CHAPTER III

POSITION OF INDIAN WOMEN : AN OVERVIEW

The human society is everywhere composed of males and females and the society is stratified on the basis of sex. Women constitute half of the population and thus, a significant segment of every society. Hence, their status, role and position determine the progress and development of the society as well as identify the culture and values on which the society is based.

This chapter explains how women excelled in social spheres along with men and how changes occurred in her position since Manu and further deteriorated and subjected to suppression throughout Indian History. At the same times it attempts to picturise the status of women in pre and post independent India and the changes in their status.

India has a long past civilization and in every stage of its history, women constitute half of its population, but their position in society is not the same in all the ages of history. Their position has been variously estimated and diametrically opposite views are expressed regarding their place in different stages of Indian civilisation. Several factors including foreign invasions for centuries together, social movements, various geographic regions, different economic occupations, political stability and instability and religious affinity of the family to which women
belong have greatly influenced her status in the family as well as in the community.²

However, for the sake of analysis, the position of women in India can be studied in different phases of history, namely, Ancient India, Medieval India, British India, and post-independent India. As the present research aims at analyzing the contributions of Basaveshwara and Dr B. R. Ambedkar for empowerment of Indian women, an attempt has been made to bring to general position of women in India down to 20th century CE.

**Women in Ancient and Medieval India**

More than two thousand years ago, the *Rigveda*, the *Upanishad*, Kautilya’s *Arthasastra* and many other writings reveal that woman in India enjoyed a fair measure of equality with men in all spheres of human activity -spiritual and religious, teaching and learning, even war and statecraft. The *Rig Veda* propagated that reality consists of two aspects, that is, male and female. Except Hindu religious scriptures, nowhere it is written that male and female are counterparts of each other, both are complimentary to each other and both in the form of *Shiva* and *Sakti* constitute the Nature. Hindu religion provides the concept of unity of male and female, which equally contribute for sustaining the Reality. Further, the woman in traditional religious belief has been regarded as the Universal Mother. The common metaphor used to describe her as
Prithivi (Mother earth), who upholds all the living and non-living beings. Finally, she had been portrayed as Prakriti, while male had been described as Purusa. Hence, Prakriti and Purusa, female and male together constitute the Reality or Nature. This religious dictate determined the equal virtue of women in family and in society. During the Vedic period, education was imparted to both male and female child. In fact, the education of women was looked upon as so important that the Atharva Veda asserts that “the success of woman in her married life depends upon her proper training during the Brahmacharya.” Hence, the girls like the boys had to undergo the initiation, the Samskar, Upanayan and Brahmacharya. They were also allowed to perform Sandhya rites like the male persons. Women thus, learnt and recited Vedas and took part in conferences and deliberations and in this context, the names of women like Lopamudra, Brahmavadini, Gargi etc. are still heard as the most learned philosopher women of Vedic age.

Even when, Buddhism and Jainism were spread in ancient India, both these religions did not make any gender discrimination, so far as education and religious preaching were concerned. The women during this period undertook equal pain like male missionaries by travelling far and wide for preaching the messages of Lord Buddha. They led a life of celibacy and became prophets of Holy Scriptures. The Buddhist history still carries the messages of the famous nun Amrapalli and the
missionary Sanghamitra, daughter of King Ashok who even reached Ceylon to spread Buddhist teachings. Similar was the case of Jainism, as one of the Great 24 Tirthankars of Jainism was Mali, daughter of King Videha.

Not only did the women of ancient India were imparted with religious education, but they were also well equipped with military and administrative training. Of course, the women of ruling elite class families were given this type of training. To give illustration, we may cite from history Dowager Queens, Nayanika of Satavahana dynasty (2nd century BCE), Prabhavati Gupta of Vakataka family (4th century CE.), Vijayabhattarika of Chalukya House (7th century CE.), and Sugandha and Didda of Kashmir (10th century CE.), who successfully administered extensive kingdoms.

The social status of women during this period was also very illuminating. Girls had their effective say in choosing their life partners and also in the marriage affair. Swayamvara was an accepted practice among the Kshatriyas in ancient India. Girls, after obtaining puberty became eligible to marry. Child-marriage was rare. So, before marriage, women were well-equipped with education and training. Even, pre-marital and extra-marital affairs of the women were not looked down by the social norms of ancient India. As Prof. Mazumdar observes, “Even wives suspected of paramours were not denied social and religious
rites, far less driven away from the family." Prostitution, though existed as a rare phenomenon, did not degrade the status of women in the society of the ancient period. The *Rig Veda*, the Buddhist *Jatakas* mention that prostitution was treated as a part of the social system and was not totally absent in the society. Nevertheless, the prostitutes also commanded a certain amount of status in the society and they were economically well paid. The other manifestation of prostitution was found in the accepted custom of dancers in the king’s palaces and Devdasis in the Hindu temples. Elopement, though unusual, was not negatively sanctioned.⁵

Further, in ancient India, there was the provision for widow marriage. According to *Narada Smriti*, widows could remarry, if their husbands died or they were impotent. Property would be granted, if the widow married a person approved by her father-in-law.⁶ Levitate (the custom by which a dead man’s brother or next of kin married the widow) was sanctioned and was extensively practiced in ancient India. Subbamma suggests that *Sati* was not approved though, there was a mention of it in the *Atharva Veda*.⁷ But, S.K. Ghosh argues that the archaic system of *Sati* prevailed at the beginning of the *Vedic age*.⁸ It was however, discontinued when the Aryans found it necessary to encourage the widows to live and increase the population by Niyoga and remarriage. There were stray cases of *Sati* in the *Mahabharat*. For
example, Madri committed *Sati* on the funeral pyre of her husband, Pandu. But the *Ramayan* bears no case of *Sati*.

Worship of Goddess was a common practice in ancient Indian society. Archaeological excavations, historical documents provide ample illustrations of the worship of female deities in the country, which is a reflection of the high and exalted social status of women in the society. Hence, Dr. Radhakrishnan rightly observes, “Indian tradition has generally respected womanhood, though occasionally we find derogatory references to women.”

However, the status of women became lowered down from about 300 B.C., when the Aryans encountered various tribal people, who inhabited the Gangetic Plains. The Aryans took recourse to invasion and needed male child to fight in the battlefield. The expectation for a male child gradually reduced the status of a woman. Furthermore, because of the availability of the cheap manual labour of the vanquished non-Aryans, the need for women labour in agriculture and in production of goods was reduced. At this point, Altekar observes, “the women became less productive members of the society and that indirectly lowered their status.”

The uneducated non-Aryan women outnumbered the educated Aryan women and this number had got a negative force for maintaining the equal and respectable status and identity of women in society.
Gradually, all women, Aryan and Non-Aryan, became ineligible to study *Veda* as well as for ritual duties. This position of women was supported by *Manu Smruti*, the first law-code for Hindus in India, which provided a dependent and thus subservient status to women in India. Manu had made a sex-based division of society and offered a lower position to women in the social ladder of the hierarchical organization of the society. To Manu, a girl has to depend on her father during childhood, on her husband during her youth, and on her son when she became old. A woman cannot do anything even in her own house by being a young girl, a young woman or even by being an aged woman. So Manu set a series of chains, for the woman where from liberation became difficult and the secondary position of women became the traditional order of society since those days.

The deprivation of women from Vedic studies and ritual duties was accompanied by the vicious social customs like early marriage, Sati, and Widowhood, which made the position of women in society very worse. Child marriage, which started from around 500 BCE and continued for a long time as a social custom had made women silent in choosing their life-partners. Women, losing their own identity and freedom became individuals to be treated with pity and sympathy in their in-laws’ house. Marriage was treated more as an alliance between two families than a union of two souls with equal and reciprocal love and
affection. In this connection, it becomes worth-quoting the ideas of thinkers like, Meheta\textsuperscript{11}, Kapadia\textsuperscript{12}, and Ross\textsuperscript{13}, who subscribe the view that “marriage in Hindu orthodoxy was not a selection between two families”, “a social duty towards the family and community”. Joint family system, which became an established social institution during this period, had its adverse effect, so far as the status of women was concerned. Dubois, in making an analysis of Hindu customs and ceremonies made a keen observation that the concentration of authority in the head of the family left an unhealthy influence for younger members who lived in a state of subordination, which obscured personal liberty and prevented development of inner talent. This is specially marked in the case of women.\textsuperscript{14}

Again, during this period, ban on widow remarriage lowered down the position of women in society. Widowhood became a curse and was considered as a result of sin committed by the women. A widow had to lead a very torturous, miserable and unbearable life-style, till she went to the graveyard. She was physically exploited, mentally tortured, and economically deprived of the property of her deceased husband. Being deprived also of participating in socio-religious ceremonies of the family and the community, she was a hatred fellow for whom life was a curse. As a result, woman preferred to immolate themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands, which created another evil institution, Sati, in
Indian society. When women were forced to immolate themselves against their own volition, it became an inhuman and brutal treatment towards women. If the women became barren, then they were treated as inauspicious persons in society.

This state of affairs of women became more deteriorated with the constant invasion of our land by enemies like Moghuls and Marathas. Social institutions broke down and society suffered a cultural collapse in India. Women became a prey in the hands of the invaders to be tortured, both physical and mental. In order to protect the women from cruel hands of the invaders, they were to be hidden inside the house and the safest place for them became hearth and home. This led to a number of evil practices, like ban on women’s education, widow-marriage and exposure of women outside the home etc., which gave rise to the customs like child marriage, polygamy, *purdah* system and deprivation of women from property ownership etc. Hence, in medieval India, the woman’s status both socially and economically was reduced to one of inferiority, backward, secondary, and unequal.

**Indian Women in Modern Period**

**A. Pre-Independence Period**

The reformist wind blew in the direction of emancipation of women for the first time in India during the 19th century. The great thinkers in this direction were Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar,
Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekanand and Mahatma Gandhi. The ideas of the social reformers became manifested to some extent by the laws enacted by the British Government in India. In 1829, the first social law was enacted by Lord William Bentinck to abolish *Sati* and to declare it a crime. Simultaneously, the Brahmo Samaj established by Raja Rammohun Roy stood for the principle of freedom of women and equality of sexes. He vehemently opposed *Sati* and campaigned for widow marriage. All these ideologies were reflected through the publications particularly, in *Sambad Kaumudi* published by him. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar took leading part in promulgating the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 to make the widow marriage legal as well as to provide a status to Hindu widow in society. In order to prevent child widowhood, another great landmark of the 19th century was the Civil Marriage Act of 1872, which raised the age for marriage of the girls to fourteen and enforced monogamy.

During the national movement for independence, Gandhiji gave a clarion call for emancipation of women from household drudgery and to join the movement. He was very well aware of the fact that if fifty per cent of the population being women would not join the movement and remain alienated from it, the non-violent struggle based upon people’s participation would not be successful. Hence, it was Gandhiji’s bidding that women in large numbers came out from their homes and stood
shoulder to shoulder with men in the struggle for freedom and this became unprecedented in Indian history. Gandhiji gave even a superior status to women. Therefore, he wrote, “I am uncompromising in the matter of women’s rights. The difference in sex and physical form denotes no difference in status. Woman is the complement of man, and not inferior.” Further, he says, “To call woman the weaker sex is libel. It is man’s injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed, woman is less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man’s superior.” Further, he wrote, “Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man, and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he... by sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most important and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over Women which they do not deserve and ought not to have.” 15 Swami Vivekananda also gave a very high status to women in India, when he said, “That country and that nation which did not respect women have never become great nor will ever in the future.”

Being inspired by the social reformers and national leaders, a large number of women came out and joined the freedom struggle. They formed a number of women’s organizations to create social and political consciousness among the women for their rights, equality and uplift as
well as for their participation in the freedom struggle. The first women’s organization was the Indian Women’s Association, which started working in 1917 by Mrs. Margaret Cousins under the leadership of Mrs. Annie Besant and her Home Rule Movement. Mrs. Annie Besant was elected as the President of the Calcutta Session of Indian National Congress, and for the first time, in this session, the opinion was expressed that “the same tests be applied to women as to men in regard to franchise and the eligibility of all elective bodies concerned with the local government and education.” Thus, the Indian National Congress recognized officially the equality of sexes in politics. In 1927, Smt. Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya organized the All India Women’s Conference and adorned the chair of its General Secretary. Similarly, Sarojini Naidu’s contribution to the renaissance of Indian womanhood cannot be underestimated. It was her call for the women’s section of the Congress that led to the formation of the All India Women’s Conference. Similar roles were played by Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Mridula Sarabai, Sucheta Kripalini, Padmja Naidu, Durgabai Deshmukh, Aruna Asaf Ali and many other great women of India who set golden foot-prints for the arise, awake, and emancipation of women for their freedom, equality and identity as well as for their contribution to the nation’ freedom.
B. Post-Independence Period.

The first task in post-independent India was to provide a Constitution to the people of India and the spirit behind the Constitution was to bridge every gap between the citizens of India, so far as right, equality and development were concerned. Hence, the Constitution does not make any distinction on the basis of sex and provides rights, freedom, and privileges equally to both men and women. The Preamble of the Constitution promises to secure to all its citizens, **JUSTICE**, social, economic and political; **LIBERTY** of thought, expression, belief; Faith and worship; **EQUALITY** of status and of opportunity and to promote among them all **FRATERNITY** assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.

Further, the Constitution declares that the equality before the law and the equal protection of laws shall not be denied to any person on the ground of sex. (Art.14). Similarly, there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the ground of sex. (Art 15). Art.15 (1) guarantees “equality of opportunity” for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state and forbids discrimination in respect of any employment of office under the state on the grounds of sex. Art 19 provides certain fundamental rights, such as, freedom of speech and expression, to assemble, to form associations, to move
freely, to reside and settle in any part of the country, and to practice any profession to both men and women of India equally. Art 25 also provides right to freedom to both men and women. Art 326 provides universal adult franchise, that is, equal participation of men and women in politics.

Apart from the equality to women along with the men guaranteed by the Constitution, the Constitution also makes certain provisions for special privileges for women. Art 15 (3) proclaims that the State can make any special provision for women and children. Nevertheless, the Directive Principles of State Policy which concern women directly and have a special bearing on their status include Art 39 (a) right to an adequate means of livelihood; (d) equal pay for equal work both for men and women, (e) protection of health and strength of workers-men, women and children, and Art 42 provides for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Among the Personal Laws made to raise the status of women is the Uniform Civil Code which was enacted by Parliament in 1955-56. It is the first step in evolving a uniform Civil Code for the entire Indian people and in removing disabilities of law. It reformed the Hindu Law relating to (i) marriage and divorce, (ii) succession, and (iii) adoption, and (iv) minority and guardianship. The Anti-dowry Act of 1961 prohibits dowry system and thereby makes the woman equal partner with man so far as property is concerned. The daughter, the widow and the mother
now inherit property along with the son, several laws against dowry, rape and immoral traffic have been enacted.¹⁶

During the U.N. Decade for Women, the Government of India constituted a Committee on the Status of Women by a resolution of the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare on 22nd September 1971. The Committee was entrusted with the task of making a comprehensive examination of all questions relating to the rights and status of women in India and to provide useful guidelines for, the formulation of social policies. Accordingly, the Committee examined the present position of women in India and recommended for raising the social, legal and economic status of women in order to bring about equality of sexes. The Committee laid emphasis on emancipation and freedom of women through employment and income generation programmes. Empowerment of women through education and employment formed the core of the suggestions laid down by the Committee.

Though the Constitution of India is working since more than forty-five years and social laws are enacted, the raising of the status of women to one of equality, freedom and dignity is still a question mark. The very fact that the numerical strength of women is declining during these years raises doubt relating to the improved status of women. The table-1 given below exhibits the picture of declining trend of the numerical strength of women in India.
Except 1981, in the entire census decades the number of women is declining. Several reasons may be attributed for this trend, such as, (a) carelessness of parents for a girl baby during her birth and during her infancy, (b) unwillingness of parents to provide medical and other facilities for the survival of girl child and finally, (c) the misuse of amniocentesis to kill a female fetus. Of course, the Government of India now has enacted the law against the misuse of amniocentesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Female Sex Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>927</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India Publications 1991

Education is one of the important indices of the socio-economic status of the individual in society. Education is not only insurance for the women at the time of odd, but also an assurance for the full-fledged development of her personality, and through that for the society. It will enlighten her instead of confusing her. The correlation between several development indicators and the level of female literacy cannot be underestimated as education is positively related with women’s participation in modern economy, in development, in environment protection and in political process. Realizing the importance of women’s education, the
University Education Commission, 1948-49 stated that, “There cannot be educated people without educated women. If general education had to be limited to men or to women, that opportunity should be given to women, for then, it would most surely be passed on to the next generation.”

The Constitution of India guarantees equal opportunities for education without any gender bias and it directs the state to endeavor to provide for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. But, what is the state of affair with female education? It is true that cent percent literacy is still a dream for the people of India. Nevertheless, the gender discrimination in the field of education is very unfortunate and sordid affair. The following table gives the picture of female literacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Male Literacy (%)</th>
<th>Female Literacy (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>27.16</td>
<td>8.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>40.40</td>
<td>15.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>45.95</td>
<td>21.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>56.37</td>
<td>29.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>63.86</td>
<td>39.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India Publications 1991

Of course, the literacy rate of females is increasing through these years, but the rate of progress is very slow and disheartening. In comparison to male literacy there are less female literate persons and if
the higher education will be taken into account, the number of females will be very marginal. It is more disheartening when we take the picture of 1991 Census Report that while more than two-thirds of women live in rural areas, female literacy rate is 25.13% as against 54.01% in urban areas.

This fact became more vivid when the Committee on the Status of Women (1975) asserted that “the image of the Indian women created by a few women holding high positions or academic qualifications conceals rather than reflecting the status and education level of the average woman of India.” In opening the discussion on “Education for Women’s Equality”, The National Policy on Education (1986), points out that “Provision of educational opportunities to women has been an important programme in the education sector since independence”, but observes that “inspite of the efforts made so far, the education system has not been able to make sufficient contribution towards women’s equality.” In the same vein, the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-2000 notes that “Education of women occupies top priority among various measures taken to improve the status of women in India” and that “great emphasis has been laid on women’s education in the Five Year Plans”. But, the same Report points out that “notwithstanding the planned objectives and endeavours, actual progress in upgrading the educational status of women has been slow.”
The reasons for keeping the girls away from getting education are namely, (1) poverty, (2) conservative social and cultural values and beliefs, (3) gender discrimination, and (4) lack of infra-structural facilities.

Combined with the low educational profile of women, the health neglect is very much prominent which exhibits the lower status of women in India even today. Gender bias in rearing up the female child is still happening to be a lingering paradox. The average expectation of life at birth for females though is in a process of constant increase, yet it has not come in par with that of males. Infant mortality of females is more than that of the males due to the general health neglect of a female child by the parents. There still remains a gap between the life expectancy of a male and that of a female. The women are more undernourished than the male persons are and V. Rajalakshmi rightly observes, “quite often the root cause of malnutrition among girls is not so much lack of food as the lack of access to food. Undernourished girls who grow into undernourished women perpetuate the inter-generations undernourishment cycle.”17 In fact, (CMR data of 1955 and NNMB data of 1975 demonstrate that there is “no evidence of secular trends indicating improved growth performance in the succeeding generation a feature expected of all successful developing societies.”18 Women in India thus take insufficient dietary intake of calories, proteins, calcium,
iron, and vitamin A. As per estimation, two-thirds of Indian pregnant women are anaemic. They do not take accurate nutritious food intake, nor do they accept the health facilities provided for them. Mrs. Gopalan of Nutritious Foundation of India in her Report (1987) on caloric intake and nutrition assessment reveals that poor nutrition standard is a constant headache of health and morbidity status of girl child in India, which needs special care and action-oriented programmes. The mass immunisation and regular health check-up of schoolchildren are necessary.

Work participation of women in post-independent India is also not encouraging. Women labour hard in household management and also outside, they get less wages and in terms of cash money her labour is not properly paid. During these years, the Indian economy has witnessed a structural transformation particularly in favour of industrial sector and service sector. In these two sectors, work participation of women is very marginal. This is due to the fact that, women lack proper education, training and skill to hold jobs in these two sectors of economy and moreover, the dynamics of gender differentiation-female inefficacy and female subordination have been transmitted outside the home over to these two sectors of the economy. Women are found in greater number in labour market, which is considered as secondary work characterised by low status of employment, less wages, occupational
immobility, particularly of employment, less use of skill and training etc. As per 1981 Census Report, the female work participation is only 14 per cent while that of male is 51.6%. When we make the rural-urban divide, it is found as per the above Census Report that in urban area, the female work participation rate is only 10.7%, while that of rural area is 23.9%. “Though majority of women in comparable age-groups of men are engaged in work, but since many works performed by women within the household sector do not have pecuniary value, they have been excluded from worker status, and the bias is more pronounced in urban India.” 19 The table given below indicates the work-force participation of both males and females.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main workers</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>51.62</td>
<td>13.99</td>
<td>34.76</td>
<td>52.62</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>29.23</td>
<td>48.54</td>
<td>7.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal workers</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Workers</td>
<td>36.77</td>
<td>52.65</td>
<td>19.76</td>
<td>38.87</td>
<td>53.81</td>
<td>23.18</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>49.07</td>
<td>8.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, it is found that in 1981, more than 80 per cent of women were engaged in the primary sector occupations thereby clearly establishing the marginal occupational status of Indian women even after more than thirty years of independence. This became more vivid
when compared to the male employed persons. Women are under-represented in many important occupations like professional and related work; administrative, executive, and managerial work as well as in the fields of science and technology. Even, as Rehman and Biswal\textsuperscript{20} have pointed out that the status of women in labour market is marginal. Their contribution to production activities still goes unrecognised. The perception about their nature of work has not yet been economically termed. Though they work harder than their male counterparts and the total hours of a day their work is more than that of men, so far, no effort has been made to develop such indicators which would measure their share in the processes of production, distribution and consumption. The irony is that, they are not earning cash money, wages or salary. In other words, they have been discriminated against both outside and within the labour market in India. Within the labour market, they are discriminated against at the point of entry into well paid and high status occupations, though no one has yet proved the so-called proposition of less productivity of women in some jobs in which they are underrepresented.

So far as the social position of women in India today is concerned, two opposite views have come to the forefront. One view is that women have now become free from the evil chains of traditional joint family system. In the nuclear family system, the wife finds herself next to her husband in taking decisions in household affairs and in shaping the
domestic economy. Similarly, the marriage system has undergone a lot of change. Due to the enactment of social laws, spread of female education and due to the growth of professionalism in every sphere, the marriage age of the male and female has gone up and child marriage has become a rare phenomenon. Marriage is no more, an obligatory fact on the part of the women. “The modern woman of the country today does not view marriage as a sole necessity but one among many aspects of home, marital comforts, good health and youthfulness.”

But marriage system in its changed form has brought with it the ugly practice of dowry, which has resulted in degradation of the status of women in the post-independent India. Neera K. Sohoni describes that dowry as a marital custom obviously enhances the status of the boy and devalues that of the girl with similar impact on the status of their respective families. Dowry has come to be demanded as a matter of right by the bridegroom and his family. If not forthcoming, there is a pressure applied to extract or even to extort it. Her future becomes threatened by the possibility of the marriage breaking up. Worse still she is in the immediate danger of physical maltreatment and being alone in a strange household with no one on her side, she often actually suffers physical abuse. In any case, being constantly among hostile people, she loses her mental and psychological peace. Ultimately, the women are to be killed or they sacrifice their life by suicide due to the non-fulfillment
of dowry demanded by the bridegroom and his family. In consequence, due to this ugly practice, the women have been treated as animate property and they are considered as puppets to dance in the tune of the male persons in her own family and in the family of the in-laws. She has got no independent voice to be raised either as a maiden or as a married woman. Obviously, she develops a fear psychosis of being a female and the parents due to the evil customs of the society make discrimination between a son and a daughter. As it is said earlier, longing for a male child reduces to a great extent the status of a female in the society.

Crime against women in present India has become alarming. Violence against women is rooted in the tradition of discrimination that has been going on for centuries. Dr. L.N. Mittal writes, “Violence and crime against women in India are increasing every year whether at home, at the workplace, on the street, in custody or elsewhere. The recent report of Amnesty International on India has observed that women are regularly raped in jail cells in India. A U.N. Report has also pointed out that India has the highest number of custodial rapes by men in positions of power. The recently brought out Data Sheet on “Violence against Women” by the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, reveals that a woman is raped somewhere in India every 54 minutes, a molestation takes place in every 26 minutes, one kidnapping or
abduction every 43 minutes. One act of eve-teasing every 51 minutes, one dowry death every 102 minutes and one act of criminal offence against women committed every seven minutes. Taking the statistics of only one year 1991, it is found that in India, there are 9793 rape cases, 20611 molestation cases, 5137 dowry death cases and 10283 eve teasing cases.
REFERENCES

2. Gaur, Alkertine, Women in India, p. 3.
15. Ibid., p.115.
16. The social laws were enacted during the British regime to create a social base for women to be equal with men. These laws are as follows:
   b. Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856.
   c. Indian Divorce Act, 1869.
d. Special Marriage Act, 1872.
g. Hindu Widow’s Right on Property Act, 1937.


20. Ibid., p.92.


23. Atray, J.P., Crimes Against Women, p.73.