

## Status of Women

Woman is an institutional creature. She may not know what that something is, but she does know that *there is something more in life*, that which she finds in her immediate environment.<sup>1</sup> The subject of the position and status of women is very wide and a comprehensive one, and therefore, is of vital importance.

In ancient India or Vedic age, women occupied position of great importance and dignity. They played an enviable role in domestic and social life and made a splendid contribution to an all-round development of society by virtue of their ingenuity, intellect, and spirit of sacrifice. It is a matter of great pride, and of course of common knowledge, how they distinguished themselves in various Arts and Sciences, Mathematics, Ethics, Theology, Economics, Medicine, Domestic Sciences and the like. The achievements of Gārgī, Maitreyī, Apālā, Ghoṣa, Sītā, Sāvitrī, Draupadī are proud memories for us. They still play role-models for the women of today. The character and knowledge of such women in the past was exalted and the past traditions were dignified. They were fully equals of men as regards their access and capacity for the highest knowledge of the Absolute. They were *Mantra*-perceivers; they engaged themselves in great hard-penances, they did what men could do. There were no bindings of any sort from the society. They were owners of riches, wealth, land and sole guardian of their children. They were treated as incarnations of Divinities, as sustainers, and as creative energy which is conducive to the growth and welfare of human society. They were educated as well as companions of men taking all responsibilities and sharing all troubles shoulder-to-shoulder with their men-folk.

The *Purāṇas* too kept up the Vedic traditions but made certain changes in the description of the legends of women. The mother or wife was not merely decorative but central and vital for the refinement of society. As mothers and wives, they were supposed to keep the high standards of ethics. Although they were not the perceivers of the *Mantras*, yet they were really elite and were having the high knowledge of self. To name a few, Sumanā, Sukalā, Devahūti and the like had a great spiritual knowledge. The lofty ideals of Indian womanhood were the essence of Hindu civilization and refinement of the *Paurāṇika* (पौराणिक) society. The highest duties of women in the *Purāṇas* were devoted service to their husband and the family members, and thus the main object of their life was conjugal fidelity and family welfare.

**Woman in Family** : Family is the first step to life. Nobody wants to be alone. Togetherness is a must. Man alone was very unhappy and so God gave him a companion, and that was the first step towards being together or (to-get-her). They started living like husband and wife or made a family. Husband and wife are two wheels of a householder's cart, equally useful in life. The first *Puruṣa* (पुरुष), though being alone, desired to be the second, and so He became divided into two, but that could not satisfy the *Ātman*—

स द्वितीयमैच्छत्। स आत्मानं द्वेधा पातयत्।  
पतिश्च पत्नी चाभवताम्। तस्मादिमर्धवृगलमिव  
स्व इति ह स्माह याज्ञवल्क्यः।<sup>2</sup>

Therefore He created and divided Himself into two अथैतस्य मनसो द्यौः शरीरम्।<sup>3</sup> The left became woman and the right one man—

स्वेच्छामयः स्वेच्छया च द्विधारूपो बभूव ह।  
स्त्रीरूपो वामभागांशो दक्षिणांशः पुमान् स्मृतः॥<sup>4</sup>

The personified form of this element is *Ardhanārīśvara* (अर्द्धनारीश्वर). When these two are combined, The *Puruṣa* becomes complete. Like *Upaniṣads* (उपनिषद्), the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (शतपथ ब्राह्मण) also avers the same<sup>5</sup>. Women and men are not considered different in the eyes of the great souled—

यदेतद् हृदयं तव तदस्तु हृदयं मम।  
यदेतद् हृदयं मम तदस्तु हृदयं तव॥<sup>6</sup>

Both should respect each other because they are complementary to each other. Bliss and *Ākāśa* are two different forms of Brahman<sup>7</sup>.

Bliss or *Sukha* was in man (*Nara*) and *Ākāśa* (Sky) was in woman, therefore, without woman man is not complete.

According to the *Atharvaveda* (अथर्ववेद) man is *Dhyuloka* (द्युलोक, sky) and woman is *Pṛthivī* (पृथ्वी, earth). Man is *Sāmaveda* and woman is *Rgveda*<sup>8</sup>. Both should conquer each other's heart and try to increase their love for each other<sup>9</sup>. The *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra* clearly says that there is no division of husband and wife, there is co-relation in action, merit and attainment of riches since their marriage—

जायापत्योर्न विभागो दृश्यते।  
पाणिग्रहणाद् हि सहत्वं कर्मसु तथा  
पुण्यफलेषु द्रव्यपरिग्रहेषु च॥<sup>10</sup>

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa* describes that one 'Ka' Brahman was divided into two. Therefore, the bodies of man and woman are known as '*Kāyam*'—

कस्य रूमभूद् द्वेधा यत्कायमभिचक्षते।  
ताभ्यां रूपविभागाभ्यां मिथुनं समपद्यत्॥<sup>11</sup>

The word '*Kāyam*' has been derived from the Noun '*ka*' (a name of Brahman) कस्य इदम् that which belongs to Brahman. Manu owed his name to his father Svayambhū (the self-born Brahman). This word स्वायंभुव has been derived as स्वयंभुवः अपत्यंपुमान् or the son of Svayambhū<sup>12</sup>.

In a certain place, the same *Purāṇa* refers to the birth of a couple *man and woman* from the *Tamomaya Jñānamaya* body of the creator. Man or *Puruṣa* was Svāyambhuva Manu and woman or *strī* was Śatarūpā, the mother of worldly beings<sup>13</sup>. Man and woman are two images of one element. But when divided into two, it becomes or appears different due to form, power or capacity. At another place, the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* refers to a story which shows the difference between man and woman in the apparent outlook of the society. Once the women while taking bath did not cover themselves in the presence of Avadhūta Śukadeva (son of Vedavyāsa), but as soon as they saw Vedavyāsa they covered their bodies. At this, Vedavyāsa was surprised and so asked them the reason. He was told that He (Vyāsa) has maintained the distinction of sex or man and woman, whereas his son's views are totally different from Him. Śukadeva is very clean and exclusive. Hence there is *Bheda* (distinction) in *Abheda* (non-different)<sup>14</sup>.

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* has stated that Brahmā disappeared after giving instructions to man to divide Himself into two: *man and woman*.

अर्धनारीनरवपुः प्रचण्डोऽति शरीरवान् ।  
विभजात्मानमित्युक्त्वा तं ब्रह्माऽन्तर्दधे ततः॥<sup>15</sup>

This distinction of different bodies took place according to one's actions. The *Liṅga (Layaṅ gacchati)* is the distinctive mark of *Puruṣa* whereas *Yoni (Causal Tattva)* is the mark of woman. The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* states that a man does not become man (*pumān*) till he attains his wife and the same *Purāṇa* says that man without woman is like a one-wheel chariot or one winged bird. This clearly states that man and woman are the two wheels of a car in this world. The woman is the only cause of life *Prāṇa* or the breath of life (*Prāṇa*) or vitality is well-established in a woman. The *Padma-Purāṇa* has clearly stated that there is no creation of any being without the female<sup>16</sup>. The husband and wife together are the makers of the family or the future of their children. They are responsible for the future global condition too. A child at his tender age can easily be moulded by her mother, but once grown up, it is very difficult to influence one's child's views. She is the *Dhātrī* (Producer) of all beings. She is an anchor of the family. She has to perform her roles as a sister, wife, mother etc. in her family. At times she is advisor, administrator, teacher and the like. Viśakhadatta in *Mudrārākṣasa* justly uses different vocatives for a woman while denoting her full-fledged personality.

गुणवत्युपायनिलये स्थितिहेतोः साधिके त्रिवर्गस्य ।  
मद्भवननीतिविद्ये कार्यादार्ये द्रुतमुपेहि॥<sup>17</sup>

“O, you possessed of merits, the abode of remedies, accomplisher of the group of three goals (viz., *Dharma, Artha* and *Kāma*) which is the cause of stability of society, science of polity in house, O' noble lady, do come quickly”.

The *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* also clearly states her multifarious roles in the family.

स्तनदात्री गर्भदात्री भक्ष्यधात्री गुरुप्रिया ।  
अभीष्टदेवपत्नी च पितुः पत्नी च कन्यका॥<sup>18</sup>

The *Skanda Purāṇa* too clearly states that a chaste woman alone is capable of upbringing of thousands of men<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, she is very respect-worthy. The sage Yājñavalkya had instructed every one member of the family-*husband, brother, sister, father and other relations*-to respect women.

The *Purāṇas* and the *Smṛtikāras* show great regard for women. Woman is regarded as *Gṛhaswāminī* (गृहस्वामिनी) or *Grahiṇī* (गृहिणी) is called Home.

According to the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, *Gṛhasthāśrama* is the best amongst the four *āśramas*.

चतुर्णामाश्रमाणां हि गृहस्थः श्रेष्ठः उच्यते ।  
गृहस्थाच्च गृहश्रेष्ठं गृहाच्छ्रेष्ठा वराः स्त्रियः ।  
पूर्णन्दुबिम्बवदना पीनोन्नतपयोधराः ।  
तद्गृहं यत्र दृश्यते योषितः शीतमण्डनाः॥

Good home is better than *Gṛhasthāśrama* and their too noble women are better than home, those women beautiful and of great moral values make that home, a worth

living place like heaven (यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।)<sup>19</sup>. Wherever women are worshiped or honored, the gods dwell there.<sup>20</sup>

**Woman as Mother** : Mother is the nucleus of civilization. No one can wholly escape the training and culture which one acquires from the lap of one's mother. The mothers prepare their children for noble life and teach them about ethics or love, compassion, forbearance, courage etc. They encourage their siblings for religious and spiritual pursuits. The brave high-souled persons like Arjuna, Bhīma, Karṇa, Abhimanyu, Rāṇā-Pratāpa, Śivājī and others attained good *Samskāras* from their mothers and had tremendous chivalry. Dadhīci, Vaśiṣṭha, Yājñvalkyā etc. had yogic powers due to their mother's efforts. Dhruva, Kapila, Prahlāda, Nārada and the like had great devotion to God all due to the influence of their mother. All the mothers of great men did not put obstacles in their sons' ways of progress. A plant when still a sapling can be directed to grow straight with the help of a support and can be turned into any direction or shape, but when it grows up as a tree, it can no more be turned or twisted as earlier when it was small. Similarly, a child at his tender age can easily be moulded by her or his mother.

The word 'मातृ' (*Mātr*) itself implies glory or respect. 'Mā Māne' or 'Māna Pūjayāmi' with this rule, the root 'Mān' (मान्—causal of *Man*) when suffixed with 'tr' (तृ), the word 'Mātr' (मातृ) is formed. The *Atharvaveda* also speaks of the glory of the mother—(मात्रा भवतु संमनाः) and the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* speaks of mother as the god—(मातृ देवो भवः). And Manu has increased the glory of greatness of mother as one thousand times greater than father—(सहस्रं तु पितृन् मात्रा गौरवेणातिरिच्यते।). 'Mātā' (माता) is used first in 'Mātā Pitarau' (मातापितरौ) in the rule of grammar. In practice we find such examples like Sīta-Rāma, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and the like. Not only in human beings, but in other species also abundance of love for their mother is found. She is the soul of the civilization; she enhances the name and fame of two families. In calamity, the mother is the only refuge (आपदि मातैव शरणम्). She is the prowess of God. Her motherhood is the protector of all the universe. Her power of progeny should be protected from all sides. She gives best food and best care to her children (माता कुमाता न भवति). Śatarūpā taught her children lessons on knowledge of Brahman and moral science. Mother Devahūti gave birth to Kapila, the great philosopher and sage who is known for his philosophy of the System of *Sāṅkhya*.

The *R̥gvedic* woman seer Sūryā prayed to God that the women should always remain *Saubhāgyavatī* (सौभाग्यवती) or endowed with good fortune i.e., longevity of husband, blessed with son or daughter and enough wealth and prosperity.

**Woman as Daughter** : For getting progeny, severe penances and vows were performed but only the previous actions were supposed to be the cause of the birth or no birth of a child. Though the men and women, generally had cherished desire of procreation of sons but the birth of a daughter also is eulogised in so many words. The *Purāṇas* at one place have very clearly explained that "The worldly life would not have come up, if all remained without a house or a family (i.e., woman). The creator has praised the acquisition of a son for deluding the beings, but without a female, birth is not possible for the beings. A daughter is equal to ten sons."<sup>21</sup> The goddess Pārvatī delighted in a beautiful garden as she was, she spoke extremely auspicious words—"The wise man who gets fashioned a well in a village, where there is want of water,

lives in heaven for as many years as there are drops in the well. The fashioning of a large well is equal to the fashioning of ten small wells. The fashioning of a lake is equal to the ten large wells. In marriage the offering of a daughter is equal to ten deep lakes, and the planting of a tree is equal to ten female babies. This is the auspicious rule that would or should definitely take place in future in the world.”<sup>22</sup> This is the prophecy made by the goddess Mother Pārvatī which shows us path for being environmental friendly and also be always respectful towards our mothers, daughters or all women. This is surely a wish to stop female infanticide and killing of an embryo.

These auspicious words are in conformity with the Vedic notion where there was no distinction between a male child or a female child. According to the *Śruti*—“त्वं कुमार उत वा कुमारी” (Either you are male or female) it does not make any difference. Even the Supreme Reality is in the form of a man and woman both. For the destruction of fierce demons, the gods produced a Goddess woman whom each god gave her powerful weapons and power. The *Upaniṣad*<sup>23</sup> avers that a daughter’s birth was equally desired. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* states that Śraddhā, the wife of Manu, when desirous of progeny asked for a daughter in boon at the time of the *Putreṣṭi*-sacrifice—

तत्र श्रद्धा मनोः पत्नी होतारं समयाचत ।  
दुहित्त्रथमुपागम्य प्रणिपत्य पयोव्रता ।।<sup>24</sup>

And at another place in the same *Purāṇa*, there is a wish of getting a learned (पंडिता) daughter who should be blessed with long life—

अथ च इच्छेद् दुहितां मे पंडिता जायेत सर्वमायुरियात् ।<sup>25</sup>

There are scattered references where the desire of getting son only is mentioned in the *Purāṇas* because with the birth of a son, some had an illusory belief that they will pay the debt of their ancestors (पितृऋण).

The women were objects of protection but never to be neglected. They should be worshipped and honoured. The apotheosis of the mother had reached a great height to that extent that the sons could never abandon their mothers or kill them, even if they were bycotted socially or religiously. Everywhere in the *Smṛtis* and the *Purāṇas*, it is repeatedly declared that the women should not be killed (स्त्रीणां वधो न कर्तव्यः). The women of noble virtues were respected and were capable of upbringing of the large family of even thousands of sons. But it won’t be out of place to mention that still there is a section of people in India who are not happy at the birth of a daughter (in the lower class where the economic conditions are poor). The justification is economic conditions or some times they are highly ambitious of getting rich at the cost of bride’s money so called Dowry. But no *Śāstra* prescribes compulsory payment of Dowry. This is the evil of the society, that needs to be uprooted totally. In a *Purāṇa* there is one passage which refutes the system of Dowry which should be replaced by the gifts made by the parents willingly according to their capacity.

The *Purāṇas* have several explicit statements regarding the respectable social status of the women but are found silent in giving conclusive evidences of her legal status or her being carrier-oriented. There are some suggestive evidences found in the *Purāṇas* which depict the pattern of the society based on the patriarchal system.

According to A.S. Altekar, “In patriarchal societies, there is a general prejudice against property passing to female heirs; so this principle of allowing स्त्रीधन to devolve on daughters did not appeal to a large section of Hindu community. Originally, the property of woman or स्त्रीधन consisted usually of ornament and costly clothes. In course of time landed property also began to be conveyed to women as *Strīdhana* or property.” Kātyāyana holds that women possess the power of sale and mortgage even over the immovable property included in their *Strīdhana*. Nārada differs from him and declares that women could dispose of only the movables in their *Strīdhana*. The law-givers like Manu created a situation which caused her exemption from legal rights which she enjoyed during the Vedic period and equal to men.

Her motherhood is the protector of all the universe; therefore all the sincere efforts should be done to guard her as she may not get spoilt due to the exigencies of the political situations of that time. All that might have proved to be the serious reason of inequality in social law and custom.

But the very heart and soul of a society and nation is based on the ideals, the real worth and dignity of which have to be judged by its inherent endeavours towards a goal that guides its destiny. The women of India have always been inspired by the twin ideals of unity and equality, purity and sincerity, domesticity and spirituality and utmost chastity and integrity. Women as mothers and wives have some special duties to perform, some special paths to follow and some special ideals to strive for. They bring happiness in life as creators and sustainers.

**Woman as Wife** : The *Purānas*<sup>26</sup> have divided women in three categories—*Sādhvī*, *Kṛtyā* and *Puṁścalī*. This division is based on the qualities and virtues of women, they possessed. In place of *Sādhvī*, the word *Pativrata* (पतिव्रता) is frequently used. She is chaste and devoted to her duties. *Kṛtyā* leaves her virtuous husband and goes to some other man, who is mean ugly and devoid of virtues and good family.<sup>27</sup> *Puṁścalī* does not devote herself to her own husband but flirts with other men.<sup>28</sup> The *Purānas* do not give weightage to the *Kṛtyā* and *Puṁścalī* but give elaborate details of the women who are *Sādhvī* or *Pativrata* or of good conduct. Having a paramour is condemned.<sup>29</sup>

The dedicated service of Śaivyā helped her husband to recover from prolonged illness. Due to her sincerity and chastity, the sun did not rise up for three days.<sup>30</sup> Their curse or boon both was very effective. Aśokasundarī cursed the demon Huṅḍa and Padmāvatī cursed Gobhila when cheated by him in the disguise of her husband.<sup>31</sup> The highest merits of a man become fruitless or futile, if he leaves his chaste wife alone or goes on *Tirthayātrā* without her. The gods, the Pitṛs, the holy rivers, oceans, sacrifices, cows, sages, holy places and the merits are always present in the house of a person who has got a duteous and virtuous wife.<sup>32</sup>

The chaste wife is like a maid in deeds, prostitute in bed, mother when cooks food, best friend or advisor in trouble. Her roles are different at different places. Mother Sītā’s words are noteworthy at the time of Śrī Rāma’s fourteen year’s exile—

नातन्त्री विद्यते वीणा नाचक्रो विद्यते रथः।  
नापतिः सुखमेधते या स्यादपि शतात्मजा।

मितं ददाति हि पिता मितं भ्राता मितं सुतः।  
अमितस्य तु दातारं भर्तारं को न पूजयेत्।।<sup>33</sup>

“Without a string or chord, *veṇā* (वीणा) a lute can not sound, without a wheel, there is no chariot, a woman even if, being the mother of hundreds of sons, does not feel happy. The father, brother and son give pleasure but husband gives inexhaustible pleasure. Therefore there may not be any woman who will not worship her husband.”

**Woman’s Beauty** : Although the inner virtues enhance a woman’s outward beauty, still the *Purāṇas* have not ignored her bodily charm. Beauty is the chief characteristic of a woman. Certain qualities are depicted as essentials of the beauty of a woman. They are enumerated as good nature, sincerity, simplicity, truthfulness, duty, politeness, purity, father’s affection, service, tolerance, love and devotion of husband or chastity.<sup>34</sup> These qualities make a woman beautiful and charming as well.

A woman should be active and flit about like a fawn and shuffle about like a swan. A slim body with black glossy hair reaching upto the ankles when left loose is highly valued. The eyes should be of the shape of a fish, high and pointed like deer, the eyebrows arched like a bow with long eyelashes to match as arrows. Because of their charm they have disturbed the concentration of the great souled sages. The *Apsarās* like Menakā, Rambhā and Urvaśī are known to be possessed of extraordinary or super human beauty. For the purpose of helping the gods, they used their womanly beauty. The women like Sītā, Sāvitrī, Damayantī, Draupadī, Padmāvati etc. also had luminous beauty. But the physical beauty should be accompanied by the inner beauty of a woman; this is what the *Purāṇas* have lauded at several places. Blessed are those women who have preserved their grace and chastity both.<sup>35</sup>

The women of the *Purāṇas* were very fond of colourful dresses, ornaments and jewellery. The women of all castes and class were interested in music and dancing. They were accomplished in chanting *mantras* and reciting *ślokas* in praise of the gods and the goddesses. The Gandharva daughters, according to the *Padma Purāṇa*, were well-versed in the art of singing. Their songs were sweet, melodious and in conformity with *Svara* (स्वर), *Laya* (लय or tune) and *Tāla* (ताल).

**Women as Divinities** : The *Purāṇas* have empowered women with the divine energy of Brahmā, or so-called *Māyā* or *Prakṛti* to be the first creation of all the beings.<sup>36</sup> That divine energy divided herself into seven female parts such as Gāyatrī, Vāk or Bhārati (speech), Svaralakṣmī (wealth of heaven and giver of wealth to all), Umā (the female ascetic), Śaktibījā (the source of power) Varṇikā and Dharmadravā (Ganges).<sup>37</sup>

**Gāyatrī** is the source of the *Vedas*, the entire world has come up from the *Vedas*. *Svasti* (ॐ), *Svāhā* (स्वाहा), *Svadhā* (स्वधा) and *Dikṣā* (दीक्षा) are said to have sprung up from Gāyatrī. *Svasti* (ॐ) denotes the expression of welfare. *Svāhā* is used for offering oblations to the gods and *Svadhā* for the manes. The gods after having received *Svāhā* at a sacrifice would become ageless and immortal. Because of this energy, these gods would drop nectar on the earth so that the earth will be auspicious due to crops and herbs so that there would be abundance of fruits, roots, liquids and foods for all the beings of the earth.

**Vāk** or **Bhārati** has settled in the mouth and mind of all people. She gives instructions with regard to proper conduct in all sacred books. She causes knowledge, joy, grief, infatuation and its absence. It is said that without her, the entire world loses its essential nature. She is Saraswatī.

**Svaralakṣmī** is in the three worlds, the collection of garments and ornaments is due to her, she confers happiness and kingdom; she is very dear to Viṣṇu. She is Lakṣmī (goddess of wealth).

**Umā** is the goddess of knowledge; she constantly destroys selfish motives in the world.

**Śaktibijā**—She is known to be the source of knowledge and would be occupying the half body of Śiva. She will be Pārvatī.

**Varṇikā**—She is the fierce power infatuating all the worlds; she is the cause of destruction of the world. This goddess is Durgā, Kālī, who formerly killed the two demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, so she protected and delighted all the three worlds.

**Dharmadravā**, the Ganges, has settled in moral conduct. Brahmā held her in a water-pot. She has risen from the lotus-like feet of Viṣṇu and held by Śiva on His head. Thus she is united with trinity of gods—Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. Dharmadravā is known to be of the form of water in the water pot and has risen from the sacrifices of Bali. Viṣṇu outwitted Bali by means of a trick. Then by planting only two feet He occupied the entire earth, then the foot in the sky tore asunder the Universe and stood before Brahmā who worshipped the water in the water-pot. After having washed the foot, the pot remained full of water that fell on the Hemakūṭa and then she reached Śiva's matted hairlocks and then flowed from there. Then the sage Bhagīratha propitiated Śiva and brought it on the earth with the worship of elephant named Airāvata who forcibly made a triple hole with his three tusks into the mountain by tearing it asunder. Therefore she flowed through the three holes as having three streams in the world; she is known as Tripathagā (त्रिपथगा) or Mandākinī, Bhāgīrathī and Bhogavatī.

Hence the seventh female Deity is Ganges. This is how the *Padma Purāṇa* eulogised the women as seven deities.<sup>38</sup> Further, the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* gives a detailed account of how all the gods parted with their lustre which became woman *i.e.*, the prowess of all the gods to destroy all the fearful demons. It is said that all the knowledge and all the human women of the world are her forms only—

विद्याः समस्तास्तव देवि भेदाः।

स्त्रियः समस्ताः सकलाः जगत्सु ॥

**Women as Embodiment of Virtues :** The *Purāṇas* state that at the time of creation the virtues took birth as females. This may ascribe us to think that women were supposed to be virtuous for the healthy society and healthy nation. It is said that *Dharma* (धर्म) is always accompanied by his retinue of virtues. None has seen in this world the form of Dharma. He of a true nature is not seen even by the sages, gods or demons. But it is said in a myth that the Prajāpati and Prasūti begot twenty four daughters, who were moral virtues or values for the good conduct to be followed in life. The names of these virtues personified women were—Śraddhā (faith), Lakṣmī (wealth), Dhṛti (Patience), Puṣṭi (Strength), Tuṣṭi (satisfaction), Medhā (intellect),



Kriyā (action), Buddhi (wisdom), Lajjā (shamefulness), Vapu (body), Śānti (peace), Ṛddhi (prosperity) and Kṛti (action). Dharma accepted these thirteen daughters as his wives. It means that Dharma is the abode of these precious virtues. The remaining eleven fine-eyed daughters were—Khyāti (fame), Satī (chastity), Sambhūti (birth or origin), Smṛti (memory), Prīti (love), Kṣamā (forbearance), Sannati (humility), Anasūyā (chaste wife of Atri), Ūrjā (energy), Svāhā (oblation to gods) and Svadhā (oblation to manes). The sages married them. These virtues as women multiplied themselves and gave birth to all the other virtues. Thus the virtues kept on increasing as males or females. All the divine mothers are virtues such as Hṛī (modesty), Kīrti (glory), Dyuti (splendour), Prabhā (lustre), Dhṛti (patience), Kṣamā (forbearance), Bhūti (prosperity), Nīti (policy), Vidyā (knowledge), Mati (intellect), Śruti (Veda), Smṛti (memory), Khyāti (fame), Śānti (peace), Puṣṭi (growth or nourishment) and Kriyā (action).<sup>39</sup> Some of these virtues enumerated here are mentioned above also.

The description of women as deities and as embodiment of virtues is significant because the woman alone can contribute to the high standard of civilization. She is the source of divine energy and abode of moral virtues; and is always accompanied by her inner power and righteousness.

**Appellations of Women** : There are meaningful synonyms of women. In *Nirukta* of Yāska<sup>40</sup> her Vedic name is *Menā*. According to Yāsk—The men respect them, therefore they are called *Menā* (मेना) or “मानयन्ति एनाः”. This *Menā* became *Mānyā* (मान्या) respectable in practice. The name of respectable mother of the goddess Pārvatī was *Menā*.

According to *Vājasaneyī Samhitā*, she is called पुरन्धी योषा, if she is having husband and son. Before marriage she is called *Duhitā* (दुहिता) because she does enhance the name and fame of two families—family of her parents and of her husband. Yāska has derived this word from the root *Duḥ*, to milch, because they at their parents’ house, were engaged in milching the cows. She is *Nārī* (नारी). The whole Solar *Maṇḍala* is reflected in a very tiny dew drop, similarly all the qualities, actions, desires, class, prowess, energy etc. are reflected in a two letter word *Nārī* (नारी). The word *Nārī* is formed of root  $\sqrt{Nṛ}$  or *Nara* because of her relationship with *Nara* (नर) man. After marriage she is called नारी. The *R̥gveda* uses the word *Gnā* (ग्ना) for women. Some scholars have explained it thus: Men go to her with sexual desire therefore she may be called *Gnā* (ग्ना गच्छन्ति). In classical Sanskrit we find the words *Gamyā* (गम्या), *Gnā* (ग्ना) and *Gamā* (गमा). In *Vedic Sanskrit*, *Yoṣā* (योषा) is used for a woman while in classical Sanskrit *Yoṣit* (योषित) is used. *Yoṣā* is derived from root  $\sqrt{Yu}$  means ‘to unite’ because she unites herself with man. She is called *Strī* (स्त्री). This word is made up of the root ‘ $\sqrt{Styai}$ ’ which means to shrink of or means *Lajjā* (shamefulness). According to Patañjalī, *Styai* means स्त्यायति अस्यां गर्भं इति स्त्री। She conceives therefore she is called *Strī*. There is another derivation from the word *Styāna* (स्त्यान) which means समुच्चय or group. शब्दस्पर्शरूपरसगन्धानां गुणानां स्त्यानं स्त्री। So, *Strī* (स्त्री) is the group of *śabda*, *sparśa*, *rūpa*, *rasa* and *gandha*. Yāska also has accepted this form of *Strī*. She is called *Vāmā* (वामा) because she spreads her beauty (वयति सौन्दर्यम्). She is called *Vāmā* because sometimes she speaks opposite things. The *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Chapter 46) states the same notion in this verse—

वामं विरुद्धरूपं तु विपरीतं सुगीतये ।  
वामेन सुखदा देवी वामा तेन मता बुधैः ।

She is called *Pramadā* (प्रमदा) which means pleasure. She gets easily delighted; she can seduce man with a very small gesture of hers. *Lalanā* (ललना) is another name used for her. The root  $\sqrt{Lal}$  means ‘to desire’ or ‘*Lālasā* or *Ichhā*’ therefore she is called *Lalanā* (ललना). Even the word *Māninī* (मानिनी) is used for her thus denoting her self-respect. She is called *Mahilā* (महिला) because she is very respectable. She is called *Jāyā* (जाया) because man himself enters her womb in the form of their son. तज्जाया भवति यदस्यां जायते पुनः। आत्मा वै जायते पुत्रः। She is called *Mātā* (माता), very respectful. The word *Mātṛ* (मातृ) means respectful. The Grammarians describe it is मान+तृप् (*Māna-Trpa*). According to Yāska, the word *Mātṛ* denotes creation or *Nirmātṛ* (निर्मातृ). She is not only the producing machine, she is very honourable or respectable. She is thousand times more respectful than father, preceptor or even heaven. She is *Dhātṛī*, *Jananī*, *Pālanakartrī* and *Viśvambharā* (धात्री, जननी, पालनकर्त्री और विश्वम्भरा).

All the above attributes explain her multiple of intellectual, biological powers. She is *Śrī* (श्री), *Śakti* (शक्ति) and *Citi* (चिति). Lord Kṛṣṇa in *Śrīmadbhagavada Gītā* says– “Among the feminine qualities I am fame, prosperity, speech, memory, intelligence steadfastness and forgiveness.” [कीर्तिः श्रीर्वाक्च नारीणां स्मृतिर्मधा धृतिः क्षमा ।।]. These are very noteworthy virtues of a woman. She is respectable (आराध्या), goddess (देवी), devotion (भक्ति) and faith (श्रद्धा). She is perfect in imperfect. There is creation in her smile, preservation in her milk and destruction in her sorrow.

Perfect beauty lies in woman; love in her beauty, oneness in love, bliss in oneness and bliss is in woman, Woman is bliss, truth and propitious.