CHAPTER–I
INTRODUCTION
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Women studies have become a very important area of research since the middle of 1960's in other countries of the world. In India the importance of the issues relating to women was taken up with the formation of the ‘Committee on the Status of Women’ by the Government of India in 1975. Different approaches are adopted to examine the position and the status of women in any given social structure. Women issues cannot be studied in isolation from the social structure, beliefs and norms prevailing in the society. One has to study the different stages in the growth of the family and of the society so as to understand the position of the women.

There are different views regarding the development of the family and society. One view is that from primitive times, the family was headed by the father thus giving rise to patriarchal system. Another view is that there was matriarchal system, headed by the mother.

The early investigations of savage society, to their own surprise, came upon a social structure totally different from modern times. There was a clan and a tribal system based on maternal kinship in which women played a leading role. Primitive society developed as maternal clans. There were sex taboos within the maternal clan system. These taboos were imposed by women to protect themselves and to get proper time for their children. Thus taboo system was connected with the matrilineal kinships.
This system was the earliest regulator of the two important human needs — food and sex.\footnote{Reed Evelyn, \textit{Women's Evolution}, Pathfinder Press, New York Toronto, 1976, p.23.}

As a matter of fact, females possess biological requirement for mammalian purposes. They are blessed with mammal organs and motherhood. There was no male subordination in primitive society. On the other hand, males were characterised by wild and violent nature. They were not co-operative and constructive in labour activities. Both sexes were unequally endowed by nature. The biological advantages for humanising the species were on the side of the female.

Females, with their nurturing instincts, enable them to lead the way in the modification of animal impulses and gradually replaced them with socialised behaviour. They were responsible for bringing changes from animalism to humanism. Thus far from being handicapped by their biology, the female sex was in fact the biologically advantaged sex. The females had more capacity for co-operation and collective action. As mother, they wielded their socialising influences over the young males. These biological advantages enabled them to institute prohibition and restraints required for social life. Through various avenues of research, anthropologists discovered that a maternal form of social organisation had preceded the civilised patriarchal society.

From the stage of primitive hordes to the stage of tribes, the descent has been traced through mothers and not through fathers. The guardian of
the child was not the father but the mother’s brother. The role of maternal
uncle in respect of the guardianship of the child indicated that father had
little role in the rearing of the child. According to E. N. Falaize, even after
the family was formed, the mother’s brother carried out the obligations of
rearing the child. In connection with the child development in the family,
Morgan, the anthropologist gave five stages—

1. Maternal primal stage
2. Cross-cousin mating
3. Pairing family
4. Patriarchal family and
5. Monogamous family

This sequence of family development show matri-family as the
starting point for an exposition of the origin of the family.

In the third stage of the sequence, the concept of family was known
to the people with the introduction of the marriage institution. The father
also started to share with the mother in the rearing of the children.

Thus husbands’ right to perform the maternal functions was
established socially and ritually. It was generally called ‘Couvade’ which
means ‘Father rite’.²

With the passage of time, there was antagonism between the sons
and the nephews over the division of property. The uncle who took charge
of rearing his sister’s child also had bias view in the division of property.

² Ibid p. 343.
This partiality led to the enmity of the two kin. Anthropologists also assert that domination of the male sex over the female sex came into existence out of the struggle between the two groups—fatherline and motherline (paternal and maternal).

At last the father encroached upon the jurisdiction of the brother in-law and eventually usurped the long established primacy of the mother’s brother. Consequently matri-family was torn between the two fathers — real father and the mother’s brother. Thus ended the matriarchal system and started the patriarchal system in which the father was the sole head of the family.

Thus with the full fledged development of the patriarchal family, women lost their control over their lives, their destinies and even their bodies. They became part and parcel of his private property. Wives were thus reduced to a mere child bearing machine in the hands of the husbands under their full domination. The matriarchal system thus slowly faded from the society with the evolution of family and property.

**Position of Women in Ancient India**

Indian history as recorded in the Puranas and Brahmanas, the first king of India was ‘Manu Svayambhu’ (the self-born). Manu was born directly of the God Brahma, and was a hermaphrodite (half male; half female)\(^3\). From the female half of his body he bore two sons and three daughters, from whom descended a series of Manus. One of them called

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Prithu became the King of Earth and gave to the earth his name Prithvi. The ninth Manu was the most famous of them all. Manu had nine sons, the eldest of whom was a hermaphrodite—hence known by the dual name Ila and Ila. From these two sons developed two mainlines of Royal descent, the Solar dynasty (Surya Vamsa) from Ila and Lunar dynasty (Chandra Vamsa) from Ila.

Here the hermaphrodite depicts that man and women are equally important in creation of the Universe. The role of man and woman in family and society are equally significant.

**Indus Civilisation:** In the Indus Civilization, the mother Goddess was the great mother and a prototype of power, later on developed into that of Shakti. There is no reason to believe that the cult of the mother Goddess originated in Anatolia or any other particular country because of the motherhood of God and the divinity of nature are quite common among the primitive peoples of the world and are widespread and deep rooted in India. The Goddess was represented in every village as the tutelary deity Grama Devta and known under various names, such as Mata, Amba, Kali etc.; sometimes to be dreaded, sometimes warding of evil spirits, imparting futility etc. Only then worship of male God i.e. Shiv was practiced.

It shows that women occupied an important place during the period of Indus Civilization. The majority of the human figurines were female like dancing girls. During this period women actively participated in the cultural field like music and dance. The female figurines were the earliest
examples of the ‘Graven image’ that we possess and were apparently the first object of worship of the species homo sapiens. It also implies that there was matrilineal system during the Indus Civilized period.

**Vedic Period:** In the Vedic period the foundation of social life was the patriarchal family and there was absolute control by the parents over children. Women held a very high position during the Vedic period. They were involved and participated equally with men relating to work and worship. Women took part in sacrifices along with their husbands and joined them in making oblations. A sacrifice participated by both husband and wife was considered the most blessed one. The God themselves covet the worship of a couple who offer sacrifice. There was no mention of women being secluded or, veiled or, excluded from all their legitimate spheres. They were learned and cultured, and many of them composed hymns. Some of the women scholars were Visvavara, Gosha, Apala etc. who attained the rank of Rishis and composed hymns. Purdah system was not there in Vedic period. They enjoyed equal rights with men in matter of choosing the life partner in marriage. The custom of Satipradha was unknown and widow remarriage was allowed by the society and were fairly common. Perhaps the position of women during the Vedic period was one of the highest ever occupied by them in Indian History both in and outside the household activities.

**Later Vedic Period:** During the later Vedic period the position of the women had considerably declined. They did not enjoy the same position as they did in the early Vedic period. Women no longer participated in the sacrifices nor, could they own or, inherit property. They did not take part in politics and were not allowed to attend in the meetings of Assemblies or, Sabha. The women’s dignity had reduced so much so that the Maitrayani Samhita classed women along with dice and wine, as one of the chief evils. This attitude to women continued from generation to generation. Even today one speaks of wine, war and women. Brahmaṇa says ‘a daughter is the cause of sorrow and a son is like the sun in the heaven’.

But regarding the education, it was open to both men and women. There were women scholars like Gargi during the period. There were also a number of women Rishis participating actively in the spiritual life of the society.

On the other hand Brahmaṇa extol the married women only when she is linked with her husband and not by herself alone. The Satapatha Brahmaṇa, for example says ‘the wife is one half of the husband, therefore a man is incomplete without a partner’.

It is obvious that the higher position of women was always linked up with that of the husband. Unmarried women were denied higher position occupied by the married women. A man was allowed to marry many wives

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and a woman had to stick to one man. Then the customs of Sati, child marriage, and prohibition of widow remarriage were widely prevalent during the period. It indicates the lower position of women in the society. The lower and subordinate position occupied by women was strengthened in due course of time resulting in the complete subordination of women to men. Women had to depend completely on men. The life of women was characterised by the protection provided by the father during girlhood, by the husband after marriage and by the son during old days. She was always subjected to the authority of the father, of the husband and of the son. The concept of equality between men and women, husband and wife has gone through one of the inequality and subordination of women to men in the later Vedic period.

**Epic Period:** We can adopt two approaches for the study of women during the Epic period by classifying into two—

a) Women belonging to the upper class and

b) Women belonging to the lower class.

The practice of Swayambhara giving the right to choose one’s husband was given to women of upper classes.

In the Ramayana, Sita was regarded as one of the ideal and reversed woman of India. Other women famous in the Epic period were Ahilaya, Draupadi, Tara and Mandodori etc. These women epitomised moral purity and ideal womanhood. Sita was depicted as one who prepared to sacrifice all the luxuries of the palace and accompanied her husband to the forest. Here the exemplary conduct of Sita as a wife and the purity of her motives
had been depicted as the qualities of an ideal woman. On the other hand, the testing of the purity and chastity of Sita through the burning process and sending her again to the forest shows that women were placed in a lower position. In the Ramayana, Tulsidas classified women in the groups of Drums, Morons, Sudras and Cattle as object fit to be beaten. This attitude had considerably influenced the mind of the Hindu masses towards women. Again, keeping the golden statue of Sita beside the throne of the King Rama shows that without the queen, the coronation of Rama as a king could not perform. This practice again established the fact that society had given respect and importance to women.

In the Mahabharata, women were honoured and adored. Where women were treated with honour the very Gods were said to be propitiated and where women were not adored, all acts became fruitless.

The position of women as a mother had been elevated to a very high position in religious literature during the period. The Mahabharata says that mother excels in her greatness ten times than the father and even the whole earth.⁹ There is no guru like mother. Even a Sanyasi is expected to touch the feet of his mother.

Women used to perform the task of counselling and guiding men on religious and social matters and often participated in discussions on various issues. On the other hand there is reverse description of women in the Mahabharata, ‘it is said that the woman is the root of all evil, and that she is narrow minded’.¹⁰ Women were also considered men’s property or,

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¹⁰ Ibid.
commodity. For instance, Draupadi was put on betting by her husband Yudhistir and moreover she was undressed by Dushasant in the court of King Dhistarastra.

This practice is also reflected in the mode of Hindu worship, i.e. from the way they elevated Gods and Goddesses. The deities were worshipped in two ways, a) as a couple and b) independently in their own rights. While naming and addressing God and Goddess them jointly, the name of Goddess always preceded to that of God, for instance, Lakshmi Narayan, Sita Ram, Radha Krishna etc. Some Goddesses are also worshipped independently like Durga, Kali, Saraswati etc.\textsuperscript{11}

During this period we find polygamy and polyandry, both being practiced. For example, in the Ramayana, King Dasharath had three wives while in Mahabharata, Draupadi had five Pandavas as her husband. Early child marriage and Sati system were also prevalent. Abhimanyu’s marriage proved the existence of early child marriage system. Madri, wife of Pandu burnt herself on the pyre of her husband, Pandu. Under the impact of Hinduism, women were regarded, first, as embodiment of purity and spiritual power. Secondly, women were also viewed as basically weak and dependent creatures requiring constant tutelage and guardianship of men.

\textbf{Sixth Century BC:} The position of women was different in Buddhism which flourished in the sixth century BC. The religion was more practical and elastic as well as highly ethical. In Buddhism, every human being man or woman is a free agent, able to work out his own salvation independent of any supernatural agency or, the medium of priest or, rituals. Buddhism

as a literal reaction against orthodox Brahmanism elevated the status of women. The inequality between men and women was discarded in matters of religion, both sexes were charged with the duty of upholding Dharma. Hence, women in Buddhism enjoyed a special place.

Buddhist marriage was organised in a simpler ceremony, it was a purely civil contract. The prescribed age of a girl at a marriage was twenty and was allowed to enjoy an independent choice. Women had the same right as the men on the question of the inheritance of property. Though women enjoyed equal rights and status in respect of choosing her life partner and inheritance of property with men, she was practically placed in a lower position and status. This was amply proved by the existence of polygamy system during the sixth century period. Women occupied lower status both in mundane as well as monastic life. The nature of women was characterised as being jealous, envious, stupid and full of anger. According to Budha ‘crying is the power of the child; anger is the power of women’.¹²

The Muslim Period (Medieval)

The advent of Muhammadanism with Arab invasions beginning in 712 AD was marked by the emergence of a new religion and culture. There was peculiar inconsistency in the position assigned to women in the interim period between the end of the Hindu rule and the beginning of Turkish one. On the one hand women were considered to be slavishly dependent on their husbands so much so that they had almost no entity of their own. It is largely seclusion that had kept women backward in respect

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of education and health and prevented their economic and social participation and had been a hurdle in the way of realizing their property rights. The Muslim Shamat law which has developed over the centuries places women in an inferior position in many respects. The powerful Muslims started the practice of marrying forcibly Hindu daughters by converting them to Islam. Consequently due to the terror of Turks and nefarious activities, many social practices came into existence that went against women. The Hindu heroic women began to embrace burning pyre instead of being captives of the Muslims. This led to the establishment of the evil custom, euphemistically called ‘Jauhar’ or, ‘Sati’. Secondly, Hindus under the compelling circumstances, started keeping women in seclusion, out of the sight of Muslim traitors. This gave rise to the baneful Purdah system resulting in the seclusion of women in the Zenana. Thirdly, the birth of a female was to be considered a burden and was not welcomed by the parents in the families, both Hindus and Muslims. This tendency had given rise to infanticide and led to the development of the practice of polygamy too. Fourthly, the strict social control over widows made the life of the widows miserable and many of them became whores. Finally, education was beyond the reach of common women in general; only women belonging to the elite class enjoyed the opportunities for religious learning and mental discipline.

Due to the social limitations and restrictions prescribed by the society, there was no progress and development in matters relating to ordinary common women. On the other hand there were women administrators, warriors, reformers, religious teachers etc. The names of

Padmini, Razziya Begum, Durgawati, Chand Bibi represented women warriors and women administrators. There were women rulers like Suryamati, queen of Ananta, queen Rudramba who ruled the Kakatiya kingdom for nearly forty years and won admiration of Marco Polo. Akbar called them 'flaming torches of love and fellowship.' The above classes of women warriors, administrators, religious teachers etc. belonged to the higher level of social hierarchy. The Muslim women were not allowed to go to mosque. Thus Muslim conquest was particularly detrimental to the status of women. The status of women in society touched its nadir.

The British Period

The old social order slowly changed with the coming of British to India. The Britishers introduced western system of education in both provinces and princely states of India. The western system of education however did not appeal to the people of India. Slowly and slowly male population of the urban area got admitted to schools established by the British. Women were kept within the restrictions prescribed by the society, not allowing them to go to schools. Very few women belonging to urban families sent their daughters to schools established by the British. Even before the implementations of the provisions made in the Wood's despatch of 1854 regarding education for women, the British was impressed by the active role of Indian women in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The part played by women in the great outbreak of 1857-58 attracted the admiration of the Britishers. It was Rani of Jhansi about whom Sir Hugh Rose observed '  

she was the bravest best military leader of the rebels'.

Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi inspired women as well as men of India. The way she participated in it and did fighting valiantly at the battle field was the revelation of potentialities of women.

The Rani of Ramgarh met her death during the battlefield while Begum Hassrat Mahal had to escape to Nepal and died there in exile. The period marked the beginning of social reforms and social reconstruction. Social reformers both men and women appeared on the scene of India to uplift the womanhood of the land. Though there was the tendency among the parents to prefer boys to girls for getting education; the need of educating women in India had started receiving some attention. There were still several impediments in the way of women’s freedom to get education on par with men, as conservative minds had continued to disapprove imparting of higher education to women. Social reformers like Pandita Rama Bai, Rama Bai Ranade and others had to come out openly advocating women’s cause.

**Emergence of Women in the Political Arena:** The birth of Indian National Congress in 1885 furnished a political platform to women. It was in the year 1900 that Swarnkumari and Y. Gangoli attended the political meetings and were the first women to speak from the congress platform. This was perhaps the new beginning of the new era. In course of time more women from the political families started to participate in the political movements of the country by taking active part.

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The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed the revolutionary activities in the political field of India. Sarla Devi and Bhikaji Rustom, K.R. Cama openly supported the revolutionaries and became outstanding leaders. Annie Besant, a British lady contributed a lot in the Home Rule movement in India. The movement was very strong during the period, 1916-1918 and influenced many women in India. Annie Besant was given the highest honour being elected the President of the India National Congress.

In later years, women of India started to participate actively in the resistance movement under the leadership of Gandhi. O'Malley observed that ‘at the very moment when the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi were calling on them for a national effort, they recognised that the prophet and the paramount had each placed a valuable weapon within their reach with one hand they grasped passive resistance and with the other the vote’.

Thousands of women joined the Satyagraha movement of Gandhiji. They raised their voices against Rowlatt Act, Salt Laws, Forest Laws and went to jail as a consequence of their working of mind towards various social customs, child marriage, the plight of a widow in society, the cases of Sati in various regions, marrying more than one woman by a man and numerous other obnoxious customs, were to be tackled and generate the

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16 O' Malley (Ed), Modern India and the West, Oxford University Press, London, 1941, p.475.
spirit of economic independence with clear realization of the ideology of Swaraj.\textsuperscript{17}

Finally Gandhiji decided on the form in which non-violent Civil Disobedience movement was to be launched. It would begin with a march by him from his Sabramati Ashram to Dandi in the Gujarat sea coast. Its purpose was to break the Salt law by manufacturing illegally but openly from the sea. Soon March 12, 1930 Gandhiji followed by 78 selected followers began the 241 mile walk through villages and reached on April 5. Women like Sorojini Naidu, Durga Bai, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, Lado Rani Zutshi and many others took leading role in the movement.

On 7th April Gandhiji broke the Salt Law and boycotted the using of British clothes and goods. Mrs. Motilal Nehru appealed to her sisters of India to consider the touch of foreign cloth as polluting ‘This cloth has blood of our brothers and sisters, how can we wear it’.\textsuperscript{18} In this regard Gandhiji expressed his view on Bai Amman, ‘She realised that the freedom of India was impossible without Hindu—Muslim unity and Khaddar. She therefore ardently preached unity which had become an article of faith with her. She had discarded all her foreign or mill made clothing and taken to Khaddar.’\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika}, March 23, 1922.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
Sorujini Naidu was not only the first Indian woman to become the President of Indian National Congress in 1925 but was also the first woman to lead the biggest salt raid in Bombay.

While men were in prison, it was left to the women of India to guide and lead the people during the critical periods of the movement. In a bid to achieve their aim, women like Swaroop Rani Nehru, wife of Nehru, had faced the Lathi blows and bullets.

The demand for independence brought in other concessions for Indians in the form of Government of India Act, 1935. By virtue of this act, responsible ministries were formed in 1937 in the provinces after the general elections. Vijayalakshmi Pandit became the first woman minister while Ansuyabi Kale and Sipi Milani became the Deputy Speakers of central provinces and Sindh Assemblies respectively.

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, the demand for independence by the national movement became stronger. Women took part in Quit India Movement, 1942. They took out processions, held demonstrations and organised camps for women to give them the required training. Women like Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta, Kripalani and Usha Mehta worked in underground during this period.

After the Second World War in 1945 and with the coming of Labour Government headed by Clement Attle in U.K, the national movement in India seem to achieve its objective. The passing of the Indian Independence Act, 1947 marked the ending of British rule in India. Thus
women played a great role in India’s freedom struggle and in the achievement of Independence.

**Women in the Post-Independence Period**

The Preamble to the Constitution of India declares equality of status and provides equal opportunities to all citizens, thereby making no difference between men and women. The beginning words of the Preamble runs as follows—

We the people of India having solemnly resolved to constitute India in **Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic** and to secure to all its citizens; **Justice**, social, economic, political; **Liberty** of thought, expression, faith, belief and worship, **Equality** of status and opportunity; to promote among all; **Fraternity** assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.

To attain these national objectives, the Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights including freedom of speech, protection of life and personal liberty etc. Indian women are the beneficiaries of these rights in the same manner as the Indian men. Article 14 ensures ‘Equality before law and article 15 prohibits any discrimination. Article 15(3) empowers the state to ‘any special provisions for women and children’.

State Policy of the Directive Principles in Part IV of the Indian Constitution pays concern on women directly and have a special bearing on their status, including, Article 39(a) which provides Right to an
adequate means of livelihood for men and women. Thus the Constitution provided many articles for the welfare & upliftment of women.

But majority of women could not enjoy the benefits of the Articles of the Constitution due to the tradition-bound social evils, superstitions, ignorance and irrational beliefs and orthodoxy of the Indian society. The first, the second, the fourth and the fifth, five year plans passed without any special provisions for the upliftment of women and without any scope for involvement of women in the development process. It was in the Sixth-Five Year Plan (1980-85) i.e. after over three decades in India’s Planning history, that a separate chapter on ‘Woman and Development’ was included in the plan document. However this too lacked the instruments that could help rhetoric rise to the level of a force capable of changing the harsh realities of women’s life.

The number of educated women had increased and the great increase in the number of industries, a result of the creation of public sector undertaking by the Government, gave more women an opportunity to work. In the words of Nehru, ‘The great revolution in a country is the one that affects the status and living conditions of its women’.

The career of women has been expanded and it is no longer limited to the household chores. They are now employed in the fields of teaching, medicine, law, film industry, public sector, fine arts, literature, sports etc.

Women also took a keen interest in political activities in the post
independence India. With the gradual rise of literacy in India women were
able to free themselves from the shackles of superstitions and orthodoxy
went even to the extent of contesting elections and some of them were
even elected to the Legislature at the Centre and State. They have accepted
and successfully carried out the responsibilities of high offices of Prime
Ministers, Ministers, Governors and Ambassadors etc. For instance, Mrs.
Sucheta Kripalani had the distinction of becoming the Chief Minister of
Uttar Pradesh, Shashikala Kakedkar, the Chief Minister of Goa and Mrs.
Satpati Nandini, the Chief Minister of Orissa and Mrs. Sorojini Naidu
became the first Governor of Uttar Pradesh. Later her daughter Padmaja
Naidu became the Governor of West Bengal.

There were also women who excelled in the international field. Mrs.
Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit became the woman President of the UN Assembly,
a rare honour for the women of the world and she was also an ambassador.
Similarly, Amrit Kaur became the Vice President of League of Red Cross.
Mrs. Indira Gandhi became the first woman Prime Minister of India in
1966 after the death of Lal Bahadur Shashtri.

**Women and Election:** In the first elections held in 1952 unexpectedly
several women stood for the membership of Parliament as well as of the
State legislatures.
Table-1  

Electoral Participation of Women (Lok Sabha Election).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elections Year</th>
<th>Seats won by Women</th>
<th>Total Seats Contested</th>
<th>Total Seats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>1984</td>
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<td>421</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>28</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lok Sabha Proceeding

In addition to Parliamentary and State Assembly elections, a large number of women also contested in the elections of the local bodies and got elected to Municipalities, Panchayats, District Boards, Taluka Boards etc.

Long back Gandhiji said that women must have votes and equal status. But the problem does not end. It only commences at the point where it began to affect the political deliberations of the nation.
Women lack channels to express their opinions. The fruits of progress are not reaching women. The religious practice, rituals, scriptures and precepts are still the forces which continue to create women's existing secondary status in society.  

The traditional attitude towards women is still prevalent in the present day society. Many leaders, intellectuals and enlightened persons believed till today, that the primary duty of women is the proper management of home and to look after the children and other members of the family. In this regard, the first Indian Governor General of India C. Raja Gopalchari believed that looking after home may be women's best career.

Thus women in India for a long time remained confined within the four walls. Only a few elite women who have political background had participated in the political movement and decision-making process of the country.

Thus women in India had to go a long way in order to reach the level of participation in the social and political process of the state. It is only after independence and with the enforcement of the Constitution of India in 1950 that woman are given equal rights and opportunities to develop themselves and participate in the social and political life without any restriction. But in reality, women do not find themselves free from the

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social norms and the structures prescribed by the traditional social norms and beliefs.

With this background in views, the following chapters examine the position and role of Manipuri women in the social, economic and political life of the state.