Woman Empowerment as Hobson's choice – A Portrait of Indian Woman History and Efforts of Government

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Abstract: **Woman in India is characterised in different forms - as mother, wife, deity, Shakti etc. But the position of woman has undergone noticeable changes from period to period. During Vedic period woman had equal status with man and that period is considered as the golden age of woman. From the position of a deity woman's position has been degraded as that of a Devadasi. This paper focuses on the position of Indian woman from the Vedic period to the present day. It is also highlights the attempts of government at different times to empower woman.**

Keywords: **Deity, Devadasi, Ardhanari, Dump driven cattle, virginity, chastity, masculine vanity, servitude, seclusion, government attempts.**

1. STATUS OF INDIAN WOMAN

The history of India and the status of woman are unified. Woman's present position, to a great extent, is the result of the ancient times' social and cultural schema. The beginning notion of *'Atharva Veda'* prominently portrayed woman as deity of homeland. The position of woman has undergone a radical change from period to period. It has degenerated from *Durga* to *Devdasi*. In Vedic period Indian woman had equal status with men and the period is considered as the golden age of woman in India. But after Aryan conquest, woman's position in the society was subjected to many social evils. The *Smriti* period kept woman's self-esteem high like ***'narystu yatra pujyante, ramante tatra devth'*** (where woman worshiped there goddess dwell) and made woman's protection as the basic obligation of every social group because at that period woman needed protection from invaders. *Manusmrity*'s interpretations by succeeding rulers and scholars made it good on one hand with its commands for the importance of respecting lady but on the other hand it got accusation by many with regard to its women spleen.

As per Indian community outlook, there are four main types of ideal woman. They are: (i) as *Purusha* and *Prakrthi*', (ii) as mother, (iii) as religious figure, and (iv) as wife. The first concept of an ideal women is as *Ardhanrishwarva* (figurative illustration that men are incomplete without women) which describes the harmony of male and female. Another ideal woman is mother. Mother divinity is worshiped in India in several ways, as a calm deity, like 'Sarasvati' and as an antagonistic deity like *'Maha Kali'*. As per Hindu religion the whole cosmos is shown as a combination of 'Shakti and Prakrthi' -different incarnations of deity *Parvati*. The third ideal woman is a religious figure. Woman has occupied a high position in *Bakti* and popular folk customs. Indian civilization created multitudes of anchorite and some of them are women like *Meera Bai*. Female gurus are referred as *Mathaji* or Mother by their devotees. The other ideal of Indian woman is wife with fidelity, simply chaste, self-sacrificing to her husband. Wife is husband's 'Ardhangini' and 'Sita' symbolized the ideal wife [1].

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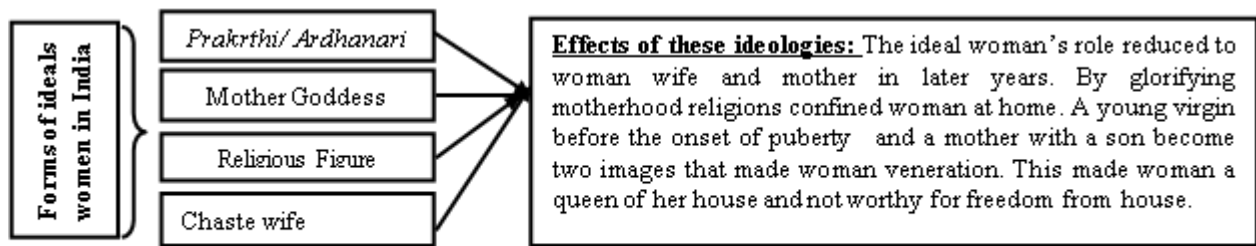
Source: Women in India past and present: Neelam Upadhyay and Rekha Pandey (modified)

Figure 1: Forms of Ideal Woman in India

Yajur Veda laid stress on women's education as it was thought that a scholarly woman will purify the existence of others with her astuteness. Through her actions, she could purify others proceedings. Scholarly woman's actions and understanding promotes virtue and well-organized management of people. At the same time, the same society considered the perfect uniqueness of woman as the one who serves the husband with full chastity and performed sacrifices, prayers and holy mantras. That means in that period individual woman (*Brahmavadinies*) and woman with husband got equal role and status in the society. Best example for that is people worshiped deities solitarily like Lakshmi, Saraswathi, and Parvati. Same way people worshiped deities as couples like Shiva Parvati, Lakshmi Narayana, etc. Ancient time woman was worshiped as a figure of divinity but at the same time many customs made woman to be the sovereign of her residence only.

Woman's intellectual position declined vis-à-vis men from the period of Aryan's advent onwards. She was considered more emotional and less rational by character compared with men. She was described as a victim of her external look. That even made a concept that her fair gender is more sensitive to the expressions of fine arts such as classical dance. Even courtesan or Devadasis were glorified and became materials for entertainment (e.g. *Chamba*). Marriages with non-Arians exempted woman from eligibility for religious studies and participations. Unmarried woman was not eligible for studying Vedas. Woman who was not married 3 years after her puberty was degraded as *shudras*. To plead masculine vanity, chastity and virginity of woman became a necessity. Man-made laws forced woman to follow strict discipline in life and fidelity to her husband. Even at that time *Varahamihira*, the famous Indian astronomer, raised his voice against degrading woman.

For centuries, woman in India snaffled opportunities by names of traditions and practices such as marriage before puberty, resistance for remarriage, travailing and enduring widowhood, polygamy and polyandry, dowry, purdah system, infanticide, sati, *Devdasi* system etc. The explained motives behind those systems were protecting woman from Mughal emperors. The truth behind these evil customs was to make sure the honour of the family. From womb to tomb the abhorrent customs and inflexible social traditions made woman inferior to man. Woman was like dumb driven cattle in pre independent India. The status of woman was equal to man during Vedic period, but victory of Aryans degraded woman to the maximum extend. In order to prove the supremacy of Aryans, they introduced many vices like slavery. To maintain distance from Dravidians, Aryans created many evils including caste based ruling system which is prevailing in India even today. The virginity of maiden and chastity of married woman measured the value of woman in society. Even now there is no change to it.

Before analyzing the present condition of Indian woman, woman's status in preceding eras also has to be evaluated. The best way to examine ups and downs of the progress of the nation is assessing the position of woman in different eras. Woman in India has experienced many social practices based on the rules and guidelines of rulers of the respective periods. At the time of freedom struggle, woman joined national movement and that became one of the reasons for the attitudinal change of women towards equality. After independence, the status of Indian woman became better in relation to economic, social, political and psychological aspects. Dr. Ambedkar, the father of India constitution, has not only provided equal rights and opportunity to woman vis-à-vis man, but also added provisions to be taken by the government to advance the status of woman [2].
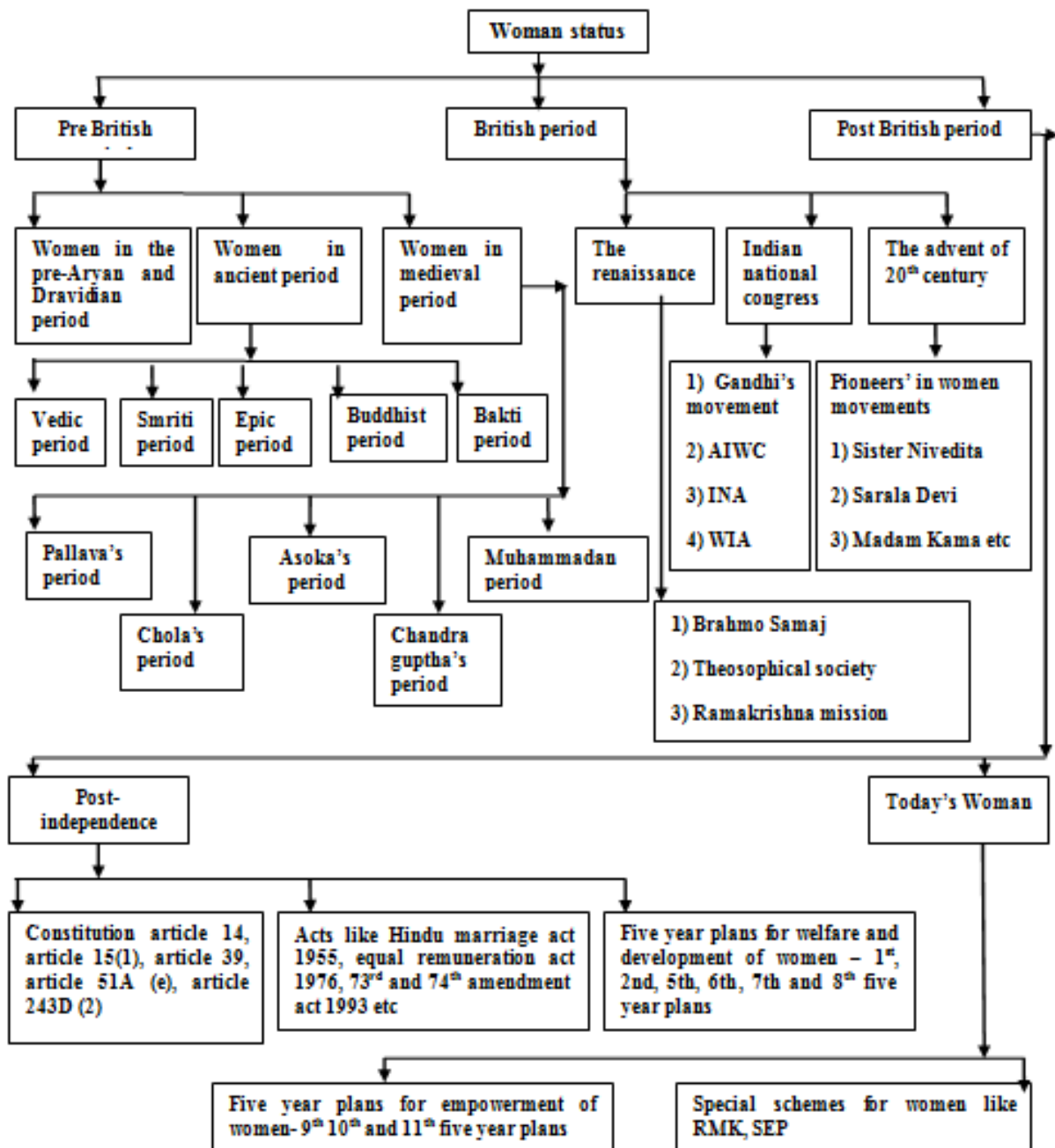
Figure 2: Indian Woman's Status at Different Periods and Actions

Woman in pre-Vedic Dravidian period: - Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa excavation findings reveal that the Indus valley community, before Vedic Dravidian period, used to worship mother deity. It implies that self-respect of woman in that era was extremely high. There are no findings of male gods during that period.

Vedic age: - Vedic age can be divided into two phases -- Early Vedic period and Later Vedic period. Early Vedic period is considered as the golden period of woman. In Early Vedic period woman had effortless and absolute access to knowledge and learning. Around 32 women including *Mytreyi* and *Gargi* massively contributed to Vedic writings. They fruitfully participated in rational debates. Women even had liberty to be *Brahmavadinies* (to remain unmarried) and that allowed woman to portray as symbol of independence. There was no practice of child marriage and the marriageable age was 15 to 16. In that period woman had full freedom to select her life partner. Marriage without the knowledge of parents was in vogue and that was called *Gandarva vivah* (e.g. *Shakunthala* and *Dushyanthan*).Then woman was treated as the 'Ardhangini' of men and that concept reveals the equal status of wife with her husband. The writings of those period show

that woman used to stay with man as spiritual companion (e.g. *Mytrey*i to *Yejnayavalkya*). Inter caste marriage was accepted and prevailed in Vedic age (e.g. *Shanthiand Rishyshringa*). Vedic age people never considered birth of a girl child as inauspicious. Divorce and remarriage were permitted by law. Woman had freedom to visit festivals and fairs and even had freedom to participate in wars.

The Later Vedic period starts with the victory of Aryans. They practiced slavery and caste system. *Sudras* belonged to the lowest caste and they performed all menial services. Caste system excluded woman from education. Woman's divorce and remarriage was considered as sinful and practices such as widow burning (Sati) and marriage of girls before puberty became social custom or rule. Woman herself started alienating girl child from education. Stories were popularized about early death of husbands of educated women. The virginity of maiden and chastity of married woman became important copula of masculine egotism. The end of Vedic period glorified the usefulness of a son and the uselessness of a daughter. Sonless woman became a prey to polygamy. Traditions such as hyper gamy and endogamy found *kulinisam*(nobility) and dowry system originated. That made girl child as a liability and led to the evil practice of infanticide. The end of the Vedic period derogated woman as intellectually and emotionally inferior to man.

Smriti period: - The distortion of woman continued with the advent of *ManuSmriti*. In Goutham's *Dharmasutra* it is clearly mentioned that marriage is a social contract and the girl must be one of the same caste. Strict fidelity to her husband was demanded from each woman. Otherwise she will be punished by her husband with curse (e.g. Gautama and Ahalya). *ManuSmriti* and *Yanjnavalkya Smriti* were extinct independence of women. As per the words of Manu woman is created to give birth to son. Manu Smriti barred women from learning. According to Manu if a girl stays in her residence for more than three years after puberty, she should be treated like a Sudra by the society. Manu Smriti made sure that the guardianship of woman in all period is vested with men. In simple terms Manu Smriti subjected woman fully under the control of man. Marriage of woman became compulsory. Single woman was looked down upon. Woman's freedom was snatched away from her and in those ages society was considering woman as fickle minded, sensual and seducer of men. Marriage before puberty became conmen and that time minimum marriage age of girls was 12 to 13. The role of woman was confined to household chores and taking care of the family. The Manu Smriti led to total degradation of woman. [2]

Epic age: -Ramayana and Mahabharata are considered as epics of Indian society. In Ramayana, woman is portrayed with good image and self-respect and is permitted to perform sacrifices and prayers. Woman is permitted to participate in the major decision making processes of the family (e.g. Kykeyi and Dasharadha). Epic Ramayana was against the social evil of polygamy (even though Dasharadha had three wives) and stressed the importance of wife as Ardhangini to perform Yagas. The heroine of Ramayana -Sita -even now is considered as one of the five ideal wives (others are Ahalya, Droupathi, Tara, and Mandodari). In Mahabharata, woman's role as a mother is highlighted. At the same time woman is considered as the root of all evils and the epic is promoting polygamy and polyandry. Epics were treating woman as an offender. Instead of highlighting the strength of woman the weaknesses of men were hid in all epics (e.g. Malsyaghandi and Parashara, Shanthanu and Malsyaghandi and so on) [1] [3]

*Buddha period: -*By allowing woman to enter into monastery and become nun for salvation, Buddhism was giving honour to woman. Buddha was teaching the importance of woman's education and taught the relevance of equality of woman and man. During Buddha period woman had special status compared to Manu Smriti period. Woman scholar Sankamithra went to Ceylon (present Sri Lanka) for spreading Buddhism. But Buddhism supported polygamy (with consent of first wife) and polyandry. The best part of Buddhism is the alienation with child marriage and girl infanticide. Marriage age of a girl in Buddhism was 20 and which is purely based on the choice of girls. Divorce, widow marriage and remarriage were permitted in Buddhism. Sonless woman is not a curse in Buddhism. Nirvana or salvation of a person is purely based on karma of a person. [4]

Mohammadan period: - The advent of Islam with Arab invasion started in 712 AD. The Shariah practices determined the status of women in Islam. The critical ones in this respect are Talaq (especially Muthalaq) and seclusion. Seclusion made woman backward in education and social participation. In India social participation is a hurdle to Muslim women and created a women clan depending on men for everything. During Mughal period powerful Muslim men started marrying Hindu girls and forced them to convert to Islam. This aggravated social evils like child marriage, Sati, polygamy that already existed in the Hindu as a measure of protecting Hindu girls from Mughal emperors. Sati (juhar), purdah system, polygamy was practiced even by Muslims. Muslim woman had equal right in her father's property. Divorce is a simple process in Islam but that right is only vested with men.

Bhakti period: - This originated during the medieval period as a reaction to Muslim domination and practices of orthodox Brahmin community. This period witnessed a progressive landmark in the history of Hindu womankind (during 13 to 16th centuries). Many women like Meera Bai, Suku Bai, and Vishnu Priya etc. joined Bhakti cult and sainthood. The Bhakti movement was even rooted in South India. Veerasaivam and Lingayath community in Kerala had around 200 to 300 saints belonging to this cult and among them 50 were nuns [2].

***The British period*: -** The picture of woman in pre-British India was pathetic. She was denied the benefits of education. Girls were married before their features were fully developed. The widowhood of women was interminable. Woman was treated like slave and had no status in the society. Due to masculine vanity and authoritarian nature of men and manmade laws woman become helpless, remained illiterate and narrow minded and perished.

Christian missionaries did a good thing by starting educational institutions which provided education to women. They opened dispensaries, orphanages and took up feminine relief works. They had some ulterior motive in doing so. The motive was propagation to Christian religion. For this, they attacked many of the customs which was prevailing in India. They also lured the lower castes to Christianity by offering economic assistance and better position in the society. Through these methods Missionaries made mass conversions of untouchables and lower classes to Christianity. British barred marriage before puberty. They also prohibited polygamy, dowry system, temple dancing, sati etc. The impact of British rule on woman in India can be discussed in three phases:

1) ***Renaissance*:-**Leading reformers of the renaissance period launched a vigorous campaign against social evils that affected Indian women. They tried their level best to restore the lost glory of woman and their rightful place in the society. The significant legal reforms in this respect are Abolition of Sati (1827), suppression of infanticide (1725 and 1804), and removal of restrictions on remarriage and widow marriage (1856).

The Father of Indian Renaissance Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774) opposed the customs of Sati and polygamy and encouraged widow remarriage. He found the Brahmo Samaj in 1828. Debendra Nath Tagore (1817) fought for the introduction of female education and remarriage of widows. Another reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar (1820) started a Champaign for widow marriages and which successfully culminated into Widow Marriage Act of 1856. He opposed polygamy and child marriage and raised his voice for woman's education. Keshab Chandra Sen attacked the concept Kulinisam and public dance by women. He also denounced polygamy and encouraged inter caste marriages and opposed the purdah system for women. His efforts led to the Civil Marriage Act of 1872.

RabindranathTagore (1861) started Shanti Niketan in 1901 and inaugurated Viswabharati in 1921. He glorified women in his writings and expressed sadness on the plight of Indian woman. Another main reformer was Swami Vivekananda (1863). He wanted women to be emancipated from all the restraints through education. Swami Dayananda Saraswathi (1824) advocated female education and widow remarriage. Marriage by consent was the main aim of Arya Samaj which was founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswathi in 1876. Maha Dev Govind Ranade found India Social Conference and supported freedom in choice of marriage. Beharmji Malabari (1853) opposed infant marriage and enforced widowhood. It was his efforts which led to the Age of Consent Act in1881. That fixed the minimum age of a girl's marriage as 12. Debendra Keshav Karve (1858) himself married a widow. His greatest achievement was in the field of woman's education. To carry out the works of social reforms Gopala Krishna Gokhale established the Servant's Society. He opposed seclusion of woman and fought for woman's education.

Woman of India of 19th century participated in Indian renaissance and struggled with a mission of women's emancipation. Pandita Rama Bai tried to abolish child marriage. She fought against religious orthodoxies and authority of scriptures. Rama Bai promoted unity among Indian woman. Anandhiben Joshi, a physician by profession, opposed girl's marriage before puberty. Francina Sarabjee advocated for female education and established many schools for women's education. Annie Besant and Rukma Bai challenged Indian traditions with respect to woman and devoted her life to the service of woman. Madam Kama, Toru Dutt and Swarup Kumari Devi were other pioneers who fought the cause of woman.

2. National Movement: -The establishment of Indian National Congress in 1885 was a significant event which had far reaching impact on woman's issues. Gandhi dedicated his interest to women and opposed child marriage and initiated actions for the wellbeing of Hindu widows. Gandhi wanted to give every widow the right to marry. Between 1910 and 1920 the number of social organizations for women such as Mahila Smitis, Women's Clubs and Ladies Societies grew quickly. In 1917 women of Madras formed the first women's association of south India under the name and style

'Women's Indian Association'. During the next 10 years two more women's organizations also were formed in India to safeguard the interests of women. They were 'The national council of women in India' (1925) and the 'All India women's conference' (1927). From 1932-1937, there was also a significant increase in the number of girls attending secondary school.

Between1900 and 1919 four women rose as leaders at the national level (They were Sister Nivedita, Sarala Devi, Madam Cama and Annie Besant). These women were following revolutionary or socialist ideology. Later from 1920 onwards women from Punjab and Bengal became centers of communist activities. Many ladies took part in Indian national movement and worked for the advancement of women. The prominent among them were Margarete Ecousins, Sister Nivedita, Sarala Devi, Sarojini Naidu, Heera Bai, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Madam Cama and Annie Besant [5].

3.   The beginning of 20th century - Though there were many women's organizations and women's participation at the time of national movement, the basic aims of those were not empowerment of women. The basic aim of such organizations was freedom of the nation. So after independence they could not flourish or grew and simply they vanished. But the advent of the 20th century, women of India came forward with new demands and objectives. The goals of these were to make sure their position equal with men in both private and public spheres of life. The demands of women's movement of the 20th century were mainly determined by women's education and career of women. The underlying objectives of their demands were free women from social vices and also to bring about unity of women.

4. Women in revolutionary movements: - After independence radical women leaders participated in different actions mainly in Kisan Sabah's particularly in Bihar and Bengal during 1946 to 51. Women of Telangana, Kerala, Bengal and many other states participated in different Naxalite movement at some point in 1967 to 1970. Ajitha Narayanan and Jayasree Rana became known leaders of Naxalite movement. In1972-73, Women played leading roles in agrarian movements in Maharashtra. This has added new dimensions to women's leadership. Later India witnessed illiterate, untouchable, tribal and Dalit participation in agrarian struggles. Many agitations took place against social evils, exploitation by landlords in different forms like low wages and insults and harassments. The aims of all these agitations emphasized the need for solidarity and empowerment of women.
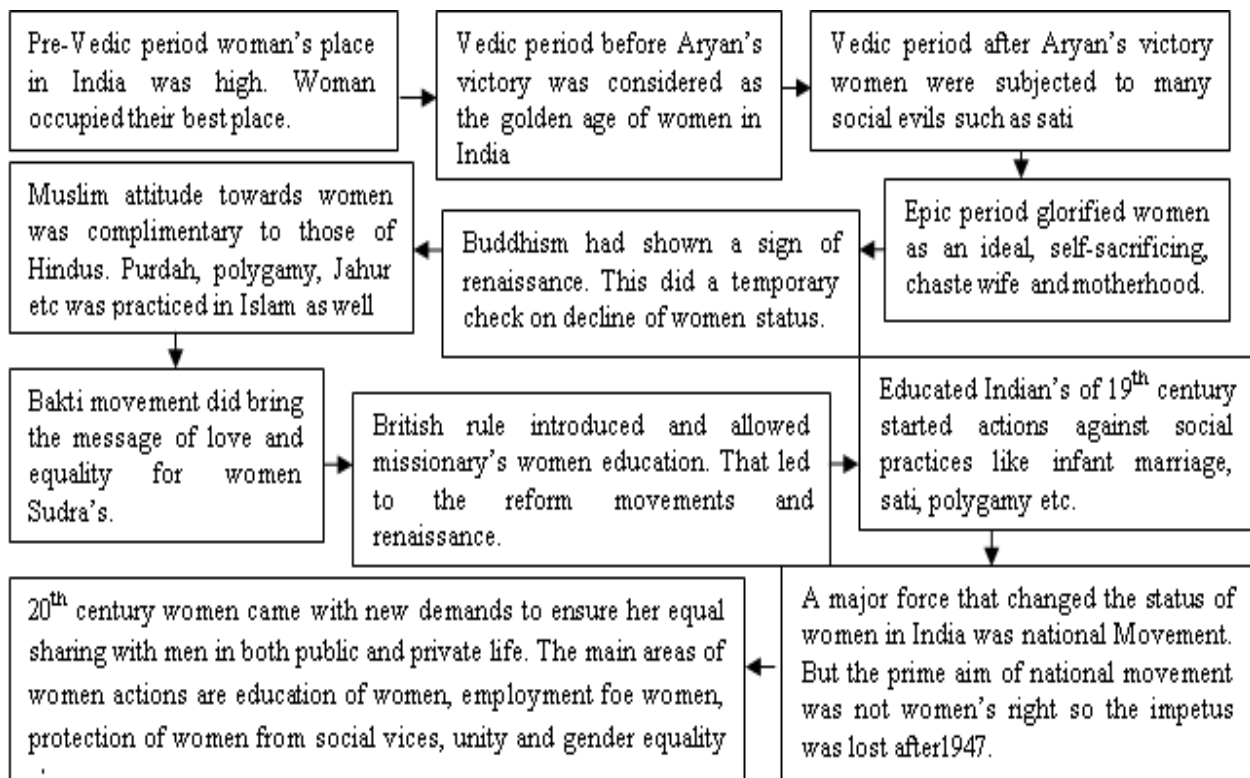
Source: *Women status and empowerment in India, and Women in India past and present (modified)*

Figure 3 Epitomizes the Status of Indian woman at various periods

2. RELIGIONS AND INDIAN WOMAN

Woman in every religion and in every period had a contradictory image. Hinduism (the dominant religion) was and still is a male dominated society. Rituals and customs such as child marriage, sati, polygamy, polyandry, Devadasi and courtesan system etc. degraded the status of woman to a great extend in the earlier days. Lower caste woman was excluded from education[3]. Initially higher caste woman had freedom to study Vedas but later she lost that freedom. Sonless woman was treated as a curse and at least a son was thought to be a must for married people for conducting rituals after their death for attaining salvation. That belief promoted polygamy. In the early days Hindus allowed woman to marry husband's brother after husband's death or serious disease of husband which resulted in polyandry. Hinduism treated women as fickle minded. Many saints icluding Agastya and Kabeer considered women in the same way. [1] But in 600 AD the famous astronomer Varahmihira [4]a pro-feminine advocate pleaded for uplifting woman's position. But the contradiction is that in Hinduism woman is worshiped as deity but at the same time she is molested as a prostitute.
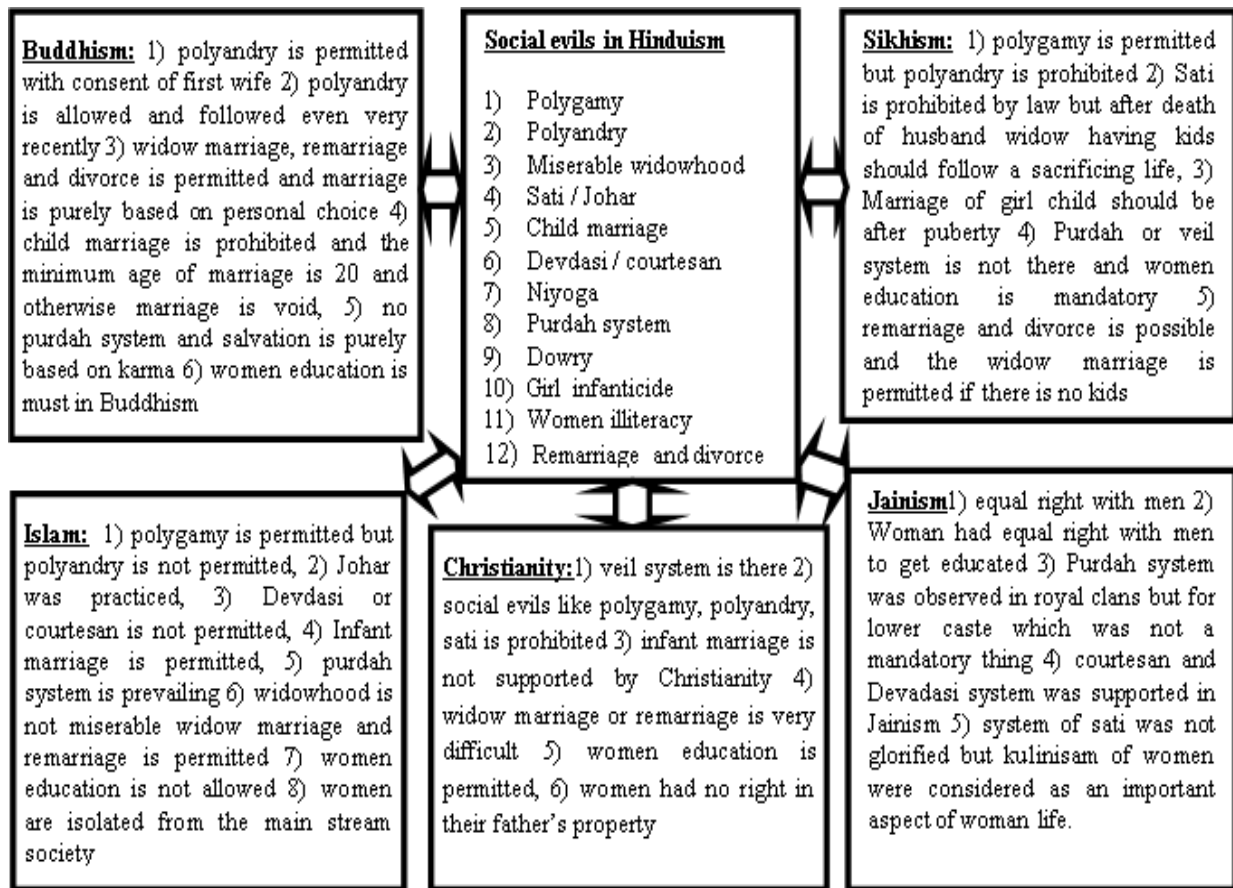
Buddha was totally against to the hyped sins of Hindu religion. He also did not believe in rituals performed by sons for their ancestors' salvation as he believed that ancestors' salvation is fully based on their Karma and desire. Both son and daughter is having equal place in Buddhism (only 0.5% of total population belonged to Buddhism). According to Buddha woman can gain good status only through purity of character. Buddha allowed woman to monastery and permitted woman to become nun. Buddhism allowed only polygamy only with the consent of the first wife. . The place of woman in Jainism (0.7% of total population) was much better vis-à-vis medieval Hinduism. Woman had equal right with men to get educated (Jain's alphabet Brahma libi came from the name of Vrishva Naths daughter Brahma). Purdah system was observed in royal clans but middle and lower caste were exempted from that. Mothers of Jain priests enjoyed high reverence in the whole society. Ancient Jain writings say courtesans (e.g., Chamba) were getting more role and they enjoyed royal gradate. Contemporary to medieval Hinduism, Sikhism could find women as an essential part of the society. Sikh gurus such as Guru Nanak tried for a radical transform to masculine vanity. Sikhism is totally against veil system for woman. Though Sikhism prohibited Sati widowhood is ostracized. Strict moral control made widowhood miserable and life pathetic. [2]

Religions treated woman differently. Islam initially granted certain rights to woman such as right in her father's property, right for divorce etc. which were denied of contemporary Hindu women. In Islam marriage is a contract. But the husband can divorce his wife at any time by saying Talaq. This system led to polygamy and forced woman to be silent and obedient. In early period woman's education was strictly restricted in Islam. Woman was only supposed to study religious scripts such as Quran. Consequently Muslim women in medieval period remained illiterate, ignorant, inferior and unequal to men. They were also excluded from mosque and listening *kuttuba*. Purdah system was compulsory for women in high caste and lower sections were excluded from Purdah system. Purdah system isolated Muslim women from the society. They were permitted to mingle with only close, immediate or near relatives. This confined them within the four walls of the house. [6]

Almost 2% of Indian population consist of Christians. In Christianity woman was treated as harbinger of sin. Christian women were denied the rights those were enjoyed by men. Christian priests discouraged women's education in the early days. All these made their life wretched. But once they started getting education the power of women in the society improved. Initially the missionaries imparted education by segregating boys and girls. Boys were taught mechanical or vocational subjects and girls cooking, knitting etc. The rationale of such education was that man should work outside the home and women inside home. Christian women had no right in her husband's property or in her father's property. But now, after Mary Roy's case they have equal rights and status with men. [7] Woman is treated differently in different religions. Some Relegions treated woman as deities and at the same time an object giving sexual pleasure. How different relegions treated women are depicted in figure 4

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[3] Department of Women and Child Development Report. National perspective plan for women (1988).

[4]Indian Women (A Brief Socio Cultural Survey) – Prithvi Nath Tikoo 1985

Buddhism: 1) polyandry is permitted with consent of first wife 2) polyandry is allowed and followed even very recently 3) widow marriage, remarriage and divorce is permitted and marriage is purely based on personal choice 4) child marriage is prohibited and the minimum age of marriage is 20 and otherwise marriage is void, 5) no purdah system and salvation is purely based on karma 6) women education is must in Buddhism

Social evils in Hinduism

1) Polygamy
2) Polyandry
3) Miserable widowhood
4) Sati / Johar
5) Child marriage
6) Devdasi / courtesan
7) Niyoga
8) Purdah system
9) Dowry
10) Girl infanticide
11) Women illiteracy
12) Remarriage and divorce

Sikhism: 1) polygamy is permitted but polyandry is prohibited 2) Sati is prohibited by law but after death of husband widow having kids should follow a sacrificing life, 3) Marriage of girl child should be after puberty 4) Purdah or veil system is not there and women education is mandatory 5) remarriage and divorce is possible and the widow marriage is permitted if there is no kids

Islam: 1) polygamy is permitted but polyandry is not permitted, 2) Johar was practiced, 3) Devdasi or courtesan is not permitted, 4) Infant marriage is permitted, 5) purdah system is prevailing 6) widowhood is not miserable widow marriage and remarriage is permitted 7) women education is not allowed 8) women are isolated from the main stream society

Christianity: 1) veil system is there 2) social evils like polygamy, polyandry, sati is prohibited 3) infant marriage is not supported by Christianity 4) widow marriage or remarriage is very difficult 5) women education is permitted, 6) women had no right in their father's property

Jainism 1) equal right with men 2) Woman had equal right with men to get educated 3) Purdah system was observed in royal clans but for lower caste which was not a mandatory thing 4) courtesan and Devadasi system was supported in Jainism 5) system of sati was not glorified but kulinisam of women were considered as an important aspect of woman life.
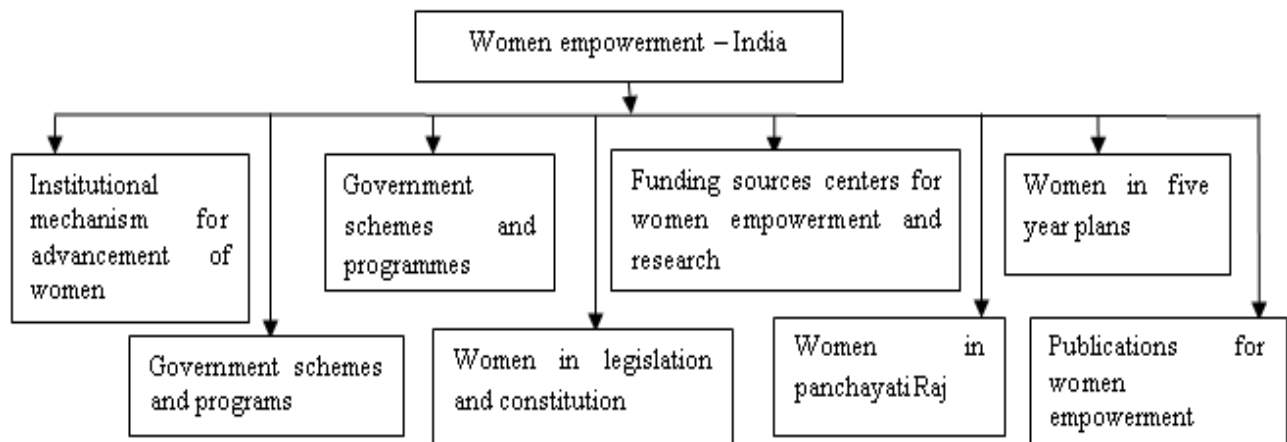
Source: Women in Buddhist tradition, National prospective plan for women 1998-2000 AD, Women in India past and present (modified)

Figure 4 Social evils and Hinduism – comparison with other religion

3. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES OF GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Empowerment will kindle a degree of self-confidence, sense of autonomy and capacity to stand alone and face challenges, disabilities, handicaps and inequalities in a male centric society. The measures taken by Indian government to empower women of India are presented in Fig. 5.

Women empowerment – India

Institutional mechanism for advancement of women

Government schemes and programmes

Funding sources centers for women empowerment and research

Women in five year plans

Government schemes and programs

Women in legislation and constitution

Women in panchayati Raj

Publications for women empowerment

Source: women's status in India – information sources, services and programs (modified)

Figure 5: Measures initiated by government of India for women empowerment

1. *Institutional mechanism for advancement of women:* **-**This includes institutions of different types of Central, State and Local governments, NGOs, civil society and other bodies. Such organizations support causes of women advancement. There are various other institutional mechanisms that are contributing to the idea of women empowerment is of recent origin. The concept is based on Women' Empowerment and gender equality. Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK),Government departments, committees, women's resource centers, SHG's, Mahila Mandals, Parliamentary committees of women, etc. belong to this category [8]

2. *Government Programs and Schemes for Women Empowerment:* **-**Such schemes and programs were aimed directly for the enhancement women's economic productivity and helping them to move out of poverty ring. Many are directed at poor in general but with special components for women. The fact behind the schemes and programs was to enhance power of women for eradicating poverty through utilizing the power of women for national development. Economic empowerment is essential for the social and political empowerment for woman for that government of India introduced many programs and schemes such as Support to Employment Program for Women (STEP), CARE- Assistant nutrition program, Women's Credit Fund (WCF),integrated child development services, hostels for working woman, Mahila Samakhya etc.

3. *Constitutional and Other Safeguards for Women:* **-** Indian constitution adopted on November 2^{6th} 1949 came into effect on 2^{6th} January 1950 present two layers of government -- One at central level and the other at the state level. Different committees connected with drafting of the constitution identified the power of women and incorporated Articles in the constitution with the objective of giving constitutional protection to such powers. The governments of India as well as the governments at the states are continuously endeavoring to ensure these rights to women such as Married Women's Property Right Act-1874, Age of Consent Act -1872, Family Court Act -1987, Marriage Amendment Act 1986, Panchayati Raj Act-1994, etc.[9] [10]

After independence a number of programmes were initiated for political, social and economic empowerment of women in India. These programmes include several funding agencies for supporting research on women advancement like National Research Development Cooperation (NRDC), Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) etc., organizations and research centers like Department Of Women and Child Development, women organizations and agencies like All India Women's Conference (AIWC), Center for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), women centers and cells with in universities etc., commissions and committees, periodical and publications, various five year plans with objectives of well-being of women, development of women and empowerment of women in India, and finally panchayati Raj in the year 1994 opened doors of opportunity to millions of scheduled castes, tribes and half of the population of the country, women of India[11][12].

4. CONCLUSION

In spite of all these programmes, the position of woman in India remains more or less the same. She has not been emancipated from most of the social evils. Though some women became political leaders at the local level owing to mandatory provisions with respect to local self-government institutions, majority of women continue to remain at the lower rung of the political structure. Though many women started participating in businesses, even today many of the women are lacking the power of spending their own money without the consent of male members. The empowerment of women is really a Hobson's choice for government as well as for the society.

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