Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Even though we are living in the 21st century, women are still occupying secondary status worldwide. It is pointed out by the United Nations that women have not achieved equality with men in any country. Of the world's 1.3 billion poor people, it is estimated that nearly 70 percent are women. A scholar, Yasmeen Mohiuddin also pointed out in his study

"Women occupy secondary status in almost every society, however, their status vary form one part of the world to another. There are inter-regional and inter-country differences in the status of women in all status indicators such as health, education, employment, domestic life, political representation and legal equality, and in the extent of the gender gap in these" (Mohiuddin: 1996).

Many theories deal with the status of women, e.g., the developmental theory, sociological theory, dependency theory and feminist theory. One common factor in all these theories is education. Better achievement on this front speaks high of social status and an educational downturn trend shows the lowering of this status. Another important factor in these theories is health. Better health indicators are signs of better production and of better status. The lowering health parameters indicate the downturn of social status. Other parameters like entry in the labour force, into trade, into defence services, participation in the national political field, in international political field, judiciary, gender equality and gender justice are also other relevant indicators of social status. A brief discussion of these in relation to status of women in Israel is undertaken below.

Israel is a nation of around 6 million persons located in the West Asia. The country is spread over an area of 27,800 square km. It came into existence after Second World War on 14th May 1948 when the British Mandate was ended, followed by war with Arab states. Before the end of British mandate the whole land was known Palestine. In fact the existence of Israel represents the culmination of almost two thousand years of longing of the Jewish people for the reestablishment of independent state. The per capita GDP of
Israel in 2000 was about 17,500 US dollar. In 2004, agriculture contributed 2.1 percent to the economy, manufacturing 16.2 percent, electricity and water supply 0.8 percent, construction 5.4 percent, trade and repair of motor vehicles 3.6 percent, accommodation services and restaurants 4.3 percent, transport, storage, and communication 6.5 percent, banking, insurance, and finance 3.3 percent, business activities 13.4 percent, public administration 4.7 percent, education 12.7 percent, health, welfare, and social services 10.7 percent, community, social, and personal services 4.6 percent, services for households by domestic personnel 1.6 percent.

Women made up about 46 percent of labor force in 2000. The literacy rate of Jewish women was equal to their male counterparts. The illiteracy rate is very low among Jewish women in Israel. It was 6.4 percent in 1995 and 5 percent in 2000. In the case of other West Asian countries during the last decade the most significant educational gains for women were in the wealthy Gulf nations of Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE--usually among the most conservative with respect to rights for women but where education has been guaranteed free through university for all citizens. In these countries, and also in Jordan, between 80 to 85 percent women were literate.

One distinguishing feature about Jewish women's education is that they receive their bachelor degrees earlier than their male counterparts. The median age for women to receive the degree is 26 years and for men it is 27.6 years. The difference exists due to male's compulsory time bound duty in Israeli Defense Force (for 3 years). The other fact about Jewish women's education in Israel is that they are having a high participation rate in the higher education than developed countries' women. It is even greater than that of the United States at the under-graduate level. It is 53 percent in the United States and 56 percent in Israel. The participation at the Post-graduate level is identical in both countries. On the other hand, it is also true that Jewish girl students are concentrating on general track rather than on vocational track. Their participation rate in humanities was 74 percent in 1980s. It was 71.4 percent in 1990s. Only 47 percent took up science and mathematics.
During the last decade of 20th century Jewish women’s enrolment in medicine field was 48 percent which was less than 30 percent in 1975. It is greater than female students of USA who are studying medicine. The education rate is higher among Jewish women than in their male counterparts not only at tertiary but in higher studies as well. The effect however, is uneven. The educational pattern of Hardei, Yemeni and Ethiopian women remains broadly what it was, but it is changing fast for girls from this background as they are joining secular school in Jewish state, although their dropout rate is higher than among the Israel’s population. The Hardei, Yemeni and Ethiopia women still suffer most of disabilities.

The second important variable in consideration of women status is the health of women. Health is essential for leading a productive life. Jewish women are having a higher life expectancy rate than their male counterparts. It was 72 years for the women in the last decade of the 20th century. Feminist theory and Beijing Declaration deal with gender sensitive methods and these are neglected by state’s policymakers. There are also contradictions in Israeli health programmes. It is spending lots of money on the reproductive health of Jewish women because child bearing has a cultural importance in this society but it is neglecting the issue of breast cancer that is a leading killer of Jewish women. Not only this, due to globalization the government has made subsidy cuts in health services and had undertaken the privatization of many hospitals. The other important thing was that Israeli Government implemented National Health Insurance Law in 1994, and retreat made in it in 1995, by Israeli Finance Ministry.

To assess women’s changing status, another important variable according to various theories is their participation in the labour force. Even when women all over the world are working in the domestic sphere their labour in this sector had not been counted as productive labour for a long time. Women’s participation in organized labour market was started during Second World War in the most of European nations because of the dearth of human resources to perform certain services because most men were busy on the war front. Women’s participation in labour force also started in certain newly independent
states of Asia. During the end of 20th century the women’s participation rate in most of the developed countries was above 70 percent. Iceland women were having the highest labour force participation rates (87 percent). In the West Asian case women’s participation rate in labour market is still very low, except in Israel.

Israeli Jewish women have been participating in the labour force before the establishment of the Israeli state or the Yishuv period. Their participation in Israeli economy has increased only in the last five decades. In 1969 Jewish women participation in Israeli labour force was only 27 percent. It was 33 percent in 1975 and 42 percent in 1980. After 1980s Jewish women’s participation rate was enhanced only by 1 percent. It was 43.2 percent in 1995, and by the end of 20th century (or 2000) it was 46 percent. If dealt with other West Asian countries women’s participation rate in Tunisia was 36 percent in 2000 while it was 35 percent for Moroccan women.

When we consider Israeli women’s presence in different sectors of Israeli economy we find that they are a part of almost all the sectors. In fact most of Jewish women are concentrating in service sectors. Their participation in agriculture was never great and it declined further in the last two decades. It was only 0.3 percent in 2000. One cause of this decline is that between 1948 and the late 1990s, the land area under cultivation in Israel has almost tripled in large part of modern irrigation, mechanization and other technologies. Most of women who are in agriculture are concentrating on floriculture and work near their home so that they can look after their children. Women in Kibbutz who are part of agriculture sector are not satisfied with the work assigned to them.

In manufacturing, most women were segregated in textile and clothing industry. Their participation in this sector started in 1950s. Till 1980, their percentage was 22.3 percent in this sector. The unique feature of this sector, according to National Consultant of Israel, was that it was the combination of advanced know-how with relatively cheap labour. The overall participation of Jewish women in manufacturing sector, in 1995, was 13.60 percent while it was 26 percent for men. In 2000, it was 11 percent for women and
23.9 percent for men. Women's presence in diamond and defence production industry is negligible.

Jewish women have been participating in trade since the beginning. In 1970s, 24 percent of women were in retail trade of food and 47 percent of them were in the retail of textile and clothing. The role of Jewish women in trade is as hired sales workers and not as owners. In 1990s the overall participation rate of Jewish women in retail trade was 12 percent while it was 14.6 percent for men. Jewish women started participation in the field of finance during 1950s. Finance includes banking, insurance and financial institutions. They worked mostly as clerical workers in these institutions. During the mid 1950s, Jewish women's participation rate in this sector was 25.6 percent. It was 35.9 percent in early 1960s. In early 1970s this ratio was 48.8 percent and 53.7 percent in late 1970s. The large number of women entering the financial institutions was located almost totally in the clerical work. During the last decade, Jewish women's participation in this sector was 4.5 percent and for men it was 2.5 percent.

The most important sector of Israeli economy is service sector. In late 1990s, it contributed about 60 percent of GDP and employed 69 percent of Israeli work force. It includes public services such as education, health, and welfare. Jewish women are a part of education, health and welfare services since the establishment of the state. The basic cause of this inclusion is that these are services related to socialization, nurturing and caring that are associated with women's nature. In fact, it is still considered that socialization and taking care of family's elders are the prime duties of women in any state. Jewish women's participation in the field of education started after the foundation of the state. Even if, Jewish women are having participation in the whole field of education still most of them are in primary schools. Most of Jewish women are working as kindergarten teachers. In the institutions of higher education women comprised a small minority. Jewish women's presence in colleges and universities in 1980s was 75 percent of female faculty and was in the rank of lecturers only. The percentage of women lecturers was always high and in 1989-90, was 29.9 percent which enhanced to 39.5
percent in 1999. Jewish women in regular positions are highly represented in humanities, next in the social sciences and least in the natural sciences. In the professional schools they form only 12 percent of the total faculty, but are again differently represented in various schools; from one third in education to 3 percent in engineering. The overall participation of women in education system during last decade was 21 percent for women and only 5.4 percent for men. The other field where women have concentrated more is welfare services that are considered as part of community services. Till 1980, 32.6 percent of women were accounted in these services. In 1960s welfare work was considered semi-voluntary and semi-professional and in 1970s much emphasis was put on professionalism.

Jewish women have been participating in Israeli Defense Force since long, but here once again they perform feminine jobs such as teaching, nursing and secretarial. It was during late 1990s that they became a part of combat unit. However, they were appointed near to Jordan border that is a peaceful area. In the same decade, Alice Miller became the first woman who joined the Israeli Air Force and that too due to the efforts of an NGO, Israeli Women Network effort.

The other cause that makes Jewish women’s economic status inferior to their male counterparts is that they are getting relatively less wages. In 1980s, Jewish women who were working in the public sector were earning 78 percent of their male counterparts that is 22 percent less. In 1992, this gap had widened to 30-35 percent. The monthly salary, according to Israeli Women Network, in the last decade for a male academic professional was 13,237 Shekel and for a female it was 7,907 Shekel. For a male manager the salary was 16,120 Shekel and for female it was 11,019. This kind of gaps exists in all branches of Israeli economy. However, it is also true that women elsewhere in the world are also getting less wages than their male counterparts. In developed nations such as Iceland, France, Australia, Denmark, NewZeland and Netherlands women’s wages were as high as 75-90 percent of men’s in 2001. In United States in 2002, the annual income of a person was $ 30,000 only but women earned only 76.2 percent of their male counterparts.
An important factor about Jewish women’s participation in Israeli economy is that ethnicity makes an impact on their economic status. *Ashkenazi* women are having better positions in the labour market than their *Mizrahi* sisters. In fact, *Mizrahi* face certain difficulties in labour market due to their less advanced education and skills. Most of them have been concentrated in manual jobs and it is more or less true about second generation also. On the other hand, newly migrated Jewish women from Russia and Ethiopia also face certain difficulties if they want to make their entry in the labour market. This happens mainly due to the weak information network, poor language skills and less availability of “feminine” kind of jobs.

Political status of women before 1970s was mainly based on the level of political participation that is having right of adult franchise and to contest in elections. During the 1970s, feminist theory found that only providing of means of political participation for women cannot make their political status strong but government have to take some special steps for the political empowerment of women. In West Asian region there are some states, which still have not provided the right of voting and to contest in election such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and UAE (Until 2000). Israel is a democratic as well as a Jewish state in West Asia that provided suffrage rights, and right to contest election to its women citizen after its establishment. The participation rate of Jewish women in voting is more or less the same as that of their male counterparts. It was 84 percent for both sexes in 1990s.

However, when we are dealing with their representation in local as well as national legislative assemblies it is still low in comparison of certain developed countries such as Finland, New Zealand, Denmark, etc. In these countries women representation in national assemblies is more than 20 percent whereas in Israel in the last 50 years it remains 8-9 percent. It is only in 1999’s election that women’s representation rose up to 12 percent in Israeli *Knesset*. Here, once again Jewish women are not occupying the ministries like Defence, Foreign Affairs that are considered most important ministries of any nation. In fact, Israel always propagated gender equality via image of its only woman prime
minister, Golda Meir who also held the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during her tenure. She was the only women prime minister in the history of Israeli democracy. In West Asia’s context Tansu Ciller was another woman who served as the prime minister of Turkey in 1990s.

Political parties are basic organs of the political system of any country. Jewish women were a part of political parties before the establishment of Israeli state. Most of Israeli political parties adopted resolutions to provide women adequate political representation during 1990s. The Labor party for example had adopted a clause that women would fill at least 30 percent of all leadership position. Likud party adopted the guideline that 20 percent of its members in leadership must be women. Mapam which is left of centre party and was the third largest party during 1990s adopted a clause to provide 40 percent reservation to women in the party. However in most Israeli parties, selection committees and/or the parties’ central bodies have a major role in preselection of candidates for the Knesset. This procedure becomes a hindrance in women’s path to achieve the beneficial positions because preselection committees always give preference to vote-winning male candidates.

Jewish women have always been part of Israeli cabinet even if their ratio was very low. Most of the time, Israeli cabinet consists of 20-25 cabinet ministers and there is only one or two women among them. In fact during the term of 15 governments since the establishment of the state, only nine women—Golda Meir, Shoshana Arbeli-Almozlino, Shalumati Aloni, Sara Doron, Ora Namir, Limor Livnat, Dalia Itzik, Yael Tamir and Zippi Livni have served as cabinet ministers. Except Golda Meir most of them headed “feminine ministries” such as social affairs, education, communication and art & science.

Jewish women have been a part of Israeli parliamentary committees since the beginning. However, their representation in Foreign and Security Committees remained around 6 percent in first two Knesset. There was no woman member in these committees in 6th, 7th, 8th, & 9th Knesset. There was a sudden increase in their number in the 13th Knesset.
During this period their representation in these committees was 17.4 percent and that was a pleasant change. Labour and Welfare and Education and Culture are those committees where women representation has always been satisfactory. Jewish women served as chairpersons of certain committees even if their ratio was not compatible with their male counterparts. Jewish women served as head of Education and Culture committee six times till 13th Knesset. This is considered as “feminine” ministry because they are related to caring. In 7th & 8th Knesset woman served as the head of Labour & Civil Services committees. During the tenure of 11th Knesset, two women headed the Immigration & Absorption, and Labour and Welfare Committees that are considered more important than the Education & Welfare.

Participation of women at local level politics is considered very significant according to feminist theory. Local politics also serves as the platform to make entry in national politics. In Israel, Jewish women are a part of local politics after its establishment even if it was quite low in initial years. It was around 4 percent in 1950-55. During the decade of 1959-1969 it remained around 3.5 percent. There was a steady increase in this ratio during the 1980s when women representation in municipalities was around 8 percent. However, there was a tremendous change in 1998 when it was 15 percent. Talking about the mayor’s posts, that is the head of local councils, only three women have served in this post. In fact it was 1998 when two women were elected as mayors. To sum up Jewish women representation is enhancing steadily at the municipality level but they are still far from decision-making level even in the local authority level.

Jewish women have not been able to reach the president office even if the state always propagated the gender equality. Israel adopted the West Minister model of democracy in which president is the nominal head of the state as in India. However, in Israel no woman has been able to reach this position. Britain is known as the mother of West Minister model of democracy. Here the queen is the titular head of the state but in the United States of America that is having Presidential form of government not even one woman
has been able to reach this highest post even if they have gained the right to stand for election in 1788. So Israel is not an exception.

During Beijing session, Economic and Social Council of United Nations adopted certain conventions that talked about women’s status. Israel is the signatory of Beijing Convention. During this session there was a talk about women’s participation at the decision-making level of those areas that were dominated by their male counterparts. Foreign Affairs and Security matters come under this category. Jewish women are a part of Foreign Ministry yet they are here, again segregated in feminine jobs like clerks, secretaries, etc. The number of women staff among the ministry’s staff abroad is very low. In 1950, and 1980, it was only 1 percent. In 1986, 6 women were appointed out of 146 staff abroad. In 1990s, this number was 4 out of 160 staff personnel. Only a few Jewish women were appointed in International bodies and this happened during the last decade of the 20th century. These women Yehudit Karl who represented Israel in Convention on the Right of Child in 1997 and 2000, Dr. Carmel Shalev and Prof Frances Raday who were the representatives of Israel in the United Nations, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. However, no woman was part of Israeli delegation in other significant organs of the United Nations like General Council, Trusteeship Council, and International Court of Justice up to 2000. It shows Jewish women of Israel even if part of Israeli political system have a very low position at decision making level as well as representation of their country in the foreign realm.

Judicial structure is a significant organ of any democratic nation that implements laws. The Israeli judicial structure consists of three main types of courts: civil, religious and military. Jewish women’s participation in civil courts can be considered as satisfactory. In 2000, there were 200 female judges out of 459 in different hierarchies of Israeli civil judiciary. That means women constituted about 43.6 percent of civil judiciary. In 1990s, it was 40 percent. On the other hand, Jewish women do not have right to serve as judges in the religious courts. The Religious Judges Law 1955, has been interpreted by different religious community leaders and this has meant that only men can serve as judges in the
religious courts. Consequently Israel has expressed reservation with regard to Article 7 (b) of the Convention of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) concerning the appointment of women to serve as judges of religious courts. It clearly throws light on the nature of the Jewish state that provides patronage to religion as well as patriarchy. Even after the passage of two landmark decisions of Israeli Supreme Court in 1988 that granted women the right to participate in the committee for selection of chief rabbis and the right to participate in municipal religious councils there were only 12 women who got chance to be a part of religious councils out of 139 till the end of 1990s. In West Asia, few countries adopted the measure in the last decade of 20th century to do the religious clerical studies. Morocco has taken lead in this area. Even though these women will not lead prayers, like their male counterparts, but will answer religious queries and teach.

Jewish women have been trying to influence Israeli political system via extra parliamentary affairs. There are certain peace movements which came into existence in Israel during the decade of 1980s such as “Peace Now”, “The Peace Quilt”, and “Women in Black”. These groups tried to influence Israeli-Palestinian peace process through arranging peace dialogues, and creating peace chains. “Women for Women Political Prisoner” is another movement that was created by Jewish women to help out women political prisoners. Even if they failed to make impact on policy making, Jewish women have informed their fellow citizens that they want to participate in peace process. One cause behind this participation is that war always makes impact on the life of women and children. So it can be said Jewish women’s political status is better than their other sisters of West Asia where in certain countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirate, women do not have suffrage rights and in other countries like Egypt, Jordan, Syria, even if women are having suffrage as well as right of representation these are mock democracies. The Jewish women are still very far from Scandinavian countries where women are having very high representation rates in national as well as local assemblies. This phenomenon is not true in the case of Israel only. Women’s representation is quite low in developing as well as developed countries that adopted democracy. Until mid
In the 1990s, most legislatures though, from the British House of Commons to the French National Assembly to the Indian Lok Sabha and the Greek Chamber of Deputies women's share were 5 to 10 percent. In the United States the proportion of women in the 103rd Congress (1993-97) was 10 percent up from 6 percent previous. A few women have held the highest post (prime minister, president) in their countries: in Europe, Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain, Vigdis Finnbogadottir of Iceland, Gro Harlem Bruntland of Norway unlike other developed democratic countries like Britain, the USA, have less representation in national as well as local assemblies.

Social status of women is primary concern of radical feminists as well as the United Nations that consider that economic as well as political status are two means of empowerment of women. The litmus test of their status is related to whether the state apparatus fights prejudices that make women status secondary. In developed, as well as developing societies, women citizens are still treated as secondary sex. They are always recognized as mother, sister and wife and not as individuals. There are certain groups in a society where they have better status than religious and less educated groups (means elite class women). In Israeli case also this assumption is true. Israel is having multi-ethnic society even if, 70 percent of its population is Jewish. However, these Jews have come here from different parts of the world and they are having their own traditions and values that always bound women status in one way or another. In other words, whether state has adopted measures to provide equal share to their women citizens in inheritance, marriage, divorce, abortion, and whether they are having control on their bodies or not is just satisfactory. The state has adopted the measure to protect its women citizens from domestic violence or social violence or not. The other significant variable is whether state is providing patronage to those organizations that consider them as inferior.

In Israeli context we do not have data about female foeticides and infanticides. In Israel Jewish women are having the right of abortion but they have to go through a state-appointed committee that has right to decide whether a woman will be given the permission of abortion or not. Israeli state has adopted this policy because it has small
population and birth rate for secular Israeli Jewish women is 2.6 percent. In fact, Israeli state is providing funds to Orthodox Jewish families who have 5-6 children and that shows Israeli state is propagating motherhood. In fact, reproduction has always been considered as a national issue; controlling it is seen as one solution to the “demographic problem”-- the danger of an Arab majority in Israel. There are leaders in Israel from the beginning who believed that the answer to this problem lay in encouraging Jewish women to bear more children, and limiting abortion rights. In 1967, David Ben Gurion stated that “Increasing the birth rate is vital for the survival of Jewish state”. This is the prime cause that Israel is having 16 In-Vitro fertilization-“test tube baby” clinics, fourteen of them being public. Indeed, Israel has the highest number of fertility clinics per capita in the world.

Contraception was not available in Israel until the late 1950s and abortions were illegal until 1976. But even after these options became available, political pressure kept Israel from ever supporting strong family planning programs for Jewish women. On the contrary it made available to them all manner of fertility treatments. In Israel's nationalized health insurance program, family planning methods have never really been covered well. Israel's new national health insurance package, passed in 1995, does not cover contraceptives or contraceptive counseling, but offers generous support for advanced fertility treatments such as unlimited in vitro fertilization.

Even if there are no data pertaining to female infanticide and foeticide in Israel among Jewish population, it is true that Jewish culture also gives preference to the male child like in many other developing countries including India. If the first child is a girl child it has been said “first girl child is a symbol of many boys”. The Orthodox family is not complete until a male child is born (only a male can pray to honour his departed parents). A Bar Mitzvah ceremony takes place when the boy is 13, to symbolize his coming of age. The majority of secular boys, along with their Orthodox peers, prepare for months for this religious ceremony. An elaborate party is held, often with a seven-course meal, at which the boy is expected to give a speech. There are no equivalent religious ceremonies for
Contemporary families do tend to celebrate a girl's birthday with a party for her friends and family, but without the fanfare as in the case of boys. In 1980s a study pointed out that preference for boys over girls is given in Israeli society and this preference cuts across social classes, urban and rural residence, and ethnic origin.

According to Judaism girls do not have the right to read and/or interpret the scared book, Torah. Although there is some talk about reform in Judaism, in Israel officially Orthodox Jews are having control on all religious positions. As mentioned earlier, women do not have the right to be a judge in a religious court and they do not count as witnesses in these courts. Even in regard to property and inheritance rights where Jewish women can go to civil courts their male counterparts file suits before hand in religious courts.

According to Judaism, Jewish women do not have any share in their ancestral property and after marriage all property belongs to their husband. Israeli state after its establishment adopted Inheritance Law in 1959 and according to this law if a woman has any property with her before marriage that would remain her property only. However, there are difficulties in getting the data that would throw light on the ground reality. In fact in most studies, it is quite difficult to get data concerning this aspect because even if many Asian states have adopted Inheritance Laws the customary practices are so popular in these societies that their women citizens do not demand any share in their parent’s property and in their husband’s property. The Israeli state is also a family--oriented society having religious control on personal matters. Israel expresses its reservation to Article 16 of Convention on Elimination Discrimination Against Women on gender equality in family law "to the extent that the laws on personal status which are binding on the various religious communities in Israel do not conform to the provisions of that article".

In Israel, like many other developed as well as developing societies violence against Jewish women is on at domestic as well as social front. It is quite difficult to get the accurate data about domestic violence in a country. In almost all developing societies
even if states have adopted certain laws related protection of women, they seldom like to file a suit against their kins or husbands. Israeli feminism is mainly related to Ashkenazi Jewish women. In 1990s, it was estimated by an NGO that there were approximately 200,000 battered women in Israel. Israeli state also adopted Prevention of Violence within the Family Act in 1991. However, it is difficult to find out whether the government has adopted the mechanism to make the women aware about this act or not. The other trend of violence against Jewish women is social violence and to some extent it is related to religious fundamentalism. Those Jewish women who wanted to do public prayer near the Wailing Wall (the group is known as Women of Wall) faced social violence. Not only men of ultra-Orthodox community are against these women, some women of this community abuse those praying at Wailing Wall. Women of Wall faced psychological as well as physical violence and the Israeli Supreme Court gave a verdict that any movement that disturbed the on-going traditions of society would not be allowed. It is a good example that judges are not gender sensitive, or may be that traditions supersede the gender equality.

There are certain women groups, such as Women International Zionist Organization, Nammat, Israeli women Network and Emmunah which are working to enhance the status of Jewish women in Israel. Among these organizations Emmunah is related to Orthodox Judaism. This is concerned with working women’s rights, the advancement of laws protecting women, the prevention of family violence and similar issues within the Orthodox community. Other organizations have been working to enhance the status of all women of Israeli society.

All the above mentioned details show that Jewish state has provided several rights to its women citizens that help them to have good education, enter in labour force and political arena. However, Israeli Jewish women have suffered from specific burdens imposed by two characteristics of Israeli society as a colonial society: the close linkage between civic and military virtue, which is enhanced by the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the numerical inferiority of Jews in West Asia that has infused Israeli Jews with demographic anxiety.
While military service is mandatory for both men and women, only men are considered to possess military virtue. As a result, individually, Jewish Israeli women enjoy fewer rights than male members of their social group in the civil and social spheres. The emphasis on maternity as women’s primary contribution to the common good has had a devastating effect on women’s struggle for equality. The other significant variable which makes Jewish women’s status inferior is the religious nature of Israeli state. However, it is true that most of the world religious or ideological sphere is dominated by male citizens of that particular society. Jewish women status in Israel has been improved a lot. However, it is true they have not been able to achieve status equal to their male counterparts. Of course this is true not only for Israeli society but also of many other societies.

The record of improving Jewish women’s status in spite of several constraints can be termed exemplary. The constraints are anti-semitism of the neighbouring states and the survival instinct of the Israeli state. The neighbouring states appear hell bent upon the extermination of Israel (wiping out threat of Israel from the world map first by Egypt and now by Iran). The survival instincts put more premium on the physical and military might and here women are less than equal. The second constraint is of lesser nature (but constraint it is) arising from ethnic factors. Restraints are imposed by the religious leaders & gender equality and liberalization are victims. So are matters of divorce by women, acquisition of assets by women or harmless acts of showing dissent at the prayers near the Wailing Wall. The ethnic factor tries to put all changes on the back burner. The third factor which goes against the better status of women in the Israeli society is its traditions. While education, enlightenment and demonstration effect of advanced societies and world-organization pull it in the positive direction the past tries to keep it stationary or near stationary.

Jews have a smeared image of blood sucking usurers and money lenders. The goals of a better status for gender seem to have a setback with such an image. All said the Jewish state has done a commendable work in gender justice and status at the home front and
surpassing even the developed countries in some aspects (Golda Meir becoming prime minister of the nascent state) and Israeli Jewish women groups taking up the cases of justice for Palestinian women prisoners and working against domination of occupied areas are unheard of humanitarian gestures, more so when the fundamentalist West Asian states openly talk of "making a mince meat of their opponents". The record about gender equality in Israel would have been far brighter in the absence of these odds. The society did achieve so much in the face of mountainous odds, especially those related to external threats. Said an Israeli social worker, "We are happy in difficulties. This is in our DNA". The dictum perhaps goes to the root of the matter.