INDIAN SOCIETY AND WOMEN

CHAPTER - III

STATUS OF WOMEN DURING VARIOUS PHASES

India is an ancient country. It has retained its cultural identity in the past five thousand years. In a way, it is the oldest civilization in the world. The Indian society has survived so long mainly due to its ability to assimilate the changes. The world changes have influenced the Indian society. However, the Indian society is not a homogeneous society. It has a very complex structure of classes, sub-classes. It has a unique system of caste, nowhere seen in the world. The super imposition of the caste system on the class structure has produced a very complex organization. It is therefore very difficult to talk about Indian women. They do not belong to a homogeneous class or type. Each class, caste and sub-caste
has retained its identity, without totally giving up the Indian identity.

The other societies in the world have moved with the times as one entity. The changes in Indian society have been different in different sections of the society. For some sections, time has virtually been stagnant. There are adivasi areas, where people have not yet seen a train. Simultaneously there are Indians who have flown in the space, Indians who have sent satellites in the space. Thanks to the Vedas and classic epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, a good deal of information is available since the entry of Aryans into India. It is therefore possible to study the social conditions in India during the Aryan period till today.

India, however, had a developed civilization, even prior to the arrival of the Aryans. The excavation of Mohanjodaro and Harappa, have established the existence of an ancient civilization. They may have lost to the weapons of Aryans, but were never the less as advanced as them in many spheres. Southern India, in particular has retained the Dravadian culture traits. The Matriarchal system in South India still survives, though most of India has accepted the Aryan patriarchal system.

In studying the present position of the jobs and job preferences of the Indian women as on today, we cannot forget her social history. The world changes have definitely affected her, but these changes have reached her through the complex social structure of the class and caste. These structures are not very rigid today never the less they are far from being extinct. The complicity can be gauged if we read the matrimonial advertisements in the newspapers.
’A highly educated computer engineer getting one lakh per month with green card seeks alliance with a Konkanastha Chitpavan girl, beautiful looking, convent educated girl, homely girl etc etc.’

Job preferences of Indian women cannot be isolated from the social influences. She is not free to decide on merits as she likes. Even her thinking and psycheque is deeply affected by the historical influences. Note the preferences of man indicated in the above advertisement. He has migrated to America but does not prefer an American girl. There are no castes in America but he wants a particular caste and sub-caste. He is a computer engineer, yet believes in horoscope. He might be working on NASA project for landing man on the moon, but does not want a ‘mangali girl’ because of the superstition that they cause death of the husband. Not all his education in science, not even his acceptance of America as his nation, can liberate him from his traditions. Despite all the claims of being free and voluntary, it is still the decision of a slave of the tradition. The job preferences of Indian woman, however modern, liberal and enlightened she may be, is yet a product of her five thousand year old social complexes. A study of the social influences is therefore a must in understanding the job preferences of modern Indian woman.

Mr. Toffler in his famous book ‘The Third Wave’ has described the social evolution of mankind. He says that in every phase of the evolution, sustenance is the main consideration. The manner in which the man gets his livelihood decides the way of life and more importantly the values of life. These values become part of his culture. They survive in spite of the change in the circumstances of the origin. The choices which a woman
being makes therefore can be better understood by study of the historical factors of the evolution.

(A) **STONE AGE**

Toffler divides human social development into four phases. The first phase is the 'Jungle Phase'. In this phase, man is just a bird of the forest. In terms of security, he is in many ways a handicapped being. He has no special organ for defense. He does not have the horns, nor biting teeth, nor speed, nor camouflage. He is a vulnerable prey. He therefore seeks safety in numbers and lives in a flock or 'Tanda' as it is called in India. The Tanda lives in forest. It gathers forest fruits. It hunts small animals. It is obliged to move from place to place in search of food. It cannot afford to move with heavy luggage. At best it has beasts of burden. This way of life influences its culture.

Any animal in the jungle has to make a vital decision very promptly. When faced with an adversary, it has to size up the situation. Will it attack the adversary or will it take to heels for survival? The stakes are very high - Kill or get killed. The Tanda cannot afford to take this decision by discussions. The vital decision is therefore taken by the Naik - Chief of the Tanda and instinctively followed by all. The Naik is the person fittest for battle strategy. It is interesting to note that at times the Naik could be a woman. Shrewdness in assessing the situation and developing, quick response was the main criteria for selection. The post was not hereditary, merit alone mattered.
The Tanda is a martial unit. There are no families. Young boys and girls stay in Ghotul and can practice free sex. Only after conception they step out of Ghotul and set up a family. As far as the battle is concerned, all joined, irrespective of sex. Everybody remained fighting fit and fit to fight.

The other reason for physical fitness was the droughts and famines. In famines and diseases, only the fittest survived. The mortality rates are very high but those who survive are physically very fit, men or women. It is interesting to note that pregnancy or delivery were accepted as a very normal phenomena. The woman about to deliver just went behind a bush and came out with a baby in arms and joined the Tanda on the march. Pardhis in Maharashtra have a very strange practice. The new born baby is kept in the sun for four hours. If it survives, then only it is accepted by the Tanda.

By nature also, women have better strength at birth so that they can take the strain of the deliveries. In 1901 in India 104 girls were born against 100 boys. The ratio has changed adversely. The physical inferior strength of woman talked about so often, is not a natural phenomena. It is more a result of social development.

The woman was not specially burdened with child rearing. The child belonged to the Tanda. Any wet mother could do the breast feeding. This phenomena is observed in the animals also.

As the civilization advanced, the human being developed weapons for shikar and self protection. Man became the most dreaded animal in
the jungle. He now had abundance of food. He could kill even the elephant. The Africans describe the elephant as “a mountain of meat”. The meat was now roasted and preserved. This lead to specialization. Women looked after cooking, while the men went hunting. The woman started losing her equality in physical strength.

It is to be noted that the choice of career is not the result of any inborn disability of the woman. She had strength for tough jobs like war, hunting or sea fishing. It was the soft conditions of life which lead to the loss of muscle power in women. It is not the fitness which fetches the job. It is the job which retains and develops the strength. Use or lose is the dictum of nature.

The power structure in the Tanda needs to be carefully studied. The naik - he or she, carried a club, a stone club in earlier days. This was replaced by metal and wood later. Only the chief could carry this ‘danda’. Dand in sanskrit means punishment. The naik could club to death any member of the Tanda on the spot as per his whim. His power was unquestioned and supreme. We still use the term ‘Dandadhikari’ - person authorized to possess the Danda or later called Kings club or Rajdanda. The possession of Danda was distinguishing mark. Even today, a Rajdanda is placed before the speaker of the Loksabha and the peon carries the Rajdanda in front of the authorities. The District Magistrate is ‘Zilla Dandadhikari’ and every magistrate a ‘Dandadhikari’.

It is to be noted that women could be the head of the clan, Dandadhikari if she had the merit to do so. Thus in terms of security
defence and political power, Adivasi women were on par with the men and could rise to the highest seat of power by sheer dent of merit.

The social status of women in the jungle state would be envied by the modern Indian women. The young boys and girls select partners in the Ghotul. Dancing is even today a ritual for Adivasis. Dances are mixed dances. Partners are selected by free choice. The system of Zagada Marriage - marriage by quarrel is very interesting. During the dances the boys and girls select the life partner. They elope and hide in the jungle. The parents of the girl approach the parents of the boy and set up a Zagada or quarrel. They demand compensation for taking away their girl. The Panchayat settles the compensation. The bridegroom's parents pay the price. The boy and the girl are then married in a simple ceremony. The community feast is at the cost of the bridegroom. The girl can at any time divorce the husband by just returning the bride price or part of it, depending on the period of the marriage. This is dowry in reverse. She does not even have to say 'Talak Talak Talak.' She is free to remarry any member of tribe. The children are the concern of the community.

The frugal needs of the Adivasi woman also give her greater independence. An Adivasi needs very little clothes. He very often prefers to sleep under the sky. Their houses are very light and cheap. 'Pal' as they call it, can be set up at any place in no time with readily available material. Adivasi woman is fond of flowers and beads, both of which she collects herself. At best she uses glass pieces and silver trinklets, all which she can acquire herself. Her dependence on the husband or the man is minimal. She smokes bidis and drinks Mahuva liquor, all of which
is home made by her.

The life style of the fisher women also is very interesting. Men do the fishing and women the marketing. There is a wrong impression that this is due to inferiority of physical strength in women. Fisher women are physically better built and strong as compared to men. They lift heavy loads, do the drying of fish, marketing in the hot sun. Marketing needs more skill than fishing. Fisher women quite often beat up the drunkard husband. They have stamina to dance for hours from Bombay to Karla caves. They dance all the way including the Ghats. Fisher women are not objects of sex. They are beautiful and often wear sarees exposing their thighs, yet a man dare not cast a sexy look at them nor would they ever try to use the feminine qualities for marketing the fish. There is never a case of eve teasing of a fisher women. Rape of a fisher woman is unheard of. Her choice of house keeping and marketing of fish is therefore a honorable choice of her own free will for which she has all the merit. Modern women have a lot to learn from them.

Another important feature of this stage of social evolution is the lack of concept of property. For the Adivasi, everything in life comes as a free gift of nature. He cannot store the fruits. He is therefore not acquisitive by nature. The land is free. He learns to enjoy life as it comes. He is therefore friendly and hospitable. There is no envy or jealousy. Nobody is the master, nobody is the servant. There is no hierarchy. Liberty, equality, fraternity came to the Europeans at the cost of the bloody French Revolution. These principles dominate the lives of the Adivasi men and women. What they choose to do, or not to do is by
their own choice or need, not by any social or political compulsion. It is a tragedy that the beautiful life style of the Advisis got spoiled by the so-called advent of civilization.

(B) AGRICULTURE AGE

According to Toffler, the first wave of change was the development of agriculture. Human being realized that a seed properly planted and nourished yielded hundreds of grains in a matter of months. This was a much easier way of life than the gathering of the fruits in the jungle. Agriculture was born. Toffler calls it a wave that entirely changed the human mind set.

Man for the first time settled down on a piece of land. He cleared a patch of land in the jungle for his farms and houses. The sustenance capacity of the land is increased many fold. Indian villages still use the term ‘Panchakroshi’, a piece of land approximately five miles in diameter, could sustain the population of the village. Man could walk up to his land at sunrise, do the farming in sunlight and return home in the evening because the maximum distance he had to cover on foot was not more than 2 1/2 miles or four Kilometers. Invariably the villages settled down by the side of the rivers. The rivers gave them water and made the land fertile by silting. Civilizations came to be named after the villages. Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati are still mentioned in vedic mantras and all rituals.

Security conditions improved vastly. The numbers in the villages were vast. They built houses. Most of the villages not only in India, but
even in Europe had strong wall surrounding the village. In Maharashtra, we call it 'veshi' the big gate of the veshi, or the wada was opened only on special occasions. A small wicket gate was used for entry and exit. Even strong castles were built with heavy guns mounted on them. Wild animals were no longer a threat. Each mans home became his castle. The village was patrolled by volunteers. Maharashtra had 'jagalyas'. England had volunteers taking turns for patrolling. Even today the popular term for police man is COP, civilian on patrol. It is interesting to note how the social customs outlast the circumstances, which create them. The sheriff of Bombay is ceremoniously handed over a big silver key. His most important duty is to hold this key. Bombay had a veshi - a wall round it till the last century. The area is still known as 'fort'. British rulers had constructed the wall to protect Bombay against decoits, robbers and occasional attack by Marathas. Later on, the security conditions improved. The wall was obstructing the sea breeze. There was now a popular demand to demolish the wall. This was done. But the key to the main door still remained with the sheriff. In the village man and woman were safe alike.

There was much greater security against famines and decease. There was abundance of food. Man was not exposed to the changing climate in various areas. He could hold ground against wild animals, against sun and rain and even against decoit. This new way of life changed his psyche and culture.

The most profound change was the development of the concept of property. Adivasi had no concept of property. The slogan of Vinobaji Bhave during his Gramdan, Bhoodan movement was now a dead idea. A
fruit on the tree belonged to the world. Any first finder could pluck it. A fruit on a cultivated tree is the property of the person who planted and nourished the tree. The farmer alone was entitled to reap the harvest. One man farming is how ever difficult. It is interesting to note that Toffler mentions eight able bodied persons as optimum unit for farming. Women in ancient India and till today receive a strange blessing अष्टदश गौरायतकलिभव “God may bless you with eight sons”. The advent of the family completely changed the mind set.

In the Tanda, there were no families, the children belonged to the tanda. Parents had no particular responsibility towards the children. The tanda enjoyed the gathered fruits jointly. Muslims still eat in a common plate (Bismilla) The entire village was to share the village produce. The output was related directly to the particular individuals efforts. Hence, the farms became the properties of the families, not of the village. Properties could be acquired, sold. Goods could be bartered. In the entire animals world, humans alone have a market system. The market joins and the market divides. Today Europe has established a common market. Most of the state afraid of facing the advent of world market- globalization. The basic concept in market is that of ownership. Ownership starts with objects, extends to animals and ultimately ends in ownership of human being. Slavery, an integral part of the ancient and historical civilization. The great halls of Romans were built by slaves, the Taj Mahal Of India was built by slaves and so was the great China wall and pyramids built by slaves, persons owned by their kings. The entire civilization was powered by muscle power, muscles of slaves and animals. Slaves performed the service functions. Man was either a master or he was slave. Status for
service functions is the hallmark of the slavery system. Conversely, those who performed service functions automatically came to acquire a lower social, political, economical status. Women moved in this direction during the Agriculture period.

How Indian—for that matter, entire world women to acquire the basic role of चूल आली मूल - 'needs to be carefully observed. Are they born of selected by nature for these functions—or they acquired it in the development of civilization? This is the central question. When there was no affluence, woman was tough enough to carry on with the tanda—despite the pregnancy and the child. Even today the poor class women do not abandon their avocation for the sake of domestic cooking or rearing of children. Maid servants neither have the lunch break or maternity home—as the memsaheb needs.

Child became the most valuable asset of the family. It was not the property of the village. Humans wanted to invest their newly acquired affluence on the child. Since the child was in the womb of the mother, great care had to be bestowed on her. This commenced with conception and lasted till the child was sucking—a minimum of year. Since she had to produce eight sons and could not prevent birth of equal number of girls. The pregnancies expected were minimum sixteen. In fact morality was high, so it came to twenty. The entire prime period of the lady of an affluent class thus became a period of 'Handle with care' syndrome. She was not to be exposed to the sun, rain. Most wadas had a special dark room for wet mothers. This made woman soft and delicate. Soft jobs of house keeping became her natural choice. Cooking and child is not
ordained by nature. It is an acquired syndrome. If we look at the animal world—the female of any species does not abandon her entire life style only for offspring or caring for the nest. It’s eggs are hatched by both. The tigresses play a major part in the hunting.

Joint family system was the need of the Agriculture age. All the virtues of culture, the value systems developed around this system. Ramayan and Mahbharat depict the ideal of joint family. Our minds are so conditioned right from childhood, that we accept joint family as an integral part of our civilization some thing which we dare not change. The ancient civilization feels very threatened, when the joint family breaks. Yet this is precisely what happened in the next wave-industrialization.

Agriculture showed to the mankind that the nature is beautiful. The limiting factor is the 'Power' to exploit it. Muscle power of man and animals was the only source of power available till the 18th century. Humans and animals consumed a good deal of what they produced—so the surplus was not much. The slaves were reluctant workers. Much of the energy of the master was wasted in extracting work. Fertile lands could sustain large population. Hence the civilization prospered along Nile and Ganges. The less lucky people of Europe now discovered a new source of power—the machine. Steam engine marked the break through. Machine can do wonders. The new slave had enormous power and it was a willing slave—at least it didn’t need whipping. The scenario now changed.

The village was in the center. The unites of production were spread around the village. Now the factory was in the center and unlike farmers,
it was immobile. Workers had to walk up to the factory - stay in the vicinity. This lead to the urbanization. Space in cities was valuable. The entire joint family could not move in the cities. The machine also had no use of children and old infirm persons. It needed a person who had a combination of physical power and mental power. To run the machine educated youth therefore migrated to the city. Nuclear family हम दो हमारे दो replaced the joint family system.

If we read the novels and see the pictures of early twentieth century, it center round the crumbling family system. The lack of values in modern generation, the neglect of elders is all decided. There is an unconcealed call to go back to the old days. There is hardly any realization that nuclear families are the need of the new civilization.

The social systems in the entire society in the middle ages was feudal. The king yielded absolute power. The king does no wrong was the basic principle of the English law. Indian society treated king as the incarnation of the God. Vishnu the God had to be worshipped. In the family, the husband was the God. पति परमेश्वर In the French Revolution the king was guillotined. He was brought down to level of the mortals. At best, he was first amongst equals, but liable and accountable to the people.

In the modern democracies, the head of the family lost his supreme position in the family. He retained the respect only in terms of service he rendered to the family. In advanced industrial countries head of the family or husband is not 'LORD' to the wife. This change has not lead to the down fall and ruination of the nation as was feared by the conservative leaders of the old generation.
The changes that are taking place in the marriage institution are also wroth study in the Agriculture wave. Chastity of the women became a great virtue. Man was willing to bestow all help on his own child, not of any other person. He had newly acquired the concept of property, where exclusiveness is an essential quality. The wife therefore had to be faithful all the time. The man on the other hand had the freedom to marry as many women as he could afford. As far as the illicit connections are concerned, the motherhood was always established, not the fatherhood. This lead to the creation of a class of women prostitutes. Since the household women accepted only one man and the man needed many women, the prostitutes supplied the need. The perversity of the system was such that the prostitute was held to be a sinner, a mean person. But the man retained his moral status. In fact the social status of the man was often determined by the size of his hires. All sorts of explanations are given for the multi marriages of the male characters in Mahabharat. However the ugly fact that woman was the exclusive property of the man cannot be hidden at all. If marriages were made in heaven and souls were united for generations after generations, why was there not a single incident of the man burning himself along with the dead wife? The truth was very simple. Wife was the property of the husband. He considered it risky to leave it behind. Who knows she may lose her virtue after his death? The Industrial revolution exposed this fallacy.

The world war I and World War II, witnessed a peculiar phenomena. The earlier wars were fought between the armies. Civilians were not the targets during the world wars. It was realized that the industrial base of the nation was the strength of the army. The factories, the civilian
population was therefore targeted. A large number of persons and
workers died. Yet their place was taken by women. Women maintained
the production. The lingering doubts about the ability of the women to
man the industries were removed forever. The western countries now
freely accept the women in their work force. The Asian countries,
particularly India has not experienced this phenomena. We Indians
therefore still doubt whether women can be equal members of the
industrial work force.

(C) STATUS OF INDIAN WOMEN DURING MUGHAL PERIOD

Vedic period was a golden era for Indian women. They held great
respect and honour in home as well as outside. They took part in every
aspect of social, intellectual and spiritual life. They occupied same position
as men did. Girls were educated like boys. During this period we had
some learned women like Ghosha, Apala, Vishwavara. They were Rishis.
They also composed hymns. In epic period women held enviable position
in the society. She was center of all activity in the family. Wife was
considered to be the ornament of the family. Mother held position of
authority and respect. Women occupied ideal position in the society. There
was no seclusion of women. They moved freely in the society. There was
no 'Purdah' system. A widow in Ancient India was allowed to remarry if
she desired so. There are references of such cases in Purans, though the
system disappeared slowly.

Purdah System

The Ajanta frescos give us sufficient evidence to prove the fact
that 'Purdah' system was not there in ancient India. In fact, the presence of ladies in social and public gatherings was a normal feature. In olden days, in sanskrit dramas also there is no trace of purdah system. In early 10th century, in most of the courts in India queens appeared in public without any veil. In fact those ladies enjoyed status of 'Raj-mata'.

But the picture started changing with advent of Islam. New social forces appeared on the Indian horizon. Polygamy received great encouragement due to impact of Muslim ideas. The social position of women started deteriorating. Daughters, wives, mothers started becoming dependents and subordinated to their fathers, husbands or sons.

Purdah was mainly observed by Muslim ladies. Hindu women observed 'Ghoonghat'. But with the advent of Mughals, Indian Hindu ladies too started observing purdah, mainly as a protective measure to save their honour at the hands of the foreign invaders. It helped them to maintain purity of their social order. Of course, purdah was strictly observed among high class families. It was mainly confined to rich and well-to-do classes and to royal families. For Muslim ladies it was a must. The impact of the system was more in North Indian aristocratic families. Wives of nobles lived in spacious houses surrounded by high walls with no windows. Female members were not supposed to freely mix and communicate with male members of their own family. Male doctors were not allowed to face ailing ladies of nobles and princely families. There was a funny method adopted for diagnosing the disease without seeing the patients face or feeling her pulse. A handkerchief was rubbed all over the body of the patient. It was then put in the jar of water. Doctor
was to judge the cause of illness just by smelling it. Than he prescribed medicine accordingly.

Ladies of the high families did not move without veils. Princesses had to take permission of kings to go out. They went out generally in mornings. They used to sit in the ‘Palkis’ carried by slaves. The slaves were not supposed to enter the residence. Females carried them inside. None dared to pass on the road when royal ladies went out in procession. Muslim ladies could not discard purdah even for a temporary period. Of course, there was an example which was an exception. Royal lady Nurjahan, broke purdah convention and used to come out in public.

Purdah was less strictly observed by middle class women. Muslim ladies wear ‘Burqa’. It is black coloured dress, covering from top to toe. It has thin net layer over eyes to see. Hindu ladies simply drew lapel of sari over their face when they met strangers. This is called ‘Ghoonghat’. Thus middle class Hindu women observed less restrictions.

Women of lower class such as peasant and working classes were entirely free from bondage of purdah. These women helped their husbands in running the family.

**Status Of Daughter**

Birth of daughter was not welcomed as that of a son. The latter was preferred to former. The daughter was treated as source of anxiety whereas son was treated as an economic asset to the family. Only cultured parents treated son and daughter at par. Otherwise majority times son
was valued more than a daughter. Even the birth of daughter was regarded as inauspicious. Same was observed even in royal families. Only women of the family rejoiced and feasted on the birth of a daughter. But if the baby boy was born, it used to be occasion for grand celebrations. This may be due to unhealthy social conditions that prevailed at that time. It included many degrading practices against women like polygamy, sati, child marriages, purdah, horrible life of widows etc.

Practice of Polygamy

Polygamy was the rule among both Hindus and Muslims. It was so widespread that statistics relating to some well-known personalities are shocking. Great Maratha king Shivaji had eight wives. Nana Phadanis married nine times to nine different girls. Bajirao Peshwa had two wives.

There was also a practice of buying and selling woman. They used to perform household chores. They entertained their masters by singing and dancing. They were known as ‘Batiks and Kunbis. They were treated very harshly and roughly.

The age of marriage and age difference between bride and groom was horrifying. Girls were married off even before attaining age of puberty. Age of five to eight years was treated as right for marriage. If the girl did not get married after 8-9 years of age, she became great cause of worry for parents. Now she was considered too old to get married.

Girls had no choice to choose their life partners. Girls only had to
obey orders of elders in the family regarding marriage.

The girls side had to pay brides price while marrying her. It was given under different names like Hunda, Soyarik, Vardakshina, Magani etc. The amount would be in cash as well as in kind, may be in the form of gold. The amount was so exhorbitant that father was advised to start collecting for it right from the birth of the daughter. The daughter, even today, is called as ‘Dhan Ki Peti’ because of the same reason.

Status of Widow

There was no practice of widow re-marriage. The age difference between the boy and girl of marriage used to be so great that girls got widowed at an early age. As the medicinal field was not advanced, many died due to unknown diseases Nana Saheb Peshwa died at the age of 42 years when his widow was just 8 years old. Nana Padnavis’s widow was just 9 years old girl. Widows had to lead miserable life. Either they were forced to go ‘Sati’ i.e. to burn themselves with their husbands or to shave their heads. Even seeing of a widow was considered as bad. She was not to participate in any of the family or social functions. She could eat only once a day. This was all because she was considered as misfortune and cause of death of her husband. So these were the punishments awarded to her by the society.

Child marriage Practice

Ordinarily the marriage used to be between a child and a grown up man. Girls were generally married before they reached the age of 10
years. On account of political and socio-religious circumstances of the time, parents tried to marry their daughters as early as possible. There was also the fear of the ruler or an official demanding a girl for wife. Rana Mal Bhatti’s daughter was forcibly snatched away by Tughluqshah. In order to save their honor, people married their daughters at a very early stage. The custom to arrange the match was solely at the discretion of the parents or of the nearest relatives and friends. Seldom a wish was expressed by any female relation of the bridegroom to see the bride before the marriage. After the marriage there used to be ceremony of ‘Muh dikhayee’ i.e. seeing face of bride by all family members.

(D) ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIA’S MOVEMENT FOR INDEPENDANCE

Gandhiji entrusted an important role to Indian women in India’s struggle for freedom, in which he, advocated the principle of ‘Non-violence’. He believed that woman, by nature, is more non-violent than man. According to him, ‘If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman’.

For him Sita was a model as ideal Indian woman. He had a strong conviction, that like Sita, the inner purity and determination can resist violence in the freedom movement. He adored Sita’s quality of self-sacrifice, without loosing inner peace and dignity. Though Gandhiji condemns Indian men for treating women as ‘Cattle’, he sees source of strength for women in their quite suffering.

He appealed to Indian women in following words to join freedom
movement. ‘The woman of India should have as much share in winning Swaraj as men. Probably in this peaceful struggle, woman can out distance man by many a mile, as silent and dignified suffering being badge of their sex.’

With his wife ‘Kasturba’ many women played significant role in freedom movement. He allowed Sarojini Naidu to command salt marchers after his arrest.

Before advent of Mahatma Gandhi also, there were women inspired for Swaraj, like Madam Cama, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu etc. Annie Besant was elected as President of National Congress in 1917. There are examples of Muslim ladies also joining freedom struggle like Begum Amman Bibi, mother of famous Ali brothers. Of course, Sarojini Naidu of all commands a lion’s share.

Women freedom fighters were quite active in Bengal. They organised ‘Swadeshi Mela’s’ in early 20th century. We can enlist them as follow - Savaladevi Chaudhurani, Dr. Nilratan Sircar, Bhupendranath Dutta’s mother, sister Nivedita. They all helped directly or in-directly in the movement.

Mrs. Annie Besants ‘Home Rule’ movement was real motivator for large number of women. She was the first to put forward demand of political right for women. She had special women’s section in Home Rule League.
End of 1920 witnessed non-cooperation movement which was joined by many women like Sushila Nayar, Renuka Ray etc. Vijaya Laxmi Pandit is another name which was greatly influenced by ‘Khadi and Charkha’ movement. Kasturba Gandhi presided over the Gujrat Provinical Conference in 1922 with her colleagues like Radha Devi, wife of Lala Lajpat Rai Basanti Devi and Deshbandhu Chhittaranjan Das’s wife in Bengal.

There were other ladies, who were drawn to the movement, because male members of their family were active in freedom struggle and were put in jail like Mrs. Abdul Qadir, Hemprabha Majumdar, Bee Amman.

Of course, these examples are like Oasis. Masses of women joined the movement from 1923 onwards. Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928 witnessed more women than men in political meetings. Maniben Patel, Mithubehan, Bhaktibehan Desai boldly faced police then. In 1930, when Gandhiji broke salt law, thousands of women joined ‘Dandi yatra’. Gandhiji exhorted them to picket liquor shops, toddy shops, shops selling foreign goods, organise ‘Prabhat Pheris’ etc. In Bombay, Kamladevi Chattopadhayay and Avantikabai Gokhale broke salt law. At the same time ‘Desh Sevika Sangh’ was established with members like Manibehan, Sarojini, Kamaladevi, Hansa Mehta. Durgabai was leader in Madras and Mrudula Sarabhai in Gujarat of ‘Satyagrahi’ women. In Calcutta ‘Nav Satyagraha Committee’ and ‘Mahila Sangh’ were established. In Delhi, Satyawati, grand daughter of Swami Sharadhanand, in Lahore Parvati Devi, i.e. Lala Lajpat Rai’s daughter, Lado Rani Devi, relative of Nehru, Manmohini Sahgal, Mr. Zutshi’s are the examples of lady leaders, who were drawn to freedom
movement because of influence of their close relative.

There are other examples of ladies, who were not non-violent. They refused to recognize any limits to what they could or could not do because of their sex. Madam Cama was most prominent of all. She worked under the leadership of Veer Sawarkar. In Calcutta, girls were trained in Marshal arts, driving, cycling, Sword play etc. in organization namely 'Chatri Sangha'. Subhash Chandra Bose had women's wing in his army headed by Captain Laxmibai, other brave soldier being Santi, Suniti, Beena, Preeti, Kalpana. In Delhi, Mrs. Jain was in charge of bomb factory, with Sushila Devi. They were all killed or arrested by police undertaking some violent activity. Women outside India were also active volunteers. They indirectly helped Indian revolutionists.

In general, Indian women participated at all possible levels in freedom movements. This allowed them to come out in public. It helped their struggle for liberation. But the zest did not continue after independence. Tilak had visualized social emancipation of women after independence. But what is experienced is totally a different story. Impact of freedom struggle on Indian women with political, social, economic conditions is analyzed hereafter.

(E) IMPACT OF INDEPENDANCE STRUGGLE ON WOMAN MOVEMENT IN INDIA

In the initial phase of the British Empire, the Indian society was not much exposed to western ideas. British rulers introduced higher
education in India basically to get administrators. However, this education had deep impact on India. Swami Vivekanand and others accepted that many social practices degrading to women had to be done away with. Raja Ram Mohan Roy got the practice of ‘Sati’ banned. Brahmo Samaj permitted women to wear sacred thread and perform poojas in their own right. Social leaders like Agarkar, Jyotiba Phule, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar took up the cause of women specially down trodden classes. They perceived the movement to be in the interest of the society as a whole. They had little use of political independance and power if the social evil practices were to continue. Mr. Tilak, however had different ideas. He gave priority to political power. He feared that social movements would cause internal conflicts, thereby weakening political movement and ultimately would delay independence. He thought that political power would facilitate social movements after independence. The women movement, therefore received a setback in his regime.

Then there was rise of national leader in the form of Mahatma Gandhi. He was a unique world leader with a complete philosophy of his own. He tackled social movements and political struggle simultaneously. He was a firm believer in woman power. Women from all classes joined and actively participated in his non-violent movement. Even the violent independence movement of revolutionaries, like Veer Savarkar had women participants. Subhash Chandra Bose raised a women army under Captain Laxmibai to fight the British army in the war. Equal abilities of the women were more than established in women struggle. However, even this has not changed the Indian family structure which remains feudalistic as ever.
Mahatma Gandhi believed in Varnas based on karya-work-duty, not on karma. However, the distinction was too subtle. Women who struggled with men, shoulder to shoulder in the streets, reverted to the feudal family system when they returned home. As far as the social movement for upliftment of Indian women is concerned, it must be noted with profound regret, that the independence movement had no lasting impact.

After independence, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru banked on the legislative powers for improving the status of women. He remained a westernized stranger, as far as Indian social structure was concerned. Dr. Ambedkar too was not able to organize a social movement for women, though he did attack the illiteracy and blind faith specially in downtrodden women. He too relied heavily on legislative power for up liftment of women across the castes and classes.

The Indian Constitution declares equal rights for women as a fundamental right. It enjoins the state to strive to do away illiteracy, blind faith and evil social practices offending women. The Hindu Code Bill has many progressive provisions for enhancing the status of women.

Women are an important political constituency commanding 50% of votes. No political party can ignore this reality. The parties are, therefore supporting 33% reservations at all levels. However, it is basically a sectarian movement. Men do not seem to be taking part in the movement whole heartedly. Legal provisions like Section 498 A (for mental and physical torture of woman) are in fact attracting hostility from men. Women's
movement is, therefore, essentially their own movement.

Women leadership is basically coming from affluent and higher middle classes. Their sensitivity towards down trodden classes is low. Prostitutes do not get much sympathy from this class. The affluent class has always been irrelevant as far as social movement is concerned. This class is as much degenerated today, as it was in the Moghul period. The educated middle class is aping the west. They are also thinking in terms of sectorial empowerment rather than a total social movement.

Under these circumstances, the burden of enforcing social legislation has fallen on the state machinery. State machinery all over the world is biased in favor of the vested interest. It lacks enlightenment. In the absence of participative policy and judiciary, the enforcement of laws remains tardy.

Enlightened social workers have to pick up the treads left by Swami Vivekanand, Agarkar and Phule and revive the social movement independent of the political and legal struggle.

(F) MODERN WORKING WOMEN IN URBAN AREA

Ever since evolution of the human species, women have been entrusted certain types of work. In primitive society, men fought, hunted and went to sea, while women engaged in less dangerous occupations. She looked after home, cooked for all, reared children. Thus women had always worked. She was not a drone in the household but an active bee. She had distinct functions to perform.
Emergence of urban working women class

In the urban middle class, women have been mainly working inside the house. The emergence of urban working class women is a new phenomenon experienced particularly after the 'Industrial Revolution'. Of course, there are some other co-lateral factors also responsible to bring out women in the economic field like breaking up of joint family system, urbanization, inflation, rise in educational level, rise in materialistic outlook towards life, impact of western culture etc. All these factors could be linked up in the following manner.

Historic view

In the primitive societies man was the food gatherer. He was duty bound to provide food for his family members. The woman stayed back in the cave to look after children. She and her children were dependent upon male. Woman played the role of the helper. So she automatically gained place of secondary importance and subordinated. She used to dress the products of the hunt, cook the meat and fish, preserve skin of hunted animal for clothing, greeted her mate from job when he was successful, starved along with her children, if he was not. She was never a participant. The survival of such races was critically dependent upon the man's skill and courage.

As the civilization progressed, man started to stay at one place instead of leading nomadic life. Instead of hunting and gathering food from jungle, he slowly started shifting to agriculture as means of survival.
This gave women a chance to participate in agricultural operations like weeding, transplanting, harvesting etc. Even today, women labour constitute more than half of the total agricultural force in India.

But in 19th century, women came out of their houses to participate in economic activities. The two world wars compelled women to participate in occupation, which were monopoly of men earlier. The industrial employment of women including those who were married was a fairly widespread phenomenon in 19th century. Previously there were women teachers, doctors and nurses. But now they stepped in offices too. But majority of women were connected with low wage jobs. Because they had accepted gainful employment mainly to supplement the family economically. The industrial revolution had left their families in the financial crunch.

The effects of industrial revolution were not limited to this, but were far reaching. Eventually this led to gender discrimination. Child bearing and rearing was traditional and prime duty of women. This allowed men to pay more attention and give more time to his job. So he became principal source of income for the family. Traditional society started to crumble. Due to urbanization, cash income became an important source of social status. Thus, not only the economic activities of the sexes became physically separated, but the social value of man's activities were measured in terms of money. This further marginalised and separated those jobs performed by his wife. As household economic activity was not given a market value, a women had no way left before her to achieve economic status independent of her husband. Hence, she
had to join the labour force for earning outside of household work. Similarly further technological changes of the industrial revolution transformed the processes of production. This resulted in drawing more and more urban women into mines, mills, factories as unskilled labourers. The majority of women found it necessary to work outside the home to augment the family incomes, due to increased cost of living. At the same time, the industries seeking to keep up profits, offered only this supplementary wages to women. Women thus came to occupy the position of marginal workers in the new economic situation. The employment of women in industrial nations has thus been a development, arising to start with, neither from social requirement of women’s work in industries nor from women’s inherent need for wage employment, but was mainly caused by the desire of entrepreneurs to utilize cheap labour for profit purposes. During the world war II, women entered the labour force due to dire economic necessity and feelings of patriotism and for the first time experienced the financial and psychological independence that an income activity outside the home could afford. The increase in income also meant that more families could afford to send their female children to high schools and colleges. These women, better educated than their mothers, were attracted towards labour force by the possibility of higher pay. Thus studies indicate that in the second half of 20th century, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of women with small children with jobs. Economic pressures aggravated by inflation and the demands of a higher standard of living, pushed women into the work force, but they were often not free to accept the best jobs at the best rate due to various social factors.
At the same, various other factors which forced women to join labour force could be explained as follows. Education has worked as the prime factor to motivate the women to work. They feel that whatever they have acquired through education has to be utilized and not wasted. They should make proper use of their abilities and do something for the service of society and nation. They want to use their leisure time in some gainful activity. Development of science and technology, changes in attitudes and aspirations, in social structures and family living patterns have all concurred to relieve the burden of motherhood and time consumption in completion of household chores, leaving women with more leisure time.

Again, they are fully conscious of their own individuality. They want to maintain the personal status and independent social standing.

This social independence is enrooted by economic independence. Hence, they want to work and earn for own needs. They want to be self-sufficient and understand very well that economic self-sufficiency can only improve their social status. The woman thus sought and have accomplished more freedom and personal security, enjoyed more rights and fight against the challenges. In short, education and self-earnings have increased their self-confidence and they are able to come out of the dependency. This is the outstanding achievement of the modern age.

But of course, the bitter fact is that this class represents rather microscopic section of the society. There are majority class of women who have to work in distress. They have to bear the responsibility of
maintaining the family in adverse condition. She may be the deserted woman, a widow, a destitute or her parents are old and uneducated or her husband is sick or disabled. Then she becomes the prime bread-winner of the family. At times, even if she is economically well off, she wants to work. She does not wish to be burden on the family. She thinks that she should be helpful to the society. She wants to use her free time in a better way or at times she is tired of the monotony of home and drudgery of life. Some of them would also have aspirations for making to their work and have the ambition of a name in the field. The demographic and technological progresses have reduced the time span of child rearing in relation to the life cycle and reduced the burden of house work and women started to get fulfillment outside the home.

Highly educated women are likely to be more interested in the employment, but by far, the largest number of women work to support families and to contribute to the family income so as to lift it above the poverty level. Women have also entered into the technical, medical, teaching and nursing fields. In some countries they are working as pilots, taxi drivers, police women, ambassadors, ministers and also as heads of nations. They are serving in the army and also in most the difficult and dangerous spheres. In this modern age women are also entering into lucrative jobs in order to enhance the family income and prestige and to utilize the education and the social status rather than merely due to economic constraints.

Promila Kapur in her book ‘The Changing status of working women in India’ also stated educated urban working women have begun to realize
that job can raise their self-esteem and self confidence and can accomplish their socio-psychological security and freedom. The various studies and surveys as well as statistics show that educated women are now more keen and desirous of utilizing their education and training than was the case previously. Working women now show strong internal commitment to work. They work for variety of reasons, including the need to feel useful and important, to earn money. The present trend suggests that women in greater number are getting into areas which were held to be the exclusive domain of men. This should be taken as positive sign for India's future socio-economic development.

(G) ELECTRONIC AGE.

Even the industrial age is now getting superseded by what Toffler has named as 'Electronic Age'. The atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki revealed to the world the stupendous power in the atoms - the power of the sun. In the jungle age, mankind used the muscle power of the animals and slaves. In Industrial Age, it used the powers of the electricity and machine. These successive leaps in power base took human civilization to greater and greater height, unimagined by their forefather, till the last century. Yet all this tremendous progress pales into insignificance, if we grasp the potential of the electronics. Petrol and coal deposits are limited. Power of the atom is limitless. Machines need to be manned. They increase the muscle power, but not the brain power. Humans have distanced a rival, the computer. The computer can think thousand times faster than the most brainy person on the earth. Robots can do jobs, man would never do. Humans, have for the first time stepped
out of earth into the vast Universe. It is not the; pilot or cosmonaut, who takes the rocket to the mars. It is the computers, who are carrying rockets and men to the planets.

It has always been fashionable for us to talk about who is born for what job, what job suits the male and what job suits the female. Now the job is to push a feather light button of a robot. In case there is a problem, press a button-the computer tells you what to do. Can we say that man has inherent qualities to do this and this job is beyond the woman?

The implications of the new Electronic Age are mind boggling. It has revolutionized transport and communications and turned the universe into a big village. STD, TV has already reached the nook and corners of India. Any problem, even the problem of career preference of Indian women has to be now considered on the global background.

Politically the nation state concept is dying. The world government is taking shape. Dictatorships have died. Liberal democracies alone seem to be succeeding. Participation of masses is the most vital aspect of democracy. Communications have made democratic decentralizations possible. Indian women have been lucky to get the right of vote right from the day of freedom. Political career for women in India is therefore as open as any other career. 30% reservation in elected bodies has been accepted. We have lady prime ministers, lady chief ministers, Zill <sup>a</sup> parishad presidents and what not.

Economically the production of goods has been relegated to the
second position. There is abundance of goods and gadgets. Prices of goods, particularly electronic goods are falling day by day. It is the service sector which is gaining importance. A cup of coffee in a five star hotel costs fifty to seventy rupees. The cost of milk, sugar is only three rupees. The rest of the price is of the service. Almost 80% of the gross national product would be in the shape of services to make up for the lost ground or the back log.

Government service is changing. It is hardly a control function now. Government is more of a facilitator than a controller. Even the police is now a service function. The army is mechanised. Women who are entering these sectors for the first time have great advantages. Man who has been accustomed to rule both the nation and family, finds it hard to become a service person. Women have been traditionally in the service sector. It is always difficult to unlearn, which is not necessary in their case. House keeping has made women excellent co-ordinators of diverse persons. Men get confused when their authority does not run. Women are used to function without over riding authority.

In Industries, the ratio of blue collar workers to the white collar workers is fast dwindling. The manual part of the work is also getting lighter. The vast numbers of adivasi women, the illiterate women in village belonging to the under privileged classes have been used to hard work. Indian women in villages are used to toil in the hot sun. The maid servants in cities easily put in eight to ten hours of work. Educated youth of the villages is taking up to table jobs in the city. More and more jobs on farms and households in the cities are now available to the women. They
can also get better payment for the jobs. However the adverse social factors affecting their efficiency need to be tackled. The small mechanization in the jobs also needs a bit of investment in gadgets, a bit of training in operation and maintenance. India is now using tractors, sprinklers, thrushes on farms. More and more green house farms are coming up. There is need for training centers to teach the girls in these jobs. Food preservation doubles the value of the goods. Women need to be trained in these jobs. Short duration, even a week training is sufficient in most cases.

Marketing of farm produce has been very weak in India. A kilo of vegetable fetching five rupees in India is sold for rupees hundred and fifty in UAE and for Rs.250 in UK & USA. What we lack in is standardization, proper preservation, efficient transport, communications and finance. Surely, we are capable of organizing these. Women banks in India are running quite smoothly.

Women run co-operative diary societies quite successfully. A white revolution-milk flood is taking place in India. The Anand dairy in Gujrat is a model of success. The vegetable vendors have been wonderfully organized by SEWA, running business worth crors. The LIJJAT Papad is providing jobs to thousands. Pickles, jams made by factories, all run by women can capture the international markets.

Mechanized kitchens is the requirement of the day. Micro waves, mixers and grinders are now common kitchen wares. Fast foods centers are sprigging up every where. Tea, coffee vending machines are getting popular. Contracts for vending of eatables on trains, road transport, air
services, tourists centers and hotels can be given to ‘Annapurnas’ run by women. These are already success models.

An Indian lady, that too from the orthodox marwari community started selling household pickles. Her problem was not production or marketing, it was the social stigma. She got over it. Today her company is selling pickles worth crores in America. Curry shops in England are making roaring business. There is ‘no hotel without a Patel’ in America. We have vast new fields which Indian women can easily capture.

The textile industry has undergone vast changes. Ready made garments are very popular. Individual designing of innumerable patterns is now possible due to computers, Indian ready garments are already dominating the world market. Woman are already in this field. The Kashida work of Kashmiri women is unparalleled in the world. If only women are allowed to step out on the streets of India and New York without social inhibitions, sky is the limit for their career.

The women movement in India has been dominated by middle class women belonging to the service class. Their vision has been limited to government jobs. In India, at best teaching jobs, being a lady doctor is the zenith of their ambition. They are not used to think in terms of women who can run industries, who can run farms and who can captures the world markets.

The government can be a great facilitator. It can open IIT’s for women, can encourage cooperatives and banks of women. Govt. can give these industries monopolies. However this is not the major constraint
for the women seeking advancement. Training and facilities are not the real hurdles for an Indian. It is the social support which is her problem. Her family, her caste, her community still matters a good deal for her. She is hyper sensible of what others speak about her, will she be called a chaloo woman, will her husband trust her, if he finds her dancing with an American in skirts and sleeveless blouse.

It is here that the Toffler doctrine is very relevant. Social concepts and systems, which sustain and facilitate growth in a particular age, become hindrances in the next age. In a traditional country like India, social concepts strangulate the morale of the woman aspiring to be some body in the new world. It is upto the social workers educators to impress on all that change is not immoral change, do not kill the culture. Culture is not sticking to age old ideas. Unfortunately for some persons, every change is bad and change for better is the worst. If only we give up our social inhibitions, sky is the limit to our growth. Sorry correction. An Indian girl has already broken this barrier. She has travelled in the space, shall we now set our eyes on the universe itself?

(H) THE LEGAL STATUS OF WOMEN

From the available literature, it can be gathered that women had no legal right of their own. They were treated as cattle. They were generally thought to be incapable of holding any property. The Hindu women lived as slaves in their husband’s household. In later times they could be bought or sold or let out for enjoyment. Narda, the law- giver, pronounces, ‘women’s business transactions are null and void, exception
in case of distress. Women are not entitled to make gift or sale. A woman can take only a life interest whilst she is living together with rest of the family. Rigveda denies widow’s right to succeed to her husband. However, she can inherit as the daughter of her parents.

Another law-giver, Manu said that un-married daughter was entitled to 1/4th of the shares of patrimony received by brothers. If there were many brothers and sisters, then the brothers were severally to give portions to their sisters, each out of his share 1/4th part.

In Vedic ages also, it appears that the unmarried daughter, who lived all her life in her parents house, generally got a share of the ancestral property for inheritance. But ordinarily, she could not claim any share with her brothers. It is clearly laid down in Rigveda that ‘a son born of the body, does not transfer wealth to sister’.

Right to Stridhana

Stridhana means women’s property. It does not include property that is inherited by a woman from her husband or any other relation. It means the gifts which received from her father or others at the time of her marriage. Katyayana goes to define the term as, ‘what is given to a woman at the time of her marriage near the nuptial fire is celebrated by the wise as woman’s property, bestowed before the nuptial fire. It is received from her parents or in-laws or any other relation as a token of affection.’
Stridhana was treated as women's separate property. She may enjoy it herself. Her husband has no right to it. If he gives it away on a false consideration or consumes it, he must repay value to the woman with interest. On the death of the woman, in case, she is married, the property belongs to her husband. Property of childless woman goes to her parents. On failure of them, their next kin takes the succession. In case of a woman with children, daughters would take her property. Succession of a married daughter is also provided. In the absence of daughter, son succeeded the property.

Various Acts concerning women during British Rule

1) **Prevention of Sati Act- 1829**—Governor General Lord William Bentinck passed this Act. According to this Act anyone abetting the commission of Sati would be guilty of culpable homicide and anyone taking part in compelling a widow to commit Sati would be guilty of murder. Thus old, brutal custom of Sati was banned in British India and later on in free India.

2) **Widow Re-marriage Act 1856**—This Act legalized re-marriage of widow. Prior to this Act, social life of widows used to be hell. She was made to wear red saree, shave off her head, stay in the dark room, eat only half stomach full, not to socialize.... the list of restrictions put on her seems unending. Some social reformers life time work helped passing of this Act.

3) **Abolition of Polygamy 1855** — A custom of having more than
one wife prevailed mainly in eastern India. The Hindus all over rest of India practiced bigamy particularly if first wife was childless. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar raised voices against it. In 1855, Act was passed by Bengal Govt. abolishing polygamy.

4) **The Sharda Act 1929** — Earlier to this Act, in India, child marriage prevailed. Premature sexual union and subsequent pregnancy proved fatal to many girls. In 1891, age of marriage was raised to 12 years for girls. But it was not observed. In 1927, Harbilqs Sharda introduced a bill to regulate marriage age among Hindus. The Act was passed as Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, but popularly known as Sharda Act. It fixed minimum age of marriage for girls at 14 and for boys at 18 years.

5) **Hindu women's right to Property Act 1937** — The Act marked a new phase in the history of women's struggle for equality with men in Hindu society. It provided a right to women to inherit property of husband. The Act provided a powerful weapon against male dominated, traditional, authoritarian Indian Hindu Society.

**Women's legal position after independance**

1) **Hindu Marriage Act 1955** — It facilitated marriage of men and women belonging to different age of marriage for boys at 21 and for girls at 16. It allowed divorce even for marriage which took place under Vedic rites. It helped national integration and tried to free women from slavery of men.
2) Hindu Succession Act 1956—Prior to this act, women could only own their ‘Stridhana’. Daughters had no right in father's property. Economic handicap led to subordination of women to men.

Hindu Women’s Right To Property Act, 1937 only allowed a wife to benefit with her husband's share in coparcenary property during her lifetime.

Hindu Succession Act allowed the widow, the mother to inherit the property of the deceased. With this act women can hold their property, have the right to sell, mortgage or give away her share of property.

3) The Hindu Adoption & Maintenance Act, 1956—The act allows a husband to adopt a son with his wife’s consent. It also allows a wife to claim maintenance even if she is living separately from her husband, provided he is proved to be guilty.

4) Dowry Prohibition Act 1961—Every bride had to be given away decked in ornaments and with cash. The custom became more and more 'a must' with modern times. Many a times bride’s parents were reduced to poverty after girls marriage. This lead to economic and social exploitation of women. So the Act was passed to stop practice of large dowries being claimed by bridegrooms people and given by the brides. Any parent agreeing to give property or valuable security for the purpose of marriage becomes offence. But the unfortunate part of it which the researcher wants to put with heavy heart is that the act is still on paper, not followed in practice even on the verge of 21st century.
Post-Independence Legislative Enactments Concerning Women

1) Divorce act has been amended to able the divorced wife to continue alimony from her former husband till her re-marriage. Other acts like IPC 148-B (regarding physical and mental torture of bride till seven years of marriage) has helped in easy divorce.

2) Law regarding rape has been made more stringent in recent times. Rigorous imprisonment upto 4 years or more for this crime is fixed. It will help upholding honor of womenfolk.

3) As regards Abortions, women are now free from any apprehension of legal proceedings. Now voluntary abortion is legalized. Thus many lives of women due to mis-carriage have been saved.

4) Other constitutional provisions— Today women have equal legal right in the matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, succession, adoption etc. Recently there are 35% reservations in the employment field for women also.

COMMENTS

Though the picture regarding 'Legal Status of women' during recent periods i.e. specially after independence seems quite rosy, in reality it is not so. Many women are not aware of their legal rights. This is specially the case of rural women folk, who are un-educated. Social organizations or other people do not take trouble to teach these people.
The actual situation is that child marriage, though rare, are still practiced in parts of Rajasthan. Every day newspaper carries atleast one or two news items of dowry death of bride. Though daughters are given right in the property, they do not claim it. Social conditions are such that even physically tortured girl gets scared to go to police. Working women has to face a lot of physical and mental harassment at her work place.

So mere passing of act is not helping uplifting economic and social condition of women. What is desired is it’s enforcement.

**SUMMERY**

Security and development are interdependent. There can be no development, if the individual is totally insecure. On the other hand, development itself gives security. However, there is often a conflict between security and development. Mobility very often brings in insecurity. Seclusion, being away from the other hand is much better, if there is mobility and exposure to outside factors. Human beings basic instinct is survival. However, human beings long for development as well. Gayatri Mantra, of the vedic period ends with the prayer, दिव्यो योनि: प्रवोधयत Let my धुः Brain power-develop.

During the jungle phase, security was almost the sole consideration of both the male and the female. All the members of the Tanda surrendered to the absolute authority of the ‘Naik’. Individuals had no identity except as members of the Tanda.
Agriculture provided both prosperity and security. The mankind now had settled life in villages. The village wall protected them against sudden attack. The number also increased. Heavy weapons could be stored. There was abundance of food and leisure. The division of power and prosperity, however was unequal. Lower classes were still at the margin, bothered mostly about survival. They toiled hard in the sun and rain. They retained their muscle power, but lacked education and development.

In the upper classes, the family structure still remained feudal. Men who occupied the seat of power, had enhanced expectations of services. They wanted good food, personal domestic services. They could afford many wives and many children. The position of the wives deteriorated. They became soft, spent more time in cooking and looking after children. Class of ‘Nach’ girls, prostitutes developed. Upper class women took to ornaments and beauty treatment to remain interests of the husbands. This was the worst period for women.

Industrialization and urbanization brought in more prosperity and security. State security apparatus vastly improved. Feudal system in the society got replaced in democratic system. Joint families disintegrated. Communications broke the barriers of village and home autonomy. Development started reaching even the lower class women. Supplementing the household income by wife’s earning became a necessity. Many males were killed in world war I and II. Women had to take their places in factories. The lot of women started improving but not uniformly.
India remained predominantly rural and feudalistic. The emancipation of women and their empowerment was most confined to upper classes in the cities. The upper class women movement had a tendency to ape the western societies, hence the problem of western nations were also inherited.

In the West, the principle of liberty were picked by America and Europe. The political and feudal system also lead to end of the family and the clan. American Lib movement totally repudiated the family obligation of kitchen and child. The Lib Movement sought parity in power with the men. This was achieved at the cost of family. Social harmony suffered. The urban Indian women movement started as a social movement for all. Shri Karve, Agarkar, Phule aimed at the upliftment of the entire society. However, the post-independence women movement is lead by women who have scant regard for the family. It has turned into a sectarian movement confining itself to empowerment of women. Power always breed jealously and exclusiveness. It brings in strife and conflict. This is already happening.

The Electronic Age is enhancing the trends noticed in Industrial Age. Women development is already the dangerous path of social strife, disharmony and conflict.

It has been rightly said that those who do not learn the lessons of history and doomed to regret them. America and Europe has developed a totally liberated female - who is rich and powerful but socially irresponsible. She does not want family or children. Russia reached the
same position by a different root. It harped on equality. State replaced the family. It also made women powerful, but irresponsible as far as social obligations are concerned.

Indian women movement was started by men with great vision. Dhondo Keshav Karve, Agarkar, Phule, Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, saw it as a social movement for all. Unfortunately, the power politics of Independent India has turned into a sectarian movement confined to empowerment of women. Power satisfies the ego. The movement aimed at empowerment, therefore, gets instant following. Development impasses social obligations, which normally people abhor.

The lessons of history, however, should not be forgotten. America, Europe remember liberty but forgot equality. Russia remembered equality but forgot liberty. Both of them totally forgot fraternity - बंधुत्व. The end product is social, global strife, disharmony, insecurity, violence. Hippies, the tribe of young people totally stepped in Narcotics - irresponsible towards and irrelevant to the society - were a product of this neglect of fraternity. Man without society is a pure and single animal. Even in the animal world, the animals bother about their offspring. How can humanity survive, let along prosper, if the humans are not to take responsibility of their children.

It is very difficult for individuals to relate to the society through the huge apparatus of the state. Russia made this folly and suffered. Humans have always related to the society through the family. Any thing which disintegrates the family sooner or later disintegrates the society.
Indian ancient wisdom should not be forgotten. The purpose of human life is प्रजानिःप्रजायायस्व. You live through your children. To develop the children is the main responsibility of both man and woman. The sole mission in life is to making children better than themselves.

The children must outdo the parents and disciples should outdo the teacher. That is the greatest achievement for man and woman. Obligations are as important as power.

Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Power bereft of obligations is an unmixed curse. This curse is already visiting the West Thanks to the lopsided women movement.

Let us go by our ancient wisdom. Vedas sought the blessing of God for individual development. But the manner of achieving it by human efforts was much better indicated by Lord Buddha in his तिर्यम.

इपुरुष शरणम गच्छामि धम्मम शरणं गच्छामि संध्यं शरणं गच्छामि

I surrender myself to the development of इपुरुष - Intelligence, which is the proud monopoly of mankind. Intelligence is always individual. Individual liberty and empowerment is a must for its development Yet Buddha hastens to add – धम्मं शरणं गच्छामि.

I surrender myself to religion. Here, religion does not mean a particular cult. धम्म in ancient India meant 'Duty'. In Mahabharata Arjun asks Krishna to advise him what is his 'Dharma' or duty - duty towards society. He would not go to war, not for empowerment or
prosperity that happens to his धर्म or obligation to the entire society. Power, development of self is a curse, if it is not in the interest of one and all. स्वेच्छाय: स्वेच्छाय: Self-empowerment at the cost of other human being is a sin - It is आनन्द स्वेच्छाय: स्वेच्छाय: निर्माण: Empowerment can be a blessing only when it is in the interest of all. Purity of means is an important as purity of their objective.

Buddha is very practical. He shows how to achieve empowerment and integration simultaneously. संघम शर्माय गच्छाय: I surrender to the group - the family, clan and society. If the empowerment does not benefit family and the society, it is a curse.

Man and woman must seek empowerment and self-development, but they should do so to ensure better development of their child well being of the child is the touch stone.

In deciding on the job preferences and charting out a course for healthy women movement, we will use this touch stone at every step.
“To call woman the weaker sex is a libel.
It is man’s injustice to woman. If by strength
is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman
less brute than man. If by strength is meant
mental power, then, woman is immeasurably
man’s superior.”

- Mahatma Gandhi