

Status of Women in India

Essay No. 01

There has been a marked change for the better in our existing, over – all approach towards the women. Gone are the days when their place was considered to be behind the four walls of the house and their only job was confined to looking after the house hold affairs. But now they can be seen working shoulder to shoulder with men in every share of life.

We had a highly successful and efficient woman prime Minister, late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, in addition to having many women governors and Chief Ministers. And even in our own time, there is no dearth of women judges, lawyers, doctors, administrators, police officers and engineers.

This, undoubtedly, a good sign and an indication of their emancipation. This has, however, increased the workload of working women manifold. They attend to their official duties and after eight hours of tiring and nerve – breaking office duty, return home to a different kind of job.

It is a common sight to see them hurrying back from their offices in the evening only to enter the kitchen at home and cook for the family and attend to other domestic chores. It is the same picture in rural areas. After toiling on the farms, they go back home to do all the house hold chores.

The men, whether in the urban or in the rural areas, seldom help in the household tasks. This situation exists because men regard themselves as superior in mental and physical power to women. Similarly, women too have been made to accept their subordinate position. However, it is rather suppressing that this type of wrong thinking has not changed with the changing times.

This attitude of superiority on the part of men has caused many problems for working women. In offices, though they are selected to important positions, they often have to prove themselves doubly competent in order to get a promotion. Again, their absence from duty or late arrival is frowned upon whereas the same lapse in a male colleague is, generally ignored and over-looked.

Even in day –to-day routine- life, women have to face a host of problems because the basic attitude towards them still remains unchanged. Customs which downgrade the position of women have yet to be overcome. The dowry system is one such custom. If the girl's parents are unable to arrange for it the girl is harassed or sent back to her parental home or sometimes even burnt to death.

Another area where women have yet to get equality is in property matters. The law has been changed to provide equal property rights to the son and daughter in a family. But this only on paper, and the daughter gracefully relinquishes her share in the property. If she insists on getting it, she is forced to go to court, for it is seldom given as a matter of right.

The very birth of a female member in a family is still an occasion to mourn, whereas the birth of a son is celebrated with great pomp and show. The present 'uplifted' status of women has put them between the devil and the deep sea.

Or, one hand, they seem to have been liberated to the extent that they are working outside, side by side men, but, on the other hand, they have to face a number of problems because of this very fact. What are the solution to these problems?

The law has, however, been amended in favour of women in many cases. Thus eve-teasing in public places, harassment in office, the dowry problem, property rights etc. can be dealt with in the court, yet the basic problem would remain unsolved. This is related to the attitude of the people, and unless this is changed, women, on the whole, would remain deprived of their rights as well as justice.

Educational institutions can help by teaching equality of the sexes through the lessons. Further, the family too should not be biased and give the same kind of upbringing to the sons and daughter. Boys should be made to help as much as the girls in domestic chores.

The mass media should also project the picture of the women as an equal with man, having the same desired ambitions and intelligence. True liberation of women possible only when our over-all attitude is changed.

Essay No. 02

Status of Women in India

Women in India have much better status than their counter-parts in many other developing countries of the world. But still there is no room for complacency and much is needed to be done to improve the lot of women in India. No doubt the middle-class women in India are now conscious of their rights and privileges, they have undergone a vocational and economical transformation. Many of them are gainfully employed in various fields of life. A few of them occupy very high ranks and positions in business, politics, law and administration. There is a marked change in their social and economic status. Yet they are doubly burdened as they have to work hard both as a housewife and as an employed woman. In this respect Indian woman are still slaves.

India is still a male dominated society. A woman has to depend on a male for protection and help at every stage of life. As a daughter she needs protection from father, as a married woman she has to depend on her husband and in advanced old age again she has to depend upon her husband or son, etc. Men are still regarded superior to women. The birth of a son in a family is always honoured while that of a girl-child never liked. Daughters are considered a curse and liability. The parents here are always worried to have a daughter because then they have to arrange for her dowry, etc.

In Vedic India women enjoyed -a very high social, and family status. They were held in high respect as Mother, Devi & Shakti. Then it was said, where women are adored and respected, there the gods abide. And yet they were exploited and ill-treated as a weaker sex, as a mere means of producing children and as an object of sex. Thus, it was underlined in no uncertain terms that they were basically weak and helpless. This marks the hypocrisy of Indian thought and vision as far as women are concerned. Lip service is of no use, the vast gap between theory and practice is too obvious not to be noticed. The widows were then treated worse than the dumb animals. The system of "sari" was a blot on the fair name of Indian society. The women were forced to die on the pyre of their husbands in the name of religion and fidelity. Thank God, it has now been abolished by law. The Indian Constitution guarantees equal status to women and men. There cannot be any discrimination on the basis of sex.

The women in India are fully protected by law, but still there is a lot of exploitation of womenfolk. In rural India, their situation is far worse. There cannot be any appreciable and permanent improvement in women's lot unless they organise themselves to fight for their rights and emancipation. They should never think in terms of weaker sex. They should rise as a one body and fight the menace of dowry; they should reject outright the dowry system. They should fight tooth and nail wherever there is exploitation, social and economic injustice. Why should they be regarded as weak and tender and exploited, raped and humiliated as such? They should raise their voice against all these social evils and fight it out

Women should stand on their feet and be economically independent. They should not depend for money, etc., on their husbands, in laws or sons, etc. But it is a matter of pity that even very highly educated and profitably employed women in India cannot spend their earnings as they like. The strings of their purse are controlled still by menfolk. Why should they suffer all sorts of restrictions, inhibitions and social taboos? They should assert their equality in every field.

More and more Indian women are getting educated and employed. They are employed as judges, lawyers, lecturers, doctors, nurses, engineers, entrepreneurs, teachers, etc. In fact, we have ladies now in so many leading

positions in almost all respectable walks of life. We have produced such a powerful woman Prime Minister as Indira Gandhi. We are really proud of her and her political achievements. An Indian woman is no more a mere ornament of the household. Her activities are no more confined to home and hearth. But her present status has to be further consolidated and improved. Such powerful social movements as the Arya Samaj, BrahmoSamaj, etc., have contributed a lot in improving their position. The women of India are also greatly indebted to Mahatma Gandhi, Mrs. Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, etc., for their present desirable status in the society. Since independence there has been a greater awakening among Indian women. Beauty, love, strength, tolerance, sacrifice, creativity, etc., are their infallible weapons and virtues. With their intelligent use they can do wonders for themselves and for others. In the present day world the status of Indian women seem, to be well secured, but they should always remain alert, vigilant and gainfully active.

Essay No. 03

Status of Women in India

The status of women in ancient India, according to our scriptures, was higher than that of men. She was regarded as the embodiment of "Shakti". She was equated with goddess in our religious pantheon of deities, and worshipped as the symbol of fertility. No Yajna was complete in which the woman, as the spouse of the man performing the Yajna, did not participate. Then came Manu and his derogatory statements about women. He said that a woman has to be dependent before marriage on her parent and after marriage on her husband. This did a great damage to the position of women in Indian society. Women began to be regarded as inferior. They were not considered worthy of respect and were excluded from various fields of activity.

During the Mogul rule in India which spanned roughly over four hundred years, the position of women became worse. They confined the women folk to the four-walls of the houses. The purdah system made them further lost their identity. The Moghuls attitude towards their womenfolk obviously lowered the status of Indian women whose sole reason of existence became the slavery of their men folk. The sati system, prevailing at that time speaks volumes of how women were treated in society. The wife, even against her wish, was forced to burn herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. The sati system continued well during the British rule in India. It was Raja Ram Mohun Roy of Bengal who vigorously campaigned against this barbarism. He succeeded in getting a law passed declaring this practice as illegal.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly during India's national struggle for independence, the position of women took a turn for the better. Mahatma Gandhi gave an ardent call for women's participation in the freedom movement. Sarojini Naidu, Mira Ben, Such Kripalani, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali were some of the leading women freedom fighters.

In the present times, there are a large number of women who have attained the pinnacle of glory in their respective fields. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, our Prime Minister, was held in high esteem the world over. In a public poll conducted in France she came out to be the most popular woman in the world. There is no doubt that in the last two decades, women have really come into their own. Increasingly more and more women specially in urban areas, are looking for self-fulfilment outside hearth and home. No wonder, we find women in every field. The myth that certain fields were only meant for men has been shattered by women. Women have proved to be more responsible, vibrant, dynamic, tough and compassionate. They have the capacity to immerse themselves wholly in any task they undertake. Hence today, women occupy top ranks in almost all the fields—be it sports, politics, performing arts, police, administration, medicine or communication. P.T. Usha, Mohsina Kidwai, Margaret Alva, Subbulaxmi, Kiran Bedi, Dr. Padmavati, Mother Teresa, Medha Patkar and Proniilla Kalhan have become names to reckon with in the areas of their work.

The statistics reveal that girls are performing better than boys in board and competitive examinations. Certainly women are proving to be more single-minded, dedicated and persevering. Women have clearly proved that given an opportunity they can rise up to any occasion. It goes to the credit of Indian women that despite family responsibilities, where the Indian male is still reluctant to share the burden, she has been able to withstand pressures of work and home remarkably well.

The Government of India has been conscious of the need to improve the status of women in India. It has, therefore, included in the Constitution of India equality of women before law. The Constitution also allows the government to make special provisions for the protection and advancement of women. A series of acts were passed in 1950. Through these Acts women were given right to matrimonial relief, right to succession and so on.

The development of women in India, who according to the 1991 census represent 48.1 per cent of the country's population, has been the centre

stage in development planning since Independence. The Government set up a separate Department of Women and Child Development in 1985. In the Sixth Plan a separate chapter viz. Women and Development was included. The National Commission for Women was set up in 1992 which is engaged in safeguarding the rights of women besides reviewing the, existing legislations for possible amendments. In addition to this, major programmes implemented by the government in the area of women's development include Support to Training-cum-Employment for Women (STEP), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Mahila Samridhi Yojana, Women's Development Corporation, some legislations/amendments, etc. The new United Front Government proposes to reserve 33% seats in legislatures also for women. The government is, laying special emphasis on the education of girls. The female literacy on the whole is on the rise. In 1901, there were 1466 male literates for every 100 female literates. By 1931, the disparity had been brought down to 560 males as against 100 females. Since 1950, the difference has steadily whittled down bringing the ratio to 164 males for 100 females in 1991.

No doubt, there are particular cases of women who have achieved eminence, in different fields. The Acts passed by the government and measures taken, by it have made some difference. But. the condition of a large majority of women in India remains deplorable.

The exploitation of women- goes on. Women are considered weaker sex. They are harassed, tortured, ill-treated and raped. Helpless and unhappy, even today, leave aside the country side in urban areas too, women are, unable to raise their voice against the crimes committed against them. Every day in the newspaper headlines one comes across a news item which reminds one of the glaring, barbaric customs still prevalent in our society. Innocent women are burnt to death because they could not bring sufficient dowry. The worst is that the murderer gets away With it. These women become victim of greed of other people and opt for death when the torture and humiliation crosses limits of endurance. If this is the scenario it urban areas, one can imagine what. must be the plight of women in rural areas, where women are illiterate, uneducated and slog from day to day slaves of men. They are not even aware of their rights and privileges. They simply take all the suffering, humiliation and torture inflicted on them in a spirit of resignation, as a result of their past Karma. Hence they carry on with their daily chores. with stoic silence.

Medical science has made tremendous progress. Today it is possible to determine the sex of the child, When he/she is still in the womb of the mother. Because of a strong prejudice in India against female children, many people persuade doctors to kill the child in the womb if it is a female child. Such practices only prove that the prejudice against female children and against women in general still exists. A landmark legislation on the Pre-natal Diagnostic Technique (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act was passed in 1994.

It is a pity that despite legislations and Acts such crimes against women are still committed. Eve-teasing, wife beating, bride burning, child marriages are still prevalent in the society. Many protective homes have been opened for such harassed women in different parts of the country. But these malpractices continue even there. Miserable conditions prevail in the institutions like Nani Niketans.

Ms Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, in her book Silver Shackles-Women and Development in India published by Oxfam, the International Humanitarian Organization, has maintained that the status of women is deteriorating drastically. She says that since Independence in 1947, female mortality has risen so sharply that men now outnumber women and tend to live longer. In most countries the reverse is true. Also in addition to their back-breaking domestic chores, women constitute a vast labour force often working for 19 hours a day.

This, however, is not to say. that the future of women in India is altogether hopeless. There are several Women's Organisations working for the enlightenment of women. The Government, too, has been taking measures to help them. The women in India are decidedly heading towards advancement No doubt, it will take some time, and patient and dedicated work is needed. Above all a change in the attitude towards women is required. Once there is an awakening of social consciousness, the women will get their rightful place in society.

Essay No. 04

Status of Women in India

Since independence there has been much improvement in the lot of women in India. They enjoy perfect equality with men. They have all the rights and privileges possessed by the males. Our Constitution guarantees them all those rights, freedom, and privileges enjoyed by the male. Consequently, they now feel

emancipated and free. The women of India, who form almost 50% of the population, have equal opportunities and rights and can aspire to any position and status in society. Many of them are in top positions in various fields of life. A few of them have been great political leaders, entrepreneurs, administrators and business persons. This marked change in their outlook, social and economic status reflects the fact that their emancipation has been almost complete. It is a fact that Indian women have much better status than their counterparts in many other developing countries.

Today, women in India are well conscious of their rights and privileges and they are politically, socially, economically and educationally not backward anymore. Their participation in the democratic process and elections has been quite impressive. In a large number of constituencies women voters outnumber men voters on the days of polling. They are contesting elections at various levels in far greater numbers. Their political wisdom and social sagacity has now been fully recognised. The status of women in India in modern times has undergone a sea change. During the last few decades, India has produced many great women leaders, social workers, administrators, reformers and literary personalities like Annie Besant, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Sucheta Kripalani, Indira Gandhi, P.T. Usha, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Padmaja Naidu, Kalpana Chawla, Mother Teresa, Mahadevi Verma, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, and Amrita Pritam, etc. India really feels very proud because of these great women and their great achievements in various fields. Their contribution in the fields of art, science, and sports, etc. has also been equally significant and memorable. Their active participation in various social, political, economic, educational, scientific and other nation-building activities as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters has been of vital importance in taking the country to greater heights. And yet, there is no room for any complacency. They are doubly burdened as they have to work hard, both as employed women and housewives. Ours is still a male-dominated society and women have to depend on men for protection and help at every stage of life. As a daughter, she needs protection from her father; as a married woman, she has to depend on her husband; and, in old age again, she has to depend upon her husband or son.

Women in India are still exploited and abused. They are still regarded as inferior to men. The birth of a female child is considered a curse in parts of the country. Daughters are considered a liability because of many social evils like dowry, etc. In spite of full legal and Constitutional protection, in practice, women are still much exploited and abused. Their condition in villages is far worse. They are not aware at all about their rights and privileges and fully depend on men. Even very highly educated and gainfully employed women in urban India cannot spend their earnings as they like. The strings of their purses are controlled by their men folk. This unhealthy attitude of men towards women, with regard to their privilege to

spend their hard-earned money, has been a source of much tension in the families. Thus, in our tradition-oriented society male dominance still prevails. A husband has a far superior position over his wife and all major decisions are taken by him without taking into consideration her wishes and aspirations. This has created an imbalance and disharmony in the families. There has been appreciable change in our attitude as far as the employment of women is concerned. We do like that our wives, daughters or sisters are gainfully employed but as far as their right to spend their earnings is concerned, our attitude is still unchanged and conservative. A working woman helps her husband by bringing additional income, but as a housewife she has no help from her husband. Men regard household chores below their dignity and never help women in their work. Thus, women are doubly burdened, which often causes tension, maladjustment and family problems.

There is much to be done towards emancipation of women in India. They are still subdued and dominated by men and cannot assert their equality as desired in every walk of life. In a number of our states, the custom of child marriage still exists, widow remarriage is not allowed, and girls are still given away in marriages against their will. Then there is the dowry system. Poor parents cannot afford to give dowry and so are obliged either to keep their daughters unmarried or give them away in marriages to unmatched husbands. Women, especially in rural India, still find themselves weak, helpless and exploited. The rate of literacy among them is alarmingly low. Sometimes they are treated no better than commodities. They are still confined to the four walls of their house: engaged in household drudgery. They have been forced by arrogant men to play a totally subordinate role because they are economically and socially not independent. This has been further helped by our old, outdated and conservative customs. Their hard work and toil as housewives and working women, though significant enough to run a household and family, still goes unrewarded and unrecognized.

The present status of women in India has to be further consolidated and improved. It cannot be achieved unless women themselves come forward and organise themselves as a power to be reckoned with. They should stop thinking in terms of being the weaker sex. They should rise as one powerful body and fight the menace of dowry and child-marriage. They should fight tooth and nail wherever there is abuse, exploitation, humiliation and injustice. They should raise their voices against all social evils and male arrogance. They should wage a relentless war against "apartheid of sex". They should come forward and take more active part in the political affairs of the country and get themselves elected in greater numbers to public offices. Their representation in our various legislatures is still too meager. Unless the women of India organise their own movements in a powerful manner they will be left out of taking vital decisions. They should assert and achieve economic independence so as to be able to play their proper and legitimate role in society.

Indian women are intelligent, hard-working, courageous and full of love, and compassion. With these qualities of head and heart they are quite competent in breaking all the bondage that binds them in. traditional subordination and slavery. Endowed with the qualities of beauty, love, strength, tolerance, sacrifice, and creativity, etc. they can do wonders for themselves and for others. In the present-day India, they can further consolidate their position and redefine their relationship with men, based on equality and mutual respect by using their strengths more wisely. It is of no use to curse and bemoan their fate as the weaker sex. They should unite and struggle against injustice, discrimination, ill-treatment, abuse and exploitation. Much really depends on women themselves. The future of women -in India seems bright but it is women themselves who can ensure it by being vigilant, alert and united. They will have to raise their voices against any violation of their rights and privileges. It is said that God helps those who help themselves and it is equally true in the case of the equality and liberty of women in India.

Essay No. 05

Position of Women in India

Women in ancient India were held in high esteem. But with the passage of time, their status deteriorated. Polygamy, dowry, sati and female infanticide came into practice. Sati was banned in 1829 by Lord William Bentick. At present rape, dowry deaths, females' foeticide, etc. have become a common affair. Certain laws are passed by the government for the safety and empowerment of women. 33% seats are reserved for women in the Panchayati Raj system.

Most women today are at equal pace with men in all spheres of life. Women must come forward and fight against exploitation and for their rights. A nation's progress and prosperity can be judged by the Way it treats its womenfolk. Men must understand and accept the fact that women are equal partners in life.

Women in the later civilizations were not allowed to go to schools. in the Gupta period, they were allowed to listen to the scriptures. In the medieval period, the practices of purdah system, dowry and sati came into being. Sati and polygamy were glorified. It is thought that the right place for women is the home. Her main duty is to cook food for the family, clean the utensils and wash the clothes. They are considered fit for producing and bringing up children. Thus, women have been deprived of their rightful place in society.

The inhuman practice of sati where the wife burns herself alive in the funeral pyre of her husband existed through the centuries. Raja Ram Mohan Roy fought against this evil practice. It was finally abolished by Lord William Bentinck in 1829. After

the development of science and technology, female foeticide is being practiced on a large scale. This has led to a drop in female ratio:

Women have not started protesting for their rights. They want to work side by side with men. Women contribute towards the social, economic and political development of the society. Swami Vivekanand has rightly remarked, "It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. it is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing."

The Indian Constitution has bestowed equal rights on women. They enjoy all social, political and economic rights. For equal work, both men and women are eligible for equal wages. Women in India 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. Women in many homes today are getting a share in the property of their father and husband.

A nation's progress and prosperity can be judged by the way it treats its womenfolk. Men should understand and accept the fact that women are equal partners in life.