

## STATUS OF WOMEN IN MODERN INDIA

By *DIVYANSHU PANDEY*

*FROM CITY ACADEMY LAW COLLEGE*

“It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing.”

- **Swami Vivekananda**

Status of Indian Women began to change radically during the modern period. Historically the period after 1750 A.D is known as the modern period.

### Women in India

Women have been treated as ‘objects’ by the male-dominated society in India and elsewhere. However, there is no uniform pattern of social, cultural and economic distinctions between men and women. In contemporary India, gender-based consciousness has its origin in emergence of the middle classes and their problems.

Patriarchy is very strong in India despite several movements for the upliftment of women launched by women’s organizations during the pre- and the post-independence periods. Sex morals have a direct bearing on hierarchy of caste and class groups.

### Status of Women during the Vedic Period

According to one view women during the Vedic period occupied an exalted position and they enjoyed a fair amount of personal freedom and equal rights with men. But another view holds that birth of a girl was not a welcome event. However she did not suffer due to that reason. She was given all the privileges entitled to a son. No discrimination was made on the basis of education. At least twenty women composed Rig Vedic Hymns. Gargi and Maitreyi were the leading philosophers of the time.

Women, in the Vedic era, so excelled in the sphere of education that even the deity of learning was conceived of as a female popularly known as ‘Saraswati’. Girls were allowed to enter into the Gurukulas along with boys. There are also instances of female Rishis, such as Ghosa, Kakhivati Surya Savitri, Indrani, Shradha Kamayani, Yami Shachi, Poulomi, Urvashi etc. Marriage in the Vedic Period was considered a social and religious duty and united the couple on an equal footing.

## **The Social status and importance of Women in Vedic and Post-Vedic Period of India**

Male and Female, the two basic components of our human society, depend upon each other and each one of them constitutes about half of the population. Over years sociologists and other scholars have tried to assess the problems faced by women and to study changes in their status around the globe in general and in Indian society in particular. We find that man and woman have been established as the two wheels of a chariot.

### **Prabhu has remarked:**

“This shows that men and women were regarded as having equally important status in the social life of the early period”.

Women had equal rights in social and religious fields but had limited rights in economic field.

The status of Indian women during this period can be divided into two stages:

- (a) Status of women during the British rule in India,
- (b) The status of women in post independent India.

### **(a) Status of women During the British Rule:**

After the fall of the Mughal Empire at the decisive Battle of Plassey (1757 A.D) the British people established their complete political supremacy over the Indian people. During the British rule, a number of changes were made in the economic and social structures of our society.

After the lapse of several centuries for the first time some attempts were made all India bases to tackle the problems that confronted women. Social reformers with patriotic spirit on the one hand and the British Government on the other together took several measures to improve the status of women and to remove some of their disabilities.

### **(b) The status of women in post independent India:**

The status of Indian women has radically changed since independence. Both the structural and cultural changes provided equality of opportunities to women in education, employment and political participation. With the help of these changes, exploitation of women, to a great extent was reduced. More freedom and better orientation were provided to the women's organization to pursue their interest.

The centuries of slavery were over. Today women want equality, education and recognition. The advancement of women is the most significant fact of modern India.

**Gandhi Ji once said** “Woman is the noblest of God’s creation, supreme in her own sphere of activity.” These words are blossoming now.

From its very inception in the 19th century, the Indian National congress included women and elected Mrs. Annie Besant as its president. One of the proudest moments of Indian womanhood was when Mrs. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit was elected as the president of the U.N. General Assembly in 1953.

In free India, the status of women has undergone profound changes. Remarkable progress has been achieved in the field of administration, science and technology, sports, education, literature, music, painting and other fine arts.

### **1. Constitutional provision and legislation in support of women’s cause:**

The constitution of India has greatly enhanced the status of Indian women by throwing upon to them all its series on equal terms with men. All the men and women of India are equity entitled for individual freedom, fundamental rights including the right to participate in social, cultural, religious, educational, economic and political activities. The constitution provides for equality of sex and offers protection to women against exploitation. It has given the voting right to women and in no way treats women as second grade citizens.

Social legislation safeguarding women’s interest:

The Government of Independent India immediately took a number of legislative measures to safeguard the interests of women.

Some of them are discussed here:

#### **(i) The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955:**

It prohibits polygyny, polyandry and child marriage and concedes equal rights to women to divorce and to remarry.

#### **(ii) The Hindu succession Act, 1956:**

It provides the right to parental property for women.

#### **(iii) The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956:**

The act gives a childless woman the right to adopt a child and to claim maintenance from the husband if she is divorced by him.

(iv) **The special Marriage Act, 1954:**

It provides rights to women on par with men for inter-caste marriage, love marriage and registered marriage. The Act has also fixed the minimum age of marriage at 21 for males and 18 for females.

(v) **The dowry prohibition Act, 1961:**

It declares the taking of dowry an unlawful activity and thereby prevents the exploitation of women.

(vi) **Other legislations:**

(a) **The suppression of Immoral Traffic of women and Girls Act 1956:**

It provides protection to women from being kidnapped or compelled to become prostitute.

(b) **The Medical Termination of Pregnancy: Act 1971:**

It legalizes abortion conceding the right of a woman to go for abortion on ground of physical and mental health.

(c) **The criminal Law Amendment Act 1983:**

It seeks to stop various types of crimes against women.

(d) **The Family Court Act 1984:**

It seeks to provide justice to women who get involved in family disputes.

**2. Women in the field of Education:**

After Independence, women of India took education in a relatively large number. For example in 1901, the literary level of the females in India was just 0.6%; it increased to 39.42% in 1991 and to 64.1 in 2001.

The educational performance of girl students particularly at high school and college level is proving to be better than that of boys especially after 1980. We have today some universities exclusively meant for women. Example- SNDT university for women (poona) (ii) Padmavathi University for women (Terupati), Mother Teresa University for women (Kodai Kanal, Tamilnadu) Sri Avinashi lingam Homes Science college for Women (Deemed University, Coimbatore.) Girls' students are getting admitted on merit basis to the prestigious engineering and medical colleges in a relatively bigger number during the recent years.

### 3. Women in Economic and Employment Fields:

In both villages and cities there has been a remarkable increase in the number of women going out of the four walls of the household and becoming workers. In the “employment market” they are successfully competition with the men folk, In every field, the number of women employees is steadily increasing since 1991, though in a smaller number, women are getting recruited into the Army force, Air force and Naval force also.

Examples:

(i) **The Maternity Benefit Act 1961:**

It gives maternity benefits such as 3 months leaves with salary to the married women workers during pregnancy stage.

(ii) **The Equal Remuneration Act 1976:**

It removes wage discrimination between male and female workers.

(iii) **The Factories Amendment Act 1976:**

It deals with working laws, weekly rest, standards of cleanliness, ventilation, first aid facilities rest rooms etc. The legislation also provides for establishing of crèches for children of working women, separate toilets for females and lays down a maximum of 9 hours of work a day for women.

(iv) **The Hindu succession Act. 1956:**

According to this act not only a daughter is given a right in her father's property equal to her brothers, but a widow also gets a share from her deceased husbands' property equal to her sons and daughters.

### 4. Women in the Political Field:

The Indian constitution has provided women two important political rights female enfranchisement and eligibility for the legislature. After the independence, the number of women voters and women representatives in Assemblies and parliament has increased sufficiently. In central cabinet and at the level of state cabinet we find some ministerial portfolios being headed by women.

The Late Raj Kumari Amit Kaur was a minister in the first central cabinet of free India. Sucheta Kripalini had successfully fulfilled her responsibilities of Uttar Pradesh so as Padmaja Naidu as the Governor of West Bengal. Smt Nadini Satpathy of Orissa state was also one of the able chief Ministers. The nation witnessed in Smt. Indira Gandhi, one of the

powerful prime ministers who gave her leadership to the country for more than a decade.

Hon'ble president Mrs Pratiba Devi Singh Patil, is holding the most important and dignified post of our country at present. In 1992, an amendment (73rd) was brought to the constitution according to which one-third of the seats were reserved for women at the panchayat level. There are many women Members and chairmen of local bodies and legislatures.

### **5. Women in the sports Field:**

If we really want to see India in future as a country which is economically enriched, politically equipped, socially developed and culturally distinguished, then definitely we have to give women a leg up in all their respective spheres of activity. Dr Radhakrishnan the Late President of India, once said "The progress of our land towards our goal of democratic socialism cannot be achieved without the active participation of our mothers, wives, sisters and daughters".

### **Recent Government Of India Schemes For The Upliftment Of Women In India**

#### **Beti Bachao - Beti Padhao**

One of the most spectacular initiatives by the Government of India, this one is pushing boundaries in the field of upliftment of women by ensuring protection and survival of the girl child in light of the declining Child Sex Ratio. It was launched in Jan 2015 fulfilling one of the election promises by the current Prime Minister.

#### **Sukanya Samridhi Account**

Launched in Jan 2015 this scheme is an extension on the first mentioned plan. The government is taking efforts not only to save more and more girls but is equally determined to provide them with better and economically secured future.

#### **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana**

Launched in March 2016 this is a step by the Government of India to keep every household fed and aims at providing free LPG connection to women below poverty line. It gained a lot of attention due to the social campaign and an appeal to the affluent class to give up LPG subsidy in favour of weaker classes.

#### **Mahila E-Haat**

A shout out to the entire community of women entrepreneurs and aspiring leaders, this plan emphasizes on empowering women entrepreneurs, NGOs, self-help groups and small producers.

Introduced in March 2016, this bilingual portal presents an online marketing platform for women all over our country to showcase products manufactured, and the services offered by them to attract customers. This portal shall act as a catalyst for their business and requires

only a mobile number to be accessed from anywhere, anytime.

A huge leap, it is in line with the 'Digital India' and 'stand up India' social campaigns to boost the Indian economy.

### **Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers**

No matter how talented or devoted a mother is, her child will always be her priority. She will give up a successful career just to look after her kids. In order to reduce this dropout, which is extensive in our country, the government has come up with this scheme for upliftment of women in 2006.

As there has been a remarkable increase in number of work opportunities for women and also the need to support the family income due to increasing inflation, this is a welcome step for all.

### **Maternity Benefit Program**

This scheme is for the benefit of pregnant and lactating women in India and desires to provide proper care, practice and efficient utilization of government sponsored facilities.

Previously known as Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana, it was renamed as Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana in 2017 to combat the increasing maternal mortality rate.

It presents conditional cash transfer for women of 19 years or above who are expecting or lactating for her first two live children. It additionally covers the wage loss incurred during this period.

### **Conclusion:**

Women have been empowered through women's art in many ways as I have explained in my analysis. Although at the same time they have had to struggle a lot to gain this power and get their voice heard. The artists Cindy Sherman, Frida Kahlo and Barbara Kruger have used paintings, photos and texts and slogan very cleverly to portray their message, although in some ways it projects and highlights even more the anxieties they faced in politics and the public sphere.

But mostly in my opinion I believe that they have cleverly used paintings, photographs and texts and slogans to get their message across in such an effective way. I would never have thought such images could express so many different ideas/points about various different topics which are very interesting and useful to empower women and give them the same treatment and respect as men are given. I also feel like it allows women to be liberated and talk about issues such as sexuality and childbirth and the pain and suffering women have to go through which shows endurance and hope in women. Their work also shows how to fight for justice in a peaceful way but still is quite strong, powerful and effective as well as showing that women do not have to have concrete identities i.e. being housewife etc. and that they too can be whatever they want to be in life because they are just as strong and powerful.

The overall message I gained from this was that we should appreciate what we have and be grateful that we do not have to go through some of the horrors of the world that these women had to go through.