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An Overview of Women's Studies Literature in India

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*Woman is called the most beautiful creation of God and that is how she is presented in all the literatures anywhere of the world.*

3.1 Introduction

Woman has inspired literature and has been its pivotal theme too. She herself is also a creator of literature and therefore a woman’s presence in literature is all pervading. A vast and varied literature has been produced during the last 150 to 200 years to depict the creation of women, having both creative and critical impulses. This literature is both the cause and effect of invigoration of the woman’s movement in this country. Today women have a secondary status in the family as well as in the society. Literature needs to respond to this and explore the reasons behind this situation. An important area of research in Women’s Studies has been to explore and re-read women’s representation and their position in literature. One needs to examine how the writers have featured this situation in their writings. While a great deal of literature has been published on women’s issues from time to time, literature related to various aspects of women’s position/ women’s issues has been conducted from various sources. There have been several studies analyzing the existing inequality of women in all spheres- economic, social, political, legal and educational status of woman.

3.2 Chronological Aspects of Women’s Literature

Periodicals play an important role in the development of literature and enhancement of culture. New ideas, literary traditions, literary discussions/observations and new yardsticks are first established in the periodicals. As a foundation of scholarship, periodical literature occupies an important place in social sciences. Journals seek to disseminate knowledge and enable researchers to publish their work, to become familiar with the work of others and to benefit from scholarly
discussions and dialogues. In fact without journals, it is difficult to ensure the growth of any research discipline. As a discipline grows, the volume of research grows and the needs for more journals to publish the research findings are increasingly felt. Thus the number of research journals in a discipline is an indicator of its status and growth.

It is also noteworthy that we have an ever-growing literature in the form not only of periodicals, but also of books, reports, research papers, pamphlets, magazine and other forms of literature which have played a significant role in bringing about requisite awakening among women to understand and solve their own issues and problems. Several eminent persons and scholars have attempted the task of exploring those views on women. There is no doubt that women and their problems have acquired a steadily growing importance in social research over the years.

Raja Rammohan Roy\(^\text{[1]}\) campaigned against the brutal system of Sati and published many pamphlets in 1818, 1819, and 1823. The first Gujarati weekly magazine, “Mumbai Samachar\(^\text{[2]}\)” was published on 1st July 1822. In the first half of the nineteenth century during the period of social reform, some periodicals were published specially in order to bring about improvement in the condition of women. The very first lines of published verse penned by women questioned the patriarchic subjugation of women, published in “Samvad Prabhakar” on 7th May 1849, is centered on the theme ‘Women of this country are not permitted to education; on what basis are they inferior to men?\(^\text{[3]}\)

In the period before1850, Meerabai must be considered as a revolutionary so far as the expression of woman’s ‘self’ from the feminine point of view is concerned. She is as a “feminist” ideal. She very acts of speaking out in a culture that silenced and marginalized the woman’s voice. According to Raje,\(^\text{[3]}\) in the thousand year long history of literature, Meerabai was different from others. She was her being a woman, a queen, a widow, a devotee and a poet. She continued this struggle till the end of her life.

Some periodicals and magazines were started for the contemporary women due to their pathetic plight and to make the society aware of this condition of women.\(^\text{[4]}\) In 1874 Bharatendu Harischandra published the periodical “Bal Bodhini” in which eight to ten pages comprised of women’s education. “Strisabodhchintamani” (1881),

Rabindranath Tagore [5] in 1889 attended a public lecture of Pandita Ramabai where Ramabai stressed the fact that women were equal to men in all aspects except drinking. Tagore disputed the stand in an article published in “Bharati” (1889) and reasoned that women lacked creativity. Then Swarnakumari Devi in response wrote an article entitled “Ramabai” (1889) and supported Ramabai’s stand. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, periodicals like “Dhyanasudha” (1892) and “Sundari Subodh” created awareness about women’s issues and encouraged women to read and write. In “Masik Manoranjan” (1895-1935) launched by K.R. Mitra, a section was earmarked for women’s issues. “Streeshikshan Chandrika” was published in (1899). These periodicals were published specially in order to bring about improvement in the condition of women.

Toran Devi Shukla ‘Lali’ (1896) [6] has presented the image of a woman in “Jagrati” who is ready to face any danger, stand and meet the challenge at the time of difficulty, who is free from fear and laziness and is a symbol of self-respect. Her dreams of such a world where everyone gets equal opportunity to live with respect. There is an expression of painful restlessness in the ‘Purdah system’, which was highlighted during the movement of national and women’s awaking. In the 19th century, which were women-centered the abolition of sati system, child marriage; encouragement to widow remarriage drew attention towards ignoring of women’s literature. In that period the agitation for women’s liberation took a definite shape. In this agitation most active and important role was played by the periodical Stri Darpan Patrika edited by Rameshwari Devi Nehru. The first publication came out from Prayag in June 1909. The periodical Stri Darpan Patrika played a vital role in shaping the right attitude to look at the status of women was fearlessly. It was the first and the one of its kind, which started with the intention of gaining the basic human rights for women.

In July 1923 Madhuri’s issue had an article on women's education by Dharmasheela Jayaswal and yet another article by Ratan Kumari Devi arguing cogently that women's education is a key to the entire social development. In the January 1923 issue Tamalalata Basu takes an approach that a woman wants neither to be worshipped nor to be insulted. She wants to be treated like a human being. In January 1924 issue Vimla Devi attacks Shukracharya's Code of Conduct for women.
Shanti Devi Arora stressed the need for change in the dominating attitude of men. In the October 1926 issue, Koushalya Devi attacks the selective imposition of moral values and ideal behaviour only on women and makes a plea for women’s liberation. It is clear that it is the aggressive approach to women’s liberation has worse woman's plight, suffering and humiliation. Literature on various aspects of women has considerably increased. The 1980s and 1990s have seen the publication of a number of historical works on women. *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW) began its biannual “Review of Women’s Studies” in April, 1986, in April and October of every year. Since then, EPW has included five or six articles on women; many provided a valuable forum for the discussion of new scholarship on women’s issues. Sometimes devoted to a single topic, articles on women and gender appear in every issue.

### 3.3 Position of Indian Women in Different Era

The position of women community has been a subject since the early ages. With the ups and downs in the society, the status of women has been affected. In order to find out as to whether the position of women, as a whole, went on improving or deteriorating, in Ancient and Medieval India, Altekar (1983) \(^7\) has divided the entire period from C.2500 BC to C.1800 AD into four distinct ages as follows:

1. **The Age of Rigveda**, from C.2500 to C.1500 BC
2. **The Age of the Later Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads**, From C.1500 BC to C.500 BC;
3. **The Age of Sutras, Epics and Early** from C.500 BC to C.500 AD
4. **The Age of the Later Smritis**, from C.500 AD to C. 1800 AD.

#### 3.3.1 Vedic Period: 2500 to 1500 BC

Murdoch (1888)\(^8\) described the position of women from Vedic period to the present day. Abstracts and quotations are provided from ancient literature to illustrate the educational, social, moral and cultural fields. He also discusses the social evils viz. sati, child marriage etc. Indra (1945) \(^9\) has attempted to give an account of women's place in Hindu society and depicts it as it has been good, bad or indifferent. In the early Aryan society represented by the Vedic literature, women have enjoyed a much better position-social, religious and political-than they did in the later ages of Dharmashastras.
Dharma (1948)\(^{[10]}\) pointed out that women enjoyed considerable liberty during the Vedic age, and their dignity and rights were socially recognised. During this period widow remarriage was allowed and the privileges enjoyed by women were more than what they are today. Chaudhary (1956)\(^{[11]}\) has described the position of women in the Vedic rituals was as daughter, wife, mother and widow. The daughter is affection-incarnate and it is as such that Vedic literature depicts her. She was just as important as the son.

### 3.3.2 Upnishadic Period: 1500 BC to 500 BC

Altekar puts it that during the Upnishadic period there were great Brahmavadins who were enriched with deep knowledge of philosophy. Gargi and Maitraye asked difficult questions in a challenge with their husband Yajnavalkya, the great thinker. Hazara (1953)\(^{[12]}\) has described that women in the Puranas have not been allowed full freedom in the social and religious life. He pointed that even though women played a highly important part in maintaining social discipline as well as in building and molding the nation, in Puranas the author looked upon them as wives and mothers.

Shastri (1960)\(^{[13]}\) has evaluated the social religious and political position of women from Rig Veda to the Grihya-Sutras. He describes the position of women in Rig Veda, Atharva Veda, and the Upanishads and also in Mantra Brahmana and the Grihya sutras separately.

### 3.3.3 Epics and Early Smrities Period: 500 BC to 500 AD

*Ramayan* is the epic which has remained the symbols of Indian tradition, till today. *Sita* is considered as the ideal for womanhood by Indians due to her chastity, sacrificing spirit and dedication. Dharma (1938)\(^{[14]}\) described the status, rights and privileges of women during the period of Ramayana. With the help of this epic, interesting bits of information about the habits, customs, education, accomplishments, status and rights of women during the Ramayana period have been given. In Mahabharata, Draupadi fights for justice and asserts her, in spite of odd situations confronting her. Janapathy (2002)\(^{[15]}\) discussed in *Indian Women Through the Ages* that Vyasa says, “Women are embodiments of wealth. If a man wants to live in comfort, he should know how to respect women. At another place, Vyasa says that “A woman is equivalent to ten Gurus”. Draupadi argues several times with Yudhisthira
on ideologies. Chakravarti (1953) in his article entitled *Main Women Characters in the Mahabharata* states that the Mahabharta, the great epic of India, has enshrined certain imperishable ideals of Indian womanhood. These ideals are found embodied in the most perfect manner in the lives of Gandhari, Kunti, Draupadi, Damayanti, Sita, and Savitri. The most important of these ideals, however, is an abiding faith in dharma or the moral order of the universe.

Hopkins (1972) study deals with the status of women in the epics. It gives the idea of the position of women during the middle ages and also enables us to see the changing position during the later period of the epics.

**3.3.4 Later Smritis Period: 500 AD to 1800 AD**

Gallichan (1914) illustrates the position and concept of womanhood in accordance with the sacred books of Hinduism by quoting from the ‘Laws of Manu’ and the ‘Institute of Vishnu’. Altekar (1938) described position of Indian women a time of near equality with men, to slow decline beginning as early as 1000 BC (precipitated by the acceptance of non-Aryan women into Aryan households) and lasting a millennium followed by 2000 years of deterioration. By the mid-18th century women's status had hit rock bottom and begun its slow recovery. Improvements in education, age of marriage, widow-remarriage, laws and customs, and recognition of women's economic potential all played a role in restoring Indian women to their long-lost status.

Majumdar (1953) has illustrated the position of women in the later Smritis that their effect was considerably diminished in domestic life by the natural instincts of men, yet there is an element of nobility in the sacrifice and self-abnegation of Indian women, and it is impossible to withhold the due praise and admiration from that patient and suffering class of humanity. According to another author,

Ghoshal (1958) in their article he describes that women were not to perform religious sacrifices, and their sacraments were to be done without Vedic mantras. A solitary exemption given by Yajnavalkya, however, was at the ceremony of her marriage. Manu prescribed a fresh sacrament for virgin widow at their marriage-Narada and Parasara followed by the Agni Purana, expressly sanctioned the marriage of women in the event of five calamities, including the death of the husband.
3.3.5 Medieval Period: 1000-1700 AD

Penny (1911) [21] describes in *South Asia* the history and life style of different types of women in the southern part of India. It covers Dravidian women, Hindu women of different castes, tribal women, Muslim women etc. He has also discussed history of all the different races, their customs and beliefs, marriage and social systems, culture and way of living. Bose (1921) [22] discusses in his book *Female education in India* the educational pattern of women from the ancient to the modern period. The author compares the modern education of women with that of the ancient period and notes that in the modern time women enjoy much more freedom of choice in this field.

According to Panikkar (1958) [23] condition of women in India gradually deteriorated from the advent of the Muslim period, till the second half of the 18th century. The author stresses the difference in the position of women between the higher classes and the ordinary people. He also deals with the customs such as sati, child marriage and the system of stridhana (dowry), and the joint family. Chopra (1963) [24] has illustrated the customs and habits of both Moslems and Hindus and throws light on many curious points of conduct and behaviour in medieval India. Hyder (1975) [25] in her article *Muslim women of Indian* discussed the privileges given to women by Islam and Muslim personal law. The part played by Muslim women in politics, literature and socio-economic development in different periods of time has been described. She opines that the various economic and sociological problems currently faced by Muslim women are part of the general backwardness and poverty of the Indian masses.

3.3.6 Muslim Period: 1526-1707

Gupta (1901) [26] discussed the social position of Muslim women, their duties as daughters, wives and mothers taboos on women, education of women etc. in accordance with the religious beliefs and rituals. He described the status of women and their rights and duties among Moslems giving stress on women as wife and mother, laws of inheritance, marriage, dowry and religious rights. Jones & Jones (1941) [27] in their book have stated that overall condition of women in Islam with special reference to the Indian situation. They give a bird’s eye view of the life of Indian Muslim women in contemporary period and then leads on the status of Muslim women in social and family life.
Misra (1967) [28] revealed a picture of the position of women chiefly of aristocratic class of Mughal period- a society where women lived in seclusion- and the various aspects of their lives- political, social and cultural. Some prominent women of the higher strata and noble families have been taken into account. Another author Mukherjee (1972) [29] described the social status of the North Indian women during the Mughal period from the reign of Babar to that of Aurangzeb. It devotes mainly to the position of a woman, her dignity and the privileges enjoyed by her in society.

3.3.7 Rajput Period: 8th Century- 12th Century

Janapathy (2002)[30] discussed in ‘Indian women through the ages’ that Alberuni, the famous historian who gave an account of India of those times (977 AD to 1084 AD) says that, “Rajput women were well-read. They were participating in social life. They were good in Sanskrit. They read and wrote well. They knew the arts of music, painting and dancing. Daughters of Kings and Samantas were good learners of horse riding also.” According to Das (1956) [31] in the middle of the 19th century in North Western India, female infanticide had prevailed among the Rajputs, more especially the Chauhans. He also described the causes, methods and motives of crime among this community.

Sankhala (1969) [32] has discussed the picture of women’s education in this period. The statistical data of number of literate women in Rajputana in the year 1901 and the number of voluntary educational institutions in Rajasthan between 1914 and 1945 has been furnished. An analysis of the female education in Rajasthan in the post independence India has also been attempted. According to Janapathy (2002) [33] Sati Sahagamana (Burning oneself on the celestial fire along with the dead body of husband) was also prevalent. But, it was not a common practice applicable to all.

3.3.8 British Period (A.D. 1757- A.D. 1947)

Some reformers like Dayanand Saraswati, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Jyotiba Phule, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda were the torch bearers to uproot the social evils like killing of daughters, sati system, child marriages they rescued the woman from her pathetic state. Their influence encouraged the British government to enact certain laws against the sati system, permitting women to remarry, abolish the
custom of child marriage, etc. Efforts were also made to spread education among girls. Some of these issues continue to affect women even in this century.

Naidu (1904) \(^{34}\) described in her book *Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu* is a collection of Sarojini Naidu’s speeches and writings, and they deal with a variety of subjects – education of Indian women covers, Indian women’s renaissance and women in national life. Karve (1936) \(^{35}\) in his autobiography *Looking Back* he relates his contribution in the social field mainly towards the betterment of Hindu widows by providing educational facilities to them, building widow homes, organising associations for their emancipation.

Chattopadhyay (1958) \(^{36}\) has described the role of women during the British regime. She has pointed the contribution of women’s organizations for the uplift of the condition of women in the country from social, educational and political backwardness. She has also described the activities of women leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Rukmini Lakshmipati, Annie Besant and others during this period.

Gandhi (1959) \(^{37}\) in his book *Women’s Social Role in Society* deals with the social role of women and the concept of equality with men in society, property rights of women, ills of purdah, marital relationship, ills of child marriage and how women should participate in politics during the freedom movement. He also describes the Indian woman in the various facets of life viz. wife and mother and her condition as a prostitute and indicates the social bindings imposed on her. Shridevi (1965) \(^{38}\) in *A Century of Indian Womanhood*, study from 1857 to 1957 traces all the achievements of Indian women in all phases of life during the last hundred years. The entire Indian renaissance with its powerful motive forces guided the destiny of our women from their utter lowliness to one of high responsibility.

Kaur (1968) \(^{39}\) describes in her book the work done by women in various phases of the freedom struggle from 1857 to 1947. This book reveals the courageous and patriotic participation by women during the British period. Khosla (1969) \(^{40}\) has discussed the aims and objects of social reform movement and social legislation concerning women in India. He discusses the earliest enactment of Hindu Widows and Remarriage Act of 1856 and the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 which gave Hindu women much greater rights than previously enjoyed by them.
3.3.9 After Independence (After 1947-)

Chattopadhyay (1947) [41] discusses that women enjoyed in the past in the various fields of national affairs, she illustrates the percentage of women scholars, the educational facilities provided for women, the general condition of women’s health, and economic condition of Indian women and the percentage of women in planning in industries and in various professions. It also studies the legal and political status of Indian women.

Sengupta (1974) [42] in The Story of Women of India narrates the story of women of India from the ancient to the modern period. The status and position of women in the Vedic age, in the Buddhist, Moslem and British periods and their role in the freedom movement have been described. The post-independence movements for equality and better conditions of Indian women-from the enlightened to the downtrodden have been picturised.

Radhakrishnan (1948) [43] described the status of women in ancient India, forms of marriage, early marriage, and choice of partners, polyandry and polygamy, the status of the widow, system of divorce, social reforms and birth control. This book Religion and society is based on the notes of his lectures delivered in the universities of Calcutta and Banaras in the winter of 1942. According to Dharma, (1948) [44] women enjoyed considerable liberty during the Vedic age, and their dignity and rights were socially recognised. Girls, like boys, were given education and they were given training in fine arts like music, dance etc. During the Vedic age widow remarriage was allowed and the privileges enjoyed by women were more than what they are today.

Kaur (1948) [45] in her book To Women suggests to the educated women the various ways by which they can serve their less fortunate sisters. She discusses literacy programmes along with economic relief possibilities through jobs such as spinning, weaving, handicraft etc. for the professional benefit of the under-privileged women. Swami and Majumdar (1953) [46] in their book Great Women of India discussed the position and prospect of women in Indian society during the last few thousand years, and present a picture of their dreams and visions, hopes and aspirations, through an illustrative study of the life and achievements of the more outstanding ones among them.
Majumdar (1953) describe in *Great Women of India* the position of Indian women in domestic life. Even though theoretically the status of women suffered a considerable decline on account of the views and ideals preached in the later Smritis, their effect was considerably diminished in domestic life by the natural instincts of men, yet there is an element of nobility in the sacrifice and self-abnegation of Indian women.

Deshmukh (1956) discussed in her article *New Dimensions of Women’s Life in India* the changes in the role of a woman after independence. Woman is an active member of this developing nation. She gives the overall employment statistics, industrial and agricultural labour data. She also mentions the changes in social attitudes which have helped to lessen the inhibition in women’s life.

Desai (1957) discussed in her book *Woman in Modern India* she followed a context that began with Vedic society and moved through the Buddhist period, Puranic Hindu society, and Muslim rule ("one of the darkest periods") to the British Raj. In her view there was no "golden age" for women, antiquity was patriarchal, and even "great women" were under male domination. The puranas were written to establish brahmins as the highest class and this process further excluded women and limited their influence. Under Muslim rule, women suffered further restrictions on rights and freedom as the dual customs of purdah and polygamy took hold. She also described that the Indian women have many facets from the earliest time to the present. She also attempted to indicate the nature of problems which Indian women have confronted after independence. It is a study of a fundamental problem for the modern era- the relation of the position of woman to the economic and socio-cultural situation in which finds herself.

Deshmukh (1958) also in her article “*Women’s Education*” stresses the need for tackling the problem of women’s education from different angles. The prejudice against educating girls has to be eradicated by having useful programmes for training girls in a way which will help them to be self sufficient. To achieve this, rules may have to be relaxed and incentives may have to be offered. The need for adult education among women is also great.

Menon (1958) pointed out that the basic revolution in India was the revolution in the status of women. It is women's status that determines the degree of
the development of a society. Unless women enjoy social, economic and political rights and have full scope to make their contribution to society a nation cannot progress. The women in India are provided with opportunities in different fields to improve their status and they should avail of the opportunities and play an important role in the coming years in national development. She also describes the role of International Organisations in fulfilling the International objective of creating opportunities for women which increased participation in all spheres of activity in different countries. Statistics is furnished to compare the political representation and the women’s right to vote in India.

Baig’s (1958) book *Women in India* is a compilation of articles by different authors. The articles show the important role played by Indian women in history and in the social life of the country. Women have played their part in every branch of national activity from higher learning to valour in the battle-field, but it is their unobtrusive work in the household, in the village or in the larger community that has molded the nation.

Mookerji (1959) discussed the status of Indian women in ancient Indian society. The wife enjoyed with her husband full religious rights and regularly participated in religious ceremonies with him. He describes that Buddhist woman of ancient India who was made eligible for admission to religious schools known as Bhiksuni-Sangha, the order of nuns. The author cites highly educated women and their activities both in Hindu and Buddhist religious orders.

Pant (1960) discussed in his article *Education of Women* the aims of women's education. He says the specific aim of women's education is to relate their unique endowments and aptitudes to the nation's needs. Altekar (1962) in *Position of women in Hindu Civilization* surveys the position of women in Hindu civilization from pre-historic times to the present day. This survey also suggests certain general lines on which the present day problems confronting them should be tackled to arrive at a satisfactory solution and author also surveys the religious position of women in Vedic period.

Das (1962) treats the subject in his book ‘*Women in Manu and His Seven Commentators*’ comprehensively both in regard to status and rights of Women as daughter, wife and their right in regard to property first given in terms of Manu’s laws and followed by the views of commentators. This book is a study of social history of
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Indian womanhood up to the sixteenth century A.D. to which belongs the last commentator studied in this volume.

Kripalani (1964)\(^{[57]}\) discusses in her article *Women and National Development* the need for more participation of women in the different development programmes launched by the government and the voluntary organisations for the upliftment of the condition of women in India.

Thomas (1964)\(^{[58]}\) in his book *Indian Women through the Ages* contended that by the Middle Ages, Brahminism had deprived women of their individuality and they remained in subjugation until the nineteenth century. According to Thomas that improvement in women's status was a function of three forces: British rule, a general awakening in twentieth century Asia, and the Indian freedom movement. Beginning in the late nineteenth century Indian women styled ‘feminist’ by Thomas, took control of the movement for women's rights and began to control their own destiny.

Dastur (1969)\(^{[59]}\) in his article *Gandhiji and the Status of Indian Women* stated that Gandhiji had immense faith on the capability of women as genuine partners in a man’s life and a co-worker in his activities. He was a crusader against the legal disabilities, traditional drags and customary shackles which placed women in a less advantageous position compared to men. The author describes the events during Gandhiji’s lifetime when he supported the equal share of responsibility to be borne by women in political and social movements. She realizes that Indian women have come a long way to gain higher status but there is lot still to be done

Chattopadhyay (1969)\(^{[60]}\) discussed about Hindu Succession Act in her article *Women's Rights and Controversy on Succession Act* that the daughter was given equal rights with the son and the mother was given equal status with the father. It brought about radical changes in the age-old Hindu law by conferring the right of succession on the daughter and mother simultaneously. It also gives an account of the states in India where this Succession Act has been introduced to give equal rights to women.

Agarwal (1973)\(^{[61]}\) gives an account of the rural working women and their subordinate role in the society in spite of the services they render both in and out of home. Data on urban employed women is also given which brings out their conflicting roles at home and outside. It also deals with the injustice done to the blue collar women workers and stresses the need for equality in educational facilities for
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girls. The author believes that emancipation of women is inextricably linked with that of the emergence of a classless society.

In (1974) \[62\], the *report Toward Equality* of the Committee on the Status of Women in India was produced in 1971 by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare. It is not a history but employs an historical perspective in assessing women’s status. The impact of this report on the research done on women in India has been significant. First the report made scholars aware of the extent to which they had ignored the lives of ordinary women. Much of the scholarship that followed this report sought to compensate by focusing on the lives of women from the lower socio-economic strata. The authors of “Toward Equality” concluded that women's status had not improved in the twenty-five years since independence. They were especially disturbed by the "total invisibility and neglect" of women's economic roles at a time when women workers faced a shrinking market for their services.

The International Women's Decade, 1975-85, has provided an impetus to the growth of women’s literature. Women’s studies is now on the priority agenda of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the University Grants Commission (UGC). A number of important universities have Centers for Women's Studies. A research institute focusing on women, the Centre for Women's Development Studies was established with the support of ICSSR in 1980. There is also a full-fledged academic journal focusing on Women’s studies. Then ICSSR established an advisory committee on women's studies headed by Dr. Vina Mazumdar to support further research on women's lives and work in contemporary India. In the following years ICSSR and other institutes have sponsored a number of studies on working women and the conditions of their lives. As a consequence, a number of books have been published focusing on women with some attention to their history.

Jain’s (1975) \[63\] book *Indian Women* is a collection of articles written by various authors on a variety of topics covering the broad spectrum of the position and problems of women from the ancient to the modern period. The first five articles by Romila Thapar, Lakshmi Menon, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Ashok Rudra and M.A. Sreenivasan scan the historical background and describe the kinds of experience women had in different ages of India's past both near and distant. They try to explain the causes for the past variations and then project how these experiences might affect the role and the behaviour of Indian women today.
According to Dasgupta (1976) the real dividing line is undoubtedly 1921-1940 that makes period a sharp increase in research publications on women. This obviously indicates a major shift in the position of women in Indian society and can be traced to the impact of their participation in the freedom movement during this period and the beginning of the equality debate. During the period 1941-50 there were political questions related to the transfer of power and the partition of India and the era bed witnessed a major improvement in publication. It should however be remembered that serious research on women’s problems was activated by the investigation and the Report of the Committee on Status of Women in India.

According to Forbes (1998) the critical year for the history of Indian woman was 1975. Between 1975 and 1979 thirty books on women were published, as many as the total produced over the previous several decades. There is an historical study by Kalpna Dasgupta(1976) which focused specifically on women in India, in her book ‘Women on the Indian Scene’.

In 1984, Menon and Butalia founded the feminist publishing firm, Kali for Women, as an independent non-profit trust. In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices edited by Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita (1984) were rallying cries that focused world attention on the deadly nature of son-preference and systematic and pervasive violence against women. At the same time these books made it clear that Indian women were organizing to protest injustice and fight for their rights.

Some studies have been done by Desai and Patel (1985) on the issues of rape, sexual harassment in the workplace, and violence against women in the family and public sphere which are major issues on which women at micro and macro levels have been struggling. Devaki Jain (1986) and others see Gandhi as a great liberator who adopted a revolutionary approach in raising the status of women.

Recasting Women, edited by Sangari and Vaid (1989) signaled a new direction in the study of women and gender in India. They expressed special concern with the resurgence of patriarchy in post-independence India manifested in atrocities against women, such as dowry murder and widow immolation, communal violence and the marginalization of women in production.

The search for women's voices has been of major importance in this period. Women Writing in India, edited by Tharu and Lalita, is one of the most ambitious and valuable collections published to date. Volume I (1991) included translations of
women's writing from the 6th century BC to the early twentieth century and Volume II (1993) has twentieth century women writers representing eleven regional languages.

Heptulla (1992)\[70\], discussed in Development Strategies for Women: Need for Political Will that the constitution guarantees equal rights to women with men. Some notable legal measures which reached the statute book were the special Marriage Act, Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Adoption and maintenance Act, Dowry Prohibition Act, Maternity Benefit Act, Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act and Anti-Rape Laws.

Kumar (1993)\[71\], published A History of Doing an illustrated account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India1800-1990. It is a wonderfully illustrated look on women's movement and activism

Agarwal’s (1994)\[72\] A Field of One’s Own focuses on the material basis of women’s subordination, especially their property rights. Agarwal has written an encyclopedic account of gender and land rights while Wadley's longitudinal study of the North Indian village lets the villagers tell their own story. Chowdhury (1994)\[73\] in The Veiled Women: Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana 1880-1990, looks at women’s roles- economic, marriage customs, widowhood, inheritance- and sees a worsening situation. Chowdhury notes that although modern development has transformed the face of Haryana, women have not benefited from these changes. In 1995 were published two new valuable collections of articles on women Form the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women, edited by Bharti Ray and ‘Indian Women: Myth and Reality’, edited by Jasodhara Bagchi.

Sarkar and Butalia (1995)\[74\] have discussed that feminist consciousness does not nestle within a woman, ready to attain progressive self-realisation within and congenial environment, but is acquired through bitter conflicts and problems of choices- within herself most of all.

Basu and Ray (1999)\[75\] also argues that is that women can assume activist roles without violating the norms of Hindu womanhood or ceasing, to be dutiful wives and mothers. The support of prominent men in religious and political life not only legitimates their roles but also bridges the chasm between good citizens and devoted wives and mothers. Women activists frequently expressed their wrath on the incidents
of rape, molestation and domestic violence against women—including bride-burning and dowry.

Ray’s (2000) \footnote{Ray’s (2000) \textit{Fields of Protest: Women’s Movements in India} in her well-conceived empirical study on different issues like violence against women, poverty and unemployment is of the opinion that consciousness and literacy are more important than other issues.} deals with the position of Hindu widows in India. Widows were regarded inauspicious and their presence was unwanted at any auspicious ceremony. It also shows women's status in the home and outside home; her position as a widow and it indicates the property rights of women and also discusses the social status of Hindu widows. She also discusses the earliest enactment of Hindu widows and Remarriage Act of 1856 and the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 which gave Hindu women much greater rights than previously enjoyed by them.

Patil (2000) \footnote{Patil (2000) deals with the position of Hindu widows in India. Widows were regarded inauspicious and their presence was unwanted at any auspicious ceremony.} discussed that the movement in the earlier phase had to deal with the violence on a woman’s body, violence on her personality and violence of values. Killing of female foetuses, violence as represented in media, particularly cinema, beauty contests parading women’s bodies, psychological explanations of the phenomenon of rape or wife battering are illustrations of acceptance of violence by the wider society.

Jayapalan, (2001) \footnote{Jayapalan, (2001) discusses that the violence against women is related to and grows out of their position in society. Violence continues unabated and no social action has been forthcoming. Legislation exists, but is seldom implemented with care of readiness. Rape is a heinous crime. Cast, religious, communal and class factors also play a role in the violence against women. The remedy for violence is not far to seek.} discussed on women’s issues that women will receive their due rights and place in society. She argued at that time women did not talk of women’s independence and equality in the manner they ought to have, that they merely chose to substitute slaver to a husband with slavery to God. In sum, they were inadequate as historical source of inspiration for women because they could not be considered sufficiently feminist

Kishwar, (2002) \footnote{Kishwar, (2002) discussed on women’s issues that women will receive their due rights and place in society.} discussed on women’s issues that women will receive their due rights and place in society. She argued at that time women did not talk of women’s independence and equality in the manner they ought to have, that they merely chose to substitute slaver to a husband with slavery to God. In sum, they were inadequate as historical source of inspiration for women because they could not be considered sufficiently feminist

Chakravarti (2003) \footnote{Chakravarti (2003) explore women’s movement of previous several decades that has provided context and impetus for the emergence of women’s studies} explore women’s movement of previous several decades that has provided context and impetus for the emergence of women’s studies
in India. Basic premise is that the concepts, tools and techniques that are now in use, endorse gender-based discrimination and the denial of equity to women.

Goel (2004) \[82\] explicates the educational social and economic position of women. She highlights the importance of education among women that the education of women is fundamental for the achievement and full exercise of their legal and social independence. A new role of seeking employment and working outside the home has now been added to her traditional roles as wife and mother.

Siddiqui (2005) \[83\] described the position of women of the Aryan invaders of India as one of authority and honour. They could inherit property and could be married at a proper age, marriage sometimes take place by free choice of the man and woman. The customs of child marriage and enforced widowhood were not prevalent among the Aryans of Vedic time.

Kalia, (2005) \[84\] described that it definitely is a tough life for a working women. There is no dearth of equality before the law; we have law for equal pay, against rape and molestation, female infanticide and everything on paper that would be the envy of even the strongest advocates of female emancipation. He also discussed other issues like sexual harassment, low pay, and double workload of women need attention.

Usha and Murali, (2006) \[85\] discussed that the notion of the female deity as sakti, the power and strength of a temporal existence or as kali, the destroyer of evil and preserver of justice went alongside with the apparition of the Devi as the smiling virgin or as Laxsmi the epitome of plenitude, domestic harmony and continuity the benevolent Mother Goddess.

Vidya, (2007) \[86\] described that women achieve an equal share of political power; many things beside politics will have changed profoundly. Some further breaking- down of the barriers that constrain the development of individual talents and restrict the range of human resources available to meet society’s need will have taken place. In this respect, women’s increasing political participation is both a source and a signal of social change.

Bisht, and Madhu (2008) \[87\] described that today women have become aware of their rights. They want opportunities of equality as well as an identity of own. Different feminist movements have created awareness for rights among women and
given opportunities to perform roles of their choice. They have started talking of their rights and freedom, showing more awareness of the opinions and attitude.

As above discourse that, women’s studies, in turn, can be defined as a comprehensive literature that embodies its concern for women’s equality, and development and it seeks to find explanations and remedies for the unequal position of women in society. After an extensive literature review on the position of woman divulges the fact that the position and condition of woman have been changing “from age to age”. Sometimes, even within the same century, diametrically opposite views about the worth and importance of women, have prevailed. While one school calls women the highest gift of God to man, the other asserts that the best way to reach God is to avoid women. On one hand women were regarded as an originator, a beginner, a divinity a mark of prosperity and most beautiful and marvelous, creation on earth but on the after they are oppressed and controlled.

Today women have attained a remarkable position in probably all fields and they are in no way inferior to men they have contributed in almost every field and made country feel proud at every occasion. They are in front, leading the country, making mile stones and source of inspiration for many. The need of the honor is for the women to realize their rights and be vigilant. However they are struggling for their own identity, shouting for diffusion of their voices and fighting for their own esteem. Every day, they cross among the fears and fraught for individuality. They continue to face a number of problems viz female foeticide, female infanticide, neglect of girl child, dowry death, incidence of bride-burning, woman battering, violence against women in and outside family, sexual exploitation and discrimination at workplace and lack of inheritance and feminine trafficking etc.

It is high time now that women should get a respectable and dignified position in the Indian society. Awareness in the women as well as society should be created and their equal rights should effectively be implemented. It is hoped that the National Commission for women would facilitate India’s women allow them to meet the new century with the capacity to fully achieve their potential with dignity and equality.
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