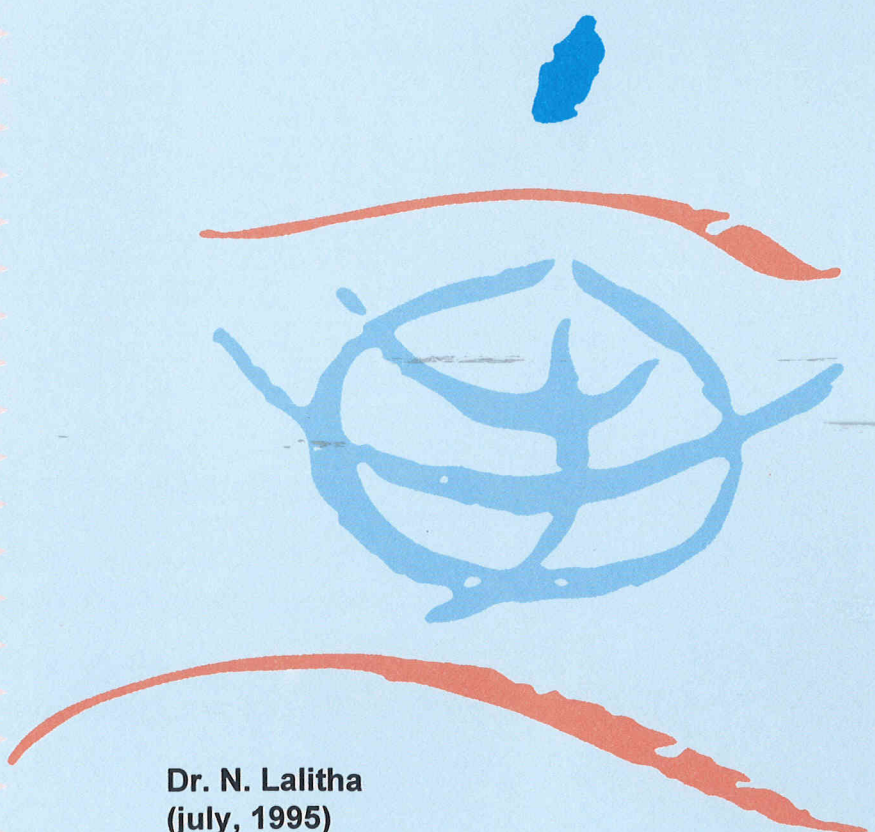




DOWRY



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DOWRY: A CURSE FOR WOMEN AND SOCIETY

Status of Women in Hindu Society:

On the one hand, women have been put on a high pedestal and worshipped; on the other they have been abused, maltreated and disgraced, perhaps as in the following couplet.

*"The woman, the spaniel and the walnut tree
The more you beat them the better they be"*

Constitutional and legislative enactments have sought to improve the lot of women but their impact has been below expectations.

The "Arthshastra" of Kautilya says:

*"The king shall provide the orphans (abala) the aged, the infirm,
the affected and helpless with maintenance. He shall also provide
subsistence to helpless women where they are carrying and also to
children they give birth to".*

Many Hindu rituals customs and superstitions, not only blocked the social development of Hindu Society, but also stifled the cultural and economic institutions of the nation.

In ancient India, women enjoyed equal status, especially during the Vedic Age. She was not only honoured in the home itself but an equal respect was shown to her in other fields of social and intellectual life. In most areas, they held their own status. In the social and religious field no Human Yagya or religious occasion was considered complete without her. In the ritual of 'Purna Ahuti' the offerings are made by the joined hands of husband and wife.

It was during the age of the 'Sutras' and the 'Epics' i.e. the period between 500 B.C. to 500 A.D., that the position of women started deteriorating. Socio-political factors such as invasions of foreigners and the misinterpretation of old religious books were some of the causes of women losing the respect and position they had held earlier. The lethargy of women of this period was also an immediate cause of this worsening trend.

By 700 A.D., the theory of the perpetual tutelage of women, formulated by Manu, a codifier of society, became prevalent. The laws of Manu state that wherever women are honoured, gods are pleased. But in the laws he annunciated, he gave women a place of very low status, depicting the woman as a vile being who should be held in slavery.

Our scriptures, classics and epics reveal a history of courage, honour and character of women who helped to shape society at that time and describe the important part played by women.

