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## STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA : A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT:

*Society without the women is not imaginable and not accepted. There are two main pillars of human life-man and woman. Both share equal responsibility in the making of society and hence both are supplement to each other. From the very beginning, the women in various societies of the world are exploited in many ways. Since women had a strong will to improve their status in society, they have managed to make a niche for themselves in today's society. Also, there are*

*some elements in the society who have helped women to be independent, fight for their rights and injustice against them. Women have succeeded in improving their status and are improving day by day.*

*In earlier times, women were exploited through every possible means by the society. They suffered a lot of criticism, lacked freedom and stood nowhere next to men. They were even deprived of the basic birthrights of a human being. It took a lot of effort and courage for them to mark an impression of "women power" and make a significant place in society. Such supportive sections of society led to the developments that are responsible for the improved status of women in today "s society.*

*This paper studies about the status of women in historical and present perspective. It also analyze the role and importance of women in the society.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Equal, Exploited, Independent, Injustice, Responsibility.*

### INTRODUCTION

One way to judge the state of nation is to study the status of its women. In reality, the status of women represents the standard of culture of any age. The social status of the women of a country symbolizes the social spirit of the age. However to draw a conclusion about the position of women is a difficult and complicated problem. It is therefore, necessary to trace

this position in the historical perspective. In the course of Indian history from prehistoric to modern times, there were distinct stages of the rise and fall in the status and role of women.' The difficulty lies in the fact, that the recorded evidence found in the same period and in the same province have expressed opposite view/s about the worth, nature and importance of women. While one school considers women as the best gift of God to men, the other school considers that the best way to reach God is to avoid women.

Some people thought that woman brings prosperity when she is properly treated and respected and is called Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Sage Agastya says "women combine the fickleness of the lightning the sharpness of a weapon and the swiftness of the eagle. Altekhar says that to ascertain the position of women in Hindu society, one should study their position, under different circumstances, like normal i.e. in peace time and abnormal i.e. in war time. Because during wars, the attitude

of the society towards women was very unsympathetic, particularly, if the women had the misfortune of falling into the hands of the enemies. They found it impossible to get re-admitted into their family and society.

The Status enjoyed by the Indian women cannot easily be assessed. While the 'idol' was worshipped the 'real' was neglected. Cormark asserts "Traditional Indian has always accorded women a high place and indeed equality"<sup>^</sup> Gorwaney observes that "ideally women were accepted as a living force in society, the embodiment of 'Skakti' and a symbol of purity religiousness, g spirituality and sacrifice. In practice, however, they were subjected to suppression, many deprivations and were exploited by men. They were denied equal rights in family, marital, social, educational, economic and political spheres. They were assigned a subordinate status.

### ANCIENT WOMEN

The position of women in Vedic period can be judged by the way in which the birth of a girl was received. None of the hymns of Rigveda considered the birth of a daughter as inauspicious. But we find prayers for the birth of a son in Atharva Veda which says, "The birth of a girl, grant it elsewhere, have grant a boy." The marriage of girls used to take place at the age of understanding i.e. between 14 to 17 years that, too, with their consent. The educated girls had naturally an effective voice in the selection of their life partners. Pre-puberty marriages were unknown as there were Swayamvara marriages where women were given a chance of selecting their partners. There were also many instances of love marriages. It can be concluded that both men and women had considerable freedom in selecting their partners though parents often arranged a suitable match.

The vedic society was largely patriarchal and male-dominated. The household was ruled by a houselord, who exercised almost absolute control over all other members of the family and to him his wife was bound by a strict tie of life-long duty and obedience. Marriage, in fact, was a religious necessity for both men and women, and neither could reach heaven without being accompanied by his or her duly married spouse. The vedic women being Sahadharmini or Patni had the fullest right to participate in all the religious ceremonies with her husband. She could also perform sacrifices independently and was not regarded as an impediment in religious pursuits. Her position was an honoured one in the family. She was the joint owner of the household with her husband though in actual practice she was the subordinate partner

Widows of this age were permitted to remarry. This practice seems to have been accepted as normal during the Vedic period. A number of references are found in the Vedas to show that widow remarriage was common, though the re-married widow could not aspire for the status of 'Grihini' (wife), where she could become the mistress of the house. The use of the word 'Parapurva' a woman, who has had a second husband, proves that widows were remarried. The word 'Didhisha' used in the Rigveda means the second husband of a woman. Atharva Veda refers to 'Punarbhva' that is, re-married widow. This shows that marriage of widows was not opposed. The custom of a widow marrying the brother of her deceased husband seemed to be common.

### BRITISH PERIOD

British Period In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the British came to India, women's status had dropped to the lowest level. It was the worst period in the history of the country because of child marriage and Sati system etc. A.L. De'Souza says, "Women were denied equal rights in marital, familial, social, educational, economic and political fields. They were assigned a subordinate status. The marriage ideals, power and authority exercised by the joint-family and caste system combined with illiteracy, age-old traditions, seclusion within the four walls of the house, made it difficult for them to seek full personality development. They had scant personal identity and few rights"

Cousin, referring to the status of women at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, states that the condition of woman was at its lowest point of literacy, of individuality, of health, of social status, of freedom of movement, or initiative of economic status of power.<sup>\*</sup> This deterioration in the status of women brought about a number of consequences. The uneducated were considered on a level with Shudras,

married before their characters were fully developed, transferred from the loving and sympathetic atmosphere of the parent's house to the house of the parents in law. Where an environment of stunningness won uncertain of concealment, much of the time compelled to delay a hopeless reality in a wearisome widowhood, their character experienced constrained restraint toward some path and unnatural incitement in others. They had no status in the public arena none in their very own estimation. They were increasingly similar to manikins which move

when another person pulls the strings than individual with psyches of their own. Where an environment of stunningness won uncertain of concealment, much of the time compelled to delay a hopeless reality in a wearisome widowhood, their character experienced constrained restraint toward some path and unnatural incitement in others. They had no status in the public arena none in their very own estimation. They were increasingly similar to manikins which move

when another person pulls the strings than individual with psyches of their own. The reasons that are responsible for the deterioration of the status of women in India were: (1) patriarchal joint family system (2) polygamy (3) Sati system (4) Forced widowhood i.e. denial of the right to remarry after widowhood (5) denial of the right to divorce (6) child marriage and (7) the purdah system. Because of child marriages with old men, there was an increase in the number of widows. Both child marriage and the purdah custom led to low literacy rate among women. Their entry to social, political and religious functions was prohibited. They were depressed to such an extent that they could not comprehend their own freedom and independent personality. Although we find during this period some exceptional women like, Chand Bibi, Rani Laxmibai, Kittur Rani Channamma and Rani Abbakkar who made the remarkable impact in the field of administration.

Later, the British realized that they could stop 'Sati' by police force but that they could not arrange the remarriage of widows. These widows had to suffer because they had no property of their own. To improve the economic condition of the women the Hindu Women's Right to property Act 1937 was passed. According to Section 3 of the Act, on the death of a Hindu male, not only his son would succeed but also his widow and the widow of the predeceased son. By this Act, a widow got the right to claim partition and a right of enjoyment of that property during her life-time. Though she was made a limited owner of her husband's property, she was freed from depending on other members of her husband's family for food and other necessary requirements.

## WOMEN TODAY

Today, the modern woman is so deft and self-sufficient that she can be easily called a superwoman, juggling many fronts single-handedly. Women are now fiercely ambitious and are proving their metal not only on the home front, but also in their respective professions. Women in Indian are coming up in all spheres of life. They are joining the universities and colleges in large numbers. They are entering into all kinds of professions like engineering, medicine, politics, teaching, etc. A nation's progress and prosperity can be judged by the way it treats its women folk. There is a slow and steady awareness regarding giving the women their dues, and not mistreating them, seeing them as objects of possession. Despite progress, the very fact that women, along with being achievers, also are expected to fulfil their roles as wives or mothers, prioritising home against anything else.

This point of view hasn't changed much. There is still a large section of women who are uneducated, and married off before the age of 18. Families are required to supply a chaste daughter to the family of her future husband. Also very few women are actually employed in good-paying jobs, and hence parents don't see the point of spending money on girls' education. Statistics say that close to 245 million Indian women lack the basic capability to read and write, which is a large number. Only 13.9% women are employed in the urban sector, and 29% in the domestic and agriculture sector, where too a majority of women are exploited by the men. The sex proportion of India demonstrates that the Indian culture is as yet partial against female, and a ton is yet to be accomplished in this specific circumstance

### SPECIAL LAWS

- There was a unique space for ladies who had substantiated themselves no less devoted or less fiery in the opportunity battle. Directly from the beginning of the Indian Republic in January 1950, the privilege of ladies to cast a ballot was perceived, and ladies have practiced that directly from that point forward.
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- The constitution of India gave for Women's equity men. The Special Provisions in the Constitution of India intended to verify correspondence of genders and non-segregation are:
  - Equality under the watchful eye of law and equivalent insurance of law (Article 14)
  - State will not oppress any resident on grounds just of religion, race, station, sex or spot of birth. What's more, the state is allowed to make any arrangement for ladies and kids. (Article 15).
  - Equality of chance in open work. (Article 16) Equal rights for people to sufficient methods for work. (Article 39(a))
  - Humane states of work and maternity help for ladies. (Article 42)
  - To secure for all residents a uniform common code all through the nation. (Article 44)
  - It is a sacred obligation of each resident of India to revoke rehearses disdainful to the nobility of ladies. (Article 51 An (e))
  - Not short of what 33% of the all out number of seats to be filled by direct races in each Panchayat to be held for ladies and such seats to be designated by pivot to various voting public in a Panchayat (Article 243 D (3))
  - Not short of what 33% of the absolute number of workplaces of chairpersons in the Panchayats at each dimension to be saved for ladies (Article 243 D (4))
  - Not short of what 33% of the absolute number of seats to be filled by direct races in each region to be held for ladies and such seats to be apportioned by pivot to various voting demographics of a region (Article 243 T (4))
- **Marriage Related Laws Special Marriage Act, 1954** - Any young lady of 18 years old or kid of 21 years can take resort to this law independent of standing or religious contemplations.
- **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** - Marriage is considered to be solemnized on the exhibition of specific rituals, particularly Saptapadhi; while first marriage subsists, second marriage is taboo; ideal to legal partition and separation is made accessible on specific grounds like, for instance, unsound of brain, transformation to an alternate religion, hopeless or transferable maladies, and so on.
- **Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961** - Giving, abetting or taking settlement is a cognizable, non-bailable offenses against the state and isn't culpable with under five years of detainment and a fine of Rs. 15,000 or the sum speaking to the estimation of the settlement.
- **Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1955** - An unmarried ladies, a widow or a divorced person of sound personality can likewise take a kid in reception.

**Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006** \_To beat the weaknesses of the Child Marriage Restraint Act, the Government of India authorized the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006. Which gets the consent of the leader of India on 10 January, 2007? The demonstration became effective from 1 November, 2007 to defeat the limitations of the previous enactment in adequately managing the issues of kid marriage in India and to set up a complete component.

### Position of Women in Twenty-First Century; India:

Second decades of twenty-first century till now the women have not own their own fate till now they remain other from the society. Living in a same country, same society, same culture today they are tortured by the men, they are deprived from their own rights as a human being, they are insulted by the patriarchy society till now they have not acquire their own position.

Because they belong to female gender, they are inferior from the male, they have not the male gender, they are women; the "other". As the women have not gotten their own real position from the



society even in the second decades of twenty-first century, the question of gender equity is raised again and this will raise again and again until the gender equity will have not practically established. The great philosopher of India, Swami Vivekananda has said like a bird can fly in the sky by its two feathers, the society also run by the same participation of both the male and female.

According to him in the bird of society, male belongs in one feather and women on the other side, without the same participation and same contribution of both the male and female the society will never progress.

Women's cry has not stopped. They were sometimes remain as Devadasi, sometimes sex keeper of jamindar/Mahajan or sometimes prostitute and when today they have tried to erase the so called tags from their group, such incidents have continued one after another.

They till now remain as things, and for that to the advertisement of a soap industry the advertisement of a nearly naked women is shown in T.V.; to sell the newspaper often the picture of half-naked women are posted. Till now the girl babies are killed before their birth, house-wife torture, rape, gang-rape are not stopped- days by days these are increasing and that is why a new movement on gender equity is needed by the participation of women – rather to stop these unfair situations women fighter is needed.

There is a need of women empowerment in the present situation in the areas of Political, Economical and Social areas. Than only the women gender differences can be removed in the society.

### VIOLENCE RELATED LAWS

- **Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1986** - This Act was embraced in India as a follow-up of the International Convention on Immoral Traffic, 1950. This Act experienced a few changes and exists today as the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1986. This demonstration goes for the denial of unlawful traffic for motivation behind sexual misuse or misuse. It spreads out methodology for salvage of a ladies or young lady.
- **Commission of Sati (counteractive action) Act, 1987** - This Act accommodates the anticipation of the commission of sati and its glorification. The Act spreads out broad arrangements to check endeavors to submit abet or commend sati. The gatherer or District Magistrate is enabled by Act to offenses identifying with Sati.
- **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005** - This Act of Parliament got the consent of the President on thirteenth Sep., 2005. The demonstration accommodated increasingly compelling insurance of the privileges of ladies ensured under the Constitution who are casualties of any sort happening inside the family and for issues associated therewith or coincidental thereto. Under the Act 2005, Domestic Violence covers any maltreatment or risk thereof that is physical, sexual, verbal, passionate or monetary.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Provision and Redressal) Act 2013 - It is a demonstration to give assurance against inappropriate behavior of ladies at work spot and for the avoidance and redressal of grumblings of lewd behavior and for issues associated therewith or coincidental thereto Whereas lewd behavior results infringing upon the essential privileges of a ladies to uniformity under Article 14 and 15 of the Constitution of India and her entitlement to life and to live with poise under Article 21 of the Constitution and appropriate to rehearse any calling to continue any occupation, exchange or business which incorporates a privilege to a sheltered domain from inappropriate behavior.

- **Women's Reservation Bill**

Since from 1990s discussions and crusades inside the ladies' development in India have unquestionably seen another attention on ladies in discretionary governmental issues. Requests for reservation of seats first at the nearby dimension bodies (town boards and regions) and starting in 1996, through vain endeavors to pass enactment for a 33% share in state and national get together's future clear sign of India's own interest in the component of sexual orientation correspondence.

Accordingly the death of the Women's Reservation Bill in the Rajya Sabha on 9 March, 2010 denoted a memorable defining moment in the tale of Indian vote based system. In the wake of being passed in the Rajya Sabha in 2010, the Bill, which accommodates 33 percent booking for ladies in Parliament and Legislative Assemblies, was sent to the Lok Sabha for endorsement, however did not see the light of the day for absence of political accord and will. Unexpectedly it was simply on 12 August 2014 that Congress president Sonia Gandhi made a pitch for the death of the Women's (Constitution 108th Amendment) Bill. Talking at a capacity in Thiruvananthapuram, Ms. Gandhi said that the UPA would mount weight on the NDA to pass the Bill in Parliament to respect its responsibility to women. What's more, presently, under Article 107 (5) of the Constitution, it is among the 68 government Bills that have pass on the disintegration of the fifteenth Lok Sabha. On the off chance that the new government needs to offer reservation to ladies, it should concoct a new enactment similarly as it did on account of legal arrangements Bill.

### CONCLUSION

After 73 years of independence in India it is noted that the status of women is not satisfied. The women are being discriminated in all areas in this democratic state. The women should be empowered in the areas of social, political and economically in India. There is a need to improved the literacy rate among the women. This can leads to the empowerment of the women and change the status of the women. Women can face all the challenges in the society if she is empowered.

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