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**SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN: UNDERSTANDING THE
INDIAN CONTEXT**

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Abstract:

One of the major problems of Indian society is the inferior position accorded to women. They do not enjoy equal status and their condition is far from satisfactory. In this article, we have tried to cover the condition, status and position of women in a different period, viz. Ancient, Medieval, British and Present Time. Any assessment of the status of women has to start with the social framework, social structures, cultural norms and value systems that influence social expectations regarding the behaviour of both men and women and determine women's roles and their position in society. A society is composed of many institutions and most important of them are the system of decent, family and kinship, marriage and religious traditions. They provide the ideology and moral basis for men and women about their rights and duties and their status and role.

Key Words:

*Socio-Economic & Political Status,
Women, India.*

A.L. De'Souza says, "Women were denied equal rights in marital, familial, social, educational, economic and political fields. They were assigned a subordinate status. The marriage ideals, power and authority exercised by the joint-family and caste system combined with illiteracy, age-old traditions, seclusion within the four walls of the house, made it difficult for them to seek full personality development. They had a scant personal identity and few rights.

1. Important constitutional and legal provisions for women in India

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

2. Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio-economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of the law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

3. Constitutional Privileges

(i) Equality before law for women (Article 14) (ii) The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i)) (iii) The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3)) (iv) Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or

appointment to any office under the State (Article 16) (v) The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)) (vi) To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A) (vii) The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42) (viii) The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46) (ix) The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people (Article 47) (x) To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)) (xi) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3)) (xii) Not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women (Article 243 D (4)) (xiii) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T (3)) (xiv) Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide (Article 243 T (4))

4. Legal Provisions

To uphold the Constitutional mandate, the State has enacted various legislative measures intended to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to provide support services, especially to working women. Although women may be victims of any of the crimes such as 'Murder', 'Robbery', 'Cheating' etc, the crimes, which are directed specifically against women, are characterized as 'Crime against Women'. These are broadly classified into two categories. (1) The Crimes Identified Under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) (i) Rape (Sec. 376 IPC) (ii) Kidnapping & Abduction for

different purposes (Sec. 363-373) (iii) Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths or their attempts (Sec. 302/304-B IPC) (iv) Torture, both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC) (v) Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC) (vi) Sexual Harassment (Sec. 509 IPC) (vii) Importation of girls (up to 21 years of age) (2) The Crimes identified under the Special Laws (SLL) Although all laws are not gendered specific, the provisions of law affecting women significantly have been reviewed periodically and amendments carried out to keep pace with the emerging requirements. Some acts have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests like (i) The Family Courts Act, 1954 (ii) The Special Marriage Act, 1954 (iii) The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 (iv) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 with amendment in 2005 (v) Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (vi) The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995) (vii) Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (viii) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 (ix) The Contract Labor (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976 (x) The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 (xi) The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (xii) The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983 (xiii) Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 (xiv) Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 (xv) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

5. Special Initiatives for Women

(i) National Commission for Women : In January 1992, the Government set-up this statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc. (ii) Reservation for Women in Local Self-Government : The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas. (iii) The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000): The plan of Action is to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child. National Policy for Children-2013 was adopted by the Government of India on 26th April 2013. National Plan of Action for Children 2016 is in Draft Format. (iv) National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001: The Department of Women & Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a “National Policy for the Empowerment of Women” in the year 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and

empowerment of women. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2016 is in draft stage.

6. History of the Status of Women in India

6.1 Ancient Period

The Ancient Indian women enjoyed a comparatively high status during the early Vedic period (2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.), surpassing contemporary civilizations in ancient Greece and Rome. The Aryans were mostly busy fighting wars. The condition of Vedic Women was good. Women also enjoyed religious status like that of men, especially in Vedic initiation and studies. The Rig Veda accorded the highest social status to qualified women of those days. Women were appointed to important positions. In that period, marriage was not compulsory. It was considered a social and religious duty and was generally undertaken at an advanced age. On the whole, during this period the position of women was high. However, the status and position of women fell in the later Vedic and epic periods. They were not considered equal to men and did not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men. Knowledge of the Vedas became limited among women. ‘Manusmriti’, the celebrated ancient law-giver, stated that man should enjoy unquestioned supremacy over his wife. He declared that women had no right to study the Vedas. Infant marriages and polygamy were established during this period. Three instances of “Sati” are recorded in the Ramayana and one in the Mahabharata. Those things we found from Hindu ritual. Buddhism and Jainism were at first indifferent towards women and Lord Buddha was reluctant to admit women into his faith. Later, women were admitted to Buddhism and Jainism.

6.2 Medieval and British Period

6.2.1 Medieval

The condition and status of women in India declined with the passage of time. During the medieval period, the woman was given a position subordinate to man. Law and religion did not recognize the equality and equal rights of man and woman. After Intervention of Mughal’s Indian women got another two social evils, Parda and seclusion. Rest of the social evils had been prevailing there. The women’s place was largely regarded as being in the home. In short, the role of women was conceived to be one of subservience to her husband, who was the master and Controller of the family. However, The Bhakti movement played a helpful role. The saints preached equality of the sexes and pleaded for equal opportunities for

women. Low status of women, despite outstanding examples: It is true that our history recorded instances of outstanding women like Gargi, Maitreyi, Rani Rudrama Devi, Sultana Begum Razia, Lakshmi Bai, Mirabai, Ahalyabai Holkar, Nur Jahan, Mehr-un-Nisa, Maham Anga, Chand Bibi, and Tarabai who accomplished great feats in the spheres of literature, art, philosophy, administration, and even warfare. The above are few of the great Indian women of this period. Other names are Jahanara Begum – the partisan of Dara Shikoh, Roshan Ara – the partisan of Aurangzeb, Zeb-un-Nisa, the daughter of Aurangzeb and Jija Bai, the mother of Shivaji, etc. Jija Bai is considered typical of Indian womanhood. However, these women belonged to the royal and aristocratic families of society and hence were free from conditions of social disabilities and subjection in which the mass of women lived. Despite such outstanding instances, the position, status and condition of women who were poor in India. The legal position of Hindu women, especially from the point of view of inheritance, was again, generally speaking, unsatisfactory. Polygamy was permissible and legal. Widow-marriage was prevalent among the non-Brahmins of Maharashtra, as also among the Jats of the Punjab and the Jamuna valley. In the middle of the 18th century, social evils increased tremendously.

6.2.2 British

In the latter half of the 18th century, when the British came to India, women's status had dropped to the lowest level. It was the worst period in the history of the country because of child marriage and Sati system etc. which attracted the attention of the British and social reformers. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the practice of Sati was confined to Hooghly, Nadia and Burdwan districts of Bengal, Ghazipur of Uttar Pradesh and Shahabad of Bihar. It was also found in other parts of India, but only as a rare phenomenon. The following factors could be attributed to the practice of Sati: (1) The position of women in the Hindu system, (2) The institution of polygamy, especially among the Kulin Brahmanas, (3) The enforced widowhood and austerity, (4) Social convention, (5) The sense of salvation attached to the rite, and (6) Antiquity and adoration of the practice. The British had shown interest in the abolition of Sati in 1813. The persuasive propaganda techniques failed to prevent the occurrence of the practice. The police also did not prove effective. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Lord William Bentinck. took it upon himself to eradicate this social evil. In spite of the strong opposition, a historic resolution of great importance was passed on December 14, 1829,

Cousin, referring to the status of women at the end of the 19th century, states that the condition of the woman was at its lowest point of literacy, of individuality, of health, of social status, of freedom of movement, or initiative of the economic status of power. The reasons that are responsible for the deterioration of the status of women in India were: (1) patriarchal joint family system (2) polygamy (3) Sati system (4) Forced widowhood i.e. denial of the right to remarry' after widowhood (5) denial of the right to divorce (6) child marriage and (7) the purdah system. Because of child marriages with old men, there was an increase in the number of widow. Both child marriage and the purdah custom led to low literacy rate among women. Their entry to social, political and religious functions was prohibited.

The British were the first rulers who unified the country as a whole and were liberal in their thinking. They believed that rational thinking had to be the basis for all customs and institutions and all customs and institutions not so based on reason had to be done away with. Society faced significant modifications. The British Government worked slowly and succeeded in providing an alternative way of life for those who wanted change, by introducing a new type of economy, state structure, and educational system through passing new social legislation. For the upliftment of women in India, several factors were responsible. The first one was the direct influence of the British noted for their courtesy towards women; the general awakening of Asians in the twentieth century and the political struggle for India's independence also gained considerable force to the feminist movement in India. The position of girls, women and widows was improved during the British period. They introduced female education in India. But the system of child marriage came in the way of the spread of female education. Hence in 1929, they passed the child-marriage Restraint Act. This Act restricted the evils of early marriages and increase in the number of girl widows. The Act not only prohibited the solemnization of child-marriages but also raised the minimum age for marriage of girls to 14 and of boys 18 years. This Act of 1929 was also known as the Sarda Act. Besides removing the evils of child marriage, it promoted female education. This led to the improvement in the position of the daughter.

The familial social status of the wife also improved during the British period because of the rise in female education and the rise in the age of marriage. The Hindu Women's Right of separate Residence and Maintenance Act of 1946 enabled Hindu wives to claim maintenance even without having judicial separation under certain circumstances. Women acquired a new social status because of social legislation called the Civil Indian Marriage Act, 1872.

However, the widow was ill-treated by her in-laws and kinsmen as the virtual destroyer of her husband. She was never allowed to appear cheerful or wear bright clothes or ornaments. She had to trudge along day and night and was the victim of all kinds of insolence by other women of the household including servants. The tragedy became all the more poignant if the widow happened to be the child. Therefore, in order to improve her lot, the British passed the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act, 1856. This Act was enacted to remove all the legal barriers to re-marriage of Hindu widows.

Later, these widows had to suffer because they had no property of their own. To improve the economic condition of the women the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act 1937 was passed. According to Section 3 of the Act, on the death of a Hindu male, not only his son would succeed but also his widow and the widow of the predeceased son. By this Act, a widow got the right to claim partition and a right of enjoyment of that property during her lifetime. Though she was made a limited owner of her husband's property, she was freed from depending on other members of her husband's family for food and other necessary requirements.

6.3 Effort of Eminent Personalities

Along with this governmental activities', Annie Besant, in 1917 promoted women's education through Indian Association. In 1920 the Federation of University of Women was established and in 1925 National Council of Women started. Great personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of Brahma Samaj , Ishwarchand Vidyasagar, as the founder of Arja Samaj, Dayanand Saraswati, Keshub Chandra Sen, Gopal Krishna Gokhale Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekanand, Byraamajai Malabari, Pandita Ramabai and others tried to bring about unprecedented awakening among women who were downtrodden and had been oppressed for centuries. The familial, social and legal position of the Hindu women greatly improved during the British period, as compared to the Muslim period. Although a small section of women took advantage of these measures and privileges given, their initiation was indeed significant. During India's struggle for independence, thousands of women took part under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalaxmi Pandit and Kasturba Gandhi. Gill has rightly observed about the achievements with regard to the status of women during the British period that if a person who died a hundred years ago comes to life today, the first and most important change which would strike him is the revolution in the position of women.

During the British rule, several changes were made in the socioeconomic structure of our society. During this period some substantial progress was made in eliminating inequalities between men and women in matters of education, employment, social and political rights. Industrialization, urbanization, the spread of education and social movements were some of the important aspects of change which affected the status of women in various ways. Due to the development in this field of transport and communication, not only new roles have emerged but also new social norms and values have emerged. Education which has been identified as the major instrument for raising the status of women was started during the British period. After the Bhakti movement, the Christian Missionaries took interest in the education of girls. A girl's school was started for the first time in Bombay in 1824. The Hunter Commission too emphasized on the need for female education in 1881. The Calcutta, Bombay and Madras universities did not permit admission to girls up to 1875. After 1882 girls were allowed to go for higher education. Maharshi Karve took up the problems of widow remarriage and education of women. He established SNDT Women's University in Maharashtra in 1916. Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Annie Besant and Mahatma Gandhi also took interests in the social and political rights of women.

7. Present Socio-Economic Status of Women in India

On the basis of above discussion, it may be concluded that the present status of women in India is satisfying. Women in Modern India the Constitution of India has provided equal rights and status to both men and women. The number of women participating in the Public and Social life of the country is far greater today than it was in the past. Women in greater numbers are occupying responsible posts as scientists, doctors, educationists, artists, legislators, ministers and governors, etc. Women are now employed even in sectors which were earlier regarded as a male line of work, like pilots, para-military, and security agencies. They have taken to physically arduous field like, police, armed forces and other adventurous occupations, thereby, doing away with the myth that, they belong to a weaker category. Life of a nuclear family of the present times has become a more co-operative venture. Many of the more important family decisions as well as the assertion of parental authority are taken by the mother. But it is only one side of the coin. The actual position is somewhat different. With rapid urbanization and industrialization of the country, exploitation of women in recent years has been a serious menace to our society. Notwithstanding the multiplication of legislation in various fields with a view to improve the social, political and economic conditions of women,

even the ancient forms of victimization, child marriage and premature consummation resulting in early and dangerous pregnancies, female infanticide, illegal abortions, dowry deaths, rape, eve-teasing and various other forms of molestation of women still continue. In fact, since the passing of the Dowry Prohibition Act and even after several amendments to the I.P.C, Cr.P.C. and the Evidence Act, dowry deaths are on the increase. Under the Hindu Succession Act, parents make will depriving daughters. Though bigamy is an offence, the rate of desertion by husbands and illegal second marriage is on the increase. The advancement of reproduction technology has brought in the new phenomenon of female feticide. One study revealed that nearly hundred percent of the aborted fetuses were females. The condition of elderly women is also not satisfactory especially those of widows. She has to learn to run the house and raise her children. If she does not earn, her condition is even worse. If the widow has no issues, she has to work hard as a maidservant in her husband's relations who might have taken her in and is totally dependent, for all her needs, on others. She has neither economic security nor a say in decisions concerning her. Families still believe that once a daughter is given away in marriage, she cannot be given away again to another person. Hence, widow remarriage, though sanctioned by Hindu Widows Remarriage Act of 1856, seldom takes place and is discouraged.

Thus we see that the condition of an Indian woman is still shocking. The life of women in India is surrounded by violence, neglect and exploitation. The incidence of Bride burning is happening everywhere in our country these days and the number is increasing alarmingly. Even the educated urban and well-informed women are exposed to such events. The Committee on the Status of Women in India rightly concludes that "the entire exercise of our committees has indicated that in certain important areas and for certain sections of the female population, there has been repression from the normative attitudes developed during the freedom movement. Even after the promulgation of the laws legal measures, the protection enjoyed by the large masses from exploitation and injustice is negligible. Though women don't numerically constitute a minority, they are beginning to acquire the features of a minority community by the recognized dimensions of inequality of class, economic status, social position and political power. The chasm between the values of a new social order proclaimed by the constitution and the realities of contemporary Indian society as far as women's rights are concerned remains as great as at the time of independence.

8. Exploitation of Women

A woman in Indian society has been a victim of humiliation, torture and exploitation. There are many episodes like rape, murder, dowry, burning, wife beating and discrimination in the socio-economic and educational fields. Indian society is dominated by men, hence women are a victim of male domination in the respective sphere of life; especially in economic life, for instance, over decision-making on resources, on the utilization of her earnings and on her body. Hence a woman's life lies between pleasures at one end and danger at another end. In daily life, women are routinely defined by sex and they are potential victims of kidnapping and rape.

The human species has made significant progress in several spheres of life. But man has not grown enough to overcome the self-made mental slavery to the laws of the jungle. Since time immemorial the laws of physical strength thrives at the expense of the weak and has made women the primary under-dogs of an exploitative society. In the lower socio-economic level of society, women do more hazardous manual labour than men. Women do more than half the agricultural works in India. Still, men are considered to be the "breadwinners". This sense of women being inferior is passed on from one generation through psychological conditioning.

The most widespread and de-humanizing discriminations and assault against women are on the psychological level. The female psyche is being crushed at the very childhood. The female psyche is brutalized long before bodily violence is inflicted on her. They are conditioned to accept inferior positions in society. Society, through a process of conditioning, creates in girls at home and in school certain thinking patterns, which ascribed to the female sex an inferior status. Besides, society gradually trains them to make this value system their own. Usually, baby girls are given bangles, anklets etc. thus communicating a sense of fragility. Another result of the social conditioning is that man either as a father; brother or husband considers women as a socioeconomic gift of his household.

9. The Vulnerability of Women

9.1 Poverty

The condition of women is more miserable in the rural India with respect to various socio-economic aspects. a) Poverty Rural poverty is one of the important characteristics of India and nearly 45 percent of rural people are below poverty line. Most of them are just surviving with day-to-day earnings. If we take International poverty line (2017) into consideration in India there were one in five Indians is poor. Eighty percentages of poor lives in rural area,

under such circumstances, within the family, the worst sufferers are needless to say women and girl children. For this category of women, neither credit nor skill training is accessible. Better health care and higher educational opportunities are far reaching dreams for their children and there is no need to say about the status of girl child in such families. She (girl child) is treated as a “silent lamb” born to suffer all evils in the male-dominated society. So far much has not been done for this vulnerable sub-culture of the society.

9.2 Violence

Indian society has been bound by culture and tradition since ancient times. The patriarchal system and the gender stereotypes in the family and society have always shown a preference for the male child. Sons were regarded as a means of social security and women remained under male domination. Due to her subordinated position, she has suffered years of discrimination, exploitation and subjugation. She became the victim of several evils like child marriage, polygamy, Purdah system, female infanticide, forced pregnancy, rape etc. In such incidents/recorded cases surprisingly, mother-in-law is also taking an active part (forgetting the fact that they are also women and sometime back they also played daughter-in-law role). This discrimination and violence against women had an effect on the sex ratio in India also (Table 2.1). The main causes of violence are unequal power-relations, gender discrimination, patriarchy, and economic dependence of women, dowry, and low moral values, negative portrayal of women’s image in media, no participation in decision-making, gender stereotypes and a negative mindset. The Hindustan Times, New Delhi (September 10, 2017) reported, Delhi is not only the rape capital of India; it has now taken lead in all types of crimes against women. As against 135 cases (number of atrocities against women at the hands of their husbands and relatives) reported in 2013, the figure jumped to more than per day 100 in 2014. Crime records compiled for 30 megacities in December 2016 by National Crime Records Bureau, shows that Delhi accounts for 30.5 percent of the total crime against women”. If such is the magnitude of domestic violence against women in Delhi, the capital city of India, it would not be surprising if the situation is worse in other areas. The information Brochure published by SWAYAN, an NGO, has shown that in 1994 there was a rape every 42 minutes, a molestation every 22 minutes, a dowry death every 106 minutes and a criminal offence every five minutes — all that does not include the innumerable cases that go unreported. Data of 2014 also reveals that every hour there is a case of one sexual harassment, one dowry death, two rapes, four molestation and six cases of cruelty by husband

and his relatives. Dr. Brenda Gael Mcsweeney, UN Resident coordinator has rightly remarked: — “we must ask ourselves when the female half of the world is living with the daily threat of physical violence or mental violence, are we truly free?”

9.3 Economic Exploitation

On the world level, women and girls together carry two-thirds of the burden of the world’s work yet receive only a tenth of the world’s income. They form 40 percent of the paid labour force. Though women constitute half of the world’s population yet they own less than one percent of the world’s property (UNDP Human Development Report 1995). According to UN Report (2005): women constitute half the world’s population, perform nearly two-thirds of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world’s income and own less than one-hundredth of the world’s property”.

The condition of women in India is more miserable in every field of social life. They are paid half of the three-quarters of the money while their male counterparts earn for the same job. In India a predominantly agricultural country, women do more than half of the total agricultural work. But their work is not valued. On an average, a woman works 15 to 16 hours a day unpaid at home and underpaid outside.

According to National Committee of Women, the growth in the percentage of women labour force in the organized sector is minimal in the last sixty years i.e. 3.44 percent in 1911 to 17.35 percent in 1971; besides, the workload either in the field or in the factories or offices, the women have to do the household such as cooking, washing, cleaning up the house etc. The younger women, besides all these, have to carry the burden of early pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. In terms of help offered to people for their various functions women seem to receive the least attention from the society.

The status of women is intimately connected with their economic status, which in turn, depends upon rights, roles and opportunity for the participation in economic activities. The economic status of women is now accepted as an indicator of a society’s stage of development. However, all development does not result in improving women’s economic activities. The pattern of women’s activities are affected by prevailing social ideology and are also linked with the stage of economic development.

9.4 Educational Deprivation

In India, the literacy rate of women is much lower than men because boys receive more schooling than girls. T.P. Sechan says that there are parts of India where the literacy rate of women today is as low as 3 percent. So stark is the gender inequality in India that it is one of the 43 countries in the world where male literacy rates are at least 15 percent higher than female rates. Educational deprivation is intimately associated with poverty. The UNICEF Executive Director Mr. Carol Bellamy says; “No country has ever emerged from poverty without giving priority to education.”(Indian Currents, 13 June 2004).

However, modest improvement is gradually coming up in the educational level of women. After independence, many steps have been taken to improve a lot of women. Many laws have also been passed. A National Commission for Women was set up to act as a watchdog on the matters concerning women in 1992. Many programmes in the areas of education, health and employment have been initiated for development of women, rural as well as urban. As a result, literacy rates are going up and fertility rates coming down. Universalisation of education, elimination of drop- out from schools, promotion of Balwadi’s and Crèches, Girls Hostels, Technical Institutions for women and distinct emphasis on health, nutrition and family welfare programmes etc. are some such initiatives.

10. Socio-demographic statuses of women

The ratio of female to male population in India has been low. As per Census data, the sex ratio of women to per thousand men is as given below:

Year	Sex Ratio
1901	927
1951	946
1961	641
1971	930
1981	933
1991	927
2001	933
2017	945

Table: sex ratio of women to per thousand men year

In the above table, it is clear that the ratio of female to male population in India has been low for a long time and this has been declining since 1901. According to 1991 census, it declined

sharply again and touched the lowest ever recorded 927. The growing female infanticide in the rural India might be a cause for this. But the 2001 census shows the modest increase (933) which is a good sign but nothing in comparison to 946 of 1951 census. In, 2017 it's showing 945. that also less than 1951. The census 2001 comes up with an alarm of the sharp decline in sex ratio among the children in the zero-six age group. In this category the country's sex ratio decline from 945 (1901) to 927 (2001).

11. Conclusion

The review of the status of women in India tells the story of a fall in the status of women to an abysmally low position from a relatively high status and nobility of the Vedic times. The fall in status has led to a socio-economic and religious-cultural deprivation of women. From the womb to tomb women are victims of violence and deprivation. The vulnerability of women in rural India and is worse compared to all India levels. Of course, there are certain initiatives in the country, especially after the Independence towards raising the status of women. However, there are miles to go in order to reach the goal of gender equality.

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