Chapter - I

Introduction

The Indian society is full of paradoxes. On the one hand, foreigners come in hordes to our country in search of spiritual solace; on the other hand, Indians rank among the most corrupt people in the world. On the one hand, we are spending millions, nay, billions to send satellites to space to prove our scientific prowess; on the other hand, the State can not provide almost half the population with the basic necessities of food, education, health and shelter.

So also in the case of woman. On the one hand, our scriptures put them on a high pedestal. Where the women are held in reverence there do the gods reside, is an old Sanskrit adage. A society grows if the women grow, if they partake of the spirit of progress, for they are proverbial domestic legislators, they are the matrix of social life. On the other hand, according to the UNICEF's latest international report, "The Progress of Nations 1997", more than 5000 dowry deaths occur every year in the country.

The fact is that the status of women cannot be examined in isolation. It is interlinked with the socio-economic conditions,


2. Indian Express, New Delhi, 23.7.1997.
political climate and inequalities inherent in the traditional social structure, its norms and values, its customs and rituals. All these play a significant role in determining the position of women.

Free India in its first important legislative document - the Constitution - declares its faith in the equality of men and women as a pre-condition to ushering in a society where there would be 'justice, social, political and economic' for all. However, more than 46 years after the solemn resolve to usher in a society where there would be equality of status for all and no one will be discriminated against, the inequality between the sexes continues. The alarming increase in dowry deaths and the daily reported molestation of women, clearly indicate society's attitude to its women. The persistent decline in the sex ratio and the evidence of neglect of female infants to the point of letting them die is increasing the gap between profession and practice.

It is true that there are examples of women who excelled in arts, literature and even warfare. A few became rulers and in the more recent past, became ambassadors, ministers and Prime ministers. These are the rare cases, perhaps they were the children of circumstances. Once opportunity came their way, they exploited it fully and made a name for themselves. They also demonstrated to the world that they were equal to anyone in courage, management and in the art of governance too but this in no way means that the status of millions of Indian women is satisfactory.
In the Indian society, women's status has generally been determined by the position of her husband or family and her individual achievements were rarely considered. Highly educated women were not allowed to take up employment outside their homes, as it was not considered 'respectable'. A wife of a well-placed man enjoyed higher social status than a woman who was highly qualified and competent in her job. In other words, 'ascribed status' dominated over 'achieved status' and this was very much a part of the total social system where 'caste' and 'class' overlapped in several ways. These are 'hangovers' of a feudal society and it takes time to change. While more and more educated women now expect to be respected on their individual merits, most men used to a dominant role in the family do not take kindly to these changes. What is important is a positive approach to resolve these tensions in order to achieve more equitable and satisfying 'roles' for both men and women. In this study the term 'status' is correlated to the participatory rights and obligations of women in the managing of society. It refers to the position of women as an individual in the social structure defined by her designated rights and obligations.

3. "The husband is the bourgeois in the family and wife, the proletariat. The relationship between man and woman is antagonistic and not non-antagonistic. Hence as production is the outcome, violence is endemic in the institution of the family, and its nature and extent would depend upon the production relations available to the family in the wider context of a society." Engels quoted in Bisaria, Sanjini, "Family Violence Against Females of the Elder Generation", in Sood, Sushma, Ibid., p.281.
Ancient India: There is a widespread misconception regarding the true status of women in ancient Indian society. It is mainly due to the lack of understanding of the original Sanskrit texts, both Sruti and Smriti which define the true status of women in early times. As a matter of fact Rigveda contains the seeds and sources from which the entire course of Hindu thought through ages flowered. Thus women in ancient India would mean women of the Vedic and the Upanishadic periods. From the available information it can be concluded that women in the Vedic age were accepted as human beings in their own right. They enjoyed considerable freedom so far as political, social and educational activities were concerned, they enjoyed a status and prestige in society. Right from the early Vedic period upto 300 B.C., women were held in esteem and respect, husband and wife together constituted a unit in society and a man with his wife was considered only half and incomplete. In homes, women were given superior position to that of men, as they were treated as the embodiment of goddess of wealth, strength and wisdom. It was said that a house where women were not respected was a cursed place and that one which accorded respect and reverence to women turned into a place of happiness and prosperity. In the words of Manu, where women are neglected, all rites and ceremonies are fruitless and that family quickly perishes, but where women do not grieve that family always prospers.4

Girls were educated like boys and had to pass through a period of Brahmacharya. Many of them used to distinguish and excel in different fields. The marriages of girls used to take place at a fairly advanced age, the normal time being the age of 16 or 17. Educated brides had naturally an effective voice in the selection of their partners in life. There were no seclusion of women. They used to move freely in society, often even in the company of their lovers. Very often there were love marriages which were later blessed by the parents also.

Women occupied a prominent position in social and religious gatherings. Women had an absolute equality with men in the eye of religion. Marriage, in fact, was a religious necessity to both man and woman. The position of the wife was an honoured one in the family. Adultery was forbidden both for men and women. A widow had a right to remarry, and under certain circumstances, woman could marry even if her husband was alive. The practice of Sati was not in vogue. However, some rare instances (like Madri becoming Sati after King Pandu) are found. The only disability from which women suffered in this age as well as in the next one, were proprietary ones. They could hold or inherit no property. The male head of the family was regarded as the owner of the family property.

In the vedic period education of women was encouraged. They were eligible for upanayana or initiation and brahmacharya or study of Brahma knowledge. The Mahanirvana Tantra says, "A girl also should be brought up and educated with great effort and
The Devi Mahatmya declares, "All forms of knowledge are aspects of Thee and all women throughout the world are Thy forms". There are references of women philosophers like Gargi, Maitravi Arundhati, Lilavati and others who attended regular vedic studies like men.

Being well-trained and grown up at the time of their marriage, women were free to choose their husbands. The freedom of women is evident from the account of the popular festival called Swayak where men and women met and mixed freely. There is an interesting passage in the saptashali where Durga, who is Kumari (Virgin) tells the asuras who aspired to marry her, "He who conquers me in battle, he who humbles my pride, he who is my equal in this world, he shall be my husband." The term 'dampati' frequently used in Indian society reflects that husband and wife were regarded as the joint head of the household."

In short, we can say that the woman enjoyed fairly satisfactory position. The community on the whole was showing proper concern and respect for women, allowing them considerable freedom in the different activities of the social and political life. Medieval Period: This degree of liberty which Indian women enjoyed in ancient India was lost to some extent in medieval India though a few out-standing women administrators left their magnificent imprints on the pages of history. During this period, the Bhaakti movement spread all over the nation. This movement (period) placed

God within the reach of all irrespective of caste or gender. Nambudiri women accepted the life of saint women. Mirabai, Muktabai, Janabai, Vishnupriya are well known names in shakti literature whose compositions are popular to this day. For widow and neglected women devotion provided an austere way of life and a certain justification for living. 6

During this period Islam spread in India. In their relationship with the divine, men and women stand on a footing of equality in Islam. Woman like man, is an individual who can pray to the almighty and can hope for redemption. Islam does not consider woman as an impediment in the path of religion nor does it consider her as the root cause of man's downfall. The Quran is replete with injunctions aimed at bettering the lot of women. There is no ban on widow remarriage, and divorce is allowed. Women's rights to inheritance, provided in Islam, are significant especially in view of the fact that they were meant for a patrilineal social structure. Islam introduced shares for wife, daughter, mother, sister and grand-mother, the general rule being that the female was to inherit half of what the corresponding male would inherit. 7 Historical evidence shows that women like Jahanara, Begum and Mumtaz enjoyed respectable positions in society. 8

During this time, the most sensitive minds among Hindus and Muslims reached out towards each other. A new religion, Sikhism, based on the teachings of Guru Nanak emerged. Guru Nanak also wanted women to be treated by men as equals. "Within a woman is a man conceived, from a woman he is born, he is married to a woman and with her goes through life...why call her bad. She gives birth to kings. None may exist without a woman. Only the one true God is exterior to woman" says Guru Nanak. 9

British Period: The advent of British rule brought 'Christianity' to India. In Christianity both men and women are believed to have been created by God in his own image. Christianity accepts equality between men and women. Everybody is baptised in the name of Christ. The Bible lays great emphasis on the image of woman as a strong and steady influence for the good. The impact of British rule, English education and Christianity propagated by missionaries resulted in a number of movements for social change and religious reform in the nineteenth century. 10

The Reform Movement: The gallant band of social reformers led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, created great awakening among women who gradually came forward to claim their legitimate rights. By establishing Brahma Samaj in west Bengal, Raja Ram Mohan Roy propagated the ideal of eradicating the obnoxious Sati system. Later, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, serving in the same way, became pioneer of widow re-marriage. In Punjab Swami Dayanand Saraswati tried to revive the fire and equal society of the Vedic period by

establishing Arya Samaj. In South India, Mrs. Annie Besant attempted to press the need for a truly national education for both men and women through her "Theosophical Society". At the same time, pioneer women social reformers like Pandit Ramabai Ranade, Smt. P. K. Ray, Lady Bose and Bhikaji Cama, dedicated themselves to open new opportunities for women...

In the nineteenth century reformers, it represented an amalgam of social practices and issues (e.g. child marriage, child widows, Sati, polygamy etc.) that was a source of much humiliation for the Indian middle class from their colonial masters and models. Cutting across class, caste, ethnic groups, language, culture and religion was the common attribute and problem of all women-gender inequality. The subordination of women manifested in restrictions on their lives. Occupational, marital and other relational choices, as Jyotiba Phule pointed out in the nineteenth century, was an "essential instrument" for maintaining caste hierarchy and Brahminical dominance in Hindu Society. But the status of higher class/caste women was more problematical than that of women of the lower classes/castes. The problems of widows' oppression, Purdah and the growing gender gap in education which had preoccupied the nineteenth century reformers did not affect the majority of Indian women. The majority i.e. 90 percent of the total female population was deeply

involved in the agrarian, manufacturing or the trading economics of the subcontinent—as partners in household or family based enterprises or as independent workers, producers or traders. The rights and roles of women of these classes mainly depended on local or community customs which often gave them far more freedom than what was available to their higher caste/class sisters, whose lives were defined much more by the code of Manu.

Neither Islam nor any of the other religions had really managed to radically alter the life styles, or the gender role prescriptions of this vast majority, in the same way as the political economy of colonial rule did. Some of these facts may have remained unknown to the nineteenth century reformers but they were not entirely unknown to the twentieth century nationalists. Gandhi did not win the response of poor working women—rural or urban—by his ideology alone, but by his awareness of much of their plight—a direct consequence of the economic depredations of colonialism.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the rediscovery of their past led a section of the Hindu elite to seek a religious foundation for reform. While spreading consciousness and pride in indigenous cultural tradition, institution like the Arya Samaj, Rama Krishana Mission, the Prathana Samaj etc., encouraged social service, educational and reform activities to bring about social change favouring women's uplift. Models of women's social contributions going beyond the family, available within Hindu tradition, were utilised to demonstrate that Hinduism did not degrade women. Women's role was merely sought to be widened in order to serve the community and the family. It was also stressed that
women's uplift was in the interest of not only women but men.13

The 1920s represented a period of major changes affecting women in the subcontinent—internal socio-economic transformations which reinforced and heightened their opposition to alien rule, and external political changes that affected women's lives in other parts of the world, providing new ideas and challenges to the expanding women's movement.

**Women in National Movement:** The relevance of a study of women's role in the national movement can not be overestimated for either the discipline of history or the study of women, especially in the context of the relationship between nationalist ideology and women's issues in the minds of men and women: Did women participate only for the country's Swaraj or also for women's freedom? Did political participation aid women's liberation? What were the perception of the leadership about women's participation?

Even the most cursory examination of women's organised activism from the beginning of the twentieth century explodes the myth still being pursued by many that women's role in the national movement(s) against imperialism was male dictated or male manipulated. Once mobilised, women moved on their own, acquiring new confidence and articulating new priorities. The number of women directly involved in the revolutionary movements that developed in Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and the erstwhile Madras Presidency from the turn of the century may have been small, but the inspirational support base of the revolutionaries included far more women whose names will never feature in the dictionaries of freedom fighters. The women who provided shelter, food and cover, carried

messages or arms, or instilled a passion to 'serve the country' among their children, telling them about the 'heroes' and 'martyrs' who had sacrificed their lives for the country's freedom did not all belong to the elites. Many were not educated, and still more were used to poverty. They played such roles without waiting for any 'social action'. They provided a communication channel for the message of nationalism, when nationalist literature, and even news of revolutionary activities were sedulously prescribed, censored and withdrawn from circulation. Even the writings of person of the stature of Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Nazrul Islam and many others, did not escape such bans. But the stories continued to spread and the songs and poems were absorbed eagerly by young people, often from women in their homes.

The politicisation of women in the newly extended female space was facilitated by the mediating role played by members of the female intelligentsia who had more time to absorb nationalist literature, as most of them were not involved in working for a living. Many became leaders in both the women's national movements. Pandita Ramabai was a delegate to the Indian National Congress in 1889 along with nine other eminent women. Sarojini Naidu believed that the fate of women was linked with the fate of the nation. She wielded tremendous influence on contemporary women and saw no conflict between tradition and women's participation in public affairs, in the world outside the home, as the world was an extension of the home. She appealed to women not to ignore their larger responsibility.\textsuperscript{14} Sarala Devi Chaudhurani became an accepted leader in the women's movement.

\textsuperscript{14} Sarojini Naidu, \textit{Speeches and Writings}, Madras, 1925.
mobiliser of youth in the nationalist cause, and was noted by official intelligence reports as 'far more dangerous' to the Raj than her husband, a well-known revolutionary. 15

The partition of Bengal in 1905 galvanised and transformed women's participation in the national movement. The mobilisation of women was attempted through the publication of pamphlets, public meetings held exclusively for women and new nationalist associations (in contrast to the elite associations) which emerged during the swadeshi period. 16 Mass struggles, militancy, armed struggle and political agitations mark this period. Women of different classes were involved in growing numbers in such activities in different parts of India, in both rural and urban areas. The Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam reported confidentially to the Governor General and the Secretary of state in 1907, that the youth of East Bengal absorbed hatred of the alien rulers who had "drained Golden Bengal of her wealth, virtually with their mother's milk". 17 Some British women who made Indian nationalism their own cause, played important roles as 'helpers' as well as 'catalysts'. Among them were Annie Besant and Dorothy Jinarajadaser, both Theosophists, Margaret Cousins, an Irish feminist, and sister Nivedita, the

17. Majumdar, 1962, q. cit.
disciple of Swami Vivekananda. Apart from the western women who chose to adopt India as their home and identified themselves with the nationalist, anti-imperialist struggles, there were many other women who played a supportive role from their own countries. Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Bhikaji Cama etc. had many supporters among western feminists who were politically radical.

The national leaders were surprised at the intensity and degree of their response to the civil disobedience movements. In fact, women defied even Gandhi in confronting the forces of repression. The majority of the women who participated actively in different corners of the country did not seek anyone's permission to do so. Unlike the social reformers, Gandhi had realised some of the negative consequences of colonial rule on women's economic status. This realisation strengthened his decision to launch the Khadi movement which would offer to the masses of women an immediate open channel for their participation in the national struggle.

Calling Khadi essentially a women's movement served many purposes. It brought the women an income basis for their survival, forced men to acknowledge women's higher skills in this activity and unleashed women's aspirations to break through purdah and other barriers of inequality. It also enabled Gandhi to challenge

the dominant upper caste and middle class value that educated the family's status with women's non-involvement in productivity work. He exhorted well-to-do women to support the movement in their dual capacity as consumers and producers, by criticising their life styles. It was their duty to help their poorer sisters who had lost their livelihood on account of the import of foreign cloth.20

The 1920s and 1930s represent a transition in Gandhi's views on women from the concept of women's rights to the far more dynamic one of role, women's energy would be unleashed for the nation-building process through an ascertainment of their productive and creative roles as equal partners, participants, leaders, conscience keepers, and beneficiaries. Between 1921 and 1925 Gandhi had added India's political salvation as a goal for women in nation building.

In comparison to Gandhi's evolving, even changing views on women and the nation-building process, Nehru's understanding of women's subordination was both limited and static. He did not understand the critical connections between the control over women and the maintenance of that differentiated and hierarchical social structure. His approach to the women's question reflected the elitist vision of social reformers. Though he piloted the 1931 Resolution on Fundamental Rights through the Congress, his action and statements reveal little or no understanding of the

20. Gandhi's speech at Gujarati Women's Conference, Dandi, 13 April, 1930.
deeper causes of women's subordination in India, or about the complexities of the situation or aspiration of the women in different sections of the society.

The transformation of the attitude towards women was actually precipitated by Gandhi's view regarding women's role in social revolution and reconstruction. In his view, "Men and women are of equal rank, but they are not identical". Under his guidance, the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Salt Satyagraha saw women in the front. The direct participation of women in the freedom struggle had a strong impact on their attitudes also. Gandhi's tireless efforts and also the good work done by eminent social reformers and women's organizations ultimately helped Indian women in obtaining their legal political rights with ease as compared to England and other western countries where women were required to put in hard fight and face the rigours of a militant campaign for acquiring the same. As they got the franchise in provinces in 1920s, they also began direct participation in politics where two women contested elections to the Madras assembly. In 1937, limited adult franchise was granted to Indian women.

Thus, women have played significant role in the freedom movement. During the freedom struggle, due to the indefatigable efforts of the Father of the Nation, shedding all fear they came out of their homes, fought shoulder to shoulder with men as their comrades and companions. Nationalist zeal and patriotic fervour of Annie Besant Sarojini Naidu and others caused a nationalist
resurgence among the women of India. They responded vigorously each call of the protest and boycott movements organised by the Congress or other nationalist organisations. Many of them also guided and provided leadership to the national movement. Annie Besant who initiated home rule League in 1916 was chosen, while under internment to preside over the annual session of the Congress. Sarojini Naidu became in 1925 the first Indian woman to be elected President of the Congress. Other women of the freedom-fame were Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Perin Captain, Sucheta Kripalani, Saraladevi, Nameshwari Nehru, G. Durgabai and many others, who earned legendary fame.

National movement was also a period of the resurgence of left revolutionary ideology in India. Prominent women revolutionaries were Madame Bhikaji Cama who organised the despatch of revolutionary literature and arms to India from Paris, Santi Das who along with Suniti shot dead Stevens, the District magistrate of Comilla in December, 1931.

Bina Das was sentenced to seven years imprisonment for her attempted assassination of Stanley Jackson, the Governor of Bengal, in 1932. On the other hand, Kalpana Dutt took part in a raid on the Chittagong Armoury in 1933. Similarly, Smt. Arun Asaf Ali participated in every round of the freedom movement since Salt Satyagraha of 1930. She became a legend in 1942 when she went underground and organised country-wide resistance to colonial rule. In 1930, Indira Gandhi in her teen formed the Vanar Sena, a children's brigade to help freedom-fighters.

The Constituent Assembly set up in October, 1946 to draft a
constitution for independent India had among its members veterans like Sarojini Naidu, G. Durgabai, Renuka Ray and Hansa Mehta.

Emergence of women Organisations: Although middle class women's involvement with the outside world was limited by the ideology that limited their education, formal education led to the emergence of a group of women with a desire for organised action to improve the lot of women.21 The early associational activities of elite women played a role in the identity formation of the new regional elites of all the major religious communities, hoping to establish the readiness of their class for increased influence, social leadership and political ascendancy.22

Numerous local women's associations, organisations, clubs, societies, samitis and institutions (hostels, rescue homes, shelters, school) were founded in both British India and Princely states. Women's uplift, philanthropy, social work among poor and destitute women and social reform were central to their work. These later developed into public activities in support of women's democratic rights and contacts with women's groups and movements outside India. Concern for the economic uplift of women was not absent but was not an over-riding issue. The majority of members of these associations were from reformist, educated and privileged families.23

The earliest organisations in the first half of the nineteenth century faced much social opposition until the intervention of the 'revivalists' whose attitude had mixed implications for women's participation in activities to uplift women. Consequently there was less opposition than to earlier reformers' efforts for the same cause and a rudimentary women's movement was under way. By the turn of the century, there was little opposition to local women's associations engaged in self-help activities. In western India, reformers of the elite of three communities (Parsi, Maharastrian and Gujarati Brahmans) led the way in the mid-nineteenth century, by establishing girls' schools in the face of stiff opposition. Later, the Prarthana Samaj, founded in the late nineteenth century, organised the Arya Mahila Samaj. Pandit Ramabai set up a series of Mahila Samaj or women's association, girls schools, orphanages and widows' homes. Ramabai Ranade (another eminent social worker of the period) established the Seva Sadan; in Bengal Swarana Kumari Devi's Sakhi Samiti (1886) a women's association was concerned with traditional women's handicrafts.24

In 1901 Sarala Devi Chaudhurani formed the Bharat Jati Mahamandal after serious differences with the male leadership of the National Social Conference. After 1910, women experienced in organising and working in local women's associations and convinced that women should take the leadership into their own hands, started provincial and national women's associations. This was possible

24. See Everett, op.cit. for a concise account, pp. 57-60.
through effective intra-elite, intra-regional networks and able organising cadres. These associations, despite efforts to be national in orientation and representative of as many groups as possible, failed to be actually national in scope, lacking all India structures, among other shortcomings. But their history is more or less identical with the history of the Indian women's movement. The associations were inevitably elite bourgeoise and urban, consisting of women from the upper crust, women with the advantages of social status, education and privilege, but redeemed by their desire to serve all women. Obviously the women's movement in this phase neither represented the masses nor counted, among its member, lower castes, illiterate, rural peasant and poor working women.

The Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) of India, established in 1875 in Calcutta, was the earliest of these bodies. It became a national body in 1896. Though its membership was confined to Christians, its objectives were broad in scope. The Women's India Association (WIA) was formed in 1917 in Madras. In the same year Sarojini Naidu led a delegation of women formed by Margaret Cousins to the Constitutional Reforms (Montagu Chelmsford) Committee, demanding universal adult franchise. The Indian women's movement believed that the enfranchisement of women would lead to legislation for social reform. The delegations memorandum asked for women's franchise on the same basis as men and improved facilities for women's education and health care.  

The National Council of Women in India (NCWI) was formed

in 1925, and the All India women's Conference (AIWC) also in 1925. By the mid 1930s, the WI and the AIWC claimed a membership of over 10,000 women. 26 The NCWI developed eight provincial councils by 1934 and had 180 affiliated societies with a membership of over 8,000. 27

The WI was a vigorous organisation that undertook to widen its scope of activities beyond fund raising, social service and women's education and sought to influence government policy on equal rights for women in some areas, and was involved with the issues of suffrage, education and social reform. The WI's founders included women like Margaret Cousins and Annie Besant, who were not merely suffragists, but political radicals and critics of imperialism in their own country.

The All India women's Conference, originally convened only to discuss women's education, became a permanent body which succeeded in developing branches all over India. It called itself an apolitical body, its constitution included a clause that it would not engage in party politics, its emphasis was on unity and women's uplift through education, social and legal reform. It also emphasised women's contribution to national development. By 1932, however, the AIWC had become involved with women's political rights and all questions which affected women and children as well as with social problems such as untouchability. Although its major focus


27. Gandhi's writings in 1906 prove how powerfully he was impressed by the courage, heroism and sacrifice of British suffragists, see Joshi, op. cit., pp. 3, 5-8.
priority remained the women's question and the elimination of women's backwardness and stress was laid on the well-being of women and the family, the future of India gradually became an important concern.28

Many members of the WIA were also members of the AIWC and many such members were members of the Indian National Congress, and leaders in the national as well. This factor led to close relations between the women's and the national movements. Consequently, the two main actors in the women's movement, the WIA and the AIWC, were swept by a variety of influences. The women's question had gradually evolved from the perspective of uplift within the traditional framework to that of women's equality. But involvement in the struggle for freedom led the women's movement into dilemmas and contradictions; it was caught between the middle class character of its membership and the increasing radicalism within the national movement with its transformation into a mass movement from the 1920s onwards. At the Govt. level the search for an organizational structure to coordinate efforts towards equality had commenced with the setting up of the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953 and the concept of a National Machinery has been evolving ever since (see attached chart).

The Govt. of India in 1971 appointed Committee on the status of women in India (CSW) to examine all questions relating to the rights and status of women in the context of changing

social and economic conditions in the country. The Committee comprising among others, eminent representatives of the women's movement raised basic questions about the socialization processes inherent in a hierarchical society about the resource, power and asset distribution patterns and about diverse cultural values of this country. In its report "Towards Equality", it made several important recommendations and also stressed the need for special temporary measures to transform the de-jure equality guaranteed by India's constitution and legal edifice into de-facto equality.

A separate Department of Women and Child Development was set up in 1985 under the newly created Ministry of Human Resource Development. The decade since Nairobi has seen the growth of many new institutions to interact and to add to the network that comprises today India's national machinery.

The National Commission for Women, a Statutory Body was set up under the National Commission Act 1990 to safeguard the rights and interests of women. Its mandated activities are review of legislations, intervention in specific individual complaints of atrocities and remedial action to safeguard the interests of women where appropriate and feasible.

Certainly the women's movement is not all that it should be or could have been. Its great quality, however, is its sanity. It is not a feminist movement and it is non-party; it has worked with the national movement and sometimes sought to correct it. It is non-communal and has worked against great indifference. Yet it has not got rid of the Lady Bountiful approach, nor has it entered into the villages. Essentially urban and middle class, it
shares all the psychological limitations of that class. As such, it has not yet been able to formulate the ideal of a positive role for the Indian women. It is not for any lack of energy or purpose but probably owing to the situation which prevents a clear understanding of the dynamics of the social process that India is undergoing.

Review of literature: Studies on women's lot and behaviour started in 1960's with the advent of feminism in the U.S.A., with a premise that there prevails a gender discrimination and women's lot in the society is not what it should be. In India, we started using the term more frequently after the International women's Year, i.e. 1975.

The review of existing literature on the emerging status and role of Indian woman has necessarily to start with her place in the freedom movement. There are so few studies of woman's role in the national movement or of the implication - social or political - of their momentous entry into the public sphere. Important works on the national movement mostly failed to examine the significance of women's participation in the struggles.

Studies published between 1968 and 1988 do touch upon various aspects and dimensions of women's participation in the national struggle for freedom. There are some factual accounts. Some historians have noted the emancipatory effects of such participation.


outspoken point of view came from a senior demographer, who in his days as a development administrator, had lost a battle to include better economic opportunities for women within the Community Development Programme - that 'fuzzy' definitions and silence on the value of women's work was part of a deliberate effort to "keep women subjugated economically, socially and politically".38 Another scholar examining the inter-relationship between the nineteenth century social reform movement, the debate on women's education, and the emergence of a new family ideology among the educated urban middle class, found that this 'dominant' social ideology bore considerable resemblance to the gender role ideology of the British middle class of the Victorian period. Interestingly propagators of the ideology took little cognisance of not only the reality of roles played by the majority of women but even the "voices from within" of women in their own homes whom they were seeking to educate and transform.39

There are several distinct points of view that seek to explain the impact of the growth of nationalism in the latter part of the nineteenth century on the situation of women and the debate on women's status. Natarajan argued that reform issues, and particularly the women's issue, lost their appeal and fervour.


by being subsumed within nationalism. A similar viewpoint is put forward by Ghulam Murshid, who places the debates on the women's issue in the early nineteenth century as 'modernising' attempts in response to the generation of western liberal ideas. Sumit Sarkar has argued that on the position of women especially, there was no autonomous struggle by women themselves to change relations within or outside the family. According to Sarkar, these early attempts at reform were not so much the outcome of western liberal or rationalist values, but more an expression of some "acute problems of interpersonal adjustments within the family among western-educated families". Accepting much of Sarkar's critique of the liberal content of the early reformers' ideology, Partha Chatterjee argues that "the relative unimportance of the women's question in the last decades of the nineteenth century is not to be explained by the fact that it had been censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle." In his view nationalism "resolved the women's question in complete accordance with its preferred goals".

Chatterjee discovers the ideological framework within which nationalism resolved the women's question. It was a dichotomous framework between the 'material' and the 'spiritual' world. Applied to day-to-day living, this dichotomy separated social space into the home and the world. "The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world and woman is its representation". The absence of any serious examination of the political significance of the acceptance of equality as a basic principle of the Indian Political System also suggests a critical lacuna in academic assessment. Why has this radical departure from the inherited social system been treated so cursarily, even dismissively, by scholars? A member of the CSWI has argued that this gap in critical analysis has strengthened a dominant tendency among the intelligentsia to view gender equality as the culmination of the nineteenth century social reform movements which threw up women's status as a major issue for debate and change.

It is interesting to note that while early twentieth century historians and analysts were effusive in acknowledging the contribution of the reform movements in improving women's status, some of

44. Ibid., pp.238-239.
the contemporary analysts\textsuperscript{47} of the movements keep silent on this issue, not even mentioning why the status of women acquired such a centre-stage focus in all the reform debates. Especially when the critiques are set within the context of the discourses on 'modernisation', 'nationalism' or 'revivalism', this extraordinary omission appears to be doubly curious.

Inderjeet Kaur has found that a new concept of womanhood is gradually emerging in India which is at odds with the traditional concept of the Hindu women as a devout wife confined to the home. They are passing through a transitional stage, neither wholly traditional nor fully modern.\textsuperscript{48}

According to Geeta Balachandran, government action for women's emancipation or equality can be neither effective nor adequate unless women themselves become more aware of their rights and responsibilities.\textsuperscript{49}

Studies on women's political behaviour are of a recent origin. While there is a rich volume of studies on political participation in general in the academic world of political science, it is not much rich in respect of women's political participation. However, we can find references in some articles and studies made upon the status of women on political grounds, though very few


scholars have tried to enquire into the political position of women and their participation in political affairs in a society. According to Milbrath, it is a tradition in almost all societies that politics is mainly an affair of men and that women should fall in line with them politically. Men tend to be more psychologically involved in politics than women. Marjorie Lansing points out that women as compared to men are less politically efficacious, less politically interested, have less political information and are less likely to participate in politics.

Herbert Ingsten has made a statistical study of electoral behaviour and party attitude of women and compares them with that of men. He finds that women nowhere make use of their vote to the same extent as the men do. Angus Campbell found the average American woman to be lower in political efficacy, lower in political involvement and less in political concept formation than the average male. However, Susan Welch found in Canada that the sex affects only participation in protest and campaign activities, where men participate slightly more than women. No sex differences were noted in voting or communal activities. Henry Chafe finds

discrimination against women deeply rooted in the structure of society, in the roles women play and in a sexual division of labour which restricted females primarily to the domestic sphere of life.\textsuperscript{55} W.S.J. Kohn in his analysis shows that 'window syndrome' is relatively strong in Britain and America but interesting less in Germany, Australia and Switzerland.\textsuperscript{56} According to Marcia Lee, lack of female participation in politics stems from three factors, namely, children at home, fear of sex discrimination, and perceptions of women that certain things are not proper to do.\textsuperscript{57}

Gabriele Dietrich points out that the politico-legal framework in India is much favourable as far as women's opportunities are concerned. However, women's participation in the parliamentary process does not contribute significantly to improve the position of women in society.\textsuperscript{58} V.B. Singh says that women's under-representation is conspicuous in a situation when the nation does not discourage women seeking the highest position of political power. It forms part of the syndrome of exclusion from political power.\textsuperscript{59}


Dayanand Kamath says that "a woman premier was at the helm of India's affairs for almost two decades. Yet, in general, women's involvement in politics is still low-key."  

According to A.R. Gupta, the political status of women in a nation is reflected in the extent of freedom granted to women in regard to their participation in the political activity. But it has failed to make any profound impact on women's participation in the actual decision-making process.

M.L. Goel finds that as compared to men, women are less involved in Indian politics. Only a few educated women feel confident about affecting government policies.

Anuradha Bhoite finds a wide chasm between de jure and de facto enjoyment of political rights by women in India. On one hand women cast their votes in large numbers, take part in agitational political activities, but on the other hand they lag behind in enjoying power positions and occupying prestigious political offices.

According to Niroj Sinha, it is an international experience that despite loud proclamations of constitutional equality between

men and women, the few women who enter politics seldom enjoy political power or are involved in decision-making process. 64

Studies carried out by UNESCO in seven South-East Asian countries, i.e., Australia, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia and Philippines, indicate that in terms of awareness, party membership, contesting elections, voting or deliberate abstention from voting and decision-making, women’s participation has not been impressive. Women remain in the periphery of the spheres of power and influence. 65

According to Rounak Jahan, two contradictory images come to mind whenever one thinks of women in politics in South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). One is that of powerful women leaders (Indira Gandhi, Srimao Bhandarnaike, Benazir Bhutto, Haniqa Wazed, Khaleda Zia), surrounded by party leaders, addressing huge public meetings, enthusiastically attended mainly by men. Another image is that of female masses, poor, illiterate and often veiled. 66

Linda Richter underlines the highest form of women participation, i.e. female leadership in South and South-east Asia. She states that the main factors which have affected the emergence of top women political leaders in South and South-east Asia.

64. Niroj Sinha, "Women as Marginals in Politics", in Pramila Dandavate and others, Widows, Abandoned and Destitute Women in India, New Delhi, Radiant Pub., 1989, p.68.
Asia are patriarchy, familial ties, martyrdom, social class, female life style, the independence movements, prison experiences and electoral arrangements. Imtiaz Ahmed also argues that the position of Indian women in the field of politics is characterised by a passive political orientation rooted within the social structure itself. So, only a substantial upheaval that undermines the structural basis for traditional views of male and female roles would modify the existing asymmetry in the political status of men and women.

Sakina Yusuf Khan points out that on an average, there have been only three women to every hundred men contestants in the past elections. Due to social conditions and the double work, women can seldom make the time to participate in electoral politics. Often, a woman is fielded simply as a compromise candidate between warring aspirants and are taken mostly from prominent political families.

According to Madhu Ashwar, one reason for the marginalisation of women is that the ruling elite has undermined the normal functioning of government and other public institutions. This has been detrimental for all citizens but especially so far disadvantaged groups like women. Women have relatively less

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ability to use money, muscle power and other forms of influence in the public sphere. Another important reason, why women cannot make it on their own in electoral politics is that electoral politics in India today is increasingly relying on violence. 70

According to Lakshmi Menon, the general attitude towards politics is another obstacle to women's participation in public life. Politics is regarded as "dirty" and education does little to encourage women to take the stigma attached to politics and to see political morality as a reflection of the collective morality of the society in which we live. 71

Bhavani and Jyothi opine that "active political participation implies discussion of public affairs, participation in political campaigns and more than that, motivation to participate. But this total involvement would come only when women have enough time and social acceptance to do the same." 72 Ashok Kumar points out that as far as women's participation in the Panchayati Raj is concerned, it is not up to mark. Mere reservation will not solve the problem unless women are given commensurate powers to function effectively. 73

73. Ashok Kumar, "Women's Participation in Local Institution", in Developing Women and Children in India (ed.), New Delhi, Commonwealth Pub., 1990, pp. 154-82.
However, Manikyamba points out that a trend of revitalisation in the context of political participation of rural women is evident and that the development psyche can be noticed in them. Men's attitudes towards women's entry into politics and leadership positions have also changed.74

Thus, the bulk of the empirical research indicates that women as compared to men participate less in politics and have less political interest and less feelings of political efficacy. Psychological, situational, structural, socio-economic and political variables account for the low participation and involvement of women in politics. Political culture and political structure of a particular political system also determine the women's participation in political affairs.

Milbrath and Goel point out that the most apathetic group is that of the young unmarried citizens who are marginally integrated into their community. Besides, it is also difficult for a couple with young children to find time for politics. But, this factor is more important in determining gladiatorial participation than in determining voting.75 Rashmi Srivastava remarks that more married women than unmarried ones took part in politics and became members of Parliament.76

75. Lester W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, op. cit., p. 115.
Mezey points out that marriage places a greater restraint upon women politicians because they have a greater need for support than men politicians do. However, even if women are assured of their husband's support and cooperation before entering politics, they are less likely to be able to commit themselves to political careers. Women forced to choose between politics and their families would opt for families and thus greatly limiting the available supply of female political activists.77

According to Vijay Agnew, a review of the political history of women in modern era reveals that women took to politics when they were supported by male family members and which in no way disturbed the traditional male-female relationship of sex-based division of labour. Women politicians perceived their participation in politics as being supportive of the activity of their male family members and involved in nationalist activity with their consent.78 Jeane Kirkpatrick points out that 'all the married legislators agree that a co-operative husband is the first requirement for successfully juggling of family and career.'79

Note on Haryana: The present Haryana, a tiny state of 27,638 square miles, which came into existence on 1st November, 1966, was carved out of Punjab on 1 November, 1966. The south east portion of this

Punjab, which is now known as Haryana, had come into the possession of the British much earlier than the rest of Punjab. The British East India Company had established itself in the Delhi territory including most of the present Haryana in 1803 itself, after the Maratha failure and their consequent withdrawal to the south. It came to form part of the Delhi division under the lieutenant governorship of the North-west province of Agra and Oudh.

The dominant popular culture in Haryana is both caste and class based. It emerges closely associated with a specific dominant caste (and dominant class) and yet is widely dispersed among different social groups that make up the social fabric of Haryana. This dominant popular culture thus often exaces divisions and dissimilarities between the cultural formulations of different social groups. In this sense the popular culture of the region must be distinguished from popular culture as generally understood, i.e. necessarily associated with the Subaltern classes. The culture of this region which can be termed as 'peasant' culture emerges here as simultaneously 'dominant' and 'popular' with layers of Subaltern cultures under its hegemonic fold. This dominant popular culture is also distinctly different from the high caste Brahmanical culture identified with the 'great tradition', as found in certain other parts of India. The ritually higher caste of Brahmins can, in fact be seen to follow the cultural practices and dominant customs of this region in preference to the Sanskritic cultural model. Yet this dominant popular culture does not work to the exclusion of other cultural strands, and encompasses both the ritually higher as well as the submerged lower classes in a
dynamic and flexible relationship. We see many of their cultural practices operating independently, and frequently in direct contradiction of and opposition to the dominant popular culture.

The colonial administration and its attitude in pre-independent India retained and reinforced the dominant social ethos of rural Haryana. This social ethos was permanently to colour and influence the subsequent changes brought about in India. In fact these fifty years of independence have situated the rural women in an altogether different rural set-up. The introduction of wide-reaching agro-economic changes has successfully catapulted this region from a backward subsistence level economy to becoming the second richest state in India.

The present-day Haryana region in this Punjab roughly approximated to the Ambala division,\(^{80}\) minus its Simla district. This Ambala division also underwent a few territorial changes after independence. Now the state has 19 districts.\(^{81}\) Geographically, it surrounds the national capital on three sides and is hemmed in between Uttar Pradesh on the north and Rajasthan with its vast deserts in the South.

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80. Through repeated territorial rearrangements, specially in the wake of the happenings of 1857 and again in 1911, when the capital was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi, the British created the Ambala division of Punjab which included six districts i.e. Rohtak, Hissar, Gurgaon, Karnal, Ambala and Simla.

81. The 19 districts are-Rohtak, Hissar, Karnal, Ambala, Gurgaon, Jind, Mahendergarh, Bhiwani, Sonipat, Kurukshetra, Faridabad, Sirsa, Kaithal, Rewari, Jhajjar, Fatehabad, Narnaul, Yamunanagar and Panipat.
Social Features: The population of the State as per 1991 census was 16,317,715 which was higher by 26.28 percent over the population of 1981. The density of population in Haryana as per 1991 census was 369. According to the size of population, this State is ranked at 15th place among the States and Union Territories of India. Its population forms 1.93 percent of the total population of India. The sex-ratio of the State is 874. In the total population of Haryana, 8,705,379 were males and 7,612,336 were females. The population residing in rural areas of Haryana constituted 1,22,72,545 and that in urban areas 40,45,170. The literacy rate of the State as a whole as per 1991 census, was 55.33. Among males it was 67.85 and among females it was 40.94. The percentage of workers in the total population of the State was 30.83 during 1991. This ratio was 47.92 percent among males and 11.29 percent among females. The people of Haryana speak many dialects of western and Rajasthani Hindi. Although the official language of the State is Hindi, a few other dialects are also very popular here. The other languages which are spoken in the State are Punjabi and Urdu.

The people of Haryana profess many religions. Every religion is further divided into castes and each caste into sub-castes. Like the existence of various castes, the religions in

83. Ibid., p.64.
Haryana are also many. The three most popular religions of the state are: Hindu, Sikh, Muslim. Ninety nine per cent of the total population is the follower of any of these religions. The other religions of the state are: Jainism, Christian and Buddhism. The per capita income of Haryana region in 1966-67 was Rs.343 which rose to Rs.2370 in the year 1980-81. During 1989-90 it was Rs.6026 at current prices and Rs.3124 at the prices of 1980-81. The similar figures for India as a whole were Rs.4252 and Rs.2142 respectively. Haryana is primarily an agricultural state. About 80 percent of its people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Various measures have been taken to raise the standard of living of its farmers. Haryana is the first state which has written off cooperative loans of farmers. It also raised the price of sugarcane from Rs.24 to Rs.35 per quintal during 1988-89. The state has witnessed a phenomenal increase in agricultural output. Foodgrains production had a quantum jump from 25.92 lakh tonnes in 1966 to 94.83 lakh tonnes in 1988-89. Today, Haryana is not only self-sufficient in foodgrains production but also among the top contributors of foodgrains to Central Pool which stands at 30-35 lakh tonnes.

84. Yadav, Aripal Chandra, op. cit.
Like agriculture, the associated activity of animal husbandry also is well developed in Haryana. Because of the suitable agro-climatic conditions some of the country's best breed, both milk and draught variety, are found in the state.

The state has a very sound industrial base. Small scale units have increased more than nineteen-fold from 4,519 in 1966 to more than 86,100 in the year 1989-90. Haryana produces the largest number of tractors in the country. One out of every four bicycles is manufactured here besides around one-third of country's production of sanitary wares. Panipat has earned the reputation of being the weavers' city of India for its exquisite hand-tufted woolen carpets and colourful handloom products. There are 400 large and medium scale units in the state. Greater emphasis is being laid on dispersal of industries in rural areas. Under this scheme 34,488 units have been set up manufacturing a wide range of products, employing 87,892 persons.

Haryana is beneficiary of the multi-purpose project on Sutlej and Beas where it shares benefits with Punjab and Rajasthan. Major irrigation projects are western Yamuna Canal, Bhakra Canal system and Gurgaon Canal. The state has completed Jui and Sewani lift irrigation schemes and Jawaharlal Nehru irrigation scheme, the biggest of its kind and Loharu lift irrigation scheme. Power generation and distribution systems have been augmented manifold. Consumption of power which was 17 lakh units a day in 1966 is now around 250 lakh units a day. Number of grid sub-stations including

pole-mounting sub-stations in the state has risen from 5,437 to 60,477. In rural electrification Haryana has an impressive record of being the first state to have electrified all its villages. More than 4,376 villages already provided with street lights. In the year of formation of Haryana only 170 problem villages out of a total of 5,686 had access to safe drinking water. At present more than 5,600 villages have this facility round the year.

Haryana has 21,273 km. of motorable roads of which only 2,000 km. are unmetalled. National highway runs to 655 km. Rail routes to Howrah, Madras, Bombay, Agra, Ajmer, Ferozepur, Chandigarh and Jammu cross through the state. Delhi and Chandigarh airports on eastern and northern boundaries link the state with other major national and international stations. At present there are six civil aerodromes at Hissar, Karnal, Pinjore, Narnaul and Bhiwani with all-weather pucca runway.

The Political Scenario: The political scenario in Haryana will baffle any observer who applied the logic which normally operates in a democratic polity. The democratic ethos is yet to strike roots in Haryana.

an identity of its own, the presence of reform movements, orderly growth of towns, the emergence of a middle class elite, the

89. Ibid.
90. Ibid., p. 767.
91. Ibid.
flowering of language and literature, are a few factors which determine the social and political consciousness in a state. These factors have been largely absent in Haryana. Instead, the social cleavage is very conspicuous in Haryana. It is of two kinds - Jat versus non-Jats and the town versus the country side.

In sum, the Haryana society has lost its cohesiveness and is riven with sharp dissensions. No government can remain stable for long once its legitimacy comes under question at the hands of a big chunk of the population. The social organism is highly fractured and disjoined. The rural-urban divide in Haryana has assumed frightening proportions. This is an ugly face of casteism in the state. In fact, it is Jat versus non-Jats in the state as a whole.

According to Dr.D.R.Choudhary, between the patriarch and the trader there is a third trend which stands for democratic polity. There is an urgent need to strengthen this trend to restore health to Haryana society. Individuals and groups are emerging in Haryana today for whom politics is not a dirty game, nor honesty an empty word. After the demise of the political culture represented by the patriarch, there was ensured a grim battle between the trader and the democrat.92

This region in the colonial period, remained one of the most backward and underdeveloped regions of Punjab. The needs of imperialism gave low priority to any improvement of agriculture in Haryana. It was seen primarily as suited for the supply.

92. Dr.D.R.Chaudhry, "Lok Sabha Elections and Haryana", Teaching Politics.
of draught animals to the rest of Punjab, as also in certain other parts of India. The determined efforts of the British to retain it as such are reflected in their irrigational policies, emphasis on low value food-cum-fodder crops, and in their attempts to curb the limited efforts made at substitution of fodder crops by other crops, which might adversely affect this region's cattle wealth. Animal husbandry emerged as a necessary supplement to this region's subsistence level economy.

The perpetuation of this backward economy proves to be very helpful to imperial interests, as the impoverished tract became a major recruiting area for the British Indian Army.

The exposure to the forces of modernisation, the process of westernisation, introduction of modern educational system, development of means of communication, social reform movement, role of caste associations and the constitutional reforms during the British raj brought about a marginal change in Haryana's traditional culture. But that change influenced only a microscopic minority of urbanised educated people.

The introduction of democratic polity based on the principle of equality, universal adult franchise, economic development through planning, rapid spread over of educational facilities and the politisation of masses have brought about some change in the traditional culture of Haryana. The democratic values of equality, rational and scientific outlook, achievement orientation, and other modern values have been injected in the traditional value system. But the change has been very slow and imperceptible. The traditional values continue to influence social behaviour. However, their hold has been weakened to some extent.
This mixed neo-traditional value system has led to the following political consequences:\(^\text{93}\)

1. It has led to a mixed or neo-traditional political, culture, the hold of parochial loyalties is very strong.

2. It has reinforced an authoritarian outlook in the political elites and submissiveness in the masses.

3. There is lack of political articulation in the masses.

4. The levels of political awareness, political efficacy and political interest are very low.

5. There is a great gap between the rulers and the ruled.

Sources - There is a scarcity and uneveness of material in terms of region and time periods. Recent works on the women's movement and women's political participation have used a multiplicity of published and unpublished archival records. Government documents form a major source of information, including secret police intelligence reports. Many private collections are still not open to scholars. Some sources of data are outside the country. Records of some political groups were destroyed by police action or otherwise through riots or careless maintenance.\(^\text{94}\)

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Many journals in India and Britain of this period (1857-1947) also contain highly useful material. Other rewarding sources are the journals of women's organizations which were mouth-pieces and/or forums in which debates on women's issues were conducted; women's autobiographies; collection of speeches and essays by women leaders (e.g. Besant, Naidu, Cousins); regional literature, reflecting variations in social perception and the response of specific societies and communities to the movements; proceedings of local women's associations etc. Oral histories and reminiscences of women in the national movement are to some extent available on tape in some archives.

As regards our women in Haryana, we have depended on material procured from the Haryana Secretariat at Chandigarh and the District authorities at Rohtak. We have also used the findings of some scholars on the role of women in municipalities and panchayats in Haryana.

Lastly, the articles appearing in Indian periodicals on women's issues have been widely referred.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental duties and Directive Principles. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards, there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National
Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights for women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW-1979) in 1993.

The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995), have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up.

However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analysed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, "Towards Equality" (1974) and highlighted in the National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) and the Shramshakti Report (1988).

In the following pages, we have made an effort to study the question of legal and political status of women both at the macro and micro level on the basis of available data. The focus is on Indian women in general. However, the data available on Haryana in relation to women has been taken up in a separate chapter.