1) Discuss the status of women in contemporary India.

Ans: Status of Indian Women began to change radically during the modern period. Historically the period after 1750 A.D is known as the modern period.

The status of Indian women during this period can be divided into two stages:
(a) Status of women during the British rule in India,
(b) The status of women in post independent India.

(a) Status of women During the British Rule:
After the fall of the Mughal Empire at the decisive Battle of Plassey (1775 A.D) the British people established their complete political supremacy over the Indian people. During the British rule, a number of changes were made in the economic and social structures of our society.

(b) The status of women in post independent India:
The status of Indian women has radically changed since independence. Both the structural and cultural changes provided equality of opportunities to women in education, employment and political participation. With the help of these changes, exploitation of women, to a great extent was reduced. More freedom and better orientation were provided to the women’s organisation to pursue their interest.

The centuries of slavery were over. Today women want equality, education and recognition. The advancement of women is the most significant fact of modern India. Gandhiji once said “woman is the noblest of God’s creation, supreme in her own sphere of activity.” These words are blossoming now.

From its very inception in the 19th century, the Indian National congress included women and elected Mrs. Annie Besant as its president. One of the proudest moments of Indian womanhood was when Mrs. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit was elected as the president of the U.N. General Assembly in 1953.

1. Constitutional provision and legislation in support of women’s cause:
The constitution of India has greatly enhanced the status of Indian women by throwing upon to them all its series on equal terms with men. All the men and women of India are equity entitled for individual freedom, fundamental rights including the right to participate in social, cultural, religious, educational, economic and political activities. The constitution provides for equality of sex and offers protection to women against exploitation. It has given the voting right to women and in no way treats women as second grade citizens.

Social legislation safeguarding women’s interest:
The Government of Independent India undertook a number of legislative measures to safeguard the interests of women. Some of them are discussed here:

(i) The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955:
It prohibits polygyny, polyandry and child marriage and concedes equal rights to women to divorce and to remarry.

(ii) The Hindu succession Act, 1956:
It provides the right to parental property for women.

(iii) The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956:
The act gives a childless woman the right to adopt a child and to claim maintenance from the husband if she is divorced by him.

(iv) The special Marriage Act, 1954:
It provides rights to women on pari with men for inter-caste marriage, love marriage and registered marriage. The Act has also fixed the minimum age of marriage at 21 for males and 18 for females.

(v) The dowry prohibition Act, 1961:
It declares the taking of dowry an unlawful activity and thereby prevents the exploitation of women.

(vi) Other legislations:
(a) The suppression of immoral Traffic of women and Girls Act 1956:
It provides protection to women from being kidnapped or compelled to become prostitute.

(b) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy: Act 1971:
It legalizes abortion conceding the right of a woman to go for abortion on ground of physical and mental health.

(c) The criminal Law Amendment Act 1983:
It seeks to stop various types of crimes against women.

(d) The Family Court Act 1984:
It seeks to provide justice to women who get involved in family disputes.

2. Women in the field of Education:
After Independence, women of India took to education in a relatively large number. For example in 1901, the literary level of the females in India was just 0.6%, it increased to 39.42% in 1991 and to 64.1 in 2001. Various benefits such as free-ship, scholarship, loan facility, hostel facility etc are being given to women who go for higher education in many towns and cities. Educational institutions meant only for female children have been established.

3. Women in Economic and Employment Fields:
In both villages and cities there has been a remarkable increase in the number of women going out of the four walls of the household and becoming workers. In the “employment market” they are successfully competing with the men folk. In every field, the number of women employees is steadily increasing since 1991, though in a smaller number, women are getting recruited into the Army force, Air force and Naval force also.

Write the policies for development and empowerment of women in India.

Ans: In the year 2001, the Government of India launched a National Policy for Empowerment of Women. The specific objectives of the policy are as follows:

• Creation of an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.