

CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN IN HINDU FAMILY

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of*
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

By

RENU CHOUDHARY



**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEM
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI -110067
INDIA
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Renu Choudhary



जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI 110 067


Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences

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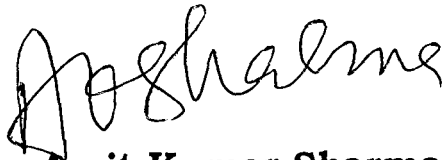
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Renu Choudhary.
Renu Choudhary
STUDENT

We recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


Prof. Ehsanul Haq
Chairperson
Centre for Study of Social Systems,
School of Social Sciences,
Jawaharlal Nehru University,
New Delhi.

Chairperson
CSSS/SSS
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067


Dr. Amit Kumar Sharma
Supervisor
Centre For Study Of Social Systems,
School Of Social Sciences,
Jawaharlal Nehru University,
New Delhi.

Assistant Professor
Centre for the Study
of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

Dedicated To

Ma and Papa

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Chapter-1

INTRODUCTION

Women forms the basic core of the family unit and family forms the basic core of the society. Family has vital importance in women's life. While a man is allowed an independent existence, women's survival is not socially conceivable without the family. The social value placed on the familiar role of women is also responsible for her subordination to man and for her lack of access to economic and political resources, even when she contributes equally or more to the family economy. Thus, while the family throttles women's aspirations towards positions of power and equality, it also places significant responsibilities on them and provides almost the only means of social survival in the majority of societies today.

In the majority of patrilineal and patrilocal communities women are likely to be in the second group marked by unequal gender relations of power running along gender lines in which men's power and women's subordination is accepted as a social norm. It is not surprising therefore, that women have a low position in this society which is reflected in lower life expectancy, lack of access to education, health and employment opportunities, widespread practice of female neglect and abuse.

Since Hindu women forms eighty percent of the female population of India, their study may help us to give general view about status of Hindu women.

In sociological terms status may be defined as the position accorded to functionaries or role occupants placed in same or similar situation, vis. a vis other functionaries or role occupants placed in other situations in the societies.

Ralf Linton has defined status “as any position in the social system”¹

Weber² has defined social status as a claim to positive and negative privilege based on either or these:-

- Mode of living
- Education and training
- Birth or occupation

Merton³ has mentioned set of statuses- status set, role set and status sequences. Single subject status is in a role-set; a set of subject statuses of a single person is a status set and a set of statuses through time is a status sequence.

B. N. Mukherjee⁴ has looked status on different parameters:-

- Status as conceived by individual resources (education, employment, health, socio-metric status, property etc)
- Status defined in terms of rights and privileges

¹ Zelditch, Morris, “Social Status”, International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Vol. 15, New York, Macmillan, 1968, pg.251

² Weber, M, Status, Encyclopedia of social Sciences, McMillan Free Press. Pg. 253

³ Merton, R.K. Status, Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Mc Millan Press. Pg. 252

⁴ Mukherjee B. N `A Multidimensional Conceptualization of Status of Women,” Social Change, March-June 1975 pg 155.

- Status reflected in the range of choice available as compared with men in the society, and control over material, social and environmental resource
- Status reflected in the responsibility of the position held, both formal and unwritten or expected ones.

Status is both subjective and objective. It is usually relative and not absolute. The status enhancement and deterioration process occurs simultaneously. For example, profit for one, would mean loss to the other at the same time or gain in one respect would lead to loss in another e.g. the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law syndrome. If in a family the status of mother-in-law is higher, the status of daughter-in-law is comparatively lower. The higher status of mother-in-law implies that she exercises power over her daughter-in-law. Power is also a relative term and refers to the degree to which individuals and groups can impose their will on others irrespective of their consent. Inequal distribution of power among the family members leads to some sort of stratification in the family. Here stratification implies unequal access to power in decision making or unequal rights to lead one's life on one's own terms.

In the study of status of women in Hindu family, an attempt is made to see position of women in the family. Her status in the family has been studied as a daughter, as a wife, as a daughter-in-law, as a mother and finally as a mother-in-law. The study of women status in

a family requires the study of family values regarding masculinity and femininity. This study has tried to present the comparative study of male and female members in the Hindu family, especially in terms of their position in the family, their education, inheritance and employment.

To study the status of woman various approaches has been put forward. Some of the most popular approaches includes indilological approach, structural approach, functionalist approach, feminist approach and Marxist approach. In the Indian context the following approaches can be discussed.

Indilological Approach

Indilogy literally means a systematic study of Indian society and culture. Indologists claims that uniqueness of Indian civilization cannot be fitted into the framework of European sociology. They claimed that Indian society would be understood only through the concepts, theories and frameworks of Indian civilization. They rely primarily on the book view. It gives more importance to the culture of Indian society than to empirical structure. The sources of indilological studies are primarily classical texts, manuscripts, archaeological artifacts and symbolic expressions. The aim indilological studies is to gain a deeper understanding of Indian sub-culture. In the writings of B.K. Sarkar, G.S. Ghurye, Radha Kamal Mukherjee, K.M. Kapadia, Irawati Karve, influence of indilological approach can be seen.

My first chapter is based on this approach. Since this chapter deals with the historical perspective, this approach has really been helpful. Classical text of A.S. Altekar, K.M.Kapadia, has really been helpful in getting an idea about the status of women in the Hindu family in different eras.

Structural Approach

Structural approach claims that sociology is a universal science of society and its concepts, theories and assumptions can be fruitfully utilized beyond Europe for comparative analysis. It gives more importance to the empirical structure in the field than to the normative framework of culture. This view propagates a very rigorous and systematic fieldwork for the collection of data. The central concept within this approach is social structure.

Structural approach in Indian sociology is most popular, most developed and most coherent approach in sociology offer the independence. This approach has been adopted to study village communities, caste structure, family structure, kinship structure, religious structure etc. It underlines the processes of structural discontinuities and differentiation in societies for special attention. Problems of equality and inequality, study of power structure, social stratification, changes in the demographic and family structure of Indian society has been studied by this approach.

My second chapter is influenced by this approach. In this chapter, I have tried to focus on the Hindu family and marriage system in India. I have also tried to focus on the status of women in Hindu family at different stages of life. Empirical studies of T.N. Madan, Lynn Bennet, M.N. Srinivas, A.M. Shah and various other have really been helpful in doing this chapter.

Contemporary Approach

Under the contemporary approach, I have taken the feminist and the Marxist approach.

Feminist agree that women at present have a lower status than men; that socially, economically and politically women are discriminated against and this state of affairs is unfair and must be changed. However, there is a difference in the analysis of the origin of subordinate status of women. Within the women's movement there have been three major ideological positions described as- Liberal Feminism , Radical Feminism and Socialist Feminism.

Liberal feminists have usually accepted the existing social order. They accepted the common arrangement by which the man earns the family income and the wife superintends the domestic expenditure. If the wife goes out to work, she will not be able to perform the tasks of child rearing and house management properly and therefore she should contribute at home by her labour. Thus, the sex role differences are accepted but with a proviso that both are considered

equal. Hence they believed that they must have right to vote and they must be given education, and they should have civil rights. Indian social reformers of the 19th century talked practically in the same vein by demanding right of education to women removal of social customs like 'sati', child marriage and ban on widow remarriage.

Liberal Feminism did not provide much insights into the roots of women's inferior status. Liberal feminism argued for equal rights for women but accepted the existing social order as valid and advocated for improvement of social customs, institutions, laws, attitude, without altering the social structure particularly the family. They also subscribed to the hope that accumulation of reforms will transform society and therefore radical restructuring is not necessary.

The main contention of radical feminists is that the roots of subordination lie in the biological family, the hierarchical sexual division of society and sex role themselves. The biological differences results in the male domination of power over women. Patrilineal hegemony is identified by the radical feminists as an autonomous historical fact more rooted in biology than in economy and they consider gender relations to be the fundamental form of oppression.

An important contention of the radical feminists is the male dominance is preserved via marriage and the family through sexual division of labour in the society. As male dominance is rooted in biology, the battle lines are drawn between men and women. The

family perpetuates the sexual division of labour through socialisation. The radical feminists aver that though there is no biological reason why there is no biological reason to support the view that reproduction and socialisation should occur only in the family. The nuclear family is considered to be a hindrance in the full realisation of equality. This contention is very much different from the liberal feminists perspective on family.

Socialist feminist view-woman's inferior status is rooted in private property, and class division in society. They have taken the Marxist viewpoint. They believe that sexist ideology and structures such as family maintains women's inferior status in the society. Oppression is inclusive of exploitation but reflects a complex reality. Power is derived from gender and class and is manifested materially and ideologically in patriarchy and class relations. So, the major task is to discover the interdependence of class and patriarchy. Socialist feminists feel that it is imperative to understand the hierarchical sexual ordering of the society within the class structure. They also feel that overthrow of the capitalist system by itself will not mean transformation of patriarchy.

According to them, the powerlessness of women in society is rooted in four basic structures: those of production, reproduction sexuality and socialisation of children. As the radical feminists they also look at family which reinforces women's oppressive condition.

Family and economy should not be looked upon as separate systems but as mutually interacting systems. The unequal and hierarchical sex roles operate in both the domains of family and economy.

The socialist feminists have raised the whole debate of domestic work. The Orthodox Marxist analysts consider that household work produces only use value and not exchange value. A group of socialist feminists argue that women's oppression is based on unpaid housework, child-rearing, child-care and housework are material activities resulting in products but women are not paid for this.

In the Indian context the dominant approach has been of liberal feminist, who are in favour of reforms within the existing structure. This approach is somewhere seen in all the three chapters as it deals with the subordination of women but in the third chapter this approach is particularly more dominant.

I have divided my dissertation basically into three chapters which is followed by conclusion.

Chapter one deals with the changes in the status of women in different periods i.e, from ancient period to medieval and ultimately to the modern era.

Chapter two gives a brief view about the family and marriage system in India. It focuses on the status of women in Hindu family at

different stages of life. It also focuses on the status of woman in Hindu law.

In Chapter three I have tried to see whether employment has helped women to get out of subordination of men or not. How is their status in the family when they are economically independent. Has their employment helped them to seek high status or equal status, in the family.

Chapter-2

WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The status of women in Hindu family has changed from time to time. Their position has been variously estimated and diametrically opposite views are held regarding her place in different stages of civilization. On one hand she is considered little better than a slave condemned to drudgery, bought as a chattel and treated as such. On the other hand, those who have had anything to do with tribes reckoning descent from mother are likely to view a woman as the undisputed mistress of the family if not community life as well. Both concepts, are “as far as the vast majority of the people are concerned, bound to be far away from actual state of affairs”.

There is so much variability in the relation of women to society that any general statement must be taken with caution. Categorically, her utility, resourcefulness in domestic life, refreshing company and affectionate care of children have always proved a great asset to her partner in life and have, to a considerable extent, determined her status at different stages of civilization.

Status of Women In Ancient India

The Vedic society was a patrilineal one, and hence father was the head of the family. All efforts were therefore made to secure the birth of a son. The Atharvaveda contains charms and ritual to ensure the birth of a son in preference to that of a daughters¹. Ancestor worship was very important and sons alone were regarded as eligible

¹ Altekar A.S., The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization, Motilal Banaradidass, Delhi Pg. 3.

for offering oblations to the manes, daughter could not perform this very important duty.² Sons were considered as permanent economic asset of the family. They lived with their aged parents & did not migrated like the daughter to another family after marriage.

However it was true that due to certain economic and social reasons a son was more desired in the vedic family than a daughter yet it does not mean that girls did not have proper respect in the family. There are references, which clearly indicate that equal social and religious status was allowed to the boys and girls in the vedic society.

Respectable status attained by the girls is also indicated by the system of education prevalent in the vedic society. Boys and girls both had equal opportunities for advanced education. Initiation ceremony (Upnayana Samskara) were necessary for endowment of women, particularly the Aryan women. No less than twenty women were among the composers of the Rig Vedic hymns.³ Gargi and Atreyi were the leading philosophers of that time.⁴ We also find a class of women known as "Brahmavadinis",⁵ who continued their studies even for the whole life time.

In the Vedic age women enjoyed all the religious rights and privileges, which men possessed. Women were educated and they

² Ibid pg 5.

³ Desai, Neera, Women in Modern India, Vora and Co. Publishers Pvt. Ltd, Bombay, 1957, pg. 11.

⁴ Kapadia, K, M, Marriage and Family in India, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1955, Pg. 252.

⁵ Altekar, Pg. 13, op. cit.

could recite Vedic hymns. The Sama hymns were chanted by women. Women's co-operation were absolutely necessary in religious rites and ceremonies. This naturally increased her religious value. It was said that a man could not become a spiritual whole, unless he was accompanied by his wife. It was believed that Gods did not accept the oblation offered by a bachelor. Wife was thus indispensable from the spiritual and religious point of view. So, her religious status was as high as that of her husband. There were special sacrifices like Seetayagna, Rudrabali and Rudrayaga which were exclusively performed by women.⁶

During the studies of the Brahmanas (i.e. 1500 to 1000 B.C) the volume of vedic studies became very extensive, so short period was inefficient for an efficient grounding in the vedic lore. As a consequence, the participation of women in sacrifices gradually became a mere matter of formality. Even the Upanayana of girls became a mere formality in course of time. The wife's participation in rituals no doubt became a formal one, but it did not stop altogether as society was not ready for it.

It is difficult to say when the institution of marriage came into existence. The vedic literature does not show any indication of a promiscuous society. It represents marriage in the form of a fully developed social institution. The Rigveda tells us that the tie of

⁶ Desai Neera, Pg. 12. Op.cit.

marriage was necessary for becoming a householder performing sacrifices to Gods and begetting children.⁷

In Vedic passage it was said that a person, who was unmarried was unholy. From the religious point of view he remained incomplete and was not fully eligible to participate in sacraments. It was only after marriage that he was considered to be complete.⁸

By about 300 B.C. marriage came to be regarded as obligatory for girls. Girls were married at a fairly advanced age in the vedic period. The precise age was not stated, but from the Avesta we learn that maidens were usually wedded at the age of 15 or 16 in ancient Persia. The same may be true in the Vedic period. There was no tradition of child marriage prevailing in the Vedic society. There are evidences that marriage did not take place normally before puberty. Wishes and choice of girls in the settlement of their marriage is also a strong indication of their status in the society. It appears from the Vedic literature that generally marriage used to be settled by the eldest male member of the family but there are other references in the Rigveda Samhita which shows that when brides were of 16 or 17 they had more or less effective voice in the selection of their partners.

Marriages at a lower age began to be advocated from about 4th century B.C. the writers of the Dharmasutras, who flourished from c.

⁷ Rigveda X 85.36, Refer to Shastri Madhu, Status of Hindu Women, RBSA Publishers Jaipur, 1990

⁸ Aitareya Brahman, I. 3.5 Refer to Shastri Madhu, Status of Hindu Woman, RBSA Publishers, Jaipur, 1990 Pg. 25.

400. BC. to c 100 A.D, begin to advise that marriages of girls should not be delayed long after their puberty. As the marriageable age of the girl decreased, education of the girl also decreased as they got married at the age in which they use to study. From 200 A.D. child marriages became the order of the day, the state of affairs changed. The marriage came to be regarded as wife's Upnayana, the husband as her preceptor, and the stay at his place as the counterpart of the stay at the teacher's house. Girls of 10 or 12 were incapable of exercising any choice in marriage, and so whole responsibility was felt upon the father. Though marriage was regarded as highly desirable for both men and women, yet the society did not insist that it should be performed at all costs. The Vedic literature often refers to the spinsters, use of word "anub" in Rig-Veda (one who grows old in one's parent house.) denotes an old maid.⁹

Monogamy normally prevailed in the Vedic age. There are instances of polygamy in the Vedic period but it was looked down with disfavour. Polygamy was allowed mostly amongst kings and the rich. But it was not a custom. For the general people if the first wife was found barren, the man was permitted to have another wife.

Eight forms of marriage- Brahma, Daiva, Arsha Prajapatya, Asura, Rakshasa, Paisacha, Gandharva, are recognised by the smritis. In that first four were considered to be approved forms of

⁹ Altekar A.S. Pg. 52. op.cit

marriage, next three were considered to be unapproved form and gandharva marriage was approved by some while disapproved by some.¹⁰

Bramha Vivah was the most ideal and the most sought after marriage among the Hindus. In this form of marriage the father of the bride invited the most suitable groom, in terms of learning capacity and character. Daughter was given to the groom in *kanyadaan*.

In Daiva Vivah the father of the bride offered his daughter in the hand of the priest as *Dakshina* and *Yajn*, which was officiated by him.

Arsha Vivah was the sanctioned procedure of marriage for sages or renunciators, in case they wanted to lead a family life. They used to gift a pair of cow and a bull to the father of a girl of their choice. In case the father of the girl was in favour of this marriage proposal he accepted the gift and marriage was arranged. Otherwise, the gift was respectfully returned to the sage.

Prajapatya Vivah was the modified, less elaborate form of Brahma vivah. The main difference lied in the rules of sapinda exogamy.

In Asura Vivah the bridegroom paid bride price to bride's father or her kinsmen and married the bride. Marriage by exchange was also permitted within this marriage.

¹⁰ *ibid.* pg. 36

Gandharva Vivah was the traditional form of contemporary love marriage. It was a sanctioned form of marriage in exceptional circumstances and among certain classes but it was not considered as an ideal in the tradition.

Rakshasa Vivah was that form of marriage which is known marriage by capture among the tribals. This type of marriage was widely prevalent during the ancient age among the kings as the prizes of war or the mechanism to improve relations with the defeated people.

Paisacha Vivah was least acceptable form of marriage. The man cheated the girl and thereby forced her to marry him. The woman, having lost her chastity, had no other alternative than to marry him. Recognising this form of union as marriage was an attempt to protect the rights of the cheated woman. It also gave legitimacy to the children born of such unions.

In Vedic times, the custom of bride price was known, but not held in esteem it was condemned vehemently by the leaders of society. The prevalence of child marriages since the beginning of the Christian era further helped its growth. When brides were grown up and educated, they had naturally some voice, direct or indirect, in the settlement of their marriage and so could not be sold to the highest bidder. When they began to be married at the tender age of 10 or 11, it became easy for their guardians to settle the marriage more with a

view to get highest bride price than with the aim of finding the most suitable bride groom.

The present day rule, which prohibits marriages between persons of the same gotra, was unknown to society for a long time. Around 600 B.C. the prohibition of sagotra & sapravara marriage took place. The caste also did not raise any insurmountable barrier in the way of marriage for a long time. It was from about the 10th century A.D. that intercaste marriages were not encouraged.

In vedic era, women had sufficient freedom of going to attend fairs, festival and assemblies. Women frequently went out on pleasure trips. Instances of `svayamvara' or self choice found in the vedic texts illustrates another aspect of women's freedom in the Vedic era.

Generally purda was unknown down to c100 B.C. Some kind of Purda was observed in certain royal families which felt, probably on account of a notion of prestige, that royal ladies should not come within the gage of Vulgar eyes. At the time when Sita set out with her husband for the forest through the public thoroughfares of Ayodhya, a regret is expressed in Ramyana, that a lady, who had so far not been seen even by the spirits of the sky, should now become the object of public gaze.¹¹ Soon after the beginning of the Christian era, a section of society began to advocate a greater seclusion for women. It was

¹¹ Altekar A. S. Pg. 168 op.cit

however restricted to royal families and some elite class. It did not affected the commoners.

In the Vedic society wife was treated with utmost courtesy and regard. Though supreme authority was clearly vested in the husband, the wife's position was one of honorable subordination. Manu has stated that a woman should be under the surveillance of father at young age, of husband at youth, and of son at old age.¹²

Manu has regarded wife as the half of the husband though not the better half. According to Manu a man does not make a whole by himself alone but attains completion in the composition of his wife¹³. It was said that a family will prosper where female relatives were happy.

Early in the vedic period brides received affectionate and respectful treatment in their new homes as they were grown up and educated at the time of marriage. There are references in the Vedic marriage hymn which denotes that brides were expected to take the reins of household from their elderly relations, immediately after their marriage.

But when era of child and illiterate brides came, the type of treatment given by the elders to the new bride began to change. They

¹² Kapadia, K.M., Marriage and Family in India, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1955, Pg-254.

¹³ Manusmriti; ix; 45 in Shastri Madhu pg. 56, op.cit

ceased to be the queens, in their new households and now they were regarded as the pupil of their husbands.

The Atharvaveda, shows that the funeral ritual of the Vedic age preserved some formalities reminiscent of the archaic custom of sati. It shows that it was still customary for the widow to tie by the side of her husband's corpse on the funeral pyre. She was, however, asked to come down, and a prayer was offered that she should lead a prosperous life enjoying the bliss of children and wealth.¹⁴ It is therefore clear that the Vedic age expected the widow rather to remarry than to immolate herself. The Buddhist literature is unaware of the custom of sati. Megasthenes and Kautilya both do not mention the custom of sati. Puranas refer only to a few cases of sati. During the period 700-1100 A.D., sati became more frequent in northern India.

Widows were not required to die with their husband. There were three courses open for widow. They could either pass their remaining life in widowhood or have some children by levirate (niyoga) or remarry regularly.

When a person died without leaving any male issue behind, it was regarded as great spiritual calamity, and it was sacred duty of a brother-in-law to see that a son was born to his sister-in-law to perpetuate his brother's memory and to ensure him a seat in heaven.

¹⁴ ibid 118

References to regular remarriage of widow in Vedic literature are few, probably because "Niyoga" was then more popular than remarriage. At this period, a widow could get as many as three sons by 'Niyoga'. So the 'Niyoga' relationship practically amounted to a remarriage.

For a long time there was no question of the woman holding any property; she herself was an item in the movable property of the husband or the patriarch. Women were given away as gifts in the Vedic age, as it has appeared from several hymns, which glorify the gifts of generous donors.

But in cultured circles husband and wife were regarded as the joint-owners of the household. The Vedic word for the couple, dampati, etymologically means the joint owners of the house. But the theory of the joint ownership of the couple secured only minor advantage to the wife. The wife had no right to incur any substantial expenditure during her coverture without her husband's permission. The wife has only the right over *streedhan* which was defined by Manu as what was given to her before the nuptial fire in bridal procession in token of love and which she has received from brother, mother, father or husband.¹⁵

Even when no bride price was paid, the bride received some wedding gifts in the Vedic age. 'Parinahya' was the term used to

¹⁵ Buhler, Laws of Manu, p. 3330 Refer to Desai Neera, *Lxlomen In Modern India*, Vora & Co. Publisher Private Ltd., Bombay. 1957, Pg 105.

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denote them, and Vedic text declare that wife was to be their owner.¹⁶ If a women dies without leaving any issues, and if her marriage had taken place by any of the unapproved forms of marriage like the Asur, Rakshasa etc, her streedhan reverts to her parents or brother. Streedhan generally devolved upon daughters. Among daughters unmarried ones were to be preferred to married ones, and among the latter, the first claim was of those who were not well-to do. Unmarried daughter got share from father's property. The Rigveda expressly refers to an old maiden claiming her share in her patrimony. But the married daughter did not get any share.

Women as widow had plenty rights in her husband's property. After the death of her husband the first successor was the widow. In the presence of her husband she had no separate property except her streedhan. Though widowed mother had wide rights to retain the property for maintenance and for the son which she could have by niyoga.

A mother inherited the property of a son, if he died without leaving any issue. She also inherited a daughter's property, if the daughter was married in the Asur form and died without an issue.

¹⁶ Altekar, A.S. pg 36, op.cit.

Medieval Period

Position of women began to deteriorate after the advent of Muslim rule. There were many factors which directly and indirectly led to the continuous deterioration in the status of woman in a medieval times.

Early marriage became a rule to safeguard the honour and chastity of girls. As a result of this the literacy among the girls went down. During the muslim rule the percentage of literacy among Hindu woman went further down with a great rapidity. Rich and cultural families were ruined by the new political dispensation. Parents were in no position to make special arrangement for the education of their daughters. Society had a general prejudice against female education; it was believed that a girl taught to read and write would become a widow.¹⁷ Ordinarily only prostitutes and dancing girls could read and write. The decline in literacy among women was so marked and rapid that by the beginning of the 19th century hardly one woman in a hundred could read in Madras and Malwa.¹⁸

We have already seen that age at marriage was low in post Vedic period. The popularity of early marriages went on increasing in medieval times. Some enlightened rulers like Akbar disliked them and recommended to their subjects that marriages should be performed after the attainment of puberty. The advice, however, produced no effect. Fitch, a 16th century English trader, has noted that boys and

¹⁷ Stark, Vernacular Education in Bengal, Pg.43, quoted in Altekar A.S., pg. 24 ,op.cit.

¹⁸ Altekar A.S., pg. 24 ,op.cit.

girls were married at Murshidabad in Bengal at the age of 10 and 6 respectively.

Dowry system assumed an alarming proportions in medieval times This, however, happened only in case of royal and aristocratic families. In such families a Rajput youth of the purest blood was desired as a son-in-law by a large number of people, as a result his price in the marriage market was very high. The dowry system had become popular in Rajputana from about the 13th on 14th century A.D. In ordinary families, however, the amount of dowry was a nominal one.

The practice of sati was mainly a medieval development. We get detailed information on sati from some late medieval puranas and foreign merchants and travelers. There are some cases in which unwilling widows were forced to burn themselves. Those who ran away from the funeral pyre were regarded as untouchables and were not accepted back by their castes and families.

Rate of female infanticide was very high during this period. Marriage of a daughter was the responsibility of her father and with the alarming proportion of dowry it became very difficult for a father to find an appropriate son-in-law. Daughter was seen as a burden. Many Hindus in India killed their daughters immediately after birth.¹⁹ They

¹⁹ Coonmackam,R,J, Abolition of Female infanticide in India, London 1915, quoted in Altekar A.S., op.cit. pg. 70..

preferred son to a daughter because a son had to perform his parents last rites. On the contrary, a daughter was considered a burden on the resources of her parents and was therefore a liability and her upbringing till marriage was considered an unwanted responsibility. In such a partial psycho-sociological environment killing of female children was not surprising. But it was not a universal practice among Hindus and was more common among the Rajputs and Jats. In Punjab it was prevalent everywhere. An infant girl was killed either by drugging or by mixing poison in her milk, sometimes a layer of poison was also applied on the mother's breast so that the baby died when she suckled.

The general adoption of the Purda system by the ruling and aristocratic families of Hindu community is subsequent to the advent of Muslim rule. It was accepted by Hindu society partly in imitation of manners of the conquerors and partly as an additional protection for the common folk. In Muslim ruling families the purda was so strict that a message had to pass through three intermediaries before it could reach the desired person in Jenana. During the Hindu period purda system was there but it found acceptance only in a very small number of ruling families. With the advent of Muslim rule it gained a powerful impetus due to the culture and example of the conquerors. Women were ill fitted for their earlier freedom on account of their inexperience and ignorance and submitted to the new order.

The seclusion of women was not confined to India alone. In Athens at C. 500 B.C., women could not meet their husband's guests or go outside the house without proper guards. The Bible lays down that woman should not speak in public at the church. In Russia soon after the introduction of Christianity the 'Terem system', which shut out women from friends and foes alike.

So, we see that with the advent of Muslim rule the position of women further deteriorated. Early marriage became a rule to safeguard the honour and chastity of girls. Women were discriminated against in marriage, marital status, divorce, widowhood and inheritance. Early marriage, enforced widowhood, sati, purdah, dowry system, female infanticide and evil practices of polygamy and polyandry prevailed in which women practically had no say and were neglected. In this period Hindu women were in a perpetual state of depression.

Modern India

When the Indians came in contact with the British in the later half of the eighteenth century the position of woman had reached maximum degree of deterioration.

At the advent of the British rule female education had practically disappeared from Hindu community. Subsequent to the assumption of the Indian administration by the British crown, Government began to take some steps for the promotion of education

among girls. Progress during the first forty years was very very slow. Early marriage at the age of 9 or 10 was the main barrier in the way of education.

8 or 9 was the usual marriageable age of girl at the advent of the British rule. With the introduction of western ideas the educated sections of society began to feel the necessity of deferring marriages to a more advanced age. Social conferences began to advocate the cause of post puberty marriages during the nineties of the last century, but their efforts were not appreciably successful till the beginning of the 20th century. The terrible havoc caused by the plague, advanced the marriageable age of girl from 8 to 12 or 13. The Sarda Act, which laid down 18 and 14 as the minimum legal age for boys and girls respectively, followed the actual practice of the advanced middle classes of society. The second world war caused a further rise in the marriageable age of girls. The inflation which it has caused since 1942 has made it almost impossible for the middle classes to balance their budgets with only one earning member in the family. Several new lines of employment became available to women with the opening of rationing and other new department.

British government passed several laws to ensure a respectable position of woman in the society. British Government passed an official proclamation prohibiting infanticide through an Act in 1870.²⁰

²⁰ H. H Hyndman, The Awakening of Asia, London, pg 1919 pg 29.

According to this Act, it was compulsory for parents to register the birth of their children, both boys and girls. This law was strictly enforced.

The Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and all other such socio-religious reform movement worked against the social evil prevailing at that time.

Sati was prevalent among some section of the upper caste Hindus for a long time. The number of Indian women committing sati was going up so rapidly that finally Lord William Bentick, then Governor-General of India (1828-32), decided to abolish it by law. His conviction was also shared by enlightened Indians like Dwarkanath Tagore and RamMohan Roy. Finally sati was abolished in 1829 and it was declared "illegal and punishable by criminal courts" by Regulation XVII.

When sati was abolished, a widow was permitted to exist but her life was miserable. She was treated badly by her in-laws, they blamed her for her husband's death. She was considered inauspicious and hence excluded from all the socio-religious ceremonies. Social reformers like Ram Mohan Roy, Ranade advocated the right of a widow to remarry. J. P. grant passed widow remarriage act in 1856.

To check the evil practice of dowry several steps were taken which unfortunately has not been successful till date. The Anit-Dowry

league was started in the first session of the Madras students convention. The Government of India passed an Anti Dowry Act in 1961 to check this evil. It is sad that young men and their parents even now are as much interested in accepting dowry as they were before this law was passed.

To check polygamy government passed various act. The Baroda State Government was the first to pass an Act in 1942 against polygamy. The Bombay Government passed it in 1996, the Madras Government in 1997, and Saurashtra in 1954.

Gandhiji also contributed in rising a socio-political consciousness among Indian women. He wanted woman to be a part of the national movement. In response to his call, women came out of their homes to join the freedom struggle. Socio-political participation gained through consciousness was sufficient for women to shed a number of socio-religious evil from which they had long suffered.

To conclude we can say that the position of women was dynamic through the ages. In vedic period the position of women was relatively respectable one. Though the birth of a daughter was not appreciated but once she was born proper care was taken. She was equal to boy in many sense. Boys and girls have equal oppurtunities for education. Equal social and religious status was allowed to both boys and girls. Her choice was asked in marriage. Her age at marriage was also

satisfactory. Dowry was not known at that time. Even purdah and sati didn't exist at that time. Widow remarriage and niyoga was allowed.

Things began to change during the medieval period and condition of women further deteriorated. Marriageable age of girls was very low hence they didn't had any choice in choosing their bridegroom. Dowry was very high at that time and the practice of sati came into existence. Women were excluded from the mainstream. Purdah system was there for women. They were not supposed to interact with the mainstream.

During British period position of woman became little better in comparison to the medieval period. British government took many steps to uplift the position of women. Many acts like- (Sarda act which increased the marriageable age of girls and boys), anti dowry act were passed. Sati was prohibited. Many social reformers like Ishwarchand Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, helped in this. They rose their voice against social evils like sati, purdah and dowry. All this helped women in securing a better position in the society.

Chapter-3
STATUS OF WOMEN
IN
HINDU FAMILY

Family describes the basic social unit in which all of us-men, women and children-live in a network of mutual ties and obligations. Significance of family for the women is more vital, than for man, as one can talk of the social problems of the latter without involving the family, but for the former, one cannot speak about their social problems without dealing with their family functions. Women's role and status have been described to put forth their functions towards the family. But before analyzing the status of women within the family, it is important to have a brief view on the Indian family and marriage system.

A.M. Shah¹ has talked about two types of family:-

- (i) Elementary family
- (ii) The joint and the extended family

The generally acknowledged meaning of "elementary family" is a group composed of a man, his wife, and their children.²

Murdock³ define nuclear family as " it consists of typically of a married man and woman with their offspring, although in individual cases one or more additional persons may reside with them."

¹ Shah, A.M. Household Dimension of Family in India, Orient Longman Ltd., 1973, p. 107-110.

² Ibid ,pg.107

³ Murdock, G.P. Social Structure, Macmillan, New York, Pg.1

“Joint family” means “two or more elementary families joined together”. Frequently the term “extended family’ is used in the place of “joint family”⁴

According to Irawati Karve, a joint family can be defined as “a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred.”⁵

The typical Indian family is the joint family. Family is based on either of the descent-father or the mother. When it follows fathers lineage it is called patrilineal descent and when it follows mother’s lineage it is called matrilineal descent.

Patrilineal descent

Barring a limited number of matrilineal communities concentrated in the South-Western and the North-Eastern regions of the country, the family in India is largely patrilineal and patrilocal. The core of the family are the males who trace their descent from a common ancestor. The women are brought as brides and the young daughters are given in marriage to the unrelated males of the same or higher caste. The scope of this family includes multigenerational membership: three to four generation of males related to the male ego

⁴ Shah, A.M. pg. 109, op.cit.

⁵ Karve Irawati, Kinship Organization in India , G.S. Press, Poona, 1953, pg.10.

as grandfather and his brothers, father and his brothers, cousins, son and nephews, and their wives, unmarried daughter and sisters.

In patrilineal family a son is looked upon as the natural successor, supporter and heir of the family. The strong preference for a son has to be understood in terms of two institutions interlinked with family: property and religion.

The religious requirement of a son is even more compelling reason for male preference. A son alone is qualified to carry on the patrilineage, perform the rites of lighting the funeral pyre and propitiating the souls of agnatic ascendants through shradha. Women who could not produce sons had a miserable existence, and more often than not, a new wife replace her.

Some of the adverse features for women in patrilineal system are:-

- The women is a social dependent .
- Her worth is measured in terms of her ability to produce children through whom patrilineality is perpetuated.
- She has no share in property. This is now sought to be corrected by law, yet cultural norms still hold strong.
- A woman does not belong to her father's family, while membership in the husbands family is conditional to her 'proper' behaviour.
- Women are controlled by family in every respect.

Matrilineal descent

In matrilineal descent, core of the family is female, and descent is traced through her. Matrilineality had a strong base among the Nayars and Tiyars of Kerala. It is found among several temple servant castes, occupational castes, and some forest tribes. In parts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu too matrilineality is found.

A typical matrilineal joint family in Kerala called "tharwad" is formed by a woman, her sons and daughters and daughter's son and daughters. The husbands of the daughters are occasional visitors who never stay in the house, and the sons go to visit their wives and children at the wives' mothers' house. There are no relations by marriage. The woman is not dependent on her husband nor does she derive her status from him. She has a dignity and rights which cannot be ignored even when a male like her brother or mother's brother may assume possibility of authority as her managers. The husband is never incorporated into this family unit, and does not enjoy any rights over his children and wife's property.

In fact the women's brother among the Nayars of Kerala, may yield a considerable position in making decisions over property matters as well as in several other public functions. Yet these functions are performed on the behalf of the sister.

There are differences in the matrilineal cultures of south-western regions, both between them and different communities within them. The north-eastern communities of Garo and Khasi and the Pnar in the states of Meghalaya and Assam live in matrilineal society, where the husband comes to live with the wife's people and tends her land. Among the Khasis, youngest daughter gets a larger share in ancestral property, as she is entrusted with the care of the aged parents as well as perform the family rituals, death rites etc. The Garos entrust this function to one daughter who then inherits the property. The practice is different from the Nayar system in which all girls are co-sharer.

Some typical features of matriarchical family system are:-

- Women are not socially dependent on men.
- They are the perpetrators of the family line and the children owe their social placement through the mother, acquire their share in movable or immovable property, and also acquire positions of authority through her.
- The women are not under social pressure to produce male children, or to prove their fertility as a precondition to their position in the family.
- A women is a full member of her matrilineal group and continues to be so even after her marriage.

- She controls her own life and her children. In case of breakdown of marriage, children remains with her.

These features of the matrilineal society gives an impression that women are all powerful matriarchs. Contrary to this notion, one finds that political power and social control is exercised by men- they may be husbands or matrilineal kin.

Men superior physical qualities are recognized; war and politics is left to them. Rulers, chiefs, elders and managers of property are men. With opportunities of education, new avenues of livelihood and geographical mobility, a man gains control over his wife and children as the breadwinner.

Marriage

Marriage among the Hindus is regarded as a sacrament and it is considered as a necessary religious duty because without a wife a man cannot enter *Grahasta Ashram* which is essential to fulfill certain obligations. Secondly, without marriage there can be no offsprings. Birth of a son is considered essential among Hindus for according to Hindu belief one cannot be released from the cycle of birth-death-rebirth unless one has produced a son to perform the death rites. Further, according to *Dharma sastras* it is moral duty of every Hindu to perpetuate his Kula (lineage). Thus begetting a son is prime goal of Hindu marriage.

Marriage being a sacrament is indissoluble. Thus according to orthodox Hindu view divorce is not permissible. Traditionally upper-caste Hindus did not permit divorce but among the lower caste Hindus whose life is not governed by *Sanskritic Hinduism*, divorce and re-marriage are quite common.

Among Hindus upper caste endogamy is strictly practiced. Among certain castes hypergamous practices are quite common. For example, among the Brahmins, Rajputs and Marathas, hypergamous marriages between the subcastes have been commonly practiced. In Kerala, there is a long institutionalized practice of hypergamous marriages between the younger sons of *Namboodiri* Brahmin families and *Kshatriya* and *Nayar* women. These *hypergamous* alliances were called *Sambandham*. However, the children born of such *hypergamous* marriages were not permitted to inherit property from their father's side.

Regarding the rules of exogamy, all Hindu practices gotra exogamy. Among the Brahmins of Northern India three types of exogamous rules are observed viz sagotra exogamy, sapinda exogamy and sapravara exogamy. According to rules of Sapinda and Sagotra exogamy, a man cannot marry a woman related to him through an ancestor upto seven generations of father's side and five generation of mother's side. In almost all parts of Southern India cross-cousin marriage and even uncle-niece marriage is permitted.

Traditionally among the Hindus, the girl is given as a gift to the groom. This practice is called "Kanyadaan". At the time of "Kanyadaan" the girl is provided with gifts from her parents and from her relatives in the form of jewellery, clothes and other items. Sometimes even husband gives certain gifts to his bride. These gifts constitutes the 'Stridhan' or the maiden's property. This property is passed on to her female heir's on the death of the women among certain sections.

Another form of exchange was also traditionally practiced. This is called bride-price. It is paid to the bride's father out a sense of gratefulness for having provided a wife. Even Vedas have recognized the payment of bride-price later on during the medieval period . The payment of *Stridhana* took the form of dowry especially in the case of hypergamous marriage. For example girls from the rich families often wanted to marry the grooms from Kulin Brahmin by paying a large amount of wealth. This exchange of wealth is different from the traditional practice of *Stridhana* and came to be known as dowry. In modern times among the Hindus practice of dowry had become widespread and is no longer confined to hypergamous marriage.

After having a brief view on the nature of family and marriage among Hindu family, I have tried to focus on the status of women as found in the studies of the Hindu family.

Birth of a Girl Child

Formally and manifestly the birth of a daughter is a much less auspicious event than the birth of a son in a Hindu family. Son are particularly auspicious and, therefore, greatly desired; they are called 'this as well as the other world' (Yahi-lok ta para-lok) of their parents.⁶ Under the rules of patrivirilocal residence and patrilineal inheritance it is exclusive duty of the sons to look after their parents in their old age. Further it is the sons alone who can offer food and drink to their manes and 'immortalize' them by continuing the line of descent.

The preference for a son when a child is born is as old as Indian society itself. Vedic verses pray that sons will be followed by still more male offspring and never by females. A prayer in the Atharvaveda adds a touch of malice: "The birth of a girl grant it elsewhere, here grant a son."⁷ There are hymns with prayers for sons and grandsons, male offsprings, male descendants and male issue and occasionally for wives but never for daughters.

Even today the traditional preference for son is very much intact. At the birth of a son drums are beaten in some parts of the country, cunch-shells blown in other and the midwife paid lavishly, while no such spontaneous rejoicing accompanies the birth of a

⁶ Madan, T.N. Family and Kinship- The Study of the Pandits of rural Kashmir, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1965. pg. 77

⁷ Quoted in Sudhir Kakkar, The Inner World- A Psycho-analytic study of childhood and society in India, Oxford University Press, Delhi pg.57.

daughter. Women's folk songs reveal the painful awareness of inferiority- of this discrepancy, at birth, between the celebration of sons and the mere tolerance of daughters.

The desirability of having sons and undesirability of having daughter is often made explicit by the outsiders also. Parents who have only daughters are pitied. Their future is considered to be bleak as they will have no support or succor in old age. A Telgu expression conveys this effectively: 'Bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another's courtyard'.⁸

Elders bless young girls and women by wishing that they have a large number of sons. The notion of greater values of sons is further strengthened by the existence, with regional variations of special worships and *Vratas* (fasts and observances) that are performed by women to have sons and to ensure a long life for sons already born. A son born after a daughter is often described as the fruit of penance and vows undertaken by the mother. A male child is so valuable that the sister after whom it is born comes in for special praise as auspicious and arguing good fortune. She is honoured in various ways. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, a lump of jaggery is broken on her back. She has the distinction of bringing in good luck in the form of a brother, a son to continue the life line.⁹

⁸ Chanana, Karuna (ed), *Socialisation, Education and women: Exploration in Gender Identity*, Orient Longman New Delhi. 1988, pg. 168

⁹ *ibid* 168

Even today among Hindu families birth of daughter is not so welcomed. Though change has taken place, many families are contended with the daughters but this ratio is very low. Even today in Rajasthan female infanticide is seen. People put poison in milk and give them to the daughters. In this high tech society many female foetus is killed even before they land on earth. Through ultra sonography many people know the sex of the child and if it is female, they go for abortion. Government has made law for its prohibition but without peoples own consent its not going to work well.

Adoption

In a Hindu family a couple generally adopts a son when they are convinced that they are not going to have one of their own. T.N. Madan¹⁰ in his study of Kashmiri *pandits* found that although a man may support his adoptive parents in their old age, offer them oblations after they are dead, and continue his adoptive father's line of descent, yet he is poor substitute for a natural son.

Girls are not generally preferred for adoption among Hindus because they have to got to other house after marriage and they are not able to support their foster parents. Pandits of Kashmir conveys their attitude towards the adoption of daughters is such words, "Adopting a daughter is like rearing a pariah dog , in the hope of

¹⁰ Ibid pg. 83

obtaining wool.”¹¹ So, a daughter does not fulfil any criteria for which they can be adopted. They can't support their parents in the old age or offering them oblation. Rather they are looked as a burden which should be soon disposed off by getting them married.

Education

Within the family there are various educational strategies for girls. Boys education is preferred to be more important than the girls education. T.N.Madan in his studies of rural Kashmir found that while the boys goes to school, girls are trained at home in household skills.

Even today when there is so much hue and cry for the upliftment of women, girls education is not considered to be as important as the boys education. If within the family, financial constrain occurs it is the daughter who has to withdraw from studies not the son. Parents makes all the effort to get their sons, highly educated as they see him as the future cheque which will reimburse in their old age. Changes in the attitude of parents towards girls education are taking place but it is limited to a very small fraction of people

Even in high status group education enhances the position of girl only in the marriage market. It helps to find a good groom for the

¹¹ Ibid pg. 95

girl. Most of the parents don't want their daughter to study to higher level because it will be difficult for them to find grooms which are educated to that level- and they may have to pay more dowry for that.

Even if a girl is highly educated and does job before marriage, there is a weak possibility of continuing it after marriage. After marriage it is the husband and her in laws who decides whether she should continue working or not. Ursula Sharma¹² in her study of North West India found that in Punjab, the girls of the very high status groups were automatically educated to a high level, but with even less expectation that they will use there qualifications to get work.

Socialization of the girl

The entire process of socialization of females in Hindu family is to internalize the concept of dependency which cripples to the development of their personality. Socialization for gender differentiation and sex inequality starts early in girls life.

There is a lot pressure on young girls from an early age to learn the household chores which they have to shoulder as young brides. Pre-pubertal girls are allowed to play with boys and other girls on streets and in parks, courtyards and other open space. With the onset of puberty the compulsions of safeguard on female modesty

¹² Sharma, Ursula ,Work, Women and Property in North West India, Tavistock Publications, London, 1980, pg. 83

push her into the interior of the house which is the secluded 'private' domain of the family.

The custom of worshipping and feeding virgin girls (Kanya) on special occasions is wide spread in India. The eighth day of the festival of nine nights (nava ratri) is one such special occasion. On this occasion in Bengal, one girl is chosen as representing the Mother Goddess. She is decorated in finery and is worshipped. The offerings made to her are consumed by others as prashad. It denotes two things. First, in the instances given above the roles or forms assigned to little girls are essentially feminine ones and help in developing their consciousness of femininity. Second, the purity and the consequent privileged status of a girl in the pre-pubertal phase contrasts sharply with puberty and post-pubertal status and thus define later stage with tremendous clarity.

The onset of puberty introduces dramatic changes in the life of a girl. In many Indian languages menstruation is likened to the process of flower or blossoming the necessary stage before fruit can appear. In South India and in some castes in Maharashtra and Orissa this change in status is expressed through rituals and ceremonies.

After puberty, generally girls become more closer to their mothers as their mother realize that soon her daughter would leave the house. Training of girl in household chores and making her

polite is exclusively considered to be mothers task in Hindu family. A girl is encouraged to walk and talk softly.

The distinction between feminine work and masculine work comes early in childhood and becomes sharper as the child grows up. The naturalness of the work supposed to be appropriate for girls is conveyed effectively, but without generating a feeling of discrimination to little girls by encouraging them in various games which involve 'dolls', 'household', 'kitchen work', 'marriage', 'baby' and 'visiting neighbours'. Beginning with assistance in cooking and other kitchen-work, serving of food, caring for younger siblings, preparing for the worship of family deities, and looking after the aged, girls learn to take some of the responsibilities themselves.

An important component of natural division of work is the notion of a sense of service (sewa) as the necessary quality for girls. In a Hindu family a girl is taught to bear pain and deprivation, to eat anything that is given to them and to acquire the quality of self-denial. This is the part of the training for reality that they are likely to confront in the house of the mother-in-law.

The notions of tolerance and self-restraint are also rooted in consciously cultivated feminine role, which is embedded in and legitimized by cultural ideology. The cooking, serving and distribution of food are important constituents of a prestigious and valued role for Hindu women. The ideal of 'Annapurna', the unfailing

supplier of food, is accepted across different regions of India.¹³ This ideal which has an aesthetic appeal and which sets out privation and sacrifice as defining characteristics of feminine moral character generates, a set of dispositions where a woman has to think of others before herself and ought not to care about what is being left for herself. So, the socialization of the girl in the Hindu family is made by keeping in mind her future role as a bride.

Importance of marriage in girls life

Hindus regard marriage as one of the most important events in the life of an individual. For a woman, marriage is the beginning of the fulfillment of her life. As T.N. Madan¹⁴ points out, the 'destiny of the Pandit women is mother-hood, and wifhood is the only culturally approved means to it'. She begins her adult and socially significant phase of her life only with her marriage, which also marks her initiation into the full ritual status of a Brahmin women.

Marriage is so important in a girls life that its preoccupation and desirability is expressed through a number of practices. Blessing and fasts (Vrat) for getting a husband like Shiva or Vishnu convey the message forcefully. The purpose of two popular festivals, especially meant for little girls, bhulabai in parts of Maharashtra and Ganguar in

¹³ Dube Leela, On the Construction of Gender Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India, in Chanana, Karuna, (ed.) pg. 180, op.cit.

¹⁴ Madan T.Nop.cit., pg. 102.

parts of Gujrat, which are characterized by collective worship, singing and playing, is to obtain good husband.¹⁵

It is impossible for young girls to escape the value of married state. Marriage signifies good fortune and a state of bliss. The terms for a married woman whose husband is alive are *Saubhagywati* or *Suhagan* which means the fortunate one, and *sumangli* which means auspicious one. There are numerous instances of auspicious occasion in which only a married woman with a living husband can perform for example spreading oil and turmeric on the body of the bride or bridegroom, and performing an *arti* on these auspicious occasion

Generally in Hindu family, a wife is expected to be virgin before marriage and chaste subsequently. In Hindu marriage there is a ritual of *Kanyadaan* which means gift of a virgin. While 'virginity' in the and chastity in husbands are considered desirable but not necessary.

In Hindu family wife is literally and moral religious half of the husband. The husband is not only wife's master but her deity. Her salvation lies in his duty. He might be a wife beater, drunkard gambler and a womanizer but her duty is to obey and serve him. Mythological characters such as Sita and Savitri are held up as ideals of devotion

¹⁵ Dube Leela, On the Construction of gender : Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India ,in Chanana karuna ed. Pg. 174, op.cit.

for women.¹⁶ The ideal of womanhood incorporated by Sita is one of chastity, purity, gentle tenderness and a singular faithfulness which cannot be destroyed or even disturbed by her husband's rejection slights or thoughtlessness. Sita legend gives us a glimpse into the Hindu imagery of manliness. Rama has all the traits of a godlike hero, yet he is also fragile, mistrustful and jealous and very much of a conformist, both to his parents wishes and to social opinion. These expectations of being a woman as model of Sita, even if the husband is not good, is there in model of ideal Hindu women.

Women as a Bride

For a few months after her marriage women is referred as the bride (mahrini) by her relatives in-law.¹⁷ She is treated as the favoured guest, served special foods and made to wear her bridal clothes and jewelry. She is allowed to go to her natal home frequently but she is expected to be present on the all occasions of domestic importance such as ritual feasts and fast, birthdays and death anniversaries. But this favoured position of the new bride in the family lasts for few days or few months only. After that her treatment in the family is rather more harsh.

In the social hierarchy of her new family the bride usually occupies one of the lowest rungs. Obedience and compliance with the

¹⁶ Kakar Sudhir, *The Inner World- A Psycho- Analytic Study of Childhood an Society in India* (2nd edition) Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1981, pg. 66-67

¹⁷ Madan T.N, pg. 128, op.cit.

wishes of the elder women of the family, especially those of her mother-in-law, are expected as a matter of course. She is expected to give respect to all members of her in-law family. Mrs. Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924) in her autobiography, recalling her father's advice while leaving her home as a bride, wrote that 'he told her to endure silently whatever trouble comes. She was not supposed to talk back even to the servants. He warned her that he expected her behaviour to enhance his family name and that if it did not, he would never allow her to visit her mother's house. She further says 'Already I was beginning to sense that the discipline in this new home would soon make any carefree life in my mother's home seem like heaven itself.'¹⁸

Unflinchingly and without complaint, the new daughter-in-law is required to perform some of the heaviest household chores, which may mean getting up well before dawn and working till late at night. Any mistakes or omissions on her part are liable to incur sarcastic references to her abilities, her looks or her upbringing in her mother's home.

Bride as a danger

A new bride also poses a threat of uncertainty and danger in the in-laws family. A bride may gain control over her husband through love and affection or through the intimacy of their sexual

¹⁸ Ranade, Ramabai, *Himself: The Autobiography of a Hindu lady* (translated and adapted by Katherine Van Akin Gates from a book written in the Marathi language by Mrs. Ramabai Ranade), Green and Company, New York, 1938, pg. 20-21.

relationship. Closeness between husband and wife is thought to be portend the breakup of a joint family.¹⁹ So, any signs of a developing attachment and tenderness within the couple are discouraged by the elder family members by either belittling or forbidding the open expression of these feelings. Every effort is made to hinder the development of an intimacy within the couple which might exclude the other members of the family, especially the parents. Oblique hints about 'youthful infatuations', or outright shaming virtually guarantee that the young husband and wife do not publicly express any interest in each other; and they are effectively left alone together only for very brief periods during the night. Madhav Gore's study of a sample of Indian men of the Agarwal community further confirms that these constraints, master minded by the older women, usually succeed in their aims: 56 percent of the men described themselves as being closer to their mother than to their wives, while only 20 percent felt they were closer to their wives.²⁰

Husband-wife relation

Towards her husband the wife's public role is one of respect and avoidance. Young wives rarely address their husband in the presence of others and then only indirectly through a third party. The emotional bonds which would form the basis for a move to split

¹⁹ Das Veena, 'Masks and Faces: An essay on Punjabi Kinship, "Contribution to Indian Sociology, Vol. 10, 1976. pg.1

²⁰ Madhav, S .Gore, "The Husband-wife and mother-son relationship, Sociological Bulletin, 11, 1961, pg. 91-102.

the joint family into nuclear units are kept publicly at a low level in the interests of agnatic solidarity. T.N.Madan, noting a similar lack of public interaction between husband and wife among the Kashmiri Brahmins draw the same conclusions: "The growth of an exclusive loyalty between any two members of household is disruptive to the ideal of joint family living. Since the daughter-in-law is a relative stronger, the development of such a loyalty between her and her husband is looked upon with particular disfavour."²¹

Similar to the young bride's public behavior before her husband is her behaviour towards her father-in-law, her husband's elder brother and, in fact, any elder males of the patriline. A daughter-in-law usually pull the end of her sari to cover her head in front of her father-in-law, husbands elder brother or any elder member of husband's side. She follow the relation of respect and avoidance towards them.²²

The extreme respect of wife for her husband is shown in Lynn Bennet's²³ study of high caste women in Nepal. She founds that the most forceful expression of the wife's deference is in the ritual in which the woman washes her husbands feet and drink that water by splashing some of it into her mouth (Gora Pani Khane). They also eat from the unwashed plate from which their husband has eaten and consume whatever food he has left for them. The wife's consumption

²¹ Madan T.N. pg. 134 op.cit.

²² Karve Irawati. Kinship Organization in India, Poona, Deccan College, Monograph Series, No.11, Poona, Deccan College, 1953, pg. 134.

²³ Bennet Lynn, Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters - Social and Symbolic roles of High Caste women in Nepal, Columbia University Press, New York, 1945. Pg.174.

of her husband's foot water and his leftover food is a symbolic statement that he is so high above her that even his impurities are pure for her.

Women's position in her in-law house depends a great deal on her husband. If the husband gives support to his wife, her status in the household is considerably increased. The public ideal of religious devotion and service to the husband may well co-inside with a woman's private strategies to secure her own position in the household, and perhaps even eventually, get her husband to split off from the joint family altogether. All depends on winning the husband's affection, and women know that their wifely services and the deference that increases his self-esteem and prestige within the family are a good path into their husband's heart.

Mother-in-law/Daughter-in-law Relationship

The attitude of a mother-in-law towards her daughter-in-law is influenced by two important factors. First the extent to which a man allows his relations with his wife to affect his relations with his parents and siblings and second the extent to which the parents-in-law of a woman are satisfied with the gifts they receive from her parents. Mother-in-law's attitude towards her daughter-in-law is generally harsh. She expects her to do all the hard work of the house. Moreover, mother-in-law feels a threat, that her son will be no more

loyal to her so she does all kind of things to keep her daughter-in-law away from him.

Women as Mother

The young Indian wife's situation, in terms of family acceptance and emotional well-being, changes dramatically once she becomes pregnant. Mother-in-law attitude towards her becomes soft, her husband is pleased; the men of the household are glad; there is awakened interest in seeing that she eats well and rests easily. This first burgeoning also marks her first upward move in the family status hierarchy.²⁴

Before the birth of her child a woman in some regions returns to her parents home. Even where birth takes place in the husband's household, she goes to her parents for a lengthy visit after the child birth.²⁵

The roots of this solicitous respect for the pregnant woman lie deep in a religious and historical tradition which equates 'woman' with 'mother', and views the birth of a male child as an essential step in the parents and the family's salvation. 'To be mothers women were created, and to be fathers men' Manu states categorically.²⁶

²⁴ Mandelbaum David G. Society in India, University of Berkely Press, California 1972, pg. 88

²⁵ Oscar Lewis, Village life in Northern India: Studies in a Delhi Village Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1958, pg. 49

²⁶ The Laws of Manu, trans. G. Buhler, in M. Muller (ed.), Sacred Books of the East, Vol, 25, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1886, p. 196

Her status in the family increased all the more when she gives birth to a son. Birth of a son is very important in Hindu family for getting salvation and he is also a medium of old age security. The son is the social redeemer of a woman and hence by giving birth status in the family also increases. She is not seen as outsider anymore because now her interest lies within the in-laws family. The threat of danger of splitting the joint family which was till now felt by the members of the family, goes away as now women is seen as the integral part of the in-laws family and now it is believed that her decisions about the family will be in the family interest.

Status of the women in the family increases as she becomes older. As the son grows up and the woman gains the position of mother-in-law, her status as a women in the family is the highest. Now she may influence on her husband decision. Mrs. Karve points out that "it is not rare to see women who were noting but weak noneties blossom into positive personalities in their middle age and boss their weak old husbands in the latter part of their married life.²⁷ So, as a women becomes mother-in-law her status in the family rises to the highest level and for the new bride whole process of subordination goes on till her cycle of being mother-in-law is completed.

²⁷ Karve, Irawati ,pg. 136, op.cit.

Widow

Widow remains in her husband's house even after his death. There are some permissible conditions for widow remarriage in some communities (e.g. levirate-women getting married to dead husband's younger brother). But generally widows are not permitted to remarry especially in Sanskritized higher caste. Among less Sanskritized 'lower castes' widows are permitted to remarry but very few actually do so.

The social indignities heaped on the widows from ancient times are well known. They were not supposed to participate in auspicious ceremonies, nor they were allowed to wear good clothes or eat normal food. Earlier there was practice of tonsure and sati which has been now banned by the government. But even today widows are supposed to make themselves unattractive to the opposite sex and are largely debarred from public spaces and are made to observe lifelong mourning for the dead husband.

The Widow Remarriage Act XV was passed as early as 1856 but stigma attached to widows continued. The economic plight of the widows is the product of unsympathetic attitude by the society. Many are forced to flee to holy cities like Varanashi to survive on people's charity.

Inheritance

Under the Mitakshara laws (a school of Hindu law which prevails throughout India except Bengal) a son gets a right by birth in the ancestral property. A girl is denied from this right and it is done in a bloodless way. The daughters are so socialized that they internalize the norms of subordination to the will and happiness of others. Generally they never ask for their share in the property.

So, in relation to property women are defined as dependent because they only have access to the most important forms of wealth producing property via their relations with men. Women are largely disqualified from exercising direct control over the most important form of property (land) by inheritance rules, which favour male heirs, and this disqualification is related to their roles as wives and sisters.

Dowry given in girls marriage is considered to be the compensation of her withdrawal from inherited property. But even the dowry given in her marriage does ultimately go in the hands of in-laws and husbands. She doesn't get anything. Land has never been a form of dowry in India, so in this case also women don't have direct control over land. Women have effective control on other forms of property like domestic goods, furniture, clothing and jewellery but they have little direct control over wealth-generating forms of property.

In theory, a woman's jewellery is considered to be her personal property, a category of *Stridhana*, (female wealth), yet it has been observed that women seldom have full control over this important category of property.

Women in Hindu Law

Government has taken several steps to uplift the status of women. The Hindu marriage act of 1956, introduced as a rule for men as well as women. It provides for matrimonial remedies like judicial separation, restitution of conjugal rights and divorce, which were unavailable under the Shastric law. The first three varnas are governed by the *Shastric law*. Women belonging to these categories did not have the right to obtain divorce on the grounds like adultery, cruelty, desertion, insanity and apostasy. Now most of the grounds are common for both husband and wife.

The Hindu succession act of 1956, also brought about radical changes in the pre-existing law and removed some of the gross feature of inequality. Under Shastric law neither a widow nor a daughter could succeed to the property of a deceased in the preserve of a son or son's son. The Hindu women's right to property act of 1937 introduced changes of a limited character to give relief to a widow. But the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 confers on the widow and the daughter a full heritable capacity to take property even in the presence of a son.

Hindu adoption and maintenance act of 1956 secularize the law of adoption. A male Hindu cannot adopt without the consent of his wife.

Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 was passed to stop dowry demand in marriage. It was again rectified in 1984 to check the evil practice of dowry. There were several laws made to check female foeticide and infanticide.

To, conclude the chapter we can say that women's status in the family is of subordinate one. Today also women is under the guidance of either father or husband or son as Manu has stated in the vedic era. Birth of a daughter is not so welcomed even today and parents have to pay a heavy amount of dowry in their marriage. Hindu family has authoritarian control over the women. Government has taken steps for the upliftment of women but they are not very effective. By the education and employment of women some changes in their status are expected to be seen, which we will analyze in next chapter.

Chapter-4

**EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN
&
CHANGE IN THEIR FAMILY STATUS**

The Indian family of today represents numerable changes it absorbed over the years. Crucial among these are the changes in the status and power relations between spouses. It is generally held that education and employment of women go a long way for their enjoyment of equality of social and economic fields and to improve their status.

However, the limited evidence available in recent studies on Indian families and problems of working women show that Indian family is losing its authoritarian controls as a result of industrialisation, urbanisation, education and employment of women.¹

As against this popular opinion and limited evidence in its favour, there is also a view that access to education and employment of women reflect only formal equality or parity between sexes and it is only a superficial index of women's status.² They argue that what really has taken place is merely 'role extension' or 'role expansion' without any modification or redefinition of roles of others with whom they intimately interact or converse without any improvement in their status.

Hence in this chapter I have tried to see both the sides of the coin. Whether employment of women has really helped her to come out of the authoritarian control of her family or she has to face role-

¹ (i) Ross, Aileen, D. *The Hindu Family in its Urban Setting*, Oxford University Press, 1961. Pg. 137.

(ii) Gore, M.S. *Urbanisation and Family Change*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1968 pg. 45

² Mies, Maria, *Indian Women and Patriarchy*. Concept Publishing House, New Delhi 1980. Pg 61.

extension, role conflict due to employment. What role does she play in division of labour and decision making of the family and whether employment has raised her status within the family.

Views about Women's Employment

Women from the lower strata of society have always worked for wages in this country, but those from the upper classes were earlier mostly confined to their homes. Many factors and forces have contributed to this growth of the newly emerging middle class working women in India. The socio-economic emancipation of Indian women has itself been a product of, and an instrument in, the change in their lives.

Women have begun to realise that, as members of society, their lives have a definite and a higher objective as well as a great responsibility. To illustrate this point Desai has quoted the following passage from '*Stree Bodha and Social Progress in India*', "Along with men, women of India have also begun to realize that supreme goal of woman's life is not circumscribed to merely love making, dutifulness to husband, child-bearing and domestic work. They have begun to realize that woman's life has a higher and a more serious objective."³

The attitude of society towards married woman's taking up a job has also changed. Ross in her study of the '*Hindu Family in its Urban Setting*' explains how wife's being gainfully employed is no more considered undesirable by the society. She writes: "Indeed, the main

³ Desai Neera, *Woman in Modern India*, Bombay, Vora and co. Publishers Private Ltd, 1957, Pg. 255.

reason that so many married Hindu middle class women work without reproach is because everyone understands the economic problem of the middle class, and that a wife's employment is often essential to the family's standard of living."⁴

Kapadia, while discussing the '*Hindu family in Transition*,' writes: "Another factor of great importance affecting the family is the employment of women which has become possible through education and present economic strains. Before the Second World it was considered derogatory for a woman to take any gainful employment. Today even the members of the older generation desire that the educated daughter-in-law must help the family by supplementing its income."⁵

Factors Influencing Women's Employment

In Urban India the decision, by married women with educational skills on whether to seek employment or remain homemakers is influenced by a number of interacting factors which include personal and domestic circumstances. In the literature on woman and work in India, it is generally asserted that women seek employment because they are forced by economic needs. Women have also been stated as secondary breadwinners in their family. If their parents or husbands income is sufficiently high they need not augment the family income, but if the wages are low, one's income is not sufficient for the whole

⁴ Ross, Alieen D, Pg. 198 ,op.cit.

⁵ Kapadia, K. M., The Family in Transition, "Sociological Bulletin, Vol. 8, No. 2, September 1959, pg. 99.

family, then they go for work. Schoenberg and Douglas⁶ have shown that during 1910-11, in Britain, low wages were associated with low proportion of women at work. But this purely economic view fails to explain the paradox of those case where increasing prosperity is accompanied by corresponding increase in the female work participation rate. Srivastava⁷ has found that in certain situations the rate of female participation in the labour force increases with the general prosperity.

So, in such conflicting views it may be said that beside economic factors other factors like marriage, number and age of children, educational qualification, dependency status compel women to seek work.

The great majority of women workers in India are engaged in either agriculture or traditional rural industries and in service occupation. The work participation rate of the urban women is significantly lower than that of rural women, and that of literate women lower than that of illiterate women. One possible reason for this might be that still many men are critical of the idea of their wives working and say that in the case of a working wife and mother, the case and development of children is hampered and husband wife ties are weakened. Wives being employed is not only disapproved in principle by many husbands but it is highly threatening for some. For

⁶ Schoenberg E.H. & Douglas P. H. "Status in the Supply curge of labour " *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 95, no.1, Feb. 1937, pg 61-67.

⁷ Srivastava, Vinita, *Employment of educated married woman in India*, New Delhi, 1998.

some men employed wives imply their own failure in their role fulfilment to themselves, to the family and the community at large.

In a study conducted on working wives it was seen that they constitute 20% of the sample, the figure tallying with the national figure for employment of women. According to the socio-economic classification it was found that only 18.80% of them work in the upper category, 13.60 in the middle category and 35% in the lowest one. This shows that the illiterate lower class forms the major part of the labour force than women from the other classes.

Types of Job Held By Women

A study⁸ of the 6 types of jobs held by women shows that 36.95% women were employed as servants, 26.30% as teachers, 13.70% as secretaries, 9.30% as cooks and tailors, 7.80% as nurses and welfare officers 9.70% as doctors, lawyers and engineers and 1.20% as beauticians and hair dressers.

If we look at the composition of types of work held by women we will see that major chunk of them are mostly in jobs like teacher, cooks, servants, tailors which may be seen as direct extensions of women's primary responsibility as homemaker and mother. For example teaching is seen by her as a job which makes her more knowledgeable and involved in her children's schooling. Moreover women from the lower class who doesn't have sufficient education, yet

⁸ Ramu G. N., Women, Work & Marriage in Urban India, Sage Publication. New Delhi, 1989.

they need job for economic reasons pursue in jobs like servants, cooks, tailors. Very less number of women are there in highly professional jobs like doctors, engineers, scientists. One of other reason behind this is that highly professional jobs seeks full time employment of women which makes home management difficult for them. Whereas jobs like beautician, tailors, teachers are not that demanding and by being in this type of job, women can handle both the responsibilities of home and office.

The lower strata women seek employment purely for economic reasons. Middle class women are economically better off than the lower income category and hence are not required to work if they do not want to. But they are expected to do all the housework and thus save money to provide other necessities. The upper class women are more free in their choice to take up work than the middle class women and perhaps better qualified also.

In the upper strata, women without education generally do not look for work, but those with college education and professional qualification would like to engage themselves in partial or full employment. The same is true for middle class families also. In the lower classes, with the lowest level of education, aspiration for work is lacking. It is seen that many of the lower class married women would not like to work if there is no economic needs.

In accordance with the type of family, working women come from, it is found that half the women from nuclear families would like to work, compared to only one-third of women from joint families. This shows that women from nuclear families, though have no one to share family responsibilities, would like to work outside home provided there are opportunities. The financial reward they get be invested in their family of procreation itself. In a joint family, the freedom to act independently is usually lost. Household responsibilities sometimes become more burdensome and the attitude of the family members towards working women might be adverse.

Division of Labour In the Family

The married working women are required to play a dual role; one as wives, mothers and housewives, and the other, as employees. Being subjected to the dual demands of home and work, they are liable to face a crisis of adjustments.

Many of the factors that militate against Indian husbands assuming domestic responsibilities are similar to those noted in relation to husbands in Western societies, e.g. normative prescriptions based on gender which permit the husband's refusal to do housework.⁹ Correspondingly, there are stipulations that compel women to define domestic work as their primary calling. Many women who have internalized this belief are reluctant to allow or coerce their

⁹ Lein, Laura, Male Participation in Home Life: Impact of Social Supports and Breadwinner Responsibility on the Allocation of Tasks; *The Family Co-ordinator*, 28, 1979, pg. 489-96.

husbands to share domestic duties. Permitting a husband to cook or sweep floors would be just as much a negative reflection on the wife as it would be on him.

The cultural belief that makes male and female have natural properties that make them competent in segregated spheres of activity is deeply rooted in the minds of Indians. These are normative prescriptions that clearly stipulate how men and women should behave in different stages of their life cycles. Terms such as '*gruhini*' and '*gruhasta*' (female and male householders) not only capture the essence of the segregation of roles, but also of attendant social expectants. Included in such expectations are the issues of authority, power, rights and obligations of both sexes and these are inextricably linked to the notions of masculinity and femininity. The contemporary definitions of masculinity and femininity are gender specific and are based on the assumed inherent qualities of the male and the female. They deliberately ignore the duality that characterizes femininity in the symbolic system, especially that which is pertinent to Hindus.

In Hindu mythology and folklore goddesses are depicted in both Sati and Shakti forms.¹⁰ A number of benevolent and malevolent deities in various regions of the country represent the Shakti form of female godhead like *Kali*, *Durga*, *Lakshmi* or *Chamundeswari*. In their Shakti form, these deities are powerful enough to destroy the evil in

¹⁰ Das, Veena, 'The Mythological Film and its Framework of Meaning: An analysis of Jai Santoshi Ma, India International Quarterly, 8 (1), 1981, pg.48.

order to protect those who are oppressed. Thus, the goddesses in their Shakti form, mould, possess masculine power and authority of cosmic proportions.

Yet, in the mundane Hindu ritual scheme, it is the sati model represented by Lakshmi, Sita, Savitri or Parvathi that is celebrated and glorified.

For both men and women in Hindu society, the ideal of woman is personified by Sita, the quintessence of wifely devotion. The heroine of the epic Ramayana. Her unique standing in the minds of most of the Hindus, regardless of region, caste, social class, age, sex, education or modernization, testifies to the power and pervasiveness of the traditional ideal of womanhood.

The popular epic contains ideal models of familial bonds and social relations to which even a modernized Hindu pays lip service, however much he may privately question or reject them as irrelevant to the task of modern life.

From the earliest childhood, a Hindu has heard Sita legend recounted on any number of sacral and secular occasions. Sita is looked as the ideal feminine identity which a woman incorporates through the many everyday metaphors and similar that are associated with her name. Thus 'she is as pure as Sita' denotes chastity in a,

woman, and 'she is a second Sita', the appreciation of a woman's uncomplaining self sacrifice. ¹¹

In the everyday scheme of life, women are socialized according to the sati-savitri syndrome which stresses self giving, asceticism, renunciation, and selfless devotion, obedience and loyalty to their husbands. According to the sati dimension of femininity, as Das notes, 'the woman is represented as subordinate to her husband.'¹² What has been overlooked by most contemporary men and women is that the ultimate authority in Hindu mythology has always been feminine, i.e. the shakti.

The particular sati-savitri image is so much expected to be embedded in Indian female identity that it is the subject matter of many Hindi movies. For example if we take a recent Hindi Movie *Astitva* (identity, Director, Mahesh Manjrekar. 2000) we will find that even today no matter how much the India has progressed people still want their wife to Sati-Savitri, even if they are not very pure, I will just give gist of the movie to get an idea.

The plot of *Astitva* is an exceedingly simple one in which a well-to-do Maharastrian family is shown. Shrikant Pandit (Sachin Khedekar) is a successful businessman and has a happy married life with his wife Aditi (Tabu) and son Aniket. Aniket is engaged to Reoti

¹¹ Kakar Sudhir, *The Inner world-A Pscho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1981 pg. 64.

¹² Das, Veena 'The Mythological Film and its Framework of Meaning: An Analysis of *Jai Santoshi Ma*. *India International Quarterly* 8 (1), 1981. Pg. 48

(Namrata Shirodkar) who is a computer science graduate working in a computer company.

Everything in Shri (Shrikant) family life is going well until he receives a registry named to his wife Aditi in which the whole property of Mallar Kaamat (Mohinish Behl) is transferred to Aditi after his death.

This pinches Shri very much and he starts tracing the fact that why Mallar Kamat did so. He comes to know through his diary that Aniket who till now he considered to be his own son was not actually his own son.

He asks Aditi about this and she accepts the fact that Aniket was not his son but Mallar kaamat's son from whom she used to take singing classes.

The story goes to flash back when it was shown that Shri is new in his business and he has to make frequent foreign tours leaving his newly married wife Aditi. Aditi feels very much lonely and wants to take up a job which is very bluntly refused by Shri as it is against his male ego that he will take money of his wife.

Aditi began coming close to Mallar Kaamat her music teacher who understands her sexual desire. She control herself but one day she becomes weak and gives herself into sexual cravings. After that she feels very guilty and stops learning music.

She becomes pregnant, she wants to tell the truth to Shri but he is so happy that she doesn't want to hurt him and hides the truth by on her sister's advice. Everything was going fine in their life, Shri felt very happy in telling his friend that how handsome his son look just like his father, until he came to know the very fact that Aniket was not his son.

Aditi apologizes for her mistake but Shri refuses to forgive her. In between she also comes to know through Shrikant's friend that he had affair when he went to foreign trips. Shri refuses to give her divorce because he doesn't want to set her free rather he wants her die every moment in her own house by facing negligence from her husband and son. Her son also doesn't understands her and abuses her.

In the last scene Aditi raises some question which made this movie somewhat exclusive. She says-No matter a man has relationship with number of woman, it doesn't makes a difference to him because he is a MAN. But still a man expects his wife to be sati savitri. She asks that the sexual desire which rises in a male body, don't they rise in female body. And if it rises what should a woman do. Should she beg before her husband or should she wait for him that when will he be pleased. Men have the sexual gratification whenever they want irrespective of their wives desire. She says that if 25 years back she wouldn't have become weak for that moment she would have to face other setback of being infertile. No body would

have said that you are impotent but the whole society, even you would have blamed me for this. You know very well that after Aniket we didn't had any children.

After this the movie ends with the note that Aditi finds her own identity by leaving her family and her husband's surname. She goes away with Reoti who also had broken her engagement with Aniket due to his behaviour with his mother.

Coming back to the point, to be feminine in India, is to conform to the attributes displayed by mythical character such as Sita and Savitri. Even today as mentioned above in the movie a man wants his wife to be sati-savitri, even if he is also not very loyal. On getting detected on having an affair during his foreign tour Shri says-*Mein Aadmi Hoon*, I am a man, I can do this. The very fact that he is a man sets him free from all the sin he does. Same thing is done by his wife about which he make a big issue.

The alternative on the opposite form, Shakti, of female existence has practically disappeared from the thinking of ordinary woman in contemporary India. Correspondingly, the view that the men are the natural masters of social order has emerged with a definition of masculinity which is rooted in gender.

Masculinity and femininity encompass not just biology but a whole range of social and psychological characteristics that are reinforced by selected customary standards. For example, to be

masculine is to assume full responsibility for the economic support of one's family, to be aggressive in the pursuit of personal and familial goals, and, or course, to be sexually dominant. If we take example of the movie *Astitva*, it shows that Shri very clearly fulfils all the three criteria of masculinity. Shri is shown in the film as typical orthodox, self-centred male. He opposes his wife's idea of doing job because it hurts his male ego. He wants to take the full responsibility of economic support to his family. He says- *Mujhe Biwi Ke Paison Ki Jarurat Nahin Hai*. He wants to be successful in his business for which he neglects his wife desire of becoming a mother for the time being. He is very much sexually dominant on her because when she wants he refuses to have sex because he doesn't want it at that time. He have sex when he wants irrespective of his wife desire. At one point in the movie she says also that, "*Is Terah to Tumme Bhi Kai Bar Balatkar Kiya Hai Shri.*"

Ideally, a husband is considered to be provider, the benefactor of his family, the supporter of his wife, and the protector of his children. In return, he expects from his wife her affection, sex deference and service. Therefore, the appropriate behaviour for the male, however stereotypical, is to be producer of wealth for the benefit of the entire family. From this perspective, domestic work undermines and threatens his masculinity. Part of the masculinity complex is the assumption that a woman is meant to serve the personal needs and comforts of her husband. Moreover, the cultural expectations that

govern what is masculine and feminine also set territorial boundaries where masculinity and femininity are to be best expressed. For women it is at home and for men it is in the world of work. Therefore, such task as cooking, cleaning or raising children are properly feminine, just as providing for the family is masculine.

Traditionally, to be female in India is to be privileged respected and revered because of the tasks woman perform- these being critical to the survival of the species and culture. Apart from her reproductive and socialization functions, a woman earns respect both within and outside the household when she acquires and conforms to what are perceived as wifely virtues. Normally the process of 'wifification' includes the cultivation of characteristics such as tolerance, dependence, nurturance, sexual servitude and domesticity. It is part of her femininity for a woman to make concessions to members of her family, to accommodate the demands of her husband and of others, even if these are against her own interests, and to define her home as the nucleus of her life.

The inevitable component of the feminine role is domestic duty a woman who is not predisposed to cook, clean or raise children is seen as lacking essential wifely attributes. Terms such as womanly duties, domestic, homemaker, or 'housewife' signifies the ascriptive nature of household work.

Household work is considered as the prime responsibility of women in all societies of the world. Parsons and Bales¹³ suggested that the adult feminine role was firmly anchored in the internal affairs of the family, while the adult male role was primarily anchored in the occupational world. Similarly, Safolios¹⁴ also found that the role remains sex-segregated. There is no evidence that women themselves have any inclination to disturb the balance.

Indian studies regarding division of labour have also arrived at the same conclusion. In Gore's (1960) sample of Agarwal families in and around Delhi 80% of the women were busy exclusively in the household work. Women were expected to be at home and look after the kitchen.

Further Dosaj (1962) studied on the division of labour among men and women in Jounsar- Bawar district indicates that in agriculture while men used the harrow and leveled the fields, constructed and repaired ridges and embankments, ploughed the land, did sowing and thrashing paddy. Women did other works, such as transplanting, weeding and breaking clods, reaping crops and husking paddy. Ramu (1989) also found that division of domestic labour continues to be based on gender identity and traditional conceptions.

¹³ Parsons, T and Bales. R.E, *The American Family: Family Socialization and Interaction Process*; Glencoe, 111: The Free Press, 1955, Pg. 50-65.

¹⁴ Safolios, Rothschild, A *Macro and Micro Examination of Family Power and Love: An Exchange Models*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 38, 1976, Pg. 355-62.

Indian men usually tend to respond changes in their familial and marital roles selectively. They prefer to live in nuclear families which, by their very structure, provide scope for increased companionship, sexual intimacy, and, to some extent, an emerging pattern of egalitarian decision making. But with regard to housework they remain inflexible and did not differ significantly from their fathers and grandfathers.

The obvious double-standard that is manifested in their selective response to women's work, and in particular to housework, has escaped most men's thinking. They do demonstrate 'modern' attitudes in approving of their wife's employment, and in recognizing the economic benefits of dual income household. A wife in employment is not seen by her husband as compromising her femininity or as his public acknowledgment of his inability to be the main provider, but her failure to do housework will certainly be perceived as such. It is not that men do not engage in what they consider 'womanly' work. They do but when they do, it is for wage and outside domestic sphere. For example, lower class men cook, clean and serve meals in restaurants, offices, industries or in upper class households. But these men will not repeat these tasks within their own households because they tend to define, construct, and sustain their work and domestic work in terms of gender.

A distinction between household task and housework has been made. Household tasks are those which are not confined to the

houses as, for example, are cooking and cleaning. Nonetheless, these tasks are part of domestic work in what they are functional to the smooth running of the household and are less gender specific than 'housework'. A husband may be willing to buy vegetables but may not be willing to clean, cut or cook them, just as he may be willing to buy a broom but not sweep the floor. Buying vegetables or brooms is less damaging to the Indian male ego and is perceived as less feminine than cooking or sweeping the floor. Such patterns exist in rural India as well, Sethi¹⁵, in a study of working women in *Punjab* and *Himachal Pradesh*, found that the proportion of men fetching firewood for cooking or minding cattle was significantly higher than those who were engaged in cooking.

Feeding children is an exclusively female task in the Indian context (Ross 1961). Sethi (1988) concluded that child-care was women's responsibility. Tropman's¹⁶ study on the employment patterns of trained women, revealed that demands of the child-care seemed to be one of the dominant factors in keeping women out of the labour market. Dua (1992) found that the non working women of her sample participated more in household task related with children as compared with working women.

¹⁵ Sethi, Raj Mohini, 'Status and Power of Working Woman Within the Family: A test of Marxian Perspective; In T. M. Dak ex., *Women and Work In Indian Society*, Delhi, Discovery Publishing House, 1988, pg. 143-145.

¹⁶ Tropman, J.E., *The Married Professional Social Worker*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 30, 1968, pg 661-665.

Samant (1976) observed that as women sought employment, their children were not looked after properly. They had to be entrusted to servants or neighbours or improperly run crèches.

So, we see that the division of domestic labour continues to be based on gender identity and traditional conceptions. Though some studies has shown that there are slight changes in the traditional division of labour between sexes. Blood and Wolfe (1975) have shown that there are some differences in the division of labour when wife was employed. But in Indian context Meis (1980) has observed that in spite of women's employment there was no change in the patriarchal authority and the division of labour. But there are other studies that there is slight change in men's attitude towards household work.

Srivastava (1978) found that husband's help in domestic responsibilities in case of working wife has increased. Chandan's (1986) study supported the same conclusion as his data showed that 75% of the husbands helped their wives in sharing household chores. However Sethi (1988) concluded that men did very little to reduce the work load in the family. They helped in the area which are less demanding. Even during sickness of the child it is woman who had to be absent from the work.

Aggrawal (1988) found that under the new situation, change in men's mind was coming and a small percentage of husbands had started helped their wives in household cores. Fifty five percent of the

husbands helped their wives only occasionally, while rest twenty-five percent admitted that they never helped their wives. Desai (1957) findings based on the replies given by 369 married woman students, tell us that a majority of men did not share the household work.

Role Conflict

Due to the dual responsibilities of office and home, working women generally passes through role-overload and role -conflict Role.overload exists when the number of roles a person occupies cannot be handled adequately or comfortably because of finite amount of time and energy. Pleck, Staines and Lang¹⁷ reported that one-third of their sample of dual-income respondents experienced moderate to severe role over-load from combining work and family roles.

Role-conflict refers to the conflict that arises. Between the expectations of the two different roles that a person adopts¹⁸. For example the dual income marriage may create conflicting expectations for women. At work, a professional women often is expected to be aggressive, competitive, and committed to her work. At home, she often is expected to be nurturing to her children and compassionate and caring to her husband. These differing expectations may require a complex display of potentially incompatiable personality characteristics at work and home.

¹⁷ Pleck, J.H. Staines, G.L. and Lang L, Conflicts Between Work and Family Life, Monthly Labour Review, 103, 1980, pg. 29-32

¹⁸ Voydanoff, P., Individual work/ Family Role Co-Ordination, in P. Voydanoff (ed)., Work and family, Bevverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1987, pg 77-96.

Some researchers have tried to line role-conflict and assistance by husbands. It is found that strain is felt all the more because, by and large husbands did not help in the housekeeping even in the families where there was no domestic servant or no elderly lady to look after the household chores. Further, Kala Rani (1976) concluded that among those working women who needed and expected help from their husband's, there was role-conflict among them if husbands did not give them assistance in carrying out these responsibilities.

Kapoor (1970) observed that, though many of the working wives accepted their dual roles, they normally received little help from husbands in carrying out duties, and thus experiencing role conflict. Whereas Radha Devi and Ravindram (1986) in their study on working women and household work using data of 434 working and 266 non-working women found that a good proportion of working women did not expect help from their husbands as they considered household work as woman's job.

Working mothers experienced more conflict when they had very small children who do not go to school. Married women subjected to dual responsibilities, wage earner as well as mother, were continuously under stress and were feeling role-conflicts.

According to Rapoport and Rapoport (1969), family life in general and children in particular were highly salient factors in producing role conflict. They found that there was a limitation in the

degree to which husband and wife were willing to delegate child care to others even when such sources were available. Singh (1972) found that among the various factors generating role-conflict, age and number of children were quite important because mother's personal attention was most essential to children when they were small. Number of children is obviously relevant because fewer children meant less work and subsequently less role-conflict among working mothers. Role strain increased with increased number of children.

The physical and mental health of children is another factor which creates role-conflict in the maternal roles of working woman. Rapoport and Rapoport (1969) found that it was important for working mother's children to be healthy because there was little room for illness in the system of dual career family.

In brief, it can be said that women are still expected to carry out their household duties including taking care of their children. In dual earner families, husbands co-operate in the household chores to some extent where this help is not received, wives experience role conflict.

Sethi (1984) in her study of female labour in Punjab concluded that women worked in agriculture for 8-10 hours and 5-6 hours at home everyday. In this way, they played a dual-role. The cultural norms constrain the employment of women but they have to work for fulfilling their needs. Saikia (1988) after analysing the work-load of the rural women of the three villages surveyed, indicates that women were

usually over burdened with household chores and other economic activities. Most of them were engaged in earning activities in addition to their day- to-day household tasks, the only time of rest for them was when they cook their meals.

Severa (1986) in her study on working women of textile industry in Bombay emphasized that the working class women had to do all the household tasks in a limited time and there was no time left for them to gossip with their neighbours. Dua (1992) also reported that in view of overall familial role expectations, the working and non-working women of her sample were found to be at par.

Contrary to the above reported findings, that the working women are carrying out their dual role successfully, other studies on career women found that working women were facing problems in carrying out their dual roles. Sixty three percent of women of her sample were dissatisfied with the performance of their household duties. Only fourteen percent of career women were satisfied with the execution of their daily domestic chores.

This dual-role, role-stress, role-overload gives rise to role conflict. Working women seldom get sympathetic considerations with regard to performance of household or other familial roles. Despite sharing the economic burden, they are expected to perform their familial roles in the same degree as non-working women.

Martial Conflict

Women face role-conflict within herself at the same she has to face marital conflict also. Empirical studies showed that the wives perceptions of the division of household work in terms of fairness, or equal¹⁹ and wives dissatisfaction with the diversion of housework²⁰ are important predictors of marital conflict. When working hours of wives increases marital conflict increases. Rogers²¹ found that wives working hours were related to higher level of marital conflict when number of children in the household increased.

Numerous empirical studies have shown that women tend to assume the demanding role and men tend to assume withdrawing role during marital conflict (Blair 1993, Gottman & Krokoff 1989).

Adopting a social structural view, some authors argue that men are primary beneficiaries of the traditional marriage, are more likely to have structured the relationship to their liking, and thus have little or less interest in changing status quo ²² Women tend to be less satisfied with the status quo and perceive conflict as their means of changing the relationship according to their desires. She wants to change the status quo and needs his active co-operation to reach her objective, but he wants to maintain the status quo and will reach their goal by doing what he normally does in fact, he is likely to avoid a discussion

¹⁹ Perry-Jenkins, M and Folk K Class, Couples and conflict: Effects of the Division of Labour on assessments of marriage in dual earner families. *Journal of marriage and family*, 56, 1994, pg 165-180.

²⁰ Kluwer, E.S., Hessink, J.A.M. and Van De Vliert, E, Marital conflict about the division of household labour and paid work, *Journal of Marriage and the family*, 53, 1993, pg. 120-125.

²¹ Rogers, S.J, Mothers Working Hours and Marital Quality: Variations by Family structure and family size, *Journal of Marriage and the family*, 58, 1996, pg 606-617.

²² Heavy, C.L. Layne. C Christensen, A Gender and Conflict Structure in Marital Interaction: L A Replication and Extension, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61, 1993, pg 16-27.

and withdraw from the interaction because it may force him to do more housework.

The presumed gender difference in the conflict behaviour predicts that woman will demand and men will withdraw during conflict over the division of labour. Logically, the conflict structure would cause both men and women to demand when they are discontent with the division of labour and to withdraw when they want to maintain the status-quo.

Decision Making

Decision making is an activity process by which a course of action is consciously chosen from available alternatives. This process involves three stages, namely; awareness of the situation, evaluation of alternatives and taking the final decision. With reference to the decision making in the family, while in the first two stages various members of the family may be involved, but in the final stage someone will have final say. This ultimately rests with the person who has ultimate responsibility on the family front. In the Indian society, where the patrilineal and patrilocal traditions are the rule, the position of the wife in the family is not governed by the in egalitarian ethos. For example, Dube's,²³ observation that in an ideal home-the final say in all matters connected with the family is always with the husband' clearly indicates the discrimination between the sexes in the decision making process.

²³ Dube, S.C., *Indian Village*, Routledge Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1955, pg. 141.

In the traditional Hindu family, a wife's position in decision making normally starts from her giving birth to children. The birth of the child is the real integrating factor for a wife to join hands in home management. Normally, the first son's wife enjoys a better position in decision making. She is treated almost next to mother-in-law in the decision making process.

In India although the norms preclude women in joint families from taking part directly in decision making, they almost always exercise an influence on their husband's decision, especially on decisions such as choice of marital partners for their children and buying and selling of land and capital goods. Such an exercise of power always occurs in private settings, while the kin of their husbands are absent, because to be seen as influencing one's husband amounts to undermining his formal power and authority-which a wife is not expected to do.

Kakar²⁴ pointed out that although the wife of the family patriarch may indeed pay a formal, and often perfunctory deference to him, especially in front of strangers, she may exercise considerable domestic power, not merely among the other women of the household, but with her husband, and she often makes many of the vital decisions affecting the family's interest. Therefore it is necessary to distinguish not only the location of power but also the form of its

²⁴ Kakar, Sudhir, *The Inner World-A Psycho- Analytic Study of Childhood Society in India*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1981, pg 118.

manifestations. In general, power is located in men who are heads of households but it is often exercised by women, though discreetly.

In urban families, which are usually nuclear in structure within emphasis on the conjugal unit, women need not resort to indirect and private participation in decision making. The urban family structure effectively neutralizes the influence of husband's filial and fraternal ties. Power and authority in such a family usually rests with the husband instead of the eldest male, as in the case of joint families. It is relatively easy for a wife to negotiate, bargain or simply assume authority from her husband.

Urban wives are more educated than their rural counterparts, and this enables them to claim competence equal to their husbands, at least in certain areas. Urban wives have greater skills and potential to share in domestic decision making.

But if we look at systematic analysis of the patterns of decision making pattern of Indian family we will get contradictory views. Khanna & Verghese (1978) found that wives role in decision making was almost the same in single and dual earner households. By contrast, Devi (1987) found that husband's power in decision making in dual earner families was significantly lower than his counterpart in single earner households. Ramu's²⁵ study suggested that wives were increasingly but informally appropriating authority from their

²⁵ Ramu, G. N, Marital Role and Power; Perceptions and Realities in an Indian urban Setting, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* XIX (2), 1988 pg 207-27.

husbands to make decisions. Sinha and Prabha²⁶, in their study of working women in Bihar , found the vast majority of couples were egalitarian in making decisions on critical issues.

To sum up we can say that men do incorporate women in decision making. Women do not take vital decisions regarding their family directly, but indirectly they do influence their husbands and in the dual earner couple this influence is comparatively high.

To conclude this chapter we can say that attitude of people towards a woman doing a job has changed. Now it is not consider as derogatory for a woman to take up gainful employment. Besides other factor economic need is the basic factor for a women to join the labour force. By gaining employment a married woman in addition to her traditional role have acquired novel responsibilities-responsibility of an employee. But despite this the expectations regarding household duties are same for a working as those of her non working counterpart.

The study of division of domestic labour, which is crucial indicator of the status of women and men in the family, has not shown any prominent changes in the attitude of men towards household work. Most of men does see that household work is exclusively woman's work even if the women is working or is the primary breadwinner. There is slight change in the attitude of dual

²⁶ Sinha, Ramesh P and Shashi Prabha, *Statue Equilibrium of Working Women*, In T.M. Dak ed. *Women and Work in Indian Society*, Delhi Discovery Publishing House pg 205.

earner couple. They accept the necessity of their wives job to increase the family income but when it comes to house hold work the very fact of being masculine comes in front of them. Even if some male contribute in the household work it is very superficial. The most they can do is to buy the household groceries. Cooking, cleaning, feeding the children, working after the old and sick people still remarks the work of the women whether she is working or not. Men can buy the diapers for the baby but when it comes to changing it they will call their wives.

So, in this case the status of women in the family has not changed to the significant level. Rather working women feels doubly burdened because of their office and household work. They have to face role conflict, marital conflict because of this. So, far decision making is concerned, we don't see much of a difference. Even non-working women do influence their husband in decision making as working woman does. But this is the bare fact that women only influence men in decision making, they don't take the actual decision publicly. It is different thing that men don't tend to defy their wives advice to avoid conflict. In majority of cases in vital decision of the family, men had the final say. So, we can say that the status of working women has in the family has not raised to the significant level when they can be placed equal to that of men. Education, employment does have made changes but these are also not very helpful, in raising their status in the family.

Chapter-5
CONCLUSION

In this study, I have tried to focus on the changes, which took place in the status of women in Hindu family. I started from Vedic era to contemporary era and found that there have not been much changes. Women's position which was respectable yet subordinate one in Vedic era continues to be the same in contemporary era. After marriage women status in the family starts from the lowest rung and gradually it enhances, especially after being mother of a son. In the whole process the status of a woman in the family is not dependent on her but it is ascribed to her in relation to male members of the family. Women is referred as daughter, wife or mother in the family. Her identity in the family is overshadowed by the identity of male members of the family. When women are employed and economically independent, as it is the case in many Hindu family today, then their status in the family does rise but still, their status is not at par with the men. Final say on family matters is that of men and the household work is still considered as the feminine work. Subordination of the women in the family is very much intact today though not in the explicit form.

In our analysis we have found that in the early phase of the Vedic period, both men and women enjoyed near equality in education and religious matters. The actual decline in the status of women, both in the family and outside, started during the Post Vedic age and gradually it became worse during the medieval period when practices such as sati, female infanticide started. Even purdah and dowry

system raised to an alarming proportion. During the British period some improvement was seen. But even Britishers refrained from taking any significant measures directed at the improvement of the status of women, as that would have amounted to interfering in personal and religious matters, areas which they scrupulously avoided. It was due to the efforts of social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahadev Govind Ranade in the 19th Century, that many religious premises which promoted sati and child marriage and precluded widow remarriage were challenged.

The representation of women in the post Vedic scriptures is not only contradictory but a clear manifestation of Hindu society's dualistic approach. Manu's code has left an indelible impression on conservative sections of Hindu Society even today. On one hand it exhorts that women should be treated with love, respect and reverence. Manu declares that women must be honoured and admired by their fathers, brothers and husbands, because where women are honoured the Gods are pleased. He recommends that, in childhood, a woman must be in care of her father, in youth in care of her husband, and in old age in care of her son.

We saw that such an equivocal approach to the social status of women extends to their position within marriage and the family as well. From the early childhood a girl is prepared to have the qualities of self denial, sense of service and respect towards others. She is

expected to keep vrats (fast) to get good husband like Shiva. Her socialisation is done keeping in view her future role as bride. As a young girl she is given dolls, kitchen set to play. She acquires these very feminine attitude, towards work from early childhood. She is asked to help in household work so that she becomes perfect in that and hence should not face any difficulties after marriage.

After marriage she is expected to show loyalty and devotion to her husband. Sati –Savitri image of women is expected even now. Manu stipulated that the wife must forever treat her husband as God, though he may be characterless or devoid of good qualities. A woman in the Hindu family is expected to fully engage in domestic duties as wife, mother and housekeeper. Politics, social and economic responsibilities are life, considered to be the male domain.

Woman status in the family depends on her husband's status to some extent. If a woman is wife of the eldest male member of the family, her status automatically rises as compared to other woman in the family. As a bride a woman's status starts from the lowest one. She is expected to do the hardest core of the household work.

Her status also depends on her closeness or intimacy with her husband. If the husband supports his wife her status usually rises. In Hindu family, customarily she has to show a relation of respect and avoidance towards her husband in front of others. Even mother-in-law and sister-in-laws looks that the new bride spends less time with her

husband, so that she doesn't come closer to him. Her closeness towards him is seen as a danger in the joint family. A wife is supposed to pursue her husband to split from the joint family.

A woman's status in the family rises as she becomes mother, preferably mother of a son. Then, she is accepted in her in-laws family as an intimate member. As a mother she is not regarded as a threat to the joint family since her interest also lies in that family. Her intimacy with her husband, now actually grows and her views are also incorporated in the family matters. When woman becomes old, she looks upon her son for support. In the partilineal family which is the dominant form of Hindu family a son is supposed to look after his parents. So, we found that what Manu had said earlier is true in contemporary family structures also. Even today a woman is supposed to be under the surveillance of her father, husband and son at various stages of her life.

It is said that economic independence will help the women to come out of this subordination, and it will help to raise her status in the family. But in the third chapter we saw that although women's status has risen due to employment but it is still not at par with men.

In this study it was found that majority of women do job when there is economic necessity. In times of prosperity however, the majority of them don't prefer doing jobs. Even their husbands didn't want them to do job. The stigma to manual work and the belief that

earning is a male domain whereas household work is a female domain is still intact today, to some extent.

Even in the progressive families where male and female both work outside, household work is considered exclusively as the female domain. Women have to perform dual roles at office and homes. She goes through the experience of role-conflict and role burden.

Participation of women in the decision-making among contemporary households has increased but as seen in various studies, still the male has the final say on the vital matters of the family. So, we can say that, though status of women in the dual-earner family is not of subordination, yet her status is not at par with men.

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