THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF THEIR CHANGING STATUS FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO PRESENT DAY

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Abstract:

To study the role of women in Indian society and politics and their changing status from ancient times to present day. The role of women in Indian society and politics has evolved over time, and there have been significant changes in their status from ancient times to the present day. Historically, Indian society was patriarchal, and women's roles were largely confined to domestic duties and child-rearing. Women had limited access to education and were largely excluded from public life.   In ancient India, women held high positions of power and respect. They could choose their own husbands, and some even became queens and rulers. The ancient texts like Vedas and Upanishads, emphasize the importance of women and their role in society. However, over time, the status of women in India began to decline due to social and cultural factors. During the medieval period, women's rights were further curtailed, and they were subject to the practice of purdah, which required them to be veiled and secluded from the outside world. This practice continued until the British colonial period, where education and social reform movements began to gain traction, and the status of women began to improve.

After independence, women's rights and status in Indian society began to improve gradually. The Indian constitution enshrined equal rights for men and women, and several laws were enacted to protect women's rights, including the Dowry Prohibition Act and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of gender equality in India, and efforts are being made to increase women's participation in politics and public life. In 2014, the Indian parliament passed the Women's Reservation Bill, which seeks to reserve one-third of all seats in parliament and state legislatures for women. Although the bill has not yet been enacted, it is seen as a significant step towards empowering women in politics.

Keywords: Role, Women, Indian, Society, Politics etc.

INTRODUCTION:

The role of women in Indian society and politics has evolved over time, and there have been significant changes in their status from ancient times to the present day. Historically, Indian society was patriarchal, and women's roles were largely confined to domestic duties and child-rearing. Women had limited access to education and were largely excluded from public life.   In ancient India, women held high positions of power and respect. They could choose their own husbands, and some even became queens and rulers. The ancient texts like Vedas and Upanishads, emphasize the importance of women and their role in

society. However, over time, the status of women in India began to decline due to social and cultural factors. During the medieval period, women's rights were further curtailed, and they were subject to the practice of purdah, which required them to be veiled and secluded from the outside world. This practice continued until the British colonial period, where education and social reform movements began to gain traction, and the status of women began to improve.

However, over the centuries, there have been notable women in Indian history who defied social norms and made significant contributions to society. For example, Queen Didda of Kashmir was a powerful ruler in the 10th century, and Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi was a prominent figure in the Indian Rebellion of 1857. In the early 20th century, the Indian independence movement led by Mahatma Gandhi provided a platform for women to participate in political activism. Many women played an active role in the movement, and their contributions helped pave the way for Indian independence in 1947.

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Women have played important roles in politics since then, with Indira Gandhi becoming the first female Prime Minister in 1966. Today, there are many prominent women politicians, including Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, and Nirmala Sitharaman. However, despite these improvements, women in India still face significant challenges. Gender-based violence, discrimination, and unequal access to education and employment opportunities continue to be major issues. Overall, while there have been significant challenges and obstacles to women's empowerment in India, their role in society and politics has evolved and improved over time. Today, women are playing an increasingly important role in all aspects of Indian society, and there is growing recognition of the need for gender equality and women's empowerment.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

To study the role of women in Indian society and politics and their changing status from ancient times to present day.

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- Women's participation in the workforce has increased in recent years, with more women pursuing higher education and joining the formal workforce. However, there is still a significant gender pay gap, and women are often relegated to lower-paying and less prestigious positions.

- The status of women varies significantly across different regions and communities in India. In some areas, women have greater freedom and access to opportunities, while in others, traditional gender roles and cultural practices restrict women's autonomy and opportunities.

- Women's participation in politics has increased in recent years, with more women contesting elections and holding positions of power at the local, state, and national levels. However, women are still underrepresented in politics, and their voices and perspectives are often marginalized.

- Violence against women remains a significant challenge in India, with high rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment. The government has introduced various measures to address these issues, including setting up fast-track courts and introducing stricter penalties for perpetrators of violence against women.

- Women's education is crucial for improving their status and opportunities in society. While access to education has improved significantly in recent years, there are still significant gender disparities in enrollment and literacy rates, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized communities.

- Historically, women in India have faced social and cultural barriers that have limited their role in society. For example, women were expected to stay at home and take care of the household, while men were the primary breadwinners.

- However, over the years, women in India have increasingly gained access to education and employment opportunities. This has allowed them to become financially independent and play a more active role in society.

- In politics, women in India have made significant strides. The Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities to men and women, and women have been able to occupy positions of power at various levels of government. For example, in 2017, a record number of 78 women were elected to the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian Parliament.

- However, despite these advancements, women in India still face significant challenges. Women continue to face gender-based violence, discrimination, and inequality in many areas of society. Additionally, there are still very few women in leadership positions in politics and the corporate world.

- There is ongoing debate and discussion in India about how to further improve the status of women in society and politics. Some of the proposed solutions include increasing access to education and employment opportunities, implementing policies to address gender-based violence, and promoting greater representation of women in leadership roles.

- Women in India have played a crucial role in shaping the country's history and culture. For example, female freedom fighters like Rani Lakshmibai, Sarojini Naidu, and Kamala Nehru contributed significantly to India's struggle for independence from British colonial rule.

- Despite the constitutional guarantees of gender equality, women in India still face social and cultural biases that affect their status in society. These biases often limit their access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

- Women in rural India face even greater challenges, as they are often subjected to patriarchal norms that restrict their mobility and decision-making power. The Indian government has implemented several programs to address these issues, such as the Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme and the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign.

- In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of women entrepreneurs in India. This has been facilitated by various government initiatives, such as the Stand-Up India program and the MUDRA scheme, which provide funding and support to women-owned businesses.

- India's first female president, Pratibha Patil, was elected in 2007, and several women have held key positions in the government and judiciary. However, the representation of women in these fields remains low, and there is a need for more women to be appointed to leadership roles.

- Overall, the role of women in Indian society and politics has been evolving over the years. While there have been significant advancements, there is still a long way to go to achieve true gender equality in India.

CONCLUSION:

The role of women in Indian society and politics has undergone significant changes over the years. Historically, Indian women were confined to the domestic sphere and had limited opportunities for education and career advancement. However, with the advent of the women's movement in the 20th century, women started to demand greater rights and opportunities. Today, Indian women have made significant progress in various fields, including education, politics, and the workforce. Women are now represented in all spheres of life, including the government, with several women serving in high-profile positions such as the President, Prime Minister, and Chief Ministers of various states. Despite these advancements, there are still significant challenges that women face in India. Gender discrimination, violence against women, and unequal access to resources and opportunities remain major obstacles to achieving gender equality.

Overall, while the role of women in Indian society and politics has evolved over time, there is still a long way to go in terms of achieving full gender equality. It is essential to continue working towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society where women have equal rights, opportunities, and representation.

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