely religious and were always devoted to her husband. She does not accept the company of any other man. She adores the *Brāhmaṇas* and the guests like her husband, performs fasting and *vratas*.

The *madhyama* type of *krtya* woman is such who does not fall into the company of other men because of the protection of the teachers. Because of the non-availability of men their desire and chastity remains intact.

The women who are born in degraded families are known as *adhama*. They are devoid of dharma, are wicked and quarrelsome. She denounces her husband and serves other men daily. She tortures her husband. With the help of other men she tries

to kill her husband who is ‘religious and glorious’. Such women look at other men with passion who consider her as beautiful and enjoy her voluptuous advances.<sup>1918</sup> The wicked woman does not serve her husband but thinks of her lover lovingly.<sup>1919</sup> Even if she is denounced by the elders and is being observed by the society she follows the sinful path. Even the kings are unable to set her on the right path. No one is dear to her and acts according to the opportunity and she is always in search of new lovers.<sup>1920</sup> Her attachment is short-lived and is disinterested in performing *vratas*, *tapas*, religious acts, household chores and serving the elders or the gods.<sup>1921</sup>

The *uttama* type of women was the chaste women who followed the path of laws and customs imposed upon them, while the society was intimidated by women belonging to the *madhyama* and *adhama* category. Such was the categorisation of women.

Behind the silence maintained in the narratives one can read the conflicts that formed the part of a woman’s life. Samjñā, the daughter of Viśvakarman was wooed by the Sun.<sup>1922</sup> Seeing the Sun, Samjñā closed her eyes. Her husband was angered and cursed her that Yama and a daughter of unsteady features will be born to her. Thus Yama and Yamuna were born to her. But Samjñā could not tolerate the rays of the Sun. She decided to take refuge under her father, but she called her own reflection to stay in her husband’s house. When Samjñā stayed for a long time at her father’s house, her father told her to go back as it is improper for a daughter to stay back at her father’s house for a long time. She went to her husband’s abode, but being afraid of his effulgence she went to the forest and taking the form of a mare she practised penance.

The Sun through his penance came to know about the real Samjñā that for fifty years she has been practising penance: “*That chaste lady had her body scorched due to the heat of the rays. Since she could not bear to look at me of excessively unendurable brilliance, she began to perform penance. Fifty years have elapsed since she had gone to earth and performed penance.*”<sup>1923</sup> The Sun taking the form of a horse went to the forest and put his semen into the nostril of the mare. Boons were showered on her.<sup>1924</sup>

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<sup>1918</sup> The *Brahmāvaivarta Purāṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa-Janma-Khaṇḍam*, Chapter 84, 25-34

<sup>1919</sup> *Ibid*, 36

<sup>1920</sup> *Ibid*, 37-38

<sup>1921</sup> *Ibid*, 39-40

<sup>1922</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Book III: *Brāhma-Khaṇḍa*, Section II: *Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa*, Chapter 13

<sup>1923</sup> *Ibid*, 47a

<sup>1924</sup> *Ibid*

The story of Samjñā is narrated in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* also.<sup>1925</sup> In this version also she being unable to bear his rays, she created her Chāyā and engaged her in his service. She went to the forest and practised austerities.<sup>1926</sup> Once Chāyā cursed Yama and told him that she is not her real mother.<sup>1927</sup> Through his meditation he saw her in the mare form.<sup>1928</sup> He took the form of a horse and begot on her three children and brought her back.<sup>1929</sup> He even reduced some of his effulgence.<sup>1930</sup> That she took the form of a mare shows her inner desire to be independent. But finally her husband brings her back indicating that women had to bow down to men. Unlike Sītā, Samjñā created an illusion not to protect herself from another male figure but her own husband.

The theory of illusion can be found in the story of Sītā also. That the shadow Sītā protected the real one shows how the inner purity of a woman was supposed to protect her. Moreover the creation of the illusory Sītā shows that it was a necessity to protect women especially the royal ones. Vedavati is said to be the past life of Sītā. When Ravana tried to abduct her, she did not create any illusion like Sītā. This shows the growing insecure position of royal women. This creation of an illusory figure refracts a woman's inner desire, emotions, conflicts and struggles.

Though women were seen to be such dangerous creatures that needed to be tamed and never trusted but their very significance in the society could never be ignored by the patriarchs. Femininity and female sexuality was misunderstood, but its importance could never be ignored. Visnu's transformation into a female, Śiva being anxious to see Visnu's female form, Amba's transformation and the case of Sikhandi, Ila's transformation and Urvaśī's curse on Arjuna shows the equal significance of women. At the same time this shows that gender was a social construction affecting the mind, body and soul. Such gendered constructions led to the adoption of various ideals in a different manner based on gender. For example infidelity had a different meaning and repercussions for men and women. The stories narrated in different texts had a different learning and perspective for men and women. One has to understand the underlying silent voice of women bounded by the loud patriarchal voice. We have to determine a woman's identity and position within the society.

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<sup>1925</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Part III, Chapter 2

<sup>1926</sup> Ibid, 3

<sup>1927</sup> Ibid, 5-6

<sup>1928</sup> Ibid

<sup>1929</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>1930</sup> Ibid, 8

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