CHAPTER – III

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CONCEPT

Status of women is a pretty worn out theme. Much has been written and much has been spoken on the subject and yet one has to go on harping on the same theme for a simple reason that woman has not attained her full status and it is necessary to remind her of it so that she may continue her efforts, till the goal is reached. The term 'status' signifies the sum total of the various culturally ascribed roles one has to play, and the rights and duties inherent in a social position. Besides the 'ascribed' status there is the 'achieved status' which results from ones' official and personal achievements. The concept of status is used to indicate the ordering of individuals in terms of attainments such as level of education, occupation, income, perception of one's status within the home, and in the community, decision making role, number of restrictions imposed on one's activities, freedom and so on. Considering 'status' in the light of these attributes it is to be noted that the level of status of women varies from country to country, the widest difference is seen in levels between women in developed and developing countries. The level of status of women is low in the developed countries and pitiably low in
the developing countries. Even within a country, the level of status of women differs, from rural to urban areas.¹

Gender equality is a prerequisite for effective participation of women in strengthening the institutional structure of democracy. Women have been marginalized because of several socio economic constraints. The number of women in leadership positions at the local village district and national level is still not commensurate with their numbers is society.²

The word gender means more than sex. The gender of a man is masculine, that of a women is feminine. The word gender is a value free concept. Differences of value arise, only when we toke genders in relation to their functions in society and what is more important when our way of looking at the matter is merely external.³ However in the contemporary feminist literature ethos gender is not a value free concept. It is a value loaded term. It has acquired new dimensions and greater significance. It now refers to the social institutionalization of sexual difference. Political theorists in the past have neglected feminine gender. John Locke defines political power as distinct from

the power relations operating within the household. Rousseau and Hegel have clearly contrasted the two spheres and have justified this contrast in legitimizing male rule in the domestic sphere. Locke has categorically mentioned that when "women hold the helm of government, the state is at once in jeopardy." Rousseau believes that women pose a permanent threat to the political order. The natural morality of women fits them only for the natural society, of domestic life. Freud offers remarkably similar justification for women's confinement to domesticity.

The most fundamental and general of these opinions associate women with nature and men with culture. Nature is seen in a lower order than culture. The feminists like Ortner agrees that the opposition between women nature and men culture is itself a cultural construct and does not exist in nature. S. Firestone in her work Dialectic of Sex argues against this separation of private and public. Women necessarily suffer from a fundamentally oppressive biological condition. It is their role as reproducers that has handicapped women over the centuries and made possible men's patriarchal power. Thinkers like Ruskin could agree that 'mans' duty as a member of the commonwealth is to assist in the ordering and in the beautiful adornment of the state. This has eventually led to the dichotomy

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5 Ibid, p.309
between morality and power. Women in the name of being more moral have been excluded from the public realm.7

Females achieve economic and political power or authority, when environment or historical circumstances grant them economic autonomy, and make men dependent on female activities. Female economic and political power or authority is ascribed as a natural right due to the female sex. A long standing magico religious association between maternity, and fertility of the soil associates women with social continuity and the social good. The right and duties attached to this emphasis, give women formal power and control at the local level, as well as the right to influence male actions, and decision making, beyond the local level. Male power and authority on the other hand is part of the social and ritual equation of hunting, warfare, fertility social continuity and the social good. The rights and duties associated with this emphasis give men formal power and control, at the local and non-local levels. These rights and duties however, do not necessarily exclude women from the realm of control.8

7 Ibid, 8 Peggy Reeves Sanday, Female Power and Male Dominance on the origins of sexual inequality, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.114
Global Scene

The UN Commission on the status of women came into existence in 1947 all of two years, after the chapter had affirmed its faith in human being and in the equal right of men and women. It is well reflected from the fact that no mention of women as such was made in the first United Nations Development Decade of the 1960's adopted in Resolution 1710 (XVI) of the General Assembly on Dec. 19.1961. Earlier to it also in the General Assembly Resolution 2542 (XXIV) of Dec. 11.1959 on Social Progress and Development.

Women did not appear but continued to be considered mainly as mother playing an important reproductive role. The first explicit reference to the integration of women in development was made in the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade adopted by the General Assembly Resolution 2626 (XXV) of No. 19.1970. Among the aims and objectives of the International Development Strategy it was stated that the full integration of women in the total development effort should be encouraged.

It was with the Third United Nations Development Decade Resolution 35 /36 passed on Dec.5.1980, that women's cause gained

9 Rekha Pandey, *Women from subjection to liberation*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, p.123
10 Ibid, p.133.
prominence. Only in the last decade or so development planners, practitioners and academics have become increasingly aware of the need to systematically incorporate women into the development process.\textsuperscript{12}

The third world conference of the International Women’s year was convened in Mexico city on 19\textsuperscript{th} June – 2\textsuperscript{nd} July 1975 which come forward with a World Plan of Action for the implementation of the objectives of the International Women’s Year.\textsuperscript{13}

From it we may elucidate one or two essential features of the World Plan of Action. First its expressions are quite strong: Full equality, free access, all types of development, all types of education, all types of employment. Secondly all these goals can not be achieved within the existing social structure. In other words their implementation entails significant structural changes, for bringing change in women’s situation in the society. It is not a question of some mild modification of certain imbalances; it implies complete overthrow of the existing social structure that discriminate against women.\textsuperscript{14}

Sigmund Freud’s famous dictum ; “anatomy of destiny” is considered to be the ultimate truth. As the division of labour assigns

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p.133
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, p.134
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 134
roles according to the physical distinction of sex age and kinship, every individual male or female has a clearly identifiable position in relation to others within the general framework of a social system. The society gives them different rights and obligations and expects different behavioural patterns from them. The difference between men and women is not based on the physical and mental capabilities. There has been no rationale for assigning a particular role to a particular sex, except social convention, and therefore, with the societies becoming more and more complex, and technologically advanced, and with development depending more and more, on individual talent and initiative, the socially assigned roles have been proving to be totally ill adapted to meet the challenges of expansion and best utilization of human resources. As a result such differences are breaking sown. Sex, age, and kinship can no longer determine a person's; man or women's place, in society. Politically, this had led the society today, to become more democratic, and to look for a widening catchment area, to get the best and look for a person, who has accomplished something, and not at his sex, age, and kinship.

In the global arena the political status of women in Ancient civilization has varied. Both in Babylonia and in Egypt women enjoyed considerable independence and high status. The code of Hammurabi king of Babylonia who resigned in the 18th century BC granted a great deal of financial and personal freedom to married women. Women could trade on their own account, independent of their husband, and could be judges, elders, witness and scribes. In ancient Egypt their status was still higher. They could
own property, worked in many sectors of the economy, took part in public life and mixed freely with men. It is said that the social roles of men and women were reversed, women becoming the dominant sex.

Egyptian queens are well known and the Greek historian, Herodotus went to the extent of exclaiming that the Egyptian people in most of their manners and customs exactly reverse the common practice of mankind.\textsuperscript{15}

Totally different was the status of women in ancient Greece. By the beginning of the Peloponnesian war in the 5th century BC, democracy had become a prevalent from of government in Greece and a great majority of Greek states had adopted democratic constitutions. But from the free, and dignified position, described in the Homeric Odes when women inherited property, their status had degenerated, to that of childbearing slaves in the 4th century BC in Athens. Only the courtesans exerted some political influence.\textsuperscript{16}

Mill dismissed the contention, that most women did not wish for the suffrage. Those who would like to vote independently, would benefit by receiving stimuli to their faculties and have a widening and liberalizing influence over their feeling. Mills publication of subjection of women in 1869 started crystallization of organized plans. In Britain the initial impact of Mill’s book was within the small

\textsuperscript{15} Verma Sudhir, Women's Struggle for Political Space- From Enfranchisement to Participation, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 1997, p.3.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, pp.3-4
group of the radicals but soon the book received international attention. It went immediately to the U.S.A., Austria, Sweden and Denmark. In 1870 it appeared in Polish and Italian and the young Russian women studying abroad were also its avid readers. By 1883 the Swedish translation had reached the women in Finland. It also had an impact in Japan. Fukuzawa Yukichi in his book 'the New greater Learning for Women’ stated that involvement in local government was to be extremely important for women’s entry into a wider political sphere. It should include women of all political hues – socialists, radicals and conservatives Anabella Shore, in her speech entitled 'present Aspect of Women’s Suffrage considered’ in reply to the opposition to women’s suffrage, stated that if women were supposed to be unfit for their franchise, because of their being physically weaker than men, then the logical conclusion would be that physical force was the basic of governance. She felt that the physical weakness combined with the legal inequality of the women led to their oppression and not protection by men. Also if physical fitness has a relationship with suffrage, all sickly men and most men above sixty, should be excluded from suffrage. It was also a paradox that people who were physically the fittest like the soldiers, sailors and the police had no voice.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid}, p.19.

However in 1988 when the Country Councils were created women were included among the electorate, and two were actually elected to the first London Country council. Democracy involved women’s franchise and the ‘citizen mother’ has a right to a
democratic political voice. It also believed that women had a moral duty to improve the society by gaining power through the franchise. By inculcating values in the political system women were capable of improving the society.\textsuperscript{18}

In the United States after the war of Revolution was over, and the convention met in Philadelphia to organize the states, no question aroused such vehement discussion as that of suffrage. The discussions were so fierce, that finally it was decided to omit the subject from that National Constitution and leave each state free to make its own qualifications for voting. By 1832 the Anti Slavery question was assuming importance and women were becoming deeply involved even on public platform. Two important women leaders emerged at that time. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, of revolutionary ancestry, and Lucretia Mott were in the fore front of anti slavery forces and the two decided that the issue of the right of women as well as of the Negro Slaves need to redressed together.\textsuperscript{19}

In July 1948 at a friends ‘yearly’ meeting in western New York they issued a call for the first Women’s Right Convention in all history. On the instance of Ms. Stanton women suffrage was included in the programme adopted at the convention. This convention is regarded as the beginning of the movement for women suffrage not only in the USA but also in the world.

\textsuperscript{18} ibid, p.26

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p.27
The distance that is visible worldwide, between women and state power, is more acutely felt, when attention is focused on the executive powers of the state. Very few women perform the responsibility of the Head of State or government. Most of these countries are developing nations. The general trends that is noted suggest that in many of these cases, family and male political linkages, political crisis, and violence, provides the background and serve as enabling environment for the entry and rise of these women in politics.\textsuperscript{20}

However one notices a positive trend in women's political participation. A comparative analysis of the election results and votes received by women candidates, over the past years, reveals that women have slowly been able to enhance their political credibility to voters.

Certain universal generalizations have been made which pinpoint on the attitudes and behavioural pattern of women in the political forefront. Because of such behavioural attitudes, there was the question as to what distinctive contribution women would make worldwide.

Observing the similarity in Political outlook between spouses, Lazarsfeld (et al) deduced "The almost perfect agreement between

husband and wife comes about as a result of male dominance in political situations. (Lazarsfeld et al 1968, p. 141)\textsuperscript{21}

A generalization that is by and now almost a cliche and which appears more securely founded, at least in terms of the recent past, is that women are politically more conservative than men. Recent studies confirm a strong relationship between female conservatism and longevity. Female conservatism has also been and in may cases continue to be a feature of voting behaviour in other west Europeans nations. Another frequent contention made on the global scale is that women are more candidate oriented as opposed to issue oriented than men; that is they tend to personalize politics.

Women's political participation has also been labelled as moralistic. We had seen earlier that female suffrage was widely expected either approvingly, as disapprovingly to introduce a new moralism into politics. This is more so because women were found to hold more pacific views than men on the issue of war. Women have been depicted as more puritanical than man. As an extension of this Puritanism and against the background of American women's involved in the urban reform movement of the progressive era, women have also been associated with 'reformism', in the sense of efforts to 'clean up' government and fight corruption. Another fundamental characteristic of female participation is that it is labelled essentially apolitical. Of all the charges, brought against women's political behaviour, apparently the most solidly founded, is that they

know less about politics, are less interested, and less psychologically involved in it, than men.

Although many commentators conclude from the information they have received that women participate politically, like inadequate men suffering from "insufficient masculisation" other feminists suggest an alternative interpretation, according to which women's participation stems from a distinctive and superior motivation.

Women are firstly more percipient than men seeing through the façade of conventional politics; secondly women are more democratic than men; they eschew power as an end in itself. Their experiences of male dominance has alerted them to the ways in which power can be abused. An emphasis on democracy, is a particular feature of the women's liberation movement. A third observation stemming from the previous two, is that women are more radical than men. They are more willing, and more able to challenge existing political practices and concepts. Finally women are more ethical and humane than men. In so far as they participate in conventional politics, they bring to it concern for ordinary human beings, and for ethical standards of comfort.

The overall conclusion of this survey of evidence and argument, must be, that few dramatic differences exist, between the two sexes' political attitudes at grass root level. Women do appear more conservative in certain respects, less knowledgeable, less interested in politics, at least conventional politics and more
moralistic. But these difference should not be exaggerated and seen in many contexts, dwindle to vanishing point. Industrial revolution of the west manned the modernization process of the world. It transformed home based family units's economic activity, into an efficient organized surplus generating process. Economic growth and industrialization may encourage women to direct their productive efforts way from home, but unfortunately, they may not qualify for employment in secondary and tertiary sectors, on the qualification of education and equate with men scoring economic contributions in the society. The Urban Women today faces the challenges of modernization, industrialization and the social changes of transition. Moving from rural to urban area, her role has changed. Her migration from an agrarian household towards organized industry has thrown her into a competitive world, where her traditional self comes into conflict with the present self she projects.

In case of competition among family members for job, the women tend to recede. The Committee on the Status of Women in India, summarized the process in this way, that in agrarian societies, the family is the unit of production. The place of work being close to the home, women and children, all participate in the process. As a society progresses from the traditional agriculture and household industry to organized industry and services, from rural to urban areas, the traditional division of labour, ceases to operate, and the complementary relationship of the family is substituted by the competitive one, between units of labour. The scarcer the job, the sharper is he competition. Technological change in the process of
production, call for a acquisition of new skills and specialization, which are different from the traditional division of labour. Women handicapped by lack of opportunities for acquisition of these new skills find their traditional productive skills, unwanted by the new economy.²²

In the international plane, the status of women though having sophisticatedly evolved, yet projects large areas of disparity with men. A brief estimate of the status of women, in developed societies and underdeveloped societies, would reveal the disparities and a general over all view would emphasize, that perfect equality in the political forefront with men has not been feasible, mostly due to barriers which are both societal and psychological. In France more than fifty percent of the women form the electorate and flexible laws relating to abortion and divorce, has been compiled, as also a positive attitude towards women's participation in the management of the affairs of the state. The Japanese society is a male dominated society, and the change through slow, has been inevitable. However the Japanese society has not deterred women, from pursuing their struggle to assert their position.

The World Plan action proposed both general and specific action in order to achieve the objectives. The specific issue which

were to receive priority were political participation of women in various branches of government.

In the Indian context the status of ‘women’ has traveled through many light and dark phases, which alternately has affected the bearings of women in society and the spate of intra familial and inter social relationships. Profound changes in social values result in changed norms. Changing norms result in a loss of certainty as to what are society’s rules. We respond to this uncertainty in ways that often reflect our need for certainty. That is either by embracing the old rules exaggeratedly, or fervently, or by accepting the new rules unquestioningly, even if they are the exact reverse of the old.23

When there is extra ordinary value change, the security that people gain from conforming to the expectations of their culture is endangered and identity crisis is predicatble. When social values are changing, much less reversing, it becomes increasingly difficult to know what we may expect from others and they from us. It becomes more difficult to know what we should want and what we should become. In a period of profound social change people lose their existential anchors. “Existential Anchors” are the commitments and responsibilities that give life direction and meaning. Anchorage is found in the task and efforts which come form commitment. A short decade ago most women’s identities were anchored in the stereotyped ideal of their family roles.

The American family heritage was based on the older patriarchal traditions of the early settlers in New England and the southern colonies. Under the English law women had many duties but few rights. Next to common law, the most potent force in maintaining women's subordinate position was religion. The colonists believed that women's place was determined by her limitations of mind and body. In order to fit her for her proper role of motherhood, the Almighty had taken special pains to endow her with such virtues as modesty, meekness, compassion, affability, and piety. In Communist China Women were accorded equal political cultural economic and social rights. All China Democratic women's federation marked a turning point in the political participation of Chinese women. New value system come be adopted by Chinese society and cultural revolution further changed the women's image. In the decisive emancipation in the Maoist paradigm, women's status changed which was in between feudalism and modernity earlier.

In the Soviet Union a marked change in the status of women took place in the October revolution. However the influence of Islam in Eastern Russia impeded the process of emancipation. Soviet women are now actively participating in the political affairs of the country. Women out number men in professional and specialized school education. Soviets realize that socialism, not capitalism creates proper social climate for equality among sexes. Urbanization,

25 Ibid,
education, new constitutions of recently liberated countries, appear to have given a better legal status to women. One important aspect of women's status is that, despite women liberation movement, laws and measures for improving their status, two or three factors still stand in their way, that is biological differences, coupled with traditional gender bias and social attitude.26

The purdah of the middle eastern countries often deter women from active participation, though it is not an universal norm in Islamic countries. Two key issues seem to have a pervasive impact on the status of women across the globe in the context of developing nations. They are (1) norms of patriarchy (2) the impact of modernization. Foremost among the institutions and traditions, which were impaired by beliefs in male dominance and female inferiority is the patriarchal orientation. Patriarchy has been rooted in society since the advent of the agrarian system. They argue that the state of women was known to be relatively high in pre-agrarian societies, since both males and females shared in the production process.27

The behavioural pattern of these societies is dictated by a patriarchal culture. Although the process of patriarchy was based on economic relations, it was legitimized by attitude and perceptions of male superiority, ranging from biological, religious to other social factors Rosaldo and Lampere reviewing the impact of patriarchy on

26 Ibid,
several societies, have concluded “that all contemporary societies are to some extent male dominated and although the degree and experience of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is presently a universal factor of life.  

In the 1970's development planners, practitioners and academicians have become increasingly aware of the need to systematically incorporate women into the development process. The specific issues which received priority in the World Plan of Action was to ensure the political participation of women in the various branches of the government.

Politics is an area, where even on a global scale women have not made sufficient penetration, and unless women at large enter the field of political decision making, little changes are likely to occur, for almost all issues, be they the issues of equality dignity and autonomy, of equal pay for equal work or how many children a woman will bear, all ultimately turn out to be political issues. They all are political because they call for a change in the entrenched social attitude, and for a restructuring of society and its institutions. And the changes have to be global.

Though the necessity of renewing women’s status is non-controversial yet it is fraught with innumerable difficulties. Regarding the Indian sub continent Prof. Srinivas remarks that it is rewarding to look upon it as a congeries of micro regions, the differences between which are crucial.\footnote{M.N.Srinivas, \textit{The Changing position of Indian Women}, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1978, P.7} Historian Romila Thapar remarks “Within the Indian sub continent there have been infinite variations on the status of women, diverging according to cultural milieu, family structure, class, caste, property rights and morals.”\footnote{Romila Thapar “Looking Back in History” in Devaki Jain, \textit{Indian Women Publication Diversion}. Ministry of Information and Broad Casting, Government of India, 1975, P.6} Sukumari Bhattacharya, a Sanskrit scholar while unveiling the picture of women, one of which emerges from its prescriptive section and the other from the core section said there is clear dichotomy between the two.\footnote{Sukumari Bhattacharya “Women in Mahabharata” paper presented in a seminar on women and culture organized by Indraprastha College, New Delhi, 1981.} Further she feels that women in the core epic behave with much greater freedom while those in other sections are presented as mere chattel. Besides the difficulty of providing a monolithic picture of women’s position at various phases of development, there is a serious difficulty of locating authentic sources which can help construct a profile of Indian women. This problem has acquired significance when history is being looked at, through subaltern sources, and with a feminists perspective.
Thus while on the one hand, historical documents that have been discovered and used by mainstream scholars, tend to be elitist, on the other hand the historians who have attempted to build up history from the very beginning have not paid enough attention to women’s question.\textsuperscript{33} India’s past being a very lengthy one, much concerted, and collaborative efforts are to be made, to attain the goal.

In order to study the development of women’s position, history has been divided into three very broad periods. The first period from 800 B.C. to 1800 A.D. described as the precolonial period is the longest one which studies the condition of women. The second one from the period 1800 to 1947 is the pre-independence and the third, the post independence period.\textsuperscript{34} The matrilineral society of Kerela in the South and the matrilineal tribal societies prevailing among the Garos and the Khasis in the North Eastern part of the country provide a qualitatively different-social setting for the women in those areas. Similarly Muslim women or the women of the scheduled castes have different norms and problem.\textsuperscript{35} It is therefore not possible to go into intricate diversity.

\textsuperscript{33} Ranjeet Guha, \textit{Subaltern Studies}, I, II & III, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1982-84. (Ranjit Guha Defines ‘Subaltern’ as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian Society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age gender and office or any other way.)

\textsuperscript{34} Neera Desai & Maithreyi Krishnary, \textit{Op. Cit.} P. 25

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid}, P. 25
The position of women in the Indian society has been a very complicated one. In fact it would not be an exaggeration to say that the recent changes in the status of women in India, is not a sign of progress, but is really a recapturing of the position that they held in the early Vedic period. Literacy and historical researches have now established beyond doubt that the women held a position of equality with men during the Vedic period. The girls as well as the boys were required to be given rigorous physical training which made them capable of being soldiers and fighters. Many times ordinary women took part in the administration of the country. There were democratic assemblies in the Vedic age. Some ladies used to take an active part in the public discussions of the democratic assemblies. The education of women was looked upon as so important that the Atharva Veda asserted that the success of women in her married life depends upon her proper training during the Brahmacharya. Thus the position of the Hindu women in the early Vedic times was very different from the lower status to which they were degraded after about 300 B.C.

It appears as if several social changes look place in the Indian society from about 300 B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era, which led to the curtailment of the freedom of women. Students of Indian Social history have need to find the reasons for the changes, which took place in the status of women after 300 B.C. One of the reasons advanced, is that sons were valued more than daughters, because the Aryans encountered various tribal people who inhabited

the Gangetic plans when they moved East from the Punjab. This movement led to a desire for sons, who would participate in the wars against the people of that area. Consequently sons were valued more than the daughters.37

The political conditions also appear to have their impact on the status of women. The period between 300 B.C. and 300 A.D. saw the invasion of the Greeks, the Cythians and the Parthians and the Kushans. The political reverses, the atrocities due to the war and the decline of prosperity produced a wave of despondency in the society. Once again the ideals of renouncement and Sannyasa preached earlier by the Upanishads, Buddhism and Jainism began to spread.38

Thus for really two thousand years from 20 B.C. to A.D. 1800 the position of women steadily deteriorated though she was fondled by parents, loved by the husband and revered by her children. The revival of sati, the prohibition of remarriage, the spread of Purdah and the greater prevalence of polygamy further affected her position. The dual standards of morality set up by man prevailed upto 1850.39

Thus it appears that the neglect of the education of women, coupled with child marriage on the one hand and the customs of polygamy, seclusion, and purdah on the other brought about a tremendous degradation, in the status of the women. The status

38 Ibid, P. 262
39 Ibid, P. 262
deteriorated, when the injunctions of Manu which codified Hindu life, obliterated the practice of upanayan for women. Manu propounded the theory of perpetual tutelage for women. ⁴⁰

With the fall of the Moghul Empire India entered into another phase of her political life. The British rulers started ruling the country. It was after the first World War that the awakening among Indian women surfaced. When the Montague Chelmsford Reforms which widened the electorate, were under discussion, a deputation comprising Indian men and women, waited upon the British parliament asking for enfranchisement of women on the same terms as that of men. The British parliament which had denied these rights to their own women, was not in a hurry, to concede to this request. They however left it to the new legislatures in India to do what they liked in the matter. In April 1921 Madras led the way by giving the same rights to women. ⁴¹

In fact women had been encouraged to enter politics and become a political force since it suited the demands for more participation and decision making raised by the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Gandhiji had also started his campaign in 1919 when he played an important role to unite all the Indian women, regard less of religion to fight together with men for political freedom. The first time Gandhiji allowed a women to share leadership in India was in the Ahmedabad Labour Satyagraha. She

was the sister of one of the mill owners but she identified herself with the workers and helped them to organize passive resistance. Later on she joined Gandhiji's Ashram. During the Rowlatt Satyagraha and the non-cooperation movement of 1919/1921 one woman Sarojini Naidu, formed a part of the Executive Committee but more women were called to participation for which activity the government desisted from arresting them.

Regarding the enfranchisement of women it was found, that after Madras, one province after another brought forward resolutions demanding this for their respective legislatures, while a certain section of men busied themselves in carrying on active propaganda outside to rouse public opinion in favour of their demands. Bombay followed close to Madras and granted the vote to women in 1921. The United Provinces made a world suffrage record by unanimously voting in favour of the women's franchise resolution 1923.

Bengal was unable to secure the passing of a resolution giving women the vote in 1922 but three years later the same resolution was passed by a considerable majority. Assam went a step further inasmuch as it not only enfranchised them but even gave them the right to stand for the provincial legislatures. Thus followed Punjab and the Central Provinces in 1926 and 1927 respectively. The province of Bihar seemed to be the most reluctant of all in

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enfranchising its women, because the first attempt at giving the right to them in 1922 failed and it was not till 1929 that the legislature passed the resolution demanding women's franchise. Realising that the feelings in the country were very much in favour of allowing women to vote, the central legislature in 1923 extended the vote for the legislative Assembly to women of provinces where they enjoyed the franchise for the provincial Councils.44

During the freedom struggle, women helped in circulating leaflets and literature, and in maintaining liaison between different revolutionary leaders. In spite of everything, the participation of women was limited. There were no women, leaders; girls were not included in the ‘Samities’ or volunteer movement; the prevailing ideology of the time was still too conservative to allow women to participate on an equal basis with men.45

In Bombay many women like Kamladevi Chattopadhaya Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Jaishri Rayi participated wholeheartedly in the freedom struggle. In Gujrat Special classes were started in the Sabarmati Ashram to train Women Satyagrahis. Mridula Sarabhai led the way. Thus from the time of the freedom struggle women were found to be politically very active. Women were seen marching in processions signing patriotic songs, picketing liquor and foreign cloth shops. There were women who had joined the terrorist

44 Ibid, P. 15
groups and helped in editing and distributing banned news papers and manufacturing bombs. By their participation in the political movement Indian women helped there own struggle for liberation. They were accepted as political comrades and given equal opportunities for participation in the freedom struggle. Most of these women were from 'good' families with high educational attainments. This was because during the struggle they had to face imprisonment, and a person who was not from a high economic status it was impossible to leave the family without financial support.46

The herald of the 19th century, and the leader of the Indian renaissance, Raja Rammohan Roy was one of the first protagonists of women cause. Other social reformer like Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, all fought hard for the betterment of women. They made persistent efforts for the introduction of female education, remarriage of Hindu widows, prevention of child marriage and removal of polygamy. Other social thinkers of the 19th century like M.G. Ranade, D.K. Karve Rabindranath Tagore, K.C. Sen and others tried to inculcate in women the spirit and values of the society by disseminating knowledge with the help of educational institutions. A number of institutions were founded to impart education to girls like Mahila Vidyalaya in 1907. D.K. Karve laid the foundation of the Women's University in 1916.47

46 Sumana Pandey, Op. Cit., p. 18
The emphasis on education of women was due to the fact that all social reformers understood, that to herald women into the political arena, education was a compulsory pre requisite. To them education was the only antidote to the backwardness and superstitious beliefs which gripped the Indian scene. There were several women leaders who worked for the emancipation of women in the nineteenth century. The foremost among them was Pandita Rama Bai (1858 – 1922), Toru Dutt (1856 to 1877). The Home Rule Movement in 1917 launched by Mrs. Anme Besant accentuated the women’s cause.48

Mahatma Gandhi rendered signal service to the advancement of the women’s movement, by making thousands of them of all classes to come out of the homes and participate in the political movement. He wrote “In a plan of life based on non violence, women has as much right to establish her own destiny as man has to establish his”. He wrote “I desire utmost freedom for our women”.49

The most important thing he did, right from the years in South Africa, was to make women participate in social movements, and public work. As a great campaigner and leader of social and political movement, he would see and realize the importance of participation of women who constitute fifty percent of the population. It was obvious that no movement could be a mass movement unless women participated in it. The most astonishing part is that, right from the beginning women responded to his call in large numbers. The new

49 Ibid, P. 271
outlook among women was gradually coming in toward the end of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth century.

He wanted women to participate in what he regarded as the vital tasks of constructive work, namely, picketing liquor shops and the shops which sold foreign cloth. He was convinced, that it is only a group of women, who could make an effective appeal to those engaged in the sale of liquor and foreign cloth, he was also convinced that even illiterate women could take part in the work of conversion. As a matter of fact, thousands of women, educated as well as illiterate look part in this picketing, throughout the country.50

Even as early as 1921 he advocated the enfranchisement of women. He wrote “Women must have votes and equal legal status. But the problem does not end there, it only commences as the point when women begin to affect the political deliberation of the nation”. Thus the ground prepared by the nineteenth century leaders and the untiring work of Gandhi led to the emancipation of women and helped them to take their rightful place in society in the way in which women of Vedic age participated in the ancient times.51

After 1930 the British authorities decided to make no difference between men and women, and women were lathi-charged shot and arrested. Thus the nationalist movement in India enabled women to evolve from an oppressed and subordinated position to an

50 Ibid, P. 273
51 Ibid, P. 273
enlightened one and have equal participation in the social and political affairs of the country.\textsuperscript{52}

It was said that the women were not slow to recognize the fact that they could use their participation in the natural movement for advancing their own emancipation. Since political activities were not objected to, women took to them with a remarkable sense of responsibility. The result of all this activity was that many of the taboos and restrictions which had been placed on women, were either lifted or quietly overlooked. As the pace of the national independence, was the sole concern of both men and women, gradually women came to be accepted as political comrades. All this gave her great self confidence.\textsuperscript{53}

If we try to find out the effect of family and environment on women, we see that most women joined the freedom struggle, because like men they were inspired by patriotism and wanted to see the end of foreign rule on their motherland. An important factor was family influence. Women from families such as those of Motilal Nehru, C.R.Das, Jamnalal Bajaj or Lajpt Rai naturally wanted to share the privations and sufferings of their men folk. Where the atmosphere at home was nationalistic, women also imbibed it.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, P. 18

Sucheta Kriplani’s family had been wearing and using Swadeshi since the 1920’s.\textsuperscript{54}

Soon after independence the country opted for a political system and a socio economic goal in which all sectors of people would be able to make a contribution, the recognition of woman, as an individual, as a member of society having a place in the political system, was stimulated, mainly because of women’s active participation, in the independence movement.\textsuperscript{55}

In the present Indian society women have obtained social, political and economic rights and are trying to play a positive role in the development of society. But in politics they are far behind their male counterparts. The poor participation of women, is perhaps an indication of their disillusionment with the unhealthy trend in politics, with corruption and inefficiency spreading in all spheres of political activity. It can also be because of the tender graceful and soft spoken nature of women which is unsuited to the rough Indian politics.\textsuperscript{56}

Thus participation of women in politics in found to be meagre not only in India but also in other countries. In America in all the researches done on the voting behaviour, women were seen to be

\textsuperscript{55} Hazel D. Lima, \textit{Women in Local government}, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1983, p.11
\textsuperscript{56} Sushama Jolly, \textit{"Women: Too soft for politics,"} Femina Jaly, 1982
uninterested and uninvolved in the game of politics. They remained on the periphery of politics.57

The Orissa Scene

It is not very easy to give a comprehensive account of women’s participation in politics in Orissa because one hardly finds any writing about women, not to talk of their role in politics. Except some general writing on freedom struggle in which one gets some idea about the political participation in the state in the pre 1947 period, no other study is available. Orissa unlike may other states in India does not rank high in urbanization. The slow progress in urbanization has resulted in slow growth of urban population. As Orissa is predominantly an agricultural state, majority of women live in villages and are basically agricultural labourers. Again as Orissa is rich in mineral resources, in many areas women work as labourers in the mines. Moreover the females from the scheduled tribe and scheduled caste primarily constitute the labour force. As education and economic position along with the social status forms the basis for effective participation, be it in public life or politics, it is essential to take the socio demographic characteristics in order to understand the role they could play in the field of politics in the state58

57 Sumana Pandey, Op. Cit., p. 20-21
Determination of the political participation of women in a state like Orissa is a difficult task for a variety of reasons. The State is a sufferer not only from economic backwardness but also from political uncertainty. The state remained divided into a number of princely states until the integration of the provinces in 1936. However these princely states had separate administrative systems. Political awakening among these princely states was also slow due to the strong hold of feudal hegemony and forces. Most importantly it is one of the states in the country which got the opportunity to get exposed to western influence very late. All these factors checked the growth of political awakening among the people.\textsuperscript{59}

Only during the civil disobedience movement 1930-36 women in large numbers began to come into the limelight.\textsuperscript{60} Distinguished women like Malati Devi, Rama Devi, Sarala Devi, Bhagyabati Devi, the head of the Kujang Raj family etc. Came forward being influenced by their husbands and relatives to participate in the movement of salt Satyagraha in 1930. With the integration of princely states, when Orissa became an unified state women started coming to the forefront of political activity. The first assembly of the Orissa state legislative in 1937 had two women representatives i.e. Smt. Sarala Devi, Mrs. A. Lakshmi Bai. However with the attainment of independence, the sphere of activities were broadened and women in

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 122-123.

\textsuperscript{60} Kishori Mohan Patra, \textit{Orissa Legislature and Freedom Struggle}, ICHR, New Delhi, 1970, P.132
collaboration with the men folk participated in the political life in a greater number.\footnote{Ibid, P. 123}

Democratic decentralization which is implicit in the Panchayati Raj has provided yet another important channel for women’s involvement in their own development as well as that of the rural community. This system provided representation to women at all levels from Panchayat level to the Zilla Parishad. In the beginning, many women were elected to these three tier institutions specially from rural and tribal areas like Balangir, Kalahandi, Mayurbhanj, Sambalpur, Phulbani. This was an impetus to rural women. It may be noted that women who had participated in the freedom struggle took an active part in rural politics.\footnote{Journal of Political Studies (Jalandhar) Vol. XIX, No.1, Feb. 1986, pp. 63-72}

The Balwantarai Mehta Committee \footnote{Balwantarai Mehta Committee Submitted its Report to government of India, recommending a system of democratic decentralization, Govt. of India, 1978.} (1962) recommended the establishment of Mahila Mandals from within the villages with the objective of securing women’s participation at the grass roots level.

Although the trade Union movement should be conducive to greater political participation of citizens, in Orissa the trade union activities are not so popular. Generally in these unions while the men play a major role women tend to be passive in membership. Even the

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, P. 123} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{62} Journal of Political Studies (Jalandhar) Vol. XIX, No.1, Feb. 1986, pp. 63-72} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{63} Balwantarai Mehta Committee Submitted its Report to government of India, recommending a system of democratic decentralization, Govt. of India, 1978.} \]
organized women labour force are not to be found involved in trade union movements.

The urban local bodies are mostly known as Municipal Committees and Municipal Corporation and their functions in most of the states are similar. The councilors of the municipalities are elected every four years in accordance with section 41(1) of the Orissa Municipal Act, 1950 read with sect 12(1) thereof. Though women have been represented in these bodies for a long time, the number of women contestants in elections to various offices of local government is generally low.64

Urban politics being different from rural politics the process of political socialization at the municipal level is generally quicker than at the rural level. In urban areas, the growth of literacy and the impact of mass media have brought about a change in the outlook of women on social and political issues. Also various women’s organization serve as catalysts for greater politicization of urban women. However at the municipality level, such factors have no impact; as a result, there is a poor representation of women.65

Membership in women’s associations is a form of indirect political participation. While these are relatively organized and permanent they are depicted as apolitical. Women’s associations are

65 Ibid
either voluntary or political by nature and are found both in urban and rural societies. However compared with men women tend to lag behind in political attainment and aspirations. On the whole, voluntary organization where women predominate, are concerned with social work rather than politics. Thus overall evidence clearly pinpoints to the aforesaid conclusion that women’s political participation is much less significant than men, particularly in states like Orissa.

The most visible trend that emerges from the participatory nature of women, in the elections to Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha is that their participation at Polls is not proportionate to their actual population. In general, Orissa shows the highest difference between male and female voters because the number of female electors exercising their voting rights has been much less than that of their male counterparts. Political participation as a process requires individual’s involvement in the political system. The degree and level of participation also indicates the acceptance of the system and the sense of political efficacy. Viewed from this point women’s score in voting and contesting in the election etc. are uniformly lower than those of men in the entire state.

So far membership in the council of Ministers is concerned women in Orissa have never been adequately represented keeping into account that the politics of Orissa is primarily male dominated.

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One of the political scientists belonging to this state views that feminism has not yet penetrated into the social fabrics of Orissa not to speak of its penetration into the political realm.67

We need to broaden the definition of “Political participation” to develop a comprehensive picture of women as participants in the policy making process of the society. In particular we need to include adhoc politics which may be defined as an activity not fully integrated into the formal political process or institutionalized. Adhoc participation implies participation in political campaigns that are relatively short lived with make shift organizations. They include direct tactics such as taking out a procession, mass signature campaigns fasting, picketing and squatting. In Orissa, women have been conspicuous in the community level movements. Their role in the freedom movement apart, they have been found active in the Prajamandal and Anti Ruler movement (against atrocities of the feudal rule) in late 30’s. But all these movements are essentially urban, related to local issues.

Women’s adhoc participation have found expression in campaigning activities, mobilizing the masses, arranging and attending meetings before the onset of elections at local, state or national level.

67 J.K. Baral and S.B. Baral, Indian Political Science Review, Delhi, 1980, P. 228
To sum up women’s participation in conventional politics at grass root level is negligible when compared to men but women also participate politically in other ways, indirectly through informal personal influence and numerous women’s associations and, directly through adhoc campaigns and protest activity.

Looking at the participation level of women in the political life of the state, certain comments can be made on the nature of women’s participation in politics and the reasons for their little involvement. It is a fact, that women’s involvement in politics particularly in Orissa is not proportionate to their population. Education social and economic status along with other factors do not encourage them to participate freely in large number. The reasons are varied and complicated.68

(1) Lack of zeal of women in the post independence which resulted in total absence of women in the political sphere for a considerable period of time.

(2) As the level of participation is low, people are mostly personality oriented in their voting behaviour than following an ideology.

(3) Dearth of leadership among women is also a potential factor not to encourage women’s participation.

SUMMARY

The term 'status' in the context of the role of women, signifies the sum total of the various culturally ascribed roles are has to play and the global rights and duties inherent in a social position. There is a vast differences of status between country to country and thus the levels of status of women varies between women in developing and underdeveloped societies as between women of rural and urban areas.

The gender of a man is masculine, that of women is feminine. Political theorists in the past have neglected feminine gender. Locke has categorically mentioned that when women hold the helm of government, the state is at once in jeopardy. Rousseau believes that women pose a permanent threat to the political order. Freud offers similar justification for women's confinement to domesticity.

The U.N. Commission on the status of women came into existence in 1947 and it was only with the Third United Nations Development. Decade Resolution that women's cause gained prominence. The third World Conference of the International Women's Year was convened in June-July 1975 which came forward with a World Plan of action for the implementation of the objectives of the International Women’s Year. In the global arena, the status of women in Ancient Civilizations had also varied. The Babylonian and the Egyptian women enjoyed a considerable high status, which the status of women in Greece had degenerated to that of child bearing slaves by 4th century B.C.
However, gradually it was seen, that the 'cause of women' became a concern not for the feminists but also for political theorists like J.S. Mill. In New York the First Women's Rights Convention in all history was summoned.

However one notices a positive trend in Women's Political Participation. The industrial Revolution, modernization, economic growth has considerably enhanced the status of women. The face of the Urban Woman today presents a different profile. This urban woman faces the multi challenges of modernization, industrialization and the societal changes of transition moving from rural areas to urban area her role has changed. Her migration from an agrarian household characterized by seclusion, towards organized industry has thrown her into a competitive world, where her traditional self comes into conflict with the present self she projects.

In the Indian context the 'status' of 'women' has traveled through many light and dark phases. During the Vedic period women held a position of equality with men, in administration, in discussion in democratic assemblies. After 300 B.C. there began a steady decline in the status of women. This steady deterioration continued till 1800 A.D., major factors being child marriage, polygamy seclusion and purdah. Manu had propounded a theory of perpetual tutelage for women. It was after the first world was that awakening in Indian women surfaced and gradually they were accorded voting rights. Education was emphasized and women were drawn into the vortex of
politics through the media of the Freedom Movement. Today the role of Indian women in contemporary society is positive, but even then their participation is said to be peripheral due to certain societal, familial and personal limitations.

Determination of political participation of women in a state like Orissa is a difficult task as the state is a sufferer not only from economic backwardness but also from political uncertainty. Only during the Civil Disobedience Movement 1930-36 women in large numbers began to come into the lime light. Although the Trade Union Movement should be conducive to greater political participation of citizens in Orissa, the trade Union activities are not so popular. So far the membership in the Council of Ministers is concerned women in Orissa have never been adequately represented. Keeping into account that the politics of Orissa is primarily male dominated. One of the political scientists belonging to this state views that feminism has not yet penetrated into the social fabric of Orissa, not to speak of its penetration into the political realm.

Comments on the general level of participation would reveal that women’s participation in politics particularly in Orissa is not in proportion to their population. Education social and economic status along with other factors do not allow them to participate in large numbers. The reasons are varied and complicated.