CHAPTER - VI

POLITICAL AND JURIDICAL POSITION OF WOMAN

The political sub-structure is analysed in terms of political and legal aspects that affect the position of women in Siddapur. In political aspects, an attempt is made to delineate all the political and legal forces which have been brought into the life of ruralites prior to and since Independence. To know the political life of women in rural India, their participation in politics, decision-making, elections, voting, awareness of political affairs of the country are taken into consideration. To know their participation at village level, their activities in village panchayat and its elections are taken into account. Also an attempt is made to outline the legal and juridical position of women of Siddapur against the background of various legislations passed prior to and after Independence to protect the rights of women. How far these have helped in creating an awareness about them and thereby becoming conscious of their rights in the male dominated society? To what extent have these provisions been used? The legislations relating to inheritance, marriage, divorce, maintenance, adoption, education, dowry and constitutional provisions are brought under scrutiny. They throw light on women's legal position in the context of my universe of study.
Women's Traditional Position

Prior to the advent of the British, the status of women was very low as they were under the grip of numerous socio-economic disabilities. The dominance of the traditional pattern of life made women subservient to the whims and fancies of men. This was more so in case of rural women.

During the British regime numerous changes occurred in Indian society. Introduction of English language in educational institutions, emergence of the spirit of nationalism, exposure to the liberal ideas of the West and freedom movement all these have contributed to a new wave of thinking among the intellectuals. The social reform movements aimed at removing the disabilities of widows, child-marriage and ill-treatment of women in families were launched. The social reformers urged the then government to take up statutory measures to remove social disabilities and atrocities on women. Prevention of sati, child-marriage and promotion of widow remarriage are some of the legal measures that came to the rescue of women.

The freedom struggle provided an opportunity to the nationalists to come together and struggle for freedom.
When it was transformed into a mass movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, it attracted men and women of all age groups and all walks of life. Women worked shoulder to shoulder with men and thus made it evident that they were equally competent to contribute their mite to the freedom struggle. Their participation generated a new wave of thinking among men regarding the status of women. They had to acknowledge the principle of equality which came to be incorporated in the constitution. Women were not discriminated in respect of legal and political rights to vote. It is relevant to mention here that though very few women, and that too from urban elite, participated in the struggle, the impact of it was negligible. The rural women by and large were not actively involved in the freedom struggle (Khanna and Verghese 1978:4; Roy 1978:1; Everett 1979:67).

After the attainment of freedom the zeal and enthusiasm with which women participated in the freedom movement diminished and women remained isolated from the mainstream of national life. The shift of emphasis from idealism and nationalism to narrow group, community, caste, region, party and selfish ends has resulted in making men more selfish and power conscious. Women who were in the forefront of freedom struggle "had to slip
back into their old grooves." The women leaders in their own position failed to establish rapport with the mass of women in the countryside and thus gradually became alienated. Despite the right to vote, women could not make a mark in improving their position in free India. Therefore, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was forced to conclude, "for this human mass with its vast latent power which was once sought after and when harnessed moved the very earth, lies today stagnant and unused for social regeneration or reconstruction." (1975:33).

Attitude towards changing position of Women and Her Roles

During the past three and a half decades, the rural women are gradually beginning to realise the importance of their political, economic and social rights. However, by and large the majority of women are ignorant of the new values enshrined in our constitution. Still they are not free from the dominance of men. They are guided by their men in their choice, or preference of candidates or party in casting their vote. They are still in the grip of traditional roles and values assigned to them, namely domestic chores with child-bearing and rearing duties.

The principle of adult franchise is guaranteed to
Indian women. It is agreed that legal equality is only the first step to full equality in practice. The equality of opportunity does not mean perfect or complete equality. It is especially true in case of a fringe village where educational and other opportunities of employment are very limited by financial stringencies, social customs and habits, traditional values and attitudes.

The success of democracy depends on the political awareness and alertness of citizens and how well they can represent and guard public interest. It is true that democracy has meaning and reality only where people at large become sensitive to their rights, duties and obligations and are encouraged to exercise them. Similarly the equality of women in politics can be judged by their participation in such activities as their voting behaviour and representation in various bodies right from Village Panchayat to State Assembly and Parliament and other decision-making bodies. If we consider their representation "at present it is less than 5% of the total membership in Parliament in India" (Chitnis 1975:12). It is also worthwhile to note women's representation in political parties, contest in elections, active participation in the deliberations at the party meetings and influencing the decision-making as indicators of the degree of women's
political involvement and exercise of political rights guaranteed by the constitution. An analysis of the involvement of women of Siddapur in the context of above indicators reveals that women of this village are not much involved in political activities. To some extent, the urban women show their awareness with the changing status of women. It is only in 1980, that women have shown their serious concern over an issue such as rape, which is assuming alarming proportions. Around this, women gathered together and protested against it. Such demonstration from women were held to build up public opinion against the injustices (Mello 1983).

In India women achieved many rights without struggling much for them as did the women in the West. Women had to fight for centuries in other countries for the same rights. That is why, the Indian women are not in a position to realise the importance and value of their rights. Even those who have struggled to achieve them came from rich, educated urban society that is, from the elite section. The majority of rural as well as urban women never felt the subjective necessity for the exercise of those rights. Both in cities and villages, during the election time, many women never felt the importance of casting their votes. They say that they are not bothered
whosoever is elected and have a feeling that whosoever is
elected will be interested in taking benefits for himself
and his relatives without caring for others. In such a
situation why one should cast vote and what is the use of
voting for them?

Though adult franchise guaranteed by the Constitu-
tion has made women equal to men in the political sphere,
women in Siddapur have not realised its importance. They
hardly felt so far that it is one of their rights by which
they can influence the happenings in the country. Except
4 women in the age-group of 51-55, others have not voted
even once in the elections so far. A lady panchayata
member who is in her 60's revealed that she has exercised
her vote in all the elections as her husband used to take
her with him. But her own daughters-in-law who are 40
and 42 years of age have not exercised their votes even
once. She is also of the opinion that nobody either from
the village or those contesting election had approached
them to cast vote. She knows that in the nearby city
the party workers move from house to house canvassing
for their candidates. It is said that the workers of
the political parties did not visit the village. It
appears that the political parties relied solely on the
local leaders. But the local leaders did not show any
interest in involving the villagers in political participation. Therefore a majority of women have not voted even once all these years.

The level of political awareness of women is greatly conditioned by the political culture of the area, the approach of the political parties, the quality of the local leadership. Therefore the political activities of women need to be understood in terms of their participation in elections. The National Committee on the Status of Women in India (1975:107) indicated the factors that deter women from active participation in politics, such as the increasing expenses of elections, threats of violence and character assassination. The National Committee reports that "working women including the professionals have greater awareness but this is not always reflected in actual participation. Nor is there any positive relationship between higher socio-economic status and political awareness. Some of the studies initiated by us revealed that the political awareness is less among women in the higher income groups, who have a negligible interest in politics, though many of the women legislators come from well-to-do families" (Ibid:107). The social status of women, their economic position, cultural norms and over-all regional outlook towards
women's participation in the wider society influence the pattern of political behaviour. In case of candidates, the difference between men and women is very wide. (See Table No.13).

The table shows that the number of women contestants for Parliamentary elections indicates an increasing trend except in 1977. The number of elected women contestants shows a decreasing trend up to 1977 and shows an increasing trend after 1977.

"The right to political equality has not enabled women to play their roles as partners and constituents in the political process, because Gandhiji's message to treat political rights, not as an end, but only as a means, has been forgotten. Instead these rights have helped to build an illusion of equality and power which is frequently used as an argument to resist special protective and ameliorative measures to enable women to achieve a just and equal position in society" (National Committee on Status of Women in India 1975:114).

For women in developing countries unlike their counterparts in developed countries, political equality has come to them as a constitutional right without any
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NO. OF SEATS</th>
<th>NO. OF WOMEN CONTESTANTS</th>
<th>ELECTED</th>
<th>% CONTESTED</th>
<th>% ELECTED</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.16</td>
<td>6.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.60</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.92</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26.20</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29.97</td>
<td>7.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Deccan Herald, dated 7.1.1985.
struggle for it. Therefore, political participation of women in these countries is conspicuously poor. Many reasons for poor participation of women in political life have been discovered. It has been shown that the upbringing of girls does not equip them with the aspirations which may make them strive for political positions and career. The stress on being good wives and dependents on men is inbuilt in the process of socialization and upbringing of girls. These have contributed negatively for developing their personality as responsible citizens and assertive politicians. The confinement of women to domestic activities and its acceptance as a desired virtue prohibited women to contribute to the political process. Their roles as politicians is far from satisfactory. Political career for rural women is not considered as necessary. It is believed that women's participation would create disruptions in the family.

Women of Siddapur village are neither aware of political rights nor consider them as essential for their living. They still go by traditional conventions and any deviation from them is not treated as necessary. As Desai (1980:7) says "rural women in all classes cook and serve food. The feeding, disciplining and socialization of the young are her tasks. She also tends the cattle, helps in
agricultural work and in the landless labouring family women have to go out for paid work. Women, in short, have to do work both in the home and outside. A recent study indicated that in daily management of time, employed rural women spent 17 hours per day and unemployed women around 15 hours" (Whyte and Whyte 1982:137). The situation in Siddapur in no way differs from the above situation. (See Table No.5).

The persistence of stereotyped roles in the family has a significant influence on the political career of women. Women are seen as most suited to the 'nurturing' areas of politics and are usually awarded portfolios such as health, education, social welfare or aboriginal affairs. This shows men's attitude towards women. Similarly election studies show that more women are involved at local level than at the upper levels of government.

In our country, a few important and high positions in politics are held by women. But it does not mean that the level of political participation of females in our country is high. They are exceptions rather than a general rule. In fact, most of the women in these exalted positions were associated with prominent male politicians. In this region many elections both parliamentary and assembly
were held so far and the participation of women in them is very low. In 1983 assembly elections, three women contested from Gulbarga division and two of them were elected. In 1985 parliamentary elections only one woman contested and was elected. In 1983 Gulbarga Municipal election 16 women from the town contested. Out of them 10 were elected. In the group panchayat of which the village is a constituent, no doubt elections were held in other villages but no elections were held in Siddapur. No woman in Siddapur was interested in or contested for the elections at various levels. The lone woman member of the panchayat was brought into the fray after great persuasion of men, as representation of women in the Group Panchayat was obligatory. People in this region, especially people of the village, are illiterate, politically uninformed and ignorant. Women are of the opinion that they do not have time to go over to the election booth to cast their vote as they are busy in their routine work due to poverty. They are not ready to forgo a day's earning for the sake of election.

Women of rich and higher castes do not show any interest in participating in elections. They feel that the political life/public life is not meant for them. Men of the village also do not encourage women for public life. In Siddapur during all these elections, except in
the 1983 assembly election, the polling booth was situated in the village office (chawadi). They have a feeling that visiting chawadi amounts to one's dishonour as the culprits were taken there in earlier times. High caste women consider it below their dignity to visit chawadi even for voting. During the 1984 parliamentary election, some educated youths from Lingayat caste took interest in canvassing for election. They approached the women saying that voting is their duty. Whether anybody approached them or not, they have to cast their vote. Among all castes it is the elderly women who came to cast their vote. This time female voting was 40% due to the efforts of educated youths of the village. Another important factor was that these women cast their vote not according to their own choice but as directed by their men or these youths.

Another very important factor responsible for the non-participation of women is that they have not been contacted for voting by any one. Siddapur is a fringe village. In the 1983 assembly election all the party workers concentrated their efforts on the city proper. A few party members had come to the village and handed over the posters to stick and requested the leaders of the village to canvass on behalf of their candidates.
One lacuna in this village is that they do not have dedicated leaders who can sincerely devote their time for the welfare of the village. The composition of the village is such that each of the four dominant communities treats itself as the leader of the village. Since it is a fringe village very near the city, all communities have contacts with the city and city leaders. Each community has the backing and support of their people. Hence, every one thinks that he is the leader and his wishes should prevail. In such a situation the village lacks genuine leaders. Instead they have leaders for each community. Lingayats, Kurubas, Kabbaligas and Scheduled Caste groups have their own leaders interested only in their community. Even among them, the rich dominate and the poor have no voice on any issue. They just follow the daily routine for their survival though in some situations they show their awareness and interest. Even in elections, specially those women who go out from village for various activities, know something but they hesitate to express their opinion and on enquiry say that they do not know and politics is not meant for them as they are busy in their routine. Even the knowledge of the events does not lead to their participation.

During the 1983 assembly election, most women of the
village were not knowing how many candidates were contesting and from which party. However, most of them knew two parties - Congress (I) and Janata party. In this election, there was only 19% voting. In earlier elections there used to be 50% voting. Women were not interested in politics and were not aware of political parties in the region; they knew only the Congress party and the name of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Thirty percent of women had seen her when she came to Gulbarga for election campaign. All men and women of the village admired her during the 1972 elections. They used to call her as 'mother', as during 1970-73 famine in the region, she provided cheap food and clothing. It is she who looked after them during their difficulties was their feeling. Now the women of higher castes dislike her policy of providing more opportunities in the form of reservation to scheduled castes and tribes. Recently, Scheduled Caste's awareness in the village had led to new strains in the village. The elders in the village allege that since the coming of the Congress (I) Raj in 1972, inter-caste relations in the village have changed. Now each caste is relatively independent to carry out its activities. No doubt Madiga and Hajam have continued their inter-caste economic and social relations but the service-castes like Holeyas and Madaru no more work as menials as they used to do earlier.
Nobody in the village depends on them for their services. They make cash payments for these services. Even earlier, inter-caste dependence was not very much in this village as discussed elsewhere. Now it is further weakened.

After the introduction of Panchayat Raj in 1959 in India, women were given representation on Panchayat. According to the provisions of the Act, in every village panchayat, there should be two women members. Since Siddapur comes under the group-panchayat, one woman from Siddapur is a member of it. This woman was unanimously nominated because so far no elections had been conducted in the village for the membership in panchayat, for want of interest in the elections. However the elections were held in other villages. But among women there is no contest for membership. Women are of the opinion that to be a panchayat member one should be bold and intelligent. Moreover, one should be free from household chores to attend the meetings and other activities of the panchayat whenever they are convened. Siddapur women, as already mentioned, are busy with duties both outside and inside the household, right from their childhood days. Even at the age of 60-65, they have to work for the family chores. Hence, they cannot take part in outside public activities like politics, which require leisure time away from home.
Women opine that it is men's work as they can afford to spend time outside the home. Khanna and Vorghese (1978:119) say that "Politics is a full-time business. Its intricacies, tactics and strategies are often too much for the average women. They have many other problems" and household responsibilities for which they have to struggle. Politics comes to their mind only when the elections are around. They are indifferent and apathetically ignorant of politics. The women who commute to city know something about elections because they have a chance to move out of the village and have some contact with outside world. Social restrictions are not very rigid for these women, but they are hesitant to talk about politics, as villagers criticise such acts.

The woman member of the panchayat who is in her sixties now, is also not free at this age from household duties. Her sons and daughters-in-law go for work outside after finishing domestic activities. She has to look after the grand-children and attend to the household work in their absence. She also feels that she cannot work properly with other members of the panchayat as she is illiterate and does not have sufficient time to spend. She is also not very shrewd or intelligent to deal with them. Other members who are in a better position approach her and get
her thumb impression, sometimes even against her will. If she asks for details, they silence her by saying that she does not understand the situation and that she cannot understand the contents of documents. Ranade (1978:27) reports similar situations where women member of panchayat put their thumb impression even without attending the meetings.

Siddapur is part of a group-panchayat consisting of Zhapur, Palya, Siddapur and Tanda. For the last 15 years, persons from the Zhapur village used to be the chairman of the group panchayat. In 1966, there was a clash between two groups of Zhapur for the chairmanship. The fight resulted in the murder of one person. The chairmanship then went to Palya village for want of a suitable candidate. But this chairman was not ready to continue the office of the panchayat in the old place. He was afraid of the situation. Hence, the office was shifted to his village, Palya. But he was staying most of the time in Gulbarga and was not bold enough to conduct the panchayat meetings in his village office. Hence, for the last 6 years no meetings has been held. Whenever the panchayat has to take decisions the members are invited to Gulbarga and their signature are secured. For Siddapur people it is very difficult to meet him for any consultation regarding village activities.
Since he belongs to a different village, he is also not very much interested in the activities of Siddapur. Neither the chairman nor the other members are interested in collecting the tax for last 15 years which could have been used for the betterment of the village. Though the village has electricity since 1963, even the street lights are not put on properly and regularly. The people have to put bulbs in their own localities. Panchayat is not bothered about street lights.

Out of the four members of village panchayat one is a woman whom people do not generally approach thinking that a woman is of no use. Second one is a scheduled caste member whom the villagers do not contact as he belongs to lower caste. Third one is from higher caste who is interested in the welfare of the village. Since he is a mild person nobody in the village cares for him. Though he wants to do something for the village, he could not do much as other members do not co-operate with him. The fourth one comes from a well-to-do family and has close contacts with the chairman of the group panchayat and a few other political leaders in the nearby city. His outside contacts place him in an advantageous position. The personal interests reign supreme in his activities and hence the village is deprived of his services.
The juridical position of women in our society can be understood on the basis of several Acts and the Statute books. Everett (1979:1) states that "India has more laws designed to improve the status of women than United States or Great Britain." Our constitution has taken steps to emancipate women and ensure gender equality, attempting to remove all legal disabilities faced by them. Much legislation has been passed on marriage, divorce, inheritance, maintenance, adoption, dowry, legal termination of pregnancy, education, female employment, including equal pay and maternity benefits, etc.

With a view to preventing child-marriage, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 1929, declaring that it is an offense to marry a man, a girl who is below 15 years of age. It was amended in 1978, stating that any person who arranges a marriage of a bridegroom who is below 21 and bride below 18 years commits an offence and also the parent of both bride and the groom who consent for such a marriage are liable for punishment.

For uniformity in customary laws, in order to ensure equality in marital relations and in succession, to remove the legal disabilities of women, several Hindu Codes were drafted and have been passed. The Hindu Marriage Act of
1955, is the most important and revolutionary which aims at improving the status of women. One of the main conditions of a valid marriage, according to the Act, is that "neither party has a spouse living at the time of marriage." Thus both polygyny and polyandry permitted and practised under the old laws have been abolished. However, Muslims are allowed to practise polygyny. The Act also provides for both judicial separation and divorce. The introduction of divorce in marriage regulations was a departure from traditional pattern. For, divorce was unknown to Hindu marriages performed according to Vedic rites. According to Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, divorce is permitted in all kinds of marriages under certain conditions, when a petition is presented either by wife or by husband. With regard to alimony and maintenance a legally specified sum is to be paid regularly as per the Act (Section 24 and 25) to the applicant as long as she remains chaste and does not re-marry.

In Siddapur all castes have been permitting divorce for both men and women. But there are only deserted cases recorded and no one has sought legal divorce or applied for maintenance till now. People are illiterate and unaware of the legal provisions in this regard, except about 30 educated youths and 6 men who have some knowledge
about the situation due to urban contact. The village lacks genuine leaders who can be approached in times of difficulties. Moreover, the living conditions in the village are such that the deserted women and their parents never feel the need to take the help of law. For a woman's maintenance is not a problem for them. She is accustomed to work in the fields or serve as a labourer right from her childhood. In brief, as a child a woman works for her parents, as a wife she works for the husband and children. Even when the husband deserts her, there will be no immediate crisis as she is an earning member. The poor economic conditions necessitate a majority of women to rely on their own earnings and thus contribute her mite to the family income. In all the deserted cases the children of such a spouse are maintained by women with only one exception among Kabbaliga where the child is with the father. Hence, women never feel the necessity of demanding alimony from deserted husbands. Even the deserted husbands' living conditions are more or less the same, as marriages take place usually among the equals.

As already noted, women are usually debarred from owning property and are excluded from inheritance. The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 is a landmark in Indian history for woman's property rights. This Act determines the heir
on the basis of consanguinity or affinity without any discrimination on the grounds of sex. According to this Act a daughter, mother and a widow inherits property as well as a son and the Act gives full rights for property disposal to all women. Desai (1957:21) says that this Act "has placed women on an equal footing with men, with regard to the right to the use of property." Section 23 of the Act provides the right of residence in the father's home to an unmarried daughter, a widow or a woman deserted by or separated from her husband.

The detailed investigations carried out in Siddapur bring home the fact that women are not aware of the Hindu Succession Act of 1956. They have not been educated regarding their legal rights in respect of inheriting the property. The fact that there is not a single case of claiming property by woman as per the Hindu Succession Act is a testimony to the ignorance of legal provisions. Even the male members of the village do not feel that there is a need for implementing the provisions of the Act. There were several occasions when the partition of the ancestral property took place. The partition deeds were prepared and got approved from the competent authorities. While preparing such deeds, care was being taken to fulfil all the requirements by obtaining the signature
from the daughters for a declaration that they do not intend to claim the share. Women never feel that their legal claim over the property is being ignored or denied. Both parents and daughters believe that their little share is already given to them on the occasion of their marriage in the form of dowry and other marriage expenses.

The Revenue Inspector who administers 35 villages including Siddapur was interviewed by me. He stated in very clear terms that during his tenure of 20 years he did not come across any case wherein a village woman had come forward to claim her share in landed or any other kind of property. He also stated that the experience of other revenue inspectors was more or less the same. The official records bear testimony to this situation. Further, he said that even in Gulbarga city there were hardly two cases where women made a claim to the ancestral property. Even they did not do so on their own but were instigated by kinsmen.

The laws governing inheritance and sharing property in the context of Siddapur appear to be meaningless, for nearly 90% of the families do not own property worth the name. The study reveals that in Siddapur 43% of the families are landless, 5% are marginal, 29% are small
landholders (below 10 acres), 15% are medium size landholders (below 20 acres) and only 6% families are big landholders (more than 20 acres). Even when some one draws the attention of womenfolk to their right to claim ancestral property, they do not attach much significance to it and think that demanding a share is immoral and against the known traditions. Some said that it would be futile to demand the share in the property as the share would be uneconomic and meagre. They preferred to ensure love, affection and help of the natal home than claiming her share from it. Women feel that the kinship relations and psychological satisfaction are more important than the legal rights in property matters.

The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1936 also bestows a few additional rights to women. It provides that though the father may appoint a guardian by will for his minor children, any such appointment will not take effect during the life-time of the mother, if she survives the husband. It comes into force only on her death, if she has not appointed a guardian by her own will. A woman is entitled to act as a natural guardian of her minor children if the father ceases to be a Hindu or becomes an ascetic (śanyāsi). The Hindu mother and the widow are entitled to act as natural guardian of their minor children,
and are empowered under the Act to appoint guardians for them by will. But Siddapur people have not made use of this Act as they are also not aware of it. In case of separation they quietly leave their children without asserting their right if husbands' family wants them. They accept the authority of their husbands over the children.

The legal provisions regarding adoption are enshrined in the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956. The couples who do not have any issue, will be seeking adoption. While adopting a child by such parents, usually a male child is preferred. A female child is not preferred owing to the compulsions of ritual dictates. The performance of religious rituals and spiritual functions happens to be the prerogative of males. For instance, when death occurs it is the son and not the daughter who undertakes the performance of funerary rites and rituals. According to this Act, a married man can adopt a son or a daughter with the consent of his wife. Married women with husbands living are not allowed to adopt children on their own, but a spinster, widow or a divorced woman can. The father without the consent of the mother cannot give a child in adoption, except under certain conditions. Though the people of Siddapur have very little knowledge about the adoption Act,
they have overcome the situation by making their own arrange-
ments outside the pale of legal requirements. In a
long case, brother's son was adopted according to formal
law, whereas in several other cases the local arrangements
have taken precedence over legal requirements. There are
six families without male issue and five families without
any issue. In case of two issueless families adoption
has taken place in the native style, that is, udvaga haki-
kolluvadu. In three families agnatic relatives are living
with issueless couples while in case of other families
the issueless couples live by themselves.

These days giving or accepting dowry is a legal
offence. Dowry system has become a social evil and its
practice has brought about untold misery to all involved
in it. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 clearly lays
down that giving or agreeing to give any property or
valuable security by parents of either party to a marriage
or by any other person at or before or after the marriage
of the said parties becomes an offence. Giving or demand-
ing dowry is punishable with imprisonment or fine or both.
It is interesting to note that despite more than two decades
of its existence, the Dowry Prohibition Act has made little
or no impact on the masses. The knowledge about the said
Act in the nearby city did not prevent the people from
accepting dowry. The same is true of the people of the fringe village Siddapur. The practices of urbanites have been gradually being accepted by them. In this village, there were hardly any case of giving or accepting dowry prior to 1970. But after 1970 the practice of dowry has gradually become acceptable to the people. However, it is not necessary to bring out quantitative considerations and comparisons with urbanites as the people in the village offer a paltry sum as dowry depending on their resources and capabilities. Thus, rural areas are gradually brought under this practice. The people of Siddapur treat dowry system as a problem and the parents who are interested in the well-being of their daughters prefer to spend some resources on dowry. Sometimes they go beyond their means in giving dowry. Many are ignorant about dowry prohibition act while those who know also indulge in this practice as one has to fall in line with the local custom. It appears that awareness or ignorance about this Act does not significantly contribute to its rejection. The lowering of the status of women by accepting dowry continues and even dominates despite the passing of Dowry Prohibition Act as early as 1961.

Equal Remuneration Act was passed in 1976 which ensures the payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers,
for the same work or work of similar nature. Similarly, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy and Abortion Act has been passed for women's welfare in 1971. But the village women do not want to make use of such Acts as this would lower the prestige of woman as well as her family in the eyes of the local community.

The women of Siddapur are unaware of the legal provisions concerning their status in society. The ignorance about the laws is due to several factors. Prior to Independence, Siddapur was a part of Nizam's State which was comparatively very much backward in respect of education, science and technology, as also socially and industrially. The nearby urban centre was educationally backward and had only one intermediate college (P.U.C. grade) till 1954. One girls' high school was established in 1933 for the whole of Hyderabad Karnataka area. The people were highly conservative and therefore this fringe village had more or less the same conditions as the interior villages. It is only after the reorganization of States in 1956 and more so after 1970, that this fringe village was exposed to new forces of change. Reorganization of the States and the establishment of the post-graduate centre near the fringe village have provided new opportunities to women of Siddapur. Now several women commute to urban centre
for different purposes. Their awareness of legal provisions concerning their status is still low. Even the women in city despite their awareness never assert their claims over property, succession, inheritance and resistance to dowry. The present study reveals the fact that the women of rural and urban areas have more or less the same attitude despite the latter being educated or the former being uneducated. Even among the educated, the principle of equality is conceded only in case of franchise and political participation but is not stretched to social and economic fields and personal and family relations. Though one may notice apparent changes in economic and social spheres of activities of women of Siddapur, very little change is noticed in attitude towards availing of their legal rights.

It is very interesting to note that the mere awareness of Acts or legislation would not lead to changes and the elevation of the status of women. In the context of the life led by women of Siddapur and the nearby city, it is evident that women do not want to resort to legal means when injustice is done to them. The enforcement of legal provisions requires one to go to the court. The women in this village feel that going to court is below their dignity. The traditional inhibitions of women and the
future consequences of such a step would force them to remain within the four walls of the house. The public opinion in favour of women's rights is yet to be formulated and taken to masses. The attitudes of men towards women in this respect needs to be drastically altered. It is also noticed that even the educated men do not desire that their women should go to the court to establish their rights. The fact that only two women have resorted to legal remedy for a share in property in the nearby city during the past 20 years bears testimony to this anomalous situation.

The legislations by themselves cannot change society and the position of women. Public opinion, social recognition rather than their statutory rights and privileges are important for the villagers, especially for women. Hence, if laws have to yield the desired results, the other agencies have to take interest and work to mould the public opinion to use the new rights granted by legislation. The judiciary and executive have a major role to play in this direction. There are some practical difficulties in implementing them. For example, enforcement of minimum legal age at marriage in Siddapur where the birth registration is notoriously poor, as registration of births and deaths were done in earlier time by
the Police Patel of the village. Since the abolition of the hereditary village officials by the government, nobody is keeping the count. Similarly marriages are not registered by villagers as they are unaware that they have to do so. Even the nearby city people who are educated also never felt the necessity of registering their marriages. In such a situation the law is bound to be widely flouted. Because law has limited influence in changing people's thinking and attitudes in case of most people, the strength of custom becomes greater than the force of law. Unless women are educated and motivated for their improvement, their position and roles will continue to be what they are.

Women of Siddapur are unable to fight the injustices owing to their ignorance of law, lack of education and the dominance of traditional values. For example, when the sugar quota is obtained from the government for distribution in the village, it is rarely distributed among the villagers. It is sold in the black-market. The people who know about this do not show any reaction and tolerate it. The woman panchayat member tried her best to get the sugar for the people by approaching the higher authorities. Her limited resources and knowledge did not take her too far and she gave it up later on.
The follow-up work which is necessary was not possible for her to undertake. She approached other panchayat members but her efforts did not succeed. Others also did not encourage and help her thinking of what a woman can do?

A group of people have emerged in Siddapur who could exploit the villagers - both men and women - as a result of their contacts with the officials in city and knowledge of laws. They become instrumental in creating conflicts among the people and involving them in litigations. The people who are ignorant of the laws seek their help in overcoming their difficulties. It is this that made some to think that contact with the city did not help them but created problems for them. A few cases from the village prove this point.

Mr. N is a businessman in the city. It is said that he always instigates indirectly others in the village to quarrel. Then he tries to bring about a settlement and extracts money from both the parties, telling them that had he not interfered, the case would have been taken to the police. He also encourages other village officials to harass people and compel them to pay money.
Mr. N has married a third wife though his first two wives are alive. He has taken dowry in all the marriages. After marriage for 6 months or a year he will be good with the wife. Afterwards, under one or the other pretext he picks up quarrel with the wife, beats her and forces her to get a radio set or gold or a vehicle from her natal home. When she refuses, she is deserted. Twice he did so. Even with the third wife he tried the same tactics but her parents boldly faced him and threatened him about the legal consequences in case he misbehaved with his wife. Now he is good to her.

A few educated and elderly men are of the opinion that if a person knows the rules and has contacts in city he may create trouble. For others who are ignorant, conventional social approval is most important. That is why they silently bear the trouble though they have some awareness of rules and regulations.

If the enlightened men have their strong organizations they could face the difficulties, bring improvement at least in their community or locality. The youth
association (yuvak mandal) which was established in the year 1977 was strong in the beginning. It could succeed in bringing about some changes in the village regarding sanitation, awareness, etc. Now it is not functioning due to the selfish interests of some members. In this village there is no women's organization as they lack initiative and interest. However, a few women form temporary groups for economic activities. For instance, 4 or 5 women of the neighbourhood take the piece rate work like weeding, cutting, plucking, etc. on contract basis and the group is dissolved soon after the work is over. They form no permanent groups and hence such groups lack continuity in time and personnel, through which women may be educated and made aware of the situation in many aspects of their life.

Summary

The political and juridical status of women of Siddapur has been analysed in terms of their awareness about political situation in the country, their participation in elections, their decision-making on political issues and the impact of the political forces emanating from the nearby city. The women of Siddapur, do not show their awareness of political equality granted to them by the constitution, despite their being near to the city.
and visiting the city every day. They hardly know the political situation and if at all they know that it is only about two political parties, namely, Congress (I) identified through Smt. Indira Gandhi as saviour of suffering masses and Janata Party opposing her. The several elections that were held in the country to elect candidates for Parliament and Assembly did not make them realise of their political rights. The percentage of women who have exercised their franchise in 1983 Assembly election is 19% which is a testimony to their indifference and non-involvement. It is interesting to note that not only women but also menfolk of Siddapur do not show substantial involvement in the political activities. Moreover their poverty constantly reminded them of their routine life. The traditional outlook on life seems to persist even to this day despite being very close to city environment.

Another very important finding is that the political parties did not care to establish close contacts with the masses and have always relied on some rural intermediary leaders who were not interested in educating people on the political conditions of the nation.

The juridical status of Siddapur women is understood in terms of their awareness to the social legislation concerning succession, inheritance, conjugal rights, dowry
and divorce. The Acts that were passed by the government to remove the disabilities and provide justice to women have already been noted. While there is an agreement over the fact that these acts are intended to improve the status of women, there is hardly any implementation of these provisions in the context of Siddapur. Demanding the share in ancestral property is not the order of the day. The people view it as unnatural and immoral for a daughter to claim a share in the ancestral property. The legal requirements are satisfied by obtaining the signatures of the daughters surrendering their share. The women themselves do not take any step in the implementation of the Acts. The fact that no woman in the village and only two women in the area have come forward to claim the property during the past three decades is revealing and convincing of the futility of legal provisions. Dowry system has been brought into the village from the nearby city. Rich and poor alike, irrespective of their economic conditions, are the victims of dowry. This has created a feeling among the parents that having daughters would ruin the economy of the family. The position of women is deteriorating owing to the acceptance of dowry system in Siddapur. A few families do know that giving or accepting dowry is a legal offence. But their awareness
has not resulted in giving up the practice as they have to adhere to local practice.

About the legal position of women in India Pappu (1975:115) writes that "though there has been considerable legislation in regard to women during the post-constitution era, in reality the position of women today is not very different from the pre-constitution days. The equality clause in the constitution has made little or no impact on the social and economic life of women in India. A woman continues to be a dependent economically, socially and even psychologically. Her status is that of a daughter, wife or mother and she seldom feels an individual in her own right. Legislation enacted during the last two decades is out of reach for most women because by and large, they have neither mental awareness nor the financial resources to take advantage of these beneficial provisions."

Therefore, looking at the ameliorative legal provisions related to women and the actual situation in which they live, it is clear that something more than legislation is needed. If the legislation has to achieve its objectives, women should be made aware of their rights and the attitude of both men and women has to change. The change in the attitude of women and their awareness towards their rights constitutionally provided and legally protected may bring
change in political and juridical position of women by which women may enjoy equal position with men in every sphere of life.