

STATUS OF WOMEN  
IN INDIA.

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**GROUP E: WOMEN'S PROBLEMS**

**TOPIC VIII: STATUS OF WOMEN AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS**

INDIAN COUNCIL OF WORLD AFFAIRS  
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The author alone is responsible for statements of fact or opinion in this paper.*

## THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

When dealing with a country like India with a very ancient civilisation and culture, the significance of the present can be best appraised against the old background. Therefore, before surveying the status of women today in India, let us give a brief glance at the status they enjoyed in the past in the various fields of national affairs.

### Past Status

1. General: In the early Vedic period, as expressed in the Rig Veda as also in the Brahmanic literature, such as Aitarya Brahman, women seem to have enjoyed equal rights with men and took equal part in all religious and social functions. Whole verses in Mahabharata refer to women as the pivot not only of domestic life but also of the entire social organism, which means they enjoyed a place of honour and respect in the Epic age.

2. Educational: Women in the Vedic period studied the Scriptures as well as Secular Sciences, some of them making notable contributions to the various branches of learning, such as literature, poetry, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, law etc. Some of the verses in the Vedas were composed by women, who won an honourable place in the galaxy of noble singers and who occupied a distinguished niche in the temple of fame.\* Women participated in public debates on philosophical and other subjects.@ We find the Great Epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, make mention of women being initiated into the study of fine arts, music and dancing, as part of their accomplishment. They also entered Guru Kulas or Universities along with men for special studies.

3. Religious: In all Vedic sacrifices, husbands were accompanied by their wives. In the Brahmanic literature, women were treated as indispensable at any of the rituals or ceremonies. Man traces his origin to the early legend, that Brahma, the Creator divided his body into two, one half man and the other half woman, and that only the combination of the two made a whole. The Rig Vede refers to women, as not only expounding the message of the

\* Professor Indra: Status of Women in Ancient India  
& Upanishads

Vedic hymns but also officiating as priests.

4. Legal: As to a woman's inheritance rights as a wife, there seems to have been some dispute; but her rights as a daughter in her parents' property were recognised in varying degrees. One may assume that, in the case of the widow in the earlier period, the right to inherit was admitted but was later overlooked. Whereas, in the case of the daughter, her rights continued to be enjoyed to a much later date, especially to her mother's property. As regards marriage laws, in the Vedic times monogamy seems to have generally prevailed, although polygamy was not unknown. Entire hymns, as in the tenth book of Rig Veda, are a discourse on monogamous marriage. The references to polygamy indicate that, though it existed, it was generally disapproved of. Moreover, it seems to have been generally confined to the aristocracy and was rarely to be found in the middle classes. The later Brahmanic literature also upholds the same monogamous spirit, although polygamy under certain circumstances, such as absence of progeny, diseases etc., seems to have been approved of. On the question of divorce, there is considerable dispute as to whether it prevailed or not, but gradually the practice seems to have obtained; and, in the Chanakya's Arthashastra, it finds a definite place, where, under certain conditions, it is permitted.

5. Political: Political administration in those days was simpler and more personal. But women seem to have had, as compared with their part in other spheres, far less to do with it directly, except for the influence they might have exercised through their husbands. The Vedic or even post Vedic literature makes little reference to reigning queens. No even in the Council of Ministers is any mention made of women, although there are references to martial women, who participated in battles. The Rig Veda clearly talks of fully-armed women going into wars. In the Taitarya Mrahmana, Indrani is described as the goddess of the army,

6. Buddhist Age: The rise of Buddhism, being a revolt against the Brahmanical Oligarchy, necessarily was a progressive force, which relaxed some of the old rigidity of empty customs and brought a larger measure of freedom to those, who were under handicaps or restrictions. Towards the end of the Turanic period, as society declined, the position of women deteriorated. Buddhism gave it a fresh vigour: they were admitted into universities for study and also into religious orders and, strangely

enough, married women also were accepted into monasteries\*. In fact Buddhist literature makes special mention of women's contribution in raising Buddhism to a high pedestal. But in the political field, women do not seem to have filled any high administrative post, even though they participated in religious functions and attained repute as ambassadors and judges. At this time, their economic status had definitely improved, for references are found to their cwing property. They also had the option of sharing in their husbands' calling and of undertaking productive work. They appear to have gained as well in social equality and were regarded as close companions of their husbands. Polygamy was greatly reduced, for the Buddhist emphasis on asceticism and restraint contributed towards minimising the spread of polygamy, although the aristocracy seems to have still indulged in it.

The conception of marriage underwent a radical change; it lost some of its old religious sanctity and became a social institution. Consequently, dissolution was permitted. Further, it is indicated that women took greatly to fine arts, especially to music and dancing.

#### Present Status

1. Educational: Education in general, and in particular, of women, has suffered immensely in India. The total expenditure on education has been 8% of the entire national revenue, and even so, it is the first item for retrenchment at times of what is called financial stringency. Apart from passing piecemeal enactments from time to time, no attempt has been made by the government to make ducation universal or a vital force in the life of the people. In the old days education was more universal; for there was a type of traditional instruction in every village, imparted in a temple or mosque. With economic deterioration, which led to general social decay, these schools too disappeared and none others came to take their place. It is therefore not surprising that the present condition of education in India is most discouraging and particularly so in the case of women, as the following figures for 1941-42 reveal: out of a total adult population of two hundred and ninety-six million the total number of scholars in all institutions is sixteen million and in recognised institution a little over fifteen million, of which for women the figure is at 3.5 million.

#### Percentage of scholars to population

Men	8.01
Women	2.61
Total	5.40

\* Professor Indra's: The Status of Women in Ancient India  
@ Mrs. Rhys David: The Tehrigathas

Women " male " 2.51

Percentage of Scholars in recognised institutions

Men	(in proportion to male population)	7.74
Women	" Female "	2.51

One curious and disheartening fact about the women's education is that, while the figures show a slight increase in the number of women in institutions from 1941 to 1942, actually there is a drop in literacy percentage from 2.73 to 2.51, which means that educational facilities do not keep pace with the increasing population, due mainly to the niggardly sums spent on education by the administration. The total amount spent on education is about 308.5 million rupees, out of which the Government spends 135 million. Even these figures are misleading, for they throw no light on quality. Most of the primary schools are single-teacher institutions. Moreover, the extreme poverty of the people acts as a deterrent. Out of 100 in class 1, barely 5 reach class 5. The figures for girls would be even more discouraging. In most villages there are no schools, and whereas boys may go to the neighbouring villages, girls rarely do. To pursue higher education is even more difficult for lack of provision. Even middle class girls are prevented from pursuing higher education due to lack of proper hostels. Special institutions for giving technical training to women are rarely established by the State. Such, institutions, as exist, are usually the result of private effort.

The absence of proper educational facilities, and consequently of training, places women at a grave disadvantage and greatly curtails their scope of utility.

Although the Indian States are, comparatively speaking, generally backward, some, like Cochin and Travancore have been able to make better strides than British India, largely due to the unusual degree of freedom enjoyed by women there because of the prevalence of the matriarchal system, they show jointly a literacy figure at 45% for the entire population.

A few of the municipalities and district boards have introduced compulsory primary education by raising funds through an education cess.

HEALTH.

The general condition of health in India is depressing. For public health, as understood in the modern context, is still in a semi-developed state in cities and towns and is almost unknown in villages. A good number of villages lack such essentials as clean drinking water. There is no adequate provision for housing, both in villages and towns, and sanitary measures are either not introduced or not enforced. The following figures reveal in a small way the existing conditions as published by the Bhole Committee Report in 1946.

<u>Death Rate</u>	<u>Infantile mortality rate</u>	<u>Expectation of life</u>	
		<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
22.4 per thousand	162 per thousand	26.91 yrs.	26.56 yrs.

Barring Egypt and the Straits Settlements, India has the highest figures for death rates and lowest for expectation of life. This is not surprising, as the per capita expenditure on medical and public health, which varies from 1 anna 7 pies in Bihar to 5 annas 9 pies in Bombay, is extremely low as compared with Rs 54-8-11 in England and Rs 51-6-0 in the USA. The per capita income in England is 17 times and in the USA 22 times of the income in India; so even taking that proportion into account India should be spending at least Rs 3/- per head. Expressed as a percentage of the total provincial expenditure, it varies from 2.5 in Sind to 7.3 in Punjab, as compared with 20.4 in England.

The inadequacy of the medical personnel, which is another factor, may be judged from the following figures, showing the ratio in proportion to the population;

Doctors:	1 to 6,300;
Nurses :	1 to 43,000
Health Visitors:	1 to 400,000
Midwives:	1 to 60,000

As a result, maternal mortality is 20 per 1000 live births and the total maternal deaths annually are 200,000. In addition,



about 4 million women suffer from disability and discomfort, due to inadequate medical attention at the time of childbirth.

2. Services: There is actually no bar to women entering any service, although there are very few of them in the higher services. They are however being increasingly appointed on various Governmental Committees and Commissions, both national as well as international. Women occupy the posts of Deputy Presidents of Provincial Legislatures, palimmentary secretaries to provincial ministers, and two ministerial posts in the provincial cabinets.

In the permanent administrative services, they are engaged in practically every department, such as medical, educational (these two probably claim the largest numbers) industrial labour, veterinary, printing and stationery, agricultural, financial, prison, public health, information, publicity, transport, communications, civil supplies, police, excise, shipping railways, forests, public works, engineering; in short, almost every department. To venture to give any figures for these services would be completely misleading, as the statistics are most incomplete. The advent of popular ministries in the Provinces and a more representative Cabinet at the Centre has increased the pace and the scope of progress in this direction, especially in the higher and diplomatic services.

3. Economics: The economic condition of Indian women is but a reflection of the general economic backwardness of the country. Prolonged subjection of the country's entire economy to foreign interests has adversely affected it. The other contributory causes that have served to keep the country disastrously poor, are: (a) maintaining of feudal and semi-feudal conditions, by giving special protection and privileges to such vested interests and retarding the natural process of democratisation; (b) slow and niggardly industrialisation, in order to keep India a predominantly agricultural country and an easy market for manufacturers from outside; (c) systematic destruction of cottage industries. All this has resulted in driving an excess population on to the land and dangerously lowering the standard of living.

Were the zamindari or landlord system prevails, the tenants have been subjected to excessively high rents, forced labour and all manner of illegal exactions, which have reduced the peasants produce by 50 to 70%. In the case of peasant proprietors, the average holding, being only 2 to 4 acres per capital is uneconomical. In either event, the peasant is dependent

on some subsidiary activity for supplementing his income. But the destruction of cottage industries has deprived the tiller of this supplementary means of income. The system of taxing by acreage and no production or income also is a handicap. It is only with the advent of the popular ministry that stricter measures are being introduced to regularise rents and give better protection to tenants and control usuary. On the whole, however, the Indian peasantry has lived in a state of perpetual economic insecurity and on the verge of destruction.

Agriculture still continues to be the chief occupation. A large proportion of the agriculturists are landless labourers, that is, twenty-three million out of a total of 31.5 million agriculturists are labourers; the total number of non-agricultural labourers is twentyfive million. Out of a total of hundred and fifty million engaged in all occupations, more than a third, about 56.5 million depends upon wage labour.

Agricultural labour is only seasonal and lives in perpetual insecurity. It is the lowest paid, payment being mostly in kind, sometimes both cash and kind, varying from one to two seers of cereals and one to two annas in cash.

The proportion of women agricultural workers to men is about 1 to 3. Sometimes it is as high as seventy-five women to a hundred men. Where they are hired hands, they are paid less than men. Even in special agricultural labour, such as in plantations, they earn less. The wage scale is as follows: \*

	<u>Plantations</u>	
	(1946)	
	Assam Valley	Surma Valley
Men	10-0-0	7-0-0
Women	8-0-0	5-4-0

These are only rough estimates, as it is difficult to make correct appraisals. Apart from the cash earnings, the tea estates provide certain food rations at subsidised rates to the labourers.

Various abuses are noted in the method of recruitment. Although, according to law, only married couples may be assisted to emigrate to the gardens, the sardar -- the recruiting agent -- may bring couples who are really not married. In 1940, the total number of assisted emigrants and their families was 16,259, whereas the non-assisted labour was only 3,439. Cases of unmarried girls being decoyed are also known. And even though the penal sanction contract has been abolished, the illiterate labour is usually unaware of it; the system of giving a bonus of Rs.12 for men and Rs.8 for women, when they entered the plantations, has been understood by labour to mean contract money, which binds them for life to the gardens.

An important feature of the plantation industry is that in proportion to men it employs more women than any other kind of organised industry, 45% in tea, 40% in coffee and 25% in rubber.

Twentyfive out of 34 million in non-agricultural occupations are engaged in industrial establishments. During the war there was a considerable increase, but in normal times the proportion of industrial workers to the population is still as low as 4%. The latest figures available for 1944 are as follows in thousands: \*

	Adults	Adolescents	Children	Workers
Men	2207	27	11	2245
Women	270	3	2	275
Total:	2477	30	13	2520

The position with regard to the women is somewhat misleading, for although the number increased from 180 thousand in 1921 to 275 thousand in 1944, their percentage share in the total volume of factory employment actually decreased from 15.3% to 10.9% during the period. This fall is all the more noteworthy at a time when the total factory employment rose by nearly 89% and the percentage share of the men workers increased from 78.9% to 88.3%. It can be partly attributed to the growth of factory legislation imposing special restrictions for women such as the ban on night work, maternity benefits and compulsory children's creches.

\* Government of India Labour Department.

As regards child labour, the decline is appreciable, from 87 thousands which is 7.4% of the total in 1921, to 13 thousand which is only about  $\frac{1}{2}$ %, as a result of legislation prohibiting the employment of children below 12 years.

Women everywhere are paid less wages than men. Where a man carries an average daily wage of Rs.1/8, as in the textile industry, the woman earns, on an average, only As.12 and sometimes even less. In the jute industry, for instance, women earn from 4/- to Rs. 7/- per week, as against Rs.8/- to Rs-10/- in the case of men. The percentage of women in this industry has declined considerably, from 25% to 13%. The Textile Labour Equity Commission Bombay, in recommending a minimum wage-scale, again suggested a lower scale for women: men sweepers Rs.24/-, women sweepers Rs.20/-, unskilled coolie workers Rs.22/-.@ Women are graded even below the unskilled, although there can be no justice in discrimination on grounds of sex, for the minimum wage is based on costs and standards of living, no on sex.

4. Various industries employing women: The Textile Industry, one of the oldest and most established, covers 50% of the total workers in perennial factories. The wages, however, vary disproportionately from area to area; workers in Bombay and Ahmedabad getting 3 times as much as those in Coimbatore and Madras. The average daily attendance for women for 1944 was about 70 thousand. In the silk industry, they form 60% of total employees; other industries in which women are employed are glass, shellac, bidi, mineral and metal industries, rice and paper mills.

A very large number of women is employed in mines. Women were excluded from undergroundwork in 1937. Due to war exigencies, the ban was lifted but has been imposed again. In 1944, there were 19,865 women out of a total of 126,047, working underground. Altogether 61,427 women out of a total labour force of 247,076 were employed in the mines, both underground and surface. Their average daily earnings underground were  $8\frac{1}{2}$  as; for surface work, however, the daily earnings varied between 4 as. and 6 as. In mica mining, although women and children are prohibited, according to the Adarkar Report on Conditions of Work, both women and children continue to be openly employed. The low wages paid to men and the high cost of living induce women workers to collude with the employers in violating the Act. The average daily wage is about 8 as. for women and for skilled workers approximately a rupee.

Wages in unregulated factories are very low. In rice milling as little as 2 as. per diem is paid, sometimes in kind.

The Maternity Benefits Act is now in operation in practically all the Provinces and a few of the Indian States, entitling a woman in continuous employment for 9 months preceding the date of delivery to receive 8 as. a day for every day on which she is absent during the four weeks immediately preceding and 4 weeks following the delivery. But all investigations and the experience of the working women show that the Act in reality operates against the women, because employers either do not engage women or they dismiss them on some pretext, in the event of pregnancy. This induces women to go on working up to the time of the delivery and resume work almost immediately after.

There are no social security Acts or social insurance of any kind in India, either for unemployment, sickness or old age. There is a Workmen's Compensation Act for those who sustain injuries while working. Generally speaking, welfare schemes, as associated today with modern industrial society, are, with few exceptions, absent.

5. Profession: Women are not legally debarred from entering any of the professions, although their number is small due to their general educational backwardness. Under the Government of India Act of 1935, no services are closed to them although there are several where in practice they are not to be found, such as the diplomatic, defence (except the non-combatant auxiliary during the war), engineering, and a few others. Women are singularly absent in all the higher grades in the administration. Some are now being recruited to the Police. The two services, that claim a large number of women, are the Teaching and the Health Services. The Indian Medical Service was originally intended exclusively for men and there was a special medical service of a semi-official character instituted for women. The scale of salary for women differs from that of men. Although in the subordinate services, the women may be paid the same as men, they are rarely taken up to the higher grades. Similarly in the educational service, where at the start the women get the same or at times even more advantageous salaries, the maximum they reach is far below that reached by men; Usually the women teachers get a lower salary than men, in either instance the salary being most inadequate. For municipal teachers, it has varied between Rs.12 and Rs.15 per mensem, which is a glaringly uneconomic wage for any career, especially for so important a post as a teacher.

6. Women in Administration: Women are to be found in practically all departments of the government. But complete figures are lacking, as no statistics seem to have been maintained. For some provinces, no figures could be obtained. But one may safely assume that they number easily over 10,000, judging from the figures secured so far. The medical profession ranks first in this instance, due to the predominantly feminine character of the health services such as those of nurses, mid-wives etc. According to the census report, out of every 1000 persons engaged in this, there were 707 women as against 293 men.

7. Arts: Women are coming fairly well into their own in all the Fine arts, whether as amateurs or professionals. They have entered the cinema profession in very large numbers and enjoy quite a privileged position.

8. Business and Commerce: The large scale business is more or less a close preserve of men. Women, however, are beginning to become more closely associated with business, functioning as directors of companies or organisers and agents. In smaller trades, they are to be found in large numbers. The census report estimate puts them almost on a par with men.

9. Domestic Service: Women easily out number men in this field. The census report states that for every 1000 persons engaged in domestic service, there are 808 women to 192 men.

10. Legal Status: The legal position of women, which came to obtain in India with the advent of the British rule, may be said to conform more to custom and convention. For, when the new rulers assumed administrative responsibility, one of the tasks they set for themselves was to codify the various social laws of the country. What those, who set about the task did, was to interpret the ancient laws in terms of existing customs and in a manner to give a legalistic form to the prevailing usages. This naturally gave rise to sharp differences over the interpretations, as happens with all old writings. These conflicts intensified as social thought and customs began to undergo rapid changes with succeeding years and decades, and the demand for new enactments, more in keeping with the modern spirit, grew. Many more of these old laws are today in the process of change and a comprehensive Bill, embodying some of the many changes needed in the laws affecting Hindu women, is on the anvil.

(a) Marriage: Amongst Hindus, marriage is not a contract and the fact that marriage was brought about during the minority of either party does not render the marriage invalid. Marriages are mostly arranged by parents and even Hindus, who have attained majority, have, generally speaking, little freedom of choice, unless they have ceased to depend on their parents or are prepared to break away from them if necessary.

According to Mohammandn Law, marriage is not a sacrament but a civil contract. A Mohammadan girl (or boy for that matter), who has attained puberty, is free to choose and marry anyone she likes and the guardian has no legal right to interfere. The guardian, however, has a right to arrange a marriage before the girl has attained puberty.

In the case of Parsis and Indian Christians, the free consent of the parties to the marriage has to be obtained except when the party concerned has not reached majority, in which case the parents' or guardians consent is necessary.

While monogamy is not compulsory amongst Hindus and Mohammadans, very few men marry during the lifetime of the wife. Polygamous marriages are seldom found in the lower middle classes, middle classes and upper classes, but they are found amongst certain classes of the peasantry and the very wealthy and among the princes of Indian States. In the Bombay Province, monogamy has recently been made compulsory and in the Draft Hindu Code, prepared by the Hindu Law Committee recently, provision has been made for monogamy amongst all Hindus all over British India.

(b) Divorse: Amongst Hindus, there is no provision for the dissolution of marriage. The Draft Hindu Code mentioned above has suggested provisions for divorce under certain circumstances.

The Mohammadan Law permits divorce, but the husband and wife are not on equal footing in the matter. A marriage may be dissolved in any one of the following ways:

- (1) by the husband at his will without intervention of the Court;
- (2) by mutual consent of the husband and wife without the intervention of the Court;

- (3) by a judicial decree at the suit of the husband of wife. The wife cannot divorce herself from her husband without his consent, except under a contract whether made before or after marriage, but she may in some cases obtain divorce by judicial decree.

Divorce is permitted amongst Parsis and Indian Christians. A Parsi woman may sue for divorce on certain specific ground, e.g., adultery, desertion for over 3 years, etc.

Amongst the Indian Christians, a woman is not quite on the same footing as a man; for while a husband can sue his wife for divorce on the ground of adultery, a wife cannot sue husband for divorce, unless the adultery is incestuous adultery or is coupled with cruelty, bigamy, desertion, etc.

Property: Hindu women have not got the same right to inherit property as men. There are more than one school of Hindu Law at present and conditions vary slightly from province to province. Generally speaking, however, the position is as follows: as a daughter, a woman has no right in her father's property at all, if there is a son.\* She only inherits her mother's property, which as a rule consists of jewellery and clothes and, in rare cases, money or other property. The only thing she is entitled to get from her father's property is her marriage expenses, besides maintenance.

As a widow, she is entitled to a share in her husband's separate property along with her sons. In the property held jointly by a family, she is entitled to her husband's interest or she may claim partition and get her late husband's share.

In either case, however, while the son's shares are 'absolute', which means that they can use and dispose of the property as they like, she is entitled only to what is called a 'limited estate'. That means, a woman, who has inherited property from her husband or her father-in-law, is really only entitled to the income thereof and cannot dispose of this property, except in need and with the consent of those to whom the property is due to revert after her death@.

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\* The Draft Hindu Code suggests giving the daughter a share equal to half of that of a son.

@ The Draft Hindu Code has suggested that abolition of the 'limited Estate' for women.



Amongst Mohammadans, women not only take an absolute share of the property inherited, but they inherit as daughter, for instance, inherits half the share of the son and a widow less than that. Under the Hanafi School of Mohammadan Law of Inheritance, when the heirs consist of a widow, son and daughter, the widow takes one-eighth, the son seven-twelfth and the daughter seven-twentyfourth. Under the Shia Law of Inheritance, the widow's share would be one-eighth and the son and daughter take as residuaries, the daughter's share being half of that of the son.

Among Parsis and Indian Christians also, there is a distinction made between men and women. Women in both cases, however, take an absolute share in their inherited property. Parsi women as daughters take a share equal of half of that of the son in their father's property. As widows, however, they take an equal share with the son (double the share of the daughter).

In the case of Indian Christians, the daughter inherits equally with the son. As a widow she inherits one-third in her husband's property, the other two-thirds being equally divided between her son and daughter.

But above all, what a national India aims at is a single national code, uniform for all communities irrespective of their religion.

11. Political: Women's biggest advance has been in the political field, where they, unlike the women of the west, have met with practical no opposition in acquiring their rights. Their heroic participation in the freedom struggle, side by side with men, has also been an additional factor in securing for them their equality of status with men. The Indian National Congress, in its Fundamental Rights Resolution of 1931, declared that there should be no discrimination on grounds of sex, and that this principle would be embodied in the future Constitution of India. Within the National Congress organisation, women function on the same footing as men, and its All-India Cabinet includes two women.

Actually, there are today two Acts of the British Parliament in force in India, which determine the political status of women. The one in force in the Centre is the Act of 1919. When this was enacted by the British Parliament, women were

not enfranchised, in spite of considerable pressure from the men and the women of India, In response to the persistent demand from India, the Act left this to the discretion of the Indian Legislatures themselves, who, without any delay, granted franchise rights to women on the same property qualification as men. Under it, only about 1% of the people are voters to the Central Legislature, which, in the case of women, would be considerably less, as women do not generally enjoy the same rights to property as men. In the provinces, however, the 1935 Act is in force. Although, under this Act, the franchise has been extended and women are eligible to stand for election to all chambers on equal terms with men, it contains features, which Indian women have strongly objected to, and which are included as added franchise qualifications for them over and above the general property and educational qualifications applicable to both men and women. These relate to:

- (1) wives and widows of those possessing or who would have possessed necessary property qualifications.
- (2) Wives and widows of those who were in the previous financial year assessed to the necessary income-tax.
- (3) wives, pensioned widows or pensioned mothers of an officer, non-commissioned officer or soldier of His Majesty's Regular Military Forces.
- (4) wives and widows of retired, pensioned or discharged officers or soldiers of His Majesty's Regular Military Forces.
- (5) educational qualifications, which vary with certain provinces.

Special seats are reserved for women in the lower houses in the provinces on a purely communal basis and on a purely communal electorate. Indian women have repeatedly and strongly objected to a franchise based on wifehood, the reservation of special seats for women and the over-representation of the communal element in the demarcation of constituencies as well as in the franchise, as undemocratic and derogatory to their dignity. The total number of women enfranchised under these terms is over six million; two million under property, four million under wifehood, half-a-million under literacy. The proportion of voters is approximately 1 woman to 5 men.

Except in the Punjab, Sind and Assam, women have the same right of franchise to local bodies as men; and women are to be found in most of the 700 municipalities and 200 district boards.

A Constituent Assembly, elected by the Provincial Lower Houses, is at the moment engaged in framing a constitution of India. Although there was no reservation of seats for women one or more women have been returned from every province, making a total of 15 in an Assembly of 400.

OUR COMMON AIM

India and the other countries of Asia have from early times been influencing one another. Though these ties may have at times become slender, the ancient thread has never quite snapped. The lines of our destiny have been as it were, traced by a single hand, and each has reflected but the hopes and aspirations, trials and struggles, achievements and successes of the other.

Over the horizon, obscured though it be by international clashes, a discerning vision can observe the mighty continental shift from West to East. It, therefore, seems to be in the fitness of things that we should once again turn our eyes towards each other, and stretch out our hands to feel the struggle of a renewed comradeship in the glad hour of our dawning freedom.

Women have no less a role to play than men in the task of reconstructing the various phases of national life. Projecting this into the wider continental life is but the logical sequence to it. The future can, however, be constituted only on the present. With this in view, a brief appraisal of the existing conditions relating to women is sought to be outlined here; in the hope that it will stimulate greater interest and will lead to a better understanding of Indian women and their problems, which are basically the same as that of all women in Asia, so that through closer cooperation and united action, may come greater and speedier fulfilment of our common ideal.

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