CHAPTER
IV
STATUS OF WOMAN

Introduction

There is a general tendency of dividing mankind on the basis of 'Gender' as 'man' and 'woman'. The gender difference, no doubt, is a biological fact. But this difference has created many other kinds of differences between 'men' and 'women', e.g., aims and objectives, desires and aspirations, duties and responsibilities, dress styles and behavioural patterns, roles and status and the like. At no stage, in the history of mankind, men and women were treated as equal and were assigned with equality of status. In spite of the desire of women to lead a life of equality with men in all respects, they have not been able to attain this goal. Consequently, women do not represent a culture, totally different from that of men. Both represent the same way of life, the same culture and the same civilisation. This is as true of the Indian women as of the women dwelling elsewhere in the world.¹

The status of women, in any given society, is indicative of its standards of culture and civilization. Swami Vivekananda has
said, 'That country and that nation which did not respect woman have never become great, nor will ever be in future'. The liberty enjoyed by women to move about and take part in public life, is the yardstick to measure the progress of that society. Mahatma Gandhi was a great humanist and an ardent advocate of freedom of women and equal status for woman and man. Hence in the study of the 'Social Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi', it is of great significance to discuss the status of woman and Mahatma's views on the subject.

**Status of Woman in India**

When we glance at the population chart of any country in the world, we see that women constitute almost 50 per cent of the total population. Therefore, we can say that women constitute half of the mankind (not womankind !). In spite of this fact, their status everywhere has always been inferior to that of man. In some societies women enjoyed better status as compared to their counterparts in other societies, but never, ever equal to that of men in their own society. Women have always been subjected to inequality, discrimination, exploitation, subjugation and in many cases inhuman treatment at the hands of men. However, any significant change in the social system also brings about some degree of change in the status of women. The story of 'Indian
Women' does not differ much from that of other women. A study of the changes in the status of women in India, through various historical stages, is imperative in understanding this problem.

The problem can be studied in three stages: status of women in (I) Ancient India, (II) Mediaeval India, and (III) Modern India.

I. Status of Woman in Ancient India

It can be divided into four sub-stages.

a) Women in Vedic and Post-Vedic Periods

During the Vedic period woman was held in high esteem by the patriarchal society. That is why the popular quotations regarding the status of woman were freely circulated in the society then, "Where women are worshipped, there Gods take pleasure." It is a fact of history that the women scholars like Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra, contributed many hymns to Rigveda. Not only the scholarship was the hallmark of the Vedic woman, but here friendly behaviour with her husband earned her much reputation in the society. According to A.S. Altekar, wife was 'a friend of her husband' and 'There is no physician like wife'.2 When Manu, the lawgiver, came on the scene, this bright picture
of the Hindu woman was dimmed and she was considered a toiling animal.

b) Women During the Epic Period

Like the women of the Vedic age, the women of epic period also enjoyed an honourable status in the contemporary society. The greatest classical epics of India, 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata', have treated women with great honour. Sita of 'Ramayana' and 'Draupadi' of 'Mahabharata' are heroines of great stature around whom the epics are woven. However, these two heroines represent two different aspects of feminine ethos in ancient India. Sita, the obedient and ideal woman and Draupadi, the stubborn and challenging woman. How can any reader of Mahabharat forget the brilliant disposition of Draupadi in the court of the Kauravas? Her daring remarks, "What right the eldest of the Pandavas has, to stake me in the game of dice when he himself has lost?", has hardly any parallel in world literature. Such instances prove that the Indian women enjoyed high status during the ancient times.

c) Women During the Period of 'Dharmashatras' and 'Puranas'

During this period, the status of Indian women appears to have undergone a profound change. Daughters were relegated to
the position of second class citizens and freedom of women was curtailed to a large extent. The disparity between son and daughter can be seen in the names given to them as 'Putra' (son) and 'Kanya' (daughter). 'Putra' is one who protects his parents from falling into the hell called 'Punn'; and 'Kanya' is one who creates anxiety in the minds of her parents as 'who would take her?'. In short, 'Putra' is the protector of the family and 'Kanya' is the destroyer of the family. Who made these illogical and unholy classifications is a mystery buried deep down in the womb of the ancient patriarchal Indian society.

Manu, the Hindu lawgiver of the period, gave the famous injunction of no freedom to a woman. 'A woman has to be under the father's care during the childhood, under the husband's care during youth and under son's care during old age. At no state shall she deserve freedom.'

Surprisingly, Manu also stated that a society in which woman is not honoured would be condemned to damnation. The wife was to be loyal to the husband. It was during this period that the male and priestly dominance started taking roots. Girls were prevented from learning the Veda and become Brahmacharinis.
It was due to such restrictions that the status of women started deteriorating and consequently various other problems like, 'Pre-puberty marriage practices, prohibition of widow marriage, husband was to be treated as God by wife (Pati paradaiva), denial of education to women, increase in the incident of 'Sati', introduction of 'Purdah' system and tolerance to practice of polygamy'\(^4\) started creeping in.

Women were denied share in the husband's property because, 'A wife and a slave cannot own property'. She was denied the religious freedom of offering sacrifices, prayers, practising penance and undertaking pilgrimage and studying the Vedas.

The factors that were responsible for the degradation of women during this period were: the imposition of Brahminical austerities on the entire society; rigid restrictions imposed by the caste system and the joint family system; lack of educational facilities for women; introduction of non-Aryan wife into the Aryan household and foreign invasions (by Greeks, Parthians, Victorians, Huns, etc.).
d) Status of Women During Buddhist Period

There was slight improvement in the status of women during this period. Some of the restrictions of the caste system were relaxed. Buddha preached gender equality. He tried to improve the status of women. Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, Shri Harsha and other kings of Buddhist era introduced measures to restore the lost freedom and honour of the Indian women. This was largely due to relatively broad-based Buddhist philosophy.

It may be worthy of observation that Buddha did treat marriage as an inevitable event in the woman's life. Widowhood of the woman was not considered dishonour. Women were free to pursue academic careers, and permitted to be 'Sanyasinis' and be members of 'Bhiksuni Sangha'. This was guided by some rules and regulations, as was also the case with 'Bhiksus' or male monks.

But, in spite of these apparent changes, we can notice that sufficient changes and improvement were not brought about in the status of women during the Buddhist period. One need not feel ashamed that only the east has ill-treated woman, even the west has its share in humiliating woman. For the purpose of a swift comparison, a glance towards the west, Greeks have treated
their women very badly. Woman was a 'second creation' for them, say, a second grade citizen. They used to lock their legally wedded wives to visit the prostitutes.

Among the Jews the woman was the most hateful creature. Even to-day, a Jew in his prayer says, "Blessed thou art O Lord, Our God! King of the universe! Who hath not made me a woman'.

In Christianity woman is, "Origin of devil, the scorpion ever ready to sting".

II. Status of Women in Medieval India (500 AD - 1500 AD)

Medieval period can be described as the most disappointing phase as far as the status of women in India was concerned. With the firmer grip of Brahminism on society after the death of Harshavardhan (646 AD), 'her freedom was curtailed, knowledge of not only the scriptures but even the letters was denied to her and her status was reduced to that of an appendage on man'.

Caste laws gained currency. 'Mitaksara' law for the entire country and 'Daya Bhaga' in Bengal reduced women to the status of slaves. Women could not inherit property. Girls were treated as liabilities. Other problems faced by women during this period
were, practice of child marriage, prohibition of widow marriage, practice of Sati, 'Purdah' system and 'Devadasi' system.

It is a heartening experience to an impartial student of sociology that woman in Islam enjoyed a very respectable position about two hundred years from the inception of Islam. In the Quran, seventeen times it is mentioned that man and woman are equal. The Quran declares, "Wives have the same right as the husbands have on them". The prophet of Islam proclaims that the daughter is the golden key to haven for her parents. Bibi Umme Ammar was the Commander-in-Chief of the Muslim army in the battle of Yemen. Another woman Fakrunnisa was delivering sermons to the Friday congregation of thousands of men in the Grand Mosque of Iraq. This elegant picture of Muslim woman faded when the lawgiver Wajid II appeared. Then what happened to the Hindu woman after Manu came, the same happened to the Muslim woman when Wajid II Came.

During this period 'Bhakti' movement gave a new life to women. However, this movement did not bring about any change in the economic structure of the society and hence women continued to hold low status in the society.
While making an assessment of the status of Indian women, Altekar concludes as follows: ‘Thus for nearly 2000 years from B.C. 200 to 1800 A.D. the position of women steadily deteriorated though she was fondled by the parents, loved by the husband and revered by her children. The revival of ‘Sati’, the prohibition of remarriage, the spread of ‘Pardah’ and the greater prevalence of polygamy made her position very bad’.

It is also important to take note of the observations made by Meera Desai. She says, ‘Ideologically women was considered a completely inferior species, inferior to the male, having no significance, no personality; socially she was kept in a state of utter subjection, denied any right, suppressed and oppressed; she was further branded as basically lacking the ethical fibre. The patriarchal joint family, the customs of polygamy, the ‘Pardah’, the property structure, early marriage, self-immolation of the widows (‘Sati’) or a permanent state of widowhood, all these contributed to the smothering of the free development of women’.
III. Status of Women in Modern India

Historically, the period after 1750 A.D. is known as the modern period. The study of the status of women during this period can be divided into two phases.

a) Status of Women During the British Rule

After the establishment of British rule (Battle of Plassey 1757 A.D.), they dominated the country throughout the remaining part of 18th, entire 19th and first half of the 20th century. During this period, the Indian social system experienced metamorphic changes. Education was one field to which the British attached special importance. In fact, it is the British rule, which provided for equal opportunities in education to women in India. Attempts were made to do away with the evils like child marriage, ‘Sati’ system, ‘Devadasi’ system, ‘Purdah’ system, prohibition of widow remarriage, etc. After centuries, serious attempts were made to tackle the problems faced by women. The British Government joined hands with the social reformers with human concern and introduced several measures towards improving the status of women by removing their disabilities on the one hand and by providing opportunities on the other.
The important forces, which were responsible for the betterment of status of women during the British period, can be summarised as follows.

The British rule brought about a change in the attitudes and values and stress on quality of life and individual freedom.

The great reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Maharshi Karve, Jyotiba Fule, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, Maharaj Sayaji Rao Gaikwad of Baroda, Swmai Vivekananda, Dadabhai Naororji, Gopalkrishna Gokhale, Mahatma Gandhi and others.

The importance of women leaders with western background also has to be underscored. For example, the role of sister Nivedita, Annie Besant, Margeret Cousins and of Indian women with British education like Sarojini Naidu, Pandit Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade, etc.

The influence of women’s education by the British administration created increased opportunities for women.

Women leaders like Pandit Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade, Torudatta, Kamalabai Chattopadhyaya, Swarna Kumari Devi,
Rajakumari Amrit Kaur, Annie Besant, and so on are of immense importance.

Many women organisations like Arya Mahila Samaj, Sarada Sadan (1887), Bharat Mahila Parishat (1904), Bharat Sthri Maha Mandal (1916), Women’s India Association (1917), All India Women’s Conference (1946). It is noted that the women working in fields like education, administration and so on is gradually increasing.

During the freedom struggle women took an active role.

Various social legislations also played an important role in uplifting the status of women. These legislations are related to marriage, property rights, and employment opportunities under Government, prevention of Sati Act, 1829. The Widow Remarriage Act, 1856, The Special Marriage Act, 1872, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, The Married Women’s Property Act, 1874 and the Hindu Women’s Right to Property Act 1939. These are the legislations, which played an important role in the upliftment of the status of women in India.
b) Status of Women in Independent India

The status of Indian women has radically changed since independence. Both the structural and cultural changes provided equality of opportunities to women in education, employment and participation in politics. With the help of these, a better orientation was provided to the women's organisations to pursue their interests. Importance of research, national policies and programmes focussed on women came to be increasingly realised. Several Commissions were appointed by the Central and state Governments to study the causes of low status of women and to protect their rights in various fields. The celebration of International Women's Year in 1975 and the activities of UNESCO also created awareness among the women about their problems.

The improvement in the status of Indian women, especially after independence, can be analysed in the light of the major changes that took place in areas such as legislation, education, economic and employment sectors, political participation in country's politics and awareness of rights and so on.

1. Constitution and Legislation in Support of Women's Cause

Constitutional provision for equality between men and women: The Constitution of India does not discriminate between
men and women. All men and women are equally entitled to individual freedom, fundamental rights including the right to participate in social, cultural, religious, educational, economic and political activities. The Constitution provides for equality of sex and offers protection to women against exploitation. It has given the voting right to women and it in no way treats women as second grade citizens.

Social legislations safeguarding women's interests: The Government of Independent India undertook a number of legislative measures to safeguard the interest of women. Some of them are:

i. The Hindu Marriage Act 1955, which prohibits polygamy, polyandry and child marriage and it also concedes equal rights to women in the event of divorce and remarry.

ii. The Hindu Succession Act 1956, which provides women the right to their parental property.

iii. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956, which gives a childless woman the right to adopt a child and to claim maintenance from the husband if she is divorced by him.
iv. The Special Marriage Act 1954, which provides rights to women on par with men for inter-caste marriage, love marriage and registered marriage. The Act has also fixed the minimum age of marriage at 21 for male and 18 for female.

v. The Dowry Prohibition Act 1966, which declares the taking and giving of dowry an unlawful activity and thereby prevents the exploitation of women.

vi. Other legislations are:

   a. The Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act 1956, which gives protection to women from being kidnapped and or compelled to become prostitutes.

   b. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971, which legalises abortion conceding the right to woman for abortion on the ground of physical and mental health.

   c. The Criminal Law Amendment Act 1983, which seeks to stop various types of crimes against women.

   d. The Family Court Act 1984, which provides justice to women who get involved in family disputes.
2. **Women in the Field of Education**

After Independence, women of India took to education in a big way. For example, in 1901, the literacy level of females in India was just 0.6 per cent. It increased to 39.42 per cent in 1991. Various benefits such as free ship, scholarship, loan facility, hostel facility and so on are being given to women, who go for higher education. In many towns and cities, educational institutions meant only for female children have been established. The educational performance of girl students, particularly at high school and college level, is proving to be better than that of boys, especially after 1980s. This performance of girls makes it evident that intellect is not the monopoly of men alone. This nation has gone much ahead in the field of education and we have today some universities exclusively meant for women – SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai, Mother Teresa University for Women (Kodaikenal, Tamil Nadu). Girl students are getting admitted, on merit basis, to the prestigious engineering and medical colleges in larger numbers during the recent years. Women have now realised that education makes a lot of difference in the social status of men or women. It must be noted that even though urban women are quite conscious of education and its importance, more
than 70 per cent of our total women are still illiterate and only a negligible number of them develop their educational career.

3. Women in the Economic and Employment Fields

In both rural and urban areas, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of women going out of the four walls to work in various establishments. In the matters of employment they are giving tough competition to men folk. In some fields, the number of women employees is steadily increasing. For example, women working as teachers, doctors, nurses, advocates, bank employees, clerks, typists, telephone operators, receptionists, personal assistants and so on, are to be found in almost all cities. In big cities, women do not hesitate to work as bus conductors, police constables, auto-rickshaw drivers and so on. Since 1991, they have been getting recruited into armed force.

Employment opportunities have given women economic independence and a feeling of importance. They can stand on their own feet and look after the entire family. This has boosted their self-pride and self-confidence. Employed women feel that they need not live as parasites on their men-folk.

In order to give protection to the economic interests and rights of the women-folk, the Government has enacted various
laws, which cover areas such as right to property or inheritance, equal wages, working conditions, maternity benefits and job security. For instance,

i) The Maternity Benefit Act 1961, which gives maternity benefits such as two months’ leave with salary to the married women workers.

ii) The Equal Remuneration Act 1976, which removes wage discrimination between male and female workers.

iii) The Factories Amendment Act 1976, which includes provisions dealing with working laws, weekly rest, standards of cleanliness, ventilation, temperature, first aid facilities, rest rooms, etc. The legislation also provides for establishing crèches for children (if the factory employees 30 or more women), separate toilets for females and lays down a maximum work of nine hours a day for women and no employment of women between 10.00 p.m. and 5.00 a.m.

iv) The Hindu Succession Act 1956, according to which not only a daughter is given a right in her father’s property equal to her brothers but a widow also gets a share in her deceased husband’s property equal to her sons and daughters.
4. Women in the Political Field

The Indian Constitution has sanctioned two important political rights to women; female enfranchisement and eligibility for the legislature. As early as in 1937 itself, some women candidates had contested elections to the local legislature bodies and had won. After independence the number of women voters and women's representatives in Assemblies and Parliament has increased considerably. Women have developed sufficient political awareness and some of them have attained very high positions in political parties, legislatures and cabinets. In the Central Cabinet as well as in the State Cabinets, we find some ministerial portfolios being headed by women. The nation witnessed its most powerful Prime Minister, in Indira Gandhi, who ably led this country for more than a decade. In many states such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and so on, about 30 per cent of the seats are reserved for women candidates in the local bodies. Many steps are taken after recent Lok Sabha Elections (1996) to reserve 33 per cent of total seats for women in State Legislature and in Parliament. It may be noted that political awareness is, at present, more among the urban women than among the rural women; and among the middle and upper class women, than among the lower class women.
5. Awareness Among Women Regarding Their Rights

Women in independent India have more rights than their counterparts in many other countries of the world. However, most of the women are not very much conscious of these rights. Uneducated rural women do not have any awareness of their rights. Ram Ahuja conducted a study, a few years ago, in eight villages of a district in Rajasthan, among 753 women belonging to different age groups. His intention was to assess the degree of awareness and measure the level of satisfaction, among women about their rights sanctioned by the Constitution of India. He concludes that the level of awareness of rights by women depends upon the following four aspects:

i) Individual background of women which refers to their educational level, aspiration level and personal needs.

ii) Social environment of women which includes the social expectations of kins, husband’s values and perceptions of the family members.

iii) Economic base of women which refers to the level of class-membership (that is, whether they belong to lower class, middle class or upper class).
iv) Subjective perception of women which refers to women’s own feeling and assessment of their status and roles.

Ram Ahuja says that more than 75 per cent of women were deprived of their rights, 20 per cent of them did not have any awareness of their political rights, less than $1/3$rd of women had the chance of inheriting their husband’s property and only 0.5 per cent of them got a share in their father’s property.\(^9\)

Based on the above study and some general observations, it could be generalised that even to-day, a majority of Indian women are being identified not as independent individuals but only as daughters, wives, mothers or as family members. Women are also not ready for their separate or independent identification. Hence, women are still regarded as belonging to the ‘weaker section’.

One can deduce that majority of Indian women (more than 50 per cent) are happy with their family life and do not cherish any ambition relating to political and public life. The earning women members also do not have the full freedom to spend their money in accordance with their own will and wish. Most of the women do not prefer to take decisions on important matters but leave them to their men-folk’s discretion. Thus, Indian women
are not completely free from the hold of the traditions. In the unorganised sector, exploitation of women continues, because they are illiterate, ignorant and unorganised. In most of the homes, male children are still being preferred to female children.

It appears that the social approach towards women, their role and status has not radically changed. Hence, merely enacting more and more legislations to ensure better opportunities to grant more rights and concessions to women is proving to be of no avail in the absence of basic change in the people's attitude towards women and women's role in society.

6. **Women in Modern India - Problems**

Women, in India, are comparatively in a more respectable position. Some of the problems, which had been haunting the community of women for centuries, are not found now. Problems such as child marriage, practice of ‘Sati’, prohibition of widow remarriage, exploitation of widows, ‘Devadasi’ system, ‘Purdah’ system and so on have almost disappeared. Development in the field of science and technology, universalisation of education, socio-political movements, modernisation and similar developments have changed the approach of people towards women to a certain extent. These developments have boosted the morale and self-confidence of women. As a result, Indian women
now feel that they too have their individuality, self-respect, talent, capacity and efficiency. Many of those women, who could grab the opportunities extended to them, have proved that they are capable of discharging the responsibilities assigned to them. The nation, which neglected almost 50 per cent of its population for several centuries, has now understood the necessity of giving equal rights and opportunities to its women-folk.

The Constitution of India provides equal rights and opportunities to women. It does not make any discrimination on the grounds of sex. Indian women are also responding positively to this changed socio-political situation. This does not mean that women are completely free from problems. On the contrary, the changing situation is creating new problems for them. They are now beset with new stresses and strains. Some of the major problems haunting the modern women may briefly be analysed here.

IV. Problems of Modern Women

1. Increasing Crimes Against Women

Crimes against women appear to be a never-ending problem. This problem has been growing more and more acute in India during the recent years. Crimes against women include
violence against women, rape, molestation, dowry harassment, wife-battering, kidnapping female children to sell to brothels, deliberate embarrassment, forcible religious conversion, cheating young women with a promise to marry them or fetch them a job and various types of sexual harassment at their work place and abuse of women including eve-teasing.

As per the Report (1994) of the Crime Record Bureau of the Central Home Ministry, 'Crimes against women increased to a great extent in the year 1993-94. As per this report, in India on an average, (i) every day, every 6 minutes one atrocity is committed against women, (ii) in every 44 minutes a women is kidnapped, (iii) in every 47 minutes a woman is raped, and (iv) every day 17 dowry deaths are taking place. The same Report reveals that crimes against women increased two times in the last 10 years; instances of rape by 400 per cent in the last two decades; instances of kidnapping and blackmailing women by 30 per cent between 1974 and 1993. In 1993 alone, about 82,813 instances of crimes against women were registered.

Violence against women is increasing not only in the western countries but in India as well. This violence against women, in particular, has inhibited women as a group from enjoying the full benefits of human rights. Women have been
vulnerable to acts of violence in the family, in the community and by the state. Women are subjected to violence in the family (battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry related violence, incest, deprivation of food, marital rape, female genital mutilation) to violence in the community (rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, trafficking in women, forced prostitution) and to violence by state (women in detention and rapes during times of armed conflict).

Exploitation and Harassment of Women

While women in the unorganised sector are very much exploited, women in the organised sectors also are harassed in several ways. In films and T.V. shows, women are more often portrayed as objects of sex and nothing more than that. This type of commercialisation of sex damages the image of women. Misrepresentation of women in the media definitely lowers the status of women. In the rural areas, lower caste working women are sexually exploited and in the tribal areas tribal women are often kidnapped and sold in the international prostitution market. Even today, a large number of poor rural women are working as bonded labourers in the houses of land lords.
2. **Decline in the Female Population**

Normally, in the population of any country male-female ratio remains more or less the same, which is half-and-half. In India the Census Report reveals that female population has been steadily declining ever since 1901. It is for this reason Meera Desai and Vibhuti Patel raised the point whether the women-folk in India represent a 'declining sex'. (It was only during 1971-81, the female population increased from 930 to 933 for every 1000 males). Even the 1991 Census Report shows that the female population has decreased to 929 per every 1000 males. Added to this, the number of women dying before they attain the age of 40, is also higher than that of males. The imbalance in the sex ratio will have its own social consequences.

3. **Female Children Becoming Victims of Discrimination**

In the Indian social context even today, male children are preferred to female children. Hence, female children are subject to discriminatory treatment. Male preference and female negligence has almost become a working policy especially in the rural areas. Discrimination between male and female children is made in the matters relating to food, dress, health, education, domestic work. The attitude of male preference and female
negligence has led to what is known as 'Female disadvantages'. In India, mothers show preference to male children. They give them more importance because they feel males are wanted during their old age to offer protection. Also, there is a typical belief among the Hindus that without the son, the parents cannot enter the heaven. That is why the son is often called 'The light of the family'. Males have greater scope than women and occupational avenues are also wider for males than for females. This male preference has led to the abuse of advanced technology. The sophisticated scanning and supersonographic equipment is being misused to find out the sex of the child; that is to go in for abortion if it is a female child. These medical tests which would cost from Rs.80 to Rs.800 are within the reach of the middle class and even the upper-lower class, resulting in the killing of the female foetuses in large number. Between 1978 and 1982, more than 70,000 foetuses were killed depending on these medical tests.

4. Health Problem of Women

   Women suffer from some distinctive health problems from which men are free. Women have to undergo the distinctive biological process of pregnancy, child-bearing, delivering, nursing, feeding, child-caring or rearing. These are their
maternal functions. But the insistence on the family planning has posed many health hazards. The use of contraceptives, copper-T, sterilisation, abortion and hormonal drugs has an adverse effect on their health. Those who make use of them suffer from problems such as weakness, bloodlessness, excess bleeding, obscenity, problems of uterus, discomfort in breast, chronic back pain. As Meera Desai and Vibhuti Patel have criticised the advocates of family planning do not seem to bother about these problems.

Women Neglecting Their Own Health

Studies have revealed that women themselves are neglecting their own health. Normally Indian women consume less food (that is, on an average 100 calories a day) and spend more energy in work. Women toil for the good of the family and children at the cost of neglecting their health. Women rarely complain about their ill health because of their virtue of 'self-denial'. As per the records of medical care centres, on an average only 25 per cent of those receiving medical care are women.

Reasons for Neglecting Women’s Health

Not finding free time to go the health centres, because of the heavy work at home, non-availability of proper medical facility to
test the health of the mother and child, especially in the primary health centres; inability to walk a long distance to reach a well-equipped health centre in the absence of proper transportation facility; non-availability of female doctors in the nearby health centres, are some such reasons.

1. **Problems of Female Education**

Social reformers and social thinkers believe that in a nation like India imparting education to women, in as large a number as possible, can prove to be a panacea for many of the problems of women. Accordingly, much attention is paid to the education of women after independence. The female literacy level is also increasing steadily. It has increased from 18.7 per cent in 1971 to 39.42 per cent in 1991. In spite of this change in the trend towards higher literacy rate among women, some other problems have cropped up. We find glaring difference between the education of men and women.

It is found that girls are being discouraged to go for higher education as also for professional and technical education.

There are regional imbalances also. In states like Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra, female education is given equal importance as education for males. Whereas in states like Bihar,
Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, education for girls is neglected even today.

Increasing drop out of female children from schools is another problem. Though female children are getting admitted to primary, middle and high schools in a substantial number, many of them drop out of the school in the middle without completing the course. For example, as per the data furnished by the Ministry of Education (New Delhi) in 1984-85, the number of female children enrolled in primary schools crossed the figure of 34.2 million and at middle school level the enrolment crossed 9.2 million. More than 74 per cent of these female children between the age group of 6-14 years, quit schools and lapsed into ignorance.

Admission to School

Even in the matter of admitting children to school at elementary level, female children are discriminated against male children. For example, in 1984-85, the admission of male children to school was around 90 per cent, the percentage of female children was only 66.2 per cent. It means complete awareness is not there among people regarding female education.
2. Problems of Employment and Unemployment for Women

It is true that relatively a large number of women are entering the employment sector. An increase in the female literacy level on the one hand and extension of employment opportunities for women in the non-agricultural sector on the other, have added to the trend in favour of female employment. For example, in 1971, in the total work force of the country, women's share was around 13.0 per cent and it increased to 28.5 per cent in 1991. In spite of this increase, majority of women, who are ready to work, are not finding work.

Illiterate Women Employed in Unorganised Sectors

Of the every 100 women employed, 52.59 per cent are illiterate and 28.56 per cent have studied up to elementary level. Of the every 100 women working in the rural area, 88.11 per cent are illiterate. These illiterate women, in the unorganised sector, are totally exploited by their employers. Women work in factories, mining industries, construction sector, in dams, bridges and road repair and other construction works in unhealthy surroundings.
Decreasing Economic Participation of Women

Technological development seems to have a negative effect on employment opportunities of women. Studies conducted between 1975-85 have revealed this fact. Application of new technology in agrarian sector, textiles, mines, jute, pharmaceuticals, small scale industries like coir making, handloom weaving, spinning, cashew, fisheries, tobacco, animal husbandry, fruits and vegetables processing, rendered many women jobless. Computerisation has also adversely affected the job prospects of women as clerks, typists and accountants.

7. Decline in the Political Participation of Women

Participation of women, who constitute fifty per cent of our total population, in politics and public life is very much negligible in India. One finds only a negligible number of women in prestigious positions like the central and state cabinet ministers, governors, secretaries and legal advisers to the governments, ambassadors to other countries, IPS, IAS, IFS officers, judges, mayors, office bears of all-India parties. No political party in India has given position to women in accordance with their number in the total population. In some areas, seats are reserved for women as we find in Mandala Panchayat, Zilla
Parishad, University Senate. Even in these areas as in our political life, there are caste, language, capitalist and minority lobbies, but there is no 'Women’s lobby' to bring pressure on the government.

**Increasing Violence and Terrorism in Politics**

Corruption in politics, criminalisation of politics, erosion of political values, disappearance of political decency, instability, lawlessness, terrorism and confusion have been increasing in our public life since 1980’s. This state of confused political situation has discouraged women to play an active role in politics.

**Declining Representation of Women in Lok Sabha**

The representation of women in Lok Sabha has been very poor since 1962 elections. For example, there were only 33 elected women members in 3rd Lok Sabha (out of 494 members) after the 1962 elections. In the 6th Lok Sabha, out of 544 elected members, there were only 19 women members and their percentage was only 3.4. In the 10th Lok Sabha (1991 elections), there were 39 elected women members and their percentage was 7.3. In 1996 Lok Sabha elections, though the total number of women voters increased to 28.24 crores (47 per cent), only 477 women candidates as against 14,259 men candidates contested for 543 seats. In the
1991 elections for the 10th 325 women candidates contested against 8,374 men candidates for 521 seats. The figures reveal the decreasing interest of women in political life.

V. Development and Welfare of Women

The successive Indian Governments have taken number of measures with a view to promoting the welfare of women. Some of them may be briefly mentioned here.

1. Welfare of Women Through Legislations

2. **Legal Assistance to Assure Justice to Women**

The Government established a special 'Cell' (Attached to labour department) in 1976 with a view to providing due assistance to women in distress. The responsibility of this Cell is entrusted to the Commissioner of Police. The Central Government has also established separate ministry, headed by a cabinet rank minister, to deal with the issues and problems concerned with women. To assist the judiciary in its task of ensuring judicial protection to women ‘Social Vigilance Groups’ are established. Family courts established according to the Family Court Act 1984, are giving legal protection to women. The Social Welfare Department has established Women’s Bureau in order to look into the problems of women and to find solutions for the same.

3. **Educational Development Plan for Women**

The University Grants Commission had stressed, as early as in 1948, the essential need for the education of women. The Central Education Department, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) and other institutions, have
evinced greater interest in providing educational facilities for women.

Women Study Centres have been established with the assistance of University Grants Commission (UGC) to study the status of women and problems and issues concerned with women.

Other Institutions

Institutions such as (1) United Nations International Children’s Educational Fund (UNICEF), (ii) Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), (iii) United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), (iv) Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and (v) Ford Foundation, etc., have shown a special interest in studying women’s problems.

4. Programmes for Improving Women’s Health

Various organisations, independent surveys and studies conducted by prominent individuals and private institutions have brought to the notice of the Central Government at different times between 1975-85 the urgent need for improving women’s health. Various governmental agencies such as Indian Council of Medical Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Central
Government Health Services Scheme (CGHS), etc., have been paying much attention to promote women's health.

In rural areas, institutional systems such as rural Primary Health Centres and Family Welfare are trying to promote women's health. World Health Organisation, World Bank and Ford Foundation are also showing concern in providing medical protection to women and children.

5. Economic Development Programme for Women

The Five Year Plans launched by the Government have paid attention to enable women to attain greater economic participation. In some of the areas such as factories, offices, clerical posts, teaching, nursing, banking, tea and coffee plantations, women employees are found in a large number. To protect the economic interests of the employed women, various legislations such as Minimum Wage act 1948, Equal Wages Act 1976, the Factories Amendment Act 1976, have been enacted. The Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh Governments have reserved 30 per cent Government jobs for women.

Institutes for providing vocational training for women have been established at various places and in 1984 there were about 125 such institutes throughout the nation.
* Women’s National Training Institute was started in 1977 and its regional units in places such as Mumbai, Bangalore, Tiruvananthapuram, Hissar, Calcutta were also opened. The Regional training Institute at Bangalore gives basic and also modern training to about 1,426 girls and part-time training to about 141 girls every year.

* Working Women’s Hostels have been established in towns and cities mainly to provide board and lodging facilities to rural women who move on to urban centres to obtain jobs. Governmental and private agencies are also taking initiative in operating such hostels.

* The National Committee for Women Welfare is established for framing appropriate policies for women’s welfare to suit the changing needs of time.

6. The Central Social Welfare Board, established by the Planning Commission, has its own Women Welfare Programmes such as providing housing, protection to weak and helpless women, fallen women, helpless widows, creating centres of social education for women and adult education centres, opening centres for giving healthy entertainment to the women, etc. The
Board gives financial subsidy of Rs.50,000 annually to those private agencies which provide good service to the women.

**Voluntary Organisations in the Service of Women**

(i) Mobile creches for working mothers' children aged up to 12 years, (ii) 'Annapoorna' Women's Co-operative Society to provide mid-day meal to working women, and (iii) Self-employed Women Association, a registered trade union to organise women rag-pickers, head-loaders, junksmith, fish vendors, bamboo-workers, beedi workers, block-printers, used garment dealers has come into being to get a fair deal for women workers.

It is true the Central and the State Governments have under various legislative and other measures for promoting the welfare of women. We cannot, however, say that the intended purpose of the Governments is fulfilled and the women have received all the benefits. The educated, middle class and upper caste women of towns and cities have taken relatively greater advantage of these measures, whereas the vast mass of uneducated, lower class and lower caste women of the rural areas are not even aware of most of these welfare measures. The deficiencies involved in these measures and the inefficient implementation of the developmental programmes by the indifferent bureaucrats have come in the way
of success of these measures. In spite of these shortcomings, the awareness of women regarding these measures is slowly growing. After the lapse of a few centuries the society is becoming slowly aware of the historic necessity of providing women a respectable place in society and paying special attention to the problems haunting them.

VI. The Status and the Problems of Indian Women: Future Prospects

The discussion regarding the status of Indian women has been continued since decades. It is an acknowledged fact that though Indian women are given importance in society, their status is not equal to that of men. Indian women are not allowed to lead a free and independent life as their counterparts do in the west. Still it is astonishing to observe that Indian women who suffered from various problems and setbacks for more than 2000 years, have been trying to come out of their traditional cells and getting themselves ready to make the best use of the opportunities offered to them.

Future Prospects

What will happen to the status of Indian women in the near future? Will they become free from the problems from which
they have suffered for centuries? Can we expect better status and better prospects for our women in the years to come? Will they be able to lead a free and independent life as their counterparts do in the west? Or whether their status is going to deteriorate further in future? Will they attain with their men folk? These are some of the questions currently being discussed in connection with the status of Indian women. On the basis of the existing state of affairs, some observations and broad generalisations could be made regarding this issue.

1. **New Problems in Place of Old Ones**

The age-old problems of Indian women such as child marriage, 'Sati' system, prohibition on widow remarriage, 'Purdah' system 'Devadasi' system, have almost disappeared. They have disappeared only to give room for some other problems of modern times such as atrocities against women, rape, dowry harassment and death, immoral traffic, torture and harassment of women under trials, sexual harassment of employed women, etc. These problems have made it difficult for women to lead an equal life with men.
2. **Continued Dominance of Male Supremacy**

The Indian society continues to be a male dominated society. Though sex equality has been provided by law, it is difficult to practise it socially. The belief that the biological and cultural roles of men and women are different is very strong in India. As long as this belief persists, and the value of male dominance prevails, male-female equality cannot be achieved in the Indian context.

3. **Regional Caste and Class Difference**

As Andre Betelle has observed there is a close link between the status and problems of women on the one and the region, religion, caste and class to which they belong on the other. These differences may continue in the coming years also. These differences are putting some hurdles in the way of Indian women developing some ‘common interests’.

4. **Relaxed Control Over Women**

As S.C.Dube has pointed out there are three principal areas in which controls are exercised on women: (i) women’s sexuality is controlled much more strictly than men. (ii) There are restraints on women’s movement and contacts. (iii) Women’s
resources (labour and skills) need regulation. On these three issues, modern Indian women are more free, no doubt. But they are not equal to men. Most of them do not bother about attaining equality with men in these areas.

5. Women Exploiting Women

In the Indian context, we also find social situations in which women themselves are exploiting women in one way or another. Examples: 'Gharwalis' or 'lady bosses' in the brothels exploiting prostitutes, mothers-in-law harassing and torturing daughters-in-law. However, the situation is improving in this field, for the educated women are becoming quite conscious of their rights.

6. Lack of Powerful Women Organisations and Movements

Indian women are forging ahead in the fields of education and employment. But they have not developed powerful women organisations, or other movements to safeguard their interests. Neither at the national level nor at the state level is such a strong women's organisation found. This situation has further added to the exploitation of women.
7. No Need for Women’s Liberation Movement

On the basis of the existing social situations, it can be said that there is no possibility of a feminist movement or a women’s liberation movement emerging out in India to assert the rights of women. Since Indian women give due importance to motherhood, rearing of children and household hence the work which they consider as ‘women’s liberation movement’ of the western type which fights for equality with men in all respects. As Romila Thaper has observed, ‘Women’s liberation does not have any immediate relevance to the Indian social situation’.

8. No Protection to the Interest of Lower Class and Lower Caste

In all discussions and debates relating to the status of Indian women, much is said about middle and upper class women and upper caste educated women. The statuses and problems of lower class and lower caste women, who constitute the majority of women folk, are not given due importance. This only shows that our discussions are misleading, one-sided, partial and even prejudiced. A majority of Indian women who are illiterate and ignorant are not capable of changing their life-styles, beliefs and values overnight. They take time to change themselves. Hence, no revolutionary change can be witnessed in the overall social
position of Indian women at least in the immediate future. Therefore, the Women's Liberation Movement, what some people call revolution, but touches only the urban elite class of women, that is the reason, why it may not succeed in India, to the extent it did in the west due to literacy among women.

9. Indifferent Attitude of the Government and Political Leaders

The measures taken and the programmes implemented by the Central and State Governments, so far in the direction of raising the status of Indian women and protecting their interests, are neither promising nor adequate. Laws and legislations alone cannot bring about desired changes in a society. Consistent and honest efforts on the part of people's representatives and social leaders are required to persuade people to accept new situations and challenges. Such efforts are conspicuously absent in India.

Conclusion

Women in India are not yet equal to men. There is no legal or constitutional barrier to equality, but only the social barrier. Women in India are more after a 'respectable' and 'meaningful' social status, which is free from all sorts of exploitation. There is no urge in them to outsmart men. They want their interests to be protected and problems to be solved. As long as the problems of
women remain as 'women's problems' and not as 'social problems', so long attempts at the redressal of these problems do not get the required attention and impetus.

Indian women are not very much after equality with men, but they expect a change in the attitude of men towards them and their status. On the contrary, they expect greater freedom, better education, self-dependence, decent jobs, a proper treatment of women by men folk, and a socio-economic environment free from all types of exploitation. Our attempts to provide such a type of socio-economic environment to women will definitely influence their social status and the socio-economic conditions in the days to come.

Status of Women – Views of Basaveswara

Basaveswara known as Jagajyoti (light of the world) the greatest social thinker and reformer of Karnataka, who lived in the 12th century A.D., has profoundly dwelt upon many topics of social relevance. He has also discussed the status of women.10

Basava, as he is popularly known, did not differentiate between man and woman. He viewed them equally and hence whatever he addresses to men, the same he addresses to women (and not after men). When one compares the ideal man and
woman of Basava's thoughts, with the tradition of Indian society, one will be able to understand Basava's independent thinking and unique status as a thinker. Whether women had a status equal to that of men during the Vedic period or not, it appears that by the time Manusmriti was written, the Hindu Brahmin religion did make a systematic classification of the status of specific values. In that system, the status of women is subordinate to, and dependent on man. The religious ideology of those times, along with the social ethic and institutional practices, grew depending on each other in such a way that it succeeded in imposing upon the woman the restrictions, which made woman, subordinate to man. The authoritative dictum of Manu in this regard is well-known. 'The woman, during her childhood should be in the custody of parents, in the youth that of the husband and in the old age in the custody of children and hence she is not eligible to have freedom.' In fact, woman lived like man's shadow during that period. The Buddhist and Jain religions hesitated to challenge this Hindu Brahmin traditional view, because these religions were socially negative. Though Buddhism had equated woman with man in the Sanyasi status, it could not do away with the deep-rooted institutionalised inequality between man and woman. The beginning of this task equality could be seen in the
mediaeval India under the magnetic leadership of Basaveshwara and in the emerging Lingayat religious movement.¹²

Man and woman are equal in substance. The symbol of this equality is the philosophy of ‘Shivatva’ (oneness with Lord Shiva). In the eyes of Basaveshwara both ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are eligible to attain the status of ‘Shivatva’. One of the aims of Basaveshwara’s social movement was to deny the restrictions and subordination of women. Advocating this idea, he argues,

‘desi putranagali, veshya putranagali
shiva diksheyada balika, saksat shivanendu
vandisi, poojisi,
padodaka prasadava kobude yogya’

‘Whether a person is the son of a maid servant or the son of a prostitute, once he receives the ‘Sivadiksha’ (purification rite) he should be worshipped as if he is ‘Shiva’ and the water that cleans his feet should be taken as the holy water’.¹³

Thus, in the ideas of ‘Sharanas’, the idea of woman’s freedom started to bloom. It entered their philosophical stand also. For them freedom of woman was not just a matter of argument. It started culminating into actions also. Because of the great commitment of Basaveshwara and the contemporary
‘Sharana’ thinkers, the ‘Gender bias’ did not enter the institutional system of ‘Sharana Dharma’ of that period. The idea of the unity of ‘Atma’ and ‘Paramatma’ received added currency and became practical with humanistic encouragement, bringing up the status of women through the idea of ‘Sharana’s Samudaya’ of Basaveshwara like Akkamahadevi and others.14

It is a fact that Basaveshwara challenged the male dominated Hindu-Brahmin system. The concept of woman as expressed in the thoughts of Basava, helps us in understanding the history of those times, as already suggested in the movement of Basaveshwara.15

In the life of a ‘Lingayat’ the ritual of ‘Lingadisha’ has an important position. It is a test of ‘Shiva Shakti’ through which a person attains the eligibility to be a member of the ‘Shiva Samudaya’. It suggests that both man and woman are eligible to attain this position. But in the Hindu Brahmin system, the woman has no right to attain ‘Moksha’ through the path of knowledge (Jnana Marga). The Lingayat woman has not only the right to earn such knowledge, but she also has the freedom to challenge the man in discussing the ‘Dharma Jnana’ (spiritual knowledge).16
Most of the religions of the world have relegated woman to a secondary position in the matters of religious significance. The Hindu-Brahmin religion has totally denied any kind of freedom to woman. But the ‘Lingayat’ religion has provided full freedom to woman in the matters of religion.17

There are instances in the life of Basaveshwara wherein the wife has been the guiding beacon in the moments of darkness. There are other examples of contemporary women like Ayadakki Lakkamma, Molige Mahadevi, who have set examples of religious freedom of woman.18

The Status of Women – Gandhi’s Views

No leader in the history has commanded such a large followers during his lifetime either in his own country or in the world as did Gandhiji. And, certainly no man has evoked such whole-hearted devotion from women. The reason is not far to seek. Gandhiji has the enviable capacity of being able to put himself into the shoes of another person, more especially when that person is the underdog.19

In spite of the unrivalled culture and high ideals of society that ancient India placed before us, we have to bear witness to the tragic fact that we have fallen far from that happy state, and
perhaps in no sphere of life has that fall been so great as in the case of woman. From being man's co-equal and co-sharer and helpmate, she has become his subordinate - a mere chattel to be used at will for satisfying his wants with no rights or will of her own. Custom and usage have dealt her harshly. As a matter of fact this subordination has been a universal factor, for it is only in very recent times that the women of the 'advanced' western hemisphere have come into their own after a struggle. And even there, they have not gained all they wanted for, in some countries, many disabilities still attach to them.

A passionate lover of humanity, an impeccable foe of injustice in whatsoever form or sphere, it is small wonder that Gandhiji early espoused the woman's cause. And as in everything that he has preached, he began the reform in his own home. Being as harsh as truth and a merciless critic of himself, the moment he realised he was a 'slave-holder' as he was called himself, his attitude to his wife changed, and with that change began his work for the emancipation of womankind as a whole. With his masterly pen and from every platform he had, throughout his long life of service, preached against the wrongs done to women in the name of law, tradition and even religion.
He has spoken out fearlessly against enforced widowhood, 'Purdah', the dedication of girls to temples, prostitution, early marriage, the dowry system, the economic bondage and martial slavery of women. 'Man and woman are equal in status.' 'I am uncompromising in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality.' 'It is sad to think that the 'Smritis' contain texts which can command no respect from men who cherish the liberty of woman as their own and who regard her as the mother of the race.' 'The saying attributed to Manu that 'for woman there can be no freedom' is not to me sacrosanct.' — are but a few lines from the many he has written on behalf of suppressed woman and are enough witness, if witnesses were needed, of his burning desire to see woman restored to her natural and rightful place in society.  

In his own institutions and programme of work he has paid equal attention and given equal place to girls and women. There is an air of freedom and self-confidence in the girls and women that had lived with him or had been under his care whether in Sabarmati or Sevagram or elsewhere. Nothing delights him more than the success of women in any sphere of life. The Spinners'
Association, the child of his imagination, which is, perhaps, nearest to his heart, is in essence a women's association. It is not for nothing that he named it thus. Those of us who have been privileged to come close to him and serve him have found in him not only a 'Bapu' - a wise father, but what is far more precious, a mother, before whose all-embracing and understanding love all fear and restraint vanish.\textsuperscript{23}

The Mahatma has paid the best tribute to our sex when he says, 'Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and suffering'. But with all his championship of the feminine cause and his appreciation of difficulties he has not withheld just criticism of many defects. In the matter of birth control, Gandhiji's writings found a good deal of opposition from many of the leaders of the women's movement. But he has put the question in a high moral plane and appealed to woman not to sell her birthright for a mess of pottage. It is not for lack of sympathy with the sufferings of women because of frequent giving birth to children that he has voted unequivocally against the use of contraceptives but because in every sphere of life he wants to protect woman from losing that moral force which is at once her crowning glory and her fortress against all attacks and temptations. Inasmuch as the spring of all Gandhiji's thought and action is non-violence. He has pointed the
way to 'ahimsa' as the way of freedom for women not only from their own shackles but for the permanent removal of the world's ills. ‘If only women will forget that they belong to the weaker sex, I have no doubt that they can do infinitely more than men against war,’ he said to women in Paris in 1932; and again in Switzerland, ‘I do not know if I have the courage to give a message for the women of Europe that you have asked for. If I am to do so without incurring their wrath, I would direct their steps to the women of India who rose in one mass last year, and I really believe that if Europe will drink in the lesson of non-violence, it will do so through its women.’ There is no doubt that of all the factors contributing to the awakening of women in India, none has been so potent as the field of non-violent action which Gandhiji offered to women in his 'war' against British domination of India. It brought them out in their hundreds from sheltered homes to stand the furnace of a fiery trial without flinching. It proved to the hilt that woman was as much able as man to resist evil or aggression. To the thinking mind it has also proved that resistance without arms was not only equally efficacious but more ennobling for the resisters as also for those who were being resisted. In any event it gave woman a definite place so far as the salvation of India was concerned.24
Today the question of violence versus non-violence is a vital one. Gandhiji’s message is a clarion call for those who believe in non-violence as the straight and narrow road that leads to heaven to muster strength on his side. Only the order day when talking to some friends about the constructive programme which he has put before the nation as a concrete plan for the attainment of Swaraj, he said in regard to women’s part in it: ‘But my greatest hope is in the women. They want a helping hand to lift them out of the well in which they have been kept. The slightest thing will work wonders. They made a record contribution during the Satyagraha of 1931-32, and even now they are playing their part nobly but not to the utmost advantage. So little work has been done among them. They are waiting to be organised. They have the capacity for suffering evoked by non-violent effort, and they will suffer silently.’ Are we going to fulfil that hope is the question before those of us who are in a position to lend that helping hand for our own souls’ sake no less than for the country and the world.25

While Gandhiji’s utterances and writings on behalf of the woman’s cause should evoke a responsive chord in every well-wisher of humanity and even in the most hardened conservative, they are meant primarily for woman, for they touch on every
department of her life and can serve as an unerring guide to her
in times of stress and strain. Above all, they call to her for
service - utter and devoted - for her own kind, for the country
and for humanity at large. It is in this spirit that every woman
should read this book. We stand to make an epoch-making
decision. May we be given the wisdom and strength to choose the
better part so that there may, as Gandhiji once said, rise up from
among us ‘women pure, firm and self-controlled as Sita,
Damayanti and Draupadi’, who will command the homage of
society as have done through the ages these immortal herons of
yore.26

Again he said, “I do not need to be a girl to be wild over
man’s atrocities towards woman. I count the law of inheritance
among the least in the list. The Sarada Bill deals with an evil far
greater than the one which the law of inheritance connotes. But I
am uncompromising in the matter of woman’s rights. In my
opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered
by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of
perfect equality. As women begin to realize their strength, as
they must in proportion to the education they receive, they will
naturally resent the glaring inequalities to which they are
subjected. He viewed that this evil cannot be understood easily. It will be interesting to observe his statement regarding the same.

Mahatma Gandhi was also critical of the legal inequalities to which women were subjected. He viewed that this evil cannot be understood. It will be interesting to observe his statement regarding the same. 'But to remove legal inequalities will be a mere palliative. The root of the evil lies much deeper than most people realize. It lies in man's greed of power and fame and deeper still in mutual lust. Man has always desired power. Ownership of property gives this power. Man hankers after posthumous fame based on power. This cannot be had, if property is progressively cut up in pieces, as it must be if all the posterity becomes equal co-sharers. Hence, the descent of property for the most part on the eldest male issues. Most women are married. And they are co-sharers, in spite of the law being against them, in their husband's power and privileges. They delight in being ladies this and what not simply for the fact of being the wives of particular lords. Though, therefore, they may vote for radical reform in academic discussions over inequalities, when it comes to acting up to their vote they will be found to be unwilling to part with the privileges.'
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25. Ibid., pp. vi-vii.

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